



advantage

A SOMEWHAT MURKY CRYSTAL BALL

By Judy Clark, SPHR

Much has been written about the future of HR. Whole books are devoted to the subject. Futurists project enticing scenarios about the way Human Resources will be managed in the decades to come. It only seems appropriate that we ought to take a shot at it.

To better see the future, we need to understand the present and our assumptions about it. So let us offer, in no particular order, the following observations and ideas to set the stage for the prognostications.

- G. Edgar Adkins, Jr. of Ernst and Young said, "HR should be the electricity that lights all our organizations."
- Jennifer Jarratt of Coates and Jarratt, a well-known futuring firm, reminds us that "Human Capital is the largest resource that organizations do not own."
- *Fast Company*, the hugely popular business magazine, subtitled one of its recent articles, "The best leaders know where all the great companies start. (It's the people, stupid!)"
- Carly Fiorina, CEO of Hewlett-Packard stated it this way, "...the most magical and tangible and ultimately most important ingredient in the transformed landscape is people. The greatest strategy...the greatest financials...the greatest turnaround...is only going to be temporary if it isn't grounded in people."
- The demographics are staggering. By 2005, 85 million people will be over 50. Manufacturing jobs in the U.S. will decrease 50% in the decade between 1995 and 2005. The business landscape is constantly changing. Each day brings new innovation and product ideas that were unknown only months before.
- Success is temporary. Just consider Levi Strauss, Lucent, Enron, and K-Mart.

And if you really want to be scared, just consider that it is anticipated that by 2019 we will have a computer that can imitate the human brain; and by 2030, that computer will have the capacity and intelligence of 1,000 human brains.

These observations and facts fundamentally impact the world of HR and, as HR professionals, we must find our future so that we can bring our best selves and the most essentials skills to our employers.

So as we gaze into our crystal ball (remember we said it was murky), here is what may happen in the future:

- HR will need to understand market shifts and anticipate them - when there is no availability of skilled applicants, HR will construct programs and formal schools to develop them.
- HR will no longer rely on employee loyalty and will come to recognize that "life is just a series of gigs."
- The number of HR professionals will shrink and substantially upgrade. There will be a barrier to entering the profession to ensure quality of HR practices.
- HR will focus far less on doing and far more on teaching others their knowledge. HR will be evaluated by their success at teaching, and the results achieved by those they have taught.
- HR will drive the organizational dialogue about productivity and the role of human assets in achieving it.
- Legislation impacting the workplace will move from federal to state, and HR professionals will routinely offer testimony about the effects of proposed legislation.
- Telecommuting will become ordinary, and we'll feel more comfortable with that.
- Many key HR activities will be outsourced or taken to the internet for employee self-service (ESS).

- Employee rights will continue to escalate. Privacy concerns will increase, but they will be increasingly difficult to deal with, given that information will be so easily obtained.
- Each employee will be “wired” for personal communications, and organizational messages will be sent via their personal communications device. Kiosks will abound in the workplace and employees will simply “plug into” them to update themselves on organizational activities, calendar changes, and new procedures, making many meetings and training programs simply unnecessary.
- HR will be about organizational change and its impact on the human capital. It may even be that a name change is in the offing – Human Resources Management to Human Capital Management.

It is clear that HR needs to be prepared for change, and more change, and more..... well, you get the idea.

DISCIPLINE AND DISCHARGE: STEPS TO AVOIDING WRONGFUL TERMINATION

By Deborah Jeffries, PHR

Performance challenges are encountered in every organization; however, not every organization manages performance problems effectively. Employers must develop competent skills in managing employee behavior. One of the most basic human resource processes that can help an employer avoid wrongful termination is a proper hiring, selection and training program. Taking time to thoroughly check a potential employee's background and references usually pays off in terms of selecting quality employees. Once the employee is on board, an effective and comprehensive orientation process and providing the new hire with written materials such as an employee handbook and rules of conduct will help the employee become familiar with the culture and expected behavior. In addition, supervisory training on performance management and the disciplinary process is critical to preventing wrongful termination lawsuits. Clearly written policies and procedures are critical tools for shaping employee conduct and behavior.

