

2021|2022

Nudge
An Axonify Company

The Deskless Report: Foodservice Edition





Welcome to the inaugural year of The Deskless Report.

The research in the following pages explores who restaurant and foodservice workers are, what drives them, and what they desperately need. But we're also looking at their leaders as well, including what keeps them up at night, how they're prioritizing the employee experience, and what they're investing in next year and beyond. That's where this report offers a unique viewpoint: We're exploring the disconnect between workers and leaders – the gaps between what workers want and what head office is providing.

In *The Deskless Report*, we'll answer a few simple questions about the state of the deskless workforce – the same questions we'll strive to answer for years to come. We hope you enjoy our findings and that they spark some new ideas and conversations within your foodservice organization.

What's in this report?

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What's the state of the foodservice workforce?

This is a question we ask ourselves every year, but this year is different. Coming out of the pandemic, foodservice and restaurant organizations have been forever changed. Foodservice operators are now stretched thin against rising food prices, supply chain issues, and heightened guest expectations – all of which are aggravated by ongoing staffing woes. And, of course, frontline workforces are finally in the spotlight as the essential, incredibly hardworking employees that they've always been. These workers can do amazing things with the right tools, knowledge, and support.

So, what's the state of the foodservice workforce? As you'll see in the following pages, we have some work to do. As we come out of this challenging period, it's time to take a hard look at who this workforce is, what they want, and how we can support them to help us rebuild – and thrive.

Lindsey Goodchild, Nudge CEO

Key Findings of The Deskless Report: Foodservice Edition

Leaders are struggling with turnover and communication

The biggest challenges foodservice leaders face when communicating with their workforce:

Knowledge retention

Sharing real-time info

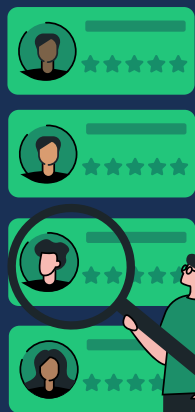
The #1 challenge facing foodservice leaders right now:



Leaders are prioritizing employee experience in 2022



of leaders plan to invest more **energy or budget** into their overall employee experience in the next year.



Workers are motivated by drivers other than compensation

51%

of workers said employee benefits/programs (like a wellness program) makes them feel engaged and motivated at work.



of workers would like to have a stronger community with employees outside their location.



There's a disconnect on the effectiveness of communications

54%

of workers said the communications they receive are somewhat to not-at-all useful.

vs.

94%

of leaders feel they're sending **meaningful, quality** communications.



Feedback is crucial to workers, but they don't feel heard

40%

of workers don't feel **heard** by their organization.

59%

of workers said that **feedback** is very or extremely important to them.



Who are foodservice workers?

—



The foodservice workforce: in need of unburdening

Who are foodservice and restaurant workers? According to the **National Restaurant Association**, there were 14.5 million foodservice employees in the United States at the end of 2021 – still down from pre-pandemic levels, but it's rising. However, understaffing is still a pressing concern, and it's impacting the industry's ability to rebuild. Understandably, a big question on every operator's mind is, what do foodservice workers want? What drives them to stay engaged and loyal?

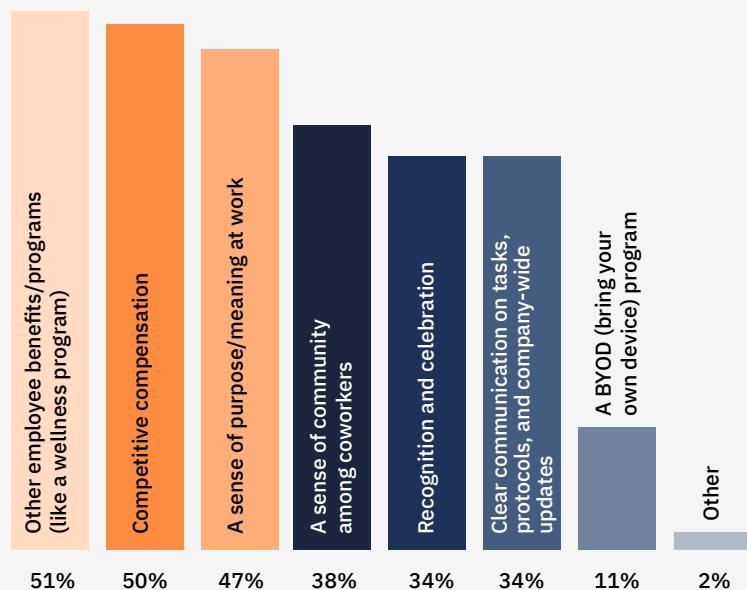
Today's foodservice workers are driven by a complex cocktail of career goals, compensation, and sense of purpose. In fact, **64% of foodservice worker respondents said they regularly think about career progression and goals**, and 47% said that a sense of purpose at work makes them feel engaged and motivated.

But this workforce is also experiencing burnout after years of understaffing paired with supply chain issues, elevated guest expectations, and ever-changing COVID restrictions. When we asked foodservice workers what makes them feel engaged and motivated at work, wellness programs and other benefits topped the list. This is a workforce in need of unburdening. Operators can't just push forward into the "new normal"; they first need to address the impact these past few years have had on their staff.

Do foodservice workers think about their career progression and goals?

