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# Human Resource Executive®

## Where Does HR Go From Here?

As employers ready to resume operations in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, HR leaders are tasked with figuring out the path forward. **PAGE 8**

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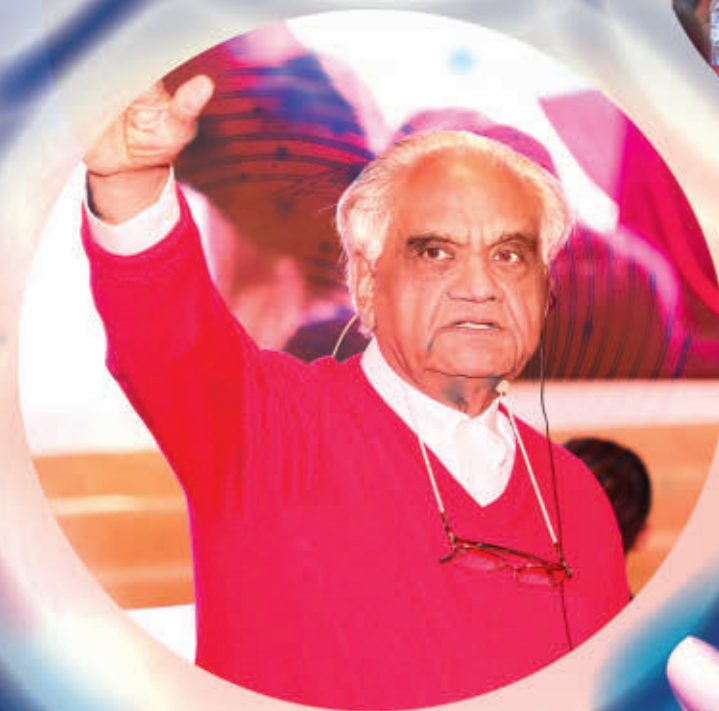
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### Creating a Smart, Safe Return-to-Work Strategy BY CAROL PATTON

After months of strategizing new remote infrastructures and PTO policies, many businesses are now shifting gears to focus on reopening operations, with the peak of the coronavirus pandemic seemingly in the rearview mirror. Experts weigh in on what it takes to get back to workplaces, while minimizing risks for both employees and companies. **Page 8**

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### HR's 'New Corporate Currency'

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### Coronavirus Resource Spotlights

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### Insights from a CHRO

See how leaders like Lincoln Financial Group's Lisa Buckingham are bringing innovation to HR.

## A Crisis is a Terrible Thing to Waste

Ben Brooks/Columnist

What if COVID-19 is one of the most important things to ever happen to HR? What if it is a massive catalyst for the transformation of how talent is managed, in ways that HR has long advocated for but never been able to advance? My friends, this is *our* moment.

The coronavirus crisis has elevated the HR function and its cohorts to unprecedented levels of visibility, importance and influence. Overnight, we've become the go-to group to figure things out, handle the endless complexity that involves all things people and to consider the psyche of the organization. Around the globe, my colleagues in HR are helping to execute the largest work-from-home experiment ever. HR is handling infected employees and their loved ones, rapidly changing laws, layoffs, compensation changes and a massively elevated concern for employee wellbeing. If our function were a stock, it would be rated a "Buy" right now. My friends, this is *our* moment.

When I first got involved with HR professionally circa 2009, I was floored to hear from many co-workers at Marsh & McLennan Cos. that we were fighting for a "seat at the table." Really? Then they educated me on the long evolution of what we now think of as HR, or increasingly People & Culture at more progressive firms. Traditionally, HR had two jobs: control costs and reduce risk—both of which it has done quite well. But what seemed to be missed is what I often call "the upside of HR": the future-focused, innovative, performance-driving, strategic, tech-driven side of HR that, while ripe with potential, has seen a snail's pace of progress since I've been paying attention to HR.

In so many ways, HR professionals haven't been set up to succeed in this progressive aspect of HR. Other organizational leaders resist changes to the status quo, budgets are often meager and quick to be frozen or cut, and the function has a lackluster brand when it comes to being change agents. But the most inspiring, most believable, most amazing people I know in HR are those who cut through these headwinds and find a way to elevate the employee experience for everyone.

So here we are in the middle of a global pandemic, and I think to myself, "Is this the best thing that has ever happened to HR?" And to be clear, I am not being flippant about the risks and impact of this terrible situation. I write this from my apartment in Manhattan, the epicenter of the (current) crisis where the number of deaths continues to climb. I have had a client hospitalized for the virus and dozens of friends ill at home. I disinfect my groceries when I bring them home and fret about the liquidity of the start-up I founded with my life's savings. But as I study adversity and mindset for



overcoming obstacles, I keep thinking that the field of HR has never been better positioned or had more leverage. So remember, a crisis is a terrible thing to waste.

This pandemic is acting as an accelerant to change, innovation and disruption that were all long in the works but slowed by the main restraining forces that protect the status quo. Don't believe me? Zoom meetings, work from home, increased flexibility, expanded sick leave, rethinking our definition of "essential" work and concern for employee wellness have been more conceptual than reality. In just weeks, we've made more progress than we have in the last decade.

What do you do, in your HR role, to not waste a crisis?

Remember, unlike 10-20 years ago, you're not fighting for a seat at the table. You're leading the goddamn meeting. You're the field marshal. Your colleagues in other functions are eagerly waiting to be directed, inspired, led. All the things that you've observed, learned and advocated for in the past are becoming painfully obvious to your co-workers as you read this. Seize the moment!

What does this look like? Moving from "order taker" to a far more commanding presence in board, executive and management meetings. Advocating for ways your employer can do the right thing, enhance competitiveness and future-proof performance. This will require you to take more risk, be bold, overcome objections, make strategic plans and deliver on promises in a way that HR never has. But I'm confident we can do it!

Remember that people's memories are uniquely sensitive at peak moments (getting married, having a child, promotion, big speaking gig) and tough ones (laid off, heartbreak, illness). How we show up as a function, and equally important, how we show up as individuals, both internally and externally, right now will be remembered for a long time.

Since the genesis of personnel or labor relations, there has never been a better time to rapidly advance the important transformations in all aspects of work. The future of work is now, and if you step up and lead, you'll open up career opportunities, build an incredible reputation and make a truly lasting impact in the lives of the humans we resource. Get to work.

By the way, I'll be back regularly, sharing more career advice and thoughts on how we can be better HR professionals. If you have suggestions for future columns, please contact me on LinkedIn!

*Ben Brooks is founder and CEO of software-based coaching platform Pilot. He will speak in October at the HR Technology Conference.*

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# Five critical steps for transforming HCM to future-proof your organization

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# Five critical steps for transforming HCM to future-proof your organization

Even before the world's health and economic landscapes were impacted by the recent global health event, employers appeared to have hit a wall when it came to productivity.

For instance, a 2017 article at FocusEconomics.com entitled "Economic Experts Weigh In: Why is Productivity Growth So Low?" reported that the technological advances and management strategies that propelled productivity in the past were no longer working.

At the same time, a U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' *Business Employment Dynamics* report found that one-third of new businesses fail within their first two years, and 50% fail within their first five.

While the factors behind these productivity-connected data points are complex, the technology powering much of today's human resource efforts is among the

key reasons why this troubling trend has gained steam, according to Linda Mougalian, Sr. Division Vice President, Go-To-Market Strategy at ADP, who has spent nearly 20 years in Product Management focusing on HCM offerings.

"The big challenge today is constant change. In fact, the only guarantee is change; it's the new normal," says Mougalian. "The ongoing global health event—with its massive shift to distributed workforces—has proven why new, innovative HR tech solutions are necessary to meet future business needs."

Mougalian points out that even as recent as a year or two ago, 53% of overall HCM purchases

in the marketplace were still on-premises solutions.

"Much of the HCM domain remains legacy technology," Mougalian says, adding that existing HCM technology struggles to meet expectations and, based on surveys, a majority of HR leaders are not satisfied with what they have today.

The reason? Not only is change today a constant, the pace of change is rapidly accelerating. And, as the recent global health event has shown, change increasingly needs to be done under uncertain and often challenging conditions; it's hard to tell what's coming next or where it might be coming from.

"That's why the workforce of today and in the future needs to be ready," Mougalian says. "The organizations that will be successful long-term

are the ones that can rapidly embrace this inevitable trend of quick and constant change."

Regarding why existing HCM technology has remained stagnant, most major enterprise

software purchases have a long shelf life and evolve over time to address specific needs.

"There exist lifespans of 10, 15 and 20 years for some of these HCM systems that remain installed," Mougalian says. "These companies need to take a 'duct taping' approach to keep all the systems in their HCM ecosystem running."

That scenario can't be blamed entirely on HR. It's well known that organizations tend to lean in the direction of revenue-generating systems,





Mougalian notes, because it can be more challenging to quantify the return on investment of HCM solutions than other enterprise applications that drive more demonstrable operational efficiencies.

To meet the “change challenge,” Mougalian offers five critical areas where HR (and HCM technology) needs to step up and power today’s businesses towards a successful future.

“These five guiding principles are the result of decades of ADP research and client experience,” she says. “We’ve found that these are the elements that differentiate successful businesses and how great work gets done.”

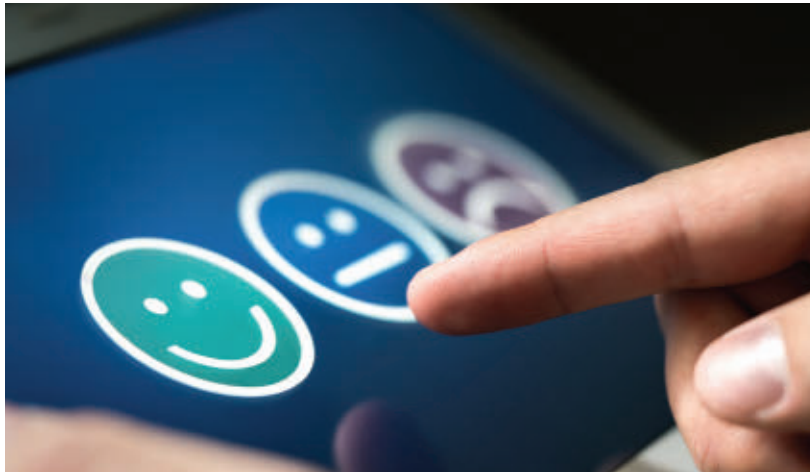
## 1

### **Understand How People Work to Improve Performance**

To succeed, HR must overcome the inability of traditional HCM systems to enable holistic digital transformation across people, teams and functions to better achieve strategic business objectives. That also includes reversing stagnant productivity trends, despite ongoing HR technology proliferation.

Mougalian explains traditional HCM systems are typically designed for hierarchies and cost centers, rather than networks of dynamic teams, and this can get in the way of employee engagement, performance and the retention of top talent.

With dynamic teams, productivity is unblocked because people are able to work outside the constraints of a traditional hierarchical organizational structure. They’re more engaged, less likely to leave and, therefore, more productive. By breaking down silos, dynamic teams help create a culture of connection and collaboration.



Also, the 2019 Deloitte Human Capital Trends survey reported that 31% of respondents said they now operate mostly or almost wholly in teams. In the same study, 53% of respondents said they saw a

“significant improvement in performance” from the transition to a team/network-based organization.

“The success of organizations that support cross-functional teams illustrates that HR professionals can help drive team leader performance by truly understanding their challenges,” Mougalian says.

Today, she adds, when you discuss cross-functional, global or distributed teams — and you can’t see how those relationships are happening — how can you know who your best team leaders and managers are? Or, how do you know what the attributes of your most effective teams are, or what your actual vacancy and retention issues are? HCM solutions based upon more traditional organization hierarchies cannot answer these questions.

## 2

### **Personalize the Employee Experience**

More and more, traditional, one-size-fits-all HCM systems can’t accommodate the diverse needs of various people, teams and functions working within an organization.

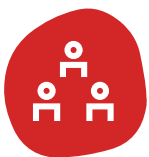
What is happening instead is that organizations deploy multiple, disconnected technologies from different vendors. By some estimates, there are 1,400 HR tech vendors in the market today, which makes finding the best combination of apps for your organization a nearly impossible challenge. With different



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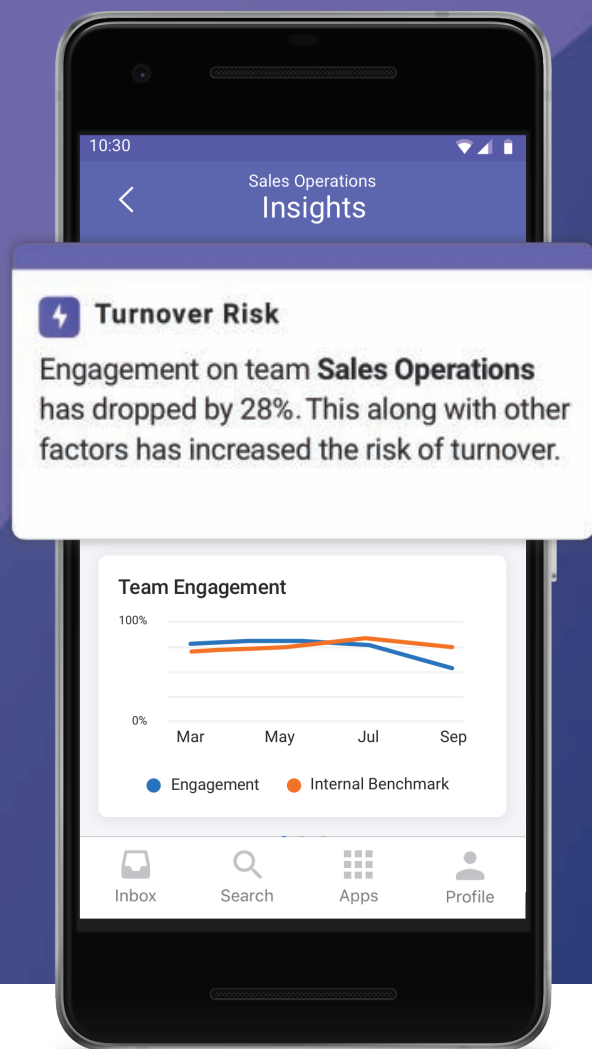


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departments and leaders often working on their own chosen software and apps, it exacerbates the silo problem—not the most efficient or cost-effective way to work.

Low employee adoption of HR technologies due to disconnected user experiences is a common challenge, Mougalian says. To combat that result, employers, with HR's help, need to build more diverse and inclusive workplaces marked by exceptional employee experiences when using HR technology.

If that does not happen, low employee usage can lead to incomplete data, which in turn drives the inability to capture efficiencies and make smarter decisions. Also, the desired need to manage the growing trend of freelancers/contractors as part of the "regular" workforce remains out of reach. Finally, low employee adoption and a lack of enthusiasm leads to the inability to drive real-time, ongoing employee skill development.

In that 2019 *Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends* survey, 84% of respondents rated employee experience important, and 28% identified it as one of the three most urgent issues facing their organization. In the same survey, only 38% said they were satisfied or very satisfied with work-related tools and technology. Clearly, there is an opportunity for improvement here, Mougalian says.

"It's about prioritizing people: making work easier, more productive and more meaningful for them," she says. "Creating personalized experiences is key to a people-centric approach to HCM."

### 3

## Quickly React to Changing Global Compliance Requirements

Keeping pace with new, ever-changing compliance regulations can be complex. Having a reliable global compliance plan of action, as



well as access to resources and guidance, is critical.

Compliance tracking and reporting becomes very tricky when you have data in multiple, disconnected systems in different countries. Still, many multinational organizations are working with a unique HR system for each country they operate in—on average, 50 or more of those systems.

To meet the seemingly unmanageable compliance challenge, an HCM platform must be designed to provide organizations with a single, global system of record that is mindful of location-specific compliance requirements, Mougalian says.

"An HCM platform should offer rapid localization and compliance capability, which enables organizations to confidently expand into new countries and adjust quickly to evolving compliance requirements," she explains. Plus, if HR can offer an HCM system that can meet those expectations, it will not only be seen as protecting the company, but it also makes compliance simpler for everyone and removes obstacles to growth—a clear efficiency boost.

"Effective HCM today should manage compliance requirements associated with expanding into new markets, as well as the rapidly changing requirements where employers already are doing business," according to Mougalian, who adds that it is especially

pertinent with the growing trend of remote, mobile capabilities – people working when and where they choose.

## 4

### Support Better Decision-Making Based on Trusted, Data-Driven Intelligence

Hype aside, when it comes to making smarter business decisions with AI-generated insights pushed to HR and business executives in the flow of work, there is much work yet to be done.

Poor data quality and lack of HCM system intelligence, in fact, is preventing employers from making the best people decisions possible. Regardless of all the chatter about analytics, data all too often remains siloed across many disparate, disconnected tools sitting outside the flow of work. In addition, the poor HR system utilization from employees (mentioned above) lowers data quality and inhibits useful data intelligence creation.

"This can make it tough for decision-makers to get the insights they need when they need them most," Mougalian says.

Also, Mougalian goes on to say, "In order to effectively leverage data analytics you have to be confident the data is robust and up-to-date, and

that it's being distilled down and delivered as timely, actionable insights for the people doing the work."

While people analytics are valued, few companies are realizing the benefits. For instance, Deloitte's *Human Capital Trends* report in 2017 found that while 71% of companies see people analytics as a high priority, only 4% of companies have predictive analytics capabilities.

With effective data analytics tools and capacities built into their HCM application, HR leaders can help line of business leaders drive team effectiveness; understand who on a team is at a risk for leaving; optimize workforce strategies using benchmarking data; and quickly get to the right action with a system that uses semantic search.

"Most of all, by bringing an effective analytics solution into the fold, HR leaders will be seen as enabling good decisions and as overcoming the reporting problems business line managers are challenged with," Mougalian says.

## 5

### Create an Adaptable HR Function

The potential of every organization is limited by the capabilities of its technology. The increasingly uncertain world of work requires people-centric technology that lets you adapt as quickly as your business needs

do, according to Mougalian. HCM based on adaptable technology is a breakaway path from the one-size-fits-all solutions, which cannot meet today's challenges.

Bottom line: Traditional, monolithic HR systems struggle to support the type of adaptable HR function required to meet rapidly







changing business needs, making it tougher for companies to expand into new markets without incurring administrative and compliance burden. Merger and acquisition activity is a particular challenge, creating a significant IT burden when it means maintaining multiple systems that support distinct, localized business needs.

Also, manual workarounds for older systems create compliance risk and potential security issues, and more traditional systems are unable to quickly add new capabilities without introducing new security risk or siloed data pools.

More adaptable HCM systems can rapidly acquire new capabilities supported by best-in-class levels of system availability, resiliency and scalability from cloud-native architecture.

In its 2018 Key Issues Study, The Hackett Group found that 33% of organizations are looking to expand manager self-service via mobile/social applications, while the 2018 Deloitte Perspectives small business technology trends report found that digitally advanced small businesses earned twice the revenue per employee and had four times revenue growth.

"For HR leaders, moving to a next-generation HCM will be a clear signal that they are known as an innovator within both the company and industry," Mougalian says, "leading the effort to enable great teams and great work."

In the end, she says, it's time for a change if an organization is struggling to meet their productivity goals while relying on traditional org charts to evaluate teams; using a generic solution for their unique organization; falling short when it comes to keeping up with rapidly changing compliance challenges; keeping data in disparate HR systems; and having trouble adapting quickly or integrating new features.

"Innovative HR leaders of today need an HCM solution that treats work as flexible, adaptable, people-centric, team-based, meaningful and engaging," Mougalian concludes. "And that solution must engender and support the ideal flow of work, drive team performance and rapidly adapt as HR and business needs evolve."



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## Top Story

### Spotlighting Succession Planning

**W**hen coronavirus invaded this country, many organizations activated their business-continuity plans. Everyone knew what needed to be done, and senior leadership stepped up to the plate. But what happens if the virus attacks someone in a non-senior position?

Some organizations don't have a backup plan for people in critical positions below the C-suite. This type of plan has not been a priority among many HR professionals or senior leaders—especially as they try to manage and engage a mostly remote workforce and figure out how to run a company without having control over future events—but it needs to be in order to prevent further disruptions in your organization, experts say.

Start the process by identifying critical roles and employees who keep your business solvent, says Colleen O'Neill, senior client partner at Korn Ferry, a global management consulting firm that recently published *Executive Succession Through the Lens of COVID-19*.

"Convene the right people together," she says, pointing to heads of departments, business units or functions as examples. "[Ask], who's critical? If you had to name an understudy, who would that person be? What needs to happen for that [individual] to be ready? [Some] are like a Swiss Army knife: They can sit in different roles. Consider retirees who may be willing to step in temporarily."

Then stress test your plan, she says. Run through realistic business scenarios before making talent decisions. Can these backups step into these roles during a crisis?

