



# Increasing Retention at Chick-Fil-A: An Analysis of Failed Retention within the Fast Food Industry

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Capstone Project

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*Acknowledgments, Gratitude, and Dedication*

*“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.” - Ephesians 3: 20 & 21*

I continually stand in awe at the goodness of God to not only save me and provide me with an eternal home in heaven through the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ but by also taking the desires of my heart and all of my dreams to then make them my reality. There was a time when simply graduating high school was the dream, so this moment at this school means the absolute world to me. Thank you, God for ordering my steps and seeing me through this journey.

To Daniel, my husband and my very best friend. Thank you for always believing in me and reminding me that I can do anything. Thank you for being willing to do whatever was needed to help me whether that was bringing food home, getting a babysitter, buying my favorite ice cream, or listening to me read pages and pages of papers while pretending to understand my points. You have been my rock, and you will forever be the best part of us.

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And lastly, to my son, Elisha Michael. I love you more with every single breath I take. Long before I ever laid eyes on you, I loved you and made decisions with your future in mind. It was important to me that you would be able to find love, support, and inspiration in your father and myself. I pray that as you grow and learn that you never once question what is possible or ever think that your dreams are too big. And if one of those moments arises where you find yourself asking those questions, I hope that you look at your mama and know that anything is possible. This project is dedicated to you because you are the embodiment of my dreams, and you are the “why” behind all that I am and all that I do. “Dr. Gresham” carries so much meaning, but my favorite title will forever be “Elisha’s mama.”



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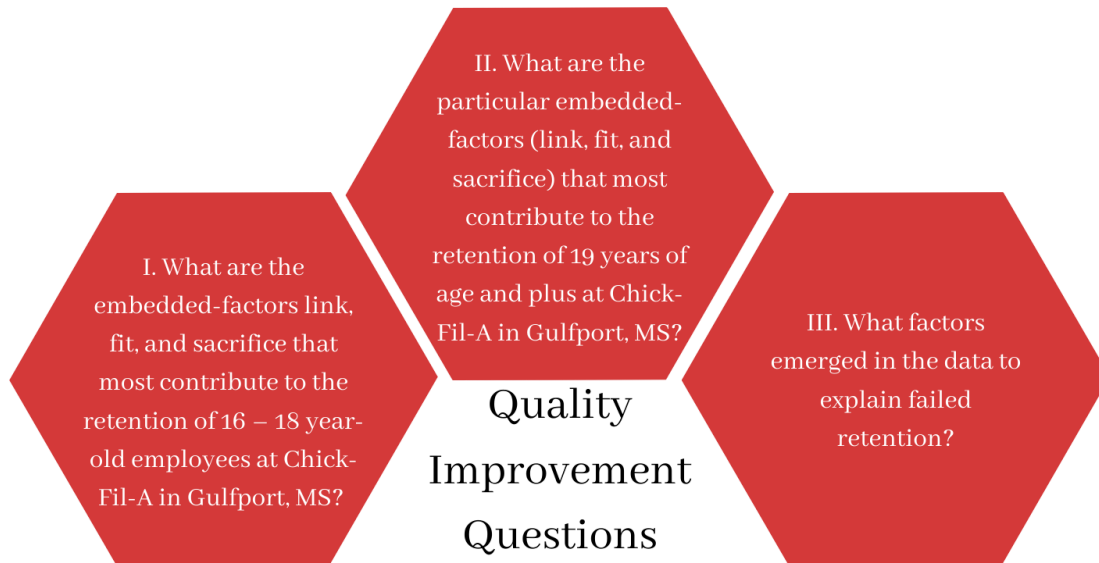
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## Executive Summary

### Aim

The leadership team aims to achieve a retention rate of about 70% within the next three years. The purpose of this project is to analyze retention and failed retention at this Chick-Fil-A in order to offer recommendations for proactive retention strategies.



### Findings

Finding #1: The particular embedded factors that most contribute to the retention of 16-18 year old employees are the personal connections made between employees on the job, gained financial independence, and transferable skills learned on the job.

Finding #2: The particular embedded factors that most contribute to the retention of employees who are 19+ in age is the family-like environment that provides holistic emotional and mental support while allowing them to gain professional skills and financial compensation.

Finding #3: As a reminder, failed retention is defined as any non-seasonal employee who either voluntarily resigned or was terminated. The issues that most contribute to failed retention are the negative societal views most associated with working fast food jobs and/or a desire to pursue a different career, which was apparent for both groups. However, trends that were specific to those 19+ in age were a lack of clear pathways to advancement, inconsistency in systems, and a desire for a better benefits package.

*Recommendations*

<b>16 - 18 year-olds</b>	<b>All Team Members</b>
<b>Retention</b>	<b>Training</b>
<p><b>Goal:</b> Retain 16-18 year-olds for two years.</p> <p><b>Recommendation:</b> Recruit and hire teenagers with a focus on high school juniors.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All team members need to engage in soft-skills training for how to communicate with colleagues. specifically in high intensity moments while also providing tips for conflict resolution.</li> <li>2. Provide specialized training for each director specific to their role.</li> </ol>
<b>19+ year olds</b>	<b>Accountability</b>
<p><b>Goal:</b> Retain 19+ year olds for a minimum of five years.</p> <p><b>Recommendation:</b> Create and display clear structure of advancement/promotions through the organization. Additionally, provide quarterly evaluations with actionable goals and benchmarks..</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish clarity surrounding role expectations, systems, and policies as well as a clear set of agreed upon steps for how to handle violations of policies.</li> <li>2. Assign a point person responsible for overseeing the implementation of the accountability system and the compilation and presentation of monthly reports.</li> </ol>
	<b>Benefits</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Create a benefits ladder that informs team members of the increased benefits for the longer they are retained (i.e. increased vacation time, etc.)</li> <li>2. Offer a 401k plan.</li> <li>3. Create and implement a transparent bonus structure with achievable benchmarks targeting focus areas/priorities of the owner/operator.</li> </ol>
	<b>Input</b>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Construct, administer, and review quarterly surveys from the staff to show a commitment to continuous improvement and to continue to lend ideas geared towards increasing retention.</li> </ol>

## **Introduction**

The Chick-Fil-A<sup>1</sup> free standing restaurant (FSR) located in Gulfport, MS has recently undergone major organizational and physical renovation with the intentions of increasing revenue and profit while simultaneously responding to customer service demands. The store received a complete remodel that almost doubled the size of the kitchen, refrigerator, store office, and dining area while also creating a double drive thru. The remodel began September 30, 2018 and the store reopened November 30, 2018.

This redesign, coupled with a leadership reorganization, has contributed to the current success the business is experiencing. This particular Chick-Fil-A store ended the 2019 year with 7.5 million in sales, which was about an 18% increase from the previous year. Nevertheless, there are new challenges. Because the physical space of the store has doubled in size, the number of staff members have drastically increased as well. According to the owner/store operator, this change in staffing has raised questions pertaining to staff culture, professional expectations, accountability, training & development, as well as the need for recruiting and retaining quality employees. With a quick service business that employs a large number of teenagers, the question is how can one create a system that provides quality training that protects the Chick-Fil-A brand while also retaining and investing in a mature, career minded leadership team who receive ongoing professional development and benefits that promote and reward longevity? My personal connection to this establishment as a former employee (Fall of 2011 – Spring of 2013) and as the spouse of a director in the organization, have allowed me to gain access to conduct this project and has opened the door for me to provide research and support to these questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this report, all references to Chick-Fil-A will be to discuss the Chick-Fil-A store located in Gulfport, MS. Whenever Chick-Fil-A is used to discuss the franchise as a whole, it will be noted as such; otherwise, it can be assumed that the phrase Chick-Fil-A is used to discuss this one particular store located in Gulfport, MS.

The Gulfport location had a significant turnover problem during the 2019 operating year. In this study, failed retention is defined as any non-seasonal employee who either voluntarily resigned or was terminated; all terminations must be approved by the store operator/owner. Retention is defined here (per the Human Resources Director) as any non-seasonal employee who works a minimum of two (2) days a week. The goal is to increase the retention of employees thus lowering the overall turnover rate.

The leadership team aims to achieve a retention<sup>2</sup> rate of about 70% within the next three years. The purpose of this project, therefore, is to analyze retention and failed retention at this Chick-Fil-A (CFA) in order to offer recommendations for proactive retention strategies.

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<sup>2</sup> In the 2019 operating year, the location retained about 40% of its staff where retention is defined as any employee who is actively working two or more days a week; this particular CFA capped their turnover rate at 100%, but in reality, the actual percentage number is much higher. The retention number is reflective of how many employees have remained on the job during the previous year (2018), which also includes employees who were hired before the year of 2018.

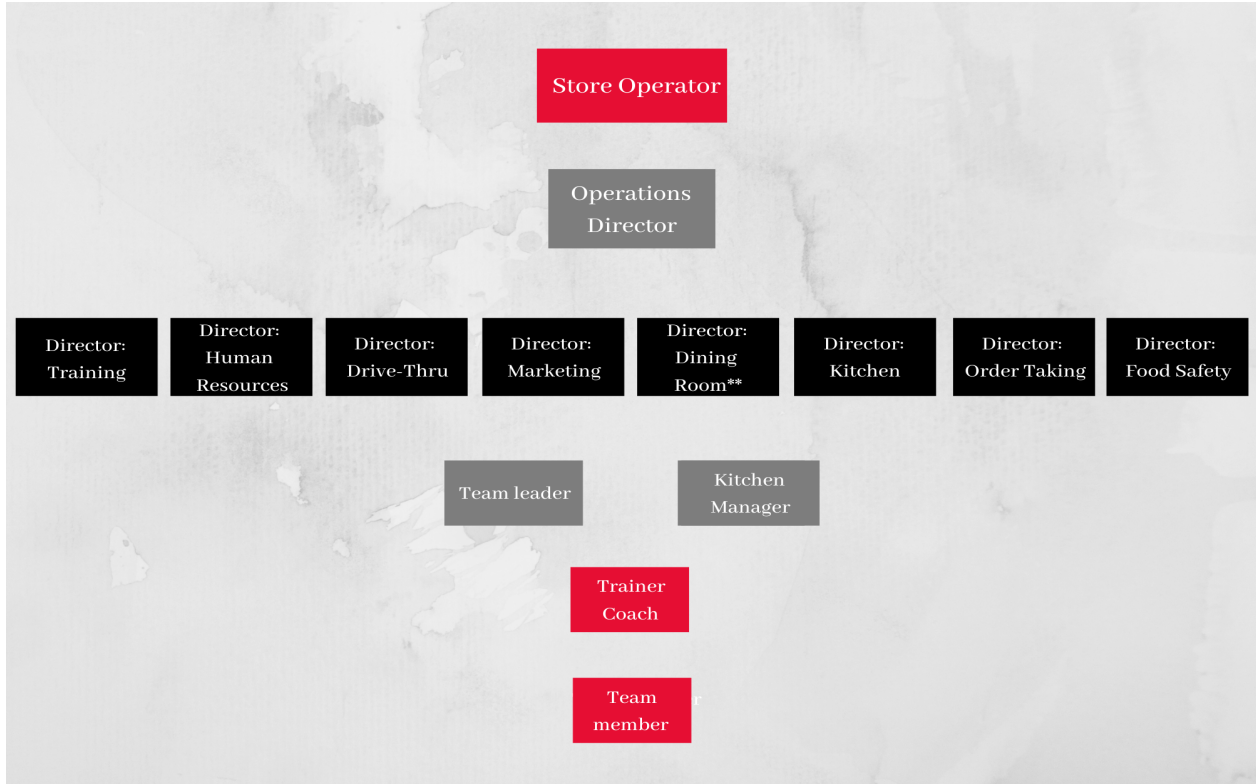
## **Organization Context**

Chick-Fil-A, as a corporation, is a quick service restaurant that prides itself on inventing the original Chick-Fil-A Chicken sandwich; the “A” in the brand name stands for “grade A quality” embodying the restaurant's commitment to its customers and the food they serve (Hendrix, 2015). They currently have more than 2,400 restaurants and are considered leading innovators of restaurant designs. According to Wagner (2015), their creative restaurants have placed them among design icons such as Apple, Ralph Lauren, and Lululemon. The owner/operator of the Gulfport, MS location believes that it is the store design coupled with the food quality and customer service that make the Chick-Fil-A brand what it is. This is also why he does not consider it to be a fast-food restaurant but rather a quick-service one.

