

Transportation Today Podcast *Transcript

Survey of the American Worker

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Murtha: *The following Podcast is a production of Macallan Communications publishers of Transportation Today. Transportation Today is your daily source of news about the latest regulations and innovations that drive the transportation industry across its diverse network of roadways, railroads, the skies above and maritime avenues of travel. Our team of experienced journalists provide the most salient transportation policy news each day, as well as exclusive features. We offer insights on the latest developments impacting Transportation and Infrastructure coming from Congress and the administration and news about federal and state agencies that influence this key industry that moves people in goods, the lifeblood of the US economy.*

And welcome to the transportation today podcast. I'm your host Jim Murtha. In today's program, we're going to have a discussion about the American workforce. Currently, there are about 266 million of us periodically drawing some kind of paycheck. That number fluctuates a bit depending on the seasons and the state of the American economy.

Up until January of 2020, most everyone who wanted a job had one. And if you are looking for employment, there were millions of job openings to choose from. Things were good. Then in February of 2020, the pandemic hit and things radically changed, not just for those in the workplace but for everyone drawing a breath on planet Earth.

Businesses everywhere had to scramble to create ways to stay afloat with a workforce locked down at home or sick with COVID 19. Things like working from home, never an option previously, became commonplace as workers decided the daily commute to a job was a waste of time.

Notions like work life balance came into play as workers, using technology, are permitted to live hundreds or even 1000s of miles away from their place of employment. Job interviews, once exclusively done face to face are now done on Zoom. With a pandemic inflation supply chain problems and now artificial intelligence changes to work are coming quickly.

To find out how workers are adapting Employbridge and industrial staffing firm based in Duluth, Georgia, conducted a survey of American workers to find out how the landscape has changed for those who make the country work from one day to the next.

Joining us to discuss the survey is Cathy Canfield, the Vice President of enterprise transformation at employee bridge.

Cathy Canfield, welcome to the Transportation Today podcast.

Canfield: Thank you so much, Jim. Good to be here.

Murtha: *All right, I want to get started with the survey. Why did you do it? Who did you survey? How many workers did you survey? And what kind of information were you looking to obtain?*

Canfield: Yeah, absolutely. We have an annual voice of the American workforce survey. We're in our 17th year of doing this work. It's the longest running and largest survey of its kind, which is focused on hourly workers throughout the supply chain. And so this year, we had over 29,000 respondents from a transportation industry, the logistics industry in the manufacturing industry. And so combined, we're just very interested in the voice of these workers in a more data statistically driven way versus, you know, we all have our biases, perhaps and

anecdotal information. And so this is an opportunity for us to be able to report out on exactly what these folks think and feel about their relationship with work.

Murtha: *Your company, Employbridge, asks a lot of questions of American workers. We'll get into the details later. But for the purposes of this question, can you identify what you thought was the most surprising result?*

Canfield: I think yeah, maybe even two if I can be so bold one, which is focused on job security, which we have not seen come up in recent years, of course, we can likely say that's due to current economic conditions, that even during the pandemic, we didn't see job security rise to the, to the interest and focus of these hourly workers as it has this year. So that's interesting.

And then the second piece is the focus on treatment in the workplace. You know, we had a lot more commentary this year on being treated with respect and expecting acknowledgement in the workplace of you know, performance and attendance and attitude. And so, those couple things were definitely more unique this year than we've seen in years past.

Murtha: *Interesting. You know, the real wildcard in the last three or four years, obviously was the pandemic and that changed well, everybody in every way you can think of, but did the survey reveal how the pandemic impacted working life here in the US?*

Canfield: Yes, for sure. We absolutely have seen and I get this question a lot, Jim, you know, how is the population of the working population changed forever? And I think at best based upon our data, we can say yes, I mean, there were things that we saw during the pandemic, around like shift in schedule, for example. And folks are willing to take a job that had a better schedule to meet the needs of their family and their, you know, commitments at home versus pay being the only factor as it had been, perhaps in years past. And so, absolutely, focus on balance and focus on family obligations has changed forever, since COVID.

