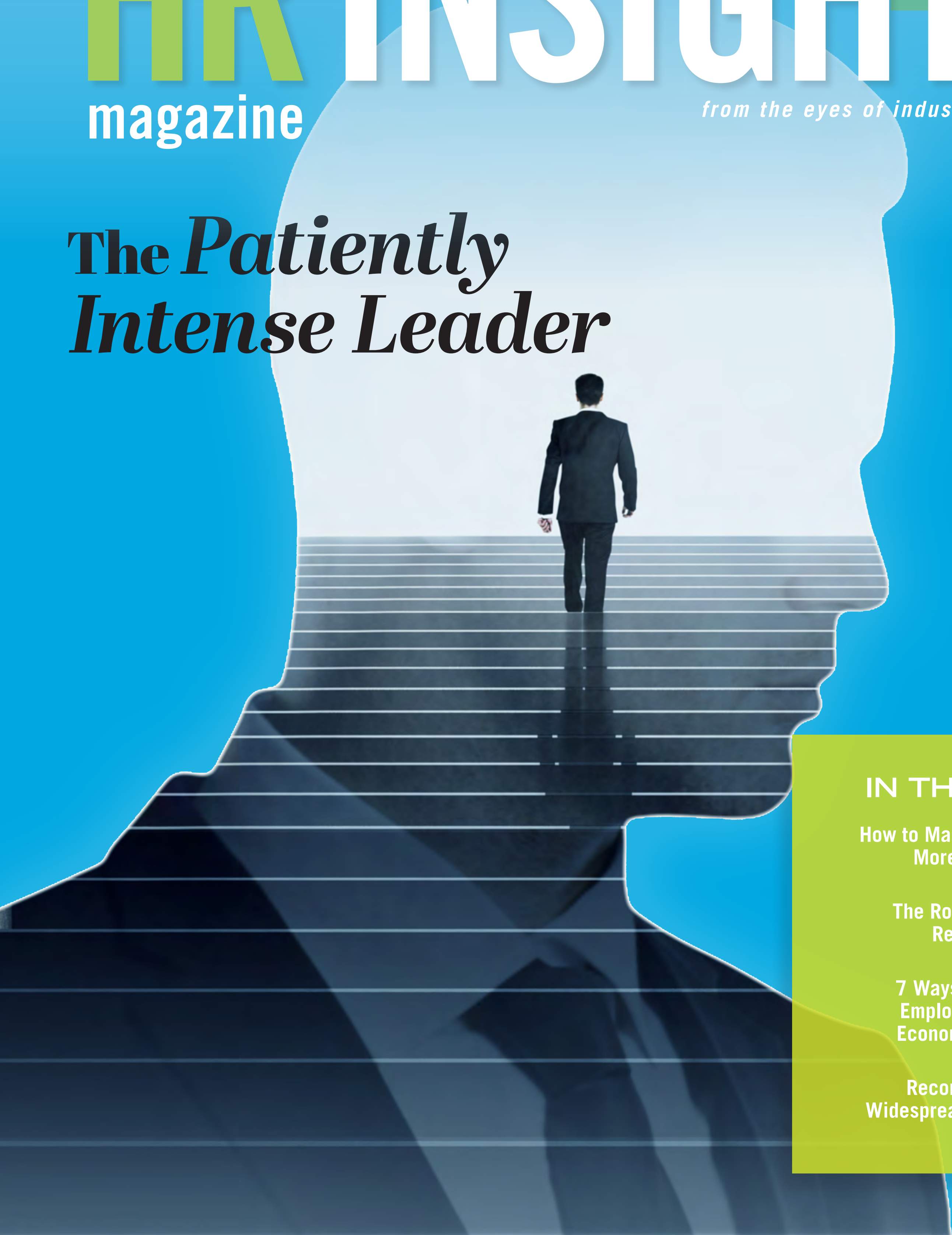
THE RESOURCE

HR INSIGHTS magazine

VOL. XI, ISSUE VI

from the eyes of industry leaders



The *Patiently Intense Leader*

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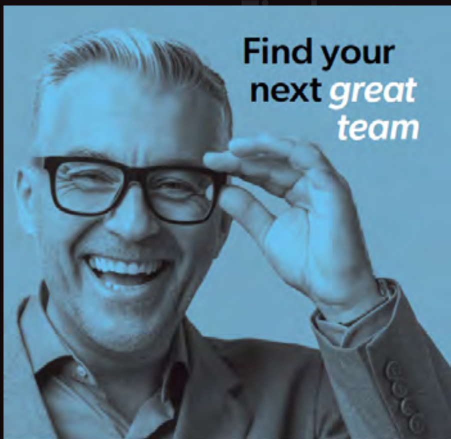

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HR INSIGHTS Magazine

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7 WAYS TO SUPPORT EMPLOYEES DURING ECONOMIC INFLATION

BY KELLY YEATES

More than just a headline, economic inflation is a painful market condition. Its wide-ranging negative impacts can take many forms and affect different populations in different ways. Inflation can be especially worrying for employers because of the potential it has to negatively influence the workforce.

For example, inflation can shorten the reach of employees' salaries, making them feel as though they don't earn as much as they used to. This might force them to take second jobs (which can lead to burnout and exhaustion) or look for higher-paying primary jobs elsewhere. It can also reduce the amount they can contribute to their 401(k)s, which can delay their savings and retirement plans. And, of course, seeing their salaries diminished can shape employees' consumer lives as well, as they struggle to deal with the rising costs of groceries, fuel, vacations, and all of their other expenses.

