

THE RESOURCE

VOL. VIII, ISSUE V

HR INSIGHTS

Magazine

from the eyes of industry leaders

Offboarding

**What It Means
and Why
It Matters**

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Providing Growth Opportunities
Beyond Promotions and Raises

6 Tips for Interviewing and Hiring
Former Employees

How to Increase Diversity and
Inclusivity in Hiring

As we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of our Company in 2019, I feel compelled to reflect back on the incredible journey that brings us to this milestone. - Kathy Hartung

THE RESOURCE

In the last issue, I shared that an employee had asked if I would be willing to mentor her and give insight into running a company, etc. I hope you enjoyed the '3 Fs' that have made it work for me!

One of the questions she asked me in her initial request was, "what do I wish I had known at 29 that I know today"? Interestingly, the answer to that question was readily available to me. It is certainly that I wish I had known my CORE (CORE Assessment)...how I'm hardwired, why I operate the way I do, what that means, and how I can be my best self. I knew at 29 that I thought & responded differently than most people, and that I could always see a positive opportunity in every situation. It wasn't until I discovered a tool (the CORE) that really explained me, and the differences in everyone, that I began to understand the *WHY*. Why we think, respond, operate, enjoy, get motivated, get stressed, love doing, hate doing, put off, or do first, love interacting with people, hate interacting with people, talk & listen to ideas, or see that as a major waste of time....and on and on and on.

I wish that at 29 I would've had this understanding of those around me. Instead of expecting everyone to act, work and think like I did, to really know how they were wired, and lead them into roles where they would thrive and succeed.

I wish I had known my parents' CORE results. To understand how we were similar and different from each other. I always knew my Mother and I saw things from a totally different perspective, but I didn't know why, nor did I have a way to understand her or our differences.

I wish I had known my children's CORE results, so that I could have parented them using that knowledge, and honoring who they were, rather than expecting them to operate like me!

I ask myself what difference would the power of this knowledge & understanding have really made if I had it 29 years ago, to use and apply to my life?

I would've been a more effective *Leader*!

I would've been a more kind, loving and understanding *Daughter*!

I would've been a more effective, kind, loving and understanding *Mother*!

Our true opportunity with this knowledge and understanding is in our desire to be our best self, to lift others to be their best self, and to honor each other in our differences!

“ Are you operating as your BEST SELF? How can we help you be your BEST SELF? Call me. In 10 minutes after taking the CORE, I can begin to help you understand how... ”



Best Regards,

Kathy Hartung, CEO

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from the eyes of industry leaders

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Offboard

What It Means and Why It Matters

BY BRIAN ANDERSON

Organizations like to say that they value their employees. But they aren't always clear about whether what they value most is their employees' current work or their employees' potential. Before choosing one or the other, though, a company must understand that the experiences an employee has before, during, and after his or her time with an organization all play a part in shaping that person's full potential. Through comprehensive onboarding, performance management during employment, and effective offboarding processes, a company shows its employees that it understands how to build a strong employer–employee relationship.

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Onboarding and performance management get the lion's share of attention from HR. But offboarding is an essential part of maintaining an organization's reputation, optimizing its current employees' working experiences, and preserving networking opportunities. Through its offboarding process, an organization has the opportunity to show both current and prospective employees that it values them for more than just their contributions to the bottom line.

WHAT IS OFFBOARDING?

Offboarding encompasses all of the decisions and processes that take place when an employee leaves an organization. Think of this phase of their employment as part of an extended analogy that compares an employee's time with a company to an ocean voyage: he or she goes through onboarding to join the organization and goes through offboarding to leave the organization.

The complexity of onboarding and offboarding processes varies with each organization. But, as when preparing to begin and end a long journey by ship, the more time and care the organization takes with these processes, the better the experience participants will have. Employees don't want an onboarding process to make them feel like passengers who are leaping onto the deck as the ship pulls out of port, and they don't want their departure from an organization to make them feel like passengers who are walking the plank.

Both onboarding and offboarding harbor elements of uncertainty and risk for employees and organizations alike. Without careful communication, each party may question the motivation of the other. During onboarding, this uncertainty often manifests in nervous excitement as the new hire and the organization test their compatibility. During offboarding, however, the uncertainty is tied to the decisions that led to the employee's departure. In the case of employee resignation, the employer may wonder if there is any way it could have convinced the departing employee to stay. And when employees are terminated or laid off, they may question their employers' true motivations for letting them go.

An effective offboarding process helps reduce the chance that misunderstandings will persist after the employee moves on. When an organization takes the time to get a clear understanding of an employee's experience, both it and the employee can part ways while keeping the door open for additional opportunities for networking, development, and growth.

OFFBOARDING AND EMPLOYER BRAND

Taking the time to understand the employee experience shouldn't be reserved for offboarding, when it's too late to affect that particular outcome. Rather, strengthening connections between employer and employees should be a continuous process, not just a single task on the onboarding checklist. Whether they're prospective hires who are deciding if they want to apply for certain positions or current employees who are reviewing their everyday work experiences, people want to know what future they have with an organization.

How job seekers, employees, and the world at large view a company as a place to work is known as an employer brand, which is essential for recruiting and maintaining an organization's healthy talent. An employer brand reflects all parts of the employee experience, including offboarding. It's not enough to give employees a strong start and see how long they stick around.

Employees leave positions that lack opportunities and don't engage them. For example, one recent study found that "86% of professionals said that they would change jobs if [the new position] offered more opportunities for professional development."¹ Another study found that "the two reasons most often cited for flying the coop were boredom and long hours."²

Taken together, these two statistics illustrate the importance of employee engagement throughout the employee experience from onboarding to offboarding (and including everything in between). In today's economy—in which job openings outnumber job seekers, and companies struggle to fill open positions—organizations must assume that most of their new hires are willing to leave for opportunities that offer greater professional development. But how do people know which organizations provide those opportunities? Some of the best sources of that information are current and former employees' descriptions of their jobs.

