March 2020

HR TRENDS

Everything HR Teams Need to Know About Coronavirus

As the coronavirus (COVID-19) epidemic continues to move across the globe, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) has been regularly releasing new updates and developments, along with best practices and instructions for businesses to help prevent the further spread of the disease. Please note that these may change as international health groups like the World Health Organization (WHO) continue to monitor the virus' progress. Always refer to the CDC's website for the latest developments.

Institute a More Flexible Teleworking Policy

Already, massive corporations like Facebook and Amazon have temporarily closed offices or instituted mandatory work-from-home in high-risk locations like Seattle. While your business may not be as susceptible to COVID-19 as international conglomerates like these, an ad-hoc work-from-home (WFH) policy is the best way to ensure your employees won't come in contact with the virus in the workplace. If your company already has an existing teleworking policy, consider making these modifications:

- If your current WFH policy requires a doctor's note, temporarily void this requirement
- Extend the amount of consecutive days employees can work from home
- Re-emphasize that if an employee is sick, they should not come into the office

Combating COVID with a Cleaner Office

Create a healthier working environment by wiping down all frequently touched or communal surfaces in the office, including counters, doorknobs, shared conference call equipment, and coffee machines. As of this writing, the CDC hasn't recommended any additional disinfecting besides routine wipe-downs. Consider posting signage that reminds staff of hygienic habits like thoroughly washing hands and avoiding excessive touching of the face. If possible, companies should also provide ample amounts of an alcohol-based hand sanitizer at various locations throughout the office.

If an Employee Has Contracted Coronavirus

If an employee has tested positive for COVID-19, it is imperative that employers inform their staff of their potential exposure to the virus, while upholding the confidentiality and privacy of the employee in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protocol. Other employees that have been in contact with the worker who has contracted the virus should refer to the CDC's latest advisory.

Stay Up to Date

The number one precaution employers can take to combat the spread or contraction of coronavirus is to stay as informed as possible. By regularly monitoring communications from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the World Health Organization, and your local health authorities, you can proactively ensure you're doing everything you can to protect the health and wellbeing of your employees.

ADMINISTRATION

What the Families First Coronavirus Response Act Means for HR Teams

In response to the spread of the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19), President Trump signed the Families First Coronavirus Response Act on March 18, 2020. The Act is an economic stimulus plan that affects coverage and cost sharing for COVID-19 testing and provides expanded federal family and medical leave and a new federal paid sick leave law.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act is a more comprehensive piece of legislation than the previous emergency spending bill, and some of its provisions—like temporarily increasing federal funding for Medicaid—will resonate even after COVID-19 has been contained. As of this writing, as reported by SHRM's Lisa Nagele-Piazza, the bill includes:

- Free coronavirus testing
- Paid emergency leave
- Improved unemployment insurance
- More funding for nutritional programs
- Protections for health care workers and employees responsible for cleaning at-risk places
- Additional federal funds for Medicaid

Let's break down some of these stipulations that will have a lasting impact for human resource teams.

Paid Emergency Leave

COVID-19 has forced millions of workers into an impossible dilemma, one succinctly summarized by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during the announcement of the House's approval of the bill: "We cannot slow the coronavirus outbreak when workers are stuck with the terrible

choice between staying home to avoid spreading illness and the paycheck their family can't afford to lose."

To combat this, the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provides workers with two-thirds of their wages for up to 90 days of leave related to their own or a covered relative's COVID-19 related illness. Paid for by the Social Security Administration, the program would be in effect for nearly a year, with an agreed expiration date of January 2021. The bill's current iteration also provides immediate sick-leave benefits for workers who get sick during the pandemic, and employers would have to provide two weeks of paid sick leave to full-time employees (part-time staff would be given paid sick leave for the amount of hours they would typically work in a two-week period.

Enhanced Unemployment Insurance

The unemployment insurance provision of the bill, officially titled the [Emergency Unemployment Insurance Stabilization and Access Act of 2020](#), provides all states with an emergency administration grant for unemployment insurance to fund staffing, information technology, and other costs related to administer unemployment, so long as workers who lose their jobs are given notice and, if necessary, training to access and navigate the system. And states where unemployment insurance claims skyrocket could receive additional funding if they commit to temporarily easing eligibility requirements and access.

OFFICE CULTURE

How To Support Your Employees During A Global Pandemic

As companies frantically try to adapt to the now-official coronavirus pandemic, many HR teams find themselves with an alarmingly jam-packed workload. Employee interviews need to be postponed, telework policies implemented or adjusted, health and wellness protocols changed. And when everyone is in crisis mode, it's easy to let a simple, but crucial, aspect of the job fall to the wayside: being there for your employees.

While setting up work-from-home, sorting out paychecks and PTO, and all the other ins and outs of your company's crisis plan does help your workers, what many people need right now is empathy, compassion and someone to talk to. This is a stressful and downright scary time for many, and as human resources professionals it's our job to be there for our coworkers when they need that support.

Here are a few things you can do (remotely) to help emotionally support your employees as we withstand the global coronavirus pandemic.

