



Essential, Confident and Burned Out

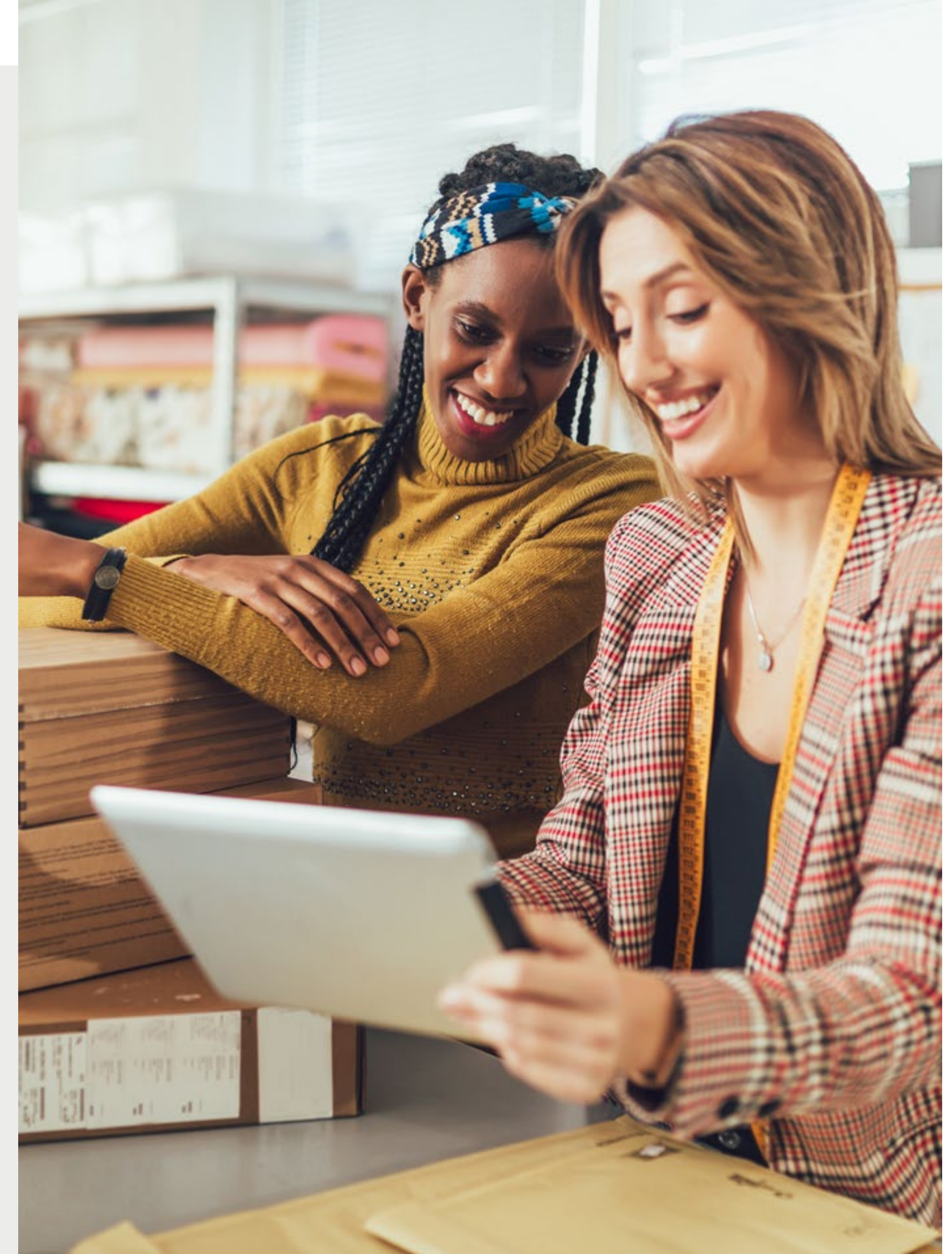
The State of the Frontline
Work Experience in 2021

Arlington
Research

Axonify™

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How's the frontline doing?

This is the question we set out to answer with our fifth annual frontline research report. Right now, everyone is talking about the future of work. How many days should people work from home vs in the office? Will hybrid work damage our ability to collaborate? These are important questions, but the conversation is mainly focused on the corporate employee experience. Few people seem to be talking about the future of frontline work despite the essential role they've played in keeping the doors open and our economies moving forward over the past 18 months.

The pandemic has made frontline work especially difficult, but these jobs were never easy to begin with. The people filling these roles work long hours. They labour in dangerous environments with complicated tools and processes. They service demanding and impatient customers. They always try to do their best whilst taking care of themselves and their families. Unfortunately, this herculean effort often goes unnoticed and underappreciated.

The frontline is at a turning point

Like employees in many other professions, frontline workers are being presented with a whirlwind of opportunities thanks to global economic recovery. This is why it's a great time to check in with them and find out how they're feeling about their work. In our 2020 research

report, we found that almost half (49%) of frontline workers had been furloughed due to the pandemic. Now, we're witnessing the impact of this career disruption as people rethink the role that work plays in their lives. Our research discovered that 45% of frontline employees have already decided to leave their current jobs.

This number may not surprise you given the labour shortages occurring in industries like retail, hospitality, food service and grocery. And, like many other companies, you probably pulled the "compensation lever" by increasing wages and offering bonuses in an attempt to attract and retain workers. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported that median hourly earnings for all UK employees in 2020 was £13.68. Yet, hiring problems are ongoing. Whilst improving wages is absolutely necessary, it's just the beginning of the story.

It's time to rethink frontline work

Our research indicates that compensation is actually the #4 reason workers cite for leaving their jobs. There's no question that some people are resigning for the chance to make more money whilst avoiding health and safety risks. But they're also looking for a more engaging and rewarding work experience. This report will show you the other levers you need to pull if you hope to attract and retain the talent you need to run a successful business.

It's time to take a hard look at the day-to-day frontline experience and make adjustments that will help people feel safe, supported and well taken care of. It's time to ensure equitable opportunities for all workers so everyone, regardless of title, location or background, can do their best and advance their careers. It's time to foster improved relationships and renew trust with the people who are the enthusiastic faces of your brand and owners of your last mile.

Remember: a job is more than just an income. It's part of our identities. I hope the insights shared in this report empower you to improve these critical areas of your business and help your employees be even more proud of the work they do and the company they work for.

And next year, when we again ask the frontline "how are you doing," I hope we see the results of the efforts and investments you've put into transforming the future of frontline work.



Carol Leaman
CEO, Axonify

45%

of frontline employees
have already decided to
leave their current jobs

Meet the frontline worker

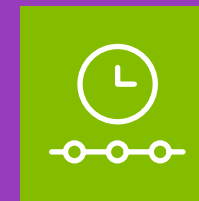
80% of the global workforce is on the frontline.

These employees are on location and in the field working directly with your customers and products every day. They're retail associates, delivery drivers, healthcare workers, contact centre agents, grocery employees and professional salespeople. They may not craft your business strategy, but they're responsible for executing it. And they share some common attributes.



Diverse

It's easy to group them all together in large workforces, but frontline employees bring diverse perspectives and experiences to your organisation. Their unique skills, goals and motivations must be considered when designing their work experiences.



Structured

They're operation-focused. They work scheduled shifts and must be clocked in to do their jobs. Their time is managed to the minute to minimise labour expenses. Most are paid by the hour and rely on consistent schedules to pay the bills and manage their home lives.



Directed

They don't get to decide what to work on today. They're assigned to specific roles, positions or functions. They must ask for manager permission before taking on additional tasks or completing extra training so as to not disrupt the operation.



Mobile

They don't sit behind desks very much (unless they're contact centre agents). They're mobile in stores, branches, warehouses and distribution centres. Some even more so, travelling as delivery drivers and professional salespeople.



Inaccessible

They often don't have work email or company-issued devices, so they're harder to reach with timely information. They use shared tools, like handhelds, points of sale and tablets, on the job. They may use personal devices, but only if permitted by company or regional guidelines.

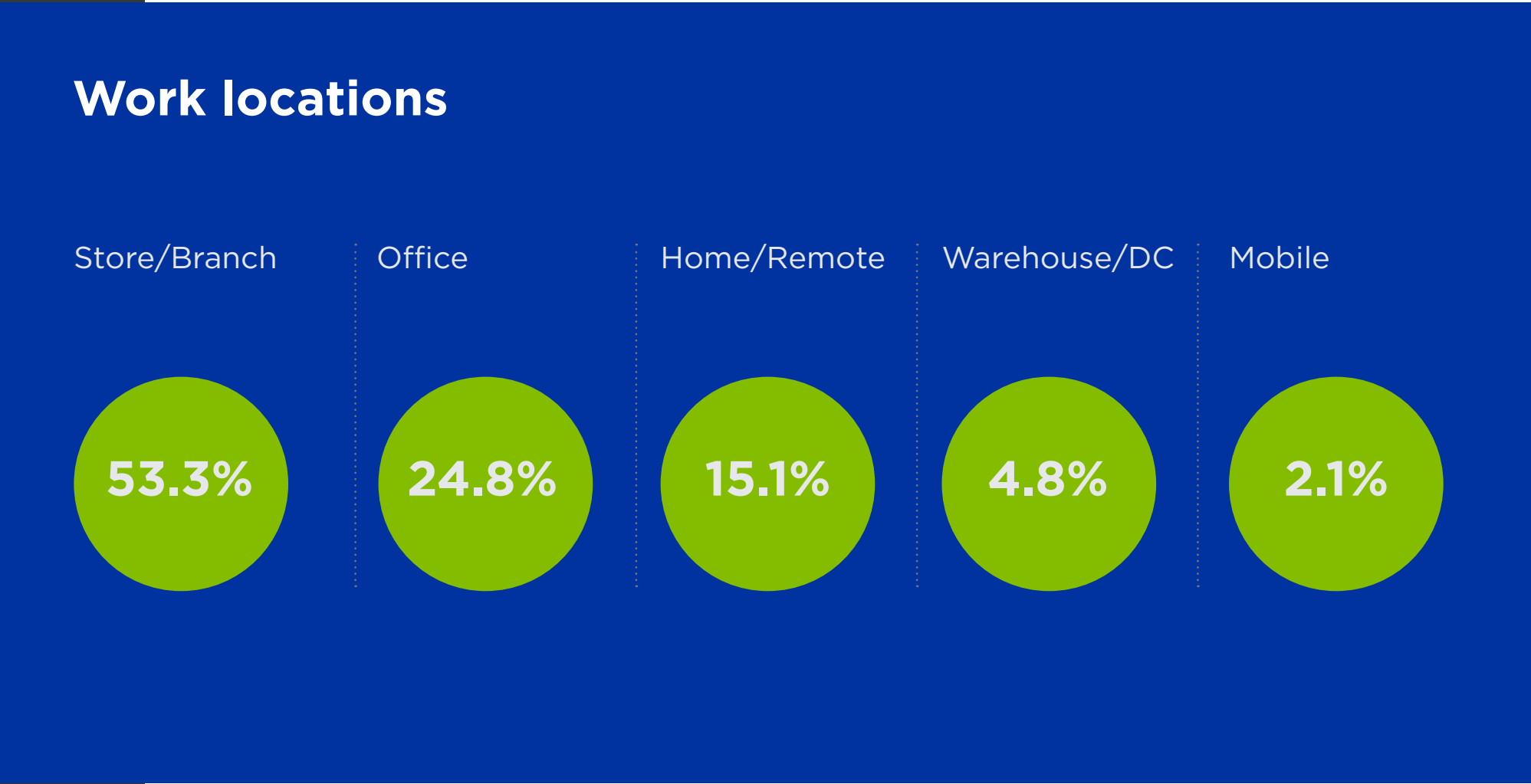
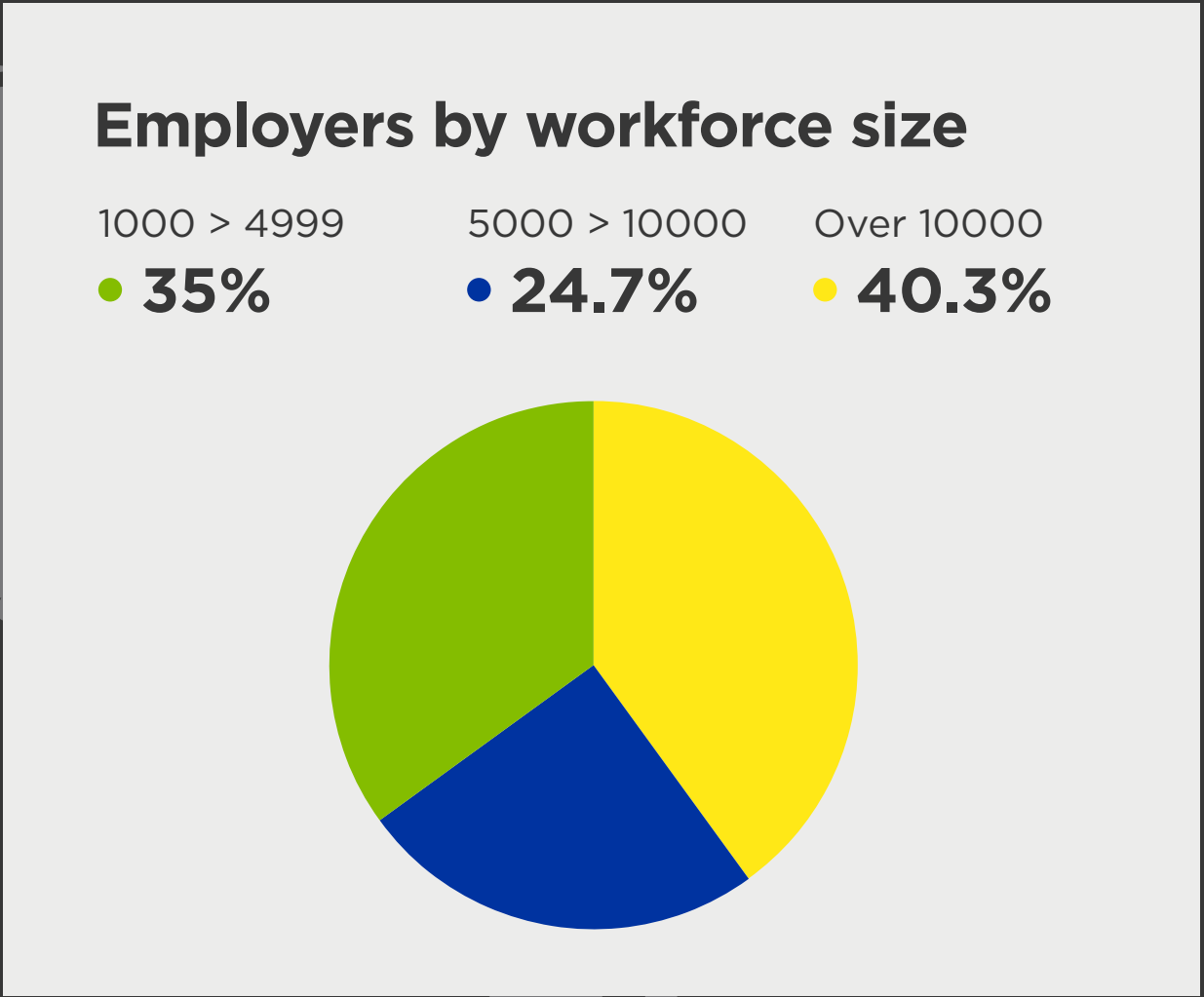
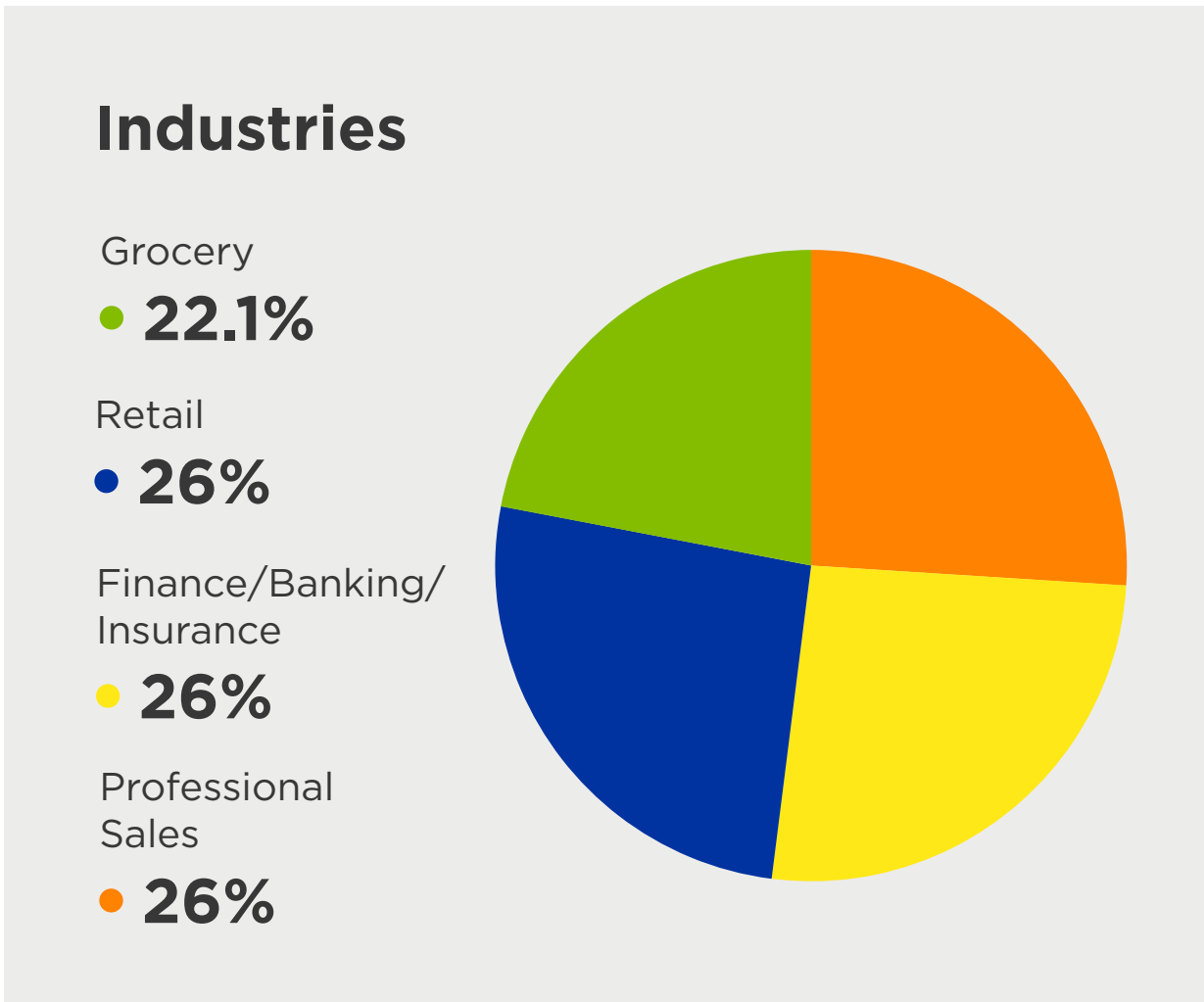
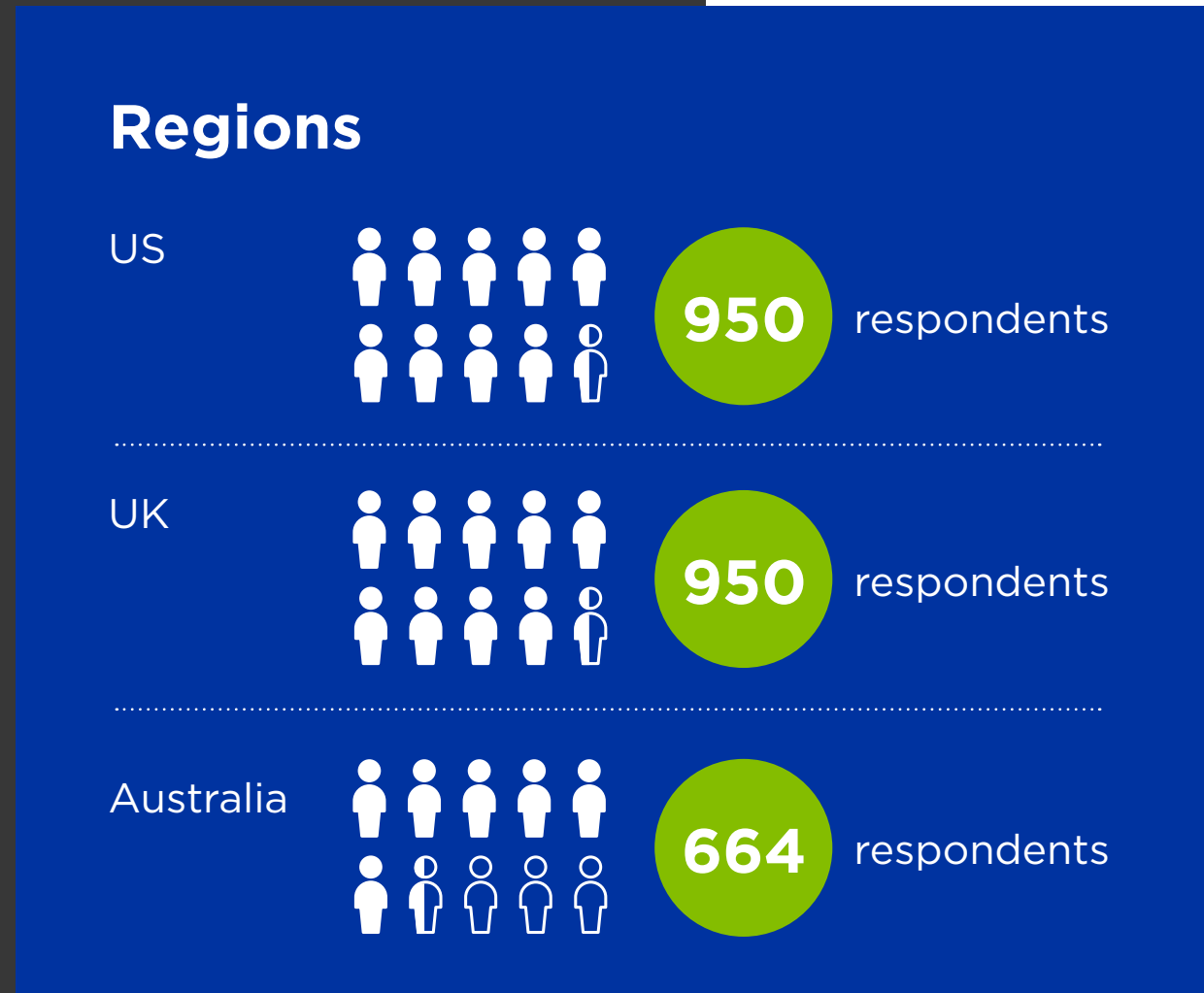


