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# COVID-19 MINDSET: HOW PANDEMIC TIMES ARE SHAPING U.S. CONSUMERS

**UNITED STATES REPORT**

*April 2020*

**CRISES ARE NOT ISOLATED EVENTS. THEY ARE COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES THAT DIVIDE EACH ERA FROM THE NEXT BECAUSE THEY FOREVER CHANGE THOSE WHO LIVED THROUGH THEM.**

*In just a few short months, this pandemic has changed our perceptions of the world to a degree typically seen only over years and decades.*

*Our findings reveal changes in priorities, values and relationships driven by the role we all must play to mitigate the pandemic and its effects on society. As consumers and employees, this means a renewed focus on organizations as employers and places of public life. For brands and employers, this means the choices they make now will reverberate in consumers' purchase decisions and workers' employment decisions for years beyond the pandemic.*

*We face extraordinary uncertainty. We don't know what work, home, school or public life will look like in the months and years ahead. To chart a path forward requires meaningful research and deep human compassion. We must understand what we expect of each other and how this crisis is reshaping our perceptions, behaviors, values and societies.*

- Natasha Kennedy  
TRUE Global Intelligence  
Global Managing Director

# EMPATHY, PATIENCE, SUPPORT AND COOPERATION MAY BE THE NEW CHARACTERISTICS OF SUCCESS

1.

## *Live your values*

- The fears and expectations of consumers are reshaping their definition of what it means to be a good organization or brand.
- Your values are on display.
- Consumers are evaluating your actions.
- Do more now. It will matter later.
- Imperfection is met with forgiveness. Inaction will be met with scorn.
- Talk about how you are helping your employees and communities. But now is not the time to look for public credit.

2.

## *Be the best employer*

- Many organizations face a conflict between the commitments they have made to support employees, and the existential necessity of cutting their costs and payroll.
- Consumers expect employers to do everything possible to support employees.
- Be ready to show how far your organization has gone to retain its workforce, and to provide those who lose their jobs with benefit payments or rehire programs.
- Where possible, show employees, not the brand, as heroes.

3.

## *Pace the recovery discussion*

- In most global markets, it is not time to push ahead with public discussion of recovery.
- Logically, it is important for the economy and the future of jobs, brands and companies for business to resume. But you risk long-term reputation damage if you appear unsupportive of containment efforts and overly commercial.
- Use an evaluation based on data to guide decisions about a return to topics beyond COVID-19.
- However, with expectations for return to normal now measured in weeks and longer, it is not too early to expand into detailed scenario planning, including communications toolkits for recovery.

4.

## *Reimagine the fundamentals*

- Be ready for a more influential and involved role from government.
- Because respect for government has increased, companies that resist government direction, regulation or contractual obligations during this crisis should be prepared for limited support among consumers.
- Be ready to examine your organization's values, purpose and brands. Elements that may play a stronger role include cooperation with government and society as a whole, being a great employer, and stronger connection to concerns for health and financial well-being.

*Nearly everyone is feeling the impact of the pandemic in some way*

## **BY THE NUMBERS**

17%

*Have a family member or friend whose health has been impacted by COVID-19*

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51%

*Are at elevated risk of major complications from COVID-19 because of their age, a pre-existing health condition, or both*

62%

*Are currently subject to a stay-at-home requirement*

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52%

*Don't want to hear about the crisis from a company they do business with unless it's about something they are doing to help them and others through this crisis*

65%

*Say the pandemic has changed how they see companies as employers*

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49%

*Want the media to provide positive stories about how people are dealing with the crisis and each other*

83%

*Are concerned for their health*

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79%

*Are concerned for their financial situation*

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71%

*Say the pandemic has changed how they see the world*

# PREPARE FOR A VERY LONG JOURNEY BACK

*Whatever that “normal” will be, we aren’t expecting it for weeks or even years*

| 15 weeks |

*Until we return to “normal” life, according to the average adult*

| 16% |

*Predict it will take anywhere from five months to two years*

## HOW LONG, IN WEEKS, DO YOU THINK IT WILL BE BEFORE LIFE GETS BACK TO "NORMAL"?

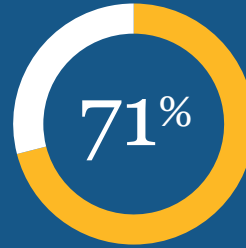
|  | U.S. | Northeast | Midwest | South | West | California | NYC Tri-State |
|--|------|-----------|---------|-------|------|------------|---------------|
| <i>Average (weeks)</i>                     | 15   | 14        | 15      | 16    | 14   | 13         | 14            |
| <i>Between five months &amp; two years</i> | 16%  | 15%       | 15%     | 17%   | 17%  | 16%        | 16%           |

