



## Ideas and information for human resource professionals



### Engagement Survey Evolution – What’s Next?



Are annual engagement surveys outdated? If you look strictly at the numbers, [the answer is no](#). As recently as 2019, 74% of companies still planned on using traditional methods to survey their staff on job and workplace

sentiment. However, this number is on the decline from 89% in 2015. Are companies giving up on finding out how their employees feel about work? No, but they are looking for ways to modernize their approach.

Here are three popular techniques making their way into engagement evaluation.

1. **Gathering engagement data more frequently.** Feedback from the traditional engagement survey quickly becomes stale. Rather than waiting for annual or biannual feedback, many companies are moving to a more frequent cadence. A “pulse survey” fits the bill. This term refers to a type of survey sent out regularly that focuses on a subset of questions regarding employee experience. Frequencies can range from daily to every few months. Human Resource departments and leadership can use a more agile approach to analyzing and responding to feedback.
2. **Leveraging data science.** Organizations who kicked the annual engagement survey to the curb may look to use employee data on-hand. For example, your company may have a social recognition and feedback tool already in place. This tool likely holds a mass number of employee comments found in various threads. A skilled data scientist can use data mining and machine learning techniques to gather new insights by looking at changes in employee attitudes and platform engagement. This predictive approach helps organizations be proactive in assessing trends and finding solutions.
3. **Providing transparency to employees.** Years ago, employees were the last contingent to hear about engagement trends. They were prompted (sometimes bugged) to complete lengthy surveys and then never heard another word about what happened to

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**In this edition:**

[Engagement Surveys](#)

[Student Loan Repayment](#)

[Powerful Emails](#)

[Sunday Night Scaries](#)

[Employer Webinar](#)



their feedback. Today, progressive companies view employees as key stakeholders. Results are shared openly, whether it is a full report on the results or options to participate in focus groups addressing new trends. Employees want to be involved in the process, rather than be an afterthought. Companies should push communications out on a regular basis and follow up, pointing out not only what is being done to address areas of improvement but also to celebrate improvements.

Do not rest on your laurels when assessing employees' commitment to their job and organization. Employee engagement is not a task that can be completed. It is not a "to do" to check off the list. It is a fluid process that requires participation from the entire company. A part of that development includes evaluation of your approach and technology to ensure you are gathering accurate and actionable data.

## A New Approach to Tuition Aid: Student Loan Repayment Plans



Employers wanting to expand benefit packages, take note! Last December, Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021. This new provision makes it easier than ever for private employers to [offer student loan repayment plans](#). Yes, you heard that right – STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT PLANS! With this new legislation, private employers can contribute up to \$5,250 per year to offset employees' student loan payments without employee tax implications. This is big news for fresh college graduates

entering the workforce laden with college debt, or the many who carry mountains of student loan debt from another decade. Truth be known, the cost of student loan debt of employees entering the workforce makes it less likely for them to take advantage of traditional tuition benefits or retirement savings.

Student loan debt in the U.S. doubled over the last decade. Let's put that into perspective. This means that on average 70% of today's degreed workers leave college with around \$40,000 in student loan debt. That is one whopping IOU! And this massive note converts to fewer employees taking advantage of tuition reimbursement programs. Willis Towers Watson reports that companies offering a tuition reimbursement plan see less than 10% of employees using this benefit. What gives? This is "free" tuition aid, right?

A closer look uncovers two core issues. Fresh college graduates may be less inclined to jump right back into the classroom after dedicating a significant amount of time to the classroom. They need a break from assignments and required reading. Additionally, they are transitioning to the workforce, which is another big life change. But the far bigger issue is the matter of funds. Traditional tuition reimbursement programs are just that – a reimbursement. In many cases, this means employees need enough disposable income on hand to pay for the course until they are reimbursed for successful completion. This up-front cost can be limiting for an employee who is weighed down with student loan debt. And a hefty monthly college loan payment affects more than just likelihood to use a tuition reimbursement program. This debt may also affect whether employees contribute to their company retirement plans, further affecting their long-term savings



potential. In many cases, this decision means the employee is also giving up employer retirement contributions.

In summary, it makes sense for companies to [reimagine educational perks](#) for a new generation entering the job market with mounting student loan debt. Early studies show strong employee interest in this benefit. In fact, approximately 40% of employees polled in the United States were interested in a student loan repayment plan. And this level of interest translates to business outcomes as well. Companies offering this benefit can expect to see higher retention and recruitment as a result.

## Pack Your Emails with Power



How many times have you finished reading a lengthy email only to discover you did not retain a single piece of information? You have no idea why the writer sent it to you or what you are supposed to do as a result. Instead, you are left trying to decide whether you should casually move it to your deleted folder or invest more time to call someone who can interpret it for you. No one likes mystery email. Use these simple tips to ensure that your emails are read, or at least not on the chopping block.

### 1. Use the subject line to make a point.

Emails with titles such as “Follow up” or “FYI” can easily get lost in a busy inbox. They are not memorable and do not tell the reader what is included. And the subject line is important – it is the deciding factor in whether 33% of email recipients choose to open an email, or not. So use the subject line space wisely. Tell the reader what they can expect in the email in a short, concise format. And please do not write a full sentence in the subject line!

