In Practice

Corporate Layoffs Leave Personnel Departments Untouched

Widespread efforts by large companies to reduce their work forces have not triggered cutbacks in personnel departments. Firms surveyed in a Conference Board study covering nearly 600 of the nation's largest companies employed an estimated seven HRD professionals for each 1,000 employees in 1985. This is the same ratio registered in 1984. All told, the median number of HRD professionals in surveyed companies was 36 in 1984, 35 in 1985, and is estimated at 36 in 1986. Lawrence Schein, who directed the survey, observes that, "The employment stability in personnel appears to reflect the more strategic role being performed by the human resource function as companies merge, develop leaner organizations, and expand their training and retraining programs in response to technological change and foreign competition. "Many companies obviously hope that personnel management will provide them with a strong competitive edge."

And merger mania is not likely to abate in the near future. According to a majority of surveyed HRD executives, mergers will continue to pervade the scene. In fact, 60 percent of those surveyed say that mergers, acquisitions, or divestitures will have an impact on their firms over the next three years. The same percentage also anticipate operational changes as a result of the introduction of new technologies in their firms.

Motivating employees whose jobs hang in the balance during a merger is the task HRD professionals increasingly are faced with. More than half of the surveyed executives predict greater use of problem-solving teams and other techniques to spur employee involvement. The survey also found HRD managers believe the two major challenges now confronting them are holding down health-care costs and increasing productivity. Nearly 90 percent of those surveyed optimistically predict increases in productivity as a result of more efficient use of their companies' human resources.

Other findings of the study include:

- Job opportunities for managers and professionals will be considerably better in financial services than in manufacturing and public utilities.
- Corporations will not emphasize such issues as comparable pay, flextime, day care, and "gainsharing," over the next three years. Not surprisingly, those surveyed predict growing corporate attention on pay for performance, appraising managerial performance, devising top management bonuses, and computerizing personnel records.
- Financial services companies and nonunion firms are emphasizing bonus plans for their middle managers and other professionals.
- Durable goods manufacturers expect more diversification, more operations abroad, and a greater use of new technology than nondurable manufacturers.

For further information on this survey, contact The Conference Board, 845 Third Ave., New York, NY 10022.

How to Survive with a New Boss

In this record-breaking era of mergers and takeovers, you may wake up one day to find you have a new boss—and a risky situation.

Employees who stay on—as well as the new boss—are responsible for easing the transition, says Andrew Sherwood, president and CEO of Goodrich & Sherwood Company, a human resources management consulting firm based in New York City. To get through the first rough days of a takeover, Sherwood suggests the following.

- First impressions are lasting, so bend over backward during the "get-acquainted" period to be sure your facts are accurate.

■ Switch your loyalty to the new boss and show you're on the new team.
■ Be flexible and open to change. Don't dwell on the way things were done in the past. Remember, the boss is adjusting to change, too.
■ Be cooperative. The boss needs you as much as you need the boss.
■ Determine the newcomer's objectives and priorities. If they aren't readily apparent, ask for clarification.
■ Check former associates of your new boss for the word on preferences, style, and idiosyncrasies.
■ Be meticulous about work habits. Get to work on time, keep lunch hours reasonable, and leave word when you can be reached if you leave your work area.
■ As problems and questions arise, deal with them openly and get them out of the way quickly.
■ Even after you've done everything possible to meet the new situation, be prepared for change. Some things are beyond your control.

Standards for Instructional Developers Set

The International Board of Standards for Training, Performance, and Instruction has announced publication of its competencies for instructional developers, the result of a 10-year effort by experts in the field. Explains the Board's outgoing president, Barry Bratton, the competencies "provide insight and guidance for many applications." "For example, they enumerate the activities that take place during course development from project initiation through evaluation. They list the conditions under which developers should perform, the performances competent developers will be able to complete, and criteria for judging adequacy of any performance."

The Board describes the 90-page volume as easily understood and jargon-free, focused on practical applications, and reflecting instructional technology as it is commonly known. And, the competencies are cross-referenced to current and historical sources "accepted by most practitioners as being authoritative."

The Board recommends their book for
■ practitioners who want to compare their skills with the accepted norm for their profession;
■ academics developing curricula for instructional professionals;
■ courseware evaluators wanting a dependable checklist for instructional products;
■ hiring officials who want a dependable set of competencies for screening applicants.

Those interested in ordering the volume of competencies should contact Judith Hale, secretary, IBSTPI, 11101 Eaton Ct., Westchester, IL 60153; tel. 312/562-8393.

Fitting in Determines Job Success

You won't find it in any job description, but the single most important criterion in the selection of an employee is not job skills or experience, says career counselor Marilyn Moats Kennedy; it's whether or not the candidate "fits in." In other words, companies hire people who share their values.

Rejection on the basis of not fitting in is very hard for job hunters to accept because, says Kennedy, they take it personally. In last March's issue of *Kennedy's Career Strategist,* she suggests, however, that the rejection may be a blessing in disguise: "Getting hired and not fitting in is the most common reason people are unhappy in their jobs. That's real pain—much worse than rejection."

Kennedy recommends that job hunters get references on a prospective employer to find what its values are: "Dredge up as many former employers as you can and ask them about the organization's culture.... Nothing has more impact on your success."

Kennedy lists six questions job hunters should ask themselves to determine if they would fit in a company.

