



advantage

DISCIPLINE AND DISCHARGE: STEPS TO AVOIDING WRONGFUL TERMINATION (PART II)

By Deborah Jeffries, PHR

Last month we began our conversation on discipline and discharge with identifying the need and benefit for employers to address issues with their employees, as well as reasons employees do not perform as expected. We also addressed the need for documentation, and the initial steps of preparation for the disciplinary conversation. This month we'll focus on the actual discipline discussion.

Using a checklist to prepare for the disciplinary meeting can assist the supervisor in feeling confident that all necessary steps have been taken. We recommend that the supervisor or manager involved in the discipline process pay close attention to the following items.

- Ensure the meeting is held close to the date of the incident.
- Select a time and place that is free from interruptions and likely to ensure confidentiality.
- Review all facts.
- Have all relevant information on hand to answer any questions that may surface.
- Consider and review job requirements.
- Have a desired structure for the conversation so the employee cannot sidetrack the discussion.
- Start on a positive note and indicate you want to help the employee be successful.
- Avoid blaming or punishing the employee. Discipline is about change, not retribution.
- Use open-ended questions to encourage the employee to express feelings.
- Use active listening and paraphrase what the employee says.
- Seek cooperation and acknowledge any information of value given by the employee.
- Focus on things that can be changed.
- Consider motives the employee may have for his/her performance or behavior.
- Point out the effects of the employee's non-performance on the work group or on customers.
- Help the employee decide how to correct the problem to ensure there is no repetition of the unwanted behavior.
- Ensure the employee understands that the behavior needs to change, and point out the consequences of not doing so.
- Focus on behavior related to specific, recent instances. Be prepared to provide examples.
- Develop a plan for improvement that includes both actions to be taken by the employee and assistance to be provided by you as the supervisor.
- Indicate a specific time frame for improvement.
- Draft any formal documentation necessary, have the employee sign and place the original in the employee's personnel file. A copy should also be given to the employee.

The Disciplinary Discussion. Following the steps outlined here will assist a supervisor in having an effective disciplinary discussion. First, supervisors should explain the purpose of the discussion. If there have been previous discussions on the

same topic, the supervisor should remind the employee of the content of those discussions. The supervisor should ask the employee for reasons for the situation or non-performance and indicate understanding of what the employee is saying. Asking the employee to suggest what can be done to improve work performance can also be helpful in creating a more participatory approach, and allows the employee to “own” the suggestion(s). Then the supervisor and the employee can work together to find alternative work behaviors that will allow the employee to accomplish goals.

During the disciplinary discussion, the supervisor may also want to ask the employee if there is any assistance they can provide to help remedy the problem. Next, the supervisor needs to indicate what action will be taken and why, and agree on a specific employee response and date. Following up with the employee to give additional feedback on the employee’s progress is important in fostering good performance and letting the employee know if he/she is exhibiting the desired behavior. A timetable should be set with the employee to review any progress made and/or any obstacles to overcome in meeting the performance goals. Depending on the issue, a time period ranging from one week to one to two months may be appropriate. The supervisor should also indicate confidence in the employee (unless termination is likely). It is critical that acknowledgement and praise be given if and when the employee’s performance improves. This can set the employee on the right path and result in even better performance. We recommend ending the meeting on a positive note and focusing on communicating the expectation of good performance, rather than an expectation of future problems and eventual termination.

For employees who feel that the corrective action taken by their supervisor is unfair, it is suggested that the employee be able to discuss the matter with HR or senior management. If repeated efforts to improve performance are unsuccessful, or when an employee commits an offense so serious that continued employment is not an option, a decision should be made about terminating employment. HR and/or a member of senior management should always review termination decisions. Only after all efforts have been made to improve an employee’s performance will a supervisor know that termination is the best decision.

