



HR SPEAK FOR THE NON-HR PROFESSIONAL

It seems that each profession has its own language and Human Resources (HR) is no exception. Unless you've worked in HR or have spent a lot of time with an HR professional, some of their "lingo" can be confusing.

Alphabet Soup

Let's start some of the key acronyms you'll hear flowing from the mouth of your HR colleague.

ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act. This is the law that prohibits employers from discriminating against individuals with disabilities.

FLSA – Fair Labor Standards Act. Frequently, this will be referred to as the "wage & hour" law. The FLSA establishes minimum wage, hours of work, and overtime standards with which employers must comply.

EEOC – The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission is the agency that is tasked with enforcing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as well as the ADA, ADEA (Age Discrimination in Employment Act), which prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, color, national origin and religion.

FMLA – Family and Medical Leave Act. Employers with 50 or more employees (or any public agency with any number of employees), must provide eligible employees with 12 weeks of unpaid leave in certain circumstances, including the serious health condition of a child, spouse, or parent.

I-9 – Form I-9 is the form all employees must complete in order to demonstrate they are authorized to work in the United States.

FSA – Flexible Spending Account. This is a plan that can be established by the organization to allow employees to fund any annual medical and/or daycare expenses they anticipate on a pre-tax basis.

There are many more acronyms; however these are ones that seem to be more frequently used.

What They Mean When They Say...

Document, document, document – Your HR pal is telling you that you need to write down (and ideally have the employee sign) any conversations related to discipline, performance, or attendance that you may have with an employee. Documented proof that you spoke with the employee about the problem and gave them an opportunity to correct it before a decision was made to demote, terminate, or take some other adverse action greatly helps the company's defense in the event of a lawsuit. As the employment law attorneys like to say, "If it isn't in writing, it didn't happen."

You can't do that! – HR is telling you that what you're proposing is likely violating an employment law and you need to change your approach to accomplish the same objective in a lawful or at least defensible manner.

Why didn't you come to me sooner? – The sooner you let HR know what's happening with employees in your department, the better they can help you address any issues you may have. Don't wait until you're ready to fire someone to tell your HR Manager that you've been dealing with this problem for a year and have no documentation (see above!). Also, if you learn that an employee is pregnant, will need surgery, or hasn't been to work in days, don't delay in calling HR. If your organization is covered by FMLA, there are specific timeframes that must be followed in order to properly and legally designate the leave.

The buzzwords, acronyms, and the "language" of HR are constantly growing. If you're wondering about a particular phrase or acronym you've heard, please email Christine Crews (chris@eafinc.org) and I'll be happy to help you interpret what HR is trying to tell you.

Contributed by the Employers Association Forum, Inc. (EAF). EAF is a non-profit corporate membership-based association dedicated to serving the business and HR communities with world-class HR tools, hotlines & legal compliance, news & trends, surveys & economic data, benefits & insurance, risk management, training & consulting, and leadership & organizational development. Our members receive discounted rates on all [EAF classroom training](#) at EAF's training center in Longwood. [Click here](#) to learn more about EAF membership benefits.