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Summer 2022

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Inside HR Advisory's
Annual Meeting

FEATURING: THE FUTURE OF WORK



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- 4 Things to Consider When Evaluating HCM Tech (By Greg Autero)
- How to choose between HSA's and FSA's (By Greg Autero)

ID CARDS

- Medical ID Card (Provided by aetna)
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Summer

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#HRAdvisory2022



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Publisher's Note

A Look Back on Our First HR Advisory Annual Meeting

It was a pleasure to see so many faces at our first in-person HR Advisory Annual Meeting in New York City in May, and we're incredibly grateful for everyone who took the time to attend the sold-out event and contribute to the discussions. HR Leaders from different industries and backgrounds came together to connect, ask questions, offer advice, and provide different perspectives – and all of you really made the event a memorable experience.

The roundtables took the discussions we have on the HR Advisory Slack channel and brought them into real life. It was an excellent opportunity to talk about the topics that are on all our minds; the future of work, HR technology, DEIB, benefits, and more. Each person's contribution to those discussions enriched the conversation and opened up more dialogue, inspiring others and bringing new perspectives into the space.

With the amount of expertise and support that was in those conference rooms – I think we can all agree that we took

home valuable information, developed our skillsets further, and made meaningful connections with fellow People professionals. That's what the Annual Meeting, and HR Advisory, are all about.

HR is never easy, never boring, and always impactful. "HR is more of a calling than a profession," as Danika Davis, our Emcee, said. People professionals have a challenging task at hand – balancing the needs of their team and the organization. And a common theme that we can take away from all of the discussions and presentations at the Annual Meeting is that nothing is set in stone, and no one is going to have the right answers all the time. It's a constant learning process, and that's why these groups and communities are so impactful.

I once again want to thank all of you who attended our first HR Advisory Annual Meeting, and all of our HR Advisory members who make this community what it is! We can't wait for our 2023 Annual Meeting, and we hope to see you there.

Sincerely,
Denise Granados, Director, HR Advisory at Bennie



THE FUTURE OF WORK

HOW HR LEADERS CAN STAY AHEAD OF THE CURVE



BY: SUSAN LADIKA

Flexibility became the name of the game when the COVID-19 pandemic began, and flexibility remains a necessity as human resources leaders map out plans for the workplace's future.

“WE NEED TO REFLECT ON WHAT WORKS AND WHAT IS NOT WORKING, AND BE FLEXIBLE ABOUT CHANGING IT.”

JOE BAST, HEAD OF PEOPLE AT NEW YORK CITY-BASED LAIKA

“We need to be flexible in our approach,” says Joe Bast, Head of People at New York City-based Laika, which offers a compliance platform for businesses. “We need to reflect on what works and what is not working and be flexible about changing it.”

His sentiments are echoed by Britney Pierini, Global Director of Workplace Experience + Design at Harness, a San Francisco-based software delivery platform. While others in an organization may want immediate answers, it's time for HR leaders to “think through things longer term and look at the big picture,” Pierini says, while leaving room to change things as needed. “It's time to be a bit more thoughtful and more intentional,” Pierini says.

At Harness, “we're still in the process of figuring out what's the future of work for us,” she adds. Many organizations switched to remote work when the pandemic began, and now are trying to determine whether employees need to return to the workplace, and if so, how frequently they need to be in the office. While many leaders think their employees need to return to working on-site, a lot of employees “are digging in their heels,” and don't want to return, says Tracey Malcolm, future of work and risk leader for Willis Towers Watson.

ALMOST 2/3 OF EMPLOYEES WOULD CONSIDER LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB IF REQUIRED TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE FULL-TIME.

And in many cases, HR professionals are “still determining what is the right combination,” Malcolm says. A survey by the ADP Research Institute, conducted of more than 32,000 employees worldwide, found that almost two-thirds would consider looking for a new job if required to return to the workplace full time. On the other hand, a survey of 3,500 U.S. managers by GoodHire, which offers background check services, found that 60 percent thought returning to the office full time would happen in the near future.

Another survey by Gallup found more than half of employees

expect to work in a hybrid environment going forward. Bast says, “I don't think remote work is ever going away again.” For many industries, “a large part of the workforce is never coming back.” Pierini believes that companies that require employees to come back to the workplace “will see a big rush of resignations. People don't want to be required to come in.”



“People need to be provided whatever flexibility you can. It's super important,” she adds. At Harness, which has offices in several cities worldwide, in-office schedules vary by location, Pierini says. In San Francisco, for example, the executive team is in the office on Mondays. In Dallas, where the focus is on sales, employees tend to be in the office three days a week. “Teams are starting to work together in office locations,” she says. They primarily gather for training and whiteboarding, “things you just can't do really well over Zoom,” Pierini says.

Meeting in person “is a time to really connect and engage with each other,” she adds. “We know people are really craving in-person collaboration.” As employees start to return to the office, one challenge is determining how to configure office space. Square Roots, a technology-enabled farming company, had already outgrown its office space in

New York City before the pandemic shut everything down, says Brannon Skillern, Vice President of People.

Now employees are working remotely if they can, and Skillern says the company “is not in a hurry to sign a lease for big office space.” When it does, Square Roots will seek out a space with plenty of room for collaboration and few, if any, dedicated workstations, she says. It’s the same situation at Laika. The company will seek out new office space, but how much it will need “is just really a big guess,” says Bast, who expects the company will sign a lease for 12 months or less so it can “figure out how to use space before making a big commitment.”

He aims for a dog-friendly office that is a “super-fun, comfortable space, so people want to be in it,” including a lounge area with natural light, conference rooms, and smaller rooms for private meetings. Bast wants to ensure that meeting rooms are equipped with high-quality cameras and microphones in a new space. If the company has a meeting that is a blend of remote and in-person attendees, everyone has to have a camera on their computer so all are included, and they can see their co-workers’ non-verbal cues. Before the meeting, someone is assigned to call on all attendees who haven’t spoken up to ensure that they have a chance to contribute, Bast says.

“I DON’T THINK REMOTE WORK IS EVER GOING AWAY AGAIN. A LARGE PART OF THE WORKFORCE IS NEVER COMING BACK.”

BRITNEY PIERINI, GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF WORKPLACE EXPERIENCE + DESIGN, HARNESS

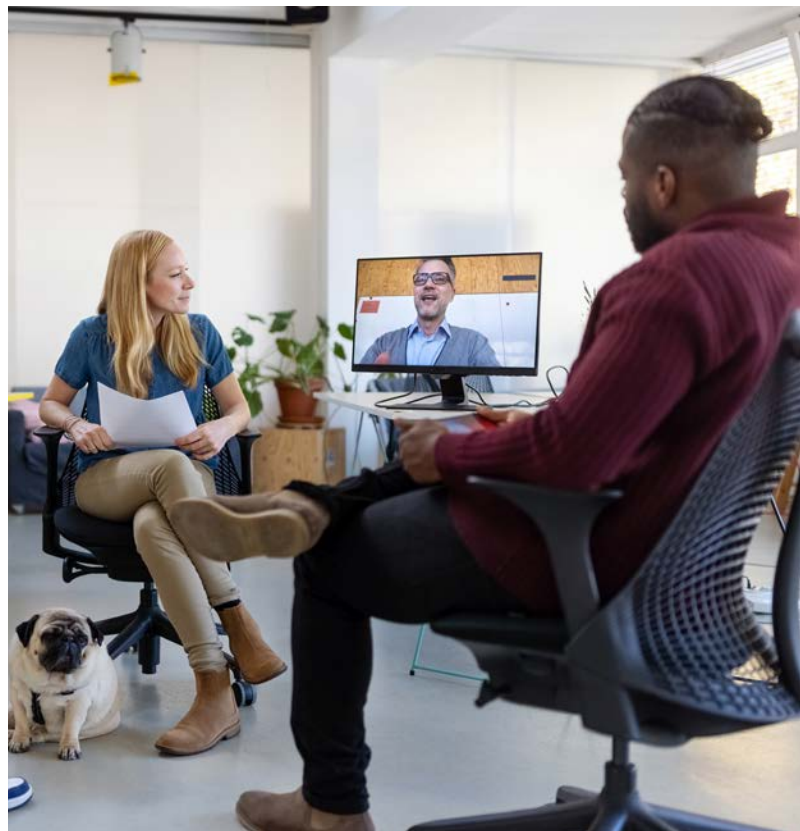
The experts say communication is key to keeping employees engaged when dealing with a remote or hybrid workforce. At Square Roots, some of the 145 employees have to work on-site at the company’s farms, and others can work remotely. The company has intensive onboarding, and the CEO meets each new hire to share the company’s mission and values, Skillern says. “Gen Z isn’t settling for less. They want to be part of it, have exposure, and be included,” Skillern explains. And Square Roots is looking to move to a “more dynamic communications hub” that is more efficient and accessible for employees, Skillern says, as the company “leverages technology to create more of a sense of community.”

