



**ez**cater

# The future of workplace experience





# The next generation craves workplace friendships, employee perks, collaborative workspaces, and on-site connections.

It's no secret that companies have grappled with how and when to implement permanent return to office (RTO) policies over the last several years. Some have adopted fully remote work models while others have decided that a gradual (or in some cases not-so-gradual) full-time return to on-site work is the way forward.

This shift presents a challenge for some companies, as employees have mixed feelings about being asked to spend more time working on-site. But it also creates an opportunity to take a future-focused approach to workplace planning — one that better responds to the needs of the next generation.

Understanding those needs starts with a question: What do today's employees envision as their ideal workplace experience?

ezCater — the #1 food tech platform for workplaces in the U.S. — decided to find out by surveying 1,000 American workers for insights into their current working environments, as well as what's on their workplace wishlists.

"The future of workplace experience will be social," predicts Robert Kaskel, VP of People, ezCater. "It's about finding ways to bring colleagues together, sometimes over a meal, so they can learn from and inspire each other, become friends, and celebrate shared successes, as well as share challenges and solve problems."

Dig into ezCater's 2025 Future of Workplace Experience Report to understand how workplace models continue to shift, the importance of workplace friendships, and how to create future-ready workplaces that foster connection and collaboration.



## Among the top findings:

1

### Younger generations crave in-person connection

Though some employees are resistant to full-time on-site work, in a surprising twist, younger generations actually yearn for more in-person connection and collaboration.

2

### Food perks are the top incentive for on-site attendance

Employees can be incentivized with the right amenities. Food perks emerged as the #1 draw for encouraging on-site attendance.

3

### Office vibe and workplace friendships matter

Beyond the perks, the “office vibe” matters as well. Today’s workers crave engaging workplaces that promote impromptu small group gatherings and a healthy mix of private workspaces and communal areas, connection, and the opportunity to develop workplace friendships (especially the youngest).

4

### Gen Z expects workplace socialization opportunities

Over half of Gen Z (56%) say they expect their company to provide opportunities to socialize.

5

### Gen Z and millennials prioritize wellbeing resources

Gen Z and millennials are 35% more likely than older generations to wish their company offered more resources for their well-being.

6

### Workers like a mix of in-person and tech tools to connect

Workers are happiest when companies lean into both technology and in-person ways to connect — and if those in-person gatherings involve food, even better.

“

The future of workplace experience will be social. It’s about finding ways to bring colleagues together, sometimes over a meal, so they can learn from and inspire each other, become friends, and celebrate shared successes, as well as share challenges and solve problems.

Robert Kaskel

VP of People, ezCater



SECTION 1

# The office redux

With RTO trending up, is your workplace attractive enough?

Companies like [AT&T](#), [Citigroup](#), and [Boeing](#) have already implemented their RTO plans. While some organizations are firmly mandating in-person work, other companies are trying a softer approach — enhancing on-site benefits to provide a more fulfilling workplace experience.



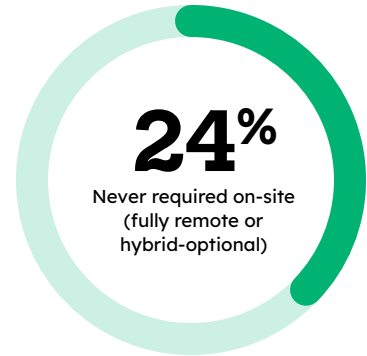
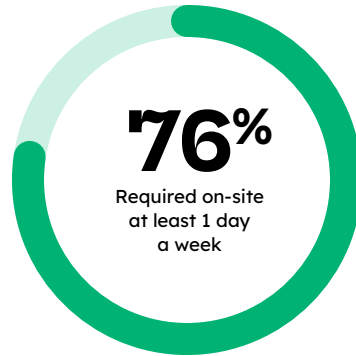
Today's workers want flexibility, friendship, and a workplace that enables both.





