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The Peoplelink Online Newsletter

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Aspiring leaders should take untraditional paths, **BECOME 'LEARNING-AGILE'**

by Hr.blr.com

Individuals who want to increase their effectiveness at work and aspire to become leaders should consider taking a higher-risk, higher-reward path. Instead of moving surely and safely up the career ladder, they should cultivate "learning agility," a quality related to being more extroverted, more focused, more original, more resilient, less accommodating, and—ultimately—more successful.

According to research, learning-agile people can process new information and situations faster than others and adjust on the fly to changing conditions, making companies more flexible and responsive. They also help firms outperform their competitors.

"Learning agility" is defined as flexibility, openness to information, and the ability to get—and apply—insight, even from a misstep.

To determine the value that learning-agile people bring to their companies, researchers from the Teachers College at Columbia University extended work previously done in conjunction with Center for Creative Leadership. The study finds that private equity-backed C-suite leaders who ranked high for



learning agility on an assessment test also outperformed less-agile peers as measured by revenue growth, EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization) performance and boss ratings issued by the board.

"Despite the compelling links between learning-agile people and business performance, learning agility has traditionally been undervalued, even in the modern workplace," says J.P. Flaum. "Organizations have tended to ignore, resist or try to 'smooth out' the rough-seeming edges of their learning-agile people. But there is a strong reason for employers to seek out learning-agile employees—and

for employees to cultivate the trait themselves."

Learning-agile people jump among assignments, take on severe challenges and sometimes fail badly. But, in doing so, they learn fast and contribute more," said Dr. Becky Winkler. "As such, a growing number of companies recognize that learning-agile employees can be a huge competitive advantage."

"Learning-agile people often don't follow the standard corporate path to success; instead, they challenge the status quo, take risks and view failures as learning opportunities," adds Flaum. "They may not always

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Leaders as Decision Architects

All employees, from CEOs to frontline workers, commit preventable mistakes: We underestimate how long it will take to finish a task, overlook or ignore information that reveals a flaw in our planning, or fail to take advantage of company benefits that are in our best interests. It's extraordinarily difficult to rewire the human brain to undo the patterns that lead to such mistakes. But there is another approach: Alter the environment in which decisions are made so that people are more likely to make choices that lead to good outcomes.

Leaders can do this by acting as architects. Drawing on extensive research in the consulting, software, entertainment, health care, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, banking, retail, and food industries and on the basic principles of behavioral economics, an approach has been developed an approach for structuring work to encourage good decision making.

This approach consists of five basic steps: (1) Understand the systematic errors in decision making that can occur, (2) determine whether behavioral issues are at the heart of the poor decisions in question, (3) pinpoint the specific underlying causes,

(4) redesign the decision-making context to mitigate the negative impacts of biases and inadequate motivation, and (5) rigorously test the solution. It can be applied to a wide range of problems, from high employee turnover to missed deadlines to poor strategic decisions.

Understand How Decisions Are Made

For decades, behavioral decision researchers and psychologists have suggested that human beings have two modes of processing information and making decisions. The first, System 1 thinking, is automatic, instinctive, and emotional. It relies on mental shortcuts that generate intuitive answers to problems as they arise. The second, System 2, is slow, logical, and deliberate.

Each of the two modes of thinking has distinct advantages and disadvantages. In many cases, System 1 takes in information and reaches correct conclusions nearly effortlessly using intuition and rules of thumb. Of course, these shortcuts can lead us astray. So we rely on our methodical System 2 thinking to tell us when our intuition is wrong or our emotions have clouded our judgment, and to correct poor snap judgments. All too often, though, we allow our intuitions or emotions to go

unchecked by analysis and deliberation, resulting in poor decisions.

Overreliance on System 1 thinking has another negative effect: It leads to poor follow-through on plans, despite people's best intentions and genuine desire to achieve their goals. That's because System 1 tends to focus on concrete, immediate payoffs, distracting us from the abstract, long-term consequences of our decisions. For instance, employees know they should save for retirement, yet they rarely get around to signing up for their 401(k) plans.

This does not mean that System 1 should be entirely suppressed in order to promote sound decisions. The intuitive reactions of System 1 serve as important inputs in the decision-making process. For example, if an investment opportunity triggers a fearful emotional response, the decision maker should carefully consider whether the investment is too risky. Using System 2, the emotional response should be weighed against other factors that may be underappreciated by System 1—such as the long-term strategic value of the investment. Engaging System 2 requires exerting cognitive effort, which is a scarce resource; there's simply

not enough of it to govern all the decisions we're called on to make. As the cognitive energy needed to exercise System 2 is depleted, problems of bias and inadequate motivation may arise.

Diagnose Underlying Causes

There are two main causes of poor decision making: insufficient motivation and cognitive biases. To determine which is causing the problematic behavior, companies should ask two questions: First, is the problem caused by people's failure to take any action at all? If so, the cause is a lack of motivation. Second, are people taking action but in a way that introduces systematic errors into the decision-making process? If so, the problem is rooted in cognitive biases. These categories are not mutually exclusive, but recognizing the distinction between them is a useful starting point.

Because problems of motivation and cognition often occur when System 2 thinking fails to kick in, the next step is to ascertain which aspect of the situation caused System 1 to weigh the trade-offs among available options incorrectly and what prevented System 2 from engaging and correcting the mistake. Common sense can go a long way in diagnosing underlying causes. Put

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BECOME 'LEARNING-AGILE'

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resemble ideal corporate citizens from a conformity perspective, but their qualities can add tremendous value to teams and workgroups, which means that learning-agile employees can find themselves on a fast career track."

5 ways to be more learning-agile

What can an employee or manager do to become more learning agile, or to cultivate learning agility within their organizations? Flaum and Winkler advise them to:

1. Innovate. Seek out new solutions. Repeatedly ask, "What else? What are 10 more ways I could approach this? What are several radical things I could try here?" "It doesn't mean you do all of these things,"

Winkler says. "But you consider all of them before proceeding." Managers can encourage their people to seek new solutions, and ask the same questions of team members.

2. Trust your intuition, and try to find the patterns in complex situations, for example finding the similarities between current and past projects, or focusing on end goals without getting bogged down too early in how to get there. Cultivate calm through meditation, and then use that newfound calm to improve listening skills by listening instead of immediately reacting.


