

Helping Employees Maintain Wellness, Avoid Burnout, and More



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Rob Parsons:

Welcome to Pulse, a Paychex HR podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host, Rob Parsons.

Rob Parsons:

Hi, everyone. And welcome to Pulse. We're joined today by our very own Alison Stevens, Director of Paychex HR Services. Today, we're going to be discussing the 2022 Pulse of HR Report, our sixth such survey of 1,000 HR professionals. The report provides a comprehensive, in-depth look at how HR leaders are adapting to support their employees in a new era of work. And you can download the full PDF at payx.me/pulse22report. That's payx.me/pulse22report. Ali, welcome to the podcast.

Alison Stevens:

Thanks, Rob. Hi. Great to see you.

Rob Parsons:

Good to see you again. There are so many great data points in the report this year, but something I found very surprising was that only 15% of companies have employees working exclusively on site. In fact, the number of companies offering remote work is up by 124%. It looks like hybrid is here to stay. But I also feel like we really haven't adjusted to it yet, have we?

Alison Stevens:

We haven't. You're absolutely right, Rob. It was really interesting to see how the data came together in the survey. It was really interesting to see that four in 10 HR leaders with remote workers say that it improves their employees emotional, physical, financial well-being, it boosts retention, it enhances quality of work, all the great things, even increasing productivity. However, we saw that, in fact, not quite there yet from an adoption standpoint.

Alison Stevens:

So as you go through the survey, you also saw that policies around remote work are really varying widely by respondent. So I think what's happening is companies are still figuring out how are they going to do this? How are they going to designate their workers or make decisions around how to designate their workers? And as you see in the survey, we saw kind of different methodologies that companies are employing right now. It's either empowering their leaders of certain departments to decide who's going to be a remote or hybrid worker, deciding only certain jobs or positions, or perhaps even hierarchy across the organization, only allowable to be a hybrid or remote worker or even just on certain days. There's so many different permutations. And I think that's really why we're seeing these different approaches and how it showed up in the survey data.

Rob Parsons:

I also found it interesting how there's impact on time tracking, which is now the biggest time waster for HR professionals. I bet you that comes into play.

Alison Stevens:

It does.

Rob Parsons:

Performance management is into play. There's a lot of factors here. And you talk to us a lot about technology and how technology can really help the business work. What should HR leaders be looking at from a technology perspective to help with these issues?

Alison Stevens:

Yeah. You know, what's also really fascinating here... I feel like this should be a six-part series.

Rob Parsons:

It may turn out to be. We'll find out.

Alison Stevens:

No, it's only one. We're just going to hit the high points. But, again, to me, what's really fascinating is I think we're in the midst of a transformation of how do we lead through that employee experience, particularly with companies with a hybrid workforce. And to me, the word of the day, and this has always been the word of the day for HR practitioners and leaders, but it's consistency.

Alison Stevens:

So companies that have employees who are permanently working in a hybrid or remote fashion, they have to do things like update their performance evaluation plans to be more accommodating. So they have to not at all be relevant to where the employee location is. It has to be a digital experience. They have to ensure that their employees are learning new skills. They have to ensure that they can communicate effectively with their employees.

Alison Stevens:

So I think too that shows up both in the employee experience as well as from an HR perspective. So that is why we saw top of the leaderboard HR saying they're having difficulty in tracking employees time. So leaning into technology just to provide a digital experience on how to track time, but also they're probably sitting determining, okay, what is the schedule? Who is remote? Who is hybrid? Who do I need to go after in order to find out what their hours worked are?

Alison Stevens:

So if they're still using a very manual process, I think HR leaders are going to find themselves having to quickly adopt to using technology solutions to provide a better experience, not just for their employees but also for HR departments.

Rob Parsons:

And I'm glad you touched on the training because now we're not just bringing everybody to a room together and having an instructor lead a class. Digital LMS systems have to be coming into play.

