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RENEWED ATTEMPT IN CONGRESS TO ELIMINATE NON-COMPETE AGREEMENTS

A bipartisan bill aimed at generally banning non-compete agreements across the country has been introduced in the Senate. The [Workforce Mobility Act of 2019](#), which closely tracks the Democrat-led Workforce Mobility Act of 2018, is a stark contrast to the limited and more measured approaches that have predominated at the state level.

In 2016, the Obama Administration [launched an initiative](#) criticizing the alleged abuse of non-compete agreements in the United States. That initiative led to the issuance of an executive order and three reports:

1. April 2016 Executive Order: “Steps to Increase Competition and Better Inform Consumers and Workers to Support Continued Growth of the American Economy.”
2. March 2016 Treasury Department Report: “Non-Compete Contracts: Economic Effects and Policy Implication.”
3. May 2016 White House Report: “Non-Compete Agreements: Analysis of the Usage, Potential Issues, and State Responses.”
4. October 2016 White House Report: “State Call to Action on Non-Compete Agreements.”

These documents criticized non-compete agreements for purportedly reducing the welfare of workers, artificially restricting competition, and hampering the economy’s efficiency by depressing wages, limiting mobility, and inhibiting innovation.

The October 2016 Call to Action urged state policymakers to pursue best practice policy objectives, including:

1. Banning non-competes for certain categories of workers, such as:
 - Workers below a certain wage threshold;
 - Workers in certain occupations that promote public health and safety;
 - Workers who are unlikely to possess trade secrets; and
 - Workers who are most susceptible to the adverse impacts from non-competes, including those who are laid-off or terminated without cause.
2. Improving transparency and fairness of non-compete agreements by, for example:
 - Disallowing non-competes unless they are proposed before a job offer or significant promotion has been accepted (because an applicant who has accepted an offer and declined other positions may have less bargaining power);
 - Providing consideration over and above continued employment for workers who sign non-compete agreements; and
 - Encouraging employers to better inform workers about the law in their state and the existence of non-competes in contracts and how they work.
3. Discouraging the use of overly restrictive or otherwise improper non-competes, including by:
 - Promoting the use of the “red pencil doctrine,” which renders contracts with unenforceable provisions void in their entirety; and
 - Imposing appropriate remedies or penalties on employers that violate the applicable state non-compete statutes.

Although the Call to Action recommended state action, the U.S. Congress responded by pursuing federal non-compete reform. Three Democratic senators, Elizabeth Warren (Mass.), Christopher Murphy (Conn.), and Ronald Wyden (Or.), sponsored the [Workforce Mobility Act of 2018](#). Democratic members of the House introduced a similar bill at the same time. Rather than adopt the Obama Administration’s endorsement of a nuanced approach to non-compete reform, both versions of the 2018 Act opted instead to ban employee non-competes entirely.

The 2018 Act stalled at the start. Perhaps recognizing the 2018 Act’s excesses, Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) [introduced a bill](#) in January 2019 that would ban non-competes only for low-wage employees. That too did not appear to garner support.

2019 WORKFORCE MOBILITY ACT

On October 17, 2019, Senators Murphy and Young introduced the 2019 Act, which is slightly more moderate than the failed 2018 Act. The new bill proposes to ban all non-compete agreements generally, except for those associated with the sale of a business or the dissolution of or disassociation from a partnership (as long as the surviving entity continues to carry on a like business after the sale or dissolution). Even in those situations, the bill strictly limits the use of non-competes. For example, in the sale of a business, the buyer may enter into non-competes only with: (i) the seller; and (ii) senior executives who were employed at the time of the sale and are subject to severance agreements that require payment to the executive, upon termination, of an amount equal to or greater than the total compensation the executive would reasonably be expected to receive in the year following the sale.

The 2019 Act also would limit the extent to which a non-compete may restrict a party's future business opportunities. First, the non-compete restrictions may not exceed one year in duration. Second, the non-compete may only prevent the restricted party "from carrying on a like business" within the same geographic area in which the business operated prior to the sale, dissolution, or disassociation. Although the 2019 Act does not define "carrying on a like business," this language could be interpreted to mean that a non-compete may prevent the restricted party from *owning*, but not from *working* for, a competing business.

