

## DO YOU PLAY FAVORITES AT WORK? YOU SHOULD.

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Fri 02/06/2017*

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I was thinking the other day about Mrs. Lacroix, my third-grade teacher. One of my classmates was complaining about a perceived slight of some kind—I imagine it had something to do with recess—and her calm response, one eyebrow raised, was, “Well, who ever said life was fair?”

We were gobsmacked. I sensed even then that this was not an original concept, but it was the first time anyone had ever laid it out quite so plainly for our sheltered little group. I think we all also sensed, intuitively, that she was right.

Some of Mrs. Lacroix’s pedagogical methods have not stood the test of time—I am thinking specifically of her propensity to whip off her glasses, stroll dramatically across the room, and administer cheek kisses to misbehaving third-grade boys—but maybe more of us could use a reminder from time to time about this “no fairness guarantees” thing.

To be sure, plenty of unfairness that takes place in the workplace is just plain wrong, morally and legally, and we should do everything we can to eradicate it. I’m talking about things like discrimination on the basis of sex, race, religion, and so forth, as well as retaliation against workers who blow the whistle on wrongdoing.

But the idea that all workers are all exactly the same, and should be treated as such, does no one any favors—particularly your superstars. Why should Driven Donny, who goes the extra mile every day and turns in truly exceptional work, get the same across-the-board 2% raise as Mediocre Mildred, whose biggest daily accomplishment is a record number of successful round-trips to the workplace coffee pot?

Seriously, why do we do this?

As Jennifer McClure of [Unbridled Talent](#) put it so well at our recent THRIVE conference in Las Vegas (which was fantastic, by the way), “We *want* to play favorites and reward the people who are doing great work.” I think that’s a sentiment Mrs. Lacroix would wholeheartedly endorse.

If you’re looking for ways to help create a strong environment for professional development at your workplace while boosting business growth and keeping your best employees engaged and on board

(because fair's fair), you won't want to miss our [Workforce Learning & Development 2017](#) conference this fall, featuring renowned keynote speaker [Bob Kelleher](#). [Check it out now!](#)

# MAKING WORK TEAMS WORK

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Tue 04/25/2017*

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There may be no "I" in "TEAM" - but there's certainly a lot of dysfunction. Even the best workplace teams aren't immune to occasional tensions and roadblocks.

This isn't surprising, really. No matter how many times we try to remind workers that we're *all* on the same team at our organizations, individual styles, egos, and personalities come into play. And, unlike in regular life, work teams are not always (or even often) made up of people we've chosen to surround ourselves with - it's more like being seated next to someone on a Transatlantic flight who may or may not speak your language.

Finally, with work getting more decentralized, teams often comprise members halfway around the world who have never met in person. Telework is great for efficiency but not so great for getting to know your colleagues as well-rounded people.

But teams are a fact of work life, and an important one.

Kim LaFever of Positive Disruption has devoted her career to helping teams adapt and thrive through change - which, let's face it, has become perhaps the one constant in life these days. It's absolutely worth taking some time to figure out how to best surf the wave: "Companies that move through change with grace, speed, and agility not only win in the marketplace, they also become the best places to work," she notes.

I'm really excited for Kim's session coming up at the THRIVE conference in a couple of weeks; she'll be talking about how to achieve success with a network of teams:

- How a decentralized approach to authority can be successfully implemented in many business settings
- Real-world examples of fluid networks of agile and powerful teams capable of delivering output in creative and impactful ways
- What Millennials, a fast-growing segment of today's workforce, demand from their teams (it's not what you think)

- How effectively using networks of teams can drive business results, employee engagement, and talent retention

Kim is one of many fantastic speakers we have lined up for THRIVE. It's going to be a fun and incredibly valuable investment in your career and your organization's success.

If you haven't yet signed up to attend, time's running out! The conference is coming up fast on May 11th and 12th. [Click here](#) to learn more; hope to see you (and some of your team members) there.

