2022 STATE OF

Deskless Work: *Retail*

HIGH-IMPACT EXPERIENCES Raydiant

A word from our CEO

It's not surprising that as we continue to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, brick-and-mortar retail stores continue to see signs of recovery. Stores are open, customers are returning, and business is beginning to thrive again. But despite this recovery, retail operations won't return to the pre-pandemic status quo — they can't.

Deskless workers in retail have weathered two years of adjusted schedules, new approaches to customer service, and an increase in turnover as co-workers seek other job opportunities. However, new technology and innovation have changed how stores function, welcome customers, and support their staff.

Is engagement improving? Are deskless workers finding more joy and stability in their work? Or are there additional forthcoming changes in retail that are burning employees out?

Our second annual "State of Deskless Work" report asked 971 deskless workers in retail to tell us more about their engagement. They gave insights into how their company can improve morale, whether they have the necessary tools and technology to provide quality customer service, and whether they'll seek employment elsewhere.

We hope you find these insights helpful as you continue to grow and evolve employee and customer engagement strategies in your brick-and-mortar locations for 2022 and beyond.

Bobby Marhamat

CEO | RAYDIANT

Key Findings

Here are seven key insights learned about the state of deskless workers in retail:

1 Only 38% of respondents are highly engaged at work, and 29% are not engaged at all.

Respondents say decreasing engagement is due to stagnant work, stress due to COVID-19, and co-workers leaving or getting fired.

2 "Better communication" is the top suggestion for how to improve engagement.

Respondents also suggest that to improve engagement, their companies should offer incentives and rewards, improve management, build team morale, and provide better tools for doing the job.

3 Many are seeing "more turnover than ever."

36% say there's more turnover than ever in their company, with 34% seeing about the same level of turnover as in the past. Additionally, 52% say they're likely to quit their job in the next year.

4 35% say their company improved customer service quality over the past year.

Those who saw customer service quality improve attribute it to their company making customer service a priority, investing in tools and technology, and investing in employee training.

5 Limited inventory is impacting customer service quality the most.

Supply chain disruptions limiting inventory are impacting customer service. Other impacts include limited hours of operation, lack of customer service training, lack of employee recognition, and lack of investment in technology.

6 Only 37% say their company communicates "very well."

Additionally, 34% believe their employer does "somewhat well" at communicating, but 29% say their employer doesn't communicate well at all. Respondents prefer verbal communication, through an app, or by email.

7 45% don't believe their company will be in business in five years.

Unless addressed, top reasons that will put their companies out of business are:

- Budgeting and administration problems
- Lack of demand for products and services
- Not investing in technology for better customer service

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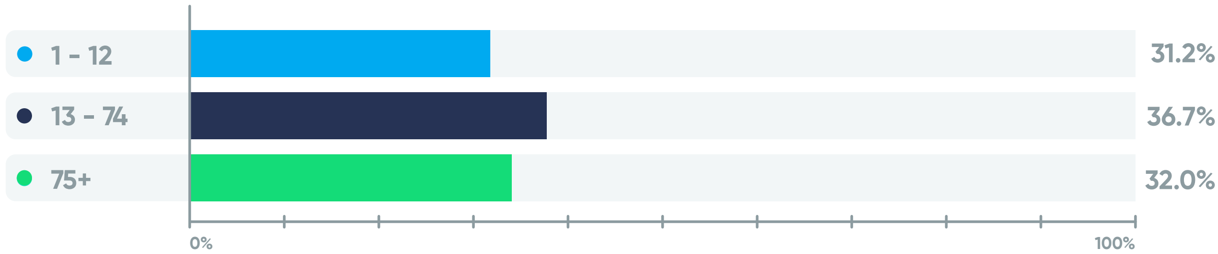
Who Was Surveyed:

Methodology and Participant Demographics

In order to provide greater context around these findings, here are more details on whom we surveyed and the methodology used. Starting on May 19, 2022, we surveyed 971 retail deskless workers in the US. The survey was conducted online via Pollfish using organic sampling. Learn more about the Pollfish methodology *here.*

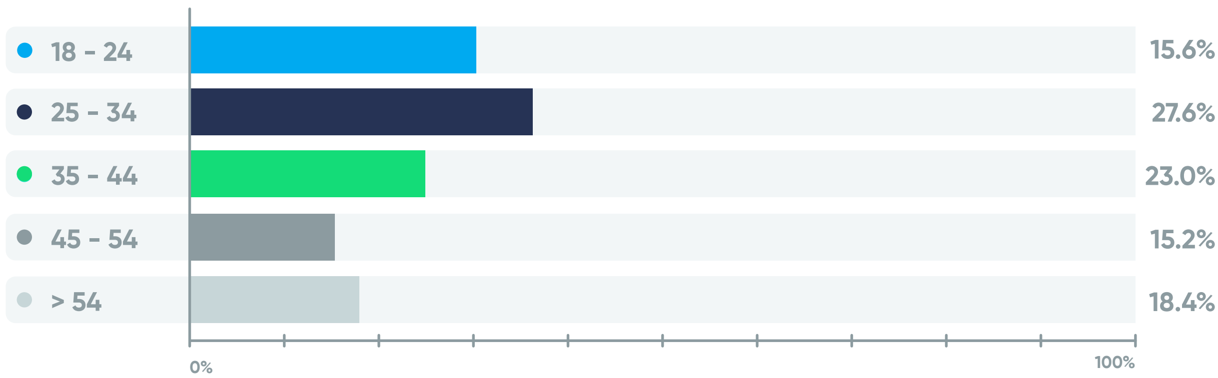
Which of the following is most accurate?

Approximately how many locations does the company you work for have in total?



Gender parameters

Age parameters



Now, with context around who our respondents were — deskless workers who work in physical retail locations, both full- and part-time — let's explore what we uncovered.

PART 1

Engagement and Turnover

"TL;DR"

Overall, engagement isn't what it should be amongst deskless workers in retail. While 38% are highly engaged with work each day, 29% are not — and engagement, overall, is down from last year. This low engagement has various impacts on organizations, including a decrease in customer service quality, decreased profits, increased absenteeism, and increased turnover.

In fact, 36% are seeing more turnover than ever these days. This could likely be due to disengaged employees no longer wanting to work for the company. But as we found, highly engaged employees are leaving, too, probably for better pay and better opportunities, despite their high engagement.

Respondents say decreased engagement is due to stagnant work, COVID-related stress, constant turnover, changes in company culture or model, and poor overall management. However, respondents suggest that to improve engagement, companies should focus on better communication with their employees, offer incentives and recognition for good work, improve their management, build morale amongst the team, and provide better tools to their workers.

Ultimately, increasing engagement will not only increase productivity, team happiness, and morale but also improve the customer experience, customer retention, and sales.

Employee engagement may be the most significant area of focus for any brick-and-mortar manager. Engaged employees feel connected to their work, enjoy being present and helping customers, and understand the value they provide. Highly engaged employees also result in lower turnover, higher profits, and happier customers. Deskless workers in retail locations have faced a number of challenges over the past two years, so how are they faring on engagement?

38% are highly engaged at work, while 29% are not engaged at all

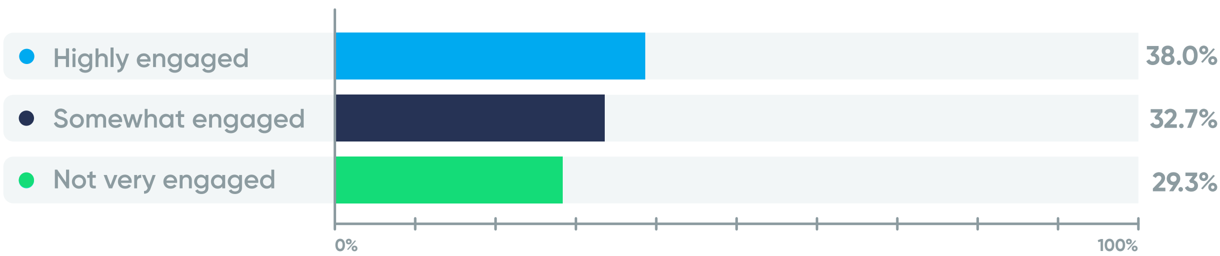
Worker engagement sets the tone for workplace culture and customer satisfaction, yet engagement varies amongst our respondents. 38% say they are highly engaged at work, enjoy what they do, and feel like they contribute. 32.7% say they are somewhat engaged, and may possibly like what they do but not be as fully committed to their company or a future with their company. However, 29.3% are not very engaged, and may simply be going through the motions.

