

advantage

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THE POWER OF CHECKING IN

We humans have an innate need to belong — to one another, to our friends and families, and to our culture and country. The same is true when we're at work. When people feel like they belong at work, they are more productive, motivated, engaged and 3.5 times more likely to contribute to their fullest potential, according to research at the [Center for Talent Innovation](#).

To better understand the emotional impact of belonging — and its inverse, feeling excluded — the [EY Belonging Barometer](#) study was launched, which surveyed 1,000 employed American adults.

The study substantiated existing evidence that exclusion is a growing issue. They found that more than 40% of those we surveyed are feeling physically and emotionally isolated in the workplace. This group spanned generations, genders, and ethnicities.

The majority of individuals look to their homes first (62%), before their workplaces (34%) when it comes to where they feel the greatest sense of belonging. While the workplace exceeds neighborhood communities (19%) and places of worship (17%), many individuals spend most of their time at work, and creating workplace communities where people feel like they belong is imperative.

Many people want more connection with those they work with. So how can organizations connect more effectively with employees and help them feel like they belong within their workplace community? The results of the survey pointed to one simple solution: establish more opportunities for colleagues to check in with one another.

Thirty-nine percent of respondents feel the greatest sense of belonging when their colleagues check in with them, both personally and professionally. This was true across genders and age groups, with checking in being the most popular tactic for establishing a sense of belonging across all generations. By reaching out and acknowledging their employees on a personal level, organizations and leaders can significantly enhance the employee experience by making their people feel valued and connected.

What didn't matter? Face time with senior leadership that wasn't personal. Being invited to big or external events or presentations by senior leaders, as well as being copied on their emails, was simply less meaningful to employees when it came to feeling a sense of belonging.

Of course, people have different preferences about how they connect with each other at work. While some people may want to sit and talk, some may prefer a digital chat and others may not be open to engaging at all. Learning how to engage with employees in a way that they feel comfortable is key to creating a sense of community. Here are a few tips to consider as you find the right option, method, and technology to check in with colleagues:

Seize the small opportunities to connect: Try to establish connections with your colleagues that communicate that you value, understand, and care about them. Be present, curious, and seize small daily opportunities to connect authentically. For example, a simple *“How are you doing? How can I support you?”* could go a long way in nearly every setting.

Check bias at the door: Check-ins are a time to listen to another person’s perspectives, not to debate or persuade. If someone shares something that you don’t understand or agree with, you might consider acknowledging their point of view or asking them to tell you more. For instance, *“Tell me more about it,”* or *“I never thought about it from that perspective, but I do realize we can experience the same situation in different ways, so I appreciate you explaining that for me.”*

Assume positive intent: Start any conversation with your colleagues believing that those talking or listening mean well, especially when it comes to difficult issues. Sometimes you might fumble through these topics, but assuming positive intent will help you pause, ask clarifying questions, and connect in a more meaningful way. Sometimes, these pauses make a huge difference. It is fine to say, *“I am pausing because I just don’t know what to say,”* or *“I am pausing because I want to learn more from you.”*

Be vulnerable: Seek feedback from your colleagues, especially those who are junior to you. Demonstrate your trust in them through the way you communicate and act on their feedback. Expressing vulnerability by acknowledging their views and talking openly about challenges you’re facing humanizes the relationship.

Be consistent and accountable: Be transparent and model consistent, inclusive behavior, even under pressure or during difficult conversations. Expect, reinforce, and reward the accountability of others.

These tips may help guide the way, but the journey towards true inclusion is never ending. It is a continuous path that requires commitment from everyone. By starting with simple things like a check-in, we all have the power to make a difference in the lives of others and even on the bottom line.

CREATIVITY IS A WOKPLACE NECESSITY

Successful and thriving organizations must be creative and in turn need to hire those who can be as well. Employees at any level can be champions of innovation. If some of your people show real interest and energy in generating their own ideas and supporting those of others, help them develop their skills. Innovation doesn’t just happen. You first must hire it and then you must work persistently to develop creative new ideas. Here are some strategies to kick your imagination into high gear:

- **Change your routine.** Reschedule your day so you’re doing things in a different order.
- **Vary your surroundings.** Rearrange your office for a different view, or switch offices with someone else if that’s practical. Hold meetings away from the workplace.
- **Share data differently.** Look for different ways to distribute information. For instance, write a report in rhyme, or deliver a presentation as a skit.
- **Switch jobs.** Spend a day doing someone else’s job—within your department or outside it.

