

## US Memo

Date: February 15, 2022  
To: Express Employment Professionals  
From: The Harris Poll  
Subject: Boomer and Blue Collar Refresh – United States

*The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between September 28 and October 13, 2021 among 2,002 U.S. adults ages 18+ who are employed full-time, part-time, or self-employed. Data were weighted where necessary by age by gender, education, race/ethnicity, region, household income, household size, and marital status to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.*

*This sample of employees includes 209 blue collar workers (defined as employees who perform manual labor and work in agriculture, automotive services, construction, maintenance, manufacturing, transportation, or utilities) and 547 Boomer employees (defined as employees ages 57-75) that were weighted individually.*

*All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.*

*Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.*

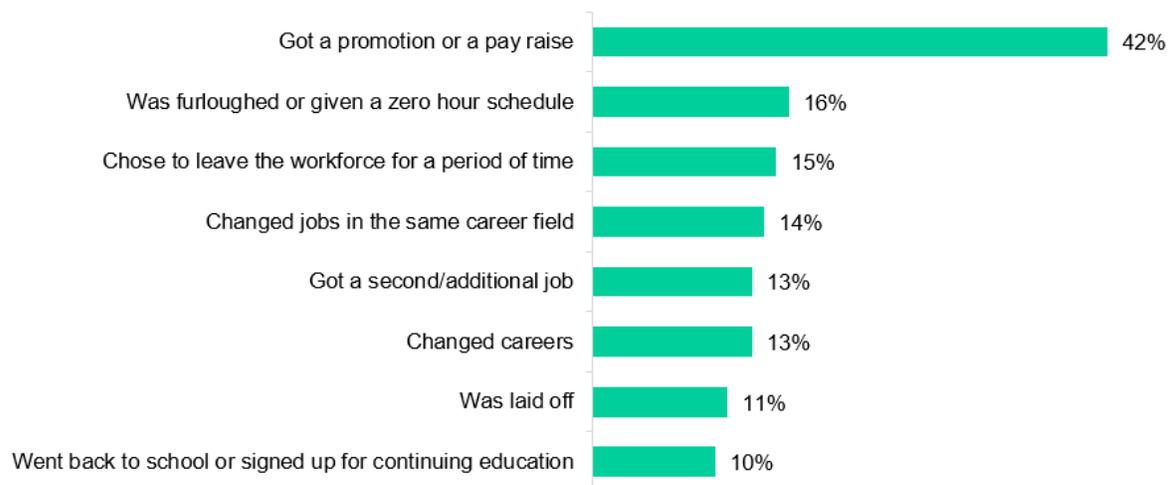
### Employee Profile

**Work is in flux for employees more so than ever as shown by an uptick in remote work, the “Great Resignation” (trend of a significant number of workers leaving their jobs during the pandemic), and starkly contrasting experiences: some employees advanced in their responsibilities or pay grade over the past year and half while others were laid off, furloughed, or had to pick up another job.**

On average, employees in the U.S. have been working for 22 years and have been at their current job for 9 years. In a typical week, they work 38 hours and about half of workers (48%) are currently in their company’s physical workplace full-time (compared to 54% who worked in-person full-time before the COVID-19 pandemic).

During the COVID-19 pandemic specifically, some employees received a promotion or pay raise (42%), and the majority of employees (62%) believe they will next receive a pay increase either this year or next. Some changed jobs in the same career field (14%) or changed careers altogether (13%), and a similar proportion picked up a second/additional job (13%). On the other hand, substantial minorities were furloughed or given a zero hour schedule (16%), chose to leave the workforce for a period of time (15%), or were laid off (11%). Notably, Black and Hispanic employees are more likely than White employees to have gotten a second/additional job during the pandemic (25% and 19% vs. 10%), and to have been laid off (16% and 18% vs. 8%).

