



advantage

INTERPRETING AND USING SALARY SURVEY INFORMATION

By Mike Brock, SPHR, CCP, and Lon Southard, PHR

So you are looking at salary data published by one of the major salary survey firms in the nation. Or you may have participated in a salary survey and you just received the results back from the organization that conducted the survey. Questions enter your mind, such as - what do all these statistics mean and how can I relate them to the specific pay of positions in my organization or to my salary structure? GOOD questions!

When reviewing salary survey data, first make sure the job content of the positions in the survey compares favorably with a position or positions within your organization. Avoid getting trapped into comparing only job titles. In an ideal world, the job description accompanying the salary survey will match the position in your organization perfectly. It seldom does. So the question becomes whether or not you should consider the salary data knowing the job match isn't perfect. To help answer this question, two more questions need to be answered.

- Would I recruit from this group reflected in the survey to fill similar jobs within my organization?
- Am I likely to lose people to fill the job mentioned in the survey?

If the answer is yes to either question, you most likely will want to consider the data. Here is where your good judgment counts. Most surveys report the following data for each position surveyed:

- Number of organizations reporting data;
- Number of job incumbents;
- Weighted average;
- Median; and,
- Salary range minimum, midpoint and maximum.

All these data points are important and each one should be carefully analyzed. Be cautious of any data reported that does not include at least the number of incumbents, the weighted average and a median or midpoint salary. Of the three, weighted average and median are the least responsive to extreme values. For this reason, they should be given greater consideration.

Validity is important. Ask yourself if the salaries reported in the survey reflect market conditions (is the data valid?). The answer to that question rests with data points in the survey including number of organizations, the number of job incumbents, and a comparison of the weighted average to the median salary. These data points in combination provide insight into the validity of the survey information and the integrity of the data. The two examples below demonstrate how to check for validity.

Example One

Assume that an Accounting Clerk with 150 job incumbents is one of the positions surveyed. With the large sample size (150), it is reasonable to assume that the salary data reported generally reflects market rates. Now assume that only three organizations reported data for the Accounting Clerk position. Even though the sample size is large, the small number of organizations reporting may not reflect the real market. If the data provided for the 150 incumbents represented responses from 40 firms, the integrity of the salary data improves markedly. Let's add another dimension to the mix. Assume that the weighted average for the 150 Accounting Clerks is \$2,500 per month and that the median salary (the middle salary of all job incumbents when arranged in order) is \$1,800. The middle salary is 39% lower than the weighted average. Here is another red flag challenging the validity of the salary data reported.

Example Two

Assume that the second position surveyed is a Bacteriologist (the population of Bacteriologists is very small when compared to Accounting Clerks) and that the survey shows 16 job incumbents reported by eight firms. Assume that the weighted average

for the 16 job incumbents is \$4,000 per month and that the median is \$4,100. This is excellent data! Even though the population (16 incumbents) is very small, it probably reflects the population of Bacteriologists in general (we won't discuss statistical significance in this article). The small sample size includes responses from eight firms representing a cross-section of employers, adding to the credibility of the data. The close relationship between the weighted average and the median salary reinforces the validity of the data. Even though the sample size is small, the other data points contribute to the validity of the salary dollars reported for this position.

After going through all of the analysis described above and deciding to use all, most or part of the salary data reported, how do you apply it to your organization? The most important number reported in the survey is the weighted average. The weighted average represents real dollars paid to real people. For reasons discussed later, it is more important than salary range parameters. The weighted average reflects the pay of high and low performers, new hires and seasoned veterans. It is the number that most organizations and compensation analysts use to determine if the pay levels for individuals are appropriate or if the salary range is appropriate.

Determining Pay for Individual Employees. If your organization does not have established salary ranges, the pay of individuals within the organization is compared to the weighted average in the market. If your pay policy recognizes length of service and performance, salaries paid to seasoned veterans and high performers should exceed the weighted average. New hires and lower level performers are generally paid below the weighted average.

