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## **Advancing Health and Well-Being in Hospitality: Employers Respond to New Workforce Expectations**

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**Advancing Health and Well-Being in Hospitality:  
Employers Respond to New Workforce Expectations**

Research Report

June 30, 2023

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## ABOUT KENDALL COLLEGE AT NATIONAL LOUIS UNIVERSITY

The Kendall College of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management at National Louis University is a leader in Chicago for preparing students for careers in these fields. The college prepares students for successful careers and eventual leadership roles across the foodservice and hospitality industries. We combine a strong academic foundation with transformative practical experience, so our students are ready to hit the ground running when they embark on their chosen careers.

Students who earn a B.A. degree in Hospitality Management have the opportunity to focus in various concentration areas. Chicago's leading hotels rank the program the No. 1 Chicago program for preparing students for hospitality management careers. The program's focus is on the combination of theory and application. The core curriculum includes fundamental business management classes with an emphasis on the hospitality industry.

Programs in Culinary Arts prepare students for successful careers through strong professional skill development, comprehensive and current understanding of the foodservice industry, environmental awareness, and exemplary professional demeanor. Appropriate to their program of study, graduates of Culinary Arts programs gain a working knowledge of business principles and a broad appreciation of the knowledge and skills required for global citizenry.

For more information, visit <https://nl.edu/kendall-college/>

## Kendall College Research Team



**Deborah Popely, DBA, Professor of Hospitality Management** is the lead investigator and former Chair of Hospitality Management at Kendall College. She is an author, publisher, researcher and entrepreneur with a focus on resilience, leadership and sustainable operations in the hospitality industry. She has held executive positions in several mid-sized organizations and is a recognized voice in the hospitality industry, as well as a frequent contributor to industry and academic publications.



**Leigh Uhlir, Dean, Kendall College at National Louis University** oversees the college's academic programs, research and thought-leadership agenda. She is a Kendall College graduate with more than 20 years' experience working for some of the nation's leading hospitality companies and restaurants. In 2006, she shifted her focus to training and education, joining Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Chicago, where she taught and led faculty for 8 years. She joined Kendall College in 2014, where she played a pivotal role in building the college and leading it through its merger with National Louis University. She continues to use her leadership skills to innovate and advocate for the restaurant industry and allied hospitality businesses in the hotel, events and tourism sectors.

**Acknowledgements:** We would like to thank the James Beard Foundation, the Illinois Hotel & Lodging Association, and the Illinois Restaurant Association for their assistance in recruiting participants for this study. We would also like to thank Datassential for collaborating with us to include questions on wellness and well-being in their May 2023 omnibus national food service survey and sharing those findings with us for this report.

## Executive Summary

Kendall College at National Louis University conducted research between Fall 2022 and Spring 2023 on the status of health and well-being initiatives in hospitality. The research involved in-depth surveys with 27 hotels and 18 restaurants, for a total sample of 45 hospitality businesses located primarily in the Chicago region.

Our research focused on the following key questions:

- What is the current experience with employee turnover and what factors are driving turnover?
- How important is health and well-being to job candidates, current employees and the organization as a whole?
- What types of wellness initiatives are hospitality businesses investing in and how have these changed?
- How are mental health and emotional well-being specifically being addressed?
- What do hospitality businesses hope to achieve with these initiatives?
- How are managers evaluating the impact and value of these efforts?

In addition, working collaboratively with the national food service research firm, Datassential, a sample of 401 food service providers from across the U.S. were queried about current employer initiatives related to wellness and mental health. Results are discussed separately below.

### **Challenges and Response**

Many people have left the hospitality and tourism industry or chosen other career paths as a result of the pandemic and other stressors. Creating a healthy, inclusive workplace culture that can help attract and retain the hospitality workforce is a critical issue for the hospitality industry. Hospitality managers across industry sectors are revisiting policies and practices and prioritizing employee health and well-being in new ways, experimenting with a wide range of strategies that could have long-lasting impact on workers and operations. These strategies include increasing pay and adding benefits, modifying schedules to promote work-life balance, initiating new training programs, and creating new pathways for advancement. The results are the beginning of a long-coming transformation that has implications for the nature of work and the well-being of millions.

## Recap of Findings

1. Stressful working conditions are driving turnover: Turnover has been and will continue to be a feature of running a hospitality business. The research highlights how high turnover begets more turnover as the pressures of short staffing and inflexible scheduling lead to physical and emotional burnout. Low pay, long hours and abuse from peers and guests were cited as other major turnover contributors, in particular by restaurant respondents.
2. Job candidates are prioritizing work-life balance: Managers and hiring executives attest that hospitality job seekers are looking for healthy, safe and inclusive work environments with reliable, supportive people who take employees' needs into consideration. Adequate compensation and flexibility (e.g., scheduling that supports a healthy and balanced lifestyle) top the list of job considerations, along with traditional concerns about titles and opportunities for advancement.
3. Health and well-being are becoming more important: Survey participants believe that employer support for health and well-being is an important factor in attracting and retaining employees, and has only become more important since the pandemic – although they think it is slightly more important to employees than to organizations.
4. The definition of wellness is expanding: Traditional wellness topics such as cholesterol and blood pressure screenings, weight management, and smoking cessation have made way for a wide variety of strategies that go to the heart of working conditions in the industry, with increased compensation and health benefits among the most prominent. Employers are taking more responsibility for establishing work cultures that support wellness rather than placing the onus on employees to cope on their own, with the goal of enhancing recruitment and retention and improving productivity rather than simply controlling healthcare costs.
5. There is more emphasis on work-life balance: Employers are touting quality-of-life factors such as paid time off, limited overtime, reduced scheduling/40-hour work weeks, and extended personal/parental leave. Well-being efforts often

include fitness memberships, tuition reimbursement, retirement planning, and discounts on products and services. A small segment, mostly restaurants, are also thinking about inclusion and social justice.

6. Employers are investing in mental health: EAPs and other mental health services were the most frequently cited offerings in the Kendall survey, along with wellness workshops or trainings and yoga/meditation/relaxation. Nearly half of the Datassential food service sample claimed to offer health benefits that cover mental health and well-being services, such as therapy or medication, along with a time or place to take a timeout and destress for employees. Flexible scheduling that takes into account the employees personal needs was mentioned repeatedly as a strategy for supporting mental well-being.
  
7. Evaluation and measurement is at an embryonic stage: Few participants had concrete plans to evaluate the impact of their well-being strategies. The majority of respondents hoped to see the benefits reflected in retention and turnover trends or shared in employee feedback. The food service providers expected to rely mostly on real-time observation of attitude and productivity along with feedback gleaned through formal and informal interaction with their teams.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Investing in employee health and well-being has become a necessary step for hospitality employers in the intense competition to attract and retain the necessary talent. The trend presents a variety of challenges, as operational and financial barriers make it difficult to devote time, energy and resources to this aspect of the business, especially in the restaurant sector.

In the past, the burden of coping with the physical and emotional challenges of the erratic hospitality workplace was on the employee. It is heartening to find that so many operators are attempting to address the underlying conditions of low pay, lack of benefits, and long hours made worse by inflexible and unpredictable scheduling, and so many are instituting benefits such as paid time off and family leave that are commonplace in other industries. Yoga and meditation rooms may well fall by the wayside, but realistic efforts to support work-life balance could make a real difference

in changing the daily experience and perception of hospitality careers and attracting sorely needed talent to the industry.

It is important to acknowledge that not everyone is onboard with these trends. A sizeable percentage of participants reported having no specific wellness program (30% of the Kendall combined hotel/restaurant sample and 14% of the Datassential food service sample). A small number of food service respondents reacted negatively, commenting that individuals who lacked the fortitude should self-select out of the industry.

The long-term impact of wellness and well-being initiatives on recruitment, retention and turnover are still unclear. There are at present limited plans by employers to measure which interventions work best and why. Additional research is needed to examine the net effect from both an employer and employee perspective.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The Kendall College survey sample is small and non-representative. The sample is skewed toward larger hotel brands and restaurant groups operating in the Chicagoland area and may not reflect the experience of other types of hotels/restaurants in other locations. Participants self-selected based on interest in employee health and well-being, potentially excluding contradictory data which showed up in the more categorically and geographically balanced national Datassential food service sample. An additional concern is the wide variation in the meaning of wellness and well-being and what constitutes a program (formal or informal) to different operators. Future research should help sort out the differing focus and scope of these offerings.

## Background

Well-being is an important topic in the hospitality industry. Lack of support for health and well-being is among the top 10 reasons for quitting a previous job in 2021-2022 (De Smet et al, 2022), helping fuel the “Great Resignation.” Since the pandemic, many people have left hospitality and tourism or chosen other career paths. Hospitality employment has had a reputation for physically and emotionally challenging work environments. Stressful working conditions, irregular hours, inconsistent pay, lack of health benefits and stressful interactions with customers, exacerbated by the pandemic, have led to historically high rates of burnout, substance abuse and suicide among hospitality workers (Deery, 2008; DiPietro and Condly, 2007; Hofmann and Stikburger-Sauer, 2017; Zhang, et al., 2020). Hospitality has one of the highest incidences of alcohol abuse (Hight and Park, 2019) and highest reported rate of suicide (Peterson, 2020).

Hospitality professionals work in a fast-paced, high-pressure environment with limited time and resources to devote to employee well-being. Working long hours, nights and weekends, and with frequently changing shifts has been an industry norm. Many recognize the need to address the problems of employee stress, burnout and associated turnover, but may not know where to focus their finite energies. Owners and managers also face difficult operational and financial barriers, especially in the restaurant sector with its demanding hours, intense pace and razor-thin profit margins.

The goal of this research is to help managers get a clearer understanding of the relationship between working conditions and employee well-being and identify strategies they may employ for maintaining a healthy and satisfied workforce. Sharing this information with current employees can help them advocate for practices that enhance their well-being and change public attitudes towards hospitality careers.

