



# Trending Issues for Employees Today

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



Retaining talented staff requires managers to understand individual needs and workplace trends

To get a sense of what is being predicted in terms of workplace trends, I monitor and track the experts and trendwatchers. While the specific lists vary from author to author, there is a common theme that has emerged of late: “Know Thy Employees.”

To compete for talent now and in the future, employers need to carefully tune into what their current and prospective employees want, need, expect, or demand. Here are what some of the trendspotters see happening in today’s and tomorrow’s workplace.

## WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

While the Millennials may have led the charge, workers of all ages have jumped on the bandwagon. Employers have had to become more open-minded about how, where, and when work gets done. While the old work-life balance conversation might be tired, a fluidity between work and life is increasingly the norm. With Baby Boomers deciding to stay in the workplace longer and Gen Z entering the job market, employers will continue to face a diverse array of talent, all looking to find flexibility that meets their own unique needs.



**Mary Lynn Fayoumi, CAE, SPHR, GPHR, SHRM-SCP** is President & CEO of HR Source, an employers' association which provides human resources services to over 1,000 member organizations. Visit [hrsource.org](http://hrsource.org)

In non-commercial food service, an employee's desire for flexible scheduling poses more of a challenge than in many other types of work settings. Facilities today are under pressure to create client-centered dining programs, which give patients and residents more decision-making ability when it comes to what, when, and where they eat. Person-centered dining is a wonderful initiative in an environment where options were traditionally very limited. That said, more resident choice can add stress to a labor pool that is already stretched to its limit. So how can you add flexible employee scheduling to this equation? The answer is, you work at it.

Even in a tight labor market, it still benefits employers to explore how they can offer their nutrition team some flexibility in scheduling. Meet with employees and discuss their individual needs. While adjusting the work schedule will not always be possible, permit flexibility whenever you can, without compromising the integrity of meals or customer service.

What might this look like in your food service? Perhaps the college student employed in your operation could prep vegetables for

tomorrow's stir-fry entree today, giving her time to cram for tomorrow's exam just before the test. Maybe the employee who refills the condiment caddies at the end of his shift can perform the task an hour earlier than usual so he can catch his son's Little League game.

Permitting employees to switch hours with one another can also provide some flexibility. Sally is scheduled to work this Saturday but was invited to her niece's music recital, so she is trading hours with

the change on the schedule, or following alternate established procedures. Make it clear that abuse of the flexible scheduling policy will result in the practice being rescinded.

## TECHNOLOGY

Almost every article I came across included predictions related to technology, from employee self-service to Artificial Intelligence (AI) to data privacy to wellness initiatives to learning and development. Today's employees expect their employers to keep pace

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Laura, who was on the schedule for next weekend.

Without proper management, these types of scheduling scenarios can pose coverage headaches and payroll nightmares. It's critical that you stress accountability to your employees, and reinforce the protocol required with trading hours or flexible scheduling. Your policy might mandate clearing the request with the manager on duty and highlighting

with technology and incorporate it seamlessly into their work-life experience. Larger, global employers almost always lead the way in this arena, but each day more medium and small employers are finding ways to harness technology to improve organizational efficiencies, offer employee training, track critical information,

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handle employee requests, and promote internal communications.

Many foodservice operations have experienced how digital tablets have transformed the way clients order their meals, and some operations are using AI technology—like Alexa—to give employees access to music, information, or even trivia questions while working. If your team is comprised of young employees, who are often more receptive to the latest gadgets, seek their input on how technology might benefit your food service. Be open to staff suggestions on ways new technologies can improve operations and enhance the work environment.

### EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

To better align benefit offerings with their entire employee population, employers will continue to expand time-off benefits. While there has often been a focus on maternity leave, employers are considering a wider array of benefits to stay competitive. Some benefit revisions will be driven by regulatory changes, but expanded offerings will also be in response to a realization that it is not only working mothers who are looking for these benefits. Expect to see more paid leave policies in addition to what is required under the Family and Medical Leave Act. Also, benefit experts predict that in the future, more employers will offer employees a “menu” of benefit choices instead of simply offering a one-size-fits-all plan. Putting the employee in the driver’s seat to personalize their benefits and select those of most value can boost staff retention.

