



Thursday, March 12, 1987 O&E



Legal restrictions, a company's personal considerations for maintaining a good records management department.

staff photo by STEVE FECHT

Records managers seek respect for 'forgotten' job

By Marie Gold
special writer

Ask Beth Sherwood about the company whose records department went up in smoke along with the building. "They went out of business, went bankrupt, because they couldn't save the documents," Sherwood said.

Of ask Richard Matyn about the company that disposed of some files they thought were useless.

"They got themselves in all sorts of trouble to the tune of billions of dollars because they could not produce the documents the court asked for," Matyn said.

Sherwood, president, and Matyn, vice president, are members of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators (ARMA), a 30-year-old organization founded to promote records and information management through educational study and research.

If the companies whose records were destroyed or discarded knew how to manage their records properly, the costly consequences could have been avoided. Helping companies decide what records management program will work for them is ARMA's specialty.

The group is holding its fifth annual spring seminar Wednesday, March 18, at the Dearborn Hyatt Regency, a daylong conference. Topics include how to set up a records system, legal requirements for records retention, disaster recovery, and how to lobby for new equipment.

COMPANY RECORDS, an often forgotten aspect of company operations, include all data relevant to every aspect of a company, from employee files to top-secret technologies developing within a department. Records management is a strict set of guidelines that businesses develop and depend upon to organize information and store it appropriately.

It includes everything from following state and national records retention regulations, to determining which storage system will work best for the company, to planning for disasters.

ARMA public relations chairman Jerry Van Loosen, vice president of sales at Van Loosen Enterprises Inc. in Redford, says that records retention programs are formulated by three factors. First are the legal restrictions, which dictate how long a company is legally required to retain documents. The rules are often confusing, he says.

Matyn, who works in the corporate records management department of Ford Motor Co. in Dearborn agrees. "Some of the retention schedules are outlandish."

ARMA International is currently pushing for uniform retention schedules.

Second is a company's personal needs, including storage space and maintenance costs.

"Historical importance is the third factor when deciding how long to keep records. Matyn says that a large portion of Ford's records are kept "virtually forever."

Without records retention, Ford's celebrated \$5-a-day pay rate and the design for the Model T might be secrets of the inclination.

Van Loosen says that retention schedules vary with each company, but about 85 percent of company records can be destroyed after 10 years of inactivity. After that time, he recommends destroying the data, but only after writing the retention plan into the company by-law.

"Don't be a pack rat with information," he said, because irrelevant data can come back to haunt a company — in the form of a court subpoena.

A company is required to present all relevant records unless they have been destroyed in accordance with a valid records retention program.

"Records retention program is one way of providing defense for a company," Van Loosen says. "You won't be responsible for something that you're legally not required to have."

Records retained past the legal requirement must also be produced when subpoenaed. These records can work against the company in a lawsuit. Had they been destroyed after the approved period, the company would not be responsible for their content.

But if records have been disposed of prematurely, the company can also incur costly damages.

VAN LOOZEN says that the majority of lawsuits concern former employee and benefits disputes. He cautions small companies that tend to handle employee claims on a personal basis to document everything and keep updated records in employee files. Failure to do so "opens themselves up to a liability that wouldn't be there if they handled the situation right the first time."

Large companies always have some litigation pending, Matyn says, and must be careful to follow every company and legal guidelines for each piece of data.

As important to a company as a retention policy is the management plan. Natural disasters, which cannot be avoided, can wreak havoc on a company if they are not planned for.

"Disaster recovery is a plan of how the company can get back on its feet the day after the fire," Matyn said. Knowledge of restoration techniques and backup copies of data stored off-site can save a company.

AS IMPORTANT as records management can be to a company, records managers are often given the status of file clerks. Sherwood said, often making it difficult to convince management to spend money on updating equipment. She is director of policy services at League Insurance Co. in Southfield.

When Sherwood's department members wanted equipment to set up a microfiche storage system, they needed to justify the cost to management. They explored how the new system could help other departments and itemized cost savings, mostly in paper expenses, from the current system.

The weekly report, a two-inch thick stack of paper, was delivered to management with two tiny sheets of microfiche placed on top. Attached was a note which said that with a fiche system, the pocket-sized sheets would replace the stack of paper.

The system was approved," Sherwood said.

Microfiche, as well as micrographs and magnetic tape, are replacing paper filing systems at many companies where records managers recognized the potential savings from the more advanced systems.

But even the most advanced system cannot help a company whose records are in disarray.

"If you can't manage your records, there is no reason to have them," Sherwood said.

ARMA's Detroit chapter, with 150 members and an annual budget of \$25,000, meets monthly to exchange information and discuss the progress of ELP, Elimination of Legal Size Files from records departments nationwide.

The organization, serving the tri-county area, also sponsors scholarships for records professionals and students. The professional award pays up to \$300 and the student award up to \$120. Sherwood can be reached at 597-1500; Matyn at 322-3880.

JOBS

Private Industry Council scrambles to find clients

Three years ago, Corinne Kelly was a 17-year-old single mother busking tables at two local restaurants and not making ends meet. Her mother called the Oakland County Private Industry Council for help.

