



ADVISORY

Fall 2021



Company Values Matter

**How Nylas' Values
Guide Their Strategy
and Day-to-Day
Decision Making**

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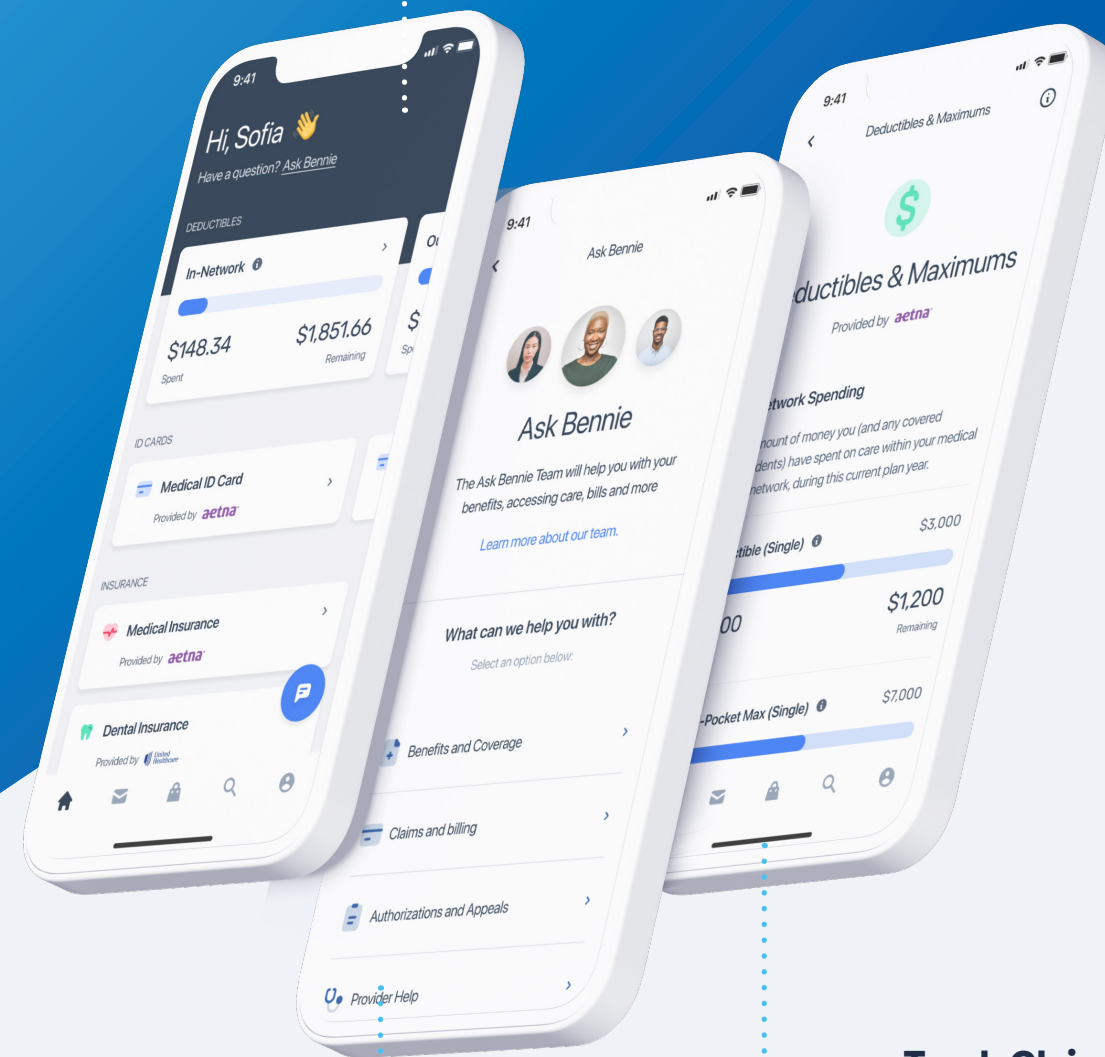
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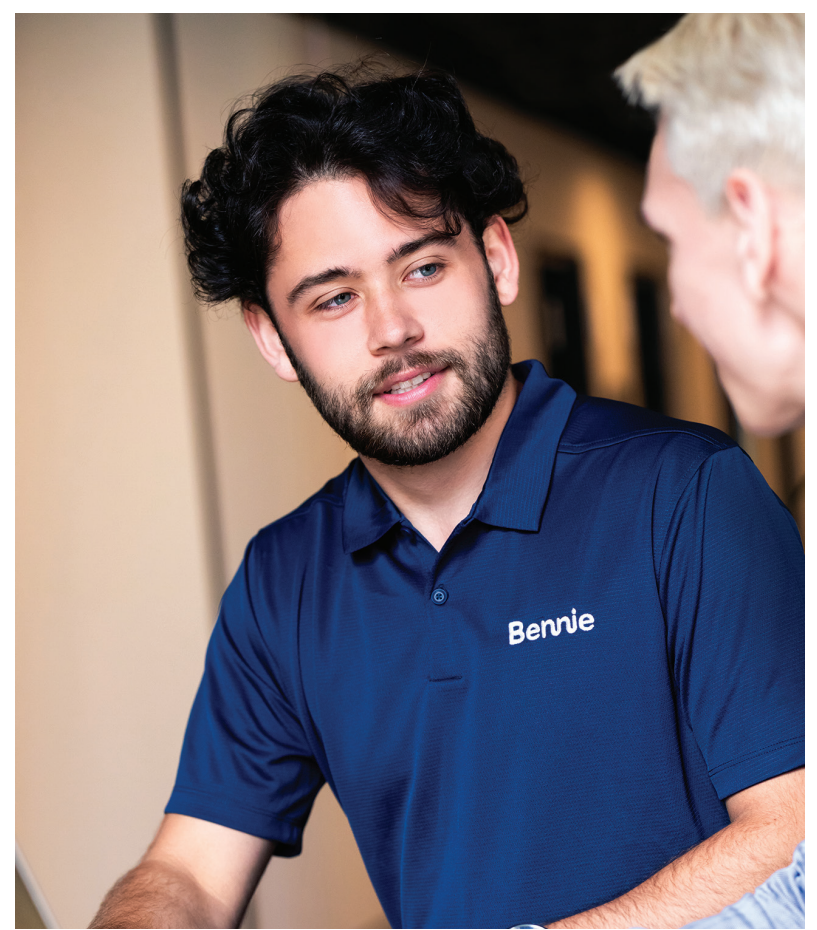
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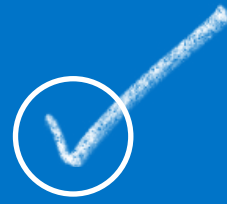
2021



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A Note from the Publisher

Benefit Renewal Season is Here

After the last year and a half, new questions and concerns are part of our daily lives now: Can my company require vaccines or masks in the workplace (and should it)? Can my company sustain long-term remote work? How does my recruiting strategy need to change? How can I ensure that employees onboard effectively and stay engaged long-term? What is the true impact of nonstop video conferencing on my employees' health? How can we further support employee mental health when many are still surrounded by uncertainty and personal loss? We're in uncharted waters mapping out a new course, and every day seems to bring about new questions that HR leaders of the past haven't had to answer.

