

The Adviser

We effectively maximize strategic positions. It's that simple

Winter 2012

From the President's Desk

Did we Survive 2012???

Well, let's cut to the chase. If you are reading this, in all probability, our Mayan ancestors got the math wrong and the world did not end on December 21st. If they were correct, read no further! On the hopeful presumption that the Mayans were in mathematical error, I am penning this message to you with a strong wish that your Christmas, yes I actually used the term, was blessed and joy filled. Additionally I hope that your New Year is prosperous.

2012 is coming to a close with a profound sense of tragedy in Newtown, Conn., and numerous other communities around our nation beset by violence and unspeakable sadness. Yet there is that spark in the human spirit that commands us to rise again with faith and optimism. Our faith in God and the spiritualism that guided our forefathers shall prevail.

We here at Great Plains Benefits Group, Inc. are profoundly blessed with the opportunity and privilege of serving you, our client/partners. For me personally, that blessing is magnified by the addition of my son, John, to our consulting practice as Senior Consulting Associate. He will be addressing you shortly with his own message of introduction and vision. Suffice to say I am one proud Father and colleague.



Many of you have had the opportunity of meeting him in person and benefiting from his expertise. John brings to Great Plains his IT skills, fresh vision, intuition and passion for helping people. He has dragged his father from the world of the Big Chief Tablet and a Crayon to Power Point, Drop Box and the wonders of new technology. If you have not already visited it, I urge you to view his handiwork at our website: www.employeradvisers.com. When John asked me what Great Plains does, in one sentence or less, I responded that we are "trusted advisers" to our clients on a wide variety of topics. He said, well then TELL them that and the website got its appropriate name.

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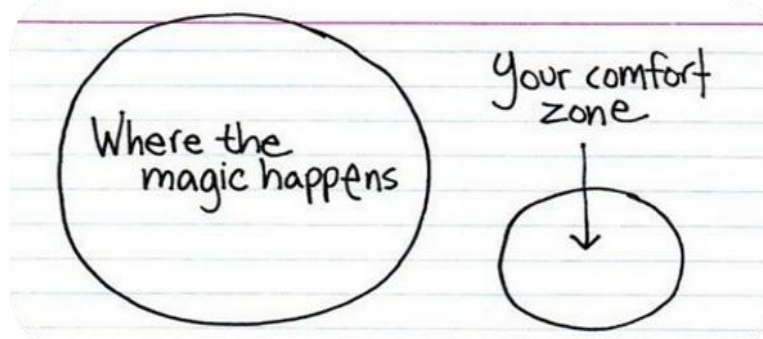
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Just the Beginning

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GPBG's Core Values

Honesty | Loyalty | Truth | Trust | Spirituality | Work | Productivity | Play | Recreation | Family | Friends | Knowledge | Learning | Money | Profitability

From the President's Desk Continued....

So please join me in welcoming John, in person, via e-mail, over the phone or by making use of the tools on our website.

State of the Union—sort of!

2013 will challenge us to become strong in our **Interdependence** to insure our **Independence**; as people, businesses, a state and a nation. The reason is simple: We all share space on this third rock from the Sun, and as of now it is our only alternative.

Our Midwestern community, specifically North Dakota, is standing in the middle of an amazing transformation, socially, economically and environmentally. Those of us in business see the tremendous opportunities that are present, yet we sometimes are at a loss to grasp the means to maximize those opportunities. We look back over our shoulders and see our collective histories of accomplishment and ponder them as “the good old days.” In many ways, the hard work and challenges that brought us to this place seem simpler in our memories.

There was a time, not too long ago, that we as employers asked for only three things of our employees; Work Hard, Be Productive and Be Loyal! Today we are looking at a “transformed” workplace with regard to the composition of our workforce. Our grandparents, parents and those of us old enough to remember when the Beatles came to America; reveled in the mere fact that we had a good paying job to go to each day. In today's world, 25,000,000 plus of our fellow citizens in the US are without that simple gift. We in North Dakota are insulated from the pain of that reality. As a matter of fact we are challenged by finding competent applicants for many of our critical job openings. Add to that a certain “new” applicant mentality which in affect challenges us as employers to “prove to the applicant that we deserve to have them work for us!” What we have is a giant Quandary!