Employers are allowing employees more flexibility in terms of schedules and other aspects of work life. This can escalate poor performance and employee behavior concerns. Because of this, supervisors need to be coached on how best to handle disciplinary procedures and processes.

Discipline and termination processes must be handled with caution in order to avoid legal problems and ensure that employees are treated with consideration and respect. Inconsistent treatment can result in low employee morale and decreased productivity. With collective bargaining agreements, inadequate documentation and improper enforcement of the rules may lead to grievances and arbitrator reversals of management actions. This two-part article will discuss why employees do not do what they are supposed to do. It will discuss why discipline is necessary, some of the benefits of a disciplinary process and procedure, provide the format for a disciplinary discussion, and factors to consider when making a disciplinary decision.

Effective performance management is critical to the success of every workplace. One aspect of performance management is the disciplinary process. The use of discipline/performance coaching is certainly one of management's least favorite activities, but can correct improper conduct and help an employee improve performance. Discipline should have an educational aspect to assist an employee to understand why an action is being taken. Without feedback, the employee is left wondering whether his/her performance is on track.

The goal of positive and corrective action is ensuring that all employees are treated fairly and uniformly. The best discipline comes from good leadership and firm, fair supervision.

Employers must retain their right to select the disciplinary response they feel is most appropriate for any given situation. In order to defend a termination decision, the courts will want to see that the employee was aware that failure to improve performance would result in termination.

Reasons for Non-Performance. There are many reasons why employees do not perform as expected:

- Employees don't know why they should perform a task or duty.
- They don't know how to perform a task or duty.

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- They don't know what they are supposed to do.
- They think they are doing it.
- They think your way won't work.
- They think their way is better.
- They think something else is more important.
- There is no positive reward for doing it.
- They are rewarded for not doing it.
- They are "punished" for doing what they are supposed to do.
- They anticipate a negative consequence for doing it.
- There is no negative consequence for not performing.
- There are obstacles beyond their control.
- Their personal limits prevent them from performing.
- They are experiencing personal problems.
- No one could perform as expected.

Before starting any formal discipline process, supervisors should ensure that they look at their own behavior and communication because it may be playing a role in the employee's non-performance.

Benefits of Corrective Action. The benefits of corrective action are numerous. Counseling and discipline can result in employee behavior that is consistent, and improve both the efficiency and quality of the workforce. On the legal side, corrective action can reduce exposure to EEO and wrongful termination suits by providing defensible documentation. In the safety arena, corrective action offers the additional benefit of reinforcing the need for safety and concern for the employer's property and equipment. Effective coaching and counseling can also result in significantly lower costs by reducing turnover and absenteeism. And, finally, discipline can indicate that justice exists in the workplace as employees learn that poor performance will not be tolerated. Non-enforcement of rules or policies can lead employees to believe that violation of organizational rules is acceptable.

Effective corrective action can have the added benefit of increasing a supervisor's confidence by resulting in earlier problem resolution, because performance problems rarely go away on their own — and may even worsen if not addressed. Better communication between employee and supervisor may also result from these performance discussions, and the employee may feel more confident because he/she will have a clearer understanding of responsibilities and expected behavior.

Preparing for the Disciplinary Discussion. In preparing for a disciplinary discussion, there are questions the supervisor should ask, such as: Was a known rule violated? Was the employee properly trained? Is the employee's alleged conduct part of a pattern of carelessness or an isolated incident? Does the employee seem willing to learn from his/her mistakes? What actual or potential damage resulted from the employee's conduct? What influence will the discipline have on other workers? Did the employee's act have any negative effects on the organization's public image? How is this discipline decision affected by the collective bargaining agreement?

An effective system focuses on correcting the problem, rather than punishing the employee. We encourage employers to use a system called "positive discipline" which appeals to the employee's self-respect rather than using a fear-based approach. Remember, the employee performance situation could be a result of poor supervision, inadequate training or personal challenges that may be affecting the employee.

