

2021|2022

Nudge
An Axonify Company

The Deskless Report: Retail Edition





Welcome to the inaugural year of The Deskless Report.

The research in the following pages explores who retail workers are, what drives them, and what they desperately need. But we're also looking at retail 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 at your retail organization.

What's in this report?

What's the state of the retail workforce?.....	Page 04
Key findings.....	Page 05
Who are retail workers?.....	Page 06
What's keeping retail leaders up at night?.....	Page 10
What's the state of retail worker communication?.....	Page 13
What's the state of retail worker feedback?.....	Page 22
What's happening in 2022?.....	Page 28
Final thoughts.....	Page 30
Appendix: Survey methodology.....	Page 32



What's the state of the retail workforce?

It's a question we ask ourselves every year, but this year is different. Coming out of the pandemic, retail organizations have been forever changed. There's a need for operational agility like never before. The expectations of consumers have been heightened to a level we've never seen. There's a labor shortage impacting virtually every organization. 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 incredible things with the right tools, knowledge, and support.

So, what's the state of the retail 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: Retail Edition

Retailers are struggling with turnover and communication

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

Knowledge retention

Sharing real-time info

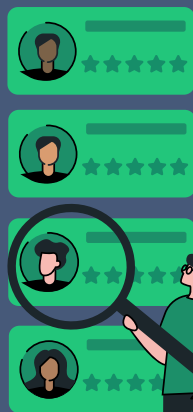
The #1 challenge facing retail leaders right now:



Retailers are prioritizing employee experience in 2022



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



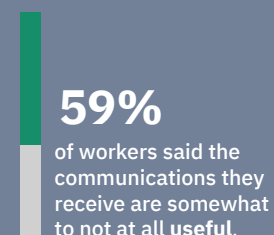
Retail workers are motivated by a sense of purpose and community



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



There's disconnect on the effectiveness of communications



vs.



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



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



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



**Who are
retail workers?**

—



The retail workforce: looking for purpose and community

Who are retail workers? According to the [National Retail Federation](#), the retail industry directly employs over 30 million workers in the United States and supports over 50 million American jobs, representing almost \$4 trillion of the country's annual GDP.

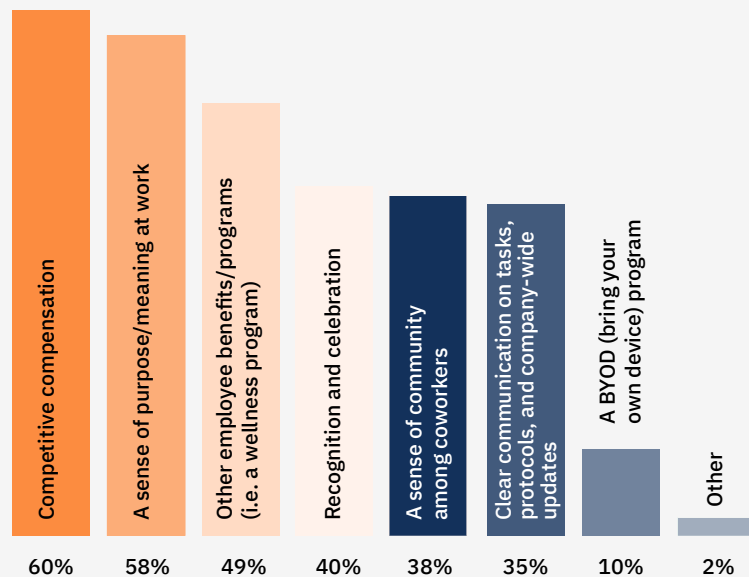
Unfortunately, despite retail being the largest private sector employer in the economy, there's traditionally been very little attention given to retail workers when it comes to enabling their performance through technology and employee experience.

Why? Unfortunately, retailers haven't kept pace with the evolving needs of their workers. Not unlike their deskbound compatriots, retail workers are driven by a complex cocktail of career goals, compensation, sense of purpose, and strong community. In fact, 68% of retail worker respondents said they regularly think about career progression and goals, and 58% said that a sense of purpose at work makes them feel engaged and motivated. Learning more about these driving forces is the first step in engaging these workers and empowering them to thrive.

Do retail workers think about their career progression and goals?



What makes retail workers feel engaged and motivated?*



* Respondents could select all answers that applied

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



“Having an online platform would be nice to interact with [my coworkers].”

Retail worker

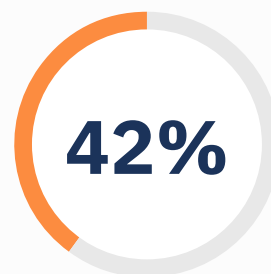
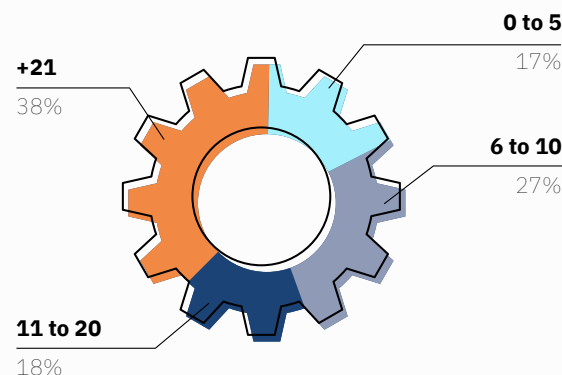
🔍 [SPOTLIGHT]

The quest for employee community

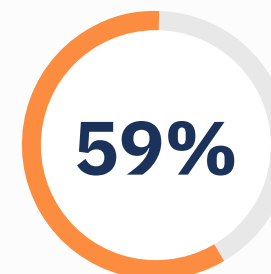
While the retail worker's desire to find a sense of purpose provides a lot of insight into how this workforce can be engaged and retained, it's their quest for a sense of community that's perhaps even more telling. **Of the retail workers polled, 38% said having a strong community at work makes them feel engaged and motivated.** This is a challenge with retail workers, where individual locations only employ a handful of workers, 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 location, 59% said they would like a stronger community with the employees *outside* their location. And among the top ways workers said they'd feel more connected to other coworkers is – You guessed it! – communication.

