



Stay HR Savvy with HR Elements®

Welcome to the UBA Partner Firm exclusive monthly newsletter delivering insights about timely human resources and employee benefits topics.

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Dear HR Manager,

The cat's out of the bag...I don't like my colleague's dog. A dog-friendly office sounded like a great perk when I joined the company until my co-worker's puppy made a habit of gnawing on my leg during Zoom calls. I am also taking inconvenient breaks to walk Fido as my colleague is nowhere to be found when he needs to go outside. There have been a few accidents. How can I tell my colleague his dog needs to stay home?

– In the Doghouse

Dear In the Doghouse,

It sounds like you got the short end of the stick. A good first step is to review the workplace pet policy to understand the expected behavior of your four-legged neighbor. This document should outline the repercussions if pets cannot meet the appropriate conduct standard. If no policy exists, don't fret. You still have options.

Start by scheduling a conversation with your colleague. Share your observations and frustrations in a kind manner focusing on how the dog's behavior affects your *work*. Be clear in establishing your boundaries (i.e., I am not comfortable with your dog touching me). If your attempt to solve one-on-one does not result in prompt correction, contact your manager or HR manager to intervene.

– HR Manager

Workplace Culture | Welcome the Gig Worker to Your Talent Portfolio

The COVID-19 pandemic affected the work environment in many ways. One area that has grown significantly is the number of employees leaving the full-time workforce in exchange for contract, freelance, or gig work.

The U.S. added two million gig workers in 2020 to a global pool of over 1 *billion* contingent workers. Unfortunately, many companies (69% per a recent Mavenlink study) are not prepared to support a contract workforce.

Human Resource practitioners can evaluate their approach to these three areas to assess their [ability to integrate the new wave of gig workers](#).

1. A healthy talent portfolio.

Talent models of days past were dedicated to full-time hires. Contract workers were a blip on the radar and often not included in workforce planning. Today's modern employment model consists of both full-time staff and gig workers. While contract workers were traditionally used for technical or creative support, the use case has grown substantially and now includes areas such as insurance, education, and health care. Contract workers are often hired for their subject knowledge or unique skills that don't exist in-house. Employers may seek to add more gig workers to diversify their talent portfolio in today's volatile employment market.

2. Management skills needed to lead a mixed workforce.

Since contractors are not employees, they generally follow different protocols. For example, they are not required to attend team meetings or even work at certain hours. Managers of a mixed workforce may need a refresher on the differing expectations for contingent workers. This difference does not alter *how* members of these groups are treated. Contract workers should be given access to the information needed to do their job and treated with respect and dignity. While you may not be conducting performance reviews for gig workers, managers can still offer them feedback on their work.

3. Flexible processes and tools.

The "old school" mentality assumed all employees were full-time hires; as a result, programs, processes, and technology were focused on this type of employee. Using the same techniques to onboard, hire, and connect with contingent hires may not be effective. Contract employees are often hired for "on-demand" work that is needed in short order. Using a traditional recruitment or onboarding process may put you behind. Instead, start integrating tools that help you manage a talent marketplace of fully screened contract workers and full-time hires. This may require an investment in new technology and contract vendors. Don't forget to invest in communication with your vetted contractors to keep them engaged when not on assignment.

One of the biggest takeaways from the pandemic is that gig workers are [here to stay](#). Human Resources can provide change management guidance throughout the organization as this type of employment grows.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion | Why Your Current Hiring Practices May Not Support Neurodivergent Candidates

Diversity, equity, belonging, and inclusion are in the spotlight in today's workforce. Employers are challenged to develop programs, initiatives, and processes to encourage a broad representation of different groups. Age, ethnicity, and gender are three categories that generally come to mind when thinking of diversity. However, it is easy to forget that *brain* differences represent another area of diversity.

The word [neurodivergent](#) refers to people whose brains process, learn, or behave differently from what is considered "typical."

Today, this group makes up 20% of the population and includes people with autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and Tourette Syndrome, among others.

The number of neurodivergent people eligible to enter the workforce grows year over year but they are chronically underemployed. At the same time, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported a record number of job openings (11.5 million) in March 2022. There is an apparent disconnect. [Employers need to update their interview and hiring practices](#) to attract neurodivergent candidates and fill their job openings. Two common obstacles for neurodivergent candidates are the interview process and the work environment.

Let's start with the interview.

The interview is a common first step in the hiring process and presents a huge roadblock for many autistic candidates (a neurodivergent population with an estimated 80% unemployment rate). While candidates with autism may possess the skills needed for a role, interviewing may not be their strong suit because their social skills do not meet the expectations of a typical candidate. They may not make eye contact or speak out of turn. They may be more comfortable with routines and out of their comfort zone in the unexpected environment of an interview. Companies actively attracting this community use different ways to evaluate fit that doesn't rely on traditional assumptions. For example, Microsoft's Neurodiversity Hiring Program invites candidates for a four-day workshop where managers can assess candidates in an alternative setting.

Then, consider the work environment.

Why spend the time and effort to bring on new staff if the new hire leaves in short order because continued support does not exist?

Competitive companies are offering accommodations so neurodivergent staff can work comfortably once onboard. Does the individual get agitated with a lot of distractions? Move them to a part of the office with little foot traffic. Does the individual have a tough time picking up social cues? Assign them a dedicated coach who can help translate the communication nuances as they settle into a new role. Remember, this is not a one-sided effort. Employers must also educate teams and managers to understand how to interact and communicate effectively with neurodivergent hires.

Large employers, like KPMG and Ford Motor Company, have created targeted initiatives to support the challenges neurodivergent individuals face in gaining and maintaining employment. A standard value seen in [successful neurodiverse talent programs](#) is *flexibility*.

If your employer is at the beginning of building an in-house neurodiversity program, the first step is to design for inclusiveness. Look for opportunities to add flexibility to your standard talent practices. How can you level the playing field for individuals who may process information differently? For example, sending interview questions out to all candidates ahead of a first interview can benefit those who need additional time to process information. These efforts do not just benefit neurodivergent candidates, they also benefit employers promoting an inclusive environment.

Leadership Tip: Knowledge Sharing

Call upon members of your team to lead knowledge-sharing sessions. An underlying benefit of this peer learning exercise is the *trust* it can build in your team.