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Keys To Creating a Better Employee Experience in 2022



HRMORNING

February 2022



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Upcoming Events

Free Webinars

Tuesday,
February 8th
2022



How to Build a Powerful Retention Strategy

Address retention head-on, protect your investment, and foster an organization where your employees are just as excited by and committed to its success as you are.

sponsored by Paycom learn more [🔗](#)

Wednesday,
February 9th
2022

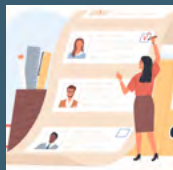


Four Steps to Better People Analytics:

How HR leaders can build business impact with insights

sponsored by Sage Peoplelearn more [🔗](#)

Wednesday,
February 16th
2022



Why and How You Should Tackle Retention Pre-Hire

Address retention at each stage of your employee journey

sponsored by Cangrade learn more [🔗](#)

Tuesday,
February 22nd
2022



2022 Labor Law Poster Compliance

New regulations and trends that could impact your company's labor law posting requirements

courtesy of Resourceful Compliancelearn more [🔗](#)

News Briefs

HR Stories You Might Have Missed

Workers' compensation? Restroom injury leads to dispute

December 21, 2021

Workers' compensation or not? A worker suffered serious injuries when a dead tree fell near a portable restroom he was using.

The worker had been painting the exterior of a house, and it was a windy day.


His employer did not put the restroom there. At workers' compensation proceedings, neither the employer nor the worker said who did.

[Read more](#) 

Using AI hiring tools? Why you need to be more careful than ever

December 30, 2021

When it comes to recruiting, who doesn't want to work more efficiently and effectively to find the right people?

But when it comes to using [artificial intelligence tools](#)  to aid in the process, a legal minefield for employers is beginning to emerge.

[Read more](#) 

Enforcement: DOL didn't go soft in 2021

January 4, 2022

It's a new year, and it's good to know where the DOL's focus was last year as far as violations go. And despite going through changes with the new administration, the DOL didn't miss a beat when it came to its [2021 enforcement efforts](#) . That means the agency will probably be even tougher this year. So, it's time to check up on and beef up your compliance efforts!

[Read more](#) 

Pop quiz: When is COVID a 'disability' under federal anti-bias laws?

January 4, 2022

Is COVID-19 a "disability" under federal laws banning disability discrimination?

The frustratingly noncommittal but accurate answer: It depends.

[Read more](#) 

Suit: Employer paid worker's final wages in 'oil-covered pennies'

January 6, 2022

Things were far from "A-OK" at this auto repair shop, the feds allege in a new lawsuit.


The suit targets Mike Walker, who owns A OK Walker Autoworks. That's an auto repair shop in Peachtree City, GA.

It alleges that Walker didn't exactly follow all the rules with regard to paying his workers properly.

[Read more](#) 

Marijuana laws in 2022: Updated regs for employers'

January 6, 2022

As more states and cities legalize marijuana and relax restrictions, the substance continues to be a tricky issue for employers who want to [keep it out of the workplace](#) .

And with the start of a new year comes a new crop of updated marijuana laws you'll need to be aware of when crafting your drug policies.

[Read more](#) 

2022 U.S. job market report: Benefits play key role

January 7, 2022

This week is a tough week for many people – not just benefit pros – because the holiday celebrations are over and it's back to reality. Unfortunately, that reality isn't great when it comes to the U.S. job market. A new report found three out of four full-time employees and a little over half of part-time employees plan on jumping ship in 2022.

[Read more](#)

Survey: The Great Resignation still going strong

January 10, 2022

If you were hoping staffing issues will disappear with the new year, you're going to be disappointed.

According to a [new study done by GoodFirms](#), retention issues are likely going to continue into 2022 as [The Great Resignation](#) rages on.

[Read more](#)

When does rude behavior cross the legal line? Court rules

January 13, 2022

No employer wants a lack of civility or [rude behavior](#) in the workplace. But employers aren't legally liable for that type of atmosphere unless the conduct crosses a certain line.

[Read more](#)

Using transgender employee's deadname was harassment, court ruled

January 14, 2022

Back in 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that sex discrimination protections under the Civil Rights Act extended to sexual orientation and gender identity.

And a recent district court ruling reiterated that. Here's a breakdown of the case.

[Read more](#)

Salary increases for 2022 going up

January 18, 2022

If you're tired of hearing about the "Great Resignation," let us apologize now for bringing it up again. Unfortunately, it's not going anywhere soon. And when the topic of salary increases for 2022 is broached, there's no avoiding it.

Now that we got that out of the way, on to salary increases for 2022.

[Read more](#)

DOL issues reminder: Companies need to accommodate nursing employees

January 21, 2022

When one employer failed to give a nursing employee private space to do so, the DOL stepped in and filed a lawsuit.

[According to the suit](#), a Labcorp lab located in Lynwood, CA, violated the FLSA regarding lactation breaks. A nursing employee requested a private space to express breast milk. Instead, the employer told her to use a common space that was often occupied with other employees. This resulted in the employee being interrupted several times while trying to pump.

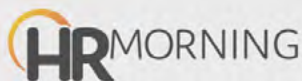
[Read more](#)

Workplace culture in 2022: How HR can make an impact now



by Michele McGovern

WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT AND NEED



Talk about workplace culture in 2022 and one thing is sure to come up: evolution.

Cultures will continue to evolve in reaction to the [pandemic that changed everything](#). Companies will reinvent themselves and employees will help revolutionize their workplaces.

All that can only happen if leaders are open to positive transformation. It'll be critical to every organizations' success.

That's because two-thirds of employees say company culture is a major reason they decide to stay at a job, according to research [from Built In](#). Almost 40% of employees want to leave their jobs because they don't like the culture, the study also found.

"As a company, you can start looking inward and see what's great about

you," said [Taylor Smith, CEO and Co-founder of Blueboard](#). "HR leaders are rising in importance as they're tasked with thinking about the employee experience every day."

That's what makes now the time to focus on creating a better workplace culture in 2022. Here's help — eight strategies and tactics:

Think and act in 3s

Many organizations think their culture is built from its vision or mission statement. While that can serve as a guidepost, you might want to focus on three critical cultural aspects: financials, flexibility, and formation.

The executive team at [Hylink USA](#) wanted to stay ahead of The Great Resignation. So they talked to employees, asking which

benefits stood out to them most, including those they'd heard about or experienced at other companies. Then they broke down the employee experience into three similar categories and decided on changes to make each better.

Some examples they implemented to improve the experience and help the culture evolve:

- **Financial.** 401(k) with 3% automatic contributions, investable 401(k) account and free counseling with a financial advisor.
- **Flexibility and Community.** Unlimited vacation, updated paid time off (PTO) policy, five year sabbatical, work from home blocks.
- **Formation,** which meant the in-office atmosphere. Monthly

Workplace culture in 2022: How HR can make an impact now

in-office massages and catered meals, standing desks, team dinners for overtime work, birthday bucks (gift cards for employees).

"Giving employees perks that optimize their work-life balance and investing in their personal futures are benefits for today's workforce," said [Hylink USA Managing Director Humphrey Ho](#) [🔗](#).

So when you think about workplace culture, you might want to break it into three categories that fit your environment and employees. Then build up from there.

Attract to retain

As we transition out of the Great Resignation, most companies will want to focus on retention – retaining the employees who stayed loyal along with the newly hired people.

"Employees were voting with their feet," Smith said. "People were looking for, 'Can I bring my whole self to work?'"

So they joined – or stayed at – companies that allowed them to do just that: be their authentic selves at work.

In 2022, you'll want to work with employee focus groups to uncover ways to make your company a place where everyone can be authentic.