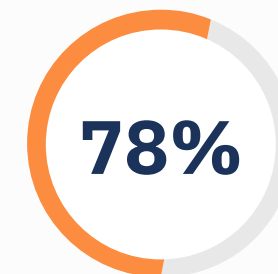
How many coworkers do retail workers have?



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 retail workers said they would feel more connected to coworkers:



Company events/parties



Communication



Shared interests/goals

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

—

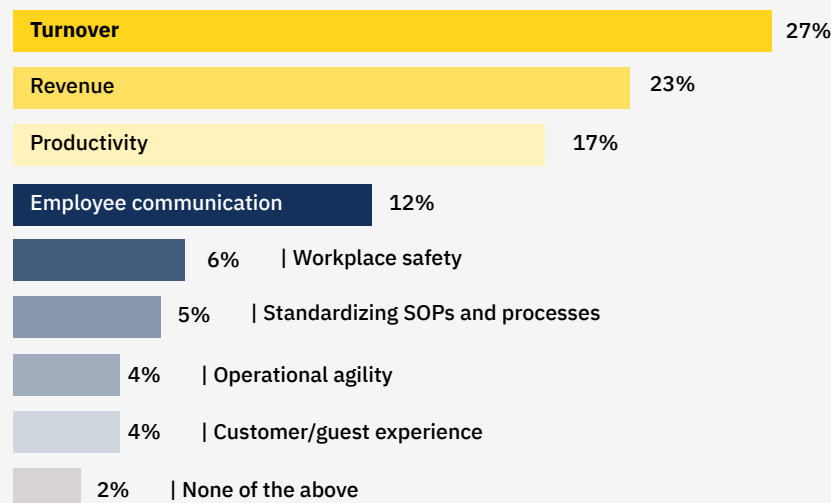


What's challenging retail leaders?

Like so many industries right now, turnover is the number one challenge facing retailers (more on that on the following page). **Revenue and productivity are also top of mind, with 23% and 17% of retail leaders choosing them as their top challenge, respectively.** This highlights the struggle of organizations to return to “normal” post-pandemic.

Retailers also indicated communication remains a major challenge; in fact, they said 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 the retail industry right now?



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

“Investing in the frontline when retail is in its current state is a winning game plan. You have to remove communication barriers between head office and the store itself.”

Frederick Lecoq | Chief Marketing Officer, Sporting Life Group

[SPOTLIGHT]

Turnover

The worst labor crisis in 30 years hit the retail industry after the lockdowns were lifted, which was caused by government subsidies, employee burnout, a heightened need for meaningful contribution among workers, and many other factors. Even now, as the world begins to re-explore what “normal” looks like, turnover is still top-of-mind for retailers – and workers. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported over a million open jobs in retail in December 2021, a 32% increase over the year before.

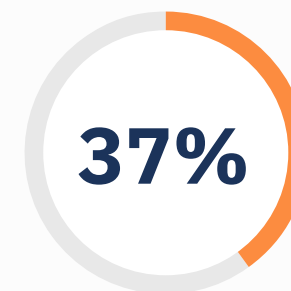
Of the retail workers polled, 37% said they currently want to quit their jobs. When asked what would make them leave their current jobs, many workers cited poor management or finding a job with better pay or benefits. But another common answer was poor communication. Here, we see synergy between deskless leaders and workers – both see communication as a problem that needs fixing. Badly.

“If you want to be an employer of choice, you need to prioritize the way in which you communicate with your workforce.”

Jordan Ekers | COO, Nudge

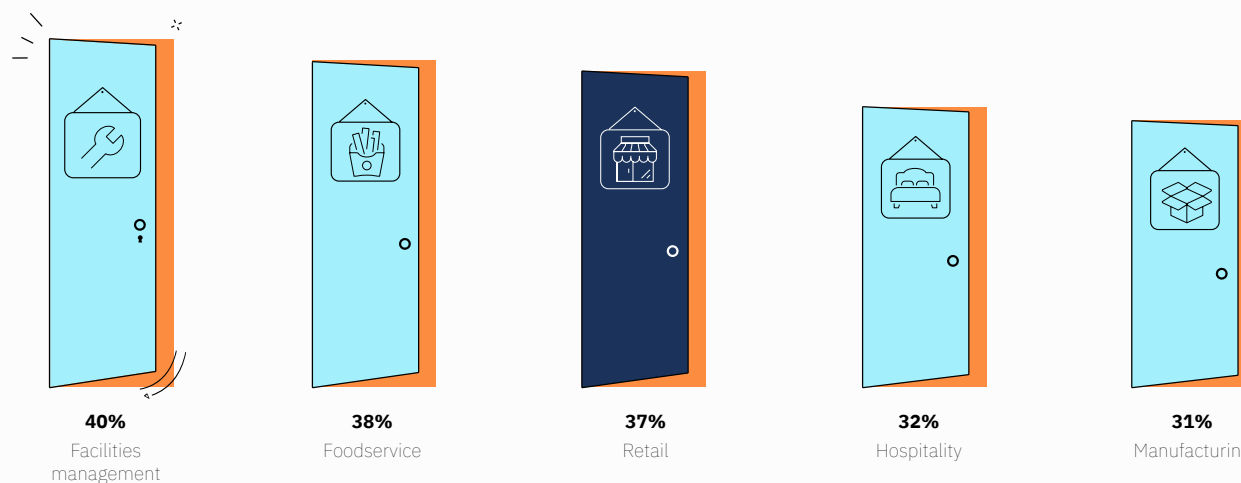


Retail leaders rated turnover as the #1 challenge facing deskless industries right now.

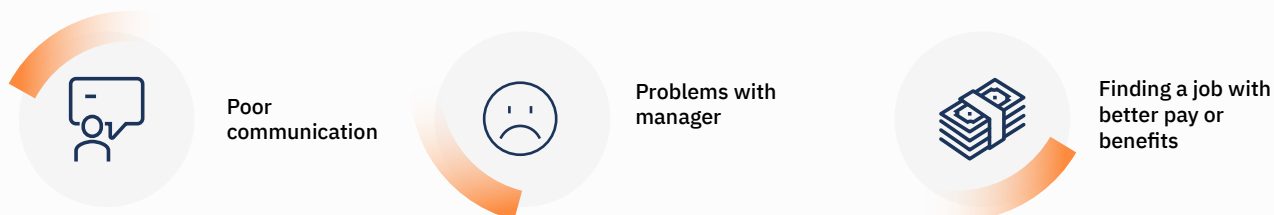


of retail workers currently want to quit their jobs.

