HR MORNING

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Can ChatGPT really replace HR pros? New study puts it to the test

HRMORNIING

July 2023

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Recruiting pro tip: Evaluate a candidate's effectiveness, not just skills and talent

May 2, 2023

Recruiting quality, high-performing candidates for critical roles in your organization is one of HR's biggest ongoing challenges.

Of course you do your recruiting due diligence by determining whether a potential hire's experience and skill level are appropriate for the job. But according to Vivian Kessler, president of boutique executive search firm Search Innovations, to truly gauge whether a finalist for a key position within your organization is a good fit, it's important to find out "who somebody is, and who they were, and who they became … what their values are (and) what gives them a sense of fulfillment."

Appearing on an episode of *HRMorning*'s "Voices of HR" podcast, titled "Secrets of a Top Executive Recruiter: Finding the Right Leadership for That Critical Role," Kessler said that when the time comes to interview a high-performing potential hire, you need to pay close attention to how the candidate responds to these questions:

- Can you give me an example of when you "went the extra mile?"
- What did you do when something you proposed at a previous company wasn't adopted?
- What's the most disappointing or frustrating thing that's happened in your professional life?
- What do you want that you don't have today?
- What do you have today that you want to keep?

What you ultimately want to learn about the person are what's important to them and their approach to getting things done.

"It's getting to know how they drive a project forward, what problems they encountered in driving that project forward, whether they abandoned ship or kept moving," Kessler said.

Consider your culture in the recruiting process

The million-dollar question: Is the candidate's style for getting things done going to set them up for success or failure at your company?

Kessler presented this example: "If you can't articulate how you get something done, who you were able to influence, how you changed your influencing approach in order to influence someone who is particularly recalcitrant, you are not going to be effective in an organization that really values … communication and gaining buy-in."

"I've had candidates who I think might be effective (at another organization), but I know they're not going to be effective (for the position I'm recruiting for)," she said, mentioning candidates she's interviewed and rejected because they were better suited for an entrepreneurial, outcomes-oriented culture.

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Benefits communication should occur year-round, survey suggests

May 12, 2023

Employee communication can be a headache for HR – even just getting employees to open your emails can sometimes feel like a struggle. But when it comes to benefits, a lack of effective communication can lead to confusion and stress when open enrollment comes around.

Ensuring employees have the right information to make an informed decision is vital. But communicating about benefits only during open enrollment season may not be enough, as a new study from LegalShield found that benefits communication isn't cutting it for many employees who are left feeling uninformed and unprepared come open enrollment season.

Employees left in the dark

The study found that a majority of employees (81%) would welcome more information about their company-sponsored benefits throughout the year.

This signals a clear desire for employees to gain information year-round, but about half of employees (47%) also reported feeling unprepared *during* open enrollment season and didn't know enough about their benefits to make informed decisions, showing a need for more effective benefits communication.

Poor benefits communication – or an insufficient amount leading up to open enrollment – can lead to employees making uninformed decisions. In fact, more than half (52%) of participants reported that they did not receive sufficient information during open enrollment.

There are clear benefits to equipping employees with the knowledge they need to make informed enrollment decisions. Employees making better use of their benefits may lead to:

- Improved employee health and well-being

- Increased employee satisfaction, and

- Improved productivity.

5 tips to improve year-round benefits communication

To ensure that employees are fully prepared when open enrollment season comes around, consider using these five ways to improve benefits communication from David MacLean, Vice President of Strategic Growth at LegalShield.

1. Use the full year to periodically educate employees about how certain voluntary benefits can address prominent issues of the moment. For example, a legal plan can provide expert guidance to an employee regarding their obligations for student loan repayment.

2. Use the weeks immediately preceding the open enrollment window to educate employees on voluntary benefits. Product vendors can typically support this with informational websites, online brochures, decision-assist tools and on-demand videos.

3. Offer interactive video (or live) seminars hosted by product vendors to overview the plans they offer and most importantly to answer employee questions. This increases employee engagement and understanding. The weeks preceding the open enrollment window is an excellent time for this.

4. Use multiple delivery methods and content formats to reach employees with different learning styles and work environments, such as a benefits administration system, text, video, employee seminars, online calculators, intranet, instant messaging, email and hard copy brochures when appropriate.

5. Share information about the generational and geographic makeup of your workforce with your vendor partners to enable communication strategies that fit the needs of those segments.

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Top 5 employment law changes: What to expect in the next 12 months

May 15, 2023

A new report from labor and employment firm Littler Mendelson PC reveals the top five employment law changes to closely monitor this year, according to insight gathered from in-house attorneys, HR pros and C-suite execs across the U.S.

So what's keeping your peers up at night?

In its 11th annual survey, Littler highlighted evolving legislation that should be on your radar now.

5 employment law changes to watch

1. Paid sick and family leave requirements

Just over 70% of employers expect paid sick and family leave requirements to be the biggest employment law change affecting their company over the next year, the survey revealed.

Moreover, as employers update policies to comply with the new laws, more than a quarter (26%) said they're concerned about litigation around paid sick leave and family leave in the coming year.

It's no surprise paid sick and family leave tops the list this year, considering the hodgepodge of legislation at state and local levels.

For example, several states (California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Washington) and the District of Columbia already have paid family leave laws – so employers must meet legal obligations under both state and federal laws.

Meanwhile, employers in Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Illinois and Oregon are preparing for

similar pending legislation that's scheduled to take effect in the near future.

2. Income-related equality

About two-thirds (67%) of respondents believe legislation related to income equality will significantly impact their work in the coming year – and 54% say they're concerned about lawsuits focusing on pay practices and wage-and-hour disputes.

Employment law changes to watch in this area include legislation on pay transparency, salary history bans and overtime pay, the survey found.

At the state and local levels, pay transparency continues to gain steam. Many HR pros are navigating through strategies and learning best practices to comply with the laws.

An increasing number of bans on asking about salary history has led to additional training for managers involved in interviewing and hiring.

As for overtime changes, earlier this year, the U.S. Supreme Court held that high-earning employees are not exempt from overtime under the FLSA if they're paid on a daily basis.

Plus, more overtime changes could soon be on the way, as the Department of Labor has projected that it will issue a new proposed overtime rule this month.

3. Data privacy regulations

More than half (54%) of respondents anticipate employment law changes for data-privacy regulations – an 11% jump from the level of anticipated changes reported in the firm's 2022 survey.

Despite that increase, only 17% of respondents expressed concern over litigation related to employee privacy.

Two pieces of notable legislation come to mind:

- The California Privacy Rights Act (CPRA) took effect on Jan. 1 and becomes enforceable on July 1. Among other things, the CPRA requires a privacy notice to be given to employees and applicants at the time a company collects their personally identifiable information.

- The Illinois Biometric Information Privacy Act (BIPA) regulates how employers can use the biometric identifiers (e.g., a retina scan, fingerprints, voiceprints, scans of hand or face geometry) used in the course of business. Biometrics can be used in time management systems, security systems and health plans. Among other things, the BIPA prohibits employers from selling, disclosing or profiting from employees' biometric identifiers.

Public interest continues to shift to the growing belief that individuals own their personal info and have the right to control it. As such, HR can expect to see more regulations affecting HR data. Currently, three more states – Colorado, Connecticut and Utah – have pending data privacy legislation that will take effect in the second half of 2023.

4. Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) considerations

Just over half (53%) of respondents expect evolving DEI legislation to impact their companies this year.

And while only 22% are specifically concerned about DEI litigation, it's worth noting that 58% also expressed concern about discrimination and harassment lawsuits.

One of the most significant DEI-related legal initiatives right now, CROWN Act legislation continues to gain steam. Earlier this year, Minnesota became the 20th state to prohibit natural hair discrimination.

In addition, legislatures in at least seven states (Michigan, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Wisconsin) are working to pass similar laws to ban hair discrimination.

And size discrimination is also making headway at local levels. Most recently, legislators in New York City passed a bill that prohibits workplace discrimination based on employees' height and weight. The mayor is expected to sign the legislation later this month.

Six other cities (San Francisco, CA; Santa Cruz, CA; Urbana, IL; Binghamton, NY; Madison, WI; and Washington, D.C.) have similar legislation, but NYC is by far the largest — which may prompt other cities to join the list.

Currently, Michigan is the only state that bans discrimination based on height and weight. However, other state legislatures (Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York) are considering similar bills.

5. Union protections and NLRB rulings

And rounding out the top five, union protections and NLRB rulings have more than a third (36%) of respondents expecting changes this year – and 24% are concerned about litigation focusing on labor and management relations.

As you probably recall, a notable NLRB ruling earlier this year restricted employers' ability to include

confidentiality and non-disparagement clauses in severance agreements for non-supervisory employees.

And in another recent ruling, the NLRB ripped Starbucks, saying the company attempted to squelch union activity. It ordered significant relief, including reinstating fired workers and requiring the company to bargain with the union.

Honorable mention: Classification of independent contractors

We have to include an honorable mention for the classification of independent contractors (ICs), which narrowly missed securing a spot in the top five.

Why? Because IC misclassifications can lead to hefty payouts.

One-third (33%) of respondents expect to see related changes in this area, which may come to pass if Acting Secretary of Labor Julie Su is confirmed.

