



# State of the UK Frontline Workforce 2023 – Fashion Retail

## INTRODUCTION

# Happiness at work: what's driving your employees exceptional customer service?



Often unsung heroes, the UK's fashion retail workforce keep our favourite stores running smoothly, ensuring customers get the red carpet treatment every time they walk through the door. But what about shop staff themselves? How are they feeling?

We recently asked 1,000 UK retail staff about their jobs and career prospects as part of our wider study, 'State of the Frontline Workforce 2023'.

On the one hand, the results are encouraging. They highlight a sector which is more likely to recognise the value of its people and provide more opportunities for progression than other industries. On the other hand, we see a workforce struggling with challenging conditions both on and off the shop floor, hoping for better pay, less stress and greater work-life balance.

In short, things aren't as bad as they could be, but they could also be greatly improved. Ongoing economic uncertainty means that staff engagement initiatives – that achieve long-term progress, motivate and help retain staff – are often deemed as 'nice to haves', not essentials. And any focus on reward and recognition is centred solely on pay.

And in today's unpredictable, tech-driven landscape, it's more important than ever to put your people first – to ensure your business doesn't come last.

Remuneration has arguably never been more significant for employees, of course. Yet forward-thinking business leaders know that pay is only part of the wider picture.

What do retail staff really want? Well, around a third want more flexibility and better communication with management, and 65% say that opportunities for career development would make them stick around for longer. They want easy access to their own schedules, and to feel able to speak up – whether face-to-face or virtually – on issues affecting them.

What they don't want is mounting work stress on top of external pressures, and being forced to use multiple apps to do their jobs, when one or two streamlined tech solutions would be much more effective.

Those who recognise the value of their employees and take the necessary steps to support and empower them – beyond simply providing higher pay – will be well-positioned to reap the rewards of a happier, more engaged and productive team that will deliver the levels of customer experience expected from a high-end fashion retailer.

# The risk of tech overwhelm

## More tech, more problems?

Across the retail sector, the vast majority (75%) of workplace interactions now happen digitally rather than in person. But are work apps and other digital tools always helpful, or – if implemented ‘for the sake of it’, rather than strategically – do they actually create more stress?

## One in three

retail workers (35%) use 5 or more apps and digital tools each day to carry out their jobs. BUT.....



79%

are still without the tech at work to be able to easily swap shifts

33%

also say apps don't help them in their work, with 24% frustrated by the sheer number of apps and lack of 'user-friendliness'



## Cluttered (mis)communication

Of course, technology can solve many problems within the luxury retail sector, with apps now available for anything and everything. Yet even with an abundance of tech at their fingertips, today's retail employees still don't always have access to the tools they need.

Often there's no connecting virtual &'hubs' where workers can view schedules and communicate with managers quickly to make adjustments, adding to frustration, confusion - and missed shifts.



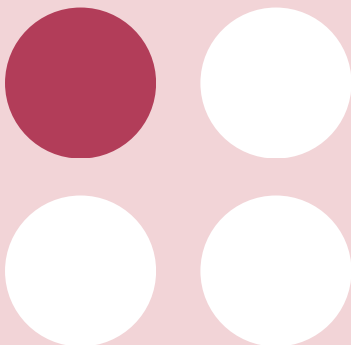
55%

have to call, email or text a manager to change shifts



63%

have missed a shift due to miscommunication, being unable to cancel or personal circumstances



One in four

retail workers (23%) can only access their schedules via a printed rota at work



### **A streamlined approach**

Employers must strive for the right tech balance. Stressed-out, overloaded employees are unlikely to provide five-star customer service, and what's more, they're unlikely to stick around.

Implementing just one or two effective, streamlined apps can reduce staff stress levels and increase productivity, ensuring employees deliver service worthy of a gold card. And let's not forget face-to-face workplace interaction altogether! Retail staff need to feel motivated, valued and encouraged to progress. More on that to follow...

#### **See it in action**

Since HMV implemented a scheduling app, it has seen a 'vast' reduction in scheduling planning time and a boost in employee engagement.

"Using Quinyx has helped bring head office closer to store colleagues. Its value in increasing employee engagement cannot be underestimated."

**Rupert Banning-Lover, Central Operations Manager, HMV**

[Read the full story](#)

# Stress on the shop floor?

For many retail staff, work-related stress has been exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis, affecting life outside of work while being inextricably linked to their jobs. Should they stay where they are for financial security, or look elsewhere for better pay? Will they need to take a second job?

While the number of retail staff thinking about quitting their roles has decreased slightly – 50%, down from 55% in 2022, our study shows that half are still thinking of jumping ship, for the following reasons:

## Reasons for wanting to quit



35%



want a higher salary

34%



feel stressed at work

32%



have no work-life balance

32%



have no career progression

31%



feel undervalued

# The causes of work-related stress

55%

of retail staff feel stressed while on-the-job, citing a variety of reasons for feeling under pressure



43%



understaffing at work

42%



the cost of living/  
not being paid enough

34%



working too many hours

31%



lack of flexibility

30%



fear of losing their job



## Reducing the load

In many cases, not only are retail workers increasingly stressed, but they also feel unable to talk to their managers about the issues that are affecting them.

