

# Talent Management

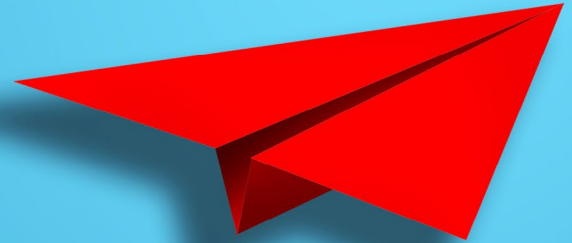
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Themed Edition  
on Talent  
Management  
& Future  
Challenges

## MANAGING THE UNEXPECTED: A MORE PROACTIVE APPROACH TO TALENT MANAGEMENT

- Marlo J. Gaal, Chief Talent Officer, Ariel Investments



## Preventing Retaliation in the Workplace

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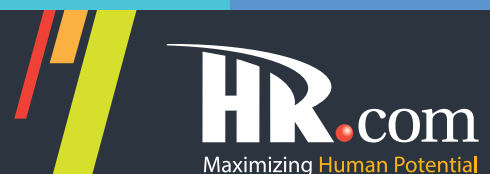
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the January issue of **Talent Management Excellence**.

Year 2020 saw a drastic transformation in the way organizations managed talent. Managing the remote workforce and meeting the dynamic needs of employees were quite challenging. In order to attract and retain top talent today, organizations must be open to shifting their approaches on assessing the value their workforce brings to the table.

As you consider how to evolve your own talent management programs in 2021 to meet the employee needs during this ever-evolving period of uncertainty, you need to re-evaluate and consider changes in certain areas. The cover article of this issue, **Managing The Unexpected: A More Proactive Approach to Talent Management** by Marlo J. Gaal sheds more light into this topic.

When the coronavirus pandemic is "over" what will become of remote work? Although the pandemic

has accelerated the shift toward remote work, the importance of location still matters, says Steve Black in his article, **Does Location Still Matter For Talent Management?** Read his article to learn about how location affects three critical areas of talent management.

With the influx of people working from home, leaders have had to find ways to efficiently and effectively handle remote management. Managers need to take a hard look at their current talent management processes and determine what is working for them and what needs to be changed, says Agota Alvarez in her article, **Remote Talent Management: What's Working And What Needs To Be Changed**.

As we move into 2021, organizations should be rethinking and reinventing ways of getting things done. Read Laura Dribin's article, **The "New Normal"**

**Demands New Thinking**, where she discusses why generating value should be the name of the game in 2021.

We have now accepted the fact that the pandemic will have a long-lasting impact not just in our personal lives but also in the way we work. Eager to learn about the key areas where change is more likely to happen? Read Lenmark Anthony Baltazar's article, **Post-Covid Future Of Work Trends**.

In brief, this edition includes articles that share talent management strategies necessary to navigate your team this year and beyond.

We hope you enjoy reading all the articles and get back to us with your valuable feedback.

Cheers!

Have a say?  
Write to the Editor.



**Debbie McGrath**  
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**Babitha Balakrishnan**  
Editor, Talent Management Excellence

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# Managing The Unexpected: A More Proactive Approach To Talent Management

## | Key HR programs to consider evolving



 By **Marlo J. Gaal**

As we start the year 2021, I know one thing is certain: that nothing is certain. 2020 was a period of immense transformation of the HR function for companies around the world. Through significant disruptors in their own right independently - a global pandemic, a movement for racial equality, an election and so much more, we – the HR practitioners – gathered invaluable data on how our teams respond to change while navigating these disruptions as they came to us simultaneously.

As we embark on this new chapter, I urge you to use this experience to develop a more proactive approach to talent management that gets ahead of this year's biggest challenge: retaining your company's most valuable assets – your employees.

Talent retention should be top of mind for corporate leaders who are still experiencing the aftershock of 2020 and bracing for the impact of this new year. In this article, I outline key HR

programs to consider evolving in order to proactively meet the dynamic needs of your employees.

### **Reset Your Thinking**

As a passionate human capital practitioner, I've learned that being a change agent who creates work environments where people are acknowledged and rewarded for adding value – while also being their true selves – yields results. In order to achieve this goal, HR professionals may need to proactively shift mindsets within their organizations from “top-to-bottom,” and proactively demand their leadership teams view talent management through a new lens.

These days, HR is no longer simply a resource. It's now a dynamic, highly strategic, and more involved discipline than ever before. In this era, your workforce is no longer simply a group of employees. They are partners. They are the lifeline of your organization. They are a critical asset of the utmost value.



In order to attract and retain top talent, organizations must be open to shifting their thinking about how to assess the value their workforce brings to the table.

## Pivot, and Pivot, and Pivot...

When you hear Ariel Investments, you might think: "global value-based asset management firm with one of the longest track records in the industry." That's true. It's what we do as patient investors. But it's not who we are. It is what we do. We are a team that celebrates diversity and practices inclusion as a way to get work done – it's in our DNA.

For much of our nearly four-decade history, we have offered fully paid healthcare for all, regardless of the level of the employee. We are also nearly 96 percent owned by employees and board members, who are true partners in the firm and who have "skin in the game."

Of course, we are proud of the foundation we built prior to the onset of the pandemic. But we were not immune to the new challenges that nearly every company faced last year. We decided early on that we would embrace change and evolve, or pivot, when necessary. This led to the development of several new initiatives and policies that have provided our employees with more tailored support.

As you consider how to evolve your own talent management programs in 2021 to meet

the needs of your employees during this ever-evolving period of uncertainty, I recommend re-evaluating and considering changes in the following areas:

- **Parental leave:** First, ensure you are providing adequate leave to both primary and secondary caregivers. Now more than ever, all parents are struggling to adapt their childcare model to account for school closures, remote work and other ongoing challenges of the pandemic. Additionally, if your policies are not already gender-neutral, consider expanding your definition of the caregiver.
- **Flexible time off:** We describe our policy as Your Time Off, which has no minimum or maximum number of days an employee may take each year. This approach recognizes the diverse needs of employees and provides flexible time to reset.
- **Equity for employees:** How you approach this will depend on your organizational structure, but the key is finding a way to give employees ownership. This makes the ROI on their efforts even clearer, every day. Ownership opportunities for all employees, regardless of level, is nothing new for Ariel. We now give our employees a choice between Ariel stock or mutual funds based on what they value most.

## NewYear, New Culture

As we look toward a new year, we will undoubtedly continue to hear the words "Trump," "pandemic,"

and "unprecedented." I'm excited to push the narrative and hear more of these other important words: Not just "diversity," but also "equity, dignity, and wellbeing." All of which serve as key components of results.

After all, words are powerful. As HR leaders, we should work together to change the meaning of the word "culture" to convey more than just "a vibe." Culture should serve as a key performance indicator that drives employee engagement and business results.

And we can't achieve this vision without redefining "success," or "successful company" to not solely be measured by your AUM or EBITDA – but also the health of your organization, from the inside, out.

• • •



**Marlo J. Gaal** is the Chief Talent Officer at Ariel Investments. Previously, Marlo was Senior Director, Human Resources, North America for Groupon Inc., where she partnered with executive leadership to integrate comprehensive people strategies with business and organizational priorities. Before Groupon, Marlo served as Corporate Director of Human Resources and Staffing at Hyatt Hotels Corporation.



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# Does Location Still Matter For Talent Management?

International experience, culture, and diversity demand the CHRO's attention in a post-Covid world

 By **Steve Black**

When the coronavirus pandemic is “over,” what will become of remote work? For some [1.25 billion](#) knowledge workers, this question is significant. Coronavirus caused mass migration from offices to kitchen tables, cities to suburbs, New York to Florida, and California to everywhere. Only a quarter of the remote employees [surveyed](#) by JLL, a real estate company, want to return to the office full time.

So, does location still matter for talent management?

By necessity rather than choice, CHROs are running a massive remote work experiment, the results of which remain unclear. Maybe location autonomy has little or no impact on productivity, as 800 employers [attested](#) early in the pandemic.

However, location does affect three critical areas of talent management: international experience, organizational culture, and diversity and inclusion (D&I). How CHROs address these issues in the post-Covid world may shape their organization for decades to come.

## International Assignments and Experience Remain Critical to C-suite Progression

Bill Gates recently [predicted](#) that 50% of business travel will disappear in the post-coronavirus world.

Apparently, he's heard about Zoom too. However, travel for international experience remains essential. Most people do not become a C-level executive at a multinational company by working from their kitchen table for 20 years.

People who run multinational organizations need to understand the cultures of their employees. Even if teams in San Francisco and Shanghai both work for one brand espousing one set of values, they do so in different cultural, legal, and political contexts. These differences are extremely difficult to grasp without in-person experience, which is surprisingly rare and valuable.

Executive recruiters certainly share this view. Robert Half's CEO Tracker [reports](#) that 59% of Australia's ASX 200-listed CEOs have international experience. At the 100 largest companies in Europe, the percentage of CEOs with international experience grew from 60% in 2006 to 66% in 2016 [according to](#) DHR International. When Russell Reynolds [surveyed](#) board members at Canada's 100 largest companies, 77% ranked international experience as an important criterion in CEO selection—yet only 37% of current CEOs had such experience (up from 25% two decades ago).

Academic studies suggest that international experience affects performance. Among S&P



500 companies, having a CEO who worked abroad correlated with [increased corporate social performance](#). Another [study](#) linked international experience to positive effects on strategic change and firm performance—and the more international experience the CEOs had, the more of a performance bump the researchers found. In China, a CEO's international experience is associated with [higher IPO valuations and superior post-IPO performance](#).

Sure, businesses may send employees on fewer business trips, but international assignments will remain critical to developing C-level executives who can lead multinational firms effectively.

