



What's New in **BENEFITS & I** **COMPENSATION**

The leading service to keep benefits managers up to date

August 16, 2021

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HRMORNING

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With **HRMorning** arriving in your inbox, you will never miss critical stories on labor laws, benefits, retention and onboarding strategies.

HRMorning, part of the SuccessFuel Network, provides the latest HR and benefits and employment law news for HR professionals in the trenches of small-to-medium-sized businesses. Rather than simply regurgitating the day's headlines, **HRMorning** delivers actionable insights, helping HR execs understand what HR trends mean to their business.

Social determinants of health help improve benefits offerings

■ *Open enrollment fast approaching*

Open enrollment begins in October, which means now is the ideal time to start looking at different ways to improve employee benefits packages.

One approach many firms are taking is looking at the Social Determinants of Health (SDOH) to prioritize what programs to implement.

Environmental conditions

SDOH refers to the environmental conditions that affect people's quality of life and health outcomes – whether an individual has access to safe housing, transportation, job opportunities and nutritious food. By

analyzing the social risk employees and their immediate communities are exposed to, Benefits pros can more effectively refine benefits packages and design location-specific programs that better serve employees' needs.

Identifying social risk and quantifying opportunities give Benefits pros the ability to enhance benefits packages to help improve the lives of employees, particularly those experiencing greater socioeconomic disparities and/or health inequities.

They can apply these measurements to SDOH and leverage that data

(Please turn to Benefits offerings ... Page 2)

MEANINGFUL WORK

Quit rate highest since 2020: What people want

With a record number of job openings comes a record number of workers leaving their jobs.

In fact, in April alone, 4 million people left their jobs, according to the DOL. Making the "quit rate" 2.7% of employed people – the highest the rate has been since 2000.

Better opportunities

The quit rate was highest in the leisure and hospitality industries. And while this mass employee exodus causes turnover issues and business disruptions, economists say employees seeking better opportunities is a sign of a healthy labor market.

The reason for so many resignations?

The pandemic gave people time to think and rethink what they want from their jobs and their lives.

It gave them time to appreciate the extra time with their families or their hobbies. And now they're looking at what their job means to them and if they're valued at work.

Yes, people are leaving their jobs for more money, but they're also in search of more flexibility and happiness.

So when you're touting your benefits, put it in the context of how your employees' work accommodates their lives and happiness.

Info: bit.ly/LeaveJobs632

Benefits offerings ...

(continued from Page 1)

to better match new and existing intervention programs to employees' social needs and health equity drivers. This leads to better health outcomes and business performance – higher retention rates, more productive recruitment, improved presenteeism and lower absenteeism.

Trends shaping benefits

Getting a good understanding of how social risk impacts employees requires identifying, reviewing and tracking a wide range of data points. Here are three trends to help narrow down benefits this year:

1. Shift to remote work also applies to health care. Today's workforce is highly distributed, with more companies embracing remote and hybrid work models as the new norm. The notion of virtual business has also spilled over into other aspects of employees' lives, including the authorization of telemedicine on the majority of health plans. Employees

want this to remain, so it's critical healthcare benefits include improved telemedicine as an everyday, safe, effective and convenient option.

2. Social support programs remain critical. Just as telemedicine emerged as a widespread healthcare option, social support programs quickly became employees' lifelines. Programs that offer education and support regarding food and nutrition as medicine, medical transportation, pharmacy refill literacy, copay coupons and temp housing remain crucial to recovery post-pandemic. Benefits pros should weave these programs into their overall benefits plans to provide timely support and foster a more engaged, healthy workforce.

3. Mental and behavioral health support is vital. There always has been and will continue to be a dire need for more mental health programs. The pandemic highlighted this weakness in our healthcare system. In 2021 and beyond, employee benefit design must improve access to mental and behavioral health support. The advent of expanded telemedicine options can be leveraged to provide more accessible, professional counseling options and mental health care.

Future of benefits

Now's the time to analyze the social risk of your employees and the communities where they live and work. Not only does today's workforce deserve benefits designed to support them, but employee assistance programs like pet insurance and legal assistance are no longer sufficient for boosting engagement and retention.

