

[A LETTER FROM VAL]  
**The New-Parent MBA**

Dear Friends:

Our twins, Dashiell and Hermione, came extremely quickly into this world a couple of weeks ago, giving us a huge, instant high while also completely taking over our lives. They are more fascinating, and at times more terrifying, than anything I've ever experienced. We're quite the pairs: these two tiny, screaming babies depending on us to figure out exactly what they need, and we tired, nervous parents having no clue what to do intellectually but knowing more than we ever imagined intuitively. Humbling? Daunting? Exhilarating? Yes, yes, and oh—heavens—yes.

Based on all the calls and e-mail I've received back at the office, a lot of you have been wondering, "How's Valerie doing? How are she and Adam adapting? Are they missing the flexibility to work late, go out to restaurants, chill out and read a good book? Or are they too gaga over their new little ones to notice?"

Good questions all. For starters, other than being sick or on vacation, this is the first time I've been off work for more than a day or two in 22 years. And as a workaholic, being away from the office for the past three weeks has been an adjustment in and of itself. Not that there hasn't been plenty of work, both pleasant and not-so, to fill the void. First, Adam and I have taken on new roles as celebrity stalkers: gazing worshipfully at the babies as they sleep, kissing them on their chubby little cheeks hundreds of times a day, watching them suck from their bottles as we interpret every slurp. Then there has been the new management challenge: figuring out how to take care of newborns while at the same time juggling an ever-growing staff of caregivers. The saying "When you have twins, you can never have too much help" is more true than you can possibly believe. I went to Target at 10:30 the other night to return some diapers and found myself blissfully strolling the aisles, enjoying the freedom so much it reminded me of the way I felt last summer while strolling around Zermatt. At least until I saw a socialite acquaintance and realized that I couldn't even calculate when I had last washed my hair.

It's all got me thinking that there are more than a few parallels between running a business and becoming the mother of newborn twins at age 46—a feeling that's grown stronger after three days of trying to write this letter from home as Dashiell, who's been having some pain in his tummy, screams to be held. After many futile attempts to comfort him—and let me tell you, nothing makes you feel more like a loser than not being able to comfort your crying child—I finally cracked the code by wrapping him in a woven Guatemalan Indian shawl and tying him to my front, like a little papoose. It works, though it means I have limited arm mobility and will have a really sore shoulder later on. But at least he can sleep this way, and I can write. So, before the crying starts up again, here are some quick thoughts on what I've learned about leadership from the first three weeks of life, times two:

Bad luck can be offset by good preparation. Thanks to all of the following happening within a seven-day period—the fabulous au pair I hired flunking her visa interview; the night nanny going AWOL; a longtime VF&Co employee who'd been struggling for motivation finally finding her passion and going elsewhere; the manager of my investment property coming down with swine flu; my father-in-law landing in intensive care; and my baby girl needing to spend time in the NICU—I wound up having to take an earlier and more extended maternity leave than anticipated. But in some ways I viewed this as a bonus: The VF&Co staff would have a wonderful time coalescing and leading in my absence, making fast decisions and getting lots done, and would do a much better job than if I were there. That's turned out to be true.

And because I'm a good recruiter and had built a deep candidate pool, I was able to hire a new team of crackerjack caregivers with only a few intense hours of phone calls. It's tough to allocate the time to do so, but leaders who are always maintaining pools of potential candidates are way ahead when it comes to finding replacements fast. And good leaders always strive to make themselves strategically unnecessary to the daily running of the business.

Assemble the perfect team, but be clear about what perfect means. We found great nannies early in the recruiting process, but the salaries they wanted were too high. This was hugely disappointing, and at first we didn't know what choice to make: break the bank or lower our standards. What we did was change our spec. We gave up on nannies who speak English, since both Adam and I speak Spanish, which opened up the candidate pool. We ended up hiring some kind, loving moms from Mexico who not only take good care of our babies but also enjoy teaching us. As a business owner, I know firsthand the frustration and disappointment of not being able to afford certain candidates. But for the past 15 years, I've managed to hire truly wonderful employees who meet our needs and come from different walks of life and stages of their careers. Do they all fit the mold? Yes, because I've changed the mold to focus on what's really important to me: values like kindness, cooperation, responsibility, and respect.