At Laika, all-hands meetings are held every Friday, so employees are aware of the company’s goals and strategy, Bast says, and managers meet one-on-one each week with their employees. That can help “build a trusting relationship between remote employees and their manager.” With remote

and hybrid workforces, some companies also deal with pay differentials. At Laika, employees are paid New York City rates, regardless of their location. “That makes us super-competitive,” Bast says.

WITH REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKFORCES, SOME COMPANIES ALSO DEAL WITH PAY DIFFERENTIALS. AT LAIKA, EMPLOYEES ARE PAID NEW YORK CITY RATES, REGARDLESS OF THEIR LOCATION. “THAT MAKES US SUPER-COMPETITIVE,” BAST SAYS.

On the other hand, at Square Roots, which has employees in various locations, Skillern has drawn up a new pay scale. She has examined each role and what the typical pay is in each location. She is looking at implementing a premium pay scale for employees in markets such as New York City and San Francisco, and a national pay scale for other parts of the country. Through her research, Skillern has found that some jobs don’t have big pay differences based on location, while others are quite large. With HR leaders grappling with so many different changes and challenges, they can’t effectively tackle all at once. Instead, they should “pick one and prioritize,” Malcolm says. ■



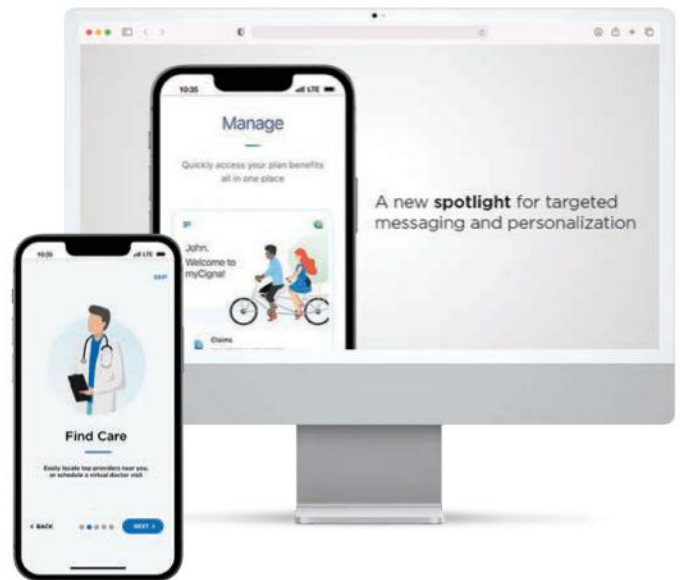


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Introducing Everquote

Everquote is an insurtech company that empowers insurance shoppers to better protect their most important assets, like their family, property, and future, through acquiring insurance. The organization uses data and technology to make insurance easier to find, more affordable, and more personalized, helping customers save money and better protect themselves against risk. Everquote currently has 750 employees, and while the company is headquartered in Cambridge, Massachusetts, it is a globally distributed company with offices in Indiana, Texas, India, and Northern Ireland.

Everquote strives to put people first and maintain a great company culture. The organization and the People team promote company culture by having different ERGs that host virtual events where employees can engage with their colleagues and feel more included. Having those spaces where employees can meet like-minded individuals and get involved within the company culture has made a big difference as the company transitioned to being a distributed hybrid workforce.

Everquote's Core Values

 Data Centricity

 Impact

 Heart

 Tenacity

 Bootstrapping

“We really welcome a diversity of backgrounds and thought with the belief that those different ways of thinking and lived experiences are what we need to push the company forward.” – Shimrit

Meet The People Team

At Everquote, the People team prioritizes ensuring that employees have the skills, resources, language, and tools they need to be successful in their roles. While Everquote's People team has around 16 people working in the department, a smaller group within that team takes on sole ownership of things like benefits, employee relations, ADA, some elements of onboarding, terminations, and compliance. However, because that kind of work touches so many different parts of Everquote, it is a team effort as a whole.

"We anchor on people, not policies. While policies and precedent may guide our decisions, we always try to take a truly people-first approach." - Shimrit



Meet Shimrit Markette

**Interim Chief People Officer & SVP,
People Operations**

Shimrit leads People Operations at Everquote and was the first HR hire back when the organization had about 40 employees. Though her role at Everquote was her first formal HR job, before joining Everquote, she worked in career services and higher education and was the Assistant Director of Career Services at Tufts University. For Shimrit, HR is all about making things seamless for employees, whether it's through policies, processes, or technology.

"HR is all about enabling people to perform their best and enabling the company to perform its best through its people. So our role is to help facilitate that and to empower people to be able to do their very best work."

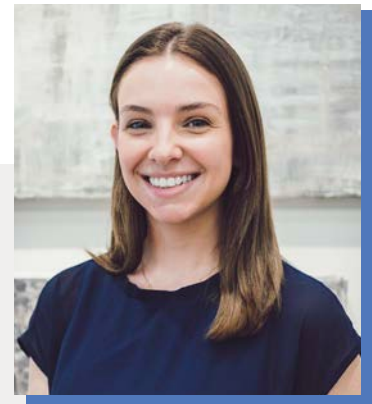


Meet Abby Tranchita

Senior Manager, Human Resources

Abby manages the core HR functions for Everquote. Before her current role, she was always involved in the HR and employee relations space in some fashion, typically in generalist or business partner positions. While she's never focused on one specific HR area, she loves that there's always an opportunity for something different every day. As COVID-19 has shifted the thought process around employee experience for organizations, Abby is excited to dive deeper into that space and figure out how Everquote can be a top-notch employer and drive a successful business.

"Some of what people used to view as the 'fluffy things' are now becoming very real and measurable topics. Managing through that and being able to correlate it to the business, then balancing an amazing employee experience – that, for me, is where I like to live."



Meet Kailee Heffler

**Employee Brand & Marketing
Associate**

Kailee helps handle anything that has to do with branding Everquote's social channels and internal and external communications. While her background is in employer branding, she's more recently gotten more involved in the HR space within the company. Kailee originally joined Everquote as an intern, and over the two years she's been with the company, she's gotten more exposure to branding, content creation, website building, running social platforms, and analytics. When it comes to HR, she's most interested in learning more about the communication aspect of the role.

"What really interests me is how people communicate and how communication is done at a company."

How Everquote Adapts to the Changing Needs of the Workforce

Remote Work & Flexibility Are Key

The future of work and remote work go hand-in-hand, and one crucial aspect of this is the flexibility that comes with it. By not having to stick to a rigid schedule, commute for hours, or always stay in one place for the entirety of the day, employees can get their lives back in a way. Recognizing the human side of employees is going to be essential for organizations, and while companies will go about it in different ways, it's something that can't simply be ignored.

Everquote has adapted to this trend through its hybrid model, allowing employees the flexibility to work from home or go into the office and be around colleagues if necessary or desired. The company has seen many benefits due to this; they're now able to grow faster, hire more diverse talent, and hire skill sets that were previously difficult to find.

"Flexibility and recognizing that employees are not just employees, they are actual humans and they have lives outside of their work, is going to, and is already, becoming a huge thing." - Kailee

Working Smarter, Faster & More Efficiently

HR tech and automation will allow People professionals to enhance the employee experience and make administrative processes much more efficient. Artificial intelligence and chatbots can cover common questions that employees have and direct them to appropriate resources, leaving more time for People leaders to focus on more complex questions.

Everquote's People team has upgraded its suite of benefits, tools, and carriers to match employee expectations at the tech level. This has created a better customer experience, and it allows employees to access the information they need and communicate with providers easily.

Nurturing a Healthy Work Environment

HR teams and company leadership need to provide opportunities for employees to share their voices. Genuinely listening to people and offering a safe space for employees to share their feedback, concerns, and questions allow a company to evolve and make the necessary changes to maintain a healthy, inclusive environment.