Murtha: *What do you think workers are expecting from a job today that maybe 10 to 20 years ago they were not?*

Canfield: Yeah, I think the resounding answer to that is choice. You know, in years past, we would see things like, Hey, I may not have the best supervisor, this may not be the best work environment, this may not even be the best pay, but I'm going to stick through it because I have a job. And having a job is really important. And I'm gonna hold. And you know, now, and just even on the last couple years, I mean, still today, even in current economic conditions, we almost have two jobs for every available working age person. And so there is absolutely this sense of, I have a choice to go to this employer every day. And things like shift and schedule, security, like I talked about location has come up into the top five, of course, probably due to gas prices. And their the stable schedule, I mean, all those things are playing into their decisions that I mean, we didn't see other than pay itself, none of those things were in the top five, even three years ago. So these folks have really changed their mind on what they're looking for. But also what they expect, you know, day in and day out, it's not just, Hey, once I get the job, I'm going to, you know, work through it, these folks are willing to jump to another opportunity, and more often than we've ever seen before.

Murtha: *So would you say that the employees have a lot more leverage over employers than they used to?*

Canfield: Yeah, I would say, you know, what I would say is they've probably had it, they just didn't know it, you know, I think we've, we've we're sort of unleashing an empowered group of folks. And, and I, you know, my hypothesis is that the creation of sort of a, quote, gig job or things as we know, them, as, you know, GrubHub, or Instacart, are sort of the last mile driver, you know, those opportunities have opened up this concept of choice. And I think folks are realizing like, wow, I do have a say, I do, you know, have an opportunity to work for an employer, who I choose, you know, or at least partner with. And so Absolutely, it's just it's awakened their voice maybe in a way that they didn't feel they had before.

Murtha: *Do you think employers understand that?*

Canfield: Oh, Jim, I'll tell you, when I see with my live audiences is there's always a group of people who I would call sort of early adopters, you know, they take this information, and they sort of run with it. And they're like, we want to be the employer of choice. We want to be out in front. And we want people to know, to come to us in our community, because we want to be considered, you know, that employer who's working on getting

closer to what an employee expects, but certainly, then you have sort of the rest of the group. And, you know, there's definitely some generational views, you know, that we see play out in some of this thinking. And so certainly some of the younger generations are really saying I want to work and I will show up and work my hardest and we're seeing that statistically be the case. But they're also the first to leave. In that respect, isn't there. If that job recognition isn't there, if that advancement opportunity isn't there and communicated with them, they will move with their feet faster than the older generations. For, you know, with who for whom they work. And so it is definitely we're seeing that more and more as the, you know, younger workers are, are starting to be a larger percentage of the population. I think for employers who aren't willing to sort of dive into some of this information and say, okay, like I'm having a generational shift in my workforce, and they think differently, and their relationship with work is different. And I need to start to be a student of that new thinking, those folks are really going to have a hard time in the coming years if they don't start to focus on that.

Murtha: *Sounds almost like a hostage situation to me.*

Canfield: I don't know if I'll go that far. But they're definitely finding some strength.

Murtha: *Well, I, from what I heard, and I actually I have my own business, and I have a lot of friends who do and their experiences are pretty much reflective of what you just said, that there's a whole different relationship between employer and employee these days. And it's, it's manifesting itself in a variety of different ways, and just depends on the business. But it's pretty interesting, though, there's no doubt about that. You mentioned the gig economy, and it occupies a prominent place in your survey. Can you explain exactly what that is and how your survey revealed its impact on today's workforce?*

Canfield: Yes, I mean, we talk about gig. And we refer to that really in sort of a flexible schedule environment. So think about it in a couple of ways. So if we have a traditional 40 Hour Workweek, an employer may offer two workers that, hey, you can work two days a week, and then we will fill in the other three days with another worker to complete 40 hour week, for example. And so that would be sort of a flex opportunity for folks who they want consistent hours, they want a consistent schedule, they just don't want 40 hours a week, let alone you know, mandatory overtime and that kind of thing. We also see what I consider a more-narrow definition of gig,

which is a true four hour or five hour, quote, shift or gig. And that we see where a company has actually been bold enough to sort of unbundle even one shift. So they have, if they have an eight or 10 hour shift, they've broken that out into two gigs. And so you can imagine, you know, in our research, we've really uncovered these, these folks who choose to be gig workers are amazing humans, you know, they're very entrepreneurial. They're very focused on their performance, because many of them, of course, participate in sort of ratings and apps. And so when they show up, they're ready to work. They do it, well, they get it done. And, you know, they go on to the next thing, traditionally, very reliable, because they're usually trying to be incredibly efficient with their time. And so when they say they're going to be there, they're going to be there, they're going to earn their wage, and they're going to go on to the next thing. So these gig workers are definitely part of our future.