## MARCH MADNESS, HR STYLE

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Wed 03/29/2017*

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While I'm by no means a huge basketball fan, I do generally enjoy all the hoopla surrounding the NCAA tournament (and accompanying bracketology) every March.

This year, however, I have found my attentions sidelined by a most unlikely contender: federal healthcare policy.

Employee benefits law isn't generally what one might describe as an edge-of-your-seat nailbiter, but that's exactly what we've gotten so far this year--the big build-up to ACA repeal, the introduction of the GOP's American Health Care Act (AHCA), and the 11th hour withdrawal of the AHCA bill when it became apparent it would lack the votes to pass the House.

What's going to happen next? I think it's fair to say that nobody really knows at this point. If there's a healthcare version of the fabled NCAA "Cinderella story" in the works, I for one am eager to see how it all plays out.

I am also eager to see how President Trump bounces back from this deal he simply couldn't close. I would imagine that he is finding leadership of the free world very different than leadership of his massively successful business empire.

Whether you're running a country, a company, or an HR department, leadership is *hard*--a role complicated by logistics, competing priorities, finite resources, and an endless array of people and personalities.

Our flagship [THRIVE conference](#) in Las Vegas in May is designed to help you rise above these day-to-day complexities so you can forge a path to organizational and personal success.

If you haven't yet checked it out, I would encourage you to do so--it's two days of intensive instruction (not to mention high-level networking) on the very topics that keep you up at night:

Performance appraisals. Talent development. Team building. And so much more. Our crackerjack events team has custom-crafted the event specifically for CHROs, VPs of HR, HR directors, and other business leaders to become successful agents of positive change for their organizations

Seriously--[check it out!](#) I will be there, along with several of my fellow BLR editors, and we'd love to be able to meet you in person. We've got a detailed agenda and speaker list up, but if you have any questions that aren't covered there, [drop me a line](#) and I'll get 'em answered.

Just think: The next HR Cinderella story could be you.

## GOT EMPLOYEES WHO ARE GOOD AT LOTS OF DIFFERENT THINGS? WATCH OUT.

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Mon 03/20/2017*

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Maybe you have been lucky enough, as I have been, to work with one or more multitalented people over the course of your career.

You know the type: Those folks you can throw just about anything at--even if those things are disorganized, poorly thought-out, and/or on fire--and get polished gems in return.

We love these people, right? But there's a downside.

It's not, as you may think, that these highly talented people are at risk of leaving your workplace for sunnier shores elsewhere. Sure, that could happen--but that could happen with any of your employees.

The problem with these multitalented folks is that, despite their myriad talents, there are probably just a few certain things they really enjoy doing. In this way, they're a lot like the rest of us. Unlike the rest of us, however, they are forever being pulled away from their true sweet spots to cover shortfalls elsewhere.

The end result? Your most valuable employees wind up doing work they are ill-suited for--not in terms of getting the job done (they do that, brilliantly), but in terms of their own preferences. And that's when they leave you.

Now, no employee is above moving out of his or her comfort zone when the job requires it. A good manager will, in fact, continually be pushing the envelope of what his or her employees can accomplish. But you need to be careful about pulling your superstars too far away from their core skills and preferences. They may be doing an excellent job, but it won't be a job they're happy doing for too long.

Instead of thinking that you simply can't afford to have these valuable employees start specializing, start thinking instead about how your workplace would look without them in it at all. Then start making sure they're on track to meet their own career goals as well as your organization's.

# POST-ELECTION WORKPLACE TENSION? T.R.U.M.P. IT OUT

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Wed 02/01/2017*

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In our house, there is an ongoing debate about the logic of pairing chocolate with mint. My daughter finds the combination delicious. My husband finds it so unpleasant as to be difficult to even think about. I try to maintain a Swiss neutrality on the issue, which invariably (and unhelpfully) leads me down the path of rummaging around in the pantry for Swiss chocolate, minted or otherwise.

