



**Blue Horizon**  
BENEFITS

# HR Technology for COVID-19 and Beyond

A BluePaper



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**About  
the  
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# Introduction

Human Resources technology is a broad category, covering everything from time and attendance, compliance, and learning management to onboarding, payroll processing and benefits administration.

Most employers are using some HR Technology today to streamline processes. For instance, almost no one calculates payroll manually anymore. But COVID-19 has brought the entire category to the forefront of managers' minds. Digital Transformation, once just an industry buzzword, has become an imperative for every organization that wants to maintain productivity and protect their workforce.



# Table of Contents

**This paper is broken into 6 Sections:**

## **Section 1. What is HR Tech**

We will provide an overview of the landscape, to help you understand what tools are available and how you can simply integrate them.

## **Section 2. Why Now**

Ironically, there are very human factors to consider when implementing technology. We will build a profile of the innovative, inspired HR Professional who's focused on tech as part of their strategic contribution to the organization.

## **Section 3. Staying Future Ready**

You may be tempted to cobble together a handful of HR Tech solutions, in order to get through the next few months or a year. We'll help you think through simplicity and elegance that'll work both now and for the future.

## **Section 4. Five HR Tech Mistakes to Avoid**

We've all been there—we're excited about a new piece of technology. But once we log in for the first time, we're overwhelmed. This section will include tips on what you can do now, to avoid buyer's remorse later.

## **Section 5. HR Tech and COVID-19**

We'll get down to brass tacks on specific uses for HR Tech, made necessary by the global pandemic. We give 5 good examples of how it's helping, with the understanding that a combination of need and imagination will continue to produce many more.

## **Section 6. Remote Employee Engagement**

Now is the time to re-commit to your employee engagement strategy, which may have fallen by the wayside during the most uncertain months of the crisis. We'll talk about how HR Tech can help re-light that fire.

## **Conclusion. The Importance of Simplicity**

You've proven you can negotiate complexity to run a business and manage a team. But that doesn't mean your HR Tech should be complicated. We'll share our commitment to simplicity and help keep you focused on simple, workable outcomes.

## Section 1. What is HR Tech?

The answer is simple: HR Tech is any software or web-based tool that helps you manage your people. Admittedly, that definition is pretty broad. So here are some of the most common sub-categories.

**Payroll System:** Almost no one computes payroll manually anymore. So by processing payroll online, you're already using some form of HR Tech. This is also probably the system an employee uses to view their pay stubs.

