



Future-Proofing Your Workforce: An Employer's Guide

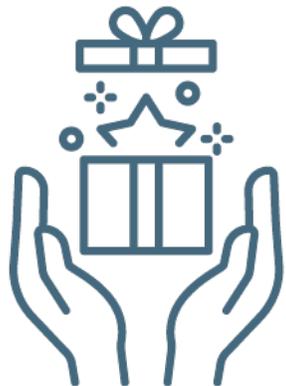
8 strategies for turning unprecedented shifts in the job market
and worker expectations into a win for you and your employees

rh Robert Half®
Talent Solutions

Key Takeaways

Employees' expectations have changed, and people are leaving their jobs in record numbers for new roles where those expectations will be met.

More than ever, managers must address employees' personal priorities and comfort levels. Asking — and providing — what workers want gives you an edge.



Remote work has had a significant impact on professionals' work-life balance and given companies access to a geographically broader talent base.

Workers' expectation of flexibility is here to stay. Remote work options and alternative scheduling such as a compressed workweek are increasingly desired.

Businesses offering more flexibility and fully remote roles are attracting higher numbers of skilled applicants and retaining key employees.

Employees want a clear career path within their company. Offering programs related to upskilling and reskilling helps keep workers engaged while addressing skill gaps and strengthening teams.

Workplace transformation will be ongoing. Companies whose managers listen and adapt to the needs of employees will thrive.