### Experiences of US Employees During COVID-19 Pandemic



### Subgroup Spotlight: Generation

Younger employees – Gen Z and Millennials – are more likely than Gen Xers and Boomers to report getting a promotion or pay raise (53% and 47% vs. 39% and 31%, respectively). They also are more likely to have made specific changes to their work situation during this time:

- Chose to leave the workforce for a period of time (24% and 20% vs. 13% and 5%)
- Changed jobs in the same career field (23% and 18% vs. 12% and 5%)
- Went back to school or signed up for continuing education (21% and 14% vs. 6% and 3%)

**Experiences and Satisfaction at Work Dependent on Job Level**

**While most U.S. employees are satisfied with their current jobs, pay and hours are consistently top of mind in the workplace – both as pros and cons. Due to the current labor shortage, some employees have received higher pay or more fringe benefits; most commonly, those at higher job levels.**

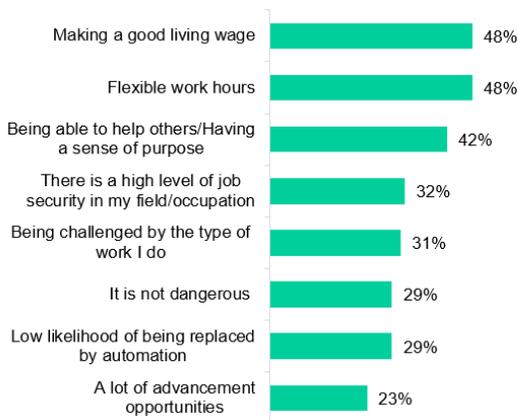
The majority of U.S. employees (87%) are satisfied with their job, including nearly half (45%) who are very satisfied. Further, 9 in 10 U.S. employees (90%) say they are proud of the work they do. When asked how they currently feel at their job, positive sentiments rise to the top. Around half say they feel knowledgeable (57%), confident (56%), and valued (49%). To this point, around two-thirds (66%) say they like their job. Specifically, the most common aspects of their job field/occupation that U.S. employees like include making a good living wage (48%), flexible work hours (48%), and being able to help others/having a sense of purpose (42%).

*Subgroup Spotlight: Length of Time at Current Job*

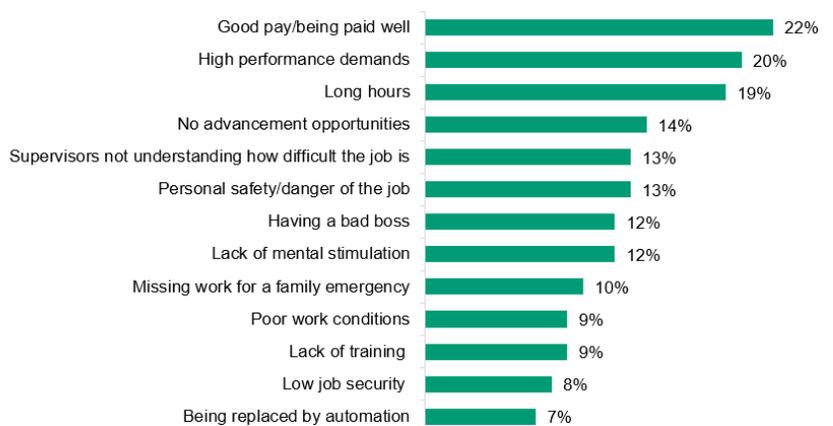
Employees who have been at their current job for at least 5 years are more likely than newer employees to be satisfied with their job (less than 1 year: 77% and 1-4 years: 83% vs. 5-9 years: 91% and 10+ years: 89%). There seems to be a pivotal period between the honeymoon phase of work and longer tenure as those who have been in their role for 1-4 years are the least likely to say they like their job (58% vs. less than 1 year: 64%, 5-9 years: 70%, and 10+ years: 69%) and that they're proud of the work they do (85% vs. less than 1 year: 92%, 5-9 years: 93%, and 10+ years: 92%).

Despite the optimism and aspects of work that many employees like, there are challenges in the workplace. A third (33%) use negative words to describe how they feel at work, such as overwhelmed (15%), frustrated (15%), and disrespected (8%). Further, the majority of U.S. employees (72%) have concerns about their current workplace; most commonly, good pay/being paid well (22%), high performance demands (20%), and long hours (19%). More than 2 in 5 (44%) report their employer does not offer all of the benefits that they want. These concerns are presenting challenges – more than a third of U.S. employees (36%) say keeping themselves motivated is a challenge in the workplace and 33% say the same of maintaining work/life balance.

