

Council Prospector

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Nuggets From Alaska SHRM



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SOCIETY FOR HUMAN
RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE ALASKA SHRM STATE COUNCIL

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Mission Statement

The mission of the Alaska State Council is to be a strategic partner with individuals, businesses, community organizations, SHRM and NHRMA in order to encourage the advancement and knowledge of dedicated human resources professionals by providing communication and professional development resources throughout Alaska.



Alaska SHRM State Council **message**

Nancy Miller, SPHR Director, Alaska SHRM State Council

What a Great Year We Have Had!



Photo: From left to right: Volunteer Christine Churchill with GCI, Nancy Miller, Aaron Gustafson with the Dept. of Labor VETS group and attendee Acosta.

2014 has been a very exciting, rewarding and productive year for your Alaska SHRM State Council!

I am very excited to announce that the Alaska SHRM State Council has been named as one of the finalists for this year's Pinnacle Award. It is such an honor to work with a wonderful team of HR professionals who have made this possible. We submitted our program "From Soldier Boots to Dress Shoes" recognizing our work over the past three years in assisting veterans in transitioning into the civilian workforce. We are continuing to work on this initiative by organizing volunteers and expanding our pre-workshops to better prepare our veterans for the job fair on November 7 at the University Center.

Our partnership efforts are keeping us busy as well! This year we have continued our involvement with the Healthy Alaskans 2020 initiative. Healthy Alaskans 2020 is a joint effort between the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, to set health goals for Alaska that contribute to the vision of Healthy Alaskans in healthy communities. The collaborative nature of this

initiative allows individuals and groups in communities from all over Alaska, including the Alaska SHRM State Council, to contribute information and ideas in every step of the process. We most recently became involved with a new partnership called the Workforce Readiness Taskforce. This taskforce is working to harness the interest and perspective of the private sector to drive action to improve work readiness of youth in Anchorage.

Our Pinnacle award-winning webinar series continued with the two final webinar programs for 2014. But do not worry; we have already started planning our 2015 schedule with informative and thought-provoking programs. For upcoming programs please visit <http://alaska.shrm.org> for more information.

If you are interested in becoming involved as a volunteer with the Alaska SHRM State Council, please visit our website at <http://alaska.shrm.org>. We would love to hear from you! ✨

Respectfully,

Nancy Miller, SPHR
Director, Alaska SHRM State Council

Partners Reentry Program

By Ann Flister, SPHR - Workforce Readiness Director, Alaska SHRM State Council



The Alaska SHRM State Council collaborated with the Partners Reentry Program this summer to educate employers on hiring ex-offenders. A two-hour workshop sponsored by the Council and held at the BP Energy Center in Anchorage on July 23 featured Cathleen McLaughlin as guest speaker. Cathleen is the Program Director of the Partners Reentry Center. She, along with a very passionate group of individuals who are committed to reducing recidivism in the State of Alaska, advocate for people and programs that bridge the gap between community and re-entrants. The Reentry Center is a collaborative program by the Alaska Native Justice Center, Nine Star Education & Employment Services and Partners for Progress.

The workshop focused on the challenges and opportunities for community collaboration--between employers, individuals, social services and government agencies--to promote employment opportunities as a means to reducing recidivism. The workshop was attended by 45 participants representing a broad range of Anchorage employers as well as corrections, labor, and social service agency representatives. Topics of discussion included the reentry process and resources provided by the Reentry Center, such as temporary housing, clothing, job search assistance, and employer referrals. Employers learned about the Work Opportunity Tax Credit, fidelity bonding and other tools to facilitate employment of prisoners re-entering the workforce.

As a bonus, participants were encouraged to bring clothing donations to assist individuals leaving the corrections system with appropriate work attire. Clothing donations are always welcome at the Reentry Center, at 419 Barrow Street in Anchorage. To learn more about employment referrals, employer resources, or how you can help, visit www.partnersforprogressak.org/partners-reentry-center. ✨



Crafting Sound Employment Law: It's Our Job

By Ben Castle Krisher, Alaska SHRM State Council Legislative Director



If you tuned in to the first half of a certain speech on the evening of January 28th this past year, you might have thought you'd wandered into a Human Resources 101 class. Topics included compensation equality, employment immigration reform, skills training and workforce development, unemployment insurance, minimum wage and payroll theory, retirement savings accounts, and health insurance plans; all issues which traditionally sat within the HR wheelhouse.

