

2026

Leave and Accommodations Employee Experience Report



Introduction

Leave and accommodations have never been more complex for HR. Rising case volumes, benefits expansions, a rapidly changing state leave law landscape, and relatively new laws like the Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (PWFA) are all converging at once. At the same time, the workforce itself is shifting in ways that shape how and why employees ask for support.

For this report, we surveyed 2,000 employees from companies with 500 or more employees. Half had taken a leave of absence in the past three years; the other half had requested an

accommodation under the ADA or PWFA in the same timeframe. We wanted to understand what they experienced across the full process: what worked, what fell short, and where there is room to do better.

Read alongside our [2026 State of Leave and Accommodations](#), this report offers a complete picture of how HR and today's workforce are navigating life's challenges within an evolving landscape of benefits and legal protections.



2026

Leave of Absence Employee Experience Report

Across this year's survey responses, several key trends stood out. We found both striking generational similarities and meaningful differences across age cohorts, all of which point to new challenges for HR and real opportunities to evolve leave programs to meet changing needs and expectations. Getting this right matters: the payoff is a more engaged, productive, and loyal workforce, and an HR team better equipped to handle growing demand.

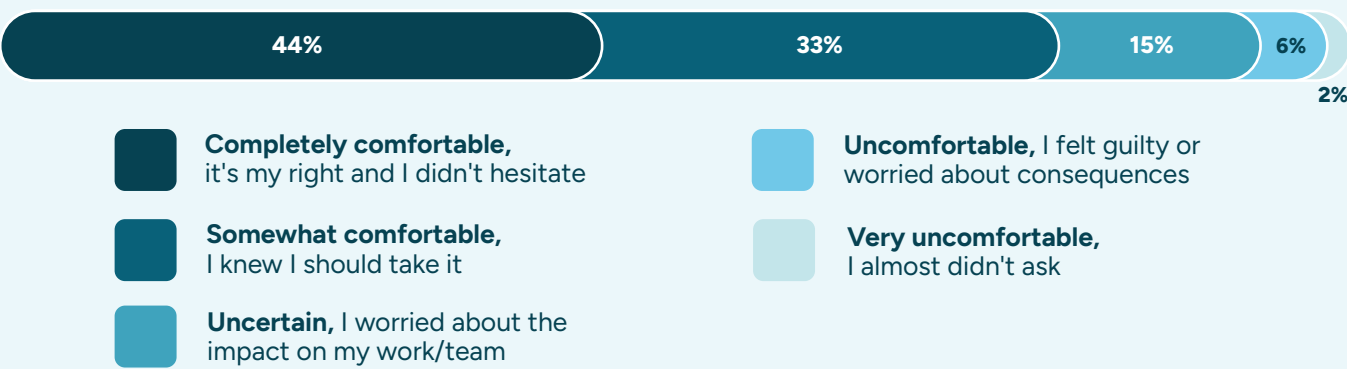


Every Generation in the Workforce Today is Comfortable Taking Leaves of Absence

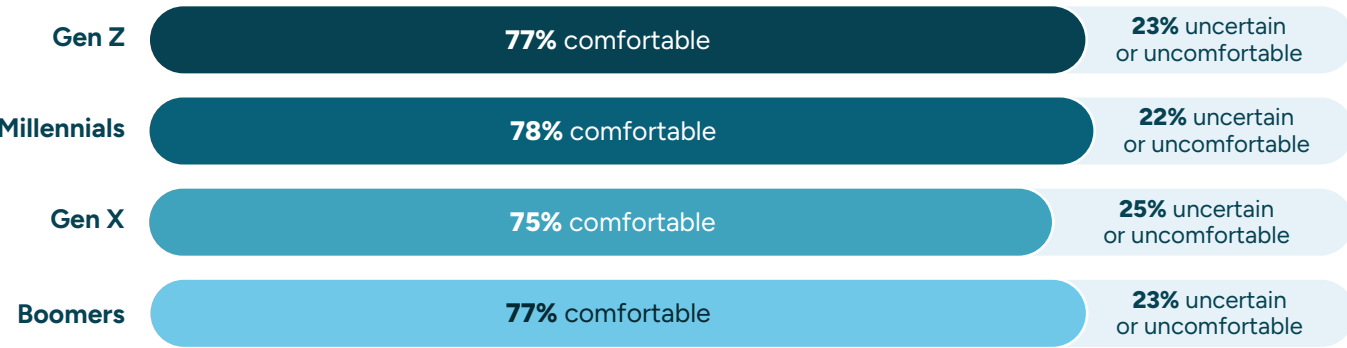
Leave rates have been rising for years, but one factor stands out as consistent across all of them: today's workforce will take the time they need. Gen Z (77%), Millennials (78%), Gen X (75%), and Boomers (77%) all report feeling comfortable requesting leave at nearly identical rates. This challenges the assumption that younger workers are driving the rise in leave requests. Older workers want work-life balance just as much as their younger colleagues.

For HR, the message is clear. Every generation needs support, and leave programs should be built to serve employees at every stage of life.

When you realized you needed leave, how did you feel about requesting it?



Every generation is comfortable asking for leave:



Nearly a Third of All Leaves of Absence are Managed by Frontline Supervisors

While more than half of employees had their leave managed by HR, nearly a third were managed by frontline supervisors. Managers have always had an outsized impact on the employee experience, but in leave situations, an untrained manager can create serious compliance risk.

FMLA is a complex law with mandated timelines, specific forms, and strict notice requirements. When managers grant or deny leave without HR involvement, or without a solid understanding of employee entitlements under federal and state law, the organization is exposed to costly complaints and litigation.

Who primarily managed the process for your leave of absence?