During her tenure in California, Su was a proponent of AB5, a law that made it more difficult for employers in the state to classify workers as independent contractors. We'll keep you posted.

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Fat, old and ugly: New wave of discrimination for HR to combat

May 16, 2023

Fat. Old. Ugly.

No one wants to be called any of those, but it's happening. In the workplace, of all places.

The new wave of discrimination at work includes weight, height and level of attractiveness, according to research and legal experts. And all the while, age discrimination continues in the workplace.

It's gotten so bad, legislators in New York City — where almost 4 million people work — banned employment discrimination based on a person's weight or height (pending the mayor's approval).

Half of the people at work are concerned about what others think of their appearance in the workplace. So on any given day, someone is thinking, *"No one talks to me because I'm fat." "They think I'm too old do that." "Everyone is staring at my bald spot."*

What's worse, some people in the workplace actually are making judgments based on weight, height, appearance and age.

"It's important that we address all forms of discrimination, and weight {height or appearance} discrimination is no exception," says Amy Kim, President at PowertoFly. "A person's body shape should not affect their ability to obtain or maintain employment … Companies need to hire the best of the best, and top talent comes in all shapes and sizes."

Let's break it down to what researchers and experts know now:

Weight bias

- 26% of employees say they 'definitely' or 'probably' faced discrimination in the workplace because of their weight, a ResumeBuilder survey found

- 71% of those who self-identified as being obese have experienced discrimination

- 53% of those who say they're overweight have faced discrimination, and

- 42% of those who self-identify as underweight say they've been treated unfairly.

Age bias

- 30% U.S. workers have felt unfairly treated because of their age (too young or too old) at some point in their career, a SHRM study found

- For 72% of those who were treated unfairly, it was so bad, it made them want to quit the job

- 26% of employees over 50 say they've been the target of age-related remarks at work in the past six months

- 17% of HR pros have received reports of perceived ageism in their workplace, and

- Almost 13,000 age discrimination charges were filed with the EEOC in 2021 (the most recent reported year).

Appearance bias

- 23% of employees say they "definitely" or "probably" faced discrimination because of their attractive or unattractive appearance (as far as being "too attractive," mostly women cited discrimination because they weren't taken seriously)

- 64% of men who considered themselves "somewhat" or "very" unattractive said they faced discrimination

- 47% of women who identified as unattractive to some degree said they were treated unfairly, and

- 12% of employees say they have "definitely" or "probably" faced height discrimination.

Note: Employees age 40 or over are a protected class and can be victims of age discrimination under the federal Age Discrimination in Employment Act. In addition, a federal law known as Title VII protects employees and job applicants from employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin. Physical appearance — height, weight and/or degree of attractiveness — is not a protected class. Yet. Local legislation often catches like a wildfire until it becomes a national issue. (Also note: Obesity may be a disability protected from discrimination by the Americans with Disabilities Act if it results from an underlying physical condition or impairment.)

"The media's impact on self perception has permeated our culture, and although we recognize its effects on the younger generation, we do not often address the effect on those in the workplace," says ResumeBuilder's Chief Career Advisor Stacie Haller. "As organizations continue to improve opportunities for all by addressing discrimination issues, they should also be looking at physical appearance discrimination."

Still, HR pros don't want any kind of behaviors that could be considered discriminatory — or just mean — in their workplace.

Combat discriminatory behaviors

The EEOC's E-RACE Initiative is groundwork for any organization to help employees be aware of discrimination and take steps to stop it, regardless of its origin. You can get advice and more details on the EEOC's website.

Here are the critical reminders for employees (also included in handouts) to combat discriminatory behaviors in the workplace:

- Respect all differences in the workplace

- Be professional in conduct and speech

- Refuse to initiate, participate or condone discrimination and harassment

- Avoid race-based, culturally offensive, age or appearance humor or pranks. When in doubt, leave it outside the workplace

- Familiarize yourself with the company's workplace policies and act responsibly

- Attend training on EEO principles and learn about your legal rights and responsibilities under the anti-discrimination laws

- Be proactive. Report incidents of inappropriate, discriminatory, harassing or abusive behavior to your supervisor, Human Resources department, union or management, and

- If you experience or witness discrimination or harassment contact EEOC or your local human rights commission.

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Ouch! Alleged hiring preference costs employer $700K

May 26, 2023

Expressing a hiring preference for a particular gender can be a very dangerous thing for employers to do.

Why? Because there is a good chance it will lead to a claim of unlawful discrimination – and that the claim will succeed.

An Indiana employer just learned that lesson the hard way, agreeing to settle an EEOC lawsuit filed against it by paying out more than $700,000 and taking other remedial steps.

In the suit, the EEOC accused the Kenneth O. Lester Company, Inc., which does business as PFG Customized Distribution, of refusing to hire female job applicants for order selector positions at its warehouse in Kendallville, Indiana.

Illegal hiring preference alleged

According to the agency, the sex-based preference was specifically expressed across the board – by hiring officials, other management and supervisory employees, human resources personnel, and even recruiters.

Some of those individuals told female applicants directly that PFG prefers to hire men as order selectors, the suit added.

The suit alleged a violation of Title VII, which generally bans the use of sex-based criteria in employment decisions.

To end the case, PFG agreed to pay a total of $709,971. The bulk of that amount — $650,000 – will go to a class of female applicants who were not hired. In addition, $39,971 will be paid to a female applicant who spurred the suit, and $20,000 will go to a class of females who were given work assignments based on their sex.

Stop doing that

The agreement ending the litigation also bars PFG from:

- Refusing to hire women as order selectors based on their sex

- Setting work assignments based on sex, and

- Retaliating against employees.

PFG will also:

- Extend a hiring preference to qualified female applicants who were denied jobs as order selectors

- Revise hiring practices and procedures, and

- Conduct equal employment opportunity training.

What Title VII prohibits

Under the federal law generally known as Title VII, covered employers generally cannot discriminate against job applicants or employees based on sex, which is defined to include pregnancy, sexual orientation and gender identity.

This means that as a general rule, employers may not express a preference for one gender over another or exclude one gender from consideration when hiring.

When it might be OK

An exception to the general rule applies when gender qualifies as what is called a bona fide occupational qualification, more commonly referred to as a BFOQ.

Title VII specifically carves out the BFOQ exception to its general ban on discrimination, expressly stating that it is not unlawful to hire a job candidate based on sex provided that sex "is a bona fide occupational qualification reasonably necessary to the normal operation of that particular business or enterprise."

So just when does this exception apply?

First, remember that this is a very narrow exception to the general rule banning discrimination. It applies only when an employer can show, in defense to a charge of discrimination, that only the preferred sex has characteristics that are needed to do the job. Those characteristics cannot be based on stereotypical assumptions.

A few examples

Example 1: An employer refuses to consider women for a loading dock position because the position requires employees to lift 100-pound boxes. The employer excludes women based on its assumption that women cannot lift 100-pound boxes. Because this assumption is false, the employer would not be able to successfully assert a BFOQ defense to a charge of illegal gender bias.

Example 2: A women's clothing store hires only female fitting room attendants. It sets the limitation because it believes that for privacy reasons, its customers would object to having males do the job. In this case, the employer is likely to prevail when presenting the defense that being female is a BFOQ for the job.

Example 3: A prison has sex-segregated wards, and the duties of prison guards include searching prisoners and observing them while they shower. In this case, the prison is likely to successfully defend a policy of hiring only female prison guards to work on female wards.

Remember: It's a narrow exception

While the concept of the BFOQ defense is an important one to be aware of, remember that it is narrow and did not come into play in the PFG litigation.

Takeaway: Be very careful about setting a sex-based preference for an employment position. Such a preference usually constitutes unlawful discrimination.

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Can ChatGPT really replace HR pros? New study puts it to the test

by Alison Roller

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK **CHATGPT COMMON HR QUESTIONS?**

HR can't seem to escape ChatGPT and other AI technology.

Although some HR pros fear that AI will completely overtake their jobs, others can see the benefits of utilizing AI to help them do their jobs better. But no matter which side you're on, the question remains: Can AI really do the job of an HR pro?

A new study conducted by Mineral put that question to the test, asking ChatGPT several essential HR questions. Here's what they found.

Putting it to the test

Mineral's test used several versions of ChatGPT – 3.0, 3.5 and 4.0 – to ask several HR questions, covering topics from termination and time off to discrimination and salary transparency. Questions ranged in complexity, but they covered essential HR topics like FLSA and FMLA.

Specifically, the AI was asked:

- What is "at-will employment"? Does that mean I can fire an employee for any reason?

- I know that most of the federal employment discrimination laws kick in when an employer reaches a certain number of employees. How do we count that number?

- How do I calculate my employee's FMLA leave?

- What is EPSL and EFMLA? Are they required?

- What salary range should I post to meet pay transparency requirements?

Then, Mineral got six HR pros – five HR experts and one employment law attorney – to rate the answers on a scale of one to 10 based on factors

like accuracy, relevancy, consistency, brevity and practical applicability.

Can AI replace real HR pros?

