

[A LETTER FROM VAL]

Caveat Emptor

Dear Friends:

This month I feel compelled to warn all the CEOs, CFOs, and HR executives out there who are in the unfortunate position of planning layoffs that, if you're planning to hire someone to provide outplacement services for your departing employees, you need to make sure you know who and what you're getting before you sign on the dotted line.

Though many of you came to know me through my executive search practice, I've also been in the outplacement business for 15 years; I am a licensed Career Management Practitioner and was honored to have been accepted into the Outplacement Institute in 1995. It's a business I love with all my heart because, done right, it allows me to help people get through one of the most difficult times of their lives. But sadly, right now it's starting to remind me of the recruiting business circa 1999, or the mortgage business in 2004. Everywhere you look, utterly unqualified newcomers are hanging up their shingles trying to get in on the action—which, of course, is none too surprising, given that firing is about the only growth industry around these days.

What is surprising, though, is that the problems clients are telling me about right now can't all be laid at the feet of the vendors. Companies that are doing layoffs are losing their perspective and, in some cases, not doing proper due diligence and accepting contract terms and service levels for their terminated employees that they would never accept on the front end for the newly hired ones. The same people who fight tooth-and-nail for quality controls and net 45 when growing are now accepting laissez-faire and net 15 when downsizing. It's almost as if they think that, since they have been forced to do a layoff, they have to give up their negotiating power. Too often this means that they're paying for filet mignon, or at least top sirloin, but what they're getting is a grisly rump roast. And unfortunately, in those cases it's often not the company that suffers, but rather the downsized employees, since an unqualified OP consultant can actually hurt an individual's chances of getting a new job through bad advice, bad positioning, low morale, or bad execution. And in this economy, no one can afford that.

Now, that's not to suggest that all employers have to shell out for top-shelf outplacement services. As the CEO of a small, self-funded business, I fully understand budgetary constraints. That's why over 80 companies have asked for our free Do-It-Yourself Outplacement Kit, and why we offer my career-transition book for sale at cost. We want to help you help your employees.

But if you are going to pay for professional outplacement, I urge you to treat it like selecting any other employee benefit and perform enough due diligence to ensure that your employees will derive plenty of value from the dollars you're spending. Because the horror stories are enough to make your hair stand on end. Did you hear the one about the two laid-off VPs who got placed in a "public" career-transition workshop with six truck drivers let go by a grocery chain, some accounting staff from a local hospital, and a baker? (No help finding a job—but at least now they can make a mean blueberry scone!) Or about the "outplacement firm" that consisted of a retired lady in Auburn whose e-mail didn't accept attachments? (Sure I can help with your resume—just make sure you convert it to ASCII first!) Or about the trainer at the career-counseling session for a group of 15 software engineers who didn't know what C++ was? (Nope, it's not your letter grade—we're pretty sure they gave you an F minus minus!)

Whenever I need to reassure myself that we're providing our clients and their displaced employees with enough help in this terrible market, I simply compare stories like those with an update I recently received from one of our outplacement consultants. "I'm working with some candidates who've been with the same organization, through many iterations, for 30 years," he said. "They thought they'd spend the rest of their lives in those jobs. A lot of them are unemployable now because nobody else is doing the same kind of work anymore. I'm coaching some of them into alternative industries or alternative professions like teaching. Some of them with advanced degrees could be math or science teachers, and there's some energy around that. We're having to stay real positive and keep an open mind so that we can land somewhere and not get too demoralized."

Notice the switch from "I" to "we"? That's exactly what I expect from an outplacement consultant: Someone who's emotionally invested and in it for the long haul. You should demand no less.

This month I'd like to thank everyone who has been giving me feedback on this newsletter. I personally read every comment and take them all to heart, so don't hesitate to get in touch with whatever is on your mind.

Take care,
Valerie Frederickson

P.S. Below you'll notice a change in our list of open HR searches. Starting this month, in addition to our own, we'll be listing what we feel are the most interesting opportunities in the market today, whether or not we're the ones conducting the search. This is part of our commitment to you and the mission of our firm: helping companies find great HR people and helping everyone in the HR community find appropriate employment.

