

Insight

Vacation realization: Work issues everywhere

I'm kayaking through the sparkling waters of Kealakekua Bay and thinking about ... human resources management.

Wait! I'm supposed to be enjoying a well-deserved vacation to Hawaii, not thinking about work. It's little wonder, though, given that human resources management functions seem to pop up everywhere.



Barbara Burr

Encounter after encounter related to the many facets of my work at the Mesa County Libraries as human resource manager. It began with worksite wellness; progressed to customer service, strategic planning, teamwork and rules; and then ended with rewards and recognition. I almost couldn't wait to come home and write about it.

My husband, Mike, wanted to go ocean kayaking during our vacation to the Big Island of Hawaii. Already, my work life started to creep in. OK, I reassured myself, I can do this. I've been diligently exercising 120 minutes a week since January as co-chair of the Mesa County Libraries' worksite wellness pilot project. I'm sure my arms are much stronger than the last time Mike suggested some type of water activity.

We drove to the Adventures in Paradise Outfitter just outside of Captain Cook to rent a kayak. We listened to the survival drill from a cool islander named Jeff. He was so reassuring he even convinced me to try to snorkeling. He offered to throw in the snorkeling equipment at no extra charge because I just had to see the amazing fish on the other side of the bay. Jeff's customer service skills were so exceptional during the orientation — from warmly greeting us to putting the kayak on top of our car — that I wanted to

bring him back and hire him to work at the library.

Jeff was also a strategic thinker without even being aware of it. He gave us a map and spent time explaining how to get to the other side of the bay — and more importantly, how to get back.

He told us to aim for the house with the red roof even though that wasn't our ultimate destination. It seems the water currents can get pushy. If you set your sights for the actual landing, you'll overshoot your mark and spend another hour trying to get back when the tide is too strong and you're already tired.

I woke up the next morning thinking about this analogy of goal setting. Perhaps those of us who are recovering perfectionists and not accustomed to the Hawaiian state of mind often push too hard to get to the goal we see and forget to consider that it might be easier to keep our destination in mind and aim a bit short. Like water currents, life most likely will push us to where we want to go anyway.

Teamwork is a buzz word in human resources these days and for good reason. It's tough to accomplish a lot on your own. Jeff suggested we buddy up with the other couple who attended the same kayaking orientation. We could assist each other at the put-in, be there for one another if someone needed help getting back in the kayak and meet some new people in the process. It was a suggestion that certainly made me breathe easier. I've been on many water adventures in the past with my husband. I've learned that teamwork is imperative when out in the wilderness.

A two-person ocean kayak demands by its very nature that both people synchronize their paddling. Effective teamwork is often likened to a crew rowing together at the same time in the same direction.

The highlight of the entire eight days in Hawaii was

seeing two pods of spinner dolphins in the bay. Jeff and others told us repeatedly to stay at least 150 feet away from the dolphins at all times so as not to put them at risk while they're sleeping.

As one who administers library policies, I have respect for following the rules. Of course, there were rogue snorkelers from a party boat who ignored the rules and swam right up to the dolphins. Those in HR work encounter a similar dynamic more times than we'd like to admit! At least I could relax and not have to deal with this problem. After all, I was on vacation.

After spending the afternoon on the snorkeling side of the bay, we made it back easily, aiming for the house with the red roof. We were exhilarated, exhausted and *really* glad there was a muscular man waiting at the take-out to literally haul in the tourists who could barely get out of their boats.

A good leader remembers the need for reward and recognition and celebrates when an employee accomplishes a goal or difficult task. Not one to miss an opportunity to celebrate, I suggested that the four of us end our afternoon by driving to Kainaliu to savor yet another tropical island chocolate coconut macadamia ice cream cone.

I know others in the wellness pilot project members might question how eating an ice cream cone relates to worksite wellness. I guess I'll just have to return to Hawaii to continue conducting an analysis of human resource functions.

Barbara Burr is human resource manager of the Mesa County Libraries and president-elect of the Western Colorado Human Resources Association. The WCHRA has scheduled its next membership meeting for 11:30 a.m. Aug. 15 at Two Rivers Convention Center, 159 Main St. in Grand Junction. For more information about the WCHRA, call 243-6505 or log on to www.wchra.org.

