

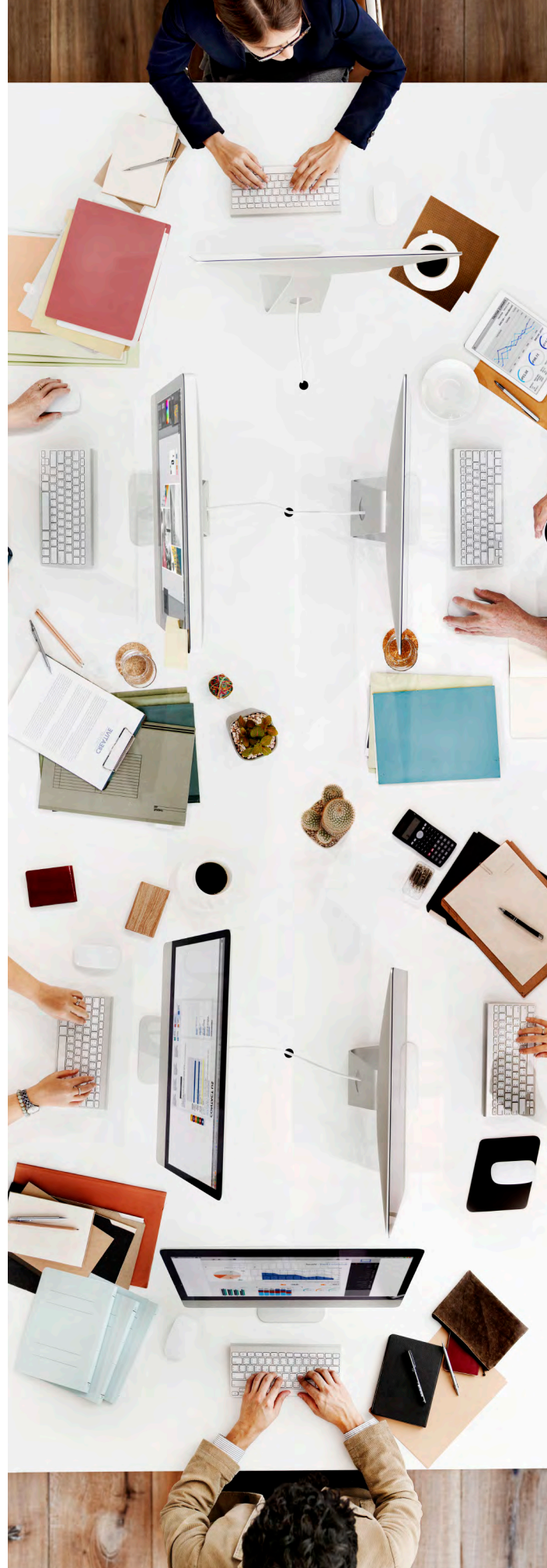


The definitive guide to work-life harmony

How to foster a culture of care and agency

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About our author:

Dr. Patti Fletcher has spent her career at the intersection of people, business, and technology. She's driven by one mission: level the playing field so that all talent can thrive.

Dr. Fletcher is the Chief Marketing Officer at Limeade, the author of [*Disrupters: Success Strategies from Women Who Break the Mold*](#), a celebrated and world-renowned expert on gender equity and an expert on how to build a culture of inclusion to drive real business results. She's an award-winning digital marketer and leadership futurist; a student of inclusive talent; an innovation-through-inclusion expert; and a writer, advisor and speaker on topics related to driving progress through people.





State of the industry in 2023

To understand the state of the HR industry, let's review what's happening in the world. A [survey](#) by CNN and the Kaiser Foundation found that 90% of adults in the United States believe a mental health crisis is plaguing the country. This heightened collective consciousness of emotional well-being can be best summed up in the quote by author Annie Dillard, *"How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives."* It's safe to say our perspective of time has shifted due to the pandemic.

The average human spends a third of their life – 90,000 hours, working. Earning a paycheck is no longer about putting in 40 hours and then going home. The pandemic changed the relationship employees have with their job, and the last three years sparked an internal dialogue: "What am I doing? Why am I doing it? Do I want to live my life in this way?"

