

**THE RESOURCE**

Labor & Industrial **INSIGHTS** VOL. VII, ISSUE III  
magazine



IT'S TIME TO  
***SUPERCHARGE***  
YOUR  
***MENTORSHIP***  
***PROGRAMS***  
FOR WOMEN!

**INSIDE**

5 Ways to Incentivize Your Workforce  
to Increase Company Revenue

Industrial Firms Focus on Retaining and  
Developing Key Talent During the Downturn

Upskilling and Reskilling –  
The Art of Coping With Change

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# 5

## Ways to Incentivize Your Workforce to Increase Company Revenue

BY ANDREW NELSON

Creating pride in and loyalty to the company is key to generating revenue-increasing employee performance. To cultivate those sentiments in their workforces, many businesses turn to incentive programs that recognize strong performance. Not all incentive programs are created equal, however, with many outdated employee-of-the-month efforts doing more harm than good to organizational morale. In order to effectively incentivize today's workforces to help grow company revenue, leaders should consider other strategies as well.



## Provide Plans for Reaching Goals

The math is simple: more sales equals more revenue. Even in the most altruistic-minded organizations, though, employees are less likely to get a warm, fuzzy feeling about increasing the company's worth than about receiving a quarterly bonus check or an upgraded company car. In most companies, the problem isn't the incentives themselves but the communication about how employees can go about attaining them. Too many companies simply take a "sell more, get this" approach that's akin to coaches telling their athletes, "If you want to win the race, run faster."

Employees, like athletes, respond well to coaching. Everyone wants to get the prize, but the journey in pursuit of it often carries the most significant impact. Companies that update their incentive programs to include detailed road maps for how employees can reach specific incentives usually achieve the best results.

Company leadership can modernize ineffective incentive programs and help employees earn rewards in several ways. One is to clearly communicate which products to focus on. Another effective strategy is to provide incremental sales goals (as opposed to one big, pie-in-the-sky incentive). Leaders can also give regular shoutouts to employees for even the smallest milestones, such as completing their first sale or selling to a new client.

## Flexible Work Schedules

Although all of the classic performance perks (e.g., cash bonuses, company vehicles, more paid time off) still carry plenty of weight, in the era of remote work, businesses need to get a little more creative in order to keep their employees motivated. When employees see other professionals doing similar jobs from home (and getting an extra 30 minutes of sleep by skipping the morning commute), they can quickly sour on an environment in which they feel imprisoned by the 9-to-5 timeclock. When possible, most people prefer to work remotely at least occasionally. Therefore, if a company's infrastructure allows flexible schedules for employees, leaders should make them part of an incentive package. They can give employees who reach certain milestones one flex day a

Everyone wants to get the prize, but the journey in pursuit of it often carries the most significant impact.

week, for example, or reward continued performance excellence with diminishing time-in-the-office requirements (and the freedom to log the remaining work hours from other locations).

In addition to increasing employee motivation, greater leniency with remote work can actually reduce the cost of employee benefits. This has an added impact on company revenue by lowering utilities consumption and reducing the need for office space.

## Offer Subscriptions

With most Americans paying monthly fees for entertainment streaming and online fitness services, it's clear that subscriptions to digital services are now a way of life. At a relatively small cost to the company, an employee gift subscription to Netflix, Amazon Prime, Peloton, or other services could go a long way toward providing the type of lifestyle benefits that resonate with a contemporary workforce and fuel strong performance.

## Tuition & Training Reimbursements

In an economy rocked by the COVID-19 pandemic, many displaced and current employees are concerned about their viability in a job market increasingly shaped by remote work, automation, and other factors.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, many of them are interested in pursuing upskilling or reskilling opportunities. By reimbursing employees for tuition and training costs, companies not only signal their interest in workers' skill development but also improve their in-house talent pools (and thus decrease future recruitment costs by

being able to promote current employees into some senior positions).

## Elite Employee Benefits

Despite the emergence of other enticing incentives, the staple fringe benefits—health, dental, and vision insurance; retirement contributions—still resonate quite strongly with employees. (For example, over half of respondents to one survey said they would give "heavy consideration" to a job with low pay but better health, dental, and vision benefits over a job with high pay but worse benefits.<sup>2</sup>) As a result, when it comes to rewards for strong performance, an increase in employer-covered insurance and retirement contributions may motivate employees more than a one-time cash bonus. Keeping in mind the rule of thumb that an employee's total cost to a company is their base salary plus their benefits, leaders should look into ways that funds appropriated for performance bonuses can be spread out to offer a more appealing benefits package.

