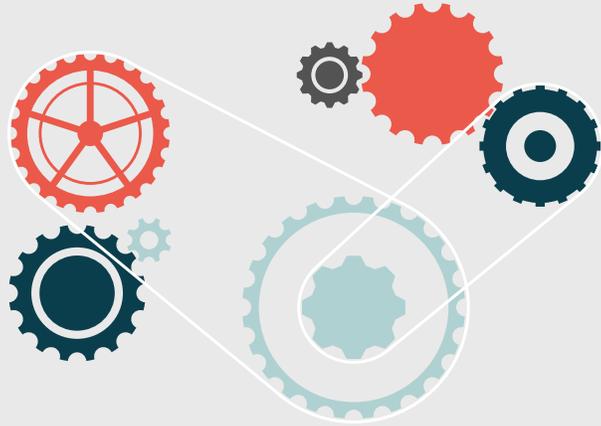




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What Makes a Workplace Great?

Here's a Researcher's Take

Thirty years ago, a business journalist named Robert Levering was approached by a New York editor to write a book called *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*.

Over the next two years, Levering and his writing partner, Milton Moskowitz, traveled around the country, interviewing more than 3,000 employees across 150 companies.

The book became a bestseller. It inspired Levering to spend another two years revisiting the top 20 workplaces on his list to find the one distinctive feature that made them all great.

Levering's quest to find the common denominator shared by the best companies in the country drove him to write another book called *A Great Place to Work: What Makes Some Employers so Good -- and Most so Bad*.

Surprisingly enough, while researching the book, Levering discovered that the "perks" weren't what made the best companies great. Sure, free lunch and onsite daycare were (and still are) awesome workplace luxuries, but they weren't what made these companies truly special.

"What really impressed me," recalls Levering, "was the spirit within these companies. You could feel that spirit when you first walked in the door..."

He attributes this "spirit" to the way employees and the management interacted with each other. Ultimately, the most distinctive feature shared by the very best workplaces was trust.



Here's how he summed up a great workplace:

“One where employees trust the people they work for, have pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with.”

But What About Managers?

Levering's research also uncovered that employees aren't the only ones who appreciate working at a great place.

A company built on trust also provides managers with several benefits that help them do their jobs better. These include:

- 1. Being able to put more energy towards achieving goals and objectives.** When people don't have to deal with internal politics, shaky communication, and other factors that of an untrustworthy environment, they can focus more energy on doing their job and doing it well.
- 2. Employees are eager to put their best foot forward.** Creative ideas flow freely in a safe and healthy environment. According to Levering, innovation thrives in a great workplace.
- 3. Better co-worker cooperation.** When trust is the glue that holds a team together, employees communicate better, have more fun at work, and feel as though they belong to something bigger than themselves.

Levering says that from a manager's standpoint, a great place to work is:

“One where you achieve your organizational objectives with people who give their personal best and work together as a team or family -- all in an environment of trust.”

In Sum

“An extremely high level of trust” was present throughout every top-20 company Levering researched. At the end of the day, trust was the difference-maker in just about every great organization. And while it may seem like common sense, instilling a culture of trust, pride, and enjoyment is hard to do -- and even more difficult to sustain and preserve.

Are you taking any steps to ensure your company is a great place to work?

The 5 Most Important Interview Questions a Retail Manager Can Ask



Interviewing?

If you're like most retail managers, the answer is yes. If not this week, then then next. That's the nature of the industry: employees turnover...often.

And while there are ways to reduce your turnover month-over-month, it's best to avoid it altogether.

How do you do that? Start by asking your applicants the right questions -- questions that'll give you the most information in the shortest amount of time.

Questions that'll help you avoid interview burnout and maximize your time ROI.

Questions that'll help you find an associate that's happy to represent your store because they're a genuinely good fit.

These 5 should do the trick:

1. Nice shirt, where'd you get it?

As long as you're genuine, it doesn't matter what you compliment: their shirt, their watch, their shoes. This question is designed to lower your applicant's stress level, make them comfortable, and get them talking.

A light, friendly question will put the candidate at ease and create an opportunity for some small talk, which, as you know, is a very important part of the retail sales process. That's why you should be weighing their penchant for it early.

If there isn't a constructive, comfortable back and forth with you, chances are there won't be any with customers -- and that can cost you in the long run.

2. What was your most difficult successful sale?

If you want to know a candidate's process when it comes to dealing with tough customers, overcoming objections, and clicking people into buying mode, you want to talk about their most difficult successful sale.

