Title A: The Top HR Challenges of 2021

Subtitle A: *Ring in the New Year with these key tips on employee management.*

Title B: The Biggest HR Challenges for 2021

Subtitle B: *Prepare for what the new year has in store with these key tips.*

Title C: The Top Challenges HR Must Prepare for in 2021

Subtitle C: *Here's what HR may look like as we ring in the new year.*

Effective HR will be more important than ever in 2021. HR professionals are the cornerstone of their company's response to the pandemic and other external issues. As we navigate a world transformed by COVID-19 and the movement for social justice, here are the key challenges to prepare for.

Image source

Planning a return to normal (or the new normal)

We're beginning to enter the uncharted territory of the post-pandemic world. Each organization must decide what the new normal will look like for them. Because there's no single right answer, HR managers should embrace the role of skilled consultant that they've increasingly been stepping into. Firms are struggling to determine what "new normal" will work best for them in terms of both what is feasible and what employees want.

For instance, does their workforce wish to continue working remotely? Or would they rather return to the office? And how can remote workflow processes be improved? By surveying employees on such topics, HR can provide key insights that guide strategic decisions.

Building competencies while working remotely.

For at least part of the year, it will probably be unfeasible for many companies to return to the office. Thus, remote mentoring, upskilling, and succession planning are critical. In 2020, we saw an emphasis on maintaining strong relationships between coworkers who already knew each other. In 2021, HR will need to work on connecting employees who *don't* already have close relationships. By encouraging new connections to flourish in the form of mentoring and skill-sharing partnerships, they'll grow the capabilities of their talent.

In a recent study, Gartner found that one-third of the skills from a typical 2017 job posting won't be relevant by 2021. They also found that peer learning partnerships lead employees to quickly begin using 75% of the new skills they've learned. Thus, remote peer mentoring and upskilling will be pivotal to their development in the coming year.

Making workplaces more inclusive

2020 has brought an increased focus on diversity initiatives. With the rise of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, companies need to reevaluate and upgrade their policies and practices to emphasize inclusiveness. Employees expect to see their companies taking these measures. For many, it's an important factor when looking for a new job—61% of employees believe their company needs to become more inclusive so that all employees can thrive. That means not just hiring diverse talent but nurturing employees' success and providing opportunities for advancement.
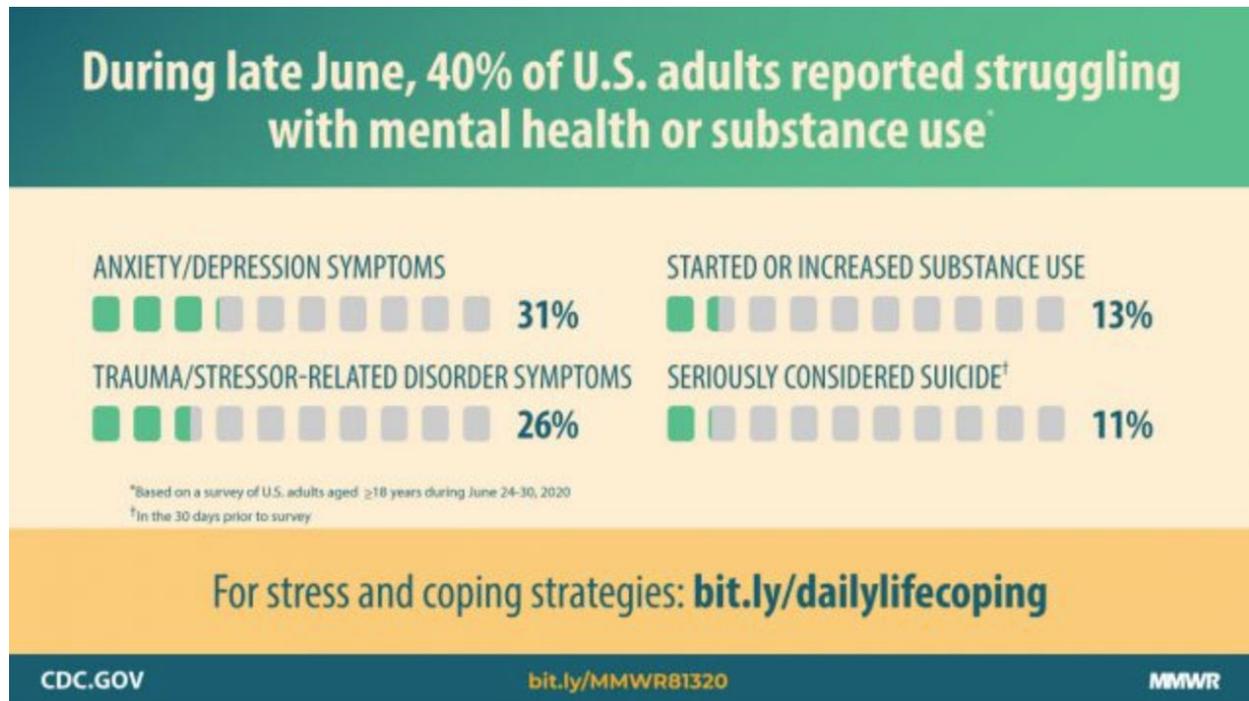
Improving inclusiveness isn't just the right thing to do. The [20 most diverse businesses](#) listed in the S&P 500 outperform most of their competitors.

