

# THE RESOURCE

# HR INSIGHTS

VOL. XIII, ISSUE I

magazine

*from the eyes of industry leaders*

## Overcoming HR Hurdles to Create a Great Company Culture



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# HR INSIGHTS

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# HR's Role in M&A

BY STRATEGIC HR

**M**ergers and acquisitions (M&A) are complicated processes that affect every facet of an organization—and especially its people. Because employees are the key to ensuring any company's success, it is critical to develop a thoughtful and strategic human resources-focused approach to M&A. When M&A efforts fail, it's frequently because "in the run-up to the deal, companies nearly always ignore the issues around their people, namely, culture and leadership."<sup>1</sup> Through early and ongoing inclusion in the M&A evaluation, planning, and integration phases, human resources can play an important role in strategic planning, change management, effective internal communication, and cultivating and transitioning culture.

## The Five M&A Phases

Most mergers and acquisitions have five phases. To increase the success of these projects, HR professionals can and should play an active role in each phase.

### PHASE 1: EVALUATION

In the first phase of an M&A process, the interested parties begin discussing the possible merger or acquisition. Discretion is paramount: because of the sensitive nature of M&As and the data that will be shared, all parties should sign nondisclosure agreements to ensure that no information is leaked prematurely.

These preliminary talks are often highly secretive because they don't always succeed (and the involved parties don't want to raise any unnecessary or false alarms). Although the required level of confidentiality varies by project, its importance is heightened if either party is publicly traded. HR involvement at a high level is critical during this early stage and should address topics such as the number of employees and managers, locations, and whether a union will be involved.

### PHASE 2: THIRD-PARTY ENGAGEMENT

Third parties (usually lawyers, accountants, investment bankers, financial planners, business coaches, or M&A advisors) help both the buyer and seller navigate the M&A process. At this phase they help develop the structure and content of the legal agreement.

Whether a merger or acquisition concludes quickly or takes months to complete, it's never too early for HR to start looking into what management changes need to take place when the deal closes, potential cultural problems, redundancy issues, and what key



employees need to be retained. Working through these issues early in the M&A process will improve the overall outcome.

### PHASE 3: PREPARATION AND DUE DILIGENCE

In order to begin its analysis, HR must gather as much information as possible from the seller during this phase. Usually provided in a secure data room, this information may take the form of general terms (without any names) and should give a good idea of what the HR side of the organization looks like. Such information could include details about leadership compensation, organization charts, NDAs, employment agreements, payroll records, currently offered benefits and 401(k) retirement packages (with information about ERISA compliance, plan carriers, plan costs, and data from the preceding two years), pending legal issues, and financial documentation.

At this point, the parties will sign a letter of intent signaling that they are all in agreement about the business framework for the merger or acquisition. Now the due diligence begins: HR and finance carefully review all documents to ensure that there are no unexpected surprises that could derail the deal.

### PHASE 4: THE AGREEMENT

The main focus of this phase is negotiating the fine details and the price (a process that often takes longer than many people expect). When parties reach an agreement on the price, legal documents are drawn up, and certain filings must be completed with the secretary of state, tax offices, workers' compensation

organizations, and other government bodies that must be notified of the event. At this point, the information will soon be public, and the organization should have a communication plan ready. Once everything is signed, the integration of the two entities begins, and management and HR must now bring the two workforces together.

### PHASE 5: INTEGRATION

HR is now tasked with ensuring the new company's full integration by working in areas such as developing a communication strategy, combining the organizations and cultures, determining redundancies, and ensuring the retention of staff. The "people" part of the acquisition is extremely critical at this point. HR must find ways to retain key employees and keep them engaged.

## How HR Can Ensure Successful Integration

To weave together a new organization, HR will need to keep an eye on many different threads—in particular, culture. Cultural compatibility issues often arise when bringing together multiple organizations in the M&A process. Regardless of the perceived similarity between those organizations, the M&A integration always has a degree of misalignment, and HR professionals should be prepared to address this challenge early on. HR should also focus on several other key areas.

## Identifying and retaining key employees

Retention of top employees is critical to the success of a merger or acquisition. To retain key talent that will help make the new organization successful, HR and management should communicate their intentions to the “star performers” as early in the process as is legally possible. (This may involve requesting access to conduct confidential interviews with those employees in advance of the actual closing date.) HR should advise management not to under commit to those top employees, because doing so could push them to consider other employment options. Star performers know who they are and understand their personal and professional marketability.

## Combining policies and procedures

HR should look at the policies of all involved organizations and consider how to handle the differences. The new organization may choose to retain only the buyer’s policies or only the seller’s policies—or combine the best pieces from both companies. HR should also determine how to handle any changes that would cause employees to have less than what they currently have (for example, reductions in PTO or loss of company-provided cell phones). In the end, the new organization may decide to grandfather those items or provide compensation for them.

## Conducting talent assessments

HR should identify and manage redundancies and reductions. To determine who will be retained and who will be let go, HR must be prepared to allocate a significant amount of time to assessing employee knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). First, HR should go through the organizational chart and identify key people (not just among management and salaried employees but among hourly staff as well). For each key employee, HR should gather the following information:

- A short summary of their main responsibilities.
- Data on their years of service, specific experience, and retention risk estimate.
- Assessment of the criticality of the role or employee for the continuation of business and operations.
- Details of any specific agreements with the employee (e.g., education, training, bonus, perks).
- Their development ambition and potential as a succession candidate or in other roles within the company.

