



Safety

Why Next-Generation Manufacturing Is All About Building Worker Trust

Roland Jones | Dec 02, 2021

What can business leaders do to keep their workers engaged and focused amid supply chain disruptions, the “Great Resignation” and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic?

Managing the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and establishing plans to bring workforces back to work safely has been one of the biggest challenges facing businesses in recent years.

Keeping workers safe while also keeping their operations going meant company leaders had to develop new ways to get work done while adhering to social distancing guidelines, splitting work shifts and implementing frequent cleaning and sanitizing schedules.

More than a year later, the world looks very different—yet in some ways still the same.

As businesses surge back to life navigating the ever-evolving COVID-19-related regulations and restrictions, managers are looking to lead their workforces through a set of new challenges, including a shortage of available workers, the need for flexible work arrangements, and a desire to boost competitiveness with innovation and efficient work practices.

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Institute for Corporate Productivity

Chief among these changes is a cultural shift in work dubbed the “Great Resignation,” which is predicted to have a lasting effect on the workplace. Americans ***quit their jobs at a record pace for the second straight month in September***. While some moved to higher-paid roles, others may have looked for a career break due to burnout brought on by the pandemic, or were searching for more purpose in their careers.

Do You Know Your Company Culture?

Once considered difficult to measure, company culture has become a critical element of business success.

Do you know your company's culture?

LRN suggests that leaders ask themselves the following questions to get a handle on it:

1. Do we truly understand what is driving and influencing the behavior we are seeing?
2. Do we know how our employees are experiencing our culture, and how that might vary across the organization?
3. Do we know how employee, leadership and organizational behavior are impacting our business performance?
4. Are we going through a period of significant change in strategy, leadership or organizationally?

There are many ways to collect data on your company culture, adds LRN, but the best is going straight to the source: your employees.

As manufacturers face these new challenges, there are ways they can enhance worker loyalty through good communication and empathetic leadership.

Read more: Shift Work and Health: Why You Need a Strategy to Keep Your Workers Safe

Retraining and Retaining Talent

The struggle to fill critical jobs remains a key problem for manufacturers, so managers should continue to find ways to improve their talent pipelines, develop strong workplace cultures and ensure training programs for the digital future of manufacturing. But for many manufacturers, the most pressing challenge is retraining and retaining the talent they already have.

A good first step toward solving this problem is to consider retention strategies, such as finding out why workers may be thinking of leaving your company. Do they feel valued? Are they compensated fairly? Have they been overworked?

To answer these questions you may want to consider speaking with teams that suffered significant cutbacks during the pandemic in case the remaining staff members are suffering from high burnout rates, which may be exacerbated by the departure of more staff.

If your workers are leaving, are your rivals profiting from your vulnerability by hiring away your best talent with higher wages, bonuses and other perks? And would overhauling your compensation program, healthcare benefits or work culture help retain workers?

Retraining your existing staff is another factor in employee retention. American manufacturing continues to evolve dramatically, with shops incorporating advanced manufacturing processes and technologies, such as robots, sensors and data management. Maintaining a competitive advantage in these new areas of manufacturing starts with training your people.

With millions of manufacturing jobs available in the United States ***expected to go unfilled***, companies are competing for scarce human talent, and so they must focus on training and developing the people they currently employ to ensure workers can stay up to date with the changes.

Professional services firm Deloitte ***offers the following suggestions*** for keeping your manufacturing workforce upskilled and trained on emerging equipment, technologies and digital skills:

- Change your talent management approach from a “supply chain” of static job descriptions and linear career paths.
- Take inventory of the skills and capabilities within your current workforce.
- Design roles that include ongoing invention and evolving skills, and then align training to this continuous learning model.
- Use advanced technologies in training environments to increase digital fluency and to upskill and reskill workers.

Read more: Risk Assessment: How to Do One and Why Technology Can Make You More Efficient

Cultivating Company Culture

Workforce well-being is an essential part of workplace culture.

According to ***a report*** by the Institute for Corporate Productivity, well-being initiatives are growing and will receive larger budgets and dedicated leadership teams in the coming years.

“Support for workforce mental health has become a core concern of well-being programs, and that emphasis on this aspect of employee wellness will continue to grow and evolve,” the report says.

It goes on to say that companies “recognize that they will need to establish formal policies that address remote work,” while monitoring the effects of the pandemic on employees returning to the workplace. This is particularly true in terms of compensation and leave considerations, which is a priority, along with the need to formalize business continuity plans for on-site staff.

Indeed, with the pandemic disrupting our working lives, completing day-to-day tasks while also managing work—and (for some) working from home—has been challenging.

For those working in predominantly blue-collar industries such as manufacturing, who may be managing child care or looking after elderly parents, flexible work schedules are important. It’s vital to know when a shift will start and end, and how much flexibility they have to manage their time.

Read more: The Benefits of Focusing on Ergonomics in the Manufacturing Industry

Look to the Next Generation

Manufacturers who want to attract and keep the next generation of employees would do well to heed the cultural evolution that is changing the expectations of the millennial (born between the years 1981 and 1996) and Gen Z (roughly from 1996 to 2010) generations.

The millennial generation, in particular, has been the subject of ample analysis and commentary, mostly revolving around the cohort’s ease with mobile technology and desire for meaning in work, and while these insights are interesting, they can be useful recruiting tools, informing companies that want to reach out to these groups.

Millennials tend to believe they can make the world a better place, and so they likely gravitate toward companies that show a strong social conscience, think about sustainability and the environment, and

prioritize the well-being of workers. Companies that reflect these values and work hard to produce an attractive work culture will likely make greater progress with the newer generations.

Indeed, a strong ethical culture can affect workplace performance, according to a **report** from ethics and compliance consultancy LRN.

The survey shows that companies with strong ethical cultures outperform others by 40 percent across a number of measures of business performance, including levels of customer satisfaction, employee loyalty, innovation, adaptability and growth.

Do you have any tips for building worker trust in the workplace? Share your thoughts in the comments below.

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