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HRA'S 30TH ANNIVERSARY

As many of you know, HR Answers recently celebrated its 30th Anniversary. We would like to THANK YOU for your continued support via your projects and your referrals. It truly has been a pleasure to be of service and assistance to you. Many of you were kind enough to join us last month for the anniversary celebration with good food, the champagne bar, and the chocolates. We'd like to say a special thank you to those who attended – it was so good to see you!!! We'd also like to offer a very BIG THANK YOU to Moonstruck Chocolates for the lovely strawberry-shaped and the specialty alcohol-infused chocolates – they were a big hit with attendees. We look forward to continuing our relationship with you for years to come!

HR NEEDS TO PREVENT WAGE THEFT

Wage theft cases typically allege the underpayment or non-payment of employee wages in violation of the federal (FLSA) and state wage and hour laws. FLSA claims have increased by more than 600% over the past 25 years, and wage-theft prevention laws have recently become a hot topic in state and city governments around the United States.

The scope of the problem is huge. Consider this two case: In April 2014, a California construction company agreed to pay \$1.35 million to settle workers' claims that it shortchanged them. The alleged violations included several maneuvers designed to avoid paying employees for their work, including denial of meal breaks and rest periods and an outright failure to pay for hours worked.

Seven class-action lawsuits were filed in March 2014 by workers in New York, California, and Michigan for a large fast food chain identifying disputes over wages.

Low-wage workers and other vulnerable employees are most likely to experience wage theft. These workers know they're not necessarily getting paid as they should, but they're afraid that if they come forward, they could get in trouble or will get fired.

The typical wage theft issues that HR needs to be worried about (and perhaps audit their processes) are:

- Paying insufficient overtime (often related to misclassifying exempt and non-exempt positions)
- Violating minimum-wage rules
- Off-the-clock claims
- Misclassifying workers as exempt instead of non-exempt
- Retaliation
- Misclassifying workers as independent contractors rather than as employees.

More than a dozen states have enacted wage-theft prevention laws or are in the process of doing so. New York and California have extensive requirements, and some municipalities, including San Francisco and Seattle, also have wage-theft rules on their books. (As of this writing, one is pending in Oregon.)

These statutes have recently become a hot topic in state legislatures and city governments around the country as many jurisdictions have moved to tighten up existing laws, give workers and government agencies new tools, and strengthen public and private enforcement. While these statutes do not change basic Fair Labor Standards Act requirements, they generally contain two added provisions:

- Notice or written-disclosure provisions requiring employers to provide employees with details about the frequency, calculation and method of their wage payments at designated times.
- Enhanced civil and even criminal penalties for employers that are found guilty of violations.

In some cases, employers can face penalties from more than one relevant law—an FLSA violation for back wages as well as civil penalties from a state wage-theft prevention law.

HR professionals play a vital role in reducing the risk of noncompliance around wage and hour laws. To avoid those consequences, wage and hour experts advise HR professionals to:

Raise awareness. HR needs to train management (i.e. changing a job classification from exempt to non-exempt) and non-management employees annually regarding the organization's wage and hour policies. HR also should facilitate open communication with workers and provide an opportunity for them to express concerns regarding wage and hour compliance.

Review job descriptions and duties. This may mean going the extra step to interviewing the manager and the employee to find out what work is routinely performed.

When interviewing employees, talk to them about what they actually do in the course of a day's work. Ask them what they did first when they got to work yesterday, what they do on Thursday morning, or what they spend most of their time doing. Why ask these questions? These are the kinds of questions people from the Department of Labor would ask during a wage and hour investigation.

Monitor requests for interns and volunteers. These are not appropriate measures for keeping payroll costs down. If a particular division or department continually requests volunteers or interns, take a closer look to ensure that they are not being misclassified and that there is no abuse of these employment scenarios.