## Conclusion

Incentivizing the workforce is a great way to drive employee performance that will have a positive effect on company revenue. However, not all incentives achieve the same (or even intended) results. By adding more options to their toolbox of incentive strategies, leaders can find the solutions that work best at increasing their employees' productivity and yield higher revenues for the organization. ■

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*Andrew Nelson is a freelance writer who specializes in human resources topics such as workplace management, employee lifestyle and fringe benefits, employee retention, and employee development. This article originally appeared on Workology.com and is reprinted with permission.*

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# HOW TO PLAN A SUCCESSFUL SAFETY STAND-DOWN

BY KEVIN BURNS

# S

ince the onset of COVID-19, many organizations have been connecting with their distanced employees through electronic means and virtual meetings. Most safety professionals would freely admit that safety stand-downs were poorly executed even before COVID; having to conduct them in an online environment brings new challenges to that process. Gone are the days of packing people into a big hall for an hours-long meeting followed by a buffet lunch. If the pandemic has taught workplace safety experts anything, it's that companies must improve their in-house safety protocols—including safety meetings.

Many fleet safety professionals have outfitted their fleet truck cabs with tablets. Now, instead of exiting their trucks and heading inside a building for safety meetings, drivers “huddle” together via video conference. Many safety officials report that no longer having co-workers look at each other in person has actually raised engagement levels in the safety

meetings. Clearly, it's time to rethink the safety stand-down. The old, in-person, safety stand-down format is not going to cut it anymore. At the same time, though, simply moving the meeting to video isn't the solution. “Zoom fatigue” is a real thing; and people are unwilling to add even more time in front of a computer screen—and they definitely don't want to spend a full day (or even a half-day) attending a safety meeting by video.

It's time to dump the endless chart-and-graph PowerPoint slides and number crunching. No more tedious presentations that function mostly to fill blocks of time in the agenda. Safety stand-downs need to be faster and punchier.

## STEP 1

### Keep the core message clear and concise.

Old stand-downs may have run up to a full day. Today's safety teams, however, might have only about an hour to run one. In order to make the most of their short time, they need participants' full attention—which means they need to get to the point quickly.

Developing a core message requires plenty of planning and thought. When crafting this message, the organization's best safety and supervisory minds should work together to brainstorm answers to these questions:

- ▶ What is the one key takeaway that we want all of our people to take into the field, regardless of their job function?
- ▶ What do we want our people to do that they are not doing now?
- ▶ What outcome would we like to see more of?
- ▶ What specifically do we want employees to do when they leave the stand-down?
- ▶ How do we want employees to support their colleagues in safety?

At the end of the stand-down, attendees should hear a very clear message about what exactly their supervisors and safety professionals want them to do. That instruction should be boiled down to a core phrase of seven or fewer words.



**"No position has more influence over the day-to-day activities of front-line employees than that of the front-line supervisor."**

## STEP 2

### Get supervisors to support the stand-down core message.

Simply put, employees do what their supervisors do: employees figure out what is important to their bosses and then do what the bosses deem important. That's why it's key that supervisors understand and buy into the organization's new stand-down core message. Supervisors must willingly support the core message in the field. Ideally, it should be rolled out to them in advance (even if just by a few hours) of the stand-down. Helping supervisors to feel like an integral part of the organization's safety success will go a long way toward getting their support for the stand-down's goals.

No position has more influence over the day-to-day activities of front-line employees than that of the front-line supervisor. Without their support, the core message cannot be sustained in the field. Not only do these supervisors need to buy into the messaging, but—more importantly—they need to understand their role in supporting the safety message and safety program. It's critical to include supervisors as a part of the solution.

