THE RESOURCE

VOL. VI, ISSUE II

Labor & Industrial INSIGHTS® Magazine

HOW SKILLS INITIATIVES CAN BENEFIT MANUFACTURERS

INSIDE

Your Consulting RESOURCE

The Resource has recently launched a new division of the business, ***Your Consulting Resource*** - to help with Human Resources and "people issues" that you may be experiencing. We'd like to support you in addressing your challenges so that you can focus on making your business most successful. In gathering feedback from our clients, it seems that turnover & retention are definite pain points in this tight labor market.

Consider these statistics:

- According to Gallup, 51% of U.S. employees say they are actively looking for a new job or watching for openings.
- Further, 52% of voluntarily exiting employees said their manager or organization could have done something to prevent them from leaving.

Your Consulting Resource can help you maximize retention of your valued employees. We can serve as a confidential third party to identify employee pain points. This can be done through employee focus groups, stay interviews, or surveys. Once pain points are identified, we'll facilitate development and execution of an action plan. We can also assist with aligning your leadership team, promoting your improvements, and establishing a continuous two-way feedback loop.

In addition to retaining your valued employees, you want them to be engaged! Engaged employees are willing to go above and beyond what is expected of them. They're committed. They drive innovation. They work harder, perform better, and help others. Research has shown, time and again, that engaged workforces significantly outperform those that are not engaged. Yet, according to Gallup, only 34% of employees report being engaged in their jobs – which means more turnover and lack of retention. Furthermore, 13% are actively disengaged, which means they are not committed and generally unhappy (and they don't hesitate to share that unhappiness with others). In addition, actively disengaged employees undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish, infecting *up to seven* other people. The remainder of the population is in the middle, and provide a great opportunity to move the needle on engagement - if you can create the right environment.

Your Consulting Resource has lots of tools and resources that can help you implement strategies to address important pillars of engagement - such as onboarding, employee recognition, two-way feedback, leadership, empowerment, teamwork, career growth, and more! Feel free to contact me for a FREE consult or coaching session.

Stay tuned! Future issues of this magazine will contain more information about other CONSULTING SERVICES that we can provide.

THE RESOURCE

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Leslie has 30 years of experience in all areas of the Human Resources field. She has worked in the Manufacturing, Healthcare, Service, and Technology industries. Leslie has a Masters Degree in Organizational Psychology as well as senior HR certifications through HRCI and SHRM. She is also Certified Professional Coach.

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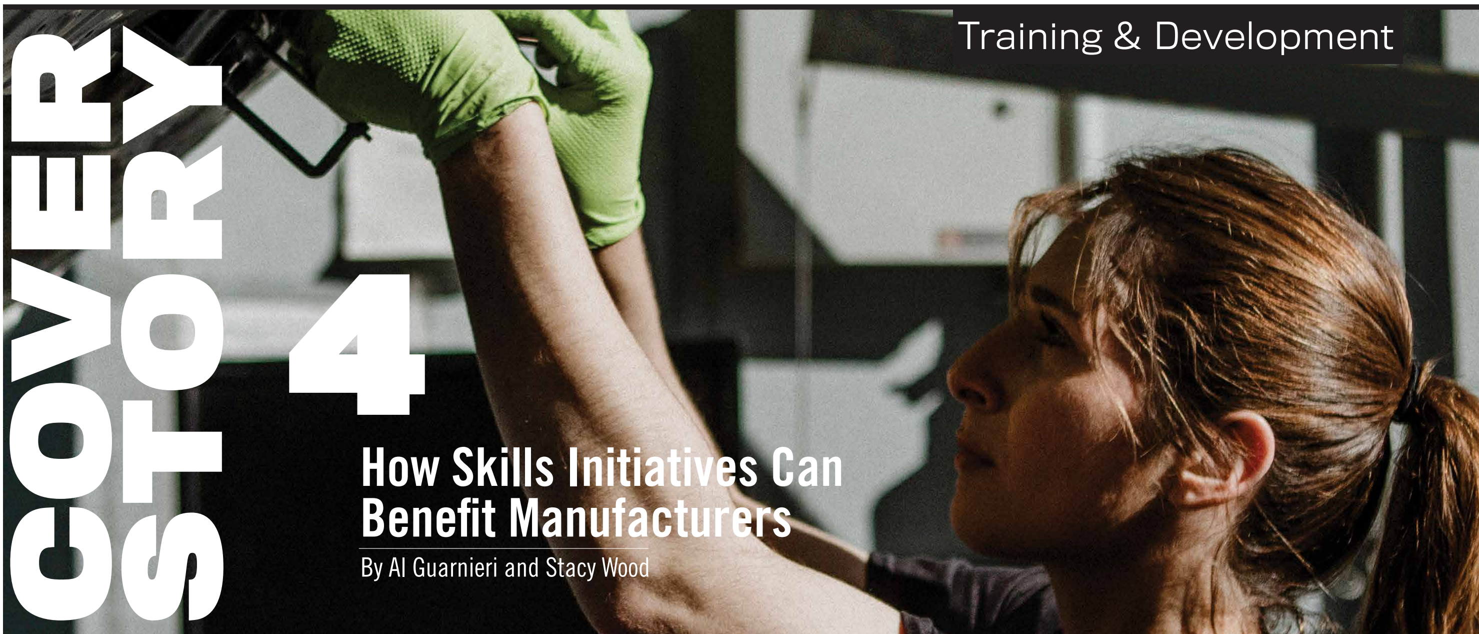

