5 HR Blog Posts

This is a collection of five different human resource blog posts ghostwritten for five different companies in the HR industry.

The Three Biggest Mistakes Companies Make When Starting a Wellness Program (500 words)

The Special Challenges of Intermittent FMLA and State Family Leave Laws (500 words)

The Advantages of Your HR Department Going Green (600 Words)

Strategies for Handling Employee HR Issues as Kids Go Back to School (500 Words)

Top 5 Red Flags HR Managers Should Act On Right Away (600 Words)

The Three Biggest Mistakes Companies Make When Starting a Wellness Program

Wellness programs are one of the fastest growing trends in companies of all sizes. A strong wellness program can help an organization lower absenteeism, increase productivity, and create a happier work environment. However, starting, or restarting, a company wellness program is not without risks. Here are three biggest mistakes companies make when trying to get a wellness program off the ground.

1. Starting Too Big

One of the biggest mistakes companies make is starting too big. You don't need a full gym and team of personal trainers to have an effective wellness program. Starting with too ambitious of a wellness plan has several drawbacks:

- They can become too expensive to justify their existence
- It can be tough to build employee momentum because the plan is overwhelming
- There is not enough time to properly staff up a wellness program and so it slowly declines over time

A company wellness program is like any other organization initiative. It requires planning and testing. Before you roll out a big complex program, it is better to start with something easier to manage. Small wellness programs are easier, and cheaper, to troubleshoot. Expectations are lower and employee momentum is easier to build. Another advantage to starting small is that you can create a wellness plan that is more narrowly tailored to your employees'' wants and needs.

2. Starting Too Small

Not only is starting too big a common mistake, but so is starting too small. A wellness plan has to have enough components to attract some of your employees to participate. Offering an occasional health lecture or having a catered salad bar is not a wellness plan. You need to have measurable objectives that you hope to accomplish through a wellness plan.

Wellness plans will not work if employees are not actively engaged with them. You need to create a plan that is big enough to get employees excited about the benefits, even if initially the benefits are modest. If your wellness plan is so small that nobody even knows the company has a wellness plan, the company will not see any of the benefits of healthier and happier employees.

3. Not Understanding HIPAA and GINA

One of the most common tools in a corporate wellness program is a Health Risk Appraisal (HRA). This assessment can help you understand what the health needs and risks of your employees are. However, the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and

the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (GINA) prohibit employers under a certain size from receiving the results of a HRA.

Any organization failing to follow these guidelines can receive stiff fines, and potentially even lawsuits. Additionally, HIPAA and GINA may cover some of the records you create for employees as part of a wellness program.

If you do not have the proper HIPAA and GINA compliance measures in place before you start a wellness program, you could be putting sensitive employee information at risk. You could also easily turn a well-meaning initiative into a big corporate liability.

Before starting a wellness plan at your organization make sure understand the HIPAA and GINA rules that apply to you and you have the resources to comply from day one of the program.

The Special Challenges of Intermittent FMLA and State Family Leave Laws

Even though the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) has been around for almost 25 years, it is still often the source of major challenges to HR professionals. While the basics of the law are straightforward, most of the challenges come from trying to operate a business efficiently and properly administer FMLA leave when the requests are intermittent.

Why Intermittent FMLA is Tough

Intermittent FMLA occurs when an employee takes a day or two off suddenly one week and then a few more days some weeks down the line. Taking leave in this way is extremely disruptive because there is no way to plan for it. instead work assignments must be changed at the last minute or simply left until the employee comes back.

It can also be more difficult to track and administer. If an employee is terminated for their disruptive leave behavior, it can trigger FMLA litigation. One small mistake in the way days or notice requirements are tracked can end up costing a company significant amounts of money in legal fees, fines, and damages.

Employees taking intermittent FMLA leave can also generate resentment in other employees. Because of the confidential nature of FMLA, it can out HR professionals in an awkward situation. They have to try and appease angry co-workers without being able to explain what the underlying issue is.

When dealing with intermittent FMLA situations, HR professionals need to be well-organized, consistent, and keep open lines of communication.

Challenge Posed by State and Local Laws

Employers that work across different cities and states face an additional challenge. They must deal with a patchwork of different, and often conflicting, laws, rules, and regulations.

Many states have their own versions of FMLA that extend the benefits to more employees. But, no two states have the exact same version. Some cities and counties have also decided to regulate leave policies. These requirements all use different standards for what constitutes proper leave, the size of covered employers, when an employee qualifies for leave, how leave an employee is allowed, and notice requirements.