*"How we spend our days is,
of course, how we spend
our lives."*

–Annie Dillard

[Gartner](#) coined this inner debate "The Great Reflection" in which employees and leaders alike judge their employment based on the "worth it" factor. While the fragility of the economy is top-of-mind for everyone, the need to evolve the workplace into a more human experience is arguably just as paramount.

It's time to care for employees

The concept of a more human workplace isn't about the "future of work." Instead, it's a critical conversation for leaders to have today as the health of employees depends on it. [Data](#) from International Labour Organization (ILO) and World Health Organization (WHO) indicate work is killing people due to the toll of long hours on the body.

"Work and life aren't separated, they're inextricably linked; employee well-being must be a top priority for organizations to foster this connection."

–Christina Shane Simpson,
Limeade Institute

Historically, the topic of healthy workplace conditions has focused on the safety of hourly workers. Now, both [blue-collar](#) and [white-collar workers](#) are confronting the impact of long hours and stress resulting in poor health and well-being.

This comes at a time when mental health has become a normalized topic. Millennials, Gen Z, members of under-represented populations, governmental agencies, business leaders, employees and consumers all demand employers take a material role in creative healthy workplace environments.

The role of the Office of the US Surgeon General is to provide science-backed information on how to improve the health of U.S. citizens and decrease the risk of illness and injury. In reaction to the work-induced well-being crisis, the federal office issued a new call-to-action for business leaders, highlighting how workplaces can be the engine of mental health and well-being.

This [framework](#) highlights the need to re-evaluate and re-think the role of work in our lives. Instead of the traditional transaction-based dynamic of an employer and employee, it emphasizes fostering healthy relationships by acknowledging the intersection of work and life: *"The overload and interference that can arise between work and life roles have been linked to negative health outcomes... On the other hand, workers who feel they can better harmonize their professional and personal needs report greater satisfaction with their work and life and experience fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety."*

The pandemic acted as an accelerator for the shift toward a more human-centric view of the workplace. Not only are consumers, supply chain partners, and government agencies placing pressure on companies to do better by their people, many employees are taking matters into their own hands. For example, there's been a steady rise in [unionization](#) across multiple industry sectors. Two thirds of U.S. citizens, empathizing with the challenge of the over-worked and under-funded employees, support unionization at a rate not seen since 1965. Unionization is the direct impact of the lack of care and focus on the total and holistic well-being of the workforce. It doesn't have to be this way.

Why well-being matters

Limeade defines well-being as feeling good and living with purpose. Well-being is a comprehensive concept that describes human beings as the complex and interconnected systems that we are. When you consider everything in an employee's life — their physical, emotional, financial, and work well-being — you're acknowledging what happens in one part of a person's life affects every other part of their life.

Despite the intent to prioritize well-being, organizations still struggle to incorporate it as a strategic component in their overall workforce strategy. One of the biggest challenges is identifying ways to infuse well-being into distributed workforces — one size fits all doesn't work anymore. In 2023, organizations will have to identify ways to ensure the needs of the business and the employee are both met.

Unfortunately, due to the economic uncertainty facing employers, leaders are hyper-focused on financial metrics, which is potentially perceived as at odds with fostering a healthy workplace rooted in well-being. In reaction to being asked to do more with less, employees have been [quiet quitting](#), a term to describe employees who refuse to go above and beyond their job descriptions. This phenomenon is an example of how the expectations of employees are shifting the power dynamics of organizational success. The health of businesses depends on the well-being of employees.

The math behind do-more-with-less is backfiring; [employee productivity is trending downward across all industries](#) alongside a two-year downward trend in employee engagement. [Gallup](#) reported the US labor market experienced its first decline in employee engagement in a decade, dropping two percentage points from 36% in

2020 to 34% in 2021; a trend that's continued into 2022, at 32%. This calls out how productivity and engagement are connected — there's a link between healthy employees and healthy financial returns.

With the recent shift in focus from employee engagement to employee experience, the market is indicating the link between the two can't be ignored. If you look at data from the [Wall Street Journal in 2022](#), 95% of employees surveyed want flexible hours in order to harmonize their work and personal responsibilities. Yet, leaders across many industries are reverting to [presenteeism](#), where workers are forced to choose between their personal well-being and a workplace that favors work over their health.

