HEALTHY HYBRID:

a blueprint for employers
to achieve post-pandemic
return-to-work success

To understand the future of work and the challenges facing employers, we surveyed 1,000 diverse employees in the US. The sample included employees across the spectrum from fully remote, partly remote, to fully back at the workplace, across industries and age groups. Here's what employers can do:

1. Turbocharge well-being to attract and retain talent

2. Be aware one-size-fits-all approaches to work location are high risk

3. Expect turbulence when establishing new work arrangements

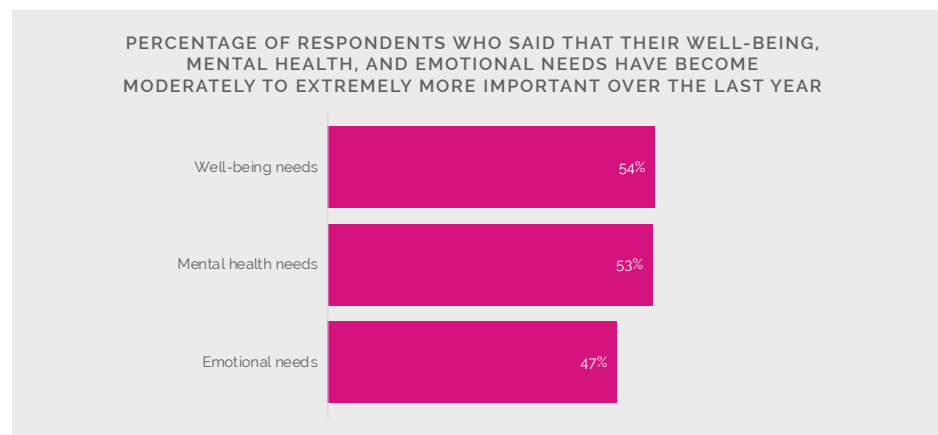4. Take a stance on vaccinations and enable appropriately

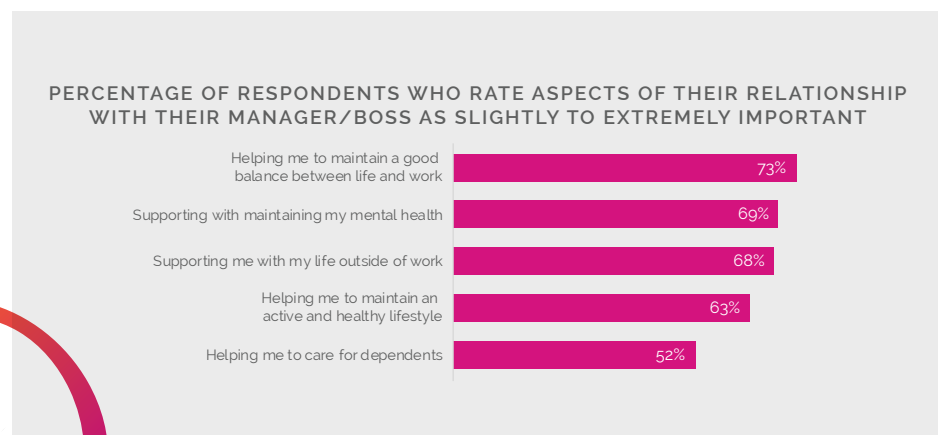5. Mind the generational gap in well-being

1. TURBOCHARGE WELL-BEING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT

23% of workers are moderately likely to extremely likely to leave their jobs in the next 6-12 months

As we emerge out of the pandemic, workplaces have changed, and so have workers' needs. Well-being, mental health, and emotional needs have all become more important in the past year:

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO SAID THAT THEIR WELL-BEING, MENTAL HEALTH, AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS HAVE BECOME MODERATELY TO EXTREMELY MORE IMPORTANT OVER THE LAST YEAR

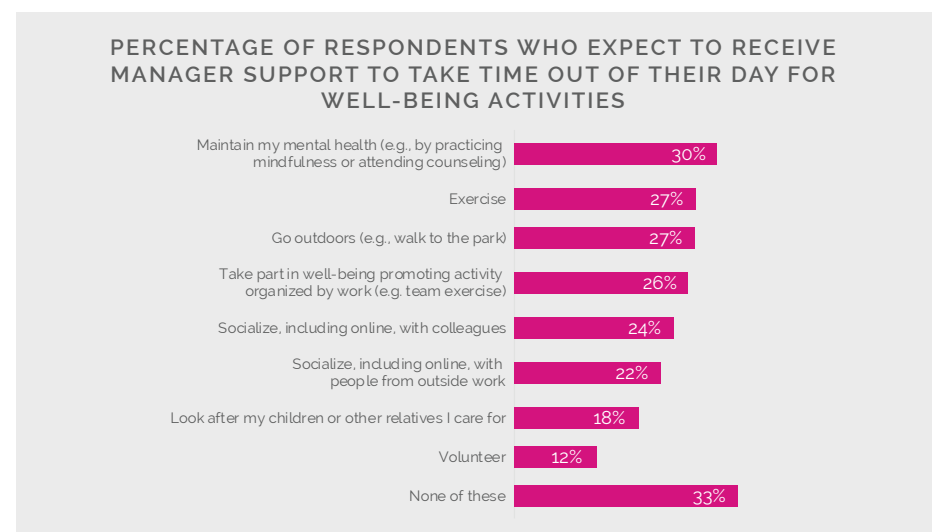|	
Well-being needs	54%
Mental health needs	53%
Emotional needs	47%

Managers play an integral role in meeting these needs. 73% of workers say that their managers helping them maintain a good balance between life and work is an important aspect of their relationship.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO RATE ASPECTS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THEIR MANAGER/BOSS AS SLIGHTLY TO EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

Helping me to maintain a good balance between life and work	73%
Supporting with maintaining my mental health	69%
Supporting me with my life outside of work	68%
Helping me to maintain an active and healthy lifestyle	63%
Helping me to care for dependents	52%

Most workers (54%) said their employers supported their well-being and 53% of employees are satisfied with how their employers handled their well-being during the pandemic. However, a gap exists between employer support versus actual manager support, with workers indicating that they are not receiving sufficient support from their managers for well-being activities.

