

2021

HOMEBUILDING WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT STUDY



About

The Homebuilding Workforce Engagement Study was carried out by Professor William Scott-Jackson, Professor Maura Sheehan and Halah E Alattas of the Oxford Centre for Employee Engagement in collaboration with the team at Building Talent Foundation. This study was made possible by the generous support of the Leading Builders of America.

About Leading Builders of America

[Leading Builders of America](#) was formed in 2009. Its members include many of the largest homebuilding companies in North America. Its purpose is to preserve home affordability for American families.

About Oxford Centre for Employee Engagement

[The Oxford Centre for Employee Engagement](#) (OCFEE) carries out rigorous research, on behalf of companies and organizations, to find new solutions to previously intractable human issues, such as maximizing engagement and leadership effectiveness. It works to use this research to develop practical, simple, yet innovative solutions to make a significant impact on work and its value, for both employers and their people.

About Building Talent Foundation

[Building Talent Foundation](#) (BTF) is a non-profit organization founded by the Leading Builders of America, 20 of the largest residential construction companies in the United States. BTF's mission is to advance the education, training, and career progression of young people and people from underrepresented groups, helping them develop into skilled technical workers and business owners in residential construction.

Acknowledgements

Building Talent Foundation would also like to thank all of the members of the **Leading Builders of America**, the primary sponsors of this study, with special acknowledgement to the following members:

- **Beazer Homes**
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- **Taylor Morrison**
- **Tri Pointe Homes**

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Finally, BTF recognizes the following partners for their support:

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Executive Summary

The talent shortage facing the homebuilding industry in America is reaching a critical level. According to a recent study by the Home Builders Institute (HBI), from 2022 through 2024 the industry will need to attract 2.2 million more frontline workers, just to keep up with demand. While recruiting new workers is important, another way to address this acute and persistent problem is to retain the employees the industry already has.

The first step in achieving that goal is to improve engagement among current workers.

While increased engagement yields positive outcomes, decreased engagement leads to greater employee turnover, which can be costly. Research has shown that turnover costs employers an average of \$15,000 per employee. In 2021 alone, turnover cost employers more than \$700 billion.

This report is the result of research conducted jointly by the Oxford Center for Employee Engagement and Building Talent Foundation. The goal was to gain a deeper understanding of employee engagement in the homebuilding industry in the United States, the factors that affect it, and the role it plays in employee retention. A total of 1,462 respondents completed the survey, with the majority identifying as frontline workers and the rest working in back-office roles. Half of the sample worked primarily in residential construction, while another quarter worked in both residential and commercial construction.

One of the key findings was that among frontline workers, the homebuilding industry received an Employee Net Promoter Score (a measure of engagement) of 14, which is the same as the average for all industries in the United States. This indicates that the industry could make significant progress in retaining people – and by extension, attracting new people – simply by addressing employee engagement.

The survey also found engagement had a significant impact on frontline workers' intentions to stay in their current jobs, and in the residential sector itself. Around half of these workers indicated they were both planning to stay in their current jobs and were also engaged. Additionally, four out of five frontline workers in residential construction see themselves working in residential construction in one year, either in their current jobs or new ones.

Of those who were considering leaving their jobs, just over half were thinking of leaving the residential sector, signaling potential talent losses for the industry. The groups most likely to be thinking of leaving their jobs were people who had between one and five years of experience, and those who work at smaller companies of less than 10 employees.

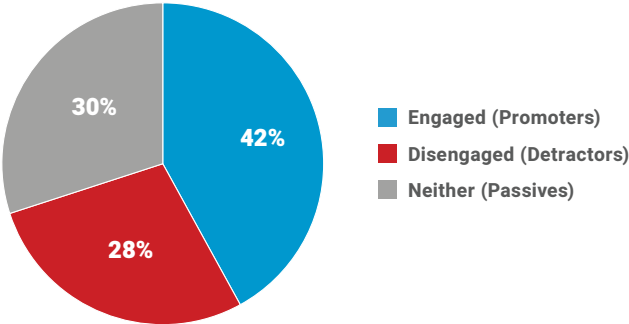
These are significant findings because the results show that employees who experience low engagement see themselves in different jobs in a year and are thinking of another job now.

It's also important for employers to understand why employees leave their jobs before they actually start a job search. To gain this understanding, the research also asked respondents about the reasons they would stay in or leave a job. In both cases, opportunities for career advancement and skill development (or lack thereof) were given as the top reason, above pay and benefits. The quality of the immediate supervisor's leadership was also important.

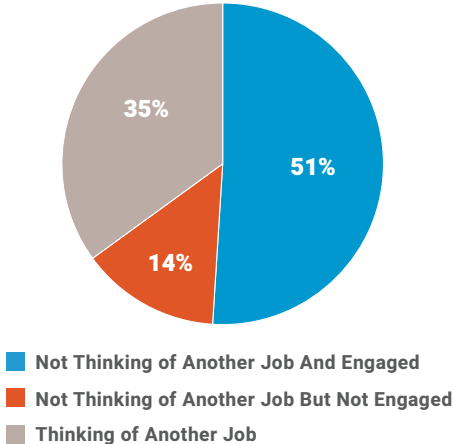
This, along with the rest of the findings in the research, support the assertion that employee engagement is critical to employee retention. Therefore, employers – and the homebuilding industry in general – should take steps to improve employee engagement. This should include providing career advancement and skill development opportunities, mentoring, creating a supportive culture, and ensuring supervisors are trained to be effective leaders.

To support employers in homebuilding, Building Talent Foundation is facilitating a collaborative effort by multiple stakeholders to address the industry-wide challenge of worker retention. This includes helping employers in the industry use every resource at their disposal to retain good employees, with career advancement, upskilling, and leadership development, being central to this approach.

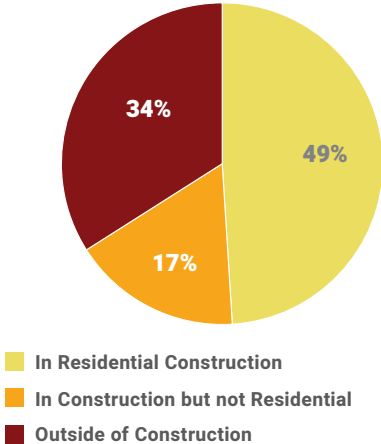
Level of Engagement



Are You Thinking of Another Job Now?



If You Are Thinking of Another Job Now, In Which Sector Would Your Next Job Be?



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Retaining Talent to Create a Sustainable Workforce

The talent shortage facing the home building industry in America is reaching a critical level. “It’s a crucial time for the homebuilding industry to come together to bring new workers into the field, ultimately creating a sustainable workforce to build well beyond this decade,” said Sheryl Palmer, Chairman, Building Talent Foundation Board of Directors.

**THE CONSTRUCTION
INDUSTRY NEEDS 2.2
MILLION MORE WORKERS
BY 2024.**

According to the Home Builders Institute’s Construction Labor Market Report from Fall 2021, the industry will need to attract 2.2 million more frontline workers by 2024 just to keep up with demand¹. That equates to 740,000 new workers per year. However, the industry is not currently on track to fill that need and, in fact, is struggling to fill the vacancies it currently has. At the end of 2021, the sector had 410,000 unfilled vacancies.

Building Talent Foundation (BTF) was established to address this acute and persistent problem. The organization’s vision is to create a sustainable workforce in residential construction by 2030. BTF defines a sustainable workforce as one that is strong in seven different characteristics: Diverse & Inclusive, Engaged, Well-Trained, Resilient, Safe & Healthy, Treated Well, and Valued.

BTF is employing a three-pillar strategy to achieve that vision:

- **Building Talent Pipeline:** Attract new talent to the industry
- **Building Talent Connections:** Connect talent supply with talent demand
- **Building Talent Engagement:** Retain talent in the industry

The third pillar – Building Talent Engagement – is central to this research. Retaining and developing talent is critical to meeting the goal of a sustainable workforce. As more people stay in construction jobs, there will be fewer overall vacancies. More importantly, developing talent and having people advance in their careers will allow the industry to earn a reputation for offering viable, lucrative career paths, making it more attractive to new workers.

Employee retention is a persistent problem. During BTF interviews, trade employers and recruiters often complained that as many as three out of four recruited trainees leave the industry within six months of a new job placement. In addition, educational institution representatives note that graduates from training programs are often not retained in their first jobs. When BTF looked for research that examined employee retention and the reasons for employee turnover, no studies that focused on residential construction were available.

To fill that gap, BTF determined that new research was necessary. BTF partnered with the Oxford Center for Employee Engagement (OCFEE), led by Professor William Scott-Jackson, to design and execute this study with the goal of understanding employee engagement in the homebuilding industry, the factors that affect it, and the role it plays in employee retention. This project was sponsored by the Leading Builders of America, and supported by HBI, Harbor Freight Tools for Schools, and many other organizations.

This report shares the results of that research.

What is Engagement and Why Does it Matter?

Engagement is the degree to which people feel enthusiastic about their work. Many studies show that companies with higher engagement show greater sales, higher profits, higher share price and higher customer satisfaction.

While increased engagement yields positive outcomes, decreased engagement leads to greater employee turnover, which can be costly. A recent study by Work Institute² found that, on average, employers can expect to incur costs of \$15,000 per employee for expenses relating to separation, replacement, training, and lost productivity. The study also found that nationwide, turnover cost employers more than \$700 billion in 2021 alone.

People who are more engaged are more productive, more dedicated, more loyal, and more likely to promote the organization. Additionally, they are often more trustworthy and reliable and use their initiative to solve problems and improve processes. They are happier in their work and make others around them, including customers, happier.

Engaged employees tend to exert discretionary effort, such as finishing a task even though it's outside normal working hours. They are also much less likely to think of quitting, and staff turnover is much lower in organizations with high engagement levels. According to Angi's 2021 Skilled Trades Report³, organizations in the top quartile in engagement outperformed those in lower quartiles in several key performance indicators. Specifically, high-engagement companies, compared to those in the low quartile in engagement, were in the top 10% in customer loyalty/engagement, 23% in profitability, 18% in sales, and 14% in productivity. These companies also performed well in other important areas, such as safety, quality, and organizational citizenship.

Studies summarized in Professor Scott-Jackson's book, *Transforming Engagement, Happiness and Well-Being: Enthusing People, Teams and Nations*⁴, consistently found that engagement levels can be high in extremely stressful, pressured jobs and are not strongly impacted by money, provided compensation is broadly similar to those in similar roles and is high enough to support a reasonable standard of living. Engagement is much more impacted by factors such as the job itself, a person's immediate supervisor, recognition, ability to develop and grow, and a person's own underlying levels of happiness (or positivity).

To understand the importance of engagement, it is helpful to look at the process employees go through when deciding to leave their jobs, as described by Professor Scott-Jackson.

Scott-Jackson found that several factors drive employees' decision process to leave their jobs. The first risk factor is low engagement, which has multiple causes that were examined in this study. When an employees' engagement is low, they begin to consider their options. They may weigh their perceived probability of finding a better job, based on the demand for their skills and the local job market, versus the costs and risks of leaving. Other external factors, like the state of the economy or global crises, also affect their decision process.

After engagement, the next retention risk factor is projection, or what employees see when they envision their careers in the future. A common way to determine this is asking where the employees see themselves in a year. At this point, they start to imagine themselves in new roles, picturing how that will impact the comfort and well-being of their families and even their social lives.

The final risk factor is the employees' intentions, described as thinking about leaving their current job. This is the precursor to an active job search. Once employees have gone through each of these phases, the probability that they will leave their jobs becomes very high.

Of course, there are other factors that can cause employees to "short-circuit" this process, like an unexpected job offer or a family decision to relocate. But by and large, these risk factors generally describe the process employees undertake when deciding to quit their jobs. Understanding that decision process, it's easy to see why engagement is one of the crucial components for organizational success. Many years of research gave clear guidance on how organizations can improve it. This study examined engagement within the homebuilding industry and, more specifically, among frontline workers employed at jobsites where the talent shortage is most pronounced.

BTF and OCFEE collaborated on this research to gain a deeper understanding of employee engagement in homebuilding and ultimately to help the industry take meaningful steps toward retaining its talent.

**COMPANIES WITH HIGHER ENGAGEMENT SHOW
GREATER SALES, HIGHER PROFITS, HIGHER SHARE
PRICE AND HIGHER CUSTOMER SATISFACTION.**

Research Methodology and Approach

To conduct the research, BTF and OCFEE administered a survey online and by telephone, in both English and Spanish, of frontline workers (employees working on construction jobsites) in the residential construction sector in the United States. Frontline workers include tradespeople as well as people in construction management or supervisory roles working on residential construction jobsites. For comparison, the researchers also collected responses from frontline workers employed in commercial construction, and people who do not work on jobsites, but rather in back-office jobs, such as accounting, purchasing, warranty, design, scheduling, contracts, and office management roles.

This survey was designed to identify the degree to which employees in residential construction frontline jobs exhibit the risk factors that lead to a decision to leave their jobs, as defined above. These factors are:

- Engagement, the degree to which people feel enthused by their work, with a higher level leading to additional effort and productivity
 - Conversely, the study also examined levels of disengagement, which can lead to thoughts of quitting
- Projection, or whether respondents saw themselves in the same job in a year's time
- Intention, or whether people were actively thinking of another job, a precursor for an active job search

These main research topics were also examined in more detail. For example, results were segmented according to whether respondents were thinking of another job in residential construction, in construction but not residential, or outside construction. They were also analyzed in the context of other factors, including length of experience, size of the company, job role, gender, and age.

In addition, the survey asked respondents to identify the top reasons for staying in or leaving their jobs. This question helps to determine more specifically the true motivating factors behind their decisions.

To assess employee engagement, the survey used the Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS), a single-question measure that is reliable and is commonly used among researchers. The Employee Net Promoter Score is measured by the question "I would recommend working in construction to my friends and family" with a five-point scale from 1 - Strongly Disagree to 5 - Strongly Agree.

The answer given to this question indicates a category for each respondent. Engaged (Promoter) is an answer of "5", Neither Engaged nor Disengaged (Passive) is an answer of "4," and Disengaged (Detractor) is an answer of "3" or less. The eNPS is calculated as the percentage of Promoters minus the percentage of Detractors. Possible eNPS scores range from -100 to 100. According to a recent report by Qualtrics⁵, anything above zero is acceptable, a good eNPS score is between 10 and 30, and above 30 is excellent.

Survey Statistics

A total of 1,462 respondents completed the survey, with the majority identifying as frontline workers and the rest working in back-office roles. Half of the sample worked primarily in residential construction, while another quarter worked in both residential and commercial construction.

