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HR Magazine

SUMMER 2021

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for the surge
of employees
expected to leave
for new jobs.

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ONLY HUMAN

EXPERIENCE NEEDED?

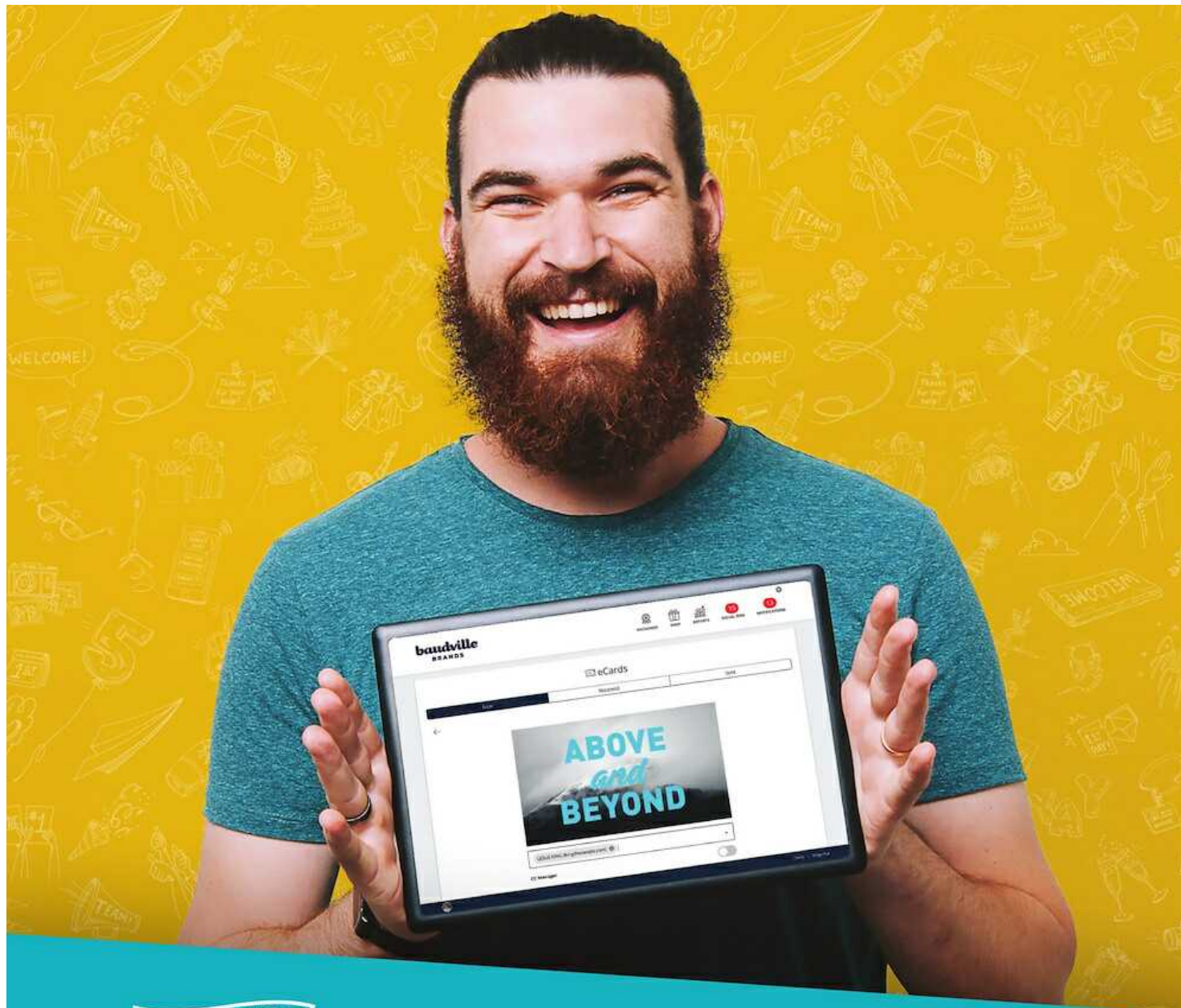
Recruiting should be about measuring the right attributes.

By Steve Browne, SHRM-SCP

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FROM THE CEO

RACIAL INJUSTICE AT WORK COSTS US BILLIONS

By Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM-SCP

Workplace bias and racial inequity bloom in the dark. If we continue to be silent—unable to speak candidly about our uncomfortable experiences and those of others—nothing will change. And businesses will pay the price.

Employee turnover due to racial inequity in the workplace has cost U.S. organizations up to \$172 billion over the past five years. The Society

for Human Resource Management's (SHRM's) new report, *The Cost of Racial Injustice*, released last month, found that one-third of Black employees faced unfair treatment at work based on race and ethnicity in the past year.

Over the same period, 26 percent of Asian employees and 21 percent of Hispanic or Latino employees experienced unfair treatment in the workplace due to their race or ethnicity.

Absences due to anxiety, worry, stress or frustration stemming from experiencing—or witnessing—unfair treatment based on race or ethnicity at

work may have cost U.S. businesses up to \$54 billion in the past year. Lost productivity during that time was even more costly, carrying a price tag of nearly \$59 billion.

If we can't talk about it, we can't fix it.

SHRM has consistently challenged workplace leaders to have open and honest conversations with their peers and teams about bias, discrimination and racial inequity, and then turn those conversations into concrete action. The key is keeping these discussions productive and safe for participation. I have my own tips that I've shared with business leaders across the globe:

Listen, don't conflate. When individuals aggrieved by overt or subtle racism describe their experiences, listeners will naturally become defensive or try to find parallels within their own experiences. This is conflation, the most com-

mon mistake made by those guilty of inadvertent racism. Listen with empathy.

Discuss, don't debate. Emphasize that the purpose is discussion, not debate or disagreement. There are no winners, and no one is right or wrong. This is a time for speaking your experience and listening to others, so setting up discussion rules is important to ensure conversations don't go off course.

Make it safe to share. Avoid blame or attribution and focus instead on behaviors. Create a safe space for each individual—both during and after the conversation—to head off later consequences.

Realize that conversation is just the beginning. It is essential that HR leaders and People Managers turn that talk into concrete action that will change work and change lives.

SHRM is supporting its members further with new tools and recommendations found in SHRM's Blue Ribbon Commission Racial Equity Report, released last month. Derived from the commission's six months of deliberations, these resources are designed to invoke measurable changes that users can implement immediately. The report includes video testimonials from Blue Ribbon Commission members; our proprietary, members-only DE&I Action-to-Change Toolbox; and other user-friendly resources and knowledge.

The report also previews SHRM's new Empathy Index—a measurement tool that enables organizations to take a quick-pulse assessment of inclusion-oriented behaviors in the workplace, tracking their progress toward creating more-empathetic workplaces and benchmarking them against the most successful companies in the U.S. and their own business competition.

With candid conversations and smart tools, HR leaders can begin to dismantle racism at work and guide their workplaces into a new era of respect, transparency and genuine inclusion. ■





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HEALTH CARE CLAIMS COULD SURGE

Delays in accessing preventive care could result in more critical conditions.

By Greg Goth



With coronavirus vaccinations now widely available, many Americans are expected to catch up on their medical care. Health claims could reflect the consequences of letting risky health conditions, exacerbated by stress, poor diets and suspended gym memberships, go untreated for more than a year.

What does that mean for employers? A financially strong 2020 for self-funded health plans could turn into a challenging 2021, experts say.

Visits for routine and preventive care trended significantly downward during the most stringent lockdown periods of the pandemic, from March through May 2020, according to health claims data. While those figures rebounded to some extent by the end of the year, new diagnoses of

cancers and other chronic diseases remained well below base line.

Sunit Patel, chief actuary at HR consultancy Mercer, says newly diagnosed cases of cardiovascular disease and diabetes fell by more than 30 percent from April through June 2020 compared to a year earlier, not because heart disease and diabetes had diminished, but because people weren't getting routine physicals. By year-end, diagnoses for these conditions were still about 10 percent below

what health care providers would normally see.

In addition, cervical cancer screening was down about 15 percent and colon cancer screening was down 25 percent. The problem with that, Patel says, is "the later you get diagnosed, the more severe the outcome is."

SELF-INSURED PLANS SAVE

Nationally, 67 percent of U.S. workers with employer-sponsored health coverage are in a plan their employer self-funds, according to a 2020 Kaiser Family Foundation survey. Based on insurance carriers' projections, 2020 medical claims covered by employer-sponsored plans will, on average, be 5 percent lower than initially forecast due to a pandemic-related decrease

in the use of health care, consultancy Aon reported at the end of last year. The findings are based on a fall 2020 survey of 44 national and regional insurance carriers.

If a self-insured employer budgeted \$10,000 per employee for medical costs in 2020 prior to the pandemic, the employer could see claim reductions averaging \$500 per employee, Aon noted.

In the survey, insurers also projected that COVID-19 will increase U.S. employer medical claims by an additional 2 percentage points, on average, above normal trends in 2021. This will include costs for care that was postponed or skipped in 2020.

Fully insured employers didn't see 2020 cost savings from the falloff in nonpandemic-related health care, as their annual premiums were set before the public health crisis began. As a result, insurance companies profited because "insurers don't have to pay for care that patients forgo," wrote Keith Lemer, CEO of WellNet Healthcare, a health care management and advisory company.

For fully insured employers, watching other companies benefit from lower claims under self-funded plans may have piqued an interest in self-insurance. That interest, however, might be tempered if there is a significant resurgence in care costs for delayed

elective procedures and conditions that worsened due to lack of treatment.

UNCERTAIN OUTLOOK

Doug Ramsthal, a partner at Burnham Benefits, an employee benefits consultancy in Orange County, Calif., thinks expectations of a surge in health care claims may be overblown.

"Not all deferred care results in more care later," he says. "In some cases, someone postponing an elective procedure may find that self-care may have resolved an issue such as back, neck or knee pain."

He points out that self-insured employer plans last year faced claims costs for COVID-19 treatment that are now going down.

"It's likely that the expansion of payment for COVID-19 diagnoses and treatment, covered at no or little cost by group health plans, resulted in over-testing and unnecessary use of emergency departments for people with flu-like symptoms," Ramsthal says. "As the prevalence of COVID-19 recedes, so will this costly care."

Still, his company expects claims costs to rise between 7.1 percent and 14.8 percent this year; the range indicates much uncertainty remains about post-pandemic health care.

Greg Goth is a freelance health and technology writer based in Oakville, Conn.



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COPING WITH PANDEMIC STRESS

A survey of more than 3,000 U.S. adults by the American Psychological Association in February 2021 found that:



47%

delayed or canceled health care services during the pandemic.



42%

said stress had brought about unwanted weight gain.



31%

said their mental health had worsened.



23%

said they were drinking more alcohol to cope.

WHEN WORKERS LOSE THEIR VACCINATION CARDS

Employers that require proof that employees have received COVID-19 vaccinations must plan how to respond when workers lose their vaccination cards.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued guidance last year indicating employers could mandate that their employees receive vaccinations. However, some states are attempting to pass legislation that could prohibit employers from asking employees for proof of vaccination or inquiring about vaccination status, says Emily Paige Harbison, an attorney with Baker McKenzie in Houston.

So if a company decides to ask for proof, "it should ensure such a requirement complies with state, county and city regulations, including health department orders that sometimes limit the information that may be required from employees," she says.

The company should clearly indicate what forms of proof of vaccination are acceptable, she recommends, and it should instruct employees not to provide any information beyond what is requested. Further, employees should not be asked questions that follow up on their status.

Vaccination providers are required to report COVID-19 vaccinations to their state health department's immunization information system (IIS), says Daniel Kadish, an



attorney with Morgan Lewis in New York City.

If an employee loses a vaccination card, the employer can ask the worker to contact the vaccination provider or IIS to obtain a copy of the card. But an employer can't reach out to the IIS directly on the employee's behalf, Kadish cautions.

If the company's policy is that all employees in safety-sensitive positions must be vaccinated when they return to work, subject to exceptions under the law, and an employee is unable to show proof of vaccination, the employer can require that the employee work remotely or be moved to a different position until proof can be provided, Harbison says.

Employers may accept electronic verification so long as there is no sign of fraud, says Holly Sutton, an attorney with Farella Braun + Martel in San Francisco.

If an employee is unable to provide print or electronic proof, the employer can require the employee to sign an attestation confirming vaccination and providing the dates the vaccinations were given, Harbison says.

Be sure to treat all employees similarly. "Permitting some employees to confirm that they have been vaccinated on an honor-system basis, but not others, could lead to claims of inconsistent treatment and potential discrimination," Kadish says.

—Allen Smith, J.D.

WHAT DO ADMINISTRATIVE PROFESSIONALS EARN?



U.S. clerical and administrative workers at the 50th (median) percentile earn the following base salaries:

Receptionist	\$37,300
Administrative assistant, entry-level	\$42,800
Administrative assistant, intermediate level	\$48,700
Administrative assistant, senior level	\$59,700
Administrative assistant, specialist level	\$66,000
Office manager	\$82,000

Source: Salary.com data via SHRM Compensation Data Center, 2021.

WHICH ARE THE BEST STATES FOR REMOTE JOBS?

After the COVID-19 crisis ends, many employees may want to continue as remote workers, leading them to look for the companies, occupations and locations where remote work thrives.

Utah is the best state for remote-job growth, followed by Colorado and the Washington, D.C., area, according to a new analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and Census Bureau data conducted by CareerCloud, a resource site for job seekers.

Mississippi is the worst state for remote work, followed by Louisiana, Alaska and Maine.

To determine which states have the most promising outlook for remote-job growth, CareerCloud scored each state across three metrics: employment per 1,000 jobs in a selection of the most common remote-friendly occupations, projected growth rates in those jobs through 2028 and the percentage of people in each state with broadband access at home.

Employment levels in typically remote-friendly jobs is currently highest in Washington, D.C. Utah has the highest projected growth rate in those jobs, and Washington state is tops for broadband access.

Looking at regional comparisons, the West had the highest average score of the four regions of the country that were analyzed, while the Midwest had the worst average total score. The other two regions studied were the Northeast and the South.

The findings are similar to data uncovered by FlexJobs, a Boulder, Colo.-based jobs site for flexible and remote jobs.

"We've found that Colorado is the state with the most remote workers, and Utah is near the top, as well," says Brie Weiler Reynolds, FlexJobs career development manager and coach. "Our data also found that Mis-



issippi and Louisiana were states with the fewest remote workers."

The three metrics tracked in the CareerCloud study are key to understanding the future of remote work, she adds.

"Broadband access is one way to explain the findings because without reliable access to high-speed, broadband Internet, preferably from a number of suppliers, remote work simply can't happen at scale," Reynolds says.

About 86 percent of people in the U.S. have access to broadband Internet, according to Census Bureau data. Twenty-one states and Washington, D.C., have even higher broadband access rates.

Frank Steemers, a senior economist with The Conference Board, a New York City-based think tank, says differences in industry and occupational composition can explain some of the differences in remote-work rates among states.

"For example, in Washington, D.C., Virginia, Maryland and California,

The Best And Worst States For Remote-Job Growth

BEST

Utah
Colorado
Washington, D.C.
Washington state

WORST

Mississippi
Louisiana
Alaska
Maine

Source: CareerCloud.

a larger share of workers work in computer occupations, which have relatively higher shares of remote workers," he says.

In addition, employees in states with more restrictive social distancing policies, such as New York and California, were much more likely to work remotely, he says.

While the gaps in remote work across regions may narrow after the pandemic subsidies, some regional differences could remain because people's habits and preferences have changed, Steemers says.

—Roy Maurer

CANADA REPLACES U.S. AS TOP WORK DESTINATION

Canada is now the most desirable destination for international workers, overtaking the U.S. for the first time, according to a new study of more than 209,000 people from 190 countries.

The research was conducted in late 2020 by management consulting firm Boston Consulting Group and The Network, a global alliance of recruitment websites. The study on worldwide mobility trends has been conducted since 2014.

The U.S. has fallen to second in the rankings “due to an inconsistent pandemic response, the adoption of more nationalistic policies and social unrest,” says Allison Bailey, senior partner and managing director at Boston Consulting Group.

“Canada and Australia [which is ranked third] are similar to the U.S.

in having English as an official language, but Canada and Australia have both done a far better job of pandemic management,” Bailey says. “They are also seen as having better social systems and more-open cultures than the U.S.”

Interestingly, the U.S. remains the most desirable destination when respondents are asked about working for a foreign employer remotely versus having to move to a country where the employer is located. So why would workers rather go to Canada than the U.S.?

“One reason is that Canada is making a tremendous effort to reach out to and welcome immigrants,” says Lynn Shotwell, SHRM-SCP, president and CEO of Worldwide ERC, the trade association for the global mobility industry, based in Arlington, Va.

Canada has expanded the number of high-skill visas available, Shotwell says, while the U.S. has not been as welcoming during the past four years.

The changes to the list of top destinations largely reflect different countries’ success in managing the COVID-19 pandemic. Almost all of the countries that have fallen lower on the list have struggled with the pandemic, while countries that have managed the public health crisis more effectively have risen in the rankings.

“The U.S. is now leading the world in vaccinations, but we had a really inconsistent situation in 2020, creating a negative impression around the world,” Shotwell says. “If you add in the social unrest that we have had and the divisions, it makes people less willing to consider the U.S. as a place to go.”

—Roy Maurer

USE OF GPA IN HIRING DECLINES

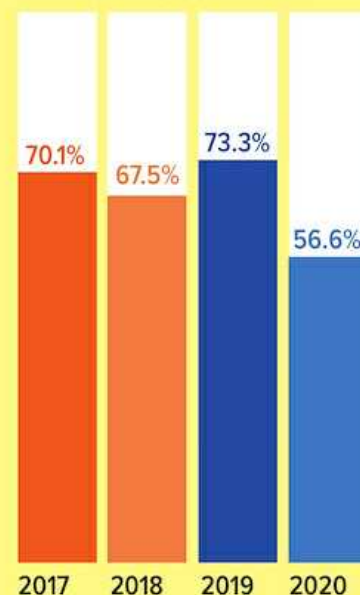
Just 56.6 percent of employers are using grade point average (GPA) to screen new college graduates for jobs this year compared with 73.3 percent in 2019, according to a survey by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE).

Using GPA to screen job candidates has been recognized as a barrier to some students, and many have questioned whether GPA is a valid indicator of a candidate’s ability to do the job, says Shawn VanDerziel, NACE executive director.

“Employers responding to social justice issues are committed to diversifying their workforces,” VanDerziel says. “Eliminating the GPA cutoff is one method employers are using to expand the candidate pool in order to produce more diversity in their new hires.”

While fewer employers are screening candidates by GPA, the average reported GPA cutoff remains at 3.0, the survey found.

PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYERS USING GPA

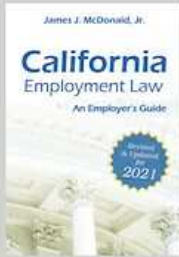


Source: Job Outlook 2021 Spring Update, National Association of Colleges and Employers.



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RECOMMENDED READING



**CALIFORNIA
EMPLOYMENT LAW:
AN EMPLOYER'S GUIDE,
REVISED & UPDATED
FOR 2021**

By James J. McDonald Jr.

It is often said that it's impossible for an employer to fully comply with all of California's complicated employment laws. This is the go-to guide for those who must contend with California employment law as part of their day-to-day work, including employers based outside of California that have employees working in the state.

The author, James J. McDonald Jr., is managing partner of the Irvine, Calif., office of the national labor and employment law firm Fisher & Phillips LLP.



**THE TALENT FIX:
A LEADER'S GUIDE
TO RECRUITING
GREAT TALENT**

By Tim Sackett, SHRM-SCP

Tim Sackett presents a proven recruiting model for talent acquisition leaders and practitioners, with real-world examples and stories about how innovative organizations are successfully recruiting today. He then shows how organizations can build and sustain their own great talent acquisition function. Sackett, president of HRU Technical Resources, an IT and engineering contract staffing company in Lansing, Mich., draws on more than 20 years' experience as an HR and talent acquisition professional.



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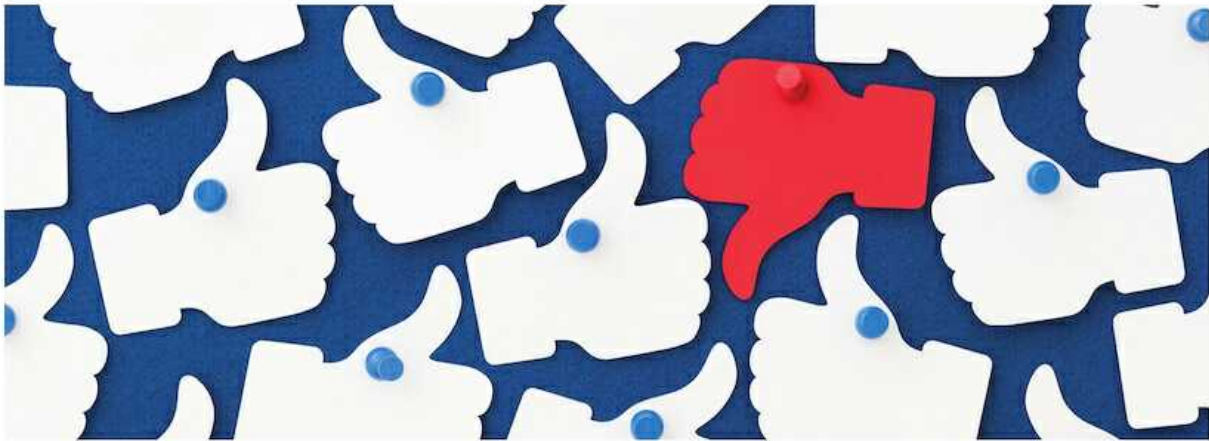
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ONLINE BEHAVIOR

Can we force an employee to take discriminatory posts off a personal Facebook page?



Forcing an employee to remove statements from a personal Facebook page or other social media platform typically would involve taking legal action. However, when a statement on social media violates anti-discrimination laws or company policy, the employer would generally be within its right to require the employee to remove the statement; the employee's refusal to do so may trigger disciplinary action or termination. Let's consider a few issues.

Most employees have a false understanding of free speech associated with social media and may feel a sense of freedom or protection in posting controversial statements on online platforms. Discriminatory, false or disparaging statements posted on personal social media pages aren't beyond an employer's reach. Violating a company's policy or code of conduct will generally support an employer's request to have a post removed.

Creating a social media policy that addresses offensive and inappropriate conduct and that communicates the company's core values is instrumental in setting clear expectations for

employees regarding both on- and off-duty conduct. Informed employees will be more aware of the impact social media posts may have on others and the employer's brand and will better understand what is acceptable.

An employer also should ensure that a statement on social media isn't protected by federal or state law. Social media posts that engage co-workers in dialogue regarding working conditions such as pay equity, scheduling issues or even complaints about a supervisor are likely protected under Section 7 of the National Labor Relations Act. Employees engaging in protected concerted activity wouldn't be required to remove a statement no matter how damaging it may be for an employer. Additionally, five states—California, Colorado, Louisiana, New York and North Dakota—offer protection from employer retaliation for engaging in lawful off-duty conduct and political activities, but not

for making discriminatory comments or engaging in illegal activities.

Implementing a detailed social media policy and carefully examining whether a questionable statement made by an employee online violates company policy or anti-discrimination laws will help employers establish a standard process for addressing employees' social media activity going forward.

Employers should also regularly review and communicate the company's policies, code of conduct and core values so employees are aware of what types of behaviors may be unacceptable.

Fostering inclusive workplaces assists employees in understanding others. Organizations with inclusive cultures may also create environments that help to reduce offensive and hateful speech in social media posts. ■



Patricia Graves, SHRM-SCP, is an HR Knowledge Advisor for SHRM.



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DEPARTMENT OF ONE



FROM SOLO TO DUO

How to build a solid business case for increasing your department's staff size.

By Theresa Minton-Eversole

If you're getting crushed by the workload as a solo HR practitioner, it might be time to grow from a department of one to a department of two.

Increasing staff size in the HR department is never an easy sell. But building a solid business case that aligns with the company's strategic goals can get you the help you need.

Follow these five steps to increase your chances for success.

1. ASSESS THE NEED

Is the company growing, and is the growth expected to continue? Do you have specific skills gaps that need to be addressed? Is the quality of work decreasing because of the quantity of work being handled? Document the work you're currently doing, the work that's not getting done due to a lack

of resources and the costs associated with both. What are the consequences of not hiring help?

"Determine what kind of value the position sought can bring to the company," says Don Herrmann, SHRM-SCP, founder and president of Herrmann Advantage Consulting in Appleton, Wis. "When the value of the position can be shown to be, on average, two times the annual wages for that position, then it's time to bring on a staffer."

Also, consider how much of the work that the new hire would handle is going to be HR work.