3. Become more reflective, exploring "what-ifs" and alternative histories for projects you've been involved

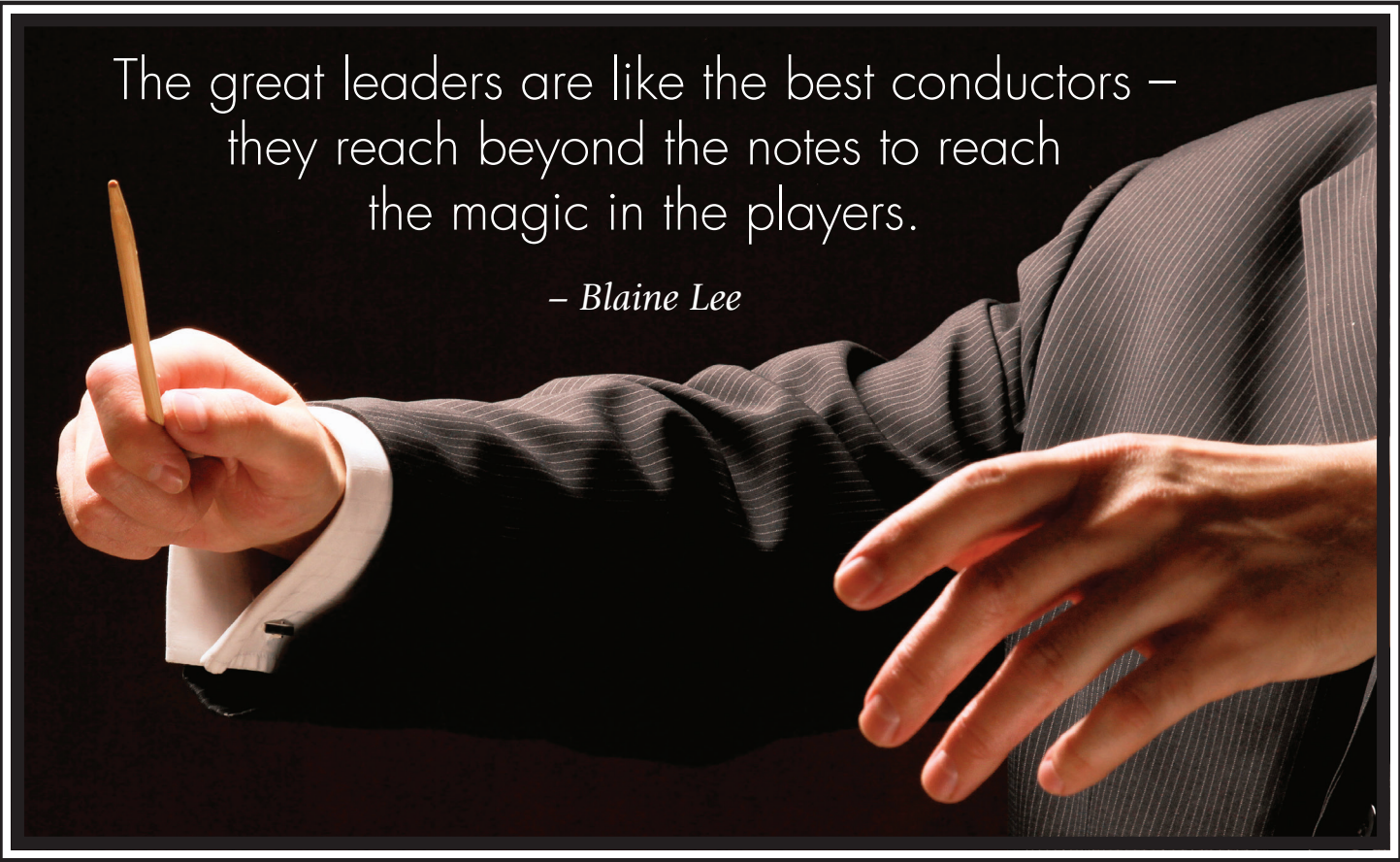
in. And seek out real input; ask "What are three or four things I could have done better here?" Make sure the question is specific but still open-ended; that way, colleagues will open up, and you'll learn something you can act on.

4. Take more risks, as long as they're smart risks. Look for "stretch assignments" where success isn't a given. These might involve new roles, new parts of the company, or new geographies. Managers can help by giving stretch assignments to their employees and by defining success as the learning and exploration, not just the outcome.

5. Avoid getting defensive. Acknowledge failures, perhaps from those

stretch assignments, and capture the learnings. Managers can help their reports do the same, in settings that give them the space to learn from failure. For example, in 360-degree reviews that focus on projects rather than people, and that focus on learnings and how to apply them in future.

Added Flaum. "If you're learning-agile, you might be arguing with managers that a strategy needs to change, or alienating colleagues as an initiative you championed falls on its face. But you'll be able to come out of the experience better than before, and take advantage of new opportunities." 



The great leaders are like the best conductors –
they reach beyond the notes to reach
the magic in the players.

– Blaine Lee

Bright Ideas

4 Ways to Make Conference Calls Less Terrible

Rob Bellmar, HBR

No one wants to sit on a boring conference call, especially when they have other work to do. But that's the reality for a lot of people, at least according to recent InterCall research on the rise of mobile conference calls and employee conferencing behavior. With 82% of employees admitting to focusing on other work while on a call (along with other, less tasteful non-work distractions), disengagement — at least during virtual meetings — has started to become standard practice. While some may argue that these employees are still engaged in other work, it raises questions about the productivity and value of these meetings.

The good news is that companies can make their meetings more relevant and productive by making a few simple adjustments — even though many of them go against some familiar office habits.

1. Stop striving for inclusiveness.

Time, not technology, accounts for the majority of associated meeting expenses. Unfortunately, online calendars, scheduling apps and email distribution lists have created a monstrous meeting invite reflex. It's become too easy to send blanket, one-hour meeting invites to 10 people when only five are relevant to the agenda.

Businesses need to break free of the notion that all attendees should be on a

conference call from start to finish. With a little upfront planning around which topics will be discussed at any given point in the meeting, managers can stagger invitations. If the marketing budget won't be covered until the last half hour of an FY planning meeting, try inviting the marketing team to



that 30-minute portion only.

Aside from facilitating more efficient meetings, it puts valuable time and flexibility back in your employees' workdays. It also proves to your employees that you value their time just as much as your own. Oftentimes managers may worry that employees feel left out or that they are missing something if they are not invited to every meeting. But if you take the time to share relevant information, either through a quick chat in another meeting or via a recap email, you can build trust and save valuable work hours. Chances are, your employees will actually thank you for giving them some time back in their day.

