

Pop Culture and the Workplace

Employee engagement, meet entertainment: Leveraging fandom to mitigate absence and drive business success



This report reconciles survey data on attendance and productivity associated with events such as the NFL championship game, presidential election, Summer Olympics, movie and television events (e.g., the Oscars and Game of Thrones finale), and more, showcasing the impact of current events on workplace culture, absenteeism, and productivity so organizations can better prepare for the biggest days of pop culture-related unplanned absences.

THE UNDENIABLE IMPACT OF CURRENT EVENTS AT WORK

When fandom strikes, absenteeism soars

In 2020, workplaces should be prepared for “the year of absence”

As organizations around the globe have long recognized, unplanned employee absence is detrimental to productivity, depletes labor budgets, and negatively impacts customer service. Plus, it’s demoralizing for employees left to pick up the extra work. In recent years, The Workforce Institute has measured how absence and current events are closely connected: When a big event occurs, absenteeism soars.

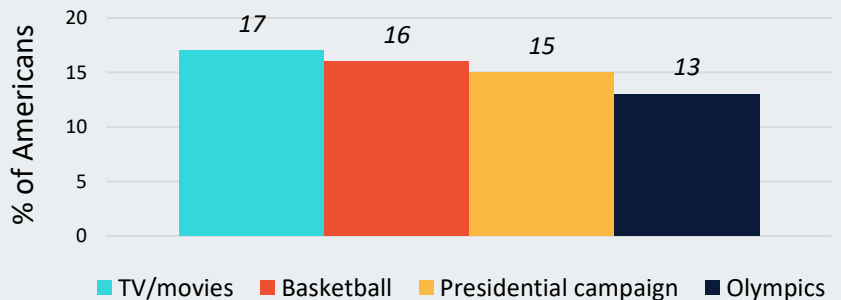
In 2020, nearly half (48%) of U.S. employees aged 18+ say they will miss or be late for work due to a pop culture event or will be distracted at work by livestreaming or reading about pop culture or current events.¹ The year is full of huge events, thanks to the Summer Olympics and the entire presidential election cycle, joining annual events like the NFL championship game, Academy Awards, and many others. Since so many workers skip work already, nearly two-thirds (64%) of employed U.S. adults actually want paid holidays to be more aligned with popular cultural events that impact their everyday life rather than with historic or religious events.²

More than ever, it’s critical for organizations to have a plan for incorporating these events into their employee engagement strategies. By exploring the impact of pop culture events on workplace absenteeism, and leveraging passion instead of fighting it, organizations can benefit from the intersection of current events, entertainment, and the employee experience.

18%

of employed U.S. adults planned to skip work or show up late on Monday after the 2020 NFL championship game, the highest-ever total since 2005.¹

Additional 2020 pop culture events most likely to cause U.S. workers to show up distracted, late, or not at all



Super Sick Monday

The NFL's championship game has a long and storied history of wreaking havoc on workplace attendance the following Monday. In 2020, a record-high 17.5 million employed Americans (18%) planned to skip work or show up late on Monday after the Big Game, the highest-ever total since The Workforce Institute at Kronos started tracking this data in 2005, and up from 17.2 million Americans in 2019. More than a quarter (29%) of employed Americans have skipped work or gone in late on Monday after the Big Game in the past, and 2 in 5 (40%) of employees wish that Monday were a national holiday.¹

Yet, despite the rising track record of no-shows and call-outs, only 2 in 5 employed Americans (44%) say their employer proactively plans for this absenteeism that is bound to happen year after year.¹

However, one compelling solution to marry the best of both worlds — workplace motivation and employee satisfaction — rests with the NFL: The majority of employed Americans (63%) think the NFL should move the Big Game to the Sunday night before Presidents Day, just two weeks later than usual, so that the day after the game will be a national holiday when many businesses close.¹

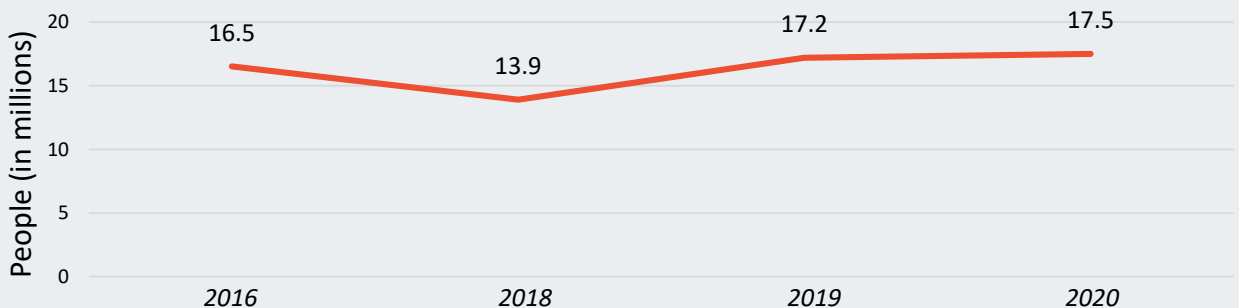


The majority (63%) of employed Americans think the NFL should move the Big Game to be the Sunday night before Presidents Day.

