



# Recruiting and Retaining Frontline Workers

Promising Practices from Across Industry Sectors



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## Table of Contents

- 1 Executive Summary
- 4 Flexible Scheduling & Stable Hours
- 5 Accessible Benefits
- 6 Financial Wellness
- 7 Safety and Well-Being
- 8 Career Advancement and Wage Progression
- 9 Recognition and Rewards
- 10 Worker Voice and Participation
- 11 Supervision and Communication
- 12 Leadership and Inclusive Policy Implementation
- 13 Table 1: Summary of Practices, Strategies and Employer Examples

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Kelly L. Aiken, principal and founder of *Workforce Development by Design*, has over 15 years of experience in healthcare workforce development at the national, state and local levels. She is a collaborative leader who offers strategic insights and innovative solutions to her clients as they design systems and programs for today's complex labor market. Kelly works with providers from across the continuum of care focusing on making frontline jobs better, developing career pathways and improving recruiting and retention practices. Most recently, she served as the Chief Program Officer at the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and the Director of CareerSTAT, a network of 300+ healthcare and workforce providers dedicated to increasing employer investments in frontline workers. Previous to the National Fund Kelly served as Massachusetts Senior Care Association's Director of Labor and Workforce Development.

### Acknowledgements

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### Executive Summary

Attracting and retaining frontline talent in the long term care sector has always been challenging but to succeed in today's environment requires new and innovative ideas. Industry sectors such as retail, hospitality, manufacturing, finance, and information technology offer promising practices for long term care providers to consider. While some of these practices were in place prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, employers in most sectors are piloting a variety of new strategies, continuously evaluating, and redesigning them to have the greatest impact.

To determine which practices to pilot, employers are actively listening to their employees to learn what is important to them. Competitive wages are critical, but workers are looking for much more, from flexible scheduling to mental health benefits to opportunities to participate in workplace decision making. In addition, the pandemic highlighted that the definition of a good job varies based on life stage, age, income level, gender and race/ethnicity. Taking all these factors into consideration and designing a range of options using a diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) lens is critical to becoming an employer of choice.

Drawing on secondary sources, this report offers a summary of promising practices organized around nine practice areas with particular focus on those designed for frontline workers. Each area includes specific strategies, employer examples and resources. An overview of each area is offered below:

1. **Flexible scheduling and stable hours:** Strong evidence demonstrates that providing frontline workers with flexible scheduling and stable hours improves employee health, increases job satisfaction and productivity, and reduces absenteeism. A range of flexible scheduling options exist, including new technology-enabled solutions that provide employees with increased control over their work schedules. For frontline workers seeking more autonomy and job satisfaction, flexible scheduling and stable hours are critical.

2. **Accessible benefits:** Businesses are making existing benefits more accessible to their entry-level frontline employees and connecting them with external benefits such as transportation and childcare to improve retention and stability. Some are giving employees a menu of benefit options that they can select based on preference while others are utilizing resource navigators to help staff utilize available benefits.

3. **Financial wellness:** Research shows that employees suffering from financial stress are distracted at work. Many entry-level workers and their families do not have enough savings to manage a \$400 emergency expense and student debt is rising dramatically with typical borrowers owing between \$20,000-\$25,000. Employers are using a range of workplace financial wellness strategies from same day pay to student loan repayment programs to assist current employees and market to prospective recruits.

4. **Safety and well-being:** COVID-19 made safety and well-being in the workplace a more important issue for employees. They are demanding physical and psychological safety and an acknowledgement that mental health is just as important as physical health. Food insecurity and unreliable transportation affects entry-level workers at higher rates and businesses are addressing it with some creative strategies.

5. **Career advancement and wage progression:** Frontline workers frequently aspire to grow their careers beyond their immediate position and are looking for well-defined pathways that are accompanied by wage progression. They want to learn on the job and are eager to obtain new skills and certifications but they do not want to wait years for these opportunities. For many frontline positions, this requires redesigning jobs and providing more career support, including paid release time and tuition assistance.

6. **Recognition and rewards:** Increased employee engagement and improved business results can be achieved through a range of recognition and reward strategies that distribute both monetary and non-monetary benefits to staff at all levels. These strategies are most effective when staff understand how their role is tied to clear, consistent and measurable goals.

7. **Worker voice and participation:** Frontline workers want their ideas, skills and talents to be valued in the workplace. Core elements of worker voice include opportunities for the frontline to participate in decision-making and both formal and informal ways to gather and share input on critical issues. Effective worker voice is often a critical component of an organization's DEI strategy and can lead to increased employee job satisfaction and innovative problem-solving.

