

FROM TURNOVER TO TENURE: INSIGHTS FOR RETAINING DESKLESS WORKERS



RESEARCH SERIES:
SHAPING THE MODERN WORKPLACE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

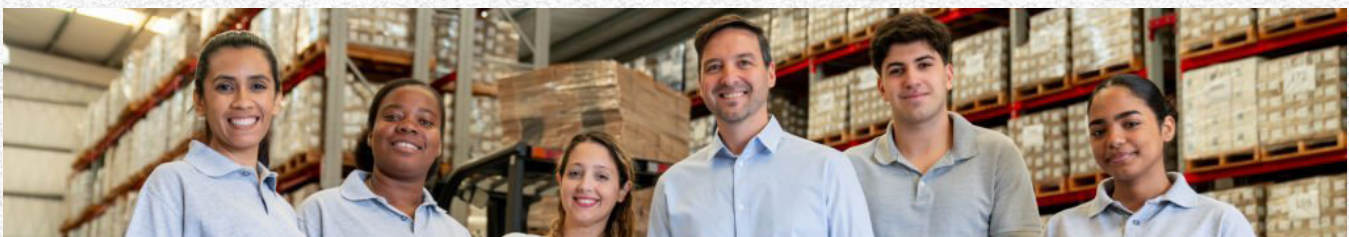
Deskless workers, who constitute 70%-80% of the global workforce,¹ play critical roles in industries such as health care, retail, construction, transportation, and hospitality. Recognizing the vital contributions of these workers, **SHRM and Fidelity Investments** have collaborated on the *Shaping the Modern Workplace* research series to explore and provide actionable solutions for the unique challenges that HR professionals may face when managing deskless workers.

This second installment focuses on retention and underscores the need for organizations to use data-driven strategies to address high turnover rates among this population. By understanding and addressing deskless workers' needs, organizations have an opportunity to boost retention, employee satisfaction, and overall productivity.

KEY FINDINGS:

- *The Critical Challenge of Retaining Deskless Workers* — According to HR professionals, deskless workers have a turnover rate 1.6 times higher than office-based employees. Although the majority of HR professionals indicate that their organizations are actively working to reduce turnover among this population, most believe that high turnover among deskless workers is inevitable. This contrasts with the perspectives of deskless workers, the majority of whom do not see their roles as temporary. This disconnect highlights opportunities for organizations to challenge assumptions about deskless workers and invest in retention strategies tailored to their needs.
- *Why Deskless Workers Leave and Stay* — Among deskless workers who report that they are likely to leave their job in the next six months, many note that they are seeking higher compensation, better benefits, and greater job stability/security. Deskless workers who plan to remain in their roles cite job stability, good work/life balance, and satisfaction with scheduling/work arrangements as top drivers. These drivers point to opportunities for organizations to take action to potentially reduce turnover by addressing key pain points and building on what's going well.
- *Effective Strategies for Retention Point to Opportunities for Greater Collaboration with Managers* — HR professionals report that offering competitive compensation is the most effective retention tool. Other effective strategies are related to scheduling and flexibility, and many managers report that they, rather than their organizations, lead scheduling-related efforts. However, managers note that they face obstacles such as budget limits, time constraints, and ensuring fairness. HR can support managers by providing tools, training, and guidance to enable them to create effective, personalized retention strategies.

As the deskless workforce spans diverse occupations and industries, the insights offered in this report should serve as a foundation, guiding potential solutions that likely require local validation to ensure relevance and effectiveness.



¹ Facing Deskless Labor Shortage with Technology, Boston Consulting Group, Sept. 5, 2024.

INTRODUCTION

Deskless workers, who work outside of desk-based office settings, represent a large and essential segment of the global workforce and account for an estimated 70%-80% of employees worldwide.² These workers perform a wide variety of job tasks across settings and industries.³ In the U.S., the largest groups of deskless workers include health care practitioners, truck drivers, retail workers, community and social service occupations, cashiers, and construction workers.⁴ These and other deskless occupations vary in terms of educational requirements, income levels, and work environments.

Despite the diversity of roles that fall under the deskless umbrella, many deskless jobs share common characteristics that can present unique challenges for HR professionals, including irregular schedules/hours, lack of a central office location, limited face-to-face contact with HR, and limited access to work email or messaging platforms.⁵ These distinctive characteristics set deskless roles apart from office-based jobs and may call for tailored approaches that meet deskless workers' unique needs.

