



advantage

WHAT IS "IP" AND WHY SHOULD I WORRY ABOUT IT?

IP stands for Intellectual Property and can be defined as anything from patents and copyrights to trademarks and trade secrets. Issues of Intellectual Property (IP) rights in a knowledge economy will take on increasing importance as employers try to establish brands and as employees fight for ownership over information and knowledge. IP rights in the workplace generally center on three issues: work made for hire, non-disclosure/non-compete agreements and trade secret theft.

The U.S. Copyright Office defines work made for hire as "work prepared by an employee within the scope of employment; or a work specially ordered or commissioned in certain specified circumstances. When a work qualifies as a work made for hire, the employer is considered to be the author."

But the changing nature of work in the knowledge economy is creating new challenges for employers, as employees either create new ways to serve the organization and customer better or demand ownership over work they have created.

Employers also face competition from entrepreneurial workers who start their own businesses. Many organizations use non-compete agreements to discourage this behavior. However, Intel decided to encourage it and reap the benefits. Intel's New Business Initiative may be a sign of things to come as the talent war continues. HR professionals may need to reformulate age-old notions of work product ownership to foster employee initiative, thereby increasing employee retention and productivity.

Another concern brought about by technology improvements involves trade secret theft. The FBI recently arrested two employees of Lucent Technologies on charges of conspiracy to steal Lucent trade secrets and pass them on to a telecommunications firm controlled by the Chinese government. Even though this type of theft is nothing new, emerging technologies have made it easier to transfer proprietary information.

Much of the United States' rule of law is based on respect for property rights, but technology is blurring the lines of ownership. The tension between increased monitoring of employees to prevent theft, and allowing more freedom to spur employee creativity may force radical changes in how we view intellectual property.

With all of this said, organizations have cause to worry... about their *bottom line*. If you do not take steps to protect your IP, it could be walking out of your corporate door and down the street to your competitor! For the hiring manager, there is the flip side of IP – is your top candidate actually able to work for you (or are they subject to non-compete restrictions)?

What should you do?

- Have a non-compete/non-disclosure agreement (or business protection agreement) in place for all employees who work with your IP (trade secrets, confidential information, customer lists, strategic information, etc.) or who come in contact with it in the scope of their employment. We recommend that you have these reviewed or drafted by an attorney who specializes in this type of contract.
- Make sure your agreements are not overly broad, making them difficult to enforce.
- If you do not have agreements in place for existing employees, it's not too late. You may ask employees to sign these agreements in exchange for something of value.
- Remind exiting employees of the non-competes (probably in an exit interview) and retrieve any sensitive documents or information.
- When hiring employees who are working or have worked for your competitors, be sure to ask for copies of any non-compete agreements up front. Remember:
 - You cannot hire someone just to obtain another company's proprietary information.
 - You cannot engage in unfair competition by hiring away key employees or multiple employees.
 - You cannot hire an employee who would "inevitably use or disclose" confidential information in the course of employment with you.
- If your potential employee is subject to a non-compete, check the following:
 - Is it enforceable? (Use legal counsel to check this.)
 - Does it apply to the position you are offering?
 - What is the likelihood it would be enforced?
 - Could you work out a business arrangement with the former employer? (Call them and ask!)

With the shrinking average tenure of today's employees, the issues of IP are becoming more critical to organizations. We

strongly recommend that organizations take steps to protect their IP in order to remain competitive in the coming years.

TRAINING TIP (INTRODUCTION IDEAS)

“Hi, my name is...” How many times have you attended a training program where the introductions started this way? Rather than relying on the standard “name, title and why you’re here” approach, inject some fun into your introductions.

- Use any soft object that can be tossed (koosh, nerf ball, roll of toilet paper, etc.) and hand it to an individual. After they introduce themselves, they throw the object at the next person, who has to introduce him or herself, and so on. For utter chaos, use more than one object.
- Require everyone to tell about his or her favorite food, most unusual vacation, favorite color, etc. If the group you’re working with knows each other, try to pick something that wouldn’t be widely known, such as “how many times did you have to take your driving test before passing?”
- Pass a roll of toilet paper around the room and instruct everyone to take “some.” The number of squares they take is the number of things they must tell about themselves in the introduction. If it’s an environmentally aware group you can also use M & M’s.
- Pair participants off and give the group five minutes to learn about their partners. They must then introduce each other.
- Another spin on partner introduction is to have partners draw portraits of each other and then share their drawing with the class.
- Ask “if” questions that participants must answer. For example: “If they were making a movie about your life, what would the title be? Who would star as you?” or, “If you could have one super-power, what would it be and why?”

