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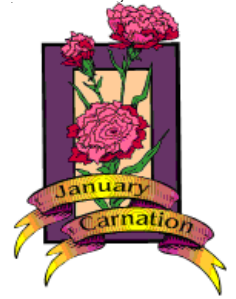
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HRAnswers

January 2010

# advantage



## IT'S A NEW YEAR!!!

We at HR Answers wish you all a very Happy New Year and a prosperous 2010. We hope your celebrations were fun and exciting, full of hope and goodwill.

This time of year often leads to renewed energy, transformations, promises, goal-setting, and so much more. Even the happiest of people, however, can lose their enthusiasm from time to time. We want to offer our encouragement! If you're feeling sluggish, discouraged, or even unmotivated, reviewing the following checklist may help reignite your spark:

**Purpose.** Why are you here? Sometimes people get so caught up in daily responsibilities that they lose sight of the Big Picture. Remind yourself why you chose this field, this organization, this role. What are you working to accomplish in your life?

**Expectations.** Are your goals realistic or do you expect too much of yourself? It's hard to muster a lot of enthusiasm when you're so overwhelmed that you barely have time to breathe. Reconsider your priorities and look for ways to redesign your workload and your personal time.

**Connection.** Do you see a gap between what you do every day and where you want to be? Connect your dots. You'll be more committed to your tasks if you can view them as steps in the right direction.

**Assistance.** Are you in over your head? Never be afraid to ask for help from mentors, bosses, colleagues, and co-workers. If you stubbornly insist on taking responsibility for more than you can handle, you'll wind up being burned out.

**Distractions.** Are you struggling with some personal issues? Simmering personal problems can drain attention and energy from your work life. Consider taking time off or seeking professional help to resolve your issues.

**Scheduling.** Do you allow yourself enough time to focus on each of your duties? Poor scheduling habits can leave you frazzled and frantic. Watch yourself so that you're not doing things twice or not at all. Examine your schedule to see where you can optimize your work to ensure you prioritize and set realistic timeframes and deadlines.

**Negativity.** Are you your worst enemy? If you spend a lot of time beating up on yourself for your perceived inadequacies, you are undermining your own motivation and progress. Stop obsessing about perfection and start recognizing—and rewarding—your own accomplishments.

When it comes to thinking about where you are and where you want to be (anything from goal-setting, to a new job, to a different relationship with others), one suggestion is to write your goals and strategies with two things in mind:

First, always write in the positive. Write what you will do now, what will be different. For example, "I will buy vegetables," or "I will set aside one hour a day to clean." It is not helpful to your brain to listen to negative messages, so don't write "stop doing," "stop eating junk food," or "don't do." Always present ideas, challenges, and concerns in a positive way.

Secondly, when writing "things" down, try writing in a place that is comfortable -in a place you like, that gives you energy, that offers you a positive vibe. You are more likely to think positively and feel positive about your new found goals and activities.

HRA is embarking on a few New Year's resolutions of our own. We wish you much success in meeting and accomplishing yours, as we do our own! We are expecting a very exciting year with plenty of celebrations, since in March we will be able to officially say, "We've been doing business for 25 years now!"

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## SALARY INCREASE PROJECTIONS FOR 2010

We are starting to see small signs of economic improvement. The stock market is better, the recession seems to be over, job losses have slowed, and consumer confidence is on the upswing. It seems the worst has passed, and now employers are anticipating salary range adjustments and base salary increases for 2010.

During 2009, many employers chose not to adjust their pay structures because of the downward push on salaries. Organizations often froze or reduced salaries as a way of holding payroll costs down while weathering the economic downturn. Now that there are signs of improvement, employers are considering restoring salaries and/or awarding increases in 2010 to retain top talent.