Documentation. The importance of documentation cannot be overly stressed. As soon as a supervisor has a concern that there may be a non-performance pattern starting, it is wise to begin keeping performance notes that function as the supervisor's desk notes. Then the supervisor has a record of dates and details of the employee's performance. These notes are appropriate when verbal employee counseling has not worked. The notes should be accurate and factual and when writing them the supervisor should remain uninvolved emotionally.

Steps in the Disciplinary Discussion. The first step in the disciplinary process is often an oral reminder. The oral reminder is just that: a conversation that details the performance issue and reminds the person of what is expected. This conversation needs to be documented for the personnel file. A summary of all verbal and written warnings should be placed in the employee's personnel file for the employer's legal protection.

After the oral reminder is given, a written reminder is usually appropriate if performance or behavior remains an issue. The written reminder should include:

- the date of the conversation;
- a description of the specific performance problem;
- a reference to the previous conversation (the oral reminder);
- a statement regarding the change needed in the employee's performance or behavior, including the timeframe for improvement;
- the consequences of not meeting performance expectations; and,
- any employee comments or statements made during the conversation.

A third step in the process can be a suspension, during which time a complete assessment is conducted including interviewing any employees who may have knowledge of the situation to obtain additional facts and data. This also allows the facts and data to be reviewed by Human Resources to ensure termination is the correct decision. For those organizations unfamiliar with conducting such assessments, HR Northwest can provide an assessment checklist and an assessment manual if needed to ensure an effective assessment is conducted and no steps are left out. Please give us a call for further details.

Suspension without pay may result from a separate, more serious work rule violation, or it may be altogether eliminated as a step for a performance problem because it is rarely effective in the latter case. Suspension pending assessment is an important process. If the allegation or situation is serious, it may be both appropriate and prudent to suspend the employee with pay (since no guilt has yet been established), conduct a thorough review or assessment, make a decision regarding continued employment and then implement the decision. Suspending the employee provides a "safer" environment and gives the employer time to complete paperwork, including the final check if necessary.

Before a decision is made to terminate, the employer needs to determine if other employees have been treated similarly in the past for similar performance issues. If the employee is in a protected class, the employer should pay very close attention to how similar cases have been handled. Have other employees with the same performance issues been retained or let go? It is also wise to retain examples of poor performance such as work samples, attendance records, productivity data, etc. If the employee is, in fact, being treated differently, there must be a clear business justification. The employee's file should also be reviewed to ascertain if any other performance documentation exists.

Then, finally, if poor performance still continues, the employer makes a decision to discharge. We recommend that an employer never give more than one final warning, because if one is issued and the employer does not follow up with termination, the "final warning" will be ineffective and the employee will not take future warnings seriously. It is important to remember the 12-month rule regarding warnings — a warning is only good for a 12-month period unless it concerns the violation of an egregious work rule such as violence in the workplace or harassment.

If a significant amount of time passes between the time the supervisor gives an oral or written reminder, and the same offense occurs again, the above steps can be repeated. If a performance appraisal is due when an employee is involved in the disciplinary process, an increase should be withheld until the employee's performance improves.

Next month we will continue this article by taking a look at tips for conducting a successful disciplinary conversation and some of the cautions for supervisors and employers.

Q & A

Q. More than once we have had to terminate someone because they were a "problem employee." But then they turn right around and collect unemployment. It doesn't seem right. As an employer, is there anything I can do to avoid this situation in the future?

A. Yes. First remember that unemployment insurance is just that—insurance. It is intended to help individuals who lose their job through *no fault of their own*. An employee cannot simply quit or deliberately behave in a way that causes him/her to get fired and then expect to receive unemployment insurance. It is not a guaranteed payout. (This is different from an employee who is dismissed solely because he or she is *unable* to do the work, in which case it is not considered their fault.)

