Department of Human Resource Management

HR2HR

October / November 2014

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

A Message from a Director

By: Rick Hughes, Learning, Development, Performance Management Director

Learning, Development, and Performance Management.

What is this title all about? Isn't this all just training? Close, but not quite the same thing. I'd like to share with you a "learning paradigm" for thinking about being a state employee, managing employees, and assisting customer agencies with helping their employees perform at their best.

At the individual level, we all want to have jobs with satisfying work and fair compensation. If our career interests and goals match with our employment situation, we'll probably be engaged and productive. At the management level, we want to have happy and capable employees who accomplish their work, while we also manage the ever-dynamic nature of our workforce and work demands.

The September initiative "Facilitating Succession and Career Planning" is one way DHRM is taking a lead in developing staff. During the past month, you were given tools to aid in exploring and planning your career. I hope you took time to consider possible career paths and options for growth within DHRM. What interests you and what are you going to do to attain skills and knowledge? The "learning" part is taking responsibility for your own goals and direction and proactively developing skills that advance your progress. We recently launched the DHRM University for the purpose of providing learning opportunities at all HR levels.

As our workforce experiences significant potential retirements of persons in leadership positions, opportunities for new leaders will grow. It is my intent to provide opportunities for all DHRM employees to develop leadership and technical talent so that current staff members can fill most if not all of these roles as key employees retire or leave our organization. DHRM University plays an important role in addressing this challenge. Our experience with growing expertise within will also enrich our ability to advise and consult with our customer agencies' leadership as they grapple with their HR planning needs.

Through a wide variety of consultation and professional development opportunities, we advise and educate leaders in a range of employee performance topics. Whether it's meeting agency Operational Excellence objectives or dealing with discipline issues, we assist managers in getting the most from their staff. The Utah Certified Public Managers ® Program is our longstanding accredited program that has trained thousands of managers to effectively lead people, manage work processes and develop self mastery. From classroom learning to online learning, we have it all.

A message from a director continued...

Our “learning paradigm” is employee success derived from the alignment of individual career goals and skills with organization objectives and needs. We want you to be successful. I encourage you to explore the resources and career options available to you. The Employee Gateway is a library of knowledge and a doorway to opportunities. Carpe Diem. If you have suggestions for other resources, please let me know.

What About Bob?

By: Bob Thompson, Labor Relations Director

To discipline or not to discipline, that is the question

In my position as Director or Labor Relations I am frequently asked to opine on whether there are “enough facts,” or if there is “enough stuff” to support discplinary action against an employee. At the heart of all such questions are concerns over liability and the ever present fear of “being taken to court” and being asked to legally support your agency’s decision to take adverse action against an employee.

Answering such questions is never easy and there is no exact science or formula guaranteeing not only that you won’t be “taken to court,” but that when “taken to court,” you will prevail. As long as humans are involved in “Human Resources” it will always be an inexact science.

With this backdrop however, I have developed a list of 10 questions I believe you should ask every time before you decide to take adverse action against an employee. While these 10 questions won’t always guarantee you will not be challenged in court, if answered correctly, these questions will go a long way in helping you limit your agency’s liability should its disciplinary decision be challenged.

(1) Is the reason for discipline based on unlawful motivation?

Sometimes an articulated reason for disciplinary action looks genuine on the surface, but upon closer examination it may be based on an unlawful reason. For example, a supervisor’s frustration over an employee’s time and attendance issues may lead to unlawful actions being taken in violation of the Family Medical Leave Act.

(2) Know the real facts.

Don’t just accept the facts as presented to you by management as true. Check the facts. Once you know the true facts, take a moment to view them from the employee’s point of view. For at least a moment in your own mind, become the employee’s advocate. This will bring clarity to all the facts and allow you to better counsel your agency on what action to take.

(3) Get the documentation.

Four types of documentation are always needed to be really prepared to support disciplinary action. First, a clearly written explanation of the events when a witness testimony is needed. Second, documentation of prior disciplinary history. Third, performance reviews and plans. And fourth, how others similarly situated have been treated.

What about Bob? Continued.....

