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THE RESOURCE 2020 REFLECTIONS

Well, I must say that "Hindsight's 2020" takes on a whole new meaning, for sure! No different than any other crisis we've faced in the past - we acknowledge it, react to it, make a plan and execute it, making necessary modifications along the way. Our 2020 hindsight now tells us that we faced this pandemic head-on, with courage and faith, and we are stronger and better because of the changes we were forced to make. Now, we plan to finish 2020 strong and head into 2021 anticipating a great year!

This year has been a doozy, but with every major life event (even the "unparalleled", "unprecedented" ones), comes an opportunity to learn, and to reflect...

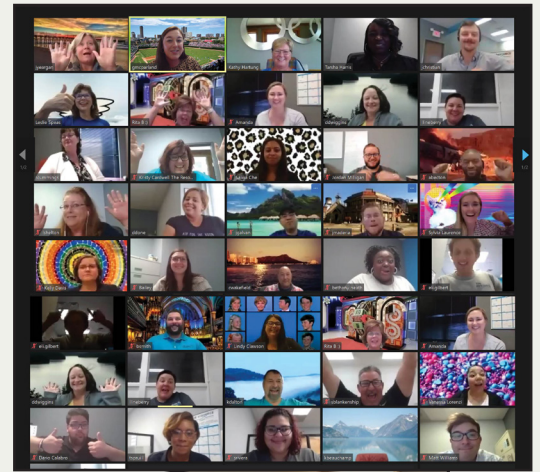_Here are some of the 2020 reflections of THE RESOURCE staff:_

- "Exhilirating"
- "Taking nothing for granted"
- "Mentally Exhausting"
- "Adapting & accepting CHANGE"
- "#AdjustAndLive"
- "Grateful - for a job, good health, and a forced slowdown"
- "DIFFERENT"
- "Emotional Roller-Coaster"
- "Trust in God no matter what comes your way"
- "We're not in control of anything except how we respond"
- "Transition"
- "Growth, nurturing wisdom, persevere"
- "One persons's courage can defeat the complacency of 1000s"
- "2020: When you feel like you're already tired tomorrow"
- "We'll either find a way, or we'll make one"
- "Unpredictable & Inordinate"

Like many others, our business was heavily impacted by COVID-19. Many of our customers had to cease operations for periods of time. We had to furlough some of our valued employees. We had to quickly adjust our operations to allow for safety precautions, and to go virtual! But through it all, we've been exceedingly blessed, with an internal staff willing to do whatever it takes to get the job done, and contract employees who worked diligently even in the midst of uncertainty; many of whom were considered "essential workers" in the manufacturing sector! 2020 also brought us recognition as a 'Best Place to Work' and a 'Fast 50 Growing Company'. All in all, we'll take what we've experienced this past year, and channel it towards growth, innovation, development, and culture in the year ahead!

Here's to 2021!

THE RESOURCE

Year in Review...

HR INSIGHTS
Magazine

Get Ready for Digital

Long before the pandemic forced everyone into working from their kitchens, home offices, or bedrooms, the world was very much on its way to eliminating the need for conventional workspaces. Today's younger generations have grown up in digital environments and already feel pretty comfortable doing much of their work online. But even though those digital natives probably find the prospect of working from home less intimidating than many members of older generations, in 2020 people of all ages are facing the same challenge: familiarizing themselves with the digital workplace.

Leverage Free Learning

Fortunately, there has never been a better time for workers (of all ages) to enter the digital workplace. Free online resources, such as YouTube and e-libraries, provide easy access to an immeasurable amount of information. The number of jobs with digital- or technology-related components is surging, putting those without the requisite skills at an immediate disadvantage, and those free online resources can help them catch up. (For example, an Internet search for "how to code tutorial" yields 302 million hits for videos alone!) Adding an array of new digital skills to their resume could put someone right at the front of the queue of candidates.

Be Willing to Learn

Many people find acquiring new digital skills a daunting task, because it can feel like learning an entirely new language. It's important that they be able—and willing—to learn these skills, though, because the demands of 21st-century economies will require the workforce to be versatile and quick to adapt and technological innovation isn't going to stop anytime soon. Some people will take longer than

THE
WORKPLACE

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

others to fully adapt to such changes, so employers must accommodate their workers' different learning styles and paces (ideally through employee training).

Embrace the Benefits of Working from Home

Employees of all ages can benefit from working remotely, and with no specific end date in sight for the pandemic, the business world should be prepared to embrace this type of work arrangement for a while. Those who believe that working from home is nothing but a brief inconvenience may want to reassess that position. With the increasing need to reduce travel for environmental reasons, as well as the ever-soaring cost of housing in major cities, the "work from home" model is likely to stick around for some time. After the pandemic-

related lockdowns and closures end, some people will need to return to commuting to their offices, but many who are capable of doing their jobs from home may be asked to do so on a more permanent basis.

Shaped by technological advances and accelerated by a global crisis, how people work is undergoing a profound transformation. But as old work models slowly begin to fade away, people who are ready for the digital workplace of the future can begin to reap its rewards today. ■

Jessica Miller-Merrell is a workplace change agent focused on human resources and talent acquisition. She's also the founder of Workology (formerly Blogging4Jobs) and can be contacted on Twitter at @jmillermerrell.

