



# SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?

HIGH SALARIES ARE NO LONGER THE  
MAIN DRAW FOR JOB SEEKERS. HERE'S WHAT IS.

BY TESS LOPEZ

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“EMPLOYERS WHO INCLUDE A WORK-FROM-HOME OR REMOTE OPTION ARE CURRENTLY ATTRACTING **SEVEN TIMES MORE APPLICANTS**,” WRITES SUSAN ARTHUR, CEO OF CAREERBUILDER.

**If** a silver lining can be found in the fallout of the pandemic, it’s that many of us (maybe finally) have started to prioritize our health and relationships over our jobs. The possibility of contracting COVID-19 was enough for the world to reconfigure how it spent each moment. That meant devoting more time to family and friends and cutting out anything that detracted from our pursuit of happiness and purpose.

The common denominator working against those goals? Work. Or, more specifically, work that doesn’t make those allowances for employees.

As the pandemic has waned, rather than returning to work, people have left it. Dubbed the “great resignation,” this trend saw record numbers of people quitting their jobs. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 4.5 million American workers handed in their notice in November 2021—the highest level recorded in one month since the data was first collected in 2000.

Juicy salaries and 401(k) matches no longer cut it; according to a study by Clever Real Estate, participants in the “great resignation” took an average pay cut of \$8,000. In a 2021 Gartner survey, 65% of respondents said the pandemic made them rethink work’s place in their lives.

The resulting new wave of job seekers is searching for an employment deal that generally ticks three boxes: flexibility, well-being and purpose-driven work. Here’s a look at how these three priorities are impacting the job market.

### 1 / FLEXIBILITY

As employees migrated from conference rooms to Zoom, a greater appreciation for the work-from-home life emerged. Employees were better able to coordinate doctors’ appointments and childcare or finish laundry and start the Crockpot for dinner before the workday began. Eliminating commutes freed up an average of 53 minutes per day for spending time with family or catching up on sleep. This made the return to a strict 40-hour, 9-to-5, five-days-a-week schedule grossly unappealing.

A recent CareerBuilder survey found that more than 61% of employed American adults agree that they work better remotely than they do in the office. Additionally, 77% of job seekers who are already employed believe the option to work remotely is important in a job posting. “Employers who include a work-from-home or remote option are currently attracting seven times more applicants,” writes Susan Arthur, CEO of CareerBuilder.

Take Drift as an example: When the sales and marketing software company launched in 2015, the co-founders were deliberate about establishing a strictly in-office work culture.

“In the course of maturing and the organization getting larger, we added a bit of flexibility, but we tracked it,” says Dena Upton, Drift’s chief people officer. “We used to give people 10 working days from home. And it was hard to attract people with that kind of rigor around office life.”

Once the pandemic hit and employees started working from home, the philosophy around flexibility changed. “We originally thought this was only going to be a one-month, two-month thing,” Upton explains. “And what we realized is we’ve kind of gone through a one-way door. We couldn’t go back through, and the future of work had changed.”



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WHEN IT COMES TO STAVING OFF AN INFLUX OF RESIGNATION LETTERS, EMPLOYERS SHOULD CONSIDER LETTING THEIR TEAM WORK IN A WAY THAT'S MOST EFFICIENT FOR THEM.

The company issued a survey to its employees asking whether they'd prefer to work in the office, remote or hybrid. The preferences were evenly split, although an entirely different and unexpected perspective emerged from the results.

"What was important in the data that we got back from the team was they all wanted an equitable experience. We [don't] believe hybrid will always be an equitable experience," Upton explains, highlighting the fact that those in the office would end up feeling more connected and involved in company decisions than those working remotely.

In January 2021, the company announced they were going digital-first. Meetings now take place on Zoom and are recorded for those who can't attend. Orientations and training are completed through video content and virtual assessments. Offices—in Boston; San Francisco; Tampa, Florida; London; Guadalajara, Mexico; and Australia—were converted to what Upton calls "conversation spaces," where local team members can gather in a more casual, relaxed setting to collaborate. But even then, "you put your Zoom call on," Upton says.

"It's about career advancement for our team. It's access to advancement, regardless of your background or where you live," she explains. "And so that idea around equality and an equal playing field are the pillars to why we went this way."

Even the company's pared-down use of its various real estate investments doesn't faze its leadership team. If a certain working schedule and location benefits employee output, customer satisfaction and the company's overall mission, Drift considers that a win.