This piece of experience will illuminate major aspects of their character, not to mention what you can expect if you were to hire them.

Typically, however, if the candidate doesn't have an answer for this question, they likely haven't sold high value items before (or they just aren't that good at it).

3. Can you tell me about a time when you had someone on the hook, but ended up not making the sale?

It happens often: you're with the customer for a while -- answering questions, sharing stories, providing values, forging a connection -- and then... nothing. If they can't share a similar experience with you, they've probably never worked in retail. Use this question to weigh your candidates' self awareness.

Are they able to own the fact that they didn't close the sale? Have they taken anything away from the experience?

After they answer, make your interviewee feel comfortable by sharing a similar personal experience (and what it taught you).

4. Can you upsell me on...?

Anything, really: a coat, a pair of pants, a television. (Although it usually works best if it's an item that the candidate has sold in the past, as they'll be able to speak intelligently about.)

The way they answer this question should give you a good snapshot of not only how they'll upsell your customers, but their selling style in general.

5. What are the top 3 reasons I should hire you?

This is the candidate's opportunity to sell herself, and it should go fairly well. If it doesn't (i.e., if she can't answer the question eloquently and convincingly), then that's a red flag.

How's she going to sell your merchandise if she can't even highlight her own value. All in all, it's a very telling question, and a strong way to close out an interview.

In Sum

The happiest retail workers are a good fit for their store's products and culture. As a manager, it's your responsibility to find and hire that person. And that's easier said than done.

Managers are under extraordinary pressure to quickly and inexpensively find people to be the face of the company. Hire the wrong person, however, and it will cost you thousands to replace them...

Avoid the frustration, disappointment, and burden of a bad hire. Cut your losses by asking the right questions from the get-go.



81% of Employees Want This Perk

Tangible perks are great.

Who's going to turn down free soda and snacks in the breakroom? Not to mention team outings, in-store pizza parties, and merchandise discounts...

These are all good things, but, according to a recent 15Five study, there's one perk that beats them all (and, by the way, it costs employers nothing):

“Open Communication”

15Five's survey of more than 1,000 full-timers shows that 4 out of 5 employees would rather work for a company with an “open communication” culture than one with a slew of cool perks.

That, however, is not the only startling statistic uncovered by 15Five. The 2015 survey (the results of which were compiled by PRWeb) also shows that:

- Only 15% of employees are “very satisfied” with the quality of communication within their companies.
- Only 15% of employees believe their managers “highly value” their feedback.
- 58% of employees said their managers value their feedback only moderately, slightly, or not at all.

The fact that 85% of workers feel as though intercompany communications could be better is alarming. Imagine the lost productivity -- all because employees don't feel comfortable speaking up or, worse yet, don't feel like they're being taken seriously.

Imagine the toll on employee happiness...

What Can Managers Do?

There are at least 3 ways you can improve in-store communication:

- 1. Implement an anonymous feedback system.** Face-to-face conversations with your team members are an essential part of being a manager. Just remember that if you ask for feedback during these talks, it probably won't be 100% honest, which can be counterproductive. Creating an anonymous feedback system will empower your retail employees to communicate freely and frankly, which is the shortest path to authentic change.
- 2. Schedule pre- and/or post-shift input meetings.** These will give your employees a chance to communicate with each other in an open forum (while you attentively listen in). Of course, not everyone will offer their opinion, but those who do will likely be insightful. Holding meeting will also demonstrate to the entire team that you care about their thoughts, whether they choose to express them or not.
- 3. Be a transparent manager.** Honest, forthright leaders emanate trust, which is critically important. Put an "open door" policy into action. Doing so encourages employees to communicate with you one-on-one. It makes you accessible. Most importantly, it gives your employees an opportunity to share important, valuable information that may have otherwise been lost to your headphones, closed door, or (dare I say it) frowning face.

In Sum

The results are in: 81% of employees will take healthy, open lines of communication with their bosses over nearly any tangible perk you can offer them. Be your best leader: lend an ear. Oftentimes, your attention spells the difference between a happy employee and one eager to take their talent and experience to the competition.

How “SMART” Retail Managers Get Things Done

For the record: anyone can be a SMART manager. It has nothing to do with IQ and everything to do with process. SMART managers aren't more intelligent than the average leader, they just know the rules.