Workers' desire to quit, by industry:



Workers' top 3 reasons for wanting to quit their job:



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

—



Communication: vitally important, critically neglected

One of the most interesting outcomes of these surveys with retail leaders and workers was the level of disconnect. While 81% of retailers said they're sending meaningful communications to their workers, **59% of workers said the communications they receive aren't useful**. And 54% of leaders said they share information daily, but only 27% of workers agreed.

There's a major disconnect on 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, CX, operational consistency... the list goes on. Unfortunately, far too few retailers are actually leveraging their communication strategies to their full potential – and risk losing their employees as a result.



How information is shared

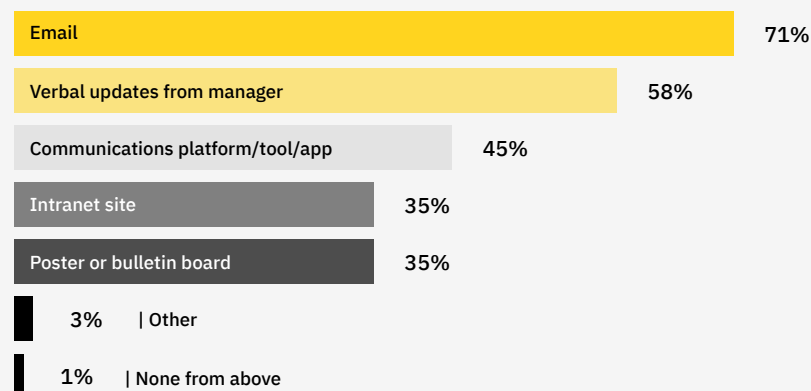
The communication channels that retailers use are crucial to their strategy. One of the biggest mistakes that companies make is leveraging the same channels used for deskbound workers, like email or an intranet site. Unfortunately, both retail workers and leaders indicated that email is still the top 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 for retail staff. They aren't as accessible during work hours, and they don't allow for the two-way communication that is so vital to associates.

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

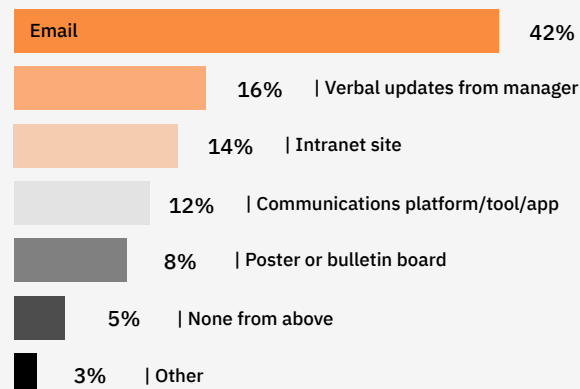
These inefficient channels can also lead to problems with knowledge retention and sharing real-time information, both of which are challenges retail leaders said they're facing when it comes to communicating with their frontline.

What communication channels are retailers using?

According to Leaders*



According to Workers



*Respondents could select all answers that applied

“In-store huddles and intranet updates alone weren't going to be sustainable this year. We knew we had to equip our store teams with the latest information and effectively respond to the market.”

Tania Walsh | Manager, Digital Communications Strategy, TELUS



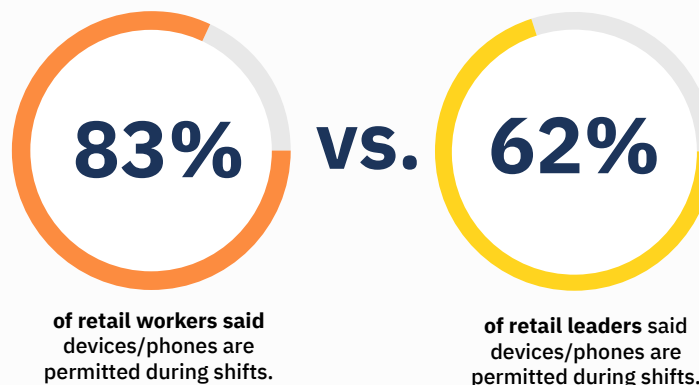
🔍 [SPOTLIGHT]

BYOD policies

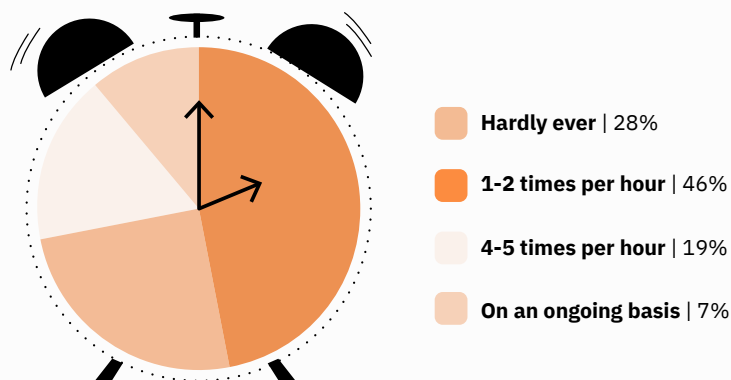
BYOD, or bring your own device, is a company policy that allows workers to bring their own smartphones or other devices to use at work. These policies are growing in popularity, especially in retail, but sometimes come against resistance from head office due to concerns with security and productivity.

When it comes to these policies, we again see a disconnect between retail workers and leaders. While **83% of associates polled said phones are permitted during shifts**, only **62% of retail leaders agreed**.

