

Retention of apprentices

Dr. Maura Kelly, Portland State University
December 2022

The overall completion rates for apprentices who started a highway trades apprenticeship in 2014–2015 was 49%, with lower completion rates for women and people of color.

On the 2022 survey of Oregon apprentices, 59 apprentices who chose to leave an apprenticeship in 2020–2021 reported one or more reasons why they left. The most common reasons are shown in the table. Additional reasons for leaving that were less frequently mentioned include: Covid-19, relocating, travel, family issues, work hours, and military service. Among apprentices who reported leaving for another opportunity, many included factors that “pulled” them towards another job as well as factors that “pushed” them out of the trades. For several participants, having another opportunity outside the trades and problematic jobsite culture within the trades contributed to leaving.

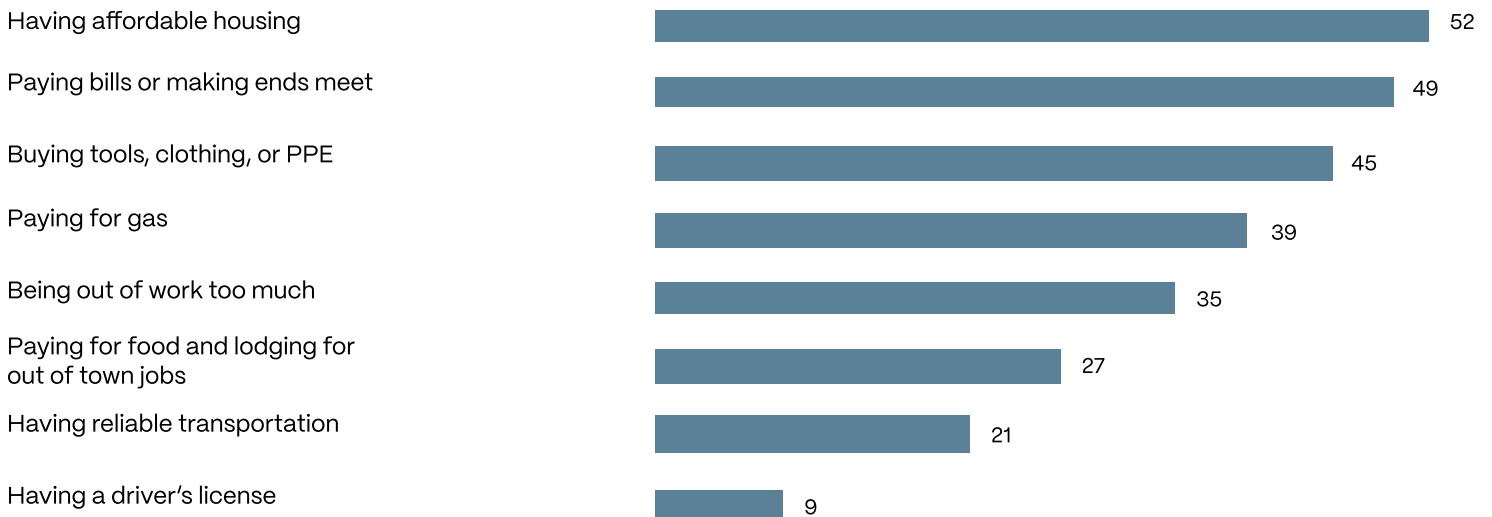
Reason for leaving apprenticeship (Frequency)	Selected quotes
Left for another opportunity (27)	<i>“Wanted to go into a different field of work.”</i> <i>“Opportunity to work at the railroad.”</i>
Needed more OJT hours and/or pay (25)	<i>“I kept getting laid off and every two or three months would have a lull in work.”</i> <i>“Inconsistency in pay.”</i>
Jobsite culture (24)	<i>“Felt disrespected.”</i> <i>“Constant belittling, other harassment.”</i>
Illness, injury, or concerns about safety not related to Covid-19 (22)	<i>“Back injury.”</i> <i>“Kept getting injured but feeling like I couldn’t report it.”</i>
Poor training on the job or in the classroom (19)	<i>“My journeymen did not want to train apprentices, so they made that pretty clear and treated me awful.”</i> <i>“Not enough class time.”</i>

**Apprentices’ reasons for leaving apprenticeship
(2022 Oregon Survey of Apprentices)**

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On the 2022 survey, 231 individuals who had either completed or terminated an Oregon apprenticeship in 2020–2021 were asked about problems they experienced during apprenticeship. While these issues impacted all groups of workers, women and people of color disproportionately reported these experiences.

