

From: Bob Nadel [mailto:hrny@hq4u.com]

Sent: Monday, January 27, 2003 1:42 PM

To: hrnymembers@hq4u.com

Subject: Letter to the Wall Street Journal Editor re Jared Sandberg's Characterization of HR

Dear HRNY member:

The following is my response to Jared Sandberg of the Wall Street Journal which last Wednesday published a Market Place Corner Column on HR. The gist of Mr. Sandberg's article is that we are the people who have popcorn at the benefits meetings where we deliver bad news, and we are also the people who arrange wilderness trips to teach people to bond. I viewed this as an inflammatory, derogatory description to which I was obliged to respond. That response is below. Please let me know your thoughts.

Bob Nadel, President, HRNY

Dear Editor:

I read Jared Sandberg's column about Human Resources professionals with some disdain, based primarily on what is your apparent disdain for our profession. While your column was "colorful" I think your characterization of my colleagues as "popcorn dispensers" and "organizers of rope climbing exercises" is highly demeaning to our chosen profession. I do not doubt your facts, because they are true. There is popcorn and rope climbing. But they are true under the theory that you can find any piece of data, at any time to prove one point, once. But how prevalent, how characteristic of that as the practice of human resources...that another story.

These very same "popcorn dispensers" are the professionals who see that you are sourced, recruited, selected and paid at your company. They provide programs that assist management to evaluate your performance. They assure you are properly enrolled in the best benefit plan for you (and they negotiate with third party vendors in a highly rising cost market). You want to be sure that you are properly enrolled in one of these plans, because if you fall off that rope in the woods, and bruise your "tush" that so called "popcorn dispenser" is the first person you will call when your claim is not paid, or you didn't understand the co-pay or the deductible.

You see, when we were attacked on 9/11, 2,000 of our members dropped their "butter and popcorn poppers" and ran to the aid of their colleagues, their employees and their management. These professionals worked for almost two years developing mental health programs to relieve the trauma, insurance filings to pay the injured, the survivors and the children. We organized job fairs and over a six month period had "thousands" of human resources professionals volunteering at job fairs sponsored by the mayor and the governor. We made sure the volunteers spoke every language represented by the cultures injured by that disaster. In the initial days following 9/11 we were tested like no other profession except for our heroic uniformed heroes. Inside companies HR was the focal point for regrouping the troops to become less stressed, more productive and to help those in need. For every injured or deceased person from 9/11 the ripple effect was to employees in eight other companies. If your company was unscathed, bet on the fact that your supplier, or your customer was not unscathed.

9/11 aside, we are the function that is called upon to train people in ethics, after the accountants and the executives shred their papers. We are the ones who counsel those about to retire on their options for retirement when they are about to retire in a bad economy with 50% of what they thought they would have in their retirement plans. And when management wants to reduce the workforce, we are the ones who counsel the "outplaced worker" and protects our companies by trying to limit the anger that results in litigation and other acrimony.

It seems also that when a company has a sudden change of fortune, in a good or bad way, we are the ones who are called to "fix" the work force. "Find me ten new people by yesterday," or "get rid of 1,000 people by Christmas."

Your own WSJ organization thinks HR professionals are important to talk to all the time. You have a representative or two who constantly calls on us to speak in front of our professionals about effective recruiting strategies, especially when it involves using the WSJ to be more effective. Indeed, we even allow your representatives to speak with our monthly membership meetings to bring their point of view to our members. I don't think that your people also try to get in front of the "popcorn vendors" with such fervor.

I have spend 34 years fixing the messes made by management. Just the other day I commented to a colleague that half of my effort over my career has been mopping up the mess left from bad management decision making, or the failure to address key situations in a timely manner. You quoted Bruce Ellig, SPHR, a highly respected member of our profession as saying that you don't have to go into the woods to teach communication. He's right. But, did you also give him a chance to tell you just how much Bruce wants us to be creative and innovative...to "think outside of the box?"

As I said earlier, its very colorful of you to call us the popcorn people, but call me when you have an eldercare problem, a child care problem, the need to know about the provisions of the Family Medical Leave Act (by the way, the government provides the acronyms like FMLA, EEO, ERISA, etc, not us). Call me when you want to know why you didn't get the raise you think you deserve, or why you didn't get promoted. Call me if you need to know if your secretary is eligible for overtime. Call me if you feel sexually harassed, or are have a "situation" with your boss. Call me when your pension plan shows less dollars and you are in a panic. Call me if someone you love dies and you feel stressed or can't come to work. Please however, never call me if you have a sudden urge for popcorn, because if you do I will be too busy to find the butter for you.

By the way, at your very nice WSJ company, do you enjoy the gym, the flex time, telecommuting, day care, concierge services...yes, we did that too.

I have to go, because there is a guy from Oklahoma City on the phone, and he's going to help me develop preventative programs based on their experience that their 1996 trauma resulted in increased suicide, child abuse, substance abuse, spousal abuse, divorce and aggressive felonies. You see Mr. Sandberg, if my profession can keep one family together, or stop one suicide, or prevent one kid from using a gun here in NYC we will have made a contribution you never even associated with our profession.

I would be happy to discuss this with you at any time in any venue, including having you as a guest speaker or panelist at one of our monthly membership meetings. Want to come and talk to our members? You have an open invitation.

Most Sincerely,

Robert S. Nadel
President
The Human Resources Association of New York