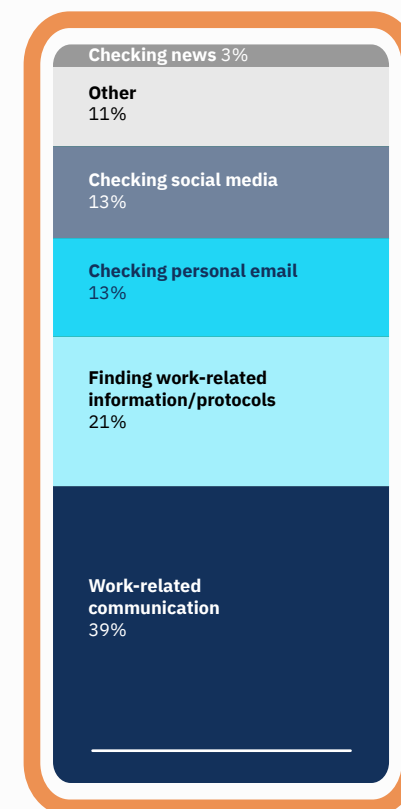
Whether or not it's permitted, 92% of retail workers have their phone with them at work; 46% of workers said they check their phone 1-2 times per hour, and 19% said they check their phones 4-5 times an hour. However, when asked *why* they're checking their phones at work, the resounding answer was "for work". A whopping 60% 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 retail 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 communications do you dislike?” the top answer from our retail worker respondents was “None of the above.”

In other words, you can’t over-share with your retail workforce. They’re starving for information. **While 51% of workers said they’re receiving company updates, 40% said they want more.** Also, 39% of workers said they’re receiving updates on products and services, but 34% said they want more. The same is true of company vision and mandate – while 79% of retail workers said they have a clear sense of their company’s vision, 66% of respondents still said they want to know *more*.

Types of communication retail workers are receiving*

Company updates 53%

Safety/protocol updates 50%

Product or service updates 36%

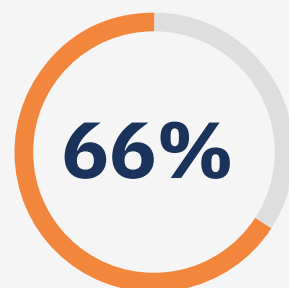
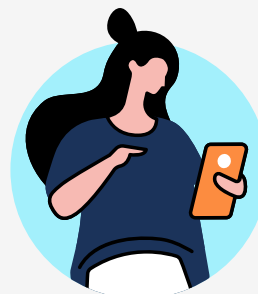
HR news 36%

Promotional updates 30%

Initiative/contest updates 23%

None of the above 14%

Other 1%



of retail workers want to know more about their company's core vision/mandate.

Types of communication retail workers want more of*

Company updates 40%

Product or service updates 32%

Safety/protocol updates 30%

HR news 29%

Promotional updates 29%

Initiative/contest updates 25%

None of the above 22%

Other 2%



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

*Respondents could select all answers that applied

💡 [NUDGE INSIGHTS]

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.

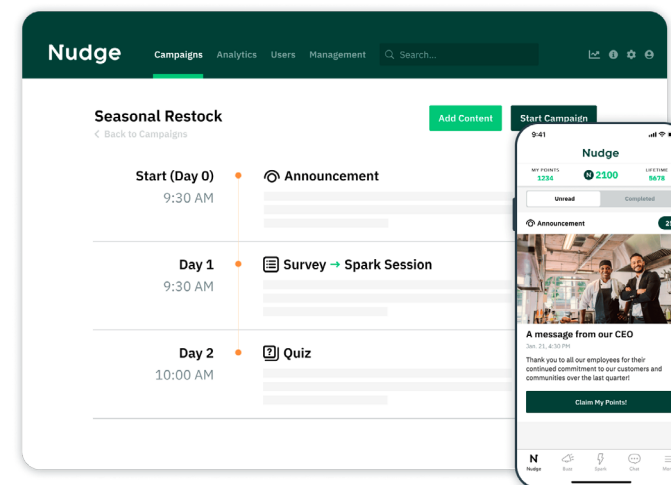
Average time spent in Nudge, per worker

2.8 min

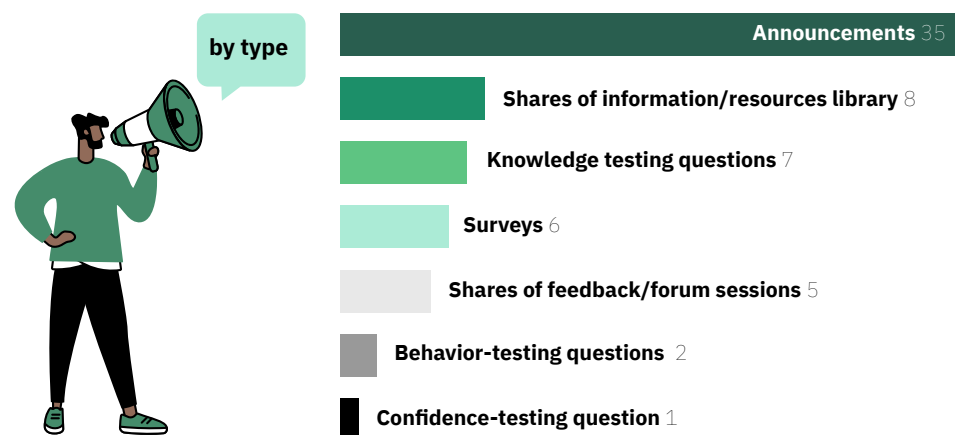
PER DAY

10.1 min

PER WEEK



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



When information is shared

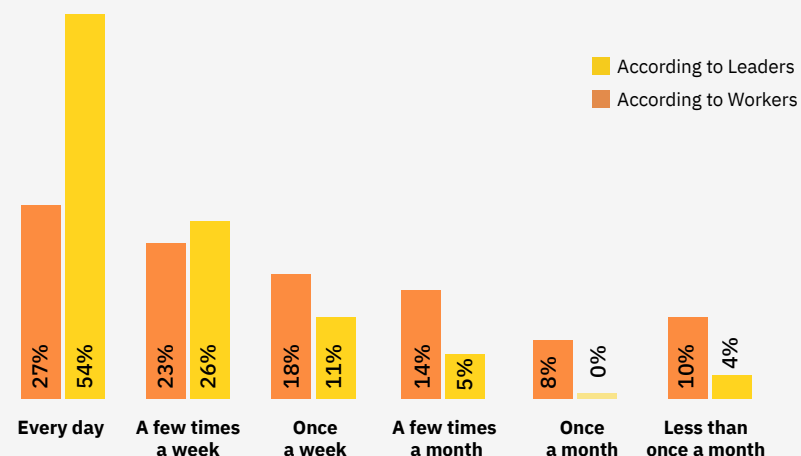
When asking retail workers and leaders about the frequency of the communications being shared, we again see a disconnect.