In Their Own Words: Problematic Experiences with Managers

Many open-ended responses pointed to issues with supervisors and managers. These responses reveal real experience gaps and compliance risks that stem from inconsistent manager training, including not knowing what to do, being unsupportive, or actively discouraging employees from taking leave.

"I wish it had been more streamlined. I felt like my manager had never experienced someone taking leave, just PTO or requested days off."

"I wish they wouldn't have demonized me for doing it. It felt like it was a really bad thing that I requested leave and I also had to get it approved through three different managers. I wish the process was easier and more fair."

"I just wish that we had a separate person responsible for approving the leave, but my manager took it too... personally."



Every Generation is Taking Leave for Very Different Reasons

Leave drivers vary widely across generations, from mental health to caregiving to injury recovery, and that spread is adding new layers of complexity for HR. Gen Z leads with mental health as the primary reason for leave. Millennials are split between physical recovery and mental health. Gen X is driven most by caregiving and surgery. Boomers lead with physical recovery and caregiving. Pregnancy and bonding with a new child account for 12% of all leave overall, cutting across younger generations.

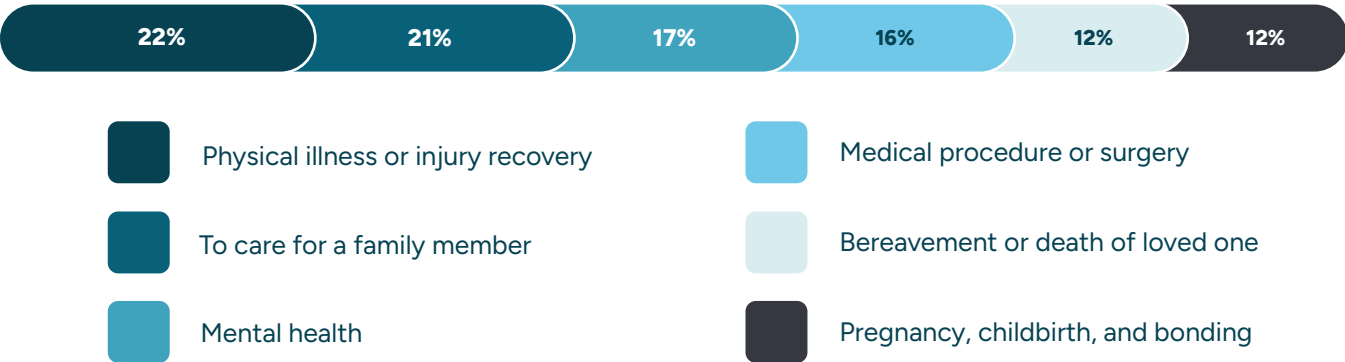
This range makes it clear that a one-size-fits-all leave program will fall short. Organizations need medical leave, mental health leave, caregiver leave, bereavement leave, and parental leave working together, because at any given time, employees across every age group are drawing on them for completely different reasons. When programs aren't built to serve the full workforce, it can create a perceived imbalance. Older employees facing serious illness who can't access the same support as younger colleagues on parental leave will notice, and morale and retention suffer as a result.

Gen X and Silent Pressure of Being the Sandwich Generation

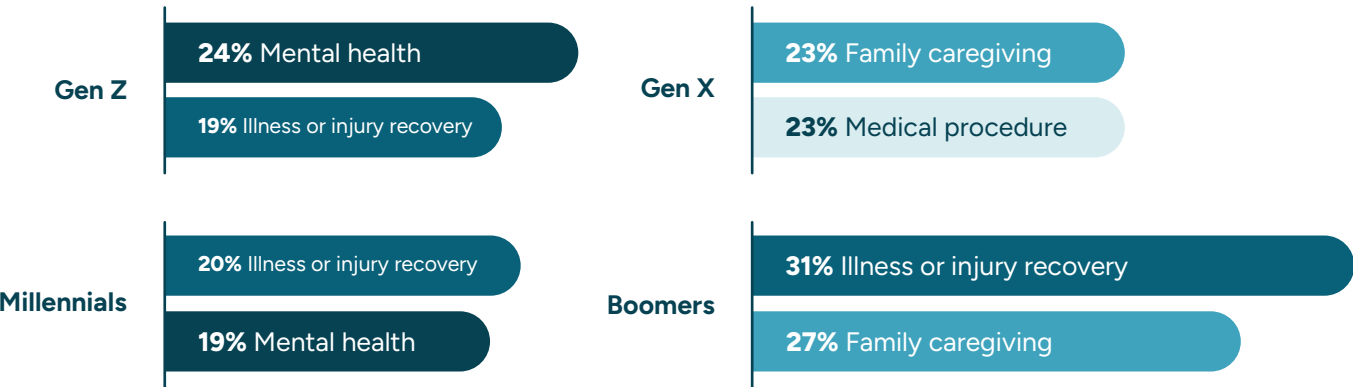
Gen X stands apart, with caregiving and medical procedures as their top two reasons for leave. This reflects the reality many Gen X employees are living: managing aging parents, supporting children, and handling their own health needs at the same time. These are employees in their prime working years, often the institutional knowledge holders in their organizations.

They are frequently left out of workforce conversations, but this data suggests they may be the generation most at risk of burnout and turnover, and the least likely to receive targeted support. Organizations that offer robust caregiver leave and flexible return-to-work options are better positioned to retain these critical employees.

What was the primary reason for your most recent leave?