In looking at some of the distinct respondent groups, we found that only 33.9% of female respondents are highly engaged in their work as opposed to 42.5% of male respondents who said they were highly engaged. Younger respondents (18-34) and older respondents (35+) were similarly highly engaged (39% and 37%, respectively).

One troubling statistic, though, when compared to last year's findings is that overall engagement is down in 2022. Last year's survey (taken in August 2021) found 52.6% of respondents were highly engaged in their work, with 25.6% saying they were only somewhat engaged, and 21.8% saying they were not at all engaged.

What caused this drop in engagement from August 2021 to May 2022? One possibility is that Summer 2021 saw the widespread reopening of retail locations after a year of being shuttered. Getting back to business as usual and welcoming customers back into stores gave a kind of hope that undoubtedly boosted engagement and excitement. However, that excitement didn't last. Since then, retailers have had to adjust for new variant shutdowns, staffing shortages due to illness and turnover, and a return to uncertainty coupled with weariness. That certainly takes a toll on engagement and could be why numbers have dropped over the past year.

How engaged would you say you personally are at work today?



37% say their engagement has increased over the past year

For 37.4%, their engagement has increased over the past 12 months. Of those, 41.3% consider themselves "highly engaged." For 31.8%, their engagement has stayed the same. However, 30.8% experienced decreased engagement — 6.4% higher than last year.

How has this evolved over the past 12 months?

Top Five Reasons for Decreasing Engagement

Those who said their engagement has decreased over the past 12 months cite the following reasons:

14.4% Stagnant work, including a lack of progress, innovation, and challenges

Engagement is decreasing because work has become stagnant, and workers aren't feeling challenged enough to stay engaged. This could also result from managing retail during a pandemic. With management focused on simply keeping the doors open and labor shortages, they can't focus on new in-store innovations or updates.

12.7% Stress due to COVID-19

After two years of shutdowns, pivoting to creative ways to sell products and services, turnover, staffing shortages, and safety precautions, deskless workers in retail are tired, stressed, and disengaged. Those who work for companies with 12 or fewer locations claimed this was their top reason for disengagement.

12.4% Loss of co-workers, either voluntarily or through termination

Constantly saying goodbye to colleagues can take a toll on morale. Turnover also means devoting time and resources to hiring and training new staff, thus adding extra work to already overworked employees.

12.0% Changes in the company culture or business model

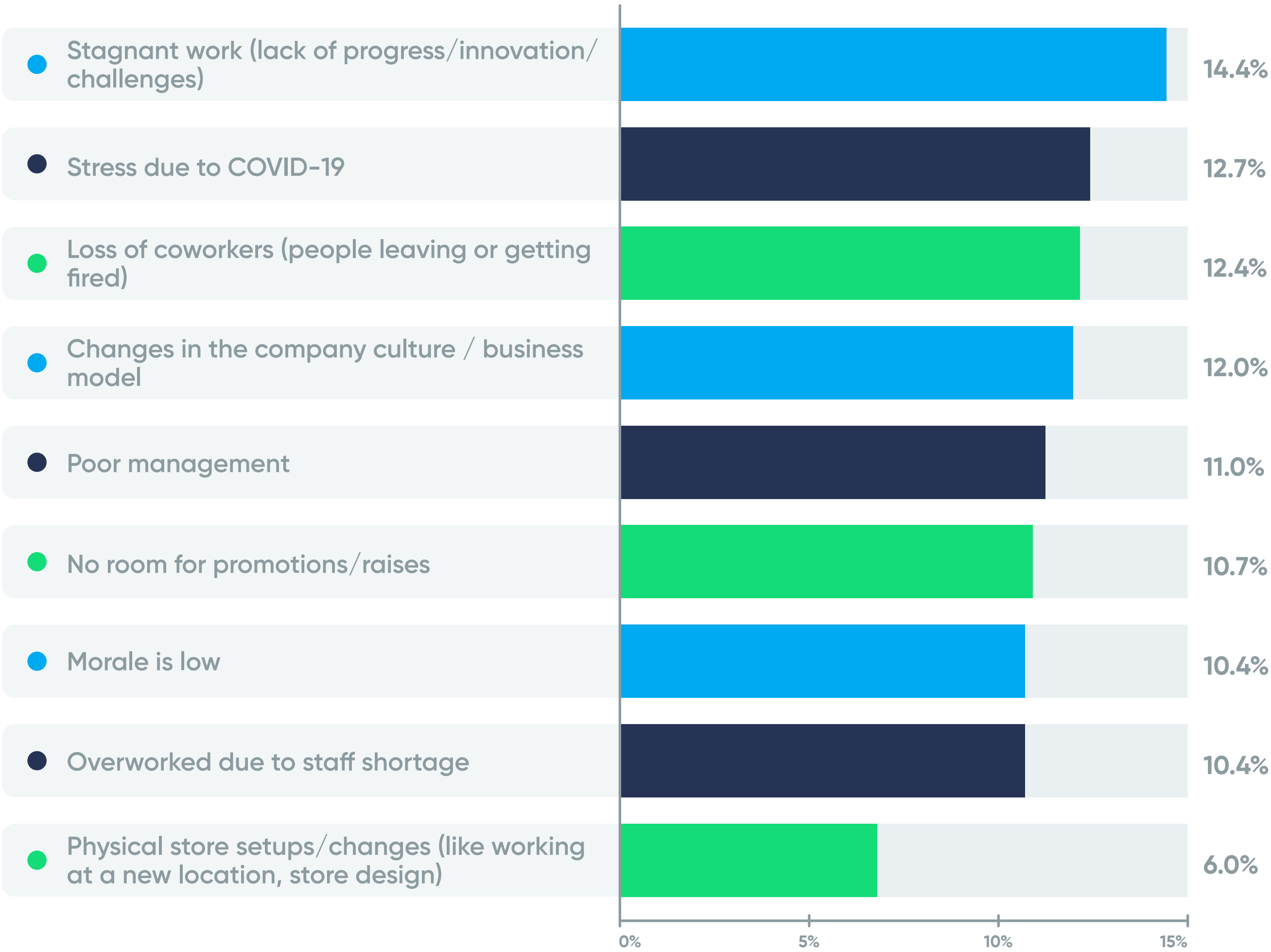
At the heart of engagement is feeling connected to the company's mission, vision, values, and goals. If those change, or another core pillar changes, like the workplace culture and tone — especially if there's high turnover — employees can feel disengaged from what they once believed.

11.0% Poor management

The adage is that workers don't leave workplaces, they leave bosses. Disengagement also stems from poor management, and with all the changes in retail, a manager ill-equipped to lead their staff through change can contribute to low morale and uncertainty.

Other reasons cited for decreasing engagement include no room for promotions or raises (10.7%), being overworked due to staff shortage (10.4%), and physical store setups and changes, like working at a new location or with a new store design (6%).

If decreased, outside of changes in pay, what would you say is the primary reason you become less engaged at work?



