

10 Ways Human Resources Will Change in 2022

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As companies manage their workforce in a post-pandemic era, here are 10 ways HR experts expect human resources departments to change.

With the new working environment many businesses are operating in, there are a number of key trends businesses should be focused on heading into 2021.

Employers should expect and increased demand for modified employee benefits like health and wellness programs and flexible work arrangements in the coming year.

HR staff should pay special attention to any new laws and regulations regarding COVID-19.

This article is for small businesses and human resources professionals who want to know what HR trends to expect in the upcoming year.

A great human resources (HR) department is of utmost value to any company. These are the individuals responsible for fielding job applicants, bringing in the most qualified ones and retaining talented employees once they're hired. The tactics that HR departments use to recruit and retain employees are always changing – especially during the "new normal" brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Here are 10 HR trends businesses should be aware of as we head into 2021 and what changes companies can make to keep up with the future of HR.

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1. Companies will prioritize diversity and inclusion initiatives.

With the Black Lives Matter movement and other social justice efforts highlighted in 2020, many employers and HR teams have changed tunes when it comes to prioritizing diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace. Having a diverse and inclusive workplace is not only the right thing to do, it can also benefit your business. Properly implemented diversity and inclusion training programs and initiatives can help with

talent acquisition, employee engagement and productivity, company reputation, and employee retention.

In 2021, HR staffs will pay closer attention to their D&I initiatives in relation to recruiting new employees and creating a safe and inclusive workspace for their teams.

Key takeaway: Implement D&I initiatives to recruit top talent and improve the overall employee experience.

2. HR departments will lean on technology for automated HR processes.

Jared Rosenthal, CEO and founder of the automated onboarding and screening system StaffGlass, said HR departments have recently experienced a massive acceleration in the push towards the use of cloud software to automate and manage their workflows – and this trend is expected to increase in 2021.

Although many companies already use software for some of their recruiting and onboarding services, the coronavirus pandemic created a bigger need for digitizing these processes. HR teams in 2021 are expected to embrace virtual HR processes like remote recruiting and automated onboarding.

"The end of the pandemic in 2021 will not stop the push toward automating HR services," Rosenthal told Business News Daily. "It's simple: If you're going to compete in the post-pandemic world, you need to move as much to the cloud as possible, including seemingly offline HR activities like drug testing and pre-employment occupational health testing."

Small business HR processes are not immune from the need for efficiencies, technological innovations, and cloud-based computing, he added. HR management should analyze the possibility of remotely hiring and onboarding new employees.

Key takeaway: The use of HR technology to streamline recruiting and onboarding processes will continue to ramp up in 2021.

3. Teams will adapt to the possibility of long-term remote work.

When the coronavirus pandemic forced businesses to shutter their doors in 2020, in-office employees abruptly transitioned to working remotely. What started as a temporary transition has since proven to be a more permanent solution for many businesses. Although several companies are still keeping their employees at home for health and safety reasons, many others will choose to implement the solution long-term due to employee demand.

"Employees love the flexible schedule and the absence of a commute so that there is more time in the day to spend with their families," said Angela Rochester, assistant

general counsel and human resources consultant for Engage PEO. "Employers should leverage technology as much as possible to maintain employee engagement."

In 2021, HR professionals will have to consider what technology and solutions will help them achieve an efficient remote workforce for the long haul. They will also need to consider what HR practices will be permanently affected by the continued integration of remote work. For example, Rochester said that HR employees should ensure remote workers are properly keeping time and enforce timekeeping policy violations.

"The impact of a flexible schedule may involve an extended workday as employees perform tasks outside of normal work hours, which could lead to wage and hour issues as employers must pay for all hours worked that employers know or have reason to know was performed, including work performed at home or remotely," said Rochester.

Key takeaway: Be prepared to adapt to long-term remote work with technology and new policies.

4. Employers will virtually maintain company culture and employee engagement.

Organizations with a full, or partial, remote staff will need to get creative in terms of keeping remote employees engaged and virtually maintaining their company culture. Without a physical office space to connect with co-workers, employees can feel isolated or disengaged, especially new hires.

"Maintaining employee engagement is crucial as remote work looks set to continue well into 2021 and beyond," said Nicole Reid, chief people officer at Xero. "To keep people engaged, they need to be connected to a purpose. It's important that every member of the team has a clear sense of the company's direction, and how their role contributes to it."

You can prioritize employee engagement and culture by hosting virtual meetings and hangouts, conducting employee surveys and increasing internal communication. Keep in mind that many employees are starting to suffer from online-meeting fatigue, so it is important to consult with your team to find the perfect balance.

Key takeaway: In 2021, you will need to work to keep your remote workers engaged through vision alignment, virtual meetings, clear communication and employee surveys.