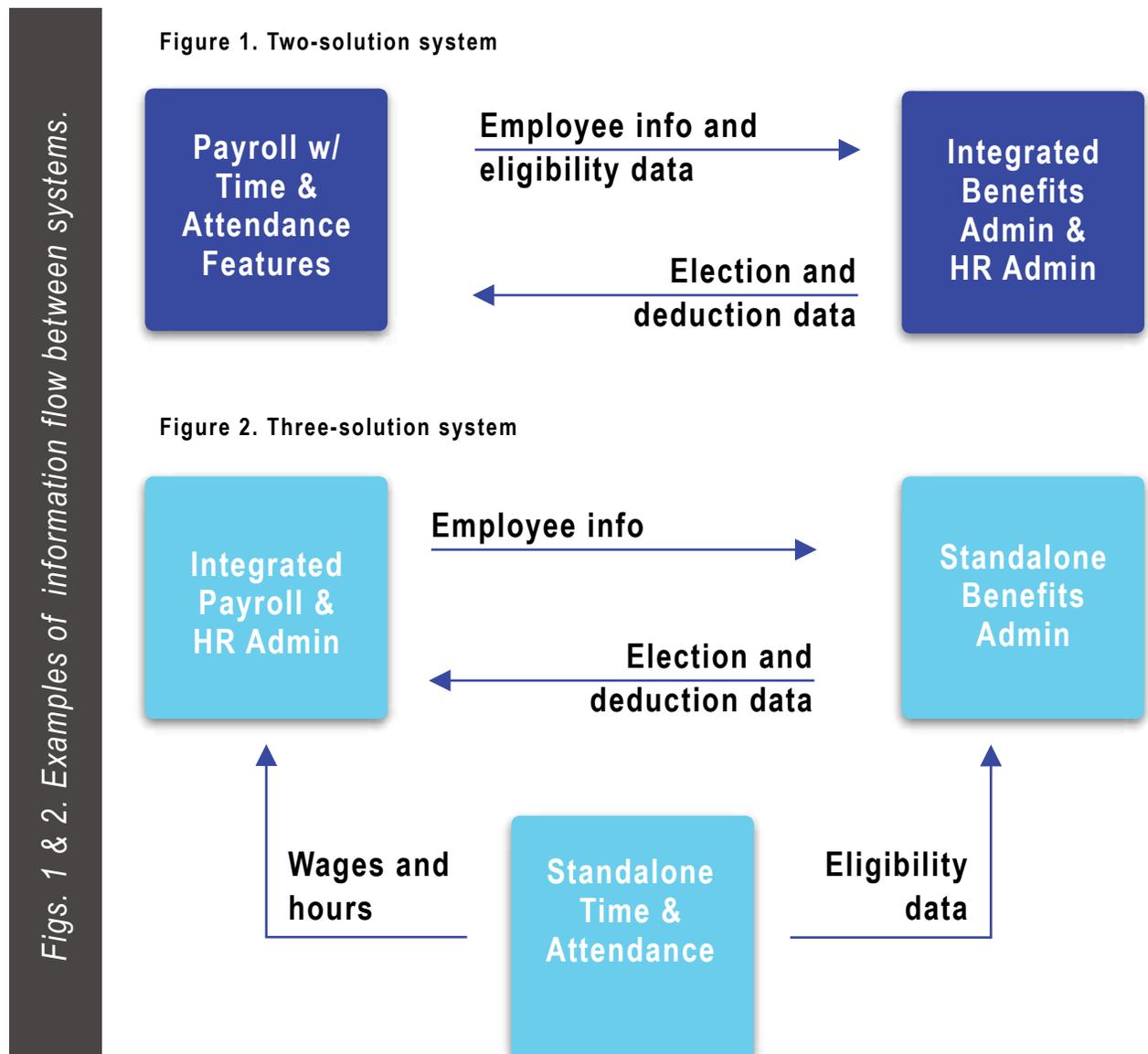
**HR Admin System:** This is the system with tools to hire, terminate, and manage your employees. It may be the system where an employee completes onboarding tasks, requests leave, and digitally signs off on company policies.

**Time and Attendance System:** Think of a digital version of the old punch clock. Employees can clock in, clock out, swap shifts, and let a manager know they cannot make it to work. Many are fancy enough to incorporate GPS, so an employee can only clock in once they are physically on site.

**Benefits Admin System:** This is where you conduct open enrollment and new hire enrollment, tracking where every employee is within the process at all times. From the employee's perspective, this is where they learn about benefits that are available, download important benefits-related forms, and make their elections.

Often times, one solution will incorporate two or more of these functions. Even if the functionality does “live” in two (or three) different pieces of software, many will integrate with each other. It’s essential that when you embark on your HR Tech journey, you think about how all these systems will “talk” to one another.

Here are a few examples:



Throughout this paper, we'll encourage you to try and get more out of your existing software before implementing anything new. As you can see from these examples, much of your desired functionality may be available without changing vendors.

When changes are necessary, we've often seen clients choose to make wholesale changes all at once. After careful review, they decide that the desire for large improvements and the resulting productivity gains are worth the upfront effort. And sometimes a fresh start just makes sense; especially if you have a clear vision of how you want your systems and processes to integrate.

If you're just dipping a toe into HR Tech and automation, the incremental approach is probably best. If you know exactly how you'd like to operate, you're probably in a better position to choose vendors who can execute upon that vision.

