



First Sun 2023
TRENDS REPORT



FIRST SUN
EAP
We Help People Be Better at Work





In 2023, the workplace is characterized by hybrid and remote work, hiring and retention challenges, and poor engagement from workers struggling with grief and trauma, a sense of not belonging, and a lack of skills to maintain performance. While much of this has existed in recent years, we are now experiencing a chronic workplace challenge versus sporadic or temporary struggles. A majority of the workforce, including leaders and HR, are now in need of resources and support to optimize well-being and maximize skills for productivity. This calls for a new culture of caring and leaders with soft skills to connect and collaborate. Going forward, enhancement and maintenance of workforce strength and resilience will need to be baked into daily business operations for employers to be effective and thrive.

The good news — your EAP with First Sun provides tools and support to achieve this complex goal. At First Sun, we are here for you, our customers, and our community. In this trends report, we review our work with our customers, the factors we see at play for the year ahead, our plans for continuing our high-impact service for you and recommendations for your success. A new definition of a healthy workplace is emerging, and First Sun stands ready and steady as your partner for maximizing organizational and personal well-being.





A New Definition of a Healthy Workplace Is Emerging

What We Saw Last Year



EAP Service Use Continued to Increase

— First Sun saw an upward trend in service use across the board. The most requested services included assistance with relationship issues, anxiety, depression and burnout. We also had parents reaching out for help with child care and school problems like bullying, poor grades, and lack of motivation. A newer trend for employees was to seek assistance with goals and mental health awareness, indicating a healthy desire for growth.

HR Reached Out With a Broader Array of Needs

— Requests for skills training, topical employee training, and coaching grew while workplace referrals remained strong over 2022. First Sun continued to receive requests to support organizations in response to acts

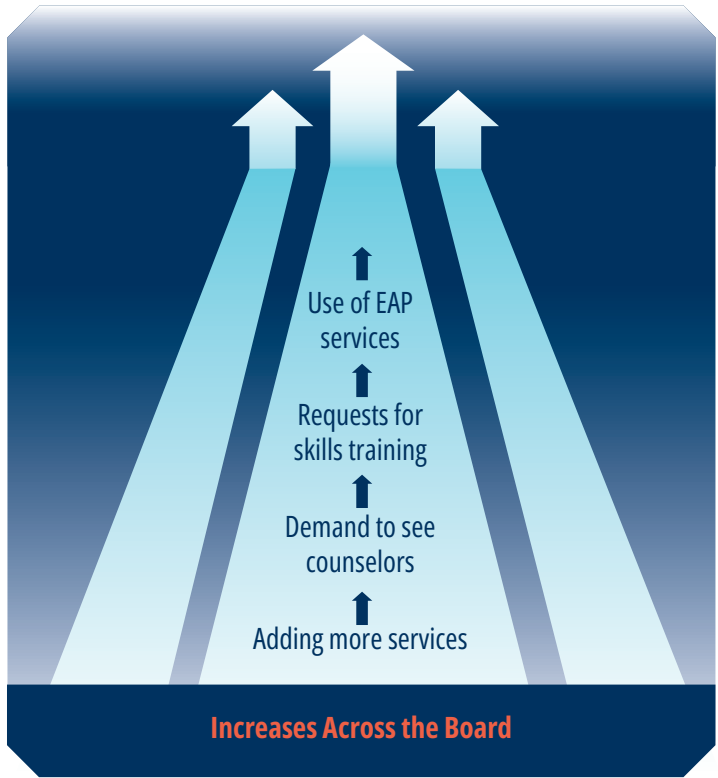
of violence, workplace conflict, and other critical events. In addition, changes like new leaders or alterations to policies and procedures created ripples across organizations and led customers to reach out for assistance to support the workforce.

