



# advantage

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Portland Office  
7650 SW Beveland St., Suite 130  
Tigard, OR 97223  
503-885-9815

Willamette Valley Office  
7287 Park Terrace Dr. NE, Suite 101  
Keizer, OR 97303  
503-463-7269

Editor: Deborah Jeffries, SHRM-CP, 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 resources professionals and labor relations professionals. If you have questions about the content, an opinion about the information, or questions about your subscription, please call us at 503-885-9815 or email us at [info@hranswers.com](mailto:info@hranswers.com)

# advantage

## GOING BACK – CONSIDER THOSE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Rumor has it that organizations are in the initial stages and conversations of planning to return to their workplaces. For some of you that means you will return to your original location and building. For many others they may remain working remotely. Job descriptions should be reviewed when your organization is creating new positions, making substantial changes to existing positions, or undergoing a major organizational (or technological) shift. We think this last year and returning counts as a shift making it a good time to review and revise your job descriptions.

In simple terms a job description is a useful, plain-language tool that explains the tasks, duties, functions, and responsibilities of a position. It details who performs a specific type of work, how that work is to be completed, and the frequency and the purpose of the work as it relates to the organization's mission and goals. Having accurate, up-to-date job descriptions is vital to an organization in order to:

- aid in identifying the requirements of each position.
- establish hiring criteria.
- orient new employees to their jobs.
- set standards for employee performance evaluations.
- establish a basis for making reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

With the changes over the last year, it is very possible that people's jobs have changed or morphed. You will want to take a close look at these before your return. Accurate and up-to-date job descriptions will help you recruit qualified applicants, generate greater interest in the positions you are filling, evaluate job performance and provide a written record of your expectations.

If you have questions on your job description or need help writing them, just give a call and we will be happy to assist.

## CURRENT TALENT ACQUISITION MYTHS AND REALITIES

Since March 2020, many fulltime or part-time job seekers are looking for work. (*Statistics taken from WorkSource Oregon – table can be supplied upon request*).

- ✓ As of April 2021, Oregon's unemployment was 6% and reduced from a high of 13.2% in 2020.
- ✓ 7,809 individuals were receiving unemployment benefits in May 2021.
- ✓ Within the Retail, Accommodation, Food Services, Arts, Entertainment, Recreational, Wholesale/Retail Trades, Warehousing/Transportation industries 2,845 were unemployed (36.44%)
- ✓ Within the Professional Services, Information, Technology, Real Estate, and Management and Administrative Services industries 1,261 were unemployed (16.15%).

- ✓ Construction (1,135), Manufacturing (1,022), Healthcare (923), and Education/Public Sector (589) industries had unemployed individuals respectively (combined 46.99%).

Since many are unemployed in Oregon, hiring new staff will not be a problem.

- ✓ As per WorkSource Oregon there were 103,500 online ads in April.  
<https://www.qualityinfo.org/documents/10182//73818//Employment+in+Oregon?cn=May2021&cm=email&cs=publication&cc=Employment%20in%20Oregon>

With the downturn in the economy, wages have fallen.

- ✓ First quarter of 2021 the average starting wage was \$18.89 about the same as 2020. Mid-gain vacancies paying \$15 to \$25 per hour had the biggest gain (increasing 74%) and vacancies paying more than \$25 per hour increased 34%.
- ✓ Don't forget that minimum wage is going up again July 1<sup>st</sup> in Oregon – to \$12.75 per hour and 14.00 per hour in Portland.

Hiring top talent regardless of industry remains challenging for numerous reason as explained in the WorkSource publication [Why Oregon's Labor Market Is Tighter Than You Think](#).

If you need recruitment (sourcing, selection, and interviewing candidates) or temporary staffing services, please give Gail Muller our Director of Recruiting & Staffing or Samara Azzawi a call as they are here to help!

## WORKPLACE BULLYING – HR BY THE NUMBERS

Workplace bullying is repeated, abusive conduct that is either verbal abuse; or behaviors which are threatening, intimidating, or humiliating; or work sabotage, in some combination. Overall, it is physical and mental health-harming mistreatment by one or more employees to one or more individuals.