The sample consists of mostly men, which is representative of the current construction workforce. The age ranges were also representative of the industry, with almost half being between the ages of 25 and 44 years, and the next-largest portion being older than 44 years.

Regarding education level, the percentage that held a college degree or above is close to the national average, according to Best Colleges 2021 report⁶.

Figure 1 - All Respondents' Worksite

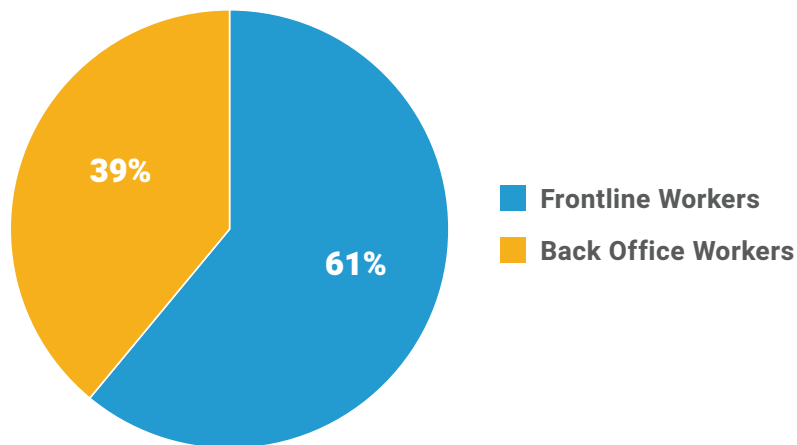
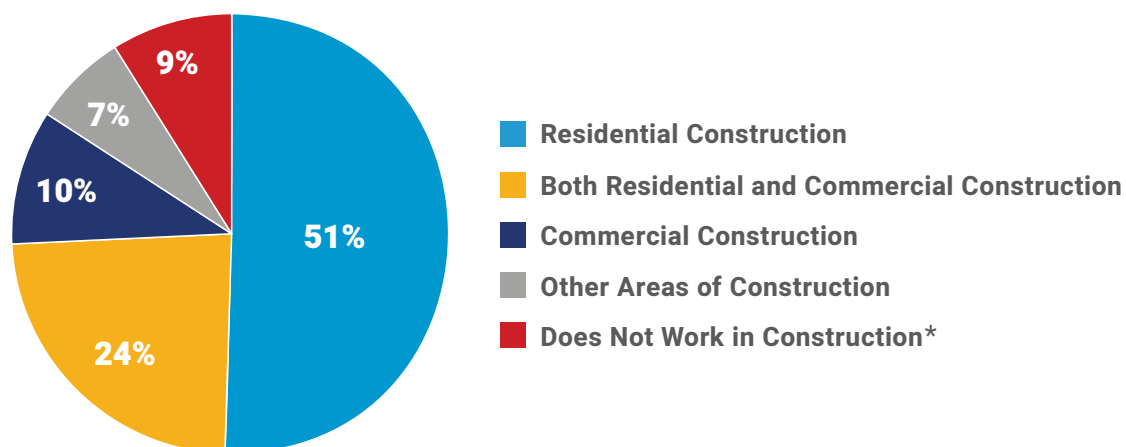


Figure 2 - All Respondents' Industry Sector

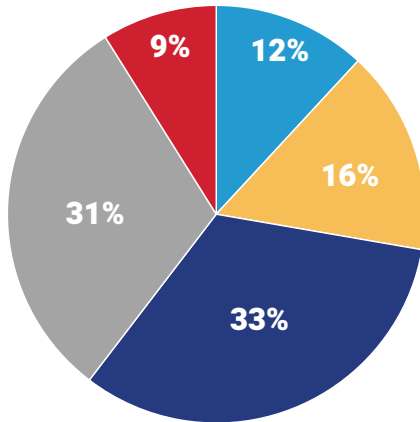


* For respondents who answered that they did not work in construction, the survey was concluded.

Subsets of Residential Construction Frontline Workers

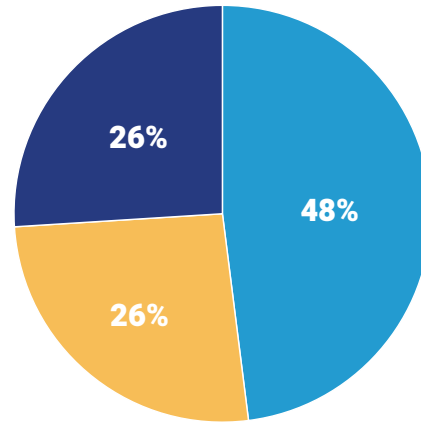
The information shown in this section reflects answers given by respondents who identified themselves as frontline workers in residential construction jobs.

Figure 3 - Residential Frontline Workers' Organization Size



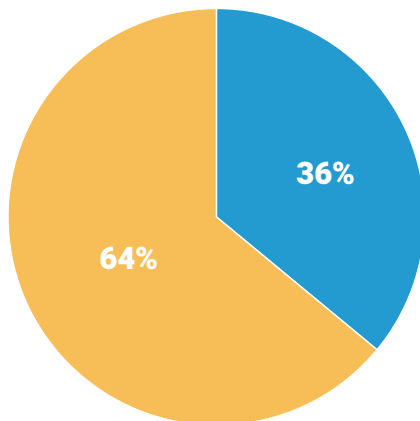
- Less Than 5 Employees
- 5-9 Employees
- 10-100 Employees
- More Than 100 Employees
- Unknown

Figure 4 - Residential Frontline Workers' Job Role



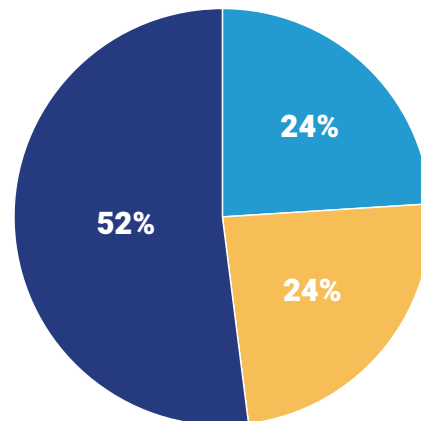
- Not a Supervisor
- Supervises Less Than Five Employees
- Supervises More Than Five Employees

Figure 5 - Residential Frontline Workers' Number of Jobs in Construction



- First Job in Construction
- Not First Job in Construction

Figure 6 - Residential Frontline Workers' Years of Experience in Construction



- Less Than One Year
- One to Five Years
- More Than Five Years

Figure 7 - Residential Frontline Workers' Gender

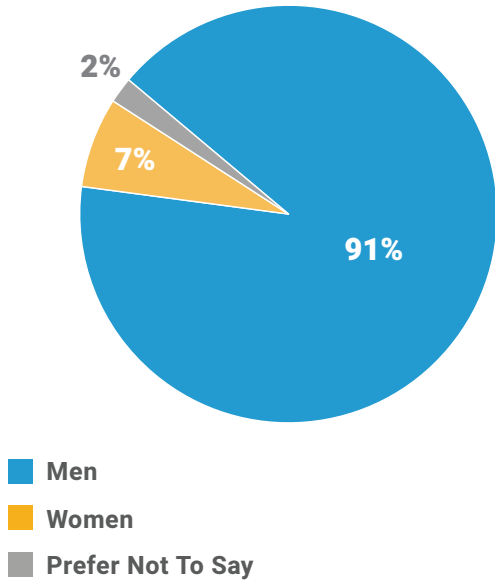


Figure 8 - Residential Frontline Workers' Age

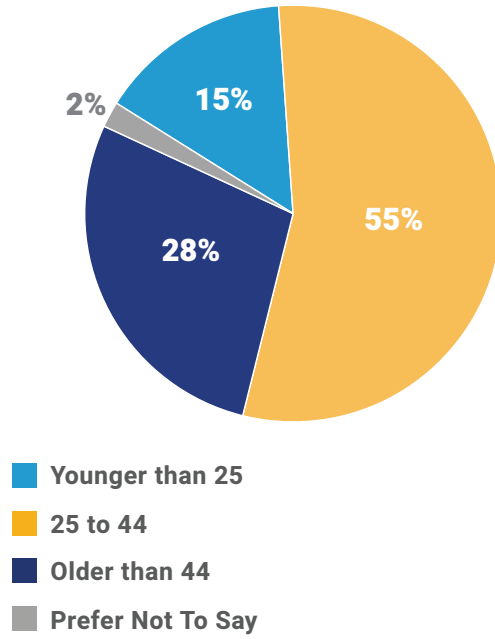


Figure 9 - Residential Frontline Workers' Education

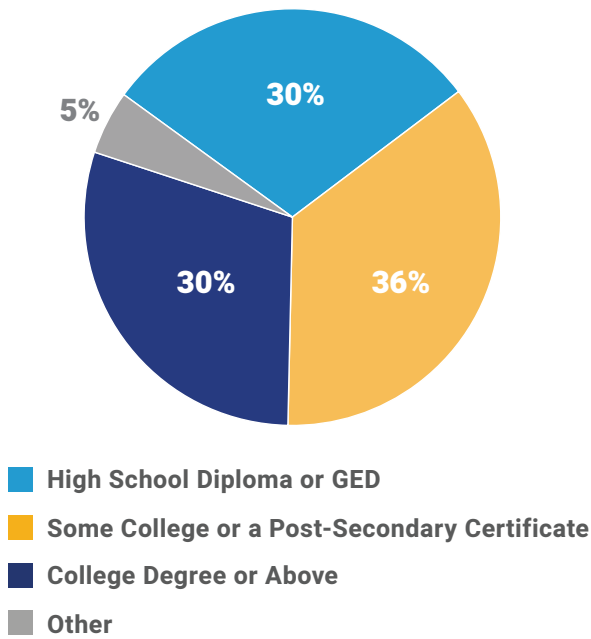
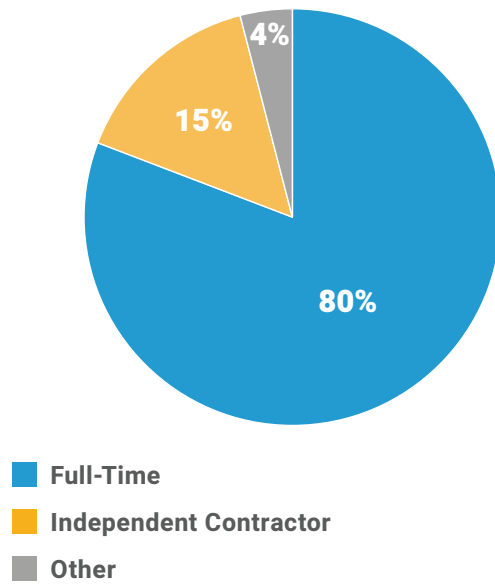


Figure 10 - Residential Frontline Workers' Employment Classification



Residential Construction Frontline Workers

The findings detailed in this section are based on responses from individuals who identified as frontline workers employed on residential construction jobsites.

Level of Engagement

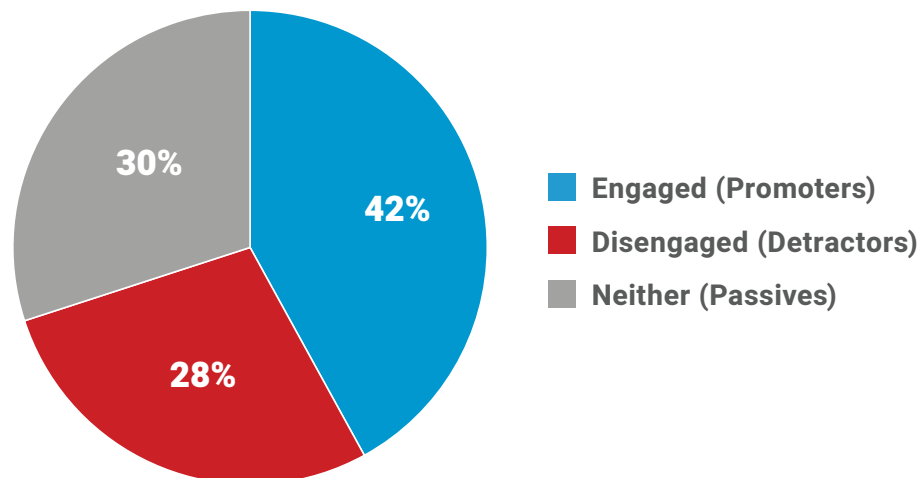
Employees' level of engagement, the degree to which they feel enthused by their work, has been shown to be the first factor in the process of deciding to quit their jobs. Engagement is measured by determining the Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS), described above.

The eNPS as determined by this research of frontline workers who are employed on residential construction job sites was found to be 14. That is equal to the average across all industries in the United States, according to a 2021 report by Perceptyx⁷. By comparison, the telecommunications industry is rated at 27, manufacturing 13, and healthcare -6.5. It should be noted that because the study focused on frontline workers, comparisons to other industries as a whole may not be particularly informative. Research focusing primarily on frontline workers in other industries might yield a different result.

Nevertheless, these results do suggest that the residential construction industry can make significant progress in retaining people – and by extension, attracting new people – simply by addressing employee engagement.

THE RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CAN MAKE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN RETAINING PEOPLE – AND ATTRACTING NEW PEOPLE – BY ADDRESSING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT.

Figure 11 - Level of Engagement

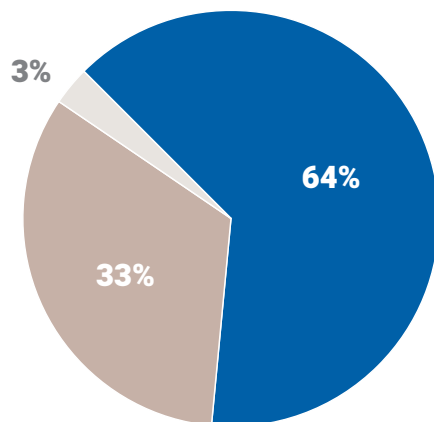


Where Workers See Themselves in a Year

Another way to measure employees' retention risk is by asking where they expect to be working in one year's time. Also known as projection, this is the second step in the process employees follow when deciding to leave their jobs.

