



advantage

TWO NOW BECOMES ONE

BY JUDY CLARK, SPHR

As consultants, we talk with clients about change all the time. Well, the time has come for us to practice even more comprehensively what we preach.

Since 1994 we have had two companies. One, HR Northwest, is our regional consulting operation; and HR Answers is our national firm that produces specialty HR services and products. In the beginning (that sounds pretty formal doesn't it?), it made sense for us to have two separate companies. The two firms sold to different clients in entirely different markets. The message and image for each of these was intentionally separate.

For the last couple of years the two firms have grown closer in activities. HR Northwest has begun offering HR products. Our HR Packets, Train-the-Trainer Notebooks, and HR Flipcards are some examples. HR Answers, which provides HR risk management support to the Firemans Fund EPLI policy in addition to having a presence on the Web through SalarySource, has begun to provide HR consulting services nationally as a result of client requests. It was getting harder and harder to differentiate the two organizations.

During our year-end meetings to plan for 2003, the management team decided that we could best serve our growing clientele and our own needs by combining the two firms. Merging the two firms would mean that maintenance of two separate identities and corporate structures would no longer be necessary. It would mean that we could focus more time on clients, and less time on internal operations.

Therefore, effective January 1st we merged the two firms into one. It was a momentous decision, and one arrived at only after lots of thought and consideration of all the implications. As you might imagine, one of the first things we had to decide was what to call the company. We considered keeping HR Northwest. It was the best known of the names, and we didn't want to lose any of the name recognition we had worked so hard to develop. We talked about picking an entirely fresh name to signify the new combined strength of offerings. But after much analysis and checking with others, we decided to retain the logo of HR Northwest and the name of HR Answers. The logo maintains our graphic image and the name is the best depiction of what we think we are for our clients – ***the HR answer.***

I have no doubt but that there are still many decisions to be made, and a hurdle or two that we may not have anticipated. But we will take those one at a time as they surface. We will work over the next few months to transition everything so that HR Answers, Inc. is what you will see. (I don't think you ever know how many things you have put your name on until you decide to change it!)

To all of you who have known us as HR Northwest, we pledge our continued commitment to quality HR consulting. The name may be changing, the firms may be merging, but the result for you should be a stronger, more comprehensive organization designed to help you meet your HR needs.

We will keep you updated on our progress. Feel free to call us if you want to know how a merger really works. For those of you who have done this yourself, if you have advice to offer, please let us know. If you just want to chuckle at us, drop by and we'll buy you a cup of coffee and let you watch us practice what we preach.

A CHECKLIST FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION

One of the most important activities an organization conducts is the recruitment and hiring of a new employee. Once the new recruit is on board an organization has the responsibility to provide a thorough and pleasant orientation to the new environment. Equally important is the measurement and strategy to keep new and existing employees on board. Here is a checklist to get you started on turning a new leaf and being the wonderful employer your employees are looking for.

(Special thanks to Sandy Ewing for the main content of this article.)

Clearly define your ideal employee(s).

- Rate what is most important. Be flexible on the rest.

Ensure that all managers and supervisors are trained to grow and retain employees.

- Track hiring and retention statistics for every department, supervisor, and manager.
- Pair up your best managers with those who need to learn how to lead better.
- Managers who do a good job of growing and retaining employees should be rewarded.
- Give managers the responsibility to treat employees fairly and consistently, but as individuals.

Share all organizational challenges, opportunities, and goals (COG) with all employees.

- Employees will understand why management does what it does when they know why.
- Sharing the COGs with employees rebuilds employee loyalty.
- If you are willing, be an "open book" operation.

Offer and encourage employees to refresh their job related technical skills.

- Training and education reimbursement demonstrates an investment in your employees.
- People lacking basic computer and Internet skills are feeling left out. Offer on-site basic computer courses even if they aren't job related.
- Support your local adult education programs by offering tuition reimbursement, loaning "teachers" for classes, and offering space for classes.
- "Soft skills," such as effective communication, conflict management, and time management, are essential skills. Grow your employees and managers in these areas.