One in three employees said that they do not expect to receive support from their managers to take time out of their day for well-being activities like maintaining mental health, exercising, looking after children or relatives, and participating in work-organized well-being promoting activities. Social and purposeful elements of well-being are particularly neglected by managers:

- **Caregiving** – Only 18% of employees expect support from their manager to take care of their children

- **Socializing** – Only 24% of employees expect support to socialize with colleagues and even less (22%) to socialize with people outside of work

- **Volunteering** – Only 12% of employees expect support to take time out of their day to volunteer

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO EXPECT TO RECEIVE MANAGER SUPPORT TO TAKE TIME OUT OF THEIR DAY FOR WELL-BEING ACTIVITIES

Maintain my mental health (e.g., by practicing mindfulness or attending counseling)	30%
Exercise	27%
Go outdoors (e.g., walk to the park)	27%
Take part in well-being promoting activity organized by work (e.g. team exercise)	26%
Socialize, including online, with colleagues	24%
Socialize, including online, with people from outside work	22%
Look after my children or other relatives I care for	18%
Volunteer	12%
None of these	33%

1. TURBOCHARGE WELL-BEING TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENT CONTINUED

It's no surprise that 80% of workers say that their employers taking their health and well-being seriously is important for their future career choices. Other factors consistently rated by employees as important for their future career choices include:

- Employer trust in allowing them to manage their time flexibly (80%); remote workers (including hybrid) especially rank time flexibility highly

- Access to generous employee well-being or health insurance benefits (77%)

- Employers taking diversity and inclusion seriously (72%)

While employers may feel they are adapting well to this new normal, worker dissatisfaction remains high, with 23% of workers being moderately likely to extremely likely to leave their job in the next 6-12 months.

PERCENTAGE RATING FACTORS AFFECTING THEIR FUTURE CAREER CHOICES AS SLIGHTLY TO EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

That my employer takes employee health and well-being seriously	80%
That my employer trusts me to manage my time flexibly during the day	80%
That my employer provides generous employee well-being or health insurance benefits	77%
That my employer supports formal flexible working requests	72%
That my employer takes diversity and inclusion seriously	70%
The opportunity to work at least 50% of my hours remotely	61%

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO:

- Prioritize employee well-being and offer generous insurance and well-being benefits to attract and retain talent

- Take an active role in supporting employee well-being across all dimensions of a person's health, including physical, mental, and social, and also allow for employees to take time out of their day for these activities

- Trust employees to manage their time flexibly and get their work done – especially remote and hybrid workers

- Show that the organization views diversity and inclusion as critical by communicating through policies and plans.

2. BE AWARE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACHES TO WORK LOCATION ARE HIGH RISK

◇ **1 IN 3** employees are moderately likely to extremely likely to change jobs if their employer's plan for the way they work doesn't match their preferences
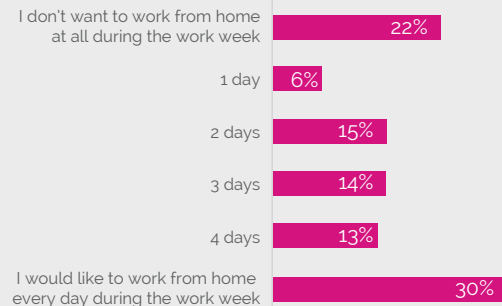
Global lockdowns and strict social distancing forced many employees to work from home. Today, the effects still linger with a myriad of work arrangements in play and an equal split between remote, on-site, and hybrid work locations from our respondents.

1:1:1

remote, on-site, and hybrid

Many have grown accustomed to their new work mode, with work situation preferences mimicking current work arrangements and ranging preferences from individual to individual.

On the other hand, employers are grappling with return-to-work strategies, knowing that some degree of physical connection is vital for forming work relationships, fostering collaboration, creating leadership visibility, and igniting company culture. However, finding where employer and employee needs intersect is complex to navigate but critical to get right. A third of employees say they are moderately to extremely likely to change jobs if their employer's plan doesn't match their preferences.

NUMBER OF DAYS EMPLOYEES WOULD IDEALLY LIKE TO WORK FROM HOME

I don't want to work from home at all during the work week	22%
1 day	6%
2 days	15%
3 days	14%
4 days	13%
I would like to work from home every day during the work week	30%

2. BE AWARE ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACHES TO WORK LOCATION ARE HIGH RISK CONTINUED

When we asked employees about how likely they are to stay in their jobs under different return-to-work strategies, the following results came to light:

45% OF HYBRID WORKERS AND 60% OF REMOTE WORKERS WOULD BE AT RISK OF QUITTING THEIR JOBS IF THEY HAD TO RETURN TO THE OFFICE FULL-TIME

Currently, remote and hybrid workers are more likely to stay in their current job if their working conditions were left up to them, with 63% in each group saying they are either likely or very likely to stay. However, if asked to come back to the office, the situation diverts significantly.

If requested to come back to the office part-time, 42% of hybrid workers and 59% of remote workers would be at risk of quitting their jobs (being only slightly likely to very unlikely to stay in their current jobs). Similarly, if asked to come back to the office full time, 45% of hybrid workers and 60% of remote workers would be at risk of quitting their jobs.

