

KPMG Friends at Work 2.0 Survey

Full-time professional perspectives

July 2025



Objectives & methodology

Objectives



Online survey among **full-time, professional employees** to understand attitudes toward and perspectives on workplace friendships.

Specifically, this survey assesses the:

- Importance and benefits of friends at work
- Presence and formation of workplace friendships
- Challenges of establishing friendships at work
- Impact of technology and generative AI on workplace friendships
- Impact of friendships on workplace dynamics
- Impact of hybrid and remote work environments on work friendships

Survey methodology



- **Online survey** among **full-time, professional employees** in the U.S., fielded June 17-30, 2025.
- The sample includes 1,019 **professionals**, meeting the following criteria:



Employed **full-time** in an **office-based role** that requires specific skillsets and/or higher education



Job titles range from **entry level to Senior Vice President**, the C-Suite was not included



Organizations with **at least 100 employees** and **range of annual revenue**



Organizations from a mix of industries

Key takeaways

Workplace friendships are valued at a 20% salary premium. 57% of people would choose a role with salary 10% below market with close work friendships over a role with salary 10% over market without close friendships.

Workplace loneliness nearly doubled since 2024, with 45% of employees feeling "isolated and alone" at least sometimes at work.



99% are interested in an AI chatbot that could become a close friend or trusted companion at work.



Three in four workers say financial constraints prevent them from socializing with colleagues outside of work.

Work-life balance is the strongest driver of job preference among all attributes. The combo of strong work-life balance and frequent learning opportunities boosts an employer's preference to 71%.

87% say friendship-enabling cultures are crucial for retention and **90% for considering new opportunities.**

The leading professional benefit respondents attribute to close work friendships is increased productivity and motivation to surpass job requirements, reported by more than one in four respondents (28%).



American workers are rewriting the rules of what makes a job worthwhile, with close workplace friendships emerging as a workplace currency.

As a starting point for comparison, all employer factors were set at mid-level to represent an average market picture of a preferred employer.

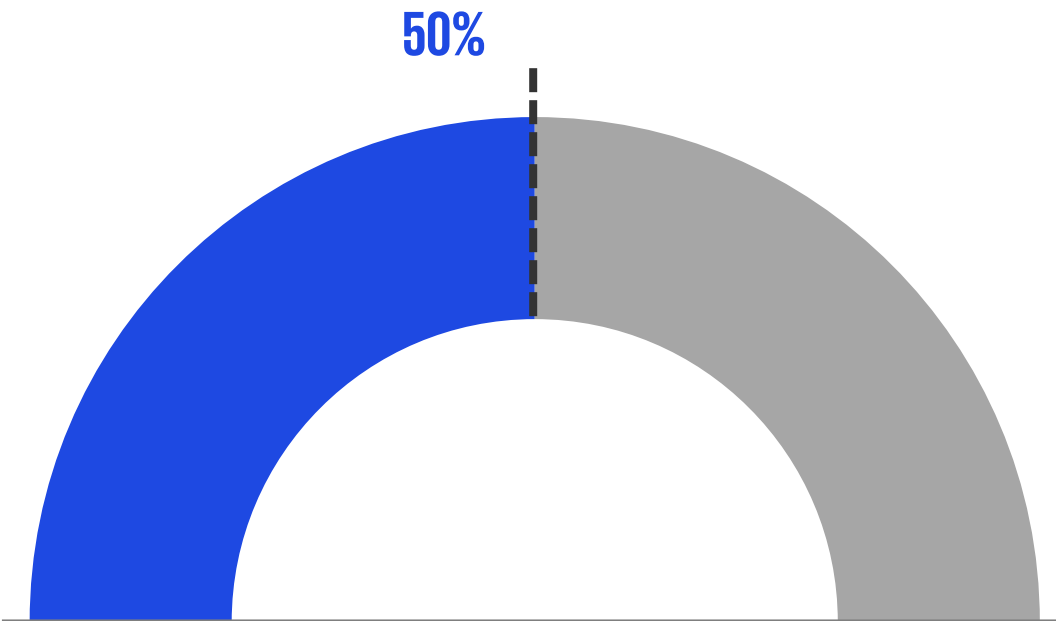
MARKET BENCHMARK:

Employer with average work-life balance, learning opportunities, level of work friendships, salary, and firm culture

	LOW	MID	HIGH
WORK-LIFE BALANCE	Poor	Moderate	Strong
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES	Limited	Occasional	Frequent, high-quality
WORK FRIENDSHIPS	No meaningful connections	Some friendly work relationships	Close workplace relationships
SALARY	10% below	At market	10% above
FIRM CULTURE	Transactional	Generally supportive	Inclusive, values-driven

PERSUASION METER
for Preferred Employer Status

Market Benchmark



More than half of people would trade 20% in salary in exchange to work with close friends.

57%

of people would choose a role with salary 10% below market with close work friendships over a role with salary 10% over market without close friendships

- Workplace friendships are valued at a 20% salary premium.
- Companies that demonstrate strong ratings across all five characteristics—salary, friends at work, work-life balance, learning opportunities, and company culture—could increase their preference among potential employees by 28 points beyond the market average.
- Work-life balance is the strongest driver of job preference among all attributes.
- Additionally, the combination of strong work-life balance and frequent learning opportunities boosts an employer's preference to 71% among potential employees.

PERSUASION METER

Findings below represent an employer with close friendships, under 10% market salary and average work-life balance, learning opportunities and firm culture.

