

Connecting the dots  
IN EMPLOYEE LISTENING

The Complete Guide to

# Reaching Deskless Workers

---

How to ensure every voice in your  
organization is heard



# Introduction

Deskless workers, who make up 80% of the global workforce at 2.7 billion strong, remain largely misunderstood by most companies despite being mission-critical employees. Due to the inherent challenges in reaching this population, they can often be overlooked in employee listening programs.

If organizations truly want to improve the employee experience, they must rethink how they approach surveys and feedback for their frontline teams. This means designing surveys with deskless workers in mind, making them accessible, communicating results in meaningful ways, and—most importantly—taking action based on what employees share.

At Newmeasures, we believe that *every voice matters*. This comprehensive guide offers insights and strategies for ensuring that your employee listening process captures the voices of your deskless workers. Topics addressed include:

- Five Important Considerations for Survey Design
- Communicating in Advance of the Survey
- Best Practices for Survey Administration
- Tips to Encourage Participation
- Communicating Findings
- Taking Action

## Who Are Deskless Workers?

A deskless worker is an employee who completes most of their work away from a desk. Large populations of deskless workers are typically found in industries like healthcare, manufacturing, retail, construction, transportation, and hospitality.

# Five Important Considerations for Survey Design

Designing an effective survey for deskless workers requires more than just adapting an existing template. It demands thoughtful consideration of who's involved, what's asked, how it's structured, and how it's communicated. From involving the right stakeholders to using accessible language, each decision you make impacts the quality and usefulness of the data collected. In this section, we outline four essential considerations to ensure your survey captures meaningful, relevant feedback from your deskless workforce.

## Involve the Right Stakeholders

Reach out to stakeholders who possess deep knowledge of your deskless population, organizational influence, and/or will be using the data to make decisions (e.g., union leader or safety leader). Including key stakeholders early in the process helps to garner their buy-in to the project and ensure the right content and data is collected.



**Expert Tip:** For organizations with unionized workers, include a union representative on the survey project team so their perspective is heard throughout the process (including the communications strategy, survey design, and results reporting).

## Ask Relevant Questions

While we don't recommend designing entirely separate surveys for deskless and desk-bound employees, we do suggest making small adjustments to ensure relevancy for each group.

Most survey topics are important to all employees, and it's essential to gather feedback from everyone. A common misconception is that deskless workers don't care about the organization's future vision or strategic messaging from top leadership, leading survey teams to consider omitting those items. However, we've found that these subjects matter to all employees, including deskless workers, and it's important to capture their perspectives.

With that said, other areas of focus may hold varying levels of importance for deskless workers and should be thoughtfully reviewed when deciding the items to include in your survey. For instance, it may be valuable to ask deskless workers about their experiences with specific processes, equipment, tools, scheduling methods, or other factors that may not apply to desk-bound employees.

## Consider the survey length

Balance the survey length with being short enough to maintain the survey taker's attention, but long enough to have sufficient data available in the reporting phase. Generally, we recommend keeping the survey completion time between 10 and 15 minutes. If you need to remove items, consider whether the items will produce meaningful and actionable insights once in the hands of leaders.

It's also best practice to limit open-ended questions to ease the burden on the survey taker. We recommend including no more than two open-ended items. One should allow the respondent to provide positive feedback about their work experience, and the other should allow the respondent to provide constructive feedback.

## Use accessible language

Avoid using unnecessary corporate jargon or overly complex language. Instead, focus on employing inclusive and accessible language that resonates with all employees, whether they work in an office or in the field. Deskless employees may feel frustrated if the survey uses language that doesn't reflect their experiences.



**Expert Tip:** Offer the survey in languages used by your employees.

## Incorporate Relevant Employee Data

When designing a survey, we encourage clients to work backwards and consider what employee data will be helpful to analyze results across key groups. This might include union vs. non-union members, a more granular technician classification, site location, and more. Be sure to include the metadata you need for effective analysis on the back end.



