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NEWS

Managing In A New World Of Work

Can You Imagine A Better Workplace?

MANAGING DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS

Anyone in business today knows there are new expectations when it comes to what employees want. Things are not what they used to be, and people are seeking something unique from their work experience. Whether this is a millennial driven shift or such changes have been subtly occurring over time because of other societal or economic factors, the truth is that companies will have to evolve to meet these different demands and expectations. Read on.

MANAGING A POLARIZED WORKFORCE

Many business owners tell me they have never experienced such a “polarized” workforce. What exactly does this mean and why is the climate so polarizing today? And, in a time when companies need people to work together to produce results, what can organizational leaders do to foster a more cohesive team environment? In our new world of work, managers must be able to effectively manage conflict. We have a framework that can help.

MANAGING A LABOR SHORTAGE

Nothing is talked about more than “where are all the workers?” This is a common question that has plagued us for the past couple years and has further been complicated by the pandemic as well as a foundational shift in how we get work done. Remote, hybrid, flex work schedules were once novel concepts. Now they are the norm. No matter the industry, there are effective hiring strategies, but it may take thinking outside the box.



GOING FROM MANAGER TO LEADER

One of the biggest challenges organizations face today is developing their managers and supervisors into true leaders. There is a recognition that the command-and-control style of management from many years ago may not be as effective in motivating high performance or, worse, can instigate legal claims when an employee feels downright disrespected. Managers who grow into leaders and take the time to develop their leadership skills will be better positioned to handle the next generation of workers and lead them to success.



Meet **Sindy Warren!**

I have had the profound pleasure of meeting and learning from Sindy Warren over the last year. Because the critical skills and mindset she teaches is exactly what is needed in today's complex world of work (and life), you will want to get to know Sindy and her company, Blue Tree Coaching. Not only is Sindy a phenomenal life and business coach, she also is a Stanford Law School graduate, yoga teacher and published author. She's one amazing woman!

Among her many talents and services, Sindy is known for her 1:1 executive coaching, which provides powerful results. In a day and age where leadership and emotional intelligence are key contributors to starting and growing a business, Sindy works with individuals who want to achieve not only monetary success but also a feeling of purpose, lasting confidence, and lifelong joy.

Whether you are looking to start a new full-time venture or a side gig, crush professional goals, enhance your personal health and well-being, manage stress or navigate a challenging life transition, you will want Sindy Warren by your side - guiding and coaching you along your journey. Check her out at www.bluetree-coaching.com or contact her at sindy@bluetree-coaching.com.



HOW HR FITS INTO THE NEW WORLD OF WORK

While the nature and purpose of human resource functions have been evolving for years, the demands of the pandemic accelerated this transition. If it is not already, HR in every organization must move beyond administrative functions to help company leaders navigate the often tricky and complex problems of attracting and retaining a top-quality workforce - one that will lead the organization into the future.

People have never been more important. Although we have frequently heard the phrase "people are our most valuable asset," the organizations that are actually living and breathing this statement and investing in employee growth and development, will be further ahead of the game. HR is crucial in helping to support a more 'employee centric' experience, ensuring that employees have everything they need to perform their responsibilities in the most effective way.

In addition, HR can be a great resource and help tap into the needs/desires of employees. They should be consistently asking their workforce what they want in terms of benefits and how the environment and culture can be improved. Organizations can't afford to become complacent and ignore feedback. HR should be connecting through conversations and surveys to gauge the employee experience (from what it was like to interview with the company to how employees feel about the onboarding and performance review process).

Organizational leaders must ensure that HR continues to play this critical role strategically and operationally, rather than being only relegated to a support function. The best companies see the value in HR engaging with employees and bringing valuable feedback to the executive table to make sure everyone feels aligned with the business goals and vision.

Employers and HR may have challenges ahead (The Great Resignation is still upon us), but there are always opportunities to do things better - creating a win-win for the employees and the business owners. Leverage HR to find creative ways (think incentives and rewards) to make sure employees remain productive and engaged.

'Strategic' HR has never been more crucial to organizational success.

Today, every aspect of the employee life cycle must be 'reimagined' - how recruiting is done, how new hires are acclimated to their new roles, and what it will take to keep people feeling connected to their work and organization.

To be effective, HR must understand the delicate balance of holding people accountable without 'ruling with an iron fist' - which can inadvertently kill morale.

SPOTLIGHT ON SHAWNA WHITLOCK

STRATEGIC WORKPLACE SOLUTIONS



Speaking of strategic HR, there is a new consultant in town, and she rocks! Shawna is a cherished friend and a trusted colleague. She has a wide depth and vast array of HR knowledge and experience. She started her career at the Plain Dealer managing several key HR functions, including labor relations and negotiations, and then moved into HR director level roles before transitioning to a full-time HR consultant and launching Strategic Workplace Solutions (SWS).

