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FACTS BEHIND ST. PATRICK AND HIS DAY

For many people, St. Patrick represents an excuse to wear green on March 17, maybe go to a parade, and drink some Irish whiskey. But who was St. Patrick in real life?

The most common belief is that he drove the snakes out of Ireland. Ireland probably never had snakes, though, and the myth may refer to Patrick's efforts to stamp out the serpent imagery used by the Druids. He also may have used the three-leafed shamrock to illustrate the concept of the Holy Trinity to the people he was trying to convert to Christianity as a missionary in Ireland during the fifth century.

Historians agree that Patrick was born in Roman-occupied Britain, the son of a Christian deacon. At age 16 he was captured and taken to Ireland, where he was a slave for six years.

During this time, his Christian faith strengthened. One day, according to a letter he wrote about his early life, he heard a voice promising he would soon return home. Shortly afterward he escaped his captors and went back to his family.

He later wrote that an angel appeared to him in a dream, telling him to return to Ireland as a missionary. Patrick went back to the land where he had been a slave to convert the Irish and to minister to those Christians living there.

Why do we celebrate him on March 17? That's believed to be the date of his death. Although never formally canonized, Patrick came to be considered a saint. March 17 was celebrated as a religious holiday until 1903, when it became a public holiday in Ireland by an act of the British Parliament.

IMMIGRATION ALERT

It is no secret that immigration is a hot topic. It incites crowds and heated rhetoric. With the changes that are being made in prioritizing deportations, employers need to be prepared for the impact that may affect their workforce. An announcement Tuesday February 20th was sent out as a Guidance by the Department of Homeland Security. The Guidance that provides this information also calls for hiring an additional 10,000 Immigration and Customs Enforcement Officers. Additionally, ICE is also required to report on a weekly basis their activities to carry out the Guidance requirements. It states that individuals who have used false identification cards/papers to secure employment are part of the group that can now be deported for criminal activity. The announcement also stated that more "aggressive immigration enforcement" is being adopted. This is different than the previous priorities, and likely different than what was thought to be the definition of a crime.

There are at least two significant concerns that employers need to consider and determine if action or a contingency plan would be beneficial. The first is worker unrest. Some portion of the workforce is likely to be edgy, apprehensive, and distressed. Any employer with a substantial immigrant population needs to think about how to address these employee feelings. The disturbance may be caused by their own undocumented status, or by the fact that they have family members who are without the legal right to be in the US. This could cause them considerable unrest, never knowing if when they get off shift and get home, whether their family member will be there.

The second concern has the potential to be even more disturbing. What if a sizable portion of the workforce is undocumented resulting in the possibility that they could be picked up by ICE and designated for deportation? Employers could find themselves hampered in production, dealing with a loss of intellectual capability in key positions, or immediately in need of many new employees in an environment where labor is not easily acquired.

Employers need to talk with their managers and consider how this change may affect them. Consider doing contingency planning for a situation that may suddenly reduce the workforce. Answering such questions as:

1. Do we think we might have a problem?
2. What resources (temp agencies, etc.) do we have or might we need if a substantial number of our employees are no longer able to work here?
3. Should we be communicating with our workforce about this enforcement change in order to alert them?
4. If we lose employees, how do we want to communicate with the remaining staff?

One note of caution, it is not permissible to re-verify the ability to work in the US unless the documents used for the initial verification have expired.

It may be that other questions about actions to be taken will surface as you think about the implications of this revised government process.

EEOC ISSUED GUIDANCE

In some recent material issued by EEOC, the emphasis was on the training requirements of employers. The notice also reminded employers that it is not just sexual harassment that is prohibited. It is any harassment based on protected classes of employees (based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age, disability and genetic information. The proposed guidance also stated that harassment based on sexual orientation is prohibited).