Which rules? Let us explain:

SMART managers follow a specific set of rules every time they set a goal or make an objective. Doing so preserves time, resources, and nerves, which helps stores save money while providing better customer service. “SMART” is an acronym for the criteria every goal or objectives should follow. Here's the breakdown:

“S” is for SPECIFIC

Specificity is key. If your goal or request isn't specific, you're leaving a lot of room for interpretation, confusion, and frustration. As a manager, you shouldn't ask an employee to simply “set up the summer display.”

Instead, say “can you please set up the summer display on the circular table to the right side of the entrance, creating color-coordinated stacks of t-shirts, polos, and pants.”

The more specific your request, the less room you leave for error.

“M” is for MEASURABLE

If you've outlined a set of criteria that can be used to determine what success ultimately looks like, your goal is measurable -- and that's a big deal.

Having a completion benchmark lets your employees know when they can move on to their next task. So, let's amend our earlier request to now be measurable, as well:

“Can you please set up the summer display on the circular table to the right side of the entrance, creating 3 color coordinated stacks of 12 t-shirts, 10 polos, and 8 pants. Any extras can be stored in the back.”

There, now employees have an end-point.



“A” is for ATTAINABLE

This has everything to do with being reasonable. You can ask an employee to single-handedly set up every display in the store, and they'll completely understand what you're asking of them, but they just won't have the time or energy or will to do it.

You can ask an associate to sell twenty jackets in a shift. You can ask the tailor on your staff to deliver 4 suits by the tomorrow morning. *You can ask.*

“R” is for RELEVANT

You're not asking the security guard to set up that display, are you? SMART managers are known for asking the right people to do the right things at the right time. And if you do, in fact, ask someone to do something outside their job description, you should be able to explain why they're the right person for the task.

“T” is for TIME-BOUND

By when do you want that summer display? Do you want it next week? Tomorrow? In an hour? Put a due date on each request you make and every goal you set. That way, your employee is clear on when you're expecting it.

In Sum

Whether you're setting long-term goals, or making shortterm requests, you should be SMART about it:

SPECIFIC	state exactly what you want.
MEASURABLE	define what it means to be successful.
ATTAINABLE	ensure that what you're asking for is reasonable.
RELEVANT	assign the right work to the right people.
TIME-BOUND	put a deadline on it.

The next time you ask something of an employee, take a minute (maybe two) to ensure that your request is as SMART as possible. That extra time investment will pay off in dividends.



Managers: Are You Having These 4 Critical Conversations With Your Retail Team?

Leadership IQ, a management consulting firm, asked 32,000 people about how they interact with their bosses.

They discovered that employee-boss communication (you know, face-to-face time) is minimal: sitting at a reticent three hours per week.

That's just too bad, because managers who put in more facetime have more engaged and stimulated workers.

In fact, Leadership IQ says that employees who spend six hours per week collaborating and connecting with their managers are:

- 29% more inspired
- 30% more engaged
- 16% more innovative

Now that's good for business. But how do managers get to that six-hour mark consistently and comfortably? Here are four conversations to get the job done:

1. The Kudos Talk

Whether it's closing a difficult customer, creating a fantastic display, or simply working overtime during a busy period, retail employees deserve recognition for their achievements and hard work.

Managers who don't give due credit will appear aloof to their team. Worse yet, they'll seem thankless. In other words, avoid the "Kudos Talk" and watch your employees' engagement levels melt like wax under a heat lamp.

OPEN WITH: "What was your biggest accomplishment last week?"

2. The Frustration Conversation

You're a retail manager, so, yes, it's very likely that you know exactly what it's like to be a retail associate. With that said, your retail associates still know better than you.

That's because they're in the role *right now*. As a manager, you should be sensitive to that fact. In other words, don't assume you know exactly what your employees are going through just because you were in their shoes at one time. After all, times are changing faster than ever before.

Show your empathy (or sympathy) by carving out time for a "Frustration Conversation," which will:

- Let employees know that you're interested in their wellbeing, and
- Provide you with outstanding feedback regarding possible improvements.

OPEN WITH: "Are there any processes you would change, or throw out altogether? Why?"

3. The Growth Discussion

Employees that fail to grow, leave.

Conversely, employees who are constantly learning and picking up new skills are the ones who keep coming in day-after-day and year-after-year.

That's why having the "Growth Discussion" soon and often is incredibly important for managers trying to build a lasting, engaged workforce. It will also help you identify less engaged team members that may need a morale boost.

OPEN WITH: "What can I help you learn next week?"

4. The Motivational Chat

A chat is short and informal.

That's why, realistically, every interaction is an opportunity for a "Motivational Chat."