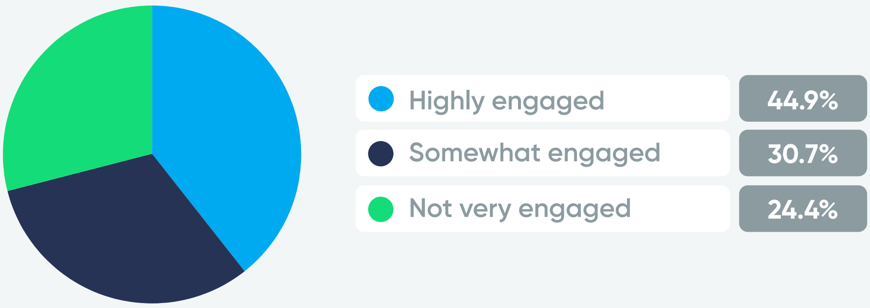
38% say their co-workers are highly engaged

Co-workers play a significant role in workplace culture, and disengagement amongst one can likely affect many. When asked how engaged they believe their co-workers are, 37.9% of respondents see them as highly engaged. 33.1% say their co-workers are somewhat engaged, and 29% say their co-workers are not very engaged at all.

2021's report, however, found respondents ranking their co-workers as more engaged than in 2022:

- 44.9% said co-workers were highly engaged
- 30.7% said they were somewhat engaged
- 24.4% said they were not very engaged at all

How engaged would you say your co-workers are at work?

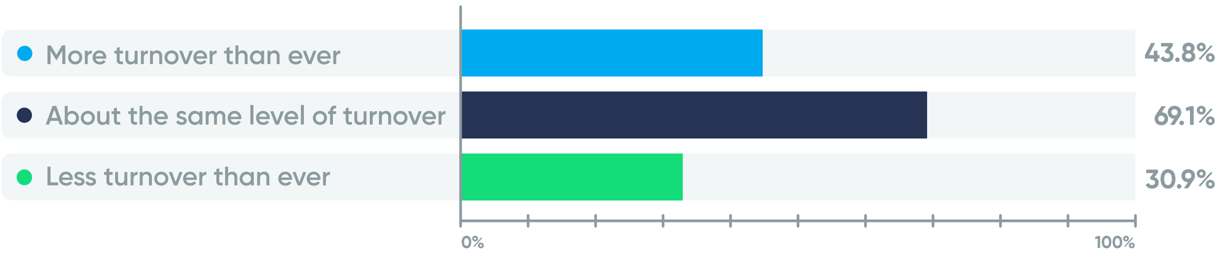


69% are seeing the same level of turnover, or "more turnover than ever"

Amid the Great Resignation, are respondents seeing higher turnover in their locations? 69.1% say there is the same level of turnover or more turnover than ever, with 30.9% seeing less turnover than ever. The good news is that this is somewhat less turnover than what last year's report found, where 79.5% saw the same level of turnover or more turnover than ever.

However, while low engagement is known to correlate directly to high turnover, that's not happening here. Of those who said they're seeing more turnover than ever, the largest segment (43.8%) ranked their co-workers as "highly engaged," and 40.9% ranked themselves as "highly engaged." Likely, these highly engaged employees enjoy their work but are leaving for better pay and better opportunities, like hybrid or remote work options or better benefits. In fact, those who said they're seeing more turnover than ever cited "no room for promotions or raises" as the top reason why their engagement has decreased.

How would you describe turnover (people quitting, furloughed or getting fired) at your company?



Top Five Ways to Increase Engagement at Work

Outside of increasing pay, here are some of the ways respondents thought employers could increase engagement:

12.8% Communicate better

The top thing respondents believe can increase engagement is better communication. Ways to do this could be better-communicated strategy from the home office, more information exchange from location managers, or reinforcement of the company mission.

12.2% Offer incentives and rewards

Employees feel engaged when they feel valued at work, so offering more incentives or rewards for performance can increase engagement.

10.7% Improve management

Especially in such volatile times, employees want good managers and leaders who can create the tone, set the vision, and encourage their team. Just as people quit bad managers, people stick with good managers.

10.6% Build team morale

As mentioned above, employees are not only having to do good work but have to navigate workplace challenges, COVID-related stress, saying goodbye to co-workers, and other impacts on their morale. They're looking for that extra boost to help with engagement.

9.7% Provide better tools for doing my job

Ineffective tools can cause stress and confusion for employees. By providing effective tools to do their jobs, employees are also better equipped to service customers. It also demonstrates that a company is listening to employee needs, providing a massive boost in morale and engagement.

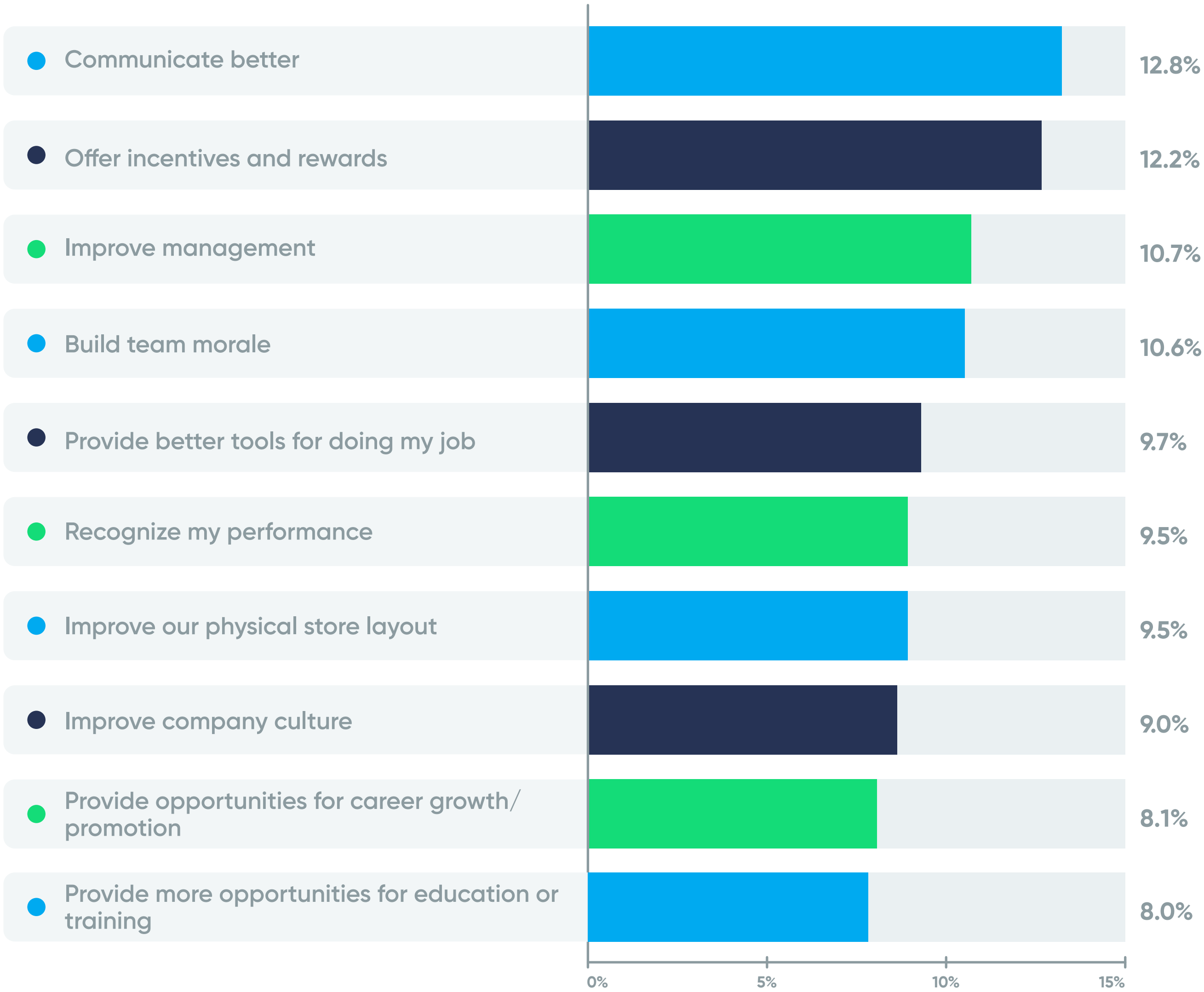
Other factors that respondents thought could improve engagement included:

- Improving the physical store layout (9.5%)
- Recognizing employee performance (9.5%)
- Improving company culture (9%)
- Providing opportunities for career growth and promotion (8.1%)
- Providing more opportunities for education or training (8%)

Looking at specific respondent groups, male respondents ranked "communicate better" first, while female respondents ranked "offer incentives and rewards" first. For younger respondents (18-34), "offer incentives and rewards" was ranked fifth and less important. Male respondents and older respondents (35+) also included "improve the physical store layout" in their top five.

