

FEBRUARY 2023

# 2023 Net Positive Employee Barometer

## FROM QUIET QUITTING TO CONSCIOUS QUITTING

How companies' values and impact on the world are transforming their employee appeal



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# 60 second round-up

**Employees want to work for a company that is having a positive impact on the world.**



2 in 3 UK employees



3 in 4 US employees

In the US and UK, **almost two thirds of employees** say efforts by business to tackle environmental and societal challenges do not go far enough. Many believe the CEO and senior leaders don't care.

**Nearly half of employees** say they would consider resigning if the company's values don't align with their own, even in these difficult economic times.

**A third of employees** say they have already resigned for this reason.

**All of these numbers are even higher for Millennials and Gen Z. We're entering an era of conscious quitting.**

**But companies can flip this into an opportunity.**

By showing greater **ambition** about your impact on people and planet

By better **communicating** your actions

By **empowering** your employees

# Foreword by Paul Polman



**In a rapidly changing labour market, where the power seems to be ever-more in the hands of the employee, C-Suites are being inundated with advice on how to recruit and retain the best people. It's no surprise: COVID upended some of the most entrenched views about the ways we work.**

Suddenly people didn't need to be at their workplaces every day, or locked in to their commute. Suddenly most of us were at home, watching the world turn upside down and questioning what getting "back to normal" should look like when the time eventually came.

In what became dubbed the "Great Resignation", record numbers of people quit and changed positions in a fiercely competitive job market, with many searching for better terms and greater purpose. Even against a backdrop of rising living costs and looming recession, this search has not disappeared. People are continuing to find ways to take greater control of their working lives.

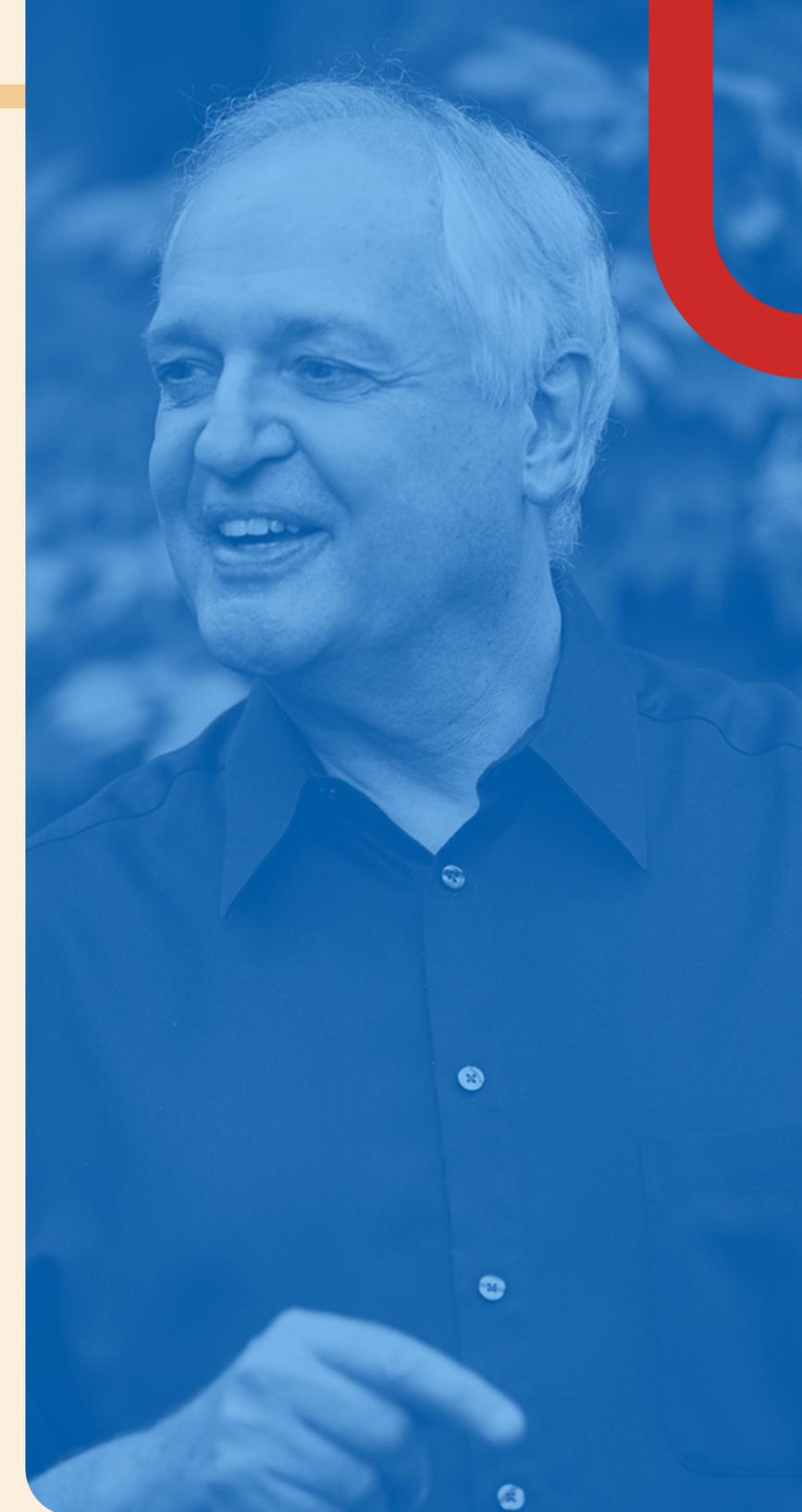
There's the much discussed "quiet quitting" phenomenon, where high numbers report being dissatisfied and doing the bare minimum that's expected, preferring to put their time and energy into other aspects of their lives. In companies around the world, many are refusing to come back to the office five-days-a-week, and demanding hybrid options instead.