In any event, my family's little chocolate/mint debate undoubtedly pales to what you've been dealing with in your workplace since early November--marked by one of the most contentious and polarizing elections in recent memory.

If you are dealing with a workplace divided, here are some tips to help you restore peace and harmony--or at least a cordial detente.

I have used an easy-to-remember mnemonic for these strategies: T.R.U.M.P.

**T: Talk it out.** Some little workplace irritations are just that--little. Deeply held beliefs about the leadership and direction of our country, however, do not fall into this category. If you have two or more employees who seem ready to come to blows over their respective politics, don't stand by and wait for it to blow over. Intervene while there is still a working relationship that can be salvaged. A four- or eight-year presidential administration is too long a time to hold your breath and cross your fingers.

**R: Respect each other's viewpoints.** This is easier said than done, of course, but there is a lot to be said for this basic tenet of civility that we are taught from the time we are very small. Respecting someone else's beliefs does not necessarily mean endorsing them, or agreeing with them. It simply means accepting that the other person has a right to have them.

**U: Uphold high standards.** You, as a member of HR, are not a regular old private citizen at work. It's your job to model the kind of open, respectful dialogue you want to see among your workforce--and also to keep your own private political views, well, private. No, this is not easy or fair, but few things about HR are!

**M: Monitor developing situations.** Like snowflakes, no two workplace disputes are ever the same. Some are garden-variety personality conflicts, while others have the potential to escalate into full-



blown violence. Similarly, exchanges that fall into the category of spirited-but-good-natured ribbing between one set of employees can constitute bullying or harassment between another. Keep an eye out and intervene as necessary. As you well know, HR's poor management or non-management of certain disputes can lead to catastrophic lawsuits down the line.

**P: Practice kindness.** To your customers, your vendors, your bosses, your UPS guys and gals, and most especially your employees. There is no downside.

# WHAT DO YOUR EMPLOYEES WANT FOR THE HOLIDAYS?

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Mon 12/19/2016*

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As a parent of young children, I am currently steeped in the magic of all things Santa. My kids still believe that anything is possible - including a giant Minion-shaped trampoline somehow appearing under our tree on Christmas morning. (If such a thing does exist, I hope Santa knows that we are not the intended recipients of this particular gift.)

What do your employees want for the holidays? No, seriously - do you know? Have you asked?

The holiday season can be a great excuse to find out what's on your employees' minds, and what's on their wish lists. Some things (nobody getting sick for the next 6 months) are clearly out of your control, but others (the ability to donate PTO days to a co-worker who needs them) may not be.

Even if you aren't able to play Santa to the degree you'd like, the very fact of asking shows that you care about your employees as people.

And that's a gift that everyone can appreciate.

## SO WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Mon 11/14/2016*

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I was telling a friend recently that, between the twin late-night shocks of a Chicago Cubs World Series win and Donald Trump's electoral victory, I may never sleep again.

For even the most die-hard Cubs fans, Trump's election will likely have a bigger long-term impact on day-to-day life here in the United States - and that includes our life at work.

What's going to happen to the [new overtime rules](#), slated to go into effect on December 1? The Affordable Care Act's reporting requirements, and Obamacare generally? Executive orders, the EEOC, the NLRB? It's enough to make any employer's head spin.

I hope you'll consider joining me and Cathy Gray for a [special BLR webinar](#) this Friday, November 18th, about the impact of the Trump Administration on employers. We'll cover everything I mentioned above, and more.

While no one (perhaps not even Trump himself) can be certain exactly what will happen under this brand-new administration, we've got some well-informed theories that will help you prepare your workplace for what's coming next.

As for sleeping at night, however, I'm afraid you're on your own.

Hope to see you at the webinar on Friday!

