



Fact Finder

HRA Services, Inc.

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

QUALITY COMMUNICATIONS

When was the last time you talked with your managers and supervisors about the tone and tenor of company communications? After all, nearly everyone agrees that the vast majority of organizational problems are the direct result of ineffective communication—formal, informal, written, oral, electronic, manual, upward, downward, and yes even sideways. It’s all so obvious and simple, yet so complicated when it comes to actual execution.

Maybe it all has something to do with communications device: People. Look how much trouble we have with computers and cell phones. Signals come and signals go. “Can you hear me now?” One unchecked settings box on the Advanced Tab can cause your email to go who knows where. Since working more closely with wireless devices, I’ve come to believe the real problem with people, for the most part, is that they are wireless. They walk around emitting signals at will with little attention to receiver settings, proprietary frequencies, and the like. Some signals hit the mark; some miss; some hit but get grabbed in translation; some never get past the recipient’s in-basket. Maybe the next big event should be hard-wiring the human dimension. At least that way, we could check to be sure we’re plugged in and the cables are connected. If you haven’t set aside 2004 budget for the hard-wiring option, talk to us about ways to upgrade your existing devices.

ARE YOUR LEADERS LEADING? (OR JUST REACTING TO CONFLICT)

Stephen Covey’s first habit of highly effective people is “Be proactive.” Are your leaders leading or just trying to keep conflict and chatter to a minimum?

So often it seems, as leaders and managers, we focus on the more quantifiable aspects of our jobs and concentrate on refraining from imposing our thinking and philosophy on others. Seldom do we engage others in the problem-solving process for fear of revealing our own self-imposed incompetencies. Here, carefully developed interviewing skills often serve well in quietly getting the information we need to shine a new light on the problem. Sometimes we even shrink from direct leadership challenges with the hope that somehow things will find a way of working themselves out—hopefully without the need for any human intervention. We see ourselves as orchestra conductors guiding the interests and development of the individual instrumentalists without any clearly visible musical score or theme to govern our overall collective activities.

As senior leaders and managers, we need to recognize these natural signs of avoidance behaviors as clear signals that less experienced leaders sometimes simply lack the training, experience, and development to know what to do. “They are doing what they’re doing because they don’t know what else to do.” The good news is that if such behaviors emanate from simple lack of knowledge and experience, real-life leadership development training and practice can be extremely helpful by exposing managers to new perspectives and presenting new vistas—new insights. While we are often prone to dismiss leadership and people problem-solving dilemmas as, after all “not rocket science,” the intensity in the eyes of some students of leadership grows incredibly bright when the light comes shining through. (I remember one suddenly blurted out, “I get it! I get it!”) Like great poetry that is so simple and clear we believe we could have written ourselves, leadership issues often appear deceptively simple and just plain old common sense. Yet when you convene a group to discuss the case, there are vehemently supported multiple solutions to what in

the privacy of your own mind seemed a rather simple one. Leadership is a growing need and a skill and discipline that our experience at HRA demonstrates clearly benefits from coaching and development. Give your developing leaders and teams the help they deserve. The results will indeed amaze you.

WHERE'S MY COPY OF OUR EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK?

Give your managers and supervisors a little test. Leaf through your copy of the Employee Handbook and jot down a few questions. For example, "How much leave can an employee request under FMLA?" or "How long can I wait before telling an employee she is eligible to apply for Family and Medical Leave?" or "How do you know that you may be facing a problem covered under the company's Sexual Harassment Policy?" or "How long should you wait before addressing a critical performance failure and how should you deal with the employee?" or "What should you do if you overhear an employee talking to another employee about salary issues?"

If answers to these questions give you a vague sense of discomfort, it may be time to bring your managers and supervisors back into the fold of adequate understanding of company policies. Employee Handbooks and Manager's Guides are not publications you can simply distribute and hope they work. They need to be accompanied by adequate, well-thought-out training and development opportunities that cause supervisors to understand the policy and experience the application in real-world situations.

If your employee and management publications are not up-to-date and intelligently applied, your company may be maximizing its exposure to potential litigation from a variety of perspectives. Dangerous as this may be, well developed and applied human resource policies carry the significant additional advantage of promoting sound supervision, leadership, and employee relations that

results in improved morale, commitment, and profitability.

WHO NEEDS SALARY ADMINISTRATION?

Most organizations want to be sure their basic policies and practices attract, retain, and motivate the talent they need to run the enterprise effectively and profitably. To do that, it is essential employees feel that the value of their contributions are weighed and measured and that they will share in the organization's success and development in a way that matches their individual contributions. Salary administration programs provide a clearly defined, systematic process for fairly and thoughtfully determining the relative value of positions within the organization. Once internal relationships are established, benchmark positions are used to determine labor market pay rates to create fair and competitive job and pay structures. These components, together with clear salary administration policies for merit increase, promotions, salary adjustments, etc., create the most fundamental building block of your company's human resource management program.

The steps in developing and implementing a salary administration program focus attention on other important aspects of organizational effectiveness such as division of labor, reporting relationships, quality of communications, leadership, and prevailing culture. Who needs salary administration: Organizations that want to be sure they are correctly positioned and anchored for high performance and effective future development?

If you do not have a salary administration and performance management program or just want to re-examine the effectiveness of your current approach to job relationships and pay practices, give us a call so we can schedule a time to talk with you in detail.

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

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