

To:

The HR Specialist

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Subject: Practical HR strategies to boost your career

In The News ...

Employers offer incentives to encourage COVID vaccine. An increasing number of companies are giving cash, leave, wellness benefits or gift cards to encourage employees to get the COVID shots. Trader Joe's and Dollar General are offering four hours of extra pay. Nearly one-third of Americans say they don't plan to get vaccinated. While few employers are mandating the shot, about two-thirds say they'll encourage it. (For tips on building buy-in, see page 2).

Telemedicine is OK to certify employees' need for FMLA. The U.S. Department of Labor says it now considers a telemedicine consultation with a health care provider sufficient to determine whether someone has a "serious health condition" that warrants FMLA leave. Previously, FMLA rules required an *in-person* doctor visit. Now, an exam "performed by videoconference" counts.

FFCRA leave expires, but Biden aims to bring it back. The big COVID stimulus law signed in December did not extend into 2021 your obligation to provide paid leave under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. However, employers can still voluntarily provide the leave and continue to receive a tax credit until March 31 (see page 3). President Biden is asking Congress to extend FFCRA to Sept. 30 and expand it to more employers.

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Remote work goes national: Do you adjust pay?

As the remote work trend becomes more permanent in the coming years, employers will take a more national-based approach to their recruiting. But that quickly raises a key question about salaries: "Do you pay a remote sales rep in Boston the same as someone based in Boise?"

In 2019, only 3.6% of employees worked from home more than half the time. By the end of 2021, about 30% of the workforce is expected to work at home at least a few days a week, says Global Workplace Analytics. The trend isn't expected to decline much.

Recruiting nationally for at least some remote positions can help organizations attract staff from a deeper talent pool, cut office-based costs and even increase diversity.



As more companies move to a remote-employee model, salaries are likely to change to match the local cost of living.

Remote recruiting can also help reduce labor costs, as location has always been an accepted component affecting salary levels. *Example:* The median pay for a software developer in San Francisco runs north of \$120k but drops to \$87k in Minneapolis for the same experience.

Facebook will now allow many employees to work from home permanently, but it said salaries are likely to change to match local costs of living. A recent Willis Towers Watson survey found that 26% of companies say they

Continued on page 2

WFH trend sparks changes to poster rules

The government-mandated posters that adorn break room bulletin boards don't do much good if employees work from home. That's why the U.S. Department of Labor just issued new guidance on how employers should inform employees about their workplace rights under federal laws.

A new DOL bulletin clarifies that:

- Employers should continue to post hard copies at work. This helps satisfy a requirement to keep notices posted "at all times."
- Strictly electronic posting is only allowed if all employees work remotely all the time, all communication is electronic and all employees have ready access to the electronic posting at all times.
- When some employees work

on-site and others work remotely, the posters must appear physically and be electronically available.

- For an electronic posting to meet access requirements, employees must be able to view a poster or file without requesting permission.
- Employers must make sure they let employees know where and how to access the electronic notice. Just as with paper postings, the electronic version must be somewhere obvious, not in the electronic equivalent of a basement storage closet.

Best practice: Include all posters in your online employee handbook. Periodically remind employees how and where to access the information.

Online resource Read the rules at www.tinyurl.com/DOLposter.

Remote work salaries

(Cont. from page 1)

would base compensation on location for remote workers.

“Although some employees may be willing to take a pay cut for the convenience of working from home or living in a less expensive area, other employees may feel that they deserve to be paid on the value of their work,” without regard to location, says a new PayScale report.

Setting remote pay: 3 options

When establishing salaries for remote staff, you basically have three options, says PayScale:

1. Base pay on employer location. With this traditional office-centric approach, employees (regardless of where they live) are paid salaries based on the market competitiveness of the company headquarters. This makes sense for smaller companies with few remote positions or those looking to simplify their compensation management. Such companies can also pay a premium to a handful of valuable remote workers and have equalization across the team otherwise.

2. Base pay on employee location. This approach is more accurate but more complicated. It’s also common with positions that are heavily regulated and must comply with local wage laws. Basing pay on employee location can be the most cost effective and competitive plan, plus best for harder-to-fill positions.

