INVEST. RECRUIT. ENGAGE.
Strategies to Leverage Retail’s Diverse Talent Pool
Introduction

New entrants, advances in technology, and an increasingly transparent global market place are disrupting the retail landscape and driving today’s retail employers to take a closer look at their brand image, relationship with consumers, and human capital investments.

It is a time of monumental change in the retail industry, with new challenges driving new business models. Multicultural communities have become the fastest-growing segment of consumer spending in the sector and gaining a competitive advantage increasingly depends upon a retailer’s ability to establish an authentic brand message and sustainable connection with this rapidly accelerating - and highly diverse - consumer base. Customer centricity has become the linchpin of success and leading retail employers are investing in strong customer service to differentiate themselves in the market, a strategy that hinges on building and sustaining a talented, diverse, and committed workforce.

Today the retail industry employs more than 16 million workers and accounts for more than one-in-ten US jobs. The non-exempt workforce is the backbone of the sector, with approximately 70 percent of retail workers employed in hourly jobs. Yet hourly workers tend to be overlooked and underserved as an important source of talent in the industry and many retail organizations are behind the curve when it comes to leveraging their hourly workforce as an asset rather than an expense.

Improving the quality of employment in the sector will mean addressing the low wages, lack of benefits and inconsistent scheduling practices that characterize the majority of retail jobs and disproportionately impact women and workers of color. While diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts remain an important objective for many retailers, increased commitment and focus are needed to close the opportunity gap that persists for most hourly retail workers. Despite years of highly publicized diversity initiatives and expenditures, women and minorities are still disproportionately represented in low-skill, low-wage occupations in the industry, and better paying jobs and upper management positions continue to be the realm of white men.

By 2042, the US will be a nation without a majority racial or ethnic group. Understanding and capitalizing on the influence employees have on the customer experience - and integrating the diverse insights of the workforce into the business strategy - have become differentiators of success. The most
advanced retail organizations are leveraging the D&I framework to establish a diverse and multicultural workforce – both to spark innovation and to serve as a cultural bridge between the organization and diverse consumer populations. Building a workforce, culture and brand that connects with the country’s changing demographics will be crucial. In a sector powered by the preferences of women and diverse consumer groups, if a retail brand doesn’t have a diversity strategy, it doesn’t have a growth strategy.

This report provides insight into the challenges, strategies and actions some best practice retail organizations are taking to develop their human capital in three core areas:

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<th>RECRUITMENT</th>
<th>ENGAGEMENT</th>
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<td>Committing to meaningful jobs and building the bench of talent in the organization</td>
<td>Finding new talent pools by leveraging technology, brand and employees</td>
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By the Numbers

Wages for retail workers are among the lowest in the US economy.

- **$2**
  The average hourly pay for a retail worker, adjusted for inflation, has fallen by $2 since the early 1970s, when the Department of Labor first started tracking the data.

On average, employees in the retail trade industry make just **$33,359** per year making the sector the second lowest paying sector of the 14 industry sectors that comprise the US economy.

Women disproportionately hold the lowest-paid positions in the industry.

**Women account for**

- **1/2** of the retail workforce
- **2/3** of low-wage retail jobs

**Women of color account for 33% of low-wage retail jobs.**

If present trends continue, there may be as many as 4.1 million American women working in low-wage retail jobs by 2022.

The situation is also dire for Black and Latino retail workers.

**Full-and part-time workers**

- **70%** earn less than $15 per hour compared to 58% of White retail workers.

- **17%** of the Black retail workforce
- **13%** of Latino retail workers

compared to 7% of White retail workers.

Black and Latino retail workers are significantly more likely than White workers to be employed part-time when they want full-time hours.

**Below the poverty line**

- **17%** of the Black retail workforce
- **13%** of Latino retail workers

compared to 7% of White retail workers.
In 2016, the average mean salary for men in retail was $39,995 compared to $26,506 for women.

On average, retail employers pay the median Black retail salesperson wages equal to approximately 75% of the pay of the median White salesperson.

For a Black full-time worker, that wage divide can amount to more than $7,500 in lost earnings every year.

The occupation with the highest share of workers—retail salesperson—exhibits the greatest wage divide.

FULL-TIME RETAIL SALESPERSONS PERFORMING THE SAME JOB

WOMEN EARN 68¢ FOR MEN $1

ACROSS ALL US WORK OCCUPATIONS

WOMEN EARN 82¢ FOR MEN $1

Retail employers pay Latino workers in these jobs wages equal to 80% of those of White workers.

DIFFERENCE $6,400 annually

On average, Asian employees in the retail sector earn 1.18 times more than other races and ethnicities.
Above Average Turnover Costs Retailers Time and Money

**AVERAGE TENURE RATE**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Retail workers</th>
<th>Overall labor force</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39 months</td>
<td>55 months</td>
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Attrition rates for hourly store employees are high:

- **39%** compared to **18%** in corporate positions

**Millennials already comprise more than 1/2 of the US labor force**

AND ARE **5x** more likely to hold a retail job than any other generation.

**HOWEVER** **60%** of all millennial employees in retail leave within the first three years.

Turnover in the retail sector is **5% per month** and it costs approximately **$3,400** every time a worker leaves to find, hire and train their replacement.

**92%** of retail managers agreed that reducing turnover by as little as one associate per month would spur profits.

**63%** believe it could increase monthly revenues by six percent.
The Changing Consumer Landscape

By 2042, the US will be a nation without a majority racial or ethnic group.

The country’s Hispanic population is expected to nearly triple by 2050.

Black and Asian populations are each expected to grow by 60%.

The white population is projected to increase only 1% from 2015 to 2065.

The black immigrant population was 4.2 million in 2016, an increase of 71% since 2000.

Latinos accounted for 70% of US workforce growth in the first half of this decade.

US Latino GDP is growing 70% faster than the US non-Latino GDP.

Today 59% of Asian Americans were born in another country.

Asians are projected to become the largest immigrant group in the US, surpassing Hispanics by 2055.

In 2017, 10 million Americans identified as LGBTQ.
**WOMEN DRIVE**

70-80% of consumer spending in the US and impact more than 85% of retail decisions.