### **Unless CHROs Deliberately Build Remote Cultures, Training and Development May Suffer**

During the pandemic, many organizations have saved costs by closing empty offices. Companies like Slack, Square, and Twitter announced that their employees can work remotely forever. Siemens became [the first major German company](#) to introduce a remote model. Its 140,000 employees can work remotely two to three days per week. But remote work policies will interfere with attracting, developing, and retaining talent if they're not executed well. I say this as the Chief Strategy Officer of a mostly-remote organization.

A fresh graduate can learn many of the basic tools of investment banking and management consulting (Excel & PowerPoint) remotely, but facetime is invaluable. How else do new recruits build meaningful connections with their colleagues (how many friends have you made over Zoom)? Who do they lean on as challenges arise? Who will answer their "silly" questions without judgment? The community and mentorship that makes some firms successful risk breaking down.

Think back to your first career. Mine was in management consulting, and it would have been far less valuable had I spent those eight years at home with a laptop. Instead, my peers and I developed the Oliver Wyman work ethic late at night around a hotel lobby table and boxes of pizza, cranking away at tight deadlines. We learned the nuances of client engagement by listening to conversations between

our boss and clients. Certain things are learned by seeing, listening, and doing. There's no substitute for being there.

I say that with a caveat: all-remote cultures, most famously GitLab, overcome a lack of in-person time through a culture of documentation. With 1,300 employees spread across 65 countries, GitLab has gained unparalleled access to diverse talent. Their [Remote Manifesto](#) offers insight into how it works. Consider four of the ten bullets:

- Writing down and recording knowledge over verbal explanations.
- Written down processes over on-the-job training.
- Public sharing of information over need-to-know access.
- Opening up every document for editing by anyone over top-down control of documents.

That is the opposite of how most organizational cultures work. But if you can't stroll down the hall to ask a coworker what their email actually meant, you need a culture of sharp writing and open access to documentation. All-remote work has [drawbacks](#), as GitLab readily admits. Not all companies or employees are cut out for it.

For most companies, the best approach will be a hybrid model combining in-office and remote days. That doesn't require a fancy corporate HQ in San Francisco. Regional satellite offices, near where employees actually live, might serve better.

### **Diversity and Inclusion Can Suffer—or Benefit—from Remote Work**

The coronavirus pandemic has taken a disproportionately heavy toll on women and people of color. In the United States, for instance, More than 2.2 million women left the workforce between February and November [according](#) to the National Women's Law Center. By forcing women out of high-paying, leadership-track jobs, the pandemic may erase decades of progress towards gender equality at work. As of December 2020, 9.1% of Black women and 8.2% of Latinas remain unemployed, compared to 6.1% of all women in the U.S. Pandemic-driven remote work has not helped their situation.



Too many women are overburdened with childcare, chores, and supervision of remote learning, and their male partners are not sharing the burden equally. A [report](#) from the Brookings Institution illustrates how intractable this problem could become. Even if women could return to work, their salaries may not cover the U.S.'s exorbitant childcare fees, which exceed 7% of the average income in every state.

CHROs could exacerbate or mitigate this loss of diversity depending on how they manage location. The first task is to bring local women back into the workforce, which means HR needs to rethink (or create) childcare benefits. If, for instance, childcare was provided on site—but no one is working on site anymore—then HR should adopt a system that funds childcare wherever parents seek it. Because many parents are supervising children who would normally be in schools but are too old for childcare, companies need to support flexible hours. In many knowledge jobs, it doesn't matter what time of day work happens, as long as the result is of high quality.

At the same time, remote work offers opportunities to improve diversity and inclusion. If no one is required at the office, then companies can recruit skilled workers from more diverse cities and universities where they lack a local footprint. In addition, companies can hire talent in foreign countries with complementary time zones. South America, for example, shares time zones

with the U.S., which makes it a natural fit for American companies that value real-time collaboration. Similarly, European companies can recruit remote talent in Africa. Whereas manufacturers tend to offshore labor to the east and west, knowledge firms should be looking north or south.

One reason to hire international women where they are—as opposed to requiring relocation—is that mothers can remain tapped into family and community networks that assist with childcare. Having someone who can drive your child to school or watch her on a late work night is vital.

CHROs have an opportunity to cultivate diverse talent and leadership by leaning into remote and hybrid work models. Software now solves the tax and compliance challenges brought on by distributed teams.

## Location Still Matters

Although the pandemic has accelerated the shift toward remote work, I still firmly believe in the importance of location. Corporate boards will continue to favor C-level executives who have worked abroad and know how to build thriving businesses in foreign cultures. New recruits will continue to benefit from in-person training and bonding with their peers and mentors. Organizations will grow more diverse if they support mothers near home and seek new talent pools across state lines and international borders.

Again, businesses embraced remote work out of necessity, not a choice. It was a jarring experiment, and the results may not be known for years. Digital communication never killed off the value of geography, travel, and place, and neither will Covid-19. Location still matters.

• • •



**Steve Black** is the Co-founder and Chief Strategy Officer at [Topia](#)



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### Retaliation: A Silent Workplace Pandemic

**Elizabeth Owens Bille, JD, SHRM-SCP,**  
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# Preventing Retaliation in the Workplace



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According to data from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), retaliation is the most frequently filed charge of job discrimination nationwide. Data from fiscal year 2018 shows that retaliation claims are significantly higher than any other type of workplace discrimination or misconduct claim. Not only is retaliation exceedingly common, but its incidence is getting worse, quickly.

of employees who say they have experienced retaliation after reporting workplace concerns has doubled since 2013, from 22% to 44%.

To gain greater insight into this growing problem, HR.com's HR Research Institute partnered with EVERFI, a leader in digital education on critical workplace culture issues, to conduct a survey of HR professionals to examine retaliation in today's workplaces.

According to a 2018 survey of U.S. employees by the Ethics and Compliance Initiative, the percentage



The main objectives of the study were to:

- gauge how much organizations prioritize preventing retaliation
- assess the current practices organizations take to prevent retaliation
- determine the approaches that can be most helpful to mitigate workplace retaliation

Although retaliation is the most frequently filed workplace discrimination charge, many organizations—about one-third—have no anti-retaliation policies in place. They are more likely to say they have a policy in place for harassment and discrimination (91%), code of conduct (88%), performance management (80%), and workplace violence (78%).

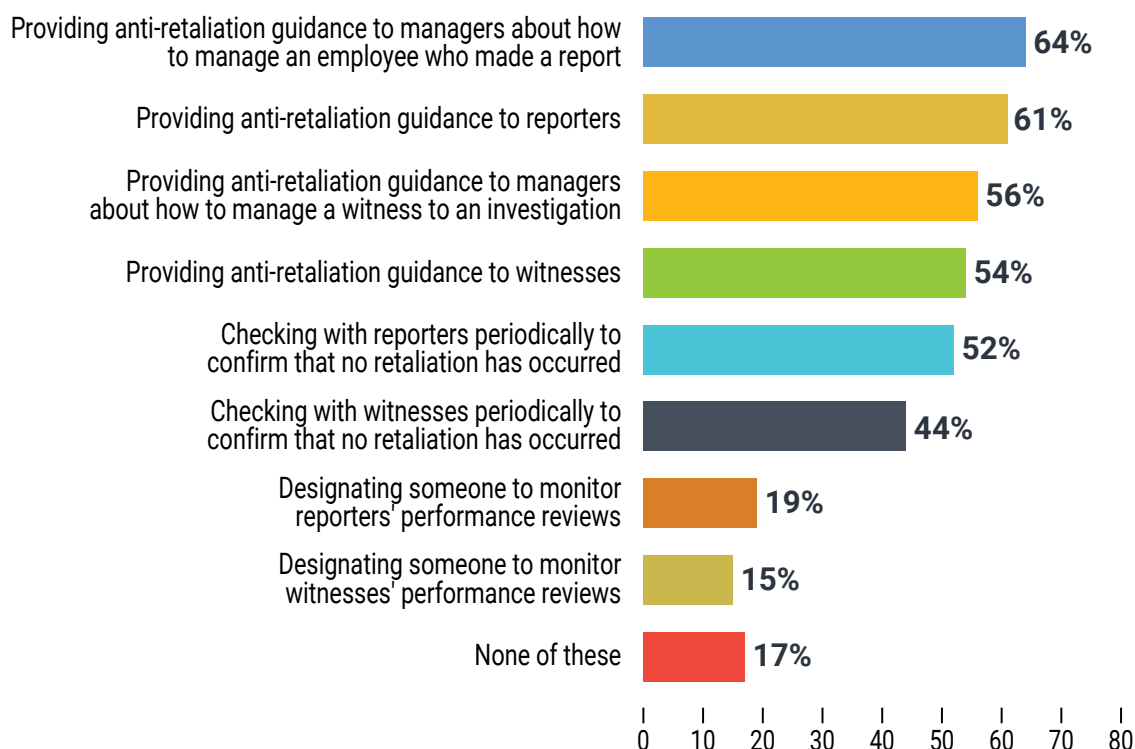
Moreover, among those HR professionals whose organizations have an anti-retaliation policy, only 57% say they provide training to all employees

about retaliation. Comparatively, 81% of those at an organization with an anti-harassment and discrimination policy say they provide training about the policy.

Most organizations that have an anti-retaliation policy include it in their employee handbook (82%). Other frequently-utilized “check-the-box” approaches include highlighting it during employee onboarding (67%) or making it available on their internal website, like an intranet page (56%).

Fewer respondents say their organizations take more active, direct, and possibly more effective, approaches to communicating their policy. Just 44% say they use an online training course to communicate the policy, 39% say they conduct in-person training, workshops, or meetings, and 22% say it is disseminated through communications from senior leaders.