They are committed to serving quality food and positive experiences to all members of the local community; this includes visits to dine in/out of the restaurant as well as community engagement events such as: Trunk-or-Treat, Daddy-Daughter date night, school spirit nights, etc. In addition to hosting free events to the public, the store also donates money, food, and time to local school districts and various organizations.

Chick-Fil-A currently employs workers ranging from 16 years of age to 58; however, there is no age cap. All employees would be impacted by the results of this project with the main stakeholders being the owner/operator and the store directors. The hierarchy of the store’s organizational positions are below.





The decisions from this project may potentially impact hiring and screening practices, training, and benefit package offerings.

## **Problem of Practice**

In 2019, Chick-Fil-A retained about 40% of their staff. However, the leadership team aims to achieve a retention rate of about 70% within the next three years. The purpose of this project, therefore, is to analyze retention and failed retention at this Chick-Fil-A in order to offer recommendations for proactive retention strategies.

A close review of the literature revealed that high turnover rates are a normed, although unwelcomed, reality of the fast food industry. Fast food restaurants such as McDonald's, Wendy's, Taco Bell, etc. all struggle with creating structures that could potentially lead to higher retention rates of employees, and while Chick-Fil-A has a much lower turnover rate than McDonald's, it is still incredibly high when one considers that over 50% of their employees leave the job each year.

Chick-Fil-A has attempted to increase its retention rates by offering more leadership positions, flexible scheduling for teenagers, discounted meals to all employees, as well as extending its benefits packages to all full-time employees (these benefits were previously only available to directors). While these changes have aided in increasing retention rates by about 8%, they have not led the team to meet its goal. And because this goal has not been met, Chick-Fil-A was happy to partner in the hopes of receiving targeted solutions to this issue.

This problem of practice is important because the owner/operator desires to save money from continuous training of new employees and redirect those funds to other avenues within the business; additionally, he would like to build stability within the brand and store culture by retaining more members of the team -- especially since he desires to get a second free-standing store. He would like for the first location to be in a stable, consistent place so that he can focus more of his energies into a new one.



If this problem is not addressed, it could prevent the store from meeting goals in all areas of the store ranging from financial, organizational, and operational. For example, the drive-thru team thrives on breaking records for the amount of cars they are able to serve during peak hours; when these goals are met, they are attached to incentives and rewards. It becomes harder to break records when new members are constantly being trained.

It appears the main root of the cause of the problem is that most people view the fast food (quick-service) industry as a transient one - one that is meant to be a stepping stone or temporary role until a “better” job becomes available. This view compacts the issue at hand, which also means that the leaders within the organization need to be proactive in order to combat the stereotypes. These mindsets will not easily go away, but they can be minimized with proper training and advancement opportunities.



## Literature Review

Retention has long been an issue within the fast food industry to the point where high turnover rates are simply expected, which costs the fast-food industry about \$10 billion per year (Dike, 2012). This issue is exasperated by the fact that the fast food industry is one of the world's most accessible employers thus making it easier for employees to move from organization to organization (Joung, 2015). In light of this issue, higher retention rates benefit all parties within an organization because increasing the tenure of employees creates the space for sales to increase coupled with cost reduction (Dienhart, 1992). Therefore, this also means that those in management positions should be aware of the factors that further contribute to turnover, such as a lack of flexible benefits, financial assistance with education, lack of incentives for performances, and individuals not receiving enough hours (Dienhart, 1992).

The fast food industry often pays entry-level employees minimum wage with little to no health or retirement benefits. However, financial compensation and promotion-based incentives have both been proven to impact the long-term career goals of employees while increasing the retention rates of the organization (Campell, 2008). These external factors act as motivators because job satisfaction is not proven to guarantee quality job performances and productivity as much as personal goals coupled with outside factors have been (Brayfield, 1955).

While providing fast food workers with advancement opportunities, one must keep in mind that increasing retention often involves additional resources, training, and development (Cloutier, et al, 2015). Simply informing employees of promotional opportunities, however, is not enough to make an impact in retention. Employees must be actively supported, coached, and trained along the way (Cloutier, et al, 2015). When the owner/operator of a store within a fast-food franchise prioritizes training and development at all levels, they must first begin with



establishing proficient communication processes that are inclusive of multiple forms of communication including intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and intercultural (Clotier, et al, 2015). Effective communication between employees and management, in particular, can aid in strengthening the operations of the business as well as the culture and relationships among the team members and leads to improving retention in fast-food (Coleman, 2018).

Poor management and leadership are a major contributor to failed retention within the fast food industry. When employees feel as though they are not respected or not provided with direct and transparent feedback, it often leads to them leaving the workplace in search of a new opportunity (Coleman, et al, 2018). Providing transparent feedback to employees gives them the space and clarity to set targeted goals for improvement - especially when employees believe they are able to add skills and knowledge to their roles, which also aid in retaining employees within the fast food industry (Dienhart, 1992).

Fast food restaurants often target teenaged and younger employees, but according to the literature, older employees are more likely to be retained than younger ones (Gosser, 2018). This is mainly due to older employees often being the primary wage earners for their household. As previously stated, hourly workers tend to be mostly motivated by extrinsic factors (pay, flexible hours) than they are by relationship factors (advancement opportunities, job satisfaction, organizational justice & prestige, and organizational commitment) (Gosser, 2018).

According to Mobley (1977), the two main causes of failed retention are a) the intention to search for another job and b) intention to leave a position. An employee's intention to seek employment elsewhere is often the first warning sign of what will soon be an addition to the failed retention rate of the organization. Because fast food jobs are so accessible, it often makes

it easier for an employee to contemplate leaving to work for another organization within the same industry. This mobility is not always a benefit for the employers because it often means they are having to spend more time and money on onboarding and training.

A study conducted by Darren Cross (2017) that included managers of fast-food restaurants who had the highest employee retention results in their district concluded the three main themes that most contribute to the retention of employees within the fast-food industry: organizational support, communication (in regards to constructive feedback and praise), and relevant training. Organizational support is important because it can influence employee satisfaction and retention simultaneously (Cross, 2017). This means that the employee must feel directly supported by the organization itself and not just by the management team at the local location. Better communication skills within the organization creates an environment that allows managers to better understand their employees as well as their goals and desires while also keeping employees informed of decisions and current information relevant to the business (Cross, 2017). Training is important because it provides role clarity and aids in developing employees' skills that are necessary for them to perform well in their role (Cross, 2017).

Although employee retention within the fast food industry is not a new issue, the literature described above suggests that a strategic focus in the areas of communication, training, and benefits can have a significant impact in improving retention.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001) examines the factors that influence employee retention, while also determining if these factors contribute to voluntary turnover. Additionally, its main focus is analyzing what causes people to stay employed with a company, which is fitting for this study because the focus is on current employees and not those whom the organization failed to retain (Cross, 2017). Mitchell describes job embeddedness as a net or a web in which an individual can become closely intertwined to that particular organization based on the multiple links that connect them to that job (Mitchell et al., 2001). The more embedded a person is, the more likely they will remain working for their organization (Mitchell et al, 2001). A better understanding of this theory could aid managers of fast-food companies in reducing the cost of employee turnover (Cross, 2017).

According to Mitchell (2001), the three most pertinent aspects of job embeddedness are: “(1) the extent to which people have links to other people or activities at/through the job, (2) the extent to which their jobs and communities are similar to or connect with the other aspects in their life spaces, and, (3) the ease with which links (personal or professional connections with other people, tangible benefits, etc.) can be broken—what they would give up if they left, especially if they had to physically move to other cities or homes” (Mitchell, et al., 2001).

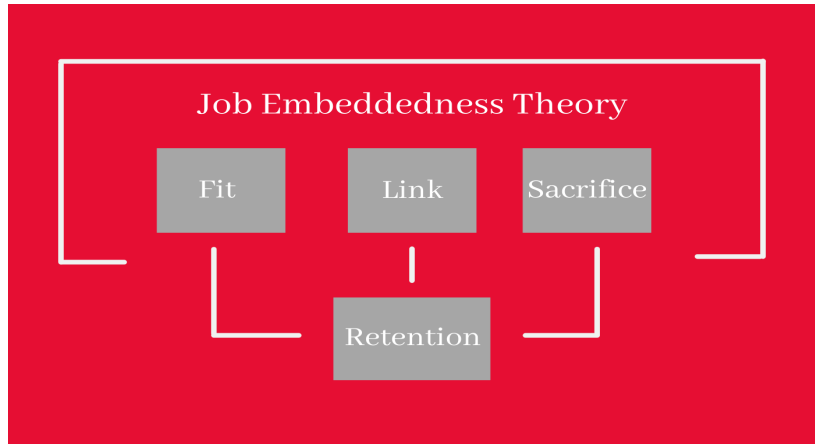
These three components, as labeled by Mitchell (2001), fit into three dimensions: links, fit, and sacrifice both on and off of the job.





