

UDEMY IN DEPTH

# The Portrait of a Pandemic at Work



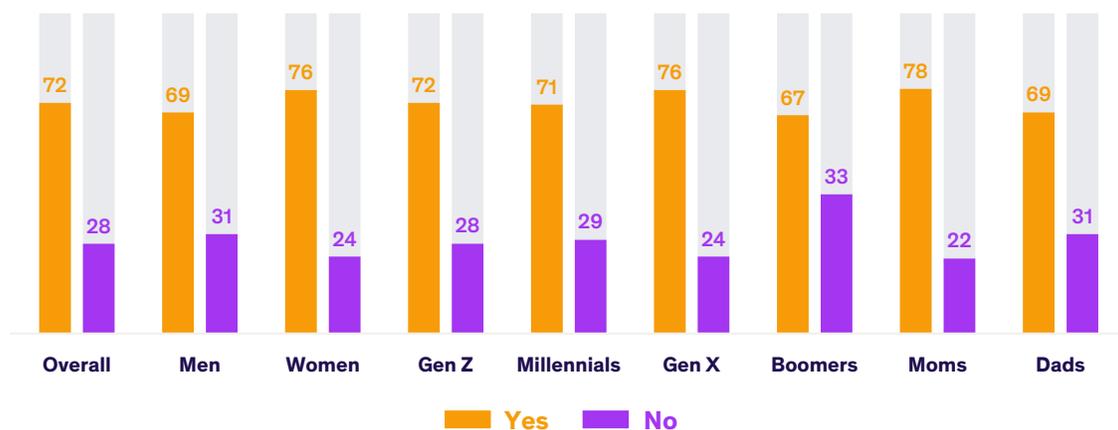
## What impact has the pandemic had on the country's workforce?

Within a few months, millions of people's lives have been upended in unimaginable ways. Employees who spent their days in offices with coworkers, attending meetings, socializing in and out of working hours, and taking business trips, are now isolated at home and connecting only online. Others are being furloughed or laid-off as many companies are making the difficult decisions to keep their organizations afloat. To add to the stress, employees' concerns over personal safety and financial stability are fostering insecurity about their ability to function and flourish.

The rocky job market and economic upheaval, along with the effect of months of sheltering in place, are resulting in a workforce that feels anxious not only about their current work situation, but also about the future. The majority (72%) worry this new reality will have a long-lasting negative effect on their quality of life and dramatically diminish their future prospects.

### The "New Normal" Caused by COVID-19

Are you concerned that the "New Normal" will have a long-lasting negative impact on your quality of life and future prospects?



For this report, Udemy set out to understand how concerns about personal health and wellbeing combined with professional insecurity are affecting people's day-to-day working life. We also asked questions about what working from home is really like. For this report,

we surveyed over 1,000 full-time workers in the U.S. who typically work in office settings (as opposed to “essential workers,” such as hospital staff and grocery store employees). Our findings have uncovered a mix of reactions from those working from home. Our survey indicates that while working remotely full-time may offer some advantages — most notably, no commutes and more time to spend with family — the long-term reality of working only from home is proving to be filled with enormous challenges.

Additionally, we uncovered that, workers are seeking out ways to improve their skill sets through online learning to make themselves more marketable and retain employment. On a less positive note, we also discovered people are turning to counterproductive behaviors while working from home, from drinking alcohol on the job to binge watching their favorite shows.

## How a Pandemic is Redefining Work

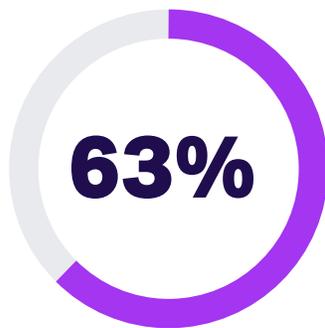
As COVID-19 case numbers continue to rise, many are realizing that this new reality is unlikely to end anytime soon. As a result, workers are experiencing growing anxiety about the lasting impact on their personal, physical, and financial wellbeing.

