

The Future of Work is For All™

Insights and Predictions from the 2020
Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For®



Executive Summary

A new decade sits before us. It's 2020 and change and uncertainty loom in the world of work as elections, economic downturns and technological advances are on the horizon.

What do these factors mean for each of us at work this year, and into the new decade? As usual, the 100 Best Companies are out in front, showing us what the future of work can look like at its best.

This report examines three critical trends workplaces are navigating: **automation & AI**, **elections** and **recessions**. We share how the Best Workplaces™ are preparing for these trends, and what your business can learn and apply.





Our 23rd Annual Study of the 100 Best Companies to Work For®

As the global authority on workplace culture, Great Place to Work® have been gathering employee experience data for more than 30 years using our comprehensive Trust Index™ survey.

It's what allows us to certify and celebrate great workplaces, including this year's winners of the 2020 100 Best Companies to Work For. Moreover, it produces the largest data set on employee experience in the world, giving us unique and deep insights into experiences from people across all backgrounds.

For this report, our team mined this data using advanced analytic and machine learning approaches to uncover the most significant drivers of the employee experience, how and why they differ between demographic groups and what it means for a company's performance. In addition, we conducted a representative survey of 1,500 working adults to determine the average employee experience in the U.S.



650,060
Survey Responses

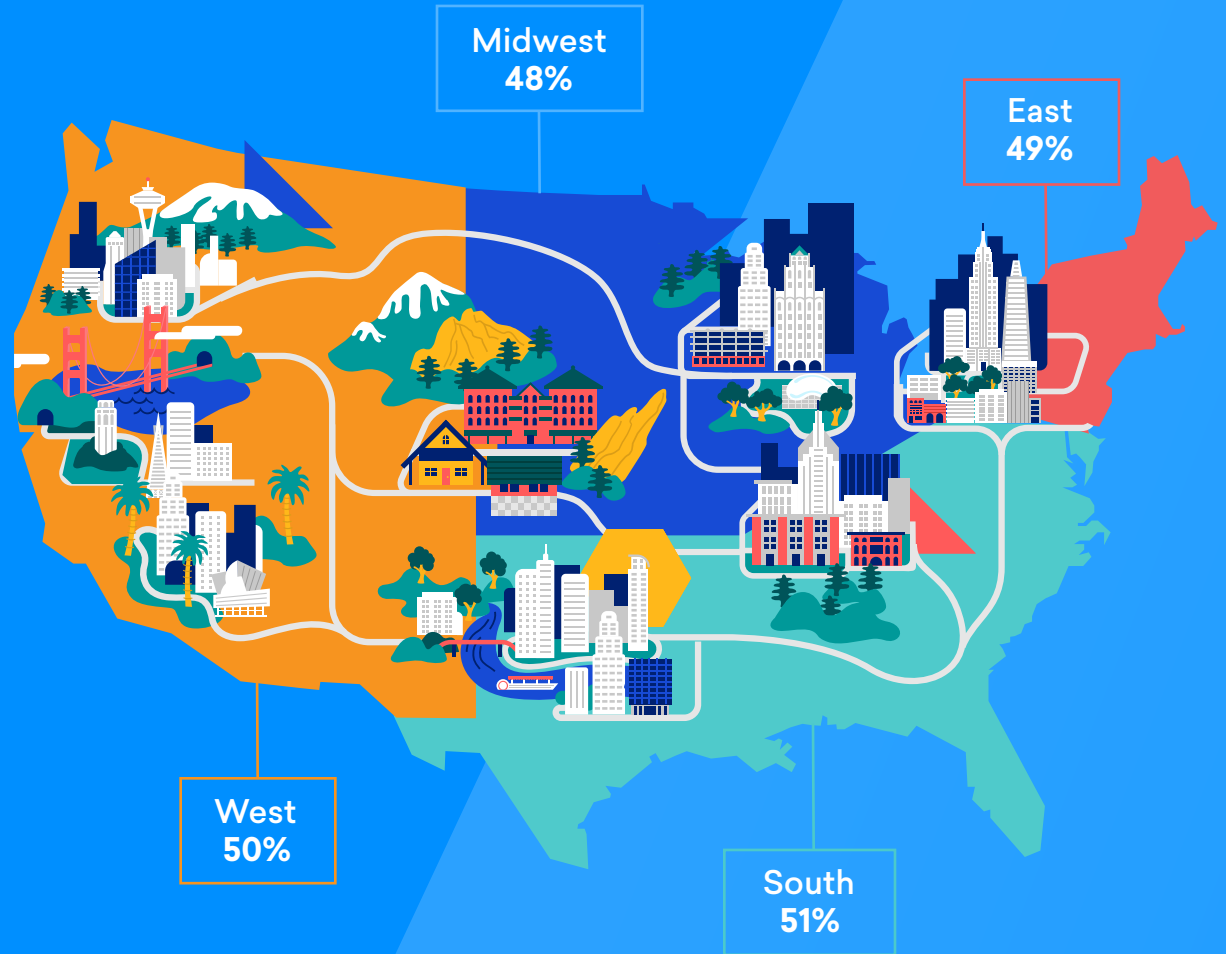
4,163,095
U.S. Employees Represented

It's tough out there.

Only 49%

of U.S. employees consistently experience their workplace as a great one.

No matter where you turn in the U.S., employees are seeking better workplaces, while employers struggle to consistently maximize the full potential of their workforces.



And it's getting tougher.

The last decade saw smartphones emerge as part of our everyday life, social media change how we consume information and millennials become the largest generation in the workforce. Those sweeping changes will look pedestrian compared to what lies ahead.

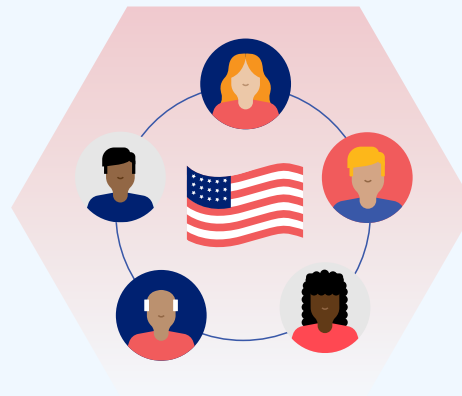
Novel ways of organizing companies, new approaches to leadership, heightened calls for wellbeing and the arrival of Gen Z are among the many issues that will keep us on our toes.

