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THEY NEED A HERO!

As employees struggle with the sliding economy, uncertainty about their own employment, and fear of losing jobs and income with no place else to go, their tensions and distractions mount. The media feeds the tension and insecurity, publicizing more bad news on a daily basis. It used to be that employees would turn to professional athletes, but sports are filled with stories of gambling and drug use. Most celebrities, whether in entertainment or politics, offer little other than maintaining their extravagant lifestyle. And leaders, whether in business or politics, are wrapped up in inappropriate bonuses, political rhetoric, blaming others, and finding excuses for their own behavior.

What do your employees need? They need a hero.

Where can they turn? They could turn to the organization's supervisors and managers. Are those supervisors and managers prepared?

Now, it may sound corny or cheesy to think of management, or even a particular supervisor, as being a hero. However, the reality is that a hero is what employees really need right now. And it's not the traditional superhero type, with extraordinary powers or even the ability to "save the day." Employees need a hero who empathizes and understands, then communicates in a way to address, but not necessarily solve, their tensions and insecurities. Once those concerns are addressed, the employees need a hero that will point them in a direction and encourage them to move forward. And it's management, or even an individual supervisor, who can have that ability. It is HR's responsibility to remind and assist supervisors to fulfill this role.

Stepping into a hero's role isn't easy, but it can be done. While it takes intentional and ongoing behavior by a supervisor, it is a role that is significant and even necessary in today's workplace. So, what steps can take someone to superhero status?

- Relate to employees. Listen to their concerns and seek to understand the issues that they face. Don't be a counselor, but do be supportive.
- Be responsive. Provide honest feedback and information. Proactively address issues or identify changes that are coming. Give more attention to the reasons or "why's" for certain workplace adjustments.
- Be persistent. Consistently communicate so that the message is heard and cemented. Make communication part of the routine of the workplace, so employees can count on it.
- Identify direction. Leadership is about identifying a direction, then pursuing it. There is a feeling of security that comes with seeing a direction to move towards. Even at the departmental level, that direction can be affirming.
- Manage performance. Equip employees, then allow them to accomplish the objectives and goals that are in front of them. This not only adds to their security, but builds self-confidence and enthusiasm. There is a mutual benefit to the organization and the employees when goals can be identified, pursued, and then achieved.

Employees need a hero who helps them meet their basic needs for security and direction. A good supervisor can do that through communication and performance management. The timing is perfect; the management skills can be developed, then utilized. Employees will benefit, the organization will benefit, and supervisors will benefit. Help them take advantage of the opportunity to be the hero.

THE LAYOFF CONVERSATION: REDUCING THE STRESS AND DISCOMFORT

Maybe the most difficult situation currently facing managers and supervisors is the layoff or termination conversation with employees. As the business environment continues to struggle, organizations are forced to address the hard decision of reducing their workforces. The actual conversations with employees telling them the "bad news" is often the responsibility of the employee's manager or supervisor. It is a responsibility that causes stress, complex emotions, and discomfort. It is a conversation intensely disliked by anyone who has to do it. Many times, managers or supervisors have even reported physical effects, such as indigestion, sleeplessness, and even dizziness, just before, during, and after such meetings. HR must be the teacher and coach as supervisors carry out this onerous duty.

While it's unrealistic to think that all the stress and discomfort of going through a layoff conversation can be eliminated, there are steps that can be taken to reduce those effects. These steps benefit everyone, so they are well worth the effort. It's critical to remember that while the conversation is difficult, it is the employee who is facing the trauma and uncertainty of losing his or her job. It makes sense to take whatever measures can make it easier for everyone.

Before going through a reduction in the workforce, consider taking the following steps in preparation for the actual layoff conversations:

Consider the communications.

- Pick the timing. Many organizations will announce layoffs early in the day and never on Fridays, so that employees have time to process the impact, then ask questions. Doing this earlier in the day gives the employee an opportunity to think about how they will share this information with family members. It also gives the employee an opportunity to file for unemployment before the end of the week, which speeds up their uncompensated time by a whole week.
- Identify how the message is initially delivered. If several jobs are being eliminated at once, what is the most effective way for the communication to be made? It might mean a group message followed by individual meetings. Consider any part of the individual meetings that you hope to keep confidential until you go through the process.