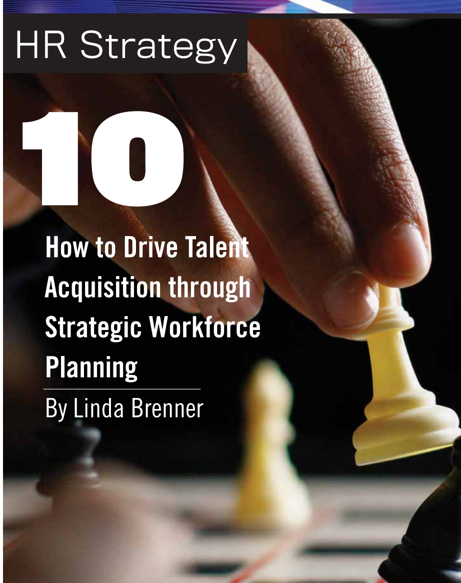

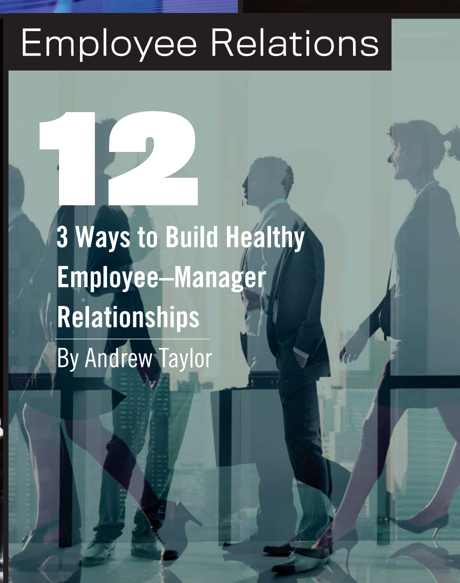

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HOW SKILLS INITIATIVES CAN BENEFIT MANUFACTURERS

BY AL GUARNIERI AND STACY WOOD

The need for skilled labor is an escalating concern for manufacturers. Not only does the low unemployment rate make it harder to find workers, but today's manufacturing jobs require very different skills from jobs of just a decade ago. The embedding of digital tools and technology in manufacturing (a transformation sometimes referred to as Industry 4.0) has necessitated a shift in the skills workers need to be successful.

Some manufacturers are turning to one type of workforce training program, skills initiatives, as a solution. These initiatives encompass a wide range of programs but are often styled as apprenticeships and fit under the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) umbrella. Across the country, community colleges and even some high schools have developed skills initiatives that can help companies find and train the talent they need. In addition, some companies have created their own skills initiatives, sometimes in cooperation with community colleges. By working with local educational institutions and government officials and by following best practices in employment law, manufacturers can maximize the benefits of these programs.

BACKGROUND ON SKILLS INITIATIVES

The apprenticeship model for these programs comes from Germany, Switzerland, and Austria, where a vastly higher percentage of the workforce (compared to the workforce in the USA) goes through apprenticeships. Those countries structure their programs around a dual-education concept: workers get practical, hands-on training in the company while they also study. During the program, students are generally paid to study and work; if they complete the program, they also receive a job offer. This structure makes this program extremely valuable for both the company and the workers: the workers get a clear path to a new career, and the company gets a pipeline to the skills it needs.

Parts of the Carolinas and other Southeastern states adopted this model as growing numbers of German, Swiss, and Austrian companies established operations in the region, and it has since spread around the United States to New Hampshire, Michigan, and Arizona, to name just a few places. More states are working to expand these programs, usually in coordination with community colleges and even high schools.

FINDING OR CREATING A SKILLS INITIATIVE

Manufacturers should first reach out to their local community colleges to see what programs may already exist. If those schools don't offer suitable programs, companies should talk to college officials about their interest in partnering to develop them.

In particular, companies looking to build a new facility or expand should consider this approach. Frequently, states will provide support for a skills initiative that helps a locating or expanding company create skilled jobs. After all, two of the main goals of most state economic-development offices are to create jobs and to increase and elevate the skills of their workforce.