8. **Supervision and communications:** Frontline workers succeed when supervisors maintain open communications and actively listen to what workers need to perform their jobs. Employers are using different types of strategies to facilitate open communication between staff and managers. They are also rewarding managers for retaining staff and supporting their career advancement. Often these strategies are linked to broader organizational DEI goals.

9. **Leadership and inclusive policy implementation:** Organizational leaders play a critical role in creating a workplace that values frontline workers and maintaining Human Resources (HR) policies that foster diversity, equity and inclusion. Many leaders are executing equity scans of their HR policies to ensure appropriate language and consistent application for all employees. Others are ensuring that all the perks of employment made available to senior-level employees are also available to frontline staff. CEOs are broadly communicating their commitment to inclusive policy implementation and calling attention to the new or revised benefits.



All these new and innovative practices fall along a continuum of cost, implementation and potential impact on recruiting and retention. As such, a small group of MSCA members reviewed them in advance to discuss applicability to the long term care industry. They offered a range of perspectives regarding feasibility and implementation, noting that some strategies may work better in different parts of the state or in different types of ownership models. Despite the variation, they agreed a mindset shift is needed in order to become an employer of choice in today's competitive landscape. They noted that everyone should consider the following:

- 1) Get comfortable with taking new risks to attract and retain talent because doing the same thing and expecting different results is unrealistic
- 2) Support creative, out-of-the box thinking to find new solutions that work for job seekers and employees
- 3) Adopt a continuous improvement approach to allow everyone to learn and adapt as necessary

Regardless of your facilities starting point, Massachusetts Senior Care Association seeks to support members during the piloting and testing of new recruiting and retention strategies. For those action-oriented administrators and leaders ready to embark on implementation, please share your learnings and communicate where you need assistance.

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

-Albert Einstein

# Flexible Scheduling & Stable Hours

## Overview

Strong evidence demonstrates that providing frontline workers with flexible scheduling and stable hours improves employee health, increases job satisfaction and productivity, and reduces absenteeism. A range of flexible scheduling options exist, including new technology-enabled solutions that provide employees with increased control over their work schedules. For frontline workers seeking more autonomy and job satisfaction, flexible scheduling and stable hours are critical.

## Strategies

- **Employee-managed shift swapping:** Employees have the autonomy to swap shifts with their co-workers without manager approval to accommodate unforeseen circumstances. Technology-enabled platforms facilitate communication between employees to swap shifts. Retailers and restaurants are actively using these platforms and reporting improved work-life balance for employees and decreased managerial oversight.
- **Alternative shifts for different types of workers:** Many sectors are developing alternative schedules to accommodate the needs of students, parents and caregivers, and older workers. These schedules may include working fewer hours per day or at different time periods. 4-day work weeks, not to be confused with compressed work weeks, is also gaining traction and showing signs of increased productivity and job satisfaction.
- **Stable Hours:** Frontline workers expect supervisors to post their schedules at least two weeks in advance and to make a commitment to maintaining agreed upon hours from week to week. This is the only way that workers can manage childcare arrangements, shared transportation, scheduling appointments, etc.

## Resources

- "13 Techniques for Implementing a Flexible Work Schedule Policy Efficiently." *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, 21 Aug. 2020.
- Reisinger, Holger, and Dane Fetterer. "Forget Flexibility Your Employees Want Autonomy." *Harvard Business Review*, 2021.
- "How to Adapt to a Flexible Work Schedule in Healthcare." C.A. Short Company, 2021.
- Gilsdorf, Kimberly, and Fay Hanleybrown. "Investing in Entry-Level Talent: Retention Strategies That Work." FSG, Feb. 2017.

“The bottom line is flexibility. We need to be very flexible for our staff these days”.

- Skilled nursing facility administrator

## Employers In Action

**Vibrant Life Communities**, a skilled nursing facility in Ann Arbor, MI, tried a new shift schedule to provide more flexibility for employees. They created the 5-9pm shift for students which also eliminated the tough afternoon shift. They also created 10-hour shifts, which allows staff to work 40 hours and have three days off. If they work a fifth day, it's overtime, but they still have two more days off.

**The Gap** employees use a smartphone app to post a request for a shift swap with other employees. Through the app, employees can notify other Gap associates of shifts that conflict with their life schedules and allow them to switch shifts with others. This gives employees the chance to change their schedules when something unexpected crops up, while at the same time saving the managers the trouble of finding a replacement for them. The initial rollout found that 95% of part-time associates surveyed agreed that the app made it easier for them to arrange their work schedules around their daily life. Younger workers, who are used to communicating on their phones, as well as mature workers are actively using the app.