## Operation return-to-office is in full swing

Most workers surveyed say they're required on-site at least once a week.



## Workers also expect on-site work requirements to increase

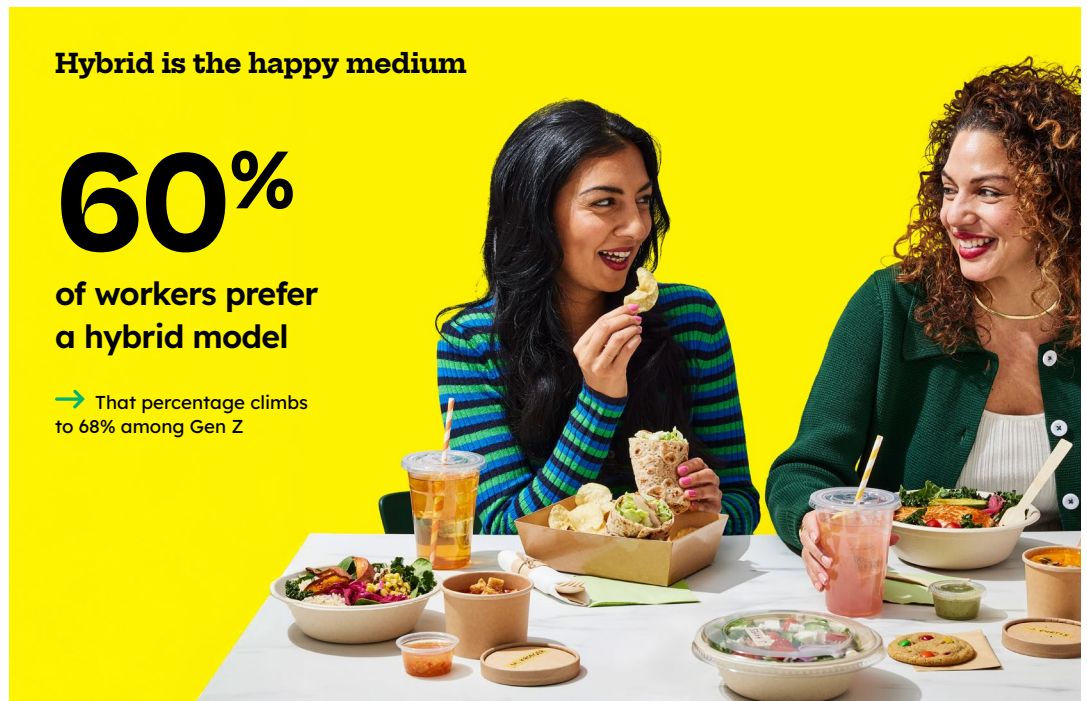
More than 25% of remote/hybrid workers expect their employer to transition to fully on-site work at some point in the future.



## Hybrid is the happy medium

**60%**  
of workers prefer  
a hybrid model

→ That percentage climbs  
to 68% among Gen Z



No matter how they work, employees want wellness resources



Nearly all (98%) workers agree that work-life balance is important to their overall happiness at work

Yet,

55%

of workers wish their company offered more resources for their well-being.

Among fully on-site employees, the percentage rises to 61%.

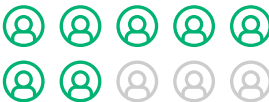
Workplace friendships are a key ingredient

Fully on-site and hybrid workers are 60% more likely than fully remote workers to say they have close friends at work.

FULLY ON-SITE + HYBRID

7 in 10

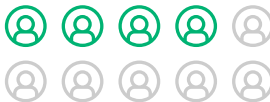
have close friends at work



REMOTE

4 in 10

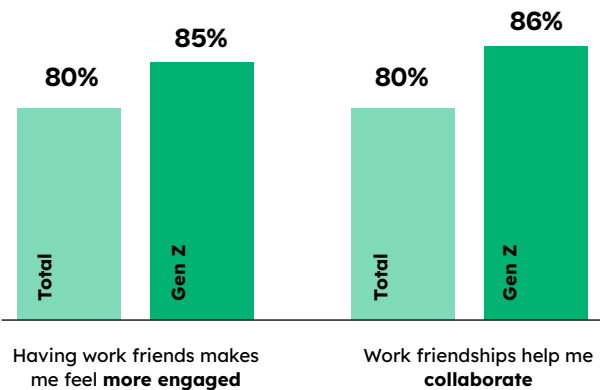
have close friends at work



vs.

