

An Interview with Laurie Brown King Chair, 2008 Bio HR Conference

By Valerie Frederickson
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So you came from high-tech when you took your first HR role in the biotech industry, do you see any differences between the two?

If you asked me 4-5 years ago, I would have not agreed that there was a difference between high-tech and biotech for HR. But in fact there are differences in the workforce, biotech people have a different flavor. There seems to be more passion among the biotech workforce. It is a well educated workforce with primadonas.

How does that passion translate in interactions as a VPHR?

What I have learned is that with the biotech crowd, you can never say “do this” but “this is why we are doing this...”

How important is it to have previous experience in biotech for an HR person?

I would not say that you need biotech HR experience to get in but my HRD says it's necessary. I believe that if you are a support person it does not really matter. However, it does help if you are a Director of Staffing or a recruiter because there are differences in the way you recruit and motivate people with a scientific background. When I was interviewed for my second role in another biotech company, they made a big deal out of my biotech experience. I did not necessarily feel that it was such a big deal.

What made the transition easy for you personality wise?

HR, VPHR: have a great relationship with CEO or whoever the boss is. Personality fit?
I am business like and empathetic. I brought in a more business like culture.
And when things needed to be done, you stop acting like the bosses.

What is your MBTI?

ENTJ (Editor's Note: this is the same profile as most CEOs. For more information, [click here](#) to read *The HR personality* by Scott Faldner, *The HR Executive Magazine*.)

Is an average top HR person as nearly as busy and/or challenged as you are?

When I see the other HR executive in my HR biotech group – and there are about 10 of them – we all look just as tired!

Do you have any advice for an HR person who is trying to get into biotech?

Network, you have at least several people you can get connected to who are in biotech who can give you some useful information about their experience, job and company.
If you are the manager level and have no biotech experience, I would recommend to go ahead and apply, it should matter that much.

What about interview prep?

I have had people coming in who had not looked us up. Do some reading, research and try to get to know the lingo. Talk to HR people in biotech. And biotech and pharma are very different; it is not the same profile.