Working smart is important. Working hard is even more important. Except for the divining of mysterious baby cries (Hungry? Cold? Wet? Tummy ache? All of the above?!?!), taking care of babies is hard work, but it's not rocket science. When they cry, I've stopped asking myself, "Is s/he hungry? Didn't s/he just eat?" Now I just run for a bottle. Dashiell apparently wishes he lived at the Four Seasons and is none too pleased about the Motel 6 service we provide. I've learned that if he's still asleep but stretches and sticks out his little tongue, I've got 90 seconds to insert a bottle or there's hell to pay. Hermione, on the other hand, just cries this pitiful little cry that says, "I thought I could trust you. Why are you letting me starve?" But despite the babies' complaints, everyone on our team here at home is pulling their weight. While Hermione was in the hospital, the night nanny added evening and weekend duty, taking care of Dashiell so that we could be there. Our day nanny has cheerfully taken on tasks like cooking dinner and doing laundry. And Adam and I hop to it every time we hear the wah-wah-wah duet. On the job, think about the folks on your team who work really hard, never complaining about the travel, pulling all-nighters when necessary. Those, not the ones who spend their time strategizing but never seem willing to roll up their sleeves, are the folks you really need.

Communicate or suffer the consequences. You're tired and stressed. You're spread too thin. The requests and demands keep coming, but everyone on the staff is taking on new responsibilities and learning on the job. And as a result, things are falling through the cracks. You know what I just described? A household full of babies with acid reflux ... and a company struggling to regain its footing after a series of layoffs. In my case, the night nanny didn't tell the day nanny that Dashiell had been up all night, and if I didn't make a point of constantly communicating with everyone to find the areas where there are breakdowns, the consequences could have been painful. In the company's case, it's why the CEO needs to get out there and talk to the rank-and-file, not skip the Town Hall meeting because he's too busy with the refinancing.

Concentration is the key. Oops, I just accidentally wrote "conception," because all the baby noise distracted me. But I've found that when it's important enough—like when my premature baby was gravely ill in the NICU—I can really, really concentrate, to the point where I don't have any idea what day of the week it is or if it's morning, noon, or night. Though work certainly doesn't qualify as a matter of life and death, that ability to tune out all distractions and focus on what really matters is as crucial to building a business as it is to parenting. Nurture it.

This month, I'd like to congratulate Mary Hartman, former VPHR of Salesforce.com, on her new job as VPHR of Pediatric Services of America in Atlanta. Way to go, Mary!

Take care,  
Valerie Frederickson

### **Ask Valerie**

Dear Valerie:

There is no way that we can get all our work done with such a reduced HR team. It is just ludicrous, and makes me hate our CFO. What can we do besides quit?

- PO'd

Dear PO'd:

I'd make the play for contract HR labor focused on the completion of projects. Highlight the temporary nature of the expense plus the savings by not having to pay for benefits. If that doesn't work, attempt to get the CFO to help you prioritize or allow you to get the internal clients to do their own HR work.

Dear Valerie:

Everything I read says that things are getting better, but I still can't find a HR job. What does your firm see in the labor market over the next several months?

- Running Out of Hope

Dear Hope:

Since I'm still on "leave," I asked James Holland to help with this one, and he told me to talk about the jobless recovery, the need to hire due to reduced inventories, the temporary increase in activity just based on global government stimulus, the need for consumer spending to increase, and the negative effect of health care "reform." That said, let's focus on what I know. There are jobs out there, and if what you have to offer is good enough, you will get hired. If you're well exposed in the market and still unemployed after four to six months, then what's wrong is what you have to offer. The challenge is to change that. Reinvent yourself. Take a step back, and then you'll be able to take two steps forward. For example, Company A is currently looking for a contract compensation analyst with strong Excel skills. Yes, it's not a highly-paid, strategic role. But, it would get you back working, refresh your skills, and position you well for full-time jobs within Company A. At the worst, you'd make some money and get some new contacts.

