

# Turning West for News

*A Publication for Friends and Clients of M. H. West & Co., Inc.*

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## **Message from the President**

In this issue M. H. West & Co., Inc. marks the unveiling of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial in Washington, D.C. His contributions to America remind all of us that the strengths of mind, the inventiveness, and the persistence that human beings can bring to a job know no barriers of disablement, age, gender, race, or nationality.

In 1997 it is time for us to embrace and act upon the belief that organizations benefit most when they have no presumptive barriers that limit the flow of talented people into their domains. To that end employers need to be prepared to:

*Asses the quality and characteristics of their facilities and their proposed programs to know that they offer comfortable environments and achievable work programs for prospective employees. In that context, disability is only one of many employee criteria which the environments and scenarios must accommodate.*

*Construct personnel policies which recognize that competent and committed employees are also committed to meeting family obligations and personal long term goals. In that context, parents' child-rearing obligations are one of the many criteria which personnel policies must take into account.*

*Provide recruitment methods which reach deeply and broadly into the reservoir of possible talent. In that context, reaching members of various minority groups who have not thought it possible that they can be considered for positions in the organization.*

*Institute problem-solving, conflict and communications strategies which recognize that human beings working together in deadline-driven enterprises do need recognized outlets for coping with their personality, style and other differences.*

*Offer seminars and workshops which include goal setting, stress management, personal development, and diversity training, as a means for anticipating the aspirations and concerns which will emerge as people settle into their roles in the organization. In that context, a sustained cooperative search for solutions is a cost-effective way to take advantage of the diverse perceptions people bring to their work.*

In a report recently completed for a large Virginia corporation, I indicated that "whatever process is used by a business to improve performance and to position the business for both sustainability and growth, the success will be built upon the strength of the people within and outside the organization." I believe FDR could "buy-in" to this statement.

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## **THINKING OUT OF THE BOX**

### **GOSSAMER CURTAINS OR PLASTIC BLINDS**

**(By Dr. John R. Rothermel)**

It is a part of our nature as human beings to make distinctions about people the first time we meet them. The question is not whether we informally characterize people but whether we use gossamer curtains or plastic blinds to distinguish them thereafter. Let us take some examples:

1. Are you surprised when you see a heavy person walk swiftly across a room, or choose a bird's size lunch from a buffet?
2. Does it confound you to discover quickness of mind in a person who is slow of speech?
3. Are you surprised by a short male who shows no particular desire to be in a "fast-track" job?
4. Have you been astonished to meet an Asian-American who confesses he or she has no talent for mathematics?
5. Are you surprised to hear a tall black American say he has never been interested in playing basketball or a Cuban-American say he does not follow baseball?
6. Would you be taken aback if you saw a 75-year old man typing orders into a computer with the same dexterity and speed of a 25-year old?
7. Are you surprised to meet a wheel-chair dependent woman who regularly competes in marathons?
8. Finally, how often have you been disappointed in the job performance of the superbly dressed, polite, articulate, briefcase-carrying, thirtyish male or female who has to be let go in six months for erratic performance on the job?

If in these examples you confess to being surprised or astonished, then it may be because you have lowered the plastic blinds around that first impression instead of suspending it in a gossamer curtain. If you are inclined to stiff inferences in cases like these, then perhaps you need to ask yourself whether you are allowing those same inferences to guide your expectations about what new employees may do on the job.

Are you, in fact, habitually dropping plastic blinds around a newcomer, thereby constricting your future objectivity about her or him? Or can you convert those plastic blinds to gossamer curtains, easily removable, and never more than lightly touching the image you have of a newcomer?

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## **DID YOU KNOW THAT?**

During his presidency, Franklin D. Roosevelt presided over the largest re-make since Lincoln of the United States Government's relationship to the American people.

In his first term he supervised the reform of agriculture, of the banking and credit industry, of the generation and distribution of power, of the conservation of natural resources, of the trading of securities, of the creation and maintenance of the nation's infrastructure, of industrial labor relations, and of financial assistance to the country's elderly and unemployed, to name some but not all of his domestic achievements.

In his third term he correctly forecast and lead the country in its preparation for a looming war. As commander-in-chief, he actively prosecuted the war--travelling by plane and boat to Casablanca, Cairo, Tehran, and the Crimea during the war years to plan ground strategy and prepare for the future peace. In 1942 he conceived the idea of the United Nations and set in motion the postwar international conference in which it was created.

He pursued the office of the president in four arduous campaigns, going to the people in stand-up speeches. He gave four nomination acceptance speeches, four inaugural addresses, and three State of the Union messages all while standing up.

Despite long days in the oval office, he was an active entertainer at White House dinners and special events, including the first state visit by Britain's King and Queen. Notwithstanding a heavy schedule of wartime meetings, he found time to visit defense plants, watch troops on maneuvers, and participate in public events in support of the war effort.

He relaxed from his official duties by going sailing, fishing, driving his car, taking the train back and forth to Georgia, playing cards, collecting stamps, and mediating the many struggles for power and recognition among his many senior government appointees.

Yet from the day he took office to the day of his death he was in a wheel chair, able to stand only because of his leg braces and to rise to his feet only with the help of others.

## WORDS OF WISDOM

--It is common sense to take a method and try it. If it fails, admit it frankly and try another. But, above all, try something.

--Democracy is not a static thing. It is an everlasting march.

--The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much. It is whether we provide enough for those who have to little.

*Franklin D. Roosevelt*

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## BUILDING ON THE LEGACY OF FDR

Industries across America are gaining reservoirs of competent people as they open up their hiring to people with disabilities. Still, the commitment of a business to integration of people with disabilities into its workforce may lead an employer to ask some questions about the process of hiring, of training, and of deployment: questions that employers have asked in the past as they hired other people who had other characteristics new to the organization.

M. H. West & Co., Inc. has assembled a portfolio of consulting services for employers. Among these is a new product called "*Solutions*". *Solutions* offers businesses and organizations consulting services that can be used individually or in a combination to comply with laws involving people with disabilities and other protected classes.

*Solutions* enables organizations and businesses to achieve "Bottom Line" projections by avoiding penalties and negative publicity from non-compliance with the laws like the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act and the Family and Medical Leave Act and Executive Order 11246. *Solutions* identifies incentives and other benefits for employees and the employer to work together to accomplish many goals. Teamwork, effective communications and understanding are other qualities that develop between employees and the employer.

## FACTS & FIGURES OF NON-COMPLIANCE

- A police officer was **awarded \$500,000 for retaliation** for complaining about sex and national origin bias. (**Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**)
  - A clerk was **awarded \$55,000 for disability bias** when fired after revealing his HIV status. (**Americans with Disabilities Act**)
  - A hospital, supervisor and human resources official must **pay \$58,000 in back pay and benefits** to a nutritionist fired for inadequate documentation of her son's illnesses. (**Family and Medical Leave Act**)
  - A company was subjected to a **penalty of \$2.4 million** for failure to accommodate a person with a disability. (**Federal Rehabilitation Act**)
  - A television station was required to **pay a former employee \$224,000** for age discrimination when he was fired. (**Age Discrimination in Employment Act**)
  - A sales representative was **awarded \$102,000** because his employer fired him after learning of his epilepsy and brain tumor. (**Americans with Disabilities Act**)
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