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Give Your Employees the Tech They Want — and Need

By Meghan M. Biro for Paychex

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About Meghan M. Biro

Meghan M. Biro is a globally recognized HR tech analyst, author, speaker and brand strategist. The founder of TalentCulture, she hosts #WorkTrends, a popular weekly Twitter Chat and podcast. Her career spans across recruiting, talent management, digital media and brand strategy for hundreds of companies, from startups to global brands like Microsoft, IBM, and Google. Meghan can be regularly found on Forbes, SHRM, TalentCulture, and a variety of other outlets. You can find her on Twitter and Instagram @MeghanMBiro.

INTRODUCTION

In our ultracompetitive economy, with ever-changing work ecosystems and a shrinking labor market, there's simply no time to stop and regroup over your HR tech. And whether your HR tech does what you need it to do or not, the process of hiring and managing your employees continues. Some companies, particularly SMBs, may be so busy keeping their operations going that there's little time or energy to devote to improving HR tech. But you may also be looking for effective ways to improve your hiring and onboarding processes, build employee engagement with a better employee experience, and beef up retention.

Great HR tech that answers the desires and expectations of employees is a powerful way to meet those needs. In this tech-centric, tech-focused, tech-enabled and tech-dependent world of work, great tech has become a key indicator of a great employer.

Closing the Happiness Gap

According to the 2018 Pulse of HR survey, 69 percent of HR leaders in SMB's are satisfied with their HR tech solution. But how happy are their employees? Even if leaders are thrilled with their HR tech solution — and that's a very good thing — it's not a win if employees feel like it falls short of giving them much-needed features, such as self-service interfaces they can get comfortable with, and a range of other options.

When tech works the way we need it to work, everyone is happy. What many HR departments need to do now is close the happiness gap, by meeting the expectations of a largely tech-dependent workforce.

Universal Expectations

Today's work culture is a digital culture. We're all online. We're all functioning with tech far more seamlessly than ever, and we're not just focused on it, we're focused in it. We interact, produce, perform, learn, develop, communicate, and complete tasks all through technology. And that's not just younger employees. That includes baby boomers, Generation X, millennials, and Generation Z. When a workplace offers tech that works well for its employees, it can be a critical factor in how employees feel about their employer. One simple reason: it's easier to get things done.

Whether you have 50 employees or 500, given the choice, your people will likely prefer HR tech that can help them do their own jobs more efficiently while managing some of the many details of their employment. People simply prefer digital, streamlined, self-service technologies to paper-chasing. The days of expecting your employees to walk their folders over to the HR office are over.

What else do people want? Compelling, well-designed, and responsive tech that they can easily master and make part of their daily work routines.

The Benefits for HR

There's another side to this benefit: it frees your HR team's time and energy for other, more strategic priorities — such as recruiting, engagement, and compliance— all of which are big stress points for HR departments today.

When the HR tech is a cloud-based system, it can generate an ocean of meaningful data and actionable insights for the HR team. So, it's not just the employees who are happy. Your HR people are happy as well.

HR tech that meets your employees' needs and wants is tech that gets used and becomes a part of daily behaviors. It seamlessly becomes part of the workday. It creates a self-directed, self-managing sense of ownership among employees — and that not only frees up HR, it also drives employee engagement. And, it helps to shape a culture of agile, engaged collaboration.