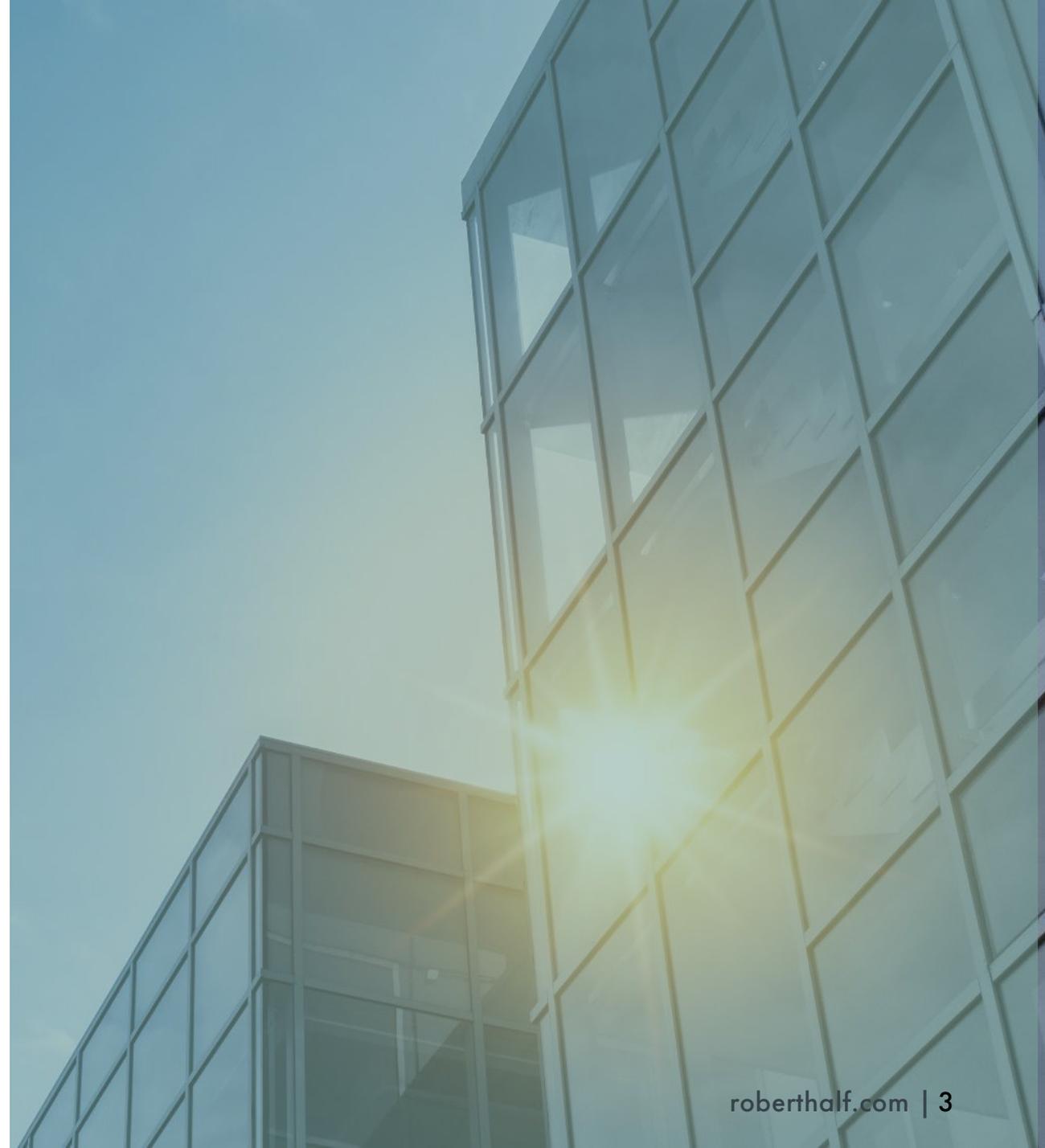


The workplace is evolving. Are you?

The workplace has gone through monumental change in the last couple of years — and that is going to continue.

Brought on by unforeseeable disruptions to our professional and personal lives, the changes include major shifts in what workers expect from a job, such as improved work-life balance and how companies must now accommodate their needs. You are an active player as this transformation evolves.

Based on from Robert Half's extensive survey programs, industry expertise and external research, what follows is an eight-point plan designed to help company leaders and managers craft a blueprint for adapting your workplace to current and future shifts.



Point 1: Embrace changing employee expectations

Your business is likely one of millions across major markets facing acute talent shortages. A confluence of factors is responsible, including an improving economy and employers looking for expanded skill sets to manage digital transformation and other projects requiring specialized expertise.

But those factors don't include the biggest trend shaping the hiring market today. The true driver is a veritable revolution in workers' overall expectations of companies.

“This is the first time in my 37-year staffing career that I’ve seen so much movement in the market and so many opportunities for workers at all levels.” — Paul McDonald, Robert Half senior executive director

People's values have shifted dramatically over the past two years. Job market trends and forces outside of work, including the pandemic and demands for social justice, are reshaping individuals' career goals and worldviews.

As they reevaluate what's important in their lives, skilled professionals won't take or stay with a job as easily as before. They have a new vision of work-life balance and what they expect from an employer. If they don't get it, they have increased confidence in their ability to find a position with another company.

The low unemployment and record-high quit rates make this a labor market unlike any that businesses have seen before.

“Workers feel they can do better,” says Robert Half senior executive director Paul McDonald. “Their gut is telling them that now is the time to make a move, even if they’re relatively content in their current job. And they have good reason. This is the first time in my 37-year staffing career that I’ve seen so much movement in the market and so many opportunities for workers at all levels.”

With **more than 4 in 10 professionals** in a Robert Half survey saying they plan to look for a new job by July 2022, this exodus isn’t likely to subside soon. “Companies should be highly concerned about business continuity,” says McDonald.

Employers are already feeling the crunch. In their 2022 and 2031 Executive Perspectives on Top Risks report, Protiviti, a global consulting firm and Robert Half subsidiary, and North Carolina State University’s ERM Initiative reveal that “succession challenges and the ability to attract and retain top talent” jumped from the eighth greatest risk in 2021 to the second greatest in 2022. In the same report, executives said they expect it to remain in the No. 2 spot in 2031.

With employers struggling to add to their workforce, there’s temptation to focus solely on hiring and let retention efforts slip. But this is the opposite of what you need to do in the middle of a radical shift in worker expectations.

Changes in employee sentiment are essential concerns for you and your business. Workers won’t always occupy the driver’s seat, but their expectations have permanently changed.

