

Eileen's Lessons

A compendium of her favorites. Volume #2



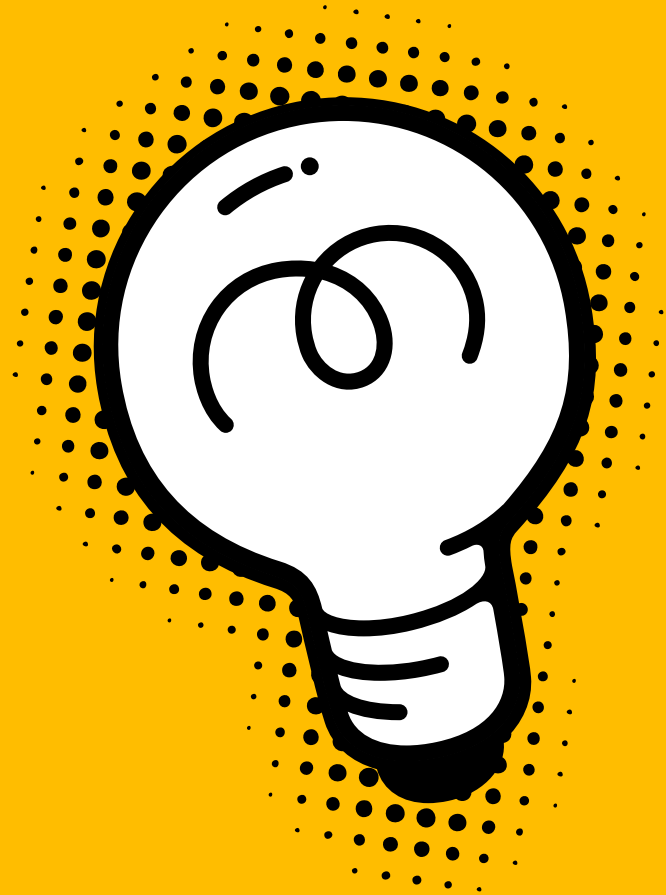
THE HR
Team
The **one** source for
human resources



Life Imitates HR

The Story Behind the Lessons, Volume II

By: Eileen Levitt, President of The HR Team



When do you experience your most creative moments? When you're driving? In the shower? They differ for everyone but we all have those times when our minds are free to shift leisurely, unencumbered by distractions and interruptions. Some call it day-dreaming; I call it necessary brain downtime. These mental breaks not only encourage creativity, they enhance intuition and improve problem-solving abilities.

As you may know, I'm an avid runner. And when my feet hit the pavement, my wheels begin turning. Usually my thoughts are about HR in some way, shape or form. That may seem odd to you at first, but it's what I do. And if you think about it, it's what we all do. Every day, we face situations, make decisions or have interactions that involve human resources, either directly or indirectly. From ethical dilemmas to building trust, our lives are filled with lessons that extend from the personal into the sphere of human resources. Life is full of gray areas and so is HR.

That's why I get so much enjoyment from sharing these short passages with you. In these sometimes humorous anecdotes, you'll find common HR scenarios that you may encounter. My goal is to assist you in being well equipped to handle them when they arise. If you need guidance or have any questions, we're always here to help. Enjoy! .

- Eileen



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Workforce Guidance for Every Generation



Some time ago, I had a college intern, and in her first week I gave her a task I thought to be simple – answering the phone.

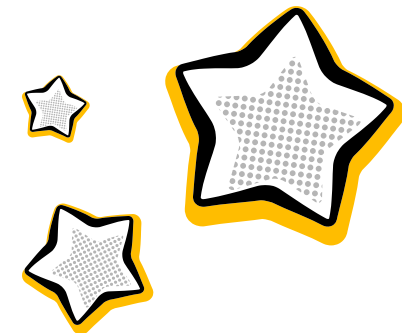
I said, “Just answer the phone, tell whoever is calling that so and so is in a meeting, and ask to take a message.” When the first call came in, she picked up the phone and didn’t know what to say.