(4) Review all relevant records.

If your case involves documentary proof, make sure you personally review all the relevant documents. For example, if someone is accused of violating agency policy, make sure you read and apply the policy to the known facts of the case.

(5) Let the employee give their side of the story.

This is especially helpful in factual situations or in circumstances where fact need to be placed in context. For no other reason this is helpful to show a reviewing body that you were trying to learn the true facts as spoken of above.

(6) Has the employee been provided notice of the problems?

An employee should never be surprised by a discipline related to performance. Performance Improvement Plans are uniquely suited to accomplish this objective.

(7) Has the employee had a chance to fix any issues that are now being used to impose discipline?

This question is closely related to question six above. This is primarily relevant in performance related disciplinary actions. I firmly believe that if done correctly in performance cases, an employee should never be surprised when informed that they are being disciplined.

(8) Consistency.

Due process requires it and justice demands it. Always, always, always be consistent in disciplinary decisions. Remember that consistency requires that you treat similarly situated with consistency. It means more than treating all apples similar. It is more exact than that. It means that you must treat all "Granny Apples" similarly. If you look closely enough you should usually find a way to distinguish one employee for another.

(9) Be consistent in applying your policies.

In other words don't make arbitrary exceptions to your agency's policies. If you have a no tolerance policy, apply it evenly to your best and worst performers.

(10) At the end of the day will a reasonable fact finder believe the actions you took were fair??

I know that life is not fair, but it is dangerous to believe that fact-finders somehow check their emotions at the door. Be sensitive to sympathetic facts that may work for or against you. Even when you have the law on your side, if it works to create what may be perceived as an injustice, fact-finders are likely to ignore the real facts and develop their own version; a version that does not impose what they perceive an injustice.

So there you have it. The next time you question the propriety of a disciplinary action, take a minute to consider these questions. Doing so may prevent headaches down the road. These questions will also help you better formulate your strategy when working with your agency in deciding appropriate actions to take while dealing in the myriad of personnel actions faced by each of us on a daily basis.

Charitable Fund Campaign

By: Sherry Saracino,
HR Project Coordinator

The Utah State Employees' Charitable Fund Campaign encourages and enables State employees to contribute to non-profit agencies easily and confidentially.

You can pledge online from October 1, 2014 and October 31, 2014. Deductions in the amount you specify will begin with the first payday in January following the campaign and continue through the year until the last payday in December. You also have the option of making a one-time donation when you pledge online. Print your receipt and attach a copy of it to your check or money order made payable to the Utah State Employees' Charitable Fund.

For more information visit the USECF web site. If you have questions or wish to make a one-time donation, please contact Sherry Saracino.

Designed Especially for DHRM: News YOU Can USE

Webinar - To Be Announced

Are you looking for an ACA update? If you are, then be on the look out for more information for a webinar presented by Debra Valentine about the latest on matters concering the ACA.

A day in the life of a HR Team...

By: Newsletter Staff

The DWS HR Team

Operational Excellence

We will deliver the highest quality services, with innovative methods, at the most efficient cost

Exceptional Customer Service

We will meet the needs of our customers with responsive, respectful and accurate service

Employee Success

We will provide an environment that fosters professional growth and personal fulfillment

Community Connection

We will actively participate with and engage our community partners to strengthen Utah's quality of life

Michelle Campbell **Dave Laycock** **Christa Rowland**

Pat Barrett **Cathy Lewis** **Rachel Dodge**

Erin Rhead

HR2HR: What are the particulars of running a successful HR office?

DWS HR: The first thing is teamwork and communication. We need to communicate well so we know what's going on and we can back each other up. We always know that if one of the analysts is gone, someone else can pick it up. You don't have to tell someone that they have to wait for a manager or for someone to get back. There is someone here to help you. Same thing applies to the specialist—we can pick up each other's stuff and make a smooth transition so people don't have to wait. We're all approachable and helpful.

HR2HR: Do you have a particular communication strategy?