## STEP 3

### Create a follow-up strategy.

Gaining supervisors' support is only part of the overall strategy. To ensure that the stand-down isn't a one-and-done event, its core message must be reinforced at all levels of the organization over a period of at least nine or ten months. Stating the core message in seven or fewer words makes it possible to remind people of it without subjecting them to a vague, drawn-out word salad. Get to the point first, and then do the work to repeat that core message as often as possible and in as many ways as possible. Planning for sustained messaging should address these questions:

- How will we expose our employees to the core message of safety over the next year?
- What reminders and visual triggers will we use?
- How will we incorporate that core message into toolbox and tailgate meetings?
- Can senior managers reference the core message in their communications?

Follow up, follow up, follow up! Without adequate follow-up, safety communications will end up being viewed as a "flavor of the

week:" easily ignored and quickly forgotten. For a stand-down plan to be successful, it needs to include a long-term strategy to win people over to it.

### The Big Picture

Implementing these three steps takes some hard work, but the reward is well worth the effort. With the pandemic already forcing organizations to review many of their usual procedures, this is a terrific opportunity for them to update one that's needed an overhaul for quite a while. ■

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# 4 WAYS TO *SUPERCHARGE* WORKPLACE MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN

BY KALIA SIMMS

A successful mentorship program should take the time to make careful matches, be both flexible in its approach and focused on its objectives, and drive a genuine conversation that benefits both mentors and mentees. A program that achieves all these things builds trust, helps identify problems (and their solutions) in a timely manner, and emphasizes that offering staff meaningful support is a priority for the company. It can also serve as a vital tool for addressing the many challenges that women often face in the workplace. Both by demonstrating support for women and by acquiring their honest feedback, which can help make policies and processes more fit for purpose, mentorship programs for women keep them engaged and help prevent them from leaving the organization.

Companies have a duty of care to all their staff, of course. But considering the unique challenges women face in today's workplace, companies should take special care to support their female colleagues, especially since fostering diverse talent is a key driver in business growth. In a recent conversation with Great Place to Work, the chief operating officer of Standard Chartered Americas and a champion of its Gender Equality Network, Nancy Wisniewski, spoke about how her company's mentorship programs help keep female staff motivated and feeling supported and sheds light on four strategies that organizations can take to build successful mentorship programs for women.

## Take the time to get the pairings right.

A tailored approach that clearly establishes the mentee's needs and identifies a suitable mentor to meet them can yield an impact-driven program that facilitates meaningful conversations and prompts genuine

opportunities to learn and grow. Obviously, the type of support needed will differ from person to person. (Someone facing specific challenges around promotion or advancement, for example, will be looking for different guidance from someone struggling to find work-life balance.) The right mentor might be someone whose experiences are similar to the mentee's, such as a more senior leader in the same business area. Or perhaps they could be someone who is much further removed from the situation and can therefore provide a fresh perspective.

In some of Standard Chartered Americas' mentoring programs, mentees can review the "personal profiles" of potential mentors and reach out to the ones they think might make good fits for an initial conversation. Once a pair is matched, Wisniewski recommends taking the time to connect properly:



"Resist the temptation to dive headfirst into career problem solving and advising. It's important to build trust and chemistry by getting to know each other on a personal basis. Remember, a mentoring relationship is like any other: it takes time to develop."

## Set clear rules of engagement.

Even before the first mentoring session, everyone involved should understand what the objectives of the mentorship program are—and what they are not. It's not uncommon for people to sign up for mentorship when what they're actually looking for is sponsorship. Understanding the difference between the advisory role of a mentor versus the







**"KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE AND BE CLEAR ON THE ASK."**

*-Nancy Wisniewski*

advocacy role of a sponsor will help to reduce disappointment in the long run. Both sides should agree to a set of expectations. How much time does everyone expect to put into this relationship? How often will the mentor and mentee meet? Making sure that commitments are realistic will help to keep momentum going. But if participants turn up for meetings unprepared or constantly reschedule them, the partnership is likely to fizzle out.

"Know what you want to achieve and be clear on the ask," suggests Wisniewski. "While it's great to build a cordial relationship where you can speak candidly and share war stories, it's also important to stay focused on the objectives of the mentorship program and make sure that the sessions are effective." She also recommends including "a midway check-in point for



mentors and mentees to see how things are going" and an end-of-program assessment "to share lessons learned that can drive improvements in future programs."