Updating or Developing a Salary Structure. The weighted average is also used as a frame of reference to establish range midpoints. In most organizations, the salary structure and each range within the structure are developed around the weighted average of jobs surveyed. Each of your range midpoints should approximate the weighted average for a given job (or group of jobs if they have similar weighted averages). As you update or develop your range midpoints using the weighted averages from the survey, the distance from one midpoint to the next (expressed as a percentage) will not be exactly the same. You will want to "smooth out" the differences to achieve consistency between midpoints. As you smooth out the differences (line slope), some trial and error or linear regression analysis may be necessary as you strive for consistency while still maintaining midpoints that reflect the survey data. If this process is not a comfortable one for you, give us a call and we can do it for you for a nominal charge.

Referring back to the survey data again, the range minimums and maximums reported in the survey need to be viewed with some caution. In some surveys, they describe established salary ranges reported by survey participants. In other surveys, the minimums and maximums are high and low salaries. Normally the author of the survey will indicate if the minimums and maximums are range parameters or actual salaries. Use the range minimums and maximums (the range spread) as a guide rather than absolutes to determine the range spread for your particular organization. As you develop the range minimums and maximums, it is important to provide a consistent spread. It is unwise to establish, for example, a 30% spread for range one, a 20% spread for range two and a 26% spread for range three. It is better if all the ranges have a constant 30% spread or if the range parameters increase in each range progressing to the highest range. Your lowest range may begin with a 30% spread, the next range a 32%, the next range a 34% spread, etc.

Analyzing salary survey data can be confusing. Applying a few basic rules will greatly simplify the process:

- Be sure to match jobs by job content, not job title.
- Pay particular attention to the median and weighted average as the most accurate reflection of actual market pay.
- Look closely at both the number of incumbents and number of participants when assessing the validity of a specific survey.
- Utilize weighted averages as the basis for a market comparison as well as for establishing your range midpoints.
- Remember that survey data regarding pay ranges is approximate and should be used only as the basis for determining range width.

By applying these principles, you will be able to develop a pay structure that effectively links company strategy with the reality of the marketplace.

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ATTENDANCE AND THE FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE ACT

Do You Need to Rethink Your Attendance Award Program?

By Stacey Lynch, SPHR

Employers have known all along what supporters of the Family and Medical Leave Act failed to realize: the law is complicated and difficult to comply with. Now that we have had about nine years to get used to it, we are finally getting the hang of it. Or are we?

As if it wasn't difficult enough to learn all the federal regulations under the FMLA, many states, including Oregon, California, and Washington, have adopted their own regulations that further complicate administration and compliance. To further add to employers' grief, some aspects of the law have implications beyond allowing the leave itself. Many organizations are finding themselves in hot water for counting FMLA leave against an employee under an established attendance policy or for failing to pay attendance bonuses because of absences under the FMLA or applicable state family and medical leave laws.

It's important for organizations to understand that it is illegal to include FMLA time off when determining eligibility for, or the amount of, an attendance bonus. Although this is not stated verbatim in the regulations, the regulations do state that "the taking of leave...shall not result in the loss of any employment benefit accrued prior to the date on which the leave commenced." The Department of Labor (DOL) has interpreted "employment benefit" to include attendance bonuses. If you have an annual perfect attendance bonus or reward, employees who miss up to 12 weeks of work during a 12-month period while on FMLA leave are still entitled to receive the bonus, as long as they are otherwise eligible.

The legal consequences of not paying bonuses to employees who take FMLA leave are severe. An FMLA violation could result in a complaint filed with the Department of Labor or a private lawsuit seeking the lost bonus, as well as any additional compensation tied to the bonus such as interest on the sums that would have otherwise been paid and attorneys' fees. Perhaps even more important, there is personal risk for the responsible HR professional or other management representative. Under the FMLA, decision-makers can be held personally liable and a court could order you to pay the settlement out of your own pocket. To add insult to injury, the court could also order your organization not to reimburse you.

Many organizations are finding that their attendance bonuses and rewards are no longer effective. Management members are not the only ones upset about paying bonuses to employees who miss work. Co-workers are not necessarily sympathetic either. Those who truly maintain "perfect" attendance are often angry and offended when they see their co-workers who have missed work getting the reward. Those who did not qualify for the award are also often upset because they feel the reasons for their absence are just as compelling as the reasons listed under the FMLA.

It is extremely difficult for many employers to keep accurate records of all FMLA qualifying absences. Without accurate and detailed records you run the risk of excluding an employee from the bonus when you shouldn't have. In most organizations, employees advise their direct supervisor when they need time off. Supervisors are not always familiar with all the intricacies of the leave laws and may inadvertently neglect to record a qualifying absence as FMLA. Employees enjoy all the rights of the FMLA even if the employer failed to properly designate it.