Pick the format, then use it.

- Be personal. Even when several jobs are being eliminated at once, it is important to individually meet with the affected employees if possible, and as soon as possible. Each person's situation is different, so meeting one-on-one is responsive to each employee. Promptly having the meetings can ensure that rumors are better managed.
- Be focused and brief. Establish a script that you can follow and refer to as you go through the discussion. This not only helps cover the essential points, but allows you to stay focused and ease the emotional effects.
- Be responsive, but in control. Allow individuals to ask questions, then answer those questions when you are ready. If you need to get back to them on something, do so as soon as you can. Don't make a follow-up promise and then break it.

Script out your key points. There are several key points that need to be addressed:

- Make sure you use the correct terminology. A "layoff" implies the individual can expect an opportunity to be recalled at some future time. If that expectation doesn't exist, clarify that the employment is ending. We prefer the word "separation," since it is not as emotionally charged as "termination."
- Identify the basis for the decision, then stick to it. Explain the business or policy basis for the decision. This explanation can indicate that the decision is objective, nondiscriminatory, and being consistently followed. Be brief. Lengthy discourse is lost on the employee.
- Don't pass the buck. Managers and supervisors may try to blame "upper management" or indicate that they are "just following orders." This does not reduce the impact of the decision and may indicate a lack of unity within management. Both of those things can be detrimental. Even if you regret the decision or it was a close call, supervisors or managers need to support the decision.
- Cover the points critical to the employee. Make sure you understand the specific points that will be most important to the employee, including timing, compensation and benefits, and next steps. If you are unsure or are questioned, respond only as and when comfortable.

Know your process. Follow each step so that you address all that needs to be addressed.

- The communication process and individual meetings as described above should be consistently followed.
- Identify any security issues, including computer and organizational information, and take steps to protect the organization and its assets.
- Know the steps that follow each employee meeting. You may want the employee to have the rest of the day off, or at least a period of time to process the conversation. If you are asking them to leave following the conversation as opposed to the end of the day or week, make sure you give them ample time to say their goodbyes and clean out their work space. Having boxes available is a nice gesture. Remember that this process is far different from a disciplinary-based termination.

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- Know what happens moving forward. Be specific as to when the employment relationship will end if the employee may be continuing to work for a period of time. Clarify your expectations for the employee's communication with customers or co-workers, and job performance while the employee continues to work.

Remember, it's not about you, at that point.

- Focus on the communication and the individual first. Get through the initial communication so the individual gets the message and can process it.
- Be prepared for the individual's response. Anticipate how the person may react. If there is a concern about hostility or violence, know how you will respond.
- It's okay to allow yourself to feel the impact and stress later, and then deal with it. There will be an emotional and sometimes even physical impact. Recognize and accept that those effects are okay and determine how you can best respond to those feelings. Do not deny or bottle up the effects. Remember that if your organization has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), it can be a resource for you in dealing with your feelings of loss and sadness. (It is good to extend this benefit for a month or two for employees losing their jobs as well.)

THE INCREASING NEED TO AUDIT YOUR HR PRACTICES: DETERMINE WHO WILL CARRY YOUR SWORD AND SHIELD

The effects caused by implementation of the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 (Act) once again remind business organizations of the importance of auditing certain human resources' practices. In the case of this particular Act, organizations were put on notice that pay discrimination with ongoing risk creates an increasingly potential liability until that pay issue is addressed. At the same time, performing an audit also provides an organization with opportunity to be proactive by putting practices and structure into place to reduce the potential of discrimination in compensation.

In determining how to audit the compensation practices and pay levels, the initial question is who will perform that audit. While there are certain cost and process efficiencies gained by utilizing internal staff, there are also specific risks and potential pitfalls in taking that approach rather than outsourcing the audit. Because many organizations are proceeding with examination of HR functions or practices, it's important to give thoughtful consideration to the pros and cons of the approach taken.

