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## HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!

We at HR Answers want to wish you all a very Happy New Year and a prosperous 2008. We hope your celebrations were fun and exciting, as well as full of hope and goodwill.

We made a couple of New Year Resolutions - how about you? We wish you much success in meeting and accomplishing yours, as we do our own! We are expecting a very exciting year with lots of new "things" to share with all of you....so keep reading, and we'll keep you posted on how we are doing.

## UPDATING HANDBOOKS

As you are probably aware, new laws have been enacted that we must all incorporate into our workplaces. Within our individual states, there have been even more.

Incorporating the new employment laws, we've given our Generic Employee Handbook a facelift. The content had been designed with the laws of the State of Oregon in mind, and the product has a solid foundation for you to begin working with. The Generic Employee Handbook can be purchased for \$105 through our website at [www.hranswers.com](http://www.hranswers.com), under the Products section. We will be happy to email you the updated version.

We want to call your attention to two last minute changes that have occurred. First, President Bush just vetoed the bill passed by Congress, expanding FMLA to include leave to care for military service personnel injured while in the service, and for families of loved ones called to duty. The Congress is expected to address the President's concerns when they return to work this month, so this may yet be added to the Family and Medical Leave Act.

Secondly, a federal judge has issued a temporary stay on implementation of the Oregon Domestic Partners law that was to go into effect on January 1<sup>st</sup>. A hearing on the stay is scheduled for February, so we may have greater clarity on that law once the hearing is completed.

As always, our Generic Employee Handbook has several options for a variety of provisions. Each organization should feel free to alter or modify the language to better match its own philosophy, benefit offerings, practices, etc. If you are concerned that a section you wish to change has some legal implications, please just give us a call to discuss your ideas and desired language.

## GAMBLING POOLS IN YOUR WORKPLACE

It's a sure bet that the next opportunity to put down some dough at work is just around the corner ...we have the Super Bowl, the NCAA tournament, the Kentucky Derby, and even the Oscars coming up.

According to Vault Inc.'s Office Betting Pool Survey, 67% of workers acknowledge that they participate in pools. People are playing, even though more than half (52.5%) know that office pools may be illegal in some states. The illegality of workplace pools doesn't keep them from participating, 63% said.

The popular office betting pools include:

- Super Bowl - 65%
- Regular NFL season - 61%
- March Madness - 57%

- Guessing the date of birth and other characteristics of a co-worker's new baby - 19%
- Academy Awards - 13%
- Reality show contests such as "Survivor," "American Idol," and "The Apprentice" - 12%
- Soccer, hockey, horse racing, NBA games, the World Series, Tour de France, NASCAR, tennis, and golf also made it onto the list.

Some workers show true creativity in the pools they form. Among the most unusual the survey heard about were: betting when an underperforming worker will be fired, the first snowfall, how long an engagement or marriage will last, the results of foreign elections, and celebrity death watches (guessing which celebrity is most likely to die).

Workers rarely get in trouble with the boss for participating in an office pool. Nearly half said they don't know if it's prohibited at work, and 36.5% of workers claim that their workplace doesn't have a policy banning office pools. But it does happen.

In February 2007, SHRM conducted a weekly online survey of 451 HR professionals, and found that most places don't have policies against gambling. The survey revealed 79% don't have a formal written policy or an unwritten, but understood, policy against workplace gambling.

Among the 21% with some type of policy banning workplace gambling:

- 86.6% prohibit it on premise
- 55% discipline offenders
- 34% offer a clear definition of what the organization considers gambling
- 25% prohibit monetary exchanges.
- nearly 24% go as far as defining illegal gambling
- 3% prohibit gambling when off duty

Some say office pools "provide banter and camaraderie in an otherwise boring day." Others (7%) state that pools are a way to prove how good they are at picking winners. For many, this is a fun-natured activity. But many suggest that work is not the place to conduct such activities, and are concerned about the amount of time and money being spent and whether there are any additional personal challenges with gambling.