Restricted

Their training is focused on the basics—onboarding and compliance. They may get updates when big changes happen, but career development is limited to “high potential workers” and “top performers.” They want to build new skills, but they don't have the time.

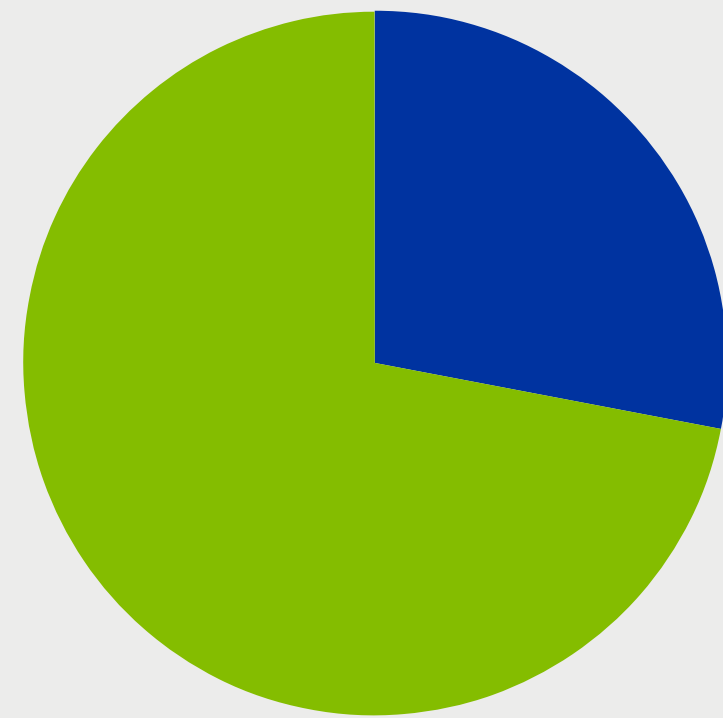
Research methodology

Arlington Research surveyed **2,564 respondents** over the age of 18 from the United States, United Kingdom and Australia between **July 22, 2021 and August 2, 2021**. At the time of the survey, respondents held frontline roles in grocery, retail, finance, banking and insurance or professional sales for companies with more than 1,000 employees.



