

16th Annual Edition

VOICE OF THE BLUE-COLLAR WORKER 2022

THE NATION'S LARGEST SURVEY
OF THE HOURLY WORKFORCE



LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE

Attracting and retaining hourly workers continues to be a challenge for employers in the wake of “the great reshuffle” of 2021. After two years of pandemic-driven labor shifts and societal change, what do blue-collar workers really want? What will attract them to a job and what will keep them?

In the 2022 Voice of the Blue-Collar Worker (VBCW) Survey, nearly 19,500 wage earners told us – anonymously – what they care about, what they need, and how they feel about their prospects in their industries.

The annual VBCW study is the largest and longest-running survey of America’s hourly, blue-collar workers. In this 16th anniversary edition, we reflect on this year’s findings in light of both current trends and historical data gathered over the years. Several important takeaways emerged:

- Pay rates continue to drive job choices, as well as other aspects of total compensation, such as benefits.
- While shift and schedule flexibility have been important in the past, they have now become one of the top three factors in a worker’s decisions about both the job they choose and whether or not to stay at a job.
- Despite a tumultuous year, workers are optimistic about their financial future and “satisfied” with their current roles.
- COVID-19 concerns have declined significantly but are still present, particularly for female workers.

As the VBCW survey continues to evolve, the goals that drove us to begin the survey in 2007 are as relevant as ever today.

- To listen to and amplify the voice of this vital component of the U.S. economy, providing data and insights on the unique factors that attract, motivate, and retain blue-collar workers.
- To provide reliable information and analysis to advise our customers on workforce practices to make them more competitive employers in today’s market.
- To share these findings with all who care about, study, and/or employ hourly workers.

This report provides highlights of the survey findings grouped around the key themes that emerged from this year’s survey. It closes with actionable recommendations for employers looking to increase the engagement and loyalty of these vital workers.

Cathi Canfield

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Vice President
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To dig deeper into the wealth of insights and data relevant to your region or business, please [reach out to us](#).

METHODOLOGY

As America's largest industrial staffing firm, EmployBridge puts half a million people to work across the country every year, giving us unique access to hourly workers in the manufacturing, warehousing, logistics and distribution industries.

From February 21 to March 23, 2022, we set up secure digital survey locations at multiple sites, including on location at employers served by EmployBridge. There, nearly 19,500 workers – employed or recently employed on a flexible, part-time or full-time basis – completed the anonymous survey.

Participants shared their insights by answering multiple choice and open response questions on their attitudes, expectations and preferences related to their work.

Nearly half (45%) of all recorded responses were from workers with 1-5 years of experience. A total of 80% of respondents came from the fields of logistics and manufacturing. And 23% of participants in a manufacturing environment work in the automotive or transportation industry.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

19,500 Hourly, Blue-collar Workers

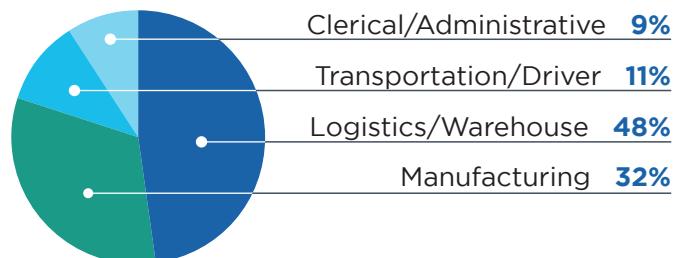
AGE (Yrs. Old)

