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INTERVIEW: FRAN RYBA, HR CONSULTANT, FRAN RYBA CONSULTANCY

# The face of employment law

BY RICHARD  
**CAWTHORNE**

No one needs reminding that life seems to be growing more complicated. This equally applies to the field of employment law. As industry grows and people become more legally-minded, employers can be left floundering in a mass of rules and regulations.

Enter Fran Ryba. "Most employers these days know they have a legal obligation to comply with employment law issues, if only to avoid the risk of tribunal claims," she says.

"However, many employers need help identifying and understanding the issues that will directly affect them in the workplace".

Ryba, who lives in Highgate and is a member of Hendon Reform Synagogue, spent more than a dozen years in senior human resources positions for a range of big companies – the likes of book publishers Faber & Faber and Random House, the Consumers' Association and Channel 4.

Thirteen years ago, concerned about how smaller businesses were coping with the growing tangle of legislation, she broke away to set up her own company, Fran Ryba Consultancy. She cheerfully admits she was throwing herself in at the deep end but, as a Fellow of the Chartered In-

stitute of Personnel and Development (FCIPD) and self-confessed committed human resources specialist, she knew what she was doing.

The growth of her consultancy since then proves the point and if her chosen field of endeavour might sound uninteresting to an outsider, it's one impression she is quick to correct.

Though her father passed away some years ago, both he and Ryba's mother were entrepreneurs and in business locally – her mum still lives in Golders Green – and their skills and enthusiasm clearly passed to their daughter.

She agrees when I suggest much of her work sounds stressful, but immediately qualifies it by saying it is enjoyable, too, because she believes in her work.

"The repeat business our clients give us proves we make a positive difference to them by offering workable solutions, a trusting relationship and peace of mind that their human resources (HR) issues are being well taken care of, so they can focus on their core business," she says.

Her reasons for going it alone are stated clearly on her website. "When I was employed in large organisations as an HR professional, I often wondered how smaller employers managed to cope with the ever-increasing complexities of employment law or effectively

handle contentious issues without the advice and guidance of an in-house HR specialist, particularly in view of the fact that the vast majority of tribunal claims are made against smaller employers", she says.

"All this motivated my desire to set up an HR outsourced service to offer clients the protection from making potentially costly employment mistakes, provide advice and in-house guidance on the management of their people as well as project-based support to busy, and often under-resourced, HR teams."

Ryba's office is at home but her activities take her all around London and the South East and often further afield, working closely not only with employers but also employment lawyers. On workplace investigations, which she describes as perhaps one of the toughest aspects of her role, she often partners with a colleague who is particularly experienced in this area.

"I am often commissioned by employment lawyers to undertake workplace investigations on their clients' behalf prior to a disciplinary, grievance or appeal process being undertaken by the employer," she says.

She adds: "A business owner might also have problems with an absent or a disgruntled employee and doesn't know how to handle it so tries to ignore the problem and hope it will resolve itself. This

often allows the employee to become more powerful, particularly if we are dealing with an alleged harassment issue or with, say, an employee who is disabled or from a minority group. Managers can find these situations challenging and that's where I can assist with clarifying what action an employer can take.

"I also get involved in a lot of company restructures, often unfortunately involving redundancies. These needs careful handling. I am often present at meetings with the employer to ensure a proper process is car-

ried out to avoid potential unfair dismissal claims".

Although most of her commissions come from employers, Ryba also works with employees in cases where redundancy does arise, advising and helping them to get them back out into the workplace by assisting in compiling CVs, honing interview skills and assessing the job market on their behalf.

Other than the obvious hard work, Ryba says the key to her success is to ensure she understands fully the nature of a client's business along with its culture and objectives and from

that build a trusting relationship with the client as a means of providing "a very responsive and professional service".

As already noted, it is a busy life, but Ryba also knows how to relax. She confesses to being "addicted" to the creative arts, particularly theatre, cinema and visiting art galleries and is learning to play bridge. Her real passion, however, is the wider world.

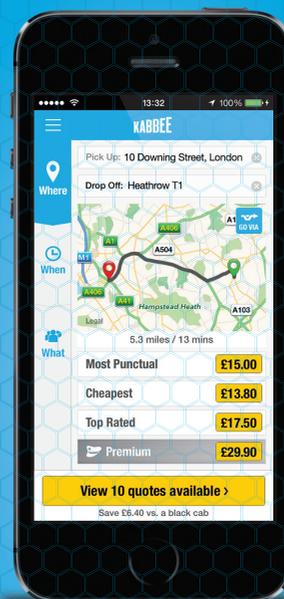
"I'm an avid traveller", she confesses. "I've been to many places and I plan to keep on exploring".

• Details: [fr-consultancy.co.uk](http://fr-consultancy.co.uk)



A committed human resources professional, Fran Ryba set up her own consultancy 13 years ago to help smaller companies navigate the increasing amount of employment legislation

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