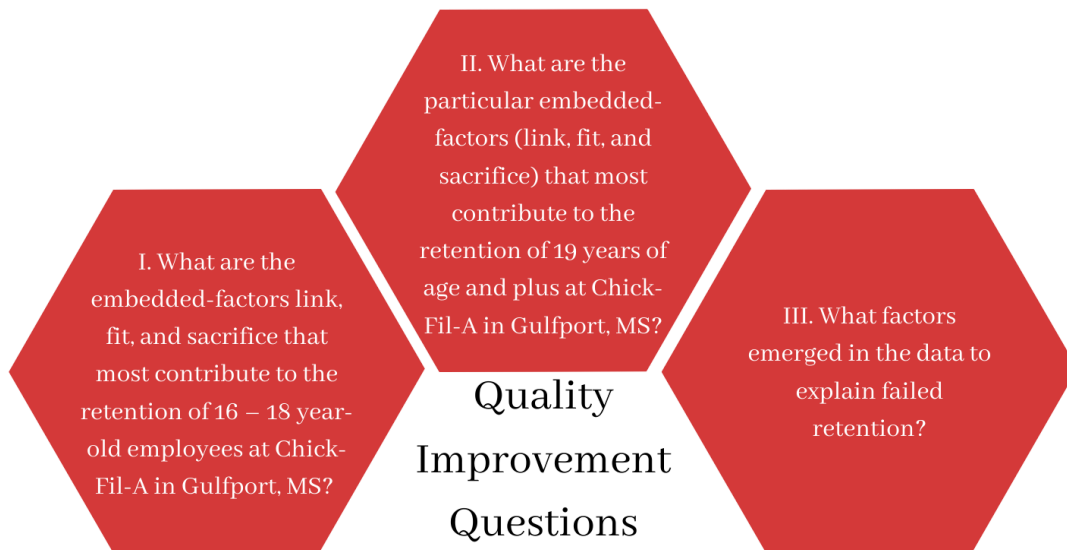
- *Links:* According to the embeddedness theory and the empirical study completed by Mitchell, et al (2001), “a number of strands (links) connect an employee and his or her family in a social, psychological, and financial web that includes work and nonwork friends, groups, and the community and the physical environment in which he or she lives.” Essentially, the more links/strands a person has between themselves and the “web,” the more likely he/she is to voluntarily choose to remain with their organization.
- *Fit:* Additionally, an employee's personal values, career goals, and plans for the future have to fit with the larger corporate culture and the demands of his or her immediate job in order for them to feel compelled to remain in that place of work.
- *Sacrifice:* These sacrifices include salary and benefit options as well as other potential sacrifices like job stability and advancement; this can also be viewed as “breaking a link.” In regards to retention, an individual is more likely to stay on the job if they conclude that what they would be sacrificing in leaving is greater than what they gain by joining a new organization.





A close examination of the embedded factors of Chick-Fil-A employees that contribute to their decision to remain with the organization can inform solutions and retention strategies that simultaneously decrease voluntary turnover while increasing retention.

Drawing on the relevant literature above, the organizational context, and the the frame of job-embeddedness, I developed the following questions to guide the investigation:



## **Data Collection Methods**

### *Survey*

The three questions that guide this study hinge on the data acquired from the first two questions and the investigations of job embeddedness factors, as articulated by 1) 16-18 year old employees and 2) team members aged 19 plus, respectively.

For data to inform the study's questions, I adapted a survey from Aon Consulting (2004) that focused on employees' experiences with the organization, conducted (8) interviews with director level leadership, and two focus groups - one with 16 - 18 year olds and another with individuals who were 19+ years in age. Chick-Fil-A has a database as well as social media pages that are used to output information to all team members. The organization allowed me to send information to team members via this list after I first attended one of their staff events to formally introduce myself and to explain the purpose of my research.

I began with a survey of all employees (n=100) to gain insight into the embedded factors that could potentially lead to failed retention. I adapted the survey from "Hiring Winning Crew" produced by Aon Consulting (2004) and adjusted the length to include the (12) questions I felt were more useful and relevant to my study; a full version of the survey can be found in the appendix. The reason I selected this survey was because it was one that was created and used in the fast food restaurant, McDonald's, and was also a part of a study that examined retention.

57% of employees (54 participants) responded to the link, which was posted on the work Facebook page as well as sent to employees' emails with a framing message. While I examined the data, I kept in mind that I was not able to present my request in person due to COVID-19 and had to rely on the short paragraph I attached to the survey as well as the support of the Human Resource Director to encourage employees to complete the survey. I considered this context

because I thought that the lack of a personal appeal might impact the amount of people who chose to complete the survey; however, I do not think it affected my analysis. The link was sent in a closed, private Facebook group and to confirmed emails based on official, Human Resources paperwork.

I administered the survey prior to the interviews and focus group meetings in order to allow for a “soft” exposure to employees regarding the research at hand, which essentially meant that it provided insight as to the types of questions I would potentially be asking them to expound upon in the interviews. Additionally, it also provided me with context to drive the conversations. A copy of the survey can be found in the appendix.

### *Focus Group 1 Design*

After the survey was completed, I gathered my first focus group of 16 - 18 year olds in order to gather data on their Chick-Fil-A work experience while building on trends identified from the survey. I used data gathered from the surveys to inform questions I asked in the focus group; for example, the survey indicated that almost 50% of the workers were in this aged group and that most participants did not intend to remain working for the organization. Therefore, I created questions directed towards finding out their reasons for leaving the organization as well as inquiring as to where they planned to work instead. The participants were selected by the Human Resource Director. The only instructions I provided her were to select candidates between the required age group and to diversify the group as much as possible in regards to race, gender, and experiences.

I designed the focus group protocol by adapting interview questions from Coleman, et al (2018). The Coleman, et al (2018) study explored failed retention in fast food restaurants with a particular focus on McDonald’s. Additionally, the study examined the current strategies used by

managers to increase retention as well as how those strategies are perceived by employees and thus lead to failed retention. The questions created for the interview were meant to act as a guide to gain more information aligned to the research question(s), and the structure of Coleman's (2018) interviews were "free flowing" and in a public place outside of each employee's place of work. I analyzed the questions and then used the ones that most aligned to my conceptual framework and cut out those that I deemed to be off-topic or irrelevant to supporting my three quality improvement questions. These questions then acted as a guide to the discussion, and I was able to add follow up questions in the moment based on responses from interviewees. The full focus group questions are in the appendix.

My protocol and interview design largely mirrored the steps outlined in Krueger's "Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews" (2002). I gave instructions to the Human Resources Director requesting a certain age group and criteria for diversity in terms of gender and race with a minimum of 6 people per group. Next, I selected a comfortable environment at the store so that employees would be able to conveniently meet with me while they were still on clock. This guaranteed that all employees would be present and would not lose any money or free, personal time by meeting with me. All participants were informed that the interview would be recorded and signed consent forms prior to the start of questioning. This then created the space for me to act as the moderator using my pre-scripted questions to later analyze and report (Krueger, 2002). I asked questions to elicit participants' descriptions of the relationships and connections they had with one another as well as to determine how their current role fit into their long-term plans. I was also able to inquire about the current sacrifices required of them in order to complete their assigned tasks/role.



For example, I asked about both the positive aspect of the job and those aspects that may drive them to resign, thus contributing to failed retention. This provided insight as to the structures, systems, and policies that either contributed to their retention or that may cause them to leave. Hearing what would cause them to leave the organization allowed me to then ask them what they would pursue if/when they were to seek employment outside of Chick-Fil-A.

*Focus Group Questions 16 – 18 years olds*

To gain insight into links, the first element of the job-embeddedness framework, I asked participants questions designed to elicit insight into the skills they have gained while working at Chick-Fil-A, the things they liked about their co-workers, and the benefits they receive from working with the organization. For example, I asked them what they liked about working at Chick-Fil-A and what skills they have learned since being on the job.

Next, I asked participants questions designed to elicit insight into how their current role fit into their short-term personal goals and plans as well as their short-term professional goals. These questions allowed me to analyze how their current role fit into their future plans. I asked them what their career goals were and how they thought Chick-Fil-A would aid them in reaching those goals.

Lastly, in order to gain insight into the impact their role has had on their mental, emotional, and physical health, I asked them questions regarding what sort of sacrifices, if any, have they had to make in order to fulfill their duties. In this particular case, this led to an in-depth discussion surrounding mental health topics, sleep deprivation, as well as relational and social sacrifices many of the teenagers felt were required in order for them to continue working with the organization. The full focus group protocol for those who were 16-18 years old can be found in the appendix.

### *Focus Group 2 Design*

I then turned attention to meeting with team members aged 19+, as directed by the second question. For question 2, I followed the same methods described above with the difference being that my second focus group consisted of team members aged 25 plus. Again, the participants were selected by the Human Resource Director; the only instructions I provided her were to select candidates between the age required group and to diversify the group as much as possible in regards to race, gender, and experiences.

### *Focus Group Questions 19+*

For the 19+ age group, I asked the same questions above in regards to link, fit, and sacrifice. However, one difference is that I also asked questions to find out what types of professional development had been the most beneficial to their work and what types of training they felt were still needed. I felt these questions were important to ask in order to determine if there was a particular training that could increase their likelihood of being retained. This led to a fairly pointed discussion regarding workplace communication - especially in regards to conflict resolution and communication between team members during peak hours of business.

### *Individual Interview Design*

I conducted independent interviews with every director because they are all 25 plus years of age and currently view Chick-Fil-A as a potential long-term career opportunity. I anticipated that these interviews could add an important perspective in addition to the focus groups and survey. The survey, focus groups, and individual interviews allowed me to forgo reviewing exit interview data and to instead focus on what current employees felt could potentially lead to their failed retention. For the individual interviews with the directors, I wanted to understand the factors that have contributed to them seeking leadership roles within the organization and what

has led to their continued retention, while also analyzing what factors could impact them making a life-long career out of Chick-Fil-A. I designed the interview protocols by adapting questions from the Colman, et al (2018) study and conducted them one-on-one and at the Chick-Fil-A office versus the Chick-Fil-store. These interview questions were different from the focus group in that there was a more intentional focus on potential retention strategies and training needs.

I conducted individual interviews with the directors who are all senior leadership members and above the age of 25 – including the owner/operator. These senior level members I interviewed included: a Training Director, Human Resources Director, Drive-thru Director, Kitchen Director, Marketing Director, Dining Room\*\*, Order Taking, Food Safety, and the Operations Director. This particular group of leaders are on career-tracked paths within the organization, which allowed me to gain more insight on the embedded factors that contribute to their retention in order to gain insight from their experience concerning potential gaps that could lead to failed retention amongst the two groups indicated by Quality Improvement Questions 1 and 2. I interviewed the owner/operator primarily to gain insight regarding the daily operations and his vision for the business including what he felt was going well and where there was room for improvement.

The first interview was the longest interview and taught me that I needed to provide more intentional framing to ease the nerves of the candidates and to better set up the time to gain insightful and useful information. I quickly realized that for some it was nerve-wracking to be interviewed by a Vanderbilt doctoral student while being unsure exactly what the person was looking for; this caused the candidate to feel like they had to give a “right” answer and often led to them sharing extra information beyond the scope of the question posed. Therefore, I learned to state the purpose of study, clarified that there was no right answer, gave an overview of the

topics, and to use body language that was encouraging and welcoming such as smiling, nodding my head, and giving direct eye contact.