Abuse at work is the only form of abuse in America that is not yet taboo. All other forms have been condemned – abuse of children, spouses, partners. How normalized has workplace bullying become? Consider these stats from a 2021 report from the Workplace Bullying Institute:

- Estimate is that 48.6 million Americans are bullied at work.
- Including witnesses, 49% of are affected (bullied + witnessed) – that's 79.3 million workers!
- Who is bullied?
  - Non-management employees, 52%, and managers, 40%
  - Women bully women at twice the rate they bully men
  - 61.3% of bullying is same-gender bullying
  - 43% of remote workers are bullied (happens most in virtual meetings, not email)
  - The rate of bullying for Hispanics (35%), is higher than for other races
- Men are the majority of bullies, 67%, and the slight majority of targets, 51%
- Bullying remains primarily top-down - 65% of bullies are bosses
- Coworkers are a source of bullying for targets, 21%
- Targets have 67% chance of losing job they loved when targeted for bullying

- 48% of the public finally realizes that workplace culture creates toxicity and enables abuse
- 58% said that disrespectful politicians encouraged bullying & rule breaking
- For the first time, bullies admit their bullying – 4% nationally, representing 6.6 million
- There are many causes of toxic workplaces. Top individual factor – a bully’s personality, 24%
- Though blaming victims is common, only 15% blamed targets for being bullied
- When bullying is reported, American employers still react negatively, 60%
- Employers tend to encourage, defend, rationalize, discount & deny bullying
- The most frequently chosen “positive” employer reaction was zero-tolerance
- Most bullying is stopped when targets quit, get fired, are constructively discharged, or transferred
- Accountability for bully is starting: punishment, termination, quitting (23%) compared to past reporting
- Public support for a new law to go beyond nondiscrimination laws is strong, 90%

It is our belief that people want to work in an organization where they can achieve and positively contribute on a regular basis. Employees want a sense of comfort trust and belonging. So, a toxic workplace riddled with gossip, negativity and bullying is not the environment for people to do their best work and a place where they want to stay. [Join us July 15th for our webinar on “Say No to Bullying”](#) to learn what you can do to create great place to work.

## HRA CALENDAR

Open 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 click on the event below.

**JUNE: National Adopt a Cat, Camping, LGBTQIA Pride Month, Men’s Health, PTSD Awareness, African American Music Appreciation, Fresh Fruit and Vegetables and Safety Month.**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Jun 10</b> | <b>Job Search Webinar FREE</b><br>11:00am to 1:00pm<br><a href="#">Register Here</a>   |
| <b>Jun 17</b> | <b>HRA Webinar – Compensation Fundamentals – Philosophy, Structure, and Policy</b><br>9:00am to 11:00am<br><a href="#">Register Here</a> |
| <b>Jun 29</b> | <b>HRA Webinar – Interviewing for Emotional Intelligence (Morning)</b><br>9:00am to 11:00am<br><a href="#">Register Here</a>             |
| <b>Jun 29</b> | <b>HRA Webinar – Interviewing for Emotional Intelligence (Afternoon)</b><br>3:00pm to 5:00pm<br><a href="#">Register Here</a>            |

**Jun 30**      **HRA Webinar – Change: You Must Be the Change Before You Can Expect the Change**  
 8:30am to 12:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**COMING UP:**

**Jul 7**      **HR Lunch Bunch: Consultant’s Corner FREE**  
 12:00pm to 1:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 8**      **Job Search Webinar FREE**  
 11:00am to 1:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 13**      **HRA Webinar – Technical Skills: Conducting Employee Opinion Surveys**  
 9:00am to 11:00am  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 14**      **HRA Webinar – Emotional Safety in the Workplace**  
 9:00am to 11:00am  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 15**      **HRA Webinar – Say No to Bullying**  
 8:30am to 11:00am  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 20**      **HRA Webinar – HR for the Non-HR Person**  
 9:00am to 12:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 27**      **HRA Webinar – HR for the Non-HR Person**  
 1:00pm to 4:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 28**      **HRA Webinar – Routine Maintenance on Time and Stress Management**  
 8:30am to 12:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**Jul 29**      **HRA Webinar – Working with Volunteers**  
 8:30am to 11:00am  
[Register Here](#)

**LOOKING AHEAD:**

- Aug 3**      **HRA Webinar – HR for the Non-HR Person**  
9:00am to 12:00pm  
[Register Here](#)
- Aug 4**      **HR Lunch Bunch – Your Activities for Supervisor Training**  
12:00pm to 1:00pm  
[Register Here](#)
- Aug 5**      **HRA Webinar – Personal Improvement: Credibility & Integrity**  
8:30am to 11:00am  
[Register Here](#)
- Aug 10**     **HRA Webinar – HR for the Non-HR Person**  
1:00pm to 4:00pm  
[Register Here](#)
- Aug 12**     **HRA Webinar – Power of Appreciation**  
8:30am to 12:00pm  
[Register Here](#)
- Job Search Webinar FREE**  
11:00am to 1:00pm  
[Register Here](#)
- Aug 17**     **HRA Webinar – Courtesy is Contagious: Workplace Etiquette**  
9:00am to 11:00am  
[Register Here](#)
- Aug 25**     **HRA Webinar – Soft Skills: Building Rapport and Enhancing Relationships**  
8:30am to 12:00pm  
[Register Here](#)

