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SURVIVING AN ELECTION SEASON IN THE WORKPLACE

While a certain amount of political discussion at work is unavoidable, it's not surprising that such talk often leads to heated and emotional argument. Political viewpoints often serve as umbrellas that cover a spectrum of deeply held personal beliefs that are formed by an individual's religion, culture, upbringing, economic class and other influences.

Best practice dictates that employees avoid political discussion of any form during the regular conduct of business. Interjecting political commentary into meetings, work-related e-mail and/or other official communication is highly unprofessional and extremely inappropriate. Doing so drags down productivity, creates unnecessary distractions, and can potentially alienate fellow employees/clients/or customers.

This particular election has also brought some other HR related challenges. So far, we have heard candidates comment on each other's or their spouse's treatment of the opposite sex, discuss plans for temporarily banning people from entering the country based on their religion, disparaging people from specific foreign countries, and pronouncing that people from a particular state have a different set of values. As you can imagine, these sorts of comments made in the workplace could have disastrous outcomes.

With emotions and passions running high, even turning into anger, individuals run the risk of making comments and behaving in ways which may be considered unprofessional, hostile, or even discriminatory towards each other. In fact, a recent study by CareerBuilder found that one in five employees who discussed politics at work had fights or heated debates with their coworkers over their political views.

The line is clear in the conduct of official business, but for many it's not as clear when socializing with ones coworkers while on the job. So, what should employers be thoughtful about? The following are a few guidelines to help employees avoid any unintended harmful side-effects that may come about when expressing their political views.

The First Amendment. To answer that question, it is important to first distinguish the differing obligations of public and private employers. Private employers have greater flexibility on whether to allow political discussion in the workplace. The First Amendment – which guarantees freedom of speech and association – does not protect the curbing of political speech by private employers. For public employers, it is a little different.

As a general proposition, the First Amendment prohibits non-political public employees (such as police officers, firefighters, and teachers) from being terminated or demoted for supporting a particular political candidate. Those public employees are free to support the candidate of either political party (or neither) without fear of repercussion. An employee who proves they faced retaliation because of such support could have a valid First Amendment claim against their employer.

The NLRA

The second consideration to take into account is the federal National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). As we have discussed in the past, this statute applies to all private employers, even nonunion workplaces, and in certain circumstances protects politically charged speech. In pertinent part, Section 7 of the NLRA gives employees the right to engage in “concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid or protection.”

The “mutual aid or protection” provision covers not only interactions between an employer and employee, but also covers efforts by employees to “improve their lot as employees through channels outside the immediate employee-employer relationship.”

Therefore, the NLRA protects certain concerted actions by employees who are discussing changes to a workplace condition. As you can imagine, with political hot-button topics such as minimum wage and immigration issues, politics and workplace conditions can often run hand-in-hand. In fact, the General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) concluded that an employer may not interfere with political speech where there is a “direct nexus between employment related concerns and the specific issues that are the subject of the advocacy.” Once determined to be protected activity, the NLRB will then generally look to your policies regarding employee conduct during work hours and in working areas to determine employees' ability to engage in that activity.

The Board also pays close attention to your restrictions on employees' use of social media during and after work hours. You should take caution to ensure that your social media policies and practices are applied fairly and consistently throughout the election season.

Federal Antidiscrimination Laws. Your next consideration should be federal antidiscrimination laws. These statutes do not directly protect political activity or speech, but your workers' activity or speech could lead to circumstances that trigger these laws, especially because other employees may be offended by the topic of discussion. The most common federal statutes – Title VII, ADEA, ADA-AA, and GINA prohibit discrimination based on race, color, sex, national origin, religion, age, disability, and genetic information.

Many of these protected categories fall squarely within political discourse. As such, you must be careful to closely monitor behavior which may trigger a complaint of discrimination or harassment. Managers should take caution when discussing political candidates and issues to ensure that the discussion does not explicitly or implicitly discriminate, harass, or retaliate in any manner related to one of the protected classes mentioned above.

