February 2018

National Survey of Retail Workers:

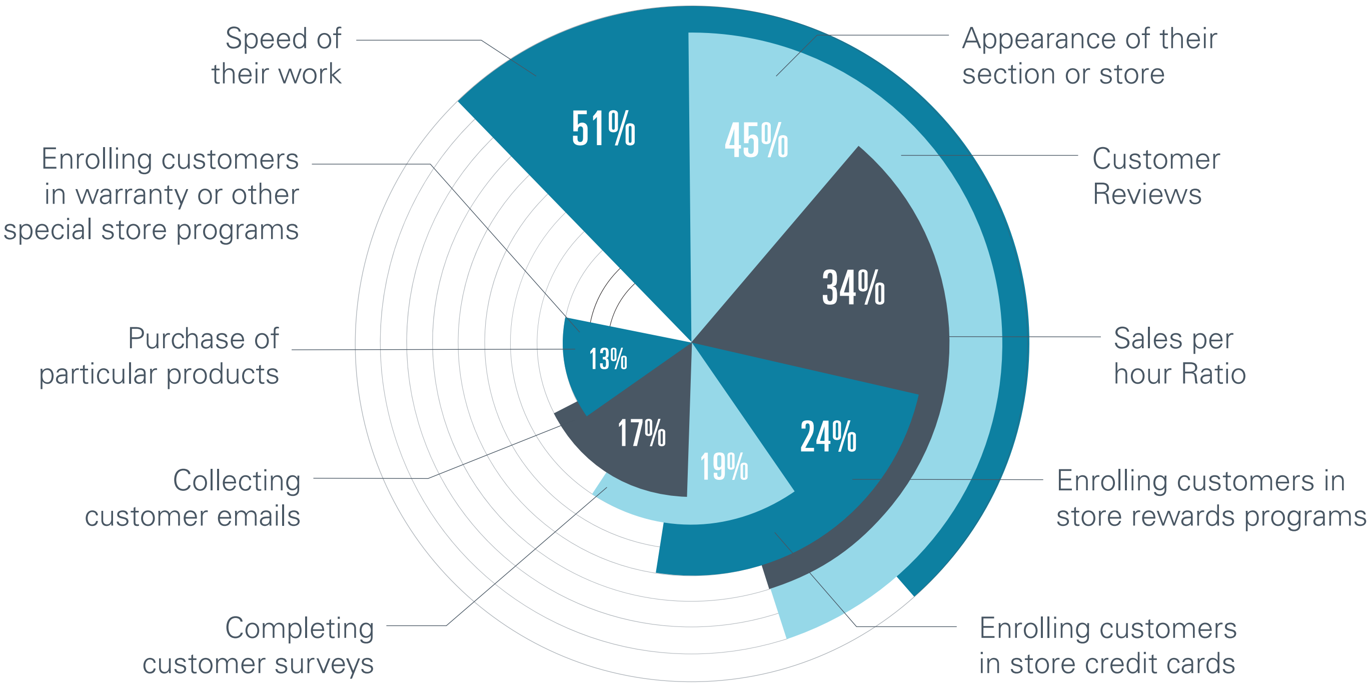
Key Insights for Workforce Development

As the nation's largest private employer, retail is a significant driver of both national and regional economies and employs 10 percent of the private sector workforce.[1] Yet the industry is currently undergoing a period of profound disruption with the growth of e-commerce, increasing corporate concentration, financial pressure from Wall Street investors, and emerging automation. These volatile industry dynamics have significant implications for the current and future economic security of the more than 15-million people who support their families by working in retail. To compete with intensifying market pressure, many retailers are both investing in new technology to automate work and upskilling their workforce to encourage customers to shop in stores. The retail workforce is now also adapting to new technologies that monitor their work performance, carry out their work duties, deliver training, manage their work schedules and offer additional employment.

Workforce development is needed to prepare those working in the service economy for the changing nature of work. In an effort to understand the experience of the retail workforce in attaining economic stability and preparing for the work of the future, the Fair Workweek Initiative conducted a national survey of 1,100 retail workers employed across major companies and within 13 retail sub-sectors including Food and Beverage, Apparel, Home and Garden, and General Merchandise.[2] To inform the programmatic work of workforce development initiatives, this brief highlights key survey findings on how the retail workforce receives training and navigates their advancement.

