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HRMORNING

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HRMorning, part of the Catalyst Media Network, provides the latest HR and employment law news for HR professionals in the trenches of small-to-medium-sized businesses. Rather than simply regurgitating the day's headlines, **HRMorning** delivers actionable insights, helping HR execs understand what HR trends mean to their business.

69% of workers don't trust HR: 6 ways to turn it around

■ *Why employees don't tell you what's going on*

Every HR pro knows striking a balance between employee and company advocate can be tricky.

And because one of HR's main functions is to protect the company, many employees are naturally distrustful. Others are dissatisfied with how their HR department has handled issues in the past.

Either way, there's a disconnect between employees and HR, and career site Zety set out to learn why.

Unreported issues

In a recent study, Zety surveyed nearly 1,000 U.S. workers to gauge

their opinions on how well HR does its job and whether they'd go to HR to report a problem.

The three main types of issues examined were personal issues, co-worker issues and criminal issues. The overwhelming conclusion? The bulk of employees **wouldn't** go to HR for problems of any kind.

Eighty-six percent wouldn't tell HR if they were struggling to cope with the death of a loved one, and 92% wouldn't speak up if they were going through a tough divorce.

Seventy-nine percent of workers

(Please see Trust ... on Page 2)

FFCRA paid leave can be used to care for kids

■ *DOL says this applies to families dealing with summer camp closures*

Employees can now use paid leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) to care for their kids this summer if camps have been closed due to the pandemic, the DOL announced.

As long as the child was enrolled in the program before it was shut down, a summer camp can be considered a place of care for an employee's child.

Planned attendance

The DOL also clarified that even if the child wasn't actually enrolled in the

camp yet, "affirmative steps" could be enough to prove the summer program was set to be the child's place of care.

Here are some examples of affirmative steps that could qualify employees for paid leave under the FFCRA:

- proof of application submission before camp's closure
- proof of a paid deposit
- proof of prior attendance, and
- proof of being wait-listed.

Click: bit.ly/FFCRA560

Trust ...

(continued from Page 1)

wouldn't report a co-worker having bad body odor, and 64% would say nothing if a colleague came into work intoxicated.

And finally, 36% wouldn't speak up if they were a victim of sexual harassment, and 60% wouldn't report witnessing theft at work.

Why they don't speak up

These numbers are quite high, and Zety dug deeper to find out why employees aren't going to HR when they should.

The three main reasons? Fear of retaliation (46%), lack of confidence in HR's objectivity (39%) and fear of not being taken seriously due to gender – complaints made by men were 26% more likely to be investigated.

When it comes down to it, though,

the bulk of employees still consider HR to be unhelpful, inconsistent and out of touch. The most sobering statistic is this: 69% of respondents don't believe that HR takes its employees' side.

Gaining trust

It's clear a lot of work needs to be done to turn that number around and gain employees' trust. And if you're not sure where to start, Dr. John Sullivan of TLNT has a few suggestions:

1. Make it a priority for higher-ups.

You'll need everyone on board to rebuild trust with employees, and the best way to do that is to put it in dollars and cents for upper management. Show them how costly it can be to have a disengaged, distrustful workforce and any other negative business consequences.

2. Stay on top of current issues. What's bothering workers at other companies right now? Those concerns could very well be happening at your business, too. Show people you care by being proactive with their needs.

3. Work on response times. Nothing frustrates employees more when it appears HR is doing nothing about a problem. Keep employees in the loop about ongoing situations or investigations, so they know action is being taken.

4. Become active listeners. Ask your employees how you can improve and which communication and reporting methods they're most comfortable with.

5. Be transparent. The more open and honest you are about processes and how HR operates, the more likely employees are to be transparent with you. It can also help to explain to everyone what HR's purpose is and how it can help them.

6. Focus on productivity. Instead of being solely a problem-solving center, make it your mission to create a workplace where employees are happy and engaged, and therefore more productive.

Info: bit.ly/HRtrust560

Sharpen your JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

■ Retaliation? Worker fired after reporting racial bias

"Good morning, Lynn," said company attorney Eric Bressler from the doorway. "Got a second?"

HR manager Lynn Rondo looked up at him. "Sure, what's up?"

Eric shifted on his feet. "Remember when Tom wrote up Francis a few weeks ago? For getting a snack from the vending machine during work hours?"