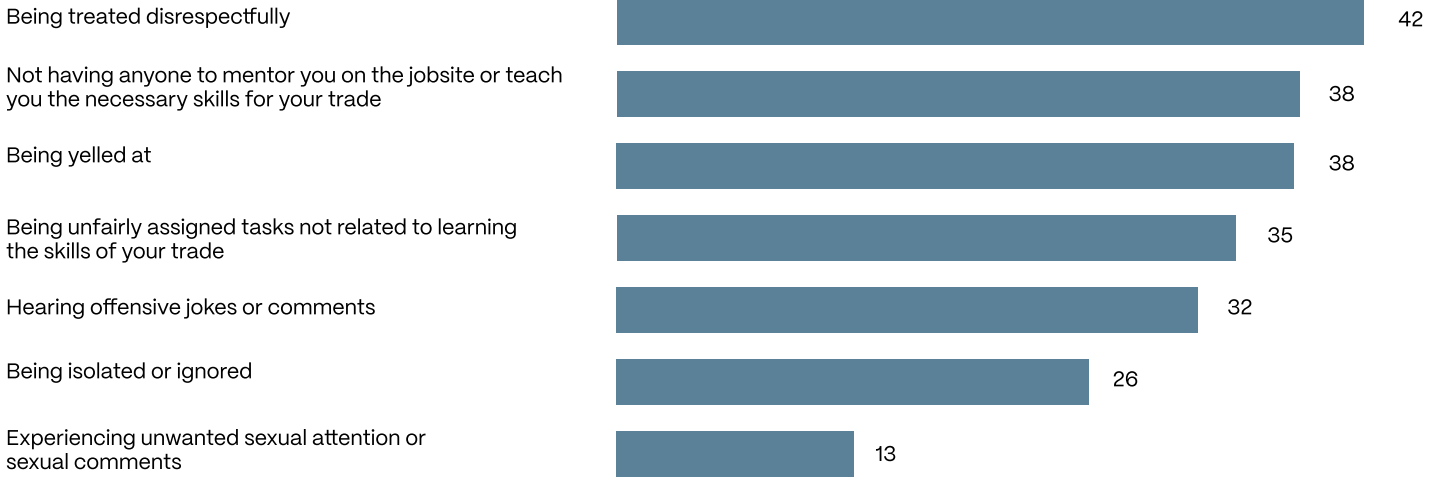


49% of Apprentices who completed the survey reported that they had difficulty paying bills or making ends meet.

Percent of apprentices reporting financial challenges
(2022 Oregon Survey of Apprentices)

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41% of white women and 50% of women of color reported experiencing unwanted sexual attention or sexual comments (i.e. sexual harassment)

"I was the only person of color and they always wanted me to clean up." (Black heterosexual woman)

"I had to dig a ditch with a shovel for six months because I had to prove I was able to tough it out." (White heterosexual woman)

"I don't think there's enough one-on-one to help apprentices learn the skills... the apprentice can't learn the crucial parts of the job." (White heterosexual man)

"Someone took photos of my butt while I was bent over and shared with co-workers/friends. That same person was my journeyman and later a lead on a job where he mentioned to a co-worker that he could get me beat up." (Multiracial heterosexual woman)

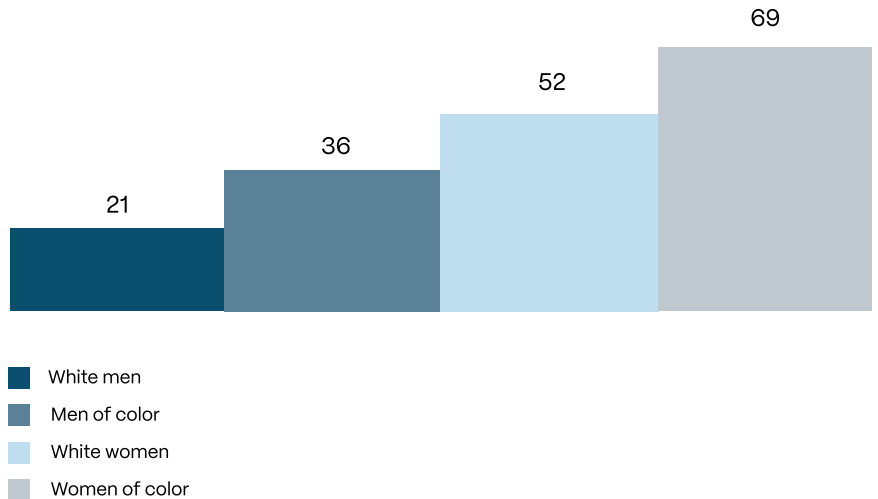
"I was let go because I wouldn't do sexual favors for a foreman." (white heterosexual woman)

"Stigma about being Mexican, racist Mexican jokes, and automatic isolation because I'm not the same 'color' as them." (Hispanic heterosexual man)

"My sexuality was questioned one too many times, and too many jokes were made about it." (White queer man)

"The tradesmen are quick to make fun of men who aren't masculine or who aren't already experienced in a trade." (White heterosexual man)

Percent of apprentices reporting jobsite challenges (2022 Oregon Survey of Apprentices)



Percent of apprentices reporting that hearing offensive jokes or comments was a problem, by race and gender (2022 Survey of Oregon Apprentices)

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Recommendations

- Revise current processes for assigning work to ensure equitable access to on-the-job hours for women and people of color.
- Promote respectful workplaces through employer policies and worker trainings.
- Create a system for reporting harassment and discrimination across jobsites.
- Ensure teaching and mentorship on the job through worker training, employer policies, and public agency oversight.
- Provide opportunities for apprentices to rotate out of jobs where they are not learning the skills of the trade.
- Provide additional flexibility in work schedules and provide opportunities for apprentices to rotate out of jobs that are not a good fit because of the schedule or location of the jobsite.

Full 2022 report available at <http://maura-kelly.com/>

