

employees quit before completing their training and probationary period, and most of the remaining 75% would leave before completing their first year of employment. The average tenure for employees at the Jubilee Mall store was nine months. In fact, during the previous fiscal quarter her store had lost nine employees—the equivalent of an entire crew for an eight-hour shift—that had to be replaced. Ronda had identified several reasons for the problem.

Both transportation and commuting contributed to employee turnover. Because most university students and local students from affluent families rejected minimum-wage fast-food jobs, most of the “line” or nonsupervisory workers were urban, working class people who did not own or have access to private vehicles. Ronda estimated that 80% of the line employees who worked at her store relied on the city’s bus system to get to and from work. Because there were few direct bus routes from the inner city to Jubilee Mall and busses ran infrequently on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays, employee commutes were often long and complicated; it was not unusual for employees to make several connections and ride for several hours to get to work. For example, the bus circuted the route from the city to Jubilee Mall every two hours on Sundays. The last bus to the city left the mall at 6:25 P.M. on Sunday evening. Employees who commuted on that bus would want to leave before 6:25 P.M. even if their shift was unfinished or their work remained undone. Those who did so would receive a disciplinary warning or “write up” as a result. If line employees were frequently late or repeatedly walked off the job before their scheduled time, they risked being terminated. Others simply tired of the long, boring commute and quit their jobs.

Absenteeism, poor punctuality, closing a store early, and walking off one’s job were also drivers of turnover. Due to the vagaries of weather and traffic, it was not unusual for bus-riding employees to show up late for their shift, and delays for personal reasons were not infrequent. When employees knew they were going to be late or absent from work, company policy dictated that the employee either find another employee to cover their shift or “call in”—give management at least four hours’ notice so a replacement worker could be found. Ronda noted that tardy employees sometimes failed to call in at all. Those that were finally reached by telephone often claimed to be unaware that they were scheduled to work that day. “I can’t remember a single day that I’ve worked at this store when everyone has showed up or was on time,” Ronda claimed. Each incident of tardiness, absenteeism, or leaving before the scheduled time earned an employee a write up.

Violations of company rules were still other drivers of turnover. The Jubilee Mall store had the most ethnically and racially diverse crew in the Tastee Max restaurant chain. Diverse employees brought behaviors and attitudes to the workplace that sometimes clashed with managerial or company policy. For example, different views on handling customer, operational, and managerial issues caused friction between line employees and supervisors, most of whom were from middle-class suburbs. Ronda noted, “Our crew is vocal and opinionated. They won’t back down if someone gets in their face. Some supervisors see this as being unruly and insubordinate.” Employees were frequently written up for insubordination, which could lead to voluntary or involuntary separation. Other rule violations included wearing improper dress, not following sanitation and safety procedures, violating labor laws, having disagreements with members of the store’s management team, being rude or “talking back” to customers, pilfering food and beverages, giving friends unauthorized “discounts” on menu items, and not attending mandatory employee meetings held at 9:00 A.M. on Sunday mornings. All of these infractions would earn the offender a write up. Theft of cash and violence toward management were cause for immediate dismissal.