The Agency Edge
RESEARCH SERIES
2022

Slam That Revolving Door!

Building Agency Employee Loyalty in a New Age

FOR OUR 9TH ANNUAL AGENCY EDGE STUDY, we decided to once again turn our attention to the attitudes, goals, and challenges of agency employees, as we last did in 2016. Given the radical shifts in what working at an agency looks like post-covid, it felt like the right time to take the temperature of agency employees.

When we found a "Millennial Mindset" among agency employees six years ago, it surprised us all that the majority of Millennial employees didn't turn out to have those attitudes — and the majority of those with those attitudes weren't Millennials. Other agency owners and we learned to view our employees differently than solely on the basis of our assumptions around age and other demographic factors.

In 2022, the world looks very different than in 2016. Agency owners and employees continue to wrestle with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic fluctuations, and changing attitudes about the nature of work. So what do agency employees believe and want? How valuable is their agency experience to them? What would improve their agency experience? And most importantly, how can agencies attract, engage, and retain the best employees in 2023 and beyond?

391 agency employees participated in our survey. The study has an overall margin of error of +/- 2.7 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

The survey respondents work with a variety of client types, including B2B, B2C, small businesses, large businesses, corporations, and nonprofits.

Three Segments of Agency Employees

27% **Enthusiastic**

45% **Self-Reliant**

29% **At-Risk**

OVERALL, most respondents are proud to work for their agency. They say their agency has a positive reputation in its industry and provides inclusive opportunities for employees. All agree to some extent that agencies need to offer more benefits to retain employees.

Based on their feelings about working in advertising or marketing agencies, opinions about their current agency, and their professional development and goals, agency employees in our 2022 study fell into three distinct attitudinal segments.

As you read through the descriptions, think about the employees at your agency. Can you identify Enthusiastic, Self-Reliant, and At-Risk employees in your agency?
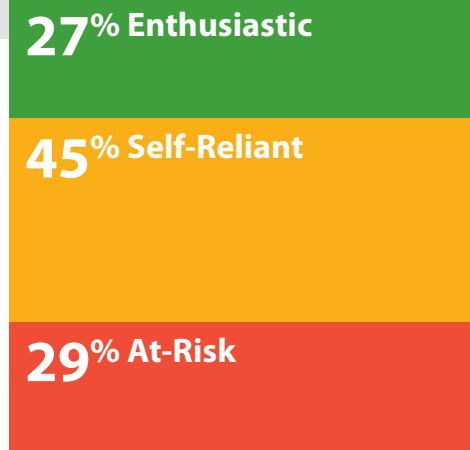
Enthusiastic Employees (27%)

Enthusiastic employees have positive attitudes about the agency they work for and their professional development. They believe the best way to gain professional experience is to stay at one agency for many years.

These agency employees feel lucky to work at an agency, are confident they can succeed at work, are positive about their career trajectory, and are close with their co-workers. They say their agency does a good job of attracting and retaining talent and meeting the needs of the various generations working for them. Their agencies are better at providing exciting opportunities than others, and they like the projects they're working on.

87% of **Enthusiastic** employees strongly feel that they are lucky to work in an agency, compared to about half of the other respondents.

Their agencies get a lot right, including encouraging work/life balance, creating an engaging and positive work culture, and expressing gratitude to employees. Their direct supervisors show interest in their professional development, and their agencies provide clear pathways to advancement. Enthusiastic employees are happy with their compensation and feel it matches their experience level and expertise.

They believe agency employees are happier than employees in other industries.

"Love the culture. It's a very tight-knit team where everybody's opinions matter and we're aligned towards the same goals."

"I think our culture is excellent because we genuinely care about each other and are interested in each other's lives outside of the office. We work well together, enjoy collaborating, and respect each other."

"Amazing! From our wholehearted living and DEI committee, plus our professional development program and all of our stipends, I'm thrilled to work for such a caring and generous agency!"

Self-Reliant Employees (45%)

Self-Reliant employees feel solely responsible for their career success, potentially because their agency doesn't give them a clear vision for the future. These respondents say success at their agency is more about who you know than the work you do, and claim a select few get the credit for the agency's successes.

These employees don't reflect the loyalty and satisfaction we see with Enthusiastic respondents. They say their agency struggled in some way during the pandemic, and they believe that they would have a better experience at a different agency. They also admit that COVID-19 changed how they feel about working for an agency at all.

Self-Reliant employees are far more likely than others to say they need to have a side hustle to feel creatively fulfilled. Two-thirds of these respondents strongly agree with this statement, compared to less than one-quarter of respondents in the other segments. They also are far more likely than others to believe it's important to gain professional experience at multiple different agencies,

67% of **Self-Reliant** employees strongly agree that they need a side hustle to feel creatively fulfilled.

Self-Respondents are slightly but significantly more likely to be in the millennial age range (63%) and to work for agencies with 100 or more employees and multiple office locations.

"Our agency culture feels good, but the leadership departments are more control-based, and unfortunately nobody feels comfortable voicing this fact out of fear. We are doing so many things right, but the development of leadership skills could make us so much stronger."

"It's easy to feel alone in a remote culture. There are plenty of invites on the calendar for get-togethers and virtual hangouts, but no one really goes."

"I really like working with my coworkers, but the culture needs improvement overall. The owner likes to give direct examples of problems as learning opportunities, which is great in theory but often turns into public shaming and belittling. Constructive feedback is brushed off as employees having 'thin skin.'"

At-Risk Employees (29%)

At-Risk employees see their agencies as instrumental in their professional development and want their agencies to play an even more active role in meeting their needs. They believe collaboration skills are vital to succeeding at an agency, and believe agencies are more successful when they're proactive about providing collaboration opportunities.

For these employees, it's critically important that their agency shows concern that goes beyond work-related interest. These employees want their agency's leadership to be concerned for their health and well-being as well.

They are also far more likely to say agencies have an obligation to help employees be more successful in their careers. While they believe their agency experience is beneficial for their professional development, they are least likely to strongly agree that their agency does a good job of attracting or retaining talent but that it's better than other agencies at providing exciting opportunities and that their compensation appropriately reflects their experience level and expertise.

76% of **At-Risk** employees feel strongly that agencies have an obligation to help employees be more successful in their careers.

These employees say their agencies give them a lot of responsibility and are more likely to say they're responsible for strategic direction, leadership, project management, and account management activities than other respondents. They are significantly more likely to be women than Self-Reliant respondents and to work in agencies of fewer than 25 employees.

"Our culture is very collaborative, but management is very old school when it comes to work schedules, sick/vacation time, and respecting off-work hours."

"We are usually understaffed, overworked, and underpaid. However, my coworkers and I are very loyal and work hard."

"My agency has an unwavering expectation to work long hours to get the job done. Not enough coverage and good people leave to go where they feel more appreciated."

"My agency has amazing intentions to meet the teams' needs (personal and professional) and foster collaboration and camaraderie but they're not always smoothly or clearly executed. We tend to throw spaghetti at the wall and see what perks/benefits stick versus having a really rock-solid cultural foundation that we build from. But the heart is 100% there."

Demographics and Agency Characteristics

If you have assumptions about demographic factors associated with the attitudes of our research respondents, you're likely to be wrong. We see segments across all ages, genders, races, roles, agency sizes, and other respondent and agency characteristics. In short, you can't assume an employee is in a particular segment based on these factors.

DREW'S TAKE

It shouldn't come as a surprise to agency owners that their employees are experiencing many of the same emotions, struggles, and reactions that they themselves are wrestling with — fatigue, struggles that come with the new way of working, and a sense that everyone is doing more with less. The feeling that "it's harder" runs through many agencies today, from the top down.

In terms of trying to discern which employees fall into which segment, it's not hard to recognize Enthusiastic and Self-Reliant employees. They're typically pretty vocal, good or bad.

The more looming danger comes from the At Risk. They're more likely to be higher in your organization, and they look, on the surface, like your Enthusiastic employees. They're shouldering a lot of work, responsibility, and pressure, but they keep chugging along.

Until they don't. This segment is like a landmine that is so well camouflaged that when it explodes, it feels like it came out of nowhere.

–Drew McLellan, agency owner and CEO of Agency Management Institute

Greatest Drivers of Satisfaction

THE FIVE MOST SATISFYING ASPECTS OF WORK for agency employees overall are making money, positive client feedback, working on exciting projects, getting a promotion or bonus, and making a difference through their work. All were cited by 38% of our respondent group.

Key drivers of work satisfaction

- Making money **38%**
- Positive client feedback **38%**
- Working on exciting projects **38%**
- Getting a promotion or bonus **38%**
- Making a difference through my work **38%**
- Succeeding in the face of challenges **36%**
- Learning a new skill **35%**
- Recognition from superiors **33**%
- Recognition from clients **29%**
- Recognition from peers **28%**
- Having time to do things besides work **27%**

Agency employees are as likely to cite positive client feedback and working on exciting projects as making money in terms of driving work satisfaction.
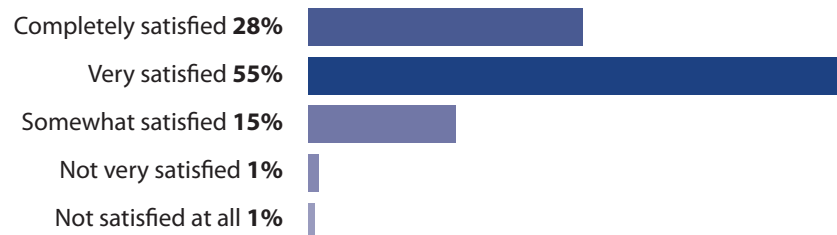
Self-Reliant employees are significantly less likely to cite nearly all satisfaction drivers. The factors most selected by these respondents are making money (28%) and making a difference through their work (26%).