Boost belonging

Nearly every company has increased its [Diversity, Equity and Inclusion \(DEI\) efforts](#) [🔗](#) in the past few years, which can help build better cultures.

To improve on that, focus on increasing the sense of belonging.

"In an ideal world, all employees feel safe and comfortable to bring their authentic selves to work," said [Kimberly Reed, Chief Transformational Officer, Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Strategist at Reed Development Group](#), and author of [Optimists ALWAYS Win! Moving from Defeat to Life's C-Suite](#) [🔗](#). "But Belonging is always a key driver of happiness and engagement."

And that's the goal in any workplace culture initiatives.

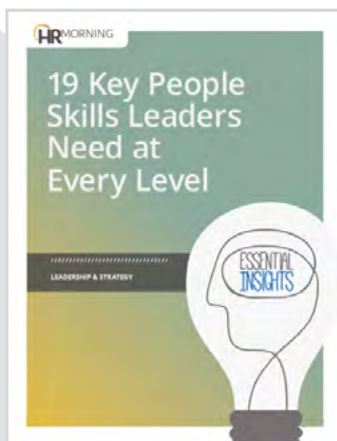
So when you work toward DEI, include the "B." That often starts with what Reed calls "Courageous Conversations." Talk with employees about how you can better support equity efforts. Find out how effective all your DEI efforts are by asking employees to share their experiences. Then respond with belonging efforts.

"If the 'B' is absent, it makes it more difficult for the 'D' to feel like a real commitment at work," Reed said.

Move toward well-being

We don't mean to harp on this subject, as [we've covered it extensively](#) [🔗](#) since the start of the pandemic. But bottom line is, well-being is critical to the employee experience.

"The biggest challenge facing employers in 2022 is to be able to predict and prevent employee mental health problems early –



What underappreciated skills set top managers apart from the pack?


19 Key People Skills Leaders Need At Every Level

Whatever you call them, these skills that make it easier for people to get along – and for managers to lead – are so important that according to a recent University of Phoenix study, a whopping 96% of executives rate them as the most valuable employee trait.

Get this guide to discover those essential skills.

[get the guide](#) [🔗](#)

Workplace culture in 2022: How HR can make an impact now

before they have a negative impact – and create a culture of mental well-being,” said [Jan Bruce, CEO and co-founder, meQuilibrium](#) .

One of the best ways to address employee well-being: Normalize it. Make it comfortable for employees to talk about struggles by initiating the conversations. Invite them to learning sessions on mental, spiritual and physical well-being.

Another big step: Offer [new or more benefits on a digital platform](#) . For instance, give employees access to virtual counseling for mental health concerns, legal and financial resources and consultations, online support group sessions, plus newsletters and webinars to help with preventive care.

Promote work/life balance


A work/life balance isn't just a “nice to have” now. It's essential to the employee experience. And you can't just encourage employees to have it.

HR and front line managers need to promote the balance.

“Grabbing a shred of work/life balance will continue to be difficult due to ongoing change, remote/hybrid work, and blurrier boundaries between work and home,” said Alanna Fincke, SVP, meQuilibrium. “In fact, Portugal just made it illegal for your boss to call, email, or message outside of work hours, and France has a similar rule.”

Take cues from Portugal. You can promote boundaries and work-life balance by imposing consequences for after hour calls, email or messages.

Make connections

Almost 80% of employees want to work at an organization where they feel connected to the purpose and the people, according to [research from Blueboard](#) . And nearly 60%

would consider quitting if they didn't feel connected at work!

Building connections may be more difficult as remote and hybrid work situations continue into 2022. But it'll still need to be a corporate priority.


Connection drives engagement and retention. So work toward showing employees how their work impacts the larger purpose and unites the entire workforce. Even better, help them connect how their daily work impacts the community, your customers and, if you're involved in a cause, the greater good.

A grassroots tactic: Work with employees to revamp job descriptions so they reflect purpose, not just duties. For instance, re-frame the hospital janitorial staff role as “helping sick people,” rather than just “cleaning.”

Stand behind and up for DEI

Double down on DEI efforts this year.

“My biggest piece of advice for employers aiming to retain employees amid this competitive job market is to hone in on what employees truly care about – diversity and inclusion,” said [Linda Shaffer](#) , Chief People and Operations Officer at [Checkr](#) . “What workers really care about {is} that their values align with the core values of their company.”

Fortunately, most HR professionals are already responding. More than 50% have made diversity and inclusion a higher priority in their hiring plans, according to [research from Lever and Blueboard](#) .

Remote and hybrid work situations helped pave the way for a more diverse workforce. You can hire from across the town or the continent now. But you want to bolster in-house programs and incentives that make employees feel included.


Look for employees who seem to

be champions of causes or informal leaders. Talk with them about areas where you can increase Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Then give them time and resources to create, build and thrive based on their shared interests and passions.

Align rewards with expectations

Employees want to be rewarded and recognized for their work. More importantly, they want recognition and rewards that align with their values. Recognition is an essential tool in creating workplace connection, Blueboard researchers found. Companies that use recognition tools to connect people are nearly twice as likely to address connection challenges than those that don't use any tools.



Since the pandemic “people value quality time out of the office,” Smith said. “They want things that are valuable to their lives.”

That can be [different for each employee](#) . One might love public recognition. Another might hate it. One might like to go out for fine dining. Another might love the zoo.

Managers will want to have informal conversations with employees. Connect personally and understand how they like to be recognized and rewarded. Then HR can help make those things happen.

“People respond and feel good when the company listens to them,” Smith said.

Recommended reading from [Michele McGovern](#)

- [8 ways to improve the employee experience in 2022](#) 
- [What employees hate – and love – about work now](#) 

The Cost of NonCompliance



\$390,000

Company fined almost \$400K for age discrimination

What happened: It's illegal to fire employees because of their age ... but that doesn't mean some companies don't try it anyway.

What people did: Davis Automotive Group in Cleveland, OH, was sued by the EEOC for age discrimination. According to the suit, the company refused to hire a 52-year-old employee because of his age. It also fired two more employees who were 67 and 70. This is a violation of the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA).

Result: David Automotive Group will pay \$390,000 to settle the lawsuit. In addition, the company must implement an anti-age discrimination policy and encourage employees to report any violations. Training on the matter is required as well.



\$36,971

Retaliation: GA-employer retaliated against former worker

What happened: Miles Walker, owner of 811 Autoworks LLC – operating as A OK Walker Autoworks, retaliated against an employee for reporting him to the DOL's Wage and Hour Division for not giving the worker his final pay after the worker resigned.

What people did: The Wage and hour Division [filed a lawsuit](#) in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia, against the Peachtree City auto repair shop and Walker. The lawsuit is seeking \$36,971 in back wages and liquidated damages after investigators found they violated the retaliation, overtime and recordkeeping prohibitions of the FLSA.

Walker allegedly paid his former worker by leaving 91,500 oil-covered pennies (\$915) and the man's pay stub that had an expletive written on it in the man's driveway. The oil-covered pennies blocked the workers driveway and stained it. It also took the former employee seven hours to remove them.

Walker also published defamatory statements about the former employee on the company's website.

In addition, the DOL found Walker violated the FLSA's overtime provisions by:

- paying other employees straight time for all hours worked, and
- failing to pay legally required overtime rate when they worked over 40 hours in a workweek.

Result: "By law, worker engagement with the U.S. Department of Labor is protected activity. Workers are entitled to receive information about their rights in the workplace and obtain the wages they earned without fear of harassment or intimidation," said Wage and Hour Division District Director Steven Salazar in Atlanta. "Workers and employers should feel free to contact the Wage and Hour Division. In fact, all employers should review their employment practices and contact the division to discuss questions they have regarding their responsibilities under the law."

