



NET IMPACT 

TALENT REPORT: WHAT WORKERS WANT IN 2012

Executive Summary

www.netimpact.org/whatworkerswant

About This Report

Net Impact's *Talent Report: What Workers Want in 2012* set out to investigate how people view 'impact jobs,' or jobs that provide the opportunity to make social or environmental impact. This survey looked at a statistically-significant national sample of 1,726 individuals: currently-enrolled university students about to enter the workforce, and currently-employed college graduates spanning three generations (Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers). We examined each group's life goals, job satisfaction, and prioritization for making an impact at work against other key job criteria.

Net Impact is grateful to our funder, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation; our research partners from the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development, based at the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University; and our media partner, Edelman for their support. Thanks also to Filene Research Institute for their support.

Funded by The MacArthur Foundation
With media support by Edelman

Full report prepared for Net Impact
by the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development
at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

Professor Cliff Zukin
Mark Szeltner

Full report available online: www.netimpact.org/whatworkerswant
Accompanying graphics: www.netimpact.org/whatworkerswantgraphics

May 2012



Letter from Liz Maw, CEO of Net Impact

Employee engagement is a hot topic these days. Studies have tied employee engagement to both satisfaction and productivity,¹ and companies realize that keeping employees satisfied is a key to high performance. Employers proudly tout making one of the coveted “100 best places to work” lists,² and today, more than 25% of Fortune 200 companies have dedicated budget to maintain their rank on such lists. At Net Impact, we believe we’ve identified a significant opportunity gap—one that could potentially double the number of employees who are satisfied with their job.

Net Impact’s *Talent Report: What Workers Want in 2012* reveals that employees who say they have the opportunity to make a direct social and environmental impact through their job report higher satisfaction levels than those who don’t. In fact, employees who say they can make an impact while on the job report greater satisfaction than those who can’t by a 2:1 ratio. This data is backed up by the two-thirds of graduating university students who tell us that making a difference through their next job is a priority, and by the 45% of students who say they would even take a pay cut to do so.

At Net Impact, we believe that work is good for more than just a paycheck. Work is an opportunity to invest ourselves in issues that are important to us. We are thrilled to release this report demonstrating that impact jobs can make employees more satisfied from nine to five, and thus more productive. Perhaps most importantly, with more of us using our working hours to make an impact on society, we can help solve the difficult yet critical problems facing our world today.

Sincerely,

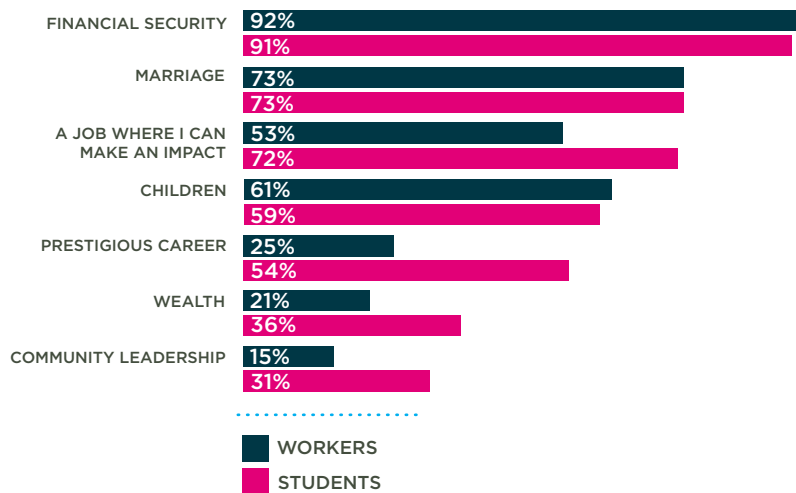
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Liz Maw". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Liz Maw
CEO

People Want Their Job to Make a Difference

Most people say that having a job that makes a social impact on the world is an important life goal (Fig. 1). In fact, students say it is more important than having children, a prestigious career, being wealthy, or being a community leader—ranking only below financial security and marriage. Professionals show similar prioritization, with having children rising higher on their list of goals.

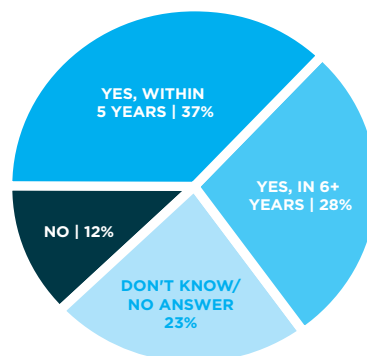
FIG. 1
The Following are Very Important or Essential to My Happiness



Students: Optimistic...and Expectant

In spite of the current economy and a bleak job market, students are fairly optimistic about both their own personal job prospects and how they can use their careers to make a difference. Fifty-eight percent of students expect to have multiple job offers to choose from. And a majority of students (65%) expect to make a

FIG. 2
I Expect to Make an Impact Through My Work...



positive social or environmental difference in the world at some point through their work (Fig. 2, previous page).