Many remote employees may have adjusted and would prefer to remain remote, while others may have moved locations, making on-site work impossible. So, there is a risk that remote and hybrid employees may leave their jobs if they are not empowered to choose their work location. Recognizing remote and hybrid employee preferences and accommodating them wherever possible is vital to maximizing retention.
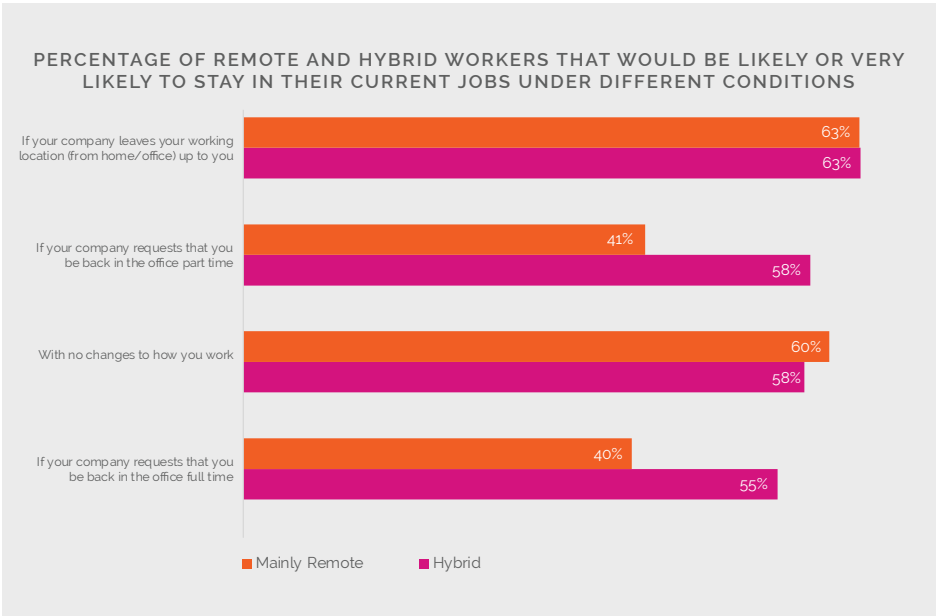
63% OF ON-SITE WORKERS WANT TO REMAIN ON SITE

Workers who are already on-site full-time want to remain so, with 63% likely to very likely to stay in their jobs if their employer requires them to be at the office full time. They prefer this significantly to flexible or part-time at the office, with the percentage who are likely to very likely to stay in their jobs dropping to 52% and 51%, respectively, if their employer implements a hybrid or remote strategy. This may indicate that on-site employees expect difficulty if they or their colleagues are working from home.

PERCENTAGE OF ON-SITE WORKERS THAT WOULD BE LIKELY OR VERY LIKELY TO STAY IN THEIR CURRENT JOBS UNDER DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

Condition	Percentage
If your company leaves your working location (from home/office) up to you	51%
If your company requests that you be back in the office part time	52%
With no changes to how you work	54%
If your company requests that you be back in the office full time	63%

PERCENTAGE OF REMOTE AND HYBRID WORKERS THAT WOULD BE LIKELY OR VERY LIKELY TO STAY IN THEIR CURRENT JOBS UNDER DIFFERENT CONDITIONS

Condition	Mainly Remote	Hybrid
If your company leaves your working location (from home/office) up to you	63%	63%
If your company requests that you be back in the office part time	41%	58%
With no changes to how you work	60%	58%
If your company requests that you be back in the office full time	40%	55%

Mainly Remote   Hybrid

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO:

- A one-size-fits-all approach for returning to the office isn't going to work. While some teams may be required to be on-site full-time, flexibility is needed where people can and are working remotely or hybrid today.
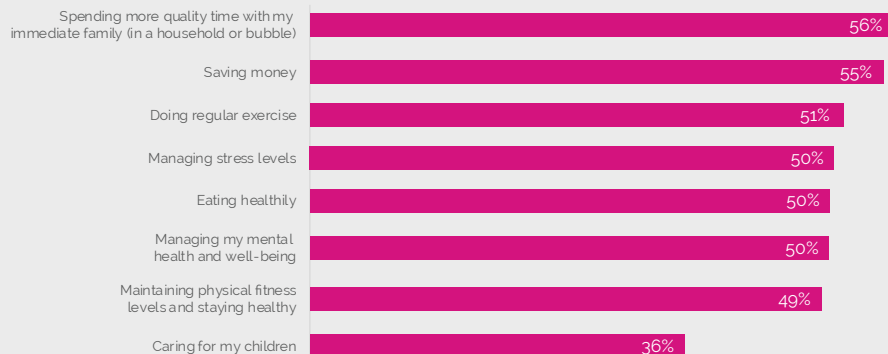
3. EXPECT TURBULENCE WHEN ESTABLISHING NEW WORK ARRANGEMENTS

△ **87%** of people are feeling at least a little anxiety over having to return to a physical work location, and 36% are feeling extreme anxiety
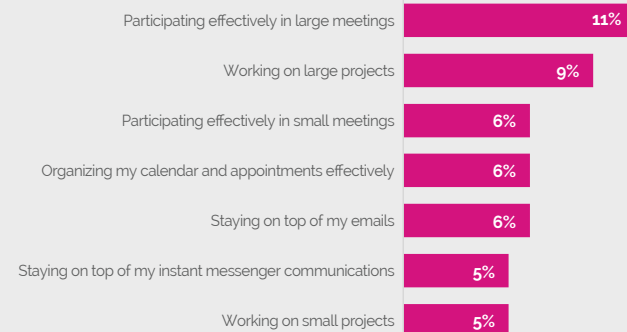
COVID-19 upended our status quo with rapid changes in our work and personal lives. More than 18 months later, the world looks different, and people have settled into new ways of working. Respondents overall now rate their mental health and well-being as being similar today as before global lockdowns.