5 TRENDS IN EMPLOYEE BENEFITS FOR 2021 OPEN ENROLLMENT

It's that time of year again: time for companies to examine their current employee benefits and consider their options for increasing value—preferably without increasing cost. This year, such decisions are further complicated (and made more challenging) by a global pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, many companies are focusing on tools to help employees stay mentally and emotionally healthy while they engage in social distancing to protect their physical health. More and more employers are expanding employee benefits for virtual healthcare (telehealth) and increasing access to programs that will help improve and maintain employees' mental health and well-being.

When weighing the options, an organization may want to know what other companies are choosing as benefit priorities. Not every trend will fit that organization's needs, but this knowledge will help it remain competitive in its market for both retention and recruitment purposes. Here are some of the most common benefits trends that businesses across all industries are pursuing for 2021. (Note that each option can be customized and scaled to meet the needs of that particular organization and workforce.)

Telehealth and Virtual Health Care

Telehealth options have been expanding for years, with both healthcare providers and health insurance carriers offering consumers the option to seek nonemergency care for minor illnesses from the comfort of their own homes. Stay-at-home orders, mask mandates, and social distancing requirements have had a profound impact on people seeking in-person medical treatment, and some telehealth platforms have seen significant jumps in their activity since the pandemic began. To address a clearly rising need, in 2021 "nearly all employers will offer telehealth services for minor, acute services, while 91 percent will also offer telemental health."[1]

Mental Health Programs

Since April 2020, the pandemic has led to heightened rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts among U.S. citizens. Many employers recognize the increased need to support their employees during this time and are looking for health plans that incorporate more mental health benefits. Open enrollment for 2021 is seeing a strong resurgence of interest in employee assistance programs (EAPs), especially those that include behavioral health counseling. More and more employers are providing their employees with access to online mental health resources, including apps, videos, and articles.

Paid Sick Leave and PTO

Before the pandemic, some state and local governments already had their own paid sick leave mandates in place. In the wake of the passage of Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) in March 2020, however, more state legislatures across the country are reevaluating their own proposals for paid sick leave. In Wisconsin, for example, state law does not require employers to provide paid sick leave, but several bills on that topic have been introduced in previous years, and it is likely that there will be a resurgence in discussion about this in the near future.

Many employers are also examining their accrued paid time off (PTO) policies and rethinking caps, payouts, and separate sick days. For years, the trend has been to do away with separate sick days and vacation days and combine the hours into one PTO bank. The unintended

"Many companies are focusing on tools to **help employees** stay mentally and emotionally healthy while they engage in social distancing to protect their physical health."

result has been that many employees choose to report to work sick rather than "waste" a vacation day. Until now the biggest concern was that they'd spread the common cold and the flu in the workplace, but with COVID-19 putting worker safety at much greater risk, some employers have reverted to distinguishing sick days from PTO and encouraging employees to stay home when they are ill.

Some employers are also looking more closely at offering unlimited PTO to avoid caps and carryover and to eliminate payouts. At the same time, other companies are allowing employees to donate their excess PTO to fellow employees who need additional time off.

Childcare Assistance

The COVID-19 pandemic has been especially challenging for working parents. With many childcare centers closed and many public schools teaching their students virtually, working parents must make some difficult decisions about work and childcare. To help alleviate working

parents' stress at home, some employers are upping the ante on childcare benefits so parents can be more focused and productive at work. Some organizations are providing onsite daycare in the workplace, and others are providing virtual activities to keep kids busy at home while their parents are working remotely. Another growing trend is for employers to provide tutoring sessions (either in-person and online) to help their employees' kids study and finish homework.

Financial Health

The pandemic has people worried about their financial well-being. Concern about risks to their employment status, threats to their income and long-term savings plans, mounting debt, stock market volatility, and the pandemic's impacts on 401(k) retirement plans is raising everyone's stress levels. Many employers are providing optional benefits, such as additional life or disability insurance, as well as offering resources and education to help employees reduce their stress and enhance their financial well-being. Some

programs include educational sessions on general topics such as reducing debt, and others include complimentary meetings with financial advisors. A few companies have opted to solve their PTO conundrum and financial stress in one fell swoop by allowing employees to directly apply a PTO payout to student loan debt.

What's Next?

The effects of the coronavirus pandemic are likely to persist for some time, and their final outcome remains unknown. One thing is certain, though: employers who take a proactive approach to helping employees through this time will be in a better position to move forward. By building a better benefits package and investing in its employees' future, a company will have a workforce that is not only more loyal but also healthy and ready for work.

Jodi Wellhoefer is a strategic risk manager at McClone, where she uses her more than 25 years of HR experience to help clients identify risks and design custom strategies to mitigate them. She can be reached via linkedin.com/in/jwellhoefer.

1. Business Group on Health. 2020. "Large U.S. Employers Accelerating Adoption of Virtual Care, Mental Health Services for 2021, Business Group on Health Survey Finds." Business Group on Health website, August 18, www.businessgrouphealth.org/en/who-we-are/newsroom/press-releases/large-us-employers-accelerating-adoption-of-virtual-care-mental-health-services-for-2021.

