

PERSPECTIVES

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PERSPECTIVES

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PHRA President's Message

Brenda Thoma, PHR

Elevating HR Excellence: A Promising Start to the Year

Dear Members of the Pittsburgh HR Association,

As we embark on a new year filled with promise and potential, it is both an honor and a privilege to address you as the newly appointed President of the Pittsburgh HR Association. This vibrant community of HR professionals has a rich history of collaboration, knowledge sharing, and driving positive change in the workplace. I am

excited about the opportunities that lie ahead for our association and the impact we can collectively make on the world of human resources.

As we look to the future, let us embrace the lessons learned and leverage them to shape a new era of HR excellence. Our role goes beyond the conventional realms of talent acquisition, employee relations, and compliance. We are architects of workplace culture, champions of diversity and inclusion, and catalysts for innovation. It is our responsibility to create environments where individuals thrive, teams flourish, and organizations prosper.

In the coming months, the Pittsburgh HR Association will focus on several key initiatives aimed at elevating the standards of HR practices in our community. Some of these initiatives include:

- **Professional Development:** We continue to provide valuable learning opportunities through workshops, seminars, and networking events. Stay tuned for sessions that delve into emerging trends, best practices, and innovative strategies to keep you at the forefront of HR excellence.
- **Community Engagement:** Our association is a hub for collaboration, and we will continue to strengthen these bonds by fostering a sense of community. I look forward to initiatives that bring us together, both virtually and in person, to share insights, experiences, and inspiration.
- **Join us as a Volunteer:** As we embark on this exciting journey together, I encourage each member of the Pittsburgh HR Association to actively participate, contribute your unique perspectives, and take full advantage of the resources and opportunities our association provides.

I am confident that, with your support and dedication, we will continue the PHRA's legacy of providing top notch resources, programs and benchmarks for HR excellence. Here's to a year of growth, collaboration, and making a lasting impact on the world of HR.

Warm regards,

Brenda Thoma, PHR

PHRA President

US Steel, HR Manager

3 Things HR Professionals Should Know About AI in Background Screening

By Jennifer Kerrigan, Regional Account Executive, Alliance Risk Group, Inc.

Unleashing the Power of AI in Background Screening: Navigating Guidelines and Compliance

As we surge ahead into an era of technological innovation, the landscape of employment background screening is evolving at a rapid pace. Employers must be cautious and informed to navigate the intersections of artificial intelligence (AI), the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) guidelines, and the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).

The Impact of AI in Background Screening & Selection Tools

Employers cannot rely solely on vendor assurances regarding compliance with Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Recent guidance from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) clarifies that if an AI tool results in an adverse discriminatory impact, the employer may be held liable. This wake-up call emphasizes the importance of realizing that longstanding nondiscrimination laws also apply to AI-driven employment selection tools.

1. AI in Background Screening

AI, with its data-driven algorithms, has the potential to revolutionize background screening by speeding up processes and increasing accuracy. According to a recent article by SHRM, “AI can quickly sift through millions of records in seconds, identify patterns or concerns that a manual reviewer might miss, and integrate disparate data sources to form a more complete picture of job seekers.” The article also highlights the benefits of AI such as reducing time spent on reviews and improving efficiency.

However, concerns related to AI must be acknowledged. As the same article mentions, “There’s an ongoing concern about AI perpetuating human biases, especially if it’s trained on historically biased data.” It is crucial to ensure that AI models used in background screening do not inadvertently favor or disfavor certain demographics, potentially leading to discrimination.

Transparency is another aspect that should be addressed. The “black box” nature of some AI models can make it challenging to understand and justify certain recommendations. This makes it harder to address disputes and ensure accountability.

2. FTC Guidelines on AI in Background Screening

The Federal Trade Commission recognizes the potential pitfalls of AI and has provided guidelines for businesses. In accordance with these guidelines, here are some key takeaways:

- **Truthfulness:** Any claims about what an AI tool can do, especially regarding employment screening, must be substantiated. It is essential to provide accurate information about the capabilities and limitations of AI systems.
- **Fairness:** Companies must ensure that their AI models do not perpetuate bias or result in discriminatory outcomes. This involves thorough testing and validation to identify and mitigate potential biases.
- **Transparency:** Transparency is crucial when it comes to AI in background screening. Users should be informed about how the AI operates, the type of data it uses, and any potential risks involved. For example, if an AI tool uses social media behavior as part of its background screening process, this must be disclosed.
- **Accountability:** There must be a mechanism for dispute resolution, and companies should regularly validate their AI systems to ensure they remain accurate and fair. Regular audits and reviews are necessary to maintain accountability.

3 Things HR Professionals Should Know About AI in Background Screening (cont.)

By Jennifer Kerrigan, Regional Account Executive, Alliance Risk Group, Inc.

3. Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) and AI in Background Screening

The Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA) plays a crucial role in the background screening process, particularly when it involves credit checks or any background screening conducted by a third-party agency. To maintain compliance and make informed decisions, employers need to keep certain factors in mind.

- First, before conducting a background screening using a third-party agency, employers must disclose and obtain written consent from the applicant or employee. This step ensures transparency and sets a foundation for a fair screening process.
- Second, if the employer plans to take adverse action based on the background screening results, such as not hiring an applicant, they must follow specific procedures. This includes providing the individual with a notice, a copy of the report, and information about their rights under the FCRA.
- Third, individuals have the right to dispute any inaccurate information in their report. In such cases, the reporting agency has an obligation to conduct a timely investigation to ensure accuracy.

Conclusion

In summary, the advent of AI presents a promising opportunity for employers to add efficiency and innovation in background screening while avoiding potential legal, ethical, and compliance issues. However, it is critical that companies tread carefully when utilizing this new technology and follow a few key steps to ensure successful implementation. Ensure all relevant FTC and FCRA regulations are followed, thoroughly evaluate AI vendors for bias, transparency, and guidelines adherence, and provide training on using AI for those conducting the background screenings.

By implementing these strategies, employers can make compliant and fair hiring decisions with minimal disruption to the overall process. If you need assistance in navigating this complex landscape, Alliance Risk Group, Inc. is here to help! Contact us today! Contact Jennifer Kerrigan for a complimentary risk review [HERE](#) Read more on this topic [HERE](#)

Enhancing Employee Engagement: 6 Strategies for Successful Corporate Wellness Programs

By Megan Wollerton – Life Force Wellness, Megan@lifeforcewellness.com

In the fast-paced corporate world, prioritizing employee well-being has become essential for fostering a healthy and productive work environment. Employee well-being is a critical factor in organizational success, and corporate wellness programs play a pivotal role in promoting employee engagement, boosting morale, and enhancing overall job satisfaction. However, designing an effective wellness program is only the first step; ensuring high participation and engagement is equally crucial. As a corporate wellness consultant, I understand the significance of creating effective programs that resonate with employees. This article will explore six strategies to promote engagement in corporate wellness programs.

1. Customization for Diverse Needs:

One size does not fit all when it comes to wellness programs. Recognize that your workforce is diverse, with varying health needs and preferences, so it's necessary to offer a variety of options to cater to these diverse needs. Conduct surveys or focus group sessions to understand your employees' preferences and challenges. This valuable insight can help you tailor wellness initiatives to suit your workforce's unique demographics and needs, increasing participation and engagement. Providing options by offering a range of activities, such as fitness classes, nutritional workshops, mental health resources, and stress management programs, ensures that employees can find activities that resonate with their individual interests and goals, thereby increasing participation.

2. Communication and Transparency:

Clear and consistent communication is vital for the success of any wellness program. Leaders should actively communicate the program's purpose, benefits, and available resources to ensure their employees are well-informed about the available wellness resources, activities, and overall objectives. Utilize multiple channels such as email, company newsletters, bulletin boards, and even social media platforms to regularly communicate the benefits of participating in the program, emphasizing the positive impact on both personal and professional well-being. This open transparency fosters trust and encourages employees to actively engage in wellness initiatives, knowing that their well-being is a priority for the organization.

3. Incentivize and Recognize Participation:

Motivate employees to actively participate in wellness programs by introducing incentives and recognition mechanisms. Whether it's through rewards, recognition, or friendly competition, incentives can create a sense of excitement and competition. Create a reward system acknowledging milestones and achievements, such as reaching fitness goals, consistently attending wellness activities, or adopting healthier lifestyle choices. Recognizing and celebrating individual and team achievements fosters a positive culture around well-being while boosting morale and creating a sense of community and camaraderie among colleagues, making the wellness program more enjoyable and engaging. Prizes, certificates, or even public acknowledgment can go a long way in encouraging sustained engagement.

Enhancing Employee Engagement: 6 Strategies for Successful Corporate Wellness Programs (cont.)

By Megan Wollerton – Life Force Wellness, Megan@lifeforcewellness.com

4. Promote a Holistic Approach:

Wellness goes beyond physical health. To truly engage employees, adopt a holistic approach encompassing physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Provide resources and activities that address stress management, mental health, financial wellness, and work-life balance. By recognizing and supporting the multifaceted nature of wellness, you create a comprehensive program that resonates with a broad spectrum of employees, leading to increased engagement and overall satisfaction.

