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## Table of Contents

TO MEMBERS - "HAPPY HOLIDAYS" ..... 2

2009 REMINDERS ..... 2

WORKLOADS, BURNOUT, AND HOLIDAY STRESS ..... 4

QUIZ: HR NEWS ..... 4

Q&A ..... 7

WORD TO THE WISE™ ..... 7

ACCOMMODATING RUDOLPH'S RED NOSE

OUNCE OF PREVENTION ..... 8

WHERE'S THE PARTY? ..... 8

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT ..... 9

WASHINGTON READERS ..... 9

FOR YOUR CALENDAR ..... 10

ON MY SOAPBOX ..... 11



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## TO MEMBERS - "HAPPY HOLIDAYS"

We at HR Answers, Inc. wish each of you, our kind readers, a very special Holiday Season. As you and your organizations move into 2009, we hope the new year will be one of sustainability and new opportunities will follow, that your celebrations are joyous and special, and that you're able to spend time with friends, family. We're very proud and honored to have been given the privilege of working with you and serving so many of your HR needs in 2008.

To each of you we wish Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Celebrate Kwanzaa, Feliz Navidad, God Jul, Frochliche Weihnachten, Buon Natale, Vesele Vianoce, Vrolyk Kerstfeest, Houska Joulua, Joyeux, Happy New Year, Kala Christougena, and Boze Narodzenie!

## 2009 REMINDERS

We anticipate that 2009 will be an interesting and bumpy ride for HR and for employers in general. At HR Answers, one of our roles is to stay current and keep you posted on items that will affect the employment arena. We want to take a moment and remind you of a few items you'll want to take care of, besides the big ones (ADAAA, FMLA, and E-Verify) that we already identified.

### IRS Mileage

Gas prices in recent months have plunged, falling to a national average of \$1.82 per gallon. Based on this, the IRS has stated that the standard mileage reimbursement rate for businesses to use beginning in January will be \$.55 per mile, down from the \$.585 posted in July. Other standard mileage rates set to take effect January 1<sup>st</sup>:

- \$.24 per mile for medical or moving purposes, down from \$.27 since July.
- \$.14 for miles driven in service of charitable organizations, unchanged.

**REMINDER:** Organizations may not use the business standard mileage rate for a vehicle after using any depreciation method under the Modified Accelerated Cost Recovery System or after claiming a Section 179 deduction for that vehicle, according to the IRS.

The business standard mileage rate cannot be used for any vehicle used for hire or for more than four vehicles used simultaneously. The IRS has pointed out that taxpayers have the option of calculating the actual costs of using their vehicle rather than using the standard mileage rates.

### Minimum Wage Increases

Effective Jan 1, 2009, Oregon's minimum wage will increase to \$8.40 per hour, and Washington's will increase to \$8.55 per hour. With this annual change comes the need for employers to post current employment posters.

### New Labor Law Posters Needed

It's a new year and you need new posters! Besides the increases in minimum wage, there will be new information on the posters around ADAAA and FMLA. So be sure to get your new posters ordered and posted ASAP.

Just as a reminder, failing to display employment law posters can place your organization at risk for fines, but what you may not know is that fines can range between \$100 and \$7,000 per incident.

And, there is a difference between "Mandatory to Post" and "Mandatory to Communicate." "Mandatory to Post" means that every employer, employment agency, labor organization, or joint labor management committee must post notices in an accessible format for applicants, employees, and members, describing the applicable posting provisions. The law requires you to display your posters at a location that all employees routinely visit, such as the lunch room, break room, or jobsite. Separate floors and multiple locations require additional posters. Also, please notice that you must post them where applicants can see them, so don't hide them away in a place never visited by applicants.

“Mandatory to Communicate” means that the employer has an obligation to communicate to their employees the organization’s policies regarding the Right to Know regulations that cover OSHA and labor law codes and regulations. Examples of this would include the employer’s responsibility to take “all reasonable steps to prevent harassment from occurring” and the OSHA standard on how to handle chemicals.

The best move is to have all the mandatory state, federal, and OSHA requirements together and in an all-in-one poster. There are several organizations out there that can help you, but we suggest that you visit our partner, Poster Compliance Center. You’ll benefit from their comprehensive offerings, great customer service, and – if you let them know HR Answers sent you – special pricing! Plus, they provide a guarantee and they back it with money - that’s something that no other provider does! The Poster Compliance Center will send you new posters whenever there is a change, if you subscribe to their service. Click on the following link from our website to receive a sizeable discount: <http://www.postercompliance.com/serviceplus/hranswers/>.