An internal mandate to "keep payroll costs down"—by turning to volunteers or interns, for example—can create a heightened risk for wage theft. "The message can't be, 'Just keep payroll costs down,'" advisors say. "It has to be, 'Keep payroll costs down and comply with the law.'"

Conduct an audit. This audit of an organization's wage and hour practices can be conducted by internal staff or by external legal counsel or a consulting firm. A key consideration is that if an organization conducts an audit and finds a concern, they need to make changes. If an organization chooses to stay with the status quo, the penalties could be extensive due to the fact that they knew but did not make corrections or make employees whole with their pay.

HR IN THE NEWS

We are starting a new column for Advantage highlighting news articles or information that we find in the news, blogs, magazines, etc. It is amazing how much of the news contains material or implications for HR professionals and their organizations. Here are our first offerings:

Suicides Increasing. Dealing with the death of an employee or a close relative of an employee is one of the most difficult tasks that HR professionals have to deal with. According to the *Science Daily* of February 2015, "Suicide rates for adults between 40 and 64 years of age in the U.S. have risen about 40% since 1999, with a sharp rise since 2007. One possible explanation could be the detrimental effects of the economic downturn of 2007-2009, leading to disproportionate effects on house values, household finances, and retirement savings for that age group. In a study published in the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, researchers found that external economic factors were present in 37.5% of all completed suicides in 2010, rising from 32.9% in 2005." This disturbing trend is one that organizations need to pay attention to because many of the vulnerable individuals may be employed with them. The article ends with this cautionary note, "Human Resource departments, employee assistance programs, state and local employment agencies, credit counselors, and others who interact with those in financial distress should improve their ability to recognize people at risk and make referrals." It is incumbent upon us to be aware and intercede as quickly as possible when it becomes evident that a staff member is in trouble.

Drug Testing – Need to Review? A recent article in *The Atlantic* (March 4, 2015) asks some provocative questions about the continued use of drug testing and its role in hiring. It cites a "police force in Idaho (that) said its recruitment efforts are set back by its own drug policy, which mandates that anyone who has used marijuana in the past three years can't be hired." It offers a review of the comments made by FBI Chief James Comey that the Bureau may have to loosen its rules to recruit staff regarding previous drug use, although Mr. Comey then walked those comments back when questioned about them. The article states, "With nearly half of Americans reporting that they have tried marijuana and more than a third of college students having used it in the last 12 months, any organization—in the public or private sector—with strict anti-marijuana policies could be missing out on a significant portion of the talent pool." This is compounded by the recent surge in marijuana legalization. Each organization will have to carefully assess where it wishes to be on this subject and consider the consequences of either maintaining drug testing or foregoing it.

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.

A New Term – Embodied Cognition. *The Wall Street Journal* ran an article in early March regarding a term that we bet most of us are not familiar with – Embodied Cognition. It detailed how “Certain kinds of hand movements have an impact on cognitive functioning improving focus or sparking fresh thinking and or faster learning.” Usually we would refer to this as fidgeting or fiddling with something. Some people doodle while others can’t keep their hand off the items on their desks. If you are unsure about what this article was discussing, you may want to watch the new TV show *Alligence* because of one the characters is a perfect example of what this article is addressing. For organizations where strict attention is the norm when someone is speaking or presenting and where fussing with something is considered rude or impolite, this new information may cause some distress, but if we are after concrete results or great problem solving, maybe one way to achieve that is through allowing employees to fidget if it helps them think more clearly.

TREND: ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

TalentKeepers recently presented the results of their 11th annual national engagement and retention trends. Over 800 organizations from across the U.S. and every major industry participated in their study. Here is a preview of some of their key findings:

- 86% of all organizations report that employee retention is a strategic priority.
- “Employee morale and workplace culture” for the first time tops the list of things that are negatively impacted by low employee engagement. “Productivity” fell to second.
- “Employee surveys” is the number one strategy organizations plan to use in 2015 to improve employee engagement.
- For the first time, “Social Networks” is ranked among the top five HR technologies organizations plan to use to build employee engagement.
- As Generation Y’s impact on the American workplace grows, 31% of organizations are now providing formal training for leaders on how to manage them, the highest percent they have seen.