- **Reintroduce yourself.** Pretend you're new to the team and introduce yourself all over again to the people you work with. What image do you present?
- **Question assumptions.** Why do you have to hold a meeting every Monday morning? What's important about the weekly memo you're required to write?
- **Dress differently.** Dress up when others wear casual clothes: Observe how it makes you feel to be different and how others treat you.
- **Look for bad ideas.** Hold a "dump the ideas" meeting with colleagues. One topic: "What should we stop doing so we have more time and energy for innovation?"
- **Hold a "blue sky day."** Challenge employees or co-workers to build a model or make some kind of graphic representation of their wildest business-related ideas. For one day, display them in hallways or your break room. Include sticky notepaper for people to share their thoughts and comments.
- **Hold a "gift exchange."** Have people write down their trickiest problem and drop them all in a hat. Then have everyone pick a problem from the hat and try to solve it. This can encourage people from different areas to get together and learn something about one another's problems and skills.
- **Form a dream team.** Collect a small group of people to meet once a week. Your job: to generate, share, and discuss ideas for innovation. Set specific subjects to stay focused.
- **Take a field trip.** Go to a museum, playground, zoo, theme park, or someplace like that. Ask everyone to come up with three business-related ideas inspired by the outing.
- **Encourage links to other innovators.** Within your organization, introduce your employees to other departments and individuals who can share ideas. Externally, sponsor your employees in professional organizations and at conferences, and provide relevant reading materials—journals, books, etc.

To learn more about fostering creativity in your workplace join us on March 31st for our webinar [Creativity and Curiosity](#).

Q & A:

Q: Can we require COVID-19 Vaccination?

A: As more vaccines have become available, we continue to get good questions about requiring employee vaccines. As with most things related to COVID-19 and people there is no absolute answer on this topic. Generally, the answer is yes, however, there are exceptions. There are several considerations we encourage you to think about in deciding if you will require vaccination.

Making vaccination a requirement ultimately means your organization is willing to terminate an employee for not meeting this new condition of employment. **This is question #1** for every organization considering the requirement path. If the answer to question #1 is yes, please don't forget the following exceptions which will apply if you implement a recruitment policy.

2.) Can Your employees get a vaccination?

The good folks at Littler Mendelson P.C. have just published the most comprehensive list we have seen of links to state agency websites, vaccine allocation plans, and other guidance related to the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines, as well as basic vaccination plan phases. [Click here](#)

3.) Are any of your employees Exempt by Law or Contract?

Exempt workers typically include people licensed or certified to provide health care, employees of a health care facility, a licensed health care provider or a clinical laboratory, firefighters, law enforcement officers, corrections officers, or parole and probation officers. Also, if you have a collective bargaining agreement that speak to vaccination, even if COVID-19 was not a consideration at the time the language was developed, you will need to follow that agreement. Less common and still applicable would be any employment contracts which could present similar challenges.

4.) Does your employee have a disability requiring accommodation under the ADA?

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has put together Technical Assistance Q & A on this very in-depth area of consideration. [Click here](#)

If you make the vaccination a requirement you will need to document the recruitment, communication with employees and, above all else, keep the lines of communication open for further discussion of individual needs. Also, don't forget this would likely be paid time.

We believe it is appropriate for organizations to encourage vaccination, rather than require, for the health and safety of each employee and their co-workers. This encouragement could include identification of availability timelines and locations, which is one of the greatest concerns shared by those wanting vaccination. You may even want to provide use of PTO or other paid leave provisions to receive the vaccine. However, be careful of other incentives as that may conflict with Pay Equity laws in some states, like Oregon.

BUSINESS NOTES

One Phish 2 Phish - Protect Your Employees. Employees are becoming more comfortable going to the IRS website to download IRS forms and tax publications. Oftentimes they are using their high-speed work computers to access these documents especially during tax return season.

Beware! The IRS is warning that scam artists continue to create so-called phishing websites that resemble the IRS site. Plus, some legitimate commercial websites also tried to resemble the IRS website or contain some form of the IRS name in their address but end in a .com, .net, or.org. These sites are not connected to the IRS. The only legitimate sites are those beginning with www.irs.gov.