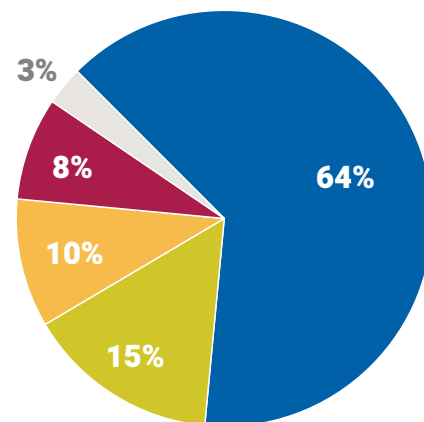
When asked this question, nearly two-thirds of frontline workers in residential construction (64%) indicated they would likely be in their current job, and one-third said they would likely be in a different job. Four out of five see themselves working in residential construction in one year.

Figure 12 - Where Do You See Yourself in One Year?



- In This Job
- In Another Job
- Not Working

Figure 13 - Where Do You See Yourself in One Year? (by Industry Sector)



- In This Job
- In Another Job in Residential Construction
- In Another Job in Construction But Not Residential
- In Another Job Outside of Construction
- Not Working

Whether Workers Are Thinking of Another Job Now

One of the key findings centered on respondents' intention to quit, which involves actively thinking of another job. This is the third and final step in employees' decision process and is typically a precursor to actively searching for a new position.

Among frontline workers, one out of two indicated they were both planning to stay in their current jobs and were also engaged. Of those who were thinking of another job, half were thinking of leaving the residential construction sector, and one in three planned to look outside the construction industry as a whole.

Interestingly, 14% of residential construction frontline workers responded that they were not looking for another job but were also not engaged, indicating that they are likely to be thinking of another job at some point.

It's important that employers should ensure that they are working to retain employees before they start thinking of another job. At this point in the decision process, employees have determined their intentions, and it's very difficult to retain them.

Figure 14 - Are You Thinking of Another Job Now?

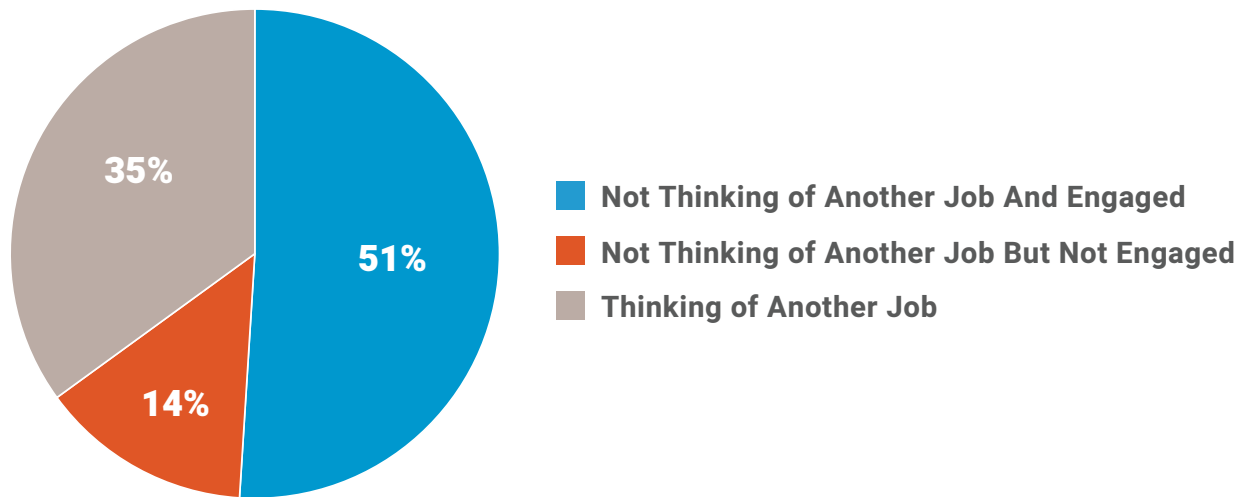
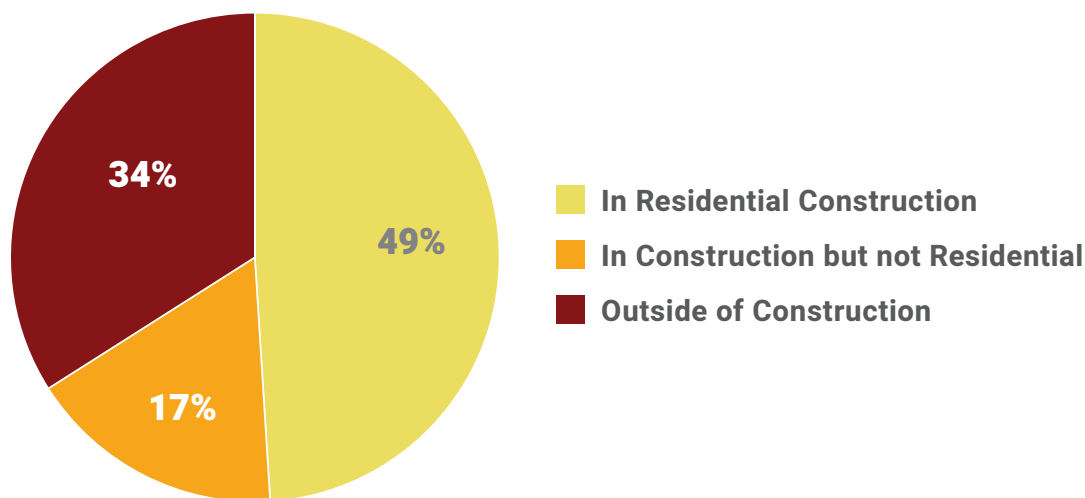


Figure 15 - If You Are Thinking of Another Job Now, In Which Sector Would Your Next Job Be?



Comparing the Three Retention Risk Factors

As described above, this research focused on the risk factors that define employees' process for deciding to leave a job. Those three risk factors are engagement, projection (where they see themselves in a year), and intention (whether they were thinking of another job). Taken separately, responses from each of these questions provide insights into employees' intentions to stay in their jobs, leave them, or even leave the residential construction sector entirely.

When the three data sets are compared to each other, a clearer picture starts to emerge about employees' retention risks. For example, if an employee is not engaged but not currently thinking of another job, it is possible – even likely – they will be thinking of another job soon. Similarly, if an employee is not engaged and indicates they see themselves in the same job in a year, they may change their mind. Finally, an employee who is not actively thinking of another job but doesn't see themselves in that job in a year may start thinking of another job in the near future.

All of those scenarios describe employees who are at risk for leaving their jobs. It's also important to remember that low engagement is a leading indicator, as it is the first risk factor in the decision process. So if an employer can address engagement proactively, they are more likely to reduce employee turnover, and the costs associated with it.

As expected, there was a strong correlation between the results from the questions of engagement, whether respondents were thinking of another job at the time, and where they saw themselves in one year.

When comparing respondents' engagement to whether they were thinking of another job, there was a clear connection between the two. The majority of those not thinking of another job were engaged (55%), and two-thirds of those who were thinking of another job were not engaged (68%).

The results were similar for the question on how people saw themselves in a year. The majority of those who saw themselves in the same job in a year were engaged (55%), and two-thirds of those who saw themselves in another job in a year were disengaged or passive.

ONE OUT OF FIVE OF THOSE WHO SEE THEMSELVES OUTSIDE OF CONSTRUCTION IN ONE YEAR ARE NOT YET ACTIVELY THINKING OF ANOTHER JOB – WHICH MEANS THERE IS STILL A CHANCE TO RETAIN THEM.

Figure 16 - Engagement Compared to "Thinking of Another Job Now"

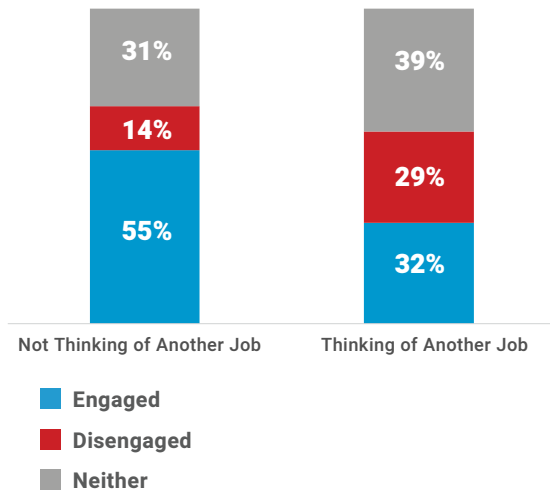
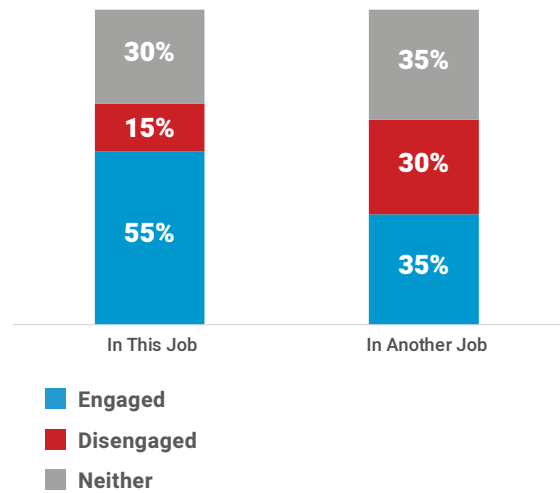


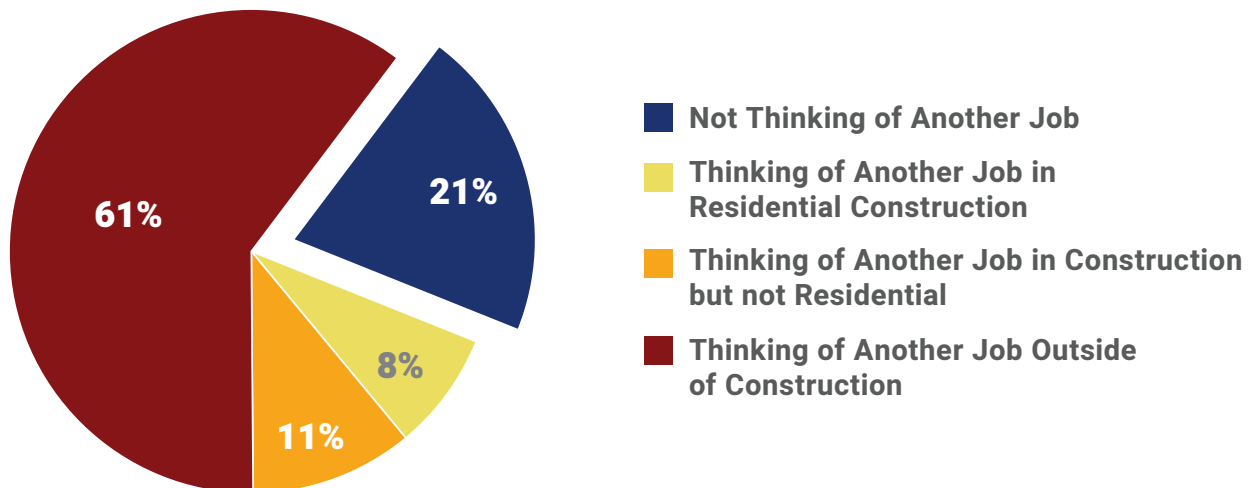
Figure 17 - Engagement Compared to "In One Year I See Myself"



Comparisons between thinking of another job and where respondents see themselves in one year's time were consistent. For example, 84% of those not thinking of another job saw themselves in the same job in a year's time. Among respondents who said they saw themselves working outside of construction in a year, it's not a surprise that the majority of those are also actively thinking of another job outside of construction.

What is noteworthy is that 19% of this group is thinking of another job in the construction sector, which could mean that they could be convinced to stay. Most importantly, 21% of this group is not yet thinking of another job. Taken together, these two groups represent frontline workers the sector could lose in the coming year. Alternatively, if employers are able to improve engagement, they could retain many of these people.

Figure 18 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" for Respondents Who See Themselves in Another Job Outside of Construction in One Year



Analyzing Risk Factors Among Respondent Subsets

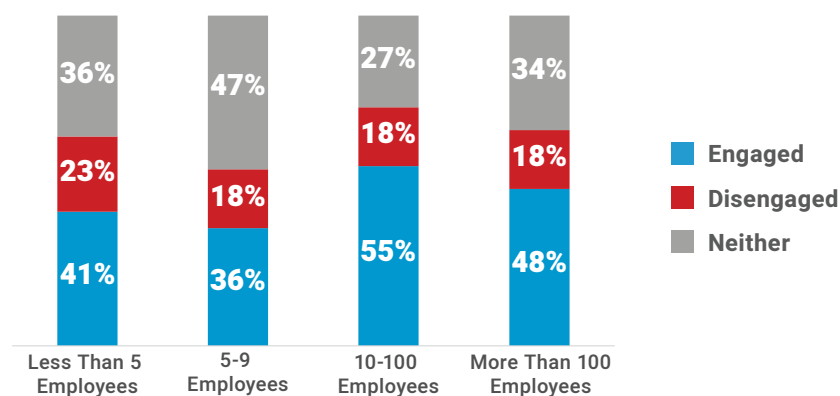
In addition to identifying respondents' overall engagement levels and their likelihood of looking for a new job, the BTF and OCFEE researchers also segmented respondents according to demographic and statistical data, such as organization size, years of experience, and gender. This was done to determine if there were any correlations to the data about employees' engagement and likelihood of staying in their jobs.

Organization Size

People who work in larger organizations were the most engaged and least likely to be thinking of leaving their jobs, contrasted with those who work at smaller companies. Among respondents who work at companies with five to nine employees, 44% saw themselves in another job in a year's time, and 47% were thinking of another job. For employees of companies with fewer than five people, those figures were 48% and 46%, respectively.

Small companies – those with 10 employees or fewer – comprise a large portion of the residential construction industry. Therefore, low engagement among employees in this group may have an outsized impact on the industry as a whole. The most actively engaged overall were those in organizations of more than 10 but less than 100 people (55%). This is likely because as companies grow into medium-sized organizations, they get better at retaining their people, yet they're still small enough to maintain closer relationships with employees. By contrast, very small companies may have close employee relationships, but lack the resources to optimize their engagement. Very large companies have human resource departments and sophisticated engagement processes, but often have a multi-layered structure that can diminish engagement.

Figure 19 - Engagement by Organization Size



EMPLOYEES OF LARGE ORGANIZATIONS WERE THE MOST ENGAGED AND THE LEAST LIKELY TO BE THINKING OF LEAVING THEIR JOBS.

