

[A LETTER FROM VAL]

Leading with Your Gut

Dear Friends:

Do you ever feel like a lone salmon of logic and reason swimming upstream against a tide of conformity? Do you dread having to sit through one more conference session or staff meeting with your pen hovering over your Buzzword Bingo card, hoping someone will say “synergy” to finish off your row? Then you’re going to love this brain-twister: Why, if all those “best practices” that so many companies and managers cling to are so great, have we ended up in an economy this lousy? And why, in these unprecedented times, are so many folks still clinging to the ideas that got us here in the first place?

Now, that’s not to suggest I’m entirely against the notion of best practices. Though I was born and raised in Berkeley, I’m no anarchist. I’m not after creativity in my accounting function, for instance. Nor do I want civil engineers building bridges or neurosurgeons removing tumors to ignore the best practices in their fields. But I do feel strongly that, in most businesses, relying on the crutch of best practices frees people from making their own decisions and taking responsibility for their actions. It trains people not to think for themselves, or to analyze what went right or wrong: “I did it right, according to the book.”

In fact, reliance on best practices can literally (and as you’ll soon see, I do in fact mean literally) teach you not to go with your gut. Think about it: In generations past, parents following what at the time were considered best practices trained their children to eat only at meal times, and then to eat whether they were hungry or not. If you were starving at 3:30 in the afternoon, a parent would inevitably say, “Don’t spoil your dinner.” Then, at the table a couple of hours later, you got this: “Finish everything on your plate. There are children starving in India.” To this day, I know otherwise highly evolved individuals who still look at their watches as an automatic response when you ask them if they are hungry. (See?)

An executive’s job is to be intimately familiar with his or her firm’s needs—to determine, if you will, whether it is starving or whether its eyes are bigger than its stomach. But in figuring out the appropriate direction and priorities and responsibilities for one’s company, too often the crutch of “best practices” does nothing more than cloud our judgment or, worse, stifle all sense of responsibility and creativity. After all, it’s not about making the best decision in a vacuum; it’s about making the best decision for a specific company at a given moment in time. You need to have practical, scalable, cost-effective practices that fit your culture, whether or not a group of consultants and academics featured them in a long treatise in this month’s Harvard Business Review.

This, of course, would be true regardless of the times, but it’s especially important to keep in mind today when even BearingPoint files for bankruptcy. Unless you happen to stumble across some white papers written by the CEOs of companies that thrived in the 1930s, there are no best practices for this type of economic climate. What you’ve got going for you is your wisdom, your strength, everything you’ve learned through your intuition and guile and trial and error. These things count for a lot, especially during tough times when the only way to succeed is to throw away the rulebook and lead from the gut.

I had lunch yesterday with Dave Ranhoff, the former CEO of Credence Systems and one of the brightest and most supportive guys around. I asked him what he thought of all this BP stuff. He said that with all the integrations and acquisitions he was involved in, he often had to retrain people from acquired companies to adopt a more consistent method of management and teamwork. He did this by holding

training sessions that he himself conducts. In these classes, he emphasized that whenever there is a challenging problem to be solved or a big decision to be made, to be clear on who the decision maker is, and spend sufficient time in discovery mode. Announce it to everyone: you're in discovery mode and solicit inputs and advice. Be clear that you're not making a decision yet. Write the problem or opportunity out as a declarative statement. Determine the information you'll need and people you want to consult with in order to make a decision. Solve one problem at a time—don't pile them on like politicians larding up an appropriations bill. Dave says that the best practices answer might work on one of your problems, but probably not on all of them, so separate them out. No feature creep. Dave stresses to his teams that they should always remember the goal: the "best practice" is not the desired result; the result you get should be the best practice. Don't forget to clearly announce your decision at the appropriate time. While everyone will not agree with it, they will more likely support it if they believed that you ran a good decision making process and felt their input was heard and valued.

Now that's what I call a best practice!

This month I'd like to thank Andrew Adelman, CEO of CoreTechs, for his long-term friendship and partnership with us. If you need any IT or Finance contractors, no one will take better care of you.

Take care,
Valerie Frederickson

Ask Valerie

Dear Valerie:

I'm on your staff, and while you were out a guy called in and started yelling at me, telling me that he was perfect for the HR role we were looking to fill in Fremont and that if we didn't place him there, he'd make sure we never work in Silicon Valley again. Just one problem: He forgot to tell us his name. What should I do?

- Young Employee

Dear Young:

This is a really tough situation. In these circumstances, one tends to get scared or frustrated. If he calls back, lead with your heart. Listen, sympathize, try to spread hope and goodwill, and appeal to his sense of fairness and reason. At least make him feel heard and that he counts. And then pray for him.