**SKILLS GAPS AND CANDIDATES**

Many organizations are having a difficult time finding job candidates with the precise skills they need. Rapid advancements in technology mean that machines can more efficiently handle tasks that were once performed manually, making once-valued skills outdated and creating positions that require new and different skills.

A recent report from Gartner suggests HR professionals should look for employees or job candidates with “adjacent skills” to the ones they need, instead of precise but hard-to-find traits. Organizations can look at their current employees who have skills that closely match to those in demand and utilize different training options to close the gaps. Employees often have other skills and competencies that are related, that they may not use in their current position and may not seem obvious on the surface, to roles the organization is looking to fill.

In its report *Trouble Finding Critical Skills. Widen Your View*, Gartner notes that organizations should include people in other, seemingly unrelated departments and functions to fill skills gaps. Target the critical skills you are looking for instead of looking for people with experience in specific roles, the report recommends.

### Tips for Identifying Skill Adjacencies

Gartner's report on skill adjacencies advises organizations to:

- Make current employee skill sets visible, and encourage managers and employees to maintain a portfolio of skills to share with HR
- Identify and mobilize skill adjacencies that are not obvious and determine which secondary or tertiary skills to start building on

An analysis that LinkedIn's data science team performed for the World Economic Forum "shows that many employees who have moved into 'emerging roles' over the past five years came from entirely different occupations." Half of the employees who moved into data science and artificial intelligence came from unrelated industries, LinkedIn said in its report.

Adjust career path strategies to encourage flexible career progression. It is worthwhile for the organization to consider the value proposition for themselves and employees. "What am I, as an employer, going to get out of skills adjacencies? What is the employee going to get?" What is the value of the training to the employee?

No employee should be forced to make a job change, but it is important to point out how the employees' strengths are adjacent to those in new jobs the employer is looking to fill. If their old job will no longer exist, make that crystal clear as employees weigh their options.

*Special appreciation to Kathy Gurchiek for the main content of this article (March 2021e. She is a writer for SHRM Online.*

## THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

"I believe that what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us. We are formed by little scraps of wisdom."

— **Umberto Eco, Foucault's Pendulum**

"Sometimes I think my papa is an accordion. When he looks at me and smiles and breathes, I hear the notes."

— **Markus Zusak, The Book Thief**

"Beauty is not who you are on the outside, it is the wisdom and time you gave away to save another struggling soul like you."

— **Shannon L. Alder**

"The heart of a father is the masterpiece of nature."

— **Prevost Abbe, Manon Lescaut**

“Someone once said that every man is trying to live up to his father's expectations or make up for their father's mistakes....”

— **Barack Obama**, [The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts on Reclaiming the American Dream](#)

“Fathers never have exactly the daughters they want because they invent a notion of them that the daughters have to conform to.”

— **Simone de Beauvoir**, [The Woman Destroyed](#)

## HR LINK

Happy Birthday, Medicare! This July marks the 56th anniversary of Medicare. Did you know you can apply for Medicare online even if you are not ready to start your retirement benefits? Applying online can take less than 10 minutes. There are no forms to sign, and they usually require no additional documentation. They will process your application and contact you if they need more information.

Knowing when to apply for Medicare is very important. You have a limited initial enrollment period to apply. If you miss the initial enrollment period, you may have to pay a higher monthly premium. If you are eligible for Medicare at age 65, your initial enrollment period begins three months before your 65th birthday and ends three months after that birthday. Visit [www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare](http://www.ssa.gov/benefits/medicare) to apply for Medicare and find other important information.

Some Medicare beneficiaries may qualify for *Extra Help* with their Medicare prescription drug plan costs. To qualify for *Extra Help*, a person must be receiving Medicare, have limited resources and income, and reside in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia. Read their publication *Understanding the Extra Help With Your Medicare Prescription Drug Plan* for more information at [www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10508.pdf](http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-10508.pdf).

