

SEPTEMBER 2021 WEBINAR

HR Post COVID

NAVIGATING HR AMID THE CHALLENGING TIMES WE LIVE IN

For our most recent webinar on Sept. 16 we were joined by Sandra M. Reed SPHR, SHRM-SCP, an industry expert with over 20 years of experience. Sandra led our informative conversation that covered the following areas:

- Recognizing how the pandemic changed HR practices in the areas of Talent Acquisition, Risk Management, Employee Relations & Engagement, Learning & Development, Total Rewards and Business Strategy.
- Best practices and innovative solutions to the re-imagined way of work
- Navigating HR burnout as part of recovery

If you were unable to join us, we've compiled the important takeaways in this webinar recap.

And learn more about Sandra Reed at SandraReed.co.

PERSPECTIVE MATTERS

Sandra started out the webinar with an interactive exercise to show that perspective matters. The image on the screen was as follows, but whether the audience saw a young woman or an old woman in the image differed. What do you see?

The purpose is to show that perspective matters and that we need to view the pandemic through different perspectives in order to come up with proactive and creative solutions.



WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

The topic of workplace flexibility has been on everyone's mind since the start of the pandemic. Will my company start requiring us to go back into the office? Will I ever return to my office again? Tech giants Facebook and Twitter have decided that their employees will work from home for an indefinite period, so what's stopping other businesses from doing the same thing?

The majority of businesses in the U.S are small businesses that do not have the means or the capital to have a fully remote work environment. Small businesses have struggled throughout

the pandemic for many reasons. They may be perceived to be a less desirable place to work since they can't offer the same remote work benefits as big companies. This has even led to lawsuits alleging that employers did not accommodate employees who wanted to work remotely. Many organizations are struggling with recruiting due to this issue, so HR has to offer solutions:

- Build a business case for remote work by including the cost of living differentials and use evidence (such as productivity tracking) that supports your working model
- Regularly update policies and procedures
- Take a job analysis initiative to redesign work to be more flexible or automated
- Listen to your employees and ask them how they see their roles flexing, even if a fully remote option is not available

The key is to change the mindset of organizational leaders who think that “not all jobs can flex.” Granted, there are certain conditions in which some people need to be in the office, but in order to attract and retain employees, we need to think outside of the usual work box, Reed suggested. Maybe take the cost of turnover and reallocate funds to a flex schedule—that could be a good use of the dollar you're probably going to spend anyway.

Source: <https://www.law.com/2021/09/09/office-reopening-plans-spurred-uptick-in-the-filing-of-covid-19-employment-lawsuits/>

TALENT ACQUISITION

In order to attract and retain high-quality talent, organizations need to get much more creative, Reed said. The standard online job application process is tedious and requires you to input all the information that's already on your resume into separate boxes. These barriers are preventing potential employees from even applying when some companies, such as TikTok, are allowing users to submit video resumes to Target, NASCAR, and Shopify through the app. Here are some strategies to build your workforce post-pandemic:

- Update and optimize technology
- Get mobile—the majority of Americans have mobile devices and at least 85% of them are smartphones
- Onboard distributed teams better: create central information hubs, photo directories, or buddy system
- Think beyond traditional recruiting sources
 - Amazon has a “Returnship” program that enhances mentoring and development for those who have been out of work for a longer period
 - Dave's Killer Bread is a company that offers a “Second-Chance” program for those with a criminal record
 - Develop an “earn while you learn” internship program

The goal is to reduce turnover in the first six months of work, as well as attract and retain new talent.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AND RETENTION

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is commonly referenced in HR because you need to understand the hierarchy in order to understand your employees. What drives them? What do they need in order to succeed? However, just like every other aspect of the workplace, COVID changed employees' needs. The questions became: What physical needs of our employees are being threatened? And, how do we fix that?

Immediately following the pandemic there was a lack of food and supplies in stores, a lack of safety, of comfort, of income, of child-care and other basic needs. All these needs that were not even acknowledged before became top of mind. Women were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Reed noted that due to the pay gap and the lack of child care, many mothers were forced to leave their jobs or work fully remotely in order to look after their kids. Although we can not change the way the pandemic affected employees and women specifically, Reed offered strategies to ease their discomfort:

- Conduct a "people" analysis that reviews:
 - Current retention strategies-what is working/not working
 - How are we investing in our people?
- Stop exit interviewing!
- Invest in AI technology to measure the engagement and that can predict exits
- Communicate with the "human"- acknowledging stress, showing appreciation, make innovative problem-solving part of every solution
- Treat employees as valued business partners, not "resources"

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

We have all come to realize that "Zoom fatigue" is very real. There's something so exhausting about being on back-to-back Zoom meetings throughout the day—the last thing you want to do when you get off work is stare at a screen! However, there are ways to combat Zoom fatigue. Here are some strategies Reed shared to help your employees be productive and grow while working remotely:

- Remind employees to not multitask while on zoom
- Avoid over-stimulating backgrounds
- Schedule phone calls instead
- Optimize micro-bursts of learning
- Commit to self-paced options
- Consider a hybrid approach that knits participants together in one meeting together in person with virtual follow up sessions

If we can start treating learning and development as an investment, we can make a huge difference, Reed said.

EMERGING AREAS OF RISK MANAGEMENT

Regardless of how hard we may try to minimize risk, it's always going to be there. Pandemic, politics, natural disasters, etc., are all unpredictable, and you can do your best to prepare for the future, but there is always an element of the unknown. Here are some things Reed noted to look out for when considering potential risks:

- Political movements at a state and federal level
- Mandates and system changes (not directly through labor law, i.e. health insurance premium surcharges)
- Consumer, company, and employee behaviors
- Hazard recognition
 - Whistleblower protections
 - Job task identification: Remote, outdoors, frequent, contact, healthcare
- Hazard control
 - Maintaining contact tracing and designating a single point of contact or process for reporting and track-backs
- Hazard prevention
 - Update Injury and Illness Prevention Program's (IIPPs) address work related flus and other contagious diseases
 - Masks, hand washing, social distancing

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

In 2019 the World Health Organization (WHO) classified burnout as an occupational phenomenon, defining it as "a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been managed."

It identifies three dimensions of burnout:

- Feelings of exhaustion
- Feelings of negativity about their job or company, and
- Feeling personally inadequate or ineffective at their jobs

It could be argued that human resource professionals are at a high risk of burnout. Over the last several years, the work of HR teams has become increasingly difficult, characterized by an environment that is all at once volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous. Here are some strategies to implement that positively supports employees:

- First things first—Reed had a message for HR people: Eat lunch!
- Acknowledge all emotions—even sadness, fear and anxiety
 - There's a term Susan David, PhD, use for this : Emotional agility
- Maintain connections: Social pain, such as being ignored, excluded or humiliated, triggers the same area of the brain as physical pain, according to a Harvard study on happiness
- Practice solving problems with the information processing neurons in the stomach: a flash of clarity, tingling, and butterflies
- Dream with your heart, not just your imagination
 - Volunteering has been shown to decrease the effects of depression and anxiety

While the pandemic has been difficult to navigate and often damaging to our mental health, it is also important to realize the areas of life it grew our appreciation for, such as essential workers, a group that was underrecognized before the pandemic. If we continue to take care of ourselves and take care of our team members, we will come out of the pandemic stronger than we were before.

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