Workplace Performance Measures

Retail employers measure employee performance in a variety of ways but several trends emerged in the survey. Among frontline retail workers surveyed, the speed of their work was the most common performance metric. Customer reviews and the appearance of the store were also common among nearly half of the respondents:



Retail sub-sectors often evaluate workers on specific metrics and performance measures, likely based on the nature of the work and the type of retail. The survey responses highlighted some of these key differences in performance metrics across retail sub-sectors:

General Merchandise employees were more likely to be evaluated based on the speed of their work and the appearance of the store.

Home and Garden employees were more likely to be evaluated based on customer reviews, enrolling people in credit cards, and customer surveys.

Clothing store employees were more likely to be evaluated by their sales per hour, the appearance of the store, and the ability to collect customer emails.

Health store employees were more likely to be evaluated based on their ability to have customers purchase particular products.

Overall, women were more likely to be evaluated on the appearance of their stores, customer reviews, completing customer surveys, and collecting customer emails. This may be due to the fact that women were slightly more concentrated in General Merchandise and Clothing stores which, based on the survey results, prioritize those performance metrics above other metrics.

"It is basically my own responsibility to decide how my job gets done."

HIGH REPORTED RATES OF AUTONOMY

Across the board, both frontline retail workers and managers reported a high amount of autonomy in their roles. About **72%** of retail workers agreed or strongly agreed that **"It is basically my own responsibility to decide how my job gets done."** 19 percent disagreed and 9 percent strongly disagreed with this statement. While there was an even distribution of reported autonomy across each sub-sector, notably, women in Big Box, Department stores, and General Merchandise were more likely to strongly disagree/disagree that they had autonomy in their roles, relative to survey respondents in other sectors.

Incentives

Bonuses and commission based on sales were common incentives—about half of the frontline retail workers surveyed receive one or both. However, these incentives are more common in certain sub-sectors dominated by men and less common in sub-sectors with high numbers of women workers.

♀♂ As a result, men were twice as likely as women to receive commissions and to report receiving both bonuses and commissions on sales.

Bonuses were more common in Home and Garden and less common in Clothing and Big Box, Department Stores, and General Merchandise stores. People working in Appliances and Electronics, Automotive, and Furniture and Home Furnishings were most likely to receive both bonuses and commission based on sales. Men were also more than twice as likely to work in those specific sub-sectors. On the other hand, half of women surveyed did not receive either bonuses or commissions (compared to 35 percent of men).

Frontline Workers

Do not receive bonuses or commissions | Receive bonuses | Receive commission based on sales | Receive bonuses and commissions

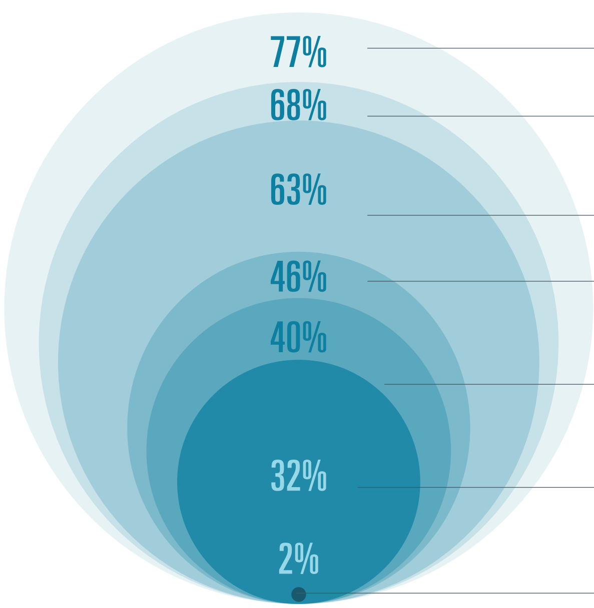
Training and Mobility in Retail

While the survey underscored both barriers to advancement and the extent of poor job quality in retail, it also demonstrated high levels of optimism among the retail workforce. Among the survey respondents, three out of four people felt there were opportunities for growth at their current employer.

