



## Stay HR Savvy with HR Elements®

Welcome to the UBA Partner Firm exclusive monthly newsletter, delivering insights into timely human resources and employee benefits topics.

December 2025

- Employee Benefits | Helping Employees Get More from Their Benefits in 2026
- Workplace Culture | Managing the New-Year Burnout Bump
- Dear HR Manager | Supporting New Employee Onboarding

## Employee Benefits | Helping Employees Get More from Their Benefits in 2026

As the new year begins, employees will be turning their attention to the benefits they selected during open enrollment. While their choices are final, many still feel unsure about how to use their coverage throughout the year. With rising healthcare costs and growing interest in everyday well-being, employees want support that helps them make confident decisions, not just information delivered once a year.

### Confusion That Lingers

Even after reviewing materials and making selections, many employees admit they rely on habit more than understanding.

[Research shows that nearly 90% of employees stick with the same plan year after year, which means important updates or better options can slip by. At the same time, 86% say they're confused by their benefits, an early sign of how easily key details fade once open enrollment closes.](#)

When employees lack clarity, they may delay care, miss cost-saving options, or feel unsure about where to begin. Without timely reinforcement, the gap between what's offered and what's understood continues to widen.

## Information Overload

Open enrollment often packs a year's worth of information into a short timeframe. By January, many employees forget the nuances of their plans or feel hesitant to ask follow-up questions.

Hybrid work can add complexity. Some employees rely on digital resources, while others prefer personal guidance or clear summaries. When communication doesn't match these needs, misunderstandings grow and engagement declines.

Even well-designed benefits can fall short if employees don't see how benefit programs support their daily lives.

## Reinforce the Essentials Early

January is a natural moment to revisit the basics. Simple reminders, such as how to find in-network providers, when virtual care is a good option, or which preventive services are included, help employees make more informed decisions.

Short guides, quick reference sheets, or brief manager talking points can reduce uncertainty without overwhelming teams. Reinforcing wellness programs, financial support tools, and navigation resources also helps employees understand the full range of support available to them.

When employees feel confident using their benefits, the value of those programs grows throughout the year.

## Better Outcomes Through Better Understanding

Employees who understand their benefits make choices that are more aligned with their needs and often experience fewer surprises. Clear, ongoing communication ensures that benefits remain useful long after open enrollment ends.

Supporting understanding now helps employees get more from their 2026 benefits and builds a stronger foundation for engagement across the year. With steady reinforcement, organizations strengthen trust, help employees feel more confident, and attract and retain top talent.

## Workplace Culture | Managing the New-Year Burnout Bump

As teams return from the holidays, many organizations move straight into planning, new goals, and fast-paced Q1 priorities. While that pace can feel productive, it often places pressure on employees before they've had time to reset. The shift can feel abrupt, leaving people overwhelmed rather than ready to accelerate.

### The Early-Year Strain

January often brings high expectations from day one. Goal-setting conversations can be energizing, but they can also create anxiety when employees feel unprepared or are still transitioning back into their routines. Many begin the year already stretched, which affects their ability to stay focused and engaged.

Burnout doesn't just impact energy, it affects daily performance.

[Employees report that burnout diminishes their efficiency \(72%\), weakens their overall job performance \(71%\), affects their attendance \(56%\), reduces their ability to serve clients \(65%\), and limits their capacity to innovate \(64%\).](#)

These early-year hurdles can compound quickly when workloads escalate without a clear path forward.

Many employees attribute burnout to heavy workloads and task-related pressures, but they also note that collaboration patterns and team dynamics play a significant role.

### Why Rushing Can Hurt Performance

When January launches at full speed, employees may struggle to prioritize or understand where their attention is most needed. Confusion can grow when roles shift, workflows change, or expectations aren't aligned early.

The experience varies across work environments. Remote and hybrid employees may feel disconnected from initial planning discussions, while others face meeting loads that interrupt productivity. These differences can make the return feel inconsistent, increasing stress during a critical performance window.

At the same time, support often falls short.

[Only 42% of employees experiencing burnout have shared this with their manager, and among those who have, 42% say no action was taken.](#)

This gap reinforces the need for more intentional early-year support.

### A Better Way In: Build Stability Before Accelerating

A smoother start doesn't require slowing down goals—it simply means setting the right foundation.

Organizations can help employees regain momentum by:

- Clarifying early priorities so teams aren't juggling competing demands.
- Protecting time for planning and regrouping, allowing employees to reset work habits and rebuild focus.
- Involving teams in expectation-setting, rather than assuming readiness for immediate high output.
- Using light, timely reminders that encourage employees to reassess workloads and stay aligned.

These small steps reduce pressure and improve clarity, giving people the space they need to re-engage effectively.

### What's Possible When You Start Right

Strong early-year support sets the tone for healthier engagement across the first quarter. When employees feel grounded and informed, they're better equipped to maintain focus, adapt to shifting priorities, and perform at a high level.

By pacing the start of the year thoughtfully and providing direction without overwhelming intensity, organizations create an environment that creates a foundation for success throughout the year.

## Dear HR Manager | Supporting New Employee Onboarding

Dear HR Manager,

We're welcoming several new hires at the start of the year, and our onboarding process always feels rushed. What can we do now to create an improved onboarding experience in January?

– *Planning Ahead*

Dear Planning Ahead,

The first few weeks carry significant influence for new team members. Employees who feel supported during onboarding are more confident in their roles and more likely to stay engaged. Research shows that strong early connections increase long-term retention, underscoring the importance of preparation.

New hires entering in January often face additional complexity, new goals, busy teams, and fast-moving priorities. Planning ahead ensures the experience feels organized, not overwhelming.

### Simplify the Path for New Employees

Start by reviewing your materials and schedules before the new year. Clear instructions, consistent messaging, and an organized first-week plan help new hires avoid confusion.

Next, coordinate expectations with managers. Early outreach, brief check-ins, and clear responsibilities help new employees feel welcome and supported.

Finally, look for common bottlenecks. Whether it's delayed access to tools, scattered introductions, or unstructured downtime, addressing these areas now creates a more seamless entry into the organization.

### A Confident Start to the Year

When onboarding feels intentional, employees begin their roles with greater confidence and connection. A little preparation today sets the stage for a smoother January and a more engaged team throughout the year.

– *HR Manager*

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