In 2020, Everquote's employees shared with the People team that they felt stressed from COVID-19 and were struggling to manage work-life balance. The People team took this feedback, and one of the changes they implemented was providing employees with Headspace, a meditation app

that the company has had a lot of adoption on. Some of the organization's teams also started doing mandatory mental health days.

"Making sure that they have tools, feel supported, can take time off, and have the flexibility they need to be able to make the balance work - that's how you retain employees in the long term." - Shimrit



Staying Up to Date on Trends

"Be curious, and ask questions." Whether that means keeping up with the national news regarding businesses and human resources or getting involved in HR communities - staying curious allows People leaders to pivot as trends develop. For Shimrit, Slack communities have been incredibly beneficial.

"The questions that are being asked there and the things that people are sharing provide a glimpse into what other people leaders are thinking about." - Shimrit

Whether you're looking for advice, best practices, or have a very specific question, by leveraging these virtual groups and communities, you can get a variety of helpful information and develop your own skillset as a People leader. 🗨



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Is It Time to Refresh Your HR Tech Stack?

By: Jennifer Wiseman

There's No Doubt the Pandemic Hit the Fast Forward Button on Digitization.

A 2021 report by Twilio estimates that the COVID-19 pandemic rocketed business digitization strategies forward by an average of six years. No matter the industry, the way we work has changed, and the technology used to run our businesses – our HR tech stack – is likely feeling the weight of that six year jump.

The tools you utilize should be streamlining and simplifying your processes, but statistically speaking, they might not be doing so well. A recent study by OnePoll found that 77% of US employees surveyed are frustrated by their company's legacy HR tech – outdated tools that no longer serve their needs. On the opposite side of the coin, HR Research Institute's 2020 State of the Industry Research report found that well-utilized HR tech stacks significantly improve HR productivity and overall employee experience – by about 63% and 57% respectively.

The numbers make it plain: a well-implemented and optimized HR tech stack results in greater efficiency, smoother processes, and more satisfied employees. So, maybe it's time for a refresh.

Look at Your Needs, Both Current and Future

Ideally, an HR tech stack will minimize present gaps in processes and user experience while remaining agile enough to adapt to your organization's future needs. Your first step, then, is to evaluate your HR systems against your current needs. What are your pain points? Naturally, if your tech stack isn't keeping up right now, it's time for a change, but even if you find you're satisfied with your current toolset, you may still want to take a look ahead.

What are your organization's strategic goals? Is growth on the

horizon? Or perhaps a shift to remote or hybrid work? Are there plans to implement DEIB practices? Once you've zeroed in on upcoming changes, ask yourself – will our current toolset adapt to those needs? If change is on the horizon, and for many, it is, then you need a versatile set of systems that will keep up with your needs.

Consider, too, what you may not need. Shedding systems and features that aren't valuable to your organization could create room in your tech budget for more useful tools. For example, smaller companies and companies that don't anticipate much expansion likely won't fully utilize expansive hiring systems like ATS. Rather than allow those systems to be underused, consider foregoing them for something that might be more relevant to your business now or in the immediate future.

Remote and Hybrid Work Are Here To Stay – Is Your Tech Stack Keeping Up?

In the wake of 2020's shelter-in-place orders, many US workers have realized that their work doesn't require a traditional office environment. With fewer distractions, better work-life balance, and in many instances, increased productivity, demand for remote and hybrid work options have shot up, and it looks like the job market will comply. Data projections indicate that the number of remote workers is only going to increase. A 2021 study by Ladders estimates that 25% of all professional jobs in North America will be fully remote by the end of 2022.

So, the question is, has your current HR tech stack adapted to the way we work now? As the work-from-home wave continues to build momentum, are your tools able to keep up with the needs of an increasingly remote workforce? Remote work presents unique challenges for security and user experience that legacy systems might struggle to bridge, potentially bringing down employee satisfaction and overall productivity as a result.



For a remote workforce, user experience is key. Systems that facilitate collaboration and employee self-service allow your workers to focus on what matters – their work. Seek out tools with mobile access and systems that integrate well with each other for an optimal experience, and increased productivity as a result.

Seek Tools That Embrace DEIB

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging aren't just buzzwords, they're important factors in creating a more socially just, innovative, and productive workplace. Whether working to meet reporting requirements or setting internal DEIB goals, having technology that is accessible, equitable, and accurate is absolutely vital.

A successful DEIB tech stack will provide detailed, equitable data and assist in eliminating unconscious biases both in employees and, if it's being utilized, AI. Anonymized data, equitable AI, gender-neutral language, and tools and categories that account for underrepresented and diverse groups are just a few of the features and qualities to watch for when seeking DEIB tools to add to your HR tech stack.

A Refresh Doesn't Need To Be a Total Overhaul

Whether you're mostly happy with your current HR tech toolset or simply lack the budget for major changes, it's still worth evaluating your current HR tech stack. There may be underutilized software or systems that can be cut to free up space in the budget, or perhaps a new pain point that can be solved or mitigated with a single new addition to your stack.

A refresh doesn't need to be a complete overhaul. In fact, smaller, more incremental change may be easier for your business to implement. At our first-ever HR Advisory Annual Meeting in May, you couldn't talk about the HR tech stack without also mentioning integration. More and more, smaller and more focused HR tools are appearing that slot neatly into larger systems, foregoing the need to purchase, learn, implement, and train your employees on an entirely new all-inclusive system.

If integrating more specialized tools into your tech stack sounds appealing, seek out seamless options, and be aware of log-in creep. Too many apps, platforms, and passwords to keep track of will result in lower efficiency and less usage overall.

The bottom line is, an efficient, equitable, and user-friendly HR tech stack is good for the bottom line, and right now, we're lucky enough to be spoiled for choice. There are more new, specialized, and affordable options available now than ever before. So, evaluate your current HR tech stack, and if any part of it is coming up short, give a refresh a shot. ■



What Does Authenticity In The Workplace Look Like?

By: Susan Ladika

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested organizations and workers in new ways and put a new focus on fostering authenticity in the workplace so employees feel safe to share about themselves and their struggles. Being authentic “means something different for everybody,” says Jasmine Francis, vice president of people + culture at Thinx, a New York-based company that makes sustainable underwear for those who have periods or incontinence. “Lots of things make up who we are.”

The pandemic “highlights we are human first, with all types of responsibilities in and out of the office,” Francis says. With that in mind, workplaces should aim to create a “non-judgmental space,” so employees are “able to show up in the rawest form of you,” she adds. That sense of being able to be authentic at work can help both the individual and the workplace.

The Boston-based Simmons University Institute for Inclusive Leadership conducted a survey last year called “The Importance of Authenticity in the Workplace.” After receiving survey results of more than 1,300 attendees at a leadership conference at the university, the institute found that more than 90 percent of the respondents thought authenticity in the workplace was important, and more than 70 percent said they were able to be authentic at work. Those who said they could be authentic at work said they felt more confident, more engaged, and happier.

On the flip side, of those who said they couldn’t be authentic

at work, more than 40 percent said they felt less productive, less effective, and less creative. As the pandemic brought about an abrupt shift to remote work for many employees, human resources leaders often have gotten an up-close and personal look into many of their employees’ lives during Zoom meetings. During those calls, dogs may bark and kids may climb onto parents’ laps, says Tiffany Cole, director of people operations at Super Coffee, based in New York City, which sells ready-to-drink coffees.

For human resources leaders, that means sending the message, “come as you are. We’ll take care of you as you are,” Cole says.

With the pandemic, “people need support. You need to have an open conversation about what is really going on” with them, says Susan Elaggan-Jackson, head of global people operations at Pegasystems, a Cambridge, Mass.-based software company.

But to get employees to be open and share, HR leaders need to build rapport and foster trust with their workers, Elaggan-Jackson says. “It needs to be organic trust, not forced,” and that takes time to develop. It’s also important for HR professionals to “show empathy and be role models” of authentic behavior, she says. To do so, HR leaders might share that they are feeling burned out or that they need a break, Elaggan-Jackson says. That could encourage employees so

that they feel comfortable in sharing if they are dealing with anxiety or struggling with a personal issue, she says.

An authentic leader “really helps drive a cohesive, engaging environment,” she says, and helps employees feel as though they are in a safe space. As an HR leader, “if you convey perfection, it’s not fair to everybody else,” says Francis, who identifies herself as a Black woman with mental illness, who grew up in different states. “Everything makes me who I am. I can talk about these things and have productive conversations about it,” she says. By working at Thinx, “it’s the first job where I can really show up as myself,” says Francis, who has previously worked at large financial organizations and felt like she had to hide her anxiety and depression. Yet she still lives her life filled with joy.