Measure employee satisfaction and find ways to improve it every year.

- Conduct Employee Opinion Surveys.
- Measure employee satisfaction by department and reward managers who improve satisfaction.
- Ask employees how to increase job satisfaction. Take their advice seriously.
- Know what your competition is doing that you are not.

Understand employee motivation.

- Tell people what you expect of them.
- Offer praise and credit for work well done.
- Know your employees and respond to their needs and perceptions.
- Get employees involved.
- Give employees a feeling they are making a contribution.

No matter what size your organization, offer creative perks to your employees.

- Free food is always appreciated. Other appreciated perks: theater tickets, gift certificates, thank you notes, flowers, negotiated discounts at local retailers, weekends at the beach, etc.
- When you upgrade the computers, offer to purchase an extra and sell to employees at your discount, or give the old machines to employees.
- Make it challenging, and ask everyone to think of low cost, creative ways to say, "Thank you!"

Sentences that will help retain your best employees include:

- "You really made a difference by...."

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- “I’m impressed with....”
- “You got my attention with....”
- “One of the things I most enjoy about you is....”
- “You can be proud of yourself for....”
- “What an effective way to....”
- “You’ve made my day because of....”
- “We could not have done it without your....”

WHEN AN APPLICANT OR EMPLOYEE LIES

BY MEGHANN DAILY

Whether the state of the economy is causing desperation in candidates or we are experiencing a surge of dishonest people, resume and application fraud is increasing. These lies can be as small as incorrect dates of employment to an entire resume filled with falsified work history, education, and skills. Employers are seeing dishonest embellishments on resumes and finding outright lies on applications. Background checks are rarely done and, when they are, they produce very little information. How can an employer protect itself from hiring dishonest people or a negligent hiring claim?

Negligent hiring occurs when an employer knew or should have known that an employee poses a threat, thus the organization is held responsible for the actions of the employee on the job. Organizations should be checking references to ensure that they are not hiring employees who are likely to harm clients or other employees. However, employers worry they will be sued for libel if they provide information during reference checks, so they provide no information at all. With the challenge of not getting information, avoiding negligent hiring becomes more difficult. Furthermore, the Fair Credit Reporting Act requires the employer to have the applicant sign a release if a third party will be used in obtaining a background check. Further complications include current legislation dictating that the applicant must be told about the information obtained during reference checks.

Though the task seems daunting, with sound recruiting and selection policies, protection against dishonest employees and libel suits is possible. Start by requiring all applicants interested in your organization to fill out an employment application. This application should include all necessary federal, state, and local regulations, a disclaimer that the applicant must sign stating the information given is accurate and truthful, and a release from liability due to damaging information that may arise from reference checks. Having these in place helps to discourage those applicants who have something to hide. Reviewing the application for certain critical points can help identify a dishonest candidate. The following is a list of red flags to look for on applications and resumes:

- Applicant does not sign application.
- Applicant does not sign consent or background screening.
- Applicant leaves criminal record questions blank.
- Applicant self-reports a criminal violation.
- Applicant fails to explain why he or she left past jobs.
- Applicant fails to explain gaps in employment history.
- Applicant leaves out short-term jobs in work history.
- Applicant gives an explanation that doesn’t make sense for an employment gap or reason for leaving a previous job.
- There are excessive cross-outs and changes on application.
- Applicant fails to give complete information.
- Applicant fails to indicate or cannot recall the name of a former supervisor.
- Resume includes falsified degrees or level of education obtained.
- Job responsibilities and skills are falsified.

The above signals the need for further probing during the interview.

While the employment application is a good starting point for avoiding negligent hiring, it’s not enough. All employment and personal references should be checked. If you are able to obtain information on past performance, this information is one of the greatest indicators of future performance. Ask the applicant who you can actually speak with to get previous job information.