Every interaction is an opportunity to highlight the benefits and opportunities that come with being an employee of your organization.

Every interaction is an opportunity to build trust and establish a connection.

Every employee-manager interaction has the capacity to inspire, engage, and motivate the employee -- and, perhaps, the manager, as well.

OPEN WITH: “How’s the week been treating you?”

In Sum

As a manager, the more you get in front of your team, the more effective, happy, and eager your team will be. Of course, it’s on you to initiate valuable conversations that make your employees feel both comfortable and appreciated. Get the ball rolling often and consistently and it won’t be long before you start seeing positive, big picture changes that drive revenue.



4 Management Habits That Breed Happy Employees

Happy, engaged employees are enthusiastic and hungry.

Happy employees are also a consequence of great leadership.

And great leadership, at the end of the day, is the result of a series of good habits.

As a manager, there are many “good” habits you can (and should) cultivate. This article talks specifically about four -- keep them top-of-mind and they will continue to serve you throughout your career.

Ready? Let's dive in:

1. Think Qualitatively.

Imagine that this month's numbers just came in -- and they're not what you were hoping for: they're low.

It's easy to point fingers in this situation, especially if you know that your retail employees still have a lot to learn before they're dangerous on the floor.

It can be difficult to suppress the urge to scrutinize in this situation, but doing so, and thinking qualitatively instead, is usually a good long-term investment.

In other words, make it a habit to think in terms of potential.

Every time you identify an underperforming associate, ask yourself: what is this employee capable of and can I get them there?

This thought process is:

- Cheaper than firing everyone who doesn't immediately measure up (because, as you know, replacing employees is expensive), and
- Will give you goals to set.

Speaking of which...

2. Set Goals.

Get used to setting goals, preferably SMART goals.

Set daily, weekly, monthly, and annual goals. Set them for yourself as well as for your whole team. You should also help individual employees set specific, measurable, and attainable goals -- and don't forget to put a deadline on their completion.

If you're already a habitual goal setter, you know just how effective this strategy is at pumping wind into your sails. And if you're not, [click here](#) to master the basics.

3. Practice Availability.

Managers delegate, sure, but they're also there to help.

In order to reach their full potential (see: 1 above), employees need to feel as though they can come to you with questions at any time. That's why managers should leave their phones on and office doors open while at work (and possibly even after hours).

Make it easy for workers to get in touch with you and you'll open yourself up to a consistent stream of input that you can use to make your store a better place to work (and shop).

And speaking of input...

4. Collect Feedback.

There's no such thing as "bad" feedback. It might be negative, but it's never going to be a bad thing.

Every successful business is built on mountains of both positive and negative feedback. That's why you should make collecting it part of your daily routine.

Always ask your team questions. Be a detective.

For example, before an associate leaves for the day, ask him or her:

- What went well?
- What could've gone better?
- What tool would've made you more productive?

