



Workplace Fact or Fiction

A GUIDE TO BUSTING HR MYTHS AND HAVING
EFFECTIVE CHECK-INS





To say that work is evolving quickly may be the understatement of the century. The disruptions put into motion by the global pandemic have caused a great reckoning for work and the workplace.

The artificial walls between work and life tumbled down. All of the complexity of our personal and work lives were blended together, never to be separated in the same way again.

The way we work has changed. But so too have the people who do the work. Factors like safety, flexibility, and equity have taken on new and more significant meaning.

Employees have different and higher expectations of work today than they did pre-2020. They expect to be treated with more care and appreciation. They want the ability to shape work to fit their lives rather than the other way around. They are looking for a better relationship with their manager.

Given how much has changed, we wondered if there are things we have traditionally accepted as true about work that no longer hold up. Do we need to challenge or update some key beliefs and assumptions we use to guide our work?

Findings from the webinar, **Secrets to Supercharge Workplace Culture**



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We decided to find out.

As part of this year's Workhuman® iQ The Evolution of Work research, which included surveying 4,100 full-time employees, we collected insights to help us sort out some workplace fact from fiction.

In the following pages, we're going to take on four examples of workplace conventional wisdom in the style of the popular television show "MythBusters." We'll explore each "myth" and share what our research reveals about it. And, of course, we'll render a judgment for each one of either CONFIRMED or BUSTED.

Regardless of the outcome of our myth busting, we'll share with you what we learned from the data to help inform your decisions about how to create a more engaging, human workplace.

This paper will close with a four-step process to help you harness recognition and the power of the check-in within your team and organizations.

But first, we have some myth busting to do.



The four “myths” we chose to investigate were the following:

1 People quit bosses, not jobs.

2 If a manager checks in frequently, the quality of the check-in is less important.

3 Manager check-ins have the biggest impact with younger and less-tenured employees.

4 Caregivers are far more likely to quit than other employees.

Let's strap on our safety goggles and get to work.

Myth #1

People quit bosses, not jobs.

One of the most commonly held beliefs about employee retention is that employees leave because of bad managers more than any other reason. This idea has been repeated so often that many accept it as fact.

Gallup's employee engagement research has for decades shown the outsized role a manager plays in how employees feel about work.

In fact, in a 2015 Gallup report titled The State of the American Manager, they directly reinforce this idea.

But this was in the world that existed prior to 2020. Is this still true today?

One in two employees have left a job to get away from a manager and improve their overall life at some point in their career.

GALLUP

Source: "State of the American Manager: Analytics and Advice for Leaders," Gallup, 2015

What the data says

In our survey sample, we asked those employees who were searching for a new job to share their main reason for doing so.

