

How to keep 'em down at the firm

COSMO'S WORLD



The signs are there, but employers may not be paying attention.

Top executives, top performers and other high-value employees are starting to get happy feet. And as the economy improves, retaining the best talent will become even harder.

"Most people feel under-appreciated right now," says **Dave Roberts of Core 2 Business Consulting** in Stoneham. "They really haven't had the opportunity to move somewhere else, but

(they) think its time." Yet a new survey of chief financial officers suggests companies have little in the way of plans to make 2005 a year of big bonuses or pay hikes. Sixty three percent of CFOs surveyed by **Robert Half International Inc.** said they won't increase annual raises in 2005 over 2004 amounts. Sixty two percent said bonus numbers won't change, either.

That could be a strategic error, unless incentives can make up the difference. But flexible

schedules and vacation time only go so far.

Because, really, is there any substitute for cold, hard cash?

"Companies without plans to increase raises and bonuses may be exploring other ways to reward personnel in the coming year," says **Max Messmer**, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International.

Meanwhile, a recent **Maritz Poll** suggests more than half of all workers feel their employers incentive programs are inadequate.

The struggle to keep top performers happy could become an economy-wide phenomenon if multiple industries expand at the same time.

Roberts, from Core 2, says he sees a real crisis emerging in the technology sector.

"You can't believe the number of calls I've had in the last five or six weeks," he says. "It's hard to keep people. And I do think organizations will have quite a challenge in keeping their valued employees."

Advice to employers:

Get ready to break open the checkbook.

"Look at your compensation structure as it exists now, and look at history over the last three or four years," Roberts says. "Try to figure out what incentives you can put it in (now). Try to get out in front. Don't wait for the economy to accelerate."

"Good people are (like) a bull market," Roberts says. "An employer needs to get in front of the trend."

By George, another crisis!

When things go bad, business is generally good for Boston's most notable spin-control technicians.

Just ask **George Regan**.

Some of the most dramatic meltdowns in corporate and civic order in recent weeks have required the services of Regan and his PR crew from Union Wharf to manage.

Costly leaks in the **Big Dig's** I-93 tunnel? Regan is flacking for belly-up Modern Continental - a likely scapegoat when all is said and done over the multimillion dollar screwup.

Internal turmoil over the handling of charity funds at the **Grand Lodge of Masons**? Regan's folks were signed up to manage a donation and publicity drive. Now they're coping with a huge mess and possible probe by Attorney General **Tom Reilly**.

And then there's **Brad Bleidt** and his Great American Swindle.

One night George and Co. are running a big party to celebrate 24-hour broadcasting at **WBIX-AM**. The next day Regan is running interference on a suicide attempt and the death blow struck to WBIX by Bleidt's 18-year Ponzi scheme.

"I am what I am," George was telling me on Friday. "Our whole company is a crisis."

Now it's getting bigger.

Regan's shop just opened three offices: One on Cape Cod, another in Hartford, Conn. and a third in Jupiter, Fla. That makes five office locations in all with Boston and Providence.

In Hartford, key clients include the **99 Restaurant** chain and **Audax, Inc.** — **Geoffrey Rehnert** and **Mark Wolpov's** venture firm. Regan folks are working for the **Steamship Authority** on Cape Cod, and handling PR for **Legal Seafoods** and the **Fort Lauderdale Country Club** in Florida.

Here in Boston, of course, it's one crisis after another for George and Friends.

But not at this newspaper . . . which is also a Regan client.

Just plenty of smooth sailing.

Winners to the end

The sad saga of WBIX, and the collapse of its business radio format, unfolded so quickly amidst the Bleidt drama it's still a little hard to grasp.

But I'd be remiss in not sending out my deepest regrets to all the good people who made it work while it lasted.

Mark Mills, in particular, was the picture of class and composure as he ran his afternoon show until the last moment possible — going out, so to speak, with his boots on. The same goes for **Chuck Jaffe**, **Steve Bailey** & **Charles Stein**, other on-air hosts and all the producers behind the scenes who made the station tick. Their hard work will be missed.



You can't be serious

John McEnroe may have had more people watch his tennis matches — in person — than watched his talk show on CNBC some nights.

The program was mercifully killed Friday as the

business-focused cable network continued its struggle to solve a prime-time programming void.

Yet in a memo to employees Friday, CNBC prime-time chief Bob Meyers made no mention of the awful ratings.

"John and the show consistently had top guests and people from all over the world waiting on line to be part of our in-studio audience," he said.

The show was averaging 75,000 viewers a night, less than half of the viewership

for business programming in the time slot before "McEnroe" hit the airwaves.

On some nights, it didn't get a Nielsen Media Research rating at all, meaning the audience was too small to measure.

It will be replaced next month by "The Big Idea," a talk show with advertising executive Donny Deutsch as host.

"Big Idea" has run on CNBC occasionally as a special.

—Herald wire services.

Patient safety comes first for Weingart

It's no small task to monitor patients' treatment and ensure their safety, but **Saul Weingart** is ready for the responsibility.

The Dana-Farber Cancer Institute recruited Weingart, a medical doctor and national expert on medical error prevention, to be vice president for patient safety and director of the **Center for Patient Safety**.

The Boston resident will concentrate mostly on directing the center, but he will also take care of pa-



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tients. Eventually, his focus will shift to the **Perini Family Survivors' Center**, which helps survivors regain their health after treatment.

Weingart's research into computer-order-entry systems to prevent medication errors gives him a good backdrop for strengthening

the center's safety standards.

He graduated with a medical degree from the University of Rochester, a Ph.D. in public policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and comes to Dana-Farber from the Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

■■■■ **Bitpipe Inc.** hired **Edward Passarella**, of Newburyport, as vice president of audience development. Passarella will enhance the overall research and search experience for the information technology professionals who use Bitpipe.com and the company's network.

■■■■ **Integrated Design Group Inc.** hired **Andrea Fisher**, of Hudson, as a mechanical engineer. Fisher comes from Process Facilities Inc., where she had a similar position. At IDG, she'll be fo-

cused on plumbing, fire protection and HVAC.

■■■■ **Deirdre Phillips** was appointed senior vice president and director of government relations at **Putnam Investments**. The Acton resident will build and maintain relationships with public officials and communicate the company's stance on legislation and regulatory matters.

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