State Laws. The final consideration you should take into account is the law of your particular state. Some states broadly prohibit adverse action against an employee based on political expression, while others provide no such protections. You should look to the law in each state where you operate to determine the level of political expression protected.

Other. It is possible for employers to have "Conduct Rules" or Guidelines. We want to provide our employees with a workplace free from intimidation, threats, inflammatory language, personal insults, and sweeping generalizations. etc. No employee should feel compelled to agree with or remain silent in the face of aggressive political advocacy. HR has the responsibility to share with employees and more importantly supervisors that attempts to embarrass, ostracize, harass or punish employees for their political ideologies can create a hostile work environment.

Election time can be fun. Employees who are passionate about candidates are also likely to be passionate about other things, which you can use to your benefit. That being said, here are a few additional tips to consider

1. Before launching into a political discussion ask all within earshot two questions: 1) Are you comfortable having a political discussion with me? 2) Do you mind overhearing me talk about politics? If the answer to either of these questions is no, then it is not appropriate to continue. Avoid inappropriate comments and jokes about political views. These can make certain employees feel singled out.
2. Remind employees of your harassment, discrimination, and equal employment opportunity policies and retrain them if necessary. If you do not have these policies, now is the time to create them!
3. If you do not have one, consider adding an organization "Code of Conduct." It should outline your expectations that all employees will treat each other with dignity and will respect differences in opinions.
4. Consider amending your dress code policies to cover political apparel and buttons.
5. Limit employee solicitations in general to nonworking time and distributions to nonworking areas.
6. Limit employees' use of email and restrict access to certain Internet and social media sites. Your electronic policy should advise employees that they should only use the organization's information systems for business-related purposes and that all activities may be monitored.
7. Deal with any productivity issues created by political discussions rather than the specific content underlying the speech, and make sure you are consistently applying these standards.
8. Thoroughly and quickly investigate any allegation of bullying or harassment.
9. Before corrective action of an employee for political expression, check to see if the political expression is concerted protected activity; if the manner of expression is protected; and whether your policies, as previously applied, allow you to discipline the employee.
10. Always check with counsel before implementing any plan or policy curbing political speech or before taking adverse action against an employee because of political speech or expression.

Special appreciation to Adam Bridges from Fisher Phillips for some of this content.

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

SUCCESSFULLY MEETING THE DOCUMENTATION EXPECTATION

Like it or not, there is an expectation in today's workplace that management, which includes front line supervisors, will meet certain expectations for compiling then presenting work-related documentation. This expectation, whether express or implied, can be seen when dealing with any workplace related proceeding. The expectation even goes beyond any legally required documentation, such as I-9 forms or employment applications. So, what is this expectation? And how can managers and supervisors successfully meet this expectation? The expectation boils down to a manager or supervisor having documentation supporting any work-related incident, decision, or action. While such documentation can range from investigative notes to an employment termination record, the key is that management is expected to document. This expectation then extends to the documentation being either required or requested when that specific workplace situation comes under scrutiny or review. Realizing that this expectation applies to a broad range of situations can create a problem for management, as managers and supervisors struggle to adapt their documenting practices for each of those situations. Rather than take that approach, a manager or supervisor can follow some general guidelines that can be consistently applied across the broad spectrum of work-related incidents, decisions, or actions.

There are essentially two types of documentation for management to compile for their own benefit or protection. First, there is **Record Documentation**, which is compiled to record an action or decision. This tends to be more formal, such as a written warning issued to an employee. Second, there is **Memory Documentation**, used by a manager or supervisor to remember a particular situation, including a specific discussion or behavior. While this documentation tends to sometimes be more informal, the same concepts outlined below still apply. Successful use of both types of documentation can be increased if the following principles are utilized.