**Mix things up.**

To provide a wider choice of possible mentor-mentee pairings, an impactful mentorship program should

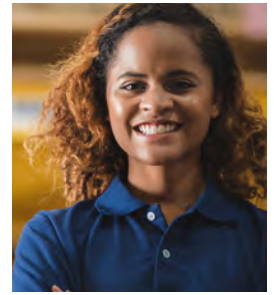
permeate all levels of the organization. It shouldn't just match senior leaders with junior ones, because although one mentee might get the most out of working with someone who's much further ahead in their career, another mentee might need someone close to their own experience level. Similarly, the best mentorship structure isn't always one-to-one: some people benefit most from a dedicated, individual mentoring experience, whereas others might thrive in a mentoring circle setup.

The mentoring relationship doesn't have to stop at the lobby, it can also extend into the community. Mentees can share what they've learned from their mentorship experiences by providing mentorship training to young people who are just starting their careers. Wisniewski explains how taking on a mentorship role in her local community (she worked with entrepreneurs in the Women in Tech Incubator at the City College of New York) helped her to reflect on her own career challenges:

"When I listened to the students talk about the obstacles they face at this

early stage of their careers, it got me thinking about what I can do to help. Can I expand their network? What experience can I share?

The opportunity to become a mentor kick-started a self-reflection process. By being on the "other side" and taking on that mentorship role, I also learned to take a much more active role in my own career development."



**Drive dynamic conversations.**

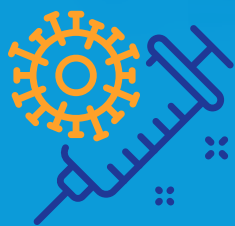
When mentees experience the benefits of being a mentor, they see the value of an impactful mentorship program working both ways. All participants should be able to benefit from the mentor relationship, so it's important to design a mentorship program that incorporates reverse-mentoring to ensure that the mentor's needs are not forgotten. Not only does reverse-mentoring help to keep all participants engaged, but it's also a useful tool for senior leaders to use for measuring organizational morale and obtaining timely insights on whether a particular initiative or strategy is landing well. Additionally, reverse-mentoring can be a great way to pass on particular skills. In recent years, for example, many organizations have enlisted their millennial, digital native staff to help their colleagues improve their tech-related skills.

Investing in and retaining junior women helps an organization maintain a diverse talent pool that is ready to transition to senior leadership in the future, which helps to build more diverse management teams. Organizational advancement isn't the only benefit of mentoring, though. At any stage of their careers, women face certain challenges both inside and outside of the workplace and having the listening ear of a mentor can make a real difference in managing those struggles. An impactful mentorship program is one way to give talented, motivated women the support they need to achieve flourishing careers. An organization committed to showing that it values all of the talent pool is likely to be one that nurtures and retains talent in the years to come.

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# Not-So-Common Employment Questions: COVID-19 Vaccines

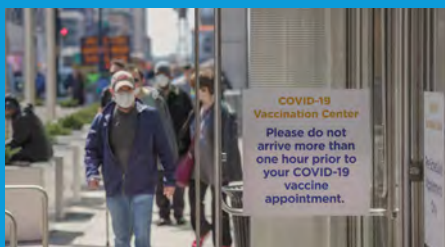
BY TOM O'DAY



**A**s more businesses begin to reintegrate employees into their workplaces, they should be sure to comply with federal laws regarding COVID-19 vaccines.

## Can I ask my employees if they have been vaccinated?

Yes. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) says that simply asking whether an employee has been vaccinated—and nothing else—is not a medical inquiry or medical examination under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employers with a legitimate business reason for asking that question (e.g., to direct patients to particular employees or healthcare providers) are in an even better position to ask that question. Employers should couple the question with a proactive statement that the employer does not want any information about medical conditions, religious beliefs, or family history as part of the response. Employers should also consider differences between the ADA and any applicable state disability law with respect to this or any other issue.



## Can I provide incentives for my employees to get vaccinated?

Unfortunately, it's difficult to answer this question definitively. The EEOC withdrew prior guidance regarding what types of incentives employers may offer as part of their wellness programs. Employers had looked to that guidance to provide incentives to encourage vaccination among their employees, and its withdrawal has left a regulatory void. In February, a coalition of business groups sent a letter to the EEOC requesting clear guidance on this issue, but it has not yet come.

