

The most current information on how financial professionals can increase cash flow & control costs.

December 18, 2019

KEY FINANCE FIGURES

| | Curr* | Lst Mo | Lst Yr |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| ■ Leading Rates % | | | |
| Prime Rate | 4.75 | 4.75 | 5.25 |
| Fed Funds Rate | 1.75 | 1.75 | 2.25 |
| ■ Money Market Rates % | | | |
| <i>London Interbank (LIBOR)</i> | | | |
| 1 month | 1.70 | 1.77 | 2.38 |
| 3 months | 1.91 | 1.91 | 2.74 |
| 6 months | 1.91 | 1.92 | 2.90 |
| ■ Stock & Bond Indexes | | | |
| DJIA | 27,503 | 27,462 | 25,027 |
| S&P 500 | 3,093 | 3,078 | 2,700 |
| NASDAQ | 8,521 | 8,433 | 7,158 |
| 5-Yr T-Bill | 1.54 | 1.60 | 2.83 |
| 10-Yr T-Bill | 1.72 | 1.79 | 2.98 |
| ■ Employment Stats | | | |
| Unemployment rate (%) | 3.6 | 3.5 | 3.8 |
| Payroll employment (thousands) | 128 | 180 | 277 |
| Average hourly earnings (\$) | 0.06 | 0.01 | 0.05 |

*As of 12/3/19

The Cumulative Effect of CFO & Controller Alert

With the pace of change accelerating and the competition tougher, what's the best chance to keep up performance and get two steps ahead of the competition? A reliable source of continuous information.

It's the **cumulative effect** that helps, not any one reading. Our unique function is to deliver solid, focused information in your area of responsibility in a fast-read format twice a month to help performance.

Scammer Baby! The holiday ho-ho-holdup is on!

■ Unauthorized expenses skyrocket in December

During this holiday season, many employees are feeling extra generous ... with your company's money!

Out-of-policy spending skyrockets in December, say the folks at AppZen.

The company used artificial intelligence to identify unauthorized spend in companies.

And boy did they find it!

Take a look at the four main categories AppZen ID'd as areas where employees are stepping outside the lines – and by how much.

That way you can be sure

the same doesn't happen within your own organization this month.

1. A 'gift' you'll want to return

Is it really better to give than to receive? Not for your company when employees are doing the giving!

Gifts take the top spot for overspending according to AppZen.

Their research uncovered \$783,000 in out-of-policy gifts purchased in December. Compare that to the \$134,000 that was green-lighted.

Gifts may be something you want

(Please see Scammer ... on Page 2)

CFO's 'young shark' email not discrimination

■ Company dodged a bullet – not everyone would be so lucky

Your company's got an aggressive growth plan, and you need the best people to make it happen. So you mention in an email that you want "young sharks" to become junior salespeople.

And then that email gets used to try to prove your company is discriminating against older employees!

That's just what happened to one of your fellow CFOs recently.

Proof firm had it out for older workers?

When two salespeople in their 50s were fired for poor performance, the

ex-employees were quick to point to this email to show the company had something against older workers.

But the court discounted the email, as it was focused on whom the company should *hire*, not fire.

This CFO and his company lucked out on this one – courts wouldn't always be so quick to ignore such a statement.

And the company still had to pay to defend itself against these claims. A good reminder to watch those words.

Cite: Downey, Bonner v. Adloox, Inc.

Scammer ...

(continued from Page 1)

folks to get pre-approved before they buy.

You do have a little added backup to keep gift spending in check: IRS.

Remind everyone that gifts to employees are almost always taxable, with a few exceptions.

For example, some companies may give workers a turkey or ham for their holiday dinners, which is considered de minimis. However, a gift certificate to purchase one may be taxable (unless it specifies it's only redeemable for the turkey or ham).

2. An appetite for out-of-policy buys

Speaking of food, that's another area you'll want A/P to scrutinize extra carefully this month.

In December unauthorized business meals jump to seven times what they

are the other months of the year.

Granted this is the time for holiday luncheons and team breakfasts so meal tallies are likely to be higher.

But these are out-of-policy expenses that employees are attempting to push through. Make sure your team is ready to push back.

3. Blame it on the alcohol

Employees in the holiday spirit? More like the holiday spirits!

The thing with booze: It gets real expensive real fast.

The average December instance of unauthorized spending on alcohol is \$573. That's six times more than it is the rest of the year.

