



KPMG + CivicScience

Friends at Work 3.0

May 2026



Objectives & methodology

Objectives



Understand how workplace relationships shape employee experience, performance, and retention in today's evolving work environment.

Specifically, this survey assesses the:

- The role of workplace friendships in engagement and productivity
- How different types of relationships shape wellbeing and performance
- The connection between social dynamics and AI adoption
- Differences across distinct employee relationship groups

Survey methodology



- Online survey of employed U.S. adults fielded April 17–22, 2026
- Sample sizes range from n=558–1,354 depending on question



Developed in collaboration with CivicScience, combining custom questions with broader consumer insight data



Data weighted to reflect U.S. Census demographics



Analysis incorporates CivicScience's Wellbeing Index (WBI) to assess employee experience



Examines four distinct workplace relationship groups, from close friendships to non-socializers

Executive summary



High-performing but at risk

Employees with close personal friends at work are the most engaged, productive, and trusted—but also the most likely to leave.

- **Engagement & performance:** They report the highest levels of consistent engagement (49% “always engaged”), strong focus on skill development (87%), and high trust in their company (47%) and leadership (39%)
- **AI adoption:** This group leads AI usage (~35%), reinforcing their role as drivers of transformation
- **Retention risk:** More than two in five (42%) are actively job searching, making them the most likely group to leave
- **Leadership concentration:** Over half (55%) manage others, amplifying the impact of potential turnover



A growing divide in employee experience

Workplace relationships are a key driver of support, growth, and engagement—creating a widening gap between connected and disconnected employees.

- **Manager support:** 78% of employees with close friendships say their manager cares about them, compared to just 32% of non-socializers
- **Growth & development:** 87% can focus on skill development, versus 52% of non-socializers
- **Meaning at work:** 84% say their work matters to them personally, compared to 62% of non-socializers
- **Beyond work:** Employees with close workplace friendships are four times as likely to volunteer weekly (32% vs. 8% for all other groups), linking workplace connection to broader engagement.



Connection amplifies outcomes

Workplace relationships shape the emotional experience of work—amplifying both the highs and the lows.

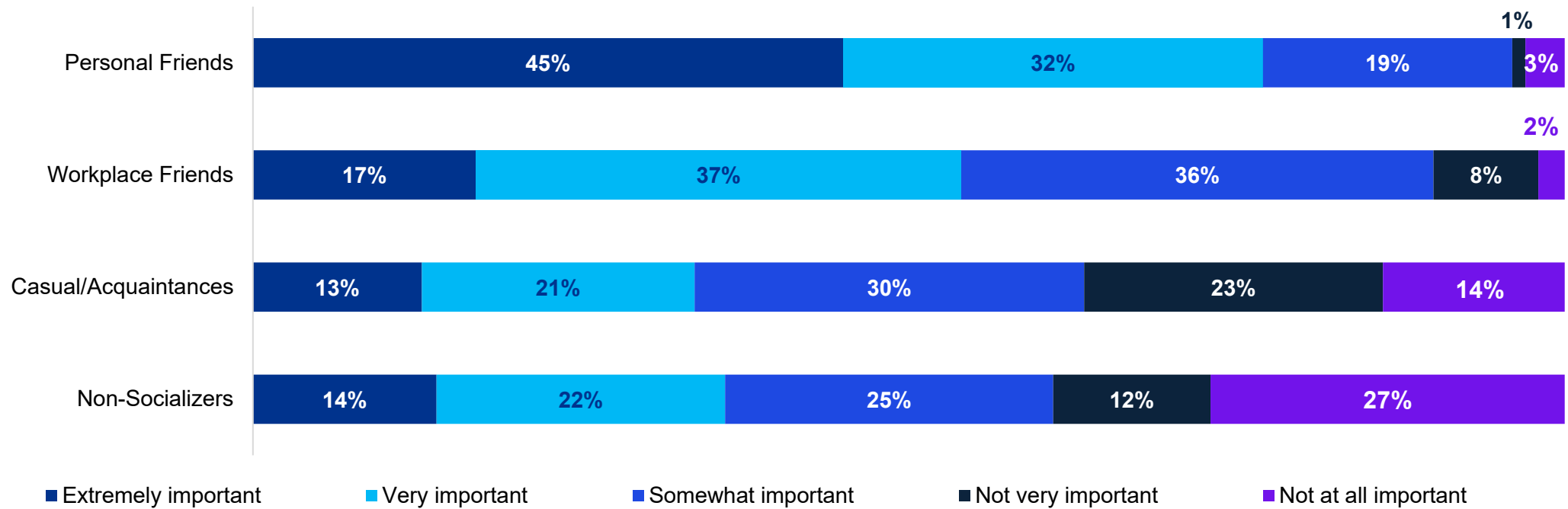
- **Emotional intensity:** Employees with close friendships report the highest happiness (82–83%) and excitement (65–66%), but also elevated stress (63–68%) and sadness (47%)
- **Balanced middle:** Employees with collegial relationships report the highest overall wellbeing (59.4) and lower levels of negative emotion
- **Disconnection drag:** Non-socializers report weaker outcomes across the board, including lower happiness (48–53%), excitement (35–37%), and limited access to support (37% lack someone to talk to about mental health)

By friends at work



Respondents with close work friends are nearly three times as likely to place significant importance on workplace cultures that enable friendships.

