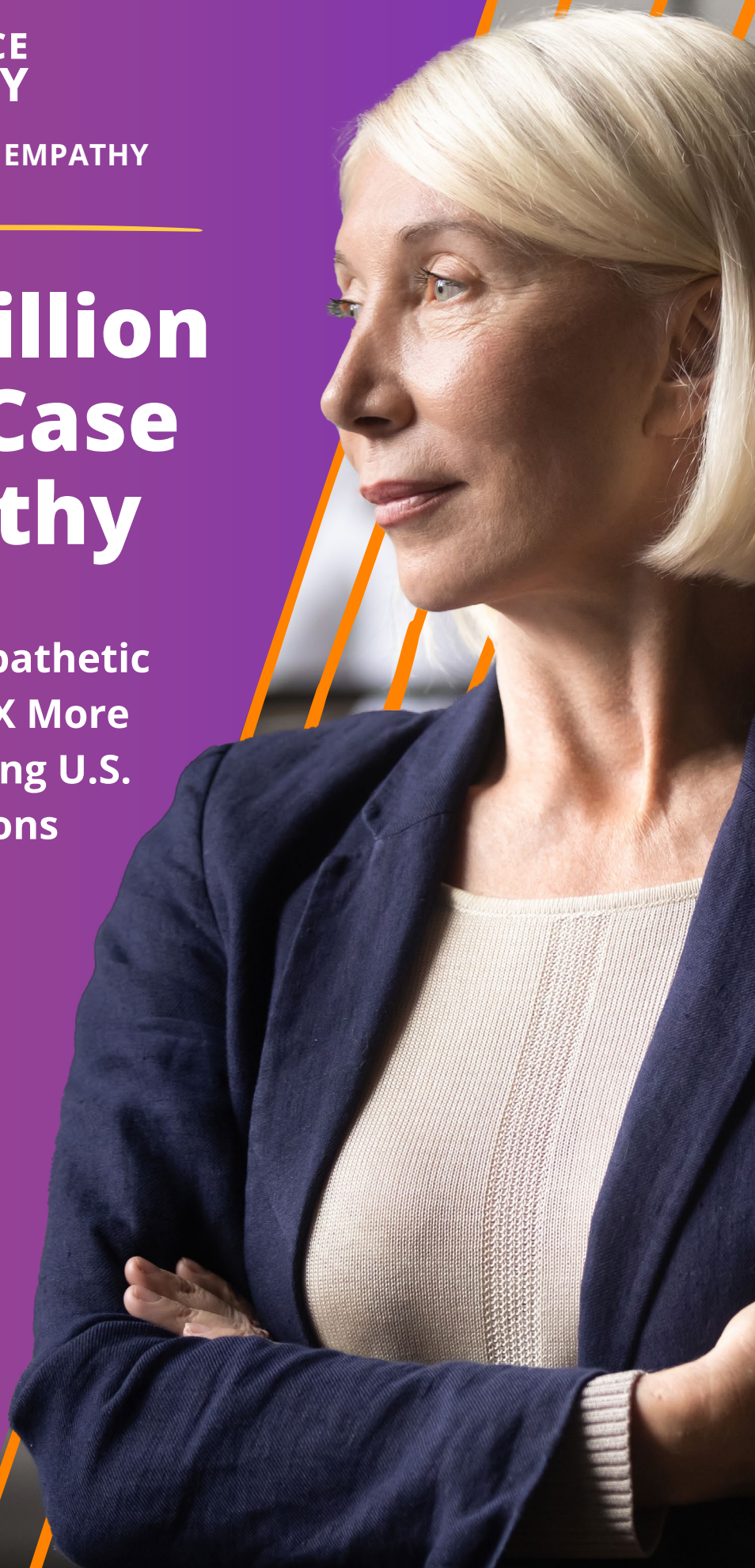


20 STATE OF
WORKPLACE
25 EMPATHY

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF EMPATHY

The \$180 Billion Business Case for Empathy

Employees at Unempathetic
Workplaces Are 1.5X More
Likely to Quit, Costing U.S.
Companies Billions



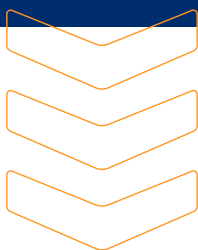


Table of Contents

A Note from Our CEO	3
Unempathetic Organizations Risk \$180 Billion Annually	4
The Ebb and Flow of Empathy Over a Decade	6
The High Cost of Unempathetic Workplaces: A Business Case for Empathy at Work	10
Toxicity and Mental Health Issues Surge at Unempathetic Organizations	13
Flexibility is the New Employee Currency	18
What Does the Next Decade Hold for Empathy?	23
About the Data	24



A Note from Our CEO

If you've lived long enough, you know everything is cyclical—markets, politics, fashion, and of course nature. After 10 years of studying workplace empathy, we find history repeats itself with perceptions of empathy closely aligned with pre-pandemic levels.

Like nature, empathy is essential to the survival of our species. Yet recently, it's become a political lightning rod—its value debated, under siege, and diminished by return-to-office (RTO) mandates and command-and-control leadership.

This rollback to pre-pandemic workplace sentiment is reflected in our CEO data: 59% now view empathy as a perk or nice-to-have, and those who say empathy is undervalued by U.S. organizations dropped 28 points year-over-year (YOY)—suggesting contentment with the state of empathy overall.

But without empathy there is only apathy. And I challenge you to find any leader who believes apathetic employees are good for business. This year's study proves there is real ROI for organizations that can effectively and consistently operationalize empathy—to the tune of **\$180 billion unempathetic companies are leaving on the table.**

While there's work to be done, our data suggests the macro trajectory of empathy is moving in the right direction: **63% of employees say U.S. organizations are evolving with the needs of working households**—a 180-degree change from 2016 when 60% of employees said employers were not evolving.

This data point is a hopeful sign for the long-term empathy outlook, and a reminder that empathy is a long game. It's strategic, deliberate, consistent, and measurable—with compounding returns for those that lead with it.

Cheers,



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon'.

Jon Shanahan,
Businessolver President and CEO

Unempathetic Organizations Risk \$180 Billion Annually

Over the last 10 years, we've been on a mission at Businessolver to raise awareness for the vital role empathy plays at work, and how it translates to ROI for organizations and leaders who can effectively operationalize it. Certainly, there's more awareness for the role of empathy in the workplace than a decade ago, yet its value continues to be undermined and challenged—even boldly being called the “greatest rhetorical tool of manipulation in the 21st century.”