Of the frontline workers who reported receiving training to help advance within the company, 59 percent received a better position. Yet most of the mobility reported across all frontline retail workers was lateral—only 18.5 percent of people had advanced to managerial roles. Among those who had advanced, 80 percent had previously worked part-time. Indeed part-time work is now the first rung on the retail career ladder and securing full-time work is increasingly seen as a promotion.

A large majority (81 percent) of retail workers reported receiving some form of cross-training to learn different roles in their workplace. Almost half of those workers received more hours as a result of this training. One third received higher wages and one fourth had gotten a new job title with more responsibility and/or more stable schedules. While the type and frequency of training varied among frontline retail workers, the vast majority of workers reported receiving at least some form of training in their current position. Orientations and on-the job training were the most common types of training, however, many workers also relied on informal conversations with coworkers or managers to learn the job.

Training Among Frontline Retail Workers



77% Received an orientation

68% On-the-job training with a more experienced coworker

63% On-the-job training with a manager/supervisor

46% Informal conversations with a manager/supervisor about how to do their job

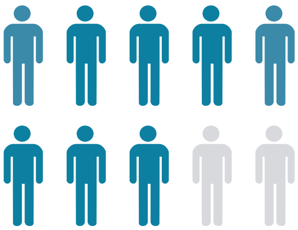
40% Informal conversations with a coworker about how to do their job

32% Training presentations and discussions during staff meetings

Only **2%** had received no training at all

Women were more likely to have informal conversations with their managers and co-workers about how to do their job (half of surveyed women vs one-third of surveyed men). In addition, women were slightly more likely to receive an orientation than men (80 percent of women compared to 72 percent of men).

Where did this training happen?



8 in 10 frontline retail workers received some form of training on a sales floor

52% Received training on a computer

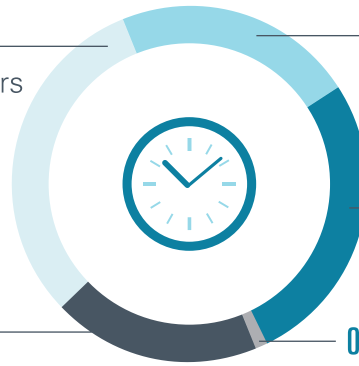
55% Learned in a training room

Only 3 percent received training through a mobile app, a surprising finding given industry attention to mobile technologies and accessibility of technology to workers.

3%

Total Hours of Training

While the majority of frontline retail workers reported receiving training, there was a wide range in the number of hours they were trained. Since starting their current job, half of frontline retail workers received 10 hours or less of training. A quarter received between 10-20 hours and a quarter received more than 20 hours.



Job Search Strategies

When looking for a job, today's frontline retail workers overwhelmingly have moved online. 84% of those working in retail rely on job websites to search for employment. Despite this, traditional strategies, such as walking into stores to inquire about job openings and using personal networks, are still strongly favored by a majority of people working in retail in search of new employment. Only one in five frontline retail workers use their local job centers. African American workers were more likely to use temp agencies or local job centers than the rest of the survey sample.

18% of frontline retail workers held a second job. That second job tended to be in retail (25%), healthcare (8%), education (10%), restaurants and food services (11%), and construction (10%).