"Often, the person responsible for HR is doing work that's not really HR's role," Herrmann says. If that's the case, delegate the work to other departments or consider hiring a lower-paid administrative assistant

rather than another HR professional to handle those duties.

HR department staffing decisions should be analyzed based on risks and rewards to determine which activities should be handled in-house and which ones can be outsourced, says Paul Young, SHRM-SCP, HR manager for the American Association of Endodontists in Chicago. Activities that add the greatest value, such as policy development and performance management, should be handled internally, whereas high-risk, low-reward transactional HR tasks, such as payroll and benefits administration, might be candidates for outsourcing.

"Make sure you've offloaded all feasible administrative functions and automated all you can before requesting staffing," says Young, who also teaches HR courses at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill. "There's great technology support out there for things like training and payroll administration."

Melanie Parrish started conducting staffing assessments shortly after joining Quicksilver Scientific as its HR director in 2017. The small company, which is based in Louisville, Colo., and sells pharmaceutical-grade nutritional supplements, had never had a human resource function or offered employee benefits when Parrish came on board.

Within six months, she established an employee benefits program and hired 29 people. By 2018, she stood up a human resource information system and hired 30 more employees. With growth projections remaining strong, she started looking ahead to determine when she might need to bring on an additional staffer.

"I reported to the vice president of finance and had a very good working relationship with her, so she was clued in to my day-to-day [responsibilities]," Parrish says, adding that the process of building a case for adding HR staff was more informal than in

‘The impetus is on HR to advocate for yourself and ask for the authority to do what you can to help leadership attain their vision.’

MELANIE PARRISH



some organizations. Still, she had to do her due diligence and create a proper job description prior to hiring a well-rounded HR generalist.

2. COLLECT THE RIGHT DATA

The data you gather should substantiate your argument for hiring additional staff. Here are some examples of the data needed to make your case:

- **Company and industry trends.** What's the long-term forecast for your company and industry?
- **Support needed to achieve the company's goals.** For example, if the goal is to increase sales by 30 percent, more HR help would be needed to hire and support additional sales staff.
- **Facts that highlight a need for action.** Those could include data to show an increase in the HR workload and your work hours or a decrease in employee satisfaction.
- **The negative business impact if HR staff isn't added.** Is it taking longer to recruit, hire and onboard new employees? Is employee satisfaction down?

Herrmann says it's also a good idea to work with other business managers to document how adding another HR professional will help them, too.

Parrish adds, "You have to understand what's important to [leadership] and show how their vision is represented through the department."

3. CREATE A JOB DESCRIPTION

Again, details matter. Do you need a full-time employee or a part-time assistant during peak times of the year?

Who will the staffer report to, and what specific work will be performed?

Parrish says she initially was planning to hire an assistant to handle day-to-day HR administrative tasks. But as she defined the position's responsibilities, she determined it was necessary to hire an HR generalist who could oversee recruiting and open enrollment so she would be freed up to handle all negotiating and strategic planning.

4. BUILD A BUSINESS CASE

Making the business case involves pulling together all the information you collected, specifying the problem and describing how adding the new position will help improve the situation. Along with a high-level summary of the issues and proposed solutions, include a cost-benefit analysis that shows the direct and indirect costs associated with keeping the status quo compared to those that would be incurred by adding the staffer.

"Keep it simple," Herrmann says. "What's it costing to do things now versus the costs of how things can be done? Don't forget to include the intangible costs associated with things like rework, errors and decreased employee satisfaction, along with the fixed costs."

Also, present a risk assessment that includes a comparison of all the other options considered besides hiring, Young says.



"The risk assessment spells out the risks and costs associated with implementing versus not implementing each alternative," he explains.

Finally, include an action plan and proposed next steps, and propose the metrics you plan to use to measure productivity and improvements.

5. DETERMINE PROPER TIMING

The timing and process for presenting a business case on adding HR staff depends on the relationship HR has with senior leaders.

Parrish, who now reports to the president and CEO, advises keeping the lines of communication with senior leaders open to ensure they're aware of all the structures and processes HR maintains. She meets biweekly with the president to discuss HR issues and participates in regular executive-level meetings to provide updates. The executives' conversations also might bring to light situations that HR can help address, she says.

"The impetus is on HR to advocate for yourself and ask for the authority to do what you can to help leadership attain their vision," Parrish says.

Hiring approvals don't always happen the first time they're submitted, Herrmann notes.

"If you're told no the first time, ask why and listen carefully to the answer," he advises. "Then you can go get help with addressing that and try again." ■

Theresa Minton-Eversole is a writer based in Alexandria, Va.

LEGAL TRENDS

THE ART OF THE SETTLEMENT

Consider a rational and relationship-based approach to the resolution of claims.

By Margaret M. Clark, J.D., SHRM-SCP

Most individual employment-discrimination lawsuits—including harassment and retaliation claims—do not make it to trial. Like civil suits of all kinds, they are much more frequently settled or dismissed on pretrial motion, such as when no version of the plaintiff's facts would support a jury's decision.

Parties choose to settle for many reasons, including:

- Preference for certainty versus uncertainty of outcome.

- Desire to save significant amounts of time, money and distraction.
- Ability to reach an agreement that all can live with.
- Interest in preserving privacy and confidentiality, although some states have begun to limit or even ban nondisclosure provisions in discrimination settlement agreements. Another factor is the impact of local court rules that require all cases to first go through some form of alternative dispute resolution.

The likelihood that most employ-

ment cases will settle highlights the need for employers to engage in early case assessment. But what does that mean? And what is a rational and sustainable process for doing so?

GOOD FACTS VS. BAD FACTS

With the help of counsel, HR professionals should look closely at both sides of the case. If the bad facts—those that would be unfavorable to the employer—outweigh the good facts, the employer may opt for early settlement, says Maria Greco Danaher, an attorney with Ogletree Deakins in Pittsburgh. If there are enough good facts, an employer may choose to move forward with defending the lawsuit.

HR professionals should be active partners with counsel in early case assessment. They are likely to have key information, such as the plaintiff's history with the company and whether relevant witnesses still work there or, if not, whether they left on good or bad terms. HR professionals will also have insight into the impact litigation will have on both the business and the budget. And they may be able to judge whether offering a settlement on one claim is likely to invite other claims. "This information is a critical piece of early case assessment and a complement to the legal analysis that the in-house or outside attorneys can offer," says Dawn Solowey, senior counsel with Seyfarth in Boston.

Case assessment, and ultimately a decision to settle a case, is about more than checking off boxes. Discrimination claims are often fraught with emotion on both sides, espe-



ILLUSTRATION BY ADAM NIKIEWICZ FOR HR MAGAZINE

cially if the HR professional is the same person who made the decision that led to the complaint. "The factor that creates the most resistance [to settlement] is when the person who decided the adverse action is the person who is deciding whether to settle the case," Danaher says. "The HR person doesn't want to think of it as 'Now we have to pay money. I must have made a mistake.'"

In broaching settlement discussions, Danaher strives to help her clients identify shared interests between the employer and the claimant as opposed to seeing only a binary choice: settle or don't settle. "You start evaluating the case on day one, but you don't start by talking about all or nothing," she says. "It's a creative, continuous process." The communication skills of both counsel and the company's representative are key to the effectiveness of this process, and a trusting relationship between them is essential.

CONSISTENT APPROACH

Employers facing numerous discrimination complaints would be wise to adopt a well-thought-out, consistent approach to settlement, Solowey says. "Even in a smaller organization that faces a small number of claims, it can be helpful to have a strategy so that you're not just reacting ad hoc to each claim or threatened claim," she says. Establishing a customized approach that's organic to and reflective of the organization—its values, business needs and budget—takes a lot of the stress out of individual settlement decisions, Solowey adds.

Exactly who plays what role in initiating and developing such a strategy will vary. "Ideally, there's a partnership between the HR professional and in-house or outside counsel," Solowey says. "As outside counsel, I always welcome any creative thinking from the HR or in-house team."

In some cases, deciding whether to settle a particular case might prompt

a larger conversation. "The HR professional is in as good a position as anyone to initiate such a process," Solowey says. She suggests opening the conversation with "How do we want to handle these more broadly?" or "Would it be helpful to put in place some internal guidelines to inform our approach to future cases?"

Regardless of who initiates the process or ultimately calls the shots, key stakeholders need to be involved in setting the strategy, Solowey says. This would include any outside and in-house counsel, HR, and leaders of major business units or departments.

As part of the discussion, HR might suggest setting a goal to help clarify the organization's approach to settlements going forward.

Examples of possible goals include reducing overall defense costs on settlements and judgments,

as well as protecting the company's reputation. Meeting those goals will require reviewing various metrics over a specified period—for example, settlement payout ranges and averages, as well as the stage of litigation when settlements were paid. It also can be useful to review the company's success rate in cases that were not settled and to calculate average costs of defense or judgment in those cases. Review of historical data also helps to set a goal for the average cost to resolve a claim.

Whether the data is collected in-house or externally, Solowey says, "the key is to keep the metrics consistently updated and in a central repository so that when there's turnover at the company, you don't lose that institutional knowledge." ■

Margaret M. Clark, J.D., SHRM-SCP, is a freelance writer in Arlington, Va.



DEVELOPING AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT STRATEGY

Dawn Solowey, senior counsel with Seyfarth in Boston, suggests questions to ask when developing an overall settlement strategy and factors to consider when evaluating each new discrimination claim.

Each organization will have its own take on the questions that will drive strategy, she says. These questions include:

- Are you going to offer severance in the interest of avoiding potential or threatened litigation?
- Are you generally going to use the early mediation program often offered at the agency level?
- For either of the above, in what dollar range would you settle?
- What does "nuisance value"—the acceptable cost of "making it go away"—mean to your organization?

In evaluating a specific claim, factors to consider include:

- Nature of the claim and strength of defense.
- Potential damages.
- Availability and strength of witnesses.
- Impact of litigation on the business or work of the company.
- Estimated budget to defend the claim through dispositive motion or trial.
- Potential proliferation of claims. Is litigating or settling more likely to invite similar claims?
- Reputational concerns. Does the publicity factor weigh in favor of vigorous defense or confidential settlement when possible?

TECH TALK

THE BEST HR PLATFORMS PUT WORKERS FIRST

Technology is emerging as a key factor in enhancing the employee experience.

By Dave Zielinski

When employees at The E.W. Scripps Co. have a pressing question about a human resources issue, they don't have to search endlessly through HR systems or endure the pain of a prolonged game of e-mail tag with support staff to find answers. Whether they're requesting a leave of absence, instructions on fixing a computer problem, a health savings account balance or myriad other types of information, employees can send a text to a "digital conversation hub" to get answers quickly with the help of AI technology.

"The hub plays the role of traffic cop, either pointing employees exactly where they need to go to get questions answered or bringing that information directly to them," says Kevin McDonald, vice president of business process outsourcing governance and HR operations at the diversified media company based in Cincinnati. "We look at the platform as a way to address all things that impact the employee experience, not just as an HR tool."

The knowledge base provided by vendor Socrates.ai overlays dispa-

rate HR, IT, shared services and payroll systems at E.W. Scripps so employees can get responses or complete transactions without having to know which system to use to get what they need.

"We're trying to reach employees where they are with the hub," says McDonald. "All of the HR-related information we feel good about from a data security standpoint we want to put right at people's fingertips."

The system used by E.W. Scripps is an example of a so-called employ-



ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL KORSBAGE FOR HR MAGAZINE

ee experience technology platform popularized within HR in the past year. Although definitions of these platforms vary, most work by creating an “experience layer” or interface on top of existing HR technology infrastructure, tying together disparate systems and applications with the promise of giving employees a more cohesive, simple and frictionless experience with technology in their organizations.

The best of these platforms create a single interface for workers and support most stages of the employee life cycle—from recruiting to performance management to career development—with an enhanced level of efficiency and user-friendliness. Many are also designed to bring frequently used HR apps and systems directly into employees’ daily workflows rather than keeping those tools orbiting beyond popular communication networks such as Microsoft Teams or Slack.

Josh Bersin, an HR technology analyst and founder of the Josh Bersin Academy in Oakland, Calif., believes one of the biggest trends in 2021 will be the accelerating convergence of HR technology and work technology. He says the trend is evidenced by the rapid spread of human resource applications into areas beyond payroll and employee administration in an effort to make HR a feature of daily work, not a destination separate from it.

“Employees don’t have the time, interest or attention span to log in to an HR system, poke around looking for the right page and then enter their vacation schedule,” Bersin wrote in his report *HR Technology 2021: The Definitive Guide*. “If technology fits into day-to-day work life, employees will find it valuable and HR will benefit. If employees find it to be an interruption and they have to learn how to use it, the verdict is simple: Companies won’t gain as much value from it.”



‘If technology fits into day-to-day work life, employees will find it valuable and HR will benefit.’

JOSH BERSIN

DEFINING THE PLATFORM

Employee experience platforms share common features, but not all are configured or applied similarly. “We believe there is no one platform in the market that captures the sum total of all the interactions employees have as they progress through the organization,” says Ron Hanscome, research vice president for human capital management (HCM) technologies with Gartner, a research and advisory firm in Stamford, Conn. “That being said, we’re certainly seeing the evolution of more continuous support for employees via technology through their full life cycle.”

Take, for example, Microsoft’s recently introduced Viva platform, which features HR-like modules for employee engagement, learning, knowledge discovery and well-being. Although it is a form of employee experience technology, Hanscome says, it doesn’t fully meet Gartner’s definition of an employee experience platform: “a diverse collection of employee- and manager-facing solutions.”

Regardless of how employee experience platforms are defined, says John Brownridge, a principal with Deloitte Consulting, the COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the need to deliver a more streamlined and cohesive technology experience to employees.

“If you worked remotely during the pandemic, your digital experience was the entirety of your experience with your organization,” Brownridge says, noting how people worked and interacted solely through computer networks and smartphones. “Because of that shift, many companies discovered that the organizational technology they thought was working well didn’t always function the way it should to help people do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.”

COMBATING ‘TECHNOLOGY CREEP’

As organizations continue to add disparate systems and applications to their technology ecosystems—a problem known as “technology creep”—employees increasingly are struggling to navigate and use them. For example, a study from Aptitude Research, a consulting firm specializing in HCM technologies, found that, on average, organizations are now using more than 10 different recruiting technology systems.

“Many employees are spending too much time searching for documents or answers to their questions and not enough time doing their daily work,” Brownridge says. “In many cases, it’s because it’s so difficult to navigate the spaghetti diagram of organizational systems to find what they need.”

In its 2020 HR Technology Survey,

The best platforms create a single interface for workers and support most stages of the employee life cycle with an enhanced level of efficiency and user-friendliness.

consulting firm PwC found that 50 percent of respondents are still focused on buying “best of breed” technology systems or stand-alone platforms, such as recruiting or performance management systems, that aren’t part of a consolidated HR technology suite. The PwC survey captured the views of 600 HR and HR information technology leaders on six continents.

“The numbers are still pretty high in terms of organizations not wanting to compromise when they want a certain technology from a niche vendor,” says Dan Staley, a global HR technology leader for PwC. “That suggests the problem of technology fragmentation isn’t going away anytime soon.”

WORKFLOW INTEGRATION

A growing number of HR technology vendors have worked to resolve the issue of technology fragmentation by consolidating their products on one platform or by integrating their systems with the popular platforms employees use every day for work. HR vendors have integrated their systems and apps with platforms such as Slack, Microsoft Teams or Salesforce to make it easier for employees to perform common HR tasks within their daily workflows. Examples of such tasks include providing performance feedback to colleagues, checking on pay or benefits, conducting interviews with job candidates, swapping shifts with co-workers, and taking online learning courses.

“The past few years have seen a movement by HR vendors to intersect their systems with those

technologies where employees live and work each day so people don’t have to think about logging in to separate systems to access HR apps and tools,” Hanscome explains.

Staley says PwC’s survey showed that the adoption rates of many HR technologies introduced to the organization continue to lag, making it vital that those systems be not only more user-friendly, but also more visible and accessible.

“Having that unifying employee experience layer on top of your technology infrastructure is one thing, but you still have to drive people to it,” Staley says. “When employees boot up their homepages, they should be able to see icons for HR apps they use most often or any

CASE STUDY: HOW ONE COMPANY BUILT AN EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE PORTAL

One organization that implemented a form of employee experience platform is Nouryon, a chemical manufacturing company based in Amsterdam. Nouryon created a dedicated HR services portal for 10,000 employees across multiple countries with the goal of resolving employee issues faster, standardizing HR processes and enhancing the employee experience.

Rather than designing the portal solely around HR processes, Nouryon chose to focus on the broader employee user experience. By surveying employees to determine exactly what they wanted from the new platform, the HR function discovered that clarity and simplicity were the top needs of user groups such as office staff, factory workers and HR managers.

“We discovered that people didn’t understand how to self-serve or navigate easily on the old legacy system,” says Liesbeth van Dijk, a global HR technology manager at the company. Employees had been spending too much time searching for HR documents and were overwhelmed by 6,000 knowledge articles on the old system, the surveys found.

The new platform, which was provided by vendor ServiceNow, gives employees a single entry point and more-visible signposts so they can find the HR information or services they need faster. The sprawling knowledge library also was streamlined and reduced to only the most relevant articles.

Nouryon plans to integrate the new portal with its core human capital management system to align operations across both platforms, reduce redundant data and create a more seamless digital experience for employees. —D.Z.



HR-related tasks on their plate. For managers, that might be things like approving employee timecards or a need to give more performance feedback to a particular employee. Those kinds of HR dashboards already exist, but the problem is they're often disconnected from other work technologies and employees have to go out and navigate to them."

REIMAGINING THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

While the employee experience has historically been considered the domain of HR, experts say more leaders outside of the function—increasingly led by the C-suite—are beginning to see that experience through a new lens as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trevor White, a research manager specializing in HCM and talent

management technologies for Nucleus Research in Boston, says the pandemic caused many executives to change their views of the employee experience from a "soft" issue to one with profound implications for employee well-being and the bottom line.

White believes top leaders now better understand how a poor employee experience in the organization—whether it's the result of frustrating technology systems, an indifferent manager or a lack of connection to co-workers—can impact employee morale and ultimately worker productivity, performance and retention. As a result, he says, more executives now see the digital experience as a key lever in the employee experience.

Gartner researchers note a similar trend in a

study the firm conducted this year that predicted more employers would shift their focus from managing the employee experience at work to managing the *life experience* of employees.

Gartner's 2020 Reimagine HR Employee Survey found that when employers support employees' life experiences, including their emotional and financial health, the organizations see not only a 23 percent increase in employees reporting improved mental health but also a 21 percent increase in the number of high-performers

compared to companies that don't provide the same level of support to employees. [IR](#)

Dave Zielinski is a freelance business journalist in Minneapolis.



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Q&A

PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT

Former Best Buy CEO Hubert Joly outlines a vision that places purpose and people at the heart of business.

When Hubert Joly led Best Buy in a remarkable turnaround, the employee manuals failed to mention sick dinosaurs.

Yet when a child and his mother showed up at a Best Buy store with a damaged dinosaur toy, two blue-shirted employees knew just what to do. The boy wanted the dinosaur cured, not simply replaced. So the employees stepped behind a counter and offered a full play-by-play of the “surgery” they were performing, then quietly swapped out the broken dinosaur for a new one.

Some CEOs might have objected to a worker handing a customer a free replacement item, but Joly, who was CEO and later executive chairman at Best Buy from 2012 to 2020, was overjoyed at the passion his employees brought to the job and their focus on leaving happiness in their wake.

Joly took over the company as Amazon was putting big-box chain stores out of business. He not only kept Best Buy from the same fate, but the company's stock soared during his tenure. Joly, who was born and raised in France and named a Knight in the French Legion of Honor, also found ways to collaborate with competitors, including Amazon.

After 20 years as a CEO, he's now sharing his knowledge in *The Heart of Business: Leadership Principles for the Next Era of Capitalism* (Harvard Business Review, 2021). Joly is also consulting, sitting on boards

and teaching at Harvard Business School. He's developing a curriculum based on the book's premise that capitalism is broken and companies need to focus on pursuing a noble purpose and treat profit as an outcome, not the goal.

How do you convince people that making money should not be the primary goal for companies?



An extensive focus on profit is wrong and poisonous and unhelpful. Don't focus at first on profit; treat it as an outcome. When I started at Best Buy, I got a lot of recommendations to cut, cut, cut. We did the opposite. We focused on people first. They are the energy of the company. First, try to increase revenue. Second, reduce nonsalary expenses. Third, optimize benefits. Then you go after headcount as a last resort.

Business and capitalism need an urgent refoundation. We have environmental problems, health problems, social justice problems, racism. The book outlines a vision of putting purpose and people at the heart of business. The difficulty is this is hard to do.

What can employers do to put people first?

One, help everybody at the company connect what drives them with the purpose of the company. At Best Buy, we're in the business of enriching lives through technology that addresses key human needs. It's about helping other human beings. Most of us can connect with this.

And two, create an environment where there are genuine human connections. If we can create an environment where every employee is “seen” and can be the best version of themselves, that's magical.

Do many companies know what their “purpose” is—and how do they find it if they don't?

What's our reason for being? The answer can be found at the intersection of four circles, like a Venn diagram: what the world needs, what we're passionate about, what we're good

‘If we can create an environment where every employee is “seen” and can be the best version of themselves, that’s magical.’

at and capable of, and how we can make money.

How did you develop your focus on both diversity and sustainability?

It’s only by having every individual feel they belong that you can create good outcomes. This country is becoming more diverse, so who would dream of a business populated only by white males? You’re going to fail. You have to have an employee population and leadership that reflect the

customer base and the community. It’s good business sense, and it’s also the right thing to do.

The environment is equally simple. If the planet is on fire, we’re not going to have a business.

What’s the best way to motivate employees, and how much of that equation involves offering financial incentives?

There’s research by MIT that shows that financial incentives don’t drive

performance. I believe that even though companies spend millions designing the perfect incentive system, motivation is intrinsic—it comes from within. Ask your team members, “What drives you?”

What prompted you to step down from Best Buy, and do you have any regrets?

I had never attached my identity to being a CEO. I had accomplished what I set out to accomplish. I was not moving to Florida to play golf with aging men. I want the next 10, 15, 20 years to be impactful—to use the platform I have to make a positive difference in the world. Today, what I’m passionate about is this refoundation of business around purpose and humanity. ■

Interview by Tamara Lytle, a freelance writer in the Washington, D.C., area.

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SHOULD EMPLOYERS TIE EXECUTIVE COMPENSATION TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION GOALS?

Aligning pay with business goals is a common method of ensuring results.

By Ed Hasan

It is now widely accepted that achieving high levels of diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) can create a competitive advantage and drive individual and organizational performance. However, organizations seeking to advance in these areas face a strategic alignment challenge: how to embed DE&I priorities into the heart of a company's business strategy.

This requires integrating DE&I practices into all aspects of the organization, including behaviors, structures and systems. Such an onerous challenge demands disciplined execution. It is therefore not surprising that many of the organizations that have recently made bold and unprecedented commitments to advance DE&I goals, including

Mercer's estimate of 15 percent to 20 percent of the S&P 500, are aligning executive pay with DE&I performance.

Using compensation to achieve DE&I strategic alignment is particularly promising since organizations extensively use incentives for other financial and business goals. Executives understand incentives, which apparently help align their individual goals to their firm's strategic priorities. Why reinvent the wheel?

Moreover, linking executive pay to DE&I goals has a multiplier effect. Once strategic alignment is achieved at the senior management level, it's easier to cascade those goals to middle managers and the entire organization. When executives have a stake in the matter, they are more likely to advocate creative ways to advance DE&I goals, such as by awarding corporate matching gifts and spot bonuses.

Pay is perhaps the most powerful motivator of performance for most people, research shows. As companies set aggressive DE&I goals—for example, Microsoft, Salesforce and Uber recently announced plans to double Black representation in their leadership teams—motivating executives to deliver results is key. To put it simply, if diversity is a strategic imperative and good for business, then it should be compensated as such.

The unusual challenges of managing in a post-COVID-19 era, as well as an increasing number of environmental, social, governance and business priorities, are competing for executive attention. Executives need extra motivation to pursue multiyear initiatives that produce long-term change. Long-term incentives are perfectly suited for this, especially when they are complemented with short-term incentives that reward incremental progress. While in a perfect world no executive should have to be compensated to drive DE&I efforts, the painfully slow progress over the last few decades and the urgent need for change call for such radical intervention.

Every HR intervention sends a signal about what the company values. At a time when some employers are merely paying lip service to DE&I and “woke-washing” is rife, organizations need to show that they're serious. When companies such as Sodexo and Procter & Gamble link 10 percent of executive pay to DE&I goals, for example, they are essentially telling senior leaders to allocate that percentage of their time and energy to DE&I issues. To employees, investors and board members, these companies are communicating that building a diverse and inclusive workplace culture is a top priority and that executives will be held accountable for achieving it.