In our survey of more than 3,200 employees, HR professionals, and CEOs, we define empathy as “the ability to understand and/or experience the feelings or perspectives of another.”

As we observe a shift back to pre-pandemic empathy views and authoritative, top-down approaches to people leadership such as return-to-office (RTO) mandates and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) rollbacks, it's time to reinforce the tangible ROI of empathy.

This year, nearly three quarters of employees (73%) say their organization is empathetic—a win in the empathy playbook given the current state of uncertainty. Yet 27% still view their organization as unempathetic, making them 1.5X more likely to change jobs in the next 6 months—equating to \$180 billion unempathetic organizations risk annually in attrition costs.

In practical terms, by failing to demonstrate and cultivate an empathetic workplace, the average U.S. employer with 2,000 employees risks over \$7 million in employee replacement costs.

[Skip ahead to see the data on the ROI of empathy](#)



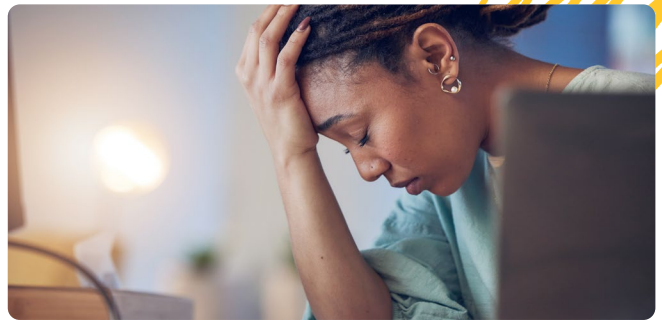
51% of employees at unempathetic organizations would take less pay to work for a more empathetic employer.

72% would change their job, role, industry, or career path.



Unempathetic organizations come with costs beyond attrition, too

Employees who view their workplace as unempathetic report **3X higher toxicity** and **1.3X more mental health issues**, factors that contribute to reduced employee productivity and absenteeism which is likewise a high-cost causality of low-empathy workplaces.



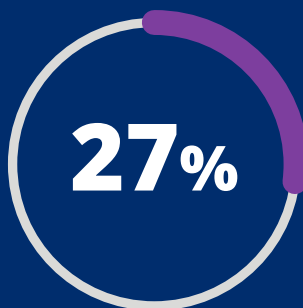
You cannot look at empathy as an option. It is not optional. It should be understood that it's a necessity of business... we're now talking real money. People may not see the ROI or not want to see the ROI, but the ROI is 100% there.

– Anton Gunn, President & CEO of 937 Strategy Group, Former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama

Which Employees Are Most Likely to View Their Organization as Unempathetic?



My organization
is **EMPATHETIC**



My organization
is **UNEMPATHETIC**

53% Women

59% Non-remote

62% Work at companies
with 1K+ employees

47% Individual contributors

52% Manager or supervisor

In this year's report, we share the many voices of empathy, including sentiments among more than 3,200 survey respondents as well as prominent psychologists and empathy advocates who share their expert advice on how to move beyond empathy in theory to practical execution.



The Ebb and Flow of Empathy Over a Decade

This year's findings show that perceptions of organizational empathy among all audiences have stabilized, returning to pre-pandemic levels after a period of post-pandemic volatility. Given the current political and economic climate of uncertainty and instability, this could be considered a win on the empathy playing field.

While 89% of CEOs agree or strongly agree that a company's financial performance is tied to empathy, fewer CEOs believe empathy is undervalued by U.S. organizations, dropping 28 points YOY to 55%. Likewise, CEOs increasingly view current levels of empathy as sufficient (+8 points YOY for their organization, +15 points YOY for U.S. organizations overall).



Empathy for Better or Worse?

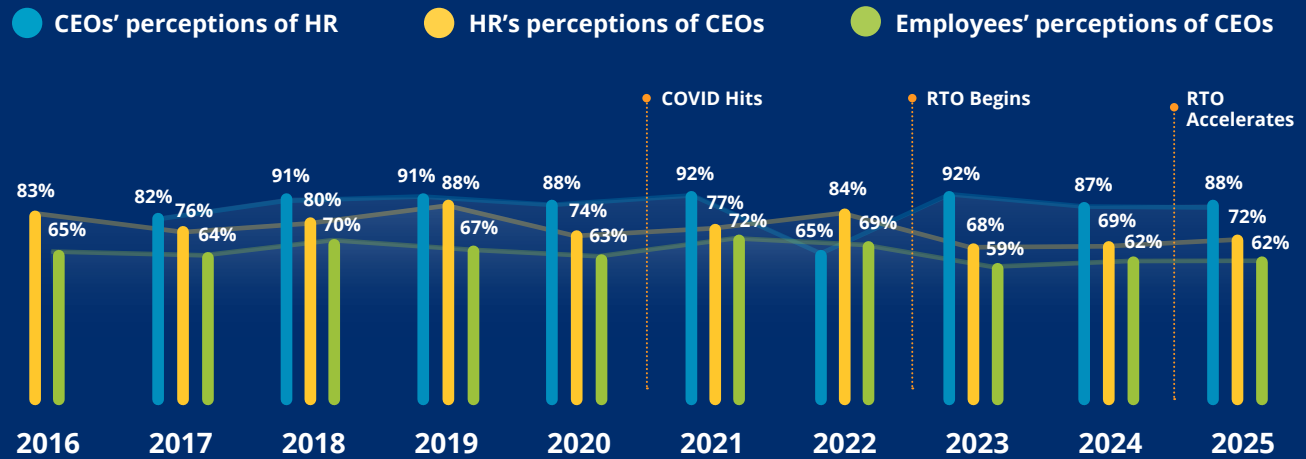
Gaps in perceptions of organizational empathy among CEOs, HR professionals, and employees have averaged around 14 points over the past 10 years, with record empathy gaps recorded in 2023 during the RTO push. HR's perceptions are significantly more volatile but have stabilized the last two years.

? My organization is empathetic

CEOs HR Employees



? How Empathetic Do You Think Each is Currently?



Empathy gaps between audiences have slightly improved over the past two years. However, tension persists. In 2025, 62% of employees say their CEO is empathetic, a view that took a 10-point plunge in 2023 upon the initial RTO push.