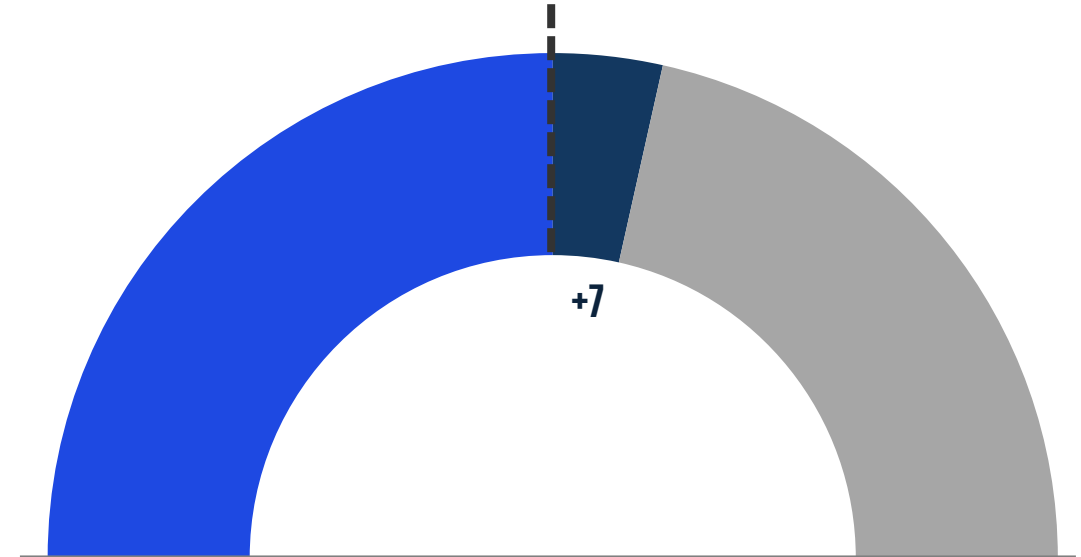
Market Benchmark

50%

Employer Scenario

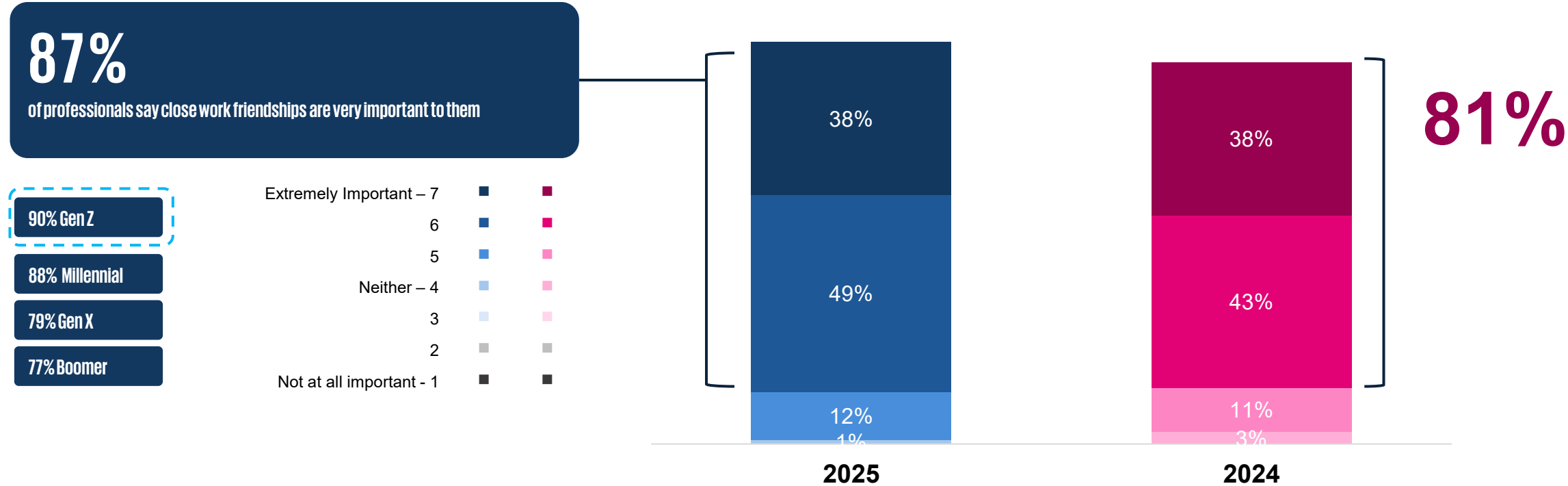
57%

+7



Close friendships are extremely or very important for most professionals.

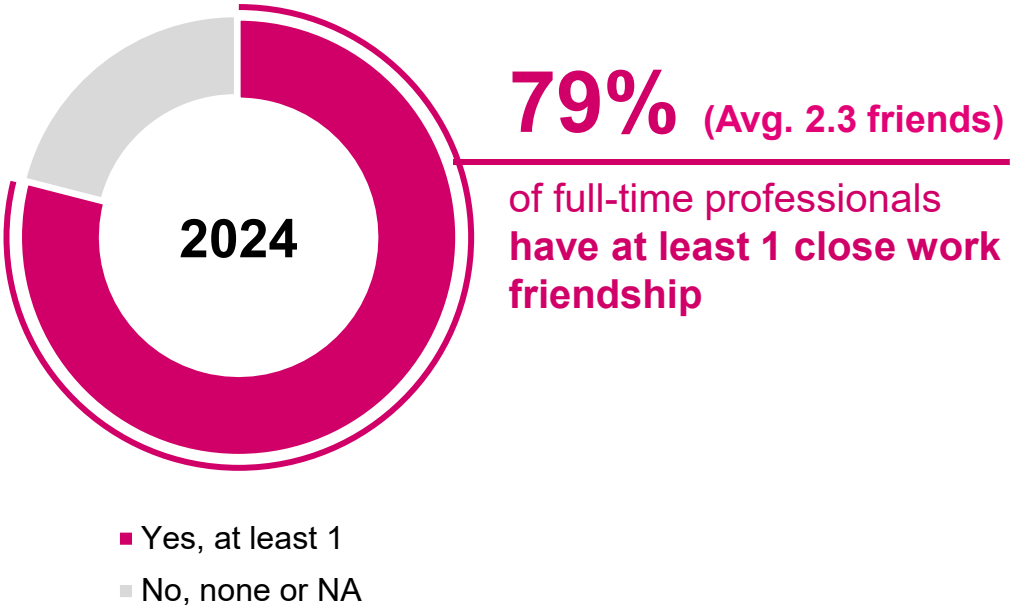
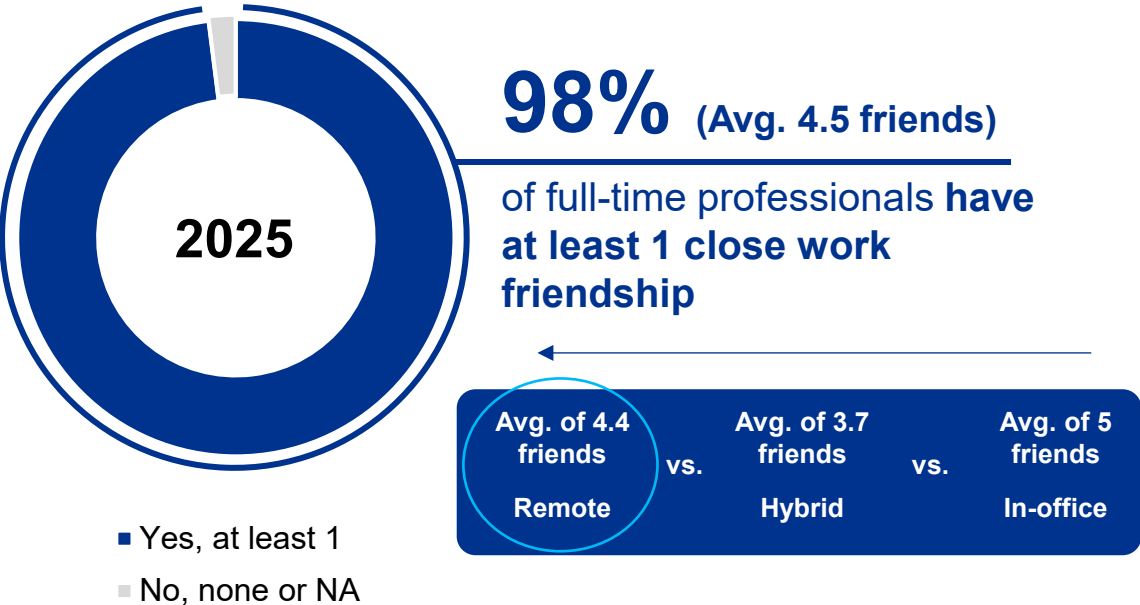
Importance of Close Friendships at Work (Tracking)