With this information on hand, HR can determine where reductions might be needed. Reduction strategies may include

terminations, early retirements, and a longer-term plan to simply not fill certain positions as they are vacated. HR should tread carefully and strategically here: how these talent management decisions are made is as important as the actual decisions themselves, because it communicates a great deal about the new organization’s values.

## Combining compensation and benefits

Depending on the circumstances of the deal—and the compensation policies of the combining companies—HR will likely be called on to splice disparate payment plans into a compensation program that fits the new organization. Because all employees (new and old) will be concerned about what is happening with their pay, HR should put their minds at ease by providing full and early disclosure about the changes being considered. At the same time, members of the senior management team will be anxious to see what types of special arrangements (e.g., stock options, special retirement provisions, severance agreements) will be offered to them, given the high-profile nature of the new positions.

In addition to developing compensation programs, HR will likely be required to assess and make recommendations about employee benefits. Similar to figuring out policies and procedures for the new organization, HR can choose to retain only the buyer’s benefits or only the seller’s benefits—or combine aspects of both companies’ benefits. (Again, HR should also decide if employees should be grandfathered in or compensated for any options that change.) As with compensation, employees are sure to be concerned about possible changes to their employee benefits coverage and will want to be informed about “the new package” as soon as that information is available.

## Implementing a Well-Developed Communication Strategy

Good communication is critical throughout the M&A process. It is important for leaders to control the message, its delivery, and its timing—especially when it comes to who gets the information first (e.g., employees, clients, media, investors). When preparing a communication strategy for employees, HR and company leaders should use concise, people-related messaging that covers the following elements:

- The shared vision for the new company.
- The nature and progress of the integration and the anticipated benefits.
- The anticipated outcomes and rough timelines for future decisions.

- Compensation and benefits.
- Key policies, rules, and guidelines to govern employee behavior and related workplace expectations (e.g., attendance, time off, harassment, drug testing, privacy).

HR will have the most success by following these best practices:

- Establish multiple routes of communication (e.g., one-on-one meetings, group sessions, newsletters, intranet updates).
- Focus on the themes of change and progress by highlighting projects that are going well and action items that are being delivered on time.
- Repeat the common themes of the M&A to increase employee understanding of the rationale behind the transaction.
- Provide opportunities for employee involvement and feedback.
- Ensure that employees understand that problems will arise and that the leadership commits to identifying and addressing those problems as early as possible.

Communicating clear, consistent, and up-to-date information not only gives employees from all involved organizations a sense of control by keeping them informed, but also increases employees’ coping abilities and minimizes the integration’s impact on performance.

## The Importance of Transparency and Compassion

Because the success of an integration hinges on how the restructuring is implemented, the acquiring company’s top priorities should be transparency and straightforwardness about what is happening and what is planned. The one thing employees of newly acquired companies appreciate most is the truth, even when it takes the form of “we don’t know” or “we have not yet decided”—or even when it’s bad. Being honest also includes sharing information about when and by what process a decision is expected to be reached.

Once decisions are made about functions and people, HR and company leaders must treat those employees who will be negatively affected by the transaction with dignity, respect, and support. Not only is this approach the humane thing to do, but it also is a powerful way to show those who remain what kind of company they are now working for and can help them to begin to develop positive feelings toward the new organization. ■

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# BEST PRACTICES FOR ONBOARDING REMOTE EMPLOYEES

BY MICHELLE ERCANBRACK

**E**ffective onboarding has a well-established track record of increasing retention, performance, and job satisfaction for onsite employees. But can it offer the same results with remote employees? With more and more Americans able to work remotely at least once a week, now is the perfect time for organizations to optimize their remote onboarding processes.

## Reduce the Distance and Get Connected

Remote work benefits both employees and their employers but can also bring its own challenges—in particular, a feeling of disconnection between employees and their colleagues or managers. Because this breakdown in communication can have a detrimental effect on productivity, engagement, and morale, companies need to give remote employees plenty of support during the onboarding process to help them create strong connections within the business.

» **Provide introductions.** Making lasting connections is vital for developing a sense of community in any business. Whether remote employees' onboarding includes some in-office training or is entirely virtual, a warm welcome must be a fundamental part of the process. Possibilities include a simple "get to know you" e-mail with a short biography and fun facts about the new employee or a team lunch (held in person or over video call). The more direct interactions and "face time" new employees can

get with their teams and managers, the better.

### » **Include some in-person training.**

Even when onboarding takes place remotely, companies can still invite new remote employees into the office for some in-person training. (And if remote employees are scheduled for some in-office time on a regular basis throughout the year, even better!) Getting all employees together in person periodically can strengthen team building.

### » **Use tools for digital connection.**

Collaboration applications such as Slack, Teams, Discord, and Hangouts are great for speedy communication and building important relationships among team members. Having a platform where employees can share vacation snaps, videos of their kids' first steps, or social invitations is just as important as having project management tools.

