



MERIT
resources

LETTER FROM JOEL



Happy New Year, and welcome to issue #3 of Merit Resources' *m.pact* newsletter!

January always represents an opportunity for us all to reflect on the past 12 months and to plan for everything we hope to achieve in the New Year. As we look forward, we hope 2010 represents a time for us all to see the economy continue to improve and for our organizations to prosper. As always, Merit Resources is here to make employment easy for you to help achieve that result!

With many sweeping changes on the horizon, we will continue to be challenged by the complexities of having employees. From national healthcare legislation to new employment regulations to increased rates and regulations for unemployment and beyond, the one thing we know for sure is that having employees is getting harder every day.

Rest assured that Merit is on top of it all and is here to make sure you can remain focused on your prosperity and growth in 2010. As always, we thank you for your business and your trust. Happy New Year!


Joel Duncan
CEO

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Story

New Year,
New Website

Human Resources

Deciphering GINA

Risk Management

Winter Driving Tips

Employee Benefits

Fitness at Your Desk
COBRA Subsidy
Extensions

Character Counts

Being Your Best &
Doing Your Best

Payroll

Safety Net

IT Development

Data Security

Merit Resources will soon be launching a refreshed and revised website at www.MeritResources.com! The new site will be primarily a cosmetic update and will still contain much of the information and materials you are familiar with from the previous version.

Some of the new features will include a great new animated video that explains the concept of PEO, video testimonials from several of our clients and complete information about Merit's corporate mission and values, ESAC accreditation, management team and more. If you'd like to be featured in one of our video testimonials, please contact Andy TeBockhorst at andy.tebockhorst@meritresources.com.

As we continue to improve the website, one of our top priorities will be additional functionality for the eMERIT client and employee HR portals.

Watch for the addition of event calendars, useful links to various websites, a number of videos ranging from workplace safety webinars to new employee enrollment, etc., and a resource library full of white papers, forms and other useful materials related to employment and much more.

**MERIT RESOURCES.COM:
NEW WEBSITE!**



POLL

As we get the ball rolling in 2010, we know that our diverse list of clients have different plans for their businesses. This survey will seek to provide some insight into changes in salary, size of staff, and predicted changes in revenue in the new year for our clients. Please click through and complete the survey. We will report on the results in the next *m.pact* newsletter.

[-Click here to take our Poll-](#)

... we make employment easy

MERIT RESOURCES • 800.336.1931 • www.meritresources.com





MERIT
resources

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Story

New Year,
New Website

Human Resources

Deciphering GINA

Risk Management

Winter Driving Tips

Employee Benefits

Fitness at Your Desk
COBRA Subsidy
Extensions

Character Counts

Being Your Best &
Doing Your Best

Payroll

Safety Net

IT Development

Data Security

HUMAN RESOURCES DECIPHERING GINA

In May of 2008, President George W. Bush signed the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA), which became effective on November 21, 2009, and applies to private employers with 15 or more employees, and to all state and local government employers without regard to the number of employees. GINA will protect Americans against discrimination based on their genetic information when it comes to health insurance and employment.

GINA covers genetic information of an individual and the genetic information of family members (for example, in determining family health history of disease). GINA does not cover an individual's manifested disease or condition—a condition from which an individual is currently experiencing symptoms, receiving treatment or has been diagnosed; however, it does cover the manifestation of a disease or disorder in family members (family history).

GINA outlines the following activities as unlawful employment practices and as discriminatory on the basis of genetic information:

- Limiting, segregating or classifying an employee, or depriving that employee of employment opportunities, on the basis of genetic information.
- The request, requirement, or purchase of genetic information of the individual or a family member of the individual except in rare cases.
- The use of genetic information in making decisions regarding admission to or employment in any program for apprenticeship or training and retraining, including on-the-job training.

Furthermore, employers should be aware that it is unlawful for an employment agency, labor organization or training program to fail or refuse to refer an individual for employment on the basis of genetic information, nor may the agency or labor organization attempt to cause an employer to discriminate against an individual on the basis of genetic information. For more information about GINA or other employment regulations, please contact your Merit Resources Client Services team.

