

TRENDICATORS ORIGINAL RESEARCH

THE 2021 JOB SEEKER MINDSET



TRENDICATORS

HR Research & Insights by Engage2Excel™ Group

INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about the fundamental changes organizations have needed to make in their recruiting processes as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. But how has the pandemic affected the perceptions and interests of active and passive job candidates? What causes candidates to accept or reject a job offer today? Why do employees consider searching for employment elsewhere? What do employees expect and what is most important to them in the recruiting process? And what role do recognition and onboarding experiences play in influencing employee career choices? *The 2021 Job Seeker Mindset* report provides detailed answers to these questions based on a nationwide survey of 803 active job seekers, 574 passive job seekers and 123 non-job seekers.

This marks the third edition of the job seeker survey report, which we started conducting every two years beginning in 2017. The Trendicators research division of Engage2Excel Group conducts this survey because we believe employers can't effectively improve candidate experiences unless they have reliable research on what matters most to active and passive candidates. As our survey results show, the candidate experience is more important in 2021 than ever before.

The 2021 Job Seeker Mindset report is the result of research and analysis conducted by Engage2Excel Group's chief scientific officer, Dr. Jack Wiley. Jack is well-known for his RESPECT framework, which focuses on what employees really want from their employer. The acronym RESPECT stands for Recognition, Exciting Work, Security, Pay, Education and Career Growth, Conditions and Truth. In his latest book, *The Employee-Centric Manager*, Dr. Wiley presents easy-to-follow guidance that will help any manager attract and retain employees; improve the productivity of the teams they manage; increase managerial effectiveness ratings; and earn promotions and higher pay.

Survey Demographics

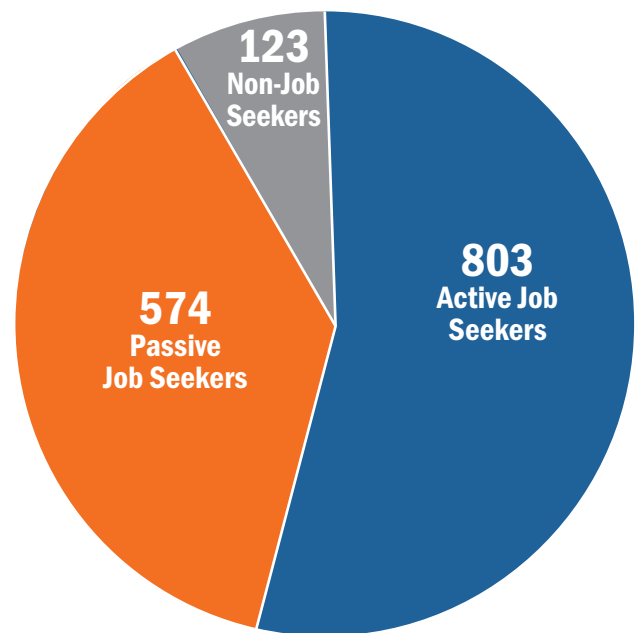
Number of Respondents: 1,500

Countries Represented: United States

Industries Represented: All major industries

Respondent Demographics: US adult workers in all job types with proportionate representation of gender, age group and racial/ethnic origin

Margin of Error: 95% confidence level +/- 1.5%



The results published in this report are based on a survey of 1,500 individuals, from all major industry sectors and demographic groups, including 803 active job seekers, 574 passive job seekers and 123 non-job seekers.

Trendicators is the research division of Engage2Excel Group, a leading provider of employee recruitment, recognition, and survey and analytics solutions. Trendicators provides original research, along with reports on insights and best practices from industry leaders and experts.

How Has COVID-19 Influenced Candidate Perceptions?

Our survey, conducted between May 25 and June 18, 2021, provides valuable insights into how job seekers' perspectives have been affected by COVID-19. More than two-thirds of survey respondents (71%) are working from home because of the pandemic. Commenting on the recent spike in infections due to the Delta variant, CDC director Rochelle Walensky said, "This is becoming a pandemic of the unvaccinated." The fact that 26% of job seekers indicated they would not accept a job that required them to get a COVID-19 vaccine is evidence that the pandemic is far from over in the U.S.