Inflation also increases stress and anxiety levels. In the workplace, this can distract employees from their work and cause their productivity to plunge. This stress can also generate interpersonal tension and conflict in the workplace—and even violence.

With all of this in mind, should organizations communicate with their employees about inflation? Although no company has an obligation to discuss topics that aren't specific to the business, today's employees (especially younger workers who are Millennials or from Generation Z) often expect their employers to acknowledge issues that personally affect them both inside and outside the workplace—and in the post-COVID workplace in particular, employees tend to have much higher expectations about the frequency and breadth of their employers' communications. Therefore, organizations must understand the needs of their workforce.

As a general rule, it always pays for organizations to get ahead of certain issues and be connected, empathetic, and transparent when communicating with employees about them. To maintain strong employee relationships and avoid getting caught off guard, companies should consider preparing a communication plan to address inflation. When a company lets its employees know that it's aware of and sympathetic to their struggles, employees are more likely to feel heard and valued—and less likely to take any drastic, stress-induced actions. There are several ways that organizations can demonstrate their care and support for their employees.

Promote the company's employee assistance program (EAP)

An EAP helps employees address a variety of both work-related and personal concerns by opening up efficient, confidential access to professional resources. When communicating with employees about inflation, management and HR should remind them of the company's EAPs services and how to access them.

For example, an EAP can help employees manage inflation by connecting them to financial professionals who can help them become more financially stable and learn how to manage the impact of inflation on their income and household budget. Additionally, employees dealing with inflation-induced stress and anxiety can find mental health professionals via their EAPs.

Engage top-priority employees

During times of inflation, employees may be more likely to leave a company in search of higher pay or better benefits. Organizations should be proactive about mitigating this, especially with workers they can't afford to lose.

First, companies should identify the most mission-critical talent in their workforce and conduct stay interviews with them to find out:

- What they like about the company
- If they have any concerns or recommend any changes
- What they need that they're not currently getting
- Which scenario(s) would make them more likely to leave

It's also important to train managers to have regular conversations with their direct reports about what keeps them at the company and what might make them consider leaving. Managers need to be able to spot the indications that an employee is preparing to leave (for example, a sudden change in behavior or an increase in absenteeism).

Support managers

Managers really are the glue that holds everything together in the workplace. But they're not immune to their own personal distractions and life stressors—particularly those resulting from widespread events (such as inflation).

That's why companies should put extra effort into supporting their managers and educate them on how to deal with unfocused, anxious employees. Their training should cover topics such as:

- Coaching employees through inflation-induced stress or resolving conflict (including how to roleplay certain scenarios)
- How to conduct stay interviews
- Freeing up space on their calendars so they can schedule regular one-on-one meetings with direct reports and keep a closer eye on what's going on with employees
- The behavioral cues, tone, and body language to look for when evaluating whether an employee is struggling more than others or might be at risk of leaving the company

Increase company contributions to retirement planning

A 401(k) retirement plan is a significant benefit that a company pays to provide for employees, and it's important that they know how to take full advantage of it for their financial well-being and future security. When communicating with employees about inflation, management and HR should remind their workforce of the long-term benefits of contributing to their retirement plans and urge them not to give up on their investments or their retirement dreams. To help ease employee stress, a company should consider upping the amount that it contributes or matches to its employees' plans each month.

Explore other financial incentives

Of course, raising salaries commensurate with inflation is always a popular option with employees. (Note that companies that enact any pay changes should be mindful of internal pay equity and should document in writing all reasons for such adjustments.) From employers' perspective, though, the cost of living doesn't necessarily equate to the cost of labor—and it's the latter that determines salaries. Furthermore, many employers have spent much of the recent Great Resignation raising salaries to attract and retain top talent in a super-competitive job market and are now stretched thin. Even during times of inflation, companies cannot become so desperate to retain employees that they overextend themselves and lose sight of their own financial viability.

If increases to base pay aren't possible, bonus programs can help employees earn more money and ease their financial stress without having a negative impact on a company's regular fixed costs.

- Performance bonuses: awarded when an employee achieves a specific goal or objective, or demonstrates a desired behavior in the workplace
- Retention bonuses: used during transition periods to encourage employees to stay
- Sign-on bonuses: given upon hire and not based on performance
- Spot bonuses: awarded as immediate (on-the-spot) recognition for outstanding contributions of individuals or teams

In addition to reducing employers' financial risk, bonuses act as a powerful incentive for employees to maintain strong performance despite personal distractions.

Seek out nonfinancial incentives as well

In times of stress, employees tend to fixate on base pay. But by looking at the bigger pictures, companies can often offer other benefits to employees that, though not costly to the bottom line, deliver personal value to employees while increasing their engagement. In addition to employee recognition programs, other options include career development opportunities and additional training, both of which have the added benefit of also making employees more valuable to their employers.

Allow employees to work from home

Inflation may put a damper on many companies' grand plans for a return to the office following the COVID-19 pandemic. With the high costs of work-related expenses (such as gasoline for commuting, eating lunches out, happy hours, dry cleaning professional attire, and childcare), many employees in roles that are conducive to remote work may resist coming into the office. From their perspective, it doesn't make sense to spend all that money on unnecessary costs.

Depending on its business model and the specific roles of its workforce members, an organization can easily mitigate employees' costs by not requiring their full-time presence in the office. Options include allowing them to work from home 100 percent of the time, using some type of hybrid schedule, or letting employees use a flexible schedule (such as a shortened work week) to reduce their days in the office.

