



# Department Managers Speak

2016 Supermarket Department Manager Survey reveals degrees of happiness and frustration.

By Harold Lloyd

If employees are a retailer's greatest asset, what superlative is left to describe department managers? If department managers are so valued, why do we do so little in the way of providing specific training and developmental opportunities? No conferences are designed specifically for them, and

they rarely attend industry conventions. No training courses or books are dedicated to becoming a better department manager.

This extraordinary contradiction inspired the creation of the first-ever, industry-wide 2016 Supermarket Department Manager Survey, a collaborative effort from Food Marketing

Institute, The Retail Feedback Group and Harold Lloyd Presents. The survey sought to determine whether department managers love their jobs, and if not, what can be done to improve their job satisfaction, and ultimately their overall performance and their company's profitability.

## Methodology

With few exceptions, the companies participating in the survey are of the highest caliber. Below-average companies tend not to want to know bad news. Good companies want to become better, and the great companies want to become greater. If retailers can gain some insight into their department managers' attitudes, they will make improvements.

The web-based survey was open to all department managers from chain and independent supermarket retailers. Some 1,692 department managers

from 63 companies participated. Respondents hailed from all departments, including perimeter fresh food, grocery and front end. Segment responses illuminated variations among departments and by education,

gender, and years of service. Question categories were “my job,” respect/job balance, communication/teamwork, store standards, training and development, education/promotion, recognition, company culture, and job knowledge/skills.

### Top Findings

#### 1 Department Managers Love the Job

Nine in 10 department managers agree that they “love their job,” with half of those in “Strong Agreement.” New managers (less than one year) are the most likely to love their jobs, while meat managers are least likely.

#### 2 Lack of Balance

Similar to results of the 2014 survey of store managers, fewer than a quarter of department managers “Strongly Agree” that they have a healthy balance between their work and home life. As more Millennials take on managerial positions, this finding is even more relevant and alarming.

### How Department Managers Feel About Their Jobs

	Bottom Quartile	Top Quartile
Love My Job	33.1%	61%
Job Personally Rewarding	29.6	53.1
Job is Secure	23.0	59.6

Source: 2016 Supermarket Department Manager Survey

**Good companies want to become better, and the great companies want to become greater.**

#### 3 It's All About Time

According to department managers, “not having enough time” is one of their major challenges in performing their jobs effectively, and as a result, the customer suffers. In the lowest-rated survey item, nearly

half of department managers disagree that “our department receives enough labor hours to effectively complete our work and serve the customers.” The fresh departments, led by bakery and meat, disagree the most.

#### 4 Give New Employees a Chance

Regarding the second-weakest survey item, 38 percent of department manager respondents disagree that “the hours allocated to train new employees in my department are adequate.” Nearly half of the bakery and meat managers believe that more training is needed for their new hires.

#### 5 The Meat of the Issue ...

Meat managers consistently gave the lowest survey ratings. Items with considerably more disagreement among these respondents include feeling respected, healthy work/life balance, taking earned time off, and sincere recognition.

With meat departments a major competitive point of difference, this finding is crucial. It's imperative that meat managers are fully engaged in this strategically vital department.

#### 6 The More, the (Not So) Merrier

Newer department managers (less than one year) gave higher ratings than more experienced respondents. However, “Agree” scores decrease significantly for respondents who've been on the job more than a year, including loving the job, finding it rewarding, fair/constructive criticism and feeling highly respected in the company.

Solutions to this revelation may help to reduce the incredibly disrup-

tive and costly effects of department manager turnover.

#### 7 Safe and Clean for Sure

Some 96 percent of department managers say that they “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” that their store meets all safety and sanitation standards. This is a strong, reassuring finding, considering that this is a strictly anonymous survey.

#### 8 Money is a Motivator

Quite possibly, no one is ever satisfied with their salary, but 23 percent of department managers say they “Strongly Disagree” that they're fairly compensated, a higher percentage than store managers in 2014. This number is too high to ignore, as perceived fair pay and self-respect go hand in hand.