Alcohol is one of those aspects of T&E policy that always causes controversy. Will your company reimburse it at all? What if employees pick top-shelf liquors? How many rounds is too many to cover?

Make sure there are no gray areas in your own policy. It's probably a well-timed idea to push out your guidelines now not only to employees, but to reinforce them with expense report approving managers.

4. Big tipper! Watch the gratuities

Here's a tip to pass along to employees during December: Ease up on the tips!

Turns out there are plenty of big tippers out there ... when it's on your company's dime.

During December the number of unauthorized gratuities handed out was up a staggering 109 times over the monthly average.

To keep tipping under control, you absolutely want guidelines spelled out in your T&E policy.

That should include both a predetermined percentage your company allows employees to tip and a requirement it be shown (and submitted) on all meal receipts.

Info: For more on AppZen's findings, go to appzen.com/blog/holiday-spend-data

Sharpen your JUDGMENT

This feature provides a framework for decision making that helps keep you and your company out of trouble. It describes a recent legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

■ Poor performer fired after FMLA leave: Retaliation?

Finance manager Mary Murphy knocked on CFO Bill Keeper's door.

"What's up?" Mary asked Bill.

"Well, Jane Thomas is suing us. She says we fired her in retaliation for taking FMLA leave," Bill said.

Mary sighed. "You and I both know that's not true. Jane was fired for performance issues."

"She claims her performance issues weren't a big deal until she took her leave," Bill responded.

'Get away from me'

"It's a shame. Jane was a fine employee for years. It wasn't until she became a 'floater' for different teams that her performance issues began. She had difficulty working with certain people," Mary said.

"Yeah, her supervisors said she couldn't take criticism. But we still tried to work with her. And she wasn't fired until five months after her leave.

"She would've still been employed if it wasn't for her outburst at her supervisor, Mindy. She claims Jane yelled at her 'to get away from me.' Jane claims she didn't scream or shout, but a co-worker said she was 'disruptive,'" said Bill.

Bill decided his company should fight this lawsuit because her firing wasn't retaliation for taking leave.

Did it win?

■ *Make your decision, then please turn to Page 6 for the court's ruling.*

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Collectability scoring: The tool you need in your cash flow arsenal

■ *The factors that'll help you recoup more cash*

Your credit and collections department is well-versed in the technique of scoring – they use it day in and day out to determine how credit-worthy a potential customer is.

But you might want to start assigning another score to protect your company's cash flow: how collectable that account is.

It's a strategy some credit industry experts are endorsing now.

Here's how it could work for you.

to just 8.9% at 24 months past-due. So as you calculate a score for your past-due accounts, you'll want to consider that, the amount owed and the skill level of the collector on the case.

FOR MORE ...

To help gauge the effectiveness of a third party collector, go to cfoandcontrolleralert.com/how-to-tell-if-your-3rd-party-collector-is-good

It'll take some tinkering to determine how to weight the different factors, but it's worth the effort.

Having these scores at your fingertips can help you do everything from determine which staffers belong collecting on which accounts to deciding

when to put a past-due customer out to a third-party agency.

Adapted in part from "Collectability Scoring – A Unique Approach to Benchmarking," by Nancy Seivard, Credit Research Foundation, crfonline.org

Assessing your odds

You know the longer an account goes past-due, the less of a chance you'll collect the full amount.

For example, a month past-due you have an 88.7% chance, but that drops

Proof: HSAs help employees get healthier

■ *Those who opt in take a much more active role in their own health care*

Good news if you're offering your employees a health savings account (HSA). They're finally warming to the concept. Not only are they contributing more but HSAs are helping them stay healthy, according to healthcare firm Alegeus.

80% make healthy choices

Employees now realize these "rainy day" medical funds can offset the cost of out-of-pocket expenses, so they're more motivated to go see a doctor. Alegeus' latest study findings:

- 38% of employees are contributing more than in previous years
- 40% say having an HSA makes

them take a more active role in their health care, and

- 80% claim they make healthy lifestyle choices.

How to get more employees to sign up for HSAs? Educate them that an HSA can be a tax-deferred investment tool, allowing them to roll over funds from year to year. It's not just for paying immediate medical expenses.

In addition, setting up automatic payroll deductions can boost interest with employees, especially younger ones.

