

# THE RESOURCE

# HR INSIGHTS

VOL. XII, ISSUE V

magazine

*from the eyes of industry leaders*

Hire for  
Attitude,  
Train  
for Skills

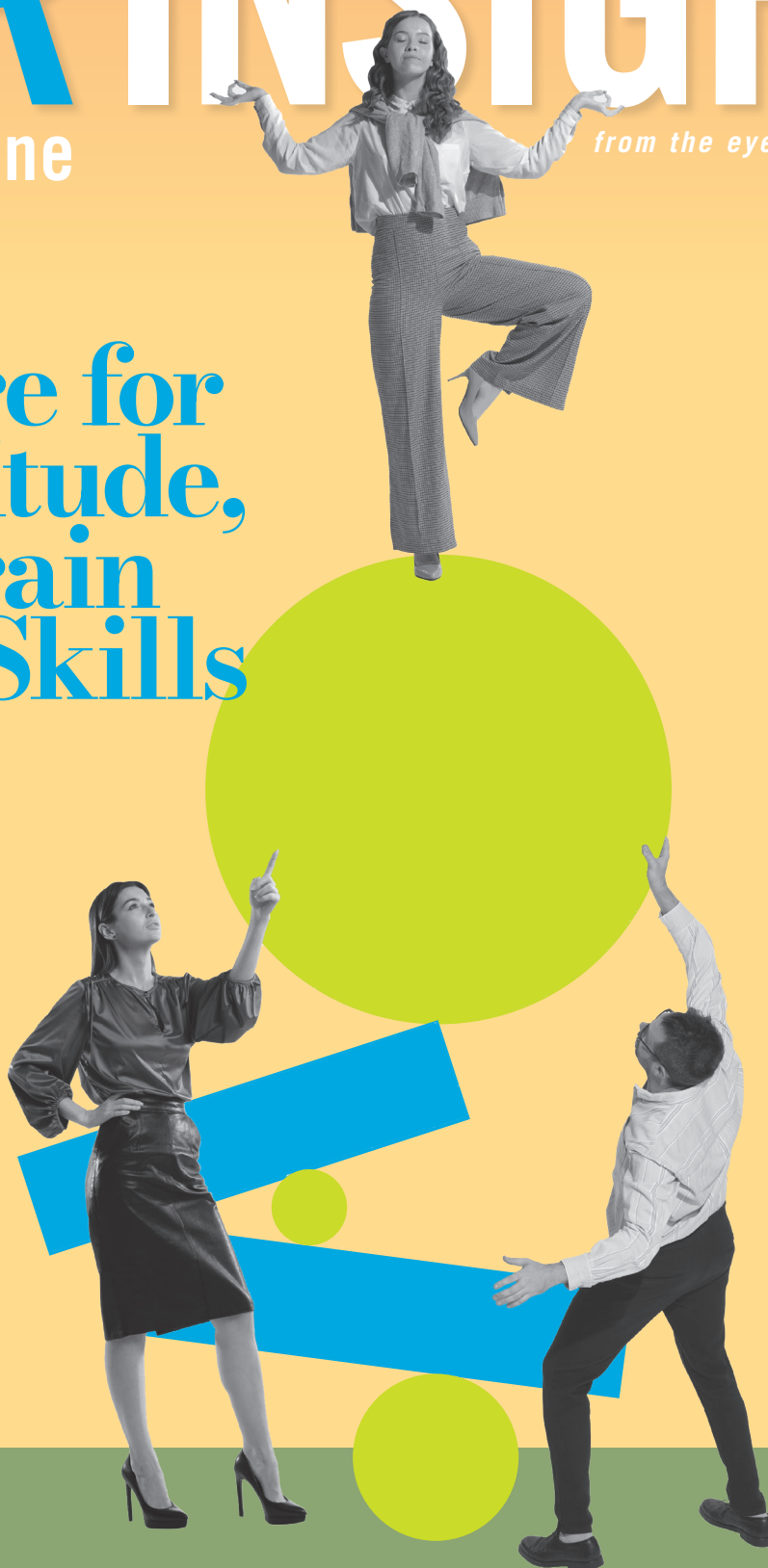
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# THE RESOURCE

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# 5 Steps for Success in Hiring

BY ALEX OLIVER

**B**ecause talent acquisition, the comprehensive process companies use to find and keep workers, is the foundation of any business, employers need a well-defined strategy for its implementation. Effective talent acquisition bypasses reactive recruitment in favor of proactive hiring. The difference between the two shows up in the quality of candidates: when recruiters scramble to get somebody (anybody!) on board, they risk bringing on workers who are unengaged and uninterested from the get-go. But when hiring professionals source candidates from carefully crafted talent pipelines, they land team members who not only possess the right skills but also thrive in their new workplaces.

The secret to a successful hiring strategy is curiosity: employers who continually question their operations, test new ideas, and take calculated risks will create talent acquisition processes that bolster businesses and their goals by bringing great performers on board. They are also adept at dealing with obstacles such as:

- ▶ a shortage of qualified candidates for certain roles (because of high demand, skills gaps, or the job location);
- ▶ intense competition from other organizations;
- ▶ difficulties in creating recruitment processes that are fair, unbiased, and legally compliant; and
- ▶ inefficiencies that can lead to months-long delays in filling a role (which cost the employer time and money).