BENEFITS

Do your pregnant employees feel supported?



by Renée Cocchi



In the past five years, 15,000 pregnancy discrimination claims have been filed in the U.S.

That's mind boggling unless you're a Benefits professional. You know that despite having laws that prevent pregnancy [discrimination](#) in the workplace, it still happens. And you know it has negative effects on the woman's career, such as lower salaries and being passed over for promotions. But did you know that it can have physical health repercussions for the employee and her child?

[The American Psychological Association studies](#) found "perceived pregnancy discrimination indirectly relates to increased levels

of postpartum depression symptoms for the mothers, and lower birth weights, lower gestational ages, and increased number of doctors' visits for the babies, via perceived stress of the mothers during pregnancy."

It's obvious to see how postpartum depressive symptoms would affect a mother's work performance, but affect her child? Just goes to show how a bad action by an untrained manager can have far reaching implications.

And the suffering doesn't stop after the pregnancy, according to follow-up research, those same women continued to suffer the ill effects of their discrimination experience – poorer health, depressive symptoms

and parental stress. Luckily, for their babies their ill effects ended after a few years.

As a Benefits pro, you have the power to help these parents-to-be and their unborn children, by not only educating executives, supervisors and managers on pregnancy discrimination, but by following these five evidence-based practices, as [reported by Harvard Business Review](#).

Parental benefits

This benefit has been gaining momentum for years now, and it seems to have taken an especially strong foothold since the pandemic started. One reason for this is the Great Resignation. Employers are amping up their benefit offerings to retain and attract employees. Offering parental leave programs that go above and beyond the basic six weeks of paid or unpaid leave is now becoming the norm. People want paid leave. They want three or more months of it, and they want their spouse to be able to be home to help. Plus, significant others in the workplace want time to bond with their children, too.

And while these studies talk about pregnancy in the workplace, companies are now offering parental paid leave for adoptions and fostering, too.

Helping your employees get these kinds of benefits creates a [supportive and happy](#) work environment. Pregnant employees and their significant others have less

Do your pregnant employees feel supported?

to worry about because they don't have to figure out how they're going to swing three to six weeks without pay. And as we've said before, less financial stress leads to happier, more productive employees.

Flexibility

Flexibility is key when it comes to pregnant employees. Allowing them to work remotely and when they're feeling their best is important. It lessens the stress of having to commute, and work when they're experiencing pregnancy-related illnesses.

Pregnant employees don't want to be seen as weak or incapable of doing their job. Offering remote work and time flexibility to all employees removes the stigma of giving preferential treatment because someone is pregnant, and allows them to do their jobs.

And as we keep saying, employees who are less stressed are happier and more productive.

Time off for appointments

Prenatal care requires doctor visits ... lots of them. And pregnant employees often feel pressured to schedule appointments when they don't interfere with work. However, this shouldn't be.

Letting employees know you understand they'll have monthly and weekly doctor appointments, and it's OK to schedule them at their convenience, shows the company understands and cares about their

health and the health of their baby. That in turn creates healthy, loyal employees.

Supportive co-workers

Another study looked at the daily experiences of stress and social support during pregnancy. Lo and behold, the results showed that employees who felt supported by co-workers and bosses had the largest reduction in stress. That in turn was tied to long-term reductions in postpartum depression and a faster recovery after the birth of their child – a win for the employee and the company.

Meet with managers and encourage them to sit down with pregnant employees and find out what “social opportunities” they want and need before, during and after work hours. Maybe they want to set up coffee breaks or group session with other new parents for advice.

Also, find out if they want co-worker connections after they take leave. Do they want to be included on emails or Zoom meetings? Have managers find out and give pregnant employees what they want. And remind managers to always defer to pregnant employees' preferences.

Doing this shows employees your attentive and supportive of their needs. This goes a long way in creating loyal happy employees.

Inclusive climate

A company that creates an inclusive climate allows their employees – pregnant or not – the ability to

thrive. When people aren't worried about their jobs, money, etc., they're happy and productive.

Remind managers that working in an inclusive environment promotes psychological safety. And “employees' experiences of inclusion are directly linked to [managers' inclusive leadership behaviors](#),” according to research by [Catalyst.org](#).

Asking questions and listening to what their pregnant employees say promotes an inclusive environment. Empathy goes a long way!

Recommended reading from [Renée Cocchi](#)

- [Employer pays \\$40K to settle pregnancy bias suit](#)
- [Pregnancy bias suit costs employer \\$39K](#)
- [Worker can't sue for bias based on wife's pregnancy](#)



Employee fired: Asked for remote work accommodation

"Hey, Megan," said Benefits Manager Betty Murphy answering her phone. "Nice to hear from you. How were your holidays?"

"Hi, Betty," said Megan. "My holidays? Oh, um ... they were fine ... but ... um, I need your advice."

"What's wrong?" asked Betty. "You sound really flustered."

"I just got fired," said Megan.

"What?" exclaimed Betty, clearly shocked. "Why?"

"They said it was due to performance issues," said Megan. "But, if I had any performance issues, this was the first I heard about it."

"What about your reviews?" asked Betty.

"They've all been fine," said Megan. "I know it's because I asked to work from home a few days a week and take more breaks to accommodate my pulmonary condition."

"That doesn't make sense," said Betty. "There has to be more to it."

Performance issues?

"We were working from home four days a week due to COVID-19," explained Megan. "Then they called us back into the office full time. After being back, I noticed how much better my condition was when I was working from home. So, I asked if I could work from home two days a week and take extra breaks when I was in the office to accommodate my condition."

"And they said no! I couldn't believe it," said Megan. "My condition makes me more susceptible to contracting

COVID-19, and they said no. When I brought up the fact that they allow other people in my same position to work remotely, they said it wasn't the same. And then a few days later, they let me go saying it was due to performance issues."

"If that's the case, you need to take your complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission," said Betty.

Megan took her complaint to the EEOC.

The EEOC alleged Megan's employer violated the ADA and Title I of the Civil Rights Act.

The employer disagreed.

The EEOC attempted to reach a pre-litigation settlement via its conciliation process, but they failed to reach an agreement. So the commission sued seeking back pay, compensatory damages, punitive damages and injunctive relief.

Who won?

The Decision

No one, yet. This case is still in the early stages of litigation.

However, in light of the pandemic and since this case is the EEOC's first of its kind, it's a good wake-up call

for employers on the legal issues and risk of creating and enforcing remote-work policies.

Legal lessons

There are several legal issues employers must be aware of that are inherent in creating and implementing remote work policies, according to Aaron Burrell, a lawyer at Dickinson Wright PLLC, and they are:

1. Remote work policies must be applied in a non-discriminatory manner. As an employer you must have legitimate, non-discriminatory reasons for denying an employee's accommodation request. In this case, the EEOC ruled

the company didn't have a "legitimate, non-discriminatory" reason for refusing to accommodate the employee, especially in the throes of the pandemic. Even if an employee works from home, you're still obligated to provide

You Be The Judge

Legal lessons (con't)

- accommodations to employees with disabilities.
2. Ensure all monitoring – productivity or communications – is based on an established company policy. If there's an appropriate "business" reason for monitoring and employees know about it and don't expect total privacy, it's generally OK. However, during a pandemic it's best to realize employees face challenges with their personal lives and flexible with expectations is required.
 3. Permit leave in circumstances consistent with your policies, and state and federal law.
 4. Have all non-exempt employees accurately record their remote work time so they're provided with the appropriate compensation. This "recorded time" includes dealing with emails and calls at any hour. And provide step-by-step documentation on how to track and record their time. Finally, even if you don't allow overtime, if non-exempt employees work beyond their weekly hours, you must pay them for the time worked.
 5. Enforce rest and meal break requirements, even when working remotely, consistent with local, state and federal law.
 6. Make sure you're providing a workplace that is free from "recognized hazards, likely to cause harm." It's required under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, and similar state laws. It's also a good idea to have employees review their remote work areas, as well as provide a list of best practices for remote workspaces.
 7. Secure legal counsel for workers' compensation and general liability coverage so you know for sure the scope of coverage relative to remote working policies.
- "The ADA requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities to ensure those with disabilities have an equal opportunity to work to their full ability," said Marcus G. Keegan, regional attorney for the EEOC's Atlanta District Office, in a release. "Denying a reasonable accommodation and terminating an employee because of her disability clearly violates the ADA at any time. In light of the additional risks to health and safety created by COVID-19, it is particularly concerning that an employer would take this action several months into a global pandemic."