Adapted from "Do health savings accounts make people more engaged health care consumers?" by Marlene Satter, at benefitspro.com

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

■ Where Janet Yellen thinks the U.S. economy is

We recently got a visit from the Ghost of Fed Chairs Past, in the form of a speech at the World Business Forum by Janet Yellen.

Yellen sounded off on what she sees as the current state of the U.S. economy and handicapped our odds of sliding into a recession in the new year.

First the good news: Yellen believes that for the most part the U.S. economy is in "excellent shape."

To that end, she thinks it's unlikely we will experience a recession this coming year.

Still, things are too close for Yellen's comfort. She says we have "good reason to worry."

And here's why.

Inequality, Fed can't do much

The biggest issue plaguing the economy now? Inequality, says Yellen.

True, we're enjoying the longest expansion in U.S. history. But the highest earners have been the primary beneficiaries.

A large proportion of the workforce feels like it just can't get ahead. And they'd be right.

Yellen's also concerned that the Fed's recent third rate drop could come back to haunt us.

That doesn't give the Fed a lot of recourse should things take a turn for the worse, asserts Yellen.

The Fed has recently said it's unlikely to cut rates again this year. Stay tuned.

(Adapted in part from "Janet Yellen says 'there is good reason to worry' about the US economy sliding into recession," by Jeff Cox, at cnbc.com)

Key ways technology can help you comply with the new OT rules

■ *You have options, depending on how tough you want to get*

You now have 11,908 reasons to look more closely at your company's Fair Labor Standards Act compliance.

That's how many dollars lie between the current overtime threshold (\$23,660) and the new one effective January 1 (\$35,568).

And unless you're bumping up salaries, you likely have employees falling into the non-exempt bucket for the first time. Which will take some getting used to on all sides.

Fortunately you can tap technology to help keep you in compliance.

From the lightest touch ...

One of the biggest shifts? Getting employees who are used to logging onto systems and answering emails at all hours to contain that to biz hours.

A gentle reminder can't hurt.

Work with IT to see if they can

create a custom pop-up message that appears anytime a nonexempt employee tries to log-in after hours to have them either 1. confirm this isn't outside regular work time, or 2. prove he or she has prior supervisor approval to work.

That can keep OT costs from racking up.

... to the heaviest hand

If you want to take a tougher stance, look no further than your virtual private network (VPN).

Think about creating a security group strictly for non-exempt employees with a rule that prohibits them from accessing systems outside time periods you set.

Adapted in part from "5 Ways to Leverage Technology for Overtime Compliance," by Adam Forman and Jeffrey Ruzal, at shrm.org

Digital supply chain ROI: one step at a time

■ *Tech investments that pay back quickly ... and prepare you for the future*

As CFO, your tech-related to-do list just keeps getting longer, more complex and more expensive.

But there's one tech upgrade where industry advisor ARC says you can achieve a return in less than two years without reinventing your entire operation: supply chain digitalization.

Supply chain tech with a quick ROI

That doesn't mean building your own global supply chain network, or even signing on to a Supply Chain Collaboration Network (SCCN).

A focused initiative that addresses just one or two aspects of the supply chain puzzle can show quick results.

Some areas to look at first?

- business intelligence tools providing real-time supply chain visibility
- CRM solutions to capture and integrate customer data, and
- field service and delivery optimization.

ARC says that, while you might marginally improve the ROI on these sorts of applications by connecting to a supply chain network, you'll get a good return even if they're not connected to a huge SCCN.

Adapted from "20 Things to Know about Digital Supply Chain Transformations," at tinyurl.com/supplychain570

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

■ Mastering the soft skills: Top 5 you'll need in 2020

It's those skills that are rarely taught in business school or even on the job. Soft skills are what every finance exec needs to grow as a leader.

Recent trends point to a pattern of skills needed to help understand human behavior in the workplace.

5 soft skills to practice daily

So which are the most important soft skills to hone in on in 2020?

- 1. Active listening:** Of course, you need to listen to your staffers when they're speaking, without instantly offering your take. But it's more than that. Look beyond the words at body language, and make eye contact to be fully engaged.
- 2. Self-compassion:** You're allowed to not always have the answer. Get comfortable with one of your staffers knowing what's needed in a situation. It'll be a teachable moment for you and them.
- 3. Empathy:** Numbers-driven CFOs need to be able to put themselves in staffers' shoes. So when one tells you they're feeling overwhelmed with work, try to understand how that might make them feel before jumping in to assess the workload.
- 4. Vulnerability:** Being vulnerable is not a weakness. It actually goes hand in hand with leadership. Say you open up and express your concerns about a project. Who knows? It could enable your team to help find a solution.
- 5. Honesty:** It's a close cousin with all of the above. Being honest will help you built trust with your team.

