



# Update

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Your Guide to Trends and Court Decisions Impacting the California Workplace



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## Weaving a Safety Net

By Cynthia Kincaid, contributing writer

In the current economy, developing and maintaining business relationships takes on critical importance.

“People are reeling from all of this, and the companies who have not taken steps to maintain relationships are going to pay a severe penalty,” said Jim Ponder, president and CEO of Turnkey Strategic Relations. He pointed to the current economic downturn as one of the main culprits eroding relationships and making them more difficult to maintain. “There has been this tremendous loss of trust, and it’s made everybody wary.”

Holly Culhane, SPHR-CA, president of Bakersfield, California-based P.A.S. Associates, acknowledges that erosion, emphasizing the time it takes to rebuild connections. “Building trust takes time. It takes people acting with integrity, and not everybody does that,” Culhane said. “Can we rebuild trust? Yes, but we’re going to have to be more careful who we rebuild trust with.”

### Getting to Know You

To build and maintain relationships that will enhance you and your company, Ponder recommends approaching a current client or prospect with the goal of getting to know them and their needs first.

“So often people have a relationship with the company instead of having a relationship with the people inside the company,” he said. “Pay attention to what’s on the walls of a person’s office and comment on that. And give them a peek into who you are. That person will start to know a little bit more about you, which makes you infinitely more interesting to do business with.”

### The Digital Downside

In today’s digital world, Ponder warns of the misuse of electronics, most notably talking on the phone and answering e-mail at the same time. “The unspoken message is that they are not important enough to have your undivided attention,” he cautioned. “While they will never tell you that, you have just put a huge chink in your relationship. Electronic communication devices can be a great productivity tool. They can also damage relationships.”

Culhane said she couldn’t agree more.

“I can build more trustworthy relationships more quickly when I talk with someone than when I’m texting, instant messaging or e-mailing,” she explained. Though acknowledging that time and geographical constraints can impede in-person meetings, Culhane would nonetheless like to see more balance in communication in the workplace.

“Trust-building may need to happen by people being more discerning about how they communicate, and doing that deliberately and intentionally,” she said. “If all you’re doing is instant messaging, texting or e-mailing, then it’s up to the person who is reading it to interpret it, and it could be misinterpreted pretty easily.”

Conversely, something as seemingly old-fashioned as sending a handwritten note can have a powerful impact. “If you are sending a handwritten note four to six times a year, it sends a big message,” Ponder said. “The subconscious message it sends is that you’ve just given your most valuable commodity to them – your time.”

### Gift Giving

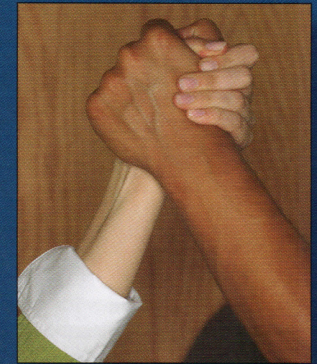
Though gift giving can be important, examining your intention for the gift is critical. “Is it a gift or a bribe?” Ponder asks. “If you’re going to give a gift, pay attention to your client throughout the year and give them something meaningful.”

Rather than give a gift once a year, Culhane makes it a point to touch base with her clients frequently either through a newsletter, card or some small gift.

“The Thanksgiving card is a fabulous tool,” she said. “I still get e-mails from presidents of companies thanking me for a Thanksgiving card because he or she actually sees it, as opposed to the Christmas. They may get a packet of SweetTarts from us that isn’t all that valuable, but they appreciate the fact that we thought of them and sent it,” she added.

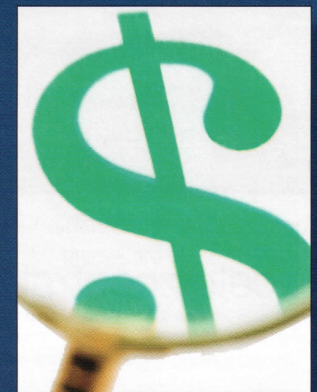
With predictions that 2009 could prove as economically difficult as 2008, building strong and honest business relationships serves as the cornerstone of success. □

### Conflict Management for Tough Times



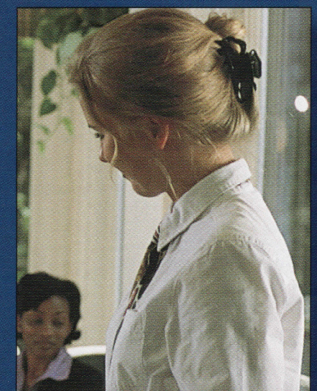
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