In this report, we focus on three major trends reshaping the employee experience over the next decade.



Automation & AI

New technologies are disrupting jobs and transforming industries. The opportunities are immense once employers and their workforces are ready.



Elections

Like it or not, political discourse is part of the workforce experience. The polarized environment in the U.S. will continue to disrupt workplace experiences unless employers tackle the topic head on.



Recessions

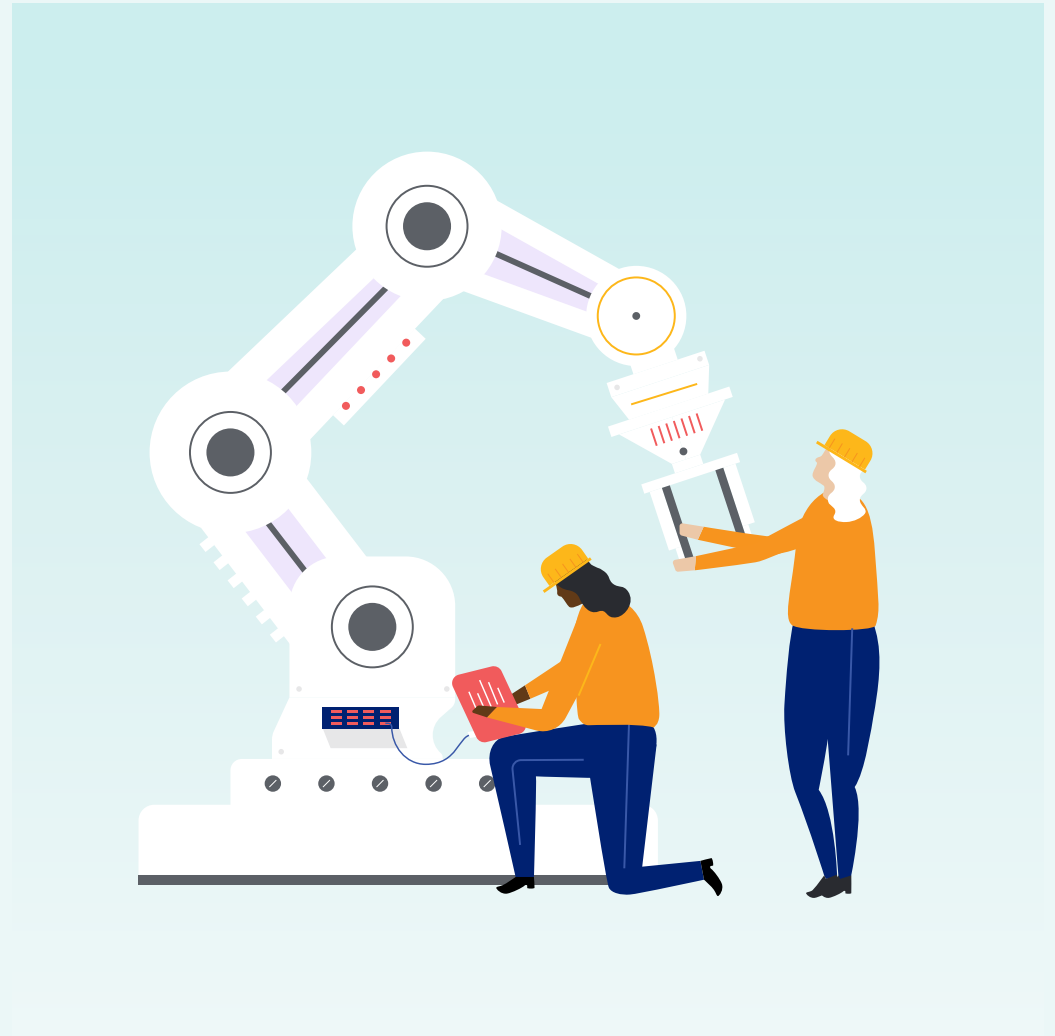
While the last 10 years brought a strong rebound from the Great Recession, economic downswings are on the horizon. The best workplaces are investing today to build strong, inclusive cultures to recession-proof their businesses.

Automation & AI

The impact of artificial intelligence is undeniable, everywhere and evolving rapidly. AI brings tremendous opportunities even as it challenges organizations and displaces workers across industries.

Can your company realize its potential fast enough?

Only if your employees are ready to run with you.



Your employees' biggest worry isn't getting replaced by a robot.

Their real fear is being treated like one. And it's this fear that can seriously slow companies down.

How do we know? We gathered and analyzed hundreds of thousands of comments from employees in the U.S. through our culture management platform, Emprising™.

When we looked at comments discussing automation, artificial intelligence and robots, we found that rather than expressing fears of being replaced, employees speak about fearing a loss of individuality, mounting stress from dealing with rapid change and a sense their employers don't care about them as people.

"I wish my company would make space for humanity and human error... I often feel like a robot and as though the company sees me as someone that is easily replaced."

Employee,
Technology organization



Some industries are ready for the challenge. Others aren't.

