



# advantage

## ROMANCE IN WORKPLACE IS DISCOURAGED

The majority of Human Resource professionals and corporate executives agree that workplace romance is something they would avoid like the plague; yet their organizations typically don't have policies addressing it. A survey on workplace romance jointly produced by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and CareerJournal.com, found that 81% of HR professionals and 76% of executives feel workplace romances are dangerous because they can lead to conflict in the organization.

Of course it is only natural that when people work closely together romantic feelings sometimes can emerge. That's why experts recommend that organizations need a workplace romance policy to help set guidelines for what is and is not appropriate, and to prepare the organization and the involved parties for challenges that may arise.

Based on the survey results, HR professionals and executives varied in their responses about the potential challenges and consequences that may arise from a workplace romance. For example, 58% of executives said that workplace romances should be banned because of the potential for retaliation if the romance ends, while only 12% of HR professionals gave that reason. Executives were also more likely to view such romances as unprofessional (58%) and agree that they almost always end in disaster (32%) while only 38% and 24% of HR professionals said the same. The differences in perception may be due to the fact that executives are more involved in the day-to-day dynamics that result from a workplace romance than HR professionals who may only become aware of the situation if a problem arises or it may simply be that HR professionals recognize that the situation is far more complex, and rarely responds well to a simple prohibition.

Despite the thorny nature of dating someone we work with, 60% of people polled by a CareerBuilder.com survey 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, two-thirds of people believe there are definite problems with office romances. The following chart outlines the incidents 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 on 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%

Co-workers who are dating should find out what the company policies are on workplace romance so they can avoid potential negative consequences. Although they may not lose their jobs, employees involved in office romances could be viewed as unprofessional, especially if they are public in their displays of affection. When an organization encounters such activities, it is best to sit both parties down and have a conversation about the fact that this relationship cannot be demonstrated in the workplace and that it will not be allowed to affect their work performance. If there is evidence that the relationship is impacting their work then it will be dealt with on a performance basis.

While the data supports that workplace romance presents challenges, it can also be a success. A majority of HR professionals (66%) and corporate executives (57%) reported that over the past five years, employees who had been involved in a workplace romance got married. The survey also found that about a quarter of the organizations are offering training on ways to best manage workplace romances – a ten percent increase over the last three years.

## SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER MISMATCHES

We have received many calls from you about mismatched social security numbers from the Social Security administration. In light of some steps the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) plans to take regarding social security numbers, as well as the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), we feel it is important to discuss the trends with increased regulations/administration regarding social security numbers.

Employers must obtain employee social security numbers for IRS purposes. Is this the only time an employer is to request this number and who needs to be contacted if there has been an error regarding an employee's number? Three of the agencies involved with social security numbers are the IRS, Social Security Administration (SSA) and, on some occasions, INS. These agencies are beginning to crack down on incorrect matches with these numbers and it is important to understand an employer's responsibility when an error is discovered.

Upon beginning employment, an employee must fill out an IRS W-4 form for tax withholding purposes. A social security number is required for this form. The IRS plans to begin penalizing employers for not verifying these numbers. Beginning in June of 2004, a fine of \$50 per incorrect form, retroactive to 2002, will be assessed for incorrect forms. Since an employer is required to supply the IRS with correct information, in the event an error is discovered, the employer needs to fill out a W-2C form to correct the error.

Another form that an employee fills out in the beginning of employment is the I-9 form. This is the form that the INS requires to be filled out to verify eligibility of employment. However, a social security number is only used for this form if the employee chooses to use his/her social security card as verification of employment eligibility. If a social security card is used and a mismatch is found, the INS becomes involved. An indication of an incorrect match does not automatically require that the INS be notified, though. The organization needs to give the employee an opportunity to supply new documentation.

In the event that new documentation is supplied, the employer should then verify this new number with the SSA at 1-800-772-6270. If the number is valid and correct, the IRS should be contacted with the correct information so that the employer is not at risk with the INS. However, if it is found the number is not correct, the employer is then in the position of possibly knowingly hiring an illegal alien.