Employees should sign and receive copies of all written warnings. If an employee refuses to sign a warning, the supervisor should have a witness observe this and write on the warning “employee refused to sign,” then sign and date the warning. The supervisor can contact another member of management to act as a witness to the employee refusing to sign the warning. As another protective measure, it is also important to note in the Employee Handbook that the organization reserves the right to take any disciplinary action it deems appropriate.

Disciplinary Cautions. One of the worst responses an employer can take towards poor performance is to ignore the problem and hope it will go away — this is rarely successful. Some supervisors are reluctant to deal with the disciplinary process because they have not been adequately trained on how to conduct performance coaching. Effective performance management is critical to an organization’s success. Every organization should provide training in this area and have a policy that supervisors seek assistance from HR prior to beginning any disciplinary discussion. In the absence of training, the supervisor may side with the employee and increase the likelihood of legal action. Role-playing can be especially helpful in teaching supervisors how to handle a disciplinary situation.

An employer should never summarily discharge and should obtain as many facts as possible by conducting a thorough assessment. A suspension is an excellent option to allow the employer time to collect data. It is important to keep assessment information as confidential as possible. Employee interviews should be conducted with care and deliberation. An investigation for serious violations should be conducted promptly. If the employee is to be discharged, the employee should be told personally and the supervisor should be clear about the reason for the discharge. The process and resulting documentation should be reviewed as if the employer may be going to court.

Singling out one employee for disciplinary action when an offense is widespread is not advisable. However, repeat violations should be called to the offending employee’s attention and the need for the employee’s cooperation should be emphasized. If there has been a long-standing pattern of abuse of a work rule, the organization should communicate to all employees the details of any new rules. Next, supervisors should communicate their expectations to employees and set a proper example. Of course, HR Northwest is available for consultation during the disciplinary process.

BROADBANDING: IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

By Mike Brock, MA, SPHR

In order to stay competitive in today's demanding business environment, organizations are under pressure to become leaner, flatter and more responsive to customer needs. At the heart of this drive for greater efficiency is the issue of appropriate compensation. Few factors have greater influence on an organization's bottom line than the ability to attract and retain high performing, highly motivated employees. In the quest for that "right" compensation system, broadbanding is an option that every performance driven organization should explore.

What is broadbanding? Broadbanding is a compensation system that utilizes much broader pay bands than traditional grades and ranges. The width of the bands runs from 100% to 300% compared to a typical range width of 50%. This means that there are far fewer bands than would be used in a traditional compensation program.

The main purpose of broadbanding is to support a flatter organizational structure that promotes a broader view of work. This is accomplished by "collapsing" a number of traditional pay grades into the much broader ranges. This moves away from jobs that are narrowly defined by the standard job descriptions. Instead, individuals with similar skill sets and levels of responsibility are grouped together into the same pay band. Movement through the bands is then based on competencies and performance rather than longevity with the organization.

Ideally, movement to a broadbanded system increases flexibility of pay practices by decentralizing pay decisions away from human resources and into the hands of the managers. Consequently, the role of human resources changes from an enforcement and control orientation to that of advising and serving in a business partnership role. The ultimate affect of broadbanding is the support of a new organizational culture/climate that improves an organization's competitive advantage.

In other words, broadbanding supports a leaner, more customer-focused organization by eliminating much of the hierarchy associated with a traditional pay structure. In addition, broadbanding is seen as a way to energize and formalize an organization's career planning and skill development efforts.

Does it work? Hewitt and Associates conducted a major survey on the effectiveness of broadbanding in 1994. The survey was sponsored by the American Compensation Association, now called WorldatWork, and included data on over 200 organizations nationwide that had recently implemented broadbanded systems. Of the surveyed firms, 78% viewed broadbanding as quite effective when measuring the three criteria of general employee feedback, enhanced job mobility and level of manager complaints.