Make sure your 2009 starts off on the right foot – get in compliance now and let us know if you need assistance being in compliance in other areas, too. We are happy to help!

### **New E-Verify Final Rule for Federal Contractors and Subcontractors**

On November 14, 2008, a final rule was announced to enforce President Bush’s Executive Order requiring most federal contractors and subcontractors to use E-Verify to confirm employment eligibility for all new hires and all existing employees who directly perform work under the federal contract. The effective date of the final rule is January 15, 2009.

Under current law, employers must complete an Employment Eligibility Verification Form (Form I-9) for each newly-hired employee to verify the employee’s identity and employment eligibility. Under the final rule, federal contractors must also enter the employee’s identity and eligibility information into the E-Verify system. E-Verify procedures require employers to record the verification number and the result obtained from an E-Verify query on the I-9, or print a copy of the transaction record and retain it with the I-9.

Although the final rule includes an exception for contracts that are for commercially available off-the-shelf items, the E-Verify requirement will be included in all federal contracts awarded after January 15, 2009, that call for a time of performance that exceeds 120 days and that have a value greater than \$100,000. Also exempted are subcontracts of less than \$3,000. Additionally, federal agencies will review existing federal contracts with a time for performance extending past July 15, 2009, and will negotiate amended contracts to include the E-Verify requirement.

If an employer is not enrolled as a federal contractor in E-Verify at the time a covered contract is awarded:

- The contractor must enroll in E-Verify as a federal contractor within 30 calendar days of the date the contract is awarded.
- Within 90 calendar days of enrollment, the contractor must begin using E-Verify to initiate verification of employment eligibility of *ALL* new hires who are working in the United States within three business days after the date of hire. This obligation applies to all new hires irrespective of whether they perform work under the federal contract.
- For existing employees assigned to the federal contract, the contractor also must initiate verification within 90 calendar days after the date of its enrollment in E-Verify, or within 30 calendar days of an employee’s assignment to the contract, whichever date is later.

If an employer is already enrolled as a federal contractor in E-Verify at the time a covered contract is awarded:

- If the contractor has been enrolled for more than 90 calendar days, the contractor must initiate verification of *ALL* new hires working in the United States (again regardless of whether they will be assigned to the contract) within three business days of the date of hire.
- If the contractor has been enrolled for fewer than 90 calendar days, the contractor has 90 calendar days after enrolling to begin initiating verification of all new hires within three business days of the hire date.
- For existing employees assigned to the contract whose employment eligibility has not previously been verified by the contractor through E-Verify, the contractor must initiate verification within 90 calendar days of the date of the contract award or within 30 days after assignment to the contract, whichever is later.

A federal contractor may elect to verify all existing employees hired after November 6, 1986, rather than just those employees assigned to the contract if verification is initiated within 180 calendar days of enrollment in the E-Verify program.

*Special appreciation to Barran Liebman for permission to reproduce the main content of this article.*

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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](mailto:djeffries@hranswers.com).



## WORKLOADS, BURNOUT, AND HOLIDAY STRESS

Smaller staffs and bigger workloads could be increasing stress levels in the workplace. In a nationwide survey of more than 7,600 workers, CareerBuilder.com reports that 78% of the respondents felt burned out. Forty-six percent of respondents said their workloads had increased over the past six months, while 45% described their workloads as “heavy” or “too heavy.” Nearly a quarter said they were dissatisfied with their current work/life balance.

Rosemary Haefner, vice president of human resources at CareerBuilder.com, says, “Sixty-one percent of workers said taking advantage of flexible work arrangements has made them more productive and 21% said it actually improved their career progress.”

The three most popular work/life programs that workers took advantage of were alternative schedules (72%), compressed workweeks (24%), and telecommuting (15%).

The holiday can be a time for joy and family, and so much more, but for many it can also be a time of much stress. Here are some practical and effective tips for managing stress during the holidays.