Negative information gathered during a reference check cannot serve as an automatic dismissal of the candidate. It is important to perform an analysis of the information received to ensure it is applicable to the job and situation. A policy for handling this information and documentation should be established in order to ensure uniformity, privacy, and legal compliance. This policy should be strictly enforced, especially when the negative information involves a criminal record (remember, not all criminal information can be grounds for denying employment).

Your responsibility, as an employer, does not stop after the person has been hired. If you follow the above, you will be able to show that you have demonstrated good faith efforts up to the point of hire. You must continue these efforts while employees are working for you. Reviewing your employees' performance and skills can show if they were honest in what they could accomplish. Documenting these reviews can provide the paper trail that you continued to watch for negligent hiring. If inconsistencies are found, or if you discover your employee has lied, regardless of when it is discovered, in most cases this is grounds for termination. You must analyze the severity of the lie and be consistent in handling all such situations.

Sound hiring practices and good faith efforts can lead to protection against negligent hiring. This can also protect your organization from losing assets through fraud and ignorance of employees. It makes good business sense to thoroughly check out all potential candidates. In cases where a fraudulent employee surfaces, consistent, immediate termination, for almost any lie, is the safest course of action.

*We encourage you to check your state legislation about reference checking laws. **You can also check out state links at www.hrflipcards.com.***

DIVERSITY EFFORTS CAN IMPROVE RECRUITING AND RETENTION

A diverse workforce can provide many benefits, including employee satisfaction, compliance with the law, a positive public image, and, perhaps most importantly, a competitive advantage through employee contributions from a more diverse knowledge and experience base. The benefits seem great, but how do you actually obtain and retain a diverse workforce and create a culture that fosters diversity? Answer: Through your recruiting practices, managerial attitudes/practices, and retention strategies.

Focusing on recruiting minority candidates is important, but this is only the beginning. The first step in your recruiting strategy is to analyze your staffing needs. When analyzing your needs, start by determining the types of jobs you need to hire for, and what minority groups are not adequately represented. You can then determine what recruiting methods will be most effective. We recommend a combination of any of the following:

- Recruit in minority communities and in minority-attended universities, particularly in classes of ethnic studies and in the ethnic associations on campuses.
- Advertise with professional organizations with diverse members.
- Encourage employee referrals (make sure not to rely solely on referrals, as that could perpetuate your current population mix).
- Advertise in publications and trade journals targeted toward diverse groups.
- Consider recruiting in any of the following: adult education classes, community social service agencies, government job training initiatives, and subscribing to publications whose emphasis is diversity.

Using the above steps may attract more diverse employees, but without a culture that welcomes diversity, retention of these employees will be difficult. You may end up attracting more diverse candidates to apply for your position only to discover the hiring manager is biased and turns away those candidates. Or, good candidates are hired only to turn around and leave because they do not feel welcomed or included. Because of this potential, it is necessary to create a culture that encourages and welcomes diversity at all levels.

A diversity initiative within the organization can help foster and create such a culture. First, develop a diversity task force to examine the demographics of your organization and to create a mission statement for diversity, strategic goals, and an implementation plan. As with many human resource practices, upper management support is critical to shifting the direction and culture of the organization. Upper management can support these efforts by rewarding members who seek to increase diversity and holding members accountable for the corporation's diversity objectives. The following are examples of how to encourage and foster a more diverse-friendly culture:

- Provide incentives for those managers who create a diverse department.

- Create a mentoring program where managers take on younger professionals of diverse backgrounds and work with them as they progress through the organization. Keep in mind this is not a charity activity, but rather a reward for excellence.
- Award publicly those members of your organization who embrace diversity and strive to encourage it.
- Have a strong succession plan in place to support and encourage diversity.
- Strong accountability systems that require diversity support in day-to-day operations.