Work friendships power connection and collaboration

Friendships make work more fun — and can improve the way work gets done.



7 in 10 workers say it's important to have friendships at work.

## Work friends help boost mental health — and can make employees more likely to stay

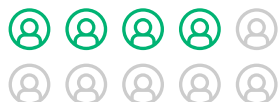
Work relationships are also good for emotional well-being. According to the [KPMG Friends at Work Survey](#), more than three out of four (78%) employees say work friends provide positive mental health benefits. In the same survey, 83% considered how well a

company's environment and culture supports work friendships when deciding whether to stay at their current job; 81% said it's important when considering a new job.

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## Fully remote workers have workplace FOMO

Even though remote workers stay connected through tech, working from home can be isolating, with fewer opportunities to create work friendships.



**Nearly 4 in 10 (38%) of fully remote workers report feeling lonely.**

In fact, remote workers are

**41% more likely**

than on-site and hybrid workers to feel lonely.

→ And one-third of remote workers (33%) feel they are missing out on social opportunities.

### FUELING FRIENDSHIPS WITH FOOD

“

**Offering lunch through ezCater helps us create a more engaging and collaborative atmosphere in the office. It encourages employees to take breaks, connect with one another, and recharge during the workday. A happy, well-fed team is often more engaged.**

**Alisa Marsingill**

Employee Relations Partner, Thales

[See case study](#)





SECTION 2

# Gen Z's ideal workplace: a hub of connection

Younger generations seek workplace friendships that foster stronger connections and make work more meaningful.

It used to be that early career workplaces were where people developed social circles and forged lifelong friendships. But that's gotten more complicated since the pandemic and the shift to remote work.

Much of Gen Z has missed out on their formative work friendship-building years. Many companies have made a valiant effort to keep workers engaged and connected through virtual team-building, but some workers — especially the younger generation — crave the old-fashioned watercooler chats and office happy hours that enabled past generations to thrive.

Only 15% of Gen Z chose fully remote as their preferred work style.



The future workforce has strong feelings about what their ideal work looks like — and employers should be listening.



“

Who knew that the digital-native generation wanted more in-person happy hours, team retreats, and team lunches? Bringing back these ‘old school’ company events can pay dividends as far as employee morale and camaraderie, and they can be simple and cost-effective to implement.

Robert Kaskel  
VP of People, ezCater



## Gen Z is hungry for employer support, connection, and socialization

In our survey, older generations seem more content with the status quo of employer offerings, but Gen Z and millennials have higher expectations.

Perceptions of happiness with work socialization also vary generationally. Gen Z wants their workplace to be modern, feel welcoming, and be conducive to connecting.



35%

Gen Z and millennials are **35% more likely** than older workers to wish their company offered more resources for their well-being.

Over half of Gen Z (56%) say they expect their company to provide opportunities to socialize.

When grouped with millennials, this younger cohort is 31% more likely to have this expectation than Gen X/baby boomer respondents.



Gen Z are the **most likely** cohort to report feeling lonely at work (38%), and that they are missing out on social opportunities (36%).

86%

of Gen Z wish their company offered some sort of event to socialize.

EARLY CAREER COLLEAGUE CONNECTIONS

“

For younger generations, in-person time is about both socializing and learning. They pick up cues about leadership, influence, and decision-making through observation. Moments such as debriefing after a meeting or seeing how a leader handles a tough conversation are incredibly formative. We can't replicate that richness on Zoom or Google Meet.