What's Changed? One might think that during times of record unemployment, creating positive candidate experiences would become less important. A comparison of the 2019 Job Seeker survey results and the results of our recent survey during the pandemic reveals quite the opposite. The table on the following page shows a ranked comparison of the most significant changes in candidate perceptions.

The percentage of candidates who said that a personalized gift from an employer would influence their acceptance of a job offer increased 28 points to 64%. The percentage of respondents who stated that interacting with other employees before or after a job offer would impact their acceptance jumped by more than 20 points. All passive candidates today are willing to learn about a new job opportunity, and 41% of all respondents said reporting to a manager younger than they are would affect their acceptance decision. While the importance of meeting someone in management or in the same job role during the interview process has declined, recognition and onboarding experiences have become even more important.

What Matters Most? The big takeaway from our 2021 survey is this: the candidate experience is more important than ever in today's job market. Candidates expect more from prospective employers than just a job offer. They want reassurance on several different levels that they are making the right career decision.



71% of survey respondents were working from home as a result COVID-19



26% would refuse a job that required them to get a COVID-19 vaccine

How Has COVID-19 Influenced Candidate Perceptions?

	Percentage of Affirmative Responses	Percentage Point Change from 2019
A personalized gift from an employer at the time of job offer would influence offer acceptance	64%	+28
Importance of interaction with other employees <i>before receiving a job offer</i>	68%	+23
Importance of interaction with other employees <i>after receiving a job offer but before day one</i>	71%	+22
Percentage of passive candidates who are willing to learn about a new opportunity	100%	+18
Reporting to a manager younger than me would affect my acceptance of a job offer	41%	+17
Importance of meeting <i>senior management</i> during the interview process	35%	-17
Importance of meeting <i>the hiring manager</i> during the interview process	67%	-13
Importance of meeting <i>a person in same role</i> during the interview process	30%	-13
Importance of being praised/recognized during various phases of the recruiting process	72%	+12
Willingness to consider other opportunities if not contacted between offer acceptance and the first day of joining the company	45%	+12
<i>The first day onboarding experience</i> will affect decision to stay for over a month	72%	+12
Likelihood of participating in a social community for an organization of interest even if there are no current job openings	56%	+12
Percentage of candidates who expect to be able to apply for a job on a mobile device	83%	+11
<i>The total onboarding experience</i> will affect decision to stay more than a year	67%	+7
Importance of a company's recognition and rewards program on a company's website	65%	+7

Why Do Candidates Accept or Reject Job Offers?



While the pandemic affected candidate perceptions in many ways, as reported in the previous section, the number one reason for accepting or rejecting a job offer hasn't changed in four years. In 2017, 2019 and again in 2021, candidates said that being recognized, appreciated and shown respect during the recruitment process was the single most important variable in deciding whether to accept or reject a job offer.

The top three reasons for accepting a job offer haven't changed from 2019, with compensation and job fit listed as the second and third most important factors. In 2017, compensation was listed as the third most important factor, with job fit in the second position. There was only one significant change in the top reasons for rejecting a job offer in 2021. Concern about job security and job fit tied for the third most important factor that would cause a candidate to turn down a job offer.



Top Reasons for ACCEPTANCE

Recognition, Appreciation and Respect	29%
Compensation	22%
Job Fit	17%



Top Reasons for REJECTION

Lack of Recognition, Appreciation and Respect	24%
Unfair Compensation	19%
Concern Job Security	16%
Concern About Job Fit	16%

Candidates say that recognition, appreciation and respect outweigh all other factors in accepting or rejecting a job offer.

Why Do People Seek Employment Elsewhere?



CEOs and HR leaders who are concerned about employee retention need to make sure that they are paying fair wages, building a culture of recognition and respect, and communicating with employees to address concerns about job security. Compensation, which first rose to the top of the list in 2019, is still the top reason employees cited that would cause them to seek employment elsewhere. In our 2017 survey, employees said that lack of recognition, appreciation and respect was the

most important factor that would cause them to leave an employer. This has remained the second most important influence on retention for the past two years. One can surmise that average wage increases in 2019 and 2021 were factors in keeping compensation as the top driver for voluntary turnover. Not surprisingly, concerns over job security in 2021 came in as the third most important reason employees gave that would cause them to look for another job.



