

# Seven Ways Savvy HR Leaders in New York Are Spending Their Summers

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Ah, summer: less-demanding schedules, lighter workloads, and a more relaxed work wardrobe. In keeping with the professional reputation of lawyers as killjoys, however, we recommend that HR professionals act more like Aesop's ants—using the summer to prepare for fall—than the grasshopper, who was so busy partying that he failed to prepare at all. So listen, Grasshopper: savvy HR leaders know to use their summer downtime to set themselves up for success when we all go “back to school.”

Here are seven suggestions of what New York HR professionals can get ahead of over the summer:

**1. Coordinate Sexual Harassment Prevention Training** – Under New York State law, all employers must provide annual sexual harassment prevention training that satisfies the State's training requirements by October 9, 2019 (NYC has its own requirements, as we describe [here](#)). An employer can satisfy these requirements by either adopting the State's model training documents or by providing live or interactive online/video training which meets or exceeds the State's minimum standards. With a mid-fall deadline quickly approaching, summer is the perfect time to think about, and possibly complete, your workforce's first annual training.

**2. Ensure Compliance with Sick and Safe Leave Law Requirements** – Both New York City and Westchester County have recently adopted new laws and requirements for paid sick and safe leave, and the Westchester law has approaching deadlines. For instance, the new Westchester County, New York Sick Leave Law requires employers to provide employees a copy of the law and a notice of how the law applies to them, either when an employee starts at the organization, or by July 9, 2019, whichever is later. Westchester employers must also post the law and a poster in a place accessible to all employees (the law and its requirements can be found [here](#)).

Employers who have employees in both NYC and Westchester must be careful to note some key differences between the New York City and the Westchester laws. For example, employees under New York City law accrue safe leave based on hours worked, whereas employees under Westchester County's new Safe Time Leave Law do not accrue leave, but are instead entitled to take a specific amount of protected, paid leave. The safe leave provision in Westchester is also *in addition* to the sick leave provision, whereas in NYC the two are combined. Given the new requirements and recent changes, this summer is an ideal time to get a handle on the state of the law that applies to your organization, and to make sure your notice and posting procedures are compliant, that your payroll systems are accruing/deducting sick and safe leave banks correctly, and that your HR departments are poised to handle requests for these kinds of leaves in the right way. You may also need to consider training for your supervisors who are often your first line of defense when fielding employee

requests for leave.

**3. Implement Changes Based on Paid Family Leave Law** – You readied your workforce for New York Paid Family Leave when it first started in January 2018, and so you know that each year until at least 2021, each January will bring a slightly new coverage and payment scheme. Currently, as of January 1, 2019, under the New York State Paid Family Leave Law, eligible employees can take up to 10 weeks of paid leave. Additionally, employees taking paid leave this year receive 55% of their average weekly wage, capped at the current statewide average weekly wage of \$1,357.11, with a maximum weekly benefit of \$746.41. Employees contribute 0.153% of their gross wages each pay period to Paid Family Leave this year. In January 2020, employees will still be eligible for 10 weeks of paid leave, but will instead receive 60% of their average weekly wage.

Given these changes, summer is a good time to update any Paid Family Leave forms distributed by your organization to reflect the increased number of weeks of paid leave employees can take and what their rights and responsibilities are with respect to taking paid leave. Managers (and staff) should be reminded or notified about the increase in benefits that is coming soon, and how that will affect their paychecks. Likewise, you should consider using this summer to work with payroll personnel to ensure employee contributions are being properly deducted from employees' wages.

**4. Review Employee Handbooks** – Reviewing your organization's policies and procedures annually is always best practice. Take advantage of the summer to make sure your organization's policies are complete, up to date and well-drafted. Once reviewed, you still need approval from key figures and stakeholders to implement any policy changes. You may find decision-makers more willing to come to the table during the summer months when work demands tend to be lighter and the work environment is more relaxed.

**5. Address Compensation Program** – Since many salary surveys are published in the spring, summer is a good time for salary benchmarking activities. Use the summer (and any available summer interns you may have!) to collect and analyze the appropriate data to determine the proper market comparisons for your organization's job listings. You do not want to find out too late that the reason a position is not filled is because the salary posted on the job listing is below market. Also consider reviewing current job descriptions during this time to ensure accuracy with tasks actually performed, and to double-check exemption categories. Taking time to address any pay equity issues you discover when assessing your compensation program is also a good idea.

**6. Plan Employee Engagement Events** – Summer is an excellent time to start planning and booking engagement events and activities for the upcoming winter, spring and summer. Booking now guarantees your desired venues are reserved well before they become unavailable. The summer's warm-weather also makes it a great time to get employees outside. Try to coordinate a few outdoor outings this summer to generate employee satisfaction and inspire workplace commitment.

**7. Recruit for the Upcoming Fall** – Slower summertime business means there is room for other initiatives like recruitment. Many businesses also find themselves with higher-than-normal resignation rates in the summer, as members of their workforce return to school in the fall. With September recruiting around the corner, now is an opportune time to start reviewing applications and conducting interviews to fill open positions, or to plan to fill positions that will open in the fall. So make your summer work for you. Better to move the HR ball forward methodically now than frantically later. You'll thank us in September.