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Human Resource Leaders Share How They Maintain and Acquire Their Most Valuable Asset: Their People



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2021 SPRING CONFERENCE

3

Questions /Answers (after session concluded)

1. Question for Lindsay: Please tell us more about Thursday Thunderstorm.

(Lindsay Pearsall) Thursday Thunderstorms are a brief virtual meeting, usually 20-30 minutes long, where one to three people share something, often personal but sometimes work-related. Topics have included our founders talking about how we became Aspect to most recently hosting a few sessions about home gardening. People have shared their home renovation projects, car rebuilds, and even beekeeping hobbies. It's been a fantastic way to stay connected and keep learning about each other.

2. Question for Lindsay: With the reduced work week was there a reduction in pay?

(Lindsay Pearsall) For the reduced workweek, we didn't reduce pay. We were and are fortunate to be incredibly busy and have had no layoffs in our history, which is a priority. We found both in experience and through outside research that some people use the adrenaline during times of trauma to lean into their work. We saw that play out with our staff. While the spike in productivity was encouraging, as it became apparent the length of the pandemic would be longer than we first thought, we also needed to offer solutions to encourage staff to have some balance.

3. How are firms measuring employee engagement? What is the survey being referenced?

(Lindsay Pearsall) This was something I didn't think to mention during the panel interview. We created our own Employee Engagement survey rather than use one out of the box to inform our strategic planning initiatives in 2019. We customized ours because we wanted more specific data and a shorter survey to avoid survey fatigue. This allowed us to get at the heart of the things we wanted to work on. That being said, there is really one question that is considered the gold standard of determining employee engagement, and it is "would you refer someone to work here?" 99% of our employees (all but one) said yes to that question. If you want a quick and easy way to measure engagement, that could be the single question to ask.

(Sherri Petro) While there are many engagement surveys, we at BSK use the Great Place to Work instrument. I have used the Gallup Q12 in other organizations. I like Great Place to Work since the categories assessed are Pride, Camaraderie, Respect, Fairness and Credibility.

(Erica O'Connor) We are working on a employee engagement survey now, hoping to get it out by fall. We did not complete one in 2020. After the survey results are in we will communicate with the staff what areas were high and what areas were low and then work on the low points. The key here is to ask for feedback, communicate back, work on some things, communicate, and repeat.

4. Can the panelists discuss the differences between doing recruitment, on-boarding, and staff development with professional staff and field and laboratory staff?

(Lindsay Pearsall) At Aspect, we don't have lab staff, but we have field staff that grow into professional staff. I consider them all professionals. So while onboarding staff needs may be different based on their experience, I think recruiting and development start with treating people how you would want to be treated. For onboarding, that means getting feedback on what we can improve on for the next person. It means thinking about what questions we're asked that could be answered in advance. In recruiting, that means being open from the beginning about our compensation ranges and philosophy as well as our timelines. My background before Aspect is in recruiting, and often this is a dehumanized process, so we work hard to make it human. For development, that means feedback, discussions, goal setting, planning, and support throughout one's career.

(Sherri Petro) BSK has the same tactics for recruitment, on boarding and staff development of all service lines but different expectations based on service line ebb and flow, routines and seasonality. We offer the same training at varied times to make it convenient for staff to participate. Anyone can participate in mentoring and our other development programs. We offer the same onboarding program elements but they can be in a different order. We recruit similarly for all service lines, by leveraging employees and their networks. We do use different (and multiple) communication tactics since we know people are in trucks, behind instruments and in front of computers.

(Erica O'Connor) Our process is in HR is the same across the board for recruiting and onboarding. We have started reassessing our postings as they come open. Looking at where we are posting based on location and position to help broaden the net of applicants. Once the candidate is hired the onboarding process will be different based on position and training needed.

5. Question for Sherri: 'Coaching circles' sound intriguing... can you please describe a little more about the process and how it came to be?

(Sherri Petro) We wanted to increase leadership development. Our objectives were to:

- Create more unity, camaraderie and management consistency across service lines
- Introduce leadership best practices
- Help our managers learn how to apply concepts from research and their peers
- Leverage our long-standing managers' expertise
- Provide a development opportunity for newer managers to embrace leadership

We surveyed managers on their professional trouble spots. We assembled 7-10 managers in one hour coaching circles once a month, insuring variety in service lines and locations. We highlighted a training topic from their list, one of our company values or a hot topic. We educated and shared.

They are a hit! We've achieved all of our objectives and my President, Rich Johnson, says it is one of the best things we have implemented.

6. Looking forward - how are you addressing/engaging the vaccine/post-vaccine phase with respect to company fabric and culture?

(Lindsay Pearsall) We know that our staff miss the personal interaction in the office and we also know staff like working from home a bit too. Data shows both that people will want the work from home set up to continue, but studies also show that the need for personal interaction may drive more people back to the office than initially thought. The data is conflicting. So, with that in mind, we expect staff needs to be different than before the pandemic, but we're going to see how those behavior changes play out in our offices before making any sweeping decision. Our offices have been at 50% occupancy for some time now, and across 8 locations, we see differences. There are going to be several factors that play into how the staff at each location respond, including accessibility such as parking and public transit, mask mandates, school schedules, safety, personal factors, etc. At some point, we'll survey our staff to understand what people are thinking and need. But, I think the answers now may be very different a month into most of us being back in the office.

(Sherri Petro) We have been very real about what is happening all along and we will continue being transparent. With a values-driven culture, we will apply our values in whatever new normal turns out to be. We are not making vaccines mandatory though we are monitoring subscription to being vaccinated. We are making changes like modifying our remote working policy as we envision more hybrid working arrangements. We are thinking about in-person events for later this year. We really enjoy being together and are missing the personal connection.

(Erica O'Connor) Looking forward we are really wanting to have more personal interaction with each other. That is something we missed out on a lot last year and the beginning of this year. I think going forward (and once it is safe for everyone) we will bring with us the good stuff we learned from remote working like some of the technology we have found over the past year. We will then combine that with things that worked in the past like good old coffee chats. One thing I am really excited about is we are implementing a new phone system that you can call, text, instant message, and video chat all from the same platform. This will continue to help us break down the physical barriers between locations.