- *Does your idea of sociability coincide with the company's?* Kennedy claims "enforced sociability," such as partying with coworkers after work or joining a bowling league, is a more common reason for job dissatisfaction than inadequate salary.
- *Does the company push employees into community service?* Coaching Little League or being active in Rotary can be difficult if you have other time commitments.
- *Is your level of education comparable to coworkers' and the boss'?* Advanced degrees from the best schools aren't an asset when the boss or coworkers haven't had the same advantages.
- *Are you highly competitive?* Find out whether getting along or getting ahead is important. Kennedy says prospective employers often say they're looking for one thing ("a real go-getter") but actually hire the opposite.
- *Can you compete financially with the lifestyle of coworkers?* Kennedy points out that a sole breadwinner may find it hard to interact socially in a company populated with two-income workers.

A company's value system doesn't always come out in an interview, advises Kennedy. Job hunters should observe the office and the people for clues. For a free sample of the newsletter, write Kennedy's Career Strategist, 714 Sheridan Road, Chicago, IL 60091.

Technical Hiring Continues to Fall

Job prospects for America's engineers

and scientists in technical fields continue to shrink, and the recent space shuttle tragedy hasn't helped. According to Marjorie Freedland, research director of Deutsch, Shea & Evans in New York, "Technical demand closed out first-quarter 1986 on a modest note. Our High Technology Recruitment Index registered just 116, considerably lower than the 127 for the comparable period last year. And, 1985 itself was a lackluster year."

Freedland's firm has maintained the index since 1960, when the nation's investment in technology was beginning a long upward curve. "Furthermore," advises Freedland, "we see no dramatic increases over the next few months, as employers can be expected to maintain their cautious stance and keep staffing lean."

Freedland cites four reasons for this downward curve in the fortunes of technologists: continued poor performance of the computer and electronic components industries; anticipated curtailed federal spending as a result of balanced budget legislation; postponement of the space program; and static general economic conditions.

The February three-month running average of 116 showed virtually no change from the January level of 115. Ominously, however, single-month data for the first three months of 1986 have been declining steadily. March stands at just 100—the 1960 base-year norm.

The Index is based on the volume of recruitment advertising directed to degreed engineers and scientists in key U.S. newspapers and journals each month.

Suggestion Boxes Save Big Bucks

Don't think your company can cut costs by thousands of dollars each year while enriching employees' jobs and their paychecks at the same time? Think again. Suggestion programs have proven remarkably effective in some of America's most successful companies.

Last year, for example, reporting member companies of the National Association of Suggestion Systems

(NASS) saved approximately $1.25 *billion* as a result of their suggestion programs. In addition, NASS reporting member companies made nearly $128 million in award payments to employees during 1985. And this was a 31 percent increase over the amount paid for suggestions adopted by NASS member companies in 1984. "Suggestion systems represent an outstanding employee communications vehicle," says Carol Lukas, 1986 president of NASS, and suggestion program administrator for Control Data Corp. "They give a company another reason to communicate with their employees—their most important resource. Employees like suggestion systems because they give them a voice in the company. Such programs are an outstanding way to build a partnership between management and employees and increase understanding and morale."

Approximately one of every four suggestions submitted to an NASS member during 1985 was adopted, according to reporting companies. In 1985, member companies included in the annual statistical report received 1,332,218 suggestions, or 14 suggestions from every 100 eligible employees. Of these, a total of 330,128 suggestions were adopted—a rate of 25 percent.

The average net savings per suggestion adopted for reporting NASS members last year was $4,397—an increase of 28 percent over similar figures for 1984. In addition, for every 100 employees eligible to participate in an employee suggestion program, companies averaged savings of $24,350—or approximately $243 per eligible employee.

NASS is a Minneapolis-headquartered, not-for-profit association of administrators of suggestion systems at about 1,000 companies.

What's Good for the Goose: Computerphobia in the Executive Suite

The odds are better than even that you won't find a computer in your executive's office (although it's a safe bet the exec's secretary has one). This one-sided acceptance of the computer is reflected in a recent survey of executives at America's top corporations by the Princeton, N.J.-based Kepner-Tregoe, Inc., in which 64 percent of the executives reported they believe computers "help managers do their job better"—but more than half of the same executives never use a computer. That America's executives are a conservative lot is more than evidenced by the snail-like pace with which many of their companies have responded to the high-tech challenge from overseas. That a majority of them are downright afraid of computers might come as a surprise. Such computerphobia in the leadership of a company is not, to say the least, an encouraging example to those further down the ladder.

What's more, the survey notes that a mere 27 percent of these top executives review computer printouts often. (Thirteen percent never review them at all.) The senior executives who have taken the plunge said they most frequently use the computer for financial analysis. A distant second was word processing, and only one respondent said "planning." The results seem to show that executives (many of whose companies are automating) remain in the dark about what computers can do for them. One CEO, when asked if computers help managers do their jobs better said, "No. They are tools for people who do tasks—not managers." (This forthright, if somewhat misguided, CEO also indicated that no one in top management in his or her organization uses a computer.) Another response to the same question was, "Middle managers, yes—top management, not yet! Systems capability is not available to make computers more effective." A third responded, "Executives are paid too much to develop computer skills at their current level. Executives are being paid to analyze and implement." What explains these defensive attitudes? Several executives cited "inaccurate data" contained in the computer. Still others, typified by one CEO's comment, cautioned against "dehumanization of decision making." Another CEO warned that computers "take judgment out of decisions." "Loss of personal dexterity," was one respondent's somber view. Yet another warned against "becoming too data-bound"! "There will always be a place for intuitive and creative judgment which can cut through endless analysis."

A fear of "conformity—consensus thinking in management" was expressed by a senior executive. In a similar vein, one COO fears "centralization—don't want it."

One of the most curious responses was by a chairman of the board who said computers help managers do their jobs better, but no one in senior management in his or her company uses a computer. Is it likely the Japanese would appreciate the irony of this situation?

Please send items of interest for In Practice to Robert Bové, Training & Development Journal, *1603 Duke St., Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.*