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AWI Workforce Impact Series

Getting comfortable with the uncomfortable at work

How can companies create a culture where employees feel safe having tough conversations with their managers?

Change the Way the World Works™

What do employees need and want from their companies during tough times?

The pace of change and new challenges has been relentless the last few years. From the unprecedented global pandemic, to social justice uprising around the world, to war and international human rights crises — resilience is low and burnout is high.

We spend one-third of our lives at work. Creating a safe space for employees is crucial to maintaining morale and engagement.

What can compassionate business and people leaders do to support their workforce?

It's understandable to feel divided on which topics are appropriate for the workplace or whether it's better to make a statement or stay silent. New employee research from Achievers Workforce Institute gives strong direction to business leaders.

According to a survey of 1500 employees, half want their company to take a stand on world events and say they feel safer when they can talk about scary times at work — just 18% say they want work to be a place to disconnect where these events aren't discussed.

Most people (62%) want to be able to have hard conversations at work but one-third don't feel safe doing so with their managers. Unfortunately, according to data from the 2023 Manager Effectiveness Report[1], just one-quarter of managers say they have received enough training on having hard conversations with direct reports.

Gen Z and Millennials — the youngest generations in the workplace — are 31% more likely to say they don't feel safe having these conversations with their managers.

A key predictor of feeling safe in these conversations is trust.

Employees with low trust are twice as likely to say they don't feel safe having these conversations with their manager, and some groups are at additional risk due to low trust.

Women and people with disabilities are more likely than average to distrust their managers. In fact, women are twice as likely as men to say they have low manager trust.

What factors increase employee trust?

Employees who feel recognized by their manager are twice as likely to have high trust and are almost twice as likely to say they feel safe having tough conversations with their manager.

A strong sense of belonging at work also doubles the rate of manager trust for employees from one-third to two-thirds. The research-backed AWI Belonging Model™ identifies five pillars for employee belonging: feeling welcomed, known, included, supported, and connected.

Learn more in the Belonging Blueprint, based on more than four years of academic, primary, and business research.