**Optimax** is a small manufacturer based in Ontario, NY, focused on creating a learning environment that promotes knowledge transfer and mentorship. To help meet that goal and the desire of older workers to scale back their time on the job, they created the "Dream Team" to allow those nearing retirement an opportunity to work a more flexible schedule (10am-2pm) and concentrate on mentoring younger employees and sharing their knowledge.

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# Accessible Benefits

## Overview

Businesses are making existing benefits more accessible to their entry-level employees and connecting them with external benefits such as transportation and childcare to improve retention and stability. Some are giving employees a menu of benefits options that they can select from based on preference while others are utilizing resource navigators to help staff utilize available benefits.

## Strategies

- **Menu of Benefit Options:** With various generations meeting in the workplace, employers recognize that not all employees have the same needs. Instead of a one-size-fits-all benefits system they are moving towards an elective model where employees can select benefits that best match their own situations and lifestyles.
- **Income-Based Premiums:** Income-based premiums help make health care affordable to lower-paid employees. Employers are paying a larger share of health insurance costs and/or prorating insurance premiums based on income.
- **401k Contributions:** Some employers are replacing their 401(k) match with an automatic 6-8% contribution for all employees with a year of service regardless of whether they contribute to the plan or not. Enabling access to 401k benefits via an emergency savings fund also makes retirement savings more accessible to deal with immediate emergencies.
- **Resource Navigator:** A resource navigator can assist eligible workers in accessing internal benefits and external supports and programs such as energy assistance, housing vouchers, food stamps, etc. Also called a retention specialist, the individual can provide career coaching and supports career development while helping to remove barriers to job retention and skill and career development through case management and referral to community resources. There are a variety of financing models for the role, including cost-sharing with other employers or community-based organizations as well as utilizing a third-party resource like Worklife Partnership to offer resource navigation services for eligible entry-level workers.

## Resources

- "Human-to-Human Support for a Successful Workforce." WorkLife Partnership, 15 Apr. 2022.
- "It's Time to Tie Employee Healthcare Costs to Pay." SHRM, 11 Apr. 2021.
- "Benefits Matter to Low Wage Workers." Mercer, 21 Oct. 2021.

## Employers In Action

**MapleKnolls**, along with three other long term care facilities in Cincinnati, OH, is sharing the cost of a resource navigator who spends one day per week at each facility working directly with frontline staff.

The navigator assists with accessing external supports (including CARES Act resources for energy assistance, housing, etc.). Grant funding was used to test the model and now each organization will contribute 25% of the navigator's salary to the host organization, a community-based social service agency.

**Small Business Association of Michigan (SBAM)** is based in Lansing, MI, where it competes for talent against much larger employers that tend to offer more generous benefits. As a small organization with 27 employees, the association has had to get creative in its benefits offerings. For nearly 15 years, the SBAM has tied employees' health insurance contributions to their pay, at no cost to employers. In today's market, employees in the lowest tier pay 15 percent of health insurance costs and those in the highest tier pay 22.5 percent.

**Cascade Engineering** headquartered in Grand Rapids, MI, uses an expanded Employee Assistance Program (EAP) model for their entry-level frontline workers that helps them to address all forms of support. The firm helped to start a nonprofit with other area manufacturers to provide employee support that helps employees in a variety of ways including training, housing, transportation, financial counseling, and other services that enable them to remain in the workplace and thrive so they can move up the ladder when opportunities arise.

**Universal Metal Products** is a custom metal-forming products manufacturer in Wickliffe, OH, that employs 287 staff representing various generations. They customize benefits and compensation packages to meet employees' needs—and those needs vary based on their income, age and life stage.

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## Financial Wellness

### Overview

Research shows that employees suffering from financial stress are distracted at work. Many entry-level workers and their families do not have enough savings to manage a \$400 emergency expense and student debt is rising dramatically with typical borrowers owing between \$20,000–\$25,000. Employers are using a range of workplace financial wellness strategies from same day pay to student loan repayment programs to assist current employees and market to prospective recruits.

