THE RESOURCE

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Labor & Industrial INSIGHTS® Magazine

THE Reengineering OF THE Workforce

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From The CEO

THE RESOURCE

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Best Regards,

Kathy Hartung, CEO

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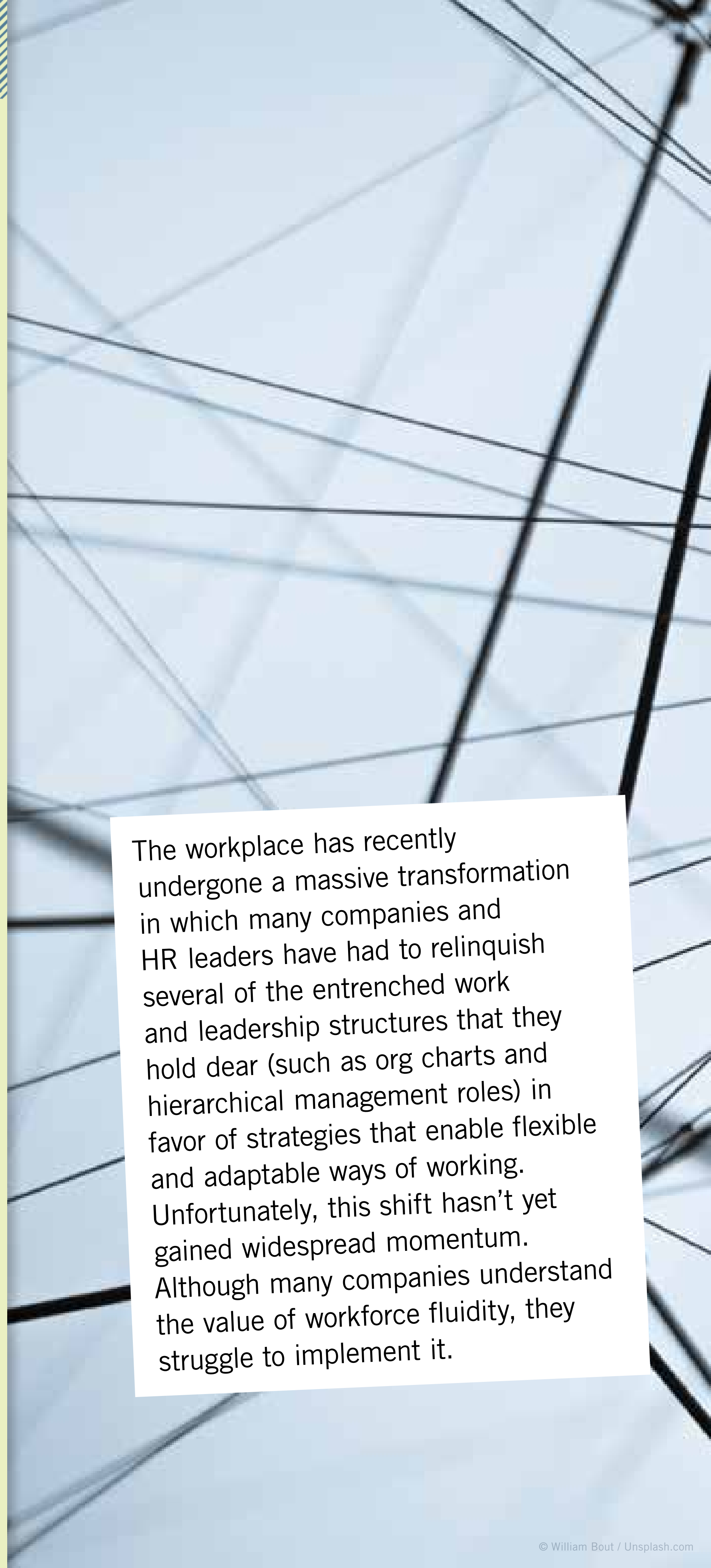

The workplace has recently undergone a massive transformation in which many companies and HR leaders have had to relinquish several of the entrenched work and leadership structures that they hold dear (such as org charts and hierarchical management roles) in favor of strategies that enable flexible and adaptable ways of working. Unfortunately, this shift hasn't yet gained widespread momentum. Although many companies understand the value of workforce fluidity, they struggle to implement it.