1. **Know the purpose of the document.** Before you start, determine what the document will be used to accomplish. A document communicating a message is very different from one that is simply recording information.
2. **Keep the document short.** This is not a high school class where the "grade" or quality of the document is based on how long it is! Record only what is relevant to the purpose of the document; don't think that the more you say, the stronger or better the document.
3. **Keep the document focused.** The broader the document, the more there is to attack or argue. Why add hassle?
4. **Stick to observations, not opinions.** Anything you see, hear, smell, or touch is an observation. Adding interpretation to that is not, e.g. "the employee's eyes were bloodshot and I smelled alcohol" is okay; however, adding "the employee was drunk" is not.
5. **Stay within your expertise.** Your expertise is job performance and behavior tied to your workplace's standards, expectations, and policies. Focus your document on that expertise.
6. **Pick your words carefully.** Use simple wording so that you can best understand, explain, and prove what you've written is true and accurate. Using broad or legal terms like "insubordination" just adds unnecessary complications.
7. **Don't make it personal.** Comments that relate to the person make your document personal and take you outside your expertise. Don't make a conclusion that reflects a personal assessment, e.g., "Sally was tardy because she is too lazy to get up on time."

While various types of documents may include additional, specific ingredients, the key factors outlined above increase the likelihood that any document will successfully meet the documentation expectation. HR Answers offers various sessions that focus on documentation expectations that cover the realm of workplace related documentation required of today's managers and supervisors. For more information, contact us at 503-885-9815.

WHAT IS A CASH BALANCE PLAN (AND SHOULD YOUR ORGANIZATION HAVE ONE)?

A Cash Balance Plan is a type of employer-sponsored retirement plan. They are generally added as an additional supplement when a company already offers a 401(k) and the owners are looking for ways to make additional contributions above the standard 401(k) limits. Cash Balance Plans have some key characteristics of in common with Defined Contribution plans: each eligible employee has their own balance, the plan sponsor makes annual contributions, and each year the account is credited with interest. However, they are actually Defined Benefit plans, and the features that make them unique and attractive are the *amount of the contribution and the form of the interest credit*.

Amount of Contribution.

Contributions to Cash Balance Plans are determined under Defined Benefit plan rules. This means that the limit is applied to the *benefit at retirement* produced by the contribution, not the amount of the contribution itself. This allows contributions to be greater for older employees. The allowable contribution for a person who is 50 years old in 2016 could be as much as \$150,000 or more (although the

plan could also be designed to produce much lesser contributions as well). Like employer contributions to a 401(k) plan, Cash Balance Plan contributions are deductible to the business in the year they are made, grow tax-deferred, and are not subject to income tax by the account owner until they are withdrawn.

The key point is that you can combine your firm's 401(k) plan contributions with a Cash Balance contribution, with the effect of creating a "supersized" total contribution.

Form of Interest Credit

The interest credit is a fixed percentage, typically something in the range of 4% to 6%. It is guaranteed by the plan sponsor, and the employee bears no investment risk. Typically the plan sponsor will invest in a portfolio that can reasonably be expected to achieve the guaranteed rate. When combined with a participant-directed 401(k) plan investment option, the cash balance account becomes the conservative portion of an employee's investment portfolio, giving employee more stability in his or her retirement nest egg.

Contributions to Employees

A Cash Balance Plan has one other important feature. The contribution credit does not have to be the same percentage of pay for each employee. A Cash Balance Plan can be designed with multiple contribution tiers, thereby directing higher contributions to business owners and/or key management employees. Unlike 401(k) plans, which are set up with multiple layers of testing and requirements to ensure they don't benefit those at the top more than the rank-and-file employees, Cash Balance plans are often designed to do exactly that. In some cases, if the employer is already satisfying certain minimum contribution requirements to the 401(k)/Profit Sharing plan, a Cash Balance Plan can be set up alongside it and may not require any contributions to the employees at all – it can simply be a way for a business owner to set aside more money each year toward his or her own retirement than is possible with a 401(k)/Profit Sharing plan alone.

For More Information

Of course this brief summary cannot possibly address all aspects of Cash Balance Plans, or all considerations necessary to help determine whether adding one might be right for your business. For additional information, email CashBalance@thecommmco.com and we will assist in scheduling a more detailed conversation with your Third Party Administrator.

Content prepared by The Commerce Company. Source: Pension Plan Specialists, PC. The Commerce Company, an independent firm and provides corporate retirement and investment planning for small to mid-sized businesses throughout the Northwest. Contact them at www.thecommmco.com or 503-203-8585.

