Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia

Exit Survey for Restaurant Industry

Report
September 2022

RANS

RESTAURANT
ASSOCIATION of NOVA SCOTIA

Introduction

The Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia (RANS) was interested to gather data to help gain insight as to why some employees have left the restaurant industry. With significant labour shortages occurring in our sector, this information has helped us to determine what employees value in the workplace and to provide recommendations for potential recruitment and retention solutions. We began data gathering with a survey that was broadly distributed and followed up with one focus group and another questionnaire.

About RANS

The Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia (RANS) is a non-profit association that has successfully represented the food and beverage sector since 1947. RANS continuously makes a positive impact for the restaurant industry through advocacy, education, partnerships & promotion. Over the past 2.5 years, RANS has worked relentlessly to support the industry through the pandemic. The association worked closely with government and public health to make sure decision-making processes considered the best interests of the industry. RANS delivered programs, webinars, regular updates, and ongoing support to assist operators during an incredibly challenging time.

About the Survey

The survey was completed by 100 people and was targeted to anyone who has worked in the restaurant industry in any capacity and who has left the restaurant industry. Survey questions and results are in Appendix A at the end of the report.

74% indicated salary/wages as a primary reason they left the industry

69% of respondents left the industry in the last 5 years

3 Major Themes

The data was analyzed by a subcommittee of the Human Resources/Education Committee, and from that analysis 3 major themes emerged:

1 Work Environment

Challenging working conditions such as long hours, inflexible and inconsistent work hours, lack of scheduled breaks, little structure and clarity of work, high stress environment, culture of substance/alcohol misuse and abuse.

Safety concerns related to toxic working environments where employers and employees engage in abusive and discriminatory behaviours including sexual harassment and racism.

Inappropriate behaviour from customers such as abusive language directed at employees, and a lack of support from management dealing with inappropriate customer behaviour.

Lack of supports and access to resources and formal structures (policy) to deal with inappropriate customers.

Lack of diversity (ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) in the workplace.

3 Major Themes cont...

2 Leadership and Management

Lack of leadership skills, capacities, and structures within the organization, and among Managers and Supervisors.

Poor, or nonexistent staff training and onboarding processes and standards.

Lack of career development supports or pathways to grow and develop within an organization.

3 Job Security and Compensation

Overall poor compensation or poor compensation structures including wages, lack of extended health benefits, lack of pension plan.

Lack of job security and structure to support challenging peaks and valleys of business.

49% indicated lack of job security as a primary reason they left the industry

Recommendations

Based on the themes that emerged, the HR/Education Committee subcommittee identified 4 recommendations for the Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia to consider.

1   Policies and Procedures

Develop and implement organizational policies and procedures that are informed by principles that include health and well-being and diversity and inclusion. Examples include:

a. Employee Code of Conduct and Procedures
b. Hiring policies and procedures
c. Onboarding and employee success framework
d. Employee discipline and performance management policies and procedures
e. Customer community standards policy and procedures
f. Employment standards policies
     i. Workplace Safety
          1. OHS & WHMIS
     ii. Breaks
     iii. Scheduling
     iv. Sick policy

Policies and procedures help ensure compliance

Recommendations cont...

Based on the themes that emerged, the HR/Education Committee subcommittee identified 4 recommendations for the Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia to consider.

2   Compensation and Benefits

Employers develop a compensation and benefit model that is comparable to similar jobs and careers including adequate wages at all levels, extended health benefits, and some sort of pension savings plan.

3   Database for Restaurants

Explore a digital platform that will support a "gig" database for restaurant employees and employers.

4   Training and Programs

Develop training courses and offer access to programs that support restaurant employees with mental health, substance mis-use challenges, and overall health and well-being.

67% indicated lack of benefits as a primary reason they left the industry

Appendix A

The Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia (RANS) conducted a survey to help gain insight as to why some employees have left the restaurant industry. Anyone who has worked in the industry was eligible to participate in this survey. With the data gathered from this survey, it is aimed to gain valuable insight into the reasons some individuals have left the industry. With significant labor shortages occurring in our sector, this information can help determine what employees value in the workplace as well as provide potential recruitment and retention solutions.

This survey included 7 questions, which are as follows:
1. Did you work in the food and beverage industry in the past five years and leave to find employment in an alternative industry?
2. How long were you employed in the industry?
3. What was your job role when employed in the industry?
4. Please indicate your primary reason for leaving the industry. Click all that apply.
5. Do you have any additional feedback you would like to provide?
6. Would you be interested in discussing this topic further in a focus group?
7. Please provide your email address if you would like to be contacted about focus groups.

