



SHIFT PULSE REPORT 2026

Shift Pulse Report

Insights from the global people platform for hourly work.

REPORT · UNITED STATES

MAY 2025 – APRIL 2026



Introduction

In shift-based industries, the employee experience is not separate from business performance. It shapes productivity, retention, customer outcomes, and the ability of organizations to adapt and grow. Yet too often, leaders lack a consistent way to understand how their teams are feeling in real time. Shift Pulse helps close that gap by capturing direct feedback from workers and turning it into actionable insight.

This year's report introduces a new generational lens, examining how workers at different stages of their careers experience work, wellbeing, and engagement. Together, these insights reveal not only where shift workers are thriving today, but also where organizations have the greatest opportunity to improve the employee experience.

Almost 79% of shift workers report feeling happy at work, a slight increase on last year despite continued economic uncertainty, inflation, and cost of living pressures. This result comes at a time of significant workforce change. Over the past 12 months, Gen Z has become the largest generation in the shift-based workforce, Gen Alpha has begun entering employment, and Baby Boomers continue to retire. This shift matters because workers at different stages of life report very different experiences at work, making this generational transition an important part of the story behind this year's results.

The data also highlights persistent disparities across industry sectors and regions. Retail and Hospitality have seen some of the strongest gains in employee sentiment, while Healthcare continues to rank lowest. Significant differences also exist between states, suggesting that workplace protections, scheduling regulations, and Fair Workweek-style legislation continue to influence how workers experience their jobs.

Sentiment is more than a measure of how people feel today. It is often an early indicator of tomorrow's performance, retention, and organizational health. In a competitive talent market, the organizations that win are the ones that stay closely connected to the frontline experience and act on what they learn. We hope these insights help leaders identify where progress is being made, where gaps remain, and how to build workplaces where shift workers can do their best work and thrive.



Silvija Martincevic

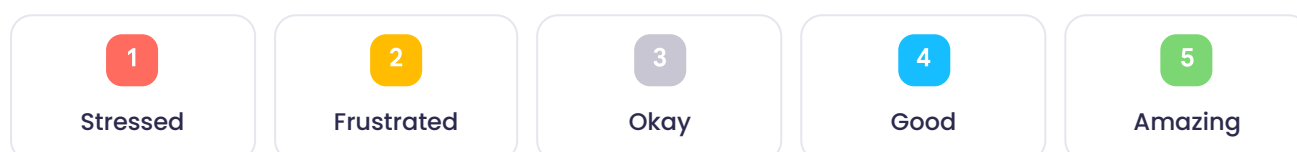
CEO, Deputy

How we measured the mood

The 2026 Shift Pulse Report is based on an analysis of 731,805 Shift Pulse survey responses submitted by shift workers across the United States and North America between May 1, 2025 and April 30, 2026.

What is Shift Pulse?

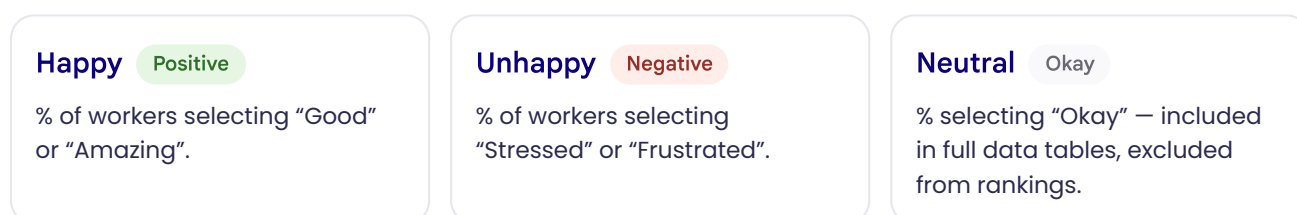
Shift Pulse is Deputy's one-tap in-app feedback tool that allows shift workers to anonymously record how they feel at the end of every shift. Workers choose from five response options:



These daily micro-interactions offer real-time visibility into worker sentiment across thousands of workplaces, enabling powerful data-led insights at scale.