41% of workers said they plan to look for a new job by July 2022



Source: Robert Half survey

Point 2: Don't underestimate the demand for remote work

"The door to remote work has opened, and if employees have their way, they will help to keep it open for a long time to come," says Robert Half senior vice president of future of work Trisha Plovie.

Extensive research over the past year has shown that the option for remote work is now an expectation among a significant part of the U.S. workforce. In a Robert Half survey, 54% of professionals currently working from home said they would look for a new job if their employer required them to return to the office. This was especially high among working parents, caretakers of elderly family members and millennials.

Employees clearly appreciate dropping their commute, reclaiming not only time but also the energy once lost to rush-hour traffic and transit.

"My commute made me feel like I was spending half my life in my car," says Paul Flaharty, a Robert Half executive director. "When I wasn't driving, I was wasting an inordinate amount of time waiting for flights in airports and getting to my destination. **It amazes me how much more productive I am with the flexibility to work from home while still having access to the office.**"



54% of professionals currently working from home said they would look for a new job if their employer required them to return to the office.



Source: Robert Half survey

Employers have found the remote model advantageous, as well. Many acknowledge that employees are as or even more productive when doing their jobs from home. The trust level managers developed is resulting in greater job satisfaction and loyalty on the part of many employees.

“Overall retention could increase given that the employee feels empowered and trusted to conduct their work remotely and have the work-life balance they are seeking,” says Plovie.

Echoing this sentiment, VISION by Protiviti reported that 95% of North American business executives believe that employee loyalty and retention will increase over the next decade.

For firms trying to hire during this time of talent shortages, remote work offers another benefit: the ability to hire skilled workers from virtually anywhere. This not only allows wider access to people with in-demand skill sets but also greater compensation flexibility in starting salary negotiations, depending on the candidate’s location.

Biggest benefits of hiring fully remote workers, according to senior managers:



54%

More applications from
skilled candidates



45%

Greater compensation
flexibility



34%

Quicker hiring
process

Source: Robert Half survey

“Companies that are offering more flexibility and fully remote roles are attracting higher numbers of applications across the board, giving those companies larger pools of talent to choose from,” says Ai Ling Lee, a Robert Half vice president. “Employers not open to remote work structures or a hybrid model where teams alternate between home and office are less likely to be considered by candidates as attractive companies to work for.”

Point 3: Reassess the role of the office



Even though nearly two-thirds of respondents in a Robert Half survey said they don't miss working in an office, **it would be premature to declare the office obsolete.** The advantages of coming together physically in one place continue to be valued by many employers and employees. Remote workers, for example, may experience isolation and miss impromptu brainstorming and casual conversations in the office that help build team cohesion and support.

Many employers defending a return to the office are also concerned about the loss of professional growth and innovation that comes with being around coworkers and senior managers. This includes one-on-one mentoring that's hard to foster at a distance. Employers also don't want remote work arrangements to lead to a siloed work culture.

Still, employers can't ignore worker demands for off-site arrangements without severe retention and recruitment obstacles. Given the advantages of both remote and in-office workplaces, a sizable number of companies are adopting a mix of these arrangements. The best strategy is to prioritize what you want to accomplish when employees are in the office. Some businesses, for example, are taking a remote-first approach, limiting their requests for office attendance to a specific purpose, such as trainings, special events, connecting with the team or meeting with clients.

"As the realities of flexible work persist and normalize, employers continue to focus on finding ways to drive authentic connection, formal and informal, to replace the conversations that used to happen in hallways," says Robert Half vice president of experience and inclusion Alf Mendez.