2019

- Unfair Compensation** 20%
- Lack of Recognition, Appreciation and Respect** 16%
- High Stress & Inadequate Social Conditions** 16%



2021

- Unfair Compensation** 19%
- Lack of Recognition, Appreciation and Respect** 18%
- Concern About Job Security** 14%

Concern about job security has replaced stress and social factors as the third most important reason why people would leave an employer.



What Do Candidates Think about Recruiting Processes?



There are a few important changes in employee perceptions about the recruiting process when comparing 2021 results with our 2019 job seeker survey results. While email and phone remain the top two preferred means of communicating with recruiters, the percentage of those preferring to communicate via text message has increased from 10% to 18%.

The percentage of candidates who expect to apply for a job on a mobile device has risen from 72% to 83%. And 56% say they would participate in a social community for an organization they are interested in, even if there are no current job openings, an increase of 12 percentage points.

What matters most to you in the application process?

Easy and straightforward	59%
Quick to complete	24%
An engaging experience	16%

How long should it take to complete an application?

5 to 15 minutes	32%
15 to 29 minutes	43%
30 to 44 minutes	15%

What is a reasonable number of pre-hire assessments?

1 assessment	27%
2 to 3 assessments	49%

How do you prefer to communicate with a recruiter?

	2019	2021
Email	42%	39%
Phone call	43%	35%
Text	10%	18%

“I expect to apply for a job on a mobile device.”

2019: **72%** 2021: **83%**

“I would participate in a social community for an organization I’m interested in even if there are no current job openings.”

2019: **44%** 2021: **56%**

What Do Candidates Think about Recruiting Processes?

How important is it to meet the following individuals in the interview process?

Hiring Manager	67%
HR Representative	46%
Trainers	39%
Senior Management	35%
Person in Same Role	30%
Future Coworkers	28%

How do candidates feel about video interviews?

Comfortable in a panel video interview	63%
Comfortable doing a two-way video interview	70%
Comfortable doing a one-way video interview	60%
Expect a video interview in the interview process	65%

Overall, having a positive experience with the following individual is most important to me

Hiring Manager	40%
Recruiter	22%
Coordinator	16%

What are the most important recruiter behaviors and characteristics?

Explaining the recruitment steps	86%
Being respectful	83%
Openness and honesty	82%

How important are career sites in influencing your decision to pursue an opportunity?

Very Important or Important	75%
-----------------------------	-----

What is the likelihood that you'll be working for a new employer within the next 6 months?

Highly Likely or Likely	58%
-------------------------	-----

Would consider another job offer if not contacted between the time of offer and the first day on the job	2019	2021
	44%	57%

What Do Candidates Think about Recruiting Processes?

How long should the recruiting process take from application to job offer?

1 week or less	38%
8 to 14 days	29%
15 to 21 days	14%
22 to 28 days	7%

In life, having a career is important to me

18 to 24	80%
24 to 40	89%
41 to 56	86%
57 to 66	64%
67 to 76	66%

How do you feel about participating in drug screening?

Employers should be able to require drug screenings	56%
I would stop pursuing a job if drug screenings were required	46%

Would reporting to a manager younger than you affect your decision to accept a job offer?

2019	2021
24%	41%

Candidates in 2021 are less concerned about meeting hiring managers, HR representatives and senior management during the recruiting process than they were in 2019, no doubt a result of the pandemic. Also, as a result of the pandemic, 65% of candidates now expect a video interview, up from 43% in 2019. Interestingly, in 2019 candidates said that a recruiter's knowledge about the job role was third on their list of factors that kept them engaged. In 2021, this was replaced by an interest in better understanding the steps in an employer's recruiting process.

More than half (57%) of candidates said they would consider another job offer if the

employer did not contact them between the time of offer and their first day on the job, an increase of 13 percentage points over 2019. More than two-thirds (67%) of candidates expect the total time from applying for a job to receiving a job offer to be two weeks or less. A stark contrast of views exists about the use of drug screens, with 60% believing that employers should be able to require them and 46% who say they wouldn't pursue an opportunity if drug screens were required. Finally, 41% of candidates say that reporting to a manager younger than them would affect their decision to accept a job offer, an increase of 17 percentage points over 2019.