5. Flexible Scheduling and Accessibility:

Acknowledge that employees have different schedules and commitments. Offer flexibility in the timing and location of wellness activities to accommodate various work shifts and personal responsibilities. Additionally, it provides resources that employees can access at their convenience, such as online fitness classes, virtual mental health support, or educational webinars. This accessibility ensures that employees can engage in wellness activities without feeling burdened by rigid schedules.

6. Create a Positive and Supportive Environment:

Workplace culture significantly influences employee engagement in wellness programs. Foster a positive and supportive environment that encourages employees to prioritize their well-being. Leaders should actively promote a healthy work-life balance, encourage breaks, and create spaces that support physical and mental well-being. Demonstrate leadership commitment to wellness initiatives by actively participating and promoting a healthy work-life balance, creating designated spaces for relaxation, and encouraging open conversations about well-being. When employees see that the organization values their health and feel supported by their organization, they are more likely to engage wholeheartedly in wellness initiatives.

Promoting engagement in corporate wellness programs requires a strategic and holistic approach. By customizing offerings, maintaining transparent communication, incentivizing participation, adopting a holistic approach, providing flexibility, and creating a positive and supportive environment, you can create a workplace where wellness is not just encouraged but embraced, resulting in not only a healthier workforce but also increased morale, productivity, and overall organizational success.

If you want more ideas on enhancing your wellness programs or prefer a neutral third-party resource for implementing a wellness program in your organization, contact Life Force Wellness – www.lifeforcewellness.com and check the PHRA website for more wellness ideas, updates, resources and workshops.

Boost Engagement to Reduce Turnover and Absenteeism: Eight Strategies for Success

By Mike Chiappetta, Sales Executive, Oswald Companies

In today's competitive business landscape, retaining talented employees is crucial for maintaining stability and growth. High turnover and absenteeism rates can hinder productivity and morale within an organization.

The key to addressing these challenges lies in enhancing employee engagement. Engaged employees are not only more productive and committed, but also less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere.

Below are eight best practices for increasing engagement that Oswald has observed in our experience **working with top employers**.

Create a culture of open communication: Regularly share company updates, goals and performance metrics from company leadership. Encourage employees to voice their opinions and concerns, demonstrating that their feedback is valued. Open communication builds trust and keeps employees connected to the organization's mission.

Recognition and appreciation programs: Implement recognition incentives to acknowledge employees' hard work and accomplishments. Celebrate milestones with public praise, awards and peer nominations. Produce and post employee spotlight videos. Feeling appreciated boosts morale and encourages employee commitment.

Invest in professional development: Offer continuous learning opportunities to help employees grow within the organization. Provide access to workshops, training and mentorship programs that align with career aspirations. When employees see a clear path for advancement, they are more likely to stay and contribute to the company's success.

Promote work-life balance: When possible, introduce flexible work arrangements and remote work options. Emphasize the importance of taking breaks to prevent burnout. Provide tools and resources to support employee mental health. A well-balanced life enhances employee well-being and job satisfaction.

Foster a collaborative environment: Organize team-building activities and social events that encourage employees to connect on a personal level. Celebrate milestones as a group, host regular in-office happy hours and ice cream socials, or volunteer together. A strong sense of camaraderie enhances engagement and builds a positive workplace culture.

Promote inclusivity and diversity: Create an inclusive environment in which all employees feel respected, understood and valued. Form employee-led resource groups and provide training. Celebrate and embrace diversity to encourage different perspectives to enrich your workplace culture.

Provide flexible benefits: Offer a comprehensive benefits package that caters to diverse employee needs. Go beyond the basics. Include benefits such as parental leave, financial wellness tools, paid sabbaticals and mental health recharge days. Unique benefits that meet employee needs demonstrate that the company's commitment to employee satisfaction and well-being.

Boost Engagement to Reduce Turnover and Absenteeism: Eight Strategies for Success (cont.)

By Mike Chiappetta, Sales Executive, Oswald Companies

Connect to Organization's Purpose: Employees like to see a connection between their day-to-day work and the organization's greater purpose. Revamp job descriptions, ensure leaders are responsible for everyone understanding how their individual contributions feed into organizational success, and celebrate everyday achievements that tie into company goals.

A workforce that feels valued, supported and motivated is more likely to remain committed and productive. Implement these strategies with a personalized approach that aligns with your company's culture and values.

Continuously monitor the effectiveness of your efforts, gather employee feedback, and make adjustments as needed to maintain a high level of engagement as you invest in your employees' well-being and growth. You'll reap the rewards of a more engaged and dedicated workforce.

Oswald's employee benefits team can help you create a plan to engage your employees. Contact Mike Chiappetta at 412-432-8249 or mchiappetta@oswaldcompanies.com.

