



## Ideas and information for human resource professionals



### Company Culture



LinkedIn, THE leader in professional networking, cites company culture as a top reason for people deciding to make a career change. With record “[quit levels](#)” in the United States (4.5 million in November

2021 alone!), it is high time to make sure you are promoting your company culture to attract talent. Company culture is

how people get things done. It represents the unwritten rules of the road that are played out in day-to-day decisions and actions. It includes the behaviors, beliefs and values present at an organization. Many companies attempt to address this need by listing fluffy corporate values or talking up team social events or flexible work hours. But company culture is more than just a list of well-written values. Leading organizations should seek innovative ways to [showcase their culture](#) while recruiting new talent.

Try these three ideas to bring your company culture to life in the recruitment process.

**Invite candidates behind the curtain.** Accepting a new job can feel like a big risk. What will the environment be like? What if I regret my decision? These feelings of doubt can be compounded by the fact that you only met a few people at the company during the interview process. Instead of sticking to the traditional recruitment routine, invite finalists into the office or on the Zoom chat for a half day of shadowing. Treat them like they are members of the team. If onsite, let them get a snack in the breakroom and a tour of the office. Use the “try before you buy” concept so candidates can experience your company culture firsthand rather than relying on third party stories.

**Let your employees do the talking.** Many recruiting processes leave an important contingent out of the plan...colleagues. Candidates may complete a full interview process never having met a peer or coworker. Excluding your team from the hiring process means that candidates are only getting a partial view of the culture. Instead, add a peer interview (or coffee) to the candidates’ agenda. This provides an opportunity for candidates to ask questions they may not

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feel comfortable asking senior staff. Additionally, employees have the power to be amazing company advocates in the virtual world as well. Encourage staff to share written reviews, photos, and insight into your company on social media or employment review sites. Let your employees do the talking!

**Be vulnerable.** It is easy enough to put on “rose colored” glasses when summarizing your company culture. Only focusing on the best parts of the company or job (Unlimited time off! Rapid growth opportunities! Mentorship!). However, your message will be better received if you offer a full view of the organization, flaws and all. This may feel like a recruitment faux pas. Why would you talk about the long hours or the less-than-desirable healthcare contributions? Because each company has a unique position in the market and representing that in a fair fashion will engender trust in candidates. Remember, there are candidates out there who are looking for a culture formula just like your company.

Assessing company culture is a tough part of the job search process. Do your part to help candidates see what your company is all about.

## The Missing Half of the Equation: Paternity Leave



For parents, this is likely not new information – the United States is far behind other developed countries in regard to maternity leave benefits. Yes, parents can apply to take up to 12 weeks of FMLA leave but this time off is not guaranteed to come with a paycheck (read: not helpful for Americans living paycheck to paycheck). In fact, the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that a mere 16% of workers had access to any sort of paid family leave through their private employers as of March 2018. The conversation has often

focused on the birth and recovery of mom (*maternity* leave) and leaves dad out of the picture. Employers are missing a valuable opportunity to support their staff without considering the other half of the equation: fathers.

[Sweden has long been a trendsetter](#) when it comes to parental leave. The Swedes first passed a revolutionary law in 2012 permitting fathers to take 30 days of paid leave. This benefit has expanded to six months of leave for fathers (mothers get a whopping 12 months!). Additionally, this paid time off benefit can be “shared” between parents so that fathers can use some of the mother’s time off budget. The Swedish experience is now a live case study in the benefits resulting from paid paternal leave and U.S. employers should take note.

A 2019 study showed that fathers who took at least two weeks off during the infancy of their child reported a sustained stronger relationship almost a decade later. The relationship benefits don’t stop there; fathers who took paternity leave also enjoyed a decreased divorce rate compared to their peers for years to come. This means relationships with their significant other were stronger because of this paid time at home. And mothers reaped the rewards of their parental benefit as well. A Swedish study correlated paternity leave with a reduction in anxieties and health problems for *mothers*.



Data show that including fathers in the equation is more than just a flashy benefit. Better relationships and improved health are reasons enough to invest in a paternity benefit to support working fathers. But think about the message a paternity benefit also sends to employees who become parents and do not fit the standard mold. It shows acceptance that parents come in a variety of packages: birth partners, adoptive parents, LGBTQ couples or single parents. A *maternity* benefit alone is not acknowledging the diversity of your employees' family structure. Companies seeking to support employees should create a broad *parental* policy to support both mothers and fathers. It is [high time](#) that companies revisit their outdated maternity policies to update benefit offerings and verbiage to reflect the inclusion of fathers.

## Generational Myths Part 2: Millennials



Today's offices potentially span five full generations [ranging from Generation Z to the Silent Generation](#). A coworker could just as easily be raised with a smart phone in hand as they could have used a typewriter at their first job. Some see differences between generational colleagues as an annoyance ("kids these days!") and many rely on generational stereotypes as fact. Truth of that matter is that generational stereotypes have about as many holes in them as a piece of Swiss cheese. Current research questions the

validity of generational stereotypes. This series uncovers top generational myths as a strategy to support a diverse and healthy employee population.