A company can control how it presents itself, but its employees have an impact on its reputation as well. For example, nearly 50 percent of the respondents to one extensive survey reported that they "use Glassdoor at some point in their job search," and nearly all of those who consult that site do so "before they even think about applying for jobs."³ As job seekers increasingly expect transparency, every decision that an organization makes can have a ripple effect on its employer brand. Salaries and benefits on their own are no longer sufficient to keep employees from jumping ship. In order to earn good reviews from former employees and build a positive employer brand, a company has to provide a consistently positive employee experience in every aspect of the organization, including throughout the employment cycle. Through its offboarding practices, a company has a final chance to demonstrate its values to departing employees and deepen and strengthen its employer brand.

OFFBOARDING AND THE PERFORMANCE CONVERSATION

Offboarding is just one of several important conversations that need to take place among employees, managers, and leadership during the employment cycle. Although regular communication can yield many benefits (such as a stronger sense of purpose and better work outcomes), it can also, when personal insecurities are involved, cause minor frictions to become major issues. These insecurities frequently manifest as something along the lines of "Don't bring me problems—bring me solutions." On the surface, this sentiment seems to focus on the positive. In reality, though, it sabotages collaboration by pushing essential practices (such as regular performance management and employee offboarding plans) to the back burner while the people in the strategy meetings discuss their latest wins.

A great workplace doesn't try to minimize its flaws with PR measures. Of all departments, HR understands best the importance of resolving issues instead of covering them up. As two HR experts explained in a recent webinar, HR deals with all the ways that "it" (which can describe myriad problems, including legal issues, payroll difficulties, office romances, employee disagreements, or the hundreds of other challenges that crop up as organizations grow) can "hit the fan."⁴ HR understands that "the fan" is always on—and that it takes work to protect and preserve a great employee experience.

Creating a great workplace involves recognizing problems, helping employees feel heard, and then taking measured steps to help both employees and organizations grow from good to great—even when those steps lead employees to different departments or different organizations. The real challenge arises when HR tries to identify current employee experience issues through the smokescreen of employee and manager positivity. It isn't always easy to move authentic feedback through the layers of an organization to the people who have the power to make the decisions.

It can be difficult for some leaders to stop acting like cartoon ostriches (who think that if they ignore something it either doesn't exist or will go away) and tackle their employees' experience issues head on, especially if they believe that failure will damage their reputations with their superiors or erode employee confidence in the organization. But downplaying the concerns of employees who decide to leave doesn't remove the consequences of turnover. And in some cases, poor offboarding strategy can backfire and make the situation much worse.

Effective offboarding can't be a surprise or an afterthought. It should flow naturally from a regular pattern of communication with employees. Performance management practices are shifting: instead of relying solely on old-school annual reviews, companies are increasingly using monthly or even weekly conversations as well. There will always be an element of the unexpected when offboarding noncontract employees, but regular, open, and appropriately transparent manager–employee communication can decrease the chance of a shock to employee or employer during offboarding.

OFFBOARDING AND BOOMERANG EMPLOYEES

Preserving open communication with employees is key when it comes to aligning their talents with the needs of the organization. When (and most of the time, it's *when*, not *if*) an employee's career path leads away from an organization, a careful and thorough offboarding process can leave the door open for a reconnection. When employees later return to companies they left earlier, recruiters call those rehires "boomerang employees." As the competition for talent gets tighter, these employees are becoming more common. Consider the results of one survey about boomerang employees:⁵

- "While only 15 percent of employees said they had boomeranged back to a former employer, nearly 40 percent said they would consider going back to a company where they previously worked."
- "76 percent [of HR professionals] say they are more accepting of hiring boomerang employees today than in the past."
- "40 percent [of HR professionals] say their organization hired about half of those former employees who applied."
- "56 percent [of HR professionals] and 51 percent [of managers] say they give high or very high priority to job applicants who were former employees that left in good standing."
- "33 percent [of HR professionals] and 38 percent [of managers] agree that familiarity with the organization's culture is the biggest benefit to hiring back former employees"

As in dealings with current employees, open communication can make all the difference in dealings with potential rehires as well. Keeping track of previous employees' performance information can help recruiters weigh them against other candidates.

A COMPLETE CYCLE

Examining and investing in the offboarding process contribute to the development of a learning cycle in which an organization learns from its mistakes and makes improvements based on those lessons. And whether employees return with new skills or part ways with the company forever on friendly terms, offboarding can prove to a company's former, current, and future employees that the organization values their progression and is interested in changing itself for the better. ■

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When I worked in the hotel industry, the company's labor attorney made a lunch reservation in my hotel's restaurant every New Year's Day, and at the start of each year he and his wife would talk about their future over a long lunch. I liked the idea of this annual discussion so much that my partners and I borrowed it (with some modifications) when we started ITM Group. As small-business owners, we knew it was important to think about what we wanted our retirement to look like (and when we wanted it to start), so we made certain that topic was on the agenda.

Through those conversations we realized that we wanted to have something to do instead of have a traditional retirement. That realization led to the launch of our new blog, *Unretirement Project*, which has connected us to many individuals who have similar ideas about their own unretirement. Some enjoy working and want to continue contributing (albeit on a reduced schedule) as they age. Others would like to pursue encore careers or are thinking about going back to school and learning something new. And others have decided to become freelancers or consultants.

Organizations have a huge opportunity here. With unemployment at record lows, companies need to find ways to tap into the talents of individuals who are thinking about retirement and unretirement. In many organizations, retirement has become synonymous with resignation, and when someone tells his or her manager, "I'm planning to retire at the end of the month," the organization has to scramble to try to capture a departing employee's knowledge and find his or her replacement.

One of the reasons that the business world finds itself in this predicament is because unretirement hasn't yet been considered part of the employee life cycle (unlike, say, transfers and promotions), the business world hasn't talked about it often and openly and *made plans for it*. Companies can embrace unretirement as part of the employee life cycle by considering these three strategies:

Recruiting: *Remember, not all jobs are necessarily full-time jobs.* When work needs to be done, the organization needs to remember the "buy, build, and borrow" approach and ask, "Does this work require a full-time position?" It's possible that the organization could hire a

part-time employee, an on-call worker, or a freelancer to get the work done.