When it comes to employee onboarding, the buddy system is one of the most reliable tools HR has at its disposal. Done well, it facilitates an immediate personal connection between new hires and the wider organization, and in the long term it can help drive employee engagement and improve time-to-productivity metrics. Such measures are especially critical in a work environment shaped by COVID-19, with many new hires spending their first days and weeks isolated at home.

Unfortunately, most buddy systems are not set up to support the current work-from-home reality. So what can HR professionals do to adapt their existing programs for remote hires?

SET EXPECTATIONS

HR must set clear expectations for current staff members who will be paired with new hires. (This is important for any buddy system, but especially so when dealing with remote workers.) To be effective buddies, those current employees need to know exactly where their responsibilities begin and end, as well as where they can go when they need more information or assistance. Any ambiguity here could lead to a new hire being neglected in the crucial early stages of their onboarding.

To define those expectations, HR should provide the current employee with

BUILDING A **NEW-HIRE BUDDY SYSTEM** FOR **REMOTE ONBOARDING**

BY JESSE FINN

answers to the following questions:

- When should I reach out to my new-hire buddy?
- How often should I connect with my new-hire buddy?
- What is my new-hire buddy's first-week schedule?
- Who is responsible for setting up my new-hire buddy's laptop and other technology?
- Whom should I contact if I have any concerns about my new-hire buddy?
- When do my buddy duties conclude?

START EARLY
Connecting buddy pairs before a new hire's first day helps them be fully prepared to hit the ground running. Having the opportunity to ask any pressing questions and get the "lay of the land" before starting work is particularly helpful in the current climate, when many organizations find themselves in a state of flux. During the preboarding phase, current employees

should aim for three check-ins with their new-hire buddies.

PLAN THE FIRST DAY
A strong first impression sets the tone for a new hire's time at the company by introducing them to the organization's culture and making them feel like a valued addition to the team. Three buddy check-ins, spaced throughout the day, can help ease the new employee's transition.

Start-of-the-day sendoff: A short (approximately 30 minutes), informal video call gives the buddies time to chat about the new hire's first-day schedule, address any questions they have, and just generally prepare them for the day ahead.

Lunchtime check-in: During this midday catchup, the buddies can touch base, discuss any additional questions that have come up, and also "course correct" if anything has gone awry.

End-of-day wrap-up: Bookending a new hire's first day with check-ins gives

both buddies a chance to assess whether the day went as planned and strengthens the buddy relationship

CHECK IN THROUGHOUT THE FIRST WEEK
Ask the current employee to write a short end-of-day report for each day of their new-hire buddy's first week. This will help HR get a clear picture of how things are going and identify any points of concern that might require an intervention.

During the first week of new-hire orientation, the current employee can play an important role in engaging the new hire by facilitating icebreaker games, organizing group activities, and providing introductions and connections. For example, using some (or all) of the following strategies, a current employee helps their new-hire buddy adjust more quickly to their new workplace:

Quickfire Q&A icebreaker: Organize a small-group video call (with the new hire and some of their colleagues) in which participants ask each other unconventional icebreaker questions.

Virtual happy hour: Wrap up the new hire's first day (or first week) with a virtual happy hour. One fun option is to create a custom cocktail recipe and have the ingredients delivered to the new hire's home.

Self-introductions: Help the new hire film and share a short self-introduction video by quizzing them over a recorded video call, then

uploading the video to the company intranet or Slack.

MAINTAIN THE CONNECTION
Many new-hire buddy systems don't extend beyond the new employee's first week at the organization. That might be sufficient in a regular office environment, but it's doesn't quite cut it in a remote setting. Ask buddy pairs to continue scheduling informal, 30-minute catch-up sessions each week for the new hire's first 90 days. This consistent connection will help the new hire get better acclimated and let them know that there is always someone there for them.

The buddy system is a tried-and-true element of HR practice, but it needs some tweaks—clear expectations, an early start, and creative thinking—to make it work well in remote settings. Consider incentivizing the process to get buy-in from existing staff, and be sure to provide a feedback mechanism so HR can have some oversight. Consistent implementation and attention to detail will help ensure that new hires don't slip through the cracks! ∎

Jesse Finn is the senior brand and content manager for Talmundo. He has a background in brand management and content creation and is passionate about ethical business. Visit them online at www.talmundo.com.

Managing remote employees is hardly a new concept. In fact, the shift to working from home was well underway—and trending upward— long before anyone had even heard of COVID-19. Between 2005 and 2018, the number of "regular work-from-home" employees increased by a whopping 173 percent,[1] with 15 percent of "wage and salary workers" working exclusively from home during 2017–2018.[2] When the pandemic struck, many businesses that were able to have their employees work from home did so, and by June 2020 "42 percent of the U.S. labor force . . . [was] working from home full time."[3]

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At first, everyone thought these arrangements would be temporary. As the weeks dragged onto months, however, it became clear that the pandemic wasn't going to end any time soon. Companies settled in for a long run of working from home. Several tech companies (such as Google and Microsoft) announced that their workers could work from home indefinitely, for example. And some companies went as far as getting rid of their centralized office spaces completely (with the plan to rent large meeting spaces for semiannual meetings, trainings, etc., when it's once again safe for large groups to congregate).