5. Employers will focus on their employees' wellbeing.

Health and wellness are hot button topics right now, and for good reason. Employers are aware, now more than ever, of the importance of employee wellbeing and its impact on business success. However, during stressful and uncertain times like a pandemic, employee wellbeing is likely to decrease or fluctuate. Employers and HR staff

should focus on improving employee wellbeing while they adapt to the "new normal" in 2021.

"Small business leaders must step up to support their employees' wellbeing and engagement, likely in ways they haven't had to before," said Reid. "They must find ways to create a flexible and healthy work environment and support mental wellbeing in some of the toughest times we've seen."

Business leadership can help improve their employees' health and wellness by maintaining transparency and clear communication with their organization.

"Make sure that people aren't getting too exhausted and burning out," Reid said. "Have conversations so you know how your team is feeling, as well what they're doing."

Reid also advises small business owners to lead by example – take the time for self-care and set boundaries and expectations so your team can follow suit.

Key takeaway: In 2021, there will be additional importance placed on communicating with your team about how you can best support their health and wellness.

6. HR teams will modify employee benefits.

The pandemic caused employees to demand a whole new set of employee benefits and working arrangements. As employers seek to provide the best possible healthcare and benefits options for their staff, they should keep their employees' new needs in mind. For example, perks like free lunches and commuter benefits have become irrelevant, while employees are starting to prioritize other benefits like healthcare and wellness programs. Reid also recommends supporting employees by offering flexible work arrangements in 2021.

"Enable flexible work, whatever that means for the individual," Reid said. "Some parents of young children, for example, might need to juggle childcare and work during the day, and being able to work in the evening instead could be one less stress. A key point is that everyone has their own unique circumstances, and you've got to open those conversations, listen and take actions that are supportive."

Key takeaway: Employers will need to provide employees with the benefits they want, like increased healthcare, flexible work arrangements, and health and wellness programs.

7. Employers will face COVID-19-specific paid sick leave and accommodations.

As coronavirus cases surge, many employees will likely continue to request time off to quarantine and isolate. Although COVID-19 is not yet a recognized disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Rochester said employers must reasonably

accommodate employees' COVID-related disabilities that may create new or different circumstances for them in the workplace.

"Employers should continue to do what they normally would with respect to accommodation requests and identify the limitations that a disability imposes on the employee's essential job functions, engage in an interactive dialogue to determine whether a reasonable accommodation exists and, where circumstances require, provide an accommodation," said Rochester.

Additionally, many state and local jurisdictions have expanded their paid sick leave laws to apply to COVID-19 related reasons.

"Employers should familiarize themselves with the paid sick leave requirements for the jurisdictions in which they conduct business so that they can update their policies accordingly and understand which laws apply when dealing with COVID-19 related sick time," said Rochester.

Key takeaway: It will be imperative for businesses to stay up to date with the current rules and regulations that govern your employees' rights regarding COVID-19-specific paid sick leave and accommodations.

8. Employers may require employees to get the COVID-19 vaccination.

When a coronavirus vaccine becomes readily available to the general public, employers may be left wondering if they should – or can – require their employees to get vaccinated. Rochester said there are a few pros and cons to keep in mind when considering whether to mandate a COVID-19 for your employees.

Pros: Mandating a COVID-19 vaccine for all employees once it is available would certainly help reduce the risk of on-the-job transmission and could help limit an employer's liability of COVID-19-related workplace illness.

Cons: If an employee who got vaccinated because it was required by their employer suffers an adverse reaction to it, that may expose the employer to potential workers' compensation.

"If employers are inclined to mandate a COVID-19 vaccine in the workplace, [they] should exercise caution with respect to ADA considerations as well as those employees requesting religious accommodations," said Rochester. "Employers should also make sure that mandates are job-related and consistent with business necessity or justified by a direct threat."

Additionally, employers should pay special attention to whether the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) or other governmental agencies will adopt guidelines relating to employer-mandated vaccines.

Key takeaway: Employers will need to take proper precautions if mandating coronavirus vaccination.

9. Compliance is overloading HR departments.

As laws and guidelines continue to change, HR departments will be burdened by various compliance requirements. HR managers will be rewriting employee handbooks and re-evaluating rule sets that will need significant overhauling, such as harassment training, leave benefits and drug testing. And in some states, new rules defining the difference between an employee and a contractor will require more attention from HR departments.

Key takeaway: Pay close attention to employee labor laws and modify your HR strategy to comply.

10. HR teams will grapple with marijuana usage laws.

Several states legalized recreational and/or medical marijuana use in or before 2020, and more states are likely to follow suit in 2021. Although employers still have a right to implement drug-free workplace policies, Rochester said companies operating in multiple states should understand that testing policies can vary by location. Employers should stay up to date on the marijuana laws and regulations in their states and local jurisdictions.

"If an employee or an applicant test positive for marijuana, employers should be mindful of ADA considerations in connection with medical marijuana use and proceed accordingly," Rochester said.

Key takeaway: As laws change, it is important to have a clear understanding of the laws regarding employees and medical marijuana usage.