

# What Do Workers Want?

Survey results on what employees want from their jobs.

By Christopher Caggiano | Nov 1, 1992

You aren't the first to wonder what your employees want from their jobs, nor will you be the last. . . . Here's what the surveys say

You want to know what satisfies your workers? Well, fortunately for you, a veritable industry has ballooned to tell you precisely that -- what pleases them, motivates them, makes them want to never leave your company. Measuring employee satisfaction is hardly new. Social scientists have surveyed employees on the topic for decades.

We've sifted through thousands of numbers, dozens of survey, and years of research to save you the exhausting legwork and the excruciating mind work of combing through the available quantitative research on what matters most to employees. You can rest easy. Regardless of the fact we found one survey that says white for every one that says black, the cumulative results won't startle you. It turns out your employees want the same things they've always wanted. And they're probably a lot happier with their jobs than you think. What do they want? Read on.

## What Workers Really Want

Health insurance, benefits, and job security pop out as being of top importance to today's workers, which shouldn't surprise you, given an environment of mass layoffs, cost cutting, and increased health-care expenses. Since workers often must share the burden of those escalating health-care costs, it also should come as no surprise that far less than half of America's workers feel completely satisfied in terms of those three factors.

The disparity between what workers want and what they're getting may drive some employers to creative alternatives, but the gap isn't likely to close. With costs continuing to spiral upward, it's questionable just how much you can do to bridge it.

But check out how high "interesting work" ranks below. Here's a factor you *can* control far more directly and cost-effectively than benefits and, for that matter, compensation. Given the dramatic 22-point lead interesting work has over high income when it comes to importance to workers, where are *you* going to put *your* efforts?

"Yeah, right," you say. "All my employees want is more money." Well, statistically and experientially, that's just plain wrongheaded thinking. You can look it up. People

will work for less (not less than a fair wage, but certainly less than the deepest pockets in town) if they enjoy their work and feel as if they're being treated fairly. If your workers are complaining about their pay, it's usually a sign that something else is missing.

Listen to C. J. Cranny, the man who wrote the book on job satisfaction, *Job Satisfaction: How People Feel About Their Jobs and How It Affects Their Performance* (Lexington Books, 1992). Ultimately, says Cranny, the chairman of Bowling Green State University's psychology department, the most important factor in creating an atmosphere that workers find satisfying is whether employees find their work "intrinsically interesting."

And it wouldn't hurt to take a hard look at how you can relieve some of that employee job stress, either.

*How important is each of the following characteristics to you? How satisfied are you with it in your current job?*

*% of workers who . . .*

	ranked it as very important	said they were satisfied
Good health insurance and other benefits	81%	27%
Interesting work	78	41
Job security	78	35
Opportunity to learn new skills	68	31
Having a week or more of vacation	66	35
Being able to work independently	64	42
Recognition from coworkers	62	24
Regular hours (no weekends, no nights)	58	40
Having a job in which you can help people	58	34
Limiting job stress	58	17
High income	56	13
Working close to home	55	46
Work that is important to society	53	35
Chances for promotion	53	20
Contact with a lot of people	52	45
Flexible hours	49	39

*Source: Gallup Poll, Princeton, N.J., 1991.*

## **The More Things Change, the More They Appear the Same**

The change in the level of satisfaction workers have with individual aspects of their jobs was relatively minor over the past two decades. But if anything stands out in the trend tables below and confirms some of what we observed earlier, it's that workers have grown less satisfied with benefits and pay than they have with any other characteristics of their jobs.

No surprise, argues David Abramis, an organizational psychologist at California State University at Long Beach. "When times are tight and you're worried about your job, pay becomes an important issue."

Absolutely. And when times are tight and costs are escalating, look elsewhere for a solution. It just might be found in some numbers that have hardly budged over the last 10 to 20 years, namely, the high percentage who desire "important and meaningful work" and the high level of satisfaction with "type of work." Remember how high "interesting work" ranks in importance among characteristics workers want in a job?

### ***What do you most prefer in a job?***

#### **% of workers saying aspect was the most important**

	1973	1980	1985	1990
Important and Meaningful work	52%	52%	48%	50%
High income	19	20	19	24
Chances for advancement	18	19	22	16
Job security	7	6	7	6
Short work hours	5	3	3	4

**Source: National Opinion Research Center surveys, University of Chicago, 1973, 1980, 1985, and 1990.**

### **How satisfied are you with these aspects of your job?**

#### **% of workers saying they were satisfied**

	1984	1988	1990	1992
Type of work	78%	80%	77%	79%
Coworkers	76	77	77	76
Benefits	81	77	74	71
Being treated with respect	64	62	60	58

And fairness				
Job security	63	64	59	58
Chances to contribute ideas	54	55	56	54
Pay	57	50	47	46
Recognition for performance	44	48	45	39
Advancement opportunities	33	36	34	27

Source: International Survey Research Corp., Employee Satisfaction Surveys, Chicago, 1984, 1988, 1990, 1992.