Today, Shawna services a variety of clients here in Northeast Ohio. She is a true HR business partner, assisting organizations by maximizing the employee experience for better overall business results and creating workplace cultures that are strong and sustainable. SWS also offers a full range of services in human resource management. These services include (but are not limited to): recruitment support and strategic planning, hiring and onboarding process development, creation of workplace policies and performance management systems, handling of employee disciplinary and investigatory matters, and management coaching and training. Contact Shawna at shawna@sworkplaces.com or visit her website at www.strategicworkplacesolutionsllc.com.



"I believe in an honest and direct approach to fulfilling business initiatives through fair and consistent execution of HR driven strategies." – Shawna Whitlock, President of SWS

A WHOLE NEW WAY OF WORKING – MANAGING DIFFERENT EXPECTATIONS, A POLARIZED WORKFORCE, AND A LABOR SHORTAGE.

1. Managing Different Expectations

Businesses need to start thinking differently. They have to be open to new ideas, able to foster positive employee relations and deal with a labor shortage that isn't going away any time soon. There are some things I continue to see smart companies do exceptionally well – from offering a more comprehensive and creative benefit package to training their management team to not only 'discipline' employees but also inspire them to meet their full potential – and these organizations will lead the way.

Here are my thoughts on the many questions that continue to surface in my daily/weekly conversations with clients. What can we add to our benefits to make working here more enticing? What other policies/ programs could we offer to make us a more employee-friendly environment? How do we effectively handle a workplace conflict and polarizing viewpoints? How do we break down silos and get people to work more collaboratively?

In my opinion, organizations focused on a 'holistic and positive' employee experience will reap the benefits of a more engaged workforce and maintain an advantage over their competition. HR leaders deploying their efforts wisely – spending their time strategically examining how certain benefits and internal processes could produce a high return on engagement. With a fresh set of eyes, everything that affects an employee's employment experience should be carefully examined. Perhaps there are policies that need updating, processes that are broken that cause employee disgruntlement, or other benefits that are completely lacking that, if implemented, may be a low-cost way to keep employees satisfied (such as additional PTO days or a flex work schedule).

HR should help their companies devise a benefits plan that makes employees feel cared for financially, physically and emotionally. Ongoing professional and personal development opportunities are critical to

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retention in addition to supporting employees future career paths. This is a different mentality from years ago where healthcare and retirement were enough.

The days of employees merely showing up to work and collecting a paycheck and benefits is over. Whether it is the pandemic driving this new notion of work or this has simply been an inevitable evolution of work, employees crave something different; they want a more purposeful experience and have distinct expectations. Employers responding to these new demands without hesitation or delay will find a more committed workforce.

People are re-examining their priorities. They want different things from their employers. In some ways, this has been a welcomed shift – employers trying things now that they would have been reluctant to try in the past, e.g., flex time or remote work. Employers that take this challenge seriously and make enhancements where necessary and feasible will be rewarded with extreme loyalty and fierce commitment (something seen as a rare commodity in today's 'jump ship' culture). Therefore, there is opportunity for businesses to get creative and really self-reflect, deeply examining unique ways to connect with and show appreciation for their employees. Traditional benefits such as health plans and a week or two of PTO are table stakes. These things are now a 'given' – employers are encouraged to go beyond the once standard policies to attract the right people.

Management and leadership teams should meet regularly with HR to discuss the 'metrics' – is there high turnover in the organization? What is causing it and how do we find out? Are there any benefits that would appeal to current employees that are not being leveraged? More than ever, managers need to step into the shoes of 'leaders' – asking the hard questions and perhaps even be willing to take a hit (cost wise) in the short-term to reap long-term bottom line results. Harvard Business Review and other workplace experts and authorities advise that this is not the time for businesses to be overly focused on short-term dollars and cents (otherwise they risk losing essential people).

There are common qualities emerging among companies that are differentiating themselves from the rest and will eventually outperform their competitors.

THESE QUALITIES INCLUDE:

- **Having core values that are followed religiously (holding everyone accountable to them no matter the circumstances).**

- **Articulating a mission and vision that everyone feels inspired by (not just generic platitudes written on the office wall, on a company website or in an employee handbook).**
- **Making sure everyone is clear on expectations (continually reinforcing policies and communicating important company standards).**
- **Being intentional about building a company culture that is respectful of diverse backgrounds and experiences (including many voices and avoiding bias in decision-making).**
- **Managers that act and think like real leaders (being the calm in the storm, showing empathy and vulnerability and actively listening).**
- **An organizational culture that not only tolerates conflict but promotes a healthy dose of discourse (because they know that constructive conflict can spark innovation and creative problem-solving).**

2. Managing a Polarized Workforce

One of the most difficult challenges employers face today is managing diverse perspectives and deeply held beliefs of their employees. Much of the conflict we are witnessing today appears to be driven by the increasingly polarized views and opinions of many employees.