## Start Things off Right With the Perfect Welcome E-mail

Communication is key to successful remote onboarding. A team-wide welcome e-mail should be on the onboarding checklist for any employee and can be especially helpful when onboarding remote employees, who face more challenges in connecting with their new teams. Here's one template to use for a welcome e-mail:

*We are excited to welcome [employee's name] to our team! [Employee's name] will be starting on [starting date] as a [employee's job title].*

*[Employee's name] brings a lot to our team. [Describe their experience and qualifications]. They love to [add information about their hobbies and interests].*

*We are lucky to have them and are looking forward to working with them! Be sure to introduce yourself!*

Not only does a welcome e-mail make new employees feel like valued members of the company, it also helps their colleagues get to know them a little better—which in turn builds connection.

## Experiment With Remote Onboarding Activities

Being the new kid on the block can be tough under any circumstances—and it's even tougher when that new kid is also working remotely. Remote onboarding activities can keep remote employees engaged and help teams feel more connected. In addition to scheduling calls just to chat about life or listening to shared playlists, teams can use other games and icebreaker activities to build connections during remote employee onboarding:

» **The Acronym Game.** In this creative word game (which can be played in person or via any online communication channel), one person throws out a string of random letters, and the rest of the team gets one minute to craft them into an acronym (and its meaning). (For example, "BDEG" could be shaped into "GDEB," with the meaning "good dogs eat burgers.") Before long, the team will come up with some great inside jokes that bring everyone together.

- » **Desert Island.** Team members get to know each other better when they each name the three things they'd want to have while stranded on a desert island.
- » **Rose, Bud, Thorn.** Each team member shares a "rose" (a positive moment), a "bud" (something they're looking forward to), and a "thorn" (something they could have done without) for that week.
- » **Camera Roll.** Each team member shares a photo (from their phone's camera app) that illustrates a random topic (such as pets, vacations, families, workspaces, or hobbies).

### Get Organized to Save Time

Bringing new hires into the office for their inductions and training can make remote onboarding feel less impersonal. At the same time, though, there's a very limited amount of time in which to get everything done during these in-office meetings. As soon as those employees become fully remote, it can be more difficult for them to gain access to certain files, sign documents, complete their training, and get timely answers to their questions. To maximize the impact and efficiency of in-office onboarding time, companies should do advance planning:

- » **Start onboarding remote employees before day one.** Many of the tedious and time-consuming onboarding processes can be carried out before a new hire even steps foot in the office. Electronic signatures make it easy to get paperwork completely remotely and enable HR to keep everything organized digitally. HR can also send out benefit enrollment information and the company handbook in advance via e-mail.
- » **Define each step of the onboarding process.** Is the finance department aware of what needs to be done before a new employee's first day? Does the IT department know what to expect? Creating a detailed checklist for onboarding makes it easier to define what's needed, assign the relevant tasks to the right people, and track what's been completed.
- » **Use employee onboarding software.** Onboarding software can make everyone's lives much easier by collecting information from new hires, providing them with all the employment information they need, and keeping everything in one centralized location. Such software is especially helpful when new hires can't attend in-person inductions or enrollment activities.

### Establish Regular Feedback Loops

Employee feedback can sometimes slip through the cracks if a team member is working remotely, leaving those employees feeling frustrated and as though their progress is stunted. As part of the process for onboarding new employees remotely, organizations should be sure to communicate clearly about expectations and provide opportunities for feedback throughout an employee's career there.

- » **Set clear expectations.** Remote employees often face greater scrutiny than onsite employees, which can lead to more misunderstandings. By setting clear expectations during onboarding about working hours, deadlines, and communication, leaders can foster a sense of shared understanding within their teams.
- » **Encourage regular check-ins after onboarding.** To help remote employees better understand what's expected of them, address concerns, and build relationships, managers should meet one on one with them regularly.
- » **Help employees set goals.** Just because they're not in the office every day doesn't mean remote employees don't want to progress like everyone else. Companies need to find ways (such as adopting performance management tools, for example) to help those employees work alongside their managers and colleagues to set and accomplish goals.

Onboarding remote employees presents some challenges but can be accomplished both effectively and efficiently. With the right planning, the right software, and the right attitude, organizations can save time and help their new employees make lasting connections. ■

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# What Motivates Generation Z in the Workplace?

BY CAROL R. BALLOU



**N**ow entering the job market in increasing numbers, Generation Z is on track to make up a whopping 30 percent of the workforce by 2030<sup>1</sup>. With those figures in mind, employers that want to attract this cohort need to figure out how to offer the incentives that will appeal to those employees and improve their engagement.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Although Generation Z wants to make a difference in the workplace, its members strive to follow their passions outside work as well. To deliver this valued work-life balance, organizations must offer adequate paid time off and make it easy for employees to use that time. (And managers should lead by example by taking time off themselves.) Companies can support Generation Z's desire to feel valued as people and foster an employee-centric culture by encouraging employees to take time off to reduce burnout, providing self-service tools that allow shift swapping when needed, and giving employees access to their schedules as far in advance as possible.

## TECHNOLOGY

The members of Generation Z are true digital natives who don't know life without a cell phone or high-speed internet. They're accustomed to using technology to receive information quickly and easily and therefore expect immediate answers to their queries. They also expect technology to play a significant role in their everyday lives, both inside and outside the workplace. To maximize engagement with this generation, employers must provide them with modern technological tools.

## FEEDBACK AND RECOGNITION

In Generation Z, organizations are finding highly skilled individuals who want a sense of purpose as well as recognition and continual feedback from their managers. In fact, 21 percent of this generation wants daily feedback from their supervisors, and 24 percent wants to hear from them at least weekly.<sup>2</sup> Implementing technologies that automate feedback provides an opportunity to provide this feedback with ease.

