



HR Pro Consulting Newsletter

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The “New Normal”

Until the global pandemic COVID-19 struck, little has changed relative to how and when we work since the industrial revolution. The current eight-hour-day and forty-hour-week date back to the early 20th century when trade unions and many employment laws were first developed to protect workers. Ford Motor Company set the new standard of eight-hour workdays in the United States in 1914 to decrease burnout and the health effects of overwork.

Despite major advances in technology, we’ve largely maintained a narrow course over last 100+ years. The gig economy began to challenge some of our traditional work practices, but it took the entire world to be on lockdown to force our hand in adaptation. Suddenly, everything was turned upside down.

Creative solutions to business continuity and household management are keys to success in the future. Business hours of operation, education, customer service, technology use, workspaces, meetings, all have changed. For some businesses, these changes are temporary, others will see these changes become the “new normal”. Much of what will be “normal” will be determined in response to how quickly a vaccine is developed and whether spikes of infections will continue to be seen in certain locations and business sectors.

The longer the changes are in place, the more we can perfect the new way of doing business and living. Business leaders should also learn from what has worked and review what hasn’t to consider if compromises make sense for the future to protect their businesses from repeated devastating effects of prolonged shutdowns as much as possible.

The organizations who reacted quickly by establishing remote work arrangements or revising their product and/or delivery methods capitalized during the most uncertain of times. Workers who are laid off whose industries are not rebounding as quickly will be hired by some of those companies who have already adapted if they are willing to perform new essential tasks. Cleaning and sanitizing; warehouse and delivery; and remote or online customer service positions will be in high demand. One thing that is certain, change is constant, and employers and employees must remain nimble and adapt.



Diversity & Inclusion

Does your organization think outside its walls and work to affect change in the community?



Managing Remote Workers

Tips and techniques to effectively manage remote workers.



Health & Safety

How have health and safety standards changed in response to the pandemic?

Managing Remote Workers

In the blink of an eye, organizations were sending employees home to work to keep them safe and their businesses operating when the world's leaders began to react to the outbreak of COVID-19 and mandate shutdowns, lock downs and quarantines. More than two thirds of those companies struggled with remote operations and managing a remote workforce.



Diversity & Inclusion

Civil Rights has become a leading issue in the United States, once again. Protests and riots erupted in response to the senseless death of George Floyd at the hands of Minnesota police. The tragic incident spurred our nation to revisit some painful truths of the past and present.

Larger organizations already have diversity and inclusion policies in their handbooks and programs within their companies. Most businesses claim to be equal opportunity employers. However, these efforts clearly have not made an impact significant enough to create sustainable change. Employees of every size company are affected by the current unrest and need support, guidance, and education to effect change.

It isn't enough to set expectations within their companies regarding treatment and inclusion of minority employees. Business leaders must take proactive steps in their communities to turn the tide. Building alliances with nonprofits, educational institutions and grassroots organizations gets to the heart of diversity and inclusion strategy and brings the efforts to the front yards of the communities that need our support.

Some businesses are decades behind with day to day practices and technology. Though most employees in business service departments and positions including, accounting, human resources, and customer service are educated and use technology in their daily lives, they still go into offices with desktop computers, fax machines and landlines. These same employees' productivity is often measured and valued by the amount of time (s)he is visible at their workstation in the office.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports the average American worker is productive less than three hours during the workday in the office. Interruptions, water cooler chats, personal phone calls, web surfing and countless other time-consuming activities occur throughout the day. With clear expectations and proper support, employees can be more productive away from some of those distractions and temptation, at home.