Benefits: *Consider a benefits package for contingent employees.* In most organizations, only full-time employees receive benefits. As companies build contingent workforces, they might want to consider offering some sort of benefits package for part-time employees. This type of incentive could go a long way toward improving recruiting and retention among this group.

Training: *Give managers the tools they need to engage contingent workers.* The key to working successfully with an unretired workforce is to treat them as though they're not retired. Managers need to engage and train part-time employees and freelancers to the same degree to which they engage and train full-time staff. The company still expects high levels of performance from all of its workers, regardless of their retirement status.

Organizations cannot afford to let their talent simply retire and take years of knowledge and experience with them. By encouraging employees to unretire for a few years, the organization could create a real win-win situation both for themselves and for their employees. As when managing all the other phases in the employee life cycle, however, the implementation of an unretirement strategy takes planning and open, honest conversations about the future. ■

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.

A NEW PHASE OF THE EMPLOYEE LIFE CYCLE: UNRETIREMENT

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

How AI Will Transform Talent Acquisition

BY SAMANTHA SPANO

Artificial intelligence has the potential to radically alter many aspects of the world, including the ways in which businesses perform key functions. Business leaders are already keenly aware of the growing influence of AI: 42 percent of executives surveyed believe that AI will be of “critical strategic importance” by the end of 2020.¹ Among their many applications, AI-powered technologies also possess the potential to change how HR teams acquire talent. Here are some of the most dramatic ways that machines could revolutionize the future of candidate engagement.

INCREASINGLY AUTOMATED CANDIDATE SOURCING

AI and machine learning will likely begin powering an intelligence-driven talent acquisition process, which will gradually replace the data-driven methods currently in use.

These technologies have the ability to gather and organize information rapidly and intuitively and could sort through both active and passive job seeker pipelines at remarkably efficient rates. In addition to speeding up the candidate sourcing process through automation, this will allow HR specialists to devote time and resources elsewhere.

HEIGHTENED CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT

Freed from certain obligations now being handled by AI, recruiters will be able to shift their energies from sourcing to the

more sophisticated task of reaching out and talking to potential employees, thus creating heightened candidate engagement. With AI technologies streamlining the sourcing and filtering of candidates, HR teams can devote their attention to getting to know candidates and talking with them about the details of their open positions.

OVERALL IMPROVED CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE

AI will make life easier not just for HR professionals but for candidates as well. The technology will expedite the application process, as advanced chatbots helpfully guide candidates through each stage of the process and answer any questions they have along the way. Because AI will enable recruiters to process applications more quickly, this technology will also reduce the amount of

time candidates have to wait to hear about the status of their applications.

TAKEAWAYS

By making talent acquisition faster and more efficient, AI has the potential to be a game changer on both sides of the hiring equation. To maximize their recruitment efforts, employers should leverage the latest in HR technology and keep looking for new opportunities to implement AI in their outreach and hiring processes. ■

Samantha Spano is a senior marketing manager at JazzHR (www.jazzhr.com). This article originally appeared on their blog and was reprinted with permission.

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Providing

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Beyond

Promotions and Raises

BY O.C. TANNER

Opportunities for growth and development in the workplace aren't easy to define or to distribute. Many employees equate opportunity with promotions and raises, which can be difficult for companies to provide to everyone. Instead, organizations should focus on building a sense of opportunity in other ways that employees desire. People want to make a difference in their work and have an impact on something bigger than themselves. By offering opportunities that tap into those interests, companies can both empower employees to do great work and provide them with workplace opportunities for growth.

GIVE EMPLOYEES A VOICE.

Employees want to feel empowered to influence important decisions at their organizations. They want to feel that their opinions and input matter, and to have ownership in the company's success. Yet in spite of this interest, only 52 percent of respondents in a recent survey of over 15,000 employees indicated that they "feel [as though] they have a seat at the table."¹

One focus group participant in Toronto describes this feeling of empowerment:

I used to work at Starbucks, and they have a lovely way of doing things, where it feels like everyone is equal. Even when you come in at entry level, they say you are at the same level as your boss. They tell you that one day you could even be in the boardroom. That message really encourages your spirit. It makes you feel like you are a part of something bigger—that you're doing something for both the company and for yourself.

Employees want to be able to move up the organizational chart and be paid appropriately for their contributions, but those aren't the only opportunities that they crave. In many cases, promotions or raises may seem more important to employees only because they don't see other possible opportunities in the horizon—in particular, being able to have a greater influence in the organization.

INVOLVE EMPLOYEES IN SPECIAL PROJECTS.

Employees feel a sense of pride when they are handpicked for special projects because of their unique skill sets and expertise. And although three out of four employees feel that special projects help them grow in ways their day-to-day jobs cannot, only 50 percent of employees have the option to work on special projects. The study found that employees who work on special projects "are 50 percent more likely to believe they learn new and valuable things in their current role, have a 26 percent increased sense of opportunity, [and] have a 25 percent increased satisfaction with leadership." Special projects also give employees visibility with leaders and peers with whom they usually do not work; this exposure helps give them networking and mentorship opportunities. With so many easily identifiable benefits to working on special projects, companies should strive to give more of them to their employees—and recognize their contributions to those projects.

PROVIDE A VARIETY OF MEANINGFUL WORK.

Everyone wants to be challenged. Even the most meaningful work can become repetitive. After all, who wants to do the same job, in the same way, day after day? Organizations need to give employees variety in what they work on, how they work, and with whom they work. In addition to challenges, variety also gives employees exposure to different parts of the organization. It allows them to expand their skills, learn new things, and see how their work affects all areas of the company.

In the study, 83 percent of respondents said they were "more likely to stay with an organization that offers new problems to solve and projects to work on than if they did not have those opportunities." When employees have variety at work, they experience huge increases in "overall job satisfaction," "the likelihood [that] they will be motivated to contribute to the success of the organization," and "the sense of opportunity available to them at their organization." Giving a variety of meaningful work to employees connects them to the company's purpose, helps them make a difference in the organization, and inspires them.