"Yes," Lynn sighed, not liking where this was headed. "I also remember Sally's complaint accusing Tom of being racist for doing so."

Eric nodded. "Sally's saying her termination was retaliation for filing that complaint."

Biased write-ups

"Hold on," said Lynn. "Sally was fired because her complaint included a lot of profanity. It violated our harassment policy."

"That's not what she thinks," Eric explained. "Sally's convinced Tom only wrote Francis up because of his race, and then the company fired her for reporting it."

Lynn shook her head. "That's not true! Anyone would've been written up for what Francis did, regardless of race. And reporting it wasn't the problem – it was the profanity that got her fired."

"Did Sally have any proof of Tom being racist?" Eric asked.

"No!" Lynn insisted.

When Sally sued the company for retaliation, it fought back.

Did the company win?

■ *Make your decision, then please turn to Page 6 for the court's ruling.*



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What's Working in Human Resources, (ISSN 1088-3223) July 15, 2020, Vol. 25 No. 560, is published semi-monthly except once in December (23 times a year).

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, or other professional services. If legal or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. — From a declaration of principles jointly adopted by a committee of the American Bar Association and a committee of publishers.

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Court says one ageist comment isn't enough to establish discrimination

■ Employee fired for missing work on three occasions

In past rulings, courts have shown that even one stray comment can be enough to get employers on the hook for discrimination.

But in this recent case, a court decided that a manager's biased comment had nothing to do with an employee's termination.

Too old to do his job?

Andre Williams worked for Waste Management Inc. in Springfield, IL, when he spoke to his supervisor about an accommodation for an ailment.

Williams' supervisor allegedly asked on multiple occasions if he was "too old" to do his job anymore.

When Williams later failed to report to work when he was scheduled three times, Waste Management fired Williams. He sued,

claiming he was fired not because of attendance issues, but because of his age – and he referenced his supervisor's comment as evidence.

But the 5th Circuit disagreed. First, it said Waste Management had a legitimate reason to fire Williams – he missed three shifts.

The court also said the supervisor who made the comment about Williams' age wasn't the ultimate decision-maker in his termination. In this instance, the comment wasn't enough to establish age bias.

While the company won this case, it's important for supervisors to be very careful about what they say – just one offhand biased comment can cause a lot of legal trouble.

Cite: Williams v. Waste Management Inc., 6/15/20.

Reassigned worker says disability wasn't accommodated, court & employer disagreed

■ Company claimed there was 'nothing to accommodate'

When an employee requests an ADA accommodation, the employer must go through the interactive process and agree on something that works for both parties.

But what happens when an employee isn't satisfied, even after the employer has fulfilled its responsibilities?

Reassignment with restrictions

Johnny Mack Mitchell, a worker at Florida chicken producer Pilgrim's Pride Corporation, injured his rotator cuff while hanging chickens.

Mitchell underwent surgery, and eventually was cleared to return to work with minor lifting restrictions. However, Mitchell's occupational

nurse suggested he not go back to his old job. Pilgrim's Pride reassigned him to a position where he'd no longer be hanging chickens.

But Mitchell wasn't satisfied with his reassignment, and he sued his employer for failure to accommodate.

The 11th Circuit disagreed with Mitchell. It said his reassignment didn't violate Mitchell's lifting restrictions and took into account the nurse's recommendation.

Mitchell also never could explain how the reassignment wasn't a reasonable accommodation for him. The company didn't violate the ADA, the court concluded.

Cite: Mitchell v. Pilgrim's Pride Corporation, 6/1/20.

■ Sexual harassment compels resignations, costs biz \$32K

When several female employees suffered from such pervasive sexual harassment that they felt compelled to resign, the EEOC taught the company an expensive lesson.

GRK Fresh Greek in New York City failed to investigate the sexual harassment allegations despite receiving complaints from multiple employees, according to the lawsuit.

The EEOC said that the company's district manager repeatedly touched female employees in vulgar ways, and also made inappropriate comments about how they should lose weight and wear tighter clothing. When the workers complained to other managers, nothing happened.

GRK Fresh Greek agreed to pay \$32,000 in monetary relief. It must also provide training to the managers who ignored the complaints and update anti-discrimination policies.

Info: bit.ly/harassment560

■ Company owes \$100K for firing workers based on age

One company replaced several of its older staff members with younger workers, and the EEOC filed a lawsuit.

