Something Old, Something New

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In less than a month's time I will have the honor of attending the wedding of a dear colleague. Although she is definitely a trendsetter, rather than a slave to fashion, I will not be surprised if she wears "something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue" as she glides down the aisle. But it wasn't the approaching nuptials that reminded me of the rhyme with which every bride is familiar. It was an old fashioned rock-n-roll concert at the Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts in Vienna, VA.

On Monday evening I accompanied my reluctant teenage daughter to a Joe Walsh concert. Our third row seats, the unusual, less than oppressive temperature/humidity, and the absolute perfect front of house mix… made it a night to remember. I can't remember enjoying a concert as much as this one. As I reflected on a perfect evening, it occurred to me that Walsh, like other performers with hit songs from yesteryear, was clever in choosing a mix of "familiar favorites" along with newer numbers. While I eagerly awaited his performance of the title track on his most recent CD, "Analog Man," I was grateful to hear Walsh perform the much older, but still wonderful, "Life's Been Good."

Listening to Joe Walsh sing the beloved, older tunes and a few new numbers, led me to reflect on the value of "old" and "new" in a risk management program. And no-where is a mix of old and new more relevant than in human resources risk management. And I'm especially proud that this year's RISK SUMMIT will feature an unprecedented line-up of HR risk management sessions, including:

- Ask the HR Experts
- Supervision: What's the Risk?
- Managing the Risk of Employee Separation
- Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Workplace Relationships, But Were Afraid to Ask
- Myths, Trends, and Innovations in Screening and Background Checks
- Managing Social Media Risk and Reward

Here are my suggestions for making the best of "old" and "new" in your nonprofit's Human Resources.

Time Tested Risk Management Tips

- **Give every employee the respect they are due.** Every employee wants to feel valued and respected. Nonprofit employees also want to feel connected to the mission of the organization. Whether your direct reports work in finance, facilities or fundraising, resolve to make every team member feel valued and

connected each and every day.
- **Remember that your employees are human beings, not psychics.** Take the time to explain your expectations, invite questions, and look for signs that staff members truly understand the task at hand. Hoping that an employee will simply "get it" without instruction is arrogant and unrealistic.
- **Praise in public, criticize in private.** When a staff member performs beyond your expectations, share that success with the entire team. When performance falls short, resist the urge to "blame and shame." Treat the shortfall as a teachable moment in the employee's career. Explain the shortcoming and invite the employee to ask questions about how they can improve their performance on future assignments.

New Fangled, But Worth Trying

- **Update your policies to reflect 21st century office realities.** Strictly prohibiting personal use of the nonprofit's equipment, software and systems no longer makes senses in a 24/7/365 world, with many employees using "bring their own" devices at work. Are your personnel policies a relic of a past age, or relevant today? If you haven't done so lately, it's time to dust off the employee handbook and make it work for the modern nonprofit your organization has become.
- **Abandon paranoia in favor of ambassadorship.** Decades ago the typical nonprofit communications policy offered stern warnings about usurping the role of the agency's "official spokesperson." Today, the most successful nonprofits have senior and junior staff actively engaged in spreading news of the mission far and wide. If your communications strategy is anchored in paranoia about what your staff "might say" to stakeholders, it's time for a reality check and policy update.

The most effective risk management programs offer a combination of "time-tested" and bold, new strategies. As you reflect on the collection of policies your nonprofit has adopted, consider whether you have the ideal "front of house mix" or an unbalanced, hard to hear and harder to enforce set of policies.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about any risk management topic and questions about the Center's resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504. The Center provides risk management tools and resources at www.https://nonprofitrisk.org/ and offers consulting assistance to organizations unwilling to leave their missions to chance.