The reasons for leave differ across generations:

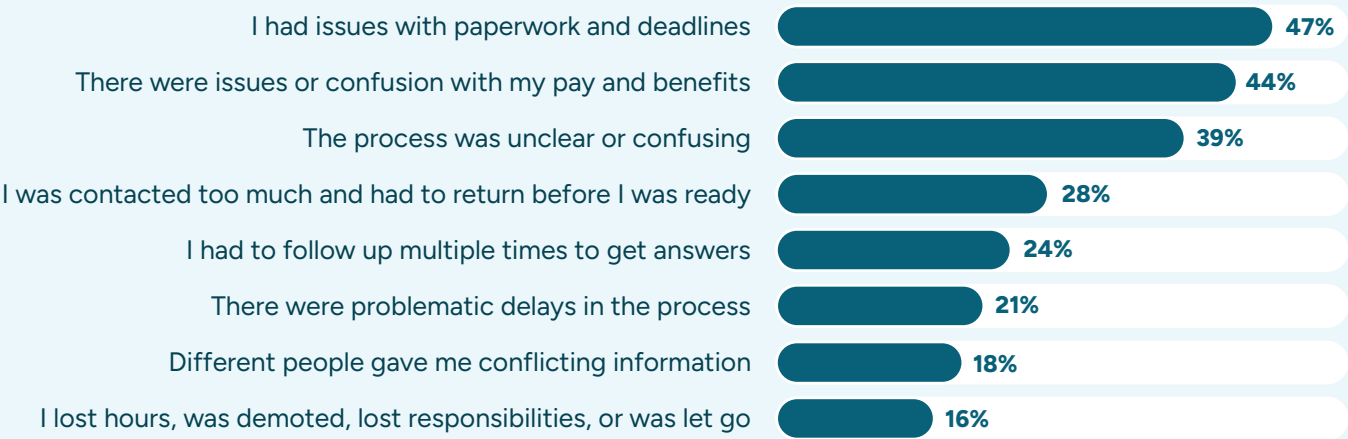


Paperwork, Pay, and Process Issues are Prevalent in Leave Programs

A significant share of employees in our survey reported running into problems during the leave process. Nearly half cited challenges with paperwork and deadlines, and an equal number reported confusion or errors with pay and benefits. Nearly 40% said the process itself was unclear or confusing. Each of these issues chips away at the employee experience and becomes a real retention risk.

The most serious finding involves compliance. Employers are prohibited from retaliating against employees who take a qualified leave of absence. Yet 16% of respondents reported lost hours, demotions, lost responsibilities, or terminations during or after their leave. In a survey of 1,000 employees, that represents more than 100 people describing actions that are serious indicators of noncompliance, occurring at some of the most difficult moments of their lives.

Did you experience any of the following during or after your leave of absence?



In Their Own Words: The Impact of the Leave Process

Many open-ended responses pointed to process breakdowns that added stress during already difficult moments in their lives. It's easy to think of employee experience in terms of gestures like flowers, cards, and check-ins. But improving the leave administration process itself has a far greater impact.

"I wish the entire process was easier and much faster. It was quite complicated and required a great deal of paperwork and I had to pay my physician to complete all of the paperwork."



"I wish the process had been more streamlined, with clear instructions from the beginning and a single point of contact to handle all paperwork and questions. It would have reduced confusion and made the experience less stressful."



"I would have liked to have a single point of contact person where I could get all the information I needed to know and submit paperwork to. The process was very fragmented and confusing. I would like more clarity on what needs to be accomplished and by what date."



"I wish communication had been clearer and more timely so I was not left anxious and in the dark about my pay and return date."



The Return to Work Experience is Still a Major Gap

Returning to work after a leave of absence is one of the most critical moments in the entire leave experience, yet it is often the least planned for. Many organizations focus heavily on the front end of leave and assume the return will take care of itself. The data says otherwise.

Only half of employees said their team even knew they were coming back, and just 50% felt welcomed upon return. Only one in three had their systems and access ready on day one, and just one in four had a return-to-work conversation with their manager.

Accommodations are commonly needed after a leave, but only 19% said anyone checked

whether they were needed. Another 19% reported difficulties or confusion when trying to request them.

This is a moment that directly shapes whether an employee re-engages or starts looking for a new job. For most organizations, it is being left almost entirely to chance. They are frequently left out of workforce conversations, but this data suggests they may be the generation most at risk of burnout and turnover, and the least likely to receive targeted support. Organizations that offer robust caregiver leave and flexible return-to-work options are better positioned to retain these critical employees.

When you returned from leave, what happened? (Select all that apply)



In Their Own Words: Returning to Work Can Be a Challenge

Many respondents reported difficulty as their leave was coming to an end. From process confusion to feeling pushed back before they were ready, the return to work experience left a lot to be desired. This matters beyond the moment itself. How an employee is brought back after extended time away has a lasting impact on morale, productivity, and how they feel about their employer going forward.

"I was assigned a case worker that was never there. This caused a three-week delay in returning. Plus there was no communication between the third-party and my company on statuses."



"I wish the leave process had been more flexible and better communicated so returning to work felt less stressful."



"I wish my team made me feel welcome when returning, instead they made me feel left out and like I didn't belong anymore."



"The company my employer used could do a lot better. There was misinformation. They didn't know that I had returned back to work after they had paperwork that said when I should turn back to work."

