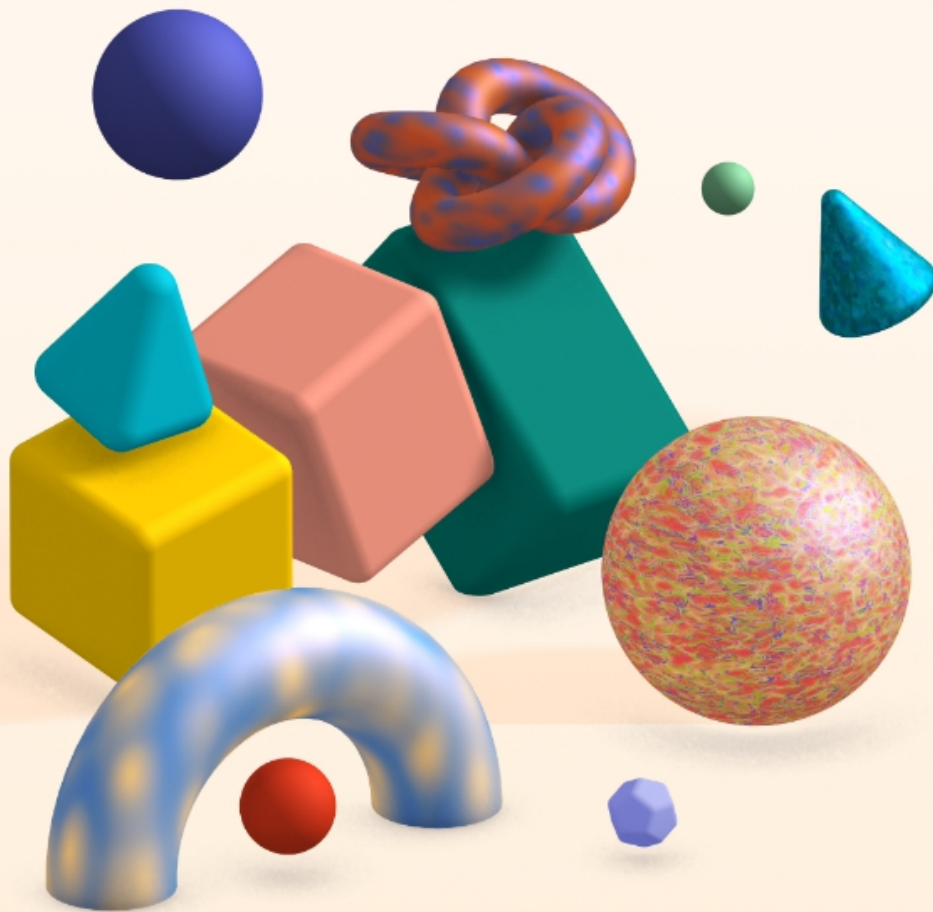


2023 Worker Survey

# The Great Discontent 2.0



Worker priorities are **changing** en masse as we speak.

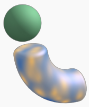
**What can you do** as an employer to maintain that bridge over the chasm of discontent?

## Introduction

The past few years have been nothing short of a roller coaster – this much is true. 2020 was just the beginning. We dealt with the pandemic, political and social upheavals, increased focus on mental health and work flexibility at that time – and we’re now seeing the biggest invasion of a European country since the Second World War, the rise of artificial intelligence as a major tool in day-to-day work, and what feels like an externally impending recession charged with layoffs, restructurings, and considerable dissonance.

This impacts the modern worker’s mindset as well. It’s pertinent for employers to understand the evolving preferences and motivations of the workforce in the United States if they want to continue to connect with new candidates and retain existing employees – and keep them motivated to do well.

We surveyed 750 US-based workers in 2021 to gather insights. We did it again in 2023 to continue to understand the changing preferences, aspirations, and values of employees over the last two years.



### **Stability is paramount – so is compensation**

The data shows a clear trend towards full-time employment, indicating that individuals are seeking stability and security in their work amidst economic uncertainties – and money is a huge part of that.



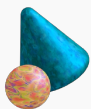
### **Flexy isn't just sexy; it's normal**

While flexible work options surged during the pandemic, it is now balancing out to a new normal – and it's becoming more of a permanent option for many employers.



### **The benefits of flex have crystallized**

Employees love that they get time and money back from not having to commute – and they really like that they can integrate their personal and professional lives.



### **Connect at the core**

When considering new employment opportunities, company culture and relationships with colleagues have grown significantly in importance.

1

# Workers are more employed than before and they're less likely to be looking for new work



### Top 3 takeaways

**Seven out of 10** are now working full time, compared with **55.3%** in 2021

Those “not working” is down from **1 in 5** to **1 in 10** – more due to choice than extraneous factors

**1 in 2** workers are now only passively open to other opportunities, up from **37%** two years ago

In 2023, nearly seven out of every 10 respondents (**69.2%**) report working full time, a sharp rise from the **55.3%** recorded in 2021. This shows increased stability of the US job market now compared with the recent past.



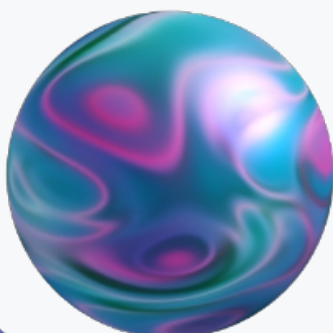
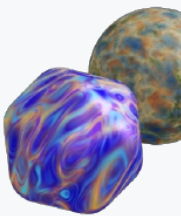
The percentage of those who aren't working dropped from **20.8%** in 2021 to **9.9%** now. But it's not just the raw percentages that tell the tale; it's the reasons behind them. When those respondents were asked why they're not working, they point to personal choices rather than job scarcity or financial pressures.

For instance, the top two reasons for not working in 2023 are family priorities (**31.1%**) and health priorities (**25.7%**), up from **30%** and **18.8%** respectively in 2021.

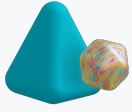
Personal and professional development also more than doubled to **8.1%** in 2023 from **3.8%** in 2021.

Those who say they're actively looking for new opportunities dropped from **33.4%** in 2021 to **22.6%** now – regardless of whether they're currently working or not. This suggests that workers in the US are now more content to be in their current work situation.

That doesn't mean they're not open to new opportunities, though. Those who say they're passively open to new opportunities – i.e. they're open to a conversation or are curious to see what's out there, but not actively hunting for new roles – grew markedly to **51.1%** from **37.3%**.

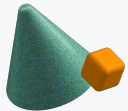


## What can you do?



### **Prioritize your employees' happiness**

The increase in job stability means employers should focus on enhancing retention strategies. This could involve prioritizing employee satisfaction, job security, and providing opportunities for growth and development within the organization.



### **Allow your teams to be flexible**

As personal reasons, i.e. family and health priorities, are leading factors for not working, employers need to consider flexible work policies that accommodate personal needs. This might include offering remote work options, flexible hours, ease of commute, accessibility, or increased family and health support.



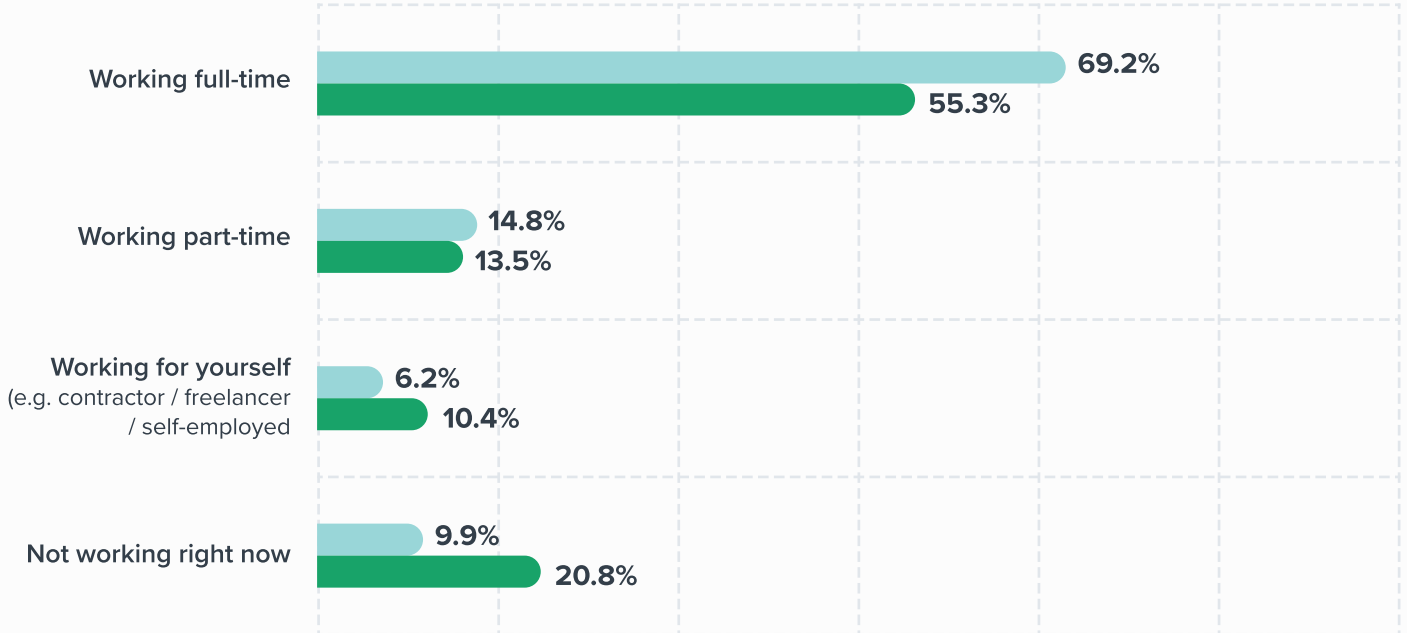
### **Market yourself as a great place to work**

With more than half of the respondents only passively open to new opportunities, employers should work on making their company stand out as an attractive option. This could involve marketing the unique benefits and opportunities of their organization, showcasing strong company culture, and emphasizing their dedication to employee well-being and personal growth.