John made me look up the word Quandary because he told me that constantly addressing “problems” creates a negative focus for us and our Clients. He is correct, because when I looked it up in Webster's I found it to be a noun which means: **“a situation in which you are confused about what to do.”** Dang Straight we are in a Quandary! Coming from the darkness of a Quandary to the Light of Understanding and Solutions is an awesome Adventure!

Great Plains Benefits Group, Inc., aka Employer Advisers, is constantly positioning itself to provide instruments and counsel to our clients to address these Quandaries. As I said when I first began, our **Interdependence** with our Clients will preserve our mutual **Independence**. So please join us and watch as we, through our Newsletter, website and direct contact with you, explore and share strategies to collectively move from the darkness of a Quandary to the Light of Understanding and Solutions.

As Robert Fulghum so aptly cautioned us, “It is best to hold hands when we walk out into the world!”



Just the Beginning

John A. Krueger

Welcome to the wide, wide, world of...Consulting!

I finally figured out what my Dad has been doing all these years. And, apparently he's not just reading the paper (just kidding.) All kidding aside, I'd like to introduce myself to you, our privileged client/partners, and share with you some of the insights I've learned in my first ten months as a Senior Associate with Great Plains Benefits Group, Inc. Here is a quick background of my education:

- Graduated from Bismarck High School 2004
- Graduated from University of Mary 2010
 - B.A. Instrumental Music Performance
 - B.S. Instrumental Music Education
 - Philosophy/Theology minor

Through my apprenticeship with Roger, I realized that as a consultant, I can still put my teaching skills to work, but, as an added bonus: have more time to spend with my family (wife Laurie, and daughter Ella), and further my career as a musician/composer.

Company Website

One of the first things I learned as a part of the GPBG team was how to get a website up and running. Roger did not have one, and in today's web-based, e-commerce world, we decided, even though it would be quite a learning curve, we would invest the time and money into a company website. GPBG joined the world-wide-web with its official domain:


www.employeradvisers.com in May of 2012.

We set the website up to be as interactive as possible. A mission of GPBG's is to "never leave our clients behind", based on the military motto, 'never leave a man behind.' When you visit our website, under the 'clients' tab, you can choose from either "existing clients" or "prospective clients." Upon choosing "existing clients" a form appears allowing the client to "request a phone call" from GPBG (which will immediately send an email to GPBG, notifying us to contact you by phone within 12 hours), and the form also includes a textbox to give GPBG a brief description of what situation the phone call will cover.

Prospective clients will be redirected to a menu of GPBG's products and services, and will allow the prospective client to request more information, and be contacted by telephone [with a REAL person] from a GPBG representative.

"...to be or not to be, that is the question..."

All my life I've felt a calling to help other people. I've also had the blessing, and sometimes curse, of always needing to operate at the highest capacity and quality. If I, or the machinery, or situation, etc., is not operating at peak performance I will not rest until the person, place, or thing, is fixed. Once that quandary (you learned about this word earlier from Roger☺) was resolved, I am always on the look-out to find out how I can get to the next level. As mentioned, this M.O. has been a blessing in my life in many ways, especially music, and the desire to learn. But it can also be a curse (just ask my wife), because the phrase "just let it go" is not in my vernacular. With that said, there are times when I have to be reminded by others in the office, or at home, that I've spent more time than needed on things like Information Technology, aka, a stubborn printer, or "redesigning" the website.



Little did I know, this obsession with perfection is a key ingredient in the life of a business consultant. Coming out of college I spent a lot of time, some would say too much time, in that existential phase of life thinking, ‘what is my purpose in life?, etc.’ (let’s just say I read a lot of books by Rick Warren.) The more I researched about consulting, and the ‘what-ifs’ of joining my father’s firm, the more I realized how important a consultant is to the framework of successful businesses, AND, I started to realize how many companies:

- A. Either didn’t utilize business consultants, or
- B. Only utilized consultants when they were unable or unwilling to accomplish the task themselves, usually a negative, crisis-type situation that was happening at the worst possible time for the company.

During this research I realized that companies don’t have to be multi-billion dollar, or multi-million dollar, huge conglomerates. But that’s the vibe that I’m getting from companies that are not utilizing the objectivity that comes from the perspective of an outside consultant. I witnessed that *it’s not the amount of money a company makes annually* that determines whether they partner with a consulting firm, it’s the annual amount of: *Honesty, Vision, and Desire* a company has, that *determines their willingness to trust the expertise of an outside voice*.