- ◆ **Prioritize Your Time.** Make two lists of everything you want to accomplish, from chores to leisure time. Put the less pleasant activities that you must do on one list and the more enjoyable activities on the other. Then combine the two lists, interchanging “must do’s” with “want to do’s.” This way, you can be productive and still have a good time.
- ◆ **Avoid Procrastinating.** Some tasks seem overwhelming, but putting them off until the last minute will cause more stress. Try breaking big projects into little tasks, and they will feel more manageable. You’ll tend to accomplish more if you feel as though you’re being productive.
- ◆ **Ask For Help.** There’s nothing wrong with asking for help for those activities that seem unmanageable. Or try to work with others to accomplish tasks. Helping one another can cut down on the amount of work and be more fun.
- ◆ **Take Advantage of “Down Time.”** Plan your shopping trips during times when the stores are least crowded. If you stop by the mall in the early evening during the week, you will probably get more accomplished than by going on a Saturday afternoon.
- ◆ **Laugh Away Tension.** A good laugh gives your body, heart, lungs, and stomach a healthy workout. It also lowers blood pressure, heart rate, and muscle tension. It can relieve stress just as effectively as taking a nap. Try to look for the humor in stressful situations, tell a joke, and find reasons to laugh. You’ll feel better!
- ◆ **Set Limits.** Be realistic about what you can do and schedule time for breaks. It’s important to make time for yourself. Don’t feel obligated to accept every invitation. Spend time with people whose company you enjoy. Make sure your expectations for the holiday season are realistic and practical.
- ◆ **Feeling Alone.** If you are away from family or experiencing a loss, the holidays can be extremely difficult. The key is to plan ahead. Decide how you want to spend your time. Perhaps have a holiday dinner and invite others? Go out of town? Go to a funny movie? Don’t get caught off guard by your emotions.

## QUIZ: HR NEWS

### 1. Which of the following is Congress expected to act on in early 2009?

- A. A proposal to replace secret ballot union elections with a card-check system.
- B. A proposal to reinstitute the military draft.
- C. A proposal to eliminate the Electoral College.

### 2. What employee activity will be reimbursable on a tax-free basis starting on Jan. 1, 2009?

- A. Bribes paid to officials in foreign countries.
- B. Losses stemming from participation in office basketball pools.
- C. Some expenses of employees who commute to work by bicycle.

### 3. Which of the following showed the highest percentage increase during 2008?

- A. Bonuses and pension contributions for entry-level workers.
- B. Bonuses and pension contributions for top U.S. executives.
- C. The Dow Jones Industrial Average.

### 4. What can college students expect when they try to land a holiday season job?

- A. Far fewer such jobs are available in 2008 compared with 2007.
- B. Many more such jobs are available in 2008.
- C. The biggest source of such jobs is Wall Street firms.

**5. Which of the following do U.S. hiring managers say they prefer?**

- A Working with poorly performing people on their payroll.
- B Staying up all night before a budget presentation.
- C Donating an organ while they are still alive.

**6. What feature has been adopted by sponsors of about half of U.S. defined contribution retirement plans?**

- A Bankruptcy counseling services.
- B Automatic enrollment of new employees.
- C A free toaster upon sign-up.

**7. How many U.S. employers who DO NOT have automatic enrollment for retirement plans achieve 90 percent participation in these plans?**

- A 7 percent.
- B 97 percent.
- C Automatic enrollment is illegal.

**8. Why is the U.S. Supreme Court scrutinizing payroll deductions in Idaho?**

- A Free speech of union members might be infringed by a state law on deductions for political activities.
- B Employees are being required to contribute to a fund to bail out large financial institutions.
- C Pay is being diverted to a potato famine relief fund.

**9. How are Americans changing their retirement savings habits in response to stock market woes?**

- A They are delaying retirement.
- B They are decreasing their contributions to their accounts.
- C Both of the above.

**10. How many U.S. employers plan holiday parties at the end of 2008?**

- A 2.7%
- B 77%
- C None; they are prohibited under federal economic bailout legislation.

**11. Which of the following describes the type of health care system most U.S. employers prefer?**

- A A government-run, single-payer system that requires every employer to provide coverage.
- B Employer-based coverage without a government mandate but with a safety net for the uninsured.
- C A market-based system in which most surgery is performed in other countries to save money.

**12. When did Congress approve the Pregnancy Discrimination Act?**

- A 1978.
- B 1918.
- C There is no such law.