Alison Stevens:

Absolutely, right? So being able to adopt technology in order to ensure they're doing things like supporting career development, supporting a career path, supporting skills, right? Now, that digital workforce means you need to have new skills. So how are companies supporting it through things like a digital learning management system? Absolutely. Very important.

Rob Parsons:

Something else I've read, and I'm curious if you think technology could help with this, is this idea that face time in the office is important and I may get passed over for a promotion if I'm not there and if I'm not being seen. And yet at the same time, we're talking about the benefits of hybrid work and remote work and not having to be at the office. How do HR leaders ensure equity in something that can be very subjective like that?

Alison Stevens:

Yes, I think they really are going to have to pay attention. They're going to have to pay close attention to the talent management and talent assessment processes that they employ in their organization to be sure that decisions are not made based on face time or in-office exposure versus non-office exposure. And that even goes down to performance management, Rob. I was just thinking about this because I saw something in an HR community that I belong to and conversation around requirement to have the employee appear on video. Right? So you've got a remote worker, they're dialing into a meeting for whatever reason. They're unable to be on video. You know, how do you manage that from a performance perspective? Is it a requirement?

Alison Stevens:

And then that kind of goes back to how do you lead through the experience of an employee and lead through the talent management process and performance management process when you have differences in how the employee is participating, making an impact on the company, whether in person or digitally, on camera, off camera. I mean, again, this is why I said the six-part series. We could go on and on about how these different ways that we are now working will show up and we will need to make really strong and consistent decisions on how we approach it.

Rob Parsons:

There's also some data, and I'm not sure if it's related to the different ways we're working, but it jumped out at me. 60% of HR leaders are concerned about employee burnout. And that's up just about 20% from before the pandemic. So what do you think is happening here? And how can HR leaders, what can they do to help?

Alison Stevens:

So they can do a lot. And I think number one is, as we saw in the survey, flexible work schedules are the number one tactic that companies have employed to address burnout. And we just talked a lot about what comes with that. But there are other things they can be doing. You know, really making sure they're emphasizing and communicating work-life balance and in threading that through their company culture and how they want their employees to approach their work. Making sure that employees and leaders have clear job descriptions and expectations so that employees are very clear in what it is they have to do. If they're managing a remote workforce, the employee may no longer have that luxury, if you will, of kind of walking into their manager's office and saying, "Hey, I just want to check on this expectation." Now, if it's that video conversation or even a telephone conversation, they may be like, "Oh, I don't want to bother my employee right now." They may not ask the question.

Alison Stevens:

So HR really, really has a role, in my opinion, of making sure that expectations, job roles are very clear. Providing training. Making sure they have a confidential way for employees to have conversations with HR, their HR department if a situation arises and they really need confidential support. Again, they can't walk into the office of an HR department, how do they establish those secure connections?

Alison Stevens:

Again, I could go on and on about this topic. There's so many things that any HR departments can and are doing right now to improve that experience.

Rob Parsons:

That's a great segue, Ali, because I'd love to plug your webinar on the Pulse of HR where you are...

Alison Stevens:

Oh, sure.

Rob Parsons:

... talking about a lot of these issues.

Alison Stevens:

We are.

Rob Parsons:

So for our listeners, you can go to payx.me/pulse22webinar to register and hear from Ali how HR leaders are supporting their employees in today's demanding work environments all while achieving ambitious business goals, because we know business does not stop. That's payx.me/pulse22webinar. And I know you're going to dig into it more Ali, but like you said, there's so much to dive into here.

Rob Parsons:

I'm curious, something I noticed as a manager that's hard to recreate in a hybrid environment is the camaraderie that comes from getting to know each other in a break room, getting to know about people's personal lives and what they're doing. Are HR leaders talking to managers in the companies about ways to help foster that softer side of the business culture? Maybe it's not an outright policy, but the ties that bind that help teams work better together and understand each other better.