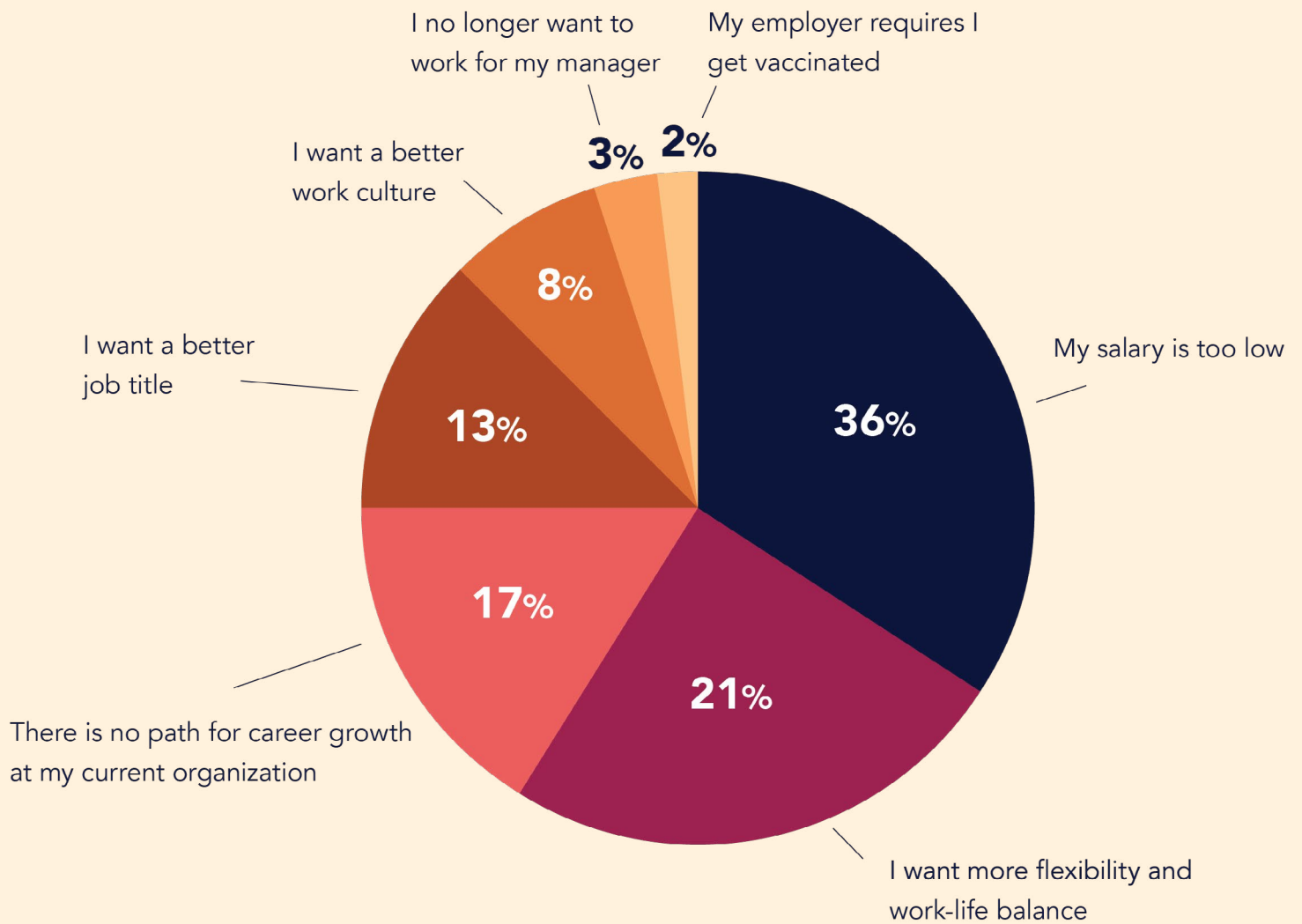
The primary reason given by 36% of respondents was “My salary is too low.” The next two most common responses were a desire for greater flexibility (21%) and a lack of career growth (17%). See all the responses in the graph on the next page.

Only 3% of those looking for a new job cited “I no longer want to work for my manager” as the reason.

Myth #1
is
BUSTED!



Why employees are searching for a new job



What this means

While it seems that the motivation for people to look for a new job may have shifted, that does not mean the manager's role is less important.

In fact, while your manager may not be the primary reason you leave, they likely play a significant role in why you stay. Gallup's data shows that your manager accounts for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores.

For example, we found that only 29% of the employees who cited their manager as the reason they were leaving reported having a weekly check-in with their manager compared to 49% for all employees surveyed.

Your interactions with your manager have a dramatic impact on your experience of work. To better understand exactly how, we turn to our next myth.





Myth #2

If a manager checks in frequently, the quality of the check-in is less important.

During the pandemic, many leaders and organizations discovered the importance of “the check-in.” As we navigated the challenges of supporting remote employees and employees working in higher-risk environments, the value of being in regular communication with employees on a one-on-one basis became very clear.

These check-ins were different from traditional one-on-one meetings. They were shorter, more personal, and focused on uncovering employee needs and challenges. These check-ins, when done effectively, allowed for recognition and coaching in real time.

The rise and broad use of the check-in is one of the silver linings that emerged from the pandemic.

But when you start talking about the effective use of check-ins, a couple of questions come up right away:

- How often should managers be checking in with employees?
- And how important is the quality of the check-in conversation?

Research suggests that daily check-ins are desirable. But what about the quality of the check-in? Is frequency more important than quality?



What the data says

In the evolution of work survey, we ask questions to assess the impact of the employee's work experience across several important outcomes including engagement, psychological safety, stress, and burnout.

Our data supports the conclusion that more frequent check-ins lead to improved outcomes. All outcomes improve as frequency increases up to the point of at least once per week, which appears to be the ideal frequency.

But frequency alone isn't enough. To measure check-in quality, we asked employees how often “items of importance to you” are discussed in check-ins with their manager. What our data shows is that to reap the true rewards of having those weekly or daily check-ins, the quality is vitally important.

The lower the quality of the check-in, the less likely it is to have a positive impact, regardless of frequency. In fact, our data suggests that a low-quality check-in is worse than having no check-in at all.