Furthermore, over half of the student population (58%) would take a 15% pay cut to “work for an organization whose values are like my own” (Fig. 3).

FIG. 3
All Other Things
Being Equal,
I Would Take a
15% Paycut...

35% ...to work for a company committed to CSR

45% ...for a job that makes a social or environmental impact

58% ...to work for an organization with values like my own

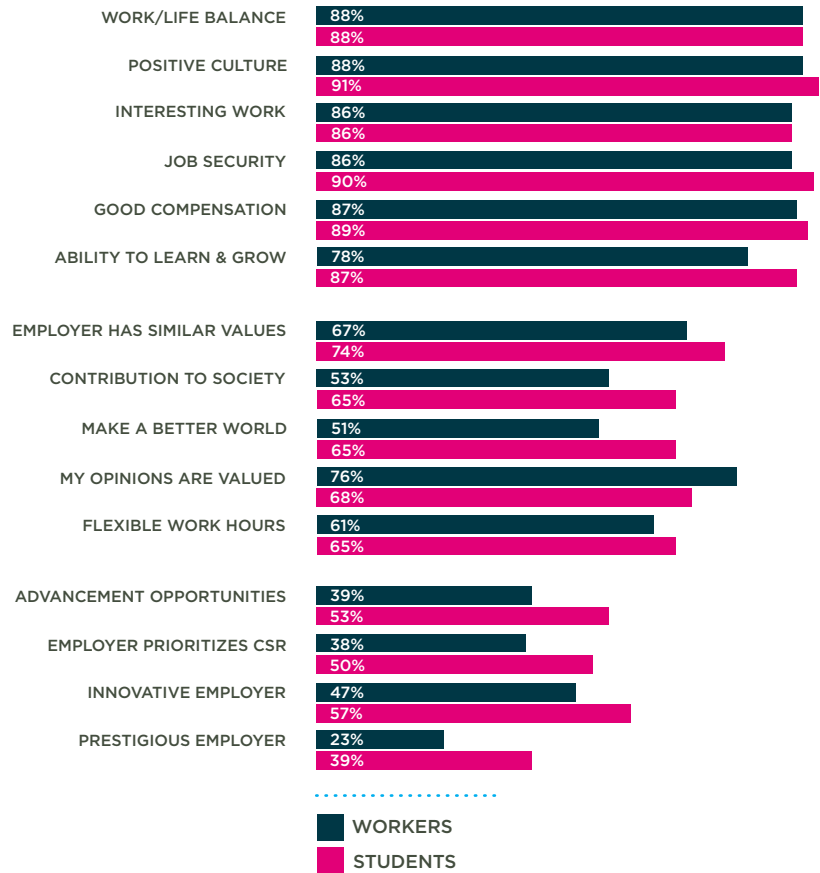
Job Attributes: Non-Negotiables & Differentiators

From our study, we saw three categories of attributes that both students and working professionals care about in their jobs. The first set includes the non-negotiables. As you might expect, attributes like office environment, positive culture, and compensation fall into this category. Next come the differentiators: those attributes that can turn a merely good job into a great one. Among these differentiators are some of those attributes that we at Net Impact are most passionate about, and that we believe employers should invest in to better attract top talent. This includes a job that makes the world a better place or a company that shares their values. Finally, attributes like company prestige and rapid promotion fall lower on the scale for all respondents. See Fig. 4 on the following page.

Students appear willing to consider jobs in a variety of sectors. When asked how they would feel about working for different types of organizations — large corporations, small businesses, nonprofit and government — about half expressed a strong preference. Of that half, government work was the most popular first-choice preference, with students citing job security as a main reason.

FIG. 4

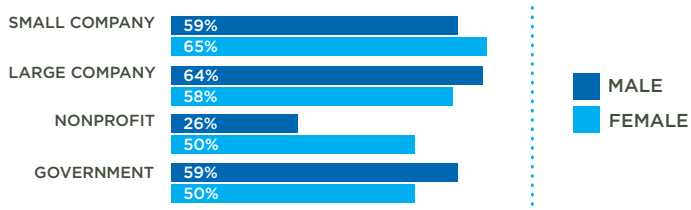
The Following are Very Important or Essential to My Ideal Job



There is a clear difference between the genders when it comes to sector preference. Female students are significantly more likely to want to work at a nonprofit or small company, while male students are more likely to want a job in government or at a large company (Fig. 5).

