

HOT SHEET

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Full-Circle HR

HR Trends:

- While the Biden/Harris campaign promised to legalize and decriminalize marijuana, it likely won't happen in 2021; meanwhile, at the state level, 35 states have approved medical use and 15 of those and Washington DC have approved recreational use.
- Under COVID-19 relief measures, employers may allow unused Flexible Spending Account amounts from 2021 into 2022 and 2021 contributions may be changed without requiring an election change event.
- A recent survey by SHRM showed that: 55% of employers are uncertain about mandating vaccinations; 81% of employers will strongly encourage vaccinations; and 76% of workers are willing to get the vaccination if their employer requires it.
- The pandemic has created a need for video interviews such that 67% of recruiters report interviewing via video; 53% of recruiters do half or more of their interviews via video; and 40% believe video interviews will become a default.
- According to Spring Health, 76% of employees report experiencing burnout and 57% report COVID-19 as a contributing factor.

Emotional Trauma of These Times

When I think back to a time when I was feeling more concerned with the political and social environment than I had ever been, I recall seeing a bumper sticker that said, "Let kindness win." It landed pointedly in my heart. I thought, boy do I/we need that right now. Little did I know how badly we would come to need kindness, in this country and all over the world.

This comes to mind as I read and think about the level of emotional turmoil, stress, social unrest and injustice, grief and, for some, PTSD we are experiencing in these 'unprecedented' times. No matter which side of a situation, issue, belief we are on, many of us are feeling deeply at risk and aggrieved. And it's affecting our productivity, our sense of self and our overall sense

of well-being. According to a Times survey, "We have a workforce at its wits end.*" I am also seeing and hearing about mental health workers who are overwhelmed and whose appointment books are booked solid. And, while they and managers, are inclined to help, they too are suffering the losses, the uncertainty, and the work and home life stressors. Reading about COVID grief** and how it affects people differently than most forms of grief (the many reasons include sudden loss of healthy loved ones, loss of more than one loved one from a family, job loss, instability, etc.) gave me pause. Add to this, the inability to say goodbye in person and that counseling is only via the Internet. I thought about the suggestions offered and wondered if they could be helpful to all



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the stressors we are currently facing. Here are the suggestions: 1. Encourage people to acknowledge and talk about their stressors, particularly their losses. Do not try to become a grief or mental health counselor, just a good and real listener who is not afraid to model showing their own emotions. 2. Suppress judgment. If you ask questions, avoid asking 'Why' questions. Just hold the person with as much kindness and care as you can; in the spirit of psychologist, Carl Rogers, contact your own human fallibility and need for compassion first; then see if you can offer that to the other. Maybe they could have done or could do things differently, but your judgment about that will not help them now. 3. Keep quiet about your

own story; sharing may seem like an acknowledgment; it actually minimizes their story and may interrupt their flow of allowing the emotion. 4. Help workers find ways to let the person know they are thinking of them; a note or photo that relates to the person's interests (e.g. maybe they love cats etc.). 5. Find out what immediate support they may need and see if you can help them find resources. 6. Be flexible to the extent that you reasonably can. The bottom line is, "Let kindness win," not only with others, but also with yourself. It does not mean you do not speak your truth, it just means you pick your time, your words, and your actions more thoughtfully and gently, and do not beat yourself up if you miss the mark.

I'm Vaccinated. Can I Stop Wearing My Mask?

Vaccinations have been welcome news for many of us who are willing, eligible, and ready to get them. The CDC's announcement that fully vaccinated people can have unmasked interactions with each other in small groups (as long as no one is highly vulnerable to the disease) two weeks after the last vaccine, has caused some employees to ask if they can stop wearing their masks at work if everyone is vaccinated. I am sure you, as an employer, are also ready to get back to a less 'encumbered' work environment. Unfortunately, we are not there yet. The truth is that, while the state may change their require-

ments, you as an employer still have a right and an obligation to ensure a safe workplace.

When communicating with employees you might tell them that while they may be vaccinated, some are not or cannot be vaccinated, some are more vulnerable if they do get COVID-19, and there is also the question of vaccine effectiveness against variants. Additionally, according to CDC recommendations for unmasking only in small groups, work is rarely a small group. Masks are about protecting everyone and allowing them to feel safe in the workplace.

If you don't have a policy

place we strongly recommend that you implement one. Your policy should:

- Align with guidelines from government agencies such as OSHA, the CDC and federal, state and local health officials.
- The policy should emphasize that it is the responsibility of all employees to wear masks while inside the employer's premises and any other time as mandated by governmental rules.
- If the employee refuses to wear a mask, they will be directed to HR (or whoever is skilled in confidentially determining legitimate exceptions to the mask rule and how they might be accommodated).

We do not have to become heroes overnight. Just a step at a time.
—Eleanor Roosevelt

The following steps can be used for policy enforcement: 1. Determine why the employee is not following the policy. 2. Ensure that the employee is aware of and understands your policy. 3. Reinforce that if the employee does not have a medical or safety reason for not wearing a mask that they must follow the policy. 4. Emphasize that failure to follow the policy will result in corrective action. If it happens again, then the corrective action should be escalated unless the employee has a reasonable explanation.

*We Have all Hit a Wall by Sarah Lyall, New York Times, April 3, 2021

**COVID Grief is Different by Kathleen Doheny, January 26, 2021