

TABLE OF EXPERTS



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Employers navigate challenging workplace dynamics

Today's employers are facing ongoing workplace dynamics brought on by demands of the pandemic, but certain to continue as the modern office - and remote workspace - continue to evolve. Between workplace choices, compensation related to onsite versus remote work, communication strategies, and simply creating an attractive and adaptive office, the post-Covid era is forcing employers to be nimble and responsive to this evolving market.

At a recent pair of panel discussions, hosted by workforce consultancy Leeds Professional Resources and held at the offices of the *South Florida Business Journal* in Miami and the Greater Fort Lauderdale Alliance in Fort Lauderdale. They also discussed how companies of all sizes continue to adapt to changing employee trends, particularly as companies are always evolving what the "modern workforce" looks like.

The discussions were led by Jonathan Leeds, President of Leeds Professional Resources. Attendees from South Florida's professional service providers, nonprofit organizations and other employers

shared their strategies to strike a balance between company and employee expectations.

These matters have become increasingly common to employers of all stripes, especially in the world forced to change with the pandemic, Leeds said.

"Each HR team is assessing how the internal operations and workplace schedule works best for them depending upon their industry, the role of the employee, and preference of the hiring managers that they feel is efficient for their department," Leeds said. "As well, we hear frequently from HR, they are doing employee polls to see what they feel works best for them and the company and

take that into consideration."

He wondered what requests have surfaced among panelists that have forced employers to consider how they communicate and collaborate with their teams, especially with the prospect of losing a good employee or stoking politics or jealousy by seemingly allowing some more freedom to work remotely than others.

At global accounting firm BDO, a flexible culture and seeking work-life balance has helped bolster communication and collaboration, said Ana del Cerro-Fals, a firm principal and Miami and Fort Lauderdale tax practice leader. Before the pandemic, del Cerro-Fals was a pioneer

THE PANELISTS



REGINALD ANDRE
CEO
ARK Solvers



ABE ANZARDO
Partner
Invisors



JODY BEAVERSON
Chief People Officer
ModMed



ANA DEL CERRO-FALS
Principal, Miami & Ft. Lauderdale
Tax Practice Leader, BDO



TIFFANY DESMARAIS
Vice President
Max Borges Agency



DAVID DRUEY
Regional President
Centennial Bank



TINA ELMOWITZ
Chief People Officer
rbb Communications



PORPOISE EVANS
Shareholder
Littler



MATT LEVINSON
COO
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JEFFREY LIPSON
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SUSAN NORTON
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Allen Norton & Blue



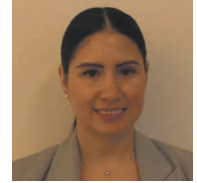
DENISSE PICHARDO, SVP
Human Resources Manager
International Finance Bank



JOEY PRINCZ
CEO & Chief Wrecker
Wrecking Ball



JOSH RADER
Managing Partner
Citrin Cooperman



DANAY RAMIREZ
Global Executive Partner
H&Co.



MICHELLE SHIRLEY
CEO & Chief Heart Officer
Be Strong International



ANN MARIE SORRELL
President & CEO
Mosaic Group



SHERRIL COLUMBO
Shareholder
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Moderator:
JONATHAN LEEDS
President and Founder
Leeds Professional Resources

and advocate for “fixing work-life balance,” she said. With the return to work, flexibility helped encourage reluctant workers to return to the office. After all, “mandates” wouldn’t have worked, especially with younger talent that senior partners knew needed collaboration and lessons in soft skills, she said.

“It would be contrary to the intent to make it seem like these were mandates,” she said.

Collecting purposes and constant communication helped at International Finance Bank, said Denisse Pichardo, the bank’s senior VP and HR manager. “We have to explain the ‘why,’ and ask ‘how do you feel?’ and connect the mission

to the project.”

Industries that rely on internships to both get work done and prepare the next generation workforce had to find their path, said Danay Ramirez, global executive partner with accounting and advisory firm H&Co. That “bullpen” represents the future of the firm, including for clients who visit the office and see young talent amid the environment, Ramirez said.

GROWING TOMORROW'S TALENT

From its summer internship program to a “young leaders program,” International Finance Bank keeps young talent interested

and engaged, which also allows managers to work with and nurture the next generation, Pichardo said.

Performance, mastery of skills, sharing of knowledge and the path to success are lost when employees aren’t in the office, said Porpoise Evans, a shareholder with employment law firm Littler.

