# How HR Can Make Deskless Retail Employees the Point of Customer Success

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**T**he employee experience for deskless workers has not historically been a priority for retail businesses. Many roles are entry-level positions where job skills can be quickly taught, and retailers may be hesitant to invest in long-term training due to the high turnover rates common in the sector.[1] The impact of turnover is significant—with as many as 74% of employers saying their organization doesn't have the skills needed for the future.[2]

A high-quality employee experience is critical to ensuring employees can build those skills. Studies have long linked the employee experience and the customer experience. The better the workplace experience, the more engaged employees are, which leads to benefits such as increased employee loyalty,[3] improved workplace safety,[4] and stronger financial performance[5] —not to mention happier customers. But delivering a high-quality employee experience to people who don't have regular access to a computer and workstation creates additional challenges.

**To help deskless retail workers thrive in their jobs in today's retail environment, HR leaders must rethink every aspect of the employee experience, from the hiring process to employees' ongoing work with the organization.** In this ebook, we explain why now is the time to bolster the deskless retail employee experience and share ideas for how you can get started today.

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# Retail jobs have changed, but longtime pain points remain

Few jobs have changed as much over the last two years as those in retail, says Lori Pierson, group vice president of HCM transformation at Oracle. "Between serving customers, working fulfillment, and delivering curbside, the role of the retail worker has exponentially broadened," she says. **"More than ever, the role of the retail associate as brand ambassador has become critical to the success of the organization."**

These increased expectations come at a time when labor shortages require employees to take on more shifts, sometimes with minimal staffing support. And while retailers in many parts of the world no longer enforce mask mandates or social distancing protocols, Pierson adds, employees often face angry customers when products are limited or unavailable—an increasing concern with today's supply chain congestion.

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Although retail workers' responsibilities and stressors have increased, some long-held pain points of the job remain. "The main problem is pay," says David Kopsch, head of retail industry practice at the consulting firm Mercer. While some retailers boosted employees' hourly pay, many companies still pay workers less than $15 per hour.[6] And the rising cost of necessities in employees' day-to-day lives can leave them with little disposable income. "We found that workers may have emergency money on the side, but in this inflationary environment, that emergency money is going toward food or fuel," Kopsch says.

**A second pain point experienced by retail employees is the expectation that they'll be available for any shift.**

While many employees in other industries have increased flexibility to work from home, that option isn't possible for many deskless retail workers. "During the hours in which they're available to go to work, they may be managing sick relatives or child care," Kopsch adds.