## HOW LOYAL ARE YOUR EMPLOYEES? HERE'S A TEST.

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Wed 09/28/2016*

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If you're looking for an engaging and inspirational nonfiction read, I can heartily recommend *We Are Market Basket*, by journalists Daniel Korschun and Grant Welker. I've written about the gripping (yes, really!) [supermarket saga](#) before, but if you're not familiar with the details, here's a quick recap:

Market Basket, a successful family-owned regional supermarket chain here in the Northeast, was embroiled in a longstanding family feud over the control and direction of the company. Things came to a head in the summer of 2014, when the longtime and much-beloved CEO was ousted by his cousin.

Normally, things would end there, for the most part. There would be internal memos and maybe a few headlines, but life would go on as usual for the rank-and-file.

At Market Basket, it didn't.

A daring group of warehouse workers put their jobs on the line and essentially shut down the business by refusing to make deliveries to the stores. Thousands of workers, from baggers to high-ranking managers, held rallies for their ousted CEO, declaring they would work for no one else. Customers boycotted the stores but took the time to swing by and tape their grocery receipts from other supermarkets to Market Basket doors in a show of support.

In late August of 2014, a deal was struck whereby the deposed CEO bought out his cousin and returned to his former position - to much revelry and rejoicing. As a regular Market Basket shopper myself, I can attest to the festival atmosphere that ensued when things returned to normal.

It's an interesting thought exercise: If your top leadership were suddenly replaced, would your employees mind? Would they even notice? (Worse still, would they be positively thrilled?)

It's become fashionable to bandy about the term "corporate culture," but where the rubber really meets the road is when that culture is threatened. Employees may feel loyal to their coworkers, or to their immediate manager, but a high level of devotion to the company itself is truly extraordinary - and a goal worth shooting for.

# LEADERSHIP AMIDST CRISIS

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Tue 08/30/2016*

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As John Lennon once purportedly said, "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans." The same could be said of leadership.

A few weeks ago, one of our BLR colleagues experienced a devastating blow when her husband was paralyzed following a mountain biking accident. (Our CEO, Dan Oswald, talked about Kim and Ryan in a [recent blog post](#).)

With Kim's blessing, Dan has kept the company in the loop - with great sensitivity and compassion - about how she and her husband are doing, and what we can do to help. I think it's safe to say that we are all pulling for them, thinking lots about them, and keeping them close to our hearts these days.

Like any good CEO, Dan has lots of exciting plans for BLR and ideas on how best to execute them - but true leadership happens in the moments outside one's official job description. There is no corporate or HR playbook (or handbook, for that matter) that comes into play when the unexpected and tragic occurs. In those situations, leaders must fall back on their own instincts and character - and the strength of the teams under them.

While it is inherently impossible to plan ahead for the unknowable, it's a useful exercise to step back and consider how you'd respond if the worst happened at your company - be it a health emergency or a natural disaster or an incident of workplace violence.

Strong, confident leadership is a great asset on a day-to-day basis - but when the unthinkable happens, it's an absolute necessity.

## HOW GOOD ARE YOU AT THE THINGS YOU HAVE TO DO?

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Tue 07/12/2016*

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As a manager working for the Connecticut branch of BLR, I am subject to the state's mandatory sexual harassment training requirement - which means I recently had the rare opportunity to sample one of [BLR's web-based training offerings](#) not as an editor or reviewer, but as an actual customer.

It was a lot of fun - and not just because I happen to personally know one of the attorneys featured in the program, as well as the narrator.

The training, folks, was really good. Informative without being preachy. Entertaining without being inappropriate. And plausible in a way that a lot of sexual harassment training isn't - the featured scenarios highlighted a lot of gray areas that could actually happen in many workplaces. Although I went into the training knowing much of the relevant law through my editorial work here at BLR, it kept me fully engaged for two-plus hours.