HR DWS: We have weekly staff meetings so everyone knows what's going on within our HR office. In addition, Pat and Cathy meet weekly with Dave about liability issues. Because our work stations are in close proximity, we can do shout-outs instead of only using instant messaging. We're pretty open with each other. Another advantage to our inter-office communication is we are located in one office. It would be much different if we were scattered all over.

HR2HR: What are some of the challenges that make HR work in this office unique from other offices?

HR DWS: One of the challenges of working with DWS is that everything is immediate. When they change, it changes just like that, snap. And as an HR shop, we have to be prepared to move with it. You have to be ready and anticipate when they are going to make a radical shift and be ready to move. You can't be too process-bound. You have to be able to work with them in constant change. They pride themselves on being on the cutting edge, so we are constantly trying to stay with them.

A Day in the Life Continued.....

HR2HR: Have you found anything that helps you to keep up with that change?

HR DWS: You just have to go with the flow and use data to look for trends. Dave often runs reports for DWS and is part of their senior leadership which keeps him in the loop with upcoming changes in the agency.

HR2HR: Are there any special quirks about this office?

HR DWS: There are a lot of politics surrounding the agency. DWS is under public scrutiny largely because employees have access to an incredible amount of sensitive data. Therefore, they undergo a lot of training, and DWS enforces a zero tolerance policy when accessing confidential information without a legitimate business reason.

DWS employees often have to deal with angry people as well as people who are experiencing tough times. There are a lot of important decisions made that greatly impact people's lives. These are hard jobs and they are under a lot of stress. We get a lot of the fallout from that because employee stress can lead to a variety of work place issues.

HR2HR: What is most rewarding about working in this office?

HR DWS: We have a great team and a great boss. We all get along and we genuinely like each other. It's awesome to be able to come to work and like all of your co-workers. We try to do fun team things like pot lucks and staff birthday parties.

Another thing we all do is eat together. When Dave first came here he thought it was a little weird, but grew to love it. We've had some of our most fun discussions during lunch. You learn more about your colleagues during lunchtime than you do during work time. It's a bonding experience.

HR2HR: Do you see a lot of work fluctuation from day-to-day?

HR DWS: There are definitely fluctuations. On some days, someone might be really busy and we all help them. No one is afraid to say, "I'm drowning and need help." That is why cross training is required here: having analysts see the work specialists are doing so we can have them learn more.

Cathy has been here 31 years and thought she'd seen it all, but she still gets questions that she doesn't know. There are still surprises.

You start your day thinking you know what your day is going to be like, but half way though the day, something gets thrown in and you're off in a different direction than the way you started. You just go with it.

HR2HR: Since DWS is a statewide agency, are there challenges in not being face-to-face with your customers?

HR DWS: There are a lot of phone calls, but we also try to visit people. We might be down in St. George or up in Logan—it just depends upon where they are and what type of issue we are dealing with. Sometimes you can meet by phone; sometimes we go on a trip; sometimes we meet with supervisors or staff and do training on issues or concerns they may have regarding a variety of topics.

HR2HR: How do you keep the human element of HR if you are not able to physically be there?

HR DWS: It's true, we are not always face to face with a customer, but I (Dave) get a lot of complements on how effective the staff are as they interact with our customers on the phone, through email and other forms of communication. One of our SALT & Pepper goals was to visit each of the outlying DWS employment centers. It might mean leaving at three in the morning to drive to Cedar City and be back by six so you don't have an overnight stay. That's what we do.

Get Green With Leaf Mulch

By: Chris Whipple, HR Technician II

Raking leaves this autumn does not have to necessarily be a chore. The long struggle of man versus the annual fall of foliage can turned into man's favor by making those leaves beneficial for both you and your lawn. Turning those leaves into helpers is both cheap and easy.
Here are a few simple ways to do it.

The first way is simply to mow over the leaves instead of bagging them. This helps save your back as well as turns the leaves into mulch. Take the grass catcher off the back of your mower then mow over the leaves on your lawn. You will want to cut your leaves to about dime-size chunks. You know you are done when about half an inch of grass can be seen through the mulched layer. Once the leaf chunks get settled-in then your lawn will get to work recycling them by using a variety of microbes and worms.