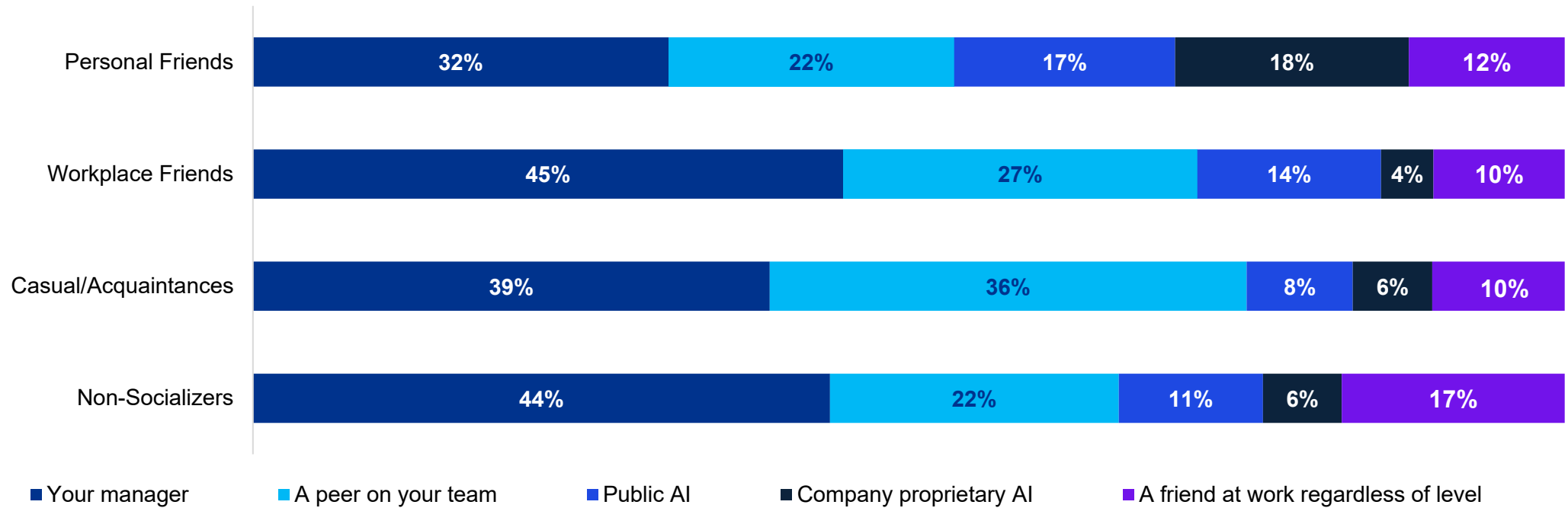
Q: How important is a workplace culture that enables close friendships to your overall job satisfaction and your decision to stay with an employer?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 1,290 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Surprisingly, employees with close friends at work are more likely than other workers to go to AI when they have a question.

Q: When you have a question at work, are you most likely to go to...



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 1,354 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

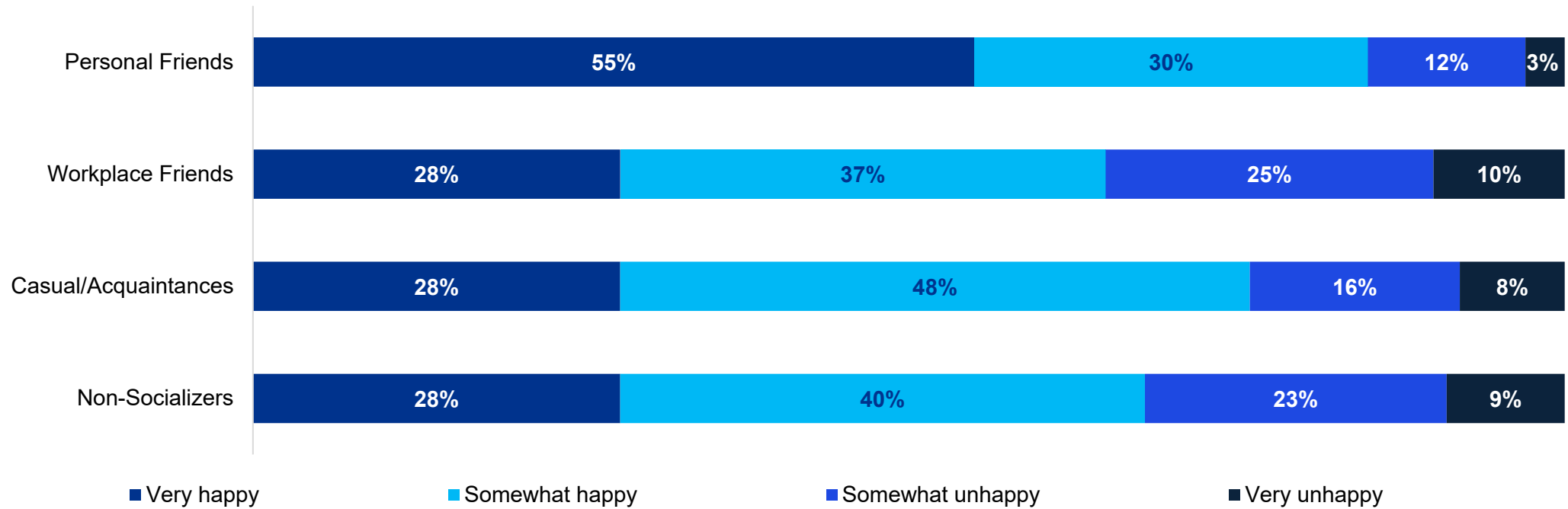
Workers with close friends at work report stronger emotions across the board — not just more happiness on the job, but heightened feelings of all kinds, both positive and negative.

Emotional wellbeing

	Close Personal Friends	Workplace Friends	Casual/ Acquaintances	Non-Socializers		Close Personal Friends	Workplace Friends	Casual/ Acquaintances	Non-Socializers
Wellbeing Index (General)	55.4	53.0	56.2	50.3	Wellbeing Index (Work)	58.2	58.6	59.4	57.8
Felt _____ strongly: Sad	47%	41%	30%	40%	Felt _____ strongly: Sad	47%	26%	22%	29%
Felt _____ strongly: Happy	83%	63%	55%	48%	Felt _____ strongly: Happy	82%	69%	63%	53%
Felt _____ strongly: Stressed	68%	64%	58%	52%	Felt _____ strongly: Stressed	63%	56%	51%	44%
Felt _____ strongly: Worried	57%	56%	49%	54%	Felt _____ strongly: Worried	52%	42%	46%	43%
Felt _____ strongly: Afriad	48%	39%	22%	39%	Felt _____ strongly: Afraid	36%	28%	23%	27%
Felt _____ strongly: Excited	66%	53%	41%	35%	Felt _____ strongly: Excited	65%	50%	43%	37%

Employees who work with close personal friends are nearly twice as likely to say they are very happy with their job.