**Retail workers also want to receive job training and see clear career paths.** A recent study from the Urban Institute found that many retailers underestimate the value of measuring frontline advancement strategies and "have not clearly mapped out what different internal career paths might look like for frontline workers," many of whom are deskless, and how the skills needed to do those jobs may overlap to help promote upward mobility.[7]
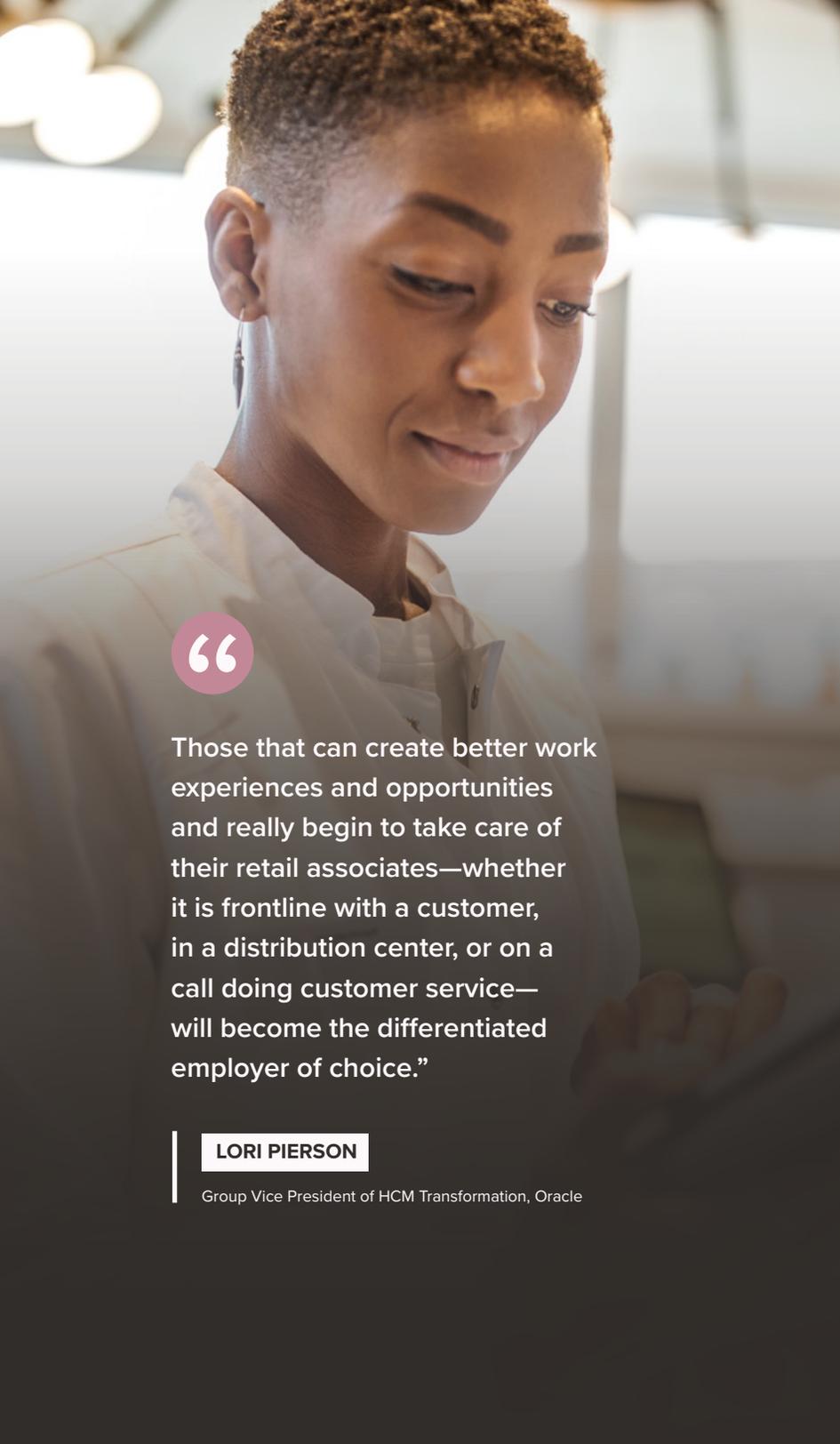
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## Deskless employees face complications

Desk-based employees typically have ready access to information about learning and career paths. Communications, course information, and social networking are usually accessible through an organization's intranet.

But deskless employees—which includes most retail workers—don't usually have access to an office laptop or computer. Without a mobile-friendly way to use the company's digital resources, deskless workers might miss out on vital information and opportunities shared on your company's intranet or email, causing them to feel left out, unvalued, and unheard. It can also mean you're overlooking talented employees for new opportunities. **That disconnect can affect retention, as insufficient pay, lack of advancement opportunities, and feeling disrespected were cited by over 50% of U.S. workers who quit jobs in 2021.[8]**

Company leaders must do a better job of addressing these pain points, and HR must lead the way. Organizations that figure out the winning formula first will have the advantage, Pierson says. "Those that can create better work experiences and opportunities and really begin to take care of their retail associates—whether it is frontline with a customer, in a distribution center, or on a call doing customer service—will become the differentiated employer of choice."

# Why HR leaders should embrace their role as company stewards

Once they're past the onboarding phase, deskless retail workers typically have little or no engagement with your team. Yet HR plays a critical role in helping to create a better experience for these employees.

HR leaders must lead with empathy while balancing business demands, Kopsch explains. "HR is asking how we can make sure employees know the resources that are available to them, such as employee assistance programs," he says. "At the same time, HR must balance bottom-line

needs when a business says, 'We don't have the money to spend on these employee initiatives.'"

**Retail HR leaders can improve the employee experience by being stewards of the organization and its employees,** Pierson says. "The role of HR should be enabling better experiences for associates and leaders that free them from unnecessary tasks so they are able to focus on the work that matters most to the organization. What could that support look like?"

One way you can do this is by using data available in areas such as attendance, retention, benefits usage, and skill development to guide the employee experience, talent decisions, and other processes, Pierson says. If there's high turnover, how can HR work with department leaders to identify warning signs revealed in the data before employees leave? If retention on a team is high, how can HR work with that team's leaders to understand what they are doing to retain workers and share that information with the rest of the organization?