According to the EEOC, Capital City Dental Care in Harrisburg, PA, fired eight employees older than 40. Of the 14 subsequent new hires, 13 were under 40.

Five of the employees filed charges, launching the EEOC's investigation. The EEOC found that the company didn't have any reason for firing the older employees beyond age. As a result, it sued the company for violating the ADEA, which prohibits discrimination against employees aged 40 or older.

Capital City Dental Care settled the suit for \$100,000. It must also update its discrimination policy with an emphasis on age-bias prevention.

Info: bit.ly/agebias660

Experts give their solutions to difficult workplace problems

HR professionals like you face new questions every day on how to deal with workplace conflict and employment law. In this section, experts answer those real-life questions.

How should we address the topic of racial disparities?

Q: After the nationwide protests regarding police brutality and racism, we feel it's important to address this with our employees. What's the best way to broach this sensitive topic?

A: The most important thing is to approach these conversations with empathy and respect, says chief diversity officer John Page.

Next, you should acknowledge that many of your employees are going through pain and discomfort right now, and encourage them to be honest about how they're feeling. It's crucial that leaders listen to their employees and do everything in their power to address concerns that are raised regarding the workplace.

Future steps to take can include evaluating your company's diversity and making plans and commitments to bring more diverse employees on board.

Can we fire workers for offensive social media posts?

Q: We've noticed a few of our employees making offensive political posts online. Is it illegal to terminate them for these posts?

A: Things get very tricky when it comes to disciplining employees for personal social media posts, say the employment law attorneys at Ogletree Deakins.

Many states offer protections

for employees engaging in political activities. However, when online political opinions start to blur into offensive statements, employees can be subject to discipline.

Here are some examples of behavior that crosses the line:

- Hate speech regarding a protected class
- Statements severe enough to constitute a hostile work environment
- Threats to employee or workplace safety, and
- Confidential company info.

What if we think a worker is faking a COVID-19 diagnosis?

Q: We suspect an employee is lying about having the coronavirus. How should we proceed?

A: Because of difficulties obtaining tests and doctor appointments, you shouldn't require workers to show you test results or doctor's notes, says employment law attorney Mark Keenan of the firm Barnes & Thornburg.

Instead, it's best to ask for the appropriate medical information. You may inquire about an employee's symptoms, diagnosis, potential hospitalization and treatment regimens.

If you suspect someone isn't being truthful, ask follow-up questions and look for inconsistencies.

If you have an HR-related question, email it to Rachel Mucha at: rmucha@HRMorning.com

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

■ Motivating during times of change: 4 main strategies

Communication skills are most critical – and most valuable – when navigating big changes.

And right now, there are a lot of major changes happening, thanks to the coronavirus pandemic.

Don't wait

Here are four strategies to rally the troops and get them to embrace your HR initiatives:

1. **Get ready for friction.** As you prepare to announce a change, brainstorm questions or concerns employees might have and how to answer them (e.g., staffers worried about how policy changes will affect them). Have a cheat sheet ready.

2. **Expect diverse reactions.** Some employees will be on board right away and some will push back. But the majority probably won't have a strong opinion either way. Focus near-term communication efforts on the swing group. Then let them help you win over the rest.

3. **Set a clear goal.** Employees are more motivated to work through change if they have an end target in mind. Find out as much as you can about what changes they want and goals they'd find worthwhile.

4. **Be honest about problems.** Let employees know there may be hiccups in the process. They'll be less likely to despair when issues come up if they're prepared.

Also, remind them it'll be worth it. Learning a new process is a lot of work but it will save time.

But the most important thing you need to do? Whether it's a change to work-from-home policies or new time-tracking software, don't wait to communicate, says expert David Grossman.

Give your team what they want most during times of change: to be in the loop as plans are put in place.

That way, you'll get them on board much quicker, he says.

Info: bit.ly/bigchange560

WHAT WORKED FOR OTHER COMPANIES

Our subscribers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular feature, three of them share a success story illustrating ideas you can adapt to your unique situation.

1 Figuring out a new way to boost engagement

We know our company can sometimes be a high-stress environment, so we make a point to do on-the-spot recognition to show our appreciation. For many years, we relied on gift cards to do that.

But changes in IRS guidelines meant we had to figure out other ways to recognize and reward great work and going above and beyond.

Our HR team evaluated giving a one-time recognition gift to all employees. But we realized our budget

could go farther and have more impact if we deployed a targeted recognition system.

