HR Insights

Investing in Training for High-turnover Roles



High turnover has long been treated as an unavoidable cost of doing business in industries such as retail, food service, hospitality, manufacturing and other frontline operations. In roles with frequent turnover, organizations often hesitate to invest in training, questioning the value of developing employees who may not stay long. Yet this assumption is increasingly being challenged by workers themselves, who consistently say that access to training and skills development is a key factor in whether they stay, engage and perform well at work. As the gap widens between what employees expect and what employers deliver, underinvestment in learning can quietly become a driver of the very turnover organizations are trying to manage.

This article explores the disconnect between worker and employer views on training in high turnover roles. It offers practical ways HR leaders can rethink learning and development as a strategic tool for retention, performance and workforce resilience.

Why Training Matters to Workers

Across industries and geographies, workers consistently rank training and skill development among their top employment priorities. According to an April 2026 analysis by Indeed Hiring Lab, 67% of U.S. workers say developing new skills is a personal priority. Yet, only 48% believe their employer shares that priority, leaving a 19-point perception gap. This disconnect appears across the eight countries studied and is especially pronounced among workers without a college degree, who are also the least likely to receive employer-provided training. Many of these workers are also concentrated in high-turnover roles, where limited access to skill development can further reinforce cycles of job instability.

For employees in high-turnover roles, training serves multiple purposes. It can build confidence, help workers perform more effectively and signal that the organization sees them as more than disposable labor. Numerous retention studies show that employees who perceive clear learning and growth opportunities are significantly more likely to stay, even when roles are demanding or wages are modest.

Importantly, workers do not view training solely as preparation for a future role elsewhere. Instead, many see it as essential for succeeding in their current job, adapting to new technologies and maintaining long term employability in a volatile labor market. When employers fail to meet these expectations, employees often respond by seeking development opportunities outside the organization, sometimes by leaving altogether.

Why Training Often Takes a Back Seat

From an employer's perspective, reluctance is understandable. Training requires upfront investment, while benefits such as productivity, engagement and retention tend to emerge over time. In high-turnover settings, leaders often worry they are preparing employees for roles they will pursue elsewhere, particularly in temporary, frontline or hourly positions. While most employers do provide training, it is often limited to onboarding or the first days or weeks on the job, focused on ensuring employees can perform immediate job functions. There is typically greater hesitation to invest in ongoing upskilling or continuous development that would enable employees to take on new responsibilities or grow within their roles.

This concern is echoed in HR and executive decision making. According to a 2025 report from the Association of Talent Development, employers are often less likely to train workers they do not expect to keep, particularly in roles that historically experience high churn or lack formal career paths. As a result, training tends to flow toward already advantaged employees, such as those in professional, salaried or degree-required roles, while frontline workers receive minimal development.

However, this cost- and time-avoidant approach can end up requiring more resources in the long term. Poor or insufficient training is strongly associated with early exits, operational errors, lower customer satisfaction and burnout. Inadequate training and limited career development can be among the fastest ways to lose new hires within their first year.

Rethinking Training for High turnover Roles

The tension between worker expectations and employer caution creates a vicious cycle. Employers anticipate high turnover and reduce training investment accordingly. Employees interpret the lack of training as a lack of commitment and leave. Turnover then reinforces the belief that training isn't worth funding.

To break the cycle, HR leaders and managers can consider how the following approaches to training could lead to a positive return on investment:

- **Prioritize fast, job-relevant training.** Training for high turnover roles should focus on helping employees become effective quickly. Short, practical training delivered online or on the job helps new hires build confidence quickly and reduces early frustration, a common reason people leave within their first year.
- **Differentiate job training from career development.** Not all training needs to prepare employees for promotion. However, clearly labeling which learning supports current performance and which builds future mobility can help align expectations for both workers and managers.
- **Invest early, not later.** Research consistently shows that the first 30-90 days are the most vulnerable period for attrition. Strong onboarding, coaching and early skills development can significantly improve retention, even in roles with historically high turnover.
- **Make learning accessible to frontline workers.** Frontline and hourly employees are often excluded from formal learning and development (L&D) due to scheduling, technology or design constraints. Mobile friendly content, paid training time and manager led coaching can help close this gap.
- **Measure training impact beyond tenure.** While retention is important, it's also worth tracking metrics such as productivity, quality, safety incidents and internal mobility. Even modest increases in performance or reductions in errors can justify training investments in high turnover roles.

Conclusion

Workers see training as essential to doing their jobs well and building future opportunities, while employers, under cost pressure and facing uncertain tenure, often view it as a risky investment. The question of how much time and resources are feasible to invest in training for high turnover roles will lead to different solutions for each employer depending on their size, industry and budget.

Contact us today for additional L&D resources.

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