

Thinking Outside the Box

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May 6, 2019

Creative solutions to HR challenges can help organizations stay relevant.

By Anthony Onesto

HR has long been viewed as a rule-oriented profession for those who excel at balancing regulatory, legal, and employee concerns while also helping companies recruit great talent. But recruiting talent today is not as straightforward as it once was -and neither is creating a company culture that retains employees.

Ping pong tables and free food in the company kitchenette are fun, sure. But they aren't engaging enough for the expanding millennial and future Generation Z workforces who value deeper relationships and experiences above all.

More than one in three people in the American workplace are now millennials, or people born between 1981 and 1997, making them the largest generation in the U.S. workforce, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data. By 2030, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that millennials will account for 75 percent of the workforce. In the next few years, millennials will be taking senior level roles in these same organizations.

So, what do millennials want in a job?

Deloitte's recent *Millennial Survey* asked more than 8,000 millennial workers in 30 countries to identify what they consider important in their work-life balance. The survey found that flexibility in the workplace is an attractive incentive, as millennials most value:

- flexibility regarding time, or having a say in when they're able to clock in and clock out;
- location, or having the ability to work remotely; and
- roles, or being able to choose the types of projects they're working on or the clients they get to work with.

As the workforce of tomorrow continues to evolve faster than most HR departments and companies are accustomed to, HR leaders need to think creatively and unconventionally when it comes to recruiting talent -especially in a tight job market filled with a new generation of employees. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the unemployment rate in February 2019 hit 3.8 percent -nearly the lowest it's been in the last half century. With such a low unemployment rate, most candidates are getting multiple job offers during job searches. In the tech sector, for example, most new recruits are juggling between two and three job offers simultaneously. As a result, organizations are competing more than ever in the last five decades to hire, inspire, and retain talent.

What does this mean?

While HR teams shouldn't throw everything out and start from scratch, this is an urgent call to action for organizations to loosen the reins on HR's ability to dive deeper into creative spaces within their own departments and suggest boundary-pushing, company-wide initiatives to help drive growth.



It's time for HR and organizations to get creative through these practices:

- 1. Consider hiring HR professionals from diverse backgrounds, even if they don't have a resume full of experience in HR.** It may sound strange at first, but hiring a passionate candidate who is a "people person" with a liberal arts degree, a background as a creative director, or a deep understanding of sociology could be highly beneficial to an HR department. While these individuals may not have an extensive background in HR policy, they may be better equipped to think creatively about HR challenges in a way that transcends standard approaches and solves big picture, organizational needs. Also, by building an HR team of people from different backgrounds, a company is better able to leverage diverse and new perspectives to create experiences and programs that are relevant to everyone.
- 2. Find out what employees value most.** It is important to understand what employees truly value in order to incentivize and retain them. Internal brainstorm sessions, informal focus groups, and anonymous surveys are a great way to extract this pertinent information.

For example, at Suzy, the HR and leadership team recently brainstormed to determine different ways the company can build a strong learning and development culture and programs to support culture. Some of the answers were surprising, including:

- “an alternative MBA program, partnering with an organization like General Assembly;”
- “internal podcasts;” and
- “immersive employee programs within clients and prospects.”

In addition, Suzy employees suggested working with outside companies to match employees with mentors who share a similar background or role and are not plugged in to internal dynamics, relationships, or hierarchies. As a result, Suzy’s leadership team gained a lot of options to consider, all generated by diverse perspectives and employee backgrounds.

3. Promote play at work. There’s a lot of truth to the infamous line from the movie “The Shining:” “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy.” Companies can’t attract or retain the best talent when employees are stressed, anxious, or overworked. Play can take many forms at work. While it does not mean letting employees run around and hit the boss in the face with a water balloon (as funny as that may sound), it does mean getting creative about breaking up the work week by implementing physical movement and recreation into the workplace. This could take the form of a bi-monthly yoga or meditation class, walking brainstorm sessions around the building, team meetings in the park, or 20-minute team-building sessions centered on playing video games together.

4. Attract tomorrow’s talent by leveraging creative ways to inspire children and young adults. Organizations should think beyond tomorrow to the future, and how they can truly make a difference by fostering the workforce of 2050 and beyond. Deloitte Consulting, for example, is currently partnering with The Ella Project to launch a new comic book series aimed at inspiring young girls to pursue a career in STEM. The graphic novel series features an inspiring comic book character, Ella, solving various problems using her STEM skillset under the guidance of various Deloitte leaders. These types of creative efforts can lay the groundwork for the future of a company and its employees by exposing children to careers they may not have otherwise considered. Consider this: According to a recent Suzy survey, 27 percent of millennial women wish they had pursued a career in STEM but did not because they were not exposed to it early on.

Although systemic changes to the U.S. workforce will take time to catch on organically, organizations can start making changes internally today -beginning with creativity in HR.

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