Are there disadvantages? Notwithstanding the generally positive marks given to broadbanding by implementing organizations, there are a number of frequently expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of broadbanding that need to be included as part of an objective discussion. These include the following:

- **Culture shock:** The flexibility required by broadbanding may not be compatible with more traditional, hierarchical structures. This incompatibility can create a significant level of turbulence in an organization that isn't fully prepared for implementing a new compensation system.
- **Compensation decision-making is decentralized.** This goes along with the general culture shock of implementing a new system. Many HR professionals in more traditional, hierarchical cultures have difficulty in passing off their traditional salary administration authority to line managers.
- **It's difficult to establish an accurate link between broadbands and the market.** This is due to the fact that broadbanding steps away from narrowly written job descriptions. This can make it difficult to clearly identify benchmark jobs for purposes of conducting a market survey.
- **Broadbanded systems can become expensive as employees "float to the top" of the pay structure over time.** This tendency has to be controlled by an effective performance management system and supervisors who are adequately trained and sufficiently objective to administer an unbiased, merit based system.
- **The system must be linked to bottom line.** Broadbanded systems tend to result in higher long-term labor costs as employees advance to the top of broad pay structures over time. This means that a mature, long-term labor force will almost certainly be paid above the comparable labor market. This higher labor cost has to be linked to higher profitability in order for a broadbanded system to be accepted by the board of directors and shareholders.
- **Broadbanding requires a streamlining of job titles and greater career development planning.** This requires a significant up-front investment from human resources staff that may already be stretched to the breaking point.

In short, broadbanding may not be right for every organization or every situation. Broadbanding requires a significant amount of customization to each business environment, and may result in profound cultural change. The question, then, is how to determine if broadbanding is right for you.

The exploration process. In light of the concerns expressed above, the decision to move to broadbanding should not be made without a thorough exploration process. This process should include the following steps.

1. **Research:** Start by sampling the available body of literature on broadbanding. There are a number of excellent sources on the topic. Two of the best are:
 - WorldatWork, Base Pay Management, pg. 2.19 – 2.22 and Res. 1, 9-30.
 - Kenan Abosch and Janice S. Hand, Broadbanding Design, Approaches and Practices, American Compensation Association and Hewitt Associates, 1994
2. **Peer discussions:** Next, discuss broadbanding and its impact and effectiveness with professionals in organizations that have a track record with broadbanding. Be sure to obtain objective opinions on both the pros and cons of the implemented systems.
3. **Discussions with management staff:** This typically takes the form of one-on-one interviews with managers and supervisors. Alternatively, focus groups can be used as a medium for discussion. A major component of this step will be educating the participants on the fundamentals of broadbanding. Be sure to take adequate time for this process.

Broadbanding is a compensation alternative that should be considered by any organization that aspires to greater efficiency and higher performance. Effectively implementing a broadbanded system may result in a profound change in organizational culture that can, in turn, lead to improved organizational effectiveness. However, as with any cultural change, there are risks attached. For this reason the decision to change to a broadbanded system should only be after a deliberate and thorough period of exploration. Above all, avoid the temptation to apply that which seems to work someplace else, but which may not be appropriate for your organization.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION UPDATE

By Tina Weber, PHR

In the January 2001 Advantage newsletter we covered the revised Affirmative Action Requirements for Federal Contractors that were enacted November 13, 2000. This year we're providing an update on things that impact employers who are government contractors and required to maintain a written Affirmative Action Plan as well as respond to the Equal Opportunity Survey.

The Equal Opportunity Survey is a request by OFCCP for the type of information that federal contractors agree in their contracts to provide to OFCCP upon request, and is supposed to encourage employers to audit their own employment practices and remedy any identified problems. One-half of the federal contractor enterprises are selected annually for EO Survey completion using a computer generated random selection procedure, and response is mandatory.

Contractors receiving the Equal Opportunity Survey must complete the form by providing the required data, and return the survey to OFCCP within 45 calendar days of the date of receipt. OFCCP estimates the survey should take contractors about 21 hours to complete, and requests three categories of information:

1. General information on an establishment's EEO and Affirmative Action Program activities.
2. Combined Personnel Activity information for each EEO-1 category by gender, race, and ethnicity.
3. Combined Compensation data for each EEO-1 category for minorities and non-minorities by gender.