Ask Valerie

Dear Valerie:

My company just did a big RIF and cut my VPHR job back to one day a week. My plan is to do some consulting to tide me over until the market picks up in the fall and I can go back to the company full-time. Do you have enough consulting work to help me pay my mortgage?

- Consulting Newbie

Dear Newbie:

I think you'll stand a much better chance of making your mortgage payments if you start looking for a new full-time job. Due to the massive number of laid-off HR people who are now offering themselves out as "consultants," that market has become quite saturated and companies are able to demand exact skill set matches. But there are still plenty of companies looking for HR leaders, and you'll find that with your education, credentials, and track record, you'll stand out and should be able to find work, even in this lousy job market.

Dear Valerie:

Do I need to wear pantyhose on job interviews?

- Wanting to Look Right

Dear Right:

I didn't realize they had e-mail back in the decade you're writing from...

All kidding aside, I stopped wearing pantyhose back in 1996, and even started wearing high-heeled sandals with business suits back in 1999 when I noticed other female CEOs doing the same. Instead of hose, wear something new that makes you look youthful, fashionable, and smart. Then show off your great attitude, profound research, and, more important, those formidable listening skills.

Dear Valerie:

How many different versions of my resume is it reasonable to have?

- Job Seeker

Dear Seeker:

You only have one career, so you should only have one resume. Think about it: If a hiring manager knew that you were changing the history on your resume to make yourself look more attractive, he'd wonder what other truths you might be willing to bend. These days, with the Internet making information easier to find, you can't risk fudging, not even a little bit.

- Valerie

[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.

Price shopping or need to customize a program? Contact Dana Hutcheon at 650 614-0220 or dana@vfindco.com. We'd love to work with you and take good care of your folks.

[Current Executive Searches](#)

Chief Executive Officer (Mountain View, CA)

A privately-held software company needs a CEO to drive the expansion of their product into the US market. (more)

Compensation & Benefits Manager (Santa Clara, CA)

A leading global developer of technological solutions needs a high energy, positive, hands-on Compensation and Benefits manager. (more)

Human Resources Business Partner (Sunnyvale, CA)

A rapidly expanding semiconductor company for wired and wireless communications needs a HR Business Partner for their Sunnyvale office. (more)

[Contractor] Human Resources Business Partner (Peninsula)

A software company based on the Peninsula needs a contract HR business partner to support their worldwide sales group. (more)

The Best of the Rest

Given the current difficult climate, we feel that it's imperative to do whatever we can to help companies find the best HR talent and to help everyone in the HR community find appropriate employment. So in that spirit, in addition to our own active searches, we've put together a list of the most interesting HR openings we know of today. Spread the word to your friend and colleagues, and of course, if you land one of these positions, please drop us a line and let us know!

Broadcom Corporation

Senior Vice President of Human Resources – Irvine, CA

Genentech

Principal OD Consultant – South San Francisco, CA

Expedia

Vice President of Human Resources – Bellevue, WA

Razorfish

Director of Human Resources – Chicago, IL

PayPal

Senior Director of Human Resources – San Francisco, CA

[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 186 – Innovative, up-and-coming HR Director

- Large-company, strategic experience in global Fortune 500 company
- Drove compensation review, development, and implementation for North America, Latin America, Asia Pacific, and European offices of a public company
- 7 years of experience driving global M&A for a high tech company
- Business partner to engineers, sales and marketing professionals, and field operators

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

Industry Events

The Conference Board – Talent Management Strategies

March 19-20, 2009 – San Diego, California

Acquiring, developing and deploying the right talent has become one of the most strategic and competitive battlegrounds in business. Talent Management is now a make-or-break corporate competency. Doing it well positions organizations to adapt quickly to market changes, seize growth opportunities and effectively mitigate risk. Yet even the best-in-class companies are struggling to find the top talent they need and keep them. Learn what it means to have a talent mindset, how to integrate your talent management processes and make sure your people assets are being fully leveraged for business impact.

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".