

SMARTER PERSPECTIVE: RETAIL

How to Make the BORING Retail Micro-Fulfillment Era More Rewarding for Your Frontline Employees

By Ian Fredericks and Dominick Keefe

An odd and very unfortunate thing has happened on the way to evolving the retail world over the past decade. Alongside the orchestrated rise of ecommerce and the unforeseen arrival of COVID, stores and the brick and mortar shopping experience have become a secondary thought. And by association, store employees have too.

Chances are you're struggling, at least to some degree right now, with frontline employee retention and poor morale. But, when was the last time you asked yourself why frontline employees joined your organization in the first place? It's likely they did so because they felt some affinity to your brand, your products and your company. After all, there's a reason that employee discounts are still so important to applicants; it's because most employees want, and even covet, the merchandise carried in the stores at which they work. It's one of the key reasons they chose your company over others.

So, we have a suggestion. Put yourself in the shoes of those employees. As a member of the store team, you started out enthusiastically merchandising a store or helping customers make choices that were ideally suited to their needs right on the store floor. Then, as



the realities of e-commerce began to set in and COVID took hold, you found yourself preparing in-store pickups for products ordered online (BOPIS). Consequently, fewer customers were being tantalized by your merchandising display prowess and less were seeking your assistance or advice in finding just the right items. That magical feeling that first drew you to work in the store was slowly evaporating each and every day.

Now, you find yourself supporting increasing buy online and return in store (BORIS) needs, and your pitching in to prepare orders that are being bought online and delivered from the store

(BODFS) as well as those that are bought online and shipped to the store (BOSS). Moreover, your doing this fulfillment center work at a fraction of the pay your fulfillment center counterparts are making.

If our use of BO-prefixed acronyms seem excessive here, that's by design. The reality is that these developments have created a retail work environment that is far more exhausting, frustrating and ultimately BORING for your frontline workers than you likely realize.

The fact is that physical retail stores are now largely in the Micro-Fulfillment

Business and frontline employees have become the micro-fulfillers, which is not what they signed up for.

But all is not lost. The good news is that with this bit of insight into the current mindset of your store teams, you're now

empowered to address what is most ailing them. Here are some practical tips for doing so based upon our and our client's successes in building and maintaining frontline worker trust and loyalty over the past couple of years:

Easy to Implement 2024 Retail Employee Satisfaction & Retention Tips

Roll up your sleeves and jump in

Next time you visit a store, don't just observe and provide marching orders. Get your hands dirty. See what it feels like to be your employees and use the opportunity to listen to what they're telling you both in words and via their actions/body language.

Feed the hearts and minds of store teams

Bring your frontline employees bagels for breakfast or pizza for lunch when you visit stores. And if you have to reschedule a planned visit, send along some snacks to show that you wish you could have been there to spend time with them. They are hungry for your recognition.

Actively solicit feedback and then act on it

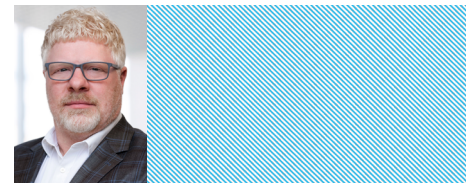
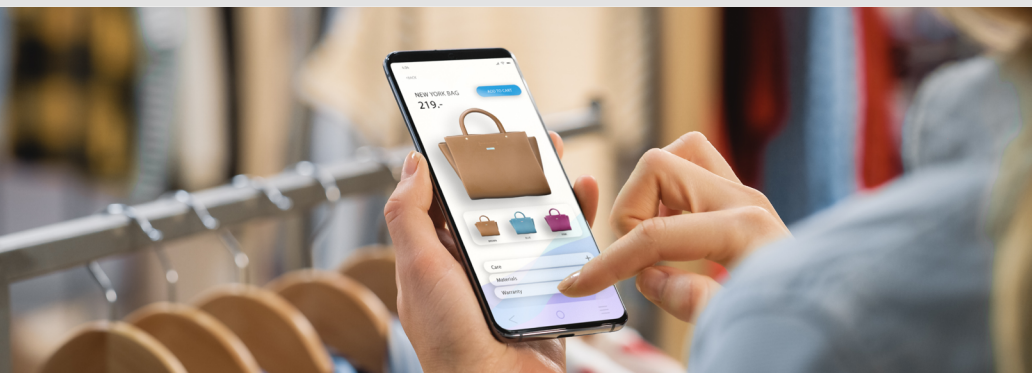
Be sure to get insights by directly engaging as many frontline teammates as possible on an impromptu basis whenever you visit stores as well as more formally via regularly-scheduled, seasonal and issue-triggered questionnaires, surveys and via the use of digital suggestion boxes and other means.

Foster a collaborative macro-environment

Every store has its challenges. Create opportunities and channels through which to share merchandising and customer service best practices and success stories across your stores. Employees on both ends of the relationship will learn from one another and feel a sense of purpose and satisfaction via the process.

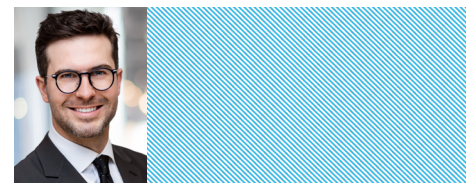
Use efficient, low cost tools and easily integrated technology to improve morale and performance

Stop the reference booklets and printed checklists. We're in the digital age and it's not only possible, but also easy to provide access to powerful collaborative applications right on your company's and your team's own handheld devices. Critically, the cost to do so is lower than you think and the payoff will be well worth it.



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