



**Reimagining Employee Well-Being:**  
Heightened Focus Likely to Last Far Beyond the Crisis

Summary of June 18 *Fortune* Brainstorm Health virtual conversation,  
presented in partnership with Salesforce

The COVID-19 pandemic, its economic whiplash, sustained national protests over systemic racism—never before in modern times have American workers faced such a perfect storm of emotional, physical, and financial stressors. Many are feeling sadness, a sense of disgrace, exhaustion, and worry over an uncertain future.

Yet, as human resources teams grapple with how companies can support the well-being of employees through these crises, they are drawing inspiration for permanent changes to policies. These are emerging in the shape of deeper resources for discussing racism and diversity, new forms of support for working parents, virtual training and onboarding programs, and ongoing conversations about physical and mental health.

“There is some beauty in the change we are going through,” said Rhonda Morris, a vice president and chief human resources officer for Chevron, during a recent *Fortune* Brainstorm Health virtual event, held in partnership with Salesforce.

While the 140-year-old Chevron has long supported historically black universities and colleges, as well as employee resource groups dedicated to diversity, Morris says the company has realized it must do more. “We have to really hold the mirror up and look at ourselves, and what are we actually going to do differently that will drive a different outcome.”

The conversation, held on the eve of Juneteenth, the U.S. holiday that celebrates the emancipation of Black slaves during the Civil War, focused on how employers can reimagine employee health and well-being during the current crisis and beyond. It also included senior human resources executives at Salesforce and Walmart, and was moderated by Arianna Huffington, CEO of Thrive Global and co-chair of *Fortune’s* Brainstorm Health conference.

Donna Morris, executive vice president and chief people officer at Walmart, said the retailer’s discussions about well-being during the pandemic have been complicated by the national protests over systemic racism and the resulting looting of some of its stores. “There’s that fine line between the true belief that people should have a voice and a right to protest, but the looting crossed that line because it increased safety concerns, and that was really, really difficult.”

So Walmart kicked off “listening sessions” amid the protests—the one on diversity and inclusion attracted more than 10,000 employees—and is committing \$100 million to create a center for addressing racial equity. The focus will be supporting initiatives in education, health care, the financial system, and criminal justice, says Morris.

One of the most important things every company can do right now is listen with empathy and be more flexible about the individual concerns of employees, according to these HR executives. “Our response was to try to pull people together, to focus on the whole situation, not to try to create a one-point solution. We wanted to hear many voices and create a sense of community,” notes Jody Kohner, senior vice president of employee engagement at Salesforce. “We all can’t be well if we’re all not well together.”

Among specific initiatives implemented by Salesforce since the pandemic began are monthly surveys to measure employee sentiment and a morning “talk show” featuring interviews with respected experts on health, finances, and other topics—the historian Ibram X. Kendi, author of *How to Be An Antiracist*, was a recent guest, as were athlete Venus Williams and alternative medicine advocate Deepak Chopra.

As communities around the United States grapple with whether to offer summer camps—an important resource for working parents—Chevron responded by developing and debuting a Monday-through-Friday virtual version for employees worried about how to keep their young children occupied while school is in summer recess. Family members of Chevron employees are donating time to help with individual programs, such as yoga and art classes.

Other policies that the speakers said their companies may embrace permanently post-pandemic include employee onboarding sessions and the way in which town hall meetings are run to keep the entire workforce updated—they’re virtual by necessity right now, but continuing these virtual sessions has advantages such as keeping people on the same page with communications and encouraging those who wouldn’t speak in a physical setting to participate more freely. “It’s a great equalizer,” says Walmart’s Morris.

There was also consensus among the speakers that employees should be encouraged to take frequent breaks—even if it’s just a 60-second meditation to catch their breath. Also, teams should be directed to step back from sending or receiving emails over the weekend. Vacations and time off should continue to be honored. That means leaders, too. “Well-being is really becoming the center focus for people and this will probably be a ‘forever’ change,” says Walmart’s Morris.

More discussions about how to address diversity and inclusion, and employee well-being are on the agenda for the [upcoming Fortune Brainstorm Health virtual event](#) on July 7 and July 8.