Enthusiastic employees cite learning a new skill (48%) as their top satisfaction factor, followed closely by positive client feedback and working on exciting projects (both cited by 47%).

At-Risk employees cited satisfaction drivers at higher levels than any other segment. They are more likely to cite positive client feedback (67%), get a promotion or bonus (60%), make money (57%), and recognition from superiors (55%) than other segments. They are also more likely to cite having time to do things besides work as a key driver of satisfaction (45%).

84% of respondents are very or completely satisfied with the projects they get to work on at their agency. Enthusiastic employees are slightly but significantly more likely.

Satisfaction w/projects worked on

Completely satisfied **28%**	
Very satisfied **55%**	
Somewhat satisfied **15%**	
Not very satisfied **1%**	
Not satisfied at all **1%**	

DREW'S TAKE

This data is a good reminder that we cannot have a cookie-cutter approach to how we manage and nurture employees. While money is a universal motivator, the others are much more specific to the individual.

Part of your job as an agency owner/leader is to explore how to motivate each employee in a way that resonates most with them, and these findings would support that practice.
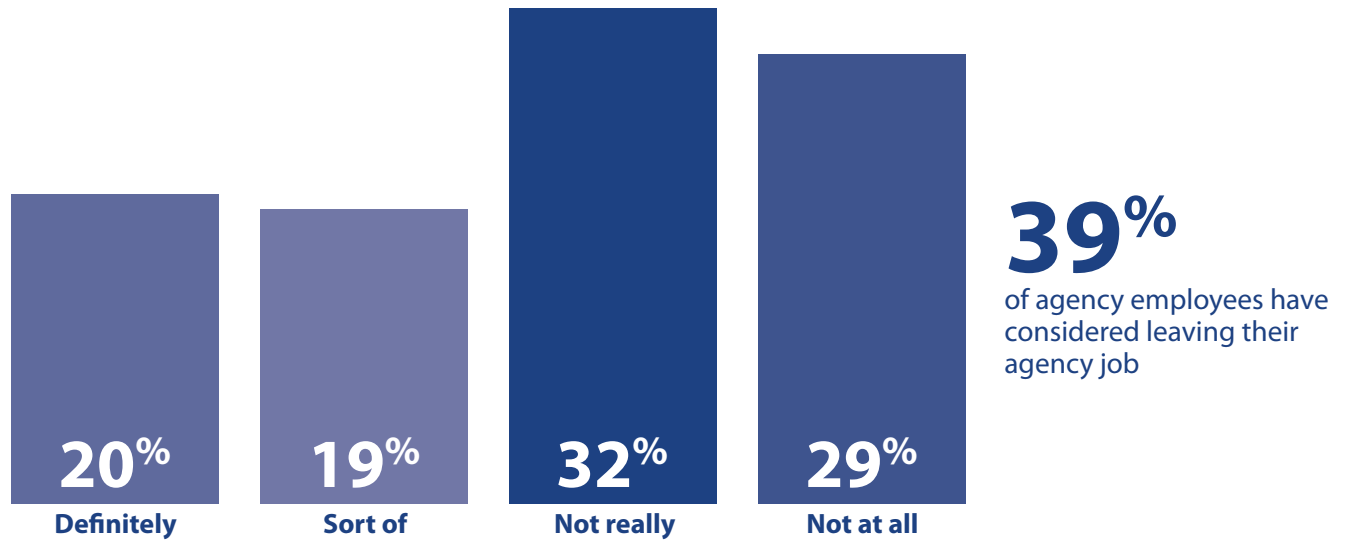
While the At-Risk group was more likely to value public recognition because of their belief that agencies play favorites and credit is not always given where it's due, it's worth noting that all of the segments want some sort of recognition that the work they're doing is valued.

The good news is that most agency employees recognize that it's still a job and not every moment of every day is going to be exciting or new. We all have to do projects that are not going to end up on our mom's fridge.

But, this data also reminds us that doing work that feels meaningful, is challenging, and is brag-worthy is important to keep in mind. Making sure each employee has a balance between the more mundane AND the exciting projects.

Considered leaving agency job

20%	**19**%	**32**%	**29**%
Definitely	**Sort of**	**Not really**	**Not at all**

39%

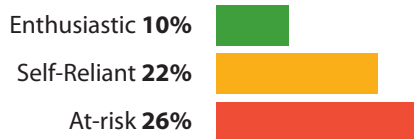of agency employees have considered leaving their agency job

Who is At Risk for Leaving?

At-Risk employees are significantly more likely to say they've considered leaving to some extent. 26% have definitely considered it, and another 32% say they've sort of considered it.
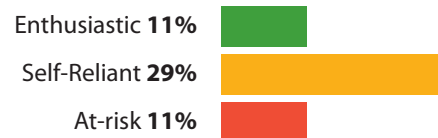
Self-Reliant employees are significantly more likely than other segments to feel that it's best to stay in a job for no more than three years before moving on to the next one. 60% of these respondents believe this, compared to about one-third of respondents in other segments.

Half of the respondents say they are somewhat or very likely to pursue employment in an industry outside of marketing/advertising in the future. **Self-Reliant** employees are significantly more likely than others to say they're very likely to leave agency life in the future.

Definitely considered leaving an agency job

Enthusiastic **10%**
Self-Reliant **22%**
At-risk **26%**

Likey to work in other industries in the future

Enthusiastic **11%**
Self-Reliant **29%**
At-risk **11%**

Sort of considered leaving an agency job

Enthusiastic **17%**
Self-Reliant **12%**
At-risk **32%**

Likely to work in other industries in the future

Very Likely **19%**
Somewhat likely **30%**
Not very likely **30%**
Not at all likely **15%**
I'm not sure **7%**
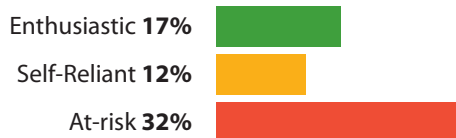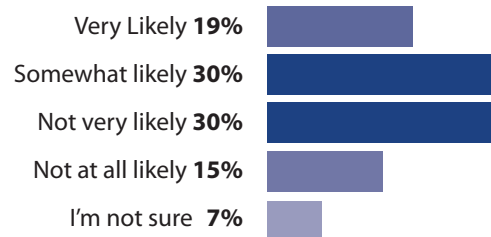
41% of agency employees have worked client side before, though 66% of those who have prefer agency work. Generally speaking, agency employees say agency work is better than client-side in terms of innovation, flexibility, fun, and creative opportunities. The only factor for which client-side comes out on top is compensation, and only by a small margin.

DREW'S TAKE

Our research shows that it's important not to take agency employees for granted. Even if they're loyal contributors, they may be open to other opportunities — or even planning to pursue them in the future.

Many agency owners, when discussing having career paths for employees, react with "I had to figure out my own career path. That's their responsibility."

While perhaps factual, it's just not the same reality anymore. Employees expect — whether we feel they should or not — their agency leadership to have a plan for their growth and future career path. They're waiting for you to have that conversation with them. Even the At-Risk who believe it's all on them would welcome the direction.

When your employees don't have a clear vision of how they can keep advancing within your agency, in their mind, the only option is to look outside of the agency for their advancement.

What Does Agency Life Look Like for Agency Employees?

THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS work full-time (92% overall) at their agencies. And most respondents—57%—say they work 40-45 hours per week.

Nearly half of our respondents work in hybrid environments, and more than one-third work remotely. Whether they work in-office, at home, or in a hybrid arrangement, most respondents — regardless of segment — say their current work environment is the one they prefer.

Current work environment

47%
Hybrid

32%
100% remote

21%
100% in-person
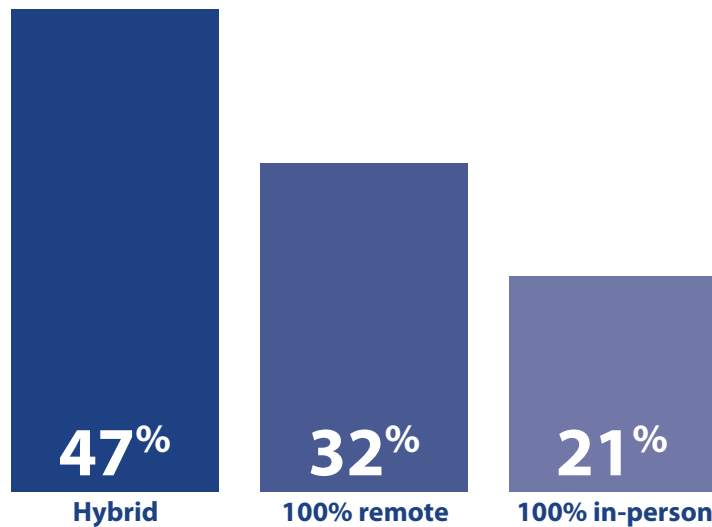
Nearly all
of agency employees have considered leaving their agency job

Employees' Perceptions of Agencies

Pros of Working in an Agency

Agency employees are drawn to the advertising/marketing industry for opportunities to be creative. Nearly 40% say this is a substantial benefit. Comparable numbers also find agencies fun places to work, appreciate opportunities to work with a range of different clients and enjoy the flexible work environment.