HR BY THE NUMBERS

Younger workers worry less about health. Millennials seem to take their health for granted, according to an AON Hewitt study that compared their lifestyle habits to those of Generation X and baby boomers. The research showed that over the previous 12 months, just 54% of millennials had received a physical, although 60% of Generation X and 73% of baby boomers reported getting an exam. In addition, only 39% agree that preventive care is important to remaining healthy, while 49% of Gen Xers and 69% of baby boomers say the same thing.

The good news: Millennials are more open to employer-supported health measures: 53% to Generation X’s 47% and the baby boomers’ 41%. They’re also more likely to participate in Employee Assistance Programs—16% compared to 10% of Generation X and 8% of baby boomers.

Sobering facts about depression in the U.S. Many people suffering from depression aren’t doing anything about it. The National Center for Health Statistics has reported that almost 8% of Americans say they’ve recently been depressed, and 3% of those indicate they’ve endured severe symptoms, including difficulty working, going to school, or participating in normal social activities.

The NCHS also reports that 65% of people with serious symptoms aren’t receiving treatment from a mental health professional. Women of all ages are more likely than men to be depressed, with those between 40 and 59 years of age showing the highest rates. Poverty also appears to be a contributing factor. People living below the federal poverty line are more than twice as likely to suffer from depression, regardless of race.

Moms at home on the upswing. The percentage of mothers who don’t work outside the home has risen in recent years. The Pew Research Center reports that the number of stay-at-home moms reached 29% in 2012, up from a low of 23% in 1999. “Traditional” mothers (married and staying at home while their husbands work) make up the majority: approximately two-thirds of the 10.4 million total.

One possible reason for the increase (though not the only one): difficulty finding work. In 2000, just 1% stated they remained in the home because they couldn’t find a job; in 2012, that number had grown to 6%.

According to the Ethics Resource Center, each year almost half of U.S. employees report witnessing unethical or illegal behaviors in their workplaces. The costs of these lapses in ethics can be costly both in terms of financial metrics (fines for fraud, bankruptcies, etc.) and employee morale. Also, according to the [Great Place to Work Institute](#) report in 2012, the stock price growth of the 100 firms with the most ethical cultures outperformed stock market and peer measures by almost 300%. Thus, researchers have shown that a firm’s culture is the strongest predictor of how much market value that firm will create for shareholders’ investments.

Life expectancy in the U.S. might be increasing, but longevity presents growing challenges to some of us. As reported by the Health Behavior News Service (part of the Center for Advancing Health), almost half of Americans age 65 or older need daily assistance with such routine household activities as bathing, cooking meals, or taking medication. About 29% of older Americans rely on help from family members or professional caregivers.

People who lunch: Chew over these facts about spending habits. Unless you brown-bag your lunch every day of the year, you're probably one of the many employed Americans who go out to lunch about twice a week on average. A study of 1,005 U.S. adults by Visa found that consumers spend about \$10 for lunch each time or an average of \$936 per year.

Men go out more than women, and tend to spend more money—\$21 per week, as opposed to the \$15 that women spend. Surprisingly, people with more money don't spend more on lunch, the study found: Participants with incomes of \$50,000 or more spend an average of \$9.60 per meal, while those with incomes below \$25,000 eat lunch for an average of \$11.70.

REMINDERS

Update on definition of spouse. Workers in legal, same-sex marriages, regardless of where they live, will now have the same rights as those in opposite-sex marriages to federal job-protected leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) to care for a spouse with a serious health condition. As you may have heard, effective March 27, 2015 the U.S. Labor Department announced a rule change to the FMLA in keeping with the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *United States v. Windsor*.