3. Base pay on national median. Avoiding local pay levels is attractive to larger organizations with a highly distributed workforce, especially for noncompetitive roles. Another option: a mixed approach that groups multiple locations together and targets an average.

Final tip: Expect backlash if a new policy reduces pay for remote staff. One option is to change the pay range for the job but not the actual pay of employees. You can then reset expectations on pay-increase eligibility and freeze pay based on location.

Encouraging staff to get COVID vaccine? Build buy-in and plan for opposition

Public health officials agree that the more U.S. employees receive COVID vaccines, the sooner business operations can return to normal. But a strict “get-the-shot-or-you’re fired” message could hurt morale and possibly be illegal.

“A thoughtful and empathetic communication plan can be the difference between confusion and resistance and understanding and adoption,” says Robyn Bachochin, a Mercer communication consultant.

Even though the EEOC gives you legal authority to require employees to get the vaccine (*with certain exemptions, see below*), it’s wise to communicate with workers to gain their buy-in.

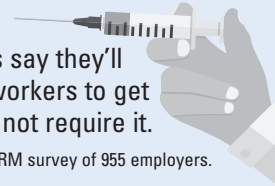
The GibsonDunn law firm suggests these practices to build compliance for your vaccination requirement or simply to encourage more workers to get the shot:

Clarify the “why.” Clearly communicate your purpose for encouraging or requiring the shot—for employee safety and to allow the workplace (and revenue) to return to normal. The more employees understand why you want them to get vaccinated, the more they’ll feel heard, the less friction there will be and fewer workers will claim unnecessary exemptions.

Survey: Most will encourage, not mandate, COVID vaccine

61% of employers say they’ll encourage workers to get the vaccine, not require it.

Source: SHRM survey of 955 employers.



Link it to specific improvements.

Tie the vaccine policy to visible changes. For example, if 100% of our employees are vaccinated, you can reopen formerly closed office space or recreation areas. Publicize any incentives you’re providing to get the shot, like extra leave or pay (*see page 1*).

Lead with facts. Provide employees with accurate and reader-friendly information on the vaccine from trusted public health sources. Given the amount of misinformation (or disinformation) out there, HR can play a key educational role.

Anticipate emotion, dissent.

Given the strong rhetoric and beliefs around vaccines, this process could lead to workplace tension or legal risks. Be aware of this and make sure this tension doesn’t rise to the level of discrimination or a hostile workplace. If you have questions about vaccine mandates or accommodations, contact your attorney.

Understand your duties for vaccine accommodations

While most employers will simply encourage the COVID shot, the EEOC says employers *can* legally require employees to be vaccinated. However, employers must be prepared to make certain religious or disability exceptions.

Disability issues. Some disabilities may make vaccines less safe. Employees who take medications for certain autoimmune disorders may not be able to be effectively immunized. It’s possible that side effects may be dangerous for some.

If an employee raises a disability-related objection, engage in the ADA’s interactive accommodations process. Discuss possible alternatives to immunization. *Examples:* teleworking, transfer to a job that minimizes co-worker contact or using certain protective gear. If no reasonable accommodation is possible, you can terminate.

Religious objections. Treat religious or moral objections just as you do disability-related concerns—seek reasonable accommodations. Remember, you cannot require workers to present the specific religious tenets that forbid vaccinations. It is enough for them to say they hold a sincere religious or philosophical belief. As with disability, you can terminate if no reasonable accommodation is possible.

Online resource See the EEOC’s vaccine guidance at www.tinyurl.com/EEOC-covid-QA and scroll down to Section K.



Think twice before Googling for medical info

It is legally risky to run an internet search to find out more about job applicants, especially if you are looking for information about a medical condition.

It's too easy for Google to turn up information that should never play a role in the hiring decision. The likely result of such a dispute: a disability discrimination lawsuit.

Recent case: A company offered a woman a driving job, contingent on a drug test. She said she takes Suboxone as treatment for opioid addiction.



An HR staffer did a quick Google search and concluded the possible side effects meant the woman would be unable to perform her job safely.

The offer was rescinded.

The EEOC sued, saying withdrawing the offer on the basis of an internet search violated the ADA. (*EEOC v. Professional Transportation, SD WV*)

Final note: You don't have to allow active drug use, but drug addiction is a protected ADA disability.