The psychology associated with presenteeism is one of control: if a manager doesn't "see" an employee during working hours, then it's perceived the employee isn't productive. While some roles, most notably frontline workers, require specific working hours, the choice between taking care of oneself or working shouldn't be at odds. Compared to an all-time high of [49% in 2020, only 24% of employees](#) now feel that their organization cares about their well-being, a low not seen in nearly a decade.

Fortunately, [ESG and SEC guidelines](#) have acknowledged happy, healthy employees are critical to business success. As a result, EU-governed employers and US-publicly-held companies are now required to report on how they're investing in the well-being of their employees.

Three ways to invest in care

The best way to future-proof your people strategy is to focus on three notable areas of investment: total rewards, culture of autonomy and trust, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB):

1. Total rewards

In this war for talent, it's no secret compelling and competitive total rewards packages are top priority for HR leaders. Organizations want to invest in resources that will attract and retain top talent. Before the technology boom, compelling compensation packages included a few key health and wealth partners, and some additional perks, which were seen as "golden-handcuffs" and made it hard for employees to leave.

Today, navigating this ever-changing landscape of vendors has resulted in a confusing and seemingly never-ending web for employers on their quest to provide a healthy environment for happy, high-performing employees. On the flipside, employees often struggle with "the grass is greener" when comparing benefits and reviewing alternatives.

2. Culture

In response to decreased engagement and an overall reluctance to return to the office, leaders must find ways to cultivate a healthy culture of trust by instilling autonomy and agency with their people. [A recent study of hybrid workers](#) found 59% of employees prioritized flexibility over compensation, and 77% reported they'd prefer to work for a company that allowed for remote work.

"We over-manage and under-lead, trying to control people rather than connecting to them and developing their potential."

–Cy Wakeman, Leadership Expert

3. DEIB

The inter-dependence between engagement, well-being, and DEIB are cited as critical to talent [acquisition, employee engagement and well-being](#), as well as [business outcomes and competitive differentiation](#). **DEIB is an integral part of company culture** to ensure psychological safety in the workplace, particularly for emerging talent. *"DEIB are the foundations of an equitable and just society. We must strive to create a community where all voices are heard, respected, and valued."* Jessica Boswell, Senior Vice President at Marsh

As younger generations join the workforce, middle generations climb the ladder with promotions, they bring with them the expectation of equity and belonging at every level and function of a business. [The U.S. Surgeon General's framework](#) also found that, "Young workers today represent more than one-third of the U.S. workforce and play an important role in shifting societal attitudes and perceptions around work-life harmony...When asked about their priorities in choosing an employer, workers ranked 'good work-life balance and learning and development opportunities' highest; workers also wanted more flexibility in where they worked, with 75% preferring hybrid or remote work options."



Evolution of the relationship between work and life

Since the world of work has changed, and we don't leave our work at the office, the notion of work-life balance has become obsolete.

Unlike baby boomers who tried and failed to strike a balance, Gen X began to focus on work-life integration as technology has blurred the lines between work and personal life. Instead of balancing the responsibilities of personal and professional roles, the concept of integration placed a heavy focus on time management and maximizing hours by multi-tasking for ultimate productivity. In a post-Covid [study](#) of the impact of multi-tasking and the long work hours of nurses, research found that striving for integration and balance negatively and severely impacted well-being including psychological safety, burnout, turnover intentions, work-life interference and the work environment.

During the era of work-life integration, the well-being of working women has been impacted that most — [31% of male leaders report burnout, compared to 43% of women. Women disproportionality hold most child-care responsibilities](#), taking on [three times](#) as much as men. Emphasizing integration where the math equation relies on hours and minutes forces women to compromise their needs to meet demands.

Work-life balance focuses on how time is used, and work-life integration prioritizes what gets done with time, often living at odds with one another. Work-life harmony values the why behind time spent. [Harmonization](#) is achieved when employees are viewed as a whole person with congruent, interwoven roles.