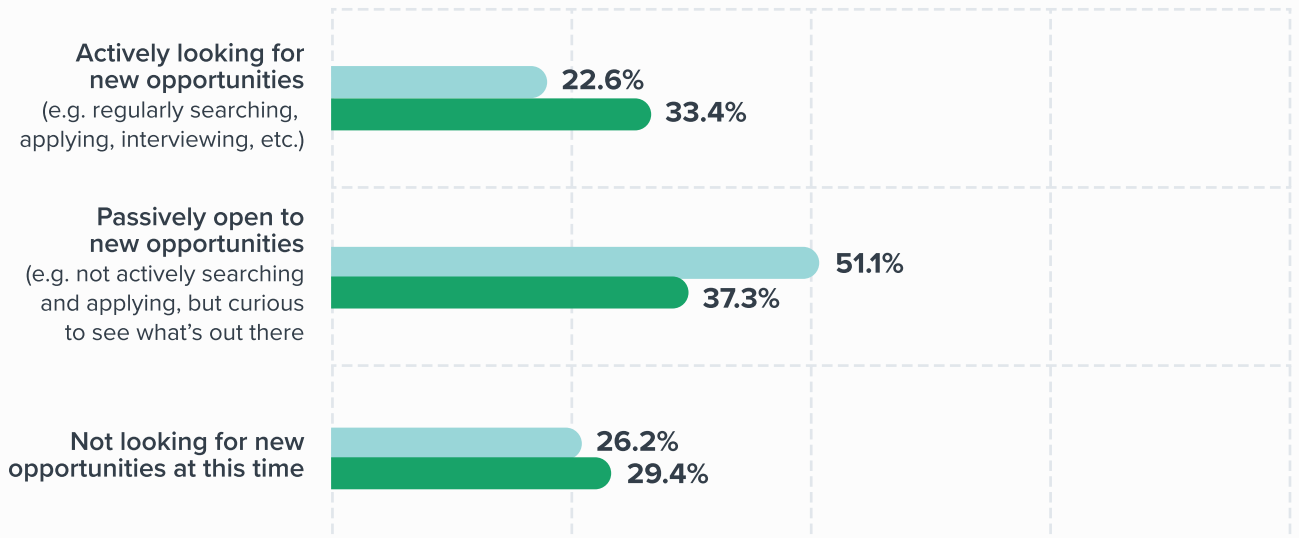


# Results 2023 vs. 2021

## Are you:



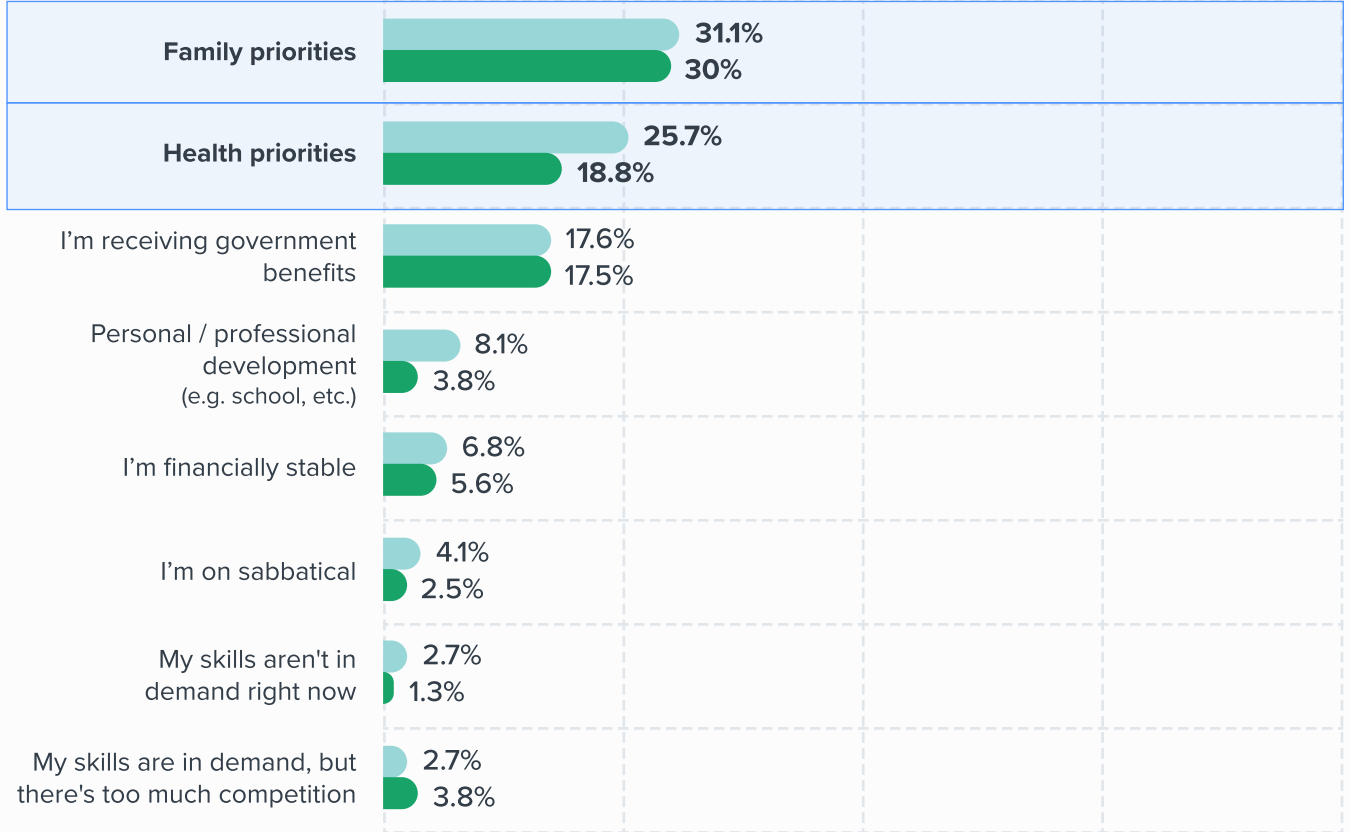
## Regardless of whether you're working or not, are you:





# Results 2023 vs. 2021

## If you're currently not working, why not?





2

# Desire for **stability and security** is growing



### Top 3 takeaways

Job security is more important now, up to **38.6%** from **32.1%** two years ago

Career advancement is growing as a job attractor from **15.8%** to **22%**

**Compensation** is still the top consideration for a job across all scenarios



Job security grew in importance for US workers evaluating new jobs. In 2021, **32.1%** considered job security as a significant factor in what they'd find attractive about a new opportunity – and this climbed to **38.6%** in 2023.

This increase in importance on job security indicates a desire for stability and predictability among workers amidst the uncertainty of the post-pandemic economy. Workers are understandably rattled and want to be able to count on a reliable income stream for the foreseeable future.



That desire for stability can also be identified in the drop in percentage of workers people looking to move to another job and in the growth of workers prioritizing greater security when they do consider a job change.

There's also an increase in career advancement as an attractor to new roles. In 2021, **15.8%** of workers in the US considered this a major factor in changing jobs – that's since climbed to **22%**.

No matter how you look at it, compensation in the form of salary, perks, and benefits is still the overarching priority for all workers regardless of the situation they're in. Comp is also growing in terms of attractiveness when potential candidates are being wooed to a new job – from **62.2%** in 2021 to **68.9%** now.

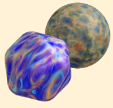
Interestingly, when active jobseekers were asked why they're looking for a new opportunity, compensation dropped in terms of importance from **63.4%** in 2021 to **58.5%** now. Going the other way in terms of new job priority are career advancement opportunities and meaningfulness of work (25% now compared with **20.8%** two years ago) are growing.



Job security in itself is valued hugely. Compensation is part of that – when a worker gets paid more, that's security in the form of personal finance. Even a focus on career advancement can be indirectly related to workers' desire for greater security – people don't want to be just mercenaries brought in to do a specific job with an end date.

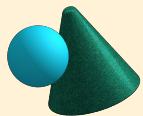
They want to be invested for the long haul. Today's workers are looking beyond the financial aspects of a job, seeking roles that offer intrinsic satisfaction – and security.

## What can you do?



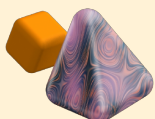
### Promote job security

As job security has grown in importance, employers should communicate the stability of their organization and roles during the recruitment process. This could be demonstrated by showcasing a strong company history, financial stability, and a reliable pipeline of future projects.



### Highlight growth opportunities

With career advancement becoming more important to workers, employers should highlight opportunities for career growth in their organizations. This can be communicated by promoting examples of career progression within the company, mentoring programs, and opportunities for ongoing professional development.



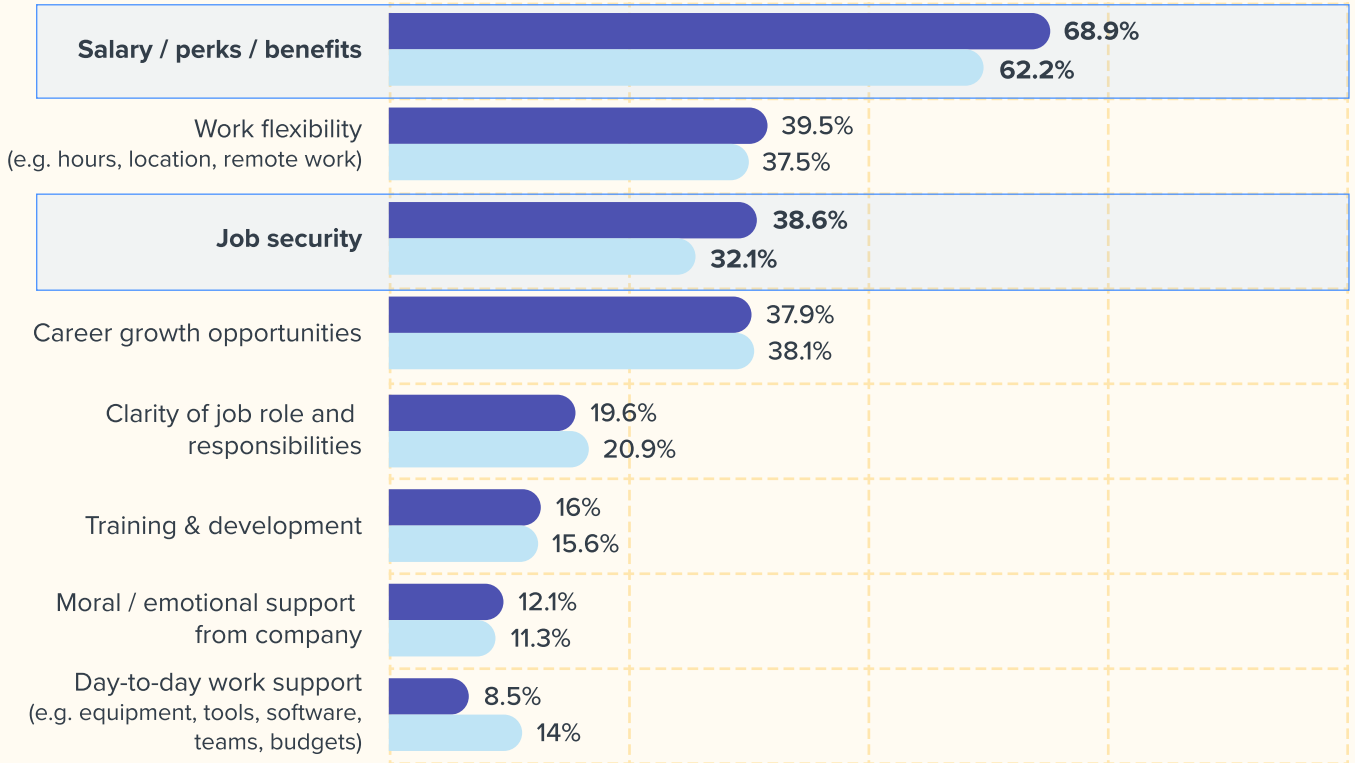
### Keep your salaries competitive

Despite the growth in importance of job security and career advancement, compensation remains key. Therefore, employers should ensure their compensation packages remain competitive, encompassing not just salary but also benefits and perks. This can demonstrate a company's commitment to rewarding and retaining its employees.