Recognition platform

Working with our vendor, we consolidated our recognition initiatives onto a single platform.

Service awards, performance incentives and nursing awards that we'd been giving as taxable bonuses, as well as wellness participation awards, were converted to points that employees can redeem for jewelry,

housewares, electronics, leisure items and more.

But it goes beyond material rewards. We saw a dramatic increase in engagement levels for evening and night shift staff, in part because of appreciation notes the day shift workers post on our recognition wall.

And tying recognition to our core values helps people understand why we do what we do.

(Jeremy Stephens, associate VP of HR, Tideland Health, Charleston, SC)

**REAL
PROBLEMS,
REAL
SOLUTIONS**

2 Focusing on respectful communication pays off

About 25% of Americans say they dread going to work. The cause? They don't feel respected by their company.

Over the past five years, total estimated costs from turnover attributed to dissatisfaction with workplace culture was \$223 billion.

We wanted to reduce those costs by fostering a positive culture grounded in respect.

Because today's diverse workplace features myriad differences in culture,

gender, age, education and more, it's crucial that managers take care in what they say, write and do.

Respect by example

Communication can break down because the intent of a manager's message may not be the same as what's interpreted by their employees.

So we made sure our leadership was mindful of:

- who the message is for, the perspectives of that person and how a third party may perceive it

- tone of voice, even in written communication

- giving full attention while listening, letting the speaker finish, and

- treating others the way they'd want to be treated – the "Golden Rule."

Looking beyond barriers to allow others to be seen and heard led to relationships of mutual respect, increased productivity and a healthier work environment.

(Cornelia Gamlem, SPHR/author/consultant, as presented during the BambooHR Virtual Summit)

3 Training needed to change with the times

Our company has a number of training events each year to update manufacturing staff on everything from health and safety, business strategy and company performance to using new production technology.

As we grew from two local plants to six geographically dispersed facilities, we continued doing large centralized events at our HQ, often lasting three or four days.

The program required a large ongoing investment, and we had

to repeat sessions to cover all the workers.

Meanwhile, our team started to see training as a waste of time, particularly when delivered by consultants with little understanding of our processes.

They complained about time and travel required for training that taught them things they already knew.

Focused and in-house

Now, we design deliver more of our program, using in-house experts to train everyone from senior

management to shop floor workers.

We keep sessions tightly focused and bring them to where our workers are.

We've also made sure to measure the benefits and costs of all training interventions, no matter how big or small.

As a result, we've cut our training costs by more than 25%, and employee quality and satisfaction ratings have jumped.

(Jose Fuentes, T&D head, Comco, Jacksonville, FL)

Glassdoor: Entry-level job postings down 68%

A major decrease in employers hiring entry-level talent is creating a problem for new job-seekers.

According to Glassdoor, the number of job postings looking for “recent grads” have gone down 68% from last year. This is forcing a lot of new grads to apply for higher-level positions for which there is a lot more competition.

Another way around the tough entry-level market right now? Some new grads, regardless of their area of study, are applying for tech jobs of all experience levels.

Info: bit.ly/entrylevel560

Employers can't require COVID-19 antibody tests

While the EEOC has given employers the green light to screen workers for COVID-19 symptoms, one thing employers can't require is an antibody test.

It's a violation of the ADA to make an antibody test a requirement in order to return to work, since it is considered a medical exam and isn't “consistent with business necessity,” says the EEOC.

Typically, requiring COVID-19 tests and temperature checks would

be considered a medical exam as well, but the EEOC has made a temporary exception.

Info: bit.ly/antibody560

Women having harder time with pandemic than men

A recent study conducted by the Mom Project found that, overall, female employees have been having a much more difficult time than male employees during this pandemic.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 60% of the jobs eliminated during initial coronavirus layoffs belonged to women. And the women who were able to keep their jobs are twice as likely as their male counterparts to look for new employment in the next year.

Additionally, employees with children are struggling to balance parenting and working during the pandemic, and are 10% more likely to look for a new job than non-parents.

Info: bit.ly/women560

Lighter side: Workers missing chit-chat at home

Remote work has its pros and cons, but here's one negative you might not think about: no more co-worker chit-chat.

Many managers might see this as

WHAT COMPANIES TOLD US

Pandemic & career goals

What do employees want most in a job after experiencing the coronavirus pandemic?