Working from home is part of the new reality of the business world. Opinions vary as to how significant it will be, but Global Workplace Analytics offers one prediction that seems pretty par for the course: "Our best estimate is that we will see 25 to 30 percent of the workforce working at home on a multiple-days-a-week basis by the end of 2021."[4]

Whatever the future brings, working from home will definitely be around for a long time to come—and business leaders need to be prepared to deal with it.

minimum time (such as 24 hours) to respond to e-mail.

When establishing best practices for team communications, set expectations for which channels should be used for which purposes. For example, some formats are especially well suited for certain types of interactions:

- **Zoom:** meetings, brainstorming sessions, one-on-one check-ins, performance reviews
- **Google Docs:** project-related questions, status updates, comments on documents or projects in progress
- **Text:** time-sensitive questions that can be quickly answered with yes/no responses
- **IM:** casual conversations, time-sensitive requests
- **E-mail:** team-wide announcements, larger project-related updates that require input from others (and are typically not very time-sensitive)

To help keep communication flowing, commit to regularly scheduled one-on-one meetings with each team member and team-wide meetings, as well as "office hours" during which employees can "drop by" to ask quick questions.

- Create a list of team projects to keep, accelerate, disband, or start—whatever is needed to meet the company's new priorities.
- When everyone's in the office together, managers can get away with being a bit "relaxed" about setting goals (assigning one while walking past an employee's desk, for example). But because remote work makes such casual, ad hoc interactions pretty much impossible, managers need to be much more deliberate when discussing roles, responsibilities, and objectives.
- When setting expectations, a conference call (rather than e-mail or other nonshared or asynchronous format) with employees makes it easier to discuss them in detail "live" and respond immediately to any questions.
- When identifying and assessing goals, use a shorter timespan than usual. Instead of monthly, quarterly, and yearly performance goals, for example, think in terms of this week, next week and this month, with long-term planning going only as far as the end of each month or maybe each quarter.
- With all that's going on right now, employees are just too distracted to think very far ahead. Help employees focus by having weekly discussions with them about their goals and management's expectations.

TIP #1

SHORE UP COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND PROCESSES.
Communication challenges were difficult even when everyone was co-located in an office, but managing remote employees has only increased the need for immediate improvements. Twenty percent of the more than 3,500 respondents in one recent survey cited "communication and collaboration" as the most significant challenges they faced as remote workers.[5] To help mitigate those issues, make team members' calendars visible to each other, require them to set their status as "away" when they aren't at their desks, and set a

TIP #2

EACH WEEK, CLARIFY GOALS AND ROLES FOR ALL EMPLOYEES.
It will be a while before things get back to anything close to "business as usual," so leaders must shore up their skills at managing remote employees. That uncertainty makes it harder to find information and get quick answers—difficulties that are only enhanced by the lack of a decentralized workplace as everyone works from home. Now it's more important than ever to be sure that all employees knows exactly what's on their plates and what their priorities are.

TIP #3

DEVELOP EMPLOYEES.
As remote workers who've barely left their homes in months thanks to widespread travel restrictions and with limits on social gatherings still in place in most of the country,

TIPS

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...ONG TERM

BY VALERIE M. GRUBB

many employees may be feeling "stuck": physically, mentally, and professionally. Give them something to look forward to by offering a vision of a brighter future and opportunities to continue to learn and grow. Develop employees through feedback and coaching, for example. Help them find mentors. Encourage them to pursue upskilling and reskilling opportunities. Managing employees (remote or onsite) includes engaging in their future growth.

EMPHASIZE TEAMWORK.

TIP #4 Many of today's employees experience loneliness, with 20 percent of respondents to one survey citing it as their "biggest struggle with working remotely."[6] Small wonder: it's much harder for people to connect with each other when they're separated by computer screens than when they occupy a shared, physical office space.

A manager must lead team members not only when they are fulfilling their work duties also when they are human beings struggling to get through this difficult time. Effective leadership includes reminding employees that everyone is in this together by coming up with creative ways—such as virtual lunch dates, exercise time, or Friday happy hours (BYOB, of course!)—to help them build connections with each other (and with management). Create the virtual equivalent of a casual conversation by the water cooler by keeping meetings open for ten minutes after the "official" part ends to give people time to chitchat and socialize a bit. Encourage team members to learn a new skill together—something work-related, perhaps, or even a new hobby.

WATCH FOR EMPLOYEE BURNOUT.

TIP #5 Many companies long opposed allowing widespread remote work because they assumed that "while the cat's away, the mice will play." When the pandemic forced them to send their employees home, though, organizations found an almost negligible decrease in production.[7] (That's especially impressive given the many non–work-related stressors employees have also had to deal with during this crisis: fear of exposure to the coronavirus, having young children at home because the schools and daycares closed, being unable to see friends and family, etc.)

Even when they aren't in the middle of a pandemic, though, remote workers tend to have higher levels of work-related anxiety than office-based workers.[8] Rather than let "out of sight, out of mind" shape their interactions with team members, managers should check in with employees regularly to see how they're managing while unable to connect with colleagues in the office. Set realistic expectations, based on where employees are in their personal lives, for when projects need to be completed or for how many hours each work day they need to be online. Encourage employees to take short breaks and real lunch breaks (not "working lunches"), to step away from their work during evenings and weekends, and to use their paid time off when they need to (even if they can't travel to anywhere at the moment).