The In-house Staff: Assess Expertise and Objectivity. Because in-house staff is familiar with the organization's practices, structure, and history, it would seem that utilizing internal personnel to conduct an audit can appear to be both cost effective and time efficient. Not only is in-house staff already an expense for the organization but familiarity with the organization would give in-house staff a jumpstart on the process.

While the use of internal staff can work well, before taking that approach the organization should review several potential pitfalls:

- Will in-house staff be able to conduct a comprehensive audit? Because in-house staff are typically not trained or experienced in going through an audit process, there is a question whether staff will see everything that should be seen. While there are audit tools that can help provide some of the essential audit process steps, the other issue is that staff can be too close to the organization to step back and see the broader picture.
- Is there sufficient in-house expertise to conduct an in-depth audit and provide the maximum value in the results? As the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act illustrates in addressing pay discrepancies, there are certain areas of HR that require a high level of expertise. Since in-house staff usually is focused on the operational side of the organization, they may be familiar with their own organization but not have the broader and longer expertise necessary to maximize the results. For example, identifying pay discrepancies then identifying criteria for addressing those pay discrepancies requires a high level of experience and expertise in dealing with compensation. When determining who to conduct the audit, the organization will want to assess what level of expertise maximizes the value of the process.
- How will the organization deal with potential or appearance of an "implied" bias? Because in-house staff is part of the organization, there can be the appearance of bias. An audit or results that appear slanted or subjective risk the credibility or integrity of the organization's efforts. Use of an outside resource to conduct the audit can add objectivity in reality and appearance that increases the value of the process.
- Who bears the responsibility for the audit process and its results? One key value that an outside consultant brings is assumption of the responsibility for the audit process, as well as its results. Through indemnification for the organization and use of liability insurance, an outside consultant is expected to stand behind its services and the results.

The Shield: Your Process and Results May be Protected. The “shield” is the use of legal means to protect against the requirement to reveal the results of the audit. Whether using internal staff or outsourcing an HR audit, the most recommended and common safeguard to provide this shield is utilizing the services of an attorney. When using in-house staff, the value of the attorney-client privilege increases since the organization bears direct responsibility for the audit and its results, as opposed to the outside consultant assuming those responsibilities. By involving the attorney directly in the audit, not just to review the results or process, the organization has the potential to raise the “shield” that the audit and its results are “privileged” from disclosure and certain information cannot be required to be released.

The existence of this privilege typically results from the attorney-client relationship that protects communications within that relationship. The attorney-client privilege can be complex, limited, and difficult to maintain. But when there is a need to protect information, this legal privilege provides some shield to releasing that information.

A similar shield may also exist with a “self-critical analysis.” While this is a common privilege asserted by organizations, the privilege isn’t recognized in all jurisdictions, or it is limited. The common balancing test is whether the need for confidentiality outweighs the other party’s need for the evidence. This results in this possible privilege being assessed on a case-by-case basis.

The other aspect of shielding the audit is to make sure that all audit related documents are specifically designated as confidential and privileged. Marking the documents in that manner is not enough; access to those documents must also be maintained. Then any employees who are granted access to the audit documents should be informed that the documents and related information must remain confidential.

The Sword: Your Response is Critical. The “sword” is the action taken in response to the audit results. Cutting up those results into action steps is important so that identified problems, issues, and risks can be addressed. No matter who is chosen to conduct the audit, the organization’s response to the audit’s findings will be critical. Being immediately responsive not only reduces potential liability that may be ongoing, but that responsiveness usually provides the organization with more options about how to address any issues that need resolution. The message is that the audit process should never be undertaken without a commitment to take steps in response to the audit’s conclusions.

Similar to determining who will conduct the audit, there are questions that should be answered before deciding who will formulate and then manage the response to the audit’s findings. One advantage of an outside consultant is that the consultant can typically put to use an action plan developed from more and broader experience, and a higher degree of expertise. This increases the opportunity for effective steps to be taken. At the same time, because internal staff is more familiar with the organization and its culture, they can often better fit the action plan into the existing culture. When making this assessment, the organization should consider the potential time efficiency gained by use of in-house staff against the broader or more in-depth effectiveness provided by the outside consultant’s experience and expertise.