18-24	---	15%
25-34	---	27%
35-44	---	23%
45-54	---	19%
55-64	---	13%
65+	---	3%

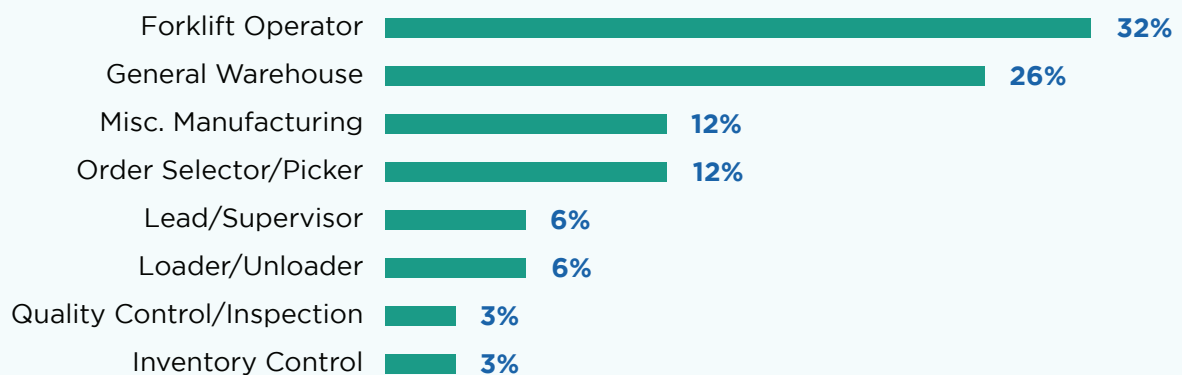
INDUSTRY TENURE

6-11 months	---	19%
1-2 years	---	22%
3-5 years	---	23%
6-10 years	---	13%
> 10 years	---	23%

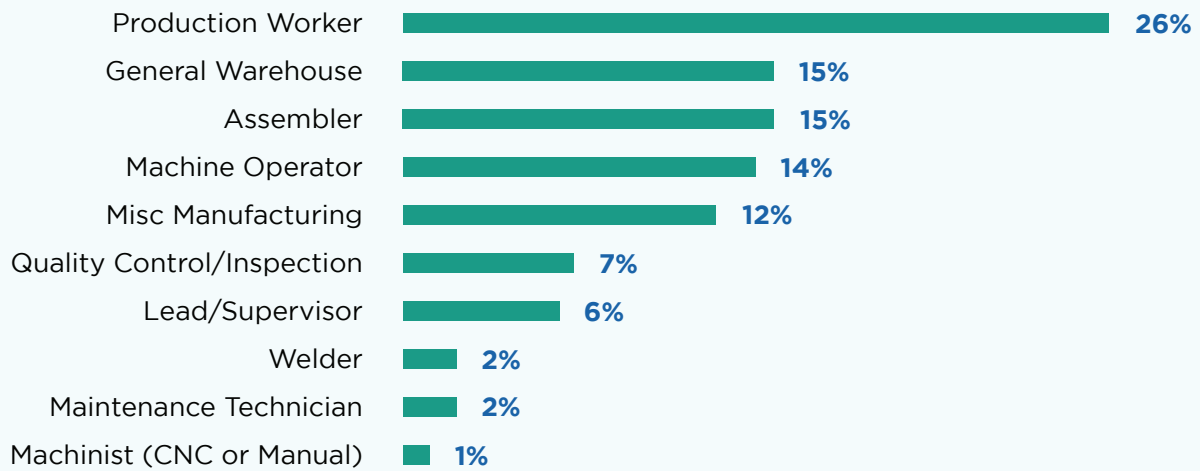
INDUSTRY



LOGISTICS WORKERS: WHAT JOB MATCHES YOUR CURRENT POSITION?



MANUFACTURING WORKERS: WHAT JOB MATCHES YOUR CURRENT POSITION?



This year's VBCW survey secured a balanced level of participation across genders, thanks to particularly high engagement by women. This makes it an important source of data on gender perspectives for employers seeking greater diversity and equity.

PARTICIPATION BY GENDER

Male	---	55%
Female	---	43%
Prefer not to answer	---	2%
Gender nonconforming	---	1%

Participants shared their insights by answering approximately 46 questions, both multiple choice and open response, exploring their attitudes, expectations, and preferences related to their work.



WAGES CONTINUE TO MATTER. A LOT.

While wages rose over the past year, pay rate remains the top factor applicants look for when considering a job. And for workers to stay at a job, consistent pay increases are now the second-most-important factor (behind schedule). With rising inflation affecting how far that pay goes, wage pressure on workers will likely continue throughout 2022.