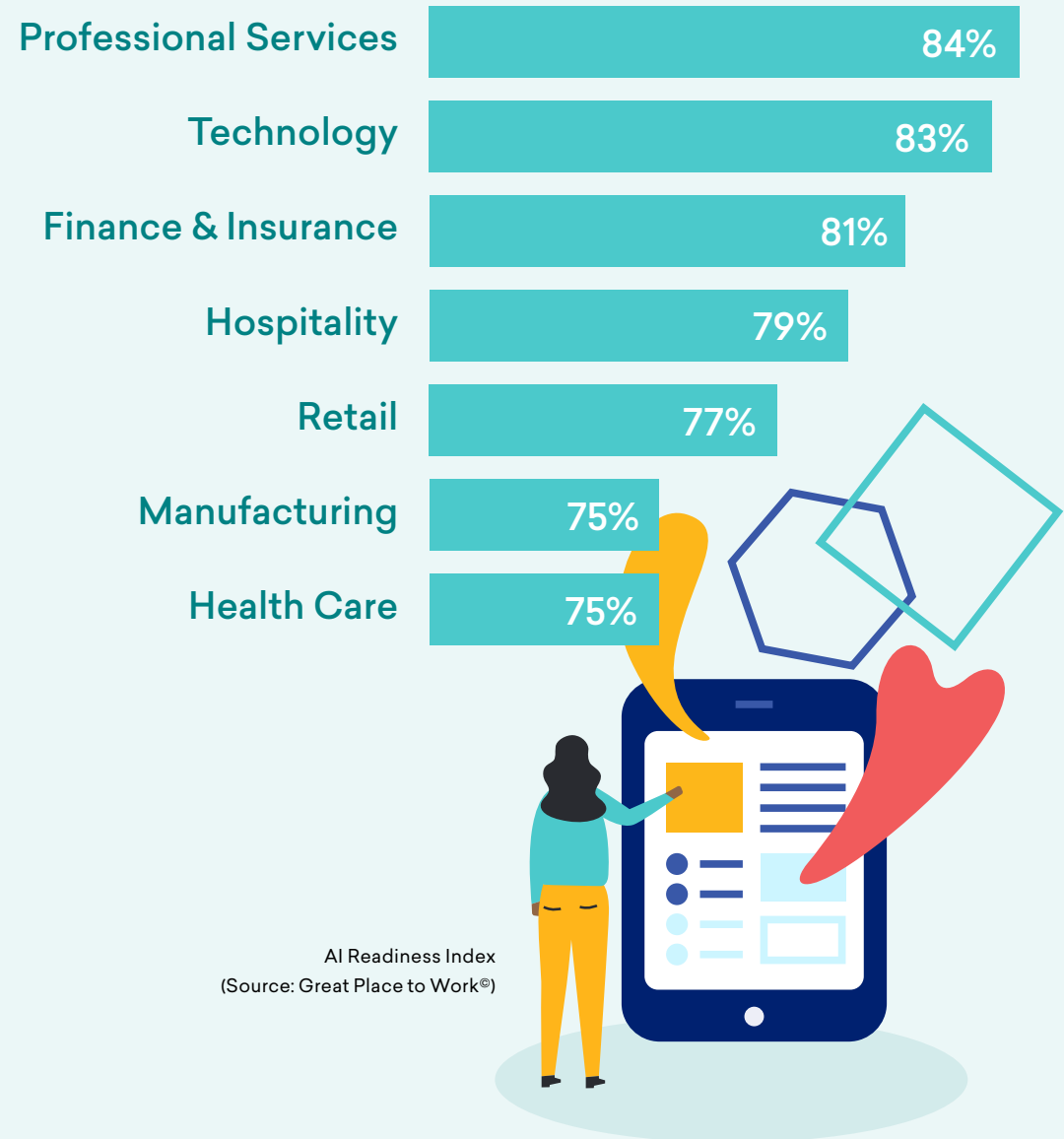
Understanding employees' real concerns about automation is only part of the puzzle. The broader question is whether companies are ready for the challenge of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

To find out, we developed an index of employee experiences that measure whether employers are ready to quickly adopt automation or AI. We call it the "AI Readiness Index."

The AI Readiness Index is made up of key aspects of our Trust Index™ survey that assess whether employees feel their employers are investing in their growth, are committed to avoiding layoffs, care for them as people, involve them in improving the business and are competent at running the business.

A high AI Readiness Index score indicates companies are likely to soar in the AI era. A low one is a warning that a company will find itself grounded as competitors take off.

AI Readiness by Industry



Several industries face a readiness deficit.

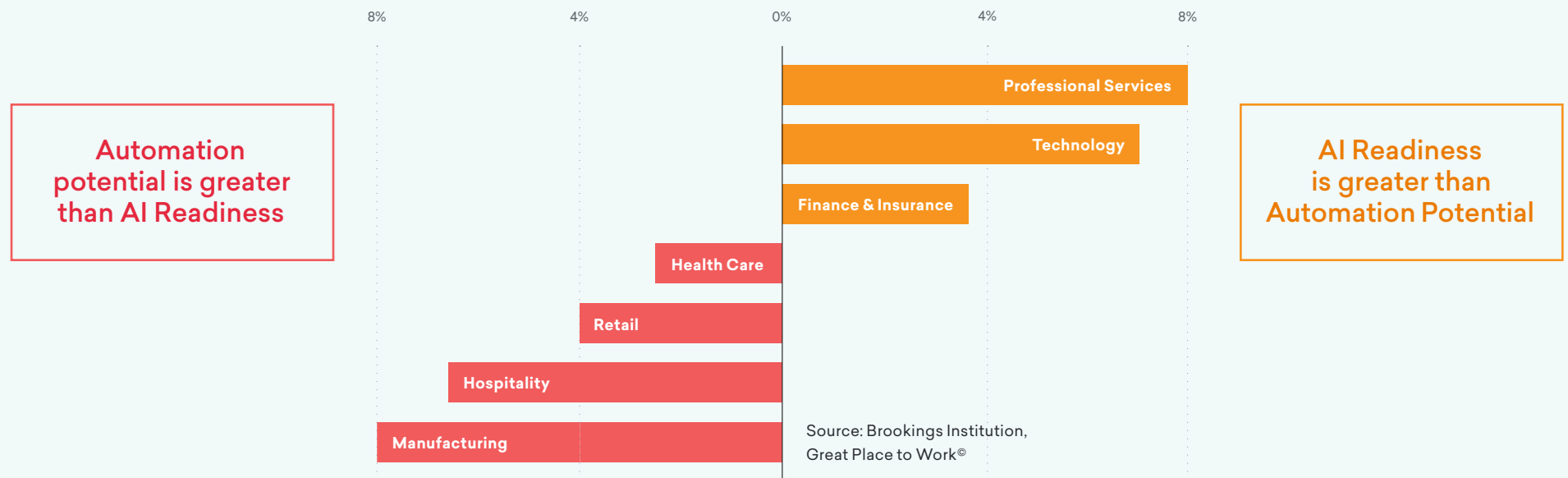
Some industries are further along the AI adoption curve. But which are best prepared with their people to lead the way in the AI age?