The problem with most of the "talent strategies" that promise to help companies navigate this new environment is that they miss the bigger picture.

**Don't get me wrong: the numerous studies telling us that employees want better pay, more flexibility and greater wellbeing are absolutely right. But, to be candid, shouldn't this be rather obvious to senior leaders?**

The danger of relying on these prescriptions alone is not that they are incorrect, but that they only tell part of the story. These analyses tend to look at employees as just that: workers, in the narrow sense. Not as human beings, many of whom crave meaning and fulfilment on top of money and flexibility. Human beings who are living through an unprecedented moment in human history; a time of "perma-crisis", where pandemics, war, global warming, economic turmoil and social division in varying degrees threaten people's health, happiness and safety, and the health, happiness and safety of those we love.

For younger employees in particular, the future is uncertain and many truly fear for the world they will inherit. 23 year old climate activist Clover Hogan put it to me well. She said that for many of her generation "despair feeds despair. We're worried about the economy, the planet, our societies - all of it. It makes young people ask themselves: what am I really doing with my life? Why am I wasting time on a job or company I don't care about?"



# Foreword by Paul Polman



**We conducted a survey of 4,000 employees across the UK & US that aims to take a more human lens to these issues, recognising that our economies are at an inflection point and the way many people think about work is being shaped by this wider context.**

Our findings are eye-opening. The message that came through loud and clear from thousands of employees is that, in addition to thinking about their financial needs and personal wellbeing, none of which should be downplayed, many also want to work for companies who share their values and who are stepping up on the biggest issues facing humanity, not least climate change and economic inequality.

**They want to give their time and skills to companies that have a positive impact on our planet and societies, and which offer hope. Many can see that their employers are trying to be “less bad”, but they can also see it’s still not enough.**

And when their companies don’t uphold their values, many employees say they are ready to resign. Indeed, many already have. Any CEO who thinks they will win the talent wars by offering a bit more money, some extra home-working and a gym membership is going to be disappointed. An era of conscious quitting is on the way.

For companies who pay lip service to values, and who are failing to deliver on their environmental and social responsibilities, these insights are doubly troubling. Not only are these businesses already lagging behind employees’ expectations, they are way out of step with the expectations and needs of Millennial and Gen-Z employees – the generations who will dominate the workforce for decades to come. It’s a ticking time-bomb: as these younger generations take over the economy in greater numbers, this disconnect will increasingly hurt companies which fail to catch up.

On the other hand, there are huge gains to be made for business leaders who move to meet the expectations of their current and future employees. The data points to three areas where CEOs and those around them can do this: the company’s level of ambition on big societal challenges; its communication with employees about those actions; and the way in which it empowers employees in this mission. Above all, it’s a question of leadership. Companies who seize this opportunity will unlock motivation, innovation and loyalty throughout the business, putting purpose at its core and building companies in which every member can feel proud.

For me, the best insight we uncover is that employees not only want their companies to step up, they also want to actively contribute. Leaders who take up this offer of partnership in a meaningful way can transform and accelerate their efforts to build a more sustainable, more responsible and more profitable business. What we call a “net positive” company, which thrives and delivers long-term value by giving more than it takes.

I hope that the many executives who are serious about understanding the future of work, and about positioning their company for success in our fast-changing world, will draw on these findings.