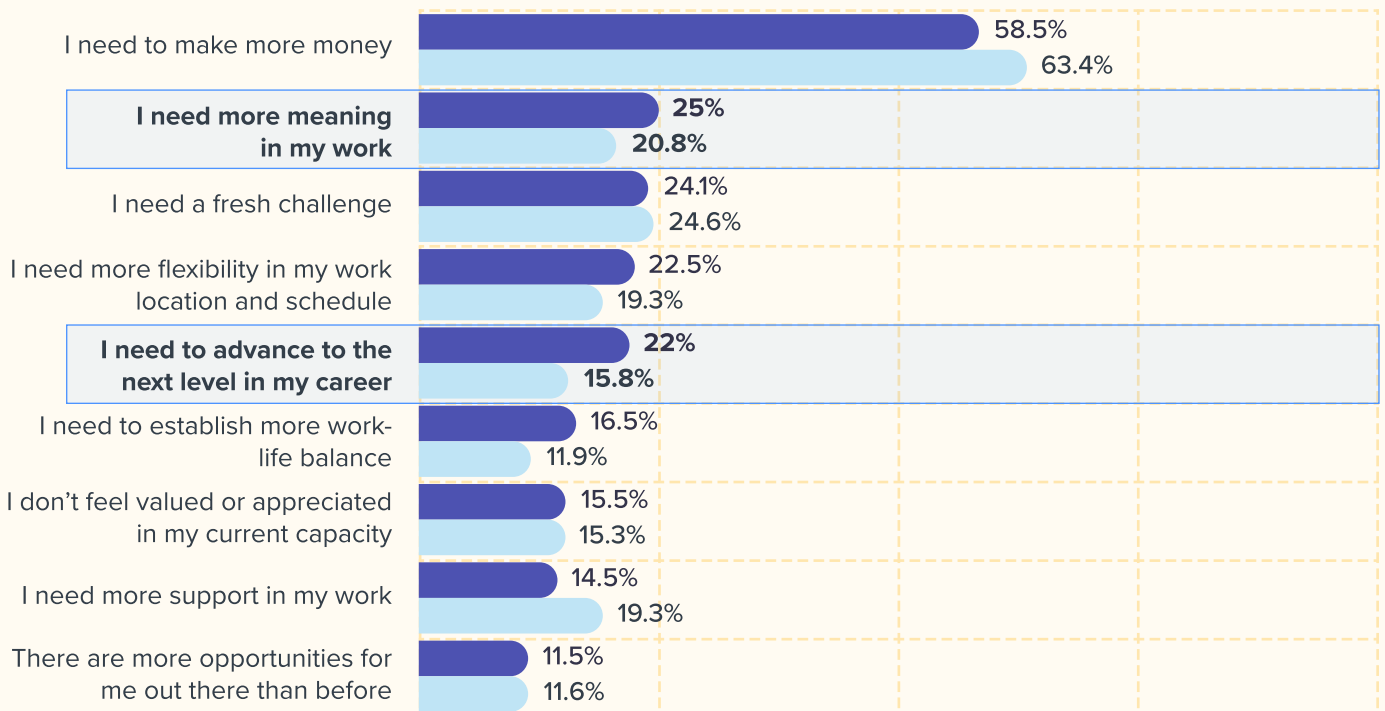


## Results 2023 vs. 2021

In regards to a job itself, what would attract you to a new opportunity?



Why are you looking for – or open to – new opportunities?



3

# Flexwork is more the norm – but it’s scattered



## Top 3 takeaways

Those working fully remote dropped from **58% to 41%** – but most have been doing it for years now

**Flexible schedules** remains steady – and those working on flexible times have increasingly been doing so for years

More employers than before have made overall **flexwork** a permanent feature

Remote work, once a novelty, became a necessity with the onset of the pandemic, and we learned this in our [New World of Work survey in August 2020](#), in which **71.1%** said remote work and distributed teams would be a major paradigm shift moving forward.



However, recent data shows a decline in remote work among US-based workers. The percentage of respondents working remotely is at **41%** now, down 17 points from **58%** in 2021.

But remote work is still far from being a fleeting trend – the prediction of it being a paradigm shift from 2020 onwards is absolutely spot on. We can see this when asking workers how long they've been working remotely – **46.1%** of remote workers have been doing so for more than two years, up from just **13.2%** in 2021. In short, many of those working remotely have been doing so for years now.

Those working on flexible schedules are uncannily similar between 2021 and 2023 – both surveys found that exactly **57.9%** are working on flexible schedules. But again, like remote work, flexible schedules are becoming more of a long term setup now, with **46.5%** saying they've been working on a flexible schedule for more than two years in 2023 – that's more than a two-fold increase from 2021, when **21.9%** said the same.

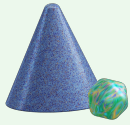
That long-term focus on overall flexibility in working time and location is also evident in employer management strategy. According to the new survey, **36.2%** say their employer has always allowed remote / hybrid work and an additional **24%** say their employer introduced it during the pandemic and has made it permanent.

Flexible schedules also has a stronger precedent to it, with **50.8%** of workers saying their employer always allowed it.

Worth noting is that **26%** say their employer introduced remote work during the pandemic and will likely return to on-location work, and **23.2%** say the same for flexible schedules. Those are not small numbers – many companies are indeed pushing for return-to-office and set schedules.

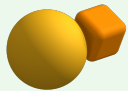


## What can you do?



### Embrace flexibility

The steady demand for remote and flexible work options indicates that these aren't passing fads, but fixtures of the modern workplace. Even as some employees return to the office, it's crucial for employers to maintain flexible work policies. This flexibility could be a deciding factor for talent considering whether to join or remain with your organization.



### Communicate clearly

Employers who introduced remote or flexible work options during the pandemic need to communicate their plans clearly. If the changes are permanent, let employees know. If not, it's equally essential to inform employees about any transitions back to on-site work, providing sufficient notice and support for the change.



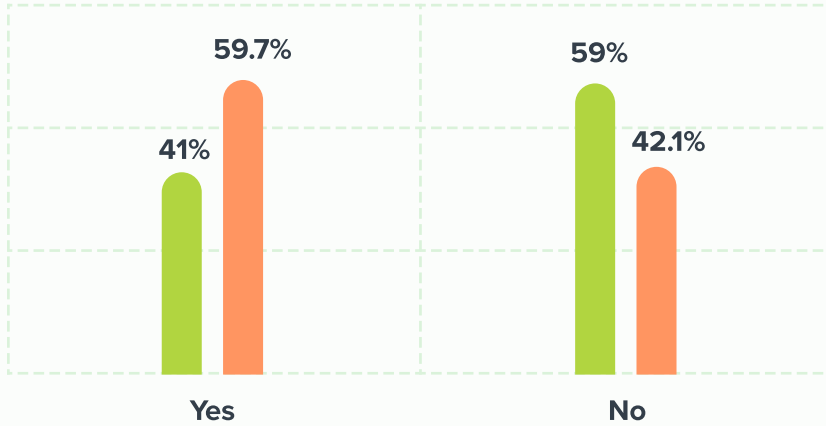
### Re-evaluate and update policies

The landscape of work has changed significantly over the last couple of years. Now might be a good time for employers to re-evaluate and update their policies around remote work and flexible schedules. Consider factors like productivity, employee well-being, and company culture when making these decisions, and ensure the updated policies are in the best interest of both the company and its employees.

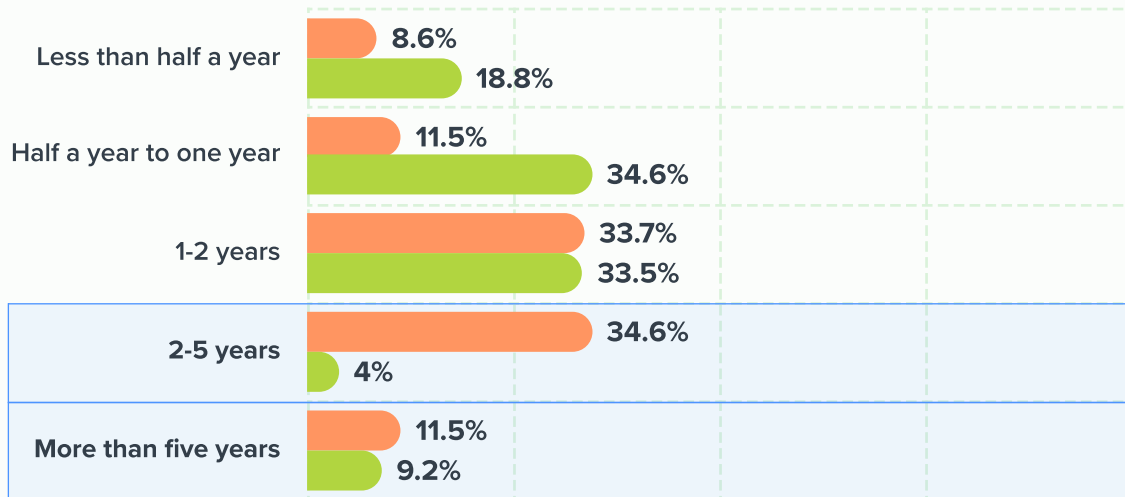


# Results 2023 vs. 2021

Are you working remotely right now?



How long have you been working remotely or in a hybrid setup?

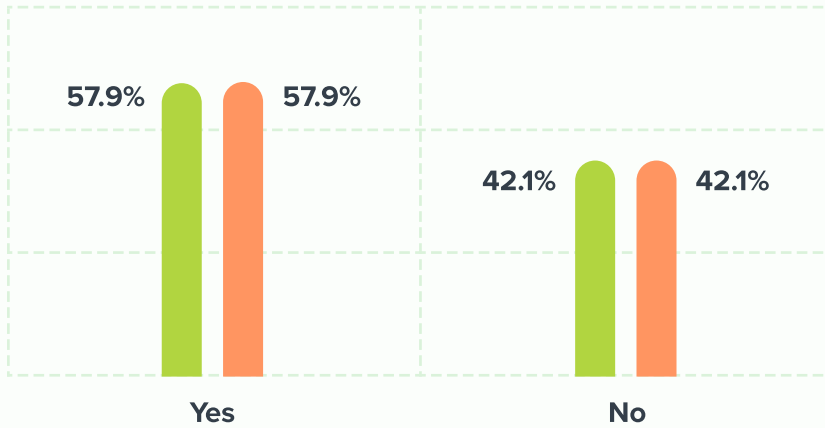




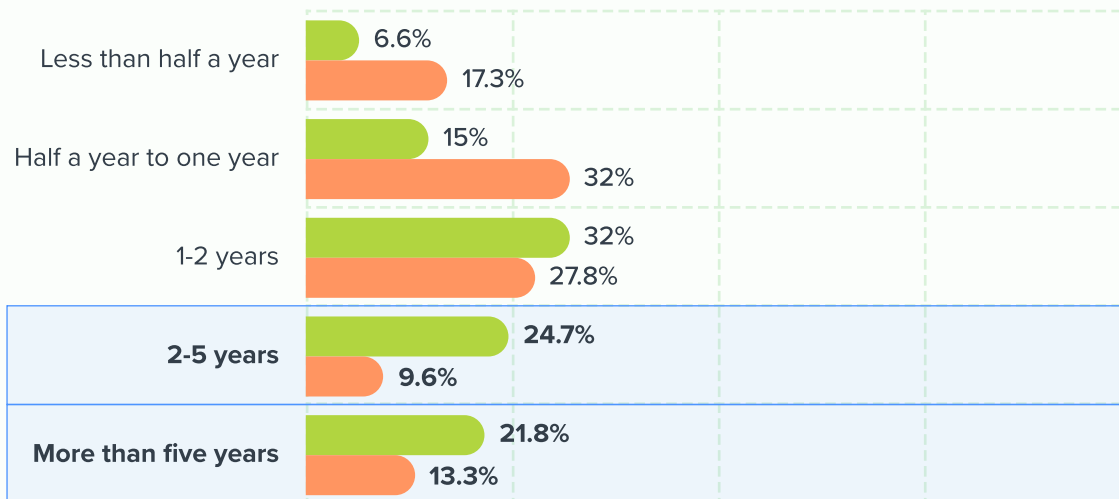


## Results 2023 vs. 2021

Are you working on a flexible schedule right now?

