

# 2020 Employee Experience Trends: How to Drive Employee Retention Through Meaningful Work



# Introduction

When it comes to creating the best workplace culture and designing an exceptional employee experience, there are many competing mindsets. Should you embrace a [#thankgodit'smonday \(T.G.I.M.\) culture](#) and push your employees to always-be-on and seek new ways to optimize worker productivity and efficiency? Should you prioritize work-life balance, inclusivity, and your employees' sense of belonging?

These competing questions and mindsets are reflective of the evolution of the employee experience itself. In a [powerful report on the employee experience that Deloitte](#) released earlier last year, they traced how the employee's experience has changed over time. What they found was that the way we work has changed as well. While the scope of what each employee is accountable for increases every year, [the future of work is less about college degrees and academic credentials](#), and more about having various skill sets, technical know-how, and training.

Most importantly, Deloitte's report found that what currently motivates employees at work is finding meaning in the work that they do. When you think about it, that's the monumental task HR and People Operations leaders are challenged with every day: find ways to increase employee engagement, translate your company's vision in a way that speaks to your team members, and provide the kind of environment that your employees look forward to returning to.

However, that's easier said than done, especially as HR leaders are hiring generations with different expectations and perceptions of employee and company loyalty. For example, the average millennial spends [less than two years](#) at a job. In fact, [a recent Gallop report](#) found that 21% of millennials have changed jobs within the last year, dubbing them the "job hopping generation."

In light of this: which mindsets in 2019 are we leaving behind and which strategies are we adopting in 2020 to improve employee experience? How do you find new ways not only to engage your employees, but help make their work more meaningful?



# Here is Sapling's list of top 10 employee experience trends in 2020

1. Invest in employee development
2. Take D&I seriously
3. Rethink the perks model
4. Offer company-wide mentorship opportunities for women
5. Kickstart offsites that have nothing to do with drinking
6. Start team building exercises through physical activity
7. Foster creativity in the workplace
8. Develop programs to increase awareness and combat burnout
9. Invest in philanthropy and charity days
10. Prioritize the employee experience through retirement

In this ebook we'll look at top trends, culture initiatives, employee development, and rethink the employee experience from hire to retire. We'll discuss tactics to improve employee retention, create a more engaged and skilled workforce, and provide strategies on how you can make your organization a meaningful place to work.



# 1. Invest in employee development

By [investing in employee development](#), you help your employees gain skills to advance in their field, so they're motivated to stay at your company. This makes your employees' work meaningful to them, and you build a strong pipeline of internal candidates who you know to be both a skill fit and culture fit.

In today's competitive talent landscape, developing talent is your best strategy in combating the skills shortage while reducing your [employee turnover rate](#). Employees will appreciate your continued investment in their careers, and will know what their future at your organization looks like. Internal promotions also provide an excellent proofpoint to newer employees of advancement opportunities at your company.

Ways you can invest in your employee development include:

- **Build an employee development plan:** Collaborate with your team members to set initial expectations for an employee's performance. This incentivizes employees to exceed expectations as they work towards meeting a clear set of self-appointed goals. A part of any successful Career Development Plan includes strategic tools such as: roadmaps, milestones, timelines, and ongoing communication. As employees work towards achieving their Development Plan's mapped out objectives, their performance and capabilities develop, increasing the organization's total ROI.
- **Offer different types of employee development:** Everyone has different learning styles, and it can be helpful to offer a variety of different opportunities for employee development. For some, that means providing job shadowing or encouraging them to take on special projects. In other cases, it may mean funding educational courses and conferences. You can also organize office lunch and learns with industry leaders to help provide insights and guidance your whole workforce will find valuable.
- **Provide employees with robust resources and productivity tools:** When you're thinking of improving the employee experience and increasing efficiency across teams, there are productivity tool mainstays like Slack for internal communication and project management software like Trello, Asana, and Basecamp. But having [a powerful HRIS like Sapling](#) can go a long way when it comes to helping employees with their career development, automating 30, 60, 90 day check-ins, and providing continued education and tutorials.

## 2. Take D&I seriously

Designing the best employee experience should extend to *all* employees. Yet in 2020, the gender and ethnic wage gap persists, the promotion rate is low for underrepresented groups, and the workplace is not a supportive environment for parents and many others.