Despite what you may be thinking, this post is not meant to be a pitch for BLR's (admittedly top-notch!) training offerings. Rather, it's meant to be a reminder that a lot of what employees experience at your organization revolves around the things you *have* to do, legally or logistically. Here are just a few examples:

- Orientation
- Safety training
- Fire drills
- Benefits communication and administration
- Performance appraisals
- Mediating disputes and disagreements
- Payroll administration
- Leave administration
- Meetings
- Equipment provisioning and maintenance

The list goes on and on. While so many of us in the HR field strive to boost engagement through innovative offerings and programs, most of the day-to-day stuff is just that: The things that must

happen, day in and day out. And while you may not always have a say in what needs to get done (e.g., mandatory sexual harassment training), you do have a say in *how* these things get done (e.g., an engaging video presentation vs. a poke-your-eyes-out-with-a-stick-awful course that checks all the legal boxes but makes watching paint dry feel like an exciting afternoon).

It's also important to remember that botching these must-dos can hurt your engagement and retention beyond repair. You may have a fantastic foosball table in the break room, in other words, but employees won't care about it one bit if their paychecks are consistently late.

So spend some time looking at the core business of HR - the things you *have* to do. How well are those getting done? If you have a very solid grip on the fundamentals, the rest will largely take care of itself (foosball table or no foosball table).

# EMPLOYEE RETENTION IS NOT A MATTER OF LADY LUCK

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Thu 06/09/2016*

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Today's valuable lesson in employee engagement comes to us from Michelle DiTondo, SVP Human Resources at MGM Resorts International. DiTondo spoke at BLR's recent [THRIVE conference](#) in Las Vegas.

You may have a lot of employees to keep track of, but it's a safe bet DiTondo has more: MGM Resorts International currently employs over 62,000 employees in the U.S. alone - 50,000 of whom work within just a few miles of one another on the densely packed Las Vegas strip.

DiTondo notes that her company enjoys a relatively low turnover rate within a high-turnover industry. The secret, she says, is culture.

While many of her employees could walk "literally next door," she says, and find a comparable position, they stay with MGM because the company knows how to make its employees feel important. She observes that many of MGM's employees do hard, exhausting work - such as cleaning casino floors or hotel rooms - for decades on end. And management never lets them forget how vital that work is to the business as a whole. "We tell them all the time that 'We could not do it without you,'" she says.

DiTondo also says it's important for HR to be both respected *and* liked in order to be successful. Even people who don't like you all that much may still do their jobs without complaint, she says. But when things go south and you need their support, they won't go to bat for you if they don't like you.

Even in the high-stakes world of Las Vegas, it seems, the golden rule remains the most valuable currency of all.



## LOOKING TO GROW? FOCUS ON THE ROI.

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Tue 05/24/2016*

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Becky Nelson has a lot of hiring to do.

Nelson, Senior Talent Acquisition Specialist at Western Health Advantage, has been tasked with helping to grow the company by approximately 20% within the next fiscal year - "a substantial growth, percentage-wise," she notes.

Nelson sat down with me at BLR's recent [RecruitCon](#) conference in Las Vegas to talk about how her company is rising to the challenge. Western Health is implementing many digital upgrades and amping up its support systems, creating a need for new talent in its information services division.

One of the strategies Nelson took away from RecruitCon was the idea of "helping to build a culture of awareness online with experts in that field." She liked the idea of revamping an internal referral program to include incentives that would allow her to tap into the power of referrals via warm contacts.

Nelson also says she's learning the importance of working with managers to clearly demonstrate the ROI of bringing new people aboard quickly. "Speed of requisition is crucial," she says. "Once the right candidate is identified, we need to be ready to pull the trigger and hire immediately." Otherwise, Western Health risks losing this talent to other employers.

Nelson has hit the ground running at Western Health, having already made 9 strategic hires by the time I spoke with her in Vegas. I have no doubt she's well on her way to getting the next few dozen filled, too.