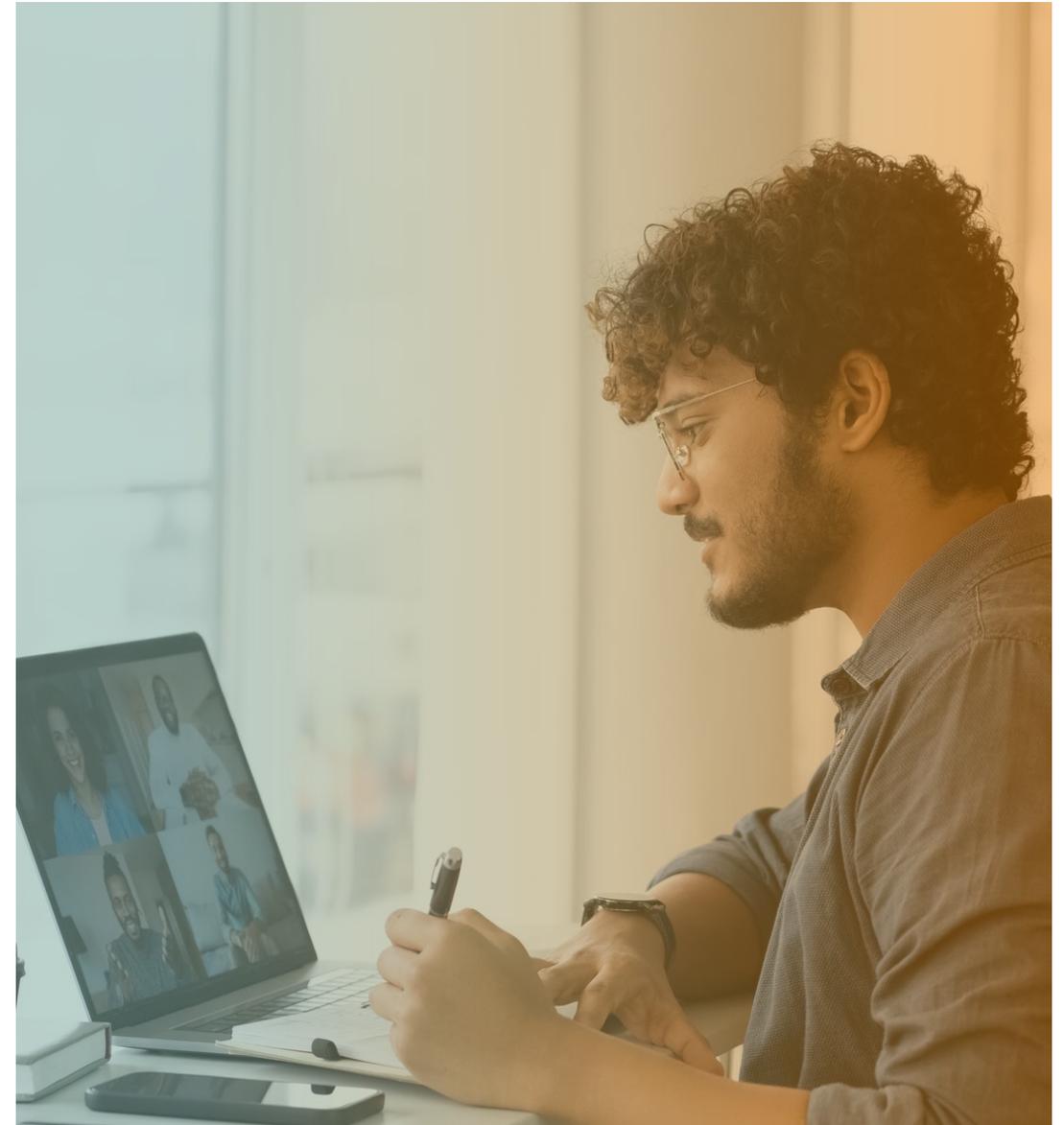
Practical considerations for companies pondering remote and hybrid work:

- Office costs and real estate evaluation processes
 - Technology for remote and hybrid work setups
 - State and city tax implications
 - Environmental, social and governance ramifications (e.g., the company's carbon footprint)
 - Cost savings compared to new expenditures
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Point 4: Take your expanded role to heart

“Managers now have the unique challenge of leading teams that have not met or may not ever meet in person,” says Marcie Reese, Robert Half senior human resources business partner. “Building a sense of community and belonging while ensuring the needs of the business are met is an additional complexity for leaders in today’s workforce. On top of that, managers have to factor in time zone differences, work-life balance challenges, and the nuances of leading both in-person and remote teams.”

