

Announcer: ([00:28](#)):

On today's episode of Tune in Tuesday, we're joined by SHRM President and CEO, Johnny C. Taylor Jr., as he shares top considerations for HR in 2021. He will be joined by Dr. Alex Alonso, SHRM's Chief Knowledge Officer to discuss new SHRM research about the COVID-19 vaccine. And, Amber Clayton, Director of the SHRM Knowledge Center, to talk about its impact on the world of work. Kicking off today's program with a 2021 welcome is Senior Vice President of SHRM Membership, Mike Aitken.

Mike Aitken ([01:08](#)):

Thank you for joining us for our first Tune in Tuesday episode of 2021. I'm Mike Aitken, SHRM's Senior Vice President of Membership. We're glad you're here to kick off the year with us. In 2020, we launched this program, Tune in Tuesdays, to provide you with a monthly virtual engagement opportunity in the lead up to SHRM21, and another chance to earn PDCs. Let us know in the chat box about what you've learned so far from these episodes in 2020. One thing is for sure, 2020 taught all of us a lot and we're thankful it brought about more opportunities to connect with you directly, even if it looked different than in years past.

Mike Aitken ([01:53](#)):

As we look ahead, we will continue to meet you where you are and we will continue to deliver the resources, tools and support you need in this ever changing environment. For example, exclusive virtual programs like this one. We're dedicated to providing you with the latest information you need to stay sharp and savvy every month and every day, for that matter to make your workplace better. With resources like our editorial content on issues that matter most to you, or access to our SHRM knowledge advisors, and even our HR daily newsletter, you'll find something new and valuable to you each and every day.

Mike Aitken ([02:38](#)):

Now, if you're like me, many of you have taken some time for introspection over the course of the last few weeks, evaluating how you can make an even greater impact in 2021. Well, I'm here to say that we at SHRM did the same thing. And we're here to support you and ready to help you tackle whatever this new year brings your way. SHRM offers some easy ways we can help you and your team to up-skill virtually. Now if you're familiar with the SHRM Competency Model, it identifies what it takes to be a successful HR professional across all career levels, job roles, and job functions.

Mike Aitken ([03:21](#)):

We've shared a link to explore this further in the resource links below. As you look for opportunities for professional developments this year, we have several tools available to you as members. Our Competency Self-Assessment will help you assess your skills, identify development activities, and plan how you can build your proficiency to continue and advance your HR career. More on our Competency Self-Assessment is also available in the resource links below.

Mike Aitken ([03:54](#)):

Now, after taking your self assessment, you can explore additional development activities, and even build your own development plan to provide some structure and metrics for success. During this past year of so much change, if you've transitioned job roles, jobs, or started working with a new company,

please take a moment to update your SHRM membership profile, so we can better serve you. It is our one connection to you and without accurate and updated information, it makes it difficult for us to connect with you.

Mike Aitken ([04:30](#)):

And one more quick plug. In the spirit of staying connected and continuing to elevate the role of HR professionals, if you've not heard of SHRM Advocacy, we call it our A-Team, it's a core driver of positive workplace policy and action, and you can be part of it. SHRM members are uniquely qualified to advocate on workplace policy issues. Our collective work impacts the lives of more than 150 million employees each day. A-Team members are given the training and education needed to effectively influence workplace public policy. You'll be able to reach out to your lawmakers by sending emails or making calls, by visiting them in their district offices, or attending state advocacy days organized by your SHRM state counselor chapter. The link to learn more about our A-Team is also included in the resource block below. Today we're going to learn more about how SHRM continues to stay ahead of COVID-19 developments as best we can, bringing you exclusive research and guidance from our Knowledge Center.

Mike Aitken ([05:40](#)):

Last week, SHRM held a webcast, Vaccination and Treatment Updates from the Biopharma Industry. Emily Dickens, our Chief of Staff, Head of Government Affairs and Corporate Secretary was joined by Sharon Lamberton, Deputy Vice President in State Government Advocacy for PhRMA, a trade association that represents 34 member companies that develop brand name medicines. Be sure to listen in to the replay to learn about the COVID-19 vaccine, how it was brought to market so quickly, and how states are going about distributing it. There are obviously so many considerations about who receives this vaccine and when it will be available to different populations. The webcast link is included in the resources link here, if you'd like to give it more time and listen to it at your leisure.

Mike Aitken ([06:34](#)):

Today, you'll learn more from Johnny C. Taylor Jr., SHRM's President and CEO, Dr. Alex Alonso, SHRM's Chief Knowledge Officer, and Amber Clayton, Director of the Knowledge Center, who will empower you with the latest information around the ever evolving COVID-19 situation, and other topics we think will be increasingly important this year. Now, without further delay, I'm pleased to hand it over to our SHRM President and CEO, Johnny C. Taylor Jr.. Johnny, take it away.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([07:08](#)):

Thank you, Mike. Thank you so much. 2020 was a year of uncertainty and turmoil, and that's to say the very least. As we enter 2021, workers and workplaces are looking for ways, ways to turn the corner in one of the most tumultuous times in our history. Thanks to the hard work of the medical and scientific community, millions of workers, tens of millions of workers around the globe will receive vaccinations in the coming months. With this advancement comes a new set of challenges to tackle though. To better understand what the vaccine means to the business community, the SHRM research team has taken time to survey members of the workforce about this chapter in the ongoing pandemic. Dr. Alex Alonso, SHRM's Chief Knowledge Officer is here to share the insights his team has gathered. Welcome, Dr. Alonso.