Sentiment Analysis Approach

All analysis in this report categorizes shift worker sentiment into three groups:



Each sentiment value is calculated as a proportion of total Shift Pulse responses within a defined cohort, such as an industry sector, parent industry, state, generation, or national group, and expressed as a percentage. Throughout this report, every dimension is presented as two separate rankings: a Happy (Positive) list and an Unhappy (Negative) list, each ordered strictly by its underlying percentage and accompanied by its own commentary, so the happiest and most pressured groups can be read clearly on their own terms.

NEW THIS YEAR

The generational lens. For the first time, the 2026 edition segments sentiment by generation, offering a clearer view of how age and life stage shape the way America's shift workers experience their jobs.

A NOTE ON RANKINGS

All rankings present the Shift Pulse data as recorded, ordered strictly by value. Some sectors and locations with smaller response volumes can produce very high or very low readings (such as 100% positive or 0% negative); these are reported as they appear in the data and are best read alongside the larger cohorts rather than in isolation.

NATIONAL SNAPSHOT

U.S. shift worker sentiment steadies, with stress easing

In 2026, 78.90% of U.S. shift workers reported feeling positive at the end of their shifts, a modest improvement on 78.48% a year earlier. At the same time, unhappy sentiment fell from 6.62% to 5.90%, its lowest level in the dataset. After last year's slow erosion of morale, this marks a tentative stabilization: slightly more workers feeling good, and meaningfully fewer feeling stressed or frustrated.

78.90%

reported feeling positive at the end of their shifts

▲ up from 78.48% a year earlier

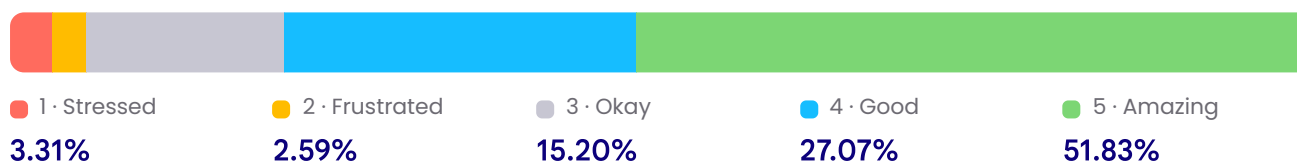
5.90%

reported feeling unhappy at the end of their shifts

▼ down from 6.62%

2026 National Sentiment

Share of all responses



78.90%

Happy (Good + Amazing)

15.20%

Okay (Neutral)

5.90%

Unhappy (Stressed + Frustrated)

Beneath the headline, the distribution shows a workforce concentrated at the positive end. More than half of all responses were "Amazing," and roughly another quarter "Good." The neutral middle; workers finishing their shift feeling merely "Okay" grew to around one in seven, a reminder that the opposite of engaged isn't always unhappy; sometimes it's simply flat.

Analyzing the Shift

The improvement in worker sentiment, while genuine, remains modest and is characterized by an expanding neutral segment. As fewer employees experience extreme emotional highs or lows, the workforce is increasingly congregating in a steady, broad center. This “Okay” majority represents a critical area for employer vigilance; a disengaged middle can serve as a silent precursor to future productivity declines, burnout, or rising turnover, even as overt negativity diminishes.

The daily reality for shift workers continues to be shaped by a few enduring influences:



Ongoing financial strain caused by the cost of living.



The widespread need to balance multiple jobs, or poly-employment.



A persistent demand for flexible schedules and stable income.

Workplace morale stays high when businesses focus on reliable scheduling, equitable pay, and meaningful appreciation. On the other hand, neglecting these core requirements frequently leads to employees becoming disengaged or choosing to leave their roles, a failure to address these fundamental needs often results in workers drifting toward neutrality or exiting the organization entirely.

Parent Industry sentiment

Across the four parent industries, Hospitality and Retail lead on happiness while Healthcare sits clearly at the bottom, and also carries the most strain, echoing last year's finding that healthcare shift workers continue to shoulder the heaviest emotional and physical loads.

Happy industry rankings

1	Hospitality	82.98%
2	Retail	82.62%
3	Services	77.61%
4	Healthcare	72.89%

Hospitality (82.98%) has claimed the primary position, just surpassing Retail. Frontline engagement within hotels, cafes, restaurants, and entertainment establishments appears to be rising as these businesses leverage a tight labor market and prioritize employee retention.