To be valued by their company

60%

To prioritize home over work

40%

To pursue a more meaningful career

33%

Source: Robert Half

The coronavirus pandemic has made a lot of employees (57%) reevaluate their careers and what they want out of a job. Employers are going to need to ensure their people feel cared for and valued.

Each issue of WWHR contains an exclusive survey to give executives insight into what their peers nationwide are thinking and doing.

just a distraction, but a recent study shows that employees find shooting the breeze with their colleagues very uplifting.

Office chatter can be tough to replicate at home, but if you sense your employees need a pick me up, maybe you should encourage them to virtually goof off a little with their team members.

Info: bit.ly/chitchat560

Sharpen your judgment...

THE DECISION

(See case on Page 2)

Yes. The company won when a court dismissed Sally's case.

Sally's attorney argued that her complaint against Tom's racist behavior was classified as protected activity under Title VII, so she couldn't be disciplined for it, even if it included profanity. Terminating her shortly afterward showed that the company retaliated, said her attorney.

But the court disagreed, saying Sally's complaint didn't provide any reasonable basis for racist motives to be behind the write-up. Without any supporting evidence, the court said the write-up itself couldn't constitute racial bias.

Because of this, Sally's inflammatory statements weren't protected. The company was fully justified in terminating her due to the violation of company policy, the court said.

■ Analysis: Timing matters

Even though the company won, this serves as a reminder to be wary about the timing of any adverse employment actions. Termination directly following a complaint can result in a complicated misunderstanding. Make sure you can provide valid reasons for the decision.

On the other hand, this case also shows companies can defeat baseless discrimination claims with proper documentation. Employees must provide concrete proof for their claims to hold up in court.

Cite: Gibson v. Concrete Equipment Company, U.S. Ct. of App. 8th Circ., No. 18-3009, 6/3/20. Fictionalized for dramatic effect.

Accommodating employees for a work-at-home shift during pandemic

■ *Immediate action plan kept them safe, productive*

In early March when the impact of the coronavirus pandemic became clear, we made a plan to close our four locations. We had a week to prepare 40% of our staff to work full-time from home.

That meant making sure they had all necessary equipment and access to any training they'd need on using that gear and remote work applications.

Step 1: Gearing up

We immediately got our orders in for 165 laptops, computer bags and headsets. Moving fast was critical – our regular vendor only had three laptops in stock, so we had to find an alternative. And right after we placed our order, that supplier increased prices by 62%.

Coordination between teams, hands-on laptop configuration and drive-thru pickup at four locations across the country got everyone geared up in about a week. It was a huge effort, but providing equipment was only the beginning.

We knew prolonged remote work was going to be a big change, even for our remote veterans. With schools and daycares closed, employees with kids were working and parenting simultaneously, many for the first time.

To make sure managers were ready to support their teams as they adjusted, we established guidelines for appropriate accountability and performance measures.

Step 2: Asking what they need

We continually ask our employees what they need, whether it's tips on working from home with small children or suggestions for

folks having trouble sleeping.

We're delivering a wide variety of resources – virtual panel discussions, timely articles via email, video recordings from senior leadership, virtual yoga sessions, engaging internal Facebook posts and more. Everything is accessible on our new internal website.

During the first week, we created a plan, and part of that involves company leaders providing daily information sessions. These sessions are aimed at inspiring and unifying us as we deal with the uncertainties of the pandemic.

To help employees cope and adjust, we emphasize treating everyone with grace and empathy.

We've shared videos from leadership and outside experts, hosted virtual birthday parties and held webcam happy hours.

We're also encouraging our employees to photograph their workspaces and post to our internal social media pages.

Step 3: Listening to our people

Of course, we'll continue adjusting our processes. What won't change is our dedication to our employees and their well-being.

As leaders, we must remember our actions create the picture of us others see. When they look at you, do they see a "people-first" organization?

Our philosophy should shape policy, not the other way around.

We must lead with humanity. After all, people are the "why" of everything we do.

(David Mele, president, Homes.com, Norfolk, VA)

Case Study:
WHAT
WORKED,
WHAT
DIDN'T

■ Are you ready to take on the HR Business Partner role?

In most small and mid-sized organizations, HR pros have to be generalists. You have responsibility for employee relations and HR tasks like policy investigations.

In short, HR generalists are responsible for fostering and maintaining the employee experience, and managing talent processes from recruiting to staffing to separation.

And you make sure all regular performance management and training activities are on schedule and in line with what your organization needs from staff.