Beth Williams

CEO, Primeast North America



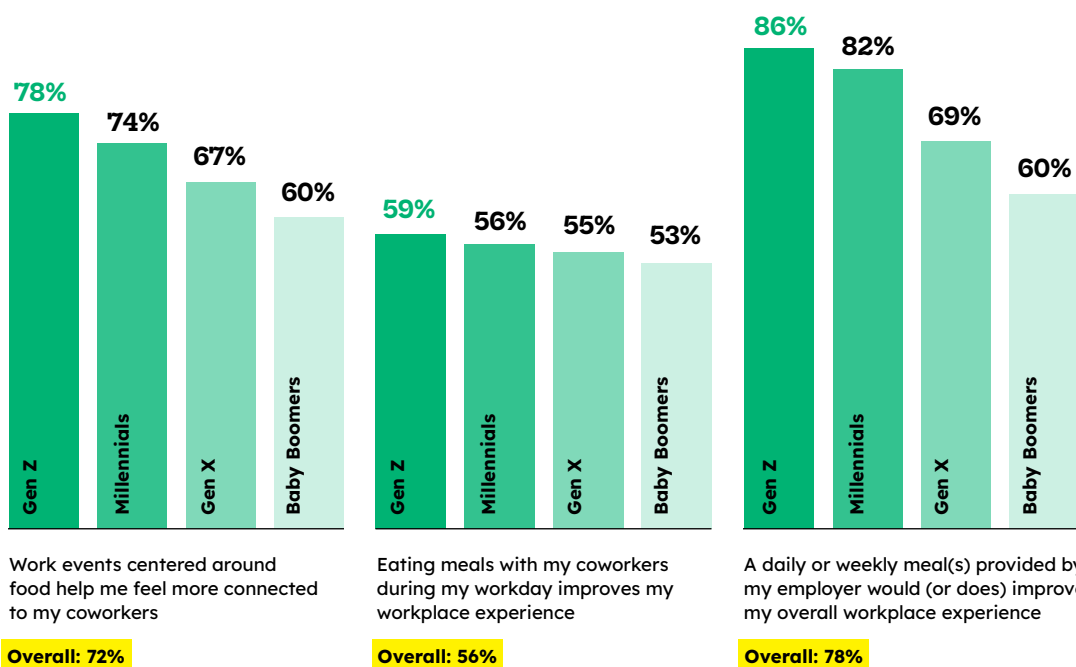
TREND ALERT

The younger the worker, the more important food is as a perk.

Gen Z is “generation foodie”

Food-related perks are important to all generations, but are more in demand for younger workers. On average, 28% more of

Gen Z/millennials wish their company offered them more food-related perks than Gen X/baby boomers.





Is your company social enough?

Employees want more opportunities to get social

WISH LIST TOP ITEMS

- #1 Happy Hours
- #2 Team Lunches
- #3 Team Retreats

What do these have in common?  
Small groups, food, and fun!

Connection & culture activities employees want more of

Key stat

Gen Z employees are 47% more likely to say they wish there were more opportunities for social interaction at work compared to older generations.

Happy hours



Team lunches



Team/department retreats



Company retreats



Lunch-and-learn sessions



Holiday parties



Coffee chats



Sports leagues or teams



Volunteering opportunities



Need an easy solution to feed employees for workplace meetings and team-building events?

Learn more

SECTION 3

# Building the workplace of the future

Inviting spaces and on-site incentives (like food!) promote employee connections.

If you want a happy and engaged workforce that is motivated to stick with your company long-term, creating a workplace experience that makes them feel valued makes good business sense. Yet, actually putting that into practice presents untapped opportunities for many employers.

Almost half (44%) of the workers required to be on-site at least some of the time say their company hasn't offered any additional benefits to encourage their on-site attendance.



Nurture your workforce with food perks, a healthy tech infusion, and workspaces that inspire connectivity.