Benchmark diversity using new EEOC tool

The EEOC has just released a searchable database of the EEO-1 data it collects each year from large employers. It's called EEOC Explore, and it can be a valuable resource for HR professionals interested in comparing their diversity initiatives and auditing hiring practices for possible bias.

EEOC Explore provides income and job data for large private employers, pulled from 2017 and 2018 EEO-1 forms. You can filter the data by location, industry, job category and year. It also provides a mapping function.

You can use the database to determine realistic (and legally defensible)

minority and female employment benchmarks for your industry, type of business and locality. If your numbers fall significantly below industry standards, consider evaluating your practices. You may uncover unconscious bias.

Advice: Consider having your attorney conduct your EEOC Explore searches and compare your hiring history. That way, the process may be covered by attorney-client privilege.

Online resource Access EEOC Explore at www.eeoc.gov/statistics/employment/jobpatterns/eeo1.

New COVID concern: 'Maskual harassment'

The customer is *not* always right. A new UC Berkeley study found the pandemic has more employees (mainly service and restaurant workers) facing mask-based harassment.

The study said, "Many workers report a dramatic increase in sexual harassment during the pandemic, which is compounded by having to ask customers to comply with COVID-19 safety protocols. Comments by male customers indicate that they feel entitled to demand that workers remove their protective gear."



Female workers often report that male customers ask them to remove their mask so they could judge their looks. Real example: "Pull that mask down so I can see if I want to take you home."

A full 41% of service workers reported a noticeable rise in unwanted sexualized comments from customers.

Remember: Unlawful harassment is unlawful, regardless of the perpetrator. Employers must treat harassment of an employee by a nonemployee the same as harassment between co-workers.

DOL clarifies how you should handle unused FFCRA leave

Near the end of 2020, a key question for employers was whether Congress was going to extend the paid sick leave and paid family leave for employees that was authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (set to expire Dec. 31).

The big COVID relief law signed just after Christmas said employers are not required to provide FFCRA leave in 2021, but may voluntarily do so. So, leave taken after Dec. 31, 2020 need not be paid by employers. However, employers must pay for all eligible leave taken before then.

The U.S. Department of Labor clarified these changes recently by issuing this Q&A on the FFCRA:

Q. I was eligible for leave under the FFCRA in 2020, but I did not use any leave. Are employees still entitled to take paid sick or expanded family and medical leave after Dec. 31, 2020?

A. Your employer is not required to provide you with FFCRA leave after Dec. 31, 2020, but your employer may voluntarily decide to provide you such leave. The obligation to provide FFCRA leave applies ... through Dec. 31, 2020. Any change to extend the requirement to provide leave under the FFCRA would require an amendment to the statute by Congress.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, extended the employer tax credits for paid sick leave and expanded family and medical leave voluntarily provided to employees until March 31, 2021. However, this Act did not extend an eligible employee's entitlement to FFCRA leave beyond Dec. 31, 2020.

Information for employers about claiming the refundable tax credits for qualified leave wages can be found at www.irs.gov/coronavirus/new-employer-tax-credits.

Note: President Biden is pushing for Congress to bring back FFCRA leave and expand it to more employers. We'll keep you posted.



Will Biden revise the \$35k-per-year overtime salary threshold?

In 2016, the Obama administration was ready to implement new overtime rules that would have raised the salary threshold for most exempt positions to \$931 per week. A federal court intervened and blocked the plan. Then, in 2020, the Trump administration raised the threshold far more modestly, to the current \$684 per week (or \$35,568 per year). Under the Biden administration, expect a push to propose rules raising the overtime salary threshold to somewhere near \$900 per week.

New COVID law adds more flexibility to employees' flex spending accounts

The coronavirus relief bill signed into law at the end of 2020 grants some financial leeway to employees who participate in health and dependent care flexible spending account plans. Employees are now allowed to roll over unused 2020 funds into 2021—and from 2021 into 2022. In addition, employers can now let employees make mid-year changes to amounts they contribute in 2021.