> The value [of using a payroll company] is there. You want to be able to focus on your business, not on compliance issues.
>
> – Greg Duffy, Super Seal Sealcoating Co.
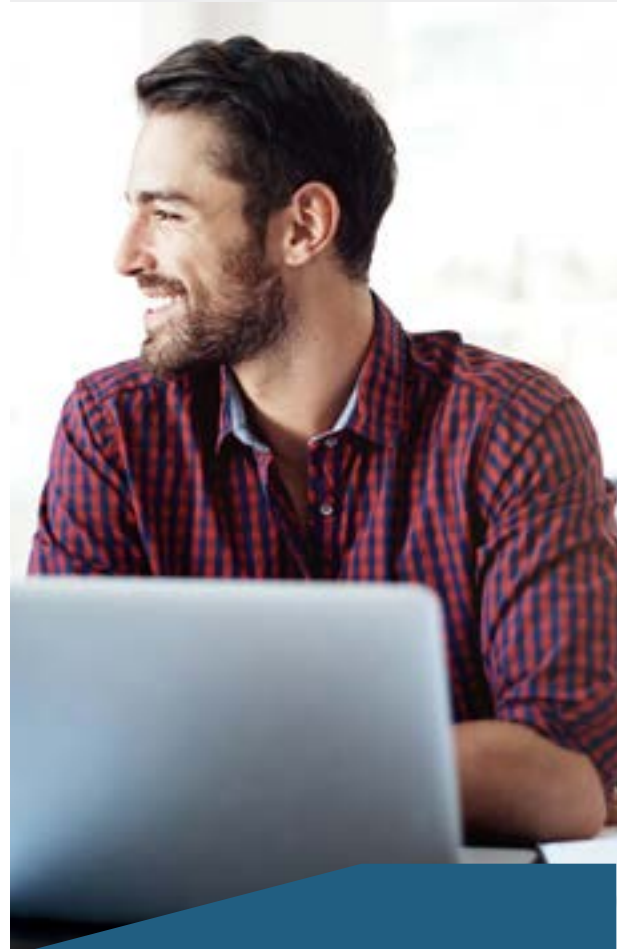
7 Key Factors

What to do you need to know in order to choose the best HR tech — that suits the needs of employees as well as employers, and drives engagement and alignment?

It breaks down to 7 key factors:

1. The Engagement Factor	There are key reasons why the tech used for hiring and onboarding has the power to inspire employee engagement — if you get it right.
2. The Experience Factor	The truth is, employee experience counts for everything. The best HR tech improves it with every interaction and each exchange.
3. The Millennial Factor	Millennial culture has a lot to do with how much we've come to rely on HR tech and make it a part of our everyday behaviors. When we can meet all employees' expectations, we're shifting the culture of the whole workplace forward.
4. The Self-Service Factor	Self-service is critical to today's workforce. Choose the tech that empowers employees to accomplish key tasks.
5. The Trust Factor	Without trust, it's impossible to have engagement. But trust is also a two-way street. The key is finding HR tech that can support the needs of employers as well as employees, and improves trust across the board.
6. The It-Works or It-Doesn't Factor	There's good reason some tech works and some tech doesn't — it depends on whether or not it fits the needs of your HR department and your employees – and, perhaps most importantly, helps you reach organizational goals. It's important to recognize problems before they start.
7. The Retention Factor	Organizations with modern digital solutions have better retention. But you need the right strategies in order to harness tech to boost retention in your organization.

PERSPECTIVE: THE LABOR MARKET

THE STATE OF THE LABOR MARKET: TIGHT

THE STATE OF THE LABOR MARKET FOR SMALL BUSINESSES: EVEN TIGHTER

The Paychex | IHS Markit Small Business Employment Watch offers regular insights into the small business employment trends driving the U.S. economy. Using aggregated payroll data from businesses with fewer than 50 workers, the Employment Watch offers a monthly, up-to-date measure of change in small business employment.

It's gone down 0.69 percent in 12 months. Reflecting the tight labor market, the 12-month growth rate has been negative since last March 2017. What's more, HR leaders in small and mid-sized organizations are also feeling the crunch. According to the Pulse of HR Survey, more than half (59 percent) of HR pros say it is increasingly difficult to find and hire quality candidates because of the tightening labor market.

[Source: https://www.paychex.com/employment-watch/#!/jobs-index/]

And we're still at a 3.9 percent unemployment rate*. It's a challenging environment for small and medium-sized businesses, even in the most ideal of workplaces.

* As of June 2018

FACTOR 1: THE ENGAGEMENT FACTOR

There are key reasons why the tech used for hiring and onboarding has the power to inspire employee engagement — if you get it right.

Engagement is a big subject in HR now. We know its business benefits, such as those cited by a recent Gallup Poll, which found that companies in the top quartile for employee engagement outperform their competitors in the lowest quartile in many categories, including:

- 10% higher customer ratings

- 21% higher profitability

- 20% higher productivity

- 24%-59% lower turnover

- 41% lower absenteeism

- 40% fewer quality defects

[Source: https://news.gallup.com/reports/191489/q12-meta-analysis-report-2016.aspx]

But we've often just focused on what departments can do on a face-to-face level to improve engagement in the workplace, including hiring effectively, communicating well, offering competitive compensation and benefits, and building a culture of appreciation and recognition.