The suggested training that employers are expected to provide should now be supported by the following:

- Championed by senior leaders.
- Repeated and reinforced regularly.
- Provided to employees at every level and location of the organization.
- Provided in all languages commonly used by employees.
- Tailored to the specific workplace and workforce.
- Conducted by qualified, live, interactive trainers or, if live training is not feasible, designed to include active engagement by participants.
- Routinely evaluated by participants and revised as necessary.

Failure to be able to show that these conditions support the harassment training may place employers at risk. There appears to be some safety for employers if they adhere to the above guidelines. EEOC says that such training shows “significant promise for preventing harassment in the workplace.” Such training should also assist employers in creating a civil workplace where incivility to one another can be more easily identified and addressed.

This is important because the EEOC Taskforce that worked on this guidance found, “... incivility is often an antecedent to workplace harassment, as it creates a climate of ‘general derision and disrespect’ in which harassing behaviors are tolerated.” Uncivil behaviors can often spiral into harassing behaviors. “To paraphrase the testimony of one witness who testified at a hearing of the EEOC Select Task Force, incivility is the gateway drug to harassment.

While this guidance is helpful in defining what harassment training should include and how it should be presented to employees, there is one major obstacle to being able to rely on this training as meeting employer obligations. The NLRB (National Labor Relations Board) has issued several opposing points of view. In their recent rulings, they have found that trying to install civility when the workplace frequently infringes on an employee right under Section 7 of the NLRA (National Labor relations Act). The NLRB does not put as much emphasis on employees acting in a civil manner if it is any way touches upon wages, benefits or working conditions.

This leaves employers in a difficult spot – anyone familiar with the rock and a hard place analogy? The line employers must walk to meet these two requirements is very thin and hard to define. Care must be taken to assess whether the words of an employee were intended to communicate to other employees or to express a personal opinion with no interest in connecting with others to affect change. And to complicate matters even more, it isn’t just the words that employees use in the workplace that must be assessed. It is also the words they use in all the versions of social media.

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.

According to Jonathan Segal, an employment law attorney who is often at the forefront of employment issues such as this, noted in the task force report that it was suggested the first step to resolve the differences between the EEOC's and NLRB's stances on civility in the workplace is to have a dialogue about it. Then the two agencies could work together to meld their disparate views so that there would be less employer confusion and greater similarity in the government's approach.

Anyone wishing to read the full report and recommendations will find that document here https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/task_force/harassment/report.cfm

CULTURAL FIT

One of the reoccurring themes in the employment arena is hiring for cultural fit. The words are used often, but we rarely hear anyone defining what that term means. It has been suggested by some that it is simply code for unlawful discrimination. If the term means hire like us, referencing our skin color, our age, our religious beliefs, etc. then that interpretation may be correct. If however, it refers to the values that drive the organization, then it assists those in the hiring process to do a much better job of interviewing and selecting candidates who are more likely to be successful.

The question then asked is what inquiries will reveal that information. The answer is asking questions that explore what the candidates believe, what attributes they will bring to their position. You might want to ask some of the following:

- Our Organization values employee drive. Tell me what that word means to you relative to employment and give me two examples of when you felt driven to perform at work.
- We expect employees to be accountable for their work. Please provide me an example of your personal accountability.
- We do not criticize employees for making mistakes, but we do ask that they learn from them. So one of the important things employees must be able to do is describe why the mistake occurred; what was the thought process used that led to the mistake. Tell me about how you make decisions; and if I asked you about your thought process would you be able to tell me about that?
- Our employees genuinely like one another. What makes a co-worker likable to you?
- How have the organizational values influenced your decision at previous employers?
- Our environment is collaborative and team-oriented. In your opinion, what personal skills or characteristics are needed to work well in that environment?
- Some positions seem to require more creativity than others. Do you believe creativity is something that any employee should have and give me an example of the creativity you brought to your previous jobs.
- How have you organized your work in the past to ensure that you follow up when necessary and you don't leave something incomplete or unfinished?
- Tell me what the phrase "above and beyond" means to you regarding employment.
- What mistake did you make in the past and what did you learn from it?