Women make up 43% of purchasing managers and control trillions of dollars of wealth.

Women are also of growing importance in business-to-business relationships.

**TODAY, WOMEN MAKE UP**

- **60%** of front-line retail supervisors
- **18%** of upper management
- **10%** of CEOs in the S&P 500 retail trade

**BY 2050 WOMEN OF COLOR WILL BE THE MAJORITY OF WOMEN IN THE US**

- But they currently hold less than 4% of Fortune 500 board seats.

**2017 ESTIMATED SPENDING POWER**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Spending Power</th>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>$1 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>$1.5 trillion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$1.2 trillion</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**MILLENNIALS**

2017 Estimated Spending Power

- **$200 billion**

**MULTICULTURAL MILLENNIALS**

- 42% of the Millennial population
- Spending more than **$65 billion** each year
- Influencing upward of **$1 trillion** in total consumer spending.

**DISABLED AMERICANS**

- Total Consumer Spending Power
  - **$220 billion** annually
  - Discretionary Spending Power
    - **$175 billion**

**LGBTQ**

- Consumer buying power
  - **+$917 billion** in 2017
Best practice retailers are increasingly recognizing that investing in their customer facing workforce and providing an excellent customer experience may be the golden ticket to surviving and thriving in the future. With effective talent mapping, succession planning that includes the hourly workforce, and equitable training and development opportunities, retailers can develop talent from within, avoid the high costs associated with external recruitment practices, and at the same time send the message the organization values its employees.

Today’s retail workers can become tomorrow’s retail leaders with the right development and support. But there is much work to be done. Occupation inequities, low wages, lack of benefits and unstable scheduling practices characterize many jobs in the industry and undermine the financial security of a large percentage of retail workers. Although the retail workforce is diverse, women and minorities are severely underrepresented among the ranks of retail managers and executives, and overrepresented in non-exempt jobs with the least stability and lowest pay. The industry is still struggling to advance women and people of color into positions of responsibility and influence.

Social media and platforms like Glassdoor have made transparency a necessity and inaction a risk. The low wages, occupational disparities, and unstable scheduling practices widespread in the industry continue to grab headlines. Policymakers in 20 major cities and 18 states across the country have raised the minimum wage already this year and are continuing to put pressure on retailers to curb unfair scheduling practices. Increased visibility of the issue exposes retail employers to legal liability and has negative impact on brand and reputation, not to mention employee satisfaction and turnover.

Investing in the hourly workforce can have a profound impact on a retail organization’s bottom-line and the US economy overall. Numerous studies have found that retailers that invest in their workforce and treat employees fairly have higher profit margins, lower prices, and better retention rates. According to a retail study conducted by the Wharton School, external hires are 61 percent more likely to be laid off or fired, and 21 percent more likely than internal hires to leave a job on their own accord. The study looked at one major retailer with more than 500 stores and found that every dollar in additional payroll led to between four and twenty-eight dollars in new sales.

“We used to prioritize our stakeholders as shareholders first, customers second, and employees third. We now realize we had it backward. If we put employees first, they in turn take care of our customers, and they in turn take care of our shareholders.”

Retail Executive
Improving the quality of hourly retail jobs will require innovation in three areas: competing by offering workers a meaningful career path that includes fair wages, benefits and stable scheduling; planning to identify and cultivate the next generation of organizational leaders, and training to provide high-potential workers with the competencies and skill sets they need to succeed and lead in the future.

**Competitive Opportunities**

Growing public pressure and increased competition for talent are causing retailers to take action. Wages are on the rise across the industry and a number of big retailers have begun to cultivate their hourly workers by offering higher wages and a clearly defined career path. Highly successful retail chains like Costco, Starbucks and Trader Joe’s consistently prove that providing employees with competitive wages, company benefits, stable schedules, and a clear path forward results in higher retention, improved market performance, and increased profitability. Target offers store associates training and development, and mentoring opportunities that lead to advancement, and has committed to raising the hourly minimum wage of its US workforce to $15 by 2020. Walmart recently raised its minimum wage to $11 and announced it will offer tuition assistance to both full- and part-time employees. These are just a few of the growing number of retail employers who are taking steps to create meaningful jobs in the sector.

Tackling unstable scheduling practices will be an important aspect of improving job quality. Many retail companies continue to implement just-in-time scheduling practices as a measure to control costs. As a result, it is not uncommon for retail workers to be unsure of what their schedules look like just a few days or even a few hours out, making it difficult to meet family obligations, schedule appointments, take on a second job, or count on a stable paycheck. In a national survey of retailers, 62 percent of managers say employees have quit their stores due to scheduling conflicts, a trend that forces retailers to spend more on hiring and training replacements. Conversely, a study by researchers at Boston College and the University of Kentucky found that giving retail employees more control over their work schedules optimizes recruitment and boosts retention.

**NEXT PRACTICE TIP**

**Strategies to Stabilize Scheduling**

- **CROSS TRAINING.** A cross-trained workforce can be deployed to where the company needs them most rather than just to a small set of tasks that are covered by more limited skill sets. The practice improves morale, increases the pool of resources available to cover shifts, and builds the bench of expertise and skill sets in the workforce.

- **SHIFT SWAPPING.** Numerous online scheduling tools allow workers to check schedules and voluntarily exchange shifts or workdays. This relieves the burden on frontline supervisors and empowers employees to manage their time. For retailers with multiple locations within a metro area, multi-location scheduling practices can help ensure shift coverage and provide hourly employees a guaranteed number of hours each week.

- **MINIMUM HOUR GUARANTEES.** These policies stipulate that employees are not sent home when customer demand is low on any given shift. When traffic is slow, cross-trained employees can shelve merchandise, replenish inventory or prepare for promotions. Employers may be able to provide more than the minimum, but employees can count on at least a set number of hours each week at their usual pay rate.