To avoid being unfairly charged for unemployment claims, you must take two measures and they must be taken before termination. First, make it very clear to the employee that certain prohibited behaviors will lead to termination. Second, document your conversations with the employee. The first measure places the employee on notice that their employment “fate” is in their own hands—that if they continue to engage in the unacceptable behaviors, they are, in essence, making the choice to sever the employment relationship. The second measure, which may take the form of written warnings or last chance agreements, gives you the proof that you will later need to provide the employment department. Written documentation is critical because you will need more than just your word to persuade the state that the employee knew the consequences of his/her behavior. Taking these basic steps will go a long way in ensuring that you are charged only for those unemployment claims where employees lose their job through no fault of their own. Do keep in mind that an employee who is let go because of performance concerns, an inability to meet the employer’s expectations, will likely always be eligible for unemployment.

Our Q&A's each month will be provided by one of our professional consultants, Steve Myhre, SPHR. If you need additional information or have questions on the material provided, please call him at 503-885-9815.

ROMANCING DANGER

Despite the thorny nature of dating someone we work with, 60% of people polled by CareerBuilder.com said they’ve been involved in a romantic relationship with a co-worker. Most people (93%) said they’ve worked in an organization where fellow employees were romantically involved. Still, most people believe there are definite problems with office romances.

Among the most cited:

Favoritism between the people involved in the romance	42%
Lost respect for the people involved in the romance	31%
Lower productivity of the people involved in the romance	30%
Retaliation or public confrontation between the people involved	25%
One or both parties left the company of their own accord	23%
Decreased morale of co-workers	17%
The organization forced one or both parties to leave	13%
Decreased productivity of co-workers	12%
Complaints of sexual harassment	11%
Other	10%
No problems	34%

HR'S EMPLOYMENT CHALLENGES

10-Year Employment Projections Drive HR Planning, Decisions. U.S Department of Labor projections for the American workforce from 1998 to 2008 provide information that shows where future job growth is expected by industry and occupation, and what the makeup of the workforce pursuing these jobs is likely to be. These projections are important to employers and HR professionals in planning worker education and training programs, preparing competitive recruitment and retention strategies, and providing valuable career guidance to employees. The projections show trends that are likely, even in the event of a recession or unforeseen disasters. Here are some highlights:

Employment

- Over the 1998-2008 period, total employment is projected to increase by 14%. This growth rate is significantly slower than the previous 10-year period when growth was 17%.
- Service-producing industries will account for virtually all of the job growth. Only construction will add jobs in the goods-producing sector.

- A decrease of almost 90,000 manufacturing jobs is expected, while productivity is projected to increase. Accounting for 13% of employment in 1998, manufacturing is expected to account for just 12% in 2008. Business services, health services, engineering, social services, management, and related services are expected to account for almost one of every two non-farm wage and salary jobs added to the economy during the 1998-2008 period.
- Professional and specialty occupations are projected to increase the fastest and to add the most jobs – 5.3 million. This occupational group also had the fastest rate of growth in the 1988-1998 period. Service workers are expected to add 3.9 million jobs. These two groups alone are expected to provide 45% of the total projected job growth over the period.
- Precision production, craft, repair occupations, fabricators, and laborers are projected to grow much more slowly than the average due to continuing advances in technology, changes in production methods, and the overall decline in manufacturing employment.

Labor Force

- The supply of workers is projected to increase by 12%. This is a somewhat lower growth rate than the previous 10-year period. The age 45-64 labor force will grow faster than any other age group as the baby-boom generation continues to age. The age 25-34 labor force will decline by 2.7 million, reflecting a decrease in births.
- The labor force participation rate of women in nearly all age groups is projected to increase, with the women's share of the workforce increasing from 46% to 48%.
- The Asian and Hispanic labor forces are projected to increase faster than other groups, by 40% and 37% respectively. The black labor force is expected to grow by 20%, twice as fast as the 10% growth rate of the white labor force. By 2008, the Hispanic labor force will be larger than the black labor force.

For more detailed information, visit the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website at <http://stats.bls.gov>.

Staffing Trends. Results of a recent survey compiled by staffing.org reveals some significant changes in U.S. staffing trends. The survey results are based on data obtained from 679 organizations in 13 different business industries in the year 2000.

