



Stay HR Savvy with HR Elements®

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

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Employee Benefits | Balancing Core and Emerging Benefits

Employee expectations are shifting, but one thing remains clear: benefits continue to be a central factor in the way workers evaluate their employer. The challenge for HR leaders is balancing the benefits that are considered *must-haves* with those that reflect the changing needs of the workforce.

The Foundation: Core Benefits

Certain categories remain the backbone of every program, according to the [2025 SHRM Employee Benefits Survey](#).

- Health-related benefits are rated as very or extremely important by 88% of employers, cementing their place as the top priority.
- Retirement savings and leave policies also rank high, each cited by 81% of employers as essential.

These offerings are no longer competitive advantages—they are baseline expectations.

Failing to meet this foundation puts retention and recruitment at immediate risk. Employees assume these benefits will be available, and when they are not, they quickly look elsewhere.

The Differentiators: Emerging Priorities

Beyond the essentials, employees are seeking benefits that reflect the demands of modern work and life.

- Flexible work policies and family service benefits are each prioritized by 68% of employers.
- Professional and career development come in at 65%.

These numbers show that employers recognize the importance of supporting both professional growth and personal responsibilities.

The message is clear: while health care and retirement build stability, flexibility and development build loyalty. Employees increasingly stay with organizations that allow them to develop their skills, balance family needs, and manage work on their own terms.

The Risks of Standing Still

Programs that do not evolve create hidden costs. Outdated benefits contribute to disengagement and turnover, costs that can reach up to 200% of an employee's salary when replacement is needed. Beyond dollars, employers risk eroding trust and damaging their culture when benefits fail to reflect the realities of their employees.

HR leaders who treat benefits as static miss an opportunity to directly influence retention and performance. A strategy that balances core with emerging priorities is what keeps organizations strong.

Action Items for HR Leaders

Strengthen your benefits strategy for the year ahead by reviewing current offerings and consulting with employees to understand their needs.

Audit Your Mix

Separate your offerings into *core* (health care, retirement, leave) and *emerging* (flexibility, family services, career development). Ensure strength in both categories.

Listen to Employees

Survey or hold focus groups to understand which benefits employees use and which ones they wish they had.

Prioritize Communication

Even strong benefits fail when employees are unsure of how to access them. Build awareness campaigns, manager talking points, and simple guides.

Measure Beyond Enrollment

Track retention, engagement, and productivity metrics tied to your most valued benefits. Participation is only part of the picture.

Plan for Change

Benefits are not a one-time event. Set a review cycle to evaluate employee needs and industry benchmarks at least annually.

The Bottom Line

A balanced benefits strategy begins by meeting employee expectations for health and financial security, but it doesn't stop there. Differentiation comes from benefits that reflect today's workforce—flexibility, family support, and career growth.

When employers strike that balance, they do more than deliver programs. They strengthen commitment, build trust, and create stability. In any market, benefits that align with employee priorities remain one of the most effective ways to attract and retain talent.

Workplace Culture | Strengthening Culture Through Timely Appreciation

Recognition is one of the most cost-effective tools for shaping workplace culture, yet it is often overlooked. When it's missing or delayed, employees don't just feel unappreciated; they also feel disrespected. They disengage, lose motivation, and eventually walk out the door.

Recent research highlights the urgency of this issue.

[Only 19% of employees report receiving recognition weekly, down from 29% just four years ago.](#)

That decline reflects more than shifting priorities; it signals a weakening connection between employees and leadership. Without consistent acknowledgment, even high performers begin to question their value. Outside of performance on big tasks, employees are most often acknowledged for:

- Work anniversaries – 48%
- Helping others – 35%
- Small day-to-day tasks – 30%
- Personal milestones – 25%
- Innovative ideas – 21%
- Community service – just 16%

Why Recognition Matters

Recognition is not just about saying *thank you*. Done well, it:

- Reinforces behaviors that support organizational goals.
- Strengthens trust between employees and leadership.
- Builds emotional connection to the workplace, improving both engagement and retention.

It's no surprise that recognition has a direct impact on outcomes. Studies link strong recognition cultures to measurable gains in both performance and loyalty.

When recognition leans heavily on tenure or routine tasks, it overlooks the creativity and initiative that also build engagement and loyalty.

Where Leaders Fall Short

Too often, recognition gets overshadowed by other priorities or is reserved for formal occasions, such as annual reviews. These delays send the wrong message: that daily contributions are invisible unless they're tied to big wins.

The reality is that employees crave recognition in real time, tied to the work they are doing right now. Without it, disengagement grows, and the organization pays the price in productivity and culture.

Practical Ways to Build Recognition into Culture

HR leaders and managers can strengthen recognition by making it timely, authentic, and consistent.

- Normalize frequent recognition: Encourage managers to acknowledge effort during weekly check-ins, not just during performance reviews.
- Enable peer-to-peer recognition: Digital platforms or team meetings can create opportunities for colleagues to celebrate each other's contributions.
- Be specific and genuine: Recognition is most powerful when it highlights what was done well and why it mattered, not just a generic "good job."
- Train leaders to notice: Managers often default to coaching problems, but they need equal focus on recognizing successes.

Recognition as a Retention Strategy

In a time when budgets are tight and salary increases may be limited, recognition stands out as a high-impact, low-cost lever for driving employee engagement. It reinforces culture, strengthens loyalty, and improves performance without requiring new systems or large investments.

The return on consistent recognition is clear: when employees feel valued, they stay longer, perform better, and deepen their connection to the organization. For HR leaders, building recognition into daily leadership practices is one of the most effective strategies for attracting and retaining talent.

Dear HR Manager | Managing Meeting Overload

How do I manage meeting overload on my team?

Our calendars are packed with back-to-back meetings, and I can see the fatigue starting to set in. People are less engaged, productivity is slipping, and yet the meetings continue to multiply. How can I cut the clutter without losing important collaboration?

— *Overbooked and Overwhelmed*

Dear Overbooked,

You're right to notice the strain. [Research shows 35% of all meetings are considered unproductive.](#) The good news? With intentional changes, you can reclaim time and energy for your team.

Audit What's Essential

Not every standing meeting needs to continue. Review recurring invites and ask: Does this meeting still serve its purpose? If not, cancel it or shorten the frequency.

Make Meetings Work Harder

For the ones that remain, enforce a clear agenda and outcomes. Shorter, more focused sessions often drive better results than drawn-out discussions.

Use Alternatives

Not every update requires a meeting. Try asynchronous tools—such as shared documents, recorded updates, or quick Slack check-ins—to keep people informed without consuming their day.

Protect Focus Time

Encourage blocks of meeting-free hours so your team can do deep work. Modeling this yourself gives permission for others to follow.

Bottom Line

Reducing meeting overload means refining collaboration. Trim what's unnecessary, improve what stays, and your team will have more energy and focus for the work that matters most.

— *HR Manager*

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