Employees are nearly 20 points more likely to view their manager as empathetic versus their CEO—a decisive view that has held steady over the last 3 years. When we compare employees who say their organization is empathetic to those that view their employer as unempathetic, the empathy gaps in leadership perceptions are astounding: **Employees at empathetic employers are 1.7X more likely to say their manager is empathetic and 4.3X more likely (a 61-point differential) to say their CEO is empathetic.**

[Skip ahead to see the data on workplace toxicity and mental health.](#)

The pandemic marked a volatile point in time for the HR-CEO relationship—and it has not recovered. While HR's view of CEOs has improved from an all-time low during the RTO push in 2023, it remains 16 points lower than how CEOs view empathy in HR, indicating lingering tension.

HR's mental health is likewise steadily improving, with mental health incidences down 22 points since 2023. Even so, **62% of HR professionals say recent RTO mandates have negatively impacted their mental wellbeing—significantly higher than employees (42%) and CEOs (46%).** And 75% of HR say they'd consider leaving their employer for a similar job with better mental health benefits. These sentiments are warning signs that RTO enforcement could further spark volatility in the HR-CEO relationship.

Empathy must come with boundaries, so all parties remain resilient without feeling the resentment of burnout that comes with overstepping and over functioning.

– Kelli Thompson, Executive Coach and Author of “Closing the Confidence Gap”

There is still confusion as to what empathy is and what it is not. The false narrative still exists that it's a weakness, that it means being overly emotional and touchy-feely, or becoming a doormat. The reality is empathy requires great strength and self-awareness to put ego aside and see other points of view without defensiveness or fear.

– Maria Ross, Speaker, Leadership Facilitator, Podcast Host, and Author of “The Empathy Dilemma”



Is everyone getting more comfortable with being empathetic at work? Data points to maybe.

All audiences are becoming more comfortable with displaying empathy at work—with 50- and 22-point drops since 2022 among CEOs and HR professionals, respectively, who say it's difficult to demonstrate empathy in their day-to-day at work. Even so, HR professionals (38%) now surpass CEOs (29%) in difficulty demonstrating empathy, with lack of leadership support cited as the main reason for this—underscoring the unique pressures HR faces in balancing empathy with professionalism, especially in the face of accelerated RTO efforts.

What are the top barriers to demonstrating empathy at work?

- 42% of HR professionals say their manager or leadership doesn't support being empathetic at work
- 49% of CEOs (+16 points YOY) and 39% of employees say they're too busy with work

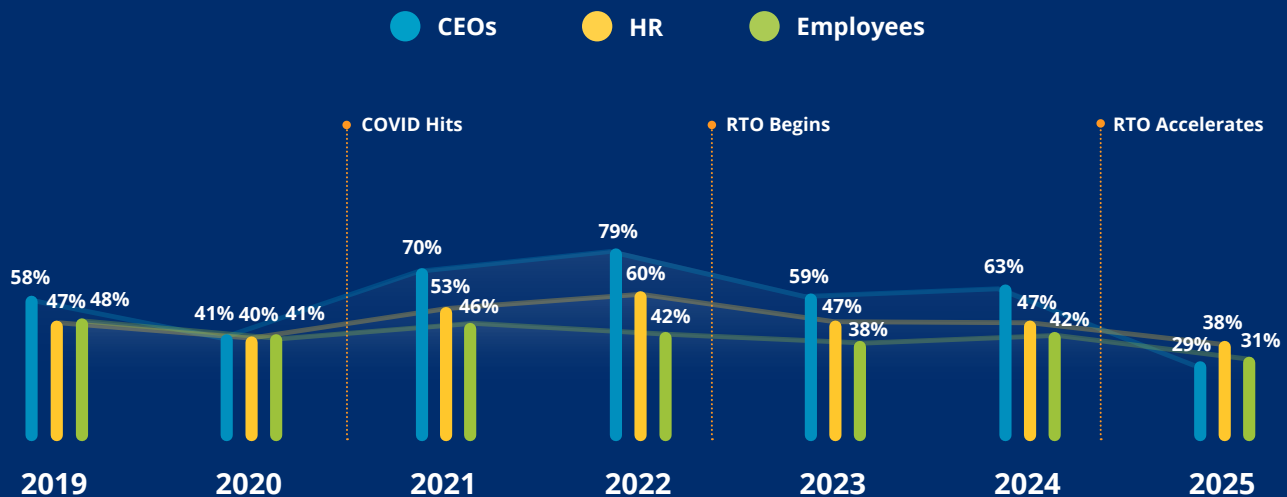


Empathy is an interpersonal skill—it doesn't mean always saying yes. The idea that empathy is a weakness stems from a misunderstanding of what it actually entails. Recognizing someone else's emotional state doesn't mean agreeing with it or yielding to every demand.

- Alison Jane Martingano, Ph.D.,
Assistant Professor of Psychology
at University of Wisconsin

HR Professionals Now Struggle More Than Employees and CEOs to Consistently Demonstrate Empathy in Their Day-to-Day Work—but Overall, All Audiences Show Improvement

It's hard for me to consistently demonstrate empathy in my day-to-day work life



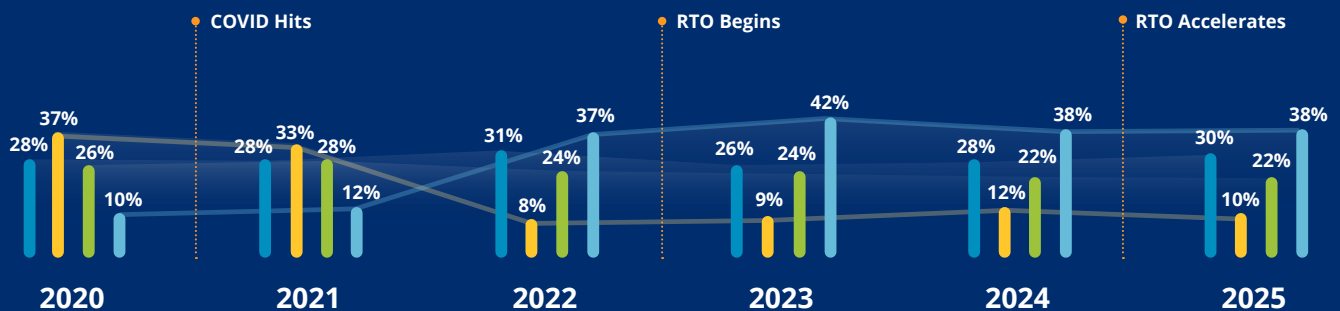
"Some employees will take your empathy for weakness and will use it to their advantage to get away with things." - 2025 HR Respondent

Employees Permanently Look to Managers for a Culture of Empathy

During COVID, the responsibility for building a culture of empathy dramatically and permanently shifted from HR to managers.