Benefits, another aspect of a worker's total compensation, now rank as the third-most-important factor in staying at a job – for the first time tying with former #1 priority “workplace culture.” Workers also said they value a 401(k) and the chance of advancement.

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In past years, we might have said that “culture is king” for blue-collar workers. Today, *compensation* reigns -- meaning pay rate plus benefits. When combined with a flexible schedule, this blend of factors appears to significantly influence “Should I stay or should I go?” decisions.



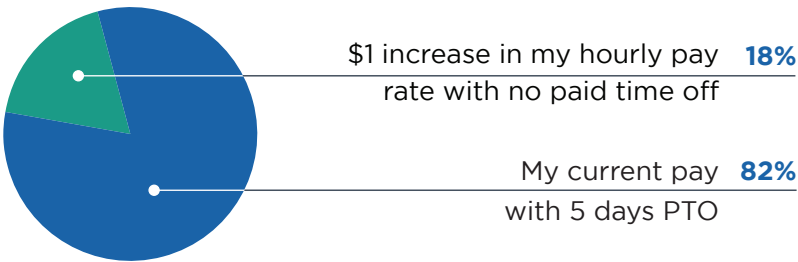
WAGES ARE RISING

The top two rows of this table show that those earning higher hourly rates grew steadily since last year. At the same time, those earning lower rates dropped significantly (17%). In the bottom row, note that even the lowest hourly rate reported (\$15.99) is nearly \$2/hour higher than last year.

Wage earners continue to seek higher wages, a trend that has solidified this year and is unlikely to change, especially amid inflation.

But benefits beyond pure pay are on workers' minds. In fact, the majority said they'd prefer a week of paid time-off to a \$1/hour raise.

2021 (\$/hr)	2022 (\$/hr)	% OF WORKFORCE
\$20	\$21.99	+9%
\$18	\$19.99	+9%
\$16	\$17.99	+3%
\$14	\$15.99	-17%



HOW OFTEN DO YOU EXPECT A PAY INCREASE?

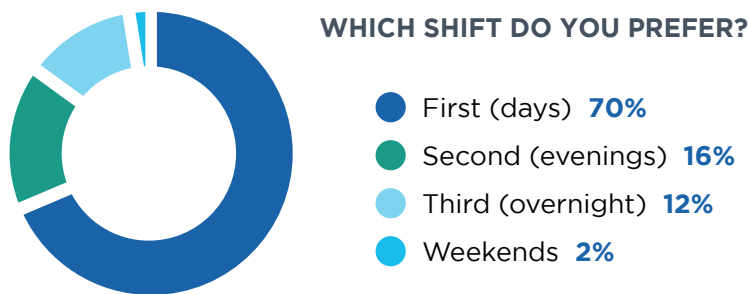
Based on performance, attendance and quality	43%
Every year	28%
Every 6 months	24%
When I have a new skill	5%



MORE THAN EVER, BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS WANT SCHEDULES THAT WORK FOR *THEM*.




Schedules and flexibility have always been important to workers. For the first time in the 16 years of the VBCW survey, schedule factors now have a much bigger impact on the choices of both candidates and employees – even more than pay and benefits in some areas. It’s the top factor for workers considering whether or not to stay at a job and the second most important factor (along with job security) for job seekers.

First shift remains the top choice for workers; however, increased hourly incentives for other shifts are a good motivating factor. For 2022, the shift differential – the minimum raise needed to convince a first-shift worker to take and stay at another shift – is \$2/hour on average, a sharp uptick from even a year ago.