A well-designed recruitment strategy sidesteps many of those challenges by ensuring that a company has ready access to pools of talent so it can make efficient, unbiased hiring decisions. By incorporating the following five steps into their talent acquisition processes, organizations can find, screen, and hire exceptional people in record time.

## STEP 1: PLANNING AND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

A good plan enables good hires. In this initial stage, talent acquisition professionals work with hiring managers and other stakeholders to address the big-picture elements. The team's first task is to identify staffing needs, devoting most of its attention to high-priority roles (but without letting less pressing needs go unaddressed for long). Once the team has



set its focus on a position, it can define the specific details (such as its job requirements and description) that will heavily inform the posting for the open role. (At a quick glance, for example, job seekers should learn that the organization wants to fill role X with someone who has Y years of experience and skills in Z.) This process not only helps attract candidates who are well suited for the job but also lays the foundation for successful onboarding by giving the future hire accurate information about, and expectations for, the role.

Next up on the hiring team's to-do list is figuring out the hiring budget and timeline. Item lines on a talent acquisition budget can include fees for job postings, recruitment events, background checks, drug screenings, applicant tracking systems, recruitment software, external recruiters or staffing agencies, relocation expenses, and signing bonuses. Timing can strongly influence the budget: a team that wants to onboard someone quickly may need to devote a big chunk of spending on advertising and other strategies to speed the process along.

## STEP 2: SOURCING

Employers looking for new employees can draw on a wide range of search methods. Unfortunately, though, none of them guarantees success. In order to connect with the best applicants available, talent acquisition teams need to employ multiple and diverse strategies. Employers can consider the following possibilities:

- ▶ Setting up employee referral programs
- ▶ Advertising open roles in a wide range of locations (e.g., job boards, social media, podcasts, billboards)
- ▶ Using job advertising tools to select ad spots that reach the most relevant and engaged candidates
- ▶ Creating internship and returnship programs

Employers will find promising candidates when they use a broad range of recruitment strategies. Ultimately, however, these manifold methods point job seekers to the same place: the employer. That means employers must carefully craft their job postings, career sites, and employer brands to pique candidates' interest and convert them into engaged employees.

## STEP 3: SCREENING

Since remote work became widespread, fewer job seekers are bound by location. The volume of applicants at remote-capable companies is up because a job seeker living in Boston can apply to a company based in Houston. With the uptick in application volume, talent acquisition professionals must spend more time on applicant screening so they can pinpoint promising candidates early in the recruitment process. An effective screening process not only makes for efficient recruitment but also minimizes the risk of poor hiring decisions.

Resume screening is the most common screening method, but it's far from the only one. For example, applicants can be asked to sit for preemployment tests and assessments that help employers evaluate candidates' knowledge and skills, work styles, and behavior. Applicants who meet employers' expectations in all of these areas are more likely to thrive in their new positions.

Reference calls are another tool that can help eliminate bad candidates. The person making a reference call should confirm the applicant's employment dates, job titles, and job duties. Checking these details can expose resume inaccuracies and exaggerations. Reference calls can also help employers gauge applicants' behavioral traits, such as how they got along with their former colleagues and their ability to think creatively.

It's important to remember that all screening strategies must comply with antidiscrimination laws. No assessment or reference call



should inquire into a candidate's personal characteristics (such as ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation). These strategies should assess applicants only on the skills, experience, and behaviors they bring to their jobs.

When used correctly, candidate screening can bolster an employer's commitment to diversity and inclusion. As recruiters and hiring managers examine soft skills during the hiring process, screening can shift the focus from who the candidate is to what the candidate is capable of. This change in perspective reduces bias in the hiring process—the first step in achieving a diverse workforce.

#### STEP 4: INTERVIEWING

Once talent acquisition professionals have found the most promising candidates, it's time to start interviewing. Decisions need to be made about several elements of this stage of the hiring process, such as the interview format and the number of interviews. The most important decision to make, however, is about the questions that will be asked. After all, the candidates' answers to them will ultimately determine who gets the job.

Talent acquisition professionals may be tempted to reach for traditional interview questions, such as "Why do you want to work for our company?" and "What is your greatest strength?" These kinds of questions work fine to kick off the conversation. But interviewers should also consider asking behavioral questions, which reveal not what candidates have done but what they *would* do. This distinction helps an organization get to know candidates more deeply, which increases its chances of making the right hire.

Examples of behavioral questions include the following:

- ▶ Give me an example of a time when you had to manage up. How did you do it?
- ▶ Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult teammate or client. How did you handle that relationship?
- ▶ What are you looking for in a supervisor?
- ▶ Tell me about how you work collaboratively while remote.
- ▶ What's something that made you better in your current role?

(As with the screening process, candidate interviews should focus on a candidate's skills and experience. Interviewers should not ask applicants about their ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, or other protected characteristics.)

#### STEP 5: SELECTION AND OFFER

It may seem as though the employer holds all the power at this point in the process. But although the employer makes the job offer,

the candidate is the one who decides whether to accept it. That's why it's imperative that the employer provide a top-notch candidate experience all the way through hiring and onboarding.