A recent article in [HR Magazine](#) reports that higher turnover rates of minorities may reflect that candidates may be provided unrealistic expectations of the corporate culture during the hiring process that leads to disappointment in the job when the true attitudes of management and co-workers becomes apparent. It is critical to create a culture that values day-to-day practices of valuing and managing diversity. Building relationships with diverse individuals is critical to the success of any diversity initiative. Successful organizations identify supervisors who grow diverse talent, focus on creating work relationships between minorities and non-minorities, work with minorities to obtain their input, and are honest about career potential.

Focusing simply on the recruiting aspect to create diversity is not enough to obtain a diverse workforce. Organizations recognize that they must create a culture that supports minorities and encourages them to grow. Once it is seen by minorities that an organization is diverse-friendly, the company will find the workforce can become more representative of the community in which they are located through strategic efforts focused on finding and retaining these critical employees.

DETERMINING YOUR HIPAA COMPLIANCE OBLIGATIONS

BY BARBARA STOLLBERG

Two concerns for many employers are whether the new HIPAA privacy requirements apply to them and what their obligations may be under the new law. The answers depend on an organization's health care program and the extent to which it receives and uses protected health information (PHI).

The covered entity categories are:

- **Health care providers** – Entities that furnish health care, bill for or receive payment for health care, or conduct covered transactions in electronic format (see transaction standards in 45 CFR 162).
- **Health plans** – Any individual, group, or combination plan that provides or pays for the cost of medical care (this includes most employers who sponsor health care plans or pay claims directly). ERISA defines group health plans as any health benefit plan that has 50 or more participants or is administered by an entity other than the sponsor, if less than 50.
- **Health care clearinghouses** – Entities that process or assist in processing health information from non-standard format to standard format (or vice-versa).

One of the keys in determining an employer's obligation is to understand protected health information (PHI) and its variants: summary health information (SHI), de-identified health information, and minimum necessary information.

- **Protected health information** includes electronic, paper, or oral health records that relate to a person's past, present, or future health conditions; health care provided to an individual; past, present or future payments for providing health care; and any health records that can actually or potentially identify an individual (45 CFR 164.501 Definitions).
- **Summary health information** does not include names or other identifying information (5-digit zip codes allowed) and summary of claims history, expenses, or types of claims. It may be used when trying to obtain bids for insurance coverage (45 CFR 164.504).
- **De-identified health information** requires that specific standards be used to protect an individual's identity. It may be used between covered entities and/or business associates for gathering data on health care costs, claims experiences, or effectiveness of wellness programs (45 CFR 164.514a-c).
- **Minimum necessary health information** is identifiable and may be used and disclosed by covered entities, but is limited specifically to what is necessary to accomplish the purpose (45 CFR 164.514d).

The two lists below help pinpoint compliance obligations. The first list details the main elements of the law, their specific citations and a brief description of the requirements. The second list describes the major business categories and their compliance obligations from the first list.

Privacy Elements

A. Use and Disclosure Rules (45 CFR 164.502-514)

Covered entities may obtain consent to use (within the organization) or disclose (outside of the organization) PHI for treatment, payment, or health care operations. Most other circumstances require written authorization from the individual.

B. Individual Rights (45 CFR 164.520-528)

An individual has the right to review and request modifications to his/her own records, review privacy notices, revoke or restrict consent, request an accounting of uses or disclosures, file grievances for violations of his/her rights, protection from retaliation or use of PHI for making employment decisions, and request confidential communications.

C. Privacy Notice (45 CFR 164.520)

Specifies language, required statements and other components of a privacy notice, including uses and disclosures of PHI, individual's rights, duties of covered entities, contact information dates, etc.

D. Administrative Requirements (45 CFR 164.530)

Requires naming a privacy officer, training staff, determining what and how PHI is used and by whom, creating policies and procedures to address information flow and restrictions, enforcing physical and technological safeguards, and establishing records retention policies.

E. Health Plan Amendments (45 CFR 164.504)

Modification of health plans to incorporate all of the above and modify business associate agreements to ensure their compliance.

General Compliance Categories:

Self-insured health plan sponsor and administrator receiving protected health information (PHI).

Requires compliance with A, B, C, D & E.

