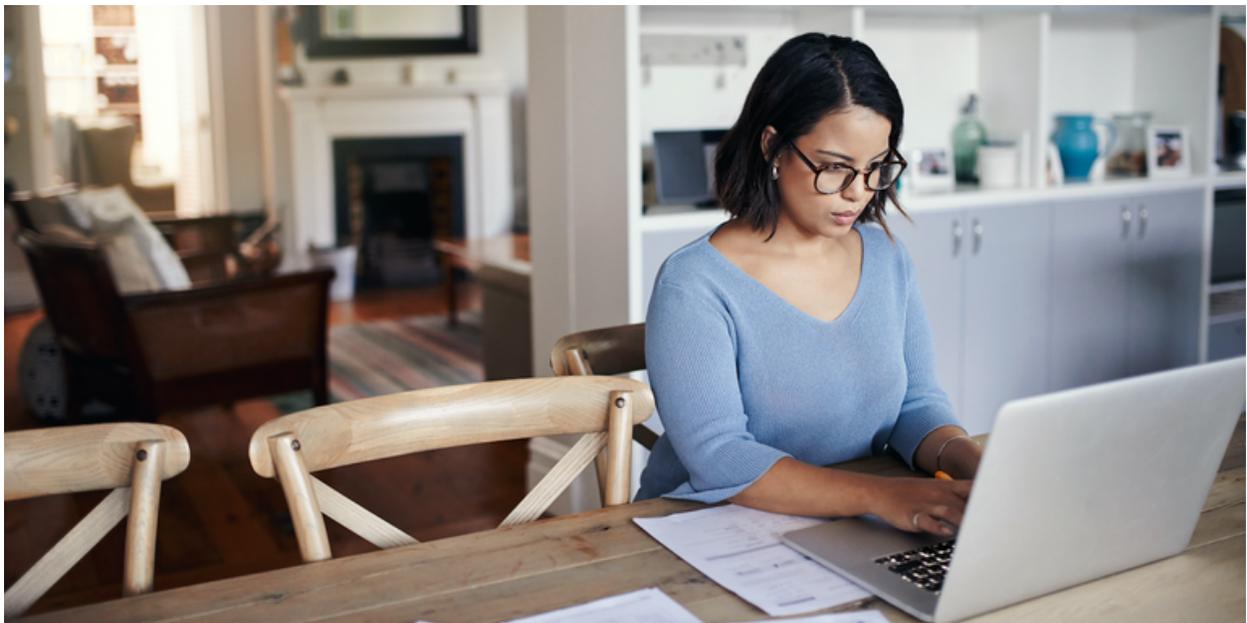


Employers Are Expanding Benefits and Perks in Response to COVID and the “Great Resignation”—Here’s What to Look For

By [Allison Torres Burtka](#)



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COVID-19 has shifted many people’s perspectives of what they want out of work and life. Maybe working remotely for the first time during COVID made your

former commute seem intolerable. Or maybe you've decided that protecting your mental health means [seeing a therapist](#) regularly and [using your vacation days](#) more often.

Hence the predictions and onset of the “Great Resignation,” with employees quitting their jobs [at record rates](#) in the spring and summer of 2021. People are looking for new jobs because their current ones are no longer a good fit. At the same time, others are continuing to search because they lost or left their jobs earlier in the pandemic. Whatever your situation, you might be looking for something different from your next job.

People are saying, “I only live once, so I am no longer willing to tolerate some of the same things I used to,” says Muse career coach [Barb Girson](#), who has been helping clients search for jobs and navigate their careers in response to the pandemic. For example, “I’ve had numerous different people that I’ve coached who said, ‘If they don’t relent, I’m going to leave,’ specifically when their company is requiring them to go back to the office without flexibility.”

Ideally, you get more than just a paycheck from your employer—you get various forms of additional support, in part through benefits and perks. And employers know this. To help their employees during difficult times, they’ve been rethinking their policies and practices and expanding the benefits and perks they offer. Here are some of the ones you might want to look into if you’re searching for a job during the “Great Resignation”—or anytime, really.

1. More Remote Work Opportunities and Flexible Schedules

After learning that employees can maintain productivity when they’re at home and working on looser schedules, some organizations are staying remote. Some are going back to the office fully (or planning to), and many are opting for a [hybrid model](#), with employees in the office for a certain number of days per week and remote for the rest. As a job seeker, you have more room to ask for flexibility.