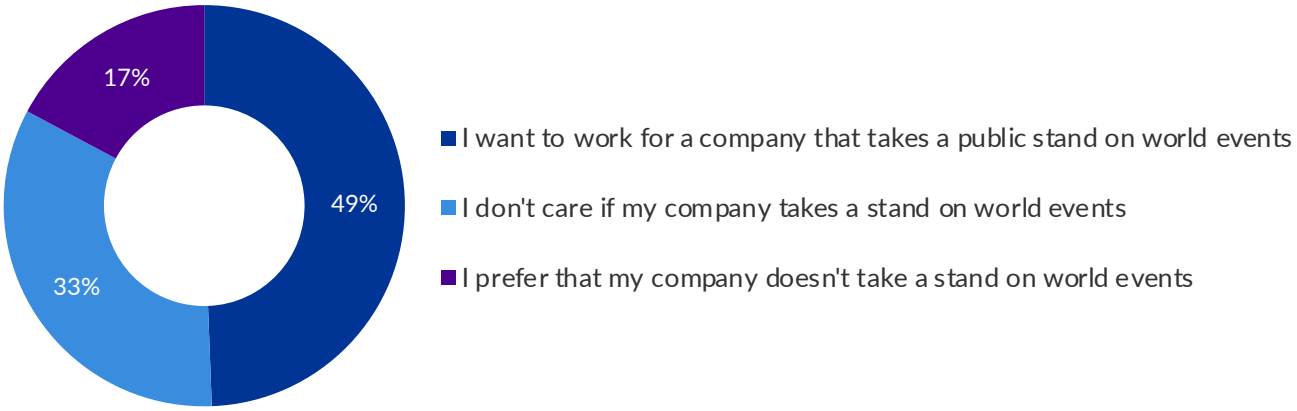
Caitlin Nobes

Head of Research, AWI

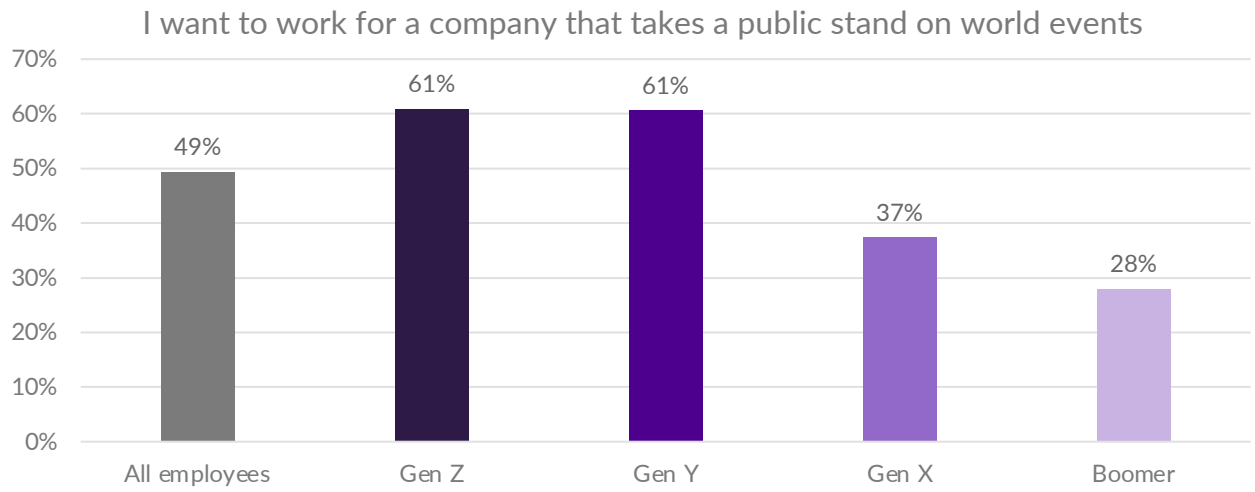
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Employers are increasingly expected to take a stand on world events

Younger generations push to publicly align with values



The expectation that an employer will take a public stand is largely driven by Gen Z and Gen Y (Millennial) workers. Two-thirds of these younger generations, born in 1982 or later, say they want to work for a company that makes this type of statement. Just one in ten of these workers prefer their company **not** take a stand, compared to one in three Baby Boomers.

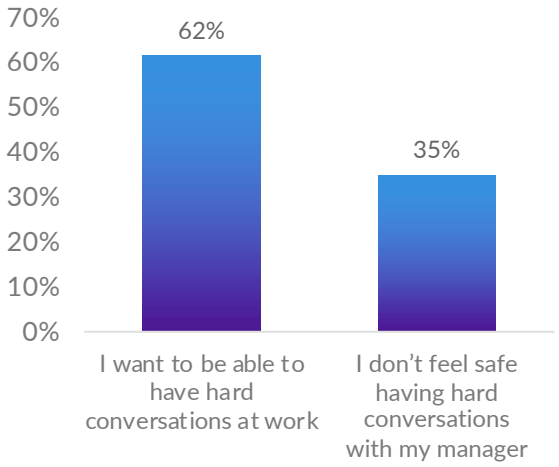


Most employees want work to be a safe space for tough conversations

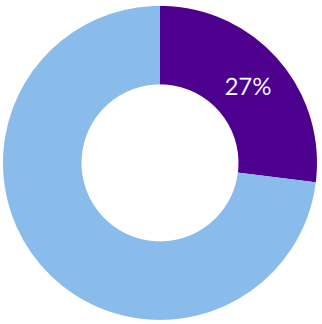
But many don't feel safe having these conversations with their managers, and managers themselves feel underprepared

One third of employees don't feel safe having hard conversations with their manager, according to the latest data from Achievers Workforce Institute (AWI).

This aligns with previous research showing that just one quarter of managers feel they have received sufficient training to support their direct reports through hard conversations.



As a manager, I have received sufficient training in having hard conversations with direct reports



Which groups feel least supported?

Not only are LGBTQ+, visible racial minorities, and people with disabilities more likely to say they can't talk to their managers, **up to 40% say there is no one at work they can have these conversations with.**

In addition, Gen Z and Millennial respondents are 34% more likely than older generations to say they don't feel safe having these conversations with their managers.