**Expert Tip:** Leverage operational (O) data you already have access to through your HRIS.

# Communicating in Advance of the Survey

Clear and timely communication is critical to building trust and encouraging participation, especially among deskless workers, who may not have daily access to email or corporate communication platforms. Before launching your survey, take time to plan how you'll inform employees about it. Start by using the systems and channels they're already familiar with, whether formal company updates or informal team huddles. Equip frontline managers with the tools and understanding they need to advocate for the survey and explain its importance. Just as importantly, be transparent about confidentiality from the start. Employees are more likely to share candid, meaningful feedback when they understand how their responses will be handled and protected.

## Use Existing Systems and Processes

Consider how your employees already receive information about organizational updates, policies, and programs. Use these existing channels to share survey information. These methods may include:

- Your organization's intranet and other online communication platforms.
- Formal communications consist of announcements from senior leaders, messaging blasts from your company's intranet portal, displays on location TV screens, all-hands company townhalls, and staff meetings.
- Informal communications are driven mostly by frontline managers. Coach them to champion the process by educating them on the purpose behind the survey and garnering their commitment.



**Expert Tip:** Identify and deploy internal “influencers” – individuals your deskless teams go to for information and trusted opinions.

## Emphasize Confidentially

Provide clarification about confidentiality practices directly in the invitation email and the survey instructions. Being transparent about how a respondent's data will be used fosters trust in the process and results in more honest feedback.

# Best Practices for Survey Administration

Effective survey administration is about more than just collecting responses. It's about making sure every employee has a fair, accessible, and comfortable opportunity to share their voice. For deskless workers, this means thoughtful design and intentional planning. From ensuring mobile-friendly formats to providing quiet spaces and on-site survey stations, every detail helps create a smoother experience. These best practices will help you reduce barriers to participation, build trust in the process, and ensure that feedback is both meaningful and representative of your entire workforce.

## Ensure the survey format is mobile-friendly

Deskless workers are often on the go, making it highly likely that they'll need the option to complete surveys on a smartphone. Therefore, it's critical to recognize how that experience may be different from a desktop or laptop. For example, each survey item should have its own line in the survey instead of using a matrix table layout. Matrices are often more difficult to read and respond to on smaller screens. With each question on its own line, we also recommend including page breaks between every 3-5 survey items to prevent the need for excessive scrolling.

## Consider the Physical Environment

- Provide a quiet and/or private location.
- When employees work in jobs that require them to be on their feet, give them a chance to sit down and take the survey.
- Ensure access to kiosks or other reserved survey-taking stations (e.g., rent laptops or iPads during the survey administration period).
- Designate a "survey team" with boots on the ground (e.g., champions rotating employees off the product lines with an iPad to take the survey).

**Client Example:** *A large paint company provides a private room with snacks and a computer for paint manufacturing employees to take the engagement survey.*

## Avoid Paper Surveys

- Paper surveys are slow and impede the ability to provide real-time results to leaders when the survey closes.
- There are complicated logistics involved on the back end, like transposing responses into a usable data reporting format.
- Using paper surveys can also raise more questions around maintaining confidentiality and trust in the process.

## Leverage Mixed Distribution Options

- Be sure to offer mobile friendly survey distribution methods (e.g., QR Codes and SMS) and communications.

*Note: People often believe that apps are collecting private information. Let employees know that the QR code leads to a secure website, not an app.*

- Utilize kiosks or personal devices (like laptops or smart phones) to encourage “in the moment” participation.



**Expert Tip:** If you plan to use QR codes or a general survey link, post it in a highly trafficked area (like near the time clocks).

# Tips to Encourage Participation

Boosting participation among deskless workers requires creativity, collaboration, and thoughtful planning. Because these employees often operate outside of traditional communication channels, it's essential to meet them where they are: on the floor, in the field, and in the flow of their day. Increase this group's participation rates using some of the below tips and client examples. By making participation easy, visible, and valued, you can ensure more voices are heard and better insights are gathered.