I think, you know, two or three years ago, when we started, including gig specific questions. In our survey, we were like, is this a fluke? Like, you know, what's gonna happen? Do? Can we even interest workers to come in to transportation to come in to logistics, as gig workers? Or is this just a food thing? You know? Or is this just an Uber thing, and we've uncovered that these workers if you can get the right schedule, figured out, these gig or gig workers will show up and do their job in a logistics facility or a manufacturing facility just as well as doing you know, sort of the original gig as we think about it with, you know, Uber, Lyft, and, and Instacart. And those guys, so they're here to stay?

I think every employer should be thinking about, is there a way for me to incorporate these sort of flexible opportunities? It certainly doesn't have to be your whole facility, right? But on the periphery, like, if I have to cover, you know, three or 4% attendance scenarios every day, like, Could I fill that with gig workers? Maybe, you know, could I figure out a way to if I have my worst attendance on Mondays? Could I put like a Monday shift in there to help me with that, you know, just some, again, creative ways. You don't have to go all in but definitely some opportunities to start to test that in your work.

Murtha: Do you think the gig workers are they doing it because they want to or because they have to?

Canfield: Yes, I think it's it's a great question. You definitely have a population who has decided I'm going to live like this. You know, I love maximum flexibility. I, you know, and usually there, there are reasons for that,

right? They could be students, they could be folks who are, you know, involved in elder care, or, you know, they have family obligations that, you know, you know, sort of require that flexibility that they can't have and sort of a full time engagement. But then you absolutely have folks who have to do it to make ends meet and or, you know, they've set their own goals, and they, they want to go after it.

So for example, we saw this year, a real sort of pronounced interest from especially the logistics sector in a 4, 10 hour shift. We've never seen it this high. You know, and I think my hypothesis is that they want that that four 10 hour shifts, because they want to go then get additional gig work, to supplement, you know, their income from that for 40 hour workweek. And so, you absolutely have folks, especially in these economic conditions, who are trying to make ends meet. And so they're using gig work as a way to do that.

Murtha: *It sounds to me that being an employer is a lot more complicated than it used to be.*

Canfield: It's, it's not for the faint of heart, for sure. Yeah. And I think I think it's right in that, you know, there's more the creativity, I think, has to be there, or at least an interest in sort of meeting your employees where they are, you know, I absolutely think a decade ago, whatever the employer, it player said, that's how it was, you know, there, there wasn't discussion, necessarily, I mean, maybe in the best places, right, where they had really strong relationships with their employees, you know, those scenarios have existed for a long time. But I would say for the majority of employers, you know, what they said went live. And that's how it was. And, boy, those things are changing. I mean, this social contract with the worker, they expect to be talked to, you know, they expect to be listened to I mean, we're even hearing things like, Hey, I'm really nervous about the economy, like, I expect my employer to tell me how the company is doing. You know, like, I want to know if we're okay, or what is our plan to weather this economic storm, and I'm like, wow, times have changed, you know, they want a seat at the table to at least have more information shared with them?

Murtha: *Well, I think part of the reason workers are looking to gig work is because things cost a lot more, and they need more money, just to just to stay even. So that's inflation. And that has had a huge impact on workers pay, they're paying more for less now, you get fewer groceries, tank of gas a lot more, everything's just more expensive. Did your survey show what impact inflation has had on workers?*

Canfield: Yeah, I think we can definitely make some statements around, you know, some things that we have seen increase that happen in normal, quote, normal years, would not have been as big of factors, for example, location. We haven't seen that be as prominent in the last few years, but this year, at least for logistics workers, it was in the top three of what's most important to them when looking for a job. So I say that to say, you know, if you have a facility where the workers have to drive, you know, 20 minutes out of town to, to work or to, you know, get your day started and then start driving again, somewhere else in the community. You know, definitely these workers are paying attention to that more than we've seen in years past. So certainly, you know, location is a big deal.