Not all these questions may be appropriate for every hiring situation, but hopefully they give you an idea about questions that can be asked to give you a sense of cultural fit. If your organization embraces robust debates about priorities, procedures, or strategies then inquiring about the applicants' comfort with dissenting opinions or the ability to advocate for their ideas would be a critical characteristic. If your organization functions with multiple projects going on simultaneously, then the ability to pace their work and to be resourceful will likely matter.

So think about the organization's values, and if they aren't stated, consider what gets someone noticed or leads to their success. Frame questions to get an understanding of how the applicants have behaved that show value or attribute. All too often, an organization focuses too much on what an applicant can do or has done without considering how they have behaved in their past jobs. Employers usually hire for what, and regretfully they fire for how they did or didn't do when interacting with others. A little more attention and consideration of past values – based behavior can lead to an excellent hire that embodies the appropriate characteristics to be the right kind of cultural fit.

AUDIT NOTIFICATION LETTERS

HRA understands that notification letters regarding OFCCP Audits have been sent out. We don't know how many or what criteria was used for selection. The letters were sent out generically to the Human Resources Director. If any of you have received one of those and has questions about how best to prepare, please let us know if you want some assistance.

IRISH THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

- St. Patrick's Day is an enchanted time—a day to begin transforming winter's dreams into summer's magic. — *Adrienne Cook*
- A best friend is like a four-leaf clover: hard to find and lucky to have. — *Unknown*
- Here's to a long life and a merry one.
A quick death and an easy one
A pretty girl and an honest one
A cold beer – and another one!
— *St. Patrick's Day Toast*
- It is better to spend money like there's no tomorrow than to spend tonight like there's no money!
— *Irish toast*
- An Irishman has an abiding sense of tragedy which sustains him through temporary periods of joy.
— *Irish saying*
- The Irish forgive their great men when they are safely buried.
— *Irish saying*
- May your blessings outnumber
The shamrocks that grow,
And may trouble avoid you
Wherever you go.
— *Irish blessing*
- Never iron a four-leaf clover, because you don't want to press your luck.
— *Unknown*
- May misfortune follow you the rest of your life, but never catch up.
— *Irish saying*
- May your home always be too small to hold your friends.
— *Irish toast*
- May your glass be ever full.
May the roof over your head be always strong.
And may you be in heaven half an hour before the devil knows you're dead.
— *Irish prayer*
- May you never forget what is worth remembering or remember what is best forgotten.
— *Irish blessing*
- May the saddest day of your future be no worse than the happiest day of your past.
— *Irish saying*
- Here's to you and yours and to mine and ours. And if mine and ours ever come across to you and yours, I hope you and yours will do as much for mine and ours as mine and ours have done for you and yours!
— *Irish toast*
- May you live as long as you want and never want as long as you live.
— *Irish saying*

CLIENT ACCOLADES

Once again **Laika** has scored an Oscar nomination, in fact, this year they have two nominations. One of their nominations is especially sweet because it is only the second time that an animated feature has been honored with an Oscar nomination for Visual Effects. Their second nomination is for best animated feature which is the fourth straight year they have been acclaimed in this category. Laika operates out of a Hillsboro warehouse and makes their animations through the use of an old-style stop-motion process which requires manipulating puppets one frame at a time...what dedication to detail! A bunch of Congrats!!!

EdgeLink, a leading staffing agency in the technology industry, has won Inavero's 2017 Best of Staffing® Talent Diamond Award and Client Satisfaction Award for providing superior service to their clients and job seekers.

The “Hiring Here” sign is out at **DW Fritz**. The company indicates that it will be adding 60 new employees, both mechanical and control technicians to fill a short-term need. Some of these employees are likely to have the opportunity to stay on with the organization. This continues the growth mode that the company has been in over the last several years. It has also added about 200 workers in their China facilities. We wish you continued success and congratulate you on your ability to meet your clients’ needs!!