# WE'VE CHANGED OUR VIEW OF THE WORLD AND OUR COUNTRY

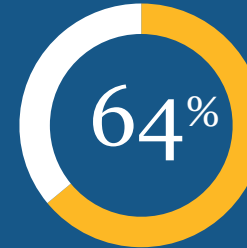
*In a few short months, the majority of Americans have changed how they view the world, our country and the economic and political systems.*

*Q: For each of the following, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.*

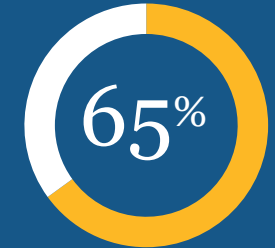
*“The Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic has changed how I view ...”*



*The world*

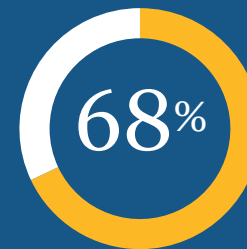


*My country*

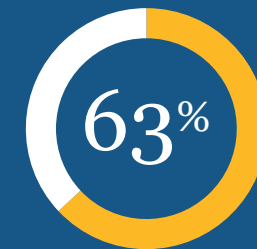


*Companies as employers*

*“My country’s response to the pandemic has changed my views of the country’s ...”*



*Economic system as a whole*



*Political system as a whole*

# THESE CHANGED VIEWS CROSS THE NORMAL POLITICAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DIVIDES IN AMERICA

*Even in the often hyper-partisan United States, majorities across the divisions that normally align on opposite sides of the culture divide are reporting changed views on America's economic and political systems.*

*We don't yet know how these views are changing or which stakeholders' new beliefs will prevail. We do know, however, systemic change increases the probability of concrete institutional and relationship-level changes.*

|  | Men | Women | 18 to 29 | 70+ | Urban | Rural | <\$30K | \$100K or more | White/Caucasian | Ethnic Minority | Liberal | Conservative |
|--|-----|-------|----------|-----|-------|-------|--------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|---------|--------------|
| <i>The world</i>                                 | 70% | 73%   | 70%      | 69% | 72%   | 74%   | 71%    | 63%            | 71%             | 71%             | 74%     | 69%          |
| <i>The country's economic system as a whole</i>  | 66% | 70%   | 69%      | 63% | 73%   | 67%   | 69%    | 63%            | 67%             | 72%             | 71%     | 61%          |
| <i>Companies as employers</i>                    | 63% | 66%   | 65%      | 55% | 66%   | 65%   | 64%    | 60%            | 64%             | 66%             | 72%     | 58%          |
| <i>My country</i>                                | 62% | 66%   | 64%      | 66% | 68%   | 68%   | 62%    | 59%            | 63%             | 67%             | 73%     | 57%          |
| <i>The country's political system as a whole</i> | 59% | 66%   | 67%      | 64% | 69%   | 67%   | 66%    | 56%            | 60%             | 70%             | 68%     | 57%          |