(Adapted from "Five soft skills you need to be a better leader in 2020," by Bas Kohnke, at fastcompany.com)

Our subscribers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular feature, three of them share success stories you can adapt to your unique situation.

1 This proof made P2P improvement a priority

Our company's Purchase-to-Pay (P2P) process was disconnected, and A/P was at its wits' end.

A lack of software or technology wasn't the problem, either. It was really our processes and culture that needed to change.

To work on a full cultural change, we needed execs' support. But every department is competing for attention and resources.

We knew we had to make a really

compelling case to prove that this P2P disconnection was something our company needed to prioritize.

Painted the full picture

The obvious evidence was the numbers. Highlighting losses and poor metrics would go a long way in company leaders' eyes.

Then, we considered, "How else is this impacting the bottom line?" That made us think about the damaged vendor relationships that resulted from these P2P problems.

So, on top of the numbers, we also gathered real-life examples of that: emails from displeased vendors, customer complaints, etc.

We compiled all our evidence on the numbers and our business relations, then made a presentation.

It got their attention for sure! And once we had execs invested, we could start making more specific plans to revamp our P2P culture.

(Juli Knisley, A/P Manager, Aflac, as presented at the A/P P2P Conference & Expo in Las Vegas)

**REAL PROBLEMS
REAL SOLUTIONS**

2 The benefit that helps us tackle student debt

The increasing cost of student debt continues to be a concern for the country, as well as a growing concern for our own employees.

It's a financial burden that can cause a great deal of stress, and we want to help employees have more financial flexibility, enabling them to focus on their life and careers.

So we decided to release a new benefit that allows our 17,000 employees to pay down their student loan debt.

This new benefit is offered through a student loan benefit provider that works with other firms, including Peleton and PwC.

Pays up to \$10,000

We pay up to a lifetime total of \$10,000 toward workers' student loan debt, contributing the funds directly to loan providers each month.

This new benefit is part of a broader suite of offerings to help our employees tackle education debt.

Earlier this year, we launched

student loan counseling.

The provider also assists with setting savings goals, finding available scholarships and refinancing student loans through a select group of lenders.

In addition, we also offer a tuition reimbursement benefit for employees pursuing undergraduate and graduate degrees.

(Martí Gervasi, Chief Human Resources Officer, The Hartford, Hartford, CT)

3 The fun way we get folks moving

It's not good for people to sit at desks all day long.

You won't believe what we did to get them moving in our office.

Sitting too long has bad effects on health, morale and productivity.

We wanted to counter that.

around their buildings and create walking groups.

Not us. We danced.

It started innocently enough.

It was when I noticed employees around me groggy around 3 p.m. every day.

So one day, I cranked up music, got up and danced.

Gimme a beat

Some joined in right away. Then it caught on.

More people around the facility

stopped and danced when they heard the music turn on day after day.

Employees have stopped meetings and paused production to join in.

Of course, dancing isn't mandatory.

But the break helps boost our staffers':

- productivity
- creativity, and
- energy.

(David Poppe, Engagement Specialist, United Shore, Troy, MI)

Time is not on your side when it comes to the T&E process: How do you stack up?

■ This can be the toughest time of the year to secure a key part

Ask your Accounts Payable staffers which part of the expense reimbursement process is the most trying, and they'll point to that five minutes it takes the approver to offer up a John or Jane Hancock.

Because it can often take hours or even days to get that 1/20th of an hour needed to keep things moving.

And this is the time of year it's even trickier.

Sidestep the waiting game

In these last few weeks of the year many folks are out of the office.