These innovative starts to a meeting or training can set the stage for a participative and successful session.

RECOGNITION: A VITAL STRATEGY IN THE WORLD OF BUSINESS

Employee recognition is a vital strategy in the world of business. Businesses, both large and small, that accept this fact will inevitably have dedicated employees who strive to achieve higher goals for their organization. This brief article will highlight some strategies to consider when developing an internal employee recognition program at your organization. It will

also attempt to convey that it is not the size of a budget that matters when investing in recognition in the workplace, rather that an organization is dedicated to implementing policies directed toward validating and supporting its employees to help the organization ultimately be its very best.

Everyone loves to receive recognition in some way, shape, or form at the workplace. Positive feedback and recognition fuel productivity and create desire for continued improvement. However, according to a new joint survey of 539 companies by WorldatWork and the National Association for Employee Recognition, 62% do not currently have an employee recognition program but have considered creating one. While most organizations recognize the merits of honoring their employees, research reveals several factors which sometimes stand in the way of implementation. Employers might wait for retention rates to diminish; many cite budgeting issues, suggesting that all recognition programs are costly; and oftentimes many organizations believe that employee morale issues will simply resolve themselves. The same survey also showed that 91% of the employers with recognition programs say the main objective of their recognition efforts is to improve employee morale. Furthermore, 73% of employers with recognition programs are trying to make employees feel as though they are part of the organization and 70% are attempting to influence employee retention. We can learn from those who have taken steps to invest in employee recognition that three key reasons for making the initial investment of time and dollars toward recognition are directly linked to morale, employee retention, and enhancing corporate culture.

Often asked questions are, “Why invest in employee recognition?” and, “What will it cost?” Employers must first realize that employees are truly an organization’s greatest asset and by not having formal and informal recognition programs in place they are not helping the organization become its best. The cost per person for budgeting truly depends on the size of the organization and the scope of the particular industry, as well as the financial and staff time they can allot to the program. If budgeting is a major obstacle, remember there are no rules against starting small and growing the program budget with time and measurements of success!

To initiate a formal recognition program at your organization, there are several key steps for employers to consider. The first step for the management team should be to outline the program:

- Determine the internal criteria for receiving formal recognition.
- Establish program budgets.
- Determine evaluation procedures.
- Decide who will administer the program.

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To develop a well-rounded program when defining program goals, consider these guidelines:

- Make sure the program targets improvement in the specific employee challenges within your organization.
- When establishing the overall look and feel of the program, both management and employee feedback should be strongly considered to ultimately represent all levels within the organization. Doing so will almost guarantee a well-received program.
- Employee focus groups or internal employee surveys can assist in identifying the needs from the various divisions within the organization, as well as generating ideas of the types of recognition employees would most appreciate.
- Look at the existing culture and determine how recognition can help you achieve additional success with improving overall employee morale.

The key to successful employee recognition is doing it for the right reasons while making sure your gestures are sincere so that employees will appreciate and feel the true value behind the program. It is important to realize that recognition is based on positive human interaction and even though rewards are important, training managers to correctly recognize staff on a routine basis using informal recognition is also a critical step toward overall success. Remember that creativity in program design can speak volumes when designing a successful employee recognition program. The biggest decision to make when starting an employee recognition program is to start it today!

This information provided by Absolute Recreation Management, Inc. dba LifeBalance Program. Please contact Dave Miller directly at: Dave@LifeBalanceProgram.com or www.LifeBalanceProgram.com. if you have questions pertaining to recognition in your workplace or if you are interested in learning more about the customized employee programs they offer.

DEALING WITH THE DEATH OF AN EMPLOYEE

By Deborah Jeffries, PHR

The death of an employee can be a traumatic experience for those who are left to deal with the loss of a co-worker. There are several key points to remember from an organizational standpoint in dealing sensitively with a deeply personal experience. Organizations need to show evidence of concern, the situation and information needs to be handled promptly and with care, personal property must be collected, and fellow employees provided time and opportunity for closure.