Embracing The Magic Of Process: A Practical Guide To 2024

By James E. Taylor, Chief Diversity, Inclusion, and Talent Management Office, UPMC

Throughout 2023, I've had the privilege of learning from some of the world's greatest masters of their craft. And oddly, my conversation with each of these titans of industry – the business leader, the athlete, the orator, the professor, the singer – did not focus on their achievements or accomplishments. Instead, I've been thirsty to glean insight into how these icons go about preparing to perform their gift that we so greatly appreciate.

As we stand on the cusp of another change of year, it's only natural to engage in reflection. The usual thoughts come to mind – achievements, milestones, and perhaps a smattering of regrets. But what if, for a moment, we shifted our focus away from results and instead, delved into the often overlooked but magical realm of process?

Give Voice To Your Process

While people are quick to reflect on or share their achievements (highs) and struggles (lows), the messy-middle often gets tucked away. In my experience, there is immense power in giving voice to your process, making it less abstract, including the lessons learned between challenges and victory. Consider writing down your thoughts on your process in a journal. Documenting your journey helps you gain clarity while also providing a source of inspiration.

The Importance Of Iteration

In a world obsessed with perfection, it's easy to forget that process involves iteration. We all know the road to success is a series of experiments, tweaks, and adjustments. As you step into 2024, embrace the concept of iteration. Be willing to adapt, refine, and evolve. Trust the process, celebrate the small wins, and view setbacks as opportunities for growth.

Choose A Word For The New Year

Kick off your journey into 2024 with a practical tool that can serve as a guiding star through the next 365 days – selecting a word for the year. Unlike the usual New Year's resolutions that tend to be highly specific and goal-oriented, a word for the year provides a more nuanced and flexible approach that aligns with your process. It's a touchstone that grounds you, reminding you of the essence you want to infuse into your actions and decisions.

Think about what you want to cultivate in your personal and/or professional life this coming year. Is it resilience, creativity, connection, or perhaps balance? Your chosen word becomes a focal point and a mantra, of sorts, that guides you through the inevitable ups and downs.

Embrace The Messy Middle

In a world that often celebrates the highlight reel, it's easy to overlook the messy middle – the space between your starting point and the finish line, often representing your how, where the real magic happens. Just ask any performer, there's meaning in the in-between where the training, the practice, and preparation occur. Instead of fixating solely on end results, take a moment to appreciate the beauty of your process.

Cheers to the magic of process!

Caught between a rock and a hard place – employers and employees struggle with mental health care

By Jessica Grande, Director, Employee Benefits, Cowden Associates Inc. (ACRISURE), jessicag@cowdenassociates.com

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it's clear that mental health and substance use disorder have become imperatives in the workplace and not just nice-to-haves. Lyra Health reports in their *2023 State of the Workforce Mental Health study* that 28% of employees report that their mental health has declined over the past year, and almost 16% report either a significant or severe impact to their ability to do their jobs.

Employers ignore mental health and wellbeing not just at to the detriment of their employees' health, but also at their business peril. However, there are many headwinds to offering a robust and valued offering that can tackle the heart of the problem with mental health care in this country. Here are some barriers to promoting a mentally healthy workforce from both employees' and employers' perspectives, along with some strategies and tactics to overcome them.

On the employee side

Burn-out and work-related stress

According to the Lyra Health study, employees cited “work-related stress and burnout” as the second most common factor affecting their mental health over the past year (the first being financial stress), with 39 percent ranking it as one of their top three. The main issues identified with stress and burnout include an unmanageable workload, maintaining work-life boundaries, and having leaders that don't keep and promote a “psychologically safe” workplace.

Stigmatization

One of the biggest barriers to employees getting the care they need when it comes to their mental health is social stigma. Even with greater awareness and more open discussion around mental health these days, many employees have concerns that their reputation, relationships, or job status would be impacted if they disclose mental health struggles or diagnosis at work.

Lacking resources and effective treatments

Approximately 47 percent of the U.S. population (an estimated 158 million people) live in an area with a shortage of mental health professionals. The shortage is particularly prominent in rural areas and economically stressed cities. Many people in need of mental health or substance use care are going without due to providers not taking new clients or are out-of-network or do not take insurance at all. In addition, JAMA Psychiatry showed that under 20 percent of mental health providers practice evidence-based treatments (EBTs). This can especially be true for employees looking for care for their children or teens. 32% of employees supporting a child with mental health struggles in the past year report they are actively considering leaving their current employer.

On the employer side

Myriad compliance requirements

Employers are required to comply with three key federal laws with respect to workers' mental health, in addition

Caught between a rock and a hard place – employers and employees struggle with mental health care (cont.)

By Jessica Grande, Director, Employee Benefits, Cowden Associates Inc. (ACRISURE), jessicag@cowdenassociates.com

to various state and local laws. The main federal regulations governing mental health and substance use disorder are the Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Under the Biden administration, there is a renewed focus on mental health parity compliance as a top enforcement priority for employer-sponsored health plans and health insurance issuers.

