

# 15 great HR lessons from America's largest human resources conference

Couldn't make it to last week's big Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) annual conference in Las Vegas? No problem, editors from [The HR Specialist](#) and Business Management Daily were there to scoop up all the HR wisdom for you. Here are 15 of the best pieces of bite-sized advice:

1. **TEACH MANAGERS TO CONFRONT, NOT COWER.** "We don't know how to have the hard conversations—people don't have that hard-conversation skill set ... But courage is teachable, observable and measurable. We can teach people how to show up and do the hard things." – *Brené Brown, best-selling author and researcher*
2. **DROP RATINGS FROM REVIEWS?** "More employers have gone rating-less (in performance reviews) and it's worked for them. The jury is still out whether that's the best move. But there's no question that having more frequent conversations between employees and managers is critical." – *Jeremy Spake, principal, Cornerstone OnDemand*
3. **GET A POLICY ON POT PRODUCTS.** "There are all types of new CBD products out there, from CBD lip gloss to CBD hand lotion. It's not psychedelic, but it is a marijuana derivative ... it's a whole new area and you need to decide if you'll make rules about it." – *attorney Lara de Leon, Ogletree Deakins*
4. **DAY 1: MORE INTERACTION, LESS HR.** "What if we took HR out of the new employee experience? On Day One, the more that new hires engage with the new people who will be part of their work family—and less with HR—the better." – *Wade Larson, chief HR officer, Wagstaff Inc.*
5. **DEFINE 'YEAR' IN FMLA POLICY.** "Make sure you define what the 'leave year' is in your FMLA policy, whether it's a rolling year or a calendar year or whatever you choose. Otherwise, the employee can use whichever calendar is most beneficial to them." – *attorney Eric Meyer, FisherBroyles*
6. **SMART OFFBOARDING HELPS YOU RECRUIT.** "How are you at exiting employees and what are they saying on the way out? ... Your goal is that they are saying great things and giving you a five-star rating in the way they're treated." – *Raymond Lee, CEO, Careerminds Group*
7. **EVERY NEW HIRE IS A FLIGHT RISK.** "All new hires are a flight risk because if they have the guts to leave their last job, they have the guts to leave you ... You have to get creative with the carrots you're dangling." – *Cara Silletto, president, Crescendo Strategies*
8. **TEACH THE RISKS OF E-MAIL.** "Do you know what the 'E' in e-mail stands for? It stands for 'evidence' ... Managers can be too informal and too harsh on email because they don't see the other person's face. Always assume a third party will see it—a jury or a judge." – *attorney Alison West, Employment Practices Specialists*
9. **AT STARBUCKS, IT'S ABOUT CULTURE, NOT COFFEE.** "At Starbucks, we talked early on about values—not the business ... (In your onboarding), instead of talking to employees about what you do, talk

to them about the values of this place and how they come to life in your business ... HR are the ones who have to change the language." – *Howard Behar, the former president of Starbucks*

10. **HOW SAFE IS YOUR DATA? TEST TO FIND OUT.** "The same way you do elevator tests and fire drill tests, your company should be doing tests on its cybersecurity plan ... there are a lot (of vendors) you can hire that will try their hardest to hack into your system." – *attorney Louis Lessig, Brown & Connery*
11. **THE No. 1 WAY TO PREVENT RETALIATION CLAIMS.** "The best defense to a retaliation claim is timely and consistent discipline ... Taking action *before* a complaint is made, if justified, will go a long way in defending any retaliation claim." – *attorney Christine Howard, Fisher Phillips*
12. **TAKE RAISES OFF AUTOPILOT.** "You should give 20% of your employee a 0% raise to allow you to have enough money in your salary budget to truly reward the high performers." – *John Rubino, president, Rubino Consulting*
13. **THE NEW VOICE OF HARASSMENT.** "If you get a complaint like, 'He yelled at me,' or 'He was mean to me,' HR still needs to investigate even if that's not your typical sexual harassment claim ... With the increased awareness of the #MeToo movement, that's something you should look into." – *attorney Shayna Balch, Fisher Phillips*
14. **SET THE BAR HIGHER FOR MANAGERS.** "If you want to build better managers, you need to set higher expectations for them." – *Mack Munro, CEO, Boss Builders*
15. **WHAT'S IN A NAME? IN A LAWSUIT, A LOT.** "If you work for a large corporation, take a look at your handbook and agreements to make sure your organization is precisely identified and that corporate separation is maintained. Otherwise, you could have problems in a lawsuit ... The goal is to keep any lawsuit or claim confined to the subsidiary because the employee will go after the deepest pockets." – *attorney Pavneet Uppal, Fisher Phillips*