

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.

November 2026

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Employee Benefits | Making Benefits Decisions That Last Beyond Open Enrollment

Open enrollment gives employees an opportunity to select coverage for the coming year. But what happens after they submit their elections? Employees still need to confirm their coverage, prepare for new costs and know where to turn when questions arise.

This is especially important as health care expenses continue to rise. KFF's 2026 Employer Health Benefits Survey found that average annual premiums for employer-sponsored family coverage reached $28,303, with employees contributing $7,471 on average.

For employers, the weeks following enrollment offer an opportunity to help employees prepare for the practical details of their new coverage.

Confirm Elections Before Coverage Begins

Employees may assume their selections are complete once they submit their elections. However, missing dependent information, incorrect selections, or outstanding documentation can create problems when coverage begins.

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Encourage employees to review their confirmation statements, verify covered dependents, and check whether additional documentation is required. HR teams should also communicate when employees can expect identification cards and access to carrier accounts.

Prepare for Changes in Costs

Employees may notice changes in payroll deductions, deductibles, or prescription coverage when the new plan year begins. Understanding these changes can help employees avoid unexpected expenses and make more informed decisions when accessing care.

A short year-end checklist can help employees prepare:

- Review payroll deductions and expected out-of-pocket costs
- Check whether preferred providers and prescriptions are covered
- Confirm HSA or FSA elections and applicable deadlines
- Save important benefits contacts and account information

Make Support Easy to Find

Questions don't end when enrollment closes. Benefits communication needs to be an ongoing conversation rather than a single enrollment campaign.

Provide a clear point of contact for enrollment corrections, claims questions, and coverage concerns. Distinguish between questions HR can answer and those requiring assistance from a carrier or benefits administrator.

Review What Worked

Before the next enrollment cycle, review recurring questions, administrative issues, and employee feedback. Were certain plan changes difficult to explain? Did employees understand deadlines? Where did they need additional support?

Completed elections are just one measurement of enrollment success. Helping employees begin the new plan year with accurate coverage and clear expectations can prevent confusion and make their benefits easier to use.

Workplace Culture | Recognizing the Contributions Performance Reviews Miss

As organizations prepare for year-end performance reviews, attention often turns to goals, results, and measurable accomplishments. Yet some of the most valuable employee contributions may not appear in a performance report.

An employee who mentors a colleague, resolves an unexpected problem, or helps a team navigate change may make a significant difference without receiving formal recognition. Acknowledging these efforts can reinforce the behaviors that help teams succeed.

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Look Beyond Measurable Results

Performance metrics provide useful information, but they rarely capture every contribution. Employees who share knowledge, support colleagues, or maintain essential processes may have less visible accomplishments than those leading major projects.

Managers can broaden recognition by asking who helped others succeed, improved a process, or demonstrated reliability during a challenging period. Show employees how their work makes a difference to the success of the team.

Make Recognition Specific

Recognition is more meaningful when employees understand what they did well and why it mattered.

Instead of offering general praise, managers can identify a specific action and its impact. For example, acknowledging how an employee helped a new colleague become comfortable with a process communicates more than simply thanking them for being helpful. Specific recognition reinforces positive behaviors and shows employees their contributions are noticed.

Recognize Different Preferences

Some employees may be uncomfortable with public recognition. Some appreciate acknowledgment during team meetings, while others prefer a personal note or private conversation.

Managers should consider individual preferences and avoid relying exclusively on formal awards or highly visible achievements. Recognition should be accessible to employees across roles, locations and work schedules.

Carry Appreciation into Everyday Work

Year-end reviews offer an opportunity to reflect on contributions that might otherwise go unnoticed. Managers can ask employees about work they are proud of and invite colleagues to recognize one another.

According to Gallup's 2026 employee engagement research, only 29% of U.S. employees strongly agreed they had received recognition or praise for good work in the previous seven days.

Appreciation should not be reserved for annual conversations. A culture of recognition develops when leaders consistently notice meaningful contributions and acknowledge them in ways that feel genuine.

Dear HR Manager | Managing Competing Year-End Priorities

Our team is approaching several year-end deadlines, but employees are also requesting holiday time off. How can we balance business needs with employee flexibility?

-- Balancing Year-End Demands

Dear Balancing,

Year-end deadlines and holiday schedules can create competing demands, especially when teams are already managing full workloads. Start by identifying which projects must be completed before year-end and which can reasonably wait until January. Clear priorities help employees focus their time and reduce unnecessary pressure.

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Next, review time-off requests and establish coverage plans early. Identify who will handle critical responsibilities during absences and communicate expectations before employees leave. Apply PTO policies consistently while accounting for operational needs and applicable leave requirements.

Planning should also account for employees' return to work. Preparing for the first days back from PTO can help reduce stress and make it easier to disconnect during time away. Encourage managers to identify priorities for returning employees rather than expecting them to address everything immediately.

If workloads become unmanageable, consider adjusting deadlines or redistributing responsibilities. Managers should also respect approved time off and avoid expecting employees to remain available unless they have an established on-call responsibility.

Balancing year-end demands requires realistic expectations, early planning and open communication. When employees understand priorities and know their responsibilities are covered, teams can meet important deadlines while allowing employees to enjoy their time away.

— HR Manager

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