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human resource professionals

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

How to Take your 2020 Benefit Change Rollout to the Next Level

With open enrollment right around the corner, employers are faced with the annual question: how are we going to get employees engaged, while helping them make the smartest benefit decisions for their individual situations?

This year, instead of plain old printouts and email, try a new method. Whether you are changing providers, introducing new features, or simply showcasing existing options, switching up your enrollment process can be easier and more enjoyable than you'd think. Give these quick and easy tips a try for a better time come January 1.

Have a Lunch & Learn

Who doesn't love a lunch & learn? Free food and a little break from the status quo is a much welcomed way to get on board with the changes 2020 will bring. Whether you are opting for an informative webinar or an in-person presentation, providing a free lunch is a great way to encourage employee participation while boosting team morale.

If you are hosting an in-person benefits presentation, be sure to have your information nicely (and concisely!) summarized. Having a paper takeaway or a digital follow-up is key, as sometimes open enrollment can be overwhelming. Many people prefer to have something they can reference at a later date to help make their decision, so be sure those materials are available.

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work

If it's possible, why not get the whole team involved in asking questions and brainstorming? Benefit changes can be complex and confusing, and sometimes people feel too shy to ask questions during a formal presentation. Try breaking up into smaller groups and challenging each mini-team to answer ten questions related to open enrollment and benefits. The group that gets the most right answers wins a prize!

Design Your Rollout Mobile & Digital First

Mobile. It might seem like a no-brainer, but employees are going to be quicker to respond to changes if there's an easy process that meets them where they are: their mobile devices. Reminding employees of a mobile registration option is a great way to capture high engagement

rates. The key to a user-friendly registration is making it as turnkey as possible. If employees have to fish around for URLs, passwords, group numbers, et cetera, they are going to be less likely to complete these items in a timely fashion. Provide all the information you can upfront.

Add Social to Your Strategy. If you are not taking advantage of a social strategy such as Facebook, Slack, LinkedIn, Twitter, and more, the time is now! Digital quizzes, surveys, and chat channels can work wonders for engaging your employees during the open enrollment process while facilitating knowledge sharing. Why not create an internal Facebook group or Slack channel where your team can ask questions and exchange information? The outcome of benefits decisions usually lasts all year, so it's important for people to have their questions answered in a casual, user-friendly environment. A big benefit for your HR team is that a digital-first strategy will cut down on "random question" drop-ins and interruptions at your office. Send everyone to one place in the digital space!

WORKPLACE CULTURE

4 Steps to a Pet-Friendly Workplace

If your team is waving goodbye to doggy day-care and the days of leaving furry friends at home, congratulations! The trend of bringing dogs to work started soon after what is widely considered [the most influential research on dog-friendly offices](#), published in the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.

Among the [many benefits](#), research uncovered that employees who brought their dogs to work experienced lower stress levels, as well as facilitated conversation and better socializing during their 9-to-5 schedules. Dogs are a great conversation starter, acting as somewhat of a "social lubricant" that allows natural discussion to flow between colleagues who otherwise wouldn't interact. Dogs can also help enhance trust and collaboration between coworkers, [according to a study](#) from Central Michigan University.

Allowing four-legged friends into your office might have unintended positive consequences for employers as well as employees. Science shows us that dog lovers [experience higher levels of oxytocin](#), the "feel good" hormone, and that even spending brief periods of time with dogs can increase a sense of well-being for the owners and their pet-loving coworkers. These feel-good hormones can [lead to higher levels of neurological productivity](#), meaning better work for less time spent.

If you haven't already adopted a dog-friendly office policy, try these steps below and get smiling! Watch your recruiting, retention, and overall office mood skyrocket.

Steps to becoming a dog friendly office:

1. **Make sure your building approves.** Some office buildings have restrictions that prevent pets from visiting if they aren't a registered emotional support animal. Building management should be able to answer this question for you, as well as help with any red tape or paperwork for getting a pet-friendly workplace approved.

2. **Take a quick survey of the team.** It's important to make sure everyone on your team is comfortable with dogs in the office. Sending out a quick survey via Google Forms or

SurveyMonkey can help you gauge whether there are allergies, fears, or just general apprehensions about pets in the office.

3. **Make sure the guidelines are clear.** To ease any stress, make sure the expectation is clear that, in order to bring a furry friend, they must be friendly (to other dogs and humans) and have all their vaccinations. To ensure that all dogs are suited for the work environment, you can get your dog certified with the AKC Canine Good Citizen Certification. It's not a bad idea to additionally request dog owners to bring their own baby gate or crate, so that their dog can be contained in one area if needed.

4. **Start small.** If you aren't ready to adopt a dogs-anytime policy, try rolling out just one day a week, maybe on Fridays. If things are going well, you can expand to a greater amount of time and less restrictions.

Read more:
Dogs in the Workplace: A Review of the Benefits and Potential Challenges
Exploring the Health Benefits of Pets
Why every day should be take your dog to work day
The Science Behind Our Love for Pets
How oxytocin can help us be more neurologically productive
Pet Partners

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

It's Time to Stop Age Discrimination in the Workplace

The kids are more than all right: they're the stars of the show.

