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GUIDE

Culture and Commitment Beyond the Retail Floor: Measuring & Increasing Employee Engagement Among Retail Workers

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Introduction

Retail is the third-largest sector in the United States by number of employees, behind only health care and education. Engaged employees directly impact the customer journey, which is critical in a sector where customer satisfaction drives business success. However, retailers often struggle with lower engagement scores and higher turnover rates than organizations in other industries. This report summarizes recent data to evaluate the current state of employee engagement in retail, offers some tips for measuring retail employee engagement, and concludes with suggestions for increasing employee engagement within retail organizations.

Measuring Engagement of Retail Workers

Traditional Metrics to Track

OneAdvanced suggests tracking the following metrics for retail workers:

- **Employee Net Promoter Score (eNPS):** These surveys determine employee satisfaction through a 0–10 rating of their likelihood to endorse the company as a great workplace. The eNPS data is key in understanding employee loyalty and engagement, with positive ratings being a strategic asset for attracting and retaining employees. Scores of 9 or 10 indicate highly satisfied employees who are likely to recommend the workplace.

- **Customer NPS and Customer Satisfaction (CSAT) Score:** These metrics reflect the quality of customer service, which is directly influenced by employee engagement.

- **Employee Turnover Rate:** This metric reflects the percentage of employees who left the organization during a specific period (e.g., the past year), with higher turnover often linked to lower employee engagement.

- **Employee Retention Rate:** Unlike Employee Turnover Rate, this measures the percentage of employees who chose to stay with the company over a given period, with higher retention rates suggesting higher engagement.

- **Absenteeism:** This metric tracks the frequency and duration of employee absence. While some absences are normal, a significantly high rate could suggest disengagement and dissatisfaction with the work environment. For example, Seramount's research finds that absenteeism is highly correlated with burnout.

- **Employee Satisfaction Score (ESAT) and Employee Satisfaction Index (ESI):** These metrics directly assess how satisfied employees are with their work environment, compensation, and job experience. High satisfaction often correlates with higher engagement.

- **Training Participation Rate:** This tracks the percentage of employees engaging in training and development programs. High participation indicates that employees are invested in their roles and interested in growing within the company.

- **Performance Metrics:** Performance metrics cover a wide range of measures used to assess individual, team, and company performance. Common metrics include sales numbers, productivity, error rates, revenue generation, project completion, and profits. Strong performance often reflects high engagement.

New Metrics to Track

Seramount is currently conducting research around new metrics of employee engagement and inclusion. Some "new metrics" that may be relevant for retail workers include:

- Average time for an employee to be promoted.

- Employee Resource Group (ERG) participation.

- Feedback from exit interviews conducted when employees leave the company.

- Feedback from stay interviews conducted while employees are still with the company.

- The percentage of formal and informal employee reports resolved in a satisfactory way (for the reporter). These reports include incidents of misconduct such as discrimination and can be used to evaluate reporting processes and conflict resolution practices.

The Current State of Employee Engagement in Retail

Research across a variety of sources raises warning signs about employee engagement in retail. This section summarizes separate studies of retail workers conducted by Seramount, Culture Amp, and Quinyx.

Seramount

Seramount's spring 2025 national survey of U.S. employees included a large number of retail workers. That study found:

- Retail workers report **similar burnout rates** to their counterparts in other industries: 24 percent of retail employees reported experiencing one or more symptoms of burnout, compared with 30 percent of workers in other industries. Additionally, 18 percent of retail workers and 12 percent of those in other industries reported experiencing more than four symptoms of burnout.

- Employees in retail were **less likely than those in other industries to indicate that they would recommend their company to a friend or colleague**. Only about 1 in 4 retail workers (24 percent) were promoters of their organizations, compared with 1 in 3 (34 percent) workers in other industries. Conversely, retail workers were more likely to be detractors. Retail had a Net Promoter Score (NPS) of -24, compared with 0 for all other industries combined.

- Retail workers are experiencing **lower levels of personal well-being** than workers in other industries: 35 percent of retail workers rated their personal well-being as above average, compared with 53 percent of workers across other industries.

Culture Amp

Culture Amp's January 2025 report on the retail industry, which is based on data collected throughout 2024, offers the most positive findings of the three studies. The study found:

- 84 percent of retail workers would recommend their company as a great place to work, compared to 80 percent among workers across all industries

- 71 percent of retail workers agreed that their company contributes to their learning and development

- 70 percent of retail employees are engaged, putting retail in the top 45 percent when compared to other industries

- 68 percent of retail employees agreed that the leaders of their company demonstrate that people are important to the company's success

- 60 percent of retail workers see themselves still working at their company in two years, compared to 65 percent among workers across all industries

- 60 percent of retail workers agreed that their company effectively directs resources funding people and effort toward company goals

- 59 percent of retail workers believe that there are good career opportunities for them at their company

- 20 percent of retail workers are thinking of or actually seeking jobs elsewhere, while 12 percent see themselves leaving within two years

- The retail industry scored highest in the area of contribution to a broader purpose: 92 percent of retail workers agreed that they understood how their work contributed to their company's overall mission. Conversely, the industry scored lowest in the category of action: 25 percent of retail workers disagreed with this statement: *I believe my total compensation is fair relative to similar roles at other companies*.