A good offer letter congratulates the recipient and contains enough information about the role (including responsibilities, compensation, and benefits) to enable them to fully consider whether they want to take the job and whether they want to negotiate different terms. Organizations should be responsive throughout the offer stage, with their talent acquisition professionals at the ready to answer applicants' questions and address any counteroffers. By sending a clear signal to the candidate that it's willing to go to bat for them, an organization reveals a lot about how it values its people.

Once a candidate has accepted an offer, it's time to bring them on board. Because employers that fumble onboarding risk creating employees who are disengaged from the get-go, organizations should consider including a number of key elements in their onboarding programs:

- ▶ **Meet-and-greets.** During the first few days, these can help a new employee get up to speed on who's who and what's what.
- ▶ **Goal setting.** Within the first 30 days, a new hire should select their health plan, set up direct deposit, and touch base with HR. During this period, they should also develop a firm grasp on what their job entails and what their learning curve will demand.
- ▶ **Ongoing support.** It may seem counterintuitive to include a 90-day check-in with onboarding. To ensure an employee's success, though, it's important to think of onboarding as a prolonged process. Use this check-in to answer any questions employees may have thought of in their first few months on the job and to address their issues or concerns.

#### HOW TO IMPROVE THE TALENT ACQUISITION PROCESS

The longer and clunkier an organization's hiring and onboarding processes are, the greater the risk that candidates will lose interest or be snapped up by its competition. Companies that use buggy technology throughout the application process, send five e-mails to set up one interview, and wait weeks before updating applicants are the ones most likely to lose their best candidates. Organizations can avoid that fate by taking three key actions.

**Enhance the employer brand.** An organization's employer brand has the power to attract dream candidates—or to make job seekers wary of joining its ranks. To ensure that it gets the right kind of attention, an employer's brand

should draw on three elements: the company's reputation, its employee value proposition, and its candidate and employee experience. These elements should inform and define every touchpoint a candidate has with the organization, and the company's career site, job posts, and social media accounts should reflect and reinforce them.

**Leverage technology and data.** The fastest way to improve the talent acquisition process is to implement technology that not only speeds up recruitment but also enhances decision making. An applicant tracking system is a good start for this. Organizations should look for software that allows them to:

- ▶ empower recruiters to attract job seekers, review applications, and communicate with candidates;
- ▶ create profiles and build relationships with top talent; and
- ▶ apply data and analytics to create a successful hiring strategy.

Additionally, using software to track recruitment metrics (such as time to hire, cost per hire, applicant-to-hire ratio, offer acceptance rate, and employee retention rate) can reveal where the company's hiring process succeeds—and where it fails.

**Prioritize a positive candidate experience.** The candidate experience should offer applicants a preview of the employee experience. Talent acquisition professionals should communicate quickly and transparently (no ghosting allowed!) and aim to leave applicants with a positive impression, which will shape their perception of the organization and increase the likelihood that desirable (and selective) candidates will accept job offers. Organizations can foster that positive impression by providing clear and accurate job descriptions, using scheduling tools to book interviews, and offering honest feedback and timely updates throughout the entire process. In short, the hiring process is an opportunity for a company to show off its employer brand.

#### SUCCESS!


With increased competition over what seems to be an ever-shrinking talent pool, companies can't afford to let their talent acquisition efforts slide. It's critical that they solidify the elements that work and remediate those that don't. When an employer nails all five stages of recruitment—job planning, candidate sourcing, screening, interviewing, and hiring—it can build a workforce that is skilled, engaged, and committed. ■

*As a content creator at iCIMS, Alex Oliver is well-versed in content and digital marketing from B2B and B2C organizations big and small.*



# COMPENSATION TRENDS IN 2023

BY FUTURESENSE



**B**ecause monetary compensation plays a critical role in attracting and retaining top talent, business leaders must stay abreast of the latest compensation trends in order to remain competitive and ensure employee satisfaction. To craft a comprehensive compensation strategy that aligns with organizational goals, they need to understand how monetary compensation is determined, the four types of compensation, and compensation models in digital marketing.





## The changing landscape of compensation

The trends in compensation shift with the economy and the labor market. The COVID-19 pandemic, labor shortages, and record-high inflation rates have affected how employers approach compensation. Amid a nationwide movement for pay transparency, employers must be more transparent about their compensation structures. Additionally, due to the competitive nature of the labor market today, employers need to offer pay plans that appeal to top candidates in order to attract and retain them. Organizations must also meet employee requirements for remote work options, flexible work hours, and additional organizational benefits that accommodate workers' everyday lives and boundaries.

## Compensation models and systems

To develop a winning compensation strategy, leaders must first understand the different compensation options available.

- ▶ Base pay is the fixed salary or wage that an employee receives for their work. It is typically set based on the market value of the position, the employee's qualifications and experience, and the organization's compensation philosophy.
- ▶ Variable pay is based on employee performance and is often used to incentivize high performance. Examples of variable pay include bonuses, commissions, and profit-sharing.
- ▶ Benefits are non-wage compensation offered to employees and include paid time off, retirement schemes, and health insurance. These perks are offered to give workers more value and to help recruit and keep top talent.
- ▶ Equity-based compensation provides employees with ownership in the company through stock options or grants. It is often used by startups and high-growth companies to incentivize and retain key employees.

To determine which compensation models and systems to use, an organization must consider factors such as the job market and industry standards, as well as alignment with its goals and values. By developing a comprehensive compensation plan that includes fair and competitive compensation packages, referral bonuses, and career development potential, an employer can improve its retention levels and attract top talent with critical skill sets.