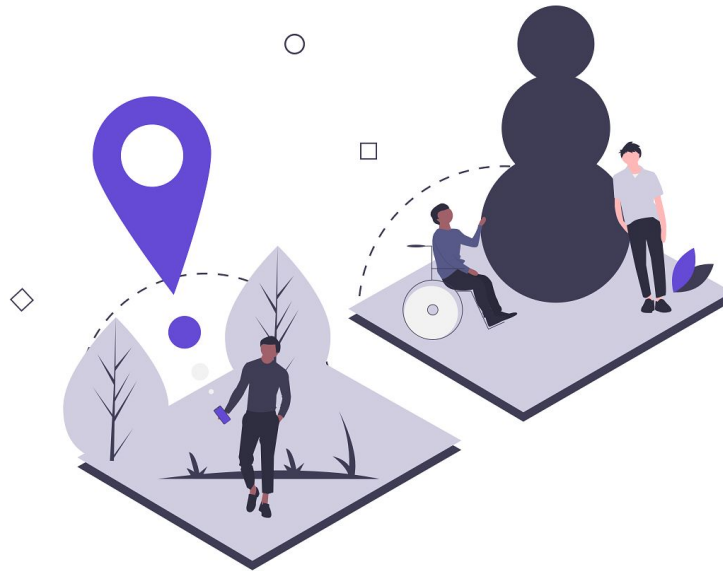
Nearly seven out of ten executives rate diversity and inclusion as an important issue, while [only three out of ten did in 2014](#). Companies are seeing the value in building inclusive cultures so that all employees can bring their best selves to work. In order to make a positive change at your company and champion your employees from diverse backgrounds, here are ways you can implement successful D&I initiatives to make a difference.



- **Leverage reporting to showcase where your organization needs the most improvement:** Your qualitative and quantitative people data can uncover where you have work to do. Look for trends in your employee feedback and dig deeper through surveys and People Ops data.
- **If your people data reveals inequity, take action:** You may hear that women are leaving your company due to unfair compensation practices. Run a pay equity analysis to see whether there's a gender or ethnic pay gap at your company. If so, make a plan to address it.
- **Don't overlook introverts:** Research shows that [society has a cultural bias towards extroverts](#). Meanwhile, introverts are more focused, productive, and create higher quality work than their extrovert peers. So it's important to level the playing field and correct the problem. Create a [meeting culture](#) where diverse contributors have equal impact.

### 3. Rethink the perks model

More and more, HR leaders and organizations are debating the value of perks. As the Tech editor Owen Thomas at the *San Francisco Chronicle* [recently concluded](#): “If there’s any lesson, it’s that companies may want to rethink perks, especially at an early stage when the company’s culture is first forming. Whatever impact giving employees balloons or fancy coffee has, what’s far worse is if you have to cancel them.”



Employees aren’t interested in artisanal coffee or video game rooms, they are looking for perks that will improve their quality of life both on and off the job. Some employee perks are easy to implement, others require more planning and foresight, but a well thought out perks model has the potential to improve your employee experience.

Here are some of the [perks that employees find most valuable](#):

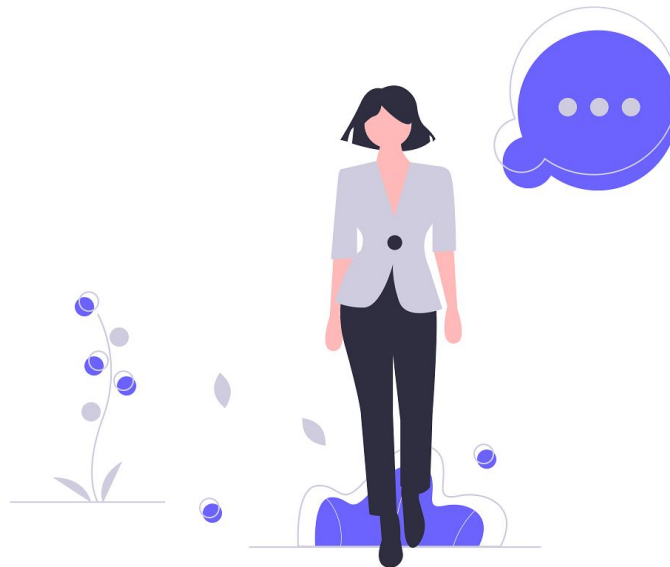
- **Work from home:** Most employees in the US ([80% to 90%](#)) say they would prefer to work remotely at least part-time. Remote work provides better work-life balance, and there are many ways you can structure remote work. For instance, you might limit remote work to specific days of the week, or at the manager’s discretion.
- **Fitness stipend:** A fitness reimbursement can help your employees feel more energized and can stay focused at work. Select the amount you want to reimburse and allow employees to choose how to spend it. Some may choose to use it on a gym membership, while others may opt to use it on things like yoga classes or season ski passes.
- **Fido-friendly office:** Who wouldn’t want to bring their best friend to work? This is a great benefit for dog owners, and as an added benefit, having dogs in the office can even reduce stress for your employees. Make it clear during your recruitment process that you have a dog-friendly office, as it can be a definite selling point.