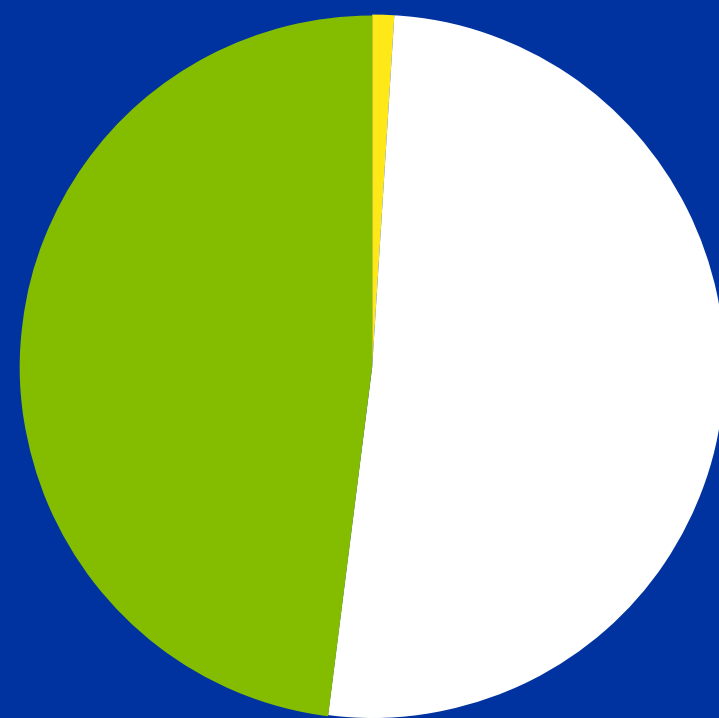
Employee status

Full-Time **72.4%** Part-Time **27.6%**

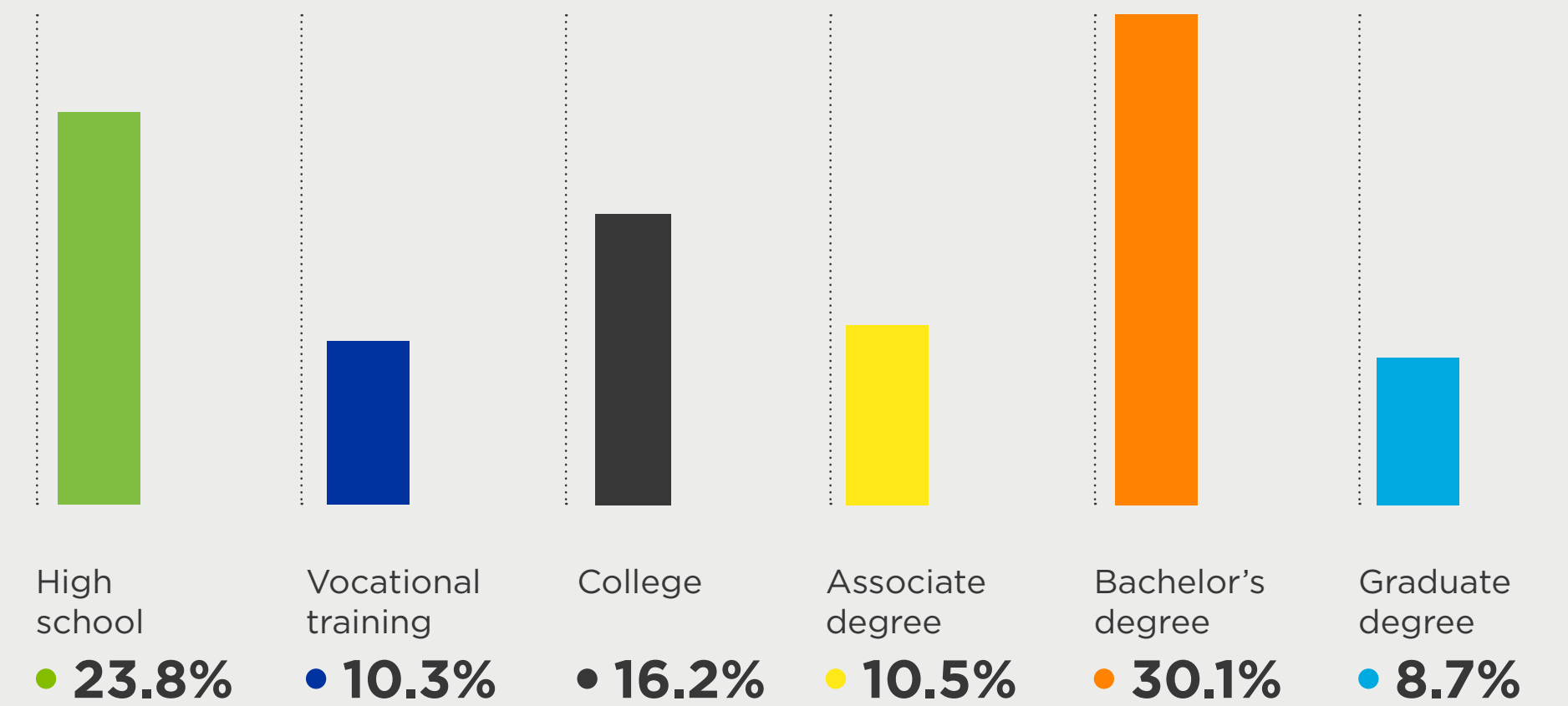


Gender

Male **48.3%** Female **51.1%** Non-Binary **0.7%**

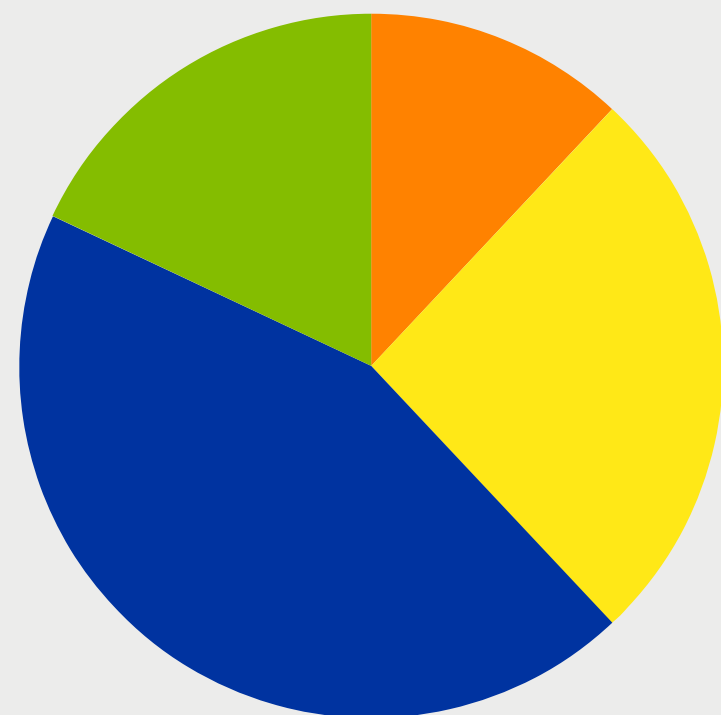


Highest level of education

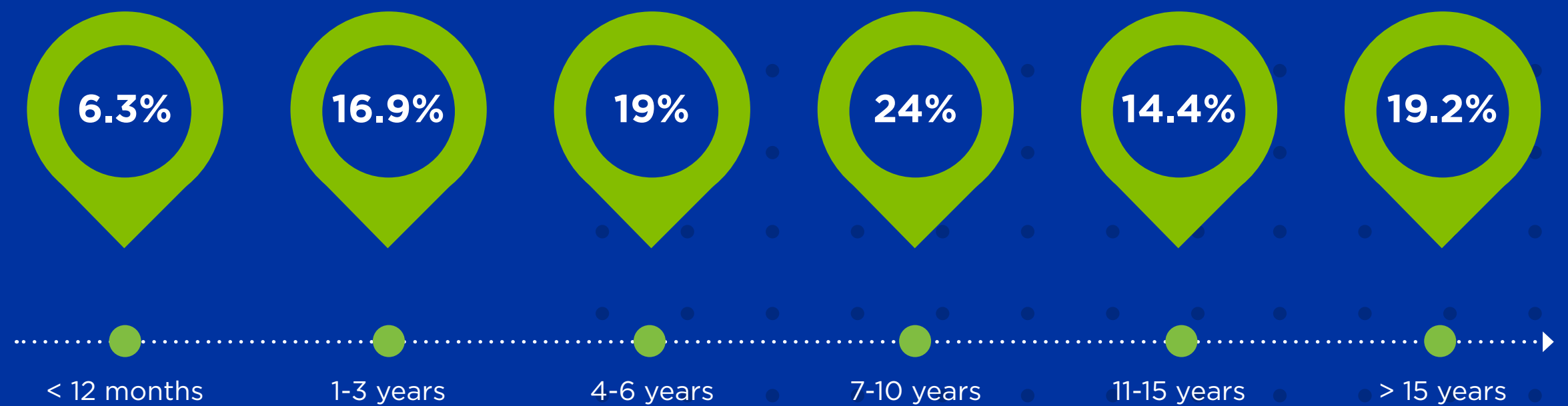


Generations

Gen Z **18%** Millennial **44%** Gen X **26.1%** Boomer **11.9%**



Employee tenure







*Axonify customers were not included in this research survey.



7 key insights

We've once again expanded the scope of our research for this fifth annual report.

-  **In 2019**, we continued to focus on digital learning and what it takes to deliver engaging, right-fit frontline training.
-  **In 2020**, we explored how the pandemic impacted the frontline and how effectively organisations were able to provide support as the workplace changed almost overnight.
-  **For 2021**, we're digging into the overall workplace experience to find out which factors make the biggest impact on frontline performance, engagement and retention.
-  The next few pages highlight the 7 insights that immediately stood out in our 2021 research.

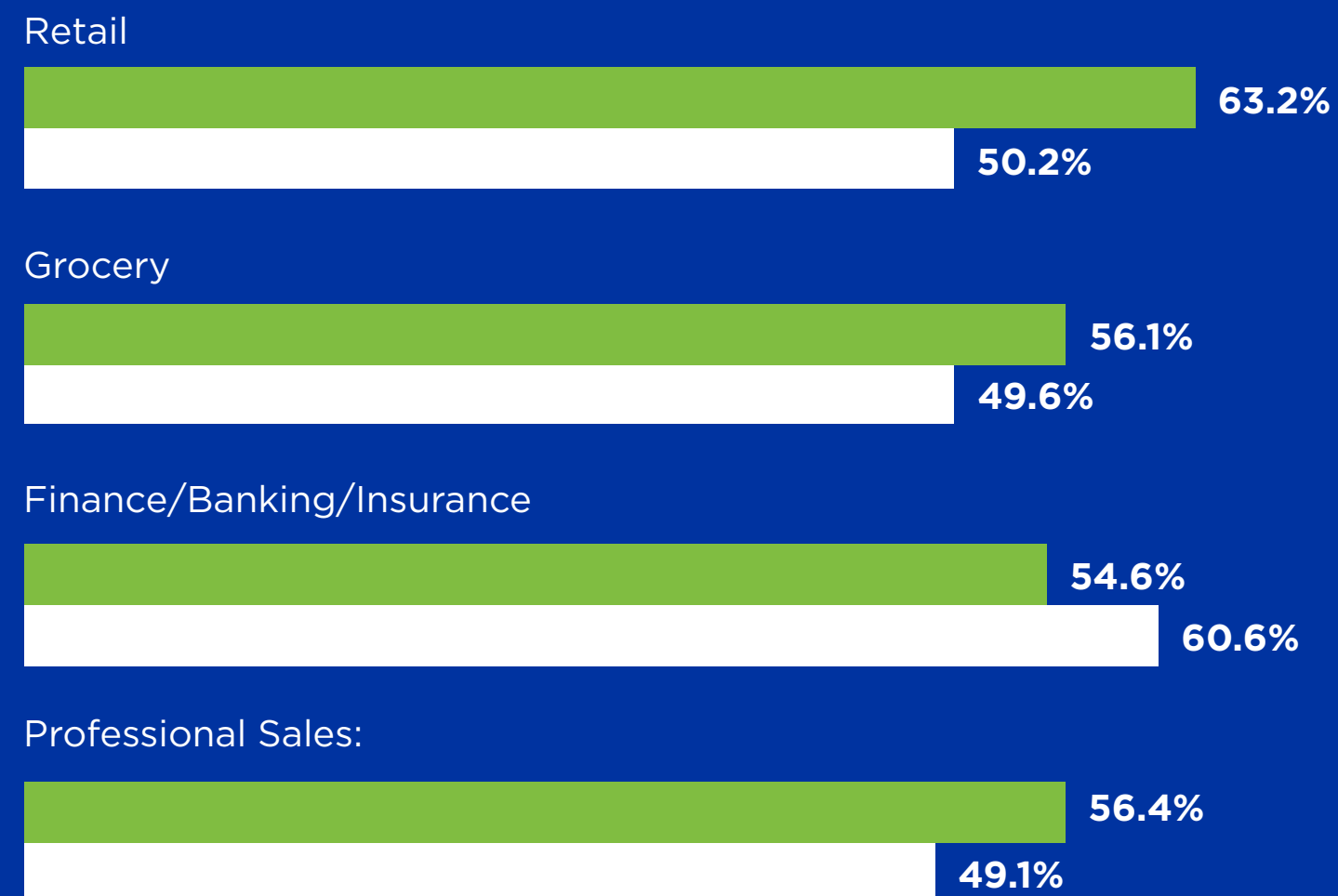


#1

Frontline workers are leaving because they're overworked and burned out, not just because they're looking for better pay.

Burnout vs compensation as a motivating factor for resigning—by industry.*

● Burnout ● Compensation

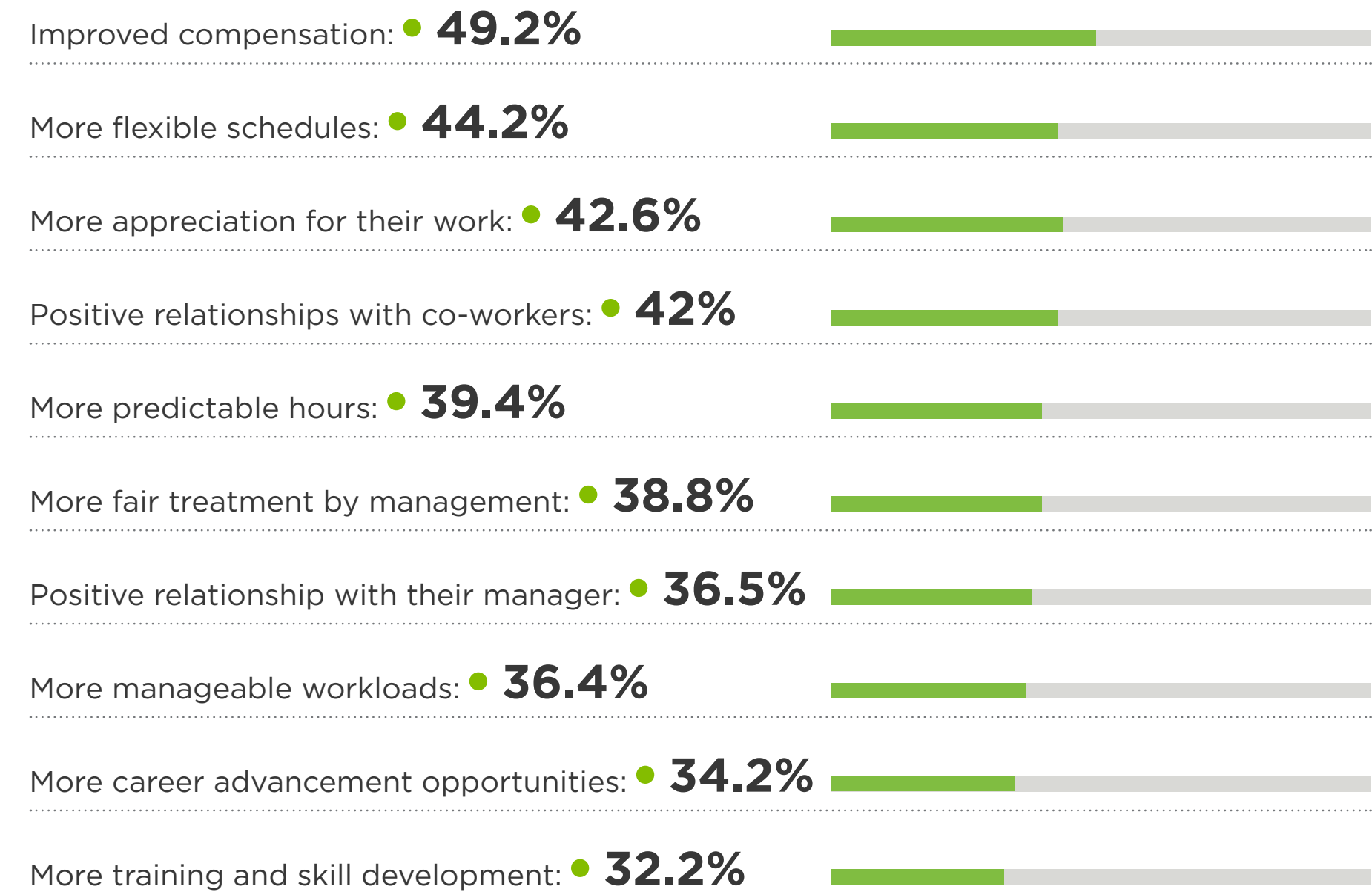


*Data reflects the percentage of respondents who selected the item from a list of options. Respondents could select more than one option.

#2

Employees definitely want better compensation, but employers also need to improve scheduling, build relationships and show their appreciation to get frontline workers to stay.*

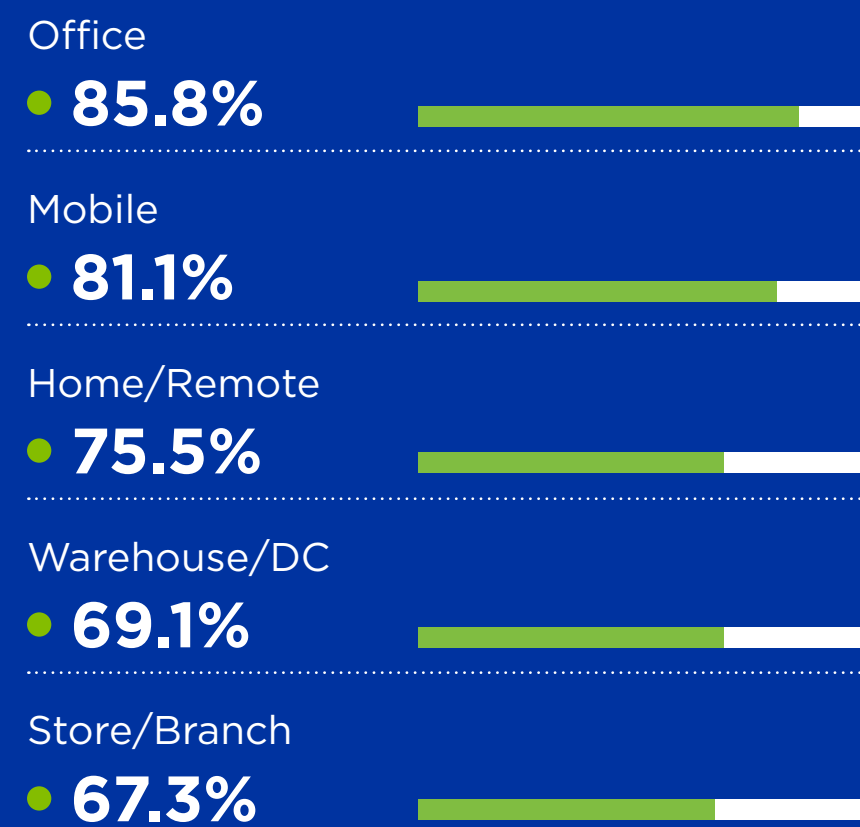
Top 10 factors that would motivate workers to stay in their current jobs.



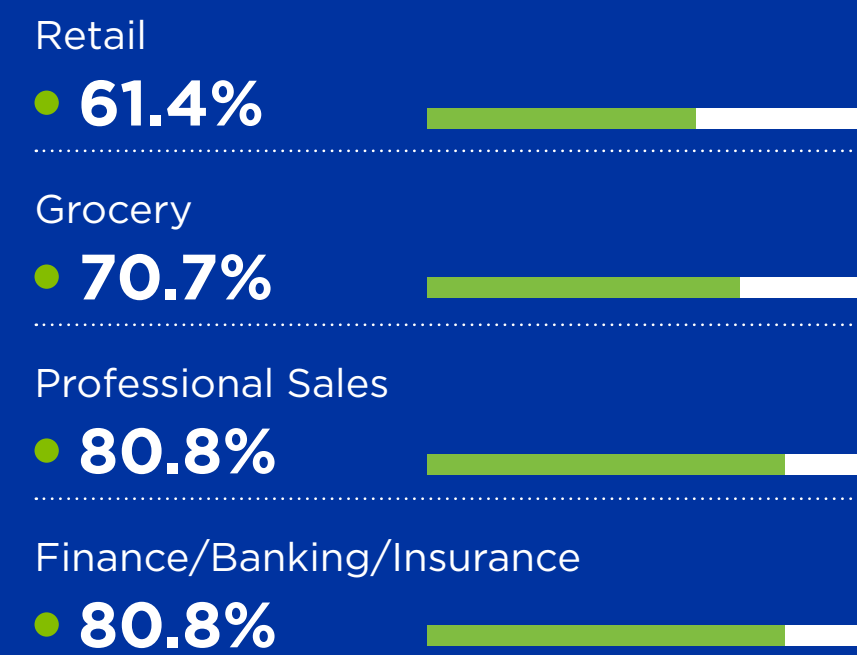
#3

People who work in stores and branches have received much less effective support during the pandemic, as compared to those who work in offices or from home.

Employee happiness with pandemic support—by work location.



Employee happiness with pandemic support—by industry.