O'Neill says it's important to be "radically realistic about talent capability." She explains that emergency succession planning requires HR and senior leaders to look through a different lens. Do these employees have the learning agility, resilience or perhaps experience to step into that role tomorrow? Although this presents a development opportunity for some employees, realize that it also poses a talent risk for HR, she says, and that people who are temporarily moved to another job may not succeed in that same position long-term.

"Wartime leaders may not be great during the recovery effort," says O'Neill, adding that they may possess short-term, not long-term, strategic skills. "High potentials, who are blackbelts at what they do, may not have the capability to operate at this level."

#### At Least Two Understudies

While many companies are in reactionary mode, HR must focus on areas essential to running the business. But don't do this in a vacuum. Meet with appropriate company leaders to develop a skills inventory of your workforce and then share it with a core team of several leaders who can help you narrow the list down to what's absolutely critical, says Andrea Walsh, lead, talent line of business for the Chicago metro area and also a senior director of talent rewards at Willis Towers Watson, a global risk management, insurance brokerage and advisory company.

Make sure to identify the top three to five skills of strong performers, she says. For instance, consider an employee who has the skills to manage payroll. Instead of naming the individual as a successor to the payroll director, she says, that same employee may have critical skills needed elsewhere in the business.

HR must also monitor the performance of successors, she says, and be willing to make adjustments when needed. But perhaps the hardest part of all is trusting them to do the job.

"You've got to create an environment of psychological safety where people know they can come to you at any time with questions," Walsh says, adding that two, even three, understudies should be named for each critical position. "You've got to trust them to figure it out. You've also got to be OK with mistakes. Help the individual and organization move on."

By observing this process, she says, HR professionals can help employees expand their skill sets and, ultimately, build a better workforce for the future.

"You're creating opportunities for people to learn new things," says Walsh. "What better way to do this than in the middle of a crisis? While people may make mistakes, they'll come out on the other side with more confidence and ability to support the organization moving forward."

She believes the pandemic has accelerated the need for HR professionals to consider how jobs need to change, which will better equip the company to handle future global or national disasters.

"Organizations need to use this time to get smart because, next time, there will be fewer excuses to not be prepared," Walsh says.

—Carol Patton

### Will 401(k) Matches Fall Victim to the Pandemic?

**E**mployers feeling the economic strains from the coronavirus pandemic have a benefit on the chopping block: 401(k) contributions.

A range of industry forecasts find that fewer than one in 10 employers has indicated plans to suspend or reduce contributions, though many more are in wait-and-see mode.

Overall, about 6% of companies have reduced or eliminated employer contributions or matches to their retirement plan, according to a survey of 369 firms by consultancy Pearl Meyer this spring. But 16% said they were considering doing so. Fidelity Investments polled 1,000 employers and found that about two-thirds are not planning to suspend or reduce the match, and less than 10% have or are planning to suspend or reduce their match.

Robyn Credico, Willis Towers Watson's defined contribution consulting leader, says she's been fielding a lot of calls from employer clients about the financial impact of suspending matches, but the majority haven't made up their minds about their plans just yet.

"Right now, a lot of employers haven't done that, but employers are preparing if they need to do it," she says.

A lot of the companies that have already made changes—or are considering doing so—are in industries taking a big hit from the outbreak, such as travel and retail, she says. Amtrak, Marriot International and La-Z-Boy are among a first wave of companies that have suspended 401(k) matching contributions as a result of the pandemic.

"For many, it's a last resort," Credico says. "But the objective is to pay people and keep them on their jobs, so a lot of [the viewpoint] is, people would rather keep their job and wait on a 401(k) match than get laid off."

Employer contributions run the gamut. Fidelity says its most popular match on its 401(k) platform is 100% match for the first 3% contributed by the employee, and then 50% match for the next 2% contributed. About 40% of the 401(k) plans managed by Fidelity use that formula, the firm notes.

Scaling back on 401(k) contributions is often a strategy embraced by HR and benefits leaders

during economic downturns. During the Great Recession in 2008, nearly a quarter of employers halted or decreased 401(k) contributions.

It's no surprise that companies may once again make that choice, industry insiders say, especially if they're faced with reducing staff as an alternative—or worse, closing altogether.

"Industries that have been hit hard by coronavirus are looking for every means possible to stay afloat," says John Lowell, an Atlanta-based partner with October Three Consulting. "While matching contributions have become customary in many U.S. companies, these companies are considering them a luxury that they cannot currently afford."

Cutting back on matches, though, does have a big financial effect on employees—another whammy as many already are witnessing dropping balances in their accounts due to stock-market volatility.

Experts say it's important for HR and other corporate leaders to encourage employees to keep contributing to their employer-provided accounts, and that they tout the benefits—tax advantages, improved financial wellbeing and so on—of doing so.

"They will want to tell them to still contribute if they can, even if they are no longer contributing themselves," Credico says. That may be difficult advice for employees to follow, though, if history is any indication. Roughly 20% of employees in 401(k) plans that suspended matching contributions in 2008 stopped saving in their 401(k) plans entirely that year, according to the Employee Benefit Research Institute.

#### For Many, a Temporary Change

What's important to note, many experts say, is that employer contribution halts are often temporary when motivated by a financial crisis.

When the economy began to rebound after the 2008 financial crisis, most retirement contributions were reinstated. Fidelity says that following the recession, nearly half of the plan sponsors that reduced their match reinstated them within a year.

It's likely the vast majority of employers will restore contributions as a competitive advantage after the pandemic and its economic fallout pass too, Credico says.

"If you have to furlough or lay off people, you want to be in a competitive position to rehire those people," she says. "And for the employees you have as part of your company, you want to help them be prepared to retire, and retire with a meaningful amount of money."

—Kathryn Mayer



## Key Ingredients for Creating a Supportive Culture During Crisis

BY TRACY KEOGH



Right now, every company, big or small, is shepherding their workforce through immense change. Business

operations are being reinvented. Employees are anxious. And things are evolving so quickly that what is true in the morning might not be true by the afternoon.

With so much uncertainty, business leaders have a critical role to play. A look at trust during the coronavirus pandemic in 10 markets—including Italy, South Korea, the U.K. and the U.S.—conducted by Edelman in early March found that people trust information about the virus they receive from their employer more than that received from government officials.

That's an incredible responsibility. But as the chief human resources officer at HP for nearly a decade, I've seen

that it can also result in a strong, resilient work community during challenging times. During a crisis, the culture you create will define your organization. The key is to keep employees at the center of your response during transformative moments.

### Be Real, Responsibly

Transparency is a key—often *the* key—contributor to employee happiness. As this pandemic heightens, bad news can't be avoided, and employers shouldn't try to do so. Instead, they should rely on the currency of trust, giving people a sense of comfort while being honest.

I, like many, was impressed by Arne Sorenson's video to his Marriott colleagues. He was able to deliver tough news in a way that alleviated anxiety. He showed empathy and selflessness and delivered a clear message, hallmarks of a true leader. Culture depends on top-down leadership that inspires as it informs, and messages will resonate more coming from one key person your workforce recognizes, usually the CEO.

### Model Culture Early and Often

Creating a supportive culture for all employees, regardless of their particular circumstances, is a vital step for global corporations. This means establishing what the "new normal" will look like in myriad contexts and communicating these changes in personable and relatable ways.

Amid COVID-19-mandated remote working, leaders must set

expectations early and model them often. When a senior manager gets on a call with their child next to them, it empowers other working parents to do the same. When a vice president participates in a virtual happy hour, she demonstrates that colleagues should still have fun at work.

### Keep the Employee at the Center of Everything

At the onset of this crisis, my team envisioned what we wanted an employee to say once we came out on the other side. Ultimately, we wanted to hear, "I appreciate how HP is supporting me and I know what to do to deliver for our customers." To make that happen, we began a dialogue and monthly surveys to understand how people are feeling.

As a result, we're enacting programs such as Wellness Wednesdays and Family & Fun Fridays. We are providing anything and everything employees need. We are hosting Q&A sessions with medical directors to answer employees' pressing questions. We are engaging teachers and education specialists to help guide parents who are now homeschooling. We are even working with a major movie studio to stream an animated movie exclusively to HP staff and their families on a company-wide movie night. Companies have to continue to be intentional about building culture, even when we are not coming together in offices.

### Enable Managers for Teams' Benefit

Time is precious in a crisis. Managers need accurate, timely

and targeted answers to frequently asked employee questions. For many companies, that requires recalibration right now. Audit your communications channels and ensure that, in addition to arming managers with comprehensive updates, there's also a go-to channel for consistent information.

By arming managers with information, it can keep employees calm and collected. That, in and of itself, will keep culture overall more elevated.

### Remember: This, Too, Is a Learning Moment

Every company should ask itself what can be learned from this pandemic. Think about how you can leverage the intense level of focus and resiliency that people have right now to create a better culture for everyone.

When there's a crisis, there's a structural shift. Things never go back to exactly how they were before. Often, I find, there's something better to come if you are thoughtful about leveraging lessons learned.

For many companies—HP included—this has been an incredible moment of community, and we'll continue to rely on the insights gained now as we move forward. How we act in the coming weeks and months is likely to define our organizations for years to come. I have no doubt we can create the culture we need to succeed by putting people first.

*Tracy Keogh is chief human resources officer at HP.*

## Caregiving Coming into Focus

**In a survey of 117 mostly large U.S. employers by the Northeast Business Group on Health, more than three-quarters of respondents (79%) said caregiving will be an increasingly important issue over the next five years.**

The survey was conducted in late 2019 and early 2020. Meanwhile, while nearly half (45%) believe they are on par with similar organizations in developing caregiving-friendly benefits, almost a quarter (22%) see themselves as below or well below average, a sign there is much room for improvement.

With a growing number of employees taking care of both their children and aging parents, employers are zeroing in on the issue and increasingly making caregiving benefits one of their top

priorities. Experts say embracing programs and benefits such as paid caregiving leave can help make an impact for caregiving employees. Without support, those employees often experience absenteeism and presenteeism, reduced employee engagement and productivity, and higher healthcare costs—all of which take a toll on employers.

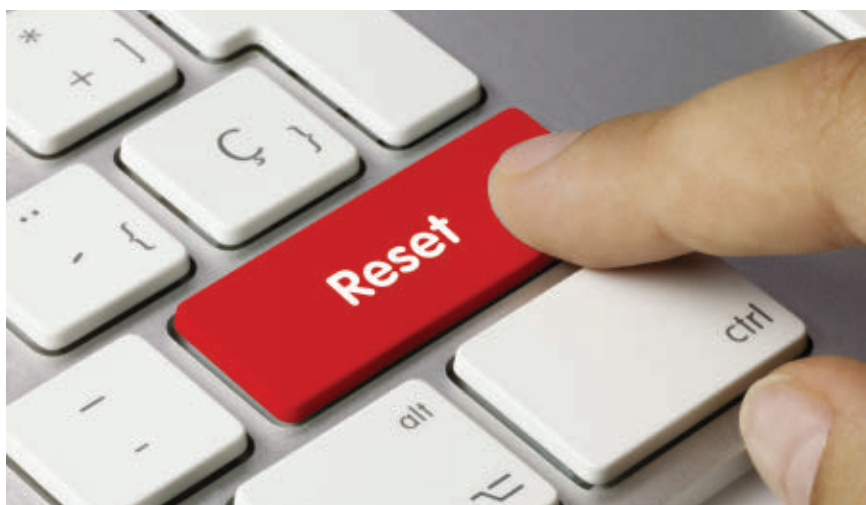
As the coronavirus pandemic shines a light on caregiving responsibilities—as most schools across the country closed starting in March—the number of employers that focus on support and add and improve such benefits may grow as organizations strategize back-to-work plans.

"The challenges for employee-caregivers have increased exponentially as a result of the risk for COVID-19 among older and vulnerable people, social-distancing requirements and 24/7 childcare responsibilities," says Candice Sherman, CEO of NEBGH. "Employers are trying to increase



support for caregiving employees by providing more backup help, flexible working hours and access to expert

resources, and some are providing relief funds to help with expenses." —Kathryn Mayer



## Pushing the Reset Button on Engagement

**"When, in your lifetime, have you had the opportunity to push the reset button this totally: personally, professionally and organizationally?" Michael Gillespie asked participants on a webinar this spring on employee engagement.**

While the founder and CEO of BlueEQ—a consulting, coaching and training organization—noted that the coronavirus pandemic has been “catastrophic,” the potential it has presented for HR leaders is undeniable. Particularly as employers begin strategizing how to resume operations as the peak of the pandemic appears to be behind us, HR has the opportunity to be a strategic partner in tackling what could be a significant challenge: employee engagement.

Among the many dimensions HR leaders will need to consider in the pursuit of engagement is the physical environment: whether they will allow work-from-home arrangements on a permanent basis, how to account for social distancing in the workplace, and even testing and other health monitoring, Gillespie says. But even more important is psychological safety.

Gillespie polled the audience on his webinar to gauge their personal concerns about heading back to work: They reported they are concerned about dealing with fearful employees, a potential outbreak at the workplace, children who are still at home, a renewed long commute, productivity, their own health.

“Leaders today have to be competent and understand how to deal with all of this stress, anxiety, fear and doubt in the workforce,” he says.

Gillespie encourages clients to envision psychological safety on a scale—the “Red Zone” representing low levels of safety and the “Blue Zone” the highest, with varying states in between.

In an unsafe environment, he says, managers may have hidden agendas, demonstrate inconsistent behaviors, micromanage and lack trust in their

employees—and, accordingly, workers are primarily motivated out of fear. Research from Harvard, Gillespie says, found staggering business results with such approaches:

- 80% of individuals lost work time worrying about an incident connected to psychological safety;
- 80% said their commitment to the organization declined because of the atmosphere;
- nearly half decreased their work effort and time spent at work; and
- 25% took their frustrations out on a customer.

On the other hand, Blue Zone environments involve high levels of trust, openness, candor and inclusion—and, in turn, peak engagement.

“It’s a place where people freely innovate, can be creative and know their contributions matter,” he says.

Given the fears workers will already be bringing with them back to the office, that type of atmosphere is a must for engagement in 2020, Gillespie notes. So, how do organizations move closer to that Blue Zone?

Psychological safety, he says, can be broken down into four quadrants that employers can actively promote:

**Learner:** A safe environment for individuals to discover, ask questions, learn from their mistakes and look for new opportunities.

**Challenger:** A “speak-up” culture, where employees can safely expose problems.

**Collaboration:** Colleagues interact freely, there’s mutual access to information and open dialogue.

**Inclusion:** People are valued, treated fairly and trust that their ideas and experiences matter, regardless of their position within the organization.

Attaining each of these is “not a linear process,” Gillespie notes. For instance, bringing people together for a project promotes both collaboration and learner safety.

“It’s a very dynamic process but one that, if it’s embedded in your culture, becomes magical,” Gillespie says. “It becomes the catalyst to get things done, to collaborate, to help organizations innovate. Psychological safety will become the competitive advantage for organizations in the future.”

—*Jan Colletta*

## Maintaining Performance, Engagement in a Pandemic

BY BRIAN KROPP



As the COVID-19 pandemic affects organizations all over the world, employees are increasingly becoming more anxious,

frustrated and fatigued. If left unattended, these feelings will impact employees’ productivity and engagement, leading to poor work quality and a disconnected workforce, and ultimately hampering an organization’s ability to succeed in these tough times.

By and large, companies have focused contingency planning on the necessary operational responses to ensure business continuity. These plans often fail to tackle the ability of workers to concentrate on their work.

HR can help managers ensure employees get the appropriate support to tackle the emotional roller coaster of this pandemic via six key strategies:

**1. Feel for the wellbeing of employees.** Identifying signs of distress among employees, both directly through conversations and indirectly through observation, is a step in the right direction for managers. Employees need an opportunity to raise issues and know that their employers care and are invested in their welfare. To promote daily interactions between managers and employees, HR should advise managers on how best to handle sensitive issues emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, including alternative work models, job security and prospects, impacts on staffing and workplace conflict.

**2. Encourage dialogue to build understanding.** Gartner analysis shows that employees’ understanding of decisions and their implications is more critical for the success of a change initiative than employees “liking” the change. Progressive managers provide for two-way conversation with their employees to ensure communication strategies improve engagement rather than harm. Interacting with managers and peers provides employees with the information and perspective they need, which allows them to express and process negative emotions and improve their feelings of control. HR can work with managers to create opportunities for two-way dialogues with their employees, which should focus on a practical view of the positive and negative effects of the current COVID-19 outbreak.

**3. Use objectives to create clarity.** A strong connection between individual performance and the achievement of business goals can boost employees’ confidence in the importance of their job, even in a challenging business environment. Similarly, having clear objectives and receiving regular updates on possible changes helps to ensure that employees maintain focus, energy and a sense of purpose. Managers can reassert the connection between employees’ work and organizational success by providing a clear view of the current organizational goals and translating the organization’s vision into their employees’ context. When employees are confident about the importance of their job to the success of the organization, they feel less anxious about their job security.

**4. Strengthen organizational values to minimize the risk of misconduct.** An unpleasant employee experience can negatively impact psychological safety by up to 35%. What’s worse, during periods of uncertainty, employee misconduct rises by as much as 33%, according to Gartner research. Aside from modeling the right behaviors, encourage whistleblowers to point out unethical practices, remind employees of the channels for reporting misconduct and highlight the consequences of noncompliance.

**5. Tailor moments of employee appreciation.** The significant disruption caused by COVID-19 will result in many employees leaning out. Organizations can stem this tide by redoubling their recognition efforts. Effective recognition not only motivates the recipient but can serve as a strong signal to other employees of behaviors they should emulate. Recognition should not be limited to monetary rewards—public acknowledgment, tokens of appreciation, development opportunities and low-cost perks are also effective recognition practices. Use the slowdown in business as an opportunity to provide incentives for employees who usually don’t have the capacity to expand.

**6. Drive engagement via innovation.** While today’s unpredictable environment will cause managers and employees to naturally become more risk-averse, fostering creativity and taking risks is critical for employee engagement and organizational performance. The disengaging impact of restrictions on innovation and risk-taking is particularly severe for high-potential employees, who tend to have a greater appetite for these types of opportunities. Emphasize the need and ability of employees to advance initiatives and find process improvements even when the organization has constraints on new investments.

During this period of uncertainty, HR should work with managers to actively embrace the concerns and emotions of their employees to maintain as much productivity and engagement as possible.

*Brian Kropp is group vice president at Gartner.*



# Creating a Smart, Safe Return-to-Work Strategy

**DESPITE TODAY'S UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGE, EXPERTS SAY HR LEADERS SHOULD LOOK FOR THE OPPORTUNITIES IN THIS FORCED CHANGE.**

**BY CAROL PATTON**

**M**any HR professionals are struggling to develop strategies that keep employees safe as they return to work. There are many more questions than answers: Should their temperature be taken before entering the building? Should they be required to wear masks or gloves? How can social distancing be maintained?

As the world slowly recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, HR professionals are now facing what may be the biggest challenge of their careers: managing and growing their business in what seems to be an impossible, impractical and intolerable working environment. However, some are discovering a break in the storm clouds. Forced change often presents opportunities that can pave the way for companies to build a more intelligent way to work and, ultimately, revolutionize how employees work together and get things done.

Senior leaders at Yoh have been meeting at least twice a week for several months, preparing the workplace for when employees physically return, says Kirt Walker, vice president of HR at the staffing and recruitment-services organization that supports approximately 15,000 global employees and independent contractors. While the company's goals have remained the same, he says, the process to achieve them has definitely changed.

Yoh's leaders have been considering many changes in their post-pandemic strategy: performing daily temperature checks of employees; requiring employees to wear masks and gloves; redesigning offices with taller partitions separating workspaces; physically returning employees to work in phases; offering hoteling, a process by which employees reserve office space on specific days instead of being assigned to a specific work area.

Meanwhile, hand-sanitizer stations have been placed throughout the main office, which has been disinfected. Employees have also been responding to weekly questionnaires about their potential exposure to COVID-19. Sample questions include: Have you been in physical contact with anyone who

tested positive for the disease? Do you have any symptoms? Have you traveled to any hot spots? So far, Walker says, one employee and an independent contractor have tested positive.

The company's leadership team also asked employees what they expect when they return.

"They were concerned about personal protective equipment [PPE], hand sanitizers, physical distancing and how they can be sure they're safe if they come in contact with someone who's been infected," Walker says, adding that leaders are also "keeping it human" by engaging returning staff in conversations to help alleviate their anxieties or fears.

Regardless of how and when states and countries allow people to physically return to their workplaces, Walker says, his company's leaders won't budge until they feel ready.

"Without encouraging any hysteria, be frank with people," he says, explaining that Yoh leaders routinely explain to employees how COVID-19 is negatively impacting the company, what's being done to reduce that impact, how they're preparing for all employees to return and what will be expected of them. "This is a process. There are going to be changes. Show empathy and have some fun. It doesn't all have to be serious."