### The Role of Your Advisor

If your benefits broker isn't having pro-active discussions about HR tech in light of the global COVID-19 pandemic, it might be time to talk to a true benefits advisor. Click [here](#) to schedule a demo of how we work with clients on strategic tech issues.

### **What's a BluePaper?**

We believe smart people need simplicity too. So we're re-thinking the traditional whitepaper—highly technical, long, and full of jargon—in favor of our BluePaper. We promise to keep it simple, concise and actionable.

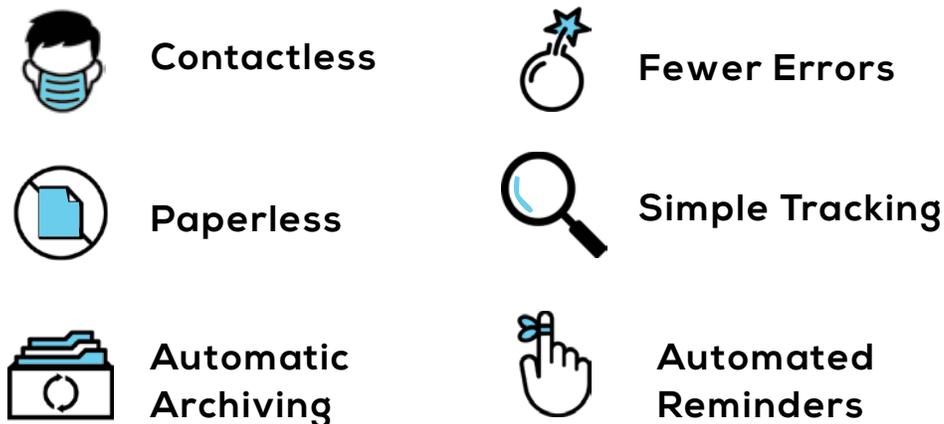
## **Section 2. Why Now?**

In a recent LeapPulse survey of HR professionals, 83% of respondents said their organizations had become more focused on digital transformation during COVID-19, and 80% of respondents believed they'd continue to accelerate in that direction post-COVID.

We believe there's a simple reason behind those overwhelming numbers: many organizations saw HR Tech as a need pre-COVID. So as the crisis hit, they weren't wasting time debating the validity of the concept per se. For many organizations we work with, it has quite literally been a matter of time; waiting for the right moment to focus on digital improvements. COVID-19 simply provided the right combination of necessity and newfound capacity.

## This is the moment.

In case you're still on the fence, here is a brief list of compelling reasons to move away from face-to-face, paper-based processes and towards digital solutions:



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Sometimes we assume that technology makes us less personal, and in a way, less human. Ironically, there are very human motivations for automating and digitizing HR processes. If done right, it frees up HR to provide leadership and support to your team in a **more personal manner**.

The HR professional who embraces digital transformation knows this intuitively. While a CFO manages certain assets (cash, investments, real estate), a strategic-minded HR professional manages an even more valuable asset: your people. But too often, executive-level talent in the HR suite is burdened with flawed paper processes and byzantine compliance procedures.

Digital transformation is an opportunity for HR professionals to prove they deserve a strategic seat at the table. If your HR team is pushing around paper, and wasting time trying to decipher illegible handwriting, they have less time to learn about and serve your employees. So while technology may initially appear as a threat to that personal connection, if done right, it can in fact bolster it.

## Section 3. Staying Future Ready

Necessity is the mother of invention. The global COVID-19 pandemic has led organizations to be much more inventive in how they're managing Human Resources. But we wonder if that reactivity—while necessary—is leading organizations to implement solutions for today's challenges without an eye toward tomorrow's.

While we can't always know what tomorrow holds, there are multiple stakeholders within your organization who can provide insight. From the C-suite to your HR Professionals and key employees, there are many voices which can help guide your thinking.

