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## U.S. WORKERS REPORT HIGHEST JOB SATISFACTION SINCE 2005

*More jobs, fewer layoffs contribute to brighter career outlook*

By Lauren Weber  
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Just more than half of U.S. workers – 51 percent – said they were satisfied with their jobs in 2017, the highest level since 2005, according to a new report from The Conference Board, a business-research group.

Over the past seven years, Americans report feeling better about their pay along with a greater sense of job security, both features of an economy with a low unemployment rate and a long decline in layoffs. In July, jobless claims continued an extended post-recession slide and hit their lowest level in nearly 50 years.

Workers on the higher end of the income scale are happier than their less-affluent counterparts. Nearly 58 percent of those with total household income above \$75,000 report feeling satisfied at work, compared with around 45 percent of those from households earning less than \$75,000.

“These are higher-skilled workers, managers, and they tend to have more control over their day-to-day work activities,” said Rebecca Ray, leader of The Conference Board’s human capital practice. “Having more control can drive a lot of how you feel about the job.”

The group surveyed approximately 1,500 workers about 23 separate topics, from paychecks to commutes. On the wage component, the satisfaction gap is much bigger between those who make more than \$75,000 a year and those who make less. Around 58 percent of households with incomes of at least \$75,000 were satisfied with their pay, similar to the rate of their overall job happiness. In contrast, 29.4 percent of people surveyed with household incomes below \$75,000 reported they were satisfied with their pay.

The numbers tell “a tale of two economies,” said Rick Wartzman, a director at the Drucker Institute, an organization focused on leadership and management, and author of “The End of Loyalty: The Rise and Fall of Good Jobs in America.” In 2016, nearly half of American workers earned less than \$30,000 a year, according to Social Security data reported by employers.

Even so, satisfaction at work has improved for two years in a row among those with income under \$75,000, while it dropped last year for those above that threshold. That may reflect a particularly tight labor market for lower-paid workers, who endured stagnant wages for years but have been seeing some faster wage gains than higher-paid workers.

Meghan Flannery, 26 years old, got a 10 percent pay increase in April when she left her job with a manufacturer in Charlotte, N.C., to become a marketing manager at TKXS LLC, a technology and services company. She was impressed that all the people who interviewed her had been at the company for at least five years.

“I want to be somewhere for a long period of time, and I want to grow, so seeing a path was really important to me,” Ms. Flannery said.

Other perks of the new job include a good work-life balance, the ability to bring her dog Paisley to work, and how “everyone here is treated like family,” she said.

Americans report being most content with their colleagues, their commutes and their interest in work. Supervisors and physical workspaces also get high marks.

Suzanne Barnes, a 58-year-old architect in Orlando, Fla., found her dream job in 2016. She’s director of design at Westminster Communities of Florida, an operator of senior-living facilities. Ms. Barnes had taken a long sabbatical to raise her children before returning to the workforce in 2014 as the principal of an architecture firm, but that job was part-time and mostly a marketing position.

A job ad for the Westminster position caught her eye, and Ms. Barnes said the role brings her back to her primary love: design work. She also gets handwritten notes from company executives thanking her for her contributions to the company.

“Once you’re really good at something, it’s very satisfying to be able to do it every day,” she said.

Overall, The Conference Board survey shows that companies have made little or no progress in fixing internal processes, which rank among the least-liked aspects of work. Fewer than a third of workers are satisfied with their companies’ promotion policies, bonus plans, performance-review processes and education or training programs. These four components were also the bottom-ranked aspects of work in 2016.

“Most of these cluster around assessment and, by extension, how you’re compensated or rewarded,” Ms. Ray said. “Many companies do not get performance management right, and when done wrong, it’s one of the most soul-crushing aspects of being in an organization.”

Job satisfaction hit 52.1 percent in 2005, and the current number remains below the 61.1 percent level recorded in 1987, when The Conference Board began tracking the metric.

“We shouldn’t confuse where the economy is cyclically with longer-term structural changes to the labor market,” said Mr. Wartzman. “By many measures we’re in a strong economy, but you still have a 30- to 40-year trend of flat wages and overall declining health and retirement security for most workers.”