

Retail Employer Round Table

Workforce Snohomish, in collaboration with Snohomish County and Economic Alliance Snohomish County, has been convening monthly industry-focused employer roundtables to gauge and assess our region's workforce challenges. These roundtable events have identified issues that are industry-specific, as well as those seen across all types and sizes of employers. Each quarter, Workforce Snohomish shares the results with all interested community partners to help align and focus community resources.

Retail Employers met on 9/27/16 and identified multiple issues that they are facing within their workforce. The workforce community partners will continue to realign the community resources to address the deeper and more systemic issues facing the pipeline, retention, and development of the retail workforce. While solutions are being developed and implemented, the community of partners would like to make sure that current solutions for many of the issues raised currently exist and can help the engaged businesses.

Following are the takeaways from the Retail Community Conversation on 9/27/2016

How to Read: underlined are the Different Sections, the red text are the **Gaps / Needs Improvements**, the green text are the **Possible Solutions / Recommendations** and the black text are the general comments that apply to the section.

1. Mindset or perception of retail careers
 - a. Retail is not necessarily what people think of as a long-term career.
 - i. Causes a talent crunch at middle- and senior-level management.
 - ii. Causes a high rate of employee turnover.
 - b. Commonly believed that retail is a dead-end career.
 - i. There are twenty year-old cart pushers.
 1. Many times these situations have been largely a personal choice.
 - c. Retail jobs are often perceived as lousy jobs.
 - d. No knowledge of any pathway into higher positions.
 - e. Just no expectation of work environment or what is expected.
 - f. Lack of flexibility: Most people only want a Mon – Fri job, especially for the younger generation.



- g. Employee must overcome a number of common challenges and misconceptions about the work environment.
- h. Transportation and child care are two issues for employees, not the employers.
- i. Feeling of entitlement.
 - i. Employers agreed that new employees know more about what their own rights are but do not know what their responsibilities are (or do not want to do what they have been asked to do).

2. Outreach

- a. Outreach will be a way to change the perceived image of retail.
- b. We need to be able to convey a message that retail is not a “dead end job”.
 - i. There are many jobs open in retail, not just entry-level.
 - ii. Retailers are specifically looking for those with leadership skills and some higher education.
 - iii. Retailers want to keep people and offer options to move around, some can even offer better pay.
 - 1. There are options to stay within many companies.
- c. Benefits of retail experience is that they will learn:
 - i. Critical conversations
 - ii. Customer services skills
 - iii. Interpersonal skills
- d. Student relations programs:
 - i. Work summer programs.
 - 1. Have positions for students to come back to or move up in after finishing school.
 - ii. Programs to introduce kids to hard jobs.
- e. Could recruit applicant by letting them know they will hold jobs for those in the military so they can enter the positions when they retire from active duty.
- f. Create a new understanding of this industry and what it means to workers.
- g. Need to sell the store brand and the benefits within the organization to our current employees.
- h. Preparing for interviews is serious business.
- i. Significant training and one-on-one coaching can help retail employees meet customer expectations and alleviate some frustrations.



3. Key characteristics that stand out in an applicant

- a. Stability:
 - i. If an applicant has not worked for over 6 months, they may not even receive an invite for an interview.
 - 1. Unless they explain why they have a gap in employment.
- b. Tailor their resumes.
- c. Clarity in applications.
 - i. Explaining why, after a few years or months at an employer or different industry, all of a sudden an applicant is applying at this store.
 - 1. May not be considered unless the applicant explains why they are leaving (or have left) their last employer.
 - 2. May need to clarify how commute is sustainable.
 - a. For instance, the job could be in Kent, the applicant lives in Snohomish County, without clarification the employer may question the employee's sustainability.
- d. Integrity.
- e. Dependability.
 - i. Calling in absent is becoming very regular and common.
 - 1. Employees will still post on Facebook or other social media what they are actually doing, despite having called in sick to work.
 - 2. Employees will not just be open and forward about upcoming conflicts (doctor, family, child or personal appointments) and will just call in or just not show up.
- f. Leadership.
- g. Interpersonal skills.
- h. Outgoingness.

