

LAW OFFICE OF LORI A. GOLDSTEIN, LLC

LABOR DAY 2022

STATE OF THE WORKPLACE



Today we commemorate Labor Day and honor the works and contributions of employees to the social and economic development and achievements of our country. As we reflect on the past 2.5 years since the pandemic upended our workplaces and personal lives, most business owners and employers truly appreciate the dedication and sacrifices that their workers make. There is more common understanding, and action – not just words - around work-life balance, trust, flexibility and humanity.

What is the current state of the workplace and where are we going?

To be sure, and without making any predictions, the prospect of a recession has many businesses and employees worried. But “The Great Resignation” continues to grow. Almost 57 million Americans quit between January 2021 and February 2022. 41% of workers globally have considered leaving their current employer this year, according to a Microsoft survey.

Why? Experts suggest a few reasons:

- Workers who didn't like their jobs stuck with it during the pandemic, but not doing so anymore.
- Many are retiring early after cashing in on a booming stock market and rising home values.
- Some have reevaluated their career paths after time that allowed for more reflection.
- People are looking for a job that allows for better work-life balance.
- With a record number of job openings (slowing down but still significant), people leave their existing roles for greener pastures.

Employees' Market

The Great Resignation gave workers advantages, including more leverage in power struggles with management and more work-life balance. Wages have risen quickly and companies are offering valuable perks in efforts to attract and retain employees.

Shift to Remote Work

Many remaining in the workforce have also shifted – to remote work. According to the Harvard Business Review, “pandemic life forced people to reexamine their personal and professional priorities. Remote work alerted us to the possibility of decoupling jobs from geography.” Some call it a “Great Exploration” and encourage leaders to capitalize on the potential. If employers embrace and support the exploration, they can position their companies and their people for personal and professional satisfaction.

At the peak of lockdowns, in May 2020, 1/3 third of U.S. workers worked remotely at some point during the month, according to the Labor Department. Most blue-collar jobs never went remote, and many offices in small and midsize cities have returned. Earlier this summer, in the 10 largest U.S. cities, workers were still working from home 38% of the time.

In a national survey conducted last month for The New York Times, 31% of 950 workers prefer to work from home full time, 45% want to be at the workplace full time and 24% want hybrid.

Why do workers prefer remote?

- COVID is still a concern, especially for immunocompromised people or those with immunocompromised family members.
- It provides more flexibility, helpful for those caring for children or others.
- Some workers claim they're judged more on the quality of their work and not their capacity to office politick.

Labor Day 2022 New “Deadline”

Some businesses are now permanently remote. Airbnb told employees they never need to come back into the office. Some companies are using their office space for team experiences and social activities.

Yet other companies that planned to call people back into the office did so, at least on a partial or hybrid basis. After Omicron, companies became more persistent and Labor Day 2022 has

been a flash point for many companies who haven't returned to everybody being on site full time.



Why do companies want people back?

Some employers say it's about "company culture," or that in-person interactions improve productivity or lead to the billion-dollar idea. A practical reason for many is a long-term real estate lease, and large spaces to fill.

How are workers reacting to companies' return plans?

Social butterflies, new hires, and people working from noisy homes are most eager to return. Some don't like screens. They miss work friendships, and offices are offering perks like Ping-Pong, rock climbing, concerts, to re-engage workers.

But many workers still want some flexibility. They feel they proved they can be productive working remotely. Employers should be aware of employee needs and take their requests seriously. Even apart from the Great Resignation, workers have been feeling empowered to assert their needs, including through unions. Many now feel that family and health – not work – is their priority. Workers continue to leave and pursue opportunities to be fully remote.

Latest guidance and rules on COVID vaccines, testing and masks

If you do have employees working on-site, continue to follow mandates, guidance and protocols to keep your employees and customers safe:

- EEOC now permits screening and viral testing measures when they are "job-related and consistent with business necessity," such as before employees return to the office after exposure to or contracting COVID.

- Most states, including Illinois, do not restrict private employers from mandating vaccines and/or weekly testing, subject to medical and religious exemptions.
- Vaccine mandates (and otherwise weekly test) remain in Illinois for K-12 schools, daycares, state-run 24/7 congregate care facilities, and any Illinois health care facilities not otherwise covered under the federal Medicare and Medicaid programs, including independent doctors' offices, dental offices, urgent care facilities, hospitals and outpatient facilities. Those covered by Medicare or Medicaid are subject to the same mandate federally.
- Testing requirements for unvaccinated staff members at Illinois long-term care facilities and hospitals is now required once a week only in areas where there is "moderate community level transmission" of COVID.

CDC Quarantine Guidance

- If someone was in "close contact" with a COVID-positive person during past 5 days, they should test after 5 days, and otherwise quarantine for 10 days after contact.
 - "Close contact" means within 6 feet of someone who has COVID for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period, starting from 2 days before illness onset until the patient is isolated.
 - If an asymptomatic person tests positive within last 5 days, they should quarantine for 5 days from positive result, and as long as fever-free for 24 hours, they can end isolation, otherwise another 5 days.
 - Someone with symptoms - even if fully vaccinated and had COVID during past 90 days - should quarantine for 5 days after symptoms start, and as long as then fever-free for 24 hours and symptoms are improving, they can end isolation, otherwise another 5 days.
- ✓ *I work with both **employers and employees** (not at the same company!) on workplace matters, compliance, contracts, training, and dispute resolution.*
- ✓ ***Career Resource Center** has been helping individuals find satisfying work for more than 30 years. As a proud CRC Board member, I can't say enough about the wonderful career transition services offered by the nonprofit. CRC is currently virtual, helping clients nationwide. We are here for employees between successes, recent college graduates, individuals returning to the workforce, those seeking a change of employment or career, and employees who need a boost in their career transition search. Schedule an appointment or virtual tour to learn about membership. Try out a workshop or presentation, or join for a year. Volunteers and donors always welcome too! careerresourcecenter.org*

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