## 4. Offer company-wide mentorship opportunities for women

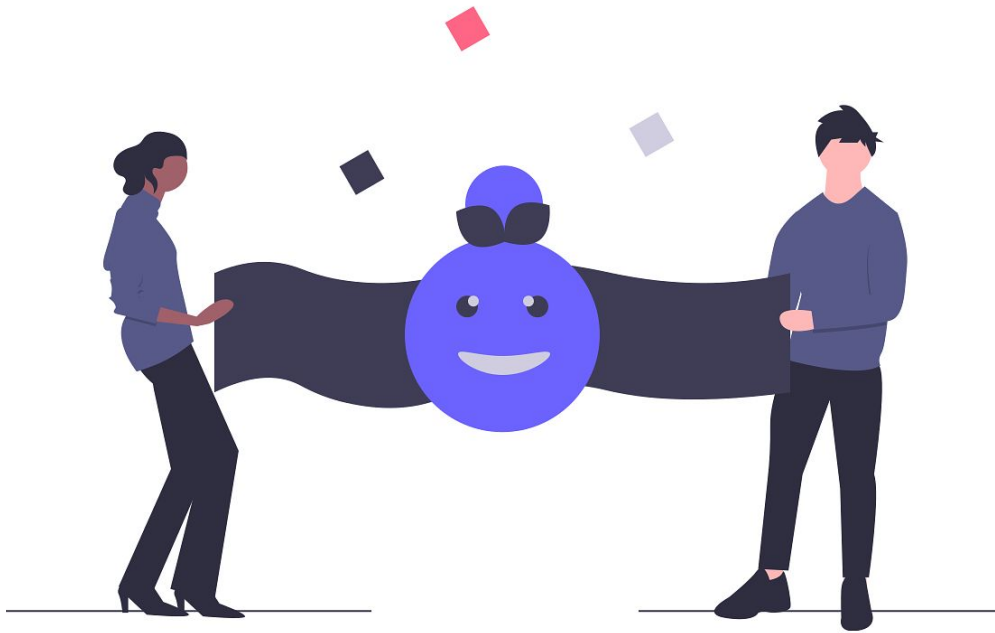
In order for women and people from underrepresented backgrounds to advance in their careers, it is essential in the workplace to have role models. For people from diverse backgrounds to gain agency in the workplace, it's crucial to have structured mentorships where people from diverse backgrounds can learn from each other.

If you want to build a [culture of mentorship at your organization](#), make sure when you're matching a mentor and mentee, complementary skills are a main factor.

Here are additional ways you can build a successful mentorship program for women:



- **Match high-performing women at the company with mentors:** Provide women in your workplace a broader network of coworkers within the company that they can learn from. Establish a frequent email cadence on topics for mentors and mentees to discuss and one-on-one career coaching.
- **Foster an employee-led community of mentorship:** Mentorship teams can be matched by a series of survey questions you create to make sure the mentees and mentors are a good fit. From there, employee mentors can lead group mentoring with a monthly mentorship workshop on specific topics.
- **Measure the effectiveness of your program and iterate:** Analyze your people data. Since starting your mentorship program, do you have higher rates of retention for your workforce of women? Are more women getting promoted, recognized, and improving their skill sets? If not, you may need to adjust your program to have the best impact for your organization.



## 5. Kickstart offsites that have nothing to do with drinking

Whether your employees face a long commute or they're parents that need to return home by a certain time, employees are looking for networking opportunities that do not involve drinking.

A recent [Financial Times](#) article found that executives are realizing, "That giving out a bottle of cheap wine as a reward for good work needed not to be the norm any longer – that it was really 'othering' folks who didn't drink." With that in mind, here are some ideas for teambuilding, networking, and offsite events that have nothing to do with drinking.