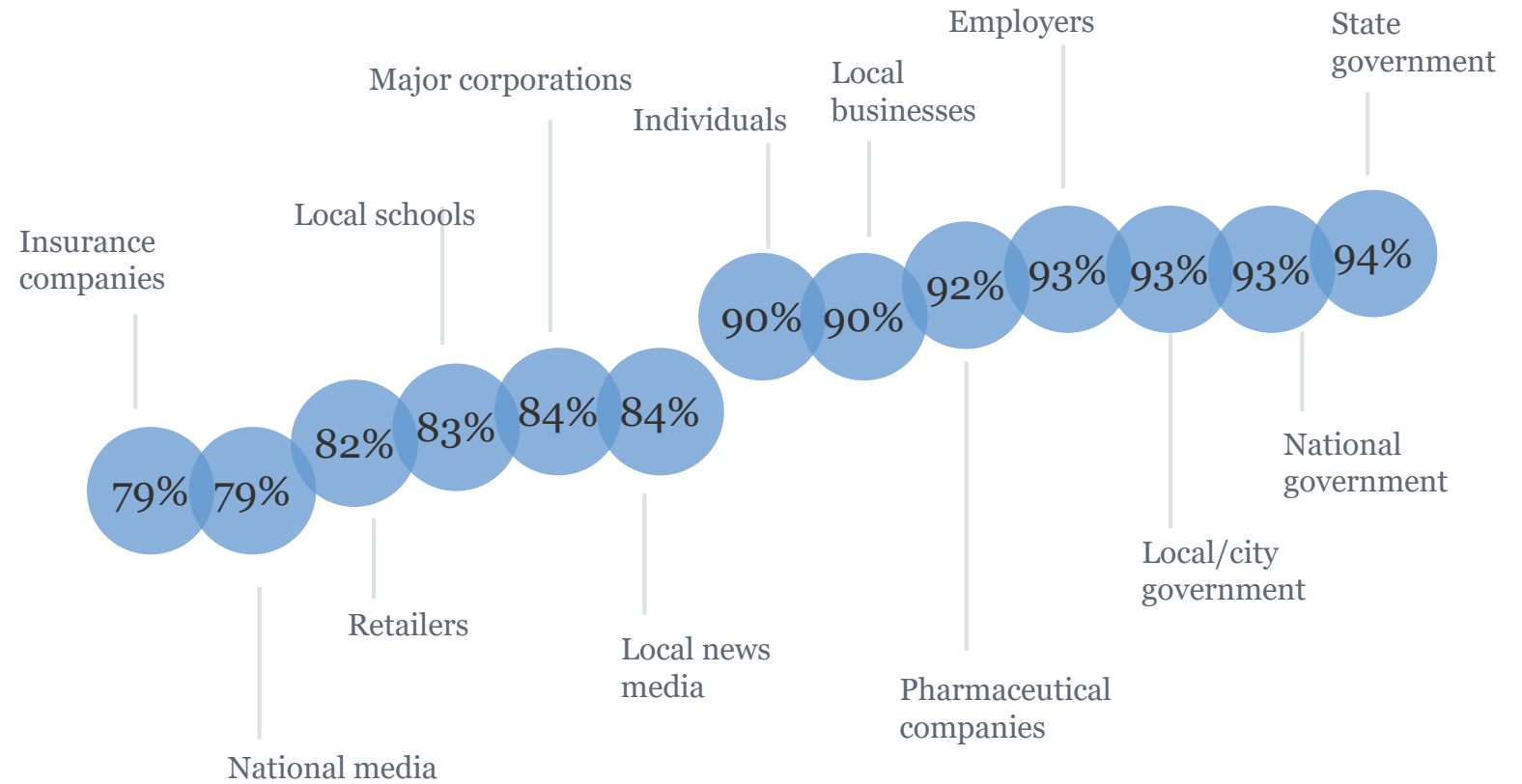
*Q: For each of the following, please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.*

# THE EXPECTATION IS THAT EVERYONE HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

*In fighting this crisis, employers and businesses are seen as just as important as governments.*

*Q: How important are each of the following in responding to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis?*

*% rating institution "very important" or "somewhat important"*





# HOW WELL ARE INSTITUTIONS PERFORMING?

*Employers score at the BOTTOM while government and schools are top of the class*

*Q: Please rate how well each of the following are doing in their role in responding to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis.*

*% rating institution's performance "excellent" or "great"*

*Top three institutions bolded for group*

|                                    | U.S.       | Liberal    | Moderate   | Conservative | Under shelter-in-place order | Not under shelter-in-place | Vulnerable due to age or condition | Family or friends' health impacted |
|------------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <i>Local schools</i>               | <b>50%</b> | <b>52%</b> | <b>48%</b> | <b>47%</b>   | <b>49%</b>                   | <b>52%</b>                 | <b>49%</b>                         | <b>55%</b>                         |
| <i>State/Provincial government</i> | <b>44%</b> | <b>48%</b> | <b>47%</b> | 39%          | <b>49%</b>                   | 35%                        | <b>47%</b>                         | <b>49%</b>                         |
| <i>Local businesses</i>            | <b>42%</b> | 43%        | 39%        | <b>43%</b>   | 43%                          | <b>42%</b>                 | 43%                                | <b>49%</b>                         |
| <i>Local/city government</i>       | 41%        | <b>45%</b> | <b>40%</b> | 37%          | <b>44%</b>                   | 37%                        | <b>44%</b>                         | 48%                                |
| <i>Pharmaceutical companies</i>    | 34%        | 26%        | 32%        | 41%          | 32%                          | <b>40%</b>                 | 35%                                | 45%                                |
| <i>Local news media</i>            | 34%        | 43%        | 37%        | 25%          | 34%                          | 38%                        | 38%                                | 41%                                |
| <i>Retailers</i>                   | 34%        | 31%        | 32%        | 35%          | 35%                          | 35%                        | 34%                                | 40%                                |
| <i>National government</i>         | 34%        | 18%        | 26%        | <b>51%</b>   | 32%                          | 38%                        | 38%                                | 39%                                |
| <i>National media</i>              | 32%        | 43%        | 35%        | 21%          | 32%                          | 34%                        | 35%                                | 41%                                |
| <i>Employers</i>                   | 30%        | 27%        | 29%        | 34%          | 29%                          | 32%                        | 32%                                | 36%                                |
| <i>Major corporations</i>          | 28%        | 18%        | 27%        | 36%          | 28%                          | 29%                        | 30%                                | 33%                                |
| <i>Insurance companies</i>         | 19%        | 14%        | 18%        | 22%          | 19%                          | 22%                        | 21%                                | 34% <sup>9</sup>                   |