The rule change updates the FMLA regulatory definition of "spouse" so that an eligible employee in a legal same-sex marriage will be able to take FMLA leave for his or her spouse regardless of the state in which the employee resides. Under the new rule, eligibility for federal FMLA protections is based on the law of the place where the marriage was entered into. This "place of celebration" provision allows all legally married couples, whether opposite-sex or same-sex, to have consistent federal family leave rights regardless of whether the state in which they currently reside recognizes such marriages.

Replace MSDS with SDS. This is the calm before the storm. Starting no later than June 1, 2015, every new chemical shipment in the United States will be required to be preceded or accompanied by a safety data sheet in the GHS format. Employers with hundreds or thousands of hazardous chemical products in their facilities should be expecting an influx of new and updated SDSs, which could create logistical problems. Each new or updated document will need to be cataloged and shared with the appropriate workers.

A small percentage of chemical manufacturers have already updated their SDSs; however, a significant number of chemical blenders are expected to miss the deadline. These manufacturers are waiting on upstream vendors to make updates before they will be able to follow suit. The delay means employers who use hazardous chemicals are going to have to remain vigilant for an extended period of time beyond the deadline to ensure all updated SDSs are received.

Now is the time for employers to prepare for the influx of new safety data sheets and put processes into place for ensuring new chemical hazard information is passed along to workers via training and SDS access.

MOTIVATION AND RECOGNITION MADE EASY

Any CEO knows that employee motivation is a key to individual performance, group productivity, and maintaining a pleasant office culture. So how do we go about setting the stage? Here are a few thoughts worth consideration.

Set a good example. Remember that your attitude is contagious. Your behaviors and communication activities are key to making members of your organization feel including in major decisions and organization direction. Listening to everyone's opinions matters and they often bring up things that others had not considered. Employees are more motivated when they feel needed, appreciated, and valued and that means you need to show and tell them that.

Focus on employee happiness. Recently there have been more articles written and CEO's speaking out about employee happiness. This is not just about pay but about contributing on behalf of the organization and to the community and feeling real joy about the work that is done. The organization can create conditions for employees to find the joy in work itself. That can mean giving workers the autonomy to choose what they do and with whom, which can help foster a desire for mastery of tasks and skill sets. This can also mean giving an opportunity for employees to do volunteer work on behalf of the organization. This enables employees to learn new skills, gain leadership development, and even keep employees motivated and sharp in between project lulls. And let's not forget about laughter. We all can use more of that in our workplaces.

Ensure that employees share in the organization's success. Employee performance, productivity, and motivation can all be tied to how invested a worker feels in the firm. One way an organization can do this is through a profit sharing plan. The objective of a profit sharing plan is to foster employee identification with the organization's success. By implementing such a program, a CEO is really saying "We're all in this together!" It is also important to remember to celebrate the successes, even the small ones. Take time out to recognize the efforts and the accomplishments along the way. Employees can feel lost or demoralized when an organization simply moves from project to project or initiative to initiative without recognizing they reached the goal.

Encourage employees to share concerns and then problem solve. Organizations are not looking for whiners, but rather people who see areas of need and then put on the thinking caps and apply their critical thinking skills to be proactive on issues and to brain storm new ideas. Employees often have wonderful ideas and can create the next new thing or even save the organization some money, but we first have to really listen to them.

A key to continued motivation is successful recognition - which is a clear understanding of what behaviors you are recognizing. Supervisors and Managers seem to get stuck in not knowing when to praise and recognize their staff members. Just like the information above, it does not have to be hard but it definitely needs to be communicated openly and as often as appropriate.