The best managers have always been good listeners, a trait that is especially desirable now. Connect more often with team members to understand how their professional and work-life goals are changing — and how the company can accommodate their priorities. Listening to what your employees say they expect out of their jobs, you and the company will also give you a good idea about what today’s job seekers want.



You and your peers are essential not only in bringing teams closer together but also in recognizing and accommodating the full scope of workers' needs, such as emotional support, physical workspace requirements and psychological safety. For companies that are intentional about making lasting change to increase feelings of belonging, the advantages can't be ignored. Many of today's workplace adaptations that stemmed from the pandemic have led to permanent changes in how leaders view and approach diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), so that initiatives can be accessible by all, whether in person or remotely. Instead of seeing these as separate efforts, leaders can collectively overhaul corporate culture and focus on flexible work and DEI strategies in tandem.

"As companies evolve their ways of working, they have an opportunity to think of new approaches to attracting talent, building community and developing employees. By using DEI as the common lens, companies can design initiatives that provide equity for all, making themselves more attractive for new hires and existing employees," observes Mendez.

He adds, "Employees are looking for organizations that live their values, promote diverse thinking and create a sense of belonging. In addition, research has suggested that younger generations are placing an emphasis on inclusion as a reason to join or stay with an organization. **It's less about pay and benefits and more about creating an environment where employees can play to their strengths and see short- and long-term opportunities for themselves.**"

In group meetings, check the pulse on DEI initiatives:

- Include your efforts to increase diversity and build a stronger sense of belonging among employees.
- Provide information on DEI strategy in internal emails and external materials, including published policy.
- Ask team members, privately, whether they feel they're treated fairly and given opportunities to speak their mind.

Addressing employee burnout is another piece of the puzzle that requires empathy. Many teams are still running lean, and the required output of each employee can be very high.

In a Robert Half survey, 41% of workers said they are more burned out on the job today than a year ago. Keep this in mind as you delegate responsibilities, assess your team's capacity, ensure equitable workloads, and bring in contract professionals and additional permanent hires to provide relief and prevent the loss of valued staff.

A few pep talks won't go very far in making your team members feel confident in your efforts to address DEI, workload issues and other individual employee concerns. Take the time to truly know your team, and offer concrete solutions for issues that may be standing in the way of achieving high job satisfaction and performance.



How to get ahead of employee burnout:

1. **Check in regularly.** Arrange regular one-on-one calls with your team members to talk about their stress levels.
 2. **Ask the right questions.** If a team member is struggling, ask constructive, open-ended questions about how you can help.
 3. **Prioritize.** Help overwhelmed workers identify their most urgent tasks, and discuss obstacles they may be encountering.
 4. **Bring in support.** Employ contract professionals to reduce the burden on your employees and provide in-demand skills.
 5. **Encourage time off.** Remind staff to take breaks during the day and use vacation time — and lead by example.
 6. **Be flexible.** Offer employees flexibility in when and where they work.
 7. **Provide resources.** Make sure your team knows about programs your company offers that support a healthier lifestyle.
 8. **Be open, honest.** Share your experiences to ease employees' stress and encourage them to discuss their challenges.
 9. **Recognize and reward.** People thrive when they feel appreciated; regularly express appreciation to your team.
 10. **Create a sense of community.** Community leads to increased belonging; provide opportunities for connection and dialogue.
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As important as it is to take on an expanded role in supporting your team members, embracing it is not easy for already fully tasked managers. How can you manage these critical but time-consuming responsibilities without relinquishing some of your others? Often, technology can help.

Today, budget planning, expense report approvals, project tracking, managing team members' workloads and more mundane tasks can be handled through software. The number of responsibilities you can tap technology tools for will continue to increase, including more subjective and complex activities handled by AI, freeing up more time to focus on your employees' needs.