**Aspects of Job Field/Occupation US Employees Like**



**Aspects of Job Field/Occupation US Employees are Concerned About**



### Subgroup Spotlight: Job Level

Positive sentiments about one's job increase with job level, as employees with a title of manager or above are more likely than non-managers to say:

- They are satisfied with their job (92% vs. 84%) and they like their job (73% vs. 61%)
- They feel positively at their job (92% vs. 81%), including feeling knowledgeable (65% vs. 51%), confident (67% vs. 49%), and valued (58% vs. 45%)
- They are proud of the work they do (94% vs. 88%)

Meanwhile, non-managers are more likely to say they have concerns about their current workplace (76% vs. 68%) and feel negatively at their job (38% vs. 26%). In fact, non-managers are about twice as likely than managers to say they feel frustrated (19% vs. 9%) and disrespected (10% vs. 6%).

Beyond on-the-job challenges, the workforce as a whole is going through a tumultuous time with novel problems. Most employees (87%) foresee threats to the future of the workforce, including the skills gap<sup>1</sup> (41%), a "lost generation of students"<sup>2</sup> (40%), and the current labor shortage<sup>3</sup> (39%). Further, around two-thirds (66%) say the current labor shortage has impacted their work-life. While some impacts are negative like experiencing a heavier workload due to staff shortages (33%) or having team members quit (23%), other impacts are more positive – around 1 in 5 employees (19%) have been provided more financial compensation (e.g., pay raise, bonus, etc.) due to the current shortage and 17% have received more fringe benefits (e.g., extra time off, flexible hours, etc.). Notably, employees with a title of manager or above are more likely than those at lower job levels to have received more financial compensation (23% vs. 17%) or fringe benefits (24% vs. 14%) due to the labor shortage. Further, those who have been at their companies for 1-9 years are more likely than new employees and more seasoned employees to have received more financial compensation during this time (1-4 years: 21% and 5-9 years: 23% vs. less than 1 year: 12% and 10+ years: 15%).

### Great Desire to Receive More Job Training and Expand Skills to Keep Up with The Job

***U.S. employees generally feel that skills needed to do their job are constantly in flux and that more job-specific training or skill development would be helpful in the workplace. Given this realization, there is also consensus that the skills gap is impacting employees in some industries more than others.***

When entering the workforce after their highest level of education, most U.S. employees (82%) felt prepared. Of note, those with a 4-year degree or higher (89% vs. 77% of those who do not have a 4-year degree) are more likely to say they felt prepared. Despite general feelings of preparation, more than two-thirds of employees (69%) wish they had more exposure to the world of work when they were in school. On the other hand, 64% of those with a high school degree or less believe they would've had more opportunities available to them if they had gone to college.

While more exposure or degrees may have been helpful in the past, there is always an opportunity – and a need – for continual learning. While more than three-quarters of employees (76%) believe their employer does a good job of offering trainings for them to update their skills, around two-thirds (66%) say the skills they need to do their job are constantly changing.

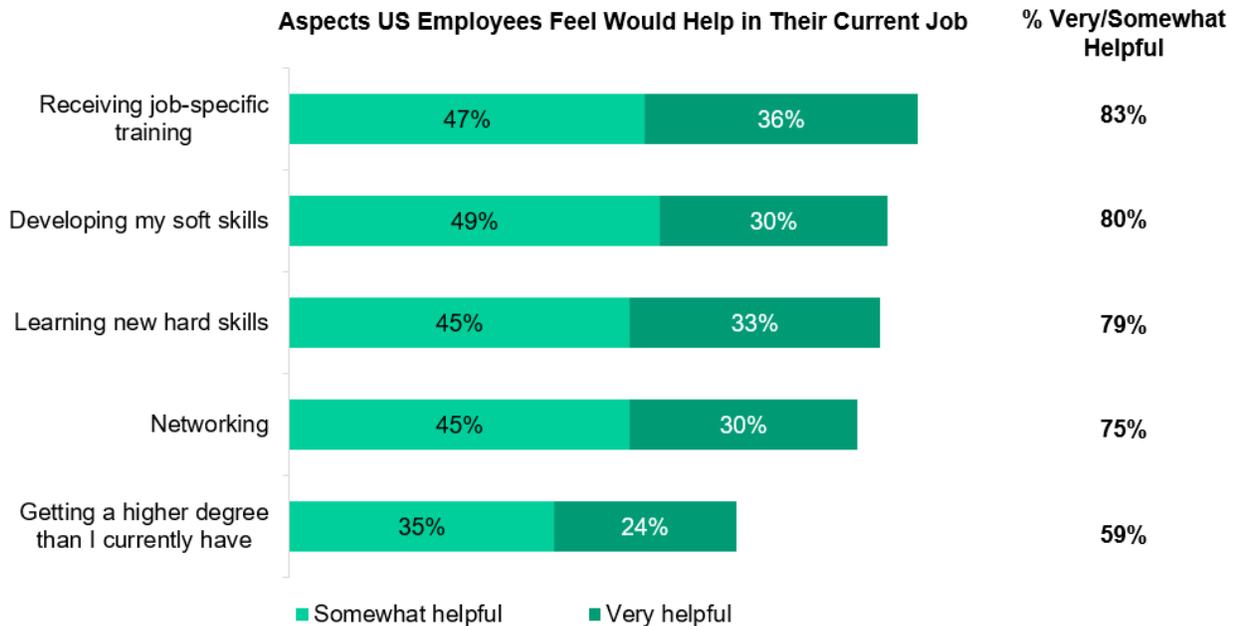
<sup>1</sup> Definition provided: A gap between the skills an employee has and the skills necessary to perform a job well