While 54% of retail leaders said that communications are shared throughout their organization every day, only 27% of workers agree. Meanwhile, 10% of workers said that they receive communications less than once a month.

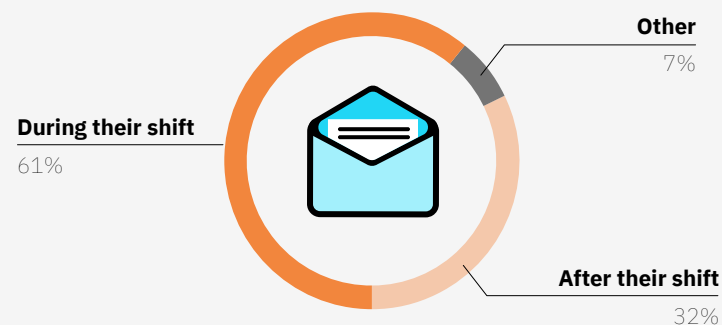
Also interesting is when this information gets consumed by workers. Whether or not retailers have a BYOD (bring your own device) policy in place, 61% of workers are reading employee communications during their shift. And it's no surprise – when the information is product details, promotional updates, and customer insights, workers need to access (and share!) it in real time, not hours later.



How often are communications shared?



When do retail workers read employee communications?



🔍 [RETAILER SPOTLIGHT: GOLF TOWN]

Driving memorable CX through real-time communication

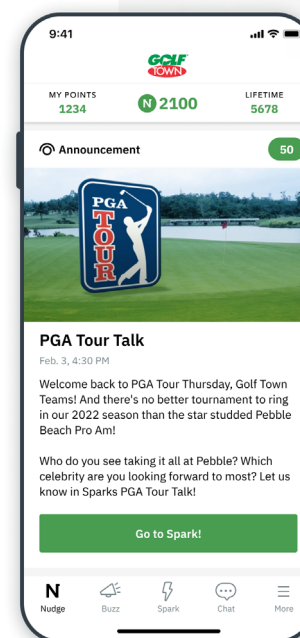
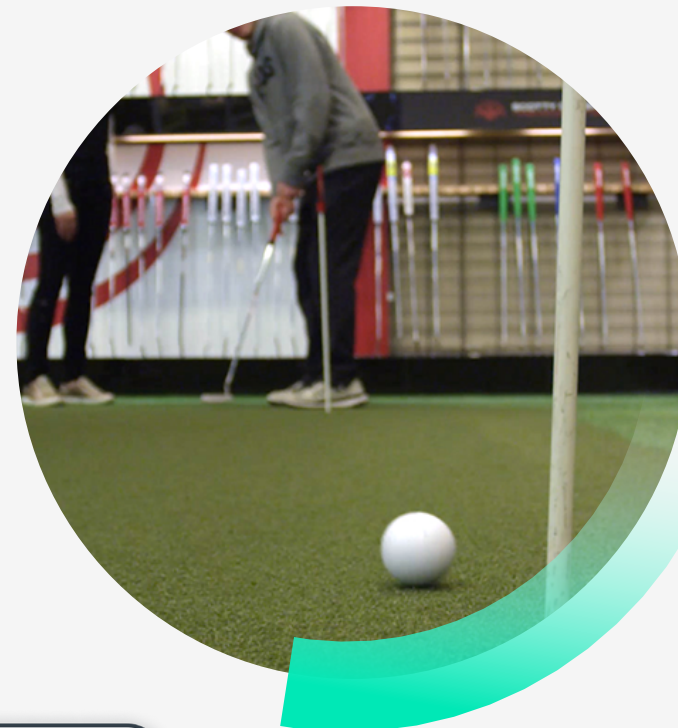
LOCATIONS: 50 **EMPLOYEES:** 1,500

It's hard to imagine a retailer with more passionate customers than Golf Town. Shoppers visit locations eager to talk about recent golf tournaments and product innovations – and Golf Town's associates need to be informed and ready to talk shop. So, when Golf Town invested in Nudge to evolve their business's in-store experience, they were finally able to engage and empower their staff with real-time updates on tournaments, sports news, and other industry happenings.

“Our staff are one of our most valuable assets because they are golfers; they are professionals and amateurs, they love and play the game,” says Chief Marketing Officer Fred Lecoq.

To ensure associates can keep up conversation with seasoned golfers, Golf Town shares frequent updates on new tournaments, even surveying staff on who they think will win. They use open forums to keep the discussions going and allow associates to share industry intel, trends, and more.

All of this adds up to a next-level in-store experience and an intensely loyal customer base. Not to mention an engaged workforce. In fact, **73% of Golf Town associates believe Nudge helps them do their job better**. Golf Town has also reported that stores who are more engaged with Nudge reflect higher customer satisfaction. That's the power of frequent, real-time communication.



“Using Nudge gives us the advantage of having highly engaged employees, that in turn drive a consistent customer experience and are inspired to come into work every day.”

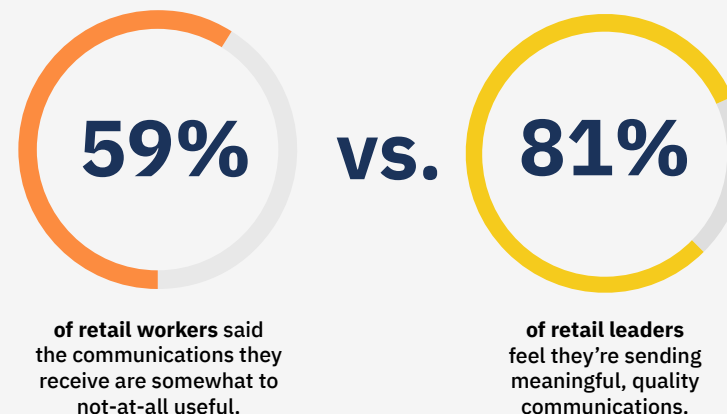
Susan Gilpin | HR Director

[Read our case study](#) to learn more about how Golf Town drives business outcomes with Nudge!