**Survey Question:** Which of these are included in your procedures when an employee reports workplace misconduct? (select all that apply)





Results show that certain groups of employees tend to be retaliated against more than others. The majority of respondents say that the person on the receiving end of retaliation is sometimes or often:

- a low-performing employee (63%),
- a female (62%), or
- an individual contributor (55%).

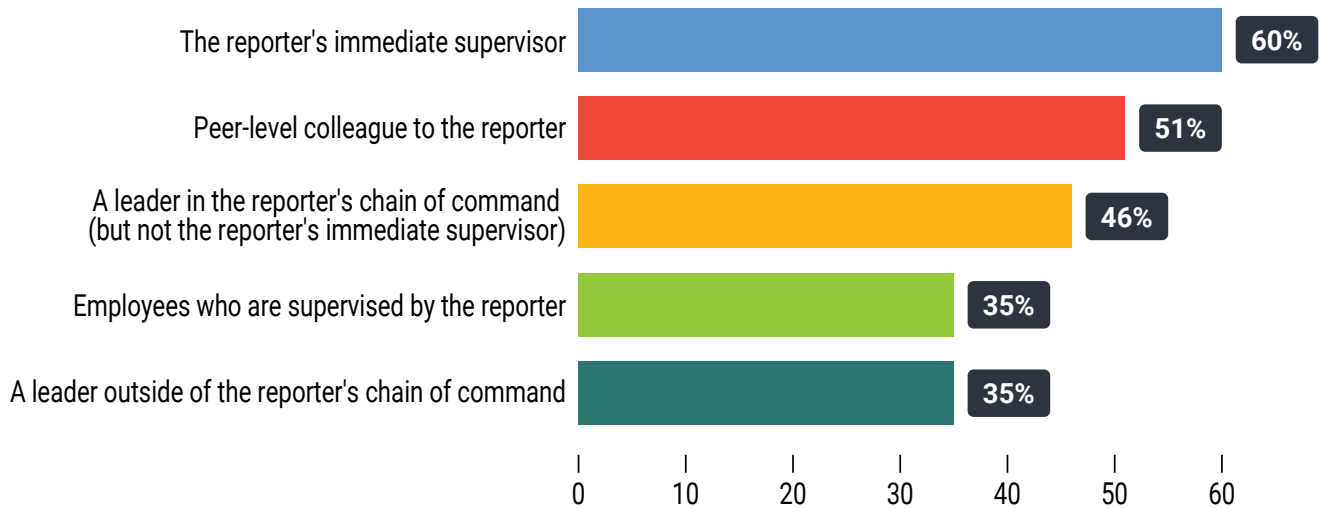
Retaliation can be a result of many types of incidents, but it is most often the result of a harassment and discrimination complaint, with about half (53%) saying it is sometimes or often the result of this. The next most common complaints that prompt retaliation are concerns about pay or


working conditions (44%), a report about conflict of interest (39%), and a request for accommodation (30%).

The survey also asked respondents how often different types of employees are the ones retaliating. The majority (60%) say the employee retaliating is sometimes or often the reporter's immediate supervisor, and many (46%) say the same about a leader inside the reporter's chain of command, but not the reporter's immediate supervisor. About half (51%) say it is a peer-level colleague to the reporter. Employees retaliating against a supervisor is not as common, but more than a third (35%) say it still occurs sometimes or often.

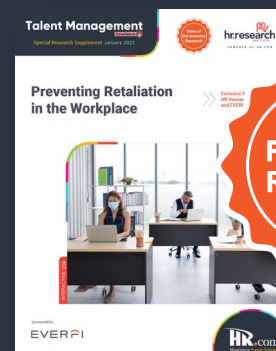
**Survey Question:** When an incident of retaliation occurs at your organization, how often is the employee who is retaliating one of the following?

Percent responding sometimes or often



To learn more about **Preventing Retaliation in Workplace** and to get 7 key insights and strategic takeaways, we invite you to read the complete report. 

## Preventing Retaliation in the Workplace



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# Retaliation: A Silent Workplace Pandemic



Elizabeth Owens Bille  
SVP Workplace Culture, EVERFI  
JD, SHRM-SCP

One of the most widespread and persistent workplace problems today is one that most organizations aren't even thinking about: *retaliation*.

Although issues like sexual harassment and racial bias make headlines (and deservedly so), retaliation is actually the most common claim of workplace discrimination by far, and has been for the past decade. The EEOC receives five times more charges of retaliation than sexual harassment--more than all race, color, and religion-based discrimination charges combined.

COVID-19, and the national unrest demanding more changes in the workforce, has further exacerbated this trend: a new survey found that more than 1 in 8 workers believe they've experienced possible retaliation for expressing concerns about health and safety during the pandemic.

## Indeed, retaliation could be the next #MeToo-type issue that takes the workplace by storm.

Here's why:

- ▶ it is alarmingly common, yet is not often spoken about by those who experience it
- ▶ it can lead to significant legal claims, decreased morale and retention, and damaged workplaces cultures
- ▶ it is not on most organizations' radar, and even if it is, many are not taking proactive steps to prevent it from happening.

Given the persistence and scope of this problem, as well as its devastating impacts, we wanted a better understanding of why workplace retaliation occurs, who tends to experience it (and perpetrate it), and what steps can be taken to help prevent it. To do this, EVERFI partnered with the HR Research Institute, surveying 528 HR professionals to get to the bottom of some key questions.

### 1. Why does workplace retaliation happen?

Retaliation can occur after any type of complaint is made, but some subjects are more likely to trigger retaliation than others. Over half of HR professionals say that retaliation is sometimes or often the result of a harassment and discrimination complaint (53%), followed by concerns about pay or working conditions (44%), a conflict of interest (39%), and a request for accommodation (30%).

When we looked at what prompts retaliation against a colleague, we found that emotions and assumptions are a driving force. Indeed, the most common reasons cited for retaliation are personal feelings of anger, embarrassment, hurt, or betrayal (61%) and viewing the person as disloyal, a troublemaker, or not a team player (59%). Far less common is the belief that the complaint was knowingly false or made with bad intent (28%).

### 2. Who are the targets and perpetrators of retaliation?

While retaliation can happen to anyone in an organization, some employees are more susceptible than others. The majority of responding HR professionals indicated that low-performing employees (63%) and women (62%) are sometimes or often the targets of retaliation, compared to high-performing employees (36%) and men (47%). While the results do not reveal the cause of these disparities, it is possible that unconscious (or conscious) biases regarding gender or performance level may influence a

respondent's perceptions of employee loyalty and intent, and therefore their own response to a complaint.

Meanwhile, employers often think retaliation is committed primarily by managers against their direct reports, but the data reveals this is often not the case. Nearly half of respondents (46%) say the person retaliating is sometimes or often some other leader in the complainant's chain of command, 35% say it is a leader outside of their chain of command, and 51% say it is a peer-level colleague. Retaliation even occurs by employees against their supervisors (35%). For these reasons, employers must take an organization-wide approach to preventing retaliation--provide training and monitoring against it broadly--as it can be perpetrated by anyone.

### 3. Are organizations aware of risky actions and are they protecting whistleblowers?

Retaliation can take many forms. And while not every negative workplace action following a complaint may be illegal (depending on applicable law), even the perception of retaliation can lead to additional complaints, legal actions, decreased morale, and damaged workplace culture.

Unfortunately, many organizations are unaware of actions that are potentially risky.

Employees and lawmakers often take a broad view of retaliation, but organizations tend to view retaliatory actions more narrowly, focusing on egregious acts like termination (80% of respondents say their organization would consider it retaliatory), hostile treatment (78%), discipline (75%), and demotion (74%). Many HR professionals said their organizations were less likely to consider changes in benefits (57%), work location (64%), or duties/work schedule (65%) to be potentially retaliatory, even though the EEOC and U.S. Supreme Court have stated that [they could be](#) (Figure 1).

We also found that many organizations don't have procedures in place to prevent retaliation and safeguard employees who come forward. Of note:

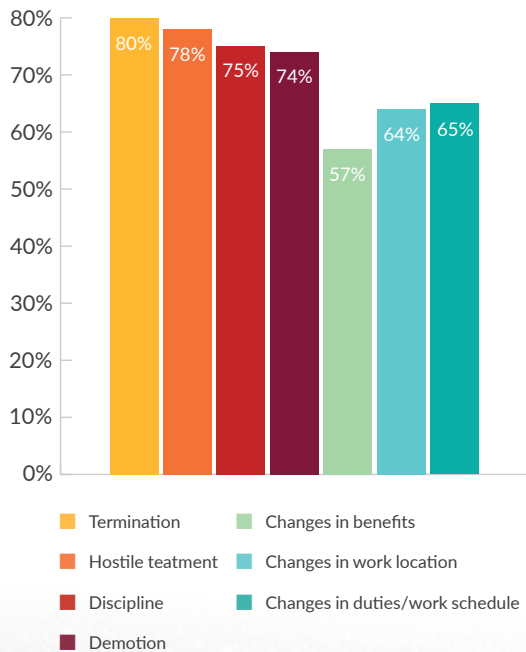
- ▶ Almost one-third of companies surveyed don't have an anti-retaliation policy.
- ▶ Of those that do have a policy on the subject, only 57% train all employees on it.
- ▶ Only half of organizations (52%) check in with employees periodically to confirm that no retaliation has occurred after a report, 64% counsel managers about how to avoid retaliation when managing an employee post-report, and just 19% designate someone to monitor an employee's performance reviews to safeguard against retaliatory ratings.
- ▶ Nearly one-fifth (17%) don't take any such steps to protect whistleblowers post-complaint.