“You have to shift the conversation from a mandate to the worker’s benefit,” he said. “You have to say, ‘I want you to succeed, and the only way you will is if you’re here.’”

Amid all the chaos, Invisors has enjoyed high retention, Partner Abe Anzardo said. It hasn’t been easy. People hired out of college lacked drive, off-site managers

meant new hires had few connections. The rise of the “great resignation” left even more staffing gaps.

Communication, in a word, translates to transparency, said Susan Norton, a shareholder with Allen Norton & Blue. Employees and clients alike appreciate openness around what is happening at the firm or “the basis behind the why,” she said.

One of the biggest requests to arise recently is the demand for asynchronous meetings. Jeffrey Lipson, managing director with Ampersand, attributed it to Zoom fatigue. With growth, some organizations have seen cultural shifts, even to the point of losing

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structure. Which meetings should be video or phone calls, which should require cameras on versus off? Structure could improve the employee experience and improve organizational effectiveness.

Layer atop that proven solutions for improved document management - a centralized document hub - and organizational collaboration and efficiency could rise.

USING 'SMARTER TOOLS'

Success still requires education and a drawback to the corporate culture. It's especially important as employee migration to other markets continues to lure people away from the office, if not the job. Education and "smarter tools" can help bridge that gap, said Tina Elmowitz, chief people officer with RBB Communications. Fort Lauderdale-based marketing firm O'Connell & Goldberg promoted an employee to the new post of people and culture manager in hopes of formalizing parameters and documenting programs and processes for better application, said Matt Levinson, the firm's COO.

At electronic health solution ModMed, use of various communications platforms - Slack channels, virtual town halls, and other solutions intended to bridge teams - has helped maintain a sense of unity as the company continues global growth, said Jody Beaverson, its chief people officer.

Law firm Littler hosts virtual

and in-person meetings and town halls, as well as a standing Friday meeting. For those who zoom in, cameras-on is encouraged, although there's no "mandate," said Sherril Columbo, a shareholder with the firm.

It's apparent how companies will deploy different solutions depending on employee needs, Leeds commented. At West Palm Beach marketing firm Mosaic, President and CEO Ann Marie Sorrell is challenged by numerous and recurring off-site events. With public engagement requiring her team to be out in the community, hybrid was required early on. Being back in the community helps employees and partners understand the importance of their roles. Backing it all up was a belief in the importance of flexibility, Sorrell said. If you worked a night or weekend, employees were encouraged to take off the next day.

"We've been trying to find some flexible ways to adjust," she said.

Being based in South Florida has helped many of these employers navigate the challenges of Covid-related hiring. However, as a digital marketing firm with a workforce and clients spanning numerous time zones across continents, company culture has helped Wrecking Ball find its path, said Joey Princz, the company's CEO. It also helped that his new hires were hungry for mentorship and the creative team thrived in the in-person environment, he said.

Leadership with Max Borges Agency knew policies in place before the pandemic left them well prepared to work from home, said VP Tiffany Desmarais. Coming back, their policies and practices helped open the doors to a wider pool of applicants. They're constantly seeking feedback on how their approach is working.

WORKPLACE ALTERNATIVES

Some employees wanted a WeWork subscription to meet more regularly. It was cost prohibitive. So, a compromise was struck. The firm would cover the daily cost for get togethers a few days a week, if needed. Leadership also offered stipends for a "virtual coffee date" to help spur imagination - and even generate fresh ideas from the grassroots, Desmarais said.

With so many companies offering different work solutions, from remote to hybrid to full-time in office, Leeds wondered how the employers create a solution that makes employees satisfied while also helping to aid with recruitment efforts.

Centennial Bank's robust set of benefits, augmented with a "what do you want" list of additional perks, helps existing talent and new hires alike, said David Druey, the bank's regional president. He called it "the Centennial way," an approach that spans the bank's locations from Florida to Arkansas to Texas. It's a framework whose flexibility fits the given location.

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PORPOISE EVANS
Shareholder, Littler

For example, distances from home to the office or branch might mean "work from home" is different in South Florida than in Arkansas, he said. It's all part of the recruitment process.

"To me, recruitment is 'let me tell you what we do well and some things we don't do well,'" Druey said. "Recruitment is explaining the parameters."

To get "buy in" from the younger generation, accounting consultancy Citrin Cooperman posts on relevant social media - with an honest look at the firm's strengths and areas in need of improvement, said Josh Rader, managing partner.