There is nothing as inevitable as death, yet we struggle with our emotions and our actions when faced with the death of people we know. In the workplace, the death of an employee or colleague can be especially traumatic. On a personal level, there are feelings of grief and loss, perhaps even guilt – “I wish I had been nicer while they were alive.” On a practical level

there are issues to deal with such as redistribution of work, payout of insurance benefits, etc.

The organization’s response should be immediate and with such regard that the level of concern is shown to both co-workers and the individual family. This *equality of respect* will go a long way in building a culture of inclusion....doing the same for all employees, no matter their position. The attachments, connections and relationships we have with people at work can be just as strong as if they are relatives – sometimes even more so. Recognizing the impact that a co-worker’s death will have on employees, and being sensitive to employee needs are important first steps in helping the organization to “heal” quickly.

The next step in the communication arena is letting all employees know that the organization cares and values them. While letting employees know that the organization is concerned about them, experts caution against crossing the line between “business” and “family.” One issue that managers have to be concerned about is that business is not family and the boundary needs to be respected. You don’t want to promise people more than you are able to deliver. This may mean avoiding language like “we’re all family,” “we all love each other,” and focusing on statements such as, “he was a valuable employee,” or “she contributed a great deal to us.”

For human resource professionals and managers, the death of an employee in the work group often comes as a sudden shock, creating stress, uncertainty and personal feelings of loss. How to share the news with employees is an immediate concern that must be handled sensitively. The first responsibility of human resource staff is to inform or assist management in informing members of the organization about the death of a co-worker.

Staff should be informed as promptly as possible to avoid speculation and rumors. How this is best done depends on the organization’s size, culture, and past communication style. A small organization may call all employees together. Larger organizations may rely on management to speak with their individual departments and will probably spend more time with those employees who worked most closely with the deceased.

A memo to all employees can be a good way to deal with more practical considerations and to address common questions that employees are likely to have once the initial shock sets in. These may include when and where memorial services will be held, if employees will be allowed to take time from work to attend the services, the availability of counseling, handling the workload, etc.

All personal property of the employee needs to be collected and returned to the family. This may be a good time to forward “a message” to the family from the employees....a group card, etc. A representative from the organization could set a time to meet with the family to return the items, present the

final paycheck, and go over any insurance and benefits paperwork as well.

Employees will need time for closure - time does heal all wounds, and allowing time for employees to grieve is critical. Many organizations allow very little space for people to grieve. The tendency in today's work environment is to say, "we need to get back to work, we don't have time for this." HR can help by offering "permission" for the organization to grieve through formal, as well as informal, means. This is important not only for staff, but for the organization as well, because it's a tangible and visible way of saying "this person mattered to us." Depending on the culture of the organization, it may even be appropriate, as soon after the death as possible, to have the staff come together, or to start an upcoming meeting with a voluntary prayer session or moment of silence. Employees might be allowed to have, in a prominent place, photographs of the person who has died or perhaps staff members may want to bring some bit of memorabilia or just something to share about the lost co-worker.

While the grieving process is different for each individual and the length of time it takes to deal with the death of a co-worker also varies, there comes a point when the practical considerations of "getting the job done" must come to the forefront. There is no "right time" to do this. It depends on the situation, the culture and the nature of the job.

One step an organization can take in a preventive mode of this type of scenario is creating a checklist. The premise of this step is to make sure that nothing important is forgotten. It is easy during this type of event to lack "clear thinking." A checklist can help minimize redundancy and keep people a little more focused. If you would like a copy of a generic checklist we have created to get you started on your own form, please give us a call and we will be happy to forward one to you.

BENEFITS COMMUNICATION

By Tina Weber, PHR

Do you know the annual value of the benefit package provided by your employer as part of your total compensation? You're not alone if you can't answer. Most employees significantly underestimate the value of their company-provided benefits. New employees may be the only ones who answer correctly, since organizations typically emphasize their benefit package in recruitment.

Communicating benefits is an important process for employers because benefits are an increasing business cost. The potential value of this expenditure is lost if benefit information is not communicated, perceived, and understood on a regular basis. Employers should provide open communication concerning benefits so that employees obtain timely and accurate information, which leads to increased job satisfaction.