Companies may also consider banding together with other manufacturers with similar needs to develop a mutually beneficial skills initiative:

> Teaming up with other businesses offers a solution here. Forming or joining an interorganizational network lowers the barrier to entry into an apprenticeship program because a network can reduce the burden for each individual firm and reduce the hurdle to offering apprenticeship. Networks are not only for SMEs [small- and medium-sized entities]. Big firms can also benefit from these partnerships.[1]

These efforts create a network that both demonstrates the need for the program and benefits from it.

EMPLOYMENT LAW CONSIDERATIONS

Manufacturers must be mindful of federal and state wage and hour laws that may affect skills initiatives. There can be a misconception that if such a program is "just training," a company doesn't have to pay for it. But the rules vary from state to state, so companies should seek legal guidance before deciding how to structure pay and benefits for these programs.

Companies should also think about skills initiatives as tools for attracting not just better talent but also more diverse talent. Hand in hand with that, manufacturers should ensure they are providing these initiatives on an equal opportunity basis. The broader the pool of potential candidates, the better.

Organizations should avoid undue reliance on word of mouth to find candidates and should also refrain from limiting the pool of potential candidates solely to those just beginning their working careers. Community colleges are a natural fit in this regard, as they retrain many people who are seeking second or even third careers. Likewise, in deciding which community colleges or high schools to partner with, organizations should consider their demographics in addition to their technical expertise.

MORE THAN MANUFACTURING SKILLS

Lastly, companies should not limit themselves solely to the nuts and bolts of their manufacturing operations when they think about skills initiatives. Manufacturers frequently mention "soft skills" as a challenge for their workforce. Some skills training programs—often those that fit under the STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) umbrella—teach soft skills such as problem-solving and creative collaboration. At the same time, a small but growing number of skills training programs move beyond teaching technical manufacturing skills to include skills in areas such as finance or information technology. These types of programs can help certain members of a company's team diversify their skill sets.

These are just a few of the ways manufacturers can benefit from skills initiatives. By partnering with community colleges, seeking support from state government, and applying best practices in employment law, these initiatives can help companies build and maintain their workforces of the future.

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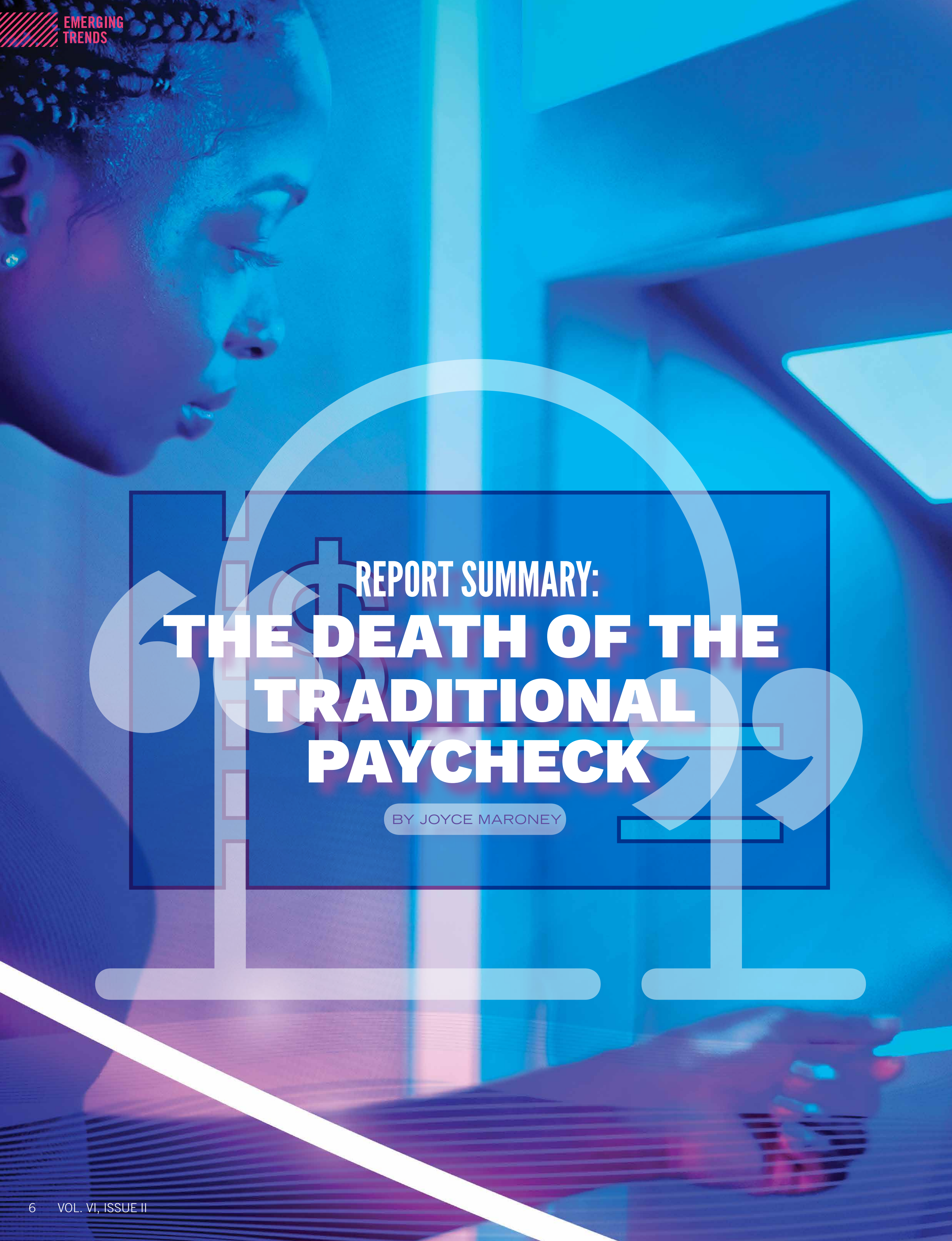
1. Johan Fortwengel. 2019. "Collaborating on Implementing Apprenticeships: Promises, Challenges, and Solutions for Managing Networks." In *Skilling Up: The Scope of Modern Apprenticeship*. Ervin Dimeny et al, eds., pp.62–68.