A company with more than one location will need to spend more time auditing internal policies to ensure compliance with the different state and local leave laws. When dealing with a leave request, HR must run through several different steps to see if the employee qualifies or not for leave under all of the different applicable laws.

These disparate policies also mean that employees in one location may have access to significantly different amounts of leave than employees in another location. This can affect everything from morale to productivity.

As the federal government seems poised to enter a period of regulation retrenchment, it seems likely that states and cities will be more inclined to stop into the void create new rules and regulations. This will only further complicate the job of HR professionals.

Intermittent FMLA leave and complying with state and local leave laws may be the biggest current challenges for most HR professionals. But, these challenges can be successfully met by taking time to carefully document leave, monitoring changes in the regulations, and regularly auditing compliance practices.

The Advantages of Your HR Department Going Green

HR departments are infamous for churning through a lot of paper. All that paper ends up harming the environment. But, many HR departments resist going paperless. The environmental case alone is often not enough to get HR departments to go green. But, with the advances to HR automation over the past several years, there is now also a compelling business case for going green.

Improves Transparency and Accountability

HR automation improves department transparency and accountability. There are no more notes written on a legal pad, hidden in a desk drawer that document key HR events and interventions. Instead, all the documentation happens in a computer file. It is easy to find any relevant notes and documents. Automation makes it easier to be consistent.

Employees have more confidence that their complaints, documents related to investigations, and other key data will not get lost in a massive and confusing filing system. The more employees trust HR to be fair and transparent, the easier it is for the HRP department to be effective.

Makes Compliance and Litigation Preparation More Efficient

Whenever people are involved, mistakes will be made. Automation cuts down on human error and even compensates for mistakes. In a pure paper system if something is misfiled, it may never be found. When you go green, and misfile a digital document, the computer's powerful search system can track down the missing document in seconds.

HR automation makes it easier to comply with the myriad different state and federal document retention regulations that cover everything from I-9s to health insurance forms. Paper documents get digitized and everything else happens automatically.

When the company is involved in litigation, a paperless HR department is a huge advantage. There is no need to review boxes of documents. Instead a few searches have to be run. Digital documents are easier to sort, more convenient to store, and makes preparing for litigation faster and more thorough.

Save Money

One of the easiest ways to make the business case for an HR department going green is just looking at the cost savings. Businesses save money on obvious things like paper and toner. But, the savings go even deeper.

HR departments with a properly deployed automation system are much more efficient. It takes fewer employee hours to process new hire paperwork. HR employees spend less time looking for files.

Documentation is more efficient and consistent. It is easier to defend against charges of favoritism and inconsistency. Automated HR reduces litigation risks because decisions and interactions are easier to monitor,

Automation can reduce the time to conduct an HR audit by 50% or more. Because audits are cheaper to conduct, they are more likely to be done. Internal audits greatly reduce the risk being fined by regulatory agencies or being faced with litigation over disparate treatment.

Saving the World

The business case alone for going green is compelling. But, there is also another key reason to use HR automation. HR automation greatly reduces the amount of paper and toner used in the office. The entire lifecycle of paper is destructive to the environment. Not only does the creation of paper require the harvesting of oxygen producing trees, but the dying and bleaching process of paper uses toxic chemicals that can poison the soil and nearby groundwater.

While paper is recyclable, less than half of the paper in an office is likely to end up being recycled. A lot of paper will still end up in a landfill, creating additional environmental issues. The ink and toner used by printers and copiers is also not environmentally friendly

When an HR department goes green it produces a tangible benefit to the environment and the benefit is compounded year after year. HR automation is one of those few situations in business where there are no downsides. Going green not only saves money and time, it also helps save the world we live in.

Strategies for Handling Employee HR Issues as Kids Go Back to School

Every fall as children head back to school across the country, HR manager gear up for the annual increase in school-related HR issues. The issues range from parents wanting time off to attend school events to employees having to stay home or leave early because of a child's illness. Here are some strategies to help you handle some of this back to school HR issues.

Review Company Attendance Policies

You probably have the company's attendance policies committed to memory. But, most of your employees don't. Autumn is a great time to remind everyone what the company's attendance policy is. If you want to make sure the biggest number of people actually read your message, you should create both a physical reminder in the form of a poster or flyer and a digital reminder in the form of an email.

Many attendance issues are the result of employees not knowing or not understanding the company policy. A little reminder may head off some issues.