How important is it for you to be able to have close work friendships? We're defining a 'close work friend' as a person... (n=1019)

Almost all professionals have at least one close work friend. Those in-office have the highest number of friends. Close work friends are more important in 2025, up 19 points from last year.

Number of Close Friendships at Work (Tracking)



How many close work friendships do you have at your current company, if any? Please enter the number of close work friendships or select the appropriate response below.(n=1019)

The top professional benefit respondents attribute to close work friendships is increased productivity and motivation to surpass job requirements.

Biggest Professional Benefits of Work Friends

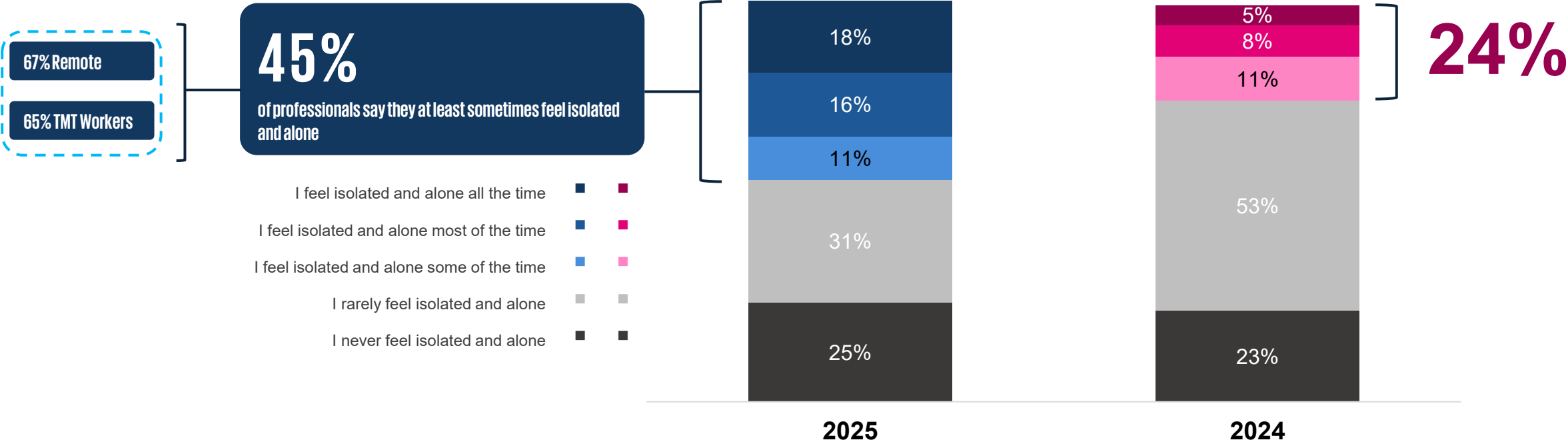
	Total	Work Setting		
		Remote	Hybrid	In-Office
Increases your productivity and motivation	28%	30%	27%	28%
Provides valuable perspective, guidance, and problem-solving	26%	25%	24%	27%
Builds confidence and expands professional skills and networks	26%	26%	28%	25%
Introduces you to new job opportunities	26%	25%	27%	25%
Increases resilience against burnout and enhances satisfaction	25%	29%	24%	24%
Boosts innovative thinking and idea sharing	25%	28%	23%	25%
Enhances your sense of belonging and connection	25%	23%	24%	27%
Improves collaboration and teamwork	25%	22%	26%	26%
Makes your job more enjoyable and satisfying	24%	23%	26%	24%
Offers opportunities for advancement within your current company	24%	23%	26%	23%
Gives access to informal company insights or changes	24%	23%	25%	24%
Fosters open and honest communication	22%	23%	19%	23%

What are the biggest professional benefits you have gained from your close work friendships? Select your top three. (n=1019)

Despite the dramatic increase in workplace friendships, employees are experiencing unprecedented levels of isolation and loneliness at work.

Almost half of employees feel like they are isolated to some extent; this sentiment has nearly doubled since 2024 and impacts remote employees and people working in the Telecommunications, Media and Tech (TMT) industry the most.