How Important Is Recognition in the Recruiting Process?



The importance of recognizing, appreciating and respecting candidates cannot be underestimated. It is cited as the most important reason for accepting or rejecting a job offer, and 70% or more say that it is important during and after all phases of the recruiting process. The single greatest change over 2019 is that 64% now say that receiving

a gift from the employer at the time of offer would influence their acceptance of the offer—a 28 point increase. Further evidence of the importance of recognition is that more than two-thirds (71%) of active job seekers say that details about an employer’s recognition and rewards program on the company’s website are important to them.

The importance of being praised during various phases of the recruiting process

Percentage of all candidates who said it is Very Important or Important

Pre-Offer	72%
Post-Offer but before first day on the job	70%
During onboarding	74%
After onboarding	76%

“A gift from an employer at the time of the offer would influence my acceptance decision.”

2019	2021
36%	64%

The importance of a recognition and rewards program on a company’s website

Percentage who said it is Very Important or Important

Active Job Seekers	71%
Passive Job Seekers	56%
Male	72%
Female	61%
Age 18–24	59%
Age 25–40	75%
Age 41–56	67%
Age 57–66	33%
Age 67–75	32%



What Do Candidates Think about Onboarding Processes?

Candidates expect a well-planned onboarding experience. Nearly three-quarters (72%) said their first-day onboarding experience would affect their decision to stay more than a month, up 22 percentage points over 2019. More than

two thirds said the total onboarding experience affects their decision to stay over a year. While interacting with other employees has always been important, a large percentage of candidates say this is important before their first day.

How will your onboarding experience affect your decision to stay with the company?

Percentage reporting Highly Likely or Likely

- First day will affect decision to stay over a month **72%**
- Total onboarding experience will affect decision to stay over a year **67%**

Most important activities on the first day of onboarding

- Completing paperwork **88%**
- Review of benefits **84%**
- Job training **81%**
- Tour of facilities **80%**
- Company orientation **79%**
- Review of onboarding plan **79%**
- Time with manager **79%**

Importance of interacting with other employees

Percentage reporting Very Important or Important

- Pre-Offer **68%**
- Post-Offer but before first day on the job **71%**
- During onboarding **75%**
- After onboarding **78%**

How long should the onboarding process take?

- Up to two weeks **40%**
- Less than a week **27%**
- Up to a month **22%**
- Up to 2 months **8%**

Candidates Sound Off on Their Onboarding Experiences

BEST EXPERIENCES

“A complete understanding of the company, my role, meeting coworkers, starting right away with training and feeling respected. Seeing a good team atmosphere.”

“A good understanding of what your specific role is. A mentor or trainer who is thorough, nice, respectful, and experienced about the job you’re getting hired to do.”

“A tour of the facility, meeting both members of management and my coworkers, then meeting with the human resources manager to explain benefits and instructions for how to get them in by the deadlines. Then just being left alone.”

“A week with the director, manager, and two other new hires with training and presentations during the day and dinners in the evenings.”

“All expectations explained before first day, tour of facility, employee orientation, meet close coworkers, paperwork done on first day.”

“Employees showed me around, and everyone was friendly and answered my questions.”

“Everything from filling out paperwork to orientation being in order and organized.”

“Given an in-depth tour, met many members of the team, eased into the position instead of being thrown into the deep end.”

WORST EXPERIENCES

“Here you go. Try to figure out what you can. We don’t have time for you today. Told I could read if I didn’t have anything to do.”

“I was assigned a mentor, but never told. I did not know where to go with questions and was given conflicting information from different supervisors when I asked questions.”

“Did a short overview and sent me in to sell without even knowing all the products we sell and services we provide.”

“Drug testing was more than an hour away, started job over a week later. Did training videos for multiple hours that were not related to what I was doing and was immediately sent out to job without any idea of what to do. Manager just left.”

“Excessive paperwork and lecture that are purely for legal liability rather than to prepare me for the job.”

“HR manager who hired me did very little training, was impatient and disrespectful, and expected me to know what I was doing after the first week on the job.”

“I accepted a job offer and my supervisor took two weeks to reply and confirm. Then two days later I received tasks with no information about processes.”