HR Answers reviewed several 2010 salary increase projection reports from well-known sources. These reports indicate a projected decline in salary freezes, and reversal of salary reductions. In 2009 base pay salary increases were at a significant low of 1.9%. Salary increase budgets are projected to rise to 2.7-3% for 2010, and will include a mixture of increases for merit, pay for performance, and promotion. Forecasts for increases to salary ranges in 2010 are 1.8-2%, and include those organizations that froze salaries. Some industries may recover faster than others and therefore both salary increase budgets and salary range structure increases may vary accordingly. All of these projections are, of course, contingent on continued improvement in business conditions.

Some organizations have a practice of using the CPI change as a reference point for their pay adjustments. The thinking is that if the CPI goes up 2% and pay is raised 2%, then employee purchasing power will remain the same. It seems like this ought to work, but it doesn't. Here are a couple of things to consider:

1. Most people's purchases and cost of living do not look like the CPI basket of goods and services, which includes new car prices, rental and home purchase, all types of power (oil, electric, gas, etc.), a specific set of groceries, etc. In the year that an individual has a baby, sends a child to college, or has that child actually leave college and not come home, the cost of living changes far more dramatically, either up or down, than the CPI. There is no "average family." Therefore, trying to set pay for all employees based on an average that exists only in concept is not a very accurate way to determine pay.
2. And then there is a year like this one – if employers are going to use the CPI to determine increases thinking that they are preserving employee purchasing power, then wouldn't it be appropriate to reduce employee pay when the CPI does down? That could be a very tough message when delivered on top of the economic news that has already been delivered to many employees.

But just in case the CPI number matters to you, here it is...it went down 3.9% last year.

## STEPS TO BECOMING A BETTER BOSS

Managers have the responsibility for an organization's fiscal assets, as well as its human assets. There are many areas that are complex and challenging for managers. Every time they turn around there is more to know on the HR side of things, more laws to comply with, more to be aware of, "best-practices" that publications are touting, and so much more. There are many avenues available to pursue becoming a more effective manager. Below is a list to get you started. For more ideas and an opportunity to fine tune your ability to manage others, HRA encourages you to check out our upcoming workshop series, "Could I Be a Better Boss?" beginning January 13<sup>th</sup>. You can learn more in the Calendar section of this newsletter, and you can sign-up on our website.

**1. Recognize a job well-done.** Everyone likes to know when they've done something good. Make your employees feel important every day. Show enthusiasm for the work and progress they have done. Praise does wonders for a person's hearing and their continued efforts.

**2. Encourage staff to take risks.** Give them enough freedom to take prudent risks. This means employees need to know they are empowered. You will find employees at all levels come up with good ideas. And if they don't offer them up, be sure to ask for their input on a regular basis.

**3. Always be honest.** Let employees know you trust them, and be honest and open in return. Withholding information or deception can destroy your credibility and integrity for good. A recent Gallup Poll found that one in five workers say their bosses don't treat their employees fairly. Don't let this be you!

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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).



**4. Offer a challenge.** Productivity and enthusiasm significantly decrease with boredom. A survey by the American Productivity & Quality Center found that the best motivator for employees is challenging and interesting work. A manager's challenge is to keep them challenged.

**5. Realize that money isn't everything.** Studies show that money isn't the only motivator for employees (and maybe not the important one). In fact, studies still show that employees choose factors like recognition for a good job, personal development, and challenging work as being (in this economy) equally as important as salary. So if you want to keep employees, a pat on the back needs to accompany that paycheck.

**6. Set straight expectations.** Set clear and specific goals for your employees. People want to know what you expect of them. Give directions and information to employees in simple, yet clear language. Tell them precisely what is involved and why you think they are the best one for the job.

**7. Know when and where to offer critiques.** Inform employees when they perform well and when they are meeting expectations. Tell them immediately. Do not lump all your concerns in one session. Don't criticize employees in front of others. Highlighting failures in public will discourage innovation by everyone involved, and you will quickly turn colleagues into enemies. It is guaranteed no one looks good when this happens.