By establishing a new, corporate focus on SDOH and its role in worsening clinical conditions and missed workdays, Benefits pros have the power to improve employees' health, happiness and productivity.

Ryan Bosch, MD, FACP, is president and co-founder of Socially Determined, the social risk analytics company for organizations committed to addressing the SDOH, and is also a practicing physician in Reston, VA.

SHARPEN YOUR BENEFITS JUDGMENT

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

■ Discrimination: Company fired worker out on medical leave

"Hi, Courtney. Thanks for stopping by," said Benefits Manager Betty Murphy.

"Sure," said Courtney. "What's up? Did my doctor send you the paperwork you needed?"

"Yes. That's not the reason I asked you to stop by," said Betty. "I wanted to let you know that Harper just handed in his resignation."

"What?" asked Courtney. "Now what'll happen? We job share. I can't work a full-time job because of my autoimmune disorder."

"I know," said Betty. "I've talked to the powers that be and they've agreed to let you work part time."

"Oh. OK," said Courtney.

Changed accommodation

Eventually, Courtney returned to full-time status, but the time she spent in her car took a toll on her.

She went out on medical leave and her doctor restricted her to no more than 30 hours of work a week. So, she asked to job share again.

"Hi, Courtney," said Betty. "I wanted you to know the company said no to another job share arrangement. They said it wouldn't be a good business decision."

"Then I guess I'll just stay on leave until I can physically return to work," said Courtney.

After some time, Courtney remained on medical leave and the company eventually fired her.

She sued, alleging an unlawful failure to accommodate her disability under the ADA.

Who won?

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

HR MORNING'S
What's New in **BENEFITS & COMPENSATION**

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: RENEE COCCHI

rcocchi@HRMorning.com

EDITORS: BRIAN BINGAMAN
MICHELE MCGOVERN
RACHEL MUCHA

PRODUCTION EDITOR: JEN ERB

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR: CURT BROWN

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Fines skyrocket the more companies blatantly take advantage of workers

This regular feature highlights recent case settlements, court awards and fines against companies. It serves as a reminder to keep benefits policies in order.

Home healthcare co. has to pay \$1.6M to 242 workers

What happened: Neoly Home Care LLC in Harrisburg, PA, got creative with pay rates to make it seem like they paid their employees overtime when they worked more than 40 hours in a workweek.

What people did: The DOL investigated and found the home healthcare company paid straight-time wages for all the hours employees worked, regardless of the number of hours worked per week.

Result: In addition to having to pay 242 workers \$1.6 million in back pay, Neoly was hit with civil money penalties of \$46,376 for the willful nature of the violations.

Info: bit.ly/HomeHealth632

Restaurant misclassified, cheated workers out of pay

What happened: Rancho Loco Grill and Bar in Red Wing, MN, and Rancho Loco Mexican Grill and Bar in Cannon Falls, MN, paid waiters who worked 60 hours a week for 30 hours. Cooks and dishwashers who worked 10 hours a day were paid a flat salary.

What people did: The DOL's investigation found the employer broke the law deliberately by denying workers minimum wage and overtime protections because they were wrongly classified as an independent contractor. The employer also frequently required servers to report early for prep work but only allowed them to "punch in" when the first customer arrived. These practices led to the employer paying for far fewer hours than employees worked, triggering

minimum wage violations. The restaurants also failed to maintain accurate records of employee wages and the number of hours employees worked.

Result: Owners Ramon Ruelas, Jorge Arcos, Nancy Arcos and Medardo Arcos were ordered to pay a total of \$435,785 in unpaid overtime and minimum wages as well as interest, and agreed to comply with the Fair Labor Standards Act in the future.

Info: bit.ly/Restaurant632

Construction co. skipped out on paying overtime

What happened: J S Plastering Inc. of San Diego paid overtime hours at straight-time rates, in unrecorded cash, instead of at the time-and-one-half rate the law requires when 40 hours are exceeded.

