



Fact Finder

HRA Services, Inc.
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"...helping organizations find solutions to people-related problems"

IS YOUR TEAM WORKING AND WINNING?

In his insightful commentaries on emotional intelligence, Dan Goleman somewhere makes the point that not all groups and organizations need to perform as teams. Some organizations get their work done operating as discrete functional divisions or departments, where operating units communicate vertically for the most part with top managers bridging major organizational units. Sometimes the government, because of its sheer size, provides the best examples of organizations where there is limited lateral communications across units or departments with common interests and objectives. 9/11 provided all too many examples of situations where sister agencies were communicating up and down and not coordinating with counterparts on a day-to-day basis. The result is often delay in getting the word out and action that is too little too late. One can certainly argue that some such agencies are efficient at the expense of being effective. The net result of 9/11 was a major federal reorganization, now known in part as the Bureau of Homeland Security.

As in government, organizations in the private and not-for-profit sectors face daily challenges in trying to operate as teams. Budget considerations, internal competition, political turf issues, leadership style differences, and conflicting agendas all encourage "going it alone" rather than risking unnecessary and inappropriate intervention by other units, departments, and divisions. One major problem, of course, is the old gestalt principle that teaches that two heads are better than one—that some things reduced to their component parts lose important aspects of the whole. This principle at its best is effective in organizations where there are common goals, shared values, clear communications, and sound opened-minded leadership. If any one of these is either missing or ill-defined, the whole organization is diminished and exhibits counter-productive behavior .

If you see signs that your organization's leadership is performing at less than optimum levels, talk with us about ways HRA can assist you in diagnosing the issues and designing solutions that will build current team strength and future bench strength. Programs such as *Frontline Management: Leveraging the Strengths of Your Style and Collaborative Skills for Teams* provide powerful platforms for empowering and energizing company leaders. These programs reduce conflict and miscommunication, encourage more efficient use of time, and provide teams practical tools needed to achieve company, departmental, and individual goals.

READY, AIM, FIRE!

“Ninety-one percent of all ideas fail” Can you imagine that? Conception versus execution.

In working with client groups, it’s always interesting and exciting to hear new ideas from employee groups for improving the way things work. What’s really surprising is then to hear, “We brought that up a couple of years ago, but nothing ever happened?” “In fact, we (our company) are really good at encouraging and generating ideas, but for some reason we can’t seem to get them implemented.” It’s an all too familiar refrain.

Someone once said that one mediocre idea executed is worth more than a million brilliant ideas unexecuted. In modern management parlance, this common problem is called the “Strategy-Execution Gap.” It is a well worn subset of current management, leadership, and project management thinking and training in efforts to improve overall organizational performance. It’s as if we were putting our weapon into firing position (strategic planning), aiming (determining the goals), and then failing to pull the trigger. How many holes will there be in the target? The answer is clear and indisputable.

While there are lengthy and insightful articles on the reasons for this organizational problem, suffice it to say here that key factors are lack of commitment and discipline and under-developed or under-utilized communication. Encouraging and raising employee expectations without delivering results creates a sense of organizational impotence that dampens morale and esprit. Over time, this lack of recourse, which is often perceived as just a “feeling,” will ultimately shutdown new ideas and sap organizational vitality.

MOVING ON

Employment transition or outplacement services have become commonplace in American business today because they provide needed support for employees and employers in making successful transitions. Clearly, losing a job is among life’s top anxiety-producers. Providing skilled, experienced direction, counsel, and support in this process is necessary for many reasons and is commonly viewed as a corporate responsibility, often even when the termination is performance-related. Corporate and moral considerations aside, employment transition services focus on events, results, and the future. They equip prospective job-seekers with the perspectives, tools, and coaching needed to move ahead.

About eighty percent of American employers provide transition services for departing employees. While clients facing severance situations often labor over alternatives and legal consequences, each separation has its own set of considerations, especially when mid-level or senior staff are involved. Resist the temptation to develop an ironclad formula. Instead, look carefully at specific individual considerations and develop a package that addresses the central issues. Objective, disinterested, and experienced consulting support is essential and helps in weighing everything from labor market factors to potential legal exposures.

Here are some important factors to consider: Absent an employment contract, you are fairly free to tailor a severance package to meet the organization and the employee’s needs. The

principal consideration is a realistic view of how much time will be needed to find the next opportunity. While you will want to avoid creating or appearing to create inequities protected by labor law, you should try to provide sufficient time, pay, benefits, and support to get the employee to the next opportunity quickly and appropriately. This may mean spending more time on self-assessment in terms of knowledge, skills, abilities, and desires. Critical criteria include job level, compensation, age, service, life-style factors, and current labor market conditions. Many employers provide one to two weeks severance per year of service, which vary by job level or title. A more practical and realistic approach is to determine with consulting support and counsel what it will take to get the individual to the next opportunity.

When circumstances arise that present the need to consider terminating employees, we provide expert professional consulting support and counsel to reduce unnecessary exposure and develop thoughtful options that benefit the departing employee as well as your organization.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

With the salary administration program review and update season just around the corner, please let us know as early as possible if you plan to re-examine internal job relationship as part of the annual review process. This year several clients have decided to review internal relationships in addition to changes in the external labor market to promote program credibility and competitiveness. Such internal reviews are prompted by significant organizational change, including realignments, addition of new functions, growth, redefined jobs, and personnel changes. Since full program reviews require re-evaluating internal relationships, more time is needed in the planning and preparation process to be sure salary review programs are completed before the new salary administration plan year is underway.

MONITORING OUTGOING EMAIL

A recent Wall Street Journal article underscores the sharp increase in employer monitoring of outgoing email. One survey indicates that eighty per cent of surveyed companies lost confidential information—either by its being intercepted or being sent out by an insider—as a high or medium threat. Forty-three per cent of companies surveyed have systems to control outbound email compared to 79% for inbound email. An additional 14% indicated plans to implement new controls on outbound email this year.

More and more companies are using encryption and smart-card technology to control and protect email communications. Social Security numbers and other information organizations may need to transmit related to benefit programs, for example, require protection where the employer is legally responsible to manage such information under HIPPA. The increasing use of electronic communications with the growing popularity of PDA Phones, BlackBerrys, etc., raises the likelihood that confidential or sensitive company and employee information might be compromised. Some employers, especially those in specialized highly creative industries, worry about meeting notices and other common administrative communications that reveal employee names and other contact information that is of value to competitors.

In addition to ensuring that your information technology staff is addressing these issues, be sure your employee handbook and human resource manuals reflect policies and guidelines to related to employee behavior in these areas. Changing patterns in the area of electronic communications make this an area for regular and frequent review.

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