Rather than scrap the idea of an attendance award altogether, you may want to consider using a productivity award instead. The logic is that employees who are not at work are not productive, and would not be eligible for the award. Even better, the DOL has sanctioned these awards. The downside, of course, is that it's not always easy to set objective productivity goals in every organization or department.

Another employment practice that can lead to non-compliance under the FMLA is no-fault absence plans. Under a no-fault plan, employees are allotted a set number of days off, to be used for any reason, before disciplinary action will be taken. The law very clearly prohibits leave protected by the FMLA from being counted under no-fault attendance policies. What this means for employers is that FMLA qualifying absences must be excluded as a reason for discipline under a no-fault policy, just as absences for bereavement leave, jury duty, or workers' compensation are typically excluded.

If you are using attendance bonuses or a no-fault attendance policy, please be sure you are administering them in compliance with FMLA and any applicable state leave laws.

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION AND REWARDS

By Tina Weber, PHR

It's important that organizations recognize and reward employees for their contributions. Recognition may be as informal as a "thank you" or a "pat on the back" to let employees know you value them and acknowledge their achievements. Recognition may also be expressed more formally through awards such as gifts, paid time off, pins, plaques, certificates, cash, or company stock. There are many ways to thank employees, and most often the act of recognition is as meaningful as the award.

People praise their dogs and offer treats as an incentive to repeat good performance. Yet many employees work for organizations where their accomplishments are never recognized or rewarded. Some employers may think that continued employment and paychecks are recognition, but compensation for doing the job is not the same as a personal gesture of thanks, which can go far to motivate performance and promote loyalty.

How do you know if your organization would benefit from implementation of a recognition and reward program? Employee turnover should offer a clue, as employees tend to remain with organizations where they feel valued. The quality of employee morale, productivity and teamwork also indicate when a recognition program would be beneficial. Payoffs for an organization might include fewer grievances, improved customer satisfaction, increased productivity, happier environment and reduced absenteeism.

There are several kinds of recognition award programs, including the traditional employee of the month or quarter, suggestion plans, and safety or attendance awards. Some examples of non-traditional recognition programs are individual or team achievement awards and special programs. Examples of special programs include:

- Length of service awards are typically given at five-year increments. Organizations may implement a tenure program that includes the award of a pin, certificate, plaque, or gift given either casually or formally during an annual organization-wide program.
- Spot awards recognize and reward an employee for going "above and beyond the call of duty." Generally, spot awards recognize a specific employee achievement, such as a cost-saving suggestion, completion of a special project, or assumption of additional duties during another employee's absence. Common spot awards include cash or time off.
- Noteworthy performance awards spotlight a particularly excellent accomplishment. This special recognition may be for improvement of work processes, resolution of a special customer situation, or saving the organization money. Employees may be recognized with a thank you, or asked to share their tips with other employees as part of on-the-job training.
- Peer recognition to thank employees for outstanding efforts. To be most effective, this should be done publicly during a department or organization meeting.

Design of an employee recognition and reward program should take into account the organization's values, and the specific employee performance or behaviors it wishes to encourage. The program should also be customized to fit the organization's culture, and assigned to appropriate individuals who will have authority and responsibility for implementation. Communicating the program to employees is of key importance so that they are aware of the recognition efforts. This can be done through posters, an announcement in a newsletter or a notice posted on a bulletin board. Consideration should also be given to the type of acknowledgement that is preferred - some employees value public recognition and others do not.

Recognition needs to occur on an ongoing basis so employees are regularly reminded that their efforts towards the organization's success are appreciated. In addition to awards programs, supervisors should be encouraged to informally offer recognition through praise and thank you's, or extras such as lunch brought into the office when a group is working vigorously to meet a tight deadline.

Even if an organization has gone through downsizing and is short on funds, there are inexpensive yet effective methods for motivating and retaining staff. Ideas include certificates of recognition, flextime, telecommuting, compressed workweeks to allow more days off, weekend getaways and tickets to sporting events. Any of these recognition methods would go far in reinforcing the value the organization places on its employees. Also, if there have been job cuts, employees may be working harder than ever, which increases the importance of rewarding their efforts.