TAKE CARE OF THE MANGERS, TOO.

TIP #6 Unwell leaders will struggle to be good bosses to their employees. Managers need to remember that they, too, are remote workers, and that they and their employees are likely facing similar challenges. Encourage managers to cultivate practices that help them combat the negative effects of remote work in general (such as isolation from colleagues) and the negative effects of remote work during this pandemic (such as isolation from nearly everything and everyone). For example, good sleep, good exercise, and healthy diets can provide great benefits to both physical and mental health, as does connecting regularly with friends and family. Managers should support their teams, but also set boundaries for their interactions with them. (After all, at the end of the day the manager is still the boss.)

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FINAL THOUGHTS

No one knows when (or even if) the business world will be able to resurrect the pre-pandemic workplace. One thing is very clear, though: working from home isn't a sprint that will end as soon as the pandemic subsides but a marathon (possibly even an ultramarathon!). Managers need to be prepared to lead their remote employees in this new, decentralized, virtual workspace. ■

Valerie M. Grubb of Val Grubb & Associates Ltd. (www.valgrubbandassociates.com) is an innovative and visionary operations leader with an exceptional ability to zero in on the systems, processes, and personnel issues that can hamper a company's growth. Grubb regularly consults for mid-range companies wishing to expand and larger companies seeking efficiencies in back-office operations. She is the author of Planes, Canes, and Automobiles: Connecting with Your Aging Parents through Travel (Greenleaf, 2015) and Clash of the Generations: Managing the New Workplace Reality (Wiley, 2016). She can be reached at vgrubb@valgrubbandassociates.com.

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Performing the Core Functions of HR Remotely

BY SUZANNE LUCAS

A human resources department isn't just a team of experts who know how to manage people: it's a team of experts who know how to manage the people in their particular company. Although every successful HR team is unique, most HR folks use similar tried-and-true strategies for keeping things running smoothly. For example, many check in with employees regularly to discuss their goals and offer them development opportunities. Some gauge employee sentiment by observing behavior in the office, and some take managers out for coffee to discuss leadership or succession questions. Whatever strategies they employ, the HR activities that most successfully address problems share one common feature: interfacing with people.

As the business world continues to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, HR teams find themselves having to support employees they haven't seen in person in many months or—in the case of new hires who were onboarded virtually—even at all. Some HR functions, such as paperwork and reporting, can easily be done remotely. But the remote execution of some functions, such as problem solving, employee development, and succession planning, requires more creative thinking.

UNDERSTAND EMPLOYEES IN THEIR NEW WORK ENVIRONMENT

When colleagues don't have opportunities to run into each other in the hallway or in line at the cafeteria, it's difficult for them to become acquainted with each other. Under today's challenging conditions, it's more important than ever for HR professionals to get to know employees so they can support them in the new normal. In addition to dealing with work-related problems at the office, team members may also be facing challenges in their home lives. (For example, some employees might be missing work deadlines because they are helping their kids with their remote learning.)

Understanding employees means understanding the nature of their work and the culture of their respective teams. By getting to know employees as individuals, HR professionals can find the best ways to support them. Such support can follow established structural avenues, such as offering parental leave or a flexible schedule. Or it can take the form of smaller, informal actions, such as moving a deadline to a different day of the week.

PROVIDE LEARNING TOOLS

On-the-job learning opportunities are always vital for employee development. But they are particularly crucial during this time of massive disruption, when soft skills (such as resilience, the ability to communicate, and productivity) give employees the tools they need to learn and grow without day-to-day coaching from HR or their managers. By implementing a learning management system, HR can help employees set goals, guide their own development, and access learning materials when they need them. HR must still dedicate time to developing and deploying the appropriate learning content and resources, but centralizing this information and making it widely available can be game changing. Remote work doesn't absolve HR of the responsibility to facilitate employee growth, but technology can actually make that process easier.

SCHEDULE FACE-TO-FACE TIME

At this point in the pandemic, everyone is exhausted and stressed by video conferencing.[1] But because face-to-face interactions make it possible to get a clearer understanding of how people are doing, video calls are a necessary evil during this time of prolonged physical separation. In order to evaluate how employees are feeling (are they down? are they energetic and motivated?), HR must make use of video calls. Taking a break from the usual video call setup, however, might mitigate some of the stress related to those interactions. For example, instead of having everyone sit in front of their computers in their home offices, invite them to participate in a video chat while sitting in their backyards or walking in their neighborhoods.

SET SOLID BOUNDARIES

HR's work is never done. There will never be a time when every employee is thoroughly happy, every manager is exhaustively trained, every succession plan is completely written, and every job description is fully updated. When working remotely and always at home, HR professionals may find it hard to truly "go home for the day." But they cannot solve every problem, and they need time to relax. Therefore it's important that HR professionals establish their own boundaries by turning off their computers and putting their phones on "do not disturb" mode. By setting this example and encouraging their employees to follow suit, HR can help guide their companies, employees, and themselves to more successful outcomes. ■

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HOW TO USE
WORKPLACE CULTURE
TO MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES

BY O.C. TANNER

Hang In There!