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This was no beginning HR class, however; this was President Barack Obama's 2014 State of the Union Address. By devoting nearly half of his speaking time to these issues, the President underscored the reality that many of us already know: across all industries, across all organizations, and across all states, the Human Resources function plays a critical role in the wellbeing of the country.

With this knowledge, it's important that we all realize that we have both an opportunity and an obligation to help inform our lawmakers as they craft public policies affecting the workplace. While this may seem a daunting task given the complexity of some of these topics, SHRM's Government Affairs team excels at tracking, researching, and providing insight to many of the issues, and they are ready to help us all be effective and meaningful advocates for the HR profession.

As the Alaska SHRM State Council's Legislative Director, I have experienced the effectiveness of SHRM's HR advocacy first hand. I attended the 2014 Employment Law & Legislative Conference in Washington DC, where I, along with three other Alaskan HR professionals, met with staffers at the offices of Congressman Young and Senators Begich and Murkowski. SHRM provided numerous resources to prepare us for these meetings, including detailed fact sheets, talking points, and brochures.

Though the issues I covered varied depending on which office I was visiting, I was struck by one constant: every staffer I met had heard of SHRM and had a positive opinion of the group. Washington DC is

populated by a multitude of special interest, lobbying, and advocacy organizations, and the fact that SHRM was both recognized and respected by Democrats and Republicans spoke volumes.

Ultimately, many of the workplace and HR issues I discussed with our lawmakers several months ago have been put "on hold", as other issues have necessarily taken precedent. However, when the 114th Congress is sworn in next January, the HR issues above will assuredly receive renewed attention and coverage regardless of the outcome of November's elections.

As practicing HR professionals who deal with these issues every day, our voices and opinions will be critical tools to lawmakers as they consider changes to public policy. Items such as **employment-based immigration reform, adjustments to the definition of exempt vs. non-exempt classifications, compensation equality, and health insurance reform** will continue to be discussed in the public sphere, and we must step up to ensure the HR profession is well represented.

www.advocacy.shrm.org – one stop shop for HR advocacy

Luckily, SHRM has made getting involved quick, easy, and painless. SHRM's policy action center (advocacy.shrm.org) allows you to read up on many of the public policy issues that affect the workplace and the HR profession. The site also provides tools and resources that allow you to contact our lawmakers (including phone numbers, addresses, and easy-to-use email forms with sample templates).

You can become even more involved by joining the SHRM Advocacy Team, or A-Team. This is a group composed of SHRM members who are dedicated to ensuring the interests of the HR profession get the necessary consideration they require when laws are being written and considered. Members of the A-Team receive regular email summaries about hot issues, recommendations to write or call lawmakers on specific topics, and even requests for expertise when working on crafting policy statements. You can learn more about the A-Team (and join up!) by visiting advocacy.shrm.org/about.

As we close out the year and look back on all of the great events and initiatives put on by our local Alaskan SHRM chapters, the Alaska SHRM State Council, the SHRM Pacific West regional team, and the national SHRM organization, it's important to reflect on why we're involved with SHRM. For me, it's because I passionately believe in the value of the HR profession, and I want to share that with everyone I can, including our lawmakers who can have such a direct influence on how HR operates. I urge you all to explore what you value about HR and your involvement with SHRM, and to consider becoming an HR Advocate and adding your voice to the discussion. ✨



Alaska SHRM State Council Among Finalists for the 2014 SHRM Pinnacle Award!

On October 10, 2014, SHRM announced the finalists for the 2014 SHRM Pinnacle Awards. The Pinnacle Award honors outstanding leadership and rewards professional excellence in the field of human resource management. The Alaska SHRM State Council was named one of 22 finalists. Our organization submitted our program “From Soldier Boots to Dress Shoes” recognizing our

work over the past three years in assisting veterans in transitioning into the civilian workforce.

Winners will be announced at the SHRM Leaders’ Summit on November 21, 2014. It is an honor to be included with other worthy State Council and Chapter finalists from all across the nation. ✦



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Will Congress Crack Your Retirement Nest Egg?