Dear Valerie:

It seems like the big lay-offs are over except for all the acquisitions going on, and they're been replaced with a witch hunt where executives pick off employees they don't like but don't have the documentation to fire, and then group them together in these little layoffs so that they don't get sued. What kind of protection do the employees have#63;

- Concerned

Dear Concerned:

Since I just saw the new Michael Moore movie last night, I think we should blame this on Goldman Sachs. But seriously, you bring up a bunch of concerns that I'll attempt to address quickly. 1) US

employers generally have the right to end someone's employment when they feel like it and this is something I agree with. I just hope that they do it kindly. If you don't like this, you should work in a union environment like my husband does. 2) No one outside of the hiring/firing manager ever has the whole picture of someone's performance, so it's difficult for outsiders to have informed opinions. 3) Sometimes there are unethical practices, and these rare employers are punished through class action lawsuits, like Wal-Mart. But most terminations are simply due to a lack of performance, personality conflicts, or a need to reduce or move headcount—quite innocent and ethical. 4) I find it most helpful to stay non-judgmental and focus on sympathy and support.

If you're worried about getting laid off, learn from what's going on with my twins' caregivers. As soon as Dashi and Maya are through the screaming phase, we'll cut down on our caregivers, and the first one to go will be the one who is often late and then sits around while the babies sleep instead of doing laundry or helping with the dishes. She's good enough for now, but won't make the first cut. The one we've decided to keep the longest: the one with a great attitude who offered to iron while the babies slept and who is happy to cook dinner. Translate this as making sure you're doing the basics. Be on time. Have a great attitude. Do your best and volunteer for more. Be supportive of the team. Follow the rules. Don't pick fights with your boss. Don't drop the ball on projects. Be pleasant.

- Valerie

### [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 HR Managers and Vice Presidents of Human Resources to specialists in the areas of compensation, benefits, and M&A.

Candidate 214 – Director of Total Rewards

- Background encompasses Learning & Development, M&A, Compensation and Benefits, and Business Partner roles
- Led corporate total rewards programs for national insurance, finance, and high tech companies
- Designed, implemented, and oversaw the stock option equity plan for a Fortune 500 company

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

### [HR Consultant & Contractors' Corner](#)

What's Up in HR At Successful Companies?

Each month you can check out what's critical to our clients by seeing what kinds of HR projects we're doing.

Cool Contracting & Consulting Assignments:

- **Fingers Crossed** Providing interim VP HR support to an exciting and growing company going for its next round of funding
- **Welcome to My Country** Assisting a mid-sized company develop their Global Mobility program as they initiate their global expansion
- **Can I Take That Back** Helping a tech company bring their outsourced HR function back in house at a lower cost and higher quality
- **Ready, Aim** Working with a mid-sized company's management team around focus and alignment of business and individual goals
- **Keeping the Seat Warm** Filling a seat on a major employer's compensation team to provide job grading and salary structure support and board presentations
- **Help is At Hand** Working closely with a major Native American tribal organization to improve their support organizations' capabilities and performance
- **Keeping Them Happy** Researching, preparing and delivering incentive compensation alternatives to very engaged board members
- **Door #1 or Door #2** Providing expertise to a major food chain company who are evaluating the self funding/self insured options
- **Outsourcing — the prequel** Working with a company that is looking to bring back work that was initially outsourced
- **Gone But Not Forgotten** Providing career counseling to multiple employees as part of the company's restructuring program

Needed an HR contractor yesterday? You will be guaranteed one qualified candidate within 24 hours, or two within 48 hours. This includes Compensation & Benefits, M&A, HRIS, Performance Management, OD, Generalist, and all other areas of expertise. All the contractors are personally supervised by James Holland and have access to our entire consulting staff and its resources. Click here for current projects and featured HR contractors' profiles.

Immediate needs? Contact our HR Contracting Team at 650-614-0220 or [contracting@vfandco.com](mailto:contracting@vfandco.com).

### [Upgrade Your HR Team's Partnering Skills](#)

This Business Partner stuff is really important! We have been bombarded with requests for private presentations of my award-winning How to Be an HR Business Partner presentation at internal HR meetings and internal global HR conferences.

You can now take advantage of a new service offering. Invite VF&Co on-site to train your staff in these valuable Business Partner skills. Specifically, we'll present four HR Business Partner case studies, and process through the strategy and skills needed to solve them.