The question for business leaders is actually simple: employees - the people who make or break the company - care about its values and impact more than most people realise, and young and future employees care most deeply of all. How are we going to show them that we care too?

**Paul Polman**

# Key findings



# Key findings

## 01

### Employees are worried about the future and want to work for companies who are doing something about it

Two out of three employees are anxious about the future of the planet and society (69% UK, 66% US).

The majority want to work for a company that is trying to have a positive impact on the world (66% UK, 76% US).

## 02

### Despite seeing some progress, employees can still see that their companies aren't doing enough

They see an ambition gap. Even though many employees are aware that companies are taking some steps to address environmental and societal problems, around two out of three in each country say current efforts by businesses do not go far enough (68% UK, 62% US).

Many believe the CEO and senior leaders don't care about these issues. Almost half of UK employees (45%) and over a third of US employees (39%) believe these leaders are only driven by their own gain.

Three quarters say a company should take responsibility for its impact, not just on its employees and stakeholders, but on the wider world (77% UK, 78% US).

## 03

### Business is sleepwalking into an era of conscious quitting

Nearly half of employees say they would consider resigning from their job if the values of the company did not align with their own values (45% UK, 51% US).

In fact, a third say they already have resigned from a position for this reason. (35% in both the UK and US). This number rises significantly among Gen Z & Millennials employees (48% UK, 44% US).

Nearly half of Gen Z and Millennials would consider taking a pay cut in order to work for a company that shares their values (48% UK, 44% US).

# Key findings

## 04

### Business leaders can close the gap between their company's actions and their employees' expectations. Here's how.

#### Ambition

Almost two out of three employees say their company should take a stronger stance on the environment (63% UK, 61% US) and on economic inequality (61% UK, 65% US).

#### Empowerment

More than half of UK and US employees want to have a greater role in helping their company change for the better (53% UK, 60% US). It's even higher for Millennials and Gen Z (64% UK, 66% US).

#### Communication

Two out of three employees want their companies to communicate actions on big environmental and societal issues (67% UK, 66% US).

Around two-thirds say their company has communicated with them about employee wellbeing (60% UK, 66% US), but this number drops dramatically when it comes to the environment (35% UK, 34% US), economic inequality (29% UK, 28% US) and social inequality (36% UK, 41% US).

## Gen Z

In 2023, Gen Z employees are aged between 18-25. They make up 20% of the US population and 9.5% of the UK population.

## Millennials

Millennials are aged 26-41, and make up 23% of the US population and 21.6% of the UK population.

*Sources: the UK ONS and the US Census Bureau International Database.*

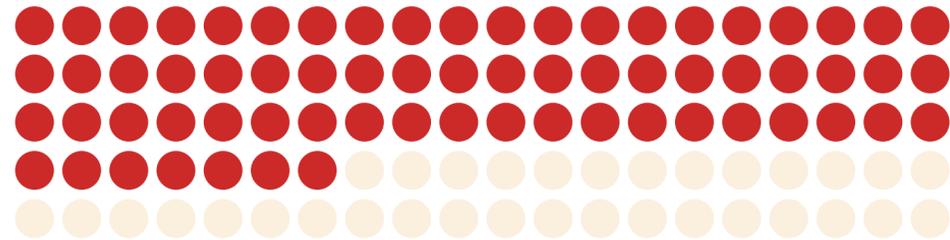
# Barometer report



# Barometer report

## Employees are worried about the future and want to work for companies who are doing something about it.

Employees are concerned about the state of the world, with two thirds saying they feel anxious about the future of the planet and society (69% UK, 66% US).



### Proportions of employees anxious about the future of the planet and society, by generation:

	Gen Z & Millennials (18-41 years)	Gen X & older (42+ years)
UK	70%	68%
US	71%	61%

Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? - I am anxious about the future of the planet and society. Base: Gen Z & Millennial (UK: 1042, US: 1007) Gen X & older (UK: 958, US: 993)

## Understanding the data:

How companies are bringing on an era of conscious quitting

What's surprising is how much higher this is than the proportions who say they are worried about paying their bills this month, although the numbers here are still considerable (41% UK, 36% US). A clear majority have concerns over the state of the global economy, climate change, biodiversity and nature loss, and economic and social inequality.

### What are employees concerned about?

#### 'I am worried about paying my bills this month'



#### 'I am concerned about the state of the global economy'



#### 'I am concerned about climate change'



#### 'I am concerned about loss of biodiversity / nature'



#### 'I am concerned about economic inequality'



#### 'I am concerned about social inequality'



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? - I am worried about paying my bills this month. Base: All (UK: 2000, US: 2000)  
Q. How concerned, if at all, are you about each of the following? Base: All (UK: 2000, US: 2000)

UK employees  
US employees

# Barometer report

## Understanding the data:

How companies are bringing on an era of conscious quitting

Even higher numbers call for business to help tackle these problems.