WELCOME FAILURE.

Most of today's organizations don't cultivate environments in which people can safely fail, try new things, or take risks. True innovation is born out of failure, though, and organizations should find ways to help employees take educated and calculated risks, fail appropriately, and learn from their failures. It's important to recognize and reward not just successes but failed attempts as well. When leaders share stories about their own failures, their employees learn from those previous attempts and also feel empowered to try new things themselves.

Regular promotions and pay raises are valuable tools for delivering recognition and opportunity. But they aren't always feasible for all organizations in all circumstances. By empowering employees to do their best work, companies can give them the same sense of opportunity and help them feel valued, learn, grow, and be able to lead their organizations to success. ■

O.C. Tanner helps organizations inspire and appreciate great work. Thousands of clients globally use its cloud-based technology, tools, and awards to provide meaningful recognition for their employees. Learn more at www.octanner.com.

1. O.C. Tanner. 2018. "2018 Global Culture Report." O.C. Tanner website, www.octanner.com/content/dam/oc-tanner/documents/white-papers/2018/2018_Global_Culture_Report.pdf. (Note: except for the block quotation, all quotations and statistics are from this publication.)

6 TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING &

BY ABBY PERKINS

Whether they run their own small businesses or work in the HR departments of big companies, people who have any recent involvement in hiring have probably heard the term “boomerang candidate,” which describes someone who has applied to work for his or her former employer. Most boomerang candidates weren’t fired for performance issues or personality clashes but likely left their previous positions under good terms. Whatever reasons boomerang candidates have for leaving the first time (to pursue a more exciting opportunity, for example, or to earn a degree or simply to make more money), they are ready to rejoin the team. So what’s the best way to go about interviewing and hiring them?

1. LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR A SUCCESSFUL BOOMERANG INTERVIEW.

It’s always wise to conduct thorough exit interviews with outgoing employees—especially if there’s a possibility they might be rehired one day. Exit interviews can shed light on the issues that may have prompted someone to leave, and that data can be especially valuable if he comes back to the organization. Before interviewing a boomerang candidate, review the notes from his exit interviews for helpful information (such as the reasons for his departure the first time) that can be followed up on during the new interview.

2. UNDERSTAND WHY AN INTERVIEW IS NECESSARY.

When a former employee is interested in returning to her old company, managers might think they don’t really need to bother interviewing her. After all, they already know her and should have a decent idea about the quality of her work, her capabilities, and her fit with the company. But because both people and workplaces can change quickly, it’s still important to interview boomerang candidates. Whether the employee left a few months ago or a few years ago, it’s likely that her skill set, experience, and even disposition have changed. Similarly, the organization has likely undergone some changes of its own—in its operations, in its internal processes, and maybe even in its culture. Even if a boomerang candidate was formerly a star employee, there’s no way to tell if she is still a good fit without conducting at least an introductory interview.

HIRING FORMER EMPLOYEES

3. FOCUS ON PREVIOUS ISSUES.

Sometimes employees leave companies for purely external reasons, with no underlying issues at play. But if a boomerang candidate expressed concerns about anything during his exit interview (or if current employees have since opened up about potential issues), it's crucial to bring them up during the new interview—in part to minimize the risk that he will leave again right after getting rehired. The goal here is to find out whether old issues will creep back into the picture and negatively affect the boomerang candidate's abilities. If he had issues with the company, he'll want to be assured that those issues have since been resolved. And if the hiring managers or HR have any concerns about the employee's performance or fit, they need to bring those up, too.

4. TREAT BOOMERANG CANDIDATES LIKE ANY OTHER CANDIDATES.

Even though a boomerang candidate has worked at the company in the past, she should be treated as if she were an entirely new candidate. This doesn't mean that former colleagues or managers should pretend they don't know her (not only would be rude, but it would make for a very awkward interview). Instead they should treat her as they would any other candidate. The interview should have a more formal tone to keep the exchange from becoming too chummy (which could steer the interview off course and make it difficult to make an unbiased decision) and to ensure that each candidate gets equal and fair treatment during the interview process.

5. FILL IN THE GAPS.

It's important to delve into a boomerang candidate's work since he left the company to get a better idea of any new pros—and cons—he might bring to the table as a rehired employee. For example, he's likely to have gained desirable skills and professional experience during his time away from the company. At the same time, though, he may have had issues at his most recent place of work that could be cause for concern. Throughout the course of the interview, ask him questions about what he has been doing since leaving the company. Not only does this strategy shed light on whether he wants to come back because he's enthusiastic about the company or because whatever lured him away the first time didn't pan out, but it's also a great way to find out exactly what new skills, knowledge, certifications, etc. he is bringing back to the organization.

6. EASE THE TRANSITION.

If the interview goes well and a boomerang candidate is rehired, immediately inform current employees of her impending return; make it clear that the decision is final, but let employees express themselves regarding the situation. Next, if the boomerang candidate will be assuming a new role or has been gone for some time, don't assume that she will hit the ground running just because she worked there before; some retraining may be necessary. Finally, check in regularly with the rehired employee to ensure that the transition is going as seamlessly as possible.

When employees leave, companies should take care not to burn any bridges with them—especially if those employees are especially valuable to the organization. Instead, companies should think of departed employees as alumni of the organization who might return at some point. In those cases, companies who have a formal process in place for interviewing and rehiring boomerang candidates increase their odds of being able to access that talent pool. ■

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4 Mistakes to Avoid



When Implementing Microlearning

BY JEFF MILLER

Books © Einar & Hand © Imabase / BigStock.com

Twenty years ago, it was more difficult to learn a new idea or skill in six minutes. Today, there are thousands of microlearning opportunities available online in the form of YouTube videos, TED Talks, or content in a company's learning management system (LMS). Bite-sized learning appeals to today's waning (or at least selective) attention spans and fits easily into a busy workday. And it works: microlearning courses can increase learning retention when compared to longer courses, and at least one expert estimates they can increase the speed of development by 300%, which is key to staying competitive amid today's rapid technological changes.¹

In spite of these benefits, few organizations take full advantage of microlearning because it's seen as the domain of the learning and development team. But once this common misunderstanding is addressed, managers and employees can start actively curating and using microlearning opportunities. Companies will then start to see the positive impact microlearning can have on ROI—as long as they avoid a few common mistakes.