It turns out that she was unaccustomed to answering phones and didn’t really know how to answer one.

Millennial? Generation Z? So typical, right? No, this happened in 1990, and she is likely now in her late 40’s. The point is that no generation has all the answers, even though we often talk ourselves into believing otherwise. And guess what? Even without all the answers, they eventually figure it out.

So, when someone asks me if I’m worried about all those ‘millennials’ graduating in the new year and joining our workforce, I simply answer, “No, they will be just fine.”

If you need some workforce guidance, give us a call from your hand set, mobile phone or voice-activated device – whichever one makes you most comfortable.



Recognize When it's Time to Make a Change



Do you use Waze, Google Maps or one of those awesome GPS tools to find your way to places? I know I do.

The other day, my husband and I went to an engagement party at someone's home. It was a new home for them, so we had only been there once before. We plugged the address into the GPS and proceeded to drive and eventually got that "You have arrived" greeting. We parked the car, got out and saw a party going on in full swing.

As we entered, we looked around: balloons, cake, and cute little drink koozies saying, "congratulations on your engagement". However, the house seemed changed and I could have sworn that their street number was a different one than what the mailbox stated. More importantly, we didn't recognize a soul there. However, we asked someone if this was the Jones (not real name) house and he said, "Yes". So we continued into the party with my famous chocolate brownies and our gift and searched for what to do with them. Someone saw

us searching and said, "Are you looking for John and Andrea?" "Who are John and Andrea?" Yes, we were at the wrong engagement party. Turns out there are two streets in the town with the same name. The other street, with the party we were attending, was about two miles down the road.

The same thing happens in the workplace. Many times, we rely so heavily on tools that we don't realize that the tools are leading us down the wrong road until we are walking back out with our brownies and gift. What do we do? We need to constantly reevaluate our tools, methods and procedures so that we are able to recognize when it is time to make a change.

Need help creating a performance management, new hire, interview or HR processes in general that work? Why not contact The HR Team?

How to Avoid Work Auto Pilot and Prevent It from Becoming an Issue



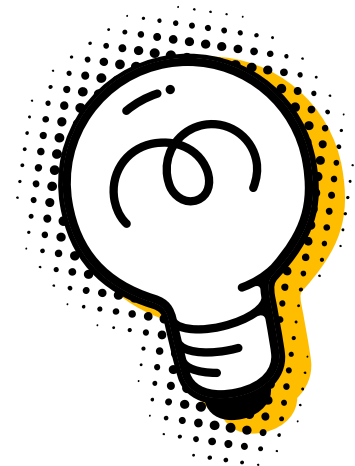
Oops I did it again! Have you ever been on auto pilot? The other day, like every day, I took a shower and washed my hair.

I got out of the shower, put what I thought was hair oil in my hair and brushed it in. I suddenly realized that I still had soap in my hair, so I quickly rinsed it out and then re-applied the oil, only to then see that I still had soap. What did I do? Rinsed my hair again and then reached for the hair oil to suddenly discover that the oil (which is in a pumper) and the hand soap (also in a pumper) had somehow switched places on my bathroom counter and thus the reason for the never ending soapy bubbles.

Admit it, we have all done it. Drive to work when we meant to go the gym or vice versa. We become used to doing certain things, going certain places so much that logic doesn't always kick in.

What about being on auto pilot at work? Paying bills without looking closely; signing off on documents without verifying all the details; accepting answers to questions that aren't complete and more.

How do we avoid work auto pilot and/or prevent it from becoming an issue? Being mindful, taking regular breaks, exercise, eating right, changing duties, asking another person to review our work, and of course having an HR audit conducted by The HR Team!



Examining a Candidate's Job Experience



When my daughter was in preschool, she went on a field trip. Where she went, I don't remember, but I do remember that while on the trip she spoke to another mom about her dog, Shadow.