Any kind of rotary-action mower will do the job, and any kind of leaves can be chopped up. With several passes of your mower, you can mulch up to 18 inches of leaf clutter.

Finally, add some Scotts Turf Builder Winterguard and your lawn is set for next spring. A recent study at Michigan State University showed that this practice helped to improve your soil composition as well as added nutrients to your lawn. How simple is that?!

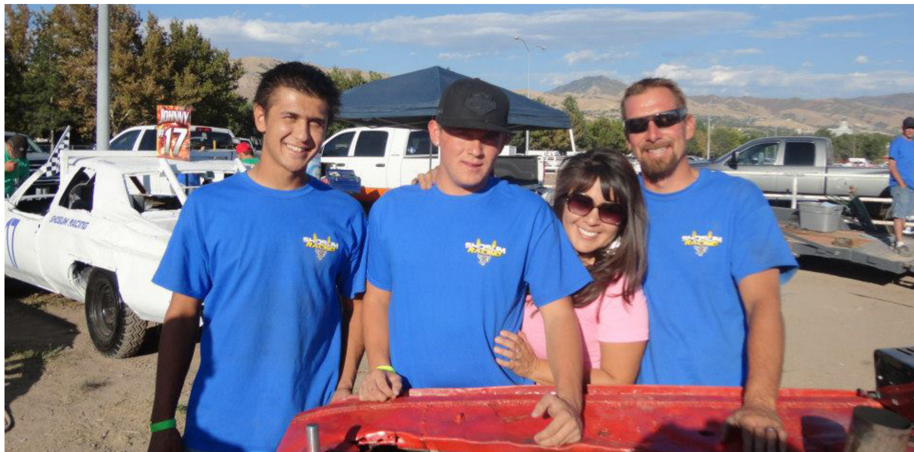
Not a fan of the mowing idea? Go ahead, rake! Besides, it is a good form of exercise. (How is that for positive thinking?) When you are done raking, pile the leaves somewhere where they won't be disturbed and just wait. It is best to put them in a spot where they are not too sheltered, as the pile needs to get wet occasionally. After about two years or less, you will have rich compost ready to be added to your flower beds or around your shrubs.

If you are feeling super productive, you can even make a 3-by-3-foot leaf mold "cage" from stakes and chicken wire. I know two years can seem like quite the commitment, so in order to speed up the leaves' rate of decomposition try running a lawn mower over the pile a few times. To ensure even decomposition turn the pile occasionally. BAM! Compost!

Even if you prefer the old trustworthy approach of raking and bagging your leaves, you can still donate them to a community garden in your area. They are basically pros at this stuff and are typically looking for leaves to use. Regardless of your commitment level, there is something you can do to use the leaves in your yard wisely. Hopefully, as you see the foliage falling from the trees you will be able to view the upcoming yard-work as more than a chore but as a way to help your lawn grown and thrive next spring.

What Do You Do on the Weekends? By: Angela Kula, HR Communication Coordinator

The night after a demolition derby, it's not uncommon to see a crumpled mess or two sitting on a trailer in front of Tina's house. It's become a family sport for the Sweet Family, with all but one member of the family having been behind the wheel.



Tina with her husband and two sons

The preparation for a derby starts many weeks before, with countless hours spent stripping old cars of interior comforts and exterior embellishments. Hours of welding, cutting, bending, and sledge hammering to get the cars ready to compete.