**13. How are U.S. employers changing pay plans for 2009 based on recent economic developments?**

- A Pay raises will decrease by an average of 1 percent.
- B Pay raises will increase by an average of 7 percent.
- C Most non-exempt workers will be cut back to the minimum wage.

**14. What did researchers discover in one in every 416 e-mail messages sent during the summer?**

- A Pictures of workers' new tattoos.
- B Attachments designed to infect the recipient's computer.
- C Claims that Barack Obama is a socialist.

**15. What is the 'medical home' concept?**

- A A mandate for on-site medical services at every U.S. employer.
- B The belief that all doctors should be required to make house calls.
- C A system in which a single medical practice coordinates a patient's care.

**16. Which group is most likely to pay close attention to their health care expenses?**

- A. Those without company-paid pension plans.
- B. Those in consumer-directed health plans.
- C. Those who are left-handed.

**17. What is the most frequently cited reason for not using social networking web sites to screen job applicants?**

- A. Questions about legality of the process.
- B. Possibility of pornography on these sites.
- C. Hate it when people have more online friends than you do.

**18. What do more than 70 percent of HR professionals in the Northeast say about their employees?**

- A. They are too distracted and overloaded at work.
- B. They don't have enough to do and sit around complaining about it.
- C. At least 10 percent bring guns to work.

**19. What has declined for seven consecutive years?**

- A. Health care premiums for single employees under the age of 50.
- B. Return on investments in the typical 401(k) account.
- C. The percentage of U.S. employers who offer health care coverage to their employees.

**20. How many U.S. employers say they expect to lay off employees in the next 12 months?**

- A. None.
- B. 26 percent.
- C. 96 percent.

**21. Who did the federal government ban from using cell phones and text messaging devices on the job?**

- A. Hedge fund managers.
- B. Professional athletes.
- C. Train operators.

**22. What action could lead to civil and/or criminal penalties against employers in some states?**

- A. Raising deductibles for employee-only and family health care coverage.
- B. Eliminating the company match on 401(k)-type retirement plans.
- C. Refusal to give employees time off to vote on Election Day.

**23. What did a new survey find is the number one challenge for employers?**

- A. Managing change.
- B. Replacing crumbling infrastructure.
- C. Understanding slang used by Generation X workers.

**24. What does new research suggest might be even costlier to employers than health care?**

- A. Company-paid life insurance.
- B. Absenteeism.
- C. Copying machines that always seem to fail right before the big board meeting.

**25. How many U.S. employers expect to pay below target for annual incentive plans, or make no payout at all?**

- A. None; it's illegal.
- B. All.
- C. 70%.

*(Answers to be found on page 9)*

## Q&A

**Q.** Winter and the possibility of inclement weather may be only weeks away. Is there anything we should be considering regarding pay?

**A.** Organizations forced to close due to inclement weather are often uncertain what they are required to do regarding employee pay. Exempt employees (those not eligible for overtime pay) must be paid for any days the organization is closed due to weather. Also, exempt employees can't be required to use their sick or vacation time to cover those days. The organization is not required to pay non-exempt, hourly employees for the time. The organization can allow those employees to use sick or vacation days to cover any lost time if they wish to do so. If non-exempt employees should find themselves stuck at work due to snow or other weather conditions, care must be taken about allowing them to extend their work time. The fact that they can't leave and others can't get to work does not change the requirement to pay them for any hours worked over 40 in a week. Those are the implications of the law. Remember, however, that when you treat different groups of employees differently, you can create a class or status issue. So thinking about the message you want employees to have can make a difference.

If you would like to see a sample of an inclement weather policy, just let us know and we will be happy to share one with you.

## WORD TO THE WISE™

### ACCOMMODATING RUDOLPH'S RED NOSE

Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer was able to utilize his unique physical characteristic to achieve a highly acclaimed position at the head of Santa's sleigh. But if you review the story, you will see that he was first a potential victim of discrimination. That risk to Santa's organization could have been avoided if only there had been earlier consideration of the essential functions of the job, rather than Rudolph's condition.

As the story goes, the realization of the value of Rudolph's red nose took some time, but eventually, that value was recognized and put into effect. And Santa finally practiced proper human resources by not focusing on the cause of the condition or even the condition itself, but by dealing with the limitations of the condition. What a good lesson as we face a New Year with a newly revised Americans with Disabilities Act. As the scope of the ADA expands, it will be even more important for managers and supervisors to effectively look past the condition or its cause and focus on the job related impact—much like Santa eventually did with Rudolph.