Top 5 positives of working in an agency

Fun place to work	**39%**
Opportunities to be creative	**39%**
Opportunities to work with a range of clients	**37%**
Flexible work environment	**37%**
Good work/life balance	**36%**
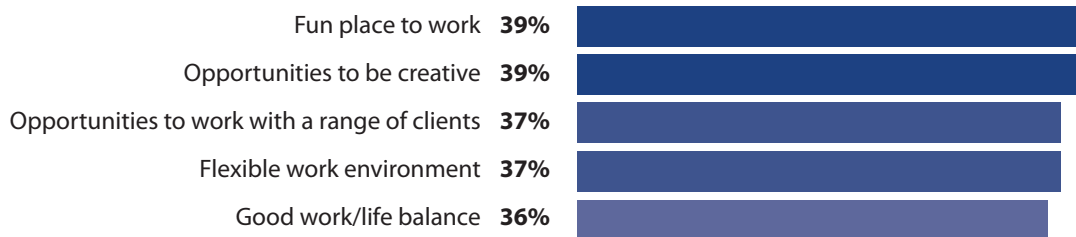
Cons of Working in an Agency

On the other hand, 42% of agency employees view the high stress that comes with working at agencies as a downside. Other downsides include difficult clients, pressure/expectations to work outside of conventional work hours, and frequent turnover.

Top 5 downsides of working in an agency

High stress	**42%**	
Difficult clients	**33%**	
pressure to work unconventional hours	**32%**	
Frequent turnover	**30%**	
Lower income	**29%**	

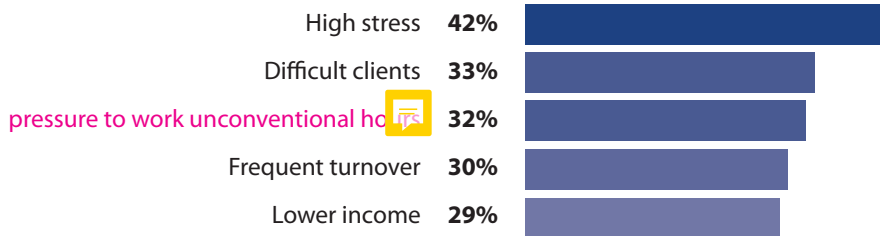**At-Risk** employees are significantly more likely to cite many of the downsides of working in an agency. 70% of them cite high stress, and 52% cite lower income compared to other opportunities.

70%

of At-Risk employees cite high stress as a downside of agency life.

High stress		
	40%	
	27%	
	70%	

Difficult clients		
	37%	
	23%	
	44%	

pressure to work unconventional hours		
	34%	
	27%	
	38%	

Frequent turnover		
	24%	
	25%	
	46%	

Lower income		
	30%	
	15%	
	52%	
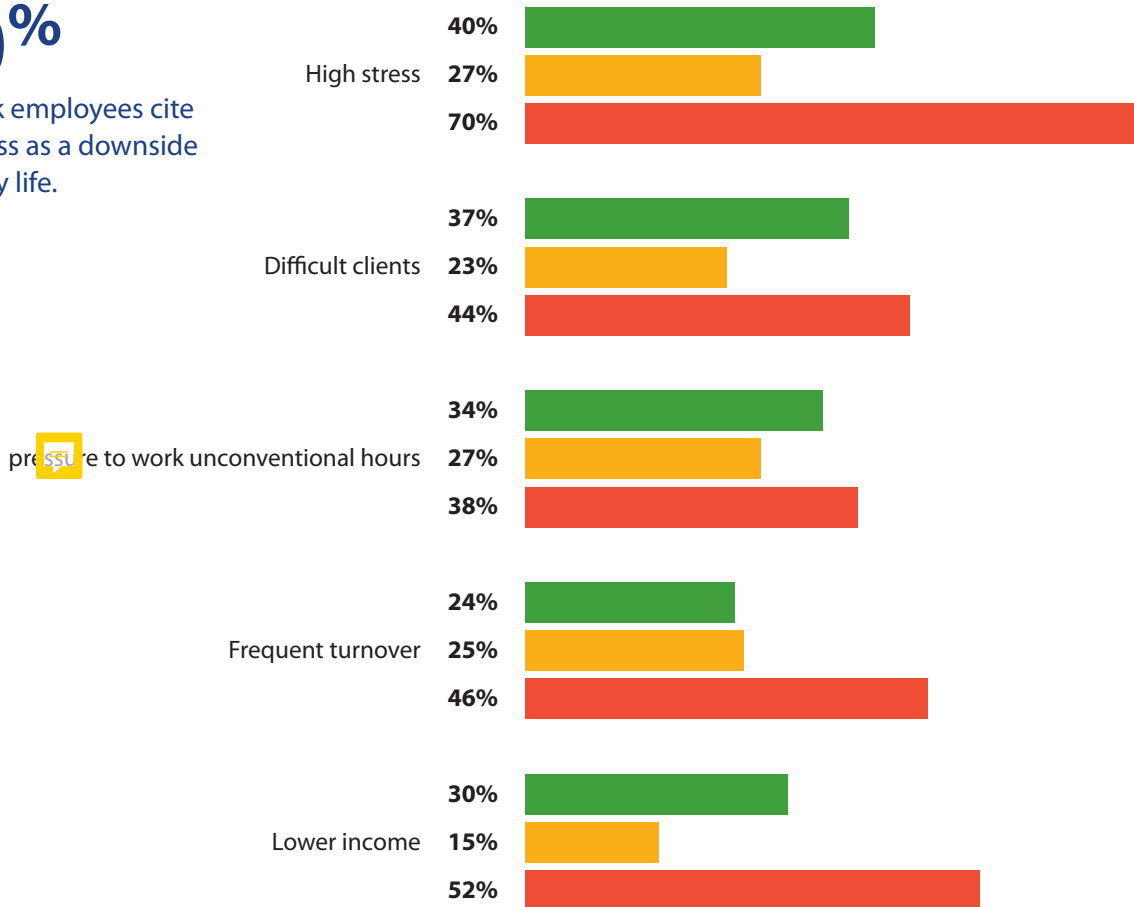
DREW'S TAKE

Agency life is not for everyone. We can't make the stress and pressure go away. Both are part of a deadline-driven, client-centric environment. The solution to these concerns starts with interviewing and hiring well. Some people are built to thrive in a pressure cooker and others are not. Being more discerning and testing for the aptitude and motivation to work in the agency space is critical.

We also heard loud and clear in this survey data that employees want to be acknowledged and seen. That doesn't just mean when they do something spectacular. It also means publicly recognizing that the work can be hard.

Talking openly about coping mechanisms, how the team can support each other on those particularly stressful days, and having benefits that support your team (mental health coverage, flexible schedules, etc.) will help mitigate the grind.

But you can also accentuate the positives. Agency life is fun, challenging, and rewarding. Putting the spotlight on those elements can make the tough days a little easier.

You can also make the good days even better. Focusing on your culture and finding ways to bring your team together so they can create real connections is a smart investment in employee morale, retention, and satisfaction.

Create a work environment that is inviting to the people who naturally thrive in our crazy work world, and then take the learnings from this study to increase the odds that they stay.
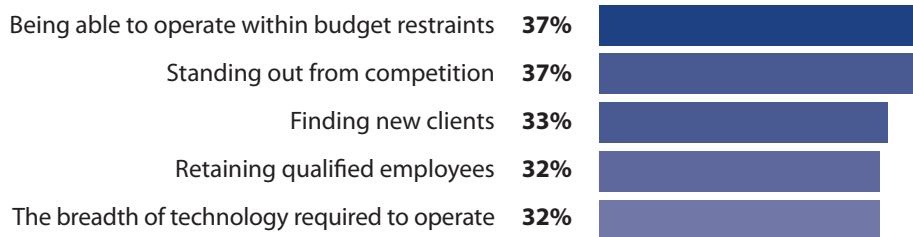
Challenges Facing Agencies

Agency employees believe standing out from the competition (37%), being able to operate within budget constraints (37%), and finding new clients (33%) are the biggest challenges facing agencies.

Biggest challenges facing agencies

Being able to operate within budget restraints	**37%**	
Standing out from competition	**37%**	
Finding new clients	**33%**	
Retaining qualified employees	**32%**	
The breadth of technology required to operate	**32%**	

At-Risk employees are significantly more likely to cite many of the challenges agencies face. Retaining qualified employees, in particular, is cited by 62% of At-Risk respondents – perhaps contributing to their feelings of overwork and poor work/life balance.

