

Season 3 | Episode 13

HR Survey Results: Employees' Concerns with Unpredictable Work Schedules



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Rob Parsons:

Welcome to PULSE, a Paychex HR podcast, where HR professionals find insights on today's top issues and inspiration to build and lead effective teams in a healthier workplace. I'm your host, Rob Parsons.

Rob Parsons:

Hi folks, Rob Parsons here. Welcome to PULSE. We're joined again by Jeanne Meister, founding partner of Future Workplace, and now EVP of Executive Networks, an HR peer network company. Jeanne has teamed up with Paychex to conduct research into employees' top concerns and priorities as the modern workplace continues to evolve. Today, we'll be discussing the impact of workplace schedules. Jeanne, welcome back.

Jeanne Meister:

Thank you so much for having me, Rob. Of all the research studies, I found this one fascinating, and the reason why is that with all the talk about the great resignation and people leaving for either better jobs or changing occupations, this research put a spotlight on people's unpredictable work schedules and how that's impacting their engagement, satisfaction, and overall well-being.

Rob Parsons:

It's really interesting and there's a lot of dynamics here, Jeanne. My work schedule's pretty predictable, but we're talking about a different segment of the workforce: shift workers, part-time workers, people in different industries that have been impacted for a variety of reasons. Can you tell me a little bit about what this unpredictability has created?

Jeanne Meister:

Well, first of all, you bring up a good point. This was the first time we included part-time workers in our sample. And overall across the US they actually make up 17% of the workforce and 63% are women. So the big finding is that they are saying unpredictable work schedules impact their overall well-being, with a particular focus on their emotional well-being — about a fourth were saying it causes burnout. And importantly, their financial well-being.

Jeanne Meister:

If you have an unpredictable work schedule and you're an hourly worker, you just really don't know how much you are going to earn from week to week. So we hear about people living paycheck to paycheck. Well, this situation really says, I'm not even sure I can pay my bills because I don't know how many hours I'm going to work each week or each month.

Rob Parsons:

So interesting. Unpredictable work schedule equals unpredictable paycheck. And one of the things I find disheartening about this is the dramatic impact this has on our frontline workers who've really, for the past two years have been heroes. Have really stepped up, have taken the brunt of the challenges we've been facing, and yet are still facing some of the issues they've always faced.

Jeanne Meister:

Exactly. I mean, about three out of 10, say that their work schedules are unpredictable. And for the younger workers, let's talk about the millennials first. Three times as many millennials have reported they have decided to switch jobs because of unpredictable work schedules. That is huge, and this is our future workforce, and they're doing it out of necessity.

Jeanne Meister:

So I think that the second issue that the younger workers flagged for us in the research was because of the unpredictable work schedules they're finding it really hard to enroll in professional training and development and to pursue their next career. And when you combine all of it really leads to dissatisfied workers who will leave if employers don't take action.

Rob Parsons:

I find this Jeanne to be actually a bit of a wake-up call for America's employers. Younger workers, part-time workers have traditionally been the taken for granted part of the workforce, the neglected part of the workforce, the easy-come-easy-go part of the workforce, the unvalued part of the workforce. Are we starting to see a shift in actually welcoming, being more inclusive, treating these people as just as valuable as traditional full-time employees?

Jeanne Meister:

We have to Rob, or else it's going to be a revolving door. I mean, I know where I live about an hour south of Albany we continue to see signs that say "Help Wanted." We've even started to see signs that say, "We'll open when we have the workforce we need to serve you." And this is really causing a major issue for employers. And I think they're now being forced to take action. They could sort of slide by before, but now this is impacting their business.

Rob Parsons:

For sure. I mean, just putting a flag out that says "Now Hiring," it's not enough.

Jeanne Meister:

Right.

Rob Parsons:

A lot of people are hiring. I have a lot of choices, a lot of options. When we talk about these unpredictable schedules, you talked about the unpredictable paycheck, the toll on well-being, what are some things that employers can do to help alleviate that? What should we be thinking about when dealing with these younger workforces, with these part-time workforces, with these more flexible, fluid workforces?

Jeanne Meister:

Well, I think employers should really look at the root cause, what's causing these unpredictable work schedules for the frontline customer-facing workers? And what can they do about it? This is the time now to develop a business plan, what technology tools can they put into place to manage their on-demand workforce? What can

they cross train employees so that they have a more fluid force that's skilled? Can they develop a culture where people can collaborate and solve business problems as a team, so you're not relying on one or two job roles?