Recognition is a great conversation (even training program to offer) to have with your leadership team. When, why, and how do we want to recognize our employees? A good idea is to always tie back to your core values. To help you (your managers and supervisors also) get started, we've put together a brief list of different times it is good to recognize your staff and reinforce motivation:

1. Offering a creative idea.
2. Going the extra-mile
3. A winning attitude and set of behaviors
4. Creative thinking and problem-solving
5. Commitment to the customer/client
6. Commitment to the organization
7. Demonstrating strong leadership
8. Accepting a challenge or new responsibility
9. Motivating and encouraging peers
10. Being proactive
11. A genuine smile that's always present
12. Ethical behavior
13. Committed to a team effort.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION/FEDERAL CONTRACTOR NEWS

Protected Veteran Data

A new regulatory rule from the U.S. Department of Labor's Veterans' Employment and Training Service eliminates the use of the current "VETS-100" Report, and changes the name of the current "VETS-100A" Report to the "VETS-4212" Report. The new report for fall 2015 will require the total number of employees and new hires who are protected veterans.

This change will not require reporting of specific categories of "protected veteran." Federal contractor employers must continue to invite protected veterans to self-identify both at the pre-offer and post-offer stage. The self-identification forms may be the same for both processes, and need no longer ask the individual to identify a specific category of protected veteran, only if they do belong to one of the defined categories. The categories should be listed and defined on the voluntary self-identification form, and are as follows:

"Disabled Veteran" includes (i) a veteran of the U.S. military, ground, naval or air service who is entitled to compensation (or who but for the receipt of military retired pay would be entitled to compensation) under the laws administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs for disability (A) rated at 30 percent or more, or (B) rated at 10 or 20 percent in the case of a veteran who has been determined under Section 30 U.S.C. 3106 to have a serious employment handicap or (ii) a person who was discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability.

"Active Duty Wartime or Campaign Badge Veteran" includes veterans who served on active duty in the U.S. military, ground, naval or air service during a war or in a campaign or expedition for which a campaign badge has been authorized under the laws administered by the Department of Defense.

“**Recently Separated Veteran**” includes any veteran who served on active duty in the U.S. military, ground, naval or air service during the three-year period beginning on the date of such veteran’s discharge or release from active duty.

“**Armed Forces Service Medal Veteran**” includes any veteran who, while serving on active duty in the U.S. military, ground, naval or air service, participated in a United States military operation for which an Armed Forces service medal was awarded pursuant to Executive Order 12985.

The self-identification forms for protected veterans should indicate the employer is a federal contractor, and summarize the relevant portions of VEVRAA and the employer’s affirmative action program. The form should also mention the information is being requested on a voluntary basis, will be kept confidential, and will not subject anyone to adverse treatment.

Q & A

Q: Is it less risky to terminate an employee within the first 90 days of employment?

A: No. A 60-day or 90-day orientation period (sometimes known as an introductory period, training period, or probationary period) doesn’t reduce the legal risks associated with termination. Even though most new hires are employed “at will,” federal, state, and local employment laws still apply. If the employer is unable to articulate the reason for termination and cannot provide documentation to support its decision, it might have a difficult time fighting a claim of discrimination or retaliation.

Therefore, documenting performance or conduct issues for new hires is just as important as documenting discipline for a long-term employee. Employers should address concerns about performance, attendance, or behavior as early as possible in the employment relationship. Overlooking problems may cause employees to believe their performance is acceptable, thus making later disciplinary action seem unfair, discriminatory, or retaliatory. In some situations, termination within the first 60 or 90 days is necessary, but employers should not rush to a decision.

ALWAYS consider the legal risks carefully. Before deciding to terminate someone, it’s important to consider whether new hires have been given the appropriate training and resources to be successful, as well as the opportunity to correct their mistakes. One recommendation is to ensure that managers and supervisors are working with and informing employee of the performance and behavior expectations within the couple weeks of employment. Set the stage early. Employers shouldn’t continue to employ an individual who is unable or unwilling to improve their behavior after coaching, counseling or training is provided. However, if the person has not been made aware of performance or conduct concerns, the organization should consider whether coaching, additional training, a performance improvement plan or a final warning is a more appropriate next step. An employee cannot fix what they do not know about.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

Hard work is a prison sentence only if it does not have meaning.

