



**THE PATHWAY
TO WORKPLACE
TRANSFORMATION:**

**UNPACKING
WHAT PEOPLE
WANT FROM WORK**

xenium 

WHY “WHAT PEOPLE WANT FROM WORK” MATTERS

Unpacking What People Want From Work



It's time again to reveal the results of our annual *What People Want From Work* survey. Of all the complimentary resources Xenium offers throughout the year, this one is consistently the most popular.

And we think we know **why**.

The companies we work with at Xenium all begin their journey with us because they're struggling to meet the endless demands of managing HR, payroll, and benefits.

Beyond the desire for operational efficiency, **our clients are also seeking to understand and improve the employee experience.**

The companies we work with care about workplace **transformation.**

That's easier said than done...

THE BIGGEST BARRIER TO WORKPLACE TRANSFORMATION

Any journey towards meaningful change needs a compass. Employers need insight into employees' thoughts about their experience at work.

In fact, that's why we created this survey. Seven years ago, we were assessing our own culture at Xenium, and we weren't satisfied with the questions other vendors asked when they surveyed our own team.

We wanted to dig deeper to discover:

- What do employees **value** in their experience?
- What do they **want** from the workplace?
- Based on their needs and values, **how are we doing?**

When you take the time to listen, something remarkable happens. The natural barriers between employees and management break down and give way to empathy and understanding.

You may be expecting complaints and negativity from the results, but what you'll find is something much different.

This survey reveals:

1. What people want from work is remarkably consistent.
2. It goes far beyond compensation.
3. And what they want is **worth fighting for.**

Let's dig in.

SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

The 2022 *What People Want From Work* survey gathered one of our largest survey populations to date, including:

93

DIFFERENT COMPANIES

(More than twice the number who participated in 2021)

1397

EMPLOYEES

(A 32% increase from 2021)

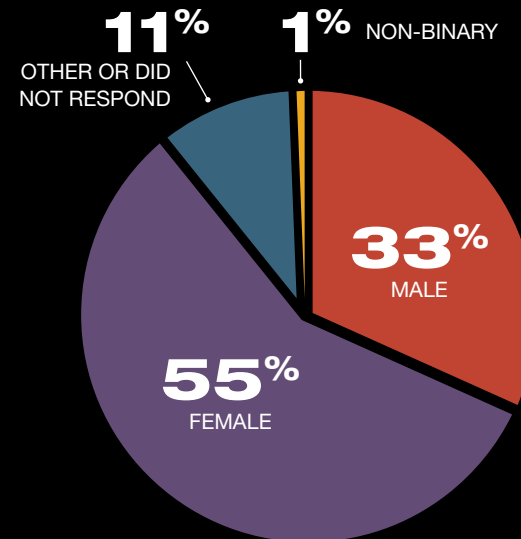
66%

**PARTICIPANTS ARE IN
NON-SUPERVISORY ROLES**

23%

**EMPLOYEES WHO
IDENTIFY AS BIPOC**

The demographic snapshot of the survey remained fairly consistent from previous years.



THE QUESTION THAT HAUNTS US

Unpacking What People Want From Work

The core metric in the What People Want From Work survey is the ENPS (Employee Net Promoter Score).

Here's the question asked to find it:

How likely are you to recommend your workplace as a good place to work?

It's scored from 1-4, one being the low end and four being an emphatic "Yes!" The even numbered scale is intentional to keep people from defaulting to the center in an odd-numbered structure.

In 2022, the average ENPS score from the survey was:

3.46

It's an incremental gain from 2021, which was 3.41. Over the course of the survey's history, the overall average is 3.3.

- **On one hand, this is incredibly positive!** Overall, employees appreciate the workplaces you provide, and we have seen continual, incremental improvement in the score over the years.
- **On the other hand, we wonder what it takes to push beyond incremental change.**

We all know that big wins are found when a business finds a way to push ahead of the average towards the apex of the industry.

So, what is it that pushes a workplace culture above this average? This is the question that haunts us. What extraordinary measures unlock unlimited potential in a team? We wonder, like any ambitious student, what gets our companies closer to the 4.0, and we believe there are clues in the data ahead.

WORKPLACE RATINGS

vs

LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE

The first section of the What People Want From Work survey covers 10 different aspects of workplace culture from two different perspectives.

EMPLOYER RATINGS

First, on a 1-5 scale, one being “Strongly Disagree” and 5 being “Strongly Agree,” participants are asked 3 questions in each category about how they would rate their employer’s performance.

IMPORTANCE RANKING

Second, they are asked to rank how important this aspect is to them.