Figure 20 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Organization Size

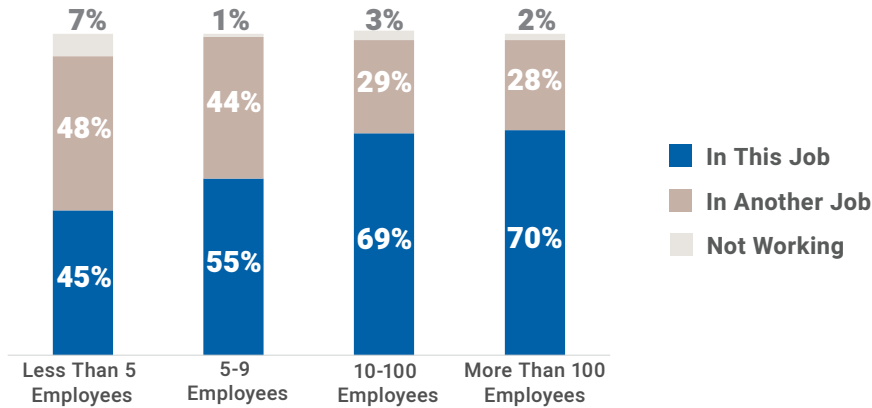


Figure 21 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Organization Size

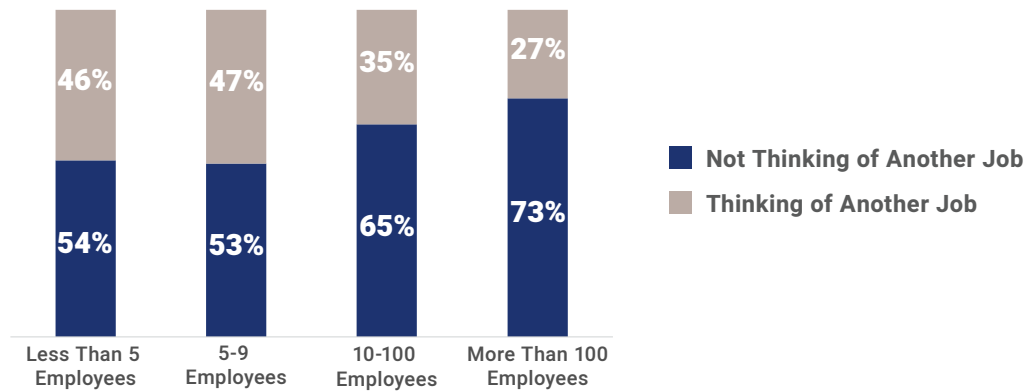
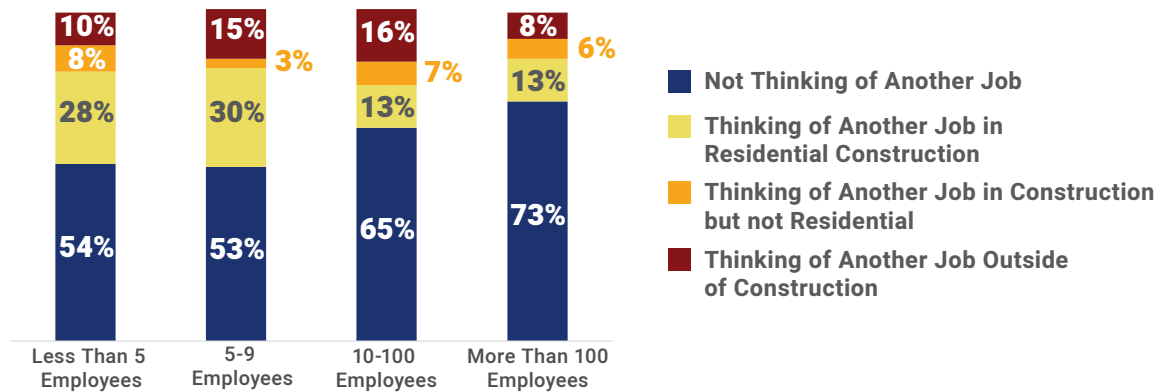


Figure 22 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Organization Size (by Industry Sector)



Job Role

Those who supervised one to five people were the most likely to be thinking of leaving their jobs (42%), with 21% of this group thinking of leaving the residential sector, perhaps because their supervisory roles came with additional stress and responsibilities. Interestingly, the same group had the highest percentage of engaged (59%). This could be attributed to the fact that people who can manage small groups of employees are in high demand in the trades. These individuals may be engaged, but they may also understand their value and could be aware of the many opportunities for them elsewhere. The most likely to see themselves in the same role in a year were those supervising more than five people.

Figure 23 - Engagement by Job Role

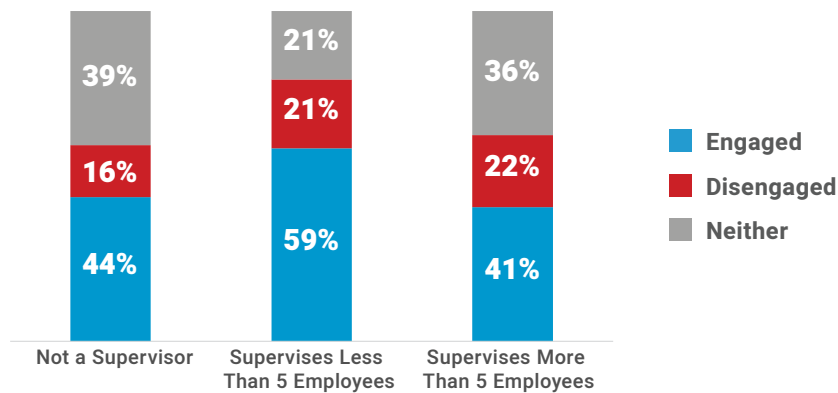


Figure 24 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Job Role

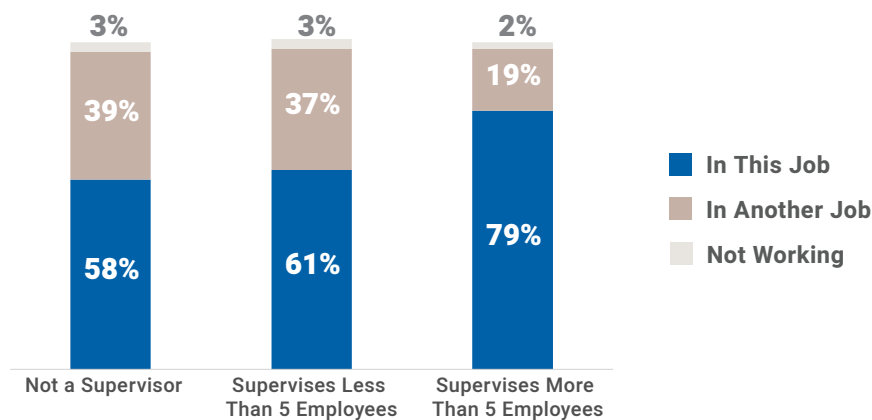


Figure 25 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Job Role

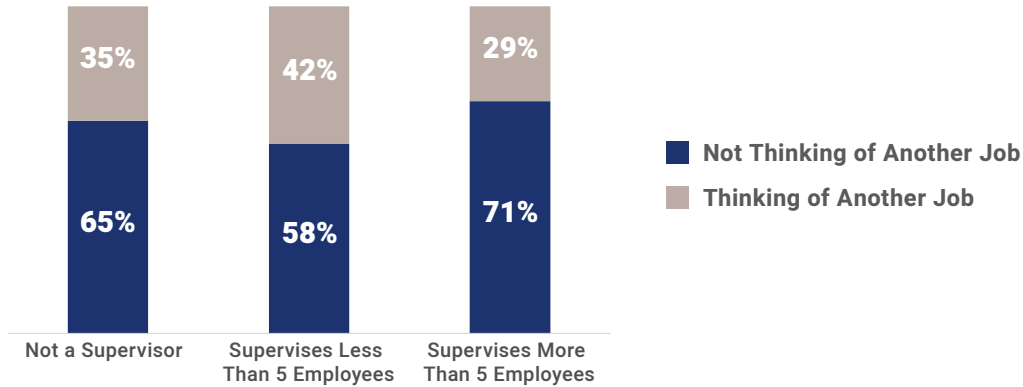
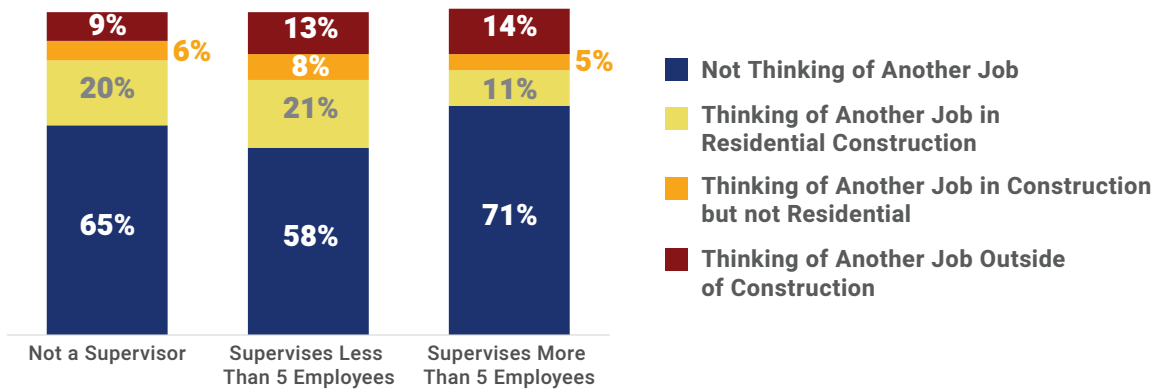


Figure 26 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Job Role (by Industry Sector)



THOSE WHO SUPERVISED 1-5 PEOPLE WERE THE MOST LIKELY TO BE THINKING OF LEAVING THEIR JOB.

Number of Jobs in Construction

Employees' number of jobs in construction seemed to have almost no effect on whether they were thinking of another job. The percentage was nearly identical for those in their first construction job (65%) to those who have had multiple positions (64%). The same was true about future expectations, as 63% of those in their first construction job saw themselves working in that job in a year's time, and 65% of those who have had multiple jobs had the same outlook.

Those in their first job in construction were more engaged (53%) and less disengaged (13%) than people who have had multiple positions in construction, 43% of whom were engaged, and 22% were disengaged.

Figure 27 - Engagement by Number of Jobs in Construction

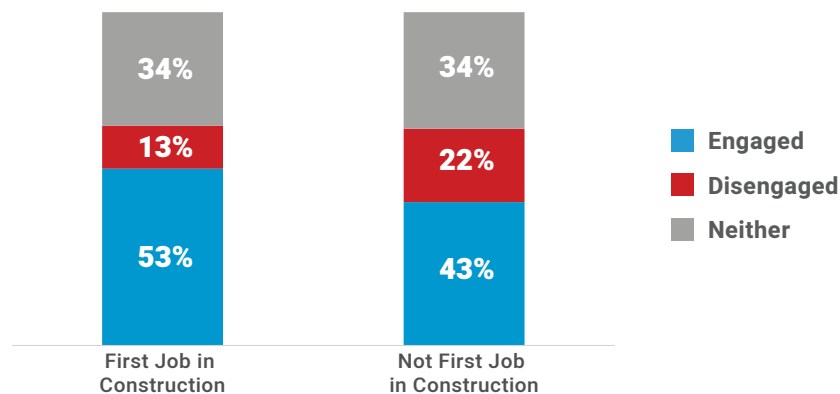


Figure 28 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Number of Jobs in Construction

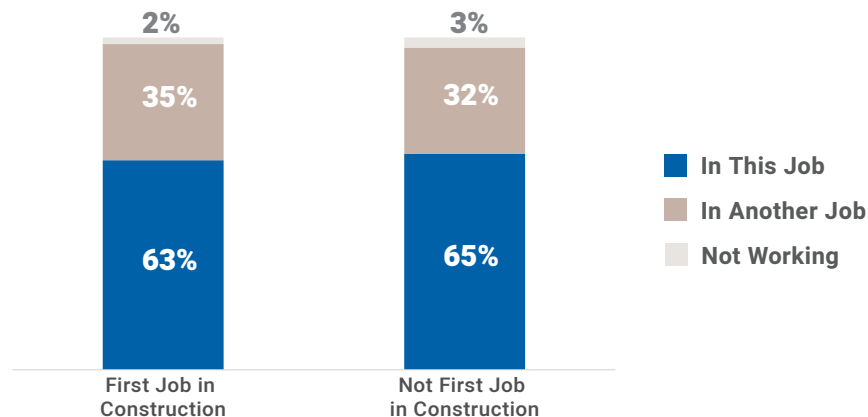
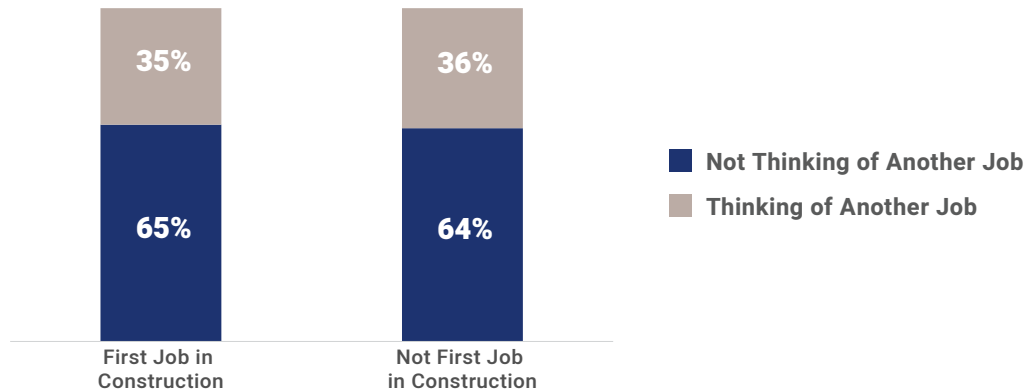


Figure 29 - “Thinking of Another Job Now” by Number of Jobs in Construction



Years of Experience

The amount of experience employees had played an interesting role in their levels of engagement. Those with less than one year of experience are the least engaged (45%) but are mostly not yet thinking of another job (69%). This can be attributed to the likelihood that people in their first year in a job want to give the job a chance for a time. What’s concerning is, given that the process of leaving starts with reduced engagement, this finding suggests that many people who recently entered the sector may be leaving their jobs in the near future.

Among frontline workers with one to five years’ experience, 43% are thinking of another job. But that group also has a greater proportion (51%) of engaged people. This suggests that in this group, nearly all those who feel less engaged are already thinking of another job. Another noteworthy finding is that in this group, one out of three do not see themselves in residential construction in a year.