Alexander Alonso ([08:01](#)):

Thanks, Johnny. It's great to be here.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([08:02](#)):

Listen, I know you and the team have been working hard while the rest of us may have taken a break for vacation. You and the SHRM Knowledge Department have been really busy trying to capture, frankly from the beginning of the year. I like to remember Friday, March the 13th of 2020 was the day when it became clear to all of us that the pandemic was going to become a real issue for us, and we didn't know how it was going to play out. Many of us thought that 14, 21 days later after the entire country essentially hunkered down and stayed home that it would all be resolved, and here we are nearly a year later, still dealing with the pandemic. As a result of that, it's become a real workplace issue, so I'd like to have you tackle a few questions for us and give us the latest in answers informed by SHRM research. First, what does the research indicate about the workforce's feeling about the vaccine?

Alexander Alonso ([08:58](#)):

Well, one of the things that we've learned specifically about the workforce and from a survey of over 33,000 American homes for working Americans, is that we've identified that there are some perceptions held about the vaccine. What we've learned is that almost two-thirds of working Americans report that they are very or somewhat likely to get vaccinated, especially as the vaccine has become available. We think that that might even change now with the news today from the Associated Press about the Coronavirus Task Force changing the vaccine strategy to be one vaccination injection as opposed to two, so two doses. That may be a pretty salient factor as well.

Alexander Alonso ([09:40](#)):

One of the things that we learned, though, is that of those two-thirds, almost two-thirds of them, so 61% of that 66%, said that they will get the vaccine within the first three months if it is available. Now, that still means that there's 36% of Americans who still feel some hesitation around this. What we've learned is that there two key factors really playing a role in this. First and foremost is concerns about the short and long term side effects associated with the vaccine, which is natural. We also have some concerns, about 58% of Americans, who say that they're concerned about the confidence in the particular vaccine development process, given that it was compressed in terms of the need, having been a global pandemic and the development process. It's natural that individuals and working Americans feel some hesitation around that.

Alexander Alonso ([10:31](#)):

The other thing that we're learning though, is that whether or not the employer requires it is in some way a factor, meaning two things. One is, 76% of Americans say that they are likely to be vaccinated if it was a requirement for going back to work. That's only 24%, or a quarter of the workforce that says that they won't go back if it's required by their employer. But the other thing that stands out-

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([10:54](#)):

If I could interrupt right there, it's really interesting for our listeners to point out the relative importance of that number, the 68 or so percent and the 70%, the numbers that you're talking about. I think it'd be

helpful for our listeners to fully appreciate and viewers, that only about 45% of adult workers take the flu vaccine annually, right? I mean, this is a pretty big lift.

Alexander Alonso ([11:20](#)):

It's a very big lift, but it also speaks to the value, or the importance of the role that the employer plays in helping maintain well-being for their workers. What we're seeing is that employers, and specifically the HR profession have a real impact now on not just well-being from the perspective of incentivizing it, but also from being really a cog in determining whether or not someone will actually engage in well-being or wellness activities. That includes vaccination, as we're describing here. So, it really has almost an 18 to 20% swing in terms of what it is that individuals will do based upon their wellness and well-being. That means we're playing a role in people's lives, and especially their wellness.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([12:04](#)):

No, I love that. This segues to a question that I've been receiving calls from almost immediately after it was clear in late November that early December, a vaccine would be on its way. This is the question of employers, how they feel about a mandate, mandating the vaccine with their employees. It's a really interesting question. More employers have called and said, and CEOs have said, "Johnny, what about mandating it?" And, small and medium sized companies differ in their response to it than larger companies. What are you hearing?

Alexander Alonso ([12:38](#)):

What we're hearing is, mandates as a whole will exist in certain industries. When I say that, what I mean is certain industries will require them as we're seeing now with the group 1A vaccination tier. What we're seeing is specifically healthcare workers, essential workers, they will build in mandates, but they make in roughly somewhere about 10% of our, eight to 10% of the industries and the workforce that we see. We still see though, that there is a large contingent of the world, and really industry who says that they will not mandate it in any way.