- **RELIEF POOLS.** Some companies maintain internal pools of temporary or part-time employees who provide short-term help when regularly scheduled workers need time off. Typically, on-demand relief workers are paid a higher wage rate to compensate for flexibility and responsiveness.
**NEXT PRACTICE TIP**

**Scheduling tools empower employees and free up managers**

*WorkJam* empowers employees to self-manage shift trades and supports a range of additional communication features designed to increase the engagement of hourly workers, including training and assessments, pulse surveys and polls, rewards and recognition, and gamification.

*ShiftMessenger* is another mobile-based scheduling tool designed for employee use. The app was used in the Gap Stable Survey Initiative. Hourly associates and store managers overwhelmingly liked the tool and found it effective. Ninety-five percent of part-time associates agreed the app made it easy to adjust and trade work schedules to meet their needs, and the majority of managers said the app eliminated time-consuming tasks related to finding shift replacements.

*Shiftboard* is a cloud-based scheduling and workforce management platform built around the hourly worker. The technology connects scheduling with time and attendance, applicant tracking, workforce communication and employee onboarding. Organizations using the platform report 50 percent reduction in total hours spent managing employee schedules and a five percent increase in revenue per scheduled employee.

*Deputy* combines the range of swift—swapping capabilities with HR information and point of sale data analytics to help retailers identify peaks and troughs of consumer traffic and predict staffing needs.

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**Pilot Study Highlights Benefits of Stable Scheduling**

The Stable Schedule Survey took an extensive look at scheduling practices in 28 stores under the Gap Inc. umbrella. In the study, 19 stores implemented four dimensions of schedule stability: increasing the consistency of schedules from week-to-week; improving the ability of employees to anticipate when they will work; giving more hours to employees who want them; and enhancing employees’ input into when they work. The other nine stores in the study were used as a control group.

There were many important takeaways from the study. For example, the study found that the majority of instability in the stores stemmed from headquarters, and that only 30 percent of instability could be attributed to fluctuation in consumer traffic. In addition, because store managers could only offer short, part-time shifts, 49 percent of the employees in the study held a second job. This meant that Gap store managers were competing with other employers for their employees’ time.

**The ROI of the pilot was high**

**PRODUCTIVITY**

+5%

**MEDIAN SALES**

+7%

+$2.9 million in revenues

Over the 35 weeks of the study in the 19 stores implementing the proposed practices.
Costco Provides Competitive Pay and Benefits

Costco pays its workers an average of $20.89 an hour, well above the national average for a retail sales worker, and 88 percent of Costco employees have company-sponsored healthcare.

More than 70 percent of Costco warehouse managers began their careers as a cashier or floor worker.

Employees are cross-trained to handle many positions: they manage cash registers, stock shelves, rearrange the store, develop promotions, and manage others. Cross-training employees does more than build skills; it supports flexible scheduling and allows employees to cover for each other across job functions.

Costco closes on major holidays; the decision sends a strong message to employees that time spent with family and friends is more important than income lost by being closed on the holiday.

When customer traffic at Costco is lower than expected, a store manager gives employees the opportunity to take time off. Employees are not forced to accept, but there are often enough employees who want time away. If no one volunteers, Costco accepts the cost of having too many employees on that shift.

Planning for the Future

Succession planning has become more important than ever. Over the next ten years, record numbers of retail managers and executives will approach retirement age and look to off-ramp. This trend has significant implications for movement and turnover in the leadership ranks of many retail organizations and provides a unique opportunity to change the industry’s demographic profile and increase diversity in both talent and perspective in positions of influence.

To kick off the planning process, retail leaders will need to assess their organization’s demographics, gender and age profile, identify when employees in mission critical positions will retire, understand what knowledge and skills will be lost, and develop a plan to advance and onboard the next generation of talent. Leveraging existing HR information and data analytics can help in this endeavor by generating important insights about the workforce and identifying high-potential employees as leadership candidates. The process must also take into account the workforce and consumer demographics unique to the different locations in which the business.

Succession planning shouldn’t be limited to C-suite positions – all mission-critical roles should have a plan in place. For many retailers, developing a diverse pipeline will require succession planning at the levels of the organization where there are significant diversity and gender gaps.
Treating entry level retail positions as a jump-off to other positions can help create career pathways for the current pool of retail workers, especially women and employees of color who are underrepresented in management and leadership positions. Studies have found that retail managers who have moved up the ranks from hourly jobs are more likely to understand front-line business challenges and have credibility within the workforce. Timelines will also need to be shortened. Employee mobility is on the rise, particularly among millennial workers, and today’s succession planning teams are on an accelerated timeline to build rapidly evolving skills sets and provide incentives and rewards to keep high-potential candidates from leaving the organization.

Frontline managers will play a key role in identifying high-potential employees and ensuring they are included in employee development programs and succession planning pipelines. Successfully engaging managers in the process – and recognizing and rewarding them for their efforts - will be critical. Best practice companies recognize the key role managers pay in the talent development process. As an incentive for managers within the organization to train the next generation of leaders, Chipotle offers people development bonuses of $10,000 for managers who bring someone up into a managerial position from within the ranks of the workforce. The company paid out over $1 million in people development bonuses in one year alone.

When implemented effectively, succession planning can provide a roadmap to develop the bench of future leaders in the organization. Developing the existing talent pool also enhances the organization’s reputation in the job market as an employer who invests in its employees and prefers to hire from within. This is a major recruiting advantage in today’s increasingly competitive job market. Making succession plans transparent helps create a culture of trust and credibility and conveys to employees that professional development is a clearly stated benefit and that a career path is possible for all workers.