Overall, I felt as though these individual interviews were a success. Interviewees responded to the questions thoughtfully and honestly while taking them seriously. I think it helped that there was no clear time constraint, so no one felt rushed. Plus, I provided an overview of the topics before diving into specific questions. I designed the protocol in a way where it was applicable to all candidates while allowing them to tailor their responses to their specific role.





## **Analysis Methods**

### *Survey Analysis*

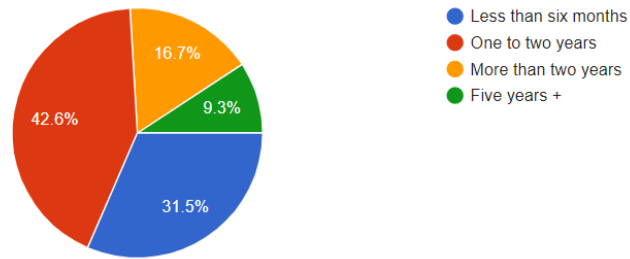
From the survey, I identified trends in relation to the job embeddedness theory (fit, link, and sacrifice) by categorizing the questions to the definition they were most aligned.

Additionally, I organized the results based on the focus group age groups, but the only significant difference was that majority of those who were aged 16 - 18 selected they only planned to work at Chick-Fil-A for 1-2 years, while majority of those who were 19+ selected that they planned to make a career out of Chick-Fil-A or were unsure how long they would stay with the organization.

The survey responses provided me with a preliminary context regarding employees' views of fit, sacrifice, and link working at Chick-Fil-A with 49% of respondents being between the ages of 16-18 and the remaining 51% being 19 years of age or older. For example, the survey revealed that approximately 74.1% of employees have been working at Chick-Fil-A for two years or less, which cemented the questions I had planned to ask regarding fit. Additionally, this number aligns with the high turnover rates found in the literature and supports the assumptions regarding failed retention from the early interview(s) with the owner/operator and Human Resource Director. Furthermore, this information also cemented my decision to conduct two focus groups with the intent of finding the reasons why most employees do not stay beyond a two (2) year timeframe.

2. How long have you worked in your current job?

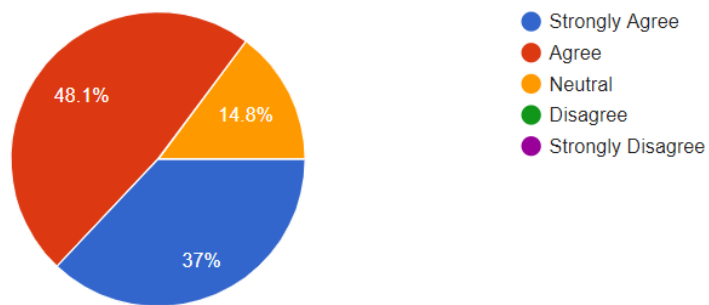
54 responses



There was not a single person who indicated they were dissatisfied with their job at Chick-Fil-A, which complicated the “fit” category because job dissatisfaction due to a toxic work environment/culture did not appear to be what was contributing to the high levels of failed retention. This drove me to question why most employees did not continue to work for Chick-Fil-A if they were in fact satisfied with their job. This preliminary finding led me to create a series of interview questions designed to elicit responses as to what was driving employees to seek work elsewhere even though they were satisfied with their work environment.

4. I am very satisfied with my job.

54 responses

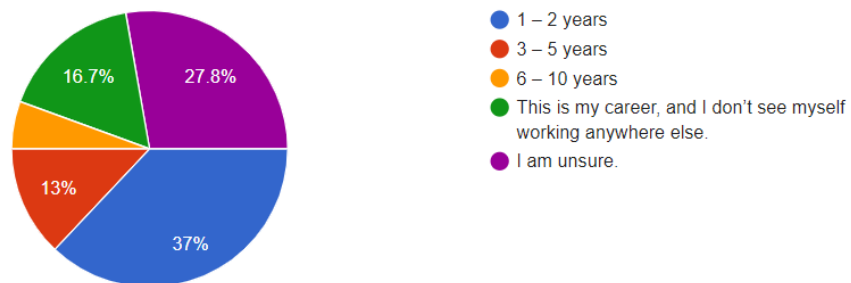


There was no clear majority in question five (5). Most team members indicated that they only planned to work at Chick-Fil-A for 1-2 years or were unsure exactly how long they intended to remain with the organization. Nevertheless, 22.2% of employees planned to continue working here for at least 6 years or more. This led me to believe that the interviews and focus groups

could provide a rationale as to why employees were satisfied with their work yet did not see themselves working at either this store or with the organization as a whole long-term. Drawing on this data, I designed interview questions that elicited career goals aligned to the fit category to focus more on where employees were headed rather than what they were leaving (Chick-Fil-A). For example, I asked them what they would be sacrificing and/or gaining by seeking employment elsewhere.

5. How long do you plan to continue working here?

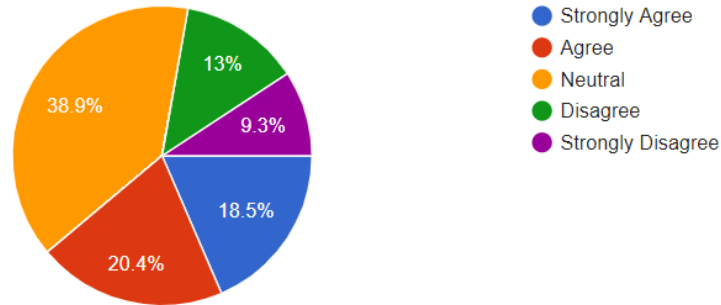
54 responses



When asked if Chick-Fil-A fit into employees' long-term career goals, the majority of participants (61.2% with 57% of those responses being from those aged 16-18) either provided a neutral response or (strongly) disagreed. This led me to believe that most of my interview participants had no intention of remaining with the organization, so I knew I needed to be intentional with my questioning to find out why. Because of this, I decided to lead with general questions to then transition to more direct ones. For example, I moved beyond asking employees whether or not they would leave the organization to asking them what field they would be going into and why.

7. Working for Chick-Fil-A fits into my long-term career goals.

54 responses



*Interviews & Focus Groups:*

Using the transcripts from individual and group interviews, I analyzed the data by identifying trends in relation to the job embeddedness theory (fit, link, and sacrifice) rooted in career goals, professional and personal benefits, and the potential losses if one were to leave the job. My first pass at the transcript was primarily intended to clean the transcript, but it also served as an opportunity to review the interviews and create initial memos about their relevance to the job embedded theory I mentioned above. I then took a second pass at the interview data intending to explicitly identify relevant themes present in responses. That is to say, I deductively coded the interview transcripts for themes that aligned with the overarching constructs of link, fit, and sacrifice (Kruger, 2002).

**Time-Table of Data Collection**

Survey	May 2020
Interviews	June & July 2020
Focus Groups	August 2020

First, I coded transcript data as a link when participants described any formal or informal connection between a person, other people, and/or institution. For example, any time a

participant spoke to a work relationship/friendship as to why they chose to remain working for the store, I coded it as a link. The codebook can be found in the appendix above the data coding results overview.

Next, I coded transcript data as fit when participants described their comfort level or compatibility with working within the organization and in the actual day-to-day environment. For example, any time an employee mentioned their career goals or passions that would lead to them leaving the organization, I coded it as fit.

Lastly, I coded transcript data as sacrifice when participants described what they would lose, whether physical, psychological, or emotional if they were to discontinue working for the Chick-Fil-A. For example, whenever a person spoke of a fear of losing a friendship, financial stability, or energy/sleep, I coded it as a sacrifice. Additionally, this category also included what team members described as current sacrifices required in order for them to fulfill their job duties.

In some cases, I found participant descriptions relevant to my research questions but not necessarily congruent to the three themes noted above. In those cases, I coded as “other” and returned later to determine whether I should adjust the codes, add a situated coding category, or view these as one-offs that did not require attention in this investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). For example, there were non-examples that candidates mentioned from previous work experiences that were good context for the interviews but not relevant to analyzing the current Chick-Fil-A work environment. Early in the process, I tested all of the codes I used by coding with a peer reviewer to check for reliability and then memoed revisions to my code definitions and examples. Finally, after each pass at the data, I wrote analytic memos to record the challenges I faced in coding, the decisions I made, and captured preliminary findings related to the research questions.



Through the inductive coding process, there were several inductive themes that I recognized; those that were repeated at least three (3) times are included in the above “other” figure. They were mostly related to participant descriptions of a lack of accountability, lack of relevant training, lack of benefits, and certain mindsets surrounding working in fast food as a career.

Quality Improvement Questions	Data Addressed QIQ	Data Analysis Approach
<p>QI1. What are the particular embedded-factors (link, fit, and sacrifice) that most contribute to the retention of 16 - 18-year-old employees?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys of 16-year-old employees</li> <li>• Focus groups with 16 - 18-year-old employees (8 participants)</li> </ul>	<p>The survey and focus group data was categorized using deductive coding based on the job embedded ness theory.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link</li> <li>• Fit</li> <li>• Sacrifice</li> </ul> <p>Each response was analyzed to determine if it aligned with career goals (link), professional or personal benefits (fit), or potential losses (sacrifices).</p>
<p>QI2. What are the particular embedded-factors (link, fit, and sacrifice) that most contribute to the retention of 19 years of age and plus?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys of 19-year-old employees</li> <li>• Focus groups with 19+ employees who are not director (8 participants)</li> <li>• Individual interviews with each director (6 participants)</li> </ul>	<p>The survey and focus group data was categorized using deductive coding based on the job embedded ness theory.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Link</li> <li>• Fit</li> <li>• Sacrifice</li> </ul> <p>Each response was analyzed to determine if it aligned with career goals (link), professional or personal benefits (fit), or potential losses (sacrifices).</p>
<p>QI3. What factors emerged in the data to explain failed retention?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys (54 participants), Interviewed (6 participants), and engaged in the focus groups (16 participants)</li> </ul>	<p>Once the survey and focus group responses were coded deductibly, I was able to identify and compare and contrast trends between the two groups. I used the responses from these various conversations to propose recommendations.</p>

## **Findings**

### *Findings in Relation to Quality Improvement Questions*

**Finding #1:** The particular embedded factors that most contribute to the retention of 16-18 year old employees are the personal connections made between employees on the job, financial independence attained through employment, and transferable skills learned on the job.

The links within the workplace play a key role in the retention of those team members between the ages of 16 - 18 years old. Many noted they have made several close friendships and even romantic connections while working at Chick-Fil-A. These relationships cultivate an environment that allows for employees to have fun while also working. When one employee spoke of the workplace relationships with coworkers, they stated, “They are not just my coworkers. They are legitimately my friends. We like to hang out outside of work; it’s more than just like a co-worker connection.”