While this research is suggestive of trends, it is not definitive. The subject requires more research to better understand the impact of these strategies on the experience of employers and employees, and to determine which interventions are most effective and why. Further research also should attempt to better define the scope and focus of well-being support.

## Methodology and Participants

Research was conducted by in-depth survey between Fall 2022 and Winter 2023. There were a total of 45 responses (27 hotel and 18 restaurant) to the in-depth survey, although not all participants responded to every question, which is noted for each question below.

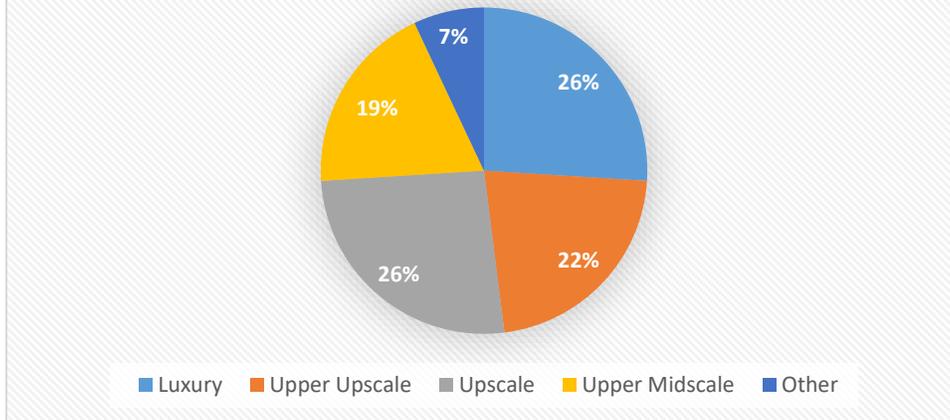
The in-depth survey instrument collected demographic data and asked respondents to respond to a series of closed-ended questions related to turnover, employee expectations, and wellness program goals, structure, offerings and usage. It also included open-ended questions about how wellness and well-being programs were evolving, along with any other strategies being used to recruit and retain employees. There was also an open-ended question on how the respondents intended to evaluate their initiatives and a space for adding any other comments about employee health and well-being. See the Appendix for sample hotel and restaurant survey questions.

### **A. Hotel Sample Profile**

The hotel sample consisted of 27 hotels, with 23 (85%) in the City of Chicago and the remainder (4) outside the Chicagoland area. Respondents were evenly divided by gender and nearly 75% were between the ages of 30 – 60. Most (84%) had worked in the industry for more than 11 years and more than half more than 21 years. Half the respondents were General Managers or other senior managers and half were hiring executives or human resource specialists.

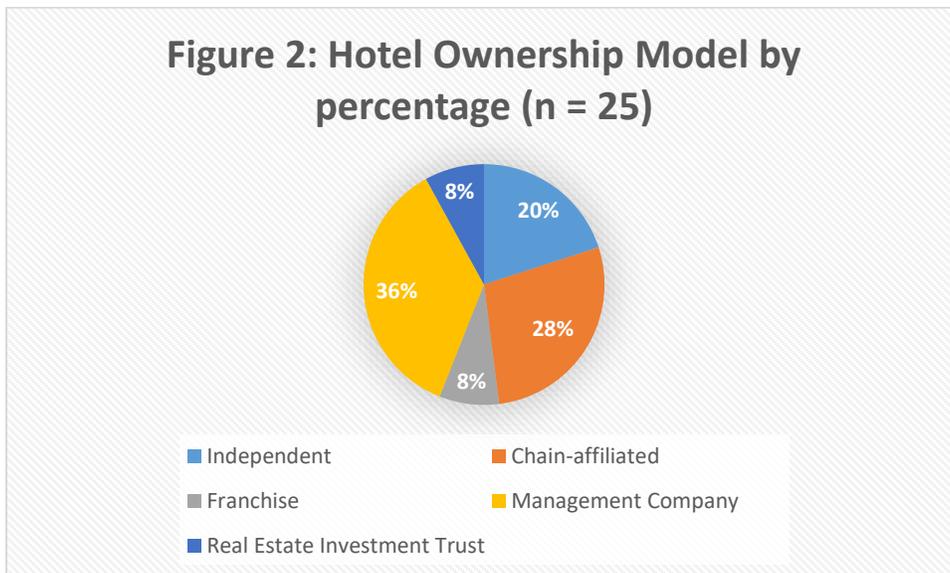
Brand Segment: Nearly all of the hotels were upper midscale or higher, with the largest segments in the luxury (26%) and upscale (26%) categories. Other (7%) consisted of boutique/lifestyle hotels. There were no midscale or economy hotels represented in our sample.

**Figure 1: Hotel Brand Segment by percentage (n = 27)**



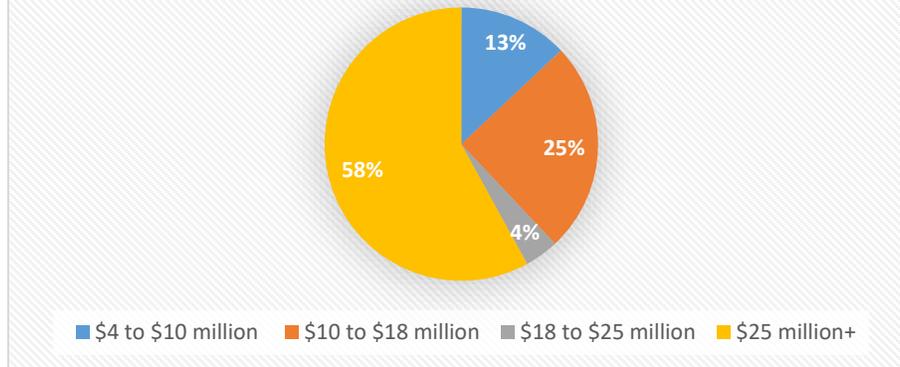
**Ownership Model:** The majority of the hotels were either hotel management company, chain-affiliated, or franchise (72%). Only 5 (20%) were independent hotels.

**Figure 2: Hotel Ownership Model by percentage (n = 25)**



**Annual Revenue:** The majority of hotels (15 or 62%) generated \$18 million or more in annual revenues. Sixteen (64%) had more than 300 rooms and approximately 30% had 299 rooms or fewer.

**Figure 3: Hotel Annual Revenues  
by percentage (n = 24)**

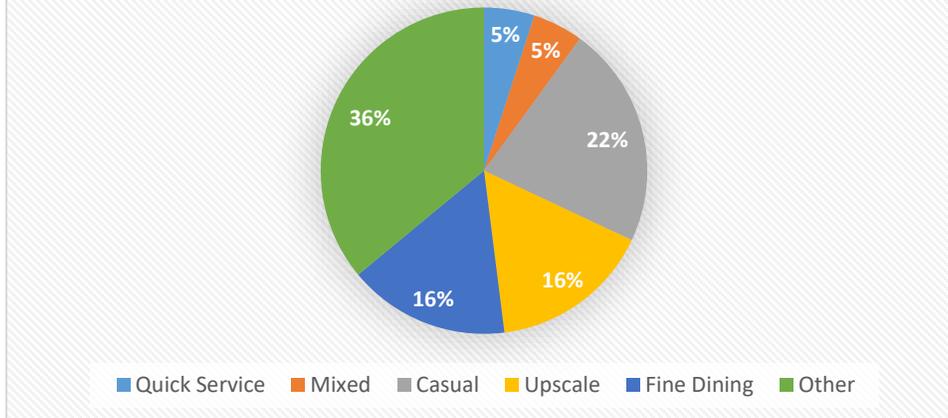


### **B. Restaurant Sample Profile**

The restaurant sample consisted of 18 food and beverage businesses. Fourteen (84%) were located in the City of Chicago, 3 (18%) were located in the Chicago suburbs and one was out-of-state (1%). Several were restaurant groups with multiple locations across the U.S. Respondents were evenly divided by gender, most (55%) between the ages of 30 – 50. The majority (66%) have worked for more than 10 years in the industry. Most (10 or 55%) were hiring executives, 8 (40%) were chefs or owners and 2 (11%) were managers.

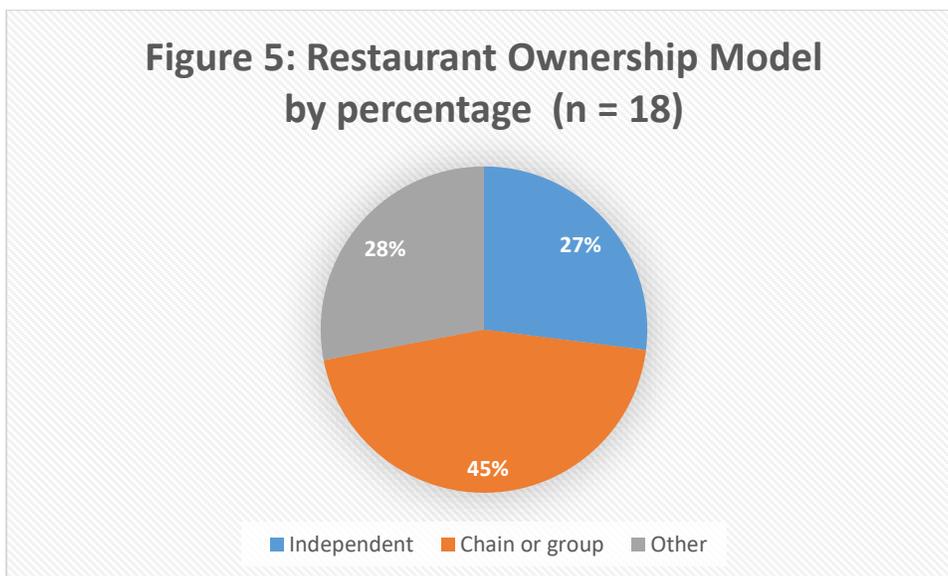
Service Type (Fig.4): All types of restaurants were represented, with the preponderance being upscale and fine dining (32%) and casual (22%). Two (10%) were quick service or mixed type. Others (36%) included private dining, food halls and catering/events businesses.