The Bottom Line: Assess Your Audit Needs Now. In light of the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act and its implications and with several new employment laws in place or moving into place, now is a prudent time for organizations to assess their HR practices, particularly those related to pay, and determine who, when, and what audit should occur. Better to do so now when the organization can control the process and proactively respond to the results.

The Starting Point: Identify Areas of Risk, then Proceed. There are several key areas of human resources where a regular audit can prove beneficial. A good place to start is with those areas of risk that are either high profile, such as compensation currently is due to the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009, or high risk, where the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009 is again a good example. So what other areas are there where an audit should be considered?

- The Hiring Process, from placing ads to the application to hiring
- The Payroll Procedures, especially the exempt versus nonexempt designations, and the processes and calculations regarding overtime
- The Compensation Structure, remembering that equal and fair pay considerations address any type of illegal discrimination, not just gender based discrepancies
- The Communications Process, looking at harassment or other employee concerns or complaints, including the organization’s responses
- The Attendance and Leave Procedures, this includes managing attendance and providing legally required leaves

The Resources: Utilize the Expertise. HR Answers, Inc. has audit checklists available for various areas of human resources. In addition, HR Answers’ consultants regularly provide HR audit services for organizations. If you are interested in either the resource or the services as you move forward, please contact us at www.hranswers.com or 503-885-9815.

MEDICARE AFTER SEPARATION

In today's economic environment, more and more people are waiting longer to retire. They are also waiting to collect their Social Security until they are fully vested. Some analysts indicate people are lowering contributions to their 401k because they need the cash now. To say things are not normal would be an understatement.

To make things worse, some people are making incorrect and/or uninformed decisions concerning their health care going into retirement. These decisions could be costly to those who miss certain Medicare deadlines. To explain all the deadlines and how an employee health plan might impact Medicare coverage is complicated. Individuals often have unique situations. Luckily, there is help, and it's all **FREE!**

Each state and territory has an organization of volunteers referred to as a "SHIAP," which stands for State Health Insurance Assistance Programs. In Oregon and Washington, they are called SHIBA, which in Oregon stands for Senior Health Insurance Benefits Assistance, and in Washington, State Health Insurance Benefits Assistance. Their function is to assist seniors through all the hoops of Medicare and the options that can lower out of pocket expenses for health care.

These volunteers are supported by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) as well as State Departments of Health and Human Services. They receive extensive training and update information from CMS. They are available for one-on-one consultations, group presentations, and classes to help people make informed decisions.

To find a SHIBA volunteer in your area, you can call one of the following numbers:

Multnomah County:	502-988-3646
Washington County:	503-615-4696
Clackamas County:	503-655-8269
Clark County:	360-735-3686

You can also call the Oregon State SHIBA Office at 1-800-772-4134. In Washington, the state number is 1-800-562-6900. You will find out what services can be provided for you and your employees.

SERIOUS ISSUES AT DOL

In a recently released report, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) reported serious failures of the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor to handle complaints of minimum wage and overtime violations and violations of many other labor laws. The GAO's nine-month investigation, in which undercover agents posed as aggrieved workers and violating employers, found numerous mishandlings, including:

- Failing to investigate complaints involving under-age workers and payment of overtime;
- Inappropriately dropping cases when employers did not return calls, or when employers claimed inability to pay the aggrieved workers;
- Urging complaining workers to file lawsuits, leaving low-wage workers without options to obtain back wages;
- Failing to record complaints in the Division's database, and inaccurately reporting that employers had paid back wages;
- Delays in investigating cases, and improperly closing or dropping cases; and
- Failing to assess back wages when appropriate, and to refer cases to litigation when warranted.

In one sample of 10 cases, nine were found to have been mishandled. "This investigation clearly shows that Labor has left thousands of actual victims of wage theft who sought federal government assistance with nowhere to turn," the report said. "Unfortunately, far too often the result is unscrupulous employers taking advantage of our country's low-wage workers."