**Sources: Coalition for Genetic Fairness and Genome.gov*



“I recommend Merit Resources to any business or organization seeking relief from the hassles of administering a pension program or going into the marketplace to purchase employee healthcare benefits. Merit does all the negotiating and they’ve done a great job getting us good, affordable healthcare coverage.”



— Suzanne Conrad,
CEO, Iowa Donor Network



... we make employment easy

MERIT RESOURCES • 800.336.1931 • www.meritresources.com





IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Story

New Year,
New Website

Human Resources

Deciphering GINA

Risk Management

Winter Driving Tips

Employee Benefits

Fitness at Your Desk
COBRA Subsidy
Extensions

Character Counts

Being Your Best &
Doing Your Best

Payroll

Safety Net

IT Development

Data Security

RISK MANAGEMENT WINTER DRIVING TIPS

Obviously winter is upon us (in a big way!), so that means the snow and ice have hit the roads. Even though it is best to avoid driving in winter weather, making sure you and your car are prepared is your best defense against bad conditions. Follow these helpful tips to stay safe on the road.

While you have very little control over the road conditions, here are a few things you can control:

- **Speed.** Decrease your speed and leave yourself plenty of room to stop. You should allow at least three times more space than usual between you and the car in front of you. This will give you time to brake gently to avoid skidding. If your wheels start to lock up, ease off the brake.
- **Visibility.** Turn on your lights to increase your visibility to other motorists. Keep your lights and windshield clean.

Remember, snow plows and sanding trucks have very limited visibility and you are safer not to pass them. You're likely to find the road in front of them is worse than the road behind.

- **Use the Road Most Traveled.** Be especially careful on bridges, overpasses and infrequently traveled roads, which will freeze first. Even at temperatures above freezing, if the conditions are wet, you might encounter ice in shady areas or on exposed roadways like bridges.
- **Don't assume your vehicle can handle all conditions.** Even four-wheel and front-wheel drive vehicles can encounter trouble on winter roads. Use low gears to keep traction, especially on hills. Don't use the cruise control or overdrive on icy roads.
- **Keep an emergency kit in your car.** Include the essentials: water, food and warmth. After these basics are included, then you can add other necessities such as an emergency light, first aid items, tools and other accessories.

* "Winter Driving Tips" courtesy of Holmes Murphy.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS/WELLNESS KEEP YOUR FITNESS RESOLUTION . . . AT YOUR DESK!

With a new year upon us, many may have decided to get physically fit in 2010. While joining a gym and getting into a workout routine are great ways to shape up, there are also a few things that you can do at work to keep your metabolism high and your heart rate pumping.

Strengthen Those Muscles!

- **Squats:** Stand in front of your chair with feet shoulder width apart. Squat down, pretending you are going to sit in your chair, then come back to standing position.
- **Knee Extensions/Flexors:** Seated at your desk, lift one leg off the chair, extend the foot straight out and lower it back down, stopping short of the floor. Try 15 each leg.
- **Wall/Desk Push-ups:** Stand and put your hands on the wall or desk. Walk feet backward, so your back is straight and bottom is down, and then do push-ups against the wall or desk. Try 15.
- **Abdominals:** Seated and sitting tall, suck the bellybutton into the spine, hold 15 seconds and relax. Repeat 15 times.

Stretch and Flex!

- **Reach for the Sky:** Sit tall, extend arms up and reach. Hold 30 seconds, and then reach to the right side and the left side.
- **Touch Your Toes:** Stand and bend at the hips, reaching for your toes with your knees slightly bent.
- **Chest Opener:** Sit tall and grasp your hands behind you, sticking out the chest. Hold for 15 seconds.
- **Hug:** Wrap your arms around your body, grabbing the opposite shoulder blades. Try to separate your shoulder blades with your hands, keeping your chin to your chest.
- **Seated Twist:** Sit up straight. Twist in your chair, keeping your hips stationary. Twist from the lower back all the way up to your head looking over your shoulder.
- **Neck Stretch:** Sitting up tall, drop your ear to your shoulder. Hold the stretch 30 seconds on each side.