HELP EMPLOYEES PREPARE FOR CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THEIR PERFORMANCE

As an HR professional, you know that a conversation about performance provides an equal opportunity for managers and employees to talk about what’s going well, what needs to improve, and how things are going in general. The challenge is, it doesn’t always go this way, and one party tends to do more of the talking. Guess which side?

We know it’s important for employees to feel valued during those conversations. It is also important that they feel empowered and comfortable contributing ideas and providing feedback to their supervisors. Our experience tells us that the best way to make employees feel comfortable about opening up during conversations about their performance is to encourage them to be prepared.

Here are several ways HR can help employees prepare in order to set the stage for a successful conversation with their supervisor:

1. **Encourage employees to think more about the process:** A conversation about their performance is an opportunity for employees to talk about more than the final outcome of what they worked on. After all, the process is just as important as the result. More importantly, a manager has more opportunities to coach and provide employees meaningful feedback to employees if they know more about how a particular project or assignment is going.

Before meeting with their manager, employees should be encouraged to complete a mini self-assessment or capture their thoughts in a performance journal or fill out their own copy of a performance review form. This exercise can help capture important details before the meeting so they can accurately outline what’s happened since the last time they spoke with their manager specifically about their performance.

2. **Ask employees to think of continuous learning and development opportunities:** Encourage employees to discuss opportunities for development with their supervisor. That way, ongoing development can be made a topic of conversation on a regular basis and managers and employees can monitor progress and report their observations along the way. Make sure staff members are truly maximizing learning opportunities for growth and development by educating them on how to tie learning activities to performance objectives and how that learning-performance connection will help the business. REMEMBER, these learning activities are not always on the job or paid for by the organization. What are employees doing and willing to do on their own time and dime.
3. **Invite employees to share their material in advance:** One of the biggest complaints about conversations about performance is that it can be difficult to predict what will be discussed. Employees can do their part to avoid any surprises by sharing the materials they have put together with their supervisor in advance of the meeting. Not only does this tip help employees prepare, it also helps their manager prepare as well. The goal is to have a more meaningful two-way conversation.
4. While performance reviews may take place once maybe twice a year there is a high need and great value in having one-on-one meetings in between. These do not have to be long meetings but they do need to happen. These meetings can be 10 minutes long. The goal is so that progress is marked and recognized, issues are addressed early, ideas can be shared, and a working partnership can be built.

There are a variety of ways to get the most out of any performance management strategy. Regardless of what processes are in place, one thing remains consistent – the best results come from active participation of everyone involved. Communicating openly and often is critical for managers and employees to drive high performance. When that happens, employees will be more motivated to perform at their best on a consistent basis, and that’s something any business would want.

HR BY THE NUMBERS

Which department are the payroll players? According to a 2015 American Payroll Association survey 50% Finance, 25% HR, 5% a standalone department, 4% a shared services department and 1% other.

Paper paychecks are so 20th century. According to the 2016 Getting Paid in America survey 96.8% of employers are using direct deposit. Paper paychecks are given by 2.2% of employers. The other options used are payroll cards at .5% and via prepaid reloadable card .2%.

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There is a rise in relocation activity. According to Atlas Van Lines in 2015 45% of small organizations, 75% of medium companies, and 49% of large firms all said the volume of relocation increased.

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\$127,200 is the maximum amount of earnings subject to the Social Security payroll tax in 2017, which is up from \$118,500.

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Employers tend to give more paid time off to new mothers than to new fathers. Maternity leave – 41 days. Paternity leave - 22 days.

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.**

MARCH

American Red Cross, Employee Spirit, International Expect Success, International Ideas, National Craft, National Ethics Awareness, National Kite, and Optimism Month

Mar 7 – May 2 **Supervisory Success - A Series for New Supervisors (8 classes)**
Ideal for those new to supervision, newly promoted or those who are being “groomed” for supervisory and leadership roles.

Mar 14 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series - Class 2**

Mar. 17 St. Patrick’s Day

Mar 21 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series- Class 3**

Mar. 22 Earth Day

Mar 29 Salem HR Lunch Bunch – Transgender

Coming Up:

APRIL

National Donate Life, Autism Awareness, Keep America Beautiful, Jazz Appreciation, National Humor, Stress Awareness Month.