## Work in Progress

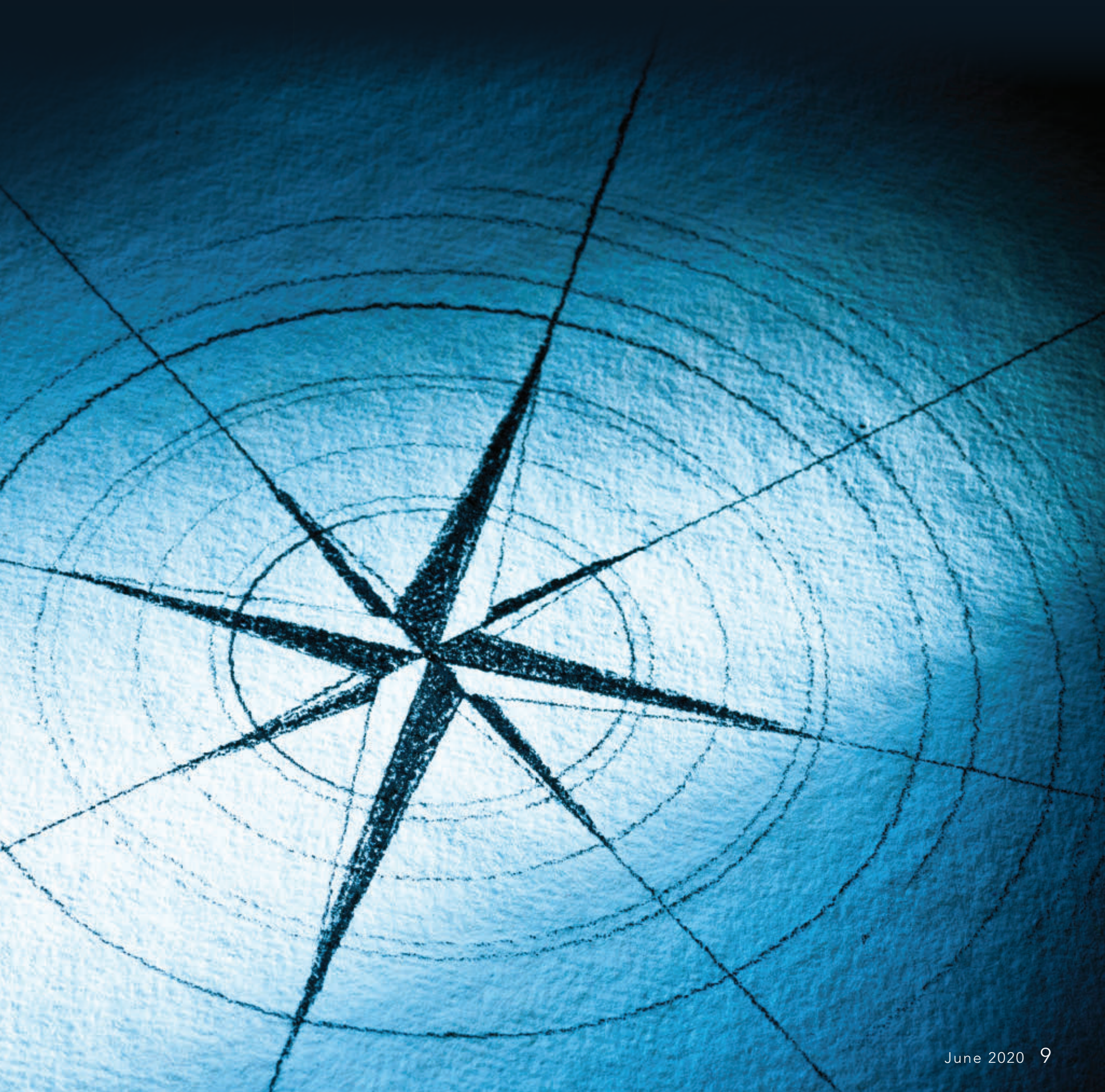
UST Global developed return-to-work guidelines for its leaders in 25 countries. The digital and technology company supports 25,000 employees around the world—which includes 1,500 independent contractors—most of whom worked from home during the peak of the pandemic.

There won't be a "big bang Monday" where all employees return on the same day, says Michael Adamson, vice president of global HR operations at UST. The recommended guidelines phase people back in to work after offices are deep-cleaned.

They also suggest using thermal scanners to take employees' temperatures, or asking workers in small offices to take their



**As the world slowly recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, HR professionals are now facing what may be the biggest challenge of their careers: managing and growing their business in what seems to be an impossible, impractical and intolerable working environment.**





# Return-to-Work Strategy

own daily temperature; redesigning interior spaces so that people sit 6 feet apart; installing hand sanitizers at entry points and in restrooms; and intensely cleaning all common areas, including door handles and elevator buttons.

Company leaders also participate in webinars and town halls to share daily challenges and suggestions on how to adapt the guidelines in various locations.

Adamson believes that employee emotions and behaviors may need to be closely monitored for a while. HR leaders should be asking, how are workers reacting and coping?

"We're moving slowly," Adamson says. "It's going to be really interesting how this changes the way we collaborate and work together."

## Avoid Cleaning House

Among the key questions HR professionals have been asking Karina Sterman, partner at Greenberg Glusker law firm, is whether all employees must return to work at the same time.

"The first wave of returning people is something HR can do on a staggered basis," she says. "Schedule rest and meal breaks and focus on staggering [employees] so that you can maximize physical distancing between them."

Sterman adds that EEOC guidance "expressly authorizes" employers to check employees' temperatures. Another best practice is to work with an in-house or external "safety czar" who can evaluate your facility from both an OSHA and CDC perspective, she says.

If some employees don't feel comfortable returning to work, ask why. Maybe they've been diagnosed with PTS (post-traumatic stress) and can't be surrounded by co-workers or customers. What are they proposing as an accommodation? If reasonable, she says, implement it and communicate to the remaining workforce that you incorporated an employee suggestion that makes the workplace safer.

Even if their reason isn't valid, still ask them for suggestions. If unrealistic, she says, you will need to make a decision about whether you want them to remain out on unpaid leave or part ways if you need their position filled.

However, be careful about using COVID-19 as an excuse to let people



**"It's going to be really interesting how this changes the way we collaborate and work together."**

—MICHAEL ADAMSON,  
UST GLOBAL

go, which can result in employee discrimination or retaliation claims.

"Usually, [employers] say [those workers] have been dead weight for the last five years but haven't done anything about them and figure this is a good time to get rid of them," Sterman says. "My question is, why didn't that person get fired four months ago, before COVID-19? If you can't articulate the reasons about what's different now ... you're setting yourself up for a wrongful-termination suit."

## Connect and Communicate

One of the most common mistakes HR professionals can make right now is assuming that what worked or didn't work before the pandemic will or won't in the future, adds John Bremen, managing director of human capital benefits and global head of thought leadership and innovation at Willis Towers Watson.

HR needs to abandon all prior assumptions and place every idea on the table, he says. But, above all, communicate workplace changes—the what and the why—before employees return to the workplace so they don't feel ambushed. Tell them why the salad bar in the cafeteria will be closed or that the workspace has been altered due to social distancing.

The same goes for communicating new employee policies or practices. Tell them that wearing masks is now required or, if they're feeling ill, they must stay or go home. Also, consider placing EAP counselors on-site to help employees deal with negative emotions like fear and anxiety, as well as the "constant pivoting of activity," he says.

Bremen says employees trust employers who demonstrate these "big five" principles: authenticity,

transparency, empathy, trust and credibility. These ideas can even be extended to employers that have had to let workers go: Some companies are making job-sharing platforms accessible to workers whose job no longer exists to help them find a new position at either their current employer or another organization.

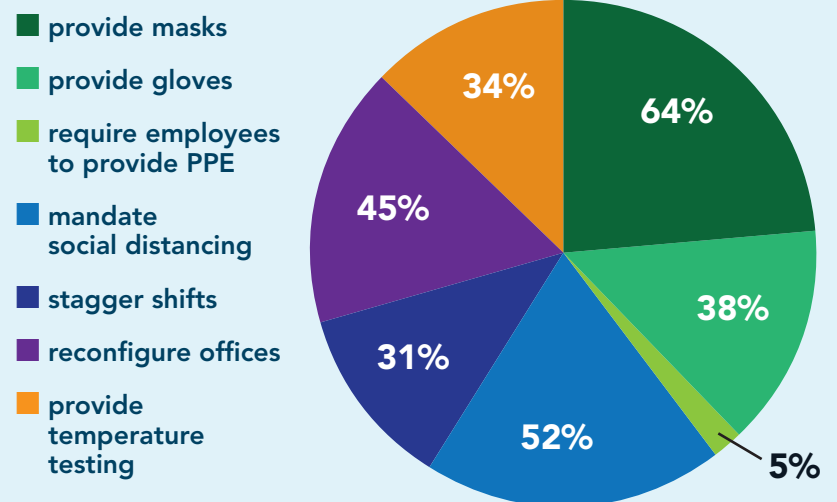
protocols, [including] a dedicated quarantine area, adjusted seating so people are 6 feet apart, have a clear one-way traffic pattern and hired someone to stand at the front door to screen [visitors] coming in and hand them masks and gloves. We're thinking about keeping the door open so people don't have to touch the handles."

Three other essential offices have stayed open with a volunteer, skeleton crew. As of this writing, the company plans to shelter in place until May 11. But before any more offices open, Byrne says, the number of COVID-19 cases must drop off in that location, and then, only 25% of the staff would be brought back to the work site on a volunteer basis.

"We're going to take it slow, learn from others," Byrne says, adding three employees in Europe and one in the U.S. were infected with COVID-19.

## Workplace Safety

In a survey of 150 employers this spring about their plans to bring employees back to workplaces, BlankRome found:



While the pandemic has flipped the world of work upside down, Bremen says, it's also giving HR professionals opportunities for growth and change involving how work is performed.

"There's a lot of invention going on right now," Bremen says. "I'm seeing companies and leaders coming together really to support their employees. That part has truly been inspirational."

## Take it Slow

At the end of April, CDK Global, a technology company that serves the auto industry, opened one of its essential offices in Petaluma, Calif., which processes license plates for the state. Six of its 25 workers volunteered to return to the workplace.

"It's sort of a pilot," says Amy Byrne, executive vice president and chief HR and communications officer at the company that supports 9,000 global workers. "We put in the state's

"We're not leading, we're lagging a week or two behind governments that ease restrictions so we can have some experience with how that's going without making employees vulnerable."

It's important to shift employees' focus toward the company's future, before and after they return to the workplace. CDK Global frequently communicates business concerns and news to employees, including about business strategies and successes, no matter how small, which gives workers a renewed sense of hope and optimism.

Looking ahead, she believes the world of work won't return to normal—if at all—any time soon.

"It's not like when [everyone] gets back, there will be blue skies and the economy is back on track," she says. "People will still be struggling."

Send questions or comments about this story to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).



**"It's not like when [everyone] gets back, there will be blue skies and the economy is back on track. People will still be struggling."**

—AMY BYRNE, CDK GLOBAL

The pandemic is driving the need for tools to meet new communications and safety concerns.

BY TOM STARNER

# Tech Tools in the Age of COVID-19

**N**ot long ago—in a world that seems far, far away—human resource leaders had their sights set on mission-critical issues: how to attract new, high-performing talent or boost that ever-pesky employee engagement with the perfect balance of benefits and compensation.

While those key talent-management challenges remain, they have been subsumed by the COVID-19 pandemic and all it entails—from how to manage a hastily arranged shelter-in-place workforce to ensuring employees who need to work on-site are safe.

Bottom line, HR is now primarily focused on figuring out how to remain effective, if not agile, in its reaction to coronavirus' economic decimation.

In all major global disruptions of the past, there has been an opportunity for technology to ease pain points affecting employees—and COVID-19 is no different. Following is an overview of a few tech-based solutions helping in key areas, mainly remote work, employee safety and expanded, effective communications.

## Workplace from Facebook

Christine Trodella, head of Americas at Workplace from Facebook, says many companies and philanthropic organizations have reached out to Facebook to understand what it's doing to support and guide its employees during these unprecedented times. According to Trodella, the company has seen growing interest in topics related to how to practice self-care and navigate new routines as employees shift to home or remote work environments.

"At Workplace from Facebook, we help our customers and their dispersed employees close the communication gaps that may arise as they are forced to adapt to a new remote work environment," she says. "We know it's not always easy."



Christine Trodella,  
Head of Americas,  
Workplace from  
Facebook

Trodella shared two Facebook resources that leverage best practices it has seen work internally, as well as among customers, to help other companies.

The first, *Workplace: Remote Working Resource Hub*, contains tools, tips and advice to keep people informed and connected so everybody can be "apart together." Meanwhile, *Facebook: Working Remotely—How We Make It Work* offers resources that are currently supporting Facebook employees

while they work remotely worldwide to help others on the same journey.

Glenn Sanford, founder of eXp Realty, a Seattle-based

Workplace by Facebook customer, says that, with a workforce of more than 28,000 real estate agents and 600 staff working 100% remotely, Workplace complements the firm's virtual campus and enables it to further connect its work community for instant communication, collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

"I encourage all agents to reach out to me via Workplace," Sanford says, noting that the company uses chat rather than email to replicate the instantaneous and off-the-cuff conversations that happen in an office environment.

"Agents freely share their best practices in videos and posts, bringing the best of the best from around the world," he adds. "We also launched a Workplace Group, eXp Kidz Korner, for caregivers who are juggling work and engaging their kids who are home due to school closings and stay-at-home orders."

In times of emergency, Trodella says, organization-wide collaboration tools like Workplace make it easy to live stream meetings or announcements, support two-way communication or even employ bots to quickly gather feedback from employees.

"Workplace is positioned to support companies needing to adapt to remote work environments, especially if they're doing it for the first time," Trodella says. "We have years of experience connecting frontline workers and now, more than ever, we know it is imperative for companies to utilize the best technology to minimize friction and close communication gaps."



Glenn Sanford,  
Founder,  
eXp Realty





## INSIDE HR TECH

By **Steve Boese**/Columnist



## HR's Post-Pandemic Challenges

I'm not sure if it is too early yet to be thinking of the post-pandemic world, the so-called "new normal" or whatever phrase gets coined to describe the changed environment

and workplaces that we, collectively, are going to concurrently inherit and create.

I am pretty confident that whatever is coming next will look, feel and respond to our actions and decisions in really different and hard to predict ways. My colleagues and I at H3 HR Advisors have been carving out time each week to research, exchange ideas and begin the process of articulating how we see work, workplaces, HR and HR technology adapting in the post-pandemic world. We are also staking out some signposts that we think the clients we support, and the people they support, can use to best navigate this new normal, including key areas they—and we'd argue all—organizations need to focus on. I'd like to share some of these early ideas here, and after you have read through, I'd love your thoughts.

**Enhanced Customer Focus and Increased Business Agility** It's pretty clear that every organization of any size, located anywhere has been impacted in some way by the coronavirus. Certainly, the headlines make it clear that a significant majority of these effects have been negative.

From an HR and people-management perspective, all organizations have their own set of unique challenges and problems. But if I had to think of one essential or fundamental element and concept that links them all together, or rather links their ability to respond to rapid changes and uncertainty, it is agility.

The ability, capability, culture and mindset that allow you to quickly and effectively transition your organization's direction, attention and people to changing conditions is of primary concern in relatively stable conditions, and it becomes an essential element of business survival in times like now. There are so many elements of agility that I am going to take the time to consider them more deeply, and break them down in future columns, but for now I am focusing on the first, pre-condition of agility: understanding your customers, (internal or external), and further, understanding how their customers' needs are changing.

**Time to Take Employee Wellbeing More Seriously** While just about every organization has been investing in wellbeing programs aimed at improving physical, mental and even financial health of their workforces, let's be honest: We didn't have to treat these with utmost urgency and care. After all, just a few months ago, times were really good, the economy and most organizations were humming along nicely and unemployment was at a 50-year low. Sure, workers had wellbeing challenges and, yes, we invested in addressing them, but on the list of HR and organizational priorities, ask yourself honestly, where did employee wellbeing really rank?

Now, we have a perfect storm of factors that will impact the wellbeing of every single person in your workforce, and every person you may hire in the near future. There are the actual physical impacts of the coronavirus (and we right now have no real idea about

long-term health effects for people who recover from the illness), as well as the acute mental-health issues that illness, grief, fear, uncertainty and social isolation can contribute to or even cause. Finally, there are the many people who have suffered incredible financial losses and what is certain to be lingering damage due to job loss.

Going forward, wellbeing—heck, just basic "safety"—is going to have to be the most urgent HR-leadership demand, at least until we can get to a place where more people feel comfortable riding an elevator with another person. Everything about wellbeing you've accomplished in the past has been stripped away, and HR leaders have to rebuild it all—while simultaneously taking care of yourselves and your family. HR is starting with a default position of "It's not safe to be in the workplace." Think about that, and I think you would agree that wellbeing is the primary challenge right now.

**Modern Leadership Needs to be Reevaluated** Of the three important business and organization dynamics we are thinking about at H3 HR, certainly the most apparent and obvious one centers on leadership. We are all seeing the news and assessing how organizations' leaders are reacting, responding and communicating to their stakeholders about the current set of challenges. Most particularly, we are looking long and hard at how organizations are treating their (usually) self-identified "most important asset"—their people. We will hear and read what they say and do and, fairly or unfairly, we and the marketplace will indeed form opinions and make judgements.

Everything we previously thought was important about leadership is probably, mostly, still important. But in a post-pandemic world, the classic archetype of a successful leader will have to be re-imagined. Sure, it is easy to say that our leaders need to be strong, resolute, clear and honest. Those are givens. How high or low on your current list of most important leader attributes would you place empathy? How about humility? Or perhaps even vulnerability? I would argue that these traits, and probably a few more, are more important in times of intense and acute stress and business challenges that we used to think. But in the new normal, there will be much more required from our workplace and societal leaders. And that includes HR leaders.

It's still early in all this. These are what we see as the important things to focus on moving ahead. In future pieces, I plan to expand on each area, and dig into some of the tools and technologies that will play a part in supporting HR in these efforts.

In almost any trying set of circumstances, the best opportunity for organizations and individuals to succeed and thrive will be to identify the most important areas of focus, be as disciplined as you can to manage these areas and, finally, reserve some time, space and energy to keep yourself and the people you care about healthy. It is cliché to say, "We will all get through this together," but that doesn't mean it is not true. And cliché doesn't mean you don't mean it—I mean it, and I think you do as well.

Good luck to all, be safe, be well.

*Steve Boese is a co-chair of HRE's HR Technology Conference & Exposition®. Send questions or comments to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

## Ceridian Dayforce Employee Safety Monitor

Eric Schuster, vice president of Dayforce product management at Ceridian, the global HCM technology company, says the company's newly released Employee Safety Monitor, offered at no charge, helps customer workforces stay as safe as possible during this unprecedented health crisis.

Using Dayforce Employee Safety Monitor, employees can report their COVID-19 status and allow their employer to effectively monitor their location, understand their movement and identify potential exposure to co-workers. In addition, up-to-date location-based notifications can inform employees about important safety information.

"Employers are met with the challenge of acting quickly and confidently to maintain critical business operations, while ensuring the safety and wellbeing of employees," he says.

With this solution, employers can also determine if their employees are working from home or performing critical functions at their primary work location—helping to manage the exposure risk of their employees.

Also, Schuster explains, the Dayforce platform allows businesses to better communicate with employees. For example, real-time location-based notifications can update employees about important health and safety information now, through the duration of the pandemic and beyond.

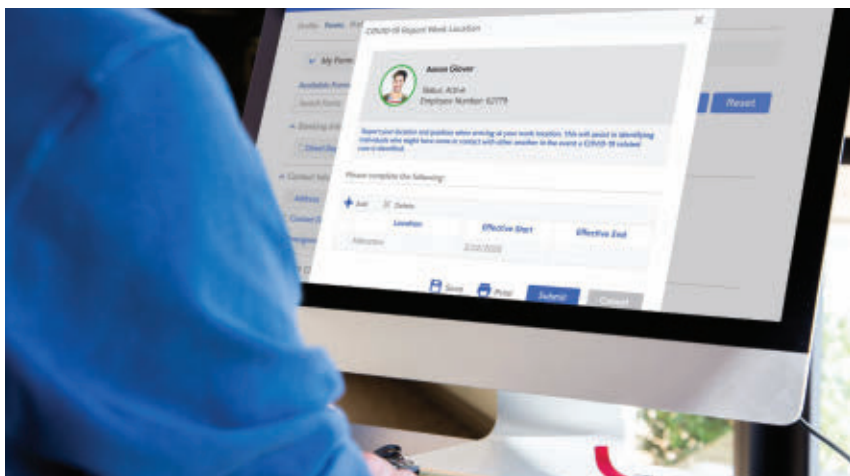
"Businesses can effectively communicate the latest information with their employees through work email, personal email or text messages," Schuster says. "This keeps employees up to date on critical news from their employers, helping to enhance communication, safety, transparency and engagement."