4. Work skills that are generally missing from job applicants.

- a. Applicants do not know how to express themselves.
 - i. Examples: On a resume they write down "MS office skills" and do not explain how they use MS Office, example of their work, etc.
 - ii. Generally speaking the quality of answers the applicant provides are not good.
 - 1. Too brief.



2. Does not relate to the actual questions.
- b. Understanding friendly engagement.
 - i. This can be difficult to engage on and train in the work environment.
- c. Basic work ethics.
 - i. Being on time.
 - ii. Willingness to work.
 - iii. Doing what was asked.
 - iv. Not hiding from task.
- d. Missing general life skills.
- e. Missing soft skills.
 - i. Communication.
 - ii. Sales skills.
 - iii. Understanding customer service.
 - iv. Knowing how to engage with co-workers.
 - v. Understanding how to talk to a boss.
- f. Lack of flexibility.
 - i. Retail is not a 9am-5pm Mon-Fri job.
- g. Not being reliable.
 - i. Not missing work unless it is absolutely necessary.
 1. Especially in the first few months.
- h. Being afraid to ask your manager or co-workers for help.
 - i. Interpersonal communication is necessary; it's a great way to learn and build team cohesion.
- i. Lack of experience.
 - i. Some employers will not consider a candidate whose time with previous employer was short.
- j. Finding people that want to be more than stockers or cart gatherers.
- k. Hard to find people that have an idea of what they want in the next 5 years.
- l. Hard to find those that have an accurate expectations of the job.
 - i. Understanding what the work environment involves:
 1. Mentally.
 2. Physically.
 - ii. People just do not understand norms of working.
 - iii. Those that understand a job is harder than just doing what they want to do.
- m. Passing assessments.



- i. Most assessments are behavioral and some test for basic math.
 - 1. Many applicants cannot pass the basic assessment test.
 - a. Some companies mentioned that over 50% of all applicants are unable to pass the initial assessment.
 - n. Not knowing how to use basic technology: Basic computer skills, data entry.
 - o. Most people are intimidated by technology, especially the older generation.
 - p. People are afraid of change, all different types of jobs.
 - q. Lack of basic math skills.
 - r. Applicants don't understand the reality of retail jobs, such as the need to do things that you don't like to do such as cleaning bathroom and working at night.
5. Skills employers are seeking:
- a. Work ethics and soft skills.
 - i. Phones need to be turned off.
 - ii. Not flexible with task and scheduling.
 - iii. Not dependable coming to work or while at work.
 - iv. Respect the work schedule.
 - 1. Show up on time.
 - 2. If they have a doctor's appointment, they need to let the supervisor know ahead of time.
 - 3. If they leave work for a doctor's appointment, they need to return back to work if that was the schedule.
 - v. Employees with sales skills.
 - 1. How to make a sale.
 - 2. How to recognize body language.
 - vi. How to count back change.
 - vii. Not accountable for their actions.
 - viii. Communication skills.
 - ix. Committed to work and employment.
 - b. Transferable leadership skills.
 - c. Looking to invest time within the company.
 - i. Job hopping is an ongoing issue.
 - 1. The millennial generation is about what is instant gratification.



- a. Will quit for a minimal pay increase and not think about asking for promotion or working up the company ladder.
 - ii. How can a company invest in people that are not willing to invest their time in the company?
 - d. Retail experience.
 - e. Able to handle more than one task.
 - i. Competent to take a list of tasks and prioritize them and work to finish them.
 - f. Being able to present themselves in a professional manner:
 - i. In attire.
 - ii. Physical appearance.
 - iii. Physical and verbal communication.
 - g. Being trainable:
 - i. Within job responsibilities.
 - ii. Willingness to cross train.
 - h. Long term focus.
 - i. Team worker.
 - j. Availability and willing to work.
 - k. Understands the reality of retail.
 - i. Job requirements.
 - ii. Working with the public.
 - l. Initiative.
 - m. Outgoing personality.
 - n. Employees that understand how to deal with non-native English speaking customer.
 - i. It is good to have employees who are bilingual.
6. Necessary higher skills that your business needs within its mid to higher management positions.
- a. Willingness to learn new things constantly.
 - b. Motivation.
 - c. Employees need to be engaged to ensure that the retailer improves upon its customer experience.
 - d. Commitment for long term career.
 - e. Understanding of the employment ladder:
 - i. Seasonal > part time > full time > management level.
 - f. Ability to be straight-forward and to the point.