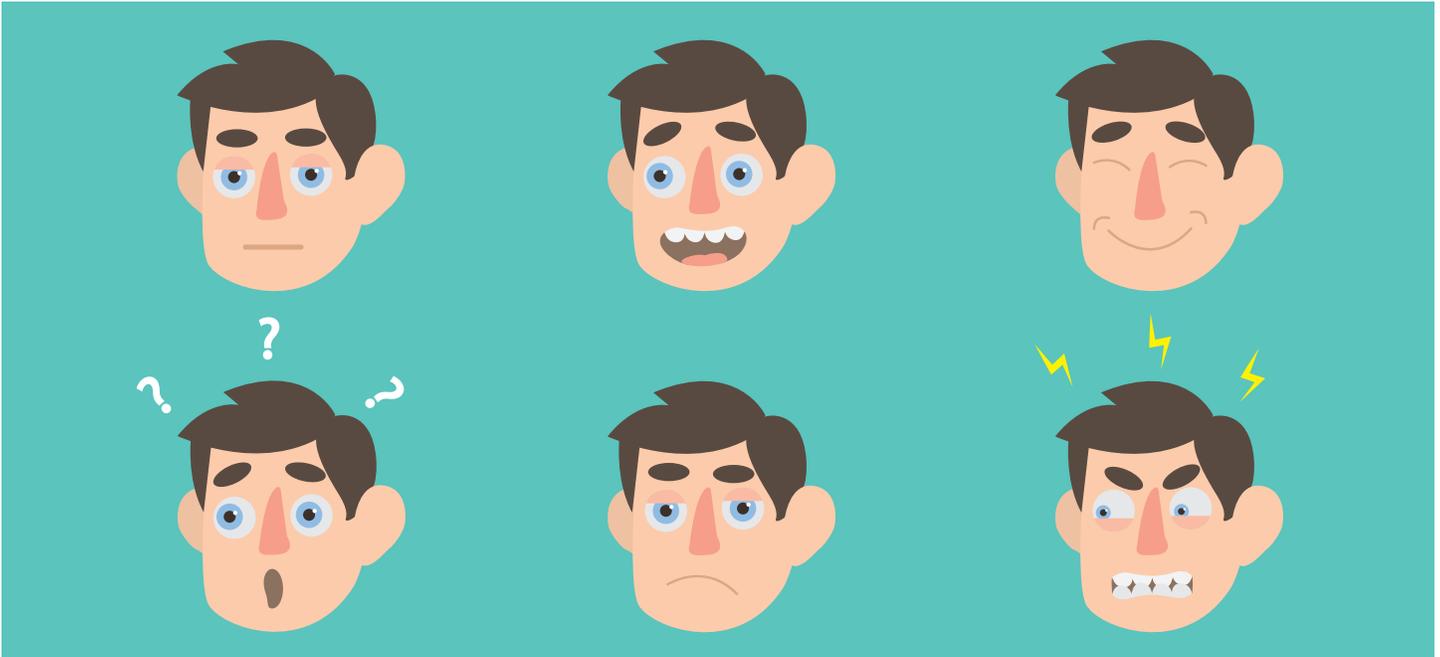
Try to get to a point where your employees know that these questions are coming, so they're actively thinking about them throughout the day. That'll make the process seamless and their feedback, in turn, will be more thoughtful.

In Sum:

It's never too late to start developing healthy, productive habits that'll help you and your employees work more cohesively. Train yourself to:

1. Think long-term and be quality-centric.
2. Set goals -- big and small -- as often as possible.
3. Be consistently available and easy to talk to.
4. Hunt down every smidgen of feedback you can get your hands on.

Start small. Baby steps will do. Allow your new habits to grow on you, and they'll be part of you before you know it.



6 Tips for Avoiding the Wrath of an Angry Retail Employee

We already talked about how to handle a retail employee with a bad attitude.

But what if your associate is past that point? What if their bad attitude has crossed the emotional threshold into...anger?

That can be more than just uncomfortable, it can be downright dangerous.

Especially if that associate leaves your company on bad terms, still angry -- and eager to vent.

That happened at Whole Foods, way back in 2011, when an (incredibly) disgruntled employee sent his resignation letter to every employee at the company. The letter was brutal, and even went so far as to call out individual employees by name.

Needless to say, it made its way to Gawker, where it was commented on nearly 500 times and shared on social media a blistering 17,000 times (gulp). The letter was a PR nightmare -- and it all started with one angry guy who owned a computer and had access to the Internet.

The Consequences of Employee Anger

...are as plentiful as they are alarming, especially in the Information Age, when an angry employee can have some devastating consequences on a company's brand, including:

- Leaking proprietary information online
- Disrespecting customers to the point of no return
- Turning off candidates and disengaging current workers

These consequences are obviously costly and detrimental. What's not so obvious, however, is that avoiding the (quite literal) wrath of an angry employee begins with the manager.

Here are six tips that every leader should mind when facing a disgruntled worker:

1. **Respect an employee's feedback.**

Sure, as a manager, it's hard to hear negative feedback. But imagine how hard it is for employees to give that feedback.

It's hard. In fact, it's downright terrifying. That's why managers always need to respect feedback. In other words, think critically about it and, most importantly, thank the employee who gave it to you.

That's what being a collaborative and constructive boss is about.

2. **Strive to find the solution.**

You might be a manager, but you certainly don't have all the answers. You can't make everything right. You won't always have a solution. Some things, unfortunately, are just out of your control.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't respond with compassion to an employee's issue. That doesn't mean you shouldn't make an effort to make it right.

Your workers will take note of this -- and they'll appreciate it.

3. **Treat everyone equally.**

In other words, don't play favorites (even if you do, in fact, have a favorite employee). The "favorites" game is a great way to polarize yourself and your team.

4. Never tune out.

Encourage your employees to vent to you -- and actually listen to them while they do. Don't tune out. Never tune out. You might miss something illuminating and valuable.

Listening will get you empathy points, keeping your employees' frustration at bay. Truly tuning in, however, will help you collect information that'll come in handy later.

