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Holiday Greetings from Leap! *



**HAPPY HOLIDAYS
FROM LEAP!**

Leaping into 2018



Since the recent firestorm that devastated our beautiful county, we've been bowled over by the indomitable spirit and heart of our community. We're endlessly proud to call Sonoma County home, and we're ready to leap into a new year full of opportunities and promise. Here, we present Leap Solutions' "Pond Picks:" staff wishes, recommendations and commitments to you—our loyal clients, associates and friends—for making 2018 a year of renewal, accomplishment and prosperity.



Counting Co-worker Blessings

Teri Lohrmann, *Office Manager*

At some point during your work life, you're likely to come across people who become more than mere colleagues. If you're really lucky, they earn a spot in your life forever. It's pretty cool to enjoy that relationship for the better part of eight hours a day—and to get paid for it, no less!

Top five blessings of our Leap family:

1. When either tragedy or joy comes to any one of us, we check-in as a group. Even at 2:00 am if needed for emergencies! The collective "caring" offers a feeling of safety and comradery.
2. They know how we take our coffee and what kind of sandwich we like. We help each other "be healthy"...but occasionally assist in falling off the wagon. (Peppermint Pattie anyone? Taco Bell?)
3. We know each other's quirks (salads are for summertime only; keeps the soap box nearby; only writes with a blue pen; the sound of a stapler makes them cringe; sings during work; likes piano music to focus; loves to talk cooking... and don't you dare give me mushrooms!). They see even our most stressed-out, "Workzilla" selves—and they like us anyway.
4. Banter (and inevitable laughter) around the conference table keeps it real! We work hard but have fun too, making it easier to enjoy our jobs!
5. We count on them for support, advice and yes, often times blunt honesty. (Humility is good!)

*Alone we are strong...
together we are
stronger*

The team at Leap Solutions is a family, and we are honored to support each other through all ups and downs. The blessings come when being at work doesn't require so much work! 2017 has been full of change, tragedy, new life and expanded business.

Our hope for 2018 is that your organization will thrive together as a team, building upon your individual and collective strengths and creating new opportunities for growth. Are you ready to Leap?®

Preparing for Whatever Comes

Chuck McPherson, *Partner*

This time last year, I wrote about planning for success. Who could ever have predicted that the planning we did and continue to do here at Leap Solutions Group would withstand the North Bay firestorm? While our office was closed for a couple of weeks, and many clients needed to reschedule, the act of pulling our team together amidst the chaos kept us in alignment and reaffirmed our dedication to one other and to our clients and our community.

In the face of unforeseen tragedy, those plans that we had reviewed and discussed weekly became something that we embraced and understood on a deeper level than ever before. As simple as it may sound, having a plan in place meant that our team could effectively communicate, both internally and externally, and smoothly navigate business interruption. As I wrote last year, “make a plan, work a plan and revisit often.” Planning is not something you do once a year and put on a shelf to collect dust; it is fluid and requires constant commitment, communication and engagement at all levels of the organization. Active planning will allow you and your organization to weather any storm—even a firestorm!



Caring for Employees

Christine Rodman, Senior Human Resources Consultant

HR professionals are largely responsible for addressing the safety, welfare and health of an organization’s most important assets: it’s people. That means HR plays an unusually crucial role during and after any disaster.

You already know the importance of developing and communicating company emergency procedures and having a clear evacuation plan in place in the event of a disaster. We have now seen firsthand the tremendous value in partnering with outstanding local, state, and federal organizations and agencies for crisis management support and vital aid toward disaster recovery. But here are some non-traditional ways HR professionals can care for employees during a disaster and throughout the recovery process:

- Implement a more flexible and responsive emergency action plan. Consider providing financial assistance for employee transfer or relocation and implementing a vacation donation policy for employees who might want to support coworkers in need.
- Encourage employees to volunteer with disaster relief programs, and pay them for their time when they do. Offer an employer-matching donation program toward relief efforts.
- Educate and encourage affected employees to utilize their medical insurance benefits or Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) for complimentary or low-cost counseling services. Consider reimbursing employees for out-of-pocket counseling services.
- For those who lost their jobs resulting from the disaster, provide information and access to local resources and job placement services. Use social media and professional networking to help displaced employees find new opportunities.
- Consider flexible leave policies (see below) that can accommodate the concerns and needs of employees who are still experiencing post-disaster trauma and logistical challenges.

There's no better time to conduct a thorough review of your current emergency plan than now. You've just seen it in action, and you can genuinely and thoroughly evaluate its effectiveness, identify opportunities and steps for improvement, and make them a priority. Leap is here to help!

Creating Smart Leave Policies

Claudia Sarmiento, Human Resources Consultant

The devastating fires that struck our community have forever changed our lives and our hearts. We need time and creative solutions for the logistical challenges of putting the pieces back together, and employers can provide both with flexible leave-of-absence policies.

