

# The Growth Factor: Investing in Your Workers for Long-Term Success



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## Full transcript

**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 folks, Rob Parsons here. Today we're going to be talking about the employee experience with two of our very own HR coaches, Rachel Sweeney, and Chelsey Evans. Rachel has 10 years of Paychex HR services experience and over 15 years' experience in human resources management overall. She's worked in many industries including manufacturing, experiential marketing, nonprofit, retail, and finance. Chelsey has nine years of Paychex HR services experience, and over 14 years' experience in human resources. Chelsey's also worked in a variety of industries, including hospitality, healthcare, marketing, and retail. Rachel, Chelsey, welcome to the podcast.

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Thank you. Excited to be here.

**Chelsey Evans:**

Thank you, Rob.

**Rob Parsons:**

So with so much focus and emphasis on recruiting new talent, I think we sometimes lose sight of the whole concept of retaining our current talent, the value they bring to the organization. I was talking to Trish McFarlane and Steve Boese a month or so ago, and they were talking about retaining talent being one of the big trends they see in 2022. So maybe you could just give me a little overview of what you're seeing there of the whole idea of retention versus always looking for what's next?

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Yeah, I think it's definitely going to be something that is very important for employers right now. Company culture has really been put into the spotlight. So it's the time that employers really need to take a look at what do they want to be known for? And what do they want to stand for? Their values, their missions. The reason that they need to do this is because employees are factoring this into their decisions when it comes to where they want to work or if they want to keep working for the same company they're working with. We spend a lot of time at work, so employees do want to be somewhere that they feel valued and they feel heard and appreciated and overall included. We're seeing that people want work to be more meaningful and have more purpose. So as employers, we need to provide that for our employees.

**Rob Parsons:**

I couldn't agree more. I think that's so critical and culture does speak to what you think about your employees. I think we are past, well before the pandemic, we were in a talent shortage and a talent crisis. I think it's only been exacerbated. It's a buyer's market, as you will. Employees get to choose where they want to work and they can choose places that are going to care, for lack of a better term. That care can be expressed in a lot of different ways, can't it?

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Yeah, I think it's really beneficial for companies to start looking more at the human side of the company. Not that time, that's just clock in, clock out, and get their jobs done. It's time to embrace that more inclusive, supportive environment, getting to know your employees more for who they are as people, making employees' overall physical, mental, emotional well-being a priority. I saw something on the CDC site that caught my eye that said that work stress is the leading workplace health problem. It's greater than inactivity. It's greater than obesity. It's work stress. That's something that employers need to take into consideration so setting up a wellness program for their employees may look costly or timely, but ultimately, the end result is really going to be beneficial for the employer. I don't think it has to be anything elaborate or expensive. Like you said, a variety of things, lunch and learn on different topics, or sharing healthy recipes, building a recognition program, not just top-down, but also peer-to-peer. Simple thank yous can go a really long way for employees.

**Rob Parsons:**

Yeah, that's a huge point. I also feel that really has to come from the top. I know at Paychex, culture is critically important. Our leadership has taken a role in not letting it happen by accident. They know what kind of company they want us to be, and they're really trying to get everybody to embrace that, and be on board. Have you seen the same thing with your clients? Do you see leadership being actively and proactively working on culture?

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Definitely. And it has to be that way. You know, it can't just be a letter from the president saying, this is what we stand for or updating our mission on our website. It really has to be that top-down approach of making it in, as part of our day-to-day. This is how we treat people. This is how we want to be. This is how we're going to show up to our employees and outside, outside of our organization, it has to be in all directions. And to gather what employees want, I think the best advice is to just ask them. Ask them what's important to them when it comes to their benefits for their workday, provide them with some options that you know are feasible, and then have employees rank them. Gather that feedback that you've learned and possibly create a culture committee. So then you're really getting that buy-in right from the beginning.

**Rob Parsons:**

I've been hearing so much of that on many of my recent podcast episodes. This idea of you don't have to guess what employees want, they'll tell you. You just have to go out and ask them. I think part and parcel of that is you have to be open to change. You have to be open to responding to that, right?

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Totally. I mean, if we think back to March of 2020 for a majority of our country work life and home life just got smashed together very abruptly. So now that these two extremely important areas have been intertwined, how can we just ask everyone to undo it? So I think it's something that all employers need to take into consideration that it was really, really stressful in the beginning. And luckily I worked for a company that was really understanding, but that's something that employers have to have that compassion. We've adjusted to a new norm so it's hard to ask employees just to go back to the way things were prior to the pandemic.

**Rob Parsons:**

Part of that too, I think we're seeing, and I've seen some research recently. Compensation's important always. And we know a lot of times that's a finance decision, and maybe as HR leaders, our hands are tied when it comes to that. But there are some things employees value that is beyond just compensation. One of the things I've seen and heard is it's about training and development. About giving them an opportunity to be better versions of themselves as it were.

**Chelsey Evans:**

Yes, definitely training and development is definitely just a great strategy for companies to embrace, to foster personal and professional growth within the workplace. And it can really position a company to be more competitive and attractive to your current talent from a retention standpoint, as well as the prospective talent on the recruiting front. Because the company can then really speak to and show that they do have a program in place. They do have growth opportunities. So it's kind of a win-win on both the retention and the recruiting fronts. And I think it's fair to say that training is a key component to employee engagement. It's so important to developing your employees and even your future leaders. You want to make sure that those training opportunities are available to everyone so, not just your new employees starting out, but really to employees at every level within the organization throughout their employment.