## Embrace Gamification

- Use creative marketing tactics like themed cookies, balloons, or posting the survey QR code around the workplace to increase visibility.
- Encourage friendly competition and gamification strategies like entering respondents in a raffle for prizes.

*Client Example: A large hotel chain printed their survey QR code on t-shirts as "walking billboards" for ambassadors to wear on-site and promote participation.*

## Get Everyone Involved

- Enlist survey and/or on-site ambassadors. Ambassadors can include representatives from the deskless population, a designated point-of-contact for questions, and ground level champions to support with participation and reminders.
- Collaborate with other functions to increase participation. Marketing and branding teams can help generate creative communications, while IT and development teams can ensure effective functioning of surveying features and loan out personal devices.
- Support union collaboration. If your teams are supported by unions, it is critical to involve union representation to create buy-in.

## Pay Employees for Their Time

- Allow your deskless workers have time to complete the survey during work hours to demonstrate commitment to collecting their feedback.
- Rotate employees out to take the survey while maintaining adequate coverage during the workday.
- Encourage frontline managers to use the last ten minutes of a shift meeting for staff to complete the survey on their personal devices.

*Client Example: A large manufacturing company encourages facility leaders to “stop the line” for deskless workers to complete the survey.*

# Communicating Findings: *Sharing Back Survey Results*

A critical piece in running a successful employee engagement survey is to follow-up with respondents and share insights derived from their feedback.

## Share Key Findings

- **Reiterate confidentiality.** Employees often need a confidentiality reminder across every phase. To enhance trust, share details around data privacy policies and confidentiality thresholds in data reporting.
- **Keep it tight and relevant.** Avoid overwhelming employees with too much information. Focus on highlighting key themes and next steps to address the feedback. Allow access to reporting dashboards for leaders who will need to dive deeper into their team's feedback.
- **Use multiple channels** to relay feedback like video recordings, huddles, pre-shift meetings, posters and bulletin boards, and on-site digital screens.
- **Demonstrate the impact.** Make an effort to align organization-wide actions with senior leaders before sharing the results. You can then report, “we heard you say \_\_\_\_, and here's what we're going to work on this year to address it.”
- **Follow up regularly.** Reinforce key messages over time, don't just communicate findings and action intentions once and move on. People often need to hear bits of information multiple times before the message fully sinks in.

## Robust Dashboard Rollout

While the survey is live, allow leaders across the organization to monitor response rates in their area and encourage participation where response counts are low.

When the results are in, use reporting dashboards to promote data transparency, [cultivate data literacy](#), and minimize gate-keeping employee experience data. Ensuring relevant data gets to the right people supports the cascade of insights to all levels of the organization and ensures impact is felt where needed most.

Encourage leaders and champions to identify where there are gaps in data access and action planning.

## Meet Leaders Where They Are

Ensure managers can access team data as part of their daily workflow. For frontline managers who also do not work from a desk, make data available offline. These leaders are likely to have the highest impact on deskless worker engagement levels and should know where their teams stand.

## Taking Action: *Bringing it Full Circle*

While sharing results back to employees is an important first step in closing the loop, there must also be a concerted effort to act on insights. Establish a strong post-survey strategy to reinforce the organization's commitment to enacting change where employees have expressed needs.

Sometimes this can mean just doing *something* with the data. Only **27% of employees** feel their company takes action on feedback “very well or extremely well” (Johnson, Cancel, & Wolf, 2021). A perceived lack of follow-up on feedback can fester among employee groups, leading to increased levels of frustration and eventual survey fatigue.

This trend is noteworthy because employees working in organizations that commit to turning feedback into action report higher levels of intentions to stay, engagement, and sense of well-being (Johnson, Cancel, & Wolf, 2021).