Cite: *EEOC v. ISS Facility Services Inc.*, 1:21-cv-03708 (N.D. Ga. 2021).

How employee engagement will make – or break – companies now



by Michele McGovern

5 STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE EMPLOYEES IN 2022



HRMORNING

The level of employee engagement could determine your organization's success this year.

Whether employees are together all the time, some of the time or none of the time, HR needs to keep them engaged. That's because engaged employees do more than *like* their work and workplace. They *care* about both things, plus their co-workers and team performance.

That spells success for any organization.

But only about 35% of employees say they're engaged, according to [research from Gallup](#).

Naturally, HR leaders and front-line managers want to increase that number. When employees care, they're more productive, create higher quality work and are [loyal to their employer](#), [Gallup researchers also found](#).

So here are five ways to increase employee engagement in 2022.

Set better goals

When employees don't understand goals and priorities, they can't be engaged.

But employees who are fully aware of clear goals and expectations are almost three times more likely to be engaged than those who aren't, according to [research from Quantum](#).

Everyone from the company executives to front-line managers needs to keep goals in sight and

How employee engagement will make – or break – companies now

top of mind. Then employees can prioritize their work and stay engaged.

A few keys to better goal setting:

- Have managers work with employees to set goals so they can determine feasibility, bottlenecks and deadlines
- Align employee's professional goals to organizational goals so they have personal interest in overall success
- Establish clear expectations around processes, time lines, feedback, rewards for execution and consequences for fails, and
- Require regular goal monitoring, progress reports and coaching, as needed.

Show the love

Companies and leadership will want to show a new level of care to keep employees engaged this year.

"What we're seeing is that *care* is rising to the forefront and becoming the center of decision-making, reducing burnout and boosting happiness at work," said [Mark Lobosco, VP of Talent Solutions at LinkedIn](#).

In fact, employees who feel they're cared about at work are three times more likely to be happy working for their company, [LinkedIn research](#) found.

"This means that managers will need to continue to adapt their styles and build soft skills to [attract and retain talent in the future](#) of work," said Lobosco.

And many managers may need some refresher training on soft skills after not working side-by-side with employees for nearly two years. A few tips:

- **Show some vulnerability.** Leaders who share struggles give employees a comfortable

space to open up and feel like their emotions matter, too. But beware: There's a line between showing vulnerability and complaining or condescending. You don't want to make your struggle bigger than employees' struggles. And you don't want to take a "you have to toughen up" approach. Say what's wrong and why. For instance, "I'm stuck on a problem, and I feel frustrated and stressed."

- **Talk, connect intentionally.** When you talk informally with employees, be fully present: Put aside screens, ignore alerts and listen closely. For formal one-on-ones, note priorities and key questions you want to ask before you meet.

Re-think well-being

HR pros and company leaders have discussed, and we've covered, [mental well-being](#) more than ever since the pandemic started.

Now that it's an important topic – if not "the" topic – HR will want to be far more proactive about overall well-being to improve employee engagement.

"As many seek to grow and evolve with the new perspective that the pandemic has brought, they will look with renewed vigor to enhance their physical, mental and spiritual health," said Adam Perlman, MD, Chief Medical Officer and co-founder at meQuilibrium.

One key, Perlman said: "Work-life integration," which used to be called work-life balance. Now we need to re-imagine what it can be, he said.

How can HR do that? First, recognize the scale tips toward life one day and work the next day. That's why it's about integration – bringing them closer together rather than drawing a line between work and life. Very seldom is there an even balance

nowadays.

That's why [flexibility is a critical element](#) to employee engagement. Even if hybrid or remote work – which offer the most flexibility – don't work for your culture, you can weave more flexibility into employees' experiences. Give front-line managers tools and authority to bend schedules when employees must tend to other demands.

Train managers to intervene

Beyond giving front-line managers tools and power to build engagement, train them to step in with tact and grace.

Employees are busier than ever and overwhelmed. Fewer people were tasked with more work when colleagues quit, were laid off or chose not to come back to on-site work.

A yoga class or meditation session can't fix that kind of pressure. But managers who know when to talk to employees about important subjects can.

Team interventions help, according to [Erin Kelly, a professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management, whose research appears in the book *Overload: How Good Jobs Went Bad and What We Can Do About It*](#).

Kelly found employees whose managers were trained to check in on personal and professional well-being were significantly less burned out and stressed. The training also helped those managers understand how to be more flexible. So the employees were also 40% less likely to quit than their colleagues whose managers didn't know how to help.

Another elixir: well-being workshops. Employees could talk about what stressed them, discover common stressors in the workplace and then work together to find superfluous

How employee engagement will make – or break – companies now

practices and policies to let go.

The key is to train hands-on managers to recognize early signs of burnout and how to intervene.

Double down on culture initiatives

In a remote or hybrid work environment, many company cultures have become diluted. That's especially true (and complicated) for [new employees hired during or right before the pandemic](#).

"In a remote-first working environment, employees may begin to feel dissociated from their organization's mission and values," said Ken Schnee, General Manager

of [Sterling's Technology, Media, Entertainment, and Hospitality Group](#).

You'll want to continue – or ramp up – culture initiatives. Send a regular cadence of messages, including reminders of your values, where they came from and why they're important.

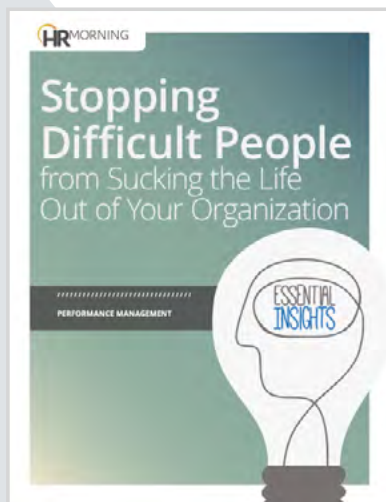
In addition, work to build or improve a culture of collaboration. Create opportunities for employees to work across job functions and with different groups.

"In this day and age, we are lucky enough to have technological advancements that can enable us to communicate and connect in unique ways," said Schnee. "Using these tools to interact with different

people across your organization can create a sense of togetherness and help people feel more connected to your mission and values."

Recommended reading from [Michele McGovern](#)

- [The new push for DEI: Strategies for better recruiting and hiring](#)
- [Don't let quitters ruin it for everyone: Give employees who stay the best experience](#)
- [Retain employees now: 5 ways to stop the exodus](#)



Don't let a few bad attitudes poison your workplace

Stopping Difficult People From Sucking The Life Out Of Your Organization

Difficult employees crush productivity, destroy morale – and push your best employees out the door. However, many organizations are finding that these employees can be turned into high-quality personnel in just a few steps.

Stopping Difficult People From Sucking The Life Out of Your Organization is a clear no-nonsense plan, delivering actionable tactics you can use today to effectively handle difficult employees and prevent bad behavior in the workplace from spreading.