This ongoing stress is having a profound effect on employees' ability to function, focus, and flourish at work. Our research indicates that optimism is indeed in short supply. Augmenting their anxiety, most workers (69%) are fearful about another wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. More than half (54%) worry that their hours and pay will be cut back, or worse, that they will lose their jobs. Not only are employees worried about their short- and long-term prospects, but the majority (58%) report that they are working harder now than before the pandemic. Most employees (56%) also responded that they are working harder than their co-workers and that maintaining a healthy work-life balance has become far more difficult.

More encouraging, most people (78%) believe that their employers are doing everything possible to protect them from the COVID-19 Pandemic. While they feel their health is a priority, employees worry that their job security is not. The majority of workers suspect that their employers are using the pandemic and economic downturn as an excuse to:

- **63% downsize their workforce**
- **61% transition to a more automated workforce**
- **52% relocate their employees and organizations**

### Employees are Losing Trust and Questioning Employer Motives



of employees believe that their employers are using the pandemic as an excuse to trim their organizations



of employees believe that their employers are using workplace downsizing to transition to a more automated workforce



of workers believe that their employers are using the Pandemic as an excuse to relocate their workforce or organizations

*“As we’re all faced with uncertainty and anxiety, take breaks and allow yourself some balance in your day. Practicing mindfulness, starting the day with yoga in the park, singing along to your favorite artist, or perfecting your chocolate chip recipe can all be moments in your day, the key is to not allow them to take up your entire workday.*

*Udemy behavior therapy instructor Dr. Alicia Paz*

### Working Remotely Goes Mainstream

Not so long ago, working from home was the exception, and going into the office was the norm. This shift to remote work (most especially video chat) has proven to be sometimes amusing (the family cat walking across the keyboard or kids playing in the background), sometimes frustrating, and certainly challenging as the delineation between work and home has disappeared.

Remote work, however, is not all bad news. Employees say that full-time remote work mitigates the health and economic risks of commuting and working on-site:

- **45% feel physically and mentally safer and healthier**
- **39% balance work and family life far better**
- **29% are more creative and innovative**

Age Correlates with Sentiment Toward Remote Work

	At Home	In the Office
<b>Gen Z</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 6% More work/family balance</li> <li>▲ 17% Happier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 17% More burnt out</li> <li>▲ 22% More engaged</li> </ul>
<b>Millennials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 20% More work/family balance</li> <li>▲ 7% Happier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 2% More burnt out</li> <li>▲ 1% More engaged</li> </ul>
<b>Gen X</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 14% More work/family balance</li> <li>▲ 15% Happier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 12% More burnt out</li> <li>▲ 14% More engaged</li> </ul>
<b>Boomers</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 3% More work/family balance</li> <li>▼ 5% Happier</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▲ 22% More burnt out</li> <li>▲ 30% More engaged</li> </ul>

**The Imbalance of Home-Work Life Balance**

Benefits aside, full-time work at home has introduced new frustrations and stresses with couples living and working together. Many of the conflicts between working couples fall along gender lines. Working remotely has eroded established rules and routines of shared responsibilities, increasing family stress and discord. This is especially true for working parents, and more so for moms of children 18 and younger.

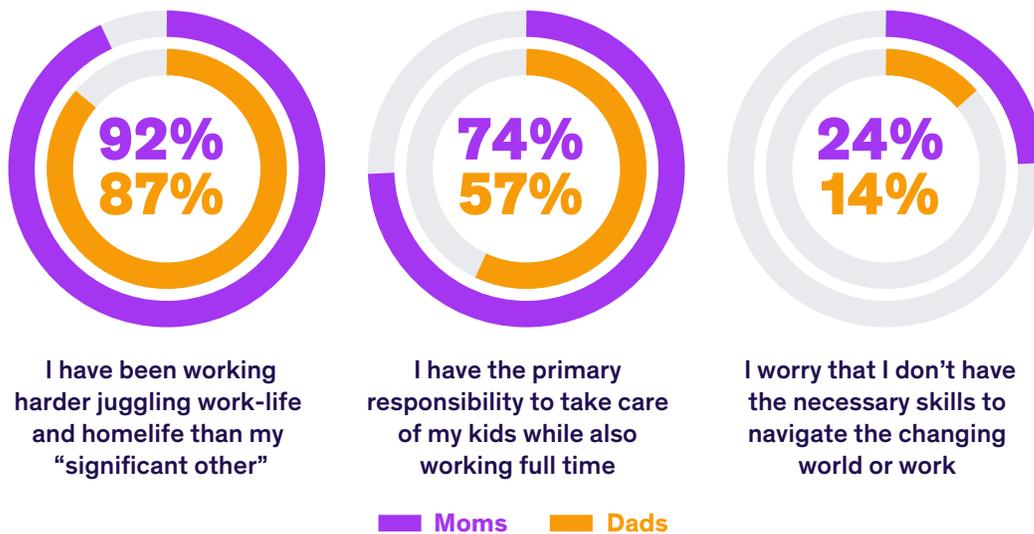
Most people (75%) report that they have been working harder than their significant other to juggle work and life at home. That figure rises dramatically for parents: 92% of moms report that the burden to balance work and home life falls mostly on them, compared to 52% for dads.

