



Catering to Culture How Cultural Shifts Will Impact the Workplace in 2019

As we look ahead in 2019, employers will face a tight labor market, a new workforce generation, and the integration of advanced technology in the workplace. In 2018, nearly half (49 percent) of the companies that participated in ZeroCater's Quarterly Customer Survey said that retaining talent was their number one reason for providing office meals, up 5 percent from 44 percent in 2017.

Where Competition for Top Talent Sparks Innovation

As the unemployment rate continues to fall, the labor market bargaining power will continue to shift in favor of workers rather than employers. In the coming year, companies will step up their benefit packages to entice top talent with “work perks” that speak to a new workforce generation that wants to feel valued. According to a study by [Sage People](#), two-thirds (66 percent) of workers view feeling valued and recognized as the most important aspect of working life. When it comes to benefits, employers should look for ways to instill trust in their employees and show them they have their best interests in mind by offering incentives such as pet-friendly offices, gym memberships, and wholesome office food programs that cater to employees' individual tastes and preferences.

“Other than stellar healthcare (which is really just an investment a company makes in keeping its main capital resource humming along), commuter benefits and the like are always appreciated. I still think that the mission of the company and the challenging problems are by and large the primary draw, but it makes the decision—especially for new grads looking at cushy “retirement” jobs at Amazon/Google/Facebook—a bit easier. But yes, if one wants to look like a tech company, one must provide the meal perk.” - Nick Hynes, Oasis Labs, Berkeley

Make Way for the Centennials

The largest generation in American history, [Generation Z](#) (born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s) will soon shape the American workforce for years to come. In a survey of more than 4,000 Gen Zers, supportive leadership and positive relationships at work ranked as the two most important factors when considering a job. Another [poll](#) found that Gen Z workers want to engage one-on-one with their organizational leaders. Employers will need to create formal, as well as informal, opportunities for leaders to spend time with this generation of employees—from a monthly coffee chat to more formal meetings and reviews. In 2019, employers will begin adapting every aspect of the employee experience to suit this generation.

“Office Food is a MUST have. We do a birthday and anniversary celebration day each month with something sweet as well.” - Cherie Power, Director of Operations at Directly

Personalize the Employee Experience

When used appropriately, technology can aid companies in collecting and analyzing their employee feedback to make their employee experience personalized, strengthening employee retention and engagement. According to a [MetLife study](#), 72% of employees were more loyal to employers who offered customizable benefits. One of ZeroCater's most valuable aspects is the employee feedback we collect and analyze for employers in order to give them a baseline understanding of how employees are experiencing their meals or snacks. With this knowledge, employers are able to make improvements to their programs, increase employee engagement, and gain a benchmark of employee happiness levels. In 2019, technology companies will raise the stakes in maintaining employee engagement while employers across the board will incorporate more employee feedback collection into the workplace to personalize the employee experience.

Serve Up Sustainability and Social Responsibility

Millennials greatly value being part of a socially responsible organization, specifically one with a mission that matches their own values. Seventy-one percent of respondents in a [Hays survey](#) said they would accept lower pay for a job that aligned with their ideals. From hosting company-sponsored community service days to reducing their offices' food waste, employers are working to align their business practices with their company values. For instance, ZeroCater partners with Re-Plate, as well as nonprofits such as Food Runners in San Francisco to redistribute their office leftovers to communities in need. In 2019, look for companies to reevaluate vendors and choose ones that not only meet budget and service requirements but also align with their own values.

Meanwhile, sustainable meat alternatives such as the Impossible Burger, Beyond Meats, and jackfruit are becoming a more mainstream and welcome alternative to tofu in cuisines from barbecue to Indian. Watch for more meat substitutions, including seitan, to star in 2019's office meals.