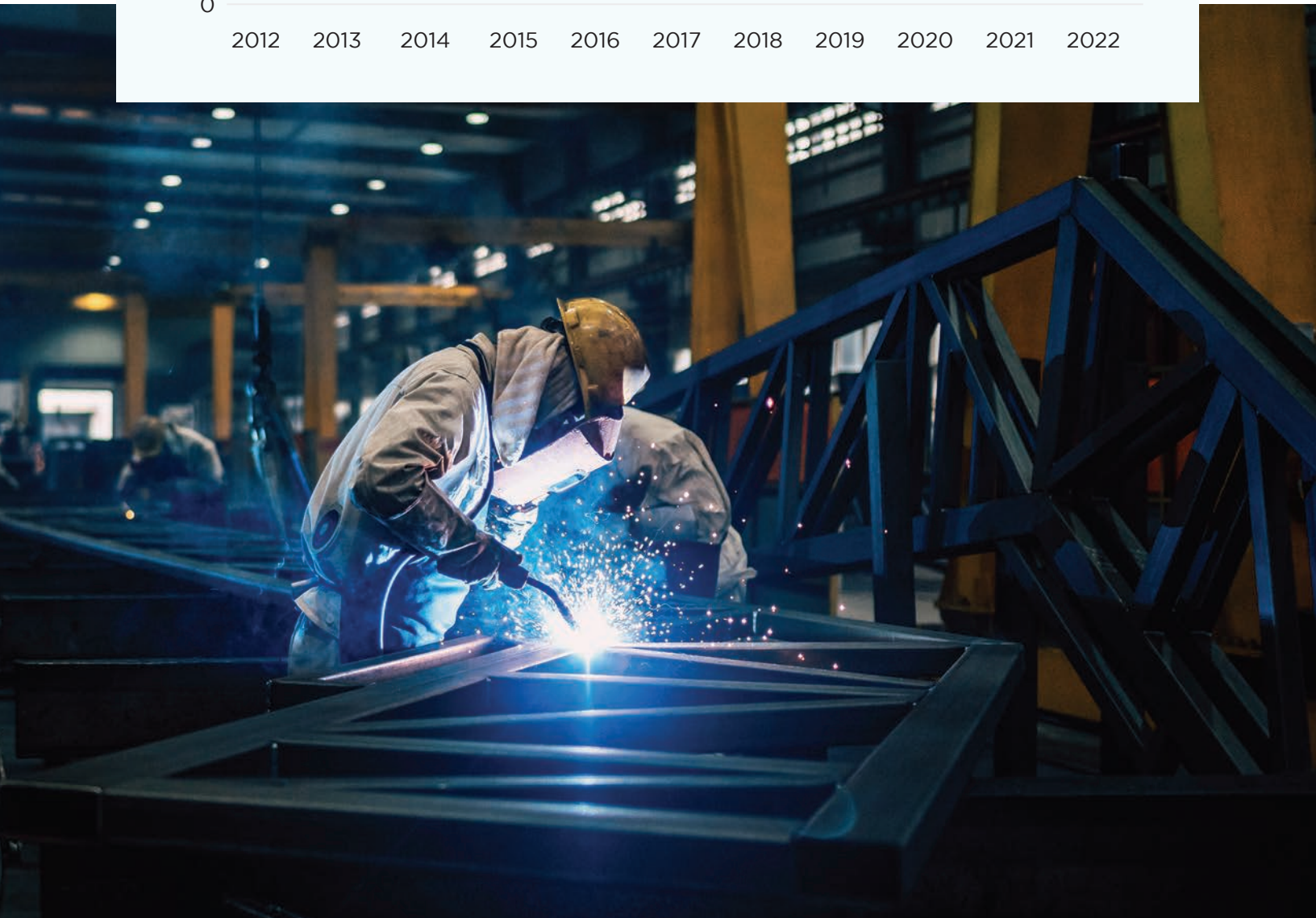