Quinyx

Quinyx's [2024 State of the Frontline Workforce: Retail Report](#) includes both general findings around frontline workers and results specific to the retail industry. It finds:

- 38 percent of frontline workers are dissatisfied or feel neutral about their job
- The top three reasons for retail worker dissatisfaction—consistent across age, education, and career goals—were:
  - *The pay is too low*
  - *The work environment is stressful*
  - *Poor leadership from my manager*
- The top reason workers considered quitting their jobs was because of low pay; 48 percent cited this reason.
- Retail workers want flexibility with scheduling, including:
  - 41 percent want advance knowledge of schedules
  - 33 percent want drop-in scheduling for varied start times
  - 28 percent want the ability to easily swap schedules within a 24-hour window
- 59 percent of retail workers considered quitting their job, up from 37 percent the previous year

Getting a Clearer Picture of Engagement for Retail Workers

Conventional employee engagement surveys are often structured under the assumption that the employee taking the survey is seated at a desk and in front of a computer during most of their workday or shift. To get an accurate picture of retail workers' engagement, consider the following strategies:

- **Don't expect hourly employees to complete engagement surveys "off the clock."** To ensure full participation from employees who spend most of their time in customer-facing roles, pay them for the time spent filling out an engagement survey.

- **Allow for mobile responses.** Mobile surveys are ideal for frontline retail teams who don't sit at desks.

- **Use pulse surveys.** With pulse check-ins, managers get a regular, low-effort temperature check on team morale. Pulse surveys should include three to five targeted questions. These short, recurring surveys help track engagement trends and let leaders respond to burnout, stress, or disconnection before it snowballs.

- **Leverage alternative measures of engagement.** Some retailers utilize store visits, performance reviews, and customer feedback to capture worker engagement. Exit interviews can also be an effective way to gain feedback and improve retention and engagement strategies.

Increasing Employee Engagement in Retail

Key strategies to improve employee engagement in the retail industry include:

- **Prioritizing open communication:** Clear communication ensures employees feel informed and valued. Tools such as employee apps and intranets connect retail employees to updates and foster engagement across locations.

- **Recognizing achievements:** Simple gestures such as "Employee of the Month" or a celebration board in the break room make employees feel appreciated and invested in their work. Celebrating work anniversaries and other major milestones as a company is an easy but meaningful way to acknowledge achievements and build connections.

- **Providing growth opportunities:** Professional development programs improve skills, boost job satisfaction, and show employees the company is invested in their future.

- **Supporting employee well-being:** Wellness initiatives, flexible schedules, and stress management resources create a healthier working environment. Offer wellness programs such as fitness challenges, meditation sessions, or ergonomic improvements. This keeps employees motivated and engaged. Create a welcoming space in the break room with resources for relaxation, celebration boards for milestones, and feedback walls. A supportive environment fosters stronger connections and boosts job satisfaction. Cultivate this space so that employees feel more connected to their workplace.

- **Encouraging team activities:** Activities such as team-building games and customer service role-play sessions foster collaboration and connection among frontline workers. Required trainings can incorporate gamification to make them interactive and fun. Retail employees benefit from engaging in activities that improve their skills while fostering collaboration. Teach new skills in fun ways that also create connections.

- **Acting on employee feedback:** Provide platforms such as suggestion boxes, pulse surveys, or digital feedback forms through employee apps. This allows employee voices to be heard and helps employees feel heard and valued. Acting on employee feedback strengthens trust and commitment to your employees by demonstrating your investment in their well-being.

- **Using technology for engagement:** Employee apps and email tools streamline communication and make it easier to engage retail teams, track progress, and drive results.

- **Engaging workers in Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** ERGs are a powerful yet often underutilized tool for connecting with and empowering frontline talent. Despite concerns about costs, scheduling conflicts, or high turnover, companies that include frontline workers in their ERGs see transformative results, from increased engagement and trust to stronger leadership pipelines. ERGs can even serve as a strategic advantage for retailers and bolster their business impact.

Case Studies

Golf Town

[Golf Town](#) works hard to improve employee engagement and the associate experience across their stores by working *with* their people. In fact, they recently collaborated with their store managers and associates to rebuild their core values: team, winning, adaptation, and authenticity.

Using their digital communication platform, Golf Town improved communication between upper management and frontline workers and increased engagement on in-store initiatives, such as events, promotions, and new offers. Within five days of launch, Golf Town achieved 78 percent adoption across their entire frontline workforce and have been able to achieve a 75 percent response rate.

"It's played a big role in helping us shift the culture and elevating the associate's connection to their team, company and our brand," says President Chad McKinnon.

Marks & Spencer (M&S)

Marks & Spencer not only recognizes the importance of employee engagement in business success but actively prioritizes its improvement. Over the years, M&S has introduced various initiatives, including health and wellness challenges, a dedicated well-being website, and numerous benefits aimed at enhancing employees' physical, mental, and financial well-being.