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Here are some illuminating questions you can ask of your key people:



## What wasn't working prior to COVID-19?

Keep it focused on processes; this isn't a group therapy session. Anything that was confusing, cumbersome and draining prior to the pandemic will remain that way if you don't listen and consider changes.



## What processes broke down during COVID-19?

This period has represented a massive stress test for organizations. Ask your people where they're getting "stuck" nowadays. It may be that a process, form, or piece of technology which worked previously—became a source of headaches in the remote work environment. Let's not return to normal without addressing it.



## Do our HR processes align with our strategic plan?

Break out the crystal ball or whiteboard and consider where you'd like the organization to go from here. Maybe you've created a new business model over the past few months. Perhaps your growth plans involve a more dispersed workforce or expanded geographical presence. In these scenarios, do your HR processes and technology still work?

As always, we stress simplicity. There's no reason to change something that is working. And if you decide you need to improve your HR Tech, see Section 1 for some examples of how to add features to existing systems and integrate new ones in a streamlined fashion.

## Other Ways to Stay Future Ready

**Focus on Mobile** Employees want to manage their PTO, benefits and payroll from mobile devices. Your solutions will have to play nice on mobile.

**Don't Forget 401(k)** While retirement plans and compliance are complex, the technology doesn't have to be. Consider whether your payroll and 401(k) or 403(b) custodian integrate.

**Texting is King** Texts are opened more rapidly and at a higher overall rate than e-mails. Look at automated texting with smart reply capabilities to communicate with your staff.



### **The Role of Your Advisor:**

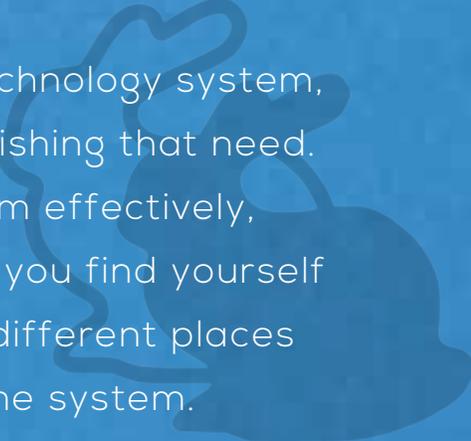
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## Section 4. Five HR Tech Mistakes to Avoid

Sometimes in life, mistakes are the best teachers. Implementing new HR Tech isn't one of those times. We know there's a lot on the line; but don't let the specter of tech-related frustration prevent you from moving the ball forward. Simply avoid some of these common mistakes, and you'll have a successful implementation and look like a hero to your team.

### **Mistake #5: Duplicating Functions**

For every need your team has within an HR Technology system, there should be one clear pathway to accomplishing that need. Put another way, for your team to use a system effectively, there should be only one way "to skin a cat." If you find yourself explaining to an employee that there are two different places they can view their paystub, you've overbuilt the system.



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### **Mistake #4: Not Asking for Help**

Before embarking on your HR tech journey, consider your key internal stakeholders and current vendor relationships. First, ask your HR and accounting departments for a wishlist of new functionality. Then, go to your payroll vendor—they might offer those features already. If not, they'll know which systems integrate with theirs. And finally, your benefits broker should help you understand how a system can streamline benefits administration. Ask for help!

### **Mistake #3: Ignoring Reporting and Tracking**

Many technology systems brag about all the data which can be input into a system—inputs are the basis of functionality. But as an executive, you should be more concerned with what that system delivers in the form of reporting and administrative tools. Will it help you with ACA requirements, or to view which employees have yet to complete a task? And are reports exportable in something you can manipulate—like an .XLS or .CSV file? Beware of systems that produce reports only in PDF.

## Mistake #2: Failing to Integrate

This could've easily been #1. There are plenty of systems out there that talk to one another, so integration shouldn't feel like a luxury. If you enter an employee into payroll, the benefits admin system should automatically know when that person is eligible for benefits. When an employee changes an address, it should update everywhere. And the HR Tech space is so competitive, the best systems won't cost you more.