REPORT SUMMARY:

THE DEATH OF THE TRADITIONAL PAYCHECK

BY JOYCE MARONEY

The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated recently released the results of a survey titled "The Death of the Traditional Paycheck," which focused on "how immediate access to earned wages (i.e., on-demand pay) and financial wellness can support recruitment, retention, and a better employee experience."[1] The data revealed that the current paycheck system presents many challenges for workers, most of whom are ready for a change to the status quo.

MOST AMERICANS HAVE MONEY-RELATED DIFFICULTIES

For example, one recent study by the Federal Reserve on household financial stability found that a significant portion of the population would have trouble dealing with an unexpected $400 expense: 39 percent would be unable to cover it with funds on hand (or with a credit card paid off before interest is charged), "27 percent would borrow or sell something to pay for the expense, and 12 percent would not be able to cover the expense at all"; at the same time "another 12 percent of adults would be unable to pay their current month's bills if they also had an unexpected $400 expense that they had to pay."[2] Another troubling finding in the report is that "one-fifth of adults had major, unexpected medical bills to pay in the prior year [and] one-fourth of adults skipped necessary medical care in 2018 because they were unable to afford the cost."[3]

Such financial insecurity in employees' lives takes a toll on their businesses: "The Death of the Traditional Paycheck" indicated that 53 percent of Americans experience financial stress that interferes with their ability to do their work.[4] (At first glance that high number might seem to be an error. But the fact is that despite the overall growth of the U.S. economy in recent years, many Americans continue to struggle financially.) Age and parental status correlate to higher stress levels: younger employees (under age 45) are far more likely to see their work lives affected by this stress, as are employees who have children under the age of 18.

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents "want access to their wages before their pay day," yet only 6 percent have this option. Some want this access for discretionary spending, such as holiday gift shopping (10 percent) or off-the-clock social activities (11 percent). But most indicated a desire for "early access to earned wages to simply cover bills, especially emergency expenses such as a car repair (32 percent) or unplanned medical care (19 percent)."

In fact, some survey respondents were so interested in getting their wages sooner that a surprising number of them said they'd even pay for this access:

> The vast majority of hourly (75 percent) and salary (71 percent) workers would consider paying up to a $5 fee reasonable to access $50 of their wages before pay day. Nearly one in 10 (8 percent) workers would consider a staggering $50 fee reasonable to access $50 of their earned wages early, which could signal a desperation among some for safe and reliable access to their own money as an alternative to short-term pay day loans.

Most (70 percent) respondents believed that the traditional pay period that covers a 40-hour workweek over five consecutive days is "outdated." Not surprisingly, employees experiencing financial stressors are most likely to desire on-demand access to their pay. For example, at the $50,000/year threshold for household income, support for early access to wages jumps from 67 percent to 87 percent. And given the choice, 43 percent of employees would swap regularly scheduled pay days for the ability to retrieve their earnings on demand, with renters (51 percent) more likely than homeowners (39 percent) to choose this option.