In the era of work-life balance and work-life integration, managers were pressured to deliver results, often at the cost of their own well-being and that of their team. HR expert, [Jason Lauritsen posited that work is defined by relationships rather than contracts.](#)

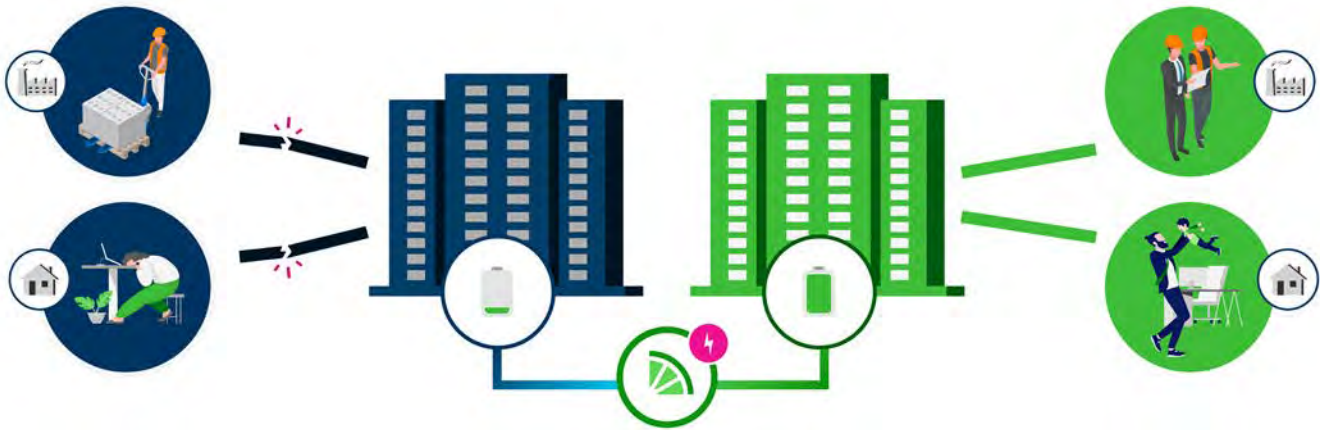
This evolution toward work-life harmony aligns with the state of the industry in 2023 and reveals the importance of agency and care. Employees want to work in a safe environment where they're trusted to get the work done — and measured on their contributions instead of the hours worked or where it got done.

Living in a perpetual state of uncertainty has [forced HR leaders to prioritize manager effectiveness](#) to navigate change management. This requires leaders to take a more human approach and focus on evolving the employee experience and enabling well-being improvement.

The paradigm shift toward harmonization and well-being in how work is designed must include all the interactions and behaviors that employees engage in throughout their workday, especially communications and connections.

This model will foster a healthy relationship between an employee and their employer, which builds trust and transparency that's mutually beneficial.

Four ways to show care and foster work-life harmony



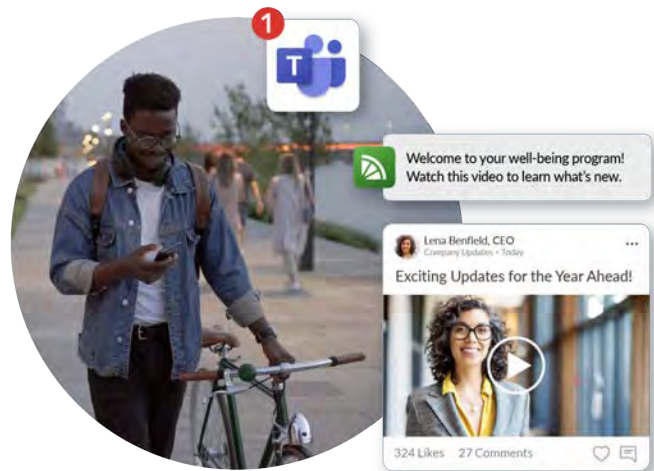
1. Orchestrate intention

Does your culture enable employees to take time for their well-being?

Tip: Organizational culture is the single most important factor in determining an organization's success or failure. Work with leadership to integrate well-being into your processes and operationalize DEIB norms and policies. Build an environment for well-being improvement that's enabled by company resources and consistently reinforced by leaders.

- Meet both in-office and deskless workers with the tools they need for their work environment
- Incorporate leader-sponsored activities in your well-being program
- Have leaders post videos sharing key company goals, updates and their personal well-being journey

Benefit: Aligns initiatives, integrates resources and merges cost centers



Customer story: "It's a really good feeling to have that support because this is like your home away from home. It feels good to come somewhere where you know the people, you feel appreciated, you feel supported... it makes you want to do better not just here but in life."

