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Frontline Analysis by the MRINetwork Team of Global Search Experts

Six Top Workforce Trends for 2017

Successful businesses adapt to new market demands, the changing workforce and ever-evolving technology. They have to - companies that don't adapt fail. Understanding the trends that are driving change, creating talent challenges, and offering potential solutions can help pave the way to adaptability and success.

Many of the workplace trends prevalent in 2016, such as maximizing talent analytics and improving the candidate experience will continue to resonate in 2017, coupled with other emerging trends that demand new ways of managing and planning for the future. The following are the top six workforce trends expected throughout the new year:

The blended workforce will continue to grow.

The gig economy, an environment in which organizations contract with workers and for short-term engagements, has created a new kind of diversity with full-time permanent employees working side-by-side with freelancers and contractors. "As more companies hire on-demand to solve key problems and cut costs, more freelancers, contractors and full-time workers will team up to work on projects together as part of the blended workplace," says Tom Sephakis, vice president of contract staffing for MRINetwork. "And with many freelancers working at remote offices, the ability to manage without borders is going to become an increasingly critical skill."

Companies will work to improve both candidate and employee experiences.

Companies create marketing experiences for customers and prospects in order to drive positive engagement, increase loyalty and grow their revenues. Now employers are recognizing they need to do the same thing for both their candidates and their employees. A recent study by Workplace Trends found that nearly 60 percent of job seekers have had a poor experience as a job applicant, and 72 percent of them have shared that experience on an online employer review site. "Every single candidate touchpoint reflects on the potential employer," says Nancy Halverson, vice president of franchise engagement and culture for MRINetwork. "If you're missing the mark, the world soon knows about it due to sites like Glassdoor, and as a result your offer acceptance rates will suffer."

Aside from candidates, employee retention and engagement are also a major concern as companies recognize that top talent have numerous employment options and losing even a few of them drastically affects productivity. More organizations, for example, will focus on identifying and eliminating unnecessary workplace complexity. By putting the employee experience first, employers will be helping to improve productivity by designing simplified work processes, and creating a culture that is more cohesive, provides more opportunities for idea sharing across the company, and ultimately is more enjoyable.

Use of talent analytics will increase.

Analyzing and curating data to measure and improve hiring will become more prevalent as talent acquisition professionals feel the pressure to combine traditional recruitment methods that leverage instinct or gut feelings, with the ability to turn everyday data into recruiting intelligence. In fact, many companies are already using data to analyze competitor talent pools to find candidates with the right skills and potential to join the organization, and are examining data on whether full-time or part-time employees bring the highest return on investment.

Employers will continue to seek better ways to interpret data and develop true insights about future and current employees, regarding whether they have the competencies, experiences, traits and drivers to succeed. "The most important consideration for organizations looking for technology solutions is to ensure they are clear about what they need and why," advises Reagan Johnson, director of technology operations for MRINetwork.

National average starting salaries are up.

For every job opening in 2008, there were 40 applicants. By 2016, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics *Job Openings and Labor Survey*, the number of applicants for every open position had shriveled to 1.4. Two factors - increased demand for skilled workers and historically low inflation - are driving wage growth and, as a result, average starting salaries will continue to rise in 2017.

When skilled professionals are both in high demand and in short supply, employers have to remain open about compensation for new hires and be informed about salary trends in their industry and in their geographic location. Failure to do so will mean losing top candidates to competitors.

More millennials will move into management roles.

This year, more than 3.6 million executive leaders are set to retire as younger professionals ascend to managerial slots. As millennials move into leadership roles, their management style is expected to bring a striking change in corporate America, with a focus on collaboration and transparency. Where previous generations adopted the traditional top-down corporate structure, millennials tend toward a flatter structure with fewer titled roles and a more democratic approach. Leadership will emerge in other forms because Millennials often believe you don't need a title to be a leader. It can come from heading a project or campaign, or even taking an active role on your team.

The uptick in boomerang workers will continue.

The boomerang employee, one who leaves a company on good terms but then returns later, is on the upswing. According to a study conducted by the Workforce Institute at Kronos: *The Corporate Culture and Boomerang Employee Study*, 85 percent of HR professionals say they have received job applications from former employees, and 40 percent say their organization hired about half of those former employees who applied.

One of the reasons for this trend is the fact that top professionals know how to effectively switch jobs within a short time. It's also easy for companies to keep in touch with former employees through social media and to track and re-employ them. As the employment market continues to tighten, it will become increasingly difficult for employers to find the quality, skilled candidates to meet their needs. One of the advantages of hiring boomerang workers is that they are already familiar with the company's culture and do not require a comprehensive orientation.

The above six trends already exist today, but their impact will increase as 2017 unfolds. Many companies are already under unprecedented threat of disruption, due to shrinking talent pools in many sectors, and employee expectations that are changing. This means employers have to be extremely sensitive to these changes and react more quickly than they have in the past. Understanding the trends that will profoundly affect the workplace next year and in the years ahead is crucial not only to their success but to their survival.