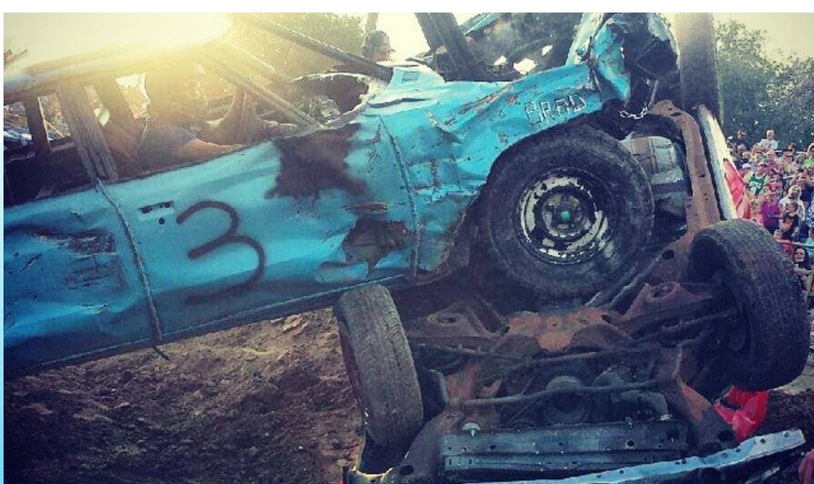
Then comes "Derby Day" as they affectionately like to call it. The day starts early although the show may not actually start until 7:00 that night. Tina and her husband Chad are normally some of the first people at the arena to help the promoter put on the show. They both have their assigned duties; Tina sells pit passes, helps with driver/car check-in, and makes sure no one gets by without a wristband. Chad helps inspect the cars to make sure drivers have followed the rules to help keep everyone as safe as possible. Their "kids" – Taylor (23), Austin (21) and Shelbie (19) all trickle in during the day, depending on whether they are driving that night or just helping put the show on. When show time rolls around, it's time for Tina to get up to the announcer's booth to time drivers between hits and for Chad and the boys to get their headphones, radios, and flags ready to start the show.

CARE to SHARE?

If you are doing something interesting on the weekends, we want to hear about it.

Email your weekend adventures to Angela Kula

It's an adrenaline rush for them all, Tina's heart pounds every time one of her kids are competing but she can't help but cheer for them. There have been some pretty scary moments for sure, like when her son Taylor rolled the Lt. Governor at Salt Lake County Fair; Lt. Governor Cox was a very good sport about it though, and congratulated him on his driving. There's no doubt Derby weekends are action packed, and the behind the scenes perspective is an exciting weekend activity for the Sweet family.

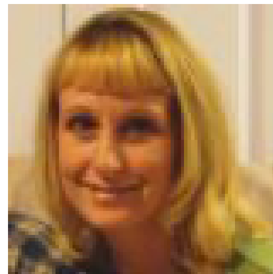


Tina's son, Taylor, driving over Lt. Governor Spencer Cox

DHRM Summer Meeting 2014

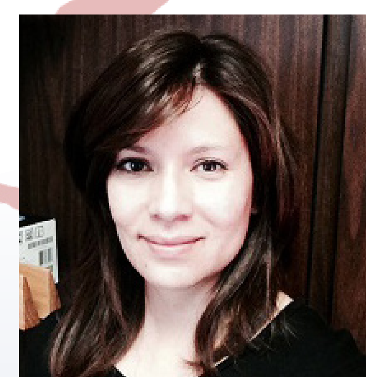
DHRM Employee Spotlight

Tehra Gorski only recently returned from maternity. She returned to an entire new team. Upon her return, she immediately recognized that the Intake Team needed some refresher training on how to create cases and documentation requirements. She developed a training tool and approached management with her ideas. She presented the training tool to the Intake staff on July 15. It was well received. Many staff commented that they appreciated the information and were not aware of many of the requirements.



Kim Diamond-Smith exhibited excellent leadership skills as the Chairperson of the Liability Committee the past six months, ending in June. This committee has been working on the HR Specialist Handbook for several years. Kim took the initiative to lead the group to finish and publish the handbook, which was just added to the DHRM portion of the Gateway.

Evelyn Gruter filled in while the department was without a finance director for five weeks during fiscal year-end and the run-up to the rate committee. Many extra hours were put in and new assignments completed by Evelyn.



Monica Jimenez is working so very well with USDC to come up with solutions to solve their personnel needs. She's really done some great things in terms of finding out what their issues are and presenting ideas to help them find a resolution.

DHRM Staff changes

Check out the Water Cooler to see all the staffing that took place over the last two months.

WATER COOLER

Newsletter staff

Editor in Chief: Debbie Cragun

Newsletter Staff:
Tammy Magee
Sue Recupero
Winston Inoway
April Nicholls
Chris Whipple
Angela Kula