



**Health
Solutions**



Women, Work, and Well-Being

3 Ways Workplace Wellness Strategies Can Help Address the She-cession

Women are opting out of the workforce in record numbers. As many women make difficult career choices, companies stand to lose the essential leaders they need to reinvent the workplace of the future. Here's how a renewed commitment to wellness at work can provide solutions, support, and bottom-line results.

The pandemic delivered a wake-up call for employees and employers alike. For many employees, work and life were already out of balance, with the pandemic serving as a tipping point to rethink how work fits into life and vice versa. For other employees, the pandemic brought layoffs and job loss, causing seismic shifts in everyday life and long-term career paths.

As a result, people are changing jobs or leaving the workforce altogether at record rates. An estimated one in four employees quit their job in 2021 alone.¹ But the reality is, the pandemic impacted women in the workforce more than their male counterparts, with the female workforce participation rate hitting a 33-year low in 2021.² While the reasons are complex, experts point to two core drivers behind the trend, which has been dubbed the “she-cession.”



Industry sectors with higher concentrations of female employees, such as hospitality, retail, and service, were hit hard during the pandemic. Although women make up 39 percent of the global workforce, they accounted for 54 percent of the overall job losses at the height of the pandemic.³



Women take on more caregiving responsibilities. Research shows women are more likely than men to spend three or more hours a day on housework, childcare, and eldercare, which equates to at least 20 hours per week or half a full-time job.⁴ The pandemic shined a harsh spotlight on the uneven split as women bore the brunt of daycare, at-home school, and work-from-home commitments.

As women consider their post-pandemic career paths, many are facing difficult choices between well-being and work. Forty-two percent of women reported feeling burned out often or almost always in 2021, a significant increase from 32 percent in 2020.⁴ And one in three has considered downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce altogether.⁴



42% of women reported feeling burned out often or almost always in 2021



1 in 3 women considered downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce altogether⁴

The Business Impact of the She-session

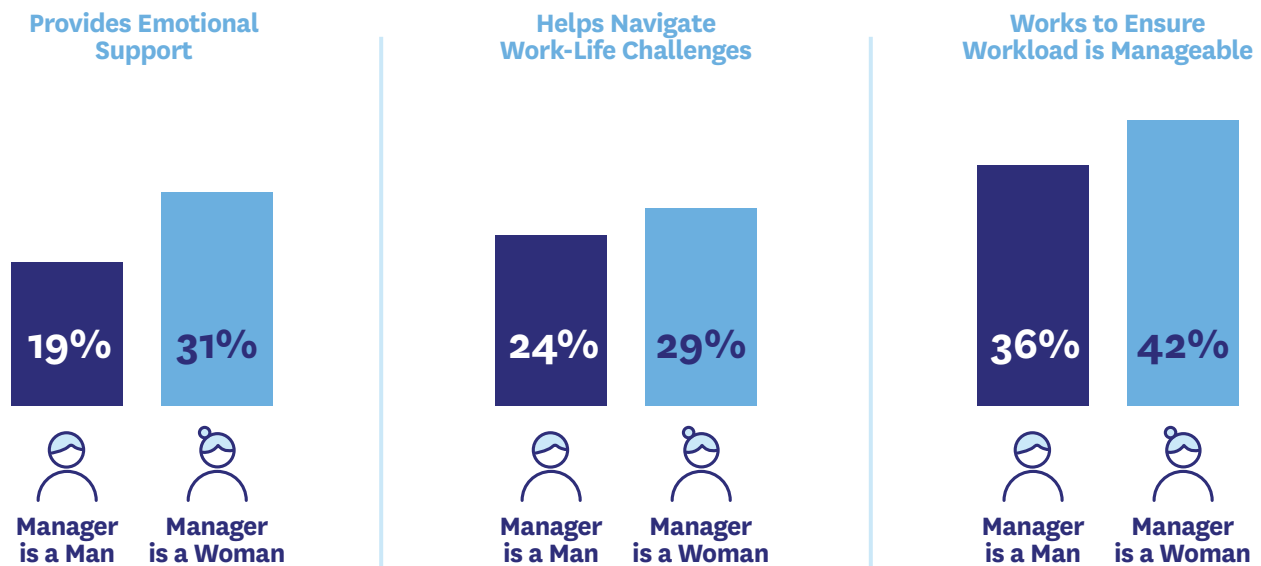
The combination of workforce trends and the pandemic-induced increase in remote work has companies redefining how – and where – work gets done. The longtime focus on supporting work-life balance is evolving to reflect employees’ desire for work-life integration instead.