Nearly three-fourths of those surveyed claim that they spend only five to 10 minutes of their workday researching and making their picks after additional research at home, with 18% spending 30 minutes doing so. Smaller percentages spend anywhere from an hour (6%) to most of the day (1%). Seventeen percent are lured by the possibility of raking in extra cash for a typical minimum investment of \$5 or \$10.

Employers should expect productivity to dip during the days leading up to the upcoming Super Bowl XLII as employees huddle over plans for parties, research big-screen TV purchases, participate in office betting pools, and prognosticate the game's outcome.

Last year it was estimated that lost wages could total as much as \$810 million in unproductive work time during the week leading up to the face-off. For Chicago alone, it meant approximately \$73 million in game-related lost productivity that week. In Indianapolis, that figure reached over \$12 million.

These calculations were based on the assumption that 90 million Americans would watch Super Bowl XLI, and that 57.1 million of them, or 63.4%, are employed (a percentage that is based on the current national employment-to-population ration).

And, of course, all that downtime carries a price tag that doesn't even include the lost productivity on the following Monday, when workers critique the commercials, replay the game, and in some cases even call in "sick."

There are always distractions in the workplace. It is up to the organization whether it wants to block access to sports-related web sites and prohibit betting pools; however, some employees feel that their organization should take advantage of these activities.

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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).

Some ideas gathered are:

- A company-sponsored betting pool that costs nothing to enter, and that awards a gift certificate to an area restaurant, is one option. *Note: The IRS reminds us that anyone who wins \$.50 or more in an office pool is required to report those winnings on their tax return, line 21 of Form 1040. If they win a significant amount, it may cause them to owe taxes, the IRS advises.*
- An organization could rent a big-screen TV and invite workers to watch the game and enjoy free food and beverages. Employers in cities that have teams going to the Super Bowl may want to consider holding a party the Friday before the game, complete with cakes decorated in team colors.
- Have a Super Bowl potluck dinner.
- Offer a “dress down day” in which employees could wear the team colors or jerseys of one of the two teams playing. Game food, such as chips and hot dogs, could be served at lunch, and stadium food, such as popcorn, could be available to employees all day.
- Some organizations are even granting employees an extra day off the Monday following the Super Bowl this year.

Overall, the main idea is to not squelch employees’ excitement; instead, to embrace that excitement and use it to build morale and worker loyalty.

**Putting fun aside, you may have some serious concerns about gambling by some individuals in your workplace. Next month we will explore the warning signs that could alert an employer to an employee’s gambling problem.**

## WHERE YOUR BANK MAKES A DIFFERENCE

*New Ruling Cites Requirement that Employees Cash Paychecks Without Cost*

Employers with California employees and who pay those employees with out-of-state checks may unwittingly expose themselves to significant penalties under an obscure California Labor Code statute.

California Labor Code section 212 requires employers to ensure paychecks may be cashed without delay and without a fee or a discount. A large national corporation felt the authority of this requirement when a California district court granted summary judgment on liability to a plaintiff class of over 100 of the corporation’s California employees who experienced difficulties when cashing paychecks. The corporation paid its employees with out-of-state checks that California employees were able to cash at California banks only for a fee. The court has not addressed damages. However, it noted that the Labor Code Private Attorneys General Act of 2004 provides for a civil penalty of \$100 per aggrieved employee per pay period for the initial violation and \$200 per pay period for each subsequent violation.

California Labor Code section 212 requires that if wages are paid by check, the check...

- must be negotiable and payable in cash, on demand,
- must be payable without discount (that is, the employee must be able to cash it immediately without having to pay a check-cashing fee), and
- must be payable at some established place of business in the state, and the name and address of that business must appear on the check.

The per-employee per-pay-period exposures mean potential penalties for failing to comply could add up quickly.

These requirements do not apply where the employee has agreed to direct deposit. Direct deposit agreements must be voluntary.

Employers with California employees should:

- Assess whether there may have been a violation of Labor Code section 212 in the past and determine potential liability;
- Ensure California employees have a means of cashing paychecks without incurring a fee by providing in-house check-cashing services or with a third-party located in California where checks can be cashed, or pay the bank’s fee on behalf of employees; and
- Consult counsel regarding other options for compliance and defense of potential claims.