The results were clear: "ChatGPT is not here to replace skilled HR practitioners," says Susan Anderson, chief services officer at Mineral. "The answers it provides are too often inaccurate, incomplete or misleading in a way that could be costly to a business that wants to lean on the tool to answer HR questions."

While the AI could handle linear, straightforward questions, its answers became unreliable as questions got more complex. The answers are also limited to information available in 2021 or before, so the accuracy of the answers fell when new information came into play.

The answers weren't just outdated, though. They also had significant inaccuracies. "In almost all cases, the answers ChatGPT provided were missing necessary nuanced details and in some cases ChatGPT completely fabricated reference material that did not exist at all," says Anderson.

For example, when asked, "What is at-will employment? Does that mean I can fire an employee for any reason?" The AI states that an employer could fire an at-will employee without "cause, notice or consequence." The use of the word "consequence" could be misleading, especially to someone who isn't familiar with the world of HR.

"An untrained user with little or no HR experience could easily be misled by a ChatGPT answer that *sounds* accurate, while a trained practitioner will recognize that the answer is incorrect or that key details were left out," says Anderson.

How AI will change HR

Despite the pitfalls of some of the answers, the study still reveals that AI tools can be valuable tools for HR pros. "ChatGPT can and will change how HR is practiced by streamlining certain processes," says Anderson. "Taking ChatGPT's answers and combining them with an HR professional's knowledge can help get accurate and reliable answers in far less time."

However, there are still disadvantages that HR pros need to be on the lookout for when utilizing AI for HR questions. "One common pitfall of ChatGPT is that it does not consistently generate answers to questions with the same facts and details every time," says Anderson. "One answer may lack the specificity needed to properly answer the question and other answers may lack necessary information based on when that information became available."

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5 employee performance review samples & 72 example comments

by Rich Henson

EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE REVIEWS **BOOST PERFORMANCE** & **BUSINESS RESULTS**

Employee performance reviews, coupled with ongoing verbal feedback, are the single most valuable tools a good manager can take advantage of to boost employee performance and business results.

But, the value of those reviews is directly related to how well a manager can deliver a useful and focused review. The review must be specific to the work the employee does so the employee understands what is being conveyed to them. The review must stay focused on the work and the workplace, and not run off track.

That takes practice, and we are here to help.

What follows are examples of five employee reviews you can use as a template to begin writing your own effective employee reviews for your staff.

These five reviews are:

- Review of a promising new employee

- Review of an experienced employee seeking a promotion

- Positive review for a middle-level manager

- Tough positive feedback for a newer employee, and

- Positive review to spur a manager's growth.

Customizable reviews

Each of these reviews can be cut and pasted onto your own computer and then tailored to meet your needs. Remember to be specific to your company, workplace and industry, when tailoring these reviews.

What's more, if you've run out of ideas on what to say about employee strengths and weaknesses, we've included 72 phrases covering six key employee areas at the end of this document. These phrases speak to the strengths or weaknesses employees might display in areas like flexibility, communication, conflict resolution, time management, leadership skills and dependability. Each of these phrases can be tailored and edited to your needs and is yours to use freely.

If you find this document of use, there are two other items on this website you should familiarize yourself with. One focuses on how to conduct an employee performance review and includes what kinds of information a manager should pull together when doing a review. The other lays out the thinking process a manager should go through when preparing to write a review.

This document is like a cheat sheet, where you put a completed review down on paper, then tailor it to fit your needs.

With some thought and a little practice, all good managers can develop useful and meaningful reviews that good employees look forward to.

These reviews, coupled with focused regular feedback, will help your team grow.

5 sample employee performance reviews

1. Review of a promising new employee

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

Here's a summary of what we discussed at the performance review last [day of the week] after your first six months here.

Strong points:

- *Exceptional skills – Be specific and use examples like fast learner, top-notched analytical skills, impressive communication skills, etc.*

- *Good skills – Be specific and use examples like "Good with new customers," "Good with understanding data," etc.*

- *Valuable participation in meetings.*

- *Takes ownership of your job*

Emerging skills to build on:

Time management. *You know that if you're to take on greater responsibility, you'll need to become more productive. The best way to do that is by developing the discipline to determine what the focus of each day should be. Once you've mastered the skill of deciding priorities, you'll be best positioned to identify the tasks to get you there.*

- **Attention to detail.** *You've made good progress to reduce sloppiness in your own work, which had the unfortunate effect of making your work appear of less quality than it was. But you*

still have room for improvement there. It pays to focus clearly on how you present information to other departments and to review your own work one last time with a critical eye.

- **Continuous learning.** *You are eager to take on more responsibility, but there are good and bad sides to impatience. Ambition is good, but your present priority is to get the most out of every phase of the training process before moving on to the next level.*

- **Core values.** *One of our core values is helping co-workers improve their performance without regard to rank or hierarchy. You seem to be unaware that most people find you hard to approach and connect with. But you have a lot to offer to others. Be aware that it's important to reach out and extend a helping hand to others.*

- **Customer focus**. *You have embraced our long-term strategy to build customer loyalty. You've recognized it's a step-by-step program and have approached it in a manner that will best position you to take customer focus to the next level.*

General assessment:

You are well on the way to meeting, and in some areas exceeding, the expectations we had of you. We have every reason to believe that after your first year, you will be able to function as a reliable employee in an important position, producing quality results with as little supervision as possible.

There are other things connected with being a valuable employee: Be specific and use examples like being a liaison with the marketing department, public

speaking skills to enthuse others, etc. But if you dedicate yourself to a solid learning process, your long-term goal of eventually becoming a manager and training others in our way of producing business results also seems achievable at this point.

You will realize that you still have much to learn on principles of management, leadership skills, the big-picture business outlook, etc. You'd do well to concentrate for the moment on becoming the best at what you currently do. That will give you the confidence and serve as the building block for future success in all other areas.

We'll do everything we can to help you achieve it.

2. Review of an experienced employee seeking a promotion

TO:

FROM::

RE: Performance review

DATE:

Here's a summary of what we discussed at last week's performance review.

Strong points:

- *You take ownership of your work*
- *Self-starter mentality, good at generating ideas*
- *Works well at helping other employees develop*
- *Keen awareness of procedures*
- *Strong core-area skills (Be specific to your workplace.)*

Emerging skills to build on:

- ***Keeping pace with technology.*** *You've mastered the execution of most specific aspects of your work, but yours is a field that's always*

changing and updating itself. It's incumbent on successful employees to stay abreast of these changes to keep themselves updated and ahead of the technological curve.

- ***Making yourself results-driven.*** *You take to heart the task of making your work the best it can be, but I don't yet get a keen sense you have etched in your mind it's all for a business purpose (use specific examples here). Make those numbers your personal goal and link your tasks more closely to business results.*

- ***Building and maintaining good relationships.*** *Good relationships are the heart of future business success. These strategic relationships need to be developed and maintained on a regular basis.*

Areas to improve:

- ***Meeting deadlines.*** *Deadlines have turned out to be your biggest challenge. You should be able to deliver your work on a more timely and consistent basis, not just now and again. When you get it right, you shine. Find ways to maintain that momentum!*

  Action steps: *Become better at thinking ahead instead of just instinctively acting. Activate the left "analytical" part of the brain, not just the right creative side. Try to emulate the success stories of others.*

- ***General management/business knowledge****. You've started to read business and management books, but a sophisticated level of understanding of business principles doesn't yet consistently show in your work.*

  Action steps: *Continue reading management and business books. Discuss what you've*

learned and show it in "upward communication" reports.

General assessment:

In many areas, you have exceeded expectations, such as in the genuine rapport you have established with your co-workers, which is essential to our business success and a model for other employees here.

Still, you're not quite working as independently as possible after one full year. Your own insights as to how you should attempt to get there are on the mark (applying well-thought-out approaches to the structure of your work).

Now, it's time to do it!

Your eventual goals of assuming more responsibility, and being a leader in the department, are achievable with hard work. Managing a results-driven business is much more than having a nice touch with certain people. It involves first mastering success skills yourself, then showing others by example, taking on initiatives beyond your immediate area of responsibility, and finally articulating the company vision through all your interactions. You're definitely capable of getting there, and we'll do all we can to help you.

3 Positive review for a middle-level manager

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

On the occasion of your most recent employment anniversary, here's a summary of our performance review discussions.

Strong points:

- *Good manager – With you on the job, the task gets*

done on time and always more than adequately.

- **Strong results orientation** – You buy into our system and get buy-in from others.

- **Improved performance** – In the past year, you greatly improved your skills in the performance review area and in administering employee work policies (Be specific here) aimed at what's best long-term for the company.

- **Excellent new recruit trainer** – People learn our core functions and values from you and learn them well.

- **Strong resource management skills** – You're valuable to me because you help me manage resource issues for the entire department.

- **Great liaison** – You show a strong commitment to fostering productive working relations with other departments.

- **Excellent consultant** – You're willing to help other areas of the company as an "internal consultant" to cooperate with our quest for future growth in new areas.

Coming priorities:

- **People development.** This is perhaps the most important thing we can do as managers for the long-term well-being of the company, and you've made strong strides in this area. You've had successes in developing new managers and effectively delegating responsibilities to them. You've built up a solid track record as an excellent trainer in the basics for new recruits, and you've managed to create staff stability and solid retention in your group, while at the same time managing the economic expectations of some employees.