The compensation data portion of the survey requires contractors to generate information on employee compensation in the format desired by the EO Survey. A compensation analysis is also a required element for Affirmative Action Plans. OFCCP will be attempting to analyze consolidated data that is not representative of how contractors actually pay their employees. Contractors will probably find they have no use for the data in the survey format, and will not use it in their compensation management program.

The release of 2000 census data has been delayed until approximately the fourth quarter of 2003. Contractors are still expected to use census data from 1990 to prepare their Affirmative Action Plans. A major issue surrounding the release of the new data is that the Bureau of the Census allowed multiple-race designations during the 2000 census. Final decisions about the format for the new census EEO file have not yet been made. At some point in the future, contractors will need to

reconfigure their HRIS data or manual systems to include the additional racial designations. The final decision could expand the new ethnic categories further, but currently the minimum categories are:

1. American Indian or Alaskan Native
2. Asian
3. Black or African American
4. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
5. White
6. Hispanic or Latino (White race)
7. Hispanic or Latino (all other races)

The revised affirmative action requirements include workforce annotations. Employees of facilities with fewer than 50 persons should be included in the Affirmative Action Plan for where they report, or where the personnel function resides. These employees must be annotated in the plan to show their actual work location. In addition, any employees hired or managed through a corporate or other office must also include an annotation for their manager's location.

The Federal Office of Management and Budget has extended EEOC's deadline for defining the term "applicant" to 3/31/02. This definition will impact how contractors identify the relevant applicant pool in order to determine if a selection criterion has an adverse impact on some applicants. Determining at what point someone becomes an "applicant," especially since Internet recruiting and electronic resumes are now common practice, is crucial to affirmative action employers. OFCCP continues to use EEOC's definition of "applicant" furnished in the 1979 document "Questions and Answers to Clarify and Provide a Common Interpretation of the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures," which is:

"[T]he precise definition of the term 'applicant' depends upon the user's recruitment and selection procedures. The concept of an applicant is that of a person who has indicated an interest in being considered for hiring, promotion, or other employment opportunities. This interest might be expressed orally, depending on the employer's practice."

OFCCP has been using a broad definition of "applicant" to include anyone who expresses interest in employment, even if not minimally qualified. What this means to contractors is that they should make every effort to obtain race and gender information from all applicants.

Employers can refer to the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Internet home page, www.dol.gov/dol/esa/public/ofccp_org.htm for additional information concerning affirmative action requirements, the EO Survey, and compensation matters. HR Northwest can also be a resource for you.

Contact Tina Weber at HR Northwest for assistance concerning affirmative action requirements, the EO Survey and compensation matters. We can complete the EO Survey for your organization, utilizing information that you provide to us electronically including EEO-1 category, race, gender, and compensation of your current workforce.

EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES LIABILITY INSURANCE

By Stacey Lynch, SPHR

There is no question that employee rights issues are creating significant liabilities for today's employers. Any time you discipline or discharge an employee, there is the potential for a lawsuit. In addition, the number of sexual harassment claims has doubled in the last six years. In 1991, the Civil Rights Act was amended to allow for jury trials as well as compensatory and punitive damages to plaintiffs in employment-related civil cases. The average award paid to individuals for employment-related claims is now over \$1.5 million. Because other insurance policies do not include employment-related areas in their coverage, employers are turning to Employment Practices Liability Insurance (EPLI) policies as a way to insure these risks.