And the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated mental health challenges for some employees, while creating new struggles for others, Francis says. “I know that if I share, I’m helping at least one other person,” she says. The pandemic also has created a situation for HR professionals “to show people we’re human,” says Nicole Cunningham, director of people + culture at MakerSights. The San Francisco-based company helps companies use consumer data to be more sustainable. Even as an HR professional, “you have lapses in judgment. You get upset. You break, too,” Cunningham says.

At Thinx, “we try our best to provide a culture to be authentic,” Francis says. “The onus really is on the organization” to work to provide that safe space for all employees, she adds. The Sullivan University survey found of those respondents who said they could be authentic at work,



more than half said that helped them to be able to do their best work and build strong relationships with their colleagues. “A manager’s authenticity contributes significantly to the ability of individual team members to show up as their authentic selves on the job,” the survey reported.

Respondents said the top traits of authentic individuals and managers were **honesty, openness, and transparency.**

Yet despite that focus on authenticity, a survey of almost 2,000 individuals by the employer review site JobSage found almost two-thirds were hiding something about their identity from their employer. More than 35 percent said they hid political views or information about their family, while about one-third hid information about a mental health condition, their relationship status, or their religion.

Almost half said they hid an aspect of themselves because they didn’t want to make other people uncomfortable, and more than 40 percent said they feared being stereotyped if they shared certain information about themselves. But that has an impact on an employee, with 55 percent of respondents saying that not being authentic impacts their mental health. Those who were most likely to hide something from their employer were LGBTQ+ employees, who said they were treated differently after being authentic, and Black employees, who feared being stereotyped.

Authenticity and diversity are linked, and if employees feel as though they don’t fit in, they are more likely to leave an organization, Francis says, leading to higher costs of recruiting and retaining employees. And the organization itself can suffer. In a homogenous organization “there’s not going to be any creativity in how we think about things,” she says. ■



MAY 12, 2022 · NEW YORK, NY

Thank You for Joining HR Advisory's First-Ever Annual Meeting!

"Still fired up after the Annual Meeting hosted by HR Advisory & Bennie! As a HR professional focused on people & culture this meeting was spot on!"

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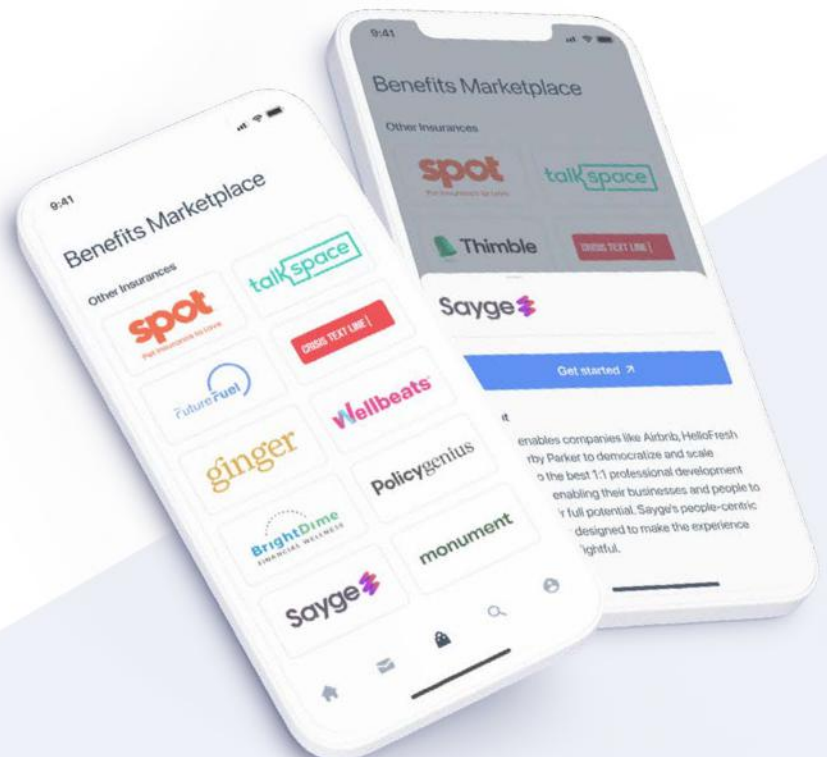
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WHAT HR LEADERS SHOULD KNOW

WHEN IT COMES
TO HIRING
& RETAINING
GEN-Z TALENT

**A Q&A WITH
ANTHONY ONESTO,**
AUTHOR OF THE NEW
EMPLOYEE CONTRACT:
HOW TO FIND, KEEP,
AND ELEVATE
GEN Z TALENT



Anthony Onesto, Chief People Officer at SUZY and author of *The New Employee Contract: How to Find, Keep, and Elevate Gen Z Talent*, has plenty of insights to share regarding understanding what Gen Z employees value in the workplace.

While he initially began his professional career in accounting, he eventually shifted into recruiting, where he got to know the HR field and discovered his passion for it. Since then, he's been involved in recruiting, training, development, and really owning the entire HR landscape for various small and fast-growing companies. He also advises HR Tech startups like Bennie.

We had the opportunity to ask Anthony a few questions that HR professionals may be curious about when it comes to hiring and retaining Gen Z talent.

Q WHY IS THE HIRING PROCESS OF GEN Z DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT FROM HIRING MILLENNIALS, GEN X, ETC.?

AO A lot of what I talk about in the book specifically is that Gen Z is not Millennials. They are distinctly different in many different ways (and alike in some ways). With this generation, they were born on the iPhone. They haven't known anything but the Internet, and things for them are very gamified. They're very much gamers and really have been the generation to focus on gaming from a consumer perspective.

They also care about purpose within companies and climate control. And this generation, unlike other ones, has really seen a recession. Their parents were part of the recession in 2008, then the COVID recession. They've seen their parents get laid off in some cases, and that has made a huge impact on them. As a Gen Xer, that had a huge influence on me writing the book. My father had worked for the same company for 40 years, and they made him reapply for his job and forced him into retirement. And I felt like that employment contract was lost over so many decades. This generation is focusing more on that contract between the employer and employee.

Q WHAT DOES GEN Z TALENT VALUE THE MOST AND WANT FROM A JOB/EMPLOYER?

AO One key factor is job design. They want flexibility. These are folks who were born on the internet and are true gamers. They're very loyal, which is a little bit different

than what we've seen with millennials (not to say that they weren't loyal). They were just more interested in gaining experiences, whereas it's a different approach with this generation in terms of their loyalty to an employer (as long as that employer is loyal back). That's the employee contract I talk about in the book at a macro level, and job design - the ability to do the job from wherever and whenever that they want. They're going to be loyal to an organization, but they're going to do it on their terms.

There are different mechanics that have influenced the evolution of their lives, like the internet. They don't know anything prior to digital. So a lot of employers need to think about programming and products that they're using for their employees as digital-first types of products. It's also the immediacy of getting things - that applies to recruiting too. So quick-apply, easy ways to apply for roles and jobs are super important. All these different things that make up this generation have a huge influence on recruiting, engagement and training.

Q WHAT CHANGES NEED TO BE MADE AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL AND COMPANY CULTURE LEVEL TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE GEN Z TALENT CAN THRIVE?

AO For years, organizations were beholden to quarterly earnings and focused on short-term gains, whether it was growth, profitability, etc. So at a macro level, these things need to change because we need to become more human-centered organizations. To do that, we have to change the most macro levels of these things - no longer thinking of organizations in short term, but longer term.

What your company is doing and how it's impacting the world is super important. Purpose has been something we've been exploring in HR for maybe a decade and a half, but this generation is actually putting purpose on the map now. I think that contract is going to be completely changed with this generation, where it's not only about data points and productivity, but it's looking at employees as actual human beings. How are they engaged with your organization? How is their health and well-being? Do we encourage inclusivity and equity across the board? All of these things are super important to this generation, and companies really need to no longer have headlines around these things and actually have programs that impact all of this.

Q WHAT ROLE DOES REMOTE WORK PLAY IN HIRING AND RETAINING GEN Z EMPLOYEES?