What people did: After a full 40-hour workweek – Monday through Friday – the construction company's workers often worked overtime on the weekends which they weren't adequately paid for.

Result: J S Plastering will pay 39 employees \$98,720 in overtime back wages and willful violation penalties of \$25,380.

Info: bit.ly/Construction632

Metal finishing co. fires worker out on FMLA

What happened: Precoat Metals – a division of Sequa Corp. – St. Louis fired an employee on protected FMLA leave without notice.

What people did: An investigation by the DOL's Wage and Hour Division confirmed the worker's FMLA eligibility.

Result: Sequa Corp. was made to pay the employee \$45,014 in back wages and benefits. The employee chose not to seek reinstatement.

Info: bit.ly/Metal632

■ **Report: Leaders, workers aren't on same page for mental health**

According to a recent report by health technology company Ginger, 96% of CEOs believe they're doing enough to support employees' mental health. However, only 69% of employees agree with that.

The disconnect between employees and company leaders continued when the report found that 69% of CEOs considered themselves accepting of mental health problems – but only 35% of employees agreed.

Above and beyond

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of employers are taking the opportunity to improve on their mental health offerings – 92%, according to Ginger's report.

But if you're unsure of where to start, here are three things Ginger CEO Russell Glass suggests.

1. **Go beyond an EAP.** Most employees expect mental health care to be included in their benefits packages, and a lot of companies have Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs). But Glass says EAPs are often limited in the resources they offer, and can take a lot of time for employees to get the help they need. Consider investing in virtual mental health support to make it quicker and more convenient for employees to get help.

2. **Communication is key.** Employees can't use mental health benefits if they don't know about them, Glass says. Make sure you're letting your people know about everything you offer, and tie programs in to their everyday needs (sleep, parenting, work/life balance) to grab their attention.

3. **Open discussions.** Employees will feel more comfortable asking for help if discussions about mental health struggles are normalized in the workplace. Glass suggests having leaders share some of their own difficulties to show employees they're not alone. Encouraging self-care days can help, too.

Cite: bit.ly/mental632

4 areas to consider when evaluating post-pandemic healthcare costs

As the U.S. starts to return to work and the new “normal,” there are four factors risk management expert Pete Edgmon says employers “need to be mindful of.” They are:

1. Employee demographics: Firms have to consider the nature of the company when evaluating health plan costs. For example, do employees do strenuous labor or do they work in a luxury office, or is the facility in an area where there’s a lot of illness, or lean or abundant benefits? Age and gender mix of employees also has to be taken into consideration.

That’s why cost analysis has to start with demographics. And company’s have to segment the data sets and subsets because accurate data analysis is critical to understanding the current and next year’s employee pool.

2. Medical elective deferrals: You can expect healthcare claims to rise over the next year because people put off medical procedures due to COVID-19. Now that many are vaccinated, they’ll be scheduling those procedures they put off.

So what firms need to do is assess

the amount of claims they had in 2020 to those in 2019, if they didn’t go down a lot, they shouldn’t rise a lot. But if they dropped, expect a jump.

Firm’s can expect a rise in musculoskeletal treatments due to the year of working from home.

3. Medical cost trends: Edgmon said, “Carriers have widely divergent forecasts on cost expectations, in part due to unclear data, but also because of unique issues with what part of the country the risk resides.” It’s predicted that firms can expect costs to increase between 6% to 8% over the next year.

Catalysts for medical costs trends include employee utilization and the macroeconomic inflation occurring in the U.S.

4. Competitive benefits: Be careful about cutting benefits to save costs, warned Edgmon. To attract talent firms need to stay competitive, but they also need to keep spending in check. Firms may want to put more toward pharmaceutical costs since it’s on the rise.

Info: bit.ly/HealthPlanCosts632

Healthcare costs

How will the COVID-19 hangover affect medical cost trends in 2022?

