HR Insights

Attracting Employees for On-site Positions

Of 1,000 company decision-makers surveyed by Resume Builder, about 90% plan to implement return-to-work policies by 2024. Although there are numerous benefits to having employees work in person, such as improved company culture and increased opportunities for collaboration and relationship development, pressuring employees to return to in-office work can increase turnover issues and harm recruitment efforts. According to a 2023 study by software company Envoy, 80% of bosses regret their initial return to office decision and say they would've formulated their plans differently if they had understood office attendance, office amenities and other factors.

Furthermore, employers who are hiring for on-site positions may struggle to compete with organizations that offer more flexible options for talented individuals. To avoid employee backlash and prevent attraction and retention issues, employers must develop policies that balance the cultural benefits of in-person work with employees' needs and wants. This article provides guidance for how employers can successfully attract and retain employees in on-site positions.

Attraction and Retention Strategies for On-Site Positions

Flexible working arrangements remain popular among employees. The 2023 Workmonitor Pulse Survey by recruitment company Randstad found that more than half (54%) of white-collar workers consider job flexibility as or more important than pay. Blue- and gray-collar workers also listed flexibility as highly important, with 42% and 48%, respectively, ranking it as equal or more important than pay. This can make attracting and retaining talented individuals challenging for organizations with solely in-person policies or positions. The following are practices employers can use to attract and retain in-person employees:

- **Give a compelling reason.** Data from the 2022 Microsoft Work Trend Index research showed that 73% of employees need a better reason to return to work than "company expectations." When asked what would motivate them to return to the office, surveyed employees listed rebuilding team bonds (85%), socializing with co-workers (84%), seeing "work friends" (74%) and interacting with direct team members (73%). Employers can leverage the social benefits of working in person to improve employee engagement, retention and branding. This may involve encouraging employees to take time to spend with one another (e.g., creating an in-office lounge or snack bar, forming companywide book clubs and sports teams, or implementing a "social hour"), removing busywork to promote more office socialization time, and creating internal networks for mentorship and career advancement.

- **Accommodate employee needs.** In many organizations, an employee's job flexibility varies with their supervisor. Time off, flexibility and workload requests may be accepted or rejected based on an individual's manager. This can greatly impact an employee's work-life balance, quality of life and job happiness. In such instances, flexibility is rarely culturally consistent within an organization and may negatively impact an employee's career advancement. Employers can manage employees' needs and desires for flexibility while encouraging in-person work by providing generous paid time off and flexible work hours. Adopting results-based evaluation techniques, which reward employees for their results rather than how much time they spend working, can also incentivize employees to return to in-person work. With this approach, employees feel in control of their personal and professional lives and are less likely to be stressed or overworked on the job. Furthermore, a results-based method removes unnecessary meetings and judgments about how and when employees work. This can appeal to employees who worry about losing flexibility and control with in-person work arrangements.

- **Focus on employer branding.** A strong employer brand can boost employee attraction and help employers better compete for talent. To strengthen employer branding, organizations can use testimonials, interviews with employees, case studies and positive employer reviews. Employers can also reevaluate their hiring process to focus on developing relationships based on transparency and communication rather than quickly filling a role. This can help foster long-term relationships with interviewees and employees who may tell their friends about their positive experiences with the organization or accept a position down the road.

- **Use hiring as a tool.** Employers should clearly communicate expectations of in-office work to job candidates and potential new hires and prioritize extending offers to individuals who are willing to work in person. Face-to-face onboarding can also improve the experience for new hires and might motivate other employees (e.g., managers) to return to the office to meet or train new hires.

- **Encourage work-life boundaries.** Numerous studies have shown that remote workers work longer and harder than in-person employees. This can lead to burnout, stress, depression and feelings of isolation. Many fully remote workers also struggle to "turn off" work at the end of the day. Promote work-life balance by encouraging in-person employees to leave their laptops at work and not to check their emails outside of work hours. Emphasizing organizational values of work-life balance can attract employees to return to the office without making them feel like they have to give up the freedom of remote or hybrid work.

- **Use incentives.** Small incentives, such as free food and office snacks, go a long way toward increasing employees' desire to work in an office. Employers can consider providing free beverages (e.g., coffee, tea and soda), healthy snacks and lunches. Additionally, employers can consider subsidizing employees' commutes and offering professional development opportunities in the office, such as training and mentorship opportunities. Offering on-site child care and fitness centers can also encourage employees to spend more time in the office.

- **Create a safe and authentic working environment.** Organizational leadership sets the tone for authentic, open and inclusive communication. Leaders must ensure employees are physically and psychologically safe in the workplace, no matter where they work. Research by LinkedIn and Microsoft has found that individuals from underrepresented groups (e.g., women, those without a graduate degree, and Black and Latino individuals) are more likely to prefer remote work. Therefore, it's crucial that employers engage in ongoing, two-way dialogue with employees of all backgrounds to ensure that they can bring their full and authentic selves to work.

Conclusion

Recruiting, hiring and retaining employees for on-site positions can be challenging amid employees' calls for increased flexibility. However, employers can reassure employees that in-person work will positively impact them by leveraging company culture, work-life balance and career advancement opportunities. Employers who successfully leverage the benefits of in-person work for employees can make in-person positions stand out against comparative remote and hybrid positions and may experience improved employee satisfaction, engagement and retention.

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