**Myth #2
is
BUSTED!**

Psychological safety increases more with quality than quantity

Psychological safety score (1-5 scale)

Check-in quality – Is it time well spent?		Psychological safety score (1-5 scale)				
		Annually	Quarterly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
	Always	3.84	3.92	4.05	4.14	4.05
	Often	3.58	3.61	3.67	3.76	3.74
	Sometimes	3.18	3.23	3.29	3.40	3.47
	Rarely	2.74	2.96	2.91	3.09	3.15
	Never	2.70	2.79	2.66	3.09	3.15
		Check-in frequency				

What this means

Strengthening any relationship requires spending “quality time” together talking about the things that really matter. These conversations make people feel seen and understood, recognizing their contributions to the relationship. The work relationship is no different.

Regularly scheduled check-ins between managers and employees are a necessity in building a high-performing human organization. For the check-ins to have the most impact, they need to happen at least weekly and be focused on discussing items of importance to the employee.

Equipping managers with the tools and training to have high-quality check-ins with employees should be at the top of your priority list to improve engagement, performance, and wellbeing.

Myth #3

Manager check-ins have the biggest impact with younger and less-tenured employees.

As a manager, it's easy to assume that certain employees need you to check in more than others. Surely some employees benefit more from the investment of your time than others.

For example, the importance of checking in with newer employees is obvious. When you are new, you have questions and require a lot of support. This is even more true when working in a remote or hybrid workplace where you can't simply ask the person sitting next to you.

As a manager with a busy schedule and limited time, it seems wise to spend more time with those newer and younger employees than those who are more tenured and established.

But is it?

What the data says

What we discovered is that while check-ins are certainly important for younger and newer employees, **they are just as important for all employees.**

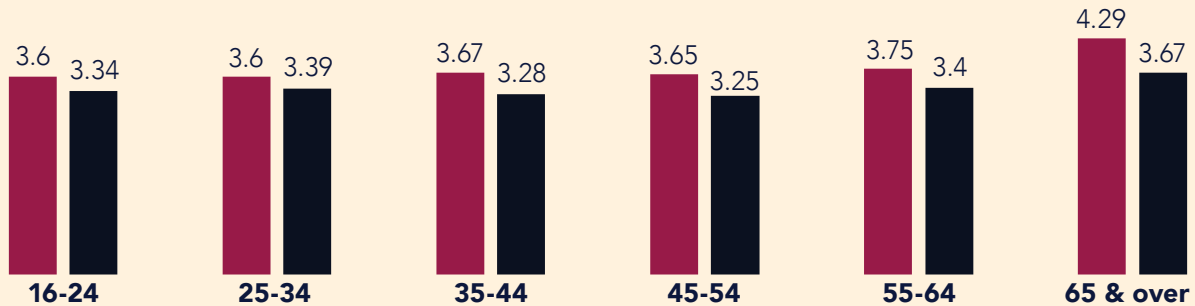
We see better outcomes for employees who check in at least weekly across all age groups, tenure, role, and career stages. In fact, for some outcomes like psychological safety, the impact of a weekly check-in was more significant for older and more tenured employees than their newer or younger counterparts. Check out the data on the next page.



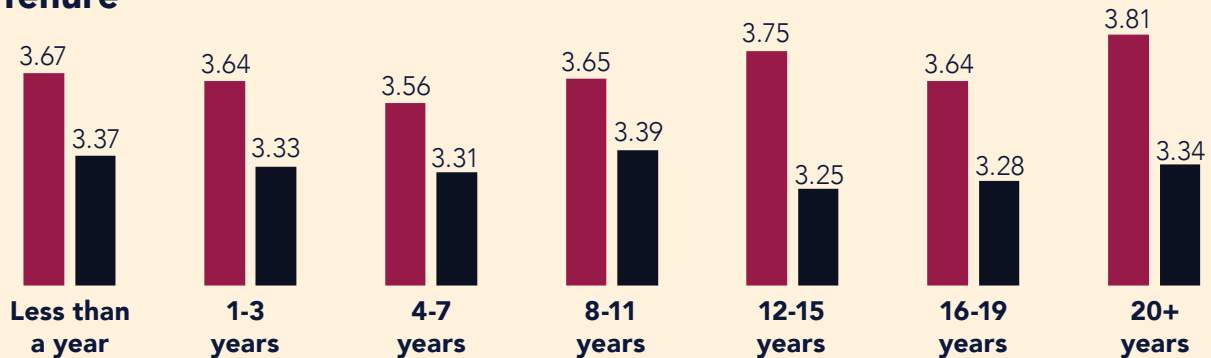
Myth #3
is
BUSTED!

