UKG

Reboarding Retail

Bringing frontline retail workers back to work
safely, effectively, and productively

Overview

As businesses slowly reopen and return to full operating hours, bringing employees back to work — or reboarding — and doing it safely and efficiently is critically important for retailers. While the concept of reboarding is traditionally associated with holiday hiring, reboarding frontline retail workers in a pandemic presents unique challenges — and opportunities. In this radically changed work environment, a reboarding plan will help you bring employees back faster and easier.

Rehiring your best employees has always been an effective, if underused, strategy for retailers. By engaging with and rehiring your best former employees, you can reduce time- and cost-to-hire by as much as 90%.[1] Employees who are already familiar with your operations get up to speed faster than new employees. And in a time of uncertainty, rehiring people you trust goes a long way toward getting things back to normal.

Effective reboarding is critical to the employee experience. Do it right and you've increased employee engagement and productivity; get it wrong and you have an unhappy, ineffective employee who may not stay long. The impact of the coronavirus on retail operations has only heightened the reboarding challenges for retailers, from safety procedures and retraining for new sales procedures to communication plans and employee well-being.

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Reboarding: Are you looking for employees in the right places?

Almost all (97%) retailers agree: Understaffing poses a significant disruption to store business.[2] And with half (48%) bracing for holiday shifts to be regularly understaffed due to COVID-19, this is a big problem. Yet only 51% of retailers are looking to rehire former seasonal employees based on their existing familiarity with the job.[3] It's a huge lost opportunity for retailers, who may be unaware of the benefits of bringing back former employees. Given the extraordinary rate of turnover in retail, you likely have a large pool of former workers who left on good terms and may be interested in returning to work. Since not all your furloughed employees will be comfortable coming back, you should be prepared to reach out to that population.

Significant benefits can come from hiring former employees. In most cases, you know these people, their personalities, their work ethics, and why they left your company. When you're rehiring former employees, they already know your products, culture, and operating model. Rehired employees can start adding value to your bottom line in much less time than brand new employees.

When your best new hire is an old hire

Retailers looking to rehire former employees run up against their first roadblock in simply trying to reach them. Few retailers have an infrastructure for staying in touch, so just finding out who might be interested in returning can be a chore. By automating former employee management with a solution like Syrg, retailers can stay engaged with top performers and build a trusted talent pool to call upon. Syrg lets you keep in touch with thousands of former employees so you can quickly and easily offer them new positions or shifts. At a time when people's lives have been rearranged, former workers might be interested in picking up night and weekend shifts that they previously didn't want. This can be a particularly attractive option for parents of children who are remote learning during the pandemic.

Safety first, people first

The first step in effective reboarding is addressing safety — fully, transparently, and frequently. Furloughed workers returning to work will understandably have feelings of fear and anxiety, and they will be expecting higher standards of protection to be in place. Overcommunicating about the safety measures you're taking to protect their health and anticipating questions before they arise will help to alleviate some fears.

You'll need to advise returning employees of new COVID-19-related policies, such as:

- Are masks and other personal protective equipment (PPE) required for employees and customers? Are these requirements voluntary or mandatory? What equipment will be provided by the company?

- How will safety requirements like masks and social distancing be enforced? Will frontline employees be required to maintain customer compliance?

- How many employees and customers are allowed in the store or in any given space at once? What other social distancing guidelines are in place?

- Will health screenings such as temperature checks be required?

- What should employees do if they feel ill? Who should be notified and how? What quarantine requirements, if any, will be in place?

Retail employers must do everything they can to ensure that returning employees not only feel safe, but are safe. Requiring masks and good hand hygiene, installing barriers between employees and customers, and instituting new policies and procedures that support employee and customer health all go a long way to creating a supportive environment that employees can return to confidently.

> **Retail employers have a vital responsibility to protect their people by creating safe workspaces and empowering managers to foster a culture of trust and transparency. And given that leadership already recognizes the likely existence and impact of COVID-19-related anxiety among the workforce, the winners will be the ones who proactively do something about it.**

Dr. Chris Mullen, Executive Director, The Workforce Institute at UKG

Identify and retrain for frontline job changes

Once you've determined how your business will operate safely during the pandemic, you need to explore how these changes will impact frontline job performance. How will returning furloughed employees and seasonal workers be expected to perform their jobs? How will training for new shopping methods like curbside pickup and expanded delivery options be deployed?

