

# HOT SHEET

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Full-Circle HR



## HR Trends:

- Rethinking benefits will become a necessity in the post-pandemic workplace. An open dialogue with, and/or survey of, employees are ways to learn what they need so you can adapt your offerings.
- The U.S. Senate recently blocked the Paycheck Protection Act which would have prevented employers from asking applicants for salary history. Conversely, 17 states & 17 local governments have already adopted legislation that bans this practice.
- The American Psychological Association reports\* that the incidence of sleep disorders has risen significantly during COVID. This may eventually impact mental health and work productivity. Research suggests that 2 in 3 Americans report sleeping more or less than desired.
- An often unmentioned reason for not getting the COVID vaccine is injection fear; mental health professionals may be able to help employees who possibly want the injection but may have this fear.
- While the CDC advises that employers may allow vaccinated employees to remove their masks, taking a position of implementing a no-mask mandate at work can create legal issues and is inadvisable.

## To Mask or Not to Mask?

Many employers are trying to figure this out as we get differing guidance from different authorities. Add to this, differing circumstances such as needing to wear a mask while dealing with the public, or when stepping away from your desk, but not when seated at your desk. At the National level, the CDC has given guidance that employers can choose to not require masks for fully immunized employees (I make that differentiation from fully vaccinated since under normal circumstances, you are not fully immunized until two weeks after the last vaccine—for most people, but in some rare situations full immunization does not even happen then). Could it be any more complicated? Of course it could. Washington state is following the guidance of

the CDC and Labor and Industries has stated that employers may do this as long as they get proof of immunization (as long as employers are not coercing employees into getting a vaccine). But, wait, there is at least one more level to consider. Some local governments have maintained a mask mandate. The Jefferson County Health Department, on 6/9/2021, restated that all individuals must wear approved face coverings over their noses and mouths when they will be at indoor public places, including all businesses and other publicly accessible indoor locations. Additionally, employers can choose to make this a requirement in their place of business if they so choose. Interestingly, while this approach can be frustrating for those who are tired of wearing masks, it

not only can be safer, but it can also help avoid divisiveness.

Divisiveness can arise not only between vaccinated and unvaccinated employees at work when they are held to different standards, but also if unvaccinated workers continue to work remotely while others must return to the workplace—even if the employee is unvaccinated for a medical reason and/or if remote work is most logical for the worker, conflict and resentment can arise. Vaccinated workers may also feel uncomfortable or anxious removing their masks around unvaccinated workers. All of this adds stressors that can take away from productivity and can lower morale.

Employers should emphasize the importance of respecting co-workers'

views on masking and avoid teasing or differential treatment based on mask-wearing. Additionally, establish a mask protocol that is administered consistently and is based on logical operation of your business that honors the safety and well-being of all staff, vendors, and customers. Communicate your policy and be transparent about the reasoning behind it. Enforce it evenly and also be willing to balance it with listening to and possibly accommodating employee needs. A policy that is too rigid will likely alienate employees and one that is too flexible may run the risk of not being followed.

*The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend.*  
—Abraham Lincoln

## Soft Skills More Sought After in the Job Market?

According to HR Magazine\*\*, soft skills appear to be pulling into the lead when it comes to what employers are seeking. Soft skills such as resilience, reliability, interpersonal communication, patience, innovation, collaboration, critical thinking and more may make an employee more adaptable in the changing job market. Technical skills, while important, may not be transferable as technology evolves if these soft skills are not present. And, as we know, technology is changing rapidly and lower level jobs are going away. Workers may need to know how to reinvent themselves and it is these

soft skills that are likely to help them to do that. Employers may feel that training the technical skills needed in the present is easier than trying to coach people into the softer skills. So does that take us back to the old adage of liberal art schools that teaching people how to think is more important than teaching them what to think? Or should it be that teaching people how to be more human is more important than teaching technical skills? As an employer, what can you do about this for your current staff. Assessing soft skills can be difficult, but if you are already doing performance reviews (as I hope you are) you can read

through these and look for indications of skills that may need to be honed. You can also do a 360 review of all staff with these skills in mind to find these skills gaps. Training/coaching these skills requires an interactive rather than a textbook or watch a webinar approach. Also, those who are strong in a particular skill could lead a lunch and learn or, depending upon your budget and the size of the need, you could offer instructor-led interactive sessions or virtual reality sessions where employees can learn and practice the skills. As we likely have seen from our remote work and so-

cial distancing experience, these skills need to be practiced so that they are not lost. Making it fun and also tying it to your company's metrics are ways to help retain the learning and encourage people to practice. Leaders must also be role models for these skills in order to foster them in your culture. It is also important to communicate to employees why these skills are important for them and for your organization.

If you are interviewing for these skills, one approach would be situational questions that invite applicants to tell stories and give examples of how they have handled a situation that might call for use of such a skill.

\*APA, Growing Concerns About Sleep, June 1, 2021

\*\*SHRM.ORG/HRMagazine The Hard Facts about Soft Skills Summer 2021