It's been good to see a transformation to a situation where people are actually asking me to make you their supervisor. We can never rest on our laurels in this area, and new people will bring new challenges. Indeed, the same people need to be constantly motivated with new challenges, too, but it's been a pleasure to see you grow in this area.

- **Influencing results.** It's been a challenging year in our drive to exceed last year's results. We have rowed upstream in a soft economy. In the end, results weren't acceptable this year in our key areas. We didn't anticipate how deeply external circumstances would affect us, and when we did react, it was too little, too late. We can't look for too many excuses. It doesn't do any good to argue (even if there's a grain of truth in it) that results would have been even worse if it hadn't been for our intervention.

If we want growth, we can't be satisfied until we find ways to advance the ball. Of late, you've tried to be more creative with different approaches (and encouraged your group to do the same), as we urged in last year's review. Not all those efforts will pan out immediately. Don't be discouraged if results don't immediately improve every time you try something innovative. Stay focused on high-impact efforts and don't get too distracted by sideshows. We believe quality is king in our business and that's where efforts should be focused!

- **Job enlargement.** You're ambitious in the best sense of the word and you want to continue to move up in the company. Don't dwell on the fact you've had the same title for the past three years and haven't had another specific promotion. You have become more valuable in the

management of the department and to the company as a whole because of the expertise you continue to acquire. Those contributions have been noted and are appreciated.

You make more frequent and valuable contributions in group meetings and are showing real leadership in the value issues, which are the most important. And you have become a valuable internal consultant to new hires. Our perspective is that you're enlarging your role at the company and it's important to keep that perspective.

General assessment:

As a department, we face three great challenges during the coming year and you will play an important part in all three.

First, you will see us as a company attempt all sorts of non-traditional activities in search of further growth. It's up to us as managers not to show jealousy toward those new ventures and to do what we can to support them – even if we don't get directly rewarded for our involvement. We will all share in the success if we do it right.

Second, we have to reverse the downward trend in our own business sector, and we're looking to your group to show us the way even in the face of adverse circumstances. It'll take a combination of hard work and getting back to basics with what has worked for us in the past, as well as a substantial dose of creativity and adaptability. It's up to us to show real leadership in not being satisfied with any part of the business going backward. We aren't satisfied until we see growth and advancement.

Third is your active collaboration in the important staff renewal we're in the middle of at the moment. We are in the process of setting and enforcing high standards for productivity and quality. We've brought on and will

continue to bring on a number of new people of varying levels of experience, and we all need to help integrate them as fast as possible and cheer their advances without any false sense of insecurity. The more smart, strong people we have at the upper levels of the department, the better it'll make us all. I feel sure the next 12 months will be exciting for all of us, and I'm confident there will be a major role for you to play.

4   Tough positive feedback to a newer employee

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

Strong points:

- *Organizational skills and time management*

- *Attitude and work ethic*

- *Initiative – Eager to take on more than what's required and expected*

Areas to work on:

- **Flexibility.** *You're strong-willed and you believe in yourself. Strong convictions have given you a confidence base that served you well in tackling a difficult job and making the progress to date, which is considerable. There's a flip side to strong convictions, however. If they aren't tempered by flexibility, it can result in rigidity. There's no room for rigidity in our culture. We're a flexible company with few rules – the only rule is to try to serve our customers in the best possible way.*

  You've exhibited something bordering on rigidity in several

ways. On a fairly minor point, you're sometimes hesitant to start over when that's exactly what is needed. We don't believe that ironclad rules on who does what is good for our company. We also admire your ambition to be named a Group Leader in short order, but it worries us that you apparently think that you're just about there. You've already told us that we will have to agree to disagree on this point, but we still urge you to try to understand – and at least respect –management's point of view.

As long as you require managerial hand-holding to get your projects into shape, you have to realize that any promotion is premature. Your focus at present should be on continuing to learn your field, or, in terms of a sports analogy, continuing to chart plays from the bench, understanding why something worked and why something else didn't, instead of tugging at the sleeves of the coach saying, "Put me in coach, I can do it." We hold no one back unfairly. We have a need for good people. When we feel you're ready for more responsibility, we won't hesitate to confer it.

- **Developing expertise.** *You learned a lot about our business this past year, but you have more to learn. You may now understand the market needs, but you don't always find the best ways to fill them. Be relentless in your efforts to find out what any piece of info really means to our customers and make the extra telephone call to regulators, consultants or other sources. Learn how business works in general and how business principles apply to your field. Ask in-house experts. Set up a site visit. Go to conferences to rub shoulders with people in our field. Above all, seize every opportunity*

to learn from our customers. We'll help you in every way we can to scale the learning curve faster.

General assessment:

You came to us with little practical experience. We hired you mainly on the raw desire and determination we saw in you. In view of that, you have exceeded our expectations during your first year here. Your eagerness to learn a difficult area has pleasantly surprised us. You've made outstanding progress and you've shown yourself to be reliable. That's made you an important part of the team that has shown improvements in the business results. You can be proud of what you have achieved in your first year.

But that pride should be tempered by a healthy dose of humility and the realization that there's much more to learn. This is a generally positive review that hopefully provides the road map for your journey to scale to the next level at our company. Your intermediate goal is to (be specific here). Following this road map can get you there.

Over the next few months, we think it's a good idea to open up some cross-training for you in another area, so you'll be progressing on more than one track simultaneously. That's so you will be able to take advantage of the first realistic opportunity for substantial advancement that arises. We trust you'll tackle any new assignment with the same dedication you've shown so far.

5   Positive review to spur a manager's growth

TO:

FROM:

RE: Performance review

DATE:

Here's a summary of our discussions on the occasion of your annual PBP performance review.

Strong points:

- All-around good guy and conciliator – You try to find the good in people and make them feel good about their work here

- Extremely capable Unit Manager – You try to set high standards for areas over which you exercise quality control. This year those efforts seem to be paying off with some modest success, although we still have a way to go.

- Excellent job running cross-training program – You've done really well running the cross-training program, refining it every year based on feedback and improving the experience for both sides. The proof is in the pudding: We now have a large group of employees who can do most jobs here in a pinch.

- Great job staying on track – Although you battled serious personal issues outside work, you were able to manage those stresses and keep up with all the tasks entrusted to you with only minor schedule accommodations.

- Provided valuable assistance and leadership – Specifically, in the production of our newest growth area with sufficient quality and quantity to shore up revenue for this important new product line that has helped offset the dramatic setbacks in other areas. You've done this hands-on, both at the production level and manager level.

- Get along with everyone – You're well-liked by the vast majority of the staff. As a senior person in your department with extensive experience working for other companies in our industry, you have a lot to contribute to some of the younger and less experienced members of our staff.

Areas of priority during the coming year:

- **Pushing harder on legacy products**. Now that external market conditions appear to be approving somewhat, it's time to press the advantage and made sure we deliver the most relevant and compelling products we can. As we discussed, one of the employees you supervise tends to let us down when we need him most. This is a shakeup challenge for you as Manager. Another employee you supervise tends to repeat the same mistakes. All of our people are too busy to keep fixing the same mistakes over and over again. If managers continue to just "fix it," they run the risk of becoming enablers for inferior performance. Guard against this and demand better.

- **Breaking new ground**. It's our impression that we haven't fully taken advantage of the opportunity for revenue enhancement presented in some key growth areas. Of course resources are always a problem – here probably more than elsewhere since we need voices, extensive production help, etc. And it's also true that for the past few months, we couldn't use our available market channels to their full potential. However, as this marketing situation tends to regularize itself over the next weeks and months, I would like you to assume the role of the champion for this product line. It's one of the best possibilities for generating new revenues based largely on our own intra-departmental efforts and doesn't need a lot of outside help to get it done.

General assessment:

I would like to see you carve out your own area of responsibility in our department with a significant revenue-generating project. You're one of our most senior people capable of great things, and I'd like to see you develop your own bailiwick – something you can point to as your own success story. The (be specific here) seems to present the best opportunity to achieve that kind of crowning success for your already productive career with us.

The past couple of years have been tough for us as a company, trying to defend legacy products as much as possible while pressing at the same time for diversification. The coming year is one for going back on the offensive on all fronts. I look forward to you being one of the trailblazing leaders in this new phase.

Onward and upward!

72 strength and weakness phrases

Flexibility

Strengths:

- Willing to accept changes.

- Inspires others to accept change.

- You use a smile to lighten the mood on tough work days.

- You switch up your routine by adjusting your work style and schedule.

- You're proactive when you see problems arising.

- You never say "It's not my job," or "Do I have to?" when asked to tackle a new assignment.

Weaknesses:

- You allow the stress created by changing routines to get the better of you.

- Colleagues avoid asking for your help because you often say "No."

- You're very rigid in what you will and won't do on the job.

- You view your job very narrowly and seldom do more than the minimum.

- You never offer to stay late or agree to stay late when asked.

- You're reluctant to take part in most any new training.

Communication

Strengths:

- Interacting with others seems to come naturally to you, and you seem to enjoy it.