Supporting good time management

Many employees struggle with time management while working at home. They're confronted with continuous distractions like kids and pets. It can also simply be much more difficult to focus at home. Thus, HR managers need to double down on sharing time-management strategies tailored to the needs of remote workers.

Emphasizing mental health support

The CDC has found that [over 40% of U.S. adults](#) are dealing with mental illness during the pandemic. Even those who are good at working under pressure may [struggle from the pandemic's aftershocks](#) in the coming months. Thus, employers should make sure to offer health plans and resources that provide ample support for coping with mental health issues. Working to sensitively offer solutions without overstepping in terms of privacy is key. Thus, HR should train all managers on how to tactfully approach employees about mental health resources. By doing so, they'll help their workforce become more resilient.

During late June, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health or substance use*

ANXIETY/DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS — 31%

STARTED OR INCREASED SUBSTANCE USE — 13%

TRAUMA/STRESSOR-RELATED DISORDER SYMPTOMS — 26%

SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED SUICIDE† — 11%

*Based on a survey of U.S. adults aged ≥18 years during June 24-30, 2020
†In the 30 days prior to survey

For stress and coping strategies: **bit.ly/dailylifecoping**

CDC.GOV — bit.ly/MMWR81320 — MMWR

Image source

Make sure you're not overloading yourself or your HR team, too. HR professionals might feel driven to become martyrs to the cause, looking after everyone's wellbeing but their own. Instead, start with your own wellbeing, sticking to reasonable working hours and asking for the support you need.

Dealing with new compliance demands

Calls for social justice have ramped up compliance demands involving everything from workplace harassment to hair discrimination. HR professionals need to become well-versed in emerging compliance requirements on topics like whistleblowing, pay transparency, and data security. Check out state and local updates on SHRM's database and ensure you're using data management software that keeps you fully compliant.

Additionally, revise your job descriptions to account for any changes made in recent years. Inaccurate job descriptions can lead to a host of issues.

Revamping the onboarding experience

The onboarding experience has completely transformed in 2020, as has the overall employee experience. In most companies, it can use some fine-tuning. New employees need opportunities to meet and connect with their team. Here are a few ideas to help them do just that:

- Virtual shadowing

- A rotating buddy system

- Virtual happy hours

- Team check-ins held by video chat each morning.

- A virtual town hall held with all employees, as Forbes suggests in "HR Trends 2021."

Image source

Share a detailed organizational chart so employees can remember who is who. Make sure it states people's area of expertise so everyone knows whom to reach out to with specific questions. As new hires get to know their coworkers better, they'll feel more engaged and loyal to your organization.

Focusing on performance management data

Systems of data-driven performance management are more essential than ever. While working remotely, managers can't physically look over employees' shoulders. A good system helps them stay in tune with how each employee is doing and where support is needed. They can easily [monitor their progress](#) toward goals without actually seeing anyone face to face.

Take these steps to surmount HR's greatest challenges, and you'll set your team up for success in 2021. Make sure your organization's leaders understand these priorities so you can form a united front in the coming year.

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