Some people who were accustomed before the pandemic to enduring long commutes and not seeing their kids during the day don't want to go back to that, says Muse career coach and career counselor [Lynn Berger](#), who's been working with folks looking to make job changes after reevaluating their priorities. "These were kind of 'good employees' who didn't want to rock the boat, who just did what they were supposed to do, and now they see a little bit of an easier and better way for themselves," she says.

So if a fully remote job or one that offers at least some remote work opportunities or flexible hours is important to you, you can make it a priority in your search. You can also look for additional perks to make remote or in-office work easier for you. Some employers started reimbursing part of remote workers' phone and internet expenses, for example. Employees who work remotely have been asking for stipends or reimbursement for other things, too, like ergonomic chairs, while those going into the office some or all of the time have been asking for commuter benefits, Berger says.

Find jobs at companies that offer [remote work opportunities](#), [flexible hours](#), or [commuter benefits](#)

2. Expanded Health and Mental Health Benefits

Before the pandemic, many health insurers didn't cover telehealth visits, and many medical providers didn't offer them. But the pandemic has changed what's available and expected and now, you may see access to telehealth as a necessity. So you might want to find out whether a potential employer's health insurance covers virtual options.

Mental health benefits have also become a higher priority for many people as COVID has taken a toll on mental health for various reasons, from adjusting to shutdowns to dealing with isolation or anxiety to losing loved ones. In response, many organizations have expanded their coverage for mental health.

Since the pandemic began, “Many employers have worked with their health care providers to add virtual mental health options, invested in a mental health app, [and] considered offering a reimbursement program for behavioral health expenses,” says Yvette Lee, HR knowledge advisor at the [Society for Human Resource Management](#) (SHRM). Some employers have also promoted their existing employee assistance programs (EAPs), which can help with personal issues such as alcohol abuse and legal problems.

If the pandemic has changed what you want from your health or mental health coverage—whether it’s the type of care your plan covers or the cost of it—make sure you look for benefits that align with your priorities.

Find jobs at companies that offer [health, vision, and dental insurance](#) (and make sure you look into the specifics, including around mental health coverage)

3. Increased Family and Caregiving Support

As day care facilities and schools closed at the start of the pandemic, parents had to figure out how to work with kids at home or find other solutions. Some employers have stepped up and offered [more support for parents](#), including stipends to help offset the costs of childcare or more robust FSA accounts and/or employer contributions to cover dependent care.

“There are also an increasing number of employers that are looking at providing caregiving benefits like employer-based [daycare] facilities or tutoring for children,” Lee says. Because some of these benefits aren’t typical in too many workplaces, you might not be aware that they’re even an option.

And perhaps more than ever, family has been front and center for many people during the pandemic. So some employers have also begun offering “family-forming benefits,” including coverage for IVF and other [fertility](#) treatments and financial assistance for adoption, Lee says.

Find jobs at companies that offer [FSA accounts](#) or [FSA with employer contribution](#) (which can cover dependent care)

4. Adequate (or Unlimited) Paid Vacation, Personal Days, and Sick Leave

These types of leave aren't new, but if you're looking for a better work-life balance, you might find that your expectations have risen. Two weeks of vacation and a couple of "personal days"—used for time off that's not vacation or sick time—may no longer be enough.

Employers have responded by expanding time off—offering more than they ever did before the pandemic—or loosening the rules about how you can take time off, such as allowing you to take a couple of hours at a time rather than a full day. Some even offer unlimited vacation. For example, some are saying: "We want the well-being of our employees, so we're going to offer 'take what you need,'" noted Girson, who also works with companies, leaders, and teams.

The same goes for sick leave. Some employers are providing unlimited sick leave so you can deal with your own or family members' unforeseen illness, like COVID, without worrying that you don't have enough sick leave banked.

Find jobs at companies that offer [paid vacation](#), [unlimited vacation](#), or [personal/sick days](#) (and make sure to ask about the specifics of their policies)

5. Ongoing Learning Opportunities

If you're ready for a job change, you want to be equipped with the knowledge and skills that will help you do your next job well and support your long-term career growth. However, professional development resources may have taken a back seat during the pandemic. When evaluating a potential new employer, you might want to find out what types of professional development it covers.