She told elaborate detailed stories about Shadow and his adventures with her. Finally, the mom asked her the color of the dog. Her reply "purple". Yes, it was an imaginary dog, but in her mind, it was very real.

How does Shadow relate to human resources? Easy. How many times have candidates for jobs put skills and experience

on their resume that is either an exaggeration or simply not true? As a manager, we need to probe deeply into a candidate's experience, ask for examples, details and more details. Because if we don't, we run the risk of hiring an imaginary purple dog.

Need help learning how to interview? Feel free to contact us.

"The HR Team has been a trusted partner for Plano-Coudon for many years now. They have helped us to document our HR processes, provide professional HR services to our employees and grow the sophistication of our HR program to match the continued growth of our company. We view the HR Team as an extension of our company and look forward to our continued relationship."

- Ryan Coudon
Owner & Founder
Plano-Coudon Construction

Seize the Day by Seizing Your Chipmunk



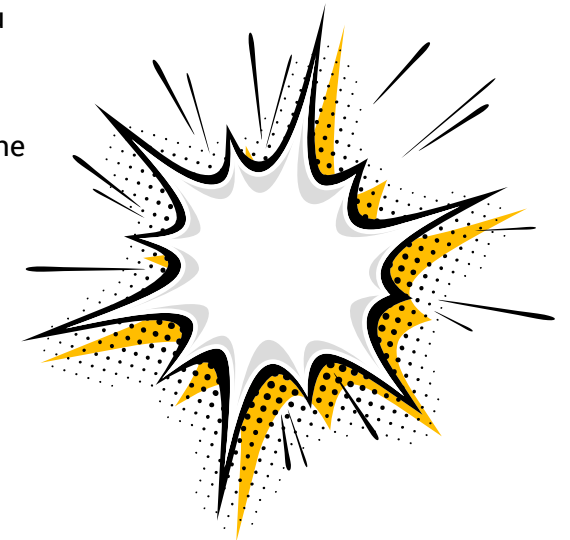
As many may know, I have a dog. She's a rascally little dog determined to cause a bit of mischief. She's a loving normal animal so it's not unusual to see that she's quite obsessed with all creatures big, small and smaller.

Many days, the dog can be found chasing after birds, ducks, cats, squirrels, pit bulls, poodles and chipmunks to name a few. Of course, most of those creatures are way too fast (or big and gruesome) for her to catch. Persistence is the key to life. So, sure enough, while on one of her walks, the dog caught something living. Upon further review, it turned out to be a chipmunk. So what does a little dog do with a chipmunk? Well, not much, and after a while she had to let it go (still alive actually).

How many of us have dreamed of catching our chipmunk? You know, that super star sales person or high level manager that will take our business to the

next level. We dream of catching them. But what if we actually managed to hire that person and we just didn't know what to do with them? Meaning, we don't have the infrastructure to support that person. It happens all the time, doesn't it?

So with fall hiring season just around the corner, my hope for all is to not only seize the chipmunk, but also know how to best utilize that chipmunk once it's seized. Of course, if you need help in creating that infrastructure, feel free to contact us at The HR Team.



When Communications Break Down, Frustration Rises

Communications are a great thing, when they work. We often think a conversation is the most simple and direct to communicate our message. However, sometimes, that isn't always the case.

A number of years ago, my son came up to me and told me about a video he watched at a friend's house. He said that it was really funny, and wanted to show me. I asked him where it was, and he said (at least I thought he said) "U2". U2? I didn't know they made funny music videos. Nonetheless, I went to the U2 website and my son was not pleased. Let's just say, he was a bit frustrated. A week or so passes and my son comes home with a post it note, on it was www.youtube.com.

Has that ever happened to you? Sometimes, communications in families, companies, organizations, you name it, can simply break down, and we need an intermediary to help smooth things along. Obviously, they are not as easily solved with a post it note, but you would be surprised how an outside perspective can help smooth things along.