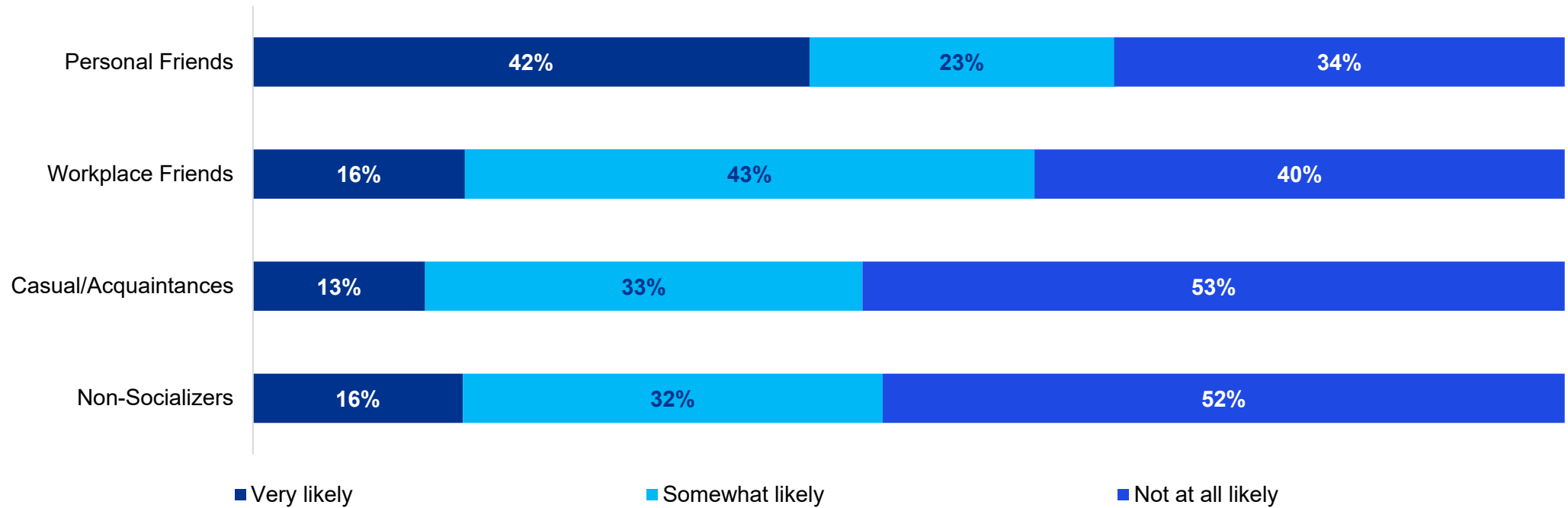
Q: How happy are you in your current job?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 982 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

However, the presence of close friends at work does not make employees more likely to stay with an employer; in fact, those who work with personal friends are notably more likely to plan on looking for a new job in the next 12 months.

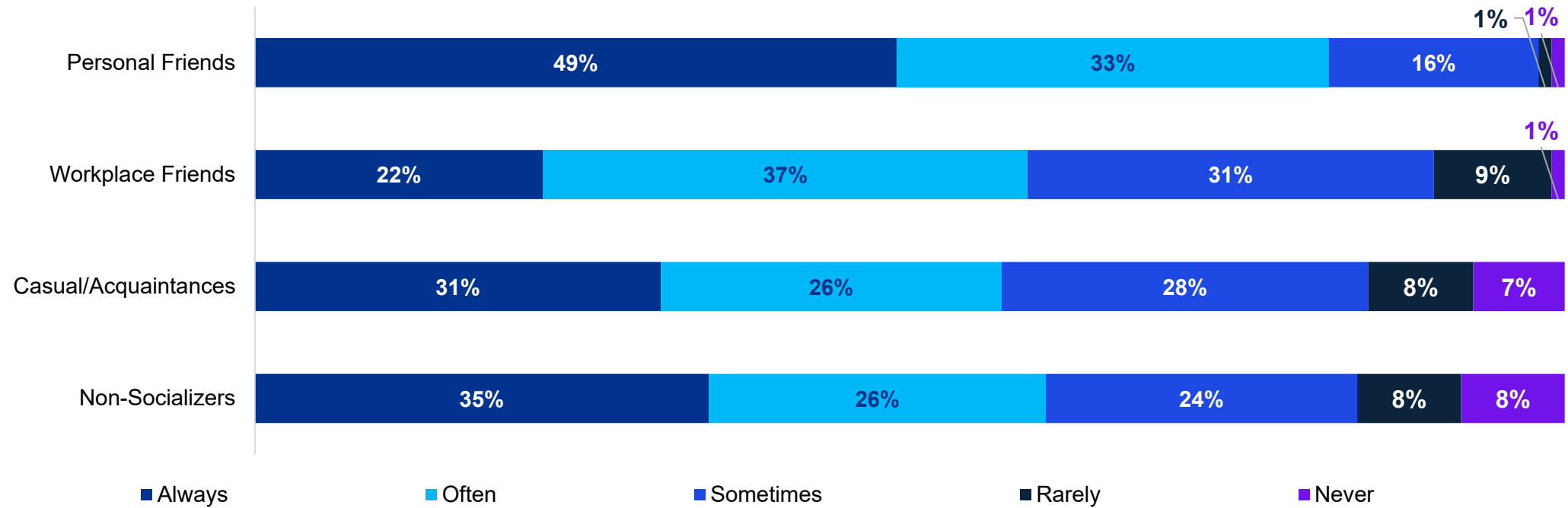
Q: How likely are you to search for a new job in the next 12 months?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 657 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

While those with close work friends are the most likely to feel engaged while on the job, non-socializers are more likely to say they 'always' feel engaged while working than casual socializers.