Next, we progress to a group whose eldest members reached adulthood in the year 2000: [Millennials](#) (also known as Generation Y). This cohort was born between 1981 and 1996. The top three [myths](#) of Millennials include:

1. **They are the laziest generation at work.** Millennials have been called the "trophy" generation with the implication that they receive accolades for just showing up. The impression this leaves in the workforce is that they are lacking motivation to go above and beyond, and may be comfortable phoning it in. The data doesn't support this critical generalization! Most Millennials are inspired by big, hairy goals at work. In fact, 59% of Millennials reported that competition is "what gets them up in the morning."
2. **Millennial employees need life instructions on "adulting."** Children of the '80s and '90s were raised with a teacher, coach, or parent nearby to instruct or help them figure out a solution. For that reason, they often get labeled as incapable. This may lead you to believe that this generation is lacking smarts, and this couldn't be further from the truth. Close to 40% of adults aged 25 to 37 have a bachelor's degree, a percentage that overshadows both Baby Boomers and Generation Y at this same point in their life. Millennials are more educated and more technology savvy than prior generations. One sign of their life skills aptitude? Check out their retirement accounts. Dave Ramsey, personal finance guru, summed it up like this: "Even though Millennials have had less than



20 years to build their retirement wealth, they are not that far behind many of those who are closest to retirement.” Yes, they may ask a lot of questions, but don’t let this fool you.

3. **They are job hoppers.** They don’t commit to companies. They leave jobs at the drop of a hat. This tune may sound familiar because you have heard it before. A Pew Research study showed that when you freeze data for age, Generations X and Millennials had similar tenures at work. Workers in the first few decades of their career are more open to looking for new opportunities to explore new jobs and learn. The data show that this sentiment is more closely aligned with a stage in life that all generations have experienced. So, let’s give Millennials a break here. Just because they don’t intend to stick around at one company to receive a glass retirement plaque doesn’t mean they have any less value than other generations.

Despite what you may have heard, Millennials are hard workers with the know-how to quickly pick up new knowledge or skills. They value stability just as much, or more, than prior generations.

**Next up in the series?** Let’s take a closer look at the employment profile Generation X.

## A Simple Approach to Difficult Conversations



The beginning of the year is synonymous with reflecting on the past, identifying new resolutions and, ahem, performance reviews. And while you tried your best this year to give spot feedback and accolades when due, you find yourself in the position of having to give [difficult feedback](#) to an employee. On top of this, your direct report is incredibly hard on themselves and defensive when approached with critique of their performance. But you, as the manager, know you need to have this conversation to

maintain an honest and open relationship, and spur them on to greater heights. Preparing for a tough conversation can be overwhelming, even for a seasoned manager. This time, turn what could be a difficult conversation into a fruitful dialogue by exploring their viewpoint and bringing a flexible goal to the table.

One of the pitfalls of giving feedback is that many managers prepare for these conversations in isolation, and those who call on peers for support can’t guarantee they are prepared for the employee’s response. It is easy for feedback to turn into a monologue, where managers drone on about the identified “issue” and the employee zones out after the first few sentences. A nervous manager may even try to fill the silence with more information than they originally planned to share, adding insult to injury. This leaves you with an employee who feels like they were in front of a firing squad instead of you, their manager, someone who is vested in their development and growth.

[SHRM’s 2019 report](#), "The High Cost of a Toxic Workplace Culture: How Culture Impacts the Workforce—and the Bottom Line," uncovered that 30% of employees say their managers do not encourage transparent communication. So, try something different! Instead of practicing for a



speech to a rapt audience, prepare to support a two-way conversation. Instead of labeling this as “performance feedback,” a term that may fill you and your employee with dread, frame it as a “connection meeting” which has a positive connotation and fulfills the same goal. Start by thinking about the scenario from your employee’s point of view. Put on your coaching hat and compile questions that encourage active participation from the get-go, prior to their fight-or-flight instinct kicking in. Use open ended questions that start with “How,” “What,” or “Tell me about,” rather than your frenemy “Why.” which often signals judgement. Instead of bringing a final solution to this conversation, pull your employee into designing the next steps. This means you will need to be flexible to the details of the final goal and allow the employee to take ownership of the outcome. And this motivation is vital to engaging and motivating your team.

There are certainly conversations that cannot be handled in this way. Claims where the health and safety of others have been threatened is a good example. But most difficult conversations can be broken down into a series (one and done is not enough) of open conversations to uncover a path forward in partnership with your employee. Aim to understand first instead of arming for battle. Your positive intent will open new doors and help you both understand how to move forward.