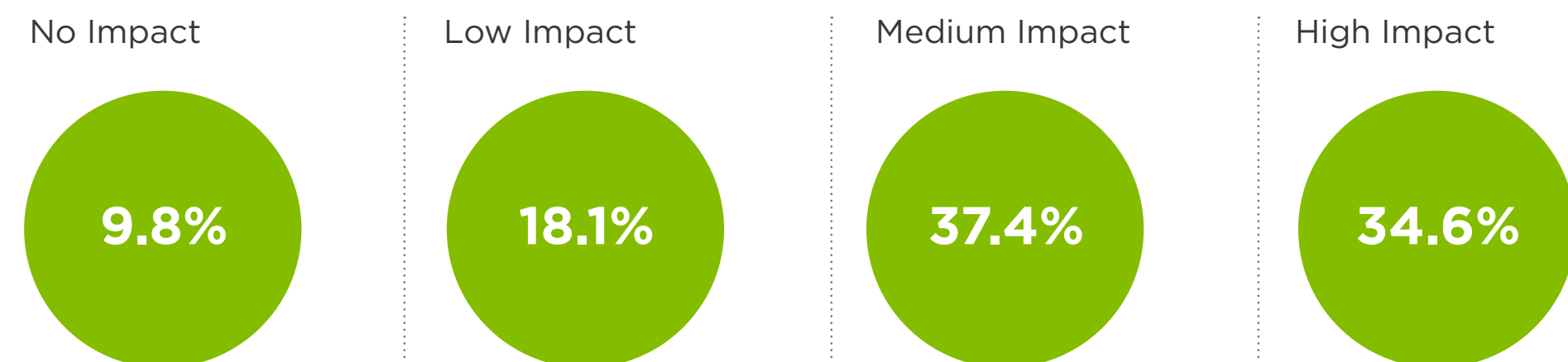
*Data reflects the percentage of respondents who selected the item from a list of options. Respondents could select more than one option.



#4

Managers need to take better care of frontline workers' time and avoid prioritising short-term productivity over long-term wellness.

Impact of time off between shifts on work performance.*



#5

Digital training and communication are heavily preferred over traditional methods—regardless of age.

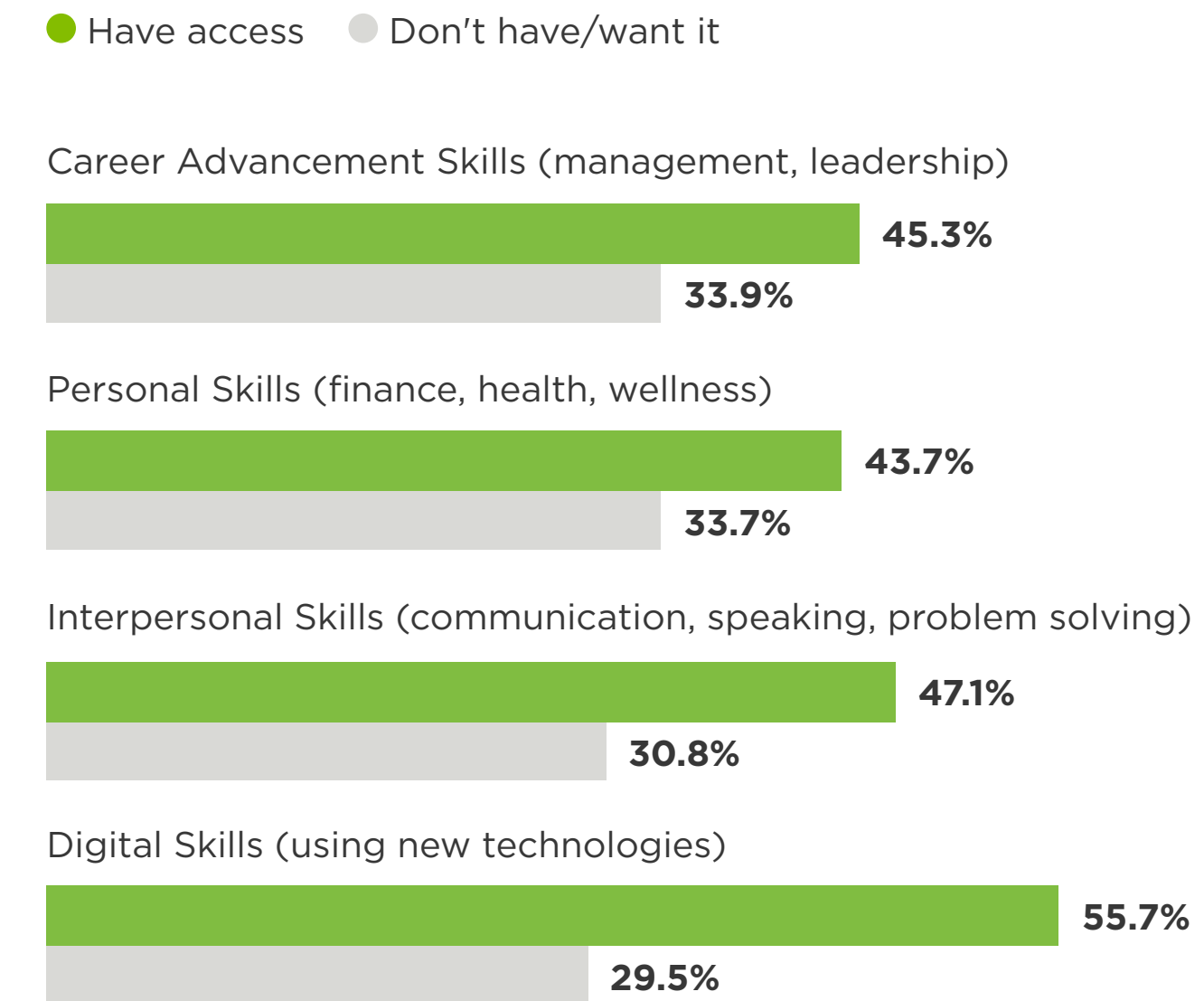
	Digital 82.3% (personal smartphone or company-issued device)	In-Person 55.9% (1:1 conversation or classroom session)	Shared Spaces 23.2% (bulletin board or other postings)
Gen Z	79%	50.5%	14.1%
Millennial	86.4%	57%	28.9%
Gen X	79.6%	60.7%	24.8%
Boomer	78%	49.7%	12.8%

*Data reflects the percentage of respondents who selected the item from a list of options. Respondents could select more than one option.

#6

Frontline workers want to go beyond the basics with skill development.

Percentage of employees who have access to skill development compared to those who do not have access and want it.

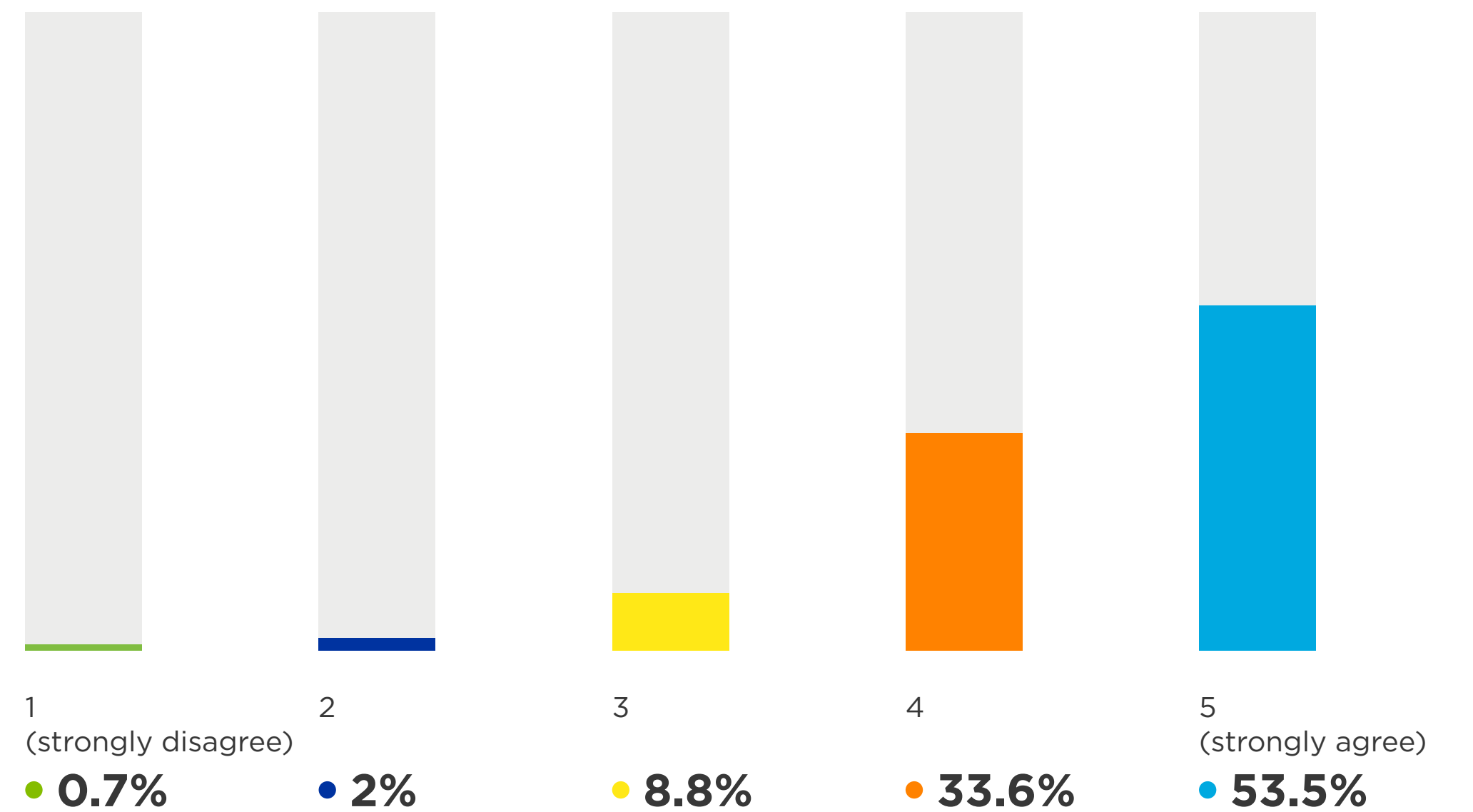




#7

Despite all of the challenges they've faced, frontline workers remain confident in their ability to do a good job.

I am confident in my ability to do my job well.



The state of the frontline work experience in 2021

Companies have been quick to pull the same four levers in their attempts to attract, retain and enable frontline performance.

Each is an important step towards reducing labour shortages. However, they're still not enough, especially when so many companies are pulling the same levers at the same time. Organisations must shift focus to the work itself and meaningfully improve the day-to-day experience to become employers of choice long term.

Let's break down the next five levers you can pull to improve frontline productivity, capability, resilience and satisfaction—now and into the future.

Companies are pulling these same levers

- ✓ **Process:** reduce and/or reposition frontline headcount through automation, robotics and self-service models
- ✓ **Wages:** increase pay rates and benefits to improve financial security
- ✓ **Bonuses:** offer one-time payouts to attract applicants for critical roles
- ✓ **Degrees:** provide low/no-cost tuition for higher education programs to increase career opportunities



Lever #1

Extinguish burnout

Focus on getting the best out of people instead of the most.



How accurately does this definition describe your frontline workers right now?

Burnout is a reaction to prolonged or chronic job stress and is characterised by three main dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism (less identification with the job), and feelings of reduced professional ability.

Source: Burnout: The High Cost of High Achievement by Herbert Freudenberger

45%

of frontline employees told us they're planning to leave their current jobs



They're leaving because they're burned out. And you can't pay people to stop being exhausted.

In the U.K. the number of workers on payroll has fallen by **813,000** since **March 2020**. What a difference a year makes, right?

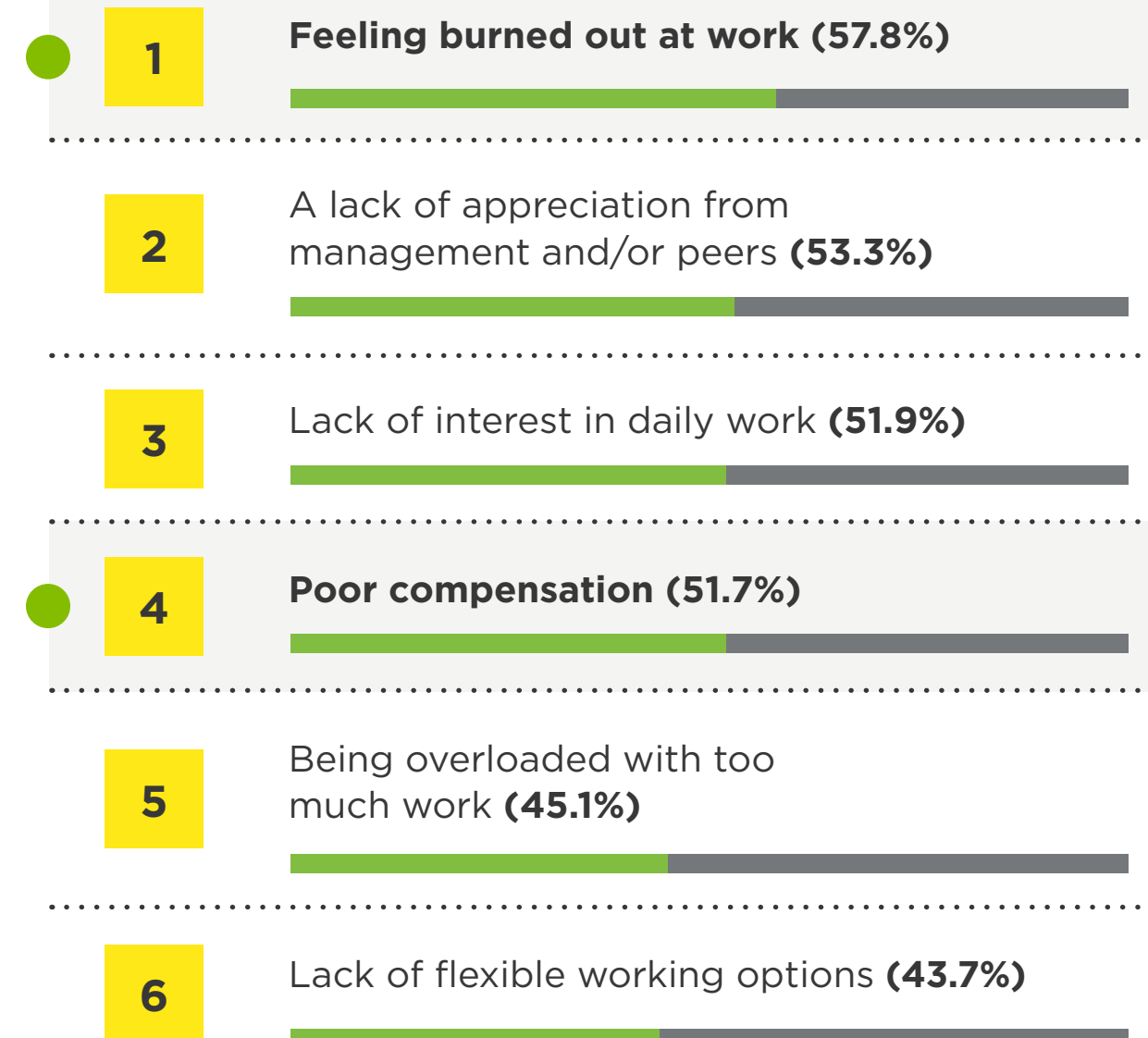
People aren't just leaving their jobs. They're taking advantage of newfound opportunities emerging from an unprecedented economic rebound. After more than a year of uncertainty, people are reprioritising how they work and live.

