

# *Humanity in HR*

**K**ayla Bartel keeps the "human" in human resources.

As owner and co-founder of Rancho Santa Margarita-based Humanity HR Consulting ([humanityhr.com](http://humanityhr.com)), Bartel's aim has always been to let small business owners focus on their respective passions, while she handles the HR side of the house.

"It started organically," says Bartel of Humanity's 2015 founding. "I had a lot of friends who were small business owners who were constantly coming to me for advice. I wanted to make sure they were doing things right.



*Photo by Brian Bartel*

*The last year of uncertainty has been a boom for the outsourcing HR space. Just ask HR expert Kayla Bartel.*

"After giving a lot of free advice, It naturally made sense to open my own practice."

Segueing from a long and successful history of in-house HR work, Bartel began Humanity HR with a belief system that employees were more than just a number.

"Having seen how things happened in-house and how the human aspect was often lost, I chose the name 'Humanity HR' for that very reason," she continues.

"For my own business, my own philosophy, I never want to lose the human aspect of human resources."

In her vast experience preceding Humanity, Bartel often found that small business owners approached Human Capital with an ineptly inverse ethos.

"I'd come in, and it was often somebody from accounting who was running HR or maybe an owner; so, I'd be brought in to start the department," she says.

"I was always somebody who was there for the people, there for the employees, and oftentimes the owner or the people who brought me in, they weren't always in favor of that approach – and they had it backwards.

*"For my own business, my own philosophy, I never want to lose the human aspect of human resources." — Kayla Bartel*

"Sometimes, they just wanted the rules or compliance and didn't always understand that if they were treating employees right and making sure they were happy and fulfilled, then the employees would really take care of the customers and the owners wouldn't need to worry about the employees, say, filing a lawsuit or becoming disgruntled."

Bartel has further observed over time that small business owners who oversee HR themselves or delegate the responsibility in-house as a multi-hat job often start to lose sight of their true company aims.

"When I'm talking with a potential client, I let them know that human resources is *my* passion; they're passion is in, say, software development or education or whatever their industry may be," she says. "That's why they started their business. They didn't start their business to do HR, or become an expert in employment law -- I did; that's why I started my business. Taking on the HR aspect for them allows them to focus on what they love to do."

Generally working with businesses sized from five to 50 employees, Bartel has found coast-to-coast domestic growth – along with international success – with a model of assigning a part-or-full-time employee of Humanity HR out to one of her clients; the Humanity representative then becomes a regular presence and extension of that client's business.

"It's great because it allows my clients to have a hands-on resource, while my employees are able to have a team of HR professionals to grow and develop with."

With Humanity's services ranging from business development to employee relations to compliance, payroll, staffing and beyond, the pandemic timeline has put Bartel to constant work with her *métier*: navigating (oft-fickle) state and federal labor laws.

"The past year has seen our greatest growth. At the beginning of COVID, so many businesses realized they needed HR. A lot of new rules and entities telling companies what they could or couldn't do. And our work exploded. We brought on a lot of new clients, and the clients that we already had needed us a lot more."

Prior to the pandemic, state or federal workplaces rule changes would occur at the onset of a year, with quarterly changes along the way.

"Now, rule changes can happen daily," she says.

At the onset of COVID, clients often called Bartel in a panic.

"We found that our clients weren't just needing constant assistance with HR, but also with how to take care of the logistics of COVID, and helping them truly know what regulations employers are supposed to be following.

"This allowed us to add an operations component to the business that has worked really well in tandem with the HR services we already offered" she says.

"From my vantage, as an HR professional, I never expected to spend so much time on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website.



“But now, I’m on there every day, because it directly impacts how things occur in a workplace in real time and for our California clients, all the compliance with response to Cal OSHA regulations.

“Across the pandemic, things can and have changed daily, so I’ve given a lot of direction based on *today* even though the rules for tomorrow could be different.”

As Bartel’s rolodex has expanded across the pandemic, so have the complexities for employers.

“The growing aspect of remote work has created some challenges for employers; the new term is the ‘wandering worker.’ It has a lot to do with taxes, and where an employee is located. Say an employer hires a remote worker in Texas, and gets them set up there for their taxes and they think they’re following the rules for the state; but, little do they know that, a month later, that new employ-

ee has relocated to another state – and they don’t tell the employer. And all of a sudden, the employer is no longer in compliance, and they have no idea they’re no longer in compliance; they haven’t set up work comp in that new state, haven’t changed the taxes to the new state, they’re not following state-specific law and haven’t established policies to do so.”

While HR may have historically been the butt of an occasional punchline, in the modern workplace the joke would appear to be on those who eschew the niche trade at their own peril.

“We love to keep a pulse on things,” Bartel concludes, “and to be that bridge between the government, the employees, the clients and everybody in-between.” — By Judd Spicer, California Business Journal

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