Build Real Relationships at Work

In 2018, the "loneliness epidemic," a rise in the global population feeling lonely," gained international attention. According to researchers from the University of California San Diego School of Medicine, a [study](#) of 340 people found that 76 percent had moderate-high loneliness, peaking in three age periods: the late twenties, the mid-fifties, and the late eighties. Employers have begun to see loneliness creeping into the workplace; [Virgin Pulse](#) reported that employees spend nearly half their day using technology to communicate, rather than communicating in person. More than half of the 2,000 people Virgin Pulse polled said they feel lonely "always" or "very often" as a result. While in 2018, 35 percent of employers provided office meals to encourage team building, according to ZeroCater's Quarterly Customer Survey, in 2019, employee engagement initiatives will take center stage as employers focus on combating employee loneliness through fostering workplace community.

"Office meals are, without question, one of the greatest sources of camaraderie at the company. In contrast to small cohorts going out for individual lunches, ZeroCater's family-style meals allow the entire company to come together and devote our thoughts to enjoying each other's company rather than the mechanics of the meal. Having a humanely timed dinner perk is also nice because it encourages people to stay for a few extra, more jovial, hours in the evening after the brunt of the day's work has been accomplished." - Nick Hynes, Oasis Labs, Berkeley

Balancing AI and Technology's Role in the Workplace

A study by [the Augmented Human Enterprise](#) found that companies using automation technologies to conduct business are 33 percent more likely to be “human-friendly” workplaces, in which employees are 31 percent more productive. This new technology is replacing administrative tasks, opening up employees for more engaging, strategic thinking tasks and roles. However, as AI continues to improve productivity, more companies will need to find ways to maintain a culture and encourage team bonding.

“I think [our employees] appreciate the free lunches very much. We have 2 office suites. I have created a policy of everyone having meals "together" in the kitchen on the days we get ZeroCater. The other days are "free" days to do what they want for lunch.” - Cherie Power, Director of Operations, Directly

Office Food for Thought How A New Workforce Will Pave the Way to a New Food Frontier

As the workforce evolves and becomes more diverse, the workplace must follow suit. A growing number of employers are building more inclusive and diverse workplaces as they are realizing the benefits of this for not only employee engagement but also overall business productivity. One area of particular interest is office food; employees are increasingly trading in their deli sandwiches for sushi, sustainably sourced poké bowls, or Israeli hummus. At ZeroCater, we found that one of the easiest and most engaging ways to support diversity in the workplace is by sharing meals that celebrate employees’ cultures. In 2019, we expect office food programs to become more dynamic than ever, celebrating culture, local communities, sustainable sourcing, and more. To do this, food companies and restaurants will increasingly adopt new business strategies by partnering with platforms that provide new distribution channels and revenue streams.

New Platforms Present Restaurants and Food Companies with a New Food Frontier

According to CB Insights, food companies will need to seek alternative points of sale to get their products into shoppers’ hands. Office food programs, like ZeroCater’s Snacks & Kitchens, have opened up a whole new distribution channel for CPG food companies to get their products into the mouths of America’s workforce, largely made up of the hard-to-nail-down millennial consumer. Employees want the latest and greatest in office snacks; 32 percent want the latest snack trends and 30 percent want to try the newest snacks on the market. ZeroCater found that 68 percent of employees say they purchased snacks and beverages outside of work that they first discovered through their office’s snack programs.

For restaurants, achieving success is increasingly difficult, with the growing popularity of meal delivery and kits, rising operations costs, and more restaurant competition than ever before. Restaurant owners must find additional revenue streams and actively market their restaurants—the office-meal business provides both. In a 2018 survey, ZeroCater found that 63 percent of employees say they have visited new restaurants they first discovered through their office meals.

Office food programs present the new food frontier in 2019. The bottom line is that more and more food companies and restaurants will choose to partner with office food service providers in 2019, seeking access to highly desirable consumers and an additional revenue stream.

“Office catering expanded Americano’s reach throughout the entire Bay Area. If people are able to try Americano at their office, they tell their friends and family about our food, and sure enough the walk-in rate increases at our brick-and-mortar location. So, not only does office catering increase revenue, it is a powerful source of marketing and growth. In large part due to our partnership with ZeroCater, my family and I opened our second restaurant in Livermore.” - Vesna Kahrman, Owner of [Americano Deli](#)

Hungry for Culture and Authenticity

A changing employee demographic is influencing what people eat at work. Gone are the days of catering that offers a standard poultry, beef, or fish option. Office meals are appealing to more adventurous appetites, due in large part to a more diverse workforce. Looking at 450 companies’ meal programs, out of 66 cuisine types, the highest-rated cuisines were Vietnamese (4.3 percent), Middle Eastern (3.9 percent), and Mexican (3.6 percent). Other cuisines of interest included Indian (3.5 percent), American (3.3 percent), and Italian, Latin American, and Thai (tied with 2.9 percent).