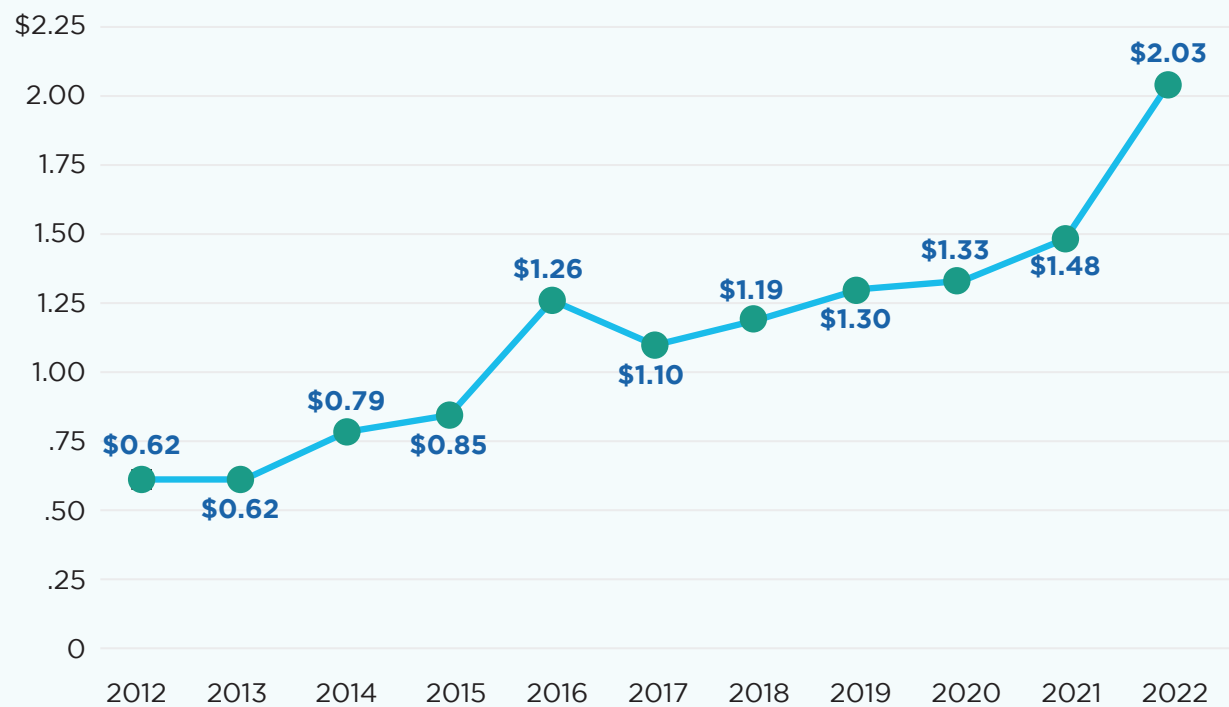