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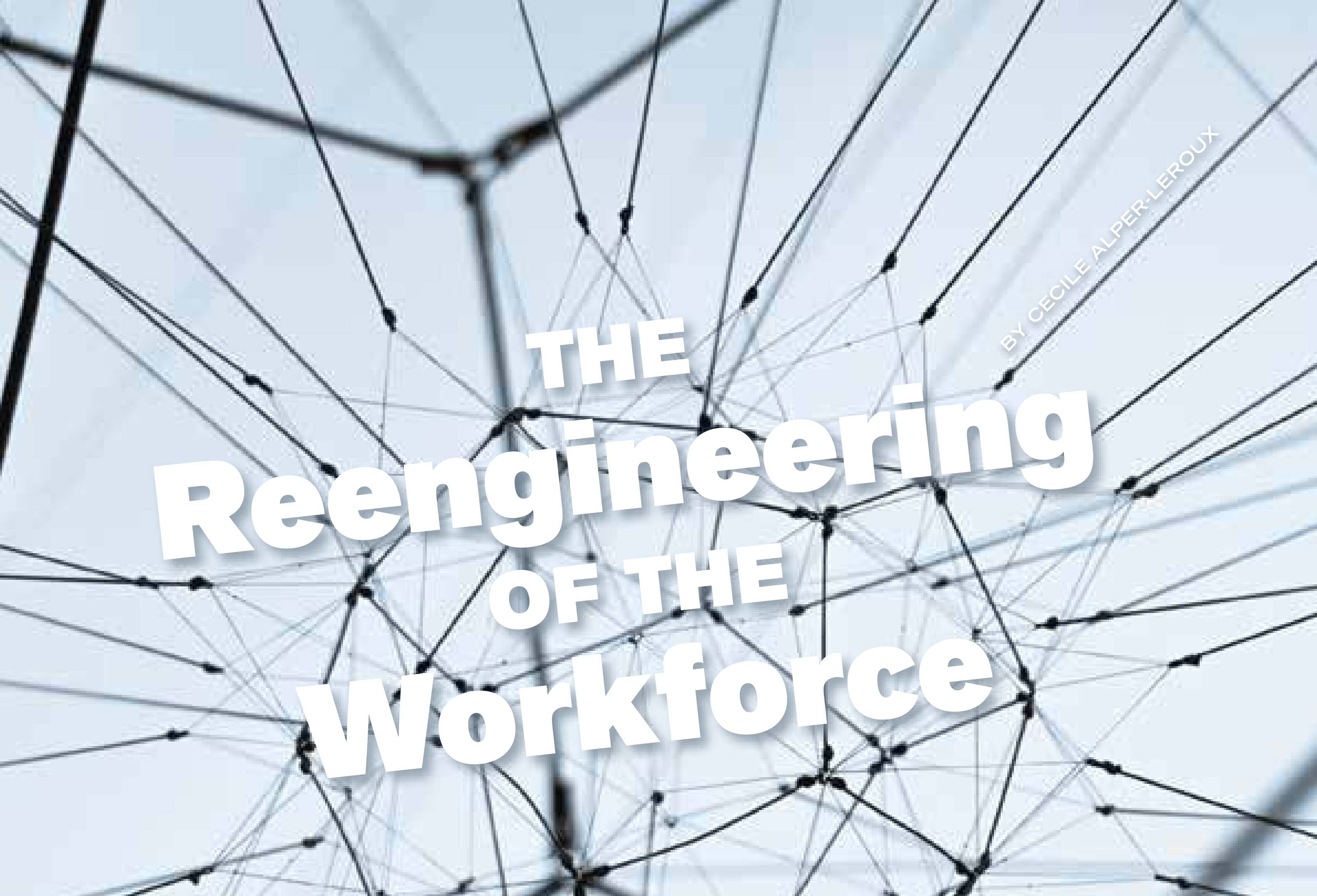

THE Reengineering OF THE Workforce

BY CECILE ALPER-LEROUX

The term *workforce fluidity* emcompasses job fluidity, organizational fluidity, and identity fluidity. *Job fluidity* exists when people are not tied to or identified with specific job descriptions; rather, they flow among initiatives and supervisors to maximize their contributions. *Organizational fluidity* exists in organizations that accept the reality of how work gets done these days and encourage collaborative efforts that bring together diverse minds and skills. And *identity fluidity* exists when companies embrace new levels of self-definition and expression, with the knowledge that making people feel safe in their authentic uniqueness will create an environment that fosters innovation.