Even before the pandemic, retailers were expanding the ways that customers could shop. The popularity of "buy online, pick up in store" has evolved into "buy online, pick up at curbside" as well as more options for store-to-door contactless delivery from retailers that may not have previously offered delivery. These new methods mean new hiring opportunities are available but also that new training is required. And pay special attention to cross-training, so employees can rapidly shift to new tasks as needed.

Be prepared to train returning employees on any new procedures. And since you may want to avoid group classroom training, look for alternate ways to deliver training, whether through employees' mobile devices or on-demand resources that employees can access from home.

When you bring employees back to work, you must give them the right amount of support to get up to speed quickly, and connect them to the ongoing training, communication, and job aids they need to be successful.

Reboarding without training doesn't work

Nearly two-thirds of frontline grocery store and retail workers feel left behind by their employers in terms of COVID-19 communication and preparedness. These employees scored lower than frontline workers in other industries and reported feeling less safe, less supported, less trained, less knowledgeable, and less confident than the average frontline worker.

That's according to [Axonify](#), which provides a learning platform designed specifically for frontline employees. The platform uses focused, bite-sized learning delivered in the way that people learn best, through an adaptive, engaging experience that fits easily into a retail worker's shift — in just minutes a day. There's no doubt that grocery and retail have been hit hard by pandemic disruptions, and that they're dealing with more chaos than the average employer. But if these employers don't turn their attention to the training and support needs of their frontline workers soon, they risk getting swallowed up by competitors who do.

Axonify's mobile platform can reach hundreds of dispersed retail workers, without relying on local stores or managers to implement training correctly or in a timely manner. This style of training is ideally suited to reboarding furloughed employees, who need to be brought up to speed on new safety procedures and transaction methods. It can also play an important role in reinforcing new policies and help prevent any decline in safety compliance that may occur over time. And the habit of daily learning can help build community among your workforce and show them that you care about their safety and job satisfaction.

How HCM technology can ease reboarding

Reboarding is an area where HCM technology can save time and effort, as furloughed and former employees' records will already be stored in your company's systems and can easily be reactivated. Employees can use self-service features on any device to ensure their information is up to date, saving time for HR and allowing them to focus on the reboarding strategy. HR can implement a reboarding strategy in that same system, setting up automated checklists with updates on policies and procedures, retraining requirements, and all changes to safety protocols so returning employees can get up to speed before they return on site.

An HCM scheduling solution can also help with contact tracing efforts if an employee becomes ill. You'll be able to easily see who the employee was exposed to and who might be at risk. You can also use scheduling proactively, by scheduling employees so they interact with the same group of coworkers on each shift, minimizing their overall exposure.

Summary

Retail stores continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience. As they evolve, they're providing more curbside pickup, online options, and augmented staff roles to keep the shopping experience alive as retail reopens and we move into the seasonal shopping season. Three in four retailers report that flexibility (80%), transparency (77%), and agility planning (76%) are more important than ever before.

Having a well-thought-out, comprehensive plan for rehiring and reboarding furloughed employees will help the process go smoothly. Being transparent with employees about changes to their positions or pay and the changes you've made for workplace safety will go a long way toward reestablishing trust. Equally important is the ability to engage your rehired employees from the moment they walk in the door, which will help them feel needed and help ease them back into their roles at work. The lines of communication should remain open, with you providing employees frequent updates and employees providing you with feedback. This will help employees feel supported and allow you to improve your reboarding plans based on that feedback.

References:

1. Syrg, *Retain your best employees*, found at https://www.syrghq.com/.

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3. UKG, *Retailers Rethink Holiday Season Strategy*, at 11.

4. Axonify, *Axonify Releases Annual Global State of Frontline Employee Training Study*, September 28, 2020, found at https://axonify.com/news/axonify-releases-annual-global-state-of-frontline-employee-training-study/.

5. UKG, *Retailers Rethink Holiday Season Strategy*, at 10, found at https://www.kronos.com/resources/2020-retail-holiday-trends-report.

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Our purpose is people