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WHICH SHIFT STRUCTURE DO YOU PREFER?

Shift	 All Workers Together	 Female Workers	 Male Workers
Five 8-hour shifts	48%	52%	44%
Four 10-hour shifts	31%	27%	35%
Three to four 12-hour shifts	12%	9%	14%
Flex	7%	9%	6%
Gig	2%	3%	1%

WHAT IS THE MINIMUM AMOUNT OF PAY INCREASE PER HOUR YOU WOULD REQUIRE TO WORK A SHIFT OTHER THAN 1ST AND STAY ON THAT SHIFT?



A “PAY-JOB SECURITY-SCHEDULE” TRIFECTA DOMINATES WORKER CHOICES.

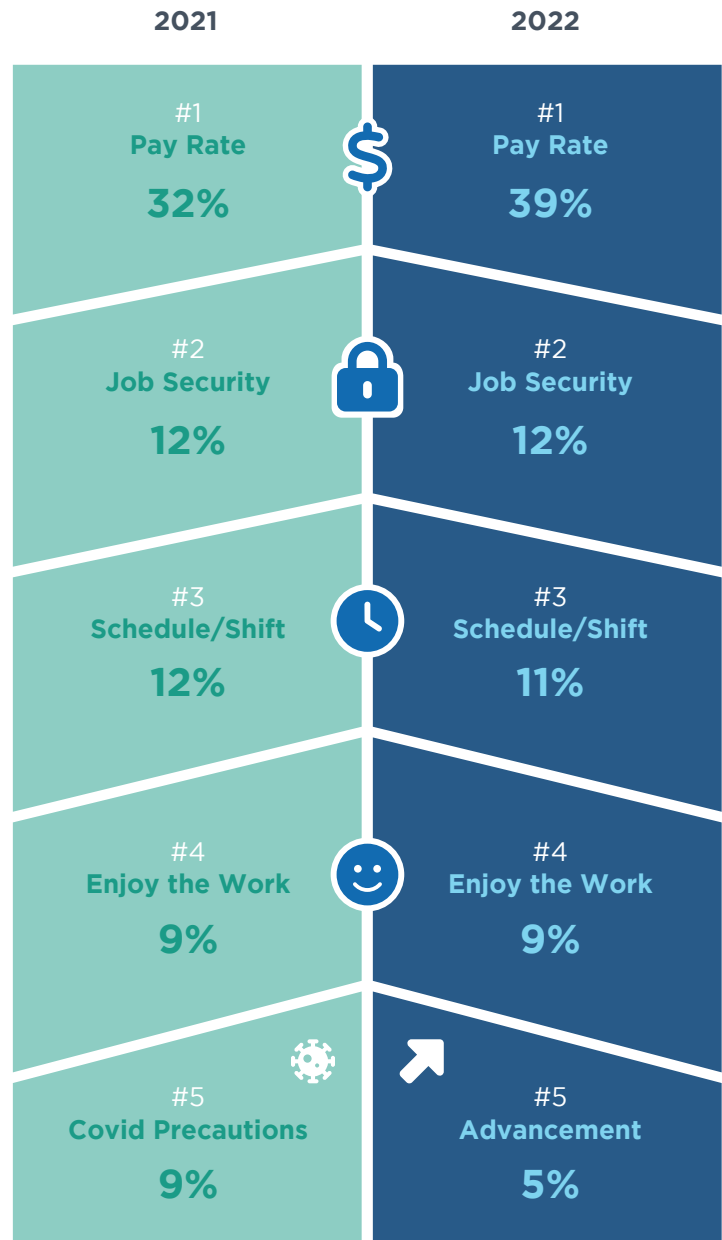
In 2022, even more workers joined the majority naming pay as the top draw when looking for a new job – nearly 40% this year.

- The number of workers ranking job security, schedule/shift, and “enjoy the work” as numbers 2,3 and 4 are nearly identical to last year.
- With the spring providing a respite from COVID-19 outbreaks, pandemic precautions dropped from the top five, being replaced by advancement opportunities.

When asked to reflect on what had driven them to take jobs in the past, 21% of workers named schedule as the most important factor, naming it ahead of the #2 factor of a pay increase. This question also revealed other important factors, including company culture (#3), benefits (#4), and location/commute (#5).

Top Motivators for Previous Places You Have Worked

1. **Schedule/Shift** 21%
2. **Consistent Increase in Pay** 14%
3. **Good Company Culture** 11%
4. **Good Benefits** 10%
5. **Location/Commute** 9%



Workers want not only a competitive wage rate, but regular increases that keep up with a rising cost of living, chances to learn skills that increase their earning power, as well as benefits such as employer contributions to retirement and healthcare insurance.

OTHER THAN PAY, WHAT EARNS YOUR LOYALTY?

2021

1. Care about my growth 15%
2. Culture, values, respects me 13%
3. Advancement opportunity 12%
4. Understand I have obligations outside work 11%
5. Chance to learn or teach new skills 10%

2022

- Advancement opportunity 20%
- Flexible work schedule 15%
- Provide 401(k) 15%
- Provide health insurance contribution 13%
- Understand I have obligations outside work 10%

In this free-response section, respondents last year named three factors to do with growth, learning, and advancement. This year, advancement became the top factor, moving from #3 to #1. Three of last year's responses had to do with being cared for, respected, and understood. This year, some of those softer "wants" have been bumped out of the top five, replaced by things directly related to total compensation, such as flexible schedules, 401(k) plans, and health insurance contributions.