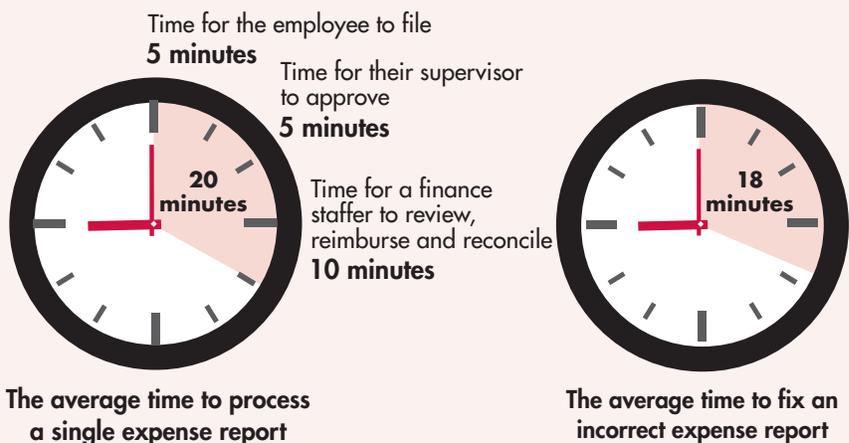
Even when they're in, their schedule is less predictable (school concerts, holiday luncheons, etc.).

Make sure you have a designated backup approver for each supervisor and that:

1. their schedules don't overlap in terms of time out, and
2. they know they're a backup.

AND YOU STILL HAVE TO REIMBURSE THEM THE MONEY!

Expense Report Processing, by the numbers



Source: "17 Ways the Expense Report Process Hurts Your Business," by Patrick Whatman, blog.spendesk.com

Talk with your own A/P team to see how these numbers compare to their experience. And considering that an estimated one in five expense reports contains errors, you can add that extra 18 minutes on to 20% of your T&E volume.

Sharpen your judgment...

THE DECISION

(please see case on Page 2)

Yes. The company won when a court dismissed the employee's FMLA retaliation lawsuit.

The employee's attorney tried to argue the proximity of her termination and her return from FMLA leave proved the firm was retaliating against her, but the court wasn't convinced.

The court said a lag longer than a month or two between leave and termination was too long to "establish a causal connection" without additional evidence. Furthermore, her outburst "ended any connection there might have been between her FMLA leave and her eventual termination," said the court.

So firing the employee five months after her leave wasn't enough by itself to support her FMLA retaliation claim. Not only that, the company had the employee's numerous performance problems well documented, the court said.

Analysis: Good documentation is key

This case goes to show that with the right documentation, companies can fire an employee even on the heels of FMLA leave.

When an employee begins to have performance problems, it's crucial that supervisors document those right away.

Employers need to consider the timing before making a termination decision. However, a court will side with an employer that presents good documentation.

Cite: Lovelace v. Washington University School of Medicine, U.S. Ct. of App., 8th Circ., No. 17-3673, 7/25/19. Dramatized for effect.

Experts give their solutions to difficult workplace problems

Finance professionals like you face new questions every day on how to deal with everything from accounting and tax regulations to management and employment law issues. In this section, experts answer those real-life questions.

Gift policies

Q: We have policies in place to restrict the value of gifts and entertainment that don't require executive officer approval. What are other considerations we should include in our gift, entertainment and travel (GET) policy?

A: While setting a dollar limit on GET is important, says compliance expert Randy Stephens, other restrictions should also apply. Consider:

Most GET policies prohibit cash or cash equivalents. The value of a gift should be considered reasonable and customary in the industry and geography.

All expenses should have a demonstrable business purpose. Many firms require that the giver and recipient are present at the entertainment or travel.

Events or locations must not be offensive or exclusive.

Set a cumulative annual limit on GET to the same firm or giver. This would prevent an employee from giving seven \$50 dinners to evade a \$250 GET limit, for example.

Required 401(k) loans?

Q: An employee asked for a loan from his 401(k) to pay for some emergency medical expenses. We currently don't have a loan program set up through our plan. Are we legally required to give him the money anyway?

A: There's no requirement for a 401(k) plan administrator to offer loans to participants, said

IRS in a letter from the Office of Chief Counsel. Under Sec. 72(p)(2) of the Internal Revenue Code, plans are permitted to offer loans to participants of up to half the funds in their account for five years. (More time can be extended for home loans.)

Plan administrators have some leeway for the types of restrictions they can place on loans (e.g., only for hardships such as student loans or medical expenses). However, they also have the right to not include the option for a loan to participants at all. So if you don't have an existing 401(k) loan program, you don't have to offer early distributions as loans.

Per-diem reimbursements

Q: We have several employees who regularly travel from our office to long-term work assignments at various locations. Does the length of their assignment affect the taxable status of any per diem reimbursements?

