

MEDIATE THIS !

THE PASSED-OVER INTERIM DIRECTOR AND THE OUTSIDE HIRE

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator:

When our division director retired, his deputy stepped up as interim. He performed very well, and we all assumed the job was his. Last month, the front office shocked us by hiring an outsider. She seems very competent but is a little unsure of herself. The former interim is understandably demoralized. He has returned to his deputy post, and now he reports to her, which is painfully awkward for everyone. As an HR manager, how can I head off a derailment?

*Perplexed in
University City*

Dear Perplexed:

When an employee is named interim team leader, and that person applies to fill the job permanently, the organization is courting the kind of imbroglia you describe.

Some employers skirt that risk with an either-or caveat: individuals can serve in an acting capacity, or they can compete for the permanent post, but they can't do both.

In workplaces where interims can be candidates, smart executives prepare these managers for a possible letdown. Some even

plan ahead for how the interims might return gracefully to their former slots and how those jobs might be made newly attractive.

But the damage has been done here. In theory, your organization can stand on procedural ceremony by insisting that policies were upheld and everyone must adjust. But human nature has (as it often does) created a messy reality, and you are wise to seek an effective clean-up strategy.

Two mediation principles can help. The first is the awesome power of empathy in healing rifts. The second is a dispute resolution equation that one plus one sometimes equals three.

A senior executive who is trusted by your workforce should meet separately with both people to touch base. The script for both meetings is the same.

These two have been placed in difficult circumstances, and management is committed to improving the situation. Their personal leadership in that effort will be indispensable and deeply appreciated.

Each person should be assured that he/she is valued and supported. (The meeting with the ex-interim should not fall into the "Why her and not me?" rabbit hole.) The greatest contribution each can make now is to empa-



GETTY IMAGES

This week's question comes from a human resources manager who hopes to defuse an awkward situation posed by a new hire.

thize with the other's plight.

The new director can imagine how the ex-interim must feel, and he can imagine how disorienting her new job must seem.

Mediated cases are typically two-party conflicts. But when adversaries are members of a unit, like a family or a firm, we use a "three-party" approach. The third party is the unit itself. The unit's functional well-being is of paramount importance, and it

must take priority over individual desires for dominance or vindication.

In a follow-up meeting that includes both employees, they should be engaged in crafting a cooperative agreement that puts them on a stronger footing.

For example, in making decisions, she could consult with him and incorporate his input. When she reaches a decision, she should inform him first, he should get

behind it, and they should implement it with a united front.

This partnership won't coalesce overnight. Teamwork improves with practice over time. Management can nurture that with patience and encouragement. Such commitment will speak volumes to the rest of the team.

Finally, while it could be argued that the organization doesn't owe this deputy anything more than a paycheck, he did step into the breach at a critical juncture, and he deserves recognition.

If he makes this transition work, a commendation is in order — maybe a new title with a salary increase or a cash award for meritorious service.

The new director should submit the nomination, and she should lead the applause at the announcement.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as President of the San-Diego based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. **Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution?** Please share your story with The Mediator via email at mediatethis@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous. If you have questions, email Dinkin at lora.cicalo@sduniontribune.com

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

PUBLIC SAFETY: KAREN KUCHER

FBI says 'Think Before You Post'

The FBI has launched a national campaign that highlights the consequences people can face if they post hoax threats online that target schools and other public places.

The effort, dubbed #ThinkBeforeYouPost, reminds would-be pranksters that hoax threats are not a joke and could result in federal or state charges. If convicted, people making hoax threats could face up to five years in prison.

This FBI campaign follows similar moves by police and school districts over the issue of school threats, including the "if you see something, say something" public service announcements produced by San Diego students this month.

"We are all trying to do the same thing," said FBI spokeswoman Davene Butler. "We want to have people be aware we are looking at this and are taking it seriously. ... Everybody is looking for it."

As part of the campaign, billboards will be posted in some areas that highlight the #ThinkBeforeYouPost message, although no billboards are planned for San Diego

County. A video on the campaign has been posted on YouTube and a FBI podcast explores the topic.

The FBI said public assistance is crucial to curbing hoax threats.

"Early intervention can prevent a situation from escalating by identifying, assessing, and managing the threat. Remember, if you see something, say something. Hoax threats are not a joke, so think before you post," the agency said in a statement.

The FBI said anyone who sees potential threats or suspicious activity should contact law enforcement. Threats spiked in the months after the mass shooting in February in Parkland, Fla., left 17 people dead.