Joe’s Tooth Paste Production LLC

Let me give you an example of what I mean. Here is a story about Joe. He’s got the capital to start up a tooth paste production company. He understands that there is a significant amount of competition, but he feels safe with his product because he knows that everyone will always need tooth paste. So thus began *Joe’s Tooth Paste Production, LLC*.

As I layout the “life & times” of Joe’s new company I’d like you to keep in mind these thoughts:

- What dollar amount can a business put on wasted time? Better yet, what dollar amount can a company SAVE by putting 100% of their time and energy into making the best product (tangible or not) ‘into the hands’ of their customers.
- Think about this relating to your own company: when was the last time that you were able to devote 100% of your day, or week, to making a better product for your customer, in Joe’s case, the BEST tube of tooth paste EVER?
- What I mean by 100% of your time, is: not taking time from product development and wasting it on issues that have nothing to do with your company’s vision, mission, and core values.

Now back to Joe. Due to time constraints (because I want you to stop reading this and get back to improving your business for your customers (already free consulting advice)), I’m going to cut to the chase: after eight years (five of which were significantly profitable) Joe’s company got lost in the shuffle and needed to file for Chapter Eleven Bankruptcy.

How is that possible?! Especially with such a strong start, and with a product that will always be in demand. It’s as if the companies that succeed, or Joe’s competition, had a crystal ball. Why is it that certain companies always seem to be able to ‘weather the storm’ and come out on top? They not only survive, but they THRIVE, year after year.

Where's my crystal ball??

Companies that come out on top year after year do not have a 'crystal ball' advantage over their competition, they simply plan better. There is a reason why pioneering companies like McDonald's, Verizon, Microsoft, etc., who now all have SERIOUS competition, are still thriving, and some would say continue to pioneer in their industry to this day.

Like you and me, they do not have a crystal ball, they have something much more relevant: they have a Plan...and a Plan B...and a Plan C...and a Plan D, etc., and they operate with the understanding that *successful business does not occur in a vacuum*. In other words, a business will not continue to be "in business" without trusted advisors, outside opinions, and the willingness to open themselves, and their vision as a company, to ideas that may not have had their origins behind the closed doors of an executive session.

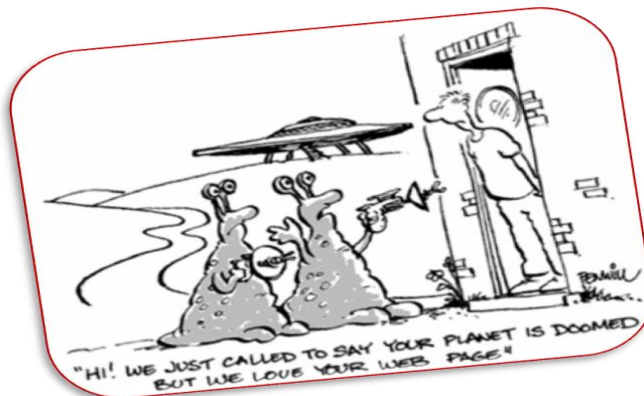
I'd like to repeat the most provocative line in this entire newsletter: *a company does not have to be a multi-billion or million dollar company to retain a business consultant!* Here is the second most provocative line in this newsletter: *Retaining a business consultant is as important to the life and future of your business as is an accountant to your bottom line.*

You may be telling yourself, 'of course this guy would be bias towards a business' need to retain a consultant...the guys a consultant!' (and let me tell you: I would not blame you either, in fact, when you're my client, I will advise you to always ask yourself to check the motivations of other people.) But please recall the beginning of this article. *I have not* been in the consulting business long enough to be THAT good of a schmoozer (and schmoozer is a technical term in the business world, at least in our office.) In other words, I've spent countless hours (remember the whole obsessive traits I mentioned previously) studying the pros and cons of whether or not *I should even be a consultant*. Questions in my mind came up like: 'Are you going to be able to help these companies? Are you going to be able to make a positive difference in the lives of others? In the sometimes unpredictable life as a consultant, are you going to be able to provide for your wife and daughter?'

