



## Why Deskless Workers Are Leaving—and How to Win Them Back

To BCG's network around the world,

Attracting and retaining talent is a top CEO priority, as the Great Resignation continues for workers across sectors and around the world. Eager to find ways to meet employees' needs, many companies are establishing new policies and practices for remote and hybrid work. But for most employees—80% of the global workforce, in fact—working from home is not an option.

A recent [BCG survey](#) reveals important trends about these “deskless workers” in sectors such as construction, distribution, manufacturing, health care, retail, hospitality, and transportation. Among the more than 7,000 respondents across seven countries (Australia, France, Germany, India, Japan, the UK, and the US), more than one-third are considering quitting in the next six months.

The survey clues us in to the pain points for this segment of the workforce. Chief among their concerns are inflexible shift schedules; insufficient benefits packages; a lack of opportunities for career growth, advancement, and learning; and a general sense of underappreciation.

I know that addressing these concerns is easier said than done, especially when so many companies are still struggling in the wake of the pandemic and dealing with supply chain issues, high inflation, and rising interest rates. But doing so can have an economic upside—for example, from reduced turnover, and from improvements in customer experience and service that result from well-trained, tenured workers delivering higher-quality output.

Equitable pay is necessary, but it's not enough. There are many ways leaders can help create a better future for deskless workers:

- **Offer flexible schedules.** Why do working shifts have to be fixed? If we adjust shift schedules to match different workers' lifestyles without affecting company operations, that could mean more time for parents to spend with their kids, extended leaves, and weekend and evening shifts for students trying to earn degrees. This is where AI and technology can help make flexibility easier for everyone. In retail, both Target and Walmart, for example, are experimenting with apps that allow workers to easily exchange shifts with one another.
- **Rethink benefits.** Every person is different. Let's treat employees as we do customers, segmenting them by technical, functional, and emotional needs and adapting benefits accordingly. One option is onsite, subsidized daycare for parents. During the pandemic, US-based childcare provider Bright Horizons added dozens of new onsite daycare centers sponsored by employers across the country.
- **Provide career growth and upskilling opportunities.** Companies can help workers—and themselves, in the end—by supporting them to create better lives and improve their opportunities for social mobility. Offer training for in-demand skills or help them learn and grow every day in their current roles with an embedded learning culture in which front-line managers give feedback and coaching. And make sure employees are aware of all internal opportunities—both horizontal and vertical—with job fairs and virtual postings.
- **Demonstrate Support and Commitment.** Close the gap between headquarters and the front line, with leaders regularly listening to and acting on feedback regarding workers' views and needs. Simple acts, such as senior leaders spending time onsite, go a long way. Hubert Joly famously spent his first weeks in the top job at Best Buy serving customers and wearing a badge that read "CEO in training."

Continuing waves of departures among the best deskless workers will have significant implications for the companies and industries that rely heavily on them. Finding ways to support and retain them will be good for business and for society. Deskless workers—the people who watch after our children and our elderly, who build our bridges and operate the transport that delivers the goods we require for work and life—deserve a better future of work too.

Please see below for our article that details the survey and what leaders can do, along with other related content.

We'll be taking the next two weeks off from the Weekly Brief. I look forward to reconnecting with you later in the month. Until next time,



Christoph Schweizer  
Chief Executive Officer

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## Further Reading



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