It is important for businesses to take action on ...	UK employees	US employees
State of the global economy	85%	89%
Economic inequality	82%	82%
Climate change	82%	76%
Loss of biodiversity / nature	81%	77%
Social inequality	70%	66%

Q. How important, if at all, do you think it is for businesses to take action on the following? Base: All (UK: 2000, US: 2000)

Heightened anxiety over our big environmental and societal challenges, and the widely held view that the private sector should help address them, likely explain why many employees now say they want to work for a company that is trying to have a positive impact on the world: **66% in the UK and 76% in the US**. Most employees want their company to have a reputation for doing good in society (**70% UK, 78% US**).

Unsurprisingly pay and benefits and employee wellbeing remain key factors when considering where to take a job, but many people also see the company's values and its commitment to the environment and equality as critical considerations. This is more pronounced amongst younger employees, indicating it will only become more imperative.

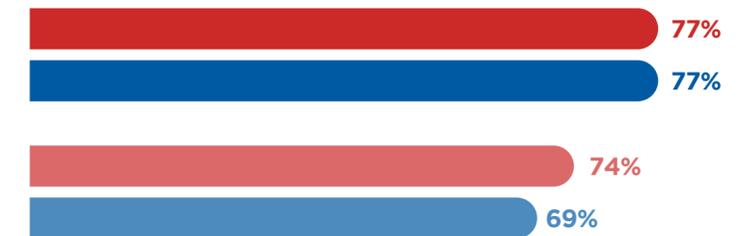
## What do employees consider when taking a job?

When considering a new job the company's ... is important	UK employees	US employees
Pay and benefits	86%	93%
Approach to well-being and work-life balance	87%	93%
Values	80%	88%
Commitment to the environment	76%	73%
Commitment to economic equality	77%	79%
Commitment to social equality	75%	75%

Q. When considering a new job, how important, if at all, are each of the following to you? Base: All (UK: 2000, US: 2000) Gen Z & Millennial (UK: 1042, US: 1007) Gen X & older (UK: 958, US: 993)

## When considering a new job the company's ... is important (results by generation)

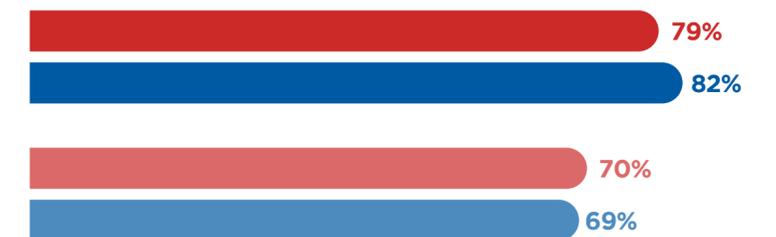
### Commitment to the environment



### Commitment to economic equality



### Commitment to social equality



UK Gen Z and Millennials US Gen Z and Millennials  
UK Gen X and older US Gen X and older