New and evolving laws also continue to make benefit programs and their administration more complex. Earlier this year, long-standing COBRA and FSA rules were upended with the passage of COVID-driven legislation. States continue to enhance their family leave policies (which are beneficial to individuals, yet administratively complex for HR). Washington will be requiring Long-Term Care insurance now.

At the same time, employees are demanding increased flexibility and personalization in their benefit programs, which parallel the increased flexibility in their work arrangements. Innovative companies are springing up left and right to solve for specific employee needs like child care, elder care, mental health, and financial health, just to name a few. Benefit managers need to strike the balance of catering to this customization while also offering a program that can meet the needs of the majority.

In our second issue of HR Advisory magazine, as we approach benefit renewal season for many of our members, writer Susan Ladika shares insights on how to run a good open enrollment. Also, Joanne Sammer breaks down how employers can leverage higher levels of corporate wellness into a competitive advantage. We'll also spotlight some of our customers and partners like Nylas and Goodpath who have successfully adjusted over the past year and positioned themselves for success in this new environment.

Above all, thank you to our members, customers, partners, and employees for being part of our HR Advisory community. We're excited to share this magazine with you, and look forward to further conversations with each and every one of you.



Greg Autuori
Vice President, Strategy & Benefit Operations at Bennie



What Good Are Employee Benefits

If No One Knows About Them?

By Janice Litvin, Workplace Wellness Speaker and Author of Banish Burnout Toolkit

As I interact with clients from different industries, talking about burnout and how to prevent it by changing behavior, I am amazed to learn that many employees are not aware of the key wellness benefits available to them through their jobs, especially mental health benefits. Many companies are finally paying attention to the importance of incorporating and expanding mental health benefits into their wellness strategy. If we haven't learned it before, we certainly learned this important lesson last week when Olympic gymnast Simone Biles, famous for her magnificent and seemingly fearless aerial feats, announced that for her safety, both mental and physical, she was taking herself out of the most competitive event of her career.

How burned out are people at their workplaces, who in general, don't have to literally soar and twist through the air with the whole world watching?



According to a February 10, 2021 survey by Deloitte, (as reported in <https://www.apollotechnical.com/remote-work-burnout-statistics/>) 77% of 1,000 respondents said they had experienced burnout at their job. Ninety-one percent said that unmanageable stress or frustration impacted the quality of their work. Even those passionate about their jobs were still stressed at work with 64% saying they were frequently stressed.

Yet, I want to draw your attention to the fact that many employees' eyes glaze over when I suggest they reach out to their EAP (Employee Assistance Program) when their stress level is getting extreme and does not let up.

"EAP?" they respond.

"Yes, Employee Assistance Program, your company has one. It's where you can get telephone access to licensed therapists all over the country who are ready to help you."

"Oh, how do I access my EAP?"

"You look in your wellness portal or contact your wellness or human resources representative."

"But I don't want to be labelled as mentally ill."

"You won't be. Under HIPAA rules (Healthy Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996) providers are not allowed to reveal the individual identify of anyone who uses an EAP."

Onboarding day is filled with so much information, it's hard for new employees to remember everything, including details about their EAP and any other mental health components. However, mental health benefits are a great example of benefits that need to be highlighted on a regular basis so that people do not forget about them, or neglect to access them when needed.

"How do I highlight?" you ask. By not only having a vibrant wellness portal, but also by driving traffic to your wellness portal. As you can see from the above conversation, many employees never bother to log in.

My best suggestion is to bring the message to them, for essentially the same reason major retail brands, like Apple, Nike, and Coca Cola, spend fortunes on billboard ads. The common advertising tenet is that buyers need to

be "touched" seven times before they will take action. Applying that rule of thumb to marketing your workplace wellness programming, why not use of all your avenues of communication, such as:

- Slack channel
- Flyers in the elevators and on the walls throughout your departments and kitchen areas, highlighting a different wellness offering or activity every couple of weeks
- Flyers in the beautifully painted stairwells (which serve to entice people to take the stairs)
- Electronic billboards in the lobby
- Employee newsletter or email blasts

The employee newsletter is a perfect vehicle to share highlights of different wellness and other benefits in each issue, perhaps in a very visible display ad. Also you could write about a success story, of how a young couple learned from your financial wellness education program how to save or invest their money, or how someone improved her health by participating in your workplace wellness programs.

Another way to drive the information to teams is through their managers. Every manager should be educated enough to know what the company's basic wellness benefits are. And the manager should be engaging in wellness activities with their team. Just imagine their doing a water-drinking challenge or a daily 3 PM outdoor walk challenge.

As I referenced in the newsletter example above, financial wellness is another important and fundamental wellness element, and links with mental health. Financial stress distracts and strains employees and impacts their productivity. Seventy-three percent of Americans rank finances as their number one stressor, according to Gordon Stein, financial wellness speaker and author of Cashflow Cookbook. "Four in ten households don't have enough savings to handle an auto-breakdown or unexpected illness," according to a Forbes report "Why Workplace Financial Wellness Programs Are Hot" (5/18/2017).

Financial education as part of wellness should be provided by an educational company, not a financial services firm whose business it is to sell their services.

What Good Are Employee Benefits If No one Knows About Them?

Whether employee mental health is affected by financial distress, family health problems, or broad issues like Covid-19 risk, ask yourself what you are doing to remove the stigma around mental health in your organization.

Did you know that one in four adults experiences mental illness or addiction in a given year, but less than one in three of those seeks treatment? According to NAMI (National Association of Mental Illness) "stigma is the greatest single barrier to treating mental illness."

Prudential worked to remove the stigma by getting company leaders to talk in front of the whole company about their challenges with depression. Getting issues out in the open begins to reduce the stigma and paves the way for others to change their attitudes and actions.

With burnout so widespread, you may know well that stress and burnout can lead to anxiety, depression, lost productivity, and high employee healthcare costs. But burnout is a two-way street. It's not just about individual action and self-care, but also about the work environment that caused the stress.

What are you doing to ensure your employees don't get burned out? According to Gallup three drivers of workplace burnout are:

- Too much work
- Not enough support from managers
- Lack of control over work

Most managers are promoted for technical skills, and no experience helping workers emotionally. Are you providing training for managers, so that when they encounter an employee who displays ongoing aberrant or concerning behavior, they know what to say or do?