**8. Keep communication lines open.** Employees want clear, ongoing, understandable communication. They often prefer face-to-face as opposed to email. Don't communicate only in times of trouble. You must relay positive news as often as possible as well. Employees feel more valued when the information is heard before, not after, important event.

**9. Make employees feel important.** The need to feel valued and needed is desired by everyone. One study found that more than half of the employees surveyed felt their managers failed to make them feel important as individuals. And 77% of those employees also said they were thinking of looking for another job. Open the door for employees to contribute. Ask for their opinions and advice; you hired the best - now let them deliver.

**10. Be consistent.** Workers can learn to live with any boss if they know what to expect. If you keep them guessing, you will lose them (physically or mentally). Inconsistent behavior breeds frustration, confusion, disappointment, and potentially anger.

**11. Be neutral.** Discrimination, even unintentional, destroys morale, hurts productivity, and opens the door to potential lawsuits. Bosses who promote unfairly, offer better assignments, or provide too much leeway will quickly lose employees' confidence in them. Treat everyone with respect, follow policy, and leave the door open for discussions when employees feel something is "not quite right."

**12. Take an interest in employees' careers.** Become a mentor to employees. Capitalize on their potential and drive, and develop where needed. Every boss should coach and counsel employees on how they can advance within the department/organization.

**13. Encourage employees to focus on progress.** A recent survey said a critical factor in employee satisfaction is a sense of making progress. Encourage employees to focus on what they got done recently. Make sure you are aware of milestones they are reaching on the way to work completion.

## Q AND A

**Q:** Our organization is having difficulty getting staff members to learn and perform other tasks to cover for sick days or vacation. Our management has appointed a team to help set up a functional system for cross-training. What is the best approach to get employees to understand and accept the concept of multitasking?

**A:** Often the best way to sell any new idea is to focus on the benefits to the person being asked to accept it. You know, "What's in it for me." When it comes to cross-training, there are many such benefits:

- First and foremost, being trained in a variety of tasks/skills/functions enhances job security. Staff cutbacks are more likely to spare those who can fill multiple slots than those with a more limited menu of offerings.
- Aside from job security in one's current organization, being cross-trained affords greater career security in the workforce as a whole. Don't be afraid to use this as a selling point. The employer-for-life model is long gone, and there's nothing wrong with acknowledging that your organization may be but one port of call on the employee's career itinerary. It serves the employee well to have as many arrows in his or her quiver as possible.
- Cross-training equips employees to provide better customer service, and people who have more successes each day are typically happier in their jobs. Customers view such employees as going "above and beyond," and are more likely to provide positive feedback. If you have good reward systems in place, the likelihood of being recognized and rewarded for outstanding perfor-

mance goes up. (Whether or not your organization is a for-profit enterprise, make sure your customer concept is operative—whether those “customers” are patients, parishioners, or citizens.)

- In today’s world of leaner, flatter organizations, with a premium on speed and innovation, many jobs have far less definition than they formerly did. To the degree that they are defined, that definition tends to be more in terms of outcomes rather than tasks. By and large, customers don’t care what tasks get done or by whom. Their primary interest is a particular outcome. Cross-training allows people to weave numerous tasks into a single customer-focused outcome.
- Cross-training also gives people a window into the rest of the organization and helps them see how their core job fits in with the rest of the operation. It also gives people a better sense of how their work affects and impacts the customers. This, in turn, puts people in closer contact with the meaning of their work (and the source of their paycheck).
- Having a widely cross-trained workforce makes it easier for managers to approve requests for vacation and other time off.

However, avoid limiting the application of cross-training to just coverage of sick leave and vacation. It allows employers to be more nimble, flexing with customer demand, seasonal trends, and economic cycles. It makes it easier to send people to training, and to allow healthy employees to care for children or elders. It helps organizations survive natural disasters, temporary bad weather, and flu outbreaks.