Looking ahead, as the U.S. emerges from the crisis, Schuster says, employers will need to be smarter than ever to keep up with the accelerating rate of change and increased complexities of work. He believes they must look to modern, intelligent software that enables their employees to access the tools and resources they need to perform their job effectively—"from anywhere, at any time, on any device."

"Longer-term, you can foresee HCM software providing actionable tools to help businesses anticipate changes within their workforce and react appropriately," Schuster says.

## AlertMedia

Alex Vaccaro, senior vice president of marketing at AlertMedia, says HR leaders are increasingly being challenged to select and manage emergency communication technologies. And more than any other recent emergency scenario,



Ceridian Dayforce Employee Safety Monitor

the COVID-19 pandemic has brought intense attention to how organizations communicate before, during and after such emergencies.

“When a disaster strikes, phone trees and email aren’t sufficient to keep people safe, informed and connected,” Vaccaro says, adding that AlertMedia

software lets employers set up a specific “Event Page” where employees can seek updated information, share photos, etc. Administrators can send a message out to hundreds of people via multiple channels (email, text, phone, Slack, etc.) in seconds.

Vaccaro says businesses like Kawasaki, DHL, Volkswagen, the Salvation Army and numerous professional sports teams are using the AlertMedia critical communications platform to communicate during emergencies.

“Numerous mass-notification companies were born after Sept. 11, but our technology was built for a mobile workforce,” she says. “HR often has a large role in the company’s emergency communications strategy—and the technology will be equally valuable post-pandemic.”

In fact, Vaccaro says, since the COVID-19 danger accelerated, hundreds of new customers sign up for AlertMedia technology to be able to keep their people safe, informed and connected. It now has customers across 100 countries, and they are communicating everything from workplace closures to changing business operations.

“Most of all, when employees see their safety and wellbeing is prioritized by the organization, employee morale, retention and productivity increase,” she adds.

Vaccaro explains that AlertMedia customers are using the technology in a variety of ways to support their employees. For instance, healthcare companies have tapped it to fill shifts, organizations are checking in on

*continued on page 16*

## EMERGING INTELLIGENCE

By John Sumser/Columnist



# It's Time for New Approaches to Engagement

The headlines are appealing: Employee-engagement scores are up across the board. It's both true and not the whole story. Your engagement

questions from six months ago probably won't tell you much about what is really going on with employees in the middle of a pandemic.

With U.S. unemployment surging towards Depression-era highs, anyone who has a job is grateful. They are also busily trying to protect their piece of turf. They're scared, uncomfortable and in transition.

It's unlikely that workers are feeling better about their work in this trying time. Work is harder. Productivity is harder. Collaboration is harder. And even the immediate future is hard to see. This is not a recipe for improved employee attitudes.

Right now, engagement is really a measure of the degree to which the workforce tells management what it wants to hear.

Engagement analysis depends on self-reporting as the data source. They are surveys after all. You ask, they answer.

We've spent the past few years studying what correlates to employee satisfaction and then developing surveys to get repeatable questions in order to track the same data over time. We asked employees what we wanted to know. We encouraged, reminded, then coerced them to respond, whether they wanted to or not. We told them explicitly or implicitly that we wanted them to say they were happy and everything was great. If we didn't like the results, we changed survey vendors.

We didn't really want to know the truth. We never had any intention of changing things. And we rarely, if ever, asked people what they wanted to tell us.

Self-reporting bias is a well-understood thing. Like eyewitness testimony, self-reported data is interesting but never the whole picture. In the rush to have something positive to say about our current situation, the pundits have overlooked the obvious: Everything has changed, and we don't know when, if ever, work will look like it did before COVID-19.

More so than ever, employees feel pressure to tell employers what they want to hear.

I asked a few engagement company executives whether or not they would be offering tools to counterbalance the skew in the data. “Now that the power balance has shifted back from employees to the employer, are you helping your clients validate their results?” It's apparently a little early for that. They all either dodged the question or just said “No.”

To really understand what's going on in the workforce, you need multiple data streams. Asking employees is a good start. But we need different questions, to be willing to listen to what employees have to say and to be committed to doing something to address the issues we find. Interpreting and validating survey responses requires a level of depth that is best executed with intelligent tools.

There are several offerings that can help you gain a deeper, more balanced perspective.

Ultimate Software's UltiPro Perception uses language analysis to unearth the meaning behind survey responses. The tool encourages companies to ask open-ended questions that generate a free text response. In the aggregate, these comments

are much more likely to show the qualitative state of the workforce. UltiPro Perception is the industry leader.

KeenCorp's Heat Maps looks at what is actually happening during work rather than what employees say on a survey. The tool runs in the background, analyzing changes in language across the full sweep of communications and detects where there is stress, discord and also where things are doing well. KeenCorp's offering is not sentiment analysis. Rather, it looks at behavioral change expressed in language and is a compliment to sentiment analysis.

JiveSoftware includes sentiment analysis in its complex suite of offerings. The company positions it as a part of its analytics package.

This is a time of both great change and opportunity to look at our processes and figure out what we should be doing differently. When our workforce shifts from centralized to distributed work, we need better, different and deeper tools and ideas.

Understanding how the workforce is doing requires individualized connection and dialogue. Taking a pulse can no longer mean just finding out if people have one. We need to find better ways to understand what is really happening, connect with each other in meaningful ways, and build the trust needed to move forward in a time where listening, curiosity and having the right information are the foundation to adapt and innovate.

*John Sumser is the principal analyst at HRExaminer. He researches the impact of data, analytics, AI and associated ethical issues on the workplace. Send questions or comments to hreletters@lrp.com.*



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## HR IN THE FLOW OF WORK

By Josh Bersin/Columnist



# Building Organizational Resilience

This pandemic has demonstrated just how brittle our society is. A tiny virus has drastically upset our lives, our economies and our societies.

*In a time like this, resilience—the ability to adapt and bounce back—will be one of the most important characteristics that will help us recover.*

But how do we *design our organizations for resilience*? Here are four things to consider:

### 1. Resilience demands distributed control with centralized coordination, not centralized control with distributed execution.

In order to prepare for the unforeseen, the military branches have developed highly trained, distributed teams that are enabled and empowered by coordination and data. We need to consider such a model in HR.

Traditional HR was seen as a low-cost, high-value service function—one that responded to employee needs and delivered services at scale. This is not the optimum model in a crisis. We need to distribute authority fast, make sure teams have the capabilities needed and coordinate the response.

Early this year, the senior executives of a global retailer heard from HR leaders in Italy and China that they were letting employees go because customers were not patronizing the stores. The company empowered local teams to shut down operations and quickly shared this firsthand information so others could act.

As the military has learned, we only win wars when the people on the frontline are well-trained, experienced, coordinated and supported with ammunition, backup and data. Think about this in the context of your HR transformation.

### 2. Resilience demands high quality, real-time data.

Facts, detail and real-time data matter. We can't respond to a crisis if we don't know where it is, how fast it's spreading and can't separate truth from speculation.

In recent months, we've seen what happens when facts are not forthcoming or are obfuscated. In a company, you can't afford to operate without complete transparency. In order for a "coordinated attack and response" to take place, accurate, real-time data is critical.

I recently talked with people analytics experts who had created real-time dashboards to inform managers where employees are located, where the virus is spreading and where travel is prohibited. On an employee level, managers knew who was working from home, living alone and might be at risk so programs and decisions could be appropriately tailored.

Such analytics are critical to resilience. If you haven't invested in this infrastructure yet, please do it now.

### 3. Resilience requires leaders who care.

Resilient organizations have leaders whom people want to follow.

Our *COVID-19 Pulse of HR* found that financial security, health and family welfare are issues on top of people's minds. If senior leaders don't empathize and relate to this, your company won't recover well.

If you want to build resilience, you have to build on a basis of trust. And this means leaders who listen, care and respond. Companies such as Unilever, Salesforce, Wegman's, Novartis, Nextdoor and IBM understand this and created business models around empathy and transparency. Their CEOs "walk the talk."

Empathy for your customers, communities, employees and their families goes a long way. Certainly, it's a more emotional way of thinking about business leadership, but in a crisis, empathy must be a top priority.

One more thought: You can't fake empathy in times like this. Companies that sincerely care will respond faster than those who don't.

### 4. Resilience thrives in a community, not just an organization.

The most resilient, adaptive and high-performing companies are made up of people who *know each other, like each other and support each other*.

In the military, soldiers are trained to look out for fellow soldiers ("Nobody will be left behind."). How many of us have a battle buddy at work?

Decades of management philosophy have ignored this need. Remember the forced rankings and the Peter Principle models? These approaches pitted people against each other and created internal competition.

Now we need a sense of oneness. We need to know each other, speak up and discuss problems, and have a family-like sense of belonging. Certainly, companies aren't families (we do lay people off), but when there is a sense of collective culture, a company can adapt quickly.

When I visit companies, I always observe how people behave. Are people nice to each other? Friendly? Respectful? Do they talk or wait for the boss to talk first?

Sure enough, in the highest-performing companies, I always sense a feeling of "we know each other" and "we know how to work together." Such social bonds are vital.

Ultimately, building resilience in our companies is coupled with liberating the innate resilience in each of us. When we give people adequate pay, healthcare, safety and security, they can adapt and grow.

*Josh Bersin is an analyst, author, educator and thought leader focusing on the global talent market and the challenges and trends impacting business workforces around the world. Send questions or comments to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

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employees working from home to assess their needs, manufacturing companies have surveyed employees prior to their shift start time to assess symptoms and automate a response based on survey answers.

Virtually all companies are communicating around government updates such as changes to shelter-in-place orders," she says.

One AlertMedia customer, Marquette Management, a Naperville, Ill., real estate property management company, is an essential business with most employees still working. Mindy Helms, the firm's director of HR, is using AlertMedia to stay engaged with the company's workforce.

"We have been using AlertMedia to send weekly inspirational messages, video messages from our partners, fun videos and surveys to keep employees engaged," Helms says. "We want our people to feel supported and are using AlertMedia as an engagement tool to stay in touch with employees who are working from home."

Helms explains that not all of the company's employees have computers, so they are using their mobile device to stay connected.

"AlertMedia is important for us because we can connect with our team members via any channel," she says.

Another customer, Metro Diner, one of 2,000 companies using AlertMedia to manage emergency communications



**"When employees see their safety and wellbeing is prioritized by the organization, employee morale, retention and productivity increase."**

— ALEX VACCARO,  
ALERTMEDIA

in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, is communicating with furloughed employees. The Florida-based restaurant franchise is sending daily messages to their team of nearly 5,000 who have been furloughed due to locally mandated closures. They have provided their people direction on how to file for unemployment, how to apply for grants, and how to take advantage of the many benefits still available to them including free meals.

"AlertMedia has allowed us to stay in touch with our people – people who mean a lot to us," says Hugh Connerty, co-chairman of Metro Diner.

"To create a great place to work, you need to create a safe place to work," Vaccaro says. "Employee safety has to be at the top of HR's agenda in order for any other HR initiative or program to achieve its full potential."

## Paradox

Even during a raging pandemic, there are employers in talent acquisition mode. Some of them are turning to Paradox, a Scottsdale, Ariz., conversational AI platform vendor that recently launched Virtual Hiring Events to meet pandemic-specific recruiting needs.

Built around Paradox's artificial intelligence assistant Olivia, the new product enables employers to quickly and easily create a virtual event and engage with people directly in a simple, chat-based environment, according to Josh Zywiec, chief marketing officer.

"Development on Virtual Hiring Events accelerated after an increase in client requests brought on by travel restrictions and social-distancing requirements," Zywiec says, noting that brands such as CVS Health, McDonald's, Unilever, Procter & Gamble, Intel, Wendy's and Aramark are Paradox customers.

Zywiec explains that Paradox clients are experiencing challenges they've never seen, which forced the company to think about new ways to add value. He explains that, while many companies have frozen hiring, many others are still actively hiring—and even the ones that aren't still want to keep candidates engaged.

"We're proudest of the flexibility of our product to help clients adapt to challenges they've never seen before," Zywiec says.

For example, one of the nation's largest healthcare companies—a company facing a massive hiring spree—worked with Paradox to build automated candidate capture and screening mechanisms to help displaced hospitality workers find a new job quickly.

Another customer, a large professional-services firm, used the firm's AI assistant to help current employees affected by shutdown industries like hospitality find jobs within other areas of the business that were hiring, such as healthcare.



"The thing employees crave most during situations like this is clear, consistent communication," he says. If employees are furloughed or have to defer compensation, they want quick answers about what this means for them. Also, if they were in-cycle for a promotion or a new job in the business, they want to know the impacts—and the next steps.

**"People want to know how the company is responding, what resources are available to them while they're remote and how policies might change once the country opens up."**

— JOSH ZYWIEC, PARADOX

"People want to know how the company is responding, what resources are available to them while they're remote and how policies might change once the country opens up and we start to go back to work in offices," Zywiec says, adding that, while HR, talent teams and hiring managers can certainly answer a lot of those questions on their own, it's not particularly efficient for repetitive FAQs.

"Giving employees a tool—like an AI assistant—where they can get quick answers to common questions is a simple step that can go a long way toward ensuring everyone feels informed and engaged," Zywiec says. "And what could be more important during this current crisis?"

*Send questions or comments about this story to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

## PEOPLE SIDE OF DIGITAL

By Jason Averbook / Columnist



# The HR Book on Coronavirus

HR is part of the history book and we're part of writing the next book, all at once.

That's a fascinating intersection, and one that should have all of us thinking

about mindset. The concept of mindset may sound soft or abstract, but in the world in which we are now living, it's the single most important component of driving not only digital success but business success overall.

As a business owner, one of the most fascinating things about the pandemic and its global impact is that there is no book written about this situation. For example, in finance, if we want to find out how to do accounting, we'd read a book. If we wanted to learn about HR policy, we'd look in a book.

But when everything stops, when everything shuts down, when work changes overnight as the world changes overnight—there is no book written for that. So, when we think about mindset, combined with what I just said, the most important thing for us all to remember is that we are writing the book. Right now, we are all writing the book together.

Let's think about that book, taking just three of our normal people processes and exploring how they're changing: onboarding, performance and governance.

**Writing the New Book: Onboarding** Onboarding must now be thought of as digital-first, and virtual.

Will people still go "to" an office in the next normal? Possibly. Will workers still go "to" work, depending on their white collar or blue collar? Possibly.

The one thing we know for sure is that, in our respective organizations, people will continue to work. Therefore, we need to develop processes, capabilities and journeys. More important than ever, journeys are

the vehicle to help people get through something.

In the old world, a new hire had humans with whom to interact face to face, eye to eye, to walk them through the culture and compliance aspects of onboarding. In the new world of work, we need to make sure that experience—a moment that really matters—comes to life in a digital format. This is where the concept of journey is so important. You can almost think of it like Process + Human = Journey. Taking it one step further, journey is the equivalent of digital.

Onboarding also needs to become virtual, which means we need to think about how to flow routings in the organization, how to train people on what it means to work in the organization, how to embed values and culture in a virtual way—and how to get things done. All of this needs to be designed to be virtual.

**Writing the New Book: Performance** Another process that's so important: How do I measure performance? Let's really think about this for a second. This is one of those HR processes of old that requires massive unlearning. Up until now, we have been measuring performance tied to the book that was used when everyone was a union employee, everyone was hourly, when we tied performance to compensation.

We don't do that anymore.

In the now of work, we need to measure how people are feeling, how they're doing in their work and understand exactly where they are, what we can do to help and how they're feeling about their specific work. When we flip our mindset in this way, a rating isn't as important. A rating is not reality. We need to shift from the world of rating to the world of reality, realizing that our workforce is different than it's ever been before.

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# Changing Tech Dynamics in Asia and Beyond

Ray Wang, HR Tech Festival Asia keynoter, provides insights on the global future of HR tech.

*This article was originally published on HRE's sister site hrmasia.com. It has been updated and lightly edited*

R “Ray” Wang (*pronounced WAH-NG*) is well-known across the technology and start-up hub of Silicon Valley. With a 30-year career across software, consulting and business research, his analysis of workforce trends and technology advances is sought after from business leaders across that broad spectrum, and he has some unique, data-backed ideas on workforce management in the digital age.

That’s covered in great part across his *A Software Industry Insider* blog, which is a must-read in Silicon Valley and beyond. From the sprawling campuses of giants like Facebook, Google and Amazon, to the start-up businesses still based in the garages of hopeful founders (and their parents), Wang’s observations, advice and insight are part of the unseen infrastructure keeping the U.S. technology industry constantly evolving and growing.

Wang is also a prominent and dynamic keynote speaker, delivering addresses at the biggest tech conferences around the world, as well as in more intimate executive settings such as the annual World Economic Forum at Davos in Switzerland.

Still on his 2020 calendar despite the coronavirus disruptions is the HR Tech Festival Asia, where Wang will be delivering a keynote address on the state of the technology industry

and how it is helping HR teams get the most out of their staff, and themselves. Originally scheduled for May 12-13, the event will now take place Sept. 29-30 at the Suntec Singapore Convention and Exhibition Centre.

## The Key Question on Tech

Wang says much of the application of workforce technology comes down to one question: “Can a work process be augmented with technology, or should it be automated because humans are actually not very good at it?” he asks. “All those kinds of things come into play.”

Wang considers his five years with Forrester Research to be vital to his realization that a wide range of stakeholders participate in every HR-technology decision.

“While I was there, I started to understand how clients view the world, how vendors view the world and, most importantly, how partners view the world,” he says. “Looking at it like a three-legged stool is really how we try to help everybody.

“You typically have these technology scenarios where the customer is trying to solve a problem, partners are there to help him out or a technology vendor is trying to help,” he adds. “And somewhere in between all that, you get to the answer.”

## On the Horizon

With such a rich history of experience and continuing analysis, Wang frequently gets asked about the

future of HR technology and what is getting him excited at the moment.

Right now, he is most closely watching the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence around the world.

“It’s really transforming how work’s going to be done and how insights are being delivered to democratize decision-making across the organization,” he tells *HRM Magazine Asia*.

In particular, he’s looking forward to AI’s potential to create digital feedback loops—networks that allow organizations to think about what’s next, he says.

“This could be used to improve anything from figuring out which employees should be given more training, more opportunities to be promoted or which employees actually need more motivation or more incentive so they’re more aligned with a particular organization and what’s actually happening,” he says. “Artificial intelligence is playing a huge role in terms of creating these opportunities for organizations, but we must also apply design principles for digital ethics for the sake of humanity.”

Most recently, Wang says, these applications have been used to great effect in regulatory and compliance efforts for complex organizations with large numbers of employees and projects.

“Oops! It turns out we hired people under the age of 18 and didn’t



pay them appropriately, or we were supposed to calculate benefits a certain way,” Wang lists as common scenarios that a well-considered examination of data can help an organization get ahead of. “Also, if you’ve got CSR initiatives that you’re trying to go after, algorithms can help you know where you stand in terms of your organization and compliance.”

## Singapore-Bound

Wang says he is looking forward to sharing some Asia-specific insights during the Singapore event.

“I’ll be talking about the changing dynamic that’s happening in Asia right now,” he says. “People like to talk about the war for talent, but I like to look at it a little bit differently. All across Asia, the skill sets for the future are being built.

“Every company and every university’s playing its role and, along the way, employees are learning from each other.”

HR Tech Festival Asia will be held Sept. 29-30 in Singapore. Visit [hrtechfestivalasia.com](http://hrtechfestivalasia.com) for more information.

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## Writing the New Book: Governance

I want to talk about the concept of getting organizations aligned, a new approach to governance. In today’s world, more than ever, mindset needs to be created. Whether it be from the top or with the top, it needs to be created in a way that aligns the HR or people leadership team, where it is coordinated and where it is focused.

The days are over where we can run HR and the people function in a siloed manner. We still have specialists

and we will still need specialists. But more important than these specialized siloes is consistency: in workforce experience, journeys and communication, as well as how HR delivers service, gets things done and answers questions. It all needs to be consistent, coherent and, most importantly, coordinated.

We have an opportunity to write a new book when it comes to onboarding, performance and governance—three things we were

already struggling with as an HR function. In this coronavirus era, we get a reset, a chance to start fresh. And once again, the book isn’t written. This is our opportunity to write the book.

Every single person in the HR function should be working together today to write their book. Write the book that works for you and for your organization, the one that’s going to drive the success of your business.

It’s scary when there’s no book. But, at the same time, we have the most amazing

opportunity we’ve ever had before. Let’s not squander it as a community, as an industry and as a family.