- Your tone of voice is inviting, so that your co-workers are encouraged to engage in work discussions with you.

- You tend to stay focused when communicating, which helps reduce confusion and the exchange of unnecessary information.

- You're a good listener.

- It's clear you think things through before you speak.

- You're confident. You sound genuine and appear to be sure of yourself.

Weaknesses:

- Your body language is closed as if you don't really want to be here.

- Your co-workers say you're difficult to engage in a work-related discussion.

- You tend to fly off the handle and complain loudly without offering any solutions.

- You tend to be defensive and unwilling to take a look at your work performance.

- You have a tendency not to be forthcoming, or to avoid difficult but necessary discussions altogether.

- You're unwilling to discuss other ways of getting the job done.

Conflict resolution/Work ethic

Strengths:

- You listen to other worker's input and concerns, and respond appropriately.

- You're good at encouraging an unwilling colleague to express themselves.

- You know when to press on or when to back down when conflicts arise.

- You can explain and assert your feelings without blaming others.

- You move forward without harboring grudges.

- You accept when you're wrong.

Weaknesses:

- You let problems fester into serious issues before dealing with them.

- You tend to interrupt when others are expressing their point of view.

- When a conflict arises, your language tends to be harsh.

- You tend not to explain a problem, but instead resort to anger.

- You jump to conclusions before getting all the information.

- Instead of defusing a conflict, your actions tend to make it worse.

Time management

Strengths:

- You have a great sense of the time needed to complete a project.

- You consistently complete tasks early.

- You tend to complete more work than what's required.

- You get your work done without impacting the schedules of others.

- You're always on time for work, including meetings and conferences.

- You've helped create new time-saving strategies.

Weaknesses:

- You spend too much time on non-priorities.

- You regularly fail to complete your work in a timely fashion.

- You avoid vital tasks and treat deadlines like they are optional.

- You often miscalculate the time needed to perform a task.

- You get left behind at times because you don't ask for help.

- You spend a lot of time making up excuses rather than making up lost time.

Leadership skills

Strengths:

- You're empathetic, which helps you understand what others are facing.

- You're confidence spills over onto the people you lead.

- You set strong examples that people readily buy into.

- You're a great planner, and others feel comfortable following your plans.

- You highlight our successes and make people feel a part of that success.

- You delegate well, handing off key tasks to the right people at the right time.

Weaknesses:

- You are a micromanager, bent on controlling every part, no matter how small.

- You are overly critical and spend much of your day finding fault with others.

- You fail to set clear expectations, so employees feel almost anything goes.

- You have acted without integrity resulting in staff questioning your loyalty.

- You spend your day locked away in your office and seem mostly unavailable.

- You take criticism negatively and sulk when feedback is given to you.

Dependability

Strengths:

- You're one of our most dependable team members.

- You've proved yourself reliable again and again.

- You're viewed as a loyal and trustworthy employee/co-worker.

- You consistently demonstrate you care about your job.

- You consistently demonstrate you care about your colleagues.

- You always perform above expectations.

Weaknesses:

- You tend to leave early, with the job half done.

- You can't be relied on go the extra mile.

- You blame others when something goes wrong in your area.

- You're unwilling to help others with their work.

- Your work results are inconsistent at best.

- You can be erratic and temperamental when pushed to finish a project.

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Inclusive culture and benefits can go a long way for transgender employees

Working for a company that supported me before, during and long after my gender transition was a monumental help both mentally and financially.

Like many people, during the pandemic, I took a closer look at life and what could be next for me. I began to explore my gender identity throughout the pandemic while I worked remotely.

I knew that my company was a supportive and inclusive place to work, but when the time came to go back to the office, I still had apprehension about how to broach the subject and begin the conversation.

I decided to confide in a nonbinary co-worker and expressed that I thought I might be transgender. And from there, the support continued to flow in.

Broadening the conversation

The affirmation I got from my co-worker gave me the boost I needed to tell a few more close colleagues, which led me to make an organization-wide announcement about my gender identity.

As a leader, I knew coming forward would help others feel safe enough to be their authentic selves as well.

I received an outpouring of support from the entire team and found that people were genuinely happy for me. This culture of inclusivity and support from my coworkers made it easier to do things outside of work too, like changing my legal name and sharing my pronouns.

Setting the bar for inclusive support

My company offered me invaluable emotional and financial support. Company-provided insurance helped me cover the costs of so many aspects of my transition – from hormone treatment and surgery to therapy.

Covering these costs was an invaluable benefit and helped ease the financial burden of transition. Combined with the inclusive culture and support from colleagues, I felt secure and confident in my position at work despite all of the changes going on in other areas of my life.

It's also helped set the bar for what I want from a future employer and

helped demonstrate the real impact that these benefits can have.

Going through a gender transition, and simply existing as a transgender person, can be incredibly hard. Offering benefits like that makes a hard life a bit easier.

(Ellie Parsons, Director of Mobile Engineering, Ovia Health, Boston, MA)

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IMPORTANCE OF **EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEYS**

45 sample questions for employee satisfaction surveys

by Renée Cocchi

Are your employees happy and content with their jobs? If you can't say with the utmost certainty that most of your employees are happy and content, it's time to do an employee satisfaction survey and find out.

An employee satisfaction survey allows HR pros to measure employees' feelings of contentment and empowerment regarding various components of their job. It's accessed via an internal online link, allows anonymity and gives HR pros direct employee feedback on a number of specific topics. These can be inclusion and belonging, compensation, general benefits and wellness, health benefits, supervisor performance, career development,

work environment, DE&I, team performance, and the list goes on.

Its purpose is to provide actionable data that'll help organizations improve their employee experience by boosting engagement and productivity. Why is this important?

Because happy employees are 12% more productive than unhappy employees, according to a study by the University of Warwick in Coventry, England. But boosting productivity isn't the only reason to do employee satisfaction surveys. Organizations that don't do them can suffer from high turnover, low morale and a decreased ability to recruit top talent.

So what questions should you include in your employee satisfaction survey?

Employee satisfaction survey questions

Here's a list of 45 questions you can ask, broken up into categories.

Company culture

1. Do you enjoy our company's culture?

2. Do you feel connected to your co-workers?

3. Do you enjoy working with your colleagues?

4. Do you feel your colleagues work as a team?

5. Do you feel valued by the company for your contributions?

6. Are you satisfied working for the company?

7. Do you feel the company is open to change?

8. How well does the company communicate news and important information?

9. When problems arise, how well does the company handle them?

10. Would you describe all staff meetings as essential?

Job satisfaction

1. How happy are you at work?

2. Do you feel your work is meaningful and valued?

3. Do you think you're given enough freedom to decide how to do your work?

4. Do you know what is needed to meet your goals and objectives?

5. Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your job well?

6. Do you find your workload reasonable?

7. Do you think that work is distributed evenly across your team?

8. How well would you say the job description matches your current roles?

9. Are your daily tasks closely related to your professional skills?

10. Would you recommend our company to friends and family?

11. Would you apply for your job again if you had to do it all over?

12. Do you feel like all of your talents are being used in your position?

13. Does your job cause you stress?

Professional growth

1. Do you feel that you are growing professionally?

2. Do you get the learning and development opportunities that you want?

3. Do you have room to grow within the company?

4. Do you feel that your job allows you to develop new skills?

5. Do you feel like your job utilizes your skills as much as it could?

6. Do you feel the company offers adequate opportunities for promotions and career development?

7. Do you see a path at the company to advance your career?

Manager relationship

1. Does your manager ask for feedback and value when it's offered?

2. Does your direct manager value your opinions?

3. Do you feel like your roles and efforts are appreciated by your supervisors?

4. Does management seem invested in the team's success?

5. Do you feel management is transparent?

Compensation and benefits

1. Do you feel your benefits package is competitive?

2. Does the company provide enough benefits when it comes to your well-being and mental health?

3. Is your pay rate enough to keep you from taking a second job?

4. How likely are you to get leave time when you need it?

Happy employees are **12%** more productive than unhappy employees

5. How much would you like to change about your current benefits package?

Work-life balance

1. What is your stress level on a typical workday?

2. Do you feel like you have been offered the support and flexibility necessary to thrive at work?

3. Do you have to work at night and on the weekend to get your job done?

4. Does the company provide you with enough PTO?

5. Have you ever canceled plans of a personal nature to handle your workload?

These questions are a jumping-off point. You can always ask more or just a portion of them, depending on the topic you're interested in knowing more about.

Importance of employee satisfaction surveys

Finding out how your employees really feel and understanding why they feel that way will help

HR identify areas that need improvement. Employee satisfaction surveys offer valuable insight into what employees want and need when it comes to enhancing the employee experience, boosting employee engagement and increasing productivity throughout the organization.

They're simple and effective, and provide a lot of data HR pros can use to improve the employee experience and productivity.

Some of the benefits of these **surveys include:**

- **Providing real-time insights** – Employee satisfaction surveys tell you how employees truly feel – not how management thinks they feel – now. HR can report the findings to the executive team, and they can act upon the findings in a short time, making decisions and planning interventions that will bring about effective results.

