



Building a
Future
That Works

WORK-BASED LEARNING IN RETAIL

Retailers face a number of challenges that make it imperative for them to adopt new strategies for attracting and retaining talented workers who can help them compete in the new economy. For one thing, they must adapt to rapid changes in their business models, such as movement toward online shopping. On top of that, as the overall labor market tightens, the pool of available talent is shrinking. Moreover, entry-level workers (who make up more than half of the retail workforce) stand to benefit the most from WBL opportunities, because many have little or no prior work experience.



Special Considerations

Fortunately, retail jobs are well suited to [work-based learning](#)¹ for three reasons:

Retailers struggle with high turnover: In 2016, the turnover rate for hourly store employees hit [65 percent](#), according to a study by Korn Ferry's Hay Group.² The industry's high turnover rate is partly a reflection of the fact that retail work is often the first career stop for many people. But it's possible to stem the tide of departures a bit. Wegmans, a supermarket chain in mid-Atlantic and New England regions, has used work-based learning to [reduce turnover](#) among its part-time youth employees from 100 percent to 30 percent by providing customized on-the-job training, pathway development, and career navigation support to its employees.³

The industry needs diverse management talent: WBL programs can strengthen the pipeline from the frontline workforce to the management ranks and bring a diverse pool of talented people to higher-level positions. This diversity will enable management to better address the varied needs of both the company's frontline-level workforce and the increasingly diverse consumer base.

Traditional retailers need to find ways to compete in the new economy: Many brick-and-mortar retailers are using customer service to gain an edge in the market as they compete against online shopping sites. Work-based learning programs can help their employees develop the communication skills that customers expect.

Companies such as Walmart and Amazon have recently launched WBL programs, effectively tapping into diverse pools of talent that can grow with the company.

1. *Making Work-based Learning Work for Retail: A Guide for Retail Employers* (Boston, MA: JFF, June 2018), <https://jff-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Walmart-Retail-Report-071818.pdf>.

2. "Retail Turnover Rates Highest Since the Great Recession," World at Work, Accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.worldatwork.org/docs/newsline/newsline-2016/11-nov/nov-23/retail-turnover-rates-highest-since-the-great-recession.html>.

3. Tiffany Smith, *Opportunity for Youth Meets Business Opportunity: Wegmans and Hillside Work-Scholarship Connection* (Boston MA: JFF, June 2018), <https://jff-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Wegmans-Case-Study-061118.pdf>.

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