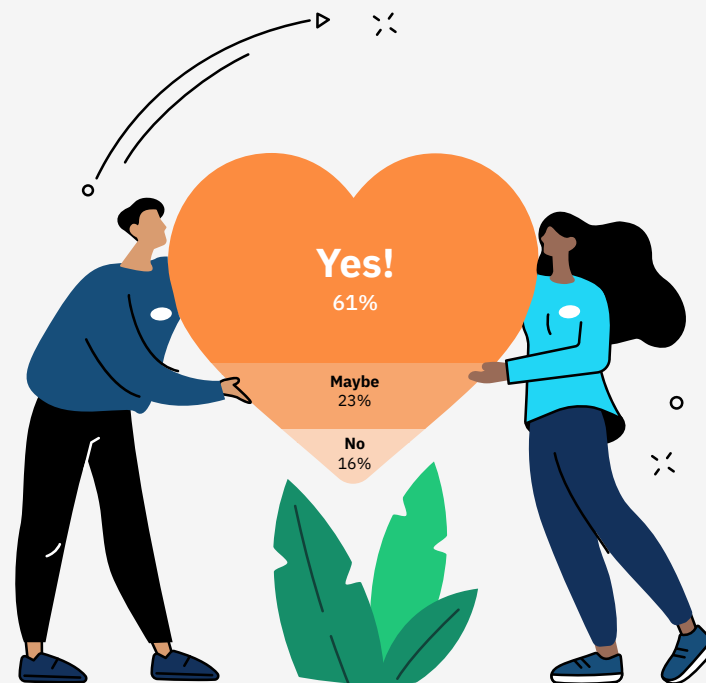


What makes foodservice workers feel engaged and motivated?*



* Respondents could select all answers that applied

Are workers willing to invest time in making their workplace better?



“As we look ahead, we have the opportunity to take the lessons learned from the last few years to reimagine a better world of work for the future, and for our people.”

Jordan Ekers | COO, Nudge

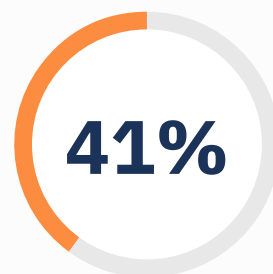
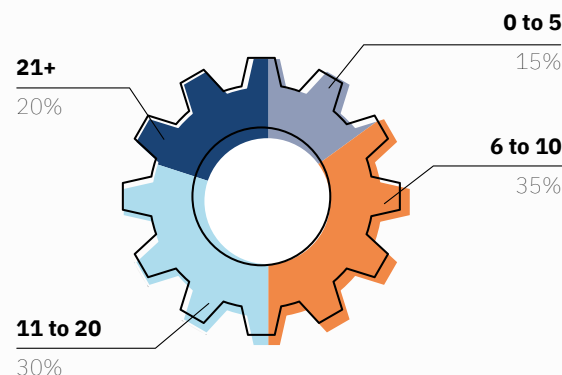
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The quest for employee community

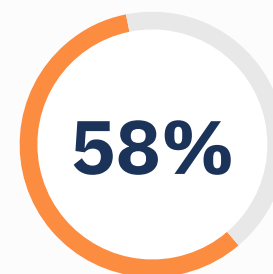
While their desire for wellness initiatives and other benefits provides a lot of insight into how this workforce can be engaged and retained as organizations rebuild post-pandemic, it's their quest for a sense of community that's perhaps even more telling. Of the foodservice workers polled, **38% said having a strong community at work makes them feel engaged and motivated.** This is a challenge with foodservice workers, where individual locations only employ a handful of people, but the company as a whole can number in the hundreds of thousands.

There's a gap there. While 78% of workers said they feel connected to the coworkers at their own location, 58% said they would like a stronger community with the employees outside of their location. And among the top ways workers said they'd feel more connected to other coworkers is – You guessed it! – communication.

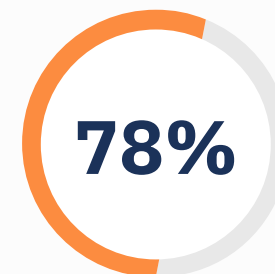
How many coworkers do foodservice workers have?



of workers don't feel connected to coworkers outside their location.



of workers would like to have a stronger community with employees outside their location.



of workers said they feel connected to the coworkers at their location.

Top 3 ways foodservice workers said they would feel more connected to coworkers:



More time for team building/bonding



Communication



More team meetings

**What keeps foodservice
leaders up at night?**

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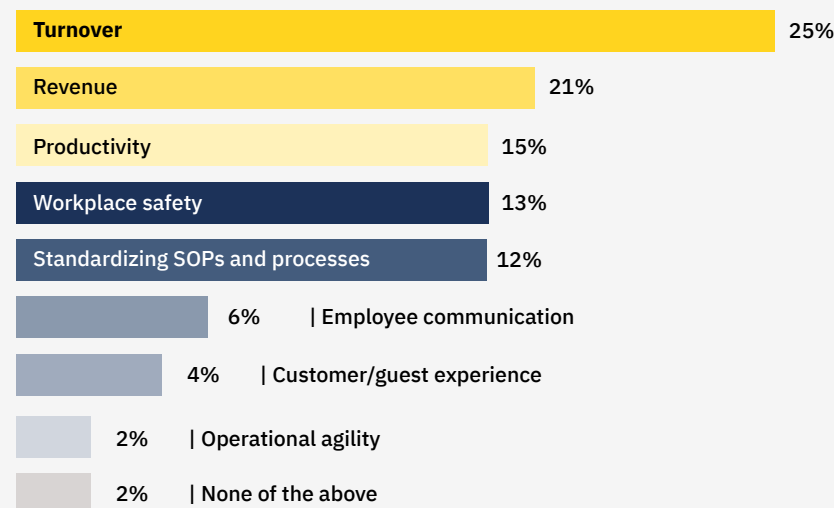


What's challenging foodservice leaders?

Like so many industries right now, turnover is decimating foodservice organizations (more on that on the following page), with 25% of leaders selecting it as the number one challenge facing the foodservice industry. But revenue is also a pressing concern, with 21% of leaders having chose it as their top challenge. It's no surprise, considering both **food and labor costs are skyrocketing**, while supply delays and shortages are leading to scaled-back menus and dining experiences.

Operators also indicated that communication remains a major challenge. In fact, foodservice leaders indicated that it's the number one barrier between head office and workers. More specifically, the biggest communication challenges facing leaders are knowledge retention and finding ways to share real-time info – two critical hurdles to overcome for any frontline organization.

What are the biggest challenges facing foodservice leaders right now?



According to foodservice leaders, the #1 barrier between head office and workers is: **Communication**.