Less than a third of shop staff feel comfortable talking about pay, scheduling problems, understaffing, increasing/decreasing hours, or how stress is impacting their health.

Concerningly, around one in seven retail workers (16%) say their employer offers no opportunity to provide feedback on how they're feeling at work and issues that are affecting them.

Managers can't be expected to solve every problem, but demonstrating a willingness to listen, and providing feedback opportunities for staff on key issues – which can be facilitated via an app like Quinyx – can go a long way.





## Why a payrise isn't enough

Despite the difficult economic climate, the reality is that job satisfaction and happiness at work isn't just about higher pay. Employees in the luxury retail sector want more flexibility, more communication and more recognition.

### What makes retail employees feel more engaged?

While 'higher pay' was given as the biggest motivator (46%), other top factors affecting engagement are:

- A more flexible schedule (36%)
- More recognition (33%)
- Better work-life balance (31%)
- Improved communication with bosses (29%)
- Less stress (29%)
- Sharing the same values as their company (19%)

# Finding the balance

Flexible working and 'work life balance' aren't just buzzterms – post-pandemic, they've become part of life, for desk-based staff at least. Yet many retail employees still struggle to secure the flex they need from their employers, to help them manage other responsibilities and enjoy some 'downtime'.

When we have tech at our fingertips and the tools to manage scheduling at the touch of a button, there's really no excuse for employers not to offer a little more 'give and take'. Without it, they risk losing their best people (remember 31% have considered quitting due to no work-life balance) and increasing staffing headaches.



40%

reported they don't have any say over their work schedule



37%

say their work schedule caused them to miss social events or holiday celebrations



26%

have missed major family and friend milestones, such as births, weddings and funerals



## See it in action:

After choosing to manage its teams through cloud and on mobile, London City Airport received a flood of positive feedback about the flexibility it provided its workforce.

"I haven't missed a birthday, an anniversary, or family time. It's impossible to put a price on how valuable that is."

-Belynda Maquis-Mondesir, Aviation Security Officer

[Read the full story](#)

# Moving on up?

Encouragingly, the retail sector appears to be slightly ahead of others when it comes to recognition and career progression. Almost two thirds of UK shop staff (64%) said they feel appreciated by management, while only 53% of employees in logistics-focused roles and 60% of hospitality staff consider themselves valued.

Retail staff are also more likely than other industries to believe their job offers development opportunities – 65% credited their organisations for offering room for progression, compared to 55% of those in logistics and 57% in hospitality roles.

Employees in high-end retail are often the immediate 'face' of a brand and its customer experience – employers wanting to hang on to valued team members must nurture them.

## Career Development = Retention

Providing career opportunities – e.g., promotions, education and training – demonstrates to staff that their goals are being taken seriously.

And getting the chance to grow within their organisation not only encourages retention, but it also benefits businesses – experienced, knowledgeable teams are what successful luxury brands are built on.

Thanks to streamlined apps that offer task-based capabilities alongside scheduling functions, retail staff can become product experts and brand ambassadors, delivering exceptional service day in, day out and helping businesses thrive. In other words, ensuring staff get the 'VIP treatment' when it comes to their career development is even more vital.





65%

of retail staff say they would stay longer with their company if they had more development opportunities



61%

would recommend a retail career to others, with 'variety of the job' the main reason for a recommendation

# In summary



The bottom line? While it's great that almost two-thirds of retail workers would recommend a job in the industry to others, there are still plenty of factors affecting staff that would benefit from more care and attention. Effective engagement is never 'done' or finished, and it's key that retailers look beyond the basics to ensure their employee experience is as high-end as their customer offer.

Another important takeaway for managers is that 'retail staff' isn't really a collective of course - it's made up of individuals, each with their own goals and markers of success. Sure, there are tried-and-tested, overarching methods of boosting engagement, but we believe people strategies are much more about 'bespoke tailoring' than 'one-size-fits-all'! A great way to kickstart the creation of a happy workforce is to open the door and encourage two-way communication.

It's tricky for businesses to get everything right for everyone, all the time, but small steps can build for an impressive impact. Showing goodwill, listening and investing in initiatives that address workers' desire to grow within their careers are important. Streamlined tools can provide smart scheduling automation and task management, while avoiding tech overload, reducing stress and increasing work-life balance.

And the 'reward' for implementing a strategy that puts your workforce first? A team of happy, reinvigorated staff (who are less likely to have their heads turned by another luxury 'outfit!'). If you're ready to make it happen, we're here to help.

\*The Quinyx State of the Frontline Workforce poll was undertaken in spring 2023, surveying 3000 UK workers (including 1000 retail staff) and 13,100 workers globally.



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