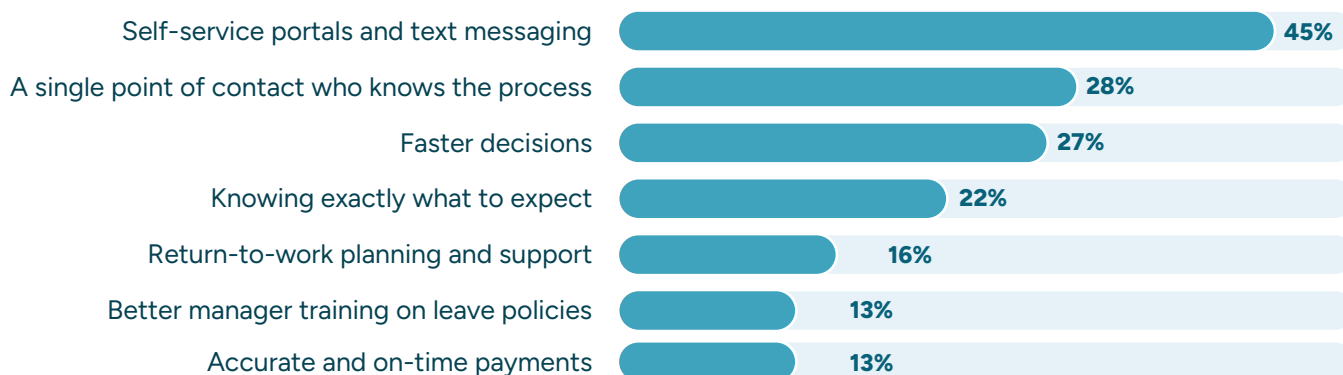


Technology is Critical to Employee Leave Experience

Employee expectations around technology and self-service are rising, and providing them with the right solutions can have a big impact on employee experience. Organizations still running leave through email chains, paper forms, and phone calls are creating friction at the exact moment employees need support most. Even HRIS add-ons often don't provide the technical foundation for a better leave experience.

Purpose-built leave and accommodations platforms change that. They give HR teams the tools to save time and strengthen compliance, while also delivering the kind of experience employees are asking for. Self-service portals, automated eligibility calculations, text messaging, and timely reminders address many of the pain points employees described throughout our survey. For overworked HR teams, better technology means fewer calls, fewer errors, and fewer employees left wondering what happens next.

What would have most improved your leave experience? (Select the top three)



If you could have managed your leave request entirely from your smartphone, would you have preferred that?



- | | |
|---|--|
| ☒ Yes, absolutely, that's how I do everything | ☐ No, I prefer speaking with someone directly |
| ☒ Yes, for some parts of the process | ☐ No, I prefer a desktop or laptop |
| ☒ No preference between phone and computer | |

In Their Own Words: Streamlined Leave Management

A large number of respondents said they wanted a better digital experience. What they described instead was slow, paper-heavy, and fragmented. Behind that picture is likely an administrative burden that is weighing heavily on HR teams who genuinely want to do right by their employees but don't have the tools to make it easy.

"I wish the process had been faster and more transparent, with a single point of contact or a portal for clear status updates."



"Definitely would be easier to do everything from my phone, through a company website portal, or something instead of filling out paperwork."



"I wish there was one person or portal to use to process my FMLA."

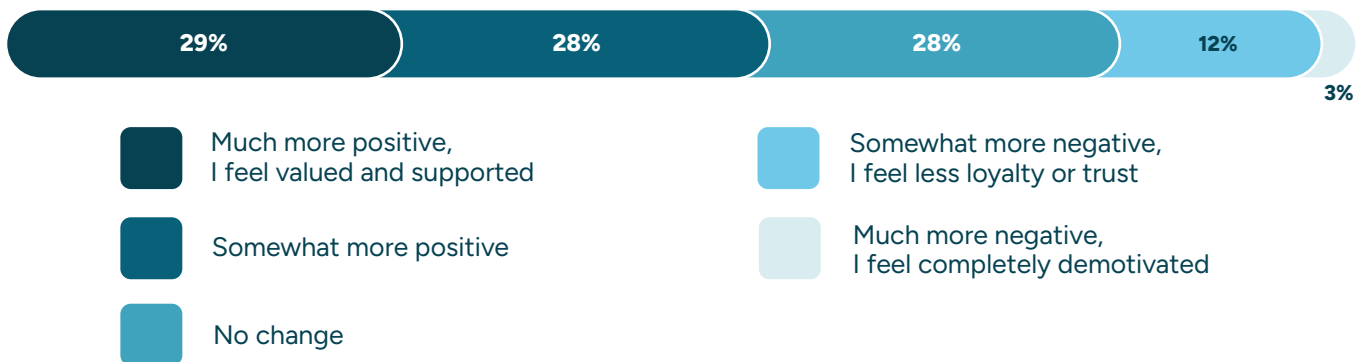


Leave Experiences Matter, Whether Good or Bad

Our respondents reported a wide range of leave experiences, from seamless and worry-free to genuinely difficult. Only a third said their experience had no effect on how they view their employer. More than half (57%) reported a more positive view of their employer after taking leave, meaning that simply offering and supporting time away has a real impact on how employees feel about where they work.

While only 15% reported a negative change, that number shouldn't be dismissed. When a leave goes wrong, the consequences are serious: demotivation, loss of trust, and in many cases, an employee who doesn't come back.

Based on your leave experience, how has your view of your employer changed?



In Their Own Words: Retention and Loyalty

Leave experiences have a direct and lasting effect on the employee-employer relationship. When things go well, employees feel genuinely cared for. When they go poorly, employees start looking for the door.



"I wished it seemed as if they cared and not immediately like I was causing a problem or met with a sense of disbelief. I quit."



"I would have changed everything about my leave. It wasn't that good and I would quit the job if given the chance."



"The process was so smooth that I believe and trust my company more now."



"I honestly can say that my leave experience was handled with empathy and professionalism. I am grateful for the company I work for and I think they could be an example for other companies looking to revamp their leave policy."

2026

Job Accommodations Employee Experience Report

Job accommodations have changed significantly since the ADA was first enacted. What began as primarily equipment and physical workplace modifications has evolved alongside the workforce itself. While there are generational differences in why employees request accommodations and what they ask for, the most common requests today look very different from even a decade ago.

Flexibility now dominates the list of requested accommodations, whether in the form of schedule changes, intermittent time away, or remote work. This finding mirrors what employers told us in our 2026 State of Leave

and Accommodations report. Schedule-based accommodations create real tension for organizations that rely on hourly scheduling, staffing ratios, or roles where being on-site is essential.