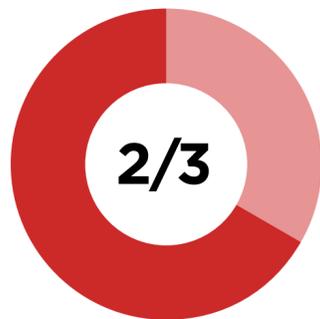
# Barometer report

## Understanding the data:

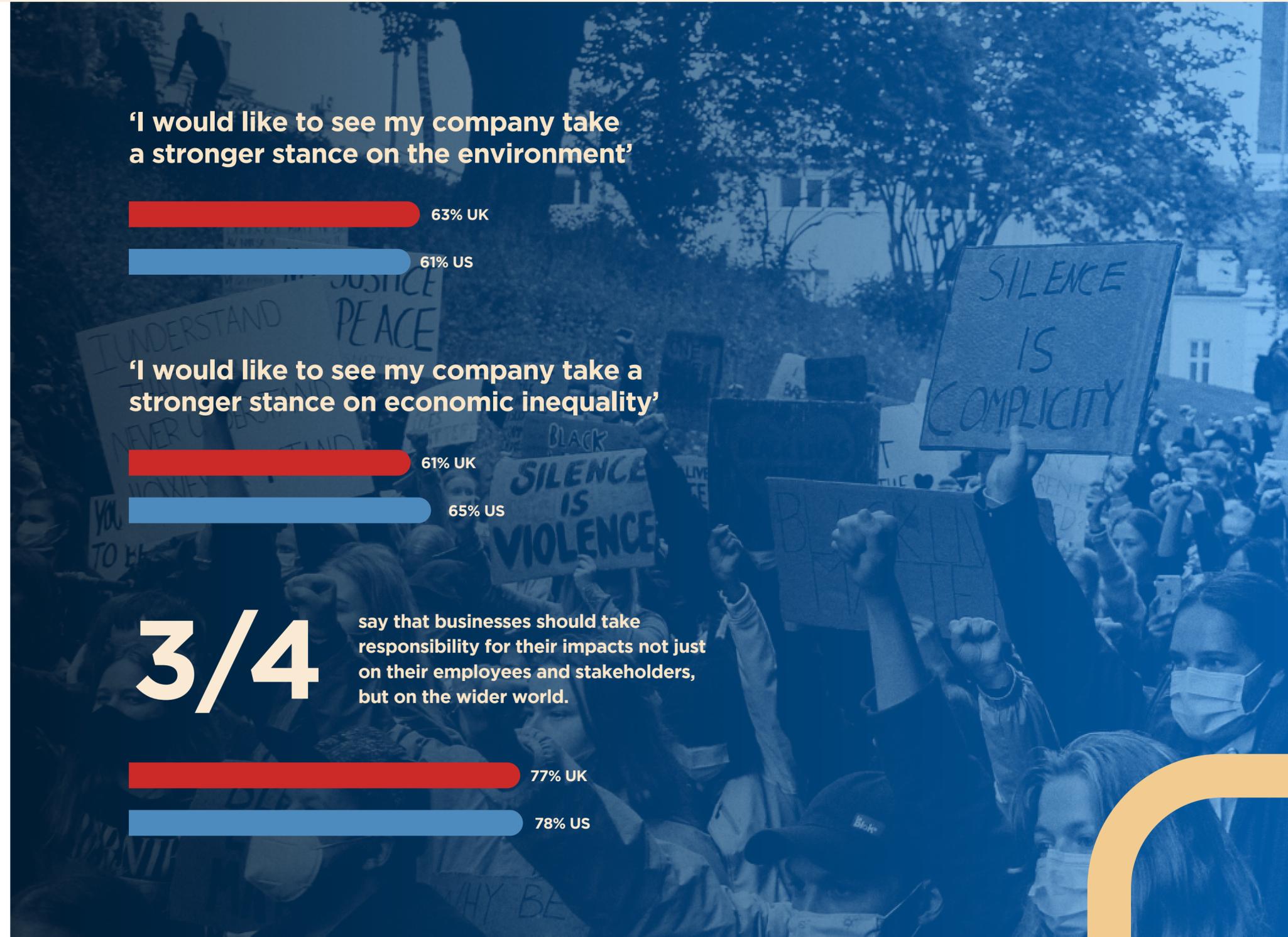
How companies are bringing on an era of conscious quitting

***Despite some progress, employees can see that their companies still aren't doing enough.***

The fact that environmental and societal issues have risen up corporate agendas in recent years has not been lost on many employees. More than two-thirds know or expect, for instance, that their company is investing in R&D and innovation to become sustainable (64% UK, 72% US). High numbers know or expect that their employer regularly reviews all staff salaries (70% UK, 79% US), and/or is taking some action to promote diversity and inclusion (71% UK, 81% US). Two-thirds know or expect their company provides a forum for employees to suggest ways of improving the company's impact on the world (63%, 70% US).



Yet still a majority say that these actions are not enough. Around two-thirds of employees say current efforts by business to tackle environmental and societal challenges don't go far enough (68% UK, 62% US). By contrast, similar numbers report having made changes in their own lives to try to be more environmentally sustainable (66% UK, 65% US). Employees want the companies they work for to do more.



**'I would like to see my company take a stronger stance on the environment'**



**'I would like to see my company take a stronger stance on economic inequality'**



**3/4**

**say that businesses should take responsibility for their impacts not just on their employees and stakeholders, but on the wider world.**



# Barometer report

Crucially, current economic headwinds are not seen as an excuse for corporate inaction, but rather increase employees' desire for companies to step up. Around two out of three employees (64% UK, 67% US) agree that the acceleration of global crises raises the bar of expectations of businesses.

However, many believe their CEO and senior leaders don't care enough about these issues. Only 1 in 5 UK employees and 1 in 4 US employees believe that their company focuses on making profit while also trying to help solve our biggest social and environmental challenges (21% UK, 27% US).