When comparing the “top 5 reasons” to last year, respondents still want similar things when it comes to increasing engagement: provide important company info on time (15.4%), hire more staff so they’re not overworked (14.1%), invest in tools to make their job easier and more effective (11.5%), provide a clear path for promotion or raises (10.3%), and provide more opportunities for education and growth (9%).

Outside of increasing pay, what's the #1 thing your employer could do that would increase your engagement at work?



PART 2

Customer Service Quality

"TL;DR"

Customer service is key to maintaining a retail business, and 38% say they provide very good service to their customers. Additionally, 35% say their company has increased its quality of service over the past year due to prioritizing customer service, investing in tools and technology, and investing in employee training.

Those respondents who have seen their customer service quality decline say the following factors are to blame:

- Invested in new technology and tools (67.7%)
- Invested in more training (64.5%)
- Invested in hiring more people (38.7%)

Ultimately, an internal commitment to providing great customer service moves retailers in a positive direction. Yet, an inability to properly manage outside forces and be nimble with constant changes is deteriorating customer service.

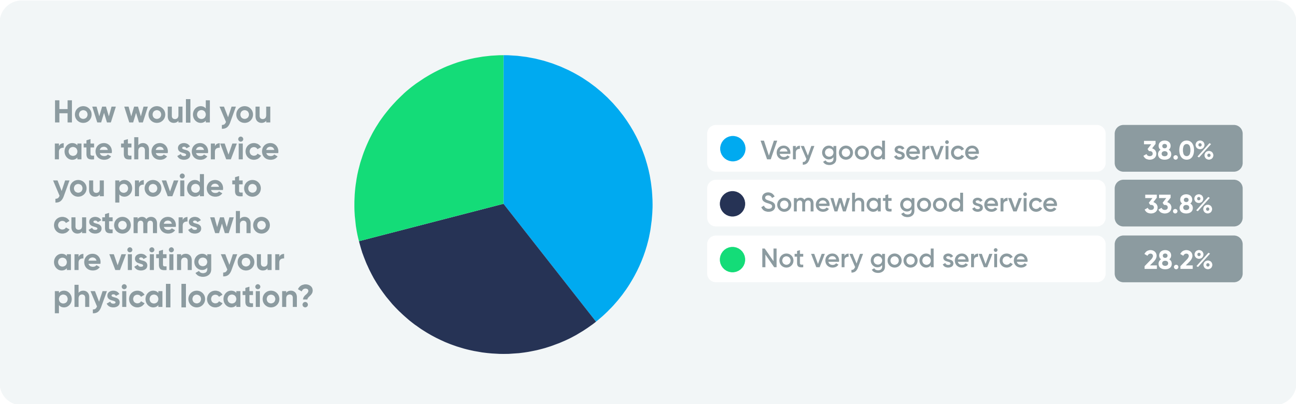
Retailers with great business strategies focus on quality service from the time a customer steps into the store to the time they leave. Especially when many consumers are turning to online retailers, excellent customer service is a differentiator for drawing in and keeping new and returning customers. When it comes to implementing quality customer service, here's what our respondents' companies are doing.

38% provide "very good" service to their customers

38% say they provide very good customer service, give them proper attention, help them find products, and leave them with a positive experience. 33.8% say they provide somewhat good service, and 28.2% say they don't offer quality customer service.

Compared to last year, it appears customer service quality is slipping, as 56.4% of respondents last year said their customer service was very good, 26.9% said somewhat good, and 16.7% said they don't offer quality customer service. Last year's survey came after a year of pandemic closures when providing excellent customer service was the difference in keeping customers or watching them switch to online purchases. Last year's results may have been evidence that companies doubled down on excellent customer service simply to survive.

However, all customer-facing businesses should be providing outstanding service to every customer who walks in the door — and these numbers show that that's just not happening.

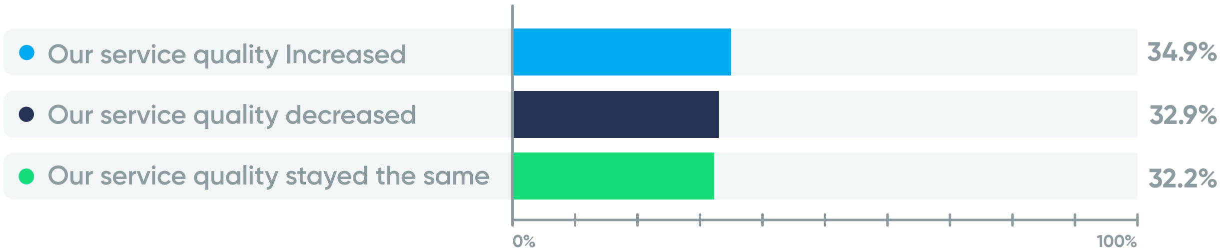


For 35%, service quality has increased

Despite the varying levels of customer service quality, 34.9% said that their service quality has increased over the past year. For 32.2%, their service quality has stayed the same. 32.9% say their service quality has decreased.

For those who replied that their service quality has decreased, the largest segment of respondents has seen more turnover than ever, has seen engagement decrease due to stagnant work, and self-ranks as only "somewhat engaged."

How has this evolved over the past 12 months?



Top Three Ways to Improve Customer Service

Those who say service quality has increased attribute it to the following:

23.0% They made customer service a priority

If you want to improve customer service, make it the top priority in your store. For example, stopping and helping a customer is more important than getting shelves restocked. Ultimately, improved customer service leads to great in-store experiences, resulting in return customers.

19.5% They invested in tools and technology

Not only do employees need the right tools to help customers find the right products, but investing in technology — like interactive kiosks, self-checkout, and digital signage for wayfinding — can improve the in-store experience for customers.

13.0% They invested in employee training

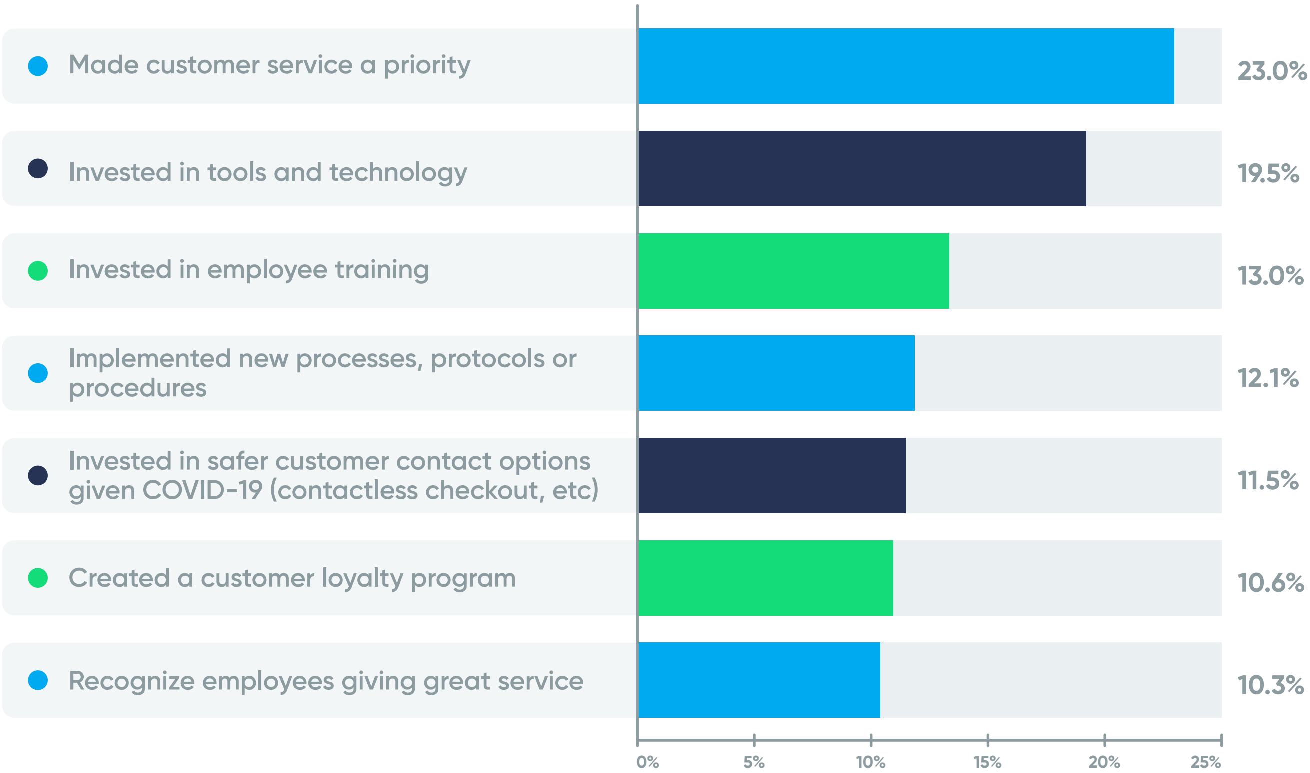
Respondents also said that their customer service was improved by becoming more knowledgeable employees. More training on product information, customer interactions, and conflict resolution likely attributed to this.