As a retail HR leader, you must also "speak business" when it comes to metrics, Kopsch says. When observing that turnover has increased, for example, consider the broader implications of that data.

"Does it mean we're spending a lot of money bringing people in when we could redirect that money to retain people by increasing pay?" Kopsch asks. **Better data empowers your team to make smarter decisions about how to foster an employee experience that enables your workers to be the best versions of themselves on the job,** in turn, saving your organization time and money by not having to hire new workers to offset high turnover.

# Improving the retail employee experience: Where HR leaders should focus first

Retail HR leaders should consider the following steps as they examine and potentially rethink the deskless employee experience at their organization.

## 1 Review the candidate experience

To improve the retail worker experience, HR leaders must start with applicants, Kopsch says. "It comes down to a company saying, 'This is why we're different, and this is what you'll experience with us.'"

Here are a few ways you can improve the candidate experience through better communication and technology:

Deploy recruiting tools that use artificial intelligence to attract a diverse slate of candidates. This can help ensure job postings reach a wide range of potential candidates.

Create personalized career sites that resonate with prospective candidates and help applicants understand their status as well as manage their application materials.

Make it easy to complete applications online and on mobile devices instead of using paper-based applications that slow down the process.

Ensure candidates understand job responsibilities by providing accurate job descriptions and make sure interviewers know the description and can answer specific questions about the role.
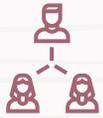
Help candidates see how the job connects to the larger vision of the company by sharing messaging from senior leaders and informational videos that show employees on the job.

Gather and analyze data from the applicant tracking system and other tools to ensure equity throughout the hiring and onboarding process.

Inform candidates about the company's social responsibility efforts, such as diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives to be aware of as well as the environmental, social, and governance objectives that guide the company's strategy. Employees are increasingly purpose-driven[9] and want to work for organizations with similar values as their own.[10]

Pay will remain a pain point until companies offer competitive wages across the board. Although HR leaders might not control the organization's compensation budget, they can demonstrate the links between salary, job acceptance, and retention—both based on industry research and through real-life examples within the company.

Ensuring pay equity within retail is a step in the right direction.[11] So is implementing programs such as on-demand pay—a powerful recruiting tool that gives employees the flexibility to manage their income. Additionally, ensuring your organization's wages and salaries are competitive in your market can help attract employees; some organizations may consider a salary study to ensure their compensation is internally and externally competitive.

## 2 Create a thorough onboarding process

Just because a candidate has accepted a job doesn't mean they'll stay for a long time (or even show up on their first day). With "ghosting" by new employees on the rise,[12] companies must continue to appeal to their employees throughout their journey with the organization. That starts on day one. Onboarding is meant to do more than ensure new hires fill out necessary documents. The process should help the new employee feel comfortable, excited, prepared for work, and make them feel like they belong.

**You can take a few steps to help ensure deskless retail workers can have a productive first day or week on the job:**

Set clear expectations about when and how employees should fill out their onboarding documents, particularly if they'll need to do so online. Having a tablet, laptop, or desktop computer available for use on their first day can avoid issues caused by lack of access to the internet or a device at home. Communicating this need to their on-site supervisor is critical.