DID YOU KNOW?

IRS suspends Form 5500 Schedule F filing requirements. The IRS has suspended indefinitely filing requirements for Schedule F (Form 5500) - a move that frees employers from filing annual information returns for their cafeteria plans, educational assistance plans and adoption assistance programs. The change does not apply to filing requirements for ERISA plans, including flexible spending accounts.

However, there is a bigger issue for employers than to file or not to file. It is true employers no longer have to file the forms, but they are forgetting they still have to run discrimination testing to make sure plans are in compliance.

* * * *

New ergo plan features guidelines, not rules. The Bush administration recently announced its plan to reduce workplace repetitive-stress injuries, replacing the Clinton-issued standards Congress repealed last year.

Under the revamped ergonomics plan, OSHA officials will develop voluntary, industry-specific guidelines to reduce and prevent ergonomic injuries. The guidelines are practical approaches over federal rules because they can be implemented more quickly and allow for more flexibility. The agency will begin rolling out guidelines for selected industries by year's end.

* * * *

Workplace napping posed as solution to employee fatigue. A report released in April from the National Sleep Foundation found that workplace fatigue costs American businesses at least \$77 billion per year. As workers become more sleep deprived (already more than half report not getting enough shut eye), on-the-job fatigue will become a more pronounced concern. Recent court cases holding organizations liable for employees who suffer fatigue-related injuries only increase pressure on organizations to take proactive steps to reduce employee drowsiness.

Touting office naps as a no-cost way to keep employees healthy, alert, and productive, experts encourage organizations to promote a 20-minute workplace nap and experience the amazing effects it can offer. For employers that aren't ready for naptime, experts recommend periodic health and safety assessments for employees, flexible scheduling, and education on time and stress management.

* * * *

Nonprofit alliance offers "401(k) Survival Kit." The Alliance for Investor Education (AIE) has rolled out a "401(k) Survival Kit" designed to arm investors with the best tools for success in retirement planning and saving.

AIE's 21-member organization of trade associations and governmental organizations contributed their top information and resources for the package, currently available at the website www.investoreducation.org. Investors can find tips on understanding market risks, building a portfolio and deciphering plan statements.

* * * *

EEOC introduces disability workshops for small employers. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) is rolling out a series of workshops to encourage small businesses to hire individuals with disabilities and bolster compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

"The EEOC has a critical role to play in introducing the fastest growing sector of the business community to a vastly skilled, but underutilized labor pool right in their own backyard," says EEOC Chair Cari Dominguez. "These interactive workshops are an important step toward providing small business owners and managers with answers to questions about...tapping into a tremendous business resource, individuals with disabilities."

The workshops will tackle issues such as acceptable questions during interviews, equitable accommodations, recruitment, and tax incentives. Small businesses in areas outside of major metropolitan cities are the targeted areas. For more information, call 202-663-4503.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU MAKE MISTAKES

If it hasn't happened to you already, it will eventually. You'll make a faux pas at work. What to do when you make a grand mistake? Here are five rules on how best to handle it:

Rule 1: Always own up to your mistake. No matter how big or stupid, it's always best to admit your mistake up front. You'll keep it from becoming an even bigger blunder later.

Rule 2: No excuses, please. Even if your dog really did eat the report, it only serves to make you look as if you aren't taking responsibility for the mistake. Forget about who or what the reasons are; concentrate on fixing the challenge.

Rule 3: Don't sit on your mistake until later. If you're quick about alerting people about your mistake, they can help come up with solutions to the concern before it worsens.

Rule 4: Find solutions. Don't just throw up your hands in despair. You'll only prove yourself as someone who can't meet challenges head on. Be proactive in searching for a solution.

Rule 5: Learn the lesson(s) and move on. It's true that there's a lot to be learned from our mistakes. So make a list of what you learned and apply the knowledge to your job and to future situations.

HOW TO HANDLE FIVE COMMON WORKER COMPLAINTS

As long as there are employees, there will be complaints. That's not to discount the challenges and issues. Many complaints can point to underlying management deficiencies. There is no magic bullet to rid your workplace of all complaints, but there are strategies to tackle the five most common ones:

Challenge 1: Distrust of management. A survey of 50,000 workers found that half said they don't believe the information their bosses give them.