# WHAT DO WORKERS HAVE TO SAY?

*Present working conditions have a strong impact on how Americans feel about the business community.*

*Q: Please rate how well each of the following are doing in their role in responding to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis.*

*% rating institution's performance "excellent" or "great"  
Top three institutions bolded for group*

|  | Local businesses | Employers | Major corporations |
|--|------------------|-----------|--------------------|
| <i>U.S.</i>                                    | 42%              | 30%       | 28%                |
| <i>Employed</i>                                | 41%              | 30%       | 30%                |
| <i>Unemployed</i>                              | 47%              | 27%       | 22%                |
| <i>Not in labor force</i>                      | 43%              | 30%       | 27%                |
| <i>Exempt from shelter in place due to job</i> | 40%              | 24%       | 23%                |
| <i>Job is essential</i>                        | 40%              | 32%       | 33%                |
| <i>Job is nonessential</i>                     | 42%              | 27%       | 25%                |
| <i>Always been able to work remotely</i>       | 44%              | 35%       | 36%                |
| <i>Finding ways to work remotely</i>           | 41%              | 32%       | 28%                |
| <i>No way to work remotely</i>                 | 38%              | 23%       | 25%                |
| <i>Working from home</i>                       | 44%              | 34%       | 31%                |
| <i>Not working from home</i>                   | 38%              | 27%       | 28%                |

## IS THIS PERMANENT?

*Consumer behavior has changed, and for many, those changes may persist past the end of the pandemic.*

|                            | NOW   | AFTER THE PANDEMIC   |   |
|----------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>BUYING BEHAVIOR</b>     | <b>67%</b><br>Are postponing purchases or travel          | <b>63%</b><br>Intend changes to their buying behaviors to continue when the pandemic is over | <b>32%</b><br>Will take into account potential diseases they may be exposed to when making travel plans |
| <b>LIFE DECISIONS</b>      | <b>32%</b><br>Are postponing major life decisions         | <b>24%</b><br>Will take planning for major life decisions more seriously after the pandemic  |   |
| <b>FINANCIAL DECISIONS</b> | <b>32%</b><br>Are saving more money than they normally do | <b>35%</b><br>Will save more than normal after the crisis ends                               | <b>31%</b><br>Will be more committed to financial planning in case there is another crisis              |

**63%**  
*say the pandemic has changed the products and services they once thought were important.*

*Overall, 97% have undertaken some new practice or postponed or canceled plans or purchases, and 90% expect enduring changes after the pandemic ends.*

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# CONSUMERS ARE PAYING ATTENTION TO HOW EMPLOYEES ARE TREATED

| 83% |

*Report that the pandemic has changed “the value that essential workers have in society and the importance of their needs.”*

| 60% |

*Described employers taking better care of their employees as “very important” right now.*