Understand that Santa could have speculated that Rudolph's red nose was due to a hereditary condition. Or Santa could have speculated, or even tested Rudolph for, a potential substance abuse condition of which the red nose was a symptom. Then Santa could have reached the decision to disqualify Rudolph from being part of Santa's team. Eventually, it was Santa seeing the value of Rudolph's red nose relative to the essential functions of the reindeer's job description that led to a happy conclusion.

How does this story tie into your workplace for the beginning of the New Year? With the revised ADA expanding the definition of disability, the likelihood is that more employees will be claiming disabilities. If it is determined that the condition is a disability, the organization will need to go through the interactive process required for considering reasonable accommodation. That process hinges on the employee's ability to perform the essential functions of the job with or without accommodation. If you recall the story, Rudolph even tried to cover up his red nose, but the cover popped off.

Should the expanded disability definition lead to more requests for accommodation, it will become increasingly important that managers and supervisors carefully evaluate the essential functions for the jobs within their department. This will require a conclusion that the essential functions are actually necessary for the performance of the job. When that is done, the organization will be in a much better position to respond to employees asserting potential disabilities.

Once the essential functions are validated, the organization can legitimately evaluate the limitations of an employee's condition on that employee's ability to perform the essential job functions. The key is to focus on the limitations, not the actual condition or cause of the condition itself. Like Santa did with Rudolph, evaluate the limitations in regard to specific essential functions. Maybe, like Santa found with Rudolph, you will not only find that the limitations don't prevent performance of the essential functions, but they might even bring an added value to the role.

## OUNCE OF PREVENTION

**Affirmative Action Plan:** Do you have one? Do you know if you should? If you do have one, is it complete? Does it have the required compensation analysis that is now necessary? An affirmative action plan, or AAP, is a very detailed document that establishes goals for the hiring and promoting of minorities and women. It is required by law for certain employers who do business with the federal government, or who subcontract to an organization doing business with the feds. If AAP's apply to you, you should be very familiar with them. Take a look at the questions below to test your knowledge of this important topic.

**YES**      **NO**

- Do you know that your organization is required to develop an Affirmative Action Plan if it has both 50 employees and serves as either a prime contractor or subcontractor for \$50,000 or more in federal contract revenue over twelve months? Or is a financial institution with 50 employees and depository of federal funds?
- Do you know that an organization with government contracts may be audited by the federal government to ensure it a) has a comprehensive Affirmative Action Plan, **and** b) is fulfilling other requirements of a government contractor?
- Do you know that an organization can be barred from bidding on federal contracts if it is found to be out of compliance?
- Do you know that, in a recent year, 36% of federal contract employers audited by the government were found to be out of compliance? Did you also know that the average penalty assessed was \$138,000?
- Do you know that federal contractors are required to maintain a log of applicants by race and gender, and be prepared to defend their definition of an applicant?
- Do you know that affirmative action employers must maintain records on applicants, hires, promotions, transfers, and terminations by race, gender, and job groups?
- Do you know that affirmative action employers must have a plan for addressing any area of over- and under-utilization?
- Do you know that there was a recent definition of an "internet applicant?" And are you in compliance with those requirements?

**A "no" to any of the above questions above may represent a potential problem.**

Based on your answers, are you facing some challenges? If yes, you're not alone. The good news is there *are* solutions to these and other affirmative action or equal employment opportunity issues. We specialize in making these kinds of compliance problems much easier to address. We have many years of practical experience in the "real world" solving real affirmative action or equal employment opportunity challenges. We just may have the ounce of prevention you need!

## WHERE'S THE PARTY?

The pitiful state of the economy is forcing some corporate leaders to say "Bah Humbug" to holiday celebrations. According to a survey by New York-based Battalia Winston Amrop, only 81% of businesses will be hosting some type of bash, a 20-year low (surpassing the 83% mark post 9/11 and 82% during the 1991 recession).

Holiday parties are often an economic indicator for businesses. This year's survey shows the economy is having a significant impact. There have been so many lay-offs and many feel that it is not appropriate to have a holiday party at a time when their colleagues just lost their jobs and are looking for new ones.