These are all important factors. But it's not enough to focus on engagement as the result of personal, institutional experiences. Engagement efforts have to reflect how we work and what we work with.

Employee engagement today hinges largely on the digital experience.

Depending on the job and the industry, we interact with devices and tech far more than people. We're on laptops, smartphones, tablets, via social media, intranets, email and alternatives, chats, and other platforms. **Tech is a huge part of the employee experience,** from hiring to onboarding to day-to-day tasks. HR tech is a critical conduit between employer and employee. And that's great news: you can catalyze employee engagement even before your hire is in the door or up and running, with hiring and onboarding software that speaks to their needs and wants, conveys who you are as an employer, and can allow them to contribute meaningful work right away.

HIRING: BREAKING IT DOWN

Hiring is a challenge for any business. For smaller businesses competing against large firms, it can be daunting. But in order to get the top talent you need to sustain and grow your organization, there's a not-so-secret weapon: great tech. Candidates are consumers today, who experience, evaluate, and share their thoughts on every interaction they have with a prospective employer. The hiring process is filled with possibilities for a great candidate experience that not only keeps a candidate engaged in the process, but builds a sense of alignment and trust even before they walk in the door. For HR, it may start with automated tasks and an up-to-date and integrated ATS system. A desirable hiring experience from a candidate's point of view will include these kinds of features:

- Easy to use communications

- Fast response times

- A consistent sense of the culture of your organization in all materials

- A way to maintain and develop talent pools

- Access to important information that helps candidates with their decision making

- Social media presence and mobile-friendly functions

- The assurance that personal data is handled discreetly and safely, and sensitive documents are securely processed

- Capabilities for hiring gig and contract workers that are on par with those used to hire more traditional employees (consistency builds trust). Smaller firms should consider partnering with an outside hiring service that has the power and expertise to assist in recruiting. They may be able to better source candidates that are the best fit, do the necessary background screenings, and help ensure compliance with state or local regulations. A high-quality hiring firm will be able to dovetail your organizational brand into their own processes, representing your company's culture, message, and success.

Depending on the job and industry, most candidates are comfortable with outside recruiters so long as there's no gap between what the recruiters convey and what the company conveys. Again — consistency is key to building trust in the hiring process.

ONBOARDING: THE ESSENTIALS

From entry-level to managers to leadership positions, you're hiring a team of people that will have a lot to do with your company's growth and success. Companies should consider onboarding as an extension of the hiring process, a bridge into the workplace, and the first chapter in what you hope will be a long and ongoing cycle of employee development. Investing in HR tech that provides a high-quality, paperless onboarding experience makes a statement to your new hires that they are valued and their experience matters. But onboarding can stall as a series of tedious steps if not handled right. Here's a bullet-point list of strategies to consider:

- A helpful and comprehensive checklist for new hires that covers the full onboarding process, enables them to track and complete all their (paperless) paperwork and provides benchmarks on their progress.

- A bridge between date of hire and first day of work that keeps the new hire engaged and introduces them into the organizational framework. Free advice: make sure you remain aware of the laws and regulations around onboarding before your hire is actually working.

- The opportunity for new hires to get a jumpstart on onboarding even before they walk in the door. That may include mobile-friendly software that enables new hires to review resources, sign and transmit documents, and create their own user portal. This time may be compensable.

- Access to a library of electronic forms — from tax forms to company documents — they are required to fill out or review. Make sure they're the most up-to-date versions. If possible, find a way for the new hire to begin viewing the slew of company documents and history, policies and procedures, in advance of Day One so they're not overwhelmed with a virtual stack of reading material when they walk in the door. But, remember this time may be compensable so you will need to know how much time the new hire spent on this task.

- Flexible processes, such as a way to begin filling out, saving, reviewing, and completing forms rather than refilling the entire form from start to finish, along with access to assistance if and when it's needed.

- A checklist of any physical or digital materials/tools employees need to start on their first day, including passwords, log-ins, and instructions for creating any accounts.

- Frequent check-ins and pulse communications by an HR manager, team head, or even a colleague to make sure the employee is making progress and can handle any questions.

- A Day One package that provides clear guidance on what needs to be done first. From job duty descriptions to company brand, the key to onboarding is a smooth transition into the daily functions that also conveys the culture and sprit of the workplace. And ideally, provide a person — such as a mentor – who can answer questions and offer advice virtually or face-to-face.