Whether it's a pregnancy, disability, medical, bereavement or personal leave, a well-planned and well-executed leave of absence can ease tremendous burden on employees without putting unnecessary strain on your organization. Components of thorough and effective leave policies include:

- Compliance with state and federal law. You'll need to know which ever-changing local, state and federal laws affect your organization and your employees. This can depend on size and type of organization, number of employees, reasons for leave and more.
- Clear eligibility and justification. Your policy should spell out what circumstances warrant leaves of absence, which employees are eligible and what information and documentation is required of them. Be sure the policy meets the core philosophy of your organization.
- Duration decisions. Determine how start and end dates are to be decided and institute length limits for each type of leave (in compliance with all applicable laws).
- Benefit policy. Know your obligations as an employer to continue benefits during a leave of absence. Some leaves of absence, such as Pregnancy Disability Leave and federal family and medical leaves (FMLA, CFRA) require continuation of health benefits; personal leaves may not.
- Documentation. Create consistent, reliable documentation to manage leave requests and leaves. Include request forms (ask for supporting documents, i.e. medical certification, as needed), letters that cover both employee's rights and employer's obligations, required notices and posters and more.
- Reemployment policy. Federal and state laws will dictate your obligation to hold an employee's job while on a particular leave of absence. Your policy should clearly define when an organization is required—and when it is not—to re-employ an individual.

Leap Solutions Group can help you design leave of absence policies and practices that will best serve your employees and your organization during times of transition. We can also help you distribute the policy and incorporate it into your employee handbook.

Recruiting for a New Landscape

Mary Henderson, *Executive Recruiter and Coach*

We were all affected by the firestorm in different ways and to varying degrees, but one thing holds true for most everyone: we are figuring out our “new normal.” As we move forward, we find ourselves reconnecting with old friends, being more cognizant of supporting local businesses, and working diligently to get families back into their homes.



However, homes and buildings aren’t the only things we need to rebuild. As the community faces unprecedented housing and labor market conditions, employers face a workforce that may well move away. It’s more critical than ever to look for opportunities to leverage contacts and resources as we support existing employees and work to attract potential new candidates to the area.

Sonoma County has proven to be resilient, and that resiliency is augmented each time we share creative ideas, encourage collaboration and look for new ways to tackle rebuilding challenges head on. We are already hearing of innovative solutions by some of our clients as they address the housing shortage and train and retain the talent that already exists in this great county. My hope for 2018 is that we will continue to think outside the box when it comes to recruitment and retention strategies so that we emerge with a community that not only survives but thrives in our “new normal.” Leap is honored to be a trusted resource and looks forward to supporting our local economy today and well into the future.

Finding Fresh Recruits

Bianca Rose, *Recruitment & HR Assistant*

With a relatively low unemployment rate, an increasingly tight housing market and a high cost of living, the demand for workers in Sonoma County is exceeding supply. In 2018, consider extending recruitments to college students. Neighboring Sonoma State University and Santa Rosa Junior College are full of bright, passionate, hard-working students who are hungry to learn, explore and gain hands-on professional experience. It’s a win-win!

One of the main obstacles facing recent college-graduate job-hunters is lack of work experience—which of course they can’t address until they are hired. By recruiting college students, you allow educated young workers to learn about possible careers and obtain invaluable workplace training, skills and experience. You and the community at large are in turn enriched by the presence and influence of qualified and enthusiastic workers, many of whom are millennials, a diverse generation of technologically savvy multitaskers and out-of-the-box thinkers with can-do attitudes. Is it time to invest in our collective future? We think so.

Buying Local Beyond Retail

Scott Ormerod, *Partner*

We are blessed in the North Bay to have the wonderful Sonoma County GO LOCAL Cooperative working to promote community buying power in support of independent, locally-owned businesses (shopping, dining, arts and entertainment, finance, construction, real estate and more). The group has proven to be a strong influence over the years, and the challenges of the October firestorm have only emphasized the importance and value of supporting our local economy.

As a local-based service-providing company, we at Leap Solutions Group want to expand the GO LOCAL concept to include business-to-business local buying support. Whether it is for your next recruitment, human resource need, organization development or other B2B need, we want you to deeply consider the lasting impact of staying local. Local investment allows firms like Leap to continue to employ and hire North Bay-based individuals. We, in turn, live here and are committed to buying local products and services. What better way to demonstrate on-going recovery support for our community than to buy local, and to think beyond retail when we do!



Now more than ever, we draw strength and inspiration from one another, and we reaffirm our steadfast commitment to the health, vitality, security and success of our clients and our community. We wish your and yours a healing and happy 2018.



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