



HR Consultant Finds Common Ground in Total Rewards

Sara J. Snoy, CCP, GRP, SPHR

Sara J. Snoy has covered a lot of ground during her career in human resources.

She has worked in the manufacturing and service industries, operated her own one-woman consulting firm and managed a corporate HR department in Mexico. Snoy even rode the dot-com boom and weathered the bust.

She also has found time to travel the world — including a recent whisky (whisky with no “e” is the Scottish spelling, she says) sampling tour of Scotland. She kayaks in the Pacific Ocean, volunteers at a historic mission and teaches classes for WorldatWork. Among all this, she still manages to find plenty of time to dote on her two gray rescue cats, Edwina and Eddie.



Hal Mattern
WorldatWork

Snoy, now a partner in a Southern California HR consulting company, recently took time to share her experiences with “workspan.”

workspan: How did you get involved in human resources?

Snoy: I have been working in human resources, which I studied in college, since I graduated. I was fortunate to run into a family friend after graduating and that led to my first job, which was in heavy manufacturing. I worked in labor relations at a gray iron foundry.

I remained in manufacturing environments — appliances, automotive parts and electronic components — for about the first half of my career. I spent two years as an expatriate working in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico. That experience convinced me that the rewards employees get from the workplace and the problems that human resources needs to solve are the same no matter what language is spoken or what cultural nuances are involved.

workspan: Tell us about your experiences working in HR in Mexico.

Snoy: I was asked by my employer at the time, General Instrument Corp., to go to its facility in Guadalajara to see if I could straighten out the HR department. It was a maquiladora [manufacturing] operation and the company wanted to maximize its productivity. There was tremendous interest in maquilas at that time, so the competition for employees was great and the turnover high.

I studied the workflow in the department, reorganized the staff to better focus their efforts and hired some top-notch people. Parts of the total rewards expectations at the time included automobiles for executives, three-meal-a-day food service and on-site medical staff, including a doctor. One of my biggest challenges

was convincing the U.S. executives that these benefits were necessary, even though they weren't customary in American workplaces. My last assignment in the project was to hire an HR manager. The HR staff went to the boss and asked if I could stay instead. So I did — for about two years.

workspan: What was it like living in Mexico?

Snoy: It was an incredible experience in so many ways, and it was a great time both personally and professionally. At first I was very lonely. As a tall blond it was hard for me to blend in, so I had to be very comfortable with my own company. I never did get a telephone in my apartment and only got a TV about a month before I left. But then I made friends, many of whom I am still in contact with today. When my husband and I moved to California seven years ago, we were able to locate close to a couple of my Mexican friends who had settled there, so I had instant connections.

workspan: What direction did your career take after Mexico?

Snoy: A couple years after repatriating I made the move to the service industry, initially with a national insurance broker, then with the premier truck leasing and logistics company, and then with Sears. Then came the dot-com boom and all the startups. I joined one and had a blast applying everything about total rewards — attracting, retaining and motivating employees — that I had learned from WorldatWork. Unfortunately, next came the dot-com bust. My employer became my first client as I started my own consulting practice helping small and midsized companies in the Chicago area.

A short time later my husband was offered the “transfer of a lifetime” to



Southern California. I'm originally from Chicago, and while it has been a fun experience living and working here in California, Chicago will always be home.

workspan: What do you do now?

Snoy: Incredibly, only a few weeks after moving to California and networking I met a woman, Kathi Guiney, who was doing the same thing I had done in Chicago. Our styles and philosophies really clicked and we began working together in our own company: Yes! HR Solutions (www.yeshrsolution.com; facebook.com/yeshrsolution).

We have clients of all kinds, primarily in Southern California. They include medical-device, manufacturing, pre-IPO, family-owned, employee-owned and publicly traded companies. We are generalists and do everything from recruiting to designing compensation systems to handbooks to training. With my WorldatWork background I do many compensation projects. It is so interesting to work one day with a company that is developing a water desalination process and the next day with one that has an FDA-approved

device for weight loss. But the fundamentals of total rewards apply to all of them.

workspan: What is it about total rewards that makes it applicable to so many different industries and companies?

Snoy: All organizations have two things in common: a mission and the need for people to make that mission happen. Total rewards is the connector. Total rewards is the path to attract, retain and motivate the right people to drive the mission. Whether the mission is safe nuclear energy or floral-scented bath and body products, the connection between the mission and the people who will accomplish the mission is critical. It is not just about salary and benefits. There are reasons someone is attracted to, say, hospice care as opposed to banking, and organizations use total rewards to connect with those reasons.

workspan: Tell us how you started teaching classes for WorldatWork.

Snoy: I have been an instructor for WorldatWork for more than 20 years. I initially attended a session because I was interested in the topic. Apparently my outspokenness caught the attention of the instructors, who asked if I would be interested in joining the faculty. It sounded like a lark, so I applied and here I am still. I have presented sessions all over the United States and in Puerto Rico, Canada and Bermuda.

workspan: What do you do outside of work? Do you have hobbies?

Snoy: I am a volunteer at the historic Mission San Juan Capistrano. We provide tours to more than 40,000 school children who visit the mission each year as a part of the fourth grade curriculum, as well as to adults who visit or attend corporate events. My claim to fame is the evening Warren Buffett and his

top investors had a dinner there and wanted tours during the cocktail hour. Bill and Melinda Gates were there, and I told Warren Buffett a ghost story.

My husband and I kayak in Dana Point Harbor, where I also work out regularly. To balance all that exercise we love trying new and interesting restaurants in the area.

My flexible schedule also allows me to be in a book club. The club has an international flavor with many foreign-born members. We read books from different countries and cultures. When we did U.S. presidential history — various books from Lincoln to Kennedy — it was fascinating to see the history I had grown up on interpreted through the prisms of European and Latin American history.

workspan: Do you like to travel?

Snoy: Earlier this year my husband and I went to Scotland to do some whisky tasting. We visited a number of distilleries on the island of Islay, but Glengoyne, outside of Glasgow, was our favorite. We have friends in Europe who we met through our cats. We became friends through an online chat room about pets, especially cats. We have gone with them twice to the Oktoberfest in Munich, and to Tuscany and the Chelsea Flower Show in London. We also met up a couple times in New York City.

In return they have visited us in Chicago as well as here in Southern California, and together we have explored national parks and animal shelters like Best Friends in Kanab, Utah. Who would have thought Edwina and Eddie would have led us to such fun international friendships and so many adventures? **WFS**

Hal Mattern writes and edits for WorldatWork publications. He can be reached at halmattern@cox.net.

Past ACA Board Member Passes Away

N. Bruce Ferris passed away at his home on the Oregon coast on July 31, 2011. Bruce served on the ACA Western Region Board and the ACA Board of Directors, and was an avid supporter of creating the certification programs. He was one of the principal founders of HR and compensation groups in San Diego, Orange County, Calif., and Portland, Ore. He sponsored numerous ACA courses through the local group network. Ferris had a long career in industry, principally with Maxwell Laboratories. His enthusiastic support for furthering our profession will be missed.