<sup>2</sup> Definition provided: A generation that does not have all of the skills necessary to be successful in today's workforce due to closures during the COVID-19 pandemic

<sup>3</sup> Definition provided: Not enough employees to fill open jobs

To this point, the vast majority feel that receiving job-specific training (83%), developing their soft skills (80%), or learning new hard skills (79%) would be helpful in their current job. Networking (75%) is also seen as helpful. Fewer (59%) think getting a higher degree than they currently have would be beneficial, and 1 in 10 (10%) went back to school or signed up for continuing education during the COVID-19

pandemic. Black and Hispanic employees are more likely than their White counterparts to say getting a higher degree than they currently have would be helpful (72% and 73% vs. 53%), and they are more than twice as likely to have returned to school during the pandemic (15% and 18% vs. 7%)<sup>4</sup>.



Considering the pervasive skills gap and need to continually refresh skills in the workforce, it is no surprise that employees believe these experiences would be helpful. Certain industries though may benefit from continual learning more than others. When asked the job fields in which a skills gap is impacting workers, technology (82%), skilled trades (82%), business, management, and administration (81%), and healthcare (80%) rise to the top.

### Respect for Blue Collar Work on the Rise

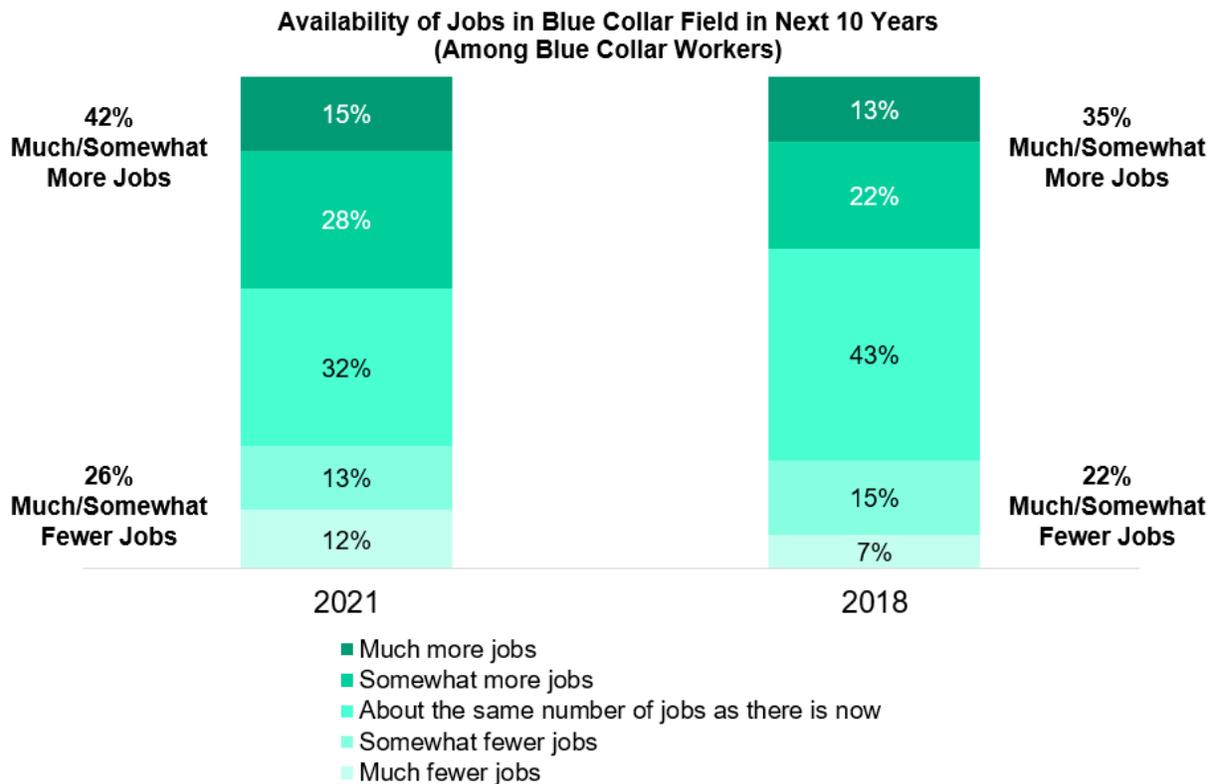
***Compared to 2018, blue collar workers are more likely to expect growth in their job field over the next ten years. In addition, many U.S. employees say blue collar work is more respected in society as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic – a silver lining for skilled trades.***