By Kathleen Coulombe, Senior Advisor, Government Relations, SHRM @KCnSHRMGA



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While many key issues important to the HR profession dominated the 113th Congress' agenda, little progress was made on issues such as immigration reform, education policy and tax reform. Gridlock, partisanship and posturing led to a politically difficult environment and resulted in the fewest number of bills passed by any Congress in recent memory.

Despite the lack of consensus in the 113th Congress, the issue of tax reform continues to be a key component in the debate about how to revitalize and stabilize the U.S. economy. Both parties have a vested interest in this issue and could be motivated to work together in the 114th Congress that convenes in January 2015. With that in mind, tax advocates, including SHRM and the SHRM-led **Coalition to Protect Retirement**, are anticipating action on tax reform next year.

Reforming the tax code will certainly have implications for both businesses and individuals. This could have an adverse effect on how HR professionals design and administer retirement plans, as Congress takes a hard look at the tax treatment of these accounts. Tinkering with tax incentives could discour-

age employees from saving and could further prevent employers from offering a retirement plan in their workplace. These changes could actually act as a barrier to savings, as opposed to a much needed impetus.

Furthermore, they could negatively affect an employer's ability to offer a comprehensive benefits package, including a retirement plan, to their employees. As HR professionals are keenly aware, in this competitive economy, offering an attractive benefits package is a key component in recruiting and retaining a talented workforce.

It's no secret, the employer-provided retirement system, along with individual retirement accounts, have resulted in widespread success in enabling working Americans at all income levels to enjoy a financially secure retirement. Together with Social Security and individual savings, private employer-sponsored and individual retirement plans have paid out over \$3.96 trillion in benefits from 2001 through 2010. In 2011, there were approximately 640,000 private-sector defined contribution plans covering over 73 million participants.

Even with the success of employer-provided retirement accounts, Americans are still concerned about their retirement. According to a 2014 Gallop Poll, Americans' top financial worry was not having enough money to retire, with 59% of Americans being "very worried" that they would outlive their savings.

So, now more than ever, it's critical for employees to have an opportunity to save in the workplace. Continuing the current tax treatment of retirement plans, along with incentives such as an employer match, automatic enrollment and auto-escalation, are essential in ensuring a financial sound retirement.

Newly elected legislators will assemble in Washington, DC in January 2015 and tax reform discussions will likely heat up. A number of these tax reform proposals could have far-reaching consequences for the HR profession. In other words, it's a great time to ensure your HR Voice is heard — visit SHRM's Policy Action Center at www.advocacy.shrm.org and tell Congress to keep their hands off your retirement! ✨



Progressive Discipline for Employees

By Susan Morgan, The newsLINK Group LLC

Sometimes businesses hire people whose performance doesn't live up to the initial expectations. Sometimes the problem isn't so much about performance as it is behavior. Either way, you already know you can hurt your business if you hire the wrong employee, but you will hurt it even more if you don't put a comprehensive, consistent procedure in place to use when employees present problems. You might even be able to redirect problem employees so they can be assets instead of liabilities.

One of the best procedures is something called progressive discipline. It starts with training. You can only expect employees to live up to your expectations when you have given them a clear understanding of what you require of them as employees. The usual way to do this is through job descriptions and employee handbooks.

Once employees understand your expectations, the progressive discipline generally consists of the following steps:

- An oral warning: The oral warning is more complicated than it might seem. For example, a manager can only reasonably give an employee an oral warning after the employee has been trained and then counseled about the specific problem. If you haven't trained the employee adequately, you don't have grounds for complaining about noncompliance. The first goal is to find out whether an employee understands what you want to see in terms of behavior and performance. If the first conversation is not enough to correct the problem, though, then the supervisor needs to have a second conversation. Document

any conversations you have about the problem in one memo or more, and place the documentation in the employee's file.