| 40% |

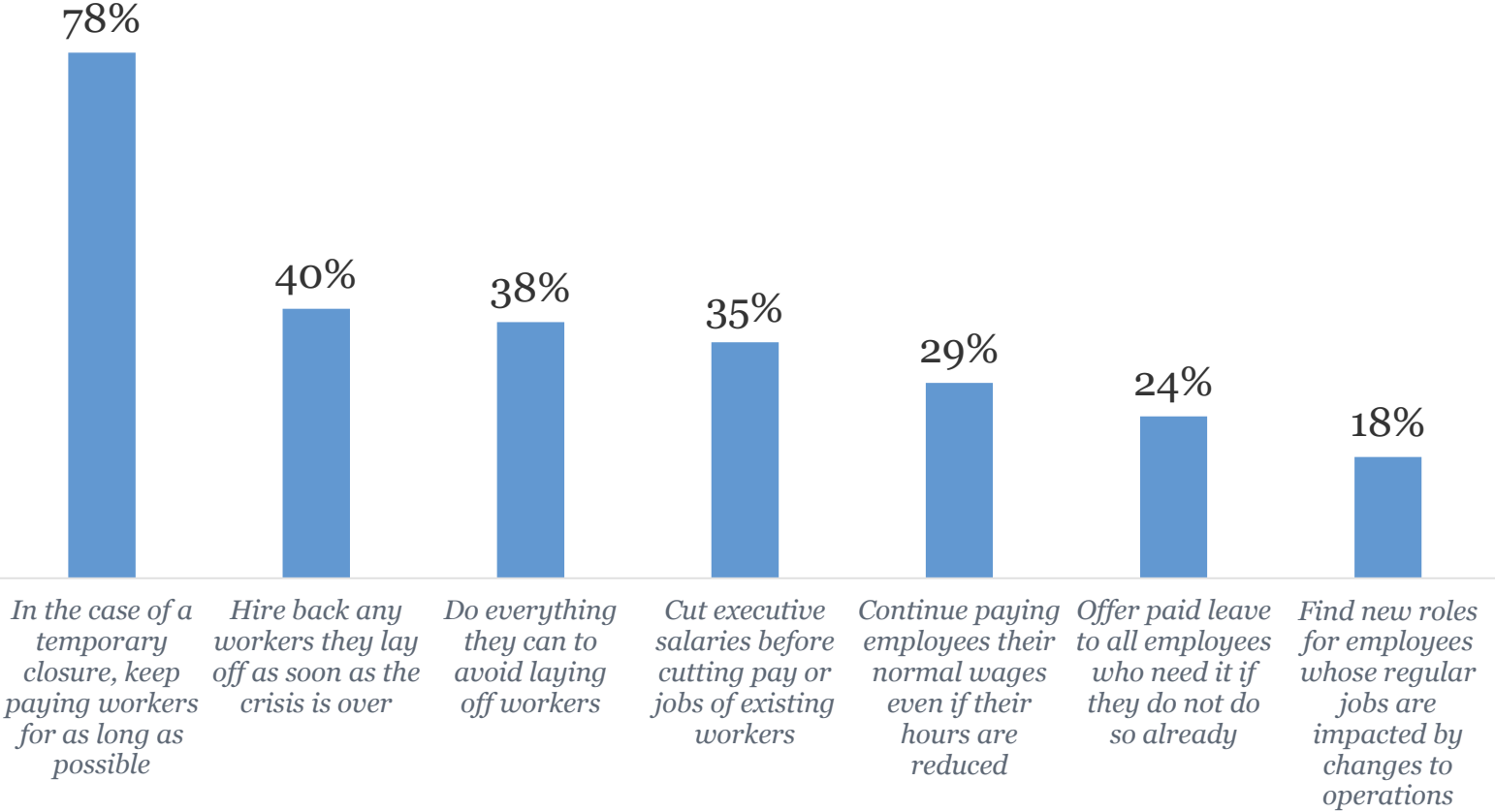
*Intend to buy from companies that took care of their employees during the crisis.*

*Q: Agree/Disagree: The Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic has changed the value that essential workers have in society and the importance of their needs*

*Q: How important is it that companies demonstrate the following behaviors during this pandemic?*

*Q: Which of the following best describes how you feel your expectations and behaviors will change when this Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic is over?*

Consumers identified many ways employers can be generous and creative mitigating the impact on workers, including:



Q: Agree/Disagree: If a business has to temporarily close, they should keep paying workers for as long as they can afford to

Q: Which of the following should companies and other organizations be doing, in your opinion, to support their employees in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis?