Psychological safety scores on a 1-5 scale

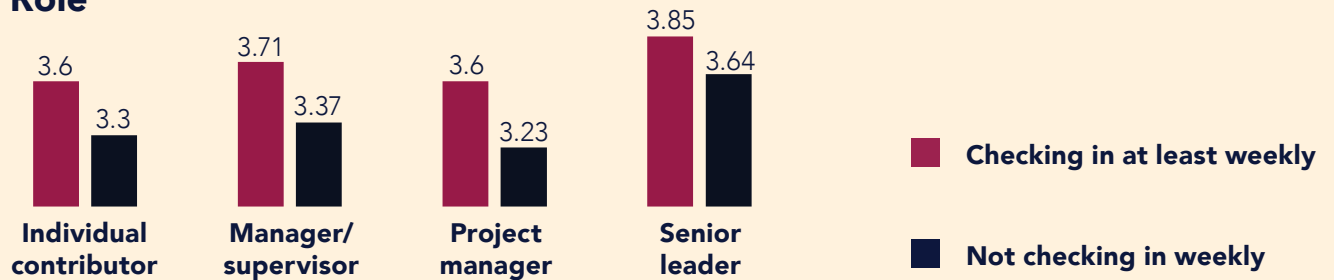
Age



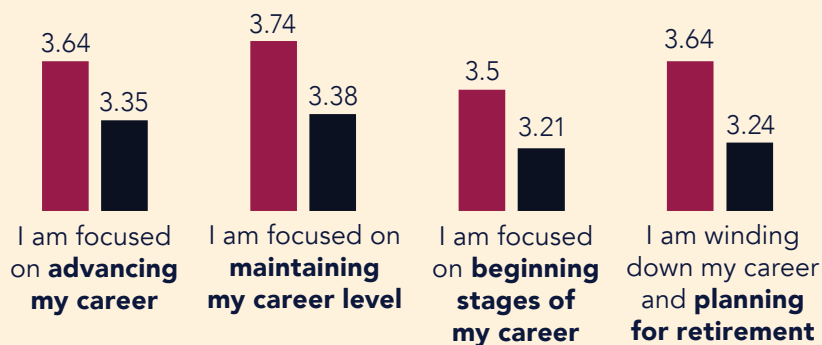
Tenure



Role



Career stage





What this means

As tempting as it may be to assume that your more tenured staff don't need as much of your time and attention as a manager, it's just not true.

Meaningful, weekly check-ins with their manager are important for every employee regardless of their age, tenure, role, or career motivation.

Myth #4

Caregivers are far more likely to quit than other employees.

While it is certainly not a new issue, the pandemic put a light on the struggles of working caregivers. When work from home and school at home collided, it became more difficult to ignore the very real challenges caregivers face.

One Harvard study estimates that the percent of employees who have some type of caregiving responsibilities is as high as 73%. According to another study, the average caregiving employee provides 20 hours of unpaid caregiving hours per week.

So, it should come as no surprise that even before the pandemic, 32% of employees in the Harvard study revealed that they had quit a job because of caregiving responsibilities. Caregivers are carrying a double workload and that seems to make them more likely to quit their jobs historically.

As work has become more flexible, is this still true today?

What the data says

Unfortunately, our data doesn't show that things have improved for caregivers at work. In fact, caregivers appear to be struggling and very much at risk.

Our data reveals that caregivers are more stressed, are more fearful of losing their job, and show more signs of burnout than their non-caregiving peers. So, it shouldn't be surprising that 43% of caregivers are looking for a new job, a significantly higher number than the 34% of non-caregivers.

One bit of good news in our data about caregivers is that high-quality, weekly check-ins are just as effective and powerful for caregivers as with other employees.

Myth #4 is **CONFIRMED!**

Caretakers are more likely to be looking for a new job overall

especially among those whose caretaking responsibilities fall during the workday.

Among
job-seekers:

34%

are non-caretakers

43%

are caretakers

37%

average across sample



What this means

The state of caregivers in the workforce is cause for alarm. Even with greater flexibility, it's clear that not enough is being done to support these vital members of your team.

And while you would be justified in worrying about turnover among caregivers, even those who are not leaving are likely struggling in other ways. According to the Harvard study, “more than 80% of employees with caregiving responsibilities admitted that caregiving affected their productivity – specifically, their ability to perform their best at work.”

It's time to invest in better ways to support caregiving employees; to not do so comes at a high cost.

One simple thing you can do immediately is to ensure they are having weekly, quality check-ins with their manager.



The four steps of an effective check-in

The check-in conversation is a technique to skillfully invite the conversations that matter. It's a vital skill to master as a manager and leader, but it's also vital if you want to be a great partner, parent, or friend.