Although lower than the optimism reported in 2018 (80%), blue collar workers are still generally optimistic about their future (73%). Nearly half (47%) believe they are better off now than they were five years ago, though this is lower than the 55% of blue collar workers who said the same in 2018. Despite these changes, most still say they can make ends meet (84% in 2021 and 84% in 2018), remain confident that they will be able to reach their lifestyle goals (75% and 78%, respectively), and are satisfied with the lifestyle that they have (63% and 67%).

<sup>4</sup> Note on highest level of education completed: White employees are most likely to have achieved a 4-year degree or more, Black employees are most likely to have between a high school and 4-year degree, and Hispanic employees are most likely to have less than a high school degree.

The vast majority of blue collar workers (91%) say they are proud of the work they do. More than 4 in 5 (83%) are satisfied with their job and the top things they like about their job field/occupation, which remain unchanged from 2018, include making a good living wage (53%), being challenged by the type of work they do (37%), being able to help others/having a sense of purpose (33%), and flexible work hours (31%).

Further, nearly a third (30%) say they are working in the job field they expected to have. Even if some did not expect to be in their blue collar role, around three-quarters (74%) believe there is a good career path in their line of work. To this point, a similar proportion (73%) believe more young adults should pursue careers in their field. When it comes to getting a job, the majority (67%) say it's easy to find a job in their field currently and more than 2 in 5 (42%) believe there will be more jobs available in their field in the next ten years, up from 2018 (35%).



While there are encouraging sentiments shared about their job field, blue collar workers also face long-standing stigma. More than half agree society generally looks down on blue collar workers (62%). To this point, blue collar workers are twice as likely as those in white collar roles to say workers in their job field receive less respect than other job fields (28% vs. 14%).

Despite these findings, 3 in 5 blue collar workers (60%) – and 70% of white collar employees – agree having a blue collar job is respected more now than it was 10 years ago. One contributing factor to this is the pandemic; two thirds of blue collar workers (67%) believe the COVID-19 pandemic changed how people view blue collar jobs. And, at least 70% of white collar (75%), pink collar (70%), and grey collar workers (77%) agree with this sentiment. In fact, when asked how views of blue collar jobs changed during the pandemic, many U.S. employees shared encouraging sentiments about essential work and skilled trades:

### *Essential work*

- “Blue-collar jobs became the needed backbone of the economy, as those workers continued to go to their jobs and get us or make for us the things we, as the general public, needed.” – Female, age 64, grey collar
- “Blue collar workers had to work thru the pandemic while most of us were off work. I think people really respected that.” – Male, age 67, grey collar
- “It became more obvious how much society at large relies on them.” – Female, age 38, white collar