The 2019 Act would require all employers to post notice of the law's requirements in a conspicuous place. It would empower the Federal Trade Commission and Department of Labor to jointly enforce the law's requirements. The agencies would be able to issue civil penalties and pursue judicial action on behalf of aggrieved parties. Aggrieved individuals would be afforded a private right of action to seek actual damages for violations, as well as for costs and reasonable attorneys' fees.

Finally, the 2019 Act defines a "non-compete agreement" as an agreement that "restricts" a worker in his or her ability to perform "any [similar] work" for a specified period of time, and in a specified geographic area, after the working relationship ends. Although the 2019 Act states that it would not prevent a business from contracting with a worker to not disclose trade secrets, it does not state whether "non-compete agreement" would cover other restrictive covenants, such as customer non-solicitation and employee non-solicitation covenants and non-disclosure agreements for the protection of confidential information that falls short of being a trade secret.

2019 ACT FINDINGS

The 2019 Act lists "findings" that paint non-compete agreements as deeply damaging to worker opportunity, as well as unnecessary to protect a company's legitimate business interests. Among other criticisms, the Act asserts:

- Non-competes "are blunt instruments that crudely protect employer interests and place a drag on national productivity by forcing covered workers to either idle for long periods of time or leave the industries where they have honed their skills altogether;"
- Non-competes "reduce wages, restrict worker mobility, impinge on worker freedoms ..., and slow the pace of American innovation;"
- Businesses are fully capable of protecting their legitimate interests through less intrusive measures, including by availing themselves of "trade secret protections, intellectual property protections, and non-disclosure agreements;" and
- Non-competes are counter-productive to the goal of "[f]ostering an environment where employers can flourish[.]"

The bill's critical "findings" are similar to the complaints about non-competes cited in a [March 7, 2019 letter](#) in which the Act's sponsors and other Senators asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate and report to Congress on the use and abuse of non-compete agreements in the United States. No report has been issued, and it is unclear whether the bill was based on any new evidence.

Trends in States

Many state governments recently enacted laws that regulate non-competes without broadly banning them. For instance, state laws passed in the past two years:

- Ban non-competes for lower-income workers (Maine, Maryland, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Washington);
- Ban non-competes for employees who are non-exempt under the Fair Labor Standards Act (Massachusetts, Rhode Island);
- Impose notice requirements that reduce the likelihood an employee will be surprised with a non-compete requirement after he or she has left a previous job (Maine, Massachusetts, Washington);

Editor: Judy Clark, CPC, SPHR, IPMA-CP: 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, or questions about your subscription, please give us a call at (503) 885-9815 or e-mail info@hranswers.com.

- Prohibit enforcement of non-competes against workers who have been laid off or otherwise discharged without cause (Massachusetts); and
- Require employers to continue paying laid off workers during the post-employment restricted period (Washington).

These state measures largely align with the recommendations in the Obama Administration's Call to Action. The 2019 Act would essentially nullify those measures.

GOING BEYOND THE CALL TO ACTION

Although the 2019 Act does not reference the Call to Action, it rejects the validity of limited reform. It argues that employers can fully protect their legitimate business interests through existing trade secret laws. This is debatable. When an employee joins a competitor, the former employer is significantly limited in its ability to monitor whether the employee is using its proprietary information on behalf of the competitor. Moreover, other vital business interests beyond trade secrets (including client relationships, goodwill in the community, and confidential information that falls short of constituting a trade secret) that cannot be safeguarded sufficiently through statutory or contractual trade secret protections.

Some may prefer a uniform federal non-compete ban to a patchwork of state laws that vary widely in the degree to which they protect the interests of employers and workers. However, safeguards against employer abuse of non-competes already exist in the court system, where employers must prove a non-compete is reasonable in time and scope and narrowly tailored to protect the employer's legitimate, protectable business interests.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

The Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship held a hearing on the 2019 Act on November 14, 2019. While a majority of the participating Senators appeared open to federal non-compete reform, approval of a broad ban is unlikely. The 2019 Act's sponsors may see their proposal as the first step in negotiating a compromise bill that might more closely resemble enacted state laws, should there be interest or ability in Congress to move this bill forward.