Managing vendors

It can be overwhelming for HR and business leaders to find the right partners to manage mental health benefits and resources for their employees and their families. Many new and niche companies have cropped up in recent years, delivering everything from meditation apps, enhanced EAPs, virtual behavioral health services, medication management and delivery, and online assessments and resources. This is confusing and complex for many HR and benefits leaders to determine which programs and services might best meet the needs of their employees, while serving to improve the bottom line and provide an ROI.

Promotion woes

Less than half of employees agree that their company uses effective communication strategies to address difficult current events with employees, according to the 2023 State of Workforce Mental Health. In the same study, it was reported that 18% of employees felt that their employer either provided no resources for mental health or they had no idea what they were. To compound these communication issues, managers are caught in the middle of business pressures, turnover concerns, and lack of training and resources around mental health issues. Many leaders are also concerned about privacy and how to engage with their employees around these issues.

Cost

Cost is always on the list when it comes to any business decision or analysis. According to a study by the National Alliance on mental illness, the cost of depression and anxiety disorders in the workplace is estimated to be \$210.5 billion per year. Further, productivity suffers when the workforce is not mentally healthy. These costs can be difficult to quantify but are estimated at over \$1 trillion in lost productivity due to anxiety and depression, according to a report by the World Health Organization. It's clear that this problem cannot be ignored within organizations.

The solutions

Recognize the link between workforce mental health and business outcomes

In a 2018 study by researcher Amna Anjum, it was demonstrated that psychologically healthy workplaces have shown a 30% improvement in employee productivity. In addition, companies that addressed both physical and mental health have been shown to have reduced absenteeism and presenteeism.

Increase the dialogue to reduce stigma to accessing care

Leaders should work to normalize mental health struggles in casual conversations with employees and also formal settings like meetings. Putting mental health on the agenda and leading by example are powerful steps to

Caught between a rock and a hard place – employers and employees struggle with mental health care (cont.)

By Jessica Grande, Director, Employee Benefits, Cowden Associates Inc. (ACRISURE), jessicag@cowdenassociates.com

reduce stigma around getting the right mental health or substance use care.

Invest in mental health benefits and better work design

Good work design – which involves autonomy, task variety, skill utilization, and feeling like your job is important – are key to combating burnout and stress on the job. If an employee has a positive work environment and feels like their managers and leadership care about them, this can go a long way to improving good mental health in the workplace. It starts with an assessment or survey of employees so an organization can identify areas that are causing burnout and stress-related issues. Address those deficiencies through policies and procedures and providing resources and empowerment to management to foster changes. From there, leaders should work with the HR and benefits team to identify gaps in the programs or benefits offered so there is a holistic approach to mental health care in the workplace.

Keep an eye towards compliance

Employers should review their benefits and HR policies thoroughly for compliance with these laws and have documentation on hand in case of an audit by the DOL or HHS. Engaging with an outside vendor that specializes in reviewing policies and programs, as well as engaging with ERISA counsel are key steps to ensuring compliance. HR leaders should also stay informed of any updates to regulation in consultation with legal counsel and benefits advisors.

Having a mentally healthy workforce goes beyond the old ways of throwing in an EAP and then calling it a day. It involves a thoughtful, comprehensive, and caring approach where business and HR leaders play a key role. It requires exemplifying and nurturing a culture that genuinely values and supports employee mental health and wellbeing. In workplaces of the future, organizations that prioritize mental health will have a competitive advantage and happier employees, which will lead to better outcomes for all.

Immigration Surge Creates Opportunity for Employers

By Nicole Mannino Johnson, Special Projects Manager, Literacy Pittsburgh, njohnson@literacypittsburgh.org

With 9.5 million job openings in the U.S. but only 6.5 million unemployed workers¹, companies of every size and industry face hiring challenges. Recruitment and retention are a never-ending cycle.

At the same time, the Pittsburgh region has been experiencing a significant increase in immigration during the past few years. Between October 2021 and October 2022, resettlement agencies in the region helped relocate more than 1,000 people fleeing conflict, persecution, and disaster.² More than 2,600 new immigration proceedings have been filed in Allegheny County as of December 2023, a 121% increase over 2022.³

These newcomers to our region represent an eager talent pool, but it is often difficult for immigrants to transition into the American workforce. They may experience challenges with credential recognition, the American job-seeking process, or English language proficiency. Additionally, as Upwardly Global describes it, “brain waste” – the non-recognition of the skills and qualifications acquired by a refugee or immigrant professional outside of the U.S. – may prevent them from finding work that aligns with their skills and experience.⁴ At Literacy Pittsburgh, 59% of our students have post-secondary education, but language barriers or credentialing hinder them from working in their field of experience.