Finally, people with more than five years’ experience are the most disengaged (24%) but also the most likely to expect to be in the same job in a year’s time (72%).

As the residential construction industry contends with hundreds of thousands of job openings, and funds initiatives to attract more people to the sector, employers should prioritize engaging new hires. The industry is investing heavily in recruiting people, but if they’re not engaged and they leave shortly after starting, the investment is lost.

That’s why BTF has made engagement one of the pillars of its strategy for creating a sustainable workforce. By focusing on engagement for employees in their first six months, BTF is helping to ensure they stay in their jobs – and the industry – for the long term.

Figure 30 - Engagement by Years of Experience

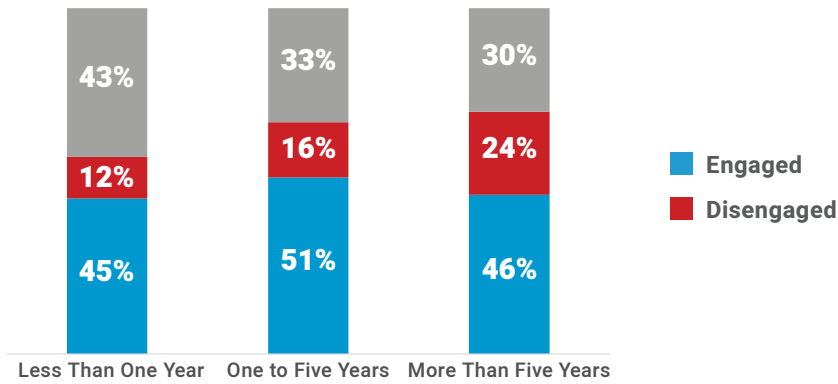


Figure 31 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Years of Experience (by Industry Sector)

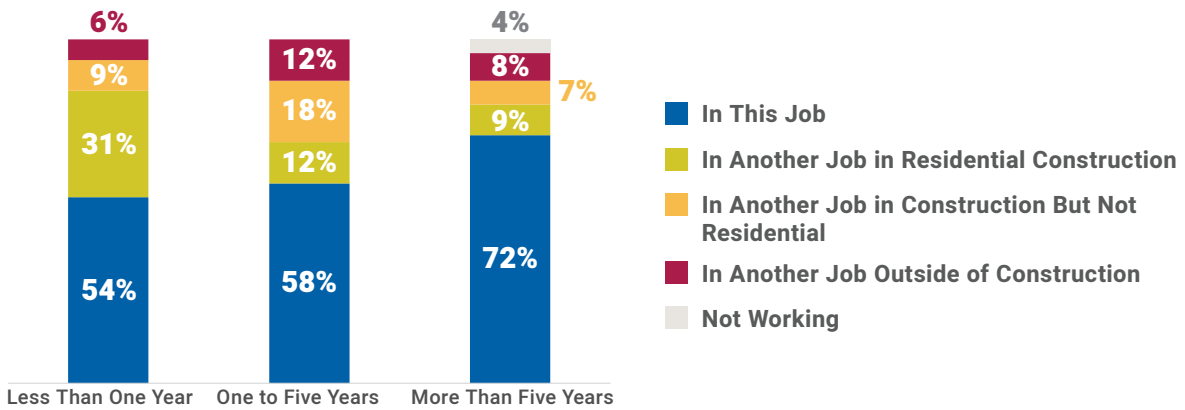
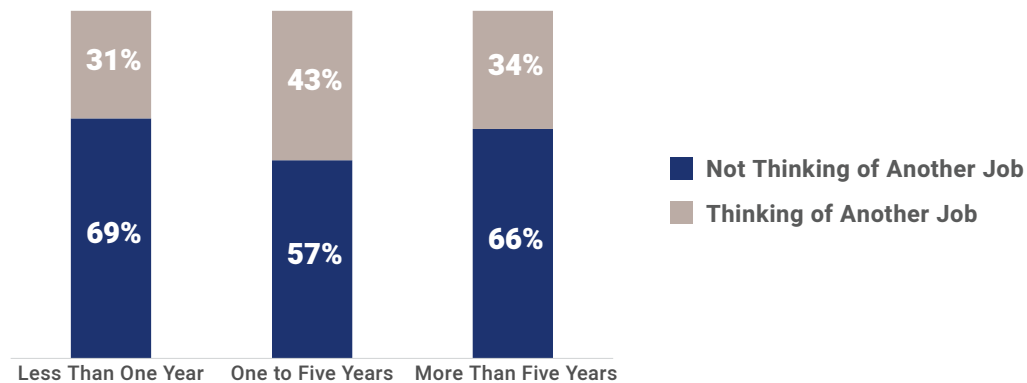
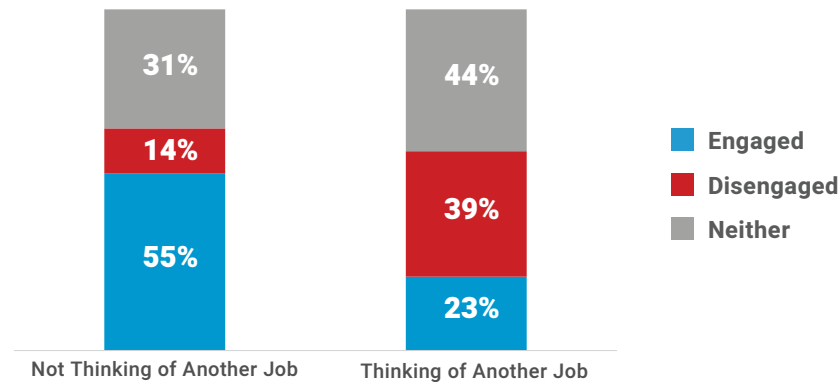


Figure 32 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Years of Experience



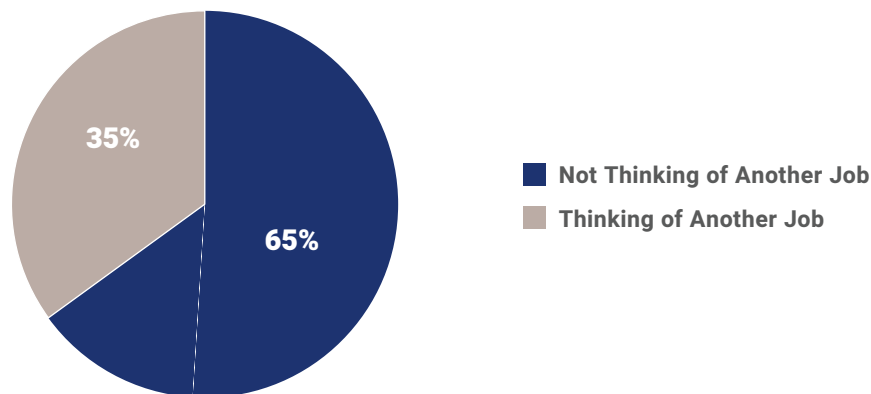
Within the group of frontline workers with one to five years of experience, results are interesting when comparing engagement with responses of whether they were thinking of another job. Specifically, those thinking of leaving are, as expected, much less engaged. But it is concerning to note that 45% of those **not** thinking of another job are **not engaged**.

Figure 33 - 1-5 Years of Experience: Engagement Compared to “Thinking of Another Job Now”



Further analysis of the data revealed that among people who supervise more than five people, and who also have one to five years' experience, one out of three of that group are thinking of another job now. This is troubling because this group consists of people who have been trained by their employers, which is a significant investment, and are more costly to replace than entry-level workers.

Figure 34 - People with 1-5 Years of Experience Who Also Supervise More Than Five People: “Thinking of Another Job Now”



Gender

Although about the same percentage of men and women are thinking of another job, a greater proportion of women in residential construction are disengaged (27%) than are men (19%). This suggests that they haven't quite reached the stage of actively thinking of another job, although 48% do not see themselves in the same job in a year's time. The industry can make significant gains in retention by addressing the engagement of female employees.

Recently, BTF produced "Women Breaking Barriers,"⁸ a paper (authored by Misty Farrell and Teilachanell Angel) that examined the participation of women in residential construction. The paper makes a case for diversifying residential construction talent pools through workforce training programs that center on women.

The gender gap in construction stands out as the widest disparity and largest untapped talent pool. Women constitute 50.8% of the population but only 10.9% of the construction industry, and only 3.8% of frontline workers in residential construction.

BTF's efforts in closing this gender gap are showing promise. From January through May 2022, 10.6% of BTF's placements have been women, nearly tripling the industry average for women in frontline residential construction jobs.

If the industry can recruit more women, it will make significant progress in solving its talent shortage. However, if the women who are already working in residential construction are disengaged the industry will lose what gains it has already made, making it difficult to recruit and retain more women. Successfully closing the gender gap will require demonstrating that these careers are a viable option for women. By prioritizing engagement for women, the industry could stem the tide of talent losses and low participation of women in construction.

Figure 35 - Engagement by Gender

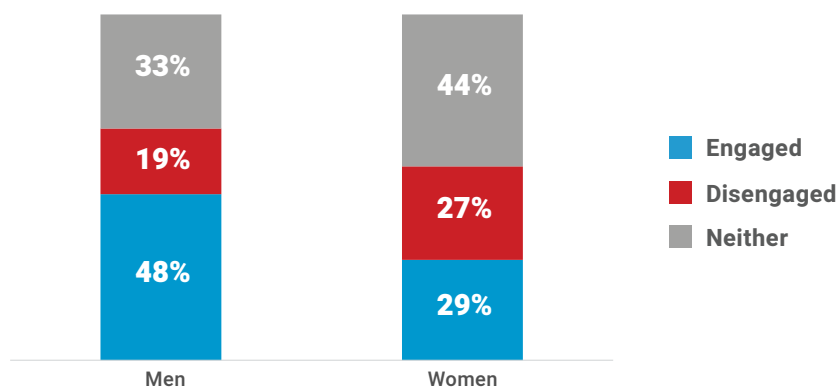
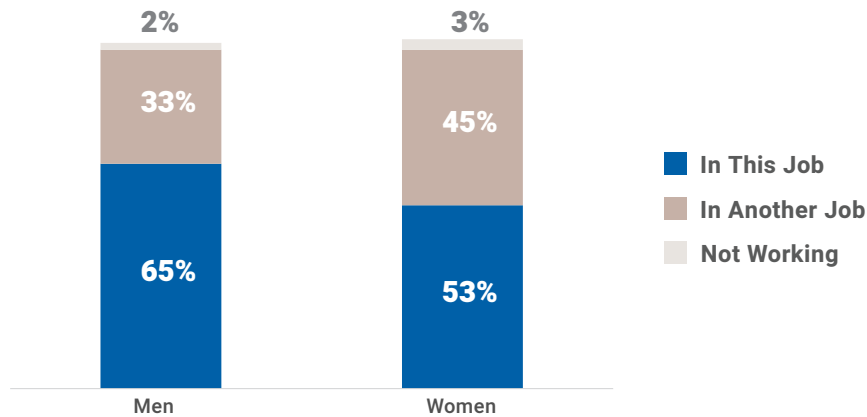
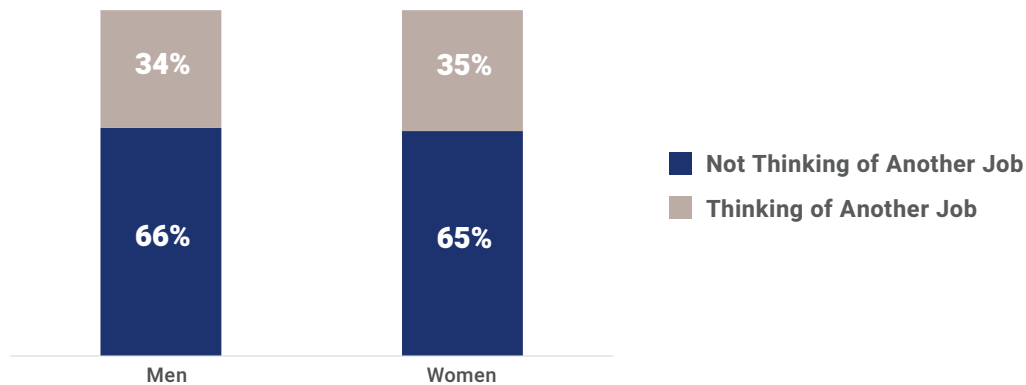
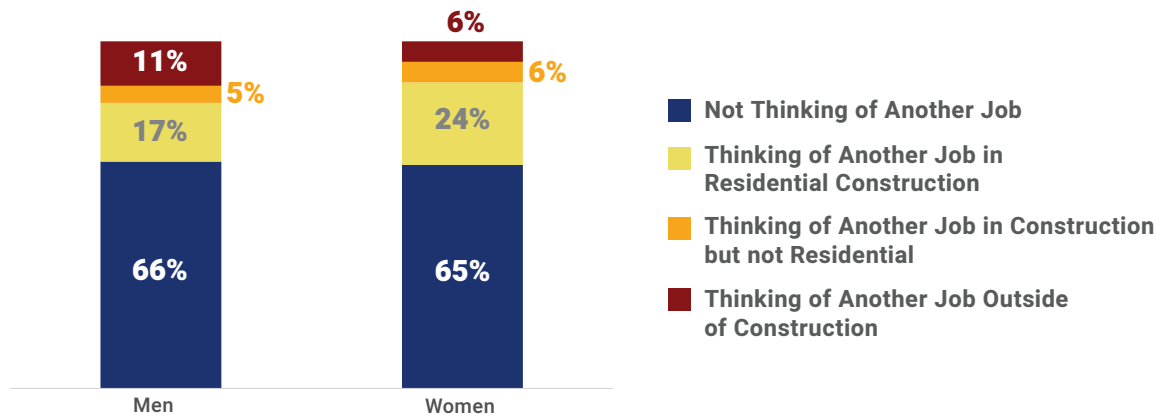


Figure 36 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Gender**Figure 37 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Gender**

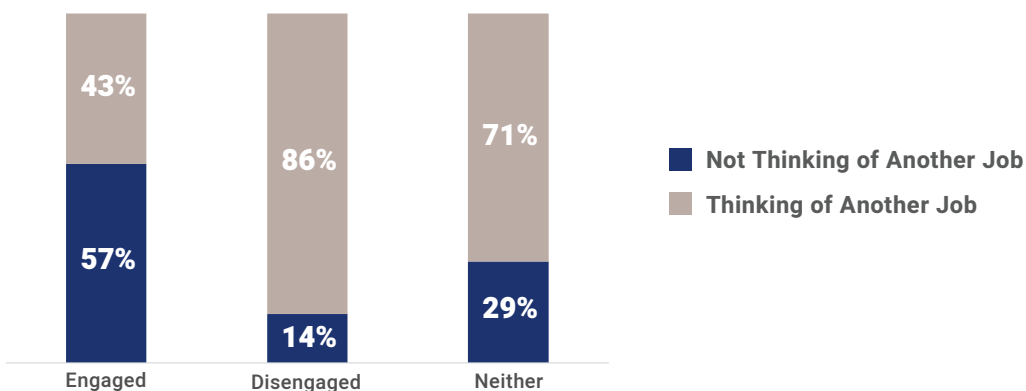
WOMEN ARE AN UNTAPPED TALENT POOL FOR RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION, BUT LOW ENGAGEMENT MAKES RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION DIFFICULT.