Note that the statute does not necessarily require that paychecks be drawn on a California bank. It does require that California employees be able to cash their paychecks without delay or a hold and without paying a fee at some place of business in the state.

## THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

“Nothing can add more power to your life than concentrating all your energies on a limited set of targets.”

- *Nido Qubein*

“The flow of blessings in our lives is directly related to our passing blessings along to someone else.”

- *Thomas Kinkade*

“What small things can I do today to bring a blessing to someone?”

- *Thomas Kinkade*

“The amount of joy in my heart is directly related to the thankfulness in my attitude.”

- *Thomas Kinkade*

“Each time you stand up for an idea, you send forth a tiny ripple of hope.”

- *Unknown*

“A man with outward courage dares to die. A man with inward courage dares to live.”

- *Lao Tzu*

“Work for the joy of it, not just for the money. Always love for the sake of it, not fearing the pain. Give your best! Do your best! Be your best! And if there is ever a day or time when you cannot figure out what to do, throw your hands in the air and dance! God’s angels are your partners.”

- *Iyanla Vanzant*

## LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL UPDATES

### **Washington Supreme Court Holds Technicians Must be Paid for Commuting in Company Vehicles**

A Washington Supreme Court ruling increases the risk that a non-exempt employee’s commuting time will be deemed compensable when the employee drives a company vehicle between home and the job site. In *Stevens v. Brink’s Home Security, Inc.*, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that a class of plaintiff installation and service technicians must be paid for the time they spent driving a company vehicle between their homes and their first and last job sites of the work days. This fact-specific ruling has important implications for employers in the State of Washington who allow or require their non-exempt employees to drive company vehicles to and from their worksites. It also reminds employers of increased scrutiny by courts and government agencies as to when the compensable work day begins and ends. ([For the full story click here.](#))

### **Halting “Legal Arizona Workers Act” Fails**

The Legal Arizona Workers Act, which requires employers to use the federal employment eligibility verification system, E-Verify, and imposes sanctions on employers that hire unauthorized workers, went into effect, as scheduled, on January 1, 2008. ([For the full story click here.](#))

### **Coordination of Retiree Health Plans with Medicare**

In a move welcomed by many employers and labor unions, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the federal agency responsible for administering the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), issued a final rule, effective December 26, 2007, that exempts from ADEA protection the common employer practice of coordinating retiree health benefits with eligibility for Medicare. Under the new rule, employers are free to reduce or eliminate retiree health benefits when retirees become eligible for Medicare (or a comparable state-sponsored health benefit), without any ADEA liability.

*Unintended Consequence of the ADEA.* The ADEA prohibits discrimination against employees age 40 or older in hiring and firing, in compensation, and in the terms, conditions, and privileges of employment. Because Medicare eligibility is based on age, some have argued to the EEOC and the courts (sometimes successfully) that reducing or eliminating retiree health benefits based on Medicare eligibility results in age discrimination under the ADEA. A wide range of stakeholders, including labor unions and public and private employers, expressed concern to the EEOC that such ADEA considerations creates an additional incentive for employers to reduce or eliminate retiree health benefits. As a result of this concern, the EEOC concluded the public interest is best served by exempting the employer practice of coordinating retiree health benefits with Medicare from ADEA protection.

*Narrow Exemption.* The retiree health plan exemption from the ADEA is very narrow. In an Appendix to the new rule, the EEOC specifically states that the exemption does not mean that the ADEA no longer applies to retirees or to current employees age 65 or older. The exemption applies only to coordinating retiree health benefits (including spousal and dependent coverage) with Medicare or a comparable state health benefit program. ([For the full story click here](#)).

## **Employees Have No Right to Use Employer E-Mail for Union Organizing Purposes**

In a case that has been pending for seven years, the National Labor Relations Board has resolved the issue whether an employer could legally prohibit employees from using company e-mail systems for personal and other non-job-related reasons, including union solicitations. Recognizing the primacy of employer property rights in this context, a three-member Board majority sustained an employer e-mail policy limiting employee usage to business-related purposes and barring “non-job-related solicitations.” It rejected an argument by the agency’s General Counsel, who had issued a complaint against the *The Register-Guard* based on a union charge that employees “should have greater rights in regard to e-mail usage than in regard to the use of other company property,” because e-mail had become a principal means by which employees communicate at work. Instead, the Board concluded that e-mail had not so fundamentally “changed the pattern of industrial life at Respondent’s facility” as to require a limitation of employers’ property rights.