### 2. Be clear about your call to action.

Put your call to action right at the top of your email! An executive summary is used in reports, plans or proposals to give the reader familiarity with the information that follows. Think of it as the Cliff notes of the business world. You can use this same format to help email recipients put your email into context. Are you sending this as a precursor for an upcoming meeting? Add this note at the very top of your email instead of making the reader hunt for this information. Do you need the reader to follow up with a specific action by a date? Be clear about the next step and deadline. Pro tip – if you don’t have a true call to action, you may want to reconsider the format or length of your communication.

### 3. Use the white space to draw the reader in.

Many people think presentations and advertisements are the only area where design comes into play. Wrong! An email that is easier on the eyes is more likely to be read and a body chock full of text is overwhelming. Use the white space around your words to draw your reader to areas of emphasis. Use bullets and spacing to highlight your main points. Just like an essay or story, your email should have a beginning, middle, and end. This doesn’t mean



you should add graphics or pictures to business emails but rather that you should think about organizing the needed information into a digestible format.

Alas, these suggestions are useless unless you proofread your email before hitting send. Ask a trusted colleague or boss to give it a look if this email is going out to a large group or client. If you are doing the proofing, save the communication and come back to it a few minutes later. Alternatively, you can copy the email into a new document and change the font to ensure you are viewing it with fresh eyes.

## Write Your Way Through the “Sunday Night Scaries”



Eighty percent of working adults in the USA have experience with this. It occurs at the end of the week and usually shows up around 4:00 p.m. No, it is not a special dinner guest. It is the “Sunday Night Scaries.” Symptoms may include stomach issues and sleeping difficulties. This version of anticipatory anxiety puts a damper on Sunday for many professionals who wonder if they made the most of their short weekend and dread the start of the workweek.

Recommendations abound for how to manage this sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. Individuals who suffer from this discomfort may want to start by trying something relatively low key (so it doesn’t feel like adding another “homework” item to your list!). All you need is pen and paper to try these simple techniques.

Negative thoughts can flood your mind as Sunday starts to wind down. The first technique allows you to “voice” these premature thoughts and assumptions on a simple list. Getting these concerns on paper can color some of the stories you are telling yourself and offer an opportunity for you to challenge them. For example, maybe you write down, “The big event I am planning on Wednesday is going to be horrible” in the first column. Create a second column where you refute this statement by listing evidence to the contrary. In the example above, you may list out examples of past events you have planned that were successful. You may even list some of the “wins” that took place during said events. Writing down these anxious thoughts can often pop the power behind them.

The second strategy involves getting a jumpstart on your work week. Creating a to-do list can help put your mind at rest. What sort of to-do list? It pays to be strategic by attacking the item that weighs heaviest on your mind. For example, are you stressed about planning lunches and dinners for the week? Start with a grocery list and meal plan. Are you worried about meeting your deadlines at work for the coming week? Block time for big projects on your calendar or create a list of items you can ask colleagues for help with (delegation can ease some of your anxiety), so you know where to start your day Monday morning. This technique allows you to start your work week with a sense of accomplishment!

If you are giving one of these ideas a go for the first time, try it on Sunday morning. Your “Sunday Night Scaries” may be lessened as a result of adding this new routine to your weekend schedule. One recommendation, try shutting down your laptop for this activity (if possible). There is something about writing that causes your brain to engage in a manner not necessary



when using technology. An additional perk to setting your laptop or smart phone down is you won't find yourself getting distracted by social media pings and email alerts.

## Employer Webinar

### ***Considerations for Employers Handling COVID Vaccine Mandates***

**Tuesday, October 12, 2021 • 2:00 p.m. Eastern**

President Biden's administration recently announced its Path Out of the Pandemic action plan. The action plan calls for employers with 100 or more employees to require employees to be vaccinated or submit to weekly tests, as well as requiring vaccinations for federal employees, contractors, and hospitals receiving federal financial assistance. OSHA is required to issue vaccine/testing rules as part of an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS). Until OSHA issues the ETS, many employers are scrambling to understand how the mandates will affect them, what employers should know if considering a surcharge, and how they might prepare for compliance.

The webinar will address the best practices for handling the mandate and surcharge issues, including:

- Who is subject to the vaccine mandate and how employees will be counted
- Recommendations on creating policies and procedures
- Concerns surrounding testing requirements, such as cost and timing
- Considerations for surcharges as a wellness program, implementation, and potential ACA affordability issues
- Reasonable accommodations and exemptions
- HIPAA considerations

This 60-minute intermediate-level webinar will help employers understand how the mandates may affect their workforces and what they can do to prepare for ETS rollout.

**Please note:** The webinar will reflect the most recent guidance reasonably available at time of presentation. In the event the ETS is issued, or other developments arise that have an impact on this topic, adjustments will be made where possible.

### **Registration**

**[Register here for the webinar.](#)** The presentation will be posted on the [UBA Website](#) the afternoon before the webinar.

### **Presenter**

[Micah Dickie](#) is a litigator in Fisher Phillips' Atlanta office. As a member of the firm's Workplace Safety and Catastrophe Management Practice Group, Micah represents clients during safety and health inspections by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and



defends them during contested OSHA matters. As part of the firm's COVID-19 Taskforce and Vaccine Subcommittee, Micah advises employers on the many workplace law aspects of COVID-19.

### **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.