56%

of employed Americans feel their employer does nothing to plan for the absenteeism that can happen on Monday after the Big Game.

The sky-high trend of Americans who plan to skip or be late for work the day after the Big Game





Summer Olympic Games

Summer, already a vacation-heavy season, welcomes the extremely popular Summer Olympics once every four years. According to a survey conducted ahead of the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, 55 million employed Americans (37%) planned to watch an Olympic event live if it aired during work hours — implying dips in productivity.³

It would be difficult for organizations to prepare appropriately for this impact, as many absences would be unplanned. Among those who planned to watch an Olympic event live during work hours:

- Nearly 1 in 5 (17%) would make up an excuse to leave work early, come in late, or play hooky altogether and call in sick;
- One-third (33%) would stream the event live at work; and
- More than a quarter (28%) would try to change their shift or hours.³

In fact, just 18% said they would take a preapproved vacation or personal day.³

Workplace streaming and late-morning arrivals may be on the rise in 2020, as the 14- to 17-hour time difference between the U.S. and Tokyo — host of the Summer Games — may prompt U.S. workers to rethink their typical routines in order to watch events live in the early morning hours instead of waiting for taped primetime coverage.

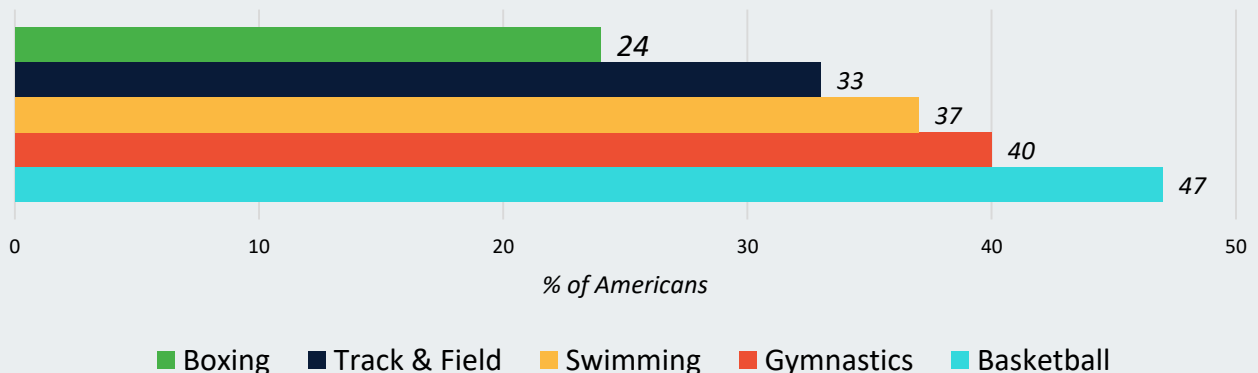


Basketball is the most popular Olympic event to watch during work: Nearly half (47%) of U.S. employees who plan to watch during work hours are most likely to watch hoops live.

37%

of U.S. employees would watch an Olympic event live if it aired during work hours.

Top 5 Olympic events most likely to be watched live at work by employed U.S. adults



Game of Thrones finale

From the Oscars that run long after midnight on the East Coast, to Netflix series premieres that are worth losing sleep over to binge-watch for hours on end, there are countless movie- and TV-related events stacked up in 2020 that threaten to interrupt workplace attendance.