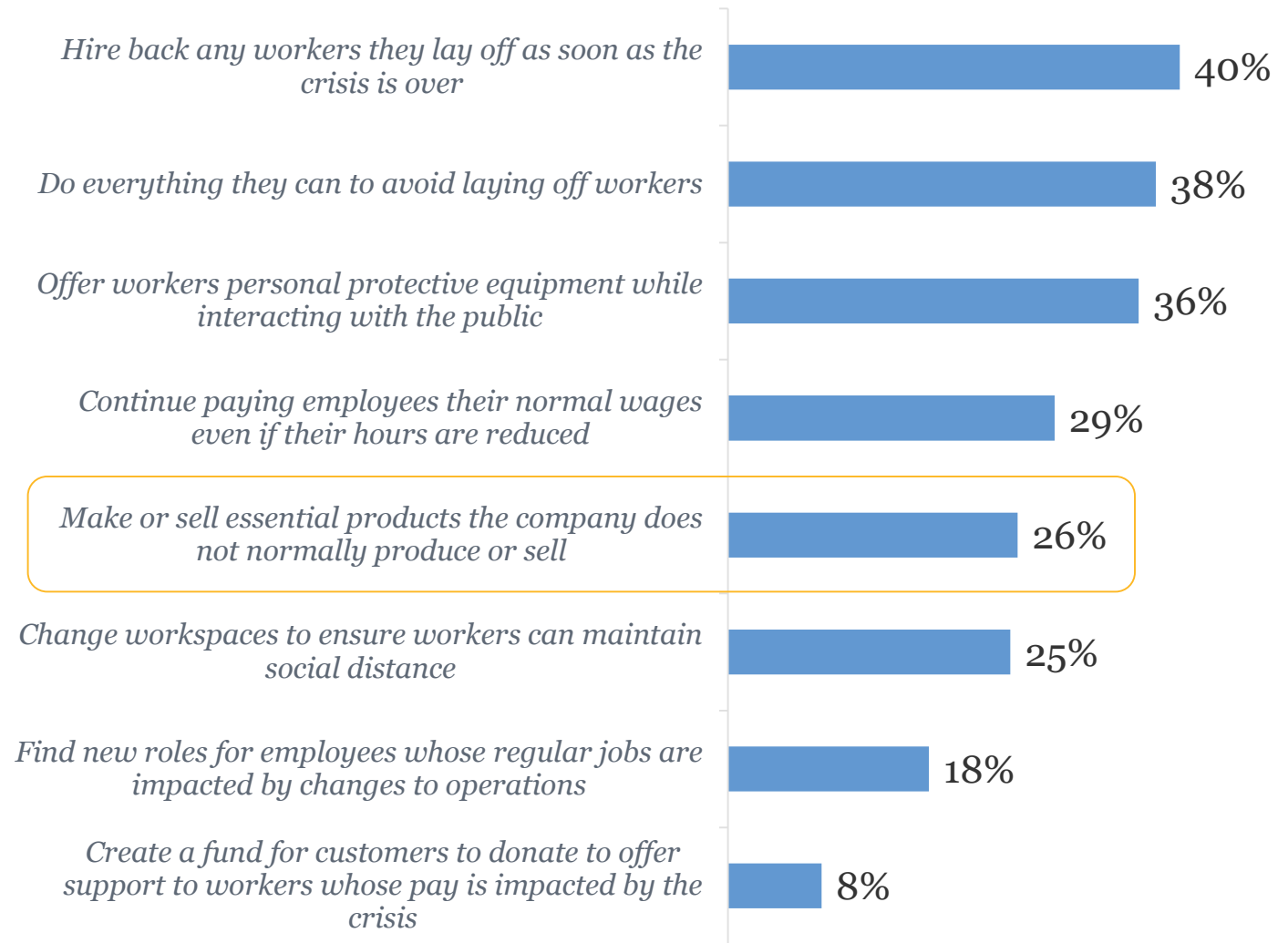
# CONSUMERS EXPECT COMPANIES TO SUPPORT WORKERS, YET UNDERSTAND LAYOFFS WILL HAPPEN

When asked, 86% say they understand that some companies will need to furlough and lay off workers.

Q: Agree/Disagree: It is understandable that some companies will need to furlough or lay off workers during this crisis

**CONSUMERS ARE FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON HELPING WORKERS, THOUGH 26% IDENTIFIED MAKING ESSENTIAL PRODUCTS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS COMPANIES CAN DO**

*Actions consumers believe are most important for companies to be taking (selected)*



Q: Which of the following should companies be doing, in your opinion, to support their customers in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis?

Q: Which of the following should companies and other organizations be doing, in your opinion, to support their employees in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis?