Alexander Alonso ([13:13](#)):

In fact, when we asked specifically from a survey of 2,000 employers, what we found is about 2% of those employers say that they will go in and mandate it, because it's a requirement for sustainability of their enterprise. But the majority, the overwhelming majority, about 55% say that they're unsure and don't think that a mandate is really required for sustainability. What they think is required is rather an encouragement and building the business case to say, "This is something that is not only good for your well-being, but ultimately good for our organization." So, there is about 61% of employers who are saying that they will encourage it strongly, and meaning they won't mandate it, they won't require it, but they will encourage it strongly as a collective perspective across their organization.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([14:02](#)):

Well, good. I think you've answered a lot of us without asking, how are you going to respond to the American workers hesitation around the vaccine? You're right, it's clearly all of us who were told and the expectations were set, that it would take two, three and even more years to come up with a vaccine naturally now are questioning, is this safe? How are employers dealing with that natural anxiety that's been created for employees?

Alexander Alonso ([14:30](#)):

What they're doing is actually putting together information workshops around the vaccine itself and around vaccination. What we're seeing is a very prevalent trend across many employers, especially in the healthcare community, is inviting the pharma companies or representatives of the pharma companies to actually do webcasts or do information sharing sessions related to the vaccine and specifically the role that the vaccine will play in helping individuals remain healthy and fight off COVID, if exposed.

Alexander Alonso ([15:01](#)):

The other thing that we're seeing is that a variety of organizations across different sectors are taking the approach of building together not just information sessions, but actually working with providers to have providers explain where it is that the vaccine came from, what the science is behind the vaccine, and how the vaccine really plays an important role in ensuring their safety, with the eye towards demystifying some of the things or debunking the myths that exist out there. One of the popular myths that we've heard recently is that it changes your DNA. That's something that people are asking. And while it does have an interplay or an intersection with your DNA, it does not change your DNA as an example.

Alexander Alonso ([15:46](#)):

Now, the other thing that we're seeing that's actually quite common is the model that we've seen across the board, which is people volunteering to take it and do it in public. So, having their CEOs, having their chief operating officers, having their surgeons, whomever, sit and take the vaccine publicly as a way of doing it. The other thing that's been a vital role here and playing an important role is providing different ways of making access to the vaccine much more effective where possible, or at least much more efficient, if you will. We do see some employers actually trying to game the system, or trade off efficiency or access for the notion of ensuring that people have access to it more quickly.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([16:31](#)):

Well, one other things I want ... We live in a capitalistic society, right? These vaccines cost money, and there's additional money and business expenses that are associated with employers' decision to either, as you said, strongly encourage, or to mandate. How are those factors, money and business expenses playing a role in this entire discussion?

Alexander Alonso ([16:56](#)):

Well, today those factors have really been limited by the relationship or the expenses being shared with governmental agencies. Whether it be the Health and Human Services department at the federal level or at the state level, we're seeing that those expenses have been mitigated. But what we're seeing is, some employers are actually, and some analytics firms are actually looking at how you mitigate the expense associated with individuals not adopting or taking the vaccine. The thing that they're looking at is, what does the long term resistance to the vaccine actually look like in terms of dollars and cents?

Alexander Alonso ([17:38](#)):

What it means for the organization's right now is looking at a long term use of PPE and trying to provide PPE across the board, especially for employers that have a lot of interactions and don't have the physical

space to ensure that when people come back to the office, they will be able to interact and remain safe. Even if the majority of the workforce has immunity or has developed some form of immunity.

Alexander Alonso ([18:05](#)):

Now, what we're seeing though is, those are long term models and long term forecast. Shorter term, we're not seeing that interplay as strongly. What we're really seeing is this notion of metrics that deal with time loss, net promoter scores and what it does to your brand as an employer, what it does to your brand as an organization. Those are some of the things that a lot of organizations are looking at when thinking about what they do now from an access perspective.

Alexander Alonso ([18:31](#)):

Now, there are other organizations on the other side of the coin who are trying to find ways to spend dollars to ensure that they get easier access moving forward. You and I have heard stories across the board about pharmaceutical companies actually working with large events organizations or large amusement parks to find ways to tie in the access to the vaccine, so that people who visit those places can actually gain access to those places by adopting or taking the vaccine. We're seeing a lot of different models right now, but it's sort of the Wild Wild West at this point, and calculating that tangible cost is something that I suspect we scientists will be studying for years.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([19:12](#)):

Well, talking about cost, a lot of employers are afraid of all of the legal issues associated with either mandating the vaccine, especially as early as it is since it's still technically in this test phase. But also, of not mandating it because there goes the risk of if, I don't mandate it, an employee comes into the workplace when it's readily available and another employee gets me sick, then there's risk with that as well. What are you hearing about all of the legal issues? I love being able to ask you scientists, given that I am a lawyer.

Alexander Alonso ([19:45](#)):

Well, what we're hearing specifically is that there are some employers. I'd say it's about 5% of employers who have had concerns about the notion of not mandating it, in large part because they are afraid of OSHA violations and not being compliant with OSHA when it comes to maintaining a safe workplace, once they bring employers back into the workplace. What it also speaks to, though, is that they start to carry on certain debts if they keep their workforce dispersed and not in the workplace.