## Mistake #1: Keeping it a Secret!

Once you implement new tech, don't wait for a big reveal. Start using it! Employees should have some familiarity with any system before they're asked to perform a complex task. It's your job to help them dip a toe in. Perhaps you can assign a simple task like updating an address or a beneficiary. Getting them comfortable and working out the kinks will pay dividends during more stressful or labor-intensive times of the year (does that sound like open enrollment to anyone?)

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## Section 5. HR Tech and COVID-19

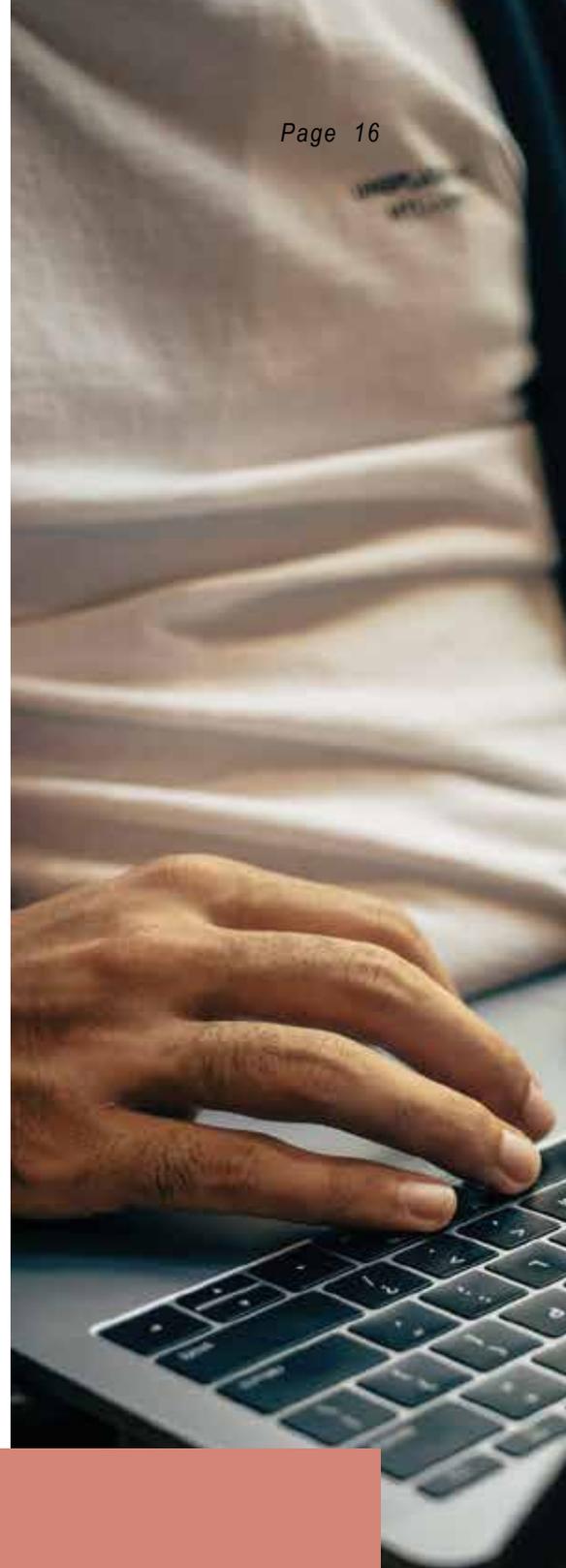
Most of our clients use an HR and Benefit Admin system that we provide at no cost. As it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would fundamentally change almost all workplaces across the country, we could easily see how our software would be used to remain productive and compliant during these strange and scary times. What we couldn't predict was how many interesting innovations they brought to us—for custom builds that let them function ever more seamlessly in the remote work environment.

This section of the HR Tech Blue Paper is about sharing ways HR tech will simplify your life post-COVID. This is only a snapshot. As the world continues to adapt, we'll keep building features based on the fascinating and creative ideas that arise from substantive, strategic conversations.