84% Look at job websites

57% Walk into stores to inquire if there are job openings

54% Word of mouth and networking

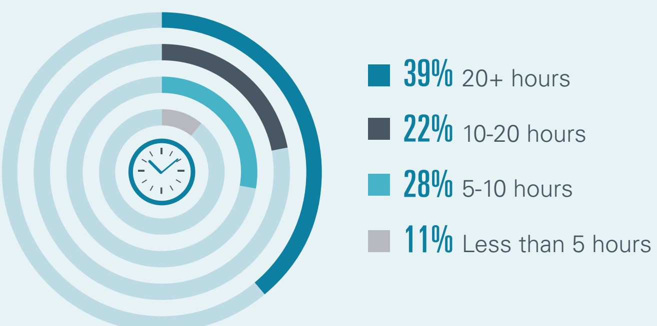
20% Use a temp agency

20% Use local job centers

The Experiences of Retail Managers

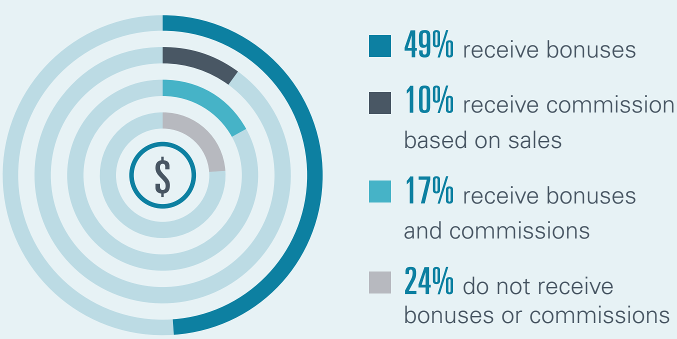
Thirty five percent of the survey sample (345 people) held managerial roles. This offered useful insights into the experiences of retail managers and how it compared to frontline retail workers. Managers were more likely to receive different types of training and more hours of training than their frontline counterparts.

Hours of Training for Managers



Nearly **forty percent** of managers had received more than 20 hours of training. In comparison, only **27%** of frontline, non-managerial workers had received more than 20 hours of training. Only one in four managers received 10 hours of training or less since starting their jobs.