**Figure 4: Restaurant Service Types by percentage (n = 18)**



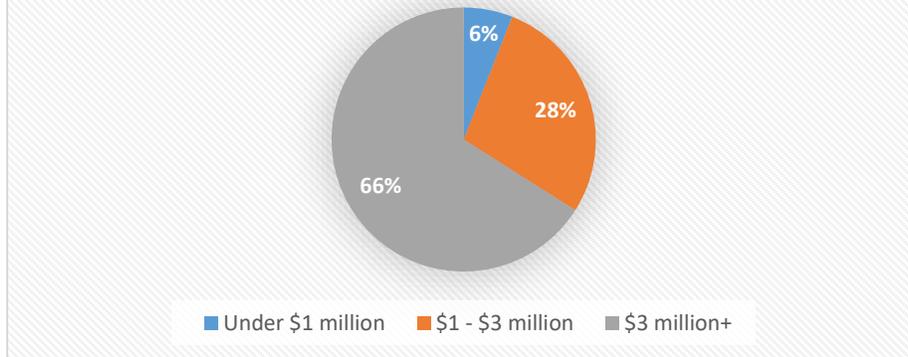
**Ownership model:** Respondents consisted primarily of chains or groups (45%) or independent operators (27%). Others (28%) consisted of corporate, hotel, catering/events, and country clubs).

**Figure 5: Restaurant Ownership Model by percentage (n = 18)**



**Annual Revenues:** Most of the respondents reported revenues of \$3 million+ (67%) or \$1 – 3 million (28%). 75% had 100 seats or more.

**Figure 6: Restaurant Annual Revenue  
by percentage (n = 18)**



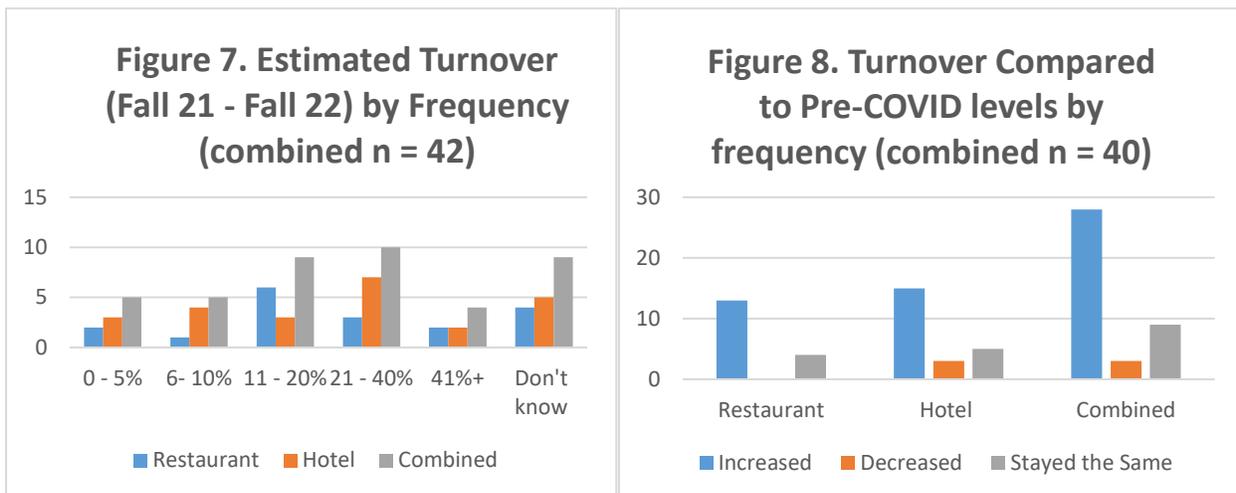
A separate sample of 401 food service providers was collected through an omnibus survey containing two key wellness questions fielded by the restaurant research firm, Datassential. These findings are reported in a separate section below.

## Detailed In-Depth Survey Findings

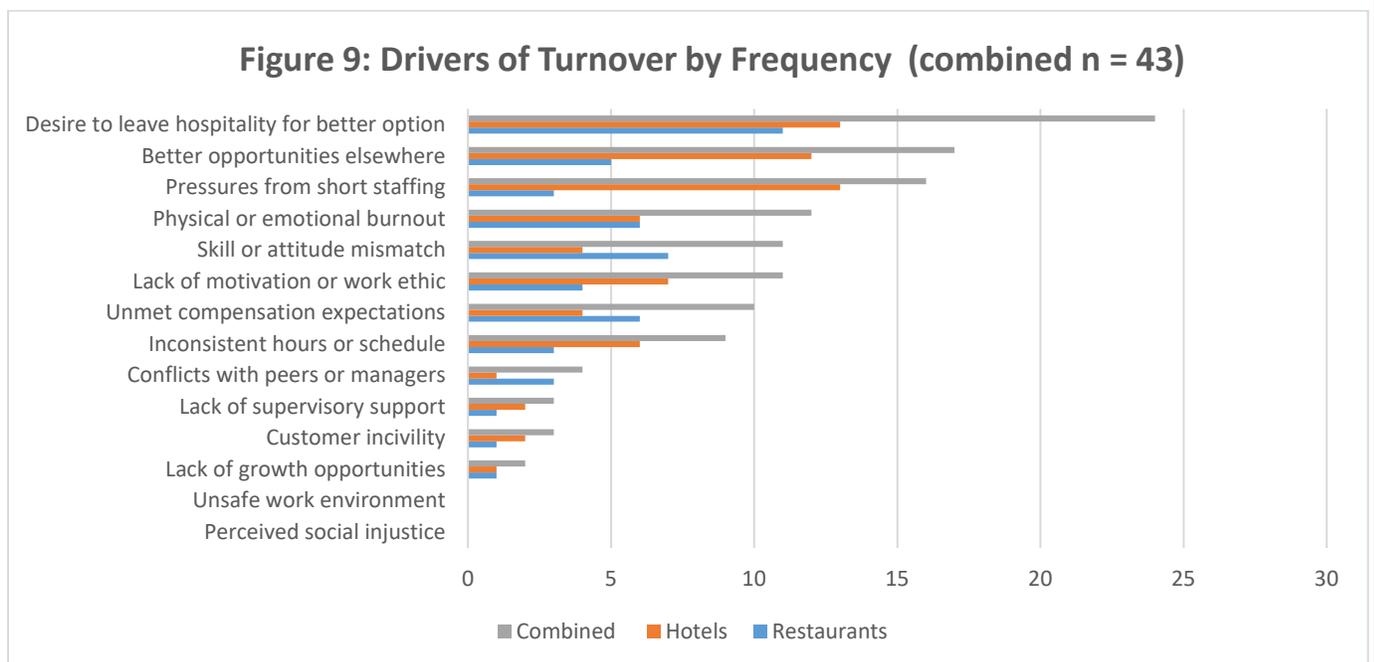
### A. Turnover Trends

High turnover has long been a feature of the hospitality industry. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the annual turnover rate in the hospitality industry is the highest of any business sector, hovering between 70% and 80% while the national average is closer to 50% (Hansen, 2023). Turnover nearly double during the pandemic to 130%. Hospitality also has the highest job opening rate of any industry, estimated at 9.5% in 2022 (BLS, 2023).

Experience of Turnover: Participants in the in-depth survey were asked to estimate turnover in the 12 months between Fall 2021 and Fall 2022. Fig. 7 illustrates that nearly half estimated turnover at 11 - 40%, with more hotels estimating turnover at 21% or above, while more restaurants estimated turnover at 11 – 20%. A significant number said they did not know their current turnover rate. Fig. 8 depicts that a total of 70% said that they thought turnover had increased for them compared to Pre-COVID levels during this timeframe. One restaurant respondent noted that hourly turnover leveled off to pre-pandemic data, but manager turnover was increasing. One hotel participant noted that turnover increased in certain roles (sales, food and beverage).



Drivers of Turnover: Respondents were asked to speculate on the drivers of turnover based on a given list of 14 factors, ranked by frequency in Fig. 9. The desire to leave hospitality for better options and better opportunities elsewhere were far and away the most frequent choices, highlighting the recent large defection from hospitality careers. Hotels selected “pressures from short staffing” and “inconsistent hours or schedule” much more frequently than restaurants, while restaurants pointed to “skill or attitude mismatch,” “unmet compensation expectations,” and “conflict with peers or managers” more often. Both groups were equally likely to cite “physical or emotional burnout” as a cause of turnover.