14.3% The Producer Price Index for all food increased YoY from January 2021 to January 2022

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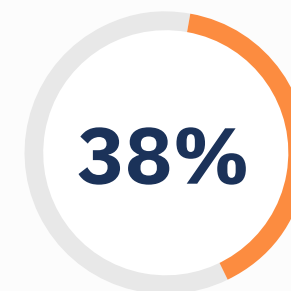
Turnover

The worst labor crisis in 30 years hit the foodservice industry after the lockdowns were lifted. Even now, as the world begins to re-explore what “normal” looks like, understaffing is still a major concern. According to the National Restaurant Association’s **2022 State of the Restaurant Industry Report**, 70% of operators across all major segments said they currently don’t have enough staff to support customer demand.

Of the foodservice workers polled, 38% said they currently want to quit their jobs. When asked what would make them leave their current jobs, many workers cited poor management or finding a job with better pay. But understaffing leading to burnout was another common response, which suggests that foodservice organizations are in a dangerous cycle of overworking what staff they do have, leading to more turnover and even more staffing issues.

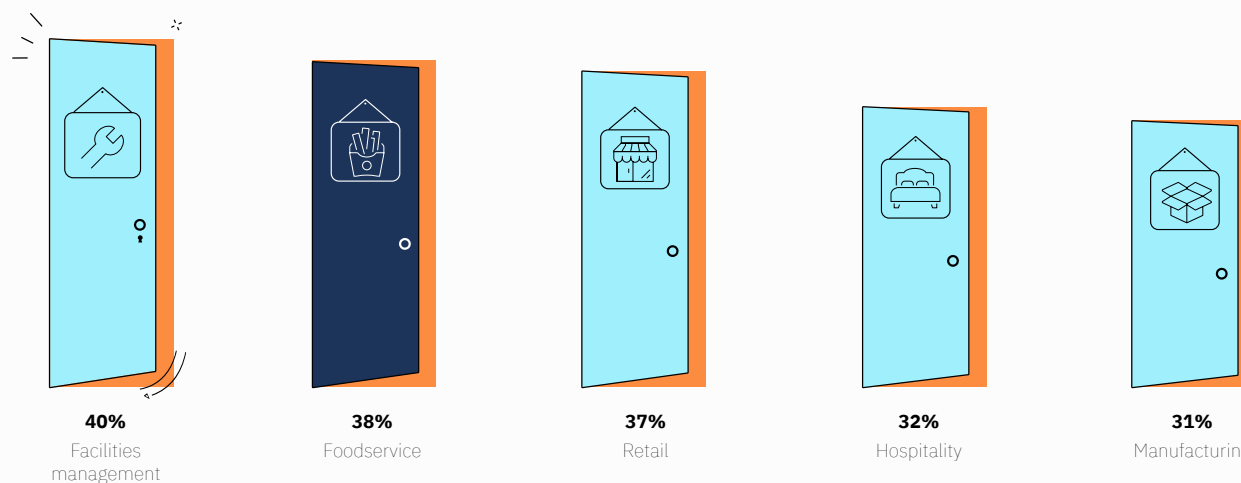


Foodservice leaders rated turnover as the #1 challenge facing deskless industries right now.



of foodservice workers currently want to quit their jobs.

Workers’ desire to quit, by industry:



Foodservice workers’ top 3 reasons for wanting to quit their job:



“Nothing is more important than hiring the right people and getting the right people in the door.”

Mike Fiato | SVP Guest Experience, Euresit

**What's the state of foodservice
worker communication?**

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Communication: vitally important, critically neglected

One of the most interesting outcomes of these surveys with foodservice leaders and workers was the level of disconnect. While 94% of operators said they're sending meaningful communications to their workers, **54% of workers said the communications they receive aren't useful.** And while 48% of leaders said they share information daily, only 17% of workers agreed.

There's a major disconnect regarding how communications are shared, when communications are shared, and whether those communications are valuable. That's a problem.

Effective employee communication has the power to drive a wide range of business outcomes far beyond the standard HR KPIs. Think revenue, turnover, guest experience, food safety, operational consistency... the list goes on. Unfortunately, far too few operators are actually leveraging their communication strategies to their full potential – and risk losing their employees as a result.



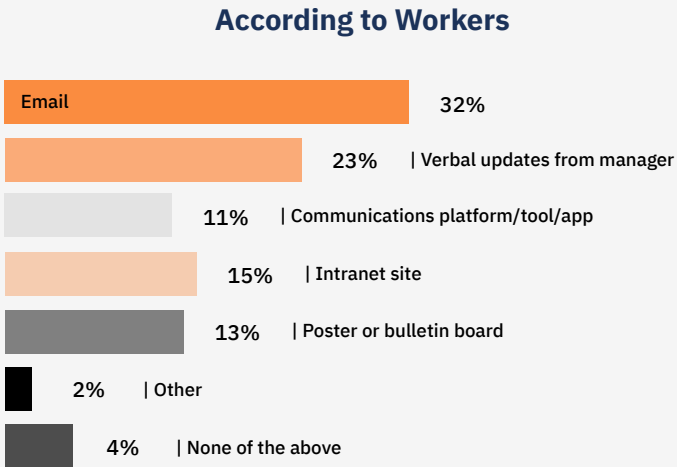
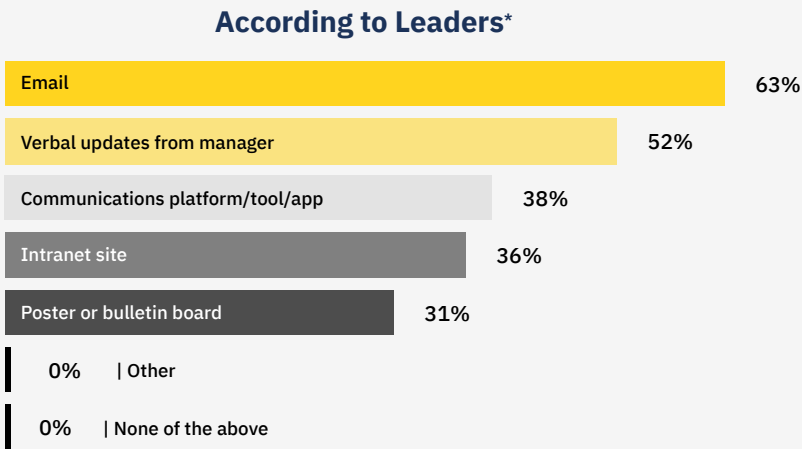
How information is shared

The communication channels that foodservice organizations use is crucial to their strategy. One of the biggest mistakes that organizations make is leveraging the same channels used for deskbound workers, like email or an intranet site. Unfortunately, **both foodservice workers and leaders indicated that email is still the top communication channel being used.** While these types of channels are still suitable for employees that have consistent access to a computer all day, they present a number of challenges to restaurant staff. They aren’t as accessible during work hours, and they don’t allow for the *two-way* communication that is so vital to foodservice workers.