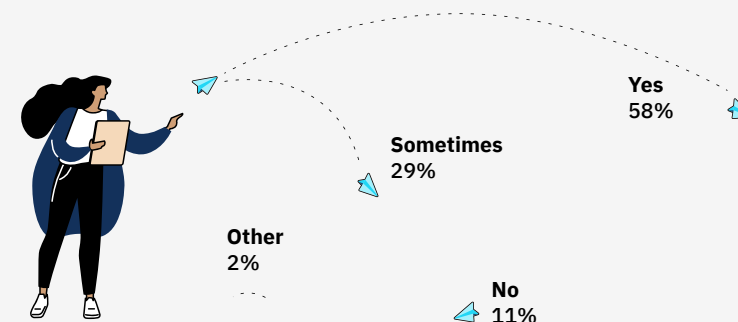
How effective are employee communications?

While 81% of retailers feel they're sending out meaningful, quality communications, workers disagree. In fact, 59% of retail 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 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 retail leaders were asked 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 retail workers reading the information sent to them?



“You can never explain things properly in an email.”

Retail worker

“If they [send updates] by email then no one would be getting their updates. Who checks their email?”

Retail worker

“I would like to have a more efficient platform.”

Retail worker

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

—



Tapping into the voice of the retail workforce

Your workforce can tell you so much.

They can tell you what the customer is thinking, doing, and buying. They can tell you the best way to drive sales, the fastest way to execute tasks, and the most effective way to mobilize on promotions and programs.

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 responsive in an ever-changing world of retail. It's also a crucial part of engaging and empowering your workforce, which can do wonders for retention and loyalty. Unfortunately, while 79% of retail leaders we polled said their organization is fostering a strong feedback culture, 37% of workers don't feel heard – and only 27% of workers said their organization asks them for feedback often.

In other words, there's an untapped opportunity.

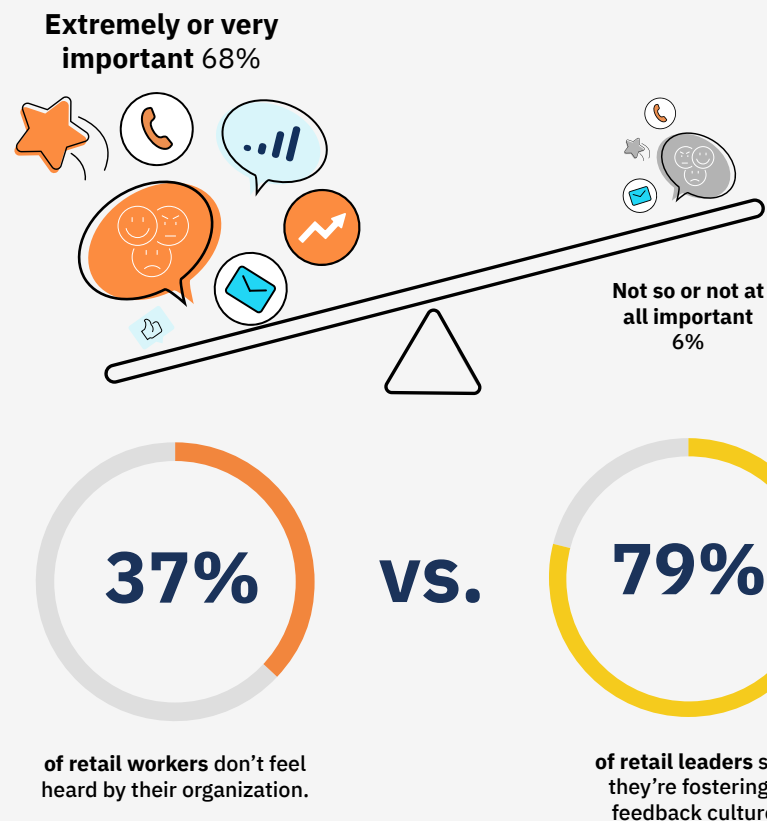


Why is feedback so important?

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 retailers to collect customer intelligence, identify protocols or processes that could be more efficient, and find best practices that can drive revenue, improve CX, and more. In fact, **64% of retail workers polled said they have opinions on how to make their organization better or more profitable.** For many industry-leading retailers, feedback is their secret weapon.

But also, retail workers want to feel heard. Of the workers polled, 68% said that feedback is very or extremely important to them. Investing in feedback empowers associates to feel more connected to their business as a whole, and makes them feel invested in helping to drive sales, CX, and other business outcomes. Unfortunately, 37% 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 their voices to be heard.

How important is feedback to retail workers?



“The feedback loop is where we learn as an organization: It looked great on paper, it didn't land exactly as we had hoped, and now we know what we need to do.”

Rachel Huckle | Chief Retail Officer, Staples Canada

🔍 [RETAILER SPOTLIGHT: MASTERMIND TOYS]

One retailer's digital reinvention, fueled by employee feedback

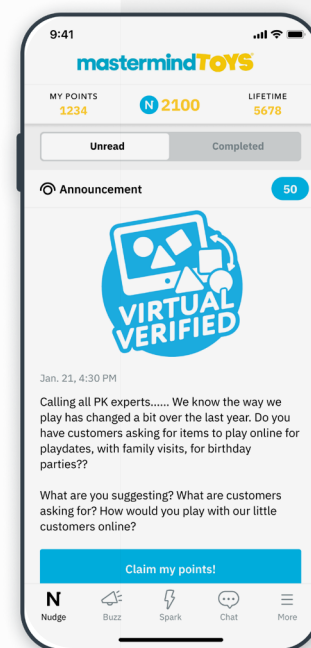
LOCATIONS: 68 **EMPLOYEES:** 2,300

When Sarah Jordan joined Mastermind Toys as CEO in January 2020, she had big plans for a “digital reinvention” to update the brand’s online presence. But the unexpected struck: the pandemic, and with it waves of lockdowns and shopping restrictions.

To keep driving revenue, the digital reinvention needed to happen *fast*. “We were a retailer who did not have a contactless curbside option, and our web experience was severely lagging behind our competitors. And so in the middle of a pandemic, we launched a brand-new digital platform. We did it in five months, from scratch, including all of the ecosystem around it. Everything was overhauled,” says Jordan.

