

[A Letter From Valerie]

Adding Fuel to the Fire

Dear Friends:

"Gas Prices Hit Record Highs." You've seen the headlines, you know it's having a major impact on your employees, and—like everyone else responsible for the well-being of a workforce—you're scrambling around trying to figure out what to do about it. But what can you do that will actually make a difference? That's sustainable for the long term and isn't just paying lip service? And that won't cost you as much as buying everyone on the payroll a Prius?

To be honest, it's hard enough to figure it out for your own household, much less for an entire company. My husband, Adam, and I were sitting in our Jacuzzi last Sunday attempting to calculate the cost of his daily commute from Menlo Park to his hotel in downtown San Francisco. With gas above \$4.25 a gallon, parking costing him a whopping \$21 a day, and the \$3 cup of tea he needs to have the energy to schlep home with both eyelids open, we're spending something like \$1,000 a month!

Even to those pulling down six or seven figures, that's real money. And to the rank-and-file, it's a huge burden. So how to help relieve some of that burden for your employees? First off, let's dispense with that obvious but wrong-headed answer, telecommuting. Yes, we know that your low-performers and semi-disengaged employees with homes in the Wine Country have asked you to consider it. Again. But with sincere apologies to all those networking companies hoping to turn high gas prices into higher profits, the truth is that telecommuting isn't going to work any better now than it has in the past. The isolation, the absence of administrative support, the inability to store confidential data, the household distractions, the lack of exposure that kills hopes for career advancement—those factors simply won't change.

Same goes for the Google method of piling everyone into a van and herding them down from San Francisco with their laptops on their knees and their cell phones glued to their ears like square cochlear implants. Or at least I know that wouldn't work for my employees. Sure, we all get along great—but that doesn't mean I'm delusional enough to think that my team wants to spend another 90 minutes together after a full day of, well, togetherness. Plus, they tend to live all over the city, and driving to and from a communal meeting place would pretty much defeat the purpose.

So what can you do to help employees save money and the planet? Here are some solutions that work for us in our demanding, high-growth consulting environment. Some or all of them may work for you too:

- De-emphasize the car in your corporate culture. Remember when companies used to 'encourage' their recruits to purchase new cars right out of school, telling them that they needed to look successful in front of customers? The truth was that the bosses thought their employees would work harder and be more fearful of losing their jobs if they had big car payments to make. Well, times have changed: Don't make driving an expensive gas-guzzler requisite for status. Make it OK to drive a tiny, dented Toyota that gets 37 miles to the gallon. Make it even better to not have a car. (We keep a 2000 Ford Focus hatchback around for employees to borrow for as long as necessary. We cover the insurance; they wash it and top off the tank when they're done. Employees use it when their cars are in the shop or if they don't have a car and need to go out for business reasons.)

- Help your employees help themselves. Encourage recent grads to live within their means, whether that means staying with Mom and Dad to save on rent or finding a place closer to the Mother Ship to cut down on commuting expenses. Promote the idea of brown-bagging lunches (in reusable bags, of course) by heading out to eat in the park rather than at a restaurant, lest the lower-paid workers be put in the uncomfortable position of either going along with something they can't afford or being left out. And tell everyone not to blow their paychecks on expensive clothes in a misguided attempt at dressing to impress. We're impressed by savings, investments, and charitable donations, not rampant consumerism.
- Encourage the use of alternative transport. Signal your approval of biking to work by providing bike racks and by making almost every day a casual day. Subsidize public transportation by reimbursing the cost of tickets or at least offering a pre-tax alternative.
- Offset high gas prices with fresh-brewed perks. Replace that worn-out Mr. Coffee in the break room with a high-quality, well-stocked espresso machine (composting the used coffee grounds, natch). That way all those barely-making-it employees who can't afford gas and their daily Starbucks run can at least get one kind of fuel for free.

Take care,
Valerie

Ask Valerie

Dear Valerie:

With the high cost of living, I'm having a hard time finding unskilled labor here in the Bay Area. What are some creative ways to find these employees?

- Desperately Seeking Workers

Dear Desperate:

First of all, I know what you mean. Last night in the gardening section at Home Depot, I offered to help a man find plant tape. The manager saw me do it, and he came right over and offered me a job. Guess I either need to start dressing better in my free time or be less helpful out in public. Seriously, though, here are a few ideas that have worked for me and others I know:

- Advertise on the big screen at local movie theaters. It's relatively inexpensive, hits the target audience, and bores into their brains when they're sitting there bored before the previews start.
- Learn the language of the workforce. In most of California, and increasingly throughout the country, it helps to know Spanish. But some areas have other large immigrant communities to tap into, too. If you're in Fremont, for instance, you might try to learn a bit of Vietnamese. Then let all of your new friends know you are hiring—recent immigrants, from necessity, tend to be extremely well connected and will refer their friends for jobs.
- Explore job-placement partnerships with not-for-profit groups that provide access to non-traditional employees, such as ex-convicts or people with disabilities. The groups help to vet the candidates and often provide grateful, diligent workers.
- Investigate overseas vocational schools. Sometimes they can route trainees through your organization for three to four months at a time.

- Valerie

Dear Valerie:

I saw that you recently spoke on the topic of Thought Diversity at an HR conference in the Midwest. What, exactly, is Thought Diversity? When does it make sense?