This Great Reprioritisation has hit frontline employers hard as they continue to reopen and stabilise their businesses. **632,000** retail workers **quit in June**, the largest number ever recorded for a single month. Industries that have long struggled with turnover are now struggling to retain the staff needed to keep the doors open. Some are shortening hours and adapting operations to deal with the ongoing labour shortage.

Our research indicates that this challenge will continue, as almost **45%** of frontline employees told us they're planning to leave their current jobs. This exodus includes workers from all generations. However, younger employees are leaving in greater numbers, with **62.5%** of Gen Z planning to resign as compared to **43.8%** of Millennials, **38.7%** of Gen X and **35.2%** of Boomers.

So why are they leaving?

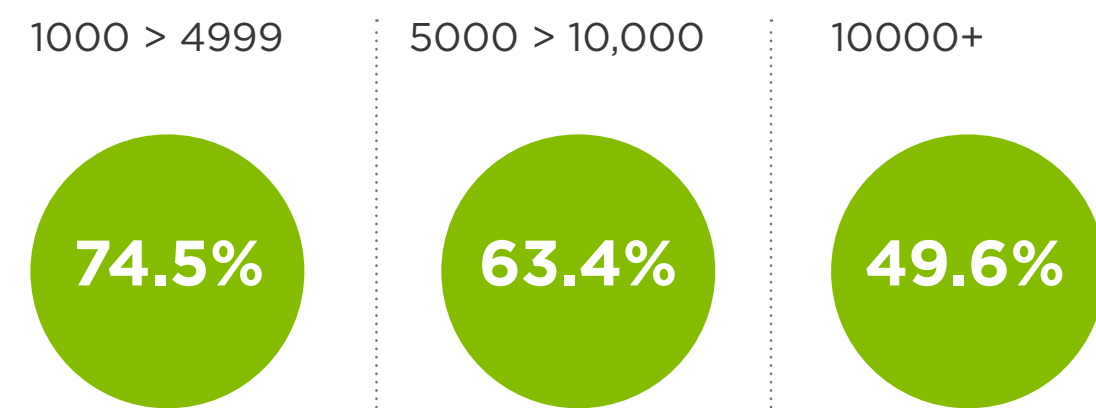
Many companies have jumped to compensation-based tactics to attract and retain workers. However, whilst pay is definitely part of their motivation, it's not at the top of frontline employees' lists.



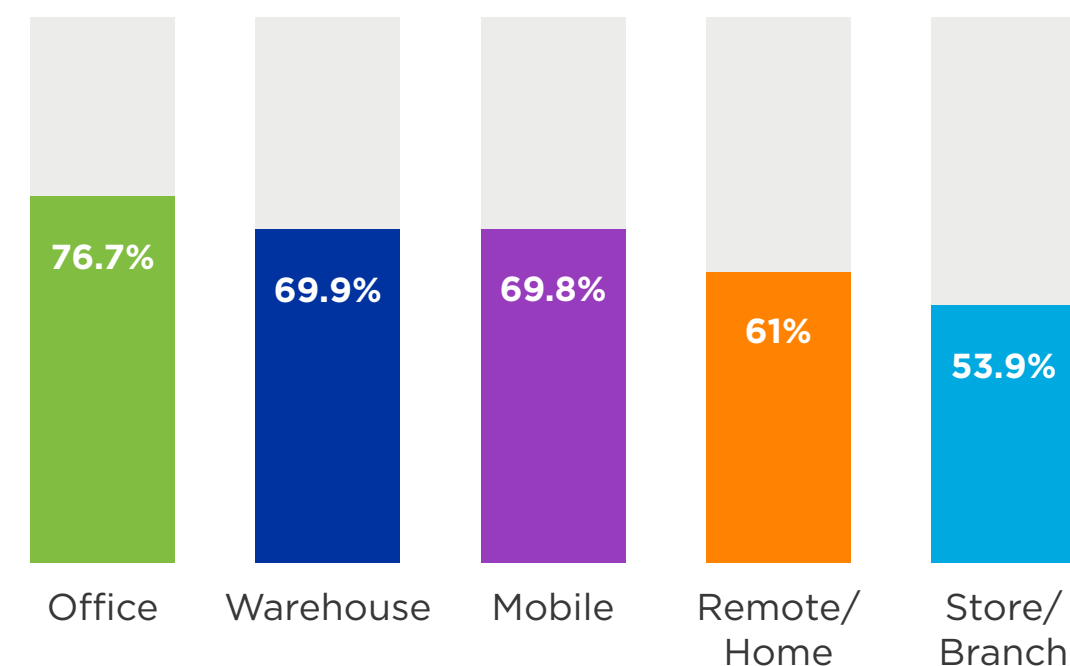
*Data reflects the percentage of respondents who selected the item from a list of options. Respondents could select more than one option.

Burnout mitigation efforts vary based on work environment

Percentage of workers with access to burnout support (training, mental health services, flexible work options, etc.) by workforce size.



Percentage of workers with access to burnout support by work location.

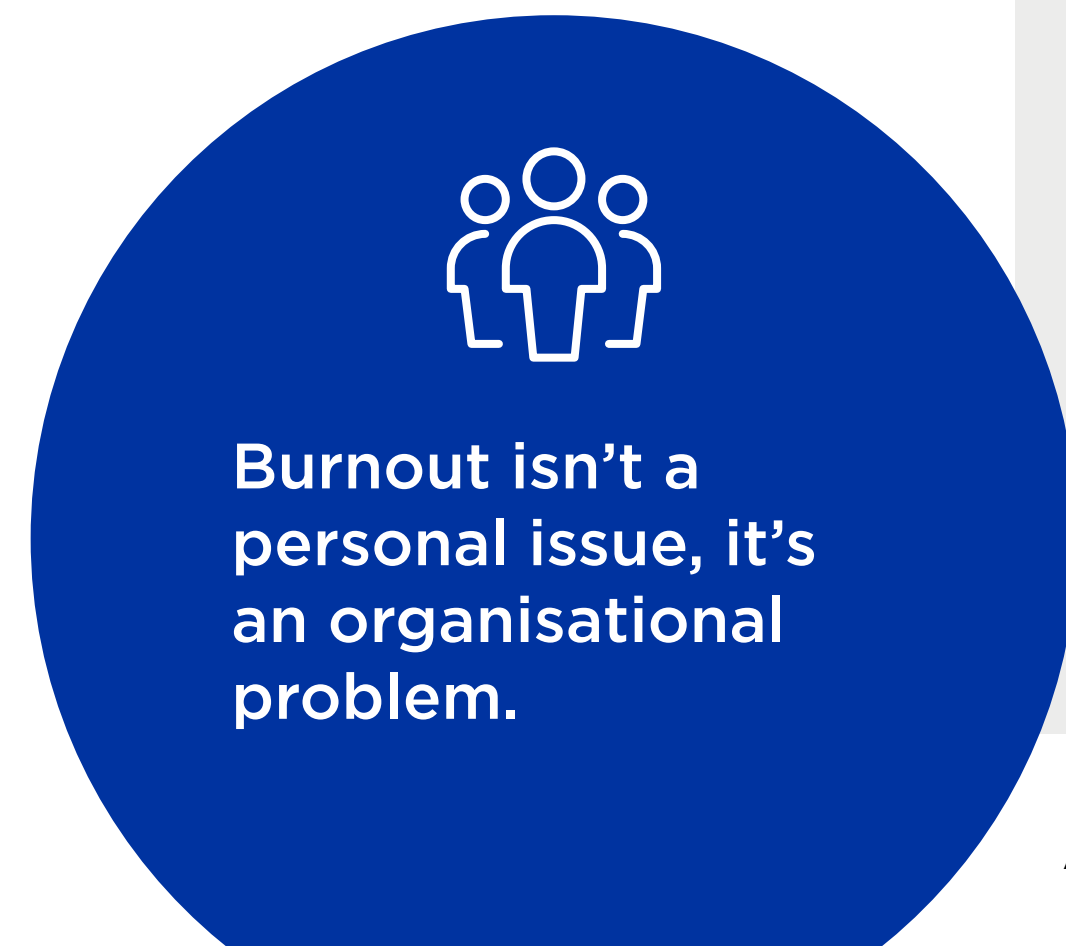


Even when companies do recognise the importance of combating burnout, they can miss the mark when it comes to prevention. Many fail to recognise that burnout is a job-related medical diagnosis. It's not something you can fix with an extra day off or by taking up yoga.

Experts commonly point to **five primary causes of burnout**.

- 1 Unfair treatment at work
- 2 Unmanageable workload
- 3 Lack of role clarity
- 4 Lack of communication and support from their manager
- 5 Unreasonable time pressure

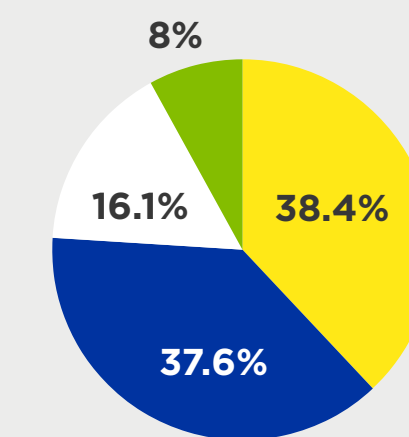
Frontline workers echoed these same issues when they cited factors like lack of appreciation, reduced work interest, overload and limited flexibility as reasons for their departure. They also reiterated how important these issues are when it comes to their ability to do a good job.



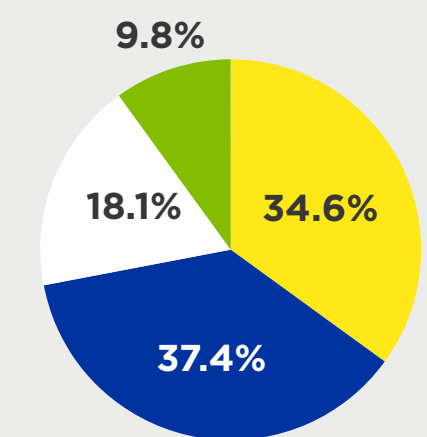
How much of an impact do these factors have on your ability to do your best work?

● No impact ● Low impact
● Medium impact ● High impact

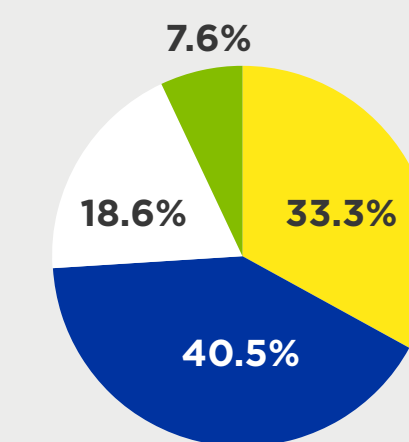
Reliable and consistent hours



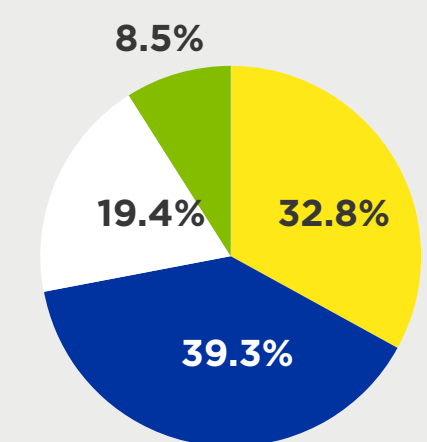
Having enough time off between shifts



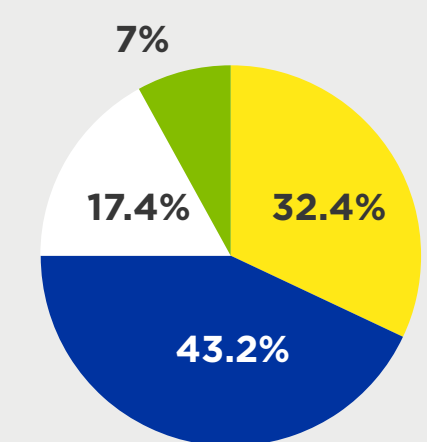
Clear and timely communication



Recognition for job performance



Clear job performance expectations



How to pull the lever

Frontline workers can't fix these problems on their own. The good news is that many companies are starting to prioritise burnout support on the frontline. 61.7% of employees report receiving support to avoid feeling burned out, and burnout-related training topics are increasingly popular.

Axonify Content Marketplace

2021 Top Essentials Topics (through July 2021)

- 1 Maintaining Mental Health During Difficult Times
- 2 How to Work from Home
- 3 Protecting Yourself and Your Frontline From Viruses
- 4 Conducting Virtual Meetings
- 5 Remaining Calm and Patient in Difficult Situations
- 6 Unconscious Bias in the Workplace
- 7 Communication Skills
- 8 Diversity in the Workplace
- 9 Proper Application and Removal of Disposable Gloves and Face Masks
- 10 Empathy Training



Prioritise mental health

Ask employees how they're doing and offer mental health support to both full- and part-time roles. Get outside experts to assess your mental health programs and make sure to provide burnout awareness and prevention training to identify and overcome early warning signs of burnout.

Remember: short-term costs can pay off long-term through improved retention, reduced sick time and increased productivity.

Today, mental health support is a rarity on the frontline, with only 44% of respondents having access to related benefits and 39.2% having access to training and awareness programs.



Reduce common stressors

- Continuously monitor workplace health and safety conditions and respond promptly to employee concerns.
- Offer people consistent schedules as much as possible so they can plan their lives around work.
- Eliminate the use of zero hour contracts and other practices that cut into employee time without the guarantee of paid work.
- Use advanced technology to forecast staffing needs and give employees more flexible options for on-demand scheduling.
- Simplify the process for requesting days off; let employees swap shifts without approval and offer staggered shift start/end times.
- Empower workers to confidently solve problems on their own by providing more flexible options, such as the ability to refund or reimburse upset customers without approval.



Balance the load

By monitoring employee hours and tasks you can identify people who may be taking on too much and be at risk for burnout. Make sure people actually take breaks during shifts and check in with employees who pick up a lot of overtime.

- If you're short staffed, make proactive changes to your operation, such as reducing hours and adapting services, rather than overloading your team.
- Clearly communicate any operational changes, such as reduced hours and services, to employees and customers.
- Establish processes that allow you to quickly adopt your operation in the future whenever staffing shortages occur.



Show your appreciation—for real

Start by assessing your recognition and appreciation strategies. Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach, instead aligning programs with the needs, interests and motivations of your frontline teams.




- Make "thank you" the most commonly used phrase in your workplace, especially for managers.
- Urge managers to use handwritten notes instead of emails or text messages to express appreciation and give employees options for formally recognising their peers too.
- Include tangible rewards, such as gift cards and company swag, as part of your recognition program.




Build workplace communities

- Avoid the temptation to legislate friendship out of the workplace by only focusing on productivity at the expense of relationships. Instead, give people time and opportunities to build relationships with their peers and managers. Put a dedicated manager in charge of your community-building efforts to make sure it stays a top priority.
- Use employee-led work councils that give workers a meaningful say in how the workplace is run.
- Host social activities (when it's safe to do so, of course) and make sure everyone has a chance to attend regardless of schedule.

Keep exploring

-  Listen in as burnout expert Jennifer Moss shares [practical tips for reducing workplace stress](#) on The 80 Percent Podcast.
-  Learn how Jim Donald [made employee engagement a must-have business strategy](#) as CEO of companies like Starbucks and Albertsons.
-  Hear how [Zappos enables their contact centre employees to independently solve challenging customer problems](#) on The 80 Percent Podcast.

Case study

-  Find out how Eden Housing combatted burnout during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic by [using digital communication and training to maintain relationships](#) and help employees manage stress.

Lever #2

Foster equity

Create an inclusive environment where everyone has an opportunity to do (and be) their best.

The increased spotlight on social justice has motivated organisations to rethink their approach to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB). Fostering an inclusive workplace is clearly the right thing to do. Every person, regardless of background, title, location and status, deserves the opportunity to do (and be) their best at work.