Implementing one of these changes has the added financial benefit of reducing company overhead. Just as significantly, though, it aligns an organization with the latest workplace trends and employee expectations and helps it avoid the dreaded post-pandemic turnover. These days, it's not just a better salary that motivates employees to make a move: most employees really want more workplace flexibility and will change jobs to attain it.

A holistic approach

Inflation isn't something that employees leave outside when they walk through the office door but a major issue that can cause employees significant amounts of stress and anxiety. In that sense, it is very much a part of the workplace. By putting into practice some (or all) of the suggestions described above, employers help their employees navigate the challenges of inflation and reduce its negative impacts on the workforce. Through actions that reengage (and retain employees) and calm their concerns, companies can shift their employees' focus back to work and maintain productivity. ■

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VACATION POLICY GUIDE FOR HR

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

Every employee needs a vacation now and then, whether it's a two-week trip to the Bahamas or a single day off for mental health. It's incredibly important for organizations to have a consistent vacation policy spelled out in their handbooks so their employees can have some well-deserved rest. But what exactly is vacation time in the workplace? Should it be paid? How does it accrue? And what's the difference between a vacation and other forms of leave?

VACATION TIME BASICS

Vacations are usually reserved for full-time employees to take time off from work for a reason other than illness. Employees don't have to work during the time they take off, and they still get paid the same amount they would have made if they had worked that day.

Because federal law doesn't require an employer to provide any amount of vacation pay, companies handle their vacation policy handbooks in different ways. But just because vacation time isn't required doesn't mean companies shouldn't provide it. Because most full-time employees expect to have some paid time off, organizations that fail to offer it can struggle to attract and retain talent.

HOW TO ASSEMBLE THE PERFECT VACATION POLICY

In order to create the best vacation policy, an organization must balance what's best for the company with what's best for the employees. Here are a few factors to take into consideration.

Sick time versus vacation time. Some companies put sick time and vacation time into one category, giving employees just one bulk number of days to be used for both purposes. Other companies separate sick time and vacation time, and employees can pull days out of one pool or the other, depending on the reason for the time off.

BULK VACATION TIME VERSUS ACCRUED VACATION TIME.

Some employers give employees a bulk amount of vacation time that's based on how long they've worked there. Alternatively, in some organizations, employees accrue their vacation hours over set increments of time, such as a certain number of hours every pay period or a certain number of days every year.

UNUSED VACATION DAYS.

It's common for a company to reset its employees' vacation time at the beginning of each new year. However, some organizations will let their employees roll over their vacation days to the following year and even pay them for their unused days in their final paycheck.

VACATION POLICY EXAMPLES

Here are a few examples of the types of wording that can appear in vacation policies:

- All full-time employees at [company] are eligible for our paid vacation plan.
- Vacation time can be used for any personal matters aside from sick time, which is included separately in our paid-time-off policy.
- Employees will accrue vacation time starting on their first day and will accrue [number of hours] every [length of pay period].
- Accrued hours cannot be carried over into the next year.
- At [company] we offer employees who have been full-time members of the staff for 1 to 5 years 25 business days of paid time off per year to be used at their discretion. This pool of days can be used for both sick time and vacation time.
- We operate our paid time off on a rollover policy, which means unused days can be rolled over into the next year.

A WINNING STRATEGY

Each company's vacation policy will vary from company to company, depending on organizational needs and employee preferences. No matter what the specifics are, though, vacation policies serve a valuable function as HR tools that not only make expectations and regulations clear, but also aid in recruitment and retention efforts. ■

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.

RECONSIDERING 3 WIDESPREAD HR PRACTICES

BY KEVIN EIKENBERRY

Many traditions that arose in the past to fulfill specific functions still have relevance today. But often, a tradition's original purpose has been lost—or is no longer being served—and "we've always done it that way" becomes the reason why it persists. This holds especially true in organizational life, where most organizations continue to follow three common practices that may have outlived their usefulness.

EXIT INTERVIEWS

In theory, an exit interview seems like a great way to increase retention. By finding out why people are leaving, a company might identify things it could improve that would reduce talent turnover. Fewer exits lead to fewer exit interviews.

The problem is that the exit interview comes too late for the person walking out the door: they are already leaving. If a company might be able to gather some useful information in this meeting, would it be enough to make a difference? Even a variation called the "stay interview," which allows HR to be a bit more proactive and hear what people like about the organization, team, culture and more, still misses the mark when used by itself.

Too often the problem with the exit and stay interviews is that leaders treat them as something that falls under the HR role—and not as something they themselves need to think about. In reality, leaders should be having regular conversations with their teams and team members. They need to have a sense of how people are doing, how they are feeling, and what they need. When leaders practice empathy, they gain a better understanding of how to support their people. Such conversations also build trust and increase psychological safety, both of which improve retention and reduce the need for HR to spend time on exit interviews.

STATUS MEETINGS

Status meetings have likely been around as long as people have been working together on different projects. The concept behind them makes sense: when everyone knows what others are doing, they can support each other and perhaps offer help. In execution, however, status meetings often get expanded to include social time or other communication purposes.

If those types of status meetings work for everyone involved, great. But if all of the meeting participants don't value the added connection and extra communication in the same way, the status meeting is not meeting their needs. In that case, it may be time to can the status meeting and consider asynchronous approaches to communication. Leaders can create instant message channels, for example, or require everyone to use templates to share brief status reports. They can also ask their teams how they would like to stay updated on each other's work and progress.

PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

It is hard to argue with the stated goal of performance reviews: to help people gauge how they are doing and identify what they could do to improve. Unfortunately, for

most people, performance reviews don't function as intended and sometimes actually create more problems than what they are supposed to address. Because performance reviews are viewed so poorly, many organizations have abolished them. That approach, however, can be equally problematic, because it can dramatically reduce the amount of performance feedback people receive.