My company...	UK employees	US employees
Focuses on making profit for its shareholders over everything else	25%	26%
Focus on making profit while also trying to be "less bad" to the environment and society	41%	34%
Focuses on making profit whilst also trying to help solve our biggest social and environmental challenges	21%	27%
Don't know	12%	13%

Q. Which of the following best describes the company that you work for?  
Base: All (UK: 2000, US: 2000)

## Understanding the data:

How companies are bringing on an era of conscious quitting

**Almost half of UK employees (45%) and over a third of US employees (39%) believe their business leaders are only driven by their own gain. These concerns are most pronounced among the younger generations.**

### What employees say about the motivations of senior leaders

Agree that...	UK employees		US employees	
	Gen Z & Millennials (18-41 years)	Gen X & above (42+ years)	Gen Z & Millennials (18-41 years)	Gen X & above (42+ years)
CEO / senior leadership of their company are only driven by their own gain	51%	39%	43%	35%
The CEO / senior leadership of the company they work for do not care about the environment	45%	21%	34%	18%
The CEO / senior leadership of the company they work for do not care about economic inequality	46%	27%	35%	23%

Q. Thinking about the senior leadership of the company you work for, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Base: Gen Z & Millennial (UK: 1042, US: 1007) Gen X & older (UK: 958, US: 993)

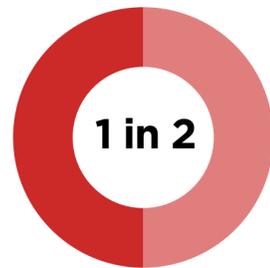
# Barometer report

## Understanding the data:

How companies are bringing on an era of conscious quitting

### *Business is sleepwalking into an era of conscious quitting.*

This strength of feeling is now fundamentally shaping how employees feel about their companies and jobs. For instance, those who say their company has goals or targets on the environment are more likely to say they are motivated at work than those who do not think their company has goals or targets (73% vs. 50% in the UK, 84% vs. 65% in the US).



Most strikingly, around a half of employees say they would consider resigning from their job if the values of the company did not align with their own values (45% UK, 51% US).

In fact, a third of UK and US employees report having previously resigned from a job because the values of that company did not align with their own (35% in both the UK and US). This number rises significantly among Gen Z & Millennials employees (48% UK, 44% US).

Even in these difficult economic times, more than a **third of employees would consider taking a pay cut** in order to work for a company that shares their values.

(35% in both the UK and US)

This rises among **Gen Z** and **Millennials**.

(48% UK, 44% US)



# Conclusions for the C-Suite

# Conclusions for the C-Suite

Some of the findings in this report may be surprising for some business leaders, and even disheartening for those who are doing more than ever on issues such as climate and inequality.

However, the story can be a **positive** one.

Out of the findings emerge three clear ways companies can close the gap between their actions and their employees' expectations, and their needs as human beings searching for purpose and hope in an uncertain world.

The risks of not doing so should be clear: less talent, lower engagement, weaker productivity. These companies will fall increasingly out of sync with employees, and with the challenging and extraordinary times in which we are living, they will become less relevant, less agile and less prosperous as a result.

The benefits, by contrast, can be phenomenal: attracting and retaining the best people into the decades ahead; unlocking their motivation, innovation and loyalty; and working together to accelerate the company's journey toward a more responsible, more sustainable and ultimately more profitable business model, so that it is better positioned for a volatile and complex future. What we call a "net positive" business, which takes responsibility for all of its impacts and acts in the long-term interests of all its stakeholders, seeking to help renew and regenerate our planet and societies, and thriving and benefitting its shareholders as a result.

## Firstly, we need greater ambition.

Our findings show that, even when employees can see that their companies are taking steps to be "less bad" on the issues that matter, they can also see it isn't enough. They are right. Whether it is failure to set climate targets in line with what science demands, or pursuing incremental policies to promote greater equity and inclusion, collectively the private sector is still not moving fast enough. Conventional corporate social responsibility is failing to shift the dial on these challenges, and employees know it. Real ambition means setting the targets the world needs, not the ones that are easy to deliver, and it means companies partnering with their peers, government and others to drive change at the systems-level.

# Conclusions for the C-Suite

## Secondly, we need better communications from business leaders.

Two out of three employees say they want to see their company communicate more about the action it takes on big environmental and social issues (67% UK, 66% US). Around two-thirds say their company has communicated with them about employee wellbeing (60% UK, 66% US), which is unsurprising after COVID, but this number drops dramatically when it comes to the environment (35% UK, 34% US) economic inequality (29% UK, 28% US) or social inequality (36% UK, 41% US).