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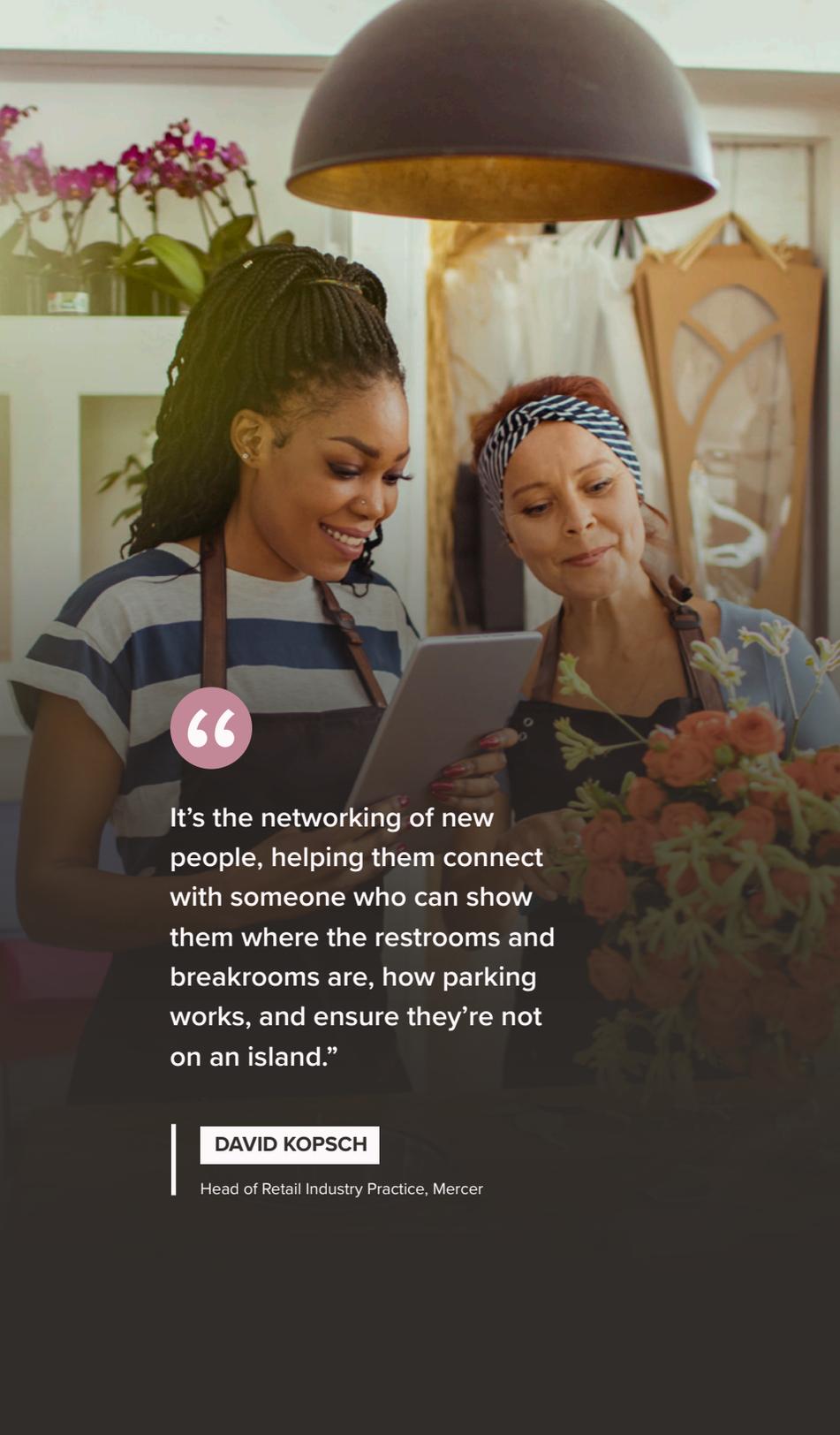
**It's the networking of new people, helping them connect with someone who can show them where the restrooms and breakrooms are, how parking works, and ensure they're not on an island."**

**DAVID KOPSCH**

Head of Retail Industry Practice, Mercer

Make sure employees know what documents and other information to bring with them on their first day in order to properly fill out onboarding forms and provide a secure place for employees to store the materials while working.

Communicate new employees' start dates and times to the on-site team, including their supervisor, so they can make the most of their shift.

Make sure new hires know the proper dress code prior to the first day on the job. This includes if specific workwear is required for safety reasons.

Ensure employees understand how to get help if they need it. Whether it's a person, dedicated help desk, or a digital assistant, knowing what resources exist and how to leverage them is key.

### 3 Ensure ongoing efforts include and empower employees

Your HR team should continue to monitor employees' progress once they are past the onboarding phase. Examining performance data for the organization can help HR leaders recognize warning signs and address problems with an employee or process before they snowball into bigger issues.

Retention is one key piece of performance data HR leaders can benefit from tracking. "For organizations—especially those with high turnover like retail—do I know when, where, and why people are leaving?" Pierson asks. "If I know that 40% of my new hires leave in 30 days in one location, what's driving that?"

Leaders can act 10, 20, and 25 days into an employee's tenure to help retain them, Pierson says. "That can be as easy as a personalized journey, a process that checks in with the associate at critical times, or gently nudging a manager to follow up with their team," she says. "The right technology investment can support these efforts."

All employees, whether deskless or desk-based, should also have a clear sense of their day-to-day responsibilities and how they fit into the big picture of the company's "why." Most people want to make a difference and will feel more connected to their employer if they understand how they contribute and if their employer's values match their own.

