

CRAIN'S

CHICAGO BUSINESS

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The upheavals of 2020—pandemic and social unrest—presented human resources executives with unimaginable challenges.

When COVID-19 set in, HR executives sent office staff home to work remotely and added safety features to plants and warehouses. They extended benefits such as additional paid time off and flexible schedules to accommodate parents with school-age children at home. And they developed virtual hiring and onboarding processes while devising ways to keep remote workers engaged.

Then, with the killing of George Floyd in May and demonstrations for social justice, HR executives led their organizations to take a fresh look at their diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. They changed their methods of recruiting to attract candidates of diverse backgrounds, established resource groups and implemented implicit-bias training. All this while handling the day-to-day basics of administering payroll and benefits and tracking performance. These 54 managers met the mark and then some.

- By Judith Crown

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NOTABLE

LEADERS IN HR

MARLO J. GAAL

Chief Talent Officer
Ariel Investments

Marlo J. Gaal, who also is senior vice president at the investment management firm, oversees HR functions including executive coaching, talent acquisition, development and retention, and equity and inclusion. She joined Ariel early in the pandemic and introduced a holistic wellness benefit to cover pandemic-related expenses. And she introduced a flexible approach to time off with no maximum or minimum. Gaal designed and began implementing “Human Resources 2.0,” a new approach to the way Ariel attracts talent and motivates employees. She led a firmwide compensation study to ensure competitive opportunities using the pay vehicles that employees most highly value. Gaal joined Ariel from Groupon, where she was senior director of HR for North America. Earlier, she held HR positions at Hyatt Hotels and OfficeMax.