Alexander Alonso ([20:15](#)):

So right now, it's been a regulatory compliance issue as far as the governmental or gubernatorial orders and mandates. But what we're seeing over the course of time is, that that will actually start to become a little bit of an OSHA compliance perspective. But I think it's a it's a great segue to some of what our knowledge advisors have actually been asked recently, and so something that I think quite a few of our knowledge advisors, and Amber herself will be able to tackle.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([20:41](#)):

Well, thank you, Dr. Alonso for coming on to the program and sharing these insights. I know we'll see a lot of you over the next several months and everyone here is going to reach out. And I'm encouraging all

of you to come back to Tune in Tuesdays because we're going to follow this very closely. I'd like to discuss more about how the vaccine will impact the world of work. So I'm pleased to welcome Amber Clayton, Director of the SHRM Knowledge Center. Amber and her team of seasoned HR practitioners provide guidance to our members on everything from compliance, to talent acquisition. So we're going to spend some time hearing literally from the man and the woman on the phones, and they can tell us exactly how this thing is really playing it out and what we're hearing about the vaccine's impact at the SHRM Knowledge Center. So, Amber, welcome.

Amber Clayton ([21:29](#)):

Well, thank you very much for having me.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([21:31](#)):

Big question is, how are businesses going to manage if people don't want the vaccine? We've got to acknowledge that coming out of a political year, an election year when the two were saying, "Maybe a vaccine won't be here for a long time? If it comes too early, I'm not ... I don't think it's safe." Now we have it, and we not surprisingly, have a percentage, a significant percentage of employees who say, "I'm not sure I want to take this vaccine right now." How are businesses responding to it, and what are the questions you're fielding?

Amber Clayton ([22:05](#)):

Yeah, that's a really good question. It really depends on several factors, one of them being, is the employer going to require it or are they going to encourage it? Because if they're going to require it, things that employers need to think about are things such as, is it job related? Is it necessary for individuals? Let's say you have a primarily remote workforce, is it necessary for all employees to get vaccinated? You want to consider those things, as well as if there are specific positions that might be a little bit more at risk than others. Maybe they have more public and face to face contact.

Amber Clayton ([22:39](#)):

So I think that whether or not they're going to have to figure out how to manage it is really based on whether or not they're going to encourage or require it. I mean, we know that already through the research as Alex mentioned, that many employees are not going to want to take the vaccine. So if an employer decides to require it, some things that may happen would be, there could be potentially turnover where those individuals decide to leave the organization, or the employer may have some challenges in recruiting employees.

Amber Clayton ([23:10](#)):

So as you're considering whether or not to mandate it, factor those things in. What would happen in order to manage the business if you know that X percent of your employees may not want to take the vaccine and they decide to leave the organization? Then you may have to hire temps, you may have to increase your recruitment efforts, you may not be able to open on time, or you may have to have a shortened schedule. There's a lot of things that employers need to consider as they're determining whether or not they're going to require or encourage it.

Amber Clayton ([23:42](#)):

The other thing too, and you mentioned, this is the refusal. And of course, if there are employees who decide to refuse it, one of the things that employers need to do is, they need to talk to the employees. They need to understand whether or not those employees have a disability that could be protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or they could have a sincerely held religious belief that's protected under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In those circumstances, an employer may have to make a reasonable accommodation, absent undue hardship. It's going to vary depending on the organization and what they decide to do as far as the COVID vaccines.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([24:22](#)):

Amber, it's really interesting. I've had calls again from CEOs, and you're getting them in the Knowledge Center. One of the things though, that the knowledge advisors are receiving, one of the things you talk about is, what happens if people won't come work for you or leave your employment because of that? But, there's also the other side. There are a significant number of employees who are expecting their employers to provide a safe workplace. So we're also starting to hear people say, "If my organization doesn't mandate it, especially in smaller businesses where you work far more closely with your colleagues, then I'm not coming back there either."

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([25:00](#)):

It's one thing we want to say to everyone listening is, you're right, it depends, but there are people who feel as strongly about the need for people to take this vaccine so that they can get back to normal, as there are people who say, "I'm concerned with any mandate." And you're right, organizations have to figure it out. To that point, 50% of organizations have already partially returned to the workplace. Yes, 50%. And I never, ever, I always pause to say, and a significant number of employees never stopped working. We talk about essential workers, and we're not just talking about healthcare workers, we're not just talking about law enforcement. The folks at your service stations, at your retailers, et cetera. A lot of people worked through this. But now that 50% of the other organizations are returning to the workplace, how will the vaccine slow or expedite businesses reopening fully?