Gone are the days when we thought a worker was just supposed to go to work, collect a paycheck and be happy to have a job. To remain competitive in this current Covid climate of unfilled jobs, you're going to have to treat your employees the way you would treat your children, family members, or friends — with kindness, respect, and assistance making sure they have what they need to thrive. 🗨️

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To learn more about Janet and her book *Banish Burnout Toolkit*, visit janicelitvin.com.



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Bennie Customer Spotlight

Company Values Matter

How Nylas' Values Guide Their Strategy and Day-to-Day Decision Making

Highlighting the People Operations Team at Nylas

By: Ina Elcott, Bennie



Introducing Nylas

Nylas is a pioneer and leading provider of productivity infrastructure solutions for modern software. Within the B2B landscape, Nylas powers the productivity layer of the software stack. "We are committed to solving the toughest challenges that developers face when building products and features that increase their users' productivity." From San Francisco to Amsterdam, the organization sits at 165 employees across the Americas and Europe with the expectation to double in the next six months.

***"I have direct relationships with the executive suite and I have to give credit where credit's due. The executives are approachable and thoughtful. They are looking for answers, so they bring in experts. They are willing to partner with people."* -Ryan**

Success stems within the team and Nylas' team is nothing short of impressive.

Meet the Nylas' People Team:

The importance of the People team is commonly overlooked. People operations professionals are the bloodline of the company. It's their job to ensure that the business gets the most out of its employees. From recruiting, to new hire onboarding, from employee retention, to employee engagement, the People Operations team's job is nothing short of multifaceted. Since a company's most valuable resource is its employees, the People Operations team plays a crucial role.

Ryan Gormley, Head of People



Originally from Vancouver, British Columbia, then moving to the States, Ryan Gormley is nothing short of a travel-enthusiast. Having lived on both coasts of the States and visiting over forty-five countries so far, Ryan has seen much of the world. Now residing in Denver, Colorado, Ryan has taken an interest in the outdoors and taking in the beautiful scenery Denver has to offer. "Mountain biking is a huge hobby for my wife and I. You can't live in Colorado if you don't have those."

Ryan completed his first undergraduate degree in international poli-sci and world history keeping the idea of going to law or foreign affairs in the back of his head. He was completely consumed by history. After realizing his personality did not line up with those lines of work, Ryan came to the conclusion that he needed to turn to something more external facing. He went back to school for another degree, with a pure focus on business. After landing internships at companies like IKEA and Blackberry, Ryan found himself working within People Operations and Recruiting teams. Fast forward to another degree purely focused on entrepreneurship, finance, and analytics, Ryan did not think he was going to end up back in the People world. "I wanted to do something completely different. I interviewed for various product marketing roles. But a VP of HR was interested in my background and MBA degree. Asked if I wanted to help with M&A integration. Got looped back into compensation and here we are today Head of People at Nylas."

Start-up fanatic, Ryan has been at Nylas for over a year now as Head of People. "I love to build things. I think that's why I've been able to not only fall in love with this role, but also it's very important to decide whether or not you belong in a startup or an established organization because they're completely different."

Rachel Ibarra, People Operations Manager



Originally from the San Francisco Bay Area, the West Coast native packed her bags and moved to Denver, Colorado. Rachel loves to travel, eat Italian food, drink Italian wine, and hang out with friends. Most importantly, Rachel loves where she works and the people she works with.

Back at school, Rachel studied psychology and criminal justice. A combination of working with children and her admiration for her college professors gave Rachel the idea of going into child psychology. After graduating, Rachel found herself in the People through a unique path. What was supposed to be an interim position for Rachel, turned into a 20-year stint where Rachel was exposed to facilities work and recruiting. "It was kind of a journey around all these different facets of HR, but it came down to working with people and dealing with people. And I don't know what it is about me, but everyone seems to want to tell me things or confide in me."

Now approaching her 1-year mark at Nylas, Rachel works on the People as the People Operations Manager.

Natasha Ubaldó, People Operations Coordinator

After growing up in Houston, Texas, Natasha Ubaldó is an active go-getter with close family ties. She found herself working in healthcare, one of the major industries prominent in Texas. During her time running private practices, Natasha got a feel for management and similar to HR, the job consisted of a little bit of everything. With a little push, Natasha took the leap of faith and moved to California to take on the tech start-up world, an environment that matched her energy and speed.

That's where Natasha found Nylas where she's been for the past ten months as a People Operations Coordinator. Once Natasha got into the People Operations and tech space, she knew this is where she was meant to be and what she wanted to do forever. "HR is the perfect combination of psychology and business, meaning that you have to deal with a lot of different personalities on a daily basis, that is the employee relations aspect of it. Then you're also on the business side, such as strategic planning, and the building of things. I think it's really just the perfect combination of what I studied, what I love, what I think I'm good at. Here we are."

Nylas' 7 Core Values:

Here at Nylas, Natasha is proud to be a part of a people-first organization. "When you put things in place that are to benefit your people, you get happy motivated employees. You build this culture that is valuable to the entire organization." At the center of Nylas' company culture are their 7 Core Values. These values guide their strategy and day-to-day decision making.

When we asked the Nylas team how employees demonstrate the company values, they all had the same response. "It's the less obvious ways. Our values are so engraved in our day-to-day interactions and how we live out and do our jobs." (-Natasha) Ryan quoted the CEO of Twilio, Jeff Lawson, that values should be something easily accepted, attained, and implemented by employees. Values aren't meant to be and should not just be flashy words plastered on a company poster, but instead ideas that a team can respect and use as their guide to carry out their work in a meaningful way. ■

Nylas' 7 Core Values:

1 // Customer Obsession

We create value for our customers because without our customers our company does not exist.

2 // Creativity

We are creators. We are intrinsically motivated by the act of creation.

3 // Velocity

We move with speed and direction.

When candidates come into an interview with the question "How do you maintain culture with this massive growth?" Ryan explains that Nylas simply doesn't. "Culture evolves for a good reason. Culture changes for the better. You strive to be better. Every new hire, every round of funding, every milestone enhances us, makes us better."

Humans tend to struggle with the idea that startups grow and develop differently than established companies. They grow exponentially at high speeds, not linearly like humans do. "One thing I thoroughly enjoy as being a leader at Nylas is being in the forefront of leadership and saying "No, culture is going to change and that's OK. We should embrace the idea that our culture is not going to remain the same." - Ryan

4 // Output-Focused

We value the results of our work, not the process.

5 // Open Communication

We speak our minds but we always do it with care for one another.

6 // Diversity, Inclusion, & Belonging

We welcome people of all backgrounds and we value different viewpoints.

"I've worked at other organizations that have this as a value on the exterior, but there is no internal conversation happening. I've been in situations where I've looked around and nobody looked like me and it was a very isolating experience." - Natasha

At Nylas, Diversity, Inclusion, & Belonging is given its own core value because it is part of the team's DNA and thoughtful leadership. Ensuring the team is always asking questions such as "What actions can we take to actually move forward in a positive way?"

