

Resolve to make 2017 better than years past

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As we put yet another year in the books and look toward the promise of a new year, we may make (and hopefully keep) personal resolutions. But as HR professionals, we ought to make resolutions—or at least consider changes—to improve the processes we use daily, weekly, or even annually. Take this opportunity to consider what improvements you can make in your organization.

Review and update HR policies and procedures

An up-to-date policy and procedure manual is important for many reasons. First, it is an easy way to answer employees' questions and make sure everyone is on the same page concerning expectations, benefits, and conduct. Second, employment laws change, and it is important that your company's policies are at least consistent with applicable employment laws. The passage of Proposition 206 is an example of a change that will require a review—and possible revision—of your policy on paid sick leave. Third, as a company grows and changes, the growth may subject the company to additional employment laws that require a review and revision of HR policies and procedures to ensure compliance.

Monitor record retention

All employers, regardless of size, are subject to some record-keeping requirements under both federal and state law. Although records must be kept only by employers that are covered by a particular law, it is wise to maintain records until you can establish that you need not comply with particular record-keeping requirements. Proper retention, maintenance, and destruction policies and procedures for personnel files are essential to avoid civil monetary penalties for failure to maintain statutory records. Proper record maintenance is also

critical in defending against employment-related litigation. The start of the new year provides a renewed opportunity to review your record-keeping policies. It also is a good time to purge documents that are now beyond retention requirements and archive records that pertain to former employees and still need to be retained.

Place new emphasis on training

All too often, HR problems arise because supervisors are not properly trained on personnel matters or issues related to employment law. Supervisors are the first line of communication to employees and should be well versed in the company's policies and the uniform implementation of them. At the very least, supervisors should know to direct employees to HR if they are uncertain of an answer rather than give an inconsistent or incorrect answer.

That is where training comes in. Supervisor training should go well beyond the omnipresent harassment and discrimination training on Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 focused on by most employers. For example, supervisors should be well versed in applicable wage and hour laws and the implementation of related HR policies (accurately recording hours worked, permissible unpaid break time, and handling unauthorized overtime). Other types of supervisory training include conflict resolution, team building, reviewing performance, and goal setting.

Also, renew your focus on training and developing employees to benefit the business. There are many benefits to training, including increased employee satisfaction and reduced turnover. Cross-training employees to be capable in more areas adds flexibility and efficiency. Cross-training also helps to promote team building as employees learn to appreciate what their coworkers do for the company.

Bottom line

While this column hardly scratches the surface of potential HR New Year's resolutions, it's a great start to the process of improving in the coming year. Implementing these and other HR resolutions will benefit your company and could change its level of success forever.

Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right.

—Oprah Winfrey

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