
An Economic Indicator: Clients Moving From Investigations to Workshops

By Lynne Eisaguirre

I spent the past two years doing more investigations than I have during the 16 year history of my business. The economy impacted this, of course. People were laid off and filed claims, or they were afraid they were going to be laid off and filed claims.

At the same time, because of the economic downturn, organizations put off proactive kinds of prevention solutions such as workshops or training.

While investigations can be interesting, and I always strive to give clients a neutral and defensible investigation I feel badly that clients and their employees have to go through this. It's never the best use of anyone's time, especially a leader. In fact, when people ask me what we do, I frequently say that we help leaders solve people problems so that they can focus on what's really important.

Happily, after a two year period of clients delaying prevention workshops, we're seeing a trend of returning to proactive solutions, instead of cleaning up messes on the back end.

Resolve to Be Proactive in the New Year

If you want to look for proactive solutions, look no further than our client United Rentals. Founded in 1997, United Rentals, Inc. (UR) is the largest equipment rental company in the world, with an integrated network of more than 550 rental locations in 48 states and 10 Canadian provinces. Their diverse customer base includes construction and industrial companies, utilities, municipalities, and homeowners.

Because UR is in the construction business, they've had a challenge attracting women. They also wanted to create a diverse workforce that reflected the community. UR started at the board level, creating a diverse group, including two women and a Hispanic director.

Although they had very few claims from their general employees, they wanted to be proactive on diversity issues. At the request of UR's Vice President of Human Resources, Craig Pintoff, we designed a series of Women In Construction meetings, held around the country. These small group meetings focused less on training women and more on listening to their concerns and suggestions.

In addition, board members and/or executive officers kicked off the meetings and stayed through the session to listen to the women's stories and concerns.

Here is the successful agenda that we developed:

Lunch with introductions

Company Timeline

Individual Timeline—Participants

Personal Highs and Lows –Participants

Break

The Meaning and Stages of Diversity

Dyads discuss United Rentals

- Where the organization is at
- Where is UR heading
- Where should UR be heading

Feedback from Participants

Dyads Discuss Individual Experiences

- What has worked
- What has not worked
- Work/Life issues
- What is needed from UR to be successful

Gather experience—Participants

Concerns, Next Steps, Accountabilities

Closing Remarks

The result was a series of lively meetings that allowed the women of UR to feel that their voices were heard, to allow them to network with other women in their region, and to give them ideas about potential career path for the future. Each

session was followed with a series of conference calls to allow the participants to continue the discussions.

What will 2011 bring for our US economy? No one has an accurate crystal ball but what we do know as I wrote in *Tough Conversations with Your Employee* is that proactive is always better than reactive.

If you analyze what a lawsuit really costs, including both hard and soft costs, such as damage to your reputation as well as the internal time of your employers and managers, the loss can be staggering. It's not just the average \$300,000 you spend to settle a claim or judgment, nor is it the average \$300,000 in attorney's fees, it's the incalculable loss of your reputation and your leaders' time.

If you look at these costs, the costs of prevention training is minimal.

Not to mention that, in terms of values, it's the right thing to do.

We wish you a happy and *proactive* 2011.