Finally, even fewer respondents indicate they take the above

precautions to protect witnesses from retaliation (although they too are protected under the law), further exposing companies to risk.

**Figure 1**

**Survey Question:** Which of the following, if taken as a result, of an employee reporting workplace misconduct, would your organization consider retaliatory (select all that apply)?

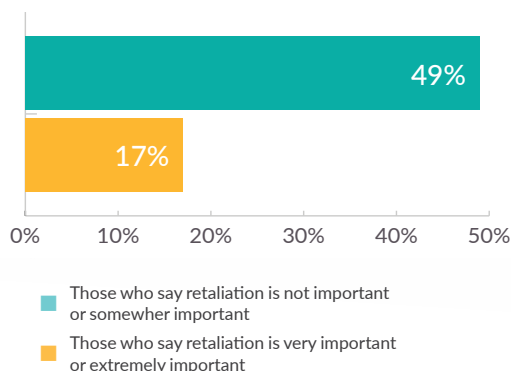


#### 4. Do organizations that prioritize and take proactive steps to prevent retaliation report fewer incidents?

The good news is that amplifying your focus on retaliation and implementing some straightforward procedures pays dividends. Our results show that for those HR professionals who view preventing retaliation as very important or extremely important, only 17% say retaliation occurs sometimes or often in their organization. In contrast, for those who indicate that retaliation

**Figure 2**

**Survey Question:** How often does retaliation occur at your organization?



is a lower priority, almost half (49%) report that retaliation is sometimes or often occurring in their company (Figure 2).

Taking some simple steps to demonstrate that retaliation is a priority makes a difference too. Companies that actively communicate their anti-retaliation policies (e.g., through training and communications from senior leaders) are far less likely to say that retaliation occurs sometimes or often (35%) than those who take a more “check the box” communication approach (e.g., via a handbook or website) (65%).

#### Next Steps

It is clear that retaliation is not a force outside of an employer’s control, nor can it be prevented by simply saying “don’t do it.” It’s a risk to both compliance and workplace culture that must be proactively addressed through policies, procedures, communication, and enforcement. It requires coaching and training to ensure all employees understand its causes, effects, and warning signs.

Today’s workplaces are evolving and changing at a rapid pace. Employees are demanding a number of changes ranging from inclusive hiring practices to pay equity, among many other critical issues. An employer’s amplified role in preventing retaliatory actions is certain to be on the list of demands to encourage fair and equitable workplaces. By shining a spotlight on this widespread issue and taking simple, yet meaningful actions now, our organizations can turn the tide on this devastating problem. Now is the time to address the demands of tomorrow’s workplace. We have all heard the calls for change and now we must all respond.

To view the full report [click here](#).



**Elizabeth Bille** SVP Workplace Culture, EVERFI

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Elizabeth Owens Bille, JD, SHRM-SCP, is an employment law attorney and currently serves as the subject matter expert on the prevention of harassment and discrimination in the workplace for EVERFI. Prior to joining EVERFI, Elizabeth was the General Counsel of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM); she also served as SHRM’s corporate secretary and chief ethics officer. She was a legal and policy advisor to the Vice Chair of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC); in this capacity, she provided advice to the EEOC regarding the federal laws prohibiting harassment and discrimination in the workplace and contributed to the development of EEOC regulations and enforcement guidance. Before joining the EEOC, Elizabeth counseled employers of all sizes as an attorney in the global law firm of Hogan & Hartson (now Hogan Lovells). She has provided training to EEOC investigators, HR professionals, and employment law attorneys on complex workplace issues, and her work has been cited in various outlets including National Public Radio, the Wall Street Journal, and the New York Times.

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# Prepare Your Organization To Be Successful By Developing Strategic Agility

What to do in your organization when the world continues to change dramatically



 By **Holly G. Green**

In today's hyper-paced and chaotic world, few things are more important to success than the ability to respond quickly to sudden changes in external forces, market conditions, or customer needs. Whether the disruption comes from a pandemic, the introduction

of a new technology, a new competitor that nobody saw coming, or drastic changes in economic policy and trade agreements, the companies that go to the head of the class are usually those that respond the quickest.



I call this strategic agility – the ability to quickly and appropriately respond to or drive change while maintaining flexibility and focus. It's not easy to come by, and it doesn't just happen by itself. Rather, it requires an intentional effort from leaders and managers to design and build an organizational structure where information flows easily throughout the company. It also requires teaching people at all levels to think strategically, keeping one eye on the future while the other focuses on what needs to get done today.

Laying a solid foundation for this type of organization requires three key elements.

## 1. Clarity

Developing strategic agility starts with getting clear on winning even if it is for very short-term timeframes. Although we are in a time of a lot of unknowns, there are things we do know. It might only be for the week or the month but get crystal clear on what is clear. Without clarity, people and organizations typically end up going in many different directions, especially when faced with unexpected change.

Imagine having to describe and define for someone what it looks like at the end of the year when you have

been successful. Most leaders can pretty quickly provide the financial objectives. And then...what else? Your employees don't make moment to moment decisions based on your core financial objectives. Very few of them are sitting around thinking about your EBITDA targets! You have to define and describe winning with specificity across as many aspects of the business as you possibly can.

You want to paint a picture of winning that is so clear there is little room for interpretation. You want to enable everyone in your organization to understand the business of your business and have the ability to make the best possible decisions day to day and moment to moment to get the organization to its destination. And you have to communicate why the destination is the one that it is including how it will benefit customers and employees. Having a vision of winning that people understand makes it easier to get and keep everyone working on the same page constantly.

## 2. Focus

If getting clear on winning represents the starting point for strategic agility, keeping people focused on the goal is the driving force behind getting there.

Front-line employees tasked with delivering your product or service day in and day out can easily lose sight of the big picture. You can help them stay focused by constantly communicating your company's definition of winning in many different ways and with as much specificity as possible.

For example:

- Start every meeting by reviewing the organization's top three strategic goals and how they will help everyone win. In a time of constant change, make sure you are updating frequently.
- Post visual cues and "brain prompts" to remind people of the destination – what it looks like when you've arrived at the next milestone. Use every online tool you have to do this, and if you have employees in a physical location, certainly use that real estate as well.
- Make sure individual employees understand how their jobs contribute to the organization achieving the goals. Don't assume others have that level of insight into the connections and interdependencies.
- As things change, communicate how the company will still win and why. Fill in the blanks that individuals may have in their thinking processes. Explain more than you think is necessary.

The more you keep people focused on winning, the better your chances of hoisting the trophy at the end of the game.

### 3. Connection

Here's the tricky part – people won't buy into your vision of winning unless they feel connected to the organization. Connection starts with having a powerful vision people can believe in and feel good about, and it also requires giving honest, candid performance feedback on a regular basis.

Feedback has always been an essential ingredient of high-performing teams. In uncertainty, it has become more important than ever. Employees of all generations want feedback, especially when delivered in a timely and constructive manner. Millennials and GenZers will demand it – from their managers and their peers. If you don't give it to them, they will find another workplace that does.

Moreover, younger generations expect to be able to give feedback as well. They have grown up in a social media world that makes it easy to give instant feedback to anyone, anywhere, at any time. Those born since the advent of smartphones don't know any other way in their social lives, and they expect the same type of communication on the job.

Today's rate of change won't slow down any time soon. Making strategic agility a top priority will allow you to respond to it (rather than just react) without losing focus and will keep your organization on track to win.

• • •



**Holly G. Green** is CEO of The Human Factor, Inc., and guides leaders and their organizations in achieving greater success by teaching you to leverage your brain and the brains of others. An experienced business leader, behavioral scientist, and keynote speaker, Holly has a rare combination of extensive academic training and in-the-trenches experience working in and leading organizations. She has also worked with elite performers including the United States Navy SEALs, Top Gun Fighter Pilots, Olympic athletes, senior NFL referees, and two United States Presidents. Holly is the former president of The Ken Blanchard Company, and co-founder of a biotech firm. She has worked in senior leadership roles with global giants including The Coca Cola Company, Dell Computer, Deloitte, and Bass Hotels and Resorts. She is a best-selling author of numerous books including [\*More Than a Minute: How to be an Effective Leader & Manager in Today's Changing World and Using Your Brain to Win.\*](#)



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# Remote Talent Management: What's Working And What Needs To Be Changed

## | Tips to adapt your strategies

 By **Agota Alvarez**

Within the last year, [62% of employees](#) state that they have worked remotely at some point in time. With an influx of people working from home, leaders have had to find ways to efficiently and effectively handle remote management. Challenges arise when organizations lack the flexibility and accountability to accurately measure and track their remote employees' performance. Managers need to take a hard look at their current talent management processes and determine what is working for them and what needs to be changed.

### How is Remote Management Different?

[Remote management](#) poses unique challenges for managers. Whereas in a traditional office setting, managers can easily track progress on any given project, they are not granted this luxury

in a virtual environment. With this, communication barriers can prove difficult to surmount. When organizations fail to consistently communicate about goals, projects, and processes, [silos can occur](#).

The lack of connection that comes from working in silos can be detrimental to your organizations' culture. [26% of surveyed employees](#) cite feelings of loneliness while working remotely. When employees begin to feel lonely at work, their engagement levels and loyalty to the company plummet. Remote management needs to identify and address these issues so that employees stay engaged with their work.

**Tip:** *Keep an eye out for indications that silos are forming in your workplace so that you can solve the problem before it*

*begins. Some key signs to watch for include:*

- Misalignment of goals between teams and individual members
- Lack of collaboration on projects
- Decline in communication levels

Additionally, [remote management](#) can be tricky for leaders looking to track performance. When working in an office, it is easy to keep tabs on tasks' progress and measure employee performance. As managers steer more toward remote management, this ease of information quickly changes.