Amber Clayton ([25:55](#)):

Again, going back to that mandate or the encouragement, if employers are encouraging employees to get vaccinations, then more than likely they'll be able to reopen those businesses possibly faster. If they're requiring it, there may be some backlog. If, for example, depending on whether or not the employer decides to implement the vaccine on-site, maybe doing an on-site clinic or having them go to a specific lab or healthcare provider, or having them go to their own healthcare provider. These things can take time and depending on the availability of the COVID vaccine, that could prolong people coming back to work, especially if an employer is asking the employee to provide documentation.

Amber Clayton ([26:37](#)):

So, it could go either way. It could be that it slows down the process of returning back to work, or maybe there are businesses that still have employees that are working remote and they'll continue to work remote until they get that vaccine, and their businesses are still thriving in a remote work environment. Again, it does vary depending on whether or not the employee is required or encouraged to get the vaccine.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([27:04](#)):

Cool. You and your colleagues are experts, right? You're experts at this, and it's one of the few things in life when you can say, "I was there from the beginning." It all started in 2020. If you've been at this work, you have all of the history. What can employers do to frame the vaccine as a benefit for all? And, what can they do to remove all of the political noise that has come out of this? I mean, it's mind-numbing, right? In other words, emphasizing the vaccine as a healthy life decision to protect all, and not a political statement?

Amber Clayton ([27:40](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. Alex actually mentioned this with the workshops and webcast. Really, it's about educating the employees. Many employers are not educated themselves in order to educate their employees, so they need to utilize their resources. They could reach out to their healthcare providers, their Employee Assistance Programs or EAPs. There's also some employers who have wellness programs, maybe they have an administrator who might be able to help provide some resources, guidance, maybe doing some webcast or some workshops for employees. There are also other areas that employers can obtain information through the Centers for Disease Control website.

Amber Clayton ([28:20](#)):

OSHA, The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, has information on their website, as well as the US Food and Drug Administration. You could find a wealth of resources there that you could provide to employees to educate them more on the COVID vaccine, and the benefits of it. And also too, check with your state local Health Department. Some of them may actually have some resources available to be able to help educate the employees as well. But I think education is going to be key when it comes to relaying the benefits of getting the vaccine while in the workplace.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([28:53](#)):

Got it. Education, we got that, but what are some specific policies that SHRM and your colleagues can recommend as employees start to reopen their offices in 2021?

Amber Clayton ([29:05](#)):

Yes, certainly a vaccination policy. If an employer doesn't have one already, you may want to go ahead and implement one now, regardless of whether or not you're encouraging or mandating a vaccine. With the reopening, you may want to look at your safety policies and practices. Again, many employers during this period of COVID have actually implemented safety measures that maybe they haven't done in past years, such as wearing the face mask and social distancing. So of course, you want to take a look at your safety policies and make sure that they're up to date, even if it's just temporarily. We don't know yet what's going to happen down the road, but certainly update those policies and practices and procedures.

Amber Clayton ([29:45](#)):

And then of course, there's other things outside of the COVID vaccine, such as the telework policy. If employers have decided that they're going to go ahead and continue to allow employees to telework, they may want to update their telework policies. If they don't have one, they need to create one. Also, to the paid leave and the leave policies, because as we know last year, we had a paid leave that was

provided through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act. It was the expanded paid sick leave, as well as the emergency family medical leave that did expire at the end of the year.

Amber Clayton ([30:19](#)):

However, they're still employees that need time off, whether they're sick and taking care of themselves or family members, or they have children who are still at home working from school online. So, many employers are actually still providing leave and through the new coronavirus COVID relief package at the end of the year, they can do so and still receive tax credit. So, look at those policies ... I would say look at your entire employee handbook and see what needs to be modified as a result of what's happened over the past year. And again, even if it's temporary, you may not have to revise the whole handbook but maybe add an addendum to that. Look at your state and local laws that have changed recently, and of course, other changes in laws that are coming up in 2021. So it's definitely, if you haven't already done it, a good time to review your employee handbook.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([31:13](#)):

Every time I get a call from someone who says, "Should I mandate vaccination or strongly encourage it?" I ultimately say the answer is dependent upon your company culture. How will company culture play a role in this whole vaccine discussion? More importantly, how will workplace culture be even more important in 2021 and beyond?

Amber Clayton ([31:37](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. With regards to the vaccine, I think leading by example is going to be important. If your leadership team is saying, "Nope, we're not going to get the vaccine," it's going to be really difficult for the employer to mandate or encourage their employees to get the vaccine. So, leading by example is going to be important. The other thing too is, if you're in a culture where there's a lot of open communication and honest communication, that's going to be really, really important. You want to be able to, again, educate your employees about the benefits of the vaccine, but also too, you may want to survey your team to see how they feel about it. What are their perceptions?

Amber Clayton ([32:14](#)):

I know we have the research, but check with your employees to find out what they feel about the vaccine and answer any questions or the concerns that they might have before actually implementing a policy or practice of requiring or encouraging vaccines. So, culture is going to be really important when it comes to the vaccinations. And then overall in 2021, I think outside of COVID and what's happening with the vaccinations, of course, there's the political issues that arise this year with the new administration coming in. We need to look at our diversity, equity and inclusion programs. There's a lot more than just COVID right now that's happening, so employers will need to really look at their workplaces and try to create a better workplace and a better work culture for the employees.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([33:07](#)):

Can employers, I mean real bluntly, offer incentives to employees to get vaccinations? I mean, we've talked about the stick. Is there a carrot that you can offer?