### *Skilled trades*

- “Skilled technicians to maintain infrastructure are now viewed with a higher degree of skill” – Male, age 62, white collar
- “They pay a lot better and people are motivated to learn skilled trades, knowing that many college degrees are virtually worthless in the business world.” – Male, age 45, white collar

### **Employees Agree COVID-19 Vaccine Will Spur Return to Normalcy but Are Split on Mandates** ***Around three-quarters of employees believe proof of COVID-19 vaccination is key to normal life. Still, there is no consensus on whether it’s a company’s responsibility to mandate the vaccine even though some employees are uncomfortable – or unwilling – to work with others who don’t get the vaccine and/or booster shot.***

The catalyst behind many present workforce changes and challenges is the COVID-19 pandemic. Most employees (74%) grade their employer’s handling of the pandemic favorably – either as an A, excellent (36%) or B, good (38%). Keeping coronavirus out of the workplace has been a new challenge for employers so some have required that employees receive the COVID-19 vaccine (40%) or booster shot (22%), and more than a third of employees say their employer has recommended they receive each (vaccine: 36%, booster: 38%). Employees at companies with at least 100 employees are more likely than those at smaller companies to report a vaccine requirement (100-999 employees: 49% and 1,000+: 44% vs. 1-9: 31% and 10-99: 29%). When it comes to the booster shot, the largest companies are lagging behind those with 100-999 employees for the requirement and are on par with smaller companies (1-9 employees: 24%, 10-99: 19%, 100-999: 27%, 1,000+: 20%).

If the booster shot is recommended annually by the FDA, similar to the flu shot, around 3 in 5 employees (61%) say they would be willing to get it. Democrats (78% vs. 47% of Republicans) and those with at least a 4 year degree (76% vs. 50% of those who do not have a 4 year degree) are also more likely than their respective counterparts to report willingness to get the booster shot.

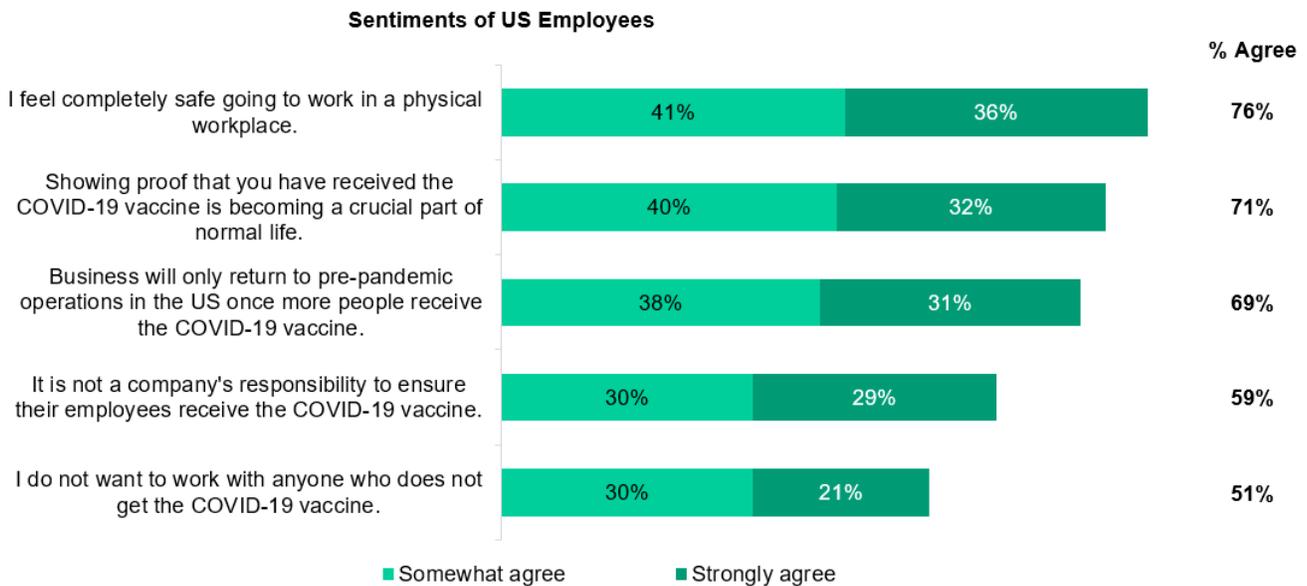
The majority of U.S. employees (76%) say they feel completely safe going to work in a physical workplace right now. When it comes to working with others who do not get vaccinated though, U.S. employees are split; about half (51%) say they don’t want to work with anyone who does not get the COVID-19 vaccine. Further, some (15%) would not be willing to work with others who do not get the COVID-19 vaccine *booster shot* if it is recommended annually by the FDA, similar to the flu shot, and another 1 in 5 (19%) would be willing to work with them but would not be comfortable doing so. In line with this, another survey<sup>5</sup> found that 47% of U.S. adults currently in the workforce are more willing to accept a job offer from a company with a vaccine mandate.