## Balancing compensation with business objectives

An organization's success depends on its ability to create and implement a compensation strategy that supports the company's objectives. It's crucial to strike a balance among several factors that might be at odds with each other: the requirement to minimize costs, the drive to accomplish organizational goals, and the need to draw in and keep great personnel. To achieve this state of balance, the organization should follow these steps:

- ▶ Define the company's business goals and objectives. (What does the company hope to accomplish, and how will remuneration aid the pursuit of that goal?)
- ▶ Consider the competitive landscape. (How can the organization differentiate itself from its competition? What are other companies offering?)
- ▶ Examine the company's financial position. (What pay packages can the organization afford to give, and how will they affect the bottom line?)
- ▶ Consider employees' needs and preferences. (What types of compensation will employees value the most, and how can the company provide them?)

By negotiating these variables, an organization can create a compensation strategy that supports its aims and is in line with its objectives, while still managing its expenses.

In today's economic climate, it's more important than ever for organizations to pay close attention to the latest compensation trends and employee needs and interests. Business leaders who keep an ear to the ground and stay up to date on these issues will be better prepared to align their business strategies with compensation strategies that support employee retention, development, and satisfaction. ■

*FutureSense (futuresense.com) provides people-focused HR, compensation, and organizational development strategies that improve business performance.*



# GETTING WORKERS INVOLVED IN SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAMS

BY TED KITTERMAN

One stakeholder cares more than any other about how companies perform on sustainability and environmental goals: employees. Younger employees, in particular, say that a company's climate record will influence whether they take a job offer, with 60 percent of Generation Z respondents in one survey saying, "they avoid employers they perceive as having a negative impact on the environment."<sup>1</sup> But tapping into the passions of these employees is a delicate balancing act, because inauthentic or poorly implemented corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs can turn away workers or lead them to perform poorly.<sup>2</sup> To achieve their environmental goals, companies must carefully involve employees in their sustainability efforts.

## Three drivers of engagement

Recent research has identified three primary factors that influence employee engagement with CSR initiatives:

- ▶ Tensions that exist either in initiatives' goals or in the means used to accomplish them. (Such tensions arise when the goals/means that an employee prefers differ from the goals/means that the employee believes their company adopts.)
- ▶ An employee's ability to adopt a "paradox mindset" that enables them to "embrace, rather than reject, opposing demands."<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Whether an employee engages with CSR work occasionally or as a daily part of their role.<sup>4</sup>

One lesson from this research is that it is easier to reconcile tensions about CSR at the means level (i.e., what tactics or programs a company pursues) rather than at the goals level. Goals represent ideology, where differences are harder to bridge. An employee focused on CSR because of a personal passion for it (for example, because they see it as "the right thing to do") will have conflict if they think that their organization is focused on CSR primarily as a business opportunity—and vice versa.

## Finding internal advocates

To avoid this tension, many companies are finding ways to ensure that employees feel included in setting goals for CSR programs focused on sustainability. At PCL Construction, for example, involving employees starts with finding local leaders who can take on the challenge. Each PCL office is empowered to set its own strategy to

meet its business needs, and each has someone who participates in PCL's Sustainable Construction Advisor Network. Employees give lots of feedback to the organization about how they perceive efforts to increase sustainability and promote climate-friendly business practices. Scott Beckman, director of sustainability for PCL, says that some PCL offices even "took it upon themselves to establish waste-tracking databases and worked with their local waste haulers to ensure that we're getting the proper reporting and tracking from them so that we can then roll that up into consolidated reporting."<sup>5</sup>

## Scaling to customers

Engaging employees is also crucial for scaling the impact of climate-focused policies. Because a whopping 64 percent of Hewlett Packard Enterprise's (HPE) carbon footprint is created by the use of the company's products, HPE is making efforts to reduce the environmental impact of its customers.<sup>6</sup> Yet even when focusing on customer-facing solutions, employees play a crucial role in educating customers and creative problem solving. In fact, because the dedicated team of six that focuses on sustainability for the entire global customer base can't possibly speak to every client that wants to make its technology more sustainable, every HPE employee is empowered and encouraged to participate in the process. "I'm always delighted when a customer tells me, 'Hey, I heard from this pre-sales person or this salesperson, and they were explaining to me all the things that HPE does from a climate perspective,'" says John Frey, chief technologist for sustainable transformation at HPE.

## Making it personal

When it comes to training, many employers are connecting learning about sustainability and climate solutions to career growth and development. For example, product managers at Trek Bicycles have extensive training in the concepts and practices of circularity (how new products can be made with recycled products with a plan to reclaim the materials at the end of life). Mark Joslyn, vice president of human resources at Trek, explains that in "workshops and classes about how the life-cycle analysis is performed and the impact of all the inputs," product managers and designers learned about how their decisions during the design process can have a huge influence on a product's environmental impact.





### Bringing the impact home

Another way to help employees connect with sustainability initiatives is to bring those initiatives to the places where employees work. Each year on Earth Day, for example, Trek holds a recycling drive to which employees can bring e-waste, footwear, and bicycle parts and equipment. Because “there are a lot of products now that are very difficult or expensive to recycle depending on where you live . . . [but] that you want to dispose of responsibly,” says Joslyn, “that’s a day that people now mark on their calendar.”