*Jason Averbuck is a leading analyst, thought leader and consultant in the area of HR, the future of work and the impact technology can have on that future. He is the co-founder and CEO of Leapgen, a global consultancy helping organizations shape their future workplace. Send questions or comments to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

The coronavirus pandemic finds more employees struggling—and employers playing catch-up in the rush to help. BY KATHRYN MAYER

# A Turning Point for Mental Health

**T**he coronavirus pandemic has put a spotlight on mental health like never before, with a slew of startling statistics revealing the effects of the crisis: The majority of employees say they are dealing with some type of mental health issue as a result of the pandemic. Many are scared about their physical health, their childcare responsibilities, new realities of social distancing and remote work. Financial stressors are sky-high, with employees worried about losing their jobs, having less money or seeing their 401(k) balances drop. The vast majority of employees say it's the most stressful time of their career—even more stressful than major events like Sept. 11 and the 2008 Great Recession.

"It's difficult for the most resilient of us right now. And for those who are vulnerable in any number of ways, it's that much more challenging," says LuAnn Heinen, vice president of wellbeing and workforce strategy at the Business Group on Health. "Those who have been struggling with mental health conditions are significantly disadvantaged with COVID. There are new stressors, family stressors, work—all of that and everyone adjusting to a new reality. It's very difficult."

But as a record number of employees look to their employers for help, the situation is revealing a startling fact: Many employers did not have the benefits, programs or culture in place to adequately address mental health concerns even before coronavirus.

"In many ways, it's shining a light on flaws that existed before we knew about COVID-19," says



Anne Richter, a health management consultant at Willis Towers Watson. Some employers were focused on a full spectrum of wellbeing, including emotional, financial and mental, she says, but many fell short when it came to helping employees with such issues as anxiety, depression and stress.

Those shortcomings ran the gamut: a lack of resources offered; lackluster



LuAnn Heinen

communication about existing offerings; and a near-unanimous view that the subject was too taboo for the workplace, insiders say. HR departments, often viewed as the heart of the

organization, were often bogged down with other administrative tasks and competing priorities, while meaningful change to address the issue was slow to catch on.

And while mental health has been gaining employer attention in the last couple of years, with more noticing its dramatic impacts on employees and many broadening their views of workplace wellbeing as a result, the changes were not widespread before the pandemic hit.

"We already had high rates of depression and anxiety, as well as stigma and access problems that prevented many from getting care," Heinen says. "And now all that's compounded. It's a really dramatic situation."

With the coronavirus pandemic putting the spotlight on a growing number of mental health conditions

and how they affect employees, experts say companies need to step up and take a hard look at gaps or flaws in their coverage. But as employers turn to new programs and start to shift their culture as a result of the new environment, will things change permanently?

## Flaws in the System

Mental health coverage has been a rising employee benefit for the last couple of years, industry experts say, often landing on lists of top areas of focus for employers. Still, despite a rallying cry from many experts—and employees who increasingly asked employers for help—a lot of companies were slow to make it a priority.

While almost all employers believe improving mental health in the workplace is good for their business, 17%



# Benefits

acknowledge not offering any resources at all, according to a survey of 1,379 U.S. business decision-makers, including HR and benefits leaders, from Transamerica Center for Health Studies. Results were released in December.

At a striking rate, employees, too, feel coverage is missing: 65% of workers say they don't feel their employer offers benefits or programs that help support or improve their mental wellbeing, according to MetLife research just released in April.

Specifically, only 13% of companies provide on-site stress-management programs, and just 11% provide mindfulness or meditation benefits, according to the latest available data from the Society for Human Resource Management. While employee-assistance programs have largely been the mental health benefit of choice for employers, only 79% of companies offer them. And, for the most part, utilization is low: Usually less than 10% of employees use EAPs, according to SHRM.

Apps from third parties that focus on and promote different areas of mental health, from meditation to sleep to emotional resiliency, have helped fill the gaps in recent years, though some employers were hesitant to invest in those resources.

"I have clients I work with that have a vast array of resources—apps, vendors, programs, communication channels—all aimed at building emotional resilience that you would fall back on in times like this," Richter says.

"Then I have other employers who say, 'That's not really our thing. We have a workforce that will likely be here maybe for two years, tops, and then they'll move on. We have high turnover; we're not going to invest in our employees.'"

That's especially prevalent in industries like retail, she says, where many companies experience 40%-45% employee turnover year-over-year.

Communication about mental health benefits or offerings has lagged as well, resulting in workers who have no idea what kind of help their employer provides. For instance, 55% of employees said their employer did not have, or they were unsure if their employer had, a specific program, initiative or policy in place to address mental health, according to Unum research from last year. EAPs, for instance, aren't a benefit mentioned during annual enrollment because employees don't need to reelect them as they would health insurance, Richter notes. So, without significant reminders from employers, most employees don't remember such programs or even know they exist.

One of the biggest shortcomings in employers' mental health efforts was being unprepared, unequipped or simply reluctant to address the issue. Just 25% of managers in the U.S. have been trained in referring employees to

mental health resources, and more than half of people are unsure how they would help a colleague who came to them with a mental health issue, according to Unum.



Kathie Patterson

"[One] crack in the system we've struggled with previously is this notion that, when it comes to issues like mental health, the onus is on employees to navigate and figure it out themselves," says Reetu Sandhu, a manager at the Limeade Institute, which conducts research about wellbeing. "This comes from these old-school perceptions like, 'That sounds like a personal problem,' or, 'Leave your personal issues at the door.'"

Kathie Patterson, CHRO at Detroit-based bank Ally Financial, agrees.

"We have not created an environment where we talk about this openly," she says, adding that employee mental health has long been "one of the most undiscussable items" for employers. "When you look at the statistics of employees who have some type of challenge, whether anxiety or depression, it was just something people don't discuss."

Meanwhile, many employees don't feel comfortable speaking openly about their mental health struggles. Even

## BEYOND BENEFITS

By Kathryn Mayer/Columnist



## It's Time to Walk the Talk

The last several years have been a big boon for employee benefits. The market was hot, new and unique offerings were plentiful, and tech was making

it easier than ever to embrace perks and deliver them to workers. We saw a rise in enviable benefits that went beyond health and retirement coverage: from generous caregiving and family-friendly policies to student-loan repayment and free tuition. Unemployment was low, competition for jobs was fierce and most employers I spoke to about strategy said improvements and additions were often the result of competing in a candidate-driven market.

What a difference a pandemic makes.

As the coronavirus outbreak radically changes every aspect of our world and our economy, it also affects employee benefit strategies. With new financial strains as a result of the pandemic and the need to compete for talent out the window for now, just how much will employee benefits be shaken up?

Some employers are dropping or decreasing coverage as a way to cut costs—frustrating to employees, yet understandable from a business perspective. Initial research from consultant Pearl Meyer, for instance, found that 6% of companies so far have reduced or eliminated employer contributions or matches to their retirement plan, and 16% are considering doing so. Other experts predict more companies will follow suit not only with 401(k) matches, but voluntary benefits and even employer-sponsored health coverage.

"Industries that have been hit hard by coronavirus are looking for every means possible to stay afloat," says John Lowell, an Atlanta-based partner with October Three Consulting. "While matching contributions have become customary in many U.S. companies, these companies are considering them a luxury that they cannot currently afford."

But even employers that find themselves in cost-cutting mode know that they are in a unique position to help employees during trying times. Many are turning to employee benefits as one of their coronavirus strategies—as a way to help workers through what the vast majority of Americans say is the most stressful time of their career.

I don't need to go into all of the startling statistics about sky-high rates of anxiety, financial stress or

other mental-health issues. Or about how childcare responsibilities and social distancing are putting more pressure on us. We all know it because we're all living through it. And this doesn't even touch upon employees' physical health woes—those of us who catch the virus and need medical care and coverage or time off and employer understanding. To sum it all up: Support is needed, maybe more than we've ever seen, and some employers are answering the call.

A handful of companies are offering extra paid time off for those who are sick or self-quarantined, waiving telemedicine copays, and expanding childcare support and caregiving leave to help family members who are sick with the virus. Others are offering employees one-time financial assistance payments to help.

Many more have ramped up communication, eager to tell employees about the offerings they already have available, from telemedicine to financial wellness to childcare benefits. It's a smart and needed move.

Employers everywhere talk about putting employees first, prioritizing their health, wellness and happiness. But what do HR and corporate leaders—and individual managers—do during a crisis? That's when HR and benefits leaders need to put their money where their mouth is.

Ally Financial's CHRO Kathie Patterson made the case to me recently when I interviewed her about her coronavirus strategy. Part of her strategy has been relying on benefits to help workers: rolling out new benefits—among them a \$1,200 financial-assistance payment for workers—improving others and communicating existing benefits that can help.

Our employees are struggling," she told me. "As a company, we say we like to demonstrate a high degree of care. This is the moment you've got to walk the talk."

It's easy to make a business case for robust benefits, rewards and compensation in a strong economy and a hot job market when employers are competing for the best talent. It's much harder to do so during an economic and health crisis, but it's far more important to support employees in times like these. Are you answering the call?

*Kathryn Mayer is HRE's benefits editor and chair of the Health & Benefits Leadership Conference. She has covered benefits for the better part of a decade. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Denver. She can be reached at kmayer@lrp.com.*

if they do feel comfortable disclosing an issue, 47% who do so have experienced a negative consequence, Limeade research finds. That finding demonstrates a “major flaw” in employer mental health attention—lack of trust, Sandhu says.

“Historically, it hasn’t just been a taboo subject within the workplace, but it has been a taboo topic in our society in general. So, leaders or employers may have not known how to address mental health,” she says. “It’s been all too often pushed under the rug. Now, however, we are starting to evolve and recognize the importance of talking about and sharing these types of human experiences and supporting the whole employee.”

### Employers Rush to Help

The pandemic has created a sense of urgency for employers to add resources and catch up quickly, as experts point out just how widespread mental health issues are and as employers begin to see the effects stress and anxiety have on their workforce.

Richter says the amount of calls she’s been fielding from employers asking about adding or enhancing mental health resources has been “overwhelming.”

“They are obviously very concerned about the distress that their employees are sharing with them, and they have a desire to help minimize that distress, so they’re looking at programmatic alternatives, whether it’s EAPs or communication, or how to push information to them,” she says.

Many companies have quickly pivoted to adding resources. Some 53% of 256 employers surveyed by the National Alliance of Healthcare Purchaser Coalitions reported providing special emotional and mental health programs for their workforce because of the pandemic.

Virtual care, apps and EAPs are all on offer. “Employer-provided mental health resources have always been important, but many organizations are now realizing the direct benefits these resources can have on their employees,” Limeade’s Sandhu says.

Target, for instance, added online resources to help employees improve their wellbeing. While workers at the retailer already had access to five counseling sessions in their EAP, employees now are getting a year of access to resources from provider Big Health: Daylight, its website and app that aim to help users navigate stress and worry; and Sleepio, its app that provides tools to improve sleep.



Reetu Sandhu

Professional-services firm PwC introduced wellbeing coaching sessions where employees can reach out to a professional coach to discuss anything that may be causing them stress.

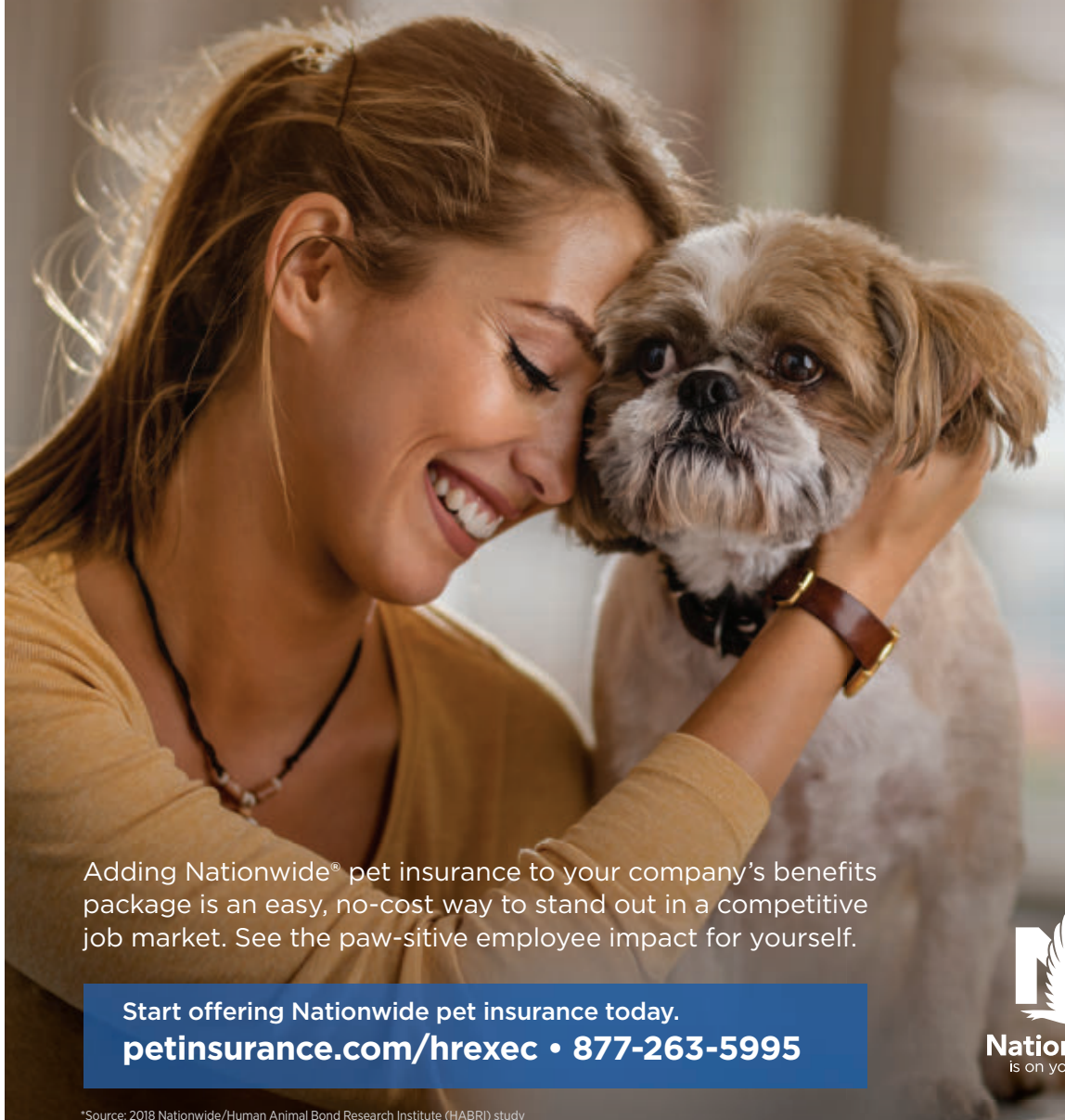
Starbucks rolled out therapy benefits for its workers in April; the

coffee giant now provides all U.S. employees—and their eligible family members—access to 20 sessions a year with a mental health therapist or coach through provider Lyra Health, at no cost to the user. Sessions can be in person or via video chat.

Starbucks is also encouraging employees to use resources it already offers, such as Headspace, a meditation and mindfulness app that was rolled

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# Benefits

out as a benefit in January. Now, more than 68,000 employees are using it. “It really cleanses and settles the mind, [especially as] we’ve been dealing with COVID,” Starbucks regional vice president Camille Hymes said in early May during an Instagram Live video. “People have worries and fears—and it’s all normal, and we recognize that. And we want to make sure they have an outlet for it.”

Other employers that didn’t have EAPs before are quickly looking into adding them, Richter says.

Meanwhile, Headspace says it’s seen a 400%-plus increase in requests from companies seeking support for their employees’ mental health since mid-March. Big Health cites that same triple-digit increase in employer interest in the same timeframe. Both firms are offering their products free to employers for a limited time to help during the pandemic.

“Even at the best of times, access to effective mental healthcare is a challenge,” says Peter Hames, Big Health co-founder and CEO. “With stay-at-home orders and telehealth providers overwhelmed, right now the gap between the need for and provision of



Peter Hames

evidence-based mental health support has never been bigger.”

Overall, employers are, in a way, going back to basics, Limeade’s Sandhu says.

“In our current circumstances, where we are forced into a position where we go back to the fundamentals—like taking care of each other and treating each other like human beings—we realize that the stuff that maybe used to be viewed as extra or nice-to-haves, like mental health, is absolutely necessary and foundational,” she says. “Simply put, mental health and our fundamental human needs are no longer aspects of work that can be deprioritized.”

## Changing Workplace Culture

A majority of employers that add or make changes to resources in response to COVID-19 will likely do so long-term, many experts predict. That especially might occur if employers get positive feedback from employees who stay healthy, more productive and tend to have better morale as a result. Beefing up communication about available benefits offerings also stands to be a permanent move.

But perhaps the biggest change that may become permanent is simply making it OK to address the issue, industry experts say. Many employers that had unspoken policies to not talk about or address employee struggles—with the exception of pointing them to an EAP—are now changing their tune.

Compelled to support employees who are struggling in a new way during the pandemic—on top of the employees who already had mental health issues—they’re encouraging openness and asking managers to lead with empathy.

“Now, businesses are checking in and asking colleagues how they are doing, as well as lending a helping hand to offer care and support during this time,” Sandhu says. “This has been a valuable lesson.”

Willis Towers Watson’s Richter adds that employers are learning that regular support—check-ins, asking how employees are doing, and showing empathy and support from direct supervisors or team leaders, for instance—is “just as powerful as a program or EAP or an app.”

“Those things, the one-on-one connection, are just as important,” she says. “Before you get down to business and discuss things, you ask how they’re doing. It used to be a formality. It’s a very important thing and we cannot discount it.”

Ally Financial’s Patterson says while the company had mental health resources on offer, the pandemic has caused her—and other company leaders—not only to talk about employees’ problems and stresses more, but to think about how to help in a new way. Part of it is about being more open, she says.

“Moving to a broader understanding around wellness got us thinking about how we provide mental support for



employees. That was always a little part of our benefits strategy to begin with, but nowadays, it’s even more critical,” she says.

A lot of her strategy has been training managers, encouraging empathy and support, and giving employees tips on how to cope. “We’re working on helping people understand they are going through a grief cycle; [they’re] going through a loss,” Patterson says. “[So we’re saying], ‘Here are some things we know about grief to help [you] build [your] awareness around it,’ and we’re doing education and workshops for leaders to think about how they can be more supportive.”

Although the pandemic is casting a light on what needs to be done now, in a tumultuous environment, many hope the changes are here to stay even when things reopen and life gets more or less back to normal. Mental health issues and stress were already on the rise among employees before the pandemic, and they certainly won’t just disappear post-pandemic, experts say.

“This has forced us to make changes and to make it OK to talk about struggles like these,” Richter says. “I hope it doesn’t change for just this tiny bit of time.”

*Send questions or comments about this story to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

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# Leading Leaders in a New Remote Reality

**HR is lending its expertise to help leaders make the shift to managing remote workers.**

BY CAROL PATTON

**B**ack in January, Greenway Health (Greenway) assembled a taskforce of cross functional company leaders to address the potential dangers of the coronavirus (COVID-19) for its 1,500 employees and organization. At the time, one-third of its workforce worked remotely.

“[HR] started getting them comfortable with all the what-if scenarios, what COVID-19 means to them and how they would lead,” explains Michele Streitmatter, chief transformation officer at Greenway, a health information technology vendor. “You can’t expect leaders who never even worked themselves remotely or led remotely to lead remotely.”

The company’s CEO, Richard Atkin, VP of Marketing Marissa Carlson and Streitmatter led the effort by speaking with the organization’s top 30 leaders personally and in a group setting. They built up their confidence by reminding

them of how the Tampa, Fla.-based company has survived hurricanes by enabling employees to work from home and encouraged them that the company’s recently tested technology would support its total workforce in a remote capacity for an extended period of time.

Many HR professionals, some of whom have never worked remotely for more than several days, are helping company executives and managers lead their entire workforce from home during this pandemic. By relying on their own coaching, training and communication skills, HR leaders are motivating and teaching their bosses and peers how to quickly adapt to a new world of constant change, anxiety and innovation.

To undertake that effort, one of the first conversations taskforce members at Greenway focused on was the company’s values.

“[We] pulled out our values like employee safety and created a set of guiding principles that we could use for this situation,” says Streitmatter,

adding that the taskforce created FAQs for leaders with answers based on the company’s values.

Since then, she says, Atkin has made weekly videos for all staff focusing on the status of the company and healthcare industry and how employees can take care of themselves. HR hosts an online weekly call with leaders to deliver coronavirus facts and address leaders’ questions. Executives also join 30-minute video calls three times a week and complete new leadership training modules on building trust, setting goals and monitoring employee performance in a remote environment.