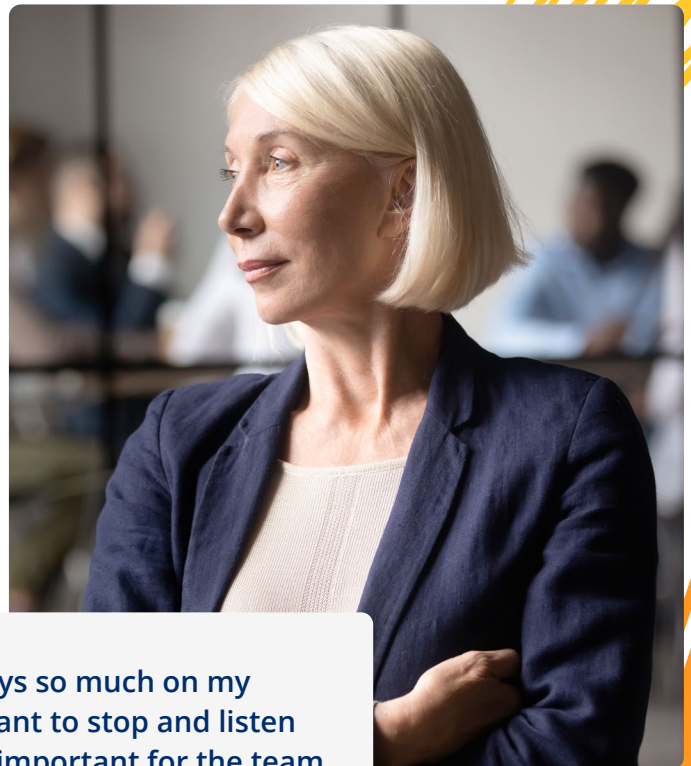
? Who do you believe has the most impact on building a workplace culture of empathy?

● CEOs ● HR ● Employees ● Managers/Supervisors



While HR professionals are crucial to fostering workplace empathy, employees increasingly view their managers (38%) or CEOs (30%) rather than HR (10%) as the primary drivers of workplace culture.

Empathy perceptions are bound to fluctuate from year to year among audiences—reacting to stresses like RTO and the economic and political climate. But when we look across 10 years of data, perhaps one of the most telling empathy wins is the perception among employees that **63% of U.S. organizations are evolving with the needs of working households**—a 180-degree change from our inaugural report in 2016 when 60% of employees said employers were not evolving with the needs of working households.



Sometimes I feel like I'm too busy and there's always so much on my plate. People's needs are so urgent that even if I want to stop and listen to them, I often don't have the time. I know this is important for the team, but sometimes I just can't find the balance.

- 2025 CEO Respondent

The High Cost of Unempathetic Workplaces: A Business Case for Empathy at Work



Upper leadership isolates their decision making and strategy, preventing middle management from being involved. This divides the workforce, making the bulk of the staff feel like a commodity and it does not create a team environment.

– 2025 Employee Respondent

This employee comment reflects the dynamic views of what empathy means in today's workforce. Empathy is more than being kind or respectful—it's increasingly linked to transparency, autonomy, accountability, communication, and a sense of inclusion and belonging. Leaders who can intentionally, authentically, and consistently activate on empathy in these capacities are much more likely to reap the tangible ROI of empathy—while also significantly improving employee wellbeing.

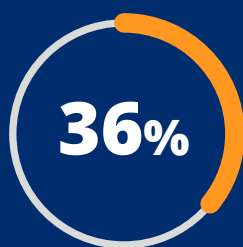
This year's findings highlight the absolute dichotomies between employees who perceive their workplaces as empathetic and those that don't—to a tune of \$180 billion that organizations deemed by employees as "unempathetic" risk through attrition costs alone.



Unempathetic Organizations Risk \$180 Billion

By undervaluing empathy's role in the workplace, employers are missing out on a high-ROI lever for long-term growth: maximizing employee retention. Over a quarter of employees (27%) view their organization as unempathetic, and these employees are 1.5X (18 points) more likely to change jobs in the next 6 months, costing U.S. organizations billions.

? Likely to change jobs in the next 6 months



Employees at
EMPATHETIC
companies



Employees at
UNEMPATHETIC
companies

↑ + 18 points

18%
× \$1 Trillion*
= \$180 Billion

Potentially saved by building
an empathetic workplace

*Source: The Work Institute: Employee Retention
Truths in Today's Workplace



According to the Work Institute’s 2025 Retention report, employee attrition costs U.S. employers \$1 trillion annually, with the estimated cost to replace an employee 33% or more of their salary. When comparing empathetic and unempathetic employers, 54% of employees at organizations perceived as unempathetic say they are likely to change jobs in the next 6 months versus 36% at empathetic employers, representing an 18% higher likelihood of attrition.



**An “Unempathetic” Company With 2,000 Employees
Risks \$7.3 Million in Attrition Costs**

For an “unempathetic” company with 2,000 salaried employees, this equates to **18% higher likelihood** of employees leaving versus an empathetic organization



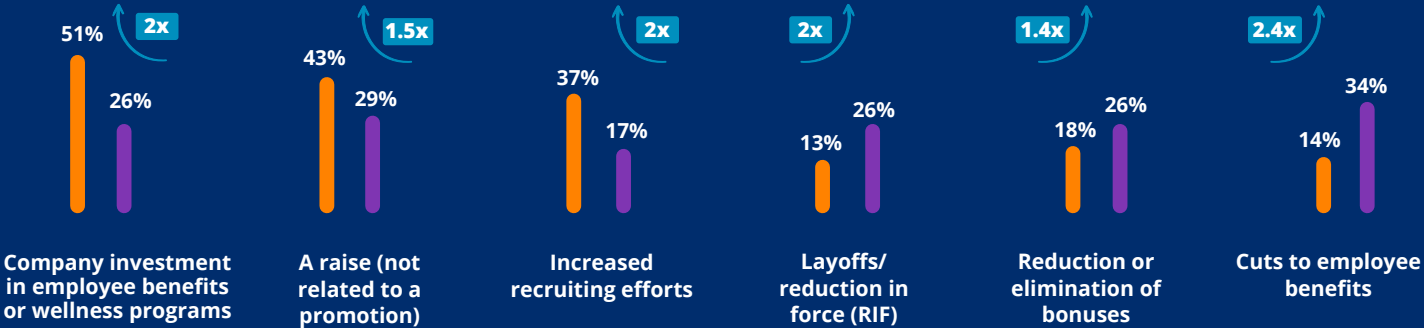
360
× **\$20,454.72 ***
(33%* of the average median full-time U.S. salary of \$61,984**)

\$7,363,699
in employee attrition at risk

*Work Institute Retention Report estimated cost to replace an employee is 33% of their salary
**U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics cites \$61,984 as average median income of full-time workers in the U.S.

