

*by Boyd Byers*

## **Life is Unfair, But Your Workplace Doesn't Have To Be**

The satirical newspaper "The Onion" recently reported the following "news" story:

"For the 50 billionth consecutive week since its inception, life was revealed to be unfair Monday. Death and suffering continued to be distributed randomly among the planet's life forms, with such potentially mitigating factors as solid community standing, genetic superiority and previous good works in no way taken into account. Despite the effects of the Code of Hammurabi, the U.S. Bill of Rights, and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, life is expected to remain unfair far into the foreseeable future."

### ***Employee survey***

Many workers see their employers as unfair (which is no surprise to those of you who have spent much time in human resources). According to a recent study, only 54 percent of employees believe their employers treat them fairly. The primary concerns are about fairness in pay (50% positive) and the way policies are carried out (45% positive).

### ***Why fairness matters***

Why does it matter whether workers perceive their workplace as unfair? Employee perceptions of unfairness can result in higher employee turnover and make recruiting new employees more difficult. Fairness concerns can also be detrimental to morale, negatively affecting efficiency and productivity. In addition, employees who believe they have been treated unfairly are the most likely to file legal actions against their employers.

What can you do to gain your workers' trust? Review your policies. Review the way you implement and enforce your policies. Review your pay practices. Are they fair? Of course, fairness, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. In evaluating whether your policies, practices, and employment decisions appear "fair," don't look at them from your own perspective, but consider whether 12 strangers picked at random from the local shopping center (your prospective jury) would think so.

Communicate your policies and decisions to employees up front to nip in the bud any possible misunderstanding or lack of knowledge that may foster feelings of unfairness. When an

employee makes a complaint of unfairness, you may need to meet with him and explain the basis for the policy or reason for the action. To the extent appropriate (and in many instances, it's not appropriate), empower your employees and let them participate in the decision-making process.

***Bottom line***

It's a fact of life that life is sometimes unfair. You nevertheless need to make every effort to ensure not only that your employment decisions and policies are fair, but also that your employees perceive them as fair.