[get the guide](#)

When do COVID-19 symptoms qualify employee as disabled?



As a Benefits pro, you probably know the ins and outs of the Americans with Disabilities Act. And you probably know more than you ever wanted to about COVID-19 and its symptoms. But do you know when [COVID-19 symptoms qualify](#) as a disability under the ADA?

Test your knowledge.

Decide whether the following statements are True or False.

[check answers on the next page](#)

- 1 TRUE OR FALSE:** An employee's doctor attributes his patients' ongoing headaches, dizziness, brain fog and difficulty concentrating to his positive COVID-19 diagnosis. He is considered disabled under the ADA.
- 2 TRUE OR FALSE:** A person with "long COVID-19" has related intestinal pain, vomiting and nausea for months, but it comes and goes. This person is consider disabled under the ADA.
- 3 TRUE OR FALSE:** If an employee tests positive for COVID-19 but is asymptomatic, they can still be considered disabled under the ADA.
- 4 TRUE OR FALSE:** An employee with COVID-19 has a fever, headaches, heart palpitations and shortness of breath, but they resolve over a few weeks is not considered disabled under the ADA.

Go to the following page to see if you are correct.

Test Your Knowledge: Answers

Answers from previous page



- 1 TRUE:** The employee is considered disabled because he is substantially limited in “the major life activities of brain function, concentrating, and/or thinking.”
- 2 TRUE:** Since the intestinal pain, vomiting and nausea are related to COVID-19 and have lasted for months, they are substantially limiting the person’s gastrointestinal function, as well as other major life activities, therefore he’s disabled under the ADA.
- 3 FALSE:** If the employee is asymptomatic, he doesn’t have symptoms that substantially limit a major life activity.
- 4 TRUE:** Because the symptoms resolve over a few weeks and don’t return, they don’t substantially limit a major life activity.



FREE CALENDAR FROM **crosschq**✓

2022 HR Calendar: Your Essential 2022 Planning Tool for Success

Start your year off right in just a matter of seconds.

Keeping in line with the bigger picture (in addition to your mountain of daily to-do-list items...) is the difference between goals that come to fruition and well, just dreams.

This 2022 HR calendar is the key to doing just that.

The free PDF maps out your entire year so that you can keep up with all your goals, ranging from crafting DEI initiatives to having some fun with your colleagues.

[get the calendar](#)

Loneliness: How HR leaders can help teams move forward



by Beverly Beuermann-King, *HR Expert Contributor*



The pandemic has kept people apart. What can HR leaders do to help reduce the impact of loneliness as we go forward?

Consider this: [More than 40% of employees struggle with mental health issues](#), and pandemic restrictions left 54% of them feeling isolated.

We were already forming fewer friendships than in the past. Previously, as life got busier, our social network got smaller and smaller. Then, COVID hit. Never before has the entire world been subjected to such collective feelings of fear, uncertainty, anxiety, and sorrow. Loneliness became pervasive.

Colleagues were no longer connecting at the water cooler. Physical distancing, working remotely, and lockdowns impacted

relationships and our mental health. The ripple impact of this will be felt for years to come.

Not light at the end of tunnel

While the switch to a virtual office with meetings online platforms has allowed for greater flexibility, efficiency, convenience, as well as safety, experts say the lack of social interaction has taken [a mental health toll](#) on our teams and workers.

As we head into the possibility of an end to lockdowns and closures, many are feeling fatigued and emotionally drained. The pandemic has made people more cynical compared to the early days of the crisis. And even with the rollout of vaccines across the country, it has done little to uplift the mood,

according to an [Ipsos poll](#). In fact, 43% of our employees are feeling pessimistic about a return to normal life once the spread of COVID-19 is contained.

The gradual reopening of society isn't making social connection easier. Even deciding how to interact with others in our family, community and workplaces has created additional tension. We are in this dilemma where we are closer than we want to be to some people, and we are too distanced from others.

Loneliness defined

Loneliness is an emotion that brings about "social pain." It's the feeling you get when distressed or anxious due to a perceived lack of connection with others when you need it or want it. It is characterized by feeling unwanted, empty, and cut off from other human beings.

Relationships need to exist, fulfill an appropriate role, and be mostly positive, to keep loneliness at bay.

Everyone feels lonely sometimes. When loneliness happens often or becomes chronic, as it did during the lockdowns, it can have a negative impact on our physical, cognitive, and emotional health.

Loneliness in remote work

A pre-pandemic survey as measured by [the UCLA Loneliness Scale](#) in 2019 by Cigna found that 61% of employees were lonely, up 7% from 2018.

In previous decades, work was a major source of friendships and connections. There were company sponsored picnics, sports teams and holiday dances, as well as impromptu water cooler conversations.

For over a year, many have been working from home or in isolation from colleagues. Conversations have been focused on problem solving, and meeting the challenges of the business disruption. Fewer meaningful relationships are being built.

Our average number of close friends whom we can talk with about important issues (such as the coronavirus) has shrunk from three to two, with over 25% of respondents reporting they have no close friends whatsoever with whom to discuss what matters to them, [one study found](#).

Research is showing that loneliness rates are increasing in the wake of the pandemic. [Mayo Clinic investigators found](#) a significant increase in loneliness and a decrease in feelings of friendship during the pandemic. According to a [Statista 2021 global survey](#), about 33% of adults experienced feeling of loneliness worldwide, with Canada and the US just under the global average. However, 36% of Americans reported feeling “serious loneliness” post COVID, according to a [Loneliness in America report by Harvard University](#).

This becomes cyclical, as we know that loneliness at work can increase absenteeism and presenteeism and impair productivity, performance,

creativity, reasoning, and decision-making even further. That can add to the sense of loneliness. When employers and employees work together to combat loneliness, everyone wins.

What HR Leaders can do to help

HR leaders play an important role in preventing loneliness among their team. One of the 10 elements of organizational culture is social support, however it is often one of the most neglected areas of workplace culture. It is seen as an extra or something to focus on if you have time.

Research shows that it is important for all leaders to increase the right type of communication needed for building social bonds. What is most important is that employees who work in virtual or in-person environments feel a stronger sense of liking and connectedness to their team members when there is a high degree of informal communication between them.

12 ways to combat loneliness

- Encourage regular check-ins and ensure that everyone is connecting as a team.
- Use online tools to keep in touch with each other.
- Develop connection specific strategies for those in emptier

worksites as well as those working remotely.

- Host regular team meetings, and don't make them all about work.
- Add some time for fun and socialization. Look at ice breakers, conversations openers, or gamified challenges.
- Eat lunch together. Exercise together.
- Create walking meetings.
- Be vulnerable. Share some of the challenges that you have faced.
- Reach out and provide emotional support when needed.
- Know how to start a supportive mental health conversation.
- Make yourself available for when employees need someone to lend a friendly ear.
- Promote the use of corporate and community resources, such as your HR department, EAP, or telehealth services for those who may be struggling.

Loneliness is an important issue that has taken on increased urgency in the face of a pandemic. Loneliness will have profound consequences for how individuals continue to weather the COVID-19 pandemic. As our teams find their way forward, it is important that HR leaders not overlook the strategies that can minimize the impact of loneliness on the mental health of those around them.

Recommended reading

- [Well-being benefits: How to get employees to use – and love – them](#)
- [Battling presenteeism with well-being programs](#)
- [Mental health benefits: A must-have resource for employees](#)

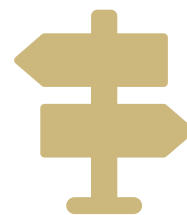


About Beverly Beuermann-King

Beverly Beuermann-King, CSP, founder of [WorkSmartLiveSmart](#), has more than 20-years' experience helping professionals control their reactions to stress, build resiliency against life's challenges, and live healthy, successful lives. She can be reached at info@worksmartlivesmart.com

What Would You Do?