Figure 38 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Gender (by Industry Sector)



For men only*, in line with the rest of the findings from this study, the engaged group was the least likely to be thinking of another job, and the disengaged were the least likely to be thinking of another job. However still, two out of five from the engaged group reported they were thinking of another job.

Figure 39 - Men: "Thinking of Another Job Now" Compared to Engagement



* The sample number of females in the survey population was not large enough to carry out similar sub-analyses to a reasonable level of significance

Age

When comparing respondents in different age groups, what stood out was that more people aged 25-44 are thinking of another job now (38%). However, more people younger than 25 see themselves in a different job in a year (38%), and people older than 44 were the most disengaged (28%).

Employees aged 25-44 are in their prime productive years. They have acquired more knowledge and skills than the younger group, often resulting from investment in training and development by employers. Failing to retain these individuals not only causes a talent shortage, but also has a compounding effect of losing individuals who can train future generations of employees.

Figure 40 - Engagement by Age

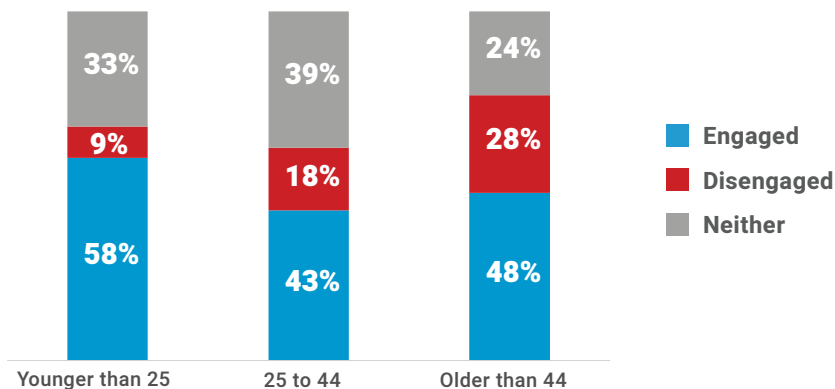


Figure 41 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Age

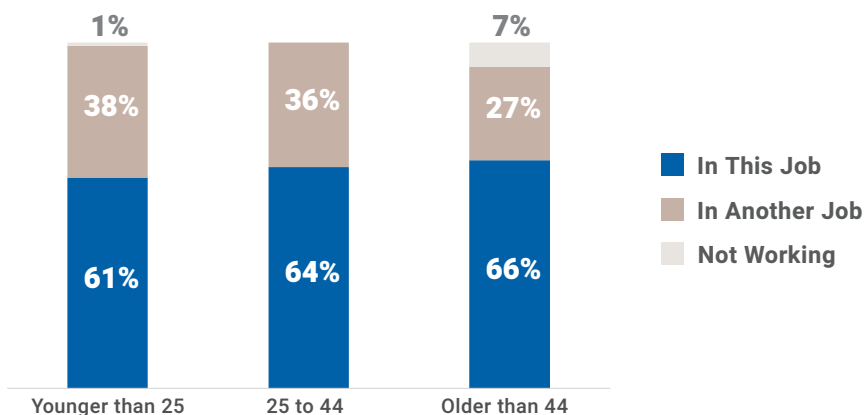


Figure 42 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Age

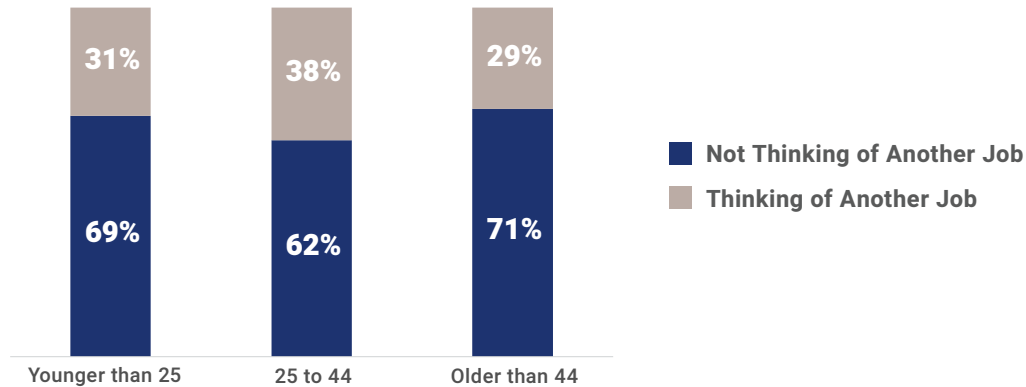
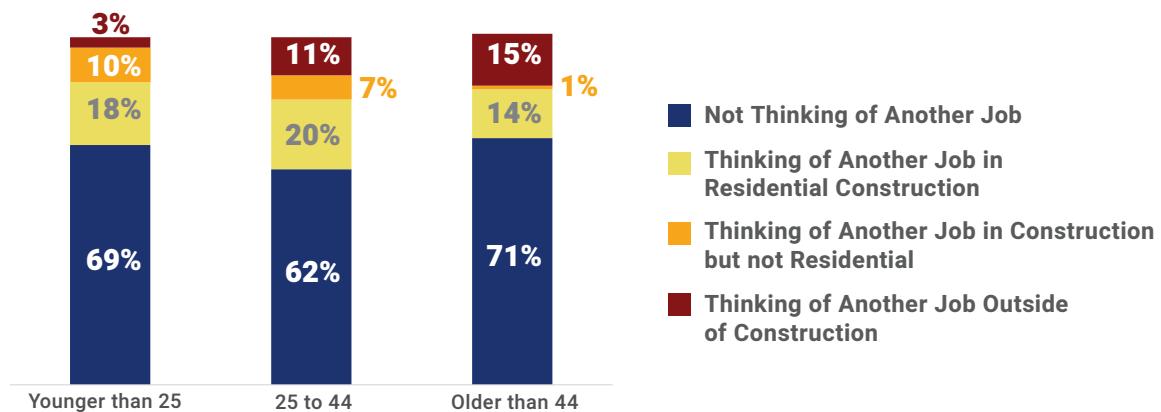


Figure 43 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Age (by Industry Sector)



Education

People at various education levels have shown comparable percentages regarding their engagement levels, whether they saw themselves in their current jobs in a year and if they were thinking of another job.

The study yielded a higher-than-expected percentage of frontline workers who have college degrees. This is likely due to the fact that frontline workers in supervisory roles (e.g. construction managers) were included in the sample. Also, college degrees used to be a requirement for many builders in residential construction, most of whom have only recently changed their hiring standards.

Figure 44 - Engagement by Education

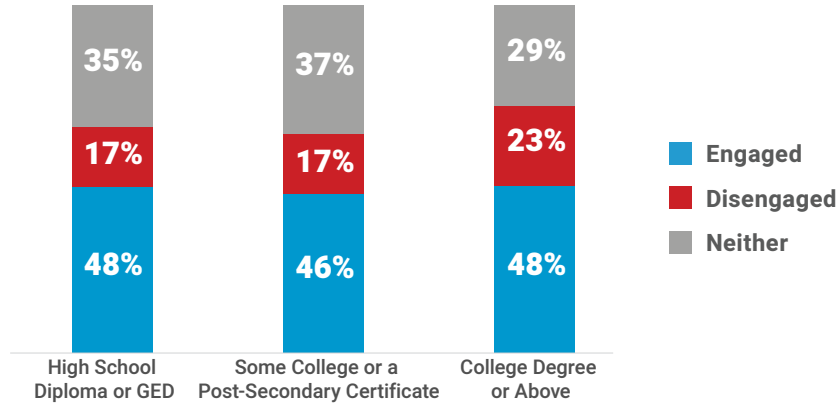


Figure 45 - "In One Year I See Myself" by Education

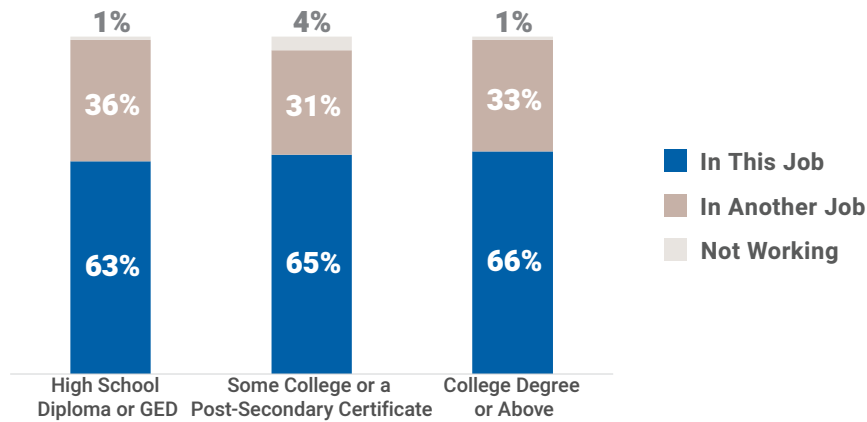
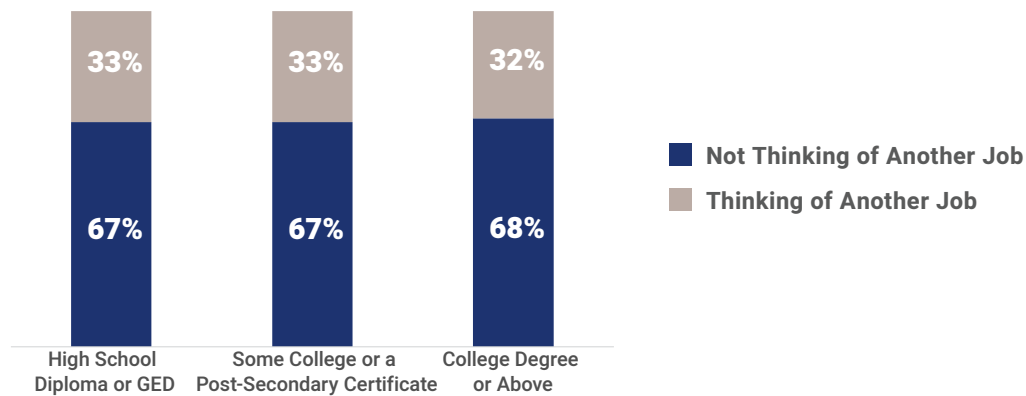


Figure 46 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Education



Level of Happiness

As expected, those who are thinking of another job and those with lower engagement are not as happy as those who are not thinking of another job and those with higher engagement.

Recent research from Professor William Scott-Jackson⁴ defines attribution style as how individuals interpret negative and positive events (particularly when they don't have actual evidence) and has suggested that innate propensity for happiness (as expressed by positive attribution style) may be a primary causal factor for engagement. People with a positive attribution style are generally more optimistic and tend to take ownership of both positive and negative events. This has significant implications for organizations wishing to improve engagement as they may succeed by helping individuals to be happier in themselves.

Figure 47 - Engagement by Happiness

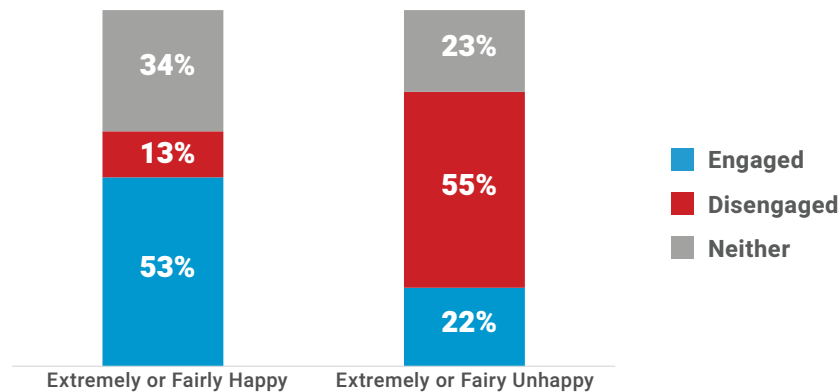
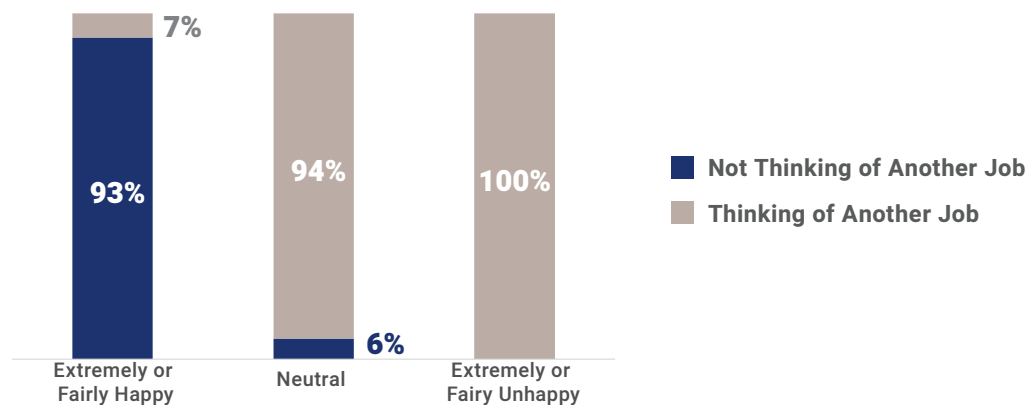


Figure 48 - "Thinking of Another Job Now" by Happiness



Top Reasons to Stay In or Leave a Job

The decision to stay in or leave a job ultimately comes down to one or several reasons that are unique to each individual. However, when respondents were asked to identify their reasons for either staying in their current job or wanting to leave it, similar reasons emerged as most important. The top reason given for both staying and leaving was career advancement and skill development opportunities or lack thereof. The quality of the immediate supervisor was the second-most common reason for staying and the third most common for leaving.