Amber Clayton ([33:18](#)):

There is. I mean, some employers may decide to give the employee paid time off to go get the vaccine, some may actually provide a small bonus. Something to keep in mind is that for nonexempt hourly employees, there may be a requirement to pay them for that time off going to get the vaccine, so keep that in mind. Salaried employees, of course, with the exempt salaried employees guaranteed salary, you may not have to pay extra. But keep in mind, the nonexempt you may have to.

Amber Clayton ([33:48](#)):

The other thing too is, some employers may decide to provide additional time off or they might decide to provide, let's say, points for getting the vaccine and other wellness programs where they can use them as gifts to get gifts for other incentives. So certainly employers can do those things, but definitely check your state and local laws, though too, just to make sure nothing conflicts with the law in your area.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([34:13](#)):

We're hearing a lot about the differences between small and medium sized companies and larger organizations, how they're going to handle this, because it's frankly ... We knew this from the beginning, the onset of the pandemic, that it was easier for larger organizations to allow people to work remotely. One, they have the technology infrastructure, they have the support systems and smaller and medium sized businesses, many of them didn't have those. So, what are we hearing about to the extent, there may not be any, but the differences I would anticipate between how small businesses and large organizations are managing this entire discussion?

Amber Clayton ([34:53](#)):

Well, you said it. I mean, large organizations tend to have the resources available to be able to have these types of programs and implement vaccines a little bit easier I'm sure, than some of the small organizations. Large organizations can work with their health care providers or with their labs, probably to get a vaccine clinic at their location so that makes it easier for the employees to actually get vaccines, whereas small organizations depending on the size might not be able to do that. It might not be worth the while for a lab or a healthcare provider clinic to come out for very few employees.

Amber Clayton ([35:26](#)):

In those situation, small businesses may be able to work together with other small businesses in their areas to get a vaccine clinic there. They certainly should be talking to their healthcare providers, their state and local health departments to see if there's anything that might be available for their employees. And again, being flexible and letting those employees go and get the vaccine from their primary care doctor might be a little bit easier than having them go to a specific location or waiting for a vaccine clinic. Small employers may have to do a little bit extra to make sure that their employees are getting what they need, but I think that in itself is actually really a motivator and a morale booster for employees if their small employer is taking their wellness into consideration.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([36:16](#)):

I hope our small and medium sized employers out there are listening, because we realize that you make up the majority of the capitalism in our country. The employment in our country rests with small and

medium sized employers, and it's critical. Don't think that we at SHRM only focus on the big companies, because we know you all are the bread and butter, if you will, of our country's economy so thank you.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([36:42](#)):

Shifting gears a little bit, Amber, the Knowledge Center is absolutely one of my favorite membership benefits, and it was before I was here at SHRM. Nothing better than to be able to call on people who are certified experienced professionals, HR professionals, to get advice and counsel. After the unprecedented year that we had in 2020, and I know we use that term a lot, what additional hot workplace topics do you anticipate your advisor team tackling in 2021?

Amber Clayton ([37:14](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. I think again, I mentioned the diversity, equity and inclusion. It's going to be a hot topic. I think we're still going to hear much about the COVID vaccine, as it continues to get rolled out. With the new administration, we may hear some questions around changes or updates to the Affordable Care Act. We may hear more information about compensation and managing paid leave, that will be a big one. We know several states are still continuing to look to provide paid sick leave programs or paid parental leave programs, so we'll probably hear more about those things as well.

Amber Clayton ([37:46](#)):

Marijuana, the legalization of marijuana both medical and recreational will be hot topics again for this year as well. And, we may see some additional questions around layoffs as far as recalling employees. As these businesses start to come back to work following last year, we may be hearing more about recalling employees back to work following a layoff. So, I think we're going to hear quite a bit this year. I mean, last year I will say, you said on precedent. We actually have ... we were the busiest last year than we have been over the last three years, so yeah, we'll definitely ... It's probably going to remain busy this year.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([38:23](#)):

Well, that's called job security. Right, Amber?

