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Great resignation, employee well-being and return to office drive future of work in Pacific Northwest

Amid new and continued challenges presented by labor shortages, hybrid work and COVID-19, PNW businesses and employees remain resilient and even optimistic about job opportunities in the region.

PULLMAN, Wash., February 8, 2022 – The future of work in the Pacific Northwest will be largely determined by the great resignation, evolving employee expectations and the debate over return to office, according to the [2022 Business in the Northwest report](#) from Washington State University's Carson College of Business.

After nearly two years of unprecedented uncertainty, the college's fifth annual report found this year's challenges centered on increasing competition for talent, the benefits and disadvantages of flexible work and the impact of COVID on Gen-Z employees—many of whom feel behind because they haven't had a traditional office experience.

"This was another tough year, but businesses across the region rose to meet the challenges presented by 2021, remaining resilient yet nimble despite ever-changing conditions," said Chip Hunter, Carson College of Business dean. "As we approach the two-year anniversary of COVID, we anticipate continued re-strengthening of the PNW business climate in 2022 and an evolving economy."

The report surveyed more than 1,000 PNW business leaders, employees and Gen Z employees about the state of business in the region and how new and existing challenges have affected them.

Key findings include:

- **New challenges: While areas such as sales volume, revenue and profitability appear to be rebounding from the impacts of COVID, business leaders are now struggling with production and labor shortages.**
 - This year, 41% of business leaders saw a decline in production over sales volume (37%), revenue (32%) and profitability (36%).
 - Similar to national employment trends, the PNW is also struggling to attract and retain employees: 69% of PNW business leaders say they want to create more job opportunities at their company but are not confident there are enough qualified applicants to fill them.

- Employees, too, are concerned about the labor shortage and the challenges around hiring and retaining employees: 30% say the inability to fill open positions is one of the top barriers to their companies' success in the next year.
- Despite challenges, 76% of business leaders and 63% of employees are optimistic about job opportunities in the PNW.
- **Employee experience: Now, more than ever, most PNW employees feel it is crucial to work for a company that cares about employee well-being and has values that align with their own.**
 - PNW employees (93%) feel it is crucial to work for a company that cares about employee well-being
 - 8 in 10 Gen Z employees only want to work for companies whose values align with their own.
 - 82% of Gen-Z employees say diversity, equity and inclusion is a “must have” in the workplace
 - Top changes that have had a positive impact on employee morale according to:
 - Business leaders: flexible work hours (75%)
 - Employees: raised wages (82%)
 - Gen Z employees: additional training opportunities (74%)
 - Business leaders (91%) and Gen Z employees (92%) also feel it is crucial their company cares about their well-being.
 - 75% of business leaders and 62% of employees *only* want to work for a company with clear mental health offerings.
- **Return to office: Safety concerns are no longer the primary reason many professionals favor remote work. Employees and employers alike prefer flexibility but admit it has made collaboration and communication more difficult.**
 - 76% of business leaders and 73% of employees feel it is safe to return to the workplace in person.
 - Despite this, the future of work is a continuing conversation: 71% of business leaders and 59% of employees think working in a traditional 9 to 5 office setting is not realistic for them.
 - There are disadvantages to remote work: 38% of PNW employees report it has the most negative impact on collaboration and teamwork.
 - Amid the ongoing debate, 60% of business leaders and 71% of employees say their company has a plan to return to the office full-time.
- **GEN-Z outlook: While Gen Z employees are most likely to feel COVID hindered their growth, they remain optimistic about the future.**
 - Gen-Z employees, many of whom entered the workforce during the pandemic, are questioning its impact: 67% feel they are behind some coworkers and peers because they never had the traditional office/onsite work experience.
 - More than any other generation, Gen Z employees (61%) feel their job responsibilities and expectations have changed a lot since COVID-19 began.
 - Despite these concerns, 71% found they work best in a flexible work environment.
 - Amid uncertainty, there is still optimism: Gen Z employees feel much less worried (49%) about the growth potential of their career than they did last year (68%).

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About the Carson College of Business

The WSU Carson College of Business is accredited across all business disciplines at the baccalaureate, masters and doctoral levels by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. Faculty across disciplines produce scholarly and applied research at the main campus in Pullman as well as at urban campuses in Vancouver, Everett and the Tri-Cities. International activities include academic centers in China and Switzerland as well as thriving partnerships with several schools around the globe. Innovative online programs supplement face-to-face offerings.