To help organizations understand and identify possible paths to address these challenges, SHRM and Fidelity Investments have collaborated



on a new research series, *Shaping the Modern Workplace*. This series explores some of the challenges associated with managing deskless workers and suggests actionable insights to support this essential segment of the workforce.

In the first installment, retention emerged as a significant challenge, with 75% of HR professionals reporting that retaining deskless workers is more of a challenge than retaining office-based employees.⁶ Building on these findings, this second installment explores additional questions related to retention and aims to achieve three key objectives:

- 1. Understand Retention Challenges** — Explore why retaining deskless workers may present unique challenges and understand the factors influencing deskless workers' decisions to stay or leave.
- 2. Evaluate Retention Strategies** — Gain insights into potentially effective retention strategies for deskless workers, from organizational approaches such as benefits to manager-led actions such as schedule input.
- 3. Understand the Role of Managers** — Investigate the role that managers can play in retaining deskless workers and ways that managers and HR can work together to create a supportive environment for deskless workers.

To explore these questions, SHRM and Fidelity Investments surveyed 1,388 deskless workers (including 505 managers of deskless workers) and 1,152 HR professionals working in organizations with both deskless and office-based workers. The findings from this research are intended to empower organizations to better support their deskless workforce, ultimately leading to improved retention, satisfaction, and productivity.

² Facing Deskless Labor Shortage with Technology, Boston Consulting Group, Sept. 5, 2024.

³ Facing Deskless Labor Shortage with Technology, Boston Consulting Group, Sept. 5, 2024.

⁴ Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation and Age: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024.

⁵ *Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement*, SHRM and Fidelity Investments, 2024.

⁶ *Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement*, SHRM and Fidelity Investments, 2024.

THE CRITICAL CHALLENGE OF RETAINING DESKLESS WORKERS

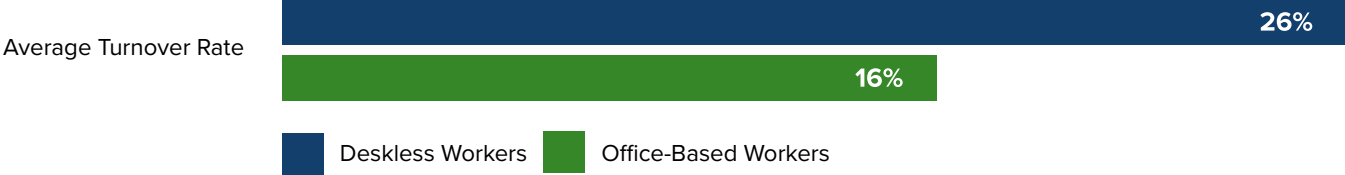
In recent years, organizations have faced ongoing challenges attracting and retaining talent. Many organizations continue to experience a shortage of qualified workers and are focused on adopting effective retention strategies to build and sustain a strong, stable workforce.⁷ This challenge may be even more pressing among deskless workers, with more than half of HR professionals (56%) reporting that their organizations are actively working to reduce turnover among deskless employees.

TURNOVER IS HIGH AMONG DESKLESS WORKERS

As reported by HR professionals, turnover rates over the last 12 months were higher among deskless workers than office-based workers, with HR professionals reporting an average turnover rate of 26% for deskless workers, 1.6 times the 16% turnover rate reported for office-based workers. Within the **health care industry**, HR professionals reported an even higher turnover rate of 31% for deskless workers, while those in **government** reported a turnover rate of 20%, still exceeding that of office-based workers. These elevated turnover rates may partially stem from the high-churn roles that fall under the deskless umbrella, such as health care, food service, and retail, but they may also point to unique pain points among deskless workers that are leading them to leave at higher rates.

Average Turnover Rates in the Past 12 Months

What is the approximate turnover rate for the following types of workers in your organization over the past 12 months?



⁷ 2024 Talent Trends, SHRM, 2024.