These examples of workplace transformation contrast sharply with yesteryear's rigid organizational structures, regimented ways of working, and uniform definitions of what constitutes leadership. Certainly, those ideas made perfect sense in the postindustrial era, when small shops gave way to large, unwieldy business organizations that needed to control a large labor force. The use of divisions, departments, and jobs based on a person's specific expertise ensured that work was appropriately doled out, supervised, and completed.

The problem with this static structure today is that it clashes with the dynamism of the global business environment and the current needs of people in the workforce. Thanks to distributed technology advancements, today's business is conducted in real time. Layers of management and delegation authority reduce the speed and flexibility of work.

At the same time, employees are increasingly being asked to participate in different projects and other initiatives under different supervisors. Titles and job roles seem almost superfluous in this environment of multi-skilled multitaskers. Yet most companies still cling to their org charts and try to shoehorn modern workforce realities into an inflexible hierarchy.

Why is this the case, and how can HR become more nimble and lead the necessary change? According to Deloitte's expansive

2017 Global Human Capital Trends survey, "Rewriting the Rules for the Digital Age," 88% of the more than 10,000 respondents "believe that building the organization of the future is an important or very important issue," yet only 11% of them say they know how to do it.[1] To get a better understanding of these findings, I reached out to Josh Bersin, principal and founder of Bersin, Deloitte Consulting LLP.

Bersin highlights the workplace transformation by recounting his own workforce trajectory:

> When I joined the workforce out of college in the late 1970s, I was given a job description and title and told how much I would earn. My boss told me what to do and wrote up my performance appraisal at the end of the year. . . . This workforce concept was based on the old industrial-scale model, which is now a disadvantage for companies, because it slows them down [and prevents them] from reacting quickly.

Today, however, many organizations are rethinking their structures and moving toward more team-oriented approaches. In fact, only 14% of the respondents to Deloitte's survey "believe that the traditional organizational model—with hierarchical job levels based on expertise in a specific area—makes their organization highly effective."[2]

Bersin observes that today "leading companies [are] moving to a more agile, collaborative, and flexible way of working. Instead of a hierarchy, there is more of a network organizational structure." As an example of this work type in action, he points to the now-common practice of forming a team of people from across the organization to take on a specific project. "People are collaborating with others who are not from their business area, lending their unique expertise and experiences to the task at hand," he explains. "They jump on and off such projects on a routine basis."

Today's new ways of working are good for companies because they are good for employees. They increase employees' sense of purpose, engagement with their work responsibilities, overall productivity, and personal happiness. People feel more in control of their lives. Moving from one initiative to another also puts people in close proximity to others who have different talents, which increases everyone's range of skills. Best of all, these new approaches enable employees to coalesce around what is most important in business: serving the customer. "Instead of focusing on efficiently executing the same task over and over, employees are empowered to make the customer happier," notes Bersin.

What will it take for more companies to embrace this shift? First they must realize that workforce fluidity has already appeared in the workplace: the digital transformation of business is a powerful undercurrent tugging the organization toward more fluid ways of working. Once companies accept this reality, business leaders can then make the most of HR agility to usher in a more fluid, inspiring, and modern workplace.

To navigate this shift successfully, organizations would do well to follow Bersin's advice and create mission-oriented project teams composed of individuals from numerous areas (e.g., marketing, sales, customer experience) and empower those teams to make decisions that benefit customers. At the same time, companies should also encourage empathy among employees so they can sense how people around them in the workplace feel about their work. By embracing these changes, organizations can help their employees find their own way in the new workplace and therefore reap the benefits of uninterrupted and innovative flows of ideas and collaborations. ■

Cecile Alper-Leroux is Ultimate Software's vice president of innovation. With more than 20 years' experience in both national and global markets, she is an internationally sought-out speaker, thought leader, and visionary on human capital management trends, hot topics, and global strategies. She can be reached at cecile_leroux@ultimatesoftware.com.

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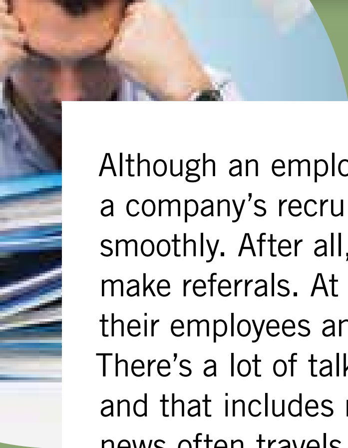
4 MISSTEPS IN EMPLOYEE REFERRAL PROGRAMS

BY KENDALL FRAZIER



Although an employee referral program can be a massive boon to a company's recruiting efforts, such programs don't always work smoothly. After all, organizations can't *force* their employees to make referrals. At the same time, though, they don't want to give their employees any more excuses or reasons *not* to make referrals. There's a lot of talk about best practices in referral programs—and that includes measures for avoiding missteps. Because bad news often travels faster than good news, companies that want to continue making those referrals should keep these four common mistakes in mind.