Additionally, CEOs Who View Their Organizations as Empathetic Are Half as Likely to Have Experienced Layoffs in the Past Year and Twice as Likely to Have Invested in Their Employee Benefits and Wellness Programs, Reinforcing Empathy’s Tangible Business Value

● CEOs at **EMPATHETIC** orgs ● CEOs at **UNEMPATHETIC** orgs



A look across 8 years of empathy insights highlights how CEOs are particularly apt to acknowledge the value of empathy during periods of low unemployment when talent is harder to find, such as 2019 when unemployment was at an all-time low and in 2023 following the Great Resignation—illustrating a case for empathy based on condition rather than consistency.

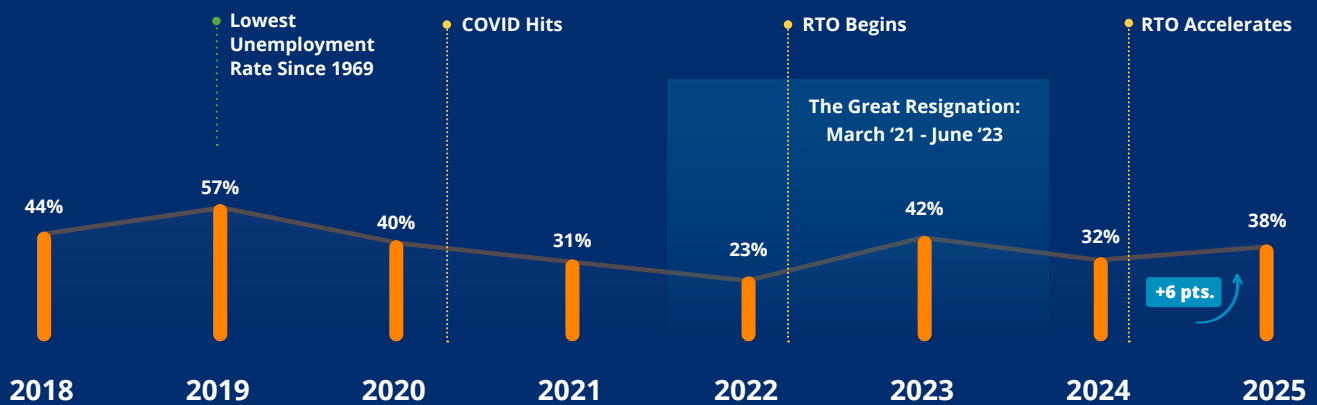
For leaders and organizations, the challenge ahead lies in transitioning empathy from a reactive, performative “nice-to-have” into a proactive, intentional, and sustainable organizational strategy.



There used to be a war *for* talent, but as this report indicates, it's turning into a war *on* talent. The war on talent means that the talent is going to win.

– Anton Gunn, President & CEO of 937 Strategy Group, Former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama

CEOs Tie Empathy to Lower Turnover During Periods of Recruitment Difficulty



? % of CEOs who selected lower turnover as a benefit of being an empathetic organization



Empathy isn't seasonal. If it disappears when times get hard, it was never embedded, it was performative. Many leaders are stuck in an 'Empathy Mirage'—thinking that talking about empathy is the same as practicing it. True empathy shows up in how decisions are made, not just how values are stated.

– Amy J. Wilson, Culture Shift Studio Founder and Author of “Empathy for Change”



Toxicity and Mental Health Issues Surge at Unempathetic Organizations

Unempathetic organizations come with high costs beyond attrition. Employees who cite unempathetic workplaces report 3X higher toxicity, 1.3X more mental health issues, and much lower feelings of belonging and connectedness. All factors that contribute to employee productivity and absenteeism, which is likewise a high-cost causality of low-empathy workplaces.

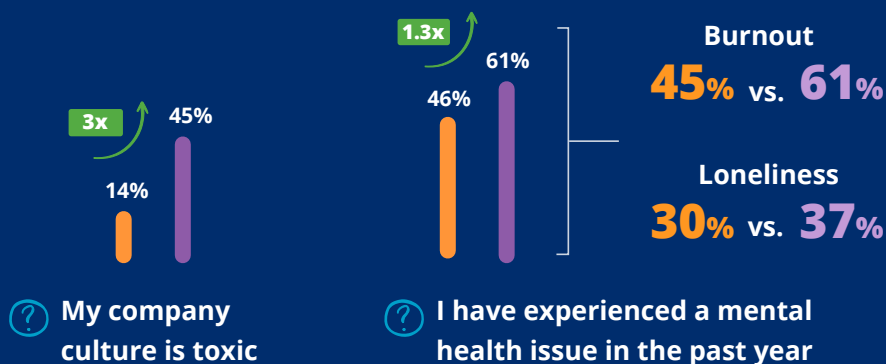
While employees (72%), HR (80%), and CEOs (85%) all say they're less willing to sacrifice their wellbeing (mental or physical) for their careers than pre-pandemic, stigma surrounding mental health remains a significant barrier to seeking support.



Missed work due to poor mental health is estimated to cost the economy **\$47.6 billion** annually in lost productivity, according to Gallup.

Unempathetic Workplaces Report 3X Higher Toxicity and 1.3X More Mental Health Issues

● Employees at **EMPATHETIC** orgs ● Employees at **UNEMPATHETIC** orgs





In a toxic or competitive work environment, I focus more on surviving and achieving than on building strong relationships, which makes empathy harder to express.

– 2025 HR Respondent

? Companies Still View Someone with Mental Health Issues as Weak or a Burden

Overall, employees (68%) and HR (69%) are significantly more likely—nearly 20 points—than CEOs (50%) to agree with the statement “companies view someone with mental health issues as weak or a burden.” This sentiment spikes to 84%, however, among employees at unempathetic organizations.



? My Company Culture is Toxic

In total, workplace toxicity sentiments improved dramatically across all respondents this year, especially for CEOs whose perceptions of toxicity are again significantly lower (14 points) than HR and employees—signaling yet again that the CEO workplace reality is much different than the employee experience.