Responses to Survey

Question One: Of those who completed the survey, 69% of respondents indicated they had left the industry in the past 5 years.
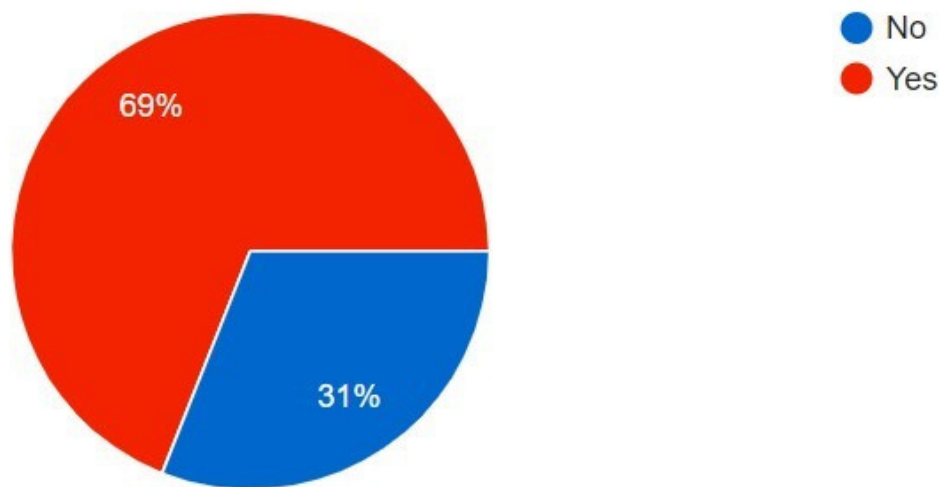