- Ongoing benchmarks and milestones to guide the employee through the process, as well as options for training and meeting schedules.

- Frequent and periodic check-ins as the onboarding process continues, to make sure the employee is feeling part of the team and integrating into the workplace from the start.

- Opportunities to share feedback on the process, including surveys or pulse questions — without placing undue burdens on the employee. These should be short, and sweet, but clear.

PERSPECTIVE: THE WORKFORCE

Onboarding is not just for full-time workers.

Deloitte's 2018 Human Capital Trends survey observed that not enough organizations are providing gig and contract workers with onboarding and development opportunities. Forty-six percent of the respondents said they were not involved in onboarding alternative workers. But as the survey showed, the workforce is becoming more of an "ecosystem" than merely full-time or traditional employees — and not providing these other workers with adequate onboarding or training can have a far-reaching negative impact. It's highly likely that your workforce will consist of a combination of different kinds of workers — and failing to provide one group with adequate onboarding could raise concerns among your regular employees, or even stir up resentment that they had to sit through onboarding that their freelancer peers did not. When it comes to collaboration, a gap in onboarding can also hamper productivity and the success of a project.

|[Source: https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/ Deloitte/at/Documents/human-capital/at-2018- deloitte-human-capital-trends.pdf]

2. THE EXPERIENCE FACTOR

Employee experience counts for everything. The best HR tech improves it with every interaction and each exchange.

User-friendly tech needs to reflect the culture of the organization and offer tools and processes that empower employees. That means everything from inclusive and diversity-friendly language to easy-to-use features. Your employees may not know enough to expect certain aspects of your tech, but they do know what helps them thrive in the rest of their tech-dependent lives.

PUT IT THIS WAY:

" **Employees today typically want to work for an employer who has developed a culture of inclusion and diversity, as well as one that offers ample opportunities for career advancement. Supplementing the human touch that is inherent to the HR function with tools and technologies that help to connect the employees to their work in a way they've become accustomed to in their personal lives can help HR professionals create an employee experience that rivals top competitors and ultimately improves overall employee engagement.** "

PAMELA LACY, PAYCHEX HR CONSULTANT

[Source: https://www.paychex.com/articles/hcm/2018-pulse-survey-tight-labor-market]

PERSPECTIVE: THE EMPLOYEE'S POINT OF VIEW

An experience made better with tech —

Here's a hypothetical scenario that shows how HR software and other technology can positively impact employee experience:

Employee A has to pick a benefits plan. Without much time to think about it, he's pretty confused and discouraged about being able to make the right choice. He needs information, and he needs it at the end of a long workday when he's still learning the ropes.

Fortunately, he can access the benefits information from the quiet of his desk and easily navigate through the choices. He finds the information he needs, uses the bookmark and save-for-review options to reserve his choice — and decides to make a final decision after a quick query to the benefits office. He texts a benefits manager, who can screen-share and walk him through his pick.

The forms can be reviewed, filled out, saved, and conveyed — all online and via mobile — and then he's all set. It's a highly positive experience, and he relates that to a coworker the next day, who then navigates the same portal, goes through the same process, and conveys that information to another coworker. The takeaway: *It's so easy to use this system! This company cares.*

Nothing drives employee engagement like the experience of feeling like a valued member of an organization and having the tools and culture that supports development and success. Or the sense that the employer not only wants the employee to flourish, they're going to make sure of it by providing the tools that turn administrative and HR functions into vibrant exchanges and opportunities to weigh in.

A tech-empowered employee experience is a sign of a great workforce culture — and that goes for organizations of any size.

3. THE MILLENNIAL FACTOR

Millennial culture has a lot to do with how much we've come to rely on HR tech and make it a part of our behaviors. When we can meet the expectations of all employees, we're also shifting the culture of the whole workplace forward.

Deloitte's 2018 Millennial Survey found that when there's a match between businesses and what millennials believe makes for responsible companies, the perception is that those companies are not only more successful, they have more stimulating work environments, and do a better job of developing talent. And those last two factors are certainly related to having the kind of technology that is stimulating and supportive, and offers employees the chance to work and learn the way they do it best — often on their own schedule and on their own terms.

