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Opportunity Knocks: The HR Connection

As an HR professional and individual coach and counselor, Jennifer Kahnweiler sees the unique synergy between both

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Kahnweiler's Recommendations

To increase your income and knowledge, work for corporate HR departments.

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- Join and become active in a local [SHRM](#) (Society for Human Resource Management) subgroup. Make contact with HR professionals.
- Develop the skills HR departments are looking for by contracting with a high-quality consulting firm.
- Identify the needs of HR professionals and position yourself to meet those needs, which include training in assertiveness, time management, and interpersonal skills.
- Apply what you learn in the corporate setting to your private practice and vice versa.

By her own admission Jennifer Kahnweiler has her feet firmly planted in two worlds: individual coach/counselor and corporate HR professional. Founder and owner of [AboutYOU](#) in Atlanta, with a Ph.D. in counseling, she has a private practice and works on a consulting basis for large corporations and agencies. How large? GE Capital, AT&T, the U.S. Office of the Treasury, and Turner Broadcasting.

Coauthoring *Shaping Your HR Role: Succeeding in Today's Organizations*, which will be published in April, convinced her that the synergy between her two worlds has never been stronger.

Parachute Associates: Why do you feel that now is such a good time for coaches and counselors to work with corporate HR professionals?

Kahnweiler: HR is in a real transition period. Most of us think of HR as paper pushing, but functions such as benefits and payroll are now being outsourced. HR has been invigorated, and HR professionals are now doing more high-level activities. Because of that, high performers are gravitating to these positions. They really respect what we do as coaches, and they need our help.

More of them are using coaches to help them perform better in their jobs. Often HR professionals need to influence people who don't report to them, and they need to learn how to do this. They also need to learn assertiveness, time management, and interpersonal skills.

Beyond their personal careers, they need help in completing their departmental duties. For example, I've seen a lot of companies bring on contract recruiters. They do the preliminary resume filtering and interviewing. There is also work in diversity and mentoring programs, team development, executive coaching, and job-task analysis—analyzing each job and determining competencies.

This contract work can really be good for coaches and counselors. They can get billable days on their calendar, which provides them with a base income. It is also more lucrative than doing individual work. Often you can charge 50 percent more. But money is just one attribute. This kind of organizational work does take more energy and requires you to stretch in different ways. You need to have more of a big-picture mentality. You need to figure out what the HR person's goals and objectives are. You need to include her in all your planning. You are working more on a project basis and you have more checks to check off.

Parachute Associates: How would a coach or counselor take advantage of the opportunities in HR?

Kahnweiler's Favorite Websites

- [Academy of Human Resource Development](#)
- [American Society for Training and Development](#)
- [HR.com](#)
- [National Human Resources Association](#)
- [Human Resource Planning Society](#)
- [Society for Human Resource Management](#)

Kahnweiler: They need to find out what HR professionals need. This isn't always easy. HR people often put their needs on the backburner. They are helper types, so you have to help them establish their own needs. You also need to be able to offer and actually deliver the kind of services they are looking for. To do that, you probably need to pay your dues. You need experience. It's important to work internally, to apprentice inside an HR organization. Or you can partner with a high-quality consulting firm—work as a contractor and get experience that way. You make less money working as a contractor than on your own, but you should think of it as an

investment.

Parachute Associates: How would a coach or counselor go about identifying one of these high-quality consulting firms?

Kahnweiler: Word of mouth. They should ask their HR contacts—find out what firm has a good reputation and uses contractors on a regular basis.

Parachute Associates: What if a coach or counselor wants to bypass the consulting firm and work directly with an HR department? What should they do?

Kahnweiler: They need to make contacts. They should join a subgroup in their local [SHRM](#) chapter. It's not enough to attend the big banquet dinners; they need to get involved in one of the smaller groups. Once they get a couple of clients those clients will spread the word. But they can't expect to be signed up right away. This is a sales process. Coaches and counselors need to be patient. It's very important to look at this as a relationship they are building over time.

Kahnweiler's Favorite Books

- [HR from the Heart: Inspiring Stories and Strategies for Building the People Side of Great Business](#) by Libby Sartain and Martha I. Finney
- [Human Resource Champions](#) by Dave Ulrich
- [Flawless Consulting : A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used](#) by Peter Block

Parachute Associates: How has your work in corporate HR departments helped you in your private practice?

Kahnweiler: Knowledge is number one. By working inside a corporation, I keep abreast of everything that's happening, all the new business concepts, terminology, and technology, and it's amazing how fast those change. It really is about having the knowledge to provide counseling within a context. If an accountant is weighing career options, I understand the potential career paths and can also suggest other areas based on my organizational knowledge. Working inside a corporation gives me credibility and richer information. I also get a deeper understanding of what corporations demand, which gives me more empathy for my clients.

If, for example, that accountant can't do one of my assignments because it's at the end of the year, I understand the kinds of deadlines he is working under. This kind of work also puts me in touch with hiring managers and helps me see my practice as a "business." For example, people in corporations talk about making their numbers and so now I ask myself, "Okay, Jennifer, are you making your numbers?"

Parachute Associates: How about the other way around: How has your private practice helped you inside corporate HR departments?

Kahnweiler: It helps me see beyond stereotypes. Sometimes you might have an idea about what HR professionals or salespeople are like. Working closely with various professionals in my private practice helps me see them as people in the corporate setting. Also, because I've worked with senior-level managers privately, I'm less intimidated by them. I know they are just people too.

Parachute Associates: What do you like most about working with HR departments?

Kahnweiler: I enjoy the chance to think strategically and develop solutions that can have a true impact on an organization. I like it when they see me as part of the team, not an outsider.

Parachute Associates: And what do you like least?

Kahnweiler: Working in HR departments that are mired in bureaucracy, when clients are stuck in a victim mentality and when I am seen as just a "pair of hands." When HR departments view outside consultants as truly outsiders, it makes the road more challenging, but not impossible.

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