Asked to comment on the drivers of turnover, respondents emphasized low pay, long hours, inflexible schedules and burnout from short staffing. Better pay and the ability work remotely in other fields was mentioned frequently. One participant elaborated on customer incivility: *“Industry workers have taken more abuse in the past year than they ever have in the past. Guests have become unrealistic in their expectations and have no sympathy for staff.”*

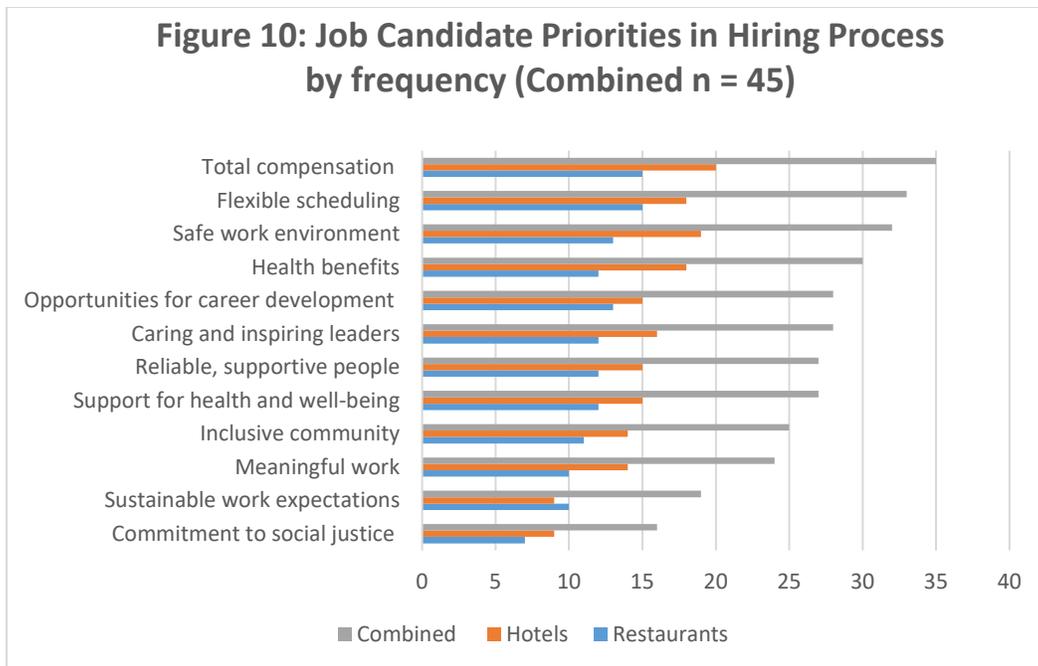
### **B. Workforce Expectations**

Since the pandemic, significant segments of the workforce are re-evaluating what they want in a job and how work fits into their lives. Traditional incentives such as compensation, titles and opportunities for advancement are still valued, but many other

lifestyle factors have taken on greater importance, especially with younger, more mobile job seekers (DeSmet et al., 2021). The perception of organizational support for personal well-being has been found to be a factor in turnover intention among hospitality employees (Varga, et al., 2021).

We asked respondents to rate the importance to job candidates of 12 considerations based on their experience with them in the hiring process. Fig. 12 shows their responses ranked by frequency, with “total compensation,” “flexible scheduling,” “safe work environment,” “health benefits” and “opportunities for career development” as the top five factors. Restaurant participants reported that job candidates were much more likely to seek “sustainable work expectations” and slightly more likely to prioritize “flexible scheduling.” Hotel participants reported that job candidates were more likely to prioritize “safe work environment.” Both groups placed a moderate priority on “support for health and well-being.”

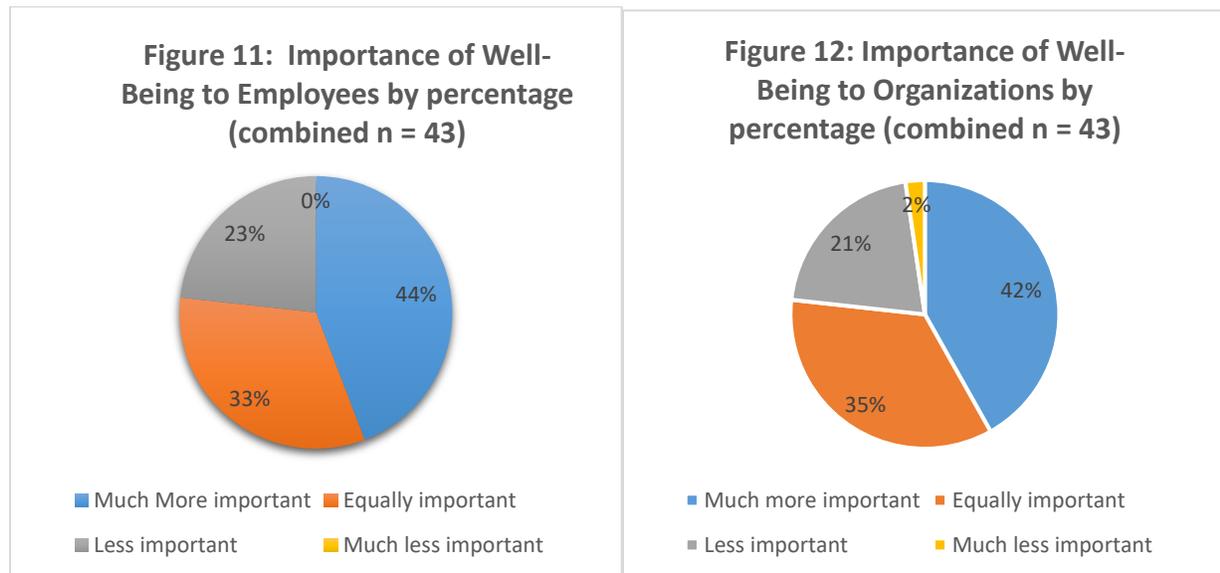
Overall, the responses indicated an increased concern on the part of job seekers to find a healthy, safe and inclusive work environment with reliable, supportive people who take the employee’s financial, professional and personal needs into consideration.



Predictive scheduling laws and flexibility: This survey did not delve into the issue of predictive scheduling laws for food service, hospitality and retail which are currently in force in Oregon and six cities including Chicago. These laws require employers to

provide workers with a good faith estimate of their work schedules 14 days in advance to aid them in planning personal and family obligations. Our in-depth questionnaire listed “flexible scheduling” as a more general term intended to signify the employer’s willingness to try to fairly accommodate the candidate’s personal and family needs in work scheduling. Under either scenario, it is well documented that workers are more engaged and satisfied and have higher rates of retention when they can count on a schedule that supports a satisfying life.

Importance to Organizations and Employees: Our results, depicted in Fig. 11 and Fig. 12, indicated that respondents thought that since the pandemic, health and well-being was more important, although slightly more important to employees than to the organization. A minority of respondents (10 or 23%) thought it was less important or much less important. Restaurants and hotels were equally likely to say that health and well-being was much more important to employees.

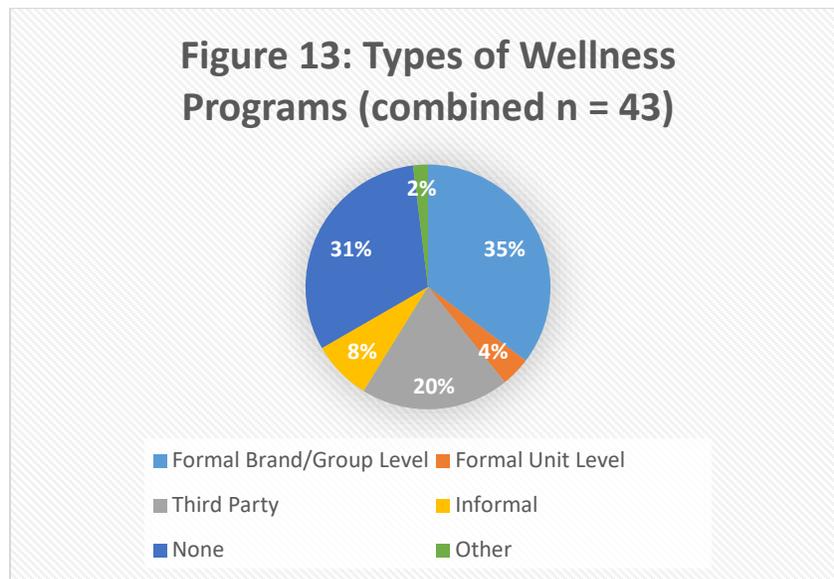


### C. Wellness Programs

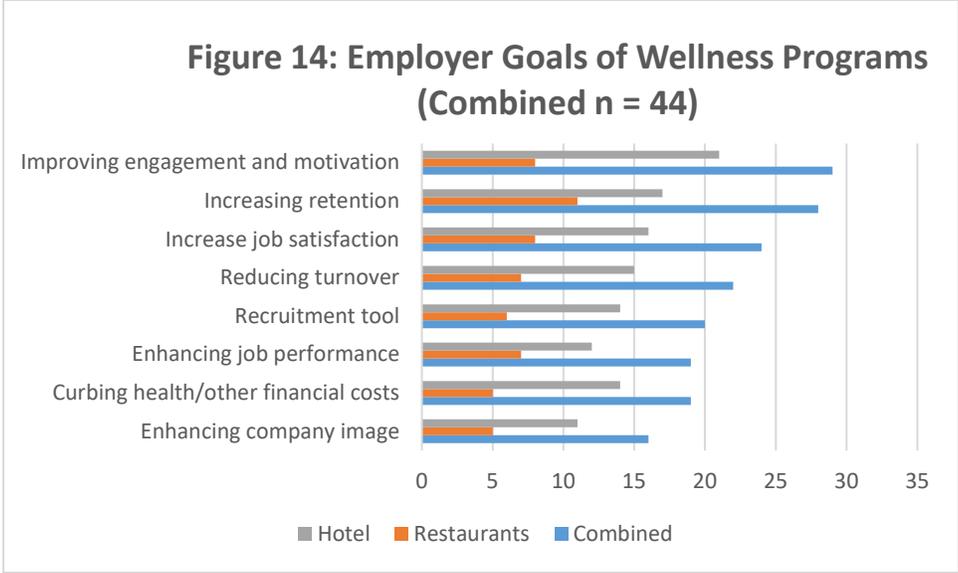
Employee wellness program have been available in the hospitality industry for many years. Hyatt, Marriott, Accor and Qdoba and many other recognized hospitality brands have well-established initiatives. Small and medium operators and independents may lack these and other health-related benefits. Only 40% of hospitality employers offer health benefits at all versus 90% of all U.S. employers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Just 64% of companies across all industries claim to offer wellness programs as part of their health-related benefits packages (SHRM, 2019).