Don’t overanalyze it, but in setting up cross-training systems, consider the needs of the organization, your customers, and the employee. Consider the needs and capabilities of both the functions giving and receiving the training. Ask where the biggest need is and start there. It’s also smart to start with willing participants, leaving the “prisoners” for last.

Finally, remember that a person’s natural talent in one area doesn’t guarantee a similar knack for everything else. Just as you hire for job fit, cross-train with an eye to that as well. Encourage a bit of pushing but not forcing. For managers, this is a wonderful idea toward succession planning.

## CLIENT ACCOLADES

**Hats Off to Bob’s Red Mill.** Bob Moore, owner, will be the guest at the January 14<sup>th</sup> Business Journal Power Breakfast, 7:30 to 9:00 a.m. at the Governor Hotel in Portland, 614 SW 11th Ave. Seats are still available. If you wish to hear Bob, you can register by calling 503-219-3432 or click here [\*January Power Breakfast with Bob’s Red Mill CEO, Bob Moore\*](#). HRA will be there!

**Kudo’s to Jive Software Inc.** They were recently featured in the Portland Business Journal discussing their growth strategies and plan to add nearly 90 workers in 2010. This is good news on many fronts. Keep up the momentum!

## DO’S AND DON’TS FOR JOB DESCRIPTIONS

One of your 2010 goals may be to create Job Descriptions or simply revise them and make them more useful in meeting compliance requirements. In either case, here are some tidbits for worthwhile job descriptions that will really support HR operations.

### 1. DO give specifics.

For example, rather than stating that a maintenance worker “keeps up equipment,” it is better to spell out the position’s requirements, which might include performing routine maintenance on assembly machines, including adjusting settings; cleaning and lubricating shafts, gears, and bearings; and dismantling and replacing defective parts, etc.

### 2. DO use accurate adjectives.

Include adjectives that describe the pace of work (“deadline-driven,” “fast-paced”) or the work environment (“enclosed area,” “noisy setting”), but avoid flowery and overly long descriptions (“cozy but comfortable work environment that encourages creativity”).

### 3. DON’T use subjective terms.

Avoid using words that are subject to differing interpretations. Instead of saying you seek a certain attitude, cooperation, or initiative, describe expected outputs, different constituencies with whom this position interacts, and the nature of those relationships (such as “reports to,” “provides support to,” “supervises”).

### 4. DON’T rely on abbreviations or jargon.

A job description should be clear to applicants and employees. Abbreviations and jargon that are specific to your organization, and not to your industry, should be avoided or explained. The same goes for acronyms.

## 5. DON'T use words that raise a question of discrimination.

Avoid language that would be questionable in a job listing. For example, don't use words such as "youthful" or "able-bodied."

## 6. DON'T list unreasonable expectations.

Most managers hope their employees will exceed their expectations and take on tasks and responsibilities beyond what's required in the position, but avoid the temptation to include standards that don't currently apply to this job.

## 7. DON'T list excessive qualifications or experience.

If you include more than what is needed to competently perform the position, you will end up with bored, overqualified workers and you will limit your ability to place otherwise qualified candidates in the position.

So, how did you do? Are you able to follow the do's and avoid the don'ts? What is the state of your organization's job descriptions? Are they up to date? Are they accurate? Are they compatible with the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended (ADAAA)? If you answered yes to these questions, CONGRATS! However, if you are not so sure that your job descriptions are as well executed as they should be (or if you've never even written them), you're not alone. There are literally thousands of organizations who have elected not to take this step.

It's easy to understand the concerns and the delays: not enough time, other projects need to be done first, or just not knowing where to start. Creating job descriptions is not a quick task, and it can be labor intensive with the updating and management review that is necessary, especially with the ADAAA's requirement and division of essential and nonessential functions.