Respondents also say that to improve customer service, their company implemented new processes, protocols, or procedures (12.1%), invested in COVID-safer customer contact options like contactless checkout (11.5%), created a customer loyalty program (10.6%), and recognized employees giving great service (10.3%).

Last year's respondents improved customer service through similar means:

- Invested in new technology and tools (67.7%).
- Invested in more training (64.5%).
- Invested in hiring more people (38.7%).

If increased, what would you say is the #1 thing your company has done to improve customer service in your physical locations?



Top Five Reasons for Decreasing Customer Service

For those who saw decreased customer service quality, the main reasons why were:

15.1% Limited store product inventory availability

Physical stores are limited by the inventory they can keep. Our respondents say that not being able to put the product in customers' hands hindered the quality of their customer service. Yet another impact of the pandemic's effect on society: supply chain shortages disrupting inventory pipelines.

13.5% Limited hours of operation

A store can't serve customers if they're not open when customers go there. Unfortunately, due to variant shutdowns, sick workers, and high turnover, stores have had to juggle their hours of operation based on who's available — which respondents say is hurting their quality customer service.

11.9% Lack of customer service training

Respondents who saw increased customer service quality attribute it to employee training. Here, respondents say that a lack of customer service training — how to keep a positive attitude, how to get to yes with a customer, how to negotiate heated customer interactions — is impacting their ability to give quality service.

10.7% Lack of employee recognition

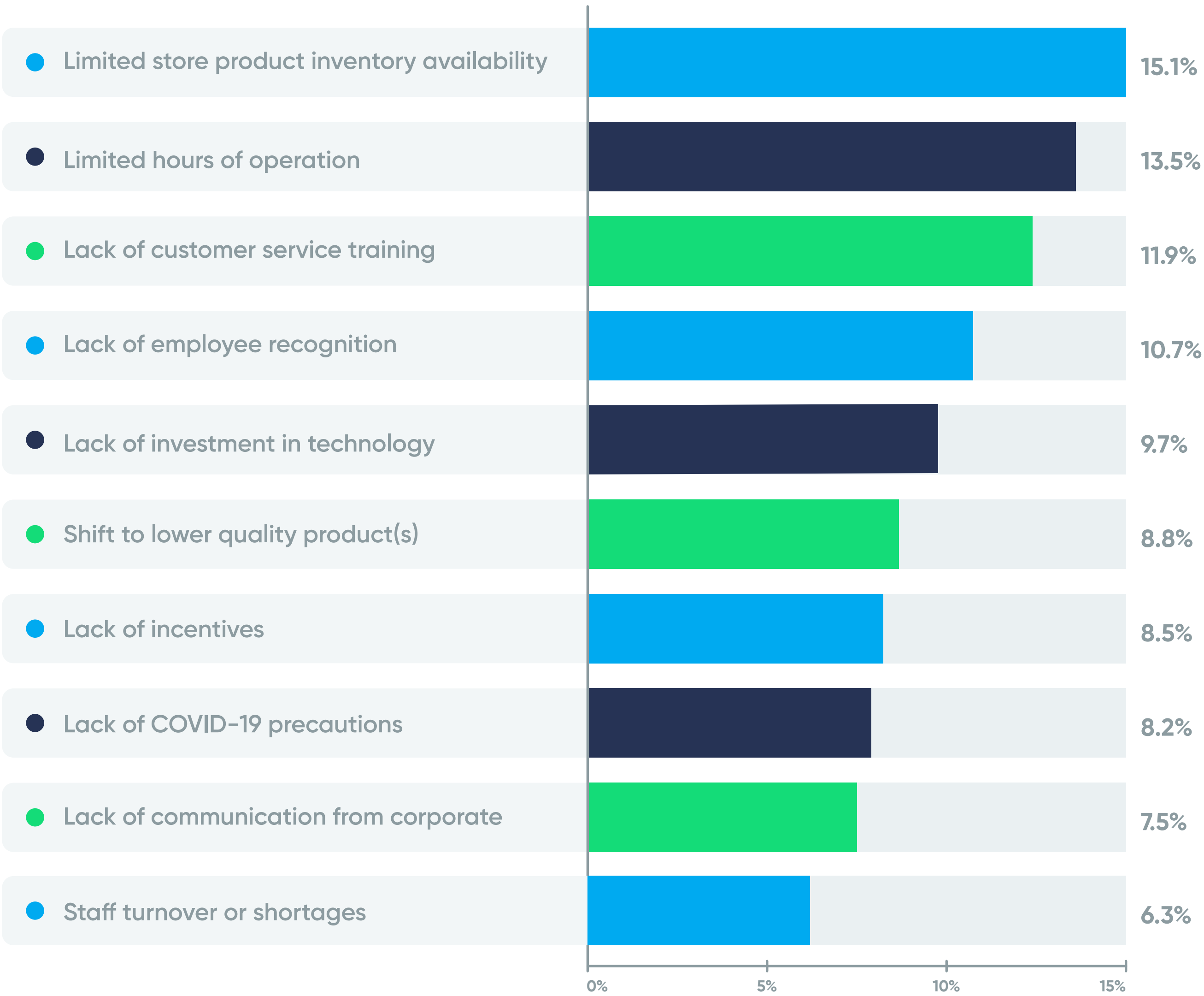
How does a lack of employee recognition impact customer service? As we saw above, one of the things companies can do to increase engagement and make employees feel valued is to offer incentives and rewards. If employees feel like they're giving their all yet are never seen or appreciated for it, they're less likely to keep delivering great customer service.

9.7% Lack of investment in technology

Similar to those who saw customer service quality increase due to investments in tools and technology, these respondents have seen their service decrease due to a lack of investment. Customers won't continue frequenting stores whose inventory systems are always off and whose self-checkout kiosks are always down.

Respondents also said that their service decreased due to lower quality products (8.8%), lack of employee incentives (8.5%), lack of COVID-19 precautions (8.2%), lack of communication from corporate (7.5%), and staff turnover or shortages (6.3%).

If decreased, why?



PART 3

Tools

"TL;DR"

So far, respondents have said that having the right tools to do their job can not only increase their engagement but increase the quality of customer service they provide. However, only half (54%) say they have the tools they need to be successful. For the remaining 46%, a lack of tools — or a lack of having the right tools — negatively impacts engagement and providing quality customer service.