M&S also values giving employees a voice, as demonstrated by its "[Suggest to Steve](#)" program, an internal platform where colleagues can propose ideas. Through this initiative, M&S has implemented numerous employee-driven ideas to improve its services.

Examples include offering more diverse and inclusive toy dolls for children, digitizing parts of compliance to reduce paper use, and introducing a reuse scheme that enables customers to bring their own containers. Engagement with the program has grown consistently [year over year](#).

REI

This sporting goods co-op is consistently ranked in the top 10 companies for employee engagement. An REI Employee Engagement Index reports that 92 percent of employees go beyond what is required to help REI succeed and that only 18 percent of employees were seriously considering leaving REI at that time.

One of REI's biggest efforts to improve the employee experience is through their "company campfire." This initiative was launched to improve two-way communication between upper management and store clerks. REI also supports its employees by offering various efforts and benefits. Employees get an additional two days off per year to "go outside and get inspired," as well as the third day off when REI closes all of its stores on Black Friday for their employees.

Wegmans

The American supermarket chain Wegmans truly exemplifies how investing in employee development pays off. They support employee growth through cross-

training, mentorship, talent pipelines, and long-term career pathways. Kevin Stickles, Wegmans's VP of HR, stated that "our employees are our number one asset, period. The first question you ask is: *Is this the best thing for the employee?*"

They offer paid internships, externships, and trainee programs to fresh graduates and students, building a steady talent pool. Their scholarship program, established in 1984, has awarded over $145 million in tuition assistance, benefiting more than 46,500 employees.

Additionally, Wegmans invests over $55 million annually in training through a variety of formal and informal development programs, remaining a highly successful and profitable business. They go above and beyond to ensure that their employees have the resources and knowledge to be experts in their area of work. Deli workers are sent on trips to France, Italy, Germany, and Wisconsin to learn about cheese, while butchers are sent to Colorado and South America to learn about beef.

Wegmans consistently ranks on prestigious Best Workplaces lists, with 91 percent of employees rating it as a great place to work, compared to an industry average of 57 percent. Plus, 94 percent of their employees state that they're proud to tell others they work at Wegmans.

Zingerman's

The Michigan-based food business group is so passionate about employee experience that it launched a spinoff. "Zingerman's Community of Businesses" includes 10 independent businesses in the Ann Arbor area: bakeries, a Korean restaurant, a cheese shop, a candy store, and even a travel food tour service. Another of their businesses is ZingTrain, a training consultancy that drives the brand's employee training program while working with other brands looking to take their employee experience up a notch.

At Zingerman's, employee engagement isn't a nice-to-have; it's a must-have. "The more engaged employees are and the more they understand where you're trying to go as an organization, and the more bought-in they are to where you're going, the more they understand how they can have an impact," explains Maggie Bayless, founding partner of ZingTrain.

The "complex ecosystem" of employee experience at Zingerman's includes a written vision, decision transparency, a "training compact," and much more. "Most people want to do a good job. They want to make a contribution. Yes, there are people that just want to punch the clock and go home. But I don't think that's most people," says Bayless. "People spend a big chunk of their life at work. They want to be engaged and feel like they're building something, and that their brain is being used. I think that for a long time, people just didn't think that was possible at work, so they didn't ask for it. But I think people always would have liked it."

Additional Seramount Resources

- **Engaging Frontline Workers in ERGs:** This guide provides actionable strategies to harness ERGs as a gateway to frontline worker engagement and career advancement. You'll learn how to involve union members, build effective communication strategies, and utilize ERGs for recruitment, retention, and leadership development—among other innovative approaches.

- **ERGs: A Retailer's Strategic Advantage:** Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are a keystone to fostering an inclusive and supportive work environment and can often be used to bolster business impact within your organization. Where many organizations fall short is failure to provide the proper tools and resources needed to support ERGs at any stage and to engage frontline workers. Join Seramount expert Katie Mooney and senior leaders from Open to All and Capri Holdings as they showcase an overview of what is in their game-changing ERG Guidebook and feature insights and case studies from the retail space.

- **Member Webinar: Sephora's Racial Bias in Retail Study:** We will be joined by Sephora's Vice President of Diversity and Inclusion, George-Axelle Broussillon Matschinga, who will share findings of their study from 2019 to 2020 showcasing how pervasive, racially driven bias and unfair treatment are in the U.S. retail industry and its implications for both the shoppers and retailers. Then, we will feature a group of panelists from DBP member organizations who will share best practices as they work to build more welcoming and inclusive environments for their customers.

- **Three Ways Retail Organizations Can Advance Their DEI Strategy:** In today's climate, championing diversity is table stakes for organizations that want to succeed. Employers are still reeling from the Great Resignation and labor shortages, and employees are now holding those in charge accountable for the promises they've made about championing diverse talent.

- **Understanding and Transforming DEI Efforts to Reach Frontline Workers:** Using data from Seramount's 2024 national survey of more than 3,000 U.S. workers, this report uncovers significant differences between the workplace experiences of frontline workers and those of white-collar workers. Across a wide range of questions, frontline workers report feeling less included at work. The report also provides recommendations on what DEI leaders, stakeholders, and people leaders can do to improve the experiences of frontline workers.