In addition to making company wide reminders, now is also a good time to reach out to any employees who have had attendance issues in the past with kids going back to school, or to anyone who has chronic absenteeism issues.

When speaking to employees with history of problematic absenteeism, try and make the tone of the conversation positive. Let them know you want to help them avoid any disciplinary issues because of work attendance problems and you are reaching out to them to make sure they understand the current policy and know where they personally stand with their attendance.

Remind Employees About FMLA and any State Benefits and Requirements

FMLA, and state laws modeled on it, may cover your employees' absences if they relate to taking care of medical issues for their children. However, as you know, FMLA is not a blanket excuse for missing work.

You may need to remind employees that if they want to take FMLA leave, they first need to meet certain requirements. Many employees are also under the mistaken belief that FMLA offer unlimited days off. Correcting common misconceptions and reminding employees about their responsibilities under FMLA and similar state laws can help reduce absenteeism.

Encourage Being Proactive

When it comes to children, sometimes emergencies happen. But, many child-related absenteeism issues could be avoided with proper planning. Encourage employees to be proactive when it comes to filling out time off requests. Many schools publish a monthly, or

even yearly, calendar of events. Employees should be encouraged to plan ahead for important events like concerts, graduations, and field trips.

The more proactive employees are with managing their schedules, the better it is for the employee and the company.

If childcare issues are a major problem for many employees, the company may want to consider changing or implementing a childcare support system at work. When parents have access to safe and convenient childcare, they are less likely to miss work

One way you can be proactive in dealing with back to school attendance issues is to document what challenges you are facing with your employees. You can use this to brainstorm other ways to address the issues throughout the year so that you are even better prepared when back to school time comes around next year.

Top 5 Red Flags HR Managers Should Act On Right Away

HR managers are responsible both for keeping the company employees happy and productive, and with making sure the company is in compliance with state and federal employment laws. While there is no shortage of things for an HR manager to worry about, there are five red flags that any organization must address right away to keep everything running smoothly and to avoid any expensive legal issues.

Red Flag 1: No One is Responsible for Tracking Changes to Laws Such as FLSA and the ACA

Laws and regulations are constantly being updated and changed. However, in the current environment, there is likely to be more change than ever. If your organization does have someone who is tasked with staying on top of these legal changes, especially to laws such as FLSA and ACA, you could be risking costing the company a lot of money or opening the company up to significant legal exposure. Simply waiting to see an update on LinkedIn or from your favorite email newsletter is not enough. You need either an employee or outside contractor proactively following what is happening with current and proposed changes that affect the organization.

Red Flag 2: Employee Training is Out of Date

Employees may complain about corporate trainings, but studies show they make a difference. Managers and staff are more productive and less likely to create liability problems when they have been properly trained. Having regular training sessions is also a good defense to charges of ignoring problems or of fostering hostile work environments.

Red Flag 3: Lack of Recent Internal Audit of Employee Documents

When employees or contractors are hired, certain documents must be filled out. Employees need to complete an I-9 and W-3. Contractors should submit the information needed to produce a 1099 at the end of the year. All of these documents are subject to different state and federal requirements. It you have not recently audited these documents for accuracy and to make sure all document retention laws are being followed, you could be sitting on a liability landmine. Regular internal audits help you find problems early on and gives you time to correct them before the government conducts an audit.

Red Flag 4: Policy and Procedure Manuals Do Not Exist or Are Out of Date

Rules that aren't written down don't count. You need to make sure employees have access to an updated policies and procedures manual if you want to hold them accountable for violation of policies and procedures. Having an up to date manual also helps avoid mistakes in the handling of sensitive information. Manuals are especially important in times of crisis. Having an up to date set of rules and steps can keep the organization running smoothly, no matter what crisis or issue it is facing. When updating the policy and procedures manual make sure there is a

section dealing with cyber security threats and protecting sensitive company and employee information.

Red Flag 5: Lack of Consistent Documentation

The first rule all HR managers learn is to document everything. However, often documentation slowly goes by the wayside as managers spend time putting out a variety of different fires. Documentation is critical to defending your actions should they ever be called into question. You cannot always rely on your memory when it comes to the details of why and how you handled a given situation.

If there is ever an EEOC claim or some type of litigation, you will be glad you have your documentation to turn over and to rely on. Your documentation system does not have to be fancy. It could be as simple as having a Word document that you update or emails that you send to yourself. What is most important is that you are consistent in documenting everything.