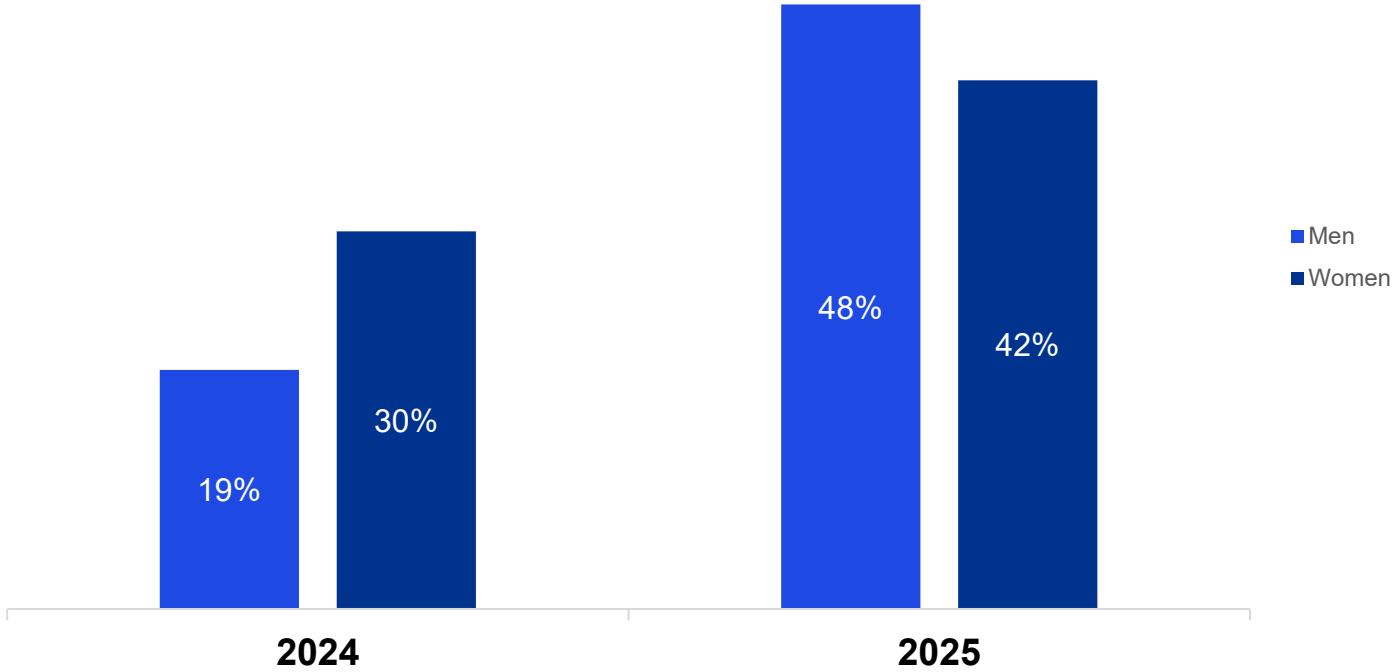
Stated Level of Loneliness and Isolation at Work (Tracking)



Which of the following statements best describes your typical level of loneliness and isolation at work? Select one. (n=1019)

Men are now more likely to feel isolated and alone at work than women, but both have increased drastically since 2024 – a 29-point increase for men and a 12-point increase for women.

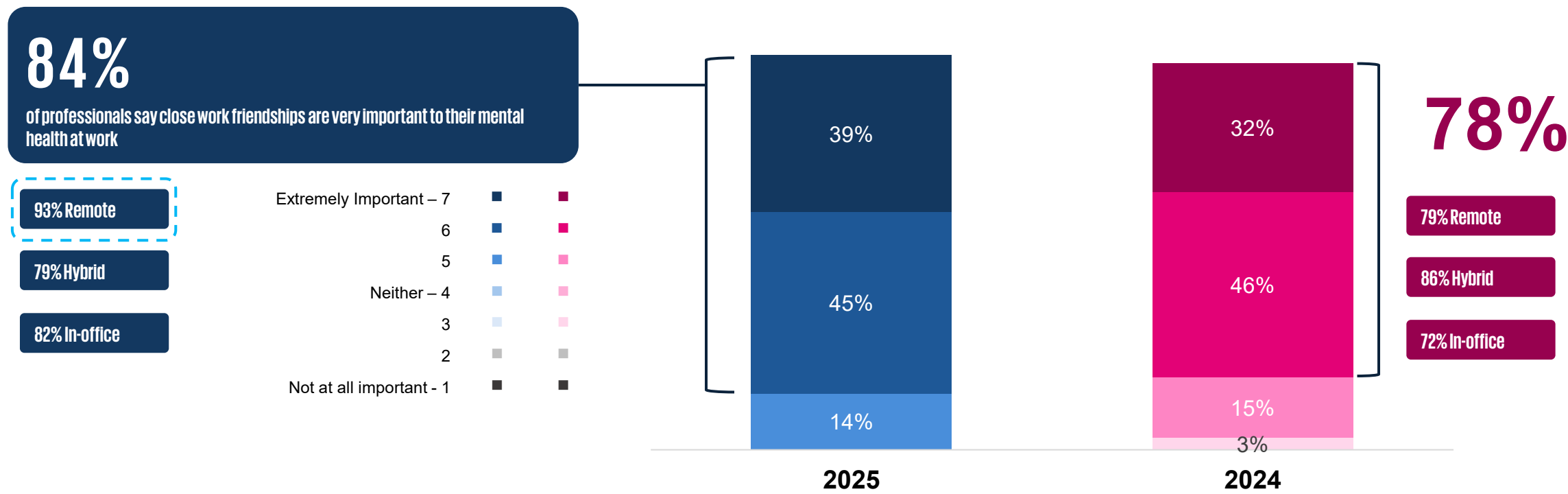
Stated Level of Loneliness and Isolation at Work (Tracking)



Which of the following statements best describes your typical level of loneliness and isolation at work? Select one. (n=1019)

Nearly nine in ten employees believe that close work friendships are very important to their mental health—a significant increase from 2024, especially among remote workers.

Importance of Work Friends to Mental Health (Tracking)



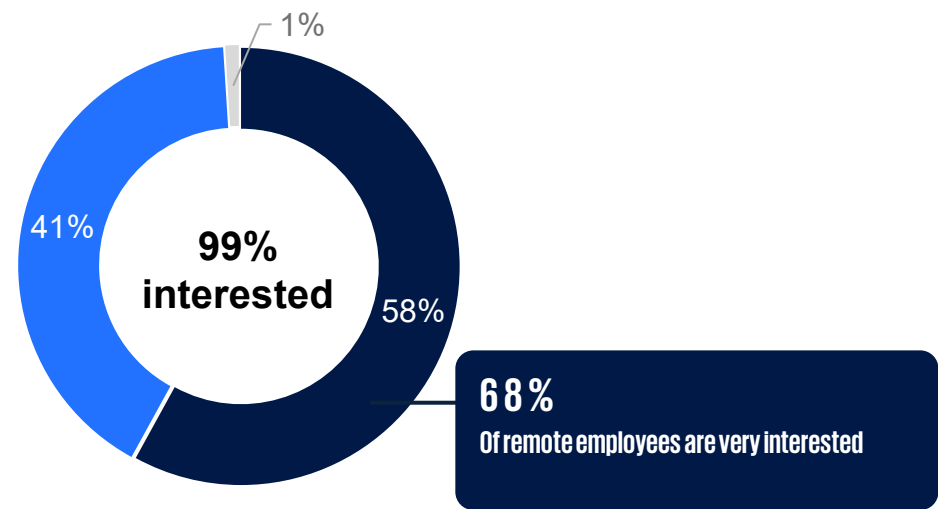
Overall, how important are close work friendships to your own mental health at work? (n=1019)

Emerging technology is simultaneously enabling new forms of workplace connection while also creating superficial interactions that undermine authentic relationship building.