FORGETTING ABOUT THE EMPLOYEE

Don't forget to pay the referral bonus! This may seem an obvious mistake to avoid, but it's surprising how often this happens. Companies should *never* put an employee in a position where he or she has to send management a note saying, "Hi. I referred Jane back in February but have yet to receive my bonus. What gives?" (Ouch!) It's best to head off such frustration by proactively updating employees on the status of referrals (which includes letting them know when their referrals are *not* selected). When a hire is made, let the referring employee know when he or she can expect to be paid and then follow through. The more transparent an organization can be about this, the better.

BEING STINGY WITH THE BONUS PAYMENT

TOO-LONG PAYOUT PERIODS

Making the reward payout waiting period too long (longer than 90 days, for example) may protect a company from undue risk but it can have a negative effect on morale. If most employee referrals stay longer than six months, then companies that have long payouts are just delaying the inevitable. A 30-day payout waiting period is ideal.

BONUSES PAID IN INSTALLMENTS

Some companies pay the bonus in two chunks—say, half at three months and the other half at six months. In addition to having a negative impact on employee morale, this practice also doubles the amount of time the company has to spend tracking and disbursing referral bonus payments. Organizations should save themselves the hassle and just pay the entire bonus at once.

LOWER BONUSES FOR REFERRALS VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Some companies reduce bonuses for referrals sourced through social media posts. Such referrals may seem like less work, but employees who make them are still sticking their necks out to promote the organization's brand. When employees' social-media–based marketing efforts produce quality hires, their companies should pay their full bonuses.

NOT HAVING MICROREWARDS

Getting a big referral bonus can be exhilarating! Unfortunately, only a small portion of a company's employees achieve that goal—and those who do have to wait a long time to see their bonuses: it takes a while for a referral to apply, interview, get hired, start work, and stay employed for the set amount of time. Add to that the time it takes payroll to process the payout paperwork, and six months can easily pass before someone receives a referral bonus.

Using microrewards to reward participation in a referral program is a great way for a company to get more of its workforce engaged. Small rewards distributed early in the referral process give employees encouragement even if their referrals don't pan out down the road. One way to do this is to offer immediate rewards (for example, a $10 Starbucks gift card to the first 50 employees who refer a friend). Another possibility is to use a points-based rewards program that gives a few points for a referral, a few more when a referral interviews with the organization, and even more when a referral is hired. (Companies that already have points-based reward catalogues set up for service awards and other achievements should strongly consider adding rewards for referrals and hires to their existing programs.)

REWARD ENVY

INTERNATIONAL VERSUS DOMESTIC

International employees can become disengaged if they see that their organization offers a substantially higher value reward for jobs in the USA than for similar jobs in other regions. (For example, a company might offer a $5,000 reward for software engineers in Silicon Valley but only ₹75,000 in India. It may be difficult for the U.S. employees to spot the difference, but Indian employees are well aware that ₹75,000 is only about $1,100.) Companies that operate internationally may want to consider keeping the reward values private.

NONCORPORATE VERSUS CORPORATE

Noncorporate employees may feel snubbed when their companies offer substantially greater rewards for corporate positions than for noncorporate positions. To be sensitive to this issue, organizations may want to consider running two distinct reward programs: one for noncorporate employees and one for corporate employees.

Employee referral programs can be a great way for companies to identify and woo top talent. But those programs work only if employees actually make referrals. And the best way to encourage employees to make those referrals is to make it worth their time and effort to do so. ■

Kendall Frazier is the cofounder of Employee Referrals (www.employeereferrals.com), a software that improves the way companies recruit talent.

This article originally appeared on the iCIMS blog. iCIMS is a leading provider of innovative Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) talent acquisition solutions that help businesses win the war for top talent. Supporting more than 3,500 contracted customers, iCIMS is one of the largest and fastest-growing talent acquisition solution providers. Employee Referrals integrates with iCIMS to pull both requisition and hiring data automatically to help employers find best-fit talent. Learn more at www.icims.com.