How is an employer notified of an incorrect match? Mismatch letters come from the SSA. It is reported that in 2000, the SSA incorrectly issued 100,000 social security numbers to non-citizens. Due to this, the SSA plans on sending out 750,000 mismatch letters to employers. Mismatches can be due to a name change, marital status change, stolen identity or clerical error on either the employer's part or the SSA's part. Despite the reason for the error, an employer is required to report the change to the IRS and possibly the INS.

What should you do if you receive such a letter? A recent article in HRMagazine, released by Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), advises your first step in receiving a letter should be to review any documentation you have on file. Depending on the information found during this review, termination might be required. Keep in mind, fines can be incurred for mistakes made on past employee's I-9 forms. Documentation must be kept on past employees for three years, so it is important to check even past forms. Because the IRS is also involved, employers must also look into the W-2 forms and correct any errors found. Finally, document all steps taken throughout the process to show your effort in complying with the SSA. An employee's future income depends on accurate information being given to these agencies. Therefore, an employer needs to explain this to the employee and work with the employee to correct the issue.

## LEGISLATIVE UPDATE ON WORKPLACE REGULATIONS

A deadline has been extended to March 31, 2003 to revise the definition of "job applicant" for purposes of federal record keeping and reporting. The current definition (in force since 1978) has become outdated in light of the number of unsolicited resumes employers receive over the Internet. A taskforce will provide a definition that will undergo review by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and then be published in the Federal Register and subject to public comment.

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The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has agreed to allow the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) to continue using the current Employer Information Report (EEO-1) without change for another year. This extension means that any forthcoming changes would not go into effect until 2004, giving employers more than a year to prepare.

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Editor: Deborah Jeffries, PHR, CPC. Advantage is published monthly and is designed to provide information on regulations, HR practices and management ideas and concerns. The intended audience is managers, supervisors, business owners, human resource and employee relations professionals. If you have questions about the content, an opinion about the information, questions about your subscription, or if you need additional Advantage binders, please give us a call at (503) 885-9815 or e-mail us at [djeffries@hrnorthwest.com](mailto:djeffries@hrnorthwest.com).



Employers are still waiting for the DOL to publish the long-awaited proposed revisions to the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) exemptions from overtime compensation for executive, administrative and professional employees, and changes to regulations under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). The FLSA's so-called "white-collar" exemptions have been under review by the Wage and Hour Division of the Employment Standards Administration (ESA) for over a year.

\* \* \* \*

Also pending is a DOL proposal to rescind a Clinton-era rule that allows states to use their unemployment insurance funds to finance partial wage replacement for parents taking leave to care for newborn or newly adopted children.

\* \* \* \*

The EEOC will propose an exemption from the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) that would allow employers to reduce or stop benefits when a retiree becomes eligible for Medicare or comparable state retiree health benefits without risk of violating the law. The new rule is intended to ensure that the ADEA does not discourage employers from providing retiree health benefits. In 2001, the EEOC had reversed its earlier position that offering Medicare-eligible employees less coverage than other retirees violates the ADEA.

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The Treasury Department and Internal Revenue Service (IRS) have issued pension-related proposals that would allow employers to convert traditional defined benefit pension plans to "cash balance" pension plans that are set up and administered on an age-neutral basis. In addition, the IRS is looking at ways to make phased retirement – currently hampered by regulatory restrictions and limitations – a viable option for both employers and employees.

## NORTHWEST LEGAL CHANGES

The state of **Washington** has recently amended its Family Care Bill, effective January 1, 2003. Under the non-revised act, employees were allowed to use their sick leave to care for a sick child under the age of 18. Three major amendments to the law extend these benefits beyond sick leave to all "other paid time off;" extend the scope of family care to a child older than 18 who is incapable of self-care, a spouse, parent, parent-in-law or grandparent; and add broad anti-retaliation provisions. These provisions apply regardless of the size of the employer or the number of hours an employee has worked. The law does not require granting additional time off, only greater flexibility in how an employee may use his/her time off.

This change does not amend the Washington Family Leave Law, which applies to employers with 100 or more employees who have worked more than 35-hours in a week. The Washington Family Leave Law allows for 12-weeks of unpaid time off for the birth of a baby, newly adopted child under six or to care for a terminally ill child under 18.