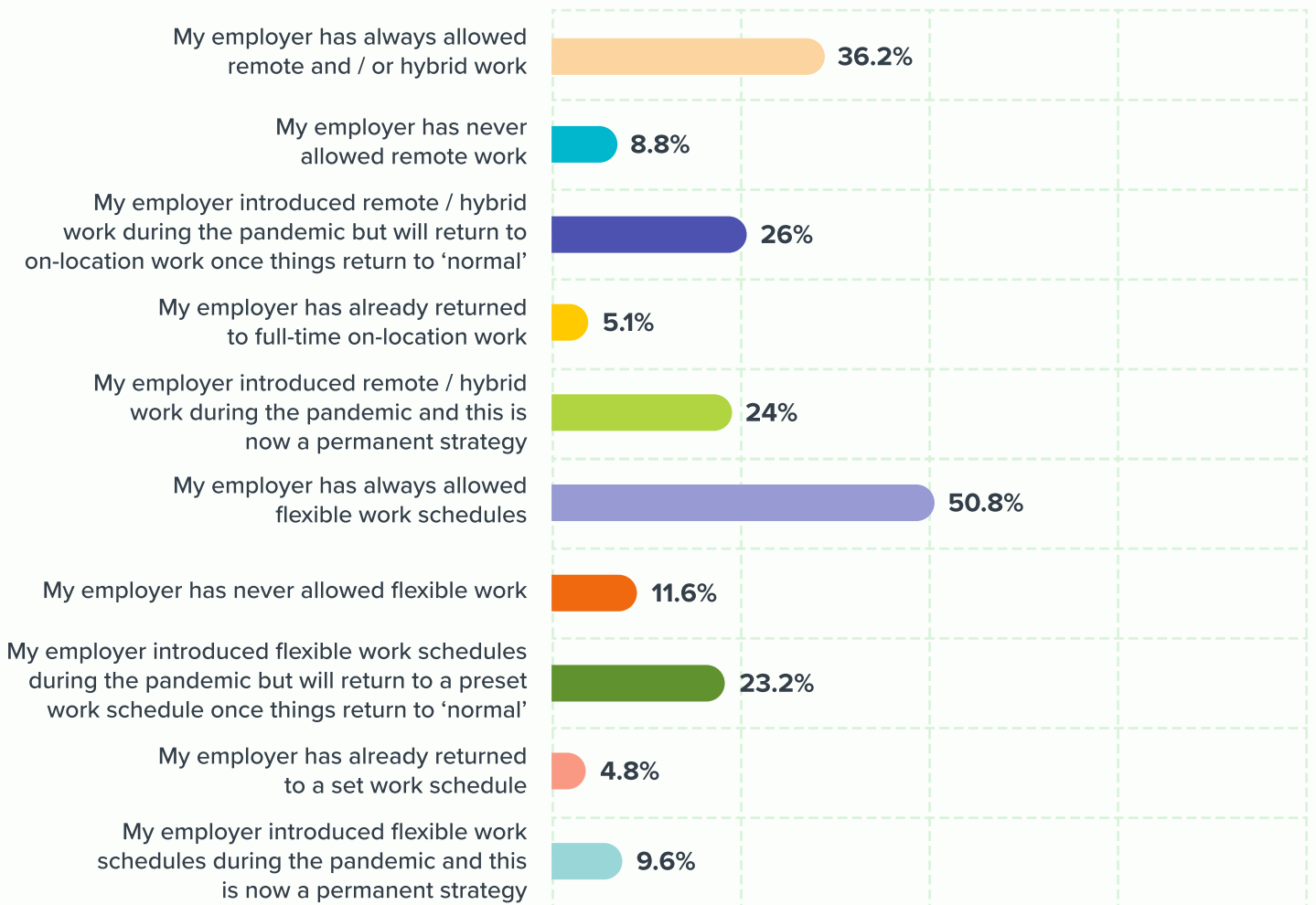


How long have you been working on a flexible schedule?



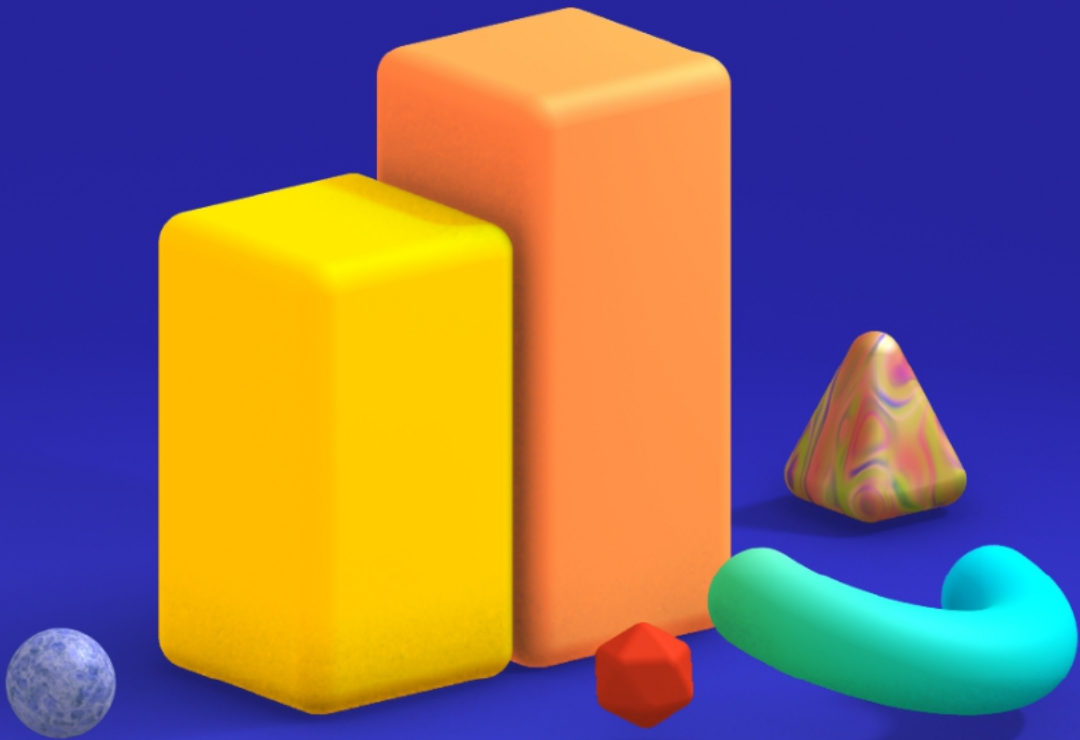


### Which situation best describes your employer? - 2023



4

# The real benefits of **flexibility** are clearer now



## Top 3 takeaways

Work-life integration is growing as a major benefit of flexwork – up to **52.8%** and **66.7%** from **39.7%** and **55.8%** for flexible location and flexible schedules

Saving time and money increasing as a benefit to **45.8%** from **33.5%**

Productivity another bonus on the rise, to **48.6%** from **39.4%**

Both the 2021 and 2023 surveys bring clear conclusions: workers have not only adapted to the remote and flexible work arrangements but also find unique advantages in them. Some advantages have risen to the surface – and sunken to depths – in the two years between the surveys.

Top of the list in terms of remote benefits is the ability to integrate personal and professional priorities – described to us as [“work-life integration”](#) by SmartBug Media CEO Ryan Malone in 2020. More than half of all workers in the US (**52.8%**) picked that as one of the top remote-work benefits in 2023, up 13.1 points from **39.7%** in 2021.

More time in the day is also a major factor. The absence of commuting is a growing highlight of WFH, with 45.8% of workers calling that a major benefit in 2023 – up from **33.5%** in 2021.

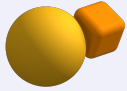
Flexibility in terms of work schedules also saw some changes from 2021 – again, the ability to balance personal and professional priorities grew in importance for workers in 2023, with **66.7%** picking that compared with **55.8%** previously.

We know that different people are more productive at different times of the day. Some are night owls, others are early risers, and some are in between. In that line of thinking, increased work performance is also growing as a benefit of flexible schedules, with **48.6%** of workers citing that in 2023, up from **39.4%** in 2021.

Overall, these shifts reveal an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the advantages of remote and flexible work. Some benefits have become clearer over time. Plus, as workers have become more adept at these arrangements, the benefits have expanded beyond just health and safety considerations to encompass efficiency, flexibility, work-life balance, and financial gains.

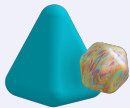
Above all, the increased autonomy that comes with flexwork appear to benefit both the employee and the employer – and that’s worth noting.

## What can you do?



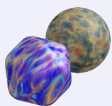
### **Emphasize work-life integration policies**

With the increased emphasis on the integration of personal and professional priorities, it's clear that maintaining work-life balance is more important than ever for employees. Employers need to develop and promote policies that respect and encourage this balance, such as promoting "disconnect time" or offering support for family needs.



### **Reevaluate cost and time-saving measures**

The increase in recognition of cost and time-saving benefits indicates the need for companies to consider how they can facilitate these advantages further. Employers could consider allowances for home-office setup, stipends for utilities, or even "no meeting" days to maximize efficiency.



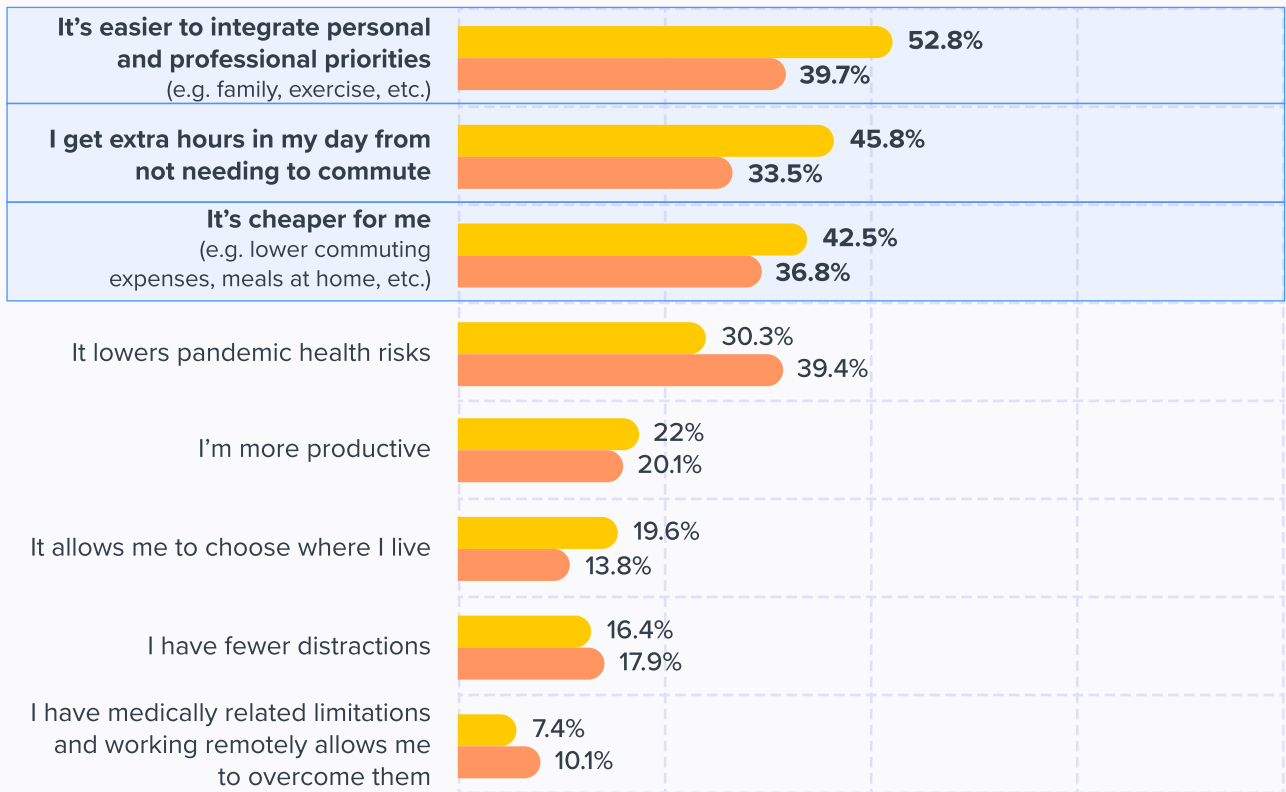
### **Promote autonomy and flexibility**

Given the positive impact of flexible schedules on productivity, it is crucial for employers to promote work autonomy. This could include encouraging employees to work when they feel most productive or allowing flexibility in daily work schedules. Businesses must continue to evolve their practices and policies to align with these changing preferences and needs of their employees.