### Getting involved

Organizations that want to get their employees more involved with sustainability and climate initiatives should consider the following recommendations:

**Start with education.** Don’t assume that employees are familiar with CSR initiatives or know what acronyms such as ESG (environmental, social, and governance issues) mean, especially with sustainability being a hot-button topic as the next contentious presidential election cycle begins. “There is a lot of noise out there,” says Heather Breidenthal, chief human resources officer of Tri Pointe Homes. “Gather and share examples and interesting stories (with pictures) from across the company. Start there and ask your employees to share their own stories. You will be amazed at what you will be able to collect, as well as the insights you will gain.”

**Develop and publish a sustainability report.** It’s important for an organization to know its current impact before it can start making measurable progress, much less communicate a strategy with its employees.

### Help employees share stories and information.

Storytelling tools and channels offer ways for employees to contribute their expertise and drive conversations across the organization. For example, through a program called My Sustainability Story, PCL employees are encouraged to share personal stories, best practices, and anecdotes with an internal audience on Yammer, the company’s internal social media platform.

**Don’t hesitate to engage.** Although the metrics to gauge improvement are getting better for environmental impact and carbon footprint, plenty of things will have impacts that are difficult to measure. “Listen to your employees; listen to your customers,” Frey says. “Don’t wait to get started until you have all the measurement systems in place.” ■

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# Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills

BY KEVIN EIKENBERRY

**I**n any job market, the interviewing process brings many challenges. Organizations want to find the right people for their roles, but the need to get those jobs filled quickly sometimes gets in the way of achieving that goal. That sense of urgency tends to push companies to hire people who seem to have the right skills—and then hope the fit works out. Unfortunately, that strategy doesn't always work.

When companies prioritize attitude, however, they get the right people more frequently than when they hire based on skills. That may seem counterintuitive. After all, employees need to accomplish specific tasks, so if they have the right skills, they should be golden, right? But hiring for attitude works—and here's why.

## Better Team Cohesion and Cultural Fit

Hiring for attitude requires hiring managers to talk more about organizational values earlier in the interview process. Not only are they looking for fit, but they want candidates to look for it too. Having these conversations improves the chances that new team members share the company's values and are more likely to mesh well with the existing organizational culture. When this fit is strong enough to promote a cohesive and productive working environment in which team members can collaborate effectively and maintain positive relationships, hiring managers know they have made a good hire.

## More Adaptability and Resilience

The world and the work that organizations want their teams to do are always changing. Companies need team members who can adapt and adjust. When they hire for attitude,

they are generally looking for—and selecting for—a mindset that supports embracing new ideas, learning from mistakes, and persevering when times are hard. People who bring this kind of resilience on day one can make a big difference at their organizations.

## Higher Employee Engagement and Productivity

A positive attitude is typically contagious, inspiring others within the team to maintain a similar outlook. Therefore, why would anyone choose to bring someone with a negative outlook on board? Engaged and motivated employees are more likely to be productive and committed to achieving the organization's goals. This approach not only contributes to a more enjoyable work environment but also drives better overall performance and results for the organization.







### Greater Growth Potential

Skills can be taught and developed over time, but attitude is often more difficult to change. Individuals who have a growth mindset and eagerness to learn are already open to acquiring new skills and knowledge throughout their tenure. Even when people come on board with relevant and needed skills, they usually still need more training. It is far easier to build skills than to change attitude and mindset.

### The Bottom Line

When an organization selects a new team member, it is making an investment in them. By hiring for attitude, it benefits from their experience while helping them learn new skills and become increasingly more valuable to the team and organization. Of course, companies always want people to hit the ground running and make a difference as soon as possible. But in the big picture, it's far preferable to have someone who continues to improve than someone who arrives with a fixed set of skills and is unable or unwilling to grow. ■

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### Better Problem Solving

There are certainly skills and approaches that can help people solve problems. Yet when people have a solution-focused possibility-creating mindset, they are instantly better problem solvers. Organizations want team members who can come up with creative and innovative ways to overcome challenges and who anticipate other obstacles. When they hire for attitude, companies are more likely to find these valuable traits in their new team members.



# How to Prioritize Employee Mental Health

BY JUAN BETANCOURT

**T**HE WORKPLACE CAN BE A STRESSFUL ENVIRONMENT. IN ADDITION TO BEING UNDER CONSTANT PRESSURE TO PERFORM AT THEIR BEST AND MEET DEADLINES, EMPLOYEES ALSO HAVE TO DEAL WITH A NEAR-CONSTANT STATE OF UNCERTAINTY AND JOB INSECURITY (ESPECIALLY IN THE WAKE OF WIDESPREAD LAYOFFS IN EARLY 2023). TODAY'S WORKERS FEEL MORE ANXIOUS, DEPRESSED, AND BURNT OUT THAN EVER BEFORE.

Mental health problems can have a negative impact on employees' job performance, as well as their physical health. They can also lead to absenteeism and high turnover rates. Mental health problems are clearly a major issue in the workplace, but they are often

overlooked. In order to create a healthy and productive workplace, employers need to prioritize their employees' mental health.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Mental health issues in the workplace can be draining, both financially and emotionally. They can lead employees to become disengaged from their work and suffer from burnout, which can lead to decreased productivity, higher turnover, and increased medical costs—all of which have a negative impact on a company's bottom line.