Succession Planning

Develop a structured – yet agile – succession planning process that can be adapted across geographic regions and store locations

Be transparent – communicating the succession planning process builds trust and communicates to employees that professional development is expected and that a career path is a clearly stated benefit

Succession planning shouldn’t be limited to C-suite positions; all mission-critical roles should have a plan in place

Create profiles of skill sets needed in critical roles now and in the future (i.e. digital, cultural competency, consumer analytics, cybersecurity, global trends)

Establish targets and measurable outcomes for increasing diversity through succession planning, e.g. at least 30 percent of overall succession slates are diverse

Assess the current workforce to identify individuals approaching retirement, high growth areas of the business, and diversity gaps

Develop and inventory of high-potential contributors at all levels of the organization; identify gaps in skills and experience that should be addressed through development tracks

Establish individualized career trajectories for high-potential employees, including training, stretch assignments, and store-to-store rotations

Provide access to coaching, mentoring and sponsorships within and across store locations and retail roles

Conduct regular assessments to ensure women, minorities and other underrepresented employee groups receive equitable training and advancement opportunities

Provide phased off-ramping options and coaching opportunities for older workers to facilitate knowledge transfer
CASE STUDY

Providing a career path at Chipotle

Chipotle provides employees with a career path with promotion possibilities and increased wages and benefits attached to each stage of professional growth. Company employees can receive up to $15,400 worth of college funding toward education related to managing a supply chain and handling P&L statements. The company’s investment in its workforce has paid off. Over 90 percent of Chipotle’s managers are promoted from within. In 2016 alone, 11,000 crew members were promoted as managers.

NEXT PRACTICE TIP

Engage and Leverage Employee Resource Groups

ERGs can play a key role in the succession planning process by identifying high-potential candidates and providing networking support and professional development opportunities.

ERG leaders and members also represent an important, often untapped, source of diverse talent already working in a leadership capacity in the organization. Many group leaders have strong leadership skills sets, including strategic planning, influencing without authority, and meeting goals on time and within budget. They hold a cross-functional role in the organization and are simultaneously responsible for engaging employees to volunteer and participate in D&I related work and influencing company decision makers to sponsor projects and commit resources. Retail leaders need to recognize this important talent asset.

The ERG leadership role should be viewed as an essential business role in the company, and as such, be directly tied to meaningful opportunities for advancement and career development. In the 2017 Diversity Best Practices Inclusion Index, 85 percent of companies provide learning and development training for ERG leaders and consider ERG leadership positions in employee performance reviews. However, only 30 percent of companies consider ERG leaders as a talent pipeline in succession planning.
Training

Providing opportunities for training and development has long been established as a route to career advancement. However, in many retail organizations, education, training, and job advancement initiatives are focused on employees at the professional, supervisory, and management levels. Remote and disparate retail locations can present a challenge when it comes to providing equitable opportunities for non-exempt employees to participate in learning and development for the non-exempt employee. However, hourly retail workers are the ‘face’ of the company and the employees most often interacting with the public and providing customer service. The ROI for investing in training and development opportunities is high. A well-structured training program and culture of continuous learning signals to the employee that they are greatly valued. Talented, trained employees that are engaged and treated well by their employers will in turn treat customers well and deliver exceptional service. Customers will remember the experience and develop loyalty to the brand.

Providing hourly workers meaningful opportunities to participate in training and development can be challenging in retail. Best practice organizations provide hourly workers with a certain number of paid training hours to participate in development programs and hold managers accountable for ensuring their direct reports have the flexibility to participate without hardship. To ensure that team members on different shifts and in different store locations have access to learning and development opportunities, training sessions are offered at various times to make sure all employees have the same access. A number of retailers are also adopting a bring your own device (BYOD) to work policy and encouraging employees to use their mobile devices for training. Mobile learning can be offered on an ‘anytime, anywhere’ basis across multiple devices, including phone, laptops, and tablets, and multiple locations, allowing learners to assimilate information at their own pace on the device they chose.

Training and development strategies for high-potential employees also include opportunities for individual coaching, mentoring and sponsorship - particularly for diverse employees who may lack the exposure and visibility that is more readily available to majority employees. These opportunities provide critical career development experience and give diverse employees a champion in the organization. Including high-potential women and diverse employees in

Retailers will need to re-examine their in-house training to assess the fit of current offerings with emerging needs.

The skills needed for tomorrow’s retail workforce are still evolving as the industry continues to move toward e-commerce, digital, social media marketing and brand positioning — all with the goal of providing a personalized customer experience across multiple cultural frameworks and dimensions. Retail professionals increasingly work in non-store occupations such as innovation labs, call centers, office headquarters, warehouses, or distribution centers. Software engineers, data analysts and social media expertise are in high demand as retailers look to develop engaging content through interactive channels. The role of the front-facing employee is also evolving. Retailers need agile, tech savvy employees that can connect digitally to a diverse range of consumers who are tech savvy themselves.
networking events with company and industry leaders is another strategy to build competencies and forge new relationships. Stretch assignments and job rotations across different store locations are also effective interventions to develop new skills and expose front-line workers to different aspects of the retail enterprise. Engaging managers in planning for these opportunities will be critical to ensuring employees are not penalized for participating.

Cultural competency has become an important skill set in today’s diverse workplace and marketplace. Developing cultural competence in the workforce enables effective communication and consistent customer service across multiple cultural and diversity dimensions and allows employee to work effectively on diverse teams in the workplace. One study found that a team with a member who shares a customer’s ethnicity is 152 percent more likely to understand that customer than a team without someone from that background.

The wide geographic spread of retail locations will require targeted strategies to build the competencies of the local workforce to match the demographic compositions of the communities in which the business operates. Developing a population profile can help inform training and development around the specific consumer populations the organization is trying to reach and the cultural competency skill sets that are needed to provide superior customer service. ERGs provide an important connection to diverse communities and should be integrally involved in developing a cultural competency strategy for the business.

Companies that don’t invest in developing cultural competence run the risk of damaging their brand and reputation by making decisions or behaving in ways that unintentionally alienate or offend cultural groups. Starbucks recently shut down 8,000 of its retail stores in order to deliver unconscious bias and cultural sensitivity training to its employees. The action was in response to the fallout following racist based actions of one of its stores managers against two black patrons. The message being sent by senior leadership is that this training is more valuable than a day’s loss in profits.

**RISE Up**

RISE Up helps retail workers acquire the skills they need to advance their careers.

- Coursework covers a wide array of knowledge including sales, customer service, inventory, retail math, and distribution.
- Training is available through flexible online and classroom formats. Sponsorships and mentoring opportunities are also available through the initiative.
- More than 20 leading retailers participate in the effort, including Macy’s, Walmart and Williams-Sonoma.
For workers in customer facing roles, participation in learning and development opportunities must be built into the business strategy and training framework. For example, how do we ensure that the messages that senior leaders get are communicated to the hourly team member? How do we ensure that different shifts are not left out of the conversation and strategy? With that in mind, LCW is often asked to leverage different modalities to ensure that learning is ‘democratized’ across the organization and not left in the hands of a few.