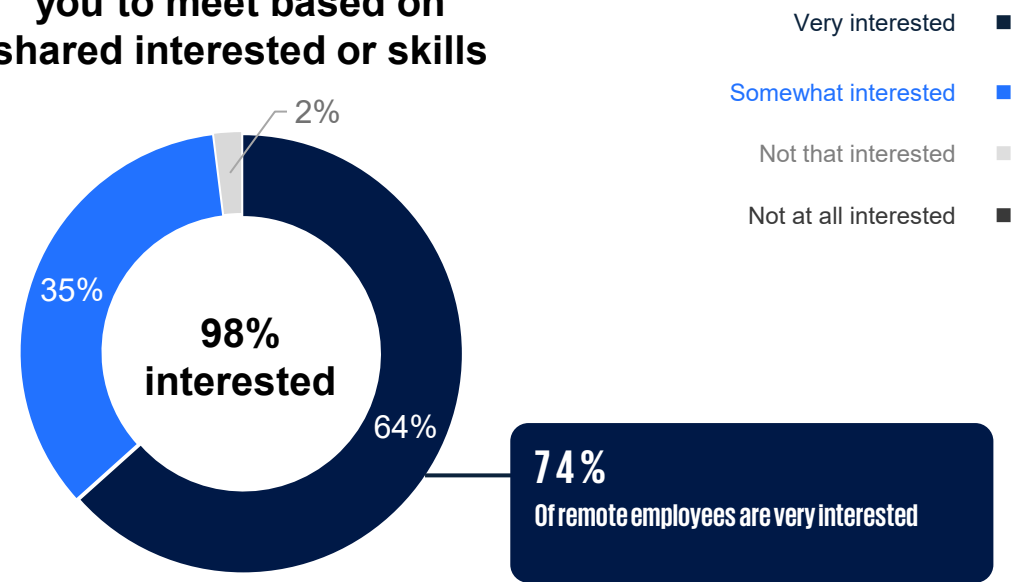
There is interest in using AI to connect with co-workers and serve as a close friend or trusted companion at work. Remote employees are especially interested in both.

Interest in AI Supporting Work Friendships

AI chatbot that becomes a close friend or trust companion at work



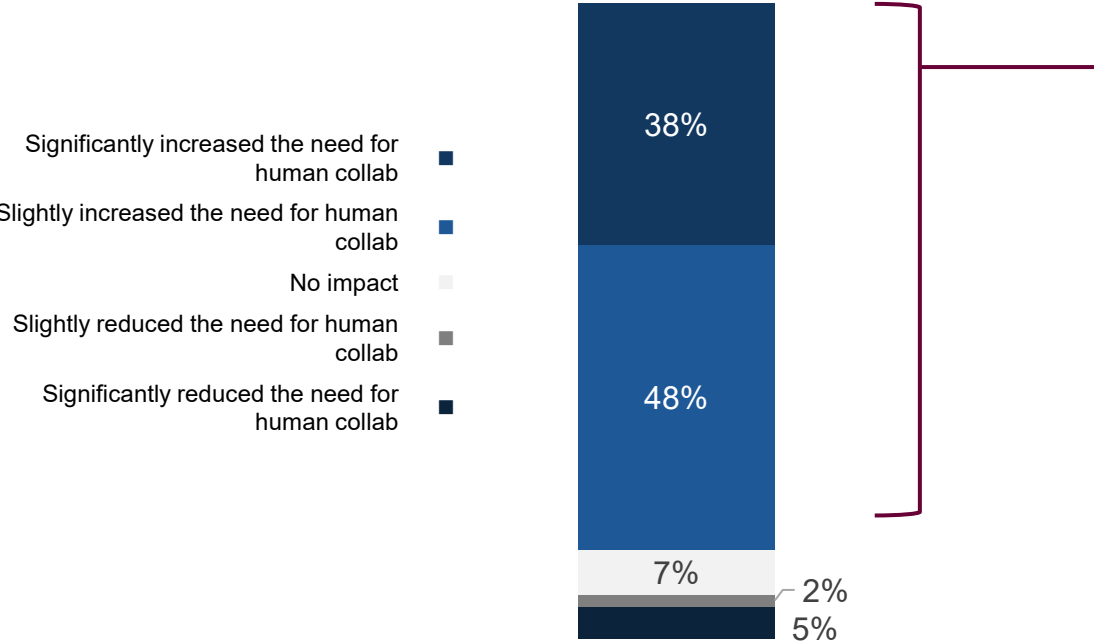
AI-based system that suggests coworkers for you to meet based on shared interested or skills



How interested would you be in using an AI-based system that suggests coworkers for you to meet based on shared interests or skills? (n=1019)
How interested would you be in an AI chatbot that could become a close friend or trusted companion at work? (n=1019)

Generative AI has increased the need for human collaboration – especially among those working remotely.

Impact of Gen AI on Interactions with Colleagues



86%
of professionals say the use of AI agents for work tasks has increased the need for human collaboration

More common among...

79% Hybrid employees **vs.** **94%** Remote employees **&** **85%** In-office employees

How has the use of generative AI agents for work tasks (e.g., getting information, brainstorming, etc.) had an impact on your interactions with colleagues? (n=1019)

Most have formed work friendships with colleagues they rarely or never meet in person yet close to half report that technology creates false connections.

Close Friendships in Hybrid or Remote Environment



81%
have formed a close friendship with a colleague whom they rarely or never see in person.