The official Medicare website at Medicare.gov offers many online services where you can find answers to these questions:

- What does Medicare cover? [www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers](http://www.medicare.gov/what-medicare-covers)
- Where do I find forms for filing a Medicare appeal? [www.medicare.gov/claims-appeals/how-do-i-file-an-appeal](http://www.medicare.gov/claims-appeals/how-do-i-file-an-appeal)
- How can I let someone speak with Medicare on my behalf? [www.medicare.gov/claims-appeals/file-an-appeal/can-someone-file-an-appeal-for-me](http://www.medicare.gov/claims-appeals/file-an-appeal/can-someone-file-an-appeal-for-me)
- What do Medicare health and prescription drug plans in my area cost, and what services do they offer? [www.medicare.gov/plan-compare](http://www.medicare.gov/plan-compare)
- Which doctors, health care providers, and suppliers participate in Medicare? [www.medicare.gov/forms-help-resources/find-compare-doctors-hospitals-other-providers](http://www.medicare.gov/forms-help-resources/find-compare-doctors-hospitals-other-providers)
- Where can I find out more about a Medicare prescription drug plan (Part D) and enroll? [www.medicare.gov/drug-coverage-part-d/how-to-get-prescription-drug-coverage](http://www.medicare.gov/drug-coverage-part-d/how-to-get-prescription-drug-coverage)
- Where can I find a Medicare Supplement Insurance (Medigap) policy in my area? [www.medicare.gov/medigap-supplemental-insurance-plans](http://www.medicare.gov/medigap-supplemental-insurance-plans)

We encourage you to share these helpful resources with friends, family, and members of your network today.



## KEEP REMOTE EMPLOYEES ENGAGED

Working from home can feel isolating and demoralizing for employees who are used to connecting with their coworkers in person. Without the right structures and activities in place, remote employees may feel not only physically distant but emotionally distant from their team.

This isolation isn't just bad for your employees. It is bad for business. Employees who feel isolated and disconnected at work have lower performance, lower productivity, and are more likely to quit. That is why it is important to create opportunities for connection remotely—to the organization, to the team, and to the work.

People keep sharing their ideas on making employees feel connected. So, we thought we would share them with you.

- Use 'No Meeting Fridays' across the organization.
- Employees were given a day off at our discretion for Employee Appreciation Day in March.
- Sent everyone meal cards.
- No work on Fridays - it is ME day. I do not respond to client Slack messages, or texts or emails. It is heavenly.
- Our team has weekly virtual coffee breaks providing yoga, meditation, boxing exercises as activities for 30 minutes.
- A day off in October and a day off in February.
- Virtual scavenger hunt
- Netflix party
- Trivia time (via [www.watercoolertrivia.com](http://www.watercoolertrivia.com))
- Virtual book club
- Team fitness challenge
- An organization is encouraging employees to spend the time they would have spent commuting to focus on wellness. Instead of driving for 20 minutes, go for a walk or take a yoga break. They even offer a mid-week yoga break.
- An organization offered a "take off" hour and had 4 different zoom rooms set up for activities - desk yoga, meditation, a virtual walk through a goat rescue.
- One organization has launched a Flat Stanley activity for employees to do during a given month to build back their team connection.

The right activities will increase employee engagement and help your team members connect meaningfully. Pay attention to the needs and personalities on your team to pick team-building activities that will resonate with your employees and build on the team culture you already have.

Connection is crucial for creating happy and engaged teams. One study, by Fast Company found that employees who had an opportunity to chat and socialize with coworkers for just 15 minutes showed a 20% increase in performance.

## Q & A

**Q: We recently terminated an employee. We just received a letter from her asking us to provide a letter stating the reasons for her termination. Do I have to provide a letter?**

**A:** Service Letters are required in many states: Arizona, California, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, Texas, and Washington (please double check your state requirements in case we missed one).

In some cases, the content must follow a specific template. Some states may even provide a form that employers must complete and present to the terminated employee.

A service letter may include some of the following information:

- Dates employed.
- Ending wages.
- Position title.
- Reason for leaving.

The timeline for responding to the request varies. Within 10 working days, an employer in Washington must provide a signed statement that addresses the reason for termination and the effective date of the termination to any employee who is discharged.

It is critical that the letter be factual and brief. (If you ever have a concern, please feel free to contact us to review your letter content.)

## HRA HAPPENINGS

We have news!!! We want to give you some updates on somethings that are happening at HRA.