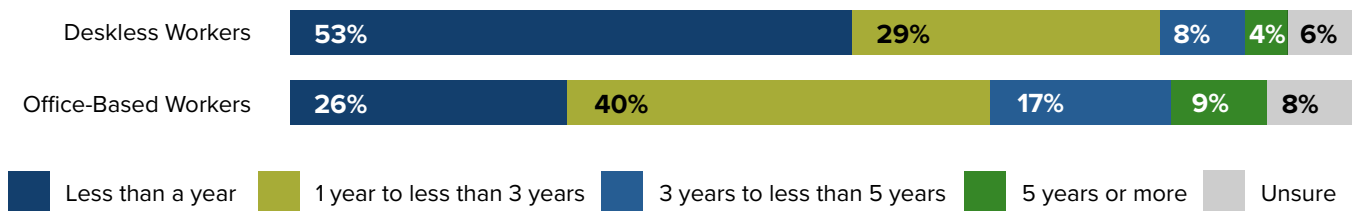


TURNOVER IS PARTICULARLY CHALLENGING IN YEAR ONE

For deskless workers, the risk of turnover is highest within their first year of employment, with 53% of HR professionals saying it is most challenging to retain deskless workers during this period. This turnover risk is particularly acute in the **manufacturing** industry, where 62% of HR professionals report difficulties in retaining deskless workers during this time frame. In contrast, HR professionals in the **education** sector report a lower risk, with only 39% saying retention is most difficult in the first year. Unlike deskless workers, office-based employees are most at risk after their first year but before their third year (40%). These insights highlight the need for tailored strategies to retain deskless workers, with a particular emphasis on understanding and addressing turnover risk in the first year in the industries and occupations where this is a challenge.

Retention Challenges at Different Stages of Employee Tenure

For your organization, at what point in employee tenure do you find retention to be most challenging?



Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.



ADDRESSING THE RETENTION CHALLENGE: WHY DESKLESS WORKERS LEAVE AND STAY

Consistent with the difference in turnover rates noted above, there is a widespread sense that high turnover is a foregone conclusion, with 84% of HR professionals reporting that they view turnover among deskless workers as inevitable, compared to 71% of HR professionals who feel the same about office-based employees. The first-year vulnerability with deskless workers is often attributed to the nature of their roles, which are typically viewed as high-churn and short-term. However, 64% of deskless workers **do not** consider their roles to be temporary, and 86% feel engaged in their current role.

Despite this sentiment, half of deskless workers feel their organization puts little effort into understanding and addressing the unique reasons why they leave compared to office-based workers. Organizations that continue to view deskless roles as inherently high-churn may risk losing out on valuable workforce potential. Instead, rethinking assumptions about these employees and understanding their preferences, motives, and needs may help inform more effective retention strategies. By analyzing both why deskless workers leave and why they stay, organizations can craft targeted strategies to better meet their needs.

WHY DESKLESS WORKERS LEAVE: TOP DRIVERS OF TURNOVER

Among deskless workers who said they are likely to leave their job in the next six months, many noted that they are seeking higher compensation (38%), better benefits (30%), greater job stability/security (27%), and improved work/life balance (25%). More than one-fifth (22%) said they are likely to leave because of a negative workplace culture.

Although these are the most common reasons for leaving, the relatively low percentages indicate a lack of consensus about reasons for turnover among deskless workers, underscoring the highly individualized nature of turnover decisions and reinforcing the importance of tailored, locally validated strategies to address the top drivers of turnover in a given population of workers.

However, understanding deskless workers' reasons for leaving only tells part of the story. By exploring the factors that encourage deskless workers to stay, organizations may discover additional opportunities to reduce turnover by building on what is already working well.

Top 5 Reasons for Leaving



What are the top 5 reason(s) you are likely to leave your job in the next six months?



Among deskless workers who are likely/very likely to leave their roles within the next six months. Deskless workers could select up to five reasons of 26 possible options.

WHY DESKLESS WORKERS STAY: STABILITY, WORK/LIFE BALANCE, AND WORKPLACE CONNECTIONS

Deskless workers who are unlikely to leave their job in the next six months said they plan to stay due to job stability/security (50%), good work/life balance (46%), satisfaction with current work arrangements/schedule (43%), good relationships with colleagues (43%), and good relationships with direct supervisors (34%).

Full-time and part-time deskless workers stay in their jobs for different reasons. Full-time workers are more likely to stay for benefits (34% full-time vs. 18% part-time) and job security (53% vs. 43%). Part-time workers are more likely to stay for good relationships with colleagues (50% part-time vs. 39% full-time) and work/life balance (57% vs. 41%).

Some of these reasons for staying are the inverse of the reasons for leaving noted previously, reinforcing the importance of factors such as job stability and work/life balance. Other top factors are unique to this list, such as satisfaction with work arrangements/schedules and workplace relationships. What this may suggest is that people are often driven to leave for better money, benefits, and stability, but relationships at work play a key role in encouraging deskless workers to stay.