Technology's Impact on Connection



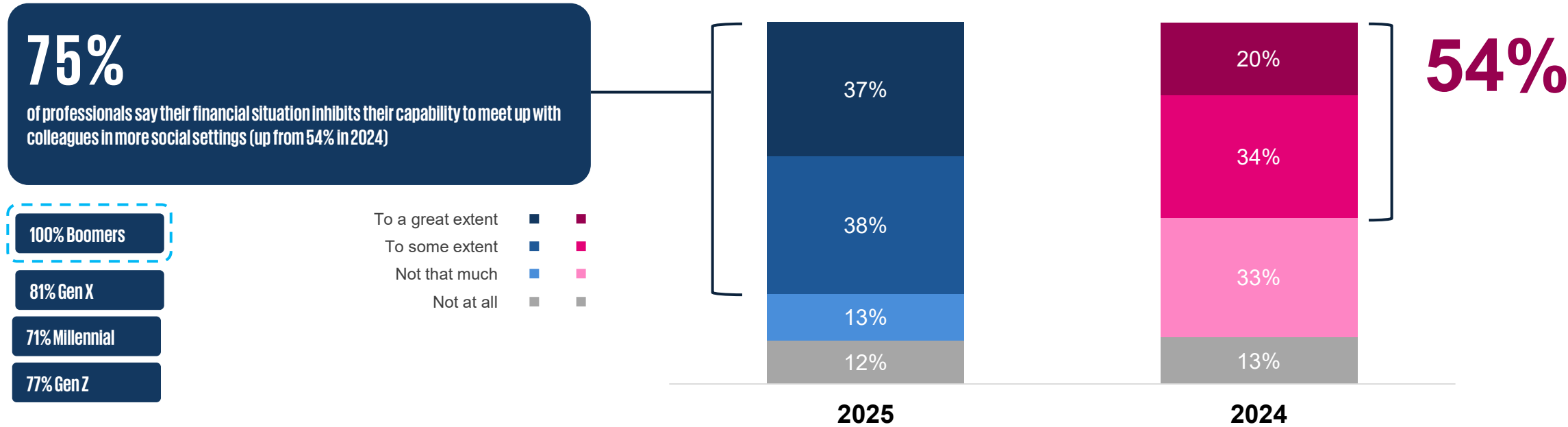
49%
report technology has created a false sense of connection among themselves and their colleagues and has replaced deep conversations with superficial interactions.

Have you ever formed a close friendship with a colleague whom you rarely or never seen in person? (n=1019)
When it comes to increased use of technology to enable virtual collaboration and communication in the workplace, which one of the following best represents your own view? (n=1019)

**Financial constraints,
generational differences and
political polarization are
creating barriers to workplace
connection.**

Personal finances and the economy are limiting interactions for three-quarters of professionals.

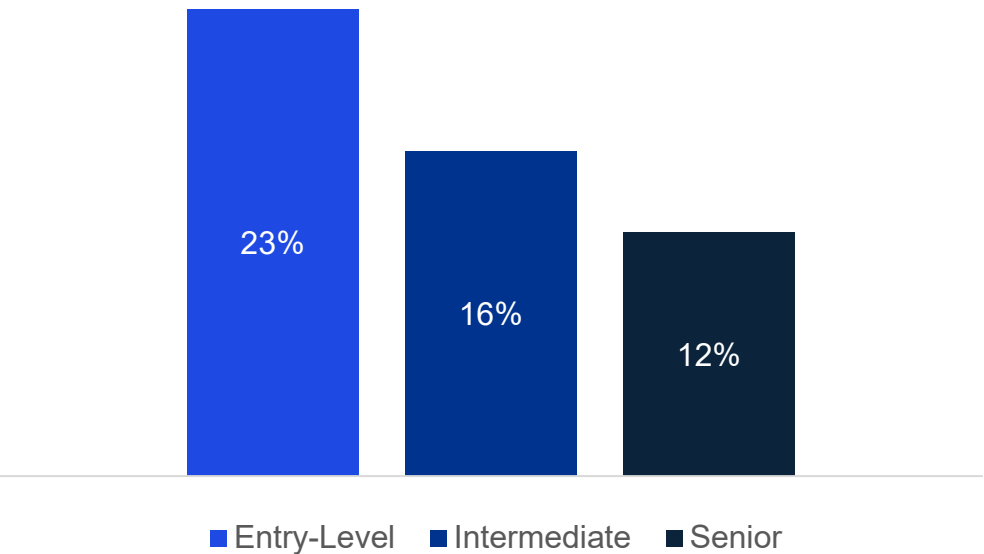
Extent to Which Personal Financial Situations Impact Work Friendships (Tracking)



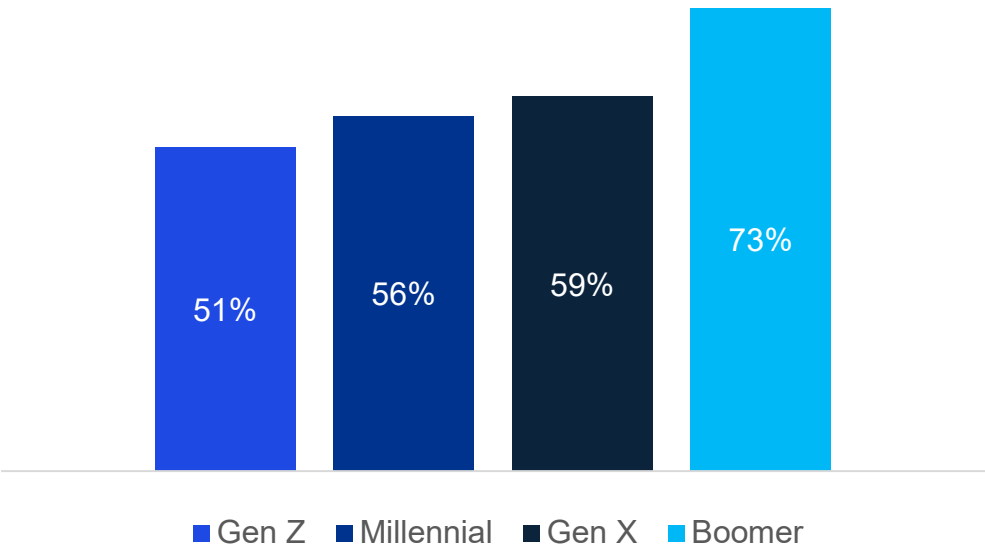
To what extent is the current economy and/or your own financial situation preventing you from meeting up with your colleagues socially to eat out, grab drinks, go to an event, etc.?. (n=1019)

Entry-level employees are most likely to end work friendships over personal values, while Boomers are more comfortable sharing political views with colleagues.