Because they also value recognition from their peers, organizations can implement peer-to-peer or team-member programs geared toward building connections and trust among employees. Such initiatives empower Generation Z workers to drive positive change in their performance (which in turn benefits the organization). Creating space for employees to contribute their input also helps them to feel valued and appreciated.

## CAREER GROWTH

Generation Z wants clear career pathways and opportunities for growth. Performance reviews are especially critical for this generation, which thrives on receiving feedback. Because many of its members are joining the workforce directly from an environment in which they received feedback constantly—school—they can find it discouraging to transition from an educational setting to a workplace in which opportunities to make measured improvements can be infrequent. Keeping the lines of communication open between managers and employees can help with this adjustment. Providing mobile communication tools to the workforce is also vital for helping these employees stay connected with their managers, with their teams, and with the rest of the organization.



## VISIBILITY AND INSIGHT

Employees of all ages want to know how the work they do makes an impact, but this holds especially true for younger generations. They want to see the results of their work via performance indicators. Visibility into real-time data not only provides those insights but can also help with the performance management of employees, as well as talent management and retention.

## FUELING THE FUTURE

Thanks to their comfort level with technology, emphasis on work-life balance, and focus on personal and social values, the members of Generation Z will have a significant impact on the future of work and play a large role in the transformation of the workplace. To remain competitive in the future economy, organizations must understand and respond to the unique perspectives and needs of this new generation. ■

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# Overcoming HR Hurdles to Create a Great Company Culture

BY CLAIRE HASTWELL

Creating a positive company culture can seem a daunting task, especially when lack of buy-in, budget constraints, and competing priorities hinder the process. But when employees trust the people they work for, take pride in their work, and have great relationships with their colleagues, company culture can be a catalyst for improving employee retention and fueling innovative thinking. By addressing five pervasive HR challenges, an organization can cultivate a company culture that provides a solid foundation for a thriving workplace environment:

**Obstacle: "I don't have time."**

Building trust does take time, but that effort yields great results for both employees and management. Investing in people pays off in productivity and loyalty, because high-trust cultures have significantly reduced turnover compared to their competitors and also see accelerated rates of innovation. In short, companies that invest in their workers deliver stronger financial results over the long term.

**Solution: Reward employee behavior with praise, bonuses, and other forms of appreciation.**

Small shifts in employees' behavior can drive powerful changes in company culture. Saying "thank you" takes only a few seconds but has a long-lasting positive impact. For example, companies can thank employees for their good work and positivity by enacting programs that share positive feedback with team members (such as the "Heard at Hilton" social media campaign, in which inspiring messages from guests are shared with Hilton

employees). Programs that encourage team members to recognize their peers (and notify people's managers each time a team member receives such recognition), too, can provide positive reinforcement. Managers can also meet their employees in a more informal setting (such as a weekly lunch with the team or with individual employees), which helps everyone get to know each other and gives leaders a space to voice appreciation of their teams.

**Obstacle: "My operating environment is too different."**

Many issues are not as unique to an industry as one might think. One thing that all businesses and industries have in common is people—and ensuring that employees feel a sense of meaning, belonging, and value lies at the heart of creating a positive company culture. Meaningful work will drive employee retention across all industries and generations.

**Solution: Keep an open mind to new ideas and solutions.**

Instead of defaulting to "that would never work here," leaders should observe what other companies are doing to cultivate a thriving company culture. Remote work environments (with hybrid working, flex hours, and globally integrated teams) can present challenges to employee bonding and engagement. But some of those challenges can be mitigated through virtual meetings that bring team members together to socialize with each other (as in Nvidia's Friendship Fridays program). Sometimes companies strengthen their culture by pausing work on everyday tasks and setting aside time to innovate (as with Rocket Companies' quarterly Hack Week, a



time when teams meet to explore new ideas and create prototypes). To solve unique industry challenges and foster a culture in which employees feel valued and heard, organizations should be sure to solicit ideas from every level of the workforce.

**Obstacle: "It's not the right time."**

Mergers, layoffs, and global events can create uncertainty in the workplace, but they can also be opportunities for positive change. When leaders foster trusting relationships, employees are better able to embrace and adapt to change. A period of disruption is not only the perfect time to reinforce company culture—it's also the right time to listen to employees, address their fears, and outline next steps.

**Solution: Communicate with and check in on employees.**

Caring people leaders understand the importance of surveying employees during times of crisis or change. By listening to their employees, businesses can shed light on hidden concerns, decode resistance to change, inform



strategic decisions, and build trust. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, DHL actively sought feedback from its employees, who in turn praised the company's persistent efforts to foster a responsive and supportive work environment, even in the midst of a global crisis.

**Obstacle:** "My employees aren't on board."

When teams are disengaged, the best path forward is for leaders to reexamine their approach and look for creative ways to rebuild trust. Companies that respond to employee feedback and take at least one action on the most important issue that employees have identified are more successful in building a sense of trust among employees and reassuring them that they will continue to be heard.



