Five ways to optimize the workforce for greater agility

Is it a significant challenge for you to get the right people on the floor at the right time in order to ensure a consistent customer experience? Doing so requires an agile, effective labor planning solution. And that’s often difficult.

58% of shoppers say they would not use a company again following a poor customer experience and 50% of those would tell others.

Here are five things you can do to establish an optimal workforce and ensure a consistent customer experience through labor planning.

1. Leverage workforce value

Operating on the critical front lines, your workforce is a crucial component of the customer’s shopping experience. An optimal workforce creates a shopping experience that is profitable for retailers and satisfying for customers. Driving repeat customers is heavily reliant on offering positive experiences, according to a Samsung study. To be successful, you need to address changes with speed and precision, and respond to variable customer demand. To build a workforce that supports this mission, you must be agile in your daily operations to make sure the right person is in the right job at the right time—regardless of season.
Improve control over costs and time

Typical budgeting and planning processes are widely regarded as unpopular activities. Conventional stand-alone or spreadsheet-based systems inadequately handle the complex plan routing, review, edit, and approval workflow. Its disconnected nature forces changes to be aggregated and distributed at every level. The lack of automated workflow and reliable edit tools creates a colossal process where annual budget creations can often last up to four months. You should ensure that key stakeholders such as regional managers and store managers are not removed from the process in an attempt to shorten cycle times. Otherwise, the very people tasked with delivering on the plan are cut from the planning process, diminishing their commitment to the budget.

Increase planning accuracy

Automation of plan aggregation and edit calculations are essential to ensure accuracy of the budget numbers. This improved accuracy is compromised if all labor costs—and demand planning across seasonality—are not considered and reflected. You should count accuracy as particularly important with labor budgets and labor forecasts. Make sure your bottom-up projections within a plan use the same algorithms as the shorter-term labor forecasts, so your budgets will reflect the reality of your scheduling needs.
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**Align goals**

Key benefits of budget and forecast processes are to build alignment of corporate goals throughout the corporate hierarchy, increase transparency of financial and labor goals, and connect sales with operations. In order to achieve this, you should implement labor budgeting and planning solutions that allow for a fast approval and facilitation process, involve managers, ownership and visibility of data, audit trails, and solicitation of hours between stores, districts, and regions.

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**Provide business insight**

Budgeting processes are only as useful as the insight that retail managers can extract from them. Commonly, managers passively watch their performance against budget numbers. Your labor budgeting and planning systems must facilitate operational and performance improvements in order to provide valuable insight. Make sure your systems provide full business intelligence capabilities, real-time visibility, quarterly and year-end performance estimates, and allow for what-if scenarios and multi-dimensional benchmarking.

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