We’re particularly seeing this in breakfast options, where companies are going beyond the traditional American breakfast, introducing new formats (breakfast tacos, anyone?) as well as unexpected ingredients. Yes, a whole new start to the day is on the horizon in 2019. Companies know there’s no better way to start the workday than with a hearty breakfast, but companies are increasingly upping the ante with international inspiration from Jamaica, [Japan](#), Costa Rica, and beyond. ZeroCater restaurant partner, A Taste of Vietnam Noodle Bar & Grill, in San Francisco puts its spin on traditional breakfast foods with items like Thai tea French toast, Sriracha bacon, and tom yum veggie scrambled eggs. Other offices start their day with Tex-Mex breakfast tacos, featuring pork belly carnitas, chorizo chilaquiles, and migas-style eggs from ZeroCater restaurant partners, including Austin Daily Press, Babycakes Gourmet in Chicago, and Benny’s Tacos in Los Angeles. In 2019, expect to see demand for even more exotic cuisines in office meals, with companies particularly interested in supporting immigrant-owned businesses for authentic flavors.

“Our office is a huge fan of office meals. Our lunches for the week are always different, fun, and tasty—it’s impossible to get bored of our options!” - Carmen Chiu, Recruiting Coordinator at [The Home Depot](#)

A Continued Focus on Local Food

Mirroring a vast majority of consumers, companies are placing an emphasis on supporting their local businesses. Supporting local businesses can have a ripple effect on the local economy. According to [The Home Sweet Home: Pros’ Edition](#) study if contractor shifted 10 percent of their business purchases from national chains to independent suppliers, local economies would see an addition \$1.5 billion in economic activity across the country. Workers are increasingly seeking socially responsible employers who share their affinity for supporting local businesses. In addition, some areas like San Francisco are enacting new ordinances that place limits on subsidized corporate cafeterias. Companies like Salesforce are opting to source their employee meals from local restaurants using ZeroCater, a third-party food services provider that partners with local restaurants, food trucks, and caterers to arrange employee meals.

"Since we both come from such close-knit families, we understand the importance of supporting businesses that are family owned. We want to see these restaurants strive and succeed!" - Holly Nari and Parker Brooks, Workplace Services at Salesforce

"My family is in the restaurant/catering business and supporting local/mom & pops businesses is very near and dear to my heart! I truly feel that local and family owned caterers put more love into their food, and you can taste it! They really care that their food be fresh, and consistent. Every meal they turn out is their own piece of art, and I really think it shows. It's really great when ZeroCater offers local/family owned catering options! Those tend to be my company's favorite places!" - Parya Bahrani, Office Manager at App-Lovin

Diner-tainment

Companies are creating a better workplace through food experiences. Food at work is meant to provide not only nourishment but also another way for employers to keep their teams engaged among ever-growing competition to retain talent. ZeroCater has seen increased demand for interactive office food experiences like omelet stations, ice-cream sundae bars, and build-your-own stations for everything from burgers to salads, and everything in between. Couple this with a surge in requests for themed meals, and 2019 is shaping up to be the year in which office meals go beyond the basics to further engage employees.

"Lunches have brought our office together. We line up with excitement when the food arrives, then after we eat, we discuss with each other how great our meal was. It's an 'event' rather than a lunch." - Gynine Montalto, Executive Assistant to CFO at National General Insurance

Snack on This

Looking at 34 companies' snack programs, Still and Sparkling Water took up 23 percent of all snacks consumed, followed by Produce, Deli Meat & Eggs (12 percent). Chips, Popcorn & Pretzels (11 percent); Bars, Protein & Jerky (10 percent); and Cookies & Sweets (7 percent) rounded out the top five categories.

