Student Loan Debt and AI Ignorance: The Silent Career Killers

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New research by EdAssist by Bright Horizons shows American workers want to develop new skills but need support from their employers on a path forward

NEWTON, Mass.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--Sep. 9, 2024-- American workers' struggles with career advancement and financial mobility have reached an all-time high. With AI's rapid advancements and no universal student loan forgiveness in sight, many feel they are up against insurmountable barriers that are preventing them from pursuing the American dream.

According to the fourth annual Education Index, commissioned by EdAssist by Bright Horizons (NYSE:BFAM) and conducted by The Harris Poll, workers want career mobility but lack direction from employers on how to get there, which may be preventing them from pursuing their career goals. While nearly three quarters (74%) of workers are interested in developing new skills or pursuing additional education, 58% don't know where to start – and more than half (52%) believe it's their employer's responsibility to guide them.

Student loan debt has taken such a toll on U.S. workers that the majority (68%) who currently carry that burden report their education hasn't proven to be worth the impact that student loan debt has had on their overall well-being and 53% of workers overall say that knowing they would incur additional student loan debt has prevented them from pursuing additional education**.** Additionally, as many face the reality of needing new skills to keep pace with the myriad technological advancements required for today's jobs, workers fear they don't have what they need to keep up with these advancements. More than 1 in 4 (26%) feel more pressure to learn new workplace skills due to AI, and 3 in 10 (30%) worry that AI will replace their job.

"To help lessen employees' burden, companies need to provide the right benefits that address education barriers head on. This can not only result in a more loyal workforce but boost a business's bottom line by helping attract and retain top talent," said Diane Bartoli, Senior Vice President of EdAssist by Bright Horizons. "Forward-thinking companies – like Abbott, GlobalFoundries and Papa Johns, to name a few – that make education investments that simultaneously enable employees to learn and advance will find themselves winning both the talent war and the reskilling revolution, while building a workforce that's ready for the future."

Student Loan Debt's Far-Reaching Impact – From Presidential Voting Decisions and Career Advancement to Financial and Mental Wellbeing

The student loan debt crisis is continuing to gain momentum and is having a far-reaching impact on workers of all ages. Among those who have student loan debt:

- 80% say it has been a huge burden for them
- 43% say it has negatively impacted their mental health
- 41% say it has negatively impacted their plans for the future
- 29% say it has negatively impacted their sleep

Many also say that student loan debt could play a role in their voting decisions for the upcoming presidential election:

- More than a third of all employees (36%) say student loan repayment will factor into their voting decision in the 2024 presidential election – with this sentiment jumping to 61% among those who personally have student loan debt
- 43% of Democrats and 30% of Republicans say student loan repayment will factor into their presidential voting decisions

Despite AI's Potential, Workers Still Aren't Using It – and Corporate Training is Severely Lacking

As AI becomes increasingly prevalent in today's workplace, many feel an ongoing pressure to keep pace with emerging technology. However, few employees report utilizing AI regularly:

- Only a third of employees (34%) have ever used AI in their day-to-day work, despite 77% of those who have used it saying it makes their job easier

This low rate of AI adoption may be partly due to a lack of training:

- Most employees (65%) say their employer has not provided any training on how to use AI in their day-to-day work, despite many (42%) being interested in such training from their employer
- In fact, nearly 1 in 3 (32%) report that their employer expects them to learn how to use AI on their own

To download the full fourth annual Bright Horizons Education Index report, click here.

About the EdAssist by Bright Horizons Education Index

The EdAssist by Bright Horizons® Education Index is the fourth in a series of reports that explore issues related to education. The research was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Bright Horizons between May 13-21, 2024 among 2,007 adults aged 18 years or older who are employed either full- or part-time. Data are weighted where necessary by age by gender, race/ethnicity, region, education, marital status, household size, employment, household income, and propensity to be online to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 3.2 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether they use probability sampling or not, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

About EdAssist by Bright Horizons

Bright Horizons EdAssist Solutions® is a leading provider of workforce education solutions, reaching more than seven million adult learners through partnerships with more than 200 of the world's largest employers to deliver high-quality, affordable education programs designed to recruit, retain, and grow talent. In collaboration with over 200 post-secondary institutions in the U.S., EdAssist designs strategic education benefits programs that help build a talent pipeline for in-demand roles, fill skill gaps, and help companies develop the workforce necessary to innovate, grow, and compete in the global economy.

About Bright Horizons Family Solutions Inc.

Bright Horizons® is a leading global provider of high-quality early education and child care, back-up care, and workforce education services. For more than 35 years, we have partnered with employers to support workforces by providing services that help working families and employees thrive personally and professionally. Bright Horizons operates more than 1,000 early education and child care centers in the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Australia and India, and serves more than 1,450 of the world's leading employers. Bright Horizons' early education and child care centers, back-up child and elder care, and workforce education programs help employees succeed at each life and career stage. For more information, go to www.brighthorizons.com.

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