But the case for finding ways to meet employees where they are is strong, and when accommodations are handled well, they drive loyalty, productivity, and retention. HR teams understand this better than anyone, and they also know they are often the ones caught in the middle, balancing employee needs against operational realities with limited guidance and even less time.



More Than a Third of Accommodations Requests are Starting with Front-Line managers

Managers have an important role to play in accommodations, particularly as flexibility dominates the list of what employees are asking for. But the ADA and PWFA carry real compliance requirements, and managers who aren't well-versed in the law can inadvertently create significant risk. More than a third of employees in our survey said they went to their manager first, and another third reported that their manager handled the process entirely. That level of manager involvement makes clear handoffs between HR and front-line supervisors more critical than ever.

The responses also surfaced some specific risks worth noting. One in ten respondents said their manager seemed uncomfortable or unsupportive during the process, and 8% reported that private medical details were shared with coworkers or other managers. Even when these situations occur in 10% of requests, across a large workforce with a high volume of requests, that adds up quickly. Ongoing manager training is one of the most direct ways to reduce compliance risk and protect the employee experience.

How did you first request your accommodation?



Who primarily managed the process for your job accommodation request?



In Their Own Words: Managers Pose Compliance Risks

Retaliation and improper sharing of medical information are serious compliance risks, and several respondents described situations that crossed clear legal lines. These experiences didn't just damage the employee relationship; they put the organization at risk of a complaint or costly lawsuit.

Self-service portals give HR greater visibility into all accommodations requests, and the right platform can automate follow-ups and check-ins so employees can flag problems before they escalate.



"The accommodations experience was traumatizing as I was being judged every single step of the way. My primary manager even started hanging out in my new accommodated area before going to start his actual work shift out on the main floor."

"I received my accommodation but I feel like my manager is continually asking me to forego my accommodations due to office politics. I work from home more than others in my department and my manager is constantly implying (or outright telling me) that the higher ups value 'face time' and my 'absence' is noticed. This puts me in a terrible position as senior leadership does not know about my accommodations and I don't want to tell everyone my business."



"It ended up working out but I was uncomfortable with having several people, including my manager, having access to my medical records. I think only HR needs to know in order to make a decision and they should keep all my information confidential."

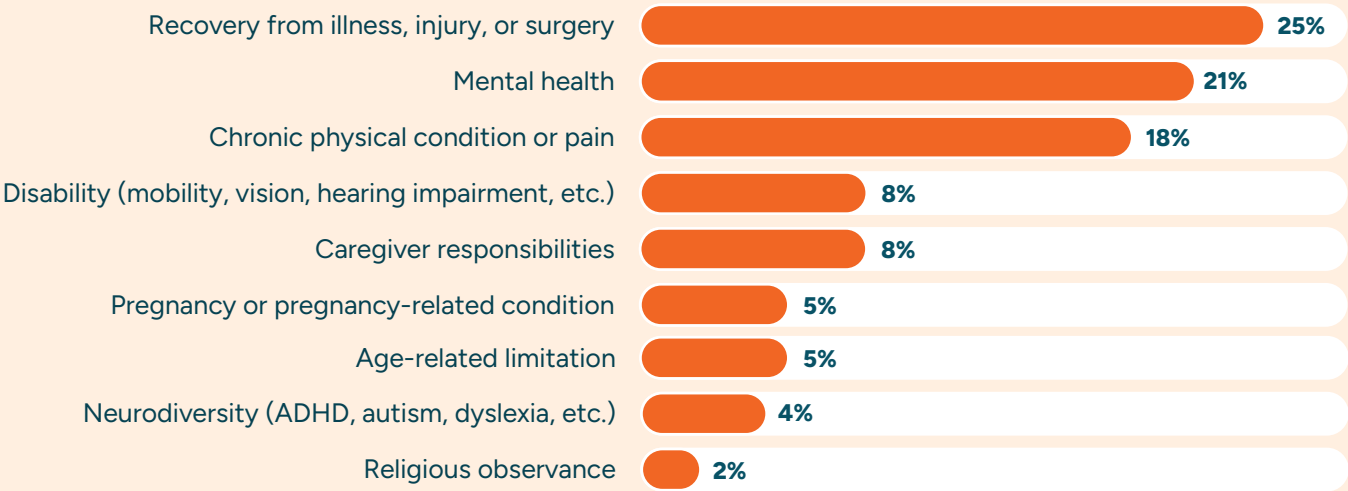


The Key Drivers of Accommodations Shift Based on Generation

The reasons employees request accommodations shift significantly across generations. Illness, injury, and surgery recovery appear consistently across all age groups, but the differences beyond that are notable. Gen Z leads with mental health and neurodiversity as top drivers. Mental health accommodations remain common among Millennials and Gen X as well, though at lower rates than Gen Z. Chronic conditions begin to dominate starting with Gen X, and Boomers report the highest rate of accommodations for physical disabilities.

The connection between Gen Z and neurodiversity is particularly striking. This is a generation that grew up with IEPs and formal support structures in educational settings, and they are bringing that same expectation into the workplace. Mental health also remains a top driver across every generation except Boomers, which means programs built primarily around physical recovery will fall short for a large share of today's workforce. Organizations need accommodations processes flexible enough to handle the full range of what employees are actually asking for.

What was the primary reason for your accommodation request?