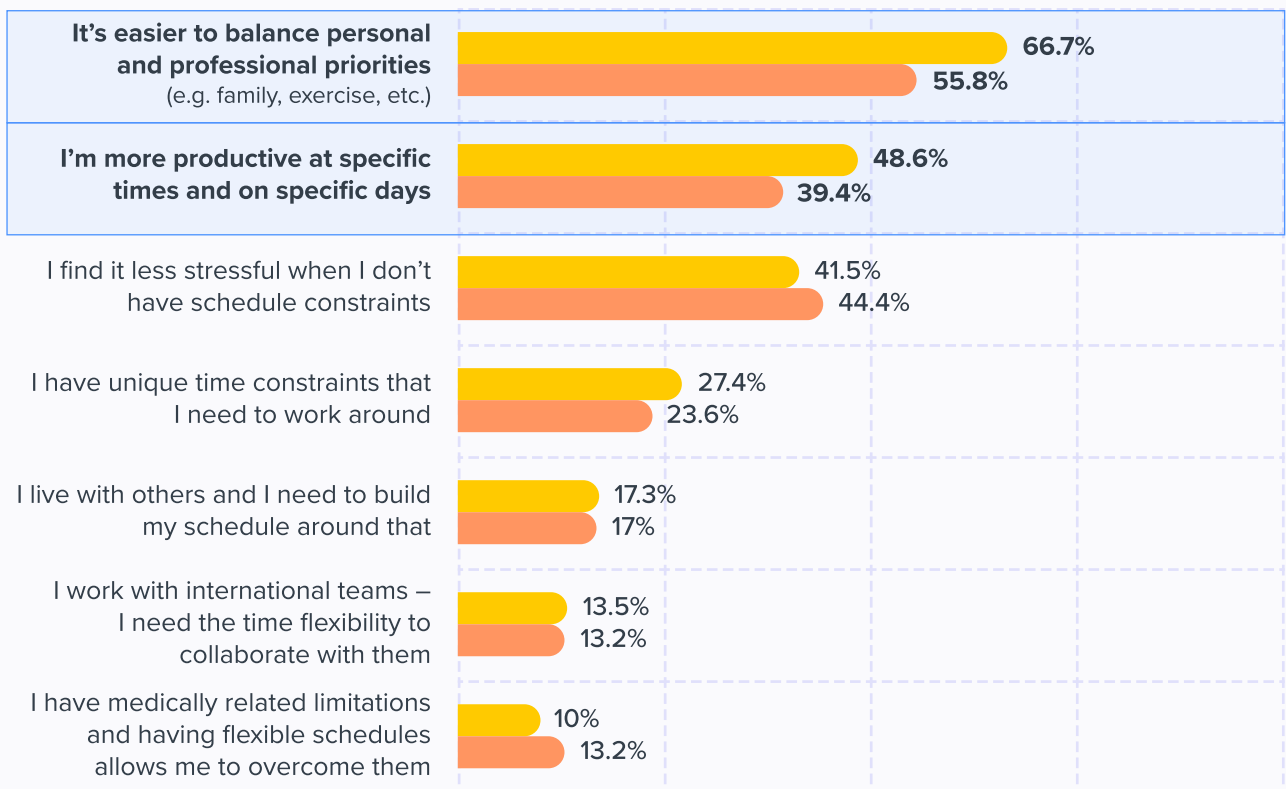


## Results 2023 vs. 2021

From the following list, please select up to three major benefits of remote / hybrid work for you.



From the following list, please select up to three major benefits of flexible work for you.



■ 2023    ■ 2021

5

# The ‘**human factor**’ is more important now than before

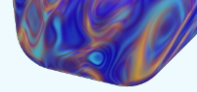


## Top 3 takeaways

**Company culture** emerging as a top factor when choosing a new job – **nearly half** say so now vs. **34.7%** two years ago

**Transparency** and **responsiveness** are increasingly attractive now, growing to **25.4%** and **34.6%** from **18.7%** and **31.3%** respectively

**Worker relationships** remain a key factor – and **corporate leadership** is diminishing in importance



Elements contributing to the **"human connection"** in the modern workplace have surged in importance. This takes place in two forms: the connection of the employee to the company where they're employed, and the connection between colleagues at work.

First, let's look at the employer's part in all this. Nearly half of all US workers (**48.3%**) in the survey ranked "overall company culture" as a major attractor to new job opportunities, up nearly 14 points from **34.7%** in 2021.

**"Company transparency"** also saw a significant bump, from **18.7%** in 2021 to **25.4%** in 2023 in terms of what attracts workers to a new job.

Workers also want to see both of these in their current place of employment. One question we asked survey respondents was whether there was something that could be improved at their job – and of those who said yes, we asked what that would be.

Those workers also highlighted overall company culture (**32.9%**) and company transparency (**24.7%**) as what could be made better at their current job in 2023, compared with **24.7%** and **20.8%** respectively in 2021.

Similar trends can be seen in employee working relationships. While not much higher than 2021's **37.1%**, "relationships with colleagues" remained high at **38.7%** in 2023 – the second-highest attractor when looking at new opportunities.

Interestingly, "management and executive leadership" saw a drop both as a new job attractor (from **33.1% to 28.7%**) and as an opportunity to improve in a worker's current job (from **38.7% to 31.3%**). This points to the growing importance of lateral working relationships in the modern worker mindset – perhaps that's a desire to build stronger connections after years of pandemic-related isolation.



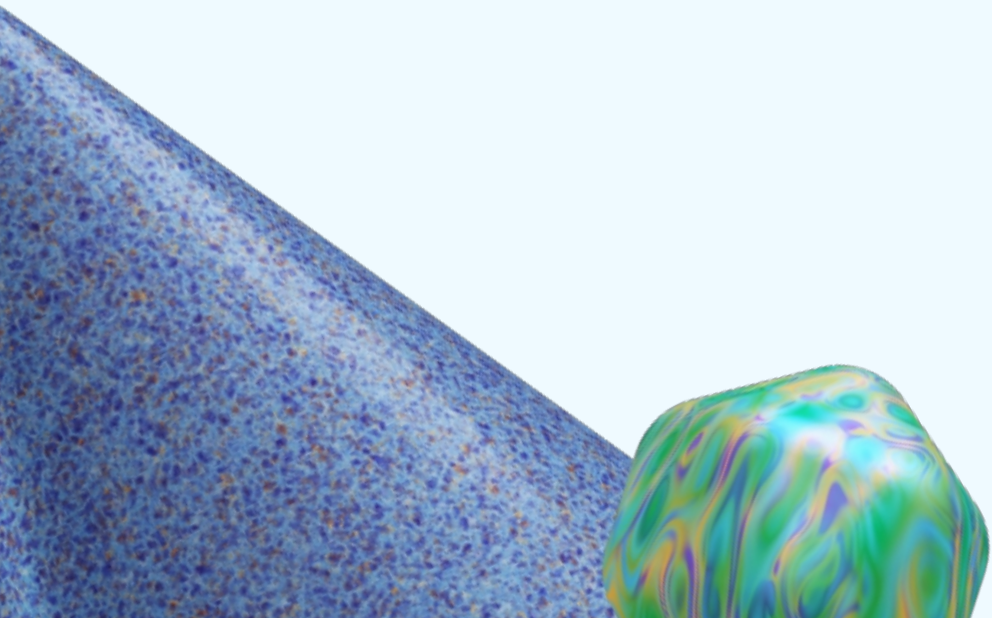
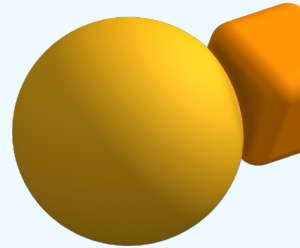




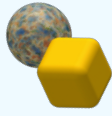
What does all this tell us? Employees are increasingly interested in their organization's decision-making process, in other words **transparency**. They want to know what part they're playing in that larger company vision, and **they also want to feel included**. They also want to feel that they belong – in other words, **DEIB continues to be valuable**.

These shifts also highlight the value of the social aspects of work – i.e. the 'watercooler' – and suggest a power balance shift towards employees who want respectful and supportive environments.

It's understandable, considering the volatility of recent years – and when combined with the greater emphasis on job security above, we're seeing that workers really do covet **stronger professional and social foundations** more now than before.



## What can you do?



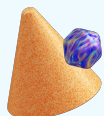
### **Strengthen company culture**

The increased emphasis on company culture calls for organizations to put more effort into defining and communicating their values, ethos, and work environment clearly. Building a supportive and inclusive company culture can serve as a strong attractor for potential employees.



### **Promote transparency and responsiveness**

Companies should strive to be more transparent in their decision-making processes and responsive to individual employee needs. Regular open forums, Q&A sessions with leadership, and timely response to employee concerns can help foster a culture of transparency and responsiveness.



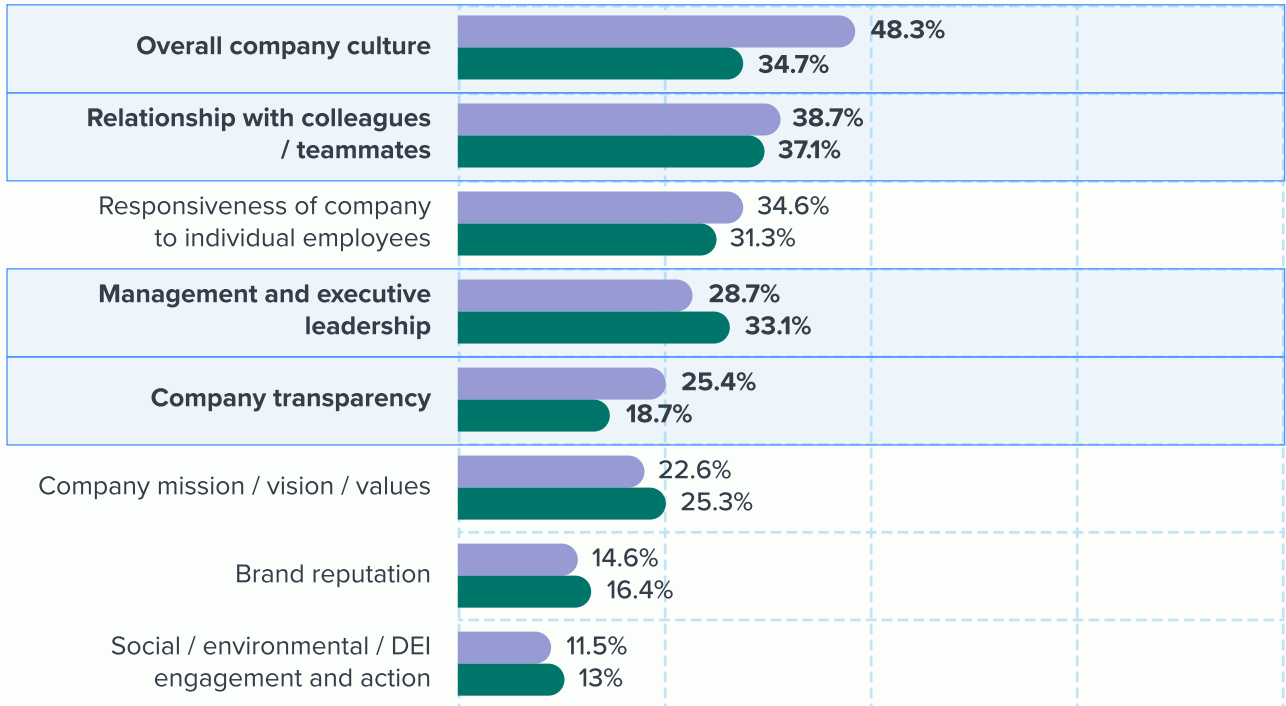
### **Encourage collaborative relationships**

The data suggests that lateral working relationships are growing in importance. Therefore, encouraging teamwork, collaboration, and social interaction among employees could be key. This might include team-building activities, collaborative projects, and providing communication tools that facilitate better peer interaction.