Types of Wellness Programs: In our sample (Fig.13), nearly 70% of respondents claim to have some type of wellness program, formal or informal, but 31% reported having no wellness program. Nearly 40% had a formal brand/group or unit-level program while another 20% used a third-party source. Respondents often reported offering more than one type of wellness initiative (e.g., brand initiative and third-party).

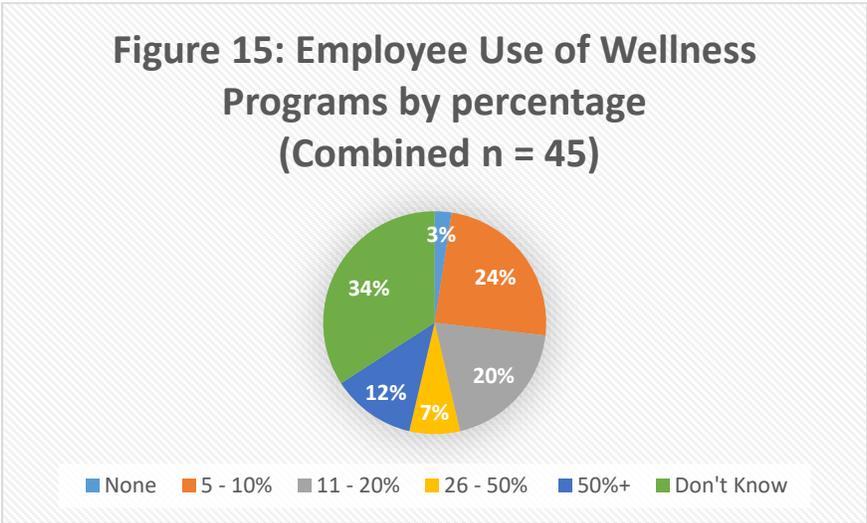
Less than 30% of restaurants said they had a formal brand/group program while about 50% of hotels reported such programs. At about 30%, restaurants say they were more likely to use a third-party provider while third parties were mentioned about 20% of the time by hotels. Surprisingly, nearly half of the hotels in our sample reported having no wellness program, while only about 15% of restaurants reported having no wellness program.



Goals of Wellness Programs: Traditionally, employers who offer wellness programs do so to manage the operational expense of health care costs by focusing on habits and prevention of chronic disease (Jones, et al. 2019). More recently, employers hope that these programs can help them achieve other goals. Our results (Fig. 14) indicated that survey participants' top goals were "improving employee engagement and motivation" "increasing retention," "increasing job satisfaction," "reducing turnover" and "helping recruit needed talent." Restaurant participants placed more emphasis on enhancing retention and job performance, while hotel participants focused on engagement and motivation and cost control. Both cohorts placed equal emphasis on using wellness initiatives to reduce turnover.

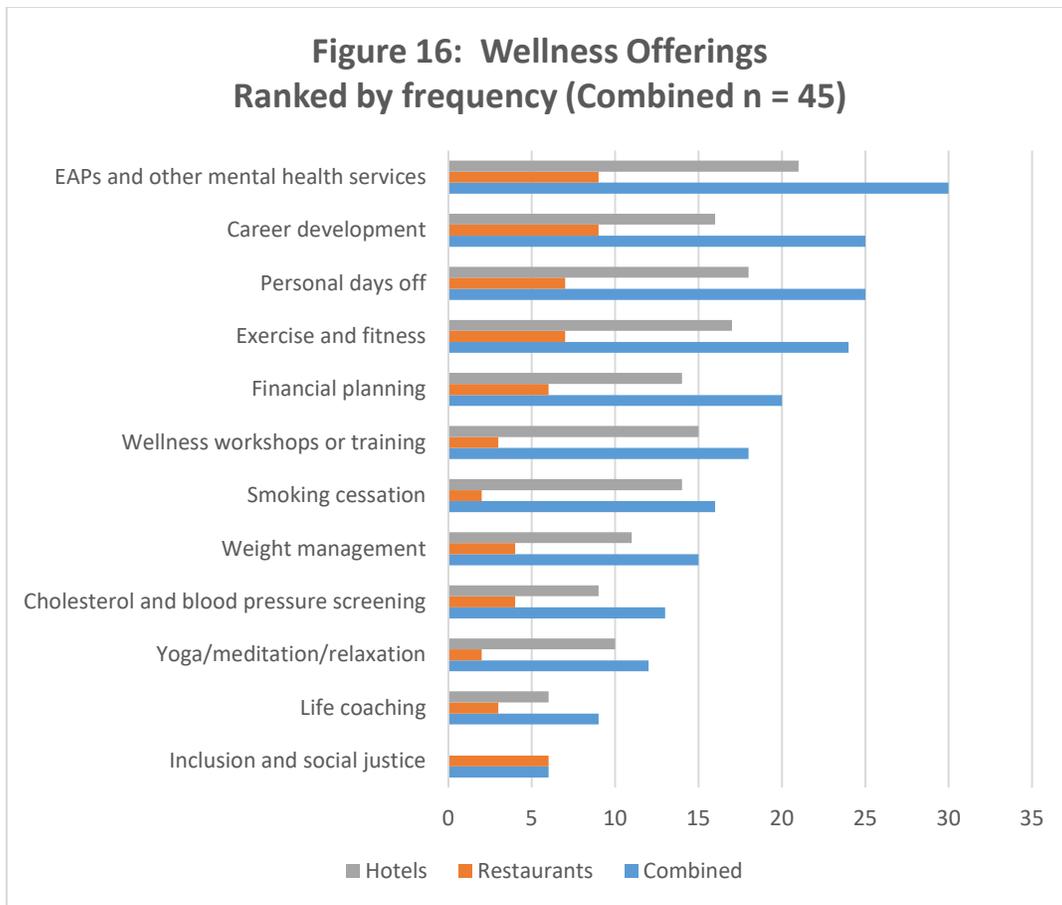


Employee Use of Wellness Programs: Across industries, only about 60% of employees who are offered wellness programs utilize them (SHRM, 2019). Traditional wellness programs place the burden on the employee to seek out these services, and barriers such as time, inconvenience and stigma get in the way. Our results (Fig. 15) showed that nearly half (44%) of the survey participants estimated that 20% or fewer employees utilized these programs, with hotels more likely to provide this estimate. Only 12% thought that half or more of their staff used wellness programs with restaurants more likely to provide this estimate. A large percentage (34%) did not know how many employees used the programs, presumably because of confidentiality requirements.



Wellness Offerings: Traditional wellness programs largely consist of smoking cessation, cholesterol and blood pressure management, weight management and fitness programs, mental health hotlines and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) focused on treating depression, anxiety and substance abuse. But this model is rapidly changing, as wellness programs have broadened to incorporate a host of lifestyle factors that contribute to employees' overall well-being and satisfaction such as personal days off, yoga and meditation, career development, life coaching, financial planning, etc. In many ways, the burden has shifted to management to support the work-life balance and personal growth goals of team members.

Our results (Fig. 16) showed "EAPs and other mental health services" as the most frequently cited offerings, reflecting the growing emphasis on promoting emotional well-being in the industry, followed by "career development," "personal days off," and "exercise and fitness." Traditional health concerns such as "cholesterol and blood pressure screenings," "weight management" and "smoking cessation" were less popular than these other options. Hotels were more likely to identify "wellness workshops or training," "yoga/meditation/relaxation," "exercise and fitness," and traditional health programs as part of their offerings than restaurants. Almost 30% of the surveyed restaurants identified enacting inclusion and social justice initiatives as part of their wellness efforts.



Through open-ended comments, participants elaborated on their responses in the areas of culture and management, benefits and incentives, and flexibility:

- **Culture and Management**: Participants comments on the need to establish an empathetic, positive culture and leadership invested in the well-being of employees. As one respondent put it, *“Finding the right balance between operating the hotel to the right business levels so we do not burn out the staff”* is critical because, as another put it, *“there’s too many other options for folks who want to work.”*
- **Benefits and Incentives**: Both hotel and restaurant respondents shared a wide range of new benefits and incentives such as fitness memberships, tuition reimbursement, retirement planning and discounts on products and service. Restaurant participants specifically mentioned the need to increase wages overall.
- **Flexibility**: Another important theme was increasing flexibility in the form of paid time off, limiting overtime, and reduced scheduling, 40-hour work weeks where possible, and extended personal/parental leave opportunities.

## D. Evaluation and Measurement

In an open-ended question, participants were asked how they measured or were planning to measure the impact of the well-being initiatives discussed in the survey, such as cost control, reduced turnover, enhanced recruitment, improved job performance, etc. A total of 27 responses (10 from restaurants and 17 from hotels) were received to this prompt.

Responses are listed in two categories below (number in parentheses indicate how often the method was mentioned).

<b>Table 1: Evaluation and Measurement Methods (n = 27)</b>	
Employment metrics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Turnover/Retention rate (10)</li><li>- Staffing percentages (1)</li><li>- Improving job performance (2)</li><li>- Controlling costs (3)</li></ul>
Employee feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Employee satisfaction surveys (5)</li><li>- Check-ins between managers and team members (2)</li></ul>

In summary, most participants who responded to this prompt planned to look at turnover/retention data and solicit feedback from employees in the form of feedback surveys.

Several indicated they did not plan to measure well-being outcomes, and others said they were uncertain or were looking for metrics suggestions. One pointed out that it was difficult to track because of multiple variables.