When you check in well, you get to the truth of what's really going on with the other person. This allows you to then provide the compassion, support, and appreciation that will foster a stronger relationship.

Every meaningful check-in conversation has four steps, regardless of whether you are checking in on someone's wellbeing, the status of your relationship, or career progression.

Let's get into it.

Check-in conversation step #1: Ask a great question.

Most well-intentioned check-ins go wrong before they even get started because we ask bad questions.

We are all guilty of it. Think about the last time you checked in with someone. What question did you ask them?

I'd bet it was one of the following:

How are you? How's it going? How have you been?

All seemingly nice questions, but what kind of response do you typically get to these questions?

Fine. Good. Busy.

One word that tells you nothing other than they don't really believe you want to have a conversation with them.



A great question invites a response that demands a follow-up question.

My favorite universal check-in question is actually a simple modification of one of the questions above. Here it is.

How are you on a scale from 1 to 10 (with 10 being “couldn’t be better” and 1 being “couldn’t be worse”)?

The beauty of this question is that it doesn’t take long for them to respond and whatever number they share is a doorway into a meaningful conversation.

Any question that invites a response that requires a follow-up is likely a great question for a check-in conversation. For more examples, [you can click here to download a list of 18 Great Check-In Questions.](#)

This brings us to the obvious next step.



Check-in conversation step #2: Ask the follow-up question(s).

Once you ask a great question and get the initial response, you obviously need to ask the follow-up question that invites the conversation that matters.

The important thing to remember when asking the follow-up question(s) is that the goal of the check-in is for you to get an understanding of what's really going on with the other person. This means being open, curious, and nonjudgmental – regardless of what they say. This is an opportunity to foster psychological safety.

The follow-up questions you ask will depend on what great question you started with.

For the question above, the follow-up depends on the number the person shares with you.

- If they share a number of 7 or higher, it's an invitation for you to learn about and connect with them. You might ask, "What's going well for you right now?"
- If it's a number between 4 and 6, you might want to ask a couple of questions to explore what's going well and where they are struggling. A great follow-up question here is, "What's keeping your number from being an 8 or 9 today?"
- If they share a number of 3 or lower, this is a call for help and requires a different kind of compassionate follow-up. You might say, "I'm sorry to hear that. What's pulling that number down for you today?"

The follow-up question opens the door to the conversation you want to have. Be thoughtful, curious, and caring in your follow-up and the person on the other side of the conversation will usually reward you by sharing what's going on.



Check-in conversation step #3: Really listen.

While this may seem obvious, the next vital step is to close your mouth, open your ears (and eyes), and really listen to what's being shared.

When we ask a great question and a thoughtful follow-up, the sharing and conversation that really matter can begin. To get the most out of this opportunity, it's critical to pay close attention to what's being communicated. This includes what's being said, but also what's not being said. You should pay close attention to the non-verbals being shared as well.

Listen patiently and allow the person to open up. When it makes sense, ask more follow-up questions.

Your goal is to learn and understand what's really going on with that person. And once you've done that, you can move to the final step.



Check-in conversation step #4: Offer support and encouragement.

The last step of an effective check-in is to connect the conversation to your desire to be supportive of the other person.

If the conversation reveals that the individual is struggling, what support can you offer to them to help them through the challenges?

This doesn't mean you have to solve their problem. In fact, it's often more powerful to ask a question like "How can I help?" or "What does support from me look like for you right now?"

If the conversation focuses more on what's going well, then it's a great practice to close the conversation by providing some specific recognition of the employee's contributions and progress. Or you might share how excited you are for them and ask if there's anything you could do for them to be supportive.

Closing the check-in by offering support and encouragement is a vital step to validating for the employee that their decision to open up and share was a good choice.

When you follow these four steps consistently, you will build trust and goodwill in the relationships with your people. This will in turn lead to increased loyalty and commitment.

The future of work is human

As the dynamics of work shift and the way we work evolves, one thing remains constant: the power of human connection.

Regardless of where or how they work, employees need their relationship with work to be a strong and healthy one. They need to know they are cared for, supported, and appreciated at work. The most effective way to ensure that happens is through effective check-ins between managers and employees.

As we've shared throughout this paper, check-ins are a powerful tool to retain, engage, and elevate the performance of all employees. They may be one of the most effective tools we have to foster a more human experience of work.

To make your organization more resilient as work continues to evolve into the future, equip your managers with the skills and tools to effectively check in with their people.

Want to combine agile performance development with structured feedback and assessments to create a culture of connection and growth? Let's talk.

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