

Labor & Industrial **INSIGHTS** Magazine[®]



INSIDE

Best Practices for Employee Experience Programs

8 Powerful Onboarding Strategies to Engage New Employees

Use Employee Education Benefits to Increase Retention

Excerpted from a feature article on *The Resource*, from the local publication, *'Forsyth Woman'*. Story by Martie Emory.

Empowering people to find their place!

"Celebrating 40 years in business at the end of this past August, *The Resource* has a proud history and an inspired story. It is truly a time-tested, innovative company that has navigated a variety of obstacles to achieve this impressive 40th anniversary milestone.

Their message to business clients is a simple one: "Are you operating as your best self?"

That theory is clearly at the heart of the company's success through the years, as they have expanded their services to meet the ever-changing needs of their clients and their employees, while keeping one step ahead in the business world through innovation, creativity, and personal insight.

For CEO Kathy Hartung, it has been both a personal and professional journey of learning, adapting, and making the most of every opportunity. From early beginnings in 1979 under the name of Executive Resources, to a new focus – and the new name Temporary Resources – with Kathy coming on board in 1983, she has guided a respected business through recession, changing workplace dynamics, and the challenges of new technology, for 36 of its 40 years in existence.

The early '90s brought changes in the business recruiting industry, with the introduction of background checks, followed by a turn to technology, with the mid-'90s bringing computers and an official "database" of applicants into the workplace. Housed in a single location in Winston-Salem in the 90s, the company then expanded to Greensboro, Mocksville and Lexington. The rollercoaster of the recession of 2008 brought still more change, and eventual rebranding and name change in 2014 to *The Resource*, to better reflect the company's mission. In 2017, the expansion continued to markets in Salisbury and Yadkinville.

"There were always plenty of challenges and obstacles to overcome," says Kathy.

Believing every employee has their very own set of unique abilities, *The Resource* team also aids companies in optimizing their current workforce as well. With every change or adjustment in staff, they assure clients they are already solving issues for the future. How empowering!

At the heart of their success, Kathy and her staff consider change to be a positive factor, and one they embrace at every stage of development.

"What's interesting is that the same challenges repeat over and over during the years, with just a different face or disguise," she says, with confidence that a positive solution will always be within reach!"

THE RESOURCE

“ At *The Resource* we are passionate about our story, and the stories of evolution our clients and employees have to tell. Here's to the next 40 years of fulfillment! ”



Best Regards,

Kathy Hartung, CEO

Workforce Management

COVER STORY



4

How to Build a Successful Employee Referral Program

By Tori Fica

Experience

6

Best Practices for Employee Experience Programs

By Peter Bellotti

Engagement

8

8 Powerful Onboarding Strategies to Engage New Employees

By Stijn De Groef

Wellness

WORK HARDER HEALTHIER!
10

How Employee Wellness Programs Boost Productivity

By Pamela DeLoatch

Retention

12

Use Employee Education Benefits to Increase Retention

By Sharlyn Lauby

Training & Development

14

The Importance of Building Trust Within a Company

By Insight Worldwide



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BY TORI FICA



After seeing a new movie that they love or having an outstanding meal in a restaurant, most people tell their friends all about it. People like to express their opinions about their experiences in the professional sphere, too, and employee referral programs are one tool companies can use to tap into the human desire to share things we like with people we care about.

Through an employee referral program, an organization's current employees refer people in their networks (e.g., friends, family, business connections) for open positions in that company. When used effectively, such programs are consistently the best sources for hiring: in 2017 alone, employee referrals were responsible for just over 20 percent of interviews and just over 30 percent of hires.¹ Because referrals are so valuable, many programs include some kind of incentive to motivate employees to refer more and more people. The best referral programs can help employees feel excited about referring their friends, allow recruiters to provide a better candidate experience for referrals, and make it easier for the organization to hire excellent new team members.

The benefits of an employee referral program are clear. So how does an organization build this channel for itself? Or how can a company get the most out of a program that it already has in place?