## Datassential Food Service Health and Well-Being Survey

Kendall College collaborated with the research firm Datassential to field two questions specifically about employee mental health and well-being in food service operations across the U.S. The two questions were:

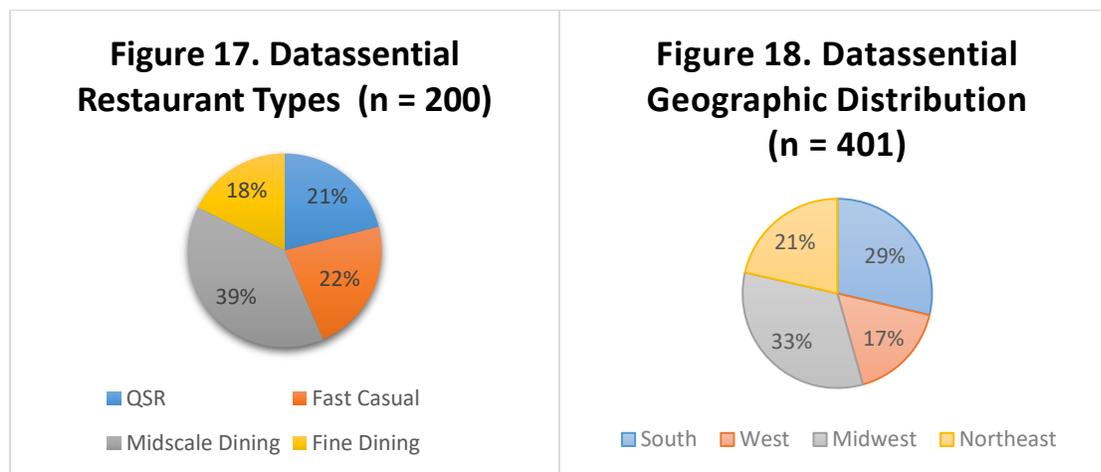
- H1: Which of the following options or resources do you or your brand offer employees to support their mental health and well-being (either directly, or through a third party, including health insurance programs)?
- H2: Which mental health, stress-relief, or work/life balance programs have been most effective in your operation?

A total of 401 businesses responded, half (200) of which were restaurants and half (201) of which were on-site providers in healthcare, lodging, business and industry, college and university, and K-12 settings.

### A. Sample Demographics

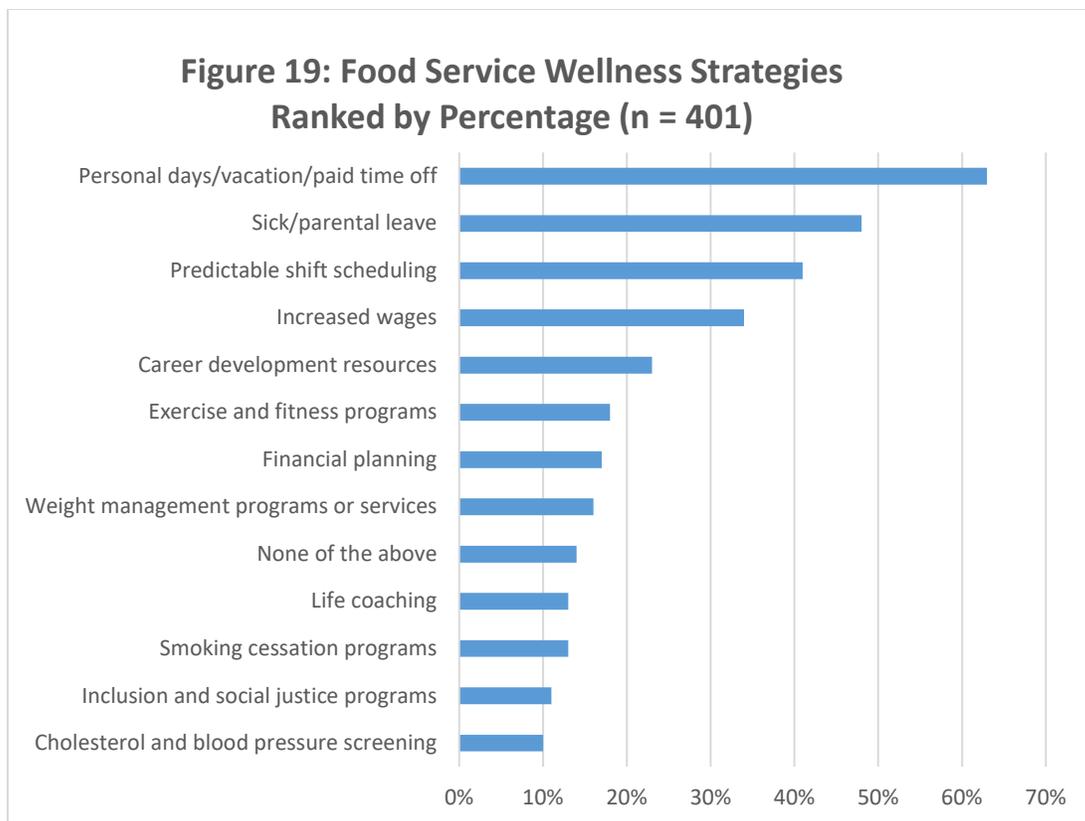
Restaurant Types (Fig 17): Of the restaurants, 136 (68%) were full service and 64 (32%) were limited service. Midscale Dining (39%) and Fast Casual (22%) made up the majority of the restaurant sample with QSR and Fine Dining at 21% and 18% respectively.

Geographic distribution (Fig. 18): The majority of Food Service respondents were located in the Midwest (33%) and the South (29%).



## B. Restaurant Well-Being Initiatives

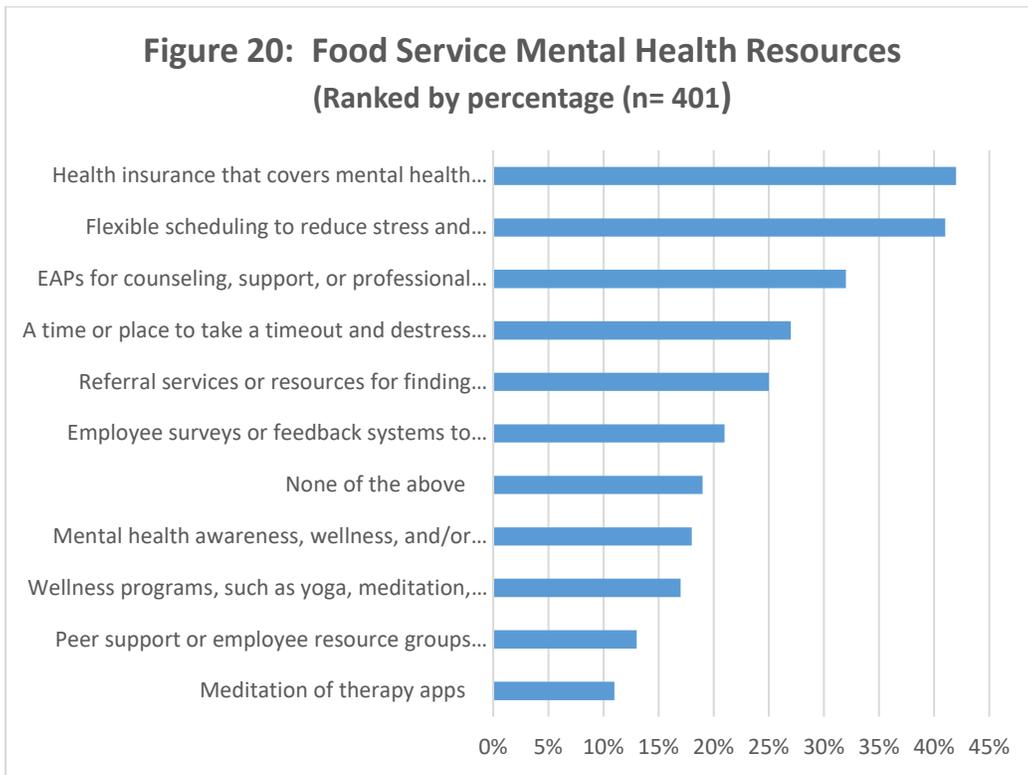
Datassential survey results reinforced many of the same themes as Kendall College’s in-depth surveys of restaurants and hotels. When asked about strategies to support employee health and wellness, professional goals and work-life balance, Fig. 19 shows that more than half of participants (65%) cited “personal days/vacation/paid time off,” nearly half (48%) offered “sick/parental leave” and 41% adhered to “predictable shift scheduling.” More than one third (34%) reported increasing wages. A sizeable percentage offered “career development resources (23%),” “financial planning (17%),” and “life coaching (13%),” along with traditional wellness options such as exercise and fitness (18%), smoking cessation (13%), and cholesterol and blood pressure screening (10%). Only 14% offered none of these options, and these were most prevalent among independent restaurants. Social justice and inclusion initiatives were rarely cited overall (11%), but were more common among on-site providers in healthcare, business and industry, colleges and universities and K-12 settings.



When asked specifically about mental health and other work-life balance programs and their effectiveness, Fig. 20 shows that nearly half (42%) pointed to “health benefits that cover mental health and well-being services, such as therapy or medication,” 32% provided EAPs for counseling, support, or professional referrals,” and 27% provided “a

time or place to take a timeout and de-stress for employees.” Flexible scheduling was identified by 41% as a way to help employees to “reduce stress and support work-life balance.” As one restaurant participant commented, “we’ve found that scheduling is the best key to stress and mental health.” Paid time off (PTO), breaks rooms and areas where staff can relax, and caring/concerned managers who listen were frequently cited in open-ended comments.

Overall, only 19% reported no mental health and well-being initiatives, although it varied a lot by segments: lower overall in the on-site settings (14%) and higher overall in the restaurant settings (24%). Mental health training, yoga/meditation (with and without apps) and peer support were cited by less than 20% of the sample. Some participants felt that the emphasis on supporting employee mental health was misplaced. One participant summed it up with the comment, “This is the restaurant business. I am old-fashioned. If you can’t stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen.”