EPLI coverage typically provides indemnity coverage for defense costs, settlements and judgments arising from employment-related claims. The ten basic areas covered include:

- Discrimination
- Sexual harassment
- Wrongful discipline
- Infliction of emotional distress
- Wrongful termination
- Breach of employment contract
- Deprivation of career opportunity
- Improper management of employee benefits
- Negligent evaluation
- Failure to employ or promote

However, not all EPLI policies are the same and it is important to shop around to get the right policy for your organization. Some of the key areas to look for when purchasing coverage are:

- Does the policy cover prior acts? Some policies limit coverage to events that actually take place during the policy period.
- Are wrongful employment practices arising from charges of retaliation or public policy violations covered?
- Is coverage limited only to the organization and its supervisors?
- Is there an exclusion of coverage for “intentional acts”? Many wrongful employment practices are considered intentional and may not be covered.

Organizations should also look at their internal policies and procedures when considering EPLI coverage. The Insurance Information Institute of America offers the following tips to make your organization more attractive to an insurer:

- Review your organization’s policies and procedures. Having effective policies and procedures in place will make the organization look less risky to an insurance carrier.
- Develop, implement and enforce zero-tolerance policies toward workplace harassment, discrimination and the abuse of drugs and/or alcohol.
- Develop an employee handbook that defines the performance and behaviors you expect from all employees. Be sure it also contains employment-at-will language.
- Conduct employee performance appraisals on a regular basis.
- Shop around to obtain the best price.

Organizations that are highly decentralized, with the authority for employment policies and activities delegated to local operating units, tend to be viewed as high risk by insurers. Other red flags include lack of HR involvement in employment activities, neglected or delayed employee performance reviews, significant turnover within the HR function, and lack of documentation relating to hiring, performance evaluation and termination in the personnel files.

EPLI is not meant to replace good employment practices and most insurance companies won’t insure an organization unless some basic employment practices are already in place. It is common for insurance carriers to conduct a review or audit of the organization’s HR policies and practices to assess the level of risk prior to offering coverage. This review is a detailed look at an employer’s employee handbook and policy manual, employment forms, workforce demographics, hiring, training, promotion and termination practices, grievance procedures, downsizing history or plans, employment-related charges and complaints over the past 3-5 years and total dollar loss history.

Although employment-related claims can be filed against organizations of any size, risk management can be especially critical for small- and mid-size employers. Many smaller employers feel that, since they know everyone in the organization on a first name basis, it can’t happen to them. Unfortunately, that isn’t always true and all it takes is for one employee to come in and file a claim. There are now a large number of EPLI carriers, and premiums have dropped substantially, making coverage affordable for small organizations.

Whether or not your organization chooses to purchase EPLI coverage, taking positive steps to ensure that all HR policies and practices are conducted legally and that all employees are treated appropriately will help protect you in today’s litigious environment. HR Northwest can conduct an audit of your HR function to assist you in determining areas where your organization is doing a good job of meeting compliance requirements and following suitable business practices, as well as identifying areas where there may be possible adverse consequences as a result of current practices. An audit can also form the basis from which to plan future personnel activities and improvements. Please call one of our offices for more information.

UNDERSTANDING DISCRIMINATION

In an employment context, the laws concerning discrimination require employers to construct their employment processes to ensure that each employee is afforded equal rights regarding hiring, pay, pay increases, demotion, promotion, transfers, access to benefits, and any other employment-related decisions. Decisions cannot be made on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, sex, Vietnam era veteran, disability status, or any other “protected class” status. Employers have a responsibility to ensure that their employment practices are free of intentional bias and any adverse impact as a result of employment practices.

It is this last requirement that sometimes gives employers difficulty. Almost everyone knows and acknowledges that intentional discrimination is wrong. At the very least, everyone knows it is illegal, and that any employer caught engaging in intentional discriminatory acts will be subject to legal action, either by the individual, by the state, or by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). The difficulty for employers frequently comes from decisions or actions that were not intended to be discriminatory.

For instance, let's say that an employer has hired primarily Caucasian employees - not because they are intentionally discriminating, but because those are the people who have dropped in to apply. For the next available position, the employer asks the employees to refer anyone they think would work out well for the organization. Because the employees are primarily Caucasian, they will most likely refer people similar to themselves, thus resulting in more Caucasian applicants. While there is nothing deliberately discriminatory about this action, the effect of it may be discriminatory. Under the law, this would be just as illegal as if the organization intended to discriminate. It may not seem fair, but it is the law.