Biden's economic plan calls for \$15 wage floor

As part of his \$1.9 trillion economic relief package proposed recently, President Biden called on Congress to increase the federal national minimum wage to \$15 per hour and end the tip credit minimum wage of \$2.13 per hour. The current federal wage floor of \$7.25 an hour hasn't budged since 2009, the longest period without an increase since the minimum wage was created in 1938.

More than 30 states set their own minimum wages that are above the federal level.

Outlook: Getting 10 Senate Republicans to sign on to the \$15 wage (and, thus, avoid a GOP filibuster) will be challenging. Republicans say it's unwise to add new costs to employers in the middle of this economic crisis.

New independent contractor rule to be halted

Just weeks before leaving office, President Trump issued a pro-employer final regulation that revised the test to determine which workers can be classified as independent contractors. But those changes likely won't take effect as scheduled in March. That's because, in his first few days in office, President Biden put a freeze on this and many other last-minute Trump regulation changes.

HR Q&A

How do we deal with false complaints?

Q. We have an employee who has filed several sexual harassment complaints. But when we investigated, they all were false. Can we do something about her?

A. No employer should discipline an employee for filing a complaint unless there is rock-solid proof that the complaint was made in bad faith. *Example:* The employee admitted to several co-workers that she made up the complaint to "stick-it" to the alleged harasser. But keep in mind, just because a complaint lacks merit, doesn't mean it was the product of bad faith.

Is it OK for managers to keep their own personnel files on employees?

Q. Several managers in our company keep personnel files on their employees that they don't share with HR. Basically, these are employee "journals." Any problems with this?

A. It is only natural for supervisors to want to keep their own "personnel" files. However, the fact that HR does not know what is in those files is a recipe for disaster. For example, supervisors may be asking about employees' disabilities in connection with leave requests, or making unlawful inquiries regarding employees' protected concerted activities. It's important that a copy of all personnel-related documentation be included in HR's centralized personnel files.

Doctor's note is vague: What can we ask?

Q. If an employee has a note stating he's under his doctor's care and cannot return to work for the foreseeable future, can the employer ask specific reasons why?

A. That depends on the type of leave the employee is requesting. Under the FMLA, employers can certainly require that the employee provide a certification showing the need for FMLA leave (see the certification forms at www.theHRSpecialist.com/FMLAnew). Be sure to follow the rules carefully, including providing the employee with his or her FMLA rights.

If the employee has already used up FMLA leave and any other time off he may be eligible for under state laws (or your own leave plan), but is requesting additional leave under the ADA as a reasonable accommodation, you should begin the interactive accommodations process. That includes exploring whether the employee's doctor believes the leave is indefinite or for a period of time. Generally, indefinite leave is not a reasonable accommodation.



Do you have a question? If so, you can email it to The HR Specialist at HRSEditor@BusinessManagementDaily.com.

Health costs flat despite (or because of) pandemic

Among the financial troubles of the pandemic, large employers encountered a paradox when it came to health costs: Their average health care costs rose just 1.9% in 2020, the lowest increase since 1997.

Reason: Employees avoided going to the doctor's office and other health care facilities for fear of getting the coronavirus, according to Mercer's National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans 2020.



Large employers typically self-fund their plans, which means they may see costs fall as utilization falls, unlike fully insured employers that pay a fixed premium. Survey results suggest that many large employers plan to use money saved in 2020 to invest in programs to support employees in 2021, focusing on their mental health.

"The need to minimize exposure to the virus and ease the strain on overloaded health facilities caused many people to forgo care this past year, which translated to slower cost growth in 2020," said Tracy Watts, a senior consultant at Mercer.

But lower utilization isn't necessarily good news. A Mercer claims analysis found that 25% fewer employees are receiving behavioral health treatment compared to 2019. Watts said that's a serious concern, since the pandemic has intensified issues with work-life balance, isolation, sleep disorders, alcohol consumption and financial stress. It has also worsened the opioid crisis.

Seventy-five percent of employers surveyed said supporting employees' emotional and behavioral health was their most important health priority for 2021.

