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Work like a dog?

Well, perhaps you should

By Mary Kelly

Things improved for me at work when I started to behave more like my dog.

What do I mean? There are a lot of articles on how to be a better manager. This is about how to be a better employee.

1. Work with enthusiasm. There are days when we drag ourselves to work, fueled by copious cups of coffee, grumbling the whole way. We contemplate calling in sick, when the only malady is we don't want to go to work when other activities, such as going to the beach, beckon. Let's face it, there are some days (especially Mondays) when enthusiasm is low.



If only we could be more like my dog, who responds cheerfully and enthusiastically to just about any activity. She bounds to greet me at every opportunity. She wags with her whole body when I say we are going to go for a walk. She tells me she is excited to go anywhere, even the vet's office.

If we could bring a dog's enthusiasm to work, we would start off the day cheerful and smiling. If we can trust that the day will be full of new challenges, knowing that we are able to handle whatever happens, we might be more pleasant. We could worry less about the bad things that could happen. We could be genuinely grateful that we are healthy enough to have a job, and we might be able to muster up more zeal for what we do.

2. Support the boss's ideas. Has your boss ever come up with a seemingly brainless idea (no, not my boss, you think, as you roll your eyes.) Well, yes, sometimes. We admit, occasionally when the boss relays his latest brilliant new plan, we may have given him that, "you gotta be kidding, right?" look before saying out loud, "this isn't going to work."

This is probably not the correct nor desired response. Even if it is a dumb idea, maybe we could give the supervisor the benefit of the doubt.

My dog is supportive all the time. Sure, my dog may think it's ridiculous to lock up the house, get into the car and drive 15 minutes for a Starbucks coffee when she knows I have a working coffee maker at home. But she nevertheless races to the car, leaps into the seat, and eagerly sticks her head out the window, ready to go.

While most bosses probably don't need that kind of exuberant demonstration, maybe we could try harder to at least be open-minded about what the manager has to say. Maybe we could work on being more receptive to the ideas of others in the workplace.

3. Some focus, please. Sometimes when the boss talks, or we are trapped in another seemingly endless meeting, do you find yourself not listening as attentively as you could? What are we doing? We do all sorts of non-listening actions. We are thinking of what we are going to say when it is our turn to talk, we ponder the growing pile of work on our desks, or we doodle our next grocery list. This is not particularly great focus.

My dog, however, has great focus. When she lies down, her eyes are focused on me. When I move around the room, she turns her head to follow my movements. She looks at me directly and waits for me to talk to her.

So maybe we can do a better job of focusing in the workplace. We can make an effort to really listen, to focus completely on what people say, and to concentrate on the issue at hand instead of allowing stray thoughts to impede work. We can strive to give people the full attention that my dog gives me.

So now when I feel myself lagging, drowsy, or unmotivated, I remind myself to work like a dog.

Some days I even promise myself a treat for being good.

Mary Kelly is an Instructor of economics at Hawaii Pacific University. She can be reached at mkelly@hpu.edu.

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[YOUR ESTATE MATTERS]

Understanding the basics of basis is important in estate planning

By Judith Sterling and Michelle Tucker

Most of us have heard the term "basis" before but are not really sure what it means. While it has a meaning in common parlance, it also has a technical meaning for tax purposes. "Basis" is the benchmark from which the taxation of property is determined upon disposition. If you sell the asset for more than your basis, you have a taxable gain. If you sell an asset for less than your basis, typically you have a tax loss.

Your basis in property originates at your acquisition of it. If you buy the property, your basis is your purchase price. Any tax depreciation of the property reduces the basis, while qualifying improvements can increase the basis.

If you acquire an asset by gift, you acquire that donor's basis in the property in most circumstances. So, if Aunti Lei gives you her 25 shares of XYZ Corp., when you sell it, you will pay tax on the amount by which the price you get exceeds what Aunti Lei paid for XYZ Corp. whenever she bought it. If the donor's basis is less than the fair market value of the property, special rules apply.

If you inherit an asset, your basis is the fair market value of the asset at the date of the death of the person from whom you inherit it. Thus, even though Aunti Lei acquired XYZ Corp. for \$2 in 1953, if at her death it is worth \$214, your basis is \$214. Note, under some circumstances the executor of the person's estate may choose to use the date six months after the person's death as the valuation date.

Thus, the basis of the recipient of the asset may vary dramatically whether the asset is gifted during the donor's lifetime or at death.

Typically, it is best to gift assets that have a basis near fair market value while retaining assets that have a large built-in gain. If retained until death, the basis of the assets with large gains would increase to fair market value and there would be no gain to tax if the asset is sold shortly thereafter. If sold later, then the taxable gain will be measured from the fair market value at the date of death.