Both leaders and workers listed “verbal updates from manager” as the second-most-used communication channel. Here, too, we see a problem. Relying on managers to disseminate information to their staff can result in bottlenecks, inconsistencies, and retention issues.

Looking at these responses, it’s no wonder that the biggest challenges foodservice leaders said their organization faces when it comes to communicating with their frontline are knowledge retention, and sharing real-time information.

What communication channels are foodservice organizations using?



*Respondents could select all answers that applied

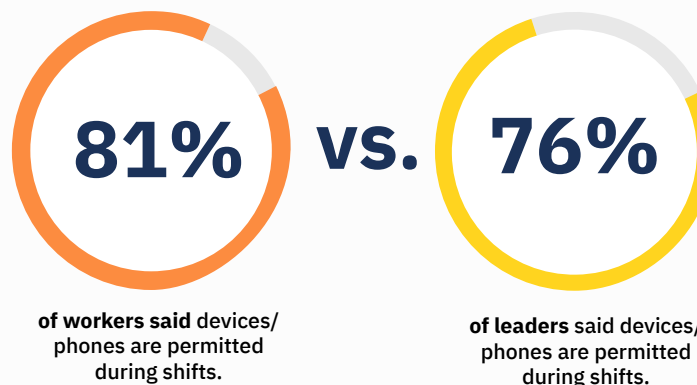
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BYOD policies

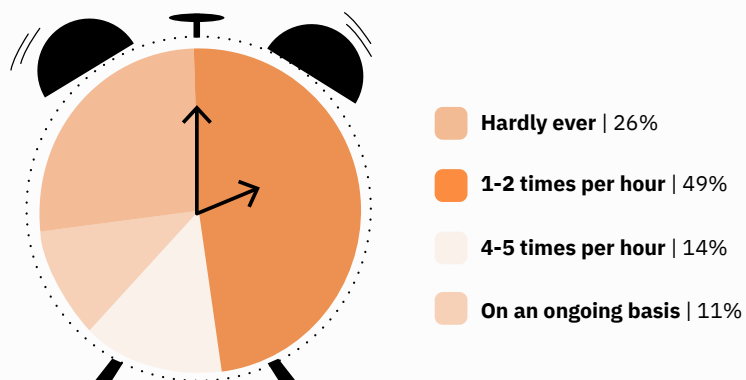
BYOD, or bring your own device, is a company policy that allows workers to bring their own smartphones or other devices to use at work. These policies are growing in popularity, but sometimes meet resistance from head office due to concerns with security and productivity.

When it comes to these policies, we see less of a disconnect between foodservice workers and leaders than in other industries. While 81% of workers polled said phones are permitted during shifts, 76% of leaders agreed.

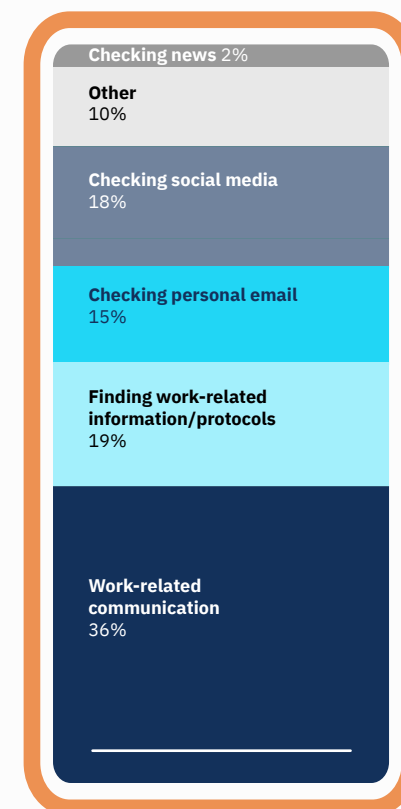
Whether or not it's permitted, **90% of foodservice workers have their phone with them at work.** Nearly 49% of workers said they check their phone 1-2 times per hour, and 14% said they check their phones 4-5 times an hour. However, when asked why they're checking their phones at work, the most common answer was "for work." Over 55% of workers said they're using their phones during shifts for work-related communication, or finding work-related information.



How often do workers check their phone at work?



What do foodservice workers use their phone for at work?



What information is shared

One of the most telling statistics in this entire report is on this page. When asked, “What type of communication do you dislike?” 27% of workers responded, “None of the above.”

In other words, you can’t overshare with your foodservice workforce. They’re starving for information.

While 49% of workers said they’re receiving company updates, 37% said they want more. Also, 31% of workers said they’re receiving updates on products and services, but 36% said they want more. The same is true of company vision and mandate – while 81% of foodservice workers said they have a clear sense of their company’s vision, 64% of respondents still said they want to know *more*.

Types of communication foodservice workers are receiving*

Safety/protocol updates 50%

Company updates 49%

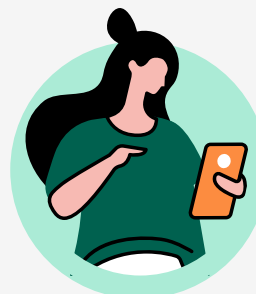
Product or service updates 31%

Promotion updates 31%

HR news 24%

Initiative/contest updates 24%

None of the above 15%



64%

of foodservice workers want to know more about their company’s core vision/mandate.

Types of communication foodservice workers want more of*

Safety/protocol updates 34%

Company updates 37%

Product or service updates 36%

Promotion updates 35%

HR news 26%

Initiative/contest updates 26%

None of the above 20%

27%

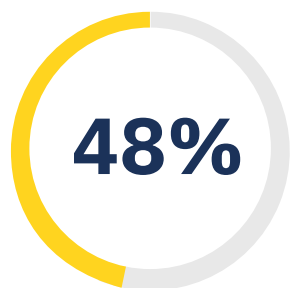
of foodservice workers chose “none of the above” when asked what types of communication they dislike.