The regulation coincides with the federal Family Medical Leave Act in providing that an employee is still entitled to 12-weeks of time off for a qualifying event, but an employer may not require employees to use a certain leave first when taking time off. Employers must allow employees to choose what paid time off they will take, but may still count the leave against the 12-weeks of allotted time off.

\* \* \* \*

The **Oregon** Court of Appeals has recently ruled to broaden the scope of wrongful discharge torts. *Dunwoody v. Handskill Corp.*, the plaintiff was working under an employment contract with Handskill that dictated she could only be terminated for just cause. She did not come to work one afternoon due to being subpoenaed in a criminal case. Her employment was terminated and she filed a wrongful discharge claim because she felt the termination was in "contravention of the clear public policy against interference in a criminal prosecution by attempting to interfere with a witness who has been subpoenaed to assist the District Attorney's Office."

The court determined that wrongful discharge torts apply to just cause terminations even if they are covered by an employment contract or collective bargaining agreement. This allows all employees to access the range of remedies afforded under tort law. The court also stated that complying with a subpoena in criminal trial is an important public duty. Though this case deals with criminal subpoenas, it is possible that courts will also rule similarly for civil subpoenas.

## CHAMBER STUDIES IMPACT OF ASBESTOS LAWSUITS

The United States Chamber of Commerce released new research recently on the impact of asbestos lawsuits, saying there is a "trickle-down" effect from asbestos lawsuits on businesses and communities.

"Over 60 companies have filed for bankruptcy because of asbestos claims, putting 60,000 employees out of work," says Thomas J. Donohue, President and CEO of the U.S. Chamber. "If that weren't bad enough, these closings have caused a

devastating trickle-down effect on towns and businesses across America, where economic well-being depended on those now-bankrupt companies. This is one more reason why Congress must act quickly to fix this problem.”

“The Secondary Impacts of Asbestos Liabilities,” a new study conducted for the Chamber by NERA Economic Consulting, was unveiled at a special briefing hosted by the U.S. Chamber Institute for Legal Reform and the Center for Legal Policy at The Manhattan Institute. The special briefing featured presentations from researchers and analysts on the asbestos issue, including Dr. Deborah Hensler and Dr. Stephen Carroll of the RAND Institute for Civil Justice, Dr. Jonathan Orszag of Sebago Associates, and Dr. Jesse David of the National Economic Research Associates, Georgetown Law School professor Paul Rothstein and retired Cook County Circuit Court Judge Dean Trafelet.

The NERA study found that nationwide, there will be as much as \$2 billion in additional costs due to indirect and induced impacts of company closings. Plant closures or mass layoffs will cause local real estate values to fall, per capita income to decline, and federal, state and local tax receipts to dwindle. The study also found increased costs due to worker retraining – up to \$3,000 per worker – and additional burden on families to continue health care coverage.

## TRAINERS: ADD HUMOR TO YOUR HIGH-TECH PRESENTATIONS

*by Deborah Jeffries, PHR*

If you want to keep your audience awake, help them retain information, and improve your credibility as a speaker, sometimes you just can't be serious! Adding humor to any style of presentation, regardless of the audience or topic, can help make any message a little smoother. Even if you use a whiz-bang, razzle-dazzle, high-tech approach to your presentation, humor can be a powerful tool that helps sell your message in an even more memorable style. Here are a few simple tips for combining humor with high-tech presentations.

Remember, *you* are always the main attraction. Audience members need to connect with you as a live, warm-blooded human being if they are going to give any credence to what you have to say. Humor is one of the most powerful ways to make a personal connection with an audience. Just because you are delivering a PowerPoint presentation doesn't mean you can't express the real you. By sharing humorous anecdotes or adding some funny props, you bring not only the message to life, but yourself as well.

If your presentation is overloaded with stats and graphs, consider throwing in a humorous statistical observation or amusing chart. For example, how about a pie chart illustrating the latest pie-consumption rates? By mixing serious slides with some humor, such as a picture of a dog, a baby or a cartoon, you can easily lighten the mood.

To find humorous material, take a digital camera with you everywhere and be on the alert for amusing signs or images. Ideally, you should strive to link a message to the picture. However, throwing in the occasional humorous red herring of a totally incongruous image can also help keep audiences on their toes.