- The written warning: If the problem still exists after the oral warning, then it is time for a written warning. A written warning consists of two parts: a written discussion about why the employee's behavior or performance is a problem, and a list of one or more potential consequences if the problem is not corrected within a certain amount of time. Depending on how valuable the employee is, a manager might choose to provide multiple written warnings. For example, perhaps it has been a while since the last warning, you think you were not clear enough, or you are pretty certain the employee misunderstood you.
- Suspension or demotion: Sometimes you don't have to apply the worst possible penalty that is available to you. Perhaps suspending an employee temporarily, or moving the employee into a lower-level job, would be enough. If you do decide to suspend someone, it's a good idea to have a standard way of proceeding with that as well. For example, you might want to start with a one-day suspension and work up to a five-day suspension, if necessary, over time.
- Termination of employment: If the time specified in the written warning has gone by and the employee's behavior or performance are still a problem, or the employee just refuses to cooperate, then the best solution might be letting the employee go.

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Saving Money on Payroll

For many companies, payroll is one of the most expensive parts of doing business. In fact, one expert suggested that wages may be as much as 60 to 80 percent of your business expenses. That's a really big piece of the pie. As such, it is a natural target for cost-saving measures. But in too many cases, some business owners think that the only way to save money on payroll is to let employees go.

That's usually a bad move:

- Good employees are an asset, not a liability. When a company makes money, good employees are a big part of that. Letting them go makes it harder for any business to stay profitable later on, after business picks up again.
- It costs money and time to train people. Telling people it's time to find a job somewhere else means that in the short term, payroll will be less expensive, but in the long term, the business owner will have to find more money and time to train new people to do exactly the same thing that the laid-off employees were doing. That is not efficient.
- You lose good will and trust within your business and your community. Yes, these are intangibles — but sometimes intangible things matter. Having low turnover is better than having high turnover, and you don't need to make things worse than they already are.

If you are a business owner and you are trying to find ways to save money, however, what else can you do besides lay off employees to reduce payroll?

Here are a few suggestions:

- Talk to your employees and be honest about what is going on. Don't be vague. Back up

Save money within your payroll department. Be accurate. Be on time. More specifically, you should verify key data, use direct deposit, know the rules and play by them so you don't have to pay penalties, and considering outsourcing the work.

what you are saying with information about clients who have gone elsewhere and financial statements that show profits going down. Most people would rather talk about how to help you save money by reducing costs than be told they no longer have a job. They might be able to give you guidance about other possible ways to save money besides cutting payroll. They might even volunteer to take substantive measures such as taking unpaid leave or reducing their own hours.

- Save money within your payroll department. Be accurate. Be on time. More specifically, you should verify key data, use direct deposit, know the rules and play by them so you don't have to pay penalties, and considering outsourcing the work. The IRS estimates small businesses pay an extra \$845 in penalties per year because they missed deadlines or made mistakes filing payroll taxes. Don't be that business.
- Is it possible to give people an opportunity to work doing something other than what you hired them to do? If there's something that needs to be done, and you were planning on hiring someone outside the company to do it, you could consider giving the work to someone inside the company instead. Some factories have even asked employees to do maintenance temporarily, with the idea that the employees could resume their regular work as soon as possible. Again, it probably beats losing a job.

- Look at whether people are as effective as they could be. You might want to evaluate the job they are doing, and maybe rewriting some job descriptions. If you can identify things that are being done that don't contribute to the company's bottom line, maybe you can have employees stop taking care of those things and have them put their focus on something else instead.
- This is one case where attrition might really be your friend. Find out whether anyone is interested in taking an unpaid leave of absence, or is thinking of quitting or retiring anyway. Even if no one is about ready to retire, however, some employees still might be ready for serious time off, especially new parents or employees who are struggling to care for aging parents or children with disabilities. Sometimes people have enough money to get by for a while, and would really like to have some personal time off as long as they know they can come back to a job later.
- If bonuses or raises are impossible, see if there's something else you could offer employees to reward them. Could you hand out stock options? Do you have a timeshare or a vacation that you could share with employees, but that wouldn't cost money from your business?
- What about reducing the length of the work week? If there is a slow period, giving people more time off than usual might be a great way to make sure that they still have enough income to get by,

while also taking some pressure off you as a business owner.