The value of positive relationships with colleagues and supervisors is particularly noteworthy, considering that these relationships often take time to develop. Considering that the first year of employment is widely regarded by HR professionals as a high-risk period for turnover, structuring roles to enable employees to form these connections can play a crucial role in encouraging deskless workers to stay in their roles long-term.

Top 5 Reasons for Staying



What are the top 5 reason(s) you are likely to stay at your organization in the next six months?



Among deskless workers who are not likely to leave their roles within the next six months. Deskless workers could select up to five reasons of 24 possible options.

ADDRESSING THE RETENTION CHALLENGE: EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

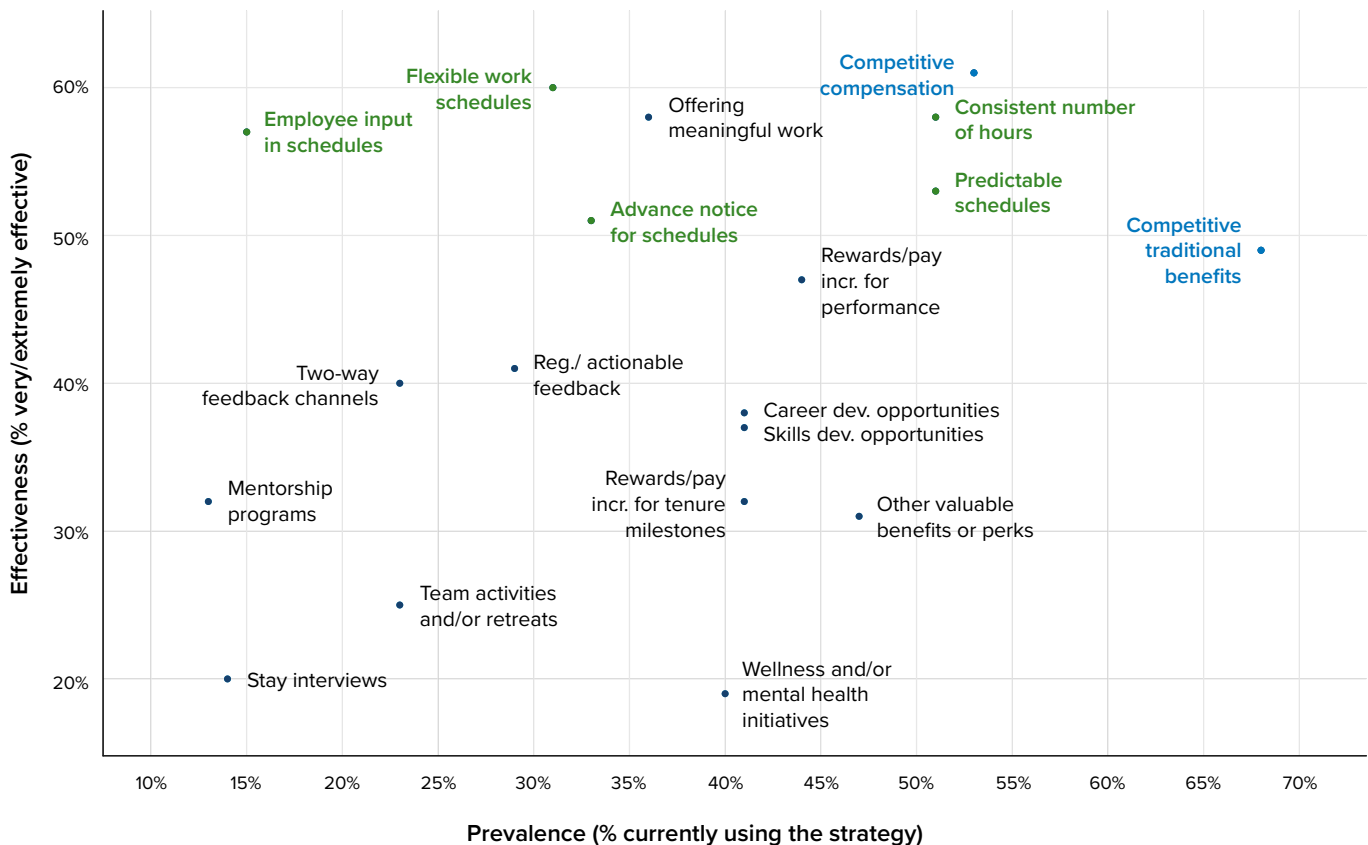
With an eye to the root causes of turnover noted above, this section examines potential strategies that organizations can implement to enhance retention within this workforce segment. HR professionals were asked about a list of possible retention strategies, and they indicated which ones their organizations are using and how effective each strategy has been. The chart below illustrates the prevalence and effectiveness of each retention strategy. Knowing the prevalence of a given strategy may help organizations benchmark against what others are doing and identify competitive opportunities. Combining this data with information about what is most effective may enable organizations to identify potential opportunities where highly effective strategies might be underutilized and uncover potential inefficiencies where common practices do not deliver desired results.