Even though more than half of employees (59%) say it is not a company’s responsibility to ensure their employees receive the COVID-19 vaccine, there is acknowledgement that business will only return to pre-pandemic operations (i.e., not limited by restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic) in the U.S. once

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<sup>5</sup> Survey conducted by The Harris Poll on behalf of Fast Company during October 2021. <https://theharrispoll.com/employer-vaccine-mandate-covid19/>

more people receive the COVID-19 vaccine (69%). A similar proportion (71%) believe showing proof that you have received the COVID-19 vaccine is becoming a crucial part of normal life.



### Employees Bullish on Retirement Preparedness

***Around two-thirds of employees are worried about saving enough for retirement even though a similar proportion believe they'll be prepared financially for that stage. While some employers offer semi-retirement, it seems more could be done on their part to ease the transition for both the employees retiring and those continuing to work.***

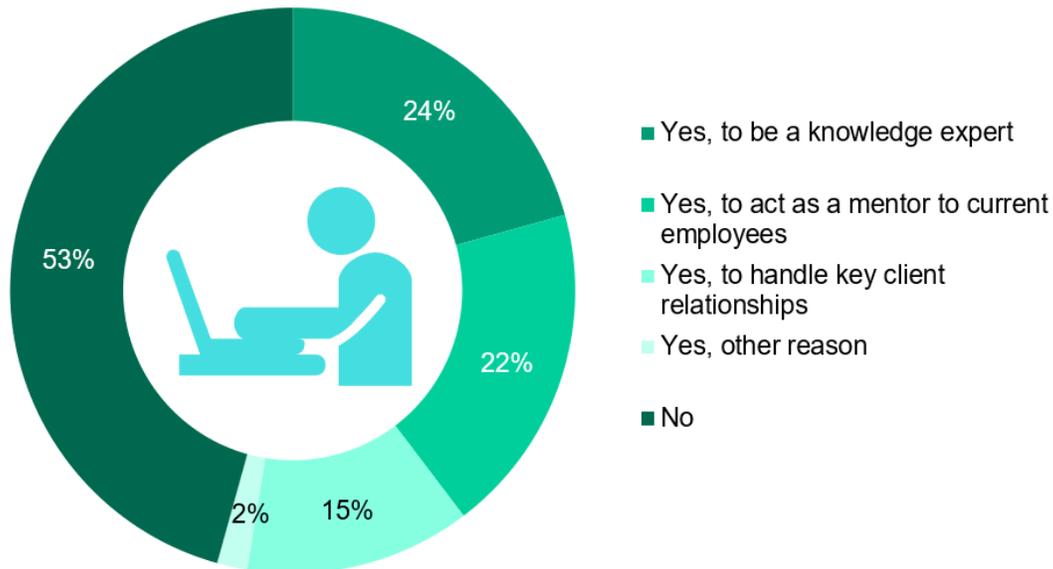
Planning for retirement is top of mind for employees and planning for older employees' departure is a common consideration for employers. Many U.S. employees changed when they plan to retire due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with around 1 in 5 planning to do so later (22%) and 10% planning to retire sooner. Top of mind when considering when to retire is financial preparedness. The majority (68%) are worried about saving enough for retirement. To this point, only around 2 in 5 (44%) say they are currently putting aside money for their retirement and nearly a quarter (24%) say planning for retirement is a challenge they face in the workplace. Given this, it is surprising that more than two-thirds of U.S. employees (69%) think they will be prepared financially (i.e., having enough money saved) to retire.

