

[A LETTER FROM VAL]

## Keeping Our Eyes on the Prize

Dear Friends:

Distracted by the election season and the cratering economy? Having trouble blocking out your financial worries and focusing on business? Wondering when our country's collective misery is going to end?

Don't worry, you're not alone. A lot of us have been distracted lately, and for good reason. Over and over I've been hearing the same stories: People seeing their 401(k)s drop so much that they have to postpone retirement for another five years. Or coming out of retirement so they can afford to keep paying those college tuition bills. And my heart just breaks for all the talented people who've recently been laid off and are now forced to look for work at this difficult time.

In this month's newsletter, I had wanted to propose that we all stop wallowing in our fears and start focusing on what comes next. My plan had been to talk about getting back to basics and what HR should be doing to lead during these difficult times. But that'll have to wait until next month, because I'm not there yet.

When it became clear two months ago that the entire U.S. financial system had broken down, I got scared. Actually, for a few moments there I was terrified, thinking about what would happen if all our large corporate clients suddenly stopped paying us, if our bank failed and our accounts were frozen, etc. I call this "Doomsday Fantasizing."

The truth, of course, is that I don't have much to worry about. My 13-year-old firm just finished its highest year ever, is still profitable, and should emerge from the downturn stronger than ever. My CPA, whom I trust, calls me "extremely conservative" and says that I'm "OK." But I've still spent too much time in a place where I don't like to be. Not positive. Not creative. Just worried.

Indeed, I get the sense that even those CEOs who have been able to keep themselves focused on work have been focusing on the wrong things, spending hours a day looking at the finances of their business rather than the business of their business. Which means no one is doing enough to get their companies—and thus the economy—out of the quagmire. I've been guilty of that too, but no more. I've made a conscious effort to shift my focus onto my business and, by extension, yours. Here's what we at VF&Co are doing to help ourselves and our clients stay strong in the current economic climate:

- Unlike the last downturn, this time we're seeing lots of companies going through multiple rounds of layoffs, but few actually shutting their doors. Which means that, unlike the last time, the need for strategic HR professionals is actually increasing rather than decreasing, as companies require more sophisticated HR executives to lead them through the minefields of reductions-in-force, employee retention strategies, underwater stocks options, and the integration of corporate acquisitions. So in response, we're improving our core service, our HR Retained Search practice, by cutting our lead times, guaranteeing our clients a qualified slate of candidates within 15 days—a level of responsiveness unheard of in our industry.
- For those going through RIFs and looking for ways to assist their laid-off workers, I've updated my [Do-It-Yourself Outplacement Manual For Harried HR Professionals](#). Or, if you don't have the bandwidth to handle it yourself, ask us about our comprehensive outplacement services and give

us the chance to explain why our practice will give you the most bang for the buck. See the [Outplacement for Your Employees](#) section below for more information.

- Given today's razor-thin margin for error, board members for companies of all sizes are realizing that having the right CEO at the controls is crucial. Organizations are especially concerned about the personality fit, since CEOs must be so closely aligned with company founders, outside directors, and the rest of the executive team. Because we're known for nailing this aspect in our HR searches, our clients have asked us to re-open our [CEO Search](#) practice, which in fact was how we got our start. In the current market, the task is two-fold: helping companies find candidates who fit into their corporate culture, and convincing reluctant, risk-averse CEOs to take leaps of faith with emerging technologies and fledgling startup teams. We're currently conducting a CEO search for a technology company based overseas, and a number of general executive searches. Please forward this newsletter on to any great CEOs (or promising wannabes) that might be interested.
- In the spirit of doing more with less, we've made a few other changes to help you stretch the dollars in your HR budget. First, we've refocused our HR Consulting and Contracting practice, making it easier for clients to get even small compensation and performance-management projects done quickly and inexpensively. We've also opened a Compensation and Equity Hotline, where we'll answer your questions about salary levels, stock options, RSUs, and the like in real time. Just call (650) 614-0220. Finally, we're offering our clients a free hour of Compensation consulting: For more information, please email us at [contracting@vfandco.com](mailto:contracting@vfandco.com).

This month I'd like to thank the awesome team at Plus Relocation, who invited me to present at their conference last week in front of a Who's Who of global relocation experts from around the world. Great conference and fabulous people!

Take care,  
Valerie Frederickson

### **Ask Valerie**

Dear Valerie:

I'm at my wits end. My sales volume is down and my sales people aren't making their commissions. All my employees' stock options are now underwater. I'm really worried about keeping good people. Please help!

- Frustrated CEO

Dear Frustrated:

You're not alone. Most stock options are underwater now. A lot of companies come to us about helping them think through stock option re-pricing, and it might be a great time to have one of our excellent consultants review your sales incentive plan to ensure it's reaching its maximum potential. Contact James Holland at [james@vfandco.com](mailto:james@vfandco.com) for more information.

Dear Valerie:

Our company became so divided over politics this year that you could feel the tension in the air. Some people still aren't speaking to each other, and I just saw two married, heterosexual Christian women

practically claw each other's eyes out over gay marriage. Any suggestions for team-building exercises to get us back to normal?

- Kinda Disgusted

Dear Disgusted:

Team building is for figuring out who needs to do what and where the interdependencies and breakdowns are. This is not a team-building issue. This is a manners issue. Tell everyone to keep their mouths shut at work and if that doesn't work remind them that we're in a recession.