"You can be productive at different hours of the day, and your family is as important as your job—and you don't have to compartmentalize those things," Upton says.

**THE TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:** When it comes to staving off an influx of resignation letters, employers should consider letting their team work in a way that's most efficient for them. Some people work best in two- or three-hour stints, while others may not fully tap into their creativity until late at night. Forcing employees to log the same number of hours at the same time in the same place every day doesn't guarantee that their best work is being done. Measure output, not input.

KATERYNA ONYSHCHUK/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

## 2 / WELL-BEING

It's no surprise that well-being dropped during the pandemic. With grim news reports, isolation and a complete 180-degree turn in how we carried out our day-to-day life, mental health plummeted. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, the number of U.S. adults who reported symptoms of depression and anxiety disorder in 2021 was up 30% from just two years earlier.

This led to an increased demand for businesses and organizations to prioritize employees' mental health; it also became a major incentive for those on a job hunt. In a 2021 survey issued by Paychex and Future Workplace, 62% of respondents agreed that "employee well-being support and benefits are a top priority when applying for or considering their next job."

Overwork and a feeling of being underappreciated by her peers led Florida-based Elisabeth Lopez to leave her role as a high school biology teacher.

"My first day as a teacher, I was told I would not only be teaching biology but four other subjects that I did not even major in," she says. She often stayed late after school to sponsor clubs—which she wasn't paid for—and spent time creating lesson plans and grading after her normal hours. "I often brought work home and was constantly stressed," she explains. "I am lucky that I was already seeing a therapist."

A connection on LinkedIn recommended that Lopez apply for a job as an instructional designer for a wine and spirits distributor. She snagged the position and now works remotely, citing flexible hours, great communication, team support, a salary bump and better work-life balance as a few of the perks in her new role.

"My life now has changed: I do not feel guilty about enjoying my weekends and not working," Lopez says. "I can close my computer once I have worked my eight hours and not feel like I am not doing enough."

Under the umbrella of well-being at work, the area of mental and emotional well-being—which encompasses perks such as wellness coaching and flexible scheduling—ranked as a top need, according to the Paychex survey. Employees also cited a desire for better mental health benefits and insurance. A 2021 article in the *Journal of Occupational and*

*Environmental Medicine (JOEM)* noted that offering a robust health care plan with "access to a large pool of mental health providers... and eliminating unreasonable service limits such as the number of outpatient sessions covered" is necessary.

**THE TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:** Don't discount opportunities to create a holistic work environment for current and prospective employees. A quiet room for workers to recharge mentally, nutritional foods in the staff cafeterias, fitness club memberships and work-free weekends are all examples of ways to contribute to a "positive mood, less fatigue and a decrease in employee burnout," according to the JOEM article. They also help create a magnet for qualified, committed workers.

## 3 / PURPOSE

Now more than ever, job seekers are craving positions that mean something to them. Work can no longer be a soulless routine—it has to offer value and fulfillment. Millennials and Generation Z, who together make up almost half of the current workforce, are especially motivated to ensure that the time they're allocating toward a job counts, whether by doing good or allowing them to carry out their own goals.

Naina Dhingra, a partner with McKinsey & Company, likens the concept of one's purpose to a North Star: "[It's] this idea of having a sense of direction, intention and understanding that the contribution you're making is going somewhere."

**THE TAKEAWAY FOR EMPLOYERS:** One way that a CEO, owner or board member can get on board with this trend is to take the time to ensure that the company or brand's mission truly reflects what they want the business to stand for. Once that mission is clarified and refined, it needs to be baked into every decision and every job title. Job seekers are searching for roles at companies whose mission closely aligns with their own values. By making that mission apparent, you're attracting candidates who are already inclined to put more effort into their work, because they believe it's important. According to 2021 McKinsey research, approximately 70% of Americans still define their sense of purpose through the work they do.

In an episode of *The McKinsey Podcast*, senior partner Bill Schaninger puts it this way: "When someone is looking for the time they spend at work to have purpose and needs alignment between the organization's purpose and their own, it's a multiple win in terms of good outcomes, of employees wanting to stay and feeling like it's a good place to work and for their intention to stay and strive." ♦

**LOPEZ IS A WRITER WHO RECENTLY STARTED WORKING FULL-TIME WITH SUCCESS THANKS TO ITS COMMITMENT TO FLEXIBILITY, WELL-BEING AND PURPOSE-DRIVEN WORK.**