DON'T OVEREMPHASIZE INCENTIVES

Today it's difficult to find an employee referral program that doesn't include at least a small reward for submitting referrals. These rewards can take the form of cash bonuses, additional paid time off, special t-shirts, or some other perk or special treat. Many organizations see a vast improvement in the number of referrals coming in when they set up referral bonuses for their employees.

At the same time, though, such a reward can become a perverse incentive if employees focus too much on it and begin submitting referrals just to earn prizes instead of actually considering who might be good fits for open positions. In that case, the company may see the quantity of referrals increase at the expense of their quality.

To avoid this unintended consequence of an incentivized employee referral program, companies should treat rewards as thank-yous rather than as motivators. One possible solution is to give an employee a small bonus only after his or her referral has

been hired and worked at the organization for a certain amount of time. In companies that make such rewards minimal and foster great workplace environments, referrals are primarily motivated by employees' desire to help their friends and to help the organization, which results in higher quality referrals.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT SOFTWARE

As an organization grows and more referrals come in, it becomes almost impossible to track them manually. Allowing referrals to fall through the cracks of the hiring process, however, can kill employees' motivation to continue making them. Automating the process of submitting referral information, tracking referrals throughout the hiring process, and communicating the outcome of referrals back to the employees who made them is vital to the successful implementation of an employee referral program.

When selecting software for this function, companies should consider how it will meet their needs. For example, an organization should choose a tool that integrates with its current applicant tracking system to avoid having to move referrals manually from one program to another. Also, a company should choose software that is easy for its employees to use and offers multiple options for referral submissions (such as sharing job postings on social media or sending a possible candidate's resume directly to a hiring manager, for example). And of course it's important to be sure that the solution allows current employees to see where their referrals are in the hiring process.

EDUCATE EMPLOYEES

An informed workforce is the foundation of a successful referral program. According to management consultant Mike Cox, one of the top reasons why such programs fail is that "employees fail to realize they exist or are unclear about how to utilize them because employers market them poorly."² The best software and the most strategic incentives in the world will be useless if a company's employees don't know about its program or don't know how to contribute to it.

Education about an employee referral program needs to cover two areas: how to make referrals, and how to make them well. In other words, the company first needs to get employees in the loop about how to submit referrals so they feel empowered to start. Then it needs to teach them how to recognize whether someone is qualified so they can start submitting higher quality referrals.

For example, at the organization's regular company-wide meetings, the recruitment team can occasionally present a list of open positions, remind everyone how to submit referrals, and

direct employees to an internal "all things recruiting" webpage for more information about how to determine whether a potential referral is qualified (including a list of the top reasons why a referral may not be hired.)

By incorporating referral program training into the onboarding process for new hires, a company can encourage employees to be excited about sharing the organization with their friends and families from the very beginning. First, train new hires on how to use the referral software to submit a referral. A few months later, once they've been able to get a feel for the company culture, train them on how to determine if a referral is a good fit—not only for the position but also for the company. This multistep process helps ensure that cultural fit remains a top priority within the referral program and helps the company capitalize on the energy and enthusiasm of newly hired employees.

BENEFITS OF EMPLOYEE REFERRAL PROGRAMS

A recruiter at BambooHR describes one of the main benefits of this type of program:

A huge advantage to hiring referrals is that they already know and appreciate your culture because they've heard about it from a trusted source. It's one thing for me as a recruiter to tell candidates how incredible it is to work here, but it's even more meaningful when that message comes from someone who is already close to the candidate. Referrals have also usually been prescreened by the person who referred them. Typically, your employees aren't going to refer someone unless they really believe in that person's ability to do well in the role and in the culture!³

Personal anecdotes such as this one are plentiful in organizations of all sizes and industries. But managers who are considering whether to implement an employee referral program often need more objective data to strengthen their cases to the executives who greenlight the expenses. Here are a few compelling data points:

- An average of 29 percent of referrals turn into hires.⁴
- Referred employees are more likely than other new hires to stick around, with a 46 percent retention rate after one year.⁵
- Although exact figures vary by industry, in general "referred workers yield higher profits per worker than do nonreferred workers."⁶
- Employees referral programs make it easier for recruiters "to gain access to passive candidates—those highly skilled and highly

sought-after people who aren't actively looking for a new job, but who might be swayed by the right opportunity."⁷

- These programs "can speed the time-to-hire by 55 percent over career sites," both by generating more qualified candidates for an open position and by helping an organization build a talent pool on which to draw when another position opens up later.⁸
- These programs can help a company gauge employee engagement, because participation in them can indicate how enthusiastic (or unenthusiastic) employees are about the organization.⁹

Obviously, an employee referral program that improves retention, engagement, time-to-hire, and more isn't built overnight. Optimizing any referral program is a continual effort, and a company may need to adjust its strategy as its workforce grows and changes. But investments in these programs definitely pay off, because they yield many benefits and can be powerful hiring tools with the potential to transform an organization. ■

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BEST PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE PROGRAMS

BY PETER BELLOTTI

Gone are the days when an employer simply expected its workforce to show up on time, put in their eight hours of hard work, and occasionally do some overtime hours to help the company achieve certain levels of growth. In today's competitive job market, most human resources managers recognize that organizations need to do more if they want to succeed at attracting and retaining employees. Thanks to the current serious shortage of top employee talent, many people now have the flexibility to search for jobs that offer much more than decent salaries and competitive benefits.

Employee experience is the sum of the levels of connection, impact, and meaning that people find in their jobs. Whereas previous generations of workers might have been content to find jobs that simply allowed them to pay their bills, today's employees are looking for much more fulfillment in their jobs. They want workplace flexibility, learning opportunities, a sense of purpose, or other factors that go beyond payroll management and other traditional tasks associated with HR departments. For these reasons, businesses that want top talent should consider investing in holistic, integrated, employee experience programs.

GOOD INVESTMENTS

In July 2019, 3.6 million Americans—about 2.4 percent of the total labor force—quit their jobs, continuing a generally upward trend over the previous year.¹ As any business owner will know, high employee

turnover takes its toll on a company. Although estimates vary wildly (depending on the study, the cost of replacing an employee can range from a few thousand dollars to 200 percent of his or her annual salary), but all companies agree that it's an expense they'd prefer to avoid.

However, retaining top workforce talent doesn't just save the company money by avoiding the costs associated with recruiting, hiring, and onboarding new workers. A happy and engaged workforce also bring numerous other benefits to their companies. Consider the following statistics:

- Disengaged employees cost their companies somewhere between \$450 and \$550 billion dollars each year.²
- Around four-fifths (81 percent) of respondents to one survey said “they would consider leaving their current job for the right offer,” and even though

creating externally competitive and internally equitable salaries can certainly help to keep employees satisfied, 71 percent reported that “they would take a pay cut for their ideal job, one that met their benefits, career progression, and company culture priorities.”³

- When compared with low-engagement competitors, companies with the most engaged employees are 21 percent more productive and 22 percent more profitable.⁴
- Companies with “performance-enhancing cultures” can see a whopping fourfold increase in their long-term revenues over companies that lack those environments.⁵

Clearly, high levels of employee engagement and a thriving company culture offer numerous economic benefits to companies. That environment doesn't magically appear, though, and integrating employee experience programs is one of the best strategies an organization can implement to keep its workforce content, productive, and engaged.

KEY COMPONENTS

Quality and effective employee experience programs create hospitable, stimulating, and positive workplace environments that

motivate all employees to elevate their productivity levels while making valuable contributions to their teams. Moving beyond hollow employee perks, these programs investigate strategies that can surprise employees, create meaningful connections between employers and their workforces, and remove barricades to help employees achieve their potential. But how can companies that want to implement an effective employee experience program get from the drawing board to the end results? Although there is no “one size fits all” approach to building employee experience programs, an organization that wants to design and implement a successful program should be sure it includes the following three characteristics.