1. Set Up Regular Video Check Ins

With a large portion of the American workforce practicing social distancing, quarantining, and working from home, it's easy for employees to feel isolated and disconnected. While many workers will get a chance to get some face time with their team members over video

conferences and meetings, it's important they also get time to simply chat, catch up, and be there for each other—just as they would in the office. Consider setting up daily or biweekly video conferences, either one-on-ones or small groups, that allow workers to hang out and converse about non-work-related topics.

2. Be Considerate of Each Individual Work Environment

While it's certainly possible to be just as productive working from home as you would be in the office, it's important to keep in mind that everyone's new work environment is going to be different, and potentially present new challenges. Workers may be sharing cramped office spaces with a spouse or roommate, and employees with children who are home from school may have to juggle parental duties in between their typical responsibilities. It's important to be understanding and compassionate as both employees and employers adjust to these new circumstances, and not to hold the growing pains of mass teleworking against them.

3. Lead with Care

Above all, openly let your employees know that you are a resource for them in these turbulent times. By leading with compassion, care, and empathy above all else, you can help keep office morale high and enable employees to feel safe and secure, despite the global pandemic.

EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

How Businesses Are Helping Their Employees Stay Politically Active

With Super Tuesday just in the rearview mirror and the 2020 general election looming ahead, we're in the thick of election season. It can be a difficult time for human resources teams, as they try to navigate politics in the workplace while maintaining an open and supportive office culture. In the past, some businesses have approached this by enacting a simple company-wide "no politics" policy. But recently, HR teams have found more success taking the opposite route: encouraging their employees to stay politically engaged.

Why Invite Politics into the Office?

For starters, the modern business often positions itself not just as a company, but as an active member of the community. If a business truly believes itself to be an advocate of the community, that means supporting its employees in exercising their primary civic responsibility: voting. Secondly, research has found that openly nurturing employees' civic involvement actually helped to reduce contentious political debate, and resulted in a happier, more engaged staff.

A 2018 survey conducted by O.C. Tanner found that 72% of employees at voting-friendly workplaces reported that their job offers the flexibility to balance their work and personal life, compared to 56% of employees at companies that weren't voter-friendly. Similar discrepancies between these voter-friendly and non-voter-friendly workplaces were found when the same participants were asked how happy they were with their company, and if they would recommend their company as a "good place to work."

Becoming a Voting-Friendly Workplace

If you're interested in promoting a more forward-thinking office culture that encourages its employees to be politically active, try implementing these policies.

1. PTO on Election Day

It might seem like a lofty ideal, but workers getting paid time off on Election Day is becoming increasingly common. In fact, 62% of the participants surveyed in the O.C. Tanner study reported that their employer gave them time off to vote. If it seems like a hard sell to upper management, remember that it doesn't have to be the entire workday—even just an hour or two on voting days can be enough for employees to do their civic duty.

2. Eliminating Meeting on Election Day

If paid time off isn't an option, consider blocking out Election Day on the calendar to prevent any meetings being scheduled. Originally conceived to promote efficiency and productivity in the workplace, "no-meeting" days are already common in the American workplace. By scheduling one on voting days, employees can feel better about taking the time to cast their ballots during the workday.

3. Offering Voting Resources

Finally, if neither of the previous options are feasible for your office or industry, you can still foster a more politically friendly workplace by offering different resources to help your employees vote. Blocking out office time for voter registration, providing mail-in ballots for absentee voting, and providing resources for early voting are all excellent ways to support employees in their responsibilities as citizens.

.

EMPLOYER WEBINAR

What Employers Need to Know About Retiree Coverage

Tuesday, April 14, 2020 • 2:00 p.m. ET / 11:00 a.m. PT

This webinar will help plan sponsors understand the compliance issues surrounding retiree health plan coverage.

This webinar will:

- Discuss which health care reform mandates and HIPAA portability rules retiree-only coverage is exempted from

- Discuss whether retirees that are included in a health plan covering active employees can be treated differently than active employees (i.e. different contributions and benefits) and what nondiscrimination rules should be taken into account

- Discuss the effect of offering retiree coverage on an employer's COBRA obligations

- Discuss how the Medicare Secondary Payer (MSP) rules and Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) apply to retirees in contrast with individuals with current employment status

- Provide a brief overview of reporting obligations retiree-only plans must comply with, including 1094/1095 reporting, Form 5500, Summary Annual Report (SAR), and Section 111 MSP reporting
- Provide a broad overview of the retiree drug subsidy program

This 60-minute intermediate level webinar will help employers understand the compliance issues surrounding retiree health plan coverage.

Registration
Register here for the webinar. The presentation will be posted on the UBA website the afternoon before the webinar.

About the Presenter
Lorie Maring is a partner in the Atlanta office and a member of the Employee Benefits Practice Group. She has extensive experience in all areas of employee benefits, including health and welfare programs, qualified and non-qualified retirement plans and executive compensation. She routinely advises employers, including non-profit and government employers, trade associations and employee benefit insurance and risk management consultants on the complex compliance and day-to-day issues arising under ERISA and other state and federal laws governing employee benefit plans and programs. Lorie also advises employers on compliance issues involving the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and Affordable Care Act (ACA), employment tax, the employee benefits and executive compensation aspects of mergers and acquisitions, and handling IRS and DOL audits and ACA penalty assessments.

Certification
This webinar has been submitted to the Human Resource Certification Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management to qualify for 1 recertification credit hour.