Of course, many factors enter the analysis of whether to gift property while alive or to die owning it, including the age and health of the donor, and the expected appreciation of the property. A qualified estate planning attorney can help you consider basis issues in the context of your overall goals, both personal and financial.

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[ON TECHNOLOGY]

Take the time to protect your power supply

By John Agsalud

When the lights went out on the mainland not so long ago, I starting thinking how much our digital/wireless wonderland has been fueled by a commodity that we've taken for granted -- power from the grid.

As folks back East found out, when the Electronic Age blew its fuse, even the most simple undertaking, such as keeping your food cool with that snazzy new stainless steel fridge, became problematic.

I've always been intrigued by the amount of power used, both by businesses and households. For example, when my parents moved into their new house back in 1968, they had one black-and-white television, a fridge and freezer, a washing machine, a dishwasher, and a 30-gallon water heater. That was status quo in '68. In fact, I distinctly recall some of our neighbors continuing to wash their dishes by hand because the dishwasher used too much juice.

Of course, if you walked into a similarly equipped home nowadays, you'd think the family was the victim of a massive burglary. It seems that two TVs in every household is the minimum, not to mention two fridges (don't forget the one out in the garage). Clothes dryers, air conditioners, and high tech gear such as DVD players, VCRs, PCs, printers, and on and on.

So what, if anything, has HECO done to ensure that we'll have dependable power?

Dave Waller, an engineer at Hawaiian Electric, said the company has addressed growing demand by both increasing capacity and undertaking energy efficiency programs that manage load growth. A good example of this, he said, is the solar water program where HECO provides incentive payments for customers to install a solar water-heating system. He said this technology can reduce electricity costs for a typical household by about one-third.

What does HECO recommend that the small business or home do to mitigate problems associated with overloading and power outages?

Waller said most outages on Oahu are caused by automobile accidents slamming into power poles or Mylar balloons contacting power lines. Whatever the cause, he said it's important for customers with computer gear or other equipment with continuous power needs to own a UPS (Uninterrupted Power Supply) or, in some instances, a generator.

Hawaiian Electric's Web site (www.heco.com) provides some useful tips on how consumers can ensure adequate protection and suggests purchasing inexpensive, off-the-shelf equipment such as surge protectors, UPS gear and the like.

HECO's Web site, while practical, is pretty basic, so I asked Waller what he did to protect his office. He said his home was built in 1948, so before even buying protective gear, he rewired his house and had a new service connection to the utility installed.

He worked closely with his electrical contractor to determine how each room in the home was utilized from a power standpoint and he factored in a possible addition to the home. He also made sure that the electrical system was grounded properly.

For his home office, he concluded that since his family used lap top computers, they didn't need a UPS but most certainly required a surge protector to shield phone lines and cable lines from voltage fluctuations. Surge suppression was a concern not just from external circumstances but also from appliances, phone lines or a cable connection. He reckoned that he spent about \$100 on the surge suppressors. Rewiring the house cost him close to \$5,000.

Gordon Bruce, an IT consultant (formerly chief information officer at the Estate of James Campbell) advises that homes and businesses first assess their power needs to determine what critical equipment they want protected and for how long. He then suggests you "oversize," or purchase a UPS with 20 percent more capacity than you need, to factor in future growth. Bruce recommends APC, a large manufacturer of UPS equipment. It offers an online tool to help you configure your UPS at www.apcc.com/template/size/apc/.

In some cases, a UPS might not be enough and you will need a generator. A UPS can handle short-term need, but is not designed to run your business during a power outage. Purchasing and installing a generator will run you at least several thousand dollars. Some buildings in Honolulu provide generator power, but not many.

Similarly, surge suppressors may not be sufficient if you have sensitive (expensive) equipment. Surge suppressors generally do a good job of preventing spikes, but do not necessarily ensure a smooth flow of power (To get that, you need a line conditioner, which will also run a few thousand dollars).

To select the appropriate UPS you'll need to list the variety of computer, processor,

monitor, or printer, the number of internal hard drives, peripheral devices (cable/DSL modems, routers, switches, etc.) and your site voltage. Then determine how long you want run time to be during a power failure.

For most systems, a five-minute window provides plenty of time to shut down your system safely. Most UPS manufacturers provide software that will automatically shut down your system if an outage is detected.

One additional comment: Printers should not be plugged into the UPS backup power plug. There's really no need to keep a printer going during an outage and they draw a very large amount of power from more critical systems such as your CPU.

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