7 // Trust

We trust one another to operate with the best interest of our customers and Nylas in mind.

One of Ryan's work philosophies revolves around the core value of "Trust". In order to find success, you have to rely on other people. "I believe in pushing people with stretch assignments, to be better versions of themselves. I do not believe in micromanagement as long as the outputs have been accomplished, deadlines are being met, and clients are happy and satisfied with your performance. Then you're on track of doing exactly what I was hoping you would accomplish."

But trust goes beyond a professional relationship. "Being in the People space, you get to know someone better than their other colleagues. A lot of the time people come to us for certain things, confide in us, tell us what's going on in their lives, or talk through any struggles they're experiencing." - Rachel

During the pandemic, this idea of trust was a lot more prevalent when mental health and the lack of separation between work and home were common struggles many employees faced, not just at Nylas. "Just being able to build genuine relationships and being in the position to support them if they need help or provide guidance makes you feel really good." - Rachel



Running a Good Open Enrollment

By: Susan Ladika

As the open enrollment period nears, many human resources departments are considering what benefits best meet the needs of their employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, and are doing plenty of advance planning to help avoid stumbling blocks down the road.

“It’s all about planning and communicating,” says David Lewis, president and CEO of OperationsInc., an HR outsourcing and consulting firm based in Norwalk, Conn. Your starting point may be reviewing the benefits you currently offer and holding focus groups or conducting pulse surveys to determine which ones your employees value and which ones they aren’t interested in, says Julie Stich, vice president of content for the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans. That gives you a chance to look at the needs of your employees, which may have changed markedly because of the pandemic, says Casey Hauch, strategic sales and

marketing leader at Willis Towers Watson.

An employee’s situation may be quite “different than it was last year,” Hauch says. By adjusting benefits to meet current needs, it creates an opportunity to show “how the employer supports and understands the employee situation.”

“What do you offer to help your employee in the pandemic?” Stich asks, adding that it could be a time to highlight such benefits as health insurance, mental health support, employee assistance programs and financial benefits, such as 401(k) plans.

Developing a Game Plan

Once you decide what benefits you want to offer, you should map out a game plan and timeline, based on the renewal date for benefits, Lewis says. If your benefits renew Jan. 1, open enrollment is often held in November. “There’s not a very big window of time.” Your broker should provide you with plan details 45 to 75 days before renewal, and then you should present them to your

Running a Good Open Enrollment

key decisionmakers, such as your CEO and Chief Financial Officer, for their approval, Lewis says.

In some cases, the price of a health plan might soar, he says, but switching to a cheaper plan might cause major disruption if particular healthcare providers aren’t covered by the new plan. Hauch says as the pandemic continues, most of her clients aren’t making major changes to existing benefits this year. “They don’t want to rock the boat in terms of having big changes to communicate.” Once your organization decides on what benefits it will offer, it should create a benefits guide and share it with all employees, says Laura Carbone, a senior consultant at Bennie. In addition, “engagement is one of the big hurdles,” she says, so you need to give yourself enough time to promote open enrollment. You also might want to

“These benefits make a big difference in people’s decisions who to stay with, who to interview with, and who to be employed by, giving them an important role in the ability to attract and retain talent.”

send information on the upcoming open enrollment period and any major changes being made to your employees via email, snail mail or text, or post it on your organization’s intranet site, Stich says. You can use the intranet to highlight new benefits, or provide worksheets to calculate such things as flexible spending account contributions, explain key terms such as high-deductible health plans and offer information in various languages, Stich says.

This year, Hauch expects HR departments to do more personalized communication with individual employees, which is designed to alleviate the need for them to go to HR. “Employees have what they need at their fingertips.” It’s also important to input all your options into your system and test the technology to make sure there are no glitches, Carbone says. “Technology is probably the biggest hiccup.”

Getting Employees’ Attention

Even though open enrollment is an important time for employees, the pandemic has made it “harder to get people’s attention. They’re just overwhelmed. They’ve had enough,” Hauch says.

But Carbone says technology may make it easier to grab employees’ attention now, since so many are working from home, and many open enrollment presentations are being

conducted virtually through Zoom or Microsoft Teams. That gives HR professionals the opportunity to record the presentation and send it to anyone who can’t attend, she adds. “It’s very important for HR teams to create a lot of enthusiasm and engagement during open enrollment, says Barbara Repandis, chief human resources officer at the Davie, Fla.-based law firm Kelley Kronenberg.

Last year, with everyone working remotely, the firm held its open enrollment presentation using Zoom, Repandis says. Carriers joined in to answer employee questions. Afterward, employees could take part in one-on-one sessions with HR professionals or carriers to get their specific personal questions answered. While the majority of the firm’s employees are now back in the office, the law firm is going to continue doing its open enrollment presentation using Zoom. “It worked really well,” Repandis says, with better employee engagement and plenty of questions submitted using chat. The format also saved time and money for the firm because it didn’t have to “take open enrollment on the road,” she says. The firm also recorded the session and posted on the company’s intranet, giving any employee who missed it the opportunity to learn about open enrollment, and allowing employees to watch it again with their spouses or partners, she says. An employee survey found lots of positive feedback about the presentation. “Overall we felt like it was a win-win,” Repandis says.

Wrapping Up Open Enrollment

Open enrollment generally runs for two weeks, Carbone says, and she recommends wrapping it up by mid-December so the carrier will have time to process the information and send new identification cards to employees. That also allows time for HR departments to respond if an employee misses the open enrollment deadline by a day or two and still wants to sign up for coverage, she says.

The types of benefits available to organizations has expanded greatly, Lewis says. Along with health, dental, vision and life insurance, some companies are offering such benefits as transportation, child care, prepaid legal services and pet insurance. Often these extra benefits are offered at the same time as open enrollment for insurance plans, but he recommends holding open enrollment for such benefits at another time of the year, such as the spring or summer, when your HR department can spend more time promoting the benefits and employees have more time to decide what’s important for them. “These benefits make a big difference in people’s decision who to stay with, who to interview with and be employed by,” Lewis says, giving them an important role to play “in the ability to attract and retain talent.” ■

Help your people handle change.

Returning to work is different for every organization. For some employees, back to “normal” surfaces old challenges. For others, new obstacles stand in the way. You know the future is full of opportunity, but navigating your team through the unknown isn't easy.

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Making Corporate Wellness Programs Work

By: Joanne Sammer

Wellness programs have become a mainstay of corporate life over the past 20 years. Employers began by focusing on physical wellness programs, largely in response to studies showing how such programs can pay for themselves many times over, especially when these programs help individuals avoid major adverse health events, like a heart attack or stroke.