There also is often a need to demonstrate to those outside the business—consumers, suppliers, activists, regulators and the media—that DE&I matters to the company. There is no better way to get the message across to a skeptical audience than by linking executive pay to the achievement of DE&I goals. That's how to show stakeholders that you put your money where your mouth is.

YES



Ed Hasan is the CEO of Kaizen Human Capital, an organizational development and HR consultancy in the Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles metro areas. He also is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University and an instructor for SHRM.

Financial incentives undermine intrinsic motivation or interest in a task.

By Ifedapo Adeleye

With the business and moral case for DE&I becoming overwhelmingly compelling in recent years, it is hard to justify why executives need financial incentives to motivate them to do the right thing. For 21st century business leaders, increasing DE&I shouldn't be an afterthought or a responsibility outsourced to HR—it must be an essential element of their jobs for which they receive a base salary.

The problem with financial incentives is that they undermine intrinsic motivation or interest in a task because people tend to think they are working for just the reward. Even if intrinsic motivation isn't enough for executives, what about using other

recognition and rewards programs that are more inclusive, such as paid time off for volunteering and peer-to-peer recognition awards? That way, all employees advancing DE&I goals can participate—not just executives. These types of programs also have more impact because they celebrate ongoing efforts and are more cost-effective.

The optics and ethics of financial incentives also can be problematic. Senior executives, who are typically in the more powerful and privileged demographic (white men), are being paid to hire and treat historically marginalized and oppressed people fairly. Meanwhile, most of the hands-on DE&I work tends to be done by historically excluded groups and middle managers, who aren't usually compensated for their contributions.

Most organizations tying incentives to DE&I goals do so only in their annual plans, creating a serious mismatch between the problem and solutions, as DE&I work takes multiple years and is more suited for long-term incentive plans. This mismatch is more pronounced when organizations set DE&I stretch goals.

FirstEnergy, an Ohio-based utility, for example, tied 10 percent (and later 15 percent) of executives' annual bonuses to three DE&I goals, including increasing diversity in the candidate pool for mana-

gerial positions and improving workplace climate. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was no payout in the first year and only a partial payout in the second, according to the company. Building a diverse and inclusive workplace takes time, and company leaders should recognize and celebrate short-term efforts as well as long-term results.

To be clear, incentives do work and can be leveraged to advance DE&I goals. But they sometimes lead to undesirable results. Volkswagen's "Dieselgate" and Wells Fargo's cross-selling scandal are examples of how executive incentives can lead to unethical behavior. If the benefit is worth the risk, chances are that some executives will be tempted to do wrong things, such as falsify DE&I data or make questionable trade-offs.

A recent study lends credence to such concerns. Researchers found that in organizations with aggressive DE&I goals, high-potential women who are considered critical to meeting diversity targets are given a pay premium (earning more than their male counterparts), whereas women overall continue to experience a pay penalty or inequity. The risk that organizations will focus on employees with "diversity value" at the expense of a broader segment of their workforce to achieve their goal is real and alarming.

Another potentially counterproductive outcome of linking executive pay to DE&I goals, given the tendency to focus narrowly on diversity (representation) metrics, is that organizations would not pay sufficient attention to equity and inclusion issues. The consequence? Retaining a diverse workforce becomes a serious challenge due to inequities and a noninclusive workplace culture; overall, DE&I progress is stalled and long-term sustainable change proves elusive. ■



Ifedapo Adeleye is faculty director of the Master's in Human Resources Management program at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C. He conducts research and advises clients on inclusion issues.

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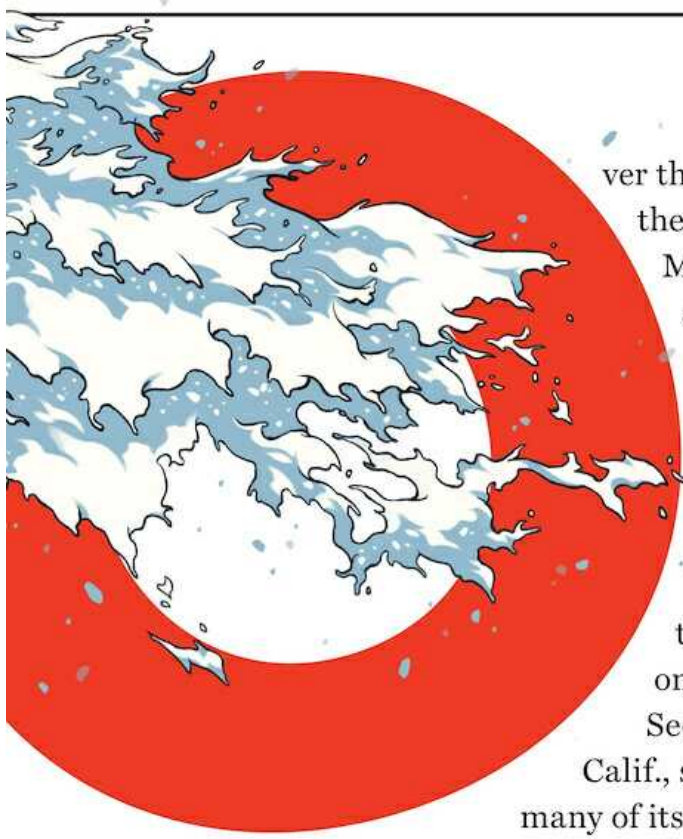
WOWER NAMI

How can HR professionals prepare for the
wave of voluntary employee departures
that experts are predicting?

By Kathryn Tyler

Illustrations by Yuta Onoda





ver the past year, three of the nine teachers at the Friends Preschool and Kindergarten in Milford, Mich., left their jobs. One retired, and two quit because of COVID-19-related health concerns for themselves or a family member. A fourth needed extensive time off to attend to her children.

“Preschools and child care centers struggle with staff turnover during the best of times,” says Tammy Rittmueller, the school’s director. “The pandemic has only heightened this dilemma.”

See’s Candies, based in South San Francisco, Calif., shut down all operations and furloughed many of its 5,000 employees when the pandemic hit in early 2020.

“After the furlough, the skeleton crew that remained worked diligently to reopen as soon as we could safely do so and start bringing our furloughed employees back,” says Chad Paulson, senior vice president of HR at the confectionary company. But, he explains, “there was a lot of uncertainty regarding the length of the furlough, and many of our employees were able to find alternative employment prior to being called back.”

Organizations large and small across the country are reporting that employee turnover rates are already reaching record highs this year. Labor analysts say they aren’t surprised, with many predicting a giant wave of voluntary employee departures caused by a pent-up demand for new jobs.

“Now that the vaccines are in motion, employers should be prepared for a turnover tsunami,” warns Melissa Jezior, president and CEO of Eagle Hill Consulting, a management consultancy in Washington, D.C.

About 1 in 4 U.S. employees plan to leave their employer as the COVID-19 pandemic subsides, according to a November 2020 survey conducted by Ipsos on behalf of Eagle Hill.

A separate February 2021 report found that 52 percent of 2,000 employees surveyed in the U.S. and Canada plan to look for a new job in 2021, an increase from 35 percent a year earlier. That’s according to *Engagement and Retention*

Report, which was released by Achievers Workforce Institute, the research arm of Toronto-based employee recognition software company Achievers.

“You’re not going to walk away from this unscathed,” Jezior cautions HR professionals.

THE EXODUS

Employees are most likely to leave a current job for one with better compensation and benefits or better work/life balance, according to the Achievers report. Burnout was cited by a majority of the 1,000 workers who said they plan to quit their job this year, according to the Eagle Hill survey.

“Employees with children at home remain a flight risk at this point,” says Cara Silletto, author of *Staying Power: Why Your Employees Leave and How to Keep Them Longer* (Silver Tree Publishing, 2018), who adds that workers on the lower end of the pay scale also are more likely to seek greener pastures.

“In general, the lower the wages, the faster the person can find a replacement job,” Silletto says. She is also president and chief retention officer at Magnet Culture, a retention consultancy in Louisville, Ky. “The higher skilled [the] people are, the harder it is for them to change industries.” She defines lower-wage workers as those earning less than \$18 an hour.

WEATHERING THE STORM

Turnover costs organizations in both time and money to recruit and train new employees—not to mention the loss of institutional knowledge and reduction in productivity while positions remain vacant.

To help retain employees as the economy improves, HR professionals can take steps now to reduce the predicted voluntary departures.

“Identify top performers you don’t want to lose,” Jezior recommends. “Empower managers to sit down with employees every other week” to conduct stay interviews de-

signed to make sure workers are satisfied. “Once people make the decision to leave and start looking and applying for jobs, your chance of keeping them is much lower. You’ve already lost the battle.”

Other recommendations for strengthening your employee retention efforts:

Address employee concerns. Listen to employees’ challenges and look for solutions.

Flexibility has been key at Renaissance Academy, a home-school and hybrid educational program with 35 employees in Farmington Hills, Mich. A new instructor gave

EARLY WARNING SIGNS

To maintain a stable workforce, HR professionals should analyze data available to them to help identify employees who are likely to leave. Here are some early warning signs that indicate employees may have one foot out the door:

Major life changes. “Keep an eye on who is graduating with an MBA or who is starting a family,” says Melissa Jezior, president and CEO of Eagle Hill Consulting, a management consultancy. “Big life changes often drive turnover.”

While such personal information can be hard to gather, developing good relationships and trust with employees can help, says Chad Paulson, senior vice president of HR at See’s Candies.

Missed promotions. Employees who are disappointed about being passed

over for promotions might begin to look elsewhere for opportunities to advance.

Keep a list of workers who applied for promotions, and check in with those who weren’t selected to ensure they feel appreciated

and to help them better prepare for the next opening.

High department turnover. Look at turnover data by department, division and manager to pinpoint where higher turnover rates exist. The employees in those divisions are at risk of leaving if you don’t quickly identify and eliminate the problem.

Paulson made a surprising discovery when he investigated high turnover in See’s Candies plants a couple of years ago. “We weren’t conducting an annual review of the competitive market and hadn’t realized our pay had ceased to be sufficiently competitive,” he says. “By simply analyzing the market and providing competitive compensation, we were able to stem the tide and enhance our recruitment and retention efforts.”

Reduced communication. Employees who fail to promptly answer calls or e-mails or who miss deadlines might be considering a move.

“A quiet employee can just as easily be a struggling employee as a satisfied employee,” says Heidi Pair, assistant director of Renaissance Academy, a

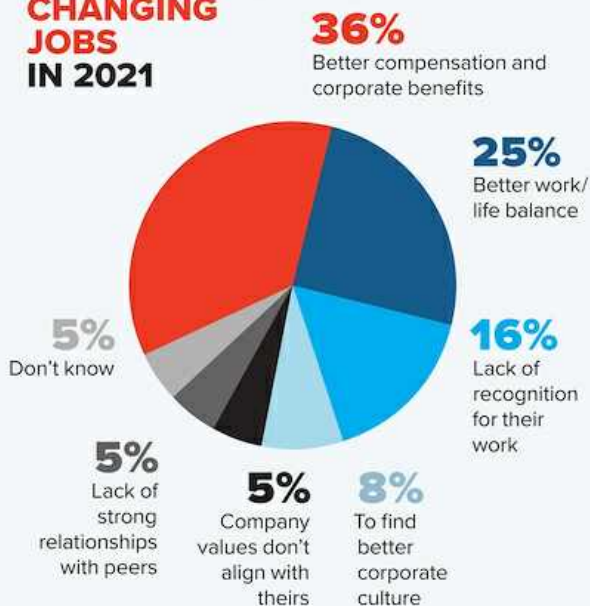
home-school and hybrid educational program. “Our instructional staff doesn’t meet in person during the summer months but uses that time to plan for their courses and build the virtual component for each course. For us, an early warning sign is minimal or no communication and little evidence of planning.”

Absenteeism. “Taking time off in the middle of the day shows employees might be doing interviews,” says Lance Anderson, SHRM-SCP, an HR and recruiting consultant at Anderson and Co. in Grand Prairie, Texas. Employees who are complaining, being less productive or job hunting online while at work might be considering a job change.

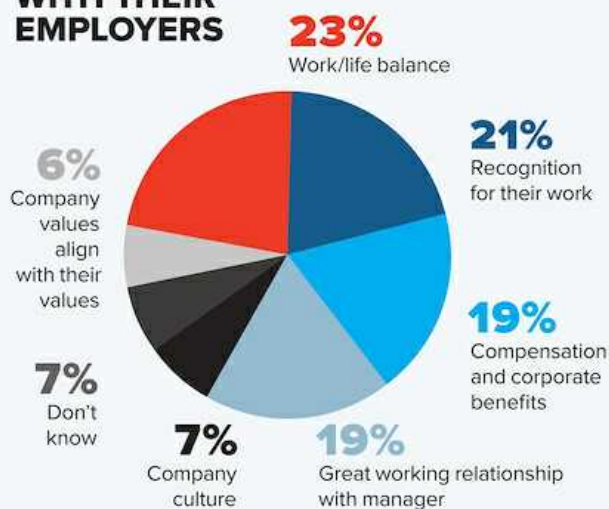
Don’t wait until they quit, Jezior advises. “Find out who you think is most at risk and start putting in some preventive measures today,” she says. “Who are your problem managers? Deal with them today.” —K.T.



WHY EMPLOYEES ARE CONSIDERING CHANGING JOBS IN 2021



TOP REASONS WORKERS PLAN TO STAY WITH THEIR EMPLOYERS



Source: Engagement and Retention Report, Achievers Workforce Institute, February 2021.

notice a couple of weeks after she was hired because she was uncertain whether her own children would be learning from home or in person.

"After some conversation, we swapped a class that was a little out of her comfort zone for an already developed course," recalls Heidi Pair, the school's assistant director. "After feeling supported and encouraged, the new instructor stayed and has become a valuable part of our team."

Present realistic job descriptions. Turnover tends to be highest among new hires—often because the job doesn't match their initial expectations. Once they experience what they perceive to be the downsides of a job, they quit. The solution is to expose potential candidates to the worst parts of the job so they know what they will be doing before they accept.

Is the factory hot and noisy? Walk potential candidates through it during the hottest and loudest part of the day. Is it difficult to take time off? Make that clear to applicants during the first interview. Employers tend to rush to fill a job with the first decent candidate, which results in a poor fit and a need to fill the position repeatedly.

"Look at your hiring processes," says Ginia Chapline, chief operations officer at Texas Trust Credit Union, which has 300 employees and is based in Arlington, Texas. "Hire for culture, not just skills. Make sure the person is a good fit for the organization. Have a successful onboarding process that eases new hires into their new work environment."

Establish strong onboarding, mentoring and advancement opportunities. New hires have weak ties to the organization, so it's easier for them to leave. To retain them, help them make connections as quickly as possible, Silletto advises.

"I see two buckets of workers today," she says. "One group is called the 'trees.' Like oaks, they are deeply rooted in the organization. They aren't leaving until retirement or they get poached with a better offer. The other group is the 'revolving door.' These are primarily new hires, and they're always a flight risk."

Her goal isn't to convert the revolving doors to trees, but to lengthen employees' tenure through strong onboarding, mentoring programs and promotions. For example, some people once spent their entire career as a bank teller. Now, that job is a steppingstone. By adding levels to that position, employees feel they are advancing and are less likely to jump ship.

"The flat hierarchy of the '90s is the opposite of what today's new workforce wants," Silletto says. "They want the assistant manager, manager and senior manager positions to give themselves a sense of advancement within one role."

Use stay interviews, not exit interviews.

Exit interviews provide insights on why employees are leaving. The idea is that once an employer knows what factors are contributing to employee departures, it can prevent an exodus.

LEARN MORE ABOUT PREVENTING TURNOVER
AT [SHRM.ORG/EMPLOYEEENGAGEMENT](https://shrm.org/employeeengagement)



But Mohammad Qais Momand, vice president of Dunya University in Kabul, Afghanistan, doesn't want to wait for an exit interview to find out employees aren't satisfied. "Why not have such interviews during the employee's career?" he asks. That way, the employer can make improvements.

When Rittmueller took over as Friends' preschool director, replacing someone who had been in the position for 23 years, she used stay interviews to find out how the staff felt about changes.

"I have been using this information to guide me through the rest of the present school year and in making plans for the next," she says. "In a small business such as our school, it's important the staff buy into the mission being set, to be part of the planning, to have a voice. It's my hope this involvement will keep my staff engaged and wanting to stay."

Offer accommodations. Silletto suggests focusing on those with young children at home or who have aging parents that need more care.

When one of her employees had two children, ages 6 and 9, at home for weeks without anyone to help, Silletto granted extended paid time off and flexible hours so the employee could work whatever time of day she was able.

"I rerouted some of the more time-sensitive items to other staff who could be more accessible for our clients," she says. "Some employers might claim they can't be that flexible, but she is the most loyal employee because I helped her through that hard time. It builds loyalty when you truly take care of your people and don't apply a one-size-fits-all strategy."

Communicate frequently. The best way to reduce turnover is to understand why employees stay and why they leave.



WHAT'S YOUR TURNOVER RATE?

Controlling turnover is one of the many quantitative ways the HR department can affect the bottom line. The turnover rate is calculated by taking the number of separations during a month, dividing that number by the average number of employees and multiplying by 100.

Source: SHRM How-to Guide: How to Determine Turnover Rate.

"The key is constantly getting input from the employees, whether it's direct communications between managers or HR, or pulse checks, or training programs," Paulson says. "The No. 1 priority should be to understand the employee's perspective and then to translate how it matches the employer's goals."

Be accessible. "Make it easy for employees to communicate with HR," Chapline says. "Our HR team is developing a new text platform to communicate with employees in a quicker, more mobile way. We've also made it easier for employees to reach HR by phone and resolve an issue on the first call."

EDUCATING MANAGERS

HR can help by training managers to communicate clearly, following through on commitments and being honest about issues that impact employees.

"If the employee doesn't believe you are willing or able to resolve the issue, they won't share," Pair says. "Also be willing to ask, 'How can I help?' and bring them into the problem-solving toward a solution."

52%

OF 2,000 WORKERS IN THE U.S. AND CANADA SAID THEY WILL JOB HUNT IN 2021—UP FROM 35% IN 2020.

Source: Engagement and Retention Report, Achievers Workforce Institute, February 2021.



2 IN 5 U.S. WORKERS SAY THEY ARE ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR ANOTHER JOB.

Source: American Workforce Roadmap Survey, SHRM, 2021.

Today's employees don't expect to work for the same company their entire career, so retention strategies need to adapt accordingly.

"We need to focus on how to extend someone's tenure as long as possible and make it a great experience so they are more likely to refer their friends, come back to us at some point or become a client," Jezior says. "It's not about reducing turnover, but rather about elongating tenure." ■

Kathryn Tyler is a freelance writer and former HR generalist and trainer in Wixom, Mich.

THE NEW WORLD OF





The pandemic put
an end to the five-day,
9-to-5, in-office workweek.
So where do businesses
go from here?

By Theresa Agovino



financial services provider TIAA had a jump-start when planning for the post-pandemic return of employees to its New York City headquarters. Before the public health crisis upended life, TIAA was already redesigning its midtown Manhattan location to create more areas for collaboration and less assigned seating to reflect employees' use of the space.

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked even bigger changes. TIAA created a hybrid work model that allows about 85 percent of its 16,000 employees to perform their jobs remotely at least part of the time. Schedules will reflect employees' roles, business requirements and personal needs. TIAA's office in Charlotte, N.C., was already being renovated to provide greater flexibility, and now the company is considering how to adapt its four other major hubs.

"The pandemic catalyzed us to think about work in different ways, for us to think about space and flexibility and how they can work together," says Andy Habenicht, TIAA's senior vice president of associate experience and solutions. "We're going for an approach that gives us the best of both worlds."

The pandemic dealt what is likely a serious blow to the five-day, 9-to-5, in-office workweek that has underpinned work life for nearly a century. Flexibility had been seeping into the workplace, but now it's flooding the corporate world as companies have discovered that remote work didn't slash productivity and employees valued the arrangement. To be sure, such onsite businesses as hospitals, hotels, retail services and manufacturing plants are less impacted. But even so, according to research from the Society for Human Resource

Management (SHRM), 70 percent of employed Americans would prefer to work remotely on a full-time or part-time basis if given the option, and 35 percent would accept a salary reduction in return for that flexibility. Also according to SHRM's research, nearly 20 percent of employed Americans who would prefer to work from home in some capacity would start looking for a remote position elsewhere—and 7 percent would quit their job—if their employer did not give them the option to work remotely.

THE REVOLUTION HAS BEGUN

Employers are taking such threats seriously. Nearly 60 percent of corporate leaders said they would let employees work from home occasionally, and 49 percent said remote work would be OK on certain days, according to a March survey by research firm Gartner. The changes are likely to have a profound effect on corporate real estate. Nearly half of companies surveyed said their overall footprint could contract up to 30 percent within the next two years.

"This is as seismic a change as we went through in the first and second industrial revolutions," says Steve Hatfield, a principal with Deloitte and global leader for Future of Work. He says companies have been slowly shifting toward more flexible scheduling, though the pandemic accelerated

REMOTE PAY

A New Way to Attract, Retain and Diversify Talent

Technology companies are on the forefront of the movement that allows employees to choose where they live, as remote work becomes much more common. Such flexibility is often cited as a way to attract, retain and diversify talent. There's no consensus, however, on how to compensate those who leave pricey locales for less expensive ones.

Streaming service Spotify will allow employees to maintain their salaries even if they move to a low-cost area. Ditto for San Francisco-based Reddit, a

news aggregator and discussion site. Reddit says on its website, "We believe this is the right balance of flexibility and support for employees, recognizing the varied tradeoffs people consider when deciding where to live."

According to Alex Westerdahl, a vice president for human resources at Spotify, "It creates too much friction to localize pay within countries." He says the company benchmarks its salaries to pay rates on the coasts, noting, "If you choose to live in the middle of the country, you will be paid well."

Westerdahl says there's a simple principle behind the strategy: "It's driven by retaining and attracting employees."

Menlo Park, Calif.-based Facebook and San Francisco-based Twitter have opted to cut salaries for employees who choose to relocate to less-pricey communities, according to news reports. Neither company returned requests for comment.

Employers generally don't reduce employees' compensation for moving to a more affordable location, according to

the move. “The pandemic uncovers that the model we’ve been using is geared toward shift workers on an assembly line,” he says.

Companies such as Facebook, Spotify, VMware, Twitter and Reddit have already given employees permission to work from wherever they choose, though some have imposed certain limits. In addition, more companies are searching for directors of remote work to manage the hybrid approach; Facebook hired someone for that job last year.

While the transformation is occurring, many companies are still uncertain how to reorganize their existing offices and are avoiding major commitments while the situation is still in flux.

“The clients are not looking to spend a whole lot of money to change the current environment,” says Janice Fellows, studio design principal at Ted Moudis Associates, a design firm. Companies want more time to study how many people will be in the office and how the space will be used before making large investments, she says.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

There are other, more immediate concerns. In the near term, employers want increased safety protocol guidance from government officials with regard to masking, physical distancing and unvaccinated employees. “It’s an interesting dilemma,” says Phil Nickolenko, vice president of corporate services at TIAA, which won’t ask employees back until January 2022 at the earliest. “We have a host of attorneys looking at requirements across the board in states where we have a presence.”

Corporate executives’ anxiety extends to how hybrid work will affect company culture, especially when diversity, equity and inclusion are at the top of everyone’s minds in light of the killing of George Floyd and others, as well as the pandemic’s effect

on women’s careers. Some fear that the approach will create a two-tiered system of employees and that leadership, even if only subconsciously, may favor those who spend more time in the office, while those who work remotely will be out of sight, out of mind.

Such thoughts are not unfounded. One study by Stanford economists concluded that employees who worked remotely reduced their rate of promotion by half even though they were more productive than those working in the office. The research, which was published in 2015 in *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* and followed employees who worked at a travel agency in China, has found a new audience amid the move to hybrid work.

Company executives fear that hybrid workplaces can create

“A” and “B” teams. Dropbox’s CEO wrote last year that “Hybrid approaches may also perpetuate two different employee experiences that could result in barriers to inclusion and inequities with respect to performance or career trajectory. These big-picture problems are nonstarters for us.” That’s why the company adopted a “virtual-first” model in which employees primarily work remotely and use the office for meetings and special occasions.

There’s a fear that women especially will be hurt by the move to a hybrid workplace because their need to address family responsibilities will make them more likely to work from home than their male counterparts. That could give men an advantage in the workplace simply by

A year into the pandemic,



68%

of American workers say having the ability to work both remotely and at the worksite is the ideal workplace model.

Of those who have been working remotely during the pandemic,



87%

want to keep working remotely at least one day a week once the pandemic subsides.

Source: Prudential's Pulse of the American Worker Survey, March 2021.

PREVIOUS PAGE AND LEFT IMAGES COURTESY OF UNSPLASH

Brian Kropp, group vice president and head of the HR practice at Gartner in Stamford, Conn.