5. Channel your inner psychologist.

Psychologists pry. They ask patients for clarification and more details. They dig deep because they know that their patients' problems started somewhere. And as soon as they identify where that "somewhere" is, the issues become easier to fix.

Therefore, as a manager, questioning your employees -- digging deep into their grievances -- can help you identify many core problems with your store, or even the company as a whole.

If an angry employee comes to you, just listen and ask questions. This will help you get past the surface issues and into the true essence of the problem (which could be starting with yourself).

6. Practice empowerment.

Because an empowered culture makes for productive, conscious, happy employees. Download Workplace's [Employee Empowerment](#) eBook to learn all about it.

In Sum

An angry retail employee can really damage a brand's image, which is why managers should be extra cautious and attentive when dealing with a disgruntled team member:

- Respect employee feedback by recognizing how difficult it must be for them to relay.
- Strive to find the solution to a problem. Don't just brush it under the rug.
- Treat everyone equally.
- Don't tune out. Your attention will be noticed and appreciated.
- Channel your inner psychologist: strive to find the root of dissatisfaction.
- Practice empowerment.



6 Ways Retailers Can Set New Hires Up For Success

Do you want to leave a positive, lasting impression on new hires?

Do you want them to have a great attitude from the get go?

Do you want them to be more productive and less likely to quit?

Then give them a warm welcome:

Providing new hires with an exceptional onboarding experience will help them find success early on.

Employers will also see a stronger allegiance from new hires who were brought on with care and attentiveness, compared to those who started and simply made their own way.

It's all about helping employees:

- 1. Familiarize themselves with the company's culture, and**
- 2. Bond with other team members.**

Here are a few strategies to help with that:

1. Have senior management welcome them.

Recognition from a senior-level manager or director can really enthuse your new hire, showing them that they're part of something larger than themselves. A personalized email is great. A phone call is even better.

2. Give them a mini hiring bonus.

As a retail organization, you're probably not at liberty to give new associates substantial cash bonuses. You can, however, give them some company swag or a store gift card as an onboarding present.

The point is to express how excited you are to have them on board — because you are. Otherwise, you wouldn't hire them, right?

3. Hook them up with a mentor.

A mentor, or a “work buddy,” is a common, old-school way to get people comfortably situated in a new role -- and it never goes out of style.

Have your new hire shadow a seasoned employee. Let them follow, observe, and emulate their mentor, while also meeting and connecting with other team members. Then check in with the mentor for progress updates.

4. Email their Q&A to the team.

Collect some fun surface info about your newest associate:

- Do they have any pets?
- What sports teams do they follow?
- What are their hobbies and interests?

That sort of stuff. Nice and light. Then email the answers to your team along with the person's photo. You can then turn your next team meeting into a round of new-hire trivia, rewarding correct answers with, well... whatever you want.

5. Take them out for lunch their first day.

As a manager, it's important to humanize yourself in front of your newest recruit. Taking them out to lunch, sharing your story, the company's history, and answering any questions that may have popped up during their first few hours is an effective way to take the edge off.

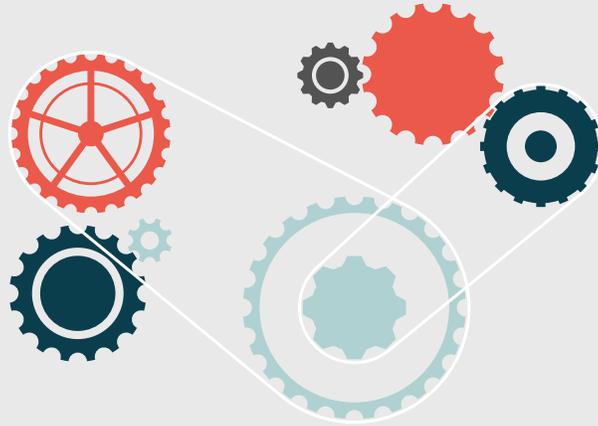
6. Give them all the perks right away.

This might be tricky -- and completely out of your control -- but treating new hires like equals will make a lasting impact on them. If possible, do it. Whether the perks are merchandise discounts, paid days off, or health insurance, allowing new employees to use them right away is a show of trust that will encourage accountability and loyalty moving forward.

In Sum

To reduce retail turnover and promote long-term employment at their company, leaders need to make a great impression on new hires. And a warm, generous welcome can make all the difference. Show employees that they're part of something great from the beginning, and they'll give you their all until the end.

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