Generally acceptable incentives are coming into focus, thanks to employers that have decided to act in the absence of guidance from the EEOC. First, incentives to cover the time and expense associated with getting a COVID vaccine seem to be reasonable and acceptable. For example, some employers cover the cost of any vaccine (to the extent not covered by any government program or insurance plan) and provide paid time off for employees to get vaccinated and for potential side effects.

Second, a de minimis incentive is likely acceptable. De minimis incentives may include a \$10 gift card or a company water bottle provided in exchange for getting vaccinated. Incentives such as these have

relatively little value and appear to be acceptable. Keep in mind their potential tax consequences as well.

The one thing that is clear is that many employers want to provide these incentives. Keep an eye out for future guidance from the EEOC.

### Can I require employees who have refused the vaccine to take a COVID test on a weekly or other regular basis?

Under federal law, the answer is likely yes, but it depends in part on the type of business. As discussed above, asking about an employee's vaccination status will not violate the ADA. Thus, separating vaccinated employees from unvaccinated employees for purposes of viral screening tests does not appear, in and of itself, to trigger liability under federal disability law.

The EEOC has advised that any medical test of employees must be "job related and consistent with business necessity."<sup>1</sup> The EEOC also states that the ADA does not interfere with employers' compliance with the recommendations of the CDC or other public health agencies with respect to testing and screening for COVID-19. In fairly definitive fashion, the EEOC stated: "Testing administered by employers consistent with current CDC guidance will meet the ADA's 'business necessity' standard."<sup>2</sup>

The CDC recognizes that "workplace-based testing for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, could identify workers with SARS-CoV-2 infection, and thus help prevent or reduce further transmission."<sup>3</sup> It recommends testing in workplaces with healthcare personnel, defined as "all paid and unpaid persons serving in healthcare settings who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials."<sup>4</sup> The guidance for healthcare personnel also recommends testing for all healthcare personnel in nursing homes and (if testing resources are available) for all healthcare personnel in other settings.

The CDC has also issued the following guidance (last updated in mid-March) for non-healthcare workplace settings:

Workplace settings for which screening testing of workers should be considered include:

- Workplaces at increased risk of introduction of SARS-CoV-2 (e.g., workplaces where workers are in close contact with the public, such as restaurants or salons, or workplaces in communities with moderate to substantial transmission.)
- Workplaces where there is a higher risk of SARS-CoV-2 transmission (e.g., workplaces where physical distancing is difficult and workers might be in close contact, such as manufacturing or food processing plants, or workplaces that provide congregate housing for employees such as fishing vessels, offshore oil platforms, farmworker housing or wildland firefighter camps.)
- Workplaces where SARS-CoV-2 infection among employees will lead to greater negative impact, such as:
  - Workplaces in remote settings where medical evaluation or treatment may be delayed.
  - Workplaces where continuity of operations is a high priority (e.g., critical infrastructure sectors).
  - Workplaces with a high proportion of employees at increased risk for severe illness.<sup>5</sup>

(Given the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers would do well to monitor the CDC guidance for future changes.)

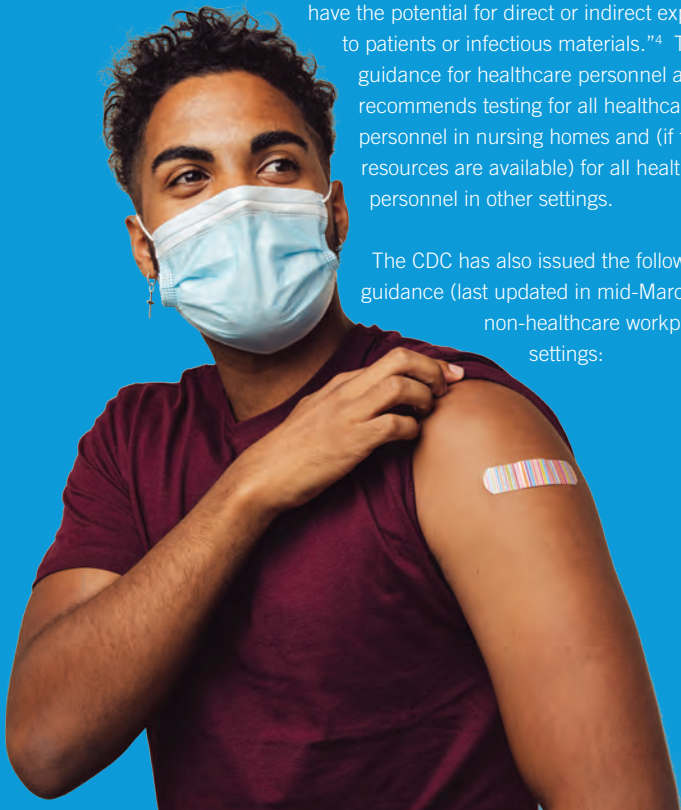
Because the CDC has identified these workplaces for screening testing, those employers likely may require their employees to take a COVID test on a weekly or other regular basis. Employers will need to continue to consider reasonable accommodations for religious or medical reasons.