We encourage you to remind employees that the IRS doesn't send unsolicited emails. Emails that solicit employees tax accounts or detailed information or financial information like PIN's and passwords are phony. Employees who receive suspicious emails should report them to company IT individuals and to a special IRS mailbox: phishing@irs.gov.

Carryovers permitted for Health and Dependent Care FSA Accounts.

Health and dependent care FSAs typically have a "use it or lose it rule" under which amounts remaining in the account at the end of the plan year (plus any grace period, which must be limited to 2 ½ months after the end of the plan year) are forfeited. The new law amends the Internal Revenue Code to provide employers with the option of adding a carryover provision or extending the grace period for expenses to be incurred. Under the

carryover provision, an employer may permit participants to carry over unused funds from 2020 to 2021 and from 2021 to 2022 so long as the carry-over does not exceed \$550. Under the grace period provision, for a calendar year plan, the 2020 grace period may be extended from March 15, 2021, to December 31, 2021, and the 2021 grace period may be extended from March 15, 2022, to December 31, 2022. The changes for health FSAs is a permanent change.

The benefit of either approach to employees in the age of COVID is obvious: Employees have more time to use their contributions, a meaningful benefit to employees incurring out-of-pocket COVID-related costs and employees whose children could not attend daycare due to the pandemic.

Employers making these changes may need to revise their plan. We encourage our clients to speak with their benefits broker about these new options.

The amended law allows employers to make these changes: allow employees to carry over unused money up to the full annual amount from the plan year 2020 to 2021, and also from the plan year 2021 to 2022 for both healthcare and dependent care FSAs.

EEOC Notes. In response to a White House directive, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) recently paused several of the prior administration's proposed and pending rules.

On Jan. 20, the White House asked all federal agencies to freeze proposed regulations and those with pending effective dates. President Biden's chief of staff, Ronald Klain shared in a letter that appointees should "have the opportunity to review any new or pending rule."

In response, the EEOC froze a set of proposed rules regarding voluntary wellness programs and a regulation on the agency's union "official time" rule. The previously proposed wellness rules would limit the value of incentives employers may use to encourage employee participation in programs that collect employees' health data. The agency's union "official time" rule would limit the on-the-clock time federal employees who are labor union representatives can spend aiding co-workers with discrimination complaints.

For more information on each of these rules under consideration please visit [the EEOC website](#).

HR LINKS

Minimum Wage is a hot topic for discussion now. But some say the conversation needs to be changed to considering a "living wage." If you aren't certain what the difference is in definition or hourly rates, you can find the info here <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>

The U.S. Department of Labor has launched a new monthly series of career workshops to provide employment assistance to transitioning military spouses. Participation is free and classes are open to all transitioning military spouses.

The workshops are part of the department’s Transition Assistance Program series targeted at helping military spouses plan and prepare for their job search in pursuit of their employment goals. Offered by the department’s [Veterans’ Employment and Training Service](#), the workshops are part of the Transition Employment Assistance for Military Spouses’ curriculum.

The following are some of the classes offered:

- Marketing Me
- Your Next Move
- Career Credentials
- Resume Essentials

This is a cooperative effort among the department’s [Veterans’ Employment and Training Service](#) and the departments of Defense, Education, Homeland Security and Veterans Affairs, the Small Business Administration, and the Office of Personnel Management, the Transition Assistance Program provides information, tools and

HRA CALENDAR

Open your Daytimers, Outlook, and all those Smartphones. The following is a look at upcoming events and workshops, special days, and other diverse and fun activities you will want to be aware of and schedule. To register for our workshops, go to [HR Answers Events](#) or click on the event below.

MARCH: National American Red Cross, Breast Awareness, Caffeine Awareness, Cerebral Palsy Awareness, Multiple Sclerosis Awareness, Craft, Kidney, Music in our Schools, and Women’s History Month.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mar 5 | Employee Appreciation Day |
| Mar 10 to
Apr 14 | HRA/SHRM Series – HR Basics: Developing Knowledge, Skills, Process,
and Systems – 5-part webinar series
March 10, 17, 31, April 7, 14
8:30am to 11:30am
Register Here |
| March 10 | HRA Webinar – Mindfulness
3:00pm to 5:00pm
Register Here |
| Mar 11 | Job Search Webinar – FREE
11:00am to 1:00pm
Register Here |
| Mar 14 | Daylight Savings |
| Mar 17 | St. Patrick’s Day |

