



Businesses could start new year by reaching out, re-employing

By Denis Collins

Despite the current trend in downsizing — and the ecstasy of Wall Street every time a company announces a major layoff — the most socially responsible action a company engages in is employing people.

Four years ago, while attending an international conference for business ethics professors in Leuven, Belgium, I was stunned by a statue honoring a manufacturer that was proudly displayed in the middle of town. I asked a resident why such a statue existed. The simple, yet un-American response, "Because he employed us when we needed him the most."



Denis Collins

Meanwhile, you have downsized and re-engineered your organization until it can no longer be any leaner or meaner. But the employees who have survived don't seem to be as cheery as they should be during this holiday season. Attempts to create rosy future business scenarios don't seem to click with this bunch. They don't like to talk about the

Collins is a professor of business ethics at UW-Madison

GUEST COLUMN

future, and when they do they tend to be overly bleak, abstract or avoiding. What should you do?

'Tis the season to make a New Year's resolution for your organization.

Pledge that you will re-employ everyone you laid off at challenging jobs that will expand your company's business. Having eliminated all of your organization's redundancies, it is now time for you to think of expansion. The survivors miss these people and feel somewhat guilty, rather than proud, of their survival status.

Put the survivors in small groups and have them brainstorm ways in which the company could expand that would result in the re-employment of those recently laid off. Are there new markets to explore? Are there niche opportunities in old markets? How could your company productively and profitably use the services of these former employees? Watch how quickly their depression turns into creativity and joy.

Where no person is an island, no business is an island. It is time to throw out some life preservers and reconnect with the broader social environment. Recently laid-off management and non-management employees with 20 to 30 years of organizational experience are wondering about the meaning of life. So are the survivors. Give them all a helping hand and put some fun back into work again.