“Leaders needed to change their expectations for employees around how work got done,” Streitmatter says, adding that for some, the definition of success changed from the amount of time employees spent at work to the quality of their output. “Our biggest issue is how to help employees balance their need to take care of their family concurrently with the need to take care of our customers.”

## How Do You Want to Be Remembered?

Some HR professionals serve as the conscience of the leadership team, says Beth Bovis, partner, senior leader, leadership change and organization practice at Kearny, a global management consulting firm.

She says many HR professionals are coaching leaders in this new dimension: How do you want customers, employees and the communities you serve to judge your behavior in this leadership moment?

Most are sharing best practices with leaders like structure their office hours, schedule open time for staff conversations, check in with direct reports and avoid checking emails or multi-tasking during conference calls.

Bovis tells the story of a CEO who visited one of his open facilities. Employees stood six feet apart from each other in the parking lot while the CEO used a megaphone to conduct a town-hall meeting and thank them for coming to work.

She says one of the CHRO’s key challenges is convincing leaders to escape the “tyranny of the urgent,” a concept introduced in Charles Hummel’s book of the same name that addresses how critical matters can crowd out what’s really important.

“You’ve got workers with kids at home who may need to work outside the normal 9 to 5, which creates stress,” Bovis says. “Leaders need to create flexibility for folks. That’s what CHROs are struggling with—what kind of interventions will help manage this so the level of anxiety and wellness in the organizations is managed.”

## A Sense of Normalcy

With nearly 4,000 global employees working remotely, HR at SEI is helping leaders focus on



# Leadership

employee psychological safety, says Colleen Stratton, head of workforce development at the global financial services and technology firm.

“We put together a microsite with resources for leaders and employees [about] benefits information and referral programs,” she says, adding that HR is asking leaders to chat with staff about their physical safety and emotional wellbeing.

HR’s four-member learning and development team also introduced

the concept of “situational humility,” she says, explaining that leaders are learning to feel comfortable about not knowing the answer to every employee question. “We’re also trying to put dates to things, even if those dates move. It’s creating a sense of a timeline that people can attach to.”

The same team is also reminding leaders to apply a three-year-old program that plays to worker strengths. It focuses on the

leadership’s management style, understanding how their employees are best managed and then modifying their style to get the best out of their staff. As an example, Stratton points to high achievers. Their boss can make them feel good by asking them what they accomplish each day.

HR also trained leaders on how to virtually spot signs of employee stress and use various technologies to mitigate that risk; SEI will soon launch online classes on how to

build employee trust in a remote work setting, says Stratton. HR even arranged to have a special office chair moved to a leader’s home office to enhance his comfort level working remotely.

But above all, the company focuses on communication. CEO Alfred West, Jr. updates the entire workforce about the pandemic and company’s status three times a week via email.

Senior executives also use video conference several times each week

## HR LEADERSHIP

By **Eva Sage-Gavin**/Columnist



## Collaboration and Compassion

Biz Stone, co-founder of Twitter, coined one of my favorite thoughts: “When you hand good people possibility, they do great things.” In my decades in the work world,

I might even say they do “amazing things.” In my CHRO roles in consumer and technology companies, I’ve coached teams who have astounded me with their dedication, drive and results.

As I speak to CHROs and CEOs about the human toll of COVID-19’s economic impacts, I see that many of them feel their people’s pain. I believe that compassion makes them better leaders. And I saw that compassion, along with swift action, with the launch of the People + Work Connect platform, just a little over a month ago.

### Designing a New Standard for Cross-Industry Collaboration

People + Work Connect is an Accenture-designed employer-to-employer platform, co-created with CHROs from Lincoln Financial Group, ServiceNow and Verizon. It connects organizations that need more workers with companies that are having to lay off or furlough workers. Created to help keep people employed during the pandemic, the platform is meant to lessen the economic stress so many workers and companies are experiencing. From consumer goods to manufacturing roles to engineers, People + Work Connect is designed as a business-to-business connection to help get people to work fast and to exchange knowledge with HR professionals globally.

What is most inspiring is how the efforts of a few human resource, technology and business leaders can create good for so many. Pat Wadors, chief talent officer at ServiceNow, put it well when she shared: “I’m so grateful that curiosity has sparked new ideas in the midst of crisis. Working together, we are stronger and more creative than when we’re alone.”

As the solution took shape and continues to evolve, it has been a reminder of what a powerful force for good we can be. We are in the business of people. And people have never needed our leadership more.

### From Idea to Reality in Just 14 Days

Accenture hosts a forum for global CHROs that meets regularly, in person and virtually. We convened virtually during COVID-19, when members let us know

that the crisis meant they could use each other’s wise counsel more than ever.

During the meeting, executives spoke from the heart about what they and their people were experiencing. As some lamented potential layoffs, others were in industries struggling to fill their newfound demands for workers during COVID-19.

It didn’t take long for the group to do the math on supply and demand—and realize companies could band together to help their people and to ease some rather urgent business needs. Within 48 hours, we built a steering committee. We held briefings and sought input from 1,000-plus senior human resource and business leaders, and public sector officials. Then, in just two weeks, we stood up a free, B2B platform that is helping put people back to work. More than 700 companies expressed interest in North America alone.

Here is how a couple of senior HR leaders from global companies describe the impact:

*Donna Morris, chief people officer, Walmart:*

“Walmart is committed to helping put Americans to work, while also helping better serve our customers during this unprecedented time. We’ve set a goal to hire 150,000 new associates by the end of May and, right now, we’re adding 5,000 people every day. We’re thrilled to be a part of People + Work Connect to help us continue finding great talent to add to our team.”

*Jeanne Mason, senior vice president, Human Resources, Baxter:*

“Our essential medical products are being used by healthcare professionals on the frontlines of this pandemic. Intense demand for our products is creating additional employment opportunities—800 in the U.S. alone. We look forward to collaborating with People + Work Connect to help us find talented, passionate individuals to join our Baxter team.”

As seasoned leaders, I know you are feeling the heft of responsibility on the shoulders of these executives—and possibly on your own shoulders. How wonderful that we are cooperating for the greater good. None of us is in this alone.

### Short-Term Spring, Long-Term Impact

I find it encouraging that, during this difficult time, the learnings from this model could help us work differently—and smarter—in the future. As Christy

Pambianchi, executive vice president and chief human resources officer of Verizon, put it: “While the current pandemic has been the impetus for People + Work Connect, we expect this type of collaboration to become the norm going forward.”

This effort came down to seven women building on each other’s ideas, changing the way businesses collaborate on talent around the world. People + Work Connect is addressing workforce needs from the frontline to the executive level. By the end of April, we had well over 100,000 jobs in play. A diverse group of companies—from Baxter and Frito-Lay to Nordstrom and Marriott—are onboarded.

Lisa M. Buckingham, executive vice president and chief people, place and brand officer for Lincoln Financial Group, put it well: “A small group of CHROs came together because we share a passion for making sure that we—and the companies we represent—are remembered for addressing this tough moment with compassion and a sense of responsibility that transcends the business we do every day.”

I want to recognize the group that took the kernel of an idea and is changing the HR and business world so very rapidly: Accenture CEO Julie Sweet; Accenture Chief Leadership and Human Resources Officer Ellyn Shook; Accenture Senior Managing Director Gloria Samuels; Lincoln Financial Group Chief People Officer Lisa M. Buckingham; ServiceNow Chief Talent Officer Pat Wadors; Verizon Chief Human Resources Officer Christy Pambianchi; and myself. I’m proud to work with these women and our amazing teams, and I’m proud of what we’ve made happen for the work world in a very short time.

People + Work Connect is just one example of where I believe our field is headed—to a future that is wiser, more collaborative, more compassionate. And that mix, in my experience, has always led to amazing results, for people and for the business.

Be well. We have an uncharted journey before us, but we’re all in this together. And some of the most amazing solutions have come from times of uncertainty.

*Eva Sage-Gavin is a former CHRO with more than three decades of experience in Fortune 500 corporations. She currently serves as the senior managing director for Accenture’s global talent and organization consulting practice and as a technology board director. Send questions or comments to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*



Michele Streitmatter

and conduct routine check-ins with staff.

“One of our leaders says for every email you send, make two phone calls,” Stratton says.

“The goal of our communication is to make sure

we’re listening [to employees].”

Still, employees can overdose on communication, adds Heather Deyrieux, president of the HR Florida State Council, an HR professional association.

She suggests that leaders keep a daily list of nonurgent matters that can be emailed daily so they’re not constantly bombarding workers.

“Many [employees] feel tired because their mind is going 1,000 miles per hour and it’s hard to concentrate on work,” Deyrieux says. “Once we get back to normal, if you didn’t treat your employees right, this will be their opportunity to change positions. This truly is a time for leaders to step up to show not only that the company cares for [employees] but ‘Here’s how I care for you.’”

Engage employees in water-cooler conversations and ask questions: How did you sleep last night? How are your kids adjusting? How are you staying active? Ask your team to jump on a video call and sing “Happy Birthday” to a co-worker. That shows you’ve been paying attention to employees’ lives before the shift to remote work, Deyrieux says, and are taking a personal interest now to ensure they’re their best selves.



Colleen Stratton

Just as important, she says, HR leaders need to stay connected with other HR professionals. Whether you make a phone call or attend a virtual happy hour, talk about employee

issues, changes or best practices in this fluid environment. Maintain a steady flow of fresh ideas to take care of yourself and your organization.

### **Triaging Fears, Boosting Creativity**

At DISYS, Laura Smith, vice president of global HR, says among the biggest challenge for company leaders is calming employee fears.

The global staffing, IT consulting and managed services firm supports approximately 4,000 employees. Before this pandemic, less than 10% worked remotely. Now, 98% do.

“I view my role and my team’s role as serving as triage combat medics for the company,” Smith says. “I’m always telling

employees to contact me for anything and they do. Fear is the overriding challenge today, and fear means different things to different people.”

Fortunately, the company launched Workplace in February and trained its employees on how to use the connectivity platform developed by Facebook. In March, as the coronavirus

spread, she says, HR worked with IT to test its tech tools and fixed some glitches. She also offered online training to a handful of the company’s leaders who were struggling with the platform’s video chat function.

Through virtual, weekly town-hall meetings, Smith says, the company’s leaders raise concerns, share ideas and

discuss the company’s health status. The CEO, Mahfuz Ahmed, recently conducted an “inspirational” town hall, reassuring employees that they would not be laid off. Innovative ideas and practices have since been “bubbling up,” Smith says.

“I’ve encouraged leaders to serve more as a coach,” she says. “What

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# Leadership

I've observed and hear from them is that they love the regular [visual] touchpoints. When we're in our offices, we don't have regular town halls. If I have any say [after the pandemic subsides], I'd like to see them continue."

Meanwhile, never assume those in senior roles are confident in leading employees through this pandemic, adds Kimberly Cassady, talent officer at Cornerstone OnDemand, a cloud-based learning, talent management and talent experience software provider that supports 2,000 global employees. In the past, 40% worked



Beth Bovis

remotely but now 100% work from home.

"I lead every conversation with, 'How are you doing?' " she says. "I ask if they need anything and what they are struggling with the most. Just asking can be a huge relief. Don't assume they know the answers, that they know what they're doing."

Cassady says the HR team was aware of its leadership's skills and gaps and projected what support would be needed. HR developed virtual training programs and held open mic meetings that attracted 215 out of 300 managers on managing remote staff and demonstrating empathy during this global crisis.

Surprisingly, Cassady says her biggest challenge involved herself.

"I never worked remotely before for an extended period of time at home," she says. "I found myself basically glued to my chair and not finding the separation between work and home or when to stop working. I was also recognizing that burnout with my team and was surprised I needed to give myself permission to take a break and step away."

She shared her experiences with the HR staff and leadership team. HR created a work-from-home tip sheet, containing best practices that leaders could share with their employees, such as set specific work hours, reduce the length of meetings and dedicate a workspace that's physically separate from other areas in your home.

Cassady's own work volume has increased. Every week, she hosts an open mic forum for U.S. managers to address questions and another to accommodate those overseas. She also writes a weekly, two-page employee newsletter covering



Laura Smith

key topics, such as employee policies, coronavirus updates, the organization's status and recent company changes. Perhaps most creative of all is that any leader or employee can host an optional development hour on topics ranging from cooking with an instant pot to family craft ideas. HR is even considering coordinating a virtual "Bring Your Kids to Work Day."

"We're getting more accustomed to this," says Cassady. "We're not going to rest on the fact that we have proven we can do this for nearly a month now. We don't know what we don't know at this point."

Send questions or comments about this story to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).

# Rising to the Challenge

**The 2020 HR's Rising Stars are tapping into their experiences of creating innovative HR strategies to help their organizations meet the unprecedented disruption of a global pandemic.**

Strong, forward-thinking leadership is emerging as a true differentiator as companies around the world strategize for how to bounce back from one of the worst global health crises in modern times. Now, more than ever, businesses need creative and compassionate minds at the helm who are willing to lead with both out-of-the-box thinking and empathy—both of which are in ample supply among the next generation of leaders named to *Human Resource Executive*®'s 2020 HR's Rising Stars list.

This year's pool of candidates contained an impressive collection of emerging HR professionals, across all industries, but we ultimately narrowed the list of talented contenders to three winners: Johan Maestri, manager of benefits at Noven Pharmaceuticals; Leslie Mikus, director of HR at MERGE; and Linh Nguyen, senior HR business partner at SEI Investments. From creating programs from the ground-up to tackling long-standing business pain points, the Rising Stars all rose to the unique HR challenges impacting their companies and achieved lasting results for their employees. We commend the three winners on the many successes they've seen already in their careers and look forward to what they, and all of this year's candidates, will contribute to the HR industry in the years to come.

Judges for the competition were Gregory Hessel, senior client partner with the HR practice and managing director of global client development at Korn Ferry's Dallas offices; Ben Brooks, founder and CEO of PILOT, Inc., winner of the 2019 HR Tech Pitchfest; and Jen Colletta, managing editor of *HRE*.

## Forced Strategies

In March, more than 300 HR professionals and employees across multiple industries participated in a global survey conducted by Harvard Business Publishing Corporate Learning about leadership tactics being employed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here are their responses:

**34%** stated that leaders need most help with leading through uncertainty

**26%** reported that virtual-work preparedness ranked second in terms of importance followed by crisis planning and response (21%)

**75%** said their organizations have implemented daily update calls with key leaders to understand the pandemic's impact on their business

**75%** have created new employee communication channels related to COVID-19, such as town halls, video messaging and a dedicated website

**70%** felt their organization has balanced priorities very well or extremely well

**73%** were very or extremely confident in their leadership's ability to keep them safe

## Rising Stars

# Merging Policies and Priorities

**Leslie Mikus has helped ad agency MERGE build HR programs and structures from the ground up.**

BY JEN COLLETTA

**L**eslie Mikus describes herself somewhat jokingly as a “policy nerd.” The descriptor was put to the test when Mikus, the director of HR at ad agency MERGE, was tasked with analyzing the benefits policies and employee handbooks for five distinctive agencies that were unifying under MERGE.

The five companies were located in three different cities and all had unique policies and procedures, which Mikus had to explore for commonalities and differences—and design a new employee handbook with a redesigned set of standards. That process curved toward offering the more innovative benefits: unlimited paid time off, fully paid parental leave and even grandparent leave.

“There was a lot of collaboration between senior leadership and our team to find the middle ground and make sure we had a common set of policies,” she says. “Some of these things carried a significant cost, but it was the right decision for the employees and for the future of MERGE.”

The organization recently went through another acquisition that allowed it to double in size, so Mikus undertook a similar exercise to unify the policies. The HR team was able to get the new handbook out remotely as the coronavirus pandemic picked up steam in March—a feat that evinces their ability to keep up with the fast-paced nature of the advertising world.

That environment attracted Mikus to MERGE.

“Things move so fast in the advertising industry and the people are so smart and dynamic,” she says. “I feel like because of that, I’ve been able to be more creative in my problem-solving.”

While Mikus says she has “found a home” in the HR side of the advertising world, she initially considered some other careers. She studied psychology at Boston University and also had an interest in law, ultimately recognizing she had a passion for the business side of psych more so than the clinical side. As a junior, she studied abroad in Sydney and interned for a recruitment firm.

“That was my first venture into the HR world,” she says. “I loved interviewing candidates, helping to provide guidance on resumes and just being able to help employees.”

Mikus pursued that interest with another internship at an investment firm that allowed her to explore a range of HR functions: onboarding, benefits administration, performance management. “And that’s when I realized I had found my passion,” she says.

Now, Mikus’ work at MERGE allows her to touch all aspects of HR, but she says she is most energized by the learning and organizational development areas.

“On the learning side, we’re able to create growth paths for employees and elevate talent, giving them the tools they need to be successful,” she says.

“And on the organizational development side, to me, that’s compliance and making sure our policies are up to date and set up so that folks can hold each other accountable in how they’re all showing up to work every day.”

In keeping with those focuses, Mikus headed up the effort to introduce a performance-management platform, which MERGE previously lacked. She identified the vendor, helped build the tool and trained employees, some of whom were resistant, on using it.

“At the end of the day, people are typically pretty change-averse. I heard things like, ‘Why can’t I keep using paper forms?’—everything was in Word before this—and I just don’t have time for this.’ Not only were we moving onto a platform, but we were also going from annual reviews to more ongoing feedback and quarterly check-ins.”

Mikus was instrumental in garnering senior leadership buy-in to help encourage managers and employees to embrace the transition.

“We also took feedback and listened to manager questions along the way so that helped people to know we were hearing them and helped us explain to them why this was important and give them the training and tools they needed to make this work,” she says.

That work paid off, as the organization is now seeing the benefits of ongoing feedback and adoption is soaring—compliance with the annual appraisal, for instance, jumped from just 10% to 90%.

Mikus also built the agency’s training program from the ground-up. Without a specific learning and development structure in place, individual teams were left to find webinars or workshops when they identified a need.

“Nothing had existed before, so I think senior leadership and department heads saw HR as a conduit for this,” Mikus says. She pressed leaders for a budget for training and undertook research into common pain points, ultimately identifying the need for standardized training for new managers, as well as sessions to improve presentation skills and thinking on your feet. For the latter two, she brought in a public speaking coach and then an improv troupe.

“It was an opportunity to get a little creative,” she says.

The strategy also aligned the workforce with strategic needs: The training helped the agency win more pitches—due to better presentations—and managers gained valuable team-building insight.

Mikus says the initiative embodies why she finds her work so rewarding.

“It’s about helping people,” she says. “If I’m able to coach a manager through a tough situation or work



## Leslie Mikus

**Director of HR  
MERGE  
Boston, Mass**

**Greatest HR Challenge:** Change management, including transitioning MERGE’s performance-management process from an annual cycle feedback loop and working to condense five company handbooks into one, both of which involved securing leadership buy-in and designing strategic steps to successfully roll out change.

**Greatest HR Accomplishment:** The launch of MERGE’s unified company handbook, which brought together five separate companies under one brand. Because the culture promotes flexibility, policies were updated to reflect that culture, such as paid parental leave, grandparent leave and unlimited paid time off.

to create a program that brings positive change to MERGE, those are my best days.”

Like most, her days look a little different now, with her dining room table now serving as her office.

When the coronavirus pandemic spread to the U.S. earlier this year, the HR team shifted gears immediately to around-the-clock COVID-19 strategizing. Mikus stayed close to CDC recommendations and local news, conducted research to inform recommendations about issues like moving to fully remote work and helped manage communications to staff. Over the past few months, the internal marketing team has taken on more of the daily communications responsibilities, freeing Mikus up to conceive of some innovative ways to foster engagement and inclusion despite the distance.

“We started a program where we send care packages to employees as a way to say, ‘Thank you for being part of MERGE during this crazy and uncertain time,’” she says. The agency aims for employees to receive the packages on Fridays to kick off their weekend and many now videotape and share their unboxing. “It’s a nice treat for us to see when the packages arrive.”

Looking forward, the pandemic may continue to shed light on the strategic value that HR has to business success, Mikus says.

“I love that I’m seeing the shift where HR is getting a seat at the table; we’re trusted advisers and partners, as opposed to a hurdle that needs to be defeated or a last resort,” she says. “With that in mind, I see myself continuing to grow at MERGE within the MERGE talent team and overseeing the development of new and exciting programs for our employees.”



# Thinking Like a Business Leader

Linh Nguyen brings a strategic mindset to her HR work at SEI Investments.

BY JEN COLLETTA

**T**ry not to become a man of success, but rather try to become a man of value.”—Albert Einstein

While Einstein may not seem like the most obvious role model for today’s HR leaders, these words of wisdom—though tweaked to be gender-neutral—have become central to Linh Nguyen’s HR career. They go hand in hand with two other nuggets of advice she received early in her career: HR is a part of the business, so always think like a business leader; and lead ethically, including by being transparent about who you are.