As COVID-19 cases rise, execs disagree on return-to-work plans



The Scenario

HR manager Stu Capper tried not to sigh as several people began talking over each other on the executive Zoom call. He knew this would be rife with differing opinions, but the meeting was quickly spiraling out of control.

"Look, I know numbers are bad," CEO Lance O'Hara said. "But we're now two years into this pandemic. We can't keep moving backwards every time there's a surge. We have safety protocols in place for a reason."

"Yes, but even vaccinated and

masked people are getting sick," Stu pointed out. "This Omicron variant is so contagious. It won't do us any good if all our employees are calling out sick."

Conflicting opinions

"I wish we could just send everyone back home," Lance said. "But at least half our workforce can't work remotely effectively."

"I had a hard time convincing my workers to come back to the office at all," said department manager Kathy Brown. "If we send them home again, it's going to be a huge battle

to get them back when numbers go down again."

"I even had a few people tell me they don't want to go remote again," Lance replied. "People want normalcy."

"I have had a few employees voice concerns about these Omicron numbers, though," Kathy added.

"I really think fully remote for a few weeks is our best bet," Stu implored.

Lance frowned. "I'm going to have to think about this. I'll get back to you."

If you were Stu, what would you do next?

Reader Responses

Barbara Irving,

*HR director, Mooseheart International Inc.,
Mooseheart, IL*

What Barbara would do: Before making any final decisions, I'd encourage the CEO to ask for employee input on how they want to proceed. The manager pointed out some employees have concerns about coming into the office, but others might not. A survey on the topic would let us know where everyone stands, and it would give us some guidance.

Reason: This decision directly impacts employees' jobs and health, so it's only fair to find out their comfort level with working in-office right now. With leadership divided, asking employees could sway execs in a certain direction. It'd be easier than us trying to guess what the employees want.

Name withheld,

*HR manager at a media company in the Northeast,
name withheld upon request*

What she would do: I'd remind the CEO how contagious Omicron is, using data to back me up, and I'd point out that if we had a COVID outbreak at the company, it would be very detrimental. I'd suggest a compromise — those who are able to work remotely should do so for now, and those who can't could come in. We could try to spread them out around the office to minimize exposure, and see if there are any tools we could purchase to allow them to work remotely at all.

Reason: Sick workers aren't productive workers — and if a large portion of the workforce contracts COVID, we'll be in trouble. COVID numbers are the highest they've ever been — it seems like a no-brainer to keep people remote if they're able to do so.

Conversations you hate: 4 ways to avoid ever having them again



by Michele McGovern

PREEMPTIVE
CHATS HELP
ELIMINATE
ISSUES

HR MORNING



You know all those conversations you hate having with employees?

They're the "suck it up," "get it together" or the "do this or we'll have to do that" kind of chats.

You could avoid them completely if you have other, more relevant, coaching conversations sooner. These are the how to "build resilience," "break out of a rut," "craft your career" and "influence others" kind of chats.

"When fully and distinctly addressed, these skills can produce outcomes that refine short-term success, as well as long-term career satisfaction," [says Jerry Connor head of coaching practice at BTS](#).

With those short- and long-term outcomes, you can forget [the other, more negative talks](#).

And while these conversations are important to have with all employees, they're critical for newer employees.

Here's what to discuss.

How to build resilience

Most employees – and especially young employees – tend to beat themselves up more than necessary when they mess up, fail or have a generally bad experience at work.

The negative self-talk derails performance for some time and make them risk-adverse.

A resilience conversation gives them the opportunity to beat themselves up a little, but not dwell on it. [To help employees balance](#) thinking and let it go, ask:

- How did you feel when you (failed, missed the deadline, forgot to ...)?
- What were you telling yourself then?
- What do you think that means about you?
- Do you really think that's true?

It's likely they don't think it's true. So from there, you can guide them on how to get through similar situations differently in the future, so you both avoid conversations you hate.

How to break out of a rut

Everyone hits a mental rut at work. They get stuck – perhaps a marketer loses creativity, an accountant gets bored, a salesperson can't win a deal or an engineer can't solve a problem.

Employees might give up or try to get it back together using the same old method (which gets the same result: nothing). They need a new thought process, and a conversation fueled by questions like these can help:

- What are you trying to solve?
- What feelings do you and other stakeholders have about it?
- Where are your deepest concerns?
- How does your biggest concern and current effort relate?

This can help people see if they're actually trying to solve the right problem and potentially different

Conversations you hate: 4 ways to avoid ever having them again

solutions – plus gain a new perspective for future ruts.

How to craft your job

This conversation should be an ongoing one. You want to help employees reflect on what's important to them so they can shape the future that engages them. Ask:

- What's going on now?
- How would you like it to be different?

- What's one thing you can do to move toward that vision?

How to influence others




Whether employees want to resolve conflict, build relationships or become a leader, they need influential skills.

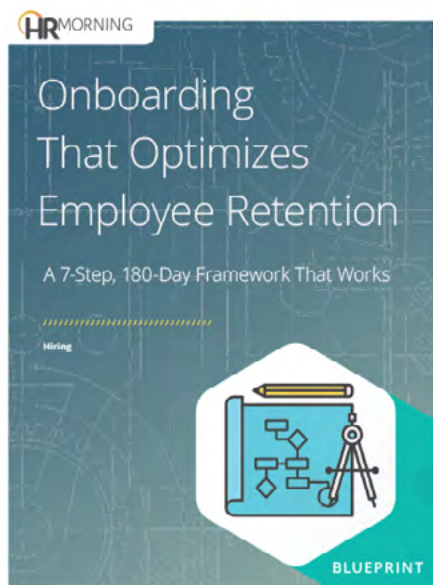
You can help them with “full-view” conversations. Ask:

- What would it take to make sure other people feel heard before you speak your opinions and ideas?

- Knowing that, how can you communicate better to build trust?

Recommended reading from [Michele McGovern](#)

- [Communication vs. productivity: 4 tips to get the balance right](#) 
- [11 keys to develop employee skills – even in busy times](#) 
- [7 ways to plan meetings people actually want to attend](#) 



Onboarding That Optimizes Retention

A 7-Step, 180-Day Framework That Works

Onboarding is more than simply signing legal papers and receiving training.

It's a vital step that introduces employees to new surroundings, new co-workers, new company goals and traditions, and new work tasks. When it's done well, you and your company will reap the rewards of retaining successful, talented, contributing employees.

Fumble it, and you miss tapping into your employee's full potential.

IN THIS BLUEPRINT YOU'LL DISCOVER HOW TO:
Fully integrate your new employee into their new work environment.

[get the guide](#) 

Case Study

Education benefit allows employees to earn degree, grow professionally



The labor landscape is constantly changing, and we wanted to make sure we were changing with it to keep our employees at their most engaged.

We strive to offer competitive pay and benefits, and one area we wanted to focus on was education.

That's when we decided to create a brand-new education benefit all of our employees could take advantage of.

Continued learning is important to a lot of people, and we wanted our employees to be able to easily pursue their education goals while still earning a paycheck.

Practical coursework

We partnered with Guild Education and three universities to create our Live Better U program.

Here's the gist: For \$1 a day, any employee could enroll in the program to earn their college degree.

We really wanted the coursework to be relevant and practical, so we worked closely with the three universities to create customized degree programs.

Workers could receive a bachelor's degree in either business

management or supply chain management. We felt these two programs would be most helpful for both employees who wanted to continue their career with us and those who wanted to pursue their business goals elsewhere.