Both deskless workers in retail and their customers need the right tools to do their job. There are many essential tools in retail, including up-to-date inventory systems to find what customers are looking for, engaging digital signage to help customers find their way through the aisles, and working POS systems to get them cashed out quickly. As we saw above, having the right tools can lead to an increase in customer service quality. Here's how our respondents feel about the tools they use each day.

31% use eight or more tools per day

When it comes to using tools like POS systems, handheld inventory systems, digital signage, and more, 34.8% use between one and three devices per day, while nearly the same amount (34.7%) use four to seven tools per day. 30.5% are using eight or more on a daily basis.

How many different types of tools do you have to interact with on a daily basis? [Such as POS software or digital signage]

54% say they have the tool they need

A little over half (54%) feel that their employer does provide them with the tools they need. As noted above, investments in the right tools can lead to higher engagement and better customer service. 46% say their employer does not. Of those that do not have the tools they need, the largest segment of respondents says they use eight or more tools per day — indicating the use of many tools, just not the right ones.

This year's number is in stark contrast to last year: 71.8% said they had the appropriate tools, with only 28.2% saying they did not. This increase could be due to respondents needing new tools and technologies to sustain operations during the pandemic — like the technology required to facilitate curbside pick-up or update the website with in-store inventory for BOPIS orders. With retail locations reopening, it seems like there may not be as much focus on ensuring employees have the right tools — but there should be. Ensuring that the right tools are available means that employees can not only continue to deliver high-quality service and create positive in-store experiences for their customers, they will continue to stay engaged in their work as well.

Do you feel your employer provides the tools you need to be successful?

PART 4

Company Communication

"TL;DR"

The number one thing companies can do to improve engagement is to communicate better with their employees. Yet only 37% say their company does very well at communicating with them, with 29% saying their company doesn't communicate well. Generally, companies communicate with the employees in their various locations verbally — which makes sense considering staff work in-location with one another. They also communicate via digital signage in the store or bulletin board in a break room. However, while respondents prefer to communicate verbally with managers and leadership, respondents want to be communicated with through a dedicated mobile app or email, especially since most respondents already have one.

This lack of communication from the top may be impacting the respondents' belief that the home office cares, as only about half (55%) think that their company understands the value they bring to the company.

There's often a long chain of communication from the home office to those manning registers, restocking shelves, packing BOPIS bags, and greeting customers in a retail location. However, communication is key between those creating brick-and-mortar strategy and those executing it. Do respondents feel that their company's communication methods are sufficient, or do they see room for improvement?

54% have a company email

53.8% have a company email, whereas 46.2% do not. Respondents working for companies with fewer than 75 locations were more likely to have an email address (55.6% have an email) than those whose company has over 75 locations (49.8% have an email). While company emails provide necessary internal communication, they also offer a sense of buy-in to the organization.

Does your employer provide you with a company email address? (Example: John.Smith@company.com)

55% believe that their company understands their value

Deskless workers in retail may know that their manager, who sees their actions daily, values what they bring to the company. But what about the home office? A little over half (54.6%) believe their company's headquarters understand the value they bring to the organization. However, 45.4% of home office employees believe their company is unaware of their value — which can significantly impact engagement if workers don't feel appreciated.

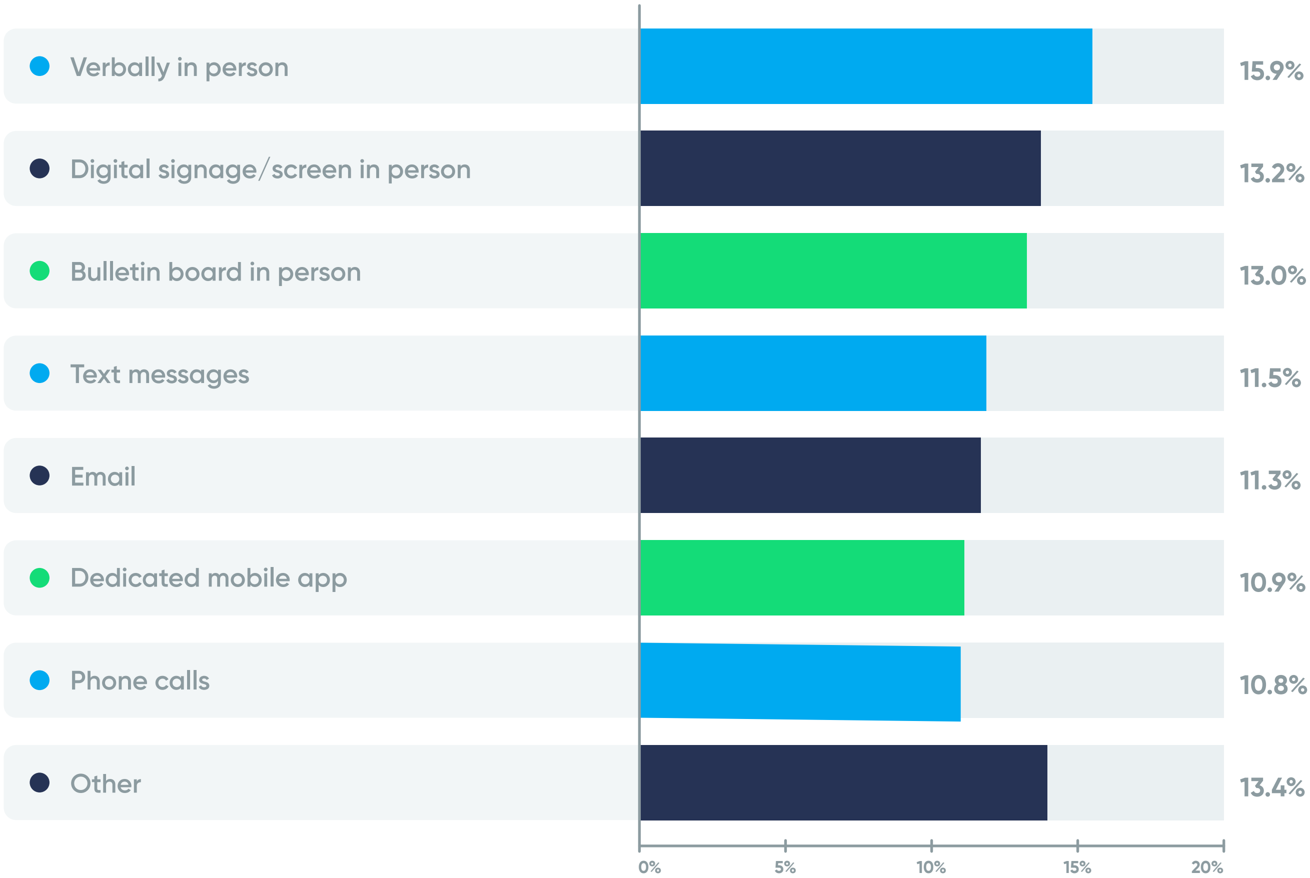
Do you believe your company's head office/headquarters understands the value you personally bring to the organization?

Companies communicate verbally, by digital signage or screen, or by bulletin board

When it comes to sharing things like weekly schedules, policy updates, upcoming promotions, and more, retailers are choosing the following ways to communicate with employees:

- Verbally in person (15.9%)
- Digital signage or screen in person (13.2%)
- Bulletin board in person (13%)
- Text messages (11.5%)
- Email (11.3%)
- Dedicated mobile app (10.9%)
- Phone calls (10.8%)
- Other (13.4%)

If you had to choose one, what would be your preferred way to communicate with your employer?



PART 5

Future Engagement and Commitment

"TL;DR"

Here, respondents observe what their company needs to work on to ensure they're still in business in five years. They not only believe that their company should prioritize customer service, especially around investments into technologies that will make the in-store customer experience much more engaging and enjoyable. They see root issues like bad administrative approaches, mishandled budgeting, and lack of awareness of customer demands undercutting future growth and stability. They also warn that unless their company puts employee incentives and rewards at the forefront — demonstrating value and appreciation for hard work during trying times — their company won't have a future.