No CEO should be comfortable with this: openness and meaningful, two-way dialogue is the only way to give employees confidence that their company is taking the actions it should. Fortunately, it is not a difficult thing to change.

## And finally, we need to empower employees.

In this Barometer we learnt that many employees not only want their companies to step up on our shared challenge, they want to contribute too. This is a tremendous offer of collaboration for business leaders who are prepared to enlist employees in the mission. More than half of UK and US employees want to have a greater role in helping their company change for the better (UK 53%, US 60%), and this number rises even higher for Gen Z and Millennial employees (64% UK, 66% US).

For many, the current block is that they don't know how. When we asked what is preventing them from personally taking action to address environmental and societal issues, more than a quarter of Gen Z and Millennial employees say they don't know where to start (28% UK, 28% US), and many said they don't consider it part of their job (28% UK, 34% US), though clearly many would like it to be.

They offer a latent pool of talent, energy and purpose that business leaders can tap into. In the words of one of the employees we surveyed, a Millennial working in the US, companies should "invest in and trust their employees, and motivate them to push for change. Make them believe they can make a difference."

**Those who do will be rewarded.**



# Focus on Gen Z

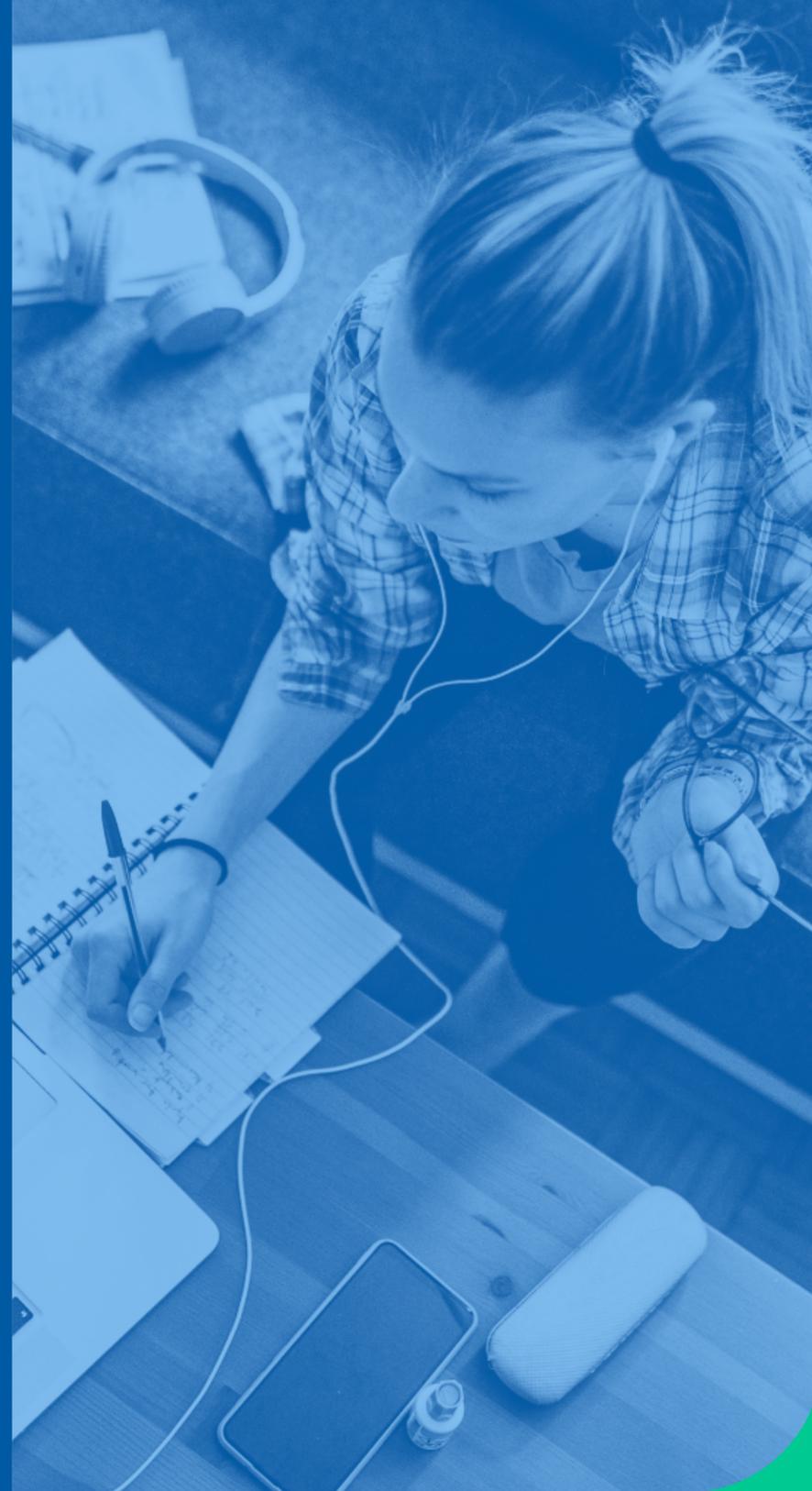


# Focus on Gen Z

**Given the importance of Gen Z as the future workforce, we conducted a Gen Z top-up survey in the week following our original survey (see methodology explainer p21). The top-up allows us to focus in on the youngest generation of employees, to better understand the future direction of travel. The findings below are based on responses from 1000 employees aged between 18-25, 500 UK and 500 US.**

Gen Z employees are the workforce of the future, and they expect more from their employers than generations before them.

They are concerned about the state of the world, driven to work for companies striving to be part of the solution, and motivated to play their part. They are also the most willing to resign if companies do not share their values.



# 3/4



of Gen Z employees (73% UK, 76% US) are anxious about the future of the planet and society.

A comparatively lower proportion are worried about paying their bills this month (54% UK, 43% US).

## When considering a new job...

The company's ... is important	UK employees	US employees
Approach to well-being and work-life balance	<b>86%</b>	<b>90%</b>
Pay & benefits	<b>81%</b>	<b>88%</b>
Commitment to the environment	<b>81%</b>	<b>73%</b>
Commitment to economic inequality	<b>81%</b>	<b>80%</b>
Commitment to social inequality	<b>80%</b>	<b>76%</b>
Values	<b>74%</b>	<b>84%</b>

*Q. When considering a new job, how important, if at all, are each of the following to you? Base: All (UK: 500, US: 500)*

