

HOW TO IMPROVE FRONTLINE WORK

A HANDBOOK



WELCOME TO OUR HANDBOOK ON 'HOW TO IMPROVE FRONTLINE WORK'

Everyone can have a good experience of work - whatever their job.

Jobs are not just about the work people do but the way their work is organised, managed and supported.

At the Good Jobs Project, we asked frontline workers and their managers how employers and colleagues could improve frontline work.

This handbook summarises their answers and draws on a wider set of evidence to show how paying attention to job quality can impact on wellbeing, job satisfaction, attracting and keeping staff, reducing absence, improving performance and encouraging innovation.

Working to boost the quality of frontline work can be a 'win-win'. Each page offers practical steps already used successfully by businesses.

Your questions answered...

What research is this based on?

The 4 Boosts emerged as themes from interviews with employers and workers in Norwich in 2021 for the Good Jobs Project. The practical steps come from good practice examples in this and other research carried out by the same team. The 'win-win' statements summarise the findings of relevant scientific research identified by our team. Full references can be found on the ProPEL Hub (link below).

There is a lot to do here - how do I get started?

If in doubt, start small. Listening to what workers are experiencing is always a good place to start, but be prepared to take at least one visible action on what you hear.

I am doing all this already - what can I do next?

Great! Find more details of cutting edge people and productivity research on the ProPEL Hub website (link below). One tip though: one area where most businesses are least active is 'making the workers part of the conversation'. Even fabulous businesses can usually do more to involve their staff and boost job quality.

See www.propelhub.org for more details...



LET WORKERS CONNECT

Give frontline workers the time, support and flexibility they need to be able to connect with customers and feel pride in their work

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

- Avoid scripts. Discuss principles for good service instead.
- Check staff ratios and workloads to see if they allow workers flexibility in how they connect with customers.
- Listen to workers on how to use their skills.

What workers say when this is not going well...

“we’re now just even beyond the skeleton crew and yet somehow just expected to continue. I say all this knowing that businesses have a profit to make and there is the reality of money, but it is always staffing that goes first.”

“even if you’ve been on your feet for some hours and you’ve been running about and busy ... you go home thinking I’ve helped to make people have a happy experience. And I think that helps to make us have a happy time as well!”

What workers say when this is going well...

WHY IS TAKING ACTION ON THIS A WIN-WIN?

Workers and customers find genuine social contact important. Meaningful work is linked to better job and life satisfaction. Improving the customer experience can bring business gains.



CARE ABOUT WORKERS' LIVES

Get to know workers and show care for their personal and worklife needs and goals, e.g. around childcare, working hours or learning

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

- Spend time 1-to-1 with staff and explore reasonable options for offering them flexibility and support
- Offer working hours as predictably as possible in advance

What workers say when this is not going well...

“you only get one or two days off every two weeks, which is just not enough to be living a life. The vast majority of people are not full time as a result... There’s no benefit to [full-time], other than the money, but you know, that’s kind of small.”

“they were really good. They were willing and able to give you the most flexible hours imaginable. As long as someone was in the shop, it didn’t matter... their business supported the flexibility that real human beings needed.”

What workers say when this is going well...

WHY IS TAKING ACTION ON THIS A WIN-WIN?

Flexible work schedules improve quality of work life and worker commitment. Managers play a critical role in promoting individual learning and learning for business improvement.



HAVE WORKERS' BACKS

Working with the public will sometimes involve difficult situations
Ensure workers feel safe, trained and supported to deal with them

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

- Give early and ongoing training (formal or on-the-job)
- Offer colleague and manager support
- Treat incidents as learning opportunities

What workers say when this is not going well...

"it can be difficult to resolve issues in a way that's actually meaningful or comfortable for you or for them. There is this looming fear that everything will escalate and things can get quite seriously bad for you, because there isn't that support."

"bad behaviour towards staff increased. I worked a lot to try and create some perspective around those kind of events. And when that happens how you can steer away ... and try to stay focused, and not taking things personally."

What workers say when this is going well...

WHY IS TAKING ACTION ON THIS A WIN-WIN?

Constantly hiding emotions in response to rude customers can cause stress, leading to mental and physical health problems. Avoiding emotional exhaustion leads to better service.



MAKE WORKERS PART OF THE CONVERSATION

Involve workers in discussing decisions that could impact their lives, making sure managers are always open and approachable

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

- Make time to discuss decisions and how business is going
- Always act on feedback (or explain clearly why you can not) to avoid cynicism about 'lip service' consultation

What workers say when this is not going well...

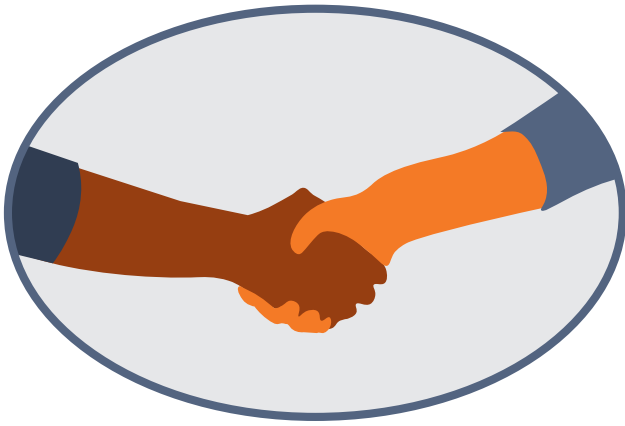
"it's very much the management and then the [frontline workers]. The management don't ever come [to site], they don't spend any time with us. We don't get an opportunity to feedback about what's working and what isn't."

"another amazing thing that our business does, and my boss does, is to, as much as possible, involve us in all decisions, in loads of different things. With the kind of not secret knowledge that many heads make light work."

What workers say when this is going well...

WHY IS TAKING ACTION ON THIS A WIN-WIN?

Being genuinely heard can reduce worker stress. It also supports business improvement, because workers can draw on their unique frontline insight to suggest new ways of working.



... FROM A FOUNDATION OF RESPECT

Respect encompasses civility, fair pay, reasonable workload and safe working conditions: the necessary foundation for good work

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

- Many businesses want to show they value their workers. Focusing on getting relationships and working conditions right shows respect for the worker every day.

What workers say when this is not going well...

"I think we are devalued all round and I think that's a real shame, because some of the nicest people I've ever met work for X and it's just kind of a bit sad. They're leaving because they don't feel like they are valued at all."

"we're an asset based organisation, which is a posh phrase which basically means that we concentrate on the positives in everybody and everything, you know, the stuff that people can do."

What workers say when this is going well...

WHY IS TAKING ACTION ON THIS A WIN-WIN?

Being treated with a lack of respect has been linked with dissatisfaction at work and employee turnover, which can lead to lost revenue and lower profitability for businesses.

MORE RESOURCES

- Download our infographic from propelhub.org (search '4 Boosts')
- Watch the explainer video on propelhub.org or on the [Work, Wellbeing and Productivity channel on Youtube](#)
- Check out our team's workplace wellbeing toolkit on the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing website](#)



THE GOOD JOBS PROJECT

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