Solution: Be candid and timely. If some bad news is going to happen, don't wait until the rumor mill gets hold of the information. Be straightforward and prompt about letting workers know what's happening in the organization, department, or team. If you're consistent, they'll trust you.

Challenge 2: Feeling overworked. The survey by Discovery Group found that three of every five workers think there aren't enough qualified people to handle the workload.

Solution: Gather the employees and come up with strategies for getting work done. Make sure work is distributed fairly. If you've downsized, make sure you aren't giving your workhorses more responsibilities than the others. You'll end up losing your best employees.

Challenge 3: Dissatisfaction with compensation. Six of ten employees think they are underpaid.

Solution: The only solution is to pay a competitive wage. Do a salary survey of peers in the same industry and share the results. That way, even if you're already paying a competitive wage (or better), workers know it.

Challenge 4: Not enough time for personal life. Four of 10 workers say they don't have a good balance between their personal and professional lives.

Solution: Ask employees what they want. Don't try to institute some kind of daycare perk, for example, without first asking workers whether they want or need it. Create perks that suit the various needs of your workforce.

Challenge 5: Feeling unappreciated. About 50% of workers think they don't get the recognition they deserve.

Solution: Dole out sincere praise as often as warranted. Forget the platitudes, no one really buys into them. The more specific and sincere the praise, the more employees feel they matter. (See article in this issue on Recognition.)

CLIENT ACCOLADES

Kudos to Portland Community College for their recent recognition for their environmental awareness in a study of campus sustainability by the National Wildlife Federation. PCC recycles 60% of its generated waste.

Special congratulations to our following client and partner organizations who were recently recognized by Oregon Business Magazine as among the 100 Best Organizations to Work for in Oregon:

Bank of the Northwest (www.bknw.com)

Climax Portable Machine Tools (www.cpmpt.com)

Employment Trends (www.employmenttrends.com)

Oregon Shakespeare Festival (www.orshakes.org)

Portland Teachers Credit Union (www.ptcu.com)

ProDX (www.prodx.com)

Qsent (www.qsent.com)

Regence Blue Cross Blue Shield (www.or.regence.com)

TIPS FOR SURVIVING THE DREADED Q&A

By Susan Jeffries

Every presenter has been faced with an audience question that makes him or her quaver down to their toes. Is it possible to prepare for audience questions or comments? Not really, but some advanced planning and on-the-spot techniques will help ease the Q&A jitters.

- Take time to anticipate questions that the audience may ask. If needed, practice your presentation in front of a group of co-workers to see what questions immediately come to mind – this will help you prepare your answers in advance. You may also want to make a list of questions you hope no one asks and answer those as well.
- Before beginning your presentation, tell the audience when you will answer their questions – during the program, after the program, or not at all.
- When answering questions, don't just dive in. Listen carefully to what is being said and think about your response. The audience will appreciate your consideration, and it gives you a moment to gather your thoughts.
- When responding, make certain you look directly at the individual who asked the question. If your answer is lengthy, keep eye contact with the rest of the group so they don't lose interest.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, DO NOT LIE. Be honest with the group and let them know that you don't know the answer. If possible, find the answer during the break or after the program. Bluffing your way through a response may come back to haunt you later.

What if no one is asking questions? Wait patiently for 15 seconds before asking again. You may want to comment on questions that other groups have asked or ask a question of the group. If you still do not receive any response, thank the group for their time and end the session.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAPS

By Deborah Jeffries, PHR

Managers complain that few workplace issues are as perplexing as sexual harassment. They perceive the rules about sexual harassment to be very confusing. The fact is, managers shouldn't trust only their instincts when deciding how to handle an incident of sexual harassment. A manager's misguided instincts could land your organization in court, with defenses that fade fast.

Most managers understand and avoid "quid pro quo" behavior, but they may be less certain of the rules regarding "hostile and offensive work environment" harassment. Organizations can help managers avoid the common traps in this area – and instruct them on how to apply the law – by using instructional scenarios. Here are some samples:

- **A direct report told me in strict confidence that a vendor regularly makes sexual comments to her. What should I do?** Your managers may worry that they would "violate" an employee's confidence by taking any action in this case.