Right now, I think also, this concept, like we talked about with job security, you know, if if we have some employers who say, hey, you know, if our shipment doesn't come in, we send everyone home. You know, these workers are looking at that opportunity very differently than perhaps they would have a few years ago, even if that opportunity is paying them more they're going with or at least they're telling us they'd prefer the stability and the job security over that higher pay. And so definitely, I think the economy is having taking its toll on the psyche of the worker for sure.

Murtha: *I know that you survey just workers but employers also are a key factor in this whole relationship. What do you think your average employer would learn upon reading the results of this survey?*

Canfield: Yeah, that's a great question. I think most of the employers who reach out to us, number one, they're just ecstatic to have data, you know, that it isn't just, you know, hey, I heard or these two people said, but it's, it's data that they can really rely upon. And it's a large, you know, segment of people, it's not just a couple of 100, folks, you know, in Albuquerque, you know, so they can really rely upon it. And I do think, you know, it just like in every workplace, there's difference of opinion, right, and certainly different, you know, everyone's looking at what's going on in their facility, from their angle, whether you're in finance or production in our HR. And so, again, to be able to all sit together as a team, and look at this and go, wow, like, you know, each of us has a part to play in this.

I think the other thing that, you know, we talked to a lot of employers about us, just there, Elissa focus on like, Kathy, just we need quality, you know, we need folks who are going to hold and one of the things that we talked to workers about this year in our survey was around, you know, upskilling, and learning new skills. And the cool thing we found is, you know, over 80% of these respondents are said, I will take my own time to learn these skills, I just want to know that I have a pathway at my company, to have this workout, whether that's, you know, pay, whether that's promotion, whether that's additional responsibility, maybe that's, you know, longer tenure, but they want to know what that carrot is. And so, you know, I talk to employers a lot, like, Hey, if you're looking for your next round of leaders, they may already be in the facility, you just don't know it.

Because many of these people have not had experience, you know, talking to a leader or talking to a supervisor or talking to HR about their future, you know, they may not be skilled and saying, hey, I would like this opportunity, I would like to learn how to do this. And so while we continue to look to the outside to bring folks in, you should know that there's a very large population of folks who are currently in your facilities who want advancement opportunities, they want learning opportunities, they may not know how to communicate that to you. And so as an employer, figuring out a way to open up those lines of communication with your current team members, you could have some really amazing folks in your, in your facility already.

Murtha: *That's an interesting phenomenon. And it's one thing that I often talk about when I'm speaking about business and companies and employees and maybe with other folks who are in business, the trend, which is way beyond a trend, it's now baked into I think, to a lot of companies is remote working, where you're on one zoom call after another. And while that may be convenient, it does remove human interaction. And you were just saying that a company could have a lot of employees that want to move up or express some desire to do something else could be good at it. But since they're working from home, and the only interact with management, either on the phone or through a zoom call, or a Microsoft team call, whatever technology you're using, there is you're missing that human element.*

I can recall, you know, my years in business, I used to take what I thought was a lot of bull crap business trips. And you know you're sitting there in a meeting saying, you know, we could have done this on a on a conference call. And I know, I'm not alone in that. But when looking back on it, it did enable me to create relationships to a

point where I could probably go anywhere in the country and find a friend or a business associate with whom I've had personal conversations with over a meal, or a drink or something like that. And now we're able to stay at home and do your work. And I think there's a cost to that. Am I right, in that? That assumption?

Canfield: Yeah, it's a great observation. I mean, we don't have anything in this survey per se that would indicate one way or the other, except to say, when we see things around, you know, communication about learning about training opportunities about courting, you know, about, you know, interviewing and how to stay connected? I mean, those are the types of things that the hourly workers are talking about in the survey. And I think you could, you know, then take from those comments collectively that, hey, there's, there's a connection point that we need to spend time and effort on, I think we see that sort of remote opportunity in our clerical and administrative, you know, really comes out of people love a hybrid or love, or remote opportunity, but it can absolutely, you know, lend itself to what you're describing. You know, I think the transportation industry, right has worked hard in that space, because, of course, especially if you have teams who are out, you know, for, you know, multiple nights and that kind of thing, and trying to keep that community and keeping that, you know, connection going like they've sort of cracked the code, I think, in a different way than maybe some other industries who are newer to that sort of remote effort. And so you definitely have that sense of, I'm in this alone, you know, that can definitely creep up if you don't make it a big effort.