Self-insured health plan sponsor receiving summary health information (SHI) only.

Requires compliance with A, B, C & D.

Fully-insured health plan sponsor having no administrative functions receiving SHI only.

Requires compliance with individual rights provisions regarding non-retaliation and non-waiver of rights (minimal compliance).

Fully-insured health plan sponsor and administrator receiving PHI.

Requires compliance with A, B, C, D & E.

Please note that this is a simplified explanation. If you have questions or doubts, please contact your legal counsel.

REMEMBER: All covered entities must be in compliance by April 14, 2003 **UNLESS** they have filed the one-year extension **OR** are a small health plan with annual receipts of \$5M or less.

For more information see: <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/whatsnew.html> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Civil Rights – What's New

HIPAA INTERACTIONS WITH OTHER LAWS AND EMPLOYMENT SITUATIONS

BY BARBARA STOLLBERG

Employers may be wondering if HIPAA rules apply to medical information required by other employment laws. The general rule is that medical information collected in the role of employer (not plan sponsor or administrator) is not covered under HIPAA, but confidentiality procedures for medical records must still be followed. These procedures require not sharing medical information except on a need to know basis, limiting disclosure to the minimum information necessary to complete the task and keeping the information in a locked file cabinet separate from general personnel records.

ADA and FMLA

- Employee's written authorization is needed for provider to release medical test results to employer.
- Employer can require authorization as a condition of employment.
- Confidentiality is required except for management to arrange accommodations, safety personnel in case of emergency treatment, and government officials investigating compliance.

COBRA

- Enrollment activities are not subject to HIPAA (employer is acting on behalf of participant and not a group health plan).

OSHA

- Employee's authorization not necessary for reporting to government agencies.
- Employee's written authorization is needed for provider to release medical test results to employer.
- Employer can require authorization as a condition of employment.

State Laws

- Federal law will override state privacy laws **unless** the state law is more stringent, **OR** for,
 - Public health and safety.
 - Insurance and health plan regulation.
 - Disease reporting.
 - Reporting state health care delivery costs.
 - Reporting controlled substance use.
 - Fraud and abuse prevention.

Workers' Compensation

- Does not apply to workers' compensation carriers.
- Information necessary to process claims is not covered under HIPAA and may be disclosed without individual authorization, **BUT**,
 - Disclosure must be limited to and comply with state or other workers' compensation laws.
 - Disclosures must be limited to the minimum necessary health information to accomplish the task.
 - Employee's written authorization needed for covered entity to disclose PHI to carrier.
 - Disclosure permitted but must provide an account of disclosures.

Employer Sponsored Health and Wellness Programs

- De-identified health information, statistics, and claims costs may be collected as long as the records do not contain employees' names or identification information (e.g. Social Security numbers).

Pre-employment Physicals or Drug Screening

- Employee's written authorization is needed for provider to release results to employer.
- Employer can require authorization as a condition of employment.

AT-WILL

Employees often do not understand that their employment can end at any time.

As you may know, the concept of at-will has been around since the 1800's. The concept has developed over time, but has gained the most recognition from a series of cases since the early 1980's. Unfortunately, there are still employees who have trouble with the concept, particularly with jobs not covered by collective bargaining agreements. Employment at-will language should be included in a facility's employment application forms and employee manuals or handbooks. The best manuals include language stating that nothing, not the classified ad, the job description, the job posting, or the offer letter, is intended to be an employment contract. Some even go so far as to describe what would be considered a contract, noting that only the Administrator or CEO has the authority to enter into such an agreement or contract. Managers should be trained not to use expressions such as, "You'll always have a job here" or "What would we do without you?" or "I could never fire you."

At-will employment means it can end at anytime. Either party can end the employment relationship, with or without prior notice. Most states recognize employment at-will, provided a termination does not violate state or federal laws, such as those relating to discrimination.