- **Employees at the Center**

Employee experience programs should never be the result of top-down decision making whereby executives dictate what their employees need to be happier in the workplace. Rather, each program should be employee-centric, with each individual worker having say in creating it. Through employee surveys and workshops, an engaged HR staff can develop meaningful employee experience programs that allow individual workers to opt in to the elements of the program that are most important to them.

- **Customization**

An employee experience program should also be specifically tailored to the unique character of the workforce. For example, PayScale made different coffees available throughout its building in order to encourage employees to move about and visit different areas. But when a coffee-tasting event revealed that there was a higher percentage of tea drinkers among the employees than management had originally thought, the company took that feedback into consideration and expanded its breakroom offerings to include more varieties of both tea and coffee.⁶

- **Integration of Cultural, Technological, and Physical**

To maximize employee engagement, employee experience programs should integrate the cultural, technological, and physical aspects of the workplace. Culture includes how an employee

feels at his or her workplace and the protocols related to structure, leadership, and workplace hierarchies. Technology gives employees the tools they need to do their jobs efficiently, and physical considerations focus on creating office environments that foster creativity, teamwork, and comfort.

- **SCALING UP**

Because a successful employee experience program is also dynamic, HR departments should be open to continually modifying it based on the characteristics and requests of the workforce. In this sense, scaling up an employee experience program isn't a one-time affair but an ongoing endeavor. To make sure that employees have what they need to stay engaged with company goals, HR should take the following steps when scaling up such a program.

- **Don't Overlook the Importance of Return on Investment (ROI)**

Having happy employees certainly makes for a better office environment and company culture, but the “business” of business is to make money. When planning an investment to expand an employee experience program, be sure to calculate how it will increase productivity, deepen employee engagement, and develop the workforce toward the organization's long-term business goals.

- **Keep Senior Leadership in the Loop**

No employee experience program can be effective unless people in positions of leadership are on board with it. When discussing ways to scale up your program, in addition to including the opinions of the employees themselves, ensure that people in managerial positions understand and support the benefits that come with dedicating resources to an improved employee experience. People in leadership positions within the company should also have a clear understanding of their participation in the program.

- **Incorporate Enabling Technologies**

The technological tools that come with the digitalization of the workplace can be extremely helpful and enabling in creating a more holistic employee experience program. For example, automating feedback requests between

employees and their immediate managers is one way to create a more fluid communication strategy that employees will appreciate. Furthermore, state-of-the-art time and attendance software can allow certain employees to work from home or remotely without affecting the organization's payroll.

- **Be Open to Constructive Feedback**

An employee experience program will succeed only if your workforce finds it to be constructive and beneficial. The best way for an HR department to determine whether a program is achieving its desired goals is to create spaces for employees to critique it honestly. Additionally, because some employees will be reluctant to discuss their physical, social, or operational work environments openly, allowing anonymous feedback makes honest appraisal more likely

Employee experience programs are powerful tools. They can be remarkably effective at improving employee engagement, which in turn increases productivity, retention, and profitability. To be most effective, however, they must be designed and implemented according to several key guidelines. ■

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8 Powerful Onboarding Strategies to Engage New Employees

BY STIJN DE GROEF

How many employees worldwide are truly engaged and enthusiastic about their work these days? Most guesses are likely to fall far short of the true number: only 15 percent.¹ With countless studies drawing a strong connection between how engaged workers are and their productivity, retention, and growth, companies should do everything they can to increase their employees' engagement. A great place to start is right at the beginning, by implementing eight key strategies during onboarding.

LIFT THE CURTAIN

On their first day at a new job, new hires usually have dozens of questions floating around in their heads, such as “What does my average day look like?” and “What do my managers and colleagues expect from me?” and “What *exactly* am I responsible for?” Set new hires on the right track from day one by making sure they understand their roles and the organization's expectations.

PLAN FOR PERFORMANCE

It's never too early to start talking about performance reviews! Walk new hires through a sample performance review sheet and highlight setting one performance target, one development goal, and a job essence objective.