To combat these issues, employers must prioritize employee well-being by implementing policies that protect and promote mental health. Such strategies can include holding regular team meetings to discuss employee mental health, offering mental health resources to employees, and providing mental health education to managers and employees. In addition, employers should strive to create an open and trust-filled environment that is a safe space for employees

to discuss their mental health with managers and colleagues. Managers should also aim to foster a work environment that promotes engagement and healthy work-life balance.

## HOW TO CREATE A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

Feeling happy and content at work is crucial to feeling happiness in life. (This is something people have long known, but the COVID-19 pandemic really drove this point home.) Here are seven things organizations can do right now to support the mental health of their employees.

**Survey employees about mental health in the workplace.** As the saying goes, "You don't know what you don't know." Many companies implement stress management programs (and that's a good start) but fail to reach out to employees to ask them about what stresses they are actually managing while at work. This information can reveal patterns that enable leaders to better gauge the energy and



dynamic of their teams and identify interventions that can have a collective positive impact.

**Help employees reduce (and not just manage) stress.** After evaluating the main stressors in the workplace, companies should consider implementing measures to reduce them, such as flexible hours or permanently hybrid or virtual work arrangements to help people juggle work and life. If resources are an issue, managers should do whatever they can to free some up (staff up, for example, or contract out, add budget, reprioritize, or put some projects on hold) because nothing is more important than the health and well-being of an organization's employees.

**Take care of employees by watching their hours.** Although burning the midnight oil seems noble and can get results in the short term, the long-term result is burnout. People need to rest, recharge, and connect with loved ones to stay mentally sound, so managers should make sure that long hours aren't a regular occurrence.

**Make time for fun and empower meaningful connection.** Whether it's playing a game or just connecting over chat, having fun with coworkers increases productivity and builds trust. It also relieves stress by forcing a cognitive shift in how stressors are viewed and creates positive emotional responses. Fostering more meaningful workplace connections at all scales (one on one, among teams, across departments or divisions, etc.) enables people to understand each other better and work together more effectively. To do this easily and quickly, some organizations are leveraging add-ons to the communication tools they're already using every day (e-mail, messaging apps, virtual meeting software, etc.) to surface actionable communication, collaboration, and inclusion tips, as well as key insights around influencing, motivating, and collaborating.

### Keep an eye out for depression.

Although "depression costs employers an estimated \$44 billion each year in lost productivity," few employers train their managers on how to recognize depression and how to intervene to help with employee care.<sup>1</sup> Considering that treating depression can save companies tremendous amounts of money annually, learning to take care of employees is well worth the effort.

**Provide support and employee care.** Organizations must provide adequate benefit coverage for mental health services (with multiple options, such as individual and couples counseling, as well as group therapy). They should offer an employee assistance program (EAP) that provides access to qualified mental health therapists and a variety of services to help employees manage their lives. A company that is unable to implement an EAP should at least compile a resource list of helpful and relevant software and services that its employees can use.

**Bring it all together.** Companies should create and share with employees written mental health philosophy and policy statements. Some organizations are taking this action to open up the conversation and give team members the support they deserve from their employers. Any communication policy around mental health should include the following major elements:

- **Acknowledgment.** This part lets everyone know that it's okay to disclose (or not disclose) a mental illness at work and to ask for help.
- **Offerings.** This clear and comprehensive explanation of benefits ensures that employees know what resources are available to them.
- **Accommodations.** This section details how employees can ask for reasonable accommodations for a mental health condition and explains that their information will be kept confidential.

## THE BENEFITS OF A MENTALLY HEALTHY WORKPLACE

The positive effects of a mentally healthy workplace go beyond the individual employee. By providing support and resources to maintain employees' mental health, businesses can create a more collaborative and stress-free work environment. This will boost morale, productivity, and creativity throughout the entire organization. Employers who prioritize employee mental health and well-being can also benefit from an enhanced reputation and better staff recruitment and retention rates.



Ultimately, good mental health is integral to business success. By creating a mentally healthy workplace, employers can ensure that their employees have the resources and support they need to reach their full potential. By recognizing the importance of mental health and well-being in the workplace, employers can create happier, more positive, and more productive environments for their employees. This will ultimately lead to increased productivity and a healthier bottom line. ■

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# HR's Role During an Economic Crisis

BY STRATEGIC HR



**I**n today's economic uncertainty—marked by high inflation, rising interest rates, record-low unemployment, and strong consumer spending—HR professionals are preparing to pivot to meet the needs of their organizations should the economy go into recession. They are no strangers to navigating and leading through turbulent times: throughout the pandemic, they led change from the front lines, creating a culture and space that supported a massive

transition to remote work and to greatly modified work environments. More than ever before, they found themselves helping organizations navigate difficult business decisions, solving problems creatively, and managing talent and culture, all while keeping a focus on minimizing costs and engaging staff during challenging times. With their skills and experience, HR professionals are well positioned to continue to help their organizations weather the current economic crisis.

## ASSESSING AND ADDRESSING TALENT NEEDS

It may be expected that HR's role during an economic crisis would center around talent. As companies make critical staffing decisions, the evaluation of talent and the use of that talent become paramount. With cost-saving conversations often focusing on how to make effective use of staff, HR leaders can address these priorities through performance evaluations, development tools, succession plans, and cross-training initiatives.