After many hours of apprenticeship with Roger, hundreds of resources via the web, textbooks, lectures, etc., I am not only comfortably providing for my family, but I am seeing the positive impact consulting can have on businesses that are both large and small. Companies like Mandaree Enterprises in New Town, ND; Larson Grain Company in LaMoure, ND; Infinity Building Systems in Jamestown, ND; Widme-Roel in Bismarck; Northern Plains Heating & Air in Bismarck; non-profit organizations like the Bismarck Cancer Center and the God's Child Project; and public sector organizations like Kidder, Foster, and Bowman Counties. That success I have witnessed is measured by many, many, different factors, including the important, but not the end-all-be-all, proof of *steady, increasing annual profits*.

You're receiving this newsletter because you've taken the first step in the partnership of success with GPBG: an effective, relevant, Employee Policy Manual. Let us get a meeting scheduled on our calendar sometime within the next four weeks. Isn't it exciting, knowing that there are levels of success in your business' future that you have yet to even imagine?! When I think of that **fact**, I'd like to see *anyone* take the smile off my face.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. We will be following up with you proceeding this newsletter, but feel free to contact us sooner than letter to get a meeting date penciled in the calendar. Thank you, it is our privilege and duty to serve you and your business family.



Practical Business Solutions

DISC Behavior Model

What do most businesses have in common when it concerns their bottom line, and desires for all employees? I believe it comes down to these three basic goals: to recruit, train, and maintain a hardworking, productive and LOYAL work force. It has been proven that you can teach someone to work hard, you can teach someone to work productively, but I believe you must hire loyalty from the beginning. Because no one has ever been successful teaching LOYALTY. And although you may be able to lead by example, and promote loyalty by your actions, it still does not ensure it. You must HIRE IT and earn its retention!

Many employers are constantly asking themselves why their employees don't get the big picture? However, we would be wise, as the management team and owners to remember that although we think in pictures, we talk and communicate in words. Our words become the lenses through which employees will see the pictures we are wishing to communicate. Remember to always ask yourself, how clean, clear, and focused is the picture that they will see. That picture's clarity and comprehension is dependent on your "lenses" of words. Every teachable job factor, must pass the following smell test: is it measureable, quantifiable, observable, repeatable, and meaningful?

So how do you identify what customary job factors you can inspect? You may feel that an employee has an "attitude". How do you quantify that? It is nebulous to say that "Henry has a bad or poor attitude"; or that "Mary doesn't share our team's sense of urgency" for this project. Even if these words were true, how could their supervisor or they themselves possibly alter this "perceived reality"?

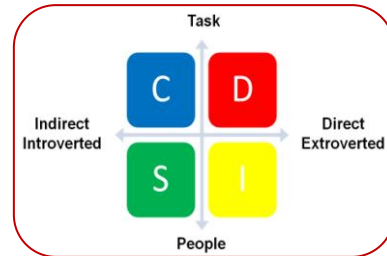
So what tools are there available to assist the owner and the HR department in this regard?

What if I told you that I had the opportunity to take a short quiz, a assessment if you will, whose questions I answered in less than 10 minutes? This assessment delivered results so compelling I felt like the folks providing this useful tool had been following me around for the last 36 years of my working life.

Because of the convincing results I achieved, I would like to provide for you a short synopsis of what this assessment would hope to provide for you in conjunction with your future employee hiring and retention process.

What is this tool, this "Keys to the Kingdom" that unlocks the human potential of my employees? It is simply the capacity to understand the behavior patterns that reside within all of us. The observable, measurable, quantifiable, repeatable and meaningful elements that compose the wonderful mosaic of who we are. But to be of particular use and value to our endeavors they must be presented in a neutral and nonjudgmental format. The definition and characterizations of human behavior are neither good nor bad; right nor wrong; they JUST ARE. To be appreciated and understood AND, yes, be a viable tool in our tool box, they must be NEUTRAL and easily understood.

Fasten your seat belts dear readers, for our next installment will challenge your foundation of beliefs related to managing the human potential. Start with this simple challenge, "If Change is so darn easy – "Change yourself first!" We plan on providing bi-monthly articles as they relate to "human insights"; especially as it relates to interactions amongst employees in the workplace.



The GPBG DISC Behavior Model

"Why do my employees only do what I 'inspect' rather than what I 'expect' of them?"

My goal is by the time we have finished with this series that you have embedded these two concepts in your toolbox of beliefs as it relates to your employees.