Team members and those on the leadership team expressed that the family-like environment is one of the strongest links tying them to the work and is oftentimes what most contributes to their retention. Employees mentioned multiple team building events (such as crawfish boils, Christmas parties, etc.) as well as spur of the moment activities like going to Waffle House to enjoy a late night meal after closing up the store that allow for them to cultivate friendships. These various activities, such as the summer water park day and crawfish boils, movie nights, the various Christmas activities and annual parties, etc. coupled with the emotional support individuals often experience is what makes the culture and bond of the employees at Chick-Fil-A so strong.

Meaningful relationships were a consistent trend in each interview. For example, when asked to describe the Chick-Fil-A work environment, one of the interviewees reported that it is a



“caring, family environment. It definitely makes you want to stay. I’m spoiled here.” The informal connections made on the job have led to many employees gaining friendships and even romantic relationships thus cementing their connection to the job, the brand, the operator, and the employees.

Team members in the 16-18 year old group viewed their current role at Chick-Fil-A as a temporary but helpful one. Essentially, while none of them currently have plans to make a career out of Chick-Fil-A, they all expressed ways in which this job has made them more independent, financially free, and allowed them to learn skills they believe will be transferable both in life and in their future career endeavors.

For example, one high school student explained what they have learned while on the job, “I guess I really like that they prioritize teaching as more than just working at a fast-food restaurant. They like to teach us just how to be polite to people and how to connect with people. That not only helps you in fast-food but like with any job because they teach you really good customer service, and I like that.”

Chick-Fil-A is providing high school aged students with transferable skills that go beyond the scope of the curriculum they are receiving at school. Working allows them to gain real-world experience that is often not provided within their traditional educational hours.

Another high school student elaborated on the benefits of working for Chick-Fil-A, “One of my short term goals is to graduate and go to college, and I feel like working here has helped me like as far as being on my own. I was kind of dependent on my parents to do stuff for me, but now that I work and have my own money, they make me do more stuff on my own. Plus, in college, I’ll have to like communicate with a lot more people and be

more personable, and I feel like working here and interacting with customers helps prepare me for that.”

This student highlighted how Chick-Fil-A also better prepares students for college due to the gained soft skills. These examples are representative of how Chick-Fil-A has cultivated an environment that allows those who are aged 16-18 to begin the transition into adulthood because working here allows them to begin to gain an insight into the type of independence to come.

Although most interviewees noted at least some sacrifices that came with working with Chick-Fil-A, all of the individuals were high school students and felt as though they “have to sacrifice [their] social life because of the money [they are] making.” They also mentioned having to sacrifice family events, time for studying, and sleep/decreased energy. One employee noted that they really value family but sometimes have to “miss out on other stuff like hanging out with [their] friends or sleep if [they] can’t get a shift covered.” However, every interviewee unequivocally stated that they agreed that these sacrifices were worth it for the financial gain and skills learned, which contributed to their decision to continue to work. Essentially, each employee in the 16-18 age range viewed the short-term sacrifices as “worth it” when considering the potential long-term gains.

**Finding #2:** The particular embedded factors that most contribute to the retention of employees who are 19+ in age is the family-like environment that provides holistic emotional and mental support while allowing them to gain professional skills and financial compensation.

The personal link of friends made on the job coupled with the family environment contribute to the retention of those who are 19+ years in age. Employees in this group expressed that they are able to bring their personal problems into work while receiving comfort and support from coworkers, a factor that they pointed to in why they continue to work at Chick-Fil-A.

Several employees went into further detail to explain that Chick-Fil-A is the sort of work environment that does not require employees to leave their personal matters and feelings at the door.

For example, an employee noted that “it’s definitely [...] a family environment.

Everybody knows each other so well because we work together so well that if one of us is having an off day, we can be like, ‘Hey, what’s up? Are you okay?’ And we can trust that conversation is going to help us for the rest of the day because you can get what you need to get out and talk it through [then get back to work].”

This particular quote is representative of comments that were made multiple times and acts as evidence that this store location has cultivated a culture where employees are encouraged to go to leadership about any issues that may impact work or their personal mental health. The family-like environment also allows them to have fun on the job and aids in cultivating personal pride in the brand since they believe “it is not like other fast food restaurants.”

Additionally, employees feel very passionate about protecting the Chick-Fil-A brand of service and take personal pride in maintaining this connection to the business. These feelings contribute to their “fit” and place within the organization and drive them to work “hard to keep the reputation of Chick-Fil-A good,” especially since the team members are “really passionate about this place.” For example, Chick-Fil-A is known for having a quick moving drive-thru, and employees take personal pride in ensuring their work maintains this bar of success when serving customers. Because Chick-Fil-A has been very intentional about branding, employees are clearly aligned regarding the expectations and reputation of the store. This allows them to have a cohesive vision for the type of service to provide while having a personal stake in upholding that brand.

In regards to fit, employees reported that they have learned skills they think will be transferable to another role, which they cited as another reason they continued to remain on the job. This means that Chick-Fil-A fits into their long-term goals because it is actively better preparing them for other positions. For example, one employee noted:

“I think one of the benefits of working at Chick-Fil-A is learning how to just be nice to people like even if someone like a customer is being irate with an attitude. You can still learn how to control yourself and be kind in return, and that’s a good trait to learn for whenever you go off to another career.”

This employee’s comment focused on the external and verbal, customer service skills gained while another focused on the internal traits gained on the job.

This particular employee felt that working with Chick-Fil-A aided in shaping who they are as a person. They stated,

“I’ve become more open and confident with myself since working here, and that’s something I still want to have in the future with my future job and interview. I was so nervous because it was my first interview, but I know that one day when I have a different job interview, I’m not going to be nervous at all. I’m going to be very confident with myself and who I am. Those are qualities I’ve gained here.”

Chick-Fil-A’s current training and work environment provides its employees with knowledge and skills gained that would also be beneficial to an employee should they choose to enter into a new field.

Similar to the 16-18 years of age group, the 19+ focus group noted that there have been sacrifices to their social life but brought in a new awareness to the impact on mental health, college plans, and study time; however, they all also agreed that the short-term sacrifices are

worth it for the financial gain and their long-term goals.

**Finding #3:** The third research question intended to explore factors that emerged in the data to explain failed retention. As a reminder, failed retention is defined as any non-seasonal employee who either voluntarily resigned or was terminated. The issues that most contribute to failed retention are the negative societal views most associated with working fast food jobs and/or a desire to pursue a different career, which was apparent for both groups investigated in this study. Certain trends were specific to those 19+ in age including a lack of clear pathways to advancement, inconsistency in consequence systems, and a desire for a better benefits package.

First, employees referenced both the positive and negative aspects of close, personal links with peers on the job. Currently, several employees also feel that personal relationships with coworkers often create fear when considering advancement opportunities; additionally, there is also a fear of potential setbacks to culture if friendships or relationships sever. For example, one employee believed that “if [they] got promoted to a team leader, [their] personal life with team members wouldn’t be the same anymore.” The family culture and connections sometimes hinder staff’s abilities to separate the business from the personal while holding team members accountable. This led one employee to state:

“I think I could do better at separating my work and my friends. It’s hard when you make friends as a team member and then get promoted. It’s kind of scary because you’re thinking they’re your friends and you don’t want to tell them what to do.”

The transition from peer to supervisor has the potential to cause tensions between employees. These personal links also lead to times when conflicts within the personal relationships carry into the work environment further creating tensions and “work drama.” It is worth noting that this concern was only elevated in the 19+ age group. There are many benefits to the family

environment found among the interactions of the employees at Chick-Fil-A, but it can also be a hindrance to work relationships because those personal connections sometimes hold employees back from correcting their peers or from pursuing leadership roles due to team members not wanting to be the boss/manager of their peers.

Second, working at a fast food restaurant does not fit into the long-term goals of many of the employees due to other passions, goals, and interests that are compacted by negative societal views of fast food jobs. This was most discussed in the 16-18 year old group. One employee drew a distinction by saying, “It’s nothing against Chick-Fil-A. I just don’t want to be in fast food. I have other goals.” For this employee, they value the company but have no desire to make a career out of a fast food job. Another employee added to the conversation, “This is the best option for fast food, but I don’t want to be in fast food forever. I will always respect Chick-Fil-A and thank them for what they’ve done, but I will eventually find another job with what I want to do as a career.” Chick-Fil-A is a respectable brand, but those within the 16-18 year old aged group view it as a launching pad preparing them to pursue their actual career goals.

For those who do plan to make a career out of Chick-Fil-A, they desire clear bonus structures, specialized and relevant training, and benefits such as paid-time-off, healthcare, and retirement. The lack of some of those offerings could lead to them seeking employment elsewhere. These were all topics discussed within the 19+ age group and individual interviews with directors.

For example, one employee presented the need for expanded benefits and clear bonus structures adding, “It would be nice to have more paid vacation time.” This discussion then transitioned into more long-term offerings that would make staying at Chick-Fil-A more appealing. When thinking of other benefits employees would like to see offered, one employee

stated, “I would like to see a 401k offered. I work really, really hard, but I’m scared at some point, I won’t be able to work this hard. I want some kind of retirement for me when I’m like 60 and can’t do certain jobs here. Retirement would keep me working here longer.” For those who plan to make a career out of Chick-Fil-A, they elevated a need for more long-term benefits, such as a retirement plan. This was coupled with the benefit of additional paid-time-off and clarity surrounding promotions. Employees enjoy the work and the environment but are not always clear as to the steps they can take to advance within the organization.

For those who have been able to advance, employees described a need for specialized training. Some employees “would really like to be trained on skills specific to [their] job with the store [because] there really isn’t training offered to [them] for how to grow and improve.” And when employees are promoted, they need to “have the right training” because some felt as though they had not been properly prepared to step into leadership and were stuck in a certain role in the organization. While there are advancement opportunities within the store, there is not specified and ongoing training to continue to support and develop employees within their promoted role.

Finally, sacrifice connected to work schedules is a contributing factor of failed retention for those who are 19+. Many employees do not view Chick-Fil-A as a sustainable environment with hours suitable for raising a family and having a work/life balance. For example, one participant stated,

“I want to have kids when I turn 24 or 25 and be married, and I look at the directors who work like 50 hours a week and stay here until like 11 or 12 at night. I don’t want to come home at 11:00 or 12:00 to like my kids asleep. I want like a 9-5 and to just come home and be with my family. Plus, this job can be very stressful and gets people down. I don’t

want to get down about a fast food job. It sucks, but I just want a regular kind of life.”

This participant does not plan to make a career out of Chick-Fil-A because they do not view the hours as sustainable.

One of the themes that emerged under the “fit” category that could also contribute to attrition is an apparent frustration with the lack of consistently implemented policies and procedures regarding call-ins, promotions, bonuses, write-ups, feedback, etc. The lack of clarity surrounding these issues often led to frustration between employees and management while having the potential to erode the positive, family-like environment of Chick-Fil-A. These inconsistencies exist both when delivering consequences or when rewarding an employee for meeting/exceeding expectations.