“There is a reputational and fairness issue,” Kropp says. “It’s not like [those who move] are having less impact. If you have two people in the same city and one person lives downtown and the other lives farther out where it’s less expensive, would you pay them less?”

Most employees don’t need to worry about salary cuts. Kropp says less than 5 percent of companies are going to

allow employees to pick where they work. And only 15 percent of organizations say they will adjust remote employees’ salaries, though 39 percent are considering such a move, according to Gartner research.

Kropp says he doesn’t believe one approach to remote workers’ salaries is better than the other. However, he recommends that companies planning to base compensation on locale be upfront with employees.

That’s the policy Palo Alto, Calif.-

based VMware Inc. has adopted. The company tells employees what their salary will be and gives them information about the cost of living in their desired location.

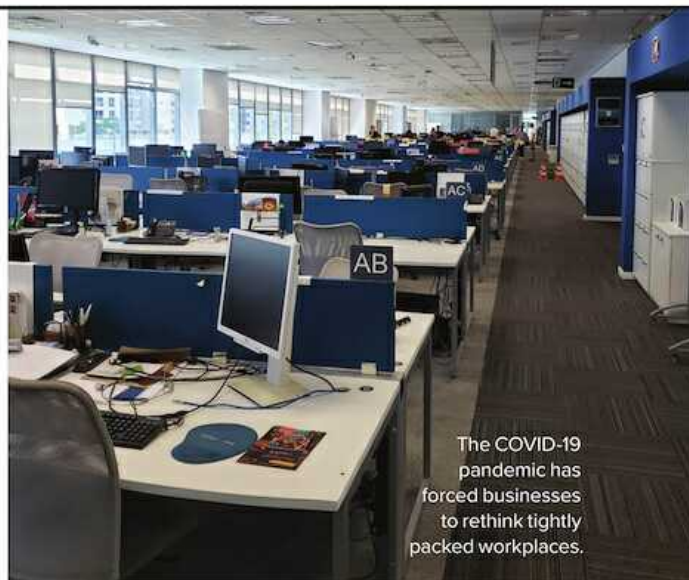
Industrial designer Shelby Barlow says she took an “almost negligible” post-tax pay cut of about \$50 a month when she moved to Miami from San Francisco earlier this year. “My purchasing power increased,” she says. “I went from living in a nothing-special house to a luxury condo.” —T.A.

being more visible and available to corporate executives. The concern is especially acute as the pandemic has already derailed the careers of millions of women who have stepped back from their positions to care for their families. The recession caused record job loss, and women were disproportionately impacted. According to an analysis by Gallup, 2.3 million women left the workforce in the year ended in February compared with 1.8 million men.

"We always have to be aware of the unintended consequences of programs designed to help people," says Sian L. Beilock, president of Barnard College, a women's school in New York City. An expert in psychology and education, Beilock says if an office is primarily populated by men, it could send a signal that women aren't welcome. "We take cues about whether we belong from our surroundings," she adds.

ANTICIPATING PROBLEMS

Company executives say they are aware of the hybrid model's pitfalls and are taking measures to avoid them. One common practice more companies are adopting is conducting all meetings virtually, even if some people are in the office.



The COVID-19 pandemic has forced businesses to rethink tightly packed workplaces.

Proponents say that approach puts everyone in the same situation. Experts suggest that team members all come into the office on the same days to build camaraderie and prevent some employees from having more time than others with decision-makers.

Spotify, for example, is keeping its offices even though

MARSHALING A REMOTE WORKFORCE

Darren Murph has a rare position: He's director of remote for GitLab, a completely virtual software developer with 1,300 employees. Few companies have such roles, though the move to hybrid work is expected to make jobs like his much more common.

Prior to joining GitLab in 2019, Murph spent more than a decade overseeing remote transformations in the marketing, communications and supply chain industries. In 2010, he set a Guinness World Record for the most posts by a professional blogger (17,212 for engadget.com). He recently spoke to *HR Magazine* about his role.

What does your job entail?

I work at the intersection of culture, operations, people, talent branding, marketing and communication. I collaborate with all functions of the business to support GitLab clients and partners seeking guidance on mastering remote workflows and building culture. I champion GitLab's all-remote culture and initiatives through content creation, interviews, webinars, case studies, podcasts, and partnerships with organizations and universities. I work across the company to ensure that GitLab team members acclimate well to remote, and

I share our learnings with those outside of the GitLab organization.

How do you create and maintain a company culture when all your employees are remote?

Building a culture across a company where there are no offices requires intentionality. While technology and tools are enabling companies to operate efficiently in a remote setting, it's important to focus on documenting culture first, then using tools to support. In co-located companies, it's easy to let culture be shaped by office decor, the neighborhood in which a company's headquarters is located or the loudest voice in the room. It's not a usable strategy in a remote environment. In a remote team, there's no office vibe, hip coffee or Spotify playlists that decide the culture. Culture is the barometer of how well values are adhered to and reinforced in an organization. Therefore, culture can only be maintained if values are prescriptively articulated and visibly



Remote work offers Darren Murph some benefits, including the occasional visit from his son.

it opted to become a “virtual-first” company last year. Its more than 6,000 employees are not required to visit corporate locations and can work from anywhere they choose, but the offices will be open for those who want to use them and for various gatherings and meetings.

The Stockholm-based streaming service created training programs for its new reality that help managers lead geographically dispersed teams. The programs include information on how to ensure that opportunities are offered fairly and how to spot signs of isolation and depression. The training builds on the experience that managers garnered during the pandemic, says Alex Westerdahl, a vice president for human resources at Spotify.

Westerdahl says he has read about the large numbers of people who are experiencing loneliness, stress and other mental health challenges, but he wonders whether individuals’ issues come from remote work or are a result of the cumulative effects of the pandemic.

 **1 in 3**

workers would not want to work for an employer that required them to be onsite full time. But

 **2 in 3**

remote workers believe in-person interactions are important for advancing their careers, and

 **43%**

of remote workers say they would be nervous about their job security if they worked remotely while others returned to the worksite.

Source: Prudential's Pulse of the American Worker Survey, March 2021.

INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Lincoln Financial Group is not leaving the choice of whether to return to the office up to its more than 9,000 employees. It hired a consultant to look at the tasks required by each position to determine which jobs require employees to be onsite full time and which can be done remotely. Most employees will have a flexible schedule, though the amount of time each must spend onsite will depend on their role.

“You can’t go rogue and let people decide,” says Jen Warne, senior vice president and chief talent officer for the Radnor, Pa.-based company. “It would be challenging and hectic for the business.” →



ACCESS RESOURCES ON HELPING EMPLOYEES RETURN TO THE WORKPLACE AT [SHRM.ORG/RTW](https://shrm.org/rtw)

reinforced through elements such as discretionary bonuses and linking promotions to values.

Aside from institutions such as hospitals or warehouses, can all businesses operate remotely? Or is remote work better for certain industries?

Industries that produce digital outputs (software, design, advertising, marketing, editorial, etc.) are most amenable to remote work, as everyone is on the same playing field by default. However, all industries can enjoy some benefits.

How can management ensure that remote work is successful?

Effective remote leadership requires absolute executive sponsorship. Even apathy equates to sabotage. The key is to realize that remote work is not about where any individual works; it’s about how the work gets done. It is fundamentally about rearchitecting all workflows to be effective in a location-agnostic setting. A quick litmus test: “Does this workflow only work when everyone is

in the office?” If the answer is yes, that workflow must change. Leaders who refuse to recognize the sea change in workplace flexibility will see heightened levels of attrition, with top talent fleeing to more-flexible organizations that invest in and support remote work.

Unlike GitLab, most companies are adopting a hybrid approach where individuals will spend some time in the office. How will that affect the director of remote’s job?

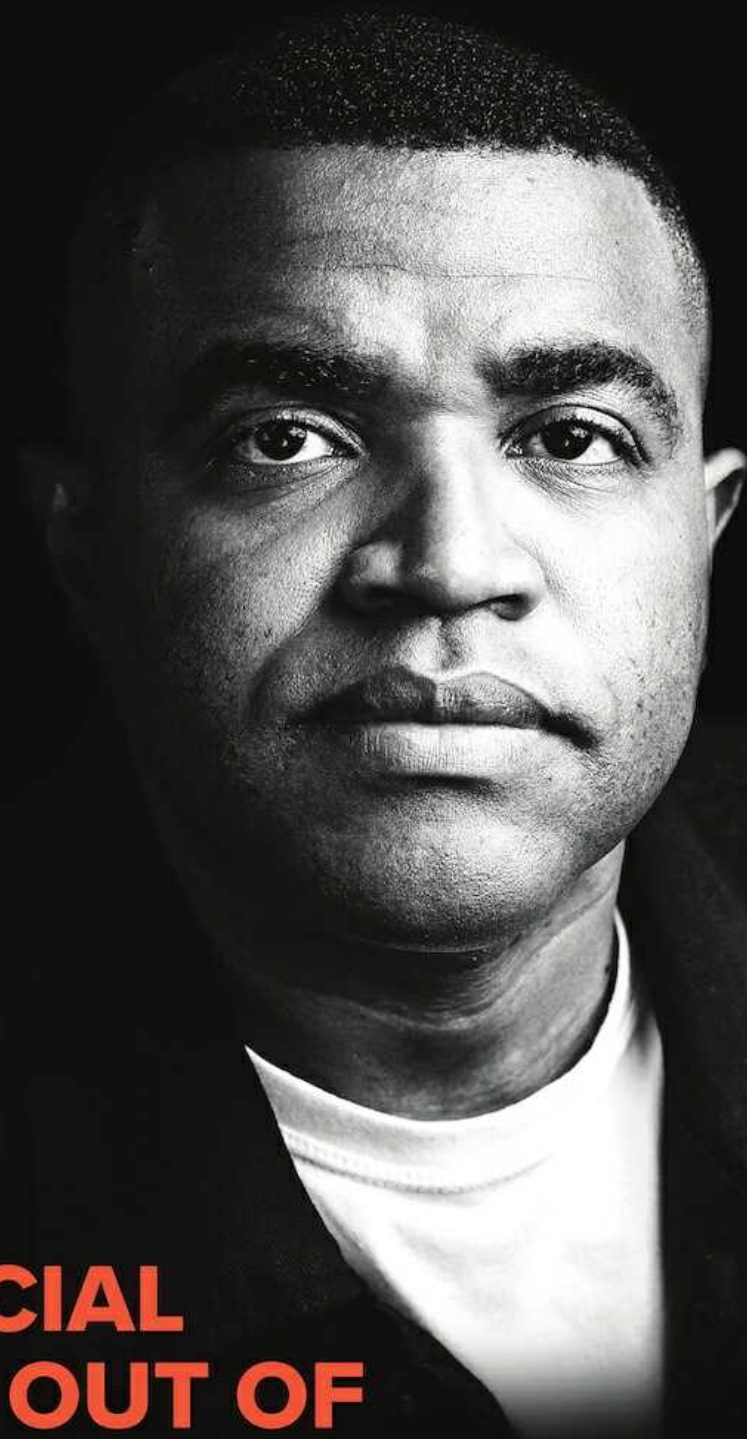
Hybrid organizations need a director of remote work even more. All-co-located and all-remote [environments] have only one playing field to administer. Hybrid has two or more unequal playing fields. Those organizations will need a senior leader who constantly balances myriad experiences and works to find equitable solutions and benefits for all. Hybrid is extraordinarily difficult to do well. By default, these organizations will end up with an “A” team and a “B” team, breeding dysfunction and toxicity.

How can you ensure that the people who primarily work onsite don’t receive preferential treatment as a result of getting more face time with leaders?

By keeping the executive team out of the office, even if the office reopens. If executives remain in-office, it’s likely that all workflows will revert to office-centric, thereby thwarting the efficiency of remote workers. But keeping executives out of the office sends a clear signal that the office is not the epicenter of power and career development. This requires a tremendous amount of intentionality and rigor, reinforcing the reality that all-remote is a fundamentally more inclusive and equitable design than hybrid-remote. The last thing you want is people coming into the office primarily to rub shoulders with the right people and playing politics to advance their careers, further ostracizing their remote colleagues who are prioritizing community, family and location. —T.A.



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Previously, Warne says, managers decided who could work remotely, and that led to significant differences between departments. “There was inequity in flexibility,” she explains. “This is consistency based on job type.”

FLEXIBILITY AND FREEDOM

VMware Inc., a Palo Alto, Calif.-based software company, opted to let its 31,000 employees work from wherever they choose, though it is keeping its nearly 200 offices across the globe open for those who opt to work onsite. The offices will also serve as meeting hubs that will help maintain team culture, says Rich Lang, the company’s senior vice president of human resources.

Lang says that to ensure remote employees aren’t being punished for their status, the company will track their promotions just as it measures career progress based on gender, ethnicity and race. Still, he isn’t overly worried about preferential treatment being an issue because managers have grown accustomed to managing remote workers.

And he says the new approach will help the company’s diversity efforts as it is now recruiting in places where it never has before, such as Detroit and Baltimore.

“People are pretty skilled now on how to have one-on-ones and how to have inclusive meetings on Zoom,” Lang says. “We told people to work where it works for you.”

Employees who have taken advantage of the company’s offer to work from anywhere are aware of the potential risks, such as not having enough face time with management and missing out on high-profile assignments. Still, industrial designer Shelby Barlow jumped at the chance to move to Miami, where she can rent a luxury apartment with a water view and a pool for \$1,550 a month. In San Francisco, she was paying \$1,600 for only one room, and various situations with roommates forced her to move three times last year.

“I never felt I could get settled,” Barlow says. “The expense of it started to feel suffocating.”

Barlow says she and her manager had multiple conversations before her move, to establish expectations and a communication schedule. “I’m not fearful,” she says. “I think VM[ware] will support me. This is an opportunity for me to advocate for myself.”

RETHINKING REAL ESTATE

Some companies are offering their remote employees an opportunity to embrace co-working spaces. Schneider Electric, with more than 135,000 employees, closed 27 of its small offices in 2020 and plans to shut as many as 20 more this year. The French company with U.S. headquarters in Boston had been thinking about streamlining its real estate for years, and the pandemic pushed it to accelerate the process. “Real estate was on everyone’s mind,” says Karen McClellan, director of the company’s real estate.

She says managing the small offices was already taking an outsized amount of her time and that the time spent on

Today’s workers spend more time on their own, making culture a bigger challenge.



85%

of remote workers say their managers are responsible for connecting them to the company’s culture, and



8 in 10

say senior leaders also have a responsibility.

Remote workers say the top ways employers can strengthen company culture are by offering remote-work resources, updating policies to reflect the way work has changed (e.g., flexible schedules, no-meetings days) and increasing communications from leaders.

52%

of workers say their company is going through significant changes beyond adjusting to the pandemic.

Source: Prudential’s Pulse of the American Worker Survey, March 2021.

it was only expected to grow as the company implemented the necessary COVID-19 safety protocols. Early this year, Schneider inked a deal with Upflex Inc., a New York City-based network of co-working spaces, for its employees in seven locations.

“We don’t always want employees to work from home,” McClellan says. “We think there’s value in collaboration that happens in the office.” ■

Theresa Agovino is the workplace editor for SHRM.

IT'S A MATTER OF

TRUST

In addition to dealing a blow to a company's culture, a lack of trust can negatively impact employee productivity, engagement and ultimately retention.

By Susan Ladika
Illustrations by Richard Mia

When the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly turned millions of U.S. employees into remote workers, some leaders began to worry whether their staffs were actually working or, instead, whiling away the hours watching Netflix or playing with their children.

The consequences of a lack of trust can be significant, impacting employee productivity, engagement and ultimately retention.

It's a particularly relevant issue now, as many organizations consider whether to offer a hybrid workplace going forward. A recent survey by PwC found that almost 70 percent of executives want employees in the office at least three days a week, while more than half of employees want to work remotely at least three days a week and almost 30 percent would prefer to permanently work from home.

"Trust is the foundation of every relationship in our life," says Jen Fisher, U.S. chief well-being officer for the consultancy Deloitte. "Every positive relationship starts from a place of trust."



Trust also serves as a foundational component of a healthy and well work environment, adds Fisher, co-author of *Work Better Together: How to Cultivate Strong Relationships to Maximize Well-Being and Boost Bottom Lines* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2021). And in this time of uncertainty caused by the pandemic, which has led to lockdowns and economic upheaval, trust may be more important than ever.

Fisher notes how the COVID-19 outbreak accelerated changes in technology and remote work. "The pandemic has catapulted us into the future in many ways," she says. "With uncertainty, you need trust and meaningful and supportive relationships."

But how can organizations make this happen?

"In order to gain trust, you should give people as much stability as possible," says Liane Hornsey, executive vice president and chief people officer at Palo Alto Networks, based in Santa Clara, Calif. The cybersecurity company has about 9,000 employees who have been working remotely for more than a year. To foster stability and security, the company announced early on that there would be no pandemic-related layoffs and said employees wouldn't return to the workplace until at least July.

Organizations "move at the speed of trust," says Elaine Yang, HR business partner manager at Lever, which offers a software platform that helps companies hire and grow. So having a workplace built on trust can lead to quicker

decisions and better collaboration. "Efficiency and productivity depend on the trust of teammates," she says.

SETTING A TONE

A culture of trust needs to be set at the top, and the HR department has a key role to play in advising senior leadership to help establish the right tone for the organization, says Paul Eccher, president and chief executive officer of the Vaya Group, a talent management consultancy based in Warrenville, Ill.

At Lever, whose 185 em-



'The pandemic has catapulted us into the future in many ways. With uncertainty, you need trust and meaningful and supportive relationships.'

JEN FISHER

ployees primarily worked in the company's offices in San Francisco and Toronto before the pandemic hit, the biggest change in the past year has been increased communication and transparency between leaders and employees. Open discussions are held on everything from companywide decisions to goals and projects, Yang says, and all-hands meetings are conducted every two weeks, with an extensive question-and-answer session at the end of each meeting.

Stephanie Stewart, SHRM-CP, HR director at Reconciled, a virtual bookkeeping and accounting service for small businesses, sees trust as a driver for employee engagement. "If employees feel trusted, they feel more engaged," she says. "Nobody likes to be micromanaged."

The Burlington, Vt.-based company, which has about 50 employees and 30 contractors, discusses autonomy with job candidates during the interview process, Stewart says. Employees generally work Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., but the company doesn't dictate what they work on or when they work on it. "We trust you to manage your schedule, prioritize work and reach out when you need help," she explains.

In a recent survey, 97 percent of Reconciled employees said they felt trusted to do what was expected of them and 92 percent said they trusted their co-workers. "That's really important to us in a remote organization," Stewart says.

Reconciled holds a monthly all-hands staff meeting, where employees can discuss topics such as self-care or their goals for the year, as well as regular department meetings and team meetings, all of which are virtual.

WATCHFUL EYES

Palo Alto Networks has employed remote workers for years. "It's not where you work that really matters; it's how you work," says Hornsey, who adds, "I would not work for somebody I don't trust."

But not all organizations are ready to embrace trust. Even before the pandemic began, half of organizations monitored employees' e-mail and social media posts, says Reid Black-

Gallup research reveals that **96% of engaged employees trust management**, compared with 46% of disengaged employees. It also shows that **highly trusted workplaces enjoy 50% higher employee productivity, 106% more energy at work and 13% fewer sick days.** Companies with high trust levels outperform companies with low trust levels by 186%.



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man, founder and CEO of Virtue, an ethics consultancy based in New York City.

The number of companies monitoring their employees has likely climbed during the pandemic. According to a 2020 Gartner survey of executives at 119 organizations, 60 percent of companies use technology tracking tools to monitor some of their hybrid or remote employees.

A company that uses monitoring software should be transparent about it, Blackman says. Otherwise, such monitoring threatens to deteriorate trust and create a bad relationship between employees and the employer.

Employers may use the information generated by monitoring to make ill-informed decisions on who to fire, promote or give bonuses to, he says. Such data often provides insight into the quantity, rather than the quality, of an employee's work.

But, Blackman says, "It's not crazy for employers to be concerned about employees working less and producing less. It's an entirely reasonable fear."



Monitoring also can be used to weed out unethical behavior or to protect a company's bottom line, he explains. But by looking beyond the numbers, employers can see if someone is struggling with working from home and offer assistance.

OPENING UP ABOUT STRUGGLES

With the uncertainty caused by the pandemic, employees "need to trust that leaders and the company are there for them," says Maggie Laureano, vice president of human resources for the Americas at Bureau Veritas. The company, headquartered in Paris with 78,000 employees worldwide, offers testing, inspection and certification services.

HR can "encourage leaders to be open and flexible with a strong line of communication between the employee and employer," Laureano says, so employees feel comfortable acknowledging when they need extra support, such as from an employee assistance program. HR can also help leaders understand how to read employees' body language and detect when something is wrong, she adds.

Plus, Fisher says, by "being open and authentic about how I'm doing and how I'm feeling, it creates a reciprocal environ-

■ According to the Edelman Trust Barometer (a survey of 33,000 people in 28 countries), **1 in 3 people don't trust their employer.**

SHOULD COMPANIES MONITOR THEIR WORKERS?

While it may be understandable for leaders to think they need to monitor their employees' work, they should carefully weigh all factors before making such a decision, says Reid Blackman, founder and CEO of ethics consultancy Virtue. His advice:

- **Choose your metrics carefully by involving all relevant stakeholders.**

Rather than make judgments based on numeric scores generated by software, be sure that what you're tracking is relevant to your organization's productivity, efficiency and revenue. Consult with your stakeholders to determine what the best metrics are.

- **Be transparent with your employees about what you're**

monitoring and why. Share the results of your monitoring with employees and allow them to provide feedback. That can increase their acceptance.

- **Offer carrots as well as sticks.** Use monitoring to help employees increase productivity or to reward them for a job well done, rather than as a means of punishment.

• **Accept that very good workers will not always be able to do very good work all the time, especially in light of the challenges brought about by the pandemic.** In these difficult times, don't decide who is a good employee or a hard worker based on current performance. Outside factors, such as home schooling or caring for a family

member, can play a big role in how well employees are performing.

- **Monitor your own systems to ensure that people of color and other groups are not disproportionately affected.** It's better to implement a policy for monitoring all employees rather than certain ones. Applying policies equally avoids discrimination. And be careful not to disproportionately monitor those in junior roles, which could impact diversity efforts.
- **Decrease monitoring when and where you can.** Reduce monitoring in areas where things are going well, which helps signal that the organization trusts employees.

Source: Harvard Business Review.

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ment. It's OK not to be OK." Just about everyone is experiencing a major challenge right now, such as mental health, child care or elder care issues, she adds. While such issues have always been present, addressing them was not a top concern for employers prior to the pandemic.

Employees are also more willing to trust and open up if managers are empathetic, says Caroline Walsh, vice president in the HR practice of Stamford, Conn.-based research and advisory company Gartner. Empathy is particularly important in this era of remote work, she notes.

"In a high-empathy-based management environment, performance is about three times higher," she adds.

While some people are naturally empathetic, empathy is a skill that can be taught to those who are not, Walsh says. HR can establish peer coaches who work with managers to help them develop empathy and learn how to have challenging conversations with employees.

Some organizations are taking tasks off managers' plates to give them time to check in with their remote employees or to learn skills such as empathy, she adds.

According to Laureano at Bureau Veritas, HR has worked to support employees by offering a total well-being program with webinars on a wide range of topics, including stress management, meditation, yoga, sleep, diet and financial well-being. "Leaders have really upped the ante in terms of the programs we provide," she says.

CREATING CERTAINTY

As employees face uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations need to strive to create a sense of stability.

While many organizations have temporarily eliminated performance appraisals, Hornsey says Palo Alto Networks continues to set goals and milestones because doing so gives employees something to hold on to and brings a sense of achievement.

Organizations also need to provide meaningful feedback,



“[Organizations] move at the speed of trust. Efficiency and productivity depend on the trust of teammates.”

ELAINE YANG

which can help build trust, says Adam Hickman, content manager at analytics company Gallup in Washington, D.C. "They hear what employees want and need and respond."

Things fall apart for employees, Hickman says, "if they don't know what's expected of them so they don't know what to do." It's important for HR practitioners to be clear and honest, he notes.

Adds Eccher of the Vaya Group: "The more you trust someone, the more they tend to show more trust in return."

Organizations also need to help employees trust themselves, Eccher says, by upskilling the workforce so it's better prepared to succeed in a remote-work environment. Before the pandemic, employees who worked remotely often were those with stellar track records who had gained the trust of managers, he notes. Today, younger workers and those without previous remote-work

experience may have "no confidence they can work effectively from home," he says, while managers may not "truly trust themselves to lead a remote workforce."

Managers need to give employees autonomy, empowerment and accountability, Eccher says, and focus on outcomes as they work to demonstrate and increase trust.

TRUST AMONG EMPLOYEES

Along with fostering trust between an organization and its workers, HR has a role to play in building trust among employees.