Daily successes that were once visible to the company leadership are no longer consistently accessible. Areas in which employees are struggling are no longer clear unless they take the time to communicate these



challenges to others. Managers need to find ways to weave transparency into their team's culture to help mitigate these obstacles.

**Tip:** One surefire way to increase your team's transparency? Make everything public! By working in public documents, chats, and folders, you can keep one another accountable and up-to-date on tasks. A quick motto to live by — if [your whole team can't see a document](#), it doesn't exist!

## Tips to Adapt Your Strategies

**Set clear expectations and set them often.** It is more critical in a remote setting than ever to [set clear expectations](#) for communication and productivity. One way to combat disengagement is by [providing frequent check-ins](#). Whether this is a daily check-in with your team to give quick updates on the progress of tasks, or a more thorough weekly meeting, use these opportunities to get insight into your team's productivity and provide oversight on deadlines.

**Overcommunicate with your team.** Communicating with

your team not only helps to hold one another accountable, but it also helps to [build trust in your department](#). It is important to make sure that you provide your team with the tools they need to communicate. Apart from assisting with tracking performance, [communication helps to align the goals](#) of your organization. Share the quick wins of your day, or reach out to others for advice on the challenges you face. Put simply, when it comes to working remotely, you cannot communicate too much.

**Provide outlets for collaboration and team-building.** Studies have shown that the [social connections in a workplace](#) directly tie to feelings of purpose and well-being. Employees who feel actively engaged with their team are [87% less likely to leave](#) their current position. Apart from collaboration on work-related tasks, it is also essential to find creative ways to connect with your coworkers outside the realm of work. Some fun ideas include playing icebreaker games on Zoom calls, [scheduling virtual coffee breaks](#), or even a Zoom lunch. Brainstorm with your team to see what ideas they have for decompressing after a stressful workweek.

**Stay away from micromanagement.** [85% of businesses](#) cite remote policies as having improved overall productivity. Remote workers feel they can accomplish more in a day, so make sure you don't hinder this productivity by micromanaging their work. [55% of employees](#) cite micromanagement as the reason

for a decline in productivity. Trust that your employees are accomplishing what needs to be done, and take the time to listen to their feedback.

Remote management presents unique challenges to leaders, but these barriers are easy to overcome with the right preparation and mindset. The first step to effectively managing your remote team comes from ensuring that you equip yourself and your employees with the tools and support you need to successfully perform your job. Through collaboration, transparency, and a relationship founded on trust, you and your employees can navigate the changes that come with remote work.

This article was originally published [here](#)



**Agota Alvarez** is the Marketing Communications Manager at Caliper, a PSI company. Beginning her career at Caliper, as a content writer, she soon transitioned into the communication side of marketing, specializing in social media management, public relations, branding, and event management.



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# Post-Covid Future Of Work Trends

| Will work go back to normal again after the Covid-19 pandemic? The short answer is no.

 By **Lenmark Anthony Baltazar**

We thought that we were invincible. That 2020 is going to be the year when our stock markets will trade new highs. When our local business will finally go international. When we can finally buy our dream home, have that dream vacation, or live that dream retirement. But then Covid happened. And in just a couple of months, the world came to a standstill.

The Covid-19 pandemic will have a long-lasting impact not just in our personal lives but also in the way we work. A [2020 Gartner study](#) identifies nine key areas where change is more likely to take place.

We've broken them down below:

## **Trend #1 Increase in Remote Work**

Even before Covid, [remote working](#) has been gaining traction in various companies across the globe. And for good reasons. Several studies show that remote working can help improve employee productivity, as well as help companies, save money from overhead costs (e.g. office space). Despite this, one of the broad challenges remote working faces is the need to effectively manage remote teams. Not to mention some job roles are simply not feasible for working at home.

Covid-19, however, taught us a lesson about the importance of resilient business structures — albeit in a very hard way. This pandemic has reignited interest in remote working as more and more people are required to stay home and strict social distancing measures are being implemented in our offices.

Preliminary data from a Gartner study shows that 41 per cent of employees will work remotely after Covid-19. The survey also shows that 74 per cent of business owners want to hire more remote workers post-Covid.

Remote work is here to stay and is more likely to remain at higher levels even after this pandemic ends.

## **Trend #2 Expanded Data Collection**

Are my employees working on the project? Is my team procrastinating? What can I do to make them more productive while working at home?

These are just some of the questions a manager or business owner asks himself as more and more employees shift from traditional office work to working from home.

Fueled by technology, businesses are most likely to invest heavily in employee tracking software as they work remotely. Consequently, expanding its capability to collect, store, and process data. Employee monitoring can be divided into five subcategories:

**Call Monitoring** - recording your employees' interactions with clients for quality control purposes. This is common at call centres.

**Email Monitoring** - this is usually done to protect the company from information leaks, detect potential abuse, and avoid inappropriate behaviour. Large

companies also monitor employee emails to make sure that workers are not wasting company time.

**Time Tracking** - using apps that monitor computer activity. Most modern time tracking software can detect idleness and will not log the time as billable time.

**GPS Tracking** - commonly used in business where employees spend most of their time on the road. Truck drivers are a classic example.

**Health Tracking** - as companies prepare for normalcy after the pandemic, we will not be surprised to see them investing heavily on tracking their employees' health --- primarily to make sure that everyone is healthy and fit to work again.

### **Trend #3 Contingent Worker Expansion**

While it's true that the [gig economy](#) is one of the hardest-hit industries during the pandemic, analysts are confident that they are here to stay. In fact, a Gartner study suggests that employers are looking to expand their gig worker population to allow more flexibility in their workplaces.

Gig workers or independent contractors are usually hired and assigned work online. They do their jobs remotely and while they enjoy flexibility, they often suffer from low pay and lack of benefits. They can act as buffers for your company and can be tapped on an as-needed basis.

Your biggest challenge here is how you can legally differentiate between your full-time employees and gig workers. Contractor-employee misclassification is no joke and you might end up with a lawsuit if things go south.

### **Trend #4 Employer as a Social Safety Net**

If there is a silver lining in this pandemic it will be this: During Covid-19, employers see how important employees are in their business. We were reminded, albeit in a hard way, that we still have humanity.

Corporate social responsibility is becoming quite a trend even before the pandemic as Millennials enter and lead the workforce. After Covid-19, employers

are looking to further this community involvement by providing employees with expanded health coverage, mental health [support](#), and financial aid.

*"This pandemic has shown how critical it is to embrace our humanity, be understanding and caring — and that holds true for companies, too. Make sure 'human' is prioritized in Human Resources. At Ally, we've been driven by what's right — just like our mantra to 'Do It Right' — and we will do whatever we can to support the well-being of customers and employees. Our already-existing financial, medical and mental health benefits were well designed to help employees through this crisis — and we further expanded our offerings to include additional services, like free telemedicine consults, that are tailored to this specific crisis. Everything we do is through the lens of care and support. That's the culture of Ally. When you get the culture right everything else falls into place and there is no better time to let that shine than right now," - Kathie Patterson, Chief Human Resources Officer, Ally Financial.*

### **Trend #5 Separation of Critical Skills and Critical Roles**

Before the pandemic, employers believe that critical roles require critical skills. But Covid-19 taught us otherwise. Employers realise that there's a new set of critical roles that is more important --- these are the roles that are needed to successfully run essential workflows.

With this in mind, we can see companies shifting from preparing employees for the next critical role to encouraging them to learn multiple skillsets. This makes employees more versatile and opens up multiple areas of advancement for them.

For employees that lack critical skills, consider crafting a career development program that will equip them with the skills to support employees in critical roles.

### **Trend #6 Humanisation (or Dehumanisation) of Workers**

While some companies restored our faith in humanity during this pandemic, there are also some who continue to push their employees to work in high-risk

situations without offering them enough support. Other companies have also become more increasingly task-oriented than before. This trend is expected to continue post-Covid.

People first and workers second.

Or workers first and people second?

How you treat your employees during and after this pandemic will have a lasting effect on your business.

### **Trend #7 The Emergence of New Top-Tier Employers**

In relation to the trend above, potential talents will surely be asking this question during interviews: How did you treat your employees during the pandemic?

Your answer may make or break their decision to join your company.

Your actions during this pandemic will have a long-term effect on your employment brand. And for the next several years, top talents will most likely go for companies that showed their humanity and genuine care for their employees' wellbeing during the crisis.

### **Trend #8 The Shift from Designing for Efficiency to Designing for Resilience**

Before Covid-19 struck, companies are focused on efficiency — investing heavily on improving workflows, productivity, and supply chains. But the pandemic shattered all these into pieces.



This won't be the last pandemic, so post-Covid, we are expecting more companies to focus on resilience and building a pandemic-proof workforce. This includes creating a responsive organisation that can quickly shift its course when unexpected events strike. The key here is to have employees who have cross-functional knowledge and training so they can adapt easily to sudden changes.

### **Trend #9 Increase in Organisation Complexity**

In the UK, a staggering [23% of businesses](#) closed their doors because of Covid-19. While in the US, [over 100,000 small business](#) (which used to define America's economy) have closed down.

However, this event is not unprecedented. During the global crisis of 2008, thousands of businesses had also shut its doors. After the crisis, global M&A accelerated as the effort to nationalise companies so they become less likely to fail intensified. Big companies become even bigger as acquisitions and mergers happened in the name of diversification. As a result, companies become even more complex posing a significant challenge to its leadership.

We are expecting to see the same trend post-Covid. And the challenges that baffled business leaders in the past will haunt us again. To help your business overcome this complexity, consider enabling customised performance management in each of your business units. Remember that what works in Department A may not work on Department B. By giving your departments a free hand when it comes to optimising their management practices based on their needs, you are creating a more resilient and responsive organisation.