### Strategies

- **Same Day Wages:** Same day pay offers workers the option to be paid a predetermined percentage of their daily net wages on the same day the work is performed. Typically pay comes on a pre-paid debit card. In some instances, employees are charged a fee to gain same day access to their wages, but large payroll providers are now integrating this feature for free.
- **Emergency Funds:** Employees can gain access to emergency funds through several types of programs. Income advance programs guarantee same day access to cash for emergency or unplanned needs. The advance is repaid through weekly payroll deductions. 401k emergency savings programs enable employees to divert resources and gain access without penalty. Some companies maintain an in-house emergency fund that allows employees to make a request. Many programs are implemented in partnership with a credit union or other financial institution.
- **Student Debt Repayment:** Companies offering student debt repayment can provide direct payments to lenders, help employees refinance student debt and make match contributions to 401k when employee's make loan payments. Until 2025, employers are able to make tax-exempt loan repayment contributions to their employees of up to \$5,250 a year and employees do not have to pay income taxes on the benefit.
- **Childcare Subsidies:** Employer-provided spending accounts or bonuses can help to cover costs associated with day care and early education expenses. Employers that supply child care subsidies can take advantage of an annual tax credit of up to \$150,000 if they use it for qualified child care facilities and services.

### Resources

- "Guide to Employee Financial Wellness." National Fund for Workforce Solutions, 2019.
- "Income Advance Guide." Income Advance Guide, Rhino Food and B Lab, 2022.
- Carrns, Ann. "More Companies Consider Helping Workers Pay Student Loans." New York Times, 28 Jan. 2022.
- Ora Lobell, Kylie. "Employers Consider Childcare Subsidies." SHRM, 22 Sept. 2020.

### Employers In Action

**International Paper** in Memphis, TN, offers student loan repayment up to \$100 per month—for a lifetime maximum of \$9,000—to help salaried employees repay student loans.

**Rhino Foods** is a food manufacturer based in Burlington, VT that developed an income advance program in partnership with a local credit union as a benefit to all employees. The program guarantees same day access to \$1,000 for emergency or unplanned needs and is repaid through weekly payroll deductions.

**UPS** offers nearly 100,000 of its workers a way to save for emergencies within its 401(k) plan. The program gives UPS employees the option to divert a portion of their paychecks into rainy-day funds within their 401(k) plans, using after-tax payroll deductions, to a linked emergency-savings option within the account.

**Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center** in Baton Rouge, LA, established a microloan fund with the Catholic Charities Diocese of Baton Rouge to help staff who were struggling financially and found themselves caught in a long-term cycle of debt caused by compounding payday loans and fees to predatory lenders. The Fund offers lower interest loans and financial counseling to help individuals and families better manage their money, escape predatory lending, and achieve financial stability.

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# Safety and Well-Being

## Overview

COVID-19 has made safety and well-being in the workplace a more important issue for employees. They are demanding physical and psychological safety and an acknowledgement that mental health is just as important as physical health. Food insecurity and unreliable transportation affects entry-level workers at higher rates and business are addressing it with some creative strategies.

## Strategies

- **Mental Health Benefits:** Many businesses updated their health plans since the start of the pandemic to expand access to mental health services. This meant expanding provider networks and increasing out-of-network coverage to make mental health and substance abuse services more affordable. A recent Calm survey found that 76% of workers say they consider mental health benefits critical when evaluating new jobs.
- **Psychological Safety:** Frontline workers, particularly workers of color, want to work on teams and in workplaces where it is safe to show up as your authentic self and voice your ideas and opinions. A psychologically safe workplace is defined as one that promotes employees' psychological well-being and actively works to prevent harm to employee psychological health due to negligent, reckless, intentional or unintentional acts. Some strategies to create psychological safety include leading with empathy, creating a culture where mistakes are ok, openness to feedback, helping workers meet their basic needs, etc.
- **Physical Safety:** Frontline employees want assurance they will be physically safe in the workplace. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses created new positions to maintain customer compliance and created hotlines to report abuse. Empowered employees are central to reporting unsafe working conditions.
- **Meal and Food Stipends:** There is growing recognition that providing free daily meals and/or gift cards for staff and family members may be necessary to offset food insecurity for some entry-level workers. In addition to providing cooked meals, some companies reward staff by providing access to a pantry with food and household staples while others promote healthy eating by distributing fresh fruit and vegetables grown by local farmers.
- **Reliable Transportation:** Frontline worker's access to reliable transportation is critical to reducing stress in the workplace. Employers are testing different strategies including: providing UBER gift cards, working with credit unions to assist with car buying, organizing shared transportation with other employers and collaborating with public transit systems like pilot strategies like Dial-a-Ride.

## Resources

- Scorza, John. "Drive Innovation with Psychological Safety." SHRM, 14 Nov. 2018.
- Nagele-Piazza, Lisa. "5 Steps for Creating a Mental Health-Friendly Work Culture." SHRM, 28 Feb. 2020.
- Frontline Forward Series. National Fund for Workforce Solutions. (2021). Retrieved April 25, 2022.
- "How Do Healthcare Workers Face Social Determinants of Health?" PatientEngagementHIT, 7 Sept. 2021.