2. Start using video.

In 2014, for the first time ever, 50% of employees used live video and web cameras in more than a quarter of their conference calls, according to recent Wainhouse Research (WebMetrics: Meeting Characteristics and Feature

among all members of the workforce. We can already see the impact of video conferencing among those who have adopted it. Wainhouse Research has found that of the employees who use video and web cams during meetings, 74% like the ability to see colleagues' reactions to their ideas, and nearly 70% feel it increases connectedness between participants.

3. But don't abandon the physical conference room just yet.

Most organizations' physical office conference spaces look nothing like they did 20, even 10 years ago. They've evolved beyond a long table and phone to include white boards, projectors, flat panel screens, web cameras, and surround sound. Participants may not use each accoutrement in every meeting, but the options for dynamic collaboration are there if they need them.

That said, it shouldn't take 20 minutes for a presenter to figure out how to use a webcam; he or she shouldn't have to restart an audio or web-based call in order to distribute multimedia content, either. Digital accessibility works when it's inherent, intuitive and seamless. This only occurs when employees are trained and comfortable using all the features today's conferencing solutions are capable of.

Preferences, 2014). Despite this milestone, video conferencing remains a point of contention, and its adoption curve is a matter of psychological acceptance. The idea that everyone in a meeting can watch what you're doing deters many workers, as does the dissonance between what we see in the mirror and what's reflected on our laptop or tablet screens.

But as video becomes more pervasive in our personal lives, we will all have to get over this reluctance to adopt it in our business lives. Younger workers, with their penchant for selfies and inclination to social sharing, are also playing a large role in accelerating video's acceptance

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Meet **SCOTT WHITE** »

Regional Vice President

White Region – OK/AR/MO

» How long have you been in the staffing business?

My first experience in the staffing industry was just after I finished my enlistment in the Coast Guard in 1993. Since joining the industry I've been very fortunate to grow and elevate my career within each position held.

» What was your first job?

What do you remember most about it?

My first real job was a shoe salesman. I started when I was 15 with the sole purpose of saving money to buy my first car. I would ride my bicycle 15 miles to and from work each day. I remember learning the proper customer service and sales skills. The challenge was to be able to find the right shoes, size them and have the customer happy with their experience.

» Who was the worst boss you ever had and why?

I've been pretty fortunate over the years that I have only had one really challenging boss. She was motivated and driven which are great attributes however her delivery was horrible. Her beliefs were that you get the most productivity out of fear and she frequently would yell at staff, not just at my level, but also at my direct reports. I believe in the being constructive and developmental and would never yell at an employee. Her approach reinforced my belief that if you treat people well and give them all the tools and support they need that they will outperform expectations.

» What motivates you each

day to sell and service your clients?

I truly love the feeling when you're in front of a client and the light comes on as to what the right solution is for the client and what's needed to make it happen. I enjoy listening to their needs and challenges and then putting a plan together that will solidify the relationship. On the service side it's such a rewarding feeling when you find the right candidate for the client and you get to make that call to tell the client this is the person for them and why. It's also a really good feeling when you find that candidate the right job and you know that you're helping them and their family.

» What are some of your long-term goals?

As I look to the future I'm excited about the team that we have and I'm most excited about truly owning each of our markets and becoming the most trusted staffing service in each location. I'm also looking forward to opening and developing the Texas market which I know will be a revenue generating machine.

» What makes Peoplelink unique, from your perspective?

I believe that we have all the right processes, policies and procedures in place to be extremely effective. That coupled with the ability to customize solutions for our customers at a rapid rate.

» What makes you successful as a Manager?

I think the main thing is that over the years I have sat in almost



every seat in the business from a recruiter to operations manager, business developer, selling branch manager, regional manager to VP. I feel that my experience and ability to coach, mentor and develop coupled with my approachable personality have been a large part of my success.

» What is the best advice you could give to other Peoplelink staff members?

I believe that there's a solution for every problem. Open communication is key and more people involved will generate more ideas and from there the best solution will become apparent. Once you find the solution then execute it!

» What is your favorite movie? Vacation. **Book?** Clive Cussler's and looking forward to the next one **Drink?** Coffee in the am, water during the day and a nice cabernet sauvignon in the evening.

» If you could have any car you want, what would it be? I must say it would have to be a Lamborghini, after all have

you ever seen a person drive one without a smile on their face?

» What is your home city? What is the greatest feature about your home city?

I grew up in Endwell, NY (up-state NY). It was a great place to raise a family and I do miss the area. In particular, the mountains and all the fall colors and crisp air. I don't miss the 80" of snow-fall a year though.

» How do you unwind when you're not at the office?

I'm an outdoors person and a single dad so I love to go hiking, biking, camping, swimming every chance I can with my kids.

» What do people like most (least) about you?

I think that not only in business but in my personal life I believe in being honest, morale and ethical. My overall personality is a very positive and upbeat and I want success for all around me and I think everyone that knows me knows that. I generally will tell it like it is and sometimes people may not appreciate that but I believe that honesty is the best policy. ☺

2014 STATE OF THE CAREER: NAVIGATING AMBIGUITY

Source: BlessingWhite Research

What is important to employees?

Employee' perceptions of career

At a high level, it appears that employees are more definitive in how they control and direct their careers, despite the ambiguity and uncertainty that prevails.

- 51% of respondents agree with the statement *"I don't think in terms of 'career.' When I make job changes, I look for 'work' that is satisfying"*
- 74% claim that they *"actively manage my career based on clear personal goals."*
- 56% of employees report knowing what they want their next job to be, but only 24% know what their employer has planned for them as a next step.

All told, only 41% of employees expect their employer to outline any kind of career path for them. This expectation diminishes as employees become more tenured:

Agree or Strongly agree to the statement: <i>"I expect my current employer to provide a clear career path for me."</i>	
Gen Y	54%
Gen X	40%
Baby Boomers +	31%

So if employees expect to be more self-directed in their careers, what are they looking to get out of work?

The three biggies over time

Since BlessingWhite's first study on career in 2003, three items have dominated responses to the item *"Choose the phrase that best describes the most important criterion you will look for in your next position"*:

- **Interesting work** - work that challenges and helps people broaden their knowledge - has consistently topped the chart of what people would ideally find in their next position, while
- **Work/Life balance**, and
- **Meaningful work** jostle for second place.

Financial rewards takes fourth place. Items such as leadership, cultural fit, job stability or opportunity for promotion come lower on people's priorities.