**Solution:** Listen to employees and help them see the value of creating a great workplace.

Employees never get tired of feeling heard and understood. The best workplaces share similar practices in implementing employee listening strategies:

- Leverage employee resource groups and committees
- Ensure authentic follow-up on employee feedback
- Create engagement through multiple channels
- Send periodic employee engagement surveys

For example, after asking more than 150 employees across its hospitals and physician clinics, "What gets in your way of creating a phenomenal experience?" Texas Health Resources prioritized 42 employee-identified pain points to work on over the next three years to improve its care team experience.

**Obstacle:** "My boss isn't interested."

Unfortunately, many leaders don't understand the value of creating a thriving company culture—and those who do don't necessarily see it as critical to running the business (even though companies with strong cultures consistently outperform the market). If top management can't be swayed to prioritize culture, department managers can always start by making improvements to their own teams.

**Solution:** Focus on what can be changed—not on what can't.

Every organization contains departments, divisions, and locations where employees enjoy a great workplace experience. Managers can start cultivating such pockets of greatness within their own companies by adopting these practices:

- Create a strong sense of identity in the department.
- Adopt a healthy mindset that treats cognitive obstacles as issues to be overcome.
- Use whatever power and position are available to build a supportive environment.
- Lead by example and use influence to inspire employees.

By focusing on those things that they can change, managers can (in time) increase their own sphere of influence and open closed doors.

Managing people can bring many challenges. But by actively working to cultivate a positive company culture, organizational leaders can mitigate many of those challenges. When employees feel valued and trusted, their increased engagement and stronger relationships with each other can build a powerful, successful workforce.

To download Great Place To Work's white paper on overcoming HR challenges, visit [greatplacetowork.com/overcome-hr-challenges](https://greatplacetowork.com/overcome-hr-challenges). ■

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# Use Texting to Improve Hiring

BY RACHEL FINDLAY

Effective hiring software is the backbone of any organization: without it, companies wouldn't be able to hire the talent they need to build a winning workforce. But even with great hiring software in place, it can be challenging to keep candidates engaged at each stage of their journey. Although recruiters do have some tools to make the early stages of the hiring process simple, efficient, and comfortable for candidates to help move them to hire, they could benefit from more strategies to streamline communication, improve the candidate experience, and hire better quality talent fast. A text recruiting platform is one such tool.

## How does texting work alongside existing hiring software?

Text engagement allows recruiters to send and manage one-to-one and one-to-many text campaigns in a single central platform. SMS integrates into a company's existing hiring software, workflows, ATS, CRM, and HR applications to provide a seamless user experience. (And these methods aren't limited to SMS: recruiters can also deliver cam-

paigns through Facebook Messenger to meet candidates where they are without using multiple tools.) Responses are automatically associated with the candidate's profile in the organization's ATS, so recruiters can respond from the central platform even when sending the campaign through multiple channels.

Text recruiting platforms integrate with most HR systems to avoid disruption to the company's existing practices and to ensure that employee data and communications are easily accessed and tracked in one platform. Seamless integrations make it easy to build a candidate pipeline with the flexibility to communicate throughout the talent life cycle.

## Give candidates the control

Long waiting times and poor communication are just a few of the factors that can make candidates feel alienated from the recruitment process, become disinterested in an organization, and (in some cases) even decide to move on to a vacancy with one of its competitors. Text recruiting allows recruiters to connect with talent anytime,





anywhere, and on the platform of their choice. Giving the control back to the candidate improves their initial experience with their employer brand and makes the talent journey a supportive experience. When candidates feel that they are respected from the get-go, they are much more likely to accept a job offer—and to stick around with

the company for the long run. Texting also allows for personalization, which is important when trying to connect with candidates who want a transparent view of a company's culture and its hiring process as a whole. Companies that use text messaging can come across as more approachable and communicative, thus leaving potential new employees with positive impressions.

## Take some of the burden off the hiring team

The job market has changed dramatically in recent years, and talent acquisition teams are feeling the pressure as leaders ask them to do more with smaller budgets and leaner teams. But how can organizations cut costs without damaging the quality of applications? One solution is to increase the impact of hiring software—and thereby decrease the amount of time recruiters have to spend on manual administrative tasks. Automating repetitive tasks allows recruiters to focus on high-level, strategic activities and creates greater value to the wider team and business. Text recruiting can save talent acquisition teams hours of their day. Text-based engagement decreases the time it takes to schedule interviews, for example. Automated workflows enable candidates to use texting to self-schedule (or reschedule) interviews, and automated text reminders help keep candidates engaged throughout the hiring journey.

## Make it easy to apply for jobs

The modes of business communication continue to evolve, and in recent years, e-mail has ceded ground to texting as the preferred platform for many. Responding to a text message is easier and quicker than crafting an e-mail to a recruiter (or carving out time to speak over the phone), especially when top talent is likely already employed. Less formal communication channels are a low-pressure environment in which recruiters can keep in touch with candidates during the early stages of their search and help them juggle the pressures of everyday life alongside the job hunt. Additionally, text-to-apply



campaigns can help remove barriers to apply for under-represented candidates, helping organizations expand their talent pools and become more inclusive employers.

## Speed up hiring processes

The new U.S. college graduates currently entering the job market “expect the entire process, from application to job offer, to take three weeks—about half the actual time (six weeks).”<sup>1</sup> Companies that want to engage talent must treat fast hiring processes not as a luxury but as a necessity. Text engagement speeds up hiring by connecting with candidates via their preferred channels. Recruiters who need quick answers from candidates in order to move them through the hiring process can more confidently rely on text messaging to get the job done.

