

WHY

RETURN TO OFFICE

WORKS

WHEN THE OFFICE ADDS VALUE

**INSIGHTS FROM 2025
WORKFORCE TRENDS**

1. RTO WORKS WHEN OFFICES FUNCTION AS EXPERIENCE HUBS

According to a report created by [Circles](#), A Sodexo Company, voluntary attendance increased in 2025 where workplaces prioritize functioning as a multi-purpose destinations rather than a traditional administrative environment.

WHAT DRIVES ATTENDANCE:

- Onsite services that reduce life friction
- Spaces designed for collaboration and focus
- Amenities that support health and productivity
- Hospitality-style operations instead of static facilities



WHAT REDUCES ATTENDANCE:

- Uniform mandates with no added value
- Offices designed only for meetings
- Experiences identical to remote work

STRATEGIC INSIGHT:

Employees return when the workplace improves their day, not when their schedule is mandated.

2. ENGAGEMENT DECLINES INCREASE PRESSURE TO IMPROVE IN-PERSON EXPERIENCE

Employee engagement refers to the degree of motivation, commitment and discretionary effort employees put toward their work and their organization. High engagement correlates with higher productivity, lower turnover, and greater participation in culture-building activities, including in-person collaboration. Low engagement reflects detachment, reduced effort, and a higher likelihood of attrition.

Recent industry data shows a sustained decline:

- Global engagement fell to 21% in 2024 ([Gallup](#))
- U.S. engagement fell to 31% ([Gallup](#))
- Manager engagement fell to 27% globally ([Business Insider](#))

Lower engagement increases the importance of workplaces that foster purpose, connection, and support, especially for employees who already feel disconnected from their employer. In-person environments play a role here, but only when designed to enable belonging, collaboration and meaningful interaction



Implication:

Organizations cannot rely on physical presence alone. RTO succeeds when the workplace actively improves engagement rather than assuming attendance automatically produces it.

GENERATIONAL COMPARISON:

COHORT	DRIVES ENGAGEMENT	DECREASES ENGAGEMENT
GEN Z	MENTORSHIP, BELONGING, MENTAL HEALTH	RIGID HIERARCHY
MILLENNIALS	RAPID GROWTH + PURPOSE	UNCLEAR PATHWAYS
GEN X	AUTONOMY + TRANSPARENCY	ADMINISTRATIVE DRAG
BABY BOOMERS	STABILITY + RECOGNITION	LACK OF VALUE IN CHANGE

Implication:

RTO succeeds when workplaces enable engagement drivers that different generations value.



3. WELL-BEING INVESTMENTS ARE BECOMING ROI-FOCUSED

Organizations are prioritizing well-being programs tied to measurable business value.



HIGH-IMPACT INVESTMENT AREAS:

- Mental health + resilience
- Financial wellness (debt, retirement readiness)
- Flexible arrangements that reduce burnout
- Manager training for psychological safety

SUPPORTING METRICS:

- Well-being programs generate 4–6× ROI, sometimes up to 11×, ([Wellbeing People](#))
- Global workforce health improvement could unlock \$11.7T in value, ([McKinsey Health Institute](#))

4. COMMUNITY BUILDING IS A RETENTION STRATEGY

The Circles report emphasizes that hybrid models weaken informal interaction, increasing the need for structured community-building.



EFFECTIVE APPROACHES:

- Purpose-driven service events
- Life-stage-based ERGs (parents, early-career, wellness)
- Relocation-aware onboarding that connects socially
- Mentorship + shadowing assignments

Why it matters:

- Positive workplace experience → 68% less likely to consider leaving

5. WHY REMOTE WORK REMAINS A VIABLE LONG-TERM OPTION

While RTO gains momentum, remote work continues to deliver value when properly structured.

KEY 2025 STATISTICS:

22% of U.S. employees work fully remote, (Neat)

83% prefer hybrid work, (Neat)

76% say flexibility impacts retention, (Robert Half)

Job postings:

- **24% hybrid**
- **12% remote**

(Robert Half)



Most effective when:

- Supporting technical/individual-contributor roles
- Expanding geographic talent pools
- Paired with periodic in-person collaboration
- Combined with structured digital onboarding

Balanced strategy:

Remote accelerates productivity; the office accelerates connection.

6. AI ENABLES CULTURE WHEN APPLIED TRANSPARENTLY

Circles notes increasing adoption of AI for burnout detection, onboarding, workflow optimization, and experience personalization.

Best-practice guidelines:

- Use AI to augment, not surveil
- Retain human oversight in decision-making
- Communicate what data is collected and why
- Prioritize fairness and bias monitoring

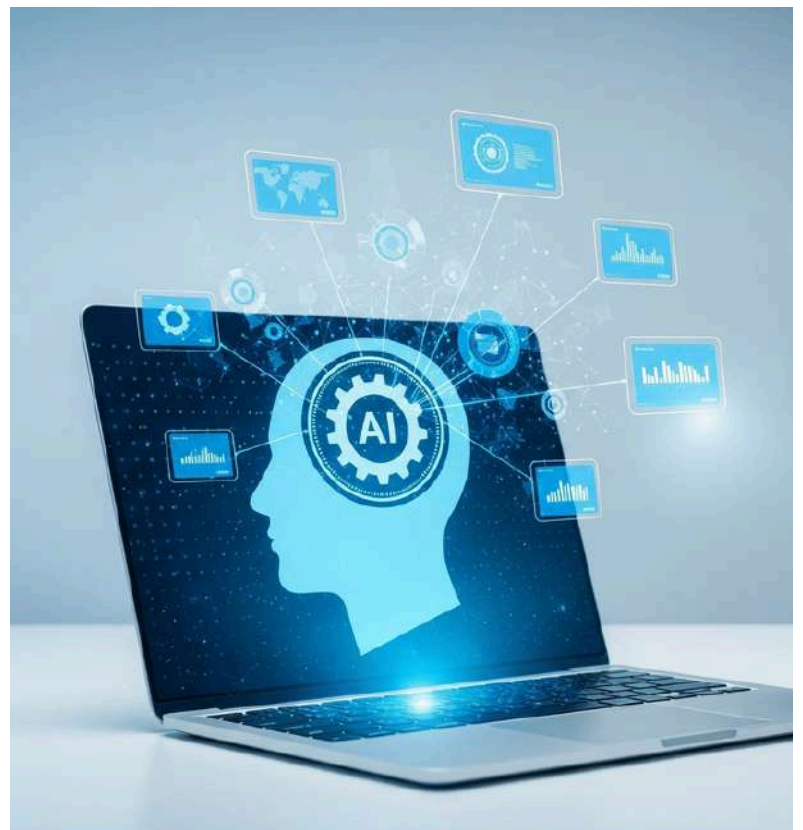
Adoption insight:

- 75% of employees are more accepting of AI when usage is transparent, ([UKG](#))

Conclusion

RTO works when the workplace:

- Enhances collaboration and community
- Reduces daily friction
- Aligns with life-stage needs
- Supports wellbeing with measurable impact



Remote work remains a viable strategy for roles where geographic flexibility, focus and autonomy drive performance. The future is not binary, it is **in-person when it matters, remote when it works**, supported by environments designed around the full employee lifecycle.