### Reason #5: Paperless Onboarding



We'll start with an easy one. All those paper forms that a new employee fills out are quite a bit more difficult to manage remotely. Deciphering poor handwriting on grainy, scanned copies transmitted over e-mail (exposing people's personal information) is, shall we say, less than optimal? HR Tech allows you to automate and digitize this entire process, and alerts both you and the employee about tasks that are outstanding.



## Reason #4: Streamlined Open Enrollment



Many of the same considerations for the onboarding process apply to everyone's favorite time of year: open enrollment. Everything that was already challenging about OE is now more challenging, and things that were easy before are now more cumbersome. An HR Tech solution can educate your employees on benefits, help them pick plans, send alerts about which employees are incomplete, and provide a clean data file to the carriers for enrollment. You just sit back and supervise.

## Reason #3: Tracking Your Assets



In the chaos of mid-March, many companies sent their workers home with computers, phones, laptops, client files, etc. But how many of those companies know where all of their stuff is now? An inventory can be done, and those physical assets can be tracked, via HR Tech. Going forward, company-provided computers, credit cards and the like can be viewed right in the system. Also, when an employee is terminated, a workflow can be initiated to ensure everything is returned.

## Reason #2: Symptom Disclosure



Time to consider all of our favorite acronyms—like OSHA, HIPAA and the ADA. Now that we're returning to the workplace, employers have a very real requirement to keep people safe, and many employers are creating a symptom disclosure process. Additionally, if someone does need to stay home due to COVID-19 symptoms, you'll want to know as early as possible, so you can make the necessary staffing adjustments. HR Tech can solve for both these needs, in a manner that keeps you compliant with all those pesky acronyms.

## Reason #1: COVID-Related Requirements



Did you know there's an employee notice requirement under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA)?

In the remote setting, taping a notice to the break refrigerator won't do. Good HR tech will not only allow you to disseminate required disclosures—but also get employees to acknowledge receipt.

As companies return to work in staggered shifts, clients have used our systems to communicate new policies pertaining to masks, handwashing and gathering in common areas. We've also worked with our clients to develop remote work policies that protect against Workers' Comp claims. If something needs to be communicated and acknowledged in order to cover your you-know-what, good HR tech will accomplish it.

**'C.y.y.k.w.'**

**Cover your  
you-know-what!**

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## Section 6: Remote Employee Engagement



Organizations with highly-engaged employees are significantly more profitable and grow faster than ones with average levels of engagement. The reasons for this are simple: engaged people bring their “A” games to the work, they build capital in the form of knowledge and relationships, and they don’t leave. Replacing a performing employee costs an additional 50% of their annual salary in the form of lost productivity, time, and direct costs. That’s on top of whatever you’ll pay their replacement.

**According to the Corporate Leadership Council, highly-engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave your organization. Engagement is not fluffy, it’s a key driver of bottom line.**

In his book, "Engagement Magic," Dr. Tracy Maylett outlines the five keys for engaging employees:

**M**eaning, **A**utonomy, **G**rowth, **I**mpact and **C**onnection.

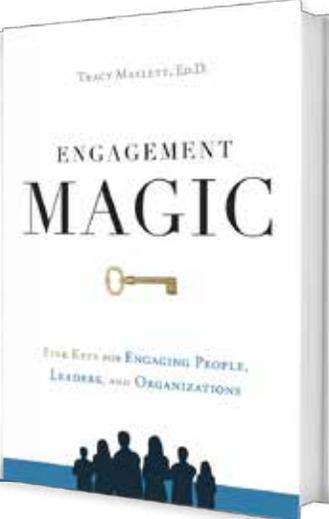
It's important to understand that any given employee, based on their inherent value system, will respond to one or two of these keys more than the others. And not everyone is engaged all the time. Most employees wax and wane—and they share in the responsibility to re-engage when they find themselves drifting. As a leader, your job is primarily to provide them the context in which to do so.