### WORKPLACE CULTURE

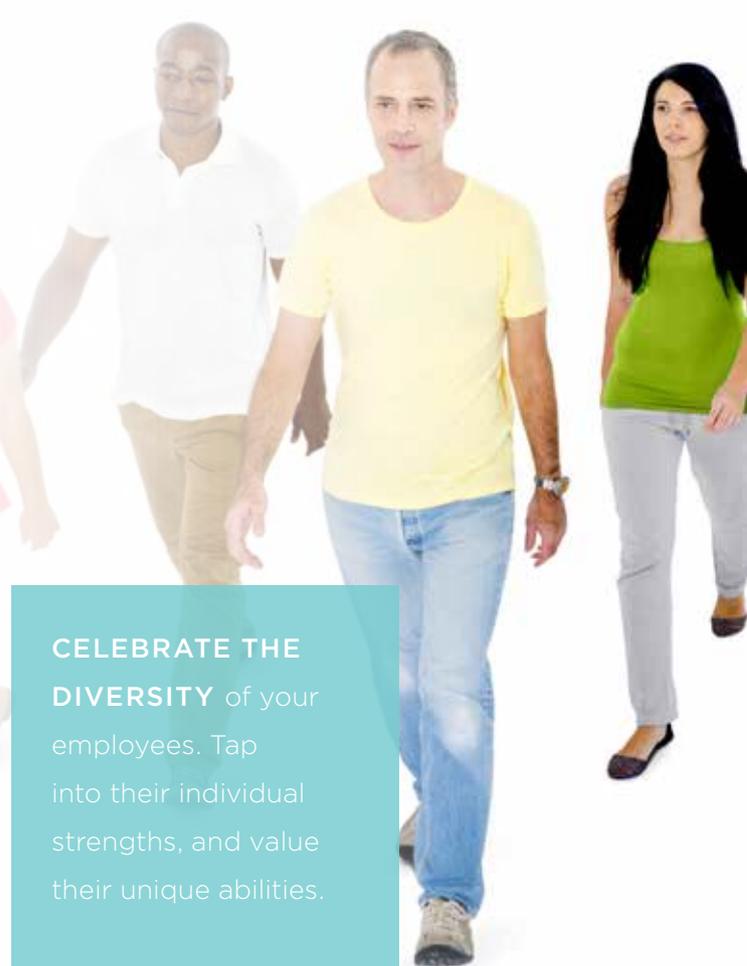
Thanks to the #MeToo movement, more employers than ever have provided their employees with anti-harassment training in the past year and a half. But a training program is not going to impact positive change if an organization’s culture does not encourage respect and inclusion. Culture starts at the top and permeates every aspect of the employee experience. The link between culture and employee engagement is well-documented, and those employers who choose to ignore it will suffer the consequences including low morale, limited innovation, and high turnover.

Celebrate the diversity of your employees! Tap into their individual strengths, and value their unique abilities. Learn more about each team member through observation and

conversation. You may discover a skill or trait of which you were unaware.

What are some ways you can honor employee diversity? If Marcus used to work in an Italian restaurant and has a passion for creating pasta, you could ask him to show others his skill or even make a dish his coworkers would enjoy. If Maria and her grandma often prepare hand-rolled tamales at home, she might be willing to demonstrate the process with fellow staff members. If Angelo plays the violin, he might like to provide background music during a special dining event.

Once people begin to see that their coworkers are much more than what they do on the job, admiration for their peers will grow and they may view their colleagues in a whole new light. Respect everyone on your team—be it for a skill they possess, the knack they have with difficult



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clients, or the sunny disposition they show each and every guest. You'll be setting a good example for your staff, while making your team members feel valued.

## FOCUS ON THE EMPLOYEE

It's clear from these trends that 2019 and beyond will deliver many challenges for employers regardless of the overall economic climate. Additional factors that will continue to impact employers' ability to compete for

talent include low unemployment, digital disruption, the gig economy, generational differences, and a complex regulatory environment. The need for managers to be both strategic and tactical is more imperative than ever. By shining a spotlight on the employee, your organization's priorities and path to success will become clearer. **E**

## CE Questions | MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



*This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.*

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1. According to the article, today's workplaces are focusing on these areas:
  - A. Flexibility, technology, employee benefits
  - B. Flexibility, good manners, in-house fitness
  - C. Technology, employee sabbaticals, larger paychecks
2. Employers today are generally more open-minded about
  - A. Intimate relationships between coworkers
  - B. How, where, and when work gets done
  - C. Employee dress codes
3. When employees are permitted to switch hours with one another, this practice should
  - A. Be handled informally between the employees
  - B. Follow a pre-established protocol to ensure that coverage needs are met
  - C. Never be allowed
4. Harnessing technology in your food service can
  - A. Improve organizational efficiencies
  - B. Promote internal communications
  - C. Both A and B
5. Many employers are expanding employee benefits to include
  - A. More paid leave policies
  - B. Personalized benefits to meet an employee's unique needs
  - C. Both A and B
6. The #MeToo movement has resulted in
  - A. More employers offering their staff anti-harassment training
  - B. Thousands of ridiculous lawsuits
  - C. A fear of fraternizing with employees outside of the workplace
7. To help celebrate the diversity of your employees, managers should
  - A. Google the lineage of their employees
  - B. Learn more about their team members through observation and conversation, and tap into their unique knowledge and strengths
  - C. Not acknowledge a person's heritage for fear they may be sued for discrimination

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