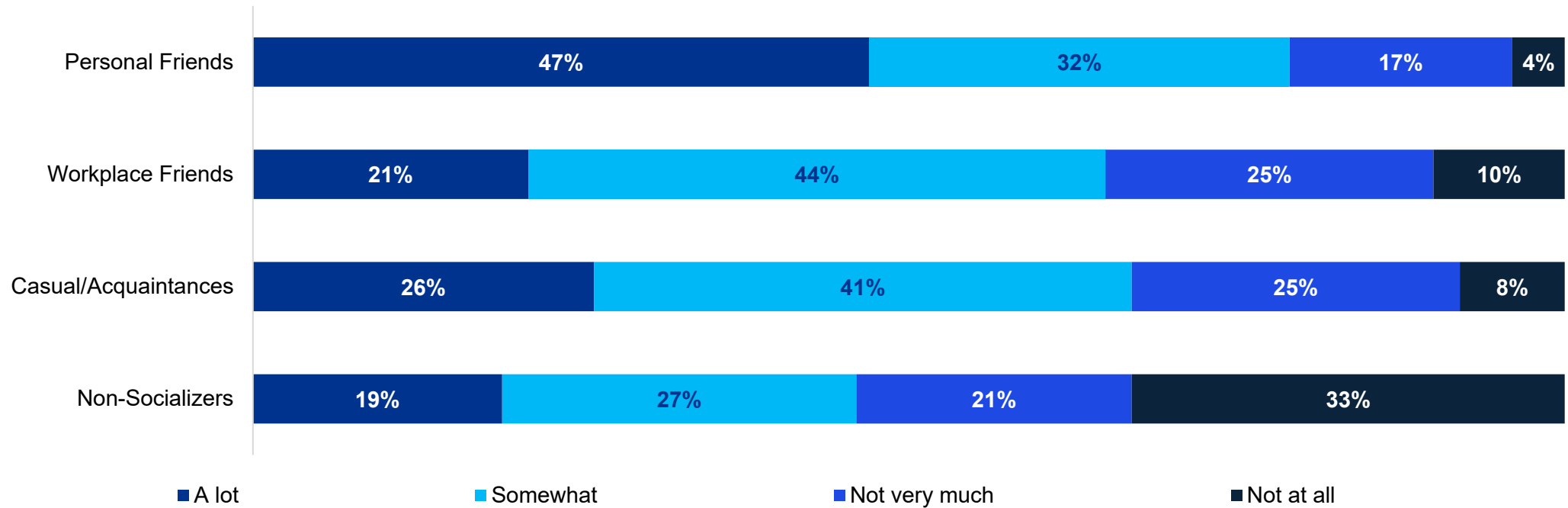
Q: How often do you feel engaged at work?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 741 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Work friendships are strongly correlated with trust in employers; only about 20% of those who work with close friends do not trust the company they work for, compared with more than 50% of those who do not socialize at work.

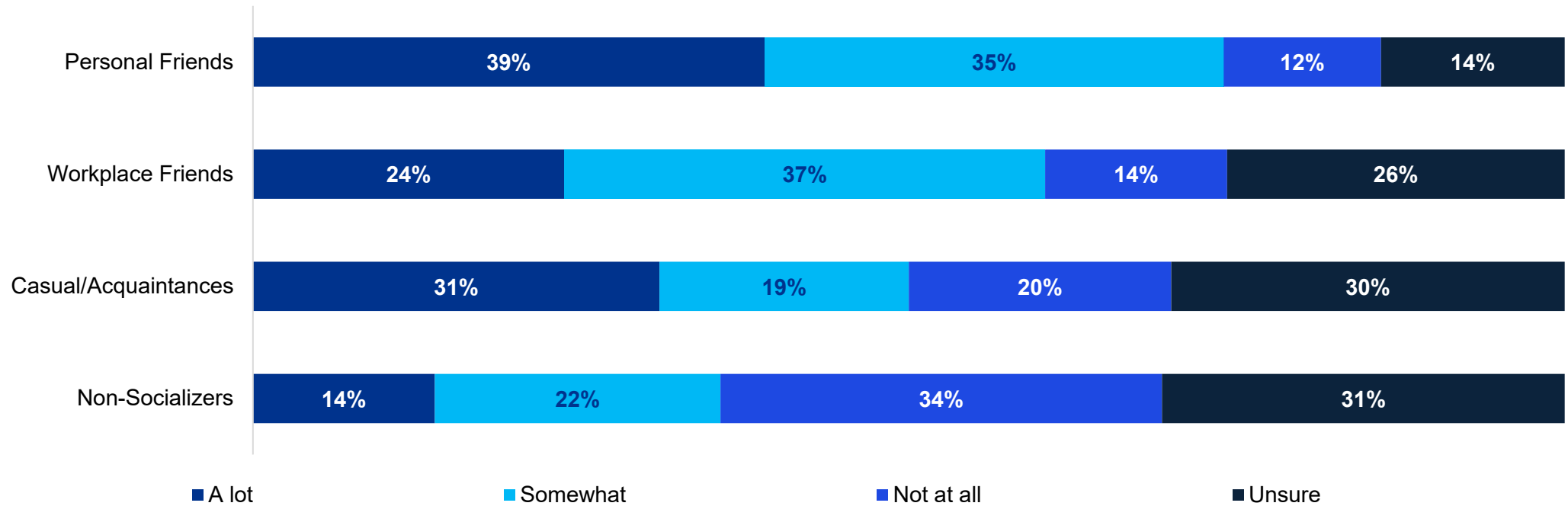
Q: How much do you trust the company you work for?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 618 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Similarly, those with close work friends are 25pp more likely than non-socializers to say they have ‘a lot’ of trust in their company’s CEO

