



Celebrating the Return of America's Workforce This Independence Day

How Full Employment is Critical to U.S. Economic Recovery

OKLAHOMA CITY, July 2, 2021 — Last year's Independence Day was not a typical celebration. Like most of America, my family and I watched virtual fireworks on television as major annual Fourth of July celebrations were canceled due to COVID-19. There were no group gatherings around the grill and no one was hanging out by the pool with friends from the neighborhood.

There really wasn't a lot to celebrate.

Fast forward to today. A sense of optimism and hope fills this great nation, and while the pandemic isn't over yet, there is so much to celebrate this Independence Day.

We have a greater appreciation for our health and that of our loved ones. We're grateful to be able to hug one another again and return a friendly smile with one of our own. But most of all, we are thankful to feel a return to normalcy.

For many, "normal" means getting back to work after being unemployed or the excitement of a new career path made possible by the changing workforce. For others, however, "normal" is still out of reach.

Over the past several months, I've driven by many well-established restaurants and stores that are forced to close during peak hours because there are simply not enough workers to keep their doors open.

The employment landscape has indeed made major shifts, including some of the biggest that our Express Employment Professionals offices have ever seen. Employment went from hundreds of applicants applying for a single position in early 2020 to employers currently scrambling to find applicants to fill positions. In June, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the U.S. added 850,000 jobs, better than the predicted 706,000.

This is undoubtedly a job seekers' market. Businesses are now pulling out the stops to attract candidates, offering benefits such as sign-on bonuses, remote work opportunities and higher pay rates. Enhanced and extended unemployment benefits have ended in 25 states because jobs are plentiful.



Without a doubt, getting back to work and the ability to choose a career you love is one of the greatest freedoms we are afforded as Americans. Additionally, a job provides so much more than just a paycheck. It's a chance to be part of a work family where one can contribute to an overall cause. It's an opportunity to provide for your family and build a future for your children. It provides a way to grow, mentally and personally. Pandemic isolation took a toll on our nation's mental health and with employees returning to the workplace, seeing familiar faces in the break room is a welcome sight.

So why aren't there enough workers?

Extenuating circumstances play a role in preventing people from returning to work due to a lack of childcare, eldercare or susceptibility to COVID-19. For example, when child or eldercare facilities can't find employees, parents and caregivers can't return to the workforce.

There are jobs integral to our society – plumbers, machinists, electricians and more – that are facing a dire shortage unless action is taken soon. Businesses need to invest in training workers to compensate for the ever-widening skills gap. Every piece is interconnected in contributing to the labor shortage.

With competition for top talent heating up, businesses need to accept new wage realities, as they can't afford to pass on quality candidates. If an applicant is truly at the top of their field, it's worth the investment to hire and retain them instead of continuing to throw money to the wind with constant turnover or vacant positions.

America's economy is back on track to realize its full potential, but we aren't there yet. COVID-19 allowed us to see what holes exist in the current workforce structure, and now is the time to plan for the workforce of the future! Looking ahead, I have high hopes we will continue to capitalize on economic opportunity in the wake of COVID-19, and celebrate a future filled with a more robust labor force and full freedom from the virus and its challenges.

A return to the familiar, both personally and professionally, is great cause to celebrate this Independence Day. And of course, backyard barbecues and fireworks in person!

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing company has more than 830 franchises in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Since inception, Express has put more than 9 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

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