MISTAKE #1: MANAGERS DON'T RECOMMEND SPECIFIC COURSES TO EMPLOYEES.

Many managers tell their employees, "Your communication needs work. Go find a refresher course in the LMS." But the problem with that approach is that the manager is asking the learner both to look for content and to evaluate the relevance of that content, all without understanding what the manager is looking for. The employee may end up learning *something*, but not necessarily what he or she *needs* to learn. Instead, managers should review the courses personally and identify the specific ones they want their employees to take.

MISTAKE #2: MANAGERS FAIL TO FOLLOW UP.

Many managers also assign learning to employees but never debrief them afterward. In fact, research by LinkedIn suggests that "getting managers involved in employee learning" is a top challenge for HR professionals. When assigning specific courses, managers should also schedule follow-up meetings to ensure that their employees understand the content and give them a chance to ask questions. The courses can then serve as a common touchpoint for both managers and employees to refer back to when discussing areas for improvement.

MISTAKE #3: EMPLOYEES DON'T USE MICROLEARNING PROACTIVELY.

Beyond the courses their managers assign them, employees should feel empowered to access microlearning to address their own deficiencies and be proactive about their growth. Employees should be coached to see microlearning as a resource for handling difficult situations, as well as a resource for their broader career development needs.

MISTAKE #4: EMPLOYEES DON'T CONSIDER THEMSELVES CONTENT CURATORS.

Although managers can assess whether a course covers the content that they're hoping employees will learn, the people who actually take a course (in this case, the employees themselves) are best able to rate its quality and efficacy. Was the course engaging? Easy to understand and apply? To help identify the best microlearning opportunities, L&D teams and managers should ask employees for feedback about the courses they take. Another great way to help employees discover learning is to encourage them to share great courses with each other—for example, by creating "playlists" of microlearning content based around a specific theme (such as management) or time of year (such as a holiday).

Microlearning holds tremendous potential to influence the workplace. It can help employees learn needed skills, it can increase employee engagement, and it can foster collaboration and community among colleagues. When microlearning is implemented properly with the involvement of both managers and employees, it can offer vital, positive growth opportunities for individuals as well as organizations. ■

Jeff Miller is the associate vice president of learning and organizational effectiveness at Cornerstone OnDemand (www.cornerstoneondemand.com).

This article originally appeared on ReWork, an online magazine sponsored by Cornerstone OnDemand featuring news and ideas on the future of work. Visit ReWork at www.cornerstoneondemand.com/rework.

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ADA Case Sends *Warning* to Employers

BY DAVID ROWLAND

Synopsis: In a 2-1 decision in Bilinsky v. American Airlines Inc., the Seventh Circuit recently affirmed American Airlines' summary judgment win against a former employee who alleged that the company violated the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) by failing to allow her to continue working remotely after the merger between American Airlines and US Airways.¹ In so doing, the majority made clear—as a “note of caution to future ADA litigants”—that employers must analyze what is reasonable under the ADA based on current technological capabilities, not on what was possible decades ago. This case also highlights the importance of having and updating job descriptions in the face of changed work circumstances.

BACKGROUND

Plaintiff Kimberley Bilinsky began working with American Airlines in 1991 as a “communications specialist.” Her job position had no formal description. Although her team operated out of the company’s Dallas headquarters, the company allowed her to work remotely from Chicago due to her multiple sclerosis; because that disease is aggravated by heat, she could not live in Dallas year round.

In 2013 American Airlines merged with US Airways, and as a result the company restructured all of its departments. American Airlines found that the merger fundamentally changed the nature of Bilinsky’s position into one that required a consistent, physical, on-site presence. Accordingly, the company offered to relocate Bilinsky to the Dallas office, but Bilinsky refused. American then attempted to find other positions for Bilinsky, but she was either unqualified for or uninterested in the positions it suggested. As a result, the company terminated Bilinsky. She then sued it under the ADA for failing to accommodate her disability.

On motion for summary judgment, the district court held that American Airlines acted lawfully when it terminated Bilinsky because she was no longer a qualified individual with a disability—that is, she could not perform the essential functions of the position in light of the changes in her job requirements. The question on appeal was: Did the district court act properly when it found that Bilinsky was no longer a “qualified individual?”