The Brookings Institution has estimated the automation potential facing different sectors. In its report*, Brookings assessed different sectors, geographies and various occupations to determine the likelihood automation and AI

would affect jobs. It identified roles with highly routine and predictable tasks as being the most vulnerable in the coming years.

Comparing Brookings' findings to our AI Readiness Index, some industries stand out as ready for the challenge... and others, not so much.

Gaps between AI Readiness & Automation Potential by Industry



* Mark Muro, Robert Maxim, and Jacob Whiton, "Automation and Artificial Intelligence: How machines are affecting people and places", Brookings Institute, January 24, 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/automation-and-artificial-intelligence-how-machines-affect-people-and-places/>

Focus on your people's future and they'll create yours.

The 100 Best Companies show there's a better way forward, no matter the industry. Their great cultures not only attract and keep outstanding talent, they allow these organizations to move faster in realizing the potential of new technologies.

The 100 Best Companies receive consistently higher marks on the AI Readiness Index across industries. Not coincidentally, they also enjoy greater agility.

Nearly 9 in 10 employees at the 100 Best Companies report that their organizations quickly adapt to changes needed for business success.

Best Workplaces Have an Edge in AI Readiness

84%



2020 100 Best

76%



Other Organizations

Want to up your employees' readiness? Invest in their future.

Far from fearing robots, employees are willing to welcome them with open arms as long as they feel like important individuals in their workplaces. Leading workplaces are making key investments to ensure every person, no matter who they are or what their role is, experiences growth and a belief they can meaningfully contribute to new and better ways of doing things.



Supercharge your development efforts

Investing in people actively shows you value their future, whatever unfolds. It lets employees tap into the talents and skills needed for the future.



Invest in an Innovation By All™ culture

When all your people experience a voice in shaping change, employee fear is reduced and your organization grows faster. Foster a climate where people are inspired to generate great ideas and feel able to share them with leadership.

Learn more from our series, [Innovation By All™](#).



Elevate your leaders' human side

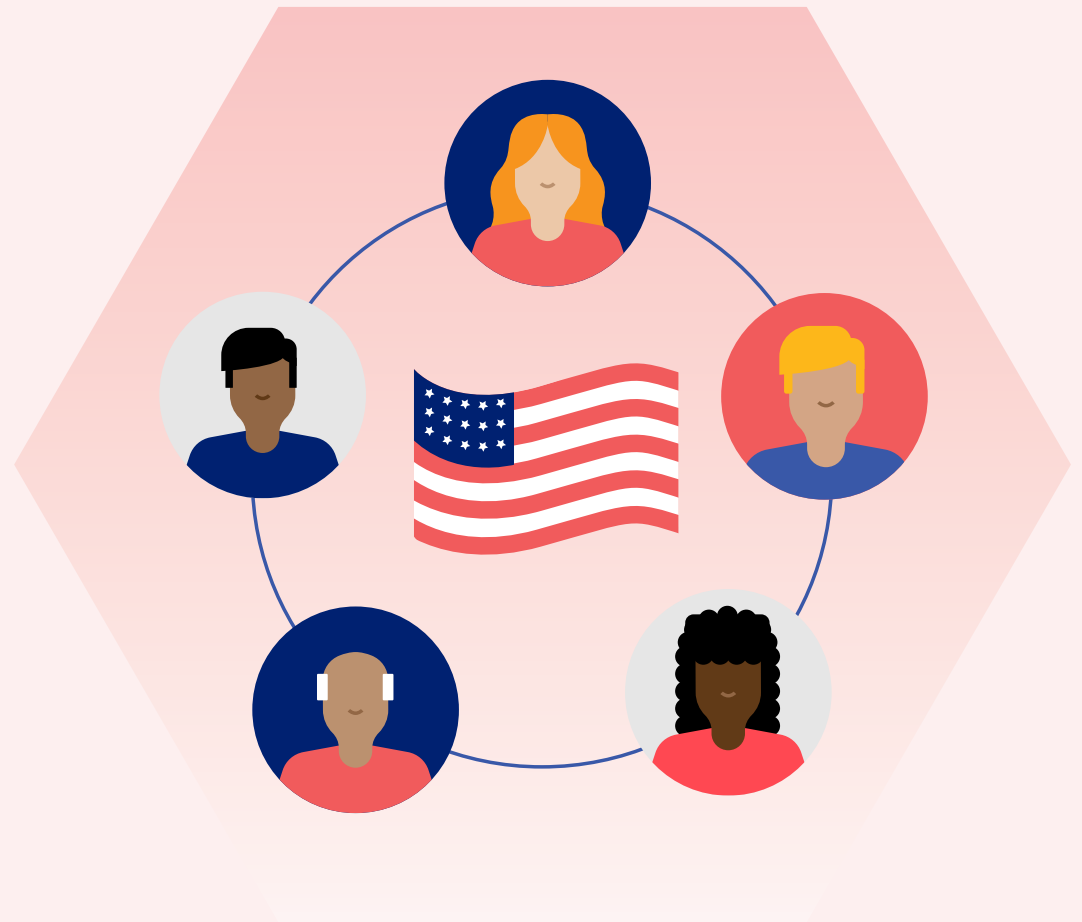
The biggest threat to people isn't machines thinking and behaving like humans, it's humans thinking and behaving like machines.

Great leaders in the future will be ones who listen, help people grow and fundamentally make all people feel sincerely cared for as humans rather than robots.

Elections

It's not just the 2020 presidential contest. This decade will bring many more elections along with divisions and debate about the important issues affecting people's day-to-day lives.

With growing participation and polarization, organizations cannot ignore that political identity is becoming as much a part of the employee experience as a person's race or age.