As you can imagine, the financial services and manufacturing sectors, which experienced the greatest decline, are the hardest hit. They are not the only ones, though. The economy has put a damper on overall merriment, with 37% of respondents revealing that their party has been either canceled or will be low key compared to years past. Cost-cutting measures are also in place, with only 71% of those surveyed offering alcoholic drinks this year—down from a survey high of 90% in 2000.

Despite fewer festivities and the lack of end-of-the-year bonuses, many organizations are encouraging and still continuing their support of the less fortunate over the holiday season. The survey responses indicated that 74% of organizations plan to participate in charity efforts ranging from donating money to volunteering and contributing food, clothing, and gifts to families and individuals in need. HR Answers is pleased to see these numbers from organizations as a piece of their Corporate Citizenship, and encourages you all to reach out into your communities now and as an on-going activity of social responsibility. (We did 11 food boxes at Thanksgiving, and are adopting several families for Christmas, so we are trying to do our part to make the season a bit brighter.)

## THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

“When obstacles arise, you change your direction to reach your goal; you do not change your decision to get there.”

- Zig Ziglar

“We can’t do everything for everyone everywhere, but we can do something for someone somewhere.”

- Richard L. Evans

“Even smiling at someone, I feel as if I’m doing something to make the world a better place.”

- Danny Glover

“Never let the difficulty of a task stand as an adequate reason for not acting; force yourself to identify precisely what is to be gained in the long run by delay. In most cases you’ll find you can’t.”

- Edwin C. Bliss

“The only certain thing about the future is that it will surprise even those who have seen furthest into it.”

- E. J. Hobsbawn

## WASHINGTON READERS

### Washington Supreme Court:

#### Employees Who Leave Work as Part of Voluntary Reduction in Force Are Not Entitled to State Unemployment Benefits

In October 2008, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that employees let go as part of a voluntary reduction in force (RIF) are not entitled to unemployment benefits.

As part of a plan to reduce costs, Verizon Northwest Inc. offered a group of management employees the opportunity to participate in a RIF. In exchange for their resignations, Verizon provided departing managers one year of continued health benefits, immediate vesting of stock options and, in some cases, enhanced pensions.

Under Washington law, employees who leave work voluntarily and without good cause are not entitled to unemployment benefits. However, an exception provides that employees are entitled to unemployment benefits if the employer announces a RIF, the employees volunteer to be included in the RIF, and the employer takes the “final action” in the RIF process.

The former managers claimed that the exception applied to them and that they were entitled to unemployment benefits, arguing that Verizon took “final action” when it selected the managers to whom it would offer the voluntary RIF. The court disagreed, finding that Verizon did not have the authority to reject managers who opted to participate in the RIF. Thus, the managers had a choice whether or not to leave Verizon and, consequently, were not entitled to unemployment benefits.

Of course, the Washington Supreme Court’s decision applies in Washington only. Although Oregon law does have a provision denying unemployment benefits to employees who voluntarily leave work without good cause, Oregon courts have not weighed in on the issue presented in the Verizon case. However, Oregon law makes it clear that employees are eligible for unemployment benefits if they are subject to a collective bargaining agreement, they elect to be laid off as part of an employer-instituted RIF, and the employees are placed on a referral list as part of the collective bargaining agreement.

*Special appreciation to Barran Liebman for permission to use and share this alert with our readers.*

## ANSWERS TO HR NEWS

1. A   2. C   3. B   4. A   5. A   6. B   7. A   8. A   9. C   10. B   11. B   12. A   13. A  
14. B   15. C   16. B   17. A   18. A   19. C   20. B   21. C   22. C   23. A   24. B   25. C

## FOR YOUR CALENDAR

Open up your Daytimers, computer calendars, Palm Pilots, and of course those Blackberries. 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, send an e-mail to Melissa Sambuceto at [MSambuceto@hranswers.com](mailto:MSambuceto@hranswers.com), or simply register online at [www.hranswers.com](http://www.hranswers.com) and click on the "Workshop Registration" tab at the top of the homepage.

### DECEMBER

Identity Theft Prevention and Awareness, National Tie, Safe Toys and Gifts, and Universal Human Rights Month.

