

From Burnout to Competitive Advantage: What the Global Frontline is Telling Restaurant Leaders

UKGTM

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Speaker Introduction



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Why the Workforce Conversation Has Changed



Restaurant operations are under pressure at every moment of the shift.




Labor challenges now show up in the guest experience: speed, consistency, and trust.



The question leaders used to ask:
How do we manage labor?



The question now is:
How does the frontline become a competitive advantage?

A photograph of a restaurant kitchen. In the foreground, a chef in a white shirt and apron is seen from behind, standing at a counter. In the background, another chef in a white uniform and hat is working. The kitchen is lit by several large, dome-shaped pendant lights. The scene is set in a professional kitchen environment with stainless steel surfaces and various kitchen equipment.

Labor is the single largest
expense in restaurants—
averaging 36% of sales.
Often exceeding food costs.

National Restaurant Association, Operations Data Abstract, 2025

The Frontline Workforce: Experience Insights

Today's Restaurant Employees

Complex, diverse, and stretched workforce

27% are enrolled in school ¹

1 in 3 are heads of their households¹

30% speak a language other than English at home¹

81% of caregivers are burned out²

¹State of the Restaurant Industry 2026, National Restaurant Association

² UKG: 2025 Perspectives from the Global Frontline Workforce



The Burnout Problem

+

76%

of frontline employees are
burned out

Frontline employees report when they are burned out, they...

Are less productive (84%)

Speed of service

Make more mistakes (72%)

Order accuracy

Call out sick from work (45%)

Peak understaffing

Start looking for a different job (41%)

Turnover risk

Top Five Reasons the Frontline Quits

- #1 Low pay
- #2 Lack of benefits
- #3 Work schedule
- #4 Not enough opportunities to advance career
- #5 My job negatively affects my wellbeing





Operations don't break at once—they break in the moment.

Speed of service
slows down

Order accuracy
drops

Managers are stuck
reacting not leading

Using Technology to Act in Real-Time

52%

of frontline employees would rather have more vacation time than a pay increase

Technology and AI for the Frontline Workforce

- Digital equity for the entire workforce with mobile access
- Simplify the day-to-day experience with decision support tools
- Multi-language capabilities
- Leverage AI for menial/ administrative tasks so employees can focus on the meaningful work



AI Can Reduce High-Friction Moments

73%

Employees would welcome AI to:

- Verify their timecards
- Check their pay

Turning Insight into Action

The Real Shift

From managing labor to managing the moment.



Staffing that adjusts in the moment

- Align staffing to demand
- Adjust as demand changes



Teams built for flexibility

- Cross-train for peak moments
- Empower faster decisions on the floor



Staff for experience—not just coverage

- Engaged employees stay
- Consistency improves the guest experience





How This Shows up in a Restaurant



- **Better communication across teams:** real-time updates keep everyone aligned
- **More flexible scheduling:** balances demand with employee needs
- **Greater transparency:** builds trust and reduces friction

We had a vision to dramatically improve our culture with open and honest communication, from our managers to restaurant staff and among frontline staff. UKG Talk not only fulfilled that vision but is a **key driver of our culture**.

Ethan Samson
Executive Vice President and
Deputy General Counsel

Operational Strength Drives Guest Experience

This is what acting in the moment unlocks

Resilient Workforce

Engaged teams stay and perform better.

Confident Managers

Act faster with the right insights.

Proactive Risk Management

Prevent issues before they impact operations.

Sustained Performance

Consistency builds trust and results.

Reduce friction in the moment—
and performance, retention, and
guest experience follow.



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HR, Pay, &
Workforce
Management



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