How HR Can Decrease Sexual Harassment in the Workplace

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

Over the past few months, several high-profile cases have increased public awareness of the fact that sexual harassment is widespread in the workplace and that it often goes underreported because victims fear backlash for speaking up. A 2016 study by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) found that "anywhere from 25% to 85% of women report having experienced sexual harassment in the workplace" (with the higher rate from respondents who were presented with a clear definition and examples of sexual harassment).[1] Clearly, it's time for business leaders and the public to address this issue and call for change.

The EEOC offers this definition of sexual harassment:

> Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.[2]

Even with such a clear definition in place, however, sexual harassment in the workplace persists—and is increasing: a recent EEOC study found year-over-year growth in the rates of incidents reported to that agency between 2013 and 2016.[3]

Thanks in part to EEOC efforts to shine a spotlight on sexual harassment, many employers are working harder to drive it from the workplace. There's a strong financial incentive for them to take this course: employee lawsuits are expensive, and a single public allegation of sexual harassment can severely hurt a company's brand and bottom line.

Because people really do "vote" with their dollars, bad PR can make a company's earnings plummet and drive its customers away. A bad reputation can also make people less interested in applying for open jobs at an organization. (For example, following last year's widespread coverage of Uber's poor treatment of its women employees, the company has lost many employees, applicants, and customers.) Fortunately, companies can avoid these problems by taking steps to decrease sexual harassment in the workplace.

TRAIN STAFF

Every single person working for your company should go through training on identifying and avoiding sexual harassment. Anyone on the payroll—whether a supervisor, an entry-level employee, or a part-timer—should know what "hostile work environment" means and how to handle sexual harassment when it happens (the usual recommendation is to contact HR immediately). All employees should also learn how to avoid "casual" harassment that is often laughed off as a joke but, according to the EEOC, still counts as sexual harassment and puts organizations at risk for lawsuits.

AUDIT HR POLICIES

What is your company's policy on sexual harassment? If you can't answer that question in one or two sentences, the policy isn't clear and memorable enough. The EEOC can help organizations find the language they need to create policies on sexual harassment and define procedures for addressing it if and when it takes place.

EMPLOYEE FOCUS GROUPS

Consider building focus groups consisting of both management and employees from different departments. By encouraging open conversations, a company can find out if its employees are clear on what entails sexual harassment and how to respond to it. After all, just because HR has a full understanding of sexual harassment doesn't mean that everyone else in the company does. Q&A time during these sessions can go a long way toward building . bridges among all employees, so let participants' questions guide the discussion.

SURVEY EMPLOYEES

Like a focus group, a survey can give HR a better understanding of what employees think of current policies and ideas for how to adapt its training for a particular audience. Ask employees to submit comments—anonymously—about sexual harassment policies and concerns in your organization. (It is important to stipulate that if a survey response contains an allegation of harassment, HR must follow up on it.) If an employee makes good, executable recommendations for addressing sexual harassment, implement them!

EVALUATE

Be aware of the male-to-female ratios in different departments and at different levels (supervisors, managers, employees, etc.) in the organization. By understanding the company landscape, HR can change its recruiting efforts to create parity. (Even though women make up the bulk of sexual harassment victims, men can be victims too, so be sure to pay attention to their concerns as well.)

PUSH BACK

Sexual harassment happens because it's tolerated and because the perpetrators often don't face consequences for their actions. If companies see sexual harassment, they need to call it out. By making it clear that such behavior will not be tolerated under any circumstances, organizations can create safer and more productive workplaces that benefit employees, managers, customers, and the company as a whole. ■

Jessica Miller-Merrell is a workplace change agent focused on human resources and talent acquisition. Named to Haydn Shaughnessy's 2013 list of top 50 social media power influencers, she's the founder of Workology (formerly Blogging4Jobs). She can be contacted on Twitter at @jmillermerrell.

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The Millennial Move into Management

BY LORENA MARTINEZ

In recent years, the C-suite has increasingly voiced concerns about managing Millennial employees. Executives are worried about high levels of Millennial turnover and the related disruption to the continuity of organizations' business plans. Some consider such turnover an active threat to a company's future, especially because in the current business environment many industries require people to do more with less.

A recent study by Gallup found that when it comes to promotions and career advancement, Millennials are more ambitious than other generations and often will change jobs in order to achieve promotions faster.[1] In response, many executives try to address Millennial flight by offering more career opportunities to keep young talent in their organizations until they are ready to become leaders.