**FREE OFFER**

*We think Employee Engagement is so important, we'll send you a copy of Dr. Tracy Maylett's Engagement Magic for FREE.*

*E-mail:  
eric@bluehorizonbenefits.com  
and request your free copy.*

*No strings attached.*



So how does this relate to HR tech? Because engagement is subject to natural peaks and valleys, consistent and open dialogue is essential.

If you've never simply asked your employees what's important to them, you now have plenty of reasons to do so. Considering all the stress and uncertainty which has surrounded COVID-19, plus a new reliance on technology to manage a remote workforce, now is the perfect time to gain new insight into your most valuable asset: your people. And you can use tech to do it.

We're happy to chat about how to design questions tailored to your organization, and how to use technology to field thoughtful answers. But when thinking about a simple place anyone can start, let's consider Maylett's MAGIC once more.

**A simple 5-question survey could include:**

**"What's an example of a time you found your work meaningful?"**

**"Where have we given you autonomy over how a task gets done? Where is it missing?"**

**"How do you plan to grow professionally? What else can we be doing, especially now, to help?"**

**"For whom are we collectively making a difference? Where does your work fit in to that?"**

**"What do you miss most about work pre-COVID?"**

Not everyone will greet each question with enthusiasm. A salesperson might key in on the growth question and provide terse responses to the rest, while a social worker will likely focus on the meaning and impact questions. And then there will be a subset of your people, maybe 10-15%, who are completely disengaged. These are likely your lowest performers, and care should be taken to "fence in" their poor attitudes to prevent contagion.

Once you have a feel for what matters to individuals and to the organization as a whole, you can use HR tech to communicate what the company is doing to keep everyone engaged. This can be incredibly liberating.

## Engagement isn't about snacks, summer Fridays, or a foosball table.

Don't just throw money at the engagement problem. Your population's responses to the survey will provide you insights that are concrete. And because you're a successful manager, we know that once you have solid facts, you will establish a direction and move the organization forward.

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# Conclusion: The Importance of Simplicity

Our firm lives by the phrase **Smart People Need Simplicity Too.** You've proven you can run a business and manage a team—achievements which require you to negotiate complexity. But that doesn't mean your HR tech should be complicated.

The essence of management is facilitating change: among your employees, vendors, customers, you name it. But how do you influence yourself to change?

Implementing HR Tech isn't going to firm up a new supply chain, or land the next big client. And it isn't going to transform your low-performing employees into rising stars. So why is it so important?

In a way, it's a straightforward real estate play: to reclaim that **priceless piece of real estate between your ears.** You want to streamline inefficient, mistake-prone, and confusing HR processes because in return, you get more freedom to focus on things that move the needle.



If you're reading this, then you're a leader in your organization; and when a leader knows something's important, they get it done. Adding a new piece of technology that solves one problem—but creates a rat's nest of other IT and operational headaches—won't help you focus on the big picture. It simply transfers the confusion from a long-standing problem to a new, less familiar one.

**HR tech solutions need to be simple, because that's the only way they'll be important. And when you know something's important, you get it done.**

Often times, after we demo a streamlined software solution to a client, the HR Director or COO gets so excited that they begin listing all the projects, previously relegated to the back-burner, that they'll now have time to do. That's our favorite kind of meeting, because it means we're bringing measurable value to the organization.

We'll leave you with a math question: how many hours does your HR team spend processing paper forms for every new hire and termination? Think about your wishlist; that running tally of improvements and new projects you'd undertake if your team was magically granted more hours in the day. By streamlining your HR Tech, one or two will be a reality this year. What does that mean for you and your organization?

A close-up photograph of a smartphone lying on a wooden surface. A black charging cable is plugged into the bottom of the phone. The phone's screen is illuminated and displays a battery icon with a green fill and the text "81% Charged" below it. The background of the screen shows a colorful, abstract pattern of blue and orange. The phone is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the frame. In the upper-right quadrant, there is a white rectangular box containing text.

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