For years employers were in a quandary over their rights and obligations under federal labor law in dealing with employee e-mail usage at work. In the absence of a determinative Board decision, the NLRB’s General Counsel had indicated in “Advice Opinions” on whether to issue unfair labor practice complaints that an employer did not have unfettered discretion to prohibit all personal e-mail usage. The issue generated so much concern among employers and unions alike that, in an unusual move, the NLRB heard oral argument on the issue, after inviting the submission of “friend-of-the-court” briefs. The Board majority’s holding sends a clear signal that without a statutory basis for an asserted employee right to use employer e-mail systems for union organizational purposes, and in the absence of disparate treatment, no weighing of employer and employee (or union) interests is necessary or appropriate to reach a result. Employers prevail. ([For the full story click here](#)).

## OREGON AND WASHINGTON EMPLOYERS FACE DATA PRIVACY AND SECURITY OBLIGATIONS

Employers have an inherent need to obtain personally identifying information about employees and applicants for employment for many purposes, including identification and verification of employment status, background checks, benefits and leave administration, contact information, and simply for running their businesses. But how employers use and maintain such information is increasingly subject to legislation in many states. **We brought you this information initially in our August 2007 newsletter. This article takes the information you need to the next level.** These state enactments seek to provide individuals, including employees and job applicants, with greater privacy and security of their personal information and protection from identity theft. While the legislative developments in Oregon and Washington are the subject of this article, multi-state and multi-national employers and businesses should be aware of the rapid growth of data privacy and security laws that may affect their organizations.

### **Oregon’s SB 583**

In July 2007, Oregon’s Governor signed the Oregon Consumer Identity Theft Protection Act (S.B. 583), a comprehensive data security law that creates two significant obligations for Oregon businesses (and companies that do business in Oregon). First, businesses must develop, implement, and maintain reasonable safeguards to protect the security, confidentiality, and integrity of personal information. This likely will require taking steps such as performing a risk assessment, preparing written policies, and training employees. Second, businesses must notify state residents of data breaches involving their computerized personal information. The law took effect on October 1, 2007.

### *Businesses Must Have a Data Security Plan*

The more onerous aspect of the law requires businesses to take affirmative steps to secure personal information it maintains, which would include personal information of employees and job applicants. This means that employers in Oregon can now be held accountable for the misuse or lack of safeguards associated with the personal information of their employees or job applicants.

For purposes of the Act, “personal information” is defined as a consumer’s first name or first initial and last name in combination with his or her social security number, driver’s license or state identification card number, passport or other United States-issued identification number, or financial account information together with password or security code information. “Personal information” further includes any combination of the foregoing identifiers, even if the name is not used, if the information is sufficient to permit identity theft from the consumer whose information was compromised. The broad definition of personal information in the Act encompasses electronic and non-electronic information; this means paper files must be protected, as well.

Employers will be deemed compliant with the Act’s security maintenance requirements where they implement an “information security program” that contains administrative, technical *and* physical safeguards. ([For the full story click here](#).)

## Washington's SB 5827

In addition to its own data breach notification statute similar to the one described above, on April 18, 2007, Washington Governor Christine Gregoire signed S.B. 5827, amending Washington's Fair Credit Reporting Act to prohibit the use of consumer credit reports for employment purposes unless the information on that report is substantially related to the employee's job duties. *The law became effective July 22, 2007.* (For the full story [click here.](#))

We offer a very special appreciation to Jackson Lewis for the main content of this Legislative and Legal Update article. Many of these items can be found on their website located at <http://www.jacksonlewis.com/legalupdates/article>.

## CALIFORNIA: LOOKING BACK AT 2007 AND AHEAD TO 2008

For our California readers or clients who have employees in California, we thought the following items might be helpful and/or serve as a reminder to you.