# IT'S NEVER JUST ABOUT THE MONEY

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Wed 05/18/2016*

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As you have undoubtedly heard by now, the Department of Labor has issued its long-awaited [final regulations relating to the new overtime rules](#). By the DOL's reckoning, these changes will extend overtime pay to 4.2 million Americans who don't currently receive it.

Seems like unequivocally good news for these workers, doesn't it? But as with so many things HR-related, it's not nearly that simple.

You see, the shift in the rules means that some people who are now considered exempt will have to start punching in and out as of December 1. They will need to track their lunch hours and breaks. They may even be told to stop checking emails and voicemails at home, as they are probably used to doing, because this sort of off-hours work is too hard to keep track of from a timekeeping perspective.

Sure, they may actually be bringing home more money when you factor in overtime pay. But for a lot of these folks, the new rules will feel like a constructive demotion, given the increased oversight and time strictures. It's like going back to the days of having to ask for a hall pass.

Many smart employers have already been working to prepare these affected workers and reassure them that their contributions remain as valuable as ever, and that this is a strictly administrative change. But it's going to take some time for this to truly sink in.

The new overtime rules are an important reminder for HR to consider all angles of a situation when implementing or communicating a new change. A new birthday celebration policy may be a nightmare for a shy employee. A "Let's get fit!" wellness initiative may be similarly mortifying for someone who is very overweight. And a seemingly innocuous dress code change may affect employees of a certain religion in a way you never even considered.

When it comes to our work lives, we all tend to take things personally - even when the latest change is issued by a federal agency and designed to protect rather than offend.

# COMMUNICATION = RESPECT, ACCORDING TO KELLY RIPA

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Tue 04/26/2016*

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I don't often get a chance to watch "Live with Kelly and Michael" (or any other daytime TV, for that matter), but I have found myself drawn to the recent drama surrounding the show.

For the uninitiated, it all began when network higher-ups decided to move "Live" co-host Michael Strahan to a full-time gig on Good Morning America. Apparently he has been making regular guest appearances there for a while, and ABC is hoping his regular presence will help boost lagging ratings for GMA.

The problem? Senior "Live" co-host Kelly Ripa, who has been with the show since 2001, wasn't looped in on Strahan's upcoming move until mere minutes before the news was made public.

Oops.

Ripa responded by taking a few days off-air to collect herself, leaving Strahan to fend for himself with a series of hastily assembled guest hosts.

When Ripa finally returned to "Live," she did so with humor and grace, noting with tongue firmly in cheek that "Our long national nightmare is over!" Ripa went on to say - in front of a wildly appreciative studio audience - that the whole highly publicized "Live" kerfuffle started a conversation about "communication, and consideration, and most importantly, respect in the workplace." (You can see [Ripa's entire return monologue here.](#))

Ripa has a point. She is a longtime flagship personality for ABC and the undisputed star of "Live." She reportedly earns \$20 million annually for her work on the show, so one would think her bosses have a vested interest in keeping her happy. And yet, she was not looped into the news about

Strahan until the last minute because it was believed she'd be unhappy regardless of when she found out.

This is a rookie people-management mistake by a very large media conglomerate. Bad news is never welcome, of course. But bad news badly delivered is infinitely worse. In any event, following the "Live" fireworks from afar has been fascinating from an HR perspective.

Speaking of HR (and we always are!), the THRIVE strategic conference is coming up in Vegas in just two weeks! I am very excited to be attending, along with many of my fellow BLR editors, and we're even more excited to get the chance to meet many of you in person.

If you haven't yet signed up, now's the time - as of this morning, there are just 10 spots left, [so claim yours now!](#) If you have any questions about the conference, I'd be delighted to answer them for you or get you in touch with someone who can. Feel free to drop me a line at [jcarsen@blr.com](mailto:jcarsen@blr.com).