- **Showing employees the organization cares about them** – When companies do periodic employee satisfaction surveys, it opens a two-way communication line with their people. It also shows employees the organization cares about them, making them feel heard. This builds trust and transparency which is vital for growth and change, and boosts employee engagement.

- **Highlighting areas that need help.** Allowing employees to give anonymous feedback means management is hearing honest feedback. This provides the organization with a chance to identify areas that need improvement and come up with employee-guided solutions that work. When people see that management is listening to them, it makes them feel

valued and happy, increasing their motivation to work harder and better.

- **Reducing trial-and-error fixes.** Periodic, targeted employee satisfaction surveys allow organizations to target fixes, reducing the need for crafting multiple solutions. They can get to the fix faster which saves time and money. And when employees see they were part of the solution, they feel ownership in the business.

- Increasing productivity. Feeling a part of the company means employees are more engaged and, therefore, more productive. They want the company to succeed.

- **Reducing turnover.** "Employees are 87% less likely to quit a job if they are engaged in the workplace," according to a recent study by Wellable. Providing employees with a culture where they feel listened to, valued and engaged means organizations will retain their employees, their knowledge and their investment in them.

- **Creating happier places to work.** Getting continuous feedback from employees helps organizations provide employees with great experiences. That translates to happier places to work where employees can thrive

Employee satisfaction and employee engagement aren't interchangeable

One important factor to note is employee satisfaction surveys and employee engagement surveys are two different measurements.

They both aid in making organizations better places to work, but they're not the same thing.

Employee satisfaction surveys are "direct feedback tools that let employees share their opinions and experiences," according to Indeed. They measure the contentment of an organization's employees and identify areas that need improvement. Employee "satisfaction is tied to elements such as compensation, benefits, recognition, work-life balance, workload, company culture, effective leadership, etc. Ensuring [an organization] meets both the material and intangible needs for employee satisfaction is critical for retaining top talent and *improving engagement* in [an] organization," details SurveyMonkey.

Employee engagement surveys are "designed to measure and assess how motivated and engaged [an organization's] employees are to perform their best at work each day," according to PeoplePulse. They provide insight into how employees feel about their work and the overall environment.

The goal for any company is to have engaged employees, and satisfaction plays a crucial role in that. Note: A satisfied employee can be disengaged. But a dissatisfied employee can never be engaged unless they somehow change and become satisfied.

Developing employee satisfaction surveys

There are no one-size-fits-all instructions for creating effective employee satisfaction surveys. The development of a survey depends on the organization and what they want to garner from the results of the survey.

But here are some general steps employers can use to customize their survey:

1. **Select survey parameters:** First and foremost, HR pros need to know what their company wants to measure before they can create survey questions. Basic topics to survey can include things like the actual job, the employee's direct supervisors, peers, professional development, benefits, compensation, company leadership, etc. From there, HR pros can delve deeper into these topics with additional questions on specific aspects.

2. **Write questions:** Keep survey questions short, friendly and easy to understand. Don't use jargon. Make the questions conversational, but direct – don't add extra information. Only ask a question once. Even if it can be asked in a different way using different words, don't. Only ask one question at a time. And use a mix of question types – open-ended, multiple choice, rating scale, ranking, etc. – to get the best results.

3. **Keep surveys short:** Now there is an exception to this step. The first employee satisfaction survey conducted will be on the longer side because it'll be used as the base survey that you can compare future surveys. This survey should be comprehensive and include up to 30 questions, advises SurveyMonkey. Warn employees the first survey is long and that their full participation is wanted and appreciated. After that, try to keep follow-up surveys to 10 questions to avoid too much data and survey fatigue from employees.

4. **Test out the survey:** Have executives and supervisors do a survey test run. The last thing HR pros want to happen is a technical glitch or users encountering questions that are confusing.

Running your survey

Surveys aren't something you can sit down and whip out in an hour after lunch. They take meeting with key people in the organization to figure out what you're going to test and why. Then there is the crafting of the survey, getting feedback on the survey from the key people and implementation of the feedback.

After all the time and effort HR pros put into developing their employee satisfaction surveys, they want to make sure they're effective and successful in gathering the desired data. To do that:

- **Emphasize surveys are anonymous**: It's important to let employees know with every survey that their responses are anonymous, otherwise some people may not participate. And you want each and every employee to participate to get a true gauge of how the entire workforce is feeling.

- **Be transparent:** Let employees know at the beginning of every survey what's being measured and why. It encourages participation. And let them know approximately when you'll be sharing the results of the survey with them.

- **Offer incentives:** Unfortunately, cash is king when it comes to encouraging the most responses, according to SurveyMonkey. Monetary incentives can include anything

from cash to gift cards to coupons. Nonmonetary incentives typically include thank-you gifts like company swag. If there isn't a budget for a little monetary incentive, make sure the nonmonetary incentive has "universal appeal" to the target audience.

- **Remind employees of the deadline:** Two weeks is a good time frame to give employees for taking an online survey. This way people who have paid time off can participate when they return. What's vital about the deadline is sending a reminder a few days before it. People get busy and forget. A friendly reminder can get the stragglers to submit their surveys.

There are numerous tools available that HR pros can use to create and run their surveys. To figure out which software solution is best for your purposes, Connecteam suggests asking:

- Is it easy for HR pros and employees to use?

- Can you customize it?

- Does it offer multiple types of questions?

- Are templates offered that you could build off?

- Can you send surveys and receive feedback in real-time?

- Does it offer performance metrics?

- Is it cost-friendly?

- How is its customer support?

Evaluating survey results

Now that all the survey results are in, it's time to do something with the data collected.

What's the best way to go about analyzing the survey results?

Follow these best practices:

- **Quantify the data**. Numeric scores are easier for most people to understand, compare and identify patterns/trends. So whenever possible, work with concrete numbers.

- **Break data down into groups.** Whether it's by departments, demographics or whatever, segmenting data will provide a deeper insight.

- **Find patterns and trends.** For example, let's say most employees are happy with your health benefits. But when you take a deeper dive into the category you notice it's the younger employees who are happy with them, your older employees aren't. You can delve even deeper into the category by looking at something like older employees' salaries to see if there's a pattern there with being unhappy with health benefits.

- **Determine if the results are statistically significant.** You want to know if your results have a certain level of accuracy. Take, for example, getting 500 finished surveys from a possible 1,000 employees. And you find 80% of your workforce is satisfied with compensation. Not bad, right? Wrong. After further analysis, you see 90% of the respondents were male when 50% of your workforce is female. Therefore, it's an inaccurate representation of the company's total population and isn't statistically significant.

- **Compare the results to your benchmark survey.** Remember earlier when we said the first survey would be longer? That's because you'll compare future employee satisfaction survey results to it. For example, say your initial survey found junior employees didn't feel listened to. You implemented new strategies to change that. In a follow-up survey, junior employees say they feel like they're being listened to. Now, you know the strategies you implemented worked.

Acting on survey results

Once survey data is analyzed, it's time for HR and leadership to do something with the results.

Here are steps you can use to maximize the benefits of employee satisfaction surveys:

- **Thank employees:** After the deadline has passed, send a thank-you email to employees for taking the time out of their day to fill out the survey. Include a brief explanation of why it was so important, when you expect to have the results ready and what you plan to do with the information.

- **Meet with management:** Once the data is compiled, gather supervisors and managers together and review the results. Discuss what the results mean to their department and what actions they think should be taken for their team and the company as a whole to increase employee satisfaction. Managers must understand what the data says and how it affects their team dynamics before the results can be presented to everyone.

- **Create a concrete action plan:** Now it's time to prioritize the results and create an action plan to achieve the goals. Note:

It may not be realistic to tackle everything the survey uncovered. Think about prioritizing goals according to which will have the greatest impact.

- **Discuss results with the workforce:** After leadership, management and HR have scoured the results together, identified areas that need improvement and come up with an action plan, it's time to share the results with the entire workforce. Provide the narrative of the results: the what, when, where and why. It's more impactful than just spitting out a litany of data. Plus, it allows employees to better understand the big picture.

- **Follow up:** After you have implemented your action plan, send out follow-up surveys to see if the plan achieved its goals. With every subsequent survey, HR can drill down even further into workplace issues.

When employees see their organization taking the time to send employee satisfaction surveys and then act on their responses, it makes them feel valued which in turn creates a happier and more productive workforce. And employees who are happy and satisfied are more likely to stay, decreasing turnover and onboarding costs.

So, while it may cost some time and money to do regular satisfaction surveys, they more than pay for themselves when it comes to productivity and retention.

Read this article online ⧉

The Cost of NonCompliance

$191K

DOJ: Company must pay $191K penalty for biased job ads

Who was involved: Honeywell International, Inc, a multinational conglomerate corporation headquartered in Charlotte, North Carolina, and an undisclosed number of job applicants.

What happened: According to an investigation by the DOJ's Immigrant and Employee Rights Section, the company discriminated against potential job applicants by posting 43 job ads on a college's recruitment platform that only permitted U.S. citizens to apply for internships. The investigation found the job ads deterred qualified students from applying for internships because of their citizenship status, and in many cases, the citizenship status restrictions also blocked students from applying or even meeting with company recruiters.