- Curious

Dear Curious:

It blew me away that a harmless little idea like Thought Diversity could bring out such defensiveness and hostility in otherwise rational HR execs. Suffice it to say, some people in our profession are dead-set against it. Building a culture of Thought Diversity means hiring disparate personality types who process information differently, as well as welcoming different perspectives and viewpoints within an atmosphere that encourages discussion and creativity. For instance, you want to make sure that managers take a non-judgmental approach to new ideas and are not saying things like “That won’t work here because we do it this way.”

- Valerie

Dear Valerie:

I know you’re heavily into gardening. We live in the Oakland hills and, in light of the drought, are being told to cut down on water consumption or face stiff penalties. What do you recommend that we plant in our front yard?

- Newly Water-Conscious Gardener

Dear Water-Conscious:

Without knowing anything about your sun/shade situation—but knowing that, in the East Bay hills, it’s usually not too hot and you do get some light frost and heavy winds—I’d recommend the following: First, dump the lawn. It takes too much water, and the fertilizer runs into the Bay, killing fish and birds. Instead, plant low, woody, drought-tolerant flowering shrubs like Penstemon and Matilija Poppies to provide seasonal food for insects and birds, and add a selection of drought-tolerant ornamental grasses to sway in the wind and provide some color. Consider planting a selection of fruiting shade trees like Plum, Asian Pear, Apple, and Orange to help reduce food transportation distances to your home and make your garden a nicer place to hang out in. Add a wide variety of succulents to give you a never-ending panorama of color, shapes, sizes, and flowers to watch. Finally, two last points: Try to reduce concrete and replace with pavers to allow natural run-off, and keep the cat inside to protect the dwindling American songbird population.

- Valerie

[Human Resources Search Opportunities](#)

Human Resources Executive Positions

Vice President of Human Resources (East Bay, CA)

A pharmaceutical leader is seeking a VPHR to oversee the companies’ global HR operations. Partner with the executive team, developing and delivering strategic initiatives to promote the growth of the business. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Director of Human Resources (Santa Clara, CA)

A global publicly-traded semiconductor company is seeking a worldwide Director of HR responsible for HR Operations on a global basis, including compensation and benefits, M&A, and staffing process and strategy. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Director of Human Resources, Office of the CTO (Espoo, Finland)

International mobile technology and networking company seeks a highly strategic person for its world-renowned research center. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Manager of Human Resources (Palo Alto, CA)

One of the largest global law firms is seeking a Human Resources Manager to support the Director of Human Resources. Supporting the Palo Alto office, future plans for this position include supporting an office in Sacramento, CA and Seattle, WA. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Senior Staffing Manager (Redwood City, CA)

This philanthropic investment firm is looking for a full-cycle recruiter with experience across all industries and desire for long-term growth within this growing company. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Compensation Search Opportunities

Director of Global Benefits (San Francisco, CA)

Large, privately held insurance firm on the West Coast and ranked among the top insurance brokers in the nation. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Director of Total Rewards (Santa Clara, CA)

A global provider of network infrastructure equipment for corporate, government, education and health care enterprises and metropolitan telecommunications service providers is seeking a Director of Total Rewards. With employees spread across the globe, this person must have a strong knowledge of international compensation and benefits and possess the ability to partner with upper management and the Business Partners to address needs throughout the entire organization. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Director of Compensation/Chief of Staff, Americas (San Jose, CA)

A global, leading provider of Electronics Manufacturing Services (EMS), is seeking a Director of Compensation for the Americas with worldwide responsibilities. This person will provide strategic and tactical execution for the Americas, in addition to leadership, planning, and supervision to the Compensation Managers in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Compensation and HRIS Analyst (San Jose, CA)

Fast growing, huge, global hardware company. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Executive Compensation Manager (San Francisco, CA)

Successful growing software and programming company seeking experienced Manager of Executive Compensation. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Senior Compensation Analyst (San Francisco, CA)

Technically savvy, Senior Compensation Analyst needed for this 3,000 employee, growing global software company. Email your resume in MS Word format to recruiting@vfandco.com.

Industry Events

VF&Co Networking Event and Open House – HR Executive Wine Tasting

June 25th 2008, 6:00 pm to 7:00 pm – Menlo Park, California

This private VF&Co event is a great opportunity to meet and network with key Bay Area HR executives while enjoying first-class wines carefully selected by our team. This event will take place at our newly expanded offices in downtown Menlo Park.

Annual SHRM Conference and Exposition

June 22nd to June 25th, 2008 – Chicago, Illinois

Programs at this year's conference include sessions on international management strategies, strategic persuasion and talent acquisition, executive coaching, and critical HR challenges for China during its economic rise. Sessions count toward recertification hours; please visit the website to find out what recertification credits each session counts toward. This year's keynote speakers include Sidney Poitier, Patrick Lencioni, Doris Kearns Goodwin, and Nancy Giles.

HR Star Conference – San Francisco

July 16th, 2008, all day event – South San Francisco Conference Center, California

Valerie Frederickson will present The Emerging Role of the Strategic HR Business Partner during this one-day free conference. VF&Co will also be hosting a luncheon and a panel of HR executives from companies like Blueshield, Celerity, OpenTV, Williams-Sonoma, H&R Block, Trianz, and Foundry Networks.