Jeanne Meister:

So I think it starts with data, if you will, and employers to develop a business plan. I think from there, they have to take a hard look at what are their well-being benefits. We now know, and we've seen over the last couple of surveys, that emotional well-being and financial well-being are being impacted significantly. So employers should take a hard look at what are they offering in these two areas and are they communicating that in the right way so that their workers really understand the full portfolio of benefits they have available to them?

Rob Parsons:

And there's probably, especially with these more novel benefits, more novel packages, there is the opportunity to extend it to your part-time workforce and give them more support and give them more of a leg to stand on and be then a more valuable part of the company. Be part of the company versus just an ancillary, just something extra.

Jeanne Meister:

Absolutely. And we now know that the major employers are starting to extend well-being benefits to families of employees. So they're really sort of having a very broad look here. They need to really do the same thing for part-time workers, for sure. And then finally, I think they have to start having more stay interviews. What would it take for you to stay with us? So they understand early what some of these issues are. And they can take action before a lot of people leave because they're not satisfied.

Rob Parsons:

I could see that also having a real impact on my full-time employee base. I know your research, we looked at part-time, but you also looked at just general raw hours worked, and people are going to get burned out. With staffing levels decreasing, the work isn't decreasing. So people are having to pick up that workload. And there's probably a lot of employees that are not feeling great about their current situation. So it's not just a stay interview, is it Jeanne. It's actually acting on what you find during that stay interview?

Jeanne Meister:

Absolutely. And what we found is the part-time workers are working shorter hours. And just as you said, because they're working shorter hours and more unpredictable hours, the work still has to get done. So the full-time workers are working longer hours and that's impacting their emotional well-being. So you can see how it snowballs throughout the workforce.

Rob Parsons:

One of the things, I had another guest, Sabina Bhatia from Payactiv, and we talked a lot with her about technology and the opportunity to swap shifts, the opportunity to share hours, the opportunity for employees to work collectively, to help contribute to managing these workloads. What have you seen on the technology side?

Jeanne Meister:

I think that's what's needed, giving workers more of a say in how they manage their own shifts. Because everyone's life situation is different and working moms have a different preference for the hours they want to work than someone who might be retired and joining the workforce again. So I think, if at all possible, how do we take the pulse of everyone and help them to propose what works best for them on an individual, personalized basis? Now it might not work out for everyone, but we should at least give workers the choice to propose the schedule that works best for them.

Rob Parsons:

It's really interesting the area you're mining into here, Jeanne, because now we're not just talking about where I work, but we're talking about when I work.

Jeanne Meister:

Exactly. And this when you work also has an impact on full-time workers. They're also raising their hands and saying, "I'd like a more personalized, customized approach, not only to working remote, hybrid, or in the office, but for knowledge workers, what are the core collaboration work hours?" So it's when you work. And so I think this whole issue of when is impacting every worker, regardless of whether they're frontline or knowledge workers.

Rob Parsons:

So interesting, Jeanne. Any last thoughts to share on what you learned during this research or what you're just seeing out in the industry around this topic of "when?"

Jeanne Meister:

I think the issue of when has to be surfaced at regular times by leaders. And I think we say a lot, leaders — especially now as the pandemic is entering, I guess it's third year now, Rob— that leaders really have to be empathic and understand the work situations of their workforce. And as a major trend, what we have seen is a pretty large disconnect between leaders lives on how they're managing their work schedules and in their overall work and personal lives of frontline workers, and part-timers. Vastly different situations. And I think leaders have to really understand what all different segments of their teams are going through, so that they can really lead with empathy.

Rob Parsons:

I think that's a great point. A lot of times I've heard we have the expectation well, I'm doing it. Why can't everybody else? And that's not always fair. It's not really realistic when we get down to it.

Jeanne Meister:

Absolutely. Yes.

Rob Parsons:

Jeanne, thank you so much for joining the podcast today. I found this to be such a surprising and interesting and important topic. So thank you for conducting this research and sharing it with our listeners.

Jeanne Meister:

And I want to applaud Paychex for putting a spotlight on this issue because our frontline, customer facing workers have come more important now, and we've recognized their importance over the last couple of years. And this has not been a segment where there's been a lot of research on their needs and expectations. So we're going to continue to dive deep on this issue. Thank you so much, Rob, for having me.

Rob Parsons:

Oh, I love it. Thank you, Jeanne. And thank you to our listeners for joining. I encourage all of you to visit paychex.com/worx. That's paychex.com/W-O-R-X to see a full breakdown of the research along with Jeanne's insights and recommendations on how you can manage this challenging issue. Finally, we'd also love you to tell us what you want from this podcast. Please visit payx.me/Pulsetopics to submit guest and topic ideas. That's P-A-Y-X.M-E/PulseTopics. Thank you all. And please stay happy and healthy.

Announcer:

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