Question Two: Of those who left the industry, the majority of respondents (33.8%) worked in the industry for more than ten years, 30.9% for 3-5 years, 29.4% for 6-10 years, and 5.9% for 1-2 years
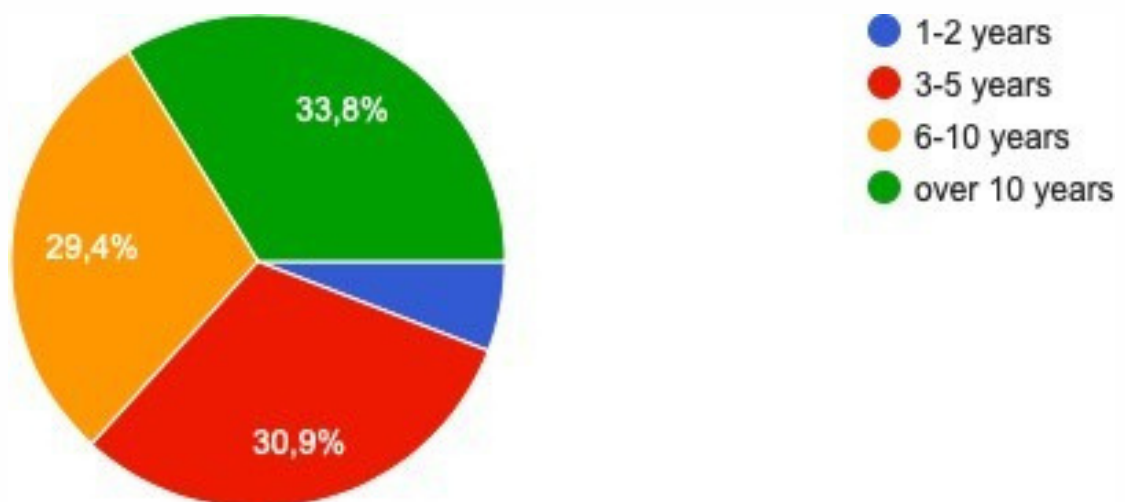
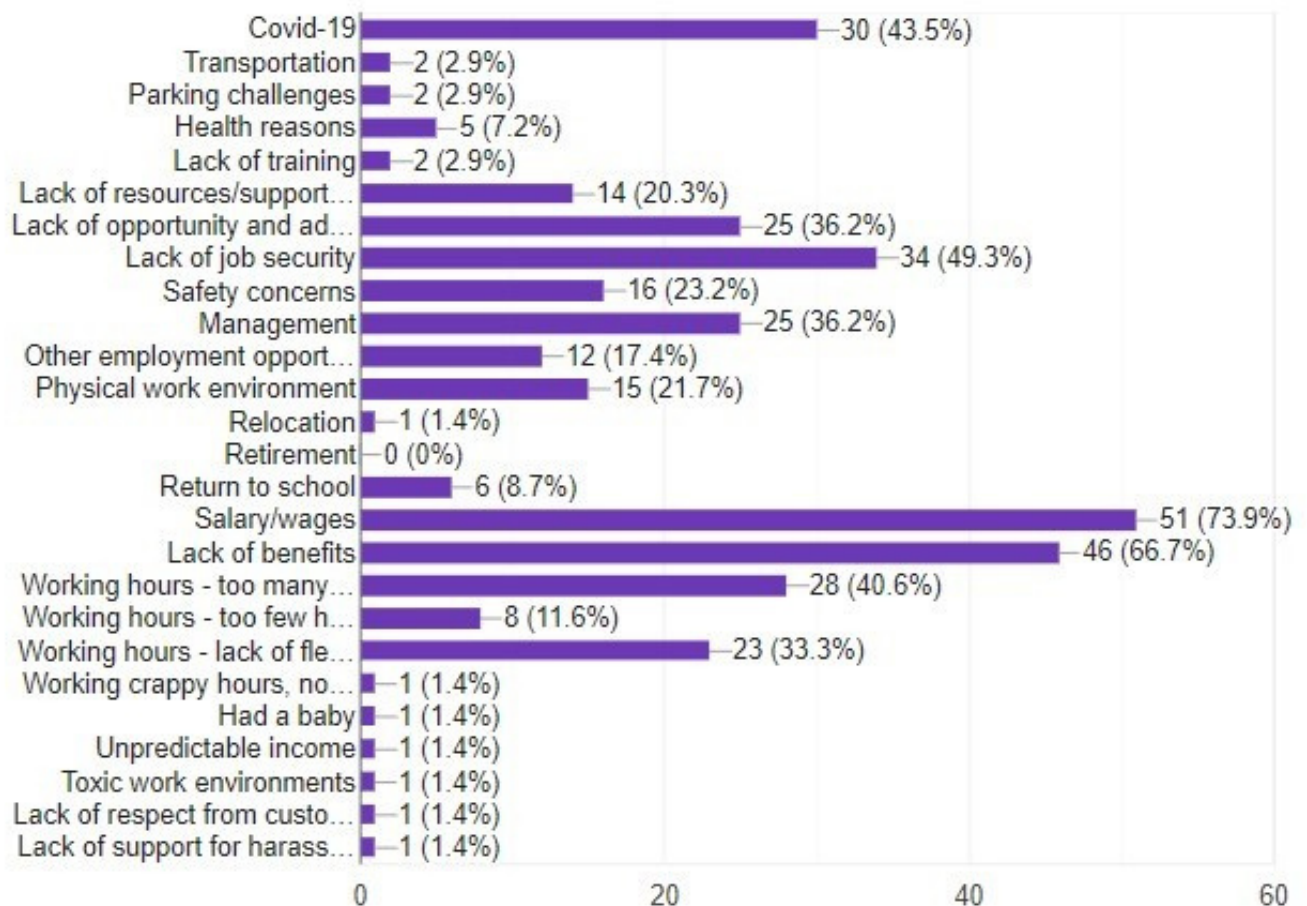# Responses to Survey cont...

Question Three: Of those who left the industry, the majority of respondents (60.9%) worked in the front of house, 40.6% worked as kitchen staff, 26.1% as a manager, and 5.8% were owners
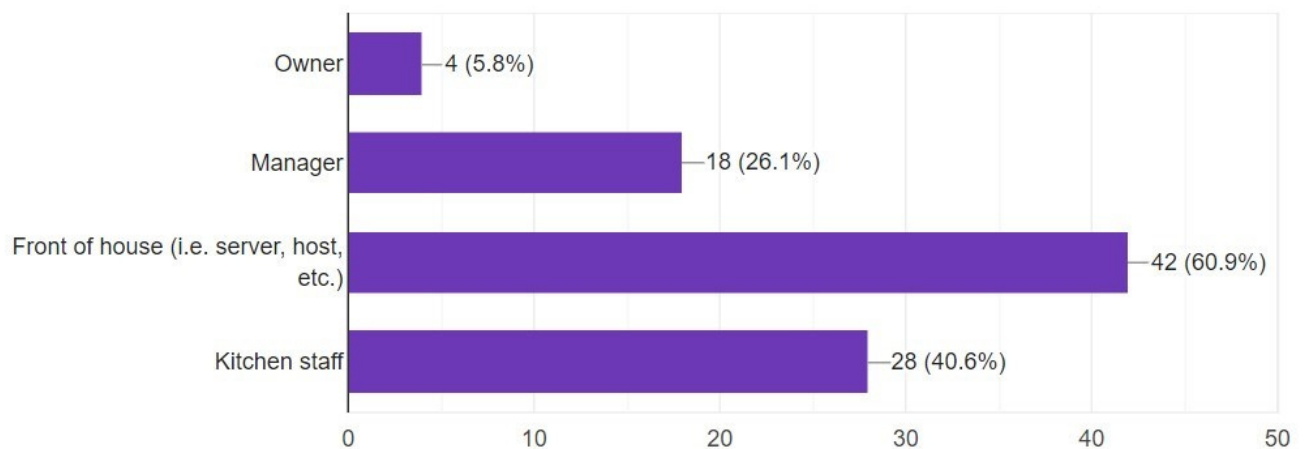
Responses to Survey cont...