### Employee Social Security Numbers

Greater protection against identity theft has been added to Section 226(a) of California's Labor Code. As of January 1, 2008, only the last four digits of the SSN or an employee identification number other than a SSN may be shown on the itemized statement every employer must, semi-monthly or at the time of each payment of wages, give each employee. The penalties for a violation can be substantial. The state Office of Privacy Protection suggests that employers, in lieu of using workers' SSNs, use employee ID numbers.

### Minimum Wage

Effective January 1, 2008, the state minimum wage increases to \$8.00 per hour. The minimum salary level for salaried employees exempt from overtime and other wage and hour rules ("exempt employees") must be "no less than two times the state minimum wage for full time employment." AB 60. Accordingly, the monthly minimum salary requirement for exempt status increases to \$2,773.33 for 2008.

### California Computer Professionals

Effective January 1, 2008, the computer professional exemption's hourly rate of pay requirement is reduced to \$36, or the annualized full-time salary equivalent of that rate. The State's Division of Labor Statistics and Research will adjust the pay rate for inflation on October 1 of each year to be effective January 1 of the following year.

### Mandatory Unpaid Leave for Military Spouses

On October 9, 2007, in California, legislation requiring employers with 25 or more employees to allow a qualified employee who is a spouse of a member of the Armed Forces, National Guard, or Reserves to take up to 10 days of unpaid leave during a "qualified leave period" when the employee's spouse is home on leave from "deployment during a period of military conflict." AB 392. The law defines "military conflict" as a period of war declared by Congress or a deployment authorized under specified sections of the federal Armed Forces Code.

### Employee Expense Reimbursement

On November 5, 2007, in *Gattuso v. Harte-Hanks Shoppers*, the California Supreme Court offered employers some leeway in how they can reimburse employees for necessary expenses.

Under Labor Code § 2802, employers must reimburse employees in full for expenses they necessarily incur in performing their duties. The Court had decided that employers may comply with that duty by paying employees additional wages or commissions—or a lump sum payment based on the employers' understanding of the job—instead of reimbursing employees for their actual expenses. (For the full story [click here.](#))

### Supervisors and Retaliatory Discharge

On December 4, 2007, the California Supreme Court heard arguments on the issue of whether an employer's supervisor may be held individually and personally liable for a retaliatory discharge under the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA). *Jones v. The Lodge at Torrey Pines Partnership*, No. S151022. The Court's decision on the issue could settle a conflict between the state's appellate courts.

## IT IS OKAY TO ASK FOR HELP

Do you resist asking for help until you're ready to scream? The majority of us would gladly assist a co-worker or friend with a request for help – if we only knew and if they only asked. Nora Klaver, in her new book "Mayday! Asking for Help in Times of Need" lists some of the reasons why people often delay a request for help:

- We may ask too late because we don't recognize early enough that we actually have a need to be filled.
- We may not see the whole picture, so the help we ask for satisfied only part of our need.



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- We may ask the wrong person or people to help us with our request.
- Our requests may be so unclear that others may not understand that we need help at all.
- Help may come, but because we weren't clear enough in our request, it's the wrong help.
- We may demand assistance rather than politely ask for it.
- We may resort to blackmail, bribery, or even coercion to get our needs met.
- We may inadvertently solicit pity instead of help.
- Our bodies may betray our fears and subtly send the message that we are too far gone to be helped.
- We may ask for help too often without concern for our friends, family, and co-workers. Compassion fatigue becomes a real possibility for them.
- We may simply frighten ourselves into never asking.