Enter the HRBP

But a recent study by Cornell University finds HR is evolving to include a more strategic role – the Human Resources Business Partner (HRBP).

So, what competencies should HR pros be looking to develop or improve to handle the HRBP role?

According to Cornell researchers, the most important are business acumen, data and analytics, and a skill they call a "talent translator."

Clearly, as HR's strategic role expands, HR pros need to understand organizations' specific business drivers and how organizational strategy relates to human capital strategy.

No surprise there, and it's equally obvious that HR pros are increasingly expected to identify and leverage data to make effective human capital decisions.

But beyond those familiar requirements, researchers identified a need for HR pros able anticipate business needs, and translate that into a workforce with the skills for today's jobs and what'll be required down the road.

HR pros already wear multiple hats. And now you can add HRBP to the collection.

Info: bit.ly/HRBP560

WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Companies face competing agendas when dealing with their employees. They must find ways to inspire their people to excel, while controlling costs and staying within the law. Here we present a challenging scenario and ask three executives to explain how they'd handle it.

Tough news, tough times: How can we navigate layoffs during a pandemic?

The Scenario

HR manager Stu Capper spent all morning handling employee concerns about returning to the office. Just when he was going to take a break, manager Ted Gilbert walked into his office.

"Hey, Stu," Ted said. "Having a nice first day back?"

"Not bad, given the circumstances," Stu replied. "Lots of people have come in with concerns about their health or their jobs, but that's to be expected."

Ted nodded. "About that last part ... I just got out of a meeting. We're going to have to let some people go."

Untimely decisions

Stu's heart sank. "What? Why?"

"It's the last thing we wanted to do," Ted

said. "But we didn't have any other options. With the amount of employees we currently have and all the effects from the pandemic, we'd go under soon without any changes."

"A lot of people were already worried about losing their jobs," Stu said with a frown. "I can't imagine how much worse the reaction will be when it becomes more than just a possibility."

"On the first day, too," Ted agreed. "And productivity's already been down. I imagine people will be too nervous to work after this gets out."

"And how are we supposed to go about this?" Stu asked. "Even during regular times layoffs are difficult – we're in the middle of a pandemic!"

"There's a lot of things to consider as we plan the best way to do this," Ted said.

If you were Stu, what would you do next?

to resort to layoffs. We'd also address any questions or concerns during this time.

Reason: Transparency is key during tough times. If you have to make an adverse decision, employees deserve to know why even if they're not directly affected. Communicating these reasons and answering questions openly will ensure everybody's on the same page.

3 HR manager from a company in the Northeast, name withheld upon request

What she would do: After handling the layoffs discretely, I'd be up front with our remaining employees about the tough times we're currently experiencing due to the pandemic. I'd reiterate how this was a last resort and we're working hard to ensure this won't happen again.

Reason: When layoffs happen, it's just as important to be transparent about the cause, or else your staff will become panicked and disengaged. Ensuring your employees know they're valued will help decrease the chance of a major morale dip.

QUOTES

As I grow older, I pay less attention to what men say. I just watch what they do.

Andrew Carnegie

Bitterness is like cancer. It eats upon the host. But anger is like fire. It burns it all clean.

Maya Angelou

If we don't change, we don't grow. If we don't grow, we aren't really living.

Gail Sheehy

If one advances confidently in the direction of their dreams, and endeavors to live the life which they have imagined, they will meet with success unexpected in common hours.

Henry David Thoreau

Our best successes often come after our greatest disappointments.

Henry Ward Beecher

The future rewards those who press on. I don't have time to feel sorry for myself. I don't have time to complain. I'm going to press on.

Barack Obama

Reader Responses

1 Ginger Kohr, Director, Owen County Public Library, Spencer, IN

What Ginger would do: I'd work with the laid-off employees every step of the way. That means making sure they get all their due benefits and providing a reference letter. I'd also stress that they'd have preferential consideration if any positions open up.

Reason: This is a time of heightened emotions. We owe it to our employees to make difficult decisions as painless as possible. Doing so could also prevent any heated retaliation against the company. And if the other employees know that we offered everything we could to the laid-off workers, it'll hopefully keep morale up.

2 Maria Reyes, HR manager, Wallenius Wilhelmsen Solutions, Oxnard, CA

What Maria would do: With respect to breaking the initial news, I'd have a group meeting with all employees to provide a company update and explain why we had