Here are some tips to managing your remote workforce:

- **Find a balance between staying connected and micromanaging.**
Check in regularly and over communicate information relevant to their jobs. Maintain a weekly 1:1 meeting via telephone or video conference. But don't expect immediate responses to email or more check-in's from your employees than if they were in the office.
- **Trust your employees.**
Most employees have a conscience and aim to meet your expectations inside the office and that work ethic translates to home, as well. It is counterproductive for an employee to react to every email or phone call while in the office, why should they have to do so when working remotely?
- **Be open to new ways of doing things.**
When given some freedom and flexibility, employees can adapt and be more efficient or find ways to accomplish a task differently. Just because the work isn't being done exactly the same way, if it accomplishes the goal, it may be more efficient.
- **Apply rules consistently and fairly.**
When setting rules for safety and technology requirements and who, when and how the work gets done. Don't single individuals or work groups out. Apply those requirements to all.
- **Set and manage to clear expectations and output.**
Manage results by first setting clear expectations and measuring output. If payroll is processed by the weekly deadline with minimal errors, the payroll administrator is meeting expectations regardless of when (s)he uploaded timesheets and made manual entries.
- **Be flexible and patient.**
Once again, it is important to be open to trying new ideas and waiting for employees who are adjusting to a new work environment to establish effective work habits and patterns.



In certain industries cleanliness and sanitization have always been top of mind and requirements for operation. In others, we have relied on the cleaning crew to sweep, vacuum and empty the trash after we're gone. In the wake of a pandemic, social distancing, personal protective equipment, and hygiene are now part of every industry's safety protocol.

Cleaning and sanitizing standards are increased in the board room and bathroom. Most companies will see operational costs raising to avoid communicable disease outbreaks in their facilities and comply with national and local health department standards. Common areas may be restricted and some perks like free coffee may be eliminated to avoid risk of congregating and disease germs left on surfaces shared by employees. Communicate changes to employees regarding additional measures you're taking to ensure safety in the workplace and explain how elimination of perks supports those efforts.

And what about the less visible employee health and safety concerns including mental health? The global pandemic has increased anxiety and added pressure to employees and their families. Employee assistance programs and group insurance mental health benefits are predicted to see significant usage increases over the next several months as individuals seek support for mental challenges including anxiety, depression and sleep deprivation. To support your employees, post and communicate information about these benefits in places they'll be seen.



Fast Facts

- National unemployment rate peaked at 14.7% as a result of the pandemic
- COVID-19 is expected to increase healthcare costs in 2021 by 1-7%
- 71% of employers admitted experiencing difficulty adapting to remote work
- Average hours worked per week in Europe 31 vs. 34.3 in the US
- 2/3 of employers had emergency preparedness plans in place; only 1/2 of those covered communicable diseases

*Supporting local businesses with management of
their most important assets...people*



If you would like more information about any of the topics covered in this edition of HR Pro Consulting's newsletter or need support in any of the following areas, contact Michelle Wachtel, SPHR today!

Small Business Human Resource Expertise

or

Interim Human Resource Management

If you do not have an on-site human resource professional, I can be your on-call subject matter expert for support when you need it.

or

If your human resource professional resigns or takes a leave of absence, I will fill the gap until a permanent hire is made or (s)he returns.

- Interviewing, selection and employment offers
- New employee on-boarding
- Termination support and exit interviewing
- Employee relations
- Benefits administration
- Performance management
- Compliance: FMLA, ADA, EEO
- Safety and wellness programs
- Employee handbook development

Project-Based Human Capital Support

When you require an outside resource to lead or contribute to business planning initiatives involving human capital, I can help.

- Strategic planning
- Succession planning
- Employee and leadership development
- Compensation program and incentive design
- Merger and acquisition support
- Reduction in force
- Organizational development and design
- Performance management system implementation
- Employee engagement
- Employee handbook review
- Job descriptions
- Human Resource audit



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Michelle Wachtel, SPHR is a tactical and strategic Human Resource professional with over twenty years of successful experience directing and executing Human Resource vision, strategy and administration in the areas of: talent acquisition, organizational development, performance management, employee relations, diversity and inclusion, succession planning, employee benefits, compensation, payroll administration, loss control, unemployment and worker's compensation insurance and employee safety and wellness programs.