“As long as you’re yourself and you have that passion, everything else will follow through,” Nguyen says.

She’s already seeing those mantras come to life early in her career. Nguyen graduated from Temple University in 2013 with a bachelor’s degree in business administration and launched right into her career with the financial-services co. SEI Investments. The year before, she had completed a workforce development internship at the Oaks, Pa.-based company, where she got a broad introduction to the company.

“My day wasn’t confined to working on HR-related projects,” she says. “The program allowed me to really understand what other business lines were working on so I could make that correlation of how HR fits into the rest of the business.”

She was hired as an HR business partner and in 2018 added “senior” to her title. Among the accomplishments that helped her earn that promotion was her work to enhance the SEI Associates Program, a year-long leadership program for college grads, which was struggling to get buy-in from business units.

“The real challenge there,” she says, “was trying to understand the root cause of where there may not have been buy-in or why people weren’t fully on board. I’ve realized throughout my career that if you focus more on the root cause of a specific problem than on just coming up with new solutions, that will get you so much further.”

Nguyen launched a technology rotation in the program and worked to build trust among the business units to support the growth of the program, which is now thriving.

She applied the same forward-thinking strategy to support SEI’s U.K. office, which was seeing high turnover and other business disruptions. Nguyen originally conducted a six-week audit of the HR program in the London office and ultimately moved overseas for two years. While there, she worked to mend relationships between the U.K. and U.S. offices, improve culture, and identify and remedy gaps, such as in training. She started London Learning Week, featuring a range of learning and development classes, as well as prizes to incentivize participation.

“Employees felt they were heard, and that’s the most important thing when working with a new group: trying to understand their needs and figure out how to meet those needs without being too disruptive,” Nguyen says.

While in London, she also led the company’s U.K. effort to become compliant with the GDPR regulation requiring transparency around the gender pay gap. Nguyen was the point person for the research and data analysis, which ultimately resulted in a broad equity analysis on sex-based workforce differences and, Nguyen says, importantly fueled conversation on the issue among leaders.

That goes hand in hand with Nguyen’s passion for advancing equality in the workplace. She has participated in the PA Conference for Women, and last year completed Temple’s Women’s Leadership Series and spoke at the SEI Women’s Network Summit.

That passion was rooted early on, says Nguyen, who is the youngest of seven daughters.

“My parents came over from Vietnam and did such a wonderful job raising all seven of us,” she says. “Having been surrounded by such strong women, I was a bit naïve about some of the gender biases in the workplace. I was always told, ‘Find your independence, use your voice, do the right thing and don’t settle for anything less because you can do that.’ Because I was brought up with that mindset, it became ingrained in me to talk about it in my professional life as well.”

The blending of Nguyen’s personal values and her work has never been more clear as the last few months, as the SEI workforce quickly transitioned to a remote setting amid the coronavirus pandemic, which she says it did with relatively few hiccups. The



## Linh Nguyen

Senior HR business partner  
SEI Investments  
Oaks, Pa.

**Greatest HR Challenge:** Developing and fostering relationships across the company.

**Greatest HR Accomplishment:** Nguyen became a key player in executing many large company projects, including the Workday implementation, the development of a gender pay-gap report for the U.K. operations and client workforce analysis.

crisis has provided an opportunity for HR, Nguyen says, to show employees how they come first.

“We’re not only trying to provide support for people in this working environment, but this is also a time to show our empathy and our compassion,” she says. “We have to understand that people are all going through different things in their personal lives. If we can try to support them and make them feel comfortable and safe, then that’s our focus.”

Nguyen faced her own pandemic-related challenge: Her wedding, which she had been planning for two years, was slated for March 28. The event itself was canceled, but her loved ones decided to not let the day pass unnoticed.

“A bunch of friends and family said, ‘Let’s do a Zoom and see how you’re doing’ and it ended up being us exchanging our vows with the rings and our friends surprised us with a video of well wishes and singing so we did our first dance in my living room,” she says. “It ended up turning out to be really special considering the circumstances. We just have to stay positive through all of this.”

Nguyen is looking forward to helping SEI assess how the pandemic will shape what the future of work looks like at the company—and she’s confident that the workforce will continue to rely on her and the HR team for support and guidance.

“This may sound odd, but I actually like it when people come up to me and say, ‘Hey, don’t take this the wrong way but you’ve been really helpful and I didn’t know I could come to HR.’ HR gets a bad rep because some people don’t see we’re strategic partners to the business and truly care about our employees,” she says. “When people tell me I’ve changed their perception on that, I know I’ve moved the needle a little bit.”

# Keeping Learning at the Forefront

**Continuous learning—both for herself and the talent at Noven Pharmaceuticals—has defined Johan Maestri's success.**

BY CAROL PATTON

Every day, Johan Maestri boosts her value to her employer and its 300-member workforce by constantly upgrading her knowledge and skills in a wide variety of HR functions.

As benefits manager at Noven Pharmaceuticals, which offer products in the areas of women's health and mental health, she is a self-taught expert on 401(k) plans and building employee participation in them. Recently, she also was involved in designing long-term incentive plans and compensation initiatives, such as total reward programs, and previously helped the company sail through back-to-back audits from the IRS and DOL—no violations, no fines, no penalties.

Maestri was hired by Noven in 2007 as a corporate receptionist and administrative assistant. Since then, she has received four promotions and is now responsible for all aspects of the benefits function, which includes plan strategy, design, cost containment and compliance for health, welfare, retirement plans and wellness programs.

Among her accomplishments was mastering the complex and confusing world of 401(k) plans.

"I had to teach myself about 401(k) plans," Maestri says, adding that she also wrote the RFPs for selecting a new 401(k) vendor and auditor. "I had to do a lot of research and basically educate myself on how to write an RFP. Then, I set up demos and interviews with our benefits committee, which helps manage the administration of our plan and its investments. It was all brand new to me."

In 2017, Hurricane Irma destroyed parts of Southern Florida. Maestri realized that many employees were struggling and using the company's short-term loans as a bank account. That was a big eye opener, she says, adding that the situation prompted her to focus more of her attention on financial wellness.

She led the change to the company's logo—typically, an apple with a green stem—by converting the stem into a dollar sign, invited more financial vendors to its health fairs, brought its 401(k) record keeper on-site several days each year to meet with employees and offered lunch and learns, presentations and webinars for workers on 401(k) plans and how to save, budget and invest.

"Our 401(k) health report gives stats on how people are doing," Maestri says. "All the metrics show that people are saving more, taking out less loans and that

their account balances are growing. These are the metrics I use to see if programs and initiatives are paying off."

However, she did spot some warning signs early on. Maestri explains that different people throughout the organization were managing the 401(k) plan manually. That led to administrative mistakes that put its plan at risk of losing its tax-qualification status with the IRS. So, she voluntarily took ownership of the retirement plan and reached out to external ERISSA counsel for advice on how to correct the mistakes.

The one-year process included submitting a voluntary correction plan to the IRS. Despite the IRS' "thumbs up," she says, the plan was still audited by the DOL, which took roughly six months, and then the IRS—another three months. Both audits came out clean, she says.

Still, the company's plant workers didn't trust the concept of a 401(k), preferring to put their money in savings accounts or bonds rather than deal with volatile swings of the stock market. After offering individual sessions with its 401(k) vendors, contributions among this segment of its workforce have risen by approximately 10%.

"A lot of education was geared toward this manufacturing group," she says, adding that the plan is squeaky clean and complaint. "It worked. And I'm ready for another audit."

Over the past five years, Maestri says, she gained valuable knowledge about HR, both inside and outside of Noven. Under her guidance, the company also conducted an in-house audit on employee dependents. Ten dependents voluntarily dropped out of Noven's medical plan, producing a company savings of \$100,000.

But now she faces a crisis that not many HR professionals had experienced until recently: a global pandemic.

Maestri says she's "digesting" how the company's benefits will be impacted by new federal legislation, including the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, which requires certain employers to provide paid sick leave or expanded family and medical leave related to COVID-19, and the CARES Act, which provides economic assistance for American workers and small businesses. Meanwhile, she also serves on the company's pandemic team and is working



## Johan Maestri

**Manager, benefits  
Noven Pharmaceuticals, Inc.  
Miami, Fla.**

**Greatest HR Challenge:** To contend with declining revenues, managers were asked to hone in on a company leadership principle—accomplish more with less. HR began exploring ways to save money on employee benefits without minimizing or jeopardizing the current benefits offerings or increasing their cost to workers.

**Greatest HR Accomplishment:** HR interviewed different 401(k) vendors through an RFP process. A new vendor was selected that offered additional employee benefits and saved the organization \$60,000 during the first year. Participation in the company's 401(k) plan has since jumped from 78% to 90%.

with in-house communications and external vendors to incorporate those laws into the company and then communicate any benefit changes to the workforce.

Likewise, her HR knowledge has been expanded in other areas. She helped design and launch a long-term incentive plan and develop performance-management initiatives involving calibration, annual performance reviews and total rewards.

"I do see myself managing total rewards—soon," Maestri says.

Until then, her deep dives into other HR functions will continue.

"I'm very much about continuous learning and am always willing to learn something new and work in a different area I haven't worked in before," says Maestri, adding that it's important for HR to connect competitive and comprehensive health plans with financial education and a robust EAP. "That's my goal and what I work on every day. That's when you'll have engaged and happy [employees] focusing on their job and not stressing out about their life."





# Thinking Outside the Talent Box

Employee sharing moves to another level during the pandemic.

BY TOM STARNER

**W**ith skyrocketing unemployment growth in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, employers today face serious decisions on how to keep people paid and/or employed. On the flip side, depending on the market sector, some employers need new workers in the fold to meet pandemic-driven demand for products and services.

One innovative solution, an employee-sharing strategy, is taking off to meet that challenge. Simply defined, one employer “shares” workers who would otherwise lose their jobs with another employer that desperately needs workers to meet business demand.

For instance, one recent effort, People + Work Connect, involves a

group of employers from multiple industries bringing together companies laying off or furloughing people with those companies in urgent need of workers. Best of all, it’s free. CHROs from Accenture (which built the platform), Lincoln Financial Group, ServiceNow and Verizon created and launched the idea, which has hundreds of employers moving ahead in its pipeline.

London-based Kate Bravery, a partner and advisory solutions and insight leader at Mercer, notes that the firm has developed what it’s calling its Temporary Talent Sharing program, driven primarily by client needs on both sides of the loaning/receiving equation that are reaching out to Mercer for help. Clients are asking to contribute staff as part of their corporate social responsibility outreach, while others are seeking to offset their employee expense line

or even provide pay for furloughed workers.

“We’re helping clients think through the main considerations to make this happen fast, factors like what are the benefits for each party involved? How will pay and benefits work during this period?” she says. Also, “Do employees earn pay aligned to their current role or in line with the new work assignment? How do they manage the return?”

The key to getting it right, she explains, is helping participating employers stay connected with employees who leave for new assignments as part of a sharing agreement, and making the process easy to execute.

“I spoke with a CHRO and they told me one of their biggest challenges was staying connected with staff taking up this program—not easy to do when off-site and not digitally connected,” she says. “To date, our work has been in response to individual clients who can see ways to mitigate risks, including the need for people to be occupied. We believe this can help employees, business and the community—both now and in the future.”

Mercer, Bravery says, “listened and learned” from companies engaging in this practice and developed a complete package that offers communications, change management and even support in practical areas, such as how to manage time sheets, pay people and, if needed, vetting and automated feedback.

“There is a lot going on for our clients and we are trying to be as agile as possible in meeting their needs,” says Bravery, noting that Mercer got its initiative off the ground within two weeks. “Speed matters if we are to impact peoples’ jobs and livelihoods, and developing partnerships everywhere helps with this acceleration. After all, companies that might compete in the past are now partnering.”

In fact, she notes that Mercer is partnering with Accenture and counseling clients about checking into the People + Work Connect site, primarily to consider which companies might be a viable partner in their location.

Ravin Jesuthasan, managing director at Willis Towers Watson, is another supporter of this developing trend.

“One of the most heartening examples of innovation during the crisis has been the B2B talent exchanges being implemented between companies seeing a significant decline in demand with those seeing a significant increase in demand,” he says.

## Breaking Down Boundaries

According to Jesuthasan, Willis Towers Watson has been helping organizations think through how

they operationalize these exchanges to significantly reduce the frictional and reputational costs associated with letting people go, while supporting workers in developing new skills.

For example, he explains that in Germany, McDonald's and grocery chain Aldi entered into a similar talent-exchange agreement. In the U.S., supermarket giant Kroger is temporarily borrowing furloughed employees for 30 days from Sysco Corp., a wholesale food distributor to restaurants that has been hit hard by the coronavirus.



Ravin Jesuthasan

Jesuthasan says some of the specific issues Willis Towers Watson is helping organizations address include:

How do we handle the benefit implications of

such exchanges, particularly if they involve unionized work groups?

How do we accurately match the skills of talent to the work being demanded so we don't have a lag in productivity when the borrowed talent is in place?

How do we protect against poaching of talent or addressing mismatches in the timeframes for each organization?

"Taking a view of work that extends beyond the organizational boundary will be critical to increasing the overall resilience of the economy to shocks like COVID-19 in the future," Jesuthasan says.

"During these unprecedented times, we are pleased to partner with Kroger, as both of our companies work to respond in an agile manner to meet the rapidly evolving needs of our associates and our communities," said



Kevin Hourican

Kevin Hourican, president and chief executive officer of Sysco, in a company statement.

While Sysco has not issued any recent updates on the program, Shannon Mutschler,

senior director of external communications, says that Sysco has expanded the effort by working with C&S Wholesale Grocers and several other retailers under similar agreements.

"The program has been successful, and we are pleased to be able to offer these work opportunities to support our associates," Mutschler says.

#### Internal Mobility

Apart from loaning employees to other companies, some employers are

moving talent within the organization with the same objective: Keep people working by putting them where they are needed.

For example, to meet the increasing demand for groceries during the coronavirus outbreak, General Mills has recently been allowing healthy office employees to

work in its factories on a temporary basis.

"Our company's purpose is to make food the world loves. But the unique circumstances of today call on General Mills to make food the world needs," said Jeff Harmening, chairman and CEO of General Mills, in a company statement. "Our most

important objectives are the continued health and safety of our employees and our ongoing ability to serve our consumers around the world. We see it as imperative that we help ensure a steady and reliable food supply for people and pets."

In a similar scenario, Paradox, which offers an artificial intelligence-

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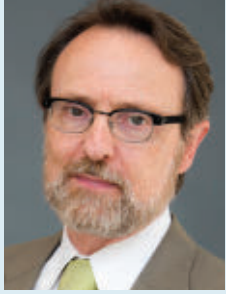


Human Resource  
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## TALENT MANAGEMENT

By Peter Cappelli/*Columnist*



### That Vexing Value of Life

There are so many challenging issues raised by *The Only Story That Matters Now* (coronavirus) that it is hard to keep them straight.

The most fundamental one is how much we are willing to pay, or more accurately lose, by shutting down the economy in order to save lives. This sounds like a policy question, but it is also a practical management problem because employers are gearing up for the challenge of bringing employees back to work when we know that doing so and ending social isolation will increase the risk that more people will get sick and die.

Many observers have noted—and the rest of us should as well—how remarkable it is that not only in the U.S. but around the world, citizens have been willing to isolate themselves, losing their income as well as their social contacts and interactions, in order to slow down the COVID-19 infection. More than 26 million Americans have already lost their jobs, and it could be a long time before they come back. Yet eight out of 10 Americans support the shutdown, a Kaiser Foundation poll out today finds. What makes this even more amazing is that the lives we are saving are unlikely to be our own, as the risk of death is concentrated among a small set of individuals, and the fact that the virus isn't going away after social-isolation restrictions start to lift means that we are actually spreading out the damage and buying time for medical advances that may not come for a long time.

Short of events in the two World Wars, I don't think there has been anything like the global mobilization and individual sacrifice of the coronavirus shutdowns, and it has been achieved with very little coercion. We have truly—and voluntarily—bought into this mission.

One problem with all this buy-in is that there is nothing we can do with it except actively do nothing and stay home. Ninety-thousand volunteer medical workers showed up in New York City to help with the virus efforts, for example (only about 900 could be used). One effect, though, is the spillover in public debate.

Those who point out that this shutdown is hugely costly and question whether it is worth it have largely been mocked for asking the question with the popular rebuttal that we should not put a value on life. Any actions that increase the risk of infection knowingly are met with scorn. This matters for employers because bringing people back to work will increase the risk of infection—modestly, perhaps even trivially—compared to sitting on our couches by ourselves at home.

Of course, we do put a value on life, sometimes explicitly so. The U.S. government, for example, uses the figure of \$11.5 million per life to decide whether regulations that might reduce deaths are worth the cost. It is impossible to avoid doing so as we constantly confront choices where there is a tradeoff between money and the probability of illness and death: Should we drive slower, buy safer cars, get better smoke alarms? And the other side: Should we pay more to eat organic food, get more exercise? Health insurance companies essentially do so as well in deciding whether the cost of particular treatments are going to be worth the benefit.

What we don't do is acknowledge that we are making that tradeoff. Perhaps especially as Americans, we have been unaware, uncomfortable and possibly unwilling to think of the tradeoff between money and the risk of illness and death perhaps because, with private healthcare, that tradeoff is rarely discussed explicitly. Sometimes we can pretend that there is no such tradeoff: When a little child is at risk and the story is in the news, we move heaven and earth to save them, and we all feel good about that.

Yet, we are incredibly inconsistent in what we spend to save lives. A few dollars given to the right agencies in developing countries can save a child's life, for example, yet those organizations struggle to get funds. This inconsistency is the essence of the comparisons with flu that no doubt we all hear. How much more dangerous COVID-19 is than seasonal flu is something that doctors can debate, but there is no denying the fact that the price we have been willing to pay to reduce the death rate from the former is vastly, extravagantly more than we have spent to reduce deaths from flu.

This lack of awareness and inconsistency will soon matter a lot when we ask people to come back to work. It will be the same problem we have getting parents to let their kids go back to school or religious organizations to get people to attend services. It is akin to what labor unions used to face in persuading their members to undertake the costly process of going on strike and then persuading them to stop and come back to work, often for settlements that were little different than before. The idea that, after all this buy-in and social pressure to self-isolate, employees will happily return to their offices and workplaces is quite probably a mistake.

As I mentioned in last month's column, there is evidence that employees trust what their employer is telling them about the coronavirus and the shutdown more than what the government is saying. But a Gallup Poll showed that only about 52% of respondents reported that their employer had articulated a clear vision and plan about how to respond to the coronavirus situation.

So, what do we do? Making employees feel as though they are still doing social isolation probably helps—staying 6 feet apart, no big meetings (yay!), lots of sanitation and so forth. But the leaders also have to do some explaining: The risk we are taking in being at work is very modest especially compared to the risks we take in everyday life already, that any social interaction requires confronting those risks and getting society going again is just as noble a mission as was shutting it down. We should ask for volunteers to be the first ones back so that the new normal is already in place when the more skittish workers return. We should also marvel at the incredible and also costly exercise we have just been through.

*Peter Cappelli is the George W. Taylor Professor of Management and director of the Center for Human Resources at The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Send questions or comments to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*



Kate Bravery

based recruiting platform, has helped clients shift talent internally to different business units that are hiring to avoid furloughs and mass layoffs. While they

were not at liberty to name the client directly, a "good portion" of the industries that specific client serves are currently closed down (shuttered schools and sporting arenas), forcing it to act fast to repurpose its workforce for the other service areas/business units where hiring is ramping up (healthcare, corrections, custodial), according to Josh Zywiec, Paradox's chief marketing officer.

Zywiec says the client used Paradox to create an outbound campaign through the latter's AI Assistant to reach out to displaced workers and see what other areas they'd be interested in. The automated, conversational AI experience was seamless for employees, but it also saved the company's recruiting and HR team hours of manual work.

"In one case, the client was able to identify and engage employees who are looking for full-time work with an opportunity at a hospital in the Dallas area," he says. "The effort allows the client to quickly fill open positions and get their furloughed employees back to work faster."

"We like to think this is an experience we won't go through again, but companies are beginning to proactively build these types of relationships for now, but also for the longer term," says Mercer's Bravery. "It's a smart way to go. Temporary talent sharing, for progressive employers, is becoming part of their arsenal of how to respond to changing economic realities that won't bounce back to as it was before."

Bravery adds that, companies already doing talent sharing largely report it enhances their employee-value proposition, so they are not concerned about losing the right talent. They also believe that this can build their workforce's adaptability. That said, they note that, if the employee feels they have a better opportunity with the receiving company, they are also OK with them taking up a new challenge. "What's key is managing the messaging and change process to ensure this builds future value," she notes.

"Companies are saying, if we get this right, it can benefit us all in so many productive ways—ways we've only just started to discover," she concludes.