	37%	
Being able to operate within budget restraints	**29%**	
	50%	
	37%	
Standing out from competition	**28%**	
	51%	
	36%	
Finding new clients	**25%**	
	46%	
	33%	
Retaining qualified employees	**13%**	
	62%	
	33%	
The breadth of technology required to operate	**26%**	
	39%	
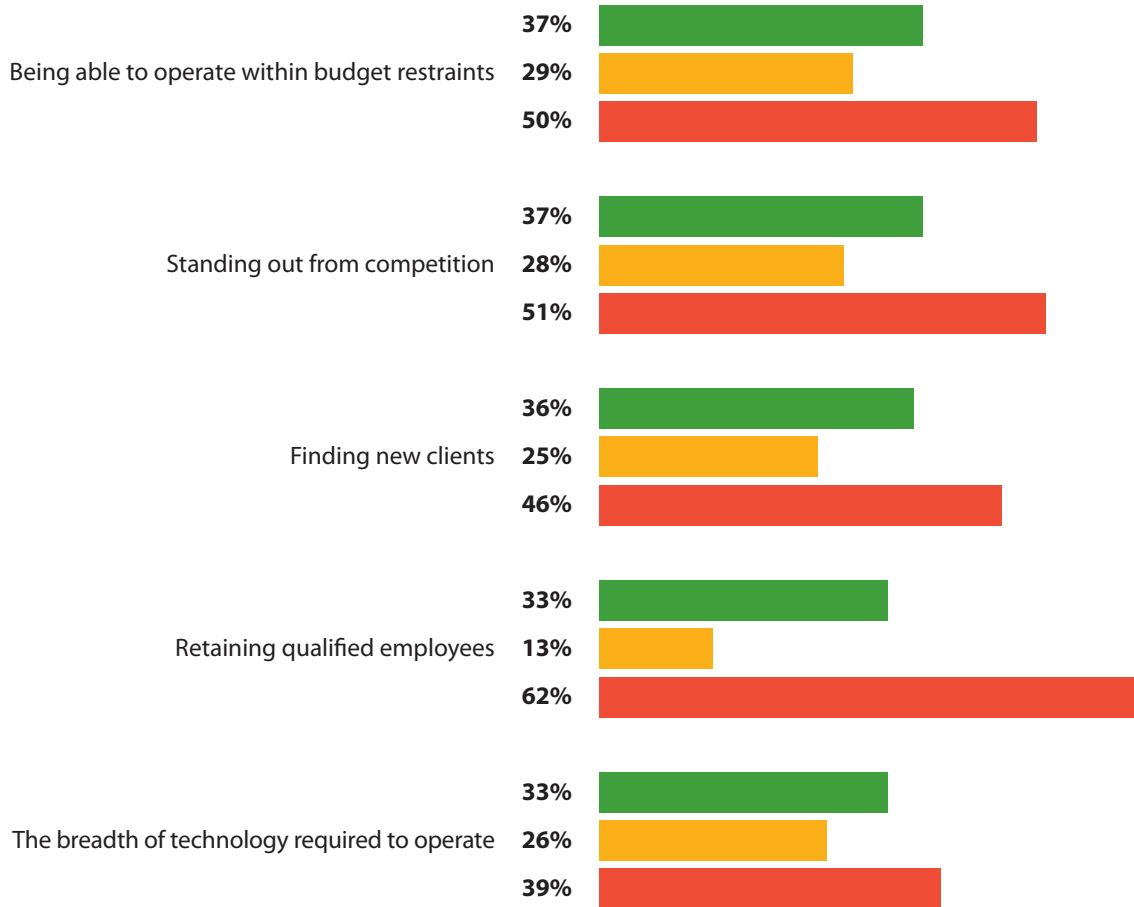
DREW'S TAKE

There's an interesting psychological truth that we've all experienced. When we're unhappy, it's easy to notice other things that we're unhappy about to add to the list. When someone is already disgruntled at work, it's easy for their complaints to add up. That may be why the Self-Reliants were quicker to spot the issues.

But it would be superficial to assume that's all there is to this question. The respondents were actually quite thoughtful and identified some genuine challenges that agencies face. In 2022, the three biggest worries for most agency owners were finding good employees, growing their portfolio of clients, and being profitable. They're paying attention, and whether you want them to see your worries or not – they do. They're also perceptive enough to recognize that differentiation, or the lack thereof, is a very real threat to an agency's success.

What Do Agencies Need to Do to Attract The Best Employees Today?

WHEN WE ASKED OUR RESPONDENTS what they believe agencies need to do today to attract the best employees, a flexible work environment was the most often-selected factor.

Agency employees also believe offering competitive pay (58%), career advancement opportunities (54%), comprehensive benefits (50%), and health and wellness benefits (50%) will bring the best talent to their agencies.

Top 5 most important factors in attracting the best employees today:

Factor	%
A flexible work environment	60%
Competitive pay	58%
Career advancement opportunities	54%
Comprehensive benefits	50%
health and wellness benefits	50%
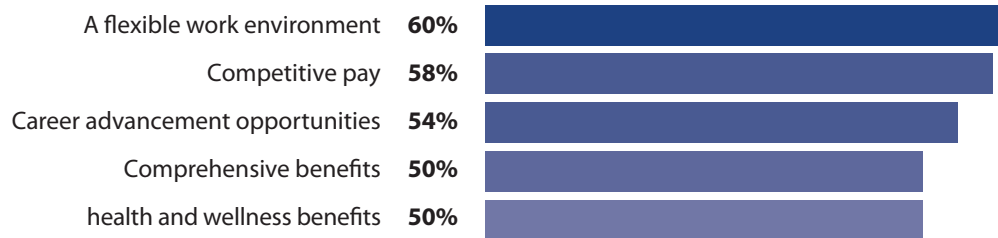
At-Risk employees are significantly more likely to cite all of these factors as key to attracting the best employees.

A flexible work environment	68% / 34% / 94%
Competitive pay	70% / 30% / 94%
Career advancement opportunities	62% / 30% / 84%
Comprehensive benefits	61% / 27% / 78%
health and wellness benefits	63% / 29% / 72%
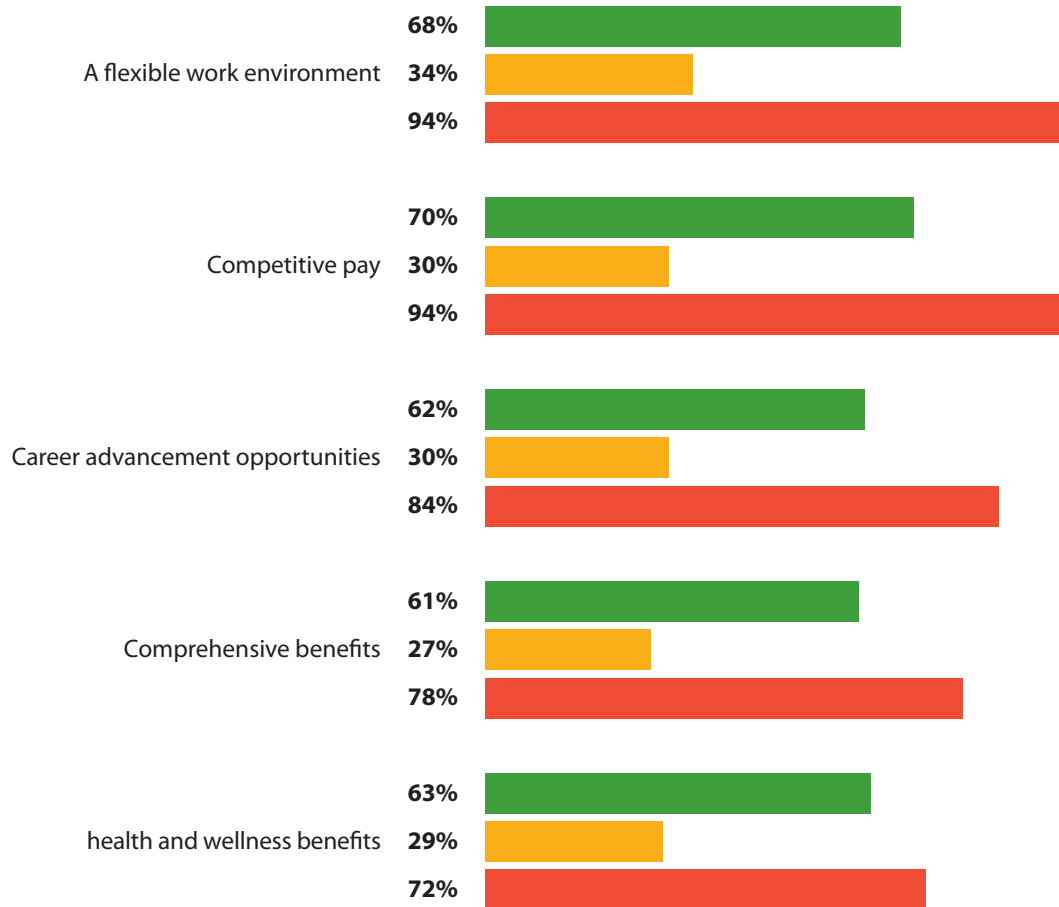
DREW'S TAKE

This is a pain point for most agency owners. You feel like you just keep giving, and no matter how flexible you are, they want more. You also need to create a workplace that fosters creativity and collaboration, and that means people need to be able to work together at the same time and, in some cases, in the same place.

Most agencies offer incredible flexibility, but many don't merchandise it very well among the staff. There are very few agencies that have a rigid 9-5 schedule or don't create an environment that supports a healthy life/work balance. That was true before covid, and it's certainly true today.

It's fair to remind your team in all staff meetings or other conversations that you understand that agency life can be challenging, which is why you offer the flexibility that you do.

AGENCY EMPLOYEES ALSO WEIGHED IN on what they see as the most important qualities of an agency leader. More than half say communication skills are among the most important. Other characteristics in the top five include a collaborative spirit, empathy, flexibility, and the ability to inspire others.

Top 5 important qualities for an agency leader:

Quality	%
Communication skills	**53%**
Collaborative spirit	**46%**
Empathy	**46%**
Flexibility	**46%**
Ability to inspire others	**43%**
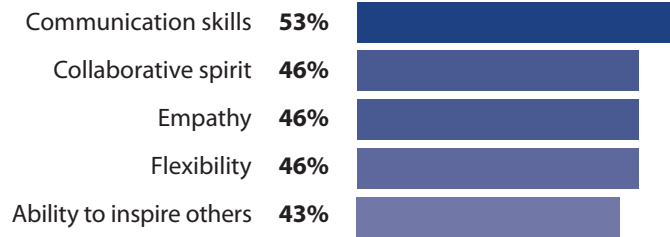
The most important quality for an agency leader, in the eyes of employees, is communication skills.