- Look at benefits. Can you offer a less-expensive insurance plan? If you match employee 401k plan contributions, could you drop the percentage? Do you have company cars? Would it be cheaper to reimburse employees for mileage if they will use their own cars? What about hiring part-time employees, independent contractors, temporary staff, or interns from the local high school or college?
- Is it possible to reduce the amount of money you are paying people? This is not something that would be popular with anyone, but most people would rather take a cut in pay than have to start looking for a new job. And if you cut your own pay by 50 percent, you will have shown that you are willing to make the same sacrifice you are asking other people to make.
- Look at whether work should be done by someone with experience, or whether it should be done by someone at an entry-level decision. Be careful: sometimes it really is worth paying the money for the right job skills, and thinking that you can always replace a seasoned pro with an inexperienced recent graduate is delusional thinking that has cost many companies a great deal of money. But if you have a job that really is better suited to youth and inexperience, hire away. After all, experience has to start somewhere. ✨

The key to being effective about progressive discipline is documentation. You need to keep detailed documents so it is clear that you have followed your own procedures and given the employee every chance to correct performance and behavior. Also, you should keep an eye on the amount of time that passes. Maybe someone has earned the right to move backward in the process as well as forward. On the other hand, you don't want problem behavior to continue indefinitely. Letting a problem drag on too long makes you look ineffective — not the message you want to send your employees.

all employees succeed in your specific business environment.

- Give employees a chance for self-defense. Sometimes you will find that an employee has a good case to make. You might be able to correct problems you didn't even recognize you had.
- Discipline encourages all employees, not just the problem ones, to live up to the expectations set by the company for their behavior and ethics. Having a standard doesn't just tell you when employee behavior is a failure; it also tells you when employee behavior is a success. Use that fact to your advantage.

bad behavior. Making the effort to try and correct behavior, and firing someone only when necessary, will reassure your remaining employees that you aren't weak or a fool. These are good points for them to understand about you.

To make your progressive discipline program succeed, you will need to do the following:

- Write a formal policy. It should be included in employee handbooks and in any documentation about how your company works that you will be giving to employees.
- Train your managers so they know how to implement the progressive discipline program.
- Spend the time and energy to make sure you document and follow up with problems. You might want to consider having someone be present as a witness or to take notes during any disciplinary procedure. Just don't choose someone who is a peer of the employee being disciplined. You could also allow the employee to select someone to act as witness. The idea is to balance not embarrassing an employee with making sure that the process is open, fair and impartial.
- Recognize that a progressive discipline program can alter or suspend the rules of at-will employment until it becomes clear your best alternative is actually firing an employee. Being scrupulous about how you implement the plan, and demonstrating patience throughout the process, works to benefit you in the long term. That way, no one can accuse you of being arbitrary or not giving an employee enough of a chance.

The goal is to use the weakest effective action so that you don't escalate any situation unnecessarily. That doesn't mean going through the steps has to be rigid, though. There might be cases where it is appropriate to skip some of the steps. Suppose you find out an employee is stealing, fighting, or using or selling drugs or alcohol. In a case like that, you may have to just fire the employee immediately. However, even that can be explained ahead of time in your formal policy. People will understand. ✨

The key to being effective about progressive discipline is documentation. You need to keep detailed documents so it is clear that you have followed your own procedures and given the employee every chance to correct performance and behavior.

You might feel uncomfortable about the idea of disciplining employees, but the reality is that discipline has a vital role in the workplace:

- Everyone benefits when they know managers are going to follow a specific disciplinary procedure that is fair and is consistently applied to all employees.
- Discipline can correct performance and behavior so employees can comply with the standards and expectations you've set. Obviously, the best outcome is not firing someone. Doing that is expensive; it will cost you in lost productivity and higher SUTA payroll taxes. Not only that, firing someone can cause bad feeling, especially when the process is done poorly. Instead, the goal is helping

- Discipline shows a good-faith effort on the part of your business to follow an impartial process when dealing with any employee problem so that if it does become necessary to terminate someone's employment, it will be clear to everyone that the company was fair and gave the employee every chance to correct whatever problems existed.

You may be surprised to realize that your employees appreciate having a well-documented, fair process for working through employee problems in a timely way. Even though nobody wants to see another employee lose a job for what seems like arbitrary and unfair reasons, people also don't want to see another employee getting away with obvious



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Tina Cloyd, PHR, Diversity	907-790-1431
Vacant, Legislative Affairs	



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