Co-workers "all experienced the pandemic together," Fisher says. "That brought people together in a different way."

Stewart says Reconciled schedules fun virtual events such as game days and regular coffee hours with employees and the CEO to discuss nonwork topics.

At Lever, the HR team holds regular check-ins on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. But they also mix it up with yoga sessions, dance parties and trivia contests. With employees missing out on opportunities to run into one another at the watercooler or break room, Yang says, "we have to build in intentional opportunities to have small talk."

Palo Alto Networks has set up groups called "circles" that bring together employees with similar interests, such as those who are home schooling their children or interested in cooking, Hornsey says. Employees are trained to facilitate the sessions.

Previously taboo subjects, such as politics and racial justice, are also permeating today's workplaces. "Employees are

According to Gallup research, **employees who trust their employers experience 74% less stress and 40% less burnout.** One-third of employees indicated they would stay longer with an employer if its leaders kept their promises, and 28% said they would extend their tenure if transparency was practiced at all levels.



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absolutely talking about important political and social issues in the workplace,” Walsh says, which can lead to mistrust and contentious relationships between employees.

She adds that in response, some organizations are putting out conversation guides for managers. HR has a role to play in helping employees address negative emotions. “This is an anxiety-provoking, difficult time,” she says.

Some organizations are hosting gatherings so employees can share their honest reactions to current events, such as the 2020 presidential election or the death of George Floyd at the hands of

Minneapolis police, Walsh says. By encouraging workers to share in a collaborative environment, employers communicate that they trust employees.

ONBOARDING CHALLENGES

Developing trust can be more challenging when new hires come on board in a remote-work environment.

At Reconciled, new employees film a video introduction to the staff in which they answer random questions about themselves, Stewart says. In addition, new hires are paired with a mentor for 90 days so they can ask questions, adjust to a remote-work environment and discuss their struggles. The mentors provide a safe space for the new hires, Stewart says, and the pairs typically form a close relationship.

“A core value is for people to feel connected to the company, not alone and isolated,” she says. “It takes a lot of intentionality.”

Since the pandemic began, Palo Alto Networks has hired about 1,500 new employees, some of whom are recent graduates, Hornsey says. A group has been set up for new hires to discuss and share, and those who are early in their careers are assigned a mentor.

Fisher explains that being paired with a buddy can help a new employee learn a company’s culture, and it can create a sense of belonging. Being part of a team “impacts job satisfaction and loyalty to an organization,” she says.

While leaders and managers are being told to overcommunicate with employees right now, Eccher says it can be something of a balancing act. It’s one thing to touch base and see how employees are doing and another to constantly

check up on and micromanage them. It can make an employee think, “I feel like a second-grader. I’m not trusted to do my job anymore.”

If an organization lacks trust, it runs the risk of creating an environment in which employees feel it’s better to cover up mistakes or withhold important input and feedback, he adds.

A lack of trust also can lead to burnout, turnover, stress, poor morale and increased health care costs, Fisher says, and can create presenteeism, which often results in limited innovation, agility and resilience.

LOOKING AHEAD

When trust is missing, that can also fuel turnover. A report commissioned by the Achievers Workforce Institute found that more than half of the 2,000 respondents surveyed in February are looking for a new job. Many said they feel less connected to their company and have noticed a change in the company’s culture since the pandemic began. As many organizations contemplate a complete return to the workplace or a hybrid work environment,

trust will continue to be an important factor.

At Bureau Veritas, more than 70 percent of the company’s employees in the U.S. and

Canada are considered essential workers, and they have been working in the field or in laboratories throughout the pandemic. It’s not clear when the office workers who switched to remote work will return to the workplace, Laureano says.

It’s important for those who work in labs or in the field to be able to trust that Bureau Veritas’ leadership will

keep them safe by providing personal protective equipment, as well as current information on COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, Laureano says. She explains that the company partners with the Cleveland Clinic and has hosted town hall meetings to provide all of its employees with the most current information regarding COVID-19.

For Hornsey, “trust is a differentiator,” and the pandemic “has thrown into sharp focus what we should have known anyway.” ■

Susan Ladika is a freelance writer based in Tampa, Fla.

SHRM research shows that when there is more trust in the workplace, employees are **23% more likely to offer ideas and solutions.**



‘If employees feel trusted, they feel more engaged. Nobody likes to be micromanaged.’

STEPHANIE STEWART,
SHRM-CP

In its global CEO survey, PwC reported that **55% of CEOs think a lack of trust is a threat** to their organization’s growth.

A Sense of





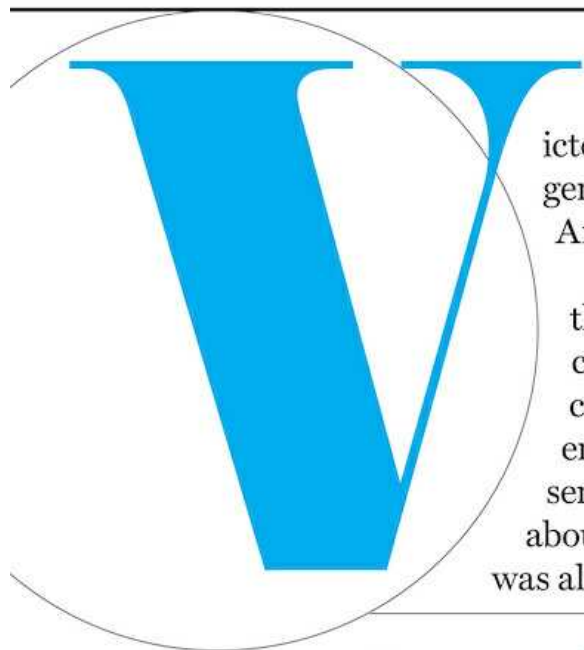
Belonging.



The landscape for transgender employees is changing for the better, thanks to a new administration and a recent Supreme Court decision.

By Andrew Deichler

Theresa Agovino, the workplace editor for SHRM, also contributed to this article.



Victor Lim wasn't sure whether to reveal he is a transgender man when he applied for a position at Bank of America in January 2020.

His loved ones advised him against divulging that information, fearing how the company and his co-workers might treat him. And Lim had his own concerns, despite having been out to his previous employer. A lack of transgender professionals in the senior ranks at that company had caused Lim to worry about his long-term career prospects, which is why he was also considering other jobs.

"Being a young professional less than three years out of school, I was very nervous about coming out and possibly damaging my career opportunities in the long run," says the 26-year-old Queens, N.Y., native.

Lim became interested in working at Bank of America after hearing a presentation by one of the company's senior leaders at an LGBTQ event in 2019. Listening to a transmasculine employee openly discussing their supportive workplace inspired Lim.

He felt comfortable enough to come out during his second interview. "The very first question the interviewer asked upon reading my legal name was 'Vicky or Victoria—which do you go by?'" Lim recalls. "I took the leap and said, 'I actually prefer Victor.' And it was a nonissue. They just said, 'Oh, OK, we can do that.'"

Lim is now a vice president, senior business control specialist, and he has become active in the company's transgender employee resource group. He even spoke on a panel last fall at the Out & Equal Workplace Summit, an event he attended in 2019.

"It was such an honor to be that representation for others, especially the next generation," Lim says. "That's why I was willing to put myself out there despite all the fears my loved ones and I had."

CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

The transgender community has let out a collective sigh of relief, thanks to the change in administration and a recent Supreme Court decision. President Joe Biden has signed executive orders that expand federal nondiscrimination protections to LGBTQ individuals and ended his predecessor's ban on transgender people serving in the military. In March, Biden's pick for assistant secretary of health, Dr. Rachel Levine, made history when she became the first openly transgender presidential appointee to be confirmed by the Senate.

In the 2020 case *Bostock v. Clayton County*, the Supreme Court determined that LGBTQ individuals are protected from discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The ruling was significant because many employers weren't certain what constitutes discrimination and often failed to give such complaints proper scrutiny, explains attorney Jillian Weiss, whose New York City law firm specializes in representing transgender clients in discrimination cases.


"Now that we have *Bostock*, this has become like any workplace discrimination issue—you have two sides and you try to figure out what happens," she says. "But the idea that you're just not providing protection to these people is gone."

More positive developments could

be on the way. The Equality Act, which passed the House in February 2021, would codify the *Bostock* ruling by specifically including sexual orientation and gender identity in U.S. civil rights laws. As the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) notes, the Equality Act would update sections of the Civil Rights Act that cover federally funded programs and public accommodations to include prohibitions on sex discrimination.

The current environment contrasts sharply to the atmosphere before the change in administration, according to members of the LGBTQ community. Previous policies eliminated many protections for transgender individuals from discrimination in the workplace, housing, medical care and school sports. Murders of transgender and nonbinary people surged, hitting an all-time high of at least 44 killings in 2020, according to the HRC.

And on the state level, introductions of anti-transgender legislation have already hit a record high this year as state legislators have put forth more than 100 bills primarily targeting transgender Americans' participation in sports and access to medical care. One such bill, passed in Arkansas, bars medical providers from administering gender-affirming health care to transgender people younger than 18. Though the bill was vetoed

A photograph of Victor Lim, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit jacket over a light blue shirt and a green necklace. He is walking on a city sidewalk with buildings in the background. The image is split vertically, with the left side showing him in a dark suit and the right side showing him in a grey suit.

Victor Lim overcame his initial concerns about coming out during his recruitment at Bank of America and turned his experience into a positive one.

A 2020 Gallup poll of more than 15,000 people in the U.S. ages 18 and older found that

5.6% identify as LGBTQ, and **11.3%** of the LGBTQ respondents identify as transgender.

More members of Generation Z (15.9%) were found to identify as LGBTQ than members of older generations.

'There are laws in place to protect us,' Melissa Batson says. 'However, just because it's in the law doesn't mean that it's honored by employers.'



According to an October 2020 poll conducted in 10 battleground states by the Human Rights Campaign and Hart Research Group,

81%

of those surveyed believe transgender individuals should be able to live freely and openly, and

92%

of voters polled believe transgender individuals should have equal access to medical care.

by Republican Gov. Asa Hutchinson, the state's General Assembly overrode the veto.

In his first address to a joint session of Congress, Biden pledged to sign the Equality Act into law. He also spoke directly to transgender Americans, saying that he "has [their] back." While many advocates praised the president for this comment, others found it too vague and urged Biden to directly address the barrage of anti-transgender

bills working their way through the states. HRC President Alphonso David told *The Daily Beast* in May that he has been having conversations with the Biden administration about potential actions with regard to the bills. David believes many of the bills violate federal law, and he thinks the president will eventually challenge them publicly. As of yet, the White House has not commented on its plans.

THE EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

Some businesses are pushing back against proposed anti-transgender leg-

islation. More than 55 major corporations have publicly opposed bills that would restrict the rights of transgender individuals, with business leaders reporting that they have had difficulty with recruitment, retention and tourism in states that have attempted to pass this type of legislation.

Moreover, some prominent companies have been vocal in their support of their transgender employees. In 2019, Maeve DuVally, managing director of corporate communications for multinational investment bank Goldman Sachs, made headlines when she came out as transgender. In multiple interviews and a blog post on the bank's website, she described how supportive her employer had been throughout the process. And in April 2021, multimedia news giant Reuters announced that Gina Chua had been appointed to the new role of executive editor. In its announcement, Reuters noted that Chua, formerly global managing editor of operations, transitioned in 2020.

Corporate America has a vested interest in protecting and embracing transgender individuals, diversity hiring experts say. Recent data suggests that members of Generation Z are more likely to identify as transgender than people belonging to older generations, and these younger individuals are demanding inclusive workplaces. With potentially a major influx of transgender and nonbinary individuals joining the workforce in the coming years, and bringing with them viewpoints unique to their communities and age group, it is incumbent on employers to identify and eliminate barriers to employment.

Bettina Deynes, SHRM-SCP, senior vice president and chief human resources officer at Carnival Cruise Line in Miami, has seen significant progress for LGBTQ workers in recent years. That support only expanded when companies stepped up their overall diversity, equity and inclusion efforts following last year's Black Lives Matter protests, she adds.

"There's been so much work on diversity and inclusion, and I feel like

it has evolved into equity and belonging," Deynes says. "As employers, we shouldn't be satisfied until people have a strong sense of belonging, where they can be themselves."

Some employers have been so supportive that transgender employees have come out at work before coming out in their personal circles, Deynes explains. Employees have told her before telling anyone else that they were considering gender-affirming surgery. "Some of them have shared this with me, and it has been such a great experience that they now feel like they can approach their family and friends," she says.

Initially, Lim's family didn't support his desire to transition when he started talking about it at age 17. By then, he had known he wanted to be seen as a man for about seven years.

"That's my earliest memory of outright asking friends and family if I looked/sounded like a boy, hoping the answer would be yes," he says.

Lim's family hails from Southeast Asia, where being LGBTQ is criminalized in multiple countries, and this reality led family members to fear for his safety. But he says a near-death experience at age 22 made him realize that transitioning wasn't optional. (He declines to elaborate on what happened.)

"It made me seriously reflect on my biggest regret, and it was not even trying to live as a man despite the dangers," he says. He started transitioning that same year but didn't reveal his identity at work until two years later.

HARSH CONDITIONS

Despite the progress that has been made, many workplaces still fail to fully support their transgender employees. According to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, the number of companies offering to pay for gender-reassignment surgery

is still low and fell from 10 percent in 2017 to 6 percent in 2019. The International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans also reported a decrease in the number of companies offering this benefit: After surging to 29 percent from 12 percent between 2016 and 2018, coverage dipped to 21 percent in 2020.

Prejudice against transgender individuals has left them vulnerable. More than half (53 percent) of the transgender respondents to a 2020 study by the Center for American Progress revealed that discrimination moderately or severely affected their ability to be hired by employers. Nearly half (47 percent) revealed that discrimination had impacted their ability to retain employment. The survey found greater disparities for Black transgender individuals, who reported higher levels of discrimination by employers than white respondents.

"The unemployment rate among transgender people is exceedingly high," notes Melissa Batson, a production clerk for Costco who travels frequently to college campuses to speak about her experiences as a transgender woman in the workplace. "There are laws in place to protect us. However, just because it's in the law doesn't mean that it's honored by employers."

COMING OUT IN THE WORKPLACE

Batson knows the stress of coming out to an employer as transgender. When she did so in 2012, 90 percent of transgender workers reported being mistreated and discriminated against in the workplace, according to data from the Center for American Progress.

She started her journey by telling Costco's HR department. An HR representative let Batson decide how she wanted the coming-out process to unfold. "It was just the right approach to be open, let the trans person guide



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how everything goes forward,” Batson says.

Concerned over how her peers and customers might react if she began to come out publicly, Batson resolved to tell her warehouse manager first. The manager later asked the HR representative, “What do we do if he shows up to work in a dress?” The HR professional responded, “She will dress how she dresses.”

Though Batson wasn’t present for that exchange, it still was upsetting when she found out what the manager had said. Nevertheless, she ultimately felt more comfortable and began taking steps to express her gender identity, such as referring to herself as Melissa and wearing more feminine clothes. “My name started appearing on time sheets as Melissa, and so people saw that,” she says.

Batson’s story contrasts with that of

Weiss, the New York City attorney who was fired by her employer in 1998 after she told a co-worker she was considering transitioning. Weiss notes that while much has changed for transgender workers in the past 23 years, many of the same issues remain. Many employers are implementing right-minded policies, she says, but employees who disregard them often face few repercussions.

That’s where Weiss’ law firm can step in; Weiss herself has represented many transgender workers who have sued their employers. She views her oversized caseload not as a sign of more harassment occurring, but rather as an indication that the transgender community is increasingly willing to act on its own behalf. “People are more aware of their rights when these issues come up,” she explains. “They’re more willing to speak out and say, ‘I’m not going to endure this.’”

WHERE THE LEARNING HAPPENS

The business world is realizing it has to make a much bigger effort to create an atmosphere where transgender individuals can thrive.

Bank of America created its policies for transgender employees back in 2014. Scott Mealus, vice president of global HR and life event services at the company’s Charlotte, N.C., headquarters, says that over the last two years, the bank has given presentations to more than 100 other *Fortune* 500 companies on how to foster a culture of inclusivity.

The bank was one of the first companies to create a cohesive framework for welcoming and retaining transgender employees, and it works with other businesses to help them do the same. When creating the framework, the bank made sure to include transgender employees in that process.

For Mealus, the work his team is doing is incredibly personal. As a gay man who came out in the 1990s, he can relate to some of the struggles that the transgender and nonbinary communities encounter in the workplace. He urges companies to revisit their policies and ensure they are inclusive of all employees. “Think about your employees who need support,” he says. “Think about how you can have great, creative conversations around the topic. You can really change workplace culture and acceptance.”

But since there has been, on the whole, so little research done on transgender and nonbinary individuals, many companies find themselves ill-equipped to educate cisgender employees who have questions. That’s where nonprofits such as Trans Can Work (TCW) and PFLAG can help by providing training to employers.

TCW conducts group sessions that explore common office scenarios in which transgender workers might encounter microaggressions from cisgender staff members. A transgender facilitator leads small-group discussions about the various scenarios.

“That’s really where the learning

Key Terms

Cisgender. Denoting or relating to people whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Gender identity. One’s concept of self as male, female, a blend of both or neither. Gender identity can be the same as or different from one’s sex assigned at birth.

Gender expression. External manifestations of one’s gender identity. These are typically expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, behavior, voice and body characteristics.

Gender-nonconforming. A broad term referring to people who do not conform to the traditional expectations of gender or whose gender expression does not fit neatly into a category.

LGBTQ. The abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer.

Nonbinary. A term describing a person who does not identify exclusively as a man or a woman. Nonbinary individuals may identify as being both, somewhere in between or outside these categories.

Transgender. A term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply a sexual orientation. Like cisgender people, transgender individuals can be straight, gay, bisexual or any sexual orientation.

Transmasculine/Transfeminine. Terms to describe individuals whose gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth but who do not want to be perceived as wholly male or female.

Transitioning/Gender transition. A process that some—but not all—transgender individuals undergo to match their gender identity more closely with their outward appearance. This may include making changes to clothing, names or pronouns, as well as addressing health care needs such as taking hormones or undergoing surgeries.

Sources: Human Rights Campaign; GLAAD; All About Gender; Planned Parenthood.



Jovan Wolf (left) and Drian Juarez worked together at Trans Can Work, a nonprofit that provides inclusion guidance and training for businesses.

happens,” says Drian Juarez, former vice president of programs for TCW in Agoura Hills, Calif., and now vice president of training and culture at Folx Health. “When people go and break out into their small group, that’s when they can be honest; they can feel comfortable.”

PFLAG, the largest LGBTQ family and ally organization in the U.S., has also found that the best way to get through to people who are struggling to accept and understand the trans-

gender community is to remove confrontation from the equation. Instead of trying to make people feel guilty for their feelings about the community or accusing them of being transphobic, the organization advises, answer their questions and help them see a different point of view.

“If we don’t alienate people, they’ll come with us, and that’s exactly what’s happened,” says Jean-Marie Navetta, director of learning and inclusion for PFLAG in Palm Springs, Calif.

REPRESENTATION AND VISIBILITY

For transgender students and young professionals, entering a workforce in which they remain heavily underrepresented is incredibly stressful. Fortunately, organizations like TCW help members of the community, many of whom are homeless or on the verge of homelessness, get ready for the workplace. The organization has resources for job seekers, including resume workshops, career fairs and job boards. TCW

TransTech Social Enterprises turned out to be a perfect networking solution for Safi Mojidi.



specifically targets companies that it knows have made inclusion integral to their policies. And companies that participate in TCW's diversity training may ultimately collaborate with the organization on the hiring process.

"We just did a training with Vimeo," says Jovan Wolf, workforce development manager for TCW. "Now we're in touch with Vimeo's recruitment department and we're gathering candidates to help fill some positions. So now it's a one-on-one, direct link to jobs with a company that has gone through diversity and inclusion training."

Even later in their careers, transgender individuals may need to seek support outside their companies. Safi Mojidi, a senior security technical program manager at messaging app company Slack, wanted to network with people who shared some of his experiences. That wasn't easy as a transgender Black man in a field dominated by cisgender white men.

But last year he discovered TransTech Social Enterprises, an incubator of transgender talent founded by businesswoman, advocate and "Pose" actress Angelica Ross. "It was an avenue where I could talk to other people who were similar to me: LGBTQ folks and people of color," he says. "It was an opportunity to talk through some of the goals we set for ourselves internally and a place where folks had access to resources and people that you typically wouldn't have, like folks who have served on boards of *Fortune* 500 companies."

Mojidi, who is based in Alexandria, Va., notes that clients of TransTech bounce ideas off each other and learn about potential setbacks and challenges they could encounter. "It's just a really good opportunity to have a group of like-minded folks to meet with on a weekly basis," he says. "We would practice our elevator pitches and talk about areas where we had weaknesses. And then we'd pivot into folks giving trainings on any number of things."

Representation and visibility matter. Workers need peers they can relate to and compatible mentors they can learn from. Without these rela-

Transgender Health Benefits

People can access a wide range of medical procedures and health care services to better reflect their gender identity, notes the British Columbia Center for Disease Control. By providing relief from gender dysphoria—the feeling of distress that can occur when a person's gender identity differs from the sex they were assigned at birth—these procedures can be crucial to the mental health of many transgender and nonbinary individuals.

There are five critical categories for fully covering transition-related health care, according to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC):

- Mental health.
- Pharmacy benefits for hormone therapy.
- Medical visits and lab procedures related to hormone therapy.
- Gender-affirming surgical procedures.
- Long-term leave for surgical procedures.

In 2009, the HRC mandated that employers wanting to earn a score of 100 percent on its Corporate Equality Index (CEI) must fully affirm coverage for medically necessary transition-related care and other conditions. As of 2020, 91 percent of CEI-rated businesses (1,040 out of 1,142) now offer at least one plan with transgender-specific health options. In 2002, no companies offered such a plan, while in 2009 only 8 percent of companies included such coverage.

Passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) was an important milestone for transgender health coverage, notes health policy information provider the Kaiser Family Foundation. Before the law was enacted, insurers could deny coverage for transition-related services or charge higher rates due to a patient's gender identity. Under the ACA, insurers are barred from discriminating against patients based on sexual orientation or gender identity when it comes to coverage for certain specific and essential health benefits. And federally funded health programs—including Medicare, Medicaid and any insurance providers that receive federal funds—are prohibited from discriminating based on sex and gender identity.

The Supreme Court's recent ruling in *Bostock v. Clayton County* also had implications for health care. While the case pertained to employment, President Joe Biden's administration applied the ruling to health care discrimination laws.

Still, 30 states allow plans that use broad exclusions to deny coverage for transgender-related health services. Nonprofit media organization NPR notes that the costs insurers incur for covering these services are relatively low. But untreated gender dysphoria has often resulted in costly medical outcomes, such as HIV infection, drug abuse, depression and suicidality. —A.D.