Anyone who worked an office job during the 1990s is probably very familiar with motivational posters. Each featured a photo of scenery or of someone succeeding at a challenging activity (such as rock climbing or hang gliding), and below it a black background with some pithy quote. During that decade, it was impossible to walk into a corporate workplace without spotting at least one of those posters hanging next to the watercooler or gracing the HR director's door.

Those posters dotted the corporate landscape because the people who created (and sold) them knew how to leverage a concern that keeps many managers up at night: how to motivate employees. The posters are no longer as prevalent as they used to be, and employers are constantly on the lookout for new ways to increase motivation. It's critical that companies address this challenge, because motivated employees work harder, require less management, and produce better results.

NEVER GIVE UP!

Unfortunately, few employees are entirely self-motivated. Posters alone won't change that, but workplace culture can significantly influence motivation. Recent research shows that "when organizations have a thriving culture, employees rate their satisfaction with employee experience 102 percent higher"—and engaged employees quickly become motivated employees.[1] By implementing effective employee engagement strategies, a company can build an inspiring workplace culture that will motivate its people for years to come.

PERSONALIZE MOTIVATION TACTICS

There's no single thing that motivates everyone, which is why managers need to learn what drives each employee individually. They need to connect with their employees on a personal level and bond with them as their leader, mentor, and friend. By getting to know team members as people, managers can discover how to motivate them as employees.

MENTOR—DON'T MICROMANAGE

Nothing shows employees that management thinks they're incapable quite like the dreaded m word: micromanaging. Instead of being a helicopter boss, a manager needs to be a mentor. This approach can yield great benefits: "when a leader is an active mentor," employees report a substantial (102 percent) increase in their motivation.[2] Mentors give their people the tools they need to succeed—then trust them to get the job done.

Your only limit is you

SHOW TRUST THROUGH TRANSPARENCY

The importance of trust in the workplace really can't be overstated. Managers should not keep significant company information from their teams but should instead treat their people as adults with the emotional intelligence to handle both good news and bad news. Share challenges to give them something to overcome and share successes to give them something to celebrate.

LOOSEN UP THE WORK SCHEDULE

Few things are more demotivating than feeling confined by one's job. If the organization's business process allows it, use flexible schedules to give employees more freedom. This is a lifesaver for working parents, students, or anyone whose busy life requires adaptable working hours. A little flexibility now can lead to more employee happiness in the long run.

THE FUTURE DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU DO TODAY
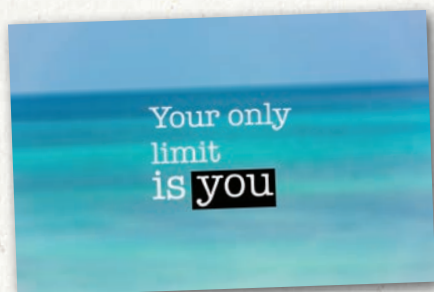
Assign special projects

Most employees don't have the chance to experience big successes in their daily routines, so managers need to provide those opportunities. One survey found that "when an employee participates in a special project and excels," they are "20 percent more likely to have an increased sense of success."[3] Once people get a taste of success, they are motivated to want and achieve more of it.

Support strong team bonds

t's difficult for someone to connect emotionally with an entire company, but when they connect with a small group of people—their team—that bond can inspire unshakable loyalty. The more an employee cares about their team, the more likely they are to work toward its success. These working relationships often develop naturally, but managers can help them grow by giving their people time and opportunities to bond with each other.

Consider employees' unique insights

No one wants to feel like their ideas don't matter—especially in the workplace. The consequences of this can be significant: in one survey, "38 percent of employees felt that when leaders dismiss their ideas without entertaining them, they tend to lack initiative."[4] To combat this, managers should encourage their employees to share their ideas. This strategy can yield insider solutions for company problems and opportunities for leaders to empower your people.

Give employees the resources they need

It almost seems too simple to be true, but the fact is that many employees are unmotivated purely because they haven't been given what they need to do their jobs well. Often, companies spend thousands of hours searching for highly motivated people without realizing they've already hired them—they just don't have the tools or resources they require to succeed.

Give work meaning

Doing work that feels meaningful can make someone feel significantly (49 percent) more motivated to help the company be successful.[5]

Managers can improve employee engagement by building company culture around a higher purpose, then showing people how their work helps reach that goal.

Provide clear goals and immediate rewards

Once they have a larger purpose, employees need manageable ways to achieve it. To motivate employees, managers should provide a step-by-step path to success by setting clear, attainable goals for their employees and giving out recognition rewards when they are met.

Infuse gratitude into the culture

All healthy relationships (including professional ones) are based on reciprocity. The more leaders care about their people (and show it through recognition), the more employees will care about their leaders and the organization (and show it through their work). Expressions of gratitude don't have to be over the top. Even small gestures, such as providing healthy snacks and writing the occasional heartfelt thank-you letters, can go a long way.

Motivation can't be forced, and there's no secret key that unlocks the "motivation vault" hidden in all employees. But leaders can foster motivation by making day-to-day choices to create a culture that helps people feel inspired, driven, and fulfilled. ■

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The Importance of "Momboarding"

BY KARINA SCHULTHEIS

For most women, returning to work after maternity leave is, at the very least, complicated. No matter how much they love their jobs, their bosses, and their colleagues, and no matter how eager they are to return to the professional world, many new mothers feel conflicted about transitioning back to the workplace (and away from being with their new children constantly).