The consequences of this skills mismatch are far-reaching, prohibiting immigrants from reaching their full income potential and creating financial hardship for their families. This is also a missed opportunity for the U.S. economy. “If we could fill labor gaps with this untapped talent, we could alleviate the strain on the labor market, boost productivity, and ultimately promote great prosperity,” explains Jina Krause-Vilmar, President and CEO of Upwardly Global.⁴

When considering recruitment and retention of immigrant populations, it is important to keep diversity and inclusion principles in mind.

Be mindful of using AI (Artificial Intelligence) for screening applicants. In one test, AI-powered tools identified 98% of essays written by non-English speakers, or new English speakers, as being written by AI. In contrast, only 10% of essays written by native English speakers were misidentified as being AI-generated.⁵

Be aware of cultural differences during interviewing. For example, body language can vary across cultures. Some candidates may give a weak handshake or avoid eye contact because that is culturally appropriate for them. Ask clear, concise questions and give the candidate time to think and respond. Best practice is to ensure your interview panel is diverse to promote understanding of these cultural differences.

Become familiar with who is eligible to work in the U.S. Legal Permanent Residents (LPRs), or individuals who hold a green card, are automatically eligible to work. From fiscal year 2020 – 2022 more than 7,000 immigrants obtained legal permanent resident status in the Pittsburgh area, with most hailing from India, China, Nepal, Mexico and Canada.⁶ Refugees and asylees are eligible for employment due to their immigration status and are authorized to work indefinitely because their immigration status does not expire. Immigrants who do not have a green card but who are eligible for work must apply for an employment authorization document.

Implement diversity and inclusion policies and practices. A written DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Plan) creates a welcoming environment for immigrant candidates. Most important, however, is that this plan permeates your company’s vision, mission, values, and day-to-day operations.

Immigration Surge Creates Opportunity for Employers (cont.)

By Nicole Mannino Johnson, Special Projects Manager, Literacy Pittsburgh, njohnson@literacypittsburgh.org

Invest in customized employee training. Offering training specifically geared toward immigrants can boost employee morale and increase retention. Literacy Pittsburgh provides customized English language, computer skills, and cross-cultural communication courses. Local employers that invest in employee training have seen positive results.

“We’ve seen a significant increase in our core behaviors survey, which is based on engagement. We’ve also seen a shift in retention, where employee turnover has really decreased. And we’ve also seen patient satisfaction scores increase because of the communication improvement amongst our team members,” explains William Dilla of Crothall Healthcare.

Over the past two years, Literacy Pittsburgh has served English Language Learners from 114 countries. Most of our students come from Afghanistan, Ukraine, Venezuela, Mexico, Turkey, and China. Our core program offerings of English language learning, reading, writing, math, computer skills, GED preparation, and career preparation equip students for success in the workplace.

We are working hard to create services and partnerships that bridge the path between education and employment or job training. Our workforce development department offers classes in workforce readiness, English for Housekeeping Careers, and Microsoft Office Specialist Certification preparation in addition to our general English language courses. Students can take advantage of resume prep, job-seeking skills, workshops on the American workforce culture and opportunities to connect with local employers at job fairs, resource fairs and mock interviews conducted during career centered classes.

At Literacy Pittsburgh, we believe that our collective well-being depends on welcoming diverse cultures and perspectives. We agree with the George W. Bush Institute-SMU Economic Growth Initiative study⁷ in December 2022:

Immigrants make America’s cities more innovative and enterprising, fill essential jobs, and enrich local communities, increasing opportunity for other people living there.

This article is part one of a series by Literacy Pittsburgh with tips on hiring and retaining immigrant talent.

Literacy Pittsburgh offers free educational programs for adults and families in Allegheny County and Beaver County. Last year, the organization helped nearly 3,700 people in the Greater Pittsburgh area improve their reading, writing, math, English language, digital literacy, and workplace skills. Adult literacy classes and tutoring move students from learning to earning and help them succeed as workers, parents, and neighbors. Learn more about their programs and opportunities to support their work at www.literacypittsburgh.org.

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HR Professionals Turn Your Personal New Year's Resolutions into Your Company Resolutions

By Ron Kubitz, Recruitment Director St. Barnabas Health System

The start of a new year serves as an opportunity for many to set new goals and commit to better personal habits. Whether it be in the areas of health/wellness, learning and personal development, communication/family relations setting a New Year's resolution is a common practice. Most polls show that close to 50% of US citizens set a resolution(s) for the new year but sadly the average resolution according to a Forbes Health/One Poll lasts just 3.74 months or in my case 3.74 days. In fact, failing at New Year's resolutions is so common that January 17 is unofficially known as "Ditch New Year's Resolution Day" while others view the second Friday in January as "Quitters Day". Now people will understand why I have a big party on January 17!