	Population	Importance (Population)
Company Leadership	4.12	4.05
Supervisor Communication & Support	4.17	4.18
Collaboration	4.11	4.16
Workspace & Physical Environment	4.30	4.25
Workplace Culture	4.05	4.24
Compensation	3.44	4.16
Benefits & Perks	3.96	4.00
Training & Development	3.86	4.00
Diversity & Inclusion	3.96	3.79

Overall, employees rate their workplaces well, with most ratings hovering near a four, and their ratings of the importance of each category follow a similar pattern.

However, one category stands out in its gap between the two scores. Compensation shows the lowest employer rating while showing a high level of importance.

This isn’t a surprise, and it is a typical result, but we want you to see something else in these seemingly similar numbers...

MAYBE MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING

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Notice the two highest Importance Ratings:

- Workplace and Physical Environment
- Workplace Culture

Both of these Importance Ratings climbed higher in 2022 over 2021, no doubt in response to the changes brought about by the pandemic. Workers are demanding more flexible work environments and positive workplace cultures.

However, these two factors have led the list for the past five years, even pre-pandemic. Their high ranking is consistent.

Your employees are trying to tell you something.

Compensation isn't their only concern, and they care about Workplace Transformation as much as you do.

There is more that unites us than divides us. Understanding this is the first key to uniting your team around cultural change.

WHAT DO THEY WANT THE MOST?

After the rankings, we ask the following question.

“Select the Top 3 factors that contribute to your engagement and overall job satisfaction (in no particular order).”

Here's the list they're
asked to choose from.



Select the Top 3 Factors that contribute to your engagement and overall job satisfaction (in no particular order).

- Autonomy
- Business Growth/Success
- Challenging Work
- Clear and Inspiring Vision
- Mission & Values Alignment
- Compensation, including Benefits
- Flexible Schedule
- Interesting Work
- Job Security
- Opportunity for Advancement
- Personal Development/Growth
- Making a Difference
- Recognition
- Increased Responsibility
- Positive Relationships
- Team Collaboration
- Access to Technology
- Work Environment/Physical Space

THE BIG THREE... AGAIN.

Here are the top 3 responses.

- ✓ Compensation (Including Benefits)
- ✓ Flexible Schedule
- ✓ Positive Relationships

Here's what's truly remarkable. Even with the large list of options you saw on the previous page, **these have been the top three for the life of our survey!** Every year, even before the pandemic, this is what people wanted.

So, although the pandemic shifted many of our practices in HR and employee management, the people themselves didn't change. Something deeply human is at play here.

1

UNPACKING THE BIG THREE

When you step back to look at the top 3 responses, what emerges is a holistic view of the ideal human experience as an employee.

Think about the subtext behind each of these priorities.

2

Compensation and Benefits = Security

Flexible Schedules = Quality of Life

Positive Relationships = Community and Acceptance

3

Employees have learned to value the time they spend at work, and if they have any demands, it's that their quality of life not diminish in the 8+ hours they invest with your company each day.

Let's look at some action steps you can take around each of these areas.



1

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

637
VOTES

There are limits, of course, to how much you can afford to pay employees, and throwing money at the problem isn't an effective strategy. (Did we just hear a sigh of relief?)

A **Compensation and Pay Equity study** reveals powerful insights and strategies for changing the way you show your team members they are valued.

In the end, never underestimate the power of individual conversations and strong, clear communication about your compensation structures and criteria for advancement. **Behind the desire for higher compensation is a deeper truth, that employees want to know they matter and are not taken for granted.**



2

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES

488 VOTES

New, hybrid home/office models are emerging every day as are company cultures who allow flexibility for family events, medical concerns, and other life events that come up throughout the week.

If the pandemic taught us anything, it's that employees can be trusted with this kind of freedom, and in many cases, they become even more productive.

Behind the request for a flexible schedule is this message, “*you can trust me.*”

When employees are taken at their word, they rise to the occasion and reward your faith in their integrity.



3

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

402 VOTES

[Research by Gallup in 2022](#) revealed how important it is to employees to find a best friend at work. We want our 8+ hours per day to be spent with people we care about and share the journey with others.

What is your company doing to help employees connect and grow healthy, supportive relationships? Making intentional time for social connections isn't fluff. It's an investment in employee retention and productivity. It's a strategic leverage point in Workplace Transformation.

Behind the desire for positive relationships at work is the need to prove "I am more than the work, and other people see it."

NOW, MEET THE “BIG FOUR” AND THE QUESTIONS THEY POSE.

Just beneath the Big Three, there are four values which all gathered a similar level of votes in our survey.