## Employers In Action

**Starbucks**, in an effort to expand the company's mental health benefits, now provides employees in the U.S. and each of their eligible family members with access to 20 therapy sessions a year.

**DPR Construction** in Atlanta, GA, has a safety representative whose job it is to make sure workers have the tools, supplies, and equipment they need to stay safe. They ensure everyone is following safety protocols, and that anyone with questions or concerns has a way to get help. Any worker can raise a safety concern and know it will be heard.

**Dick's Sporting Good** instituted a Safety and Respect Hotline after employees were physically attacked by customers upset with company mask rules. Employees call the hotline if they feel they have not been treated with dignity and respect. Customers who shop in the store also can use the hotline.

**Penn Medicine** in Philadelphia, PA, opened a food pantry during COVID-19 that allows any employee to pick up a bag of nonperishable food to feed at least a family of four for one day. Up to 140 employees show up every day. They partnered with a food service vendor to have them deliver food to the pantry that they purchase with donations from other staff.

**Lincoln Electric** based in Lake County, OH, worked with their public transit agency to provide a van service from underserved areas in the county to its manufacturing jobs that are hard to reach by existing routes. The transit agency then expanded the pilot to launch a transportation benefits program called Transit GO, which provides participating employers located along an industrial boulevard in the county the ability to offer fare-free benefits to their employees. As of June 15, 2021, the program has 107 participating businesses. From those businesses, 113 employees are using local route bus service and 52 are using Dial-a-Ride.

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# Career Advancement and Wage Progression

## Overview

Frontline workers frequently aspire to grow their careers beyond their immediate position and are looking for well-defined pathways that are accompanied by wage progression. They want to learn on the job and are eager to obtain new skills and certifications, but they do not want to wait years for these opportunities. For many frontline positions, this requires redesigning jobs and providing more career support, including paid release time and tuition assistance.

## Strategies

- **Micro-credentials and Digital Badging:** A micro-credential is a short, competency-based recognition. The badge is the technology used to display the earned credential. Many micro-credentials are developed with industry based on the skills and competencies needed in the workplace. Micro-credentials require a competency-based learning framework and should be stackable into career pathways that align with wage increases.
- **Career Pathways:** Frontline jobs can be restructured to include broader responsibilities as a means to create more accessible career pathways and to alleviate work from other team members. When a frontline job has a clearly defined and communicated career ladder with skills-based milestones it will make advancement more accessible and rewarding to frontline workers.
- **Reverse mentorship:** Reverse mentorship turns traditional mentoring upside down by pairing junior frontline employees with senior leaders who then regularly share their experiences and insights with management. The goal is to provide new perspectives and insights.
- **Cross Training:** Giving frontline workers the opportunity to cross train will build their skills and provide management with more staffing flexibility. Advanced certification can be built into this model as well.
- **Educational Support:** Employers are restructuring their tuition reimbursement programs to make access easier for frontline workers who cannot afford out-of-pocket tuition expenses. A tuition assistance program designed with frontline workers in mind typically transfers tuition payment directly to an educational institution and can be used for industry-recognized certifications.

## Resources

- "Micro-Credentialing." Education Design Lab, 6 Aug. 2020.
- "Tuition Assistance Policy Discussion: Roadmap to a Skilled and Educated Workforce." Upskill America, 2021.
- "Wepco Plastics." National Fund for Workforce Solutions, Frontline Forward Series, 2021.

## Employers In Action

**Mariani Packing Company**, a food manufacturing company located in Wisconsin, decided to recognize production and packaging operators with a skill-based incentive system. Each operator position now has three levels after the entry level. Advancement through these levels is based on objective criteria, including productivity, mastery of different machines/processes, and paperwork accuracy. Advancement still must be approved through a managerial assessment. Operators who advance through each of these three levels qualify for raises.

**High Plains Community Health Center** in Lamar, CO, redesigned the role of the medical assistant and incorporated a new career pathway that provided more incremental wage gains in alignment with increased competencies. The medical assistants are responsible for a broader range of activities and this added capacity allows other team members to take on additional clinical work.

**Pershing**, in Jersey City, NJ, started a reverse mentoring program to engage millennials and provide management with new insights. The program is led by two millennials at the firm and mentors are required to meet with their mentees at least once a month. Pershing cites a 97% retention rate among millennials and claims the reverse mentoring program was a critical reason why they have retained so many millennials.

**IBM** uses digital badging and micro-credentialing tied to wage increases and professional development goals. Since its inception in 2015, IBM's Digital Badge Program has issued over 500,000 badges, with 87% of IBM employee participants saying they are more engaged with the company as a result. An employee can select a goal skill set to see what existing skills they can improve on, or what new skills they can learn.