The statistics about discrimination are not very helpful. No one can tell if discrimination is actually on the rise, if people are more aware of their rights, or if people just feel more comfortable reporting concerns they have. Another factor that's making this a continuing issue is the large amount of immigration that is occurring. The immigration pattern is changing the nature of some of the discrimination complaints and religious discrimination complaints reflect this change.

There are also more complaints of sex discrimination because of "glass ceiling" issues. The glass ceiling is experienced by women unable to rise to senior positions within an organization because of their gender. While sex discrimination is certainly not new, this particular element of it is now a more significant reason for legal action.

Employers can minimize their risk of legal action by taking some simple and consistent steps with their hiring and employment processes. A policy outlining the organization's commitment to equal opportunity action and employment is a good first step. Then employers should review their practices, pay levels, and promotion patterns to ensure that no discrimination is occurring. Supervisors and managers need to be trained and oriented to the issues regarding discrimination. They need to be sensitized to the impact of their words on employees or applicants. A general statement about "needing fresh blood" or "someone with new ideas" may be construed as telling someone they are perceived to be too old for the organization. While this may seem absurd to some, it has been the basis for a successful lawsuit more than once.

In the final analysis, employers are charged with ensuring that equality and equity exist in their workplace. It is the employer's responsibility to set policies that protect employees' rights, and to take action to see that those rights are not abridged by managers, owners, or other employees. Failure to take this responsibility seriously can result in unfavorable legal action, a poor public image, loss of business, and difficulty hiring and retaining qualified employees. Business is difficult enough without these added issues.

Q & A

By Steve Myhre, SPHR

Q. I heard that if I am having a meeting with an employee, they have the right to have someone there with them. Is this true even though I am a non-union employer?

A. It's close. More accurately, a non-union employee has the right to have a co-worker present when the employer is conducting an interview that could reasonably lead to corrective action. This protection, known as the Weingarten rights, is based on the 1975 U.S. Supreme Court decision, NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) v. J. Weingarten, in which union employees were granted the right to request that a union representative be present during an investigative meeting that could result in employee discipline. As it now stands, the NLRB's current position is that this right extends to non-union employees as well (but stay tuned because the NLRB has changed its mind more than once on whether this right is available to non-union employees).

So if you are conducting an interview and the employee requests that a co-worker be present, what are your options? You have three. You can grant the request and proceed with the interview. You can end the meeting right then and there. Or you can end the interview piece of the meeting and proceed with the corrective action (this one sounds harsh, I know. I'm not recommending it - I'm just saying that it's an option). The employee does *not* have the right to a co-worker's presence for the sole purpose of actually administering the corrective action. In fact, a non-union employee's right does not extend to any other types of meetings—only those that may reasonably lead to discipline. Also, be aware that you are not required to inform employees of their Weingarten rights. You only need to act on the issue if the employee raises it.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

By Terri D. Ano, Ph.D., SPHR

The Washington State Legislature is now in session. The regular session runs from January 14th to March 22nd. While we know that balancing the budget, the economic/business climate, and transportation are considered their "big" issues, we should see some Employment issues addressed. Look for action on the following: extending unemployment benefits for family, the ergonomics bill, and domestic violence and stalking legislation. We may also see a worker's compensation bill that focuses on retraining. Be sure to contact your legislators to support or oppose the bills that you care about! The hotline for contacting legislators and getting bill information is 1-800-562-6000.

Workers Compensation in Oregon. The Department of Consumer & Business Services has adopted an average reduction of 0.1% in the pure premium rate Oregon employers will pay for workers' compensation insurance in 2002. The pure premium rate is the base premium reflecting the actual cost of workplace injury-and-illness claims, before insurer administrative expenses and profits are added.