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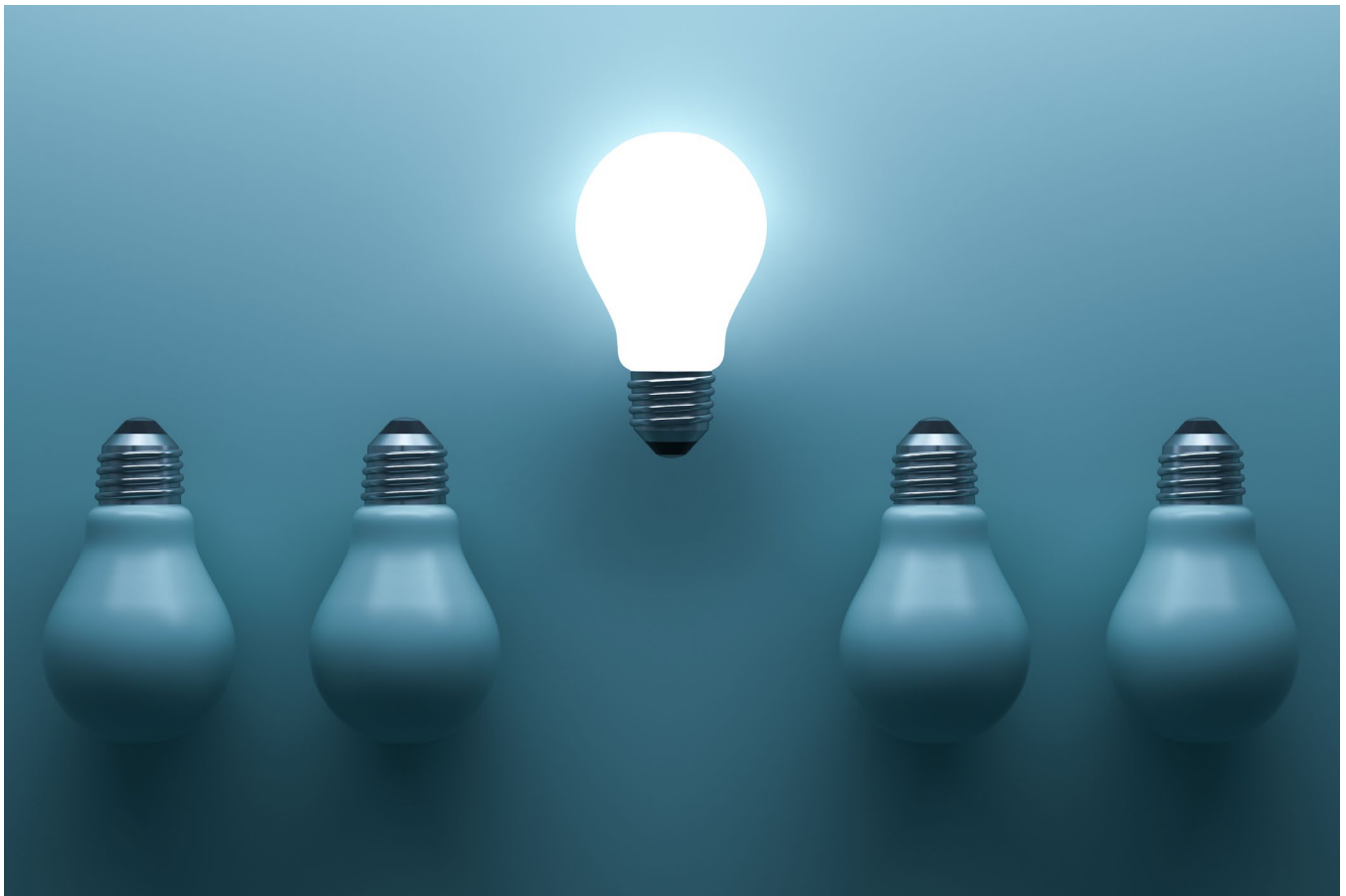
**Lenmark Anthony Baltazar** A chemist-writer hybrid who enjoys writing about business, entrepreneurship, and HR whenever he is not tinkering with chemicals in the lab. Today, he is part of the content management team at HR software company [Sage HR](#).



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# The “New Normal” Demands New Thinking

| Generating value should be the name of the game in 2021



By [Laura Dribin](#)

Throughout 2020, we heard a lot about the “new normal” as we faced a global pandemic, economic uncertainty, and social unrest. Yet as a business leader, it is important to keep things in perspective through proper

strategic planning and nimble approaches to leading your organization. With proper planning and leadership, opportunity can come from the adversity of 2020.

## The “Standard” Way of Planning

This time of year, many companies have just gone through a strategic planning period. The CEO typically owns the development of the strategy

and shares it with their executive team. Then, each department head is instructed to create a list of their department’s budgeting priorities. The department heads create lists but there is usually little guidance that the list should be based on the new strategy. Once prioritized, budgets are set and projects can begin with scope, budgets, and timelines often dictated.

Companies begin this process by defining strategic objectives and we end up with a result that is measured by how quickly, how costly, and what fits into a bread box. Cost overruns, time overruns, and ineffective solutions are commonplace. We even have a name for failed completed projects that don’t succeed: shelfware. Somewhere along the line, project delivery became about completion. Unfortunately, there is often a vital component missing: demonstrating value.

## The Missing Link

Value is often the casualty of present-day strategic planning efforts. Showing how the plan provides value to the organization is the missing link. It is time to fix how we deliver strategic initiatives (i.e., project management)! Ask a project manager why they are implementing a new solution. Their answer is often tactical. They know it needs to be done—but how it integrates into the bigger picture is missing.

Until business leaders reexamine aligning strategic objectives with project delivery objectives,

companies will continue to miss the mark. The basic tenet is forgotten. Getting something done doesn’t mean that it is done right. Improvements may be achieved but are they the right achievements?

As we move into 2021, organizations should be rethinking and reinventing ways of getting things done. Changes should begin right after the strategy is finalized.

## How to Get Started

Let’s take a look at how to transform this strategic execution process with a value-generating focus:

### Strategy and Alignment

- Once a strategy is defined, communicate it out. Start with the executive team and work through the entire organization. The delivery of the strategic vision should be how your team is measured and how success is measured.
- During the budget process, the prioritization of potential initiatives should be focused on assessing which initiatives will bring the most value to drive out the strategy. The discussion should be centered on value generation and creating realistic goals and metrics. Are the proper questions being asked and answered?
  - > Does the proposed initiative support the strategic objectives?
  - > What should success look like if this initiative is undertaken?

- > What would be a realistic goal if this was successfully undertaken? (metrics) (If revenue will be increased, is 3% or 10% the goal? What’s realistic?)
- > Is the overall company budget being allocated across divisions that align the strategy? (e.g., if hiring differently is a strategic objective, will the HR/Talent team be getting enough funding to make that happen?)

### Delivery

Once the list of strategic initiatives has been selected and the budget is finalized, revamping how projects are managed needs to change.

- Once a project is ready to kick off, the individual’s skill set that will manage a strategic initiative will change. This individual needs to understand the corporate strategy enough to know how their project fits into delivering on those strategic goals. This individual’s performance should be measured against their drive to value.

**Note:** *This is not your typical project manager that has been taught to manage time, budget, and scope. While that is still a reasonable tactical measure, this individual needs to drive this effort with an eye toward value. For many projects, a project manager’s skill set works fine yet, for strategic value-generating initiatives, a leader accountable to driving desired outcomes (value) becomes more critical.*



- Performance reviews should be aligned back to delivering value for the organization. It translates to a need for a leader that remains accountable to the strategic objectives.
- This role needs to incorporate the process of ensuring adoption is deemed successful. The value can't be reached if the end-users don't use a new solution because of a lack of training or missed expectations. How well an initiative is adopted will help define the level of value achieved.
- “What cannot be measured, cannot be managed.” Success metrics are paramount to value generation. By using these metrics through the execution of the project, it becomes easier to course correct if assumptions prove false and drive the initiative to different results.

Standard project management just doesn't work anymore. It really hasn't worked for some

time. Standish Group started measuring project success based on time, budget, and scope in 1994. The numbers of failed projects were abysmal then and hasn't improved radically since. Add in missed opportunities, lack of value, shelfware, and the numbers become dramatically worse.

### Here's What Value Looks Like

A large Fortune 500 company acquired another large corporation. Prior to integrating the two companies, the Fortune 500 company took the time to define expected success and develop success metrics. Then they created a plan to find synergies for cost reductions in every department.

Early on, the team (while intermittently measuring those metrics) realized that they reached their goal prior to completing the plan. The executive team was given the option to continue cutting to the bare bones by completing the plan

or to stop and optimize the team to gain a competitive advantage. They chose the latter.

The interesting difference between this example and a normal acquisition integration is that a typical project would have continued through to execute the entire plan (thus cutting the company to the bare bones) through the found synergies without the value checkpoint. The management team would not have been given the option. In a “normal” project, the numbers wouldn't have been realized until the end. The act of focusing on value allowed this particular company to make better business decisions.

### New Year, Think Value

So, as we move into a new year, it is time to stop taking for granted that standard project management brings about the best results. Generating value should be the name of the game in 2021.

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**Laura Dribin** is the Founder, President and CEO of Peritius Consulting.



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# 6 Strategies To Build A More Resilient Organization

| Your role as a leader is critical right now

 By **Meridith Elliott Powell**

Wow, who thought a virus could so drastically disrupt the marketplace. Businesses have shut down; social distancing has become the norm and it has us all wondering when if ever things are supposed to return to normal and what is normal going to look like now?