*Send questions or comments about this story to [hreletters@lrp.com](mailto:hreletters@lrp.com).*

## WORDS OF AUTHORITY

# Getting the Basics Right: Build a Solid HR Foundation for Resiliency, Agility and Growth

**P**eople are the heart of any business. Successful leaders understand that, which is why figuring out an employee-focused strategy has become table stakes for them. Companies must also juggle competing forces: the ability to pivot and adapt the workforce to changing business needs, and meet expectations from external market pressures and internal stakeholders.

Data-driven processes that offer insights can help, as those insights are necessary to plan for immediate and future workforce needs, recruit and reskill employees, and develop employee-led experiences. But many organizations are flummoxed about where to begin. How do they go about designing the critical foundation?

In short, start with the basics. Step one is to map the stages of your employee lifecycle and your data strategy before implementing them into your HR system. And don't do this exercise in a silo: Consult with your finance, operations and executive teams as well. Your workforce strategy and technology fundamentals are your foundation, and it should be resilient enough to handle the biggest business shifts your business might face, such as M&A, major market fluctuations and global expansion.

You might be thinking, "easier said than done." So, to ensure your business gets the basics right, we've put together comprehensive strategy and execution guides with practical tips on how to start building your HR foundation. We've organized these guides around the four employee lifecycle stages we've identified.

## Plan to Hire

Align your workforce plan with your business objectives for more effective planning, recruiting and onboarding.

Set up a strategic but simple plan-to-hire process with the insights to match individuals with skills needed. This will inform your recruiting team's hiring plans. Here are a couple of ways to get started:

- Analyze employee trends, such as demographic insights and turnover data, to inform strategic workforce-planning decisions.



- Reduce your time to fill and improve time to productivity by eliminating gaps in your recruiting process while staying aligned with hiring regulations.

## Hire to Pay

Streamline HR and payroll to boost efficiency and enable agility across your organization.

Having a single source for data you can trust empowers your organization to create a seamless hire-to-pay process. This gives cross-functional teams the ability to execute more accurate payroll with the flexibility to keep pace with workforce and data changes. First steps for this stage of the employee lifecycle include the following:

- Identify compliance and regulatory standards and employment law updates needed alongside your payroll counterparts.
- Determine financial insights necessary to assess labor costs, including paid time off, overtime trends and incentive-pay analysis.

## Develop to Perform

Go beyond performance management by fostering a culture of recognition and

continuous engagement, learning and growth.

The traditional culture of performance management had a heavy focus on annual performance reviews and past accomplishments. But today's most successful companies look forward, examining how to best personalize professional development to improve retention, reduce turnover and accelerate organizational performance. Not only do you need to help develop your talent, but you must also align their growth plans with your company's strategic goals and objectives. Here are a couple of ways to get started:

- Define your recognition strategy. Ensure this is developed along with your company goals.
- Design personalized learning paths and programs that deepen and expand an employee's expertise.

## Reward to Retain

Embrace a more dynamic, personalized approach to help employees feel truly valued, motivated and fulfilled.

It's a new world that requires new ways of thinking about rewards and retention—evolving from a static, salary-centric philosophy to a more dynamic, personalized approach. Build a comprehensive reward-to-retain program that goes far beyond traditional compensation and benefits packages, encompassing a richer array of potential rewards that include flexible work environments, personal growth opportunities, career development and work-life balance.

- Define total-rewards packages and plans as part of a flexible rewards program. Gather employee feedback and assess individual engagement to these benefits.
- Collaborate with your total-rewards team to discover which rewards are widely used and valued by employees, and tailor your investments accordingly.

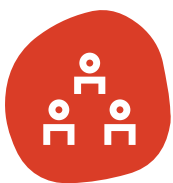
To find out more, visit *Getting the Basics Right* at [workday.com/en-us/pages/getting-the-basics-right-hcm.html](https://workday.com/en-us/pages/getting-the-basics-right-hcm.html).



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A global, platform-based HCM solution designed to drive team performance and rapidly adapt to changing needs

## Discover the 5 key pillars behind the solution



### DYNAMIC TEAMS

Enable team leaders to drive engagement, retention and performance closest to where work happens



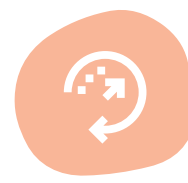
### WORK AND PAY YOUR WAY

Select and configure mini-apps by function, location or team to provide personalized experiences to support great work



### GLOBAL COMPLIANCE

Confidently expand into new countries and rapidly adapt to evolving compliance requirements



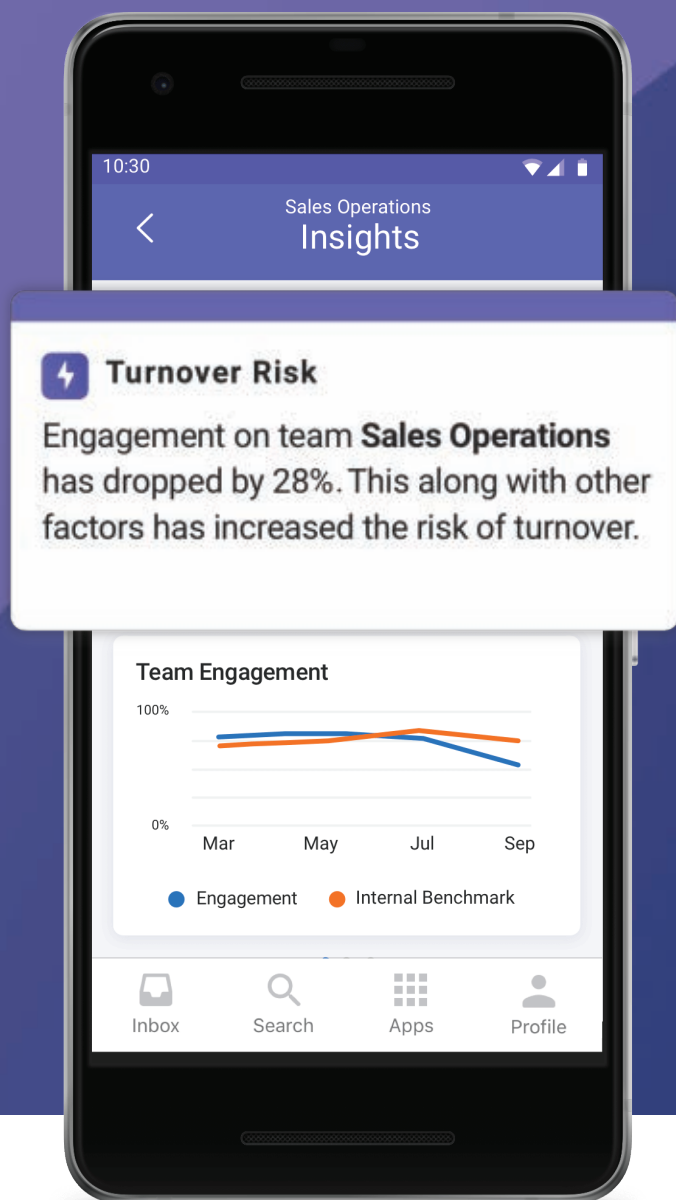
### REAL DATA, REAL ACTION

Capitalize on trusted people insights delivered in the flow of work



### ADAPTABLE TECH PLATFORM

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# Insights from a CHRO

## Kate Threewits on Communication and Change Management

BY JEN COLLETTA

**K**ate Threewits, principal and senior vice president of human resources at business communications firm G&S Communications, says her interest in HR was sparked more than 20 years ago by the field's potential to address the dynamic intersection of the human experience and business strategy—a value that has remained constant despite HR's radical changes in the last two decades.

Threewits has witnessed those changes from a variety of vantage points. She led HR at All Kinds of Minds, which advocates for education that recognizes learning differences, and spent six years as the director and later senior director of HR at the American Heart Association. In 2014, she joined G&S as the senior director of HR and saw a series of promotions in the last six years. Her responsibilities have included recruiting and retention, benefits administration, culture, training and more, with accolades that include helping the agency earn the 2018 Corporate/B2B Agency of the Year award from the Holmes Report.

We checked in with Threewits to see how her organization is handling today's challenges while continuing to look forward.

### How different has your day-to-day been because of the pandemic (both personally and professionally)?

It's changed significantly on both fronts. My workday looks much different in my role at G&S, and I now have the added responsibility of homeschooling a second grader. I try to stress the importance of work/life integration to our employees as often as I can, and, in this new environment to which we find ourselves having to adapt, it is as important as ever. I realized early on that, to be effective, I would need to do some of the very things I was recommending to others, like developing a routine, designating a specific work space and creating work blocks in order to maximize productivity. It hasn't been easy. In fact, at times, it has been chaotic. It is important that we are honest with ourselves and others about how we are feeling and accept the fact that it's not going to be perfect, and that's OK.

### How has your approach to communicating with employees shifted since the pandemic started?

As we continue to see ebbs and flows in the pandemic, we communicate with employees early and often. We understand that some employees need to shift in order to care for their families and, to help facilitate those adjustments, we offer a flexible work environment. Supporting flexibility in working arrangements and communicating a shared empathy for the challenges we're all facing goes a long way in building trust and respect. Also, we remind employees of their benefits, including telehealth options available, so they do not have to postpone necessary check-ups.

### Once the crisis subsides, what will be a few of your top priorities at G&S?

One of our priorities is making sure our employees feel healthy and safe as we return to a "normal" working environment. We want to make sure everyone eases back into their routines and knows that we will be here to offer them assistance where needed.

### Is there any advice you were given early on in your career that's helped shape your approach to HR? (Or conversely, is there any advice you found to not pan out in your experience?)

My mentor, Ella Wilson, had a sign in her office that read, "Change or Die." I have never forgotten that, and I have taken that with me throughout my career. Adaptability and change management are essential in today's fast-paced, always-connected environment. The title of Marshall Goldsmith's book, *What Got You Here, Won't Get You There*, rings more true today than ever before. You have to continue to learn and continue to evolve to remain an effective HR leader in today's workforce.

### What prompted the creation of the Think Differently Together initiative at G&S? And what have been some of the lasting impacts from it?

Our CEO, Luke Lambert, reached out to me after sitting through several industry meetings focused on the lack of diversity among communications agencies. He was frustrated by the lack of progress being made and wanted to take action. From there, we created our D&I program, Think Differently Together. We found that a diverse and inclusive workforce encourages out-of-the-box thinking, which is necessary to foster creativity, drive innovation and guide business strategies. A variety of voices leads to new ideas, services and products, resulting in business growth for our clients. It is a competitive advantage for us and an important part of our culture.



### You've worked both in the non-profit and for-profit worlds: Is there a mindset shift between the two, in terms of HR strategy?

There are certainly nuances between non-profit and for-profit organizations. However, I don't see a huge shift in HR strategy between the two. The overall goal of any effective HR strategy is to inspire people to do the best work of their life. In order to do that, people have to feel a connection to the organization's mission and an understanding of the role they play in achieving that mission. In the non-profit world, the mission may be more obvious. For instance, the American Heart Association builds healthier lives in the fight against heart disease. But, regardless of the organization, it's still about helping employees make an aspirational connection and recognizing their contribution to our world.

### What have been one or two of the biggest changes the HR industry as a whole has undergone since you started working in this field?

Without a doubt, it has been the evolution of HR from tactical policy enforcer to strategic business partner. When I first started my career in HR, there was still a great deal of skepticism about the value that HR brought to an organization, and we had to fight for a seat at the table. Today, the C-suite considers HR a valued, strategic advisor critical to the achievement of overall business strategy.

### What was your first (or worst) job?

My first job out of college was in a customer service call center for a large telecommunications company. I quickly realized it was not the career I wanted to pursue but, looking back, the customer service experience I gained while there was a skill set on which I continue to rely.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

My favorite way to unwind is to spend time with my family. I also enjoy Pilates; it is the 45-minute activity of my day that truly belongs to me.

## Zeroing in on Mental Health

As employers shift their coronavirus strategizing to creating return-to-work plans, aspects like office redesign to allow for social distancing and benefits enhancements to help workers through the challenging times may be commonly discussed. According to new research, organizations should also pay close attention to mental health. In a survey by Willis Towers Watson of more than 200 employers across multiple industries that collectively employ nearly 2.5 million people, 64% reported they anticipate their employees will be more stressed and anxious than usual in the next few months. Related, 60% believe they will be challenged to help employees tap into resiliency in the coming months.

### What it Means for HR Leaders

While increased stress and anxiety during and following a global pandemic would be a no-brainer, it's one that still requires employer action, says Casey Hauch, senior director of communication and change management at Willis Towers Watson. One step all employers should take to alleviate the burden on both managers and employees is increased training and development opportunities, Hauch says.

"It's really important that managers are supporting continued flexibility and are doing so consistently upon return to work," she says, "demonstrating an understanding of employee needs, and managing teams and work accordingly."

Communication has emerged as one of the driving forces of employee resiliency during the pandemic. Hauch adds that "over"-communication is not a bad thing, as workers are hungry for information—even if it's a simple "we don't know" message. Employers can also tackle rising stress levels by doubling down on connecting employees to the company purpose.

"This pandemic has really highlighted the need for having a greater purpose than just profits, and perhaps caused some organizations to question whether theirs is clear enough—to customers, community, employees and other stakeholders," Hauch says. "To articulate and connect employees with purpose and reason for being in this new world will be critical."

—Jen Colletta





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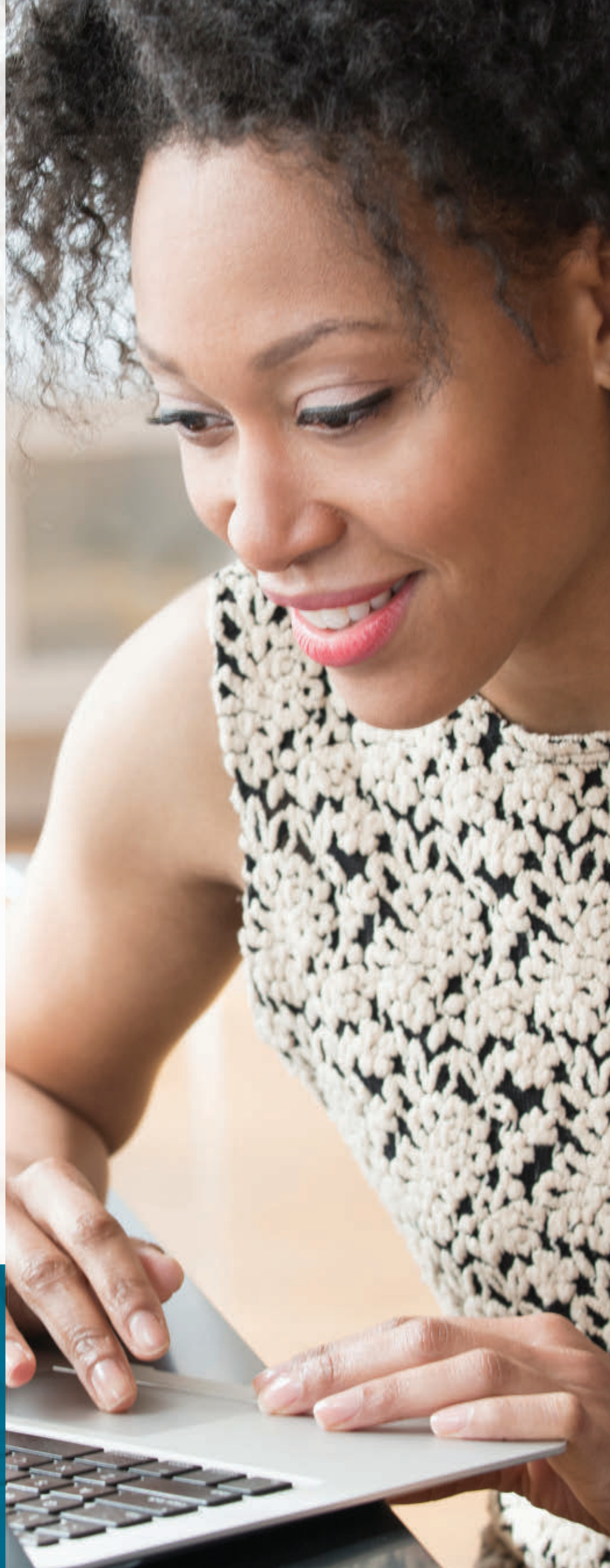
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# Marketplace

Below is a listing of products, services and solutions for human resource executives and their organizations. To receive more information, please contact them directly.



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## People

**Compiled by Jen Colletta**

**Ali Intres** was hired as senior vice president of HR and talent management at *Forbes*, focused on recruitment, training and development, benefits administration, culture and more.

She most recently was senior vice president of talent and business operations for the East Coast at Digitas and previously held several HR leadership roles at Time, Inc.

Intres earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Wagner College and a master's degree in organizational psychology from Columbia University.

**Shelly Holt** was recently named chief people officer at *PayScale, Inc.*

Holt comes to the company from Expedia Group, where she was vice president of learning and development. Previously, she held leadership roles in the area of learning and development at SAP and Concur.

*Accruent* has hired **Aaron Hamilton** as vice president of HR.

Previously, Hamilton served as head of global talent at Tektronix and held HR leadership roles at Honeywell, Fortive, General Electric and Home Depot.

He has a master's degree in industrial labor relations from Cornell University and a bachelor's in business management from Arizona State University.



*Kaiser Permanente* named **Christian Meisner** as senior vice president and CHRO of its Kaiser Foundation Health Plan, Inc., and the Kaiser Foundation Hospitals.

Meisner previously was corporate vice president of talent and integration at United Technologies Corp. and was also CHRO at Otis Elevator Co.

He earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Villanova University and a master's degree in labor and industrial relations from Michigan State University.

**Valeria Escobari** has been hired as the first chief people officer for financial-consulting company Danforth Advisors, LLC.

She spent 10 years at Boston Consulting Group, most recently as consulting team talent manager. She has also led enterprise strategy at Iron Mountain and consulted at Skype.

Escobari has a bachelor's degree in history and literature from Harvard University and a master's of business administration from London Business School.

*Precision BioSciences Inc.* has hired **Dora Alvarado** as its senior vice president of HR. She comes to the organization from Premier Research,



where she served as vice president of HR.

She has also held HR leadership roles at Phononic, IntraHealth International, Tekelec, Parata Systems, RTI International, Cigna Healthcare and SC Johnson.

Alvarado earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Costa Rica.

**Maurice Barrett** joined the Newark Museum of Art as its head of HR.

Barrett comes to the museum from hunger-relief agency City Harvest, where he most recently was CHRO and previously served as senior director of HR. He has also held HR leadership roles at Community Brands, EFT Inc. and RADVISION.

He earned a bachelor's degree in international business management from Berkeley College and a master's degree in HR management and development from New York University.

*FLIR Systems*, a producer of thermal-imaging products, has hired **Paula Cooney** as its senior vice president and CHRO.

Cooney most recently was vice president of HR and communications at H.B. Fuller, where she previously was director of global HR strategic



programs. She spent 13 years with Intel Corp., including as the HR director of global strategic employee relations.

She earned degrees from the National College of Ireland and the University College Dublin.

**Allison Pinkham** recently joined *THE HEINEKEN CO.* as chief people officer.

Most recently, Pinkham was vice president of HR at Boehringer-Ingelheim, where she held numerous HR leadership positions in the last eight years. Previously, she was in leadership roles at Mastercard, University of Virginia, Booz Allen Hamilton and Accenture.

Pinkham holds a bachelor's degree in communication and public relations from Virginia Tech.

*Lumber Liquidators* hired **Matthew Argano** as its next CHRO.

Argano comes to the company from Altar'd State Inc., where he was senior vice president and chief people officer. Previously, he held top HR positions at the Fresh Market, Maidenform and the Children's Place.

Argano earned a doctoral degree in philosophy from Tennessee Temple University.



22 million

The number of Americans who filed for unemployment in the first four weeks after large portions of the U.S. economy began shutting down because of coronavirus.

Source: Daily Beast



13

In mid-March, 32% percent of employees surveyed said coronavirus had harmed their mental health, a number that jumped 13 percentage points to 45% two weeks later.

Source: Kaiser Family Foundation

60%

Percentage of employees who are confident they can do their job efficiently while working remotely.

Source: Glassdoor

22%

Percentage of employers that say their caregiving benefits are below or well below average.

Source: Northeast Business Group on Health



41%

Percentage of Americans who say not having enough emergency savings is their top financial concern right now.

Source: National Endowment for Financial Education.



3.5

Fully remote employees are 3.5 times more likely than others to work across five or more teams.

Source: Gartner

69%

Percentage of employees who say the current pandemic is the most stressful time of their careers.

Source: Ginger

175,000



The number of jobs Amazon added in March and April to meet increased demand.

Source: Reuters





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