## Achieve long-term success

Using texting to engage with candidates brings so many benefits to both parties that it's clearly a no-brainer. A text recruiting platform allows organizations to set up automated workflows, manage text-to-apply campaigns, and more easily connect with candidates. Text recruiting is the perfect complement to hiring software, and integrating the two into one central, modernized platform can enable organizations to have great success in attracting—and hiring—top talent. ■

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1. iCIMS Insights. 2023. “iCIMS Class of 2023 Report.” iCIMS website, [www.icims.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ClassOfReport\\_2023.pdf](http://www.icims.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/ClassOfReport_2023.pdf).

# *The Value of Playfulness in the Workplace*

BY TERRI KLASS





**A**s people move into adolescence and adulthood, they tend to lose touch with the playfulness that usually dominated their childhoods. In those early years, it was easy for them to just play. They joined in games with other children without worrying about being the “best” player (or even understanding all of the rules) and immersed themselves deeply in a world of imagination.

What might today’s workplaces look like if they included an element of that playfulness? How might teams interact differently? What might change in how leaders see themselves?

### **Play unleashes imaginations**

Childhood play encourages people to see things through a different lens. A child can be a pirate queen, a purple jaguar, or whatever else they can envision. Similarly, leaders can also imagine new roles and explore new possibilities.

### **Play offers a time out**

Play provides an opportunity to step back from everyday routines. Taking a pause from the usual hectic schedules and grind enables leaders to “just be,” so they can relax enough to see things that were not available to them before and so they can center themselves and breathe new life into their bodies.

### **Play lies at the heart of innovation**

Creative play such as building sand castles and Lego structures empowers children to innovate without rules or borders. When leaders play, they

throw away their self-limiting beliefs about “the tried and true” way of doing things. As a result, they free themselves to innovate.

### **Play connects mind and body**

People’s bodies give them great information about how they are feeling and what they need to do. Leading with an element of playfulness makes it possible for leaders to use their bodies as resources to help them make decisions. For example, asking themselves questions such as “What is my body telling me about my job situation?” or “What steps do I need to mindfully take when I am feeling this stress or anger?” during play can help leaders connect their minds and bodies better.

### **Play connects people**

When leaders cultivate a culture of playfulness, they foster an environment of interconnection. In both in-person and remote settings, adding humor and lightness to any situation can make a crazy project even crazier and help everyone laugh about all the things that are going wrong.

Playfulness can open up all sorts of possibilities. Play enables people to bring out their best selves and figure out what’s important to them (and how to achieve it). Leaders who introduce an element of playfulness to the workplace might actually find that it’s their greatest superpower. ■

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# HOW GENERATIVE AI CAN SUPPORT HR AND RECRUITMENT

BY JESSICA MILLER-MERRELL

**S**tories about new AI technology have dominated the headlines for years. Recently, many of them have focused on generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Microsoft's Bing Chat, and Google's Bard. There are some problematic areas in AI (though the "robots will take our jobs" claims have yet to be proven a cause for alarm), but AI holds a lot of promise as a tool to help people be more productive and to automate tasks that take up a lot of time for HR and recruitment staffers.

Generative AI is increasingly being used in HR and recruitment by various organizations and HR technology companies. One recent survey of 1,000 business leaders, for example, found that nearly half of their companies were already using ChatGPT and nearly all that hadn't yet adopted it were planning to do so within the next half year.<sup>1</sup> In general, its main uses were in "writing code" (66 percent), "copywriting/content creation" (58 percent), and "customer support" (57 percent). GenAI is already making inroads into recruitment, too, where those same organizations used it primarily for "writing job descriptions" (77 percent), "draft[ing] interview questions" (66 percent), and "respond[ing] to applicants" (65 percent).

In human resources and recruitment, these smart tools can automate repetitive tasks, thus enabling HR professionals to focus more on strategic work. As of April 2022, nearly one in four organizations reported using automation or AI to support HR-related activities, including recruitment and hiring.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of AI is likely to continue trending upward, with HR leaders worrying that not implementing AI solutions will put them at a disadvantage vis-à-vis their competitors.

## IMPROVING EFFICIENCY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Generative AI can boost the efficiency of many HR processes. For example, it can help recruiters create job descriptions or advertisements based on specific input parameters (such as required skills and job responsibilities). In these processes, it can mitigate industry-specific jargon and other factors that might limit inclusivity, and therefore increase the posting's accessibility and appeal to a more diverse applicant pool. In addition to content creation, these large language models can also help recruiters sift through vast amounts of applicant data quickly. By identifying patterns in applications that correlate with successful hires from past experiences, they can make it even easier to create candidate short lists.

Beyond recruitment processes, generative AI has the potential to benefit all aspects of human resources management. For instance, it can create personalized training materials or assist in answering employees' questions about company policies. It can also assist with tasks such as generating messages to



remind staff about upcoming events and use collected data to compile comprehensive reports on employee performance.

It's clear that this technology has plenty to offer when used responsibly. All of these improvements not only save time but also facilitate better decision-making capabilities within organizations, ultimately resulting in enhanced productivity across the board.

## GENAI APPLICATIONS IN HR

GenAI can help organizations streamline HR processes, improve candidate experiences, and make more data-driven decisions in talent management. Many companies are already exploring GenAI-powered solutions in these areas, and the uses of GenAI in HR and recruitment will continue to evolve as technology advances.

