

# A Closer Look at Who's Quitting

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## FULL TEXT

American workers' stampede toward the exits hasn't let up. New data puts a finer point on who, exactly, is leaving jobs these days.

Workers resigned from a record 4.4 million jobs in September, according to Labor Department data, and new surveys show that low-wage workers, employees of color and women outside the management ranks are those most likely to change roles. The findings signal that turnover isn't evenly spread across the U.S. workforce even as employers across industries struggle to fill a variety of roles.

The overall percentage of people considering leaving their jobs – about three in 10, according to research by consulting firm Mercer LLC – is fairly consistent with historical trends. But sentiment varies across demographics and occupations. While front-line and low-wage positions typically see high rates of turnover, for example, employees in those roles are especially likely to leave now, Mercer found in a survey of 2,000 U.S. workers conducted in August.

And a survey of 3,600 U.S. workers released recently by software maker Qualtrics found a growing share of women open to changing roles. Some 63% of female middle managers said they intended to stay in their jobs next year, a drop from 75% in 2021, while 58% of women in nonmanagerial roles said the same.

For Nakisha Hicks, the Covid-19 pandemic created professional challenges and an opportunity to re-evaluate her long-term career priorities. She started working at the Nashville Symphony in late 2019 and was quickly promoted to vice president of human resources. The role required her to manage the organization's employee strategy through the onset of the pandemic, which involved furloughing 85% of staff.

At the same time, a coaching business she had launched outside of work to help HR professionals, particularly women of color, advance their careers was blooming. As workers faced pandemic layoffs and contemplated job changes, Ms. Hicks hosted Zoom workshops on virtual networking, built her client base and hired a small staff. Last June she returned to work in the Nashville Symphony office and found herself making hard choices about how to allocate her time. By the next month she had begun making more from her coaching business than from her job, and on Nov. 1 she resigned to focus on her business full time.

"I've been a W-2 employee since I was 14," said the 42-year-old Ms. Hicks. "For me, I reached where I wanted to reach in my career and it was like, 'What's next for me?' It was a natural progression."

Among front-line and low-wage workers in Mercer's survey, 37% of food, retail and hospitality staffers are thinking of quitting, up from a historic norm of 27% among eight million employee responses collected by the company over the past five years.

Nearly half of low-wage and front-line workers surveyed said their pay and benefits were insufficient while 41% said they felt burned out from demanding workloads. Some 35% of Black employees and 40% of Asian employees said they were considering leaving, compared with 26% of white employees.

The nation's high turnover trend has maintained momentum over the past several months as factors like plentiful job openings, a continuing child-care crisis and increased household savings have made job-hopping – or simply quitting – more attractive to some workers.

Companies have been brainstorming how to get more candidates in the door. The hiring overhaul signals a potentially broad rethink of job qualifications. The change could help millions of people get jobs previously out of

reach, according to economists and workforce experts.

Credit: By Kathryn Dill

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