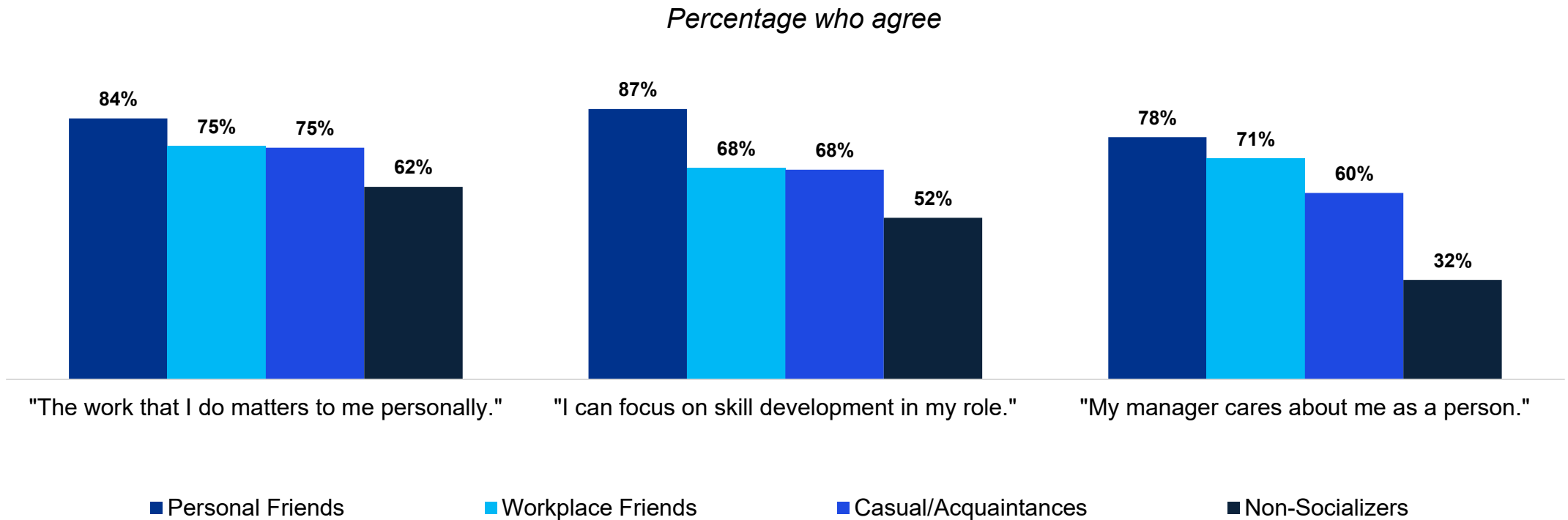
Q: How much do you trust the CEO of your company?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 602 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Non-socializers are significantly less likely to believe their manager cares about them, that they can focus on skill development in their role, or that the work they do matters to them personally.

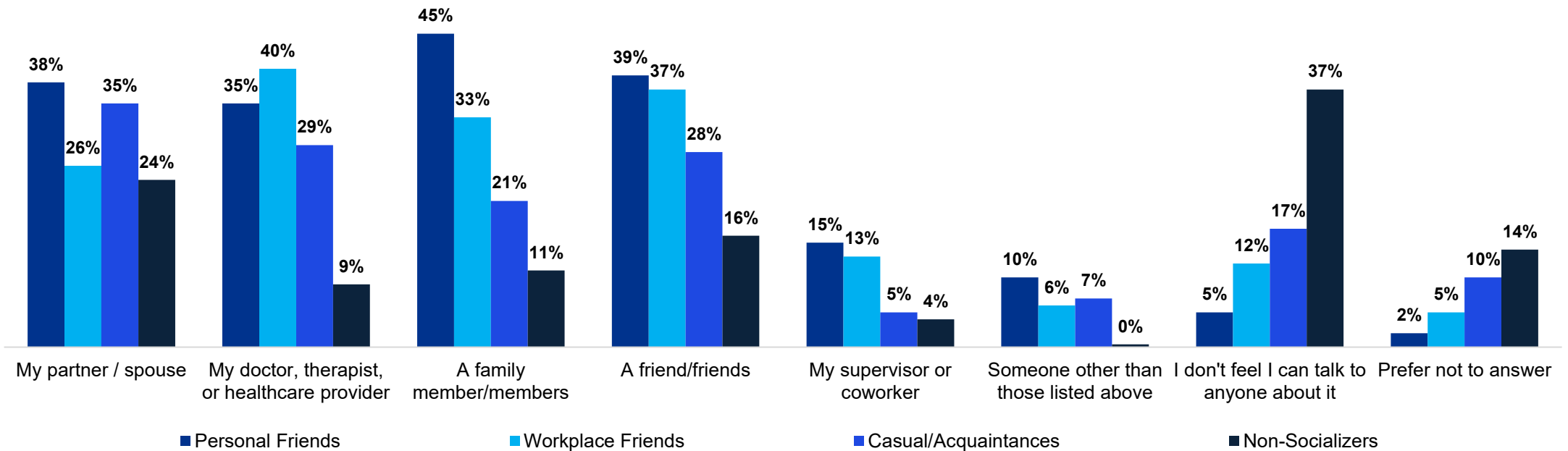
Q: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 681+ | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Work socializers are much more likely to be open about mental health with the people in their lives, while nearly 40% of non-socializers feel like they don't have anyone they can talk to about it.