FINANCIAL WELLNESS AS A DESIRED BENEFIT

Workers want their employers to help them with unexpected expenses, with 64 percent of them interested in short-term loans, early access to their wages, or other financial support from their employers. But workers want more than financial assistance: they want educational assistance as well. Specifically, 74 percent of respondents would rather "work for an employer that offers financial planning, budgeting, and automated savings tools over one that does not." This comes as no surprise to payroll expert Martin Armstrong, who says, "Employers have embraced the responsibility of offering physical wellness programs to employees, and as we welcome 2020 it's time they consider doing the same with financial wellness and on-demand pay."

Times are changing—and companies need to change with them. Considering that over half (57 percent) of the survey respondents say they value on-demand pay enough to put in extra time and effort at work to get it, organizations must start working toward meeting those needs if they want to stay competitive. ■

Joyce Maroney is the executive director of the Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated, a leading provider of workforce management and human capital management cloud solutions. She can be reached on Twitter at @WF_Institute.

1. The Workforce Institute. 2019. "The Death of the Traditional Paycheck? U.S. Workers Want Faster Access to Wages, Finds Workforce Institute at Kronos Survey." The Workforce Institute website, December 18, workforceinstitute.org/the-death-of-the-traditional-pay-check-u-s-workers-want-faster-access-to-wages-finds-workforce-institute-at-kronos-survey/.
2. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. 2019. "Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2018." Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System website, May, www.federalreserve.gov/publications/files/2018-report-economic-well-being-us-households-201905.pdf.
3. Ibid.
4. These figures and all the subsequent ones in this article are from: The Workforce Institute. 2019.

ADA INTERACTIVE PROCESS: BACK TO BASICS

BY JANICE PINTAR

Passed almost thirty years ago, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was the first comprehensive federal law that addressed the needs of individuals with disabilities by prohibiting discrimination in employment, communications, public services, and public accommodations. Modeled in large part after the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title I of the ADA generally prohibited discrimination against employees with disabilities but also imposed additional obligations for employers to provide reasonable accommodations for their employees with disabilities.

Despite the important public policy behind the ADA and the general support it received, the ADA has proved to be one of the more difficult and time-consuming laws for employers from a compliance standpoint, and has garnered a sizable amount of litigation between employers and their employees. Even today, disability charges are the third most frequently filed claim at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), following retaliation and sex discrimination claims.

ADA PROTECTIONS EXPANDED

Much of the litigation in the past decades has focused on whether the employee who was alleging disability discrimination was even entitled to protection under the law. In other words, was the employee "disabled" as defined under the ADA and thus entitled to a reasonable accommodation in the first place? After the U.S. Supreme Court came out with a trio of decisions narrowing the definition of disability, holding that individuals who effectively controlled their conditions (e.g., diabetes, cancer, or epilepsy) may not be disabled and entitled to reasonable accommodations, the ADA was amended in 2008 to expressly reject the Supreme Court's decisions. The amendment expanded the definition of "disabled" under that law to provide a much broader scope of protection for employees.

Called the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), the amendments to the law and the regulations that followed provided that the definition of disability be construed broadly and that the determination of a disability should not require an extensive analysis. The practical effect of the ADAAA was that many more employees were entitled to protections under the law, including (but not limited to) reasonable workplace accommodations absent undue hardship. As a result of the increase in requests for reasonable accommodations, employers have had to spend much more time on compliance related to the "interactive process" that generally must be engaged in after such a request is made by a disabled employee.

THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS

Neither the statute nor the regulations clearly define the interactive process despite its importance to both employers and employees. The regulations provide that:

> To determine the appropriate reasonable accommodation it may be necessary for the covered entity to initiate an informal, *interactive process* with the individual with a disability in need of the accommodation. This process should identify the precise limitations resulting from the disability and potential reasonable accommodations that could overcome those limitations. [emphasis added]

Reasonable accommodations can include a myriad of adjustments, modifications, or changes to the workplace. Some examples noted in the regulations include making facilities or equipment accessible and usable, job restructuring, and modified schedules. But how does an employer know which reasonable accommodation should be provided? Or whether the reasonable accommodation requested is likely to assist the employee in overcoming a barrier caused by his or her disability? To answer these questions, the employer should engage in a robust interactive process before approving or denying a requested reasonable accommodation.

BACK TO BASICS

The easiest way to begin the interactive process is to talk to the employee who has requested the accommodation. Having an informal discussion with the employee about his or her request is a great way to start the process and ensures that the process is interactive. Although the ADA does not proscribe the use of any forms or documents that must be used in conjunction with the employee's reasonable accommodation request, employers should consider documenting the employee's requested accommodation and discussions with the employee, and then determine whether they need medical information to substantiate the condition and determine the effect of that condition on the employee's ability to perform his or her essential job functions.