	2020	2021	2022
Preventive/diagnostic care	↓	↓	▬
Deferred care condition stayed the same	↓	↑	↑
Deferred care condition worsened	↓	↑	↑

Source: Medical cost trend: Behind the numbers 2022 by PwC Health Research Institute; bit.ly/MedCostTrend632

Encourage employees to stop putting off medical treatments. Issues that are allowed to worsen cost more to treat and will affect your healthcare costs.

3 questions you want to ask employees more often

As a manager, giving feedback isn’t just a one-way street.

The best leaders also ask employees for feedback on how they’re doing.

But that can present another problem: Most employees don’t jump at the chance to critique their managers.

Fortunately, you can make it easier on employees in your department by asking these effective questions:

‘How did I do on ... ?’

Narrow it down to a specific problem or situation you recently faced together.

For example: “How clear was the suggestion I proposed on researching a new dental benefits provider?”

Then sit back and listen. Mentally prepare yourself, and you’ll be more likely to listen to the good and the bad, and figure out what to do with both opinions.

‘What do you like about ... ?’

Ask employees what they liked about the monthly meeting or what worked well when you delegated a task. Was it your communication style or the timeliness?

The more specific you are about the topic, the more likely they’ll open up. Then you can dig deeper to really get to the usable feedback.

‘What don’t you like about ... ?’

Every employee has his or her own pet peeves with management and communication styles.

One team member may hate one-on-one meetings, while another hates email-only communication.

Either way, you’ve given them the OK to discuss these concerns – which they wouldn’t likely fess up to on their own.

Source: Forbes, bit.ly/2SpRyzs

Our readers come from a broad range of companies, both large and small. In this regular section, three of them share success stories you can adapt to fit your needs.

1 **Surveyed workforce before return to work**

The pandemic forced many of our people to work remotely. And when the time was right to start drafting a return-to-work plan, we needed to carefully consider the safety and comfort of our employees.

If there wasn't enough buy-in on returning to work, it could have a negative impact on morale and productivity.

So we sent a companywide email of the draft version of our policies and asked for employee input.

Every few months, we asked our people in a survey to rate on a scale of 1-10 how comfortable they were with the return-to-work plan.

Time to move

We knew it was time to make a move toward reopening when 94% responded with an eight or higher. The other 6% said they'd be anxious about returning, no matter what.

Another important question we asked: "How comfortable would you be if we stopped doing morning temp checks?" It got nines and 10s from 94%.

We also got some good suggestions when we asked if there's anything we should be doing to make the workplace safer.

When we reopened, we made sure to post plenty of signage around the building to remind everyone of the organization's COVID-19 safety rules.

So far, we haven't sent anyone home because of COVID-19 symptoms, and there have been no complaints.

(Barbara Irving, HR director, Moose International Inc., Mooseheart, IL)

**REAL
PROBLEMS
REAL
SOLUTIONS**

2 **Benefit: 'Global Day of Rest' helps stress**

Many of our employees developed some bad work habits at home during the pandemic – and the habits weren't the kind we would've imagined.

They'd work through lunchtime, plan and attend too many meetings and jam-pack their days by taking on more work and responsibility.

We could see some getting overwhelmed and burned out – even if they didn't see it or denied it.

We recognized it as a time for

leadership to step in and encourage employees to step back.

Share what you've done

That's why we called for one "Global Day of Rest" per quarter.

We asked all employees to *not* log in or otherwise work. The idea was for everyone to be off – so no one felt compelled to just check in or try to look extra ambitious.

Instead, we encouraged them to go out, do something they loved and show or tell us about it on our internal

social channels.

And we're happy to report that it's been a great success.

Employees love sharing photos and stories from their fun day.

As leaders, we know they're getting a much-deserved break from work.

(Ann Powell, Executive VP & HR Officer, Bristol Myers Squibb, spoke at The Conference Board's Organizational Impact on Social Change Issues online conference)

3 **This works better than an 'open door' policy**

Many managers who handle benefits and compensation say this to their employees and colleagues: "My door is always open."

The open-door policy suggests they're open to answering benefits questions or chatting with employees at any time.

And I've found it's not an effective policy at all!