AO Remote work has escalated the opportunity for companies to recruit and retain Gen Z talent. Going back to job design, autonomy, and giving them the ability to do their job from anywhere; companies realize that maybe offices aren't necessary for productivity. In fact, maybe offices have always been counter to productivity in that matter. This generation wants that flexibility in the job and they want that autonomy.

From a recruiting perspective, any company that is fully distributed is going to have an advantage over a company that has office-only. In terms of the hybrid approach, I think there's a value. So I don't think being completely remote is the answer. I think the idea is, how do we bring people in on a regular basis into a space that maybe is not the office anymore, but a place for folks to collaborate and do different things?

Q WHEN IT COMES TO RETAINING GEN Z TALENT, IN WHAT WAYS DO MANAGEMENT, REWARDS, AND RECOGNITION NEED TO SHIFT?

AO From a management perspective, it's really about focusing on some of those soft skills like EQ and looking at your employees more as human beings. How do we motivate folks? How do we trigger some of the things that motivate you as a human being outside of just work? This is a generation that has been playing games, and any time you got over a level, you would get rewarded with a "skin," for example. It's almost in real-time. So the idea of rewards being more in real-time is something that we need to start thinking about versus where most rewards are.

Looking at that gamification element in the workplace is going to be really interesting, and I'm excited to see how companies take that recommendation and see what ideas they come up with. The idea of getting content quickly applies to training and development. The way they intake content is very different than other folks. So we have to think about the training modules. Recognition needs to happen more in real-time.

Q WHAT ARE THE TOP TRENDS THAT WILL BE MOST RELEVANT IN THE WORKPLACE?

AO You have to say remote or distributed workforces at this point. I think this idea of distributed workforces is not going away, it's only going to increase. You'll find some companies are going to stumble their way back into an office or a hybrid situation. They may even stumble on hybrid and think of distributed workforces now and then, bringing people back in for what we call here at

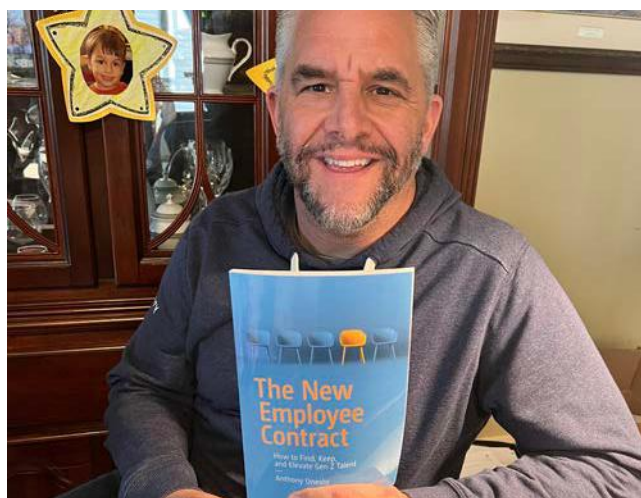
SUZY, "experiences." So, instead of it being a place where you clock in and out, it's now a place where you're going to go and experience something. In the spirit of that gamification, you're going to a location to experience. That experience could be educational, or it could be fun. But this idea of experiences versus offices is something that I think is going to trend too.

The humanization of the workforce is another trend - remember that these are these aren't widgets, these aren't robots, these are human beings. How does that play into the decision-making that they do, or their motivations? How do we become more human? How do we become a more human organization and then start measuring those organizations based on their humanity?

Q HOW WILL GEN Z SHAPE THE FUTURE OF WORK?

AO I think they're going to drive companies to be more human-centered organizations. For the past 40 to 50 years, companies, by design, were created for profit. Oftentimes, the employee would be a tertiary stakeholder - you had investors, you had executives, and then employees were third. What we'll see Gen Z do is bring more of a human-centered focus into organizations, forcing them to think of the employee first (or maybe not just first, but alongside customers). Even Amazon, which is very customer-focused and always has been, has now staked its claim into the employee space by being employee-focused.

To learn more about the topic of hiring and retaining Gen Z talent, scan the QR code to get Anthony Onesto's book, *The New Employee Contract: How to Find, Keep, and Elevate Gen Z Talent*.



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Why Belonging Matters in the Workplace

HR Advisory
Member Spotlight

**Jasmine
Francis**

**VP of People +
Culture at Thinx**

Thinx!

By:
Kristina Dinabourgski
Bennie



While many HR professionals may be familiar with DEI, for some, DEIB may be completely new. So, what does the “B” added to the end of the acronym mean, exactly?

The term “belonging” is something that Jasmine Francis, Vice President of People + Culture at Thinx, is very familiar with. But, before we dive into the topic of belonging in the workplace, let’s learn more about who Jasmine is and how she got into the industry.

Getting to Know Jasmine Francis

When Jasmine isn’t working, she loves to read, dance, eat (she’s a foodie), be around people with high vibrations, and collect crystals. She started her career in human resources as an HR assistant at a private equity company, at the time not knowing exactly what she wanted to do. However, she realized that she really enjoyed it, and as she grew in her career, she was able to align exactly what her interests were and what she was good at in her job.

“I just said, ‘Let’s just give this a try.’ And it worked and it aligned with who I was.”

Jasmine’s work philosophy can be summed up as: “Be human and show up.” Earlier in her career, she felt that she had to show up perfectly and know all the answers. But as she learned more about herself throughout her journey, she realized that it’s okay to just be herself, and be human. Because at the end of the day, no one is perfect and everyone really is learning along the way. So while there is an expectation to get a job done right and show up accordingly, it’s okay to be human while you’re doing it.

“One thing that I’ve learned throughout my career, especially at my time at Thinx and as I’ve gotten to know myself as a person more, is it’s okay to not have all the answers. You actually are going to be more influential by being humble and saying, ‘I don’t know.’ Carrying yourself in a human way and saying, ‘I made a mistake,’ is more motivating to your team. And it empowers other people to know that it’s okay for them to be themselves.”

When it comes to her biggest accomplishment to date, it’s living and thriving – both professionally and personally. There was a point in her life when her mental well-being wasn’t the strongest, and today when she looks back at that time, she’s grateful for how far she has come, that she didn’t give up hope, and for all that she has been able to accomplish.

“At that point in my life, I would have never predicted that I would be able to thrive in the way that I’m thriving now.”

She’s learned to take up space and use her voice. Earlier in her career, she was always afraid to give the wrong answer or say something at the wrong time, but she realized how to navigate using her voice when organizations didn’t always provide a safe space for people to express themselves.

“At the end of the day, if I want to see results, I’ve got to know how to stand up for myself when I have a place to do it and when I don’t have a place to do it. So, using my voice to question things, to voice how I feel, to share my ideas, and to do it with pride is something that’s really, really big for me. And when I say to ‘do it with pride,’ I mean with confidence.”

People, Culture, & Values at Thinx

Thinx is a retail company that creates sustainable solutions to menstruation and incontinence, including underwear designed for periods and bladder leaks. The organization is very value-based, and those values are also baked into every aspect of work life.

“We look at ourselves as a community and not just a sole business. We are taboo-breakers, sustainability advocates and people with periods or incontinence. We are truly changing the narrative every single day.”

Thinx Company Values

- Be Human
- Be an Ambassador
- Be Accountable
- Be Curious
- Be Profitable

As VP of People + Culture, Jasmine is responsible for all things within that realm, with the exception of talent acquisition. She essentially handles everything involved in the employee life cycle, from strategy, processes, people partner support, employee engagement, retention, and much more. No day is exactly the same for Jasmine, but she’s grateful that Thinx allows her to have full autonomy to think strategically about the business and execute things with buy-in from leadership.

What Does Belonging Mean in the Workplace, And Why Does it Matter?

Previously, inclusivity seemed to be a substitute for belonging. There was a bit of an assumption that if a workplace was inclusive then that meant it was making sure that people belong – but the two are actually quite different and should work more in parallel to each other than combined into one.

“The intention of being inclusive essentially has a parallel to belonging. But belonging takes it a step further by saying, ‘What am I proactively doing from an action standpoint to ensure that our employees feel as though they belong to the organization, want to be at the organization, have a seat here, and have a space here,’ which is actually different than making a business decision about something and thinking about other people. So I think being inclusive is the thought and belonging is really the action behind it.”



The Impact on Benefits, Policies, and Processes

To encourage belonging in the workplace, one of the first steps an organization needs to do is to look at the policies, benefits, and processes in place and examine whether they're based on the assumption that everyone starts from the same place or has the same background, experiences, or lifestyle. Certain expectations may have a one-size-fits-all approach, which results in inequity of employees feeling that sense of belonging.