But has this renewed focus on workplace equity found its way to the frontline?

Our research shows that frontline employers still have considerable room for improvement. The same approach applied with your corporate team is unlikely to work on your large, culturally diverse, geographically distributed frontline workforce. In fact, you may need to consider a variety of tactics to meet the unique needs of different frontline segments. This is why you should focus on equity (providing everyone with the right thing) as opposed to equality (providing everyone with the same things) when it comes to workplace experience.



Thankfully, focusing on DEIB is also a good business strategy. Studies have repeatedly shown that companies that make DEIB a strategic priority achieve better results.

35%

McKinsey found that companies with higher degrees of racial and ethnic diversity perform 35% better.

19%

A Boston Consulting Group study found that organisations with more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenue.

74%

Deloitte revealed that 74% of employees believe their companies will achieve greater innovation if DEIB is integrated into their cultures.

Our 2021 survey revealed three key areas of disparity on the frontline: gender, work location and job status.

Gender

Whilst gender discrimination takes many forms, one of the most discussed is the pay gap. In 2020, [women earned 84% of what men earned according to Pew Research Centre](#). Our data shows a related gap in frontline pay satisfaction based on gender identification. Employees who identify as male report 69.6% satisfaction with their compensation whilst employees who identify as female report 59.6% and employees who identify as non-binary report 58.8%.

This gender-based disparity extends into other key parts of the frontline work experience with male employees reporting greater satisfaction on topics like manager trust, pandemic support and career development.



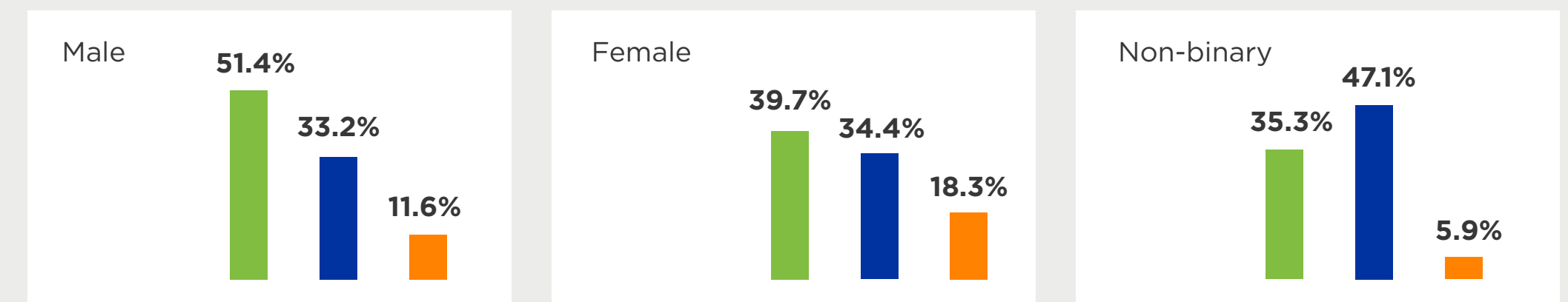
	Trust manager to consider employee wellbeing when making decisions	Satisfaction with support during the pandemic	Satisfaction with career development opportunities
Male	72.3%	77.6%	69.3%
Female	62.3%	69.8%	58.5%
Non-Binary	64.7%	58.8%	52.9%



Male employees also have greater access to training on topics like management and leadership.

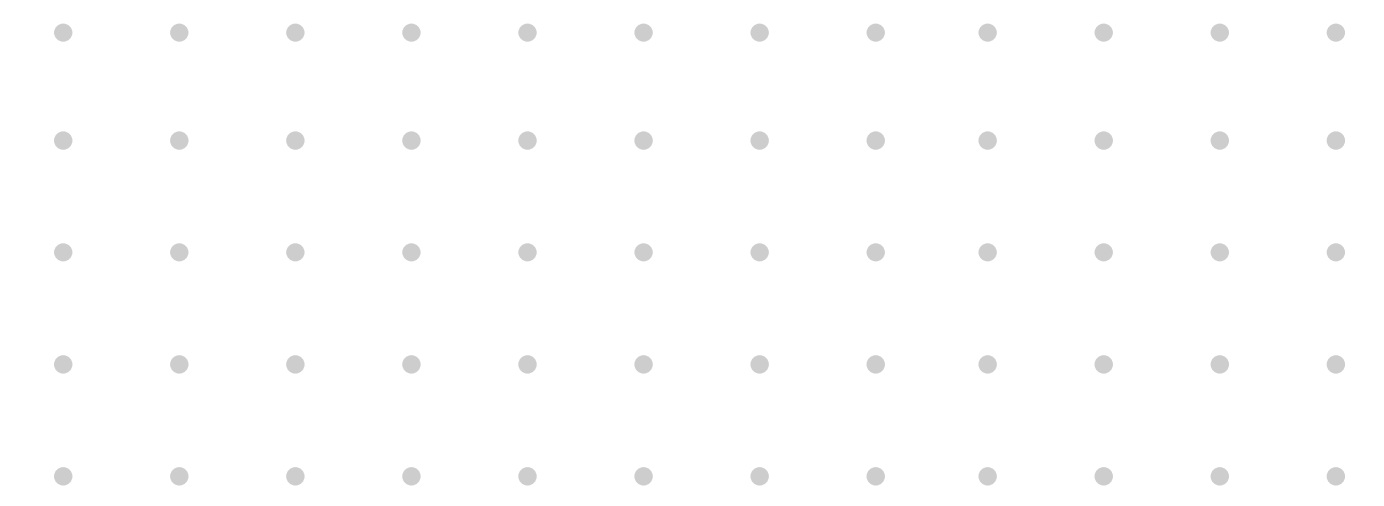
Access to career development training (management, leadership, etc.)

● Have ● Don't have and want ● Don't want



Work location

The COVID-19 pandemic has expanded the existing gap between corporate and frontline workers. Data shows noticeable disparities in job satisfaction based on location in areas such as everyday work, pandemic support, career development and resource access.



	Office	Remote/Home	Mobile	Store/Branch	Warehouse/ Distribution
Happiness with everyday work—by work location	81.4%	62.3%	81.1%	64.2%	72.4%
Satisfaction with support during the pandemic—by work location	85.8%	75.5%	81.1%	67.3%	69.1%
Satisfaction with career development opportunities—by work location	81.4%	57.4%	66%	56.1%	75.6%
Access to the tools and resources to do best work—by work location	84.4%	73.6%	83%	68.8%	81.3%



Overall, people who work in offices are almost always happier than people who don't.

Some of this variation is to be expected. However, whilst their day-to-day experience is dissimilar, their satisfaction with those experiences should be similar. For example, companies had to develop two different pandemic support strategies based on the specific safety and performance challenges each group faced. But results show that office workers were much more satisfied (85.8%) with their support as compared to store/branch employees (67.3%).

It's also interesting to note that remote and WFH employees reported lower levels of satisfaction in several areas as compared to office-based team members. This echoes the ongoing conversation regarding how work must evolve to enable hybrid models as more people are able to return to offices.

Job status

The only real difference between the jobs of full-time and part-time is the average number of hours they work per week (regulations vary by company/region). Even still, many part-time workers clock full-time hours, especially during busy periods.

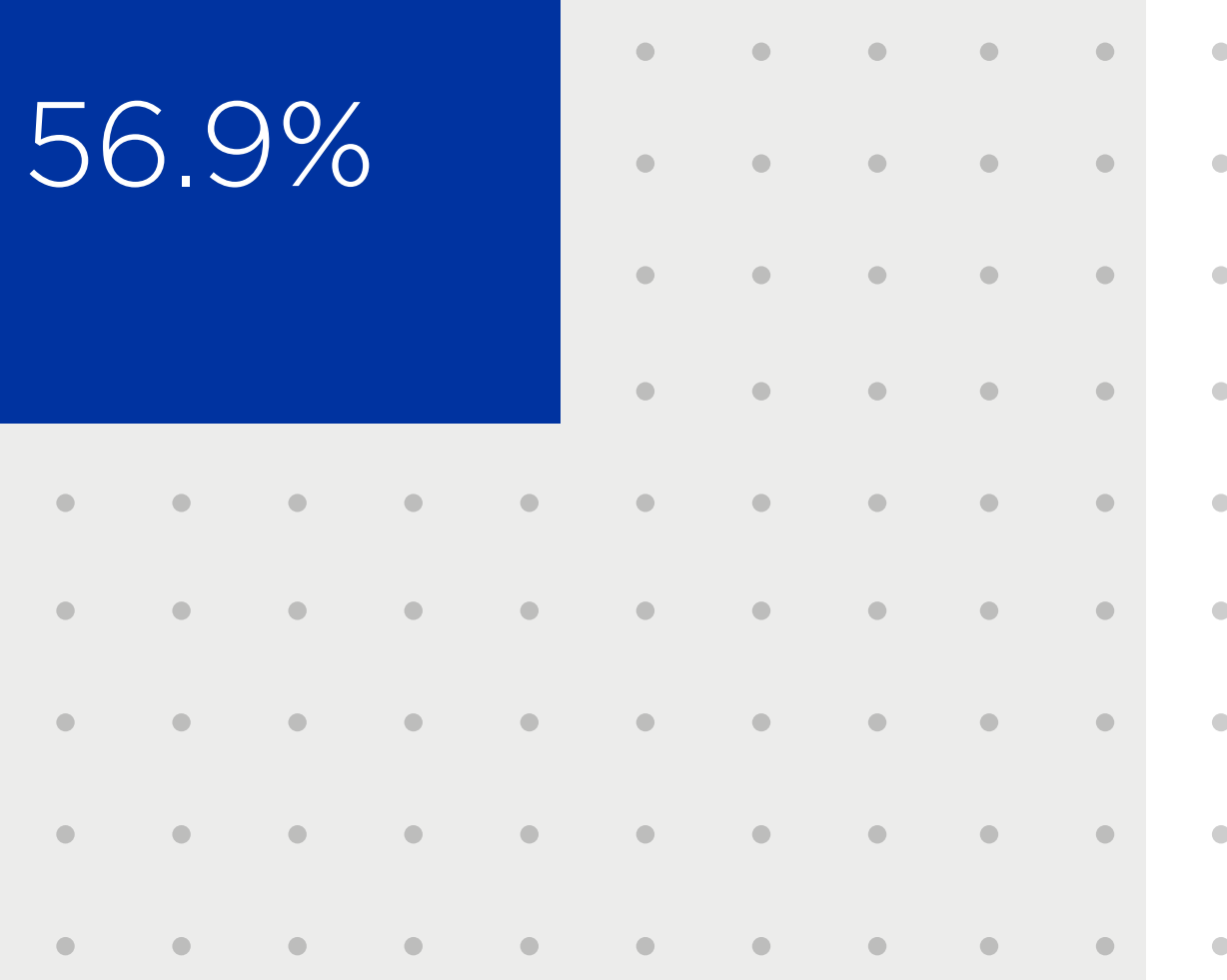
Data shows that disparities in their work experiences go even deeper than their schedules.

	Satisfied with total compensation (pay, benefits, etc.)	Satisfied with support during the pandemic	Trust manager to consider employee wellbeing when making decisions	Feel well informed about changes that affect them	Satisfied with technology provided on the job	Happy with everyday work
Full-time	70.3%	77.6%	72%	71.3%	72.9%	73.5%
Part-time	49%	62.7%	54.2%	54%	57.6%	56.9%



Again, some of these variations are to be expected. Full-time employees often receive additional health and other benefits that reflect increased satisfaction with their total compensation. Likewise, part-time employees may have multiple jobs or attend to other activities that are of greater importance to them, thereby reducing their overall satisfaction with everyday work.

However, job status shouldn't impact the fundamental ability for an employee to trust their manager, have access to important information or be able to effectively use technology. And customers expect the same experience regardless of who they interact with. Workers should have the same expectations regarding their workplace support.



How to pull the lever

Like burnout, ensuring equitable experiences across your workforce is a complex problem that can't be solved overnight. But, with the pace of change and critical role your frontline plays in pushing your business forward, it's a great time to start the process. Here are some recommended practices for promoting equity in your workplace.



Use equity as your decision-making lens

Make sure you understand your organisation's perspective on DEIB and use it as a decision-making lens to ensure everyone receives equitable support and opportunity.

- Apply the lens across functions like recruitment, hiring, development, recognition and promotion so your workforce more accurately reflects the diversity of the communities you serve.
- Help all employees expand their perspective through continuous DEIB training and communication.

Conduct equity assessments

- Deploy pulse surveys to access key elements of the workplace experience, including the factors referenced in this research report.
- Analyse ongoing feedback to identify trends and gaps.
- Take proactive steps to improve workplace equity to they have a powerful voice and are capable of driving change across the organisation.



Explore flexible working practices—for everyone

Most frontline employees can't work from home, but you should still look for opportunities to introduce flexibility into their work experiences.


- Explore flexible scheduling practices that offer a variety of start times and shift durations along with simplified options for swapping shifts.
- Consider introducing hybrid roles in which employees spend some days on location and others working remotely. For example, retail associates may work 3 days in the store and 2 days from home as contact centre agents. And make sure your policy is transparent and equitable.


Close the gap between remote and on-location experiences


- Strive for equitable (the same levels of support) rather than equal work experiences.
- Avoid forcing the same tools and processes into every department and function when they aren't designed to fit their specific work experiences.
- Build personas for each employee audience and use them to build right-fit work experiences for all.



Keep exploring

 Hear what it takes to create "A Great Place to Work for All" from Great Place to Work CEO Michael C. Bush on The 80 Percent Podcast.

 Watch Michael C. Bush [breakdown his team's latest research into workplace equity and inclusion](#) in this recorded session from AxoniCom LIVE 2020.

 Explore the connection between equity and skill development in the workplace as well as the role chief learning officers should play in fostering equitable opportunities in [this CLO article](#) by Axonify's JD Dillon.

Case study

 Read the story of how Canadian grocer Longo's is [using mobile technology to deliver DEIB training to their store associates](#) without disrupting their daily operations.

Lever #3

Communicate consistently

Make sure every employee gets the information they need to make the right decisions.

When compared to complex workplace issues like burnout and equity, communication may seem pretty straightforward. For several years now, our annual frontline research report has revealed that it's one of the frontline's biggest challenges and therefore one of the most powerful levers you can pull to improve the work experience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of frontline communication as well as ongoing gaps in workers' ability to keep pace with change. And our [2020 State of Frontline Employee Training](#) report found that 98% of employees received communication during the pandemic. The problem isn't a lack of communication: it's the quality.



How employees rated communication received during the pandemic.

Relevant: ● **46%**

Reliable: ● **40%**

Timely: ● **39%**

Information is getting to the frontline. It's just not the information they need. And this has a clear impact on their ability to do their jobs.

Impact of clear and timely communication on employee performance.

No Impact: ● **7.6%**

Low Impact: ● **18.6%**

Medium Impact: ● **40.5%**

High Impact: ● **33.3%**

Frontline communication suffers for two reasons: digital gaps and lack of prioritisation.

Digital collaboration tools—like email, intranets and Microsoft Teams—are commonplace for corporate team members but rare in frontline environments, especially in store-based operations like grocery and retail. As a result, these employees feel less informed about changes in their workplace.



Risky business

Managers continue to rely on analog methods, such as pre-shift meetings and breakroom postings, to share important messages. This can turn critical frontline communication into an inconsistent, slow-moving game of telephone, where messages are interpreted and deprioritised along the way. This heavily impacts part-time workers, who are less informed than their full-time peers (54% vs 71.3% respectively). Whilst some managers implement their own digital solutions, such as informal Facebook and WhatsApp groups, to improve communication, this unapproved technology adds more risk to their businesses.