Benefit communications include special challenges for an employer to overcome in order to be effective. Employees

oftentimes believe that benefits are an entitlement rather than a form of compensation reward for profitable and productive work. Benefit programs are complex to communicate due to disclosure requirements, legal terms, investment options, vesting schedules, and eligibility criteria, to name a few. Consistent, accurate statements should be given by designated representatives to avoid employee misunderstandings. Employee questions should be referred to these trained staff. Benefit plans often require modification due to legal changes or cost increases. Plan documents should state that all plan amendments are to be written and approved by the plan administrator or board.

It's important for employers to take special care with written benefit documents. In court, a plan administrator's informal written promises of benefits have been known to take precedence over conflicting information in a summary plan description. Employee handbook statements and summary plan descriptions (SPD) should state that if there is a conflict or confusion between the SPD and the plan document, the plan document controls.

At this point, it may be useful to define what is a benefit. A benefit is typically described as any form of compensation that is not included as part of an employee's base pay or that is not directly tied to either their job performance or job requirements. Employee benefits take many forms, such as mandated benefits (social security, unemployment, and workers compensation), elective benefits including health insurance and paid leave, and specialized offerings such as child care assistance, tuition reimbursement, dry cleaning service, health club membership, etc.

In addition to employee recruitment and retention, benefit communication is also crucial for organization decisions concerning benefit reductions, eliminations, or improvements. Employees are more accepting and supportive of negative decisions when they understand the rationale behind them. Communications should further inform employees about how to use their benefits wisely, or about any new benefits plan. There are three important steps for successful benefit communications: 1) develop a communications strategy, 2) create the communications campaign, and 3) evaluate the communications efforts.

An effective communications strategy includes analyzing the employee population in order to tailor the message to specific groups based on position, education, length of service, and location. Communications should include employee spouses and dependents eligible for benefits too. Timing is also an important consideration when there are legislative and regulatory changes. You don't want employees to rely on other sources for information rather than their employer.

In planning the communications campaign, it's important that employers select the most effective media type for getting employees' attention. Possibilities include booklets, Power Point presentations, videotapes, letters, bulletins, company newsletters, brochures, handbooks, summary plan descrip-

tions, Internet and Intranet, posters, and benefit statements. All of these have advantages and disadvantages, and a successful campaign will include several techniques. The key to effective communication is repetition of the message.

Communications campaigns should:

- start with a basic message concerning the changes, and promising that more information will follow;
- continue with additional detailed information and examples of dollar costs;
- be personalized for each individual employee or employee group; and,
- conclude with more information in group meetings, offering employees an opportunity to ask questions individually or in groups, and revising handbooks and summary plan descriptions to reflect the new information.

Evaluating communications campaigns is tricky and difficult to quantify. However, an employee follow-up questionnaire can be effective for gauging the success of communication efforts. A questionnaire might ask how often employees use the Internet or Intranet for information, or what media form was preferred or most effective.

There are several effective methods for delivering employee benefit information. Employers need to choose which methods match their needs and their employee population. Choices include group or individual meetings, video presentations, software disks, teleconferences, written materials such as employee newsletters or memos, summary plan descriptions, and personalized benefit statements that help convey the message. New office technologies, such as Internet or Intranet sites, and electronic mail messages, are playing an increasingly larger role in communicating benefit information to employees. With Intranet, employee benefits can be described in detail and links offered to the insurer's Web site. Online benefits information is becoming more popular because it is low maintenance and available to employees at any time.

A number of employers distribute an annual benefit statement to give employees a personalized view of the value of their total benefit package. These statements typically include employee's and spouse's birth dates, employment date, annual base pay for current year, information on medical insurance, group life insurance, retirement plan, long term disability, profit-sharing, dollar value of paid leave (vacation, sick, holiday), worker's compensation, unemployment insurance, and social security contributions. Medical, disability, death and retirement benefits can be summarized by the dollar amount of the employee's coverage, including employer and employee portions. Social security benefits are estimated based on employees' past earnings. Flexible spending accounts and tax savings plans should be included. Paid leave can include a breakdown of xx number of days at a dollar value of \$xx. The statements usually conclude with the total estimated annual cost of employee's benefits, employee's

annual contribution toward the costs, organization's benefits contribution cost, and total benefits as a percentage of salary.