### C. Evaluation and Measurement

The panel was asked how they measured the effectiveness of any mental health, stress reduction or well-being programs they might have. The responses fell into the following categories:

- Observation: Of those who answered affirmatively, the most prevalent method was observation of employees' attitudes, productivity and performance as a clue to mental health and well-being. Some felt that in their daily interactions, they could anecdotally assess employees' moods and general enjoyment of the work. One respondent expressed it as *"Increased level of punctuality, improvement on interaction with peers, better work attitude in general. At the end that gets reflected in productivity."*
- Employee Feedback: The second most prevalent method of measurement was by soliciting feedback by either formal or informal means. Formal means included periodic surveys and open and closed forum. Informal means involved conversations, personal check-ins and other day-to-day communications. One participant said, *"I try to talk everyone one of my workers each day and usually can judge if something is wrong or they are stressed."*
- Employment Metrics: A sizeable number said they do or hope to track turnover and retention rates, recruitment and referrals, and attendance as a signal of employee satisfaction. Fewer call-outs and sick-days was specifically mentioned.
- No Measurement: Approximately one third did not or felt they could not measure the effectiveness of such efforts, or lacked the capacity or systems to do so. Some felt it was best done by another department (HR) or an outside specialist. Several felt that these outcomes should not be quantified.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The hospitality industry has faced and continues to face significant challenges when it comes to advancing the physical and mental health of its workforce. The pandemic helped bring those challenges to the fore, as many workers left the industry for other fields and careers, creating an unprecedented staffing crisis that continues to impact operations and profitability. Management policies and practices are shifting rapidly, as employers struggle to meet their staffing needs while attempting to address new workforce expectations. This study highlighted the ways in which hospitality employers are trying to balance the physical, mental and emotional needs of current and prospective employees with those of running a relentlessly demanding business.

### **Turnover Drivers**

Turnover has been and will continue to be a feature of running a hospitality business, but keeping it from imperiling the whole enterprise is a pressing problem that requires creative solutions. The results highlight how high turnover begets more turnover as the pressures of short staffing and inflexible scheduling lead to physical and emotional burnout. Low pay, long hours and abuse from peers and guests were cited as other major turnover contributors, in particular by restaurant respondents.

### **Job Candidate Priorities**

Respondents felt that job seekers are looking for healthy, safe and inclusive work environments with reliable, supportive people who take the employee's financial, professional and personal needs into consideration. While job candidates express traditional concerns about compensation, titles and opportunities for advancement, a host of lifestyle factors have become more prevalent, chief among these are adequate compensation and flexibility, e.g., scheduling that supports a healthy and balanced lifestyle.

### **Importance of Employee Well-Being**

The research strongly suggests that employer support for health and well-being is an important factor in attracting and retaining employees, and has only become more important since the pandemic -- although slightly more important to employees than to organizations.

## **Availability of Wellness Programs**

While the percentage of employers claiming to offer wellness programs has grown, more than 30% of our sample did not. Larger hotel brands and restaurant groups were more likely to say they offered such programs and restaurants were more likely to utilize third-party providers. While in the past control of healthcare costs was the primary motivation for offering such programs, at this point, recruitment, retention and reducing turnover seem to be more pressing drivers. Improving performance, engagement and motivation, along with employee satisfaction, were also highlighted.

## **Wellness Program Usage**

Despite the uptick in the availability of wellness offerings, the percentage of employees who use them remains small (10% – 50%), with restaurants estimating on the higher end of the spectrum. Because of confidentiality, a large percentage of respondents (30%) did not know whether employees used these services, particularly in relation to EAPs and other mental health offerings.

## **Wellness Program Offerings**

Traditional wellness offerings (smoking cessation, cholesterol and blood pressure management and weight management) have been superseded by mental health support in the form of EAPs and mental health hotlines. Personal time off was among the most frequent strategy cited by respondents and expanded on in open-ended comments in the form of paid time off, limited overtime, reduced scheduling/40-hour work weeks, and extended personal/parental leave. Wellness workshops or training and yoga/meditation/relaxation were offered by a small percentage, mainly hotel participants. Almost 30% of the restaurant sample identified enacting inclusion and social justice initiatives. Other types of lifestyle support were cited and embellished on in open-ended comments, including fitness memberships, tuition reimbursement, retirement planning, and discounts on products and service.

## **Food Service-Specific Findings**

The Datassential sample of 401 food service employers dramatically reinforced the themes that emerged from the Kendall survey. More than one third (34%) reported increasing wages. A whopping 65% cited personal days/vacation/paid time off, nearly half (48%) offered sick/parental leave and 41% adhered to predictable shift scheduling as part of their wellness agendas. Paid time off (PTO), breaks rooms and areas where staff can relax, and caring/concerned managers who listen were frequently cited in

open-ended comments. Specifically related to mental health support, nearly half (42%) claimed to offer health benefits that cover mental health and well-being services, such as therapy or medication, 32% provided EAPs for counseling, support, or professional referrals, and 27% provided a time or place to take a timeout and de-stress for employees. Flexible scheduling was identified by 41% as a way to help employees to reduce stress and support work-life balance.

### **Evaluation and Measurement**

Plans to evaluate or measure the impact of these efforts are in an embryonic stage. Less than 70% of the Kendall survey participants responded to this prompt and those who did focused on employment metrics such as turnover/retention data and employee feedback as their primary evaluation method. About two-thirds of the Datassential sample discussed evaluation, emphasizing real time observation in the form of enhanced performance and attitude. Secondarily, they thought they would turn to employee feedback (formal and informal), and employment metrics (recruitment, retention and reduced turnover). A percentage of both samples said they lacked the capacity to track these outcomes or felt that it would be too difficult to do given multiple variables at play. A few asked for guidance on how to approach the evaluation process and some felt it should not be quantified.

### **Contradictory Findings**

It is important to point out that not everyone was onboard with the trends cited in this study. A sizeable percentage of the Kendall survey respondents (31%) reported having no specific wellness programs as did 14% of the Datassential sample, most commonly independent restaurants. There may be many reasons for this – financial, operational and even philosophical. A small percentage of food service participants were hostile to the idea of providing health and well-being support, pushing it back on the employee to self-select out of the industry if they didn't fit into the environment.

### **Recommendations**

These findings ultimately reflect a long-term change in the culture of the hospitality workplace that places a higher priority on the needs and expectations of employees. Several participants commented on the need to establish an empathetic, positive culture and leadership invested in the well-being of employees. If nothing else, this is important for competitive reasons. Employers who do not respond to changing workforce attitudes and expectations risk losing out in the intense competition to attract and retain qualified workers.

In the past, the burden of coping with the physical and emotional challenges of the erratic hospitality workplace was on the employee. It is heartening to find that so many operators are attempting to address the underlying conditions of low pay, lack of benefits, and long hours made worse by inflexible and unpredictable scheduling, and so many are instituting benefits such as paid time off and family leave that are commonplace in other industries. Yoga and meditation rooms may well fall by the wayside, but realistic efforts to support work-life balance could make a real difference in changing the daily experience and perception of hospitality careers and attracting sorely needed talent to the industry.

Finally, efforts to evaluate and measure the lasting impact of well-being initiatives are still limited. Employers are trying a lot of different approaches, some of which may be more symbolic than substantive. It behooves the industry to mount a more rigorous study of what works best for both the worker and the organization, to help hospitality managers know where to place their limited resources of time and funds.

## Limitations of the Study

The Kendall College survey sample is small and non-representative. It is skewed toward larger hotel brands and restaurant groups that have more substantial resources on which to draw to develop and manage wellness and well-being programs. Most operate in the Chicagoland area and may not reflect the views and needs of operators in other markets. Participants self-selected based on interest in employee health and well-being, potentially excluding contradictory data which showed up in the more categorically and geographically balanced national Datassential food service sample.

A further concern is the wide variation in the meaning of wellness and well-being and what constitutes a program (formal or informal) to different operators. Although they are being counted together, there may be substantial differences in the focus and scope among these offerings. A more rigorous examination is needed to sort out the differences between, for instance, an operator who merely offers a mental health app versus one that provides comprehensive mental health benefits.

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## APPENDIX

### A. Health and Well-Being in Hospitality Survey - Food and Beverage Sector

What is the name of your restaurant or beverage business(es)?

What is the location(s) of your food service/beverage business(es)? Check all that apply

City of Chicago  
Chicago Suburbs  
Outside Chicago ADI - please list specific location in "Other"  
Other:

What is your current position? (check all that apply)

Owner  
Chef  
General Manager  
Assistant Manager/Shift Manager  
Hiring Executive (human resources, talent acquisition, etc.)  
Contracted Manager

Are you?

Male  
Female  
Prefer not to say

What is your age range?

20 - 30  
31-40  
41-50  
51-60  
61+  
Prefer not to say

How long have you worked in the restaurant or beverage industry?

<1 year

- 1-3 years
- 4-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21+ years

How long have you worked at your current restaurant or beverage business?

- <1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21+ years

What type of restaurant or beverage business do you work at?

- Quick Service
- Fast Casual
- Casual
- Upscale
- Fine Dining
- Take out only (normal functioning)
- Private Dining
- Bar or Lounge
- Other:

What is your business's ownership model?

- Independent restaurant or bar
- Restaurant or beverage chain or group
- Franchise
- Other:

What is your business's annual revenue range?

- Under \$1 million
- \$1 - \$3 million
- \$3 million+

How many seats (per unit) does your food/beverage business have? (Give an average if you have more than one site)

- Under 50 seats
- 51 - 100 seats
- 101 - 150 seats
- 150+ seats

How many sites or locations does your business have (please write out the number below)

How many years has your business been operating?

- 0-3 years
- 4-9 years
- 10-49 years
- Over 50 years

What has been your business's turnover rate over the last 12 months?