"If companies leveraged social media a little differently," he said, "you'll have a lot more success in having more candidates."

Done well, these efforts create an award-winning workplace, said Michelle Shirley, CEO and "chief heart officer" with Be Strong

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International. It's tough work that relies on employees, volunteers and fundraisers. For her part, Shirley offers significant time off so employees can tend to their families, especially kids still in grade school, she said.

Like others in attendance, Allen Norton & Blue offers paid volunteer days off, which allows workers to volunteer with their favorite charities, Norton said.

A LOOK AHEAD

Leeds asked the panel for their thoughts on how the workforce and workplace will evolve next - and how companies in attendance are preparing for what's to come. The workplace has fundamentally changed and Rader with Citrin Cooperman suspects it's never going back. So that leaves leadership to plan for tomorrow's new realities.

That may mean smaller office floor plans with fewer desks and more collaborative space need to accommodate half the staff who are offsite most of the time, he said. Salaries are changing Leeds noted. Overall, HR teams are in understanding that salaries in this market place have increased about 20% across the board post-Covid, "and if they want to get the qualified candidates they are looking for, that they have to be competitive and accurate with the compensation."

Salaries come with quirks, like those with fewer apparel and commuting expenses seeing

downward adjustments versus those who have those added costs. At O'Connell and Goldberg, which moved to Las Olas from downtown Hollywood, they've created an office in a destination where its people want to work, Levinson said.

Creating these valued workplaces and relationships, with education and mentorship as part of the offerings, translates to "happy employees who stay longer," said Elmowitz with RBB Communications.

Lipson with Ampersand knows people "crave human interaction." So the firm is maximizing the human element, offering dynamic PTO for people who might be traveling and want to squeeze in work and play.

For some companies, including smaller businesses, these aren't new policies or practices. Mosaic is bringing on new hires from Jamaica, Sorrell said. ARK Solvers today is offering benefits enterprise organizations have served up for years, CEO Reginald Andre said. This has allowed the company to look beyond South Florida as it grows its talent base and service offerings.

"We can serve anybody," he said. "We don't need to look at that small map anymore."

With South Florida's place in the hemisphere - and increasingly on the global map - employers are weaving a broader, multicultural tapestry. At H&Co., having employees and clients from throughout the hemisphere

and world has created a truly diverse workplace, Ramirez said. They celebrate holidays from throughout Latin America - including 16 from Argentina alone - which opens fresh perspectives.

Are all these approaches and perks working? Just ask. RBB Communications fields "happiness surveys" twice a year, Elmowitz said. What perks do employees like? Do they want more - or more flexible - PTO or some other change of benefits? Are they feeling valued? Benefits are constantly changing. Leadership has to stay atop what the people want, she said.

"What was important six months ago might not be now," she said. When asked if they see themselves at the agency in a year, 94% answered yes. "People are very candid," she admitted. That helps with employee retention, and encourages leadership to further invest in the skills of people who say they plan to stay.

Some people want the freedom to travel while working, or move to a new city, or evolve into their role. "Flex is way beyond being able to work remotely," said Beaverson with ModMed. Such growth will require "guardrails" to allow flexibility, while adhering to legal, health care, or IT security issues, she said.

Discussions of "quiet quitting" - where employees do the bare minimum to keep their jobs - or the continued "great resignation" or employees floating

outside job offers as a way to boost their current salary, have employers dealing with a dynamic market. Leeds asked how the organizations have dealt with an employee submitting a resignation and understanding the factors of why they are deciding to leave. Are they likely to ask them to stay by providing them a counteroffer - or wishing them the best in their next endeavor, he asked.

Answers varied. BDO will work with valued employees to see what it might take to keep them, del Cerro-Fals said. Rader with Citrin Cooperman said it depends on the time of year; during tax time, people generally won't leave and he won't recruit from other firms.

Shirley with Be Strong International trusts that the "strong relationships" she's built with her team will help avoid offer/counter offer scenarios. She always considers the worker's circumstance. Where she used to take any resignation personally, she doesn't any longer.

"This might be a stepping stone to their next thing," she said. "They just really have to be careful how often you're doing that."

With the ongoing dynamics of today's workplace, the modern workplace and workforce will continue to change. Communication, collaboration and a commitment to culture and strong relationships will help employers connect with their teams - and ensure a place in the workplace of tomorrow.