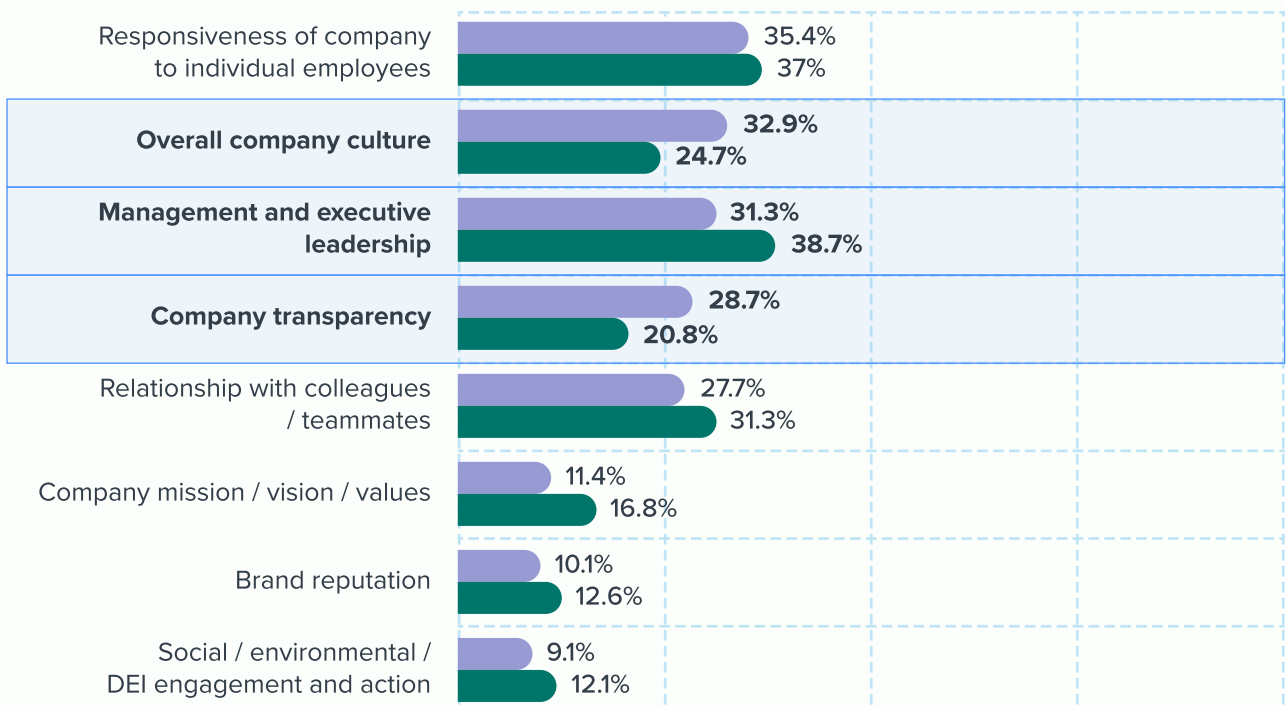


## Results 2023 vs. 2021

In regards to employers, what would attract you to a new opportunity?  
Please select up to three items from the list below.



Ideally, what could your employer improve for a better employee experience? Please select up to three items from the list below.



■ 2023    ■ 2021

6

# Compensation remains a top motivator



## Top 3 takeaways

Salary / perks / benefits is already a top attractor, and even more so now – up to **68.9%** from **62.2%** two years previously

It's growing as a major area for improvement in current jobs too, to **63.7%** from **57.4%**

While money is still a top priority when actively looking for work, it's not as high as before – **58.5%** compared with **63.4%** two years ago

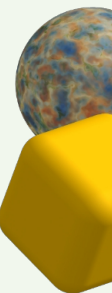
This much is clear: **money talks, and it always has.** Probably always will.

Compensation was already a clear priority for most workers in our 2021 dataset – and it’s even more so now. The percentage of those who picked salary / perks / benefits as one of the major factors that would attract them to a new role grew from **62.2%** in 2021 to **68.9%** in 2023.

And of those respondents who say their current job could be better, **63.7%** point to salary / perks / benefits as a top area for improvement compared with **57.4%** in 2021.

The interesting downturn from 2021 is in the area of why employees are actively looking for new work – “I need to make more money” actually took a dip from **63.4%** to **58.5%** over the two-year period. What does that tell us? When people are looking for new opportunities, it’s not necessarily because of money. It’s because of other things. And with the number of active candidates dropping to **22.6%** from **33.4%**, this is telling us that workers are staying put where they are – it’s safer and more secure in this uncertain economy.

Still, the data resoundingly points to the importance of compensation across the board. Well-compensated employees will be happier, and jobs are more attractive when they pay well.



## What can you do?



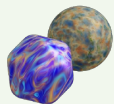
### **Reevaluate compensation packages**

With the increased focus on salary, perks, and benefits, employers should periodically reassess their compensation packages to ensure they remain competitive and attractive. This can involve benchmarking against industry standards and considering factors such as cost of living and inflation.



### **Enhance benefits offerings**

Besides salary, the emphasis on perks and benefits calls for a more comprehensive and enticing benefits package. This could include health benefits, retirement plans, wellness programs, flexible work schedules, remote work options, and professional development opportunities.



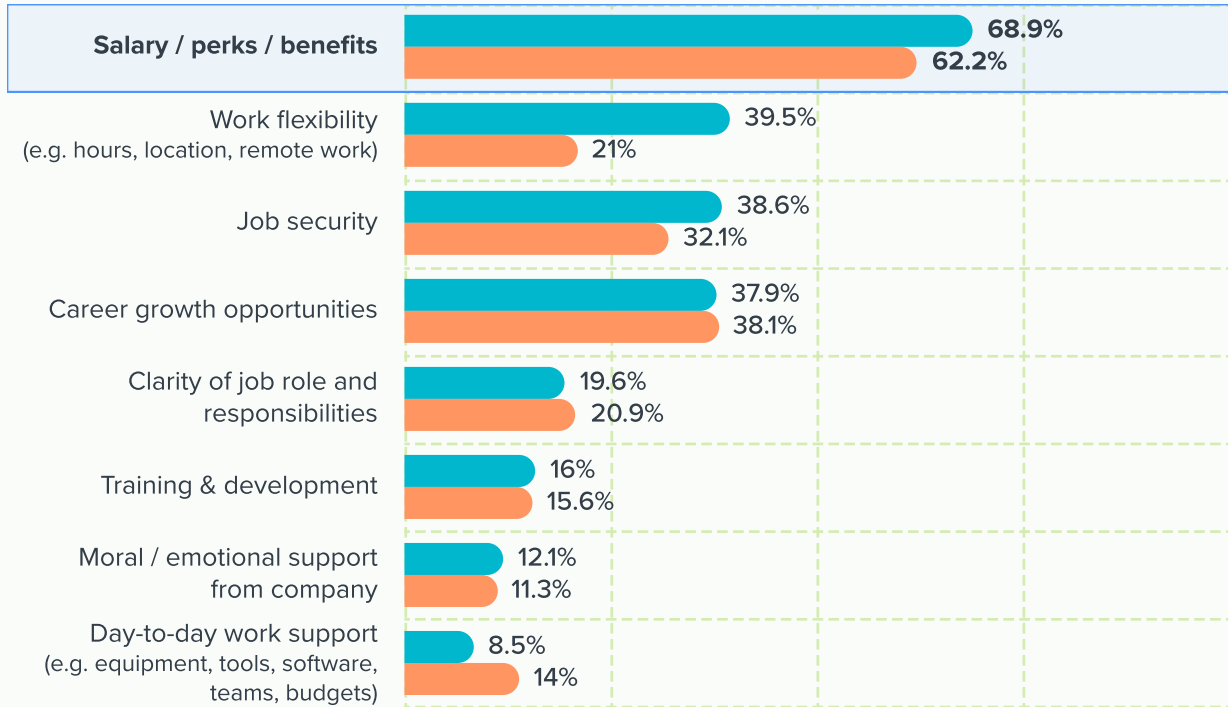
### **Create attractive offers to lure passive candidates**

With a significant rise in the number of passive job seekers, employers need to craft compelling offers to attract this group. This could mean not just offering a competitive salary, but also demonstrating the potential for career growth, a positive work culture, and a strong commitment to employee well-being.

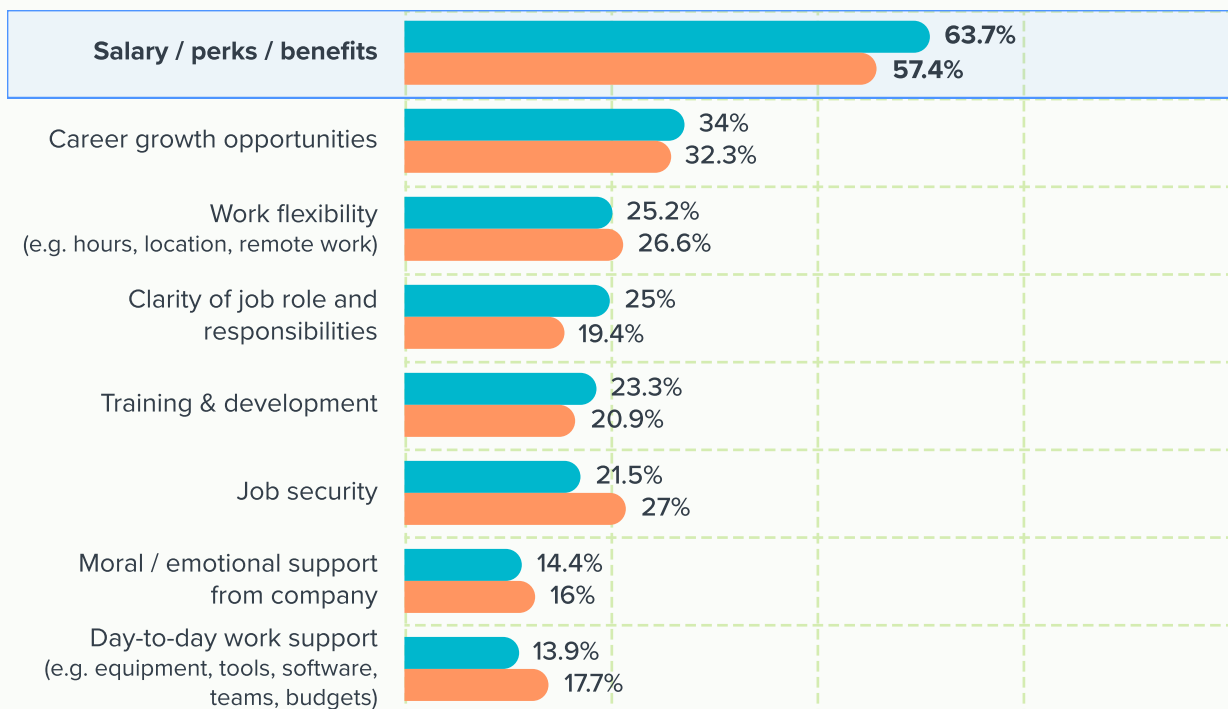


## Results 2023 vs. 2021

In regards to a job itself, what would attract you to a new opportunity?  
Please select up to three items from the list below.



Ideally, what could be improved in your current job for a better employee experience? Please select up to three items from the list below.