Different personal beliefs/values seriously harmed or ended a relationship with a close work friend



Comfortable sharing political views openly with closest work friendship

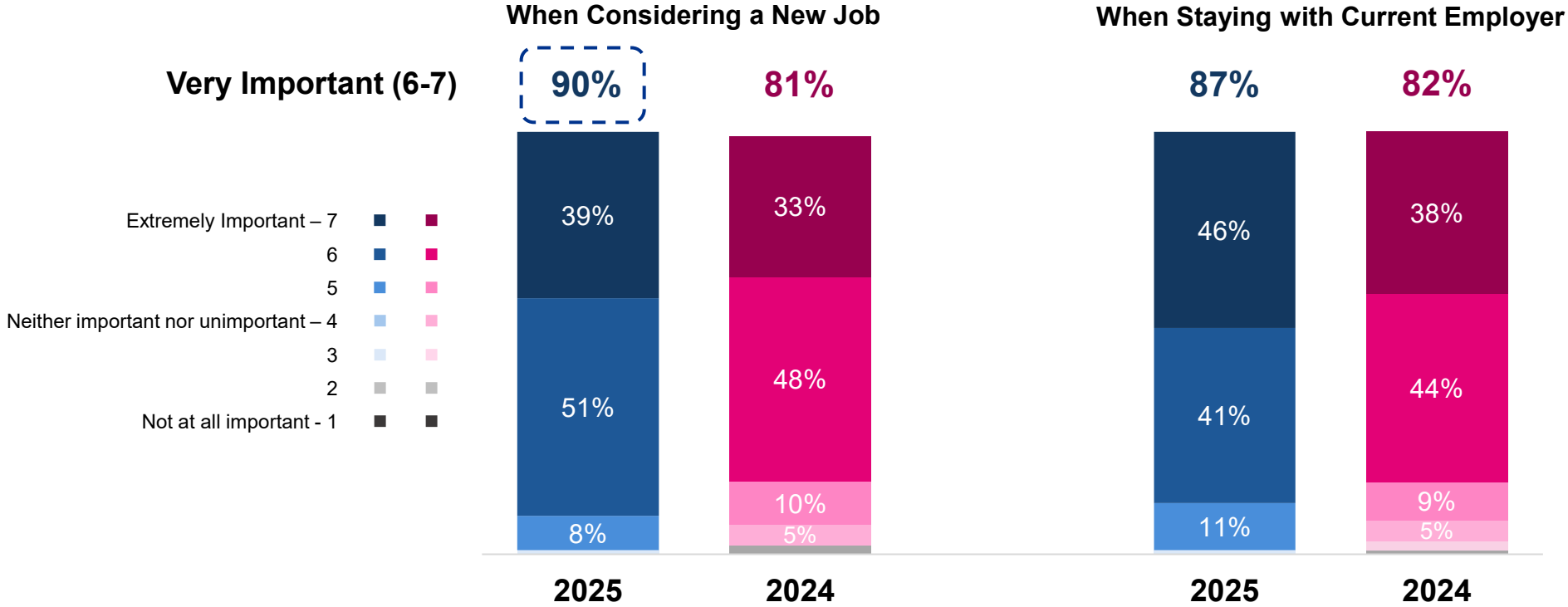


Which of the following have seriously harmed or ended a relationship with a close work friend? (n=1019)
Rate your agreement with these statements about your closest work friendship: I feel comfortable sharing my political views openly with this person. (n=1019)

Companies face a growing need to design friendship-enabling environments that can bolster retention and recruitment as employees increasingly value relationship-fostering cultures.

Nine in ten employees say that it's very important for new and current employers to be supportive of strong work friendships.

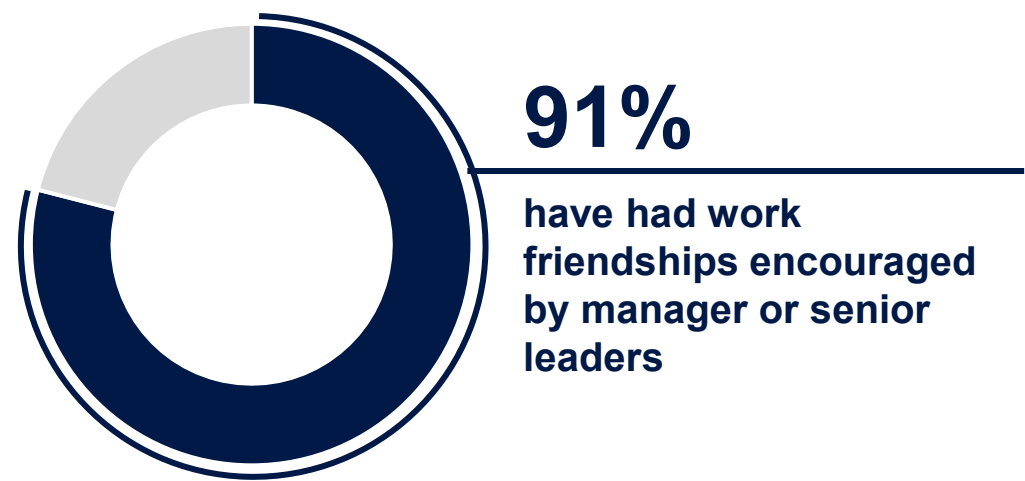
Importance of Company Culture that Enables Friendships (Tracking)



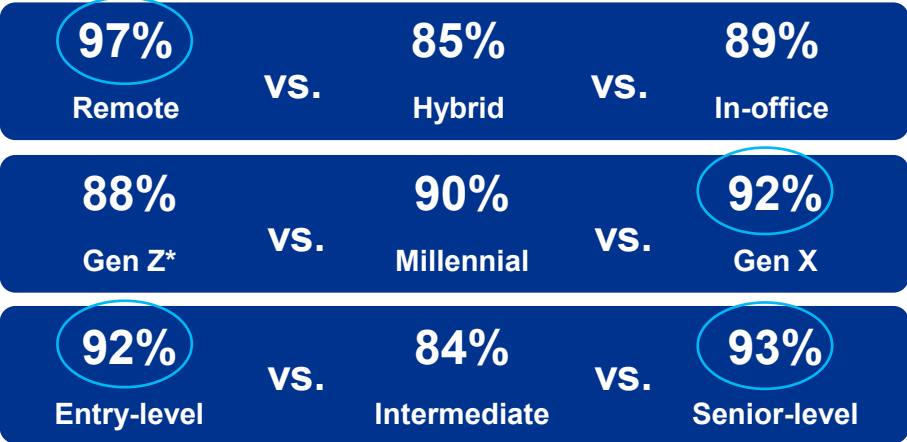
When considering a new job, how important is it that the company promotes an environment and culture that enables you to make close work friendships? (n=1019)
When it comes to staying with your current employer, how important is it that the company promotes an environment and culture that enables you to make close work friendships? (n=1019)

Nine in ten employees have been encouraged by their manager to foster friendships for the sake of career growth; this is even more common for remote workers.