Retail (82.62%) is a close second. Sustained morale in this sector is bolstered by advances in shift consistency, wage transparency, and flexibility, even as workers navigate the typical stressors of customer-facing roles.

With Services (77.61%) occupying the mid-tier, Healthcare (72.89%) remains the lowest-ranked parent industry for the second year running, marking a consistent trend in the data. Ongoing challenges such as staffing deficits, inconsistent scheduling, and regulatory demands continue to weigh heavily on morale within the healthcare sector.

Unhappy industry rankings

1	Healthcare	7.91%
2	Services	5.67%
3	Hospitality	5.62%
4	Retail	5.16%

Healthcare (7.91%) has the most negative sentiment of all major industries, which aligns with its last-place ranking for happiness. Difficulties such as intense emotional labor, physical strain, and lingering post-pandemic exhaustion are common in clinical, care, and frontline medical positions, a trend further supported by sub-sector findings where healthcare-related roles frequently appear on the least happy list.

In the middle are Services (5.67%) and Hospitality (5.62%). The standing of the Hospitality sector is particularly striking; while it excels in happiness, it simultaneously harbors a notable level of negativity. This duality reflects the high-energy, high-pressure nature of the field, which provides fulfillment for many while leading to exhaustion for others.

With the lowest negative sentiment across the four major sectors, Retail (5.16%) combines high happiness with limited stress. This outcome suggests that industry-wide improvements in scheduling predictability and flexibility are successfully benefiting a broad range of its workforce.

Industry Sub-sector sentiment

Detailed sub-sector analysis reveals a more precise picture. High levels of job satisfaction are most prevalent in the food, beverage, and niche retail sectors, whereas the greatest strain is found in healthcare-related, care-based, and demanding service positions. By separating these findings into distinct rankings, the divergence in worker experience becomes clear. Notably, certain categories; including adult services and tobacco/vape retail, feature in both the highest and lowest sentiment groups, suggesting environments that provide great fulfillment for the majority but leave a significant portion of the workforce feeling overstretched.

Top 10 happiest sub-sectors

1	Gambling	100.00%
2	Firearms Stores	89.53%
3	Cafes / Coffee Shops	89.50%
4	Accommodation	84.09%
5	Adult Services	82.76%
6	Sit Down Restaurants	81.79%
7	Doctors' Office / Medical Clinic	81.36%
8	Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores	81.01%
9	Fast Food / Cashier Restaurants	80.30%
10	In-Home Care	73.14%

With a flawless 100.00% positive rating, Gambling leads the sub-sector rankings. This sector exhibits the most intense positive sentiment in the entire study, as 96.88% of its workers described their experience as "Amazing." The high morale likely stems from a vibrant customer-facing atmosphere paired with the benefits of tips and collaborative team structures.

Firearms Stores (89.53%) follow, reaffirming a finding from last year: highly specialized, niche retail environments with tight-knit teams and clear job expectations can deliver exceptional satisfaction. Workers in these settings report strong role clarity and a sense of belonging.

Cafes & Coffee Shops (89.50%) sit a fraction behind, with the highest "Amazing" share among the larger sectors at 72.64%. Fast-paced food and beverage environments, when well managed, foster camaraderie, flexibility, and a clear daily rhythm, a formula that keeps morale high.

Accommodation (84.09%), Adult Services (82.76%), and Sit Down Restaurants (81.79%) round out the upper tier, alongside strong showings from medical clinics and fast food. The common thread is autonomy, predictability, and a sense of control over the workday, factors that, as last year's report observed, matter as much as prestige or pay.

Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores (81.01%) appear at #8, but with a crucial caveat: this sector also tops the unhappiest ranking. It is one of the most polarizing environments in the dataset, delivering high satisfaction to most workers while leaving a sizable minority frustrated, a tension explored on the next page.