Result: The company had to pay a $191,995 civil penalty. Under a consent decree with the DOJ, it also had to:

- Stop engaging in discrimination based on citizenship.

- Remove references to citizenship status, immigration status or visa categories from job ads.

- Ensure that all employees with any role in the recruiting process, including writing job ads and screening applicants, receive training to comply with the law.

- Review employment policies and revise them to prohibit discrimination in recruiting, hiring and termination processes, as necessary.

Info: [Honeywell International settlement](#) ⧉, 5/23/23.

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[Read more The Cost Of Noncompliance in your Membership Dashboard](#) ⧉

38 employee engagement ideas to boost morale and productivity

by Michele McGovern

Employee engagement is critical to every organization's success — so you likely need employee engagement ideas *all the time*.

Just 32% of employees are fully engaged at work right now, according to a Gallup index. And almost 20% are actively disengaged. This great divide between full-on engagement and total disengagement can cause big problems in any organization.

Engagement vs. disengagement

Employee engagement looks different at every company, but it's commonly seen as employees' commitment to work and loyalty to their employer. You see employees with positive attitudes toward their company, colleagues and customers, and who want to to help contribute to overall successes.

Engaged employees contribute to the better good, helping themselves, colleagues and the company succeed.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, disengaged employees often have negative attitudes toward their work, the organization and sometimes colleagues and customers. You'd usually see employees working slowly, lacking interest in their work, being easily and prolongingly distracted, and doing the minimum.

Disengaged employees don't care about their work, the company,

colleagues, clients — *pretty much everything associated with working — and don't fully contribute on a day-to-day basis.*

Specifically, disengaged employees have 37% higher absenteeism rate, 18% lower productivity rate and 15% lower profitability rate than their engaged counterparts. Put that into dollars, and it's a third of the disengaged employee's salary wasted every year, Gallup researchers found.

Employee engagement ideas at work

That's why the need for employee engagement ideas never ends.

HR professionals and front-line managers want to keep employees engaged. And you want to re-engage employees who've lost interest

in and passion for their work and company.

Here are 38 employee engagement ideas:

1. Foster open communication

Idea: Encourage and foster open communication.

Implement: Get company executives to regularly communicate higher level information (in simple language) that affects people and processes. Ask managers to share department level information weekly and maintain an open door for employee feedback.

Effects: Employees will feel more comfortable speaking up and asking questions when they see communication flow easily and candidly.

2. Create ways to collaborate

Idea: Create more opportunities for professional collaboration across departments, functions and seniority levels.

Implement: HR can create more inter-departmental teams to explore, design and execute employee initiatives. Encourage department and team leaders to invite representatives from other departments they work with closely to be part of projects.

Effects: Employees who are part of initiatives outside their individual areas get a more holistic view of operations — and often find deeper meaning at work and interest in their company.

3. Offer development opportunities

Idea: Offer more opportunities for career development.

Implement: Build a library of online or on-demand training geared at helping employees learn general skills that can help them advance in any area — for instance, leadership, decision-making, problem-solving and goal-setting.

Effects: Employees become more engaged with organizations that show they care about their learning professional development and career growth.

4. Create and revisit career paths

Idea: Help front-line managers work with their direct reports to create, review and update career goals and progress.

Implement: Give managers tools and time to lay out each employee's career aspirations. During regular performance reviews, map out how employees can develop skills and pursue opportunities toward those goals.

Effects: Employees stay loyal to leaders and organizations that invest in their future.

5. Clarify purpose

Idea: Clarify the purpose behind assigned work.

Implement: Make it clear to employees the rationale behind their work. Even better, describe their contribution in the context of the larger project or program and the company's vision.

Effects: Employees who see how their contributions impact their job and organization's success are more committed to doing their jobs well.

6. Actively listen

Idea: Actively listen to employee concerns and ideas.

Implement: Create open dialogues through one-on-ones, town hall meetings and online portals to capture employees' ideas, concerns and questions. Get upper level management involved in addressing what's uncovered.

Effects: You make employees feel valued and understood when you solicit and welcome feedback — and more importantly, act on it.

7. Communicate, commit to vision

Idea: Communicate, celebrate and continually get commitment to the company vision.

Implement: Give employees (and customers) a visual reminder of your company vision everywhere — signs on walls, below your logo, in electronic correspondence, on social media placements and posts,

etc. Celebrate success that directly impact the vision. Ask employees for their commitment to the vision.

Effects: Employees will stay engaged when they see how their individual commitment makes an impact on organizational success.

8. Match interests

Idea: Match employee interests in their jobs and tasks.

Implement: Find out employees' preferences and greatest interests in their jobs and tasks. Encourage managers to assign tasks that match those whenever possible. But regularly review their preferences, as they change over time.

Effects: People work harder when they are interested in what they're doing.

9. Create healthy tension

Idea: Create a healthy level of competition.

Implement: Hold employees to high, but reasonable, standards so they seldom get bored and almost always strive to reach goals. Offer rewards for reaching goals and create levels of accountability if expectations aren't met.

Effects: Employees remain productive when they feel they can reach goals and be rewarded for that.

10. Involve employees in hiring

Idea: Involve employees in the hiring process.

Implement: When possible, bring employee(s) who will be impacted by the new hire in on the hiring process. Invite them to sit in on and participate in the interviews. Train

them on the types of questions they can and can't ask. Let them have a voice in the final selection.

Effects: Being involved makes employees feel appreciated and useful — and you get valuable insight to make a better choice.

11. Recognize and reward good work

Idea: Recognize and reward the best work.

Implement: Never miss an opportunity to point out and appreciate good work. But make a big deal out of the best work. Give employees public recognition (if they're comfortable with it) and reward appropriately.

Effects: You'll boost morale and light a fire under employees to continue to do great work.

12. Celebrate work highlights

Idea: Celebrate team and individual accomplishments, plus special anniversaries and milestones.

Implement: Schedule time at least quarterly to celebrate — perhaps with food and camaraderie — team accomplishments, employee goals, work anniversaries and milestones. You don't have to hand out rewards then. Just do some public celebrating to show you noticed, care about and are proud of what employees do.

Effects: Recognizing employees often makes them feel they work for a good company and good people.

13. Celebrate life events

Idea: Recognize and celebrate events that are important to people outside of work.

Implement: Congratulate employees on life events such as birthdays,

weddings, engagements and births. Also ask them to share personal triumphs – such as completing in an athletic event, participating in a cultural event, graduating, getting certified, buying a home, etc. — so you can share their good news and everyone can congratulate or compliment them.

Effects: You can build a tighter sense of community when leaders and employees celebrate each other's personal accomplishments.

14. Make people feel important

Idea: Take time to make others feel important (formally and informally).

Implement: There's a difference between feeling important and feeling appreciated. Importance is about relevance. Bring up employees' and teams' past successes and contributions to others in meetings or individually. Reiterate the impact they had on current conditions and why it was important.

Effects: Employees will relish in the attention and feel good about the positive things they've done — and can do going forward.

15. Add some fun

Idea: Plan fun events in the workplace for employees to choose to participate in.

Implement: Schedule breaks and lunches with board games and puzzles for employees to work on together. Organize potluck lunches with themes. Have a picnic catered, and set up outdoor activities such as cornhole and frisbee. Bring a food truck on site and give employees a longer break to enjoy time to chat.

Effects: Employees will feel appreciated and relieved from work stress.

16. Upgrade the workspace

Idea: Improved work spaces to make them more inviting.

Implement: Try to add plants and colorful artwork to otherwise dull and gray work areas. Invite employees to put their personal touches on their workspaces. Or give them the opportunity to collaborate on what to do to improve the space — and run with their conceivable ideas.

Effects: Moods will brighten when the workplace is brighter and more inviting.

17. Lean on mentors

Idea: Create or improve a mentor program.

Implement: Ask employees to serve as mentors to new employees, those who want to advance professionally and anyone who wants a mentor. Bolster an employee peer mentor program by giving mentors time and tools to train. Then give them scheduled opportunities to mentor, plus the organic opportunities that will arise with their mentee.

Effects: Employees will likely be more interested in growing at your company and learn more while part of a mentor program.

18. Connect personally

Idea: Make daily efforts to connect with colleagues.

Implement: It may sound cliché, but small things matter. Saying hello and goodbye to people you know and people you will get to know means something. Address them by their names. Even better, ask about their weekend, hobby, significant others (bonus: know and use their family members' names), or anything that's

important to them. You do it, others will, too. Soon enough, everyone will feel like they have a work family.

Effects: Employees will care more about work when those at work care more about them.

19. Let employees praise each other

Idea: Give employees tools and time to recognize, thank and congratulate each other.

Implement: You can go high-tech or low-profile when equipping employees with tools to recognize each other for great work, contributions and help when it's most needed. There are many social recognition platforms to adopt, allowing people to shout out kudos and share stories. You can also hang a recognition board and sticky notes for visual shout-outs. Encourage front-line mangers to start or end meetings with time for peer praise and thanks.

Effects: Peer recognition creates a circle of goodwill and positivity.

20. Help employees address stress

Idea: Give employees opportunities and outlets to manage stress.