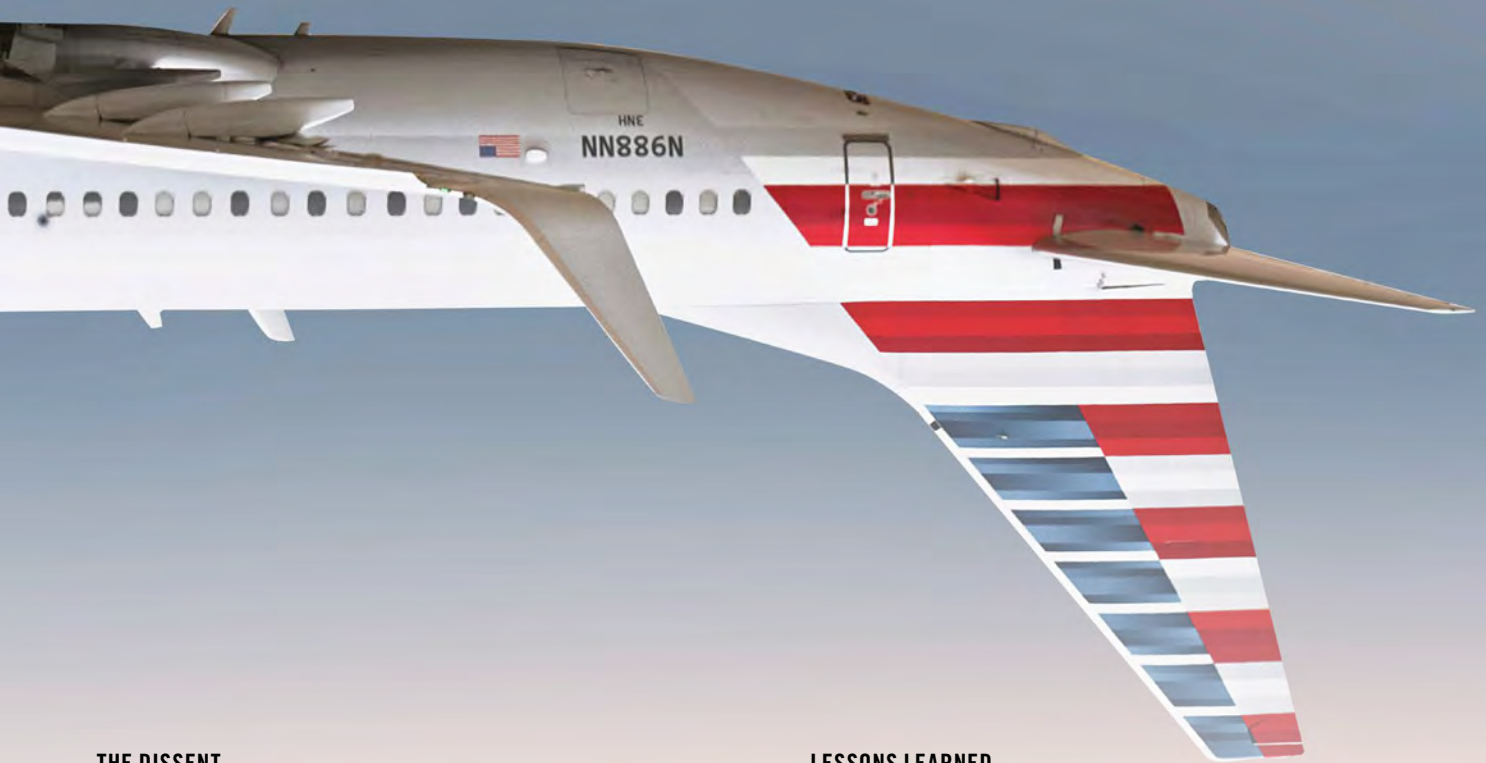
MAJORITY ANALYSIS

The ADA prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities who, with or without reasonable accommodations, can perform essential job functions. Typically, courts look at job descriptions to determine if something is truly an essential job function. However, because Bilinsky’s position had no job description, the majority had to determine the essential job functions.

In lieu of a job description, the majority (Judge Michael Kanne and Judge Frank Easterbrook) analyzed statements from multiple American Airlines employees who attested to the major changes the merger brought. They all stated that the merger forced American to massively restructure its business operations across all departments. Put simply, the restructuring caused Bilinsky’s work to evolve from independent activities to team-centered crisis-management activities. This shift required frequent face-to-face meetings in which Bilinsky could not participate.

Consequently, the majority determined Bilinsky was no longer a qualified individual and could not perform the essential job functions while working remotely. In support, the majority also cited Seventh Circuit precedent that states, “Just as an employer is not required to create a new position or strip a current job of essential functions [under the ADA], an employer is not required to maintain an existing position or structure that, for legitimate reasons, it no longer believes is appropriate.”

The majority stressed that its holding in this case was extremely fact specific and that it is confined to the unique facts and circumstances the merger presented. The majority reiterated that employers cannot simply rescind an accommodation because it is inconvenient or burdensome and instead must utilize all available technologies to reasonably accommodate employees who can otherwise perform essential job functions. In doing so, it acknowledged that the Seventh Circuit’s pronouncement from 24 years ago that working from home as an accommodation would be required only in the “extraordinary case” is less true today.



THE DISSENT

Although Judge David Hamilton agreed with much of the majority's legal analysis and applauded the majority's recognition that prior holdings regarding "working from home as a reasonable accommodation require a fresh look today," he would have found that there is a dispute of fact for a jury to resolve as to whether in-person presence was an essential job function after the merger. Judge Hamilton observed that the "unusual absence of a written job description position" should "raise our eyebrows," and that courts should not simply take an employer's claims about a job's essential functions at face value.

Viewed in a light most friendly to Bilinsky, the evidence showed that although a presence in the office might be preferred by American Airlines, it had not been shown to be essential. Hamilton further noted that although it would certainly be easier for American if Bilinsky operated out of Dallas, that is not the standard of the ADA. The ADA requires employers to make sacrifices in order to hire and retain workers with disabilities, and Bilinsky's accommodation was one of those sacrifices. As a result, Hamilton would have held that a jury should decide whether physical presence is an essential job function of Bilinsky's position.

LESSONS LEARNED

American Airlines survived its close call with the ADA, but the next employer may not. This case offers several key lessons (and warnings) for employers:

- Although they will assess other evidence, courts look heavily to job descriptions in determining essential job functions. Employers should keep those descriptions as accurate and up to date as possible.
- Restructuring is a legitimate complication and can change the essential job functions for various employees. These changes should be reflected in new job descriptions.
- The pace of technological advancement is dizzying. With that rapid change comes the need to consider technological solutions to barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities. Remote work arrangements are certainly more common and can be far more effective than they once were. ■

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Worth the Investment: **Why Corporate Culture Is Important**

BY JULIE DODD

June 2018 marked 92 consecutive months in which new jobs were created; during that month the unemployment rate hit its lowest point in nearly two decades.¹ These numbers indicate fantastic news for job seekers and the overall economy but also signal an underlying issue for employers: there's a talent shortage, and its negative effects are especially strong during a time when employees are twice as likely to quit than to be laid off.² Against such low unemployment and steadily increasing wages, attracting and retaining high-quality candidates can be extremely challenging. The most effective way for an employer to stand out and build loyalty under these competitive conditions is to foster a high-functioning, people-first corporate culture.