But now that a good number of those Millennials are in managerial positions, they aren't necessarily happy in those roles. Research by Great Place to Work has found that as Millennials move up the corporate ladder, their desire to stay in their organizations decreases.[2] How can this be? Why is it that one of their key goals—a promotion—proves to be a disappointment once they achieve it? Something in the nature of current leadership roles isn't clicking with Millennials' expectations about what being a leader is like.

First, Millennials often receive pressure from their managers to lead according to a set of values they do not believe in and to evaluate their people using management approaches that don't resonate with them. Examples of this include encouraging presenteeism versus fostering flexibility, hoarding information versus leading with transparency, excluding employees versus involving them, and treating interactions with employees as transactions versus treating them as opportunities to build stronger relationships.

Millennial managers also question the level of fairness in their organizations, particularly when promotions are awarded. Over the last decade, many companies have transitioned from promoting based on the employee's tenure (that is, the amount of time he or she has been with the organization) to promoting based on the employee's skills and qualifications. But whereas the duration of an employee's tenure at an organization can be measured objectively, the quality of employees' skills and qualifications are assessed subjectively.

Lastly, Millennials frequently complain that, in order to prove that they deserve a promotion, they are expected to fulfill managerial role functions before actually being awarded the title of manager. When a Millennial finally receives a promotion to a management position, he or she has often been doing that job for some time. Consequently, the "new" manager feels disappointment about the role—and about the organization.

According to researchers at the Brookings Institution, "it is estimated that by 2025 [Millennials] will make up as much as 75% of the workforce."[3] As more and more Millennials grow into managerial roles, organizations will need to rethink the structure and nature of these roles. Transparency and the ability to have tough conversations will be critical to companies' efforts to sustain their business plans with a stable leadership team and will enable them to create a stronger perception of fairness within their organizations.

As Millennials increasingly move into management, they face new, daunting challenges that their predecessors didn't have to address. One is figuring out how to navigate the massive transformation of the nature of work—a shift that has already begun—because of increased automation and reliance on technology. In this environment Millennial leaders will be valued especially for the strong people-management skills (such as the ability to lead with transparency, an emphasis on inclusivity, and a focus on relationships) that their generation prioritizes. ■

Lorena Martinez is a New York–based consultant at Great Place to Work (www.greatplacetowork.com), the global authority on high-trust, high-performance workplace cultures.

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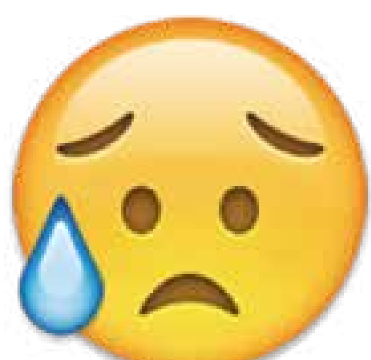

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How to Get to the Bottom of Engagement Problems

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

Everyone agrees that it's important for organizations to ask employees for their feedback. But employee surveys have an impact only if companies do something with the data they provide. The only way companies can take action, though, is if they get specific, relevant information—and such information does not come directly from a single survey. Employee surveys should function as conversation starters, and even the best-designed surveys can struggle to anticipate the follow-up questions needed to get enough detailed information from employees. That's why it's important for companies to set a baseline in their surveys and then go beyond that baseline to get additional feedback as necessary.

When it comes to getting specifics, it's important to ask the right follow-up questions. For example, asking questions that intentionally elicit certain desired responses not only runs the risk of tainting the survey with confirmation bias but also doesn't produce useful information. Most organizations struggle with the same four common organizational concerns: communication, management, misalignment, and change management. Because almost all employees have opinions on these topics, each one offers a good entry point for questions that can point the company in the right direction to improve employee engagement.

COMMUNICATION

Every single *organization* needs to communicate effectively in order to accomplish its goals. At the same time, every single *employee* needs to communicate effectively in order to perform well. Good communication is vital, but not everyone perceives communication in the same way. If baseline survey feedback indicates the presence of communication issues, then the question might become "What kind of communication issues?" (For example, is there a lack of transparency? Are communications poorly timed? Is it that messages just aren't clear and understandable?) To make sure that the organization focuses its communication efforts effectively, it can include a follow-up item that asks employees to comment on a statement such as "I get the information I need from my manager to be effective in my role." This then gives employees an opportunity to provide additional information that might help the organization develop the better communication practices that employees want and need.