For example, a company may offer a 401K benefit, but not everyone may be knowledgeable about its purpose or how to utilize it – and as a result, they may not contribute to it because they don't really know what a 401K does. To be inclusive and promote belonging, a company needs to rethink the frameworks and processes in place and find ways to present and share information that takes people's different experiences into account for the best outcomes.

“The time that we have to spend now on being more thoughtful and more intentional is demanded of us because we have to recognize, especially now, that we're all in different situations and we have to be very thoughtful about our policies so that our people can show up. And we have to continue to recognize that they are again, humans first and then the employee second.”

Authenticity

“DEIB is really based on authenticity. And it's on the organizations to make sure that they can provide that type of space as best they can.”

There needs to be a willingness within an organization to actually make the changes necessary to create an environment that encourages belonging. This means making sure that employees are comfortable and have the space to speak up and express their concerns of how a policy or verbiage makes them feel without being penalized. Employees need to feel secure that if they fill out a DEIB survey that their responses will be taken seriously. All that starts with the environment and tone of leadership and decision-makers.

After gaining an understanding of what belonging means and how it translates into the scheme of DEIB, the next step is to be actionable. A starting point can be to ask employees

HR ADVISORY ANNUAL MEETING



how you can make them feel as though they belong in the company. From those responses, create an action plan and communicate that plan to the organization and how it can be executed. But you don't need to stop there, even after your plan is in place, continue to create a space where people can continuously be open and express what they need.

How Jasmine is Leading Initiatives That Highlight Belonging at Thinx

Jasmine did an overhaul of all the policies at Thinx after hearing some great feedback during one-on-ones with her team. She saw that certain policies that may be standard for other organizations didn't work for Thinx's population and decided to make some changes.

So, Thinx renamed its bereavement policy to "compassionate leave" and changed it from three days to two weeks. A caregiver policy was also implemented, which gives people ten paid days off to care for whoever they need to care for. Thinx also extended its parental leave policy to give people who are carrying a child additional time off before they begin their parental leave.

To encourage belonging, Thinx also gets groups of people together to have open conversations about what's on their

minds. They've also gotten big on sending out engagement surveys.

"It gives people a very clear avenue to talk about what they need to feel good working in the company. It gives them a space to talk about what's going on in the company, their concerns, what's working, and what's not working. So I think just giving a voice and having that additional channel is another way to make sure employees feel as though there is a place for them to belong."

DEIB is constantly evolving, and HR leaders are all learning how to navigate the space in better ways. Regardless of what point you're at in your DEIB journey at your organization, what matters is that you approach the situation with an open mind and open ears. Be open and ready to learn about different perspectives and experiences. By doing that, you're already going in the right direction. ■



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From the Community: On Access & Resources

"The HR Advisory community Slack is the best resource I've found for HR professionals. It's so well organized, has great content and provides very useful information."

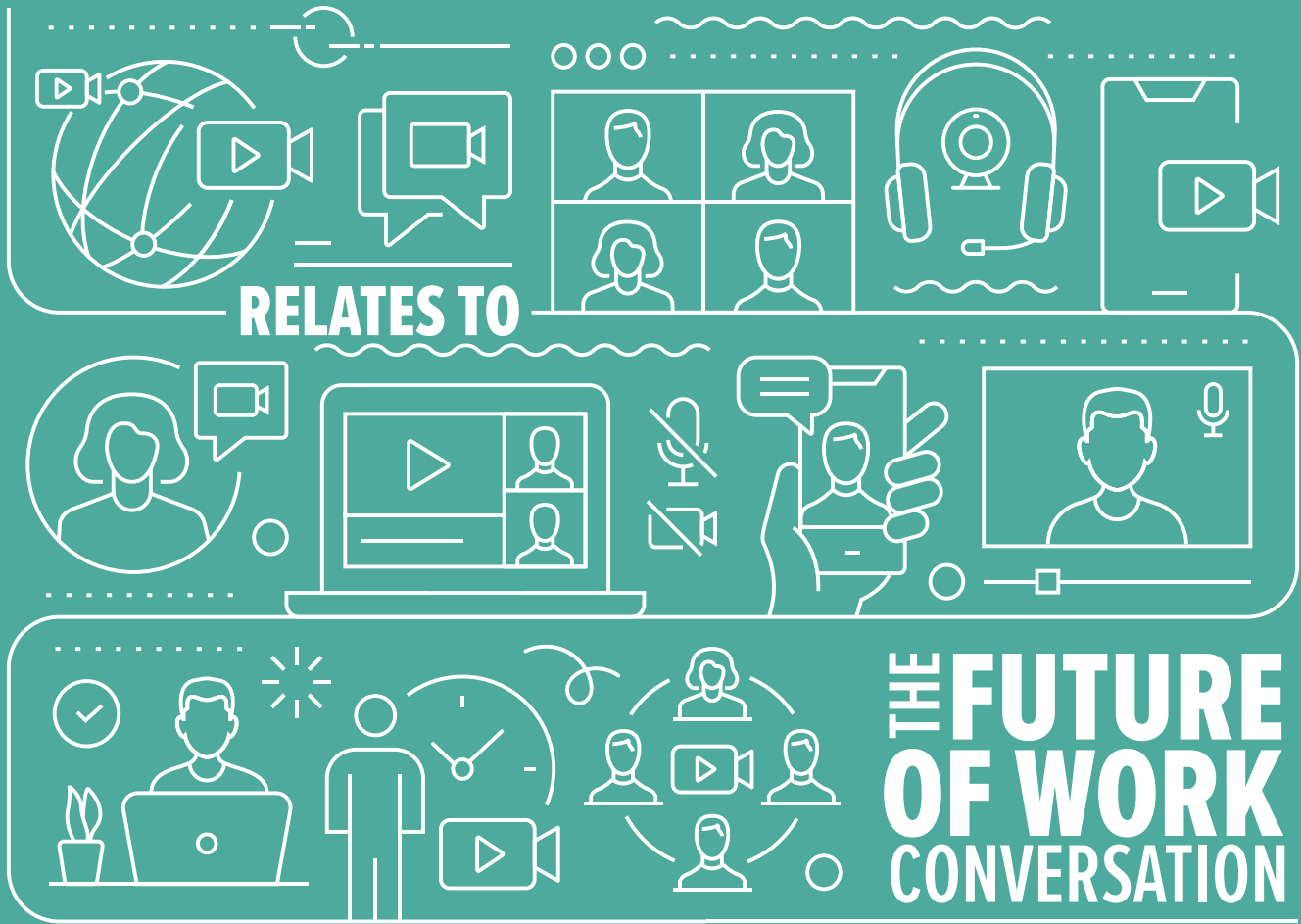
Amy Kruglak, Sr. PeopleOps
Leader/Consultant, StartupPOPS



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HOW REMOTE WORK



A Q&A WITH:



JOANNE CAMPBELL
PEOPLE OPS SPECIALIST
AT GRAFANA LABS



ERICA WOODS
HEAD OF PEOPLE &
CULTURE AT STACKLET



AUBREY BOCK
DIRECTOR OF TALENT
ACQUISITION AT STACKLET



EMILY PORTER
DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE + TALENT AT
COMMON THREAD COLLECTIVE

The way we work is changing, and remote work is here to stay.

Whether you're managing a remote-first organization or deciding what the best solution is for your team, see what these People leaders learned through the process and get their expert advice on how to build and maintain a healthy, productive remote work environment.

What would you tell yourself now to make your transition to remote work easier?

JC Set your own boundaries and stick to them. If you had a hard time “turning off” or stepping away from your desk/computer in a physical office, be aware of that and set yourself up for success. It is important that you are “working from home and not living at work.”

EW Use your calendar and Slack to set your hours and stick to them. Walk the dog every day at 2 pm? Make sure everyone knows so that your version of work/life balance is acknowledged and respected. It’s OK to occasionally walk the dog on a call, but if that is your zen time, make a point of not accepting meetings scheduled during that time. Your manager/co-workers will respect your schedule as much as you do.

AB Something that was important to me was making sure I spent time in person with other humans. Understanding your introversion/extraversion (in my case extroversion) levels and what your needs are is important. For me, I needed to find ways to have socialization that I missed from an office. Some of the changes I made were: instead of solo fitness, I do group fitness classes. After working in an office for 10+ years, being at home alone (except for my wonderful dog, of course) all day was a big transition and some small but impactful changes helped me a ton.