1. **You, the employer, have an obligation to establish and communicate your net outcomes and end results.**
2. **Contrary to popular opinion, you do not "manage" people but you can direct their behavior towards attaining those outcomes, ends, and results.**

Some may think that you can delegate this and simply move out of the way. However, you must nurture and attend to this emerging culture of behavioral based management.

A Chinese proverb reminds us that "A person who knows others is wise, a person who knows themselves has wisdom."

UPDATES

We continue to remind our Clients that any Policy Manual which has not be reviewed or up-dated within the last three (3) years maybe out dated. We provide the up-dating service as part of this Service Agreement

ND Smoking Law Change may mean that the topic needs to be addressed in your Policy Manual

When will the new law take effect?

December 6, 2012, which is thirty (30) days after the passage of the initiated measure.

What will be covered by North Dakota's new smoke-free law?

North Dakota's new smoke-free law advances public health by protecting more workers, residents and visitors from secondhand smoke exposure in public places and places of employment.

The new law will protect people from exposure to secondhand smoke:

- In all enclosed areas of public places and places of employment such as restaurants, bars, truck stops, guest rooms and common areas within hotels and motels, healthcare facilities, long-term care centers, assisted living centers, licensed adult day care facilities, retail tobacco stores, hookah establishments, workplace vehicles, charitable gambling and gaming licensed facilities, and places of public access that may be leased for private functions.
- Enclosed area means all space between a floor and ceiling that has thirty-three percent or more of the surface area of its perimeter bounded by opened or closed walls, windows or doorways. A wall includes any physical barrier regardless of whether it is open or closed.
- Within twenty (20) feet of entrances, exits, operable windows, air intakes and ventilation systems of an establishment in which smoking is prohibited by the law.

Electronic Cigarettes:

The use of electronic cigarettes is prohibited in all places where smoking is not allowed under the law.

Fines and Penalties:

- The fine for an infraction by an individual who smokes in violation of the law is not to exceed \$50 per offense.
- The fine for an infraction by an owner, manager, or person of general supervisory responsibility of an establishment that does not comply is not to exceed \$100 for the first violation, not to exceed \$200 for a second violation within one year, and not to exceed \$500 for each additional violation within one year of the preceding violation.
- A proprietor's violation of the law may result in suspension or revocation of a permit or license issued to that proprietor for the establishment where the violation occurred.
- Each day on which a violation of this law occurs shall be considered a separate and distinct violation.

Continued on next page...

UPDATES

Governmental, specifically County Whistle Blower Protection:

We are recommending that all of your County Government Clients consider adding this to their Policy Manual under Policy #102

Employee Relations:

The County will afford protection to all of its employees under NDCC 34-01-20. The County will not discharge, discipline, threaten discrimination or penalize an employee regarding the employee's compensation, conditions, location or privileges of employment because:

- The employee, or a person acting on behalf of an employee, in good faith, reports a violation or suspected violation of federal, state or local law, ordinance, regulation or rule to the County, a governmental body or a law enforcement official;
- The employee is requested by a public body or official to participate in an investigation, a hearing or inquiry;
- The employee refuses a County order to perform an action that the employee believes violates local, state, or federal law ordinance, rule or regulation. The employee must have an objective basis in fact for that belief and shall inform the County that the order is being refused for that reason.

Cell phone Texting

Since August 1, 2011, texting while driving in North Dakota has been outlawed as a form of distracted driving. Your policy manual should reflect this prohibition to employee's who drive as a part of their employment responsibilities.

But even more significant is the law pertaining to texting by CMV Employees which is summarized as follows:

"A Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) rule prohibits texting by Commercial Motor Vehicle (CMV) drivers while operating in interstate commerce. The rule, which became effective on October 21, 2010, imposes sanctions, including civil penalties (fines up to \$2,750 for drivers and \$11,000 for carriers) and disqualifications from operating CMVs in interstate commerce, for drivers who fail to comply with this rule. Additionally, motor carrier companies are prohibited from requiring or allowing their drivers to engage in texting while driving. Through this rule, the list of disqualifying offenses for Commercial Driver's License (CDL) now include a conviction under state or local laws, regulations or ordinances that prohibit texting by CDL drivers while operating a CMV, including school bus and transit drivers."

We can e-mail your manual and/or any changes you desire and the up-dating is instantaneous. Should you need this data externally, CD's can be provided

Please feel free to contact us for this service at:

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