—*Malcolm Gladwell*

When given an opportunity, deliver excellence and never quit.

—*Robert Rodriguez*

The first myth of management is that it exists. The second myth of management is that success equals skill.

—*Robert Heller*

Divorced from ethics, leadership is reduced to management and politics to mere technique.

—*James MacGregor Burns*

CLIENT ACCOLADES

HRA client **MallforAfrica (Mall Boxes)** was recently highlighted in an article in the *New York Times*, due to the much-needed services they provide in shipping products for African-based companies that otherwise have faced a problematic situation. **What a fantastic concept!**

Totem Ocean Trailer Express (TOTE), an HR Answers client, announced the upcoming launch of the world's first natural gas-powered containerships in an industry that dates back thousands of years! The vessel sulfur emissions will be reduced by 97%! The ships are currently being built and are anticipated to be operated between Jacksonville, FL and San Juan, Puerto Rico in late 2015 and early 2016.

HRA client, **Vigor Industrial**, recently announced their acquisition of Seattle-based Kvichak Marine Industries, creating the single largest NW shipyards. Vigor's growth has been and looks to continue to be growing astronomically. **Kudos, Vigor!**

HRA would like to congratulate **Richard Birkel, PhD**, who works for our client **Catholic Charities**. He was honored as an outstanding individual in business at the 2015 Global Business Awards Luncheon.

Local magazine *Oregon Business* recently released its list of the top 100 best companies to work for in Oregon. The following are clients and friends of HRA who made the list:

Large Companies

- Perkins Coie (6)
- Fortis Construction (9)
- Andersen Construction (10)
- R&H Construction (11)
- AKT CPA's and Business Consultants (13)
- Anthro Corporation (15)
- Perkins & Co. (16)
- Lane Powell (17)
- M Financial Group (29)
- Pacific Continental Bank (31)

Medium Companies

- Convergence Networks (7)
- CBT Nuggets (8)
- Scott Edwards Architecture (22)
- Sokol Blosser Winery (24)
- KPD Insurance (25)
- Emerick Construction (27)

Small Companies

- Matrix Networks (24)
- Healthco Information Systems (28)
- Davidson Benefits Planning (32)

HR Answers is very proud to have done work for a large number of non-profits over the years, and many of those clients have been ranked by the Portland Business Journal for their fiscal-year budget. The following HRA Clients made the list for 2014:

- **Oregon Food Bank (5)**
- **Central City Concern (6)**
- **Cascadia Behavioral Healthcare (8)**
- **Albertina Kerr Centers (9)**
- **Oregon Child Development Coalition (12)**
- **NW Energy Efficiency Alliance (13)**
- **DePaul Industries (14)**
- **Worksystems, Inc. (17)**
- **Morrison Child and Family Services (19)**
- **Planned Parenthood Columbia Willamette (20)**
- **Community Action (22)**
- **Luke-Dorf, Inc. (24)**
- **CODA, Inc. (27)**
- **Human Solutions (29)**
- **Catholic Charities of Oregon (30)**
- **DoveLewis Emergency Animal Hospital (40)**
- **Boys & Girls Aid (49)**

Congratulations to JLL and CBRE, Inc., two friends of HR Answers, for making the Portland Business Journal's list of top ranked metro-area commercial real estate firms. JLL is HRA's real estate broker and CBRE is our current (soon to be former) landlord. **Well done, folks!**

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 Bryse Bishoff at bbishoff@hranswers.com, or fax it to (503) 885-8614.**

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 13 **HRA/UEA Workshop – Tualatin
Bermuda Triangle
8:30am-11:30am**

May 20 PHRMA's Strategic Conference (recertification credits available)
Oregon Convention Center
8:30am – 5:00pm
http://www.portlandhrma.org/events/event_details.asp?id=594001&group

May 25 Memorial Day – HRA will be Closed

May 30 Neighbor Day

May 27 HR Lunch Bunch - Salem
2nd Chance – Hiring Ex-Offenders
12:00pm-1:00pm

JUNE

**HR Answers will be moving. Please make a note of the new address because it is really similar to our current address.
NEW ADDRESS IS: 7650 SW Beveland Street, Suite 130, Tigard, OR 97223**

Because of the office move, there will be no HRA workshops this month. Be on the lookout for an Open House announcement later in the summer.