- 0 -5 %
- 6 - 10 %
- 11- 20%
- 21 - 40%
- 41%+
- Don't know

Has turnover increased or decreased as compared to pre-Covid levels?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed approximately the same
- Other:

In your view, what are the top 3 drivers of turnover at your business currently? (check no more than 3, including any others you might have listed)

- Better opportunities elsewhere
- Customer incivility
- Desire to leave hospitality altogether
- Unmet compensation expectations
- Conflicts with peers or managers
- Lack of supervisory support
- Lack of motivation or work ethic
- Skill or attitude mismatch
- Pressures from short staffing
- Inconsistent hours or schedule
- Perceived social injustice
- Physical or emotional burnout
- Lack of growth opportunities
- Unsafe work environment
- Other:

Please elaborate on the top 3 drivers of turnover at your business, in particular any "other" items not list above.

What are the top 3 most difficult positions to fill at your business currently, and why?

- General manager
- Assistant general manager
- Executive Chef
- Sous Chef
- Line Cook
- Pastry Chef
- Dishwasher
- Steward/Receiver
- Host/Hostess
- Server
- Food Runner
- Busser
- Bar manager
- Bartender
- Bar back
- Other:

Please elaborate on the top 3 most difficult-to-fill positions at your business. Explain why you think these positions are so hard to fill.

From the candidate's point of view, please rate the importance of the following factors in the hiring process for your business.

- Very Unimportant
- Somewhat unimportant
- Neither important nor unimportant
- Moderately Important
- Very important

- Total Compensation
- Health Benefits
- Flexible scheduling
- Meaningful work
- Reliable/supportive people at work
- Support for health and well-being
- Safe work environment
- Caring and inspiring leaders
- Inclusive community
- Commitment to social justice
- Sustainable work expectations
- Opportunities for career development/advancement
- Total Compensation
- Health Benefits
- Flexible scheduling
- Meaningful work
- Reliable/supportive people at work
- Support for health and well-being

Safe work environment  
Caring and inspiring leaders  
Inclusive community  
Commitment to social justice  
Sustainable work expectations  
Opportunities for career development/advancement

What kind of employee wellness program(s), if any, does your business offer?

Formal brand/group initiative  
Formal independent unit initiative  
Third-party program  
Informal efforts  
None  
Other:

What does your employee wellness program(s) cover? (check all that apply). If you have none, please skip this question.

Cholesterol and blood pressure screening  
Exercise and fitness  
Smoking cessation  
Weight management  
EAPs and other mental health services  
Wellness workshops or training  
Financial planning  
Yoga/meditation/relaxation  
Personal days off  
Career development  
Life coaching  
Inclusion and social justice  
Other:

What is/are the goal(s) of your employee wellness program? (check all that apply)

Curbing healthcare/other financial costs  
Reducing turnover  
Increasing retention  
Improving engagement and motivation  
Enhancing job performance  
Increasing job satisfaction  
Enhancing company image  
Recruitment tool  
Other:

Who at your business oversees wellness initiatives? (check all that apply) If you don't have any wellness initiatives, skip this question.

Owner  
General manager  
Assistant general manager  
HR/Talent Development/People Officer  
Employee committee  
No one  
Other:

Approximately what percentage of employees take advantage of employee wellness offerings at your restaurant? (Skip if there are no wellness offerings at your business)

None  
5 - 10%  
11 - 25%  
26 - 50%  
51% or more  
Don't know/it's confidential

Please rate the importance of employee health and wellness at your business since the pandemic.

Much less important  
Less important  
Equally important  
More important  
Much more important

Employee Health and Wellness - to the organization  
Employee Health and Wellness - to employees  
Employee Health and Wellness - to the organization  
Employee Health and Wellness - to employees

Have you modified the work environment to enhance employee well-being? If so, please describe why and the steps you have taken to create a "culture of wellness" at your business.

What other strategies related to working conditions are you using to attract and retain employees or meet other goals?

How are you measuring or planning to measure the effectiveness of these strategies (e.g. cost control, reduced turnover, enhanced recruitment improve job performance, etc.)?

Please feel free to share any other comments you may have about the topic of employee well-being in hospitality.

## B. Health and Well-Being in Hospitality Survey - Hotel Sector

What is the name of your property(ies)? (Please specify your specific unit(s) not a brand or corporate entity.)

What is the location(s) of your property(ies)? Check all that apply

City of Chicago  
Chicago suburbs  
Outside Chicago ADI (please list specific location(s) in "Other"  
Other:

What is your current position? (check all that apply)

General Manager  
Owner  
Hiring Executive (human resources, talent acquisition, etc.)  
Contracted Manager  
Other Senior Manager  
Other:

Are you?

Male  
Female  
Prefer not to say

What is your age range?

20 - 30  
31-40  
41-50  
51-60  
61+  
Prefer not to say

How long have you worked in the hotel industry?

<1 year  
1-3 years  
4-10 years  
11-20 years  
21+ years

How long have you worked at your current property?

- <1 year
- 1-3 years
- 4-10 years
- 11-20 years
- 21+ years

What is your property's brand segment?

- Luxury
- Upper Upscale
- Upscale
- Upper Midscale
- Midscale
- Economy
- Other:

What is your property's ownership model?

- Independent hotel
- Chain-affiliated hotel
- Franchise
- Hotel Management Company
- Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT)
- Other:

What is your property's annual revenue range?

- Under \$4 million
- \$4 - \$10 million
- \$10 - \$18 million
- \$18 - \$25 million
- \$25 million +

What is your property's number of rooms range?

- Under 150 Rooms
- 150 to 299 Rooms
- 300 to 600 Rooms
- More Than 600 Rooms

How many years has your property been operating?

- 0-3 years
- 4-9 years
- 10-49 years
- Over 50 years

What has been the rate of turnover in the past 12 months?

- 0 – 5%
- 6 – 10%
- 11 – 20%
- 21 – 40%
- 41% +
- Don't Know

What has been your property's turnover rate over the last 12 months?

- 0 -5 %
- 6 - 10 %
- 11- 20%
- 21 - 40%
- 41%+
- Don't know

Has turnover increased or decreased as compared to pre-Covid levels?

- Increased
- Decreased
- Stayed approximately the same
- Other:

Please elaborate on the top 3 drivers of turnover at your property, in particular any "other" items not list above.

In your view, what are the top 3 drivers of turnover at your property currently? (check no more than 3, including any others you might have listed)

- Better opportunities elsewhere
- Customer incivility
- Desire to leave hospitality altogether
- Unmet compensation expectations
- Conflicts with peers or managers
- Lack of supervisory support
- Lack of motivation or work ethic
- Skill or attitude mismatch
- Pressures from short staffing
- Inconsistent hours or schedule
- Perceived social injustice
- Physical or emotional burnout
- Lack of growth opportunities
- Unsafe work environment

Other:

Please elaborate on the top 3 most difficult-to-fill positions at your property. Explain why you think these positions are so hard to fill.

From the candidate's point of view, please rate the importance of the following factors in the hiring process for your property.

Very Unimportant  
Somewhat unimportant  
Neither important nor unimportant  
Moderately Important  
Very important

Total Compensation  
Health Benefits  
Flexible scheduling  
Meaningful work  
Reliable/supportive people at work  
Support for health and well-being  
Safe work environment  
Caring and inspiring leaders  
Inclusive community  
Commitment to social justice  
Sustainable work expectations  
Opportunities for career development/advancement  
Total Compensation  
Health Benefits  
Flexible scheduling  
Meaningful work  
Reliable/supportive people at work  
Support for health and well-being  
Safe work environment  
Caring and inspiring leaders  
Inclusive community  
Commitment to social justice  
Sustainable work expectations  
Opportunities for career development/advancement

What are the top 3 most difficult positions to fill at your property currently, and why?

Front desk agents  
Rooms management  
Housekeeping  
Sales and marketing  
Food and beverage - back of house  
Food and beverage - front of house  
Bartenders  
Event services

Revenue analyst  
Reservations  
Bell staff  
Concierge  
Security  
Engineering  
Accounting  
Other:

What kind of employee wellness program(s), if any, does your property offer?

Formal Corporate/Brand initiative  
Formal Property-level initiative  
Third-Party program  
Informal efforts  
None  
Other:

What does your employee wellness program(s) cover? (check all that apply). If you have none, please skip this question.

Cholesterol and blood pressure screening  
Exercise and fitness  
Smoking cessation  
Weight management  
EAPs and other mental health services  
Wellness workshops or training  
Financial planning  
Yoga/meditation/relaxation  
Career development  
Personal Days Off  
Life coaching  
Other:

What is/are the goal(s) of your employee wellness program? (check all that apply) If you do not have one, please skip this question.

Curbing health/other financial costs  
Reducing turnover  
Increasing retention  
Improving engagement and motivation  
Enhancing job performance  
Increase job satisfaction  
Enhancing company image  
Recruitment tool  
Other:

Who at your property oversees wellness initiative (check all the apply) If you have none, please skip this question.

Owner  
Upper management  
HR/Talent Development/People Officer  
Front line managers  
Employee committee  
Other:

Approximately what percentage of employees take advantage of employee wellness offerings at your property? If you have none, please skip this question.

None  
5 - 10 %  
11 - 25%  
26 - 50%  
50% +  
Don't know/it's confidential

Rate the importance of the property's employee health and wellness since the pandemic to your organization:

Rate the importance of the property's employee health and wellness initiatives since the pandemic to employees

Have you modified the work environment to enhance employee well-being? If so, please explain why and describe steps you have taken to create a "culture of wellness" at your property.

What other strategies related to working conditions are you using to attract and retain employees or meet other goals?

How are you evaluating or planning to evaluate the effectiveness of wellness initiatives (e.g. controlling costs, reduced turnover, enhanced recruitment, improving job performance, etc.)?

Please feel free to share any other comments you may have about the topic of employee well-being in hospitality.