**MAKING A
DIFFERENCE**

292
VOTES

**INTERESTING
WORK**

268
VOTES

AUTONOMY

266
VOTES

**PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT/
GROWTH**

244
VOTES

**MAKING A
DIFFERENCE**

**292
VOTES**

**INTERESTING
WORK**

**268
VOTES**

AUTONOMY

**266
VOTES**

**PERSONAL
DEVELOPMENT/
GROWTH**

**244
VOTES**

Does it surprise you to see these concepts win out over more practical concerns like job security?

Behind all four of these ideas lies this thought, “I want to know I’m doing something that matters.”

- Are you communicating the success and impact your people make with your team?
- Are you helping your people understand their unique contribution to this success?
- Do your employees know you trust them to take ownership and initiative in their roles?
- Are their accomplishments recognized, and do they see a clear path forward for growth?

And before you answer these questions, think about this. There are two levels of communication which must occur. Most of us are pretty comfortable with group communication.

But what about the **individual**?

Each of the Big Four items are actually questions which need to be answered for every team member. They are narrative cliffhangers in your employees’ minds. Until someone answers each question like “Am I making a difference?” or “How will I grow here?” for each employee, the narrative tension is unresolved.

Your employees need to hear from you individually on all four of these fronts. They need answers to these questions. (We’ll come back to this idea in a minute...)

CONFIRMING THE FINDINGS THROUGH QUALITATIVE DATA

We've always included an open-ended comment section in our survey to balance our quantitative collecting of stats with qualitative insights from employees.

The first of our last three questions revisits employees top priority from a different angle.

If asked by a friend, what is the top reason you would give for staying at your current job?

Of the hundreds of responses, these themes were the most common.

- 1. Positive work environment and team dynamic**
- 2. Flexible work arrangements and work/life balance**
- 3. Alignment with company mission and values**
- 4. Opportunities for learning and professional development**
- 5. Autonomy and trust in employees**

In this case, the qualitative responses served to confirm the findings of the ratings and rankings above.

HOW EMPLOYEES WANT YOU TO IMPROVE

The second of our qualitative questions asks where employees see room for improvement. In these responses are the clues to how a business breaks past the 3.46 ENPS average score.

What is the one thing your employer can do to make the biggest difference in your job satisfaction and performance?

- 1. Improved pay and benefits**
- 2. Better communication and support from management**
- 3. Opportunities for advancement and training**
- 4. Flexibility in work arrangements**
- 5. More effective and efficient processes and systems within the company**

These themes from open-ended comments mirror all of the priorities we've unpacked so far from the survey. They continue to confirm how important these themes are to employees.

Perhaps even more revealing is what happened in the final question...

HERE'S WHAT EMPLOYEES **REALLY WANT**

The last of our qualitative questions is completely open-ended. It's a simple request.

Please include any additional comments here.

In this open-ended, unguided prompt, employees often chose to share what they found as the biggest shortcomings in their workplaces.

These were the top themes in the optional comments.

- Limited time off
- Lack of recognition for accomplishments
- Ineffective communication and leadership
- Poor compensation

Limited time off is an interesting addition. It's a topic not covered elsewhere in our survey and clearly top of mind. The last three, though, are drawn from the same desires as the responses to "what makes the biggest difference."

At the end of the day your employees want,

1. To be **known.**
2. To be **heard.**
3. To be **valued.**

They want to know you see and understand their importance as characters in your company's story, and when it isn't happening, they notice.

HERE'S YOUR CHALLENGE → FOR 2023

Here's our invitation to you based on the 2022 survey results...



MAKE 2023 THE YEAR OF THE
INDIVIDUAL.

Think about all of the messages we've unpacked behind these survey responses.

COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Am I taken for granted?

FLEXIBLE SCHEDULES

Do you trust me to deliver results?

POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS

*Am I more than the job,
and does anyone see me?*

THE "BIG FOUR"

Am I doing something that matters?

These questions can't be answered through programs, newsletters, or inspiring speeches at an all-staff event.

These are questions which haunt your employees, and only when you answer them individually will they be resolved. Take the time to listen, know, and encourage your team.

Ultimately, it's your pathway past the question haunting you.

**This is your path past the
3.46 average ENPS score
to something extraordinary.**

This is the road to meaningful workplace transformation and, ultimately, the employee retention and productivity you're looking for. The data is behind you.

**NOW, THE
WORK NEEDS
TO BE DONE.**



TAKEAWAYS

In this “Year of the Individual,” embrace these three tasks to foster Workplace Transformation and growth.



Have regular dialogue with employees.



Take action based on the feedback you receive.



You can only do so much at one time, so prioritize retention strategies for your top performers and hardest-to-fill roles.

SIGN UP FOR THE **2023 SURVEY**

SIGN UP →



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