This is a sad list. Most of do not wish someone to be unsuccessful, whether it's on a project, working on a team, or standing in front of a group. We want people to succeed! The good news is that we can learn to ask for help, but we need not fall prey to our own worst enemy – ourselves and our negative self-talk and beliefs:

- Asking for help makes you look weak or needy. Many would tell us that asking for help is a sign of strength and shared leadership and responsibility.
- Asking for help indicates incompetence— in fact it shows others that you want to do the job right— to develop and learn.
- Asking for help can harm relationships. No way! It is a two-way street; give and take.
- Asking for help puts others in an awkward position. Maybe sometimes, but the reality is that if you tell people why you are asking and why you need them they are much more willing and able to assist. And it must always be possible for someone to say “no”... otherwise you can damage relationships. This is not a rejection of you; it's more a matter of timing or available time.
- Asking for help means the job might not get done right. There is no “one” way that something can be done. It is okay to explore other options and ideas. This gives someone else a chance to shine and an opportunity for you to learn and loosen the reins.
- Asking for help means you'll have to return the favor. This is not a time to be counting favors; help freely given comes with no strings attached. Of course, there has to be a very sincere thank-you when it is done.

Many employees feel they have to be independent and self-sufficient. These are admirable qualities that employers look for and can often lead to success; however, more can come from those who have a great support system and who work as a team with a great deal of collaboration.

To learn more about asking for help and the seven steps that make up The “Mayday!” Process we encourage you to read the book. Klaver offers encouragement and hope even to those who are most loath to ask for help. For more information, visit [www.maydaythebook.com](http://www.maydaythebook.com)

## ON THE BUBBLE?

If a leader's performance has caused major concerns and puts them “on the bubble,” what is the course of action? Does it make sense to consider changing a leader's behavior instead of transitioning the leader and recruiting a replacement? Retaining a coach to facilitate the leadership changes is certainly less expensive than the recruiting process. However, coaching doesn't always work, and the hidden costs of the leader's unchanged behavior can also escalate. Coach or replace? Which path is the better one to take?

There are four considerations to explore:

- 1. How widespread is the concern that has surfaced?** Highly visible leaders can easily broadcast both constructive and limiting behaviors. When these limiting behaviors need to be addressed, other peoples' perceptions can become an obstacle to making a successful behavioral change. If the perceptions of a leader's limiting behavior are both widespread and rooted in the minds of those with whom s/he works, then the path to change becomes more difficult or insurmountable.
- 2. Is the behavior that needs to change habitual or stress related?** Counterproductive leadership habits that have been successfully used by a leader in previous work experiences are more difficult to change. Barring a personal epiphany brought on by a crisis, most leaders don't give up these habits easily. However, limiting stress-related behavior can often be contained or extinguished with coaching. Oftentimes, stress produces emotionally charged responses that can, over time, be positively managed with less emotion.

3. **If judgment is the concern, is this a coachable situation?** Leadership judgment is a significant and intangible quality that is critical to a leader's success. Judgment calls can arise within moments and have impacts that can last for days or years. Not all judgments are perfect, and they add up. When judgment calls accumulate on the negative side, the situation is usually coachable. New leadership best addresses poor judgment.
4. **Is there a climate of support for the change that is required?** Making any kind of real change in behavior requires a sustainable climate of support. There is little room for impatient conversations, premature audits for change, or abandonment of commitment or support for a leader because the expected change has not happened immediately. It can take several months (sometimes longer for more complex areas of competency development) before any real change becomes evident, let alone permanently implanted into a leader's mind and behavior. Real change takes time.

So what are the alternatives? The first consideration most likely is to take corrective action if it is feasible. Would the organization and individual be best served through coaching to effect change? However, when a leader is on the bubble and one or more of these concerns surface in the process of considering what action to take, the most effective outcome may be to assist this individual in finding a new role inside or outside of the organization.

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## 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 Erika Wilson at [EWilson@hranswers.com](mailto:EWilson@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.

### JANUARY

Celebration Of Life, Hot Tea, and Reach Your Potential Month

- Jan. 20-26 Hunt For Happiness Week
- Jan. 21 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day
- Jan. 23 Compliment Day
- Jan. 23 HRA Breakfast Briefing (Tualatin)  
Positive Workplaces  
8:00am-10:00am**
- Jan. 25 Fun At Work Day

### FEBRUARY

American Heart, Chocolate Lover's, African American History, and International Friendship Month

- Feb. 2 Groundhog Day
- Feb. 6 Pay A Compliment Day
- Feb. 8 Laugh And Grow Rich Day
- Feb. 10-16 New Idea Week
- Feb. 12 Advantage Plan Luncheon (Tualatin)  
For Advantage Plan Clients (invite only)  
11:45am – 1:30pm**
- Feb. 14 Valentine's Day
- Feb. 18 President's Day
- Feb. 20 HRA Workshop (Tualatin)  
Improving Your Communication  
8:30am – 4:30pm**
- Feb. 26 HRA Workshop (Tualatin)  
No More Negativity - "Repeat Performance"  
8:00am – 11:00am**
- Feb. 29 Leap Day

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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 corporate counsel.