Mar 18 **HRA Webinar – Ideas for Creating a Happy Workplace**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)

Mar 20 First Day of Spring and International Day of Happiness

Mar 31 **HRA Webinar - Soft Skills: Creativity and Curiosity**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)

COMING UP:

Apr 6 **HRA Webinar – Emotional Safety in the Workplace**
 9:00am to 11:00am
[Register Here](#)

Apr 7 **HR Lunch Bunch: Consultant’s Corner - FREE**
 12:00pm to 1:00pm
[Register Here](#)

Apr 8 **HRA Job Search Webinar - FREE**
 11:00am to 1:00pm
[Register Here](#)

Apr 8 & 15 **HRA Webinar: Performance Management (2-part webinar)**
 1:00pm to 4:30pm
[Register Here](#)

Apr 13 **HRA Webinar: Foundations of Leadership**
 8:30am to 12:00
[Register Here](#)

Apr 14 **HRA Webinar: Creating a Culture of Belonging**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)

Apr 28 **HRA Webinar – Soft Skills: Critical Thinking**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)

Apr 29 **HRA Webinar – Personal Improvement: Building Trust**
 8:30am to 11:00am
[Register Here](#)

LOOKING AHEAD:

- May 4** **HRA Webinar: Interviewing for Culture**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)
- May 5** **HR Lunch Bunch: Writing Questions for Employee Opinion Surveys **FREE****
 12:00pm to 1:00pm
[Register Here](#)
- May 6** **HRA Webinar - Technical Skills: Job Descriptions – A Valuable Resource in Risk Mitigation and Compliance**
 9:00am to 11:00am
[Register Here](#)
- May 13** **HRA Job Search Webinar - **FREE****
 11:00am to 1:00pm
[Register Here](#)
- May 18** **HRA Webinar: Coaching**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)
- May 20** **HRA Webinar - Technical Skills: Compensation Fundamentals I: Market Analysis and Salary Surveys**
 1:30pm to 3:30pm
[Register Here](#)
- May 25 to** **Success for Beginning Supervisors – an 8-part series on Tue & Thu**
Jun 17 1:00pm to 5:00pm
[Register Here](#)
- May 26** **HRA Webinar - Soft Skills: Emotional Intelligence**
 8:30am to 12:00pm
[Register Here](#)

IS HAPPINESS A SKILL?

Businesses and organizations are doubling down on efforts to prioritize employee well-being. Things like routine "check-ins," mentoring programs and company-sponsored mindfulness training are increasingly becoming the norm.

But are there actions we can take at an *individual* level to protect our wellbeing? What can we personally do to boost our own resilience, manage stress, safeguard our feelings of purpose and positivity, and bring our "best selves" to work despite the uncertainty?

It is a skill of the mind; a capacity to shape the way that we see, process, and interpret our reality and the things around us. Yes, Happiness can be developed like any other competence.

The quality of our happiness, says Pelin Kesebir, researcher and author, is contingent on the health of our relationship to reality, ourselves, and other people. And understanding that happiness comes from within.

"Too often we make the mistake of equating happiness with external factors: the fulfillment of certain desires like wealth, love, certain rules; hedonistic pleasure; or other people's approbation," she says.

A better approach is to think about happiness as something that emerges when we become comfortable with reality, whatever it looks like. The happiness skill, she says, is about achieving a certain acceptance of yourself, of other people and of the reality you inhabit. So how is it done? Here are some guidelines to feeling comfortable with reality.

Being happy doesn't mean feeling good all the time. Happy people have their own share of negative emotions. Getting comfortable with sometimes being uncomfortable is key to happiness. Letting go of expectations about an easy and perfect life and accepting the inevitability of change and loss can mitigate frustration when things go wrong.

If something is a fact, fighting or resisting is simply a waste our time and energy. As the pandemic has demonstrated, railing against things for which we have no control won't change anything. Far better to accept facts and move on.

Our attention is like a spotlight: what we focus on becomes our reality. This means that we can choose not to focus on the negative at the expense of the positive. The point is not being delusional or rejecting uncomfortable facts. We need to be fully in touch with reality for sustainable happiness. Rather, it is realizing that reality is larger than what our attention is presenting us, and under uncertainty, the same event can be interpreted through different lenses, some more positive than others.

All too often our inner voice will tell us that we're not good enough, smart enough or successful enough. But fussing with thoughts and feelings that pop up – taking them as facts – is the opposite of true awareness.