## How employers can make the work day more “appetizing”

Modern companies are ramping up their perks and amenities to incentivize in-person attendance and to improve employee

engagement and satisfaction. And appreciative employees are asking for a second helping.



Hybrid and remote employees agree that food-related perks are the **#1 draw** to encourage on-site attendance.



More than half (54%) of workers say they'd rather eat with other people than alone.

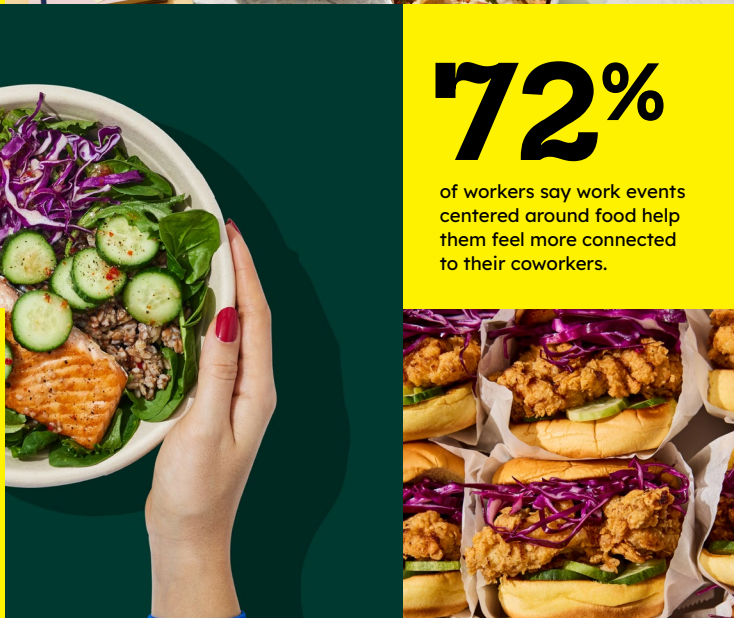


# 72%

of workers say work events centered around food help them feel more connected to their coworkers.



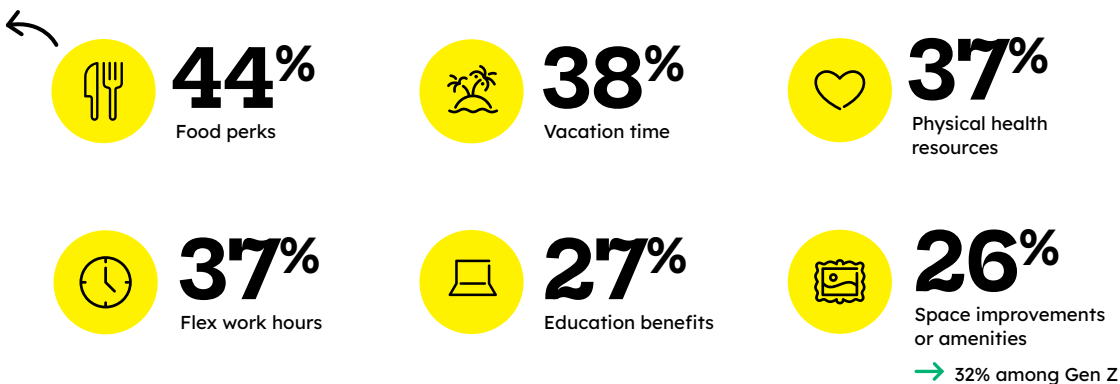
More than three quarters (78%) of respondents say a daily or weekly employer-provided meal would (or does) improve the overall workplace experience.