Alison Stevens:

Yes. And I think there are limitless opportunities to foster camaraderie, foster strong culture, making sure that managers are leaning into the needs of their employees, checking in with that. I mean, to me, it just comes down to a simple conversation, right? As leaders, are we checking in and just asking how are you? How's everything going? How's your family? Is there anything I can do to be supporting you? And kind of just making it sometimes just having just that conversation versus going directly into business results or directly into performance. Just making sure does the employee have everything they need so you can continue to foster that culture, particularly when you don't have the luxury of an in-office environment anymore.

Alison Stevens:

And I was just talking about this with my team the other day. You can't feel the vibe of your employee if you're talking to them over a video camera, whereas if they walked into your office and they sort of perhaps sigh before they talk or you just see in their body language. It's much harder to just see what's going on in the small screen...

Rob Parsons:

Yeah.

Alison Stevens:

... versus seeing it in person. So there's a lot more work that not only HR departments but leaders can do to really just be sure at the very basic level they're checking in with their employees.

Rob Parsons:

Yeah. We talk a lot about on this podcast about everything HR leaders can be doing. It could be giving –

Alison Stevens:

I know.

Rob Parsons:

The last area I want to touch on is the fact that they're not immune to these issues and challenges themselves. They can succumb to burnout themselves. And I suspect a lot of HR leaders are starting to feel a little frayed, a little worn at both ends.

Alison Stevens:

Absolutely. 100% yes. And something that I'm seeing happening now quite regularly is just the emergence of lots of conversations, lots of digital conversations occurring amongst HR leaders. HR influencers, thought leaders bringing forth this topic of HR burnout within HR departments and what can people be doing. There's obviously a lot to happen. A lot anybody can do around self-care, making sure you're taking a vacation, say no, decline the meeting, don't schedule a full back-to-back day, but there are days where that's just not possible.

Alison Stevens:

So what I've seen and has really been helpful to me as a leader is reaching out to the community, having that opportunity to know that you're not alone, right? You know the saying, put the oxygen mask on yourself before you put it on someone else. And I think the HR community has really come together and there's just so much conversation happening on LinkedIn and in other forums on how HR leaders can learn from one another, share best practices, dive in and get really great information to help them feel like they're not alone.

Rob Parsons:

Even just to commiserate as a writer and a content creator, I love going to Content Marketing World every year because I'm immersed with like-minded people in the profession, really thinking about being better and not the day-to-day grind. And it really is invigorating. So I imagine you're seeing that on the HR side as well.

Alison Stevens:

It is. Absolutely. And it's funny, just a few days ago I popped into a Zoom call with other HR professionals and people leaders from around the country, based on a group that I belong to, when we were talking about internal communication and sharing best practices around what can we be doing to really be sure we're communicating effectively with our employees. And it was a conversation with people leading, people leaders from very small companies to very large companies. And it was just fascinating to talk about the different experiences and the different things we're seeing. But at the end of the day, it just felt so good to be able to either share something that's working or also be able to just provide support and follow up and have a conversation with people all facing similar challenges regardless of the size of the company that you might be a people leader for.

Rob Parsons:

I love that. I hope in some small way our podcast here is helping contribute to that.

Alison Stevens:

Absolutely.

Rob Parsons:

Any last thoughts to share, Ali, before we wrap it up?

Alison Stevens:

No. I'm looking forward to the webinar coming up. And this was a great conversation, kind of a great teaser, if you will, for more conversation on the topic, really great research, proud to be a part of it. And it was really great talking to you, Rob.

Rob Parsons:

Fantastic. Thank you so much for joining the podcast today. And thank to our listeners. I encourage you to download the full Pulse of HR Report at payx.me/pulse22report. It's great research. There's a ton of great insights in there. And to hear Ali discuss the findings in more detail, register for her webinar at payx.me/pulse22webinar. I've seen the deck and trust me, she's got a lot of great information prepared for you all. Thank you once again, and please stay happy and healthy.

Announcer:

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