*“We use a traffic light system at home. When I have a ‘red’ card on my office door, it means the children can’t come in because I am usually teaching a webinar. When I have a ‘green’ card on my office door, they are free to come in and chat and ask for help. When I have a ‘yellow’ card on my door, they have to knock first.*

*Mom of two and Udemy leadership instructor Priya Nalkur*

Indeed, a majority of parents (57%) report that it has been challenging during COVID-19 to get their work done while taking care of their children. Again, the gender fault line reveals that more women than men are feeling the burden of childcare. Far more moms (60%) than dads (38%) say they struggle with attending to their children, including helping them with remote schoolwork, while working from home. What’s more, 53% of moms, versus 38% of dads, say they work much harder now than before the pandemic. As working families navigate back-to-school uncertainty, these concerns are likely to only grow.

**Bring Your Work to Kids Day**



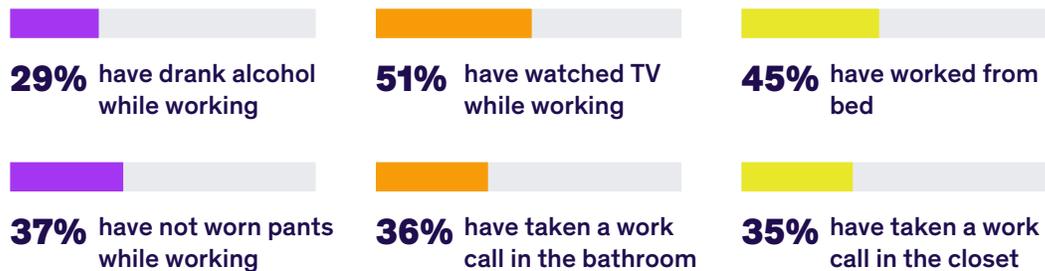
**The Weird World of Working From Home**

Working without pants, taking calls in the bathroom, streaming Netflix. Welcome to the often bizarre realities of at-home work. Working from home means that former basics like showing up for work professionally dressed and engaging with colleagues in person have fallen by the wayside for many. Casual wear has taken on a new meaning, with 37% of respondents reporting that they sometimes don’t wear pants while working. At-home work informality also expands to other creative solutions, with 36% of employees confessing that they have taken a work call in the bathroom and 35% from their closets (given that these may be the space that most resembles a private home office for many workers).

Distractions with this new population of at-home employees also reign supreme. While seasoned employees who are accustomed to working remotely full-time have already found ways to avoid home distractions, these newer remote workers are finding how hard it is to focus on the home front. Most (86%) simply have frustrating and distracting issues with technology.

But others are struggling with their own personal habits, confessing that cooking and eating (61%), pets (57%), and video games (44%) are the major reasons they aren't focused on work. What's more, many confess to indulging in even more counterproductive behaviors while on the job: with almost half (45%) working from bed and almost a third (29%) drinking alcohol.

### Remote Working is Causing a Shift in Employee Behaviors



*“To maximize productivity, it’s important to create time boundaries. This is especially crucial as we work remotely and lack the physical boundaries between work and home. I recommend picking a stopping time every day to ensure that 1) your work doesn’t bleed into all aspects of your life and 2) you’re more productive because you’ve given yourself a defined period of time to get things done.*

*Udemy time-management and productivity instructor Alexis Haselberger*

### A New Focus on Sharpening Skills

The full story about America’s changing workforce is hardly only about slacking off on the couch watching TV and playing fetch with the family dog. We suspect that over time, those who find themselves working remotely full-time will make adjustments, and as some of our research reveals, learn techniques for becoming more efficient and disciplined.