If you want help, HRA can be of assistance. HRA consultants can write your job descriptions or review what you created, and we also offer a Resource Guide with samples and suggestions on how to best write your job descriptions. Let us know if you want more information or if you are interested in purchasing the resource guide (\$95) by calling Melissa Sambuceto, or visit our website [www.hranswers.com/services/resource\\_guides](http://www.hranswers.com/services/resource_guides).

## NO RAISE THIS YEAR

Earlier in this issue we wrote about the declining CPI. This information touches on a related note – what happens and how do you communicate the fact that the organization has to freeze pay for this year, or extend a pay freeze for another year?

This is never an easy message. Employees often expect a raise each year, and as employers we may be the reason they have this expectation. If we are not being transparent about financial challenges or the downturn in business, employees may believe that the organization is doing better than it is and therefore expect to receive more money.

The best way to approach this challenging conversation is to let employees know about the economic impacts of this recession, the reduced customer ordering, the decrease in collections, etc. While no employer wants their financial difficulties broadcast throughout the community, explaining to employees in broad terms what is happening, what actions are being taken to respond to the challenges, and how the employees can help is a good start. Talking with employees about trade-offs, such as "every dollar spent on healthcare is a dollar that can't be spent on raises" help employees understand that the employer's resources go only so far.

Come join us on February 9<sup>th</sup> for a workshop dedicated to this difficult and painful employee conversation. The session is noted on our workshop calendar elsewhere in this issue.

There are some ways to make this a better and easier conversation; there are also some ways to get employees engaged in helping the organization have more money to pay employees. Come and learn how working together can actually mean resources available for pay increases.

## HAVE A HAPPY "FAMILY" AT WORK

Your co-workers are not your family, but the same rules that ensure a warm relationship with family members can apply to the workplace too. Here are some guidelines for communication and mutual respect that will create a positive atmosphere at work:

- **Respect boundaries.** Understand that people have their own concepts of personal space and privacy. Just as you wouldn't go into your sister's room without her permission, don't assume you can open someone's desk to look for a pen or a piece of candy. Stay out of your colleagues' personal lives, and limit how much you share of your own.

- **Keep promises.** Family members and co-workers both need to know they can depend on you. Don't make commitments you cannot keep. If something prevents you from doing what you've said you will do, be honest and explain the challenges as soon as possible. Do

everything reasonable to live up to the promises you make. This is a reflection of your integrity. You'll build a reputation for trustworthiness that will aid your career.

• **Don't waste people's time.** We're all busy with our jobs or our chores. Although a certain amount of informal chat helps build and maintain a friendly atmosphere, don't overdo it, and do not let your co-workers distract you or waste your time on discussions that can wait. It is important to stay focused and keep moving toward your goals. Work need to be progressing so keep an eye on your priorities, and other people's too, so everyone can concentrate on getting work done.

• **Pay attention to people.** No one likes to be ignored, whether it's by your father reading the paper while you're trying to talk about your day or by a co-work-er checking his or her iPhone during a meeting. Courtesy is giving people your full attention when they're speaking to you. Eliminate the distractions so you can show you respect their time and intelligence.

## THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.

*-Theodore "Teddy" Roosevelt*

A time of quietude brings things into proportion and gives us strength. We all need to take time from the busyness of living, even if it be ten minutes to watch the sun go down or the city lights blossom against a cloudless sky.

*-Author Unknown*

Be more concerned with your character than with your reputation. Your character is what you really are while your reputation is merely what others think you are.

*-Dale Carnegie*

If a window of opportunity appears, don't pull down the shade.

*-Tom Peters*

There are no menial jobs, only menial attitudes.

*-William Bennett*

There's nothing so rewarding as to make people realize they are worthwhile in this world.

*-Bob Anderson*

## OVERCOME THE POWER OF NEGATIVE THINKING

Some say positive thinking is not easy. But if we are honest, positive thinking is a choice! We choose how we will feel or react to situations, people, etc. Negative thoughts can creep into our mind and jump out when we least expect. The trick isn't to fight them, but rather to manage them so they don't get you into trouble. Here are some ideas to help you combat being negative.