Humorous quotes that relate to your talk are a quick and easy way to add levity to a presentation. Be sure to look for quotes from unusual sources. For example, what does your five-year-old have to say about workplace safety? What humorous quips has James Bond, Dr. Frasier Crane, or Robin Williams made about your particular topic?

With a little bit of forethought and planning, it is possible to incorporate humorous photos, sound bites, or video clips featuring members of your audience right into your presentation.

Spontaneous humor is not only the funniest form of humor; it also lets the audience know you are not on autopilot. So don't dread those high-tech blunders and bloopers – use them as a source of humor. You can even develop a set of wisecracking comeback lines in case of bulb burnout, laptop crashes, or extension-cord pratfalls.

Keep the entire humor you use squeaky-clean. Also, remember that the safest form of humor is turning the punch line around and laughing at yourself first and foremost.

Always aim to kill two birds with one stone (or in this case, two rubber chickens) with your humor by linking it to a message. Wrapping your message inside a humor nugget will help the audience recall the information later on and actually enhances the credibility of the presenter. And if the audience doesn't always appreciate or understand the humor, all is not lost because you've still managed to deliver some useful content.

Once you've tapped into the light-hearted spirit we all have inside of us, using humor will become child's play. And, as a bonus, available only for the duration of your life, it will help keep you sane, both on the podium and sitting in front of it.

## MORE LAWSUITS PREDICTED AS LAYOFFS CONTINUE

Legal experts predict another tough year for employers and employees, with increases in employment-related lawsuits in the wake of continued layoffs.

According to the Employment Law Alliance (ELA), hundreds of the world's leading employment and labor law experts think continued workforce cuts, accompanied by a flood of wrongful practice allegations, will be the hottest workplace-related legal issues this year. The group conducted a survey of more than 550 attorneys across the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. American-based ELA members ranked their top five concerns as follows:

- Layoffs and reductions in force;
- Family and medical leave requests;
- Whistleblower claims;
- Age discrimination claims; and,
- National origin discrimination claims.

ELA member Tamara Hjelle Olsen said, "Like 2002, 2003 is going to be a busy year for employment lawyers, which is probably not a good sign for employers or employees." Those surveyed said that in 2002, when workplace litigation grew, the vast majority of the cases involved workforce reductions. The second biggest reason for litigation growth was the fact that unemployed workers were having a harder time finding work after termination. Unfortunately, when a terminated employee cannot find another job, the employee sometimes looks to litigation as an option for generating revenue. Only about one-third of those surveyed said they expect their clients to actively increase employment and labor law training for managers. This figure is troublesome because the best defense against a litigious workforce is a sound, consistently implemented training program.

A more hopeful result from the survey was that those questioned believe an increase in compliance this year is expected to produce fewer claims involving safety and health disputes, disputes over disability accommodations, and sexual harassment claims.

If we can be of assistance, please just give us a call.

### Q&A

*by Steve Myhre, SPHR*

**Q:** Is there a requirement that employers provide harassment training to its employees and managers?

**A:** Not exactly, but there might as well be. While there is no law or regulation that specifically requires employers to provide harassment training, enforcement agencies along with recent court rulings state that an employer must take reasonable steps toward preventing harassment (among other requisites) to minimize liability. One of these "reasonable steps" is training. As an employer, you must be able to demonstrate that employees understand your harassment policy including their rights and obligations. Merely handing them a copy of your policy is not enough (although also essential).

Managers must also understand their unique role in carrying out the harassment policy. They must know how to be proactive, what to look for, how to deal with a complaint, and when to pass a complaint on to their supervisor or HR. This requires training. A misstep can subject the employer to significant liability.

We recommend that employers provide harassment training for all new employees with annual refresher sessions for all current employees.

Remember, training is just one piece of an effective harassment prevention program. Other pieces include: developing a thorough, written harassment policy; giving a copy of the policy to each employee; actively encouraging the reporting of suspected harassment; investigating and documenting all harassment claims promptly, discretely, and thoroughly; taking corrective actions appropriately and consistently; and following up on the effectiveness of corrective actions.