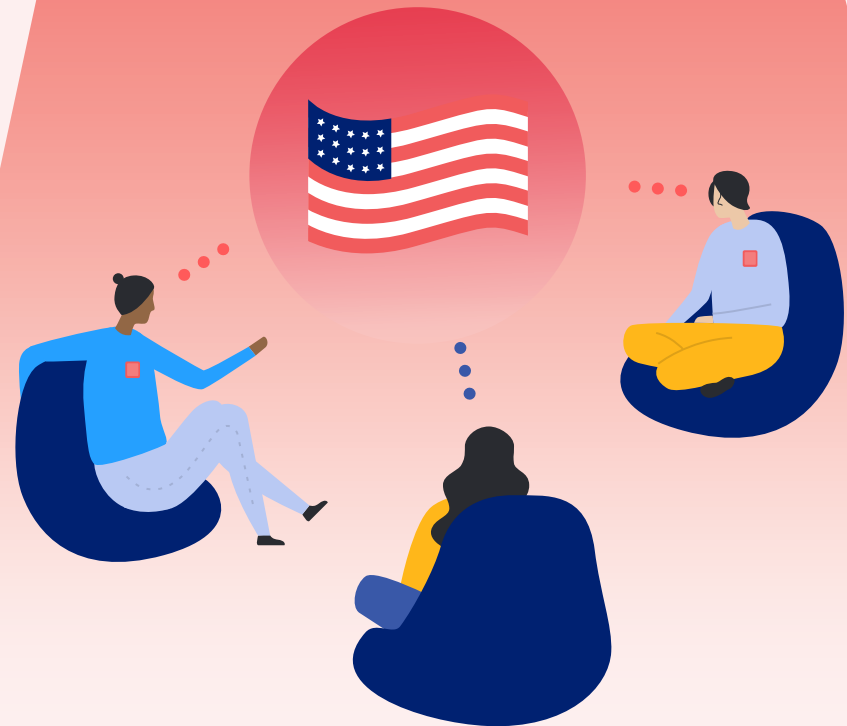


Politics aren't staying outside of work any longer.

Over the last decade, staying out of the fray stopped being an option for companies.

Consider what people told us in response to our Trust Index™ survey. Among employees' written responses, 1 in 20 commented on today's top political trends... *in a survey about their workplace.* And when they mentioned these trends, the most common phrase they used was **“constant fear.”**

What's more, the term “conservative” has shifted in meaning. The term now describes people's identity compared to years past when it described risk-averse decisions or organizations.



Untended, these changes undermine relationships, team cohesion and innovation.

A study by the American Psychological Association after the 2016 presidential election found 26 percent of full-time and part-time employed adults said they felt tense or stressed out as a result of political discussions at work.

Over half said they had discussed politics at work after the election, with 40 percent reporting at least one negative impact, such as lower productivity, strained working relationships and increased sense of burnout.

“I must say the effort to be ‘inclusive’ is quite admirable, except it leaves out groups like whites, males, and straight employees. When are they specifically embraced and encouraged to form groups to promote themselves? To what extent does inclusion influence meritocracy?”

Employee in Retail organization

“I often feel looked down upon because I don't openly support left leaning policies. I just take a neutral stance and am very careful not to reveal my viewpoints for fear of retribution.”

Employee in Technology organization

“The company needs to take more of a stance PUBLICLY on issues such as equal pay, women's rights, gun control, etc. Especially since these issues have directly impacted our company, and we have even responded to them internally (\$15 minimum wage, gun control post-Dayton shooting, Girls Who Code, etc.)”

Employee in Financial Services organization

No matter what your political opinion, you are likely to think work sucks.

In a representative survey of 1,500 U.S. workers, Great Place to Work asked people to describe their work experiences and their political beliefs. It uncovered one thing that unites people across the political spectrum: a need for better workplaces.