To help ease the frustrations regarding promotions, one employee believes transparency to be the solution and that those in leadership could be more “open about who’s coming to work. Who has been hired. What positions we’re looking for so that people don’t feel threatened.” Currently, there does not seem to be consistent transparency regarding who receives a promotion or even what roles are available. For those who are seeking to be promoted, there is more support needed to provide them with clarity and feedback as to how on track they are to advance within the organization. One participant believed this issue could be resolved through consistently doing reviews but that they are currently “kind of hit and miss on that and people don’t know where they stand or when they’ll get a raise.”

And for those employees who do receive their reviews consistently and raises (which was found to be mostly those who reach director status), they still desire ongoing goal tracking and incentives. For example, they would “like to see a better bonus structure. Like, hey, if you hit this goal, you get this. If we could just have it structured so that we can have set goals to meet, I think



that would be easier and a better benefit would be the vacation time package.” This type of clarity could potentially boost employee buy-in while supporting the goals of both the owner/operator and the Chick-Fil-A brand as a corporation.

There also appears to be “a lot of inconsistencies with the way situations are handled. It’s like the consequence changes depending on who the person is.” This issue leads to employees feeling as though “things are wishy-washy. Rules change. A lot.” Based on my observations, the lack of clarity surrounding expectation with dependable, expected ways in which breaches in culture/expectations are handled leads to an erosion of culture and trust.

Lastly, a persistent issue mentioned was problems with communication, especially when considering how employees should speak to one another, voice ideas, and address issues. When asked what they thought to be one of the needs of the team, an employee stated, “Communication. We all need that training. Some of us are too rough. Some of us are too soft. Some of us don’t like confrontation and just avoid hard topics with employees. We all need to learn how to have those hard conversations.”

#### *Limitations of this Investigation*

The limitations involved with utilizing my findings are first that the focus groups participants were pre-selected by the Human Resource Director instead of being selected at random. This could have potentially created a bias by allowing the HR Director to select candidates who may have been deemed as the best representatives and employees of the store, which could also mean they were potentially the happiest with their work. This could have led to a lack of a diversity of experience from the employee with working at this particular Chick-Fil-A store.

**Recommendations***Retention (16-18 year-olds)*

At present, the leadership team's retention goal for the 16-18 year-old age group is a minimum of two years per employee. With this goal in mind, I recommend that Chick-Fil-A focus its recruitment efforts on hiring more high schoolers in their junior year while beginning the recruitment process even earlier; this earlier recruitment could lead to an increase in retention due being able to hire workers who do not plan to have major career or academic transitions until post high school graduation. Majority of the 17-18 year olds who spoke about transitioning from their current employment was due to the pursuit of college and other career goals post high school graduation -- not a dissatisfaction with working at the organization. The findings revealed that many of the high schoolers planned to continue working at Chick-Fil-A so long as they were in high school while also implying they wish they had started working there sooner in order to save more money for college and to finance their senior year. Some fast food organizations, such as Taco Bell and McDonald's, offer high school students scholarship money towards college if they commit to working with the organization for a certain period of time, but I am not aware of a similar offering with Chick-Fil-A.

*Retention (19+ year-olds)*

A consistent theme that emerged from the interviews and focus groups was the lack of transparency in various systems within the store's operations and organizational structures, which are factors that contribute to failed retention. Although team members are aware of the different titles and positions within the leadership team, they are not as clear as to the steps they would need to take in order to work towards and achieve the status of a promotion. Chick-Fil-A, therefore, should create and visibly display (both in the Chick-Fil-A office and in the employee

break room spaces) a detailed structure of advancement/promotion opportunities within the organization; this should also be coupled with quarterly evaluations with actionable goals and benchmarks because team members often expressed a lack of a clarity as to whether or not they are on track to receive a promotion. The description of advancement opportunities should be supported with the implementation of consistent evaluations in order to allow for feedback to be both given and received while also providing space for team members to ask questions in a mentoring and supportive environment.

*Recommendations that can Impact All Team Member Retention*

- ❖ Because the literature shows that communication among team members often contributes to failed retention (Clotier, et al, 2015)., it is my recommendation that the owner/operator bring in a third party consultant to provide intensive soft skills (interpersonal) training for directors with a specialized training for the Training Director to equip her to support the development of sustainable relationships that promote retention. The goal would be to relieve on-the-job tensions and frustrations between the family-like environment and the need for high expectations and feedback. Employees at all levels in both the focus groups and individual interviews expressed an interest and need for soft skills training.

Chick-Fil-A team members often receive intense trainings on how they are expected to speak and communicate with customers verbally and non-verbally while providing second-mile<sup>3</sup> service. However, they do not receive the same sort of training and ongoing coaching in regards to how to communicate with fellow team members -- especially with conflict resolution. This lack of soft skill training could lead to an increase in failed retention.

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<sup>3</sup> Second mile service is a term Chick-Fil-A uses to mean that employees should be doing above and beyond to service customers. This inspiration is taken from the Bible verse Matthew 5:41.

- ❖ Given that employees regularly brought up the need for additional training, it is my recommendation that specialized and relevant training be provided for each director based on their role, needs, and gaps. A 1-on-1 meeting between the owner/operator and each director would lend context for each need. For example, the Marketing Director would benefit from social media and advertisement training - skills that are specific to her role. This is important because it will allow the owner/operator to cultivate a work environment keen on developing and retaining directors.
  
- ❖ Because a central factor in failed retention is a lack of consistency in work expectations, there is a need for clarity surrounding role expectations, systems, and policies as well as a clear set of agreed upon steps for how to handle violations of policies. It is my recommendation that the owner/operator meet with the directors to analyze and review current store policies regarding attendance, call-ins, etc. and discuss ways in which the team could present a united front and consistently implement steps that address violations. The lack of consistency surrounding work expectations and the issuing of consequences affords the owner/operator with the opportunity to choose a point person who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of the accountability system(s). This person should also be provided with clear benchmarks and expectations for reporting monthly updates to the owner/operator and leadership team while managing both clear expectations and consistent responses rooting in continuing to value meaningful relationships between management and employees. Additionally, these reports should encompass breakdowns of the offenses for that month as well as the response with verified follow-up by the director who issued the consequence. If you do not clearly articulate policies and consistently follow through on consequences, it

threatens the best of what you are doing and what has allowed Chick-Fil-A to build the brand and reputation it has. This will also aid in increased retention and clarity of role expectations.

- ❖ When considering the suggestions that emerged the most from the individual interviews with the leadership team regarding what they felt would guarantee them being retained by Chick-Fil-A, benefits and incentives were elevated the most. Directors and those with the 19+ age group expressed concerns over desiring long-term benefits they could enjoy as they aged while continuing to work at the store and for the owner/operator. Based on these revelations, I am recommending the creation of a benefits ladder that informs team members of the increased benefits for the longer they are retained (i.e. increased vacation time, etc.) This ladder should be broken down into what is earned based on the years of working at the store; this would allow for employees to clearly know what to expect and when as they set their own goals and plans for the future. Next, the owner/operator should consider offering a 401k plan to encourage employees to view Chick-Fil-A as a lifelong career option. The owner/operator will incur new financial costs due to increased benefits offerings and should utilize the Human Resource Director as well as resources from the corporate office for the best choice for 401k plans and bonus structures. Lastly, employees are currently offered short-term incentives in the form of bonuses; however, there is no transparent bonus structure with outlined benchmarks that target focus areas and/or priorities of the owner/operator. Therefore, my last recommendation under this point is the creation and implementation of a transparent bonus structure with achievable benchmarks that also allow for directors to self-monitor their progress. This will aid in allowing directors to have a long-term stake in the organization.

- ❖ It is my final recommendation that Chick-Fil-A construct, administer, and review quarterly surveys from the staff to show a commitment to continuous improvement and to continue to lend ideas geared towards increasing retention. If employees are surveyed, it would provide the leadership team with ongoing opportunities to assess and improve the store operations. This survey should include multiple choice questions and short responses/comment boxes to allow team members to elaborate as they see fit. Additionally, this type of ongoing feedback and review coupled with the findings from this project could lead to the Chick-Fil-A in Gulfport, MS being a leader and model within the organization and fast food industry regarding retention rates.

These recommendations align with the vision and goals of the organization as well as provide support for policies that are already loosely in place but lack transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the literature also revealed that extrinsic factors are needed in order to both motivate and retain employees (Gosser, et al, 2018). These extrinsic factors will encourage and reward those who are meeting and exceeding expectations while providing support systems and an opportunity for feedback for those who are not.



## **Conclusions**

This project was conducted in order to provide the Chick-Fil-A Gulfport, MS location with strategies to use in order to increase their retention rates. Through the findings, it became evident that there was not a single employee who expressed dissatisfaction with their job. Even when they noted that they did have tough work days from time to time, they still claimed to feel connected to the store, the brand, and to the people they work alongside. It is evident that the culture of the organization plays a major role in retaining employees since they enjoy the work and feel as though they are a part of a family environment.

This family environment is what most contributes to the retention of 16-18 year old employees due to the personal connections made between employees on the job, gained financial independence, and transferable skills learned on the job. It also allows those employees who are 19+ in age to experience holistic emotional and mental support while gaining professional skills and financial compensation. Despite these factors that positively contribute to retention, failed retention is a very real issue within the fast food industry and Chick-Fil-A mostly due to the negative societal views associated with working fast food jobs and/or a desire to pursue a different career. These issues are compounded by a lack of clear pathways to advancement, inconsistency in systems, and desires for a better benefits package.

I also think the leadership at Chick-Fil-A Gulfport, MS can learn from this project that the changes they are seeking to better themselves can be found by continuing to work and collaborate with their fellow team members - especially when considering that all recommendations came from a collective gathering of team members' opinions and experiences. This solidifies that the store is in a great place and has the right people on the team to move it forward. Now, they simply need to take the next steps to implement the recommendations in

order to better the collective and to push the store to higher levels of achievement.





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## **Appendix**

### *Chick-Fil-A Individual Director Interview Questions*

#### **Fit**

Describe some things that your supervisor does well to keep you on the job?

Please describe the opportunities for advancement.

What are some positive aspects of your job?

What bothers you the most about your job?

Has the way any supervisor treats you been a factor in considering leaving or staying on this job?

What are the chances that you will remain in the profession but leave the organization? Explain.

#### **Sacrifice**

Describe some things that your supervisor does not do well that could lead to you leaving?

What parts of your job bother you to the point you would quit?

Have you worked another fast food job before this one? If so, when you left is there anything that the company could have offered that would have convinced you to stay?

What did you lose by leaving that job?

What would you lose by leaving this job?

#### **Link**

What are the three rewards or perks that you currently have that persuade you to remain with the organization?

What incentives or rewards would you like to see?

