



HRA Services, Inc.

Fact Finder

April 2002

. . . helping organizations find solutions to people-related problems

BRIDGING THE GULF

Whether prompted by downsizing, merger, performance, or re-organization, outplacement has over the past two decades become commonplace in American corporate life. About eighty per cent of U. S. employers now provide transition services for departing employees. While clients facing severance situations often labor over alternatives, choices, 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. Of course, 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 pitfalls to avoid:

Absent an employment contract, you are fairly free to tailor a severance package to meet organization and employee needs. Probably the principal consideration is taking 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 as quickly and appropriately as possible. 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, and current labor market conditions. Many employers provide one to two weeks severance per year of service, which may vary by job level or title. A more valid approach is to determine with consulting support and counsel what it will take to get the individual to the next opportunity.

Outplacement has become so commonplace in American business because it provides necessary support for the employee and the employer in making the transition a success. Clearly, separating from one's job is one of life's top anxiety-producers. Providing skilled, experienced direction, counsel, and support in this process is necessary for many reasons and is often viewed as a corporate responsibility, especially when the severance is not performance-related. Corporate and moral considerations aside, employment transition services focus on events, results, and the future and equip the prospective job-seeker with the tools, perspectives, and coaching needed to move ahead.

DEALING WITH THE DAY-TO-DAY

"Where should we be filing our I-9 forms?" "I read somewhere that we're supposed to post an OSHA form once a year. Do we have to do that even if we didn't have any injuries last year? By the way, what form is it and what are the posting requirements?" "Can we ask an employee to use vacation time as part of their Family and Medical Leave?"

These are actual recent client questions. Some of you may not know that HRA has been providing clients this kind of day-to-day support for many years. Unfortunately, many of the rules and regulations designed to protect employees and employers can become complicated and convoluted in real-world applications. In addition to wrestling with these issues for many years in various organizational settings, we participate in many professional advisory services and forums where we can often help you find solutions in short order to problems that otherwise can be perplexing and time-consuming.

When you face an issue where you feel you need professional human resource advice and counsel, simply give us a call or fire off an e-mail. Use our web site e-mail if you like: www.hraservices.com. Normally, we will be able to respond in a matter of minutes or hours. Some issues require additional research of regulations and statutes and labor market practices and may take somewhat longer.

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT?

In their drive to find and keep good employees, managers and supervisors often overlook the obvious—the very thing that caused them to achieve and excel—reaching for new goals, developing new skills and competencies.

Each of us has competencies and interests we see as special. It might be writing skill or feeling that we are good leaders or simply feeling as if we are especially effective in working in groups or just getting along with others. Often we see these as our current strengths and areas where we believe we have great potential that simply needs mentoring and development. Sometimes there are even areas where we have fears we would like to overcome but are reluctant to speak out and take a chance at serious failure—examples include being uncomfortable in speaking to large groups or taking on new assignments where we have only limited expertise.

For many reasons, managers and supervisors often work hard at keeping themselves insulated from employees rather than getting to learn who their people really are and, as importantly, who they want to be. We forget that perhaps the most telling aspect of leadership is knowing our people. The better you know the individuals on your staff—each of whom is obviously an individual—the more effective you can be in providing the kind of leadership that relates to their unique interests, capacities, and situations. The more effective you will be in meeting their expectations and having them meet yours. This, of course, sounds simple enough. It takes two essential elements: First, you must be willing to risk failure if you are unable to establish a real leadership relationship. Second, you

must take the time required to get to know staff talents and build team success and strong unit performance. It's risky business, but if you don't give it a shot, you'll never know what could have been. "Leadership is its own reward."

ANXIETY AND ORGANIZATIONS

Over the last two decades, HRA has worked closely with a wide range of clients in a variety of settings in providing high-quality consulting support in organizational effectiveness and design. If you face perplexing organizational issues, we would be happy to talk with you.

The March 2002 issue of the *Harvard Business Review* has two thought-provoking, insightful articles that will prompt you to see your business in a different light: "Edgar Schein: The Anxiety of Learning" and "Do You Have a Well-Designed Organization?"

Edgar Schein provides thoughtful perspectives on why learning organizations have so much trouble learning. A pioneer in the field of organizational psychology, he reflects on his early work with the repatriation of thousands of American prisoners of war after Korea and applies his observations on "learning anxiety" and "survival anxiety" to difficulties in effectively managing the change process in today's organizations. Schein's conclusions challenge our current thinking and prompt us to critically diagnose what's really going on within the change process and how that affects organizational behavior.

The second article treats with simplicity and clarity organizational issues that you often sense but can't quite put your finger on. It provides sound principles and perspectives for organizational planning and development.

The *HRA Fact Finder* is published by HRA Services, Inc., to keep clients and business associates abreast of developments and trends in human resource and personnel management and is not intended to serve as professional advice on specific personnel and organizational issues.

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If you have questions or further interest in any of these subjects, please call.