## DO YOUR POLICIES HELP YOUR PEOPLE PLAY BALL?

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Fri 04/08/2016*

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I recently read a [fascinating profile](#) of Amy Waryas, the senior VP of HR for the Boston Red Sox. It's a great read, even if you're not a card-carrying member of Red Sox Nation (and even if you're as far from one as humanly possible - Yankees fans, I'm talking to you!).

Waryas has had an interesting career to date. Before joining the Red Sox, she was director of HR at the Boston Beer Company (BBC), where she reported directly to COO (now CEO) Martin Roper. The article notes that, after six months at the BBC, Waryas was asked to join a management committee that met every six weeks to discuss high-level strategic issues.

"If HR reports to the CFO, they're always a layer down," Roper is quoted as saying. "It suggests that the people aren't necessarily as big of a focus to the company as the cost and finances are."

Wow. If you're like me, you may re-read that sentence a few times and marvel at how true - and significant - it is to your work in HR.

The "human" aspect of human resources means there are very few inconsequential decisions when it comes to an organization's people.

A dress code focused on a "professional" appearance may inadvertently exclude - and offend - male members of a religious faith whose beliefs require them to grow facial hair. A neutrally applied "no telecommuting" policy may be a career-changer (or career-ender) for a hard-working mother of young children who also needs to take her own mother to frequent doctor's appointments. And a seemingly innocuous org chart decision speaks volumes about what a company values most.

"Including me [on the BBC's strategic management committee] was almost like a symbol to the people and employees that they're being heard. I was able to advocate for the employees directly," Waryas says.

There are a lot of moving parts in HR, to say the least, and a lot of considerations (legal, logistical, and otherwise) to keep track of. But sometimes it's helpful to step back, as Roper and Waryas were able to, and look at the message behind the decision.

Your starting line-up will thank you for it.

## EMPLOYEE EXCELLENCE: NO TUNE-UP NEEDED

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Thu 03/10/2016*

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I love my sturdy little Subaru - the all-wheel drive is particularly appreciated during our snowy New England winters! - but it's a 2005 model that's getting on in years (aren't we all...). So I spend a fair amount of time at the auto body shop getting things looked at, tweaked, and replaced.

My shop employs a guy named Chris I see every time I go there. I suppose he's a mechanic, but he really operates more like a concierge: Greeting people as they come through the door. Breaking the news matter-of-factly yet gently when a transmission is kaput. Offering extremely well-informed recommendations on tires. Including customers in the staff coffee runs. And so forth.

Chris is a tremendous asset to this auto body shop - he is their public face, and he is the reason we all feel like we're in such good hands when we bring our cars there. This is not a fancy place by any stretch, but it's being run by someone who's extraordinarily good at, and well-suited to, his job. Which is always a beautiful thing to behold.

What's really interesting to me, as a jobs dork who ponders things like this, is that much of what Chris does is probably nowhere in his official job description. The above and beyond is what makes him exceptional. For this reason, my hat's off not only to Chris, but also to his higher-up who gives him the freedom to excel.

It's a good reminder to us all that letting go is an essential element of strong leadership - and that excellence can thrive wherever it's allowed to flourish.

Before I sign off, I want to quickly remind you all that today - March 10th - is the *last* day for the special Early-Bird discount for the May THRIVE conference in Las Vegas! Holly Jones, my fellow HR Suite Seat blog host, and I will both be there, and we'd love to meet you in person! [Click here](#) for more info - we hope to see you then.

# DON'T FORGET ABOUT YOUR INTERNAL CUSTOMERS: YOUR EMPLOYEES

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Wed 02/10/2016*

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Don't forget your most important customers!

I recently watched an interesting video from WorldatWork about [creating a consistent employee experience at the Walt Disney Company](#). Two senior HR executives discussed how the whole HR department has been working together for the past several years to increase the global consistency of the Walt Disney employee experience.

David Gunn, Disney's SVP of Corporate HR and Employee Relations, noted that they spent over a year "talking to our consumers" to pin down the true "value of working here - financially, quantitatively, and qualitatively," and then figuring out "how to tell that story."