As an HR Professional how often do you and your team go into a new year gung ho for change and improvement, full of great ideas and plans only to see most of them fall by the wayside early in the year? Is your team setting the correct New Year's HR resolutions? Are they well thought out and realistic for your company or are they destined to fail before you even start? As an HR professional have you ever given thought to mirroring your own personal resolutions to those of your company? If you feel that your resolutions for improvement are good enough for you (keep them HR appropriate of course) then why would they not be good for all? I am recommending that as an HR professional you should mirror your resolutions to those of your company and watch the success and improvement that this will bring not only to you as a leader but your organization as a whole.

Confused? Let us take a look at a few examples of what I mean? Over 70% of personal New Year's resolutions deal with improving one's health or wellness in some form. Whether it is improving your personal fitness, losing weight, fixing your diet, or increasing work-life balance, health and wellness is at the forefront of most resolutions. Does this not mirror what most of our employees are telling us what they desire going into 2024?

At the top of most employee wish lists is a better work/life balance. As many of our colleagues now work from home the intersection between work and personal life has begun to blur or dissolve completely. Thus, it is imperative that as an HR professional you help your company draw a clear line by providing work flexibility (production over hours worked), monitor workloads and productivity levels on a regular basis and promote mental health days as needed.

Mental and physical health and wellness in HR is the practice of employers caring about the physical and mental (stress) well-being of their workers. As an HR professional is your company providing enough benefits in this area such as insurance coverage, EAP, wellness apps, counseling/coaching, and more. Are you offering outside speakers and consultants who can offer talks and classes on varied health and wellness topics? Shameless plug but reach out to Megan Wollerton or Niki Campbell (or others) for assistance in these areas! Additionally, how about offering Yoga or Tai-Chi classes, weight loss programs, gym memberships and the like to help address employee concerns and issues. In a recent survey conducted by ADP almost 50% of employees say their work is suffering because of poor mental or physical health. What are you as an HR professional doing to address these concerns?

Another popular area for personal New Year's resolutions involves learning a new skill or taking up a new hobby. Also, near the top of the list is finding time for more volunteer opportunities and giving back to the community at large. Not shockingly these same desires are high on your employees lists as well. Survey your employees

HR Professionals Turn Your Personal New Year's Resolutions into Your Company Resolutions (cont.)

By Ron Kubitz, Recruitment Director St. Barnabas Health System

(especially the younger generations) and training and development is high on their lists of what they desire in a company as well as the opportunity to do meaningful volunteer work in the community.

As an HR professional what can you (and your company) do to implement new professional development initiatives for existing and new workers? Are you digging deeper into their professional aspirations and career prospects so you may better lead them to internal advancement opportunities? Take a look under the hood at your evaluation process, training programs, mentorship opportunities and the like to show that you truly care about employee success and development.

Along the same lines most companies are still facing a labor crunch and the war for talent is great. As an HR leader one must recognize that growing an organization does not necessarily mean expanding headcount. What is your company doing in terms of upskilling and reskilling your current staff? Focusing on these areas may reduce the need for hiring (and save \$\$), as well as improve retention, simplify succession planning and increase job satisfaction and performance.

Upskilling and reskilling can involve cross-training employees, providing opportunities to collaborate with different departments, offering formal or informal mentorships, and familiarizing teams with new tools and technologies. If you're not sold on the importance of upskilling, consider that the World Economic Forum's 2023 Future of Jobs Report found that half of all employees will need reskilling by 2025 to keep up with evolving technologies.

In terms of volunteer efforts are you encouraging (and allowing) employees to do a designated number of volunteer hours on work time in the local community? Not only does this offer them satisfaction but it also helps to make you an employer of choice in your local market area. Volunteer work is a win/win/win scenario for all involved.

In terms of developing new skills (or hobbies) what are you doing as an HR professional to bring new technologies and "hobbies" into the workplace. No, we are not talking about learning to play golf here, but as an HR pro are you seeking to learn new tactics that will enable you to provide great value to your organization? One such HR resolution should include getting aboard the AI (Artificial Intelligence) train. According to Forbes Magazine "while 72% of U.S. CEO's say AI is a top investment priority, only about 5% of employers currently use these tools to recruit more efficiently". When most HR functions are short-staffed and overworked, why not kick off the new year by embracing generative AI to maximize resources and allow you to focus on more strategic projects?

As a professional striving to be on the forefront of technology what are you doing to learn more about AI and what value it can bring to your organization? Some of the many impactful HR usage cases for AI include developing job descriptions, creating interview questions, screening resumes and composing candidate communication pieces. Are you familiar with ChatGPT, are you using chatbots or other technology to help improve the HR and company cause? The more you learn in these areas the more value you will provide to your company.