## Food leads the pack when it comes to perks that employees want more of

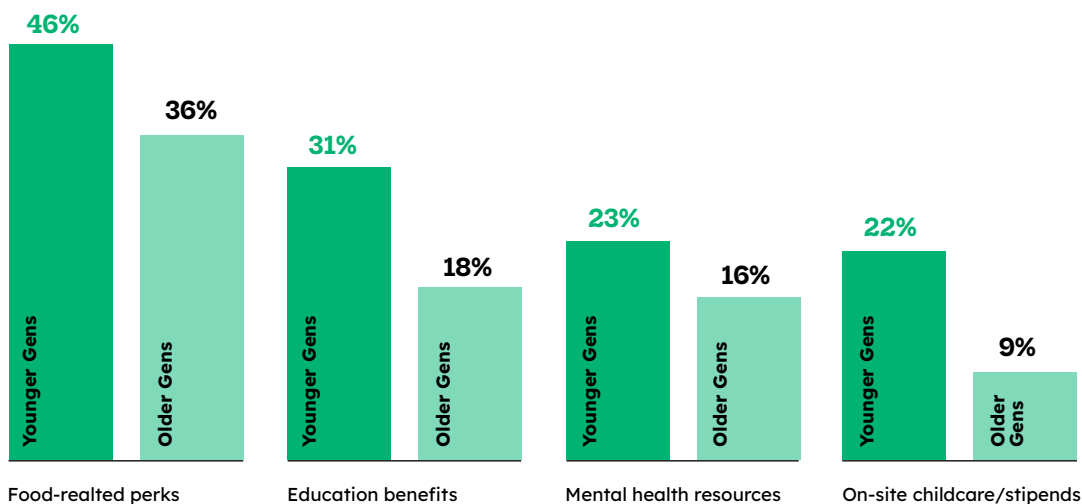
### Missed opportunity alert

Only 19% of those surveyed say their employers are currently offering food perks



## Well-being initiatives younger workers want more of

When compared to their Gen X and baby boomer coworkers, Gen Z and millennials were more likely to want the following:



When asked to choose just one amenity that would convince them to work onsite more frequently, more than a quarter (28%) of remote or hybrid Gen Z workers selected food-related perks.

That answer was more popular than education benefits, commuter stipends, and generous vacation time.



CASE STUDY / EZCATER + CARE.COM

“

While companies grapple with RTO and hybrid work strategies, food remains a consistent motivator to drive on-site attendance. At Care.com, we maximize impact by pairing free lunch with learning and networking opportunities, from face-to-face conversations with leadership to Q&As. Since partnering with ezCater, we’ve tripled attendance on days where food and learning programming are offered.

Jacob Davis

Director of Workplaces, Care.com

[See case study](#)



## Create spaces that cultivate collaboration and socialization

Employees across all work models agree that the primary purpose of the office of the future is to serve as a central hub to collaborate, have meetings, and connect. In fact, shared workspaces are becoming more commonplace, with 22% of hybrid workers pointing out they do not have a permanently assigned desk or workstation.

Toward that end, thoughtful workplace design is critical in a hybrid work environment, says Miriam Groom, CEO of Mindful Career, a career counseling and coaching firm that serves Canada and the U.S. “When employees feel that their workspace enhances both productivity and well-being, engagement and satisfaction naturally increase.”



**15%**

of fully on-site or hybrid workers wish the layout enabled more opportunities for collaboration.

→ And 1 in 5 among Gen Z!

**Most workers (60%) see collaboration and connection as the primary purpose of the physical office in the future.**

Fewer than one in ten employees cite a “cubicle office” (workstations partitioned off) as ideal.

## Most employees want to ditch the cubicle life

Instead, the most popular option across generations was a “mixed office” space, which combines open-plan areas, some cubicles, and private offices.

“Break rooms, lunch spaces, and informal gathering areas are essential in fostering a sense of community and creating organic

opportunities for collaboration,” says Groom. “These spaces help rebuild trust and connection, especially after years of remote work. Companies that prioritize these human-centered designs will have a significant competitive advantage in attracting and retaining top talent.”

## On the future workplace wishlist → More small group gathering spaces

57% of Gen Z crave outdoor spaces



Outdoor spaces 48%



Meeting rooms 11%



Breakrooms/eating areas 36%



Large conference areas 13%



Lounges 35%

## The return of the watercooler conversation

Bevi, a Boston-based beverage and hardware company, has a unique perspective on RTO trends. Data collected from the thousands of the company's internet-connected water dispensers, which are placed in offices large and small across the U.S., provide a remarkably reliable indicator for office occupancy, according to reporting from Bloomberg.