During the recruitment process many candidates simply skim over applications, failing to read or comprehend the paragraphs employers so carefully include. These same candidates, if hired, are so excited at the prospect of a new job that they again fail to read or comprehend similar statements during the orientation process.

Sharp managers will mention at-will verbally during the orientation process, because educating employees in all aspects of the business, including status as an at-will employer, is a never-ending process.

Q&A

BY STEVE MYHRE, SPHR

What should I do if I find out that one of my employees is not authorized to work in the U.S.?

Once you have discovered that one of your employees is illegal, you are now knowingly employing an illegal alien – something you don't want to do. The first step is to give the employee an opportunity to provide new documentation. Acceptable documentation is listed on the back of the I-9 form. You must then provide the employee with sufficient time to provide the documents. Ten to twelve days is usually sufficient, but no more than 45. If instead the employee provides a receipt of application for the appropriate documentation (e.g., social security card) then give the employee 90 days to furnish the actual documents. If the employee does not provide the appropriate documents within these time frames, you will be forced to terminate.

A note of caution: If your determination of the employee's illegal status was based on an invalid social security number, be aware that this could increase the chances of an audit by the INS. Therefore, make sure your I-9's are in order and that you are not knowingly employing any other illegal aliens.

If you have any questions regarding this or any other employee-related topic, please feel free to give me a call or e-mail me at smyhre@hnrnorthwest.com.

A TOP TEN LIST FOR HR PROFESSIONALS

According to David Ulrich, professor and Director of the Human Resource Executive Program at the University of Michigan Business School, the following top ten list is a prescription for HR professionals:

1. Leverage technology.
2. Measure the impact of what you deliver.
3. Be willing to do what you advise others.
4. Coach executives to be bold, focused, and customer-centric.
5. Frame problems in a long-term context while delivering day-to-day results.
6. Keep external customers and investors in mind when making critical decisions.
7. Define, build, and deliver capabilities for customers and intangibles for investors.
8. Deliver both compassion (caring about people) and competitiveness (caring about the organization and customers).
9. Remember to focus on costs and growth.
10. Never forget the "human" in human resources.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

Be like a duck – keep calm and unruffled on the surface, but paddle like the devil underneath.

-Anonymous

Maturity is: the ability to stick with a job until it's finished; the ability to do a job without being supervised; the ability to carry money without spending it; and the ability to bear an injustice without wanting to get even.

-Abigail Van Buren

The young and the old have all the answers. Those in between are stuck with the questions.

-Anonymous

True friendship is like sound health; the value of it is seldom known until it is lost.

-Charles Caleb Colton

Happiness is to be found along the way, not at the end of the road, for then the journey is over and it is too late. Today, this hour, this minute is the day, the hour, the minute for each of us to sense the fact that life is good, with all of its trials and troubles, and perhaps more interesting because of them.

-Robert R. Updegraff

CRIME SCENE

According to data compiled by Ernst & Young, one in five employees in America say they have witnessed co-workers commit fraud in the workplace. What kinds of crimes are being committed?

- Stealing office supplies – 37%
- Stealing products or cash – 25%
- Padding time sheets – 18%
- Inflating expense accounts – 8%
- Accepting kickbacks from suppliers – 6%
- Falsifying bookkeeping records – 3%

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. To register for our workshops, please call any of our offices, send an e-mail to Susan Jeffries at sjeffries@hrnorthwest.com, or just register online at www.hrnorthwest.com under Consulting services.

JANUARY

January 6-12 “Someday We’ll Laugh About This” Week.
National “Thank Your Customers” Week.

January 14 National “Clean Off Your Desk” Day.

January 20 Martin Luther King’s Birthday celebrated.

**January 22 HRN Workshop - Willamette Valley
Compensation Basics Part I
8:30 - 12 noon**

**January 28 HRN Workshop - Tualatin
One-on-One Coaching Techniques
8:30 - 12 noon**

**January 28 HRN Workshop - Puget Sound
Being Your Own Internal Consultant
8:30 – 12 noon**

REMINDER: The Advantage newsletter will now be available only via email. To continue to receive the newsletter please provide [us](#) with your email address.