As always, discuss your plans and goals with your physician before embarking on any new fitness program.

... we make employment easy

MERIT RESOURCES • 800.336.1931 • www.meritresources.com





COBRA SUBSIDY EXTENSIONS

EDITOR'S NOTE: The information below about changes and additions to employment law is intended to keep you informed about employment trends, and does not indicate a necessity for any kind of activity on your part. As your HR provider, Merit Resources stays on top of all issues related to employment for you and contacts you directly if it requires you to take any action. If you have questions about COBRA, the jobs bill or any other legislative issues, please contact your Merit Resources Client Services Team.

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Story

New Year,
New Website

Human Resources

Deciphering GINA

Risk Management

Winter Driving Tips

Employee Benefits

Fitness at Your Desk
COBRA Subsidy
Extensions

Character Counts

Being Your Best &
Doing Your Best

Payroll

Safety Net

IT Development

Data Security

President Signs Law to Extend COBRA Subsidy, Jobless Benefits

By Bill Leonard, SHRM

President Obama signed legislation into law on Dec. 21, 2009, that extends for six months a federal subsidy to help unemployed workers acquire health insurance through their former employers' healthcare plans. The new law will take effect immediately.

As expected, the Senate acted quickly and approved the measure on Dec. 19, 2009, three days after the House had passed the proposal. The new law provides an extra six months of federal subsidy payments that allows unemployed workers to purchase healthcare coverage guaranteed by the Consolidated Omnibus Reconciliation Act, better known as COBRA. The new law extends eligibility for the subsidy program for two months.

The extensions to the COBRA subsidy were added to the Department of Defense (DOD) spending package (H.R. 3326), which passed both the House and Senate by overwhelming margins. The DOD spending bill included an amendment that will provide an additional 13 to 20 weeks of unemployment benefits. Under the new law, unemployment insurance benefits will increase by \$25 a week.

"This bill ensures that workers who have lost their jobs through no fault of their own will not lose the unemployment and health benefits they rely upon to provide for their families," said Rep. Charles Rangel, D-N.Y., chair of the House Ways and Means Committee. "The immediate benefits and assistance provided in this bill help provide some measure of economic security for millions of our fellow Americans struggling during this holiday season, helping ease their pain as they search for their next job opportunity."

The new law extends the duration of the COBRA premium subsidy payments from nine to 15 months. The law changes the eligibility date for the program from December 31, 2009, to the end February 2010. According to the law, workers who are laid off from their jobs on or before February 28, 2010, can qualify to receive the subsidy payments.

The eligibility deadline and duration of the subsidy payments has created some confusion for employers who must notify laid-off employees about the program and then track and verify that workers are eligible to receive the subsidy. The subsidy was part of the federal stimulus package that was enacted in February 2009 and pays 65 percent of the monthly health insurance premiums for COBRA-provided coverage. Subsidy payments began running out for unemployed workers on Dec. 1, 2009, which compounded confusion over the program as media reports stated that the COBRA subsidy was expiring on that date.

Continued on next page.



... we make employment easy

MERIT RESOURCES • 800.336.1931 • www.meritresources.com





COBRA SUBSIDY EXTENSIONS CONTINUED

Jobs Bill Approved Narrowly

A similar extension to the COBRA subsidy was included in a jobs creation bill (H.R. 2847), which was also approved by the House on Dec. 16, 2009. The jobs legislation passed by the narrow margin of 217–212 and now moves on to the Senate. Senate leaders have stated that they will not begin debate on the proposal until January 2010.

The measure combined \$50 billion in spending for public works and infrastructure projects with another \$50 billion

in aid to states and local governments, which are facing major budget deficits.

Republican leaders in the House denounced the proposal, calling it “the son of stimulus” and stated that the federal government could no longer afford to support its deficit spending habits.