It seems like developing market research in every business sector is all about millennials and Gen Z. How do we capture and retain their interest? How do we market and remarket to them? What are they interested in to begin with? What do they find attractive in a brand or company?

In the midst of a culture that glorifies youth, we must be particularly careful about how we recruit employees of all ages, and not neglect the benefits of a multi-generational workplace. After all, corporate diversity initiatives should be 360 degrees, and that includes age.

According to research from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 25% of the workforce will be 55 or older in 2024, up from 11 percent in 2000. People are retiring later and staying in their careers longer. Studies also show that workers older than 50 are more engaged at work than the younger generation, and therefore can provide a unique perspective that may not be present in millennials or Gen Z.

So how do we make sure that these older employees are part of our team? One of the biggest keys to preventing and reversing age discrimination is simply making sure that age is included in your diversity discussion as plainly as possible. Many initiatives center on understanding how gender, racial, and ethnic diversity plays a role in company operations, but little time is spent on age.

"There's substantial evidence that an age-diverse workplace, especially in industries that tend to exhibit ageism, can lead to more effective teams and companies," says Chip Conley, Airbnb's strategic advisor for hospitality and leadership.

A good first step to mitigating age discrimination at work is how you present your company to begin with. If your digital presence and recruiting materials are full of photos of trendy 25-year-olds, you are sending a clear message about who you're looking for.

Additionally, if you are funneling money into social ads for hiring, you might be missing great talent entirely as older generations are less available to these types of communications. Make sure any job listings are scrubbed of age-related language like "digital native" and "tech-savvy." These terms immediately deter older talent and narrow your candidate pool. The consequences of non-adherence to age-neutral hiring practices goes beyond just missing out on talent. Failing to keep a multi-generational team in mind could put your company at risk for expensive age discrimination lawsuits.

Another way to grow an age-diverse team is to promote talent from within. Millennials and Gen Z have less loyalty to companies than previous generations, and that reputation may not be due to their own lack of values. If millennials age but do not experience career advancement opportunities or investment from an employer, they will look elsewhere to get the promotion they want. Conversely, if your team has a strong career advancement pipeline, you'll be able to retain talent that grows with you while diversifying your age group.

Read more:
Labor force projections to 2024: the labor force is growing, but slowly
How to Avoid Ageism
Employers Used Facebook to Keep Women and Older Workers From Seeing Job Ads. The Federal Government Thinks That's Illegal.
Older workers need not apply. Heck, they're not even seeing many job ads on Facebook, lawsuit alleges.

OPERATIONS

How to Handle Pay-History Inquiries —The Right Way

We've all been there. You've gotten deep into the job interview process, and then you're face-to-face with the awkward question: would you share your previous salary?

Whether the question rears its head in a digital application or during initial in-persons, none of us like answering it. Many people, especially young people, are less committed to their employers and seek new jobs every few years in order to rapidly spike their salaries, yet having to confront the pay question is never comfortable.

Why Pay-History Bans Exist

To date, there are 17 state-wide bans on potential employers inquiring about pay history, as well as 19 local bans. The goal of these bans is to end the cycle of pay discrimination, as well as the cycle of low-earning and poverty.

Everyone knows that it has long been illegal for employers to pay different wages to men and women for the same work, but despite this, the wage gap between men's and women's earnings persists. One 2019 PayScale report found that women still make only $0.79 for each dollar men do. A Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) analysis discovered that in 2018, median weekly earnings for female full-time wage and salary workers was 81% of men's earnings. When it comes to minority women and women of color, the pay gap is even more pronounced. The salary history ban is designed to put a stop to that, and begin to repair the damage it has caused.

Pay-history bans allow people who have experienced historically low pay or pay discrimination to have a fresh start when they come in to interview. Some bans go even further than merely blocking pay history questions. A few also prohibit an employer from relying on an applicant's pay history to set compensation if discovered or volunteered; others forbid an employer from taking action against employees who choose to discuss pay with coworkers.

Navigating Pay History

It's important to ensure your hiring team is educated and aware of pay-history regulations. Read on for thought-starters on what your team can do to make sure you are compliant with these laws.

1. **Audit and review recruiting materials.** The first step for many employers is to audit and remove any recruiting materials that ask salary-history questions in states where this is illegal. This includes but is not limited to digital applications, printed materials, and interview scripts.
2. **Develop alternate methods for assigning salary.** Your HR and recruiting teams should be focused on finding the right candidate for the job, not necessarily the one who has the right salary profile or history. Asking questions about a candidate's comprehensive experience, previous tenure, and education can be smarter ways to determine what is fair when discussing salary. Using a junior, mid-level, senior, coding model can help your team develop salary ranges that are fair.
3. **Foster a culture of transparency.** If it makes sense for your organization, it's not a bad idea to share salary ranges for each job internally. This will help employees feel confident that their compensation is fair in relation to their colleagues'.

Read more:
Millennials: The Job-Hopping Generation
The State of the Gender Pay Gap 2019
3 Ways The Gender Pay Gap Is Even Bigger Than You Think