

## **The most pressing questions**

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THOMAS DOYLE - Victoria Advocate

Just like at many other small businesses, Joyce Foster is the human resources department at Crossroads Movers.

As co-owner, her duties require her to do many things other than just running the day-to-day operations of her business.

"The hiring is one of the worst things because with the new laws and everything," Foster said.

While Foster keeps up to date on such issues through a professional organization, keeping up with changing laws, policies and other issues would be most difficult.

Very few small businesses have a full time human resources professional to handle such issues, said Keith Mudd, interim director of the Small Business Development Center at the University of Houston-Victoria.

So the SBDC and the Victoria Chamber of Commerce will sponsor four morning seminars from March 15 to May 2 on the topics that seem to come up most often, Mudd said.

"These seem to be topics that small businesses need the most help with," he said. "These seminars are to draw light to the subject and show them some resources that they have available to them that are low cost, low budget and reliable."

At the first session on March 15, representatives of the Texas Department of Insurance will provide information on recent changes in workers compensation issues, Mudd said. A question and answer session will be included.

The April 4 session will cover how to write an employee handbook.

"A lot of small businesses don't think they are necessary, but oftentimes business owners can protect themselves by having things clearly spelled out in writing before a problem arises," he said.

Thinking about possible problems can also help companies develop a plan of action in advance to help the firm weather a crisis, he said.

How to recruit, hire, develop and terminate employees legally will be covered April 18, Mudd said.

Some people don't realize there are certain questions you can and cannot ask in a job interview, said Phyllis Hunt, president of the Victoria Chamber of Commerce. And just

because Texas is an at-will employment state doesn't mean an employer can't be sued after firing someone, she said.

Finally on May 2, the topic of discussion moves to security in the workplace, Mudd said.

Security in the workplace includes protecting employees from harassment and violence as well as securing physical property, he said.

All of the latter three programs will be taught by representatives from the Human Capital Program of the University of Texas San Antonio Institute for Economic Development, Mudd said.

All classes will be from 8 a.m. to noon UHV-Multipurpose Room at 3007 N. Ben Wilson in Victoria. Sessions are \$49 each or \$150 for all four.

For more information call the Victoria Chamber of Commerce at 361-573-5277 or the Small Business Development Center at 361-575-8944.

- Thomas Doyle is a business reporter at the Advocate. Contact him at 361- 580-6511 or [tdoyle@vicad.com](mailto:tdoyle@vicad.com), or comment on this story at [www.victoriaadvocate.com](http://www.victoriaadvocate.com).