The virus seemed like the biggest threat we were facing, but now we add political unrest, the partisan divide and the continuous anxiety and fear so many in our society are feeling as the virus and social tensions continue to rage. For many of us, these are the most challenging times we have ever faced in our society. It is enough to make you believe that success and happiness are not possible. That there is too much disruption, too many obstacles and too much change happening way too fast.



But nothing could be further than the truth. There is so much opportunity in the marketplace, but we need to be mentally fit and prepared to take action if want to take advantage of it. The fastest way for our organizations and our teams to heal is by moving forward and building the mental toughness needed to come out successful on the other side. And as leaders, that is your job right now. To dig deep, to show up, and to help your team develop the skills and strategies they need to care for themselves, push through the challenges, and build their own resilience.

When this crisis started, I did an informal poll of my clients and my social media followers. Simply asking the questions: When uncertainty hits, are you someone who runs to the sound of the gunfire and takes action? Or do you sit back and take more of a wait and see approach? More than 74% of responders said they take a wait and see approach. Many sharing they were unsure of what to do or how to move forward.

Again, as leaders, this is where you come in. Creating a sense of calm for your team, and more importantly helping them find the path forward, cope with the stress they are feeling and build the inner strength they need to bounce back and push through the challenges.

## Six Strategies to Build A More Resilient Organization

### 1. Transparency & Communication

Sharing information often is key to helping employees build resilience. In uncertain times, your team wants to know the facts and the reality of what is going on. Lack of information will have them creating their own stories and ideas of what the future looks like. Lack of transparent information will create distrust. As a leader, you need to communicate often with your team and across different platforms. You need to be open and honest with them, sharing what you feel is going well, what you are worried about, and where you feel the priorities are for the company and team to be successful.

### 2. Purpose & Vision

One reason people get stuck when faced with challenges is they can't see past the obstacles. As a leader, you need to paint the picture of what is possible, and give them a reason to continue to push through the challenging times.

Your team wants to do work that matters, they want to feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves, and they want to know their hard work will result in something. As a leader, you provide that by continuously sharing the purpose and vision.

### 3. Ownership

Once your team understands where you are headed, and how you plan to get through this crisis they want to help you get there. One of the biggest challenges of uncertainty is feeling out of control. As a leader, you give your team back that control by giving them ownership and skin in the game. In other words, you determine "what" direction you are headed, but you ask your team "how" to get there. When you ask them how, you simultaneously give them voice, responsibility and give them back a sense of control.

### 4. Condition for Change

In a world where things keep changing and obstacles keep emerging, you need a team that can adapt easily and quickly. To build a team like that, you need to condition your team for change. Literally, get them in shape, used to, and actually thinking about change

before change even happens. Change can be your greatest opportunity if you see it coming, if you ignore it, the change will bury you.

### 5. Create Connection

In times of crisis and extreme change it can be all hands-on deck and work first. All understandable, but if you want your team to be strong, to be engaged, then you need to give them the time to connect. The time to build the relationships that make them feel they are part of a team, that they belong and that they are working together and alongside others to move through the challenges.

### 6. Rinse & Repeat

And last but not least, rinse and repeat. Building a more resilient organization is not something you do and check it off your to do list. No, you need to go back through these strategies over and over again, and understand the stronger team you build the more successful your organization will be.

The truth is we have just come through one of the hardest years of our lives, and there are probably even more challenges that we must face in 2021. But you have only to look down through history to see that out of uncertainty comes some of our greatest success. Your role as a leader is critical right now. Step to the plate, help your team build the skills they need, and you will see all of this uncertainty become your strategic advantage.

• • •



Voted, One of the Top 15 Business Growth Experts To Watch, and Top 41 Motivational Sales Speakers, **Meridith Elliott Powell** is an award-winning author who helps her clients learn the strategies to turn uncertainty to competitive advantage.



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# From Challenges To Opportunities To Strength

## | HR's road ahead for 2021 and beyond

 By **Elizabeth Bille, Jesse Raney Bridges and Erin McClintock**

If 2020 taught us anything, it was that the future is unpredictable. We can forecast that some of the shifts from last year are going to stay with us in the next decade and beyond. The good news is that the biggest problems ahead already have proven solutions. If HR practitioners take a proactive approach and tackle these challenges head on, they will quickly pivot into their biggest strengths.

### **Challenge 1: Building Top Talent Brands**

Although regulatory mandates are powerful drivers of workplace policies and practices, business pressures play an increasingly prominent role. In the war for top talent, employees are prioritizing a company's brand as an employer: 86% say they would not apply for or continue to work for an organization that has a bad reputation. From the #MeToo movement, to calls for social justice, and the Business Roundtable's recent reimagining of the purpose of a corporation, employees, applicants, boards, shareholders, and the public will continue to scrutinize a company's practices and

workplace culture. Successful organizations will assess their values, policies, and practices to ensure they are aligned in support of an inclusive, ethical, and sustainable workplace. They will benchmark their practices against comparable organizations to continue improving and will become a brand that attracts top talent.

### **Challenge 2: Maintaining Culture in a Remote Environment**

Remote work is here to stay, at least to some degree. It has been a win-win for businesses. Productivity remained steady or even increased in 2020, although managers reported struggling with leading remote teams. Surveys show that 80% percent of employees want to continue working remotely at least occasionally, and 58% hope it will be their primary way of working. It's no surprise, then, that 74% of CFOs plan to make remote work permanent for some portion of their employees post-Covid. Additionally, the remote work environment [along with dedicated discussions about equity that were spurred

by protests over racial injustice] created an unintended, but positive increase in the sense of belonging for employees of color. Forward-looking HR practitioners are already building new skills and implementing new processes and technology solutions to enable team management and collaboration. They are delivering online workplace training, to drive culture and employee engagement and will continue to do so as work becomes more "hybrid".

### **Challenge 3: Supporting Employee Mental Health**

According to data from the Kaiser Family Foundation, 36% of adults reported symptoms of anxiety or depression in June 2020, compared to just 11% in June 2019. Mental health challenges can impact retention, productivity, and job performance — not to mention healthcare costs. Progressive workplaces recognize the benefits of investing in the mental wellness of their employees — and data supports this. HR practitioners will get ahead of these concerning trends by supporting their employees in a variety of ways. Mental health and wellness support come in many

forms: counseling resources for employees, availability of apps or technology tools to promote positive mental health, the allotment of “mental health days”, or the utilization of workplace mental health education programs. In particular, there will be a focus on equitable mental wellbeing services that provides programs and services from culturally competent practitioners.

### Challenge 4: Shifting DE&I to the Center of All Workplace Activities

Company responses to the protests against racial injustice

highlighted the need to make external commitments to equity and also make meaningful progress internally. As the focus on accountability, transparency, and progress on DEI goals continue, you can anticipate a deeper need to align your organizational values to these tenets. Recent research shows that organizations that have a stated value of diversity and inclusion “walk the walk” and have increased gender diversity on their boards and senior management teams. There will also be a call to sophisticate and standardize reporting of demographic

and talent data to meet the expectation of accountability and transparency. To be successful, DE&I will extend beyond the talent management capacity and become more central to the operations of your organization. For this to work, DE&I teams will need to grow and scale. Starting the year by focusing on the challenges ahead can be daunting, but with the right training, mindset, and planning these challenges will evolve into progress.

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**Elizabeth Bille** is the Senior Vice President of Workplace Culture at EVERFI, a leading provider of workplace training. In this role, she serves as EVERFI's subject matter expert on preventing harassment and discrimination, promoting ethical conduct, and creating positive, thriving workplace cultures. Prior to joining EVERFI, Elizabeth was the general counsel and chief ethics officer of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). She also served as a legal and policy advisor to a former Vice Chair of the EEOC; in this capacity, she provided advice to the EEOC regarding the federal laws prohibiting harassment and discrimination in the workplace and contributed to the development of EEOC regulations and enforcement guidance.



**Jesse Raney Bridges (she/her/hers)** is the Senior Vice President of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) at EVERFI. She provides subject matter expertise to shape inclusive and equitable workplaces, higher education institutions and K12 schools. Jesse's approach blends a strategic focus on organizational policy, practice and culture, with empowering individuals through behavior based skill building to create sustainable change. Her background in counseling, behavioral science, storytelling and practical DEI experience informs her work. Jesse has a successful track record of architecting the role of the DEI Strategist. Prior to serving as EVERFI's first SVP of DEI, she was the first Senior Director of Organizational Culture and Head of DEI at EAB.



**Erin McClintock** serves as EVERFI's Vice President of Community Engagement Impact and Education, where she leads the organization's work in mental health, well-being, and social and emotional learning. She approaches her work from a strength-based standpoint, and has a diverse array of expertise in mental health, substance use prevention, violence prevention, digital wellness, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. In her role, Erin looks critically at the ways in which technology can make an impact on tackling some of the world's most seemingly intractable issues, and how to best leverage education to cultivate a widespread impact on individuals across the lifespan. Erin holds a graduate degree in Mental Health Counseling and completed her post-Master's education in trauma and addiction counseling.



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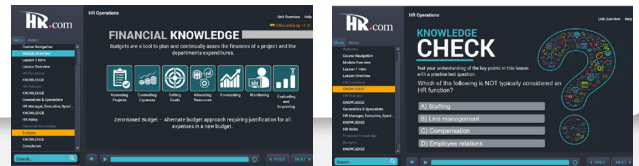
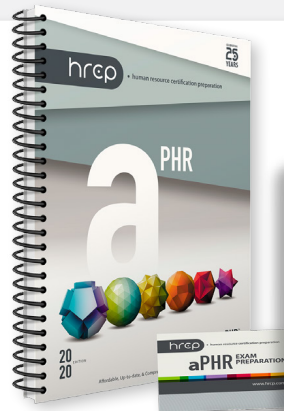
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# Inviting Your Boss To A Thinking Together Conversation

| How to talk to your boss in a way that works



 By **Marsha Acker**

A common question among managers and agile coaches learning the skills of coaching others is, “How do I coach up?” In other words, “how do I coach my boss to be a better boss and

tell them that I think they are the problem?”