Today, Corinne is employed in data processing by her local school district.

"I picked up on things pretty fast," she says of her on-the-job computer training experience. "Now I've got the health insurance, I bought a car and I'm going to move into my own place. I'd like to go to college some day."

PIC administers money from the Job Training and Placement Act of 1982 designed to retrain low-income and unemployed workers to industry standards. In an effort to be more responsive to the market demand for job skills, the council is composed primarily of individuals from private industry who direct training programs at private sector employment. PIC's area includes all of Oakland County except the city of Pontiac and several of its adjacent communities.

This year PIC is aggressively recruiting low-income and unemployed workers for its federally funded job training and placement programs. Target groups include single female heads of household, youth between the ages of 16 and 21, people over 55, teenage parents, high school dropouts, veterans, displaced homemakers, handicapped people and low-income workers. All are encouraged to call the PIC hotline at 1-800-PIC-LINE.

UNLIKE ITS Wayne County counterpart, which is inundated with calls, Oakland County PIC has had "more of a problem getting the word out," said Karlann White, marketing assistant coordinator. "In Wayne County, one out of five residents are eligible for the programs. In Oakland County, that ratio is one out of 20."

PIC's marketing program for the next year includes placing posters along bus lines, in gas stations and retail outlets. It also has developed a 30-second video to launch this year's summer jobs program. PIC soon will begin recruiting 1,500 to 1,700 young people from low-income families through the PIC hotline.

Local community agencies, such as Southfield Community Placement, Oak Park Community Employment Service, and Troy VIP provide the job training and placement. Part of their job is getting the word out about their services.

"Youth is the hardest segment to reach," said Kathleen Strand, director of the Oak Park Community Employment Service. "I would also love to be able to recruit recently divorced females."

Troy VIP Director Dorothy Kultz agreed.

"A lot of people are eligible who don't think they are. We help the working poor as well as the handicapped and unemployed. We are really a grass roots program that cares about helping people."

PIC's FREE services include workshops to assess experience and interest, develop resume writing and interviewing skills. Classroom and on-the-job training is offered in a spectrum of fields that include clerical, maintenance, health care and computer repair.

"We help that person, listen to their problems and try to make a marriage in terms of work," according to Harold McKay, PIC

manager of employment and training. "We want people to know that there are programs out there that work. We can get to someone in a day. Two out of three of our clients make it in a job over 30 days."

PIC also meets the needs of local business through its pre-employment screening services and training programs tailored to individualized businesses.

Ted Meskin of Troy's DECO-GRAND explained how the program works in his plant where clients are trained in the use of computer-controlled numeric lathes, which turn and grind engine parts.

"They (Troy VIP) send us qualified applicants. We will be reimbursed 50 percent of their first six months' salary in exchange for training. We give people a chance to be gainfully employed."

Local businesses are encouraged to tap PIC's resources in meeting recruitment needs.

Numbers game hurts neediest

The Job Training Partnership Act and its associated private industry councils recently have come under attack for "creaming." By focusing their efforts on those who could find jobs on their own, PICs have been criticized for achieving placement goals at the expense of those who need help the most.

The subsidized job training programs have been termed "welfare for corporations" who would have to apply for such training anyway.

Harold McKay, manager of employment and training of the Oakland County Private Industry Council offers some insight into the problems Oakland County PIC deals with locally.

"As a business person, I believe in performance, measurement and outcome," McKay said. "Any one of our (training) contracts will have indicators of performance. What they haven't defined are some very basic things such as what's a placement."

Locally, 30 days is the required "retention" period used to define a placement. Critics argue that such parameters discourage the placement of high-risk trainees who lack good work characteristics but need a job the most. McKay counters that his council

chooses to "train people to the level of competency in the market place rather than generate placement numbers" while still maintaining credibility in the business community.

KATHLEEN STRAND is director of the Oak Park Community Employment Service, a subcontracting community agency, handling actual training and placement. She calls "creaming" a "non-issue."

"The vast majority (85 percent) of out-clients are on welfare. Troy VIP (a Troy-based subcontractor) works primarily with the handicapped. In order to qualify for our program, you have to be pretty poor. Sometimes we do get someone in our program with a degree, but they have other significant problems such as emotional problems. Given the qualifications to get into our program, you can hardly be considered cream. There are some people who are desperate that we don't reach, though."

Who are the "desperate" that the JTPA, its predecessor CETA, and society in general fails to reach?

Most program subcontractors and small businesses involved in

Please turn to Page 3



Cadillac Owners

Q: "Do you demand excellence from the people who service your Cadillac?"

A: Crestview Cadillac does.

The Detroit's Newest Cadillac Dealer strives for quality and excellence when protecting your investment. Individual attention starts the moment you are greeted at the door. We take time to listen to your individual situation. We take the time — because we care.

IF YOU BELIEVE IN PREFERRED TREATMENT
VISIT CRESTVIEW Cadillac

"THE SERVICE ALTERNATIVE"

Service manager Pete Wyskowski
Hours: 7:30-5:30 Monday thru Friday

Crestview

on Woodward, 1 Mile N. of Square Lake

333-7021

Cadillac