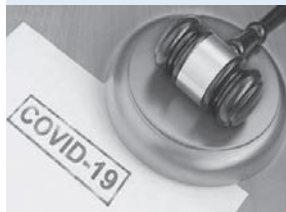
Off-duty COVID behavior: What you can & cannot require from employees

To prevent employees from bringing COVID into the workplace, how far can you go? Here are some do's and don'ts:

Demand employees follow virus-avoidance rules. You can strongly encourage employees to follow CDC or state guidelines during nonworking hours—and discipline them for failing to do so. *Example:* A nurse was fired after she posted a TikTok video bragging about traveling and not wearing a mask.

Restrict travel. Some employers have policies that prohibit personal travel out of the area during the pandemic. By avoiding travel, employees are less likely to become infected and spread that infection.

If you establish a travel ban, apply the rules uniformly. Be able to articulate a clear justification for your policy.



Check the law in states where you operate. California, for example, generally

prohibits restrictions on otherwise legal activities (such as travel) when employees are not at work. An outright ban might violate such laws.

However, nothing prevents you from telling employees who do travel that they cannot return to work until they have self-isolated for the amount of time recommended by the CDC.

Limit gatherings. To reduce spread, the CDC and most states recommend against large gatherings. Share that guidance but be wary of outright bans on off-duty gatherings. Firing employees who ignore the prohibition could trigger a lawsuit.

Implement a testing program. Employers with access to new rapid COVID testing may consider requiring the tests this spring. While medical tests typically violate the ADA, the EEOC takes the position that testing during a pandemic does not.

Using emojis in the workplace: A terrible idea or ?

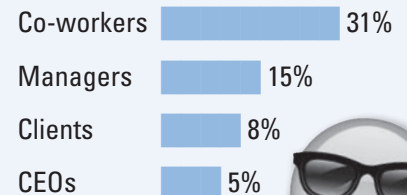
After a marketing manager pitched her big idea in a meeting, a co-worker simply replied electronically with a goat emoji. At first, she thought it was a donkey and was insulted. But she later learned that a goat emoji stands for "**G**reatest of **a**ll **T**ime."

There's a clear generational divide over whether it's appropriate to use emojis in work communication.

Over half of professionals between the ages of 18–29 say they use emojis to lighten conversations and connect with people at work, says a new survey by Clutch Content. Most workers use emojis when interacting with nonmanager co-workers.

But many people (22%) think their colleagues who use emojis regularly are "annoying" or "less competent."

Who do you send emojis to?



Experts say the use of emojis has increased during the pandemic as workers without in-person contact use them to express emotions.

Three tips for smart emoji usage:

1. Know your audience. Avoid emojis in messages about serious topics or to co-workers with whom you have limited interactions.

2. Match your recipient's style. Just like with in-person communication, mirror the conversation style with your recipient (formal, silly, etc.)

3. Stick with basic emojis. There are more than 3,000 different emojis. Stick with the basic, most-understood ones to avoid misinterpretation or potential inappropriateness.

To: _____
 From: _____

Date: February 2021
 Re: Interview questions

Hiring

Say goodbye to 'interview robots': 5 questions to help keep it real

As a manager, how often do you finish interviewing a candidate and feel that you never really got a peek inside the *real* person? Just lots of expected answers to the questions that the applicant, well, expected.

That's why it's wise to mix in some curveball questions along with the typical interview fodder. Here are some outside-the-box, yet highly telling, questions to ask candidates to get a better sense of what makes them tick—and if they might fit as part of your team:

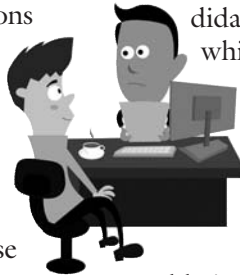
1. "If money and education had nothing to do with getting your dream job, what would it be?"

From this answer you can glean the person's long-term goals, and how vested they are in the particular job at hand. For example, a person whose response is way off from the role for which they're interviewing may not be someone interested in staying for the long term.

2. "What kinds of people can you not stand to work alongside?"

Though this question is posed as a negative, it's an opportunity for the candidate to tell

you the type of person they are in a team environment—and how they'll deal with challenging colleagues.



In a perfect world, the candidate will acknowledge that while people may have infuriating characteristics, the ability to work past those to reach the real goal at hand is key. A person who uses blaming language, for example, probably isn't the type of employee who loves to work as part of a team.