Mental Health Issues and Stigma Surge at Unempathetic Workplaces

Employees at Unempathetic Organizations Are 2X More Likely to Work Through a Mental Health Issue Alone

Stigma runs much deeper at unempathetic organizations, with a 16-point increase in employees who say seeking employer-sponsored support could have negative career repercussions. Likewise, employees at unempathetic companies are 1.5X more likely (43% unempathetic vs. 28% empathetic) to say their manager or leadership does not support being empathetic at work.

	Employees at EMPATHETIC organizations	Employees at UNEMPATHETIC organizations	EMPATHETIC vs. UNEMPATHETIC gap
I worked through a mental health issue myself without support	12%	27%	15 points
Seeking mental health support through my employer could have negative career repercussions	50%	66%	16 points
Companies view someone with mental health issues as weak or a burden	65%	77%	12 points
I will be challenged on my decisions for the business if I use empathy	38%	49%	11 points
It's hard for me to consistently demonstrate empathy in my day-to-day work life	27%	42%	15 points
My manager / leadership does not support being empathetic at work	28%	43%	15 points



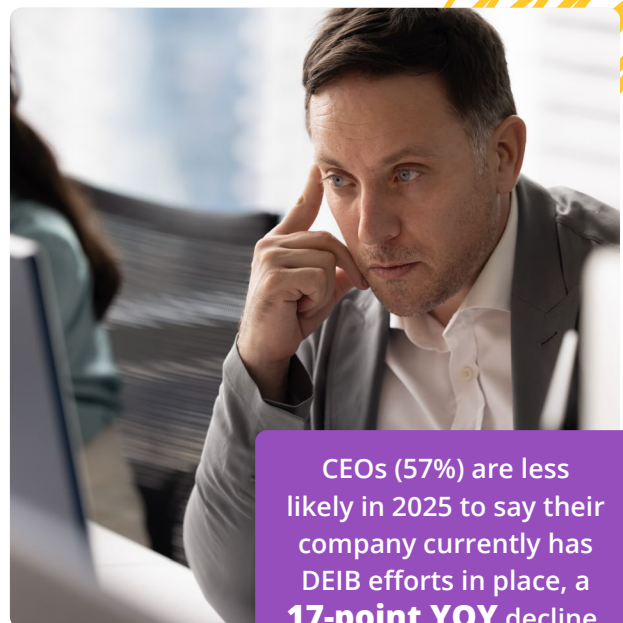
Employees at Empathetic Organizations Are 4X More Likely to View Their CEO as Empathetic and 2X More Likely to View HR as Empathetic

The business case for empathy is likewise clear in how empathetic organizations foster greater belonging, connectedness, and authenticity—with these inclusive feelings 1.3X to 2X higher at empathetic organizations. Additionally, employees at unempathetic organizations are 2X more likely to feel disconnected from leadership, underscoring the foundational role empathy plays in creating supportive and inclusive workplaces.

	Employees at EMPATHETIC organizations	Employees at UNEMPATHETIC organizations	EMPATHETIC vs. UNEMPATHETIC gap
I feel like I belong at my company	93%	61%	32 points
I feel like I can be my true, authentic self at work	91%	56%	35 points
I feel connected to my peers at work	93%	70%	23 points
I feel connected to my leaders when I'm at work	88%	43%	45 points

Overall, of the CEOs who cited a mental health issue, burnout (63%) was the leading factor, versus employees who are much more likely to cite anxiety (75%) and depression (60%).

Kelli Thompson, Executive Coach and Author of “Closing the Confidence Gap,” comments on how leaders struggle to balance empathy: “I see leaders frequently over-empathize and over-function to the point of being disempowering to their teams, becoming at risk for burnout and their teams then don’t fulfill their potential. It can be a vicious cycle. Instead, leaders must learn how to use empathy with boundaries—the ability to understand and sense their teams’ perspectives without jumping in, taking over, or fixing.”



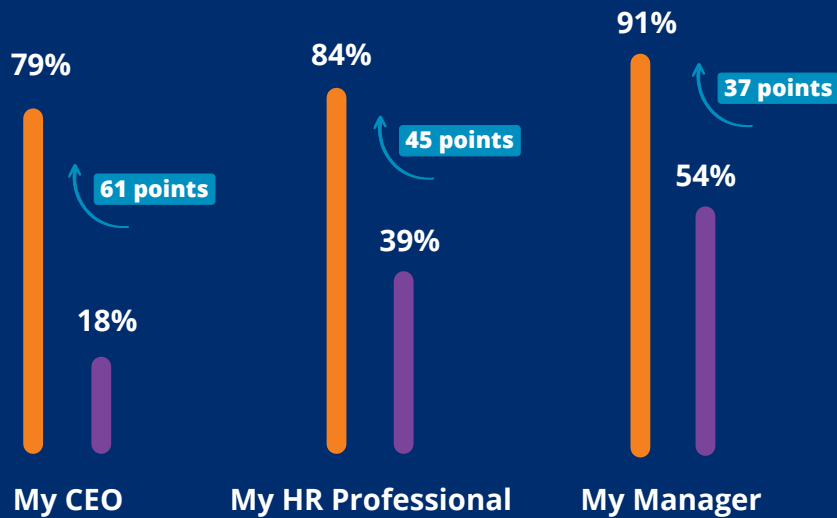
CEOs (57%) are less likely in 2025 to say their company currently has DEIB efforts in place, a **17-point YOY** decline.

Employees at Empathetic Organizations Are 4X More Likely to View Their CEO As Empathetic and 2X More Likely to View HR as Empathetic

? How empathetic do you think each of the following is currently?

● Employees at **EMPATHETIC** orgs

● Employees at **UNEMPATHETIC** orgs



When we compare employees who say their organization is empathetic to those that view their employer as unempathetic, the empathy gaps in leadership perceptions are astounding: **Employees at empathetic employers are 1.7X more likely to say their manager is empathetic, 2X more likely to say HR is empathetic, and 4X more likely (a 61-point differential) to say their CEO is empathetic.**

Kelli Thompson shares, “Emotionally unaware leaders can be more critical, angry, or even detached, which can fuel disconnection with their teams. Empathetic and self-aware leaders are emotionally intelligent, and thus, can connect with their teams at a deeper level—leading everyone to feel seen, heard, and understood—even if they can’t always make a popular or easy decision.”



The leadership is disconnected from the needs and concerns of the employees.