Most supervisors instinctively recognize the importance of confidentiality when handling sensitive matters. But in this case, those instincts are wrong. Let your managers know that the organization's legal obligation to investigate and resolve sexual harassment complaints supersedes absolute confidentiality.

How should a manager respond? The most important steps are to acknowledge that the situation is serious, get the employee to describe what happened and notify management or HR. Inform your managers that a failure to notify management or ownership may result in corporate liability and even personal liability. To overcome any qualms about confidentiality, emphasize that you will involve only those people who are essential to the investigation and corrective action.

This scenario raises another tricky issue: the organization's responsibility to eliminate harassment by a vendor or customer. Managers need to know that the case law on sexual harassment extends corporate responsibility to the behavior of non-employees too. Harassment of this type should be treated and responded to as seriously as any other harassment in the organization.

- **Two employees in my department were dating. Now the man says he ended the relationship, but his ex-girlfriend has threatened to sabotage his work if they don't get back together. He's been told that he's a big boy and needs to handle this thing on his own. Is this acceptable?** No. A manager must treat this situation as seriously as any other harassment complaint. The fact that two employees once dated does not preclude a later claim of sexual harassment. One key aspect of harassment is that the behavior is unwelcome, and the man's complaint to his supervisor gives notice that this is the case. The ex-girlfriend's behavior may unreasonably interfere with the man's job performance and create a hostile and offensive work environment.
- **I overheard a rumor about sexual harassment involving one of my direct reports. Since it is only a rumor, shouldn't I wait to hear directly from the employee?** Absolutely not! An organizational liability for sexual harassment can begin with nothing more than hearsay. Any situation in which a supervisor knows or should have known about harassment triggers the organizational obligation to investigate the matter and take corrective action. The trick, of course, is to investigate such incidents without fanning the flames of an unfounded rumor and getting the organization sued for defamation of character. That's why your managers should not attempt to ask questions themselves, but rather inform management or HR immediately of the rumor.
- **I often give employees a "pat on the back" for a job well done. No one seems to mind, and I don't mean anything sexual by it. Is this okay?** The reality is some people may object to physical touching despite a manager's intent. Any form of unwelcome touching, gestures or remarks can constitute sexual harassment. A manager cannot assume that any behavior is welcome because an employee does not object immediately. He or she may go along with such behavior for fear of reprisal. One sign that an employee dislikes a pat on the back and similar gestures is a failure to initiate such touching or reciprocate when it occurs.

Managers should ask themselves this question when in doubt about what is appropriate: "Would I want my daughter or wife (son or husband) subjected to this behavior at work?" A good recommendation is to use memos or special awards to recognize workers.
- **I don't believe anyone can win a harassment case due to one sexual joke or crude birthday card.** An isolated occurrence is unlikely to create automatic liability. However, some courts have held that a single, sufficiently abusive incident of sexual harassment may serve as the basis for a claim. It is important to know the law does not require that a plaintiff suffer actual psychological injury to prove harassment; it's enough that he or she found the behavior hostile and abusive.
- **What does the law say about same-gender harassment? I thought it only applied to men who harass women.** Title VII applies to both men and women, and it prohibits same-gender harassment as well. Any difference in treatment that is based on a person's sex is "actionable." Managers must treat every alleged incident of sexual harassment seriously, regardless of gender.

HRN HAPPENINGS

Hats off to **Mike Brock, SPHR**, who gets to add the following initials to his name, CCP, Certified Compensation Professional. After two years and nine tests, he is relieved and we are excited to have this additional knowledge on our staff. We are proud of you, Mike!

Our staff makes us special – they're a class act. Join us in celebrating the following anniversaries for the first half of the year:

- 17 years: Judy Clark, SPHR, CPC
- 12 years: Deborah Jeffries, PHR, CPC
- 7 years: Kathryn Dodge, PHR
- 6 years: Dale Lander & Sandra Browne
- 5 years: Tina Weber, PHR
- 4 years: Terri Ano, SPHR, Ph.D. & Mike Brock, SPHR, CCP
- 3 years: Nancy DeJardin
- 2 years: Milena Dadaj & Micki Franks & Jennifer Sheets
- 1 year: Jennifer Hritz & Steve Myhre, SPHR

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.