### Can You Satisfy All the People All the Time?

What your workers want depends on who they are. Forget about differences between what women and men want. Not *one* survey we found, including a recent ambitious one undertaken by Wellesley College's Center for Research on Women, suggests any difference among the desires of the sexes. "Men and women find similar aspects of the workplace rewarding and problematic," Rosalind C. Barnett, senior research associate of the center, tells us. Differences in expectations correspond more to education levels than anything else.

Employee satisfaction, says Cranny, is "a function of the difference between what employees want or think they should get, and what they're really getting." The problem is that many workers simply *don't know* what they're really getting. A study by the Wyatt Co., an international consulting firm in Boston, found that among employees who are dissatisfied with the way their benefits are communicated to them, only 13% report being satisfied with their benefits. But among those who were satisfied with communications about benefits, 75% report being satisfied. How many of your workers really know what benefits you're giving them?

***Select from the following list the two factors that are most important to you in your current job.***

% of respondents who chose each factor, by education level

	High school	graduate	Some College or less	college graduate
Pay	46%	42%	29%	
Amount of independence	31	35	40	
Pleasant working environment	30	23	17	
Liking the people at work	29	24	19	
Gratifying work	25	32	43	

Contribution to public good	11	14	23
Important career step	10	15	19

Source: "The Chivas Regal Report on Working Americans," Research & Forecasts, New York City, 1989.

***Would you say you are enjoying your work more, less, or about the same as you were five years ago?***

	Prof/	Sales/ Blue	Overall mgrs.	Tech. admin.	collar
More	52%	60%	55%	51%	44%
Less	19	14	18	22	24
About the same	27	24	26	26	31
Don't know/	2	2	1	1	1no answer

***Source: "The Chivas Regal Report on Working Americans," Research & Forecasts, New York City, 1989.***

### **All Work And No Play . . .**

Remember, workers have lives, too. They may spend an average of more than 25% of any given week at their jobs, but for most people, there's more to life than work -- as is dramatically punctuated by the gap between "happy family life" and the first job-related answer in the chart above.

You want satisfied workers? Consider the study by the Wyatt Co. showing that employees who thought their employer's policies helped balance work and family responsibilities were far more likely to feel a commitment to their company as more than "just a place to work" than those who thought otherwise (62% versus 13%). And there's nothing like committed employees.

*Which one of the following would most give you the feeling of success in your life?*

*% choosing each factor*

*Happy family life - 62%*

*Ability to do some good in the world – 15%*

*Earning lots of money - 10%*

*Position and prestige in your work – 6%*

*Involvement in some creative activity – 4%*

*Fame – 1%*

*Don't know/no answer – 2%*

*Source: "The Chivas Regal Report on Working Americans," Research & Forecasts, New York City, 1989.*

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Inc.com, 7 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007-2195.

What Do Workers Want? There is no single answer. by Jeannette Cooperman. January 27, 2011. 5:03 PM. Back to Search Results. RSS. Those workers might prefer ego strokes, or contests and rewards, or lots of socializing, or improved efficiency. CMA's job is to figure out which carrot to dangle. More time with their manager or less? Public recognition or private praise? Security and stability or risk and challenge? Autonomy or the reassurance of being an important cog in a very smoothly turning wheel? Opportunities for advancement or permission to relax and stay put? Four years ago, companies were hiring fast and often. "In our recovering economy, IT workers are growing more confident," says Shravan Goli, president of IT staffing firm Dice, which noted the importance of intangible rewards in its own recent salary survey. "The job market is good, with a lot more jobs out there. Folks are less worried about retention. "Good pay is still necessary for retaining workers," he continues, "but it's no longer sufficient." I don't want to end up in a cubicle farm where nothing you do really matters." The freedom to challenge himself, on company time, makes a difference. For instance, a few years ago when his manager saw Dillbeck's enthusiasm for the then brand-new iPhone, he encouraged him to experiment with the technology. The disparity between what workers want and what they're getting may drive some employers to creative alternatives, but the gap isn't likely to close. With costs continuing to spiral upward, it's questionable just how much you can do to bridge it. But check out how high "interesting work" ranks below. Here's a factor you can control far more directly and cost-effectively than benefits and, for that matter, compensation. Given the dramatic 22-point lead interesting work has over high income when it comes to importance to workers, where are you going to put your eff... What do you most prefer in a job? % of workers saying aspect was the most important. 1973. 1980.