"If there is any reason to believe the safety of others is at risk, we ask that the public immediately reach out to their local police department by calling 911, or contact the FBI via tips.fbi.gov or over the phone (1-800-CALL-FBI)," the statement said.

karen.kucher@sduniontribune.com

NORTH COUNTY: J. HARRY JONES

Palomar opens Fallbrook campus

Ten years in the planning, Palomar College last week opened its new North Education Center in Fallbrook, which is designed to reduce the commute time for students who live in the northern reaches of the county, as well as some who live in Riverside County.

The campus is in the northeast corner of the intersection of Interstate 15 and state Route 76, where many homes are under construction near the 80-acre "interim village."

The village consists of more than 20,000 square feet of learning space in state-of-the-art modular buildings and more than 700 parking spaces off Horse Ranch Creek Road, which was built several years ago at the college district's expense. The campus also offers two science labs, a computer lab, seven new classrooms, and a learning resource center.

Palomar College District spokeswoman Laura Gropen said construction of permanent buildings will begin in a year or two. Palomar will begin by offering 40 courses at its Fallbrook location this summer, ranging

from biology and nursing to business and sociology.

Courses including "high-need, high-demand classes" that students desire for transfers to four-year state universities will be offered, said Jack Kahn, vice president for instruction. "Students will be able to do two associate degrees completely at the campus, one for business and one in sociology," he added.

Eventually, the campus will cover about 50 acres and offer far more classes, Gropen said.

Funded by Proposition M, a \$694 million general obligation bond, the North Education Center site was purchased in 2007 for about \$38 million. The budget for the interim village is about \$20 million.

The new facilities are at 35090 Horse Ranch Creek Road, which is just east of Interstate 15 off state Route 76.

jharry.jones@sduniontribune.com
Twitter: @jharryjones

THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

Gathering multiple viewpoints is key

Reporters' and editors' jobs call for them to gather multiple angles on a story to present as full an account as possible of the news.

A recent follow-up story on a fatal shooting by San Diego police was based on a witness who criticized officers' handling of the situation. A reader emailed furious over the story. She said it was biased, that the witness obviously hated police and his account must be false. She added that the article created contempt for police, who risk their lives every day.

Here's the background on the story. Officers answered a call about 11 p.m. May 27 in the southern San Diego community of Nestor. Police said callers described a man carrying a knife and walking into traffic. The U-T published a story online May 28, and it appeared in print on B1 May 29.

The story uses a San Diego police statement and the recollections of two witnesses, a husband and wife who went on the record, to provide an account of what had happened.

Reporter Deborah Sullivan Brennan went to the neighborhood May 28 looking for witnesses. The couple she quoted live on the corner of the intersection where the shooting occurred.

One of the witnesses in the story said officers ordered the man to drop the knife, but he refused. He said the man appeared disoriented and jabbed at officers with a pocketknife. The witness said police tried talking to the man, but he became increasingly agitated. Officers shot him with bean bags and a Taser, but he would not be subdued, the witness said.

Police said the man then charged at officers, and they opened fire, killing him.

The follow-up story ran online May 30 and in print on B5 May 31.

The story by reporter Karen Kucher was centered on another witness account of the shooting. Photographer John Gibbins talked to this witness while taking pictures at the scene, and passed the contact information to Kucher.

This witness, who went on the record, said he was inside a parked motor home about 20 feet from the shooting. He said police told the man to get on the ground and "next thing you know, they just started shooting."

The follow-up story reported that the witness said he did not see the man holding a knife or see the use of bean bags and a Taser. The piece included a paragraph that said other witnesses corroborated the police account that the man refused to drop a knife.

The story continues with the witness saying the shooting seemed excessive and questioning why police could not have used other tactics.

The reader angry over the follow-up story said in her email that the decision to publish the article was "appalling." An acquaintance of the reader also emailed supporting the claim of bias.

At first I questioned the appropriateness of writing the second story. How can the witness' veracity be gauged?

But after more thought, and talking to several editors, I believe the account is worthy of publication. It's widely accepted that witnesses' accounts vary. The follow-up story also said the witness' account differed from others and the police report.

Public safety editor Dana Littlefield, an experienced legal affairs reporter, said there was no obvious reason to dismiss the follow-up witness' account.

She has in her past reporting not used statements when people are getting basic facts wrong, such as time or location. That was not the case with this witness.

In responding to the readers who emailed, Littlefield presented what I believe is an excellent argument for publishing the story while rebutting the claim of bias.

"I appreciate your criticism, however, I have to disagree that the article is biased," Littlefield wrote.

"It is our responsibility to listen to and report various points of view when we cover incidents and issues.

"We wrote a story immediately after the shooting that contained the description of events as related by SDPD, and we included several comments in that story from two witnesses who corroborated the Police Department's account.