In response to the report, the new Secretary of Labor, Hilda Solis, said she takes the findings seriously. She stated that the Division plans to increase its staff by one-third by hiring 250 investigators, enabling it to refocus on enforcement responsibilities.

E-VERIFY UPDATE: DELAYED AGAIN!

For the third time, the E-Verify use requirement for most federal contractors and subcontractors has been delayed, with the requirement now scheduled to become effective June 30, 2009. This means that federal contracts awarded after June 30, 2009 will impose the obligation on federal contractors and subcontractors to enter each newly hired employee's identity and employment eligibility into the E-Verify internet-based database. This information is currently required through use of the revised I-9 form, the Employment Eligibility Verification Form.

While the I-9 form is required for all employers, the use of the E-Verify system is for federal contracts with a value in excess of \$100,000 and that call for a time of performance that exceeds 120 days. Contracts for commercially available items and subcontracts of less than \$3,000 are exempt from the E-Verify requirement. This requirement was initially effective January 15, 2009, but then delayed until February 20, 2009, then until May 21, 2009. If you have any questions on the requirements of the E-Verify system, please contact us at 503-885-9815. Otherwise, we will continue to keep you updated.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

In honor of Mother's Day, here are some Quotations on motherhood.

"A mother is not a person to lean on but a person to make leaning unnecessary."

— Dorothy C. Fisher

"The world is full of women blindsided by the unceasing demands of motherhood, still flabbergasted by how a job can be terrific and torturous."

— Anna Quindlen

"To nourish children and raise them against odds is any time, any place, more valuable than to fix bolts in cars or design nuclear weapons."

— Marilyn French

"My mother could make anybody feel guilty—she used to get letters of apology from people she didn't even know."

— Joan Rivers

"The best way to keep children home is to make the home atmosphere pleasant—and let the air out of the tires."

— Dorothy Parker

"A mother is a person who seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie."

— Unknown

"A mother's arms are more comforting than anyone else's."

— Diana, Princess of Wales

CLIENT ACCOLADES

Many of you may remember that, years ago, this section appeared regularly in our Advantage newsletter. Well, it's back and it's about time. Our clients are doing, creating, and achieving so many great things, and we want to recognize them for those accomplishments!

And we ask for your assistance too. Let us know what you're doing, what is being accomplished, and what awards, recognition, and other great things are happening with the organization. We want to hear from you! Just email us at goodnews@hranswers.com.

Congratulations to **Harney County District Hospital!**

Not only did Harney County District Hospital in Burns, Oregon, take an innovative step to save on energy costs, but in doing so they also will provide ongoing support for the wood products industry in the region. When building their new facility, the hospital became the **first hospital in the United States** to use a woody biomass heating system. The system that has been put in place is a wood pellet boiler. Although there are other facilities that have used this type of heating system, Harney County District Hospital is the first of its kind to implement this approach and is doing so in a 7-day a week, 24-hours a day operation.

Approximately 100 tons of wood products will be used annually, at a cost of \$10,000. Based on those costs, as well as tax credits and the increase in oil prices, the wood pellet boiler's initial projection of a 15 to 18 year payback has been reduced to 3 years. The system requires little maintenance and the approximate 30 gallons of ash produced every 2-3 weeks is typically given to people in the community to use as a soil supplement.



Congratulations again to **Harney County District Hospital** for taking an innovative step to recognize their heritage, save money, and be energy efficient! A job well done!

Cheers to **Aequitas**. They recently announced expansion plans by opening offices in Florida, California, and Massachusetts. These locations will allow for improved access to potential financing clients. Congrats, **Aequitas**! Growth is a good thing!

Hats Off to **Clackamas County Fire District #1**. They're heading to Hanoi, Vietnam. For the last five years they have been sending teams through **Medical Teams International** (also one of our clients) all over the world to assist and train in basic firefighting techniques and safety, as well as incident response. Keep up the good work, CCFD! Efforts like yours are needed and highly valued!