Employers, especially those that are struggling to attract or retain employees, may be more willing to pay for professional development opportunities to prevent [burnout](#) and better support employees. This might include professional or leadership coaching that can help you thrive in your role, Girson says. It might also include [tuition reimbursement](#) and other financial support for learning and development, [online courses](#) and skills training, [mentorship](#) and shadowing opportunities, and other educational programming in the office or virtually—all of which can help you succeed in your role and land future jobs.

Find jobs at companies that offer [access to online courses](#), [learning and development stipends](#), [tuition reimbursement](#), [mentor programs](#), [shadowing opportunities](#), or [lunch and learns](#)

6. An Office Culture That Works for You

Previously, some employers sent the message: “Check your emotions at the door. We want you to come here and be professional,” Girson says. But that might not work anymore. “Modern companies realize that they need to provide better support so that people can manage their work and their life, and they’re increasingly concerned about whole-person happiness and life satisfaction,” she says.

Being able to show up to work as your whole self might mean you want your next employer to have meaningful diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in place. As the pandemic exposed existing inequities, the U.S. also faced a reckoning on racial and social injustice. You may expect more from your next employer, including knowing what DEI work they’re engaged in, how they ensure everyone feels valued, and what opportunities you’ll have to get involved.

An office culture that makes you feel supported and happy at work might also mean events that encourage camaraderie, including work retreats or volunteer opportunities, like a day off to work at a food bank with colleagues to help people in need, Berger says.

Find jobs at companies that offer [diversity and inclusion programs](#) or [company outings](#)

7. Specialty Wellness Perks

As people have been struggling to stay well and healthy in trying times, some employers have stepped up their wellness offerings. For instance, some employers are expanding the fitness programs or subsidies they offer. Others offer access to meditation or yoga classes, either live or through apps.

These benefits might not make or break a job offer, but their existence might signal how much an organization and its leaders value your well-being. And even if the perks are small, they might make your life easier, and that's something. So think about what kinds of support or programs might make a difference for you, based on your preferences and needs, and look for companies that offer it.

Find jobs at companies that offer [wellness programs](#), [fitness subsidies](#), or [on-site gyms](#)

A Few Quick Job Search Tips to Help You Get the Benefits and Perks You're Looking For

Because your priorities may have changed over the course of the pandemic, it's important to know what you want and to ask the right questions to find out whether a potential employer is the right fit. Here are some tips (and you can find more detailed job search tips for the "Great Resignation" [here](#)):

- **Don't be too afraid to bring up topics that once were taboo.** For example, because both employees and employers have had to deal with unexpected challenges during the pandemic, such as adapting their work around their family situations, it may be easier to talk about your family needs sooner. So you might bring up these needs—and ask about the corresponding benefits—in an interview, Berger says.

- **Remember that you're interviewing the employer as well.** Ask about their policies and practices as well as how they've handled unforeseen situations, such as those that have come up during the pandemic. If an employee got COVID, how did the company handle time off, for example? The answer can tell you a lot about how your prospective boss, team, or company supports employees in practice.
- **Read between the lines.** For example, the employer may offer plenty of vacation, but you may get the sense from the way the interviewer talks about time off or their workload that there's "a traditional badge of honor for working late to the point of exhaustion and burnout," Girson says. Benefits and perks aren't just about what's on paper—you also want to understand what the cultural norms are in practice.
- **Mine your networks.** You can use [LinkedIn](#) to find connections who work at the potential employer to ask them more about how the company deals with certain situations behind the scenes, Girson advises. Are flexible work hours actually as flexible as they seem?

The bottom line is to know what you want—and to ask for it. "Be very aware of your needs," Berger says, because at most companies, "Everything's on the table right now."

Allison Torres Burtka is a freelance writer and editor in metro Detroit. She writes about topics that range from leadership and careers to diversity to sustainability to sports to health and wellness. The common thread is empowerment. Her writing has been published in [The Guardian](#), the Sierra Club's [Sierra](#) magazine, [Crain's Detroit Business](#), [espnW](#), [Women's Running](#), [Insider](#), and other outlets. Before becoming a full-time freelancer, she was the editor of *Trial*, the flagship magazine of the American Association for Justice. Along with her writing, she has edited magazines, books, blogs, and other types of content. To see more of her writing, visit her [writing portfolio](#).

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