Conservatives



Liberals

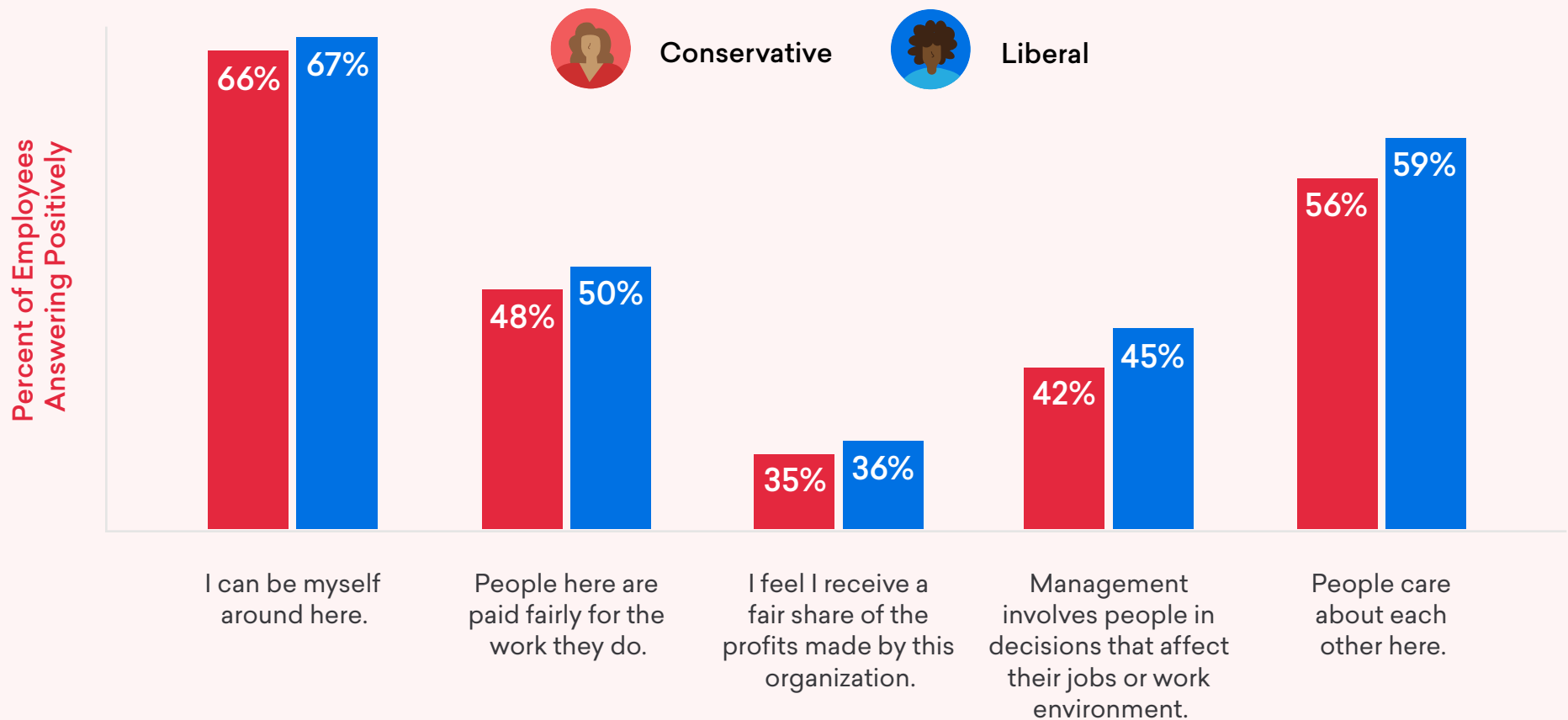
49%

of people with conservative political beliefs experience a great workplace

52%

of people with liberal political beliefs experience a great workplace

Liberals and conservatives tend to have similar experiences at work in most areas.



The one place where experiences vary: perceptions of fairness.

Perceptions of unfairness at work are common, no matter your political beliefs. More than half of all employees typically see promotions as unfair. Three in five believe favoritism is common.

However, people with conservative beliefs are more likely to experience these concerns. This is particularly true when people are asked about whether they're treated fairly regardless of their political beliefs.

These differences show leaders the places where extra attention is needed as they work towards cultivating a great workplace for all.

At the Best Workplaces, leaders are not shying away from these topics. For example, they're increasingly public about who gets promoted and why, aiming to promote a stronger sense of fairness through transparency.

Compared to conservatives, liberals are...

47%

more likely to believe people are treated fairly regardless of their political beliefs.

34%

more likely to believe their managers avoid favoritism

26%

more likely to believe promotions are fair



The conversations will happen. Set the stage for a better, more productive discourse.

Traditional advice is to keep politics separate from work. That's not an option any longer. Rather than avoiding it, leading organizations are taking steps to cultivate more productive and inclusive discourses. They are setting the stage for continuous conversations and reinforcing employees' common purposes and connections. This allows them to maximize the potential of all their employees, regardless of belief, while mitigating the negative impacts from political polarization.



Generate evolved conversations

Use the conversations to strengthen your business rather than divide it. Step into them proactively, looking to set the stage for repeated dialogues, characterized by curiosity and empathy.

Give employees the tools and space to learn about and from different viewpoints as well as to build empathy and understanding.



Amplify your shared values and purpose

While there are differences, remind employees of the many commonalities and connections. A sense of shared purpose and values gives people common ground to come back to and deepens their shared commitment to the organization and its mission.



Activate your For All Leaders™

For All Leadership is leadership for these complex political times. For All Leaders give employees the psychological safety and space to constructively share differing viewpoints, fostering genuine human connections within and across diverse teams. They create the day-to-day experiences that allow every employee to bring their unique selves to work, no matter who they are or what they believe.

Recessions

Economists continue to forecast a business downturn landing at the start of the decade.

What steps can leaders take now to recession-proof their businesses and thrive over the next 10 years? It starts with building a consistently inclusive and positive culture.



Our metrics of employee experiences predict company success during a recession.

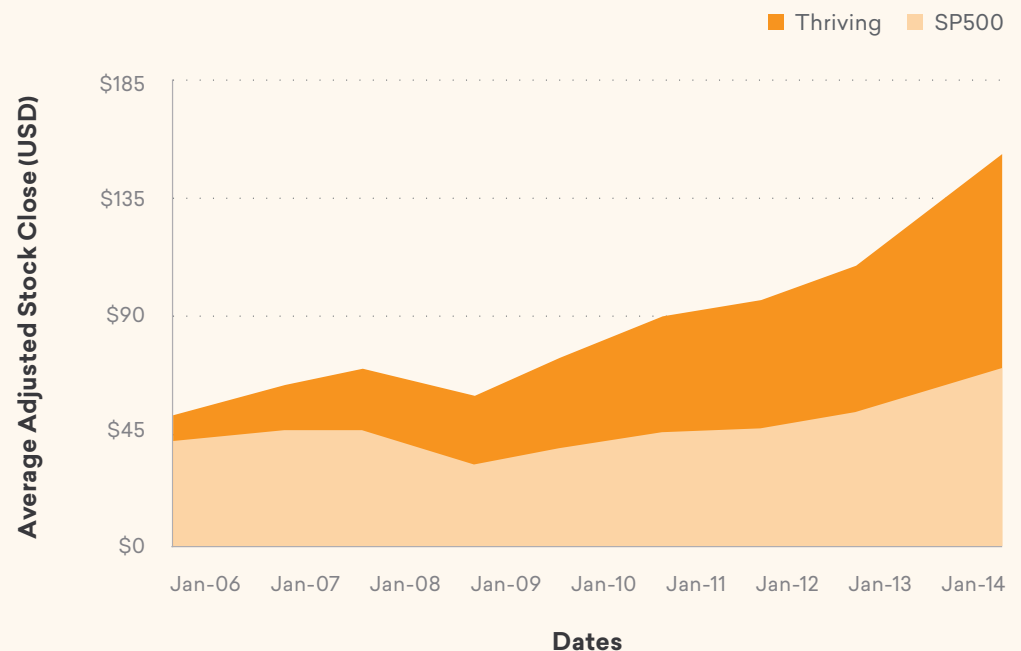
We discovered this link between D&I and success during a downturn in a study of the Great Recession.

In particular, the experience of certain groups of employees—including historically disadvantaged groups—predicts whether organizations flatline, survive or thrive during a recession.