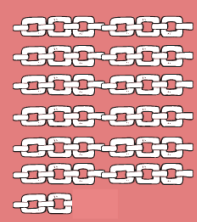
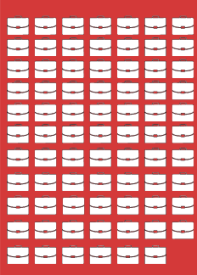
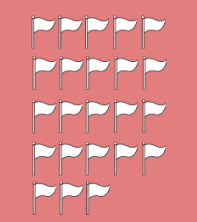

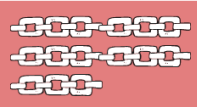
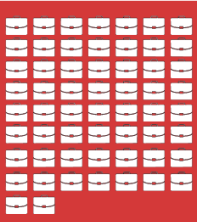
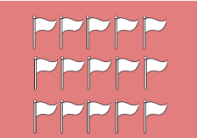

Would those keep you working in fast food longer? Why or why not?

*Codebook*

Code	Definition	Example
Link	<p>"A number of strands (links) connect an employee and his or her family in a social, psychological, and financial web that includes work and nonwork friends, groups, and the community and the physical environment in which he or she lives" (Mitchell, et al., 2001).</p>	<p>"We all come from different places and have learned a lot about each other. We have built really strong relationships with each other, and it makes me want to stay here."</p>
Fit	<p>"An employee's perceived compatibility or comfort with an organization and with his or her environment" (Mitchell, et al., 2001).</p>	<p>"Professionally, this job has taught me how to grow as a leader and how to communicate with other people. This job will help me to grow and learn how to manage a business."</p>
Sacrifice	<p>"The perceived cost of material of psychological benefits that may be forfeited by leaving [or staying at] a job" (Mitchell, et al., 2001).</p>	<p>"One of the biggest sacrifices I have had to make has been to my social life outside of work. I'm not as involved in some activities like I used to be because of work."</p>

*Data Coding Results Overview*

The table below details the amount of times link, fit, and sacrifice were deductively coded from the interviews and focus groups.

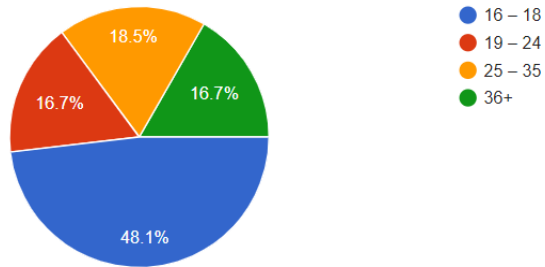
JOB EMBEDDEDNESS THEORY				
	Link	Fit	Sacrifice	Other
Interviews				
Interview Total:	38	76	23	28
Focus Groups				
Focus Group Total:	15	68	15	2
Overall Total:	53	144	38	30

*Chick-Fil-A Survey Questions*

- 1. Which age group do you belong to?
  - A. 16 – 18
  - B. 19 – 24
  - C. 25 – 35
  - D. 36+

1. Which age group do you belong to?

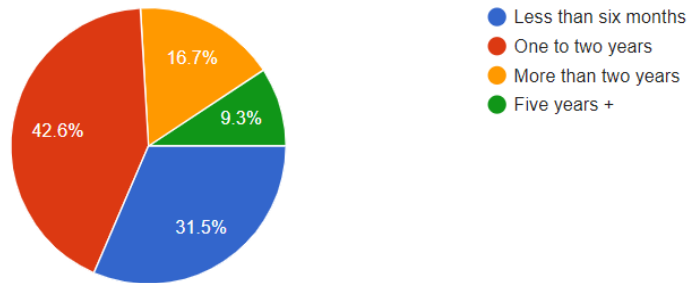
54 responses



- 2. How long have you worked in your current job?
  - 1 Less than six months
  - 2 Six months to one year
  - 3 One to two years
  - 4 More than two years
  - 5 I have never held a full-time job.

2. How long have you worked in your current job?

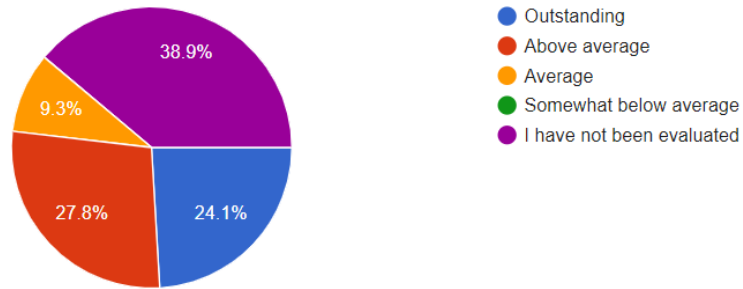
54 responses



- 3. How were you evaluated by your supervisor in your current or most recent job?
  - 1 Outstanding
  - 2 Above average
  - 3 Average
  - 4 Somewhat below average
  - 5 I have not been evaluated

3. How were you evaluated by your supervisor in your current or most recent job?

54 responses

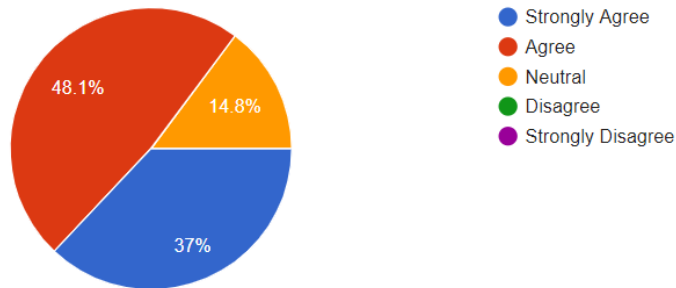


4. I am very satisfied with my job.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

4. I am very satisfied with my job.

54 responses

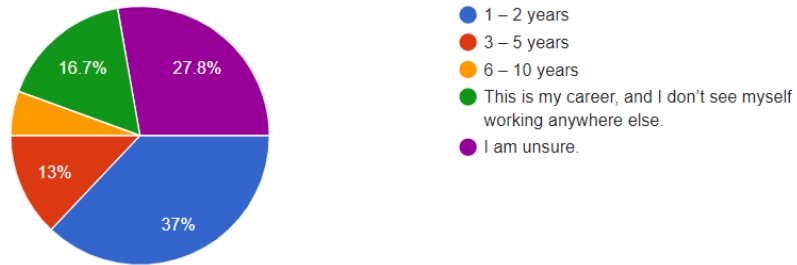


5. How long do you plan **to continue** working here?

- 1 – 2 years
- 3 – 5 years
- 6 – 10 years
- This is my career, and I don't see myself working anywhere else.
- I am unsure.

5. How long do you plan to continue working here?

54 responses

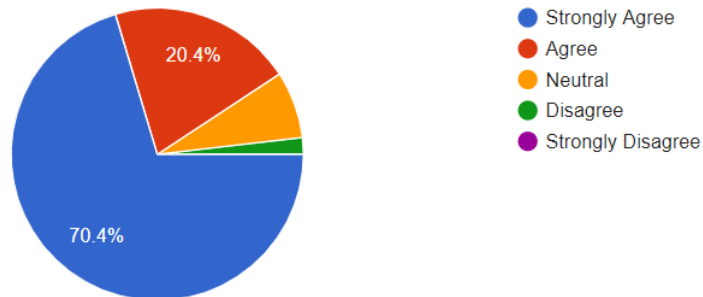


6. I would recommend others to work for Chick-Fil-A

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

6. I would recommend others to work for Chick-Fil-A.

54 responses



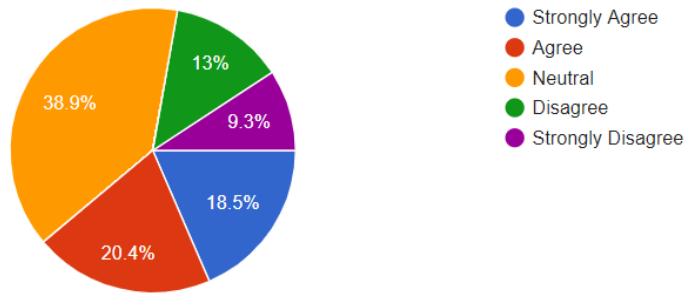
7. Working for Chick-Fil-A fits into my long-term career goals.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree



7. Working for Chick-Fil-A fits into my long-term career goals.

54 responses

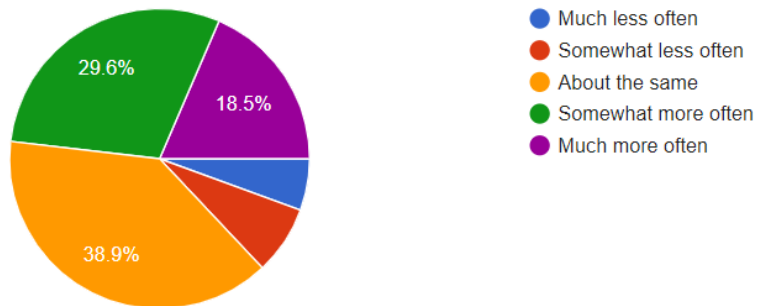


8. Compared to your peers, how often do you lead others?

- 1 Much less often
- 2 Somewhat less often
- 3 About the same
- 4 Somewhat more often
- 5 Much more often

8. Compared to your peers, how often do you lead others?

54 responses

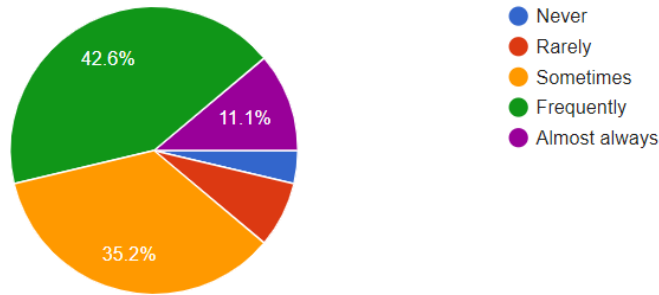


9. How often do other people come to you with their problems?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Frequently
- 5 Almost always

9. How often do other people come to you with their problems?

54 responses

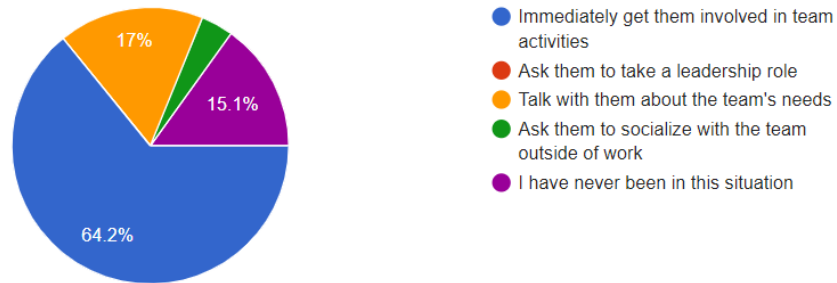


10. How do you respond to a new team member?

- 1 Immediately get them involved in team activities
- 2 Ask them to take a leadership role
- 3 Talk with them about the team's needs
- 4 Ask them to socialize with the team outside of work
- 5 I have never been in this situation

10. How do you respond to a new team member?

53 responses

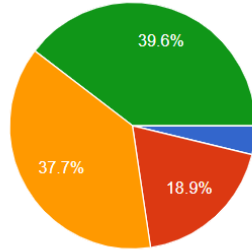


11. While you are working, you overhear a pair of coworkers on break. The two are talking about another team member because she works too slowly. What would you be MOST likely to do?

