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Robert Half International

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Introduction

Robert Half International: The Story of An American Company charts the remarkable journey of a firm that transformed the landscape of professional staffing and business consulting. Established in 1948 in New York City by Robert Half and his wife, Maxine, the company began as a single employment agency addressing a growing need for specialized accounting talent. From its earliest days, Robert Half International set itself apart by focusing on the quality and specialization of its services—a philosophy that would come to define its operations and fuel its ascent in the decades that followed.

The company's innovative approach was revolutionary for its time. By carving out a niche in accounting and finance staffing, Robert Half laid the groundwork for the modern concept of specialized recruitment. As the organization set its sights on expansion, it pioneered the franchise model in personnel services, helping establish more than a hundred franchises across the United States by the mid-1980s. This wide-reaching network not only facilitated tremendous growth but also planted the seeds for the next era of transformation.

The mid-1980s and 1990s marked a critical period of reinvention and bold vision, as new leadership took the reins and Robert Half International underwent major structural and strategic shifts. The buyback of its franchises led to increased operational efficiency and a unified brand, while going public provided the capital necessary for diversification and international expansion. The emergence of divisions such as Robert Half Legal, Robert Half Technology, OfficeTeam, and The Creative Group expanded the company's reach into new professional domains, solidifying its status as an industry leader and a household name in talent solutions.

Entering the 21st century, Robert Half International further demonstrated its resilience and adaptability in the face of evolving economic landscapes. With the establishment of Protiviti—a consulting arm focusing on risk management, internal audit, and technology advisory—RHI ventured beyond staffing into the broader world of business consulting, opening new streams of revenue and expanding its global influence. Sustained growth, a diversified service portfolio, and robust international operations testified to the company's ability to respond to the shifting demands of clients and professionals around the world.

Beyond its business achievements, Robert Half International has long been recognized for its ethical standards, corporate culture, and commitment to responsibility. From accolades for workplace excellence to recognition for ethical conduct and sustainable practices, the company's reputation is as deeply rooted in its values as in its financial performance. By consistently ranking among the world's most admired companies and

best places to work, Robert Half has turned culture into a competitive advantage.

This book tells the story of Robert Half International's rise from a small New York agency to a Fortune 500 and S&P 500 global leader, exploring the key milestones, innovations, and philosophies that powered its growth. It is also a critical look at the company's present-day operations, leadership, and role in meeting the workforce challenges of the digital age. Finally, as talent and technology continue to reshape the future of work, this book offers insight into how Robert Half International is poised to continue shaping—and leading—the evolution of work itself.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Founding of Robert Half: A Vision in 1948

In the bustling post-World War II landscape of New York City, where innovation and enterprise were quickly reshaping American industry, a quiet revolution was brewing in the world of professional employment. This revolution didn't emerge from a grand corporate merger or a technological breakthrough; instead, it began with a simple yet profound idea conceived by a man named Robert Half and his wife, Maxine Half. In 1948, they founded Robert Half Inc., an employment agency with a very specific focus: accountants. This seemingly straightforward decision marked a pivotal moment, not just for their nascent company, but for the entire employment services industry.

At a time when generalist employment agencies dominated the scene, the Half's vision of specialization was remarkably prescient. Most agencies aimed to place any type of worker in any available position, a broad approach that often led to a less-than-ideal match between talent and need. Robert and Maxine Half, however, recognized that the burgeoning field of accounting, with its intricate demands and specific skill sets, required a more tailored approach. They saw an unmet need for an agency that truly understood the nuances of accounting and could connect qualified professionals with companies seeking those precise skills.

This dedication to specialization was not merely a business strategy; it was a philosophy. Robert Half believed that by focusing on a specific niche, his agency could develop unparalleled expertise in that area. This deep understanding would allow them to better assess candidates' qualifications and, more importantly, to discern the exact requirements of their client companies. It was about moving beyond simply filling a vacancy and instead, making a truly strategic placement. The goal was to ensure that both the professional and the employer would thrive from the match.

The early days of Robert Half Inc. were characterized by a hands-on approach. Robert and Maxine were deeply involved in every aspect of the business, from interviewing candidates to building relationships with potential client companies. Their office, likely a modest affair in the sprawling metropolis, would have been a hub of activity, a place where resumes were meticulously reviewed and potential connections were carefully considered. This personal touch was crucial in establishing trust and demonstrating their commitment to quality.

Their initial focus on accounting professionals quickly proved to be a shrewd move. As businesses expanded and the complexities of financial management grew, the demand for skilled accountants soared. Companies, both large and small, found

themselves in constant need of qualified individuals to manage their books, prepare taxes, and navigate increasingly intricate financial regulations. Robert Half Inc. positioned itself perfectly to address this burgeoning demand.

The success of their specialized approach was not immediate or effortless, but it was steady. Word began to spread among accounting professionals and businesses alike that there was an agency in New York City that genuinely understood their unique needs. Candidates felt more confident that their specialized skills would be appreciated and appropriately matched, while companies found a reliable source for the precise talent they required. This mutual benefit fueled the early growth of Robert Half Inc.

In those formative years, Robert Half was not just building a business; he was effectively pioneering a new model for the employment services industry. He demonstrated that by narrowing the focus, one could deepen the impact. This idea, that specialization leads to superior results, would become a cornerstone of the company's identity and a guiding principle for its future expansion and diversification.

The establishment of Robert Half Inc. in 1948 was more than just the opening of another employment agency. It was the birth of a concept that would ultimately revolutionize how companies sought and found talent, and how professionals navigated their careers. It laid the foundation for a company that would not only endure but would grow to become a global leader in specialized talent solutions. The journey had only just begun, but the critical first step, a vision rooted in specialized excellence, had been decisively taken in the heart of New York City.

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