



Undervalued and Overloaded: Employees Are Running on Empty

Insights from a survey of more than 2,000 employees show that many feel treated like faceless commodities, not uniquely talented individuals — a dynamic that leaves them feeling undervalued, disconnected, and disengaged.





Executive summary

Employees today are expected to do more, faster — often juggling complex technology that evolves constantly and collaborating across global time zones. Insights from a **Bright Horizons®** and Harris Poll survey of over 2,000 U.S. workers found **employees feel more like cogs in a machine than valued individuals**.

Without customized support to balance the demands of their professional and personal lives, they're left struggling to keep up. This disconnect comes at a steep human cost: workers report feeling undervalued, overwhelmed, and disengaged from their roles. And the consequences ripple beyond employee well-being as productivity declines and workplace culture suffers.

Supporting employees holistically — not just as workers but as whole people — is not optional. Organizations must rethink how they invest in their workforce, providing the resources and flexibility employees need to succeed both on and off the clock.



**Nearly half of employees
don't feel valued at work.**



When employees don't feel seen, workplace culture cracks

In work cultures where people are treated as tools rather than teammates, emotional connection and loyalty appear to fade fast. **Employees who feel undervalued are four times more likely to burn out (45% vs. 11%),** and nearly eight in ten **(76%) are open to new opportunities.** Further, burned-out employees are also more likely to rate their mental health (28% vs. 7%) and physical health (21% vs. 8%) as terrible/poor compared to their counterparts — all of which further hurt engagement and output.

When employees disengage, workplace culture starts to break down — and the two feed off each other. This costs U.S. companies millions each year: between \$4,000 and \$21,000 per employee. For a company with 1,000 employees, that adds up to an average annual loss of \$5 million.¹

45%

of employees don't feel valued at work.

35%

of employees feel seen as a means to an end by their employer.



Meaningful employer support fuels employee performance

The gap between what employees give and what they get in return continues to widen. This may leave team members feeling undervalued, which can ultimately impact motivation and performance.

To close that gap, leaders must prioritize decision-making that balances business outcomes with human needs.² That means consistently providing the emotional, logistical, and social support employees need to truly thrive. In fact, **nine in ten employees (92%) report that when they feel supported by their employer, they're more productive.**



6 in 10

parents say their work suffers when their personal life becomes overwhelming.

Chronic stress doesn't clock out

An always-on culture has blurred the line between work and personal life. And competing demands have turned stress into a chronic issue for many.

Roughly half of burned-out workers rate their **sleep (49%)**, **exercise (51%)**, and **personal time they get (44%)** as poor or terrible. Frequent care-related disruptions, like a sick child or school emergency, may be causing parents added pressure at work, as **58% of parents say their work suffers when their personal life becomes overwhelming**. This fuels a cycle that drags down both wellness and performance.

Burned-out employees are nearly **five times** more likely to rate their outlook on life as terrible/poor compared to those who are not burned out (23% vs. 5%).

3 ways burnout takes a toll



Sleep



Exercise



Personal time

The domino effect of poor workplace support

Employers may see the work getting done but overlook the slow toll burnout takes on their people. Chronic stress quietly impacts health — driving up medical claims and insurance costs. In fact, burnout can cost employers 0.2 to 2.9 times the average health insurance expense per employee.³



Addressing burnout takes more than surface-level fixes. It demands leadership that prioritizes well-being and flexibility, offering meaningful support that meets employees where they are — at every stage of life.



8 in 10

younger workers feel employers should provide customized benefits to address employee needs at different life stages.

Gen Z and Millennials are running ragged and looking for employer support



By 2030, **Millennials and Gen Z will make up 74% of the workforce**, and many are already struggling with burnout and work-life balance.⁴ Disturbingly, nearly a third (32%) of younger employees (i.e., between the ages of 18-43) **believe feeling burned out means they're doing their best** — a deeply ingrained belief tied to outdated definitions of success. In fact, more than half (55%) of Gen Z and Millennial workers say they don't have enough time in the day to give both work and their family/friends the time they need.

These younger workers expect employers to provide more help. More than **eight in ten feel employers should provide customized benefits to address employee needs at different life stages**, and many expect employers to treat child care as an essential infrastructure, not a personal issue — with **six in ten Gen Z and Millennial employees (59%) saying employers should bear the responsibility for helping parents access child care**.

Personalized support for a changing workforce

Employees now expect caregiving support as a standard benefit — not a perk. Without it, employers risk losing talent to organizations that prioritize real-life needs.



For hybrid workers, **the toll is becoming increasingly evident.** They are significantly more likely than remote and on-site workers to say:

56%

There isn't enough time in the day for me to give both work and family/friends the time they need.

64%

My work suffers when my personal life becomes overwhelming.



Hybrid work makes for a fragmented life

Many organizations embraced hybrid work to combat burnout — but are there unintended consequences?

Though it offers flexibility, the constant juggling between work and life can make it hard for employees to thrive. Flexibility alone doesn't guarantee success. In some cases, it can create more problems.

Balancing acts are reaching breaking points

Hybrid work promised balance: a way to blend professional life with personal demands more fluidly. But for many, especially working parents, it's become a juggling act without a break. What looks like flexibility on paper often feels like chaos in practice.

Uninterrupted focus has become a rare luxury, and 51% of hybrid working parents say they are trying to be a good parent and employee but are accomplishing neither.