- Dec. 11**      **HRA Breakfast Briefing**  
**ADA Amendments Act for Supervisors**  
**HRA Tualatin Office**  
**7:30am – 9:30am**
- Dec. 17      Clean Air Day
- Dec. 21      Winter Solstice
- Dec. 22      Hanukkah Begins
- Dec. 25-26**    **Christmas: HRA Offices Will Be Closed**
- Dec. 26      Kwanzaa Begins

### JANUARY

- Jan. 1-2**      **New Years: HRA Offices Will Be Closed**
- Jan. 7**      **HRA Workshop**  
**Facing the Revised FMLA Regulations**  
**HRA Tualatin Office**  
**8:00am-11:00am**
- Jan. 22**      **HRA Workshop**  
**HR Dashboards**  
**HRA Tualatin Office**  
**8am – 11am**

## ON MY SOAPBOX

It's December! How did it get to be December already? I am sure that it can't be past Spring; Summer at the latest! I truly do not know where the time goes!

When I think about 2008, it will always stand out as an unusual year. It was filled with the campaigns and elections that kept many of us glued to the news channels (good for them, exhausting for us); the economic challenges that rival the Himalayas in magnitude; the strife around the world including the most recent atrocities in India; and a host of what *would* have been big stories, absent the others just mentioned. It is overwhelming. It is numbing. It results in mass capitulation as we say, "Enough! I just can't handle or take in any more!"

And then we couple all of that with the sense that we never get things accomplished, our to-do list only grows longer, and our sense of having too much on our plates is inescapable. We ask ourselves, "Am I too busy?" "Am I trying to do too much?" "Is anything I do sufficient?" And the problem is not that we ask these questions, it is that there are no positive or affirming answers.

As I spend time with people and listen to them talk, I am hearing more about the pressure that people are feeling. They cite examples of e-mail requests that are followed instantly with a phone call, "Did you get my e-mail? When can I get an answer?" People petulantly say, "Didn't you get my message? It's been two hours since I texted you."

The pace at which we operate and expectations we have placed on ourselves with the help of others around us have been significantly raised. We are all trying to jump higher (and faster).

We are living in a time when everyone seems to want things more and faster. We aren't interested in waiting for receipt of something we have ordered. We don't want to wait for an answer in the mail in two to three days. We want things now! Examples of this abound. We have Jiffy Lubes and their counterparts on every third corner promising to get us in and out in 10 minutes. We can upload, to Walgreens, pictures we have just taken, and anyone we give the code to can download the finished, polished picture anywhere in the U.S. in one hour. Advertising promises us instant gratification. We appear to be convinced that faster is better; more is better; and everything we ask for will occur and it had better be perfect.

Do you ever think (as I do) what would happen if for one day, all the electronic mechanisms that move our orders, calls, and messages were to disappear? Do you ever long for a day of sitting perfectly still and not having to move to do anything? Do you ever wonder if the quality of our lives would be compromised by a return to the Pony Express for a month? (And how did they ever call that "Express?")

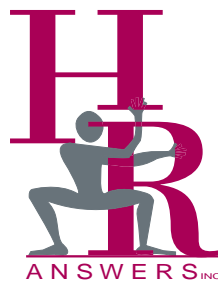
Somewhere in this search for ever-increasing speed and the increasing number of events, (many of them major) that unfold each day, there needs to be a realization of the toll this is taking. The pressure and expectation load being carried by many is crushing. We run the real risk of losing sight of what is important. People are losing the valued concept of "quality time," and substituting "real time" in its place. We are not taking time to be with one another, to talk, to learn, to enjoy. We are far too busy trying to absorb and react to our environment and the impacts of each day and its trials and demands.

As we approach the time of holidays, year-end wrap-up, and thinking about the horizon of next year, we need to intentionally commit time for slow down, for reflecting and feeling, for being who we want to be in our best moments, not our most hurried ones. We need to say, "No more, not now, I need time to breathe and enjoy my family, my life, some moments away from the fray." Our health and sanity depends on our ability to suspend the race, even if only for a short while, regain our sense of priority, sit quietly, and be thankful for all the blessings we have.

I'll stop "preaching" now, and end with one sentence and two questions. I know I wrote this as a tutorial for me, and I am going to try to remember and live it, at least for a few weeks until I forget (again). Am I alone? Was it meaningful or did it resonate with any of you?

Happy Holidays!

- Judy Clark, President



"Whatever the Question"

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