Murtha: *Well, yeah, I mean, it. I'm thinking that, you know, in a small company, for instance, and I have one of those, that I think if you have relationships with all of your, if you're a team, if you're a true team, and you have relationships with everybody that's under your roof, maybe you're less apt to when things get tough to lay somebody off you you'll find a way to economize at some other place. But if I only see this person as a little square on a zoom call, or as a, as a voice on a in a in a phone conversation, then maybe I don't care all that much. I'm just I mean, I'm getting a little philosophical here, and we're supposed to talk about a survey. But I think it all folds in with a lot of questions that you asked, and how things are evolving. And I think that however convenient, remote working may be, there is a cost to it. To everybody, to the employees and to the employers. That's I think that's the point I was trying to make.*

Canfield: Yeah, I think that's right, Jim, I mean, we have as one of our recommendations to employers, you know, to show respect and compassion. And we talk about the different ways, you know, to do that, I mean, it's not always like to your point in person interaction, but it's seeking to understand their experience. I mean, you can do that remotely or in person, you know, to give second chances, you know, things go, we all have very busy lives, things can get sideways, how do we lean into that and say, okay, awesome, how are we going to recover from this? Can we recover from this? You know, how can I help you? Explaining hidden rules? You know, to your point, hey, if we, if we've known this group for a long time, we've all been working together for a while, like, we can complete each other sentences on Zoom or in person, you know, that right for that for that new hire? Who's coming in? Like, I don't know, the last seven acronyms that you've mentioned, you know, how they're laughing at something that I don't understand, you know, all those types of things? Boy, it's much more pronounced in a remote scenario than in person for sure. Yeah.

Murtha: *Well, I think a lot of your survey was done with a manufacturing type businesses. And you know, that's sort of hands on, it's hard to do it remotely. But it's still an element of the worker, employer dynamic that I think, has yet to completely play itself out. It's going to take some time. And I just, I'm normally an optimist. But I'm a little pessimistic about that. Because, you know, we're finding more and more ways to pigeonhole ourselves to be alone. And, you know, I'm a very social person. I've always been that way. And I think that humanity is better served when its members know each other a little bit better than just on a computer screen. That I think that was my point.*

Okay, well, let's look ahead a few years. What changes do you see in the offing and how workers view their jobs and how they work? Let's take it 5 to 10 years.

Canfield: Yeah, I mean, you definitely, as we've talked about briefly, you know, generationally, everything changes, you know, we have if you look just at the population and, you know, even through to your point, like 2029, I mean, we'll have anyone today who's sitting in that 65 to 70 range will retire, which is over 4 million people today, and everyone in that 16 to 24 bracket. You know, we don't, we don't have that many people to replace our retirees. And so that is a big gap for employers to be considering here over the over the next five to six years. I know, you know, I hear regularly and just sort of national news about robotics and automation and

how that makes a lot of people nervous. But the reality is, like, we need to utilize those tools and, you know, figure out a smart way to introduce them into our workplaces. Because if we just look at projected, you know, age groups, I mean, you know, without some type of machine to reproduce a bunch of awesome people, like, you know, we have who we have, and we're just going to have a big gap, and just the workers in general. And then like, we talked about just the view of work and people's relationship to it. I mean, these are current high school and college students, you know, they, they have watched their parents and maybe even their grandparents work, you know, 30 to 40 years at a place, and maybe not have a pension, not have a retirement or it's gone. And they're like, man, do I want to do that? Or do I want to forge a new path that, you know, looks differently? And so, I think the workplace as we know, it, is definitely going to change and I think we'll need, you know, to invest in some automation and to make sure that we can cover the gap of just human beings who we who we don't have today in the States.

Murtha: *Okay, well, that's all the time we have for today's program. Kathy Canfield of Employbridge, thank you so much for sharing the results of your illuminating survey.*

Canfield: Thank you, Jim. So much appreciate the time.

Murtha: The preceding podcast was a production of Macallan Communications publishers of Transportation Today, to submit your ideas for future programs, just go to [www dot transportation today news.com](http://www.transportationtodaynews.com) and look for the podcast section on the front page.

Until next time, I am your host Jim Murtha. Be well be safe, and be prosperous.

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