It's been a tumultuous few years for deskless workers in retail, as they've had to be adaptable and creative during the pandemic's shutdowns and resilient during employee shortages. What does the future look like for our respondents? More importantly, what do our respondents think the future holds for the retailers they work for.

52% are likely to quit their job in the next year

As we've seen, engagement is varied amongst respondents, and many are looking for incentives and opportunities that their employer doesn't provide. As such, about half (51.8%) say they plan to quit their job in the next 12 months — and this number bumps to 56% when looking at respondents ages 18 to 34.

Are you likely to quit your current job in the next 12 months?

Only 55% believe their company will be in business in five years

Employee longevity within an organization is one thing. But what about the organization itself? A little over half (55%) of respondents believe their company will still be in business five years from now.

Last year's respondents were much more bullish about the future of their company, with 79.5% stating they believed their company would still be in business in five years.

Do you believe your current company will be in business "5 years" from now?

Top Five Reasons Their Company Will Go Out of Business

There are several reasons why respondents don't believe their company will still be in business in five years, but here are the top five:

9.4% Budgeting and administration problems

Badly managed businesses — especially with mismanaged finances or clunky operational procedures — won't last unless turned around from the top. The largest segment of respondents sees their current company as having these issues at the core of their business.

9.2% Lack of demand for products and services

Simple supply and demand is another reason respondents believe their company will go out of business. This could also relate to low engagement being a lack of innovation or progress: companies aren't evolving products and services to meet customer demand.

8.9% Not investing in technology for better customer service

As we've frequently seen, improved customer service stems from investments in tools and technology. These respondents see their company as lacking in that investment, resulting in negative in-store experiences and driving customers away.

8.9% Lack of employee incentives or rewards

Employees want to be valued and appreciated for their work, especially in a volatile environment such as retail over the past two years. But if employees provide outstanding customer service even to irate customers, volunteer to cover staffing shortages, and take on more work due to employees out sick, yet aren't acknowledged for it, they won't stick around — and neither will the company.

8.2% Lack of connection to our corporate office or headquarters

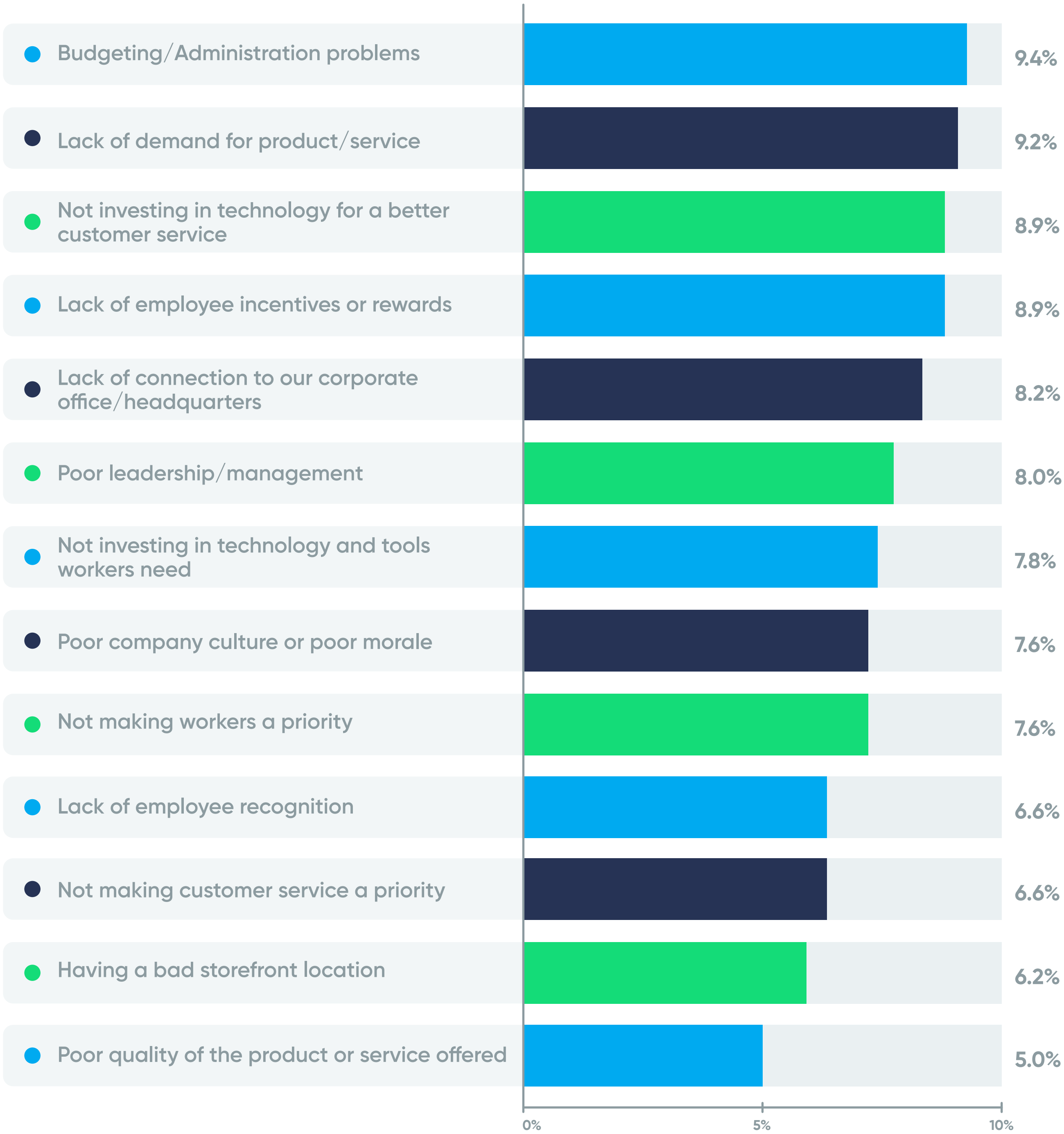
Like how boats untethered to a dock can float out to sea, retail locations that don't have strong connections to the home office will begin to drift. If strong communication about vision, strategy, and standard procedures don't come from the top, retail locations will cease to provide branded, consistent service — and the whole operation will sink.

Respondents also see their company going out of business for the following reasons:

- Poor leadership or management (8%).
- Not investing in technology and tools workers need (7.8%).
- Poor company culture or poor morale (7.6%).
- Not making workers a priority (7.6%).
- Lack of employee recognition (6.6%).
- Not making customer service a priority (6.6%).
- Having a bad storefront location (6.2%).
- Poor quality of the product or service offered (5%).

For respondents who work for a company with 12 or fewer locations, their number one reason for seeing their company potentially go out of business was because they're not investing in technology for better customer service. For respondents who work for a company with 75 or more locations, their number one reason was that their company isn't making workers a priority.

If you had to choose one, what would be your preferred way to communicate with your employer?



PART 6

Takeaways

Deskless workers in retail are the face of the company. Highly engaged, dedicated workers love interacting with customers and helping them find the products and services they're looking for. They ensure the store is clean and the displays well stocked and organized. They go above and beyond to ensure the customer walks out of the store with a bag in hand. Or, if the product wasn't in stock, ensure it's been ordered and on its way.

Engaged employees are an asset to any business, especially for customer-facing retail companies. So how can store managers and retail leaders increase engagement and appreciation? How can they ensure their employees are taken care of, and their business is sound? Based on the findings above, here are a few approaches.

1. Increase Employee Engagement

Only 38% of respondents are highly engaged at work — meaning that when a customer walks into a store staffed by twenty employees, only eight will be highly engaged in the work that day. Despite fully disengaged employees being unlikely to change their disposition, business leaders do have the opportunity to move the needle on the 33% who say they're somewhat engaged.