Many companies, too, face challenges during this turbulent period, as they struggle to support and retain their people. A study by the U.S. Census Bureau found that "one in five women quit their job before or shortly after the birth of their child in 2006–2008."[1] But it doesn't have to be this challenging for women to balance motherhood and their careers.

There are clear ways that companies can support new moms as they return to work after maternity leave. "Accounting for nearly one-third (32 percent) of all employed women," working mothers are a significant employee population.[2] Learning to support and retain them is good for them, good for their companies, good for business, and good for the economy.

Paid Maternity Leave: Crucial—But Insufficient

Among the 193 member countries of the United Nations, only eight do not mandate paid parental leave—and the USA is one of them.[3] Fortunately, more and more private companies are recognizing the importance of paid family leave and stepping in where public policy fails. As of 2018, "more than one in three U.S. employers offers paid maternity leave beyond the amount required by law," and many even extend time-off benefits to fathers, who've traditionally been neglected in the parental leave conversation.[4]

By offering paid parental leave, employers signal that they care. It's a coveted benefit that certainly helps both attract and retain talent. Still, twelve weeks is just a blip of time in an employee's (hopefully) long tenure at their company. Their circumstances and needs as parents will change over time, and although offering a competitive parental leave package is important, companies can and should do more.

Enter "Momboarding"

"Onboarding matters" is the universal refrain these days. Everyone understands the importance of welcoming new hires, ensuring that their technology needs are met, and using plenty of communication and feedback to ease them into their responsibilities. It's an established fact that a well-designed onboarding process contributes to long-term employee success, engagement, and satisfaction. The next step is for organizations to broaden their onboarding programs to include welcoming back new parents.

The need for such programs is clear. For example, in a survey of over 1,000 working mothers who had recently returned from maternity leave, about 90 percent of the mid-to-senior-level respondents said their organizations offered no "returner program, one to one coaching, or group coaching," and about one third felt "unsupported and isolated or wanting to leave due to [their] experience."[5] (What's especially shocking about this survey is that it was conducted in the UK with women who received nearly an entire year of paid maternity leave!) Clearly, organizations that want to support and retain their employees need to offer more than just generous paid time off.

Fortunately, implementing "momboarding" processes results in a win for everyone involved. Such programs help mitigate the stress new parents face and simultaneously increase retention, engagement, and loyalty. Companies should consider incorporating the following simple (and no-cost) best practices into their current return-to-work and momboarding procedures.

Plan ahead

Great momboarding begins before offboarding. During the last few months leading up to planned parental leave, managers and employees should define who will be taking over which projects, put process documents in place to ensure seamless transitions, and discuss return-to-work plans (with the understanding that these plans may change once the baby arrives). As part of these conversations, managers should ask whether employees would like to be kept abreast of important organizational changes, and if so, what is their desired method of communication. This can help employees feel connected and remembered in their absence, without any pressure for them to check in (or to check e-mail).

Be welcoming

An actual party isn't necessary, but taking the time to welcome back returning employees can ease their transition. It's important not to overwhelm them on their first day back, but just as it's a best practice to give new hires time and space to meet their teammates, companies should give their returning employees casual, stress-free opportunities to catch up with their colleagues. Time for a returning employee and their manager to touch base with each other can set the stage for open communication about any new concerns or considerations related to the employee's new parent status (such as ensuring that a new mother has time to pump or evaluating potential scheduling changes).

Be flexible

If there's a silver lining to COVID-19, it's that companies now have more trust and willingness to let people work when and how they work best. Many managers and companies that had been firmly opposed to working from home have seen record productivity with newly remote teams during the pandemic. The challenges of working strict 9-to-5 days without schools or daycare centers helped managers realize that just because work doesn't get done during typical hours, that doesn't mean it doesn't get done. Savvy business leaders are increasingly adopting the perspective described by Aron Ain, the CEO of UKG: "I trust [employees] to get their work done. I'm more concerned about what they do instead of where they do it or when they do it."[6]

As a nation, the USA seems to have finally learned that flexibility at work is both acceptable and desirable. One might argue that this sentiment is especially true when it comes to new mothers and momboarding. Babies get sick (a lot). Pumping is time-consuming, exhausting, and absolutely necessary for breastfeeding mothers (not to mention a legally protected right). There are medical appointments, school activities, daycare closing times, and many other parenting-related factors to consider. By staying flexible and working with employees to help determine which (if any) expectations need to change, companies can foster mutual trust, strengthen the employee–employer relationship, and hedge against losing top talent.

Create a "while-you-were-gone" resource

The world of work moves fast, and an employee who returns to a "new normal" that everyone else is already accustomed to can feel overwhelmed. Therefore "momboarding" should include familiarizing returning employees with new workplace developments (such as the latest projects, technologies, or team structures). Managers should also prepare returning employees for any important company-wide communications or policy changes.