For example, for one organization LCW delivers a monthly inclusion series that is one-hour long and delivered in a virtual classroom with hundreds of participants interacting on topics such as “Race Matters: How to have conversations about race at work.” To ensure that team members on different shifts and in different store locations can all attend, the sessions are offered at various times over a one-month period, making it accessible for all members. As a result, the Corporate Vice President in Headquarters has the same experience that a customer-service facing associate in the store has.

For other companies, the focus has been on providing microbursts that are no more than 5 to 15 minutes long that can occur pre-shift, as a way to kick off a team huddle and embed D&I topics into the store environment. A mix of no-technology, low-technology and high-technology options is the key—because the range of skills and tools available in very large organizations with a full range of work environments—from the sales person who lives out of their car, to the customer-facing clerk, to the person on the loading dock. Thought as to what method is the best one to connect with each one and their reality is what real inclusion is all about. Such “in the moment” nudges help sustain behavioral and systemic change and embody inclusion in the learning and development space.

NEXT PRACTICE TIP

DBP Solutions® partner LCW provides inclusive training opportunities for front-facing employees.

Learn more at www.LanguageAndCulture.com

Cultural Competency Checklist

1. Embed cultural competency in the strategic business plan and workforce development strategy
2. Conduct regular assessments of the diversity of consumer populations served by the organization
3. Identify the cultural competency skill sets needed in the workforce – account for variation across retail store locations
4. Continually assess the cultures and diversity dimensions represented and underrepresented in the workforce – adjust recruitment strategies to address gaps
5. Monitor cultural competency in the workforce to ensure consumer language, needs and preferences are reflected in messaging, products and provision of service
6. Provide ongoing cultural competency training and coaching – measure impact of those interventions
7. Ensure work-teams reflect different diversity dimensions and are equipped to leverage that diversity
8. Embed cultural competency skill sets in hiring and promotion decisions
Talent Share Program

One retail organization established a talent share program to support the development and advancement of its internal employee pipeline. When a position opens in any department across the company, it is openly posted and any employee in good standing can apply. If hired, the employee serves in the new role for six to nine months, providing an immersion experience that fast tracks new skills development. The employee’s manager allows them to be ‘loaned’ for the duration of the assignment but gets to keep them as a budget item. Once the assignment is complete, the employee returns to their original position. The ROI of the talent share program is high. The program has reduced costs associated with hiring and onboarding an external candidate, enabled growth opportunity and exposure to other parts of the business, and preserved the cumulative knowledge and maturity of employees. In the first two years of the program, internal placement rates in the company doubled.
Recruitment

As the competition for talent increases, retailers are becoming more innovative and insightful in their recruitment strategies. The most effective strategies incorporate a clear business commitment, along with clearly defined objectives and measurements. It is important to set aggressive recruitment goals that reflect the demographics of the populations the company serves and the locations in which it operates. Setting measurable recruitment goals - and regularly communicating progress - creates accountability, telegraphs the importance of the effort, and provides a baseline for course correction. Many organizations also require recruiters and those involved in the hiring process to use diverse slates of candidates as well as diverse interviewing teams for key positions, an effective strategy for minimizing discrimination and unconscious bias in hiring, promotion, and job assignments. Leveraging technology, cultivating and communicating a positive employer brand, and providing incentives for employee referrals as well as for job candidates all contribute to building a strong recruitment process.

Leverage Technology and Social Media

Having a recruitment strategy focused on getting the organization seen on the small screens of smart phones and tablets is a growing practice. Company websites and social accounts can broadcast important information about what it is like to work at the organization. LinkedIn has a number of talent solutions that help employers find, vet and contact candidates. Retailers can create a community page on Facebook and a careers tab to post jobs, or design a unique hashtag that employees can use to post information about the company and their jobs on Twitter and Instagram. A study by Pew found that the largest group using Instagram is adults between 18-29 with some college education, making the platform ideal for attracting younger job applicants. Best practice companies also monitor Glassdoor to see what employees are saying about the organization and using that information to address and solve workplace problems.

- **SOCIAL MEDIA OUTREACH**
  Social media outreach and engagement has become a critical tool for sourcing new talent, including Twitter, Facebook, Glassdoor, Pinterest, Quora, and LinkedIn. College students spend two to four hours a day on social media sites – tap into this engagement targeting diverse groups, associations and networks.

- **VIDEO JOB POST**
  Video job posts that provide insight about the company are also emerging as effective recruitment tools. A Deloitte study found that job postings on Facebook that feature videos receive 36 percent more applications.

- **GAMING AND SIMULATION**
  Gaming and simulation have shifted recruitment focus from checking credentials to assessing skills. According to Deloitte, nearly a third of global business leaders are using games to assess potential candidates by simulating tasks they would do on the job.

- **MOBILE PLATFORMS**
  Mobile platforms can increase access to new talent. A recent survey found that 50 percent of individuals check their phones 25X per day, while 10 percent check more than 100X per day.
Promote Brand

A diverse workforce and inclusive culture have become central to employer brand and reputation, and key to attracting new talent. Employees are the face of the brand; involving them in spreading the word about the company through their social media networks can have widespread impact and will authentically resonate with prospective talent. Big retailers are engaging key influencers in their organization and using them to dispatch company culture and values by telling their ‘story.’ Some retail companies create a unique hashtag that employees can use to post information about the company and their jobs on Instagram and Twitter. Content shared by employees receives eight times more engagement than content shared by brand channels; brand messages reached 561 percent further when shared by employees.

Incentivize employees

Employee-referred candidates are 3x more likely to be a good match for the job because employees give these candidates detailed, accurate information about the job requirements and working conditions. As a result, candidates are likely to proceed with the selection process only if they feel it is a good fit. And because they do fit well, referral candidates who are hired are less likely to quit or be fired. While employee referral programs deliver the best cost-per-hire and the best quality candidates, many companies don’t administer these programs well. Bonus amounts often are not of enough significance to incentivize employees to make a referral, and some companies don’t pay the bonus unless the new hire stays with the company a certain amount of time.