Enthusiastic and **At-Risk** employees have much higher expectations for agency leaders than do **Self-Reliant** employees, with a majority citing each of the top five characteristics as most important.

Communication skills	**66%**	
	37%	
	68%	
Collaborative spirit	**58%**	
	28%	
	66%	
Empathy	**53%**	
	31%	
	65%	
Flexibility	**56%**	
	29%	
	65%	
Ability to inspire others	**60%**	
	24%	
	58%	
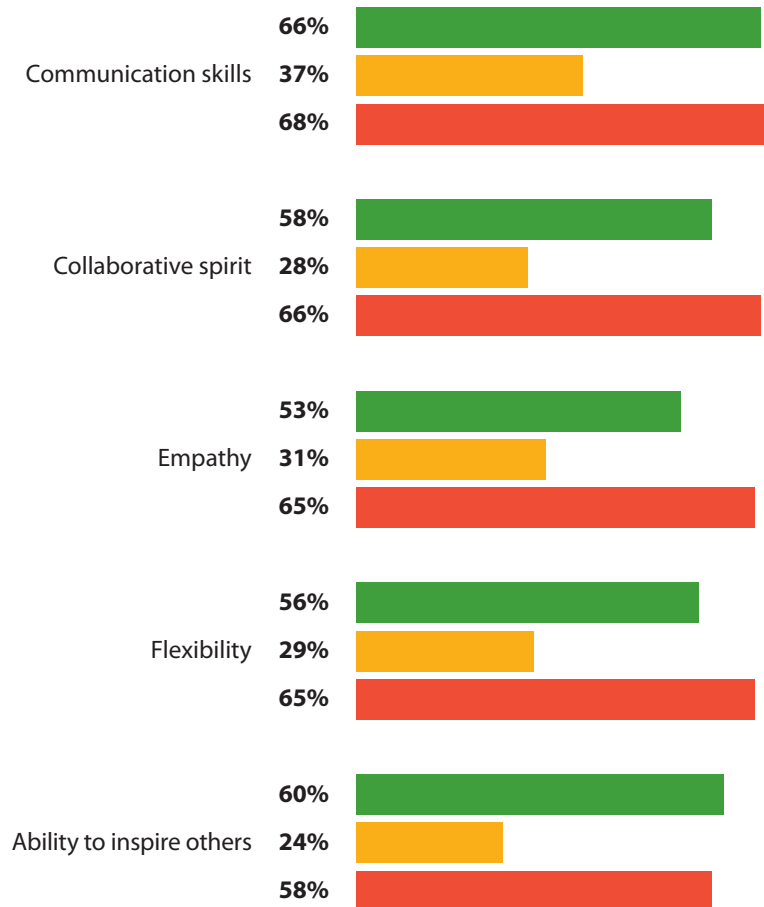
DREW'S TAKE

There are two key takeaways for every agency leader here. First – no matter how much you communicate, they're hungry for more. They love hearing from you about the agency's history, goals, and where you are all headed next. When you don't communicate, they create a narrative in their heads. It's better to have an accurate story come from you.

Second – in several places in this study, they clearly indicate that they need your empathy and concern. They want to know that you care about them as people. That you understand their bigger picture, whether that's dealing with a child on the spectrum and what that means to their ability to be in early or that their mom has dementia. When they're going through something, they want to know that you've noticed and care. And when they accomplish something, they want your praise and approval.
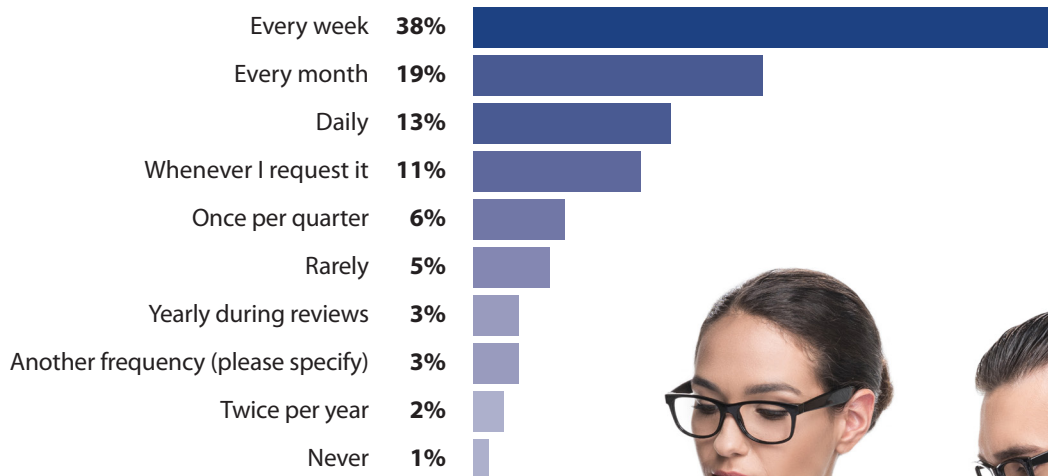
For a small handful of agency leaders, this need feels burdensome. They just want their employees to do the work and keep their personal stuff at home. Even if you don't express this out loud, the employees can sense it, and clearly, based on the numbers, it detracts from their connection to the agency and their long-term commitment.

Working With Supervisors and Leadership

OVER ONE-THIRD of respondents say they meet with their supervisors once per week, and most employees, regardless of segment, are meeting with their supervisors at their preferred frequency.

How often respondents meet with supervisors

Every week	38%
Every month	19%
Daily	13%
Whenever I request it	11%
Once per quarter	6%
Rarely	5%
Yearly during reviews	3%
Another frequency (please specify)	3%
Twice per year	2%
Never	1%

How often respondents WANT to meet with supervisors

Every week	**31%**	
Every month	**23%**	
Daily	**17%**	
Whenever I request it	**15%**	
Once per quarter	**7%**	
Another frequency (please specify)	**3%**	
Twice per year	**2%**	
Yearly during reviews	**1%**	
Rarely	**1%**	
Never	**0%**	
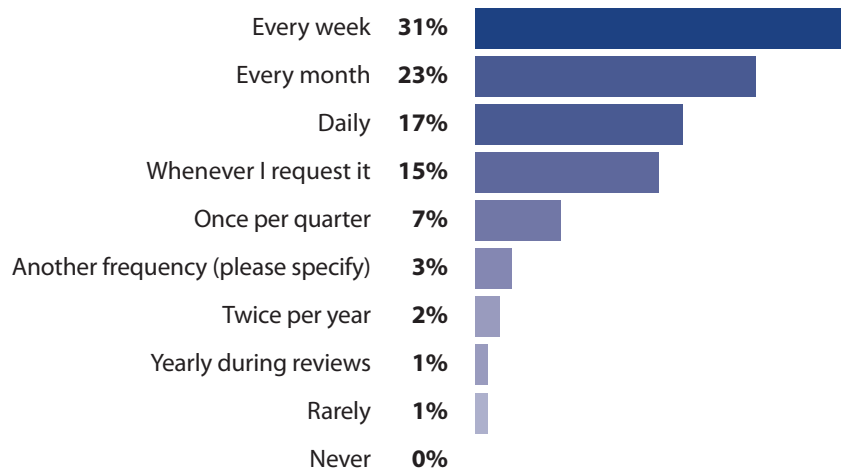
48% OF AGENCY EMPLOYEES feel extremely comfortable talking to leadership about professional advancement. 46% say they feel somewhat comfortable doing so. There is no significant difference between responses based on segment or age group.

Comfort talking to leadership about advancement

Extremely comfortable	**48%**	
Somewhat comfortable	**46%**	
Not very comfortable	**4%**	
Not at all comfortable	**1%**	

DREW'S TAKE

Professional development is a shared responsibility. Together you can map out a plan where both parties invest time and money.

This is probably a bit surprising to most agency leaders. We all think we talk to our employees all the time. And we do. But we typically are talking about the work in front of us or on the horizon. We don't stop to have meaningful conversations about the long-term plan we have for an employee and the steps that together we're going to take to get them there.

We don't explore the professional possibilities with our team members. We assume if someone is a junior woodchuck they want to be promoted to woodchuck someday. They may not even know that there are other options available to them.

One-on-one meetings are the perfect place to have these kinds of conversations and to set quarterly growth goals that align with the career path that you and the employee have decided makes the most sense. If you're not familiar with this type of meeting, Build A Better Agency podcast episode #15 can walk you through what they look like and even provide the form you can use.

Recommending the Agency Business to Others

WHETHER AGENCY EMPLOYEES would recommend agency work to friends or family as a career path depends on the attitudinal segment they're in.
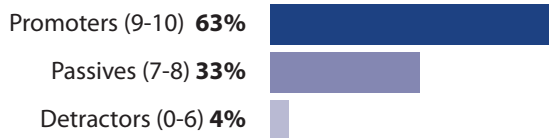
Enthusiastic employees have the highest **Net Promoter Score** (59), with 63% Promoters and only 4% Detractors.
Self-Reliant employees have a NPS of 38.
At-Risk employees only reflect an NPS of 12, with 52% Passives.