If a company's current performance development (a more accurate term than performance management) processes are working for everyone, great. But if any changes are made, they should be focused on facilitating and encouraging leaders and team members to have more frequent and helpful conversations about performance progress and suggested next steps.

NOT A QUESTION OF RIGHT OR WRONG

There is nothing inherently wrong with any of these practices. But there might be a long wrong with how they are working for any particular organization or team. Now might be the time to reassess these practices. If they aren't serving everyone, it's time to make adjustments to bring them into line with their intended function—or replace or eliminate them.

Kevin Eikenberry is the chief potential officer of the Kevin Eikenberry Group, a leadership and learning consulting company that has been helping organizations, teams, and individuals reach their potential since 1993. His specialties include leadership, teams and teamwork, organizational culture, facilitating change, and organizational learning. He can be reached at info@kevineikenberry.com.

How to Make DEI Programs

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs that create a culture of inclusivity are key to attracting top talent, retaining employees, and developing an engaged and highly productive workforce and have had a significant presence in the workplace for some time. In recent years, though, a growing number of businesses are researching and implementing these programs in an attempt to fix a multitude of issues, many of which have become more visible and prevalent in a post-COVID world. But not all programs have been received with equal enthusiasm. In fact, some DEI programs have lacked the necessary support, failing from the start or long before they are able to make positive impacts.

Researchers have found that companies with a more diverse workforce and leadership team are overall more profitable than their peers that lack such diversity. Many factors lead to this growth in revenue. Notably, today's applicants want to work in strong company cultures that value people and how employees contribute to a company's success. This interest drives top talent to companies with well-developed inclusive cultures and improves retention among current staff. An engaged workforce tends to be more productive—and higher productivity generally means higher profitability.

How have these organizations created such engaging and impactful DEI programs? All successful DEI efforts include a few critical elements.

SINCERITY OF PURPOSE

In order to achieve positive outcomes, a DEI program must have genuine buy-in and full support from top leadership down. DEI initiatives and the reasons why they are needed can connect very deeply and personally with people, especially those who have been affected by discrimination or microaggressions. Employees expect leadership to spearhead meaningful change by actively cultivating a culture of inclusivity, not to just bring up the topic as a talking point. This involvement requires a certain level of participation by leadership and can manifest in many different ways, including:

- Developing, distributing, and living inclusive cultural values
- Updating policies to be more inclusive (e.g., treating Juneteenth as a company holiday, adding paid parental leave, updating anti-harassment policies)
- Confronting unconscious bias
- Holding people accountable for their poor behavior
- Creating a mentorship program specifically for underserved groups
- Leading by example in words and action

Programs More Effective

BY STRATEGIC HR

- Giving positive recognition when successes are achieved

INVESTMENT IN DEI INITIATIVES

No corporate program can succeed without business leaders' and departments' time, attention, and funding. This means consistent efforts, such as monthly speakers, regular workshops, community partnerships, and more. The most engaging DEI initiatives with long-term positive impacts do cost time and money: time for employees to coordinate and go through planned experiences; money to support training, marketing efforts, and partnerships; and time off to volunteer and make an impact in the local community. Efforts such as these that strengthen the organization's culture are time and money well spent.

CLEAR PURPOSE AND MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Any strategic-level project requires a well-defined implementation plan that has carefully developed strategic goals, clearly defined and measurable outcomes, and target achievement dates. Once agreement is reached on the goals, groups within the organization can be assigned to work on different objectives. Leadership should be responsible for the overall direction of the DEI roadmap of goals, though everyone in the company can be assigned to specific tasks, with outcomes tied to their performance metrics. (Note that many HRIS platforms include measurement tools for tracking several important DEI metrics.) Leadership should communicate the goals—as well as quarterly progress updates—to all employees within the organization. Good communication and strong commitment (especially from leaders) to diversity can increase engagement levels, which not only assists in achieving organization-wide DEI goals but also helps improve recruitment and retention.

Creating a culture of inclusivity takes time and consistent effort in order to achieve a meaningful, long-term impact. By continuing to educate others and developing a psychologically safe workplace, an organization can feel the positive effects of higher productivity, retention, growth, and engagement. ■

Strategic Human Resources is a national full-service HR management firm based in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 2021 it joined Clark Schaefer Hackett Business Advisors to lead key HR solutions. The president and founder of Strategic HR, Robin Throckmorton, can be reached at robin@strategichrinc.com.

1. Sundiatu Dixon-Fyle et al. 2020. "Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters." McKinsey & Company website, May 2019, www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-wins-how-inclusion-matters.