Top Three Reasons for Accommodations by Generation



Gen Z

31% Mental health

20% Illness, injury, or surgery recovery

11% Neurodiversity



Millennials

23% Mental health

23% Illness, injury, or surgery recovery

17% Chronic physical condition



Gen X

27% Illness, injury, or surgery recovery

19% Chronic physical condition

19% Mental Health



Boomers

32% Illness, injury, or surgery recovery

28% Chronic physical condition

11% Disability

Accommodations Today are All About Workplace Flexibility

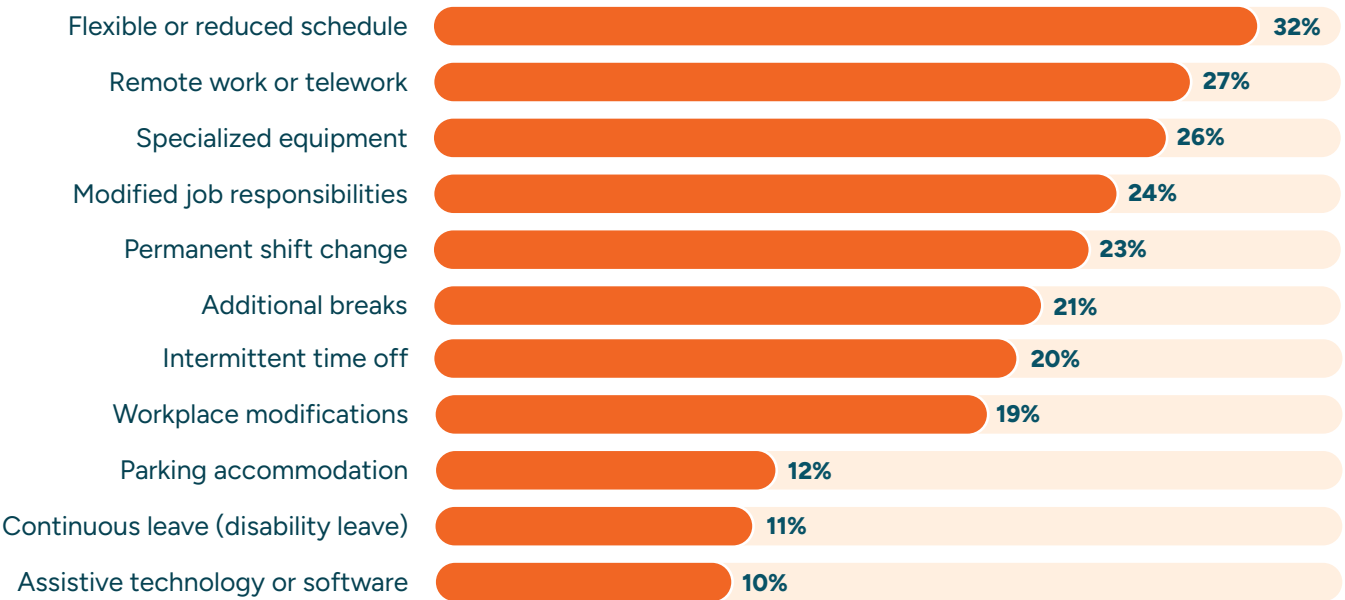
When most people think of a workplace accommodation, they picture specialized equipment: an ergonomic chair, a modified workstation, assistive technology. But that picture no longer reflects what employees are actually requesting. Combined with employer data from the 2026 State of Leave and Accommodations, our findings show a significant shift in what accommodations look like in practice.

More than half of all requests involve schedule and shift changes. Nearly a third are for remote work, and modified job duties account for another quarter. Specialized equipment, long considered the default accommodation, now represents a much smaller percentage of

all requests. The rise of return-to-office mandates is adding another layer of complexity, driving up requests not only for remote work and flexible schedules, but also for parking, seating, and office equipment from employees who are being asked to come back on-site.

Generational patterns are visible here as well. Gen Z and Millennial requests lean heavily toward schedule flexibility and remote work. Moving into Gen X and Boomers, specialized equipment and modified duties become more prominent, reflecting the physical conditions and age-related needs that tend to increase over time.

What accommodation(s) did you request? (Select all that apply)



Top Three Accommodations by Generation



Gen Z

46% Flexible or reduced schedule

32% Permanent shift change

26% Remote work



Millennials

33% Flexible or reduced schedule

27% Remote work

26% Modified duties



Gen X

30% Flexible or reduced schedule

29% Remote work

27% Specialized equipment



Boomers

36% Specialized equipment

22% Remote work

21% Modified duties



Most Employees Eventually Get What They Need, but Compliance Risks Remain

More than half of employees received exactly the accommodation they requested, and another 22% eventually got theirs, even if it took longer than it should have. At a baseline level, that suggests most organizations are trying to do the right thing.

But the data behind those outcomes tells a more complicated story. Only one in four employees said their employer formally engaged in the interactive process, the legally required step under the ADA. Only a third had a meeting to discuss options. Meanwhile, 15% reported invasive questions or inappropriate

sharing of private medical details, a finding that points to real compliance exposure hiding beneath otherwise acceptable outcomes.

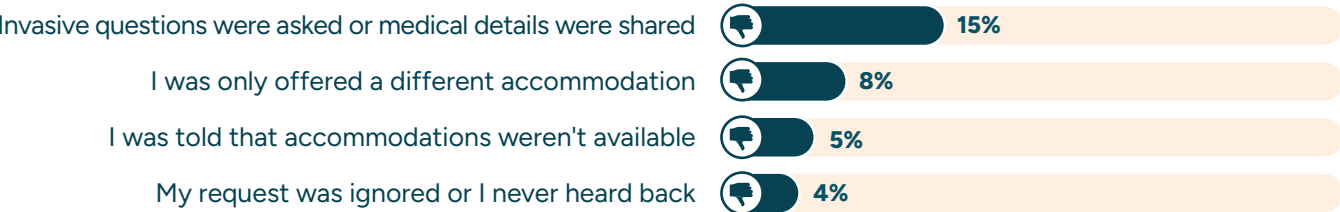
Getting to the right result doesn't always mean the process was compliant. Many employees are receiving accommodations, but not always through a process that would hold up to scrutiny. For the 9% whose requests were denied or redirected, and the 4% who were ignored entirely, the risk is no longer theoretical.