More recently, employers have also found that prioritizing all aspects of employee well being can yield benefits for both employer and employee. As a result, employee wellness programs now tend to focus on four specific pillars of wellness that employers consider to be within their realm of influence:

- 1. Physical Wellness:** Health screening, disease prevention, exercise, diet and anything that impacts bodily health.
- 2. Mental/Emotional Wellness:** stress reduction, mental health support, meditation, and access to therapeutic support.
- 3. Financial Wellness:** managing money better and more confidently, setting savings and investing goals and priorities, and reducing debt.
- 4. Social Wellness:** creating a sense of belonging and cohesion that allows employees to form strong and supportive relationships at home and at work.

The New Face of Wellness

For growing companies with limited budgets, wellness does not have to include an on-site health clinic or other expensive infrastructure. In fact, some of the most effective wellness activities can develop organically on a shoestring budget. For the past six years, Wonolo, a growing staffing technology company, has held a monthlong physical fitness challenge with cash prizes for its 150 employees.

“Each month an employee serving as commissioner creates teams and sets the rules for points, such as points for breaking a sweat for 30 minutes, drinking a certain amount of water or swapping an unhealthy snack for a healthy one,” said Katie Evans-Reber, the company’s vice president of people/culture. “It helps people meet folks outside of their direct team, get in shape but has just enough competition and money associated with it that people keep it up.”

In fact, one could argue that this event supports all four pillars of wellness—physical activity (physical), a sense of accomplishment and fun (mental/emotional), teamwork and belonging (social), and cash prizes (financial). From the employer’s perspective, events like these do not need to cost a lot of money to make an impact.

Proactive Wellness

The most effective wellness programs help prevent problems from occurring or at least helping employees identify and address problems before they become overwhelming. Accounting technology firm Xero made two small but important changes to

Making Corporate Wellness Programs Work

support employee wellness. The company replaced its sick leave program with wellbeing leave and began awarding each employee about \$500 to spend on some aspect of their personal well being. These changes send the message that employees need to take time off and invest in what is necessary safeguard their wellbeing. “We wanted to make it explicit to our staff that we value their mental health as equally as their physical health and that they can take leave for either of these reasons,” said Nicole Reid, the company’s Chief People Officer.

Perhaps more importantly, this approach also emphasizes the need to be proactive when it comes to overall wellness. “This means shifting from acting only when an issue is already present, for example, when someone is already at breaking point, to recognizing and acting” before a crisis occurs, said Reid. In these cases, the company also incorporates aspects of social wellness in any solution, such as allowing employees to redesign their job or gain access to more resources to support them in their job. For example, the company will work with an employee to identify ways that employee can gain more control over their work and feel more empowered.

Designing an Effective Wellness Program

These companies are not alone in prioritizing wellness. Here are three ways companies can make sure their wellness efforts yield benefits for both employees and the organization.

1. Involve Both Employees and Managers.

Developing an effective wellness program should involve both employees and managers. “The only way to know what your employees are looking for is to ask,” said Kelli Clark, consulting firm Aon’s global head of culture and change. “Conduct surveys and make it a priority to listen to what they want from a wellness program.”

Aon also trains certain employees how to identify colleagues who are struggling with mental health challenges. These individuals can then talk to their colleagues and make them aware of available wellness resources, including virtual doctors, mindfulness workshops, employee assistance programs, recorded webinars on a variety of wellbeing topics like preventing burnout and creating a healthier lifestyle, and an app that provides online and mobile therapy.

Business leaders also need to be on board, with frequent reminders of the importance of employee wellness. “When we provided extra time off to our employees at the height of the (Covid-19) pandemic, we checked in with leaders to ensure employees were using the time,” said Deb LaMere, CHRO of software firm Datasite. “This led to more than 93% of our employees taking advantage of the days off.”

2. Measure Utilization.

Once the wellness program is in place, it is important to determine how employees then use that intelligence to improve it. Most vendors that offer wellness-related apps, videos, classes and webinars can provide data on what content employees are using, how often and for how long.

For example, if employees begin certain classes but don’t finish them, that can indicate that employees are interested in the topic or activity but are not becoming engaged with the content. “If your employees are not participating or if participation drops off, then you should reconsider that program,” said Mitch Chailland, president of Canal HR.

3. Measure Impact.

Wellness programs have an impact in a variety of ways and it is important measure that impact as much as possible. In some cases, this measurement is straightforward. Vendors involved in financial wellness programs can provide data on the number of employees participating and completing programs, as well as aggregate data on improvements in employee savings and debt reduction, for example.

When measuring the impact of its physical wellness programs, SAP North America looks at a mix of data on program usage, annual sick leave taken, medical cost savings, and positive health outcomes. For example, the company measures the results from its programs for employees with certain chronic health conditions based on improvements in blood pressure and blood sugar readings over time, for example, as well as medical costs and the projected prevention of major or critical health events. “Some (programs) require hard ROI but others will rely more on soft cues and engagement surveys so you will need to use your best, qualitative judgment,” said Jason Russell, the company’s head of total rewards.



Maintaining Momentum

Effective wellness programs can make a significant difference to both employers and employees. By remaining vigilant to ensure that these programs remain both fresh and relevant to employees and a good investment for the organization, employers can leverage higher levels of wellness into a competitive advantage. ■

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The Reentry

Return to the Office



By: Maureen Middleton, SPHR

Nearly two years after most offices turned on a dime and office workers were sent home to work remotely, we are starting to head back into the office. There is an air of uncertainty mixed with possibility as HR professionals and organizational leaders try to navigate the next uncharted territory.

In this moment of shared collective experience lies an opportunity to do things differently.

The Reentry: Return to the Office

To say that everything changed during the pandemic would be an understatement. The normal boundaries between work and home were non-existent. Calls and meetings were interrupted by children and pets. Our living rooms became our offices. Parents were open about the struggle of balancing caregiving and work and people openly discussed mental health issues and the toll that the pandemic was having on them. It made us all more vulnerable, more human. Given all of that, it makes me wonder what we have learned during this time and how we can carry those lessons with us as we enter the new normal, both as a society and specifically when we return to offices. The three main areas of opportunity are: when/how we work, normalizing mental health challenges and outwardly discussing challenges and solutions, and communication – how we exchange information and ideas as well as what topics are now discussed in the workplace.

Covid 19 forever changed the way we work. It proved that many jobs could be done remotely, and it pushed organizations to change the way they envision work. It is safe to say that the 9 to 5 is dead (or at least being reimagined). Starting the day earlier, being offline for a few hours in the middle to the day as needed and working after the traditional hours of an office may be the new normal. This time is extended when you remove the traditional commute which can be multiple hours depending on where you live. Now that employees have embraced more flexibility in work and the ability to navigate work responsibilities with other life responsibilities, it's hard to imagine going back to pre-pandemic mindsets.

Going forward employees are looking to continue the flexibility they have been afforded and it must be balanced by some guardrails. During the pandemic many employees ended up working much longer days because of the loss of the expected 9 to 5 schedule. This also means that many employees are feeling really burned out. It will be important to address this burnout and create space to talk about better ways of working moving forward. Organizations need to be more people centered if they want to retrain their teams.