In fact, it's quite the opposite. Who has the time for interruptions

throughout the day, especially when one question turns into a laundry list of them? And the "got a minute" interruptions never come at a good time.

What's more, some employees abuse the open-door policy, never learning to solve issues themselves.

Be proactive

On a manager's part, it's generally a lazy, passive way of communicating with others.

I don't recommend completely closing the door, but I did find more

appropriate approaches.

For instance, I like weekly one-on-one meetings and daily stand-up group meetings to stay ahead of issues. They help everyone – not just me – manage time better.

When I couple those with "office hours" – when employees know they can just come in – I do a better job of helping anyone who needs it.

(Kevin Kruse, Founder & CEO, LEADx, Philadelphia, is author of Great Leaders Have No Rules)

PAID TIME OFF

Benefits of company-wide vacation

Vacation time isn't entirely relaxing anymore. A modern employee taking time off from work may still find themselves inundated with emails, calls from their boss or even requests to complete quick tasks.

Connectivity and technology are the culprits behind this "always on" culture, and it can be damaging. If employees never get the chance to truly disconnect and recharge, they're going to burn out.

Some companies try to combat burnout by offering employees unlimited PTO, but being able to take more time off doesn't eliminate the urge to stay connected to work.

Like summer vacation

Wanting to solve this issue, Ariela Safira, CEO and founder of mental health platform Real, figured out a way for her employees to truly rest.

Every quarter, her company shuts down for one week, giving everyone a mandatory vacation.

With everyone out at the same time – and with no work happening that they're missing out on – Safira realized her employees could truly disconnect and enjoy their time off.

When employees go on vacations now, there's a hesitancy to come back to work and discuss their time off, since their colleagues have been hard at work the entire time.

Company-wide vacation eliminates that problem. Safira relates it to the feeling of a kid on summer vacation – all your peers are relaxing and having fun at the same time, and you share a bond with them because of that. Employees come back from their shared time off excited to swap vacation stories.

Rested and ready

For Safira, the logistics of shutting down for a week weren't too difficult to figure out – just planning ahead of time, and communication with clients about being out of office.

The impact on Safira's employees has been well worth it.

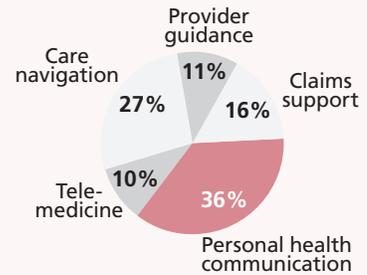
Since company-wide vacations have gone into effect, employees have felt less guilty about not working. While out of the office, they thought about work less than before, and came back feeling much more rested.

With the pandemic having made remote work the norm, separation between work and home is more

WHAT BENEFITS EXEC'S SAID

Which employee support tools do you want to try in 2022?

(Totals were rounded up.)



Source: Annual enrollment 2022: Benefits for a recovering workforce conference by Businessolver

Helping employees with their immunizations, preventive screenings and management of chronic conditions – personal health communication – is essential for controlling healthcare costs.

(Each issue of WNB&C contains a current survey to give benefits officers insight into what their peers nationwide are thinking and doing.)

blurred than ever. Something as drastic as a company-wide vacation can be necessary to force people to take a rest, and come back ready to do their best work.

Safira says stress relief apps and mental health days aren't cutting it anymore, and it's essential to listen to what your people really need.

Info: bit.ly/vacation632

SHARPEN YOUR JUDGMENT – THE DECISION

(See case on Page 2.)

A federal district court ruled in favor of Betty's company, and Courtney filed an appeal.

Courtney argued that her request for the job-share arrangement was a request for reassignment to a vacant position. It was also a position she held previously, and is an accommodation that the ADA and implementing regulations specifically consider.

But the company said job sharing wasn't good for business and was a position that they got rid of after Courtney's partner resigned. As proof, they pointed to the fact she worked on a part-time basis after the job sharing ended. And after that she went back to work full time, until she went out on medical leave.

The appeal court said the requested accommodation

wasn't required because the job-share position didn't exist and thus was not "vacant."