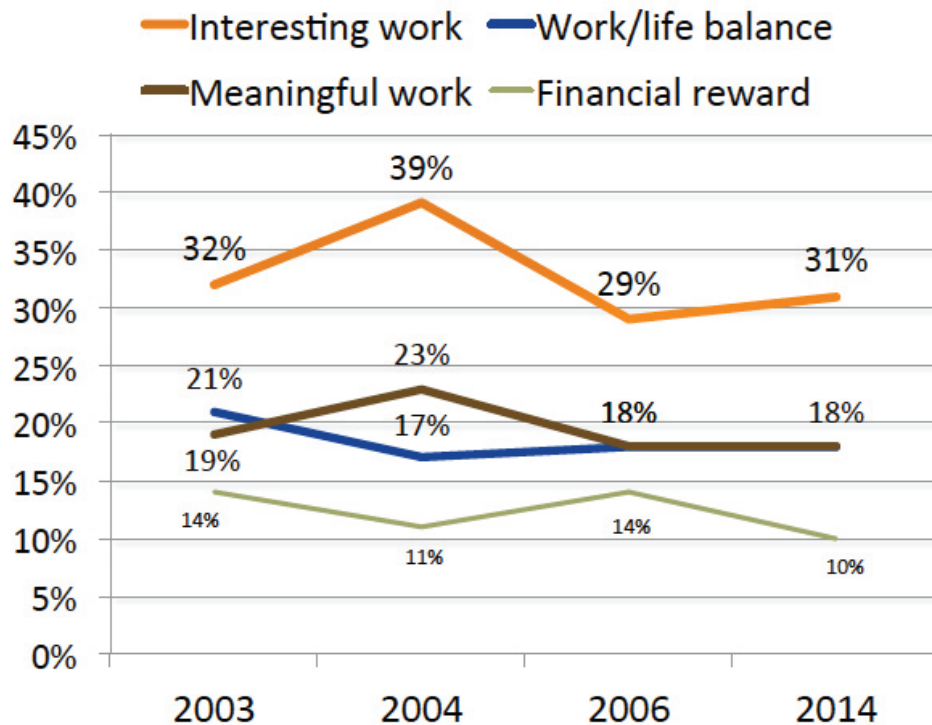
It is worth noting that the top items that people wish for or seek out in their next career move are *subjective and personal*. The few items that are easily quantified and that most of us would agree upon in terms of how we measure them (salary, direct promotion, job security) are not top of mind. **This illustrates the importance of individualized approaches to career and the importance of collaboration and dialogue in the understanding what - for instance - "interesting work" means to that individual.**

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Most important criterion sought in next job - 2003 to 2014



It's all about the work

People who are working on new projects or new products are the most engaged. What motivates someone is that they're on projects that move the needle and benefit the customers directly.

Andrew Coven

Senior Director of Engineering, Photoshop products at Adobe

Different priorities based on life stages, gender and manager status

As we might expect, people will be placing a different emphasis on what they are looking for from their next career step, depending on their current personal situation and experience.

Younger people (with lower average incomes) place higher relative importance on financial rewards. People in mid-career, with young families, aging parents, and prove professional tenure, place higher importance on work/life balance. Baby Boomers+, now well established in their professional journey, appear more likely to make decisions based on meaningful work.

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	Gen Y >1978	Gen X '65-'77	Baby Boomers+ <1964
Gen Y place more emphasis on financial rewards	12%	9%	9%
Gen X place higher value on Work/Life balance	17%	24%	13%
Importance of “meaningful work” goes down in middle age as work/life balance grows in importance	18%	14%	20%
Opportunity for promotion is low across the board (but a bit higher for Gen Y)	5%	4%	2%

We also note some differences between genders: Men favor financial rewards (14% vs. 7% for women) while women value work/life balance (20% vs. 15% for men). We find people with managerial responsibilities seeking interesting work (35% for managers vs. 27% for individual contributors) at the expense of work/life balance (12% for managers vs. 22% for individual contributors).

Career stagnation...or not?

People increasingly believe that it's OK to stay in the same role as long as there is still an opportunity to develop and learn new things:

Agree or Strongly agree to the statement: “I don't think there is anything wrong with staying in the same job if I can try new things or develop my skills.”	Total	2007 Numbers
Agree	88%	80%
Neither Agree nor Disagree	7%	12%
Disagree	6%	8%

At the same time, in many of the interviews we conducted, we heard how people struggled a bit with the perception of stagnation:

I have been at the same company for 6.5 years and I am very happy. My role has changed massively. Sometimes I do worry though that 6.5 years is too long and have I been pigeonholed. But I am happy and providing the company value and I am getting a lot out of it both personally and professionally - so I think it is OK to stay.

Rosie Adams

Learning and Development Manager, London, UK

Note for employers: developing people in-role is fine, but some effort should be focused on making progress visible and appreciated by others. Formal recognition may include an extension to a job title or an award for taking on new activities.