In addition, for the calendar year 2002, the department has set the Workers' Benefit Fund assessment rate at 3.6 cents. This applies to each hour or partial hour worked by each employee an employer provides with workers' compensation insurance coverage.

Effective January 1, 2002, employers will pay 8.0% of their insurance premiums to fund the cost of state workers' compensation-related programs and workplace safety-and-health programs that serve Oregon employers and workers.

At the federal level, we have seen a fair amount of action. Specifically, the following has occurred:

- The Spousal Visa bill passed the Senate right before the holidays (the House passed it previously) and is expected to be signed by President Bush. All we need now is a set of instructions from INS.
- The new Mental Health Parity bill finally failed and the original bill was extended for one year.
- The Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) governing contractor responsibility was reversed by the Bush administration. This bill, sometimes called the "Blacklisting Rule," had been challenged by a lawsuit and had previously received a stay by an unpublished interim rule. We are not sure whether the revocation will be challenged.
- The Supreme Court has further defined the ADA. The decision makes it clear that the ADA is designed to protect those with disabilities, not those with injuries or repetitive stress disorders.

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 feel free to call any of our offices.***

MARCH

American Red Cross, National Nutrition
National Colorectal Cancer Awareness,
National Women's History, and Optimism Month.

March 3 National Anthem Day

March 6 Stop Bad Service Day

March 7 HRN Workshop – Portland
Handbooks and Policy Manuals
8:30 - 12 noon

March 8 Employee Appreciation Day

March 17 Saint Patrick's Day

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

March 31 Easter Sunday

APRIL

April 9 HRN Workshop - Portland
Compensation - Part I
8:30 - 12 noon

April 17 HRN Workshop - Puget Sound
Team Building
8:30 - 12 noon

April 23 HRN Workshop - Willamette Valley
Understanding & Preventing Harassment
8:30 - 12 noon

ON MY SOAPBOX

Once every four years is an Olympic year. I admit it, I am addicted. I love the pomp, the music, the achieving personal bests or new records, and the athletes' stories. There is so much to admire, much to learn about the sports, so many lessons about living in a global world.

This year there are special stories: the Canadian pair skaters and the judging scandal, the record number of American medals, the culmination of a wonderful Olympics after all the questions and outrage surrounding the selection of Salt Lake City as the venue.

But one of the things I have found most interesting is the athletes' ability to talk about their accomplishments and success. They reveal their sense of joy and achievement with honest statements about how hard they have worked and how much they thought they might succeed. They are exuberant about how fast, how high, how well they performed. They shamelessly triumph with heads held high and arms upraised. When presented a medal, they often mug for the cameras kissing their awards and waving to the crowds.

I hear very few, if any, derogatory remarks about the jubilation that spills from honored athletes. People are anxious to know how they feel, to share in their exultation, to see them rewarded for all their years of effort and dedication.

It is not so natural for the rest of us. It is something I think most people have great difficulty expressing. We are taught from early childhood not to boast. We are instructed that humility is a virtue. Muhammad Ali aside, it is with significant struggle that most of us say anything resembling, "I am the greatest!"

And isn't that sad? Why is such a stigma attached to honest statements of accomplishment in our workplaces? How wonderful would it be to declare, "I did this well" without others taking offense, or feeling that we have been inappropriate?

Our inability to state what we have accomplished can adversely affect our credibility so it is important to learn how to do this well without causing resentment. We must find a way to encourage individuals to take credit for achievements without generating braggadocio or self-promotion.

Perhaps it starts with little things. Statements like, "I am pleased I could get that finished" and "I am really proud of this - it is some of my best work" seem like safe places to start. We can foster this type of behavior. First, we need to persuade people to be proud of their achievements. Secondly, we need to ensure that we don't allow them to de-value what they accomplished with negating language.

Very few of us will stand on an Olympic podium to receive a medal. But each of us should be proud of good work, and comfortable saying, "Yes, I did that." If we want others to value us, we must first value ourselves and what we contribute.

- Judy Clark, President



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