- **Resume screening and matching.** GenAI can assist in parsing and analyzing resumes, extracting relevant information, and matching candidates to job openings based on skills, qualifications, and experience. (Impress)
- **Chatbots for candidate engagement.** GenAI-powered chatbots can automate candidate engagement, answer common questions, schedule interviews, and provide a more interactive application experience. (Paradox, MeBeBot, XOR)
- **Job description generation.** To help organizations attract diverse candidate pools, GenAI can create job descriptions that are inclusive, free from bias, and optimized for search engines. (Textio)
- **Interview and assessment automation.** GenAI can help create customized interview questions and assessments based on job requirements. It can also analyze candidate responses to assess that person's suitability for the role. (Vervoe)
- **Employee feedback and surveys.** GenAI-driven natural language processing (NLP) can analyze employee feedback and survey responses to identify trends, sentiments, and areas of concern within the organization. (Glint)
- **Predictive analytics for employee retention.** Using historical data and other information, GenAI can predict

1. Resume Builder. 2023. "1 in 4 Companies Have Already Replaced Workers with ChatGPT." Resume Builder website, February 27, [www.resumebuilder.com/1-in-4-companies-have-already-replaced-workers-with-chatgpt](http://www.resumebuilder.com/1-in-4-companies-have-already-replaced-workers-with-chatgpt).

2. SHRM. 2022. "Fresh SHRM Research Explores Use of Automation and AI in HR." SHRM website, April 13, [www.shrm.org/about-shrm/press-room/press-releases/pages/fresh-shrm-research-explores-use-of-automation-and-ai-in-hr.aspx?](http://www.shrm.org/about-shrm/press-room/press-releases/pages/fresh-shrm-research-explores-use-of-automation-and-ai-in-hr.aspx?)

which employees are at risk of leaving the company, thus allowing HR teams to take proactive measures. (Visier)

- **Diversity and inclusion.** By analyzing HR data and identifying potential areas of bias in hiring and promotion GenAI can help organizations track and improve diversity and inclusion efforts. (TalVista)
- **Skills assessment and gap analysis.** GenAI can assess employees' skills, identify skill gaps, and recommend personalized training and development plans. (Pymetrics, Reejig)
- **Candidate sourcing and talent pipelining.** GenAI-powered tools can identify and engage passive candidates, building a pipeline of potential talent for future openings. (Hiretual)
- **Personalized learning and development.** GenAI can recommend personalized learning resources and development plans for employees based on their career goals and skill gaps. (Degreed)

GenAI can be particularly helpful for generating text that HR and recruitment teams can use in their various functions. The ability to create prompts that will lead GenAI to produce relevant content is a skill that professionals in those areas should definitely cultivate, because it will improve their processes and make their work easier. Here are some examples of possible prompts on several HR-related topics.

## JOB DESCRIPTIONS

- "Generate a job description for a software engineer with expertise in [specific technology or skill]."
- "Create an inclusive job posting for a [job title] position."

## CANDIDATE ENGAGEMENT

- "Compose a follow-up e-mail to schedule an interview with a candidate."
- "Generate an automated response to acknowledge receipt of a job application."

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- "Create interview questions for a [job title] position to assess [specific skill]."
- "Generate behavioral interview questions for evaluating teamwork."

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

- "Draft a statement promoting diversity and inclusion for a job posting."
- "Suggest strategies to improve diversity in our hiring process."

## EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK ANALYSIS

- "Analyze employee survey responses to identify common themes or concerns."
- "Generate a summary of positive feedback from recent employee reviews."

## CANDIDATE SOURCING

- "Find potential candidates with experience in [industry] on professional networking sites."
- "Create a list of passive candidates for a [job title] role in [location]."

## ONBOARDING

- "Generate a checklist for new employee onboarding."
- "Compose a welcome e-mail to send to new hires before their first day."

## EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

- "Generate a message for recognizing an employee's outstanding performance."
- "Compose a congratulatory note for an employee's work anniversary."

## EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

- "Suggest ideas for promoting employee wellness in the workplace."
- "Create a communication plan for mental health awareness initiatives."

## HR POLICY CREATION

- "Draft a company policy on remote work guidelines."
- "Generate an anti-harassment policy statement for the employee handbook."

## PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

- "Provide sample performance review phrases for communication skills."
- "Generate a performance improvement plan for an underperforming employee."

## COMPLIANCE MONITORING

- "Create a checklist to ensure compliance with [specific labor law or regulation]."
- "Generate a report on HR compliance measures for the past quarter."

These prompts can serve as starting points for HR and recruitment teams to use generative AI tools effectively. They can help streamline tasks, improve communication, and enhance various aspects of HR and talent management.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

The most important thing to understand about AI in general is that although it has flaws, it can be cross-checked and moderated by actual humans. Organizations should put an AI policy in place now to lay the foundation for the successful implementation of this emerging technology. By making sure they understand how their HR tech vendors use AI, leaders can also ensure that its use doesn't have unintended consequences. (For example, if an applicant tracking system uses AI to scan faces during candidate assessments via video, HR and recruiters will want to be sure that those scans don't lead to excluding protected classes.) Addressing these concerns and others that emerge as the use of AI becomes more widespread will enable companies to harness this technology to its fullest potential. ■

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# A Smorgasbord of Stressbusters

BY JAMES MOUL

**E**ven when people enjoy their work, get along great with their teammates, and love their clients, they still have bad days in the office. We all have days when the workplace stresses us out.