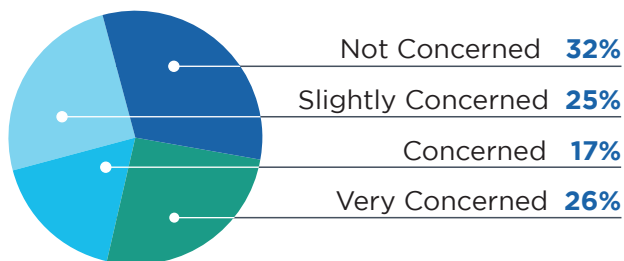


COVID-19 UPDATE:

Concerns have lessened, but not vanished

2022 is not like 2021 or 2020. We're all a bit pandemic weary, and our experiences have changed workers and employers alike. The expectations hourly workers bring to the workplace today reflect this transformation. **How are wage earners feeling about the pandemic in 2022?**

A little better. For the past two years 71% were consistently worried about it endangering their health and safety. This year concerns are notably lower. Today, 31% of workers say they are not concerned about COVID-19 at all, while 25% are slightly or somewhat concerned, 17% are concerned, and 26% are very concerned.



When asked what concerns them about it, 42% cited their family's health. Another 18% said wearing a mask. Notably, only 3% now say COVID-19 precautions matter to them when seeking a job.

While attitudes are changing, pandemic impacts remain in other ways. For example, 16% noted their last 3 absences were COVID-19 related.



WORKER OUTLOOKS VARY (Subtly) BY GENDER.




As pandemic impacts broke unevenly across many demographics, women were particularly affected. Female workforce participation dropped to a low of 54% in April 2020, a rate not seen in the U.S. since 1985. It sat just slightly higher at 56.7% in April 2022 according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)¹.

This was a significant drop from women's peak of 60% in 1999, although females' workforce participation has always been lower than that of males².

WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM THEIR JOB?

When seeking a job, the top priorities for all workers together are: #1 pay rate (39%), #2 job security (12%), #3 shift/schedule (11%), and #4 enjoy the work (9%).

Looking at the top responses by gender, more women placed shift/schedule as second only to pay, while more men cited job security as their second priority when seeking a job and then enjoying the work.

Priority	 All Workers Together	 Female Workers	 Male Workers
1.	Pay Rate	Pay Rate	Pay Rate
2.	Job Security	Shift/Schedule	Job Security
3.	Shift/Schedule	Job Security	Enjoy the work
4.	Enjoy the work	Enjoy the work	Shift/Schedule

The value that female workers place on schedule came up again when we explored the shift differential increase. The average amount women said they would need to change to a less desirable shift was \$.07 higher than men – a small but noteworthy difference. They're also more interested in different shift schedules like flex and gig than their male counterparts.

Sources

¹“Current Employment Statistics - CES (National)”, April 2022, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/LNS11300002>

²“Women in the Labor Force: A Databook”, Report 1092, April 2021, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/home.htm>

The female workforce expressed higher job satisfaction, too, with 46% considered “promoters” compared with just 40% of males. However, 27% of female workers were also “detractors,” while only 20% of males were.

The majority (53%) of male workers in 2022 said they are actively looking for a new job, while only a minority (37%) of female workers are. For employers, this means that 16% more of men are trying to leave than women workers. When asked why they left their last job, male workers cited finding “a better use for my skills” 4% more often than females did.

When asked what employers could offer (other than higher pay) to gain their loyalty, women’s top ask was a tie between schedule and opportunities for advancement. In response to the same question, men cited advancement – 6% more often than women. Among survey participants who work in manufacturing, the differences were nominal. A majority -- 65% of men and 51% of women -- showed interest in upskilling to roles such as fabricator, automation and robotics tech, operations manager, and CNC machinist.

WORKERS SAYING THEY ARE ACTIVELY LOOKING FOR A NEW JOB



Female Workers **37%**



Male Workers **53%**



OPTIMISM ENDURES

WHO LIKES THEIR JOB?

The majority (77%) of workers called themselves “somewhat, very or extremely satisfied” with their current job. As noted above, female workers expressed higher job satisfaction, while more males say they are already hunting for a new role.