Implement: Invite employees to join a group – but don't make it mandatory – with a facilitator, who is ideally a clinician and makes it a safe space to talk about struggles in and out of work. One of our experts calls these kind of meetings Conscious Conversations. Even better, ask employees to define their "safe space." They might make rules such as: No judgment. No politics. Respect for each other. Nothing leaves the room.

Effects: When employees can talk openly about struggles with stress, they'll likely share strategies to overcome it. Also, just getting

concerns out in the open helps normalize and alleviate stress.

21. Ask employees for insight

Idea: Ask employees for their thoughts and ideas on projects.

Implement: Ask employees for their opinions on how to handle a project, solve a problem, create something new — or pretty much anything your team will tackle. This is different than getting feedback. This is including their ideas to shape the future.

Effects: Employees will feel like a bigger part of the organization when you solicit their expertise and opinions — and use them.

22. Rate leadership

Idea: Ask employees for feedback on leadership.

Implement: At least twice a year, give employees an anonymous survey, asking questions related to their leaders and leadership decisions. It's not meant to be a gripe session, but it's important to solicit criticism (and maybe praise) that they might be otherwise reluctant to give publicly. Even more important, follow up, relaying what you heard and explaining what you'll try to change and what can't be changed and why.

Effects: When employees feel they have opportunities to give feedback up the chain of command, they'll become more comfortable with constructive criticism and speaking up when they have good ideas.

23. Regulate work/life balance

Idea: Ensure employees can manage their work/life balance.

Implement: Go beyond encouraging a work/life balance for employees. Help them regulate it. In your regular

one-on-ones, ask employees to rate their work/life balance. Work with them to create a workload that allows them to meet goals and maintain their outside life, recognizing the scale will tip temporarily in either direction.

Effects: Employees will be more willing to work harder for an organization that recognizes that sometimes they must — and will — put their personal lives first.

24. Promote work/life integration

Idea: Help employees understand and accept work/life integration.

Implement: A little different from work/life balance — which separates the two — work/life integration sees no distinction between the two: They both must coexist in harmony. Find out employees' preference — balance or integration — and work with them individually to make theirs work best. For instance, an integrator might prefer to handle email after hours because he or she is less stressed and better equipped to tackle them then. But a balancer may prefer four, 10-hour days with no overlap on life or work.

Effects: Options improve job satisfaction.

25. Provide more flexibility

Idea: Provide flexible work hours and spaces.

Implement: For roles that can be done remotely or hybrid, offer the flexibility of working in different places and on different schedules. Even if employees aren't physically engaged in a workplace, flexible work arrangements increase employee engagement. When you allow employees to have more control over their schedules and locations, you tell them you trust

their judgment and abilities to handle work.

Effects: Employees who have flexible, hybrid work schedules have a stronger sense of loyalty to their company than people who work on-site full-time, according to research from Prudential Financial Services.

26. Measure output more than input

Idea: Shift from input-focused performance expectations to output-focused expectations.

Implement: Furthering flexibility, change how you rate performance. Rather than require a certain number of hours, types of reports and quantity of tasks, look at what's produced. Let employees have more control over how their jobs get done. And, as long as it gets done to meet time, quality and quantity expectations, let them maintain their autonomy.

Effects: Autonomy is one of the greatest influencers on job satisfaction and engagement. The more employees have, the more they'll be happy with their jobs.

27. Support volunteering

Idea: Give employees opportunities and time to volunteer.

Implement: Create policies that allow employees to participate with volunteer organizations while being paid. You might ask them for ideas on organizations your company can support with time and resources. Or you might let them pick their favorite philanthropic causes.

Effects: When employees have a positive impact on causes they care about, they'll likely have a positive experience in the workplace that allows them to do that.

28. Create space for socializing

Idea: Build space and time into your workplace for employees to be social.

Implement: Set aside space where employees can interact for mostly social — less professional — purposes. For instance, stock the break room with board and card games. Set up a picnic area outside for casual lunches. Set up a virtual Zoom room where remote and hybrid employees can get together for fun activities such as cooking classes or virtual games.

Effects: For one, employees will likely have more fun at work. From there, they'll see and contribute to a more positive company culture.

29. Make technology accessible

Idea: Ensure that employees have the technology tools to do their jobs well.

Implement: Invest in the right technology to make employees as efficient as possible. More importantly, secure the IT systems and support to ensure they have adequate access and function to always do their work. Very few things are more frustrating to employees than not having the tools to do their work day-in, day-out.

Effects: When companies invest in technology, employees feel the company has invested in them and their success.

30. Respond immediately

Idea: Respond to employees' issues, concerns and feedback immediately.

Implement: Create a system — automated, if possible and necessary — that lets employees know you've received their submitted issues,

concerns or feedback immediately. Then, have protocols in place to address them personally within an hour. Ideally, this is all automated so you can create reminders to act and follow up until it's resolved.

Effects: When you take employees' concerns very seriously with immediate response, they'll recognize they work for a caring organization.

31. Offer the right benefits

Idea: Offer benefits that benefit all of your employees.

Implement: Survey employees every year to find the best, most-suitable benefits to offer. Look at your usage data to determine which benefits employees use and at what rates. Then align your benefits offering to match their needs. For instance, the demand for pet insurance has skyrocketed in recent years. Meanwhile, gym memberships go unused. What do your employees want and use?

Effects: Yes, employees are attracted to organizations that have benefits they need. But they're more attracted to organizations that care about — and respond to — what they want.

32. Invest in managers

Idea: Train new managers to be leaders. Re-train existing managers to lead people.

Implement: Many managers are in leadership positions because they were good workers, so they know how to do their employees' jobs really well. But they usually aren't equipped to be a leader, coach and mentor. Invest more resources and time into training new managers to be leaders of people, processes and intelligence. Offer continuing training in softer skills such as coaching, problem-solving and

emotional intelligence, plus rewards for participating and implementing practices from it.

Effects: Managers have the biggest impact on employee engagement and satisfaction. Make them better leaders and you'll have more engaged employees (and all of the benefits of that).

33. Build Employee Resource Groups

Idea: Promote Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) and support the creation of more groups.

Implement: Give employees tools, time and resources to create new or more ERGs. You might host an ERG fair in a break room annually (much like a college activities fair held each semester to bolster memberships). Ask employees regularly for new ERG ideas. Let ERGs take responsibility for their participation, activities, goodwill and growth.

Effects: When employees feel part of a group of similarly minded or situated colleagues, they're more engaged at work.

34. Increase movement

Idea: Increase more physical well-being opportunities.

Implement: Encourage walking meetings. Offer on-site yoga or cycling classes. Encourage employees to develop ERGs around movement. Then support those with resources.

Effects: A healthy workforce is more productive, engaged and involved.

35. Promote mental well-being

Idea: Increase mental well-being awareness and improve mental well-being benefits.

Implement: Normalize mental wellness by giving employees resources that help them understand their mental well-being, identify issues and access resources to address any. Furthermore, create opportunities for leaders and employees to talk about struggles with balancing it all and taking time to focus on mental well-being. This is important because nearly 80% of employees say workplace stress affects their mental well-being, and relationships with family, friends and co-workers, according to Mental Health America's Mind the Workplace Report.

Effects: When you normalize mental well-being and the need to achieve it, employees can more easily address their issues and needs for help. That way, they'll be as effective as possible on the job.

36. Manage change

Idea: Create protocols and processes for organizational change.

Implement: Work across departments and management teams to create (rebuild or improve) an Organizational Change Roadmap. While it can't encompass all aspects of change — after all, so much is unpredictable — it can help guide who makes decisions, with what information, when and how everything is communicated. It can also help determine timelines based on the degree of changes. Most importantly, this will help employees know what to expect whether the change is sudden or expected.

Effects: Predictability in the throes of change is comforting for employees. You can assure, to some degree, what will happen next, furthering their loyalty to the company.

37. Create traditions

Idea: Create, document and allow traditions to evolve.

Implement: Document your existing company traditions, why they're celebrated and how you normally do that. Take a closer look at how the traditions might evolve now, considering the current workplace experiences and situations. This is important because a positive culture is made up of shared experiences and meaningful traditions.

Effects: Shared experience and traditions build affinity to the company and its people.

38. Foster friendship

Idea: Create opportunities for employees to make friends at work.

Implement: Having a best friend at work is strongly linked to positive business outcomes, such as higher profitability, increased safety and employee retention, Gallup researchers found. So host a catered, social lunch with games. Promote and support ERGs and their functions. Bring back the company picnic. Ask employees for ideas on other social events and give them the reins to organize.

Effects: More friendship builds increased engagement.

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Meet Our Editors

Our editors read and vet hundreds of sources and hand-select the most relevant, practical content. Then we add our seasoned perspective and deliver actionable insights to help you understand what today's trends mean for your business.

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Michele McGovern writes. A lot. These days, she covers HR, digging deep into company culture, DEI, leadership, management and the everchanging world of work. In the years between getting a BA in journalism from a state school and writing about HR, she wrote about big-city crime for a wire service and small-town life for local newspapers. She's a mediocre mom, decent wife, wannabe athlete and consummate pursuer of fun - on land, snow and water. Follow her on Twitter @sheknowswork. Find her on LinkedIn @michele-mcgovern-writer

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