

The Five O'Clock News[®]

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\$4.95

April 2009

A Publication of The Five O'Clock Club[®]—www.FiveOClockClub.com

Vol. 23, No. 4

"One organization with a long record of success in helping people find jobs is The Five O'Clock Club."

FORTUNE



"...I bought my daughter a dress."

A Lesson in Becoming a Moral Compass

In his role as VP of Labor Relations at Mount Sinai Medical Center, New York, Jeff Cohen has been a strong advocate of hiring people with criminal records. He spoke of one memorable case, in which he made the decision to hire a man who had been convicted of manslaughter and had served six years in prison:

My interview with this man was an eye opener. He was completely honest. He referred to the crime 25 years ago as a mistake of his youth. He said that, if he had not taken the other man's life, he would himself have died that day. It was chilling. He told me he had three young daughters, and lived in one of the worst sections of New York because it was all he could afford: no one wanted to hire him because of his record. He was grateful for the opportunity to talk to me, but he also understood that he would not get the job.

Here I was facing a moral decision. I went to my own mentor, Dr. Norman Metzger, a giant in HR in the healthcare field. He told me, "Be the moral compass." After all, a great employer is not measured by how well people at the top are treated—but by how people who need help the most are treated. We offered him a job. He passed probation and is doing a fine job.

Three weeks ago I got a call that this gentleman wanted to see me. I had not seen him in more than eight

months, and I immediately imagined the worst. No one ever comes to see the VP of Labor Relations for anything good, ever. He entered the room, just as he had eight months earlier. He told me that he was truly enjoying working at Mount Sinai, and he was thankful that he had been given the opportunity. He had been working overtime and earning extra money. Then he looked up at me and said, "You know what I did? I bought my daughter a dress."



"During the interview, he told me he understood he would not get the job."

I have worked in labor relations for a long time, and pretty much nothing affects me. But this guy just hit me in the heart. He was so proud of himself. He had done something for his daughter and just wanted to tell me. So...you want to talk about social responsibility? Just do the right thing. ●

Also in this issue

- ◆ The Help of the Small Group
- ◆ How Supply and Demand Affect Your Search
- ◆ The Five O'Clock Club Process (4-page insert)