FEBRUARY

**February 6 HRN Workshop - Tualatin
Low-to-No Cost Benefits
8:30 – 12 noon**

**February 13 HRN Breakfast Briefing -
Tualatin & Puget
Sound
Love is in the Air - Coping with
Office
Romances
7:30 - 9:30 a.m.**

**February 19 HRN Workshop - Willamette
Valley
Compensation Basics Part II
8:30 – 12 noon**

**February 25 HRN Workshop - Puget Sound
Conducting Effective Employee
Orientations
8:30 – 12 noon**

ON MY SOAPBOX

I had the opportunity to participate in two remarkable events early in December. The first, an Economic Summit held at the Convention Center in Portland, was an opportunity for government officials and business leaders to discuss how, by working together, we could stimulate Oregon's economy and resolve many of its financial problems. Oregon has the dubious honor of leading the nation in unemployment in 14 out of the last 16 months. Our job growth has been substantially reduced; we have the shortest school year of any state; and our deficit has led to five unsuccessful legislative sessions culminating in a ballot measure to raise taxes that is unlikely to pass.

When organizers first conceived the event, they anticipated about 200 participants. They were astonished that approximately 1,300 people attended! The tables of 10 were mixtures of age groups, geography (all 36 counties were represented), perspectives, and backgrounds. Panelists provided unique views of the problems, answers, and priorities. Intense discussion took place at each table. There was standing room only in breakout sessions covering 12 different approaches to addressing the problems, as smaller groups tried to bring focus to each particular option.

It was a day of learning, flashes of brilliance, and critical thinking. It was both depressing (so much to overcome) and exhilarating at the same time. An organizer of the event told us he helps build these processes all the time and has been involved with many state groups seeking to create new futures, but he had never seen turnout this high, never seen a comparable level of creative thought, and never felt a similar downright determination to find and implement solutions. I couldn't help thinking this was the 21st century equivalent of the Oregon Trail pioneers going into uncharted territory, convinced that success lay at the end of the journey.

The second event took place only one day later. A few minutes after 2:00 p.m., our front doors opened and Senator Ron Wyden and one of his aides stepped into our lobby. His office had called a week earlier, asking if we were interested in having him drop in and spend an hour or so with us. We had barely paused before responding "Yes!" Senator Wyden and I chatted for a few minutes in my office (you should have seen how clean it was). I told him I thought he had done a wonderful job at the previous day's event and that, based on all the ideas and comments the Summit had generated, I was encouraged about Oregon's future. His schedule called for him to meet with our staff and share a bit about the congressional agenda. He told us about some of the bills he expected to be introduced, offering his ideas on their viability and possible outcomes. He commented on the likely struggle between Democrats and Republicans, given the one-vote margin held by Republicans. He listened attentively to our questions and concerns underlying them. It was an illuminating afternoon during which we felt like beltway insiders, if only briefly.

As you might imagine, the two events gave me much to ponder. My political history, if charted, would show peak periods of high involvement, and longer stretches of conscientious voting and high news attention but little else. These two days were rarefied air. I came away with several thoughts. First, like the bumper sticker says, politics is local. If we don't offer opinions and ideas, we can't/shouldn't gripe about the outcome. We have not only a right, but an OBLIGATION to be involved and active in our state and its issues. If we choose not to take an active role, we fail our citizenship.

Oregon has many grave concerns. We must raise our voices, commit our efforts to search for the best responses, and take these responsibilities seriously. This state is only what we make of it and Oregon has a terrific reputation for innovation and independent thinking. It is time for us all to share our ideas and our passion for living here, so what is special about Oregon isn't lost. I truly believe we can impact our future, but only if we're all involved in the present. If you agree, contact me, and I'll share the "white papers" that came out of the Summit. It's a good place to start.

- Judy Clark, President



Providing Customized HR Services That Matter Most

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WWW.HRNORTHWEST.COM