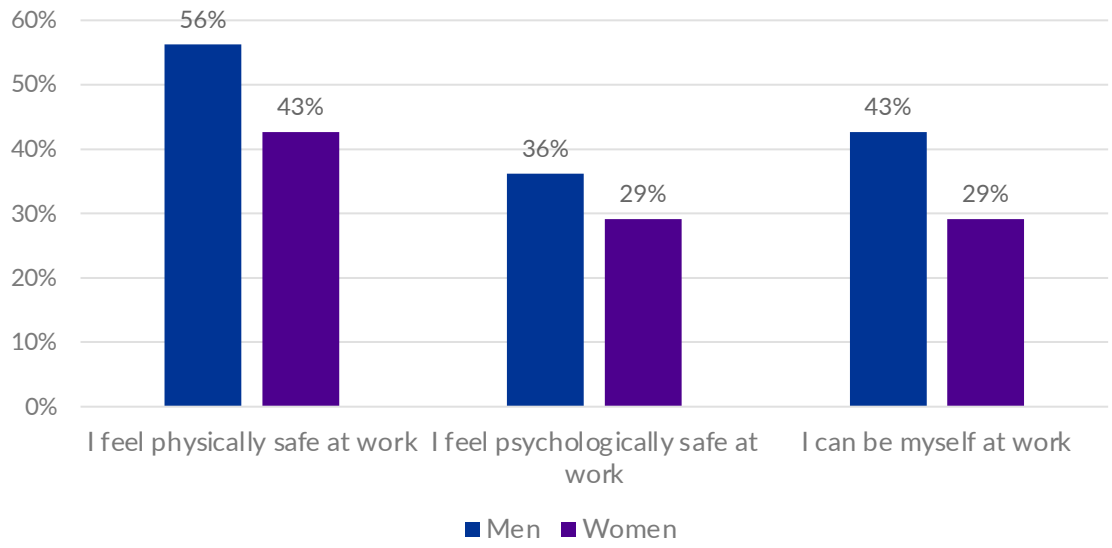
There is no one at work that I can have a hard conversation with

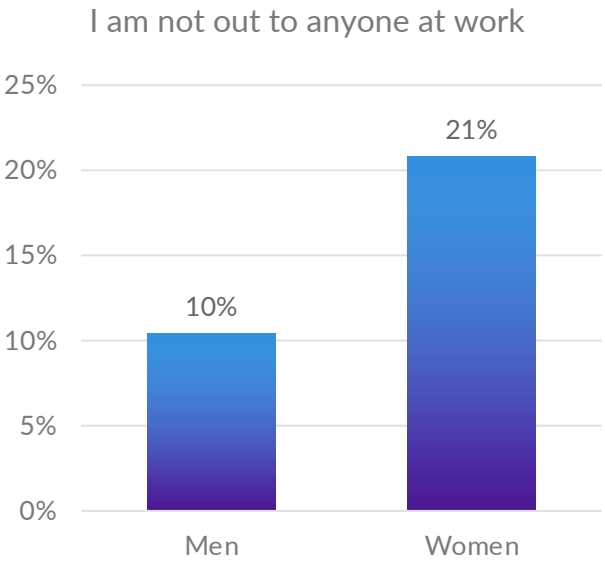


Women say they can't be themselves at work

Women are less likely to feel safe at work and less than one-third say they bring their whole selves to work

Across all demographics, women are the least likely to say they trust their manager or coworkers. This is compounded for women from other traditionally marginalized groups, such as women of color, LGBTQ+ women, and women with disabilities.





Women are less likely to be out as LGBTQ+ at work compared to men

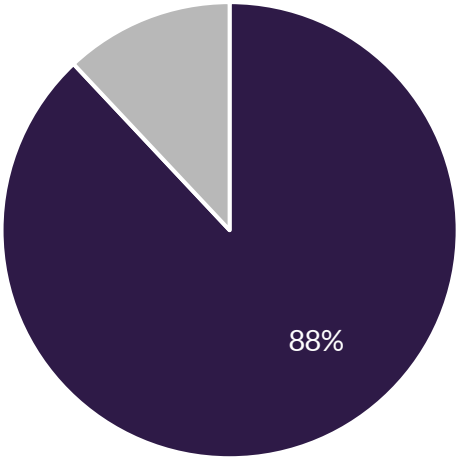
In addition, women are 39% more likely than men to say they want the workplace to be a safe space where they don't have to discuss or confront world events.

While this viewpoint represents just 22% of women, it shows that there is no universal approach to tough topics at work — people leaders can only do their best to accommodate all preferences.

What does everyone agree on? Having fun at work!

