

TREE PRUNING & LESSONS FOR DOWNSIZING THE WORKFORCE

By Carol Bergeron



When you live in a condominium complex, like I do, getting things done around the house can be tricky. In community living, everyone has opinions expressed with great passion whether they hover around analyzing the root cause, alternative solutions, best providers, budgets, etc. God bless the elected trustees who weigh the inputs and make decisions which will delight some and disappoint others.

Accolades go to my trustees on a recent, contentious situation. It involves trees, yes trees. At our fall annual meeting it was announced that 6 tall, healthy, pine trees, wedged into a tight space on a slope between parking and a walkway to townhomes, were chartered for slaughter. This got my attention since the targeted casualties are located directly outside my front door.

Several years earlier we had a problem where the tree branches obstructed the walkway from all sunlight. The snow from the branches would fall onto the shady walkway in uneven large clumps and freeze overnight thereby making the walkway treacherous to navigate. Increased shoveling and sanding did not cut it. I took a few spills myself before the situation was largely remedied by pruning low hanging tree branches and bows.

The safety problem apparently carried over from prior years and the final solution was scheduled for 2009 implementation; cut down all 6 trees. Gasp! Removing all 6 trees might completely solve one problem but certainly had the potential to create others like ground erosion and drainage problems (ice skating anyone?). Their removal would adversely impact the positive value trees add to any property: aesthetics, real estate value, energy savings, noise pollution barrier, air and water quality preservation, pavement protection, etc.

Long story short, following the annual meeting concerned residents did some digging and suggested an alternative solution. Our assumption: trees grow. Our solution: selectively and routinely prune tree limbs and bows.

The trustees could have dug their heels in but instead they had the courage to: learn more about the situation, reject an across the board tree slaughter and adopt a holistic approach that addressed safety concerns without compromising the long-term value of the property.

Here comes the connection. Downsizing the workforce unfortunately has become commonplace these days. I shudder when thinking about labor force reductions implemented via an across the board slashing because of the huge potential for destroying long term organizational value. Eliminating jobs is tough stuff and no one I know takes it lightly. If it's your only option then you are best served by establishing the right balance between short and long term mission critical priorities and selectively pruning resources that do not support those priorities. True, sometimes entire limbs will need to come down. But at the end of the day your long-term viability depends on roots, a trunk and primary branches that are healthy and strong.

Routing List

I am happy to report that while writing this month's newsletter from my toasty home office, I got a front row seat and watched the tree huggers thoughtfully and selectively prune my great pines. It was heartwarming when I think of the alternative.

For those of you facing layoffs, there is lot you can do to re-bolster productivity among remaining employees. Give me a jingle and I'd be delighted to discuss ideas with you.

Upcoming Events

A Strategic Approach to Family and Small Business Compensation

Thursday, February 12, 2009, 8:30 to 1:30, Montpelier, VT

Sponsor: Vermont Family Business Initiative

Register: <http://vfbcompensation.eventbrite.com>

Strategic Workforce Planning

Tuesday, April 21, 2009, 9:00 to 4:30, Sturbridge, MA

Sponsor: Employers Association of the North East

Register: www.eane.org

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