– 2025 Employee Respondent

Flexibility is the New Employee Currency

As RTO mandates climb among high-profile companies, this year's data reveals employees will go elsewhere if they are forced back into the office: **60% of remote/hybrid employees and 74% of remote/hybrid HR professionals say they would leave their job if their employer required them to work in the office full-time.**

Flexibility is increasingly viewed as a form of currency with employees willing to sacrifice pay for increased freedom over when and where they work: **51% of total respondents would take a pay cut to work remotely, rising to 64% for HR professionals.**



87% of total respondents say companies that allow some form of remote work or flexible work arrangement prioritize employee wellbeing.

51% of Respondents Who Work Hybrid or Fully Remote Would Take a Pay Cut to Keep Their Flexibility

While 60% of employees and 74% of HR professionals who currently work in a hybrid or remote environment say they'd leave their job if required to work in the office full-time, only 33% of CEOs say the same.

- Total Remote/Hybrid Respondents
- HR Professionals, Remote/Hybrid

- Employees, Remote/Hybrid
- CEOs, Remote/Hybrid

I would be willing to take a pay cut to work remotely



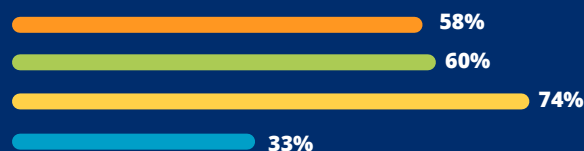
Most likely

- 57% Technology
- 58% Financial Services

Least likely

- 33% Healthcare

I would leave my job if my employer required me to work in the office full time



Most likely

- 73% Asian
- 72% Financial Services

Least likely

- 39% Government

I prioritize new opportunities that allow at least some remote work



Most likely

- 88% Technology
- 79% Financial Services

Least likely

- 52% Manufacturing





Let's be clear, employees have the ability to walk away from a nine to five. I think it's going to get worse for [unempathetic] employers, particularly with Gen Z, because Gen Z is the most values-driven part of the American workforce that we have ever seen. They know what they want in a workplace and they have absolutely no qualms, no fear or trepidation about walking away.

– Anton Gunn, President & CEO of 937 Strategy Group, Former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama

CEOs (75%), HR (77%), and employees (69%) are largely aligned in the belief that companies enforcing RTO mandates are doing so to maintain control and oversight rather than foster collaboration and innovation. Likewise, 68% of both CEOs and HR say being in an office is outdated in the modern workforce.

These findings align with a growing body of evidence showing that workplace flexibility is no longer a nice-to-have, but a strategic business imperative. Research from Revelio shows firms with RTO mandates are experiencing slower growth. **Since mid-2022, companies mandating full-time office attendance have expanded by an average of 0.3% whereas those embracing flexible work models have grown at a 0.6% rate—twice as fast.**



Double-Digit Empathy Gaps Exist Between Fully Remote and On-Site Employees

Remote and hybrid employees have significantly higher perceptions of empathy for their leaders and organizations, including a 20-point gap in how empathy is perceived in HR professionals.

? How empathetic do you think each is currently?

	Fully Remote Employees	Hybrid Employees	In-Person Employees	Gap Between Remote & In-Person Empathy Perceptions
My Organization is empathetic/very empathetic	80%	78%	70%	10 points
My Manager is empathetic/very empathetic	88%	84%	76%	12 points
My HR Professional is empathetic/very empathetic	84%	76%	64%	20 points
My CEO is empathetic/very empathetic	70%	67%	59%	11 points



Only 44% of In-Person Employees View CEOs in General as Empathetic

Gaps in empathy perceptions between remote and in-person workers grow even more when respondents are asked broadly about companies and leaders in general, with only 44% of in-person employees saying CEOs are empathetic.

	Fully Remote Employees	Hybrid Employees	In-Person Employees	Gap Between Remote & In-Person Empathy Perceptions
Organizations/companies in general are empathetic/very empathetic	70%	67%	54%	16 points
CEOs in general are empathetic/very empathetic	63%	55%	44%	19 points
HR Professionals in general are empathetic/very empathetic	75%	74%	61%	14 points

Since the pandemic, the ability to balance work and home has become fundamental to the employee experience—and our data shows this type of autonomy is one of the greatest expressions of empathy an employer can offer: **91% of employees agree/strongly agree that flexible work hours and flexible work location (88%) are top benefits that demonstrate empathy.** And 72% of total respondents would be willing to work longer hours for an empathetic employer.



RTO policies often create trust fractures, not just logistical challenges. Organizations must rebuild trust through listening, flexibility, and empathy-based manager conversations, not mandates.

– Amy J. Wilson, Culture Shift Studio Founder and Author of “Empathy for Change”

Top 10 Employee Benefits Viewed as Empathetic

Paid time off, maternity/paternity leave, core benefits, mental health benefits, and workplace flexibility are seen as top demonstrations of empathy across all audiences. When viewed from a “strongly agree” perspective, paid time off and flexible work rises in importance, with 53% of CEOs and 49% of total respondents strongly agreeing that flexible work hours demonstrate empathy—9 points higher than even annual compensation increases (41% strongly agree).



To what extent would each of the following types of employee benefits help demonstrate that a company/organization is empathetic?

Employee Benefit	% Total Respondents That Agree/ Strongly Agree Benefit Demonstrates Empathy	% Total Respondents That Strongly Agree
Paid time off (PTO)	91%	51%
Flexible work hours	92%	49%
Paid maternity leave	92%	49%
Core benefits (i.e., medical, dental, vision, and life)	91%	46%
Wellness days / weeks (i.e., paid time off related to mental health and wellness)	92%	46%
Employer contributions to financial plans (e.g., 401(k), HSA, FSA, HRA, etc.)	91%	45%
Flexible work location (i.e., working from home or remotely)	88%	45%
Extended mental health benefits (e.g. mental health days, online mental health providers)	92%	44%
Paid paternity leave	90%	44%
Family benefits (e.g., paid after school programs, daycare)	90%	43%

Want vs. Reality: Majority of Employees Prefer Hybrid or Remote Work, but 51% Are In-Person Full Time

This year's findings show the majority (68%) of employees prefer to work hybrid or remotely, yet 51% of employees report full-time in-person work—this is still, however, a 15-point decline from the height of RTO in 2023.

While in-office employee rates have remained steady over the past 2 years, CEO in-office presence rose 14 points YOY—from 34% in 2024 to 48% in 2025, nearing 2023 RTO levels. In contrast, only 40% of HR professionals report being in-office, a drop of 11 points.