LEAD WITH INSPIRATION

Explain the company's unique mission (whether it's championing sustainable technology, revolutionizing the aviation industry, banking with a purpose, or something else) to new employees and then hone in on how their individual work will contribute to it. When employees work toward a purpose that is greater than “making money for the company,” they are more likely to stay engaged.

POWER UP

Equip new hires right off the bat with the gear they need to succeed, whether that means a lightning fast computer, login information for the company's resource center, or personalized business cards. Nothing dampens a new hire's enthusiasm like having to wear a visitor badge for the first week because no one thought to request his or her security pass.

AXE THE ADMIN

Don't send new hires home on the first day with a headache from signing one too many forms. Walk them through a few of the most pressing documents and leave the rest for later.

GET FACE TIME

One recent study found that 94 percent of employees “would prefer their manager address mistakes and development opportunities in real-time.”² On the very first day, managers should set aside quality time to connect with new employees and start cultivating great relationships with them.

BREAK THE ICE

A LinkedIn study about workplace relationships found that “46 percent of professionals worldwide believe that work friends are important to their overall happiness.”³ A team lunch on the first day can help facilitate the building of friendships (or at least positive relationships) in the workplace and may even result in a new hire meeting someone who becomes his or her best buddy.

WIND DOWN—AND PREP FOR THE FUTURE

The first day can feel like a whirlwind to a new hire, so set aside the last minutes of the day for a calm debrief. This is the perfect opportunity to answer any questions that may have come up throughout the past few hours and summarize the schedule for the rest of the week. New hires will leave engaged and excited to come back rather than think “Abandon ship!” as soon as they walk out the door. ■

A passionate HR professional, entrepreneur, and cyclist, Stijn de Groef is the CEO of Talmundo (www.talmundo.com), an HR technology company. Before founding Talmundo in 2012, he worked in senior talent management roles at EMEA and at the global level at Swarovski and Goodyear. De Groef now travels the world to spread the word about Talmundo's employee onboarding software and the strategic importance for businesses to get onboarding right.

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WORK HARDER
HEALTHIER!

How Employee Wellness Programs **BOOST PRODUCTIVITY**



BY PAMELA DELOATCH

For employees to perform well, they must *be* well. To accomplish that, they must practice living a healthy lifestyle by taking care of themselves physically, mentally, and socially. Companies that want to help their employees be well need to provide workplace environments that support the health and well-being of the whole individual. Although many companies offer medical benefits, only a few have wellness programs that promote holistic wellness on a daily basis. Often companies assume that such programs are too expensive or too difficult to implement, but they may be unaware of the strong correlation between a person's well-being and his or her performance.

THE WELLNESS AND PERFORMANCE CONNECTION

It's been well established that employees perform better when they are engaged in their work. But it is hard for them to be engaged when they're unwell in any way. Even a mild illness such as a cold can decrease employees' energy levels and distract them from their current tasks. Stress

can have the same result and, because it's a chronic and increasingly widespread condition, can lead to even more problems. Unfortunately, today's employees are more stressed than ever before. In one recent survey, for example, 87 percent of respondents said they were stressed in the workplace, and 15 percent of them

described their workplace stress as "not manageable."¹

Not only can chronic stress lead to burnout and turnover, but people who stay in stress-inducing environments increase their risk of stress-related illnesses, including cancer, heart disease, obesity, and mental illness. Stressed employees are also expensive: by some estimates, through healthcare costs, accidents, absenteeism, employee turnover, decreased productivity, and worker's compensation claims, highly stressed employees cost U.S. companies as much as \$300 billion each year.²

Clearly, it is difficult for employees to deliver peak performance when they are under stress, have a physical ailment, or feel socially isolated. Fortunately, the opposite holds true: employees who are well and happy perform significantly better. One psychologist found that when people felt more positive, they had a "happiness advantage"

that made the brain “31 percent more productive” than when it was “negative, neutral, or stressed.” The same research found that positive brains were “37 percent better at sales” and made physicians “19 percent faster [and] more accurate at coming up with the correct diagnosis.”³ (In some cases, happiness could mean the difference between life and death!)