*Respondents could select all answers that applied

When information is shared

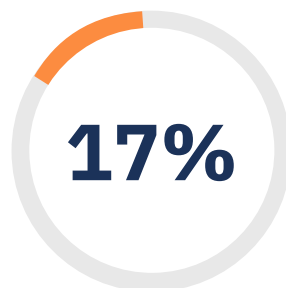
When asking foodservice workers and leaders about the frequency of the communications being shared, we again see a strong disconnect. While 48% of leaders said that communications are shared throughout their organization every day, only 17% of workers agreed. Meanwhile, **13% of workers said that they receive communications less than once a month.**

Also interesting is when this information gets consumed by workers. Whether or not foodservice organizations have a BYOD (bring your own device) policy in place, 49% of workers are reading employee communications during their shift. And it's no surprise – when the information is menu updates, promotion details, and guest insights, foodservice workers need to access (and share!) that information in real time, not hours later.



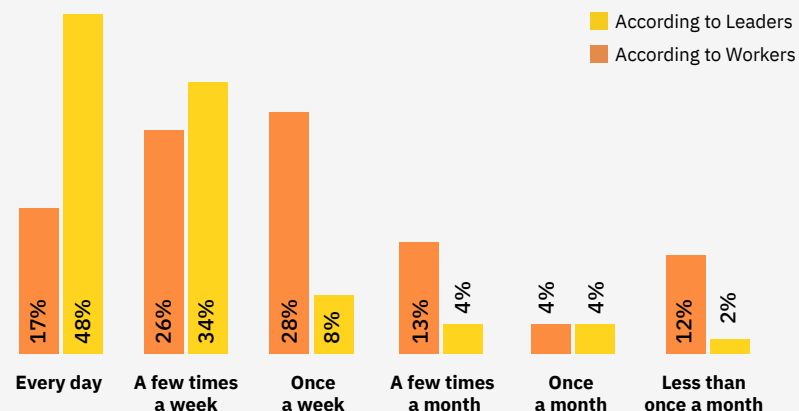
of foodservice leaders said information is shared daily.

vs.

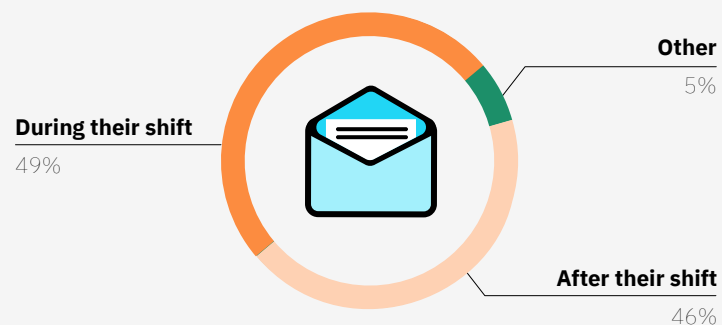


of foodservice workers said information is shared daily.

How often are communications shared?



When do foodservice workers read employee communications?





How organizations use Nudge

When it comes to the frequency of employee communications being shared and consumed, there are some fascinating insights we can learn from our own usage data. Our digital communication platform shares bite-sized information with deskless and frontline workers where they'll actually read it: their phones!

While some organizations are hesitant to implement a BYOD policy, what the data shows is that workers are getting the information they need quickly and efficiently. In fact, **the average Nudge user only spends 10 minutes in the app each week.**

Nudge data also shows the types of communications that organizations are sending out each month – and announcements lead the pack, by far. Again, that's where the bite-sized information comes in. Organizations share announcements to send short-and-sweet information to their teams in real time, which means workers are getting what they need faster and easier – and can get back to doing their jobs.

