

## Plan ahead: No boss, employee is 'indispensable'

By Holly Culhane, Contributing Columnist



Do you believe you are indispensable at work? Would the world fall apart if you took some time off? Would your business stop running?

If you have ever been summoned to jury duty, you would be left with the impression that many people are the linchpins upon which their companies are held together.

During questioning by attorneys, we hear a wide range of reasons why one potential juror or another should be "excused" from serving. But the most common excuse is that a long absence from work, or sometimes away from an individual's business, would be an overwhelming hardship.

With sufficient planning, the hope is that everyone should be able to take time off from work, whether it is to serve on a jury or to go on vacation. The results of this planning will benefit a business and its employees in many ways beyond just covering for absences.

Whether we get sick, someone in our family needs help, or we want to take vacation, at one time or another, we need to take time off from work. To keep our businesses or work units running smoothly during our absences, we need to develop plans to delegate responsibilities.

As we look to 2015, many of us are already discussing vacation plans and those of our employees and co-workers. Planning now for these absences will help keep businesses productive and strong, whether or not "the boss" or some other key employee shows up for work.

Some steps you can take to develop such a plan include:

--Update responsibilities. Ask each employee and supervisor to write a summary of their primary responsibilities and update their job descriptions. This will help identify ways to complete work when an employee is absent. But interestingly, this step also may reveal "perspective gaps." An employee's and management's list of responsibilities may differ and need to be reconciled. Include in this updated list current contact information for key employees and clients.

--Delegate. From this updated list, determine logical individuals and avenues in which to delegate responsibilities. Communicate delegated assignments in writing to all employees.

--Training. Cross train employees to perform delegated tasks. Before a planned absence, begin transitioning work between employees. Ensure that systems have been set up to share critical documents.

--Update projects. Before an absence, ask the employee or supervisor who will be gone to update well in advance the status of projects under his or her direction. This update should be communicated "up and down" the chain of command.

--Clean desks. Before an employee or supervisor leaves for vacation, jury duty or some other reason, require him or her to clean off their desk. This should result in "loose ends" being tied up and important documents returned to files, where they can be easily found.

We all would like to see ourselves as indispensable. But a company that cannot survive the absence of the boss or a key employee is inflexible and vulnerable to unforeseen events. Spending time now to plan for absences will ensure a company's healthy future and continued success.

***This article written by Holly Culhane first appeared online and in The Bakersfield Californian on Thursday, November 27, 2014. Holly Culhane is president of the Bakersfield-based human resources consulting firm P.A.S. Associates. She can be contacted through her website [www.pasassociates.com](http://www.pasassociates.com) and through the [PAS Facebook](#) page or by phone at 631-2165.***

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