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THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

And now we welcome the new year. Full of things that have never been.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Be at War with your Vices, at Peace with your Neighbors, and let every New-Year find you a better Man.

~ Quoted in Benjamin Franklin's 1755 Poor Richard's Almanack, December

The years teach much which the days never knew.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

The greatest oak was once a little nut who held its ground.

~ Author Unknown

Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.

~ William James

Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.

~ Winston Churchill

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you must keep moving.

~ Albert Einstein

The road to success is dotted with many tempting parking places.

~ Author Unknown

UPSKILLING THE WORKFORCE

Employee Development, Training, Cross-Training: What we call this process has changed over the years, but the concept remains the same; how do we assure the viability of our business and our industry during a tight labor market? Most industries today are experiencing major challenges in recruitment and retention of employees, but the high tech, construction, healthcare and manufacturing industries are the hardest hit. Why? Because over the past few decades popular opinion in the United States has emphasized the importance of higher education over the trades and technical education. Much of the challenge found in the labor market presently is among the trades.

Changing the executive mindset around this has been a challenge, but the cost of employee turnover (costs range from 75% of salary up to 200%, proving that it is more cost effective to train and motivate your employees, then it is to replace them) and lost business potential is forcing the issue. Yet, even in the midst of these challenges, some have reverted to the mindset that “this too shall pass,” in reference to the threat of a cooling economy. Innovative organizations are not relying on this short-sighted notion and instead are wrapping the concepts of “Upskilling” into their strategic planning process.

Upskilling is an investment in three areas of employee development: 1) Securing the most current, industry and technology specific training for your new hires; 2) identifying and enhancing the technical skill sets of your existing employees; and 3) improving the soft skills (emotional intelligence) of your management.

Potential Benefits of Upskilling Include:

- 1. Improved employee retention.** When you can't hire them, you need to ensure you are keeping them. Surveys show that employees often do not leave because of money (although it is a factor) but primarily because they do not feel valued. Feeling “Valued” is a bit different for everyone, but the items that fall into this arena are related to: 1) a great (or at least good) work culture; 2) ability to improve their skills sets, and 3) the ability to then use those new skill sets (among others). It can be statistically shown that organizations with a great work culture have not only reduced turnover, they become known as an employer of choice, making it easier to attract good talent.
- 2. Improves employee engagement.** An employee is unlikely to be satisfied with a job without being engaged in that job. Employee engagement is much more than being content with pay. An engaged employee is an employee who is deeply involved and invested in their work. Organizations with genuinely engaged employees have higher retention, productivity, customer satisfaction, innovation, and quality. Engaged employees can also require less training time, experience less illness, and have fewer accidents.
- 3. Improved Customer Satisfaction.** Engaged employees = satisfied (return) customers. When employees perceive they have value and are working for an employer with a great work culture, that engagement is directly transferred in how customers are taken care of. Additionally, employees with enhanced skills are better able to “speak the language,” leading customers to believe in the employers' products and services. In fact, satisfied customers become better brand advocates for your organization.
- 4. Attracts new talent.** The reality of the current labor market is that the talent we attract is already working somewhere else. When employees feel valued, engaged and have a strong sense of their skillsets, your organization becomes known in the marketplace as an “employer of choice.” Who doesn't want to work for an organization with a great work culture? In essence, your employers advocate for your organization and are instrumental in its recruiting efforts.

However, upskilling is not as simple as sending your staff to training. Providing education of any type to employees, without accurately understanding the skill gaps, needs and reasons for the education, is a waste of time and money. Simply, it does not have the effect your desire. Upskilling begins with a gap analysis. A training gap analysis is a measurement of the level of skills possessed by employees at any given moment in relation to the optimal level of skills they need for optimal productivity, or the level of skills the organization needs to meet the constantly changing demands and changes in technology.