But agility requires effective communication. Jordan and her team needed a way to capture feedback from their workforce. That’s where Nudge came in. Within two months of launching Nudge’s digital communication platform, **Mastermind Toys sourced over 9,000 best practices and ideas from associates**. The ideas included feedback on what became its industry-leading curbside pickup service. But they also included thoughts on how to iterate the brand’s offerings, like pandemic birthday party trends and turning the windows of closed retail locations into “impulse aisles.”

Since launching Nudge, **Mastermind Toys has seen over 35,000 best practices and feedback shared between teams and locations**. “Nudge has enabled us to get real-time feedback from the field so we can hear from our store associates and learn about key customer insights, to then pivot and re-imagine the way we show up,” says Jordan.



“Especially throughout the course of the pandemic, it has been so important to me to give employees a direct channel to ask questions, share concerns, and offer feedback.”

Sarah Jordan | CEO

[Read our case study](#) to learn more about how Mastermind Toys drives business outcomes with Nudge!

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, but more about how effective it is. While 74% of retail leaders said that their organization has channels in place for collecting feedback, only **27% of workers said they're asked for feedback often**. A common challenge in retail 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 retailers have channels in place, they're not ones that are useful and functional to workers.

Case in point: The top three feedback channels cited by both workers and leaders were surveys, conversations with managers, and email. This is a problem. None of these feedback channels offer opportunities to crowdsource ideas or best practices from your frontline. Furthermore, none of them offer opportunities to send real-time feedback directly to head office. Think about it: If an associate just learned that customers are finding your loyalty points program confusing, you'd want them to share that intel with you as quickly as possible, not hope they'll remember to share it hours later, after their shift ends.

Top 3 feedback channels used, according to workers and leaders:



Surveys

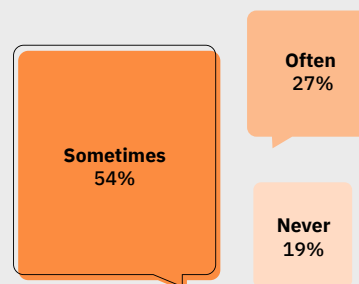


Conversations with a manager

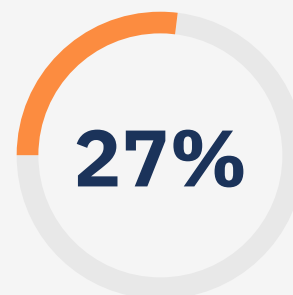
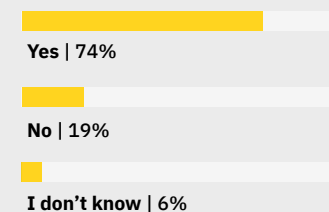


Email

How often retailers are asking for feedback, according to workers

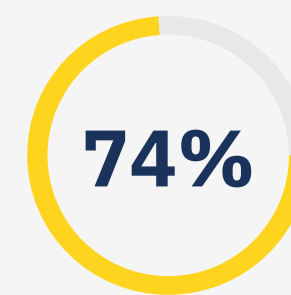


Do retail leaders feel they have channels in place for collecting feedback?



of workers said their company asks for feedback often.

vs.

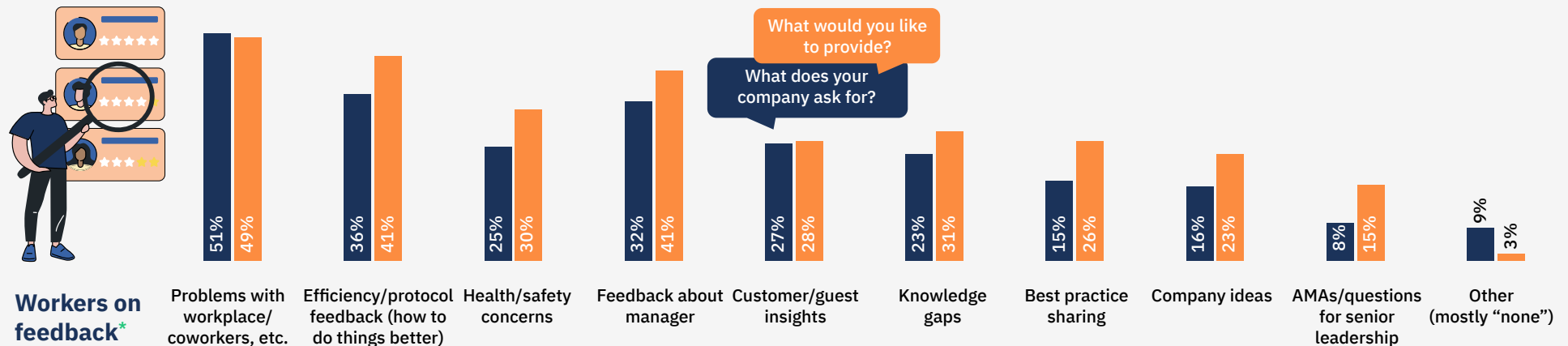


of leaders said their company has channels in place for collecting feedback.

Types of feedback collected

When it comes to feedback, the “what” is just as important as the “how”: the specific kinds of feedback retail 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, retail workers want more. They want to give more customer insights, more feedback about efficiency/protocols, more health and safety concerns.

One interesting feedback type was “Knowledge gaps.” Only 23% of retail workers said they’re asked for this feedback, and 31% said they’d like to provide this feedback. Identifying knowledge gaps is incredibly valuable when it comes to auditing your communications at scale – and monitoring your workforce’s preparedness for upcoming product launches, promotions, and other key events. And the fact that workers want to share these gaps speaks volumes about how hungry they are for information.



*Respondents could select all answers that applied

What's happening in 2022?