3. "Tell me the best, and worst, part of your favorite boss."

This isn't meant to gauge whether a person had a good or bad relationship with a previous employer so much as it is to understand the management style that suits the person best.

4. "How would you solve this problem?"

It's common to ask a candidate how he's dealt with a challenge in his *current* role. To gain more insight about how the candidate may fit, describe a real problem your department has faced and ask the candidate how they'd approach it.

Then ask how the candidate arrived at that solution and what other alternatives he considered. You'll learn more about the person's understanding of your industry and their ability to think (quickly and critically) to resolve problems.

5. "What do you think about when you are alone in your car or commute?"

This unusual question is reportedly asked by a Fortune 500 company. Not only can you gauge a person's priorities in life, this question can fuel a deeper understanding of their personality and what motivates them in their work.

Most common interview mistakes made by bosses

Talking too much. Don't deliver monologues about the job, the company or your background. Aim for an 85/15 split, with 85% of your time spent listening. Don't rush to break a silence; give applicants time to respond.

Failing to prepare. Don't quickly scan a résumé just before conducting an interview. Review it beforehand and think about what you want in a new employee.

Asking off-the-cuff questions. A loose approach isn't good. At best, it can be uninformative and, at worst, legally dangerous. Prepare a list of questions and stick to them. You can dig deeper into experience, but start with your list.

Not knowing your legal limits.

Interviews are a legal minefield. Understand what you can and can't ask legally. Every question should revolve around one issue: "*How well could this person perform the job at hand?*" Avoid questions like:

- Are you married?
- How old are you?
- Do you have children or intend to?
- What are your day care plans?
- Do you suffer from an illness or disability?

Becoming blinded by personal preferences.

Are you both baseball fans? Do you have kids in the same grade? Avoid letting a common interest bias your feelings. Just because you both run marathons doesn't mean the person can keep up the pace at work.

Being impolite. Don't start interviews late or end them abruptly without an explanation. Don't cancel at the last second if possible. Don't read emails and take calls during interviews. Candidates who value politeness may wonder whether they will receive it on the job.

More insightful questions ...

- How can we best reward you for doing a job well done?
- What have your mistakes taught you?
- What kind of supervisor brings out your peak performance?
- What is the most useful criticism you ever received? Given?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adapt quickly to change.
- How do you stay current on industry trends and standards?
- What do you think are key qualities for this position?



When you discover you employ a U.S. Capitol rioter

Imagine that you learn one of your employees was part of the hoard of rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol on January 6 in an act of open rebellion against the United States.

Can these people be fired from their jobs? Answer: Absolutely!

“But Jon,” you ask, “doesn’t the National Labor Relations Act protect individuals’ political advocacy while they’re on their own time in nonwork areas?”

The answer: It depends.

Under the NLRA, the protection of employees’ political advocacy depends on when that advocacy occurs and how it is expressed.

- Nondisruptive political advocacy for or against a specific issue related to a specifically identified employment concern, which takes place during the employees’ own time and in nonwork areas = *protected*.
- On-duty political advocacy for or against a specific issue related to a specifically identified employment concern = *subject to lawful and neutrally applied work rules*.

- Leaving or stopping work to engage in political advocacy for or against a specific issue related to a specifically identified employment concern = *subject to restrictions imposed by lawful and neutrally applied work rules*.

NLRA the political advocacy *must be nondisruptive*.

And there was absolutely nothing “nondisruptive” about what happened at the Capitol that day. The violent and disruptive nature of the rebellion removes all hope anyone could hold for any employment protections.

Everyone involved absolutely has the constitutional right to hold whatever opinion they want to hold. And they even have the constitutional right to peacefully express those opinions.

Those rights, however, stop at an employer’s door. And I, as a private employer, have the right to hold my employees accountable for their viewpoints and terminate when I, in good faith, determine that those viewpoints cross the line into violence or threats of violence and constitute criminal behavior.

Jon Hyman is a partner at Meyers Roman in Cleveland and a thought leader on employment law topics. You can read his popular blog at www.coronavirუსlaw.blog.



Photo: TapTheForwardAssist, CC BY-SA 4.0 via Wikimedia Commons.