Amber Clayton ([38:28](#)):

Yes, I love it. I love it.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([38:29](#)):

Thank you so much for joining us today, and to all of your colleagues who man or woman our calls every day and our advisors. I want to thank you. Thank you for the work that you do. You have literally been corporate first responders, so many people turn to us every day. And all of you who are watching, please take advantage of this benefit. It's one of your most valuable membership benefits. Now, I'd like to take some time to talk about our top considerations for the HR profession and the business community in 2021.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([39:02](#)):

It's clear to each of us that we have a tough climb ahead to recover and reinvent our businesses in the coming year. Much of the work will fall on to HR professionals as we make tough decisions about when

and how, and frankly if we're going to bring people back to work, and what practices and policies will change because of the economic uncertainty and the extreme stresses our employees have faced over the past 10 months. Yes, we're going to need to reassess our talent strategies with so many people looking to reenter the workplace. We'll need to consider the implications of a vaccine on our workplace policies. We'll need to invest in developing skills as never before. And, we'll need to support those who have faced grief, stress isolation, and yes, burnout, from the impact of the pandemic as well as the social strife that defined the year 2020.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([39:57](#)):

The human cost of the events of last year are incredibly difficult to assess, but every one of us know someone who is seriously suffering financially, emotionally, or both. We know for example, the so called deaths of despair, which focused on white male suicide and overdoses are certainly increasing. Reports of domestic violence have risen sharply. One in four people SHRM surveyed feel down and depressed often. Our recent research, The Journey to Equity and Inclusion, found that 20% of us workers feel undervalued. Not just undervalued, but undervalued at work, and for black workers it's one-third.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([40:41](#)):

People have lost faith in our oldest institutions, and it's not just because of the black swan events of this year. We've been going down this path for a while. We have a truly American problem. We have what I've been calling an empathy deficit for a lot of reasons we can point to. Stark political divisions, the isolation made easier by technology, the deterioration of civility. We just don't talk to each other civilly or respectfully anymore. We have literally given up on understanding the hearts of our fellow human beings. We've collectively lost the ability to look through others' eyes to walk in their shoes. And I ask you, how did we arrive at this empathy deficit, this gap?

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([41:31](#)):

Well, for a long time, the rhetoric of media and our politicians has been setting us up into rival camps. It's me, versus you. We're increasingly tribal as a society, and we live in a world of separate identities. If it's not red versus blue, it's men versus women, it's urban versus rural, black versus white versus brown, immigrant or native, blue collar versus white collar, pink collar, millennials versus baby boomers. I mean, it never stops. Even more sinister and underlying this divide are messages like, if you aren't with me, you're against me. I'm right, so that makes you wrong. You're not like me, so I don't like you. Someone Like you hurt me, so I'm going to hurt you back.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([42:16](#)):

This lack of empathy is widespread, because lacking empathy is extremely easy these days. It takes no thought and it takes no sacrifice to reject or invalidate someone else. Much of it can be done quite handily on the anonymous internet, as we know. Look at the media we consume, it has become so fragmented. We can curate exactly the right messages that make us feel good or feel aggrieved, depending upon what entertains us. We don't even have to know what the other side's opinion is or to experience it. As long as it's different, it's fair game.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([42:51](#)):

The empathy deficit shows up everyday at work. Much of the resurgence of DE&I programming in the wake of the George Floyd killing was supposed to encourage open conversation and mutual understanding, but too often, it bypassed empathy. Well-meaning programs devolved into grievance sessions, a way for one group to beat up on another group in a so-called safe space. It may have been safe for them, but not for anyone else, rather than listening and trying to relate to the other folks experiences.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([43:23](#)):

Now look, no one ever changed anyone else's mind by convincing them that they were wrong. This is why SHRM's Together Forward @Work platform focuses so much on having difficult conversations with smart guardrails. With boundaries, discussions, they don't turn into debates and people aren't punished for their opinions. HR, as curators of workplace culture, we are the ones to set expectations for these conversations so that they are actually effective, fancy that.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([43:56](#)):

Another reason we have an empathy gap is, I want it my way. In ever more alarming ways, we've seen fellow Americans face off, attacking one another over ideology. But deep down, we all really want the same thing, to make a decent living, to take care of our families, to enjoy personal freedom and to end this virus. But we each want to do it our way, that's the problem. Although we have the same goals, we aren't unified by them because we've been conditioned to think only of ourselves, which is the opposite of empathy.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([44:33](#)):

Society is now all about the individual. We've become a have it your way culture, a Burger King culture. The work environment encourages this. We've conditioned employees to demand an individualized experience. They want tailored health and retirement plans. They want customized training and development and growth pathways. We have to admit, we created this and now it's expected, and we need to deliver to remain competitive in the talent market. But once upon a time, societies and politics did not celebrate the individual above all. They were grounded in the notion of a common good and collective responsibility. That's because we as human beings naturally want to, and need to find shared ground.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([45:19](#)):

I bring this up a lot when I talk about DE&I and the nature of inclusion. When you meet a stranger, what's the first thing you do? You start looking for things in common. Where did you grow up? Where did you go to school? Do we know the same people? That search for commonality is what enabled early humans to survive as a species when isolation meant death and extinction. As humans, we want to know and understand each other. This is why empathy is not necessarily something we can teach or learn. It's frankly inherent in human nature, so it's more like something we should be able to exercise.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([45:56](#)):