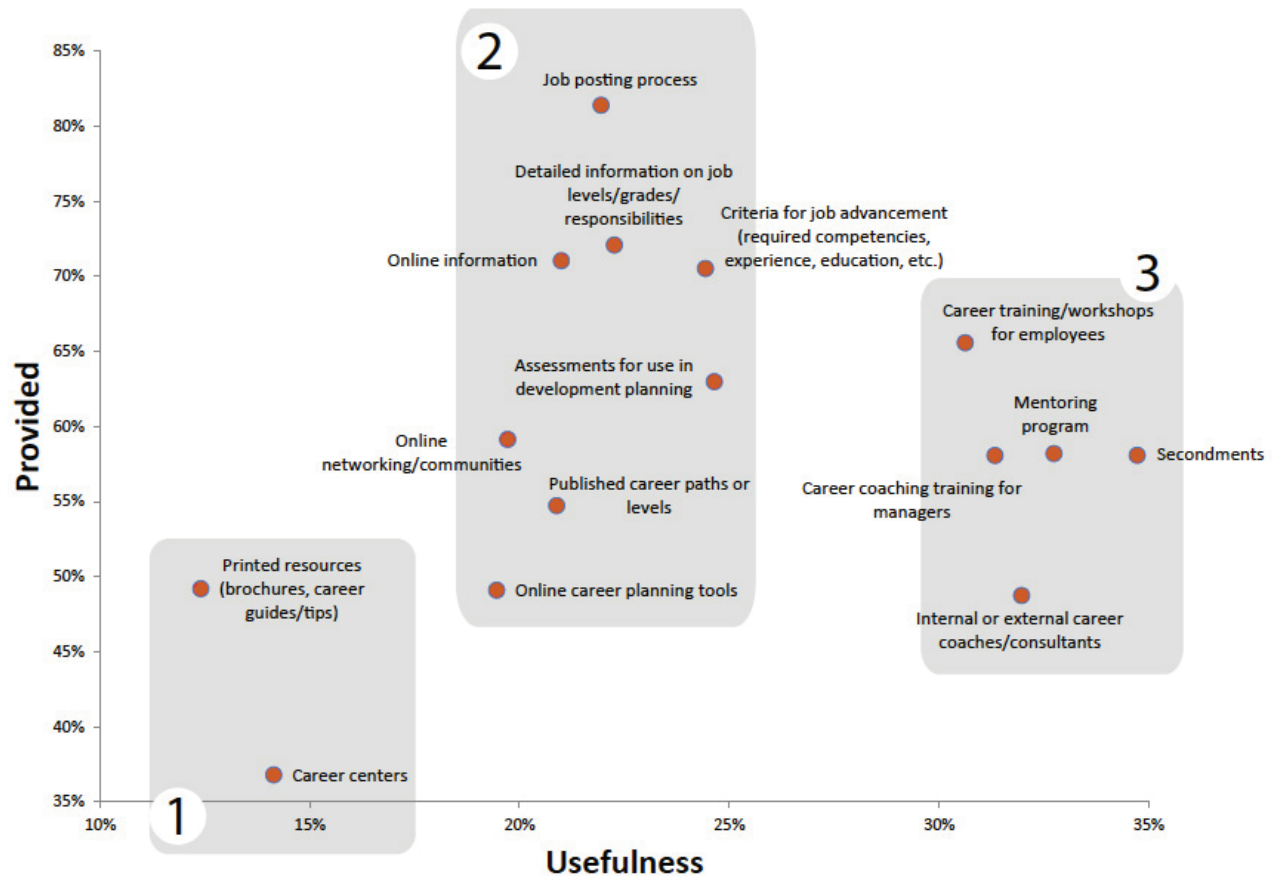
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What career resources are organizations providing?

Most important criterion sought in next job - 2003 to 2014



When analyzing responses regarding the type of resources companies provide and those employees find useful, three distinct groups emerge as illustrated in the graph above.

Group 1 were the time wasters - a couple of resources that few employees find add any value, and that most companies have moved away from providing. Both of these items are likely to be perceived as old-school, pre-internet solutions.

Group 2 were the low-touch, broad-reach solutions - those more commonly-provided resources that one-in-four or one-in-five employees reported as being valuable. You will note that all of these are broad-brush and typically self-serve resources.

Group 3 were the high-value-add high-touch group - this includes individualized and time-intensive solutions such as training and mentoring. not only are these ranked highest in terms of their usefulness for employees in guiding their careers, these are the resources that have seen the biggest growth in the percentage of people reporting them being useful. In a parallel development, colleges and universities are seeing a similar evolution of the career resources that graduates are requiring. The focus is on exploring interests and building exposure, and less definitive career paths - a precursor for expectations inside an organization?¹

¹ See Hanover Research - April 2012 "Best Practices in Career Services for Graduating Students" <http://www.hanoverresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Best-Practices-in-Career-Services-for-Graduating-Students-Membership.pdf>

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In terms of changes in which resources are being provided:

- We see a big jump in the number of employers providing “Online networking/communities” (+16 points) - not surprising given the evolution of internal social media in corporations.
- We also see a big drop in the number of companies providing career training to individual employees (-15 points). Other resource-intensive approaches are also seeing a decline - overall this group of most-useful resources has seen a 5 percentage point drop in the number of employees reporting having access to such tools.
- Irrespective of how useful the resource, there has been an overall reduction in the percentage of employees reporting having access to career resources from their employer - a trend that can be attributed (we believe) to both:
 - a) pared-back development budgets since 2007, and
 - b) a lack of certitude on which resources provide the best value given today’s ambiguity around career.

		2014 useful	Change since 2007 (useful)	2014 provided	Change since 07 (provided)
group 3	Secondments/temporary assignment	35%	+7	58%	-3
	Mentoring program	33%	+6	58%	-3
	Internal or external career coaches/consultants	32%	+2	49%	0
	Career coaching training for managers	31%	+3	58%	-4
	Career training/workshops for employees	31%	+2	66%	-15
group 2	Assessments for use in development planning	25%	-2	63%	-8
	Criteria for job advancement (required competencies, experience, education, etc.)	24%	0	71%	-6
	Detailed information on job levels/grades/responsibilities	22%	-2	72%	-8
	Job posting process	22%	-4	81%	-2
	Online information	21%	+3	71%	+5
	Published career paths or levels	21%	+3	55%	-5
	Online networking/communities	20%	+3	59%	+16
	Online career planning tools	19%	+3	49%	0
group 1	Career centers	14%	-1	37%	-1
	Printed resources (brochures, career guides/tips)	12%	0	49%	-7

It should be noted that the data presented here reflects employees’ assessments of available tools. In almost every interview we conducted with HR or organizational development professionals, we heard frustration over how few employees accessed the self-serve resources that were provided - indicating a lack of perceived value, a lack of employee initiative or a failure to effectively promote and highlight the resources available.



yourself in the shoes of the person making the decision (or failing to make a decision) and ask, "What would I do in this situation and why?"

Design the Solution

Once they've diagnosed the underlying source of a problem, companies can begin to design a solution. In particular, managers can use choice architecture and nudges, concepts introduced by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein in their 2008 book *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*. The goal of choice architecture is to improve people's decisions by carefully structuring how information and options are presented to them. In this fashion, companies can nudge employees in a certain direction without taking away their freedom to make decisions for themselves.

Public-policy makers are increasingly using choice architecture tools to nudge people toward better decisions on issues such as tax payments, medical treatments, consumer health and wellness, and climate-change mitigation. And businesses are starting to follow suit. For example, Google implemented choice architecture in its cafeterias in an effort to get employees to adopt more healthful eating habits. As Googlers reach for a plate, they encounter a sign informing them that people who use bigger plates tend to eat more than those who use smaller plates. Thanks to this simple change, the proportion of people using small plates has increased by 50%.

How to Choose the Right Lever

We recommend that companies

first consider bypassing both systems so that the desired outcome is implemented automatically. Because this strategy requires no effort on the part of decision makers, it is the most powerful way to influence results.

For many reasons, however, this approach may not be feasible or desirable. It may be impossible or prohibitively costly to automate the process in question. The targeted individuals may resent having the choice made for them. Or a "one size fits all" approach may be inappropriate.