Have you ever been encouraged by a manager to foster friendships to help advance your career?

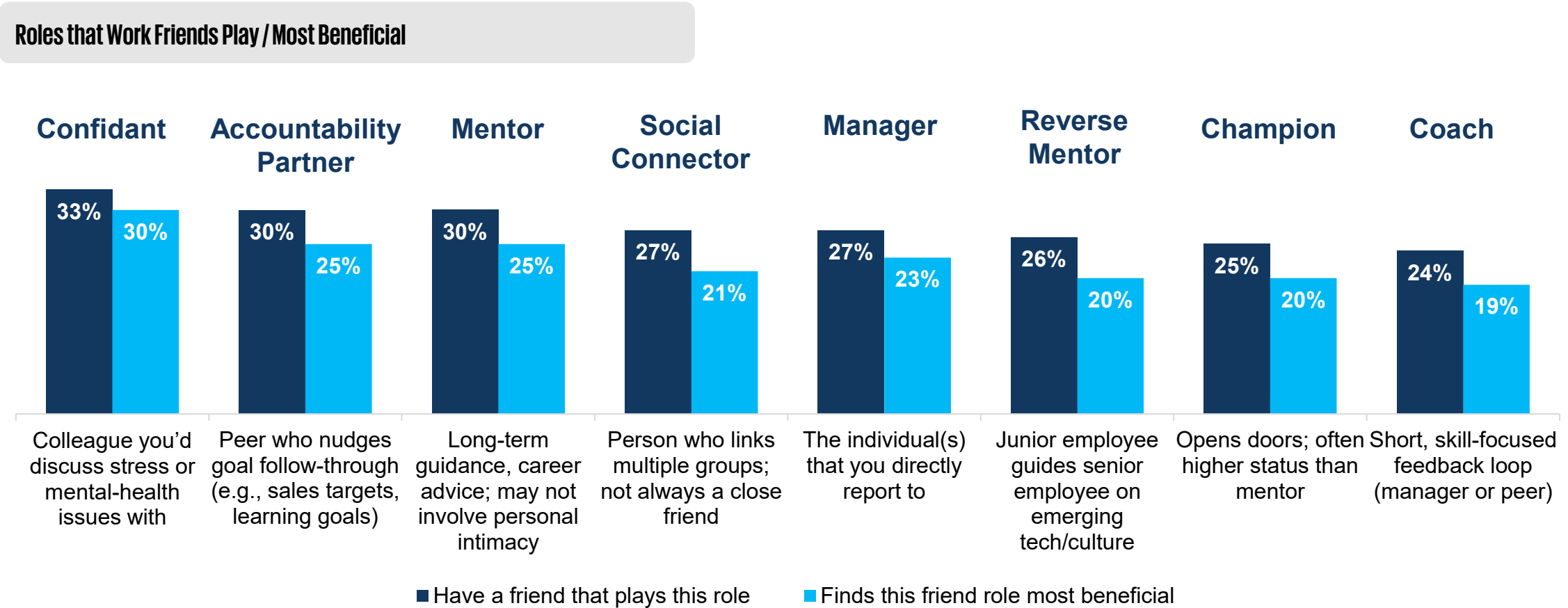


More common among...



Have you ever been encouraged by your manager or other senior leaders to foster friendships with colleagues in order to help advance your career? (n=1019)

Work friends most often play the role of confidants, accountability partners and mentors. These are also the roles that professionals find most beneficial.



Work friendships are more often established through company-related social activities, joining clubs, attending workshops – and less so from more formal collaborations and mentoring.



How have you initially established connections with friends at work? Select all that apply. (n=1019)

Establishing gathering spaces for team-building is the most effective practice for fostering a culture of close friendships at work. Remote workers are less likely to find practices effective.

Company Practices Most Effective at Fostering a Culture of Work Friendships

	Total	Work Setting		
		Remote	Hybrid	In-Office
Establish a central company location for regular in-person gatherings	32%	30%	32%	34%
Create smaller, regional office spaces where employees can gather	28%	27%	30%	28%
Reward employees who foster inclusion, kindness and collaboration	27%	21%	35%	28%
Offer stipends for team lunches, coffee meetups, or social outings	26%	21%	32%	27%
Regular team-building events	26%	17%	27%	30%
Opportunities for informal connection during the workday	25%	24%	27%	24%
Shared-interest groups and social channels	24%	20%	25%	25%
Seeing leaders with close work friendships	23%	19%	20%	26%
Encourage cross-functional collaboration	22%	15%	24%	26%
Offer 'buddy' or mentorship programs	22%	15%	24%	26%
Celebrate personal milestones and achievements	21%	15%	22%	24%

Which company policies or practices do you think most effectively foster a culture of close work friendships? Select all that apply. (n=1019)



kpmg.com/socialmedia

Some or all of the services described herein may not be permissible for KPMG audit clients and their affiliates or related entities.

The information contained herein is of a general nature and is not intended to address the circumstances of any particular individual or entity. Although we endeavor to provide accurate and timely information, there can be no guarantee that such information is accurate as of the date it is received or that it will continue to be accurate in the future. No one should act on such information without appropriate professional advice after a thorough examination of the particular situation.

© 2025 KPMG LLP, a Delaware limited liability partnership and a member firm of the KPMG global organization of independent member firms affiliated with KPMG International Limited, a private English company limited by guarantee. All rights reserved.

The KPMG name and logo are trademarks used under license by the independent member firms of the KPMG global organization.
ESG-2023-13424

MADE in KPMG