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Employee Retention in the Post-Pandemic World: Health and Safety Come First

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After more than a year of soaring unemployment rates, America is ready to get back to work. As COVID-19 cases continue to dwindle throughout the country, companies are eager to welcome staff back to the office.

However, things aren't necessarily going according to plan. In what has been called "the turnover tsunami," companies are bracing for a colossal wave of resignations. According to the *2021 Engagement and Retention Report* from Achievers Workforce Institute, 52 percent of workers plan to look for a new job in 2021. Left unaddressed, this surge could leave employers with hundreds of vacant positions to fill.

Employers are discovering that employees and job seekers have new expectations compared to the pre-pandemic days. Simply put, employees are not jumping into jobs purely for the sake of a reliable income. They don't want to work in places where they fear for their health and well-being. Instead, they are seeking jobs with employers that are willing to prioritize their physical and mental health. For many employees, that means looking for remote or semi-remote jobs.

But the *Philadelphia Business Journal* reports there is a disconnect between employees and HR departments when it comes to remote work. While 80 percent of executive-level employees would like to keep working remotely or in a hybrid capacity, 70 percent of HR pros say employees will only work remotely less than half the time. These differing priorities are a key driver of the coming turnover tsunami.

4 Ways to Put Employee Health and Safety First

In the post-pandemic world, employees will be more attracted to workplaces that make them feel valued and safe. Employees expect their employers to create and implement comprehensive health and safety plans while ensuring the continuity of daily operations. This is a tall order, but it also gives organizations an unprecedented opportunity to revamp their workplaces in service of a better work/life balance for all employees.

Adopting digital health and safety platforms can make this task more manageable. With the right tools, employers can continuously assess conditions in the workplace, identify gaps in safety plans, and provide updated health and safety protocols. Tech companies have been working diligently since the start of the pandemic to create robust software that helps businesses capture health data and access actionable insights.

And the good news is that taking steps to support employees' safety will inevitably increase the value of a company's brand and make it more attractive to consumers and job seekers alike.

Below are some of the ways companies can incorporate better health and safety practices into their daily operations — and, hopefully, avoid the turnover tsunami:

- *Health Screenings*: Conduct daily health screenings for employees before they enter the workplace. This significantly reduces the possibility of a viral spread within the workplace. Employees can submit brief answers to questions regarding potential COVID-19 exposure and symptoms. Keep questionnaires simple so that they

to questions regarding potential COVID-19 exposure and symptoms. Keep questionnaires simple so that they can be filled out quickly and accessed from any device. Be sure to comply with all relevant regulations regarding the collection of employee health data, as different jurisdictions may have different rules.

- *Automated Distance Monitoring and Contact Tracing:* Consider providing employees with wearable Bluetooth beacon technology, which can be used to monitor social distancing, send post-exposure notifications, and streamline contact tracing if an employee tests positive for COVID-19.
- *Occupancy Tracking:* For companies that experience high foot traffic from the public or vendors, automated occupancy tracking systems can help steer traffic and identify areas of possible concern.
- *Air Filtration Systems:* Quality air filtration can help prevent viral spread — and, as an added bonus, it also helps employees who are susceptible to breathing problems like asthma.

Companies across the nation must tackle brand new challenges to continue operations, and one of the biggest challenges of all is turning out to be the massive shift in employee needs and priorities. This isn't a fleeting change: COVID-19 has changed the world in many ways, including the workplace itself. There is no indication that businesses will ever go back to operating how they did before the pandemic uprooted everyone's lives.

If companies want to recruit quality candidates, retain existing employees, and create reputable post-pandemic brands, they must make a genuine effort to respond to the changing needs of today's workforce.

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