

5 lessons learned by employers in 2022 that you need to know

Many employers will look back at 2022 as the year the dust began to settle. Unlike in 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, survival — both physically and of the company — no longer consumed every waking thought. Likewise, 2022 lacked much of the “What do we do now?” feeling that permeated 2021 as the world dealt with the pandemic’s aftermath.

Despite companies generally no longer existing in crisis mode, 2022 still presented its share of challenges. From labor shortages and supply chain issues to quiet quitting and employee demands for better work-life balance, “business as usual” never returned to many places (and may never do so).

As the calendar turns, leaders can only speculate on what 2023 might have in store. However, they bring to the new year a wealth of knowledge derived from their experiences in 2022. Here is a look at some of the important lessons employers learned over the past 12 months.

Remote work is no longer an experiment

During the pandemic, companies sent workers home out of necessity. Management worried about productivity, and employees felt uncomfortable at first adjusting to this new way of performing. But what started as a feasible solution during a time of limited options grew into an acceptable, even preferred, way of operating.

“Many businesses and fields can maintain their existence thanks to the rise of the work-from-home model. Some fields have even begun to thrive as a result of this shift,” says Tom Miller, chief marketing officer at [FitnessVolt](#).

Benefits certain employers have derived include:

- Reduction of overhead expenses and rent of physical space.
- Expansion of the job candidate pool by eliminating geographical barriers to employment.
- Greater coverage to clients through employees opting for non-standard business hours.
- Increases in productivity.
- Happier employees.

This last point deserves further consideration. Employees initially forced to telecommute often developed a taste for this lifestyle. Remote work improved many work-life issues by eliminating a daily commute and allowing more flexibility for childcare and other familial concerns.

Knowing from experience that the arrangement can succeed, employers quickly learned that eliminating work-from-home options could spell trouble. Employers demanding a return to the office often received resignation letters instead. And companies looking to lure top talent soon learned that mentioning the ability to work from home increased interest from job seekers. Ads touting [remote or hybrid work](#) attract seven times more applicants than in-person roles.

Hybrid set-ups sometimes offer the best of both worlds

Speaking of hybrid arrangements, some employers learned the value of mixing on-site and off-site operations. Potential advantages include:

- Increased opportunities for socialization and development of company culture.
- Together time for brainstorming, teaching new skills, discussing sensitive subjects, and other activities that often benefit from physically being in the same room
- Sharper focus on certain tasks because employees can perform them at home without interruptions from colleagues.
- Maintenance of better work-life balance.

“2022 was the year that taught us that a hybrid work model was the most productive for our team, even over the in-office model we had before the pandemic,” says Kyle MacDonald, director of operations at [Force by Mojio](#). “Our team's production was greater once we fully adopted the hybrid model this year, which means we'll be keeping the hybrid work schedule through next year. Our team is happier, more productive, and they love the freedom that comes with a hybrid work model.”

Andreas Grant, founder of [Networks Hardware](#), says that he learned that as long as employees are getting the job done, the method or workplace should not matter. He adopted a hybrid workplace approach to give employees what they desire.

“Some people enjoy a proper work-life balance from home while some people need their office environment,” Grant says. “There is no-one-size-fits-all solution here to get the most productivity out of them. The sooner you realize this, the faster you will be able to bring out the best in your employees. The lesson I learned in 2022: Instead of trying to put your employees in a box, give them their preferred option.”

Managers must provide direction

Offering employees guidance and feedback is nothing new to successful leaders. Such information gives team members confidence that they are doing things right and provides constructive criticism that sets the stage for improvement.

When all workers are not physically in the office 9-5 on a daily basis, however, such communication runs the risk of falling by the wayside. Managers must make a deliberate effort to not let this happen.

“This year I've discovered how important it is to set clear expectations for remote workers,” says Grace Baena, director of brand at [Kaiyo](#). “In an office environment, employees can learn about expectations through traditional orientation processes and pick up on the actions of others. In a remote environment, however, these details are not always clear. To help ensure the success of remote teams, I've learned that you need to clearly communicate expectations from day one. Employees should know what's expected of them in their role, what they should accomplish within the first month, their key priorities, how many hours they should be available online, and what their schedule should look like.”

Mental health — including your own — demands attention

Lingering pandemic concerns, racial injustice, inflation, political divisiveness . . . 2022 contained a myriad of problems capable of contributing to anxiety and depression. Add to this stress from daily living — from juggling the care of children or elderly parents to meeting workplace expectations to do more work with fewer people. [Burnout](#) is a real problem, and smart employers know they cannot look the other way and tell workers to just deal with it.

“The most important lesson I learned this year is the importance of mental health,” says Robert Davidson, CEO of [California Title Loans](#). “Mental health is just as important as physical health, and it's something that should be taken seriously. It's not just about having a good attitude or being happy all the time. Mental health is about having balance in your life and being able to cope with stress. It's something that we should all work on, and it's something that I'm going to continue to work on in the coming year.”

Some of the actions employers took to improve mental health include:

- Better coverage of mental health under insurance plans.
- Encouraging employees to take mental health days and to use vacation time to recharge.
- Unlimited PTO (that employees are encouraged to use).
- Flexible schedules to provide better blending of personal and professional obligations.
- Access to stress relief measures, such as on-site yoga and free subscriptions to meditation apps.
- Respecting downtime by limiting contact with employees during non-work hours.

Many employers learned that much of the workforce is not just hoping to work for a company that sees the importance of self-care and balance, they are demanding it.

“2022 said goodbye to ‘living to work’ employees and said hello to workers who ‘work to live,’” says Monte Deere, CEO of [Kizik](#). “A culture that supports work-life balance has become just as important as fair wages for recruiting and retaining employees. There has been a marked shift pre-pandemic to post-pandemic in what top talent prioritizes — lifestyle. When posting for new jobs, we had to adjust our job and company description to comment on culture and what kind of life the worker could expect to live. This aspect has become a crucial part of recruitment, since workers are no longer willing to put up with what they had before.”

The increased emphasis on getting more out of life and reducing burnout extends beyond current and potential employees. More and more leaders also realize they need to take measures to protect their own well-being.

“The most important lesson I learned this past year is how important it is to take care of your mental health,” says Clint Proctor, editor-in-chief at [Investor Junkie](#). “As we all know, the world is a stressful place. It's easy to get wrapped up in work and let your personal life suffer. It's important to take care of yourself and make sure you're focusing on what matters most to you. I'm aware that, as a leader, it's not always easy to admit that you need help. But when you don't take care of yourself, your team will suffer.”

Be grateful

Lastly, with the worst of the pandemic seemingly over, employers in 2022 often paused to reflect on events. Many developed a deeper appreciation for health, work, and people they counted on during trying times.

“It might be more of a reminder than an actual lesson, but 2022 was a huge reminder for being grateful for an awesome team in the office,” says Nick Mueller, director of operations at [HawaiianIslands.com](#). “With the upheaval of the workplace nationwide over the past few years, it's a good reminder to always be thankful for having a solid team that you can count on, day in and day out. The more you show your appreciation for your solid team, the more they're going to stick with you through the tough times, as well as the good times.”

Brandon Wilkes, marketing manager at [The Big Phone Store](#), echoes this sentiment.

“The most important lesson I learned this past year is to respect and cherish my workers,” Wilkes says. “They are the backbone of my business, and I would be nothing without them. I have learned to listen to their concerns and to value their input. I have also learned that it is important to provide them with a safe and supportive work environment. I am grateful for their hard work and dedication, and I will continue to do everything I can to make sure they are treated fairly and with respect.”