Happier people are those who can look at their own thoughts from a distance, who can hear and observe their emotions and inner voice without being carried away by what is going on their heads. They instead question the validity of those voices and aim at a more truthful and constructive inner voice. Happy people not only apply these concepts to their personal lives but to their work lives as well.

To learn more about what you can do to help create a happy workplace join us for a program on March 18th [Click Here.](#)

HRA NEWS

For HRA 2021 has kicked off with a BANG and we thought we would share news with you.

Over the last year we have been updating our technology on a variety of fronts. This updating also took hold inside our office with an internal office remodel. So, for the month of March our staff will be working from home while construction is taking place. We will let you know when the work is done and we have moved back in and can show off the place even if that means taking pictures and sharing virtually.

Our Senior Consultant, Paul Hutter, has recently accepted a position in compensation with a healthcare provider. He will be assisting them in building their compensation systems, as well as helping them broaden their Human Resource Generalist bandwidth. He will be missed, and we wish him the very best on this new journey.

Our requests for educational programming continue. While the Pandemic gave us a rest for a couple of months the requests have not died down. We have been busy!! Beside our local offerings both Laurie and Deborah will be speaking at the upcoming NHRMA Conference held this September and hosted by the Oregon State Council of SHRM. Make sure you check them out. Deborah has also been asked by CUPA and the local Student Chapter of SHRM (HRLT) to present at their upcoming conferences. Let us know if you are attending any of these events so we can say "hi."

HR BY THE NUMBERS

American workers are on the move! According to one study, between 14 and 23 million Americans plan to relocate as a result of the opportunity for remote work presented by the shelter in place orders resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

In an SHRM Survey from February 2021 called Navigating COVID-19 they found that 33% of Americans believe that the COVID-19 vaccine should be mandatory for everyone who is able to receive it. In addition, 28% of Americans who have been employed at some point in the pandemic would not get vaccinated if their employer required it, even if it meant risking termination from their job. They also found:

- Sixty percent of workers will probably or definitely get the vaccine once it becomes available to them.
- Nearly a quarter (24%) of employees who are not planning to get vaccinated would change their minds if their employer offered incentives such as cash bonuses or stipends, paid time off (PTO) or gift cards.
- 12% of employees would be willing to get vaccinated only if they might otherwise lose their job.

A recent data report by Tessian looked at employee preferences when it comes to remote vs. in-person work. Below are some specific statistics that might be helpful to organizations, managers, and HR teams looking at whether and when to bring staff back to the office:

- 11% of employees said they want to work exclusively from the office post-pandemic; 89% prefer a partly remote setup.
- 35% of employees would not work for an organization without flexible working options.
- The average employee wants to be able to work remotely at least 2 days a week.
- Demographic differences:
 - Men are almost twice as likely as women to want to return to a full week in the office (22% vs. 13%).
 - Older employees are much more likely to want to work from home, with 92% of respondents over 51 saying so vs. 56% of 18- to 30-year-olds.
 - 89% of U.K. office workers want to work remotely vs. 65% of American workers.
 - Employees working in accounting and finance are twice as likely as people in sales and marketing to want to work exclusively in an office post-pandemic—17% vs. 9%, respectively.

Learning on the job is not what it used to be. Economic constraints have impacted many businesses and organizations, which causes learning budgets to be drastically cut year-over-year. At the same time, employers have not necessarily assessed the expertise they need for the future and how to invest in the talent to make businesses flourish.

A Pew Research Center survey found that more than half (54%) of adults in the labor force say it will be essential for them to get training and develop new skills throughout their work life to keep up with workplace changes. And 35 percent of workers, including about three-in-ten (27%) adults with at least a bachelor's degree, say they don't have the education and training they need to get ahead at work.

Global industry analyst, Josh Bersin, did a study back in 2018 and found the opportunity to learn and grow was second to only to the nature of the work itself, as the number one source of inspiration in making employees happy and wanting to work harder.

A more experienced coworker or an expert with specific knowledge or skills can coach or mentor their peers or employees by providing guidance and monitoring of putting what employees learn into practice. Coaching/Mentoring also provides the ability to demonstrate, model, give feedback, and explain the "tricks of the trade" with workplace procedures.