FIG. 5

I Would Like My Next Job to Be in the Following Sector



Employees: Satisfied With Impact Jobs

When we look at on-the-job impact opportunities compared to job satisfaction, we start to see an intriguing picture take shape. Slightly more than half of professionals (55%) say they are currently in a job where they can make a social or environmental impact on the world. These respondents are more satisfied with their job by a 2:1 ratio (49% report high satisfaction levels, compared to just 24% of those who do not have impact opportunities at work).

We see these satisfaction levels reinforced when digging into the ways people feel connected to impact through their jobs, too. For example, 45% of employees who say they worked directly on a product or service that makes a positive social impact report being very satisfied with their jobs, compared to 29% of those who don't. The research finds similar numbers for people who provide input on sustainability or corporate responsibility issues at work, or volunteer alongside their co-workers.

Women Care More About Impact Jobs Than Men

A number of differences in work attitudes and life goals also show up between the genders. Women consistently express a stronger desire for jobs with impact than men:

- Sixty percent of employed women say that working for a company that prioritizes social and environmental responsibility is very important to them, compared to 38% of men.
- Thirty percent of working women say they would take a pay cut for a job that makes an impact, compared to 19% of men.
- Female students are more likely to want a job with a company that prioritizes corporate responsibility than male students (60% and 40%, respectively).

Impact-related priorities are the only ones that significantly differ between male and female students. All other job-related priorities (such as compensation, culture, and flexibility), are very similar across the genders.

Civic Engagement, Trust & Job Satisfaction Among Generations

While the generations are more similar in attitudes toward work than distinct, a few key differences emerged.

- Millennials are the most dissatisfied with their current job (24%, compared to 14% of Gen Xers and 18% of Boomers).
- While all generations are dissatisfied with opportunities for promotion, Millennials are more dissatisfied than others with how their company values their input and seeks their opinion, as well as with their compensation. Gen Xers are more dissatisfied with their company culture, and Boomers are more dissatisfied than their younger colleagues with the way their company prioritizes social or environmental responsibility.

Our study mirrors a number of previous research reports that show a decline in civic engagement between the Boomer generation and the younger generations.³ Specifically:

- Less than half of students (43%) reported voting in the last year, compared to nearly three-quarters of Boomers (77%).
- Older generations are more likely than younger to report they have boycotted or “buycotted” (i.e. purchased something based on their values) a product or company.
- Boomers are also the most likely to say they will donate to causes, volunteer outside of work, or be involved with a religious community.
- Boomers trust that people are mostly trying to be helpful (as opposed to looking out for themselves) more than younger generations do. They are also least likely to say it’s important to make a difference to others rather than be personally successful (Figs. 6A and 6B, following page).

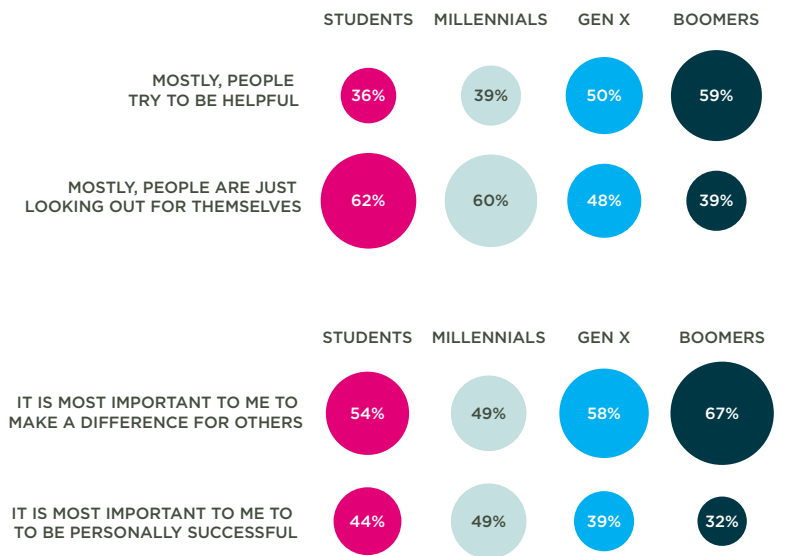
People Feel Responsible

In one encouraging data point, the majority of all generations (61-70%) agree that they have a personal responsibility to make things better for society, rather than leaving it to others. The question remains as to how the younger generations specifically plan to do this, as they show less enthusiasm than Boomers around traditional civic activities like volunteering, donating

money, and political participation. Net Impact would like to see these feelings of personal responsibility manifested in the workplace, and our mission is to help both employees and employers make that a reality.