- Plan a day hike or retreat in nature
- Schedule a class around an artistic activity like painting or making ceramics
- Indulge in a pancake or ice cream social

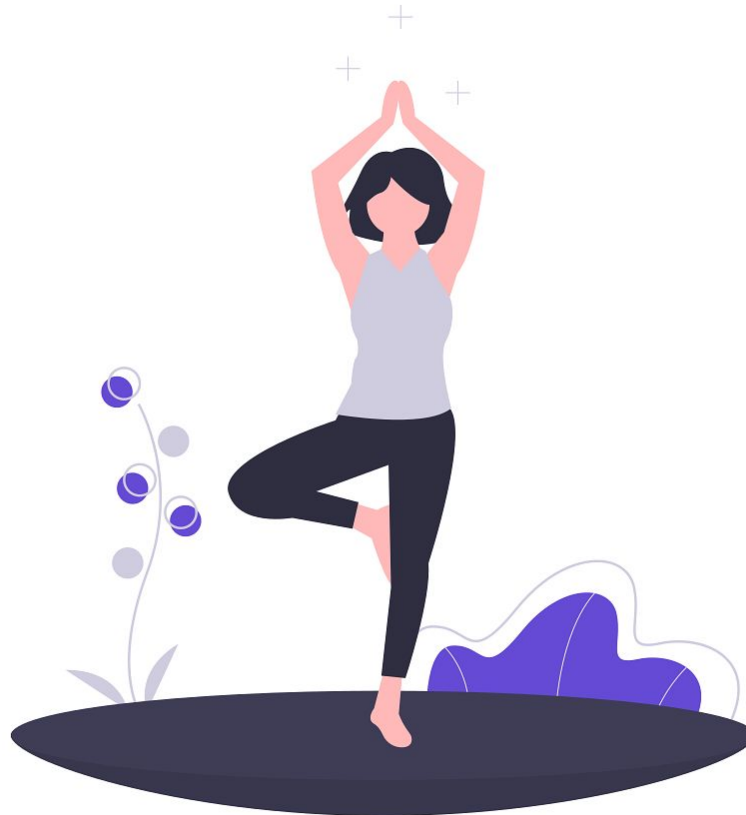


## 6. Start team building exercises through physical activity

If you want to improve the wellness of your workforce, a great way to kickstart this trend is by creating regular activities centered around physical exercise. Employees who exercise regularly report on having higher energy levels throughout the day and having less stress at work.

Additionally, employees who workout together often work better together. Benefits of sponsoring company wide physical activities include: [better social connections](#), prevention of diseases, and improving productivity. Group exercise activities can include:

- Sponsoring a weekly running group
- Participating in a dance class
- Playing a team sport like ultimate frisbee
- Having walking lunches or on the go one-on-one meetings



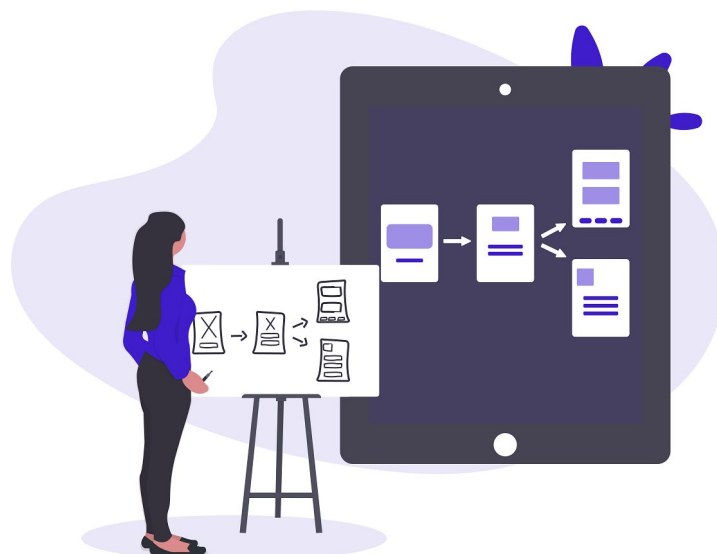
# 7. Foster creativity in the workplace

When you encourage creativity in your workforce, you create a culture of innovation and encourage your employees to think out of the box when it comes to problem solving. Getting the opportunity to be creative on the job inspires excitement for the work that your employees do.