### Addressing the Gaps

The percentage gap between the top quartile (TQ) and the bottom quartile (BQ) companies is dramatic: There's a difference of more than 30 percentage points between the companies in the BQ and those in the TQ regarding the following “Strongly Agree” statements:

“I am not made to feel guilty when taking earned time off.”  
BQ 26.0% TQ 58.2%

“I work well with the store manager.”  
BQ 41.0% TQ 71.4%

“My last performance review was constructive.”  
BQ 10.8% TQ 50.5%

“Our store recognizes and celebrates achievements.”  
BQ 9.9% TQ 46.3%

“This company recognizes years of service.”  
BQ 13.5% TQ 60.7%





### Take Action

Wherever department managers are on the satisfaction spectrum, the top findings represent a call to action.

**1 Publish (internally) stringent requirements to become a professional department manager** in your company. Don't perpetuate the "last clerk standing" as the likely next department manager. Make becoming a department manager more of a position for employees to aspire to.

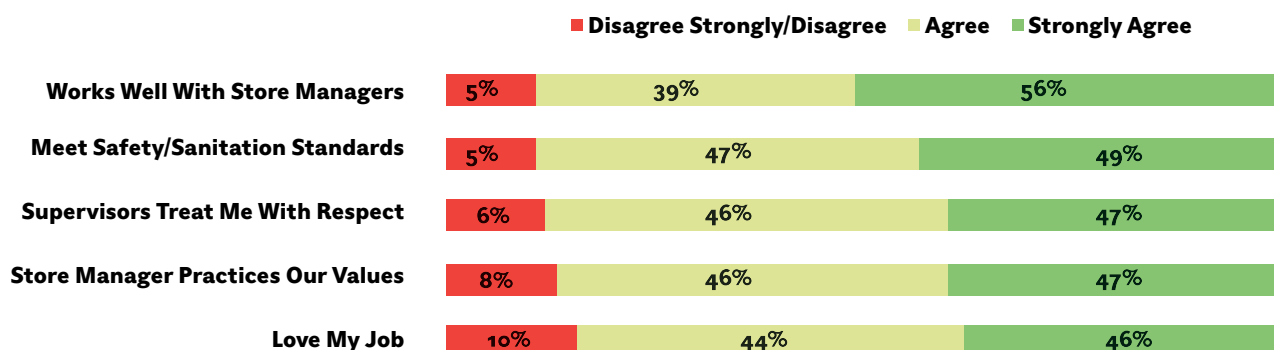
**2 Impose a strict 50/50 store visit ratio** for supervisors in which half their visits are announced at least three days in advance and the remaining half are unannounced. This will give all department managers an opportunity to plan for their supervisors' visits so that uninterrupted learning and communication can occur.

**3 Offer annual management development courses** on computer skills (as it applies to your stores),

store finances, and how to handle a discipline issue. These are the three topics that department managers requested most.

**4 Inform and enforce the notion** that anyone overheard teasing another employee or manager about taking earned time off will be reprimanded. "Another vacation? Didn't you just have one?" shouldn't be acceptable questions.

## Bright Spots: Highest Rated Items



Source: 2016 Supermarket Department Manager Survey

**5** **Form a task force** or a simple focus group of 12 store managers to brainstorm possible recommendations to improve work/home life balance. There has to be a coterie of partial solutions from which to choose. Let department managers help solve this vexing dilemma.

**6** **Audit several department manager meetings** in various stores. Assess what's transpiring. Are the meetings truly meetings, or mind-numbing lectures? Do the department managers seem engaged? Take 15 minutes at the end to survey

their feelings about one or two of the survey findings.

**Perceived fair pay and self-respect go hand in hand.**

This will elevate the status of department managers in your organization.

**8** **Commit (or recommit) to conducting thorough performance evaluations** with meaningful goals established in each to methodically assist in professional development.