Note that as of late January, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) advises employers to treat all employees, vaccinated or not, the same when it comes to risk mitigation strategies.<sup>6</sup> For example, employers who continue to require employees and nonemployees to wear masks and physically distance while on their premises should impose those requirements regardless of vaccination status. ■

**The answers presented here focus on compliance with federal law. As always, employers will need to take state and local laws into consideration in addition to federal law.**

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# Upskilling and Reskilling:

The Art of Coping with Change

BY THE REWORK EDITORS



Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, preparing for constant change has become a fact of everyday life for businesses. In recent months, organizations have had to rapidly digitize processes—faster than ever before—and employees’ responsiveness and adaptability have been critical to the success of this shift. Over the past year, leaders learned (if they didn’t know it already) that companies that can reinvent themselves are better positioned to weather crises and thrive. Even when the pandemic ends, though, organizations must continue to give their teams the tools they need to be resilient and able to cope with uncertainty and adapt so that the efforts made throughout the past year can be sustained and amplified.

## The Heart of the Matter: Training

Because skills play a huge role in organizations’ success, the HR function must focus on skills development for existing positions (upskilling) and create development plans for new functions (reskilling). Even if a job title does not change, over time, some of the tasks assigned to that role will become obsolete and replaced by new ones. To remain competitive, each employee must learn to integrate these new tasks into their role and understand how those tasks affect the business. At the same time, organizations need to create new professions and career opportunities to respond to market changes so they can fully satisfy their customers. The simultaneous use of reskilling and upskilling enables organizations to remain successful and gain a competitive advantage.

The World Economic Forum anticipates that “at least 54 percent of all employees will need reskilling and upskilling by 2022” in order to perform well in their roles and allow their businesses to thrive.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, employees themselves recognize this change in workplaces and the need for regular training: 77 percent of respondents in a 2019 PWC survey “said they would be willing to upskill in order to become more employable.”<sup>2</sup>

## Artificial Intelligence and the Transformation of Skills Management

To achieve the highest return they can on their investments in upskilling and reskilling, organizations need to go much further in the implementation and management of training. Because of the misperception that training isn’t work (and vice versa), today’s employees do not spend nearly enough time on training. Organizations that want to see increases in efficiency, productivity, and quality need to recognize that training and work are linked and interdependent.

A close look at the practices of leading organizations reveals that their success stems in part from having in place a thorough training strategy at all stages of an employee’s time in their company.

Artificial intelligence plays a key role in this strategy by helping companies monitor the skills that each employee—and the organization at large—already has as well as those they need.

Companies need to know, as precisely as possible, what each employee is currently able to do, which skills they have, and which new skills they want or need to learn. By linking this information to job descriptions and development plans, an organization will know which skills its candidates need when they are being recruited. It will also know which career development opportunities to offer to employees as well as any relevant training a team needs to achieve its goals. Therefore, artificial intelligence has a positive impact not only on the efficacy of skills management but also on career development.