The sections on the next several pages will unpack strategies spanning two categories: compensation and benefits, which are widely used, and scheduling and flexibility, which tend to be highly effective but may be underutilized.

Retention Strategies



Effectiveness and prevalence of strategies for retaining deskless workers, according to HR professionals.



Effectiveness is among those who use the retention strategy.
Colors highlight strategies discussed on the next several pages.

COMPETITIVE COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS: COMMON STRATEGIES THAT ADDRESS KEY REASONS FOR LEAVING

The two most common strategies for retaining deskless workers are offering [competitive traditional benefits](#) (68%) and offering [competitive compensation](#) (53%).

According to HR professionals, offering competitive compensation is the most effective strategy for retaining deskless workers, with 61% reporting that this approach is very or extremely effective. As “seeking better compensation” is the most common reason for leaving among deskless workers, it makes sense that organizations that offer competitive compensation find it to be a particularly effective strategy, as it directly addresses a common pain point.

However, offering competitive traditional benefits — despite being the most common strategy — is not reported to be among the most effective, with 49% of HR professionals reporting high effectiveness. This could imply a need for organizations to refine their benefits strategy, as “seeking better benefits” is the second-most-common reason for leaving that deskless workers mention. To address this gap, organizations might seek to better understand employees’ benefits-related needs and preferences that may be leading them to seek employment elsewhere and refine their offering accordingly, or they may need to focus on improving benefits enrollment and utilization. (For further insights, see SHRM and Fidelity Investments’ report, [Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement](#).)

Although these compensation and benefits strategies are likely to apply to all workers, they may be particularly important for deskless workers. Compared to desk-based office workers, who tend to be salaried and may have clearer paths to advancement, many deskless workers are paid hourly and may earn less (although there are deskless occupations that are higher-earning, such as doctors and pilots). Further, they may be employed in roles where promotion paths are not available or not clearly defined, leading them to look externally for roles where they can earn more money or receive better benefits.



SCHEDULING PRACTICES: UNDERUTILIZED, EFFECTIVE, AND COST-EFFICIENT

Practices related to scheduling vary in their prevalence. While offering a **consistent number of hours** and offering **predictable schedules** are relatively common (51% each), relatively fewer organizations give **advance notice for schedules** (33%), offer **flexible work schedules** (31%), or **take employee input on schedules** (15%).

According to HR professionals, practices related to scheduling are among the most effective retention strategies. Of the top seven most effective retention strategies, five relate to scheduling, including offering flexible work schedules (60% very/extremely effective), having consistent hours week-to-week (58%), allowing employee input on schedules (57%), providing predictable schedules (53%), and giving advance notice of schedules (51%). Giving advance notice for schedules, offering flexible work schedules, and taking employee input on scheduling are notable areas of opportunity, as they are highly effective but infrequently used.

These scheduling practices address foundational needs and several reasons that deskless workers commonly cite for leaving and staying. Namely, two of the top five reasons for leaving are seeking greater job stability (27%) and wanting better work/life balance (25%). Conversely, the top three reasons cited by deskless workers who plan to stay in their jobs are job stability (50%), a good work/life balance (46%), and satisfaction with their current work arrangements/schedule (43%). Taken together, the scheduling practices above can support these needs for stability, balance, and work arrangements that fit employees' lives.

Additionally, when deskless workers have stable and consistent schedules, they may be more likely to form supportive relationships with the colleagues who they see on a regular basis, supporting a key retention driver. Beyond that, scheduling practices may be cost-effective solutions for organizations that do not have the budget to increase compensation or add additional benefits.

In sum, while compensation, benefits, and scheduling practices are essential retention strategies, their success ultimately depends on the managers and HR professionals who implement them. With this in mind, we now turn our focus to the critical role these individuals play in bringing these strategies to life.