- Chris Martinez, Benefits Leave Specialist, Mercury Insurance



2. Energize managers

Does your culture equip managers to be role models for well-being improvement?

Tip: Managers have been found to be one of the strongest drivers of employee well-being and engagement. Managers have an important responsibility for the experience employees have at work, and it's critical that they have the tools to support employees' work-life harmony. Focus on managers and give them the support to drive engagement, collaboration and well-being in their employees.

- Include quarterly “manager challenges” that provide clear strategies to assist managers in promoting well-being activities
- Survey managers to understand what support is needed
- Create a “manager toolkit” with key information and resources designed to support them

Benefit: Fosters trust and agency

Customer story: *“I can't imagine an organization having to navigate through a circumstance as disruptive as COVID-19 without having a platform like Limeade in place to help their people. We have built into our culture well-being as a vital foundation. We know that people are going through stress, anxiety and more — and having a central point that we can say 'here is help' — our speed to care for people has been there from day one. Telling a story with a single access point and constantly telling them that story over again is vital right now.”*

- Tony Bridwell, Chief People Officer, Ryan

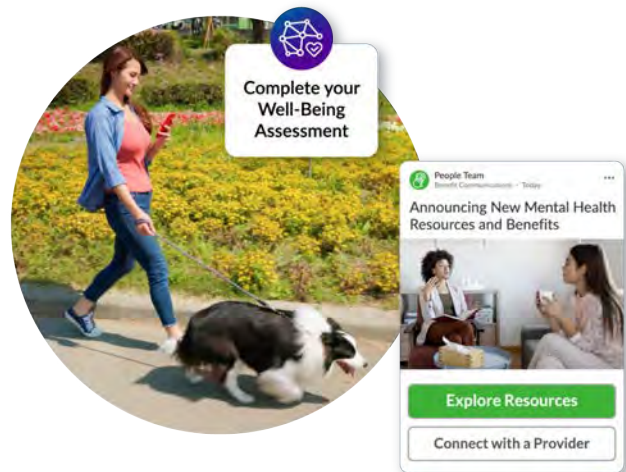
3. Personalize communications

Does your culture prioritize well-being communications or have a channel for listening?

Tip: When information flows freely, employees feel more valued, have higher well-being, and are more engaged. One size does not fit all in this case. Prioritize an effective method for communicating and listening that resonates with employees.

- Target groups with upcoming events and webinars for their specific or underutilized resources
- Enable wellness champions with writer permissions to promote local activities and events
- Survey employees to understand what is going well and what additional support and resources they need

Benefit: Provides transparency and increases employee satisfaction



Customer story: *“We thought the app would be a big hit with millennials, but we're finding that employees of all generations have fallen in love with their ability to communicate with it. We post every single day and employees finally have visibility into what is going on with production and why. They're engaged and we're learning so much from having a direct feedback loop with everyone.”*

- Claire Haggard, Manager, People Engagement, Wabash National

4. Cultivate connection

Does your culture encourage social connection between employees?

Tip: Connection to others and having support from co-workers helps cultivate a sense of belonging which is highly influential to overall well-being. Connect employees to foster a sense of support and belonging, which will also personalize their experience.

- Highlight a different ERG each month to raise awareness and encourage employees to join
- Encourage managers and leaders to regularly send cheers to their teams to celebrate and highlight achievements
- Create a “weekend challenge” for employees to share and celebrate their unique hobbies, skills and plans

Benefit: Combats isolation and loneliness



Customer story: *"For me, the success has come from the culture shift that I've seen since we started this journey. In the halls you hear people discussing their points, which activities they're participating in or their biometric screening results. You wouldn't have heard people talking about this without a great well-being program and the excitement we've been able to build."*

-Cheryl Priddy, Division Vice President, Benefits, Kindred Healthcare

Work-life harmony occurs when the different aspects of life coexist, fuel one another, and foster positive energy. To create work-life harmony, you need to connect what employees do to values and purpose, so every area of life contributes to well-being.

Need an exercise to put this into practice? Check out the [work-life harmony worksheet](#) to reflect on personal values and how they align with work.