Nine out of 10 employees want to be able to have fun or light conversations at work, and seven out of 10 say they can

I want to be able to have fun/light conversations at work



1/3

of employees say there is no one at work they can have fun or light conversations with

Creating a culture of connection

AWI research finds three specific ways that business and people leaders can help employees build stronger relationships and connections. These different tools or programs can help employees meet their peers, build true connections, and feel safe bringing their whole selves to work.

Connection tools

Access to matching tools for meeting coworkers increases the likelihood of having strong relationships at work by 33%.[2]

Frequent recognition

When asked what would help them feel more connected at work, employees' number one answer is feeling meaningfully recognized.[3]

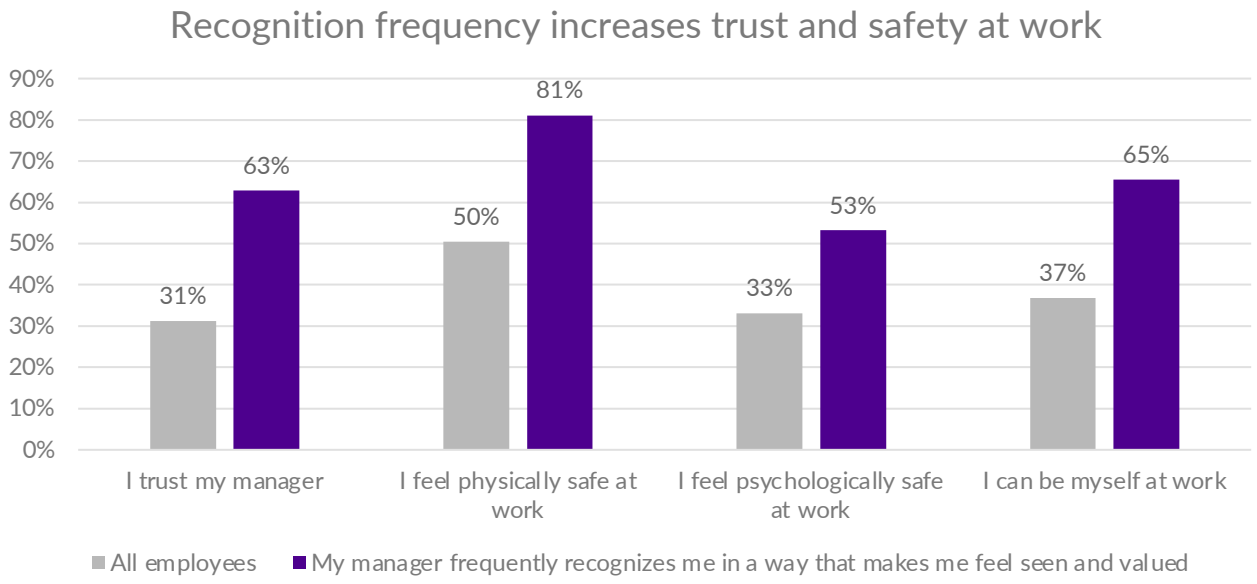
Mental health support

Employees who say they are supported in caring for their mental wellbeing are twice as likely to feel a strong sense of connection at work.[4]

How can business and people leaders create a culture of trust and safety?

A strong sense of trust and safety starts at the manager level

Employees who say they receive frequent recognition from their manager are more likely to report high trust, a sense of safety, and the ability to bring their whole self to work.



Fostering a culture of belonging for everyone

The AWI Belonging Model™ makes employee belonging tangible and practical for every organization. Use the model to align siloed HR functions for driving meaningful change and measurable business results.

Welcomed | Known | Included | Supported | Connected

Learn more about the business case for belonging and get 10 actionable toolkits. Download the AWI Belonging Blueprint today.

Thank you for reading

AWI Workforce Impact vol. 1

April 2024

Sourcing

Unless otherwise indicated, data in this report comes from a March 2024 survey of 1,500 employees in the USA and Canada.

1. Manager Effectiveness, 3,600 employees surveyed in August 2023
2. 2024 Engagement and Retention, 3,800 employees surveyed in November 2023
3. Tech-Enabled Employee Experience, 3,700 employees surveyed in May 2022
4. Manager Effectiveness, 3,600 employees surveyed in August 2023

About Achievers

Achievers works with hundreds of organizations like yours around the world to solve their toughest people problems with the power of frequent recognition, the number one driver of behavior and culture.

Change the Way the World Works™

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