Counselors Continued To Be in High Demand and Short Supply

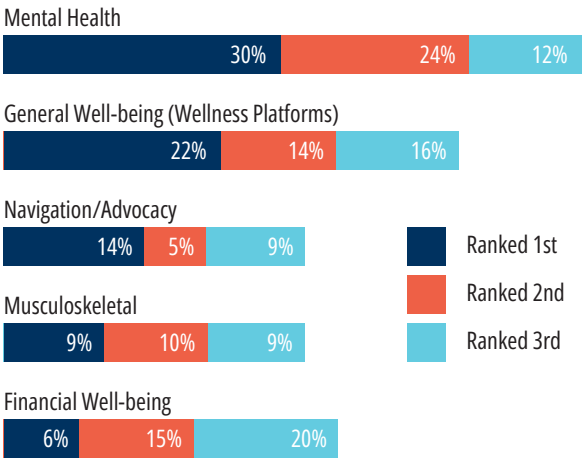
— Trends toward limiting hours, restricting service modalities, or leaving the profession remained in effect. Those who remained available raised their rates.

Employers Enhanced Existing Services or Added New Ones

— We saw a sharp increase the number of sessions or purchase of training to attract, retain and support employees.



U.S. Employers' Focus on Mental Health and Well-being Solutions for 2024



—Willis Towers Watson (2023, February 2) 2022 Vendor Strategy Survey



Our Creative Strategies



Strategies to Enhance Access to Counselors — Increasing demand for mental health care paired with the exodus of many counselors to online counseling has caused access to in-person counseling to be a nationwide problem. First Sun has a two-pronged strategy for managing the access challenge. First, we have created a tiered system for our provider network to pay higher fees for special services and those in rural areas to secure availability. Second, we are proactively working to usher new counselors into the service pipeline by providing professional training and peer support and making referrals to those who meet our credentialing requirements.

New Services and Partnerships to Support “Everyone At Potential” —

Same-day Access to Expert Spiritual Care — The pandemic created a period of extended stress and trauma for many people. As a result, employees are at increased risk for suicide, substance misuse, and relationship challenges. Increasingly, there are challenges to well-being due to moral injury, loss of meaning, or a sense of betrayal by family, society, employers, or life itself. But research shows that in the wake of trauma, there is also the opportunity for growth and spiritual development is vital in that process. First Sun has partnered with The Company Chaplain to provide this support. As a part of their EAP bene-

fit, employees and their family members can now choose spiritual care delivered by clinically trained, board-certified chaplains to receive expert, confidential, caring wisdom and support. While not tied to any religion or belief system, these services provide employees with support for their values and beliefs. A spiritual care session with one of our chaplains provides emotional and spiritual support that is stigma-free and completely confidential. And it is easy to access. Chaplains are available on a same-day basis at the time that's most convenient for those in need.

Twelve-Week Online Counseling Program for Anxiety, Depression and Burnout — As we enter 2023, anxiety, depression, and burnout are at alarming

levels. They are taking a toll on employee well-being and workplace productivity. Many employees don't know where to turn and are worried about seeking help. This might lead to lost time at work. First Sun is partnering with Companion Benefit Alternatives to offer Meru Health to employees who have coverage through BlueChoice® Health-Plan of South Carolina or BlueCross® and BlueShield® of South Carolina.

Meru Health provides a holistic mind-body approach that blends foundational elements of sleep and nutrition with biofeedback and continuous clinical support to help those struggling with anxiety, depression or burnout. This program has produced industry-leading results and is offered at no cost to

employees. First Sun staff members connect qualified employees with Meru Health for assessment and entry into the program. Employees can participate in this confidential program from any location without taking time off from work. Meru Health can be used in addition to other services available from First Sun.

Individual and Family Coaching Program for Workplace Referrals —

When employees are struggling with life issues, performance often suffers. With First Sun's services in place, HR and managers can refer these employees to us. We can assess and provide support with personal issues that contribute to their workplace performance problems. A new resource added to our EAP plans is one month of no-cost individual and

family coaching and peer support for workplace-referred employees. Our trusted partner, Youturn Health, offers a virtual support program designed to help individuals and their family members struggling with stress, substance misuse, addiction, suicidal ideation, and grief by utilizing evidence-based strategies to build resilience and coping skills. The program's core components include on-demand access to an online video library, multiple tracks of coaching modules, personalized peer coaching, and continuous care management from trained professionals. There are many coaching tracks available that allow the program to be tailored to each family member's situation and needs.