Question Four: Respondents listed their primary reasons for leaving the industry. Salary/wages (74%) was the leading reason, followed by lack of benefits (66.7%). The rest of the list of reasons can be seen in the graphic below:

Respondents could select from the following list: Covid-19, Transportation, Parking challenges, Health reasons, Lack of training, Lack of resources/supports, Lack of opportunity and advancement, Lack of job security, Safety Concerns, Management, Other employment opportunity, Physical work environment, Relocation, Retirement, Return to school, Salary/wages, Lack of benefits, Working hours (too many), Working hours (too few), Working hours (lack of flexibility), and other (those listed by respondents as other reasons were: crappy hours, had a baby, unpredictable income, toxic work environments, lack of respect from customers, and lack of support from harassment)

Reason	Count (%)
Covid-19	30 (43.5%)
Transportation	2 (2.9%)
Parking challenges	2 (2.9%)
Health reasons	5 (7.2%)
Lack of training	2 (2.9%)
Lack of resources/support...	14 (20.3%)
Lack of opportunity and ad...	25 (36.2%)
Lack of job security	34 (49.3%)
Safety concerns	16 (23.2%)
Management	25 (36.2%)
Other employment opport...	12 (17.4%)
Physical work environment	15 (21.7%)
Relocation	1 (1.4%)
Retirement	0 (0%)
Return to school	6 (8.7%)
Salary/wages	51 (73.9%)
Lack of benefits	46 (66.7%)
Working hours - too many...	28 (40.6%)
Working hours - too few h...	8 (11.6%)
Working hours - lack of fle...	23 (33.3%)
Working crappy hours, no...	1 (1.4%)
Had a baby	1 (1.4%)
Unpredictable income	1 (1.4%)
Toxic work environments	1 (1.4%)
Lack of respect from custo...	1 (1.4%)
Lack of support for harass...	1 (1.4%)

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Five: The following are qualitative responses provided by respondents:

- The people have become rude and having to ask for proof of vaccinations is terrible. People are so mean about it we should not have to do this. The government made the tiles. They should enforce them, not us. We have lost so much business because of this.

- Industry pressure from COVID one minute open, next minute closed no job security.

- The cause was burnout for many reasons. All the reasons above butter to that. The biggest issue is the industry itself and the culture around it.

- Lack of professional employees.

- Unreliable income stream, some months could pay bills, some months could not.

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Five Continued...

- The service industry has been proven to be unsustainable (financially, environmentally, practically, emotionally, physically...) and unless major changes take place to support those working within it, that show that they are just as valuable as other workers, there is literally no incentive to pursue a career in this industry. In fact, at this point in my career, I would actively dissuade young people from considering a career making or serving food/drink and advise them to choose a path that will give them better, healthier and more sustainable opportunities for personal growth. The entire system of dining out and "being served" has both racist and classist origins and if RANS wants to understand problems occurring in this industry, it should take this into account. It should also look at sexism and other kinds of discrimination that make working in certain environments incredibly uncomfortable if you aren't a CIS white man. Service industry workers are not just leaving the industry cause they don't wanna do it anymore. They are at higher risk for developing substance abuse problems, mental health issues, often do not have health coverage, the freedom to choose their own hours, sometimes they work for abusive bosses that make every moment at work a living nightmare. There is no protection or recourse for these workers. The question isn't "why are they all leaving?", it's "why the **** would anyone want to stay".

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Five Continued...

- I enjoyed my time in the industry and I willingly stepped away. I had a good wage and worked at a great place.

