



GRADS
of LIFE

BUILDING AN EQUITABLE REMOTE WORK STRATEGY: LESSONS FROM 2020

Between COVID-19 and a national reckoning around racial justice, the last year has sparked dramatic changes in the labor market, especially for the most vulnerable workers.

Employers around the country worked to rapidly adapt to a new reality and meet new employee needs and expectations. With the pandemic still evolving, and the rate of Americans voluntarily leaving their jobs reaching an all-time high, employers have an opportunity to heed the lessons of the last year to build more inclusive, supportive and engaging organizations for the long term.

Recently, business leaders around the country have expressed a wide range of perspectives as they consider how to continue managing through the pandemic: Some are eager to return to in-person work, while others are embracing remote work and its benefits long term. Maintaining remote and hybrid working options going forward can enable companies to hire more inclusively and support their employees more holistically, but they must apply an explicit equity lens to ensure workers from underrepresented groups are not left behind.

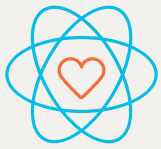
We surveyed over 500 young, diverse workers (mostly low-income Gen Zers and millennials of color) to determine how those employees most affected by the events of the last year really felt about their employers' responses, and how employers can best support diverse talent and, therefore, remain resilient and competitive.



HERE'S WHAT WE HEARD

from diverse workers on their experiences navigating remote work through the height of the pandemic.

WHAT WORKED WELL



GENERAL SUPPORT

Despite the challenges of shifting to virtual work and managing the effects of the pandemic and the racial justice movement, employees largely felt supported by their employers.

65%

of respondents reported that their employer accommodated tech needs in the shift to remote work.

61%

of respondents reported that their employer had conducted frequent check-ins.

59%

were satisfied with employer support during the shift to remote.



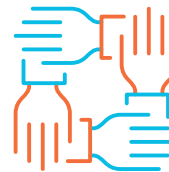
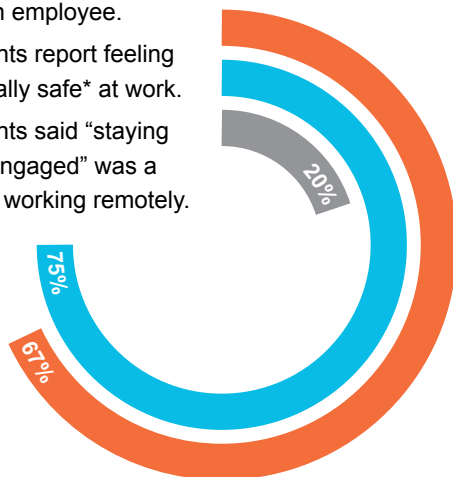
BELONGING AND ENGAGEMENT

Businesses have done a good job of maintaining a sense of community and trust in the virtual environment.

67% of respondents report feeling valued as an employee.

75% of respondents report feeling psychologically safe* at work.

20% of respondents said "staying online and engaged" was a challenge in working remotely.



GROWING COMMITMENTS TO DEI

Companies' commitments to DEI help diverse employees feel more connected.

67%

of respondents agree that their employer has acknowledged racial and social injustice.

53%

of respondents agree that their employer has meaningfully advanced the cause toward improving racial and social justice.

64%

Respondents who agree that their employer has meaningfully advanced the cause of improving racial and social justice are 64% more likely to feel valued at work.

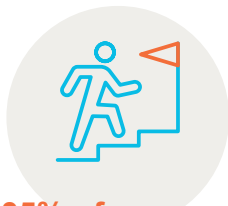
* Psychological safety refers to the belief that one can speak up without risk of punishment or humiliation.

LOOKING AHEAD

While employers managed the transition to remote work well overall, they have the opportunity to improve in specific areas:

COMMUNICATION AND TRANSPARENCY ON CAREER PATHS

Despite feeling generally supported in the transition, employees reported a lack of information and support related to career advancement as a significant challenge in the remote environment, where proactive communication is especially important.



Only 35% of respondents think their employer provides information about career advancement/promotion opportunities.