The reason for an assessment of a training gap is to help organizations discover inconsistencies within their current talent pool. Gaining an idea of what type of skills their employees have will help these organizations know how to tackle the issue of further training for workers. Since the objective is not just to enable the employee to gain certain areas of expertise to perform at their current job, the goal analysis must be closely aligned to the organizations strategic plan for growth. What new or additional skills will allow our employees to move us into the future?

Employee development programs that are created in a vacuum (by managers or training professionals only) are destined to fail. Once skill gaps are discovered and training opportunities are aligned with the organization's strategies, employees who are going to be retrained need to be made part of the design. Their involvement is critical.

One size does not fit all. In order to be successful in increasing your employee's skill sets, your development plan must be very flexible. Different personality styles and different generations learn differently. Part of the gap analysis is to discover how people learn, and then to employ as many different learning styles as possible.

Lastly, a word about emotional intelligence. A leader's job is to "make a place where others get the work done." When we do not create value, which translates into a great work culture, we simply don't make a place where people can get the work done, much less desire to stay. How employees see themselves as valued or not valued is directly affected by management. When managers and leaders do not have a complete understanding or accountability for their own personality styles, how they manage given those style, how they communicate, and their effectiveness in managing conflict, they are not likely to contribute to a great workplace culture.

Soft skills development for managers is directly linked to the technical upskilling of employees. One cannot (successfully) be done without the other.

The value of upskilling is the benefit of improved employee retention through value and, ultimately, increased customer satisfaction. This directly creates greater success for the organization's profitability and long-term longevity. Upskilling allows companies an opportunity to not only provide better services and products, but to also leverage their employee's engagement and satisfaction to enhance their reputation in the market.

ANNUAL REPORT – FOCUS ON EMPLOYEES

Publicly-held corporations must produce an Annual Report each year. According to Wikipedia: "The report is usually the best source of information for most people to determine the financial health of a company. An annual report gives a basic overview of the company over the past year. It usually includes: an opening letter from the CEO, a business profile, a management analysis, and financial data."

There is no mention of the workforce in this definition. In fact, further research found only one definition that even spoke about employees. It states: "Annual reports provide information on the company's mission and history and summarize the company's achievements in the past year. While financial achievements are included, other achievements also are noted, such as research advances, market share gains or honors awarded to the company or its employees."

The reference to "employees" is literally that last word of the definition. Why is it that the traditional Annual Report provides little or no information about employees? Annual Reports typically focus on assets of the corporation. Is this a statement that they do not perceive the workforce to be an asset? HR Professionals would argue that the workforce is the most important asset that an employer has.

- When the workforce is considered one of the primary assets that the organization has, it incorporates data about employees in their content. It may cover such elements as:
- Number of employees or at least FTEs (full-time equivalents)
- Number of new hires during the year
- Turnover rates for the past year
- Time to fill vacancies
- Total payroll and benefit costs
- Average seniority/length of service for employees
- Results of any employee initiatives
- Commendations, awards, patents received by employees
- Any HR specific metrics used by the organization to measure employee success or achievement of employee goals.

Why provide all this information? Identifying the answers to these questions and sharing it with investors, interested parties, and the workforce increases the accuracy of planning processes, allows for identification of trends, and communicates the importance of the workforce that makes it possible for organizational success.

Even if your organization doesn't have an obligation to compose an Annual Report, this would be great information to share with employees along with what is going to be the focus for the following year based on the information provided by the measurements of these items. Having this data increases the likelihood that everyone is aware of the new initiatives and why they are important. While a formal Annual Report is not required, it would be a good process to develop an annual HR report that provided statistics, a recap of previous initiative and information about the focus for the following year. It is a great way to ensure that the workforce knows how much attention is being given to HR and to encourage workforce buy-in to the new objectives.