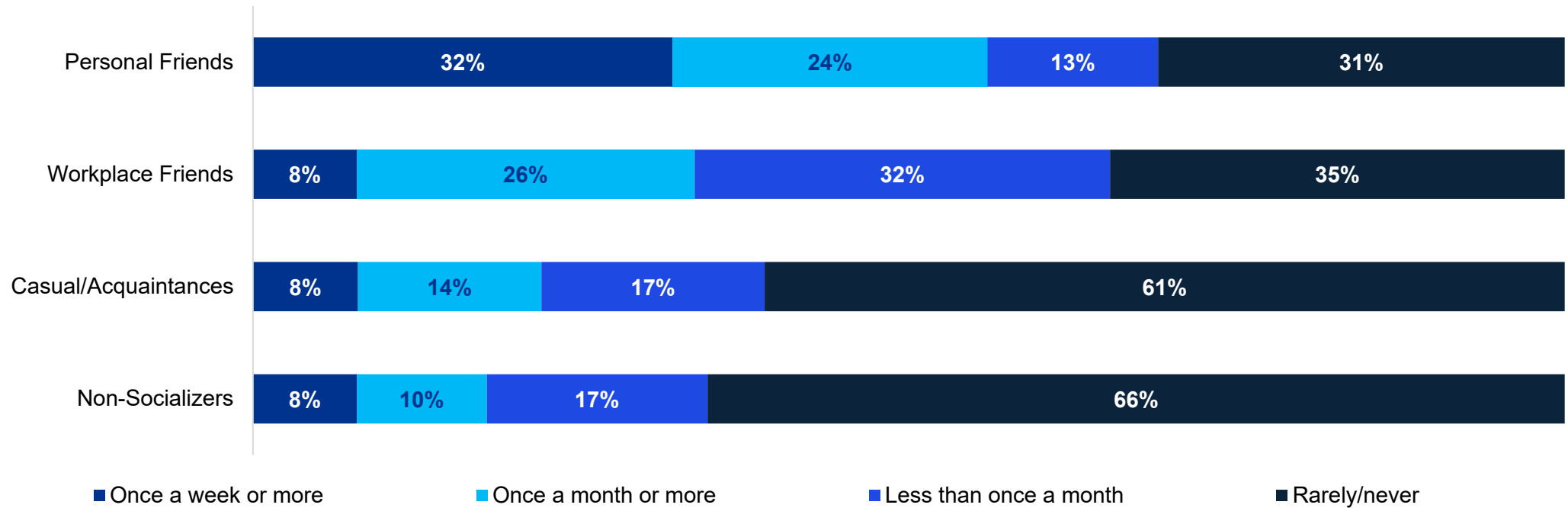
Q: In your life, who do you feel you can talk to about your mental health? (Please select all that apply.)



Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 558 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Employees with close personal friends are four times as likely to say they do volunteer work on a weekly basis.

Q: How often do you do volunteer work?



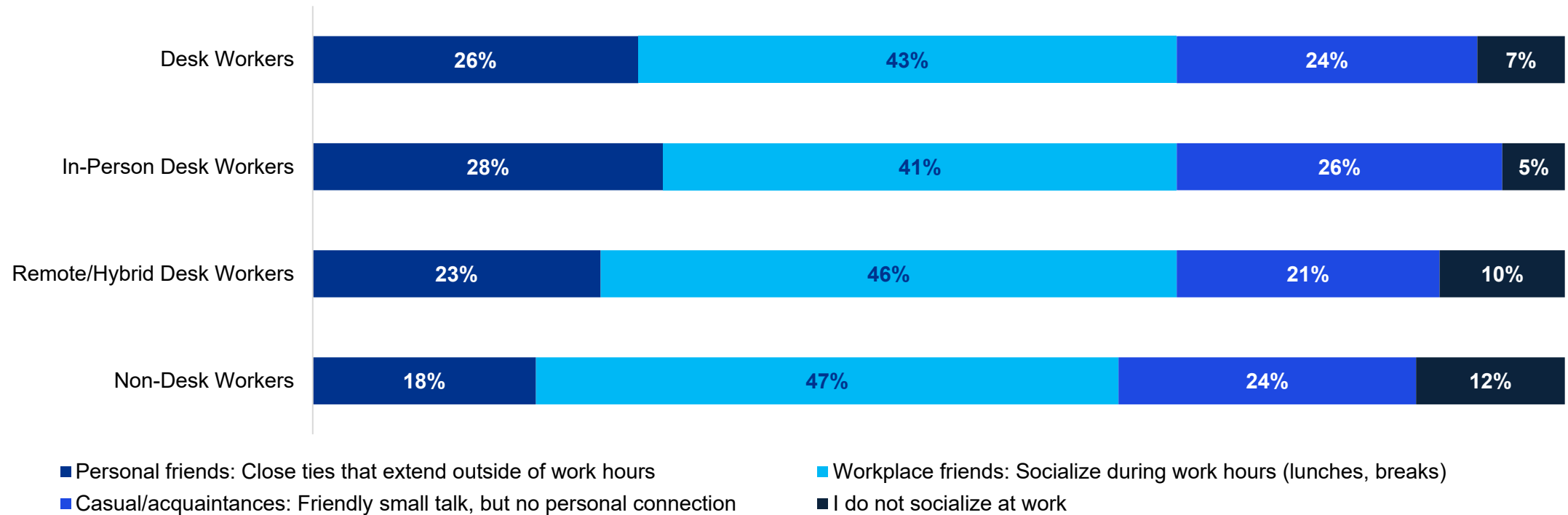
Responses: Employed U.S. Adults = 801 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

By job type



In-person desk workers are the most likely to have close personal friends at work, while non-desk workers are the most likely to say they do not socialize at work.