How to pull the lever

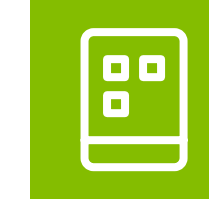
Every employee needs access to timely, reliable, relevant information so they can make good decisions and do their best work. Companies need to think about building strategies and investing in tools that enable right-fit communication methods for everyone on the frontline. Here's how you can get started.



Go digital

It's time to finally retire the bulletin boards and shut down the secret WhatsApp groups. Instead, consider these strategies:

- Implement communication technology designed for busy, mobile frontline workers.
- Give everyone the opportunity to access the most up-to-date information regardless of role, location, manager or schedule.
- Enable channels that can be used for centralised messages, such as those from executives and department leaders, as well as decentralised communication within teams and locations.



Consider every access point

Point of sale systems. Handheld scanners. Bulletin boards. Let employees retrieve timely information updates on the digital access points that best align with their workflow and preferences. Implement a bring your own device (BYOD) policy so employees have the option to access information away from work. BYOD has proven especially helpful for part-time workers, during periods of accelerated change and to support employees during furloughs and shut downs.



Make sure communication is two-way

- Look for digital tools that include options to post, respond and react to messages, even those sent to thousands of employees.
- Avoid the temptation to restrict functionality, and therefore conversation, because you're afraid of what people might share.
- Establish clear ground rules, implement community management to hold people accountable and trust that employees know how to behave in the workplace.



Prioritise the stuff that's actually important

Too much communication can be just as bad as no communication, overloading employees and making them prone to forgetting. Work with your communication influencers to establish guidelines for prioritising frontline communication. Only push the information that people need to know ASAP and provide an easily searched digital knowledge base to cover the nice-to-know stuff.



Turn communication into behaviour change through reinforcement

Making information easier to access is just the first step. Now, you have to make sure they retain it and apply it on the job. Use reinforcement training, such as daily refreshers and question-based learning, to help employees retain need-to-know information long term. Urge managers to reinforce key points during their group meetings and one-to-one coaching sessions.

Keep exploring

Share this [Axonify Communication infographic](#) and kickstart your new frontline communication strategy.

Pick up [practical tips on improving your frontline communication](#) from JD Dillon (Chief Learning Architect at Axonify) in just 5 minutes on The 80 Percent Podcast.

Case study

Find out how New Zealand-based retailer Briscoe Group used [digital communication and BYOD to keep their associates informed and connected](#) during pandemic lockdowns.

Lever #4

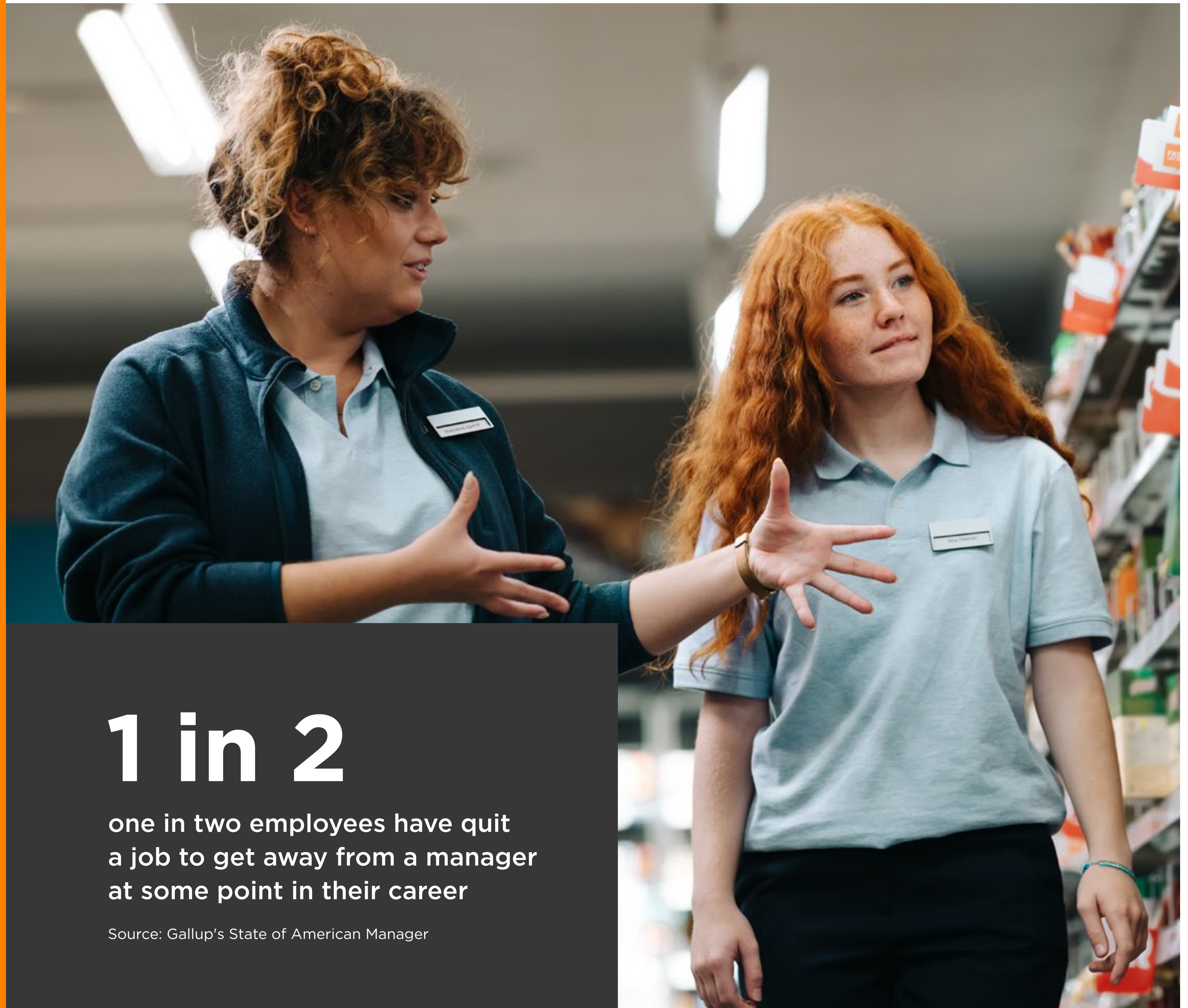
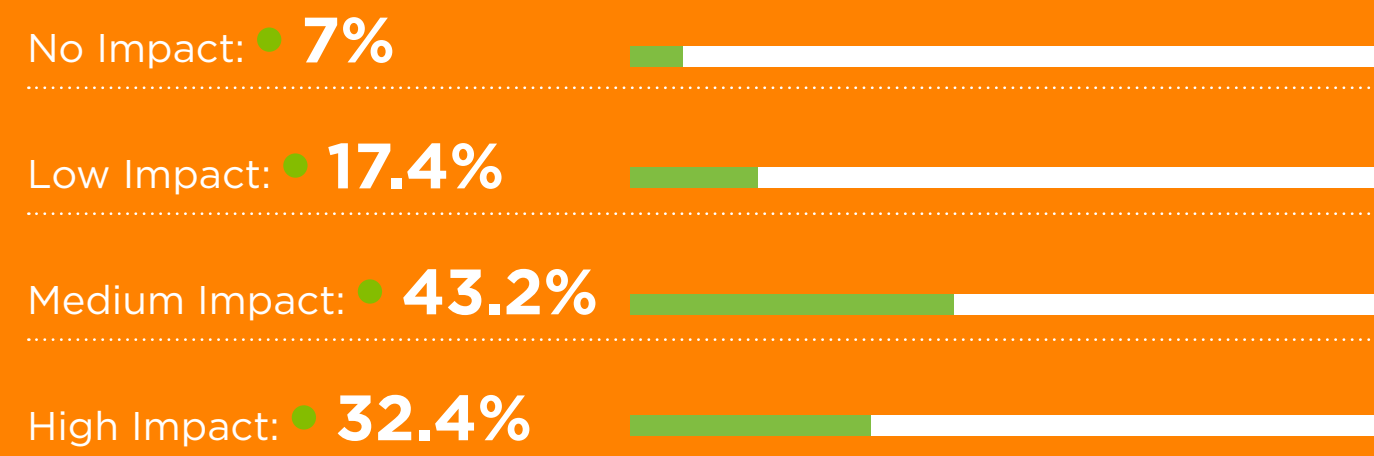
Empower managers

Help your managers build an agile, inclusive, productive frontline workplace.

Manager influence is especially potent on the frontline. Consider the five primary causes of burnout referenced earlier in this report. You can draw a straight line between each factor and the day-to-day role managers play on the frontline.

A company can establish guidelines around equitable employee treatment, but managers should hold themselves and others accountable for treating people fairly. Managers control schedules, work assignments and deadlines. Managers are responsible for communicating timely updates, especially in the absence of digital messaging tools. And managers set expectations regarding job performance, which has a considerable impact on an employee's ability to do their best work.

How much impact do clear performance expectations have on your ability to do your best work?



1 in 2

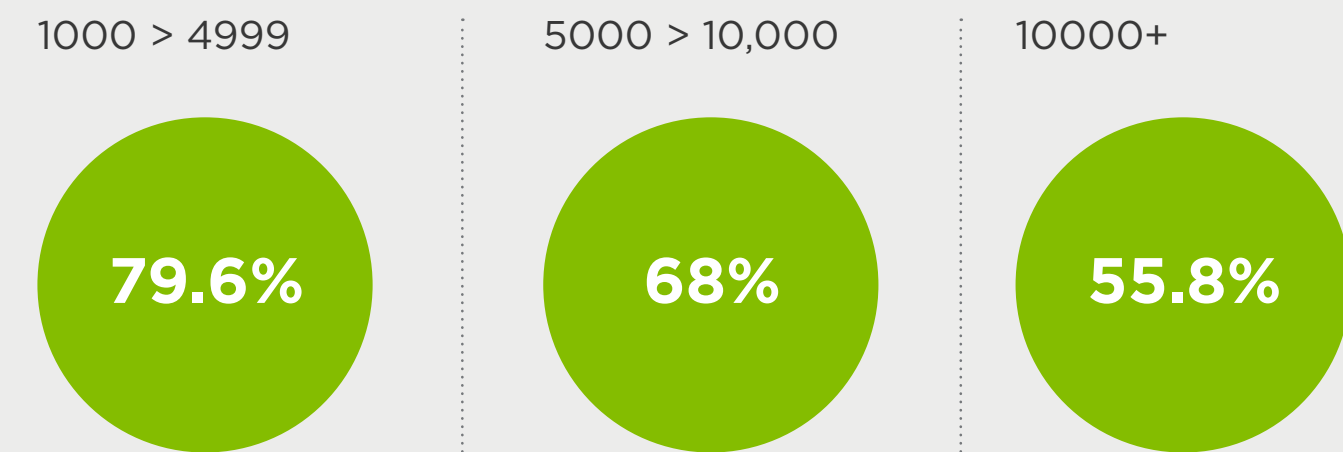
one in two employees have quit a job to get away from a manager at some point in their career

Source: Gallup's State of American Manager

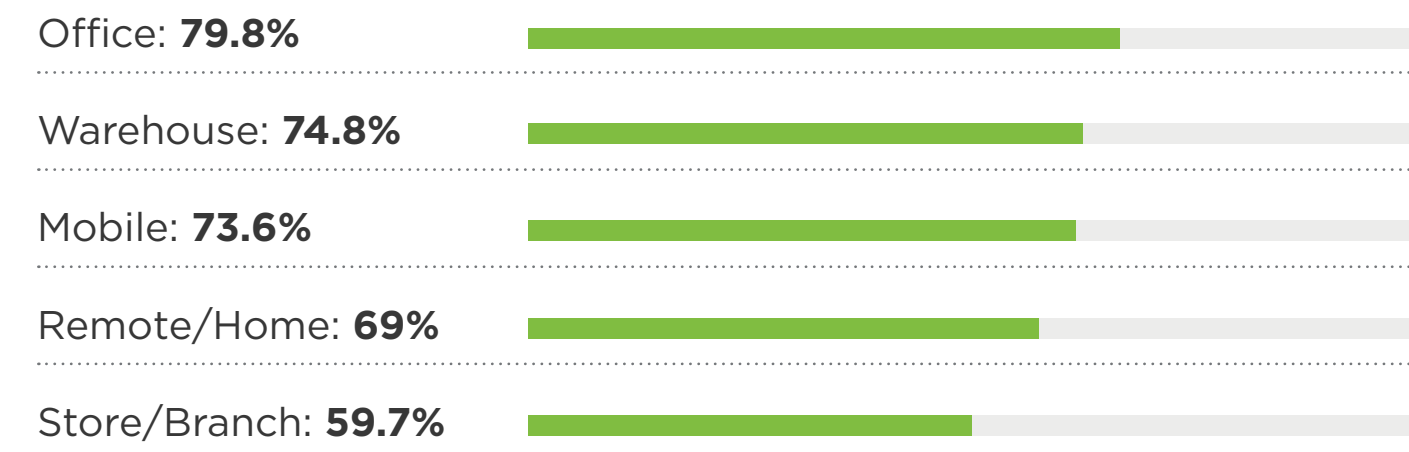
Managers are the face of your company

Employee satisfaction with their company (73%) and their direct manager (72.7%) are closely aligned. Their feelings about their managers fade when employees intend to resign (66%) as compared to those who plan to remain (80.9%). Perhaps it's not that employees leave managers instead of companies. Rather, the manager is the everyday embodiment of the company, and they decide to stay with or leave both.

Employees trust in managers to consider their physical and mental wellbeing when making decisions—by workforce size.



Employees trust in managers to consider their physical and mental wellbeing when making decisions—by work location.



How to pull the lever

Managers play a critical role in enabling frontline execution and retaining key talent. Here are some ideas to help them balance long-term relationship-building efforts with short-term performance expectations.



Train managers earlier

Many frontline managers are still waiting for their chance to attend basic management training. Meanwhilst, they're figuring things out on their own and making decisions that impact frontline workers, customers and business results.

- Shift away from a programmatic approach to management and leadership training.
- Continue building skills by using microlearning to embed training within the busy workflow for managers and high-potential employees.
- Focus on human skills first, such as leading with empathy, communication, delegation, conflict resolution, fostering psychological safety, leading through uncertainty, etc.



Provide coaching resources

- Give managers a reliable place to go for information and support for dealing with employee concerns.
- Create an online community where managers can share proven practices and seek help from their peers, especially if they work in remote and distributed teams.
- Make sure managers know they don't have to solve complex problems on their own.



Hold managers accountable for the entire job

- Install systems that measure a manager's entire role, not just their ability to deliver on KPIs.
- Use pulse surveys to gather timely feedback from employees. Merge this data with KPIs and other metrics to get an holistic view of manager performance.
- Follow-up with managers to ensure they provide consistent, fair leadership.



Make check-ins an expectation

Make sure managers acknowledge that spending time with their frontline employees is a core part of their job. Doing a quick walk by and asking "how are you?" isn't sufficient. Instead, urge managers to conduct regular one-to-one conversations away from the operation so they can build relationships and foster trust.



Help them be there when it matters most

- Managers can't support employees in challenging moments and gather feedback for senior management if they're stuck in the office handling administrative tasks.
- Assess manager workflows and responsibilities to make sure they have enough capacity to spend time on the frontline.
 - Staff the operation with leadership layers (managers, assistants, supervisors) so they delegate management responsibilities without leaving the frontline behind.
 - Stress the importance of working shoulder-to-shoulder with employees during management training and ongoing communication.

Keep exploring



Hear what it takes to [enable managers to bring magic to life on the frontline](#) from Dan Cockerell, a 26-year veteran of The Walt Disney Company, on The 80 Percent Podcast.

Case study



Learn how Shaw Communications [uses digital training and behaviour observation to improve the quality and consistency of frontline coaching](#) in their retail stores.