Unemployment remains at historic lows, and the Great Resignation may signal the beginning of a long-term shift in the labor market. For many businesses, growth has been slowed because of workforce shortages: "U.S. workforce participation rate has fallen to 62.3 percent, down from 67 percent in the late 1990s."<sup>1</sup> Now more than ever, HR professionals need to focus on strategies to help their organizations attract, retain, and develop high performers.

As organizations strive to meet their attraction and retention goals, they are also faced with the realities of current economic conditions. The soaring cost of living has placed pressure on employers to increase salaries as paychecks are stretched by the significant increase in the prices of household goods. HR's role is to help businesses remain competitive in the job market by developing total compensation programs designed to motivate and reward high performance.

In addition to ensuring that compensation and benefits are appropriate for market conditions, employers are challenged with meeting the needs and expectations of a multigenerational workforce. With job seekers across all generations pointing to work-life balance and the availability of growth opportunities as two of the main factors they consider when choosing to join a company, HR can champion programs that motivate employees of all ages by offering ample paid time off, flexibility, and professional development opportunities.

## RESKILLING FOR THE FUTURE

As technology rapidly advances, many businesses find their growth hindered by skills gaps within their workforces. During an economic slowdown, HR can shift the focus to the future and find ways to fill skill gaps by providing

training and development opportunities to current employees. This can be a win-win situation: not only does this arrangement help the business to better meet its needs, but it also provides growth opportunities for those employees who want them.

## MANAGING THE MOOD

During an economic crisis, HR should partner with the leadership team to encourage and embrace a culture open to flexibility, evolution, and grace toward others. Maintaining the team's psychological safety can be particularly challenging during economic downturns or layoffs. In those times, it's critical for HR to be transparent in its communications about what is happening in the organization, as well as acknowledge what is unknown. Employees who are left in the dark can become disengaged, putting the organization at risk of fostering a culture of quiet quitters.

## SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Economic challenges always take a toll on employees in one way or another. To ensure a thriving and productive environment, consideration must be given for their mental health and well-being. HR should promote the organization's employee assistance plans, take advantage of the copay waiver for many mental health plans, and communicate regularly to staff about community resources and financial offers from local banks.

HR's role has shifted and grown during this period of economic challenge, which has put pressure on HR professionals and business leaders to do more with less. Businesses across the board are all looking for creative ways to engage their workforces, reinforce productive and positive behavior, and retain staff—all while allaying employee concerns and fears. HR professionals can and should seize this unique opportunity to play a significant role in leading their organizations through this national crisis. By supporting their companies through appropriate economic-driven actions, they can promote their organizations' vision and goals, as well as their employees' health and well-being. ■

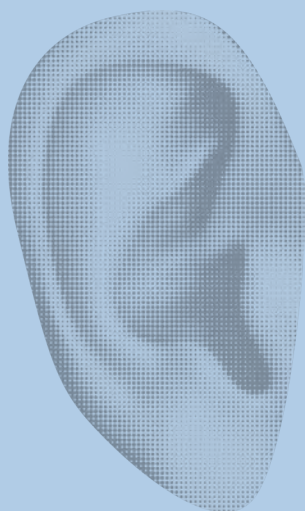
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# LISTENING AND LEADERSHIP

BY TERRI KLASS



One of the most important and underestimated skills needed for influential leadership is the ability to listen. In phone calls, face-to-face interactions, or virtual meetings, the emphasis is often on the speaker. But the listener, too, has a very important role to fill, especially if that listener is also a leader.

Everyone has had the experience of participating in a conversation that just didn't feel right. Often this happens when the other person isn't listening actively. As social beings, people can sense when someone isn't connecting to a conversation—a distancing or “out of touch” reaction that can lead others to feel frustration or anger. When “shallow” listening dominates over active listening, the negative repercussions can be both severe and widespread throughout the entire organization.

## People Feel Unheard

The goal of any communication is to share information. But when someone is multitasking and not listening completely, the person who is presenting that information to them walks away feeling unheard, which can lead to a breakdown of trust and a sense of feeling unvalued. Even when they disagree with someone, leaders still need to listen actively by giving others their full attention. Shutting down before or during what should be a two-sided conversation clearly sends an unwelcome message: “I don't care to hear you out.”

## Misunderstandings Occur

When leaders pretend to listen and aren't focused on what someone is saying, unnecessary mistakes and misunderstandings can result—an unfortunate and common situation in today's business environment. To ensure that accurate and comprehensive information is being shared, leaders should ask open-ended questions (in particular, the “who, what, when, where, how, and why” ones), be curious about what the speaker is offering, and clarify to make sure everyone is on the same page.



When “shallow” listening dominates over active listening, the negative repercussions can be both severe and widespread throughout the entire organization.

## Relationships Are Damaged

Leaders must build relationships based on trust and honesty. They can accomplish this only by listening—completely and sincerely—to the points that others make. Leaping to conclusions or trying to finish someone else's sentences tells them that they don't matter. Often, when someone is allowed to complete their message entirely, listeners realize that jumping in prematurely (and cutting off the speaker) would have led to wrong conclusions. When leaders remind themselves to stay quiet and be patient, they strengthen their relationships.

