

HOT SHEET

Volume 11, Issue 1
January 24, 2024



Full-Circle HR

HR Trends:

- Many employers are pushing for employees to come back into the office. However, there is some merit in considering accommodating an employee with COVID in working from home if they feel well enough and it is logistically feasible. Two contributing factors are the upsurge of the JN1 variant and that COVID has become less likely to require hospitalization.
- For the first time since 2020, the estimated average pay increase in 2024 (3.8 to 4%) is expected to be higher than the inflation rate.
- According to WTW's Global Medical Trends Survey, the cost of U.S. medical care benefits is projected to go up 8.9% in 2024, compared to 8.2% in 2023.
- A new ruling by the U.S. Department of Labor could change how independent contractors are classified and could have a significant impact on gig workers and more. The new ruling removes extra weight given to 2 factors of the 6 factor test; it will weight them equally. For more information see [Independent Contractor](#).
- About 60% of employees report 'covering' up who/how they really are at work to avoid judgment and questions from co-workers.

Keeping Your Hourly Workers

Hourly workers make up the majority of the U.S. workforce (nearly 60% according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics) and yet are often left behind when considering employee satisfaction.* This is even more striking considering that remote work and flexibility opportunities cannot as readily, or at all, be extended to many hourly roles. There are many challenges in hiring hourly workers and, according to a recent survey by SHRM, nearly half of them are looking for other jobs!*** As of June of 2023, builtin.com, estimated the cost of replacing an hourly employee as \$1,500. This direct cost occurs each time an employee needs to be replaced. However, it does not include the loss of productivity, depletion of employee mo-

rale, damage to employer brand, or the domino effect as other employees follow the departed employee.

A SHRM survey identified the 5 top reasons that hourly employees would stay at their current jobs: 1. Pay (and pay transparency) 2. Work Schedule 3. Location 4. Benefits and 5. The Work Itself. 1. **Pay.** As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, the projected pay increase for 2024 is 3.8 - 4 %. This is the first time in years that it will keep pace or exceed the inflation rate. Hourly employees have been feeling the pinch of this more than most. Meanwhile, many companies concerned about a possible recession are tightening their budgets. Even with an eye toward this concern, it's important for managers to be trained and skilled at

identifying the top performers and helping their organizations invest in keeping those employees.

2. **Work Schedule.** While frontline hourly workers often cannot work remotely, thinking creatively about providing flexibility where possible so they can attend their child's events or care for a parent etc. goes a long way toward giving them a sense that you value them. Another phenomenon that has occurred is that as managers have been able to work remotely they have become disconnected from their staff and may not be current with what matters to their staff members. 3. **Location.** Working on-site means that commutes can be gruesome for staff. Are there creative ways to ease this

for employees? Commuting benefits, schedule flexibility, 4-day workweeks, etc. are some possibilities. 4. **Benefits.** Work to assure that your benefits are responsive to your employees' needs. In addition to time off, education benefits, healthcare, childcare, etc. Consider other perks like spiffing up the breakroom, offering snacks, and using company buying power to get discounts for staff. 5. **The Work Itself.** Help staff see how their job connects to a larger purpose. Grow their skills. Take an interest in who they are and what is important to them. Foster a culture of understanding and acceptance of differences.

Although no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending. — Carl Bard

Weight Bias in the Workplace

More than 1 in 3 people in the U.S. are considered overweight, and 2 in 5 of those are considered to be in the range of clinically obese.*** These are astounding figures to consider when addressing the level of workplace bias and failure to accommodate people in these categories. Additionally, the bias extends further toward women, particularly in the area of wage rates. Men often do not suffer the same wage impact and in some cases are actually paid a higher wage.^ Interestingly, as women slim down their salaries go up. Another factor against women is that they already command a lower wage than their

male counterparts. Further, as they age, their physiology changes and weight becomes even more challenging to manage. A former CEO at IBM recounted a story of her boss suggesting that she "get in good physical shape," not because he thought less of her talent and ability. He wanted her to be able to move up the ladder. He supported her in doing so—but knew odds were against her due to weight bias.

According to a SHRM survey, 72% of employees say they have experienced discrimination based on their weight and that it has led them to consider quitting their job. 11% of HR professionals admit that weight played a role in hiring deci-

sions.*** Part of the reason there is some sense of 'justification' for this bias is that people believe that it is within the control of the overweight person, unlike the color of someone's skin, etc. Furthermore, this prompts others to make assumptions about the person based on their appearance—they aren't eating healthfully or they eat too much, they don't exercise, they don't care about their appearance, they are lax in their work habits, they can't do things quickly, and so much more. Even folks who are in this group can make these assumptions about others! Currently, there are not many direct legal protec-

tions against weight bias. While the ADA offers protections for some diagnoses that may result due to the extra weight, it does not directly protect obesity as something that limits a major life function. However, there is a growing trend in that direction and in recognizing that there is more to this than just 'will power.' Therefore, it is important to engage in the interactive process if there is a real or perceived limitation and need for accommodation. Employers can also be proactive by assuring that furniture, uniforms, and spaces in general are able to accommodate people of all sizes and shapes. This too is part of the whole of DEI work.



* Higginbotham.com, *How to Attract, Motivate, and Retain Hourly Workers*, February 2, 2021.

**SHRM, *What Matters to Hourly Workers*, Lytle, Tamara, January 13, 2024.

***SHRM, *Confronting Weight Bias*, Gonzales, Matt, January 6, 2024.

^NPR, *The Weight Bias in the Workplace is Real and it is Only Getting Worse*, Gogoi, Pallavi, April 29, 2023.