

Maximizing Results Through People
A CEO to CEO Quarterly Newsletter

5-15-04

Babies & Employees

Dear Fellow CEO:

In our last Quarterly newsletter, we introduced Heather Haas, our new Training and Recruitment Manager to you by mail. She's smart, insightful, engaging and easy to like. The more time I spend with her, the more I realize what a terrific addition she is to our organization. She's learning very fast, she's already added her first client; everyone at BWA, as well as our clients, are in awe of what she brings to the table. If you've met her, you know why; if you haven't, once you do, you'll understand quickly.

She's around 30 years old and has been married about a year and a half. I didn't ask any questions about her having children during the interviewing process (as I'm not supposed to). Heather volunteered she didn't have any children but would probably like some down the road.

Two weeks after starting her job as we were driving back from lunch Heather announced, "I've got some news for you." I said, "OK". Pause. I thought news, especially news from a terrific employee phrased in this context, is almost never good. I braced myself and continued to drive. "We're having a baby!" Heather announced.

I composed myself and congratulated her. She told me everything's going fine, she was feeling great, all systems are go. She wanted to wait until the first trimester was over before announcing anything. I talked about our first baby, family excitement, etc.

Then, we talked about what she wanted to do. Heather really hadn't done a lot of planning in that regard yet, and I didn't remember what our pregnancy leave policy was (this will actually be the 3rd baby our female employees have had at BWA, the 5th overall). She thought she'd want to take a couple of months and then return to her job. Because both her parents and in-laws are in town, Heather thought day care would be relatively easy. End of discussion. Back to work.

I thought I did pretty well in the situation. I conveyed my enthusiasm for Heather and Matt (her husband) having the baby. I was pleased and positive. I didn't have a cardiac arrest. I don't think my face lost its color.

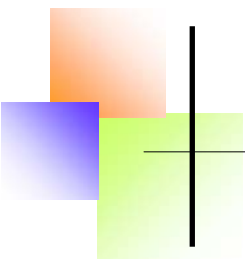
Here's what I was thinking.

Heather is terrific. No mistake. But, we'd looked long and hard to find just the right person for our training and recruitment manager and Heather was a great catch. Now, I began to think, what if we lose her? What if she is drawn back to stay with her child after delivery? What about the investment in time, money and commitment we've made? These issues were real and troublesome.

I needed more time to think.

Whenever I wrestle with an idea about how to make a philosophical decision regarding the business, I inevitably pull out our Mission and Values statements. They really do serve as a guide. So, once again, I read them. And it struck me as I read. I'd done exactly the right thing on that day and I knew I would continue down the path on which I'd started. The path was right because the Values statement read:

"The people at BWA matter at BWA. We recognize that life should be a balance between work and play. Doing our jobs is important and will be valued and evaluated. But, family comes first."



We wrote that into our Values Statement because it was and is true for everyone at BWA, including me. My work does matter to me. So does my family. I have had three children. I took time off of work in each case. The experience is one I would never change. People matter. Work matters. Life has to be a balance between work and play. Family does come first. No doubt about it. But if work is good, it matters too.

Then, why would I even consider the issue of an employee having a baby as troublesome? Having that thought was real, but the troublesome part was wrong, and had to be vanquished. The employee was good, and if we offered her work she could enjoy, all would eventually fall into place.

I decided I shouldn't and wouldn't consider Heather's pregnancy troublesome. Having a baby is the most important thing in the world (for many people). More important than work. Work must exist around that reality. As a leader, I've got to try my best to create an environment that allows work to be energizing, fulfilling, even fun, while people live their lives, and yes, have babies too. Heather might have her baby and not come back to work. That would be disappointing, but life would go on. If I can create an environment where Heather and others like her would both have babies (as well as live the rest of their family lives) and want to come to work, we'll all be the better for it. BWA, our employees – even our clients.

Gina Bindley, our Recruiting Administrator, had her third baby, Tanner, several months ago and is just starting to regularly come back to work. She brought Tanner in a few weeks back and we shared the joy of having a new member of the Bindley (and broadly BWA) family. I remember seeing the smile of both a proud mother and a loving infant together and thinking this is one of life's true pleasures. While Tanner isn't my baby, I feel a kind of pride of family with him too. He's one of ours, and that just feels good. I feel proud too, that Gina says Rielly, her oldest daughter (at seven) talks about coming to work at BWA when she grows up. I hope she does.

I watch Heather every day now, checking for the physical changes that come with pregnancy. She's only gotten a little bigger, and she's self conscious about her stomach growing as the little one does its thing growing inside of her. But I watch now, not in fear, but in anticipation – anticipation of a new member of our family. I'm not worried about Heather leaving. I'm worrying about when our new recruit will be ready to come to work.

Thanks for reading.

Bob Wilson, President
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