Although recency bias may be at play in these self-assessments, it shows that people have more-or-less found stability. To add to this, most workers who worked remotely since the beginning of the pandemic found that it made aspects of life easier. Spending more time with family, saving money, and participating in well-being activities was easier, and workers experienced little to no difficulty in workflow and relationship management.

PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS THAT FOUND THE FOLLOWING RELATIONSHIP FACTORS MORE DIFFICULT

Factor	Percentage
Participating effectively in large meetings	11%
Working on large projects	9%
Participating effectively in small meetings	6%
Organizing my calendar and appointments effectively	6%
Staying on top of my emails	6%
Staying on top of my instant messenger communications	5%
Working on small projects	5%

PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS THAT FOUND THE FOLLOWING WORKFLOW FACTORS EASIER

Factor	Percentage
Spending more quality time with my immediate family (in a household or bubble)	56%
Saving money	55%
Doing regular exercise	51%
Managing stress levels	50%
Eating healthily	50%
Managing my mental health and well-being	50%
Maintaining physical fitness levels and staying healthy	49%
Caring for my children	36%

3. EXPECT TURBULENCE WHEN ESTABLISHING NEW WORK ARRANGEMENTS CONTINUED

PEOPLE FEAR HAVING TO ADAPT AGAIN

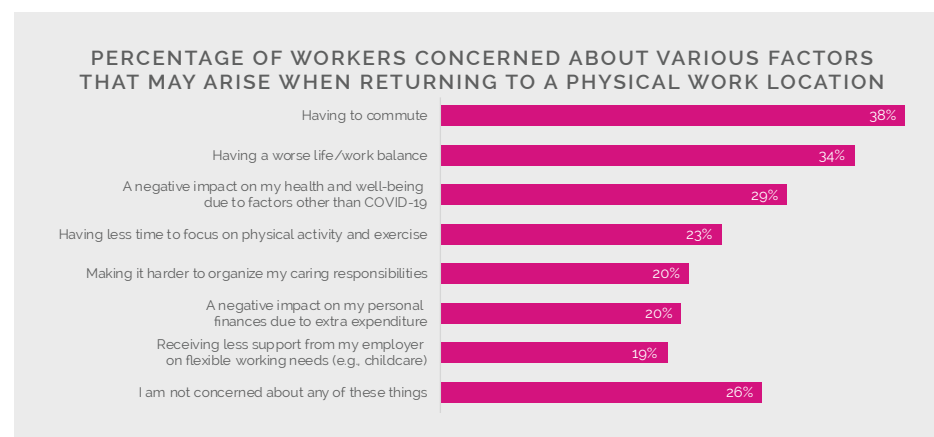When we asked workers how much anxiety they feel about returning to a physical work location, most (87%) feel at least a little anxiety over returning to a physical work location, and 36% feel extreme anxiety. When we split by current work location, it becomes clear that remote and hybrid workers are significantly more anxious about going back to a physical work location. Related to anxiety, 72% of remote workers and 75% of hybrid workers experienced at least some, and 45% of remote workers and 34% of hybrid workers are feeling moderate to extreme anxiety. Those already back in the office have settled and are much less anxious about being back at work, with 56% saying they feel no anxiety about being in the physical workspace, and only 17% express moderate to extreme anxiety.
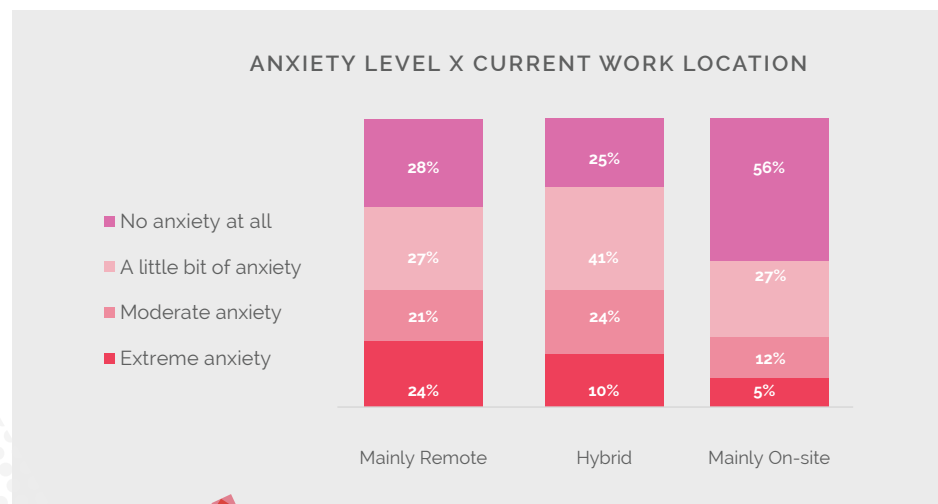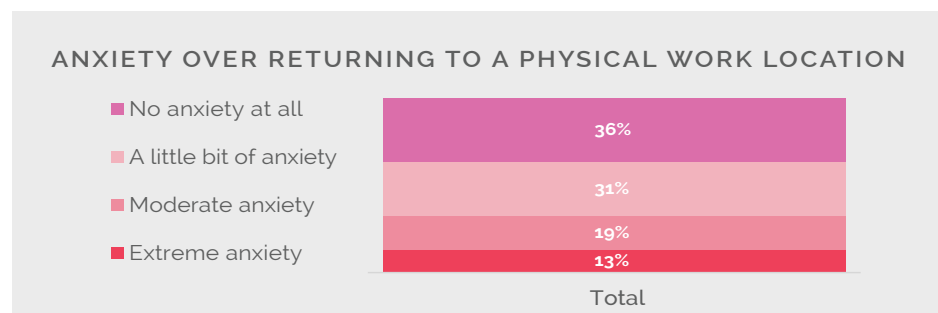
Besides the fear of coronavirus, and despite self-reporting their mental health as fine, these statistics show employees have significant anxiety about the future and having to adapt again. This anxiety may be due to status quo bias, structural life changes, or other difficulties that could emerge like:

- Spending extra time commuting and having less time to create work-life balance and to exercise

- More difficulty in caring responsibilities

- Pressure on finances from extra expenditure

- Concerns over having less flexibility

- Other potential impacts on health and well-being besides COVID-19

ANXIETY OVER RETURNING TO A PHYSICAL WORK LOCATION

- No anxiety at all
- A little bit of anxiety
- Moderate anxiety
- Extreme anxiety

Total
36%
31%
19%
13%

ANXIETY LEVEL X CURRENT WORK LOCATION

- No anxiety at all
- A little bit of anxiety
- Moderate anxiety
- Extreme anxiety

	Mainly Remote	Hybrid	Mainly On-site
No anxiety at all	28%	25%	56%
A little bit of anxiety	27%	41%	27%
Moderate anxiety	21%	24%	12%
Extreme anxiety	24%	10%	5%

PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS CONCERNED ABOUT VARIOUS FACTORS THAT MAY ARISE WHEN RETURNING TO A PHYSICAL WORK LOCATION

Having to commute	38%
Having a worse life/work balance	34%
A negative impact on my health and well-being due to factors other than COVID-19	29%
Having less time to focus on physical activity and exercise	23%
Making it harder to organize my caring responsibilities	20%
A negative impact on my personal finances due to extra expenditure	20%
Receiving less support from my employer on flexible working needs (e.g., childcare)	19%
I am not concerned about any of these things	26%

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO:

- Careful consideration is needed for return-to-office plans, both in how they will work and change management, appreciating the significant anxiety many workers have and the turbulence this may introduce into their personal lives

- Expect additional flexibility needed in the first few months and be sure to provide well-being support.
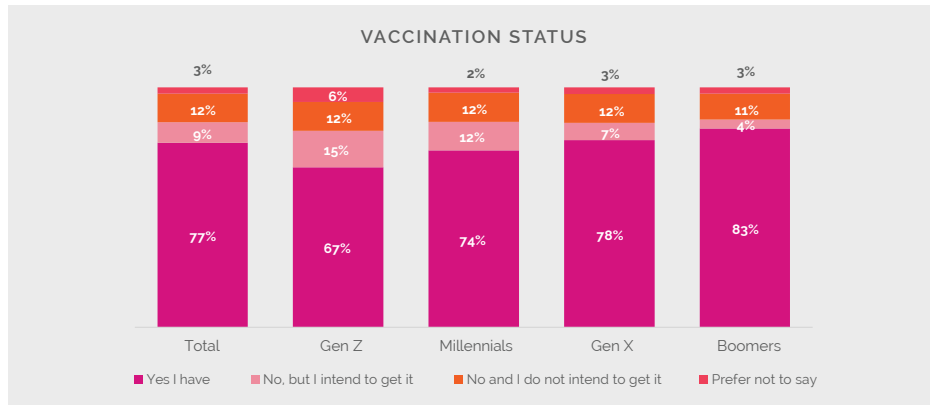
4. TAKE A STANCE ON VACCINATIONS AND ENABLE APPROPRIATELY

☐ **53%** of US employees said they would be more comfortable going back to the office if they knew everyone was vaccinated

While vaccine mandates continue to be controversial and divisive, the evidence that they dramatically increase vaccination rates is compelling. Yet, vaccine hesitancy lingers, and the importance of a clear vaccination policy and a strategy to increase vaccine take-up cannot be overstated.
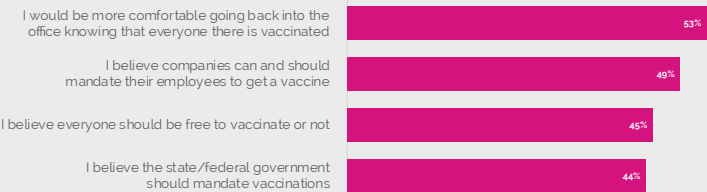
VACCINE TAKE-UP AND ATTITUDES

Over 85% of our respondents have received the vaccine or plan to receive it. When split by generation, older workers are more willing to get the vaccine, with 87% of boomers having either received or plan to receive the vaccine.

VACCINATION STATUS

	Total	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Prefer not to say	3%	6%	2%	3%	3%
No and I do not intend to get it	12%	12%	12%	12%	11%
No, but I intend to get it	9%	15%	12%	7%	4%
Yes I have	77%	67%	74%	78%	83%

■ Yes I have ■ No, but I intend to get it ■ No and I do not intend to get it ■ Prefer not to say

This trend continues into vaccination attitudes. While most people (53%) would be more comfortable going back to the office knowing that everyone is vaccinated, the proportion of senior employees is much higher (66%). While respondents are divided on vaccine mandates, a clear majority (62%) of senior employees feel that companies can and should mandate their employees to get vaccinated.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE VACCINE — AGREE/STRONGLY AGREE