June 3 **NO** HR Lunch Bunch This Month

June 5 SHRMA's HR Basics (recertification credits available)
Chemeketa Center for Business & Industry
626 High St NE, Salem Oregon
8:00am – 4:00pm
Registration Info: <http://salem.shrm.org/forms/register-upcoming-2014-basics-0>

ON MY SOAPBOX

Are there people you admire so much that your comments are, “He’s simply disgusting” said with a smile that infers he is anything but? Well, that is my brother. I have not mentioned him except in passing in any previous Soapbox entries, but he is currently doing something that is so different, I felt I had to mention it. But first, a little background....

He is three plus years younger than me. As with many families, the children of my Mom and Dad are quite different, you’ll see what I mean as you read this. Craig and I have some similarities, perhaps even some that we haven’t identified. We both love to debate, we both talk a lot, and we both love Oregon and all it has to offer. We both chose to build our homes on the same street as the one we grew up on because we loved the area and the sense of continuity that gave us. We both have adventured into the world of owning our own businesses. For all of these similarities, the differences between us are much more apparent.

Craig is a natural musician. When we were young, I took violin and piano lessons. I showed little aptitude for either of them, but I persevered. Craig learned to play the bagpipes (we’re Scots) and the piano. He cried through each day’s practice session on the piano. He said he hated it, and he certainly acted as though he did. Now as an adult, he not only plays the piano and the organ solely by ear, but he has composed substantial pieces of music including a Catholic Mass. I don’t understand how someone goes from hating the piano, to discovering that he can play it without any music in front of him after only hearing a few bars.

And then there is the writing. I remember being almost astonished when he announced he was going to Germany to do research for a history novel he was writing. I have written speeches and articles, and even a few HR Manuals, but a book?? Then it turned out that it was a trilogy. Not one book, but three!! He has also written a set of three mystery novels! I admit that I may be the only one who has insight to the subtle inside jokes and references that appear in his text, but then, I know for a fact that when he wrote those words, he did so with a smile about the meaning they would have for me. I am in awe of the time management, the creative process, and the amount of detail that it takes to turn out such products as these.

As if that weren’t enough, there is his amazing skill with wood. He carves, sculpts, and creates wondrous pieces of art. At Christmas, everyone wants him to draw their name so that they might receive a gift he has made. I remember the jewelry box he made one year...it was a seven different types of hardwood in the shape of a Mayan Temple with many little drawers and secret hiding places. It was simply phenomenal! And it wasn’t a present for me 😊.

So I shouldn’t have been surprised when I got an email from him detailing his efforts to combine two of his passions. He wants to publish the mystery series and needs some funds for that endeavor. He decided to use Kickstarter to generate funds for the endeavor and, as usual, he chose a different approach. He determined to provide each contributor with one of his wood creations in return for their contribution. Who thinks of things like that?

After hearing this news, I wandered off to Kickstarter and there he was (Craig Allen). Not a lot of money yet, which must mean that they are not familiar with the quality of his woodwork, but since I am, I will make a contribution because that way I get to pick one of the art objects. (If I can’t get one at Christmas, I know I can get one this way.)

Siblings are often different with different passions and abilities even though they are the product of the same parents and are raised in the same home and environment, but I sure wish that I had acquired some of the creative skills that are the possessions of my brother, because he is a most unique and talented individual.

And if you are like me, and have one of those “disgusting” people in your life, count yourself very fortunate, because they are the kind of folks who we can admire right up close!!

- Judy Clark, President



“Whatever the Question”

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

WWW.HRANSWERS.COM