

In The Hybrid Era, Are You Overlooking Your ‘Mismatched’ Employees?

HR executive | Livia Martini | October 30, 2023

Over the last few years, organizations have come to see clearly that workplace wellness is table stakes. But even with the best intentions, many people leaders are struggling to improve the state of wellbeing in their workforce. In a new survey, my team at Gympass has discovered a major, unresolved problem behind this trend.

As the world of work has transformed, making remote and hybrid options far more available, one group of people in particular has been suffering. We call this group the “mismatched.”

Large majorities of today’s employees, across a wide array of industries, are satisfied with how they’re working—whether in office, from home or a combination. But those who are dissatisfied have far worse states of wellbeing.

The numbers in our new survey, the State of Work-Life Wellness 2024 Report, make this clear. People who work remotely but prefer in-office, or who work in-office but prefer remote work, are twice as likely to report that they are “struggling” or “really struggling.” They’re also twice as likely to say they’re unhappy working at their company. They report higher stress levels, lower emotional wellbeing and more sleep loss due to work stress.

Overall, just over a third (37%) of people surveyed are among the “mismatched.” But, the survey shows that this problem is not spread evenly among in-office and remote workers. Nearly four in 10 office workers (39%) wish they had a different work environment, while only 28% of at-home workers said the same. So, our survey finds that the remote workforce is, on the whole, more satisfied.

Virtually all employees now prioritize wellbeing

As Maxine Carrington, chief people officer for Northwell Health, writes in the foreword to our study, “Companies must care about these gaps if for no other reason than these inequities limit their success. Happy employees run more profitable departments, while burnout drives productivity and turnover losses of \$322 billion annually globally.” (Northwell Health is the largest healthcare provider and private employer in New York state.)

Tackling this problem is especially important amid such a strong job market. Talented people have a great many choices for where to work. CNN even called a recent jobs report “stunning” and a “shock” for its high job-growth figures.

Our survey found that wellbeing, which was already a top priority for employees and job seekers, has become even more so. Virtually all employees (96%) want to work for companies that prioritize wellbeing. And 93% believe it’s as important as salary—a significant increase of 10 percentage points since our survey last year. Eighty-seven percent of workers said they would consider leaving a company that does not focus on employee wellbeing, which is also a 10-point increase.

Expand flexibility—at all levels

How can organizations address mismatched employees? Rather than seeking ways to entice and encourage employees to return to the office, adopt a different mindset: How can we expand work options for our team members? How can we give each individual the widest array of possibilities? Creating an environment that supports this kind of flexibility while delivering results is the answer.

People leaders should also make sure managers have discussions with individual employees to discover whether they are “mismatched” and what kind of work setup they prefer. Be willing to experiment with different possibilities until they find the environment that’s right for them.

If your business can’t offer much flexibility in where people work, our study finds that another form of flexibility can help everyone boost their wellbeing: the flexibility to take part in wellness activities at whatever time works best for them. By providing resources for all forms of wellness, and the freedom to put those resources to use, organizations can deliver transformation results.

This requires making sure that options are available across the board. Our survey found that while 91% of company leaders say they can take time for their wellbeing, only 76% of managers and 66% of non-managers said the same. Leaders need to recognize that team members might not feel the same freedom they do and that they need to address these gaps. They should model the behavior they want to see in their teams, and actively encourage team members to make use of this flexibility.

I’ve found that maximizing flexibility goes a long way in nurturing talent. At Gympass, it helps us to create a culture that supports accountability and trust. This not only empowers our team members to work in the ways best for them but ensures our entire company is set up for greater success, both in business results and individuals’ wellbeing.

The good news is that these efforts more than pay for themselves. Our recent research on the ROI of wellbeing found overwhelmingly positive returns. The more we, as people leaders, do to empower our team members to build healthier, more balanced lives, the more we all stand to gain.