The social contract between the employer and the employee is forever changed by the pandemic. No longer do employers call all the shots. The power dynamic has shifted especially given that there is a shortage of employees in many sectors. This shift allows employees to be more frank in what they want for their employers. The requirement to have people in offices because that is what leaders want is no longer relevant. We have proved that we can work remotely and there is no going back to the old way. Organizations have the opportunity to apply the lessons they have learned to not only attract employees by offering flexibility but also to retain their current staff. During this time, mental health has become less taboo, and more organizations have encouraged managers to have frank conversations with their employees when they see that they are struggling. HR professionals often remind employees about the EAP services that are

offered. This is a relatively inexpensive benefit that most organizations offer employees. HR needs to equip front line managers to recognize the signs of employees who are struggling with mental health and empower them to direct staff toward services. Signs of struggle manifest differently for different people, it might be a change in attendance, having their video off on Zoom when they are normally on, taking more sick time than they had previously.

Another lesson the pandemic has taught us is that clear and transparent communication is critical especially when facing so many unknowns. Employees expect to hear frequently from leadership. They want to know where things stand, what is next, and how the organization is handling things, even if the message is “we don't know right now but will get back to you.” Employees want to feel safe when they return to the office. They want to feel like their company is thinking ahead, planning and considering their views. Communicating through multiple channels and seeking input at regular frequencies is key. Organizations need to share the why behind decisions that they are making and also communicate how they will evaluate success. Leaders have had to constantly iterate through this time as information has changed and evolved.

As part of the communication loop, leaders have learned that their staff want compassion. They want to be heard and supported as a whole person. The old concept of leaving your personal life at the door has been upended by the blurring of personal and professional. Help your leaders display empathy by teaching them to recognize struggle as discussed above and also encouraging them to build in connection time. In the era of Zoom meetings, it is easy to jump right in on the agenda without doing a personal check-in or an ice-breaker to build community. These moments are critical during this time and will make a difference when we return to in person work.

The Covid 19 Pandemic has provided lots of lessons. As we return to in person work, I encourage us all to take time to pause and reflect. It is important to acknowledge that we all have changed during this time and recognize the value of holding onto the lessons we have learned so that we can reimagine office spaces that work for everyone. As we welcome staff back in person, flexibility and being people centered will be paramount. Now that staff have experienced flexibility in where and how they work and companies have evidence that remote works, let's embrace this change for the improvements it brings across the board. Organizations that provide flexibility will likely fare better than those returning to a rigid work environment. Those that create space to talk about mental health and allow staff to admit when they are struggling are going to be the ones that attract and retain staff. It will be important to provide resources to help staff address these issues. And one of the most important lessons learned is that we are all in this together. Covid has highlighted the interdependencies of our communities and workforces. ■

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1. A Human Interest Advisory Fee of 0.50% of plan assets per year plus average fund expenses of 0.07% per year is billed quarterly to the employee's account. In the event the plan sponsor utilizes a third party advisor, the third party advisor fee would be defined as part of a separate agreement. For plan sponsors who choose 3(21) investment advisory services, fund fees may vary dependent on chosen investments.

2. 401k Averages Book Update Includes Fees for Plans with \$100,000 Average Account Balances, PR Newswire, 2018: <https://prn.to/3uU4Kec>.

3. Goodbye 401(k) Transaction Fees, Human Interest, September 2020: <https://humaninterest.com/blog/zero-401k-transaction-fees/>.

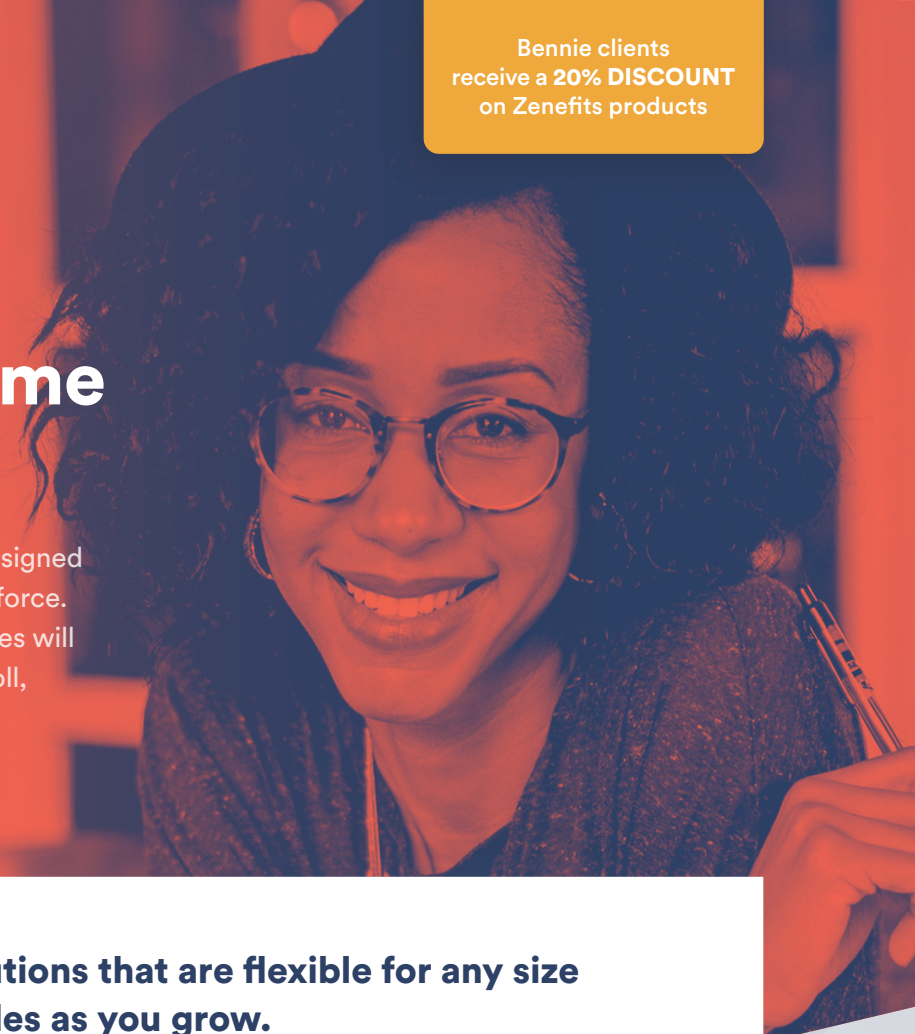
4. G2: Human Interest Inc.'s 401(k) administrative services (<https://www.g2.com/products/human-interest>), and Google (<https://hi-info.co/googlereviews>); Human Interest, Inc., as of March 4, 2021.