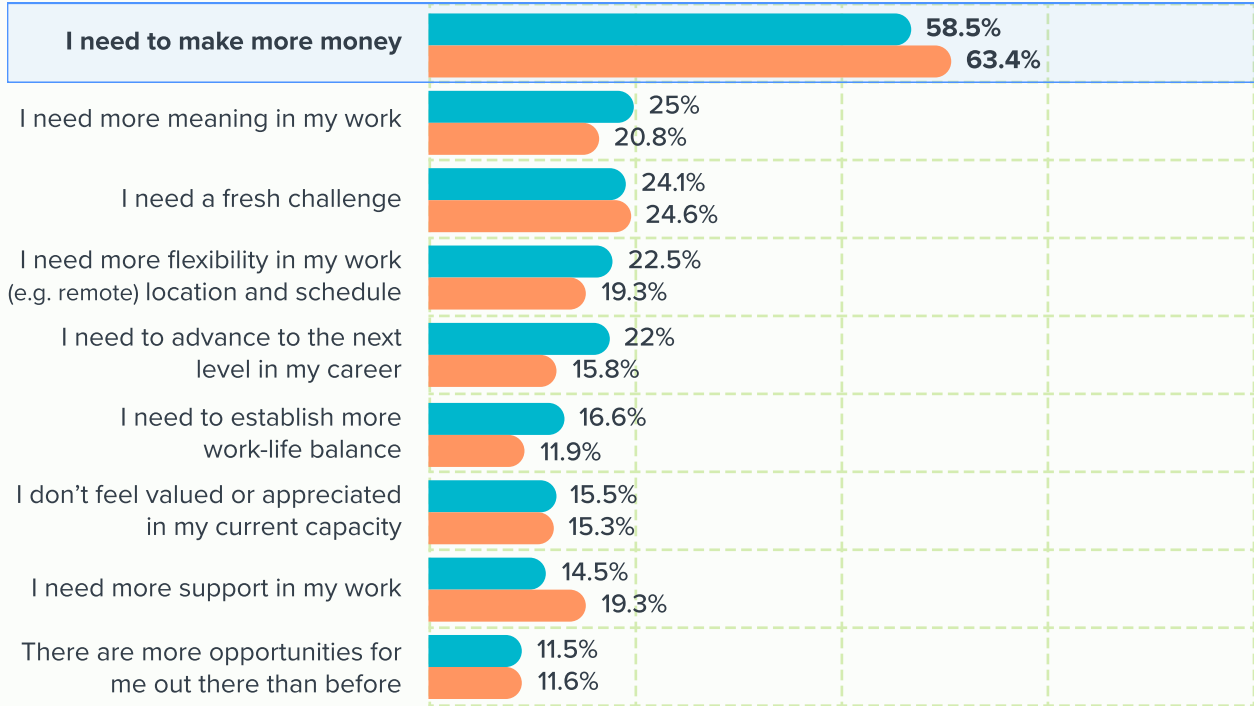




## Results 2023 vs. 2021

Why are you looking for – or open to – new opportunities?

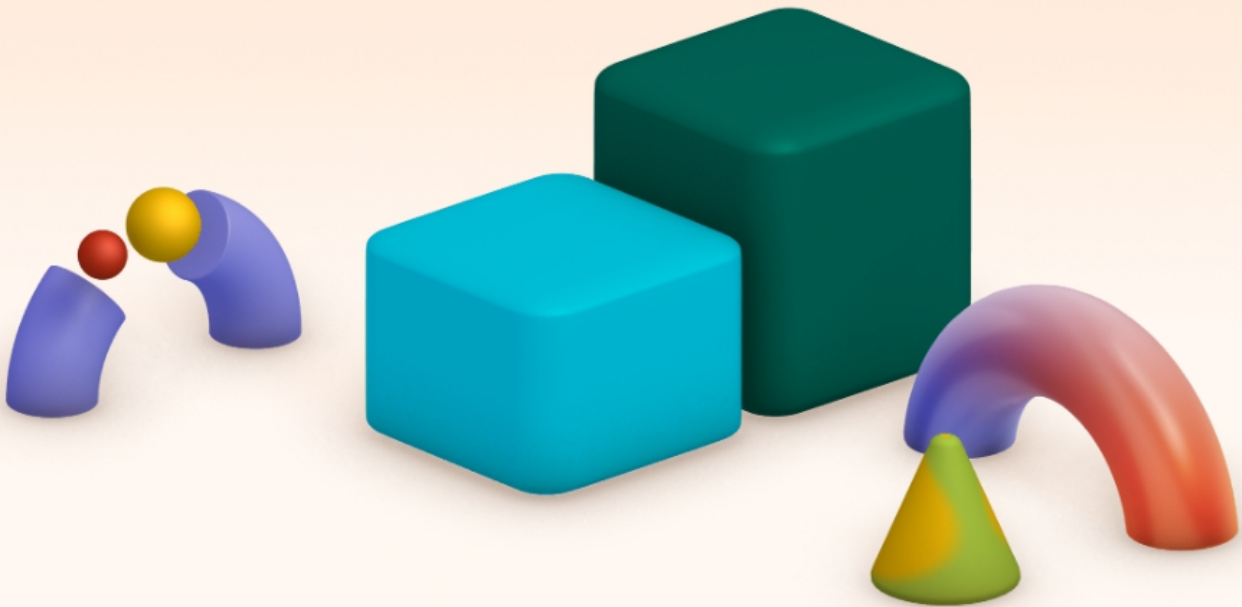
Please select up to three items from the list below.





# 7

## People want to **learn** and **grow**



### Top 3 takeaways

Career advancement is surging as an area of interest for those open to new roles – up to **22%** from **15.8%**

Training & development is also a growing area for improvement in current roles, now at **23.3%** from **20.9%**

Overall and day-to-day support in the workplace is dropping both as a reason for a new job (**14.5%** now vs. **19.3%** in 2021) and as an area for improvement in a current job (**13.9%** vs. **17.7%**)

Still, it's not just about money and balance. Today's workers have a likewise strong appetite for advancement in their careers and acquiring new skills. Growth is on their minds.

Among respondents who said they were either actively or passively open to new job opportunities, **22%** said they want to move to the next level in their careers – and that's up from **15.8%** in 2021.



When asked what would get them interested in a new opportunity, the lure of a better job higher up on the ladder is a major factor for **37.9%** of respondents – largely unchanged from **38.1%** in 2021. They even want to see it in their current area of employment – **34%** say advancement potential is something that could be better in their job, up from **32.3%** in 2021.

Closely aligned with upward career trajectory is the attainment of new skills through learning & development opportunities.

The desire for training and development remained somewhat significant for a little more than one in seven workers – from **15.6%** in 2021 to **16.0%** in 2023 when assessing the appeal of a new job.

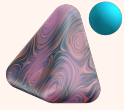
Similarly, training and development as an area of improvement in their current role showed an increase from **20.9%** in 2021 to **23.3%** in 2023.

Worth noting is that the need for more support at work is going the other way – **14.5%** say that's a need they're looking for in a new job compared with **19.3%** two years ago, and **13.9%** say it's an area that can be improved in their current work, down from **17.7%** in 2021.

So, it really isn't only "show me the money". These data points underscore that companies need to focus on creating opportunities for personal and professional growth. Workplaces aren't just workplaces – they ought to be fertile 'growth places' where employees can see a clear trajectory for their professional advancement. The drop in need for support indicates that workers may be feeling more confident, and/or employers have risen to the challenge of supporting their workers through the tumult of the last few years – creating a fertile environment in which employees now feel they can thrive.



## What can you do?



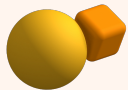
### **Invest in career development**

Workers are expressing a clear desire for advancement. Employers should invest in systems that allow for clear career progression, such as implementing transparent career paths and promoting from within.



### **Emphasize growth opportunities**

The potential for advancement is a key factor in attracting new talent. During the hiring process, communicate the potential for growth in the role and within the organization to entice potential candidates.



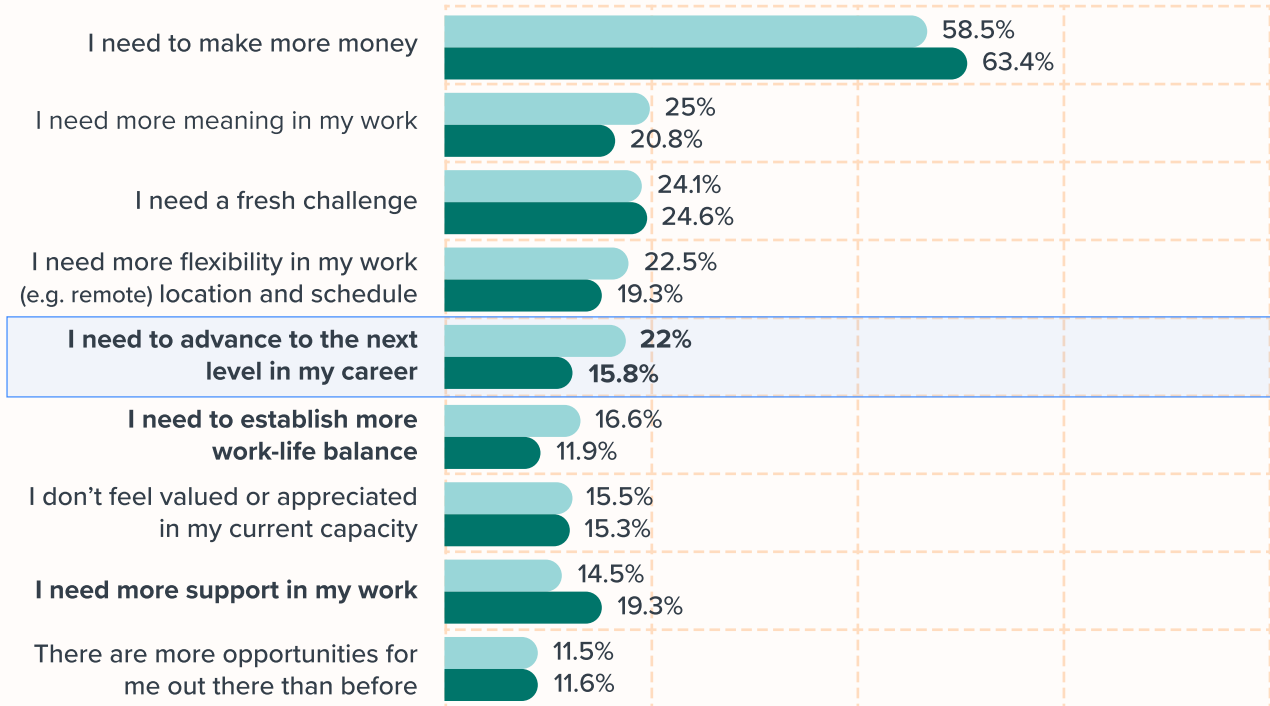
### **Enhance training and development**

Continuous learning and skills development are increasingly crucial for job attractiveness. Companies should enhance their training and development opportunities, offering tailored programs and resources for employees to upskill and reskill. This not only attracts new talent but also retains current employees by making them feel valued and invested in.