Likelihood of recommending agency work to friends/family

Enthusiastic

Promoters (9-10) **63%**	
Passives (7-8) **33%**	
Detractors (0-6) **4%**	

Self-Reliant

Promoters (9-10) **54%**	
Passives (7-8) **29%**	
Detractors (0-6) **16%**	

At-Risk

Promoters (9-10) **30%**	
Passives (7-8) **52%**	
Detractors (0-6) **18%**	

Grand Total

Promoters (9-10) **50%**	
Passives (7-8) **36%**	
Detractors (0-6) **13%**	
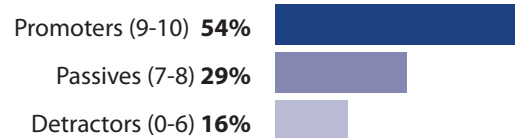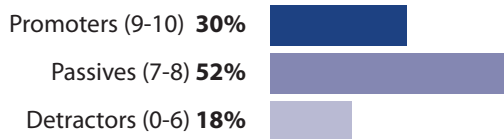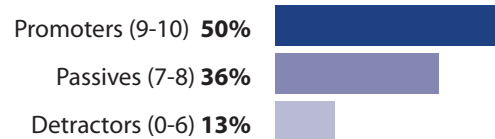
At-Risk employees are least likely to recommend friends or family members consider agencies as a career path.

Advice for Owners
Reducing the Risk of the At-Risk

At-Risk respondents are not only more likely to hold many responsibilities in your agency, are most likely to cite agency challenges and personal stressors, and are most likely to have considered leaving, but they are also least likely to recommend the agency business to others — a key concern when 22% of agency employees heard about their agency position through direct contact from someone within the agency, and 48% say that knowing someone in the agency influenced their decision to accept the job.

Addressing the needs of this critical and often least-vocal group of employees in your agency is Job 1.

So how can you increase the numbers of employees who will sing your agency's praises? It all depends on recognizing which segment they belong to and addressing their unique perspectives and needs.

The truth is, the odds are good that you have all three segments inside your shop right now. No matter which buckets your employees fall into, there are some truths spoken that can and should be put into place at every agency.

- Your employees want to be seen as individuals and to know that you care about them both professionally and personally.

- They will benefit from you being vulnerable enough to share your struggles, too, on occasion. You don't have to be the fearless leader all of the time. Your vulnerability will actually make you more inspiring and authentic.

- Your employees need help defining their career path, and if you don't show them their potential future, they will move on to an organization that will.

- Not everyone has the temperament to actually enjoy agency life. Develop hiring practices that help you suss that out before you add someone to the team and carefully evaluate the employees that you do have. It's okay to help someone transition to a different career if they don't truly enjoy what they're doing now.

- Find ways to be flexible while still getting the work done at the excellence level you and your clients expect. Involve the team in finding these solutions. But don't feel like you have to give in to every request or notion.

- Clear, frequent communications from agency leadership is critical to employee retention. They are eager to know more, contribute to shared goals, and be a part of something bigger.

THE AGENCY EDGE is an annual study developed by Agency Management Institute and Audience Audit™ since 2014. To see more Agency Audit studies, explore the data, and find more resources, we encourage you to visit the following:

https://agencymanagementinstitute.com/agency-tools/agency-edge-research-series/

https://audienceaudit.com/agency-edge-research-series/

About Agency Management Institute

Agency Management Institute (AMI) was founded in 1999 and serves small to mid-sized privately-held agencies. AMI produces a weekly podcast, Build A Better Agency, and offers public workshops, remote and on-site consulting, and membership-based agency owner peer networks. AMI has conducted the annual Agency Edge research study in partnership with Audience Audit since 2014.

About Audience Audit

Audience Audit is a research agency helping marketing agencies build ROI and reputation based on research. Our work developing world-class custom quantitative audience insights and our focus on attitudinal segmentation gives marketers access not only to the demographic and behavioral characteristics of their target audiences but also to the attitudes, experiences, and assumptions that affect their decision-making.

About Dynata

Dynata is one of the world's leading providers of first-party data contributed by consumers and business professionals. With a reach that encompasses 60+ million people globally and an extensive library of individual profile attributes collected through surveys, Dynata is the cornerstone for precise, trustworthy quality data. The company has built innovative data services and solutions around its core first-party data offering to bring the voice of the customer to the entire marketing spectrum, from market research to marketing and advertising. Dynata serves nearly 6,000 market research agencies, media and advertising agencies, consulting and investment firms, and healthcare and corporate customers in North America, South America, Europe, and Asia-Pacific.

AMI
Addendum

The results of the **2022 Agency Edge study** of agency employees provided many surprises — but none so striking as the difference between respondents in agencies who are part of the AMI community and those who aren't.

155 employees working in agencies in the AMI community participated in the study — 40% of the total respondent group.

AMI Agency Employees Present a Unique Profile

Self-Reliant employees represent only a small fraction — 8% — of the employees working in agencies who are part of the AMI community. This is a dramatic difference from the large majority they represent of non-AMI-agency employees (68%).

Instead, AMI agency employees are overwhelmingly likely to fall into the **At-Risk** group (59%, compared to only 9% of non-AMI respondents). Even considering the margin of error of the AMI agency respondent group (+/- 7.8 percentage points), the difference is large and statistically significant.

AMI agency employees are dramatically more likely to be At-Risk than other agency employees.

AMI Agency Employees	Non-AMI Employees	Grand Total
32% Enthusiastic	23% Enthusiastic	27% Enthusiastic
8% Self-Reliant	68% Self-Reliant	45% Self-Reliant
59% At-Risk	9% At-Risk	29% At-Risk

It's impossible to know from the study data why AMI agency employees show such a dramatic differential from those not in AMI agencies. They are not more likely to be in senior roles. They are significantly more likely to be women and to work in agencies with fewer than 25 employees.

But the result is that AMI owners likely don't face the same risks from **Self-Reliant** employees as they do from those who are in the **At-Risk** segment.
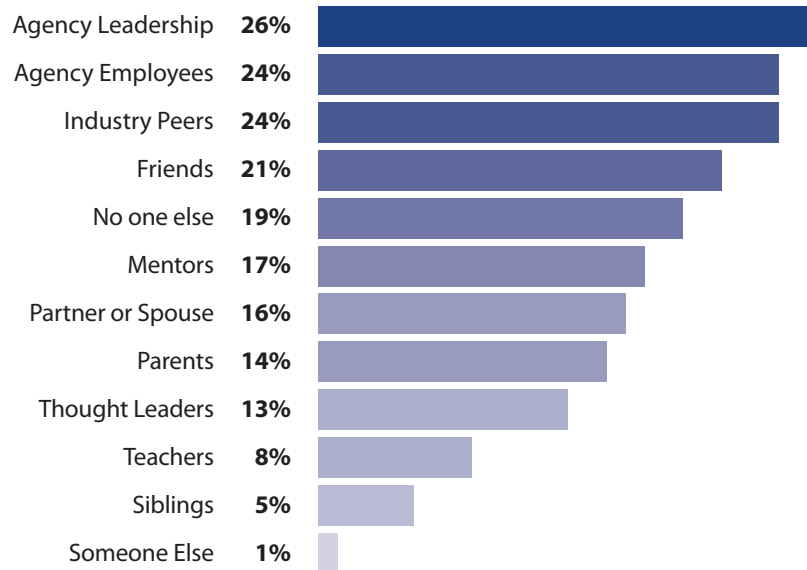
ABOUT ONE-FOURTH of agency employees learned about their current position through online job boards like LinkedIn, Indeed, or ZipRecruiter, followed by knowing somebody who currently works at an agency. AMI agency employees are significantly more likely than other respondents to say they found out about the opportunity for their current position through direct contact with someone who works for the hiring agency.

Once they enter the recruiting and hiring process, various factors influence their decision to accept an agency job. Top of the list is opportunities to work on many different types of projects with 76% of respondents citing this as most influential in their decision. Other top responses were the ability to be creative (67%), stability (64%), and the agency having a good reputation (62%).

The people who stand to influence prospective employees the most are those connected to agencies or the marketing/advertising industry. Agency leadership is the top influence, followed by agency employees and industry peers.

Who influenced decision to accept agency job

Agency leaders are cited more often than any other people as influencing the decision to accept an agency job.

Agency Leadership	**26%**
Agency Employees	**24%**
Industry Peers	**24%**
Friends	**21%**
No one else	**19%**
Mentors	**17%**
Partner or Spouse	**16%**
Parents	**14%**
Thought Leaders	**13%**
Teachers	**8%**
Siblings	**5%**
Someone Else	**1%**

Those under 26 are significantly more likely to be influenced by friends and less by agency leadership.

A key tool in attracting top employees is knowing where they are looking for resources that help them in their work. Overall, respondents cite search engines, websites, webinars, social media, blogs, and other resources. **Enthusiastic** and **At-Risk** employees are more likely to cite any of these than are **Self-Reliant** respondents.