One final area that is popular amongst the personal resolutions is spending more time with loved ones and communicating more with friends and "long-lost" relatives. This also can translate into a work-related HR resolution as we should always strive to improve personal and corporate communications as well as our internal

HR Professionals Turn Your Personal New Year's Resolutions into Your Company Resolutions (cont.)

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collaborations. I know that one of my “personal” work related resolutions this year is to improve my collaboration with our Marketing department. Marketing is great at promoting the company services and benefits and of course HR (Recruiters) are great at selling why our companies are great places to work. So, it only makes sense that a strong bond between HR and Marketing will serve to enhance recruitment, retention and the overall employee experience. We all could do a better job in sharing employee reviews, company HR news and milestones and recognizing behavior that goes above and beyond. Certainly, marketing can also assist with HR ad company branding, recruiting events, social media, and external marketing correspondence.

Lastly in terms of communication it is imperative that we work to promote open and honest communication and strive to gain employee trust. We must value employee input and stay in touch with our employees to keep them up to date on HR and corporate happenings. Whether we might opt for annual surveys, weekly one-on-ones or increased reviews, back and forth honest communication is a must. HR must ensure that employers maintain consistent expectations, provide feedback and be quick to praise even the smallest of positive accomplishments.

To wrap things up you as the HR professional must work within your organizations to choose your resolutions wisely. Choose 2-3 resolutions, set clear goals and measurements of success, review often and report successes (and failures) to senior leadership. While just as with personal resolutions you may be tempted (or become too busy) that resolutions start to slip away. In order for resolutions to succeed they must be reviewed quarterly if not more often, and progress must be monitored and if needed adjustments made.

I wish all of you a great 2024 and feel free to get back to me with comments. Also feel free to share other great HR resolutions that you may have on the PHRA social media pages so that we may learn from you. I hope to see all of you at an upcoming PHRA event and once again Happy New Year!

New Members and On the Move

Sebastian Lacy
YWCA Greater Pittsburgh

Sarah Theimer
IBM

Kristina Belcastro
Vision Benefits of America

Kathryn Buza
Butler County Community College

Martin Bishop
Washington Health System

Michael Edgar
Washington Health System

Richard Todd
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Allegheny County Department of Human Services

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Human Interest

Marisa Seeds

Courtney Baum

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Migliaro Consulting & Event Specialists

Scott Raley
Armco Credit Union

Emily Trout
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Taylor Raper
GrayMatter Systems

Kara Nastasi
The Ellen O'Brien Gaiser Addiction Center

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South Hills Interfaith Movement

Tori Leya
Beacon Hill Associates

Elizabeth Swearman
Robert Morris University

Juliana Naugle
Onward Robotics

On the Move

Congratulations to the following PHRA members on their recent achievements:

- **Cameron Henry, HR Generalist**, Community Living And Support Services (CLASS) recently became SHRM-CP certified.



2024 Events

The Pittsburgh Human Resources Association offers many valuable networking and education programs throughout the year. Keep an eye on the PHRA online event calendar for a complete and up-to-date listing of all programs. Register for an upcoming event today!

Pittsburgh Human Resources Association

One Oxford Center
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Pittsburgh, Pa 15219
PH: 412-261-5537
www.PittsburghHRA.org



Events

January 23 | [Learn](#)
Holding Up the Mirror to Invisible Gender Discrimination

January 30 | [Learn](#)
Successful Workplace Investigations: Five Fundamental Steps and Strategies

February 12 | [Certify](#)
12 Week Virtual SHRM-CP & SHRM-SCP Prep Class- Spring 2024 Begins

February 13 | [Learn](#)
HR Roundtable Discussion

February 13 | [Learn & Network](#)
2024 Engaging Pittsburgh Awards Celebration

February 14 | [Learn & Network](#)
HR Roundtable Discussion

March 5 | [Network](#)
The PHRA Experience Webinar: Making the Most of Your Membership

March 12 | [Learn](#)
Cotton Candy or Broccoli: Navigating Remote, Hybrid, and In Office Work

March 13 | [Learn & Network](#)
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March 19 | [Learn](#)
HR Academy

March 20 | [Network](#)
Meet Your PHRA Colleagues

April 10 | [Learn & Network](#)
HR Roundtable Discussion

May 8 | [Learn & Network](#)
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June 11 | [Network](#)
The PHRA Experience Webinar: Making the Most of Your Membership

June 12 | [Learn & Network](#)
HR Roundtable Discussion

July 19 | [Learn & Network](#)
HR Roundtable Discussion

August 14 | [Learn & Network](#)
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September 11 | [Learn & Network](#)
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October 9 | [Learn & Network](#)
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