However, learning by doing on the job doesn't cut it. Workplace learning requires structured experiences that help develop the capacity of workers to perform at their best potential. According to the Bersin study referenced above, a few (7%) employees referred to as "heavy learners" managed to spend 5 hours a week in some form of learning. This learning could be reading, taking classes, watching courses, or doing other things relevant to advancing their skills and careers. Medium learners (47%) spent 1 to 5 hours learning, and the light learners spent 1 hour or less.

An MIT Sloan Management Review & Deloitte Digital 2018 Global Study found the most successful, fast-growing, and digitally enabled organizations are differentiated by one thing. They transformed the way individual and organizations learn. The study showed that 73 percent of employees in these organizations were updating their skills every six months. And 44 percent reported continuously updating their skills. This required organizations to provide opportunities for employees to learn fast, learn well, and learn regularly.

Learning on the job may not be what it used to be, but there are far more opportunities to learn every day. Employees are the backbone of an organization. Allowing them to take advantage of what is available is a great way to encourage them to learn and hone their skills while looking to achieve their goals.

TIME TO RE-EVALUATE YOUR PERFORMANCE REVIEWS?

Between the shakeup of the pandemic to our new generation entering the workforce, 2021 might just be the year to re-evaluate your evaluation process. There are several emerging trends with performance reviews:

- **The Frequency.** More and more organizations are opting to move performance reviews from an annual to quarterly event. The goal is to create a continuous feedback loop that benefits both parties and makes implementing changes easier.
- **Separating pay and performance.** More HR departments have split pay discussions from performance reviews. Removing pay from the conversation sets the focus on performance and reduces the stress and negative impacts a salary negotiation can have on the goals set. It also is important that organizations need to be able to afford the pay increase and that might mean no annual increase.... or if doing the review more frequently you would not have an increase each time.
- **Reducing bias.** Unfortunately, there are a variety of ways biases can creep into our review activities. Gender, primacy, recency, centrality, halo/horn, and leniency are some of the most common concerns. New strategies are emerging as proven steps to reduce bias in reviews, including well-written evaluation rubrics, adding executives and HR managers to the review process and on-going manager training.

As so many businesses transition to remote work arrangements, many managers now find themselves tasked with how to lead employees from afar for the first time. Whether you're having ongoing one-on-one calls with employees to simply stay connected to what they're doing, or you're [delivering critical conversations](#) like [performance reviews](#), these simple tips can help you get the most out of virtual meetings.

Let employees know that you would like to see them. Sensitive conversations like performance reviews are far more streamlined when you can see the employee's facial expressions and reactions – even if the review is positive.

Give your employee several days of advance notice that you would like to have the conversation using live video tools so they can prepare for a private and professional exchange while working from home, particularly now that so many employees are tasked with juggling homeschooling and their job.

Make it a two-way conversation. Traditional performance review conversations tend to focus on basics like promotions, areas in which the employee succeeded since the last review, and highlight opportunities for improvement, skill development, and growth.

All of these factors still apply to a remote performance review but remember that employees likely have more questions about the present and future than the past in this new environment. Approach the review as a collaborative conversation, first and foremost, and plan to listen more than you talk. Invite the employee to ask questions about the “new normal” in the organization as you review past performance, new goals, and areas for development.

Discuss changed priorities openly and honestly. Business priorities may have shifted over the several months and employees may now fear for their job security. Dedicate time in the discussion to cover the wins and misses of the past, and how the employee can remain a valuable contribution moving forward. Clearly outline duties that may evolve or change in the coming months, so the employee understands where to focus, and why.

Create a plan for how to support the employee. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that remote workers are more productive than those who work in a physical office, but those stats are based on employees who have *chosen* to work remotely. The fact is, remote employees may not feel connected to the organization, the culture, or co-workers. Remote work arrangements can be isolating, and require a level of self-direction, motivation, and discipline that’s not intuitive for every employee. Regardless, many employees do not have a choice about where they’re working right now.

Dedicate at least part of the review discuss on how the employee can still collaborate with you and co-workers under the new circumstances. Talk about and even ask how much coaching, guidance, and support do they need from you while working from home? Do they understand the priorities and goals, and feel confident that they have the tools and skills to achieve them?

Every employee has a different work style and varying needs when it comes to succeeding remotely. Now is the time to get to know what your employee enjoys doing, where they feel capable and where they are struggling. Agree on a plan that will fuel your employee’s professional success moving forward. As importantly, assure your employee that their mental, emotional, and physical health is as important to you as her job performance right now.

