

Workers in a Post-Pandemic World

If you feel anxious about returning to the old way of doing work as the pandemic evolves, you are not alone. A survey from ManpowerGroup found that almost all workers (94%) report [concerns about going back to the workplace](#). After health concerns for themselves and their family, workers are most worried about returning to an old way of working and losing the flexibility they have gained. As real estate services firm JLL puts it, for more and more people, [work is not somewhere you go](#), but something you do.

Workplace Flexibility

Most workers believe the COVID-19 crisis marks the [end of full-time work in the office](#). In an Adecco Group survey, [75% of employees](#) said they wanted flexibility around office and remote working after the pandemic, and employees on average said they would like to split their time about evenly between working in the office and working from home. A survey reported by HR Daily Advisor found that 35% of employees [would not work for a company](#) without flexible working options. A Cisco survey found that [nearly nine out of 10 workers](#) want to be able to choose whether to work from home or the office once COVID-19 workplace restrictions ease, and have greater autonomy over their hours. In fact, PwC's Workforce Pulse Survey found that almost a quarter of employees are [considering or planning to move](#) more than 50 miles away from a core office location. That's on top of the 12% who have already made such a move since the start of the pandemic. According to Fortune, 38% of remote knowledge workers say their [stress is lower](#) while working remotely (while 20% say it's worse). The vast majority of workers (eight in 10) want to [better balance family and](#) work in the future.

Different Backgrounds, Different Concerns

Overall, being able to both [socialize and collaborate with colleagues in person](#) is what workers find most beneficial about returning to their workplace. Otherwise, how workers feel about a return to the workplace [varies](#) by gender and career stage:

- **Gen-Z vs. Millennials:** Gen Z is most keen to return to the workplace to develop their careers and socialize (51%), while millennials are least positive (38%).
- **Gen X vs. Boomers:** Gen X values being in the workplace to concentrate and collaborate away from household responsibilities. Boomers choose socializing and collaborating with colleagues (34%) as a top reason to return.
- **Gender Divide:** Almost half of men (46%) feel positive about returning, only one-third of women (35%) feel the same. Women report feeling more concerned or nervous about the return. Both men and women rank not having to commute and having flexibility to work when convenient in their top three benefits of working from home. Men are more likely to want to be in the office for visibility & promotion, while women are more appreciative of the office as a means of separating work from home.
- **Working Parents:** Men with children list spending time with their family as a top benefit to working remotely. Women feel more negatively about going back to work, increasing in concern the younger the child – 61% for children 0-5, 53% for children 6-17 and 50% for 18+.

Focus on Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

According to Indeed, both men and women have become less comfortable asking for a raise or promotion during the pandemic. However, the [baseline for women was lower](#) and the subsequent drop in confidence was bigger. In asking for a promotion, previously, 82% of men were comfortable doing so compared to 70% of women. But there's been a 4.5% decrease for men and an 8.5% decrease for women, the report found. [Decreased comfort in asking for work location flexibility](#) among women is

likely due to the disruption to childcare during the pandemic. Almost a third of employed women in the U.S. surveyed by SHRM said they personally know a woman who has left a job during the pandemic due to caregiving responsibilities. Most people surveyed by Catalyst are optimistic about the changing workplace and believe that workplaces will accelerate gender equity in the wake of COVID-19. However, employees are [skeptical of their employers](#)—they do not perceive that their company is fully committed to taking action to build a more inclusive working environment.

A McKinsey survey on [challenges facing diverse employees](#) during the pandemic found that LGBTQ+ employees disproportionately fear losing ground at work and report feeling isolated. They report more acute work-related challenges than their straight and cisgender peers, including workload increases and stress over performance reviews, as well as a heightened loss of connectivity and belonging. People of color, especially in the United States, are more worried about workplace health and safety, as well as career progression and balancing responsibilities at home. McKinsey also projects that one out of every ten U.S. workers will likely be [forced to leave their jobs](#) and take up new occupations by 2030 as COVID-19 transforms the labor market, with women, minorities, the young and the less educated likely to be the hardest hit.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincided with widespread protests over racial injustice following the murder of George Floyd, with impacts also being felt in the workplace. According to a September 2020 survey from Glassdoor, 76% of employees and job seekers said [a diverse workforce was important](#) when evaluating companies and job offers. Nearly half of Black and Hispanic employees and job seekers said they had quit a job after witnessing or experiencing discrimination at work. Approximately 37% of employees and job seekers said they wouldn't apply to a company that had negative satisfaction ratings among people of color.