Lever #5

Prioritise skill development

Build the talent pipeline you need to overcome the disruptions yet to come.

The CFO asked the CEO ...

“What happens if we invest in developing our people and then they leave us?”

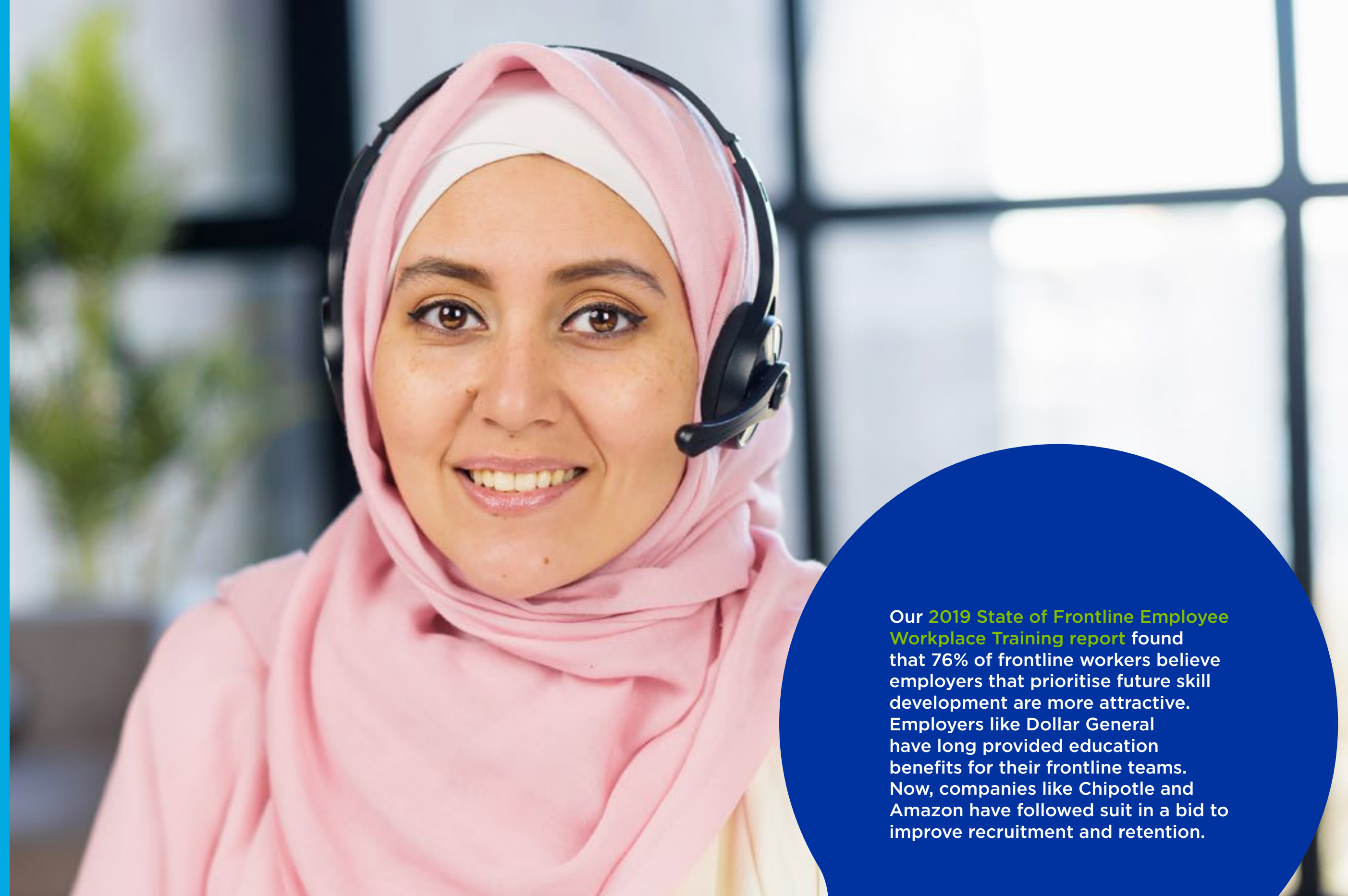
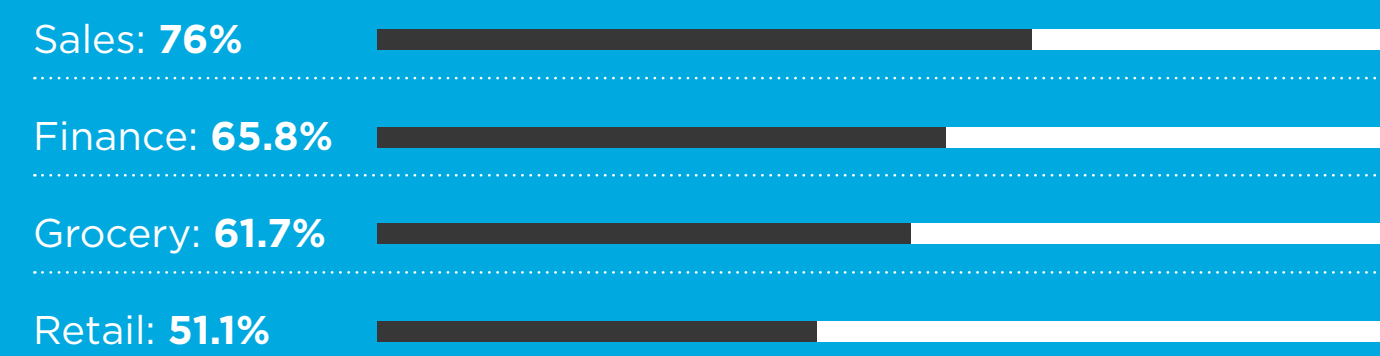
The CEO replied ...

“What happens if we don’t, and they stay?”

This anecdote has long been used to reinforce the importance of skill development in the workplace. As it becomes harder to recruit right-fit talent, companies need to be willing and able to build the skills they need in-house. 72% of executives believe “the ability of their people to adapt, reskill and assume new roles” is critical for navigating future disruption according to the 2021 Deloitte Global Human Capital Trends report.

Building new skills is just as important on the frontline. However, according to this year’s survey, internal skill development remains inconsistent.

Employee opportunity to take on new responsibilities and advance their careers—by industry.



Our 2019 State of Frontline Employee Workplace Training report found that 76% of frontline workers believe employers that prioritise future skill development are more attractive. Employers like Dollar General have long provided education benefits for their frontline teams. Now, companies like Chipotle and Amazon have followed suit in a bid to improve recruitment and retention.

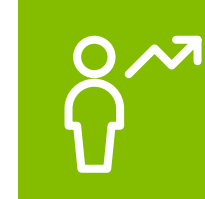
Why is frontline training deprioritised?

Retail associates, grocery workers, contact centre agents and delivery drivers are difficult to reach with traditional courses and training programs. They’re heavily scheduled and spend most of their time focused on execution. Pulling them away from their everyday tasks would hurt the operation, and adding staff in order to make time for training is a considerable expense.

Combine this challenge with the high churn many frontline employers have historically experienced, and it’s easy to see why frontline skill development often takes a back seat. 35.8% of employees say they only receive training during big job changes like transfers and promotions. 20.3% rarely or never receive additional training.

How to pull the lever

As the War for Talent rages on, companies should be rethinking their talent strategies and prioritising building both core job skills and future-focused capabilities. A continuous learning approach will help employers close timely staffing gaps whilst building bench strength and preparing for future disruption. Here's how you can begin creating a culture of ongoing development for your frontline.



Make skill development part of the job

Inconsistent training focus is what allows skill gaps to develop. By the time you realise you've lost people with in-demand skills, it's too late to upskill others, and your operation takes a hit. To keep pace with change and build a disruption-ready business, companies should prioritise employee development and productivity at the same level—regardless of what may be happening on any given day.



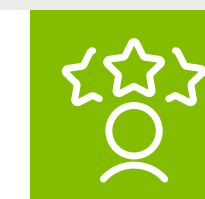
Focus on skills, not jobs

Rather than architecting training programs that align with specific roles and titles, shift to focus on transferable skills, which naturally makes training shorter and easier to consume. For example, employees in retail stores and contact centres may complete the same core customer service training and then learn how to apply these skills within the specific context of their everyday work.



Move training into the workflow

- Restructure skill development programs so they fit seamlessly into the everyday work experience.
- Use microlearning to introduce new topics in bite-sized activities that take just a few moments to complete.
- Provide access to on-demand training and support materials employees can access using their workplace and personal places.
- Reinforce critical knowledge and skill topics with ongoing digital and on-the-job practice activities.



Go beyond the basics

- Go beyond the basics of onboarding, core job skills and compliance to retain experienced workers or keep people engaged long-term.
- Offer upskilling for employees who want to take on more responsibilities and get promoted into management.
- Cross-train people who want to add variety by working different positions and explore new functions.
- Reskill workers who want to make lateral moves into different roles or apply what they've learned during company-sponsored higher education programs.

Keep exploring

Find out how you can **redesign your training** so it balances **employee development needs with the priorities and performance of your business** in Axonify's Ultimate Guide to Frontline Training.

Read the 2019 State of Frontline Employee Workplace Training report to **learn more about what frontline employees want from a skill development program.**

Case study

Learn how Citizens Bank, one of the oldest and largest financial institutions in the U.S., **leveraged cross-training to quickly transition branch employees** into phone support roles.



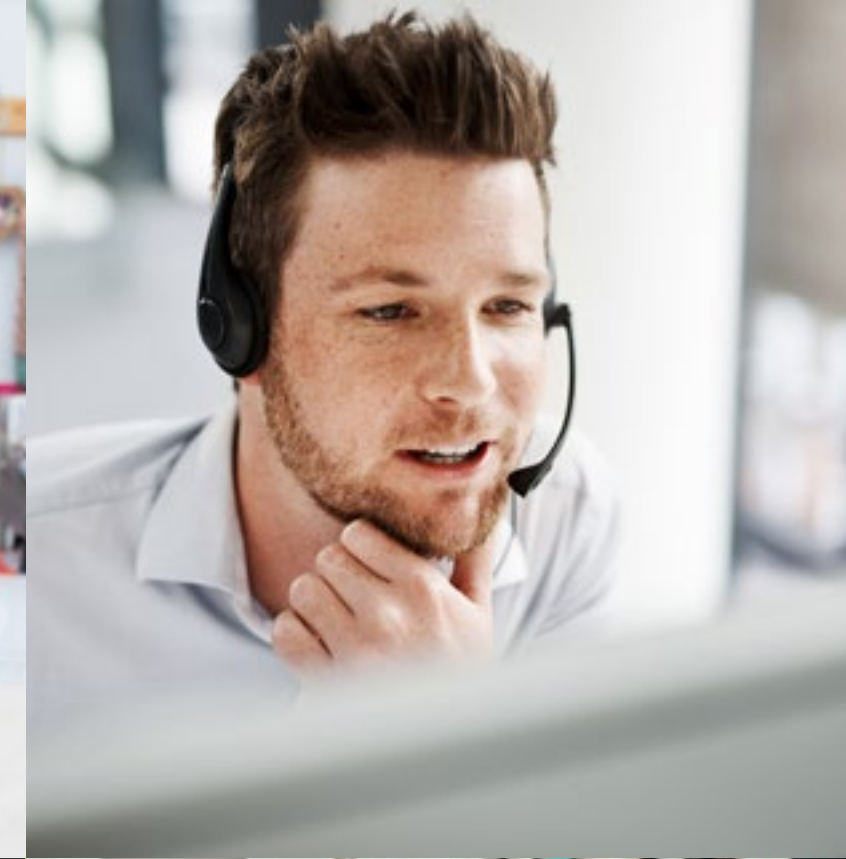
Building the future of frontline work

It feels like everything is up for grabs right now when it comes to how businesses operate.

- Will companies return to offices, or will they adopt hybrid work?
- Will retailers lean into ecommerce and automation, or will they differentiate their brands through in-store experiences?
- Will industries like travel, food service and hospitality return to pre-pandemic volume, or will they totally reimagine their business models to suit changing consumer preferences?

Leaders have tough decisions to make and plenty of metaphorical levers to pull when it comes to the future of their businesses. These decisions will transform customer experiences for years to come. They'll also reshape employee experiences and shift the role people play within the company. To overcome disruptive labour shortages, leaders should be including employees in their decision-making process so they understand what will be expected of them moving forward. Frontline workers have spent years getting to know your customers, products and services and can therefore contribute to strategy development in lots of ways.





Frontline employees have levers to pull, too

Workers on the frontline have been presented with an unexpected and consequential opportunity to rethink their professional lives. They've dealt with furloughs, layoffs and health concerns for the past 18 months as well as years of physically and emotionally demanding work. Now they get to decide:

Do I still want to do this kind of work because it supports my personal and professional needs, goals and interests?

OR

Should I seize the opportunity to try something new that will give me greater satisfaction and flexibility to live my best life?

The real-world insights shared by frontline employees in this report demonstrates what it will take to earn the trust and loyalty of this unique group of workers.

- ✓ Take care of your people by reducing workplace stress, balancing workloads and providing mental health support.
- ✓ Use diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging as a decision-making lens so everyone has a chance to do and be their best at work.
- ✓ Close communication gaps so everyone has access to timely, relevant and reliable information and feels like they're a part of the process.
- ✓ Enable managers to build relationships and foster trust on the frontline by being there when it matters most.
- ✓ Make frontline work more than just a job by offering continued skill development and career advancement opportunities—without disrupting the daily operation.

This is the kind of work experience employees are demanding and therefore what's required to ensure ongoing productivity and effectiveness on the frontline. If employee needs aren't met, they're going to look elsewhere and businesses will struggle with ongoing disruption as a result.



We set out to answer one question through this research: how is the frontline doing? We got our answer. They're essential. They're burned out. Yet they're still confident, ready and willing to do the job, even in the most challenging circumstances. But they need your help to reach their full potential. The support you give your frontline workers makes a huge impact on their daily work experience. If you take care to ensure your people feel safe, supported and well taken care of, they'll do the same for your customers. Then everyone wins.

Are you ready to pull the next lever?

Learn more about Axonify

Axonify is proud to sponsor the annual State of the Frontline Work Experience research program.

Axonify is the modern training and communications solution for frontline employees that actually works. Why does it work so well? Because the experience is fun, fast, personalised and designed to make critical information stick. And employees love it—83% of users log in 2-3 times a week, which translates into meaningful behaviour change that drives business results. More than 200+ customers in 155+ countries and 57 languages, including Walmart, Levi's, Merck, AstraZeneca and Kroger, trust Axonify to fuel their people's performance to keep pace with their business.

Founded in 2011, Axonify is headquartered in Ontario, Canada and works directly in Europe and via a partner network for the rest of the world.

If you want to learn more about building a resilient, disruption-ready frontline workforce, head over to axonify.com and click Speak to An Expert.

Transform your frontline experience with Axonify's selection of purpose-built digital solutions.

Train

Support your frontline teams with the knowledge and confidence they need to perform on the job from day one. Axonify Train is an LMS that cuts through the noise to quickly onboard your frontline teams with customizable learning paths that get them contributing faster and providing excellent customer experiences.

Communicate

Axonify Communicate enables communication between your frontline and HQ so you can build a united workforce of highly engaged employees. It features a chronological social timeline, communities, notifications, and analytics to help you supercharge the frontline experience and get the insights you need.

Reinforce

Axonify Reinforce builds a confident, high-performing frontline team. How? By teaching them the top things you need them to know, using continuous focused bite-sized bursts of information and other techniques proven by science to make learning memorable.

Content

Axonify has lots of flexible options to stock your platform with content that gets your people doing the right things. Tap into our ready-to-go content marketplace, repurpose your existing libraries or build your own custom content with our learning experts.

AxonifyTM