- g. Availability for different time frames / shifts.
- h. Leadership skills and interpersonal skills.
- i. Customer service skills.
 - i. How to deal with difficult people.
- j. People skills.
 - i. How to deal with co-workers.
- k. Work ethic and initiative.
 - i. Not having to always being told to "do something" or "what to do".
- l. Dependability.
 - i. Showing up on time, and ready to work.
 - 1. Not taking first part of the shift just getting ready to work.
- m. Being trainable and cross-trainable.
 - i. Leadership is more than "I just want to do my job."
- n. Strong leadership skills.

7. Other issues facing retail businesses.

- a. Staff demanding that employers balance schedules to work for the employees.
 - i. Too many do not show up to work.
 - 1. High level of excuses from employees, such as, because they didn't know they were scheduled.
 - 2. Almost all employers have employee schedules out two to four weeks in advance.
 - a. Generally still need to call people in because of people not showing up.
- b. Employees do not know how to use computers for work purposes.
 - i. MS office.
 - ii. Professional applications.
 - iii. Non-social media applications.
- c. Lacking "business like" behavior such as how to dress, how to groom, how to interact with external and internal customers, and how to communicate with managers.
 - i. Many need to be taught what is "appropriate" at work and what is "not appropriate"
- d. Many employees bring or engage in drama at work.
 - i. Cause issues with customers and co-workers.
- e. Argue with managers.



- i. Many workers do not comprehend hierarchical structure.
- f. Employees do not understand the concept of teamwork.
- g. Lacking self-initiative.
 - i. Such as fixing on the spot (shelves, around cash register, etc).
 - ii. Will only do what they have been told to do.
- h. Many employees use public transportation so they cannot work late shifts.
- i. The cost of child care is affecting the careers of working parents.
- j. Being the first job for many people, many workers are just learning to deal with interrelationship drama of being teenagers and workers.
- k. Seattle pay leads to many deciding to try driving to seek work in Seattle.
- l. Teens only want Monday through Friday shifts with no weekend work.
- m. Call-ins have gotten worse and can ruin scheduling.
 - i. Workers will still post on Facebook their real activities.
 - ii. Larger businesses can lose 30-40 hours of work per day from employee call-ins.
 - iii. Millennials value their time off, but do not always value a job which is a different world view from boomers.
- n. The current generation feels entitled to do less even when company gives more.
- o. Retail has tried to cater to millennials.
 - i. Millennial shoppers want and enjoy coming to retail.
 - ii. But millennial workers do not want to be within retail.
- p. Many workers have two to three jobs.
- q. Many workers feel they should get to decide what their job is.
 - i. It is about what "I get paid for" and not more.
- r. Public generally lacks application, resume, and interview skills.
 - i. Sense of urgency.
 - ii. Confidence.
 - iii. Dressing appropriately not just at interviews but at all times.
- s. Some employers agreed that they are lacking intensive internal training.
 - i. Training about workplace expectations may be needed as well. Because of high numbers of part-time workers and relatively low pay, retailers frequently serve as first employers.
 - ii. Culture aspect and diversity of population.
- t. Some customers don't like employees with tattoos.
- u. Sometimes customers are sensitive.
- v. Staff do not want to work longer hours for fear of losing benefits.
- w. Many workers do not know how to identify advancement opportunities in the workplace.



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