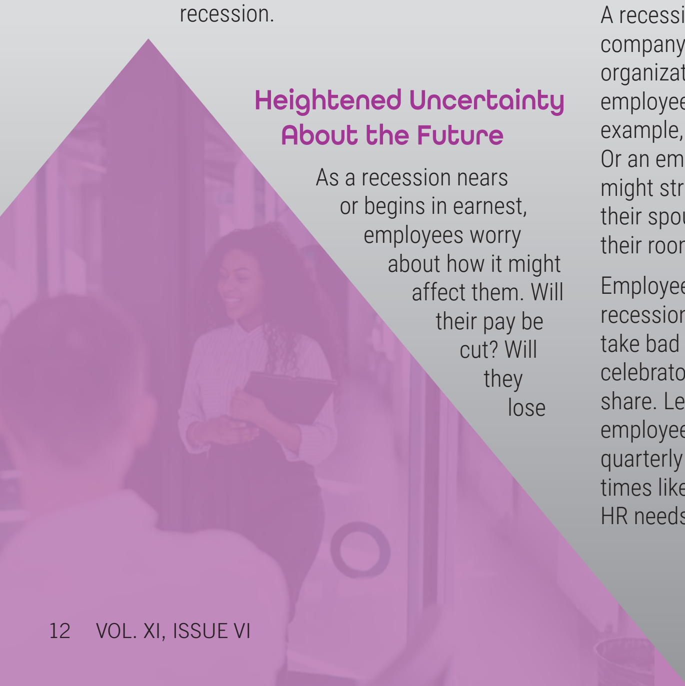
THE ROLE OF HR IN A RECESSION

BY FUTURESENSE

The prospect of a recession has many businesses and their employees worried. During an extended economic decline, sales drop, jobs disappear, and productivity decreases. Companies have less revenue to invest, and their customers have less money to spend. With their lives shaken by financial instability, people are more motivated to play it safe and less inclined to take risks.

With the possibility of a recession on the horizon—and the inevitability of a recession eventually at some point—everyone working in HR ought to be prepared for when it strikes. A recession hits more than just bank accounts: stress grows, tensions mount, and morale falls. People become less productive simply because they're preoccupied by their personal finances. Each of these conditions affect the bottom line.

HR's role in a recession is to mitigate stress, resolve tensions, maintain morale, and ensure that employees continue to be rewarded for their hard work. This is what HR should be doing all of the time, of course, but these tasks are especially important during economic downturns. Drawing on respect and empathy as guiding principles, HR can help their organizations and employees navigate the challenges that emerge during a recession.



Heightened Uncertainty About the Future

As a recession nears or begins in earnest, employees worry about how it might affect them. Will their pay be cut? Will they lose their jobs? Will their retirement savings evaporate? It's difficult for anyone to plan or act when they don't know what's going to happen. For some people, waiting for the possibility of bad news induces as much anxiety as receiving that bad news.

Whether a company is booming or struggling, its leadership should be as transparent as possible. If the business looks poised to do well despite the overall downturn, it should deliver that message to employees and give them that confidence. If navigating the recession will demand more efficient work from everyone, leadership should clearly communicate that without sugarcoating the consequences if those goals aren't met, and it should show its appreciation when those goals are achieved. Whatever the case, leadership should never mislead employees. Employees will eventually find out that dishonesty—and will remember not to trust their leaders in the future.

Employee Financial Hardships

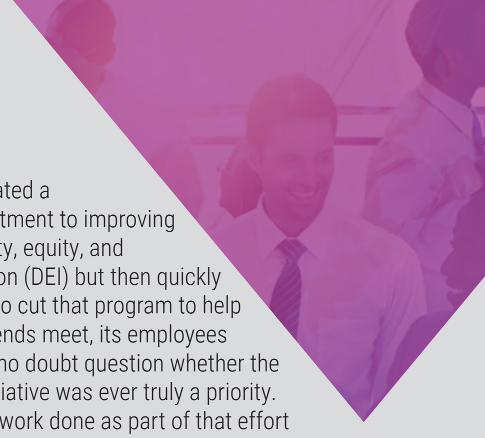
A recession doesn't hit everyone in a company the same way. Even if an organization fares well, the finances of its employees may not be in good shape. For example, their 401(k)s may be tanking. Or an employee who just received a raise might struggle to pay their rent because their spouse or partner lost their job or their roommate had to move away.

Employees' experiences during a recession will vary widely. Some may take bad news harder or feel less celebratory when there's good news to share. Leadership shouldn't assume that employee morale is high just because quarterly financials are on the rise. In times like these, empathy is invaluable. HR needs to keep up to date on what their people are feeling and point them in the direction of helpful resources.

Layoffs

Unfortunately, recessions can sometimes lead to layoffs. A layoff occurs when an employer terminates the employment relationship because there's no work available for the employee to do, the company can't afford to pay the employee, or the company is on the verge of closing completely. Layoffs are stressful for everyone, but conducting them poorly increases that stress unnecessarily, makes lost revenue even more likely, and may expose companies to liability. When considering and administering layoffs, HR should keep the following in mind:

- **A company should be sure to understand its compliance obligations regarding layoffs.** The federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act of 1988 (the "WARN Act"), which applies to employers with 100 or more full-time



employees, requires 60 days' notice before a mass layoff or business closure. Many states have their own versions (called "mini-WARNs") that kick in at a lower employee count. State unemployment insurance law may have notice requirements as well.

- **Leadership should be doubly sure that layoffs are absolutely necessary and that they're letting the right number of people go.** Layoffs mean less work gets done—period. Unless the company is shutting down, it needs at least enough people remaining to keep the business running. Quickly rehiring people after underestimating how much work needed to be done to stay afloat won't inspire confidence and will likely lead to confusion about shifting job duties.
- **Leadership should determine whether the layoff will be temporary or permanent.** If a company intends to rehire laid-off employees later, it should let them know and keep them apprised of developments or changes in the business plans; otherwise, it will be scrambling if it's ready to rehire workers at some point and no one can or wants to return. Also, given the waiting times for unemployment insurance, being on-again, off-again with employees can seriously interfere with their income.
- **Layoffs should be fair and nondiscriminatory.** Layoff decisions should be based on legitimate business reasons—and those reasons should be well documented.
- **Organizations must comply with laws regarding final pay.** Many states require that a company pay an employee much sooner than their next regular payday if they're discharged or laid off. When state law doesn't address layoffs specifically, companies should consider using the deadline that applies to terminations. If state law doesn't set a deadline for final paychecks at all, it's a good idea to pay no later than the next regular payday.