Therefore, Courtney essentially asked the employer to create a new position for her to accommodate her disability. But the accommodation duty doesn't go that far, the court ruled. The decision for the employer was affirmed.

Analysis: She asked for too much

It's good to know courts are willing to side with employers when accommodation requests are too unreasonable – such as creating a new position. However, it's still critical to engage in the "interactive process" whenever the ADA is in play.

And make sure you have clear documentation that you made an effort to accommodate the employee's request.

Cite: *Perdue v. Sanofi-Aventis U.S., LLC*, No. 19-2094, 2021 WL 2324553 (4th Cir. 6/8/21). Dramatized for effect.

Rewarded employees for using healthcare cost transparency tools

■ Encouraged employees to save, earn money

Even when we explained how it saves money, employees weren't shopping around on their own for the most affordable, high quality healthcare practitioner or facility.

It's like that adage: You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

But then our health plan rolled out cost transparency tools – websites and mobile apps – to help our people make value-based healthcare decisions.

We also teamed up with our health plan to spread the word about a powerful incentive for our employees to use those tools.

Cash back

The transparency tools shine a light on what our people are likely to pay for healthcare services, as well as the quality of care they can expect to receive.

For example, they can compare what it'll cost for important preventive

'You have this really cool tool to save money. And when you use it, you get money back.'

screenings, such as a colonoscopy or a mammogram, at different local providers.

When our employees engage with the transparency tools, and they utilize a low-cost, high-quality provider for their procedure, the health plan keeps track of that and gives them a monetary award.

That check our people get for using cost transparency tools says: "Thank you for wisely spending your healthcare dollars. Thank you for saving yourself money and thank you for saving our health plan money."

Told their co-workers

The best part is as soon as our employees get that check for using transparency tools, they tell their families about it. Then they tell their co-workers about getting paid for shopping around to find the best price on healthcare services.

Word of mouth spread fast: 'Hey, did you guys know you have this really cool tool to save money? And when you use it, you get money back.'

That got people's attention and led to increased engagement with the transparency tools,

which is a good thing, because going forward, healthcare cost transparency is going to become more of a requirement than an option.

Cases in point: Congress came up with the "No Surprises Act" to control surprise medical billing and the "Transparency in Coverage" Final Rule, which is in the Federal Register, requires hospitals and most group health plans and issuers to publicly disclose price and cost-sharing info.

By implementing the cost transparency tools and offering incentive program, our employees are making educated, cost-conscious decisions about their health care, which in the long run, saves us money.

(Honor Dundore, benefits director, Sinclair Broadcast Group, as presented during the webinar "Annual Enrollment 2022: Benefits for a Recovering Workforce")

Case Study:

WHAT WORKED, WHAT DIDN'T

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

■ Absentee costs: How they're affecting firms' bottom lines

Healthcare claim costs get a lot of attention when it comes to cutting costs. But absenteeism is just as big of a drain on company resources.

Test your knowledge. Decide whether the following statements are *True* or *False*. Then check your response against the answers below.

1. Total annual costs related to lost productivity was \$84 million, according to a Gallup-Sharecare Well-Being Index survey of 94,000 workers (55% of whom had a chronic health condition).
2. Firms with paid time-off (PTO) programs have lower absentee costs than those with separate sick-time and vacation banks.
3. A Cornell study showed older employees were twice as likely to be absent as younger ones.
4. In 2021, CFOs are more concerned about employees' health than consumer issues.

ANSWERS

- Answers to the quiz**
1. *False*. It was actually \$84 billion not million! And 77% not 55% were found to fit the survey's definition of having a chronic health condition, such as asthma, cancer, depression, diabetes, heart attack, high blood pressure, high cholesterol or obesity.
 2. *False*. The type of time-off program doesn't seem to affect absentee costs. High morale levels and solid health and safety practices are stronger indicators of lower absenteeism costs.
 3. *False*. The study found age by itself was not a reliable indicator.
 4. *True*. CFOs are aware of the toll the pandemic took on their business AND staff. This year they're more concerned about employees' mental and physical health than they are about consumer issues.
- Info: bit.ly/investopedia632*
bit.ly/CFOs632

No Surprises Act bans surprise medical billing

The No Surprises Act interim final rule was published in the Federal Registry July 8, 2021.