EP Boundaries, “clear is kind” feedback, expectation setting, utilizing your calendar, and being aware of your needs are key to setting yourself up for success. Be flexible and give yourself permission to adjust what you scheduled, in the event that is what is needed at the moment. Being in a remote environment allows you the freedom to trust your discernment for what you need on any given day to ensure you are working from the best place possible.

With remote-first or remote-only companies becoming more popular, what types of ways will we need to adapt for remote workforce optimization?

JC Set clear expectations on both the employer and employee sides. Thankfully, I think, we are beyond the mindset that people who work from home aren’t working. Remember, everyone doesn’t want to work from home (or can’t work from home). How do we ensure that those individuals are also set up for success?

EW I think it can be boiled down to adapting an outward mindset with regard to how people work best and what they need to do their best work (whether that is remote/hybrid/in-office), not imposing one’s own thoughts on what it means to be productive onto others, and relaxing into the typical realities of remote work (dogs barking, kids/partners entering the room during meetings, eating, the doorbell ringing, etc.).

AB Have realistic expectations and consider that we are in each others’ homes. Build a culture that allows lots of collaboration (via technologies, types of meetings, meeting structure, communication, etc.). And lastly, work with employees to help them do their best work.

EP As our workforce continues to become diverse and truly reflective of the world around us, this includes differences in thought, and what works best for someone may not work best for someone else. How can we continue to foster an environment (whether remote, hybrid, or in-office) that gives employees the flexibility and opportunity to truly step into what works for them AND ensure the needs of the business are being met? Gone are the days when it was viewed as an either/or situation - we realize it is a both/and. “Clear is kind” communication, choosing courage, and leaning into vulnerability will help us continue to foster and build relational equity and trust.

What types of tools do you think will be needed (or you are using) today that help support that?

JC There are a couple of areas to focus on; think about what resources the person needs to do their job efficiently, and invest in management development. Everyone is going to have their own version of a home office depending on the space they have to work with, so making sure they have the tools to be successful is crucial. This can range from ensuring they have the right communication tools to making sure the internal IS/IT team is set up to address issues that their nontechnical colleagues are very likely to have. Investing in your leadership will be critical in supporting, developing, and empowering your employees (regardless if they work from home or in an office).

EW The investment should be in human development. Focus on ensuring that each person is seen and heard and that their development needs are respected and celebrated. Not everyone wants to advance into people management (thankfully!) and it is important to ensure that everyone has a path laid before them that supports their growth in ways that suit their professional needs.

AB Helping people create a home working environment that best serves them given their circumstances is essential. This may mean noise-canceling headsets for the employee who shares their office with a partner, or great collaboration tools for a team. Keeping an open door as HR professionals and listening to what employees need to be high-performing is key. Invest in people and invest in their career paths. As cliché as the saying is, “What if we invest in them and they leave?” vs. “What if we don’t and they stay?” it is true.

EP Giving employees the tools they need to succeed is as much about the platforms, tech, and laptops, as it is about the touchpoints we are having with them to ensure we have a pulse on their needs. What additional ways can we

partner with them so they are successful in their environment and in their role (i.e. home office stipends, internet reimbursements, health + wellness stipends, professional development, etc)? When we are interviewing someone to join the team, it is equally them interviewing us and ensuring we will invest in them the way they will invest in the company and clients.



What ways do we need to pivot how we work together in a remote setting while also keeping company culture/boundaries/collaboration?

JC Don't have rose-colored memories of how things were before. Was your culture "perfect" before? If it was, why was it perfect or special? Did everyone already have a perfect work/life balance or was that already something that needed improvement? How did your team collaborate and work together when they were in the office? These are important questions that the business should gain insight into. Organizations now have an opportunity to not just try and duplicate what they did in a physical office into a virtual one, but to recreate the areas that were already great and improve on the areas that already had gaps. Ask your people: Why have they stayed with your organization? Why did they join? What would be the reasons they would decide to look elsewhere?

EW Live in the now with your teams. Humans have a tendency toward trying to reinvent things in the image of the past. It is important to remember that we are not in people's offices - we are in their homes. There is no reason that remote employees need to apologize for life occurring in their homes, and that life occurring in their homes doesn't indicate that they aren't giving their attention to the task/meeting at hand. I see my role in People Ops as one of accepting, and helping my managers/team members accept, that part of the great joy of working from home is that there is an intimacy to it. I have virtually met and gotten to know more partners, children, and pets during my 6 years of remote work than I ever did when I worked in "old school brick and mortar" spaces and I love it!

EP Being part of a company that has transitioned from offices to now being fully remote, all while scaling to triple our size, I have experienced this firsthand, and being willing to innovate and adjust how we do things has helped us get to this point. We have operationalized our values and feel that is at the core of what we do and how we want to show up.

From there, to allow employees the opportunity to not have to hide parts of themselves or their lives and to create a safe space for them to show up as their authentic selves and thrive in their roles is a way we can be a point of differentiation. We are all working on solving the same problems and answering the tough questions, so when we think about retention it comes down to, "Who do I want to do this work with, and who do I want to do this work for? How can we continue to foster that?"

What advice would you give to organizations or employers who are thinking about making the switch to remote-first?

JC Ensure you know the reasons why you believe it will be advantageous to your business, employees, customers, and vendors. Is the organization prepared for everything that goes along with the AMAZING pros that come from a remote-first organization - remember everything isn't all rainbows and butterflies. Seek advice and consult from other organizations that have already gone through the process, you aren't in this alone - learn from your peers!

EW There are a TON of great remote organizations that have mastered maintaining quality distributed teams for years before the pandemic (some for 20+ years). Reach out to them (reach out to me if you want suggestions for who to contact) and get advice. HRA's "remote-first" Slack channel is also a great place to get your questions answered and get tips. I'm hopeful that more of the mainstream HR support groups will begin to embrace remote work, but until they do, network, network, network to get as much information as you need to lead your company toward the brilliant switch to remote work.

I also recommend that you know how your company wants to conduct its remote business. Are they local, regional, national, or international? It's important to know how you want to scale in this way so that you can plan for the inevitable issues that come up with hiring in different localities and asynchronous work for teams in multiple locations. Personally, I adore working with asynchronous teams. I feel a real clarity in having to ensure that everyone is communicating clearly across multiple time zones and with people from different cultures.

EP Asking yourself the right questions proactively and leaning into resources to learn more is so advantageous. As the saying goes, you don't know what you don't know, so think about how you can get more information so it is a decision that will have the most longevity and set your employees and business up for success. Now there are definitely times where you will learn along the way, but what are things you can have additional awareness on, and what will work best for you and your company? Even if this is something your employees want and have been asking for, it is still a transition and there will be some change in management, so how can you communicate that to employees so they are set up for success and have an easier time with that change? ■

HR Advisory Dinners

This past year we kicked off in-person dinners! Community is so important, and we hope this is a time to connect and get advice on current challenges and get to know others in the same space. The energy at these events makes us excited for more dinners to come.



Stacey Richey

VP, People, Corvus Insurance

"It was refreshing and energizing to be able to share space with my HR peers in person again. It reminded me of how important it is to have a supportive community of like-minded HR professionals. Thank you to the HR Advisory team for giving us this opportunity!"



Joseph Arquillo

Senior Manager, People Operations, Clyde

"Thank you to the Bennie group for putting on a tremendous event where I had the opportunity to connect with other individuals in the People Ops space. Genuinely enjoyed the ability to step away from work, have some in-person interactions, and enjoy the connections that were made!"



DEIB

How to Tie DEIB Into Your Employee Benefits Strategy

By: Jennifer Wiseman

Benefits are a reflection of company culture, a promise to current employees, and a billboard for candidates: here are our values, and this is how we're committed to them. Incorporating DEIB practices and philosophies in your benefits strategy, then, is a fantastic, tangible step forward in bridging the "say vs do" gap in diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace.

Tying DEIB into your benefits strategy requires an ongoing, top-down commitment to empathy, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Patience and vulnerability are necessary for successful implementation, and though it may be a massive undertaking for some, the rewards of DEIB are worth it.

What Does a Benefits Strategy That Embraces DEIB Look Like?