Consider the case of a bank that must decide whether to renew loans to small businesses. It could automate the renewal decision using information from the businesses' balance sheets and cash flows. However, the bank may make better lending decisions if loan officers familiar with the businesses have discretion over whether to renew loans. Even if two businesses appear identical in the bank's computer systems, the loan officers may be aware of other factors—for instance, changes in the management team—that make one a higher risk than the other. Of course, giving loan officers discretion introduces biases into the decision-making process—a potential cost that must be weighed.

It's hard to change the way people's brains are wired. So change the context for decisions instead.

If bypassing both systems is not an option, companies must choose whether to trigger System 1 or engage System 2. The deliberative approach of System

2 can override mistakes caused by System 1, but cognitive effort is a limited resource. Using it for one decision means that it may not be available for others, and this cost must be taken into account. For example, in a study of fundraising efforts conducted at a U.S. public university, the performance of fundraisers improved significantly when the director thanked them for their work. This intervention strengthened their feelings of social worth by triggering System 1. One can imagine interventions that would engage System 2—for instance, asking the fundraisers to take more time to prepare for each call or increasing their accountability for results. However, such interventions might drain their energy and cognitive resources, diminishing their effort and persistence.

Test the Solution

The final step is to rigorously test the proposed solution to determine whether it will accomplish its objectives. Testing can help managers avoid costly mistakes and provide insights that lead to even better solutions. Tests should have three key elements:

Identify the desired outcome.

The outcome should be specific and measurable. In the case of the retailer that wanted employees to use home delivery for prescriptions, it was clear: increasing the percentage of employees who signed up for home delivery.

Identify possible solutions and focus on one.

If you alter too many things at once, it will be difficult to determine which piece of a complex change produced the desired effect. To avoid this problem, the retailer rolled out its "active choice" prescription program without simultaneously implementing other changes. Introduce the change in some areas of the organization (the "treatment group") and not others (the "control group").

If possible, divide the individuals, teams, or other entities randomly into two groups. Randomization helps ensure that any differences in outcome between the two groups can be attributed to the change. When such simple randomization is not feasible for reasons of logistics, ethics, cost, or sample size, more-sophisticated analytical techniques can be employed.

Insidious biases and insufficient motivation are often the main drivers behind significant organizational problems. But it's extremely difficult to change the way people's brains are wired. Instead change the environment in which people make decisions. Through some simple adjustments, executives can produce powerful benefits for their employees and organizations. ☞☞

4. Understand technology use versus abuse.

Technology is essential to innovating the conference call and boosting staff engagement. When applied incorrectly or misunderstood by end users, it can cripple both efforts. Managers have to use utmost discretion when implementing conferencing tools in a way that's


useful to employees, not abusive to their time or productivity.

In other words, just because you can video conference from your iPhone before boarding a flight doesn't mean you should. Organizations should dictate a new form of meeting technology etiquette, one that respects staff flexibility, and their right to efficient, uninterrupted work time and collaboration. Part of this decorum includes redefining "full

deployment." Rather than give all employees the same basic conferencing tools, give them what they really need to fulfill their unique responsibilities.

Mapping the technology to the user, not vice versa, increases the likelihood that staff will take advantage of these resources and deliver a higher return on investment.

Audio-only conference calls still permeate offices everywhere,

but the status quo won't hold for long. Changes in technology and workforce composition are happening too fast, forcing the rules of business communication to shift accordingly. Remember: Humans are multi-sensory creatures. Meetings aren't one-dimensional either. In order to better engage your employees when you meet as a group, you might want to start by how you communicate with them. 



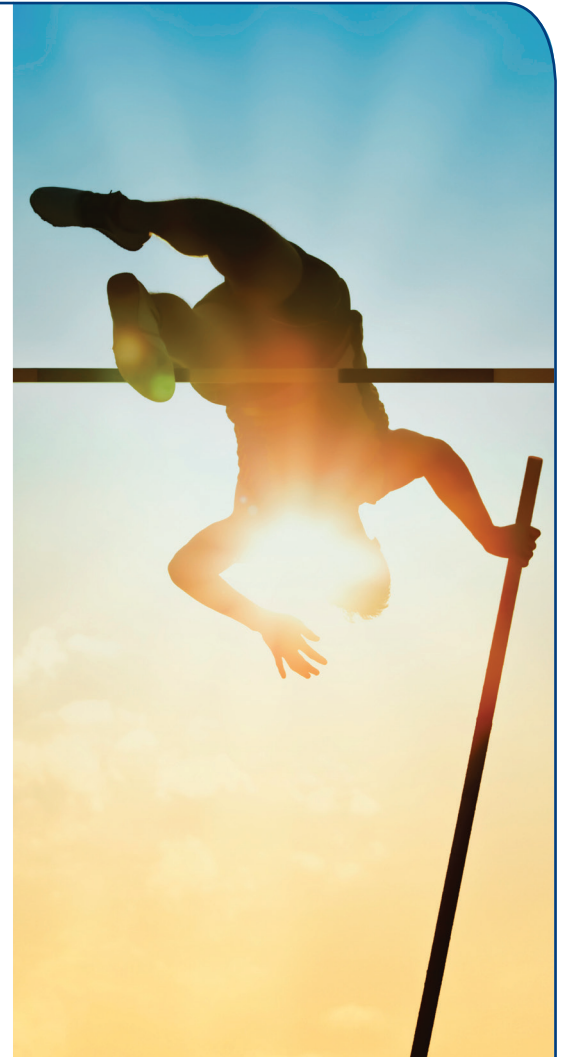
Raising the Bar in Staffing

To us, raising the bar means not settling for "good enough." It means making the best matches between employers and job seekers. And it means working harder to provide the right talent, improved productivity, and innovative business solutions.

In simplest terms, raising the bar means **adding value**.

The Secret to Our Success:

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- **More accountability.**
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For more information, call Jeannine Victor at 574.232.5400 x 261.

Summer internships — A hotbed of investigation and litigation

By Susan Prince, JD, Legal Editor

It's that time of year again. The trees begin to bud, the chill finally leaves the air, peoples' moods seem to lift. . . and we consider whether we need to pay our summer interns. Particularly in times when employers have decreased their hiring numbers, summer interns are an attractive option at little or no pay. Interns cost much less than new hires and employers don't have to provide interns with benefits.

Summer interns often get a bad reputation, but the majority of respondents to a BLR HR Poll regarding internships last summer stated that they had a positive experience with their interns. While 37 percent of poll respondents did not hire summer interns in 2014, those who did had a good experience by a wide margin (52 percent). Only 4 percent indicated that there were problems with productivity, attendance, or workplace skills. Interesting to note was that our intern poll results from two summers ago (2013) shows 35 percent of respondents were not hiring interns, while three summers ago (2012) results showed only 26 percent did not have interns that summer.