EXPIRED FORM I-9 STILL IN EFFECT

The current version of the Form I-9, the most fundamental tool HR professionals use to determine if applicants are eligible to work in the U.S., expired on March 31. Until further notice, though, employers should keep using the expired form until the recently proposed "smart" I-9 is in effect, according to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS).

In March, 2016, USCIS published a [second round of proposed changes to the form](#) in the *Federal Register*. The proposed, revised form is designed to address "frequent points of confusion that arise for both employees and employers .

The proposed changes specifically aim to help employers reduce technical errors for which they may be fined, and include:

- Validations on certain fields to ensure information is entered correctly. The form will validate the correct number of digits for a Social Security number or an expiration date on an identity document, for example.
- Additional spaces to enter multiple preparers and translators.
- Drop-down lists and calendars.
- Embedded instructions for completing each field.
- Buttons that will allow users to access the instructions electronically, print the form and clear the form to start over.
- A dedicated area to enter additional information that employers are currently required to notate in the margins of the form.
- A quick-response matrix barcode, or QR code, that generates once the form is printed that can be used to streamline audit processes.
- The requirement that workers provide only other last names used in Section 1, rather than all other names used.
- The removal of the requirement that immigrants authorized to work provide both their Form I-94 number and foreign passport information in Section 1.

- Separating instructions from the form. Employers are still required to present the instructions to the employee completing the form, however.
- The addition of a supplement in cases where more than one preparer or translator is used to complete Section 1.

The proposed changes will have far-reaching impact because all employers are required to complete and maintain the Form I-9 for each employee hired to verify their identity and authorization to work in the United States. Ultimately, the form will be available for download at <http://www.uscis.gov> upon being approved.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

Everybody thinks of changing humanity and nobody thinks of changing himself.

-Leo Tolstoy

Experience tells you what to do; confidence allows you to do it.

-Stan Smith

A leader is a dealer of hope.

-Napoleon

“I never notice what has been done. I only see what remains to be done.”

-Madam Curie

“I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something; I will not refuse to do the something I can do.”

-Helen Keller

“I’ve never sought success in order to get fame and money; it’s the talent and the passion that count in success.”

-Ingrid Bergman

HR LINK

We hear you. We know many of you still have question around ACA. And we know this because you call and ask. Well, as we move into summer time you may have questions around part-time and seasonal workers. Here is a link that provides several resources. We especially like the Employee Status items with regard to your seasonal and part-time workers. We hope this is helpful to you!
<http://www.trinet.com/resources/affordablecareact/faqs.htm>

Q & A

Q: What’s the plan on succession planning? We are a 300 person organization who is coming late to the succession management game. Should we start at the top with our executives, or is it more important to work from the ground up?

A: Don’t try and swallow the whole elephant in one bite. Your need for quick results is understandable, but the challenge you face is a daunting one. Lessons learned that apply to your question is:

- The error of trying to do everything for everybody. Start where you will have the most impact, quickly. Do you have an aging executive team? Do you see retirement coming up soon? If so, focus on at this level.
- You need to establish a culture of accountability, trust and sharing. We suggest that you begin by developing an informed advisory group made up of people who have experience with this type of planning. They will be able to steer you around some of the pitfalls associated with this process. They should understand the value of establishing the right culture for succession planning.
- Assessment should be included in your succession plan. If you learn that you don’t have the bench strength needed internally, you will need to do an analysis of your regional talent market. However many organizations preferred to fill from within.

CLIENT ACCOLADES

Cascadia Behavioral Health Pilots New Model. Later this year, Cascadia Behavioral Health will break ground on a gleaming \$3.5 million center in Northeast Portland that will combine affordable housing and physical and mental health services. Cascadia, a nonprofit provider of mental health and addiction services to low income people, has plans on the drawing board for three other similar clinics with integrated services with the first being the existing Garlington Center building which will be razed in September to make way for the new project. This is a big deal for them and their staff! We are so proud to be associated with them!!