An Ongoing Process

Think about how much energy goes into welcoming and fully acclimating new hires. Building trust and complicity takes time, and even when managers have strong existing relationships with returning employees, the fact remains that those employees' lives have changed dramatically since they left. They are, in many ways, new people, with new needs. Even after the official "momboarding" phase ends, these employees' needs and interests as parents will continue to evolve—and organizations should continue to address them. ∎

Karina Schultheis is the manager of human insights and HCM at UKG, where she leads thought leadership research and content strategy. She can be reached at karina.schultheis@ukg.com.

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TIME-BLOCK YOUR WAY TO **PRODUCTIVITY**

BY MIKE MCKERNS

Want to become one of the most productive people in the office? Take a page from Elon Musk, Bill Gates, and other entrepreneurs and creatives who are famous for their productivity: replace traditional to-do lists with time blocks.

Like 43 Folders, Gettings Things Done, bullet journaling, and countless other time- and task-management techniques, time blocking helps people be more productive by providing a structure they can use to organize their time and attention. Unlike those other strategies, however, time blocking doesn't stick with a high-level perspective on a day but instead requires users to carve their time into smallish (usually 15- or 30-minute) blocks. Each block lists one thing—and that's all you focus on during that time period.

For example, if you've set aside 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. to write up a report on your latest project, during that hour you don't schedule a team meeting, you don't work on your department's budget, and you definitely don't check Facebook (no matter how many times your notification alert dings!). All you do is work on that report.

Among the many benefits of time blocking is its ability to help you focus your attention by reducing your choices. Trying to multitask or getting distracted every time a new message lands in your inbox or a quick trip to fill your coffee cup in the breakroom turns into an unplanned ad hoc chat with a colleague leaves you having to restart a task frequently ("where was I before I got interrupted?"), which can hamper your work on it. When you dedicate a block of time to one task, your ability to make steady progress on it improves dramatically.

Time blocking also helps you set clear parameters for your tasks. Whether or not you've heard of Parkinson's Law ("work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion"), you've no doubt experienced its effects for yourself. Think about how often you wake up thinking that the tasks on that day's to-do list will take a certain amount of time but find when you go to bed that they filled your entire day (and even then, you didn't manage to complete them all!). When you use time blocking to schedule all your time, there are no undefined periods that can be taken over by project creep.

Don't just take my word for it—try time blocking for yourself. Here's a quick-start guide to the technique. (Note that most time blockers recommend setting up the next day's plan at the end fo the current day. Most of them also suggest writing everything in a regular analog notebook, but if a digital calendar or special app works better for you, go for it!)

IDENTIFY YOUR PRIORITIES.
These can be work-related (such as working on a particular project or running weekly team meetings) or part of your personal life (such as family dinner together every evening or weekly yoga classes). The categories can be as narrow as you need, but when you're just getting started on this method, focus on three: "deep work" (when you really don't want to be interrupted), "shallow work" (when you're reading e-mail and social media, doing meal prep, or engaged in other tasks that don't require intense mental focus), and a "bookend" or "shutdown" period to wind down one day and plan the next one.

CREATE YOUR TIME BLOCKS. Assign your time (in 15- or 30-minute blocks) to the tasks on your list. Don't try to fill up every single minute. When you first start with this method, it can take you a while to get a feel for how much time you actually need for tasks when you truly focus on them, so leave yourself a little wiggle room.

BE FLEXIBLE. One of the biggest proponents of time blocking, Cal Newport (a professor of computer science at Georgetown University and the author of several books on productivity, technology, and culture), reminds time blockers to be ready to adjust or correct their schedules on the fly "if the day unfolds in an unexpected way."

Because you can't just write a quick list of tasks, the setup for time blocking is more involved than it is for most other personal productivity tools. Unless you have the discipline to spend 15 to 20 minutes each day planning the next day's time blocks, this may not be the best tool for you. Similarly, if this approach is too rigid for your temperament, then look elsewhere for organizing tools.

Time blocking is free to try, though, so you might as well give it a shot. Who knows—maybe this will be just what you need to spur your own productivity and creativity!

*Mike McKerns is the editor in chief of **HR Insights** and is the co-founder of Mamu Media, the SMART content division of Haley Marketing.*

RECIPE

Homemade Granola

Granola may have started as "hippie food," but it outgrew that label decades ago and is now fully mainstream. No longer the exclusive domain of health food stores, it's readily found in chain supermarkets and is on the menus of restaurants, coffee shops, and cafes across the country. And for good reason: it's delicious! Once you see how incredibly easy it is to make (and customize) your own granola at home, you'll never want to go back to store bought.

Yield: 6 servings

Time: just over 1 hour

Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

Calories:	325 cal
Fat:	8.1 g
Dietary fiber:	5.5 g
Sugars:	21 g
Protein:	8.8 g

What you'll need:

- 2 cups of rolled oats
  (don't use any kind of instant or steel-cut oats here)
- 2 Tb light brown sugar
- 2 Tb maple syrup
- 2 Tb coconut oil, melted

Directions:

- Preheat the oven to 250 degrees.
- In a very large bowl, combine all the ingredients.
- Spread the mixture into a thin layer on a rimmed baking sheet (use a second sheet if needed).
- Bake for about an hour, stirring halfway through.

Optional add-ins to mix in before baking:
shredded coconut, nuts (try cashews, walnuts, or almonds)

Optional add-ins to mix in after baking:
dried fruit (raisins, berries, and dates work well), sunflower seeds, pepitas

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