

## NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES

Now that we're into the first January of a new decade, it's as good a time as any to assess how we perform our jobs on a day-to-day basis. Human resources managers are no different, and here are my five suggestions of things they might consider trying in 2010.

1. First, stop working for employers who don't share your personal philosophy of employee relations.

The degree to which an employee "fits" in his or her workplace will determine, to a significant degree, his or her likelihood of success. This is perhaps true for human resources managers as much as for any other category of employee.

I frequently deal with human resources people who seem uncomfortable with the way their employer deals with its employees. These people should consider looking for an employer which better matches their own approach.

If your view of employee relations is at the "hardball" end of the spectrum, find a similar-minded employer. If, instead, you advocate a "softer" approach to employee relations, look for an employer who shares that view.

2. Second, consider whether to stop wasting time and resources trying to turn poor employees into good ones. It may actually be true that you cannot turn a sow's ear into a silk purse.

Is it possible that, in your particular industry, it makes better sense to invest your time and effort into weeding out and replacing poor performers? We've all seen the mathematics of how much it costs to replace an employee, but it may be that it's even more expensive to retain underachievers.

3. Third, work on changing the perception that your department is a typical bureaucracy. This label, obviously, isn't accurate for all human resources departments but there is a view out there that human resources people are slaves to administrative processes.

So, learn (and take to heart) that your role is to advance your employer's primary business objective. In everything you do, ask yourselves, "How are we assisting this business to achieve its primary objective?"

Donald Keough is a former President of the Coca-Cola Company. In his book, *The Ten Commandments for Business Failure*, he commented, "There must be rules and routines in every business to maintain the proper rhythm in everything. Over time, however, it seems that inevitably the rules and routines become more important than the ends they were designed to serve." Don't let this become the way your h.r. department is perceived.

4. Fourth, and this is closely related to the previous point, show a willingness to apply some "what if?" thinking. One frequent criticism of human resources departments is that they demonstrate a

closed mind to fresh ideas and things are done a certain way because that's the way they've always been done.

The "what if?" approach means contemplating the possible. It's sort of a comfortable first step, or a halfway point, between "can't" and "can" and requires a mind that is open to new concepts.

5. Finally, do the simple things that advance your employer's business interests, like implementing employment contracts. Properly implemented employment contracts are a critical mechanism for controlling and eliminating employee-related liabilities.

It is inconceivable to me that there is a trained, experienced human resources person out there who doesn't recognize the value of properly documenting the employer-employee relationship. Yet, many employers forego this simple, valuable tool.

If the only things the employment contract contains are a properly structured probation clause and an enforceable severance clause, you will have greatly contributed to your employer's business.

Think of the probation period as one long audition for a job. It reveals an individual's true skills and attitude in a way that interviews cannot - there simply is no substitute for viewing an individual on the job in real work situations.

A severance clause is required to oust the impact of the implied common law requirement of reasonable working notice of termination. This is, without a doubt, the single most important element of an employment contract.

These are five steps any human resources manager would be well-advised to consider as he or she embarks on a new year and a new decade. Who knows, one of them might be just the change you – and your employer - are looking for.