Most company leaders I talk with seem to struggle with finding the right 'balance' – believing individuals are entitled to their own views and opinions (whether political or otherwise) but also recognizing that these views and opinions can cause strife between their workforce. When disagreements ensue and conflict escalates, this has all sorts of impact on the workday – making people feel uncomfortable, morally attacked or judged and can also create a 'hostile work environment' when remarks or actions become overly offensive and pervasive (creating legal exposure for an employer).

Organizations should be proactive and communicate their stance on employees openly and freely discussing controversial or political topics. They can either take a 'neutral stance' and ask everyone to avoid such conversations (include a policy that discourages this type of talk) or they can permit employees to express their views and opinions as long as they are not discriminatory or harassing. Social media and electronic communication have opened up a whole new dimension and can also quickly create legal risks if employee concerns or complaints are not taken seriously.

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The best leaders keep a close eye on conflict and, when tensions start to brew, they intervene. They address issues early and directly and with care and candor. They resist the urge to dodge conflict and instead are willing to linger in a space of discomfort and contraction and help facilitate a meeting of the minds (or at the very least, reduce friction by using proven conflict resolution strategies).

There are many types of conflict in the workplace – personality conflicts, arguments over how work should get done, philosophical disagreements and many other types of conflicts that can even include physical or verbal altercations. There are the minor spats and major all-out brawls, email wars and face-to-face screaming matches. In my line of work, I've seen it all and often say that whether you put 2 or 2,000 people under one roof, conflict is inevitable.

Managing conflict can feel like a daunting task for most managers or HR professionals. The best case scenario is to have a framework in place that everyone in the organization understands and if conflict escalates, they know that there is a 'process' that should be followed to fairly and constructively try to resolve such conflict. When this is lacking, conflict can feel scary and things can get personal quick. Therefore, developing a conflict resolution policy/framework that your organization can use when disputes arise will help mitigate 'destructive' conflict and turn it into 'constructive' conflict.

Organizations should never take the stand that conflict is utterly unacceptable and never tolerated. While having 'artificial harmony' is tempting, it's not normal or natural to have a pleasant, everyone gets along atmosphere every minute of every day. Some level of conflict is healthy and may lead to new discoveries and a culture where people challenge each other (in respectful ways of course) to always learn and improve. There is great benefit to this type of workplace dynamic.

At our upcoming **Workplace Coffee Talk on April 28th from 9-10am**, we will discuss best practice tips and a tried-and-true framework for resolving conflict constructively. Some of these include – assuming positive intent; attacking the issue not the person; using solution-oriented language to reframe the issues; and being trained on conflict resolution best practices.

For more information, [register here to learn more: **Managing Conflict Virtual Coffee Talk.**](#)

3. Managing a Labor Shortage

There isn't a week that goes by that I don't receive a call about the unprecedented labor shortage we are currently contending with. As I wrote about in prior newsletters, there are several driving forces behind this phenomenon. Some of these are pandemic related but other reasons for the tight labor market were already in play before Covid-19 hit. These include a high volume of people retiring, women exiting the workforce to care for family members, employees experiencing an 'awakening' during the pandemic and deciding to pivot on their career paths, employees seeking better pay and benefits (with the big benefit being flexibility/remote work opportunities), etc. Currently, there are about 3.5 million fewer people in the workforce relative to this time two years ago.

As a business owner or organizational leader, there are many things you can do to combat this shortage and continue to bring in top talent (so don't give up!). Obviously, deciding to increase wages and bolster up your benefits package will contribute to a deeper candidate pool. This may mean that employers will need to budget for increased labor costs and explore other benefit options if necessary. It's always helpful to talk with your employees and get a real pulse on what it will take to keep them satisfied and employed.

In addition to the 'tangible' benefits, it will also help to revisit your policies – anything you can do to uplevel your time off and flex time policies will be immensely appreciated. Expanding paid time off and leave of absence options will do wonders for morale and retention. In addition, employees want to feel a part of something purposeful – this is an opportunity for employers to really hone in on their vision and values and help their employees feel connected to the company goals and the broader societal impact the organization makes.

One of the best ways to increase engagement/retention is to manage and lead the right way. What do I mean by this? Ultimately, the employees I talk with who are loyal to their companies tell me that they have a 'boss that cares' about them. It seems easy enough, right? But in the midst of our busy days, it's easy to forget the importance of getting and receiving feedback and connecting with the people we work with. Every day, spend a little time asking employees how they are doing, and it will make a difference.