Dear Valerie:

Even though we're doing OK and have cash in the bank, our employees are walking around like zombies, scared of losing their jobs. Given that I'm not allowed to (and ethically wouldn't) reassure them, what are some other ways of keeping them motivated? After all, we do need to get work done around here or we will be in trouble.

- HR Therapist

Dear Therapist:

If I felt like shorting a stock right now, I'd choose Yahoo!, because I'm sure no one there is focused on work. Here's how I keep my team together during times of uncertainty.

1. Grab your team and revisit/revise your strategic plan. Break it all the way down into activities for each person.
2. Meet with your team once or twice a day and go over what needs to be done and who's going to do it. Pay attention to interdependencies.
3. Encourage everyone to start the day by making a list of at least three things they can accomplish that day. Doesn't matter if they're small, as long as they get done.
4. Take 15 minutes each day to relax and have fun with your team. Have tea with them. Go for a walk. Tell jokes.
5. Take the most upset ones aside. Listen to them. Mother them. Bolster them up.
6. Calendar some positive, non-work activities to do with them in the coming months. For example, my team will be hosting a Christmas store where poor immigrant families can "shop" for free books and toys for their kids. To help us with this, please email me at [valerie@vfandco.com](mailto:valerie@vfandco.com)

- Valerie

## Feeling Good

Here's a great distraction for you: This Christmas, my employees and I will be hosting a Children's Christmas Store in our offices in Menlo Park in early December, where poverty-level parents can "shop" for free clothing, toys, and books for their children. We'll help the parents with the selections, and our plan is to have enough age-appropriate books for each child to receive at least five. Please come join us the day of, and please help us by donating new or used children's clothing, books, and toys. You can bring it by or we'll come pick it up. If you're not local, you can help by donating gift cards from Target, Border's, Amazon, Children's Place or other children's stores, or donate directly to Children's Book Project. Contact Michele Li at 650 614-0220 or [michele@vfandco.com](mailto:michele@vfandco.com) for more information.

## **Outplacement for Your Employees**

Tired of the same old outplacement services? Come to the best! Since 1995, America's Best Places To Work firms have come to VF&Co for customized, caring, and flexible outplacement programs. What you get: free on-site Take-Outs; Valerie's popular book on Career Transitions; one dedicated career counselor for each candidate; the hands-down best online programs and resources; in-person seminars delivered with warmth and humanity; hours of individual assistance for each candidate including resume development and career counseling; and real, old fashioned job development and networking contacts.

Want to see our approach? Get a free copy of Valerie's 18-page guide, [Do-It-Yourself Outplacement Kit for Harried HR Professionals](#). Price shopping or need to customize a program? Contact Dana Hutcheon at 650 614-0220 or [dana@vfindco.com](mailto:dana@vfindco.com). We'd love to work with you and take good care of your folks.

## **Current Executive Searches**

### Featured HR Executive Search of the Month

Director of HR Programs [can come from Finance] (San Francisco, CA)

An internationally-recognized technology company needs a Director of HR programs to drive strategic talent management projects, including mergers and acquisitions, organizational planning, organizational change and transition management, new policy implementations, international compliance, and expatriate programs. This role will be as a sole contributor. Training in a formal project-management discipline, project implementation experience, exceptional organizational skills, knowledge of HR best practices, and previous experience consulting for a big 4 consulting company required. International project implementation experience preferred.

HR Executive Searches

Human Resources Executive (East Bay, CA)

Director of Staffing (San Jose, CA)

Human Resources Business Partner (Sunnyvale or Irvine, CA)

Compensation & Benefits Manager (Santa Clara, CA)

Senior Analyst, Compensation & Benefits (San Jose, CA)

Benefits Analyst (San Francisco, CA)

General Executive Searches

Chief Executive Officer (Mountain View, CA)

VP Business Development/Country Manager (Southwest)

E-Marketing Manager (San Mateo, CA)

To view more information on this month's Executive Search opportunities, [click here](#).

## **VF&Co HR On Demand**

Would you like to have access to an at-a-glance feature of HR professionals who are pre-screened, pre-interviewed, highly motivated, and ready to go? Check our website for updated profiles on a variety of

candidates from Human Resource Managers and Vice Presidents of Human Resources to specialists in the areas of compensation, benefits, and M&A.

Featured HR Candidate of the Month

Candidate 178 – HR professional with extensive international HR management experience

- Built HR infrastructure for multiple start-ups in the North America and Asia Pacific regions
- Designed and implemented a leadership competency program to address key issues in international HR management
- Worked closely with regional teams in the Americas, Asia Pacific, and EMEA
- Well-versed in policy design and administration, recruitment, employee relations, performance management, expatriate issues, compensation and benefits, organizational development, and conflict mediation

For more information on this candidate and to view the rest of this month's featured candidates, click [here](#).

### **Industry Events**

HR West – NCHRA's 25th Annual Conference

April 28-29, 2009 – South San Francisco, California

The NCHRA's Annual HR West Conference is celebrating its 25th anniversary! Join Valerie Frederickson & Company at the premier gathering of Human Resources professionals in the Bay Area. Valerie will be presenting a follow-up to our most popular "The Emerging Role of the HR Business Partner" presentation, entitled "How to Become a Successful HR Business Partner".

DLA Piper – Labor & Employment Law: Doing Business & Restructuring Across Europe

December 3, 2008 – Silicon Valley, California

Join Valerie at DLA Piper's new workshop on how to navigate the minefield of European Labor Law. Key topics include an overview of the European legal framework, appointments and contracts, diversity and equality laws within Europe, business reorganizing and downsizing, termination of employment, collective employee obligations, and claims avoidance.