- 1 Tell the coworkers not to complain about another team member.
- 2 Suggest that the co workers directly talk with the person who works too slowly.
- 3 Keep working on my own tasks and say nothing to the coworkers.
- 4 Suggest that the coworkers talk about their concerns with the supervisor.
- 5 Tell the team member that others are talking about her and she should work faster.

11. While you are working, you overhear a pair of coworkers on break. The two are talking about another team member because she works too slowly. What would you be MOST likely to do?

53 responses



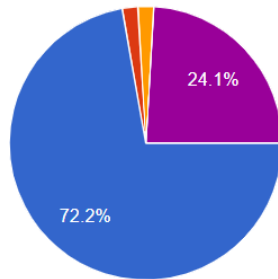
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- Suggest that the coworkers directly talk with the person who works too slowly.
- Keep working on my own tasks and say nothing to the coworkers.
- Suggest that the coworkers talk about their concerns with the supervisor.
- Tell the team member that others are talking about her and she should work...

12. During the middle of a shift, you notice that your coworker, Jim, looks really upset. What action would you take?

- 1 Ask Jim if there is anything you can do to help.
- 2 Leave Jim alone and give him time to cool off.
- 3 Ask Jim if he's having family problems.
- 4 Volunteer to work during your break so Jim can have extra time to cool off
- 5 Let your supervisor know that Jim might not be ok.

12. During the middle of a shift, you notice that your coworker, Jim, looks really upset. What action would you take?

54 responses



- Ask Jim if there is anything you can do to help.
- Leave Jim alone and give him time to cool off.
- Ask Jim if he's having family problems.
- Volunteer to work during your break so Jim can have extra time to cool off
- Let your supervisor know that Jim might not be ok.

## *Focus Group Interview Questions Guide*

### **Retention Strategies based questions**

Thinking back to previous jobs. What are the three rewards or perks that you would identify as the best way to persuade you to remain with the organization?

What are the three incentives in your previous job(s) that you would identify not so good ways to keep you there?

What incentives or rewards would you like to see?

Would those keep you working in fast food longer?

Why are the incentives that you have mentioned important to the way you feel about a job?

### **Job satisfaction based questions**

Describe some things that your supervisor does well to keep you on the job?

Describe some things that your supervisor does not do well that could lead to you leaving?

Please describe the opportunities for advancement?

What are some positive aspects of your job?

What parts of your job bother you to the point you would quit?

What bothers you the most about your job?

Have you worked another fast food job before this one? If so, when you left is there anything that the company could have offered that would have convinced you to stay?

Has the way any supervisor treats you been a factor in considering leaving or staying on this job?

What are the chances that you will remain in the profession but leave the organization?

### **Employee Training based questions**

Describe your jobs training program for your position?

What else would you like to be trained to do?

What type of training should be offered to employees who are not in supervisory positions?

(mandatory or voluntary) What type of training should be made available for supervisors and managers? Leadership training?

What training have you received since obtaining your current job?

### **Managers based questions**

Do you have established performance goals for your employees? What are they/why not?



On average, how long do your employees stay? Crew members/ supervisors

What is your opinion concerning evaluation reports?

Describe a typical job interview for me?

Would interview training help?

In your opinion what are the incentives that would make a strong organization and help the company retain more employees?

Do you think employee retention training would be beneficial to fast food managers and supervisors? Why or why not?

What is done to ensure supervisors and managers show interest in the feelings of subordinates?

Coleman, J., Morgan, J., Mays, D., & Mays, L. (2018). *Employee Turnover in Fast Food Restaurants: An Exploration of Employee Retention Practices* (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2018847366/>



*Survey B - Sample* (Questions from this survey were adapted and used.)

Hiring winning crew

Form: 2000

Copyright © 2004 by Aon Consulting

1 How long have you worked in your current or most recent full-time job?

- 1 Less than six months
- 2 Six months to one year
- 3 One to two years
- 4 More than two years
- 5 I have never held a full-time job.

2 Suppose we contacted your most recent supervisors (or teachers). How would they describe your dependability?

- 1 Much better than my coworkers (or classmates)
- 2 Somewhat better than my coworkers (or classmates)
- 3 About the same as my coworkers (or classmates)
- 4 Worse than my coworkers (or classmates)
- 5 Much worse than my coworkers (or classmates)

3 In the past year, how many times were you late for work (or class)?

- 1 Never
- 2 1 or 2 times
- 3 3 to 5 times
- 4 6 or more times
- 5 I have not worked (or had a class) in the past year.

4 How often do people come to you for advice or suggestions?

- 1 Always
- 2 Frequently
- 3 Occasionally
- 4 Seldom
- 5 Never

5 How were you evaluated by your supervisor in your current or most recent job?

- 1 Outstanding
- 2 Above average
- 3 Average
- 4 Somewhat below average
- 5 I have not been employed or Evaluated

6 Suppose we contacted your most recent supervisors (or teachers). How would they most likely describe the speed with which you complete your assignments?

- 1 Much faster than others
- 2 Somewhat faster than others
- 3 About the same as others

- 4 Slower than others
- 5 I don't know

7 Compared to your peers, how often do you lead others?

- 1 Much less often
- 2 Somewhat less often
- 3 About the same
- 4 Somewhat more often
- 5 Much more often

8 How would you describe your grades in high school?

- 1 I got mostly A's
- 2 I got mostly B's
- 3 I got mostly C's
- 4 I got mostly D's and F's
- My school did not give grades

9 If you do not get this job, how easy will it be for you to get another one?

- 1 Very easy
- 2 Easy
- 3 Difficult
- 4 Very difficult
- 5 I don't know

10 How often do other people come to you with their problems?

- 1 Never
- 2 Rarely
- 3 Sometimes
- 4 Frequently
- 5 Almost always

11 Suppose we contacted your most recent supervisors (or teachers). What would they say about how often you stretch the rules at work (or in school) to get things done?

- 1 It never happens
- 2 It rarely happens
- 3 It happens occasionally
- 4 It happens frequently
- 5 I don't know

12 In school, how many of your teachers didn't like you or gave you a difficult time?

- 1 Most
- 2 About half
- 3 Some
- 4 Very few
- 5 None



13 How do you respond to a new team member?

- 1 Immediately get them involved in team activities
- 2 Ask them to take a leadership role
- 3 Talk with them about the team's needs
- 4 Ask them to socialize with the team outside of work
- 5 I have never been in this situation

14 How would others rate your ability to handle last minute changes?

- 1 Well above average
- 2 Above average
- 3 Average
- 4 Below average
- 5 Well below average

15 While you are working, you overhear a pair of coworkers on break. The two are talking about another team member because she works too slowly. What would you be MOST likely to do?

- 1 Tell the coworkers not to complain about another team member.
- 2 Suggest that the co workers directly talk with the person who works too slowly.
- 3 Keep working on my own tasks and say nothing to the coworkers.
- 4 Suggest that the coworkers talk about their concerns with the supervisor.
- 5 Tell the team member that others are talking about her and she should work faster.

16 How often did you complete extra credit assignments when they were offered in school?

- 1 Whenever offered
- 2 About 75% of the time
- 3 About 50% of the time
- 4 About 25% of the time
- 5 Never

17 How do you typically handle stress on the job (or in school)?

- 1 I speed up to handle the extra work.
- 2 I work more slowly, but concentrate harder.
- 3 I rely on others more when I'm under stress.
- 4 Stress does not influence how I approach my work.
- 5 I don't know.

18 While you are on break, a customer spills a large drink in a busy area of the restaurant. Cleaning the floors is the job of another team member, but he is taking a customer's order. What would you do?

- 1 Tell the other team member about the spilled drink
- 2 Talk to the team member and agree on a plan to clean up the spill
- 3 Clean up the spill as quickly as possible
- 4 Warn customers about the spill until the team member has a chance to clean it up
- 5 Ask the manager who should clean up the spill





19 During the middle of a shift, you notice that your coworker, Jim, looks really upset. What action would you take?

- 1 Ask Jim if there is anything you can do to help.
- 2 Leave Jim alone and give him time to cool off.
- 3 Ask Jim if he's having family problems.
- 4 Volunteer to work during your break so Jim can have extra time to cool off
- 5 Let your supervisor know that Jim might not be ok.

20 A customer asks you a question and you are not sure of the answer. You feel the customer expects you to know the answer. What would you be MOST likely to do?

- 1 See if you can get them to answer their own question by talking it through with them.
- 2 Explain that I do not have the information to answer their question but that I will get back to them shortly with the answer.
- 3 Make up an answer to satisfy them now and plan to correct it later if needed.
- 4 Deflect the question and focus their attention on a different issue.
- 5 Bring someone into the conversation who can answer their question.

21 In high school, how many classes did you fail?

- 1 None
- 2 One
- 3 Two
- 4 Three
- 5 Four or more

22 Suppose we contacted your most recent supervisors (or teachers). They would be most likely to describe your skills at meeting deadlines under pressure as:

- 1 Superior
- 2 Above average
- 3 Average
- 4 Below average
- 5 Well below average

23 In school, how frequently per year did you request an extension on a due date from a teacher?

- 1 Never
- 2 One
- 3 Two
- 4 Three
- 5 Four or more times

24 I consistently focus a high level of energy on my work.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree



25 I dislike having several things to do on the same day.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

26 People say I am a very reliable person.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

27 People say I am the best worker they have ever seen.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

28 If asked, my most recent managers (or teachers) would say that I can work longer and harder than most of my coworkers (or classmates).

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

29 I often lose my patience with others.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

30 People say I can be counted on to do whatever it takes to get the job done.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

31 I always pay attention to every detail.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

32 I am sometimes unkind to others.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

33 People say I always do things correctly and accurately.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

34 I am always on time.

- 1 Strongly Agree
- 2 Agree
- 3 Neither Agree nor Disagree
- 4 Disagree
- 5 Strongly Disagree

35 I would prefer a job in which . . .

- 1 The work is interesting
- 2 I am helping people



*Interview Questions and Research Questions Relationships*

1. Tell me a little about your career and what human resource practitioners do. This question explores research question 1.
2. How long have you worked for your current organization? This question explores research question 2 and 3.
3. What made you stay with the organization up to this point? This question explores research questions 1, 2, and 3.
4. Given what you have said about staying with the organization up to this point, what would you like to see changed or improved in the workplace? This question explores research questions 1, 2, 3, and 4. As employees open up, they may identify specific needs to add value to their work life in describing their lived experiences with the organization and why they stay.
5. Is there anything that would make you leave? This question explores the participant's intentions about leaving or not leaving the organization and aligns with all of the research questions (1-5).
6. Is there anything else you would like to say?