So long as the disability is not known or obvious, employers are allowed to ask employees for medical documentation about the employee's disability and the functional job limitations when the employee requests a reasonable accommodation. Doing so is not required by the ADA but is recommended, because the documentation both provides evidence for the employer's participation in the interactive process and increases the chances that a reasonable accommodation may be found that works for both the employer and the employee.

Of course, there's no guarantee that engaging in an interactive process will always result in a positive outcome that works for both parties. Not every reasonable accommodation requested is actually reasonable. And as previously noted, employers do not have to grant a reasonable accommodation that would cause an undue hardship to the business. That said, employers who deny a request and fail to engage in the interactive process, who fail to effectively document their compliance with this important step, or who fail even to recognize that a reasonable accommodation is being requested by their employee will face an uphill battle if and when the employee files a claim alleging an employer's failure to accommodate.

Janice Pintar has extensive litigation experience in the field of employment law and was a plaintiff's attorney for nearly thirteen years before joining Associated Financial Group's HR Consultants in 2015. She educates and advises human resources professionals and employers on a broad range of employment issues and best practices and costly litigation compliance topics. She can be reached at Janice.Pintar@associatedbank.com.

HOW TO DRIVE

Talent Acquisition through Strategic Workforce Planning

BY LINDA BRENNER

In the human resources world, it's hard to find a term more nebulous, more misunderstood, and more hated than *strategic workforce planning* (though *onboarding* might run a close second). Fortunately, strategic workforce planning is started to shed some of its negative connotations, as more and more companies recognize the important role it plays in improving hiring and retention results.

In any effort, the absence of a concrete goal makes it impossible to achieve desired results. Nonetheless, talent acquisition (TA) teams frequently work without clear goals (for example, recruiters often say that their priorities are "to fill jobs fast" and "to keep hiring managers happy"). This ambiguity is complicated by the fact that hiring priorities are difficult to identify.

As it relates to talent acquisition, strategic workforce planning (SWP) identifies future hiring needs and priorities aligned to business strategy. But achieving that goal is easier said than done, because the different parties involved often have different agendas and preferences. In many organizations senior leaders vie for top priority for their own needs, for example, or they have different opinions about which roles are most urgent to fill (with some prioritizing the most frequently hired roles and others placing the highest value on those roles closest to the customers).

Because these debates often lie outside the purview of the talent acquisition team, the absence of strategic TA representation means that conversations—and decisions—about hiring priorities and workforce strategy can lose steam and fall off the HR planning agenda. But unless different groups in the organization can agree on TA priorities and decisions, no TA strategy can be completely successful.

HOW TALENT DRIVES BUSINESS VALUE

Markets set a company's business value based on reasonable projections of future cash flow driven by asset performance. There are two types of assets to consider. The first type comprises tangible assets (equipment, buildings, trucks, etc.), all of which companies report in their financial documents. The second type includes intangible assets (brands, customer relationships, IP, proprietary technology, etc.), none of which companies report (unless they sell or acquire another company). Nearly 90 percent of the value of the average company is attributable to intangible assets created solely by its people.[1] An organization's human capital creates intellectual capital, intangible assets that can be thought of as the valuable accumulations of employees' intellectual output over time.

To measure the value of SWP and talent acquisition investments in an organization, one must first understand how value is created (and will be created) within that specific business. For public companies, a review of public documents (such as investor presentations and 10-Ks) provides a solid baseline understanding. For example, it is easy to determine that in a company such as Raytheon, a relatively small team of engineers creates the greatest amount of the organization's business value. Brand managers and product innovation professionals lead the way at Coca-Cola and Proctor & Gamble. And at a pharmaceutical firm such as Merck, the R&D department creates value by developing patentable new drugs.

Great hires in a business's key asset-creation areas will result in huge gains in business value. Poor hires, on the other hand, will create great risk. For this reason alone, strategic workforce planning is essential to determining the most critical roles in the organization. Only through SWP can organizations identify talent acquisition priorities, establish goals, and effectively deploy resources

HOW TO DEVELOP A STRATEGIC AND TARGETED WORKFORCE PLANNING PROCESS

Efforts to build workforce plans across entire swaths of the business (by level, by geography, etc.) are typically too unwieldy to enable concrete, actionable priorities and next steps. Given the importance of critical roles in an organization, starting with a very narrow targeted role or functional vertical (for example, research, data analytics, merchandising, or brand management) and creating a strategy from there is the key to successful planning:

1. Using the methodology described above, build a case for identifying the roles and skills that are most essential to creating future business value for the organization. Meet with several key business, talent management, and HR leaders to get their understanding and buy in. Discussions should cover both the need for prioritizing workforce planning efforts and the reasons why this particular group of jobs and skills was identified as key.
2. For this group of roles or functional area, collect the following information:
   —One or two years of hiring, attrition, and internal movement data, sorted by role or by employee
   —Organizational charts
   —Business plans (both short term and long term) for the function
3. Analyze the data and prepare materials for a half-day workshop with the senior leader and his or her direct reports.
4. Conduct the half-day workshop with the leadership team:
   —Present an overview of the session's goals (specifically, workforce planning and strategic priorities and plans for talent acquisition).
   —Review the team's hiring and attrition trends for the previous one or two years.
   —Get the team's input on specific replacement and new hiring needs and plans for the next six to twelve months.
   —Taking into consideration business goals and scenario planning, discuss and capture known high-level hiring needs beyond one year.
   —Facilitate a discussion about the criticality of the roles (or groups of roles) and the availability of talent in the marketplace for the skills required.
5. After the workshop, summarize and present the group's results and identify talent priorities, estimated numbers, timing, and provisional approaches.
6. Develop the talent acquisition strategy required to find, attract, and win people to fill the identified roles, beginning with the roles deemed most critical and requiring the scarcest skills available in the marketplace.
7. Set talent acquisition goals (e.g., speed, cost, quality, diversity) and targets by sourcing channel, then align resources to execute plans to secure the future workforce.

By prioritizing the most essential skills, workforce planning efforts deliver the most important information and action steps to key business areas first. From this starting point, one can methodically move on to other functional areas.

THE RESULTS

This method of targeted and strategic workforce planning will yield numerous, concrete results:

- Alignment among senior leaders and key stakeholders regarding workforce planning and talent acquisition priorities
- Lists of specific hiring plans and priorities to revisit and update on a quarterly basis following the working session
- Assessment, by business leaders, of the criticality and availability of skills for their predicted openings
- Prioritized, data-driven, TA forecasts and plans for the specific functional area
- Goals, tactics, and measures of success for the TA team for these targeted roles

Success in hiring cannot be achieved without clearly articulated aims. Organizations that want to improve their hiring need to define goals that are business-based, accurate, measurable, and value-added. The only way to accomplish that is through targeted and strategic workforce planning. ■

Linda Brenner is the managing director and founder of Talent Growth Advisors. She has built a team of finance, HR, talent acquisition, talent management, marketing, and operations experts with wildly diverse backgrounds and one thing in common: exceptional problem-solving skills. Brenner can be reached at linda@talentgrowthadvisors.com.

1. Talent Growth Advisors. undated. "Intellectual Capital Index." Talent Growth Advisors website, talentgrowthadvisors.com/our-big-idea/ici.

3 *Ways to Build* HEALTHY EMPLOYEE–MANAGER RELATIONSHIPS

BY ANDREW TAYLOR

Everyone has to deal with various ups and downs in their work relationships. Sometimes the coworkers are great and the bosses are nightmares—or the other way around. When employees and managers work well together, though, those relationships can yield plenty of benefits for everyone involved (including the organization in general). For that reason, companies should prioritize building and nurturing healthy employee–manager relationships, starting with these three strategies.

CHALLENGE EACH OTHER

Employee engagement is usually talked about primarily as a pain point for managers. But being disengaged or essentially “checked out” for 40 or more hours each week sounds like a bad time for *anybody.* All people want to be engaged in what they’re doing. Everyone needs to be challenged.

But not just any challenge will do. Burnout is a real thing, and employees want work that is challenging in a meaningful way, not just challenging because it’s demanding. Meaningful work is certainly a driver of engagement, and people are willing to compromise a great deal to have it. In fact, one recent study found that “on average, employees will give up 23 percent of their total future lifetime earnings—nearly a quarter of their income—in exchange for work that is always meaningful.”[1]

CELEBRATE WINS

When a team wins, the victory goes to everyone involved. But it’s also important to recognize individuals for their contributions to that effort. Unfortunately, many people tend to shy away from taking credit for their accomplishments. Sometimes this is out of fear of being perceived as arrogant. Or perhaps they want to avoid taking attention from anyone else’s hard work.

The need for employees to speak up on their own behalf diminishes, however, when they have a manager who makes it a point to highlight team members’ unique contributions whenever possible. And that’s one great way to strengthen employee–manager relationships: if people spend less time worrying about elevating themselves and instead put that energy into elevating those around them, *everyone* is lifted up and celebrated.

Not having to manage a personal brand with constant self-promotion can be amazingly freeing. When employees and managers do that for each other by highlighting each other’s successes, that lifts a tremendous burden off everyone’s shoulders—and suddenly gives them time to focus on the things that really matter.

TRUST EACH OTHER

If an organization wants people to care about their work, it must trust them to do that work by allowing them to take ownership of it. For certain types of work, rigid workflows are of course absolutely necessary. (For example, no one would want to drive a car that was built by an assembly line professional who took creative liberties in the production of that car.) But when that rigidity is imposed when it isn’t required, it can restrict the development of trust.