Despite more CEOs returning to the office, 53% now view flexible hours as a must-have benefit—a 21-point increase and nearly equal to employees (51%). **Yet access remains unequal: just 39% of employees say flexible hours are offered by their employer, compared to 51% of CEOs who say the same.**

Other inequities include:

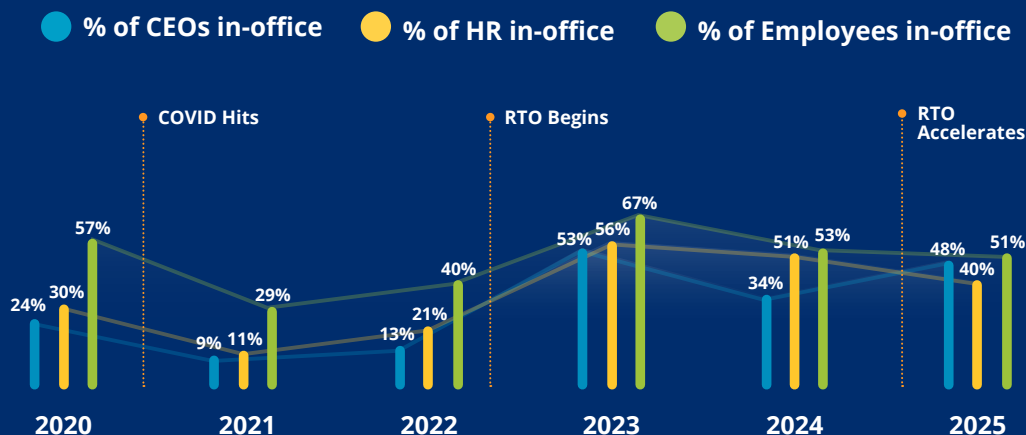
- 91% of CEOs say flexible work hours are a top way organizations can demonstrate empathy and support mental health, yet only 29% of employees and 21% of HR say they take advantage of flexible hours versus 41% of CEOs
- 38% of employees say their job cannot be performed remotely versus 23% of CEOs
- Women CEOs (79%) are far more likely to work on-site than men (39%)



62% of HR professionals, 46% of CEOs, and 42% of employees say recent RTO mandates have negatively impacted their mental wellbeing.

How In-Office Work Has Shifted Over the Past 5 Years

After RTO implementation in 2023, in-office mandates softened for all audiences. In 2025, CEOs are back in office (+14 points YOY), modeling the RTO they desire from employees.



What Does the Next Decade Hold for Empathy?

The cost of empathy inaction is not theoretical—it's measurable. Organizations that fail to lead with empathy risk higher attrition, mental health issues, and toxicity—leading to absenteeism, isolation, and breakdowns in trust and connectedness. In today's climate, doubling down on empathy isn't just the right thing to do—it's a business imperative essential to an organization's survival. The challenge ahead lies in moving from awareness to action. Organizations that succeed in the next decade will be those that “walk the empathy talk”—embedding it into their policies and performance metrics.

Here's what experts say about the outlook for empathy and how to put it into action...

When you infuse empathy into your policies, practices, and communication, you make it real. You put it into action. Instead of simply paying it lip service. Walk your talk.

– Maria Ross, Speaker, Leadership Facilitator, Podcast Host, and Author of “The Empathy Dilemma”

Empathy gaps are equity gaps. The groups that most need empathy, including but not limited to women, people of color, in-office staff, are often the least likely to experience it. The future belongs to organizations that build Essential Lovable Cultures: cultures people trust and want to stay in, not just tolerate.

– Amy J. Wilson, Culture Shift Studio Founder and Author of “Empathy for Change”

Empathy reached its lowest point around 2009, at least among college students. It's been trending upward ever since. If we follow those cohorts, those low-empathy Millennials are now entering leadership positions. That might mean a few more years of stagnation, but with Gen Z and Gen Alpha rising, I'd expect a rebound... we should see more empathic employees enter the workforce each year.

– Alison Jane Martingano, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Psychology at University of Wisconsin

In my experience working directly with leaders, the first place they must learn to practice empathy is being empathetic to themselves—their own struggles, imperfections, and shortcomings. The more self-aware they are of their own inner experience and roller coaster of emotions as a leader, the more capable they are of holding space for others' experiences. This is where authentic empathy comes from. It's hard to practice with others unless we first practice with ourselves.

– Kelli Thompson, Executive Coach and Author of “Closing the Confidence Gap”

Every day when employees show up to work they're asking three questions: **Do you care about me? Will you help me be successful? Can I trust you?** You cannot answer these questions out of order because if you try to answer the third question before answering the first two, you're going to lose... employees are going to disengage. They're going to quit. But before they quit, they're going to engage in counterproductive workplace behaviors that cost money. So, you have to have empathy to show people that you care about them. And if you answer those first two questions repeatedly, you start to build trust, and trust is the foundation of a business that builds an affinity.

– Anton Gunn, President & CEO of 937 Strategy Group, Former Senior Advisor to President Barack Obama



About the Data

Celebrating 10 Years of Empathy Insights

Over the past 10 years, Businessolver has studied the evolution of empathy in the workplace hearing from collectively nearly 26,000 employees, HR professionals, and CEOs about their views on a variety of workplace issues.

Our study examines the behaviors and benefits that make a workplace empathetic. In this study, empathy is defined as “the ability to understand and/or experience the feelings or perspectives of another.”

In March of 2025, Edelman Data DXI fielded an online survey of more than 3,200 participants across 6 key industries: financial services, government, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, and technology. To qualify for the survey, respondents needed to be 21 years or older, a U.S. resident, and be employed full-time or part-time within their respective organization with 100 or more employees.

Our survey included subgroups for gender, ethnicity, parent/non-parent status, veteran status, managers, work location status (remote, hybrid, in-person), and generations. Small employers are defined as organizations that employ 100-999 employees. Large employers are defined as organizations that employ 1,000+ employees.

Unless otherwise noted, findings are cited throughout in “Top 2 Box” on 4- and 5-point scales (e.g. agree/strongly agree, important/extremely important).

About Businessolver

Since 1998, Businessolver has delivered market-changing benefits technology that empowers empathetic service supported by an intrinsic responsiveness to client needs. The company creates client programs that maximize benefits program investment, minimize risk exposure, and engage employees with easy-to-use solutions and communication tools to assist them in making wise and cost-efficient benefits selections. Founded by HR professionals, Businessolver’s unwavering service-oriented culture and secure SaaS platform provide measurable success in its mission to provide complete client delight.



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