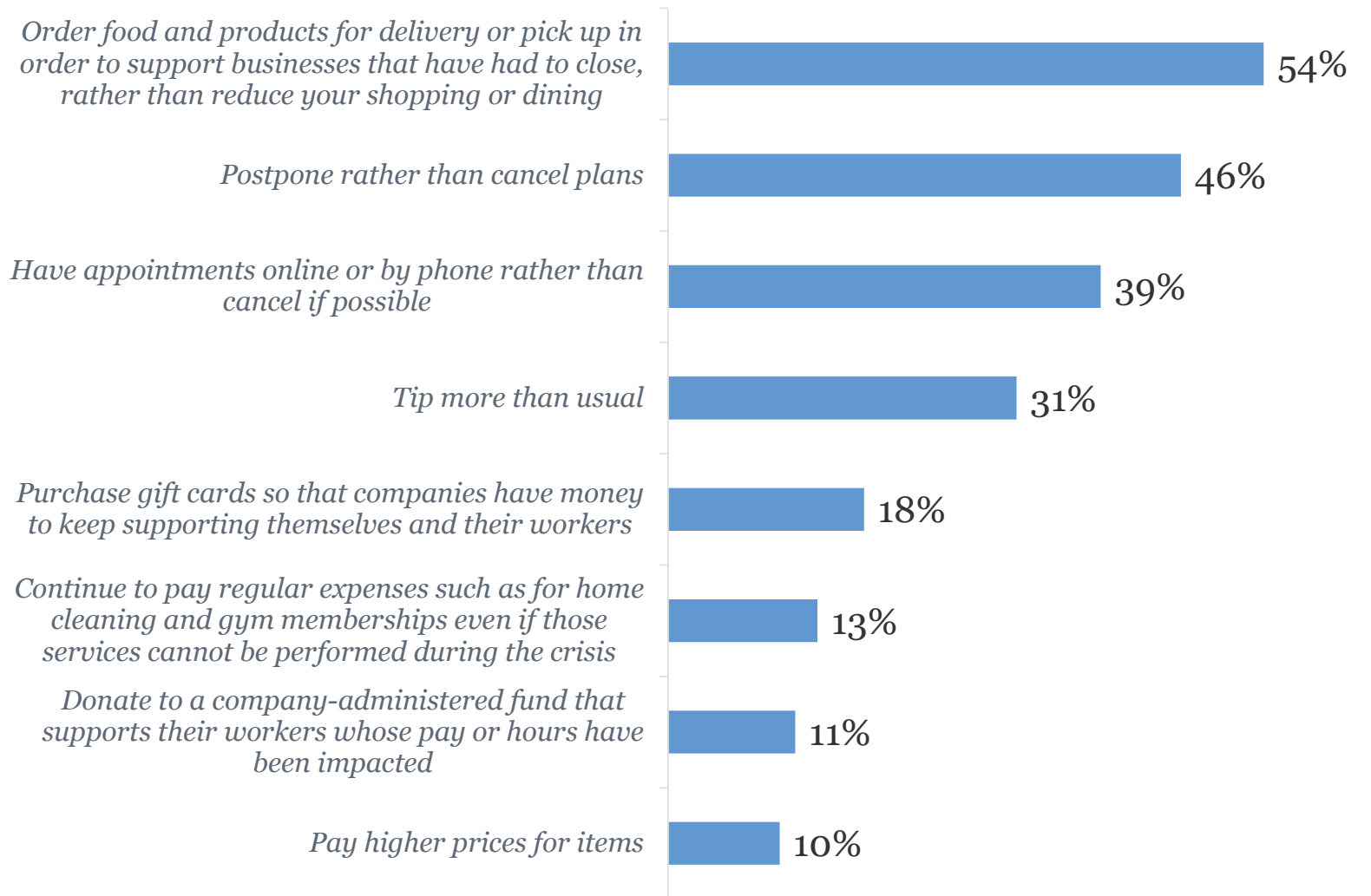
# CONSUMERS ARE WILLING TO HELP BUSINESSES SUPPORT THEIR EMPLOYEES

91%

of consumers are willing to take at least one of these actions to support workers

Q: Which of the following are you willing to do in order to support workers who have been, or are at risk of being, furloughed or laid off?

## Actions consumers are willing to take to support workers



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## EMPLOYEE LOYALTY IS AT STAKE

*Despite the fragile economy, companies could face higher turnover because of their choices and communication failures*

*Q: Which of the following best describes how you feel your expectations and behaviors will change when this Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic is over?*

*Employees are evaluating current and potential employers' behavior during the pandemic.*

**30%**

*of employees, not including those self-employed, report at least one of the following:*

**19%**

I will look into how a company behaved during the pandemic when considering whether to work there.

**9%**

I will no longer be loyal to my employer because of how they behaved during the pandemic.

**10%**

I will look for another job with an employer that supports its employees.



*New benefits will be desired as being part of the future of work*

51%

*Want those new benefits made permanent, including:*

54%

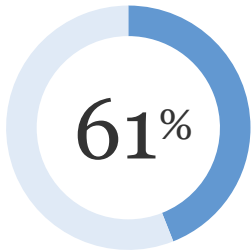
Of employees exempt from shelter-in-place orders

64%

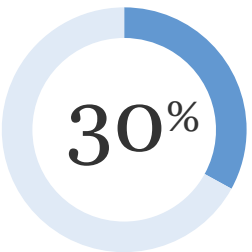
Of healthcare workers

54%

Of workers deemed essential during the pandemic



Percentage of employees who would normally need to be at their place of business to do their job and are now working from home



Percentage of employees currently working from home who expect to be able to do so when they need to because they “have proven that I can be productive working from home”

**EMPLOYEES SEE ADAPTATIONS THEY WANT TO KEEP**

Q: For each of the following, please indicate whether you agree or disagree.