91% of workers surveyed said they were optimistic about their financial future.

Overall job satisfaction is 5% lower than last year, with just 44% feeling positively toward their job. While this downtick in satisfaction is seen across age groups, workers over 45 are more satisfied with their jobs than younger people.

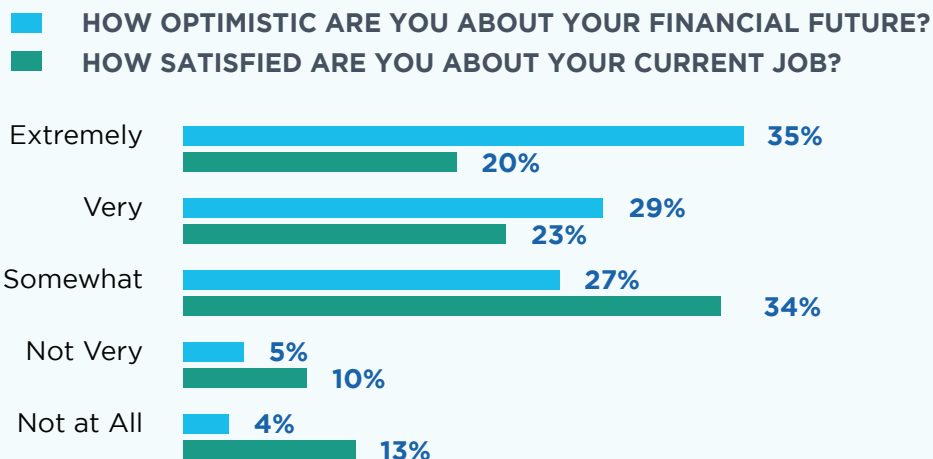
WHO LIKES THEIR INDUSTRY?

While a record high of 67% of workers said they plan to stay in their industry, some sectors showed more potential for possible churn. For example, 57% of workers in logistics and 50% in manufacturing said they are actively looking or would consider another job.

WHO'S OPTIMISTIC FOR THEIR OWN FUTURE?

Perhaps surprisingly, 91% of workers surveyed said they were optimistic about their financial future. This question was new to the VBCW survey. We were curious about overall morale and workforce attitudes following several years of pandemic.

The optimism may come from seeing an abundance of job openings and rising pay rates. It is important to note, however, that even with dramatic increases in wages in the last few years, the consumer price index (CPI) has also risen, leaving the average worker just slightly ahead of where they were financially as far back as 2002.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Following two years of pandemic-dominated challenges to the global economy, America's blue-collar workforce reports feeling optimistic about their opportunities. An abundance of jobs and a strong uptick in overall wages likely contribute to this perspective.

Despite personal optimism, satisfaction with current jobs dropped 5% overall and many wage earners report they are actively looking for other roles.

Competitive compensation – wages and benefits – will continue to be vital factors, especially as rising inflation chips away at the buying power of the dollar. In 2022, workers are looking for advancement that brings higher pay (not just to learn something new), and financial help such as 401(k) and healthcare contributions from employers.

Building on a trend that emerged in 2021, schedule is now a high priority for hourly workers. Flexibility and/or several dollars more per hour in pay will be needed to lure workers into shifts they see as less desirable.

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO SUCCEED IN 2022?

Align your offerings with what your workers truly value. Employers who provide what workers value most can gain an advantage in reducing churn and attracting and retaining valued workers amid an ongoing competitive market for the best labor.

PROVIDE WHAT WORKERS VALUE MOST

- Offer **competitive pay**, especially for off shifts.
- Include **benefits like health insurance and retirement** so employees can build secure financial futures with your organization.
- Build **clear paths to advancement** including upskilling to new roles.
- Review attendance policies and **eliminate mandatory overtime** whenever possible.
- Establish a **great on-boarding experience** for new hires that includes **career advancement** specifics.
- Demonstrate **empathy and respect for the blue-collar workers**.

To gain data insights relevant to your business in 2022, [reach out to EmployBridge today.](#)

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