

Merge Gupta-Sunderji predicts the top five employee-related trends this year

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You should already be focusing on a number of these areas, but pay even closer attention to them in the new year Leadership speaker and consultant



Here are my predictions for the top five employee-related trends in the upcoming year. My hope is that this list will give you insights as to where you should focus and emphasize your energy and effort as you go boldly into the future.

My forecasts come predominantly from two sources – from hundreds of conversations I have had with people in organizations this past year, all the way from senior executives to front-line workers, and from my continuing perusal of a wide variety of publications and academic journals. None of these five issues are new; in fact, they’ve been gradually gaining traction for the past several years. But in 2018, I anticipate that attention to these five areas will gain the greatest momentum.

THE INCREASING PROFILE OF MENTAL WELLNESS

At least four out of five employees have experienced the physical and psychological symptoms of poor mental health in the workplace, ranging from short-term stress to chronic serious conditions. Fortunately, the taboo and negative stigma attached to mental illness continue to fade. Nowadays, employees struggling with depression, anxiety, bipolar and ADHD are not only commonly diagnosed and treated, but are more likely to be accepted and supported by their workplace peers. If your organization doesn’t already have a system in place to offer mental wellness tools and resources to employees, then 2018 is the year you need to get on it.

THE AGING WORK FORCE

As the last of the baby boomers move into their fifties and beyond, they’re living longer, healthier lives, and that presents two challenges. Some are choosing to continue to work and retire later, but just as many are opting to leave earlier. Those who stay in their leadership roles often block positions, making it harder for younger workers to progress, resulting in higher turnover and frustration in the lower and mid-ranks. On the other hand, those who choose to take early retirement invariably take

decades of tacit knowledge with them. This loss of undocumented, intuitive experiential information about people, business processes and informal procedures can leave huge gaps in an organization's cumulative intelligence. Both these scenarios can cripple your company, so it's up to you to actively identify and work to mitigate these situations.

THE INFLUX OF GENERATION Z

Generation Z will start turning 23 in 2018, which means that increasing numbers of them will be working in more than just fast food and retail. Just like millennials changed the face of work, so will these young entrants to the work force. In many ways, members of Generation Z are similar to millennials, but most of their traits are further accentuated. Think even better multitaskers, even higher expectations, even more global, more entrepreneurial and more tech-savvy. If you're seeking to employ high-performers in this age group, then it behooves you to understand more about who they are, what motivates them and how they operate to get things done.

THE PROLIFERATION OF FLEXIBLE WORK

The trend toward remote work and flex-time continues. Employees are attracted to flexible work arrangements because they see it as freedom – to be productive, stay motivated and save time. So much so that if your organization doesn't offer it as an option, at least periodically, it will put you at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to recruiting, hiring and keeping top performers. If you're a leader who believes that time at the office proves a strong work ethic, then you may need to seriously question your point of view. Or else, watch while your best and brightest walk out the door ... right over to your competition.

THE ADVENT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence continues to transform the world around us, and the workplace is no exception. Robotics are already commonplace in manufacturing, but the significant change next year will be greater use of chatbots and voice-enabled virtual assistants. In the customer-service sector, chatbots already provide around-the-clock, personalized, automated conversations between company and consumer. In human-resource departments, chatbots are giving employees quick and easy answers to frequently asked questions. And voice-enabled virtual assistants are already replacing entry-level positions in many organizations. What are the opportunities in your company?