A checklist for managers — how to ace your expanded role:

- ✓ Connect more often with your team to understand how their goals may be changing.
- ✓ Let them know how critical they are to the success of the business, and cite specific examples.
- ✓ Ask how they feel about the company's diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.
- ✓ Master the art of conducting sensitive conversations virtually.
- ✓ Listen to employee concerns. This can also help you determine what promising job candidates want.
- ✓ Don't rely just on talk. Put action behind your words.
- ✓ Beware of burnout creeping into your workforce.

Point 5: Acknowledge that flexible work models are here to stay

Whether off-site, in the office full time or somewhere in between, many employees also want a flexible work schedule. While more than half of professionals say they would be tempted to change jobs to join an employer that offers a remote option, a flexible schedule would sway an even larger majority, according to Robert Half research.

A flexible schedule typically means a compressed workweek, such as four 10-hour days or flextime where employees set their own daily eight-hour schedule. Windowed work, when employees break down their workday into non-consecutive chunks of time — 8 a.m. to noon and 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., for example — is also increasingly popular. You'll have the most success if you consider input from your staff when deciding which options to implement.

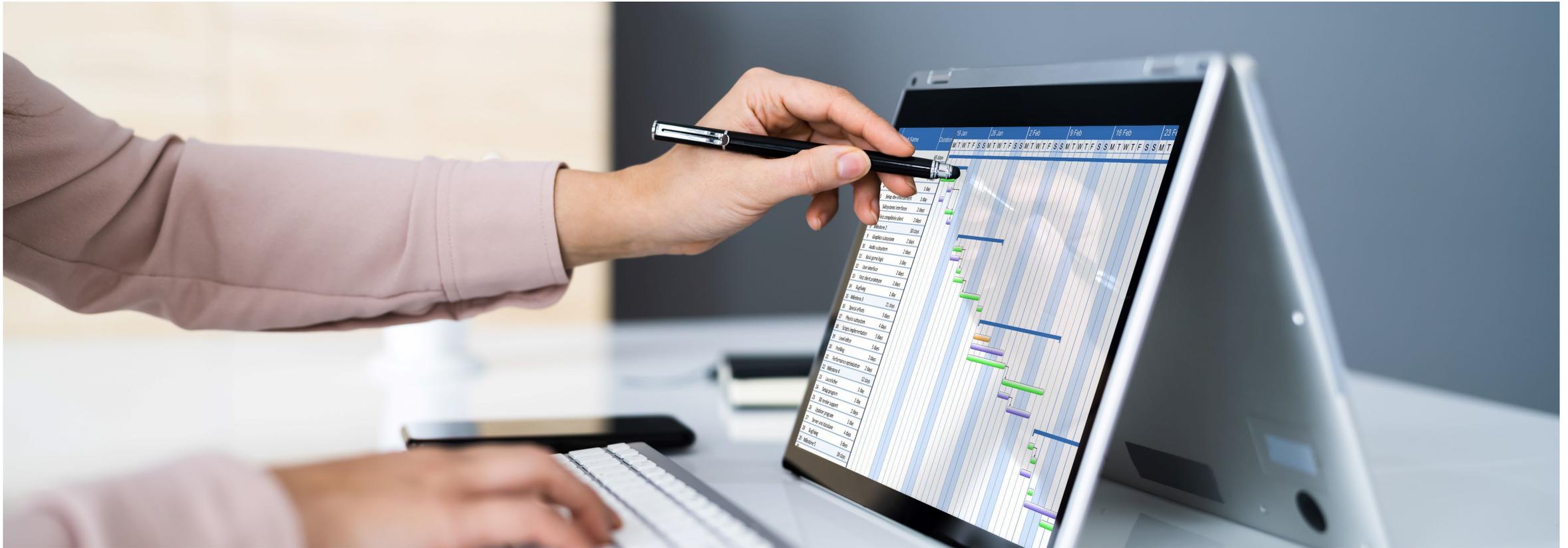
Offering employees flexibility in where they work and, especially, their work schedules is now essential for recruiting and retaining skilled talent.