FIGS. 6A & 6B

Generational Trust and Generosity





Putting the Data to Work: For Employers

In order to satisfy, attract, and engage top talent,⁴ employers would be well advised to place a greater emphasis on connecting jobs to social and environmental impact. In good news, many employers are already taking steps to do this at a macro level, with 95% of Fortune 250 companies publishing sustainability reports⁵ and nonprofits like Teach for America actively recruiting on college campuses (and becoming the #1 choice for thousands of undergrads). But there is more that employers can do:

MAKE IT THE DNA OF EVERYONE'S DAY JOB

While most employees want to feel a direct link between their day job and making a social and environmental impact, that can be hard to do when bogged down in the daily grind of emails and meetings. Executives must clearly define and articulate their organization's broader mission and priorities first, and then connect the dots to every department and level of staff.

In addition, employees need to understand how their skills can be applied to specific impact-related activities, either as part of their job description (such as through product or service development), or as an initiative that goes above and beyond their daily role (such as starting a volunteer program). Several short case studies can be found on Net Impact's website, www.netimpact.org/whatworkerswant.

RECRUIT FOR IMPACT

Once impact opportunities have successfully become embedded in the DNA of the day job across an organization, companies can and should integrate this message into recruiting efforts. The majority of students in our study, for example, expect their future job to offer impact opportunities. Companies or nonprofits that offer students direct ways to engage with such opportunities through their job will have a recruiting advantage over others that can't.

WINNING WOMEN OVER

For employers hoping to attract and retain more women, investments in impact jobs will pay off, as women are much more likely than men to say making a difference is important to them. The corporate sector especially can benefit from connecting jobs to impact, as female students are less likely than men to prioritize employment at a large company.



Putting the Data to Work: For Employees & Students

Job seekers and employees have the opportunity to derive greater levels of satisfaction and productivity from their nine-to-five by seeking out, carving out, and making the most of impact opportunities.

KNOW YOUR VALUES

Not surprisingly, workers indicate a big preference for jobs that align with their values, so being clear about what those are will help during the job search. This clarity will allow students to identify which potential employer is a values-match, and which is not. Net Impact's *Six Steps to Job Search Success* (www.netimpact.org/jobsearchsteps), can help job seekers better articulate what they're looking for.

FIND YOUR VOICE

While many employers seek to tie mission into every job, not all organizations have clear paths laid out for those who want to make an impact. Knowing how to make a business case to upper management for why an employer should provide impact opportunities is critical to gaining buy-in. Check out www.netimpact.org/impactatwork for more resources for aspiring workplace changemakers.

WALK THE TALK

If making a difference in your job is important to you (and, based on our data, it probably is!), rethink your assumptions about what makes a "good job." When researching potential employers, focus on organizations—nonprofits, government, mission-oriented companies—that enable their employees to bring their values to work and make a difference. These are the jobs that are most likely to make you happy, according to Net Impact's data. And if you're already employed, look for ways your current skills might be applied to impact work, and consider how you might weave impact into your daily responsibilities and projects. If you can connect the dots of your day job to impact, the research shows you'll be more satisfied on the job. And that's something that all of us, at every level and every function, can use more of. 🌍

Endnotes

- ¹ Towers Watson, “The Power of Three: Taking Engagement to New Heights.” URL: http://www.towerswatson.com/assets/pdf/3848/Towers-Watson-EmployeeSurvey_power-of-three.pdf (2011).
- ² John Sullivan, “Assess Your Employment Brand Using an Audit Checklist.” URL: <http://www.ere.net/2008/07/21/assess-your-employment-brand-using-an-audit-checklist> (July 21, 2008).
- ³ Jean M. Twenge, PhD, and Elise C. Freeman, MA, San Diego State University; W. Keith Campbell, PhD, University of Georgia; “Generational Differences in Young Adults’ Life Goals, Concern for Others, and Civic Orientation, 1966-2009,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 102, No. 5.
- ⁴ Corporate Leadership Council, “Driving Performance and Retention Through Employee Engagement.” Washington DC, 2004.
- ⁵ KPMG International Survey of Corporate Responsibility Reporting 2011, <http://www.kpmg.com/PT/pt/IssuesAndInsights/Documents/corporate-responsibility2011.pdf>, p. 6, p. 7.

About Net Impact

Net Impact is a community of more than 30,000 changemakers using our careers to tackle the world’s toughest problems.

A San Francisco-based nonprofit with more than 300 chapters worldwide, we provide support, connections, and practical advice to help people in all sectors and job functions create a more just and sustainable future.

For more information:
www.netimpact.org/whatworkerswant