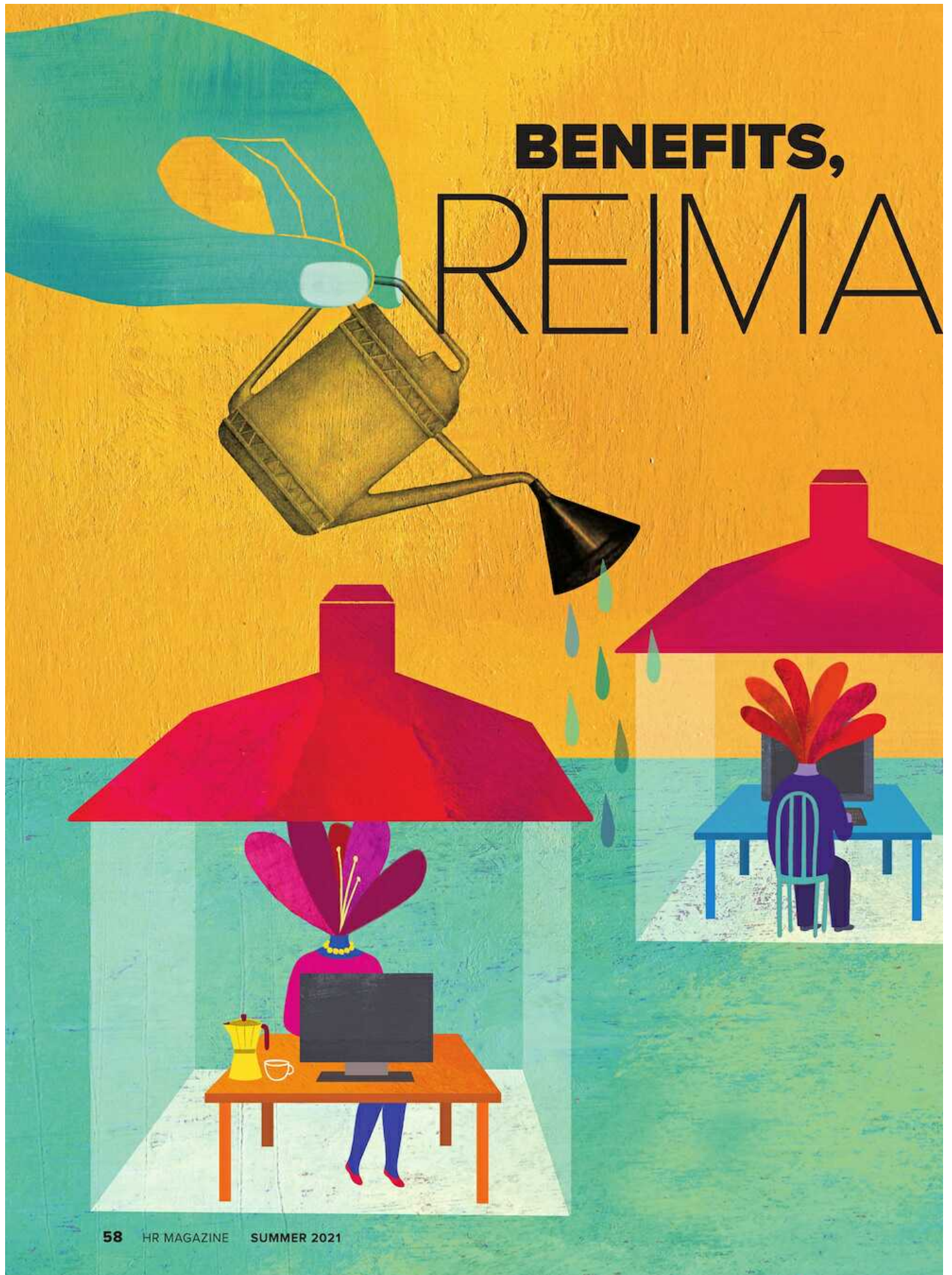
tionships, it's difficult to thrive in any organization. And when employees aren't performing at their best levels, the entire company can suffer.

For transgender and nonbinary individuals, it can be a long, difficult struggle to come out in the workplace—if they choose to come out at all. Research suggests that members of younger generations are more likely to

identify this way and more willing to disclose that they do. Therefore, anything that can be done to make them feel welcome and accepted will only help an organization in the long run. ■

Andrew Deichler is an online writer/editor for SHRM specializing in coverage of students and emerging professionals.

BENEFITS, REIMA

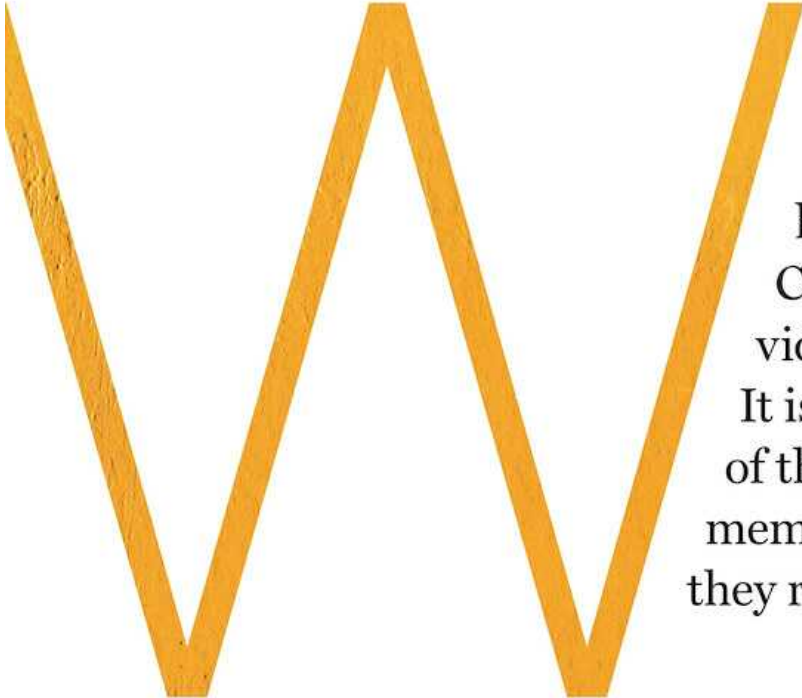


GINED



What will your
post-pandemic
workforce want
and need?

By Joanne Sammer
Illustrations by Anna Godeassi



hen we look back on the COVID-19-era workplace, video calls will loom large. It isn't only the ubiquity of these calls that will be memorable, but also what they revealed.

"With school disrupted, it wasn't unusual to be on a video meeting and see or hear kids in the background asking for help with schoolwork," recalls Jennifer Weber, chief human resources officer at Archer Daniels Midland Co. in Chicago.

Pets, including those newly adopted during the pandemic, also made sudden appearances in the frame.

Employees have spent the pandemic caring for their immediate and extended families, including older relatives, as well as their friends, neighbors and colleagues. When there's a minute left over, they also try to care for themselves.

As employees juggled their personal responsibilities in plain view of their managers and colleagues, many employers adjusted employee benefits plans to accommodate this new reality. HR professionals preparing for a post-pandemic world must determine what benefits their future workforce will want and need. Fortunately, the clues are right in front of them.

"Employees are caregivers," says Luke Prettol, health and well-being benefits manager with ChampionX, an oil field technology company based in The Woodlands, Texas. "The time has come to be more explicit in support of this."

FUTURE FLEXIBILITY

The guiding light of post-pandemic employee benefits is likely to be flexibility. Even as the pandemic recedes, challenges could still emerge from localized

outbreaks that close schools or create new restrictions in communities. Employers that offer flexibility in how, when and where work gets done are likely to be viewed more favorably by current and potential employees.

This flexibility includes providing an array of benefits that meet employees' needs, and then modifying those benefits when workers' needs change. The modifications can be as simple as replacing an onsite gym with an annual stipend that employees can use to buy in-home equipment, take in-person or virtual classes, or purchase a personal fitness app.

"Employers can repurpose benefits money if there is lower headcount in the office going forward," says Julie Stone, managing director, health and benefits North America, at Willis Towers Watson in Parsippany, N.J. "It's about meeting people where they are."





‘Employers can repurpose benefits money if there is lower headcount in the office going forward. It’s about meeting people where they are.’

JULIE STONE

Providing an allowance for home offices is another example of benefits flexibility. Employers with a hybrid or remote-first work strategy may want to offer reimbursement for home-office furniture and supplies.

“Unless employees can bring home things like office supplies, stationery, desks and chairs, companies may want to consider providing an allowance or budget from which workers can purchase necessary provisions,” says Kelly Chance, director of national benefits delivery with Insperity, a professional employer organization based in Houston.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Access to mental and behavioral health support is likely to be ongoing as employers consider post-pandemic employee benefits. The stigma associated with seeking mental health support has been ripped away by the enormity of the pandemic and its attendant stress and isolation, and people have become more willing to get help.

SAP North America introduced mental health days as a way to promote awareness of and de-stigmatize mental illness.

“It starts with a day off, and we want it to lead to an ongoing conversation about employees’ physical and mental

health and wellness,” says Dan Healey, the company’s vice president of human resources in Newtown Square, Pa. With employees working from home, the “lines between home and workspace have blurred to the point where it can be tough to see the lines at all.”

When Celeste Parker thinks about the post-pandemic workplace, her concern is the psychological toll a year of disruptions, uncertainty and worry has taken on employees and their families.

“A lot of kids were out of school for a year,” says Parker, manager of employee benefits and relocation at retailer Costco in Issaquah, Wash. She notes that 35,000 of the company’s 165,000 employees have children under the age of 16 and “some of them are going to need help” once the pandemic abates.

One of Costco’s key changes for 2021 was to make pediatric behavioral health specialists available to support employees and their families as they work through these issues and settle into a new normal in their personal lives.

In addition, employers continue to beef up and expand access to employee assistance programs (EAPs) and other

mental health resources. For example, Costco has increased the number of EAP mental health visits available to employees from six to eight per year. The company also removed

BENEFITS FOR PANDEMIC PETS

Interest in adopting and fostering pets soared during the COVID-19 pandemic—and employers responded by offering pet insurance to workers.

Surveys conducted by The Hartford of 1,328 employers found that interest in offering pet insurance increased to 29 percent in June 2020 from 22 percent just before the pandemic closures and lockdowns began in March 2020.

“Times of crisis are a great opportunity for employers to strengthen relationships with employees by meeting their needs with convenient, personalized benefit programs,” says Anna Lyons, senior vice president of people and culture at Alegeus, a health care funding platform based in Waltham, Mass.

That’s one of the reasons SAP North America introduced pet-related benefits

during the pandemic. The company now offers a suite of options that include pet insurance, preventive care plans, telephonic vet visits and online concierge services that provide information on pet care.

“Our goal is to make benefits as flexible and personalized as possible,” says Dan Healey, SAP North America’s vice president of human resources.

However, while more employers offered pet insurance, there was no uptick in the number of workers who chose to buy it, according to a report by professional services company Aon. —J.S.



co-pays for in-person or telehealth behavioral health care.

To expand access to mental health support, pet food company Canidae Corp. now allows all 144 of its employees to access its EAP, even if they don't participate in the company's health plan. In addition to connecting employees with traditional counseling services, Canidae's EAP will focus on "life management" programs, including child care resources, elder care assistance, homebound-education support, and weight and nutrition resources, says Karen Casey, the company's head of people and culture in Stamford, Conn.

POST-PANDEMIC TIME OFF

Recognizing the stress employees are under, a growing number of organizations are tweaking their allocations and policies on paid time off (PTO) as they prepare for a post-pandemic world. Although some companies have noted that these changes are temporary, benefits executives say at least some of the new approaches are likely to continue beyond this year.

Electric, an IT provider in New York City, mandates that its 290 employees take a companywide day off on the first Friday of each month.

"We also remind employees regularly to use their PTO," says Jamie Coakley, Electric's vice president of people. "We check in with employees who have not scheduled or taken their PTO."

SAP North America has overhauled its entire PTO system by uncapping the number of sick days available to employees, simplifying the process for obtaining a leave of absence and doubling its crisis leave allocation from five days to 10.

Crisis leave began as a way to help employees who were facing disruptions during the California wildfires and in the wake of hurricanes in the southern U.S. Since the



'We check in with employees who have not scheduled or taken their PTO.'

JAMIE COAKLEY

pandemic began and most employees moved overnight to working exclusively from home, Healey says, "employees are empowered to decide how to use their crisis leave to deal with problems in their personal lives."

Some employers are using PTO to reinforce employee flexibility and autonomy in remote or hybrid work environments. With 89 percent of its employees indicating they would prefer a hybrid work schedule once they are able to work onsite again, financial technology company Finastra plans to allow employees to work at home two days a week and in the office two days a week while also introducing unlimited time off.

"We are signaling a more trusting environment," says Sharon Doherty, the London-based company's chief people and places officer.

Giving employees control over their time can also be a powerful employee benefit. Professional services firm PwC has added a new leave option that allows employees to take on no work for up to six months while maintaining their benefits and collecting 20 percent of their salary. The company also offers options such as working a 70 percent to 80 percent schedule instead of full time, as well as compressed, four-day workweeks.

"People can step away from work for any reason with no explanation necessary," says Kim Jones, PwC's leader of people experience, who is based in Dallas. "We can't take all the challenges employees face away, but we can take some sting out of it."

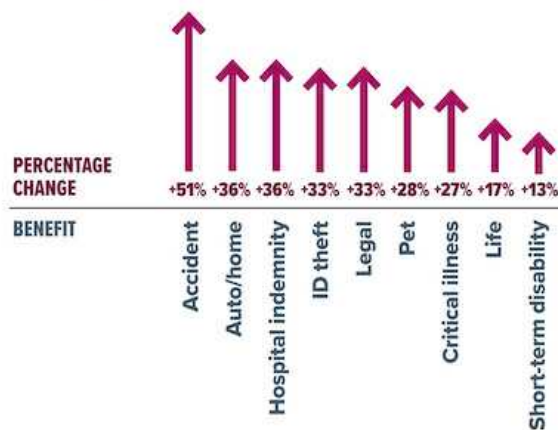
Implementing more-flexible time-off options requires more than just crafting more-liberal policies. Companies and

VOLUNTARY BENEFITS OFFERINGS INCREASE IN THE U.S.

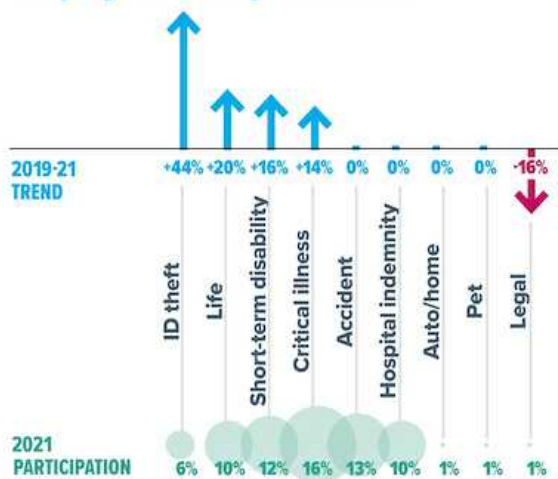
Aon, a professional services company, reported a 27 percent increase in the number of its U.S. employer-clients that offered new or additional voluntary benefits to workers during the 2021 open enrollment cycle and a 15 percent increase in workers eligible for these benefits.

"The biggest shift we saw in the last open enrollment cycle was the addition of voluntary benefits because they had little to no budget impact for employers," says Dani McCauley, Aon's U.S. customer experience leader for voluntary benefits and enrollment solutions.

Rate of Growth in Voluntary Insurance Benefits Offered by Employers, 2019-21



Employee Participation Rates



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their managers must provide consistent messaging about taking time off and how far flexibility extends.

"This is about navigating boundaries," says Willis Towers Watson's Stone. "It has to be clear that caring for a sick child is not just a workday at home with a sick child."

THE VIRTUAL CARE REVOLUTION

The pandemic created fertile ground for the implementation of virtual tools to support employees' physical and mental health. As a result, telemedicine and digital tools have gained levels of utilization and acceptance in just a few months that would have taken years to achieve pre-pandemic. For example, publishing company John Wiley & Sons Inc. in Hoboken, N.J., saw a 35 percent utilization rate when it introduced a mental health app to help its 7,000 employees manage burn-out and workplace stress, says Danielle McMahan, Wiley's chief people officer. That was better than the 25 percent to 30 percent expected.

Utilization is just part of the picture when it comes to telemedicine and digital tools. At Electric, Coakley is digging deeper into aggregate user data for insight into how and how often these tools are used. One-third of the company's workforce adopted a new, on-demand coaching app—well above the goal of 25 percent. Now, Coakley is analyzing data on how many repeat sessions employees have scheduled and whether they are meeting with the same coach, which can indicate that employees are building relationships with specific professionals. This same approach could be used to analyze aggregate data from digital behavioral health tools.

The rapid growth in virtual tools designed to support employee health and wellness has been a mixed blessing for some employers. After analyzing telemedicine utilization data, ChampionX's Prettol is concerned that some employees could be left out. For example, employees with higher incomes and education levels tend to be active users of telemedicine, while other groups of employees have been slow to adopt it.

"Can telemed become more equitable in usage distribution?" Prettol asks. "There are still things we are trying to figure out."



‘We recognize that preventive care took a back seat in the past year.’

CELESTE PARKER

Ensuring consistent quality of telemedicine and digital health care tools is another concern. “Everything in this space is moving so quickly,” says Kate Brown, Mercer’s Center for Health Innovation leader in Austin, Texas. “Employers may not be asking questions about quality because they are so focused on just getting something in place.”

At Costco, Parker monitors utilization rates of the company’s digital health offerings and makes sure all employees and their families have the same access to quality, affordable care. If a digital or telemedicine solution offers only adult-centered behavioral health care, for example, she looks for other tools that provide care for adolescents, as well.

In addition, Parker considers how many health care professionals operating within the telemedicine or digital solution are employed by that company and how many are contractors. She also asks how the solution assesses the quality of the providers.

“We want to make sure that virtual tools measure and maintain quality,” Parker says, “which can be difficult even with providers in a traditional behavioral health care setting.”

Employers may find multiple uses for digital health tools. When ChampionX was transitioning to remote work in the early days of the pandemic, managers found that digital tools designed to support employees returning to work following childbirth were helpful when managing a newly remote workforce.

“No one had a playbook for the pandemic,” Prettol says, “so we used the playbook on employees returning from maternity leave as the cornerstone in how we trained managers on remote-work management.”

DELAYED SCREENINGS

Employers are bracing for less happy news in a post-pandemic world. While telemedicine and digital tools have

helped to fill some of the health care gaps recently, many people skipped nonemergency health care altogether, including annual preventive screenings for conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure, diabetes and cancer.

This gap in care is likely to lead not only to a greater-than-normal number of cases, but also to an increase in cases of greater severity. Cancers, for example, that might have been caught early a year ago are now being diagnosed at a more advanced stage.


To help counteract this reality, many employers are stepping up chronic-disease screening and management programs. Costco, for example, enhanced and expanded its diabetes management program to provide free equipment for monitoring blood sugar, as well as materials and coaching for employees with either Type 1 or Type 2 diabetes.

“We recognize that preventive care took a back seat in the past year,” Parker says.

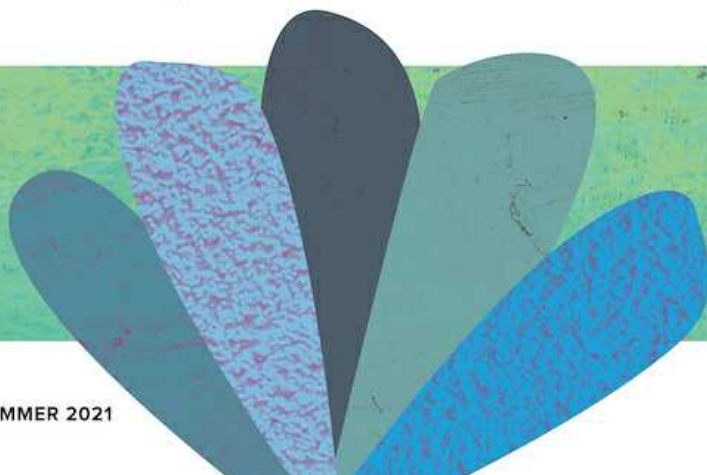
LOOKING AHEAD

The post-pandemic future of employee benefits is a work in progress, with many variables driving its trajectory. If employers continue supporting remote or hybrid work arrangements among their employees, a location-agnostic talent strategy could drive a very different employee benefits approach in the months and years ahead.

“The pipeline for talent would be wide open,” says Deb LaMere, chief human resources officer for software provider Datasite in Minneapolis.

If that happens, the changes to employee benefits in 2021 and 2022 could be just the beginning of an entirely new era. 

Joanne Sammer is a New Jersey-based business and freelance writer.



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Hart & Soul

Judi Hart's HR background and people-oriented perspective serve her well in her role as COO at a private investment firm.

By Novid Parsi
Photography by Robert Gallagher



Early last year, Judi Hart's career took an unexpected turn. After almost two decades in HR, she became chief operating officer (COO) at PEAK6, a Chicago-based investment and technology firm with 1,200 employees. Previously, Hart had served as the organization's chief people officer.

On the surface, the shift may seem momentous—but Hart doesn't see it that way. As COO, she says, she applies the same critical lesson she learned in HR: "There's not a single decision a business leader makes that doesn't have a people impact."

After Hart joined PEAK6 in 2018, its portfolio of companies increased from two to six in her first year. Each of those companies had its own siloed operations—its own HR, legal, finance, marketing and IT teams, among others. Meanwhile, PEAK6 gradually expanded Hart's responsibilities beyond HR to include marketing and facilities. In 2020, PEAK6 centralized its operations and placed them under the purview of Hart, its first COO.

Hart's people-oriented perspective serves her well in her current role. "I'm really strong at leading a diverse group of people to deliver," she says. "I don't need to be an expert in finance, compliance, legal or marketing if I've surrounded myself with the right group of people."

Those who have worked with Hart also believe the COO position is a good fit for her. "I was not surprised she took this bigger role on the operational side," says Cory Randles, people business partner at Apple in

Culver City, Calif., where Hart worked as an HR director for four years before joining PEAK6. "More than a lot of HR people I've worked with, Judi really tries to understand the business problems that need to be solved. She has a great gift for bringing people together to drive change."

As the tumultuous events of 2020 unfolded, Hart used what she calls her "wartime leadership skills" to help quickly steer PEAK6 operations from almost entirely in-office to



almost all remote when the pandemic hit. As employees' work and personal lives overlapped in multiple ways, "we as leaders had to be more empathetic and compassionate," she says. She helped guide the company through a period of heightened social unrest, for instance, by giving people time off to participate in protests.

The company had created her role just in time. "I couldn't fathom going through what we went through in 2020 without having a central leader who brought all the teams together," she says.

'WRANGLING CRAZY'

Just as her HR expertise has informed her work as COO, Hart says, a commonality across the companies where she has worked has similarly primed her for her current role. "They are all organizations led by passionate, creative leaders who have very big personalities and who want to disrupt industries," she says. And each of the companies was on the verge of explosive growth when Hart arrived.

Early in her career, she worked as an HR manager and generalist for video game developers Mike Morhaime and Frank Pearce at Blizzard Entertainment. Later, as vice president of people and culture at Beats by Dr. Dre, she worked closely with company founders and music industry executives Jimmy Iovine, Luke Wood and Andre "Dr. Dre" Young. Now, at PEAK6, she reports to founders Jenny Just and Matt Hulsizer.

To collaborate with "absolute visionaries," as Hart describes them, she keeps her emotions in check and brings a level-headed attitude. Hart sees her role, in part, as translating the founders' vision to the employees who work to achieve it.

"I don't want to alter their brilliance, but my job has been to take that, absorb it and not react to it," she says. Put another way, "I always jokingly say my job is to wrangle crazy."

Hart recalls interviewing for the position at Beats. "Luke Wood clearly told me, 'I've never known my HR person and never really wanted to, so I'm not even sure how to hire for this role,'" she says. Hart thought to herself, "Challenge accepted."

With Hart's guidance, the organization grew from 25 to 750 employees, then integrated with Apple while maintaining Beats' strong culture. Less than three years after she joined the company, Hart remembers, Wood was asked about the most impactful thing he did at Beats. His reply? Hiring the right HR leader.

BLENDING CANDOR WITH COMPASSION

Just as important as her relationships with founder-leaders are the ones Hart forms with employees. "When I take a minute to ... ask about people's kids and their weekends and keep a sense of humor, I build relationships with them," she says. "And when I do that, people work that much harder. People really aren't that high-maintenance. A little bit of care goes a long way."

Her approach blends candor with compassion. "I'm clear, direct and transparent," Hart says, "but I'm also kind in my delivery. My intent is always to help."

Former colleagues can attest to this. "She's direct with heart," says Denise Dunlap, who has known Hart since 2003, when they both worked in HR at what was then Vivendi Universal Games (now Activision Blizzard). "She's a straight shooter, but people don't leave conversations thinking they were disrespected."

In 2005, Dunlap hired Hart to help her build the HR function at Blizzard Entertainment. Today, Hart's former boss happily reports to Hart at PEAK6. "I knew nothing about the firm except that Judi believes in it," Dunlap, the company's chief people officer, says of joining the organization two years ago.

For Hart, her success at founder-led organizations has hinged on her ability to identify the kind of employee who thrives there. Hart neatly characterizes the type: "Their life is work and they love it, but they also have a sense of humor, which is important when you work the way we work."

Hart may as well be describing herself. "I get a lot of joy and passion out of work," she says. "I always have."

INTEGRATING WORK AND LIFE

In fact, work has been part of Hart's life since she was a teenager. She went to a high school in Austin, Texas, that had a



'There's not a single decision a business leader makes that doesn't have a people impact.'

