

The Perks Employees Seek Most

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What do workers want most from their employers in 2021? Above everything, they're looking for time away from work. In a recent survey by benefits provider, Unum, participants were given a list of 16 non-insurance benefits provided by employers. When asked to choose their top three options, paid time off, flexibility/remote working options and paid family leave were the top non-insurance benefits.

Paid leave (PTO, vacation, etc.) came out on top for a third straight year, despite fewer people traveling during the current pandemic. In fact, employees haven't taken as much time off as usual, which research consistently finds to be detrimental to their emotional health. This supports the long-held belief that paid time off is important for employees, allowing them to rest, recharge and return to work more productive. With social distancing, lockdowns, etc. impacting the way people work, it is important for employers to encourage employees to use their time off to rest their minds and improve their overall health. Fortunately, most employers recognize the need to recharge and encourage their employees to use their time off benefits!

Flexible and remote working options were second on the list, while **paid family leave** came in third. When survey participants were separated by gender, women tended to view paid family leave in higher esteem than men. This may reflect that women are often the primary caregivers in their households. Another survey reported that one in four women are considering leaving the workforce or taking a smaller role because of added personal pressures such as caregiving during the pandemic.

Those three benefits beat out other popular non-insurance perks such as fitness or healthy lifestyle incentives, financial planning resources, professional development and student loan repayment benefits.

This survey, conducted annually, reiterated some of the trends seen in the previous year as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Paid family leave has been a benefit repeatedly clamored for by employees as they dealt with more personal concerns, such as children at home or an increase in eldercare responsibilities. In response, many employers have been rolling out new leave benefits or enhanced current paid leave policies.

Though remote work and flexibility have always been popular among employees, their importance soared in light of the pandemic, as scores of employers sent employees to work from home. Flexibility has become a COVID strategy for employers as employees have had to deal with a slew of challenges that have affected productivity, such as helping kids with virtual learning or dealing with a number of other stressors. This flexibility has been embraced by employees and may become the new norm going forward.

While paid time off has been a constant top perk in the eyes of employees, the survey highlighted the importance of Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs), financial planning and identity theft protection as well. EAPs, which have been a focus among employers looking to help employees improve their mental health, jumped up several spots from the previous year's survey. Financial planning resources landed among the top five perks for the first time, as many employees dealt with worsening financial health.

Identity theft protection jumped up several spots actually becoming the top-rated perk for Gen Z (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) workers.

Traditional employer-provided benefits, such as medical/dental insurance and retirement plans including pensions or 401Ks, will always be important to employees and integral for employers to stay competitive in the race to recruit/retain talent. However, the requested perks topping the survey, should not be overlooked but offered or enhanced when possible to meet the changing needs and preferences of today's employees.