MANAGERS PLAY A CRITICAL ROLE IN RETENTION

Managers can have a pivotal role in shaping the employee experience. According to SHRM Thought Leadership, HR professionals rank managers as the second-most-influential factor in shaping the overall employee experience, while employees themselves place managers as the third-most-significant factor.⁸ In addition, workers who report having highly effective managers are nearly twice as likely to feel satisfied and fulfilled by their jobs.⁹ For deskless workers who plan to stay in their roles, many note that they are doing so because they have a strong relationship with their manager.

Through direct contact with deskless workers, managers can identify and address key factors affecting retention. Regular engagement helps them understand workers' concerns, motivations, and frustrations. This connection builds trust and allows managers to spot early signs of disengagement or dissatisfaction — key indicators of potential turnover. This section outlines the role of managers in retention, highlighting common practices, areas for improvement, and key challenges.

MANAGERS USE SCHEDULING PRACTICES TO RETAIN DESKLESS WORKERS

When asked about their retention strategies, managers reported using an average of four approaches. The most frequently cited practices are:

1. Offering flexible work schedules (40%).
2. Providing consistent weekly hours (35%).
3. Giving advance notice for schedules (29%).
4. Ensuring predictable schedules (28%).
5. Incorporating employee input into scheduling (28%).

These strategies are identified by HR as highly effective for retaining deskless workers, and these findings emphasize that managers are often aligned with what their employees need. However, adoption rates remain low, as 40% or less use these strategies. This gap underscores the need for organizational support to empower managers with the necessary tools, training, and resources to fully implement and scale these proven techniques.



⁸ *The Case for Employee Experience*, SHRM, 2024.

⁹ *Effective People Managers: The Linchpin of Organizational Success*, SHRM, 2024.

SCHEDULING PRACTICES ARE MORE OFTEN MANAGER-DRIVEN

Unlike areas such as compensation and benefits, which are typically led by HR, scheduling is often driven by managers (see table below). This reveals an opportunity for organizations to step in and offer more structured support. A collaborative approach can empower managers to adopt these scheduling practices consistently, improving retention and reducing turnover.

A Collaborative Approach to Retention



Percentage of managers reporting that each strategy is manager-driven vs. organizationally driven in their organization.

RETENTION STRATEGIES	MANAGER-DRIVEN	ORGANIZATIONALLY DRIVEN	GAP (MANAGER-ORG)
Employee input in schedules	58%	42%	+16
Predictable schedules	55%	45%	+10
Flexible work schedules	54%	46%	+8
Offering meaningful work	51%	49%	+2
Consistent number of hours week to week	50%	50%	0
Advance notice for schedules	50%	50%	0
Competitive compensation	36%	64%	-28
Competitive traditional benefits (e.g., retirement, health care)	30%	70%	-40



FAIRNESS AND BUDGET CONSTRAINTS ARE KEY RETENTION HURDLES FOR MANAGERS

A critical starting point for HR is addressing the challenges managers face when trying to implement retention strategies. Among the most common difficulties cited are ensuring fairness among team members (35%), working within tight budget constraints (35%), lacking sufficient time (30%), and receiving inadequate support from upper management (28%).

Top 3 Challenges Managers Face in Retaining Deskless Workers



What are the top three most significant challenges you face as a manager of deskless workers when trying to implement retention strategies?



Managers could select up to three challenges.

The issue of maintaining fairness is particularly noteworthy. Many manager-driven retention strategies focus on scheduling accommodations. Granting flexible hours or allowing employees to have input on their schedules can complicate efforts to ensure fairness across the team. This issue is further compounded by time constraints. Scheduling is already a demanding task for many managers, and incorporating individualized adjustments only adds to its complexity. These challenges highlight the nuanced and multifaceted nature of effective retention strategies.

In summary, managers' close relationships with deskless workers provide critical insights into their needs and daily realities. These insights can enable managers to develop retention strategies that truly resonate with employees. However, for these efforts to succeed, organizations must empower managers with the tools, training, and support to implement these strategies effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR RETENTION BY GETTING TOTAL REWARDS RIGHT

HR professionals report that compensation and benefits are the most important factors in attracting and retaining deskless workers.¹⁰ To build a solid foundation for retention, organizations must ensure their total rewards packages align with the needs and expectations of their deskless workforce. By taking a thoughtful and proactive approach, businesses can create competitive offerings that foster loyalty.