Internship programs can provide advantages for both employers and interns, but many internships risk running afoul of state and federal laws. Employers can end up on the hook for significant amounts in unpaid wages, employment taxes, and penalties. To avoid these unintended consequences, make sure your program:



- Is similar to training that would be provided in an educational environment.
- Predominantly benefits the interns.
- Provides interns with skills they can use in multiple employment settings rather than only in the employer's operation.
- Ensures interns do not perform the routine work of the business on a regular and recurring basis.
- Does not result in the displacement of regular employees.
- Does not merely augment the existing workforce during specific time periods.
- Puts interns under the close supervision of existing staff.
- Provides no immediate advantage to the employer from the interns' activities.
- Impedes the employer's operations on occasion.
- Runs for a fixed length of time, established before the internships begin.
- Does not entitle interns to employment after their internships conclude.
- Makes clear to interns that they are not entitled to wages for their time during the internships.

In general, the more an internship program is structured around a classroom or academic experience as opposed to the employer's actual operations, the more likely the internship will be viewed as an extension of the individual's educational experience (this often occurs where a college or university exercises

oversight over the internship program and provides educational credit).

The more the internship provides the individual with skills that can be used in multiple employment settings, as opposed to skills particular to one employer's operation, the more likely the intern would be viewed as receiving training.

Under these circumstances, the intern does not perform the routine work of the business on a regular and recurring basis, and the business is not dependent on the work of the intern.

On the other hand, if the interns are engaged in the operations of the employer or are performing productive work (for example, filing, performing other clerical work, or assisting customers), even though they may receive some benefits in the form of a new skill or improved work habits, an employment relationship may still exist because the employer also benefits from the interns' work. In such a case, intern pay is required.

The federal Department of Labor reminds us that the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) defines the term "employ" very broadly as including to "suffer or permit to work." Covered and nonexempt individuals who are "suffered or permitted" to work must be compensated under the law for the services they perform for an employer. Interns in the for-profit private sector who qualify as employees rather than interns typically must be paid at least the minimum wage and overtime compensation. Heed this reminder from the DOL, and keep them from knocking at your company's door at the end of the summer.

31 of the stupidest things ever put on a resume

By Christian Schappel, hrmorning.com

Want to meet a bunch of people who absolutely didn't get the job?

A Reddit user started a thread calling on all interviewers to share "the most ridiculous thing you've seen on a resume."

The user stated the reason for this as, "I'm reviewing

resumes and someone stated that they have 'advanced knowledge of the internet.'"

Presumably, the user wanted to take this opportunity to revel in others' absurd resume findings.

Luckily for all of us, the thread produced a plethora of gems.

Here are some of the highlights:

- "None of my references really like me, so please don't believe what they say."
- "We got an application from a man who simply put 'Mexicans' as his reason for leaving former employment."
- "I was helping someone with their resume once who listed their email address as 420bluntbro@...."
- "Grate communication and attention to details."
- "Under 'certifications' this guy put 'bad ass.'"
- "I had a guy put 'Cougars' in his interest category."
- All nicely typed on the first and only line of the page: "My name is Mike and I'd like a job. Here is my phone number. Thanks."



CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

- “My friend used to put ‘petroleum transfer specialist at British Petroleum’ on his resume. In reality, he pumped gas at an BP gas station.”
- “‘Applied to Harvard University’ under their education profile.”
- “My brother-in-law put under Skills that he can ‘Hold 17 eggs in one hand.’”
- “At the bottom under an interests/hobbies type heading: Collects Dragon Eggs.” (Commenter said this was more than a decade ago, so it was long before Game of Thrones.)
- “When I worked retail, I once received an application that was filled out with a rainbow pen. Under address they wrote, ‘Not Relevant.’”
- “... I’m a producer and have read a lot of acting resumes. If you list ‘dinosaur noises’ as a skill, I AM going to make you demonstrate in your audition.”
- “I have a buddy who thought it would be a good idea to put his 2.0 GPA on a resume.”
- “‘Hydration specialist’ — she was the water girl for a football team.”
- “An astrophysicist I know included ‘Can use a shovel,’ on her resume when applying to research positions. She got her first pick.”
- “I was interviewing prospective servers for a restaurant. One young man turned in a resume written entirely in text speak. i.e. Werk Xperince- Bezt bAg Boy in da hizzouse at Da Key FUUD! I told him the job required he be able to write in English. He took the ‘resume’ back from me and left.”
- “On a resume applying for a helpdesk position. USMC sniper, two tours in Iraq, 23 confirmed kills. To be fair I did consider hiring him and stationing him on the roof. There were a number of technical problems he could have solved from up there.”
- “I manage a coffee shop, and females constantly put glamor shots in the resume.
- I even had one middle aged woman include a full length picture of herself in an evening gown. It was weird.”
- “World of Warcraft Guild Leader as an example of leadership skills (listed like a previous job).”
- “Under ‘Reason for applying with us:’ ‘My parents are rich, and I thought I could live for free off them for a few more years. Turns out I was wrong. Now I need to get a job and move out. I’m lazy though.’”
- “‘Have you ever been convicted of a Felony? If yes, please explain’ Answer: ‘Yes. Arson. But he deserved it, will discuss in interview.’”
- “‘Spelling Bee Winner’ listed under accomplishments/activities. The ironic part — the Objective part of the resume started ‘To obtane a chalenging position...’”
- “All seriousness: ‘Italian cuisine logistics engineer’. He was a pizza delivery guy.”
- “One guy summarized every position with a one-line summary.. that sounded like a movie trailer. The one we laugh about to this day is ‘a code-slingin’ cowboy venturing alone into the Wild West of Java’.”
- “‘experience using microwave,’ on an application to a restaurant.”
- “‘I am in the top 2% of programmers’ No explanation of how that is determined. . . I should have asked. :-”
- “I asked someone to fill out an application, since they didn’t have a resume. . . he only had one previous job, and in the space where it asked why he left, he wrote ‘got locked up.’”
- “Left a contact email that started with kinkykitty@”
- “Windows 7 was my idea.”
- “I bake great cakes and will share if you give me this job.’ It was for a mortgage banking position.”