Compassionate, flexible, and accessible—if DEIB is at the heart of your benefits strategy, you'll be working to ensure all of your employees have equal opportunities and feel accepted and valued. Conceptualizing what that might look like in practice can be challenging, though. So we'll start off with a just few concrete examples of inclusive practices and equitable benefits:

- **Utilizing gender-neutral language in documentation and education** is a free first step to take toward creating a more inclusive benefits strategy.
- **Floating holidays and expanded or unlimited PTO** allow employees to observe cultural, religious, and personal holidays they might not have been able to, or felt they were allowed to, otherwise.
- **Likewise, expanding PTO categories** – especially if your only categories are sick and vacation – can encourage all workers equally to take the time they need. It's a simple move, but the value of workers feeling seen, heard, and understood can't be overstated.
- **Flexible schedules and remote work** are hugely popular right now – an estimated 82% of U.S. employees want remote work options, according to a 2021 survey by Global Workplace Analytics. Flexibility and remote and hybrid work options give people with disabilities, parents and caretakers, and retired and semi-retired workers a fairer shake at joining and moving up in the workforce.
- **Home internet and tech stipends** provide support to employees of all socioeconomic backgrounds.
- **Gender-inclusive family benefits**, including parental leave for childbearing and non-childbearing parents, and fertility, adoption, and surrogacy options will attract a more diverse pool of candidates to your business.
- **Gender affirmation benefits and transgender-inclusive healthcare coverage**, which focus on prescription drug coverage for hormone therapy and gender-affirming surgical procedures, will foster a more transgender-inclusive work environment.
- **Telemedicine and wellness offerings** like health apps and medical transportation stipends grant employees greater access to care regardless of their socioeconomic background or place of residence.
- **Flexible package options** that cater to specific employee life stages, if within your organization's budget, are a surefire way to ensure that your people are getting the benefits they want and will use.

Get Leadership Involved at the Starting Line

Successful implementation of DEIB benefits starts at the top. By now, that might be a familiar refrain, but there's no denying the truth of it. When diversity, equity, and inclusion are truly understood and embraced by the organization's decision-makers, DEIB strategies are adopted more naturally downstream.

How do you do this? Go in with a plan and keep messaging straightforward. Humanizing DEIB can go a long way toward gaining support. Give concrete examples of what tying DEIB into your benefits strategy will look like, and don't be afraid to provide data that supports the greater benefits for the company as a whole.

The research is on the side of DEIB, and luckily, numbers are the simplest way to illustrate to your C-suite employees the benefits of both a diverse workforce and the DEIB-focused benefits strategy that will attract and retain it. According to McKinsey's 2015 Diversity Matters report, gender and racial diversity produce significantly higher financial returns. Racially and ethnically diverse companies are 35% more likely to have financial returns above the median, and gender diverse companies are 15% more likely. Numerous studies have shown that diversity, equity, and inclusion aren't just desired by the modern workforce, they're good for the company's bottom line as well.

Get Input and Support From Your People

Your employees know what they want. Give them the time and space they need to tell you, and listen with intent. Pulse surveys, polls, focus groups, and one-on-one discussions can narrow down which parts of your current benefits plan your employees are happiest with, which are underutilized, and where to look for adding new options. When surveying workers, take steps to ensure that your underrepresented employees are heard -- it's vital for achieving equity.

Once the surveys are done, your employees can also champion DEIB initiatives. Just don't assume that every underrepresented employee wants to add diversity education onto their plate. If you do find workers passionate about diversity and inclusion and eager to contribute, support them. They'll be your benefits strategy's biggest champions.

Benefits Education Must Be Accessible

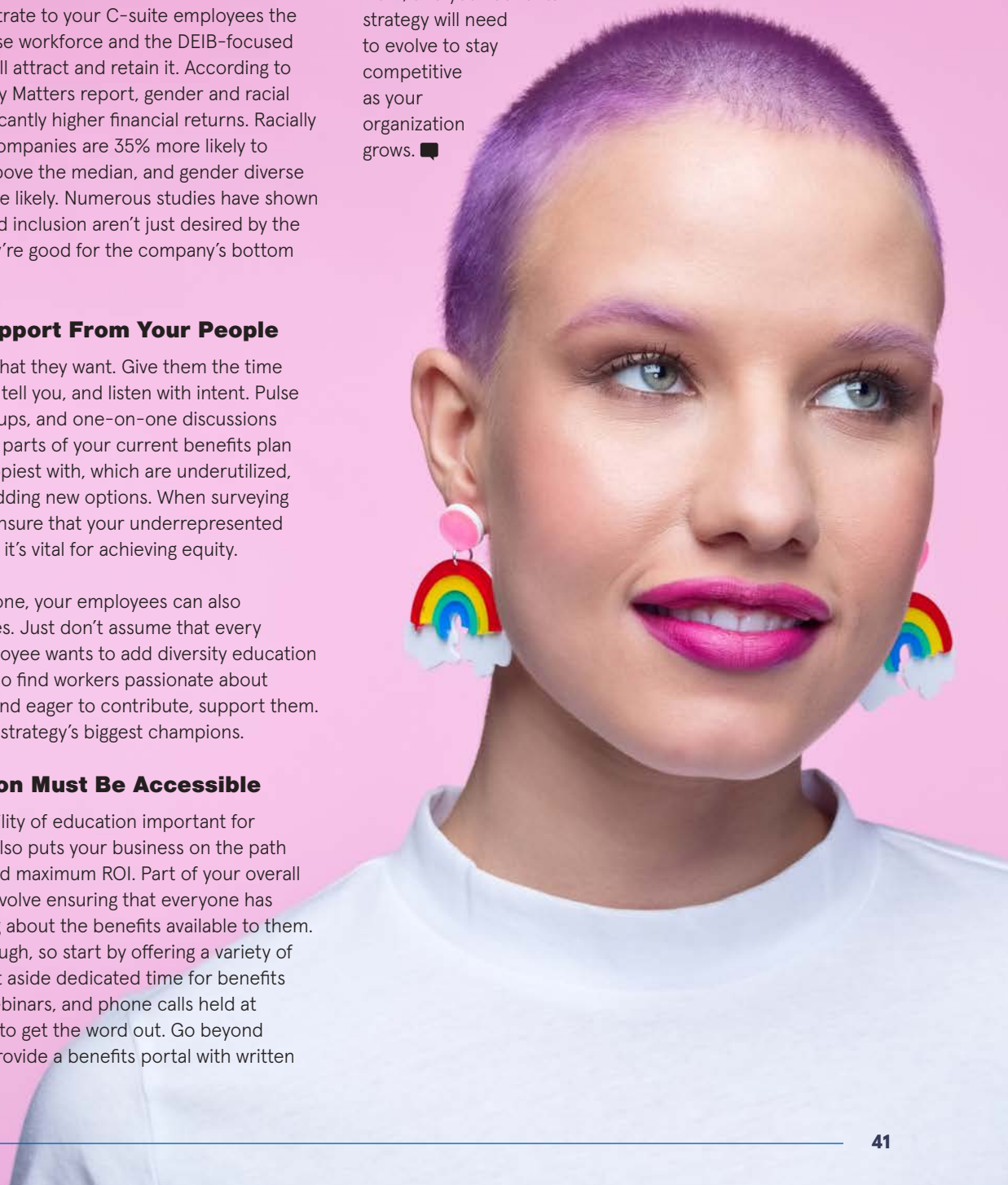
Not only is the accessibility of education important for promoting DEIB, but it also puts your business on the path to achieving that coveted maximum ROI. Part of your overall strategy, then, should involve ensuring that everyone has equal access to learning about the benefits available to them. An email alone isn't enough, so start by offering a variety of educational options. Set aside dedicated time for benefits education. Meetings, webinars, and phone calls held at different times will help to get the word out. Go beyond group education, too. Provide a benefits portal with written

and video FAQs and guides or open the door to one-on-one support. Accessibility services like closed-captioning for webinars, meetings, and videos can also be implemented to stretch your reach.

Adaptability Is Key In Sustaining DEIB Practices

Change management is a huge part of DEIB, and being open to change when it happens is just the baseline. Stay on top of what's to come by reviewing demographics and forecasting the needs of your people. Be willing to acknowledge areas where improvement is needed -- vulnerability is a strength here.

Weaving DEIB into your benefits strategy isn't a fix-it-and-forget-it project. It's ongoing work, and your benefits strategy will need to evolve to stay competitive as your organization grows. ■



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