The act bans insurers, even carriers on the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program, from any kind of surprise medical billing. This happens when patients go to in-network hospitals and receive care from providers who are out of network.

Share with your employees that the act prohibits:

- surprise billing for emergency services and dictates hospital services must be provided on an in-network basis
- insurers from charging out-of-network rates for ancillary care, like anesthesiology, at an in-network facility, and
- “high out-of-network” cost sharing, including co-insurance and deductibles for emergency and non-emergency services.

Healthcare providers must obtain patients’ consent for care that will be billed as out-of-network before it can be billed at the higher out-of-network rate.

For healthcare providers, the regs take effect Jan. 1, 2022, and for insurance providers the first full contract year beginning on or after Jan. 1.

Info: bit.ly/NoSurprises632

Mental health benefits being offered to children?

Should you be offering mental health benefits to your employees’ children?

The results of a new survey from Headspace says yes!

In fact, 39% of employees said their work stress follows them home, and 84% want their dependents to be able to use their mental health benefits.

Reason: If employees’ children are stressed, they’re also stressed out. And guess what – they’ll bring that stress to work with them, which is bad for productivity.

In addition to being a great performance booster for employees, it’s also a great retention and recruitment tool.

Info: bit.ly/Children632

Company offers unlimited PTO, plus 2 weeks?

It’s true, many employees didn’t take vacation in 2020 because of COVID-19. But guess what? Many didn’t take vacation before the pandemic either because they felt guilty for missing work and they were afraid their workload when they returned would be unmanageable.

And we all know stressed out employees lead to burned out employees.

That’s why Lessonly, a workplace training platform, required its workforce to take a one-week company-wide winter break. And now they’re looking to do it in the summer too. And that’s in addition to already offering unlimited PTO!

It gives their employees time to reset and recharge at the same time. No one is left with extra work because someone else is on vacation.

It’s a mid-year boost that serves to refresh and recharge their employees.

Info: bit.ly/2WeekBreak632

Will electronic verification of I-9 docs end soon?

As more COVID-19 restriction are done away with or relaxed, it looks like the leniency the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has offered since March 2020 will be ending very soon.

How soon?

While ICE has allowed employers to verify new hires’ I-9 documents via electronic means, as of Aug. 31, you’ll have to go back to in-person inspections of driver’s licenses, Social Security cards and other docs related to I-9 form.

So employers should start their backlog of physical inspections of virtual I-9s as soon as it can be done safely.

HOT APPS & WEBSITES

■ Compare your 401K plan

Looking to see how your firm’s 401(k) plan stacks up against your peers’ plans? This free site offers detailed and easy-to-understand benchmarks.

Click: brightscope.com

■ Wellness program ideas, tips

Need some ideas how to best customize your wellness program? Fit Small Business offers an article on best practices and how you can narrow the list of offerings.

Click: bit.ly/Wellness632

■ Stress-relieving employee tool

With people coming back to the office, stress levels may go up. Share this free stress-relieving tool with your employees that only takes two minutes to complete.

Click: bit.ly/StressRelief632

If you have a benefits-related question, email it to Renee Cocchi at: rcocchi@HRMorning.com

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Penny for your thoughts on this employer’s appalling act

Hopefully any HR/Benefits managers would advise an employer never to do the following no matter what happened!

A Georgia man received his last pay from his disgruntled boss in the form of 91,515 oily pennies delivered in a wheelbarrow to his house.

He spent hours each night cleaning them, which amounted to about \$5.

The man’s girlfriend created an Instagram post of the pennies that went viral and caught the attention of Coinstar!

The company picked up the pennies, gave the man a check for \$1,000 and offered to donate the same amount to a charity of his choice.

Click: bit.ly/Coinstar632