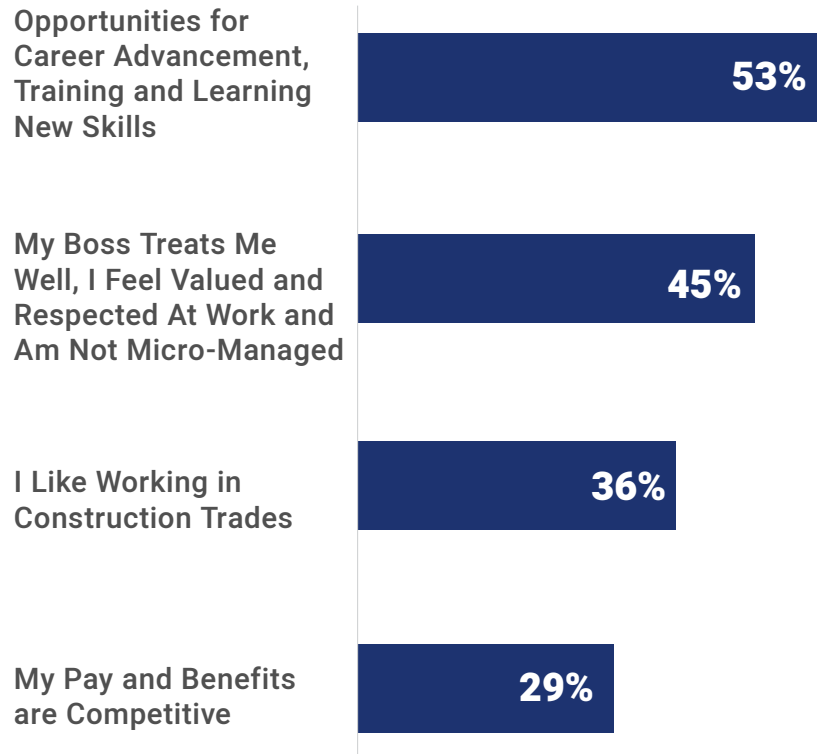
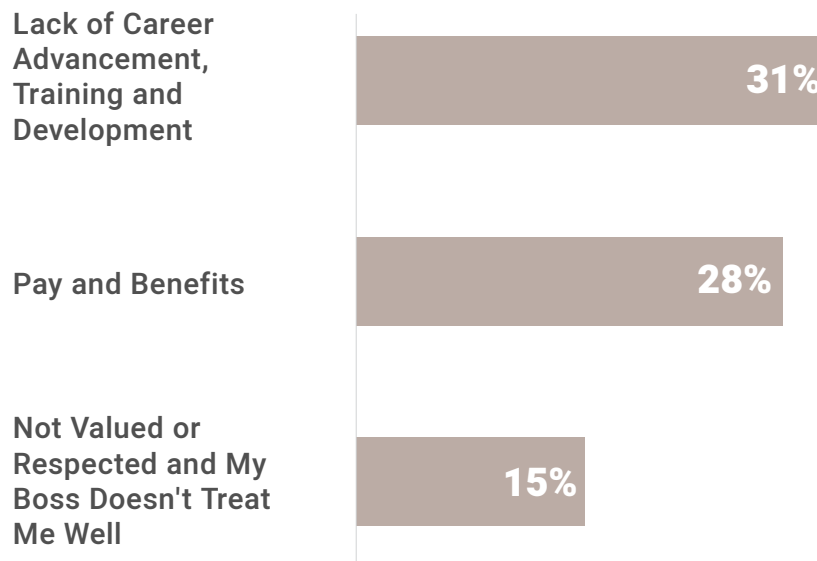
What's interesting is that pay and benefits, while clearly important, were not the most important reasons given in either case.

Other research from Professor William Scott-Jackson⁴ corroborates that career advancement and skill development, and a person's immediate supervisor are the most frequently cited reasons for thoughts of leaving. When comparing the reasons given for leaving or staying in a job across specific groups, like age, gender, and education, no significant differences were found.

To measure employees' motivations for staying in their current jobs, the survey asked them to select the five statements that most accurately described why they were not thinking of another job. Conversely, for employees who were actively thinking of another job, the survey asked them to select five statements that best reflected their motivations for leaving.

Respondents were presented with options such as whether they like working in the trades, if they like the trade they're currently in, if they like working in construction, if their supervisor and co-workers treat them well, if their compensation is competitive, if they have enough opportunities for training/skill development/advancement, if they feel micromanaged, if they believe they have job security, if they feel safe in their work, if they enjoy going to work, and if they feel valued and respected.

PAY AND BENEFITS, WHILE IMPORTANT, WERE NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT REASONS GIVEN FOR STAYING IN – OR LEAVING – A JOB.

Figure 49 - Top Reasons Given for Staying in Their Job**Figure 50 - Top Reasons Given for Thinking About Leaving Their Job**

What Employees Like About Working in Construction

In an open-ended question format, frontline workers were asked to write in their own words why they like working in construction. Answers centered on some common themes and concepts, which are shown (unranked) below:

- Ability to learn
- Ability to work different job sites all day stuck in one place
- Accomplishment of building homes
- Being outside and not stuck behind a desk
- Building peoples dreams
- Making money & nobody micromanaging.
- Construction is a valuable trade that is always going to be in demand and I feel like it is a trade that needs to be preserved for future generations
- Every day is a new challenge
- Pay is earned, not given. Mentally and physically challenging, co-workers are good
- Satisfaction of taking nothing to something
- The ability of being part of a project from start to finish and be able to say “I helped build that structure.”
- Working with my hands, learning valuable skills, plenty of opportunities
- My boss treats me very well
- What I like about construction is being able to determine what’s broken and repairing it makes me feel good. Most of all seeing that I made that customer smile really makes my day.

What Employees Don't Like About Working in Construction

In an open-ended question format, frontline workers were also asked to write in their own words why they dislike working in construction. Answers centered on some common themes and concepts, which are shown (unranked) below:

- After hours calls and rude customers
- Always being away from my family
- Being on call and not being able to plan my days as I want while on call. I can waste a whole day waiting for service calls to come in and end up not having any work. The heat, I really wish I didn't have to sweat all day every day
- Cold weather outside working, commute and drive
- Attics, heat, job conditions, heavy lifting
- Homeowners feel that they own you and can be very disrespectful
- Lack of Enough safety measures, low pay, lack of respect from our superiors, and it's is tiresome
- Lack of leadership
- very physically demanding. It has worn out my body
- Low pay and poor management
- not enough time for training.
- With the lack of skilled help the builders and their unrealistic schedule have not caught up with the times.
- Work life balance, more colleagues and supervisor have not knowledge moreover don't take interest in solving customer problem in letter and spirit
- The hours and working environment can be challenging at times. IE, weekends and inclement weather

Comparing Frontline to Back-Office Workers

The survey also included responses from people working in back-office roles in residential construction. Comparing their responses, fewer people in residential construction back-office roles are thinking of another job (24%) compared to frontline workers (36%), although slightly more back-office workers are actively disengaged (21%). Similarly, more back-office workers – such as accounting, purchasing, warranty, design, scheduling, contracts, and office management – see themselves in the same job in a year’s time. Interestingly, the same amount of frontline and back-office workers are thinking of another job outside of the construction industry.

Figure 51 - Engagement: Frontline Workers vs Back-Office Workers

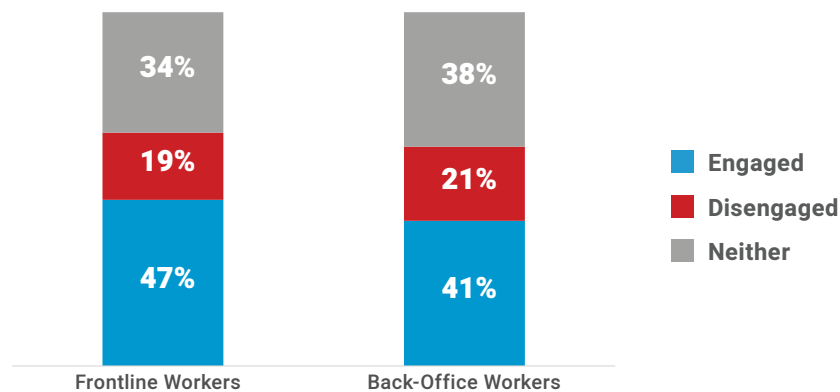


Figure 52 - "In One Year I See Myself": Frontline Workers vs Back-Office Workers

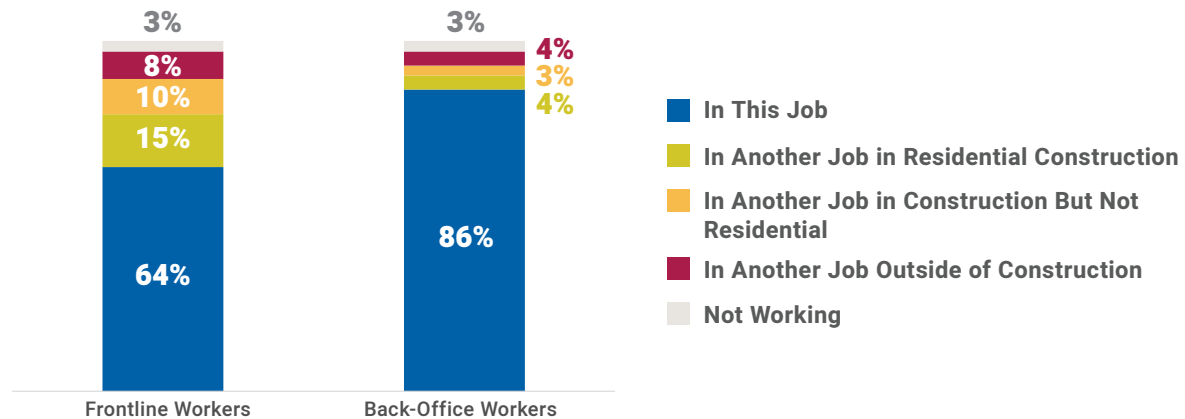


Figure 53 - "Thinking of Another Job Now": Frontline Workers vs Back-Office Workers

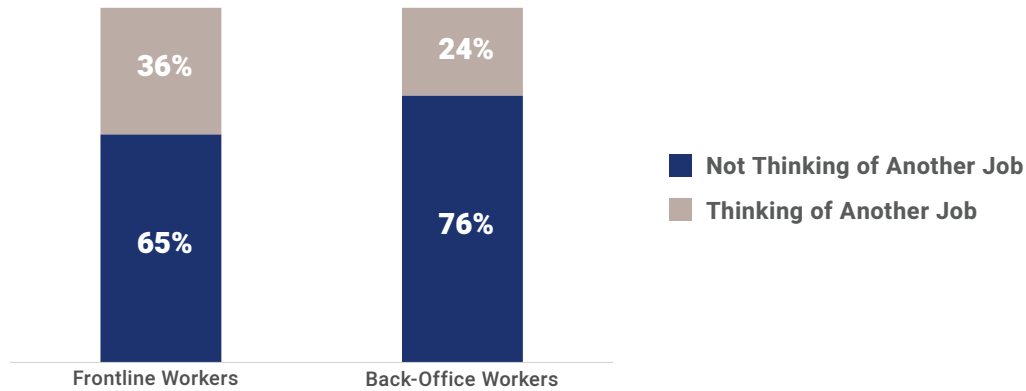
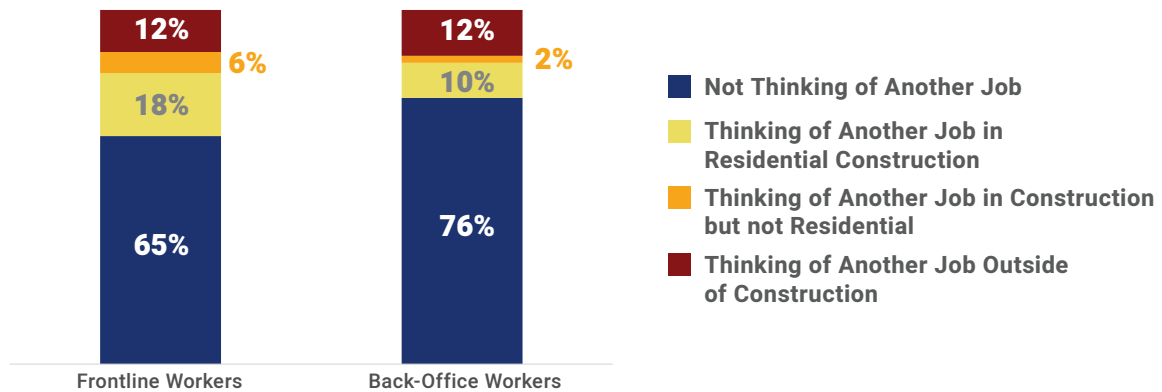


Figure 54 - "Thinking of Another Job Now":
Frontline Workers vs Back-Office Workers (by Industry Sector)



Comparing Commercial with Residential Construction Workers

For comparison, the survey also included frontline workers employed at commercial construction jobsites. It found that frontline workers in the commercial sector were more likely to be thinking of another job (45%) and, interestingly, 20% of them were actively thinking of another job in the residential sector. Engagement levels were very similar in both sectors.

It should be noted that a portion of the trade workforce has traditionally worked in both residential and commercial construction, shifting from one to the other depending on economic conditions, demand, and opportunity in each sector at a given time.