Dear Valerie:

I get a newsletter from an HR professional group. This month the author wrote, "I can't get you a job. I can't introduce you to anyone. I don't want your resume. I can't network with you." It really turned me off. I thought that's what these groups are for. Don't you think that's a little mean-spirited?

- Peeved

Dear Peeved:

It's a harsh message, but put yourself in her shoes. She has to make a living, and she can't do it by spending all of her time holding informational interviews and networking on behalf of laid-off HR folks. They don't pay her bills. This, in fact, is the great unspoken disappointment for job seekers: A lot of employed folks simply can't afford to allocate the time to help them, at least not in this economy, when

everyone is focusing on whatever they need to do to keep the lights on. So give this woman a break—she may not get high marks for diplomacy, but at least she's being honest!

Dear Valerie:

I'm an HR consultant in the Rust Belt, where there's absolutely no work in sight, so I'm thinking about moving to California. I'm trying to discover HR 3.0, looking for points of light and pockets of growth. The last time this happened, I picked up business from a restructuring firm—perfectly counter-cyclical. I'm trying to figure out who is making money, but the whole world is so interconnected now that it doesn't seem like there are too many growth areas. Please let me know if you have any pearls of wisdom!

- Ms. Consultant

Dear Consultant:

There is no HR 3.0—it's business as usual. The problem is not that HR has changed, the problem is the economy. If you want to stay in the Midwest, then find something else to do there, at least for the time being. If you want to move, move because you've always wanted to live in California, not because there are more jobs here. Frankly, things are tough here too, and it's often not easy for Midwesterners to adjust to this area. They tend to deeply resent the housing prices and traffic, and their spouses often miss the homeland.

- 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](#)

[Contractor] Executive Compensation & Global Benefits Director (Santa Clara, CA)

An international high-tech company is looking for an Executive Compensation and Global Benefits Director.

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.

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!

Gap, Inc.
Vice President of Talent Management – Bay Area, CA

Expedia
Senior Director of Operational Excellence – Bellevue, WA

Digg
Vice President 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 HR 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 190 – Director of Human Resources Business Partners with high-tech background

- Strategic and tactical HR Business Partner with extensive experience in billion-dollar public technology companies
- Developed creative and effective solutions to critical business issues with an emphasis on increasing the organizations ability to achieve its business objectives
- Provided HR leadership and coaching to senior executives and management teams worldwide in various areas including performance management, conflict management, and team development
- Led multiple Human Resources efforts designed to help the company achieve its strategy of focusing on its core businesses while divesting of all non-core operations

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

Industry Events

2009 Staffing Industry Analysts' Executive Forum Panel on Outplacement
March 17-19, 2009 – Miami, Florida

Join Valerie Frederickson & Company at the 2009 Staffing Industry Analysts' Executive Forum, the most prominent annual meeting for CEOs, owners, and senior level executives from all sectors and segments of the staffing industry. Typically comprised of over 55% CEOs/owners and 90% VPs and above, the Executive Forum provides access to the top industry thinkers, leaders, and innovators, a focus on the staffing industry's strategic issues, developing trends, future opportunities, and current challenges, and

an unparalleled opportunity for informal, peer networking as well as more formal deal-making. Valerie will be an expert on a panel discussing outplacement trends in today's economic climate.

NCHRA's 25th Annual HR West Conference 2009

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 San Francisco Bay Area. Valerie will be presenting a follow-up to our most popular presentation, The Emerging Role of the HR Business Partner, entitled How to Become a Successful HR Business Partner, featuring case studies and practice sessions!

2009 HR Star Conference, Atlanta

May 13, 2009 – Atlanta, Georgia

Please join Valerie at the 2009 HR Star Conference in Atlanta, a day of learning, sharing, networking, benchmarking & community building for HR professionals on the east coast. Valerie will be speaking on resources and best practices for HR business partners whose companies are going through times of big change.

PIHRA District 7 May 2009 Meeting

May 21, 2009 – Long Beach, California

PIHRA District 7 serves the greater Long Beach area and gets together once a month to network and learn from a guest speaker on a HR-related topic that will enhance their profession. Due to a special request from the chapter's professional development chair, Valerie has agreed to bring back her most popular presentation, The Emerging Role of the HR Business Partner, for a speaking engagement at the chapter's May meeting.

2009 HR Star Conference, San Francisco

July 15, 2009 – South San Francisco, California

Look for Valerie to speak once again at the super popular San Francisco HR Star conference. Details to come.