It also found that attracting and retaining millennials and Gen Z respondents starts with financial rewards and workplace culture. But other factors include workplaces that offer more flexibility. And again, HR tech that can be used when and where and how an individual employee wants is going to go a long way in terms of forming those perceptions.

Finally, the survey found that millennials and Gen Z respondents are not sure they have the skills and capabilities they need to compete in "Industry 4.0" – the new industrial revolution. How do they develop those skills? They're looking to their employers. And this isn't just technical, hard skills. It's also all the soft skills, interpersonal skills, and the like. An organization that can provide a strong learning and development component, and models the right approach in their tech, is going to have great appeal to these generations.

[Source: https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/ pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html]

4. THE SELF-SERVICE FACTOR

Self-service is critical to today's workforce. Choose the tech that empowers employees to accomplish key tasks.

A recent Paychex survey that found an overwhelming majority (73 percent) of full-time U.S. workers today expect their employer to provide a high-level of employee self-service to complete a variety of HR tasks on their own. The good news is there's a whole array of capable, agile tech available to SMBs. There's no reason an SMB can't offer the same powerful tech solutions far larger firms do.

In the meantime, in a complementary Paychex poll of business owners, half (53%) of employers with 500 employees or less do not currently offer their workforce any level of employee self-service.
|
Source: https://www.paychex.com/secure/whitepapers/self-service]

Employees want to be able to interact with their workplace tools in much the same way as they do in their personal lives. And that means being able to do the things they need to do: accomplish simple, common actions and independently complete a range of HR-related tasks, such as:

- Confirming contact info

- Changing an address,

- Checking a time-off balance

- Requesting time off, whether personal day or vacation

- Viewing pay stubs and pay-to-date tables

- Independently adjusting a 401(k) balance or savings plan

As Paychex VP of corporate strategy and product management Tom Hammond notes,

> **Today's society has moved from being tech-enabled to tech-dependent, and with that shift has come an expectation for self-sufficiency in the workplace.**

To many employees, self-service capabilities are no longer an option when it comes to HR Tech. They should be a given.

5. THE TRUST FACTOR

Without trust, it's impossible to have engagement. But trust is also a two-way street. The key is finding HR tech that can support employer needs as well as employees, and can improve trust between all parties, across the board.

There's a saying: Trust is gained in drops, but lost in buckets. Given the nature of how we communicate and convey information, that certainly applies to the workplace. There are so many opportunities for trust to erode along the employee lifecycle, particularly as it pertains to HR. It may not be the process, but just a much a matter of perception. Compensation and benefits may be perceived as unfair, prone to bias, arbitrary, or inconsistent if they are not transparently and clearly calculated. Any kind of gray area can trigger speculation and questions. Even filling out forms can be a trigger point if perceived as exposing information (even if in reality, it isn't) when it should be confidential or discreet.

Time and Attendance

Another potential HR minefield is time and attendance. There are daily frustrations that have to do with logistics, a perception that the employer doesn't trust the employee to be honest, a suspicion that certain managers may not record time the same way as others, and the complexity of having to manually record time and attendance at one location while working at another.

Trust is a two-way street: if the employer creates processes designed to "catch" employees, the whole system may create friction between employer and employee. From an employer's point of view, though, it's not entirely out of line to question time and attendance.

Paychex noted recent surveys that show why:

- In one, a survey conducted by a forensic accounting firm, more than 30 percent of employees admitted to falsifying time records.

- In another survey, more than 65 percent of employees surveyed punched in and out earlier or later than scheduled.

    [Source: https://www.paychex.com/articles/hcm/latest-technology-track-time-attendance]

6. THE IT-WORKS OR IT-DOESN'T FACTOR

There's good reason some tech works and some tech doesn't — it depends on whether it fits your HR department's and your employees' needs. It's important to recognize problems before they start.

Here are three hints that trouble's coming — and that you may need to reevaluate your HR tech:

Difficulty of use.

If your people are not actually utilizing the HR tech you offer them, there' a disconnect. One example: if your tech has a messaging function, but no one is using it, then it may be either redundant or cumbersome to use. Ease of use is essential for tech today. Factors influencing ease of use may be offering employees the option of doing the work, such as onboarding or training modules, during their workday, or fitting a long process into their already packed schedule, or asking overloaded managers to walk employees through the new tech.

