

Employee Loyalty Linked to Satisfaction with Benefits

Employees of small businesses who are very satisfied with their company benefits are more likely to report greater job satisfaction and a stronger sense of loyalty to their employers, according to [recent findings from a MetLife study](#). Aside from salary, health coverage ranked as the number one benefit driving loyalty among those employees interviewed for the study.

Younger Workers Place High Value on Benefits

The study, which included several hundred interviews of small business employees (those working for companies with fewer than 500 employees), also highlighted a number of key differences between younger and older workers when it comes to employer-provided voluntary benefits:

- 46% of younger workers identified employee benefits as an "important reason" behind their selection of employers, as opposed to 29% of older workers.
- One-half of younger workers reported relying more on employer-provided benefits to achieve financial security due to current economic conditions, while 37% of older workers reported the same.

Both younger and older workers would rather pay more of the cost for employee benefits than lose those benefits.

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5 Tips to Prepare Your Business for a Natural Disaster

As Hurricane Isaac recently reminded us, natural disasters can happen suddenly at any time. The loss of essential records, files, and other materials during a disaster is commonplace and can not only add to your damage costs, but may also delay your return to normal operations.

Securing Company Documents and Equipment

To reduce your vulnerability, determine which records, files, and materials are most important; consider their vulnerability to damage during different types of disasters (such as floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes) and take [steps to protect them](#).

1. **Confirm your insurance.** Make sure you're aware of the details of your flood insurance and other hazard insurance policies, specifically which items and contents are covered and under what conditions. Check with your insurance agent if you have questions.
2. **Back up essential files.** Regularly back up vital electronic files (such as billing and payroll records and customer lists) and keep backup copies in a secure off-site location. Important papers (plans, legal documents, etc.) should also be stored securely off-site.
3. **Consider the location of equipment susceptible to damage.** Raise computers above flood level, move heavy objects to low shelves, and secure any equipment that could move or fall during an earthquake.
4. **Take inventory.** For both insurance and tax purposes, you should maintain written and

photographic inventories of all important materials and equipment. Estimate the cost of repairing or replacing each essential piece of equipment in your business.

5. **Perform regular building maintenance and repairs.** Periodically evaluate the building envelope to make sure that wind and water are not able to penetrate the building.

Our section on [Planning for Workplace Emergencies](#) includes additional guidelines on developing an emergency action plan to protect your employees and business during a disaster.

Online Advisor Can Help Employers Comply with COBRA

Did you know the federal government provides free interactive guidance for help complying with COBRA? The [COBRA Advisor](#) is an easy-to-understand online tool that can help you determine your compliance with key requirements under the law, including requirements related to:

- Notices,
- Qualifying events,
- COBRA election procedures,
- Duration of continuation coverage, and
- Paying for COBRA.

[COBRA](#) generally requires that group health plans sponsored by employers with **20 or more employees** in the prior year offer employees and eligible spouses and dependents the opportunity for a temporary extension of health insurance where coverage under the group plan would otherwise end due to certain [qualifying events](#).

The information provided in the Advisor is not intended as legal advice. Employers, including those with fewer than 20 employees, may also need to comply with state "mini-COBRA" laws and should check with their [state insurance departments](#) for specific requirements.

If you're looking for more easy-to-understand guidance, our [Steps to Success](#) provide a series of "how-to" interactive guides to help you understand and manage COBRA, FMLA, and other key HR responsibilities, such as hiring employees and conducting performance reviews.

Reminder: New SBC Notice Requirements Take Effect Soon

After a six-month delay in the original effective date, group health plans (including [grandfathered plans](#)) will soon need to comply with a new requirement under [Health Care Reform](#) to provide a summary of benefits and coverage (SBC) so that employees can more easily compare insurance options.

The new SBC notice requirements are effective for **plan years and open enrollment periods beginning on or after Sept. 23, 2012**. If you need a refresher, the following are some key points for group health plans:

- An SBC must be provided to plan enrollees at specific times, such as upon application for coverage and at renewal, as well as upon request.
- Insured group health plans can satisfy the requirement if the [issuer](#) provides a timely and complete SBC to the participant or beneficiary.
- Combining information for different coverage tiers, different cost-sharing selections (such as levels of deductibles and copayments), and different add-ons to major medical coverage (such as FSAs, HRAs, HSAs, or wellness programs) into one SBC is permissible, provided the appearance is understandable.
- SBCs may be provided either as a stand-alone document or in combination with other summary materials (for example, an SPD), if the SBC information is intact and prominently displayed at the beginning of the materials and in accordance with the SBC timing requirements.
- The SBC must comply with certain appearance and format requirements and must use

terminology understandable by the average plan enrollee; an [SBC template](#) along with instructions and related materials that may be used to satisfy the notice requirements, is available [online](#).

The U.S. Department of Labor has released three sets of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) (FAQs) which address a number of issues relating to the SBC notice requirements. The FAQs also make clear that, during the first year of applicability of the new SBC rules, penalties will not be imposed on plans that are working diligently and in good faith to provide the required content in an appearance that is consistent with the [final regulations](#).

For more information on the new SBC notice requirements, please visit our section on [Health Care Reform](#).

Protecting Employees from Workplace Violence

Nearly 2 million workers in the United States report having been [victims of workplace violence](#) each year. While nothing can guarantee that an employee will not become a victim, there are steps employers can take to reduce the likelihood of workplace violence.

What is workplace violence?

[Workplace violence](#) is any act or threat of physical violence, harassment, intimidation or other threatening disruptive behavior that occurs at or outside the workplace. It can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults and even homicide. Workplace violence can affect and involve employees, clients, customers, and visitors.

What are my responsibilities as an employer?

Under federal law, an employer has a [legal duty](#) to provide a workplace free from recognized hazards that are causing, or are likely to cause, death or serious physical harm to employees.

According to the [U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration](#) (OSHA), the best protection employers can offer is to establish a **zero-tolerance policy** toward workplace violence against or by their employees. It is critical to ensure that all employees know the policy and understand that all claims of workplace violence will be investigated and remedied promptly. Other recommended actions include:

- Providing safety education so employees know what conduct is not acceptable, what to do if they witness or are subjected to workplace violence, and how to protect themselves.
- Securing the workplace using video surveillance, extra lighting, or alarm systems as appropriate, and minimizing access by outsiders through identification badges, electronic keys, and guards.
- Limiting the amount of cash on hand, especially during evenings and late night hours.
- Equipping field staff with cellular phones and hand-held alarms or noise devices, and requiring them to prepare a daily work plan and keep a contact person informed of their location throughout the day.
- Instructing employees not to enter any location where they feel unsafe and facilitating a "buddy system" or police assistance in potentially dangerous situations or at night.

Where can I find additional information?

To learn more about workplace violence prevention, including risk factors, prevention programs, and training resources, visit OSHA's website on [Workplace Violence](#).

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