As always, The HR Team is here to help you with the myriad of people issues that occur in the workplace. So feel free to contact us to discuss.



Would You Buy a Raffle Ticket From a Child? How About a Salesman?

Several years ago, a nonprofit board I sat on had a fundraiser. My daughter, who was about 10 at the time, expressed an interest in attending, so I brought her.

Many nonprofit fundraisers have 50-50 raffles and this was no exception. My daughter, on her own, decided that she wanted to sell raffle tickets. Her ticket selling method? She walked up to people in the room and asked them, "Do you have \$5?" and when they complied, she handed them a raffle ticket. Our then county executive told me that when he told her he only had a \$20, she said, "Great, that means you get 5 raffle tickets because they are 5 for \$20."

Cute, isn't it? What if my daughter wasn't 10? What if she was a grown woman/man and approached people that way? What if she was a homeless person? I suspect that her pitch would not have been as well-received. The fact is that we make judgements/decisions every day on people based on the interpretive lens we put on them.

Does this happen in the workplace? You bet. I've sat in meetings where managers fret over giving someone 6-weeks off for maternity leave, but don't flinch when someone suddenly needs 2 months off due to an unexpected illness or injury. Or commending a male co-worker for leaving early for a child's soccer game but think less of a woman who leaves early for a family commitment.

In HR, we call this lens implicit bias, and it is a field we are studying and learning more about and is one of the many reasons small companies need The HR Team. If you'd like to learn more or need help, give us a call.



Stop, Slow Down and Ask for Help from the Right Experienced People



Did you have a favorite outdoor park or similar venue that you enjoyed as a child? I did, and we called it the “Duck Pond”. I loved to go to there with family, friends and the like to walk around, watch and feed the ducks.

One day, I was there with some friends and one of them saw this beautiful feather floating in the water. We all admired the feather for its shape and just “overall beauty”. It was close to the edge of the water, so the friend decided to just reach in and grab it. However, instead of grabbing the beautiful feather, she fell into the mucky water. Oops. The other friend reached over to help her get back to dry land and then, oops, she fell in too. What happened next? You guessed it! I reached in to help both friends and I also fell into the swampy pond. Now all three of us were in this mucky water together. After a few tries and some resourceful help from my mother we were able to walk out of the pond and onto the path. You see, the pond wasn't deep and it wasn't something that required an army, just another perspective.

I learned a few things that day: Someone once told me that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing twice and expecting

different results. I don't know if we were insane, just simply in a tunnel where our thoughts just weren't making sense. As a result, lending a hand seemed like the only path.

Simply following the leader also didn't work. One person said we should do it, and we did. We didn't even stop to think if it made sense.

If you want to get out of the muck, you need to ask for help from the right person and hopefully that person has experience.

Sound familiar? Too many times I have seen business people try the same thing over and over, they try to do things too fast, follow the leader and fail to ask for help from the right people.

Sometimes we simply need to stop, slow down and ask for help from the right experienced people. Experienced people like the ones at The HR Team. So feel free to contact us.