The most popular snack categories speak to a shift in employee eating habits towards more [mindful snacking](#) in 2019, with a focus on wholesome ingredients and simple labeling—from artisanal brands like Angie's Boom Chicka Pop Sweet and Salty Kettle Corn edging out traditional chips, to RXBar and KIND Bars setting an example with their granola and protein bar category. In 2019, office snacks will see a makeover, with food manufacturers retooling their recipes to parse a never-ending list of ingredients while updating packaging to reflect the wholesomeness of the snack.

By the Numbers: The Top Ten Most Popular Snacks of 2018

1. Bananas (22.3 per employee, per month)
2. La Croix Grapefruit (14.9 per employee, per month)
3. La Croix Mango (11.5 per employee, per month)
4. Hard Boiled Eggs (11.4 per employee, per month)
5. Ito En Jasmine Green Tea (10.9 per employee, per month)
6. Crystal Geyser Alpine Water (10.4 per employee, per month)
7. Diet Coke (10.4 per employee, per month)
8. Avocado (10.4 per employee, per month)

9. Coke Zero (10.4 per employee, per month)
10. Meiji-Hello Panda Cookies (10 per employee, per month)

The Low-Carb Craze Continues

With paleo and keto diets all the rage, it's no surprise that there's a rise in low-carb, high-protein office snacks and a drop in bread and carb heavy options. In 2018, ZeroCater offered 15 jerky options, with Country Archer brand beef jerky (in original and teriyaki flavors) the most in demand and comprising nearly 15 percent of all jerky consumed nationwide. Meanwhile, the Bread and Baked Goods category takes up less than .5 percent of all office snack programs.

When employees do crave a carbohydrate, they mostly stick to a less guilty, whole-grain option such as Dave's Killer 21 Whole Grain Bread (18 percent), or they go for it, indulging in warm and toasty breakfast classics like Sara Lee Plain Bagels (19 percent) and Thomas' Plain English Muffins (17 percent). This rings true in the cereal category as well, with Kellogg's Special K Red Berries being the most popular cereal (13 percent).

In 2019, expect offices to continue to opt for lower-carb snacks like jerky or protein bars. Meanwhile, whole wheat will continue leading the Breads and Baked Goods category in 2019 because a focus on health and wellness is at the forefront of both employee and employer agendas.

“There has definitely been a rise in associates going low-carb. It seems like Keto has been a popular diet that most people will adapt to because of the flexibility between trading carbs for fats. It's important to take our associates' dietary options and restrictions into consideration when catering any meals because we want to make sure we are accommodating to our whole team and not just a few of them. A well-balanced meal for each associate keeps a positive morale and workplace, and also reflects positive associate appreciation. We are in the business of bringing people together, but we also make sure to maintain our #onefamily culture with our associates.” - Jeanette Ta, Office Operations Manager at Topgolf Media

Desperately Seeking Comfort

When employees aren't reaching for a healthy option, it's most likely that they're craving comfort, often with a treat from their childhood. This is true in nearly every category. Two of the top three kinds of cereal are General Mills Cinnamon Toast Crunch and Honey Nut Cheerios, while Cheez-Its (6 percent) and Chex Mix (3 percent) take a good percentage of the chip category. In 2019, expect employees to turn to their favorite childhood snacks, especially when on a deadline—all in moderation, of course.

All the Buzz

Coffee . . . an office isn't quite complete without a fresh pot brewing. In 2018, ZeroCater found the three most popular whole bean coffees for their office customers were Philz Philtered Soul, Allegro Espresso 924, and Equator Organic French Roast Fair Trade. Not surprisingly, portion packs or single serving options are popular in the office, with Equator French Roast Fair Trade Portion Packs taking up 11 percent of the entire coffee and tea category. The most popular tea varieties for offices include green, English teatime, and chamomile. In 2019, expect to see smaller roasters and artisanal brands take the lead in the coffee category.

At ZeroCater, we help companies build a better workplace culture through engaging food programs that bring the office together, encourage better communication and collaboration, support team building, and boost office productivity.