### Balance Quick Wins with Long-Term Fixes

Address smaller, more visible issues fast while planning for larger-scale changes. Identifying and implementing quick changes shows employees that their feedback was heard, understood, and matters to the organization.



**Expert Tip:** Qualitative data collected via open-ended comments is a great tool to identify quick wins (like equipment or uniform needs).

### Be Honest About What's Possible

If a key piece of survey feedback cannot be addressed immediately or may not be realistic for the organization to pursue, relay this decision to employees. Focus on explaining the “why” and other considerations.

### Empower Frontline Managers

While deskless worker feedback must be acknowledged within the organization-wide goals and action planning, frontline manager have the closest contact with this population and will influence their daily work life the most. However, this group needs to feel empowered to affect change within their own team.

- **Clarify Expectations.** Outline action planning expectations for frontline managers allow access to necessary training and tools to succeed. Providing a template or online tracking platform can help leaders formulate a concrete plan.

- **Help Prioritize Development Opportunities.** There is a tendency for leaders to want to address all areas of feedback at once. Realistically, this becomes too overwhelming and does not foster lasting behavior change. Instead, encourage leaders to focus on 1-2 areas of improvement.
- **Promote Accountability.** Hold leaders accountable by establishing regular check-ins throughout the year to evaluate progress on action plans and identify barriers. Encouraging leaders to share their action plans with a trusted accountability partner can also be highly effective. Inviting others to hold them accountable helps ensure that their commitment to improvement remains a priority, even as other responsibilities compete for their attention. Additionally, consider providing leaders with tools and resources to track their progress and adjust their plans as needed, reinforcing a continuous improvement mindset.



**Expert Tip:** Encourage leaders to focus on the topics that are driving their engagement scores.

## Debrief Successes & Opportunities

As employee listening ambassadors, it is critical to reflect on lessons learned for the next survey cycle. However, do not forget to acknowledge and celebrate your accomplishments.

Encourage front-line managers to do the same, promoting a culture of continuous improvement while also recognizing positive progress and areas of excellence. Highlighting success helps maintain momentum in those areas, which can often be more difficult than moving the needle where much improvement is needed.

Take the time to connect with deskless workers in your organization and inquire about what they think went well and where gaps may still exist. Continue your commitment to taking action and improve the process for future surveys.

### Final Thoughts

Employee surveys are a critical component of a robust employee listening program as tools to measure the employee experience over time. However, it can be difficult for employees to complete surveys when they do not have regular access to a computer during their workday. Use this guide as your starting place to strategically plan your next survey cycle and provide an opportunity for all voices in your organization to be heard.

V0025

## Sources

- Deskless Workers: HR Strategies for Benefits Engagement (2024). Retrieved September 25, 2024 from <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/research/deskless-workers-hr-strategies-for-benefits-engagement>
- Johnson, L., Cancel, Y., Wolf, M. (2021). Employee Experience Trends. Qualtrics Report. <https://success.qualtrics.com/rs/542-FMF-412/images/Qualtrics-2021-Employee%20Experience-Trends.pdf>

## About Newmeasures

Newmeasures is a boutique firm of Industrial & Organizational Psychologists with expertise in designing and executing employee listening strategies. Our mission is to help people within organizations listen to one another so they can thrive – both as individuals and collectively. We are passionate about providing white-glove service and tailoring our services to meet our clients exactly where they are.

We believe that employee listening should connect the dots rather than simply checking boxes. By utilizing multiple listening methods and linking employee experience (EX) and operational (O) data, we help our clients gain the insights they need to make informed decisions in real-time. In addition, our offerings include a built-in system of action to support clients in using employee feedback to improve the employee experience in the ways that matter most.

Contact us to learn how we can help you evolve your listening program beyond engagement to help create compelling and differentiating employee experiences.

 1-877-888-3817     [info@newmeasures.com](mailto:info@newmeasures.com)