Affordable Legal Services for Small Businesses — First Sun risk management consultants work with our customers to consult about behavioral risk in the workplace. One of the recommendations is often for the employer to seek legal consultation related to the issue or to consider revising outdated policies that increase risk. Our consultants find that while most large companies have in-house or contracted legal services, small businesses often don't. First Sun has negotiated a discounted rate for three plans of comprehensive legal services for small businesses. LegalShield Small Business Plans allow you to be connected with a single attorney firm where you have affordable, direct access to consultation on any business legal matter, contract review, debt collec-

tion help, and more. These services help small businesses avoid mistakes, improve functionality, and reduce risk while working hand-in-hand with our EAP services.

Leadership Training for Our Customers and the Community — In October, First Sun held its first in-person Advisory conference since the onset of the pandemic. The event was an opportunity to celebrate our 30th anniversary, and the day was full of learning, surprises, fun, and gratitude to those who have helped us succeed. We brought back chair massages, door prizes, and a catered lunch. Our program focused on the new landscape of substance misuse – a problem we see many clients and customers face. Richard Jones,

chief clinical officer of Youturn Health, presented on substance use and misuse trends affecting the workplace and the latest science and understanding about recovery. Our goal was to help HR leaders understand more about abuse and recovery, which can lead to better support and improved outcomes for employees and the workplace.

With employee stress, anxiety, and frustration at an all-time high, Christina Isenhower, one of First Sun's leadership trainers, presented a virtual manager workshop in November. This two-hour complimentary workshop on trauma-informed leadership was provided for our customer base and the community to help leaders and managers understand trauma and equip them with tools to

honor employees' experiences while maintaining healthy boundaries and accountability in the workplace.

Creative Collaboration to Support Populations in Need — First Sun continues to find creative solutions to help those in need. We continued our program to support the South Carolina farming community by providing counseling and life management services through SC AgriWellness. This program is provided in collaboration with the SC Department of Agriculture, SC Farm Bureau, and the Clemson Extension. It is funded by a grant from the US Department of Agriculture. With suicide rates and depression at all-time highs for farmers and their families, this program is a lifeline.

First Sun has also partnered with TogetherSC, an association of nonprofit businesses in South Carolina, to provide EAP services to members at a reduced group rate. Providing these highly favored benefits allows nonprofit businesses to attract and retain employees and the consortium-based pricing makes it possible for them to participate.

New Services To Meet Individual and Organizational Needs



What We See Ahead for the Workplace



The workplace is changing, the workforce is challenged, and a recession may be on the horizon. The work of HR professionals to provide resources and support for employees and leaders is now paramount. Successful businesses will re-imagine their culture to fit 2023 workforce needs and find ways to provide meaningful support for well-being and practical tools for upskilling and re-skilling.

The Employee Is the New Customer and HR Has a Monumental Job To Do — According to LinkedIn, the relatively new title of employee experience manager is now on the list of the 25 fastest-growing jobs. Employees are replacing customers as the primary focus for business leaders. As a result, HR is now front and center in the

formula for success. HR is moving to the strategic function of addressing systemic issues related to multiplying talent and maximizing employee discretionary effort. Businesses must work to attract and retain employees with positive cultures and provide experiences supporting inclusion and growth during their tenure. In the way that functional medicine focuses on the individual root cause of an illness to design the treatment, fostering engagement and well-being at work has become an individual process rather than a blanket tactic. This strategy requires different operations and skills. HR professionals are attempting to achieve this in the context of high complexity, with constant change, repeated disruption, and a beleaguered workforce. While this new imperative is getting HR a desired

seat at the C-suite table, the challenges are unprecedented and overwhelming. It is leading to burnout and turnover in the HR profession.

Declining Mental Health Is Being Addressed as a Public Health Issue

— Mental health challenges and distress for employees continue to be at an all-time high due to workplace, economic, societal and political turbulence. In addition to soaring health care costs, business sustainability is impacted by the lack of well-being in the workforce. Engagement, morale and productivity are flagging while turnover continues with no notice quitting, mid-career job changes, and key employees retiring early. Governments are responding with action to address this public

health issue. For example, in Europe and Canada, legislative efforts are taking shape to set guidelines and mandates for employers to support employees' mental health as part of overall environmental, social, and governance (ESG) initiatives. While OSHA has not yet adopted any mental health mandates, the US surgeon general's office has created a [Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-being](#). The framework provides education and specific recommendations to support the well-being of employees, leaders and HR professionals.