THOUGHTS TO THINK ABOUT

“St. Patrick’s Day is an enchanted time—a day to begin transforming winter’s dreams into summer’s magic.”
—Adrienne Cook

“A best friend is like a four-leaf clover: hard to find and lucky to have.” —Unknown

“May your blessings outnumber the shamrocks that grow. And may trouble avoid you wherever you go.” –
Irish Blessing

“For each petal on the shamrock, this brings a wish your way: Good health, good luck, and happiness for today and every day.” –Irish Blessing

“May your trouble be less. And your blessings be more. And nothing but happiness come through your door.”
—Irish Blessing

ON MY SOAPBOX

I want to introduce you to someone who has much to teach us about business, customer service, and serving as an inspiration to others. His workplace teacher was the son of the founder. The founder had some definite ideas about how business should operate. He impressed these into his son as he was growing up. The founder started business as he opened a root beer stand. But it wasn't long before he converted it into a restaurant. To ensure that he retained employees, he put a doctor on the payroll to handle employee and their families' health issues. This was a highly unusual thing to do in the 1940's. He was way ahead of his time. This was indicative of what he taught his son about caring for employees. This man thought if "...you take good care of your people, they will take good care of the customers, and the customers will come back."

When the son took over management of the organization, he operated off the principles that he learned from his father; and he expanded the business. He also believed in training, lots of training. For one of the operating units, the new hire spends 90 days learning the job before they ever operate on their own. And in most of the other operating units, there is at least 30 days of training. His thought was you can't expect an employee to do the high-quality care of customers by saying simply, "Do your job." They need to know how to do each step of the operation, so the customers always have the same experience. He is known throughout the industry for his checklists. He admitted that he built one for every job and each detail of their work.

At one point, a new CEO was hired. He was the first non-family to be CEO in the organization. He adhered closely to the principles upon which the organization was founded, and he incorporated some of his own ideas. One he is known for is his award programs. When the organization continued to expand to worldwide, he decided that it was time for Awarding Excellence. Each year he invites about a dozen employees from around the world and brings them to Washington D.C. for 4-5 days. They get a tour of the city, access to many of the monuments, and then there is lunch with the man who is at the top. That lunch is small with only the award winners and the CEO of the organization, but the Celebration Dinner is really big. Between 400-500 to executives and managers are in attendance to hear the stories of the award winners. There is lots of clapping and cheering!! And then there is the award, a big medal for each winner. And following the medal presentation, each employee tells their story. The award winners are often cooks, maintenance, and front desk personnel. But their work stood out and they were recognized for the excellence they brought to their jobs. The CEO himself was recognized with the Chief Executive of the Year Award in 2019. This is an award given through a vote of other CEOs, which may be the highest accolade one can imagine. His name is Arne Sorenson, and he was responsible for the largest expansion that Marriott International accomplished. People describe him as a combination of "...empathy, warmth, and possessing of iron principles."

This is how Mr. Sorenson described his beliefs about the employees of Marriott: "We think we have about 730,000 people that wear our name badge every day. What we aspire to is that every one of those associates, no matter how senior or junior their job is, deserves to be treated with the kind of dignity that every human being deserves. They deserve to be able to grow in their job if they want to grow in their job. They deserve to be able to take pride in their work. If they take pride in their work, they're going to deliver something that is even better for our guests and customers...we want very much to be an example of something different, where everyone is welcome in our company to be an associate with us. Everybody is welcome to be a guest in our hotels. If we can be an example of genuine hospitality and create opportunities for folks, it is obviously something that is important and one powerful reason why I love the job so much!"

Mr. Sorenson was recruited by Bill Marriott. Being a lawyer, Mr. Sorenson had handled a 1993 court case for Marriott when he and Bill Marriott had become close. A few years later Mr. Marriott contacted him and offered him a job. Mr. Sorenson said “Yes, but not as a lawyer” and Mr. Marriott said “Okay.”

In a recent interview, Arne showed his humility by saying, “I will never have the celebrity that Bill Marriott had as CEO, and, frankly, I don’t want it. My name is not over the door and it never will be over the door.”

Arne Sorenson died on February 15, 2021 of pancreatic cancer. He was 62 so we lost him too early. A man who was CEO of the largest hotel chain in the world had much to share with us about the value of each employee and constantly thinking about the ways to make them feel special.



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