**Integrated Packaging Corporation** in Detroit, MI, expects hourly employees to learn how to operate at least three different machines. They are given pay increases for learning new skills, which serves as an incentive to them as they become more valuable to the company. Early on, the company negotiated with the unions to get cross-training into the contracts. Now 50% of the corrugated box industry has skills-based pay incorporated into union contracts.

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## Recognition and Rewards

### Overview

Increased employee engagement and improved business results can be achieved through a range of recognition and reward strategies that distribute both monetary and non-monetary benefits to staff at all levels. From performance-based incentives to gamification strategies, staff are most engaged when they understand how their role is tied to clear, consistent, and measurable goals.

### Strategies

- **Performance-Based Incentives:** Companies offering performance-based incentives establish measurable goals then teams or individuals are rewarded on a periodic basis (monthly, quarterly, annually) when their performance helps to achieve the intended results. One business model called Open Book Management incorporates a performance-based bonus structure that creates transparency by sharing financial information with employees. This includes financial education for employees and showing them how their production influences the finances.
- **Gamification:** Employers are utilizing game design elements and game principles in a variety of ways to motivate and engage staff. Gamification turns day-to-day activities into a competitive process and typically includes monetary and/or non-monetary rewards. Leaderboards, training passports, and badges can be used to track the competition.
- **Employee Stock Ownership Plans (ESOPs):** For-profit companies can be wholly or partially owned by employees. According to the National Center for Employee Ownership, ESOPs are commonly used to motivate and reward employees and to provide a market for the shares of departing owners. Employee ownership can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Employees can buy stock directly, receive stock as a bonus or stock options, or obtain stock through a profit sharing plan.

### Resources

- "Fundamentals of Open-Book Management." *The Great Game of Business*, 2022.
- Kahn, Karen. "Optimax Systems: Business Logic of Continuous Learning." *National Fund for Workforce Solutions*, 17 July 2018.
- "11 Tips for Creating Performance-Based Bonuses." *Small Business Trends*, 8 Feb. 2022.
- "How an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) Works." *National Center for Employee Ownership*, 24 Aug. 2020.

### Employers In Action

**Optimax** in Ontario, NY, developed a bonus structure based on the principles of Open Book Management, transparency and sharing financial information with employees at all levels. Every month, the company's leadership and employees review the organization's performance together in an all-staff meeting, discussing topics such as sales, on-time delivery, future orders, etc. If the company was profitable that month, management distributes 25% of those profits amongst the workforce, using a formula based on wages and length of service. The company's leaders have found that the monthly bonus structure influences employees' daily behaviors much more than annual bonuses.

**Zebra Technologies** in Lincolnshire, IL, uses gamification to engage staff in developing new ideas and innovative practices. Their tech-enabled recognition program fosters a culture of more frequent, spontaneous recognitions. Employees earn points to purchase items from local businesses. There is also a peer-to-peer functionality that encourages colleagues to send virtual ecards and messages to recognize the hard work for their peers. All recognition activity is featured as a social "news feed" so others can comment on the recognition.

**Home Depot** has a profit-sharing program for non-management associates that provides semi-annual cash awards for performance measured against the company's business plan, including sales and productivity goals. The program has granted awards totaling more than \$1 billion to associates over the last three years. In fiscal 2020, 100% of stores qualified for the program based on the outstanding performance of their associates. This resulted in payments to non-management associates of approximately \$616 million.

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# Worker Voice and Participation

## Overview

Frontline workers want their ideas, skills and talents to be valued in the workplace. Core elements of worker voice include opportunities for the frontline to participate in decision-making and both formal and informal ways to gather and share input on critical issues. Effective worker voice is often a critical component of an organization's DEI strategy and can lead to increased employee job satisfaction and innovative problem-solving.

## Strategies

- **Employee Council or Committee:** An independent workgroup comprised of frontline workers tasked with providing their insights and ideas directly to management. They provide valuable feedback on critical issues and can take an active role in their own skill development and career pathways.
- **Inclusive Continuous Improvement:** Improvement suggestions gathered through meaningful employee engagement strategies shows a commitment to inclusive continuous improvement and open communications. Idea boards, frontline listening sessions, focus groups and pulse surveys can all be used to promote a free flow of ideas for consideration.
- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Connecting employees who share similar values or have similar experiences, ERGs can allow new, two-way communication between leadership and underrepresented groups such as working mothers, Black and Latinx workers providing a better pulse on how an organization is operating. They help to create a sense of belonging in the workplace and give underrepresented talent a voice. ERGs are considered a critical component to increasing diversity, equity and inclusion.