There are two common reasons this question arises: the first is that there has been a specific

interaction that has left someone feeling deflated or demoralized. Perhaps they were not heard and understood, or they didn’t like the way they were spoken to. The second reason is that they

feel unsupported in their work, or maybe feel like they are being told to lead change while their boss's behavior keeps rewarding old patterns instead.

This second scenario is part of a bigger issue—and one where it seems like the boss is the “problem.” Instead of creating change, it feels like you're just slogging through the mud and getting your foot stuck with each step.

But chances are, what's going on is not something that can be solved as simply as the concept of “coaching up.” In fact, there's no such thing as “coaching up.” If what you're actually looking for is the opportunity to give feedback about a specific incident, this is a feedback conversation. But when you're addressing a bigger, systemic issue, it's time for something more. Instead of trying to “coach up” or give feedback, try inviting your boss to a Thinking Together Conversation.

## The Dark Side of Feedback

What's missing most from feedback conversations in organizations today is the notion of inquiry. So many of us come into a conversation locked and loaded with our own perspective and the desire to just put our idea out on the table and have it heard. We expect the other person to make sense of what we've said and then take the action we desire.

While direct and candid feedback has a place and purpose, the common one-way delivery of

one person's experience can be unbalanced. It assumes that one person has the complete picture, that one person's ideas are more “right” than the other's, and that spending time asking someone else for their perspective or input is a waste of time.

This quick, get-in-and-get-out feedback style is what I call “driveby feedback.” It's not really a conversation at all—it's a one-way “download.”

No one wants to be told that they're “doing it wrong,” and if you start from a place of assuming you know what the problem is—and only focus on telling your boss what they are doing wrong and what they need to do more of—it's a monologic approach that makes you right and them wrong. You've invited them into a debate and set them up to either defend the actions they've taken or just check out within the first few seconds of your conversation.

So, what's a Thinking Together Conversation and why does it matter?

An alternative approach would be to invite your boss into a Thinking Together Conversation.

Thinking Together Conversations require all parties to come to the conversation with genuine curiosity and the assumption that solving the current problem or dilemma cannot be done by just one person. It requires a broader shared understanding of what's happening. In a Thinking Together Conversation, we need to bring

questions instead of solutions. In essence, we are inviting others into a dialogue instead of a monologue for the purpose of learning together to craft a better solution.

Engaging in a Thinking Together Conversation invites a real, meaningful conversation that has the potential to shift something important in the dynamic. You're not “coaching up” (if such a thing were even possible)—you're engaging in inquiry. You're thinking together with your boss in a way that can create real change.

## The 3 Steps to Starting a Thinking Together Conversation with Your Leader

Here are some action steps you can take to invite a Thinking Together Conversation:

### Step 1: Be Clear About Your Intention

Why do you want to have this conversation? How do you want to show up in it?

If your answer to either of these questions comes from a place of wanting to reprimand, punish, or blame your boss, then do some work on your own thinking before asking to have a conversation. Coming from that place will not serve anyone, and it definitely does not promote curiosity.

If, however, you're coming from a place of genuine curiosity and seeking to understand—with a belief that there is more than one side to what's going on—you'll be in a much better position to start a

real conversation. If you are willing to engage in a way that's open to hearing different perspectives, both you and your boss will likely learn new information. From there, you will be far more likely to be able to create a new solution together.

### Step 2: Create an Invitation

Invite your boss into a conversation for learning and exploration.

Behind every dilemma are multiple truths and perspectives about what's creating the current situation. So make it inviting for you and your boss to want to come to the table.

Imagine that you'd received the results of a 12-month engagement survey suggesting that your boss's lack of engagement was impeding progress. You could give driveby feedback that would get you nowhere, or you could create an invitation:

- "We just got the survey results back. I would love to have a conversation with you about it and get your thoughts."
- "I notice that the engagement survey shows a 'lack of engagement by senior management' as the greatest barrier to our performance. I'm curious what you make of that?"

Understand that when managers are invited to a conversation, they are often expected to solve a problem or have some solution immediately. Instead of replicating that dynamic, try inviting them to

a conversation for learning and understanding. Together, you might co-create a solution.

### Step 3: Be Prepared to Offer Your Observations

This can be one of the most challenging aspects of a Thinking Together Conversation. It requires you to both be curious about your boss's experience and perspective and candid about your own observations. David Kantor calls this the speech act of Bystand—a morally neutral observation about what's happening. To pull it off, you need to be prepared to share what you notice. Pulling from the scenario described above, here's an example of how you might offer a morally neutral observation about what you see happening while remaining curious about what's happening for your boss:

- "Would it be helpful if I shared what I've observed? You asked that we schedule more collaborative planning meetings and include you. We now have these meetings booked every two weeks. However, you have attended 2 of 12 meetings in the past 6 months, and it's left the team feeling confused and unmotivated. What's happening on your end that's pulling you away from these meetings?"

Thinking Together Conversations move us away from looking for someone to blame and hold us accountable to the kind of inquiry that supports meaningful dialogue. When we seek to understand multiple perspectives

and learn more about what's happening in the current situation, it's much easier to discover a new solution that might not exist yet. It's an effective way of speaking truth to power while creating space for real results.

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**Marsha Acker** is a professional facilitator and an executive and team coach with 25 years of experience supporting leaders as they tackle complex challenges and spearhead change in their organizations. The founder and CEO of TeamCatapult, she uses systems thinking, structural dynamics, dialogue, and agility to help teams collaborate and align with clarity, purpose, and vision. Acker served as the track chair for defining the ICAgile Team Coaching and Enterprise Coaching learning objectives for eight years and is currently a member of the ICAgile Agile Coaching Expert Certification panel. Marsha is a Certified Professional Facilitator (CPF), Certified Professional Co-Active Coach (CPCC), Professional Certified Coach (ICF-PCC), Organizational and Relationship Systems Coach (Center for Right Relationship), Dialogix - Certified Structural Dynamics Interventionist, and an ICAgile Certified Expert Agile Team Coaching and an ICAgile Certified Expert in Enterprise Coaching.



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# It's Time To Rethink Your **Soft Skills** Training Strategy

Steps that will help to ensure you're prepared for what lies ahead



 By **Sheri Jeavons**

It's time to think about soft skill training in a new way. We all know this type of training traditionally takes place face-to-face over the course of a day or two and includes role play, personalized coaching, and more advanced programs that offer individualized video recording.

It's a big event. While there's no replacement for that type of collaboration, comradery and personalized coaching, many organizations no longer allow their professionals to be away from work for extended amounts of time. The result? Soft skill training is falling by the wayside and many of you are not doing it at all.

It's time to rethink your soft skills training strategy. The following steps will help ensure you're prepared for what lies ahead.

## 1. Collaborate with IT

Collaboration with IT is a critical component of your training initiatives. In the past, training and development departments never had to work with IT to get training initiatives off the ground. Because of this, those relationships may not exist, creating a disconnect that can be difficult to overcome. I strongly recommend that you identify someone on your team who has IT experience or baseline IT knowledge who can serve as the liaison with the IT department.

This is a critical first step in implementing the AI-driven software and gamification options available to you. If you can't get IT involved and on board with the adoption of these newly available technologies, you will not be able to grow your professionals in a scalable, measurable and budget-friendly way.

## 2. Blended Learning

While a blended learning approach to training is nothing new, it can be challenging to apply to soft skills training. Take a fresh look at your content and consider how you can spread the learning out over several weeks or months. Ultimately, there's no way around it. You must redesign your curriculum and adapt it using available technologies. For example, week one might feature a 60-minute educational webinar with an assignment on AI-driven software or an eLearning platform designed for practice.

Week two could include a virtual collaboration session with several team members and a manager for role-play scenarios. Week three may be a face-to-face team meeting to practice the new skills and have a discussion. Thirty days from then, you repeat the process with new role plays and new circumstances.

## 3. Identify Potential Partners

When you're first getting started, you don't know what you don't know. This means, you likely can't do it all by yourself. You'll have to identify and interview outside vendors who you can lean on to answer your questions. These partners can provide you with a variety of solutions to help you reach your goals.

This may include training tools that can be implemented via mobile devices, an existing eLearning platform, live online or even face-to-face.

## 4. Customization Is Key

When soft skills training becomes somewhat automated, the customization that naturally occurs in a classroom can be lost. This may decrease the effectiveness of the training because the end users may feel that it doesn't apply to them. You must be willing to create different activities and assignments to meet the specific needs of different levels of professionals within your organization.

## 5. Involve Managers

Once all your systems are in place and the training is off the ground, your work still isn't done. In order to keep individuals engaged, accountable and ultimately implementing the new skills they've learned, consider enlisting the help of their managers. Assigning these managers tasks and/or meetings with the trainees is a critical step to ensure your great training content isn't forgotten in the hustle and bustle of daily tasks.

Ultimately, adopting and implementing these new technologies provides you the opportunity to successfully train more people within the flow of work for less money than ever before.

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**Sheri Jeavons** is President of Power Presentations, Inc. Sheri founded Power Presentations in 1993 and has evolved the company to meet its clients' changing needs. However, her mission has stayed the same: Create communication skills training programs that professionals leave saying, "That was the best training I've ever attended. Ever."



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