



Gill Crowther

Managing Director at Great Managers, HR Director Gloucester Rugby

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: gill@gillcrowther.uk

SKILLS

- Human resources
- Employee engagement
- Strategic planning
- Succession planning
- Leadership development
- Coaching
- Organisational development

EDUCATION

University of Warwick

Engineering and Business Studies, Manufacturing Systems Engineering and a range of management topics

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Chartered Fellow

Adding to our extensive repertoire, Ennis & Co were delighted to welcome Gill Crowther, Managing Director at Great Managers, and HR Director, as an Associate of the company in December 2021.

Gill is a strategic, innovative HR professional with a wealth of experience across the technology, pharmaceutical, automotive, and hospitality sectors. Channelling her boundless energy, exuberant style, and creativity into driving results, Gill brings an incredibly fresh perspective to Ennis & Co. We wanted to find out just how she does this for her clients, too, as well as her thoughts on the future – and why HR can be likened to the perfect gin and tonic...

You HR career has spanned many sectors. What has been your favourite industry... and why?

“There is something about each of the sectors that I have loved”, explained Gill. “From a pharmaceutical perspective, you are creating products that are genuinely helping people. How can you not be inspired by that?”

On transitioning from pharma to technology to work for Microsoft, I wasn't sure if I would feel as enthusiastic... yet I joined the leading edge of technology, at a time where the vision became **our passion, your potential**. For me, it still held the element of really helping people – in terms of how technology can transform how we go about our lives... and make it better.”

Yet not every industry had adapted to utilising technology to make life easier. “When I left the technology sector, we could already easily work from home, every meeting room could accommodate virtual meetings - but many businesses even post COVID are resisting this. Digitalisation and thinking differently about communication are huge passions of mine – and this applies to every sector. There are still leaders out there who don't want to do this... and they'll simply get left behind.”

You have also been consulting for many years, yet the role of HR has arguably changed most rapidly due to COVID-19. What do you think has been the most opportune change, and why?

“I would like to think it has accelerated people's valuing of HR – because there was a certain point in March 2020 when the word furlough appeared, and everyone swivelled their chairs and turned to us! HR just needed

to be one page ahead”, explained Gill. “I believe the net worth of a good HR person in a leadership team has gone up and, hopefully, this will stay up. For years, I have been talking about how Board recruitment tends to value specific skills or sector experience e.g., finance/automotive, and doesn't often seek someone who has expertise in HR / people. The truth is – not everyone can do the people bit! It's a specialism, and it needs to be valued. I hope that COVID-19 has upped the ante on that.”

The recent years have seen the emergence of many discussions regarding the new role of HR in an ever-changing world of work. What do you foresee as the biggest change coming?

“The progression from COVID to hybrid working – and the organisations that are on the front foot will make it work. Old-style leaders saying words to the effect of “well, working from home didn't really work, did it?” will fail. Also, the digital revolution continues, and people are looking for more flexibility and, again, if you don't commit, you'll be left behind.”

“Leaders that are good enough to consider the five-year timeframe in more detail will also thrive – yet the downside of COVID-19 is that leadership teams are not feeling confident yet to set a vision they can really push for. So, one of the next steps is ensuring the right leaders are in the right room to create the real sense of vision – centred around the organisation – and really questioning – what does this mean for them? The hospitality sector, for example, is so difficult in terms of future vision– people are flooding back to venues, and we need to manage this safely. How do we help leadership teams really create the right vision that's flexible enough, adaptable enough, to keep meeting the things that come flying at them– but also clear enough and gives enough direction so people can get behind it? Ultimately, adaptability is even more prominent, for business and for the future of HR.”

Change always takes time, but when there's a will, there's a way. Has there been a particular change that resonates for you?

“Change is my huge passion and I want to make sure it's done right.”

“Recently, I have led the process of closing of a business, the reasons for this were completely out of our hands – yet even so, it was extremely key to handle this as well as possible, especially when dealing with people not used to moving jobs. The company (automotive sector), unlike somewhere like the technology sector, where

career moves across companies is prevalent, had many long serving employees (some people had been there for 30+ years) and it was key to help them understand the “what next” and “how do I live without my role”.

“My strengths are in the strategic and futuristic area and finding solutions and ways forward. Therefore, when it comes to talking to people at risk of redundancy, I make sure I have someone on the team to balance my strengths with a more empathetic view.

I can make sure the change is being done for the right business reasons and then I can make sure I am reminded about how people will react to the news.

I am then able to coach the other business leaders through, to help them not feel so emotionally drained by difficult conversations. Running high quality change process is about continuous improvement, no matter how often you do it.

What's your “HR gin & tonic”?

“This is an analogy that is very fitting for the complexity of great HR! Firstly, there needs to be the right mix of uniqueness and flavour in your HR team, the balance of botanicals, which creates your ‘gin’. Please treat your HR (Gin) as a true specialism and don't just get some vodka and bung some juniper berries in!!

“Then you've got to get the rest of the mix for your G&T right and aligned to the business need – making sure you add the right mixer (which is the right team) or tonic, and that it is totally aligned with the culture and values of the organisation.”

“Your leaders are then the ice cubes, and the final flourish – the garnish – is the CEO. Trying to fit with a CEO if you're a lime girl rather and they need a cucumber one, for example, just wouldn't result in the right mix! Or if you have a wilted and out of date “cucumber”, for example, who may not appreciate the people and is just focused on the numbers, it is not going to work with this Gin!

“In summary, this is all about bringing all of the right elements together and making it work – and that's how you make the perfect HR gin and tonic!”

To find out more about how Gill can help support your leaders and managers, please contact:

gill@gillcrowther.uk

