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Have Your Leaders Adapted to the New Realities of the Workplace?

Welcome to the new decade, where the conflation of social distancing, social justice, and social media influence is impacting the workplace in unprecedented ways. With generational changes in the workforce and the need to lead from a distance, no one knows how to optimally navigate this environment. It's a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" scenario: what leaders do or what they say is just as dangerous as what they *don't* do or say.

New Management Realities

By all accounts, 2020 has been a turbulent year for everyone – at home and at work. Social distancing, a new concept has transformed how we currently live and work. Social justice protests and calls for diversity and inclusion have driven a slew of potential changes to how we manage various issues in society, including in the workplace.

Change has been rapid and to this point ongoing, requiring constant vigilance for new expectations and requirements. Most companies strive to maintain communications and update their employees with new expectations for functions, policies, benefits and behaviors. Beyond issuing revised standards, organizations count on management teams to be the primary conduit for implementing and supporting new approaches and mandates. It's important that these new requests are not ignored or placed at the bottom of a manager's long list of regular duties.

Keep an Eye on Trends

Based on our experience of working within multiple industries and organizational cultures, leaders are focusing on these emerging trends:

- **Social distancing practices**, including the increase of working from home and reduced onsite work schedules, have company leadership and management "leading at a distance." For many companies, this form of management has not been commonplace and leaders are trying to get up-to-speed on effective techniques.
- **Social distancing** has also created customer and vendor distancing. This trend has limited personal access and direct sales have been drastically limited in 2020. While that may change somewhat in the future, the trend that has emerged involves more engagement via video conferences and telephone calls. Personal interaction with customers and vendors is declining significantly and may never return to previous levels.
- **Social justice** and political battles have driven more tension between differing constituencies. A number of our clients have reached out to us to discuss how to address the issue of employees expressing their political views on social media. In other words, employees are expressing their freedom of speech publicly which in turn has created conflict with other colleagues with differing views. Therefore, tension is building within the work environment, where otherwise teamwork is being touted.
- **Diversity and inclusion** are evolving to be among the most visible workplace issues today. Pay equity, approaches to recruiting, and increasing diversity are just some of the main topics of discussion for leadership. However, while many organizations have begun dialogues about these concerns, most have not developed a substantive strategy to address the issues.
- **Generational change within the workplace** has carried over from the previous decade. While it is not as visible as other trends, the emerging generations are also influencing changes in policy, compensation, benefits and organizational values.

Strive for Unifying Solutions

As senior leaders attempt to engage in discussion and development of new strategies on these trends, they struggle with where to land on the various issues. With the goal of building a unified team with a common values structure, the

challenge is to achieve some type of balance that satisfies a diverse and polarized workforce. The goal is to build a unified team with a common values structure.

Companies continue to communicate new policies, value statements and compliance-based statements aimed at managing risk. Once communicated, the implementation and support for these revised standards fall directly on the shoulders of the supervisors and managers who are in the trenches daily. This is quite a challenging responsibility given the lack of training and exposure to such matters.

Adapt Management Training for Trends

Many, if not all, supervisors/managers have not been trained to handle the complexity of social distancing, leading at a distance, social justice, diversity/inclusion, pay equity, social media and generational differences. Today's management teams may be experts at the technical aspects of their work, but are not yet equipped to effectively move forward through these emerging trends. For this reason, we strongly recommend devoting time and creating a uniform supervisory and management training framework that provides the necessary tools for handling current trends and issues.

Managers during the next few years will focus significantly more on complex issues than in prior decades. Senior leaders must devote time to calibrating and reinforcing the company's core values, determine approaches to communications, risk management and policy to meet the evolving realities of today's workplace. Building a new management foundation for this new decade is not a choice but an absolute necessity to foster an appropriate organizational culture.

For more information on adapting to new management realities in the workplace, contact Dan Simovic at dan.simovic@findley.com