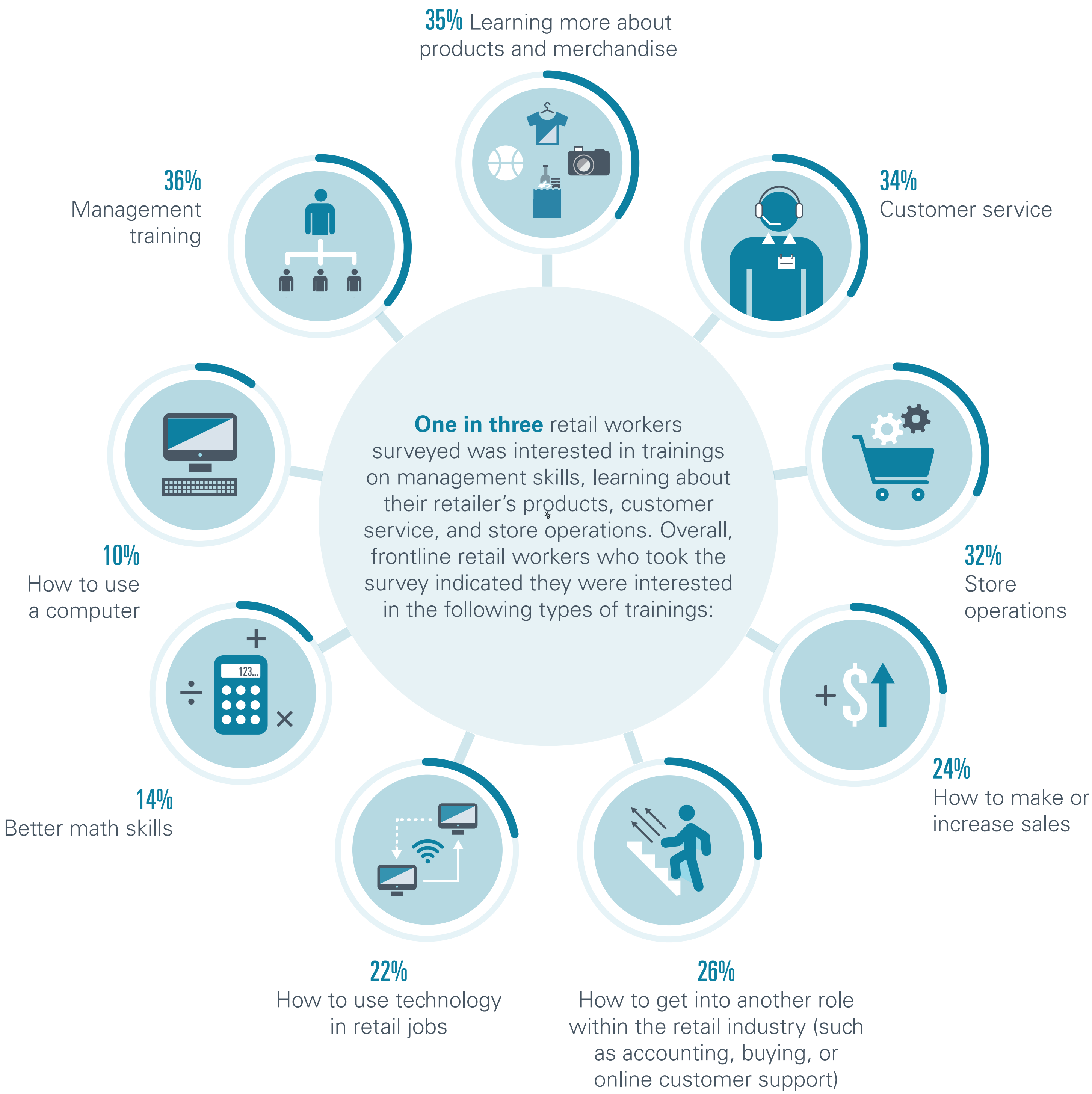
Incentives Among Managers



Bonuses and commission based on sales were common incentives among retail managers. Over **75 percent** received some form of performance incentive.

Among the managers surveyed, 54 percent reported they were evaluated on customer reviews, factoring more heavily into their performance metrics than frontline workers. A higher number of managers were also evaluated on sales per hour ratios and the appearance of their store compared to frontline workers.

What Trainings Are Frontline Retail Workers Interested In?



Survey Sample and Methods

The survey findings featured in this document were the result of a comprehensive 60-question online survey conducted on the Qualtrics platform in 2017. The survey sample included 1,110 retail workers from 46 US states. The sample included sub-sector, race, and gender quotas to ensure the survey sample was broadly representative of the US retail industry. The survey respondents were 45% men, 54.5% women, and 0.5% transgender; 55% white and 45% people of color; 65% frontline workers and 35% managers; and ranged in ages 18 to 78 (the average age was 41).

While the survey sample spanned across 250 different retailers, the sample had higher concentrations among major retail employers like Walmart, which had 130 survey respondents. There were also 20-30 survey respondents from large retailers such as Kohl's, JCPenny, Home Depot, Walgreens, Target, Macy's, Dollar Tree, and Best Buy. For the purpose of this report, frontline retail workers included any respondent who indicated their current job title was: Sales Associate, Cashier, Store Associate, Customer Service Representative, Stock Associate, Team Leader, Key Holder, and Visual Merchandiser. Managers included any respondent who listed the following job titles: Manager, Store Manager, Department Manager, Supervisor, or Shift Manager.

Additional Resources

In November 2017, the Fair Workweek Initiative published "Job Quality and Economic Opportunity in Retail: Key Findings from a National Survey of the Retail Workforce." For more information on the survey findings related to job quality, advancement, cross-training, and tenure please visit: **http://bit.ly/RetailJobQualitySurvey**

The Center for Popular Democracy is a nonprofit organization that promotes equity, opportunity, and a dynamic democracy in partnership with innovative base-building organizations, organizing networks and alliances, and progressive unions across the country.

Fair Workweek Initiative, a collaborative effort anchored by CPD, is dedicated to restoring family-sustaining work hours for all working Americans. We partner with diverse stakeholders to advance an integrated set of strategies that include policy change, public education, and industry engagement.

1 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, "Table 2.1 Employment by major industry sector, 2006, 2016, and projected 2026," https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_201.htm.

2 The survey sample included 13 major sub-sectors including: Food & Beverage, General Merchandise, Automotive, Home & Garden, Clothing, Health & Personal Care, Sports, Hobby, Books & Music, Appliances & Electronics; Furniture & Home Furnishings, Gasoline Stations; Direct Sales, Online Retailing & Catalog; Other Non-Store.