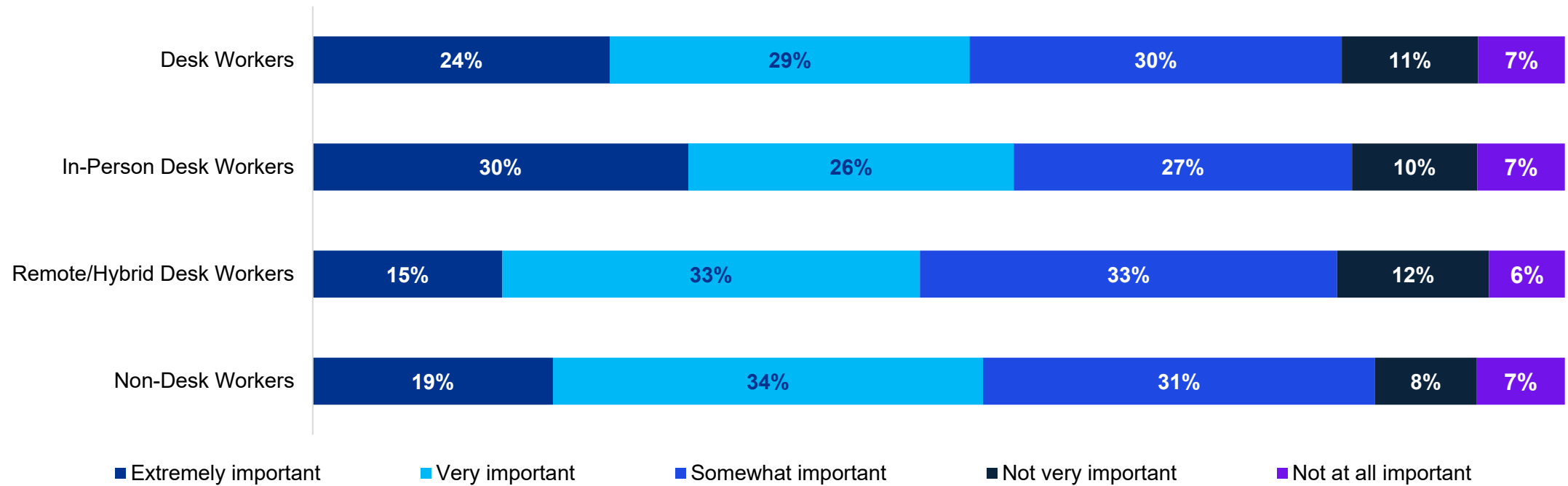
Q: Which of the following best describes your relationships in the workplace?



Responses: Desk Workers = 878; In-Person Desk Workers= 515; Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers = 363; Non-Desk Workers = 927 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

In-person desk workers are the most likely to prioritize workplace cultures that enable close friendships with coworkers.

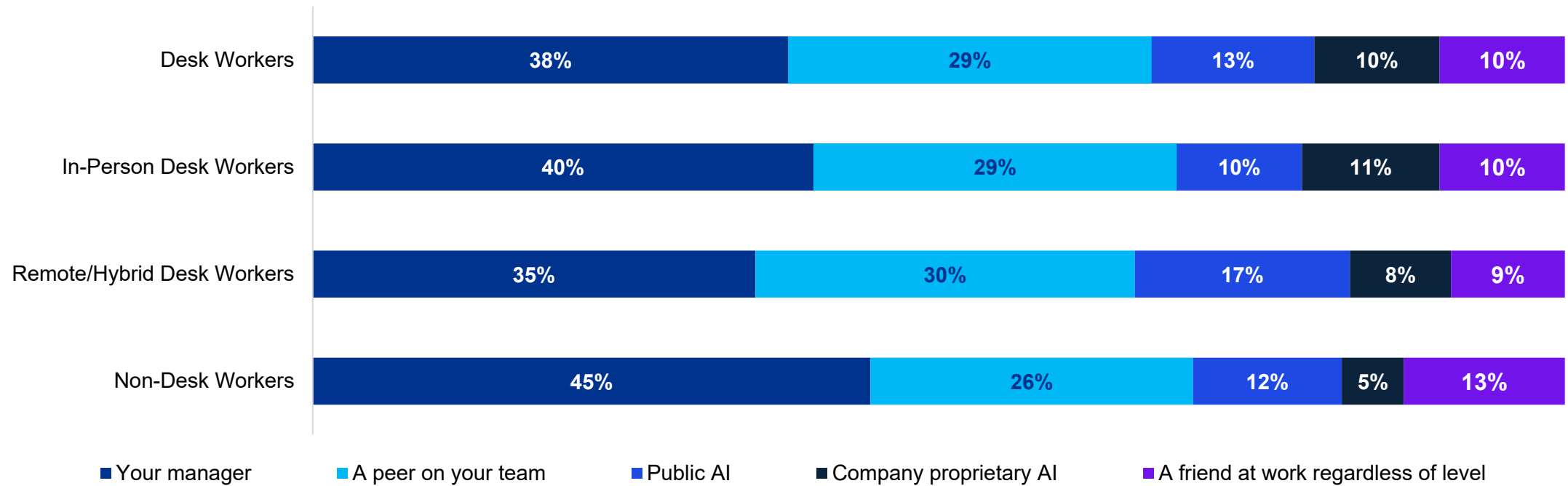
Q: How important is a workplace culture that enables close friendships to your overall job satisfaction and your decision to stay with an employer?



Responses: Desk Workers = 844; In-Person Desk Workers= 494; Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers = 351; Non-Desk Workers = 481 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

Remote desk workers are the most likely to turn to AI when they have questions at work, while non-desk workers are the most likely to ask their manager.

Q: When you have a question at work, are you most likely to go to...



Responses: Desk Workers = 876; In-Person Desk Workers= 509; Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers = 367; Non-Desk Workers = 511 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