A: When employees go out of town for work, per diem reimbursements aren't taxable if the worker is on a "temporary" work assignment. According to a memo from the IRS' Office of Chief Counsel, a temporary assignment is one that doesn't last longer than a year. If a worker's assignment is longer than this duration, per-diem reimbursements become taxable.

If you have a question you'd like our experts to answer, email it to Jennifer Azara at jazara@cfodailynews.com

COMMUNICATION KEYS

■ The practice that will make you a better question-asker

You know asking good questions can do everything from solving problems to making your staffers feel more engaged.

To raise your question-asking game, make it a habit to ask at least two follow-up questions, such as:

- "What makes you say that?"
- "Why do you think that?"
- "What do you mean by ...?"

Info: lifehack.org/articles/communication/how-amazingly-good-asking-questions.html

■ Feel a cry coming on? How to keep the tears at bay

It just happens to some people: Confrontations make them tear up. But you'd probably rather not cry at work.

Try this trick when you feel things bubbling up: Look up.

Rolling your eyeballs upward can keep the tears from spilling over, until you can get a breath to compose yourself.

From "How To Stop Yourself From Crying," by Jess Commons, at refinery29.com

■ Proofreading: The place you're most likely to miss

Little is as embarrassing as an email or memo coming out of Finance with a typo in it.

And while you no doubt proofread before you print or hit send, check these twice: logos, company names and extra-large headlines.

It turns out the larger the type is, the more likely you are to miss a typo.

Info: publicationcoach.com/become-a-better-proofreader

Recent developments that can help your business stay ahead

The only place facing a FUTA credit reduction

Looks like states got better at managing their money this year! There's a single locale staring down the prospect of a FUTA credit reduction for 2019.

And it isn't even a state! The Virgin Islands is the sole place that failed to pay its federal loans by the November 1 deadline.

The result? A credit reduction of 2.7% for this year, reports the Department of Labor (DOL).

Info: For the DOL announcement, go to oui.doleta.gov/unemploy/futa_credit.asp

'Tis the season ... for online shopping scams

Warn all employees, from your company's purchasers to staffers who may be doing some holiday shopping:

The number of reported online purchase scams spikes by 70% between now and January.

In the last three years alone, the number of overall scams increased by around 300%.

One thing you want folks to be especially wary of: Buying off of Facebook ads. It's considered the No. 1 way in for scammers.

So finds a recent study by Comparitech.com

Info: comparitech.com

Fed fee hike coming for these employer forms

Get ready to pay significantly more when your company needs to file immigration benefit forms with the feds.

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) just proposed raising filing fees by an average of 21%.

For example, the H-1B visa fee would jump to \$560 (a \$100 increase) while the L-1 visa would skyrocket to \$815 (a 77% hike).

We'll let you know if and when the changes are finalized.

Coming soon: Paperless retirement plan notices

Those bulky – and costly to mail – retirement plan disclosures may soon be a thing of the past!

The Department of Labor just proposed a new rule to let employers e-deliver both summary plan descriptions and other ERISA-required disclosures.

Note: You'd have to alert participants they're available online.

Comments were due at the end of last month. We'll update you when final rules are released.

Lighter side: There are soft skills and then ...

Yes, you've probably expanded the skills you're looking for in a job applicant beyond numbers proficiency.

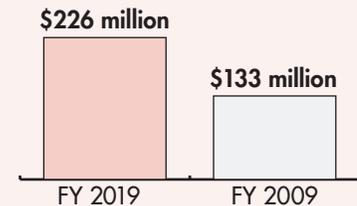
But there are some "skills" that just don't matter, despite the fact that real-life job applicants offered them up:

- mind-reading and psychic abilities
- pie-eating contest winner
- once helped deliver a baby
- elementary school spelling bee champ, and
- proficient in voodoo curses.

From "Pie-Eating Contest Winner, Psychic Ability: Job Seekers Tout Kooky Accomplishments," by Kathy Gurchiek, at shrm.org

MEASURE UP

Back wages paid by employers to resolve Fair Labor Standards Act violation cases



Source: U.S. Department of Labor, dol.gov/whd

What type of violations have your peers on the hook for back wages? Overwhelmingly it's overtime missteps, compared to minimum wage issues (83% of cases vs. 18% in FY 2019).

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Each issue presents real-world examples of what worked and what didn't for CFOs and Controllers in a wide variety of industries – all in a concise format that saves you time.

Depend on this publication for the winning ideas you can put to work today to help your company manage growth.