Where employees look for job-related education and resources

Search engines	**44%**
websites	**43%**
webinars	**35%**
Social media	**34%**
Blogs	**33%**
Conferences	**31%**
Workshops	**30%**
Email newsletters	**26%**
Podcasts	**24%**
Networking events	**24%**
Video streaming service	**22%**
Print media	**15%**
Other	**3%**
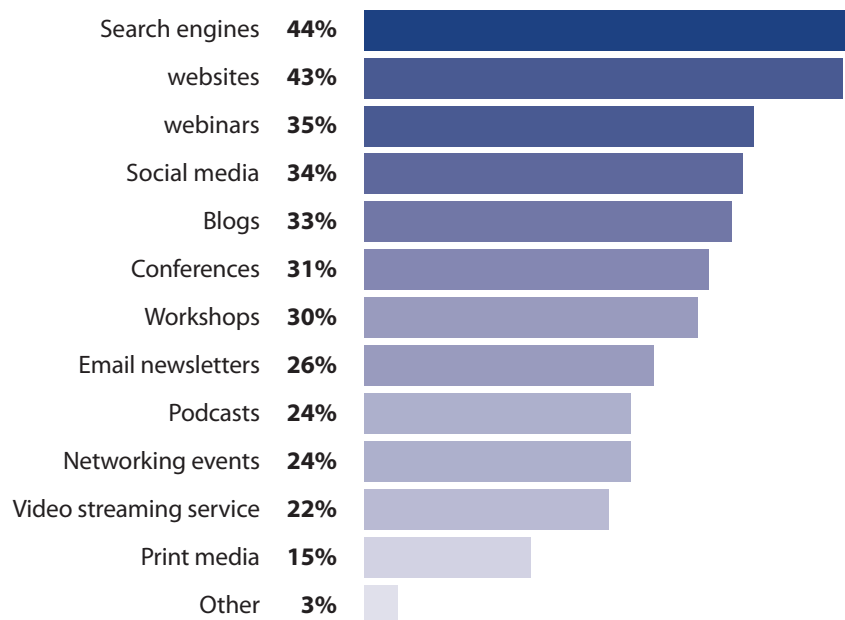
Skills for Agency Jobs

More than half of agency employees say that communication, problem-solving abilities, teamwork, flexibility, and a positive attitude are critical skills necessary for thriving at an agency.

Top 5 Critical Skills for Agency Employees

Skill	Percentage
Communication	**55%**
Problem solving	**54%**
Teamwork	**54%**
Flxibility	**51%**
Positive attitude	**51%**
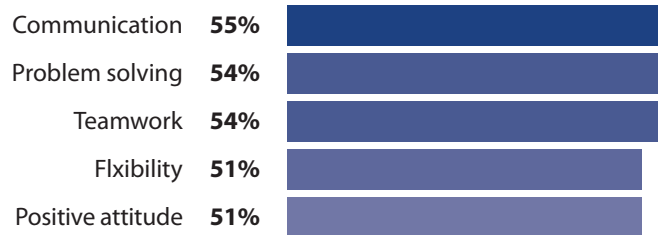
At-Risk employees are significantly more likely to cite communication and teamwork as vital. Since these employees are more likely to be in strategic roles, their perspective is not surprising.

Critical skills when working for an agency

Communication
- 68%
- 27%
- 88%

Problem solving
- 73%
- 27%
- 81%

Teamwork
- 66%
- 28%
- 85%

Flexibility
- 66%
- 28%
- 74%

Positive attitude
- 65%
- 30%
- 70%
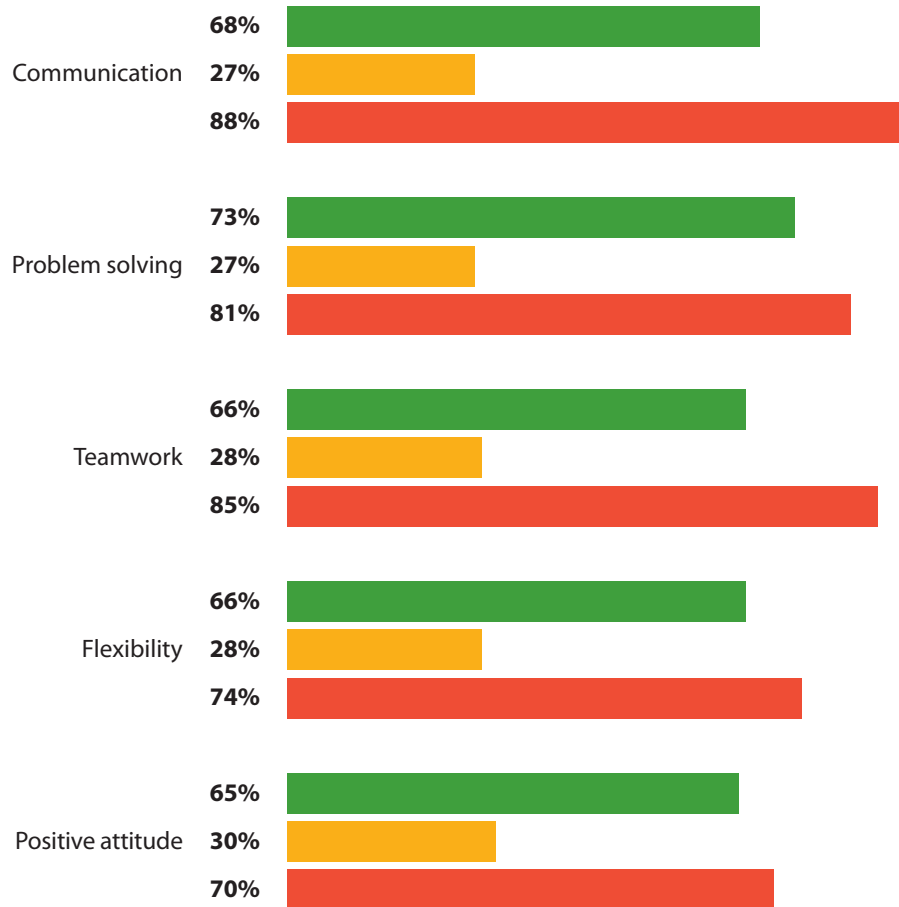
How Long They Expect to Stay

While 37% of respondents say they plan to stay at their current agency for one of two years, another 37% say they want to be at their current agency for five years or more.

How long employees expect to stay at their current agency

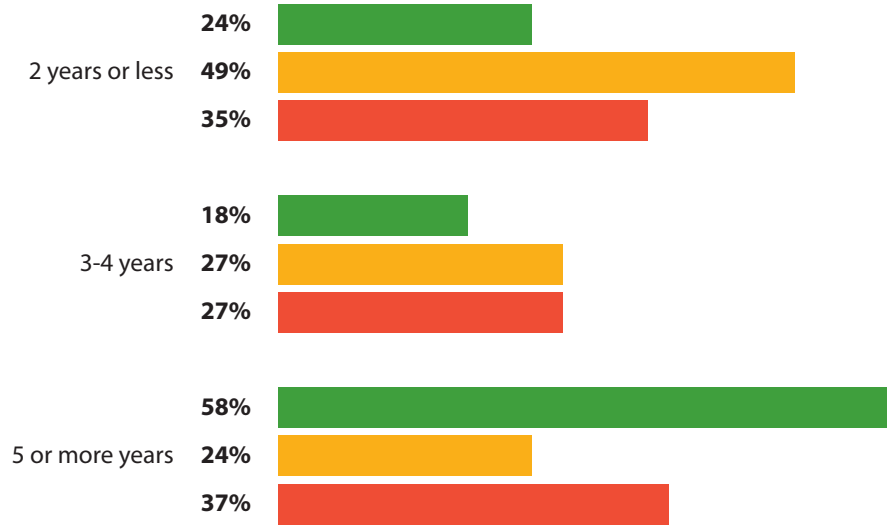|	
2 years or less	**39%**
3-4 years	**24%**
5 or more years	**37%**

Enthusiastic employees are significantly more likely to say they plan to stay at their current agency for five or more years.

	24%
2 years or less	**49%**
	35%
	18%
3-4 years	**27%**
	27%
	58%
5 or more years	**24%**
	37%

AMI agency employees are also significantly more likely than other respondents to say they plan to stay at their current agency for at least five more years.