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One way to do that is by sharing customer stories. Explain to employees that they're not just stocking and selling products. Rather, they're helping a parent feed their family or creating a memorable experience when a child gets her first baseball mitt and spends hours playing catch with her friends. How your product improves people's lives is the story companies need to tell employees.

Having the right tools and resources to do their jobs can also help increase feelings of belonging. Make sure employees have access to tools such as digital assistants to help access information quickly and in a personalized, guided way. Having information when they need it can help employees be more productive, observe health and safety protocols, and keep a pulse on new opportunities and initiatives happening within the organization. Ensure deskless workers have the same level of access to these systems as desk-based workers by making them available on mobile devices.

**Other areas of importance for HR after the initial onboarding period include:**

**Offer scheduling flexibility.** Can workers easily complete tasks like requesting schedule changes, picking up shifts, and tracking their hours through an online time management portal accessible from their mobile devices rather than having to call or email a supervisor?

**Provide ongoing training opportunities.** Are upskilling and other training opportunities available to deskless workers at your organization, and is that training applicable to their job roles and career goals? Consider providing paid time to participate in training, as well as making the experience mobile-friendly and giving access to devices so those without internet or a computer at home can undertake training.

**Listen to feedback and support career development.** How do deskless workers receive feedback on their job performance, both in the course of their workday and as part of a structured review cycle? Digitizing employee profiles and feedback records can help keep track of performance reviews, goals, and progress made over time, even amid turnover.

**Prioritize well-being and physical safety.** Your organization's employees are multifaceted people, and work is only one element of their lives. Acknowledge that by enabling them to bring their whole selves to work and creating or strengthening corporate policies that support self-expression. Workplace safety is equally important in showing employees that they are valued as individuals. Tech platforms like the company intranet and chat systems enable employees to build relationships with their coworkers, connect with affinity groups within the organization, and review workplace safety policies and their related rights.

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> HR has traditionally been and continues to be the glue between managers and employees. It's up to HR leaders to establish the expectations, training, and encouragement so retail managers can create an environment where employees can thrive."

**DAVID KOPSCH**

Head of Retail Industry Practice, Mercer

# How HR leaders can help retail managers develop their employees

In retail, direct managers often have the closest relationships with workers. Not all managers enter the role with the leadership skills required to foster these relationships, but they can learn. Good managers need to receive feedback and some level of mentorship or training in order to become better leaders. Managers must also understand the nuances of their industry and company so they can better support workers. For example, a manager at a pet products retailer and a manager of a 24-hour grocery store encounter different employee concerns and needs.

To engage and retain employees, managers must create a problem-solving atmosphere, get to know their employees as people, and promote open communication and trust. Doing this requires managers to understand and proactively support each member of their team.

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In retail, this can include having career discussions with employees as part of their scheduled check-ins that explore their interests and possible opportunities within the organization. Managers can take what they've learned about their employees in those conversations and use it to connect them with training and other growth opportunities within the organization.



Technology can help managers take that step with employees, Pierson says. "Organizations that effectively prepare and bolster their managers to create a high-quality employee experience invest in technology to drive their strategy, and then they continually optimize the technology investment as the business strategy changes." This technology can be used to capture, track, and analyze performance data, spot potential problems, identify successes, guide career development conversations, influence business decisions, and support the exchange of feedback to ensure the associate feels rewarded and valued in the organization.

Retail HR leaders can work with department managers to use listening strategies such as pulse surveys, town halls, and one-on-one feedback to assess what their workforce views as a high-quality employee experience. The next step is to use that information to find the right technology systems—from the talent acquisition phase to onboarding, completion of daily tasks, and upskilling—to ensure the organization can foster an employee experience that reflects the broader requirements of the marketplace and the unique needs of their brand.

# Take the next step to improve the deskless employee experience

Retailers today face high turnover, heightened customer expectations, and broader employee needs, along with market headwinds that can quickly become volatile. To stay competitive, retailers must bolster all stages of the employee experience—and as an HR leader, you must be ready and able to provide a blueprint for doing so in today's retail environment.

By pairing well-thought-out recruitment, onboarding, and retention processes with technology vetted to align with the organization's needs, retail HR leaders can ensure their organization offers an employee experience that inspires and engages deskless workers, enabling them to do the same for their customers.

**To learn more about how Oracle Fusion Cloud Human Capital Management can help your retail organization embrace opportunities for innovation, click here.**

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