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Hybrid needs a human touch — and more comprehensive support

No matter the work setting, all employees need support to manage their personal and professional lives. And without more thoughtful, human-centered solutions, no type of working model will be a success.

Working parents who have worked remotely with their school-age (6-18 years) child(ren) at home **face ongoing challenges during calls and meetings**, including reports that they often/sometimes:



54%

Are distracted by their children



53%

Stay muted more than normal due to background noise



47%

Get interrupted during meetings



39%

Are working from less-productive locations



Where parenting and remote work collide

Working from home doesn't erase child care demands.

For hybrid and remote workers juggling kids at home, responsibilities are intertwined, distracting focus, and resulting in longer days — potentially leading to overload and burnout. These occasions of working while parenting likely cause many to be switching gears — from Zoom calls to homework help, then racing back to meet a deadline.

These daily disruptions may help explain why **69% of working parents** who have worked remotely while their child(ren) are home **resort to screen time** to keep children occupied.

To catch up from the disruptions, **67% are working outside regular hours (i.e., earlier or later)** — which only adds to stress and sleep deprivation, and decreased time for one's personal life.

Empowering hybrid working parents to thrive



Hybrid working parents need more than flexibility. They need support — not just for early childhood, but once children reach school age, when care gaps still disrupt work and well-being. Before- and after-school care, school-break coverage, and back-up care options when regular care falls through are essential to helping parents stay productive and present.



Three in five

working parents who have PTO report they use up to two weeks each year to solve child care challenges.

When child care fails, everyone suffers

Balancing work and parenting is an everyday reality for many, regardless of where they work. Without consistent, reliable child care, employees can't fully engage at work — many are simply getting by. And parents today often rely on fragile, patchwork child care solutions just to make it through the week, with 64% having experienced changes to their child care during the workday. Additionally, **more than half of working parents (56%) report challenges that have prevented them from finding reliable child care.** Child care challenges typically fall into three categories known as the "child care trilemma — Quality, Affordability, and Accessibility."⁵

For frontline workers, the strain is even greater: 66% experience challenges finding reliable child care.

The cost of broken child care support

Nearly four in ten working parents report that parenting responsibilities have forced them to leave work early or arrive late to work (39%) and three in ten reported missing a day of work entirely (32%). Child care appears to compound work absences, as working parents are often forced to use their time off for caregiving. In fact, three in five working parents who have PTO (60%) report they use up to two weeks each year to solve child care challenges.

When child care falls through, the ripple effects go beyond one employee: more than half of non-parent employees (53%) have been asked to take on extra work to help a coworker who is managing parenting needs. A lack of reliable child care may be putting everyone at greater risk of burnout.



Key
takeaway

Child care isn't just personal — it's professional

The system is strained — and so are the people in it.

This strain reveals a key opportunity for employers: **more than four in five working parents** with children from infancy to preschool (82%) **would be more likely to use a child care center if their employer provided it.** By increasing the supply of quality, affordable child care needed, employers can support families and long-term performance.



A new standard for employee trust and loyalty

Building a supportive workplace means offering benefits that consistently address the real and evolving needs of all working parents as they progress through their lives.

Previous [Bright Horizons research](#) confirmed that **employee fulfillment** stems from meeting **three core needs**,⁶ including:

- 1. Autonomy:** trusted, flexible work, control
- 2. Expertise:** skilled, confident, supported learning
- 3. Connection:** belonging, ties to work culture, meaningful work

To build and sustain high-performance teams, organizations must look beyond traditional benefits and surface-level solutions. The most resilient organizations — those that succeed in uncertainty — put their people first. They demonstrate this by providing personalized support that cares for the whole person, both at work and beyond.

**To explore ways to better support your people,
[get in touch](#) to see how we can help.**

About the Harris Poll

Method Statement

The research was conducted online in the U.S. by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bright Horizons among 2,007 U.S. adults aged 18 years or older who are employed either full-time or part-time as a W-2 worker (i.e., employer withholds taxes from wages). The survey was conducted between January 14-28, 2025.

Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, employment, household income, smoking status, and children in household under 18 to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys.

The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 3.0 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

About Bright Horizons

Every day, Bright Horizons helps employers attract employees, retain them, and create healthier, higher-performing workforces by solving their education and care needs. We offer affordable, high-quality child care; reliable nationwide back-up care; trusted senior care assistance; unique coaching and support for children's education; and impactful workforce education programs — solutions that support personal responsibilities, and help people work their best at every stage of life.

Endnotes

- 1 Marie F. Martinez, "The Health and Economic Burden of Employee Burnout to U.S. Employers," American Journal of Preventive Medicine, February 26, 2025
- 2 Corrie Comisso, Arpan Kumar Saha, Pubali Dey, Cintia Cheong, and Preetha Devan, "2025 Global Human Capital Trends," Deloitte Insights, March 24, 2025
- 3 Julian Hayes II, "Employee Burnout: The Hidden Threat Costing Companies Millions," Forbes, March 17, 2025
- 4 Andrew Hewitt, "The Next-Gen Workforce: Five Key Tech Areas Separate Younger Workers From Older Generations," Forrester, March 16, 2021
- 5 "Making the Case for Family Care: The Value of Investing in Employees," Bright Horizons, January 24, 2024
- 6 "Building a Sustainable Workforce," Bright Horizons, 2024



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