Beyond financially preparing for retirement, the transfer of knowledge is important to avoid a "brain drain" in the workforce. Most U.S. employees (73%) say it's absolutely essential or very important for employees to share the knowledge needed to perform their job responsibilities with others. The vast majority (84%) believe it's a big loss when older employees retire without passing along their years of knowledge to younger employees. When the transfer of knowledge does not happen, employees can be left learning how to do a job on their own, and nearly half of U.S. employees (47%) have experienced this. Encouragingly, the majority (66%) believe their employer is taking the right steps to make sure they don't experience a "brain drain" (i.e., when older employees retire without sharing knowledge of how to do their job with younger generations).

One way to help ease the transition is "semi-retirement" in order to postpone the time to retirement for employees. The majority of employees say they'd be likely to partake in semi-retirement, either by having a flexible work schedule (79%), transitioning to a consulting role (66%), or working reduced hours with

reduced benefits (59%). However, only around 1 in 5 (21%) say their employer offers semi-retirement. Instead, another way employers ease the retirement transition is by bringing former employees back to the company. Nearly half of employees (47%) say their employer has brought retired employees back, either to be a knowledge expert (24%), act as a mentor to current employees (22%), or handle key client relationships (15%).

### Companies Who Have Ever Brought Back Retired Former Employees



#### Subgroup Spotlight: Company Size

Compared to smaller companies, employees at companies with at least 100 employees are more apt to say:

- It's absolutely essential or very important for employees to share the knowledge needed to perform their job responsibilities with others (1-9 employees: 68%, 10-99: 65%, 100-999: 76%, 1,000+: 77%)
- They have had to learn how to do a job on their own after an employee retired (1-9 employees: 36%, 10-99: 45%, 100-999: 48%, 1,000+: 52%)

However, employees at the largest companies with at least 1,000+ employees are *less* likely than those with 100-999 employees to say:

- Their organization offers semi-retirement (1-9 employees: 12%, 10-99: 21%, 100-999: 27%, 1,000+: 19%)
- Their employer is taking the right steps to make sure they don't experience a "brain drain" (1-9 employees: 57%, 10-99: 70%, 100-999: 71%, 1,000+: 63%)

#### Boomers in the Workplace Synonymous with Sources of Knowledge

**Employees of all ages share the sentiment that Boomers in the workplace have valuable knowledge. Compared with 2018, common work challenges are mitigating while the practice of knowledge sharing is on the rise.**

In the workplace, Boomer employees are more likely than their younger counterparts to feel knowledgeable (66% vs. 49%-57%) and this is reiterated by younger employees who say they view

Boomers in the workplace as having valuable knowledge (61%), people they can learn a lot from (48%), and as role models to look up to (43%). Fewer younger employees view Boomers as behind the times of technology (19%), less productive (11%), or as a source of delays on projects (8%). Further, only 15% of U.S. employees say figuring out how to work with employees of other ages is a current challenge for them in the workplace; among Boomers, this challenge has decreased from 2018 (12% in 2021 vs. 18% in 2018). Other challenges such as keeping up with new technology (22% vs. 36%), maintaining work/life balance (17% vs. 32%), and figuring out ways to share their knowledge with others at their company (11% vs. 17%) are less common for Boomers now than four years ago.

When it comes to retirement, more than 2 in 5 employed Boomers (42%) say there are certain benefits their company offers its active employees that prevent them from retiring. More than half (58%) wish their company offered more help for transitioning to retirement and around a third (32%) say planning for retirement is a challenge they're currently facing, though this has decreased from 2018 (41%). Regarding their employers, around two-thirds of Boomer employees (67%) say their company is well prepared to handle their retirement and nearly half (48%) report their company has an adequate successor in place for their role when they retire.

To prepare those successors for their retirement, more than half of Boomers (59%) have shared all or more than half of the knowledge needed to perform their job responsibilities with others who will need the information after they retire. This has increased significantly from 2018 (43%). Despite this uptick in knowledge sharing, more than a quarter (27%) say the processes at their job change so often that their knowledge and experience in their role will be irrelevant by the time they retire – though this has decreased significantly from 2018 (33%). Further, nearly 1 in 5 (17%) are hesitant to mentor younger employees because they may lose their job after sharing what they know with them.