• **Identify the triggers.** When you have a negative thought ("This will never work . . . I'm a total failure") stop and ask yourself what's bringing it on. You may be tired or stressed out, or you may be affected by someone else's perspective. If you can locate the cause, the thought itself won't have as much power over you.

• **Focus on the now.** You don't have to be a Zen philosopher to realize that worrying about the past or the future isn't very productive. When you start chastising yourself for past mistakes, or seeing disaster around every corner, stop and take a breath and ask yourself what you can do right now to change the situation or turn it into a success. Giving yourself something to do often distracts you from destructive thoughts.

• **Replace the negative.** If you find yourself plagued by "worrying," train yourself to think of something else. Memorize a short poem, phrase, or meditation, and when you catch yourself in a negative thought, say it or think it to yourself. Haven't you heard the phrase, "Go to your happy place"? Your conscious mind can concentrate on only one thought at a time, and driving the negativity away will free you up to move forward again.

HRA encourages you to join us on February 3<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 am for a 2-hour workshop called "Move from Problems to Possibilities – Positive Workplaces." This session will offer ideas to take back to your workplaces about dealing with negative attitudes and offering methods for a positive outlook to yourself and others (all without drugs).

## HUMOR HUMOR

Every April, HRA publishes a special April Fool's Issue of the Advantage Newsletter. We have fun doing it. You write us and tell us you like it, that it made you laugh and brought a smile to your face. So we thought, why wait? Do we have to keep all the funny stuff only for April? Well, the answer is no! To be honest, there are so many funny stories and information out there that we could do several April Fool's issues. So each month we will have a little humor for you. Our goal is to brighten your day and offer you a smile each month. Here is our first one...enjoy!

Workplace retorts better left unsaid:

“And your uninformed, knee-jerk opinion would be . . . ?”

“If I throw a stick, will you leave?”

“Does your train of thought come with a caboose?”

“Did the aliens forget to remove the probe again?”

“I'm trying to imagine you with a personality.”

“Can I trade this assignment for what's behind door #1?”

“How do I set a laser pointer to stun?”

“You thought you wanted a career. It turns out you just wanted paychecks.”

## 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.

### JANUARY

Financial Wellness, International Creativity, National Get Organized, National Glaucoma Awareness, National Mentoring, and National Thank You Month

Jan/June	<b>HRA Workshop Series (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Could I Be A Better Boss?</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b> <b>Cost: \$60 each or \$300 for the series</b>
Jan 13	<i>Workplace Culture/Expectations – Building and Modifying Them</i>
Feb 17	<i>When Talk is Tough and Problems Hard to Solve</i>
Mar 10	<i>Why are Performance Reviews so Darn Difficult?</i>
Apr 14	<i>I Have to Write Down <u>What</u> How Often?</i>
May 12	<i>You Want Me to Not Only Manage, But to Lead?</i>
June 9	<i>How Do I Get Them to Want To?</i>
Jan 11 <sup>th</sup>	National Clean Off Your Desk Day
Jan 17 <sup>th</sup>	Get to Know Your Customers Day
Jan 18 <sup>th</sup>	Martin Luther King Day
Jan 20 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>When Violence Threatens Our Workplace</b> <b>7:30 am – 10:30 am</b>
Jan 23 <sup>rd</sup>	National Pie Day
Jan 24 <sup>th</sup>	National Compliment Day
Jan 25 <sup>th</sup>	Fun at Work Day
Jan 26 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Behavior – Appropriate, Inappropriate, and Downright Intolerable</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>
Jan 28 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Winning the Customer Service War – Even More Important Right Now!</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>