Actionable Steps:

- 1. Evaluate Pay and Benefits Competitiveness:** In today's economic environment, characterized by inflation and rising health care costs, many deskless workers reported that they are seeking jobs with higher compensation and greater stability. Consider conducting compensation and benefits audits to ensure your packages remain competitive in the market. Tools, such as SHRM's annual [Employee Benefits Survey](#), may help you compare your benefit offerings against similar organizations based on industry, geography, and size. This data-driven approach helps identify where your organization stands and highlights areas for improvement.
- 2. Understand Employee Benefits Preferences:** Many employees point to inadequate benefits as a key reason for leaving their jobs. Despite that, relatively few HR professionals reported that offering competitive benefits was highly effective, pointing to an opportunity to refine the strategy to better meet employees' needs. Engaging directly with employees to understand their benefit preferences is essential, and offerings such as [Fidelity Workplace Consulting's Benefits Optimization](#) may help. By uncovering what matters most to your workers, you may be able to tailor benefit offerings to better align with their needs — transforming benefits from a standard offering into a powerful and impactful retention tool. (For further insights, see SHRM and Fidelity Investments' report, [Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement](#).)
- 3. Focus on Benefits Enrollment and Utilization:** Beyond getting the offering right, another challenge may be ensuring deskless workers understand and take advantage of those offerings. Consider implementing targeted strategies to boost benefits enrollment and utilization rates, particularly for deskless workers who may face unique barriers to accessing and understanding available resources. (For further insights, see SHRM and Fidelity Investments' report, [Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement](#).)

By offering competitive compensation, aligning benefits with employee priorities, and increasing awareness and utilization of benefits programs, organizations can strengthen their ability to attract and retain deskless workers.

¹⁰ *Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement*, SHRM and Fidelity Investments, 2024.

2. CONSIDER SCHEDULING PRACTICES AS A LOW-COST, HIGH-IMPACT RETENTION STRATEGY

Scheduling is an often overlooked yet powerful retention tool for deskless workers. Many deskless workers have limited control over their schedules, which can lead to dissatisfaction and turnover. When employers implement strategies that offer workers more control over their work hours, provide predictability, and allow for input into their schedules, they can support employees' work/life balance and sense of stability. Innovative and flexible scheduling practices can therefore serve as low-cost, high-impact tools to boost retention.

Actionable Steps:

- 1. *Get Employee Input in Scheduling Decisions:*** A key opportunity to enhance retention may lie in involving employees in the scheduling process. Deskless workers may often feel disconnected from decisions that affect their daily lives, including when and where they work. Giving employees a voice in the scheduling process — whether through digital surveys, feedback forms, or direct conversations — may improve engagement and loyalty. Even simple changes, such as asking for shift preferences, may create a sense of autonomy and fairness. While it may not always be feasible to accommodate every request, the act of soliciting input potentially demonstrates that the organization values its workers and seeks to support their work/life balance.
- 2. *Implement Predictable and Flexible Schedules:*** One of the most effective ways to reduce turnover may be to offer flexibility within a predictable framework. This could include predictable shift patterns (e.g., fixed shifts) with the option for workers to request changes when necessary. By providing employees with clarity on their schedules well in advance, employers can potentially help reduce stress, enable employees to meet their nonwork responsibilities and goals (e.g., for caregiving or continuing education) and improve overall job satisfaction. Managers can also be trained to ensure that flexibility is balanced with business needs, so that operational efficiency is maintained without sacrificing employee satisfaction.
- 3. *Use Technology to Streamline Scheduling:*** Technology plays a crucial role in simplifying scheduling processes. Scheduling software can help streamline the creation of schedules, automate shift changes, and track employee preferences, all while saving managers valuable time. By using advanced scheduling tools, organizations can better meet the unique needs of deskless employees — offering shift swaps, availability requests, and predictive scheduling. These tools not only support flexibility but also ensure that schedules are created efficiently and with fairness in mind. For example, managers can easily track who has requested time off or needs certain shifts, improving transparency and reducing disputes. Additionally, such technology can provide employees with easy access to their schedules and allow them to request changes in real time.
- 4. *Equip, Train, and Support Managers to Balance Flexibility and Fairness:*** Managers play a crucial role in implementing effective scheduling practices, and their ability to balance flexibility with fairness is essential to retaining deskless workers. To succeed, they need the right tools, training, and support. Managers should be equipped with technology that helps them evaluate scheduling requests and make thoughtful adjustments, ensuring business needs are met while supporting employees. In addition, targeted training is critical to help managers navigate challenges, such as accommodating scheduling preferences without creating favoritism or contributing to burnout. By providing managers with the necessary resources and ongoing support, organizations can foster fairness, transparency, and trust — key elements for improving retention and team satisfaction.