Increased Benefits

A 2020 survey from Prudential revealed that most workers (77%) now consider benefits programs as a [crucial part of their compensation](#), up from 67% in 2019. The survey also found that a higher percentage of workers consider it a big reason they would stay at a job, with many respondents revealing that they would be willing to take a chance on a new job if it offered better benefits. According to online mental health services provider SilverCloud Health, more than three-fourths of American workers want their employer to offer [online mental health services](#) as a part of their benefits. The pandemic may have also fundamentally shifted employers' sense of responsibility for helping [improve employees' financial wellness](#) – 62% percent of employers feel "extremely" responsible, up significantly from 13% in 2013, Bank of America's 2020 Workplace Benefits Report noted.

Many organizations are also reconsidering their approaches to paid time off (PTO). Even pre-pandemic, American workers used only about half of their eligible vacation time. In 2020, [the average workday lengthened by nearly an hour](#), according to a working paper published by the National Bureau of Economic Research, and an overwhelming majority of Americans have shortened, postponed or canceled their planned time off in the past year. Many company leaders are encouraging workers to unplug from the daily grind and enjoy time away from work. According to SHRM, [unlimited time off](#) is becoming an increasingly popular alternative to managing PTO time. Workers may welcome such changes: in a PwC survey 44% of workers said they would [surrender at least 10% of a 20% pay raise](#) if their employer provided unlimited vacation time.

Empathy & Support at Work

Hesitancy to return may be driven largely by a [lack of trust](#), including a lack of trust in employers. In a survey performed by the Adecco Group, 74% of workers said they feel it will be important for managers to [exhibit empathy and a supportive attitude](#). “We see after the pandemic there will be a huge need to rescale managers around soft skills,” said Adecco CEO Alain Dehaze. A large majority of employers, 86%, reported in a recent EY survey that they intend to establish moderate to extensive [workplace safety strategies](#). Those types of efforts may create positive morale and office culture. According to Catalyst, 90% of employees feel companies offering [programs to address wellbeing and mental health](#) were more empathic. In terms of basic workplace safety, Deloitte research explored which safety measures are [table stakes for returning to work](#). The most important factors identified were regular cleaning of equipment and shared spaces by a cleaning service and regular spraying/fogging to disinfect shared spaces. Fear of exposure at work persists, even as vaccination rates increase. A survey conducted for Glassdoor by the Harris Poll revealed that 7 in 10 U.S. employees who are currently working from home due to COVID-19 believe that workers should be [required to get a COVID-19 vaccine](#) in order to return to the office. Furthermore, most of those surveyed said they would be more likely to get vaccinated if their employers incentivized them to do so (either with PTO or cash).

Skills & Learning Employees Want

The pandemic underscored the importance of soft skills for coping with stress, both in and out of the workplace. Learning platform Udemy reported that between 2019 and 2020, the number of hours logged for courses that teach anxiety management alone jumped by nearly 4,000%. Other [mental health and wellness skills](#) that saw the biggest jumps in demand in the last year included resilience, stress management, meditation, and mindfulness. When PwC asked employees what skills they consider critical to their career over the next three years, respondents were [more likely to list softer skills](#) such as problem solving and adaptability than technical skills like coding and data visualization. Networking will also be important – researchers have observed that [social networks have contracted](#) by roughly 16% during the pandemic.