What “Potty Words” Can Teach Us about Communicating with Employees



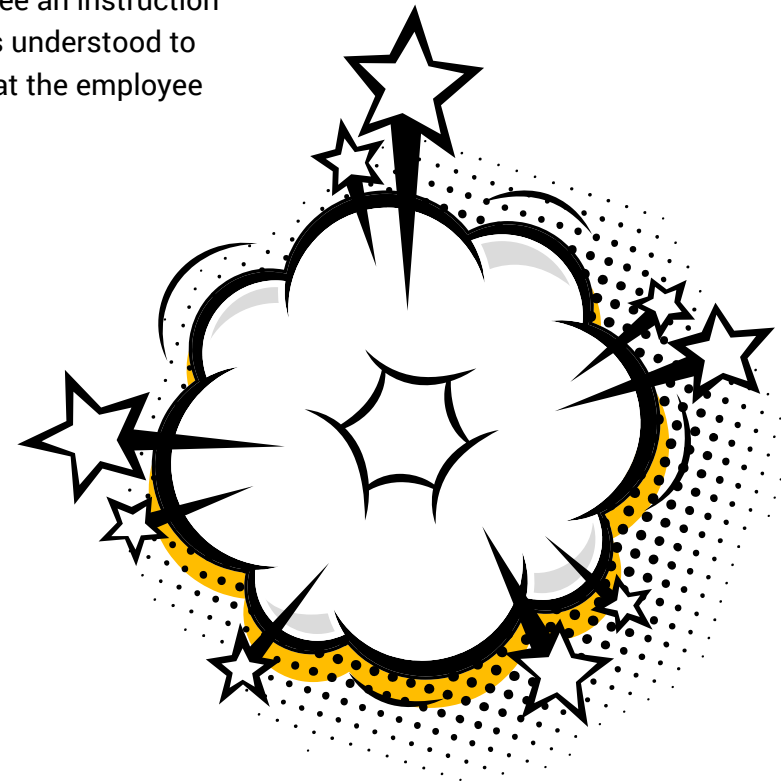
When my son was in pre-school, like any other 3-4 year old child, he discovered “potty words” and he quite enjoyed using them. As a result, my husband and I told him that potty words should only be used in the potty and he was fine with that, or so we thought.

One day, we received a call from his pre-school teacher letting us know that he was going into the potty quite often, yelling a few choice toilet related words and then walking out. Let’s just say our next conversation with our son was a bit more detailed on the use of potty words.

As a manager, have you ever given an employee an instruction you thought was understood to only discover that the employee

interpreted your “simple” instructions a bit differently? I thought so.

Need help communicating and training your employees? Give us a call.



The Importance of Recognizing Individuals



I like Estée Lauder makeup. Why? Aside from it looking nice on me, everything they sell has my initials on it.

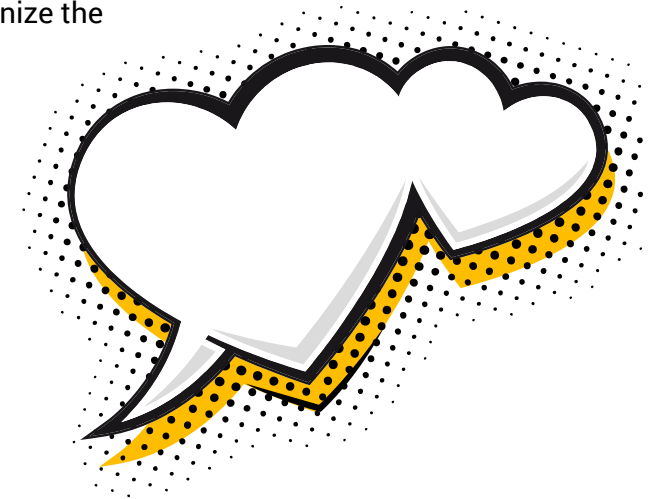
One day, my father was at my house and saw an “EL” makeup case and said, “Wow, that’s amazing, do they have a customization stamper at the store?” I said, “You bet.”

The fact that we want to be treated as an individual isn’t anything new. In fact, Dale Carnegie’s 1936 book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” even has principle #6 dedicated to it: “Remember that a person’s name is to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language”.

As a manager, we do need to recognize teams, but we must also remember to recognize the individuals.

Why? Because when your people are contributing at their highest levels, your organization is destined for growth and prosperity. By the same token, when one team member is struggling, your entire organization is at risk. Finding ways to support and develop your employees is one of the smartest moves you can make.

If you need some assistance unlocking the potential in your people, give us a call.



Make a Small Child's Day, Tell Them They're Going to Disney World

When my daughter was 3.5 we took her to Disney World for the first time. If you want to make a small child's day, tell them they're going to Disney World.