## Looking Ahead

Companies that use data science to identify new skills and effectively upskill and reskill their employees will have a clear edge in the ongoing war for talent. Key strategies include the creation of academies or in-house training centers, the deployment of regulatory training in line with company strategy, and the provision of other resources that employees need to improve their skills. Much more is needed, though, and companies should keep looking for ways to reduce today’s skills gaps as much as possible and to prepare employees for tomorrow by giving them the skills they will most certainly need in the future. ■

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*This article was written by the editorial team of Cornerstone’s ReWork blog ([cornerstoneondemand.com/rework](http://cornerstoneondemand.com/rework)), a guide to the changing talent-management industry that helps executives and HR leaders succeed in the new, technology-driven economy. It is reprinted here with permission.*

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# INDUSTRIAL FIRMS FOCUS ON RETAINING AND DEVELOPING KEY TALENT DURING THE DOWNTURN

BY PAUL DONNELLY

Although the industrial world finds itself in a volatile period of much economic uncertainty, maintaining the core of its current workforce is critical for capitalizing as the economy recovers. In previous downturns, many firms (such as engineering, procurement and construction companies that design and build complex energy and chemical plants) cut personnel deeply to quickly align costs to reduce revenues. These cuts ultimately undermined those organizations' ability to successfully pursue and execute new projects as capital spending picked back up.

However, these cyclical trends underlie a larger, looming issue: a large segment of skilled industrial workers is close to retirement age. (For example, in just one area—construction—“about 41 percent of the current U.S. . . . workforce is expected to retire by 2031.”) The need to retain and transfer the experience and skills of those workers is on the minds of many executives.

To ensure the long-term viability of their workforces, firms need to prepare for the future by continually enhancing the skills of their employees and moving forward aggressively with digital transformation programs that support knowledge transfer and reuse through the organization. Those two measures will help firms cope with future disruptions that, at this point, seem inevitable and part of the new normal.

## Disruption: Good for Differentiation

Two of the most obvious disruptions to the workforce over the last several months are the shift to remote work and how people work in the context of increased enforcement of social distancing measures. Although only some workers in the industrial plant can do their jobs effectively while working remotely, the organizations that were able to quickly pivot to remote work or adjust working conditions for plant workers not able to do their jobs at home will come out stronger from this uncertain time.

Being agile as a business and being prepared for the future are two major differentiators that not only set an organization apart from its competitors but also attract and retain talent. How an organization reacts to major disruption is always a good indicator of how it might handle any change, in any situation. An industrial company that can adjust to an increasingly complex and uncertain world will have more success both in retaining key talent and in recruiting the digital natives needed for the future.

Many of the executives now helming industrial firms have accumulated significant experience in managing through previous downturns and are well-positioned to provide sound leadership. With assurance that leadership will make the appropriate

shifts to adjust to new realities—without compromising the firm's core capabilities—employees will have confidence that their organizations will remain competitive in the future.

## Continual Learning Is Now Mandatory

If the industrial world wants skilled talent, it may have to develop that talent in-house. Technology completely revamps industrial organizations and the way they operate, but it also constantly changes. The skills that plant operators or engineers needed to possess just a few years ago might look entirely different today. This rapid pace of change is one reason why the industrial world can never stop enhancing the skills of its workforce.

Modern continuing education, especially in the industrial segment, needs to encompass more blended learning to be effective. Expert-guided learning in a classroom can certainly be a good option, especially if a local university or college can partner with an industrial organization to create a curriculum for workers to gain new skills and experience. At the same time, if an industrial company's technology vendors offer specific certification programs in leveraging their technology or processes, it is important to have workers get those certifications to ensure that they are using the technology correctly and getting the most value that they can from it.

Technology will play a key role in keeping skills sharp. For example, operator training simulation software can let workers experience real-world plant scenarios virtually, so that their choices, decisions, and mistakes in that simulated environment do not have actual consequences. Such software helps employees learn in ways that would not be possible in the real world.

## Attracting New Talent

For quite some time, younger generations have relied on technology to streamline many aspects of their daily lives. Through this experience, they have developed expectations that they will be able to leverage technology to streamline much of their work lives, too. Firms that adopt new technology (such as artificial intelligence

and machine learning) to reduce tedious, low-value tasks will therefore stand out and have an edge when recruiting the best talent among younger employees. At the same time, because younger generations joining the workforce prioritize environmental sustainability and corporate responsibility more than preceding generations, artificial intelligence-enabled technologies that support “greener” operations within the plant life cycle can help attract that talent.

Even as the industry continues to navigate the current downturn, it also needs to be planning for the future. The downturn will end eventually, and companies must prepare now to face the demographic, skills, and technology shifts ahead. Only then will they be able to retain and recruit the talent they need to succeed. ■

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