“Managers need to open their minds and approach employees for their ideas on how to work remotely or follow flexible schedules,” says Robert Half senior district president Dawn Fay. “There are functions and roles where you need a person on-site, but maybe people can suggest a way to job share or do their work in a way that will allow them to work remotely at least some of the time.”

Staff who must be in the office full time, Fay adds, may have ideas about how they can restructure their hours or make other adjustments that offer them more flexibility.

Companies appear to be getting the message about increasing schedule options. “We are seeing a big shift in firms’ openness to more flexibility,” says Flaharty. “They’ve realized that the more restrictive they are, the harder it is to attract the candidates they want.”

The message is clear: Flexible work is the future of work.



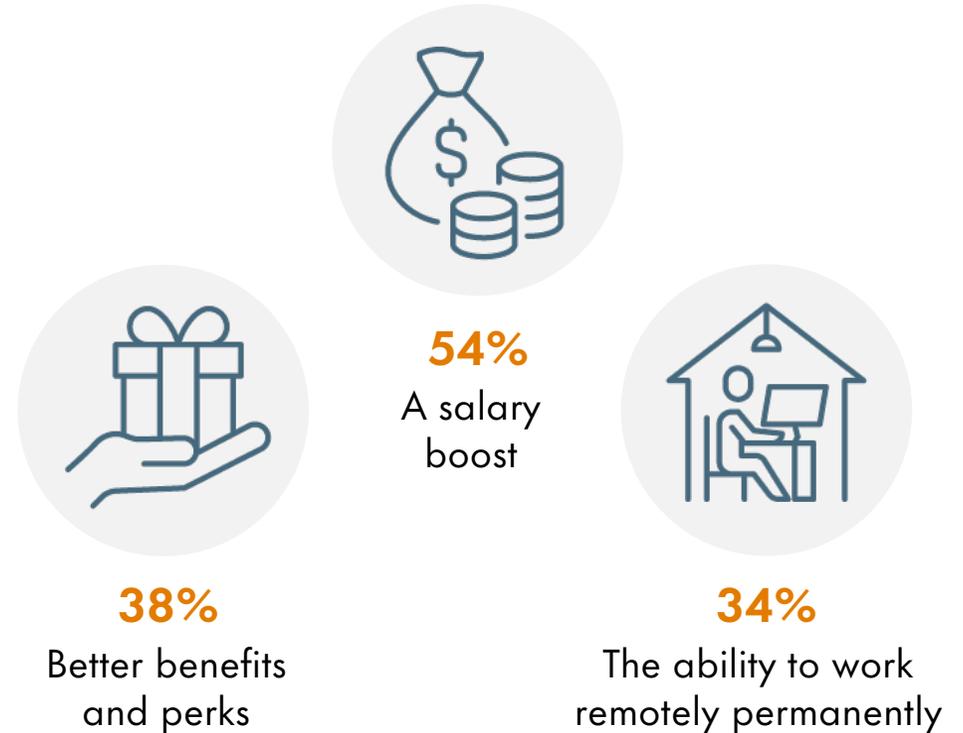
Point 6: Home in on compensation and perks

Robert Half research found that nearly half of professionals feel underpaid, and better compensation is what's driving many workers to look for a new job.

The changing employment and workplace landscape — including the blisteringly competitive hiring market — is fueling not only the desire for remote work, but also what employees and top job candidates look for in benefits and perks. Other nontraditional nice-to-haves are moving to the must-have list.

“People are very eager to have their companies help them with things that really weren't as much of a focus before the pandemic, such as health and wellness programs,” Fay says. In response, firms are adding or strengthening initiatives ranging from fitness and stress reduction to nutrition and mental health. This goes beyond the old standards of health insurance and subsidized gym memberships.

Employees' top reasons for changing jobs:



Source: Robert Half survey

Options for more time off facilitate better work-life balance, and mindfulness and meditation courses help people stay focused, engaged and productive. Offerings centered around financial wellness such as retirement planning are also higher on workers' shopping lists.