MANAGEMENT

Because managers are responsible for planning, organizing, staffing, coordinating, and controlling almost all of the work that happens in companies, engagement surveys are usually designed to obtain feedback about management. "Management" is a pretty broad category, though (and not necessarily synonymous with "leadership"), so if the baseline survey results report that managers are inconsistent or untrained or look like they're stressed, then the organization needs to have a better sense of who those comments are about (e.g., front-line supervisors, department managers, C-level leaders, *everyone*). Asking employees to comment on a follow-up item such as "My manager challenges me to improve" could provide additional clarification and feedback about not only "who" but "where" the focus needs to be.

MISALIGNMENT

Organizational problems don't always occur one at a time but often travel together. Sometimes management has problems with communication, a combination that adds a whole new dimension to the employee engagement conversation and what the potential solutions might be. For instance, if baseline survey results show misalignment, is it because policies and culture don't match? Because communications and culture don't match? Or because performance and communication don't match? All of these circumstances point to misalignment but can manifest themselves differently in the workplace. In that case the organization might want to follow up by asking, "What one change would improve your confidence in the future of our organization?" Responses could signal the need for an employee recognition program that aligns culture with communication. Others might point to the need for a more formalized goal-setting process to align performance with communication.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

All of the organizational management issues discussed so far involve change. When they trust that something will change in response to their feedback, employees will openly and honestly provide it. Therefore organizations need to pay attention when baseline survey results show that employees feel that their voices don't matter. In those cases, they might believe that the organization is hesitant to implement change, unable to prioritize change, or poorly equipped to execute action plans—or all three! It could make sense to include a follow-up item such as "I am excited about where the company is going" to get a greater understanding of what employees think about the company's future. It might also prompt additional employee feedback sessions or the creation of a suggestion program.

THE POWER OF FOLLOW-UP SURVEYS

Conducting a baseline employee survey is the first step in the process of exploring employee engagement. When organizations see changes in their baseline data, then they can find the specific information they need in order to implement real change. Some companies choose to do this through focus groups and action committees, but though these efforts can be successful, they can also drain resources, quickly get hijacked by loud individuals, and end up not providing a whole lot of value. Deploying follow-up items through a second pulse survey enables organizations to ask specific questions (both quantitative and qualitative) to better identify the key issues and crowdsource ideas to improve engagement. And following up has one key added benefit: it show employees that the company is listening to them. ■

Sharlyn Lauby is the author of HR Bartender (www.hrbartender.com), a friendly place to discuss workplace issues. When not tending bar, she is president of ITM Group Inc., which specializes in training solutions to help clients retain and engage talent. She can be contacted on Twitter at @HRBartender.

Your Competitors Are Stealing from You

BY MIKE MCKERNS

IN DECEMBER 2017 the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics announced that the national unemployment rate was an astonishing 4.1%.[1] This low rate means that many companies have unfilled openings because there simply aren't enough people looking for jobs. More likely, though, they're struggling to fill open positions because the type of people those companies want or need to hire are already employed by their competitors.

In the current employment market, whether your competitors sell the same products or services that you provide is irrelevant. The important thing is that they're competing with you for talent. If they're hiring the people you need, that action has the same negative financial impact on your business as cutting into your customer base.

After all, you need good people to make your company run. If you can't continue to produce and distribute your products or services because you don't have enough employees, your business is in danger of failing. In this situation, what can you do?

There's actually only one viable option: to make your company more attractive than those that are competing for your talent. Essentially, *you need to steal your competitors' talent.* (That sounds a bit ruthless, but it's not called a "war for talent" for nothing!)

The key is to offer more attractive options. Start by looking at issues such as pay, working environment, perks, and schedule flexibility—all areas that can make or break a candidate's interest in an organization. Find answers to the following questions: Why did our top performers accept jobs with us? Why do those employees choose to stay with us? What advantages (real or perceived) do our top talent competitors have over us? Let that information guide you in crafting your own incentives.

Unfortunately, this isn't a problem that has a quick fix but one that requires commitment to a long-term strategy. If you want to win the talent war, 2018 needs to be the year you step up your hiring game. ■

Mike McKerns is the editor in chief of Labor & Industrial Insights and cofounder of Mamu Media LLC. He can be reached at editor@mamumediallc.com.

1. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2017. "The Employment Situation." BLS website, www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf.

Today's Warehouses Still Stock Plenty of Hazards

BY BOBBY PIRTLE

Today's warehouses and distribution facilities have little in common with their counterparts from a generation ago. In both eras, these places were used to store products and materials until they were shipped. These days, however, the long-held image of dark, cramped buildings and stacks of boxes is no longer accurate: contemporary warehouses and distribution centers are brightly lit spaces with ceilings 30 feet high (or taller!), with sophisticated conveyor networks, robotic forklifts, and computer-controlled picking and packing machinery having supplanted much of the manual labor.

