

Finding talent, engagement top HR trends for 2019

Developing workplace policies around cannabis legalization, #MeToo movement also major concerns: Survey

BY JOHN DUJAY

ATTRACTING and retaining workers has become a high priority for Canadian businesses, and that trend will continue into 2019, according to a Morneau Shepell survey.

"Employee turnover has become the top concern, with two-thirds of employers really wanting to focus on employee engagement," said J.P. Girard, senior vice-president for Western Canada at Morneau Shepell in Halifax.

"As employers, executives in the C-suite, we need to make sure that every single employee in the organization understands why the work they do matters and what it means to the overall strategic direction of the organization."

Two-thirds (67 per cent) of human resources leaders want to focus on employee engagement as a top priority, according to the survey of 356 organizations across Canada.

"Identifying and attracting and retaining employees is a top priority, which is ahead of last year a little bit, which was really focused on the cost side, when you look at reducing short-term disability, streamlining HR administration processes," said Girard.

Forty-three per cent of HR leaders said reducing worker turnover will be a top priority into 2019, accord-

ing to the survey, which surpassed "streamlining administration of programs" and "reducing short-term disability costs" — both of which were top priorities last year.

"Typically, people leave organizations when they feel like they're not engaged, which means perhaps they are not working well with their boss or their supervisor, perhaps they do not see the opportunity for them to grow," said Girard.

"It also goes back to some old-fashioned, open communication as well: People are way more engaged when their employers are more open about what their strategy is, what their plans are as an organization — then people feel part of something bigger."

The quest to find the right workers was also top-of-mind for 59 per cent of HR professionals, according to the survey.

The continuing influence of younger workers in the workplace is a trend HR departments will have to grapple with in 2019, according to Janet Salopek, president and senior consultant at Salopek Associates in Calgary.

"If you're not engaging the millennials, you're not keeping them," she said.

"It has to be a focus... The millennials like short bursts of work, so they won't stay with us for years and

years. If you're lucky, you'll keep a millennial for two years."

Millennial workers require unique ways to be engaged, according to Baldev Gill, COO at Chartered Professionals in Human Resources of British Columbia and Yukon (CPHRBC) in Vancouver.

When it comes to the whole culture and engagement piece, it's about a lot more continuous performance reviews, or continuous engagement, where managers are having at least weekly meeting with employees, such as an open-door policy where people are able to come in and speak to their manager or supervisor on a more regular basis, he said.

"Especially when we're dealing with the multiple generations working under one roof, certain folks want certain types of feedback, and we're finding that some of our younger employees are wanting a little bit more hands-on feedback, a little bit more continuous feedback," said Gill.

"And some of our more senior folks in our office, they are happy with the once-a-week touch-base, or a little bit less of performance management."

Newer trends for consideration

More than half (52 per cent) of hu-

man resources departments plan to update workplace policies around cannabis within the next 12 to 18 months, and 48 per cent plan to train managers to address the new reality, found Morneau Shepell.

With legalization just around the corner in Canada, there are a lot of HR professionals who are still in the dark about what is coming, according to Luc Page, executive director of the Chartered Professionals in Human Resources New Brunswick (CPHRNB) in Moncton.

"There's a lot of HR professionals that are still asking for us to hold sessions with different lawyers on: what would be the legal trends, what's going to happen?"

"And even officials, they don't even know how to react because what is the impact? What are the legal interventions that we need to implement in the workplace as well?"

It's about treating cannabis in the same vein as substance abuse, according to Salopek.

"Everybody's (saying), 'Well, we've got to develop a policy for cannabis! No, you bring it into your substance-abuse policy,' she said.

"As it becomes legal going into 2019, figuring that out will definitely be a priority, in my opinion, for organizations."

Implementing a way to address

cannabis in the workplace is easier said than done, said Gill, with people debating the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy or an impairment policy where it's no different than a person's inability to do her work.

"I know that that's a big topic certainly for the last part of 2018, and also into 2019," he said.

"Also, the training that goes around identifying issues surrounding cannabis use for managers. How do they detect it? What do they do about it? Who do they speak to? How do they manage it?"

While many companies in the survey indicated they plan on implementing training, 45 per cent have no plans as of yet.

"A lot of people are just waiting,

but I'm not sure what they are waiting for," said Girard. "I know a lot of companies are just quiet on that right now: 'OK, we'll just wait and see.' Or maybe they (think) 'It's not an issue for us. I'm not sure.'"

#MeToo importance

But when it comes to the global #MeToo movement and sexual harassment in the workplace, most companies have taken action.

Eighty-four per cent of HR leaders have zero-tolerance policies in place; 80 per cent said they foster a culture where employees feel confident reporting bullying and harassment; and 79 per cent have a senior leadership commitment to eliminate negative behaviours, said Girard.

"Sixty per cent of employers effectively provide managers and clear tools and resources to address negative behaviours in the workplace. And 25 per cent plan to implement a process in the next 12 to 18 months," he said.

While the progression is better than in past, more work needs to be done, said Girard.

"We're now in 2018, looking back to the '90s and 2000s, and we are appalled the way people behaved. So how do we not get to 2038 and look back at 2018 and do the exact same thing?"

"It comes with more open dialogue, it comes with people not being afraid to say, 'No, actually, that does bother me, and that is harassment,'" he said.

To be diligent, employers should inform employees of the rules, what's acceptable, what's not, and put strong policies in place, said Salopek.

"It's a direct result of the #MeToo campaign and the profiling that that has taken in our social media," she said.

"Organizations are really paying attention to that, boards are paying attention to it, leaders are paying attention to it, and they're trying to get ahead of it in that they are putting in place respecting-the-workplace training for layers within their organization," said Salopek.

"Many of them are starting with their leaders and then offering it down to the employee level."