Creativity is also behind better products, creating campaigns and communicating in a way that resonates with your customers, and fixing some of your workplaces biggest problems. Additionally, working on creative exercises as a team can strengthen bonds and improve collaboration.

Here are ideas for how you can stimulate creativity in your workplace.

- **Hold creative brainstorming sessions:** Encourage managers to be open to new ideas from their workforce. Instead of simply holding conventional whiteboarding sessions, ask provocative 'what if?' questions at your company wide brainstorms. Remember to foster a “there are no wrong answers” mindset, doing so helps your employees come up with unique solutions.
- **Cultivate a risk-taking mindset:** When employees aren't proposing new ideas, it's often because they fear making a mistake. Cultivate a culture that isn't afraid to take risks by rewarding creative experimentation. This could mean providing a financial reward like a giftcard to the person with the most creative idea, or enforcing a policy where on a weekly basis, managers highlight their employees' ideas and achievements.
- **Provide quarterly creative workshops and speaker events:** Often times, listening to a person in a creative field or participating in a creative workshop can help your employees' creative juices start flowing. Schedule quarterly onsite workshops or take a field trip to a museum or creative event to inspire your employees.



## 8. Develop programs to increase awareness and combat burnout

Last year, the World Health Organization [classified burnout as a legitimate medical diagnosis](#). Burnout is a condition of fatigue, stress, and exhaustion that leads to a person's inability to focus, work, and be productive. [Employee burnout is not only on the rise](#), but 23% of employees report they feel burned out at work very often.

There are many causes of employee burnout. Oftentimes, employee burnout is the symptom of a much bigger problem such as unreasonable workloads, abusive managers, and a lack of support in the workplace. Burnout accounts for over \$125 billion in healthcare spending, and the cost of absenteeism and turnover as a result is high for most organizations.

Below are some ways that you can help combat burnout and prioritize your employees' health and wellbeing:

- **Implement wellness programs** Whether it's providing a meditation room onsite, a free weekly yoga class, or creating a running club at work, giving your employees a physical outlet or place to relax can greatly improve your teammates mood.
- **Remove the stigma from mental healthcare:** [1 in 4 Americans has a mental illness](#) and millions of adults will [experience depression or anxiety in their lifetime](#). Make sure that your healthcare plan covers mental health and provide your employees with information meetings that make it clear just how prevalent mental health issues are so that your employees can receive the help that they need.
- **Create policies that respect your employees' off time** Implement a "right to disconnect" policy, preventing managers from sending work emails after work hours. This enables your employees to maintain healthy boundaries, rest, and return to work energized.
- **Provide communication training for managers** Many workplace conflicts that create stressful work environments could be avoided with proper manager training. Be sure to create a training program for all managers to improve communication between managers and direct reports and create a supportive workplace.

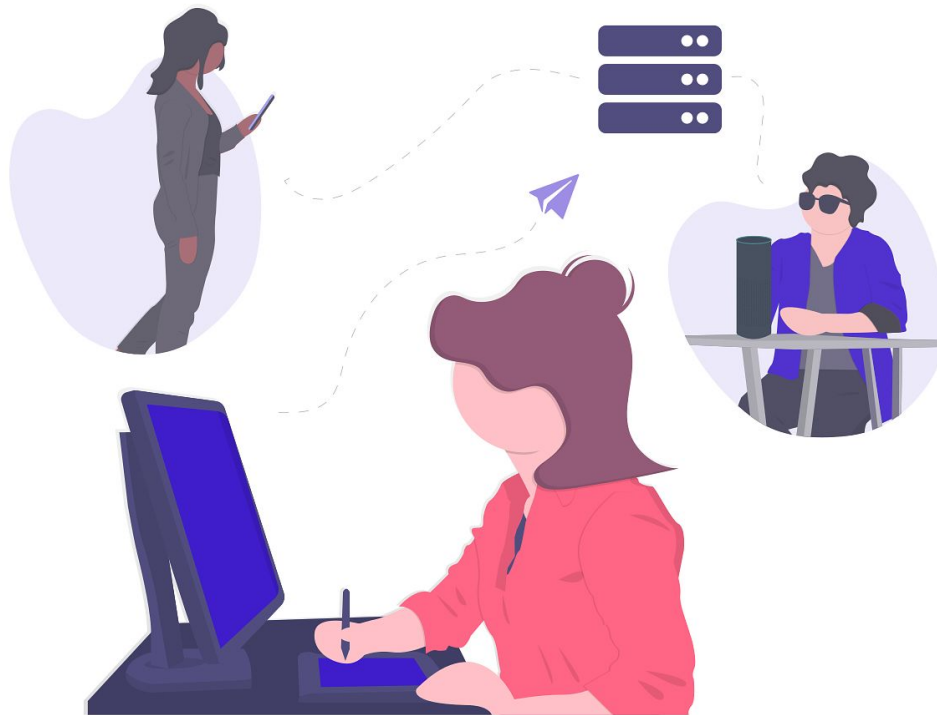
## 9. Invest in philanthropy and charity days

