

This Labor Day, Let's Look Forward

The long history of Labor Day dates back to the late 1800s and while its specific origin is still something of a debate, one thing is for certain: it was firmly rooted in the union movement.

The first proposal of the holiday, for example, called for a street parade to exhibit to the public “the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations” of the community, followed by a festival for workers and their families.

A lot has changed since those days. Today, as the workforce continues to evolve at a rapid rate, it takes more than just a picnic or parade once a year to recruit or retain quality employees and leaders.

This Labor Day, we encourage you to take a moment to look to the future, consider how the workforce is changing, and how to best show your appreciation not just on Labor Day, but year-round.

Here are a few significant areas to focus on...

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS

More than one-in-three American workers (35%) are millennials, making this the largest generation in the U.S. labor force, according to U.S. Census Bureau data. Generation Xers account for a third of the labor force and Baby Boomers represent a quarter of the total, but their presence is fading.

Millennials view work very differently from past generations – including the one managing them. They have stated they want benefits, but different benefits, like flexibility and student loan repayments. They are starting to think about families to a larger extent and prioritize things like paternity leave. They continue to value social giving, and appreciate benefits like volunteer time off and charitable gift matching.

We took a deep dive into how to best engage millennials in a [recent Intelligence Briefing](#) and this guidance still holds true. As millennials move into more positions of leadership, they will have an even more significant impact on the workforce and organizations should be ready to work with them.

CULTURAL CHANGE

As the workforce becomes increasingly diverse, span-of-control becomes more challenging and change disrupts much of what people are familiar with, it is harder to get everyone on the same page. But one thing that is shared by employees across the board is the need to be heard. Now is an important time to evaluate and define—or redefine, if necessary—your workplace culture to ensure that it meets and reinforces your goals while offering employees a voice.

Recognizing your strengths to reinforce—and your vulnerabilities to address—will create a more positive and engaging workplace culture for your staff, teams and

RECOGNIZE AND APPRECIATE INDIVIDUAL AND GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

Having multiple generations in one workplace can strengthen organizations, offering employers a wide spectrum of views and skill sets. But it can also offer a wide range of challenges. As managers, it is important to know how to navigate the various personalities and perspectives, and avoid stereotypes. When making assignments, don't make assumptions, and be sure to provide clear information on roles, responsibilities and deadlines. Patience and an open mind goes a long way. Mentor programs and leadership education on generational differences can also help bridge the gap.

employees at every level. This culture of engagement and employee voice will put you ahead of future labor organizing efforts, should they occur.

TECHNOLOGY

Technology continues to grow as an integral part of the workplace, and has contributed to improving employee production and efficiency while helping us to stay better connected with colleagues around the globe. But we don't always do a very good job of keeping up on the benefits in balance with the risks, according to some analysts.

Digital wellness plans to assist employees in embracing new technologies can be one way to address this. As part of this effort, some employers are also implementing onsite programs to ensure that employees are taking a bit of time out of their day to disconnect.

Looking ahead, the impact of technology on the future of work is highly uncertain. Some analysts project that technology, especially automation, could cut even further into available jobs in the near future. Others argue that the same technology, when leveraged appropriately, could open up significant new job opportunities. One thing we do know: the technology is here and we have to be prepared to use it as an asset rather than look at it as the enemy, and help our workforce see it the same way. Our competitors know this, too.

THE "GIG" ECONOMY

Last but certainly not least, improved technology has, to some degree, contributed to an increasingly remote workforce that includes independent contractors, consultants and freelancers. You might have heard it referred to as the "gig economy." As a recent New York Times article pointed out, over the last decade, 94 percent of jobs have appeared outside of

QUESTIONS TO ASK



What resources do you have in place for employees to provide direct input?

What processes do you have for employees to receive feedback/information from leadership that is meaningful for them in their jobs?

Are there ways you can improve employee communication and engagement?

"traditional employment." It is currently a bit like the Old West—with protections and regulations just now being considered and debated. We can anticipate that this component of the American workforce will only become bigger in the years to come and will most likely transform the way we all do business. How are you looking at this from a business strategy perspective and workforce development issue?

So, remember...

Labor Day will always be a union holiday, but it also offers an important opportunity to look at your own workforce/team and find or create ways to effectively engage and reward them for a job well done as well as prepare them for the changing future of the workplace. If you are diligent and willing to listen, employees will be much less likely to seek having a union at all.