### FEBRUARY

Feb 3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Move from Problems to Possibilities – Positive Workplaces</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>
Feb 9 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>When Increasing Pay is <u>Not</u> an Option</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>
Feb 11 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Adjusting to New Laws – Some Even a Year Later</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>
Feb 16 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Write a BIG Check or Go Directly to Jail – Organizational and Personal Liability</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>
Feb 23 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>Don't Jump to Conclusions – Stop to Ponder and Think</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>
Feb 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>HRA Workshop (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>When They NEED a Pat On the Back – Ways to Effectively Say "Thanks!"</b> <b>7:30 am – 9:30 am</b>

### APRIL

April	<b>HRA Workshop Series (Tualatin Office)</b> <b>(Thursdays/Supervision Success – For Beginners 1<sup>st</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup>)</b> <b>8:30 am – 12:30 pm</b>
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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 recently had the opportunity to talk with a group of HR professionals on the topic of Increasing Your Influence and Leadership Capabilities. Candidly, I spent far less time talking about Leadership, and far more time talking about Influence - how to increase HR's credibility and influence within the organization. Because HR is a staff role, not line management, it can't dictate or order things to be done; it must persuade, recommend, and influence others to accomplish its work and help the organization move forward. That was the premise of the presentation.

A funny thing happens sometimes when I am speaking...the words on the page or PowerPoint slide take on new meaning or depth as I begin to refer to them. That happened two or three times during this presentation. The first was when I began to talk about the session's objectives, one of which was to be able to express a "professional point of view." Without a professional point of view, there is no reason for anyone to care about or listen to what HR has to say. I had written those words and I knew what I intended to talk about, but when I came to that slide, suddenly a deeper meaning was yelling in my head.

I first heard about a "professional point of view" from Sue Meisinger, the former CEO of SHRM. Her comment was, "If you are a professional, then you must have a professional point of view" about the business or people issues of the day. She was so very right. Those words have stayed with me over the years, and I have heard Sue use them often.

As I stood there at the front of the room, it dawned on me that we in HR can have the best professional point of view ever, but if we don't have the trust of the organization, our point of view won't matter. *If we don't occupy a position of influence, and aren't seen as credible, our point of view will never result in action or organizational improvement.* Fortunately, the "noise" from this revelation was so loud that I could hear it even over the sound of my own voice, and therefore I could share my new insight with the attendees.

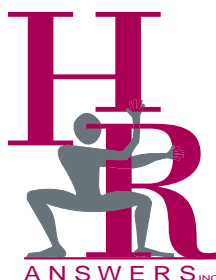
The second "aha" that morning was a statement I read to the participants from an article entitled "Maximizing HR's Influence in the C-Suite," by Frank DiBernardino. The article offered four ideas for heightening HR influence. His first idea was the most impactful. It was such a simple sentence, but one with the power to reverberate through my brain. And it was hard not to laugh, given my role as President at HR Answers. What was this concept that rattled me? *"If you want to have influence, put yourself in the CEO's shoes."*

Think about it. How often does HR say, "What are my CEO's priorities? What is his/her hot button or biggest need right now?" If HR is able to understand those needs and priorities and fashion good ideas for helping the CEO address them, HR builds credibility, relationship, and influence. And if HR doesn't report to the CEO, how about simply replacing that title with whomever HR does report to? It works the same way.

I shared lots of other ideas during my presentation -some of them pretty good, I think. I shared excerpts from books and articles I had read on the subject, and even some brand new material that had just been published within the last 30 days. But I think I got at least as much out of the conversation as the participants did. Those two concepts have been batting around in my head ever since.

Influence is defined as "the power to affect persons or events, especially power based on prestige, credibility, or knowledge." If HR is seen as knowing their stuff (that's a technical term), delivering on their promises, always putting the organization first so that there is no question of self-interest, considering things from a CEO's perspective, and having a professional point of view, then influence will accrue. That influence will allow us to make tough recommendations and be heard. It will allow us to step to the front and lead positive change. And isn't that what we all say we want?

- Judy Clark, President



"Whatever the Question"

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