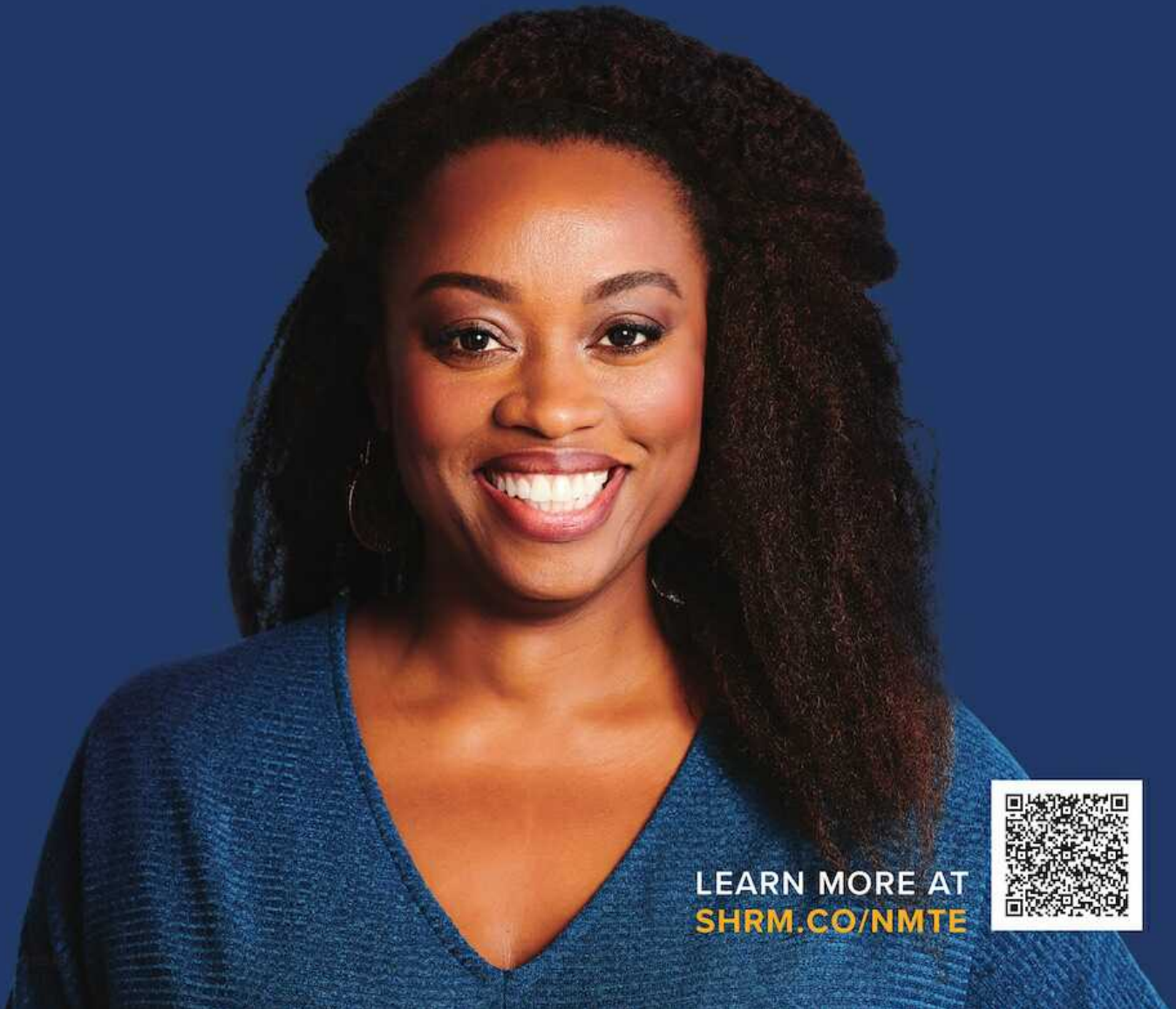




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business co-op program, where she attended class for half the day and worked the other half. It then took her eight years to graduate from college because “I chose to work full time and go to school part time,” she says.

To get her degree in music at the University of Southern California (Hart wanted to become a radio DJ), she first had to complete an internship. As an older student with her own apartment, she balked at the idea of working as an unpaid intern.

So, to fulfill the requirement, she landed a paid job as a recruiting coordinator at Vivendi Universal Games. “And I fell in love with HR,” she says.



she couldn't let her job wholly dictate her sense of worth. That had led to constant self-doubt. “I spent years consumed by what others thought of me,” she says. “I gave so much of my power away to the job.”

So, Hart decided two things. First, it was perfectly OK in work settings to admit any knowledge gaps. “I allowed myself to say, ‘I don’t know, but I’m super resourceful and I’ll find out,’” she says. Second, Hart released herself from the hounding fear of losing her job. Now, she says, “I fundamentally believe I’m employable, and either the place I’m at sees that value or they don’t. And if they don’t, I believe there is someone who does.”

That fear of unemployment had its roots in Hart’s childhood—and it’s entwined with her tireless work ethic.

Both of Hart’s parents grew up very poor on farms, picking strawberries and cotton. “That’s what drove them, and I was raised with that,” says Hart, who has an older brother and sister. Hart’s father later started his own investment firm; her mother worked as an executive assistant.

As her parents’ fortunes rose, the family moved into a nice house near a country club. But her mother tried to “keep up with the Joneses,” Hart says, and Hart’s parents eventually filed for

‘I get a lot of joy and passion out of work.’

bankruptcy. “The next thing I knew, all five of us were in a one-bedroom apartment,” she says.

“If you ask me what drives me today to be the person I am and work the way I work, it’s that experience,” she says. “I have two daughters, and I don’t want that experience for them.”

Even so, Hart has learned in recent years that life doesn’t have to play a subordinate role to work. She owes that lesson to PEAK6 co-founder Just, a working mother of four. “She’s the most successful female I’ve ever met,” Hart says, “and because she operates the way she does, she has given me the flexibility to do the same.”

Pre-pandemic, Hart planned flights for business trips so she could get home in time for her kids’ plays and basketball games. She never misses any of their events. “[My boss] taught me that I can have professional success while putting my family first,” she says. ■

Novid Parsi is a freelance writer based in St. Louis.

While Hart’s career thrived, she eventually ran into challenges related to what she calls “work/life integration, not work/life balance,” when she experienced a major change in her personal life. In 2006, Hart had her first child, and she was wracked with doubt: “Should I stay home or work? Am I a bad mom? Am I a bad employee?”

She decided, at first, to stay home. Less than a month later, she took on a contract recruiting gig. “It was about staying connected with who I am, using my brain and having something outside of my child,” she explains.

In 2008, 21 months after the birth of her daughter, Hart had another. “It was the hardest thing I ever did, having two kids,” she says. “And it immediately sent me back to work.”

Hart returned to the workplace full time. Yet she learned

The Hard Facts About SOFT SKILLS

Why you should teach employees to be more resilient, communicative and creative.

By Kate Rockwood

Being gifted at performing the technical aspects of a job can take an employee only so far. To become a stellar employee or an admired leader requires an arsenal of skills that are harder to measure but critical to success.

Dubbed “soft skills,” they are behaviors, personality traits and work habits, such as collaboration, critical thinking, perseverance and communication, that help people prosper at work. Think of it this way: A talented graphic designer might wow people with her creations, but if she constantly misses deadlines or doesn’t listen to feedback—leading to costly project delays or upset clients—her career might stall.

There are many ways a lack of soft skills such as dependability, time management and critical thinking can derail an employee with solid technical skills. According to LinkedIn’s *2019 Global Talent Trends* report, 89 percent of recruiters say when a hire doesn’t work out, it usually comes down to a lack of soft skills.

Perhaps realizing this, many employers are prioritizing soft skills during hiring. Monster’s *The Future of Work 2021: Global Hiring Outlook* reported that when employers were asked to name the top skills they want in employees, they cited soft skills such as dependability, teamwork/collaboration, flexibility and problem-solving.

While most people are hired for their technical abilities, their soft skills give them “career durability,” says Alexandra Levit, a workforce futurist and author of *Humanity Works: Merging Technologies and People for the Workforce of the Future* (Kogan Page, 2018). She defines that term as the ability to acquire the skills, knowledge and mindset needed to be an engaged and productive member of the team.

“For someone to be successful 10 years down the road, they need to be resilient and be able to reinvent themselves in different learning environments,” she adds.



SORTING SOFT SKILLS

The beauty of soft skills is that they're highly transferable. Creativity, responsibility and excellent communication skills can be applied to any job. But how can HR professionals tell which soft skills need shoring up or matter most in their workplaces?

Conducting a skills or training needs assessment can be a great way to find out, and the HR team might already have much of the information it needs, says Abby White, SHRM-CP, CEO of Gró HR Consulting, based in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Ask managers to look through their team members' past performance reviews to identify soft-skill weak spots as well as proficiencies such as how employees respond to e-mail or their attitudes during and involvement in team meetings.

"Watch for those types of behaviors where there's a chance for improvement," White says.

Self-assessments and 360-degree feedback reports can be used in combination to prioritize the soft skills employees need to work on, says Di Ann Sanchez, SHRM-SCP, founder of DAS HR Consulting LLC in Hurst, Texas. She points to the surprising results of her own past 360-degree feedback as an example of how employees can learn from the way others perceive them.

"The lowest score in my 360 was always communication, which shocked me because I think I'm a great communicator," Sanchez says.

But after learning that some co-workers found her style intimidating, Sanchez asked to work with a communication



'Companies have a lot to gain by treating soft skills as they would any technical skill.'

LIZ CANNATA

coach, who she says helped her to be more aware of her audience. She stresses that it's also important for companies to consider bias and cultural and gender differences when evaluating soft skills.

"An aggressive communication style, for example, might be treated as more acceptable in men," she says. "You need to be sensitive to different gender perspectives but not hold people to wildly different standards."

To find out which soft skills are most needed in an organization, look no further than your most successful employees. See if there are certain traits they share that allow them to prosper in your workplace. Sanchez also recommends that HR professionals ask executives what their top four or five most-wanted employee soft skills are to ensure buy-in. And when in doubt, reread some of your company's literature.

"Take a look at your company's value statements and think about your company's culture," Sanchez says. "Those are your company's priorities when it comes to soft skills."

ARE THEY TEACHABLE?

The path to teaching someone a technical skill, such as how to drive using a stick shift, is tangible. The process might not be pretty—picture lots of herky-jerky braking and clutching—but it's fairly clear.

Conversely, teaching someone how to be more patient, a better team player or more innovative may not follow a predetermined formula, but it still can be done. While it's true that some people have innate personality traits that allow



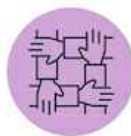
MOST-WANTED SOFT SKILLS

What are the top skills employers are looking for?

A survey of 3,100 recruiters from the U.S., Canada, the U.K., France, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Sweden revealed the most in-demand skills:



Dependability



Teamwork/
collaboration



Problem-solving



Flexibility

Source: *The Future of Work 2021: Global Hiring Outlook*, Monster.

them to evince certain soft skills more naturally, these skills are also honed over time.

"Companies have a lot to gain by treating soft skills as they would any technical skill," says Liz Cannata, vice president of human resources for Chicago-based talent acquisition company CareerBuilder.

Sometimes an employee is deficient in a certain soft skill because of a lack of experience or a previous situation. White cites the example of one of her employees who appeared unable to solve problems independently. But it wasn't because the employee lacked the ability to make decisions. It was because she had previously worked for a micromanaging supervisor who never allowed her to offer solutions. White encouraged the employee to come up with a potential solution or two when an issue arose before bringing the problem to her attention.

In cases like that, it's important for companies to foster an environment where it's OK for employees to make mistakes and be vulnerable. Kristina Johnson, chief people officer for San Francisco-based identity and asset management company Okta Inc., says if such an environment doesn't exist, organizational culture can be at the root of the problem.

"Imagine an organization where leaders approach questions and concerns and mistakes with empathy and understanding," Johnson says. "Then consider a workplace that's aggressive and blame-focused, where employees are afraid to make mistakes and too embarrassed to ask questions. As you can imagine, employees will stick around at one

'You need to be sensitive to different gender perspectives but not hold people to wildly different standards.'

DI ANN SANCHEZ

of those organizations much longer than the other."

A recent Yale University study found that people with emotionally intelligent supervisors—those who are self-aware and empathetic—were happier, more creative and more innovative. On the flip side, 70 percent of the employees whose managers were identified as having little emotional intelligence said their main feelings toward work were negative.

GETTING STARTED

Like technical skills, soft skills can weaken if they go unused. That's why it's important to practice them continuously.

"Developing soft skills won't be successful in most cases using a one-and-done approach like a single webinar or panel discussion," Cannata says. "No one really develops their technical skills that way, either."

Instead, the soft-skills training methods that tend to work best are "flexible, shorter and more frequent," Cannata says.

It's also a good idea for companies to offer a variety of learning experiences. "Some people will do better with written training; others are more experiential," says Mel Hennigan, vice president of people at education software company Symplicity Corp., based

in Arlington, Va. "Whenever possible, we work with the employee to figure out the approach that works best for them."

While most people are eager to learn, Hennigan finds that gaps between a training program's design and objective and between a training delivery style and an employee's learning style often get in the way of a successful outcome.

Cannata recommends using a combination of larger-group training, mentoring programs, and self-guided programming such as short, on-demand videos or podcasts.

It's critical to show employees why this training is important. That might mean drawing a direct line between improving soft skills and achieving higher pay or a promotion.

If the company doesn't have the resources to start a soft-skills training or development program, it should consider partnering with a university or nonprofit that specializes in social emotional learning, emotional intelligence or conscious inclusion, Cannata says.

But there are also plenty of inexpensive and less-taxing ways to improve soft skills in the workplace.

Some methods can be as simple as challenging employees to up their time management game by using the Pomodoro Technique for a week. This method recommends picking a single task or project to focus on, setting a timer for 25 to 30 minutes, and working solely on that task. When the time is up, you take a two- or three-minute break and then get back to work for another 25 minutes. →

The three soft skills U.S. employers have the most trouble finding:

- 36% Critical thinking
- 36% Communication
- 34% Creativity

Source: *Reimagining the Workforce 2021: Closing the Skills Gap Through Education*, Wiley Education Services.



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Companies can also lean on in-house talent for informal training sessions such as lunch-and-learns. Instead of focusing on a technical skill, a session might center on time management or active listening skills. Also leave space throughout the day for employees to talk about what's going well with their work and, more importantly, what's not.

"If you want to work on improving communication and connecting within a small team, walk through everyone's approach to different scenarios, like high-stress or time-sensitive situations," Johnson says.

One of White's favorite recent activities has been holding a weekly book group for her team. Every Friday morning, team members meet to talk about a different chapter of the book they're all reading and discuss what they learned and how they will apply those lessons at work. So far, the group has read 13 books, including *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace* (Northfield Publishing, 2012) by Gary Chapman and Dale Carnegie's classic *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (Simon and Schuster, 2011).

"I can hands-down say that someone has gotten at least two major useful items out of each book," White says. "They're also really good team-building exercises. People look forward to collaborating with their colleagues on Friday mornings."

TYPES OF TRAINING

For more-involved training on soft skills, there are formats and technologies to meet every budget and desired outcome. But generally, those that require reflection and interaction from employees work best.

"If people just listen to a presentation or an online video, they're not really getting a chance to practice the skills they learn," Sanchez says.

Here are some soft-skill training methods to consider:

Virtual reality. Real-world experience is a terrific teacher, but virtual reality might be the next best thing. A 2020 PwC survey found that virtual reality learners were four times more focused than e-learners and felt 275 percent more confident to act on what they had learned.

Some companies offer virtual reality simulations that mirror real-world scenarios, such as asking employees to react to a customer complaint. Hotel and resort company Best Western attributed a 100 percent increase in its guest satisfaction and loyalty score to its virtual reality employee training program.

Online learning. There's no shortage of online classes or learning programs that target soft skills. For added benefit,

consider ones that provide dialogue simulations that allow employees to practice the skills they've learned.

Coaching/mentoring. Because of the expense, coaching is typically used at only the highest levels of leadership, Sanchez says, but companies would be smart to build employees' leadership skills from day one—especially considering companies with higher levels of internal hiring have 41 percent longer employee tenure. One way to do that is through mentorship programs. Leveraging the soft skills of company leaders, whether it's done one-on-one or in groups, is an affordable and beneficial practice. Nine in 10 workers who have a mentor say they're satisfied with their jobs, according to a CNBC/SurveyMonkey survey.

Interactive workshops. "Interactive, instructor-led workshops are the most compelling and impactful methods to teach skills like emotional intelligence," Johnson says. She recommends workshops that simulate real-world scenarios and give employees a chance to hear actionable feedback based on their responses.

Gamification. Gamification adds a gamelike element to a training session, which can be done in a number of ways.

Levit points to the innovative learning approach Slack uses with its employees. The messaging app company created interactive scenarios based on the *Choose Your Own Adventure* children's book series

by asking employees to pick a character, read the person's role and job duties, and "then engage with a chatbot to perform tasks and hone skills," Levit says. "The end result was a learning approach that allows employees to fail or make choices in a safe place and then evaluate and reflect on the outcomes." One study found that adding a fun element like gamification boosts informal learning in the workplace.

As with any kind of training, it's important to evaluate the impact of soft-skills training and tie it to your company's key metrics, such as performance review conversations and goal setting, Cannata says.

It's also helpful to evaluate employees before and after a major training session and follow up on their performance at the three-, six- and nine-month marks, Sanchez says.

"Done right, this can be a huge benefit for the company and the employee, especially for retention," she says. "Even if the employee doesn't like it at the time because it makes them uncomfortable, they can see you're making an investment in their future." ■

Kate Rockwood is a freelance writer based in Chicago.



'Interactive, instructor-led workshops are the most compelling and impactful methods to teach skills like emotional intelligence.'

KRISTINA JOHNSON

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

We asked you to tell us you're an HR professional without telling us you're an HR professional. You responded in droves.

Illustrations by John S. Dykes



**No, you can't
use sick time
to care for
your dog.**

—Kim Piper, HR manager,
Wamego, Kan.

How can you possibly describe to people what your HR job entails?

No one outside of human resources can really understand the broad spectrum of responsibilities that are placed on you. Nor will they believe the heavy demands made on your time by a multitude of people—from the executive team down to entry-level workers. Sometimes *you* can't even believe what people ask of you!

In recent social media posts, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) asked you to "tell us you're an HR professional without telling us you're an HR professional." Thousands responded on Facebook, LinkedIn and the members-only SHRM Connect discussion board. Do any of these sound familiar?

**Behind-the-scenes
miracle worker!**

—Adanna Sargeant,
HR manager, JMD Wireless LLC,
Chaguanas, Trinidad and Tobago

**I'm a very nice person
and like people. But
a lot of them never want
to come to my office.**

—Eileen Itell,
assistant vice president, human
resources officer, AmeriServe
Financial Bank, Johnstown, Pa.

**You want me in your
boat to help you row,
not to bail water when
it starts to sink!**

—Lynn Travaglio,
HR manager, Jennie-O Turkey
Store Inc., Willmar, Minn.

**People I work with
talk to me like I am
something in between
Dear Abby and Oprah.**

—Rose Fernández Eubanks,
global business partner,
Orange International Carriers,
Herndon, Va.

Employee: Um, the
toilet's backed up ...
Me: OK. Did you tell
maintenance?

Employee: No.

Me: Thanks for stopping by!

—Stephanie Riccobono,
owner, SeniorHR Consulting,
Sterling Heights, Mich.



**The unofficial lawyer,
peacemaker, private detective,
doctor, babysitter, janitor,
therapist & certified mind reader.
Oh, and I'm either loved
or hated, depending on
what you want or need.**

—Tamrah Fairman,
HR manager, EMR Elevator Inc., Arlington, Texas

Manager:
Hey, do you have a minute
for a quick question?

Me: You bet.

What's up?

Two hours later ...

—Emily Tietzen, SHRM-CP,
HR director,
Anduzzi's Sports Club,
Green Bay, Wis.



**I fix problems you
didn't know you had.**

—Darlene Burgess, SHRM-CP,
HR manager, Franklin Street,
Tampa, Fla.

**I'm processing an STD
that will go into LTD
that's not covered
by FML, but will need
accommodations under
ADA until they can
RTW FT FD.**

Oh, this is also a WC.

—Patricia Matthews,
employment manager, Virginia
Department of Motor Vehicles,
Richmond, Va.

**I have
developed a PIP
for my child.**

—Tamara Bedford,
human resources, Universal Mental
Health Services, Winston-Salem, N.C.

No, you can't!

No, no, no.

—Maria Diaz,
HR director, Vision Landscapes,
Bonita Springs, Fla.

**I can't cure
crazy, but I can
document it.**

—Kerri Straw, SHRM-CP,
senior HR consultant, OmniaHR,
Coeur d'Alene, Idaho

**To save time,
let's just assume that
I'm never wrong.**

—Nazish Masood,
HR executive, Prepac Engineering
Industries (Pvt) Ltd.,
Lahore District, Punjab, Pakistan

Manager:
I would like them to have
10+ years' experience,
be a superstar, have no
personal life, previous
experience with a *Fortune*
500 company, but I'd like
to pay them like they just
graduated college.

—Melissa Wagner,
HR manager, Q Car Wash,
Fort Worth, Texas

New hire:
(Just finished his
sexual-harassment
training as part of the
onboarding process.)

HR person:
Congratulations!
Here's your certificate.

New hire:
So ... are you single?

—Ranyah Ghusseini,
HR generalist, Somerset, N.J.



**In order for you to receive
the perfect attendance
bonus, you must have
perfect attendance.
You called off 3 times, that's
not perfect attendance.**

—Holly Trudeau,
HR generalist, WHEMCO Inc.,
Pittsburgh

**I'm your company's
first line of defense.**

**The next is a
law firm. I cost less.**

—Chantice Cook,
founder, Pathway HR Solutions,
Cincinnati

**So you are
wondering why
the employee is
doing that. I know,
let's ASK them!**

—Amy Stone Scannell,
vice president, HR consulting
services, OneDigital Health and
Benefits, Boston



**I'm sorry,
I sent 948 reminders.
How did you miss it?**

—Kimberly Partridge,
HR generalist, Talbert Building
Supply, Durham, N.C.

**I babysit
adults.**

—Liz Bligan,
HR manager, Catalent
Pharma Solutions,
Philadelphia

**When you
are in the
bathroom stall
and they say,
“Do you have a
minute?”**

—Ashley King Mills,
senior director of operations,
North Carolina Bar Association &
Foundation, Cary, N.C.

**I understand you feel
picked on by your supervisor.**

**Please understand
that everything they are
telling you to do is
BECAUSE IT'S
YOUR JOB!!!**

—Annie Wiechman,
director of finance and human
resources, Senior Care Pharmacy,
Wichita, Kan.

**When you're so good
at terminating
people that they
thank you
when leaving
your office.**

—Cassie Barber,
HR business partner, Cincinnati

**Document, document,
document.**

—Sonja Jordan,
HR director,
T2 Utility Engineers,
Pearland, Texas

**People are *not*
the least of my worries.**

—Hazel Le Gendre,
quality assurance analyst,
Republic Bank Limited,
Port of Spain,
Trinidad and Tobago



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MANAGING PEOPLE

A BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE

How to help your team transition to a new boss.

By Vanessa McGrady

The time has come to tell your team goodbye: Perhaps you landed a promotion or a job at a new company, or maybe you're retiring.

Whatever your reason for leaving, you'll need an exit strategy to help your team stay productive and positive. By smoothing the transition for your staff and your replacement, you'll also protect your legacy as a caring, competent leader. And who knows? You and your former team might meet again someday.

Here are key steps you can take to make the transition easier for everyone involved.

MAINTAIN FOCUS

Stay engaged. First and foremost, maintain your own productivity, says Matt Erhard, a managing partner at Canadian recruiting company Summit Search Group.

"It can be easy to get distracted by your excitement and anxieties related to a new position," but too often good managers do their worst work right after they decide to leave their current job, Erhard says.

Be flexible. Understand that your team's needs and expectations will depend on the circumstances. If you're moving to a different department within the same organization, for example, your former team members will probably expect you to be available to respond to their questions after the move. However, if you're going to a

new company or retiring, they'll be less likely to seek you out and you may not have time to respond if they do.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

Call a team meeting. Announce your impending departure to everyone at once. Keep the announcement positive, says Wendy Deacon, a former nonprofit executive based in Denver who now runs DestinationU, a personal consulting and strategic-planning business.

"Keep the team focused on key priorities and what the next one or two steps are," Deacon advises.

Update your files. Create or update files related to procedures, contacts and contingencies. While team members may have plenty of institutional knowledge, you'll want the incoming manager to have as much information as possible to keep the team moving forward.

Sharing such information is especially important for knowledge workers.

"People organize their thoughts and files in different ways," Erhard says. "Typing up a couple of pages explaining where you are in current projects and how to continue them can go a long way toward smoothing the transition, especially if you won't get an opportunity to work with the person replacing you."

Reassure staff. How you leave is as important as what you leave behind, says Carrie Williams, an execu-

tive leadership coach and owner of Los Angeles-based RainShadow Coaching.

"The best thing that a manager can do is reassure the team before they leave because whenever there's any transition in a team, individuals get insecure about their status, and that can affect the transition overall," she says. "Helping the team get really clear on their values and priorities so that they can express them very clearly and coherently to the new management is incredibly important. It's kind of like a team 'understanding their why.'"

Provide transition time. If possible, alert your team of your departure a month in advance.

"Focus on the projects you have, wrapping up the ones you can and deciding who will take over ongoing work," Erhard says. "Approaching your current work in this way can help you feel like you're preparing for your new job without neglecting your current team."

STEPPING INTO A NEW ROLE

When you start a new position, you'll want to refrain from making any major changes until you understand the group dynamics.