Re-imagining Company Culture Is Key To Attracting, Retaining and Engaging Employees

— The pre-pandemic culture of 2019 doesn't translate to a successful 2023 and beyond. Employees

are seeking improvement in conditions at the workplace. Trends show that unionization is gaining favor in the minds of the public and employers are paying attention. Successful companies will be looking to intentionally define a culture that will bring forward the best growth and sustainability. With a post-pandemic reset on work-life balance, successful workplace cultures are moving toward communities where employees come together and contribute their best toward a unified set of goals.

Flexibility, Autonomy and Benefits

— According to Indeed, the top three qualities job seekers look for in a prospective job are flexibility, autonomy, and good benefits. And these same variables make employees stay.

Employers who can build flexibility and autonomy into scheduling, location of work, process and even scope of work appeal to a wider pool of applicants. The very act of coordinating with an employer to work through aspects of choice around the job engages employees and begins a process of collaboration.

As for benefits, make them meaningful. According to Newfront's trends report, employers will look to add benefits that stand to cut bottom-line costs. These include increasing preventative care coverage in health plans and adding or augmenting well-being benefits like lifestyle spending accounts (LSAs), EAPs, financial wellness programs, pet insurance, and even allowance to use remote workspaces with gyms.

Positive Work Experience — Researchers in positive psychology are finding that a positive culture is a formula for business success. Positive psychology can be easily defined by the acronym PERMA, which stands for positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning and accomplishment. The idea is that people are most motivated, engaged and resilient when in a work context where employees help and reassure one another, where gratitude and recognition are frequent, and where they feel seen, respected, needed and valued.

Caring Employer — In addition to focusing on the experience of work for employees, trends show that employers are taking a more active role in caring for their employees.

Many employees come into the workday with mental health or well-being challenges. That makes it strategic for the employer to consider structures and processes that can ease stress and pressure. Some tactics include scheduling proactive rest before active business periods, no meeting Fridays, no email or calls during non-work hours, allotted wellness time and assuring that employees use annual paid time off. Skills classes can also be offered to help employees build habits for self-care and strengths for coping with challenges.

While DE&I has been on top of many organizational initiative lists, new energy is emerging to move beyond diversity and deeper into equity, inclusiveness and belonging. Inclusive leadership is on the

rise where leaders have an open-door relationship with staff, practice active and passive listening, and have skills in proactive empathy. Leaders who understand trauma-informed leadership help to create psychological safety for employees, which is a necessary underlayment for equity, inclusion and belonging. Attention is also going to the practice of one-on-ones which needs to change in light of the hybrid workplace. Effective managers meet frequently with direct reports, ask great questions and lean into listening to create meaningful connections, listen to ideas, brainstorm, spot and resolve problems quickly and collaborate to create growth goals for long-term success.

Intentional Teams — With busy schedules and remote employees, team building

doesn't happen naturally. Distance and flexible schedules don't facilitate strong teams, spontaneous innovation or collaboration. Employers are responding with a focus on communication and collaboration tools, strategic meeting schedules, and a clear definition and understanding of what teamwork looks like in the organization. Some employers are investing in skills training such as communication, conflict management and assertiveness to facilitate strong team performance.

The Top Three Things the Workplace Needs: Skills, Skills and More Skills — Post-pandemic worker shortages mean employers need to bring in needed skills and talent. A trend emerging as an alternative to the expense and challenge of hiring is quiet

hiring. This involves creating a pathway for advancement to grow current staff into new roles. Another tack is to lower education and credentialing requirements for applicants to seek candidates with strong skills or competencies who can train on the job to fill gaps. This points to employers needing sustainable ways to upskill and reskill to keep the business strong. And this is not a short-term issue. Due to tech changes that regularly occur in most jobs, the average worker needs to upskill and reskill to stay effective in the same job or hope to advance. And disruption is here to stay, which means that leaders need to upskill to be at the top of their game to maintain staff engagement. Successful employers will create a culture of learning where employees are encouraged

toward a growth mindset and leaders are given tools to support pathways for advancement for themselves and their employees. Here are areas to focus on skill building and tactics for operationalizing that won't break the bank:

Employee Skills — Employees are lonely, anxious, depressed, burned out and quietly quitting. There are increased incidences of team conflict due to differing political or social beliefs. Much of this can be alleviated by augmenting employee skills. Personal skills such as relationship building, emotional stamina, assertiveness, and establishing foundational self-care habits (eating, sleeping, exercising, mindfulness) and professional skills (negotiating, networking, and time management) can impact well-being and performance.