* * * *

DW Fritz, Wilsonville manufacturer began formally welcoming workers and clients to its significantly expanded space. DW Fritz Automation Inc, added the 33,000-square-foot space for its robotics work, among other lines. The move gives it more room to implement the “lean manufacturing” principles it’s lately adopted. Way to go folks! Onward and upward!!

* * * *

HouseSpecial’s specialty is adding personalities to animated characters. In 2014 their studio decided to focus exclusively on feature films, spinning off the so-called “commercial division” into it’s own company, from the firm Laika, Inc. HouseSpecial took over Laika’s commercial business, which includes household brands like Honey Nut Cheerios, Planters, and Haagen-Dazs. On a recent workday at HouseSpecial’s studio, one employee is putting together a model of the red M&M’s character. In the next room, creatures ranging from cute to macabre populate the tabletop. Sounds like you are making a name with the products we all know – that’s terrific!!

HR BY THE NUMBERS

Whether you are a Fortune 500 Company or a business with a handful of employees, hiring qualified, honest employees is crucial to the success of your organization. Unfortunately, if you don’t take the necessary steps when hiring a new employee, you could be held liable for not having a policies and practices in place. Take a look at these facts:

- 16% Of Applicants Have A Criminal Record.
- 37% Of Applicants Admit To Falsifying Their Application.
- 30% Of All Small Businesses Fail As A Direct Result Of Employee Theft.
- 1 Out Of 20 People Have Served Time In Prison.

Editor’s Note: Simply having a criminal record is not the concern (remember ban the box legislation) what matters is if there is a correlation of the crime to the body of work and how recent is the criminal activity.

EEOC collected more than \$525 million from 89,385 discrimination charges in 2015. Retaliation charges (39,757 in 2015) increased by 5% and make up 44.5% of all private sector charges filed with EEOC. Race claims (31,027) were in the number two spot and next is Disability at 26,968.

ECI’s (Ethics and Compliance Initiative) latest National Business Ethics Survey (NBES) study of gender in the workplace, finds that men and women in business leadership roles approach their jobs in similar ways and are about equally committed to ethics in the workplace, but females leaders and women employees at all levels face much greater ethics risks than their male counterparts. If they speak up, there is a price to pay.

Selling Passwords. For a price, 1 in 5 employees would sell the passwords they use to access their employers’ computers networks according to a survey from SailPoint Market Pulse. The survey found 44% of world-wide respondents would sell the passwords for less than \$1,000, some would sell for less than \$100 (really?). In the U.S. we had the highest percentage of sellers, at 27%

It is important to understand the role co-workers play in employee engagement. **Team Performance is the #3 Factor Impacted by Employee Turnover.** Team performance is a top factor in turnover right after Morale and Culture and just 2 points below Productivity. In fact, over half, 56%, of employers responding to a 2016 Workplace America survey say Team Performance is one of the top factors impacted by employee turnover.

Immigration is a hot topic of the 2016 election season. Here are some economic stats about immigrant workers. There are 40 million immigrants living in the United States according to the 2012 censuses. That’s 13% of the U.S. population which represents 16% of the labor workforce and 46% work in white collar jobs.

- 40% of the fortune 500 organizations were founded by an immigrant or the child of an immigrant.

- Immigrant-founded engineering and tech firms employ 560,000 workers and generated 63 billion in sales in 2012.
- According to Kauffman Foundation's 2015 survey new entrepreneurs who are immigrants are on the rise 13.3% in 1997 compared to 28.5% in 2014.

Whether it's planes, trains or automobiles some **workers have quite the commute**. Even with telecommuting, Americans spent a lot of time getting to and from work. Less than 1% ride their bike 3% walked 4% work from home 5% take public transit and 9% carpool and 76% of us drive solo all according to the US census bureau 2013. (Editor's note: Our Cathy Lamb-Mullin is one of those bike riders – lots of applause, Cathy!)

According to the national truck driving jobs there are **3.5 million truck drivers in the US**. 58% are white males 19% are Latino males 16% represent all other males and 7% are females driving between 2000 and 3000 miles a week.

Employers **spent an average of \$693 per employee on wellness based incentives in 2015** compared to \$594 in 2014 and \$430 in 2010.