For scheduling and copies of the handouts, contact Michele Li at [michele@vfandco.com](mailto:michele@vfandco.com) or 650.614.0220.

### [Current Executive Searches](#)

Director of Human Resources (Northern California)

A complex, global, rapidly-expanding company is looking for a Director of HR to groom into their next head of HR. Our client is looking for a well-rounded, hands-on generalist with strong international experience and political savvy. The position reports to the VP of HR and will have no direct reports initially. The ideal candidate will be collaborative, flexible, energetic and detailed, with leadership potential. Candidates must be able to travel up to 50% of the time to domestic and international locations.

[Contractor] HRIS Analyst (San Mateo, CA)

A growing software company urgently needs an HRIS analyst to participate in an HRB Project Implementation. The successful candidate will have experience with at least two HRIS implementations or extensive HRIS experience in a start-up or midsized company.

[Contractor] Senior HR Generalist (San Mateo, CA)

A high tech company in the insurance space needs a Senior HR Generalist for a 3-month contract. The successful candidate will have experience in multi-state workers' compensation, benefits administration and open enrollment, recruitment, payroll and ADP, and terminations. Start-up experience is a plus.

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!

Webroot Software, Inc.

Vice President of HR – Mountain View, CA or Boulder, CO

Children's Hospital of Orange County

Vice President of HR – Orange, CA

NuVasive, Inc.

Vice President of HR – San Diego, CA

Time Warner

Executive Director of Corporate HR – New York, NY

Veolia Water North America

Director of Talent Acquisition – Chicago, IL

Banana Republic

Field HR Manager, Pacific & LA Regions – San Francisco, CA

## **Industry Events**

Learning Right Sized: Best Practices for Enhancing the Manager as Trainer Program and Measuring Your L&D Program's Success

October 28, 2009 – Palo Alto, California

Managers and Measures can be a L&D professional's great asset or challenging liability when it comes to maximizing your learning and development program—particularly when you're on a tight learning budget. So what to do? This BOLD workshop will explore two main areas that can assist you in getting the most out of your L&D program's effectiveness: how to involve managers as conduits in the training delivery process, and what metrics can be used to determine a program's success.

**BOLD: Financial Intelligence for HR: How You Can Add Value to Your Organization**  
November 12, 2009 – Redwood City, California

The most successful HR professionals are those who are viewed by the executive team as understanding the financial side of the business. Whether you're aligning your HR goals and objectives to the corporate strategy, promoting the value of manager training, or presenting to the board, this course will enhance your financial intelligence and strengthen HR's value within your organization. This course is recommended for HR and OD professionals with a basic understanding of finance and accounting principles - from HR business partners to OD Directors to HR VP's.

**Bangalore HR Summit 2009**

December 18–19, 2009 – Bangalore, India

Hosted by the Institute of HRD, the Bangalore HR Summit is an international convention for Human Resources Professionals aimed at bringing together HR professionals, academics, researchers, and management professionals to deliberate on this year's theme Innovation in HRM. This two-day event will include presentations eminent speakers of national and international repute, who will share their expertise in enhancing organizational effectiveness through innovation in human resources management.

**NCHRA: 2010 HR West Conference**

April 26–28, 2010 – San Francisco, California

Come hear Valerie speak at the 26th annual NCHRA conference in San Francisco. Additional details forthcoming.

**SHRM: 62nd Annual Conference & Exposition**

June 27–30, 2010 – San Diego, California

Why attend the SHRM Annual Conference? 1) Learn. The greatest minds in the business provide advice, answers, best practices and tools you can put to immediate use. 2) Engage. Come listen to some of the most dynamic speakers in the world to get inspired, informed, and energized while learning to elevate your strategic abilities. 3) Network. Take part in the world's largest HR conference and network in person with participants from over 140 countries. 4) Recertify. Stay ahead of the complexity in HR and earn recertification credits toward PHR®, SPHR® or GPHR®. 5) Invest. The SHRM Annual Conference provides you and your teams with all the HR education you need in one place, covering strategic and tactical learning that you'll need for success.