Some significant results are:

- The average cost-per-hire was \$4,522, which is higher than the previous year by \$636. Cost-per-hire is calculated by dividing total recruiting costs by the total number of hires.
- Cost-per-hire costs were highest in the Southwest Region (Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Northern Mariana, Guam).
- The cost-per-hire figures ranged from \$2,181 for educational services to \$11,209 for consulting services.
- The recruiting efficiency ratio was 13.58% in comparison to 16.04% the previous year. This ratio is calculated by dividing total recruiting costs by total compensation recruited (does not include sign-on bonuses, travel expenses, visa expenses, time to fill, customer satisfaction, or quality of hire).
- Of particular interest is the fact that recruiting efficiency ratios were substantially higher for the Northwest Region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, Wyoming) and the Southwest Region. This is thought to be due at least in part to the high-tech industry's prevalence in these areas.
- Larger organizations seem to have lower cost-per-hire and higher recruiting efficiency ratios – perhaps a result of an efficient economy of scale.
- The variance in costs may be due to the use of different recruitment strategies necessary to address labor market dynamics.

For more information about the results of the survey or just to peruse their web site, visit www.staffing.org.

Life Balance Concerns Will Influence Job Changes. Employees don't want to work all the time; they want time to play, to relax, to enjoy relationships and activities outside work. This desire for a different kind of lifestyle will drive significant shifts in the workplace.

Workers of all ages -married and single, with and without children - will be more concerned about their lifestyles in the years ahead. When asked, employees say they are beginning to feel overworked and under-appreciated. That sense of being under-appreciated even extends to how workers feel about how they're treating themselves. More employees are focusing on how they manage their work lives and how they manage their personal lives.

Some of the concern is the extra load placed on people who did not get laid off during the 2001 economic slowdown. The Families and Work Institute reports that of workers who remain after current downsizing efforts, 54% feel overworked, 55% feel overwhelmed by the workload, 59% lack time for reflection, 56% can't complete their assigned tasks, and 45% must "multi-task" too much. This kind of pressure is counter to desires for better life balance. The risk will remain, since we expect layoffs to continue as employers continue to restructure, reorganize, and streamline.

Even in organizations that have not downsized, the same challenges and pressures are present. When employers cannot hire enough competent workers, and the work still has to be done, the workers who are there must assume the responsibility. When someone leaves for another job, a career change, a move out of town, or is ill for just a few days, the load is spread among those who are left. With plenty of employment choices, workers who feel overloaded will attempt to escape.

Other employment may not be better, so workers will seek to strengthen balance on the personal side of their lives. They'll search for ways to find happiness in non-work activities. Insisting on better balance, people will consciously organize their personal time differently.

Workers share in the corporate pain. More and more workers are actually paying to keep their jobs. With the economy taking a dive, employees are forgoing "non-salary compensation" like bonuses and stock options to reduce the number of people troubled companies lay off.

Workers, from lawyers to department store clerks, are facing 10% to 100% cuts in bonuses, profit sharing, stock options and commission payments. Nearly half of all U.S. organizations have already suspended or are considering suspending bonus and incentive pay this year.

Up to 10% of all workers have some kind of variable pay. Among organizations that employ more than 500 people, about 40% of all workers get variable pay. And about 60% of middle managers making \$60,000 to \$100,000 are eligible for bonuses—up from 40% from 10 years ago.

What's it all mean? While such cuts in bonuses and other compensation help keep more workers employed, those same workers will be taking home less income to their families.

BENEFITS OF LOW-COST BENEFITS

It's a time when many organizations are caught in a financial tug of war. With disappointing earnings and escalating health care costs, it may seem difficult, if not almost impossible, to implement new benefits in order to keep staff members, and keep them motivated.

Yet, not all benefits come with big price tags. And, as some organizations are finding out, little bennies, particularly those tied to recognition, can go a long way toward creating a positive work environment.

Bob Nelson, founder and president of the training and consulting firm Nelson Motivation, Inc. and author of several books on what motivates employees, differentiates between awards/rewards and other low-cost benefits. Benefits are those things that are available to everyone, while someone is selected for a reward. His view on creating a low-cost benefit for everyone: "I put this in the category of things that are nice to do that loosely impact morale," he says. However, he cautions that this kind of benefit can quickly become status quo. He cites the organization that provides donuts for its employees every Friday. By the third or fourth Friday, he says, people are asking, "Where are the donuts?" At Mary Kay they call this the paradox of the valued employee. If you do things just to be nice to employees, it can backfire.