AMI Agency Employees

Non-AMI Employees

2 years or less	**28%**
	45%
3-4 years	**26%**
	24%
5 or more years	**46%**
	32%
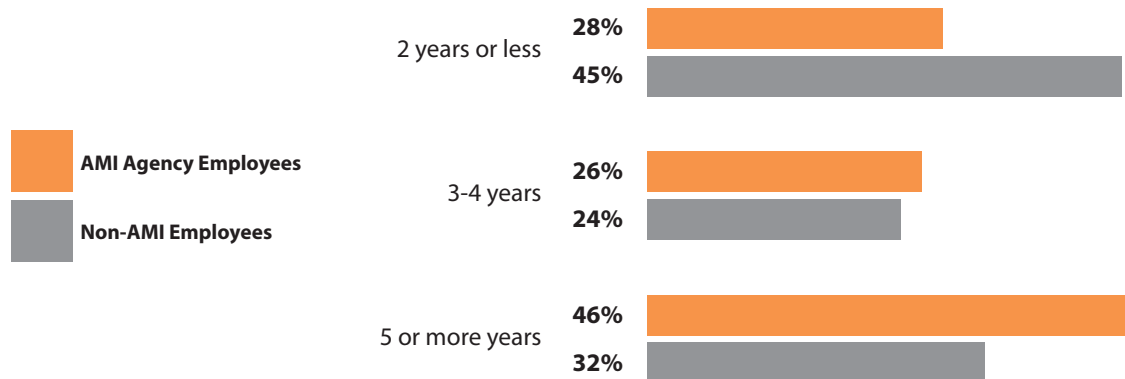
Among those who are not planning to stay at their agencies for another five years, about 40% of respondents plan to be at their current agency or another. But one in five respondents isn't sure where they'd like to be in five years, and that's especially true for **Enthusiastic** and **At-Risk** employees. As we've seen, that could mean an entirely different industry. It could also mean a client-side role.
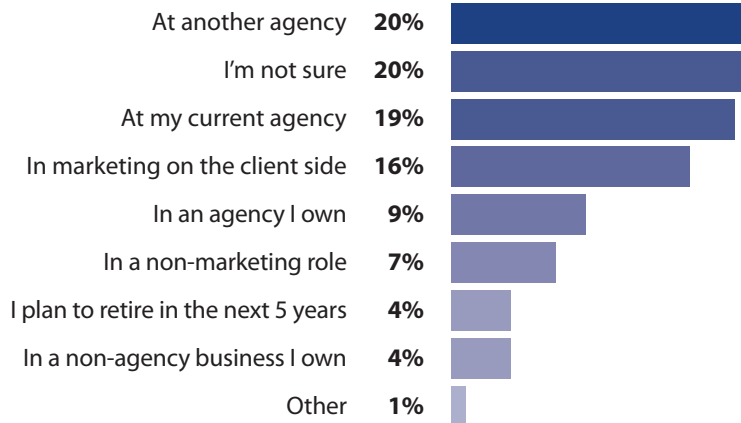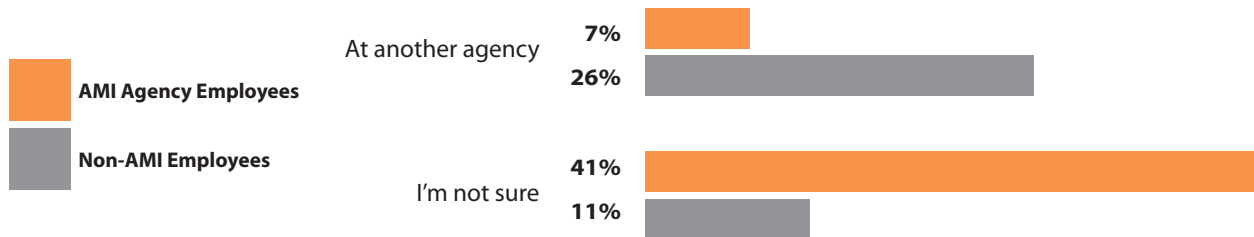
Where respondents want to work in 5 years

At another agency	**20%**
I'm not sure	**20%**
At my current agency	**19%**
In marketing on the client side	**16%**
In an agency I own	**9%**
In a non-marketing role	**7%**
I plan to retire in the next 5 years	**4%**
In a non-agency business I own	**4%**
Other	**1%**

AMI agency respondents who don't plan to be at their current agency in 5 years are far more likely to say they aren't sure where they'll be — and less likely than other respondents to say they want to be working in another agency. This highlights the risk that these employees may consider leaving the agency business entirely in search of better pay, better work/life balance, and less stress.

AMI Agency Employees
Non-AMI Employees

At another agency	
AMI Agency Employees	**7%**
Non-AMI Employees	**26%**

I'm not sure	
AMI Agency Employees	**41%**
Non-AMI Employees	**11%**

AMI agency employees are significantly more likely than others to say they're not sure they'll be working in an agency in 5 years.

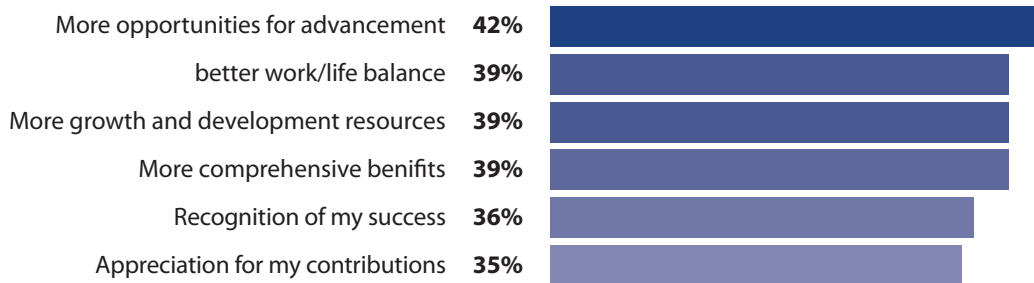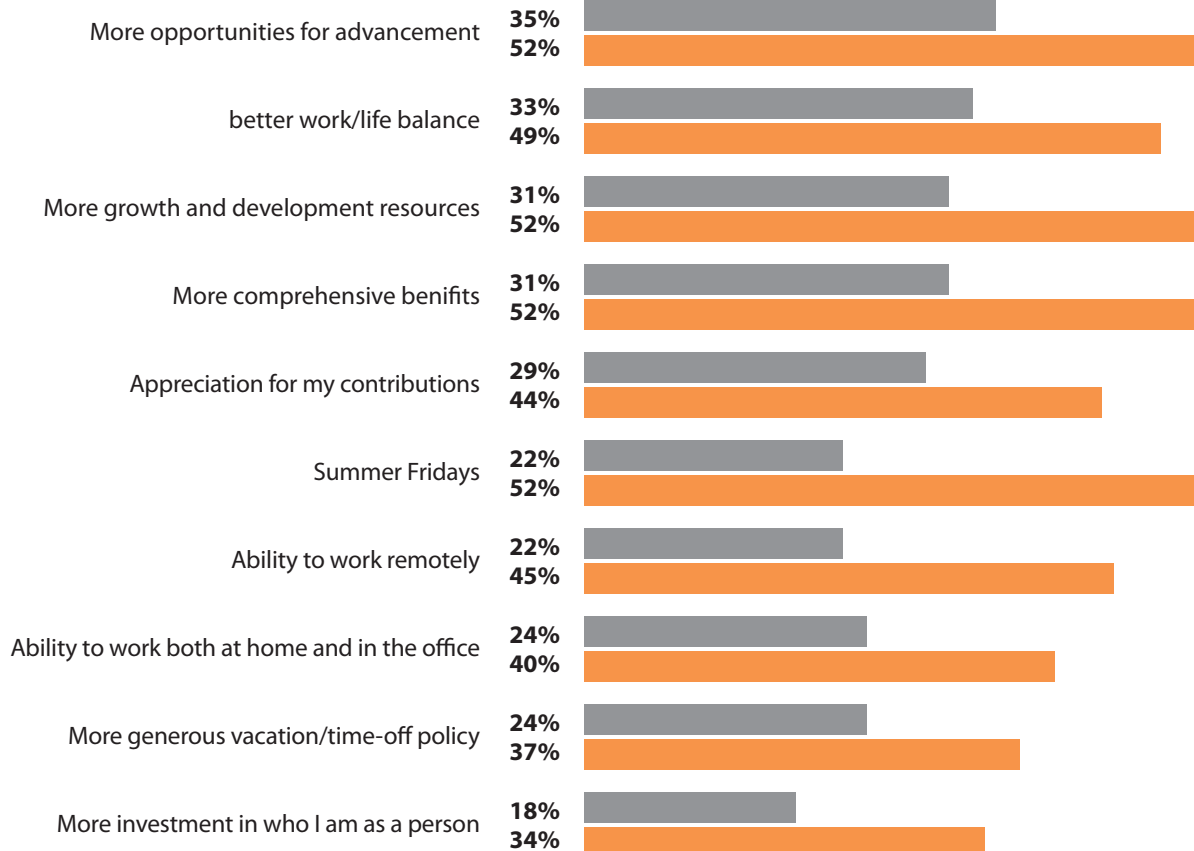AGENCIES CAN BETTER RETAIN EMPLOYEES by understanding what motivates them to be committed. 42% of agency employees say more opportunities for advancement influence their decision to stay. And 39% say better work/life balance, more growth and development resources, and more comprehensive benefits influence them to remain committed to their agencies. **At-Risk** employees are more likely to cite any of these factors.

Most influential factors driving commitment to current agency

Factor	%
More opportunities for advancement	42%
better work/life balance	39%
More growth and development resources	39%
More comprehensive benifits	39%
Recognition of my success	36%
Appreciation for my contributions	35%

AMI agency employees set a higher bar for remaining loyal to their current agencies. In addition to the top factors, they want more time off, a flexible work environment, and more investment in who they are as people.

Factor		
More opportunities for advancement	35%	52%
better work/life balance	33%	49%
More growth and development resources	31%	52%
More comprehensive benifits	31%	52%
Appreciation for my contributions	29%	44%
Summer Fridays	22%	52%
Ability to work remotely	22%	45%
Ability to work both at home and in the office	24%	40%
More generous vacation/time-off policy	24%	37%
More investment in who I am as a person	18%	34%

What's important to agency clients

The Importance of Collaboration Opportunities

Opportunities for collaboration are unquestioningly important to agency employees, with 97% saying it's either somewhat or extremely important to them.

Importance of collaboration opportunities

Extremely important	**62%**	
Somewhat important	**35%**	
Not very important	**2%**	
Not at all important	**1%**	

The Importance of DEI Initiatives

Regardless of segment or whether respondents work in AMI agencies or not, and regardless of age or gender, agency employees overwhelmingly feel that diversity, equity, and inclusiion (DEI) initiatives are very important. This is a rare question on which all groups agree.

Importance of DEI initiatives

Extremely important	**47%**
Somewhat important	**39%**
Not very important	**12%**
Not at all important	**2%**

Only 31% of respondents say their agency is currently engaging in DEI initiatives.

Agency has current DEI initiatives

Yes	**31%**
No	**42%**
I'm not sure	**26%**

AMI agency respondents are significantly more likely to say they're not sure if their agency has current DEI initiatives underway — a concerning percentage given the importance of this issue to employees, but a relatively easy one to address.

Yes	**35%**
	29%
No	**27%**
	51%
I'm not sure	**39%**
	19%