Reduced Hours and Pay Cuts

In addition or as an alternative to layoffs, a company might consider reducing hours or pay. In this situation, too, there are rules to follow—and morale is sure to take a hit.

Employers generally have the right to reduce the number of hours an employee works. A company that plans to send an employee home before the end of their shift should check state law for reporting time pay. Other restrictions may apply as well—it's important to review any applicable contracts as well as relevant state or local laws. Exempt employees aren't paid by the hour, however, so simply reducing their hours won't in itself lower their pay and save the company money.

When an organization still needs a lot of work done but can't make the finances work, pay cuts may be the best option. A company can reduce the rate of pay of nonexempt employees as long as it keeps pay above the federal, state, and local minimum wages, still pays overtime when applicable, and doesn't make the change retroactive.

It can also reduce the salaries of exempt employees as long as they don't fall below the federal and state minimum salary thresholds and, as with nonexempt employees, the reduction in pay isn't retroactive. In addition, to avoid violating the salary basis requirement for exempt employees, any change should be ongoing rather than frequently fluctuating. Federal law doesn't require advance notice of pay reductions, but some states do, so it's important to check the relevant state's requirements.

If a company needs to reduce exempt employee pay below the minimum salary threshold, it will need to reclassify those employees as nonexempt, pay them at least the minimum wage and overtime as required by law, and provide them with any legally required breaks. It's important to avoid reclassifying employees on a short-term basis, however, because doing that can make a company look like it's trying to avoid the rules.

As with layoffs, all decisions regarding cuts to hours or pay should be made in a fair and nondiscriminatory manner—and must be thoroughly documented.

Temptation to Cut "Nonessential" Programs

When money is tight, companies must make sacrifices. But they also need to remember their commitments and consider the consequences of casting them aside. For example, if an employer had stated a commitment to improving diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) but then quickly opted to cut that program to help make ends meet, its employees would no doubt question whether the DEI initiative was ever truly a priority. All the work done as part of that effort could be jeopardized, and the company's reputation in the labor market could suffer.

When deciding what programs and practices to stop, organizations should proceed cautiously. People assess an organization's values based on where it spends (and doesn't spend) money. What does a company's choices say about its values? Every action communicates a message.

If an organization really has no choice but to cut programs and practices that speak to its values and commitments, it must communicate these decisions to employees thoughtfully. Transparency is key, as is following through again on these commitments when the company is back on its feet.

Everyone on Edge

Money problems weigh heavily on most people. Patience wears thin, the ability to collaborate with others deteriorates, and peaceful environments become pressure cookers. In the event of a recession, it's very likely that people will lose their temper more quickly, longstanding conflicts will escalate, and new drama will erupt. Rather than be tolerated, though, behavioral and performance issues must be addressed right away. Leadership should remind everyone that they're all working for a common purpose, teach their teams effective communication skills, and practice conflict resolution strategies. Ignoring drama or otherwise allowing it to fester will only hasten the best employees out the door.

Recessions are difficult, and getting through them sometimes require hard choices. Treating people with respect and empathy sets everyone up for success in the long run. By being prepared to address recession-related challenges as they arise, HR can guide their organizations and employees through these difficult periods. ■

FutureSense provides people-focused HR, compensation, and organizational development

Is It Time to Improve Your Job Postings?

BY LINDA BRENNER

Whether a candidate applies for a role because they are actively drawn to a particular organization, because they stumble upon an open positive via a general search on Indeed, or because a sourcer found and wooed them, the job posting is almost always a checkpoint in the hiring process. Although companies have been trying to improve their job ads for decades, the need for improvement has taken on new urgency in the last year given the scramble for talent, particularly for candidates with skills in scarce supply.

And that means it's time for every organization to check its own job postings. CHROs, recruiters, hiring managers, CFOs—anyone who has any say at all in hiring should go to their company's career site, choose a random job posting, and evaluate it by asking and answering the following four questions.

IS THE POSTING A JOB DESCRIPTION OR A JOB AD?

Don't use job descriptions in place of job ads. A job description is usually a long document with lots of details and legalese and might include phrases such as "this position requires sitting for long periods of time." On the other hand, a job ad is succinct, compelling, and differentiating.

Job descriptions are best used at the time of the offer to ensure that the candidate has all the information they need to make an informed decision about accepting the position. Remember, a job posting is no more a legal document than a commercial for potato chips is. The function of the ad is to get people to want to eat potato chips, not to tell them the details about how potato chips are made, what ingredients they contain, and what potential harm could result from eating them.

THE NEED FOR IMPROVEMENT HAS TAKEN ON NEW URGENCY IN THE LAST YEAR GIVEN THE SCRAMBLE FOR TALENT

IS THIS A GENERIC LIST OR A COMPELLING PITCH?

A good job ad doesn't simply highlight the three to five most important responsibilities of the job and end with "other tasks as assigned by leadership." It also includes other information that's important to the candidate, such as where the job is based, whether hybrid or virtual options are available, and whether the position requires travel. Companies should take their cue from Google's own job ads, which put remote work information at the very top, followed by qualifications, the employment value proposition, and the key responsibilities of the role.

ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS CLEARLY STATED AND REALISTIC?