There is a healthy appetite for change, with 77% of employees reporting they are [ready to learn new skills](#) or completely retrain. One third of employees surveyed by PwC even reported they’re willing to [accept smaller pay increases](#) if their employer allowed them to spend their time learning different skills with the ability to choose what they learn. [Millennials and Gen-Z employees](#) may be especially eager to reskill. A poll from Liberty Communications and market research company Opinium found that 46% of respondents who had jobs felt their roles were not taking them into their desired career direction, and 35% felt it was unlikely they would end up in their desired role. According to LinkedIn Learning, Gen Z learners are more likely than any other generation to [spend time learning](#) if it can help them perform well in their current jobs, build the skills needed to work in a different function, or find new roles internally.

Optimism & Opportunity

Stakeholders at every level of the workplace, as well as academics, industry leaders, and government officials, continue to draw lessons from the pandemic. It has been a year-long (and counting) forced experiment for millions of people and no two experiences have been the same. If there are to be silver linings to a year that brought hardship and loss to so many, hopefully one of them will be lasting improvements to the way we work. Workers have experienced how it can be different, for better and for worse, and are speaking up. It is up to employers to partner on creative solutions as we move forward.



Jesse Van Hoy is a librarian working on Echo's research team. He pivoted to librarianship after working as an elementary school administrator, completing his MLIS at the University of Washington in 2018. He was raised in the New York metropolitan area and now lives in Shoreline with his wife and two-year-old son.

Mental Health Resources & COVID-19 Information Sources

- [Mental Health Services – Washington State Health Care Authority](#)
- [Behavioral Health Services – Oregon Health Authority](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control](#)
- [World Health Organization](#)
- [Medline \(US National Library of Medicine\)](#)
- [Food & Drug Administration](#)
- [American Psychiatric Association](#)
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [Mayo Clinic](#)
- [Public Health – Seattle & King County](#)
- [Washington State Department of Health](#)
- [Oregon Health Authority](#)

Sources

[What's next for America's workforce post-COVID-19?](#)

PwC | Report | 24 March 2021

Employees are on the move, with almost a quarter considering or planning to move more than 50 miles away from a core office location.

[Companies Weigh Changes to PTO Policies for Post-Pandemic Times](#)

SHRM | Article | Paul Bergeron | 17 March 2021

Unlimited time off is fast becoming a popular alternative to managing PTO time.

[Upskilling Hopes & Fears 2021](#)

PwC | Report | 16 March 2021

77% of employees are ready to learn new skills or completely retrain.

[Survey: Coronavirus challenged the success of many working moms](#)

HR Dive | Article | Sheryl Estrada | 16 March 2021

Almost a third (31%) of employed women in the U.S. surveyed by SHRM said they personally know a woman who has left a job during the pandemic due to caregiving responsibilities.

[Is the 9-to-5 office routine dead? Here's what workers want](#)

Fortune | Article | Lance Lambert | 12 March 2021

38% of remote knowledge workers say their stress is lower while working remotely.

[COVID-19 Vaccines Should be Required Before Returning to the Office, Say 70% of Employees](#)

Glassdoor | Blog | 10 March 2021

68% would be more likely to get a COVID-19 vaccine if their employers incentivized them (e.g. cash bonus, more paid time off) to do so.

[Gen Z, millennials say pandemic changed their career hopes](#)

HR Dive | Article | Ryan Golden | 5 March 2021

46% of respondents who had jobs felt their roles were not taking them into their desired career direction.

[Women now less comfortable asking for a raise or promotion, report finds](#)

HR Dive | Article | Sheryl Estrada | 5 March 2021

In asking for a promotion, previously, 82% of men were comfortable doing so compared to 70% of women. But there's been a 4.5% decrease for men and an 8.5% decrease for women.

[2021 Workplace Learning Report](#)

LinkedIn Learning | Report | 3 February 2021

Gen Z learners are more likely than any other generation in the workforce to spend time learning.

[One of Ten in U.S. May Have to Switch Occupations Post Pandemic](#)

Bloomberg | Article | Rich Miller | 18 February 2021

Women, minorities, the young and the less educated will probably be the hardest hit.