- I spent years in this industry starting as a Line cook working up to executive chef and owner only to come to the realization the entire industry is overworked, underpaid , under appreciated, disrespected by the general public and still viewed as unskilled workers. My passion for the industry was constantly used against me to justify long hours and low pay. I came to the conclusion that if I wanted to be able to spend time with my family and make a living wage I had to make a career change.

- A rise in unrealistic expectations from industry and customers has made this a terrible industry to work in. Somehow customers want a low price as the cost of goods rise and the wages stay stagnant - owners cut the corner of paying wages and end up with staff who hate their lives and do not want to be there but are stuck because of security or lack thereof.

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Five Continued...

- Food costs money. If you want someone to make it for you, it costs more. It's not an unreasonable thing to think when it's written in plain English. The amount of times in my career I hear non-restaurant industry folk complaining about the price of a product, when I know from experience that the restaurant is making a merger profit, if any at all.

- As I've transitioned away from the industry I am gaining an understanding of the relationship regular folk (non-restaurant workers) have with food. Without any meaningful data, I believe that an issue many people have is that they simply do not know how to cook. Yes, they can boil a carrot and know well enough to put salt in their pasta water but that may be where the knowledge stops. The understanding that it actually takes time and real skill in order to prepare a meal (or like 200 meals a night) is unfathomable because it's never been learned. It is this that I believe is causing restaurateurs to underprice their product because regular folk don't value their work. Workers cannot be paid well under this model, restaurateurs will try to pinch every penny they can to make a profit, which inevitably falls on the workers to work harder, faster and more efficiently to make the whole operation work. The worker is getting tired of it.

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Five Continued...

- Government making rules for us.

- There should be a reverse Yelp where servers can rate customers and if they are great they can get discounts/deals/specials and if they suck then the server at least knows what they are in for.

- Low pay late hours, constant abuse and mismanagement.

- I loved my time in service, but it took its toll on my life. Working while everyone else (who isn't in the service industry) is playing made things like dating very hard. There also wasn't much job security - you don't work, you don't get paid. No sick leave. And there's very little flexibility once you're actually at work. Can't duck out for an appointment or an errand like you can in other jobs. Finding the time to pee was sometimes a challenge.

- The service industry is singe handedly the most toxic environment I've ever worked in, and as a queer person, I never felt safe.

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Five Continued...

- Minimum wage, slave labour serving entitled babies, which only seemed to have gotten worse since the pandemic began, with no raise aside from mandatory minimum wage increase.

- Restaurants attempting to compensate staff by paying them less than 30% of total tip percentage and using that as leverage to pay minimum wage. "We pay you in tips".

- With lockdowns impacting job security I didn't feel I could rely on the serving industry any longer as a feasible career. I now have a 9-5 WFH job that is not impacted by increasing COVID cases so my income is much more secure.

- I'm surprised given all the conversation lately, lack of paid sick days isn't on the list. Lack of paid vacation is another lack of the industry.

- This is a highly skilled industry that is not compensated adequately for those skills.

Responses to Survey cont...

Question Six: Lastly, respondents were asked whether they would be interested in discussing this topic further in a focus group where they provided a yes or no answer. Of those surveyed, 65.6 percent responded no, while 34.4 percent responded yes as well as providing their emails.
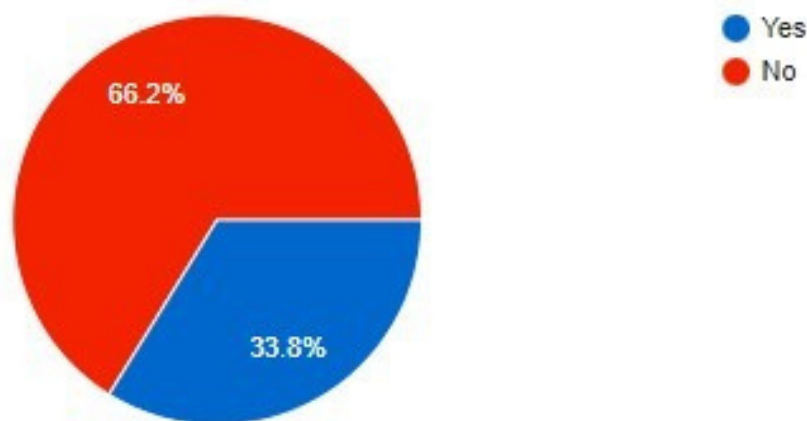
Question Seven: Email addresses were provided by 22 respondents who indicated they would like to participate in a focus group.