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Going Beyond “Serve the Customer”

HRA Member Spotlight

Madeline Nehlen

Employee Experience Manager at BentoBox



By: Ina Elcott, Bennie

A true New Yorker at heart,

Madeline Nehlen, lives with her wife, dog, and a small greenhouse in Lower Manhattan. “I have like fifty tropical plants. It’s definitely plants first and people second in our household.”

Maddie’s background is nothing short of impressive. After a few years of working as an administrative assistant and a set production assistant, Maddie found herself serving her third assistant role to the CEO at BentoBox. “I had that administrative assistant and copywriting experience. And it just so happened that that’s what she was looking for.” At the time Maddie joined BentoBox, the company had thirty employees. Fast-forward four years later and three different roles, Maddie has watched the high-growth company reach

“Here at BentoBox we’ve never had that negative HR perception which I feel very grateful for because I do think it’s a tough stereotype to break through.”

over 160 employees. “Through working with our CEO, I got a front row seat to watch how she thinks and admires BentoBox. It filled my own headspace. It was just a natural fit that I should move over into a more people-focused function.” Soon after Maddie transitioned over to the first People-focused role at the company, the team hired a VP of People and now sits at seven employees and growing. And that was the start of BentoBox’s People Team.

“Here at BentoBox we’ve never had that negative HR perception which I feel very grateful for because I do think it’s a tough stereotype to break through.” Maddie believes that the highs of HR are being able to plug into the company’s growth while getting to know every person who joins the team. “Being able to form personal connections with people from all departments and all levels, I do feel lucky. I love working with our employees every day. I love that I get to know and talk to everyone, especially right now when

we’re not all in the office, it’s something really special.”

Coming up on her fourth year at BentoBox, working within the People space has taught Maddie to stay humble, accept responsibility, and not dwell on mistakes. “When I first started in this career, I found myself always being very apologetic and having to explain myself. In your professional life, you have to accept responsibility and learn from it.”



BentoBox is a restaurant website content management system platform within the hospitality technology industry. “It’s sort of like if you take the best parts of Wix or Squarespace and the best parts of a restaurant website design agency and combine them.” BentoBox empowers over 7,000 restaurants to own their presence, profits and relationships by providing them with tools that drive high-margin revenue directly through their websites. Restaurants, bar owners, and more come to BentoBox for beautifully designed websites, online ordering, gift cards, contactless dining, the list goes on.

“On top of a beautiful branded website, we offer out-of-the-box features that are plug-and-play, ready to go for the hospitality industry. Anything from reservations to events booking to online ordering. We are trying to disrupt the whole third-party thing that has started to happen.” With no additional fees that take away profit from our customers, BentoBox’s true mission is to empower restaurants to succeed in their mission of hospitality and give them back that direct connection with their customers that a lot of these third parties have come in and taken away.

“I truly believe that there is not a single company that is doing all of the things we do at the best-in-class level that we’re doing it in.”

At BentoBox, as an Employee Experience Manager, Maddie focuses on all things end-to-end employee lifecycle experience from pre-onboarding all the way through to

exit and beyond. That means managing every employee's experience along their career path which means making sure that they're making meaningful experiences, buying into the mission and vision, ensuring they're happy, that they see a future at BentoBox, and have all the resources they need.

"Then on the daily, it could be any number of things. I'm in that HR role where I'm a bit of a catch all. I thrive under a lot of work. I love that I have a million balls in the air at once. "In other roles, you typically don't have much freedom of choice. But, if you have a job like mine if I'm feeling a little burnt out, I can work on something else for the time being nothing is ever the same."

The core mission of BentoBox's employees explains why the team is perceived the way they are. Their employees live in a hospitality-first mindset. Over 8% of the BentoBox team have worked in the hospitality industry before in some capacity before arriving there. "I used to work for a catering company. We have people who owned or still own restaurants as well as former bartenders and servers run the gamut. And I believe that translates." Not only does that mindset translate to their customers, but also how the team treats and serves one another. "When someone comes to the People team with a problem, it's our job to solve it. And it's also our job to make sure that they walk away having had a good experience with us. And that just goes right back to hospitality."

This brings us to the core principles of BentoBox, all falling under one of three pillars: Hospitality, Taste, and Bottom Line.

Serve the Customer.

"This lies at the core of our company."

Simple. Intuitive.

Deliver value.

This is your company.

"We take this one very seriously. We are very lucky to still be at the size where every voice can be heard."

Be an expert.

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Be authentic.

Excellence is in the details.

Low burn, high velocity.

Having a product and mission that are easy to rally behind is crucial for a successful company. "When I joined we were at about thirty people and most of those people are still here four years later." The Pillar "Serve the Customer" is especially

important to Maddie and the People Team. "We take a very thoughtful approach to how we do our perks." In addition to the "need-to-have benefits" such as medical, dental, vision, and 401k matching, BentoBox has taken an out-of-the-box approach to their company perks and benefits. "All BentoBox company events and perks tie back to the mission of supporting restaurants. It's those daily touches that remind people of what you're doing, why you're doing it, and why they want to stay."

Living the idea of "Serve the Customer" through company perks and benefits:

Tipping Perk: If an employee goes to any BentoBox restaurant, they are able to expense the tip. "We have over 7,000 restaurants, so it's super easy to do. And we get to support our customers all at the same time."

Events & Holidays: All company events and holiday parties are thrown at customer establishments.

Meals & Gifts: Team meals and company gifts go through BentoBox customers.

Through Their DEI Committee: we have a goal to tie back to our social impact incorporating our customers. "Our black-owned business happy hour was a success. All employees got to expense a meal from a black-owned business. Same thing with AAPI owned businesses. Our most recent social effort, we all attended Drag Queen Bingo and it went with a donation to the Stonewall Community Foundation. It's about having fun and getting together, but also being able to tie it back to a greater cause."

Principal Awards: Presented at each Quarterly Meeting, nine employees are presented with awards for aligning to one of the nine BentoBox principles. "It's back to "Serve the Customer". Employees are being recognized by people across teams, across departments. It's a fun recognition where employees get to wear a sash and receive a BentoBox restaurant gift card."