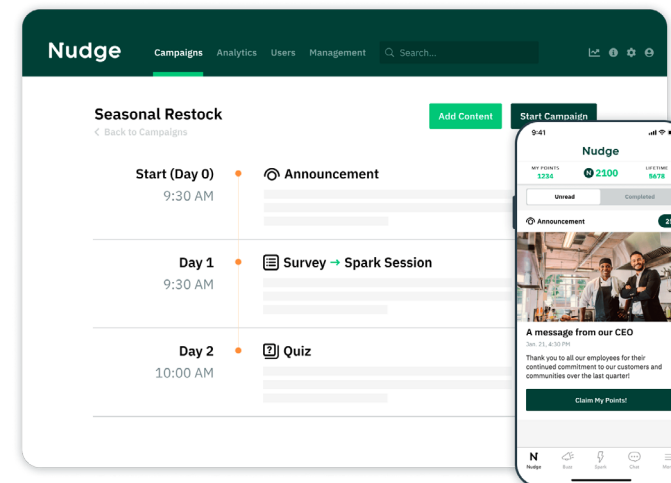
Average time spent in Nudge, per worker

2.8 min

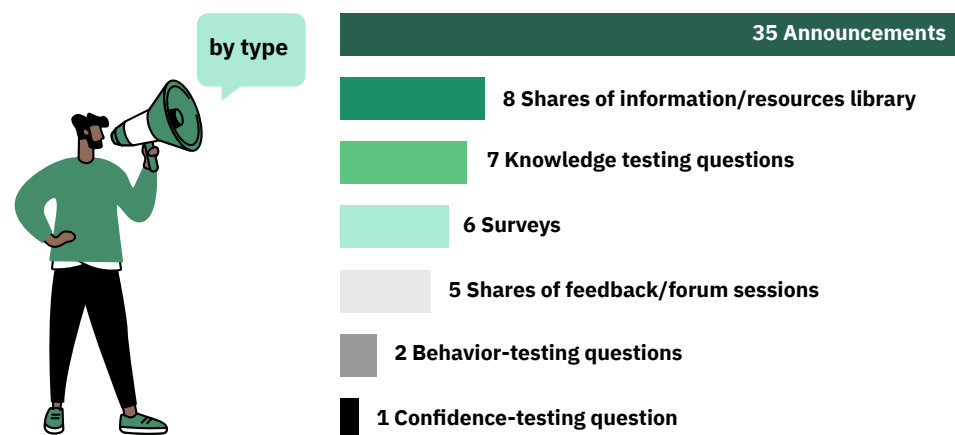
PER DAY

10.1 min

PER WEEK



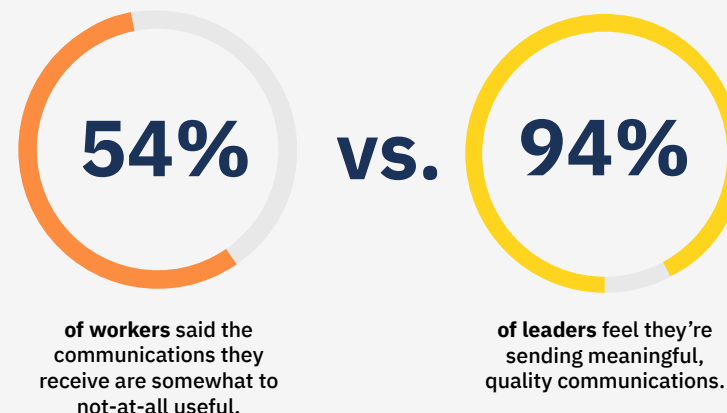
How many communications does an average organization send through Nudge each month?



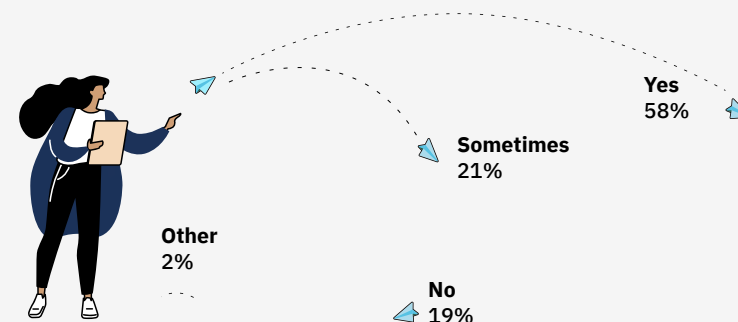
How effective are employee communications?

While 94% of operators feel they're sending out meaningful, quality communications, workers disagree. In fact, **54% of workers said the communications they receive are somewhat to not-at-all useful**, which might explain why 40% of workers said they only read the communications sent to them sometimes – or not at all.

As you can see from some of the foodservice worker insights below, having the right channels and frequency in place is a big part of achieving that effectiveness. But another part of the process is monitoring it, and that's where we see leaders falling short. When foodservice leaders were asked about the methods they use to monitor the effectiveness of their communication programs, the most common answer was “None” or “Not sure.” Without ways to continually monitor and improve your programs, the effectiveness of your employee communications will be continually at risk.



Are foodservice workers reading the information sent to them?



“We miss so much because we have info coming from ten areas.”

Foodservice worker

“[I want] technology or apps specifically designed for communication.”

Foodservice worker

“I want it told to me ASAP, and I’m okay with messages.”

Foodservice worker

What's the state of foodservice worker **feedback**?

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Tapping into the voice of the foodservice workforce

Your workforce can tell you so much.

They can tell you what guests are thinking, doing, and ordering. They can tell you the best way to reduce food waste, the fastest way to execute tasks, and the most effective way to mobilize on menu promotion.

They're a wealth of incredibly vital information... if you ask them.

Having fast and easy real-time feedback channels for your workforce is make-or-break for organizations looking to stay agile and drive revenue in today's restaurant industry. It's also a crucial part of engaging and empowering your workforce, which can do wonders for retention and loyalty. Unfortunately, while 87% of foodservice leaders we polled said their organization is fostering a strong feedback culture, **40% of workers don't feel heard – and only 25% of workers said their organization asks them for feedback often.**

In other words, there's an untapped opportunity.



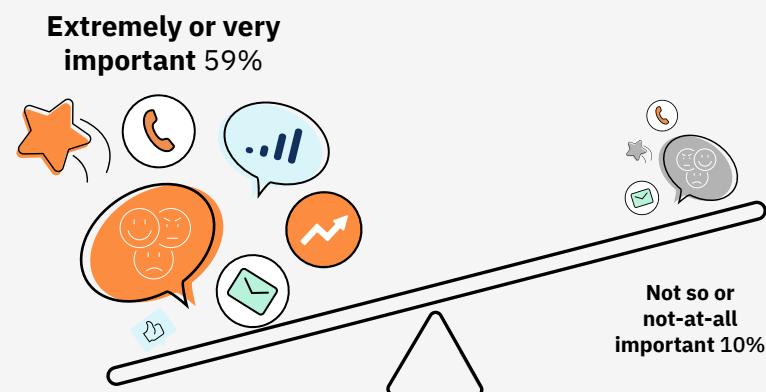
Why is feedback so important?

For many industry-leading foodservice organizations, feedback is their secret weapon.

Traditionally, employee feedback might have been seen as HR territory. But there are so many business benefits that come from fostering a two-way feedback culture. It's a great way for foodservice operators to collect guest intelligence, identify protocols or processes that could be more efficient, and find best practices that can drive revenue, improve the guest experience, and more. In fact, **66% of foodservice workers polled said they have opinions on how to make their organization better or more profitable.**

But also, foodservice workers want to feel heard. Of the workers polled, 59% said that feedback is very or extremely important to them. Investing in feedback empowers staff to feel more connected to their business as a whole and makes them feel invested in helping to drive revenue and other business outcomes. Unfortunately, 40% of workers don't feel heard by their organization. We'll delve into the channels, frequency, and types of feedback workers want in the coming pages, but one thing is clear: Workers want a voice.

How important is feedback to foodservice workers?