## Resources

- "What Is an Employee Voice Strategy?" PeopleInsight, 2021.
- "A Practical Toolkit to Help Your Small Business Create Jobs That Boost the Bottom Line." Good Jobs, Good Business, Pacific Community Ventures, 10 Sept. 2019.
- "What We Mean by 'Worker Voice.'" National Fund for Workforce Solutions.
- "How ERGs can give underrepresented talent a voice." Mentor Spaces Resource Center, 2021, March 26.
- Hastwell, C. 4 research-backed ways to improve employee retention in retail. Great Place to Work®, 2022.

## Employers In Action

**UT Southwestern Medical Center** in Dallas, TX, established a Patient Care Technician (PCT) council after receiving feedback that PCTs did not feel like their voices were being heard by leadership. The Council has a nurse leader sponsor who ensures the PCTs voice is included at all levels of the organization. The Council also oversees competency certification and bonus payout for certification.

**Wepco Plastics** in Middlefield, CT, was short staffed during the pandemic. Through an employee engagement survey, staff suggested cross training everyone so they could manage all aspects of the machinery. Management followed through on the suggestion and staff reported feeling deeper trust, respect and commitment. Now they've resumed their weekly "all hands" meetings during which time the company shares metrics and creates space for workers to raise any concerns they have.

**Abercrombie & Fitch** actively involves employees at all levels in decision-making. They have a strong commitment to valuing the voices and opinions of all their associates, regardless of title, department or seniority. As a result, 92% of employees say people are given a lot of responsibility at the company. It also creates a culture of innovation where people are not afraid to think outside the box or try new ways of working to benefit the company.

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"For employers, effective worker voice contributes toward innovation, productivity and organizational improvement. For employees, it often results in increased job satisfaction, greater influence and better opportunities for development."

CIPD, 31 Jan 2019

# Supervision and Communication

## Overview

Frontline workers succeed when supervisors maintain open communications and actively listen to what workers need to perform their jobs. Employers are using different types of strategies to facilitate open communication between staff and managers. They are also rewarding managers for retaining staff and supporting their career advancement. Often these strategies are linked to broader organizational DEI goals.

## Strategies

- **Stay Interviews:** This is a structured 1:1 interview between a manager and a valued employee. The stay interview is designed to for leaders to learn what makes employees want to keep working for an organization or what might make them leave. It's critical that the stay interview occur between a manager and employee and that there is willingness to hear how they want to be managed for better engagement and retention.
- **Open Communication:** Employers are using digital communication platforms to facilitate more frequent two-way communication between managers and staff. Rather than using email or other analog forms of communications, staff can access information and provide feedback quickly on their mobile devices using apps such as Nudge, Beekeeper, Yoobic, etc.
- **Management Accountability:** When managers know that frontline worker engagement and job satisfaction is part of their own performance scorecard, they are motivated to focus on their team's engagement and to monitor improvements. Key retention and turnover data are increasingly integrated into management's annual performance review process. Employers include coaching and mentoring in manager job descriptions and provide tools and resources to facilitate their growth and development. Finally, as businesses pursue greater diversity and inclusion, they are collecting and sharing turnover and retention data by gender and race/ethnicity.

## Resources

- Finnegan, Richard P. "How to Conduct Stay Interviews: Core Features and Advantages." SHRM, SHRM, 24 Sept. 2021.
- "4 Frontline Employee Communication Trends to Watch." Axionify, 2021.
- "Advancing Frontline Employees of Color: Innovating for Competitive Advantage in America's Frontline Workforce." PolicyLink, 2020.

## Employers In Action

**Zara**, the Spanish retailer, known for its rapid design process uses the digital app Nudge to gather and share customer insights from their sales associates and store managers. They capture customer comments, fashion ideas and observations which influence the design and marketing of new merchandise. These trend insights replaced the daily sales reports previously shared with staff.

**Sodexo** uses a diversity scorecard index, a tool that measures quantitative and qualitative progress in recruiting, retaining and promoting women and employees of color. Sodexo's qualitative metrics have "rigor around them, are measurable and get at the behavior change and outcomes we're after." In 2012, Sodexo made the strategic decision to begin holding managers and executives accountable for diversity when it began linking scorecard results to a significant portion of management bonuses that can range from 10 to 15 percent of the total bonus for managers and 25 percent of the total bonus for the executive team.

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# Leadership and Inclusive Policy Implementation

## Overview

Organizational leaders play a critical role in creating a workplace that values frontline workers and maintaining Human Resources (HR) policies that foster diversity, equity and inclusion. Many leaders are executing equity scans of their HR policies to ensure appropriate language and consistent application for all employees. Others are ensuring that all the perks of employment made available to senior-level employees are also available to frontline staff. CEOs are broadly communicating their commitment to inclusive policy implementation and calling attention to the new or revised benefits.