JANUARY- FUN AT WORK

Hooray! It's National Fun at Work Day (1/28), and what better way to celebrate than to have FUN? Having fun and positivity in the office can significantly improve productivity and performance. We think fun should never be put on the back burner, so we've come up with ideas to liven up the workplace:

1. First and foremost, decide to have fun yourself. Don't wait for the fun to be had, create it wherever you go. Embrace a positive, happy attitude and it will likely rub off on those around you!
2. Be sure to get management involved in all of the fun-having. Their participation really sets a precedent around the office, and coworkers will soon follow along.
3. Encourage spontaneity. Have a few options around the workplace for co-workers to jump away at any given moment to play a quick game of tic-tac-toe, ping pong, coloring or even some board games in the lunchroom to get those fun problem-solving juices flowing.
4. Build a "fun committee." Some of us are more gifted than others at making mundane tasks more appealing, and a team of "funthusiasts" dedicated to coming up with fresh ideas to keep the office having fun is a perfect way to create a happy environment.
5. Start an office tradition for Fun at Work Day. Shared experiences often build better relationships and create a sense of connection and community. Some ideas would be an ice cream sundae bar, a potluck, a game day, a breakfast-for-lunch day, wear your favorite team jersey or have a theme day. This is where there's room for creativity, and you are only limited by your imagination!
6. Use January 28 as a day to be a little more personable. Now more than ever, most of our day-to-day work is done heavily behind our phones and our computer screens. Make it a point to stop by a co-workers desk you haven't caught up with, hand deliver a note, or just stop by to say hello!
7. Tell a joke or two. Sometimes jokes can be cheesy, but in the end everyone gets a good laugh.

Remember, there is no "best way" to have fun, so experiment and see what works best in your office

REMINDERS

Oregon Expands Pregnancy Accommodations Law (1/1/20)

Beginning January 1, 2020, Oregon law expressly requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations for known limitations related to pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions, absent undue hardship.

Currently, when an employee needs accommodation due to pregnancy, childbirth, or related conditions, employers must navigate a complicated patchwork of interacting state and federal laws to understand their options and obligations. The new law gathers the rules regarding pregnancy and childbirth accommodations in one place. The legislature drafted the law to essentially parallel the laws governing disability accommodations, in order to facilitate employer understanding and implementation. So, for example, just as is the case in the disability accommodation context, a reasonable accommodation for pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions may include modifying equipment, periodic rest, assisting with manual labor, or modifying work schedules.

Read the rest of the article:

[Recent and Upcoming Changes to Oregon Pregnancy & Childbirth Accommodations Laws](#)

Little | Nov 2019

Effective date: 1/1/20

Text of the measure can be found [here](#).

Enforcement by [Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industries \(BOLI\)](#)

BOLI Technical Assistance for Employers [Accommodations for Pregnancy Related Conditions](#)

BOLI template notice ([downloads](#) to your [computer](#))

Stay tuned! BOLI is also responsible for developing training and education materials to inform employers and employees of the rights and obligations created by the new provisions.

Additional Law Firm Articles

Oregon employers with at least 6 employees now have to provide reasonable accommodations to employees and applicants who have limitations in the workplace related to pregnancy or childbirth (including lactation needs).

[Two New Oregon Laws Provide Protections for Pregnant and Nursing Mothers](#)

Barran Liebman | Jun 2019

In addition to providing reasonable accommodations, employers must provide a written notification of the Employer Accommodation for Pregnancy Act to new hires at the time of hire and within 180 days of the Act's effective date (i.e., by June 29, 2020) to all existing employees. Such written notification also must be provided within 10 days to an employee who has informed her employer of a pregnancy.

[Oregon Enacts Pregnancy Accommodations Law](#)

Jackson Lewis | May 2019

Employers are excused from providing reasonable accommodations if doing so imposes an undue hardship. To qualify as an undue hardship, the accommodation must require significant difficulty or expense, taking into [account](#) the same factors that apply under Oregon disability discrimination law.

[Oregon Passes Law Expanding Pregnancy-Related Accommodations for Employees](#)

Lane Powell | Jun 2019

NEW FEDERAL LAW FOR FEDERAL CONTRACTORS AND AGENCIES

The President has signed the National Defense Authorization Act for 2020. It contains a provision titled the Fair Chance Act which is intended to assist individuals with a criminal record have an easier opportunity to be hired. Federal contractors now need to be aware that no conversation about criminal history can occur with any applicant until a conditional employment offer has been extended.