Learn from the past with the Game of Thrones finale: A May 2019 Kronos survey showed that staggering one-third (34%) of employed U.S. adults said they planned to watch the finale when it premiered late on a Sunday night, likely one of the most significant drivers of workplace absenteeism in 2019.⁴

Approximately 27.2 million employees who planned to watch the finale live admitted they would either miss work, arrive late, work remotely, be less productive than usual, or experience another impact on work obligations on the following Monday. This included 5.8 million employees who typically work Sunday nights but planned to use a vacation, sick, or personal day to watch the finale live.⁴

However, while these pop culture events may impact attendance, they aren't entirely doom and gloom for employers: A third (33%) of employees feel that talking about these big shows at work provides a common ground that helps build closer relationships with colleagues.⁴

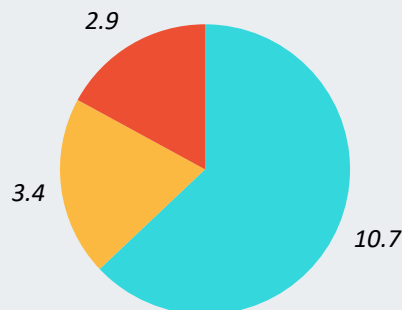
34%

of U.S. employees planned to watch the Game of Thrones finale live.



Nearly 6 million employees who work Sundays planned to use a vacation, sick, or personal day to watch the finale.

Employed Americans (*in millions*) whose typical work routine was interrupted by the Game of Thrones finale



■ Planned to skip work ■ Planned to work remotely on Monday ■ Planned to show up late on Monday

DON'T BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD

How organizations can successfully combat no-shows and late arrivals after big cultural events

Take action in the face of unplanned absence

- 1. Make controlling absenteeism a priority.** There's no excuse for losing control of absences. Business tools are available to control and monitor absence levels and trends. Consider setting the parameters to alert you to all unscheduled absences after the Big Game or other major events.
- 2. Implement an absence policy and communicate it to employees.** A clear absence policy is critical for balancing employee and employer needs. Highlight specific rules for time-off requests before big events.
- 3. Be proactive.** Encourage ongoing communication between managers and staff about time-off requests or schedule changes.
- 4. Support flexibility.** Consider offering a late start time after big weekend events and ensuring your system can monitor flex hours.
- 5. Consider unpaid leave.** Accept that members of your staff will tune in to these big events — and may celebrate afterward — as unplanned absences are often high the morning after an event. To be prepared, offer staff the option to book unpaid leave up to a maximum number of hours or days.
- 6. Provide incentives for excellent attendance.** Time and attendance systems are invaluable for tracking attendance levels. Consider offering perfect attendance bonuses as an incentive to reduce absenteeism.
- 7. Be a team player.** Rather than curbing enthusiasm, go with it. With a bit of luck and open communication, this will enhance staff morale long after the game clock runs out.
- 8. Make absence management part of your long-term business plan.** Organizations can benefit from a well-designed absence policy that is monitored and enforced year-round.

12%

of employed Americans say their employer plans for absenteeism after the Big Game by offering flexible start/end times on Monday.¹

11%

of employed Americans say their employer plans for absenteeism after the Big Game by reducing workloads.¹

10%

of employed Americans say their employer plans for absenteeism after the Big Game by encouraging remote work.¹

ABOUT THIS REPORT

“Pop Culture and the Workplace” reconciles survey data gauging attendance and productivity associated with national pop culture and current events to showcase the impact of current events on workplace culture and help organizations better prepare for the most “popular” days for unplanned absences.

THE WORKFORCE INSTITUTE AT KRONOS

The Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated is a think tank that helps organizations drive performance by addressing human capital management and workforce management issues that affect both hourly and salaried employees. Through education and research, The Workforce Institute empowers organizations with practical ideas for optimizing the 21st-century workplace. Board members and key stakeholders publish articles and insights through The Workforce Institute blog at www.workforceinstitute.org.

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For more on how Kronos can help your organization address employee engagement and other key workforce management issues, please email Kronos at educate@kronos.com or visit www.kronos.com.

Survey Methodologies

Footnote 1: The “Super Bowl Fever” survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Kronos from Jan. 16–21, 2020 among 1,148 employed U.S. adults ages 18+.

Footnote 2: The “Paid Holidays” survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll from October 3–7, 2019 among 1,180 employed U.S. adults ages 18+.

Footnote 3: The “Torching Productivity: 2016 Olympics vs. Work” survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Kronos from July 21–25, 2016 among 911 employed (full-time and part-time) U.S. adults ages 18+.

Footnote 4: The “Absence is Coming” survey was conducted online by The Harris Poll on behalf of Kronos from May 7–9, 2019 among 1,090 employed U.S. adults ages 18+.

These online surveys are based on a probability sample and therefore no estimate of theoretical sampling error can be calculated. Respondents were asked similar but different questions in prior surveys; missing years in the graph are a result of the survey not being conducted. All population projections are based on survey data and population estimates based on U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data.

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