According to the Society for Human Resource Management in a 2015 publication "**The real ROI for Employee Wellness Programs**" stated for every dollar invested in the wellness programs yielded \$6 in health care savings.

Healthy happy workers. In April 2016, Fortune said the signs showing you have a successful corporate wellness program are programs that are practical and accessible. The work environment is health-conscious. Wellness is integrated into the organizational structure. Wellness is linked to existing support programs. Health screenings and education are offered.

"I DID NOT KNOW YOU DID THAT" – HR AUDITS

This article is dedicated to expanding your understanding of what HR Answers does, because we often hear "I didn't know you did that!"

First, let's start with what an HR Audit is (or, as some prefer to call it, an HR Review). A healthy HR function in an organization is as important as the physical and mental wellbeing of a human body. Typically, an organization may conduct an HR audit to get a clear picture of the overall status of HR in the organization and to find out whether certain systems put in place are yielding any results. HR audits can also help organizations to identify any gaps, misses or lapses with compliance activity, and the reasons for those. Every organization plans certain systems and targets; an HR audit compares the plans to actual implementation.

Some of the potential benefits of an HR Audit include:

1. Ensure effective utilization of human resources.
2. Review compliance with laws and regulations (both state and federal).
3. Instill a sense of confidence in the human resource department that it is well-managed and prepared to meet potential challenges and opportunities.
4. Maintain or enhance the organization's reputation in a community.
5. Identify and address HR-related concerns.
6. Seek out HR-related opportunities.
7. Conduct due diligence for mergers and acquisitions.
8. Support initial public offerings.
9. Give HR recognition for a job well done!

There are four separate types of HR audits: an internal audit; a compliance audit that focuses on relevant regulatory requirements; a processes- and practices-focused audit, and a functional audit.

- **Compliance:** Focuses on how well the organization is complying with current federal, state, and local laws and regulations.
- **Best Practices:** Helps the organization maintain or improve a competitive advantage by comparing its practices with those of firms identified as having exceptional HR practices.
- **Strategic:** Focuses on strengths and weaknesses of systems and processes to determine whether they align with the HR department's and/or the organization's strategic plan.
- **Function-Specific:** Focuses on a specific area in the HR function (e.g., payroll, performance management, records retention, etc.).

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An HR audit involves an objective look at the organization's HR policies, practices, procedures, and strategies to protect the organization, establish best practices, and identify opportunities for improvement. An objective review of the organization's "current state" can help you evaluate whether specific practice areas are adequate, legal, and/or effective. The results can provide decision-makers with the information necessary to decide what areas need improvement.

The general process of conducting an audit includes seven key steps:

1. Determine the scope and type of audit.
2. Develop the audit questionnaire.
3. Collect the data.
4. Benchmark the findings.
5. Provide feedback about the results.
6. Create recommendations or action plans.
7. Foster a climate of continuous improvement.

To learn more about these steps or explore if an HR Audit/Review would be a good step for your organization, please give us a call, and let us know if we can help.

HRA HAPPENINGS

Please join us in welcoming **Mishelle Radtke**. She is our newest employee and is serving as Judy's Executive Assistant and we are pleased as punch that she has joined our team!!!

CONGRATULATIONS are in order for **Laura Morton**, our Recruiting Coordinator. She recently got married. We are so happy for her and her beau. Now we have to get used to calling her **Laura Back**.

Hats Off to **Deborah Jeffries, PHR, CPC, SHRM-CP** who recently celebrated her 25th anniversary with the firm.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Open up your Daytimers, Outlook, Palm Pilots, and all those Smart Phones. 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, or send an e-mail to Anna Loughlin at aloughlin@hranswers.com, or fax it to (503) 352-5582.**

MAY

National Bike, Physical Fitness and Sports, Mental Health Awareness, Healthy Vision, National Mobility Awareness, Clean Air, Get Caught Reading, National Barbeque, National Stroke Awareness, and National Smile Month.