People who are trusted enough to complete a project to the best of their abilities are likely to be more invested in producing the best possible results. When the trust between employees and the business is mutual, the business and its people take care of each other. That works on every level within an organization—and certainly in employee–manager relationships.

Keep in mind, though, that building trust does take time. An employee and manager who have worked as a team for years will likely have a much stronger degree of trust in their relationship than an employee and manager who have just started to work together. Employees who want to build trust in their work dynamic need to give their managers reasons to trust them, and managers need to do the same with their employees. In order to establish trust in an employee–manager relationship, it’s important that all parties do their part—regardless of where they fall in the hierarchy.

By following these three strategies, employees and managers can strengthen the relationships they have with each other. By making each other feel challenged, celebrated, and trusted, they set the stage for increased engagement and productivity. ■

Andrew Taylor is the PR and marketing writer at Ultimate Software (ultimatesoftware.com), a leading provider of cloud-based HCM solutions, where he develops content that empowers organizations to achieve their human capital management (HCM) goals while putting their people first.

1. Andrew Reece, Gabriella Kellerman, and Alexi Robichaux. 2018. “Meaning and Purpose at Work.” BetterUp website, get.betterup.co/rs/600-WTC-654/images/betterup-meaning-purpose-at-work.pdf.

HOW to Engage Employees MORE

BY BONFYRE TEAM

Employee engagement has been a hot topic for the better part of the past two decades, but there seems to be confusion as to what it actually is. First, consider what it is *not*:

- Employee engagement is not employee motivation.
- Employee engagement is not employee satisfaction.
- Employee engagement is not two employees deciding to get married.

Rather, employee engagement is a combination of how connected employees feel to their workplaces and the level of effort they put in as a result. Engaged employees stand apart from the typical worker in their ability to go the extra mile, bring passion to their projects, and help bring their organizations' mission to fruition.

Most organizations want all of their employees to be "engaged." But only 34 percent of U.S. employees are engaged at work.[1] The following three strategies can help companies boost engagement.

IMPROVE COMPANY COMMUNICATIONS

Even if a company has decided to do away with cubicles, employees can find it difficult to feel connected with the people next to them if they aren't regularly working on similar projects. They can also struggle to explore commonalities among colleagues when employees sit on opposite sides of the office. Company communications platforms can help employees connect by providing a space for them to share updates and communicate with others about their work, hobbies, and interests. By using these platforms to ask for insight on a project, for example, to make announcements about the company's bowling team, or to share travel tips, employees can feel more connected to their colleagues and to their companies.

GET RID OF UNSATISFYING WORK

Engaged employees who feel strongly about the company's mission want to feel that they are helping to realize it. Most company goals are achieved by a lot of moving parts doing many different tasks—not all of which are particularly satisfying. Long hours of repetitive work can take its toll on employees' happiness and make them feel as though they aren't contributing value to the organization or engaging with those around them.

As tedious as this type of work can be, however, most of it is essential to the proper function of the organization. This is why more and more companies are turning to robotic process automation (RPA) solutions and enlisting the help of software bots to automate much of the busywork that makes up a significant portion of an employee's day. This shift allows employees to contribute less to monotonous work and more to work that requires creative and innovative thinking and is therefore more satisfying.

NURTURE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Employees who join an organization are deciding to invest their future with that company. This decision is based in part on their belief that the organization will nurture their professional growth and open doors to new career opportunities in the future. Because this belief increases employee engagement, companies should do their best to live up to it. Thankfully, an effective development program doesn't require an extensive training budget. One option is to provide cross-training for employees to learn about the key responsibilities of other positions in addition to their own. This training not only encourages employees to look at the organization as a more likely candidate for their next career opportunity, but also gives them a more holistic view of the value the organization provides its customers. As a result, those employees will acclimate quickly to new and exciting roles, thus providing the company with a more competent and engaged workforce.

By implementing strategies that increase connection, job satisfaction, and growth opportunities, companies can have a positive effect on three of the key factors that influence engagement. With the job market showing no signs of improving, organizations need to do whatever they can to keep their employees engaged.

Bonfyre offers an award-winning employee experience platform that helps companies around the globe build an engaged workforce and vibrant work culture. Learn more at bonfyreapp.com.

1. Jim Harter. 2018. "Employee Engagement on the Rise in the U.S." Gallup website, August 26, news.gallup.com/poll/241649/employee-engagement-rise.aspx.

THE RESOURCE

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We work to determine your unique needs & customize our services accordingly. Whether you're a new or established business, outsourcing may be the right decision to reduce overhead, increase productivity, and ensure compliance.

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Start at the CORE and maximize your employee ROI

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