Thoughtful, strategic investment in the lives of employees pays dividends and delivers real business results. Companies that do this attract the best minds in the industry and are rewarded with more loyal, more productive, and happier employees. But developing, maintaining, and improving corporate culture requires a substantial amount of time, care, and financial resources to make a true difference—which is why even the most forward-thinking executives can have difficulty deciding how much to invest in culture.

When leaders fully understand the comprehensive business case for *why* investing in their people is so important, however, the decision is usually much easier to make. A positive and productive culture isn't just great for employees—it's also great for companies. For example, Ultimate Software receives just as much press for its employee-focused culture as it does for its solutions and services. Its reputation as a great workplace has helped it attract great employees, which in turn helped it hit \$1B in recurring sales revenue in 2018.

Clearly, an investment in corporate culture is an investment in the bottom line. Here are a few reasons why organizations should prioritize making those investments more effectively.

BETTER HIRES, STRONGER OUTPUT, ENHANCED RETENTION

The inherent benefits of enhanced corporate culture include improved employee morale and engagement, and numerous studies suggest that engagement positively influences productivity, performance, and retention. For example, “organizations with a high level of engagement do report 22% higher productivity.”³ Similarly, a global study of 50,000 employees found that the ones who “are most committed perform 20 percent better and are 87 percent less likely to leave the organization.”⁴ Considering the high cost of replacing even a single valuable employee (up to twice his or her annual salary), it's imperative that organizations do everything they can to encourage their employees to perform their best *and* stick around.⁵

MORE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The direct correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction has been well documented in numerous studies. For example, one found that employee engagement has an even greater effect on customer satisfaction than sleep medications has on insomnia.⁶ When employees feel supported and empowered by their organizations, they're motivated to do their best to give their customers that same level of care.

INCREASED SALES AND BETTER SHAREHOLDER RETURNS

Improved corporate culture is also directly tied to increased profits. One analysis of 28 years' worth of stock-market statistics found that organizations that invested in employee satisfaction “generated 2.3 percent to 3.8 percent higher stock returns per year than their peers.”⁷ Research by Glassdoor revealed that “increasing employee engagement investments by 10 percent can increase profits by \$2,400 per employee, per year.”⁸ Additionally, a three-year-long study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* tracked 755 retail-bank employees for three years and learned that employees' attitudes and corporate culture had a significant impact on overall business outcomes.⁹

The strongest corporate cultures are built around the idea that when companies take care of their employees, the employees will take care of the organization's customers, who will, in turn, take care of the shareholders. Organizations that invest in their corporate culture are simultaneously investing in their future. Company policies and practices that put people first will yield payoff for years and years to come. ■

Julie Dodd is the chief services officer at Ultimate Software (ultimatesoftware.com), where she oversees support and implementation of services for Ultimate Software customers. Ultimate Software is a leading provider of cloud-based HCM solutions.

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How to Increase *DIVERSITY* and *INCLUSIVITY* in Hiring

BY ICIMS

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) defines diversity as “the collective mixture of differences and similarities that includes, for example, individual and organizational characteristics, values, beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences, and behaviors.” In comparison, it describes inclusion as “the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success.” For a visual representation of these definitions, imagine a salad: diversity exists in a salad that contains many different ingredients in one bowl, but inclusion exists when that salad is mixed together so that every bite contains some of each ingredient.

The two concepts often remain undifferentiated because they are intertwined in efforts to cultivate diverse and inclusive environments. It’s important to distinguish between them, though, because they have different functions:

In the context of the workplace, diversity equals representation. Without inclusion, however, the crucial connections that attract diverse talent, encourage their participation, foster innovation, and lead to business growth won’t happen.¹

In business, value of diverse workforces cannot be overstated:

- Diverse perspectives foster innovation.
- Diverse teams perform better.
- Diversity can help a company become a global leader.

- Diversity improves an organization’s work culture and helps it attract superior talent.
- Diversity improves a company’s customer service.

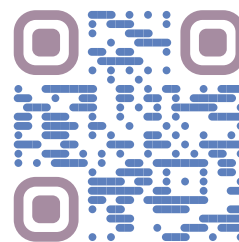
Creating a diverse and inclusive organization starts at recruitment. A company can’t have a diverse workforce if its hiring practices aren’t varied and inclusive. Continuously sourcing from the same talent pools or using the same tactics will yield homogeneous talent.

To hire better and become a conscientious organization in the community, first be sure to source from multiple channels in order to connect with a variety of demographic groups (categorized by veteran status, age, gender, disability, etc.). Once that connection is made, don’t lose it with a job description riddled with biased wording. Make sure

that the job descriptions are gender neutral and have clear and inclusive language.

Lastly, the technology used to screen and assess applicants should be unbiased. Although companies are always looking for the next best thing to streamline their work loads and improve their speed-to-hire, it’s important to find a solution that actively promotes diversity and equal opportunity for all applicants. The ethical application of artificial intelligence can help on this front. ■

iCIMS Inc. is a leading provider of innovative Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) talent-acquisition solutions that help businesses win the war for top talent. To learn more about how iCIMS can help your organization, visit www.icims.com.



To learn more about diversity and inclusion in the workplace, scan the QR code above to access the recent iCIMS webinar called “How to Hire with Less Bias.” This webinar covers topics such as:

- What diversity and inclusion look like today
- How to source and grow talent pools with more diverse candidates
- How to create inclusive job postings
- How to use AI to address diversity and inclusion

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What can we do to improve our retention?

BY STRATEGIC HUMAN RESOURCES INC.

QUESTION:

We know that finding and hiring good talent is a real challenge. Fortunately, we don't have many open positions right now, but how do we keep the talent that we have? What can we do to prevent our employees from leaving and improve our retention?

ANSWER:

This is an excellent question! And one that all employers should be asking themselves and directing time and resources to address retention. Like most strategies, there's no 'one size fits all' solution. There are, however, a number of things that organizations can do to engage (and hopefully, retain) the employees they have.