Manager and Leader Skills — Soft skills (i.e., listening, empathy, clear communication, authenticity, transparency, etc.) as well as understanding issues like equity, inclusion and belonging, have become paramount to enhancing engagement and reducing burnout in a hybrid and remote work environment. Managers and leaders are in a position to know their staff as people, including their life circumstances, challenges, and ambitions. Whether in routine conversations or one-on-one meetings, managers can connect workers to the organization's bigger picture and foster meaning in work. And it builds trust. Trust between manager and employee can function as a bridge to effectively cross a number of organizational, cultural and personal challenges allowing more job flexibility

and a culture of collaboration rather than control. Leaders are also role models for employees who can impact group well-being by using employer benefits, practicing healthy habits, being vulnerable, and promoting benefits to others.

Creative Pathways for Filling Skill Gaps — Ongoing training is becoming part of the standard operating procedure for employee and leader roles. Having advancement opportunities is well documented to support retention and engagement. Even employees and managers who've been in the position for some time can have a productivity boost by receiving training to hone their skills. But training can be expensive and hard to operationalize. Employers can take creative tacks to achieve training

goals. Growing trends include scheduling ongoing topical webinars, providing group skill-building for managers, paying for registration for conferences, education reimbursement or tuition assistance, online subscriptions, reimbursement for books, dedicated time for learning, and help to find resources like free podcasts. In addition, there is great value in offering coaching and mentorship to fill gaps in skills or providing stretch assignments to build knowledge and grow employees into new roles. Another trend is to hire back employees who have retired. While not always interested in taking up their previous roles, many can apply their knowledge and expertise to lighter duties to earn needed income.

71%

of people
view unions
favorably.

– Gallup

94%

of employees
stay longer
with training.

– LinkedIn

98%

of HR professionals
report feeling
burned out.

– HR Dive

How First Sun Is Positioned for the Future



New Client Service

Platform — First Sun has launched a new client service platform that provides an online portal to access counseling and life management benefits. It also provides employees and leaders with on-demand services available through their EAP plan. Members can visit our learning centers to find webinars, training bites, apps, books, and podcasts on topics like sleep, communication, grief, resilience, relationships, and more. Interactive self-help financial tools and fillable legal forms for everything from simple wills to rental agreements are free on the site to help employees move toward legal and financial well-being. HR professionals and leaders can access information about how to use the EAP as a workplace tool and quick links to EAP

resources to support employees forms for making employee referrals. Check out the new platform and post the link where employees will be sure to see it.

Enhanced Retention and Service Program

— This summer, we will launch a new vehicle for customer service and engagement. The customized digital communication system empowers corporate clients to easily educate employees about their EAP benefits. Each group leader will receive regular messaging that highlights resources specific to their benefit model, including “grab and go” promotional content and language that can be seamlessly incorporated into their monthly newsletter or internal email blast. Opportunities to connect with their dedicated account manager or

another First Sun team member will be a click away. In addition, the new messaging system will remind group leaders about the full range of products First Sun offers, opportunities for increased impact, and tips and tricks for successful utilization.

Upskilling and Reskilling for Employees and Leaders — First Sun has created a fresh library of training for employees to close skill gaps and boost engagement and well-being. Topics like Boosting Assertiveness, Setting Goals, Using Empathy to Effectively Communicate, and Striking a Work-Life Balance support employees with both personal and professional growth. Training is fun and engaging and is provided in a virtual format.

Skill-building workshops and coaching are also available for HR, leaders, and managers to support success in the complex landscape of the 2023 workplace. Our leader skill-building has been retooled to include training on trauma-informed leadership and an emphasis on the soft skills that are now essential for effective management.