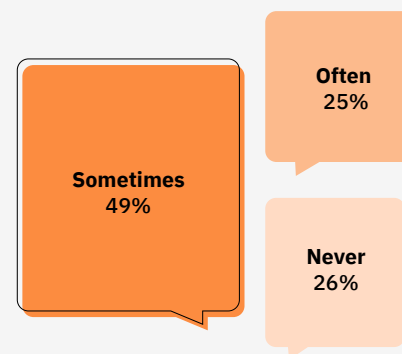


How (and when) feedback is collected

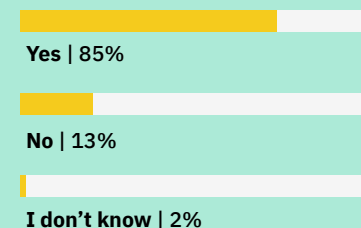
When it comes to employee feedback programs, the disconnect might be less about whether a program is in place, and more about how effective it is. While 85% of leaders said that their organization has channels in place for collecting feedback, **only 25% of workers said they're asked for feedback often**. A common challenge in fast-paced foodservice organizations is making sure that the feedback channels you have in place are easy to find, simple to use, and top-of-mind. In other words, even if organizations have channels in place, they're likely not ones that are useful and functional to workers.

Case in point: For both workers and leaders, the top two feedback channels they said their organization uses are surveys and conversations with a manager. This is a problem. Neither of these channels allow frontlines to send feedback directly to head office in real time. If a worker learns that guests are finding your loyalty program confusing, you'd want them to share that intel with you as quickly as possible, not wait until they can get facetime with their manager (cue the broken telephone), or worse, wait until they get sent a survey to fill out weeks or even months later.

How often companies are asking for feedback, according to workers



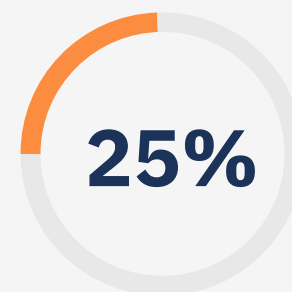
Do leaders feel their organizations have channels in place for collecting feedback?



Top 3 feedback channels for:

Foodservice workers

1. Conversations with a manager
2. Surveys
3. Communication platform/app

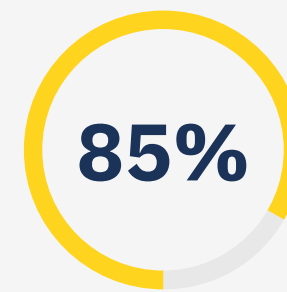


of workers said their company asks for feedback often.

vs.

Foodservice leaders

1. Surveys
2. Conversations with a manager
3. Communication platform/app

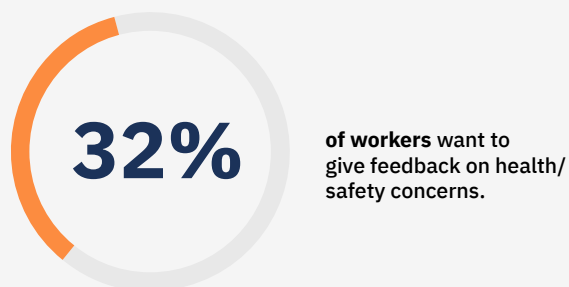


of leaders said their company has channels in place for collecting feedback.

Types of feedback collected

When it comes to feedback, the “what” is just as important as the “how”: the specific kinds of feedback foodservice workers are being tapped for. Workers were polled on what types of feedback they’re asked for, and what types they’d like to provide. The responses were very similar, which again suggests that while some feedback programs are in place, workers want *more*. They want to give more guest insights, more feedback about efficiency and protocols, more health and safety concerns.

The workers’ responses concerning efficiency/protocol feedback was interesting. **While 32% of foodservice workers said that they are being asked for this type of feedback, 50% said they would like to provide it.** Identifying these types of improvements are valuable to organizations looking to fine-tune their processes, especially when they’re understaffed. And the fact that workers want to share these insights speaks volumes about their commitment to helping improve their organization.



*Respondents could select all answers that applied

What's happening in 2022?

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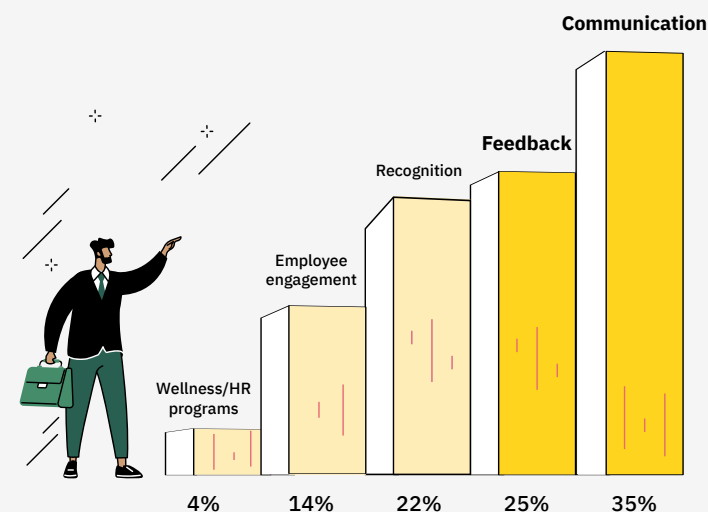


Investing in the employee experience

This report began by saying that we have some work to do. And here, we see that leaders seem to agree: 76% of foodservice leaders plan to invest more energy or budget into employee experience in 2022, and **35% of leaders plan to invest more in employee communications.**

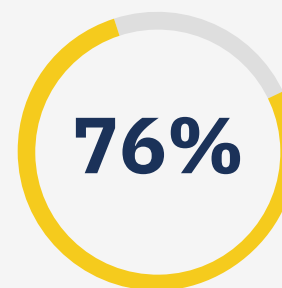
These are exciting numbers, especially considering 12% of leaders said they don't have any kind of employee communications program in place, and 18% said they currently have no budget allotted for employee communications. Are these numbers on the lower side? Yes. Should they be much, much lower? Also, yes. Throughout this report, we've seen workers being very clear on what they want when it comes to communication, feedback, and the overall employee experience: They want *more*.

What areas of the employee experience are foodservice leaders planning to invest more in?