May 18 Good Neighbor Day

May 19 HRA/UEA Workshop – HRA Office – Tigard
Hazard Communication and Emergency Response
9:00 am – 10:00 am
Learn more:
<http://www.unitedemployers.org/workshops/>

May 25 PHRMA's Strategic Conference
(recertification credits available)
Crown Plaza – Lloyd Center
1441 NE 2nd Ave
7:30am – 5:30pm
<http://www.portlandhrma.org/events/...>

May 25 HR Basics – Crash Course in Employment Law -
Salem
<http://salem.shrm.org/events/...>

**May 25 HR Lunch Bunch – Salem
Succession Planning
12noon-1pm**

May 25 HRA/UEA Workshop – UEA Office – Portland
First Aid/CPR
9:00am – 1:00pm
UEA Building, 906 NE 19th Ave, Portland
To register, call Rachel at (503) 595-2095,
email us at troutt@ueainc.com,
or visit our First Aid/CPR [training page](#).

May 30 Memorial Day – HRA will be Closed

Coming Up:

June 1 HR Lunch Bunch – HRA Office - Tigard
Investigations
12noon – 1pm

**June 7 HRA Workshop – Tigard
Minimum Wage – Now What?
8:30 am- 10:30 am**

**June 16 HRA Workshop – Tigard
Building Your Creativity!
8:30 am-11am**

June 29 HR Lunch Bunch – Salem
Disaster Preparedness
12noon- 1pm

June 29 HRA/UEA Workshop – UEA Office – Portland
First Aid/CPR
9:00am – 1:00pm
UEA Building, 906 NE 19th Ave, Portland
To register, call Rachel at (503) 595-2095,
email us at troutt@ueainc.com,
or visit our First Aid/CPR [training page](#).

Planning Ahead:

July 4 HRA Offices will be Closed

**July 14 HRA Workshop – Tigard
The Changing Nature of Work
8:30 am- 10:30 am**

**July 20 HRA Workshop – Tigard
Internal Investigations
8:30 am- 10:30 am**

**Sept 27-
Nov 1 HRA Workshop Series— Tigard
Supervisory Success
8:30am – 12:30pm**

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

ON MY SOAPBOX

I had an opportunity a couple of weeks ago to participate in a Forum regarding Workplace Culture (the article about that will be in the Portland Business Journal June 3rd). It was a great experience. There were three of us in a facilitated conversation. The discussion was lively and we covered a fair amount of ground. One the gifts that come from an experience like this is the opportunity to learn from others. One of the participants, Trever Cartwright from Corragio Group, shared a concept he relies on to help him generate discussion and insight in his consulting. He said one of his favorite questions was, "If the organization could talk, what would it say it needs from me?"

As I have shared that question with others, there is a moment of quiet reflection as they think about it, and then almost universally, they say, "That's a really good question. I don't think I have ever heard anybody ask that before." I agree...it is a great question because it puts an entirely different spin on assessing ourselves and the needs of our organization.

I think this question can be asked by many people. It is not just a inquiry HR professionals. If they could anticipate what the organization might say, it would assist them in making appropriate changes and setting the best priorities and policies. It could be asked by marketing professionals because the answer may suggest a different strategy of promoting products or services. It is a good question for executives because it may reveal that the most important focus is not being addressed. Each department could ask that question and perhaps learn what the rest of the organization would want them to do differently. And I think on a personal basis, it could be a great question to ask in our families. Think about what our instincts might tell us if we asked, "If this family unit could talk, what would it say that it needs from me; or from us."

I love it when a simple turn of a phrase can prompt a greater understanding of our dynamics or cause us to think about relationships or practices in a new way. It broadens our critical thinking skills and it refreshes concepts leading to better decisions. Reversing our typical thought process brings us new insights. We can ask if our breakthrough ideas have relevance for particular groups or aid us in seeing what has been unseen so far. New thoughts lead to new solutions or inspiration about how to address opportunities or problems. Isn't it great when changing a question can be so revealing?

So, my suggestion is that you use this technique to broaden your horizons and release your creativity. I am betting that you will find that a simple inquiry leads to a powerful strategy that generates a new way of thinking and acting on behalf of the organization, and maybe in your personal life as well.

- Judy Clark, President



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