Offer Tuition Assistance

In today’s tight labor market, retailers are recognizing that to attract and keep best talent, they will need to offer new types of incentives – tuition assistance is one benefit a number of big retailers are banking on. In a survey by the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, approximately 83 percent of organizations provided educational assistance or tuition reimbursement to their employees. Almost 75 percent of organizations in that survey report their educational assistance offerings are successful. Forty-five percent of programs were successful in retaining current employees, 44 percent kept employees current on evolving skill sets required for the organization, and 39 percent maintained/increased employee satisfaction and loyalty.

Employers that are able to assist their employees repay their existing student loans have an opportunity to differentiate themselves. In the American Student Assistance survey, 76 percent of respondents said that if a prospective employer offered a student loan repayment benefit, it would be a deciding or contributing factor to accept the job. In a recent Oliver Wyman survey, 58 percent of respondents would prefer their employer make payments toward their student debt than toward retirement funds. Nearly half of respondents selected student loan repayment as the most important employee benefit among six potential options,
including retirement and health care contributions. Ninety percent say that having a student loan repayment benefit would positively impact their decision to accept a job offer, to recommend an employer, or to stay with their current employer.

CASE STUDIES: TUITION ASSISTANCE

Starbucks

Starbucks’ tuition assistance program covers the full cost of earning an online bachelor’s degree with a choice of more than 70 undergraduate degrees through Arizona State University. The company also offers students support from a dedicated team of coaches and advisors and 24/7 tutoring on a variety of subjects. Employees who work at least 20 hours per week are eligible for the benefit. The company hopes to have 25,000 employees graduate from Arizona State University by 025.

Walmart

Walmart in 2018 announced it will fund college degrees for its US workforce. The retailer’s 1.5 million employees will be able to pursue associate’s or bachelor’s degrees in business or supply-chain management at three nonprofit schools for $1 a day. Walmart will subsidize tuition, books and fees and provide support with the application and enrollment processes. The tuition program – offered to part-time staff as well as full-timers – is intended to improve employee retention and engagement. There is no penalty for courses already taken if an employee leaves the company while enrolled in school, and no requirement to continue working at Walmart for any period after receiving the degree. Walmart executives estimate as many as 68,000 employees may sign up for the benefit.

Strengthen Onboarding

Most organizations have structured processes for onboarding newly hired salaried workers, but not many extend those same practices to hourly workers. Research shows that the trajectory of a new hire’s success is set as early as the first two weeks. Significant time, money and resources are spent recruiting and hiring new employees. Providing strong support through onboarding them makes good business sense. Effective onboarding leads to faster time to productivity, better retention rates, and higher employee engagement. In a national survey, 52 percent of organizations perceive effective onboarding as improving retention rates; 60 percent agree in shortens time to productivity, and 53 percent said effective onboarding improves overall customer satisfaction. In the same study, 60 percent of managers cite failure to establish effective working relationships as a primary reason employee onboarding fails.
Tap into New Talent Pools

Many retail organizations have made strong inroads with regard to establishing partnerships with non-profits and job boards to source women and minorities, but fewer have tapped into other talent pools, including older workers, individuals with disabilities and veterans.

OLDER WORKERS

Most employers focus recruitment efforts on young job seekers, overlooking older workers who may be seeking a second career or part-time work. This is a significant missed opportunity. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that by 2022, 25 percent of all US workers will be over 55. By 2050, the number of individuals in the labor force who are 65 or older will grow by 75 percent; the number 25 to 54 will only grow by two percent.

Older workers will be the largest source of talent in the next two decades, yet a PwC global survey found that only eight percent of CEOs include age as a dimension of their D&I strategy. According to studies by AARP, age-inclusive HR practices can improve organizational performance and reduce employee turnover. Studies found that teams with age diversity performed better on complex decision-making tasks, and the productivity of older and younger workers was higher in companies that utilized mixed-age work teams than in companies that did not.

CASE STUDY

CVS Caremark: Recruitment and retention of older workers

CVS Caremark has a long history focused on increasing the number of colleagues who are 50 or older. As one example, the company’s Snowbird Program offers older workers unique workplace flexibility by allowing several hundred pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, and other store associates to transfer from northern states to CVS locations in Florida, Arizona and other warmer climates. The program not only helps CVS keep up with seasonal business surges as customer traffic fluctuates from one region to the next, it also helps the company attract and keep older workers. Over the past two decades, the number of CVS colleagues aged 50 or older has increased from seven percent to 22 percent.

NEXT PRACTICE TIP

Recruiting Older Workers

1. Host networking forums and post job opportunities targeted to retirees and company alumni through social media
2. Leverage alumni groups of existing older workers in the workforce
3. Post jobs in newsletters, magazines, and other print media targeted to mature readers
4. Broadcast job posts and career opportunities in LinkedIn community groups catering to the over 50 crowd
5. Partner with organizations specializing in helping older workers and retirees find work:
   - AARP’s Life Reimagined for Work program
   - American Society for Aging’s Career Advantage
   - Senior Job Bank
   - The Senior Community Service Employment Program
VETERANS

Veterans bring ethnic and gender diversity, a strong work ethic, tax credits, specialized training, and countless other skills sets when they enter the civilian workforce. Common traits include leadership skills, working with team members from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural competency, and supply chain and logistics skill sets. Today, 48 percent of veterans are employed in the civilian labor force; one in five of them have climbed the corporate ladder and become executives. Among veterans with LinkedIn profiles, more than 50,000 hold high-level roles at companies with more than 1,000 employees, while nearly 90,000 are executives at firms with fewer than 1,000 people.

A few of the many hiring resources for veterans are: Hero2Hire, which was launched by the Defense Department to connect employers and career-ready veterans seeking jobs, JOFDAV.com, an online database of professional resumes of disabled veterans looking for work, and RecruitMilitary.

INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

There are at least one billion people with disabilities worldwide, comprising 15 percent of the world’s population. In 2016, 13 percent of the nation’s population reported a disability. Thirty-two percent of individuals with disabilities have an associate’s degree – equivalent with individuals without disabilities, and 14 percent have a bachelor’s degree or higher.

One great resource for finding professional with disabilities looking for employment is through the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), an online system which includes a job posting platform for employers. The portal is the largest resource of job candidates with disabilities with 18,000 active job seekers on the site. TAP offers business the opportunity to post jobs, search candidate resumes based on skill sets and geographic availability, capture job metrics, generate compliance reports, interview candidates, have online job fairs, and have their jobs seen by individuals with disabilities throughout the country.

Working Mother recently published a report focused on individuals with disabilities in the workplace: Uncovering Hidden Potential Non-Apparent Disabilities in the Workplace: Understanding a valuable untapped talent pool of people with non-apparent disabilities. The report provides important insight into recruiting, hiring and onboarding this important source of untapped talent.

Trend: Demand for Bilingual Workers is Rising

According to a 2017 report by the New American Economy, by 2020, proficiency in more than one language will be among the most important skills a job seeker can have. The study estimates the US economy loses almost $2 billion each year because of language or cultural misunderstandings.

US employers posted roughly 240,000 job advertisements aimed at bilingual workers in 2010; the figure more than doubled to 630,000 by 2015.

Employers posted more than 3X more jobs for Chinese speakers in 2015 than they had just five years earlier. During the same time period, the number of US job posts listing Spanish and Arabic as a desired skill increased by 150 percent.

Sixty percent of occupations with the highest demand for bilingual workers were open to individuals with less than a bachelor’s degree. Retail jobs accounted for 18 percent of all bilingual job listings in 2015.
Inclusive Recruitment Practices

1. Track and measure hiring ratios and audit outcomes for gender, racial or age patterns and disparities; tracking non-hires can be equally insightful.

2. Benchmark where the organization stands relative to competition.

3. Determine what percentage of diverse talent is needed in the pipeline to create a difference in the next three to five years.

4. Understand and monitor the talent pool in the industry and each business region.

5. Establish measurable goals for diverse interview and promotion slates.

6. Review the full talent acquisition and career advancement life-cycle for bias, including job posts, interview guides, job requirements, promotion opportunities, and criteria weighing evaluations.

7. Conduct anonymous surveys; leverage recent hires and those who declined offers to help identify hidden biases and recruitment shortfalls.

8. Ensure accessible and culturally inclusive communications and messaging.

9. Engage managers at all levels in recruitment and hiring, as well as identifying and developing high-potential employees – and recognize and reward them for their efforts.

10. Build strong partnerships with schools and student associations, and community-based associations and organizations; leverage ERGs in developing these partnerships.

11. Monitor and use social media especially for brand messaging, employee/ERG testimonials.

Employer-led Coalition Targets Job Opportunities for US Youth

The 100K Opportunities Initiative is an employer-led coalition of private, public and philanthropic organizations working together to get the 4.9 million American youth aged 16-24 who are out of school and not working hired.

An upcoming event in Atlanta describes the scope of the initiative. The coalition is working with the city’s Mayor and 75 local leaders and service providers to host the Atlanta Opportunity Fair. Recruiters from more than 25 leading US employers including FedEx, Starbucks, Nordstrom, Five Guys, HMSHost, Taco Bell, Arby’s and others plan to conduct more than 1,800 job interviews at the event for full-time and part-time entry-level positions in the area. To date, more than 175,000 youth have found jobs, internships or higher education opportunities through the coalition’s efforts, of which more than 4,500 received on-the-spot offers at the six hiring fairs held to date. With membership now exceeding 55 employers, foundations, civic leaders and non-profits, the 100K Opportunities coalition surpassed its 100,000 milestone and made a new commitment to hiring one million Opportunity Youth by 2020.

BRAG

BRAG is a non-profit organization that prepares and educates professionals, entrepreneurs and students of color for executive leadership in retail, fashion and related industries. The organization has several college chapters that offer guidance and direction to students considering a career in retail. Summer internships include seminars, workshops, retail math classes, a business case study, and executive level work responsibilities. Interns are provided with a mentor, one-on-one counseling, and opportunities to interact with industry professionals. The organization’s membership consists of students and professionals working in retail, wholesale, marketing, and direct sales – providing a captive talent pool for sourcing high-potential job candidates.
Engagement

When hourly workers are paid and treated fairly and have access to opportunities for growth and development, they are more likely to be engaged, stay with their employer longer, and go the extra mile when it comes to job performance. Engaged employees’ productivity is 20 percentage points higher than that of disengaged workers, according to research done by the Corporate Leadership Council. A study by CNBC found that the engaged and motivated retail store employee brings in 69 percent more revenue than employees who are not.

Engaged employees are more productive and serve as stronger brand ambassadors. However, according to a recent Gallup poll, nearly 70 percent of US workers are disengaged. In addition to being less productive, disengaged workers can negatively impact productivity and morale in the workplace. They are also more likely to look for work elsewhere. It is estimated that 51 percent of employees are actively looking for a new job or watching for new job openings.

Competition for talent is on the rise and today’s workers expect a better employee experience. They want more control and flexibility in their jobs and expect to be informed and connected with their employer. They want their voices to be heard and expect to be recognized and rewarded for their achievements.

Establish Inclusive Communication

Despite the high value retailers place on front-line workers as brand advocates, most lack a communication structure that directly connects this segment of the workforce with important corporate information.

In a national survey of retail managers, 46 percent of managers say important information about new products, promotions and workplace practices are communicated to managers only, who then are charged with forwarding the information to front-line workers. This practice adds additional responsibilities on store managers and risks losing consistency of message. Fifty-five percent of managers in the study say the head office rarely or never recognizes hourly employees from their store for doing good work, which can further contribute to those workers feeling disconnected and disengaged in their jobs. Only 11 percent of managers say their organization has digital channels for frontline workers to access important information. In the same study, 94 percent of managers agree that direct two-way communication between corporate offices and front-line workers about company goals, standards and marketing efforts would make front-line workers more productive and stronger brand ambassadors.