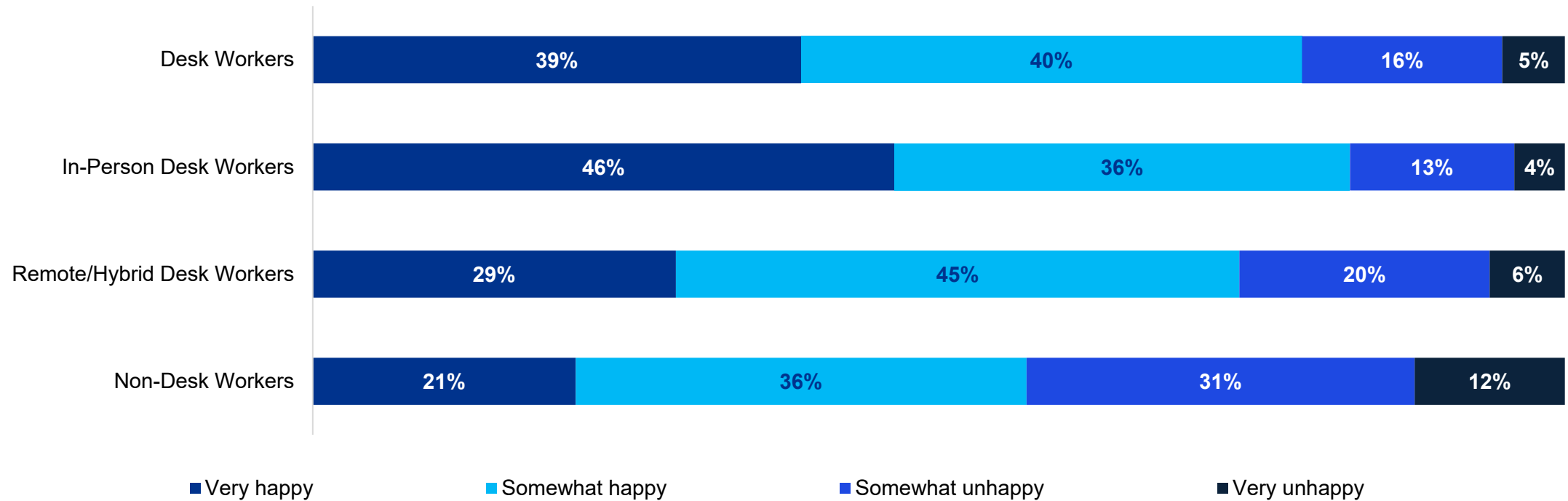
Interestingly, workplace wellbeing is higher than general wellbeing for in-person desk workers (+6.6), remote desk workers (+5.5), and non-desk workers (+4.2).

Emotional wellbeing

	Desk Workers	In-Person Desk Workers	Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers	Non-Desk Workers		Desk Workers	In-Person Desk Workers	Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers	Non-Desk Workers
Wellbeing Index (General)	52.4	53.2	51.5	54.1	Wellbeing Index (Work)	58.5	59.8	56.6	58.3
Felt _____ strongly: Sad	47%	48%	44%	43%	Felt _____ strongly: Sad	37%	34%	41%	37%
Felt _____ strongly: Happy	69%	71%	65%	64%	Felt _____ strongly: Happy	71%	71%	70%	66%
Felt _____ strongly: Stressed	63%	63%	63%	57%	Felt _____ strongly: Stressed	57%	55%	61%	52%
Felt _____ strongly: Worried	61%	61%	59%	53%	Felt _____ strongly: Worried	51%	50%	53%	48%
Felt _____ strongly: Afriad	43%	42%	45%	38%	Felt _____ strongly: Afraid	29%	27%	32%	26%
Felt _____ strongly: Excited	58%	60%	56%	52%	Felt _____ strongly: Excited	52%	51%	55%	47%

Job happiness is significantly higher among desk workers (both in-person and remote) than non-desk workers.

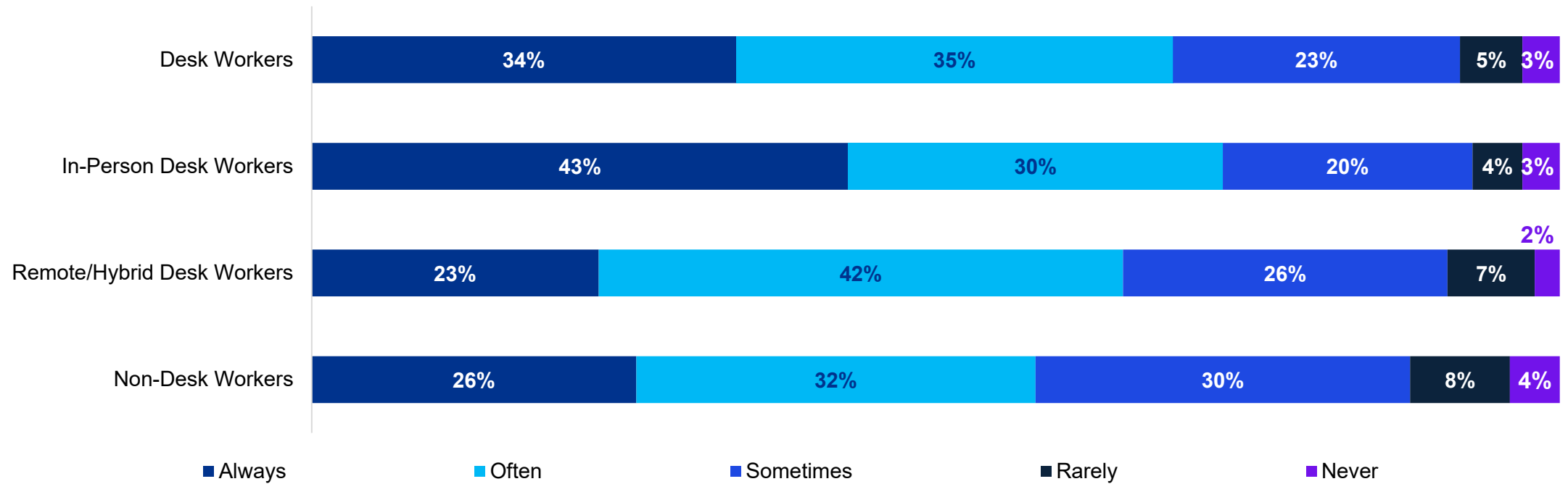
Q: How happy are you in your current job?



Responses: Desk Workers = 1,009; In-Person Desk Workers= 608; Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers = 401; Non-Desk Workers = 1,065 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026

In-person desk workers are 17pp more likely than non-desk workers and 20pp more likely than remote desk workers to say they ‘always’ feel engaged at work.

Q: How often do you feel engaged at work?



Responses: Desk Workers = 894; In-Person Desk Workers= 533; Remote/Hybrid Desk Workers = 361; Non-Desk Workers = 924 | Survey Fielded: April 17, 2026 – April 22, 2026



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