

## Member's Quarterly

## Summer 2026 Edition

### Perspective

## Deskless Workers

*Discover what motivates them*

I came across an interesting term a while ago: 'deskless workers'. No, this was not referring to the musical chair game that some office workers are playing in the recent return to the office protocols. It was referring to people who work outside of a desk-based office setting. The numbers are shocking. It is estimated that 70 to 80 percent of all workers around the world fall into this category.

They range from those who work in transportation to employees who perform cleaning and maintenance. Others work in retail or supermarkets or food packing or processing. Cleaning and maintenance workers at 34 percent and delivery, logistics and transportation workers at 28 percent are the most prevalent categories of these so-called deskless workers.

These deskless employees who work in fixed locations like plants or shopping malls or within office buildings may be fairly easy to communicate with. But how do we talk with this wide and varied group of employees about things like benefits? Most of them have limited access to a computer at work, many work irregular hours and it would be hard to hold a meeting so that you could address all of them at the same time.

Sometimes, the only contact that HR has with these employees is when we hire or fire or discipline them. We likely hand them their employee booklet and then may never physically see them again, unless we pass them in the hallway or the parking lot. This means that we need some different ideas and maybe a whole new approach to communicating with this large group of workers.

Options that seem to work include employee surveys, focus groups and possibly some individual interviews to get a sense of what they may need in terms of benefits. Find out if the current package even meets their needs. That way, at least you will know if you are on the right track.

The reason for making this effort is not just to do the right thing for your entire workforce. It may be a key to unlocking how you can keep more of these deskless workers longer at your organization. One recent global study of workers in transportation, retail, construction and healthcare found that almost 40 percent of them were looking at quitting their jobs within a short period of time.

There are many reasons why this group is looking for greener pastures. A major factor is salary, although many of them have received higher salaries during and since the pandemic. Others are seeking more flexibility in terms of working hours and scheduling. But for most of the employees surveyed, they talked about improvements in their overall benefit package as being an important incentive for them to stay or go to another employer.

Potential solutions could include improved and extended healthcare benefits and things like mental health support and access to expanded employee wellness programs. Be creative and think outside the office box. Your entire workforce will appreciate it.



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