Empathy is a muscle we all have, but we need to strengthen it. And it's HR's job to strengthen empathy in the workplace, to close the gap, to work that muscle that has atrophied. Empathy is not a soft skill, it's a business skill. It's what enables people to work cooperatively with others who have very different

experiences, preferences, styles, and opinions. But, empathy at work is on a downward slide. Employees' and HR's professional ratings of their own organizations empathetic behaviors have fallen steadily since 2018. And while 91% of CEOs say their own company is empathetic, only 68% of employees agree. CEOs have an obligation, an obligation to demonstrate empathy in their leadership, but it really comes down to HR to put it into practice as a workplace value, part of our culture. HR is in the position and has the expertise to build up this atrophied empathy muscle in our organizations and our workplaces.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([46:57](#)):

So, what can you do? First, you can consistently make the business case to your leadership for a better, more empathetic workplace, and the business case is really a talent case. Empathetic workplaces are businesses that can retain the best people. New research about Gen Z, the workforce just now entering our workplaces, we can see the impact of empathy. 83% of them say they would choose an employer with a strong culture of empathy, over an employer offering a higher salary. 79% would choose an empathetic employer, even if it meant changing their role, industry or career path. And, 83% would consider leaving their current organization for a similar role at a more empathetic organization. So let's face it, our future talent doesn't need another reason to leave because of workplace culture.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([47:47](#)):

Secondly, we need to make the connection between empathy and performance in our organizations. The Center for Creative Leadership's research found that empathy in the workplace is positively related to job performance. HR leaders must identify the intersections where empathy and performance come together. And standing at those intersections are your people managers, so give their empathy muscles a workout. When asked who has the most impact on building a culture of empathy, employees' top response was their manager. Not their CEO, not their coworkers, or their HR leaders. That is why empathy is such a large part of what we do, and more importantly, part of SHRM's new people manager qualification.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([48:30](#)):

These days with so many people working away from each other, managers are on the frontlines when people are struggling with work or stress. This is new for them, and we've got to help them. Think about pre-COVID. How involved did we get with how people were managing their personal lives at home? We had responses for workplace harassment, but not for domestic abuse. For administering family and medical leave, but not for supporting people juggling work, childcare, eldercare and homeschooling.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([48:57](#)):

When a parent has to come to work and leave their children home to do remote school on their own, that parent is not bringing all of themselves to the job. And, those children may not be getting the best preparation for their future, and they are our future, our future workplaces. So now this becomes a manager's concern, which makes it very much an HR concern. The lines between work and home aren't blurred, they are nonexistent. An empathetic manager's actions can be as simple as watching for signs of overwork and stress in their employees. Showing sincere interest in the needs, the hopes and dreams of their reports. Being willing to break the office wall and offer help with people's personal problems. Showing compassion, compassion for personal loss and cheering for personal achievement. We've got to do all of that.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([49:49](#)):

Thirdly, we must be aware that beyond managers, there's a whole reservoir of empathetic people all around your workplace. Do you know who they are? Can you tap into them? Earlier this year, SHRM had all of our employees take the CliftonStrengths Assessment. It was a great exercise to learn about the innate gifts and passions of each of our team members. One member of our HR team had the idea to connect together the 50 or so employees who scored empathy as one of their top three strengths. They meet regularly on Zoom to talk about manifesting empathy and understanding how to bring that into our day to day work.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([50:28](#)):

Finally, you can make full use of SHRM programs and resources that promote empathy, equity and belonging. Empathy is at the heart of so many of the resources and platform SHRM has been developing for our members and the entire HR profession. What is empathy, but getting talent back to work and ensuring that people who've made mistakes get a second chance and making sure that older workers, people with disabilities, veterans and others locked out of the workplace have equitable opportunities to succeed in a job? What is empathy, but guiding difficult conversations around racial justice and equity at work? Conversations that can change people's lives? What is empathy, but making sure that inclusive workplace cultures extend to differing political opinions?

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([51:16](#)):

Our new campaign, When I Grow Up, focuses on removing barriers that block people from reaching their full potential like exclusion, discrimination, harassment, and inept managers. In 2021, let's approach every problem and every challenge by putting the we, before the me. When we build empathy muscles in the workplace, we really can impact the world beyond. We have an opportunity, an opportunity to make an empathy impact that will be felt in homes and communities all across the world. And now is the time.

Johnny C. Taylor Jr. ([51:50](#)):

We have new leadership in all branches of Washington and in our states, a vaccine on the way, a new year, and a lot of ground to make up after the great pause. Know, that SHRM is here to support you as empathy ambassadors and credible business leaders as you tackle the recovery and renewal of your workplaces. Whether it's through cutting edge research Alice talked about, the knowledge support that Amber's advisor team offers, our always on tools and resources, or the common ground you find in your local SHRM chapters, we've got you covered from all sides so you can bring broad holistic perspectives and exciting new ideas to your organization. I want to thank you. Thank you again for joining us today for Tune in Tuesday. I look forward to seeing you throughout 2021.