Something for everyone

Our goal was truly to encourage all types of learning. We also wanted to ensure Live Better U was sustainable long-term — we wanted high enrollment and completion rates.

To really appeal to all employees, not just the ones seeking a bachelor's degree, we added additional learning opportunities as well.

Employees could also earn their GED if they never finished high school. Others could get major discounts if they entered master's programs or took classes to learn a new language.

Getting the word out

We were so excited about this program that when we rolled it out, we were a little surprised at employees' hesitation to join.

People were very skeptical — a dollar a day for a college degree sounded too good to be true!

To tackle this, we had managers speak with their employees about Live Better U and answer any questions.

Employees were told about all the support available to them, too. For example, those who join the program are assigned an education coach who will help them work through the application process and select the right learning program for them.

To really drive home the point, after we got our first few participants, we had them share their stories.

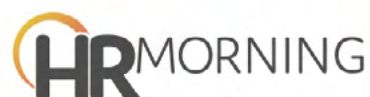
One employee who was too busy with work and family to go back to school was able to easily balance her coursework all online.

Another employee is working toward her business degree to open up her own salon on the side, all while continuing to work for us.

We're already so pleased with our participation rate: 4,800 employees are currently enrolled!

(Michelle Malashock, corporate communications, Walmart, Bentonville, AR)

PBMS, SPECIALTY DRUGS, HIGH-COST THERAPIES TOP THE LIST



BENEFITS

Pharmacy trends: What Benefit pros need to know



by Renée Cocchi

Handling benefits, it's important to keep an eye on what's going on in the pharmaceutical industry. New pharmacy trends can affect healthcare benefits and budgets.

So, here's a brief overview of what's been happening and what to watch for.

A trend that has emerged over the past year is certain states have proposed legislation to remove limits on pharmacies that dispense both specialty and maintenance type medications.

"Historically, much of the emphasis on this topic has been on the fully insured benefit," said Alysha Fluno, Pharmacy Innovation Leader at Mercer in the [webcast New Shape of Work: Top Employer Considerations in 2022](#). "But what's changing is we're starting to see legislation written that also impacts, the

self-insured benefit. This has the potential to impact plan design. So, staying informed about what's happening with legislation – what's being provided and improved – will be important to track in the upcoming year."

Another trend that's gaining traction is managing pharmacy benefits through data driven insight.

Not only are employers able to see how their plan is performing throughout the year, but they're now using their data as a foundation to optimize their benefit, making more timely and informed decision.

Pharmacy benefits managers

A couple of consistent themes that'll continue into next year are around drug costs and transparency of how

pharmacy benefits managers (PBMs) are making money.


PBMs manage prescription drug benefits on behalf of health insurers, Medicare part D drug plans, large employers, and other payers. They can have a big impact on figuring out total drug costs because they negotiate with drug manufacturers and pharmacies to control spending. This in turn shapes patients' access to medications and determining how pharmacies are paid.

Since 2015 there has been a downward shift in revenue from rebates, and that's indicative of PBMs reducing their business risk on rebates by shifting the rebates over to newer rebate GPOs (Group Purchasing Organizations). "This practice is ultimately causing less transparency in the industry, and clients are now needing to find creative ways to manage their

rebates now that these GPO entities have become involved,” said Fluno.


Plus, the growth in PBM fees and specialty pharmaceuticals have become the main source of profit for PBMs. This is forcing companies to manage contract negotiations differently and focus more on specialty drug management in the future.

Specialty drugs

While the cost trend for [specialty drugs](#)  has increased year over year, relief may be coming, but not until 2023.

“The good news is we have a year to prepare for the changes that’ll be happening in the biosimilar market,” shared Fluno.

Biosimilars are a class of medications akin to generic drugs. But they’re for certain infusible or injectable medications. Many PBM contracts that are in the market today are either vague around this class of medications or they’re mute on them. So, 2022 is going to be the year to renegotiate contracts regarding biosimilars.

Here’s why: This summer [Semglee](#) , which is a biosimilar of the insulin Lantus, was brought to market.

“It’s great because we now have market competition for biosimilars in diabetes, which you would think would help to drive down costs. But what’s different with this launch is Semglee came out with two different pricing options: a high list price with a rebate and a second lower list price option,” explained Fluno.

Drugs have never been brought to market with two pricing options.

“This is a new approach we’re now needing to manage,” said Fluno. “And we need to do it quickly. I say this because the final patent on

Humira, which is an injectable anti-inflammatory drug, is expected to expire in early 2023. And there are six manufacturers right now that are approved to bring their biosimilars to market, as soon as the Humira patent expires.”

Humira is likely the No. 1 drug in terms of costs for just about every plan sponsor. It generates over \$20 billion a year in annual revenue in the U.S. “So, this is going to be one of the largest patent expirations in the history of the U.S. drug market,” stated Fluno.

“So, as we are now seeing with Semglee, PBM contracts need to be negotiated with very tight language around biosimilars, including biosimilar rebate guarantees, not only to drive value to the plan when those patents for Humira finally expire, but also to drive value back to your members so they can save on their drug costs,” explained Fluno.

High-cost therapies



The final trend that needs to be pointed out is the high-cost therapies entering the market – gene and cellular therapies. When it comes to specialty drugs, this small and growing group of treatments are the costliest advancements in medicine today. They’re slowly trickling into the market, and they’re mainly seen right now on medical benefits because they’re infusible medications.

“The cost of these treatments is much higher than any therapy costs from the past,” said Fluno. “These therapies have truly been deemed break throughs in modern medicine. Many of them are actually cures for rare diseases like sickle-cell anemia, hemophilia and even different cancers.”

The good news is the utilization of these therapies will be very low. But on the flip side, it’ll only take one member with one treatment to change the financial forecast of your drug budget.

“Predictive analytic tools have really come into the market around this to help plans understand their risk of these expensive therapies,” said Fluno. “And while you may not be able to avoid the costs, just having insight into your plans risk will allow you to not only plan but prepare for that potential cost exposure.”

Recommended reading from [Renée Cocchi](#)

- [Study: Top priorities for 2022 benefits plans](#) 
- [Three trends for containing healthcare costs](#) 

Grew our benefits to meet employees' needs



When the pandemic hit, it affected large and small companies. And like most companies, our employees' lives were turned upside down and got complicated. And that affected what they needed as far as benefits and compensation went.

I recalled my days as a young professional juggling work and raising a family. My wife also had an equally busy career. And I look back now and wonder how we would have handled the challenges of the pandemic.

As the CEO I wanted our employees to have a support system that helped them when they needed it most. I saw it as my job to build it.

Flexibility was key

We saw our people were struggling with COVID-19. We knew they needed help immediately, so we created timely programs and benefits that gave them additional time to deal with whatever came their way: COVID-19, enhanced parental and caregiver support, educational support for their children, easier access to telehealth, and more.

But not everything worked initially. There were some hick ups, but we

assess them on the spot and made needed adjustments.

Assessed success

You can't judge success of a benefit without analyzing it's use. While we did that on the fly to make immediate adjustments, we also took time in 2021 to assess what worked at giving our people the flexibility they needed.

After we did this, we made an announcement in October of several enhancements to our benefits and compensation package that focused on mental, physical, social and financial well-being.

Added benefits

Here's what we added:

- **Health benefit:** Starting Jan. 1, 2022, we reduced our employee healthcare premiums by 10% with no change in the benefit levels. We also introduced healthcare advocacy services. With healthcare inflation projected to be 6% for 2022, our plan participants would experience a savings of 16%.

- **Benefit for employees' futures:** We replaced our current 401(k) match and pension programs with a single, automatic firm-funded contribution within the 401(k) plan equal to 6% to 8 % of eligible W-2 pay. The new plan features flexibility as all employees will receive the contribution without any requirement to contribute their own money.