While the S&P 500 suffered a 35.5 percent decline in stock performance from 2007-2009, **companies whose key employee groups had very positive experiences posted a remarkable 14.4 percent gain.**

For that group of “Thriving” companies, the good news wasn’t limited to the recession. Their gains started before the downturn and continued well past it as competitors lagged. From January 3, 2006 to February 1, 2014, the Thriving group saw their stock performance increase 35 percent, while the S&P 500 had just a 9 percent gain. **That’s nearly 4X outperformance.**

Companies with consistently inclusive workplaces thrived before, during and after the Great Recession, earning a 4x annualized return.



“Thriving” describes publicly-held companies in GPTW’s data set that achieved returns of 14% or greater between 2007 and 2009.

The charts represent change in the average adjusted stock closing prices for the S&P 500 and our “Thriving” company group. The adjusted stock close is the stock value after accounting for corporate actions, such as stock splits, dividends and rights offerings.

Often-marginalized employees turn out to be bellwethers when the business climate turns bad.

The key groups of employees are women, people of color, front-line workers, hourly male workers and long-tenured employees. Why do these groups act as bellwethers for an organization?

For one thing, historically marginalized groups are often the first to feel the effects of a business running into trouble – whether those impacts are wage cuts or the threat of layoffs.

The employees we found to be critical populations play vital roles in a business in good times and bad. They often serve customers directly and are plugged into the reality of how the business is doing. And they are a source of good ideas that many companies overlook – whether those ideas are for cutting costs or for generating revenue in new ways.



"When my daughter suffered from an autoimmune disease in the midst of a serious recession, I was concerned about the weekly runs to the lab. My manager made sure that I understood that a late arrival or early departure was not an issue."

Employee in Manufacturing organization

"Management has a strong sense of respect for the value of employees – during the great recession, layoffs were minimized by temporary & modest across-the-board salary cuts, with management taking steep salary cuts."

Employee in Manufacturing organization

"During the recession 5 years ago we had to close many departments. Most, if not all, of those employees were given an opportunity to cross-train or be placed in other departments. They go out of their way not to lay employees off."

Employee in Healthcare organization

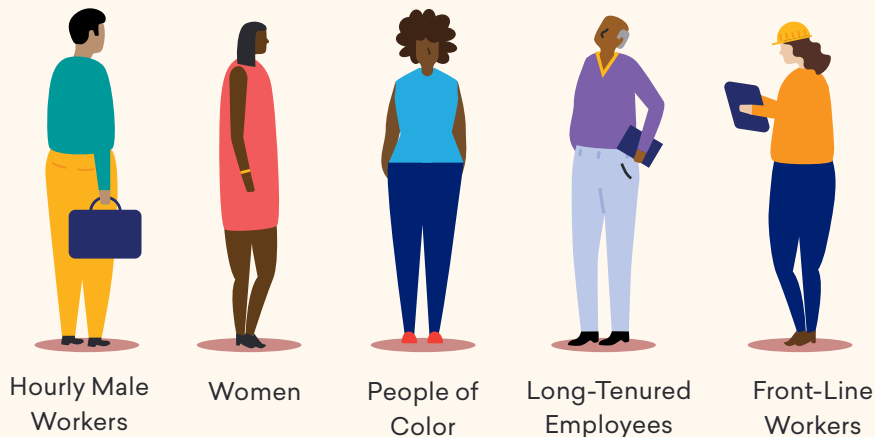


It is vital for businesses to create positive experiences for these employees in several key arenas.

These areas are **inclusivity, innovation, fairness and integrity**.

In effect, an inclusive culture in critical areas enabled organizations to soar past the deep decline most companies experienced during the recession.

Key Employee Groups



X

Key Experiences

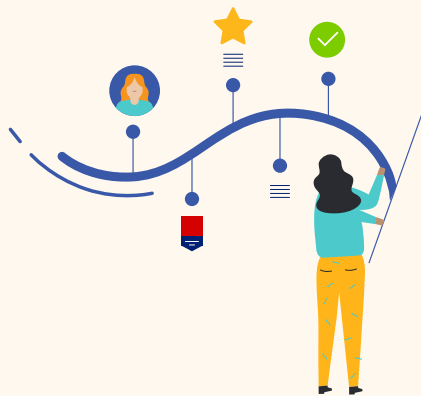
- ▶ Treated as full member
- ▶ Innovation By All™*
- ▶ Management delivers on promises
- ▶ Promotions are fair
- ▶ People are welcomed to new teams

= **THRIVING
DURING
RECESSIONS**

* Innovation By All is a composite measure of Trust Index™ survey statements that assesses whether an employee is invited to contribute their creativity to the organization. For more on this concept, see our [Innovation Insights report series](#).

Leaders can position their organizations to thrive during the next recession.

During downturns, most companies follow the last-in, first-out approach. They lay off recent hires, which often erases progress made towards a more diverse employee population. What's more, organizations often overlook how frontline and historically disadvantaged groups are faring and fail to solicit their ideas. These are missed opportunities to thrive.



Build a different plan of last resort

Research suggests layoffs are rarely effective. But if there's no other choice to get through a recession, apply a D&I lens to the decisions.

Preserving and improving equity and belonging during a downturn will prove vital to the long-term success of the company.



Step up your listening now

Paying attention to the inclusiveness of your culture when economic bad news hits is likely too late. Measure and monitor the experience of employees, especially key groups, on their experiences of inclusivity, innovation, fairness and integrity.

Encourage and equip leaders at all levels to ask powerful questions to better understand these key groups' experiences and perspectives on the state of the business.



Build stability and agility with your For All Leaders

Downturns produce anxiety and fear. For All Leaders are a powerful antidote, creating stability for their employees through consistent communication, dialogue, and care. These experiences also enable organizational agility and speed, right when they are needed most.

The Path to 2030

The next decade will be many things when it comes to the workplace. Boring is not one of them.

Technology, people's political identities and the business cycle are causing changes. Other key issues on the horizon include the next generations heading to work, new leadership approaches and the need for sustainable work practices.