Here are some ways to put your best foot forward:

Start with values. Gather as much information as possible before you meet your staff, says Carrie Williams, an executive leadership coach and owner of RainShadow Coaching. Learn the team members' roles, strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, understand the team's philosophies and goals, which are not necessarily the same as what can be found in the overarching company mission.

"It's the team's way of operating and their values and beliefs that they hold dear," Williams says. "This is how the team wants to show up for each other, what they expect from each other and what they're going to hold each other accountable to."

Understand the new dynamic. Team development has a specific trajectory. When there's a major change, the team must recalibrate.

"Any time you mix up the team, you're impacting what stage they're at in their team-building model," Williams says. A good leader understands this dynamic and will offer grace during the transition period, she adds.

Build trust. Even if team members are enthusiastic about your arrival, they'll need time to learn how you work. Strive to establish psychological safety to build trust with team members, Williams says. As your new team works through the transition, assume everyone has the best intentions. —V.M.

Recommend a replacement. If you are allowed to weigh in on your replacement, consider someone who may not be the team's star player but who has tremendous management potential. According to Gallup's *The State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders* report, 82 percent of companies make the wrong choice in selecting a manager, mostly because they promote high-performing individual contributors who are great at their current jobs but lack the people and problem-solving skills to be a good manager.

"The good news is that sufficient management talent exists in every company," according to the report. "It's often hiding in plain sight. ... Specific tools such as talent audits and talent assessments offer a systematic and scientific method for finding those employees who have the natural talent to be great managers."

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE

Brief the incoming manager. Find several hours (or even a full workday, if possible) to sit down with the new manager who will be supervising your former team, Erhard says. Cover items such as pending deadlines, policies and processes. Make sure the individual has a list of people in other departments who work with your team so he or she can keep projects moving when you're gone. And share any past challenges or obstacles you've encountered and how you resolved them.

Also, brief the incoming manager on the team's, and each individual member's, strengths and weaknesses.

Williams suggests creating a detailed document on how the team works that includes any assessments, behavioral tests or performance reviews that could be helpful. "All of that is valuable information for the new manager coming in," she says, "and it will speed up the process of transition. It takes some of the hiccups out."

But be sure the new manager has the opportunity to form her own opinions, too, Williams notes, because she could have a different experience with team members. Or her approach might be different, which could give her new insights into people's personalities and the team dynamics.

Show empathy. Remember that the employees you leave behind are probably worried about what changes your departure will bring. Be sensitive to the mood in the room.

"When a new manager comes in, the biggest fear is that they're going to have different goals or standards

than the past manager," Williams says. "And that's fine. But everyone needs to be reassured that they're still working for the same overall goal as a team." ■



Vanessa McGrady is a freelance writer based in Glendale, Calif.

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21-0112

YOUR CAREER

WHAT YOUR HR RESUME SHOULD LOOK LIKE AFTER THE PANDEMIC

Even if you're not looking for a new job, it's time to give your resume a tuneup.

By Daniel Bortz

Human resource practitioners have met an array of challenges during the pandemic. That makes now an ideal time for industry professionals to update their resumes.

"The pandemic turned the world of work on its head, requiring HR professionals to develop strategies, programs and procedures to meet the challenges and opportunities of a rapidly evolving workforce," says Alyssa Gelbard, founder and president of Resume Strategists Inc., a New York City-based career consulting firm. "This resulted in development of new skill sets to effectively manage, recruit and onboard distributed teams; keep employees safe; drive remote engagement; and support new ways of operating. These skills should be reflected on their resumes."

Kim Isaacs, a professional resume writer and career strategist based in Philadelphia, agrees that savvy HR professionals can leverage their new skills to improve their employability. "The pandemic has contributed to a major transformation in the global workforce, from a dramatic increase in remote working to a focus on employee and customer safety," she says. "While some industries have been impacted more than others, it's prudent for HR professionals to revisit their resumes and ensure they convey an understanding of pandemic response initiatives, programs and best practices."

Take these steps to give your resume a pandemic makeover.

SHOWCASE THE RIGHT SKILLS

A great resume highlights the HR skills that are at the top of employers' wish



lists, but what companies value has changed as a result of the pandemic.

While priorities may vary by organization, experts say many employers will be seeking HR professionals with proficiencies in these areas:

- **Crisis management.** "The pandemic has showcased the need

for agility and crisis management amid a sudden and sweeping shutdown of onsite operations," says executive resume writer Jacqui Barrett-Poindexter, who owns a Dallas-based coaching firm. "Human resource [practitioners], at the helm, needed to be quick

and clearheaded, with an ability to source and deploy the right tools for employees and their managers to be successful in a home-office environment.” She believes crisis management skills will play a key role in the post-pandemic workplace. “Whether [dealing with] another health care emergency, a natural disaster or other severe challenge, employers want to know their HR team is equipped and armored to face the battle,” she says.

- **Process building.** When offices shut down and employees began working remotely, companies had

to develop new systems for managing those workers, and that task often fell to HR. Furthermore, Barrett-Poindexter says, many companies will opt to maintain a virtual workforce post-pandemic, while others will resume operations using a hybrid scenario where employees split their time between home and brick-and-mortar offices. “Either way, processes for how employees function and interact continually are in flux, and employers [will] look for a strong skill in process construction,” she says.

- **Digital collaboration.** Louise Kursmark, an executive resume

writer and co-author of *Modernize Your Resume* (Emerald Career Publishing, 2016), says employers are now looking for HR practitioners who possess expertise in running large-scale Zoom meetings, creating virtual training programs and coordinating events that build employee engagement with staff who work remotely.

- **Wellness program management.** “The pandemic has increased the focus on health and wellness, so familiarity with wellness tools, programs, plans and resources will also be desirable,” Isaacs says.
- **Employee retention.** “The numbers say people have been cautious about changing jobs during the pandemic,” says Donna Svei, an executive resume writer in Los Angeles. (According to a survey by global talent and outsourcing company Yoh, nearly 8 in 10 employed Americans said they would not consider a job change during the COVID-19 outbreak.) “If you’ve been involved in designing and implementing voice-of-the-employee systems, forecasting turnover, or developing retention programs, those activities will stand out on your resume,” Svei says.
- **Diversity, equity and inclusion.** The racial injustices that took place in 2020 brought attention to social injustice and discrimination issues at work. Consequently, employers are looking for HR practitioners who can develop, lead and implement diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, Kursmark says.

6 RESUME DO'S AND DON'TS

The pandemic may require you to make substantial changes to your resume, but some resume rules never change. Here are six do's and don'ts to keep in mind.



1. Do keep your resume to one page. Spoiler alert: Hiring managers and recruiters have short attention spans—really short. In fact, one 2018 study by Ladders Inc. found that recruiters spend an average of just 7.4 seconds on an initial screening of a job candidate's resume. So stick to a one-page resume that packs a punch rather than a two- or three-page resume.

2. Don't use Times New Roman. Want your resume to stand out visually when you're competing against dozens of other job applicants? Use the Calibri or Verdana font to give it a modern look. And don't use more than one font—multiple typefaces can be distracting.

3. Do highlight accomplishments instead of duties. Your resume's “Professional Experience” section should focus on your career accomplishments rather than your job duties.

4. Do quantify your achievements. Hiring managers latch on to hard numbers when reviewing resumes, so use metrics to describe your results. For example, instead of writing that you “helped employees work remotely during the pandemic,” write that you “supervised 10 remote employees during the pandemic.”

5. Do proofread your resume for spelling and grammatical errors. More than half (55 percent) of hiring managers surveyed by staffing firm Addison Group ranked typos as their biggest resume turnoff. That echoes the results of a CareerBuilder poll that found 77 percent of hiring managers said typos or bad grammar are instant deal breakers.

6. Don't use the same resume for every job application. In the Addison Group survey, 90 percent of hiring managers said they've noticed when a resume isn't tailored to the job they're hiring for. —D.B.

EXPLAIN WHO YOU ARE

Your resume's “Summary” section, Kursmark says, should provide a concise snapshot of who you are, list your core skills and highlight the results you've delivered to past employers.

To account for the pandemic, Barrett-Poindexter says, a resume summary should explain how your efforts during the past year helped your company “not only survive but

thrive during this economic and health care crisis. You may also want to use the summary to showcase one specific initiative you spearheaded and brought to the finish line during the pandemic.”

Isaacs’ advice: “As the pandemic required many HR professionals to work independently, the summary could also reflect that you’re a self-starter, proactively initiating, planning and executing HR initiatives.”

TOUT HOW YOU OVERCAME WORK CHALLENGES

In the “Professional Experience” section of your resume, you’ll want to focus on your achievements during the pandemic. “I recommend a storytelling approach to accomplishments on a resume, outlining the challenges faced; the solutions implemented; and the results or benefits to the employer, staff,

customers and other stakeholders,” Isaacs says.

For example, a benefits manager who implemented virtual benefits fairs during the pandemic might write, “Following shutdown of West Coast operations due to COVID-19, won buy-in for developing, building and hosting virtual benefits fair attended by 92 percent of the workforce. The transition to virtual fairs is expected to save \$25,000 annually while providing employees with feature-rich benefits tools.”

KNOW YOUR KEYWORDS

Because many employers use applicant tracking systems to screen resumes by searching for certain keywords, your resume must include terms that are relevant to the job you’re applying for, says

Jane Horowitz, Chicago-based founder and principal of More Than a Resume, a career coaching service for college students.

In addition to scrutinizing the job posting for relevant keywords to include in your resume, Gelbard suggests, consider incorporating the following pandemic-related terms: virtual teams, remote teams, crisis management, crisis response, virtual hiring/onboarding, employee safety and risk management.

One silver lining of the pandemic is that you’ve expanded your abilities while helping your company navigate these unprecedented times, which makes you a more valuable professional whether you’re searching for a new job or not. **HR**



Daniel Bortz is a freelance writer based in Arlington, Va.



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DATA WATCH

RETURN-TO-WORK ISSUES THAT UNSETTLE THE BRAIN

As employees re-enter the workplace, what's top of mind for CEOs and CHROs?

By Alexander Alonso, SHRM-SCP

As I spend time talking to CEOs and CHROs, I've come to realize the myriad considerations they now live with more than one year into the pandemic.

Some question whether they will ever return to the worksite. Others wonder what efficiencies they will realize with a fully remote workforce. Most are considering how best to maintain their organization's cultural values as they persevere.

And for many business leaders, the primary question is how to make a safe return to the worksite possible. As a researcher, I find this last issue is the one that unsettles my brain.

VITAL QUESTIONS

Providing data for the multitude of employers considering a return to the worksite is paramount. Let's take a look at what leaders at organizations have been deliberating as they make return-to-work decisions.

How many workers are back in the workplace? As of March, 70 percent of U.S. employees were back, according to a survey by the Society for Human Resource Management, and that number is growing. U.S. workers who have returned feel more comfortable at work now than in 2020.

What makes these employees most comfortable about being back at the worksite? Here are the most influential factors affecting U.S. workers' comfort levels regarding health and safety at work:

- The number of people wearing personal protective equipment (PPE) (cited by 58 percent of respondents).
 - The quality of safety policies or procedures (52 percent).
 - The amount of social distancing occurring (48 percent).
- What are employers doing to pre-

pare their workers to return? Organizations are maintaining precautions such as PPE mandates, enhanced safety protocols and adherence to social distancing rules.

But increased communication is the biggest driver of readiness for returning to the worksite, according to 80 percent of employees. The good news

leading retail CEOs and hearing the clarion call for data over mandates. Specifically, the leader of a *Fortune* 250 enterprise was asking for more information rather than opinion. During this call, I was reminded of the most important part of my role in research: to deliver data to support better decisions.

My graduate advisor was fond of saying, "Data is the double-edged sword upon which leaders mount their successes or impale their legacies." The words were a bit dramatic, but the point was a good one: Leadership is about the ability to access data and determine what it means.

WORKPLACE COMFORT LEVELS RISING

As coronavirus vaccines become widely available and employers establish safety protocols, U.S. workers who are at their regular worksites feel more comfortable regarding their health and safety than earlier in the pandemic.



Source: COVID-19 & the Workplace: A Retrospective on the Pandemic One Year Later, SHRM, 2021.

is the majority of employers have increased the frequency of their communications and improved transparency to help make their workers comfortable with decisions that are made.

CLARION CALL FOR DATA

I recall sitting in on a private conversation between

More than one year into the pandemic, we see a daily cache of data at our disposal, but it is what we do with it that will sustain our enterprises as we look to preserve our workforces and collectively move forward. [HR](#)



Alexander Alonso, SHRM-SCP, is chief knowledge officer for SHRM.

SHRM TALENT

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Did you know U.S. organizations lost \$223 billion in the past five years due to workplace culture? Action must be taken.

Make your plans now to refocus, reboot and reimagine your talent strategy. Attend this year's SHRM Talent Conference & Expo on August 22-25, 2021.

This live online and in-person experience features 50+ sessions across seven content tracks facilitated by 75 industry-leading speakers. Attending also earns you 20.75 PDCs.

NOW MORE THAN EVER, we need to hire inclusively. We need to give untapped talent a chance, and we need to transform the workplace.

Register Now!

Learn more and register now: **SHRM.CO/TALENT2021**





SEE YOU IN LAS VEGAS!

Now more than ever, it's critical for HR professionals to connect with industry experts and trailblazers at the SHRM Annual Conference & Expo 2021, also known as SHRM21, Sept. 9-12 in Las Vegas.

The conference is scheduled to take place at the new West Hall, the state-of-the-art, 1.4-million-square-foot expansion at the Las Vegas Convention Center. In-person and online passes will be available.

Onsite attendees can expect a range of learning, networking and entertainment opportunities that adhere to protocols to protect their health and safety. SHRM and the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority are working together to implement a comprehensive health and safety plan.

Those attending virtually will have access to all general sessions and a full range of HR educational workshops to help them stay on top of the latest innovations, strategies and workplace policies.

"SHRM21, our signature event, offers the HR industry and business leaders workshops and educational sessions that will enhance their skills; introduce them to emerging technologies; and spur thinking about new talent management strategies, DE&I [diversity, equity and inclusion] efforts and the importance of building positive workplace cultures," says Jeaneen Andrews-Feldman, SHRM's chief marketing and experience officer.

For the latest information, go to annual.shrm.org

WHERE TALENT RECRUITING IDEAS GROW

Join talent acquisition professionals from all over the world at the SHRM Talent Conference & Expo 2021, which can be experienced online or in person in Las Vegas, Aug. 22-25.

The way we attract, engage and retain top talent is evolving. Get the support you need to reimagine your recruiting and employee engagement and retention strategies, processes and policies.

The four-day conference offers participants the ability to choose from 50 educational sessions in seven content tracks. Topics include:

- Hiring disasters and how to avoid them.
- The role of artificial intelligence in talent assessment.
- How to avoid turnover, absenteeism and long-term damage.

For the latest information, go to shrm.org/talent-conference



NEW MEMBERS JOIN SHRM'S MEMBERSHIP ADVISORY COUNCIL

SHRM welcomes five new HR professionals to the 2021 Membership Advisory Council, which supports SHRM's membership and volunteer leaders across the country.

The council is made up of one elected representative from each of the five regional councils and provides strategic and operational input from SHRM's members to SHRM's executive team and Board of Directors.

The new members are:

- Catharine Mirabile, SHRM-SCP, chief human resources officer and managing director of benefits administration, CGI Business Solutions, Auburn, N.H.
- Shauneen Scott, SHRM-SCP, vice president, Northwest Human Resource Management Association, Salem, Ore.
- Michael D. Shaw, SHRM-CP, human resources manager, EMBARK, Oklahoma City.
- Elliott Wilson, SHRM-CP, president, TRC Staffing Services Inc., TRC Professional Solutions, Columbia, S.C.
- Jeremy York, SHRM-SCP, lead consultant and president, InvigorateHR, Indianapolis.

SHRM FOUNDATION LAUNCHES HR APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

The SHRM Foundation has launched an apprenticeship program to help employers develop HR specialists at their organizations.

The Foundation is one of 28 organizations that received a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's "Apprenticeship: Closing the Skills Gap" program, which supports large-scale expansions of apprenticeships in a range of industries.

Through its Human Resource Registered Apprenticeship Program (HR RAP), the Foundation will offer employers of all sizes:

- Guidance in tailoring coursework and on-the-job learning to meet their needs.
- Recommendations about educational institutions that can provide classroom learning.
- Resources to recruit apprentices and provide supportive mentoring.
- Assistance in completing all federal reporting requirements.

HR RAP will help close the HR skills gap by allowing individuals to earn wages while receiving hands-on training to successfully fill high-skill, in-demand HR specialist positions, says Wendi Safstrom, the Foundation's executive director.

Apprenticeships allow employers to provide customized training and offer a way to tap into a more diverse pool of job candidates, such as people with disabilities, individuals without four-year degrees, people who were formerly incarcerated, veterans and older workers.



Learn more at hrapprentice.org

SHRM CREDENTIALS GIVE YOU AN EDGE



HR professionals can enhance and showcase their expertise by earning SHRM Specialty Credentials in a number of different focus areas:

- The Inclusive Workplace Culture credential gives HR professionals the tools needed to shift organizational culture from toxicity and divisiveness toward engagement and inclusion.
- The Workplace Investigations credential teaches which complaints justify formal investigations, effective interviewing and data gathering techniques, how to analyze results, and more.
- The HR Department of One credential highlights the key challenges facing solo practitioners and identifies best practices for addressing them.
- The People Analytics credential provides a foundation in the principles and applications of metrics and technology that support HR practices and organizational objectives.
- The U.S. Employment Immigration credential increases HR practitioners' effectiveness in managing employment visas, employment verification processes and audit risks to keep their organizations compliant.
- The Talent Acquisition credential teaches HR professionals how to recruit a workforce that is sustainable and high-performing.
- The California Law HR credential gives HR professionals a deeper knowledge of that state's complex and unique employment laws.

To earn a SHRM Specialty Credential, candidates are required to purchase and complete the relevant learning package and then pass a 50-question online knowledge assessment.



Learn more at shrm.org/specialtycredentials

SHRM CEO NAMED PRESIDENT OF NAHRMA

Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM-SCP, SHRM president and chief executive officer, has been named president of the North American Human Resource Management Association (NAHRMA), the representative body for HR management in North America. He will serve a two-year term.

As NAHRMA president, Taylor will help empower HR professionals in the U.S., Canada and Mexico to face key challenges by focusing on sensible policy solutions relating to workplace flexibility and leave, health care, and immigration, among other topics.

"NAHRMA has a unique opportunity to both lay the groundwork for economic recovery and address critical workplace issues that will improve the experience of workers across North America," Taylor says.



"One country cannot accomplish this alone. Together, we can develop sound policies that can positively shape 21st century workplaces."

NAHRMA was founded in 1997 by the national human resource associations of Canada, Mexico and the U.S. SHRM serves as NAHRMA's permanent secretariat.

NOTICE OF ELECTION OF THE 2022 SHRM BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Ballots for the coming election of new members to SHRM's Board of Directors for 2022 will be e-mailed to all eligible voting SHRM members on Sept. 10, 2021, followed by two reminders.

The voting deadline is Oct. 10.

The election results will be announced Nov. 11 during SHRM's Annual Business Meeting.

Categories of eligible voting members include professional, general, special expertise, retired, and professional life and past chair life.

E-mail information must be current. To update your e-mail address:

- Visit MySHRM at <https://www.shrm.org/my/> account. You may be prompted to enter your SHRM credentials.
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You may also call the SHRM Customer Experience Team between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. ET at 800.283.7476, option 3 (U.S. only); +1.703.548.3440, option 3 (international); or TTY/TDD +1.703.548.6999; or e-mail shrm@shrm.org.

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KENNETH MAYES, SHRM-CP

Program manager, Institute for Veterans and Military Families, Syracuse University, Fort Bragg, N.C.

Kenneth Mayes is a passionate advocate for military veterans. A second-generation soldier, Mayes retired from the U.S. Army in 2013 and took a job as an HR generalist in Fayetteville, N.C.

He soon realized that the leadership principles and competencies he practiced as an Army recruiter and training coordinator were similar to those practiced in the civilian world of HR. His passion for helping others led him to attain his MBA in human resources and his Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) certification.

Mayes now leads the Institute for Veterans and Military Families' Onward to Opportunity program at Fort Bragg. The career skills training program improves the employment prospects of service members transitioning to civilian life, as well as of veterans and military spouses. He also is an ally for underrepresented groups as co-chair of the institute's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Working Group at Syracuse University in Syracuse, N.Y. And he assists those in the HR profession as president of the Fayetteville Area Society for Human Resource Management chapter of SHRM.


WHAT OBSTACLES HAVE YOU OVERCOME TO GET WHERE YOU ARE TODAY?

My greatest challenge was the untimely death of my spouse at age 42. Caring for someone with a terminal illness is a gut-wrenching experience. It's especially difficult when you have been a problem-solver for your family and face something you can't resolve. But I learned that internal fortitude, not circumstances, determines our future.

WHAT IS THE BEST ADVICE YOU'VE EVER RECEIVED?

One of my senior military leaders taught me that even if you are a self-proclaimed master of something, there is always room for growth and improvement. I learned to never accept the status quo and to remember the lessons in every interaction that I experience.

WHAT DO YOU ENJOY IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

In my spare time, I enjoy listening to music and working as a DJ at private parties. My genres of choice are R&B, jazz, old-school classics, hip-hop, reggae and New York house music. 

EXPERIENCE NEEDED?

We need to provide equal access to jobs and initiate a talent acquisition process that measures what really matters.

By Steve Browne, SHRM-SCP



It's hard to believe I'm entering the 35th year of my career. I distinctly remember the challenge of finding my first job in the newly renamed field of "human resources." This was before the Internet, so I went to the library on the campus of Ohio University at the beginning of my senior year and found a book called the *Million Dollar Directory*, which contained a list of company profiles. I picked out 200 brand-name firms, typed (yes, typed) a cover letter and resume for each one, and mailed (yes, mailed) them out.

In response to those 200 letters, I received a handful of rejections and one positive reply. I interviewed with a *Fortune* 500 giant and was hired. Did I mention that the country was in a recession when I was graduating from college? Also, unemployment at the time was through the roof. Sound familiar?

The company that hired me was just starting to look for recent college graduates to join its recruiting department. I was the first new grad it hired. I didn't have any tangible experience. I just wanted to go into HR. Every other manager in the department had advanced by moving up the ladder of the organization. I was an "experiment" in response to a directive for HR to adopt the model that revenue-driving departments were using. In other words, I was in the right place at the right time.

I'll never forget this experience because it runs counter to most companies' approaches to hiring people. For the most part, we continue to rely on old models and expectations, including the myth of experience. When we operate under that myth, we equate years of experience with talent and skill sets, advancing to the next step of the hiring process candidates whose resumes indicate they have a certain level of tenure. If a resume doesn't show the prescribed years of experience, we toss it aside.

You'd think that after 35 years, things would have evolved. You'd hope that with advancements such as artificial intelligence, applicant tracking systems and chatbots, we'd have moved the needle. We haven't. We refuse to do so because we think if we eliminate the "experience" parameter, we'll get a mishmash of underqualified people.

But how does one gain experience to match the job qualifications if companies aren't willing to take a chance

on investing in someone first? We've forgotten that when our careers began, someone opened a door for us and invited us in. We've lost sight of this because we're working. I hate to be this candid, but if you have a job, you typically don't care about those who don't.

This has to change. There's no reason for people to prove they made it through some imaginary gauntlet, thus earning the right to work for a company. It's a hiring method that's archaic and unproven. How can we say we're hiring for "talent" when we're really looking for people who match the buzzwords, overly complicated job descriptions, and hidden preferences and biases of our current approach?

It's time for all of us to open doors.

As HR and talent acquisition professionals, we need to redefine the landscape to allow everyone access to jobs and then initiate a process that measures aptitude, character, strengths and potential. We need to realize that we can train people on the details of the jobs they'll take on. We're going to have to do that anyway, even for "experienced" candidates.

We should value the skills, knowledge and experience people earn over time. But instead of playing an organizational match game, we should see how we can bring those attributes into our businesses and allow talent to move us forward.

I'm not sure what's needed to create a design that's inclusive, consistent and accessible, or how that design is supposed to look. I just know it can—and must—exist. I plan to start by opening doors for others. As an HR practitioner, I can reach out to job seekers and help make connections in other organizations if I don't have roles available in mine. We have to think of others outside of our companies. Consider how businesses would excel if we connected them with available talent.

You see, experience isn't needed—genuinely helping others land roles is! **HR**

Steve Browne, SHRM-SCP, is chief people officer for LaRosa's Inc., a restaurant chain in Ohio and Indiana with 11 locations. A member of the SHRM Board of Directors and author of *HR Rising!!* (SHRM, 2020) and *HR on Purpose!!* (SHRM, 2017), he has been an HR professional for over 30 years.



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