If you have any questions regarding harassment or any other employee-related topic, please feel free to give us a call or email me at [smyhre@hrnorthwest.com](mailto:smyhre@hrnorthwest.com).



## TIPS FOR DEALING WITH THE EEOC

So you got a call or a letter from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ([EEOC](#)). How do you respond and deal with this intimidating agency? According to Cari Dominguez, Chair of the EEOC, here are some mistakes employers make that you can avoid:

1. Not being proactive. Corporate legal departments should self-assess and monitor EEO policies and procedures on an ongoing basis. Attention to such details will signal your commitment to the rights of employees. Make this commitment part of your corporate structure. Value the staff and their opinions and utilize the resources of the Office of Human Resources.
2. Undermining credibility with EEOC by not presenting accurate information, by denying access to information, by not retaining relevant documents and by not letting EEOC interview relevant witnesses. Recognize that lying to a federal agency can result in perjury charges based on either sworn or unsworn statements. Once an investigation has started, an employer has a duty to preserve all documents that are reasonably related to that investigation. It is a felony to destroy or spoil documents once notified of an investigation.
3. Engaging in delay tactics. Remember that prompt responses may result in prompt resolutions. If a subpoena must be issued, enforcement of that subpoena in federal court makes the existence of a charge and federal investigation a matter of public record. EEOC may issue a press release, especially if a fee award is issued to EEOC.
4. Not taking advantage of EEOC's mediation program, not engaging in settlement discussions during the investigation and not engaging in meaningful conciliation discussions after a cause finding has been issued. Taking advantage of the confidential pre-suit settlement opportunities can prevent an EEOC press release.
5. Not responding appropriately when a problem in the company is discovered. Take advantage of the opportunity to swiftly and decisively eliminate the problem. For example, conduct a meaningful investigation and take effective corrective action to eliminate the problem. Do not let legal maneuvers, or the fact that EEOC is involved, get in the way of doing the right thing.
6. Retaliating against employees who file charges of discrimination. EEOC takes charges of retaliation very seriously. Train your managers to be VERY careful about actions that could be interpreted as retaliatory once an employee files a charge of discrimination (even changing an employee's lunch schedule can appear to be retaliation). EEOC will sue in a retaliation case even if it has determined there was insufficient evidence to support the original discrimination complaint.
7. Not communicating with EEOC when the investigation is ongoing. If you need additional time to respond, make the request and provide a reason. Don't fail to communicate.
8. Underestimating the Commission and assuming it won't litigate. Help managers understand that the EEOC is a law enforcement agency. They are not to be taken lightly. If a Regional Attorney wishes to authorize a lawsuit, it will move forward with all its unpleasantness.

*Special thanks to The Management Advantage, Inc. for the main content of this information.*

## THE INTERNET, INTRANETS AND THE ADA

*by Barbara Stollberg*

Are you aware that the Americans with Disabilities Act may apply to websites, as well as other forms of communication?

The ADA requires all covered entities (private employers, local governments, employment agencies, and labor organizations having 15 or more employees) to provide reasonable accommodations or modifications that allow disabled workers to perform the essential functions of their job. What if the essential functions include using the company intranet to communicate or obtain information? Does your website allow deaf or visually impaired workers to access this information?

Reasonable accommodations listed in the ADA include "acquisition or modifications of equipment or devices" that are effective in allowing the individual to perform essential functions. The increased use of graphics, audio formats and interactive features make it difficult if not impossible for deaf or visually disabled people to fully understand a website's content. Screen access software is used by blind or visually impaired people to translate computer content into words, however, websites with extensive images are meaningless to screen readers unless there is a tag to provide a descriptor or a text string that describes the image. Revising a website to provide universal access does not need to be extensive or expensive. Adding descriptive tags to images, providing text only options and offering html versions of documents (in addition to PDF versions) may be all you need to do.