It's an intriguing concept, and one that organizations of all sizes can learn from. As everyone knows, satisfied customers are loyal customers. In the employment context, this translates into higher rates of employee retention, more high-quality referrals to new sources of talent, and a more engaged, productive workforce. Here are some questions to consider:

- What do employees get from working for you (besides a paycheck, of course)?
- Is there a strong, consistent sense of culture across locations and/or departments?
- Are benefits offerings communicated effectively?
- Do employees have a good sense of their total compensation, including benefits?
- Do employees know - and, even more importantly, share in - the company's vision?
- Are managers and employees on the same page about performance expectations and evaluations?
- Do you provide ample opportunities for employees to learn and grow on the job?

If you don't know the answers to these questions, it's time to find out. While this is more of an ongoing initiative than a quick-fix project (Gunn observed that Disney is now five or six years into this process, and still learning), it's one that will pay off in many ways for both your organization and your employees.

Because your most important customers are the ones on your payroll.



# THE 5 SS OF EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEE APPRECIATION

*Submitted by Jennifer Carsen, JD, Legal Editor  
on Thu 01/07/2016*

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Brought to you by the letter S.

Today we're featuring a guest post by [Jennifer Carsen, J.D.](#), BLR employee benefits editor.

Many HR professionals have spent a lot of time thinking about the best ways to express appreciation to employees. We here at BLR have, too, and I've come to the conclusion that it's not about the big, expensive, flashy gestures. Sometimes simple is better. Straightforward. Solid. Today's post, if you haven't guessed, is being brought to you by the letter S. And these 5 Ss are all you need to remember when it comes to effective [employee recognition](#) strategies:

1. **Snappy** (or "swift," if you prefer). This one's a biggie. Sometimes we agonize over getting the recognition *just exactly perfect* to the point that it takes a long time to get the show on the road. By the time the employee receives the recognition he or she deserves, the accomplishment triggering it is a faraway dot in the rear-view mirror. Don't let this happen. Good deeds deserve prompt action in response.
2. **Specific**. Specific to the employee, that is. "One size fits all" may work when it comes to, say, handkerchiefs (which should generally not play a starring role in your employee recognition efforts, FYI), but they are ineffective when it comes to showing genuine appreciation for a job well done. They can even backfire big-time. Your go-to magnum of company-branded champagne, for example, is a perfectly awful choice for a star employee who happens to be a recovering alcoholic - and/or six months pregnant. You don't need



to send out lengthy questionnaires or quiz the employee's co-workers, but don't make the mistake of assuming that any one item will work for everyone. It won't.

3. **In Sync.** (Yes, this one is a stretch from the "S" standpoint - but bear with me.) What I mean by this is that the reward should be comparable to the accomplishment. If an employee has figured out a way to save the company \$7 million each year, a \$25 Target gift card just doesn't cut it. By the same token, over-rewarding relatively small (yet still valued) accomplishments can be both embarrassing to employees and exhausting for HR.
4. **Shared.** The most effective employee recognition gestures tend to be public to some extent, shared with either the employee's team or the company at large, as appropriate. Many employees love a public 'atta boy or 'atta girl. (Some do not, however, which brings us back to #2 - the reward should always be tailored to what that specific employee would appreciate the most.)
5. **Sincere.** If you forget all of the other Ss, remember just this one and you'll be leaps and bounds ahead of the pack. *Sincere* appreciation is in desperately short supply in our world these days. If you can express, honestly and genuinely, why an employee's accomplishment is noteworthy and special, it will mean the world to that employee - and make him or her want to repeat the feat as soon as possible. Handwritten notes are a wonderful thing indeed - even if, like me, you have dreadful handwriting that made your 3rd-grade cursive teacher cringe.

Stay tuned for my next guest post installment, when I'll bring you boomerang employees (courtesy of the letter B).