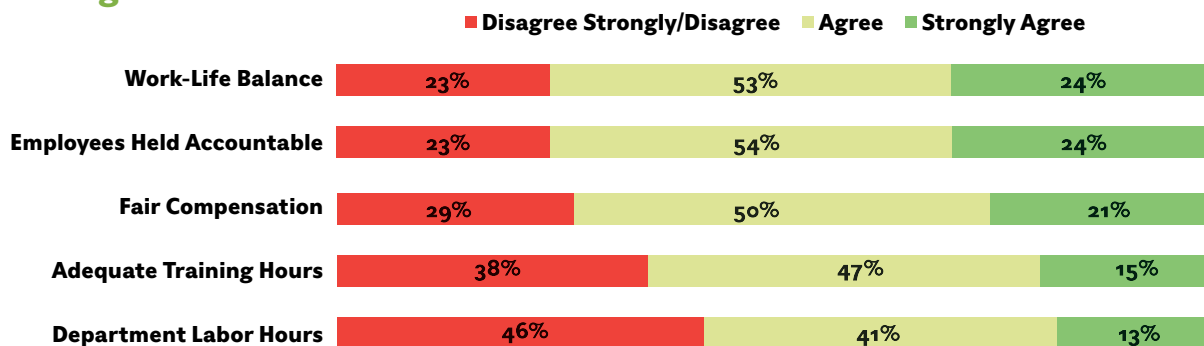
**7** **Pre-plan job promotions of department managers.** Have their new business cards made in advance. Celebrate promotions and years of service more sincerely and robustly.

**9** **Before top management orders hours to be cut** in any department, they should be willing to work one shift on a busy day in that department to determine whether the cutback is truly warranted.

**10** **For those satisfied with the overall "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" scores**, begin to focus on increasing "Strongly Agree" scores.

Department managers are key resources in a successful operation, and it's time that upper management began treating them as such and taking their concerns and viewpoints seriously. After all, where would the store be without them? **PGI**

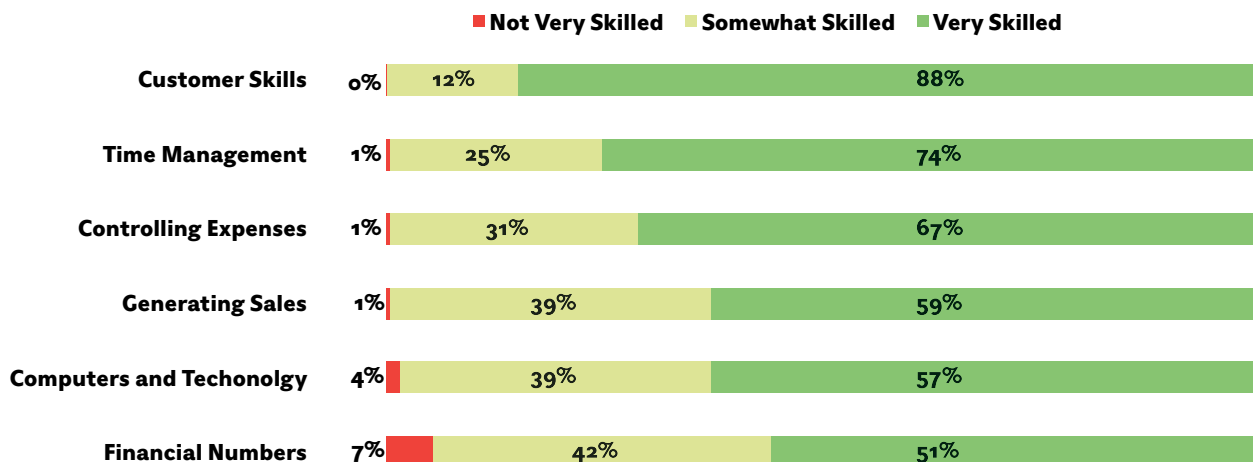
## Red Flags: Lowest Rated Items



Source: 2016 Supermarket Department Manager Survey

## Self Assessment Comparison

How knowledgeable and skilled do you feel about...



Source: 2016 Supermarket Department Manager Survey