# Focus on Gen Z

## Very high numbers want to work for a company that is trying to have a positive impact on the world (71% UK, 80% US)

Around three-quarters believe that businesses should take responsibility for their impacts not just on their employees and stakeholders, but on the world (73% UK, 81% US).

These employees care deeply. Two out of three say they would be less motivated in their job if the company's values did not align with their own (66% UK, 69% US) and three out of five would consider resigning (58% UK, 62% US).

In fact, many already have.

## Half of UK Gen Z employees and two out of five US Gen Z employees report having previously resigned from a job because of this (49% UK, 40% US).

Many would consider taking a pay cut in order to work for a company that shares their values (45% UK, 43% US).

## They can see that companies are still not doing enough.

Significant numbers say...

- that they are worried about their company's impact on the world (48% UK, 41% US)
- that they don't know what their company stands for (39% UK, 26% US)
- and that senior leaders do not care about the environment (41% UK, 33% US) or economic inequality (46% UK, 36% US).

Gen Z employees want their companies to take a stronger stance on the environment (67% UK, 72% US) and economic inequality (69% UK, 76% US).

Crucially, they also want a much greater role in helping their companies change for the better (69% UK, 67% US).

## However, nearly 1 in 3 say they do not know where to go / start in their company (30% UK, 33% US).

There are immense opportunities for CEOs and senior leaders who work harder to enlist Gen Z employees as partners in the mission.

## Methodology

Opinium conducted an online survey with a representative sample of 2,000 British and 2,000 American adults who are employees of medium to large private companies (250+ employees). Data was weighted to be representative of employees by gender, age, region, industry and employment status (full time / part time). Fieldwork took place from Friday 6th January to Friday 20th January 2023.

This was followed by Opinium conducting a boost survey of Gen Z (18-25 year olds) employees in each market to create a sample of 500 Gen Z employees in both the UK & US. This sample was weighted to be representative of a wider population of employees by gender, age, region, sector and employment. Fieldwork for the boost survey took place from Friday 20th January to Monday 30th January 2023.

Data analysed and reported by Republic.

## Paul Polman

is a business leader and campaigner, and co-author of *Net Positive: how courageous companies thrive by giving more than they take*. As CEO of Unilever (2009-2019) he demonstrated that business can profit through purpose, delivering shareholder returns of 290% while the company consistently ranked

1st in the world for sustainability, and was voted a top place to work. Today Paul works to accelerate corporate action to tackle climate change and inequality.

Find out more  
[www.paulpolman.com](http://www.paulpolman.com)