Beekeeper

One platform gaining traction in the industry is Beekeeper – a mobile-based communication tool in use in more than 137 different countries. The platform is designed to connect non-desk workers with the rest of the organization through mobile or web-based technology. The tool can help overcome language barriers and promote workplace diversity and corporate culture by translating posts and comments in 30 languages. Retail companies use the platform to distribute company news, updates and protocols; send 1:1 or group messages and share files; recognize employees and strengthen retention; get instant feedback through pulse surveys, and generate ideas and solutions to workplace challenges through bottom-up communication.
A study by Industry Week found that 62 percent of workers expect to be able to communicate with their CEOs face-to-face on a regular basis. Effectively connecting with front-line workers calls for a continuum of engagement activities - not one-time events. Progressive retailers are using live streaming, ‘virtual town hall’ meetings and video newsletters to connect with their hourly workforce. Webcasts, webinars and interactive town hall meetings can utilize features like real-time polling to keep employees engaged and get their feedback on new ideas and consumer needs.

Employee Resource Group participation

Employee engagement results from a sense of purpose and community in the workplace, which can be challenging when workers are distributed across stores, warehouses and corporate offices. Hourly employees often feel voiceless within an organization, and the feeling can even be stronger among workers who are members of an underrepresented group. The retail-based shift structure and wide geographic spread further contribute to making hourly workers feel disengaged and disconnected from the workforce and goals of the company.

ERGs can play a key role in connecting the hourly worker to the D&I enterprise and helping marginalized workers feel less isolated in the organization. In a recent SHRM study, the majority of respondent companies reported they successfully use their ERGs to improve the organization’s leadership development process, drive results, forge relationships, and ensure alignment between business and diversity strategies. Ninety percent leverage ERG members during the onboarding process to acclimate employees and engender a sense of loyalty and belonging to their new company.

Foster innovation

Progressive retailers empower employees to problem solve and make decisions about work process improvements – and reward those efforts whether they are successful or not. Letting employees become champions of change increases the likelihood that the change will be meaningful and lasting. Best practice organizations including in the retail industry have used hackathons to collect employee ideas and design new approaches to workplace design, benefits and rewards, and meeting the needs of consumer populations.

ERGs and Hourly Employees

In a DBP member poll, companies were asked about the involvement of hourly employees in ERGs. The major findings include:

- **95%** of responding organizations have non-exempt employees who participate in affinity groups
- **90%** do not restrict the number of hours a non-exempt employee can volunteer for an affinity group or initiative
- **75%** in 75% of companies, hourly employees are eligible to lead affinity groups
- **42%** of companies pay their hourly workers for activities related to affinity group efforts
Community Connections

A Gallup study of hourly workers found that this population are more highly motivated by the opportunity to give back to communities than by organizational mission. Locations with a “local” mission saw employees exhibit greater engagement and ownership over their work. Encourage retail workers to craft their local missions – as company leaders, stay involved in those discussions. ERGs can play a key role in helping to shape the local mission and connect with community leaders to carry out that mission. When leadership gets involved in the local mission, relationships are formed and front-line workers are afforded visibility.

One out of ten employees at Home Depot is a veteran. The company’s employee-run Military Appreciation Group (MAG) has helped develop and launch a number of programs to assist associates that are veterans as well as veterans in the community. The group designed and implemented #serviceselfie to foster community-based volunteering and raise money for veteran-related causes. For every photo uploaded to Twitter or Instagram with the #serviceselfie tag, Home Depot donates $1 to a veteran-related cause, up to $500,000 total. This year, thousands of store associates will volunteer their time to improve veteran housing in communities nation-wide. The company also provides workplace flexibility for associates who serve in the National Guard, reserves, or who are military spouses.

**CASE STUDY**

**Why Wegman’s Success Matters**

Wegman’s placed second on the Fortune 100 Best Companies to work for beating out companies like Boston Consulting Group (number three on the list), a company known for great compensation and benefits. In contrast, numerous Wegman’s positions pay $11 per hour and a department manager earns a yearly salary of under $60,000. The high ranking speaks to the importance of a culture of inclusion and engagement as a driver for employee satisfaction, retention and productivity.

Ninety-three percent of employees said management is honest and ethical; 96 percent said they had great bosses, and 97 percent claim they benefit from great communication. Rewards programs recognize work anniversaries, developmental goals and acts of service. Ninety-eight percent say they are given the resources and equipment to do their jobs and 99 percent called the workplace a ‘great atmosphere.’ Wegman’s invests more than $50 million annually in training and development, including management trainee and leadership development programs, department universities, workshops and certification programs. The company offered $5 million in tuition assistance in 2016. Employees aren’t obligated to return to Wegman’s after graduation, but many do.

Wegman’s offers health insurance for part-time employees and 100 percent company-paid health coverage for full-time employees and their dependents. The company donated more than $6.5 million to philanthropic causes in 2016; 95 percent of employees feel good about the ways the company contributes to society.
Conclusion

Consumer populations are more racially, ethnically, culturally, and economically diverse than ever before. Being competitive in the future will require building brand loyalty with a highly diverse consumer base and delivering a high-quality customer experience through a diverse, talented and culturally competent workforce.

Against this backdrop, retailers across the industry are rethinking their business models and human capital strategies; many are putting renewed focus on the front-line workforce. Hourly workers have long been overlooked as an important source of talent in the industry. Examining best practices of higher wages, comprehensive benefits, predictable scheduling practices, and equitable advancement opportunities can be a market differentiator for most non-exempt retail jobs in which competition for talent is fierce. Women and minorities hold a disproportionate percentage of low-wage jobs in the sector, and pathways to higher paying roles in the sector remain elusive for millions of workers. Reducing turnover in the sector (which is among the highest in the US economy) will enhance the bottom line and help to improve overall communities.

The retail industry is the largest employer of low-wage workers in the country. Elevating the quality of jobs and opportunities in the sector has profound implications for millions of American workers. Investing in the hourly workforce by providing competitive wages, stable scheduling, training and education, and equitable opportunities for advancement can have a profound impact on a retailer's bottom-line and the US economy overall.


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