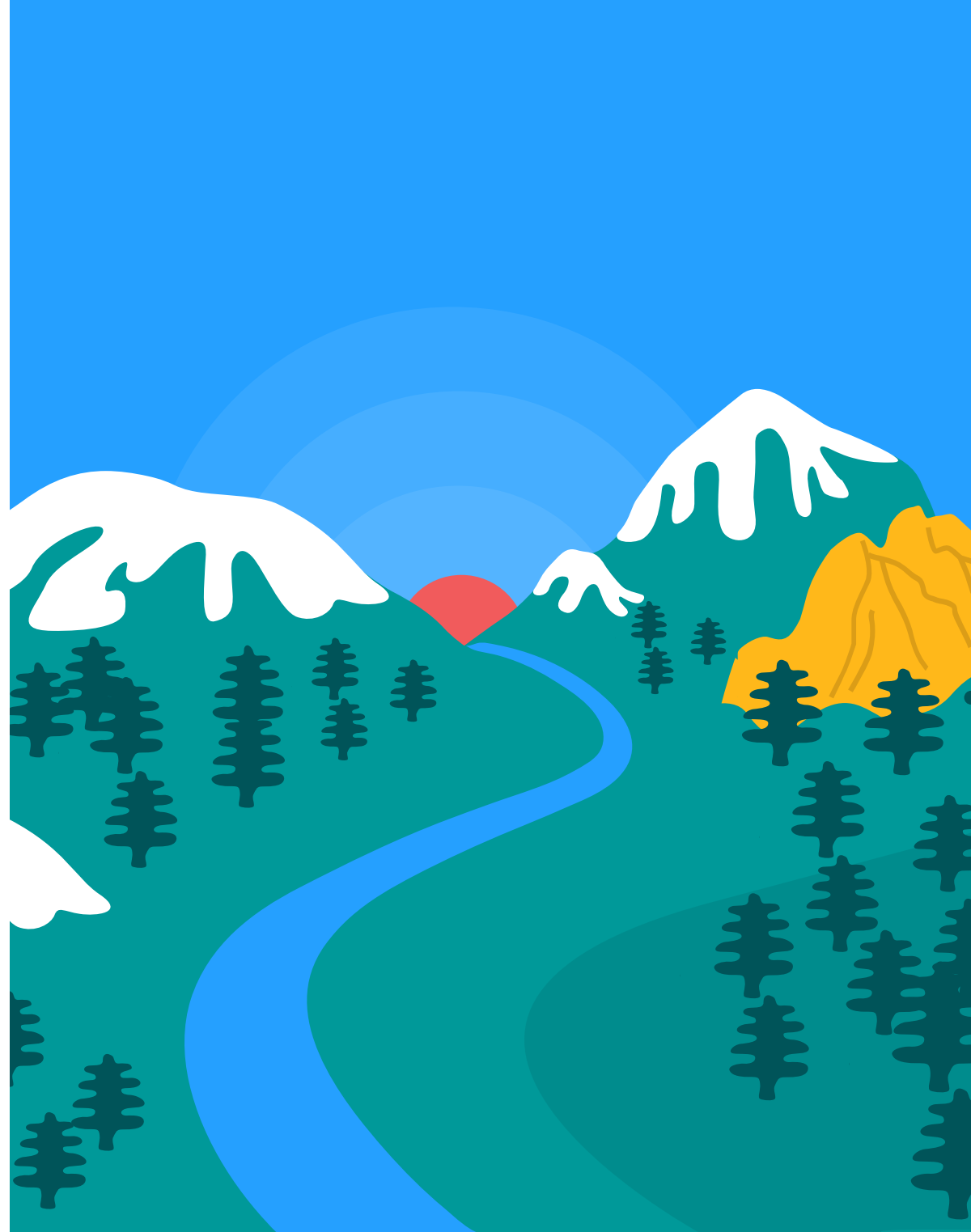
These all represent challenges for organizations and employees. Yet there is a sunny path ahead.

The 100 Best Companies show the way forward. These companies have created great workplaces For All™—for everyone, no matter who a person is or what they do for the organization.

As a result, they have built a path to realize the promise of AI, gain strength from a diversity of opinions and thrive during downturns.

And they give us hope that we can accomplish our mission: to build a better world by creating great places to work For All everywhere by 2030.

Will you join us and the 100 Best Companies in pursuing this mission? Together we can make this decade the one when work started working For All.



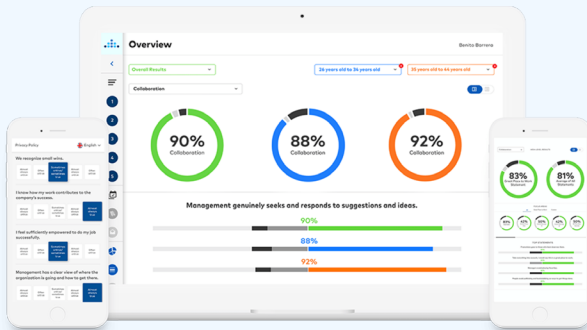
Rise to meet the challenge of tomorrow with Great Place to Work®

Feedback

How ready is your workforce for AI?

Can you withstand the next recession?

Get the answers you need with our culture management platform, Emprising™.



Certification

Amplify your employer brand as a Great Place to Work–Certified™ company.



Recognition

Earn recognition for building a great workplace.

Apply today to see your company on the next *Fortune* 100 Best Companies to Work For® list.





About Great Place to Work®

Great Place to Work® is the global authority on workplace culture. Since 1992, we have surveyed more than 100 million employees around the world and used those deep insights to define what makes a great workplace: trust. We help organizations quantify their culture and produce better business results by creating a high-trust work experience for all employees.

Emprising™, our culture management platform, empowers leaders with the surveys, real-time reporting and insights they need to make data-driven people decisions.

We use our unparalleled benchmark data to recognize Great Place to Work-Certified™ companies and the Best Workplaces™ in the U.S. and more than 60 countries, including the 100 Best Companies to Work For® list published annually in *Fortune*.

Everything we do is driven by our mission: to build a better world by helping every organization become a great place to work For All™.

To learn more, visit greatplacetowork.com, listen to the podcast "[Better](#)," by [Great Place to Work](#), and read "[A Great Place to Work for All](#)."

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Authors

Nancy Ceseña

Data Scientist

Marcus Erb

VP of Data Science & Innovation

Ed Frauenheim

Senior Director of Content

Chandni Kazi

Data Scientist