To be clear, an organization can’t “make” its employees happy. It can, however, develop a collaborative culture of health and promote wellness initiatives that empower employees to work toward becoming their best selves.

GETTING ON BOARD WITH WELLNESS

As companies realize the impact of wellness on their employees, leaders are increasingly developing and promoting various programs that encourage employees to be more active and to pay more attention to their health. Nearly half (46.1 percent) of the companies surveyed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “offered some type of health promotion or wellness program.”⁴ Programs for physical wellness can include onsite gyms or even napping pods. Examples of activities that focus on social wellness include table tennis, Friday happy hours, coed softball leagues, or team challenges that build community.

Not every company has the budget or the space to launch a wide spectrum of wellness programs. But there are plenty of inexpensive and accessible options. For example, some companies have begun offering employee yoga classes. Because prolonged sitting and inactivity can lead to health problems, the Hatha Yoga approach, which focuses on stretching the hips, hamstrings, shoulders, and wrists, is particularly helpful for office employees who typically sit at desks and work on computers all day. Breathing techniques used in yoga bring oxygen to the brain and increase relaxation or energy as needed; they also facilitate meditation, which increases mental clarity. In addition to physical and mental benefits, workplace yoga classes also bring social benefits when employees try something new together.

ENCOURAGING PHYSICAL MOVEMENT THROUGH FUN ACTIVITIES

Physical movement doesn’t just burn calories—it also causes a person’s

cardiovascular system to perform better and even helps him or her to think more clearly. Walking increases blood flow to the brain—particularly to the areas of learning and memory—thus improving attentiveness. And simply walking more can dramatically boost creativity, too.⁵

Not everyone wants to sweat it out at the gym, but companies can incorporate movement into the workday. For example, instead of booking conference rooms for meetings, managers could try “walking meetings” that get everyone moving (and, when done outside, help them get some fresh air, too!). Another option is to take a page from the online shoe retailer Zappos, whose wellness director “puts [playground toys] on the plaza and sees what happens.” On these days, called Recess Tuesdays, “people will come outside, shoot some hoops, play tetherball [and] volleyball, and monkey around.”⁶ This type of program succeeds in part because it draws people in without forcing them to participate. (And of course, who *doesn’t* want some adult recess time?)

Companies can also encourage wellness through friendly competitions, such as step challenges or weight-loss challenges. These activities can help employees meet coworkers outside of their usual social circles and feel a sense of accomplishment. If participation is voluntary and the senior leaders are all in, employees may feel more motivated to participate (and more enthusiastic about the program).

CREATING RELATIONSHIPS FOR SOCIAL WELLNESS

Making employees feel that they belong is an important aspect of a successful wellness program. Numerous studies have shown that employees who have best friends at work are more engaged and less likely to leave—and that employees who are lonely at work are less productive, less healthy, and even more likely to quit. Unfortunately, most employees fall into the latter group, and businesses pay a high price for it: in just the United Kingdom alone, the effect of lonely employees costs employers about \$3.5 billion per year.⁷

By creating social wellness programs that bring people together, companies can help employees cultivate relationships. Celebrations and other social activities show employees that they are seen and valued. Departmental retreats, virtual coffee dates with people on remote teams,

non-work-related classes, lunchtime potluck meals, and learning how to form flash mobs are just a few of the fun activities that can bring people together. Providing break rooms—and opportunities to use them—can foster interaction throughout the day. Using collaboration software (such as Slack) for informal team conversations can help all employees, including remote workers, feel connected wherever they are (especially when the GIFs start flying!).