Figure 55 - Engagement: Residential vs Commercial

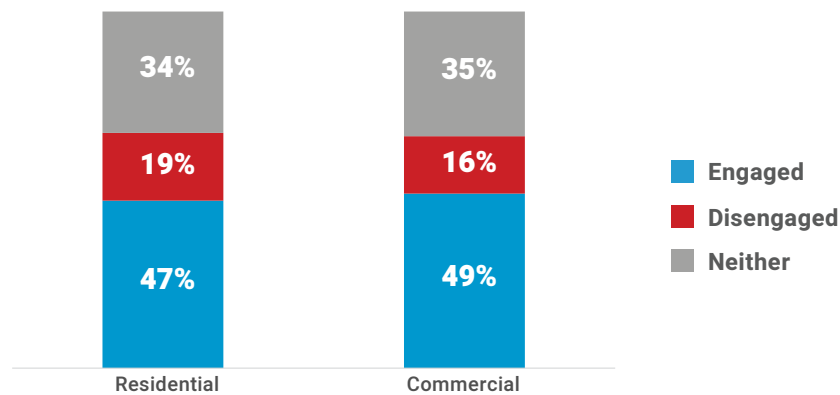


Figure 56 - "In One Year I See Myself": Residential vs Commercial

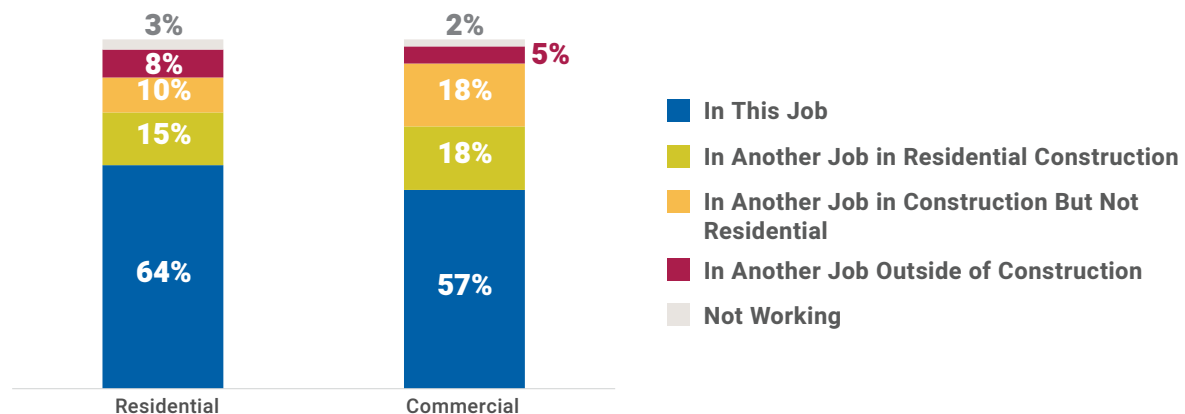


Figure 57 - "Thinking of Another Job Now": Residential vs Commercial

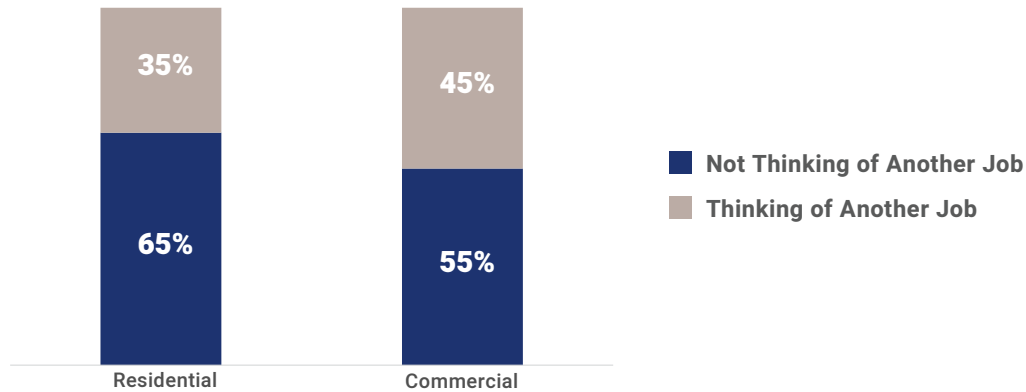
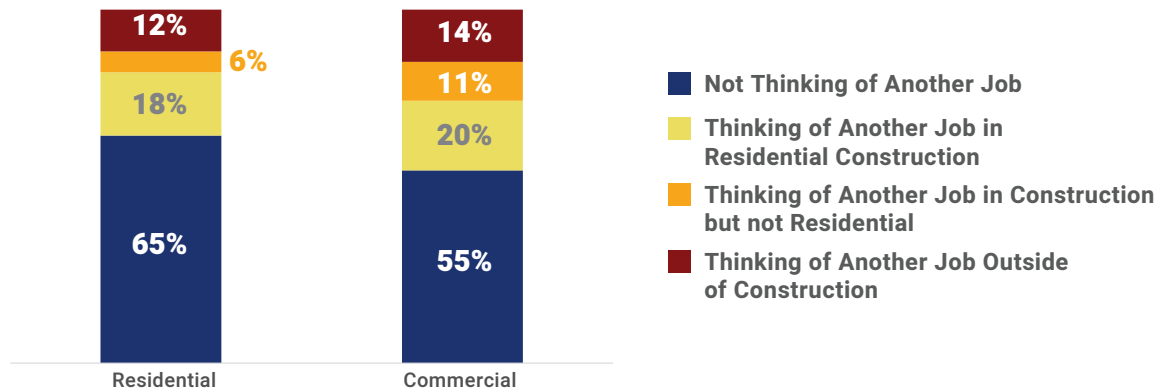


Figure 58 - "Thinking of Another Job Now": Residential vs Commercial (by Industry Sector)



20% OF COMMERCIAL CONSTRUCTION FRONTLINE WORKERS WERE THINKING OF MOVING TO THE RESIDENTIAL SECTOR.

Engagement and Retention

The talent shortage in residential construction is one of the most significant challenges the homebuilding industry has faced in recent memory. Solving this issue will take a concerted effort on many fronts, with employee retention being one of the most important. The more employers are able to keep the employees they have, the less time and resources they will need to spend recruiting new ones. Turnover can cost employers \$15,000 per employee in costs related to separation, replacement, training, and lost productivity. In addition, more people staying in homebuilding jobs will result in the industry gradually gaining a reputation as a viable career alternative for young people.

Therefore, keeping good people from leaving should be a priority for employers. And as this research has confirmed, employee engagement is critical for retention.

For many employees, the process of leaving a job starts a long time before the actual exit. It starts with reduced engagement leading to thoughts of quitting, often (as confirmed again in this study) caused by poor supervisors/team leaders or by lack of development.

But employees rarely make these reasons known to their employers once they quit. Seeking to understand peoples' reasons for leaving, many employers have implemented exit interviews. But these have proven to be unreliable in identifying the root causes of poor retention. Not only are any reasons given based on the past (so may not be relevant) but reasons reported after exit (often money, security etc.) are never the real reasons which originally drove the process.

This research surveyed current employees – to assess their levels of engagement and thoughts of quitting or staying and the reasons or causes for staying or leaving. The more employers can understand the importance of engagement and take steps to improvement, the easier it will be for them to prevent their best people from leaving. They will also see benefits in better quality of work, increased productivity, and reduced costs from recruiting.

Compensation

When considering employees' reasons for staying in or leaving, a job, it's easy to assume that compensation is the most important factor. However, as this research has shown, employee engagement and opportunities for career advancement and skill development are more important.

Thus, for most employees the decision to stay at a job is not all about the money, though money is still important. More importantly, compensation is intertwined with engagement. If the rate employers pay their employees is not competitive in the marketplace or is too low to support a decent lifestyle, that can lead to low engagement and low employee retention. Giving raises to employees does lead to an increase in engagement, but if career advancement, skill development, and supervisor leadership are not at acceptable levels, the increase is temporary.

How to Improve Engagement

As this research found, the most-cited reason for an employee's decision to leave their job is the lack of opportunities for career advancement and skill development. Another common reason is an immediate supervisor's poor leadership skills. Research by FSG⁹, Brigham Timpson¹⁰ and Charpia¹¹ also recommend immediate supervisors' leadership development, and opportunities for learning and growth as key factors in retention.

Career Advancement and Skill Development

Employees rely on their immediate supervisors to give them the tools and opportunities to grow in their careers. Some of the actions employers can take to help employees stay engaged include:

- Ensuring supervisors understand and support employees' motivations, ambitions, and goals, and provide mentorship to all employees
- Communicating opportunities (and requirements) for advancement and helping employees to take advantage of those opportunities
- Fostering a positive, team-centric atmosphere and culture in which team members are encouraged to learn from each other
- Setting aside time and providing resources for employees to pursue professional and skill development

Some of these actions may be more difficult for smaller companies, where, as research showed, employee engagement can be a significant challenge. Large companies often have a dedicated human resources department, as well as the resources and expertise to provide opportunities for training and advancement. Small companies typically do not have these resources. Fortunately, there are many training modules, tools, and other resources available online at low or no cost.

In addition, leaders at smaller companies may be hesitant to spend the time and money necessary to offer skill development to employees, only to see them leave for better job opportunities. To be fair, this rationale exists at many large companies, as well. However, as this research shows, not developing employees is a key factor in causing them to leave, and development may aid in retention.

Small companies do have some advantages they can leverage. First, they can be more agile and flexible than large companies, given that they don't have the corporate structure and layers of reporting that large employers do. Also, company owners, who set the rules of the company, are much closer to the frontline workers, and are able to develop closer relationships with individuals. Small companies can use both of these advantages to increase the engagement of their employees.

Similarly, although small companies may not have clearly defined career paths for promotion and development of their employees, leaders can ensure that people with particular talents and skills are able to contribute more to the business and take on leadership or customer-facing roles.

Development of Immediate Supervisors' Leadership Skills

Having good leaders is critical for the ability of any business – large or small – to ensure that their people are engaged.

Larger organizations often have a multi-layered structure in which managers have people reporting to them who, in turn, have their own direct reports. As people advance up the corporate ladder, they acquire wide and extensive experiences (good and bad) in how to lead and manage teams.

Immediate supervisors are team leaders, and small company bosses who directly lead small teams of up to around 20 people. These leaders, sitting lower in the pyramid, actually lead the majority of the people and can easily cause very low (or high) engagement in their team members. They often have no previous leadership experience or may well have received little to no leadership training (or poor training). Strategic level leadership is very different from every-day leadership of a small team.

Unsurprisingly, research has found that most leaders have no idea how to be a leader, and many leaders disengage their people on a daily basis, usually by accident and with no bad intention. Bad bosses are not evil; they just don't know what they're doing.

OCFEE has found that the things that first line leaders do to demotivate their staff are basic leadership tasks which, while easy to get wrong, are also easy to get right. Similarly, one doesn't have to be born a great leader – they just need to do it right. But, like any other skill, leadership comes with knowledge and practice.

Worldwide research found a common set of activities which when done well had the greatest impact on engagement and were most often done poorly by leaders. The top six were:

Having Frank Conversations

In any work setting, situations arise in which an employee has failed, is not meeting expectations, or has done something wrong. In these situations, leaders should speak honestly and openly with the employee to deal with the situation effectively and ensure that the problem is resolved, both immediately and longer term.

Achieving Tasks on Time and Budget

One of the key aspects of leadership, and one that requires informal leadership and leadership of oneself, is to manage the completion of jobs on time and on budget. This includes accurately estimating the time and costs required, breaking down the job into smaller tasks, identifying the needs for each task, and continually monitoring progress.

Running Effective Meetings

People spend a great deal of time in meetings – even in the construction industry – which are often ineffective and a poor use of people's time. Leaders should work to make meetings more effective through proper planning, staying on-subject during the meeting, setting clear action items, and monitoring progress of those steps.

Managing Time

Time management is one of the most important things a leader can do, for themselves, for their teams, and for their companies. This involves setting priorities and focusing on them, not getting distracted by less important tasks, and delegating tasks effectively.

Setting Goals and Managing Performance

Performance Management has two main objectives: to set stretching future goals which contribute to the objectives of the whole team and to facilitate the individual's development, performance improvement and value to themselves and the organization through performance reviews. This is highly related to achieving 'tasks on time and budget' but with a longer-term developmental focus.

Motivating Others

One of the most important roles a leader has is to motivate the people that report to them. This starts with setting an example of being motivated themselves. It also involved recognizing and praising people for their achievements, which improves the engagement of the team and reinforces positive behavior.

This section is based largely on many years of research and consulting carried out by Professor William Scott-Jackson and his teams (e.g. Scott-Jackson and Mayo 2017, Scott-Jackson et al 2021) as well as numerous other studies and findings.

Building a Sustainable Workforce

BTF is well positioned to facilitate the collaboration of all industry stakeholders (builders, trades, suppliers, training providers, trade associates, etc.) to address the industry-wide challenge of worker engagement. BTF is committed to helping employers in the industry use every resource at their disposal to find and retain good employees.

BTF is already conducting multiple initiatives that provide engagement and retention of frontline workers in residential construction. Current initiatives include:

Career Exploration

Providing career exploration information on its JobsToBuild platform, including career pathways and connections to training resources for multiple careers in residential construction.

Career Coaching

Making BTF team members named Engagement Managers available in local markets to offer career coaching, placement assistance in residential construction jobs or relevant training programs, and post-hire support for up to six months.

Aligning Skill Building with Demand

Facilitating collaboration between various stakeholders in the homebuilding industry, including manufacturers, educators, and employers, to reduce the gaps between what students learn in trade schools and training programs and what employers need from the people they hire.

Building on the initiatives already in place, this research points to the need for additional strategies to help employers in residential construction get the support, knowledge, and tools they need to improve employee engagement.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

Identifying and highlighting role models and effective leaders, and showcasing their people management best practices through presentations and online videos.

Training Resources Repository

JobsToBuild will be adding a Learning Management System (LMS) which will feature training modules provided by our partners. The LMS will track participants' progress and measure its impact. The LMS can also include leadership skills training.

Knowledge Sharing

BTF will share the findings and recommendations of this study to all employers in the BTF network, and will follow up to encourage employers to implement the recommendation of this report and improve engagement across the industry.

**BTF IS COMMITTED TO HELPING EMPLOYERS IN THE
INDUSTRY USE EVERY RESOURCE AT THEIR DISPOSAL
TO FIND AND RETAIN GOOD EMPLOYEES.**

The Need for More Research

As this survey is among the first of its kind to specifically focus on frontline workers in residential construction, it inevitably uncovered the need for greater understanding. Some of the areas that need additional research include:

- How to maximize career development and progression (and employees' perceptions of both) in a sector where very small organizations are prevalent
- Identify the key characteristics and behaviors of the most effective leaders in residential construction and improve the effectiveness of immediate supervisors

BTF will also repeat this survey periodically to measure the progress the homebuilding industry is making in employee engagement, and its impact on retention.

In Closing

While it is clear there is much still to be learned about employee engagement for frontline workers in residential construction and more that needs to be done to provide employers with resources and support to improve it, this research represents a major step forward. It clearly identifies the importance of employee engagement as it relates to retention and addressing the talent shortage challenge in the industry.

BTF, along with its partners, have already begun taking steps to address employee engagement with employers and are actively planning more initiatives as a result of this research. BTF and OCFEE also hope that this research will help other industry groups, associations, and even individual employers in their efforts to improve employee engagement.

EMPLOYERS CAN RETAIN TALENT BY IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT, ESPECIALLY FOCUSING ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPERVISORS' LEADERSHIP SKILLS.

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