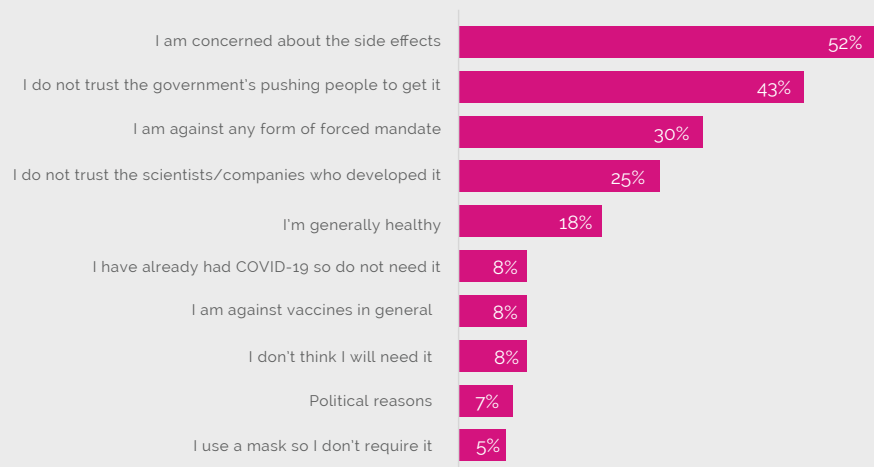|	
I would be more comfortable going back into the office knowing that everyone there is vaccinated	53%
I believe companies can and should mandate their employees to get a vaccine	49%
I believe everyone should be free to vaccinate or not	45%
I believe the state/federal government should mandate vaccinations	44%

VACCINE HESITANCY

Out of those not getting the vaccine, most (52%) cited concern over side effects as their main reason for not getting the vaccine. This is especially true of younger employees, with 68% of entry-level employees concerned about side effects. Other factors listed include mistrust in governments and institutions and opposition to mandates, amongst other reasons.

4. TAKE A STANCE ON VACCINATIONS AND ENABLE APPROPRIATELY CONTINUED

FACTORS CITED AGAINST RECEIVING THE VACCINE

Factor	%
I am concerned about the side effects	52%
I do not trust the government's pushing people to get it	43%
I am against any form of forced mandate	30%
I do not trust the scientists/companies who developed it	25%
I'm generally healthy	18%
I have already had COVID-19 so do not need it	8%
I am against vaccines in general	8%
I don't think I will need it	8%
Political reasons	7%
I use a mask so I don't require it	5%

Those unwilling or reluctant to get the vaccine are much less concerned overall about returning to physical workplaces, with 42% saying they have no concerns about returning to work compared to just 29% of vaccinated individuals.

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO:

• Given the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 vaccines, employers should consider taking a stance on vaccinations to ensure their staff are safe and comfortable at the office

• At the very least, employers must drive vaccine take-up. A variety of measures are available for employers to encourage vaccination. Mandates work well, but other measures are also available, like linking certain benefits to vaccine status (for example, reduced health plan contributions for vaccinated individuals) or through workplace campaigns.

CASE STUDY

**How Vitality helped clients overcome vaccine hesitancy**

76% of people who said they were undecided got vaccinated

Recognizing the important role that Vitality plays in COVID-19 prevention, we asked our members about their vaccination intentions starting in January. Of the 90,000 survey respondents, 70% said they were already vaccinated or planned to get vaccinated. To encourage hesitant or undecided people, Vitality launched a campaign to educate, engage, and incentivize these members. This included motivational and educational communications, personal goals, rewards, linking vaccination status to healthcare contributions, blog posts, and webinars to help people make an informed decision and change behaviors. Vitality also developed a global toolkit with free resources for employer and insurance clients and the broader community.

From the participating vaccine-hesitant pool, 69% increased their willingness to or got vaccinated as of May 28. Additionally, 67% of those with elevated clinical and/or lifestyle risks increased their willingness to get the vaccine. Of those who said they were not planning to get vaccinated who engaged in Vitality, 35% ultimately received the vaccine. Older individuals, females, and members living in urban areas had greater decreases in vaccine hesitancy.

As of October 18, 2021 a total of 165,544 Vitality members have submitted proof of vaccination.

Vitality® | vaccinate together
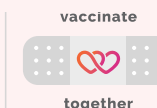
5. MIND THE GENERATIONAL GAP IN WELL-BEING

27% of Generation Z respondents rate their mental health and well-being negatively versus just 10% of boomers

A worrying trend emerges across dimensions when looking at the survey results: younger people are disproportionately struggling.

POORER WELL-BEING

Even before lockdowns, Generation Z fared much worse than other generations in terms of mental health and well-being, with 18% of Gen Zs rating their mental health and well-being as somewhat to very bad, compared to just 7% of boomers. Post lockdown, while other generations have stabilized to pre-lockdown mental health and well-being, the situation has worsened for Gen Zs, with 27% now rating their mental health and well-being as somewhat to very bad.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING SELF-ASSESSMENT SCORES

	Healthy (good/very good)	At-risk (somewhat good/neutral)	Poor (somewhat bad/bad/very bad)
Boomers	55%	36%	10%
Generation X	51%	36%	14%
Millennials	46%	41%	13%
Generation Z	51%	21%	27%

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO ARE MODERATELY OR EXTREMELY SATISFIED WITH DIFFERENT WELL-BEING CATEGOREIS

	Senior-level	Mid-senior level	Mid-level	Entry-level
Social well-being: you have meaningful friendships and relationships in your life	63%	56%	41%	41%
Community well-being: you like where you live	63%	49%	41%	39%
Career well-being: you like what you do every day	64%	49%	40%	34%
Physical well-being: you have energy to get things done	63%	49%	36%	35%
Financial well-being: you manage your money well	62%	51%	34%	34%
Purpose well-being: you feel like you are making a difference in the world	62%	41%	32%	34%

