

Building A Better Benefits Culture

by Harrison Newman, Employee Benefits Consultant

Employee benefit programs are evolving. It is no longer enough to have comprehensive medical, dental and vision coverage options. Post-pandemic, employees across generations are asking for more from their employers. Employee well-being is the top priority from Boomers to Gen Z. In fact, a people first culture was the highest ranked company initiative across each generation in participants recently surveyed. So it stands to reason that organizations who can adopt a people first approach to employee benefits culture will increase overall job satisfaction in their employee population.

The fact of the matter is that the average employee is dissatisfied at their current job. 77% of employees are disengaged while 42% of managers report high levels of stress and more than a third of senior leaders are feeling burnout. At every level there are signs of occupational fatigue so the solution to this problem cannot be addressed in a one size fits all manner. HR benefits have a significant role in overall employee job satisfaction and employees respond well when they believe employer initiatives genuinely prioritize their needs as an individual. Forbes research suggests that a people-first culture is one of the top initiatives employees across generations perceive their workplaces are genuinely committed to.

Putting this into action means knowing your employee community. It means being inclusive and understanding that what works for a Boomer may not be a priority for your Gen Z employee cohort. Millennial employees believe employers should make diversity, equity and inclusion programs one of their main concerns. Whereas Gen Z employees want their employers to focus on pay equity. These demographic differences matter. In short, what does a modern inclusive benefits culture look like for your specific organization? Figuring that out is the first step and you won't know until you ask.

- 1. Consider an Employee Resource Group.** I've touted the benefits of an [employee resource group](#) in the past but it bears repeating. ERGs can play a crucial role in identifying a gap in the workplace benefits employees need to feel supported at an organization. Think for a minute about the impact of improved fertility benefits if you have a large LGBTQIA+ population on staff. As alluded to throughout this article, four generations of employees are currently in the American workforce and their needs are diverse and can be wildly disparate. ERGs can establish trust and provide feedback on which benefit programs are helpful or wasteful. They can also foster community by providing employees with a safe space to discuss their own experiences.
- 2. Stay Sharp on Mental Health Benefits.** Across all generations insurance coverage for mental health services was rated the most important mental health benefit. 57% of Baby Boomers would like a dedicated office space for meditation or decompressing. That percentage drops to around 48% when Millennial or Gen Z employees are surveyed. Just over half of employees across all generations said they would like a dedicated office space for mental health concerns. Creating a people-first benefits culture means taking care of them not just financially but mentally. 62% of employees say that access to mental health services is key to their overall job satisfaction. A statistic that makes sense when you remember that more than 70 percent of employees are disengaged at work. Examine your mental health offerings and assess what changes may be needed to promote employee well-being.
- 3. Be Flexible.** Nearly 80% of respondents prioritized flexible work options as part of the benefits program across all four generations surveyed for this study. Employees are more than their jobs. That can be difficult to navigate but it is essential to establishing a people-first environment that supports an inclusive benefits culture in your organization. Flexible work options will differ by industry and employer need but employee appetite for adaptable work arrangements persists despite RTO policies. Determine what is feasible and build a strategy that serves your employees.

But start by gathering information on your specific employee needs. Your people. Your culture. And remember that some of these changes can be implemented through voluntary benefits. Building a better benefits culture does not have to mean high cost. It does mean paying attention to what your employees need.

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