**Chelsey Evans:**

So you're showing that the company's invested in their future and committed to their overall growth. And it really can send that positive message, that affirmation support saying like, "Hey, we believe in you. We want you to succeed here and do really great things." And so I think it's important that companies kind of shift away from this mindset of like, we need to do training and just check a box for the sake of saying, well, that particular training is done, could move on from there. But rather training and development really should start with the company being committed to that, like ongoing and continuous learning as part of the employee experience. They want to make sure it's relevant, it's timely and it's not just learned, but it's also applied and embraced and reinforced within the organization to the extent that it really becomes ingrained into the company culture. And so those are all reasons why it's just so important to create that well-rounded training program that not only meets the needs of employees, but it also is hitting the goals of the business.

**Rob Parsons:**

I love that Chelsey, that selfishly as a manager, I know the better my people are, the better the results are going to be, the better the work's going to be. It's easier for people. We can do more. We have more capabilities, we perform better. So even just on a management side, I love what you mentioned about it's not just checking the box, that it really is beneficial to you as a manager to support your employees and help them do this. Have you seen with clients that when you talk about training, it is talking to the leaders and talking to managers and talking to supervisors and helping that frontline understand how to support employees?

**Chelsey Evans:**

Hands down it really is, just like we were talking about a little bit earlier. It's that top-down approach. We do have to have the support from the very top for it to trickle down and actually carry meaning and purpose and actually be embraced. It's so very, very important in order for it to actually be part of the company culture. And so management has to — I don't think it's a negotiable item anymore — they have to embrace it, and have to make time for it, and remove any roadblocks or barriers to training and just truly embrace it and be supportive.

**Rob Parsons:**

And I suspect too, there's some layer of motivation there too. Helping employees understand there's a future in the company, but you've got to be accountable too, to up-skilling, to re-skilling, to embracing these opportunities and becoming better even if you don't want to be a leader one day, the job's always changing. The work is always changing. You've always got to work to stay up-to-date, and I could see that coming into culture as well. It just really ... everybody is pulling the same direction.

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Yes. Taking a look at like, the current state of affairs in our labor market, we, hands down, are experiencing that labor shortage for the foreseeable future. So now is the time to really dig in. Companies really need to look internally within their organization. Definitely on one hand, you could say that you have employees who possess certain skill sets that are needed and are in high demand. But what you may notice is like, some of those employees may feel right now, a little overworked, a little burned out. They may be taking on a little bit more than they normally do, and they don't even have time to focus on development.

**Rachel Sweeney:**

And then on the other hand, you have your existing employees that maybe lack a particular skill set and so they're feeling overlooked for job growth and opportunities potentially that could really cause them to feel stagnant in their roles. And that is not a great feeling. That can lead to job satisfaction and just disengagement and we don't want that. We don't want to give them a reason to leave the company. So companies really need to shift their focus, look internally at what are they focusing, maybe on the recruiting front, to fill positions? Why are they looking in that direction? And then look internally and reflect, do we have good employees here that we can take the time, we can invest in, and we can up-skill and we can re-skill?

**Rachel Sweeney:**

And I think if companies shift that and really look more introspective, they can really make significant impacts that really elevate the employee's experience because they're going to be able to show once again, that they're willing to take the energy, the time, the investment into that individual's personal growth, and they're going to see that that's going to just turn around that employee's experience and help keep them there with the company in the long term.

**Rob Parsons:**

I love that and that really goes back to a couple points Chelsey was making earlier, this idea of culture. If you have a culture of putting in 60 hours when 40 are required, you don't have a culture of giving people time to get better. Even if you say training's important, if your culture doesn't allow the time to them invest in themselves, you're going to have a problem. And if you don't listen to your employees and see that Chelsey is ready for a move, but she needs that push or needs that help or needs that leg up. If you're not listening and paying attention you're going to miss that and Chelsey's going to go looking somewhere where she's going to get that opportunity.

**Chelsey Evans:**

Yeah. I think you make an excellent point, and Rachel had talked about this too, like, we really just need to ask the employees, ask the managers. It's so important to get that feedback and take it because we could be completely missing the mark with what we think or what we assume. And so we really need to stop doing that and change our mindsets around asking first and considering that in light of maybe the other parameters that we're working around, but asking first can really help clear the path of like, what direction do we need to go? And so maybe we won't be missing the mark. We're being proactive with our approach and again, it can save time. It can make employees, managers happy and they're going to feel supported and more, I would say more of a buy-in also, to what the company is ultimately laying out in regards to like, training, et cetera.

**Rob Parsons:**

I love that, Chelsey. Rachel, we're coming up on time here, do you have any last thoughts to share with the listeners before we wrap this up?

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Yeah. I think something to keep in mind is flexibility. I think that's going to be the key word. Think outside of the box, break those traditional rules, and reimagine when possible what that workplace could really look like for employees just don't go into autopilot and default that we can't do something. I think it's time to get creative and have fun with it.

**Rob Parsons:**

Love it. It really — employee experience — it's easy to pass that off as jargon, but those words were chosen on purpose, and that's something I love that you're both focusing on and how to improve that. It's not just a job anymore. We spend so much of our time, we invest so much emotionally into it. It should be rewarding. And I love the advice you're giving today. Super important topic. Thank you both so much for joining the podcast.

**Rachel Sweeney:**

Thank you so much for having us.

**Chelsey Evans:**

Yes. Thank you.

**Rob Parsons:**

So great. Always great having our own HR experts on board. So to our listeners, thank you all for joining as well. If you have guests or topic ideas, please visit [payx.me/pulsetopics](https://payx.me/pulsetopics) to share them. That's P-A-Y-X-dot-M-E/pulsetopics. Thank you all, and please stay happy and healthy.

**Announcer:**

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