To have any chance at protection under the National Labor Relations Act, an employee’s political advocacy must be nondisruptive.

Thus, employees who were merely present at the speeches on January 6 might enjoy some employment protections depending on an employer’s policy, as would employees expressing political opinions in other venues, such as pro-life/pro-choice rallies or Black Lives Matter protests.

But as to employees who breached the Capitol on January 6 or cheered the sedition from outside the Capitol? To have any chance at protection under the

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Biden's Labor Department choice aims to 'put power back' in unions

Look for the U.S. Labor Department to lean heavily in favor of workers and unions, says Boston Mayor Marty Walsh, President Biden's nominee to head the DOL. Walsh, a labor official before entering politics, says that under Biden, "we have the opportunity to put power back" in the hands of working Americans and unions. Walsh is expected to initially push for tighter workplace COVID safety rules, paid leave and a \$15 minimum wage.



Marty Walsh

Biden pushes tougher COVID workplace safety rules

One of President Biden's first executive orders directs OSHA to add more enforcement teeth to its COVID safety rules for businesses. Expect OSHA to publish revised employer safety guidance in early February. By March 15, look for the agency to issue emergency temporary standards, which may include mandatory mask wearing. A separate executive order issued by Biden on Jan. 21 requires face masks be worn by all federal employees and federal contractors. It also requires masks by Americans using airplanes, buses and trains.

Vision benefits: Blue light glasses are red hot

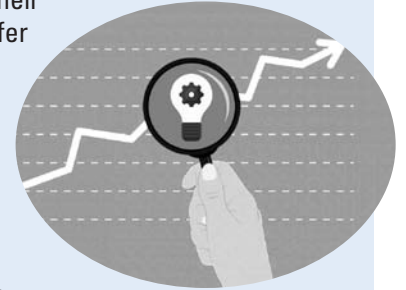
Between back-to-back Zoom meetings and using digital entertainment to unwind, many of your employees are spending more than 75% of their day in front of screens. As a result, more workers are turning to blue-light blocking glasses to get relief and filter out harmful blue light from screens. Zenni says sales of its blue-light glasses jumped 250% from 2019 to 2020. *Option:* Offer free glasses to staff as part of your vision benefits.

4 issues HR leaders must confront in 2021

As HR continues to address organizational changes caused by the pandemic, the Gartner business advisory firm has identified these future-of-work decisions that HR must tackle this year.

1. Redefining remote work & office space.

Organizations will need to revisit the remote/hybrid work policies they implemented during the crisis. Also, they must decide what their corporate offices can offer employees that remote spaces cannot. The emotional upside of working directly with colleagues will have to be balanced against management's likely desire to cut office costs.



2. New tech for on-site employees. Emerging technologies will play a key role in reducing the necessity for employees to perform tasks on-site. *Examples:* Virtual and augmented reality software connected to robotic processes.

3. New employment models. HR must evaluate the long-term viability of pandemic-driven experiments such as flexible part-time work, job sharing and increased reliance on gig workers.

4. Diversity, equity and inclusion. Many organizations made new or heightened commitments to create more diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces in 2020. Employees will expect those initiatives to continue. HR leaders need to evaluate their organization's talent strategy to ensure it will meet their commitments to DEI.

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Remote workers rent private homes to hold meetings

Here's a timely new trend: Growing tired of gathering on Zoom, groups of remote employees have begun renting out meeting spaces in private homes. Using online matchmaking companies like Codi (www.codi.com), some companies are using these meeting and co-working locations as an employee perk, and they say it helps improve employee engagement and retention.

Is there anything more dangerous than crossing the IRS?

Payroll Compliance Handbook

Once upon a time, payroll used to be easy: the employee's gross pay minus federal, state and local taxes. Then along came health premium and 401(k) deductions. Still simple, but...

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- **A woman has less experience and education than a man in a similar role. Can you pay her less?** Plus, how to establish an equal pay merit system that works
- **Fringe benefits: taxable or non-taxable?** How to reward fringe benefits to employees without crossing swords with the IRS
- **W-2s, W-3s, 1099s and more: What errors will land you in the IRS hot seat?** We'll tell you how to avoid them
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