Use Insights from the 2021 Job Seeker Mindset Report to Optimize Recruiting and Onboarding Experiences

OPTIMIZE RECRUITING EXPERIENCES

Educate each member of your talent acquisition team about the importance of praising and recognizing positive behaviors among all candidates. For candidates, this experience is the single most important factor in accepting or rejecting a job offer. Consider hiring undercover candidates to audit recruitment experiences annually.

Make sure your total compensation and benefits are competitive and clearly understood by employees and candidates. Conduct an annual employee survey to evaluate causes that may negatively influence employee engagement, productivity and loyalty.

Re-evaluate your recognition and rewards program periodically, actively promote this important benefit internally. Make sure that this program occupies a prominent place on your career site.

Review your company's new employee communications program. Replace standardized form letters with engaging and personalized communications and consider sending branded gift items to make new hires feel welcome.

OPTIMIZE ONBOARDING EXPERIENCES

Carefully plan, organize and execute each employee's onboarding experience to avoid creating a negative first impression. First-day onboarding experiences influence whether employees will stay over a month.

Formalize onboarding programs if you haven't already and make sure to build in opportunities for recognition and employee interaction. In addition, set expectations about how long an onboarding program will last and what's included.

Show your appreciation for a new recruit by celebrating their offer acceptance with a welcome gift branded with your company logo. It's a great way to make new employees feel like they belong even before their first day.

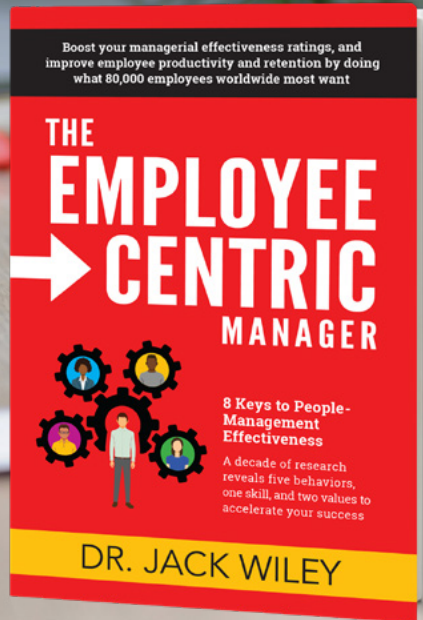
Conduct a post-onboarding survey of every new employee and provide this feedback to everyone involved in the onboarding process.

The Engage2Excel group of companies creates engaging career and consumer experiences. Its Career Experience Suite (CXS) provides recruitment, onboarding, employee recognition, manager development and employee survey solutions tailored to each organization and designed to help clients find and keep their talent. With over 3,000 client partners, Engage2Excel has a proud heritage of developing innovative solutions that improve competitive advantage and boost bottom-line results.

To learn more, visit engage2excel.com.

Engage²Excel™

Give every manager the definitive guide to people management in the modern workplace



Engage2Excel is proud to announce availability of a special, pre-release edition of *The Employee-Centric Manager* by Dr. Jack Wiley, our chief scientific officer. Based on a decade of groundbreaking research, this much-anticipated book is the definitive guide to people management in the modern workplace.

Special Offer: *The Employee-Centric Manager* is available for volume corporate purchases through Engage2Excel. You can purchase a gift-box edition to be sent to every manager with a personalized letter from your CEO or have your volume purchase of books shipped to one or more corporate addresses.

A Must-Read for every manager in your organization.

Based on a Decade of Research that reveals what 80,000 employees in 27 countries most want from their manager.

Written by Dr. Jack Wiley, award-winning organizational psychologist, researcher, author and leadership consultant.

8 Keys to Managerial Effectiveness: Presents the five behaviors, one skill and two values every manager can embrace immediately to boost managerial effectiveness ratings and improve employee productivity and retention.

Written for Managers of All Levels: Includes 90 easy-to-apply “do and don’t” tips, 40 best practice recommendations, eight successful manager profiles and 96 verbatim quotes from employees on their positive and negative experiences with managers.

Order online at [Engage2Excel.com/ECM](https://www.engage2excel.com/ECM) or call 704.872.5231 x2049

Engage²Excel™