Apr 4 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series - Class 4**

Apr 5 Portland HR Lunch Bunch – Nepotism

Apr 11 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series - Class 5**

Apr 15 Take a Wild Guess Day

Apr 18 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series - Class 6**

Apr 20 **Strategic HR Management**

Apr 21-27 National Volunteer Week

Apr 26 Admin Professional Day

Apr 25 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series- Class 7**

Apr 26 Salem Lunch Bunch - Developing Leaders

Apr 27 **Proper HR Documentation**

Apr 30 National Honesty Day

Planning Ahead:

MAY

May 2 **Supervisory/ Manager Success Series- Class 8**

May 3 Portland HR Lunch Bunch – Transgender

May 4 **Recruiting 4 Part Series - Part 1**

May 9 **Change Management - Resources for Supervisors and Managers**

May 10 **Getting Organized - Presented by Bethanne Kronik**

May 11 **Recruiting Series - Part 2**

May 18 **Recruiting Series - Part 3**

May 23 **Creating a Positive Workplace**

May 25 **Recruiting Series - Part 4**

May 31 Salem HR Lunch Bunch - What Does HR Need From Our Managers?

Flyers for our workshops can be found on our [events](#) page under each workshop.

[View more details and register on our website here!](#)

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

We have some engagements that ask us to assist with defining the difference between what an organization is doing and HR best practice. When we talk internally about the project, we often use the term, gap analysis. That is a fancy term for defining the gap between what is being done and what could or should be done. Sometimes we discover for the client that there really isn't a gap, but more often, we discover that there is a gap and it can be minimized or eliminated by taking some course of action. The ones that are most challenging are the ones where the gap is the size of the Grand Canyon.

When this occurs, it is critical that we not only are able to recommend actions that will decrease the size of the gap, but we also need to investigate why the gap is so large. Failure to do that may leave the client in a situation where after our departure, things return to the way they were because there is always a reason for that large a gap to exist in the first place.

There are a variety of reasons the gap has occurred. Sometimes the gap exists because there has been a decision to have significant decentralization of the function involved with HR. Different supervisors or managers may operate differently and build their own practices. It may be that there is little structure or policy in place. This isn't an intentional decision to decentralize, it is that no decision has been made and the organization has just evolved. There may be a rationale in place that says that dealing with different workgroups requires different processes. This can happen when there is a "this group is special" kind of operational mentality. This frequently happens in IT, law enforcement, sales, or R&D, but it can happen in any organization or with any department. In most organizations, there are some "sacred cows" and because no organization wants to disrupt something that doesn't appear to be broken, it is hard to address the exceptions and make the changes to consistency that may be more optimal.

But, back to our gap for a minute...in the beginning of me being a consultant, I was pretty sure that gaps were the sign of a problem. After almost 32 years, I can say unequivocally, that concept is correct...part of the time. Gaps are an invitation to look at the reasons, the results, and the understanding of gaps that exist. It is not always (a very dangerous word) a sign of dysfunction. By taking some time to examine the gap, understand what it impacts, talk to the people on both sides of the gap, and look at the results that are being accomplished, the nature of the gap and its positive or negative effect, a determination can be made about whether it is something that needs to be changed. Approaching the discovery of a gap with a simplistic view that it must be damaging denies the opportunity to dig a little deeper to more fully understand what is happening and why.

When new processes or thinking can be introduced to an organization so that work is more streamlined and efficient, it can make a world of difference. It is hard at first to make those transitions, but the payoff can be seen in greater productivity.

But it is also true, that not every gap needs modification. The Grand Canyon is beautiful to behold. It is magnificent! Making it smaller would be a horrible disservice to all who have had their breathe taken away by the panorama it provides us.

- Judy Clark, President



ANSWERS, Inc.
"Whatever the Question"

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

WWW.HRANSWERS.COM