Alternative access options must be used if an accommodation would produce an undue burden or affect the level of service in the organization or agency. Websites need not be the only access option; so most organizations are not required to modify their websites. This should provide food for thought, however, especially if extensive use of the web is part of your business. In addition, there is a U.S. Department of Justice Policy Ruling, "Accessibility Requirements Apply to Internet Web Pages" (*National Disability Law Reporter*, vol. 10, par. 240, September 9, 1996) that states: "covered entities under the ADA are required to provide effective communication regardless of whether they generally communicate through print media, audio media, or computerized media, such as the Internet. Covered entities that use the Internet for communications regarding their programs, goods, or services must be prepared to offer those communications through accessible means as well." As your business expands its electronic services for employees, are you prepared to risk legal action?

The Rehabilitation Act is the federal version of the ADA. It applies to individuals with disabilities who use information or services from a Federal department or agency and requires them to have "access to and use of information and data that is comparable to the access to and use of the information and data by such members of the public who are not individuals with disabilities."

Access to information technology is specifically addressed in Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act ([www.section508.gov](http://www.section508.gov)). It requires the federal government to provide access to people with disabilities, employees and members of the public who obtain information from federal agencies, as well as to states who receive Assistive Technology Act grant assistance. Specific language of the act includes federal agencies who "develop, procure, maintain, or use electronic and information technology." Effective communication via an accessible medium is specified as an area where accommodations are required whenever an entity uses the web for communication purposes. Any organization that wants to supply IT-related products or services to the government must comply.

Standards for accessibility to electronic information were issued on December 21, 2000 by the Access Board (<http://www.access-board.gov/>). This independent federal agency, also known as the Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board, is devoted to accessibility issues for people with disabilities under Section 508, as well as the ADA, the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and the Architectural Barriers Act.

In addition to the Access Board, there are a number of organizations that focus on accessibility issues for electronic information. Some are listed below.

## **CAST (Center for Applied Special Technology)**

<http://www.cast.org>

The mission of this non-profit organization is to use technology to expand opportunities for all people, especially those with disabilities. Their software program, Bobby, (<http://www.cast.org/bobby>) can be used to check a website for its accessibility level. How does your organization's site rank?

## **Designing More Usable Websites**

<http://trace.wisc.edu/world/web/>

This reference is only one of the offerings of this site from the Trace Center at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Also included are links to accessible web guidelines, government efforts, web access tools and other resources.

## **DisabilityInfo.gov**

<http://disabilityinfo.gov/>

The portal provides access to disability-related information and programs available across the government on numerous subjects, including civil rights, education, employment, housing, health, income support, technology, transportation, and community life.

## **Making Your Website Accessible to the Blind**

<http://www.nfb.org/tech.htm>

One of the papers available from the National Federation of the Blind technology section. The paper includes recommendations for an accessible site and discusses how blind people surf the web. The organization offers a number of other resources for the visually disabled.

## **U.S. Department of Justice – ADA Homepage**

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

The official site for regulatory information, standards, technical assistance, guidelines and other resources to comply with the law.

## **Web Accessibility Initiative**

<http://www.w3.org/WAI/>

This group is supported by organizations around the world and focuses on providing universal access to the web regardless of an individual's disability. The site includes resources, guidelines, checklists, training information, references, papers and other information to assist in developing websites accessible to people with disabilities.

## WebAIM – Web Accessibility in Mind

<http://www.webaim.org/>

This website contains articles, books, tips, training, and links to information about developing accessible websites. There is also a screen reader simulation for users to try.

### THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

“Love is unselfish, understanding and kind, for it sees with it's heart and not with its mind. Love is the answer that everyone seeks.”

- Unknown

“Love is the language that every heart speaks.  
Love can't be bought, it is priceless and free...  
Love, like pure magic, is a sweet mystery.”

- Helen Steiner Rice

“In this age, which believes that there is a short cut to everything, the greatest lesson to be learned is that the most difficult way is, in the long run, the easiest.”

- Henry Miller

“The Golden Rule of conduct is mutual toleration, seeing that we never all will think alike and that we shall always see truth in fragment and from different angles of vision.”

- Mohandes Ghandi

“I have a new philosophy. I am only going to dread one day at a time.”

- Charlie Brown

“A diplomat is a person who thinks twice before he says nothing.”

- Frederick Sawyer

“A positive attitude will not solve all your problems, but it will annoy enough people to make it worth the effort.”