[Nine out of ten millennials](#) would consider taking a pay cut to work at a company whose mission and values align with their own. But the appeal of working for mission-driven companies appeals to more demographics than millennials and improves your workforce's perception of your company and your leadership.



As a [Gallop report](#) recently found, “With mission-driven workers, companies realize major performance gains, including increased employee loyalty and retention, greater customer engagement, improved strategic alignment and enhanced clarity about work priorities.” Not only do philanthropy and corporate programs increase an employee’s connection to their company, but it improves the public’s opinion of your organization as well.

Companies can jumpstart their corporate responsibility program by providing employees with paid volunteer days. For instance, you can provide your team members with four paid volunteer days each year to use as they wish. Other companies may choose to plan company-wide or department-wide volunteer activities, such as a day working at your local homeless shelter.



## 10. Prioritize the employee experience through retirement

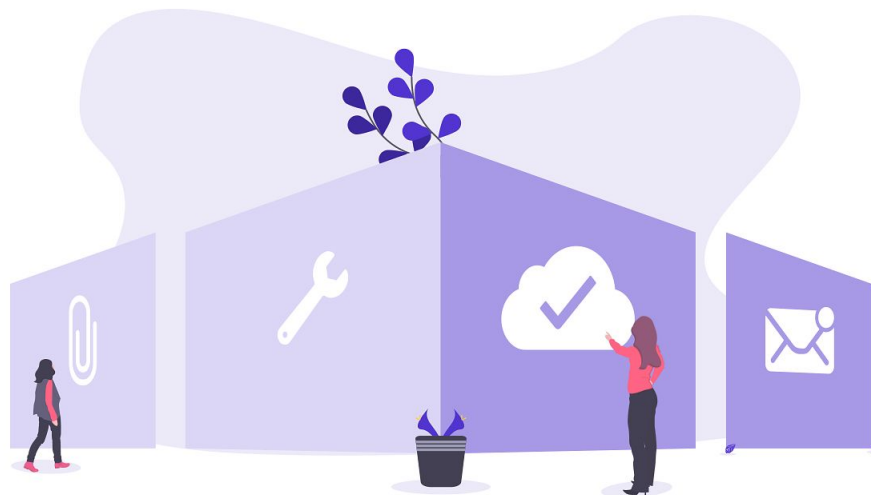
Forward-thinking organizations are realizing that the employee experience doesn't end with onboarding. Now, organizations are putting more thought into their employee offboarding process, knowing that former employees can recommend future job candidates and impact future talent pipelines. This makes it crucial for companies to offboard on good terms.

A strong offboarding process might include:

- **A one-on-one conversation** between the employee and their manager to discuss the reasons for the employee's departure and next steps.
- **An exit survey** to learn how you can make strategic improvements to your employee experience.
- **A farewell event** like a lunch or happy hour to send the employee off with the team's well wishes.
- **A request for a [Glassdoor review](#)** so your departing employee can share information about their employee experience with potential job candidates.
- **An invitation to keep in touch** via your company alumni program, whether that's an email list, LinkedIn or Facebook group, or in-person reunions.

# Conclusion

Creating a better employee experience starts with career development and helping each of your employees make their work more meaningful to them. Alongside career development, investing in D&I initiatives, and mentorship for people from marginalized backgrounds helps give everyone at your organization equal access to equal opportunities, while becoming a highly skilled workforce.



As you build out the programs that matter most to your employees, it's essential to think of what improves their quality of life. Meanwhile, as issues like burnout become more pervasive in the workplace, it's crucial to have trainings, programs, and policies in place to best advocate for your team members.

Designing the best employee experience is about making your workplace an environment where your employees want to come to work and believe in the mission. We hope that this ebook helps shape your employee experience initiatives and gives you a plan of action for how to best support your workforce.

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