## Strategies

- **Equity Scan:** An organization's policies, practices and procedures may not be designed and implemented in a way that fosters equity and inclusion for employees at all levels. An equity scan will ensure language is appropriate and application of policy is consistent and fair. One outcome is often making benefits more accessible to entry-level workers.
- **Leveling of Perks:** Extra rewards or incentives on top of salary are considered perks of a job. Free food, Paid Time Off (PTO) for volunteering, and flexible schedules are highly valued perks that may be offered to some employees but not all, particularly frontline workers. Intentionally leveling perks so that everyone can take advantage of them is another way to create a more equitable and inclusive workplace.
- **Salary transparency:** Providing greater salary transparency is an equity strategy that gives workers a better sense of how their salaries compare to others in the organization, particularly senior leadership. If large gaps exist between the highest and lowest paid workers, senior leaders commit to reducing the gap by making pay adjustments. All job descriptions include a salary range and pathways to promotion and advancement are clear.

## Resources

- "Employer Toolkit." Women's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, 2022.
- Finnegan, Richard P. "How to Conduct Stay Interviews: Core Features and Advantages." SHRM, 24 Sept. 2021.
- "Job Design Framework." National Fund for Workforce Solutions, 2022.

## Employers In Action

**Salesforce** is a cloud-based software company headquartered in San Francisco, CA. Their CEO made a public commitment to equity and followed through by conducting an audit of salaries by race and gender. He pledged to close the gap between highest and lowest paid employees and to keeping this wage gap at 60% or less.

**Mercy Health** headquartered in Cincinnati, OH, reviewed all their HR policies, practices and procedures to ensure their company fostered equity and diversity. This review was an important step to take in their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) journey. They specifically looked for obstacles in their HR policies and practices that prohibited equitable implementation across all levels of employees.

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"Becoming an employer of choice is a strategy, not an accident. Designing your jobs for equity and inclusion will help you build a great company where your employees thrive."

Job Design Framework, National Fund for Workforce Solutions



**Table 1: Summary of Practices, Strategies and Employer Examples**

PRACTICE AREAS	STRATEGIES	EMPLOYER EXAMPLES
Flexible Scheduling and Stable Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee-managed shift swapping</li> <li>Alternative shifts</li> <li>Stable hours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vibrant Life Communities</li> <li>The Gap</li> <li>Optimax Manufacturing</li> </ul>
Accessible Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Menu of benefit options</li> <li>Income-based premiums</li> <li>401k contributions</li> <li>Resource navigator</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MapleKnolls</li> <li>Small Business Assoc of MI</li> <li>Cascade Engineering</li> <li>Universal Metal Products</li> </ul>
Financial Wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Same day wages</li> <li>Emergency funds</li> <li>Student debt repayment</li> <li>Childcare subsidies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>International Paper</li> <li>Rhino Foods</li> <li>UPS</li> <li>Lady of the Lake Health</li> </ul>
Safety & Wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mental health benefits</li> <li>Psychological safety</li> <li>Physical safety</li> <li>Meal &amp; Food stipends</li> <li>Reliable transportation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Starbucks</li> <li>DPR Construction</li> <li>Dick's Sporting Goods</li> <li>Penn Medicine</li> <li>Lincoln Electric</li> </ul>
Career Advancement & Wage Progression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Micro-credentials &amp; digital badging</li> <li>Career pathways</li> <li>Reverse mentorship</li> <li>Cross training</li> <li>Educational support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mariani Packing Company</li> <li>High Plains Community Health Center</li> <li>Pershing</li> <li>IBM</li> <li>Integrated Packaging</li> </ul>
Recognition and Rewards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance-based incentives</li> <li>Gamification</li> <li>Employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimax Manufacturing</li> <li>Zebra Technologies</li> <li>Home Depot</li> </ul>
Worker Voice & Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employee council or committee</li> <li>Inclusive continuous improvement</li> <li>Employee Resource Groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>UT Southwestern Medical Center</li> <li>Wepco Plastics</li> <li>Abercrombie &amp; Fitch</li> </ul>
Supervision and Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stay interviews</li> <li>Open communication</li> <li>Management accountability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Zara</li> <li>Sodexo</li> </ul>
Leadership and Inclusive Policy Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equity scan of policies, procedures and practices</li> <li>Leveling of perks</li> <li>Salary transparency</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Salesforce</li> <li>Mercy Health</li> </ul>