Disruptive Event Management Services To Support the Workplace — First Sun is known for our responsive critical incident response services. When a crisis happens in the workplace, our team of consultants is available to help navigate and provide support to leaders and employees. Events that disrupt business such as the natural death of an employee, a political

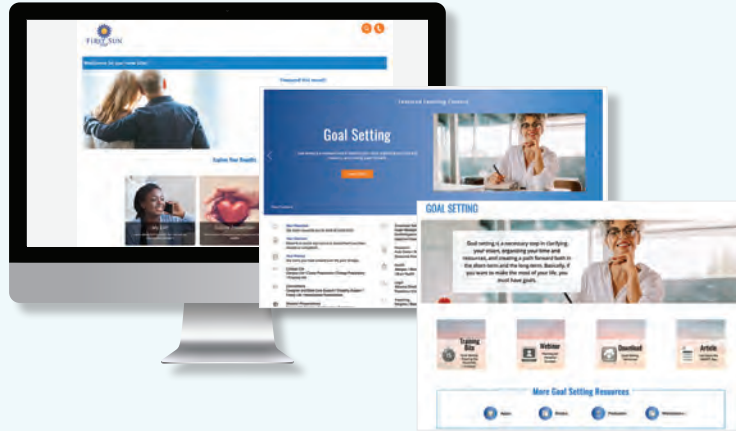
event that creates friction in the workforce, or a change in company culture or leadership happen routinely. Business leaders need to manage this new field of constant change. First Sun has expanded our critical incident services to include support for all types of events and workplace situations that affect the behavioral health of employees or otherwise disrupt the flow of business.

Investing in a Strong Foundation for the Future — First Sun is strategically hiring new staff to augment our services and strengthen our service team. We are onboarding new staff members for intake and account management, and hiring staff to build and provide training. We are also investing in a state-of-the-art client database to allow

for enhanced capabilities for interacting with our clients and counselor network. Improved communications and efficiencies will help us to maintain an excellent service experience.

50% of all employees will need reskilling by 2025.

– World Economic Forum



New Client Service Platform

Quick Access to EAP Benefit



First Sun News



Shannon Lake
Incoming Leadership

Maria Lund
Retiring President and COO

Nancy Grunnet
Incoming Leadership

First Sun Continues National Growth — First Sun continues to see growth for our EAP and Spark population programs across the US. Businesses are attracted to the integrity of our staff, our creative and tailored solutions, and our wide range of integrated resources and partner services.

Celebrating Our 30th Anniversary — In October of 2022, we celebrated our 30th anniversary. In our founding days, we imagined an EAP that provided meaningful services, eliminated barriers to accessing and using benefits, and was a place where employees felt proud to work every day. In 2023, we have grown into an award-winning national EAP known for creative services and delivery that has

been listed as one of the top ten EAPs in the country by SHRM. In addition, we have unprecedented employee longevity, with many of our staff remaining with us for 15 to 30 years.

Leadership for the Next Generation — One of the founding leaders, Maria Lund, will retire at the end of March. In 2005, she took on leadership after the death of Don Lake and has enjoyed a successful run at the helm of First Sun EAP. Maria looks forward to spending time with her grandchildren in Charleston. Moving into the lead roles are Nancy Grunnet and Shannon Lake. Nancy has been with First Sun since 1997. As Vice President of Corporate Consulting, she served as a key driver behind First Sun's current organizational

restructuring and development of a five-year business plan designed to innovate programs and services. As head of our Solutions division, she developed new lines of business pertaining to leadership and coaching products and expanded partnerships to augment First Sun's training, coaching, and consulting services. Shannon Lake has been in the role of Vice President of Operations. She now rises to lead the growth for EAP, Spark and the Solutions training product lines.

Voted
ONE of the
TOP 10
EAPs
in the country
by SHRM.

Recommendations for Successfully Navigating Current Workplace Challenges

- Read the [Framework for Workplace Mental Health and Well-being](#).
- Survey employees and update benefits and policies to create a culture that fosters well-being.
- Train managers in skills to help them connect with and support employees.
- Examine job roles to see where additional flexibility or autonomy can be built-in.
- Enhance benefits in ways that contribute to individual and organizational success.
- Provide opportunities for employees to build skills in foundational self-care and positive team relations.
- Use creative strategies to grow employees into new roles and managers into effective leaders.



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We Help People Be Better at Work

First Sun 2023 Trends Report
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