We are very excited! We have new staff members that we would like to introduce you to. We have been very fortunate to add two new consultants to our team. Please join us in welcoming them.

**Anna Lee** is one of our Senior Consultants and has over 15 years of human resources experience in leadership roles with governmental, profit and non-profit agencies. Her previous experience in a variety of disciplines and work environments provides her a global HR perspective. She has a passion for effective supportive management, process refinement and a keen sense of working toward mutually beneficial outcomes within best business practice.

Anna is a Senior Certified Human Resource Professional with Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM-SCP) as well as Senior Certified Human Resource Professional with International Public Management for Human Resources (IPMA-SCP). She has served for five years on the IPMA Oregon Chapter Board including a term as President and Vice President. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for Oregon Child Development Coalition. OCDC connects families to programs, services, opportunities, and well-paying jobs in communities throughout Oregon. OCDC embraces cultural diversity and practice inclusiveness.

*In her free time, Anna enjoys spending time with family and friends, and traveling the world sightseeing and enjoying all the amazing history and culture!*

**Jennifer School** possesses over 20 years of Human Resources experience in the private, non-profit, and public sectors. Jennifer has worked in a variety of industries including retail, supply chain, transportation, law enforcement, manufacturing, and childcare. She has worked with organizations on the various stages of the employee lifecycle – staffing and recruitment, employee relations, labor relations, performance management, safety/worker’s compensation, training and development, compliance, and project planning. Jennifer brings expert knowledge to employee relations and performance management. She earned a Master of Science degree in Management with an emphasis in Industrial/Organizational Psychology and holds a bachelor’s degree in Psychology from Western Oregon University. Jennifer brings a perspective that helps to uncover alternative solutions and balancing the people needs and organizational results.

*Outside of work Jennifer enjoys spending time with family, friends and enjoys a good cup of coffee! Writing poetry is a passion and she has been sewing since she was 9 years old and is now teaching family and friends how to sew. Jennifer likes to cook and bake with her two adult daughters whenever they have the chance to spend time and share recipes.*

\* \* \* \*

We also have other reasons to celebrate. Over the last couple of months, we have had several staff members who have celebrated work anniversaries with us. We are lucky to work with these awesome individuals!

- Rachel Grenya (May 17) 4 years
- Caroline Gregory (June 6) 4 years
- Gail Mueller (May 22) 4 years

## **EMPLOYEE RETENTION TAX CREDIT EXTENDED AGAIN**

The CARES Act, passed in the spring of 2020, included broad measures designed to incentivize employers (especially small businesses) to keep employees on the payroll despite reduced revenues. While the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) got most of the attention, the Employee Retention Credit (ERC) also provides some employers with a generous tax credit for retaining workers.

The original terms of the ERC under the CARES Act were changed with the passage of the Consolidated Appropriations Act (CAA) on December 27, 2020 – and then more recently, changed again in the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), which was passed on March 11, 2021.

Business owners may find that their organizations now qualify for assistance under the newest version of the ERC, even if they did not initially qualify at the time of the CARES Act.

### **Who qualifies?**

To qualify for the ERC, an employer must meet one of two tests. Either:

1. The employer's business is fully or partially suspended by government order during the calendar quarter, due to the COVID-19 pandemic,  
or
2. The employer's gross receipts are below 50% (for 2020) or 80% (for 2021) of the comparable quarter in 2019.

Initially, employers were barred from qualification for the ERC if they had previously received a PPP loan. That restriction was lifted in the CAA; however, employers may not claim the ERC for any wages that were already counted as payroll costs in qualifying for PPP forgiveness.

### Calculating the Credit

The amount of the credit is a percentage (50% for 2020; 70% for 2021) of up to \$10,000 in qualifying wages (including the employer-paid portions of health insurance premiums) per employee, per quarter. The definition of "qualifying wages" depends on the number of employees the employer had (on average) during 2019.

- For "small employers" (defined in 2020 as 100 or fewer employees and in 2021 as 500 or fewer), the credit is based on all wages paid to employees, whether they were working or not.
- For "large employers" (defined in 2020 as greater than 100 employees and in 2021 as greater than 500), the credit is based only on wages paid to employees who did not work during the calendar quarter.

### Claiming the Credit

Employers do not need to wait for a filing process to receive the credit, but can receive it immediately, by deducting the claimed amount from the quarterly payroll taxes they send to the Treasury. If an employer's credit amount exceeds their payroll taxes, they may request a direct refund of the difference from the IRS.