When we took our daughter, she insisted on figuring out what to bring and then packed her own suitcase. On the first morning, we were woken up at 5am (the park opened at 8am that day) by a giant smile and our daughter who was dressed in a princess costume and shoes from her dress up box proclaiming "I'm ready for Disney World".

Ok, I guess we weren't clear on the whole sun comes up request and maybe we should have checked her bag a little more closely. Having said that, against our better judgement, the princess costume with dress up box shoes were worn to the park.

Guess what we discovered? Every little girl wore the same outfit with the same uncomfortable shoes and that she completely fit in. Basically, it was the "best vacation ever".

Sometimes, even against our better judgement, we need to let (little) people do what they think is best, because they might just be right.

Need help understanding and setting expectations with your people? Give us a call.



Making Mistakes, Learning From Them, and Moving On



What would you do if you happened to get sick while taking an exercise class at a gym? Not fun, right?

What if someone who just so happened to be interviewing you for a job later that day was also in that exercise class? Beyond embarrassing.

No this isn't a Seinfeld episode. In fact, a friend of mine texted me the other day to tell me that this happened at her gym.

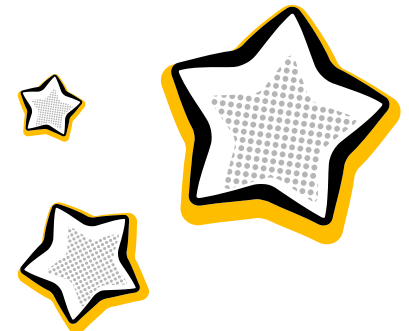
Clearly, the individual, who didn't know their exercise limits, was trying to make a good impression on his/her potential future manager. Oops.

One of my favorite questions to ask a candidate in an interview is: "What is the biggest professional mistake you have made and what have you learned from it?" Who are we kidding? We all make

mistakes, but it takes a truly great potential employee to recognize those mistakes, learn and then move on.

Was the person hired? Well, my friend followed up and found out that he/she pulled themselves out of contention that day. Which is a shame but it does happen.

As always, The HR Team is here to help you with the myriad of people issues that occur in the workplace (and beyond). So feel free to contact us to discuss.



Take a Different Perspective on the Gifts we Receive



It's December, a time for holiday cheer and gift giving.


A few years ago, my aunt was very excited about a holiday gift she was going to give to my daughter. My aunt had debated between a necklace and a bracelet of a popular teen brand, but then found a watch made by the popular brand on the clearance rack. It was almost a steal and very practical, thought my aunt—jewelry and a time piece in one!

What happened? The watch was returned. Why? In the words of my daughter, “Why do I need a watch to tell time? I always have my cell phone with me to tell me what time it is.”

Fast forward to today. Guess what? She's about to graduate college and now wears a watch. Why? In her words, “I've realized that looking at your cell phone all the time is rude.” As we go through life, we often learn things that encourage us to take a different perspective on our gifts.

Whether you're a friend of the firm, an employee or a client, we appreciate your support and confidence in The HR Team. Happy holidays and may it be a joyful and prosperous New Year for all of us.





"The HR Team has provided us guidance and a road map to help us move from a service-based company to a technology company. This transition has increased our company's value, making us more competitive in the marketplace. [They] have helped us better inspire our people by putting systems in place for giveback and recognition programs, annual reviews and for obtaining employee feedback that have all paid off in dividends."

-Jennifer Bisceglie
President & CEO, Interos



Founded in 1996, The HR Team is a Maryland-based human resources outsourcing firm committed to developing strategic, customized solutions that respond to the unique needs and cultures of organizations of all types and sizes. Available as a one-source alternative to an in-house HR department or on an à la carte project basis, the company's flexible service models address the full spectrum of HR needs that many organizations struggle to address.

The HR Team helps clients achieve their highest level of success by providing value-driven human resources services that leave them time to focus on what they do best: directing business growth and profitability. Headquartered in Columbia, Maryland, the firm serves all of Maryland, Washington, DC, and Virginia.



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