** Bill Leonard is senior writer for SHRM.*

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Story

New Year,
New Website

Human Resources

Deciphering GINA

Risk Management

Winter Driving Tips

Employee Benefits

Fitness at Your Desk
COBRA Subsidy
Extensions

Character Counts

Being Your Best &
Doing Your Best

Payroll

Safety Net

IT Development

Data Security



CHARACTER COUNTS! IN BUSINESS

BEING YOUR BEST & DOING YOUR BEST

We live in a society that has brought to life the adage “Do whatever it takes to win.” People use that phrase to indicate a level of commitment, whether in regards to little league athletics, political campaigns or professional success. Aside from a deep commitment, “whatever it takes” could also include a willingness to lie, cheat, steal or deceive.

Lack of good character is certainly evident in major corporate scandals of the recent past, including Enron, WorldCom, Tyco and Adelphi. These ethical failings were a reflection of corporate cultures that valued the bottom line and self-interest over good character.

While these examples certainly highlight a lapse in ethical judgment, good employees need more than just ethics (or moral character). Being a strong employee also requires performance character: striving for excellence and doing your best work.

Consider these examples of performance character:

- Solve problems efficiently and effectively
- Be self-directed
- Act with professionalism
- Keep yourself motivated
- Actively listen and take the perspective of others
- Look for causes that inspire you
- Know how to ask for help

A company that demonstrates both excellence and ethics can be more successful! To get started, identify your company’s values and then reflect those values in your mission statement. Those values will also help you guide your decision-making. By making your company one of character, employees can be happier, more productive and more fulfilled team members. The culture of your company can change overnight!

To learn more about us, please visit CharacterCountsInIowa.org.



... we make employment easy

MERIT RESOURCES • 800.336.1931 • www.meritresources.com





PAYROLL SAFETY NET

BY JOE GARDYASZ, BUSINESS RECORD

After pumping more than \$1 billion into Iowa's economy in 2009 in the form of unemployment checks to jobless workers, the state will require some employers to dig deeper this year to replenish the Iowa Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund.

A 50 percent overall increase in the state's unemployment tax is expected to generate an estimated \$175 million in added

revenues for the trust fund this year, and employers that cut the most jobs can expect to shoulder the heaviest additional tax burden. Iowa Workforce Development (IWD) officials hope the unemployment tax increase, the first in eight years, will begin to level out the trust fund's steep decline by the end of 2010.

[Read More ...](#)

IN THIS ISSUE:

Feature Story

New Year,
New Website

Human Resources

Deciphering GINA

Risk Management

Winter Driving Tips

Employee Benefits

Fitness at Your Desk
COBRA Subsidy
Extensions

Character Counts

Being Your Best &
Doing Your Best

Payroll

Safety Net

IT Development

Data Security

IT DEVELOPMENT DATA SECURITY

Every day, Merit Resources is working on your behalf to make employment easy for you. That includes keeping all electronic and physical records for our clients and your employees safe.

Merit Resources follows standard best practices that span across the healthcare and financial industries. Our approach to securing electronic information is modeled after the FFIEC (Federal Financial Institutions Examination Council) Information Security Framework.

The first phase in securing your electronic information is through the use of encryption technology. This ensures that employee data is transmitted over secure channels when using the eMerit Online HR Portal that provides encrypted access for our clients and worksite employees to access pay-stubs, direct-deposit forms, W2 and tax information that contain confidential data.

Merit Resources also encrypts our plan provider enrollment and management systems, as well as our internal management systems.

Soon, we will begin rolling out identity-based e-mail encryption to our clients and our worksite employees. This means if a client or an employee communicates with us through e-mail, we have the option to encrypt that message based on the sensitivity of the contents. At Merit Resources, we also install anti-virus and anti-spyware software on all workstations and servers, and all mobile computers and Smartphone devices are physically encrypted. Firewalls and Intrusion Detection sensors protect all physical entry and exit points of our networks. Finally, we utilize web-filtering software to protect against malicious and infected websites as well as phishing attacks.



... we make employment easy

MERIT RESOURCES • 800.336.1931 • www.meritresources.com