Our study reveals that two-thirds (67%) of workers are aspiring to better themselves, using the extra time they've been awarded (with no commutes and fewer social engagements) to learn new skills or enhance existing ones.

A third (37%) of respondents have spent time seeking additional training in professional or role-specific skills, like web development and graphic design. In addition, given that working remotely will most likely be a continued reality for tens of millions of Americans for many months, if not for another year, employees are seeking ways to improve how they work from home. After all, the distractions mentioned earlier will prove a liability if they don't learn to be more productive within their working hours at home.

### What Skills Do Remote Employees Need to Learn?



Most say that they also want to improve what are considered the “softer” skills, like communication and time management, to help them be more effective and desirable employees overall. Some (29%) are even taking the newfound time while sheltering-in-place to devote to hobbies and skills such as learning how to meditate, bake sourdough bread, or play a guitar.

Finally, in terms of “how” employees want to learn, they are looking for the most efficient modes of learning in a world transformed by the pandemic and an economic downturn. Most workers overwhelmingly preferred taking an online course (49%), followed by company-sponsored professional development (23%) with a lagging third choice, traditional classroom or going back to a brick-and-mortar school (13%).

## Return to Work? Not So Fast

As states reopen, employers and employees face the reality of returning to a shared workspace, with some employees commuting via public transportation, and many planning what needs to change to keep everyone safe.

While workers miss the office culture and happy hours (48%), collaboration (47%), and office perks like snacks (34%), they still have strong ideas on what the new world of work should look like.

These expectations include flexible remote work policies (78%) and the opportunity to relocate if they are allowed to keep working remotely (54%). If workers aren't permitted to have flexible working options, nearly half (48%) of all employees would consider leaving their jobs. Millennials (65%) have higher expectations than Boomers (16%), with a majority of Millennials saying they would consider leaving their job without flexible options to work remotely or relocate. The majority of workers (74%) also think a 4-day workweek would make them more productive.

### Future of (Flexible) Work

MON 31	TUES 1	WEDS 2	THURS 3
<p><b>74%</b></p> <p>believe that a 4-day work week would make them more focused and productive in their jobs</p>	<p><b>78%</b></p> <p>of employees said that it's important for employers to offer flexible remote-work policies moving forward</p>	<p><b>54%</b></p> <p>would contemplate relocating if they're able to continue working remotely</p>	<p><b>48%</b></p> <p>of employees overall would consider leaving their job if flexible working options aren't offered moving forward</p>

## A Healthier and Safer Office?

Employees have surprisingly low confidence that employers will reconfigure the workplace to make it safer. Only 41% anticipate that workspaces will be designed to enhance employee health and safety.

In addition, about a third (35%) of workers believe they will be going on fewer travel meetings and doing other in-person work-related tasks like in-person presentations and conference room meetings.

Additionally, the majority of people have strong feelings about new workplace safety requirements. Our survey found that:

- **80% are willing to wear a mask while working onsite**
- **75% believe that their employer should require all employees to be regularly tested for COVID-19, and they should not be allowed to work on-site if they test positive for the virus**
- **75% think their employer should require COVID-related safety training to ensure a safe working environment**

## Will We Ever Go Back to “Business as Usual?”

Based on our survey, the short answer is “no.” The COVID-19 Pandemic and resulting economic downturn are transforming how and where we work. In the short term, many employees are not prepared to return to a work environment that feels unsafe. In the long term, it is likely that workers will have more opportunities to work from home and learn how to do so more effectively. .

Without a doubt, employees are changing with these dramatically changing times: they are learning the upsides and downsides of working full time from home. While some are slacking off, many are upskilling to remain viable in an uncertain job market..

With each passing day working from home, employees and their organizations are shaping the future of work. Time will tell which changes brought on by the pandemic will prove permanent, and even preferable, to our old normal.