To be sure they cast a wide enough net, job postings should include objective qualifications and list both "required" skills and "preferred" skills. Differentiating between the two and highlighting the skills and experiences that will carry the most weight in selection decisions makes the selection criteria crystal clear to candidates. Lose the laundry list of subjective—and vague—skills, such as "work well with others," "have integrity," "be able to multitask," and "excel at listening and communicating," and instead spell out the objectively defined desired skills, experiences, or knowledge. Also, ditch experience ranges (e.g., "3–5 years") and just specify the minimum threshold (e.g., "3+ years"). After all, unless a company intentionally practices age discrimination or uses ineffective hiring criteria, it's not going to disqualify someone whose 6 or more years of experience fall outside an arbitrary "3–5 years" range. Netflix is one company that does a good job of clearly stating the desired qualifications; in many cases, its job ads don't specify how many years of experience a candidate should have—only the types of knowledge they need.

IS THE AD SELLING THE FULL EMPLOYMENT PACKAGE?

Does the job posting include specific, compelling information about the benefits and perks of the job? A company shouldn't wait until the offer stage to let candidates know about great aspects of its employment value proposition (e.g., generous paid time off, the low cost of health insurance, retirement plan contributions, volunteer programs, special discounts). Great candidates have lots of options, and the sooner an organization communicates the value of its total package, the more likely it will be able to reel in top talent.

Now is the time for companies to put their best foot forward with a marketing-based refresh of their ads, starting with their most critical and difficult-to-fill roles. Having the analytics team compare the number of unique visitors to a set of job postings with the number of applications for those roles can reveal a great deal about the effectiveness of the organization's approach to recruitment. If the job postings aren't attracting great candidates, then it's time to spice them up (perhaps with help from a freelance writer who can offer a new perspective) so they reflect the company's overall brand and are appealing enough to compel readers to click on the "apply" button. ■

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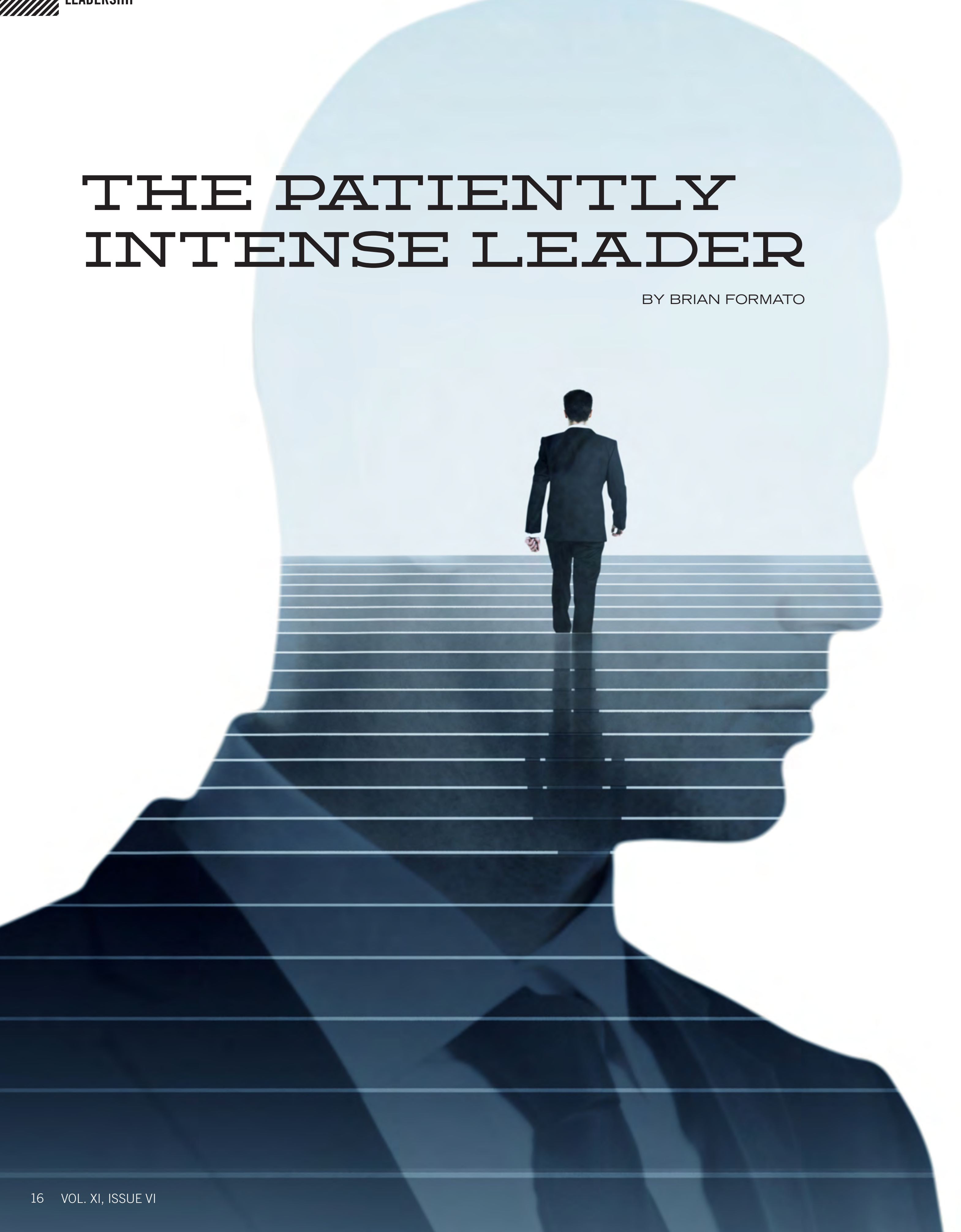
THE PATIENTLY INTENSE LEADER

BY BRIAN FORMATO



Taking a close look at executives across various industries, geographies, and company sizes provides insights into the commonalities and differences in style and approach that work best in different settings. The best leaders know their own strengths—and their own weaknesses. Their self-awareness isn't the only significant determinant of leadership success, though. The ability to be "patiently intense" is another correlative success factor. Patience and intensity might seem like opposites, but the two competencies actually create balance that leads to leadership success.