- **Family benefit:** Three weeks of additional paid caregiver leave are now provided, above and beyond employees' regular PTO. This time is for caring for a family or household member with a serious health condition. It includes time to grieve the loss of a loved one. We also added two caregiver concierge programs to help employees find the care their loved ones need.

- **New parent benefit:** Previously, we provided six weeks of paid parental leave for primary caregivers and two weeks for non-primary caregivers to bond with a newborn, newly-adopted or new foster care child. Now, all parents will receive 12 weeks of paid parental leave regardless of who the

primary caregiver is. This is in addition to disability leave for employees who give birth, allowing some employees up to 22 weeks of paid leave.

- **Time off benefit:** Working remotely, the line between our work and personal lives has blurred. So twice a year we will take a company-wide break. This will give our people at least nine consecutive days to disconnect and spend time with family and friends. This is part of an expanded holiday

calendar that now provides 16 paid holidays per year, including Juneteenth. This is all in addition to a generous PTO program, “no camera Fridays,” and no internal meetings on Wednesday afternoons.

- **Recognition benefit:** People can recognize each other’s achievements with financial awards, electronic gift cards and experience-based rewards.

As a company we prosper when our people grow professionally



and as individuals. And we’re committed to continuing to invest in our extraordinary people – their careers, future, well-being and families.

Paul Knopp, CEO, KPMG, New York,
[shared on LinkedIn](#) 

STAFF DEPARTURE

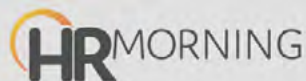
Help women workers during COVID-19: 4 best practices




by Rachel Mucha



PANDEMIC DROVE **MILLIONS**
OUT OF WORKPLACE



The coronavirus pandemic hit a lot of employers and employees hard – but studies have found [women workers are disproportionately negatively impacted](#) .

Between service job layoffs and the absence of many child care options, about two million women have been driven out of the workforce to stay home with the kids, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

African-American and Latina women have been impacted the most, with a disproportionately high number neither working or actively looking for work.

Employment experts say this mass exodus will hold dire consequences for women's long-term career prospects and hurt the long-fought battle for equal pay.

Not to mention, this will cause major staffing issues for employers who are already dealing with the impact of The Great Resignation.

Diversity is key


If you're like most employers, you might wonder what you can do about this. But you don't have to stand idly by as women exit the workplace.

Studies have consistently shown that a diverse workforce is incredibly beneficial, with positives ranging from higher efficiency to better problem solving and financial performance.

Not only that, but it's a risky legal move to do nothing about this issue.

If your company is seen as male-dominated, it can lead to gender discrimination claims – and the last thing you want to do is discourage female candidates from applying for or accepting a job.

It's crucial for employers to act now and think of tangible ways they can begin to address this issue before it's too late.

Here are four best practices to ensure your company is [supporting women](#)  and offering them the tools they need to succeed right

now, courtesy of the employment law attorneys of the firm Epstein Becker Green.

1. Evaluate output only

When working remotely, women tend to have family care responsibilities fall on them more than men. So while your male employees may be able to work uninterrupted all day, female workers may have to get up during meetings to attend to a baby or help older kids with their virtual schoolwork.

Be flexible, and don't hold it against your women workers if they can't attend every Zoom meeting or if they work odd hours. Focus on the work they're producing instead of availability or hours clocked.

2. Conduct exit interviews

The best way to understand what's pushing women out the door is to ask them. Encourage your people to speak candidly about why they're leaving. Many often will speak more freely once they're no longer on the payroll.

To be more proactive, instead of waiting until women have already left, conduct anonymous surveys before people start leaving so you have a chance to retain them. This can allow you to nip any problems in the bud. You can't fix issues if you don't know what they are.

3. Consider a virus leave policy

While paid leave offered under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) expired, employers can still offer COVID-specific leave for their employees.

Twelve weeks of paid leave to help care for family members can be incredibly helpful for women balancing home and work responsibilities, and can help keep them engaged and contributing.

4. Focus on fixing the system

It's important that the responsibility isn't placed on women to figure out how to help themselves. The system is what's broken – not the way women are handling this.

Instead of spending valuable time training employees on time management, form practices designed to support them in what they need. Women want to be able to balance home and work duties – and it's up to you to help them.

Evergreen strategies

And while the above practices are pandemic-focused, there are more ways employers can support women in the workplace all the time.

Here are some additional tips courtesy of [Timely.com](#):

1. **Achieve equal pay.** This one is simple — if your company currently has a wage gap, pay men and women the same salary for the same jobs. Women will be more likely to stay at the company when they're paid fairly.
2. **Ask for women's opinions.** A big part of feeling respected in the workplace is feeling heard. Employers should make sure women are given the opportunity to speak, and are listened to. This means being vigilant at meetings if male colleagues attempt to interrupt women or "steal" their point.

3. **Have a zero tolerance approach on sexism.** Set the tone for an inclusive workplace by showing employees no sexism will be tolerated, including "jokes" and seemingly harmless remarks. This also includes looking out for unconscious gender bias, such as unfair dress codes.
4. **Don't ask about women's private lives.** Keep conversations professional. Don't ask women things like when they're planning on getting married or having kids — and don't assume their personal life plans will affect their career plans.

Recommended reading from [Rachel Mucha](#)

- [One-third of HR pros struggle to get leaders to see pay equity issues](#)
- [2022 workplace trends: What HR needs to know – and do – now](#)
- [Question: The pandemic forced a lot of women out of the workplace. Are there any ways we can support them as they return?](#)

Question

The CDC released new quarantine guidance. What does this mean for our employees who were exposed to COVID-19? How long do they need to stay out of the workplace?

Answer

Yes, the CDC adjusted its quarantine guidance — and the length of recommended quarantine depends on whether a person tested positive for COVID-19, or whether they were just exposed.

If one of your employees tests positive for COVID-19, they must isolate for a minimum of five days. If after the five days have passed the employee no longer has symptoms, they may come out of isolation. However, they should continue wearing a mask around others for the next five days.

If one of your employees is exposed to a COVID-positive person and aren't vaccinated, they must quarantine for five days. If no symptoms or positive test appears after those five days, they may leave quarantine but wear a mask for five additional days.

If the exposed person is vaccinated and boosted (and has no symptoms and tested negative) they don't need to isolate — they should just wear a mask around others for the next 10 days.

If symptoms begin at any time for exposed people, they should go into isolation and remain there until symptoms clear and they test negative.

Question

We have an underperforming employee who drops the ball more often than not. How do we know when the time is right to let them go? And what's the best way to proceed?

Answer

Terminations are never easy, and there are a lot of things to consider before making this decision, say employment law attorneys Robin Burroughs and Thomas Strong of the firm Venable LLP.

Here are some questions you should ask yourself:

- **Do you have a valid reason to fire this employee?** Many states have at-will employment, meaning you don't need cause to fire someone, but it's always a good idea to have a solid reason, such as attendance or performance issues, or policy violations. It's also crucial to ensure it doesn't look like you're firing an employee for an illegal reason, such as discrimination or retaliation.
- **Are you required to use 'progressive discipline?'** Your company may have a policy requiring you to make an employee aware of their shortcomings or to place them on a performance improvement plan (PIP). Even if you aren't required to do this, an employee should never be surprised by a firing. It's always best to have several conversations with them before it gets to termination.
- **What will you tell the rest of your employees?** Someone's termination will likely affect many other workers at the company. It's important to strike a balance between explaining why the person is no longer at the company, while also protecting their privacy. Also, have a plan in place for the transfer of assignments and duties.

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