With ‘Cadillac tax’, employers face another ACA hurdle

By Jessica Webb-Ayer, HR.BLR.COM

The enactment of healthcare insurance reform (also known as the Affordable Care Act or the ACA) in 2010 began an extended period during which far-reaching changes to the American healthcare system started taking effect, including changes to employer-provided health insurance.

Employers have had to deal with myriad healthcare insurance reform provisions in the last several years, but ACA compliance is not over yet. More specifically, another future provision that employers also need to be planning for is the excise tax on so-called “Cadillac” plans that becomes effective in 2018.

CADILLAC TAX DETAILS

So what is the Cadillac tax? The ACA added Section 4980I to the Internal Revenue Code. Under this provision, effective January 1, 2018, a 40 percent excise tax is imposed on employer-sponsored health plans with total values that exceed \$10,200 for individual coverage and \$27,500 for family coverage. The threshold amounts may be adjusted in certain circumstances (e.g., for individuals in certain high-risk professions and for certain group demographics).

This healthcare insurance reform provision has been controversial since even before the ACA was enacted, and organized labor has been especially vocal regarding its distaste for the tax. It is still a much-maligned part of the law, but until now it has taken a backseat

because more imminent ACA provisions that concerned employers were going into effect before 2018.

However, in 2015, employers are beginning to be concerned with this upcoming provision, especially because the IRS has recently released guidance related to the tax.

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

There have been a couple of recent developments that employers should be aware of regarding the ACA’s excise tax.

Notice 2015-16. In February, the IRS issued Notice 2015-16 to “initiate and inform the process of developing guidance” regarding the upcoming excise tax. The notice outlines potential approaches that might be taken in future guidance and also solicits comments on these possible methods and other related issues.

Repeal legislation. Last week, Representative Joe Courtney (D-CT) introduced legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 2050) that would repeal the Cadillac tax. In a press release, Courtney noted, “The excise tax is a poorly designed penalty that will put a dent in the pocketbooks of many families and businesses with health insurance plans that do not resemble the ‘Cadillac’ plans originally targeted when this policy was adopted—instead, the excise tax will punish people living in higher cost areas, with ‘Ford Focus’ level plans.”

WHAT NEXT?

So what actions should employers be taking regarding the ACA’s Cadillac tax? Even though there is a push to repeal the tax, employers need to plan for it assuming it is still going into effect. Employers should evaluate their benefits plans to see how the tax might affect them and whether they will need to take action to avoid it. Employers also need to monitor developments on the healthcare insurance reform provision, including any new regulations, guidance, or legislation that may be on the horizon.

Supreme Court ruling a ‘huge step forward’: But for EEOC or employers?

by Christian Schappel, HRmorning.com

What happens if the EEOC doesn't go all-out in an attempt to resolve discrimination complaints with employers before filing a lawsuit? That was the question before the Supreme Court.

The case was brought to the court by Mach Mining LLC, an employer claiming the EEOC didn't do what it was required to do under federal law to resolve discrimination claims prior to filing a lawsuit.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act requires the EEOC — prior to filing a lawsuit — to attempt to conciliate a dispute with an employer after the agency finds reasonable cause to believe the employer discriminated against a worker.

Did it conciliate ‘in good faith’?

This all started when a woman, who'd applied to be a coal miner with Mach Mining filed a complaint with the EEOC that the company denied her employment because she was a woman.

The EEOC then investigated and determined there was reasonable cause to believe Mach Mining was guilty of discrimination. The EEOC then invited the claimant and Mach Mining to engage in informal methods of dispute resolution.

According to the case before the High Court, both parties were then told the EEOC would contact them to begin the conciliation process. About a year later, the EEOC informed Mach Mining via a letter that the conciliation process had failed. Shortly after, it filed suit against Mach Mining.

In the lawsuit, the EEOC claimed it fulfilled its obligation to attempt conciliation. But Mach Mining countered,

saying the EEOC failed to conciliate “in good faith.”

The EEOC then said the court had no authority to review its conciliation efforts. And again, Mach Mining took the opposite stance, claiming the court had the authority to review the reasonableness of the EEOC's conciliation efforts.

A district court ruled in favor of Mach Mining. The Seventh Circuit court then reversed that decision.

So before the High Court the issue went.

What was hanging in the balance?

A win for Mach Mining would've surely limited the EEOC's ability to expedite the conciliation process and jump into a lawsuit, thus giving employers a better shot at settling charges out of court.

So on which side did the Supreme Court fall?

In a 9-0 consensus, the High Court took Mach Mining's side and ruled courts do have the authority to review whether the EEOC has fulfilled its conciliation obligations.

But employers shouldn't pop the champagne just yet; this doesn't appear to be the win they were hoping for.

The problem: While the High Court said it's well within other courts' authority to review the EEOC's conciliation process, it put pretty strict limits on how deep courts can actually dig into the process.

In fact, the limits are so strict the EEOC is actually treating the ruling as a victory.

In a recent news release on the ruling, the EEOC called it, “a step forward for victims of discrimination.”



EEOC General Counsel David Lopez said in the release:

“This unanimous decision is great news for victims of discrimination on whose behalf we are seeking relief — and for the public, which ultimately benefits from our work. As the court noted, Title VII is about substantive outcomes. We are pleased the court rejected the intrusive review proposed by the company and its supporters. The court recognized that the scope of review is narrow and a sworn affidavit is generally sufficient to meet the statutory requirements. If the employer has concrete evidence that such efforts were not made and the court finds in favor of the employer, the remedy is further conciliation.”

WHAT CAN COURTS DO?

Five critical aspects of the Supreme Court's ruling:

- Title VII's conciliation mandate only requires the EEOC to notify an employer of the claims against it and give the employer an opportunity to discuss the matter. The notice must describe what the employer has done and identify the employees (or class of employees) that have been effected. The

EEOC must try to engage the employer in a discussion to provide the employer with a chance to remedy the allegedly discriminatory practice.

- Title VII does not, require a good-faith negotiation between the EEOC and the employer.
- Courts can review whether the EEOC has fulfilled this conciliation obligation.
- All the EEOC needs to produce before a court to prove the agency has fulfilled its conciliation obligation is a sworn affidavit stating it gave the employer notice and an opportunity to achieve voluntary compliance.
- If an employer is able to produce “concrete evidence” the EEOC did not provide it with information about the charges against it or a chance to resolve them voluntarily, a court can only stay the proceeding and require the EEOC to meet its conciliation obligation.

Bottom line: While this case could be considered a win for Mach Mining (albeit a slim one), it could also be an affirmation of just how much power the EEOC has when it comes to perusing discrimination claims against employers. The EEOC is certainly taking it as the latter.