As evidenced by the fact that respondents said their co-workers were at different levels of engagement in their workplace, engagement will look different for everyone. Leaders looking to address and increase engagement can start with what resonated most with various respondents above

Some workers would feel more engaged if they received more communication from their company, as those who are looped in on information always feel more engaged and aware. Since engagement often stems from a connection to the company's mission, reiterate the mission and how workers connect to it. Communicate "new policies & procedures" and anything that workers should be aware of from the top. Share stories about workers who provided excellent customer service or a positive testimonial from a review site. Verbal messaging in person is the primary way communication happens today, but use other methods like dedicated mobile apps, digital signage (possibly to replace bulletin boards), and email to share information more broadly with workers scattered across different shifts.

Offering more incentives and rewards also increases engagement, showing employees they are seen and valued for what they bring to the organization. Having monthly employee honors, recognizing employees at staff meetings, gamifying the experience to create friendly competition, or even offering monetary recognition for good work done, are all ways companies can achieve higher engagement.

Respondents believe that better tools make the job easier while providing higher quality customer service. Workers need updated and easy-to-use inventory management systems, POS systems, and other software. If they're using handheld inventory devices, are they efficient, or are they causing more friction? Do location managers have the proper sales planning, inventory ordering, and payroll tools? Would employees benefit from having digital signage installations and self-service kiosks to help streamline customer service? As we found above, workers using eight or more tools per day still don't have the right ones they need, so audit and ask to uncover what tools could really benefit employees.

Finally, some workers would feel more engaged if there was improved team morale. Morale is most impacted by staffing shortages, turnover, and COVID-related stress. Building team morale may come as a byproduct of establishing better communication, implementing incentives and rewards, providing better tools, and more. But overall, location managers set the tone for their employees' morale throughout the shift, and should keep a positive attitude and demonstrate the company's mission through their actions.

2. Focus on Customer Service

Customer patronage keeps retail businesses alive, and highly engaged employees go a long way to creating a great customer experience. But what else can business leaders focus on to create great customer experiences?

Respondents said that customer service quality increased when their company made customer service a priority. Too often, the pressures of store upkeep, getting inventory onto the shelves, or seeing how fast cashiers can knock out the line becomes the priority. Making customer service a focus means instilling the message in workers that customers are first — and that it's encouraged to drop what you're doing to help them or take some extra time to ensure they're greeted and heard.

Another way to increase customer service quality is by investing in tools and technology to provide better customer service. Self-service kiosks can help them find what they're looking for. Digital signage can show product locations, demonstrations, or current promotions. Cashless and self-service checkouts can help them get on their way soon. Retail stores looking to the future are already utilizing technology to make the in-store customer experience more positive and engaging.

Finally, respondents said employee training is improving customer service. Providing excellent customer service by engaging with customers, asking the right questions, and having the store knowledge to know how to offer them solutions takes some skill. As does handling the more tricky aspects of interacting with customers when you don't have a product in stock, there's an order mix-up, or a customer gets frustrated with their experience. Investing in customer service training for workers can not only increase the positive interactions customers have, but it can also help workers be more confident and excited to help customers.

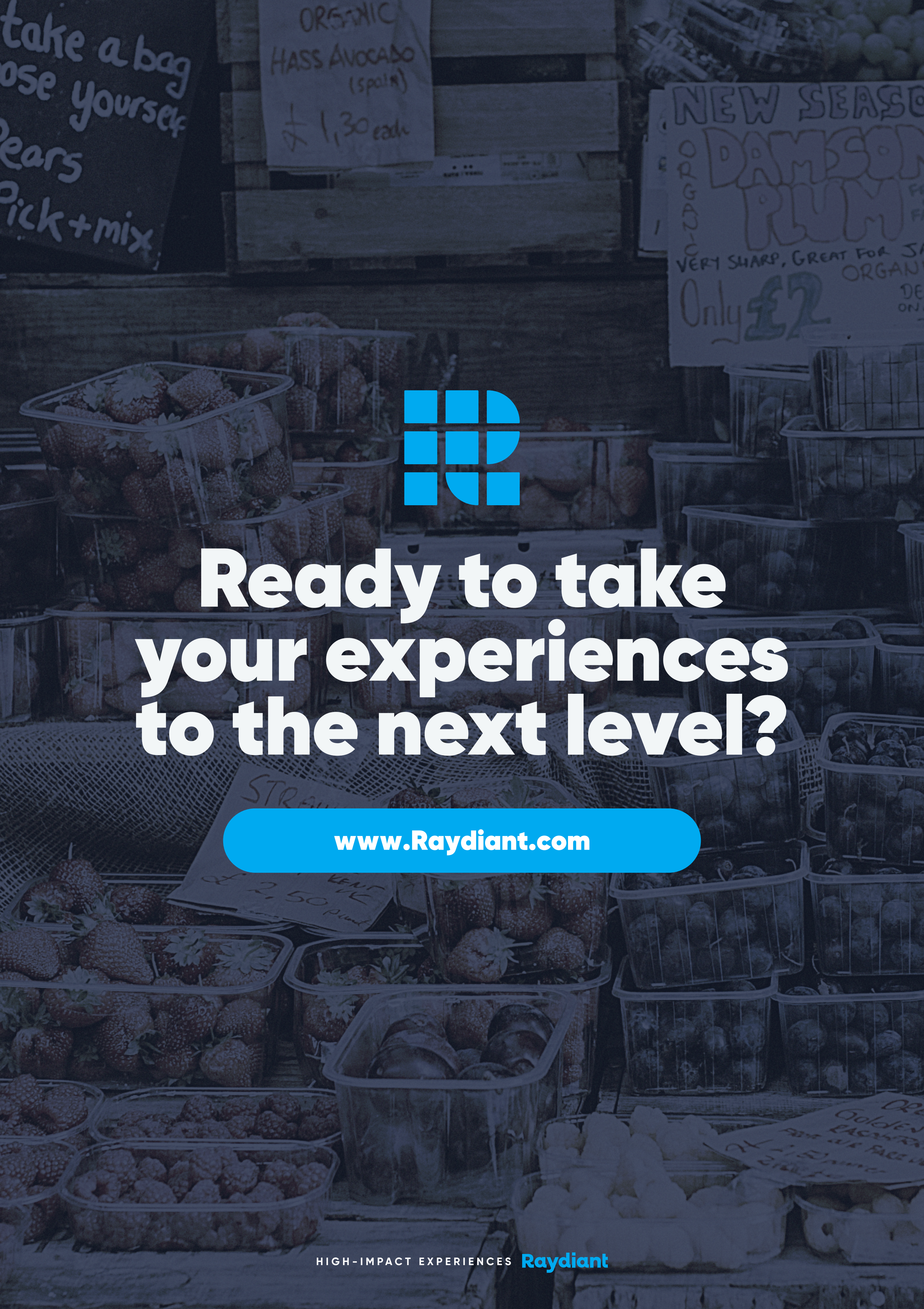
3. Manage for Change

Along with the day-to-day interactions and operations in their store locations, respondents are also challenged by the pandemic's continuing impacts, including pivoting operations during shutdowns, schedule shifts, increased turnover, and inventory shortages caused by supply chain disruptions. Any one of these can negatively impact morale and engagement, but all of them together are wearing deskless workers in retail thin.

All this juggling – and the requirement that staff remain nimble and resilient – requires strong leadership and managing for change. It is imperative to keep morale high, communicate the value employees bring to the company and their customers, and ensure they have the right tools and training to do their jobs. But so is frequent communication about operational changes, managing expectations around staffing shortages, and ensuring that workers know what to do if customers come looking for products that are not there. Ultimately, a focus on increasing engagement and being attentive to employee needs, concerns, and fears as retail still weather this state of flux.

The State of Deskless Workers Today and Tomorrow

Getting products into customers' hands and seeing them walk out happy and satisfied with their experience is what every retail leader hopes to see. But the key to achieving that reality is to equip workers with the tools, training, and encouragement they need to keep them highly engaged and valued. It will take some effort as the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to linger, but it's a worthy challenge for any business leader.



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