

BOOK REVIEW

Kaplan Human Resource Certification by Karen Yasgoor and Susan Bressler (Kaplan Publishing, 2008); **PHR/SPHR: Professional in Human Resources Certification Study Guide** by Anne Bogardus (Sybex, 2009); **PHR Exam Prep: Professional in Human Resources** by Cathy Lee Gibson (Pearson Education, 2007).

Reviewed by **Ashley Guidroz**, Ph.D., SPHR. Dr. Guidroz is a culture consultant for Trinity Health in Farmington Hills, MI. She received her doctorate in industrial/organizational psychology from Bowling Green State University and a M.A. in industrial/organizational psychology from Minnesota State University. Contact: guidroza@trinity-health.org.

Electing to sit for the Professional in Human Resources (PHR) or the Senior Professional in Human Resources (SPHR) accreditation is the first step in showing one's commitment to the field of HR and demonstrating competency of HR principles and core practices. There are a myriad of resources available for test preparation including on-line or university-based classes, study guides, and practice tests. Study guides are a popular choice for those individuals who have the discipline to stick to a self-paced study plan, and, luckily, they are not without choices. Three of the more popular study guides include *PHR/SPHR: Professional in Human Resources Certification Study Guide* by Anne Bogardus, Kaplan's *Human Resource Certification* written by Karen Yasgoor and Susan Bressler, and Pearson Education's *Professional in Human Resources Exam Prep* by Cathy Lee Gibson. This review compares the features available within each guide.

The three texts are organized similarly with an initial chapter providing suggestions for study preparation and tips for taking the exam. All three books include a breakout of the percentage of test questions represented by each functional area on the PHR and SPHR exams. And each functional area is reviewed separately within its own chapter. Within each chapter, however, the style for presenting relevant information differs.

Bogardus: PHR/SPHR: Professional in Human Resources Certification Study Guide

Each Bogardus chapter follows the same format. Chapters begin with a list of the HRCI test specifications for the functional area that is covered within the chapter. "Notes" are off-set to draw attention to additional web-resources such as government websites for employment legislation. There is also a denotation of "PHR Only" or "SPHR Only" to flag information that will solely be covered on one exam or the other. Chapters conclude with a summary of the material, a list of essential information that should be known for the exam, a list of key terms, and review questions with answers. Bogardus includes four appendices within the book that provide information about the companion CD, a case study to solve typical HR challenges in a fictitious company,

additional federal employment legislation and case law, and a list of resources that includes books and websites to obtain further information.

Kaplan: Human Resource Certification

The Kaplan text provides information for both the PHR and SPHR exams. The text itself includes four practice exams (two for each certification) with explanations of the correct answers. The chapters are straightforward and include a review of the important topics for each functional area, a summary of the chapter content, and open-ended review questions with answers and explanations. Pages within each chapter may also include side bars with information related to real world application of concepts, content that is likely to appear on the exam, or recent news events that reinforce HR concepts. The Kaplan text includes three appendices with information on exam codes and specifications, a PHR/SPHR case study, and resources for further study.

Pearson: Professional in Human Resources

The Pearson text is the largest of the three study guides reviewed but solely focuses on preparing individuals to sit for the PHR exam. Each chapter begins with study strategies, such as writing and answering your own essay questions as a means for reinforcing the concepts. These study strategies are duplicated across each chapter and are not tailored specifically by content area. The content within each chapter covers the major topics for each functional area but the authors have also added offset text titled “Exam Alerts,” “Notes,” and “Tips” within each section. An “Exam Alert” includes information that is most likely to appear on an exam; a “Note” designates content that is deeper than the scope of the book and may require additional training and review; and a “Tip” section focuses attention on concepts that may also appear in other sections of the book. Each chapter concludes with a summary, a list of key terms, exercises to apply your knowledge, open-ended review questions and practice exam questions with answers, and suggested resources for further study. The Appendix to the Pearson text includes information on the content contained in the companion CD.

A Comparison

Comparing the study guides to each other reveals some advantages and disadvantages to each text (See Table 1). Although organized similarly, the Bogardus and Pearson texts provide more comprehensive information within each functional area chapter than the Kaplan text. The Kaplan text is the shortest of the three books, roughly 420 pages, but 230 pages of the book are reserved for four full-length exams with answers (two PHR and two SPHR exams). Content review in the Kaplan text is brief. For example, 16 pages are reserved for reviewing Strategic Planning and Management, the content of which focuses on the need for HR to meet an organization’s objectives. The Pearson text covers this same subject in 44 pages and discusses the evolving role of HR in organizations, the strategic planning processes, environmental scanning, measuring HR effectiveness, and other aspects of strategic organizational management in which HR can play a role.

Another difference among the books is the additional resources provided. Bogardus and Kaplan both provide additional chapters reviewing federal employment legislation and case law. In the case of the Kaplan text, this could be because the chapter on Employee and Labor Relations, where the majority of this information is discussed in Bogardus and Pearson, was too brief to encompass all of the information. Both Pearson and Bogardus include companion CD's that provide additional resources. The Bogardus CD contains a PDF version of the book, a full-length PHR and SPHR exam, and 400 electronic flashcards that can be used on a PC, Pocket PC, or Palm Handheld device. The Pearson guide includes one practice exam with detailed answers, but the companion CD includes a practice test engine, MeasureUp, that provides multiple test modes for taking test questions and detailed explanations of correct and incorrect answers.

Finally, the Pearson text is specifically designed to prepare individuals for the PHR certification and does not appear to provide information for studying for the SPHR exam. The Bogardus and Kaplan exams could be used for studying for either of the two exams and both include practice test questions for the PHR and SPHR exams.

Summary

All three of the study guides reviewed in this article would be helpful resources to individuals preparing for the PHR or SPHR exam. For individuals who are looking for more detailed review of the test content, the Bogardus or Pearson book might be a better fit. The additional materials provided in each of these texts, such as open-ended questions, case study, and key terms, may help reinforce HR content and principles making it easier to apply that knowledge during the test. Individuals who study better by taking practice tests and reviewing answers might find the Kaplan text to be sufficient, particularly if they are not in need of a detailed review of the HRCI content areas. Lastly, the Pearson book is only suitable for individuals sitting for the PHR exam as it does not appear to address content tailored specifically to the SPHR exam.

Table 1. Comparative Features of the Bogardus, Kaplan, and Pearson Guides

	Bogardus	Kaplan	Pearson
Study Preparation and Exam Tips	√	√	√
Review of Core Knowledge Requirements	√	√	√
Separate Chapters for Functional Areas	√	√	√
Content for PHR	√	√	√
Content for SPHR	√	√	
Practice Tests for PHR	√	√	√
Practice Tests for SPHR	√	√	
Glossary of Terms	√		√
Companion CD	√		√
Employment Legislation Supplement	√	√	
International HRM Supplement			√