### Considerations

There is a lot of interplay between the ERC and other wage-based credits, as well as significant complication regarding changing rules, in multiple sets of legislation, covering different time periods. Details such as the factors that determine whether a business is considered partially or fully suspended, and who qualifies as a full versus part-time employee, will also affect eligibility and calculations.

Due to these complications, as well as the potential for fraud that arises when generosity meets complexity, the IRS has a five-year statute of limitations (extended from the normal three years) to review tax filings that claim the ERC. We recommend working closely with your company's tax advisor to determine whether and how the ERC applies to your business.

*This article was prepared and provided by The Commerce Company. The Commerce Company was founded in Portland in 1995 and provides corporate retirement and investment planning for small to mid-sized businesses throughout the Northwest. Contact them at [www.thecommmco.com](http://www.thecommmco.com) or 503-203-8585. This information has been obtained from sources considered to be reliable, but we do not guarantee that the foregoing material is accurate or complete.*

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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 legal counsel.

## ON MY SOAPBOX

When I started Soapboxes, the world felt a little different than it does now. But that was 35 years ago so it is natural that time, remembrances, and trends then would no longer be at the forefront of our experiences now. Thinking about the message I would write for each Advantage Newsletter, I made myself a pledge in 1986 and shared it with staff. I thought it was important to stay away from topics that might cause controversy or sow dissension. I pledged that I wouldn't write about politics or religion. I didn't believe that my opinion about such personal perspectives was anything appropriate of note. There have been moments when I regretted that pledge. When everything inside me called out for me to say something. I am going to break that pledge because I am so distressed about what we are experiencing. And if I offend any of you, I apologize. There is something I simply must say.

It is Friday night as I write and I just finished watching a favorite film, *The American President*. It is a favorite because it is both light-hearted and very serious. I suspect that it is hard to write so the script dances so movingly from one emotion to another. In my opinion, this movie does that, and does it well. It is partly about characters that I find very appealing, and it is partly educational about our system of government.

So, when I went channel surfing to find something interesting to watch, I discovered that the film was on one of the movie channels. Clicking on to it even though it had already started, I felt like I was greeting an old friend. I knew the story and the lines, so I could simply watch without worrying about what was going to happen next.

In the scene when the President (Michael Douglas) stepped into the press briefing room, I knew what he was going to say. What I didn't know was how it would impact me. I have always thought that it was a special piece of writing, it sums up what America and its citizens' relationship with its government was supposed to be. That speech is primarily about American values and the beliefs that America was built on. As I watched and listened the words pounded at me. They hurt so much that tears crept down my face. I was surprised at the depth of my sadness.

I have always thought that America was about hope, about moving forward, and about possibility. Recently, those words had not been descriptive of what I believe now. America now seems to be more about division, strife, and bitterness. Some of the difficulties are petty, but some are desperately serious, and I fear that they will resist resolution. It takes the combined effort of all of us to bring about change. We seem to have given up the respect for one another that used to live in the phrase "the loyal opposition." And in exchange, we have words and actions that are personally damaging and derogatory. My decision to write about how I felt sent me scrambling to find a Thesaurus. I needed words to convey the depth of my emotions. There are riots, demonstrations gone awry, loss of life, and everyday presence of atrocious lies that distort reality. We appear so hell-bent on destruction or besting those whose ideas depart from our own, that there is no room for careful consideration of options or common courtesy. Negotiation and compromise have become dirty words because they do not support suppression of those who want different outcomes. We are watching leaders display the traits that we try hard to teach our children to avoid.

Anger, hostility, and violence emerge every day in our news and social media. For many, it elicits fear and apprehension which easily transmutes to anger and fear. One needs only to look at the political landscape to observe the vocabulary, upheaval, and an insurrection that is still hard to believe. We are surrounded by cheap shots, vacillating and contradictory opinions which destroy our ability to have faith in anyone's comments. We

are now living with daily news of assaults and bloodshed that results in widespread anxiety and depression. It used to be that most Americans held the ideal of our government as a thinking, principled, and capable body of elected people committed to the progress and interests of our citizens. This is evidently no longer the case. If we do not act with the wisdom of our better angels, I dread what might be ahead of us. I am truly scared for our democracy, and I can't believe I have even thought that. I pray that we can reduce the level of anguish and substitute a spirit of conciliation, but I am not sure enough of us want that.



“Whatever the Question”  
Visit Our Website for More Information  
[hranswers.com](http://hranswers.com)

*Judy Clark, Founder*