After you requested your accommodation, what happened next? (Select all that apply)

Positive and Compliant Experiences



Negative and Noncompliant Experiences



In Their Own Words: The Impact of Poor Experiences

A handful of responses stood out as particularly serious examples of accommodations going wrong. From a lack of support for an employee navigating cancer treatment, to resistance over something as basic as a chair, these stories reflect how much room for improvement still exists. A closer look at how accommodations are being managed, and where the process is breaking down, can prevent experiences like these and make a meaningful difference for employees at their most vulnerable.



"I had a high-risk pregnancy. The assistant principal wanted me to do outside car duty where I would be on my feet for 45 minutes opening car doors and unloading children. I asked for a different duty indoors and that was granted. I asked for a chair, and I was not treated well when I asked for that small accommodation."



"I was compared to the HR director's special needs daughter, whose diagnosis was nothing like mine, eventually leading to me leaving the company. I am considering taking legal action."



"It seemed like there was a large deterrent for me or anyone else in the organization even thinking about asking for any type of ADA special accommodations."



"Having been diagnosed with cancer and had to go through surgery, chemo, and radiation, I expected that work restrictions and accommodation would have been simpler, especially after being promised that I will be supported and helped finding a less strenuous workload in healthcare. It took too long to make that happen, and I had to go back to work early due to financial constraints. Some people just don't care."



Workplaces Are Struggling to Support Mental Health and Neurodiversity Accommodations

Taken as a whole, most employees did not report negative experiences during their accommodations process, which reflects positively on employers handling a wide range of requests. But those numbers shift considerably when you look at results by accommodation type.

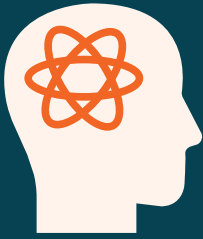
Employees requesting neurodiversity accommodations reported the highest levels of friction. Thirty-seven percent said the process took too long, 28% feared retaliation, and 24% said their manager was uncomfortable or unsupportive. Mental health accommodations weren't far behind, with 30% experiencing delays, 20% fearing retaliation,

and 16% feeling discouraged from asking in the first place.

The accommodations with the least friction were those tied to illness and injury recovery, where nearly a third of respondents reported no negative issues at all. That gap points to processes that are better equipped to handle visible, physical needs than invisible ones. It also likely reflects a manager challenge: when an accommodation involves schedule changes or time away, it directly affects how the work gets done, and managers without proper training may resist or mishandle those requests without fully understanding the legal obligation to engage.

During the accommodations process, which of the following did you experience? (Select all that apply)





Top three issues with mental health accommodations

- 30%** The process took longer than expected
- 20%** I was worried about retaliation or being treated differently
- 16%** I felt discouraged from asking



Top three issues with neurodiversity accommodations

- 37%** The process took longer than expected
- 28%** I was worried about retaliation or being treated differently
- 24%** My manager seemed uncomfortable or unsupportive



Top three issues with illness or injury recovery accommodations

- 24%** The process took longer than expected
- 21%** I had to explain my medical condition multiple times
- 15%** I was worried about retaliation or being treated differently



Those who reported having no negative issues

- 28%** Illness/injury recovery
- 19%** Chronic pain or condition
- 17%** Mental health

In Their Own Words: Experiences Asking for Mental Health Accommodations

Many mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety, and PTSD, are covered under the ADA. They may also be covered under the PWFA when exacerbated by pregnancy or childbirth. Despite this, several respondents described real barriers when requesting mental health accommodations, including stigma, documentation hurdles, and a general lack of awareness about what they were entitled to. These are gaps that employer can close through manager training and confidential, streamlined request processes.

"I really wasn't ever informed about how my PTSD and bipolar disorder could be accommodated prior to talking to HR. I wish I would have been taught at the time I was hired what flexibility is and isn't an option."



"The process was highly uncomfortable, because so much stigma comes with mental health issues."



"It felt as though they purposely made it a difficult process to discourage you from asking."



"I submitted medical documentation with my request but it was from a few years ago and they wanted new documentation. It takes a long time to get in to see a social worker, so it would have been another three months before I could have done anything about it."



Technology Can Drive Better, More Compliant Experiences

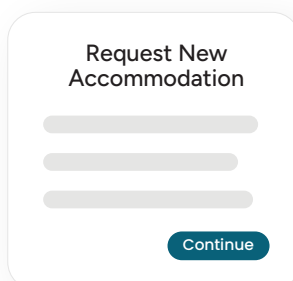
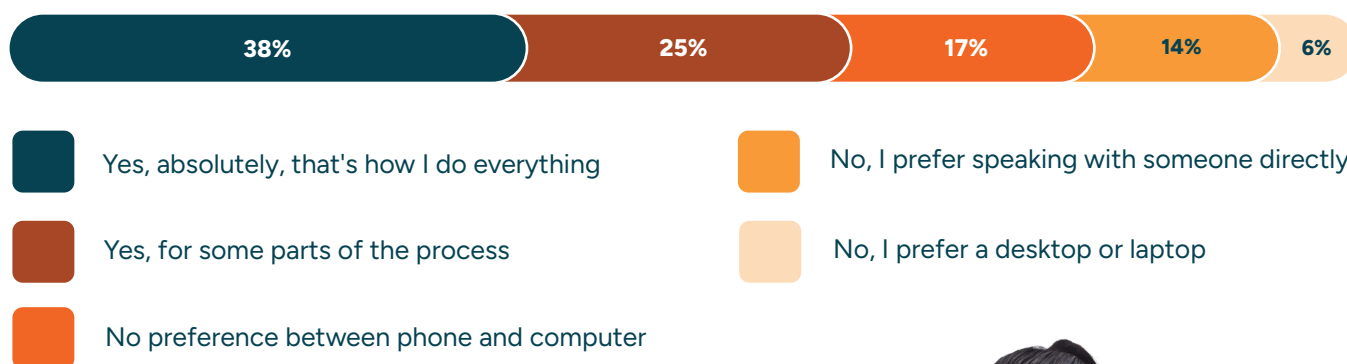
The compliance risks in accommodations are often invisible to HR. When managers handle requests informally, grant accommodations through a quick conversation, or share medical details without thinking twice, those situations may never make it back to HR. Without a centralized system routing requests through HR, there is no way to know what is happening, let alone ensure it is compliant.