An organization that sets out to build a healthy workplace culture must remember that this change is not a one-and-done process. By using a wellness survey to find out the area of greatest employee concern (i.e., their greatest pain point) and starting with activities—even simple ones—to improve that area, the company sends the message that it cares about its employees and recognizes the importance of holistic wellness. When an organization builds a healthy organizational culture in which people have a sense of well-being, not only will they be more engaged at work, but they will begin to thrive in all other aspects of their lives as well. ■

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Use Employee Education Benefits to Increase Retention

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

With unemployment rates hitting record lows, employee retention is vital to the long-term health of any organization. One LinkedIn study drew a straight line between retention and education, with a whopping 94 percent of respondents reporting that “they would stay at a company longer if it invested in their learning and development.”¹ This study raises an important question: How can organizations invest in employee learning to improve employee retention?

Employment learning programs can be grouped into two categories. Internal programs are those developed and delivered by internal staff or by contractors hired by the company; they include technical training, management, leadership development, and mentoring. External programs are those for which the employee often chooses the subject and the place of delivery; they include employee educational benefits, such as student loan repayment programs and tuition reimbursement programs.

Any type of benefit (including employee education benefits) should include four key elements:

- **Alignment with talent objectives.** Employee benefits should help the organization recruit, engage, and retain the best talent. To meet those goals, benefits don't have to be expensive—but they *do* need to be things that employees value and want.
- **Communication to candidates and employees.** Research by family and education solution provider Bright Horizons draws a connection between program success and regular, proactive marketing of employee education benefits.² Organizations need to remember that they cannot simply mention a benefit during an interview or during new-hire orientation and think they're done.
- **Relationships with strategic partners.** Many employee benefits involve outside partnerships (e.g., health insurance, life insurance, gym memberships, food and snacks). In the case of tuition reimbursement, outside providers can include education providers (such as colleges and universities) as well as third-party benefits administrators.
- **Attractive and available to all.** This element is a big challenge for employers. What makes employee education benefits effective is inclusion, and inclusion is measured by utilization. The research by Bright Horizons found that “on average, across all industries, 4.9 percent of eligible employees participate in a tuition reimbursement program.”³ When unemployment rates aren't at historic lows, organizations might think that a 5 percent utilization rate is pretty good. But in light of the current skills gap and the employee retention challenges facing organizations today, then it might be time to reconsider what makes a rate “pretty good.” Even though it isn't possible to implement an employee education program that all employees embrace, organizations still need to improve their utilization rates if they want to reap the benefits (such as increased retention) that such a benefit offers.

Whether an organization is thinking about offering a tuition reimbursement program for the first time or wants to audit and update its existing program, it should be sure that the program is something that all employees would be interested in and able to use. Here are six areas to focus on when increasing the inclusivity of such a program:

- **Program name.** To many people, the commonly used term *tuition reimbursement* applies only to college expenses. Education involves much more than college, though. Perhaps *education assistance* is a better term for the benefit.
- **Eligibility.** Seventy-four percent of organizations offer tuition reimbursement only to full-time employees.⁴ Companies that want to improve their retention rates need to retain both full-time employees and part-time employees (especially in industries that have a large front-line workforce, where part-time employees often move into full-time positions). Therefore organizations should consider expanding the eligibility of these programs so they apply to—and appeal to—a larger pool of employees.
- **Waiting period.** Although 38 percent of organizations let employees receive tuition reimbursement immediately, most organizations still have some kind of waiting period.⁵ Companies need to weigh the financial cost of delaying access to the benefit against the results they're missing out on.
- **Financial models.** Asking employees to prepay for their education and wait for reimbursement can be a huge barrier to participation (especially in industries that have a large entry-level workforce). Companies should consider working with their program administrators to offer direct payments to education providers and remove the need for up-front payments by employees.
- **Education.** Organizations shouldn't limit reimbursement only to college courses directly related to an employee's current position. Rather, they should consider expanding the types of courses that are eligible for reimbursement to include general education diplomas (GEDs), language courses, and

certifications and credentials, as well as degrees in subjects that are valuable to the organization but not directly related to an employee's current career path.