HRA LIMERICKS IN HONOR OF 25 YEARS

Is your creative side showing? We sure hope so. Many years ago during a previous HRA celebration, our staff spent time (that was a really fun staff meeting) and careful thought to come up with some HR Limericks which we turned around and asked our client attendees to vote on. We remember them chuckling and even laughing out loud as they read through the collection of 15 creative limericks. Well, 10 years ago the votes were counted and the following are the top three vote winners. We hope you enjoy reading them as much as we did creating them.

3rd place:

To help you with your HR worry
Be sure to call us in a hurry
We'll do what it takes
To give you a break
And avoid a trip to the jury

2nd place:

We are only a phone call away
When they push you to premature gray
Don't pick up the ax
Just send us a fax
HR Answers saves the day!

1st place:

We're some folks who practice HR
Clients come from both near and from far
We give them advice
They say, "Thanks, that's nice"
Then they go do something bizarre.

Now it's your turn! Send *your* original HR limericks to djeffries@hranswers.com by June 30, 2009, and we'll publish the winning submissions in an upcoming newsletter. As an incentive, the top vote getters will also receive...well, it's a surprise! We'll let you know in a future issue.

MEDIATION – TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

My seventh grade social studies teacher, who looked a little bit like Captain Kangaroo with his fair complexion and funny hair style, took me outside his classroom and, shaking his finger at me while turning beet red, said, "I want you to behave!" Well, of course, that had very little effect on me. Not only did I have a hard time behaving when there were all these other people to talk to and joke around with, but I didn't respect this teacher. It was how I felt about my teachers that determined if I behaved for them in class. Now, you can discuss the trajectory of that kind of behavior and judge it, or you can accept the fact that in large part, it's probably how a lot of people might react—not just seventh graders. And for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction, in the social sciences as well as the physical ones.

One place in which this conflict is played out is the workplace, where situations can lead to entrenchment, diminished productivity, and even job loss. Sometimes it is with a supervisor-employee relationship, and sometimes between two co-workers. Many times both parties were at one time good friends or at least on amicable terms. One of the individuals gets their feelings hurt by the other, feels disrespected, and in turn acts out their disrespect for the other party. No amount of supervisory finger shaking or discussion seems to turn the situation around. Even edicts to "Just work professionally with one another" are unsuccessful.

Now arguably, if there were clear parameters and consequences put in place before anyone got to that point, interpersonal difficulty might not have escalated so much. But life being what it is, employees are human and unpredictable, and managers are often busy dealing with their daily responsibilities and working toward the organization being profitable. They fail to seize that critical moment (the “teachable” moment and the opportunity to reinforce behavior expectations) in time. Instead they are left with two people, many times both very good employees otherwise, who cannot get along or talk to each other with any semblance of civility. Of course, there is the option of firing these individuals, but like my teacher, what does that accomplish? Would it really be better to begin over with unknown entities who have their own set of feelings and reactions, and have to endure the learning curve of two people?

This may be the point when mediation is an option. There can be many reasons people don’t like working with each other, but few are willing to risk job loss and the negative attention garnered just to be “right.”

Mediation is a simple process in which both parties (sometimes more, if others are involved) get to share their side of the story of how the conflict began, listen to the other party’s perspective, and hopefully, in the best of all situations, arrive at their own joint action plan to continue working together in a successful way going forward. It is the belief of mediators everywhere that this process is a time-tested way of getting feelings out on the table where they can be openly acknowledged and dealt with.

Once those feelings are explored, people start discovering things they weren’t fully aware of about the other person. Sometimes, the other person is able to share vulnerabilities that they couldn’t share earlier. Often, the similarities in viewpoints people share comes out and that overrides their polarizing views. One of the most common resolutions is an apology and an understanding of how and why someone’s feelings got hurt, an agreement to act in respectful ways toward each other going forward, and acknowledgment that the previous behavior was not at its best. Again, this has to happen before a critical juncture or the opportunity is lost. Before you decide that the best solution is termination for one or both parties, why not try mediation first?

You do not want to find yourself in a situation where a workplace situation has deteriorated to the point of “nowhere to go but out!” To learn more about how and when to use mediation, give our Mediation and Professional Consultant, Joan Sampson, PHR, a call.

WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Workplace violence is a growing concern for employers and employees alike. There have already been numerous situations within the last six months tied directly to the change in our economy from the stress level experienced by some workings. Because of the economic downturn, we can expect some workers to experience diminished coping skills.

HR Answers, Inc. is a sponsor of the *NORTHWEST WORKPLACE VIOLENCE CONFERENCE* at the Oregon Convention Center, Portland Oregon, June 15-16, 2009, hosted by Corporate Security Services.

Our own Judy Clark will serve as a speaker and moderator at the Conference, one of many speakers in a great line-up! Judy recommends this conference as a “must attend” for Human Resource Managers, Risk Managers, Supervisors, Security Personnel, Safety Committee members and employees.

[Learn more about the upcoming Northwest Workplace Violence Conference](#)

Event Registration:

As a program sponsor HR Answers Inc. can offer its valued clients significant savings. Two-day Event Registration: \$150.

To take advantage of the HR Answers registration discount: enter the promotion code: **WPVSPONSOR2009** on the registration site: <http://www.eventbrite.com/event/323498593>

A full agenda and more information is available online at: www.corpsecure.com/events.php3

To request a conference brochure contact John Posey at jposey@corpsecure.com or: 888-822-4277.

WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW

As consultants, we know workplace violence can strike anywhere and any time, and no one is immune. We also know workplace violence is an act of aggression causing emotional or physical harm. Workplace violence can take many forms (e.g., verbal abuse, emotional abuse, physical assault, direct or indirect threats, sexual harassment, rape, pinching, hitting, biting, grabbing, kicking, or being struck by any heavy object that’s handy).

The statistics are scary:

- According to the [*Occupational Safety and Health Administration*](#) (OSHA), certain workers may be at increased risk for workplace violence due to the nature of their work. These situations include employees working alone or in small groups, late night or early morning hours, in community settings or having extensive contact with the public, or delivering passengers, goods or services.
- According to the [*Bureau of Labor Statistics' Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries*](#), workplace homicides are the second leading cause of fatalities in the workplace.
- According to the [*National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*](#) (NIOSH), the majority of workplace homicides are robbery-related crimes.
- According to the [*U.S. Department of Justice*](#), over 1 million people become victims of violent crime while working or on duty each year.
- Also according to the [*National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*](#) (NIOSH), an estimated 1 million workers - 18,000 per week - are victims of nonfatal workplace assaults each year.
- According to the [*U.S. Department of Justice*](#), women are five times more likely than men to be attacked at work by an intimate partner, which suggests that employers have to be focused on Domestic Violence as well.

Between what we know and what the statistics tell us, there are still many organizations not doing what they need to do to protect themselves and their employees. The risk management issues like legal liability are a growing and significant concern for employers. Now employers are training their employees and supervisors to understand the nature and ramifications of workplace violence, to be aware of employees who may be at risk of workplace violence, and to use the organization's policy to report acts of workplace violence.

Employers need to institute a zero tolerance policy regarding workplace violence. In addition, organizations can offer Workplace Violence Protection Programs to educate employees and management. By creating a workplace responsibility team (consisting of representatives from human resources, legal, security, occupational health, or other managers if some of these aren't departments in your organization, and local law enforcement), organizations are taking a proactive and practical stand against workplace violence. Keep in mind that if you have an EAP you should tap into their educational, training, and/or preventive programs to intervene for employees who may be at risk for workplace violence or for those who have been victims of workplace violence.

Employers must also be aware of and have a plan of action in place on the following related issues:

- **Employee Safety and Security.** By working with their insurance organization and collaborating with local law enforcement agencies, organizations can take proactive measures to ensure the safety of their employees.
- **Negligent Hiring.** Negligent hiring is the failure of an employer to investigate a job applicant's work experience, character, and criminal history prior to hire. To decrease the possibility of hiring individuals who may have a history of workplace violence, and avoid possible litigation, organizations may wish to re-examine and/or revise their hiring practices, including reference checking, credit checks, and security background inquiries.
- **Workplace Bullying.** Under the umbrella of workplace aggression, the issue of workplace bullying is becoming acknowledged as a significant concern in today's workplace.
- **Employee Morale.** Of course, when threats or acts of workplace violence occur, employee morale suffers. Proactive steps to combat low and/or damaged employee morale include establishing policies and practices, training programs, and employee assistance programs that promote respect in the workplace.
- **Domestic Violence.** The workplace is not a world unto itself, isolated from an employee's personal life; domestic violence has a direct impact on the workplace. Domestic violence leads to stress, fear, lowered job productivity, increased absenteeism, greater medical expenses, and an increased risk of violence in the workplace. Family violence is one of the major causes of death for women in the workplace.

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, or simply register online at www.hranswers.com and click on the "Workshop Registration" tab at the top of the homepage.

MAY

Clean Air, Get Caught Reading, National Bike, National Mental Health, and National Stroke Month

- May 5 National Teachers Day
- May 7 **HRA 5th Annual Provider Night (Tualatin)**
Tualatin Office
4:30pm – 7:30pm
- May 15 Bike to Work Day
- May 18-25 National Effectiveness Week
- May 25 **Memorial Day**
HRA Offices will be closed!

ON MY SOAPBOX

I have joined the world of Twitter and I am learning a lot. I am learning about social media, how people communicate using some of the new technology, and about how to communicate with others in 140 characters or less. But that isn't all – I think that I am also learning about how isolated many of us are, and how something like twittering or tweeting creates a sense of affinity with others, many or most of them people we don't even know.

Usually when we meet someone face to face, we progress with getting to know one another slowly, exchanging information about our backgrounds, our likes/dislikes, and our family histories. We tell stories about what we have encountered, where we have gone, what we have done. We reveal our style and beliefs as we talk, and over time a picture of who we are is formed in the mind of our acquaintance or friend. We disclose our traits and inner qualities.

With Twitter or other social media tools, we appear more likely to think we are talking with people who know us well, as opposed to conversing with almost strangers. This perception leads us to give them access to both the mundane and extraordinary events of our lives. A careful read of twitter posts (called tweets) reveals glimpses of our deeper personal lives and our thoughts. We seem far less reserved; perhaps it is because we are communicating in shorthand, or maybe it is because we convince ourselves that “friends” or “followers” are invested in us or care about who we are and what we value. I wonder if that is true, or just what we want to believe.

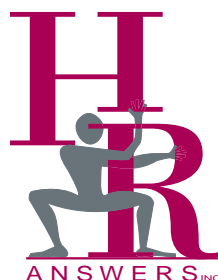
Being new, I have about 55 followers, and I find that I am beginning to care about how many there are. Ordinarily, something like that wouldn't matter to me. I am usually much more about close friends than general acquaintances. But I see these people on the site, not celebrities, just ordinary folks with hundreds or thousands of followers, and I wonder what that would be like, and why so many people care about what those individuals are doing or thinking. The competitive part of me wants the numbers to grow, and the personal part of me isn't even sure why I signed up, except that it seemed to be an opportunity to learn about technology and how it impacts communication, about how the younger generations share information. It's a strange phenomena; an internal conflict of wanting more, and yet realizing that, for the most part, these are not people with whom I have much in common or any real connection with.

I have learned one thing that has just amazed me. So many of the messages contain links to articles and resources that enlighten me. Because I am HR, I have deliberately sought many HR connections, but I have found others that have no relationship to HR that are simply fascinating. They share information about anything and everything. The range of subjects is unlimited. I can spend hours wandering through materials and documents they have found interesting or valuable, and I have wallowed in topics from spirituality to history to early Americana to celestial bodies to discovery to, to, to, etc. It is astounding what variety and breadth exists, especially when considering that the invitation to read or explore is so limited in information.

If you aren't on Twitter you should consider it...there is so much to learn about other people, about a vast array of subjects, and about yourself. It is intriguing that messages of 140 characters or less can expose so much about so many things. Who knew??

Judy Clark, SPHR
Twitter: Westlinn63

- Judy Clark, President



“Whatever the Question”

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE:

WWW.HRANSWERS.COM