

Pagans In The Workplace:
A Guide For Managers and Human Resource Directors

An employee at your company practices a religion with which you may not be familiar. This leaflet is simply to give you information you may need to understand the different experiences this employee may share with you, and answer any questions you might have.

What is a Pagan employee likely to practice and believe?

Because Pagans generally follow a non-credal, non-dogmatic spirituality, there may be even more variants between Pagan religious beliefs than there are between denominations of Christianity. The most commonly practiced types of Paganism are Wicca, Asatru, Druidry, or simply Paganism or Neo-Paganism, just as a Christian can be Catholic, Presbyterian, or simply Christian. All of these are somewhat different from each other. Because of this, the following statements may not be true for every Pagan you encounter. However, there are some practices that are generally common among Pagans; the employee can tell you if his practices differ significantly from the following:

A Pagan employee will celebrate a nature-based, polytheistic religion

A Pagan employee will honor Divinity as both God and Goddess, sometimes with a feminist emphasis on the Goddess. One effect of this is that the employee is likely to treat gender equality as an assumption.

A Pagan employee will celebrate religious ceremonies with small groups on an astronomical schedule, rather than with large congregations or on a set weekly schedule. Most observe the beginning and midpoint of each season as major holidays (sometimes called Sabbats); some also celebrate on Full Moons (sometimes called Esbats). These celebrations are called rituals, circles, or blots, and the congregations called covens, groves, hearths, or circles. Some sects believe that holding the ceremony at the exact astrological moment is important. Others will schedule their gatherings at the closest convenient time. Your employee may want time off during some or all of these times. Requests should be treated the same as any other religious time off request; that some Pagans do not ask for time off should not invalidate the needs of the others whose tradition follows a more structured calendar.

A Pagan employee may wear a symbol of his or her religion as an item of jewelry. The most common symbol is the pentacle, a five-pointed star in a circle. The misconception of the pentagram as a satanic symbol is based upon its inverted use by those groups, in the same manner in which devil-worshippers may use the Christian cross inverted. The meaning of the pentacle as worn by Pagans is rooted in the beliefs of the Greek Pythagoreans, for whom the pentagram embodied perfect balance and wisdom; inserting the star in the circle adds the symbol of eternity and unity. Other jewelry that may be worn includes Celtic knotwork, crosses, and triskelions; Thor's hammer; the labrys, a double-headed axe used as a symbol by Greco-Roman worship of Cybele; Goddess

figurines; crescent and/or full Moon symbols; the Yin-Yang symbol; or an ankh, eye of Horus or horns of Isis from Egyptian mythology.

A Pagan employee will honor Divinity as immanent in Nature and humanity, and view all things as interconnected. This often leads to a concern with recycling, ecology and the environment, and a fascination with the natural life cycle and seasonal patterns.

A Pagan employee may believe in magic, and may spell it "magick" to differentiate it from stage illusions. This may include belief in personal energy fields like the Chinese concept of chi. Quite often it also includes the use of rituals and tools to dramatize and focus positive thinking and visualization techniques, many of which are virtually identical to the techniques taught by motivational leaders and found in books such as *The One Minute Manager* and *Unlimited Power*. Just as in motivational training, the object is to focus on positive issues. Therefore, a Pagan will not attempt to "hex" or curse; in their ethical structure such actions are believed to rebound on the sender, and therefore are proscribed.

A Pagan employee may call herself a Witch, a Wiccan, a Pagan or Neo-Pagan, a Goddess-worshipper, an Asatruar, an Odinist, a Druid, or a Heathen. He is unlikely to call himself a "Warlock", as that is believed to come from the Scottish word for "oathbreaker". And while a Pagan employee may or may not be offended by the stereotype, she is likely to quickly inform you that the green-skinned, warty-nosed caricature displayed at Halloween bears no relation to her religion.

A Pagan employee will hold ethics emphasizing both personal freedom and personal responsibility

Pagan ethics allow personal freedom within a framework of personal responsibility. The primary basis for Pagan ethics is the understanding that everything is interconnected, that nothing exists alone, and that every action has a consequence. There is no concept of forgiveness for sin in the Pagan ethical system; the consequences of one's actions must be faced and reparations made as necessary against anyone whom one has harmed. There are no arbitrary rules about moral issues; instead, every action must be weighed against the awareness of what harm it could cause. Thus, for example, a Pagan employee could consider consensual homosexuality a null issue morally because it is an individual decision involving sharing love with another person. Yet stealing would be wrong because it harms one's integrity and the business environment, and causes the costs of the theft to be absorbed by innocent consumers. The most common forms in which these ethics are stated are the Wiccan Rede, "An it harm none, do as thou wilt," and in the Threefold Law, "Whatsoever you do returns to you threefold."

A Pagan employee will hold a paradigm that embraces plurality

Because Pagan religious systems hold that theirs is a way among many, not the only road to truth, and because Pagans revere a variety of Deities among their pantheons, both male and female, a Pagan employee will believe that each person is free to choose his or her own destiny, and will not believe in evangelizing or proselytizing. One advantage of this is that a Pagan employee will thrive in a pluralistic environment, eager to support an

atmosphere that discourages discrimination based on differences such as race or gender and encourages individuality, self-discovery and independent thought. A Pagan employee is also likely to have knowledge of other religions; most Pagans have explored other spirituality before deciding on their own. Because Neo-Paganism's mainstream popularity is less than 50 years old, few Pagans were born in the faith, but those who are were likely taught about many religions as well; Pagan parents are adamant about not forcing their beliefs on the child but rather teaching them and letting the child decide when he is of age. While a Pagan employee will focus more on individual experience of the numinous than written dogma, she will respect the sacred texts of other religions, but be unlikely to believe them literally where they conflict with scientific theory or purport to be the only truth.

A Pagan employee is likely to enjoy reading, science, and helping professions
Margot Adler, National Public Radio journalist, reported the results of a survey of Pagans in the 1989 edition of her book, *Drawing Down the Moon*. The results showed that the one thing Pagans hold in common despite their differences is a voracious appetite for reading and learning. Pagans also seem to be represented strongly in the computer and health-care fields, so the Pagan employee is likely to be computer-literate and highly effective in any helping profession.

Despite its sometimes-misunderstood beliefs, Paganism is believed to be currently the fastest-growing religion, and provides a satisfying spirituality to its practitioners. With the present appreciation of diversity and tolerance in the business environment, more people now understand that different cultural backgrounds bring perspectives that can be valued instead of feared. It is our hope that as a manager or human resources executive this will provide you with the information you need to be able to facilitate understanding.

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