## ON MY SOAPBOX

I've been listening to all the discussion regarding the current national and regional economic situations and forecasts for the coming months. While I typically try to pay attention to those matters on an ongoing basis, it's especially important at this time of our business cycle when we're planning for our next fiscal year. It helps me determine where we should place our resources; what services we will emphasize or focus on, and what new resources we should be developing to assist all of you with upcoming HR issues.

In some years, these decisions seem clear, and in others, they're a bit challenging. This year, it's just plain murky. Some pundits are saying that we're heading for a recession, while others are saying that we're already in one. If they're correct in either case, it means there will be work reductions and layoffs, and we at HR Answers should make plans to strengthen our outplacement services and ensure that everyone knows about the broad support our CareerMakers division can provide when staff reductions are planned.

As you might imagine, up ticks in staff reductions do not usually coincide with hiring activities, and we are clearly seeing significant hiring going on in some of the business sectors we support. That would suggest a far different emphasis. Since our HR Extras division assists with recruiting, screening, and hiring, organizations need to know about our ability to help them with these activities.

We are also getting many, many requests for assistance with compensation planning, incentive plans, and benefit communication assistance from organizations who say that retention is their #1 concern. They want to make sure they have strong total rewards programs so that the good employees they have won't leave for greener pastures.

To further complicate the issue, we are getting increasing numbers of inquiries about our training programs. The workshops we hold on site at HR Answers are often so full we have to add second sessions, and we are often being asked to deliver many of the programs internally to organizations as well. They seem to have learned that the better their supervisors and managers are, the more highly satisfied the employees are, so they're paying significant attention to their need for internal training and development. Of all the requests we receive, these might possibly be the most satisfying for us, since the results truly have the power to transform the organization.

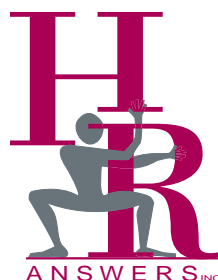
We are extremely appreciative of the faith our clients place in us by allowing us to assist with these different types of projects. But in the past by reading the "tea leaves" of the economy and tracking what our clients are requesting most often, we've been able to identify the services that they are most likely to need. This year, we simply can't tell, and that makes planning a huge challenge. It affects where we place our resources in training and hiring. It makes it difficult to allocate hours appropriately so that we reserve enough time to meet immediate client issues, yet plan out far enough to ensure an even revenue stream. We know that we're not alone, and that most organizations are experiencing some of the same difficulties as they try to forecast what the coming months will bring. At least, that's what they're telling us.

If you've been watching the stock market the last few months (and who hasn't heard about the significant swings almost daily), it feels a little like that. We no sooner get our plans made, and new information flows in that's completely contrary to what we thought we knew just a few days before.

So, to all of you out there who are struggling with the same uncertainty, who are trying to determine the best direction for future efforts, who are trying to set stretch, but attainable goals - we commiserate. I can't speak for what you will decide, but we have decided that we need to be ready to assist you with *whatever* is on your horizon. We want to increase the number and scope of our conversations with you to ensure that you are aware of the full range of assistance we have available to you. For us, it just doesn't look like a focused approach will be right for 2008. Organizations are simply facing too many entirely different business situations. So, please, holler when you have a "people concern." We can probably help, but even if we can't, we sure know some other great folks/firms who have expertise that may not necessarily reside with us.

We wish you the best in 2008. From the way it's starting, compounded by it being an election year, the one thing we can say for sure is that it will be an INTERESTING ride!

- Judy Clark, President



"Whatever the Question"

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