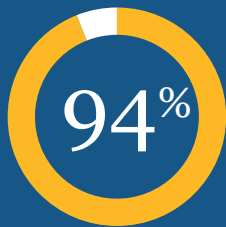
Q: Which of the following are you currently doing?

Q: Which of the following best describes how you feel your expectations and behaviors will change when this Coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic is over?

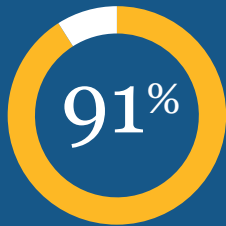
# CONSUMERS AND EMPLOYEES SEEK ACTION

*Expectations are high because the consequences are high, both to human health and to the economy. Not addressing these needs can endanger customers and employees. They both expect companies to take steps to protect them.*

## AMONG CONSUMERS



*Want companies to implement various physical protection and distancing measures to keep them healthy*



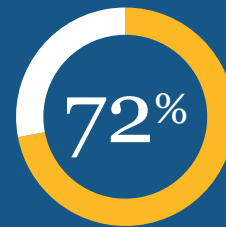
*Expect companies to take various steps to help workers stay healthy – providing personal protective equipment and hand sanitizer, breaks to wash hands, making physical changes to space and operations to allow social distancing, and other steps*

*Q: Which of the following should companies be doing, in your opinion, to support their customers in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis?*

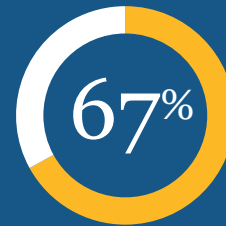
*Q: Which of the following should companies and other organizations be doing, in your opinion, to support their employees in response to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis?*

*Q: What do you need from your employer right now?*

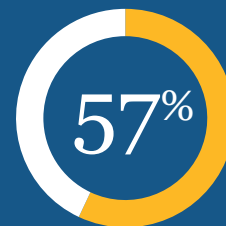
## AMONG EMPLOYEES



*Report the need for social distancing measures from their employers*



*Need more and better communication from their employer*



*Need greater flexibility to accomplish their work and balance competing responsibilities*

## Looking Ahead

# HOW CAN WE CONTINUE THE MOMENTUM TO WORK TOGETHER AS INDIVIDUALS?

Most Americans feel that other individuals are doing “excellent,” “great” or “good” in fulfilling their role in this crisis, though some groups are less united in this view.

Some still need to understand the importance of cooperating – *12% reported they've ignored shelter-in-place requirements.*

| Individuals' performance                  | U.S. | Gen Z+ Millennials | Gen X | Boomers+ Silents | Employed | Unemployed | Parents |
|---|------|--------------------|-------|------------------|----------|------------|---------|
| % rating “excellent” or “great” or “good” | 63%  | 53%                | 65%   | 71%              | 61%      | 53%        | 57%     |
| % rating “fair” or “poor”                 | 32%  | 41%                | 29%   | 24%              | 33%      | 42%        | 37%     |

Q: Please rate how well each of the following are doing in their role in responding to the Coronavirus/COVID-19 crisis.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

*Our research underscores the indelible importance of the actions taken by organizations now. The study shows the bigger the threat, economically and socially, the more important it is to create a foundation of confidence based on accountability, transparency, frequent updates and realistic, incremental goals. Well-structured communications, based on values and actions, can acknowledge the pain and challenges we all face today, while helping to improve and even accelerate better outcomes for individuals, organizations and society.*

- Peter Verrengia  
Senior Partner  
Head of FleishmanHillard's Global Recovery and Resurgence practice

# METHODOLOGY

***TRUE Global Intelligence**, the in-house research practice of FleishmanHillard, fielded an online survey of 1,119 Americans adults 18 and older March 30-31, 2020.*

*Data have been weighted by gender, age and geography.*

*The margin of error is  $\pm 2.9\%$  and higher for subgroups.*

*For reference, 10% of respondents corresponds to 24.9 million Americans based on the U.S. Census Bureau's 2018 Community Population Survey.*



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# QUESTIONS?

**For questions related to the COVID-19  
mindset study, contact:**

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**For support navigating COVID-19, contact:**

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