Last year's data saw an 18% YOY rise in on-site attendance compared to the year before, and Bevi sees indicators that we will see office attendance reach 75% of pre-pandemic levels in 2025.

Cathy Lewenberg, Bevi's CEO, says that today's companies are stepping up their amenities to make RTO more palatable for employees, adding perks that make people actually want to show up at their desks, such as customizable beverages from a Bevi water dispensers.



“

Offices need to evolve into spaces people want to spend time in. The cubicle era is over, replaced by spaces designed for collaboration, creativity, and balance — places employees enjoy coming to, even if they're coming in less than before.

Cathy Lewenberg  
CEO, Bevi



## The role of tech

While many workers enjoy the flexibility of working from home at least some of the time, there are drawbacks to relying too heavily on tech-only communications — let's call it “ping fatigue.” Workers may feel like they can't

unplug from work, but at the same time, the always-on digital communication loop can be ill-suited for creating meaningful connections.

ALWAYS ON, BUT FEELING DISCONNECTED

“

Constant pings, status checks and digital nudges condition people to be available, always. The result is a blurred boundary between work and life and the emotional toll that comes with it. I've worked with leaders who feel guilty stepping away for a walk or pausing for lunch. That's not flexibility, it's digital presenteeism.

Beth Williams

CEO, Primeast North America



## Tech can also bring people together... when it's implemented and used strategically

58% of workers surveyed say they have used AI to streamline work tasks recently, but only 34% feel their company provides them with the proper training to use AI.

It's important to prepare workers for a future with AI, but just making tools available is doing the bare minimum. Training and expectation setting is what will empower workers to become AI enthusiasts who leverage the technology to improve their workflow and supercharge ideation.

AI and chat integrations within collaboration tools are becoming second nature communication channels for the next generation of workers.

**Roughly 1/3 of Gen Z and millennial workers say that chat tools are their most used communication channel (32% and 34% respectively).**

## Future workforces getting more chatty

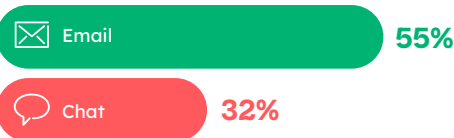
While email is still the most ubiquitous method of workplace communication (98% of employees use it vs. 80% who use chat tools) the younger workforce is leading the chat transition charge.

Another factor that may drive the shift to chat platforms is that even when remote and hybrid workers who lean heavily on those communication tools return to the office, those tools remain ingrained in their workflow.

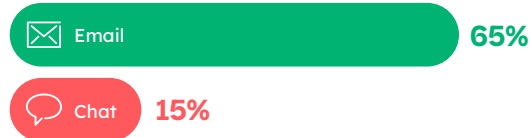
### Old-school vs. next-gen

#### Top communication tool

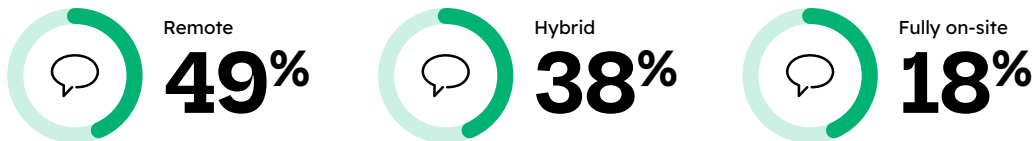
##### GEN Z



##### BABY BOOMERS



#### Those who work at home prefer chat as the most used tool for staying connected





# The future of workplace experience starts now

Creative workplace amenities, reimagined office spaces and opportunities for socialization and connection — including ezCater's workplace food solutions — can provide a future-ready workplace for today's workforce and beyond.

[Learn more about ezCater >](#)