"When available, we followed up with a story that contained a different point of view — which is our responsibility — but also noted again that there were witnesses who agreed with SDPD's description of the shooting."

I did not find the follow-up article biased. It summarized the police account and the accounts from the other witnesses.

Also, the witness in the second story went on the record with his name. There is accountability in that. I believe the reporting responsibly presented an opposing view, which is part of proper journalism.

adrian.vore@sduniontribune.com

FROM THE ARCHIVES | LOOKING BACK OVER 150 YEARS

ESTIMATING THE GOOD LAND

The San Diego Union-Tribune will mark its 150th anniversary in 2018 by presenting a significant front page from the archives each day throughout the year.

Sunday, June 10, 1888

In the 1880s writer Theodore Strong Van Dyke profiled and promoted Southern California in a series of works, including two books on San Diego. In this article for The Union, he looks at the development potential of the backcountry in the wake of a land boom sparked by the arrival of the transcontinental railroad here in 1885. (At the time, the county of San Diego included much of the territory south of San Bernardino, from the Pacific Ocean to the Colorado River.)

Here are the first few paragraphs of the story:

THE BACK COUNTRY.

Vast Area Available for Immediate Settlement.

SOME INTERESTING FIGURES.

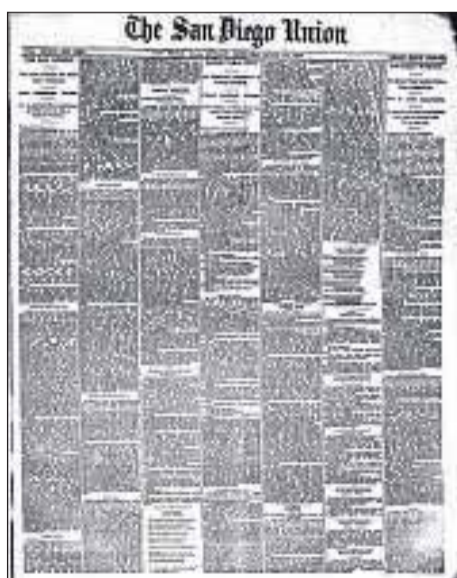
T.S. Van Dyke Says There is Enough Orange and Lemon Land in San Diego to Supply the Whole East.

Written for THE UNION—No. VI

To examine the inhabitable part of this county, with anything like the care required for a full idea of it, would take nearly two months of steady travel. Even then there would be hundreds of little side valleys, and pockets of land from fifty to 500 acres each, and many a bit of tableland quite as large, which the traveler could not see, and the existence of which he would not suspect but for the road leading toward it from the main highway. All these small tracts are now under cultivation and

supporting people whose numbers would astonish anyone who would take the pains to hunt them up.

It will be impossible in this series of articles to glance at all these in detail. It will be enough to run over the main portions, the reader always remembering that these small tracts surround all the larger tracts and in many cases, as in the Jamul and Santa Maria, may have the largest population, because the main valleys are not yet settled to any extent. In a book just published by Le Berthon & Taylor, of this city, I



have outlined the leading features of our county with selections of pictures that show resources instead of seabeach, antiquities and rocks, of which every man of sense knows we have enough and wonders whether we have anything else.

Before examining here the good land in detail it is proper to consider the question. What shall we call good land, or arable land?

Some very worthy persons have criticized me for limiting the area of land in this county available for immediate settlement to about 555,000 acres. They place it all the way from

2,000,000 to 4,000,000—the later being the fashionable figure. Both parties are correct enough perhaps. The difference is in the point of view. They include everything that can be inhabited in the year 3000, as it is in the most densely settled countries of Europe. They would show a man a hillside of good land half covered with boulders and say: "That land is first rate, you can plow around those boulders at first, and gradually blast them out year after year as you get richer from your olive and raisin crop. They raise olives and grapes on far rougher land than that in Europe. Why they even carry dirt up the hill-sides and lay it on terraces of rock."

Now this is all perfectly true, and all such places will, in some century, be settled. But a man who should invite a friend to leave his home in the East, to come here and live on such a piece of land would be quite liable to have his head broken when he took him out to look at it.

ESTIMATING THE GOOD LAND.

I estimate as good land such only as people will settle now, such as any reasonable man who had been in California long enough to know that land that cannot be irrigated is not wholly worthless, and that tableland and slope land is for many purposes better than the bottom lands, would be willing to pre-empt or homestead to-day; not what poor people who must have a home somewhere will take up some time in the distant future. This way of estimating necessarily excludes the Colorado desert, although it is certain that there are hundreds of thousands of acres upon it of which the soil is almost faultless and which will some day be reclaimed by water.