So how does an organization institute feel-good benefits without negative repercussions? According to Nelson, it begins with sending the right message. "If you take a look at the *Fortune* 100 Best Companies to Work For, all have strong cultures of trust and respect," he says. Once such an environment is established, he then prefers to tie benefits back to performance as much as possible. While he acknowledges that there are "those things you do for morale," he's a firm believer in tying activities to motivation.

"Today the better motivators are more personal, more contingent oriented," he says, indicating that rewards are most effective when timed close to desired behavior, and when they have a context. In addition, he says, the best motivation comes from people the employee holds in high esteem. Nelson points out that this is particularly true with programs like years-of-service awards and employee-of-the-month recognition.

And, according to Nelson, it's largely about delivery. It is not only about the item, but it is about the presentation. Likewise, he indicates that program review is important. Many organizations set up a program and never look to see how it's doing

According to Nelson, effective acknowledgement of individual achievement is a powerful, low-cost management tool. Yet, while many organizations have acknowledgment-related activities, he says most of these activities have little impact. The reason? Organizations are not making the connection between activities and recognition, Nelson explains. "Recognition is exciting. Recognition is special," he says.

So what will your organization offer its employees? Not sure what perks will pique employees interest? Consider a recent Maritz Poll that found 58% of employees call themselves baseball fans and that, of those people, one in eight has called in sick to attend a baseball game. The same Maritz Poll found that, while there are many baseball fans, workers prefer football.

The Society for Human Resource Management 2001 Benefits Survey reveals that 40% of 754 respondents offer company-purchased tickets for sporting or cultural events.

The Xerox Corporation is one organization that makes baseball tickets available to employees. The company has a box at Frontier Stadium in Rochester, N.Y., the home of the Rochester Red Wings, a Triple-A affiliate of the Baltimore Orioles. Obviously, the marketing purpose of having the suite is for customers, but if the seats aren't being used, why not share? Some bosses will ask for the box for a night of employee team building. Many employees say such outings can be both fun and motivational.

Xerox has other low-cost benefits, including several that are tied to recognition. There is a corporate-wide program where, at his or her discretion, a manager can award a \$100 dinner-for-two gift certificate at a local restaurant. A manager must indicate why certificates are given out. Frequently they are used in connection with specific projects.

The banking environment, known for its conservatism, has even followed suit. Northern Trust Bank of Arizona, for example, offers flextime to all non client-contact employees. The bank also offers several low-cost benefits to employees. For example, tea, coffee and hot cocoa are provided free of charge for all employees. In addition, employees are given free parking in a covered lot. Employees are encouraged to carpool. As an incentive, the bank provides reserved parking spaces for carpool vehicles. Employees who carpool are then eligible to receive gift certificates or cash awards.

In addition to these perks, Arizona employees receive several other low-cost corporate benefits, including shopping discounts and reduced admission to amusement parks, and all employees receive holiday gifts each year.

Other low-cost ideas that many organizations have instituted include;

- Pets at work;
- Free beverages;
- Foosball, pool tables and video games;
- Casual clothing;
- Subsidized fitness centers; and,
- Flextime.

WORDS TO FORGET

The workplace is not necessarily getting to be an easier environment for supervisors or employees. But one thing is for sure - there are certain words and phrases that should be avoided. Take a look at this list and see what others you would add.

10. It doesn't matter what I do—I'm only one person.
9. I'll change just as soon as everyone else does.
8. Do as I say, not as I do.
7. That's their opinion . . . what do they know?
6. Because I said so, that's why.
5. I win and you lose.
4. It's not my job.
3. I don't care.
2. Those people.
1. Me

CONGRATULATIONS!!

Please join us in celebration as we announce the birth of Rennick Clark Jeffries, a beautiful baby boy born to Deborah and Brian Jeffries. Born on Jan. 4, 2002 at 12:12 am, weighing in at 9 lbs 1 ounce, and a teeny tiny 21 inches long. Best wishes to you and the whole family, Deborah.