Guest Speaker Series: Originally started as an initiative to bring in a customer that aligned with a sort of theme of each quarterly meeting. "For example, one of our themes was "go higher". We brought in a guest speaker that was a customer who ran a restaurant that was fully employed by formerly incarcerated individuals." Eventually, the initiative expanded to include all forms of creative minds of people from all different walks of life. This series of guest speakers is a great way to spark creativity, conversation, and collaboration. 🗨️

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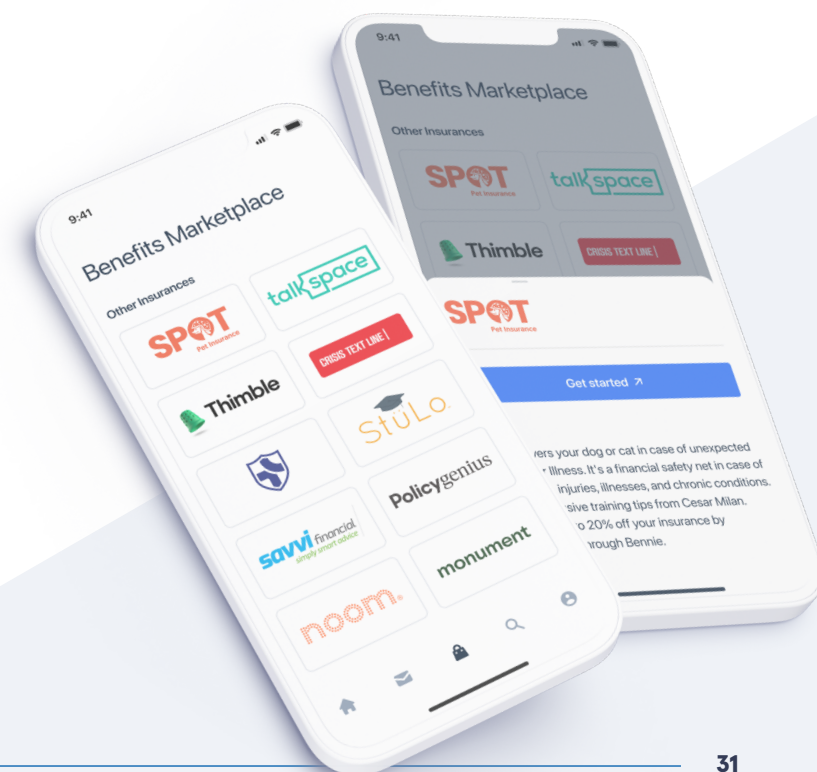
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3 Ways To Engage your Hybrid Workforce in Volunteering

By: Srinagesh Vitthanala
CEO at Bright Funds

The COVID-19 global pandemic has re-shaped the fabric of our society. Everything we do, from work to play to learning, has been adapted to accommodate social distancing. Now the wide availability of vaccines is slowly beginning to return the world to “normal” as restaurants open, travel begins and in-person school resumes. However, many businesses are discovering a new resistance toward returning to full in-office experience. A recent survey by the Conference Board found that 43% of U.S. workers question the need to return to the office at all, and the percentages were higher for millennials, women and individual contributors. Another survey by FlexJobs confirms this finding – 65% of workers said they wanted to stay fully remote after the pandemic. Even more surprising – 27% would be willing to take a pay cut of 10 to 20% to keep that benefit.

How does culture work when everyone is remote?

Flexible work is clearly here to stay, but how can companies propagate a positive culture without in-person interaction? Losing water cooler chats and ice cream socials to remote working tools such as Zoom and Slack may have little impact. But there is no stand-in for the magic that happens when teams come together to serve a greater cause as they bond, learn and grow in a shared purpose. SCORE, a volunteer network of business mentors found that company-sponsored volunteering results in the following benefits:

- Happy employees (93%)
- Improved employee leadership and professional skills (92%)
- Better employee well-being (77%)
- Boosted morale (70%)
- Strengthened camaraderie among employees (64%)

Given these benefits, companies should consider including a volunteer program as part of their philanthropy initiatives. It provides an easy way to foster a positive culture, communicate core values and engage employees in giving back to society.

3 Ways a Volunteer Program can Succeed with a Hybrid Workforce

Implementing a successful volunteer program with a hybrid workforce may not be as straightforward but these tips may help:

I

Offer Flexible Volunteering Opportunities

Your workforce is hybrid, so your volunteer program needs to be as well. Whether you plan to offer volunteering opportunities year-round or during a one-time event, make sure to include all of your employees. Remote employees may prefer to participate in virtual volunteering opportunities or, in some cases, local opportunities that are socially distant. Be flexible on what counts as volunteering to increase participation. For example, if you decide to host a company-



3 Ways to Engage Your Hybrid Workforce in Volunteering

sponsored event to plant trees, allow remote employees to prepare tree-planting kits in their home or plant trees locally. Several organizations facilitate virtual volunteering opportunities, and many nonprofits have expanded virtual opportunities during the pandemic. Consider offering a wide variety of events, including those that may be important to your charity partners and those posted by your employees.

To help, we have included a list of virtual volunteering opportunities you can use as a starting point in our [virtual volunteering toolkit](#).

2

Foster a Sense of “Togetherness” Locally

Virtual volunteering may not be quite the same as a team working side-by-side in a soup kitchen, but there are other ways to cultivate a sense of community. Create virtual spaces for connecting and brainstorming such as Slack or a Facebook Group. Appoint local volunteer mentors that can act as a bridge between the company and employees. These mentors can act as a resource for local employees, as well as help coordinate, communicate and recognize local events. For example, if a business wants to sponsor a company-wide volunteering event, volunteer mentors can work with local employees to decide how they want to support the event. This could include local and virtual gatherings for kickoff and post-event celebrations, matching t-shirts, sharing stories etc. Matching t-shirts for all employees regardless of their volunteer location can also help foster a sense of togetherness.

As a case in point, one technology company allowed its global teams to come up with their own ways to give back virtually. Its Dublin team held a virtual bake sale for a local NGO, while its U.S. team hosted a virtual bingo night with athletes from the Special Olympics.

Realized Worth notes that appointing local volunteer mentors provides a two-fold benefit. One, it lets employees know that the company “takes citizenship and the causes employees care about seriously.” Two, elevating employees to “volunteer mentor” status is also an excellent way to improve cross-company connections and recognize employees for their leadership.

3

Engage Employees with Dollars for Doers

Dollars for Doers is another way to encourage employee participation in your volunteer program. It matches each hour of volunteer service with an amount to donate to a nonprofit. For example, if an employee volunteers for 10 hours at the local animal shelter and the Dollars for Doers rate is \$10/hour, the employee would receive \$100 to donate to a nonprofit of their choice. It’s a great way to thank employees for investing their time in helping the community (or virtual nonprofit of their choice).

Getting to Good, Virtually or Otherwise

It’s no secret that companies leading with purpose are doing well. Including a thoughtful volunteering program as part of that purpose can help foster a positive workplace culture. And that will help drive innovation, growth, employee engagement and community goodwill.



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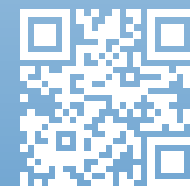
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From the Community:

On Impact & Accessibility

"Bennie's HR Advisory community is truly something special! Not only does it remove the financial barrier making it accessible to an array of People leaders, but it also engages members through welcome swag, shared discussions, membership spotlights, magazines, community events and more. In an industry filled with professionals who are constantly giving, it's so refreshing to be a part of something that recognizes this and intentionally goes above and beyond to fill us back up!

- Jasmine Francis, Senior Director of People & Culture, Thinx



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