Annual benefit statements could be accompanied by a message explaining the organization's benefit philosophy and purpose of benefit programs, including protection for medical expenses, disability, or death, and assistance in providing retirement income. A personalized benefit statement can effectively demonstrate the annual value of employee benefits received as part of total compensation.

Benefit statements can be computer-generated, offering speed and accuracy to the communication process. The benefit statements may be mailed to employee homes, or included with paychecks.

Getting the word out on the value of benefits, or effectively explaining benefit programs, is vital to employee retention. It's crucial to both inform employees as to "how good they've got it," or effectively explain the benefits program so that employees can make informed decisions regarding their benefit choices.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

There is no great genius without a bit of madness.

- Aristotle

Most folks are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.

- Abraham Lincoln

If we let things terrify us, life will not be worth living.

- Seneca

Instead of living life to the fullest, try having a full life and live it.

- JoJo Johnson

If you think that something small cannot make a difference - try going to sleep with a mosquito in the room.

- Unknown

GET A HANDLE ON ABSENTEEISM

Unscheduled employee absenteeism is at its lowest rate in a decade, according to CCH Inc.'s Unscheduled Absence Survey. Why? Employees are satisfied with their jobs, particularly if their workplace offers work-life programs such as flexible schedules and telecommuting.

Findings:

- **1.8 percent:** Average rate of absenteeism at organizations with "good" to "very good" morale.
- **2.8 percent:** Average rate of absenteeism at companies with "fair" to "poor" morale.

Work-life programs that helped reduce unscheduled absences (ranking bases 1-5, with 5 being most effective):

- **Flexible scheduling** - 3.8
- **Compressed work week** - 3.8
- **Leave for school functions** - 3.6
- **On-site health services** - 3.6
- **Job sharing** - 3.5
- **Telecommuting** - 3.5

With today's tight labor market there is little room for employee absenteeism. Although there are plenty of legitimate reasons for not coming in to work, sometimes a few employees can take liberties an organization simply cannot afford. To stop absenteeism before it gets rampant, try these suggestions:

- **Be a good example.** Do as you say. Show up for work on a regular basis. When you're out of the office, let employees know how they can reach you by cell phone or pager.
- **Practice common courtesy.** Make the workplace a pleasant place to be. Practice common courtesy by greeting your employees every morning and letting them know you appreciate their work and dedication. Every now and then, provide breakfast for everyone—doughnuts, bagels or coffeecake, for instance—to show you appreciate their coming to work every day.
- **Recognize people for their attendance.** Keep track of attendance and tardiness. You do not want this to turn into a pattern or bad habit. Think about rewarding attendance with lunch or dinner passes at a local restaurant, but be consistent with the reward.

ANTHRAX GUIDANCE ISSUED

In November 2001, the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued new guidance for employers on how to respond to worries about anthrax in the workplace. Although Labor Secretary Elaine Chao emphasized that the guidance does not create new requirements for employers, it does provide useful information for them.

The guidance develops a matrix of appropriate responses based on the level of risk for that workplace and the likelihood of worker exposure or contamination. Responses are based on three zones of risk: green, yellow and red. Most employers are "green zone" employers (workplaces where contamination from anthrax spores is unlikely). OSHA recommends these employers develop safe handling procedures, provide training to employees on appropriate responses, and establish procedures for handling suspicious mail. Green zone employers should provide vinyl or nitrile gloves upon request of an employee.

Yellow zone workplaces are those where contamination from anthrax spores is possible. Risk factors that put a workplace

into the yellow zone include handling bulk mail or mail from facilities that are known to be contaminated, workplaces where employees work near equipment such as high-speed processors or sorters that could aerosolize anthrax spores, workplaces in close proximity to other workplaces known to be contaminated, or workplaces that may be targets of bio-terrorists. In addition to providing gloves, yellow zone employers are encouraged to limit the number of employees in mail areas, avoid contaminating machinery, encourage employees to wash hands regularly, and develop and disseminate detailed emergency response plans. OSHA also recommends more personal protective equipment.

Red zone workplaces are those where contamination from anthrax spores has been confirmed or is strongly suspected (government offices, postal facilities and some media outlets). Red zone employers need to plan for protection for employees, as well as procedures for emergency response, clean-up and investigation by authorities.

Although the guidance technically does not create new obligations, employers are having to learn about this new threat. This guidance is intended to help employers make informed choices about risks and appropriate responses in the workplace. You can read the full documents at www.osha.gov.