MAY

- Asian Pacific American Heritage, Older Americans, Creative Beginnings, International Business Image Improvement, and National Mental Health Month
- May 1 May Day
- May 5 Cinco de Mayo
- May 5-11 National Small Business Week
- May 7 National Teacher Day
- May 9, 16 & 23** **HRN Workshop - Portland Beginning Supervision, I-III**
8:30 - 12 noon each day
Special series price: \$225
- May 12 Mother's Day
- May 12-18 National Women's Health Week
- May 14** **HRN Workshop - Puget Sound Teaching Your Organization about Harassment- a Train-the-Trainer Program**
8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.
Special program price: \$200
- May 27 Memorial Day

JUNE

- June 12 HRN Workshop - Willamette Valley Taking Care of Your Customers
8:30 - 12 noon
- June 13 HRN Workshop - Portland Managing Employee Performance
8:30 - 12 noon
- June 18 HRN Workshop - Puget Sound Leadership for Supervisors
8:30 - 12 noon

JULY

- July Training Hiatus - All locations

ON MY SOAPBOX

One evening in the middle of April, I met the nicest man. I needed help to do something important to me, and he went beyond helpful. He ensured that my personal mission was achieved.

I was in New York City on the last night that the beams of light pierced the darkness above Ground Zero in Manhattan. When I first learned that I would be making a trip to New York City, I began thinking about what might be possible for me to do while I was there. It isn't accurate to say that I "wanted" to visit the site of the World Trade Center towers - it would be more exact to say that I felt obligated, compelled to stand there and pay homage to the lives lost; to recognize the life-altering events of that tragic day.

A meeting and dinner were planned for that evening. The group I was with walked together from the hotel to a restaurant where we enjoyed a plentiful meal of good food spiced with laughter and invigorating conversation. As we were finishing our after-dinner coffee, I explained that I wouldn't be walking back to the hotel with them, as I wanted to make a side trip. I mentioned my plans, and was cautioned to be very careful while out on the streets. I'm unfamiliar with New York City, and having heard many stories of the dangers and difficulties that others have experienced, I felt anxious as I headed off alone to find a cab.

But, on this night, I was *not* alone in the city, or in my efforts to honor and acknowledge. My partner in those efforts was a cab driver who understood this was a momentous event for me. As I entered his cab, I uttered just a few words about my intentions. He didn't need me to elaborate, which was a good thing because the torrent of emotions flooding through me was already making it difficult for me to talk. The driver said he would get me to the best place for both viewing the lights and having an opportunity for "personal minutes."

He headed towards the tip of Manhattan. The night sky was a combination of fog, clouds, and clearing. As he drove, he talked about people he knew and what they had experienced on the 11th of September and the following days. He didn't ask questions, he just shared. Some of the stories were very sad, and some were stirring. Some were quite personal, and others were the re-telling of stories he had heard from others. He seemed to know that I just needed to connect, to integrate myself with what had happened.

As we drew closer, he stopped for a minute, looked around, then said he thought he could find a better spot. We drove for a few minutes more, then he stopped again. He did this four or five times before he found just the right place, declaring, "Here, this is the best spot. You can see the lights. You can walk here and be safe, and I can see you from the taxi. You go - take time, think and feel this place; I will wait right here for you."

There are no words to describe what I thought or felt that evening as I stood there so near the lights, so near the ground turned sacred. I don't even really know how long I was away from the cab. I walked, reflected, remembered, and prayed for all those lost and hurt. The pain was great, but it was also a cleansing time. I could look at the beams of light reaching to the heavens and see them as ladders allowing thoughts and prayers to reach those who had left us. As a cloud passed over, the lights from the ground bounced back, and it took little imagination to feel a message of comfort and reassurance being sent back to each of us still here on earth.

The ride back to my hotel was a quieter trip. The driver seemed to know that I needed time to collect my emotions. But he did pose one question, the only one he asked me that evening. "Do people where you live still care so much?" My tears flowed as I told him, "We all care very much, and we are still hurting for what you endured here."

I don't know what country he was from, or how long he has been in the United States. I usually ask about those things, but I didn't on this evening. I only know that he was the nicest, most helpful New York cab driver anyone could want to meet, and that he was everything I needed that evening. I didn't feel alone. I felt supported as I confronted the horror and reverence that are Ground Zero.

- Judy Clark, President



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