By rethinking and improving scheduling practices, employers can directly address one of the most significant challenges facing deskless workers. Simple yet thoughtful adjustments — such as involving employees in scheduling, offering predictable flexibility, and adopting smart technology — can drive engagement, reduce turnover, and create a more satisfied workforce.

3. STRENGTHEN HR-MANAGER COLLABORATION FOR RETENTION SUCCESS

Retention is a shared responsibility, and building a stronger, more strategic partnership between HR and managers is essential for achieving meaningful results. While managers play a critical role in executing retention strategies, many still face challenges in effectively implementing these strategies.

Actionable Steps:

- 1. *Rethink the Traditional Approach:*** Move beyond conventional top-down HR directives by involving managers early in the development of retention strategies. Consider encouraging them to critically assess their teams' unique needs and propose creative, tailored solutions that go beyond one-size-fits-all practices.
- 2. *Establish a Dynamic Feedback Loop:*** Consider replacing infrequent surveys and static feedback forms with a continuous, action-oriented feedback system between HR and managers. Setting clear, measurable goals for improving employee satisfaction and linking these outcomes directly to managerial performance will ensure accountability on both sides.
- 3. *Transition from Reactive to Proactive Collaboration:*** Consider cultivating a culture where HR and managers work together to anticipate challenges before they arise. Consider creating joint task forces or innovation teams dedicated to addressing the evolving needs of employees, particularly deskless workers. Make collaboration an integral part of the organizational workflow, not just a series of occasional meetings.

By fostering more intentional collaboration between HR and managers, organizations may create retention strategies that are both impactful and sustainable.



CONCLUSION

Deskless workers form the backbone of many industries critical to our economy, yet retaining this essential workforce presents unique challenges. With higher turnover rates, particularly within the first year of employment, and distinct issues related to scheduling, compensation, and workplace dynamics, these roles demand tailored approaches to improve retention. High turnover among deskless workers isn't inevitable. By rethinking assumptions, engaging with employees, and adopting evidence-based strategies, organizations can transform retention challenges into opportunities for growth and stability.

Key recommendations for addressing these challenges include building a strong foundation through competitive total rewards. Aligning compensation and benefits with employee needs ensures that this basic yet crucial factor becomes a driver of loyalty, rather than a reason for turnover. Scheduling practices also stand out as a low-cost, high-impact retention tool. Offering more predictability, flexibility, and employee input in scheduling directly supports many of the top reasons deskless workers stay, such as stability and work/life balance. Lastly, strengthening collaboration between HR and managers is vital to advancing retention efforts. Managers, who often serve as the primary touchpoint for deskless workers, need tools, training, and support to balance fairness, practicality, and flexibility.

Retaining deskless workers isn't just about reducing turnover — it's about unlocking their potential, cultivating long-term engagement, and ensuring they feel valued. By adopting thoughtful and proactive strategies, organizations can not only address current challenges but also foster a more satisfied, stable, and productive workforce. Now is the time to act. Investing in the well-being and support of deskless employees isn't just a retention strategy — it's a commitment to strengthening your organization.

METHODOLOGY

Unless otherwise attributed, all data and insights in this report come from the following surveys:

Deskless workers: The survey was fielded electronically to a sample of deskless workers via a third-party panel on Oct. 17-25, 2024. In total, 1,388 deskless workers participated in the survey. Of these, 505 were deskless workers who also manage deskless teams. Respondents were eligible to participate if they were employed full-time or part-time by an organization, identified as a deskless worker, and were either an individual contributor or a manager of individual contributors. Respondents represented organizations of all sizes in a wide variety of industries across the U.S.

HR professionals: This survey was fielded to a sample of HR professionals via SHRM's Voice of Work Research Panel on Oct. 8-10, 2024. In total, 1,152 HR professionals participated in the survey. Respondents were eligible to participate if they work for organizations that employ both deskless workers and office-based workers, and if deskless workers account for more than 10% of their workforce. Respondents represented organizations of all sizes in a wide variety of industries across the U.S.

How to cite the research: *From Tenure to Turnover: Insights for Retaining Deskless Workers*, SHRM and Fidelity Investments, 2025.

Disclosures

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