LEGAL TRENDS AND CHANGES

Ohio has two important changes that employers should know about that will affect their employment practices. First, the new Ohio Minimum Wage (effective January 2022) is now \$9.30 per hour (and for tipped employees, \$4.65 per hour). All Ohio employers should also understand the difference between exempt and nonexempt employees as misclassification can lead to legal exposure. A pay audit can help identify any potential issues!

Second, the new Ohio Employment Law Uniformity Act (effective April 2021) states that employees can no longer file a discrimination/harassment claim directly in court and must first file with the Ohio Civil Right Commission (OCRC). Previously, an employee could directly file a lawsuit. This law also lengthens the time limitation for filing with the OCRC from 180 days to two years. Similar to a federal EEOC charge, the OCRC may investigate, mediate, file a lawsuit on its own, or issue a "right to sue" notice to a complainant. The other important thing to note about this law is that it gives an employer a protective shield if it can show that it has a anti-discrimination/harassment policy in place; has educated their employees on the policy/complaint process; and has exercised reasonable care to prevent and correct harassing behavior. So make sure you have a solid policy and have conducted training!

A key law known as the Ending Forced Arbitration of Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Act (effective March 2022) is important for employers to understand, especially those who have mandatory arbitration agreements with their employees. This law essentially restricts employers from forcing workplace sexual harassment or assault claims to be resolved by arbitration. Even if you have employees that have signed the agreement, they can now go directly to court with their sexual harassment/assault claims notwithstanding this agreement. However, employees may still choose to arbitrate such claims as some employees feel arbitration is a sufficient way to resolve disputes. You will want to revise your arbitration agreements to reflect this change!

A LAWYER YOU SHOULD KNOW: Becky Price, Esq., Founder of Ibis Legacy Law, LLC

Many of my clients recently have asked me about 'estate planning' and 'succession planning' as they plan for their future. No doubt the pandemic has made us think about the uncertainties ahead and even our own mortality. The good news - there is an exceptional lawyer in town who can help!

Becky Price is the founding Attorney of Ibis Legacy Law, LLC. Becky initially started law practice of estate planning and estate/trust administration as the Law Office of Rebecca Yingst Price, LLC in 2011. In 2022, she made the decision to rename her law firm to reflect the legacy component of the firm's core values, specifically, that with proper planning everyone can leave a lasting legacy for their families and for their communities. Specifically, that estate planning is more than a one-time financial transaction. A great estate plan encompasses each individual's values and beliefs, as well as, their concerns, hopes and dreams. It is about empowering those who will benefit from your hard work and setting them up for success to continue the cycle.

Becky works with individuals and families at all stages of life to ensure that their loved ones are protected in the event of their death and disability by having a comprehensive estate plan in place. She takes extra care and attention to contingency planning for her clients and their families since we have all learned the hard way since 2019 that life can be unpredictable and challenging. She works to ensure that business owners have the proper legal documents in place to ensure that someone can step in to run the business in the event of an emergency without the intervention of any Court.

*What is an Ibis? Ibis birds are known for their communication, trustworthiness, and ease with transitions. Those characteristics are put to the test during natural disasters when they're proven to be the last to leave and the first to return. It's no wonder they're a symbol of safety from harm. Whether it's a crisis situation or you're planning ahead, we'll help you plan for times of transition and guide you from beginning to end.



Becky can be reached at price@ohiowills.net or 216-991-6200

www.ohiowills.net/team/rebecca-yingst-price



FINAL PLUG!

And last but not least... our friends at NFP are offering professional liability insurance specifically for law firms. They now have a division that is considered the leading expert in this type of insurance. Please contact Holly Frank for more information:

HOLLY FRANK

Advisor - Corporate Benefits

6450 Rockside Woods Blvd S., Suite 250, Cleveland, Ohio 44131

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Networking Night Out

Tuesday - April 26, 2022

5:30 - 8:30 pm

MICHAEL ANGELO'S

Michael Angelo's Winery

The Dining Room

5515 Broadview Rd, Richfield, OH 44286

We thought this would be a great time to celebrate Spring and get our favorite clients, colleagues and fellow consultants out to meet and mingle. Along with appetizers and wine,

Shawna Whitlock, Holly Frank and Stella Skaljac will have a (very brief) presentation on

"how employers can boost retention and successfully recruit by offering creative benefits"

RSVP by April 21, 2022 to:

Holly Frank

holly.frank@nfp.com

OR

Stella Skaljac

stella@imaginehrconsulting.com

OR

Shawna Whitlock

shawna@sworkplaces.com



Can't wait to see you!