

## The Perks are Evolving: How Employers are Reinventing Benefits to Keep People Happy (and Around)

By Marty Graig – May 20, 2025



Image via [Freepik](#)

The notion of “good benefits” used to be pretty straightforward: health insurance, a 401(k), and maybe some vacation time you didn’t feel guilty using. But if the past few years have taught business leaders anything, it’s this—people want more than just a paycheck and a dental plan. They want to feel cared for, seen, and supported in the totality of their lives, not just during the hours they’re clocked in. In an era where job-hopping is practically a sport and burnout is part of the cultural vocabulary, companies are finally getting creative with how they retain top talent. And what’s more, they’re realizing that better benefits aren’t just a nice-to-have—they’re a business strategy.

### Mental Health Gets a Seat at the Table

Let’s be honest: no one’s doing their best work when they’re barely holding it together mentally. That truth has forced employers to stop treating mental health as a fringe topic and [start weaving it into the fabric](#) of the benefits conversation. Beyond basic Employee

Assistance Programs (EAPs), companies are now funding therapy sessions directly, giving mental health days with no questions asked, and offering on-demand counseling platforms as part of their perks. There are even startups tailoring wellness packages to include meditation coaching, burnout workshops, and grief counseling, all on the company's dime.

### **Trading the Foosball Table for Life Design**

Once upon a time, office perks were about mimicking college: ping-pong tables, cereal bars, and kegs on Fridays. Now, they're more about designing a life people want to live. We're seeing employers pay for things like financial planning, fertility services, elder care assistance, and even home cleaning services. It's not just about adding bells and whistles—it's about [removing friction from your team's daily life](#) so they have the energy to show up fully. Some companies are even experimenting with "life concierge" services that handle errands or coordinate personal projects for employees. Yes, really.

### **Flexibility as a Form of Respect**

While remote work certainly isn't new anymore, the way it's being structured is. Employers are beginning to treat flexibility not as a perk, but as a foundational value. That means asynchronous schedules, shorter workweeks, and even [results-only work environments](#) (ROWEs) where people are judged strictly by what they produce, not when or how they do it. The shift says, "We trust you," in a way that resonates far deeper than just giving someone Friday afternoons off. And that trust? It's rocket fuel for retention.

### **Education as an Investment, Not a Perk**

More employers are realizing that footing the bill for job-related education isn't just generous—it's strategic. Whether it's a master's program in project management or certification in cloud computing, helping team members level up in areas that directly benefit the company creates a win-win scenario. Online degree programs make this even easier by allowing employees to juggle full-time roles while progressing in their studies at their own pace. If someone on your team is eyeing an IT degree to sharpen skills in information technology, cybersecurity, and systems architecture, [consider this](#) a smart way to develop talent from within.

### **Paid Sabbaticals Aren't Just for Professors**

You used to have to be an academic or an author to enjoy a sabbatical. But now, more employers—especially in the tech, nonprofit, and creative sectors—are baking paid time off into the structure of tenure. Think: every five years, take one month off, fully paid, no Slack notifications allowed. These intentional breaks [help workers reset](#), prevent long-term burnout, and often come back with new ideas and clearer thinking. The return on investment (ROI) might not be on a spreadsheet, but it's showing up in team morale and retention rates.

### **Learning and Growth That Doesn't Feel Like Homework**

Nobody wants a LinkedIn Learning subscription if it's just another checkbox on their performance review. What's clicking these days is real, hands-on development—mentorship programs, paid certifications, conference stipends, or even time during the week to work on personal or stretch projects. Some companies have gone further, offering “growth budgets” employees can use on everything from pottery classes to public speaking workshops. Because here's the thing: professional development [doesn't always happen in a classroom](#)—it happens in a space where people feel challenged, inspired, and supported.

## **Workplace Design That Supports Whole People**

Yes, the physical office still matters—especially now that some workers are returning part-time. But the best companies are rethinking those spaces entirely. They're offering wellness rooms that aren't just glorified nap pods, creating café-style collaboration spaces, and integrating nature, quiet zones, and adjustable lighting. But it's not just about interior design. It's about giving people agency over how they interact with their workspace. One fast-growing trend? Offering stipends for remote workers to design their ideal home office setup—complete with ergonomic furniture, noise-canceling headphones, or even soundproof booths.

## **A Strategic Partner in Building a Benefit Blueprint**

Here's where many companies are realizing they don't have to figure all this out solo. That's where groups like [The Jethro Project](#) come in. Instead of copying the tech giant down the street or relying on internal guesswork, companies are teaming up with consulting firms that specialize in human-first strategy. These groups help assess what employees need—through surveys, focus groups, and smart research—and then build benefits that match those needs without blowing the budget. The result? Benefits that feel bespoke, not boilerplate.

At the end of the day, companies aren't reinventing benefits just to be trendy or check a box. They're doing it because turnover is expensive, morale matters and people perform better when they feel genuinely supported. Perks are no longer about perks—they're about purpose. You don't keep great people by giving them a gift card on their work anniversary. You keep them by creating a system that values their humanity every single day. And while no benefit strategy is one-size-fits-all, the common thread is clear: if you take care of your people, your people will take care of the work.

*Elevate your organization's performance with insights from [The Jethro Project](#), where academia meets professional expertise in engineering, economics, management, and leadership.*