- **Identify your high performers and high potential employees and actively re-recruit them to ensure retention.** Consider those employees who consistently exceed expectations, deliver results, the positive influencers in your organization or those in mission critical positions. Dedicate time to solicit their feedback, understand their challenges, remove barriers that may be hindering their success or satisfaction level, and provide regular opportunities for growth and development. These steady performers often get the least amount of time and feedback from their managers, while poor performers oftentimes suck up the bulk of time. Managers should make a regular habit to change that.
- **Make sure your compensation and benefits are competitive.** According to a Glassdoor **survey**, nearly half (45 percent) noted that salary was among the top reason for employees changing jobs, followed by career advancement opportunities, benefits and location.

- **Survey your employees to gain a better understanding of what's important to them and solicit their ideas to improve your work place.** Annual surveys can be a great way to get input from your employees on key issues (i.e. engagement, benefits, leadership, etc.) to help you develop a retention strategy. One word of caution.... it's imperative that organization be transparent about the results and be ready to act upon the feedback that's given. To maintain credibility, share survey results (the good and the bad) with employees and prepare an action plan to work and improve on the areas you can make a positive impact.

Instead of an annual survey, many organizations have begun the use of employee pulse surveys. These surveys are often just one or two questions that employees are asked to answer more frequently (i.e. monthly, weekly). They are short and very specific, helping give you an immediate picture of what is happening in your workplace. These surveys allow you to get deep into the issues at hand for quick and immediate response. One of our favorites is **TinyPulse** but you can also create your own on a tool like **SurveyMethods**.

- **Train and develop your managers.** How often have you asked someone why they chose to leave a good organization, only to find it was because of their immediate supervisor? Supervisors have the greatest impact on the work environment. To be effective, first line supervisors need to be as adept at people-managing skills as they are in their technical capabilities. Communicating effectively, identifying how to motivate diverse individuals, approachability, and showing a genuine interest and caring about their direct reports – are all just a few of the skills needed to create a positive workforce. No matter how strong your benefits and compensation packages may be, a poorly skilled supervisor can have devastating effects on morale and to your turnover. ■

Strategic Human Resources Inc. is a national full-service HR management firm based in Cincinnati, Ohio. Its president and founder, Robin Throckmorton, can be reached at Robin@strategichrinc.com.

BUILDING TRUST IS A PROCESS

BY MIKE MCKERNS

Trust doesn't happen overnight. Instead, it accumulates over time. Building trust is well worth the effort, though, particularly in the relationships companies have with their employers and their customers. After all, people want to work for and buy from companies and brands with which they feel a connection. Building trust is a worthwhile endeavor for any company—and following these five principles can help it achieve that goal.

Be authentic and transparent. Trust starts here: authenticity and transparency lay the foundation for everything that follows. Honesty is not always easy, but it is always the best policy when it comes to building trust through experiences and actions.

Show your human side. Without the humans who work behind the scenes, a company is little more than a bucket of widgets and a balance sheet. Connect your customers to the human side of your business by sharing stories about how the organization has affected people's lives or about the employees who make the company's work happen.

Personalize all communication. My wife and I made our first visit to a new neighborhood restaurant a few months ago, and while waiting for our table we decided to get a drink at the bar, which was very crowded at the time. As soon as the bartender noticed us, he came over and introduced himself by name, shook our hands, and asked our names. Fifteen minutes later, when he told us that our table was ready, he said, "Mike, Addy—it was great meeting both of you. I had your tab transferred to your table. Please come again." And we did. The fact that the bartender remembered the names of patrons on a very busy evening made a very positive and powerful impression on my wife and me.

Own your mistakes. *Everyone* makes mistakes. But most people are judged more not on the mistakes they make but on how they react immediately after making them. Saying "I was wrong" and then doing everything in your power to right that wrong can go a long way toward building goodwill and trust in both life and business.

Listen to and act on feedback. If you've ever given feedback to a company and felt frustrated when that message seemed to fall on deaf ears, then you know exactly how you *don't* want your own employees and customers to feel. Think of each and every piece of feedback you get from internal and external customers as a gift that presents you with an opportunity both to identify and improve on weaknesses and to learn what's working so you can spread that success to other areas of the business.

Trust should never be assumed; rather, it must always be earned. Through trust, people achieve a feeling of safety and confidence in a company, because they know that it will do the right thing for them (as customers or as employees), for the environment, for the shareholders, and for anyone or anything else that can be affected by the organization's actions. By building trust, companies can deepen and strengthen the connections they have with both their employees and their clients. ■

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

RECIPE

GROWN-UP GRILLED CHEESE

A grilled cheese sandwich is one of those foods that never goes out of style. It's fast to whip up when you're hungry, is easy enough for kids to make on their own, and is hands-down one of the best comfort foods out there. (Bonus: clean up is easy, too, because it requires just one skillet and a spatula!) It's not possible to truly "outgrow" this all-ages dish, but if you want a grilled cheese sandwich that's a bit more sophisticated than the traditional version with American cheese on white bread, you're in luck!

YIELD: 1 serving

TIME: about 10 minutes

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- 2 slices of whole wheat sandwich bread
- 2 Tb butter
- 1 oz brie
- ½ medium apple, cored and sliced
- 2 Tb walnut pieces

DIRECTIONS

1. Melt 1 Tb of the butter in a cast-iron or nonstick skillet over low heat.
2. Lay one piece of bread on top of the melted butter. Add the brie, apple slices, and walnuts, then cover with the second piece of bread.
3. Cook until the bottom of the bread is browned, then use a spatula to lift the sandwich out of the pan.
4. Melt the remaining 1 Tb of butter in the pan. Then return the sandwich to the pan, but with what was previously the top now on the bottom.
5. Cook until the bottom of the sandwich is browned. ■

Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

Calories: 567 cal

Fat: 41.6g

Dietary fiber: 5.9g

Sugars: 11.6g

Protein: 17.2g



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