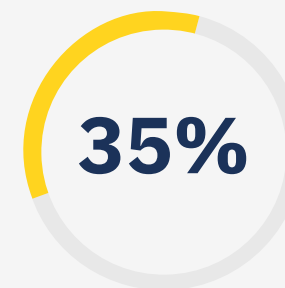


“We’re grateful to have had the foresight to invest in technology that would connect our brand and franchises with frontline staff, and are finding it more useful than ever now that we’re adapting so rapidly to modifications of COVID-19 training.”

**Steve Rothenstein | Senior Director of Franchising,
Dippin’ Dots & Doc Popcorn**



76%
of foodservice leaders plan to invest more energy or budget into their overall employee experience in the next year.



35%
of foodservice leaders plan to invest more money into employee communication.

Final thoughts

As I flip through the pages of this report, a few things jump out at me. First, the needs of foodservice workers have evolved. They have career goals, a hunger for community, and opinions about how to make organizations better. To get the most out of workers, we need to treat them like partners – like vital assets they are.

It's time for foodservice organizations to finally shake off the deskbound legacies that have stuck around for far too long. Time and time again, we see deskbound technology causing problems in frontline organizations; it's too slow, too computer-focused, and too ill-suited to the needs of the deskless worker. For foodservice organizations to truly thrive, they need to embrace the two-way, real-time, information-sharing practices that their staff needs.

I can't wait to see what the next year brings.

Jordan Ekers, Nudge COO



Participate in The Deskless Report 2022

The Deskless Report is an annual look at the state of the deskless workforce, the challenges facing deskless leaders, and the technology that's driving change. Want to take part in next year's survey for The Deskless Report 2022? Participants enjoy a chance to have their voices heard – plus, early access to the results of our research! [Click here](#) to add your name to the list.

About Nudge

Nudge (an Axonify Company) is a frontline enablement solution that empowers workers with the knowledge, tools and resources they need to execute consistently and confidently every day. Nudge's mobile-first platform combines two-way communications and guided task execution to help deskless organizations enable their frontline across every location in real-time. Employees can complete tasks, provide feedback, take part in discussions, and test their knowledge while earning recognition and points. Since 2012, over 65 million Nudges have been delivered, driving profitability, employee retention, and providing teams with the insights to create memorable customer experiences. Based in Toronto, Canada, Nudge has the highest user ratings in its category, and is used by leading brands across North America, including Compass Group, Staples, Mastermind Toys, and Margaritaville. Learn more at www.nudge.co.



THE DESKLESS REPORT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

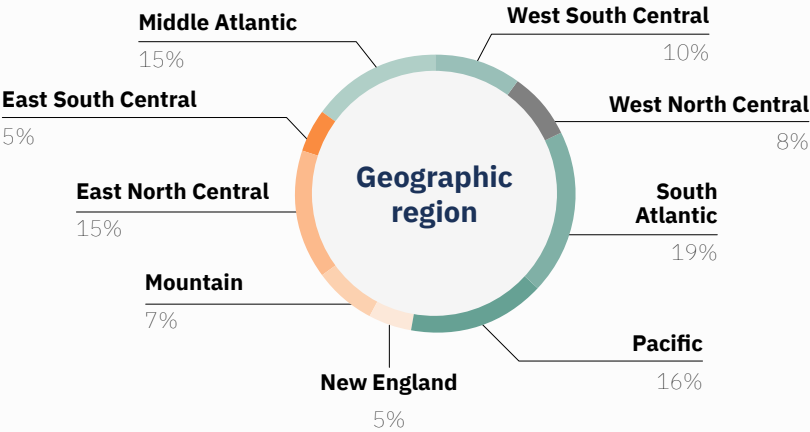
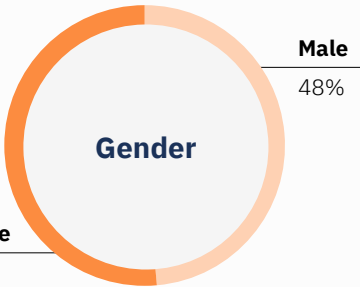
Deskless workers survey



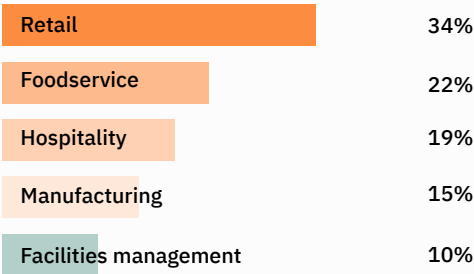
865

U.S. deskless workers were surveyed in June 2021

Age



Industry



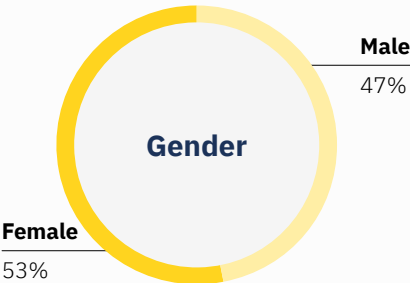
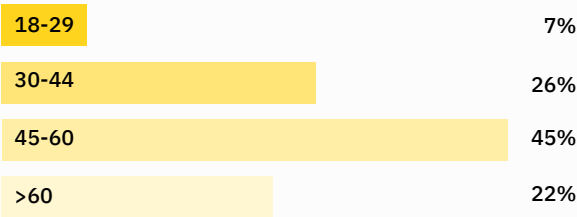
THE DESKLESS REPORT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

Deskless leaders survey

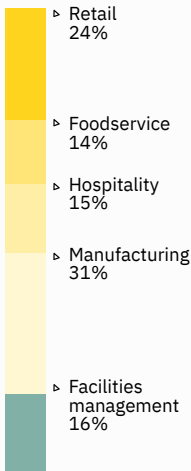


300
U.S. deskless leaders were surveyed
in June 2021

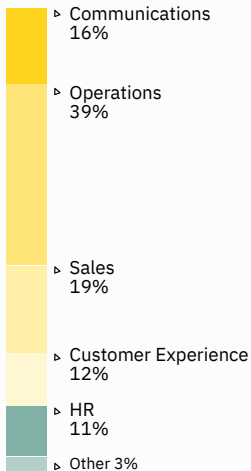
Age



Industry



Functional Area



Seniority

