

Analyze This

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April Showers, Bring May Flowers, & Allergies

It has been great these last few weeks to see the sun begin to show its face. I cannot wait to get out in the yard and begin the ritual of “Spring Cleaning”. I only have one small problem...ok several small problems...runny nose; sneezing; itchy, watery eyes – oh the joys of spring. I, like many of you, suffer from the pains of seasonal allergies. This year, I have already begun to feel the effects of this annual visitor. Many of the experts on the subject say we are in for a very exciting allergy season.

“In the past five years, pollen counts have been low because of the drought, but last year it was high because (it was a) high-moisture year, and I expect this year to be the same,” said Dr. Alan Bitner of the Intermountain Allergy and Asthma Clinic, which began tracking

pollen last week.

Early returns from the clinics’ tracking stations show a high amount of pollen from the elm trees, which is normal for this time of year. The elm pollen is just the precursor to the cedar pollen, which is the cause of problems for many people. I know from past experience that this time of year can be a real hardship for some employees and employers. According to data from the National Health Interview Survey, about 26 million Americans experience some sort of hay fever. These symptoms result in decreased productivity and missed work days, as well as increasing prescription drug costs. Educating employees about appropriate treatment options and taking some internal office precautions may help offset these costs.

Follow up with your physician or your current insurance carrier to see what is available to you or your family when it comes to allergy medication. These could range anywhere from the

tried and true meds (which may now be over the counter), to new medications on the market. Check with your carrier for the generic meds that may be at a lower cost to you. In the work place, change the filters on the air conditioning system as often as is recommended by the manufacturer. Try not to leave windows open when trees and shrubs are in bloom. When you are at home, check and change the filters on the air conditioning unit. Make sure your pillow case and bedding is changed more often as the pollen outside will find its way to your pillow. You may want to shower before you retire for the evening to get rid of the pollen that you have acquired during the day.

I love the spring time. Everything is in a period of a fresh and new beginning. But with this reemergence of the colors of spring, we who suffer from the side effects of this yearly ritual need to be prepared to fight back. Take time to prepare now and you may be able to take time to smell the roses.

Wisdom Withdrawal Savvy Strategies Help Avoid Skill Shortages

THE DEMOGRAPHICS of the nation tell us we are getting more culturally diverse and increasingly older. “Beginning this year, every seven seconds in America, a Boomer turns 60, yet 70 percent of our survey respondents have not yet attempted to identify where business wisdom resides in their organization,” says William Arnone of Ernst & Young’s human-capital practice. “This means one thing: Corporate America is facing a significant wisdom withdrawal.”

According to an exclusive report for the International Foundation of Employee

ers will have to compete aggressively for the services of talented and, especially, technology-savvy workers.

Consequently, human resource management practices must be adapted to the sellers’ market conditions. Productivity and profits will fall among firms that can’t recruit, reward, and retain highly skilled workers during the coming shortage. According to the report, the general labor shortage will be felt most acutely as a skilled labor gap in the professional, managerial, and technical fields. A firm that figures out how to recruit skilled workers, retain them, and continuously enhance their productivity will become an employer of choice.

While there is no concrete formula for becoming an employer of choice, recommendations commonly offered suggest



Benefit Plans (IFEBP), *Becoming an Employer of Choice: Strategies for Worker Recruitment and Retention*, the skill shortages will begin to emerge when Baby Boomers (workers between the ages of 41 and 60) begin to retire, starting as early as 2006. Anticipated shortages in the domestic labor supply likely will be 5.3 million in 2010 and 14 million by 2020 as the cohorts that follow are just too small to replace the Boomers. “We’re rolling into the most severe shortage of skilled workers that this country has ever seen,” says Justin Heet, consultant, of Indianapolis’ Hudson Institute and author of its white paper, *Beyond Workforce 2020*.

According to the IFEBP report, skill shortages create a sellers’ market where employ-

the following: (1) Continuously “re-recruit” top talent; (2) Give new hires jobs suited to their talents and engage their interest so they can succeed; (3) Promote from within, to the extent possible; (4) Treat highly skilled workers as professionals with control over their work; (5) Avoid layoffs; (6) If you must downsize, cut fat, not muscle; (7) Avoid across-the-board hiring freezes; (8) Overcommunicate with employees; (9) Accommodate employees’ desires to achieve work-life balance, to the extent possible; (10) Get great mileage out of low-cost benefits (perks); and (11) Cultivate the future workforce by getting involved with education and training institutions. ☐

Bulletin Briefs

Employers Expect Health Benefit Costs to Slow in 2006

Employers’ average cost for total wages and benefits grew by 12 percent from 1991 to 2005, with increases in benefit costs outpacing wages by 8 percent since 2002, according to a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report. “The good news from the report is that employers are still covering the same percentage of costs that they always have,” says Lisa K. Horn, manager, healthcare, for the Society for Human Resource Management governmental affairs department. “While most companies remain committed to providing healthcare benefits for their workers and families, employers are also providing information and tools to help workers become more educated healthcare consumers,” says Helen Darling, president, National Business Group on Health. ☐