Q & A

Q: An employee over 40 years of age is terminated...the employer provides a separation package with the condition that the employee signs a release prohibiting legal action (age discrimination suit) against the employer. Is this binding on the employee? Can the employee's rights be signed away? What if the employer has numerous similarly situated employees sign such an agreement?

A: When employers terminate employees, either individually or as part of a reduction in force, employers often offer them severance or separation packages. In exchange for the package, employers seek security against lawsuits arising from such terminations and employers obtain the protection through waiver agreements employees sign. However, in order to make a waiver of a right to bring an action enforceable, it must be entered into knowingly and voluntarily, and meet other specified requirements. Give us a call if you need more detailed information.

HRN HAPPENINGS

Congratulations to **Ray Redburn, Ph.D.**, who celebrated his first year of employment with HRN in December. We also want to recognize **Terri Ano, Ph.D., SPHR**, who is celebrating three years with the firm this month. We are pleased to have both of these individuals as part of our team!

Hats off to **Valerie Stinson, PHR**, our HR Extras Director. She was recently recognized for her efforts with the SMART Program.

EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS DRIVE HR PLANNING

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>.

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.

JANUARY

International Creativity, National Clean Up Your Computer, and National Poverty in America Awareness Month.

January 1 Happy New Year!!!

January 14 National Clean Off Your Desk Day

January 16 Religious Freedom Day

**January 17 HRN Workshop - Portland
Emergency Management - Are you Prepared?
8:30 - 12:00 noon**

January 21 Martin Luther King Jr. Day

January 23 National Compliment Day

**January 29 HRN Workshop - Puget Sound
Emergency Management - Are you Prepared?
8:30 - 12:00 noon**

FEBRUARY

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

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

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

ON MY SOAPBOX

There was a sense of anticipation about the unknown as I headed to downtown Seattle. It was Saturday morning and I was embarking on something I had only heard about. I found a place to park, took the elevator to the correct floor, and stepped out. The entry area was filled with people. They looked as though they knew what they were doing. I didn't! I showed my ticket and was allowed in.

At first it was easy; I saw my girlfriend and joined her by the espresso stand. After all, I was going to need the sustenance of coffee if I expected to conquer what the next hours had to bring. We turned, checked our map, and then headed off in the direction Cath suggested, since she was a veteran of these events.

What was this that needed such planning, such careful execution, such marshalling of energy and emotional control? It was the Northwest December Jewelry and Gem Show, the largest in the United States. Aisles and aisles of gold, silver, gems, and exotic jewelry. Row after row of show stalls, each with its own treasures displayed. Some pieces were ornate while others simply hollered elegance with simple clean styling and faceted stones. Corundum, topaz, opal, jade, pearls, tourmaline, the list could go on for many paragraphs. The colors ranged from the palest of pink with only a shadow of color to the pure black of onyx. The ruby reds, fire opal oranges, and citrine yellows danced under the lights. The sapphire blues, emerald greens, and amethyst purples glowed with inner fire. The shapes and sizes stretched from the tiniest of rounds to the free-form of laser cuts. There were some cuts I knew - cushion, barrel, princess, oval, baguette, emerald. But there were some for which I had no name, no familiarity.

The purveyors of these enticements were from all over the US, and their native homes were much further away. The accents and languages flowing in the grand hall were from every corner of the globe. Their attire often mirrored their homelands and added to the variety and colors of the picture. Each vendor sought to separate us from our money. It was done with style, humor, persuasion, and tempting discounts. Their unique sales abilities were on full display.

I found much that was appealing, and even some I could afford. There were many items unlike anything I had ever seen before. The creativity of the jewelry craft was exquisitely exhibited.

I learned about the formation of the crystals, the minerals needed to color the stones, the geographic locations from whence a particular mineral comes, and so much more. It was an oral class in gemology presented for anyone who wished to listen. But I learned something else, and I really only realized it as I was driving back to Portland. In that hall, the concept of diversity was alive. The colors of the gems, the ethnicities of the vendors, the differences of the buyers, all coming together to create a panoply of visual images. There was harmony! There was joyful expression of differences! There was diversity – fully appreciated and cherished. If only we as people could have that level of regard and caring for one another – the gems of humanity!

Thanks, Cath! It was a great day!



-Judy Clark, President

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