- Herm Albright

### FOR YOUR 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. To register for our workshops, please call any of our offices, send an e-mail to Susan Jeffries at [sjeffries@hrnorthwest.com](mailto:sjeffries@hrnorthwest.com), or just register online at [www.hrnorthwest.com](http://www.hrnorthwest.com) under Consulting services.

#### **FEBRUARY**

**American Heart, International Expect Success, and National African-American History Month**

Feb. 9–16 Celebration of Love Week.

Feb. 14 Race Relations Day. To recognize the importance of improved and positive race relations.  
Valentine's Day.

Feb. 16-22 Nostalgia Week. To celebrate the common experiences and shared memories, which distinguish each generation, as well as those experiences that tie all generations together.

Feb. 19 **HRA Workshop - Willamette Valley Compensation Basics Part II**  
8:30 – 12 noon

Feb. 25

Spay Day USA. To end pet overpopulation by encouraging people to have their cats and dogs spayed or neutered.

Feb. 25

**HRA Workshop - Puget Sound Conducting Effective Employee Orientations**  
8:30 – 12 noon

#### **MARCH**

March 13

**HRA Workshop - Tualatin Building a Workplace Safety Program**  
8:30 – 12 noon

March 25

**HRA Workshop - Puget Sound Violence in Your Workplace**  
8:30 – 12 noon

Information and advice offered through Advantage should not be construed as legal opinion. The material contained herein will not apply to all circumstances or to all organizations. Use it as a resource and reference. Should you feel legal advice is required, please consult with your corporate counsel.





## ON MY SOAPBOX

“Should we order business cards now, or wait until they run out?” “How should we answer the phones – do we need to use both names or should we just go directly to HR Answers?” “Does anybody know if we asked Don and Gary to come over for this meeting?” “I just heard that we have to tell the bank which federal ID number to use when they do its reporting. Has that been taken care of yet?” Oh, so very many questions and each one requires some scrambling or checking with lots of people to get the answers.

Last month I wrote the introductory article (not my Soapbox) about the fact that we were merging our two companies (HR Northwest and HR Answers), and acquiring another consulting firm. The article was primarily factual, and written from the perspective of providing you information. This month I want to share with you a bit more about what it has actually been like to make those transitions.

I use several quotes in my presentations on change that describe the unique nature of total organizational change. One of my favorites is that “Change is like Linus without his blanket.” That is accurate! From a process standpoint, our internal merger was easier than most where it is between two separate organizations. The only negotiations that were occurring were between me as owner of one company and me as owner of the other company (a pretty absurd set of circumstances no matter how you look at it). But it doesn’t change the fact that many aspects of our processes, financials, marketing, etc. have to undergo wholesale change.

And we made these tasks so much more challenging with the deadlines that we set. And I need to be clear here – we worked on the acquisition for almost six months, three months more intensively, which was just the right time. But the merger was decided at the last moment so we only had the last two weeks of the year to accomplish that. Do you have any idea how little time there is during that time given the holidays? We really aren’t happy unless we can make things just a little more difficult.

There was a lot to do. Emotions were all over the board. There was great happiness that we were going to be one company. There was uncertainty about new job responsibilities. There were roles to define, supervisory changes to make, integration actions to identify, and all of this left us questioning what needed to be done next and how was everything going to affect us personally. For myself, it was a strange mixture of feelings. There was the natural anxiety about making sure everything was considered. I was always certain that I was forgetting something. There was pride in watching the Management Team discuss and decide to take such major steps. There was consideration of how this would feel to the folks in the firm being acquired. It was so important that this work well for them. The days were so filled with details and tasks that there was little time for reflection. But in the late evenings I could think about what these changes meant. One night my thoughts would be joyous, celebratory, with great pride in our 18-year journey. The very next night, my fears of inadequacy would surface and I would feel overwhelmed and uncertain. (I am sure that I was “interesting” to be around for those last couple of weeks. I probably owe some people great gratitude for their patience and forbearance.)

Looking back on it now from the vantage point of four weeks, it is clear that we experienced, both emotionally and structurally, what every organization does when undertaking such changes. We still have things to do and questions to answer, and it will be fascinating to see how long it takes us to think we are done. But we did it, and we learned from it, and we are ready to do it again.

- Judy Clark, President



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