These are process gaps, and technology is one of the most reliable ways to close them. When 63% of employees say they would prefer to handle some or all of their accommodation requests from a mobile device, they are asking

for a process that is clear, trackable, and in their hands. A purpose-built accommodations platform creates a documented, auditable trail from the first request through final decision. It keeps medical information contained, routes requests to the right people, and ensures the interactive process actually happens rather than getting lost in an email thread or an informal hallway conversation.

For HR teams managing rising request volumes with limited staff, that kind of structure is what makes a compliant, consistent process possible at scale.

If you could have managed your accommodation request entirely from your smartphone, would you have preferred that?



Accommodations Experiences Have a Major Impact

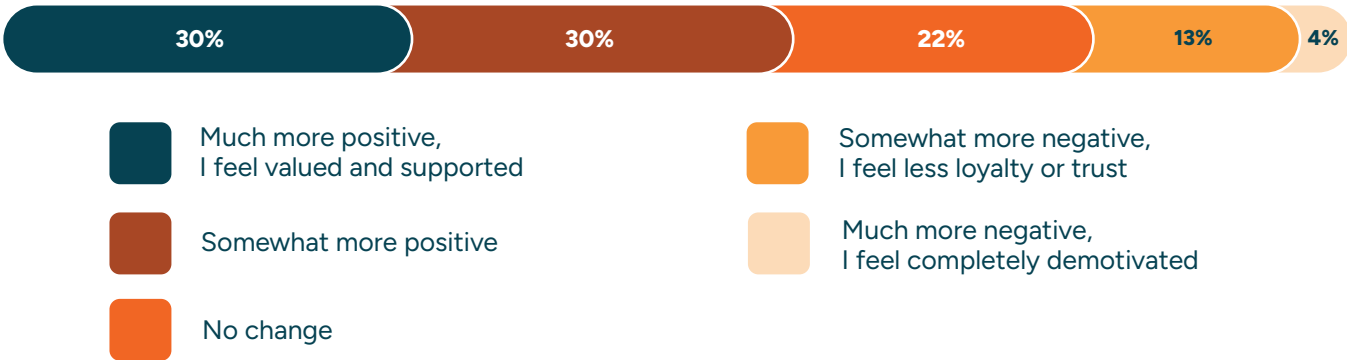
The data makes a strong case for taking accommodations seriously as part of the overall employee experience strategy. Sixty percent of respondents reported a more positive view of their employer after their accommodations experience, a meaningful signal that handling these requests well builds real goodwill and trust.

The 22% who reported no change represent an opportunity worth noting. These are employees whose experience was neutral, which often means the process worked but felt transactional. With some attention to

communication, follow-up, and manager support, many of those neutral experiences could become positive ones.

While only 17% reported a negative change, the consequences when accommodations go wrong are significant. Employees who feel unsupported, ignored, or mistreated during the process are more likely to disengage, lose trust, and eventually leave. Accommodations are one of the most direct ways an organization can show employees that they are valued as whole people, not just workers.

Based on your accommodations experience, how has your view of your employer changed?



In Their Own Words: Productivity and Loyalty

Accommodations carry real weight in the employee-employer relationship. A well-handled request can deepen an employee's commitment to their organization. A poorly handled one can undo years of goodwill, sometimes in a single interaction.



"The HR team that reviewed my request was mostly very hesitant and not open to the accommodations I found necessary. The process overall felt very debilitating and made me less loyal to my current company."



"I felt very unsupported by the company I've dedicated 16 years of my life to."



"I have a very supportive employer, and they see my worth so they're willing to give me what's needed and I'm loyal to them."



"I thought the accommodations experience was successful. I am thriving and enjoying work with the support I need from my team."



Conclusion

The data in this report tells a story that HR teams are already feeling in their day-to-day work. Employees are taking leave and requesting accommodations at higher rates than ever, across every generation, and for a wider range of reasons than most programs were originally built to handle. At the same time, the processes supporting those employees are often falling short, leaving them confused, unsupported, or in some cases, facing situations that put the organization at serious legal risk.

The good news is that the path forward is clear. Employees don't need perfection. They need a process that is easy to navigate, a manager who knows what to do, pay that is calculated correctly, and a return to work that feels like a welcome back rather than an afterthought. For accommodations, they need a confidential, consistent process that takes their needs seriously regardless of whether those needs are visible or invisible.

These are solvable problems, and the right technology makes solving them significantly easier. AbsenceSoft was purpose-built for exactly this challenge. From automated eligibility calculations and compliant FMLA workflows, to self-service portals, text messaging, and return-to-work tracking, AbsenceSoft gives HR teams the tools to manage growing caseloads without sacrificing the employee experience. The platform also supports the full accommodations lifecycle, including the interactive process, medical documentation, and follow-up, all in one centralized system.

For HR teams that are ready to move from reactive to strategic, AbsenceSoft is the partner built for this moment.

Schedule a demo today with a Certified Leave Management Specialist and see how AbsenceSoft can transform the way your team manages leave and accommodations.

[Schedule a Demo](#)