—

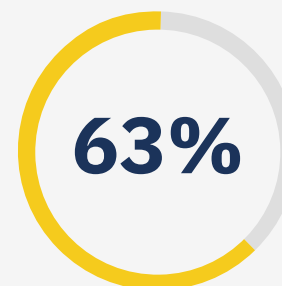
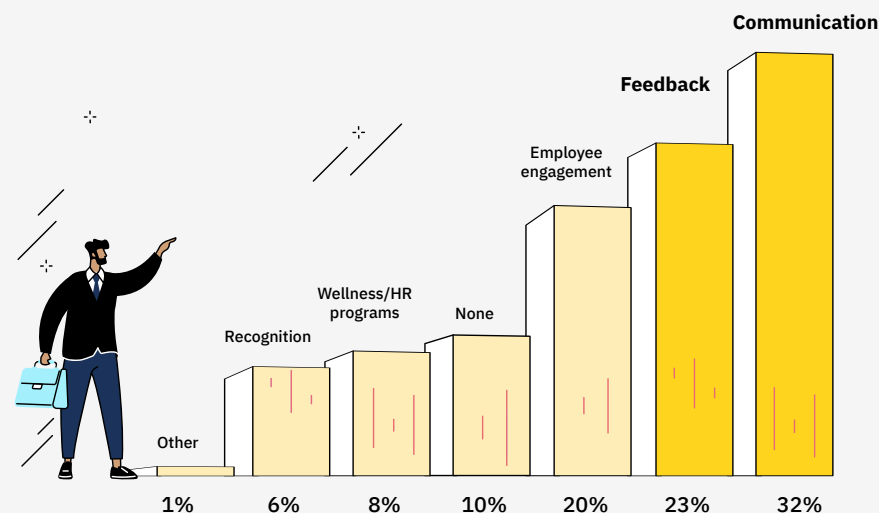


Investing in the associate experience

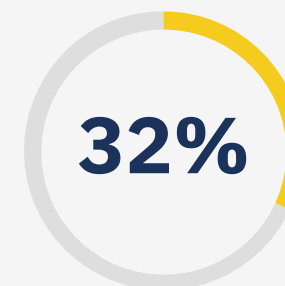
This report began by saying that we have some work to do. And here, we see that retail leaders seem to agree: 63% of leaders plan to invest more energy or budget into employee experience in 2022, and **32% of leaders plan to invest more money in communication.**

These are exciting numbers, especially considering 23% of leaders said they don't have any kind of employee communications program in place, and a staggering 31% said they currently have no budget allotted for employee communications. These numbers should be much lower. 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 retailers planning to invest more in?



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



of leaders plan to invest more money into communication.

“Investing in the frontline when retail is in its current state is a winning gameplan. You have to remove communication barriers between head office and the store itself.”

Fred Lecoq | Chief Marketing Officer, Golf Town

Final thoughts

As I flip through the pages of this report, a few things jump out at me. First, the needs of retail 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 the vital assets they are.

It's time for retailers 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, too ill-suited to the needs of the retail worker. For retailers to truly thrive, they need to embrace the two-way, real-time information sharing that their workers desperately need.

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



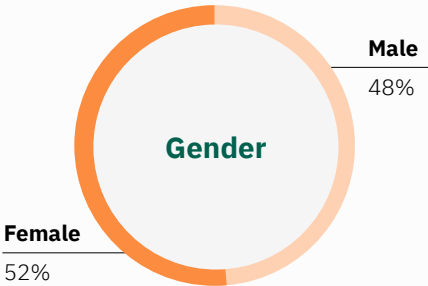
865

U.S. deskless workers were surveyed in June 2021

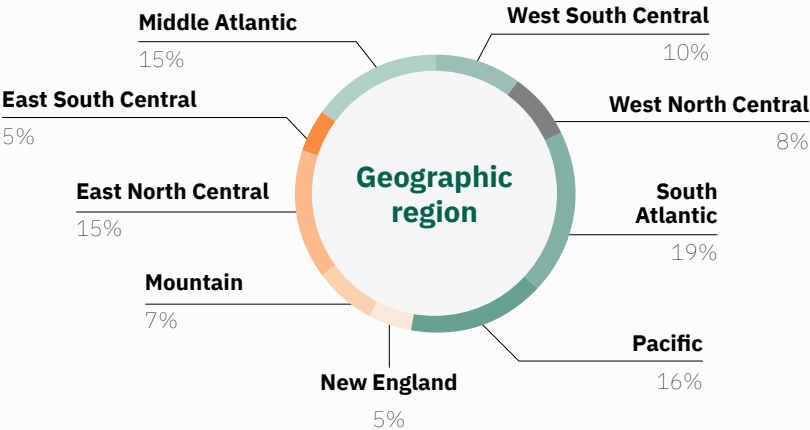
Age



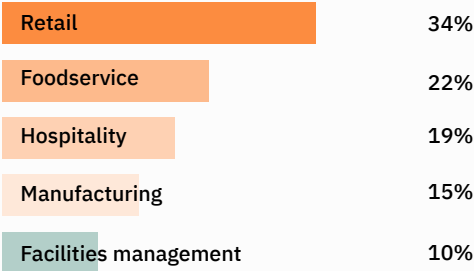
Gender



Geographic region



Industry



THE DESKLESS REPORT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

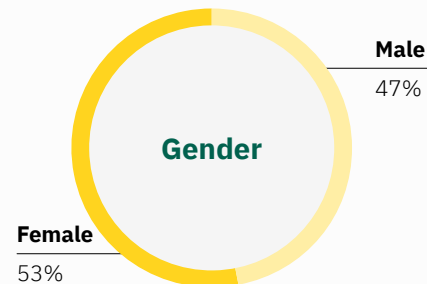
Deskless leaders survey



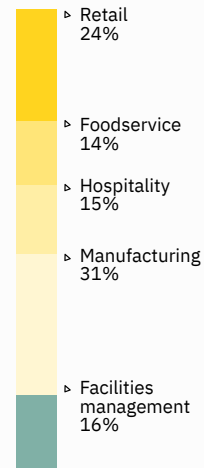
300

U.S. deskless leaders were surveyed
in June 2021

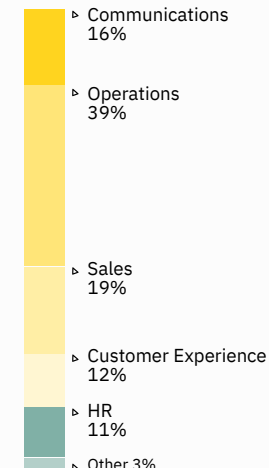
Age



Industry



Functional Area



Seniority