Poor integration.

If the HR tech can't be integrated into existing systems, there's a problem. It means you're going to have to repeat the same processes already being handled by existing systems, and that kind of redundancy is neither cost effective nor beneficial. And it's going to get worse as work continues.

If the HR tech makes the same processes and tasks take longer than before, it may not be a lag based on a learning curve. If there isn't improved efficiency, not only does that slow things down, it can influence employee perceptions that your company isn't making wise investments or putting its people first.

TROUBLESHOOTING: NEXT STEPS

If you're having issues with the tech, take some careful next steps to learn more:

1. **Solicit feedback.** Start with seeking feedback from valued employees to get a baseline for problems. Then, send out a larger survey to everyone. Design the survey so it asks clear questions but leaves room for thoughtful answers. Don't ask, "Do you like or dislike the new HR tech?" without also providing options as to why, and what aspects of it. Offer room — or alternatively a forum or virtual bulletin board — for opinions and suggestions.

2. **Be accountable.** Once you have asked people for their feedback, act on it. Report back to employees with a summary of the survey's results, and share your plan of action with them.

3. **Make a change.** Whatever you do, don't not change the problematic tech once it's been clearly established that it's a problem. The ramifications of doing nothing could be extremely broad, and may affect not only engagement, but retention.

4. **Employ analytics.** Monitor use and track performance and add that data to the aggregate of feedback and survey results to make sure you're staying on track as you improve. Offer transparency and visibility not only to leadership, but to managers and employees as well.

7. THE RETENTION FACTOR

Organizations with modern digital solutions have better retention. A recent study on the role of technology in attrition found that U.S. workers whose employers provide outdated tech are not only 750 percent more likely to be frustrated, they're also 450 percent more likely to consider quitting.

But it's not enough to just get new tech. You need the right strategies in order to harness tech to boost retention in your organization.

[Source: https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/the-new-digital-workplace-divide-us-workers-whose-employer-provides-outdated-technology-feel-less-productive-are-750-percent-more-likely-to-be-frustrated-and-450-percent-more-likely-to-want-to-quit-300671979.html]

To return full circle, in the 2018 Paychex Pulse of HR survey, retention was identified as one of the 5 toughest challenges by the key HR decision-makers in U.S. small businesses. Given the tight labor market, the challenge of retention for small businesses is tremendous. What's also interesting here is that the other challenges respondents identified all relate to retention in some way. Not being able to address these other issues can have a seriously detrimental effect on engagement and morale — leading to the loss of talent.

Here's a breakdown of the top 5 challenges:

- Keeping up with regulations (38 percent of respondents)

- Tracking employees' time (38 percent)

- Complying with regulations (35 percent)

- Offering competitive benefits (33 percent)

- Retaining talent (31 percent)

A comprehensive and technically strong HR platform can help solve all of these challenges. From staying up and complying with the latest regulations to time and attendance, to calibrating compensation and benefits, all are empowered by a cloud-based system.

As employees come into contact with all of these, the experience can be far more positive when all are part of the same system and part of the same working environment, including employer transparency, responsiveness, and self-service tools.

The bottom line is be human: no HR department should hide behind the tech — and the best tech enables a human touch and human presence in any interaction.

New digital solutions and employee self-service technologies not only solve HR's pain points, but they can close the gap between employment and engagement. With the right approach, as well as user-friendly and self-service functions, the best tech raises employee engagement and catalyzes employee activation throughout the employee lifecycle – from hiring to onboarding to a continuing spirit of collaboration, and alignment with the employer.

For SMBs, that's a win.

ABOUT PAYCHEX

Paychex, Inc. is a leading provider of integrated human capital management solutions for payroll, human resources, retirement, and insurance services. By combining its innovative software-as-a-service technology and mobility platform with dedicated, personal service, Paychex empowers small- and medium-sized business owners to focus on the growth and management of their business. Backed by more than 45 years of industry expertise, Paychex serves over 650,000 payroll clients as of May 31, 2018, across more than 100 locations in the U.S. and Europe, and pays one out of every 12 American private sector employees. Learn more about Paychex by visiting www.paychex.com, and stay connected on Twitter and LinkedIn.

800-319-1479

To learn about how Paychex Flex® could be the right HR tech for your business, visit **payx.me/RightTech.**

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