Says Mendez, "Employees will continue to prioritize mental health and well-being, and these programs will need to be integrated into overall ways of working versus standalone benefits programs."



Point 7: Upskill and reskill, again and again

Ambition and career goals deserve renewed attention. Robert Half research shows that 6 in 10 professionals plan to seek a promotion as the next step in their career. But the research also found that many workers feel they've already reached a dead end with their current employer: More than 40% feel they don't have a path for advancement.

Supporting professional development in the new world of work won't be easy and can be a particularly challenging part of managing hybrid teams. The logistics of delivering training virtually to a dispersed workforce is just one barrier. In fact, shortfalls in developmental opportunities often have more to do with the kind of training people want and need. That's because jobs evolve and new roles are continually being created, all demanding new skill sets. Employees and job candidates have picked up on that trend.

Organizations' continuous move toward digital transformation has been a yearslong driver of what professional development should focus on. What's new is a pandemic that has shown companies how critical it is to have the right tools in place to stay in business during a period of disruption. This has fueled a cross-industry acceleration of firms' digital plans. That's why much of the upskilling and reskilling companies now pursue involves technology. But the difficulty of finding and hiring new people with the necessary technology skills is part of the reason firms must look inward today.

To be clear, upskilling is not a one-step process but a moving target. Today's higher skills will become tomorrow's baseline. The need to grow talent at home is likely to increase in the future. In Protiviti and North Carolina State University's report on top risks for 2022 and 2031, executives' concern that the adoption of digital technologies will require "significant efforts to upskill/reskill existing employees" ranks as No. 4 in 2022 — but jumps to No. 1 for 2031.



Your upskilling and reskilling programs should play a role in your hiring strategies. Employers who wait around for the perfect employee do themselves a great disservice. Candidates who check every proverbial box are rare, if not impossible to find, and those who come close will be in very high demand. Instead, employers can recruit workers who may lack the expertise they prefer but have the potential and bandwidth for gaining the needed skills and growing into the role — and beyond.

Your efforts could include such programs as in-house training, mentoring, succession planning, job-shadowing and fee reimbursement for professional certifications and college courses. Whatever path you offer, consider it part of the investment to future-proof your company.

Point 8: Watch for the next steps in workplace evolution

Technology will continue to improve how people stay connected and productive in what could become an even more employee-dispersed world. Business systems will need to become more intuitive and seamless from the user's perspective to help employees quickly find the information they need.

Many of the communication tools used today, such as phones and even video calls, will likely become archaic as technology becomes more sophisticated at helping employees connect with customers and each other.



“We are about to witness the unleashing of the most incredible technology I’ve ever seen,” [wrote Josh Bersin](#), an industry analyst and founder of The Josh Bersin Academy. These new digital experiences will “further transform the definition of hybrid work,” he said in his HR Predictions for 2022 report.

The metaverse, for example, uses immersive technologies such as virtual and augmented reality to allow dispersed workers to meet in virtual settings that seem more real than ever. Major IT companies are already developing metaverse tools with the goal of more effectively bringing together people separated by geographic distance.

“The potential of the metaverse is to fill the engagement gap between remote work and in-office interaction,” says Michael Allenson, director of business performance improvement at Protiviti. “It can create an even better, more immersive at-work experience.”

While so many changes coming at once can be confusing, even frustrating, the transformation of the workplace represents an opportunity for companies. The more you can do to continually reassess workers’ evolving needs, the better you’ll be at keeping valued performers and adding new talent.

“It’s hard to imagine a future that looks very similar to the world we came from or live in now,” says Flaharty. It’s also hard to imagine a time when leaders can stop listening.

“In the end,” says Mendez, “I believe the goal for companies is to evolve into a workplace where employees want to spend their time and get a sense of purpose.”

95% of North American business executives believe that employee loyalty and retention will increase over the next decade.



Source: VISION by Protiviti

Additional resources



The Demand for Skilled Talent

About Robert Half

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