- **Delivery models.** Today's technology allows individuals to learn from practically anywhere, and the quality of online education has significantly improved and now includes many new, innovative, high-quality options. Organizations might want to consider allowing massive open online courses (MOOCs), classes at exclusively online colleges, or even online education courses offered by non-university providers (such as the Society for Human Resource Management) to be included in educational assistance programs. Some newer education providers that target adult learners can provide great learning experiences at a much lower cost than traditional classroom-based approaches (whose costs continue to rise).

Fostering and encouraging employee learning can help companies attract, engage, and retain their talent. Providing employee educational benefits is one great way to support learning opportunities. But in order to be truly effective, such programs must meet the needs of *all* of an organization's employees. Only through inclusivity can adoption increase, and only through adoption can a program achieve its goals. ■

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The Importance of Building Trust

COMPANIES

WITHIN A COMPANY

BY INSIGHT WORLDWIDE

The strongest structures rest on solid foundations made of stone, concrete, and rebar. Similarly, the strongest organizations, too, rise from solid foundations—but theirs are made of services, products, and company culture. Different companies have different needs, but one thing that the most successful organizations have in common is a foundation that includes plenty of trust.

As companies struggle to source—and keep—top talent in an increasingly tight job market, they would be wise to pay attention to the strong correlation between trust and retention. In one recent study, 53 percent of the respondents said that trust was “a major factor in whether they stayed or left a company.” That same study also found that lack of trust was the reason why 24 percent of employees in the United Kingdom leave their jobs.¹

When employees are confident that they have management’s trust, usually those employees will not only meet expectations but actually *exceed* them. In an environment of trust—where they are both trusted and trustworthy—employees are more engaged and more productive. Stephen Covey describes how trust has a positive ripple effect throughout an organization:

When trust is high the dividend you receive is like a force multiplier, elevating and improving every dimension of your organization and life. High trust is like the leaven in bread, which lifts everything around it. In a company, high trust materially improves communication, collaboration, execution, innovation, strategy, engagement, partnering, and relationships with all stakeholders.²

Susan M. Heathfield echoes this sentiment:

Trust forms the foundation for effective communication, employee retention, and employee motivation and contribution of discretionary energy, the extra effort that people voluntarily invest in work. When trust exists in an organization or in a relationship,

almost everything else is easier and more comfortable to achieve.³

Happy and engaged employees are the ones most likely to put in the “extra effort” that leads to stronger and more financially stable organizations. One study found that when companies rate highly as “employee friendly,” they realize better returns on assets and equity than those that are less successful at currying favor with their employees.⁴

From a management perspective, high levels of trust within an organization offer one especially valuable benefit: under those circumstances, management can devote less time and fewer resources to worrying about their employees. Managers don’t have to wonder about day-to-day—level concerns, such as what workers are doing at any given moment, what they wear to the workplace or to client meetings, when they arrive and depart, how long their breaks are, or whether they are truly ill when they take “sick days.”

The need to micromanage isn’t the only concern that fades in a high-trust environment. The positive effects of trust extend beyond the cubicle walls. For example, in a high-trust environment, managers don’t have to be concerned about what their employees are saying about the organization not only when they’re in the office but when they’re outside the workplace, too. And those managers can also rest assured that their employees aren’t likely to be interviewing with competitors—a consideration that carries heightened significance as companies compete for talent.

So how does a company build a culture of trust? Achieving this goal takes time as well as

concerted efforts on several fronts. For example, transparency can help bolster employee confidence in the organization.⁵ Encouraging cooperation and communication among team members can improve their trust in each other.⁶ Similarly, promoting employees’ development can demonstrate confidence in their abilities and trust that they can fulfill their responsibilities well.

For any of these strategies to be effective, they need to be used with a population that’s receptive to them—that is, with employees who will be good partners in a trust-based relationship. Identifying such employees is a task that begins with the hiring process. A culture of trust within a company is an attainable goal, but only if the organization starts working toward it right from the start. ■

Insight Worldwide provides preemployment assessments and testing solutions. Its integrity testing is one critical tool that recruiters and hiring managers can deploy in their search for trustworthy employees who can help organizations accomplish their goals. For more information, visit insightww.com.

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