[For younger job seekers, diversity and inclusion in the workplace aren't a preference. They're a requirement.](#)

Washington Post | Article | Jennifer Miller | 18 February 2021

37% of employees and job seekers said they wouldn't apply to a company that had negative satisfaction ratings among people of color.

[Survey Demonstrates Importance of Post-COVID Workplace Flexibility](#)

HR Daily Advisor | Article | Lin Gensing-Pophal | 17 February 2021

The average employee wants to be able to work remotely at least 2 days a week.

[78% of U.S. workers want their employer to offer online mental health services, survey says](#)

Becker's Health IT | Article | Katie Adams | 16 February 2021

The survey found 78 percent of employees prefer online mental health services over in-person services. It also found 35 percent of respondents wanted their employer to provide access to online mental health services via text or chat.

[Social Networks and Loneliness During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)

Sage Journals | Article | Balazs Kovacs et al | 19 January 2021

We observe a reduction in network size of roughly 16%.

[Shaping the future of work for a better world](#)

JLL | Report | January 2021

The corporate mindset was already shifting, but the pandemic has now hastened the realization that work is not somewhere you go, but something you do.

[The year is over and workers left almost all of their vacation days on the table](#)

CNBC | Article | Jessica Dickler | 31 December 2020

Since March, an overwhelming majority of Americans have shortened, postponed or canceled their planned time off.

[Employee Benefits in a Post-Pandemic World](#)

Corporate Wellness Magazine | Article | 22 December 2020

Workplace benefits have long been a crucial part of an employee's compensation plan; however, the pandemic has highlighted their importance.

[Diverse employees are struggling the most during COVID-19—here's how companies can respond](#)

McKinsey | Article | Kweilin Ellingrud | 17 November 2020

In majority-white countries, people of color (POC) are especially worried about workplace health and safety, as well as career progression and balancing responsibilities at home.

[Training for this workplace skill is up nearly 4,000% in 2020](#)

CNBC | Article | Jennifer Liu | 30 November 2020

Udemy found that, between 2019 and 2020, the number of hours logged for courses that teach anxiety management alone jumped by nearly 4,000%. Demand for courses that teach people other soft skills including resilience and stress management also saw triple-digit growth.

[The role of the remote worker in the post-pandemic era](#)

EY | Article | 27 November 2020

A large majority of employers intend to establish moderate to extensive workplace safety strategies.

[If we rebuild, will they come back?](#)

Deloitte | Article | Steve Hatfield, Susan K. Hogan, Natasha Buckley | 29 October 2020

Business leaders have been rethinking and changing their office spaces, but have they considered how workers have changed?

[Nearly nine of 10 workers want to keep work-from-home option: survey](#)

Reuters | Article | 14 October 2020

Even though only 5% of those surveyed worked from home most of the time before the lockdown, now 87% of workers wanted the ability to choose where, how and when they worked.

[Why Empathy Is a Superpower in the Future of Work](#)

Catalyst | Infographic | 5 October 2020

Employees increasingly expect empathy in their workplaces and see it connected to flexibility, engagement and wellness, and diversity and inclusion strategies.

[Employers Feel More Responsible for Employees' Financial Wellness](#)

SHRM | Article | Stephen Miller | 1 October 2020

Employers are now more likely to address broad aspects of employees' financial lives.

[Work, Reimagined: ManpowerGroup Research Reveals What Workers Want Post COVID-19](#)

PR Newswire | Press release | 27 August 2020

Almost all workers (94%) report concerns about going back to the workplace. Most people agree that work-life balance will be better going forward.

Full report available [here](#)

[HR Execs Reveal How the Pandemic Is Forcing Companies to Rethink Worker Needs](#)

US Chamber of Commerce | Article | Mark Hamstra | 5 August 2020

Managers of remote employees need to boost soft skills, empathy and ‘mental health literacy,’ according to executives from Microsoft, The Adecco Group and more.

[The Impact of Covid-19 on Workplace Inclusion: Survey](#)

Catalyst | Report | 15 July 2020

Employees are skeptical of their employer—they do not perceive that their company is fully committed to taking action to build a more inclusive working environment.