As with all federal laws, there are some exceptions. This does not apply to law enforcement agencies, employers related to national security, positions that have access to classified information, and position where a criminal records check is required by law.

The Office of Personnel Management will be drafting the full regulations and my add to the exception list. We will keep you up to date as we learn more about this new obligation.

POLITICS IN THE WORKPLACE – FREE SPEECH OR NOT?

Q: We know that we are headed into an election year – is there anything we should do to set the stage for our employees?

A: It may be time to ensure that your employees understand the expectations you have as an employer. Remember that for the private sector, employers have the right to dictate what is acceptable speech in the workplace so long as it doesn't abridge employee's rights to talk with one another about wages, benefits, or working conditions. Explaining to employees what the rules are about political speech is considered wise. It is also wise to explain that if the conversation becomes heated, the employer will likely take action which may be disciplinary in nature. Remind employees that they don't know the full picture of their co-workers so it is possible that there may be deep-seated emotions attached to some of the differences in political opinion. Additionally, make sure that employees can access a few people to share their concerns about political, or any other conversation concerns.

CLIENT ACCOLADES

Kudos to **Octavia Chambers**, the **Trail Blazers** Director of Equity and Inclusion, was selected as one of the *Sports Business Journal* "New Voices under Thirty." She is responsible for leading the development and tracking of cross-departmental diversity and equity inclusion strategic plans. Way to go, Octavia, we are very proud of you!!!!

HR BY THE NUMBERS

According to HR Technologist, 57% of employees find it too hard to get the right answers when they search the HR portal. The study reports that 53% can't keep track of where to go for an answer, and nearly half feel it takes too long to get an answer when they call or email an HR person. With, 72% of employees call HR for help, HR are continually inundated with frustrated employees. This data comes from a recent Pulse Report which was trying to learn if AI would be able to resolve these difficulties. The summary of the report suggests that AI would be an option for dealing with these issues.

* * * *

A diversified workplace is good for the bottom line, yet people with disabilities have historically been left out of the workforce. The labor force participation rate for people with disabilities is about 33.3% compared to 77.6% for those without disabilities.

Research shows that firms that employ and support workers with disabilities have 28% higher revenue and 30% higher profit margins than peer businesses that do not. Inclusive employers report higher overall employee morale and higher retention rates of workers with disabilities. Research also reveals that people with disabilities are healthier and happier when they have the opportunity to work.

* * * *

Although the U.S. unemployment rate is at a record low, 48% of US workers surveyed said they were worried that they'll lose their jobs. 34% fear recession is looming. 32% hear rumors of layoffs at work. 30% cite layoffs at their workplace. 61% of workers ages 18 to 34 reported having layoff anxiety compared to 41% of those 35 or older. *Source: the Harris Poll survey on behalf of Careerarc.*

* * * *

Is there a first-time promotion gap? For every 100 men promoted or hired into the first management position, only 72 women are given the same opportunity. Closing that gap would add 1 million women to management roles over the next five years, according to a 2019 study LeanIn.org, a nonprofit founded by Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg and consultancy McKinsey and Company. The study also found men hold 62% of manager of other positions, while women hold just 38%. Only 1/3 of organizations set gender representation targets for first level manager roles, compared to 41% for senior manager levels.

Only 19% of HR leaders said getting promoted to a first-level manager roles were the biggest challenges to getting equal numbers of women and men into management.

* * * *

Cold and flu season is upon many of us in the US. The question is are your coworkers making you sick? 90% of professionals come to work sick. Of those 33% always go to work when they're feeling unwell 57% sometimes to. So that begs the question why don't they stay home? 54% say they have too much work to do. 40% don't want to use a sick day. 34% do feel pressured by their employer to be present. And 25% see the coworkers come to work sick.

Source: Accountemps surveys. 28 U.S. cities survey.

FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Open up your Daytimers, Outlook, and all those Smartphones. The following is a look at upcoming events and workshops, special days, and other diverse and fun activities you will want to be aware of and schedule. **To register for our workshops, go to [HR Answers Events](#), or email your registration form to info@hranswers.com.**

JANUARY

National Month of Blood Donor, Braille Literacy, Hobby, Hot Tea, Mentoring, Slow Cooking, and Soup.

- Jan. 13 National Clean Your Desk Day
- Jan. 16 HRA Workshop – Portland/ Tigard
[Job Search Workshop](#)
11:00am – 1:00pm
- Jan. 19 National Popcorn Day
- Jan. 20 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Jan. 22 HRA 6-Day Workshop – Salem
[The Engaged Leader Winter Series](#)
8:30am - 12:30pm
- Jan. 25 Chinese New Year
- Jan. 27 National Chocolate Cake Day
- Jan. 28 HRA Workshop – Webinar/ Teleconference
[Pay Equity - Overview How to reach compliance and the proposed rules](#)
8:30am - 12:30pm
- Jan. 28 National Fun at Work Day

Looking Ahead:

- Mar. 4 HR Lunch Bunch – Webinar/ Teleconference
[Employee Onboarding](#)
12:00 – 1:00pm
- Mar. 19 - HRA Workshop Series – Portland/ Tigard
- May 14 [Spring Supervisory Success Series](#)
8:30am - 12:30pm

View more details and register for our workshops on our website at hranswers.com.

Coming Up:

- Feb. 5 HR Lunch Bunch – Webinar
[Am I A Bad Boss?](#)
12:00 – 1:00pm
- Feb. 13 HRA Workshop – Portland/ Tigard
[Job Search Workshop](#)
11:00am – 1:00pm
- Feb 27 Oregon State Council of SHRM
Employment Law Conference
HRA will be there
[Click here to register](#)

ON MY SOAPBOX

Can you imagine what it would be like to call your parents or a friend as you leave for work, check in four or five times with them as you are driving, and then call once more to say that you arrived safely? That is the experience that one of the HRA staff endured while living in Iraq. Her name is Samara, and she works in our Recruiting and Staffing division.

I started thinking about focusing a Soapbox on her during one of our pop-up (start of the week) meetings. She shared what she was working on and then her eyes lit up and a big smile took over her face as she told us that there were only a few weeks left before she could take her Citizenship test and become a US citizen. Her anticipation, hopefulness, and joy at the prospect was in her voice and her expression. As I left the meeting that morning, I thought about her excitement and felt sad that we who are already blessed with that designation, take it for granted. She is looking forward to proving that she is worthy of becoming a US citizen by being able to answer the questions put to her, by being able to share why she is committed to this, and being able to take the oath that accompanies this transition. She told me, "I will let my Iraqi passport lapse when it expires."

It took three years for her to complete the application process, and that was expedited because she was employed by a US-based NGO. Because of that employment, she received death threats and she knew to take those seriously because two cars were bombed near to her. She was investigated by the FBI and the CIA to ensure that she wasn't a threat to America.

When she finally got the call of permission, she had only five days to get ready to leave everything behind. Fortunately, her brother was also applying, and he got his call three days later. Their trip was arduous (Iraq to Jordan to Germany to JFK), but nothing like the fear and apprehension that they had endured while waiting for approval.

They initially settled in High Point, North Carolina because a friend of theirs was located there. They had to wait until they got their green cards before they could move somewhere else. We are so tickled that she chose Portland!

When I sat down with her to learn more about how it was in Iraq, about the decision to try to come to America, and how the US is like what she thought, and how is it different. I could have been in tears at her description of what we are to her. She talked about feeling safe here. She said that when she becomes a citizen, she will feel equal to everyone who was born here, and she is very excited to have that feeling. She talked about being able to vote and what a privilege that is since the "elections" in Iraq are fixed.

We ended her conversation with me by talking about her Dad. She said that he always preached about having an open mind. In coming here, she talked about being accepted by everyone and how meaningful their comments were about seeing how much potential she has. She finished by saying, "You folks who are already citizens should give your country a break. No country is perfect. Be grateful for having a voice – so many places do not have that. In America, you have the right to construct your own dream."

- Judy Clark, President



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