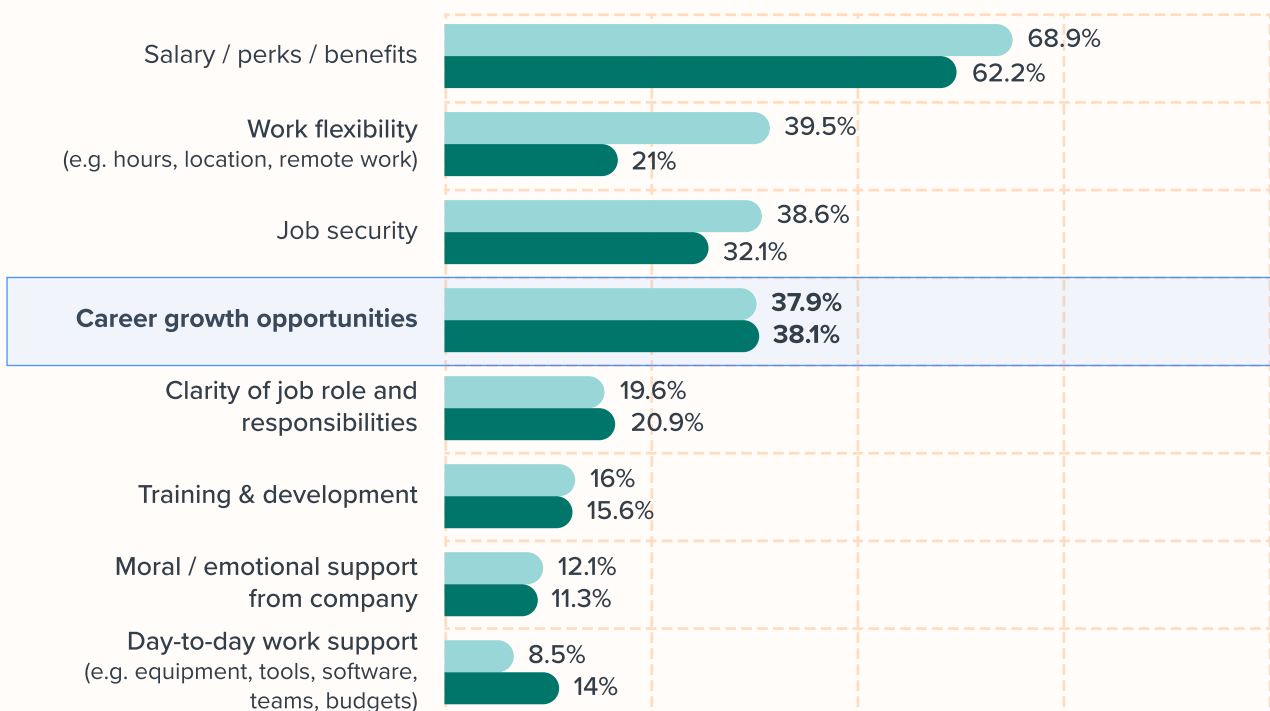


## Results 2023 vs. 2021

**Why are you looking for – or open to – new opportunities?  
Please select up to three items from the list below.**



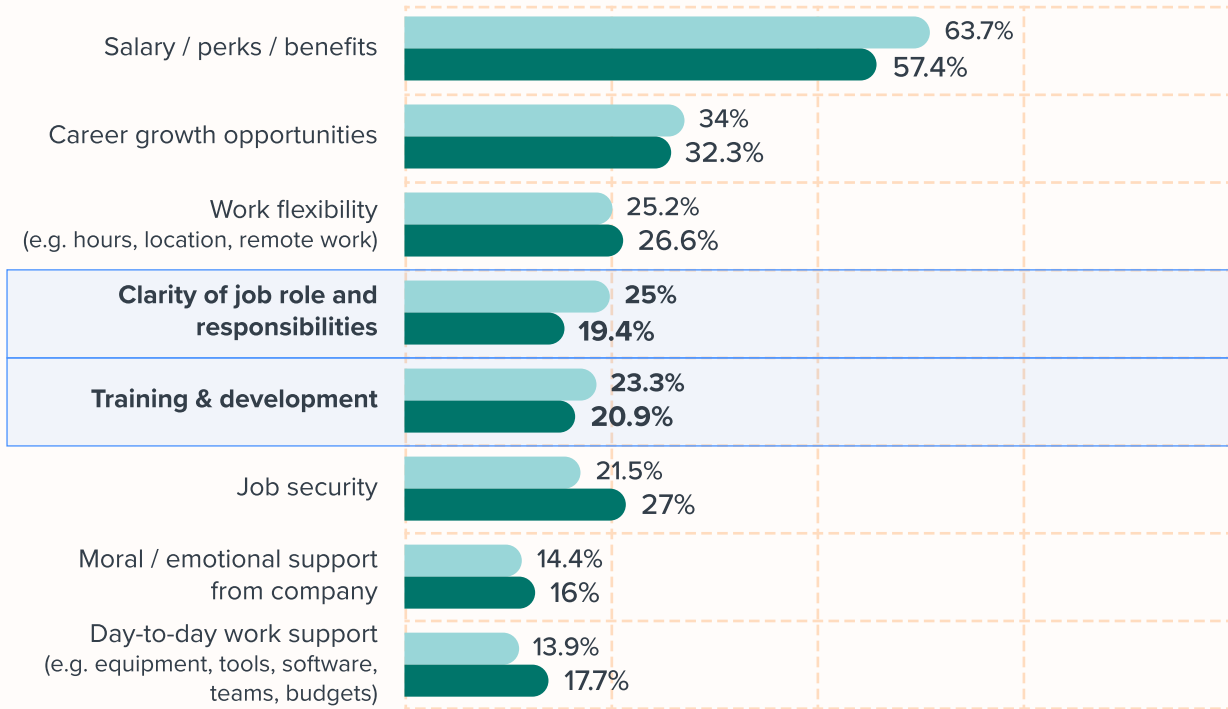
**In regards to a job itself, what would attract you to a new opportunity?  
Please select up to three items from the list below.**





## Results 2023 vs. 2021

Ideally, what could be improved in your current job for a better employee experience? Please select up to three items from the list below.



8

The **most significant** shifts  
in our dataset



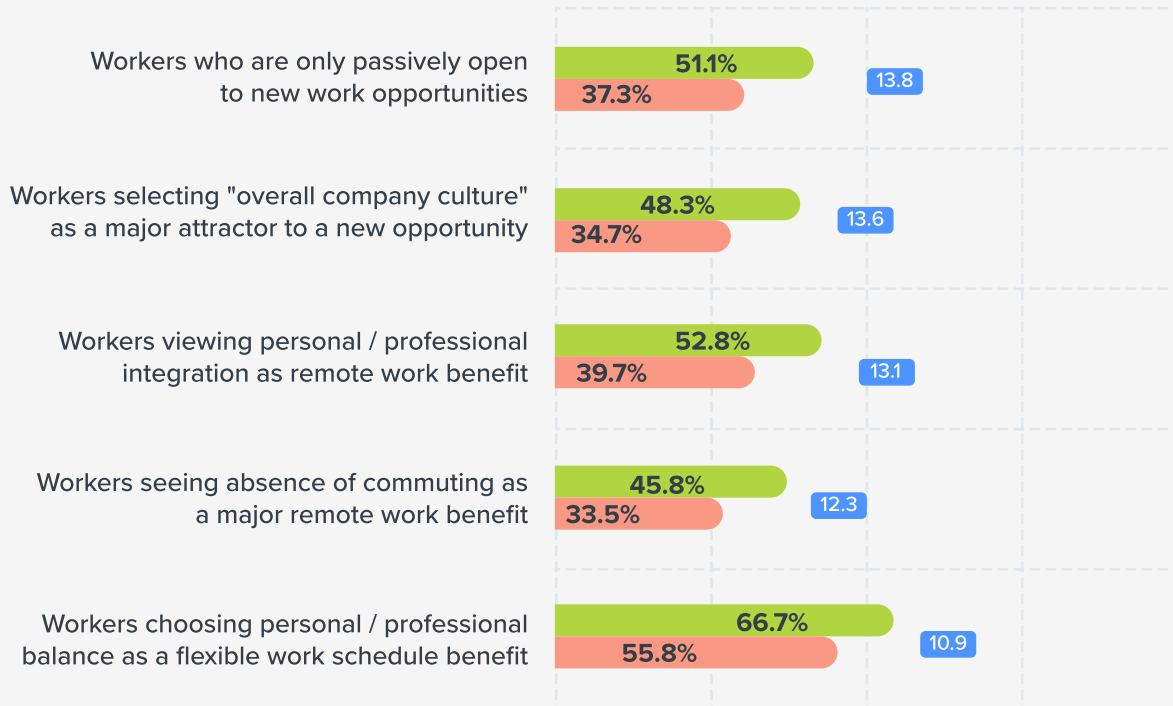


# Results 2023 vs. 2021

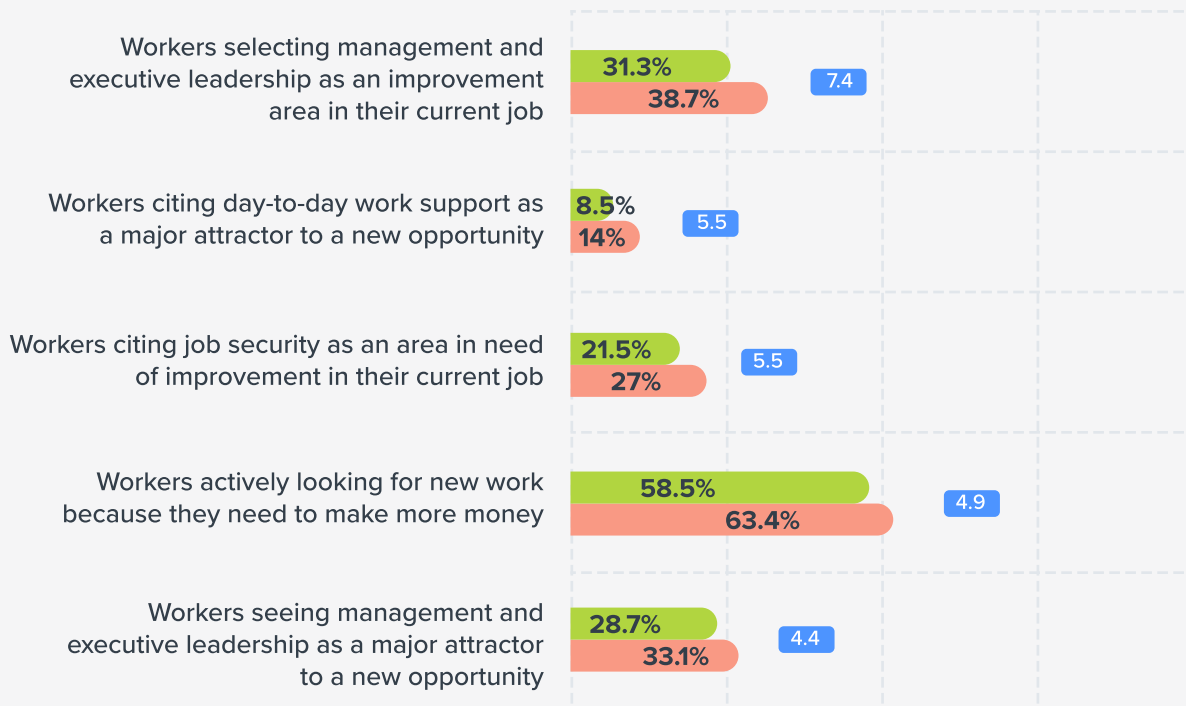
It's always interesting to draw trends across timelines – a specific area worth looking at is the biggest shifts between the two datasets.

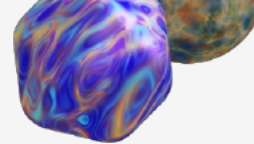
Here we have five major shifts upwards and downwards:

## Biggest upward changes



## Biggest downward changes





# It's all about **engagement**

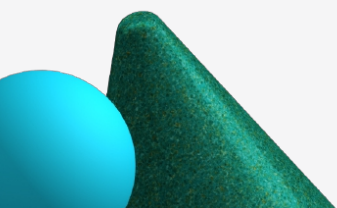
As an employer looking to attract and – more importantly – retain talent, this report should provide you with **a north star** going forward. Your teams value stability and security, flexibility in schedules and work locations, connections and humanity, and of course, compensation.

This was always the case. But it's even more so now, and workers are indeed getting it. Flexible work is becoming standard in many jobs. Compensation is growing (even if inflation is prompting it). The expectation is that a job isn't just a "job", but a livelihood.

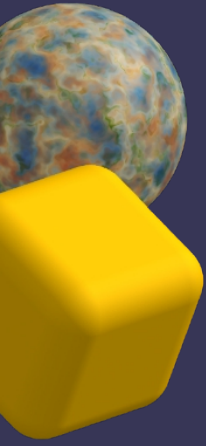
As remote work starts finding its groove in a more sustainable fashion, the workforce isn't shy about saying, **"We love the flexibility, keep it coming."** They're also wearing their hearts outwards and valuing a workplace that feels like a community, where company culture and relationships glues everything together. And where an opportunity for career growth knocks, they'll answer that door whether it's in your company or another.

Now, here's the big question: What does this tangibly mean for you, the employer? When your company is struggling to roll with the punches, especially during these volatile times, you're likely calling on your teams to roll with the punches too. That's fair, of course. The question is – will they? And more importantly – **how can you set it up so that they \*will\* roll with you?**

The answer is clear from our survey. People are very hesitant to move jobs, but they will move for a new opportunity. They'll stay with you when they're engaged – and while engagement is a two-way street, **a lot of it falls on you to build that optimal experience so your teams will stay with you for the long haul.**







# Let's grow together

Explore our full hiring platform with a 15-day free trial, no credit card required. Post jobs, get candidates and manage applicants all in one place.

[Request a demo](#)

[Start a free trial >](#)