## Leader Effectiveness Is Compromised

If it becomes clear that a leader is only half listening to what others are saying, they will never be taken seriously in their role. The people they work with will not want to share their ideas, because they won't believe that their leader will listen to really understand. Under these circumstances, a leader can quickly fall out of the information-sharing loop and therefore lose their ability to have a positive impact on their team, department, and organization.

At best, “shallow” listening can undermine relationships. At worst, it can destroy them. In all cases, though, it will have a significant negative impact on someone's ability to be an effective leader. Anyone who wants to be a strong leader must cultivate their authentic listening skills and honor what others have to say. ■

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# The Rise of AI in the Workplace

BY JAMES MOUL

The rollout of AI innovations seems to be picking up more steam each day: just as we learn about “the latest thing,” something new arrives hot on its heels. Less than a year ago, DALL-E exploded onto the scene, heralding the arrival of generative AI. Not long afterward, as people were just beginning to wrap their minds around how DALL-E’s capabilities could revolutionize the creation of images, ChatGPT showed up and challenged our understanding about text meaning and generation.

In both cases, there are raging debates about whether these tools will ultimately be net positives or net negatives. On the one hand, they can do what they do very quickly. On the other hand, they have opened a Pandora’s box of questions about creativity, copyright law, authorship, ethics, artistic license, and myriad other issues. AI holds a lot of promise in terms of making our lives easier. But until we have enough time, knowledge, and experience to adequately assess the applications—and implications—of AI, it’s unlikely that there will be a universal rush to embrace it fully (and without reserve) in all its forms.

That said, we are already seeing some useful applications for AI in the business world. Some of them have been around for a while, operating in the background. For example, applicant tracking system (ATS) software has been in widespread use for many years, especially in larger companies. One function of an ATS is to use certain defined criteria—such as keywords, skills, or credentials, for example—to sort through job applications quickly. This is not without controversy, though; many critics point out that although an ATS may improve the efficiency of some hiring processes, it also frequently removes from consideration many people who don’t possess certain characteristics yet would actually be great employees, thus reducing workforce diversity.

Productivity trackers, such as software that logs keyboard strokes and mouse movements, have also been around for a while. Supposedly, these AI applications can reveal when employees are “really” working. But they’ve been less successful at increasing efficiency than they have been at increasing employee unhappiness. No one likes being micromanaged and mistrusted in

this way, and workers have figured out lots of ways to circumvent those applications (or, if they are able to leave, aren’t sticking around for long in the positions that use them). This is a clear case in which an AI implementation isn’t necessarily benefiting organizations.

If we proceed thoughtfully, carefully weigh pros and cons, and measure risks, the business world is likely to find many interesting uses for AI. For example, it might be able to help streamline and automate even more elements of the recruitment process. In addition to its current task of reviewing applications, it might be pressed into service reviewing the applicants themselves—say, by analyzing their body language during interviews or by creating psychological profiles of candidates. (Without careful implementation, though, such uses could run the risk of repeating some of the same problems associated with AI-driven application screening.) Generative AI, such as ChatGPT, can also be a useful management tool by functioning as a sort of automated executive assistant to help managers with appointment scheduling, budgeting, project management, trip planning, and other tasks.

If you’re thinking about putting in a rush order for every AI tool you can get your hands on, though, slow your roll! Leaders who rush to adopt AI applications risk damaging the relationships they have with their employees. If employees feel that AI is being brought into the workplace in order to undermine them (or eventually take over their jobs completely!), they will lose trust in their organizations and managers. Then engagement will nosedive, followed by drops in productivity and retention.

It’s important to remember that even if AI applications can improve some aspects of work, people should remain at the center of the workplace: AI’s main function is to serve humans. If you keep that as your North Star as you wade into the realm of new and improved AI tools, you’ll have more success in implementing AI that benefits—rather than harms—your organization. ■

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Often, a little “something extra” is all it takes to transform a dish from “ordinary” to “transcendent.” Balancing salty, sour, and sweet, quick pickles are welcome additions to salads, sandwiches, tacos, grain bowls, and pretty much any savory dish you can imagine! (Omelets? Sure, why not!) In just a few minutes—and with minimal cleanup afterward—you can put together a flavor punch that will elevate even the simplest dishes.

**YIELD:** 2 Cups (4 servings)

**TIME:** 5 min.

## WHAT YOU’LL NEED:

- ▶ 2 TB rice wine vinegar
- ▶ 2 TB white sugar
- ▶ ¼ tsp salt
- ▶ ½ c grated carrots
- ▶ ½ c grated radishes
- ▶ ½ c finely chopped cucumbers
- ▶ ½ c finely chopped scallions

## DIRECTIONS:

- ▶ Combine the vinegar, sugar, and salt in a large bowl.
- ▶ Add the vegetables.
- ▶ Stir thoroughly to distribute the dressing.

## NOTES:

If you’re preparing other dishes for the same meal, get the pickles going first, so their flavors have time to meld. (But it is also perfectly acceptable to eat the pickles right after you make them!)

Feel free to experiment with other veggies (tiny cauliflower florets, thinly sliced red onion, and shredded cabbage all work great). Just try to keep the dressing-to-veggie ratio about the same.



## Nutrition Facts

Amount per Serving

**Calories:** 39 cal

**Fat:** 0 g

**Dietary fiber:** 0.5 g

**Sugars:** 18 g

**Protein:** .3 g



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