Only 29% of respondents think their employer provides formal coaching/mentoring.



Only 29% of respondents think their employer provides leadership development programs.

EQUITABLE UPSKILLING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIVERSE TALENT

Employees also report disparities in access to support for professional development, a common challenge that can easily become exacerbated in the virtual environment.



Only 35% agree that their employer has instituted a plan to invest in management and leadership training, mentoring/sponsorship, and other career development programs for Black employees.



Only 41% agree that their employer has instituted a plan to create more support for Black employees.

ENHANCED COMMUNICATION WITH JOBSEEKERS

Respondents who are actively job-seeking are looking for prospective employers to signal their commitments to equity.

ONLY 15% of jobseekers surveyed report feeling that prospective employers are empathetic to what they are experiencing in response to the racial justice movement.

66% noticed that job postings rarely or never communicate organizational responses to the racial justice movement.

As the competition for talent continues, employers have an opportunity to attract and retain diverse candidates by expanding and strengthening remote working arrangements. To build an effective remote work strategy that centers and drives equity, consider the following:

1. Don't rush back to "normal": Consider how practices adopted over the last year can be retained and expanded upon to support DEI goals.

- Consider which roles can remain virtual, and build remote recruiting pipelines to expand economic opportunity where it is most needed and meet diverse hiring goals.
 - Employers often cite the inability to "find" diverse talent in their markets as a challenge to equitable hiring. By retaining remote roles permanently, employers can eliminate geographical boundaries and hire diverse talent where they are.
 - For example, a tech company in the Silicon Valley can build partnerships with workforce development organizations in cities like Cleveland, Birmingham, or New Orleans, where there are large numbers of diverse talent and limited economic opportunities, to establish talent pipelines. This enables companies to meet hiring goals, and supports economic mobility for those that need it most.
- Retaining remote work for the long term can also introduce new challenges. **A study found** that remote workers can be more easily left behind, with less likelihood of being promoted. But employers can take steps to mitigate those risks and ensure a level playing field, especially for remote workers from underrepresented groups, who already face barriers to equitable opportunity.
 - Make calls equitable: If one person is remote, the call should be entirely remote.
 - Ensure equal opportunities for mentorship, sponsorship and more casual career discussions for remote workers.
 - Get creative with informal virtual gatherings to foster connection and belonging.

2. Ensure transparency and frequent communication around professional development opportunities and career paths.

- Employees want to understand how their current work is connected to growth opportunities and get the support they need to advance.
- This is doubly important for diverse talent who have fewer organic opportunities to gain support, and is further exacerbated in the virtual environment. Ongoing conversations about career development can help employees continue to feel supported and remain engaged.

3. Double down on your commitment to racial equity

- The data confirms the power of an explicit commitment to racial equity for prospective employees. Be sure to also make your stance clear in job postings and other communication with applicants.

We encourage employers to consider the needs and voices of their most vulnerable workers as they continue to navigate the pandemic. If you are interested in learning more about virtual work strategies to advance equity, contact Grads of Life.

METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted in October 2020 among a 4,674-person representative sample of **Year Up's** 18,000 alumni. We received 552 completed survey responses. Respondents were 55.6% male and 42.4% female, with 98% being between 20 and 38 years old. The majority of respondents were nonwhite, with 45.4% identifying as Black or African American, 31.8% as Hispanic or Latino, 13.9% as Asian, 5.4% as white, and 4.3% as two or more races.

ABOUT US

Grads of Life empowers companies to drive equity through employment. We work with leading employers to create inclusive talent strategies that deliver both social impact and business benefits. Through our data-driven approach, we help companies understand their current positioning and create customized engagements to help them achieve their goals. With deep issue area expertise, we act not only as a consultancy for our clients but as a thought partner and support system, providing the research, tools, and networks they need to create systems-level change. Born out of an initiative of Year Up, we have a long history of helping companies address their talent needs while advancing economic justice and are proud to continue to help build the employer movement to close the Opportunity Divide.