"Being patient doesn't mean going slowly. It means going at the appropriate pace."

Merriam-Webster.com offers these definitions:

- ***patiently:*** "in a patient manner : with calmness or without complaint or hurry in spite of delays, difficulties, tedium, etc." [1]
- ***intense:*** "marked by or expressive of great zeal, energy, determination, or concentration" [2]

Both terms focus on staying the course and persevering despite opposition or adversity. They actually do go hand in hand. After all, in order to succeed, a leader must have the grit and determination to fend off naysayers, deal with adversity, and power through obstacles. Intensity in the form of sustained effort is required to launch a company or to scale a new solution.

Being intense is not enough, though. Leaders must be able to sustain that intensity over the long haul and exhibit stamina. Many intense leaders have failed, especially when trying to drive change in larger, more established organizations. This is where patience comes in: effective leaders must leverage patience to calmly and deliberately address opposition and, often, to slow the pace of decision making.

When introducing a disruptive solution to the market, the desire to go fast can sometimes derail ambition. Understanding the importance of being deliberate, calculating, and patient is a critical skill. Being patient doesn't mean going slowly. It means going at the appropriate pace and recognizing how to alter that pace as needed to bring the team, investors, customers, and other constituents along.

Leaders set the tone for their organizations. Those who are able to balance patience with intensity will be likely to guide their companies to long-term success. ■

Brian Formato is the founder of Groove Management, a leadership development and executive coaching firm; and the creator of LeaderSurf, an adventurous development program for business leaders of all backgrounds, industries, and corners of the world who want to break old habits and create lasting change. He can be reached at bformato@groovemanagement.com.

1. "Patiently." 2022. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/patiently.
2. "Intense." 2022. Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/intense.

WATER COOLER CHRONICLES

Rethinking a Cherished Tradition

BY JAMES MOUL

As 2022 draws to a close, many organizations are preparing to hold end-of-year or holiday parties for their staff. These gatherings can be great opportunities for companies to show their appreciation for their employees' hard work, for staff to connect with each other socially in ways that build camaraderie and strengthen the company culture, and for organizations to acknowledge and participate in society-wide seasonal celebrations and mark the transition to a new year.

Before booking the venue and hiring caterers, however, you may want to pause for a moment and think about what it means to host a big corporate holiday party at the end of 2022.

Most of the business world currently has a "Hooray! The pandemic is over, and now we can get back to normal!" mindset. Yes, vaccinations and other safety protocols have mitigated the danger of COVID-19 enough to allow many workers to return to their offices. And yes, the supply-chain issues of the past two years seem to be finally fading away. In many ways it does seem like the crisis is over.

But even though safety and reliability have returned, that doesn't necessarily mean we'll ever be able to return to exactly how things were before the pandemic. Many people are still dealing with the effects of the pandemic: some lost people they loved,

some have suffered financial hardship, and some are dealing with long-term health issues after having COVID-19 themselves. Also, because many employers are keeping (for now, at least) the remote or hybrid work arrangements that became widespread during the height of the pandemic, companies' actual physical workplaces have been transformed—and with some organizations opting to keep everyone remote permanently, some shared physical workplaces have disappeared completely.

So what does this mean for end-of-year parties? Rather than blindly follow tradition, companies should consider whether those parties still hold value today. Given that the economy is teetering on the edge of recession, do organizations still want to spend a lot of money on such festivities? Would employees see this as an insensitive expenditure on the part of the company and prefer to get an end-of-year bonus instead? Can the company afford the expense? If a company does decide to have a party, what logistics need to be considered to ensure that remote and hybrid employees are included?

Ultimately, the best thing managers can do right now is to read the room. They should talk to their staff and see how they are feeling and get a sense of how employees might feel about attending a big corporate blowout party. It's very possible that a company's employees would welcome a chance to relax and socialize with each other in a festive setting. It's also very possible that a company's employees aren't feeling ready to celebrate just yet or might feel resentful about such an event. By approaching the issue with transparency and sensitivity, managers will have more success in finding a solution that works best for their organizations. ■

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RECIPE

Winter Sangria

Celebrating the apples, cranberries, and citrus that are at their peak and flooding the supermarkets as fall transitions into winter, this sangria is a welcome addition to both festive gatherings and quiet, cozy evenings by the fire (and a great opportunity to break out that punch bowl that's been languishing at the back of the pantry!).

Yield: 5 servings
Time: 4 hours (10 minutes to prep, plus refrigerator time)

Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

Calories:	89 cal
Fat:	0 g
Dietary fiber:	2 g
Sugars:	9 g
Protein:	0.5 g

What you'll need:

- 1 crisp apple
- 1 orange
- 1 750ml bottle of dry red wine (pinot noir is especially nice here)
- ½ cup fresh cranberries
- ¼ cup Cointreau (Triple Sec will work too!)

Directions:

- Peel and core the apple, then cut it into thin slices.
- Peel and section the orange, being careful to remove all traces of pith. (If you are handy with a knife, you could supreme the orange instead.)
- Put everything together into a pitcher or large mason jar.
- Store, covered, in the fridge for at least four hours before serving.

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