Ironically, the she-session puts companies at risk of losing the leaders they need to adapt to the changing

work landscape and create environments for female—and male—employees to thrive. Among the leadership skills needed to transform the future of work, women score higher in emotional intelligence, empathy, adaptability, and teamwork.⁵ Overall, female managers are more likely than men in similar positions to recognize when their employees are stressed, tired, or burned out. And women leaders do more to promote employee well-being by checking on team members, adjusting workloads, and providing support for those who are dealing with work-life challenges.⁴

Women Business Leaders Are Well Suited to Redefining the Future of Work.⁴

Percentage of Employees Who Say Their Manager Consistently:



When employees feel supported by their managers as they navigate work-life challenges, they are more likely to be satisfied with their job, less likely to leave the company, and less likely to feel burned out.⁴

The Opportunity for Holistic Wellness Programs

With the pandemic as the catalyst, companies have a unique opportunity to reinvent their workplace culture to further prioritize well-being and meet the evolving needs of women in the workforce. In this period of change, workplace wellness strategies can play an essential role in how companies help women—and all employees—address work-life challenges and create a network of support. Viewed through a lens of overall well-being, successful wellness programs should center around three core attributes.



1. Whole-Person Focus

Nine in ten business executives say that investing in a healthy workforce will be tied to business success and the overall U.S. economic recovery in the months ahead.⁶ However, there is recognition that well-being isn't about physical or mental health. A workplace culture focused on well-being must take a holistic approach that recognizes employees' physical, mental, emotional, financial, and social health—across both their work and personal lives. A whole-person approach means applying a strategic focus to integrate separate wellness initiatives to ensure they meet a diverse set of employee needs and work seamlessly together.

By focusing on holistic well-being, companies do more than help employees improve their overall health. Research shows these companies are two times more likely to exceed their financial targets, three times more likely to retain their employees, and eleven times more likely to have lower employee absenteeism.⁷

2. Work-Life Integration

Employers who shifted to work-from-home models during the pandemic gained new insight into the lives of their employees and the choices they make around work and family priorities. In response, many companies are increasing workplace flexibility by adapting hybrid work models and offering more opportunities for remote work. While these options are highly valued by women, companies need to be sensitive to potential equity issues, such as favoring in-person employees when it comes to promotions and project opportunities.

To help mitigate the she-cession, companies must also recognize the caregiving imbalance between women and men. Helping employees better manage childcare and eldercare responsibilities can range from formal employee benefits, such as parental leave and dependent care flexible spending accounts, to less formal arrangements like referrals and discounts with local community organizations offering care services. The combination of flexible work options and caregiving resources can be the difference makers women need to coordinate schedules with their partners, address childcare challenges, and balance work deadlines with family obligations.

Employers lose an estimated \$12.7 billion each year due to lost productivity, absenteeism, and attrition caused by employee childcare challenges.⁸

3. Empathetic Leadership

The impact of a workplace culture focused on well-being and better work-life integration for employees is greatly multiplied by empathetic leadership. Empathy for employees is conveyed through executive leaders who set the tone within the organization as well as frontline managers who establish day-to-day relationships with employees.



When company executives and frontline managers are able to demonstrate their care for their employees and their willingness to provide support, it helps to drive employee satisfaction, retention, and productivity. Eighty-six percent of employees who feel their leaders are empathetic report they are better able to navigate their work and personal obligations.⁹ And having a supportive direct manager when coping with work-life challenges makes a significant difference in employees' decisions to stay with the company. Nearly half of employees (49%) say they've left a job because their managers lacked sensitivity when employees were dealing with issues in their personal lives.¹⁰

The way companies and employees think about work is evolving rapidly. Behind the headlines, reimagining how, when, and where work gets done requires a deep understanding of employee needs, challenges, and pain points.

From there, building a culture of wellness that adapts to the changing workforce by providing flexibility, resources and support will be a powerful tool for addressing the she-cession, attracting and retaining employees, and driving business growth.



WW Health Solutions partners with companies of all sizes to deliver weight-loss and wellness programs that achieve wellness goals for both employees and the business.

Based on the #1 doctor-recommended weight-loss program,¹¹ our solutions are backed by behavior change science, the latest nutritional research, and innovative digital technology, all designed to make healthier habits easier to build and sustain.

Learn more at [WW.com/HR](https://www.ww.com/HR).

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