

# Are More Workers Accepting Return-to-Office Orders?

By Mark McGraw, PSHRA®

In January 2025, MyPerfectResume asked American employees how they would respond to a return-to-office (RTO) mandate from their employer. More than half (51%) said they would quit before complying with such a directive.

One year later, the online resume builder asked the same question, with drastically different results.

In a recent survey of 1,000 U.S. workers, MyPerfectResume found just 7% of respondents saying they would leave their job rather than accept a forced return to in-office work.

“This dramatic decline signals a shift away from worker leverage toward a new phase of employer control—what many are calling the ‘Great Compliance,’” [according to MyPerfectResume](#).

“Workers are bracing for a future that leans more heavily toward on-site work, tighter oversight and reduced bargaining power,” wrote MyPerfectResume’s Jasmine Escalera. “Remote work is no

longer seen as a guarantee. It’s becoming a privilege workers feel they must protect.”

While many workers still want remote work options, the findings suggest that employees are generally more accepting of in-person work arrangements than they’ve been in recent years. For HR leaders, this means being part of the effort to determine the right mix for their organizations going forward.

## Less resistance to RTO

The survey also found 46% of respondents saying they expect organizations to become stricter about requiring on-site attendance in the days ahead, with 73% expecting employers to expand their use of surveillance tools to enforce accountability.

In addition, 44% said they believe that at least half of U.S. employers will have eliminated remote work altogether by the end of 2026.

The trend toward return-to-office directives is not a deal-breaker for many workers, however. For instance, just 33% of respondents said they would look for another remote job. In 2025, 40% indicated as much, according to MyPerfectResume.

“Remote work is being reframed not as a right, but as a negotiated benefit, one that fewer workers feel empowered to defend,” Escalera wrote.

“As job security tightens, companies are reclaiming authority over where and how employees work. For millions of workers, 2026 won’t be about resisting RTO. It will be about adapting to it.”

Melissa Barker, vice president of practice development at Phoenix-based global recruitment firm the Duffy Group, attributes much of the shift in attitudes to economic anxiety.

“More than ever, employees are prioritizing job security, particularly in an uncertain economy,” said Barker, who has special expertise in recruiting for government and public sector organizations.

That said, Barker sees other factors at play as well.

“During the pandemic, working from home was the ‘shiny object.’ As time passed, the allure of working alone has waned. While not [true] in all cases, in general, I think employees are eager to get back to a routine and enjoy the energy and camaraderie that exists in an office.”

## The importance of a thoughtful plan

Employees’ desire to return to an in-person work model is probably a good thing, based on the MyPerfectResume finding that 47% of workers said they anticipate roles to be wholly or mainly on-site as 2026 unfolds. Another 27% said they expect a hybrid model to dominate the workplace in the days ahead.

Finding the right balance between in-person and off-site work is a question that many employers have been wrestling with since at least the start of the coronavirus pandemic. An organization and its HR team have a few variables to weigh, said Barker.

“One of the biggest considerations is physical space,” she said, noting that some employers reduced their physical footprint during the pandemic.

“As more employees return to the office, it is critical that [employers] have a thoughtful plan to bring people back, including desk-sharing and scheduling so that team members aren’t working out of conference rooms, or, worse yet, have no space to work at all.”

Barker also recommends exploring creative scheduling options that benefit staff members. For example, this could include scheduling staff members for four 10-hour days that give them an extended weekend.

Flexible schedules, such as 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. or 7 a.m. to 3:30

p.m. with a 30-minute lunch, might be desirable for, say, workers with children, she said, adding that establishing a mandatory in-office day and scheduling in-person meetings accordingly is another option.

As the organization’s employee relations leader, HR has a duty to set and communicate on-site work policies with executives and managers across the agency, said Barker, adding that line managers should adapt policies based on the needs and roles of their teams.

For example, she said, on-site attendance is different for office workers versus IT staff working at a 24-hour help desk or those in public- and customer-facing positions.

Finally, Barker suggests “selling the benefits of working in the office,” starting with a welcoming, inviting office environment that promotes creativity, teamwork and collaboration.

“Play up the perks in the office,” she concluded, “from comfy couches ideal for brainstorming to coffee bars, stocked refrigerators, on-site gyms and more. Bottom line: Emphasize the positives of the change.” ●

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