Across well-being dimensions, entry-level employees are much less satisfied than senior employees. While employee percentage of respondents rating their satisfaction with well-being categories as moderately to extremely satisfied, split by employee level dimensions (moderately to extremely satisfied) ranges from 62% to 64% for senior employees, this ranges from 34% to 41% for entry-level employees.
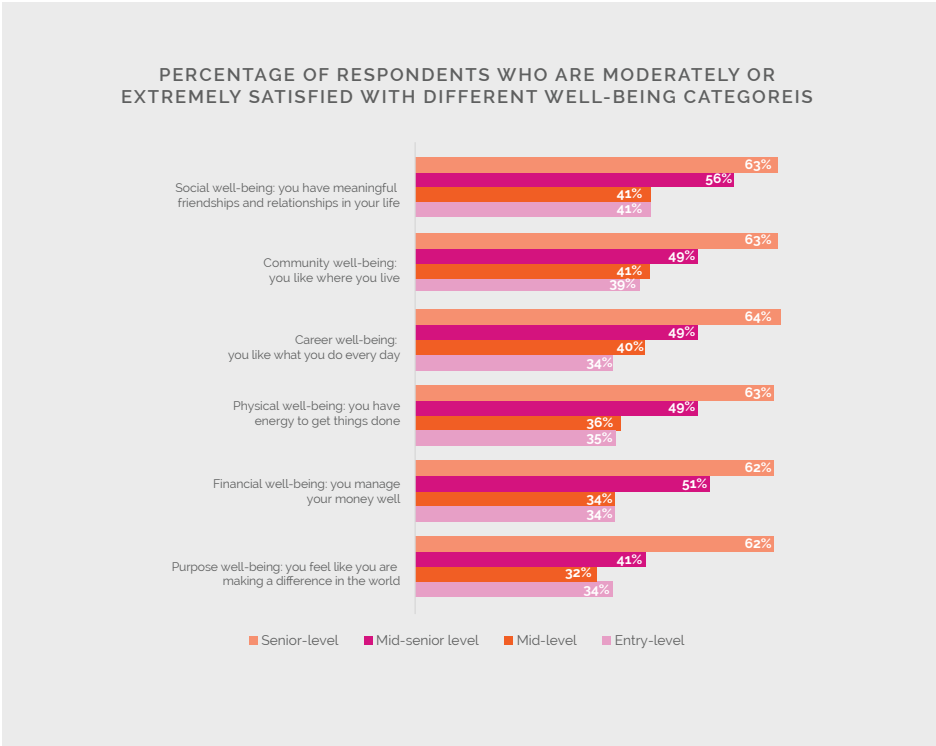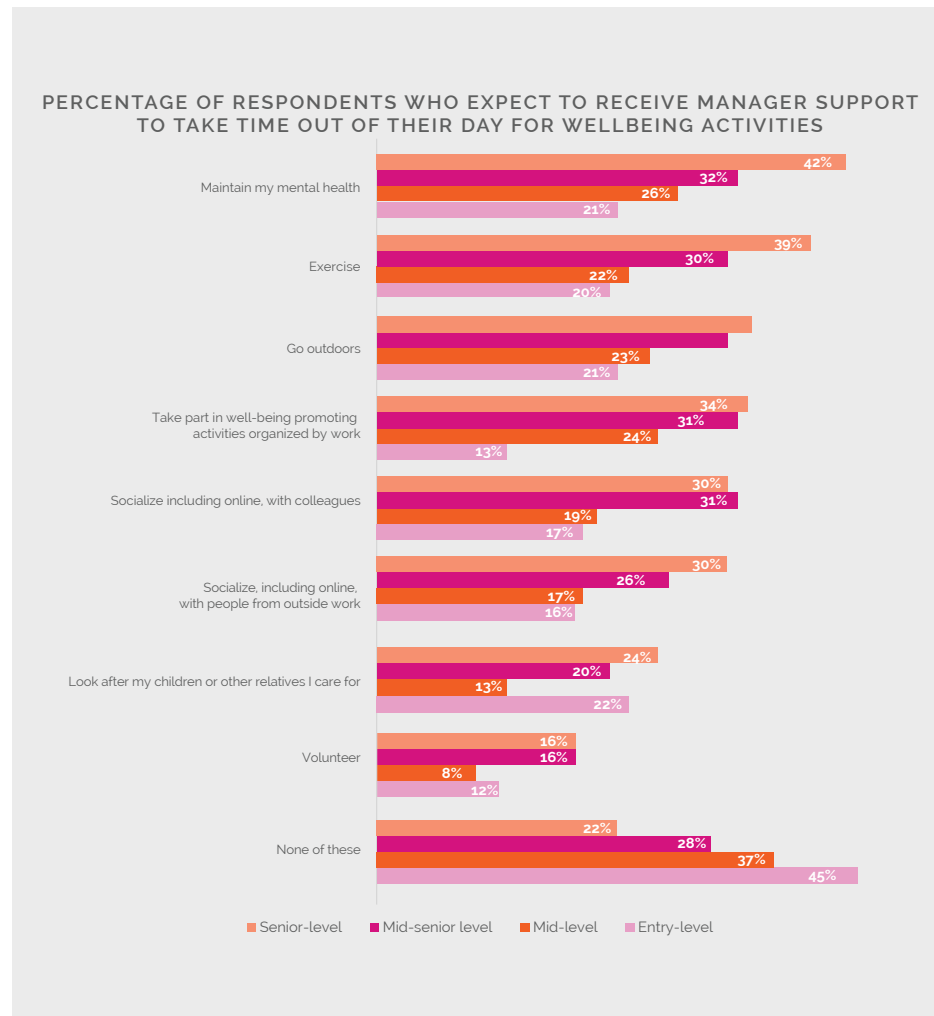
5. MIND THE GENERATIONAL GAP IN WELL-BEING CONTINUED

LACKING MANAGER SUPPORT

Younger, entry-level employees feel significantly less supported by their managers for well-being activities, especially mental health. While 42% of senior employees feel their managers will support them in maintaining their mental health in the future, only 21% of entry-level employees feel the same. These differences are seen across well-being activities, including exercising, going outdoors, participating in work-organized well-being activities, socializing, volunteering, and caring for children and relatives.