Despite such changes, though, the fatal injury rate of the warehousing industry is higher than the average fatal injury rate of all other industries. The primary reason for this appears to be the wide variety of hazards that exist in warehouses and distribution centers. Fortunately, there are some steps that can be taken to reduce the risks associated with the most common hazards.

FORKLIFT OPERATIONS

According to OSHA, forklift accidents injure nearly 97,000 workers every year across all industries. They also result in about 85 fatalities, over two-fifths of which are the result of turnover accidents.[1] Training and certification of operators is an important step in accident prevention, as is maintaining forklifts and checking them for hazardous conditions.

Forklift drivers should wear seatbelts and always keep their speed below 5 mph (and go even slower on slippery surfaces and in congested areas). Drivers should follow safe procedures for lifting and stacking loads and ensure that loads do not exceed the forklift's operating capacity. Facilities need to maintain safe clearances in areas where forklifts operate—an especially important consideration in the aisles of today's taller warehouses, where forklift damage to a low section of shelving can cause higher sections to fall. Drivers also need to be careful around loading docks and near open pits, vats, and tanks.

If forklifts are powered by combustion, steps need to be taken to minimize the potential for them to release hazardous gases, such as carbon monoxide. Adequate ventilation must be provided, and workers should be trained to recognize the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning.

CHARGING STATIONS

Some forklifts and other material-handling equipment are powered by large batteries, and warehouses that use such equipment typically have charging stations where workers can swap depleted batteries for fully charged ones. Operators need to be trained in all procedures related to changing batteries (such as positioning a forklift properly and fully applying its brakes). Because lead-acid batteries can vent gases or leak (and occasionally explode), proper personal protective equipment, such as rubber gloves and eye protection, should be used. Also, an eye-wash station should be nearby, and fire extinguishers should be available.

LOADING DOCKS

The locations where trucks and railcars are loaded and unloaded present a variety of hazards. Most injuries at docks result when a forklift runs off a dock, when equipment strikes workers, or when poorly stacked materials fall on workers. It's important to make sure that dock plates are properly secured and are rated to handle the weight being moved over them. Visual warnings should be placed near the edges of docks, and operators should steer clear of the edges (and, in particular, should never back up to an edge). Workers should use ladders and stairs, rather than jump off of docks.

CONVEYOR SYSTEMS

Conveyor belts and similar equipment are extremely efficient at moving materials through a facility and reducing the amount of human effort involved in their transport. However, they do create hazards for workers. Some of the most common sources for workplace injuries involve workers being caught in pinch points or nip points; in those cases, guarding those points can prevent accidental contact. Workers may also be injured if incorrectly loaded products fall off conveyors; training can minimize the potential for those events. Facilities also should have a lockout or tagout program to protect crews that are repairing conveyors and other equipment.

STORAGE ISSUES

Incorrectly stored products can fall and strike workers. Or, when products aren't properly balanced, using a forklift or other equipment to move them can result in tip-overs. Therefore it's important to stack products evenly and not to overload shelving or racks. If workers will remove products by hand, be sure to place heavier products on the lower or middle shelves to reduce the potential for back and shoulder injuries. Workers should remove only one product at a time, rather than try to take an entire stack. Finally, aisles should be kept clear of obstructions.

MISCELLANEOUS HAZARDS

As with any worksite, each warehouse and distribution center should have a comprehensive safety plan that gives workers clear guidance in the event of a fire, weather event, or other emergency. Exit locations, evacuation procedures, and assembly areas outside the building should be designated. To help first responders know how to proceed, procedures should be in place to identify how many employees and visitors are present and where they are located. The sheer size and complexity of modern warehouses makes a quick response challenging, but having a thorough plan improves the likelihood that all people present will remain safe in an emergency situation. ■

Bobby Pirtle currently oversees the accounting department as financial officer with Safety Management Group (www.safetymanagementgroup.com), a nationally recognized professional service organization that provides workplace safety consulting, training, staffing, program planning, and implementation.

1. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). 1995. "Powered Industrial Truck Operator Training." U.S. Department of Labor website, www.osha.gov/laws-regs/federalregister/1995-03-14.

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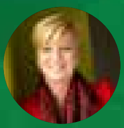

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