HR NORTHWEST CALENDAR

Open up your daytimers, computer calendars and palm pilots. The following is a look at upcoming events, special days and other diverse and fun activities you will want to be aware of and get scheduled.

FEBRUARY

American Heart, International Boost Self-Esteem, International Expect Success, Library Lovers', National African-American History, and Plant the Seeds of Greatness Month.

February 7 **HRN Workshop - Portland**
Conflict Management
8:30 - 12:00 noon

Feb. 10-16 International Flirting Week (could be a problem with that Romance article!)

Feb. 11-17 Live to Give Week

February 11 Motivaction Day (to recognize that it takes both motivation and action to produce results)

February 13 **HRN Workshop - Willamette Valley**
Employment Practices - What You Don't Know Can Hurt You
8:30 - 12:00 noon

February 14 Valentine's Day

February 19 **HRN Workshop - Puget Sound**
Conflict Management
8:30 - 12:00 noon

MARCH

March 7 **HRN Workshop - Portland**
Handbooks & Policy Manuals
8:30 - 12 noon

March 19 **HRN Workshop - Puget Sound**
Handbooks & Policy Manuals
8:30 - 12 noon

ON MY SOAPBOX

What is it that you expect – from yourself and from others? What outcomes do you anticipate? Why are some of us optimists and others pessimists? Why are some of us so easily pleased, while others find little joy in small pleasures?

The answers are complex, a function of our personal experiences and perceptions about how life has treated us. They are also a result of our expectations, the way we think things should or will be. In 1964, a man named Vroom tried to explain it. He presented the concept that people are influenced by the expected results of their actions, and will try to achieve that which will have the desired results. It was a revolutionary way to think about motivation and expectations.

(I can just hear you now: “Judy, this is far different from what you usually write. What’s with this theory stuff? This sounds a lot like an academic treatise, not a Soapbox!” But wait! There is a “Judy point” here. Just give me a minute.)

An acquaintance recently told me that she was really disappointed with her Christmas gift from her husband. In the weeks preceding the holiday, he had been promising that she “would just love it,” so she was excited and anticipatory. But when she opened the gift, she found it wasn’t at all what she had thought. It wasn’t anything that was on her “wish list,” and she couldn’t imagine why it was even a gift for her. It was a tent, a big one.

Her husband had heard her say often that the family didn’t spend enough time together. So he thought a tent would be just right, since it would allow the whole family to get away for camping. He thought it was a wonderful gift!

Her impression was quite different. She was thinking she was going to receive something far more personal, something just for her. She was hurt that he hadn’t cared enough to get her something she wanted. Also, she saw camping as a lot more work, not restful family time.

Was there anything wrong with the tent as a gift? No, absolutely not. But it wasn’t what she expected. She “expected” something from her list. Getting the tent, no matter how well-intentioned, was disappointing. Will she make a list next year, knowing that it didn’t net her the desired result this year? I don’t know.

All this made me think more about expectations. What do we expect, and how do we handle not getting the desired results? Think about Norman Rockwell’s Thanksgiving – have any of you ever had one of those at your house? What about the fairy tale ending, “.....and they lived happily ever after.”? How do we reconcile that with the reality of a 50% divorce rate? And what do we expect from relationships? Are we setting ourselves up for disappointment by expecting people to meet our needs instead of their own?

Expectations are powerful. When we expect a lot from ourselves, we conquer great obstacles and that helps us be our best selves. But when our expectations are about others or events outside our control, when we can’t accept or bounce back from a different outcome than we expected, we can become anti-wish or anti-hope. We may opt out of caring, and feel that nothing good will happen.

Our internal motivation moves us to take actions that we believe will result in positive consequences. Evaluating our expectations to ensure they are appropriate and not detrimental is essential. Watch out though – expectations are insidious little creatures that creep into our minds when we aren’t looking. I can’t speak for you, but I have to scan my brain regularly to evict them from residence.

- Judy Clark, President



Providing Customized HR Services That Matter Most

Please feel free to visit our website:

www.hrnorthwest.com