When asked what their expectations are of their managers, Gen Zs and millennials expect more from their managers to support their well-being and well-being activities, from maintaining work-life balance to caring for dependents. In addition, when asked to rank the importance of well-being dimensions, Gen Z place less emphasis on financial well-being and more on physical well-being, career well-being and community well-being compared to older generations.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO EXPECT TO RECEIVE MANAGER SUPPORT TO TAKE TIME OUT OF THEIR DAY FOR WELLBEING ACTIVITIES

Maintain my mental health
- Senior-level: 42%
- Mid-senior level: 32%
- Mid-level: 26%
- Entry-level: 21%

Exercise
- Senior-level: 39%
- Mid-senior level: 30%
- Mid-level: 22%
- Entry-level: 20%

Go outdoors
- Mid-senior level: 23%
- Entry-level: 21%

Take part in well-being promoting activities organized by work
- Senior-level: 34%
- Mid-senior level: 31%
- Mid-level: 24%
- Entry-level: 13%

Socialize including online, with colleagues
- Senior-level: 30%
- Mid-senior level: 31%
- Mid-level: 19%
- Entry-level: 17%

Socialize, including online, with people from outside work
- Senior-level: 30%
- Mid-senior level: 26%
- Mid-level: 17%
- Entry-level: 16%

Look after my children or other relatives I care for
- Senior-level: 24%
- Mid-senior level: 20%
- Mid-level: 13%
- Entry-level: 22%

Volunteer
- Senior-level: 16%
- Mid-senior level: 16%
- Mid-level: 8%
- Entry-level: 12%

None of these
- Senior-level: 22%
- Mid-senior level: 28%
- Mid-level: 37%
- Entry-level: 45%

Legend: Senior-level · Mid-senior level · Mid-level · Entry-level

5. MIND THE GENERATIONAL GAP IN WELL-BEING CONTINUED
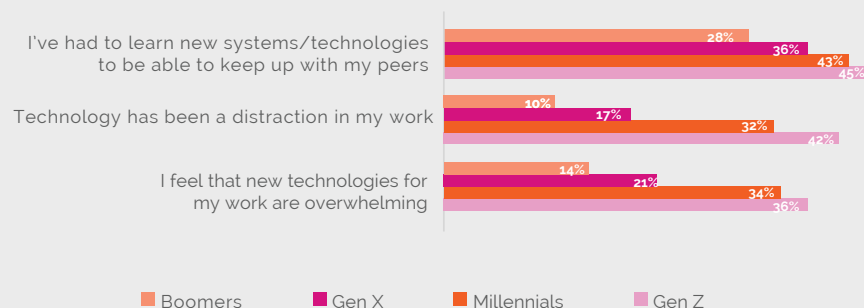
SOCIALLY DISCONNECTED AND OVERWHELMED

Entry-level employees have experienced fewer of the benefits of working remotely compared to more senior employees. For example, while 60% of senior staff felt they could spend more quality time with their immediate family, only 43% of entry-level staff felt the same.

Having spent less time socializing and with family, younger staff are feeling more socially disconnected. This also explains why Gen Z emphasizes community and social dimensions of well-being more than other generations. Combined with poorer well-being and less manager support, Gen Z is overwhelmed.

Most workers feel that technology has helped them achieve more productivity (47%) and have a better work-life balance (53%). However, Generation Z is overwhelmed and distracted by new systems and technology. This is surprising and worrying, given that Generation Z grew up with technology. It indicates that pressures in life and work are compounding to such a degree that additions feel overwhelming and distracting.

HIGHER ATTRITION RISK

The result is that younger generations are more likely to leave their jobs with 27% of Gen Zs and 30% of millennials moderately to extremely likely to leave their jobs in the next 6-12 months vs. just 15% of boomers.

PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS THAT MODERATELY OR STRONGLY AGREE

I've had to learn new systems/technologies to be able to keep up with my peers
- Boomers: 28%
- Gen X: 36%
- Millennials: 43%
- Gen Z: 45%

Technology has been a distraction in my work
- Boomers: 10%
- Gen X: 17%
- Millennials: 32%
- Gen Z: 42%

I feel that new technologies for my work are overwhelming
- Boomers: 14%
- Gen X: 21%
- Millennials: 34%
- Gen Z: 36%

Legend: ■ Boomers ■ Gen X ■ Millennials ■ Gen Z

WHAT EMPLOYERS CAN DO:

- Urgent attention is needed to attract and retain younger staff. Engaging Generation Z and millennials requires an adaptation of strategy compared to previous generations with enhanced well-being support, especially from managers.

CONCLUSION

The world of work looks different. With COVID-19 confining people to their homes, many spent more time with their loved ones, while others were socially isolated. The data indicates that people have adapted to a 'new normal,' even feeling that many components of life have been made easier. However, younger generations are being left behind – struggling disproportionately with their mental health and well-being and feeling isolated, overwhelmed, and unsupported.

As a result, many are reevaluating their careers with worrying levels of workers, especially younger workers, at risk of quitting in the next 6-12 months. Workers are also anxious about what's to come with a fear of having to adapt to additional change. Importantly, a shift in the needs and expectations of employees has occurred. As employers contemplate return-to-work strategies, understanding and adapting to employee needs and expectations and navigating return-to-work challenges is vital to prevent workplace failure.

NOTE ON DATA AND METHODOLOGY:

A total of 1,009 employees were surveyed across a mix of ages from 18 to 65+, with a 70:30 split between roles categorized as 'white collar' and 'blue-collar' and a 50:50 split between male and female. Respondents were diverse across geography and industry in the USA and represented a spectrum of workers across seniority, income group and tenure from small, medium and large businesses. Where questions were posed to the respondent around an opinion, preference, attitude, concern or likelihood where the answer has two dimensions (positive or negative), a seven-point scale was used with 3 positive options (extreme, moderate and slight), one neutral option, and 3 negative options. Data collection and analysis was conducted by an independent company.

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