This might happen when a project deadline is looming, or when you're struggling to find a solution to a particularly vexing problem. Perhaps you're feeling frustrated because the photocopier jammed (again) or irritated because someone just burned a bag of microwave popcorn (again). Or maybe it's simply the case that a gray and rainy day has put you in a bad mood.

Most of us have techniques for shaking off those negative vibes. Gardening, travel, music making, and other hobbies are great for boosting moods. Some people might feel their stress dissipate when they play sports or get spa treatments or watch movies with friends. There are lots of great ways to alleviate stress when you're outside the office.

Unfortunately, when you're still on the clock (and need to get your work done), you usually can't just leave your workplace if you're having a bad day. Instead, you need to figure out how to mitigate your workplace stress right here and right now—while you're still in the office. So what can you do?

**Meditate.** One of the most effective ways to bust a bad mood is to step outside of your current headspace and try for a "reset." Meditation is the classic example of this strategy. Taking a few moments to clear your mind and stop thinking about whatever's bothering you has been scientifically proven to reduce

stress (and yield many other mental and physical benefits, too!). There are different types of meditation, but if you're doing this at your desk, you'll probably want to avoid the versions with lots of movement (such as tai chi) or chanting and instead stick with those that involve being still, closing your eyes, and focusing on your breath for a few minutes.

**Shut out the annoyances.** If other people's actions are getting on your nerves, take a break from them. Noise-canceling headphones can silence the sound of your colleague who's having loud phone conversations a few desks over and make space for the music (or white noise) that can help you focus on your work. And kicking on "do not disturb" mode for an hour can cut out distractions and do wonders for your productivity.

**Leave your desk.** Sometimes all it takes to relieve stress is a change of scenery. You might not be able to go on a two-week tropical vacation at that precise moment, but maybe you can take your work to a nearby coffee shop or library for an hour or so. If you can't leave your building, then perhaps there's a break room or unused meeting space would do the trick. And if none of those options are viable, at the very least you can probably dip out for a brief walk around the office (or even—weather and time permitting—outside).

If you have your own office with a door, that privacy gives you a few more options. For example, you can do some yoga or simple stretches to get your body moving, or find calmness in lying down on the floor for a few minutes. An enclosed space

also gives you the ability to ditch the headphones and listen to—and sing along with—whatever music brings your stress level down. (Just be sure you aren't loud enough to be heard by your coworkers, because that might bring their stress levels up!)

Consider checking in with your colleagues, too. Remember, we all experience workplace stress at some time—so perhaps you can all work together to come up with solutions that have the potential to help everyone. Set up a miniature putting green in the corner of the break room, for example, or a small dart board (one with velcro darts, please—not the stabby ones!) in the meeting room. Sometimes doing a repetitive physical task (such as sinking some putts or tossing a few darts on their way to a meeting) for a few minutes can make people feel more at ease.

If management gives the okay for something a little more involved, try organizing office-wide social events. How about brief soccer matches during lunch in the field next to your building? Or an afternoon coffee meet up once a week: each person brings their own beverage, and management provides cookies or other snacks for everyone to enjoy.

Workplace stress is a reality in the business world. If left unchecked, it can cause productivity and morale to plummet. (And on a purely personal level, being stressed out feels awful.) Different remedies work for different people, so find—or invent—the solutions that work for you! ■

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RECIPE

## Lentil Soup

Every cook's repertoire needs a good soup that's easy to make, freezes beautifully (so you have a quick meal at the ready), and packs a nutritional punch. This lentil soup is a flavor powerhouse that makes for a terrific weeknight supper and can shine on its own but also goes nicely with accompaniments (such as freshly baked cornbread or a side salad).

**YIELD:** 8 servings **TIME:** 1 hour

**WHAT YOU'LL NEED:**

- ▶ ¼ cup olive oil
- ▶ 2 stalks celery, diced
- ▶ 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ▶ 3 carrots, diced
- ▶ 1 yellow or white onion, diced
- ▶ 1 bay leaf
- ▶ 1 tsp dried basil
- ▶ 1 tsp dried oregano
- ▶ 1 tsp cumin
- ▶ 2 cups dry French green lentils (brown lentils will also work)
- ▶ 6 cups vegetable stock (this gives a good flavor boost, but water is also fine)
- ▶ 1 (14.5 ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- ▶ 2 cups fresh spinach, chopped
- ▶ 2 TB fresh lemon juice
- ▶ salt and pepper

**DIRECTIONS:**

- ▶ In a large stock pot over medium heat, heat the oil, then add the celery, garlic, carrots, and onion. Saute just until the vegetables start to change color (but are still very firm), about 5 minutes.
- ▶ Add the bay, basil, oregano, and cumin. Stir in the lentils, stock, and tomatoes. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer (uncovered) until the lentils are tender, about 45 minutes.
- ▶ Remove from the heat. Stir in the spinach and lemon juice, then add salt and pepper to taste.



**Nutrition Facts**

Amount per Serving	
<b>Calories:</b> 273 cal	
<b>Fat:</b>	7.6 g
<b>Dietary fiber:</b>	7.5 g
<b>Sugars:</b>	6.2 g
<b>Protein:</b>	13.8 g

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