Top 10 unhappiest sub-sectors

1	Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores	13.34%
2	Animal Health	13.07%
3	Care Facilities	11.55%
4	Employment Services	11.31%
5	Dentists	11.31%
6	Delivery & Postal Services	10.64%
7	Call Centers	10.50%
8	Childcare / Community Centers	9.42%
9	Adult Services	9.20%
10	Security Services	8.51%

Tobacco, E-cigarette & Marijuana Stores (13.34%) record the highest negativity of any sub-sector, driven overwhelmingly by frustration (10.06%) rather than acute stress. The same sector ranks #7 on happiness, a genuinely polarized workforce, where the typical worker is satisfied but a frustrated minority pulls the negative score to the top of the table. Solitary work and customer-facing friction in a heavily regulated, fast-changing category likely explain the split.

Animal Health (13.07%) and Care Facilities (11.55%) follow, with strain skewed toward stress. Both carry heavy emotional weight and physical demands, often with limited recovery time, consistent with the broader healthcare pattern of high burnout risk.

Employment Services (11.31%), Dentists (11.31%), Delivery & Postal Services (10.64%), and Call Centers (10.50%) cluster in the double digits. Call Centers stand out for being almost entirely frustration-driven (8.54%), the hallmark of KPI pressure, repetition, and limited schedule control. Childcare / Community Centers (9.42%), Adult Services (9.20%), and Security Services (8.51%) complete the list, spanning care work, solitary roles, and emotionally demanding environments.

Happy vs unhappy industry traits

Across every cut of the data, the same drivers separate the happiest sectors from the most pressured ones. They have less to do with the type of work and more to do with how that work is structured, supported, and scheduled, a finding that holds as firmly in the U.S. as anywhere.

Happy industry traits POSITIVE

Predictability and a clear daily rhythm

Cafes, restaurants, and accommodation offer a defined cadence to the working day, even when fast-paced.

Autonomy and role clarity

Specialized retail and clinic-based roles give workers clear expectations and a sense of control over their work.

Tight-knit team structures

Niche and small-format environments foster belonging, camaraderie, and mutual support.

Connection to those they serve

Care-adjacent roles report high satisfaction when workers feel a genuine bond with clients and customers.

Unhappy industry traits NEGATIVE

High emotional labor

Animal health, care facilities, childcare, and call centers demand constant emotional effort with little recovery.

Frustration-heavy, low-control work

Call centers and tobacco/vape stores are dominated by frustration, a signature of KPI pressure and customer friction.

Physical strain and rigid timeframes

Delivery, postal, and security roles combine physical demands with unforgiving schedules.

Understaffing and post-pandemic pressure

Healthcare-adjacent roles continue to face demand that has outpaced staffing and resources.

US States: a country of contrasts

As in prior years, sentiment varies sharply across North America, shaped not just by geography, but by local economic conditions, industry mix, and workplace culture. Reading the happiest and most unhappy locations as separate rankings reveals an important nuance: several appear near the top of both lists, a sign of genuinely divided workforces rather than uniformly good or bad conditions.

Note: rankings present the data as recorded, ordered strictly by value; smaller-sample locations can produce very high or low readings and are best read alongside the larger cohorts.

Happiest US states

1	Rhode Island	100.00%
2	Alaska	95.35%
3	Hawaii	92.89%
4	Nevada	89.07%
5	Montana	88.58%
6	Idaho	86.62%
7	Washington	85.35%
8	Arizona	81.63%
9	Alabama	79.28%
10	Michigan	78.96%

Rhode Island (100.00%) leads the nation with a perfect positive rating, the highest across all locations. Not far behind are Alaska (95.35%) and Hawaii (92.89%), where upwards of 90% of shift workers express favorable sentiment. This high morale is likely driven by tight labor markets and robust hospitality and tourism industries, both of which perform well on a national scale.

Strong performances continue with Nevada (89.07%), Montana (88.58%), Idaho (86.62%), and Washington (85.35%). This cluster of Pacific and Mountain West states indicates that successful industry models, specifically in specialized retail, accommodation, and hospitality, are effectively scaling across these geographic borders.

Just outside the top ten, North Dakota (78.16%) marks a notable turnaround: a year ago it reported the highest negative sentiment in the country, and it now sits among the happiest states, a sign that conditions in some rural and resource-driven economies have improved.

Most unhappy US states

1	Arkansas	12.68%
2	New Hampshire	12.31%
3	District of Columbia	11.11%
4	Minnesota	10.52%
5	Arizona	8.68%
6	South Dakota	7.93%
7	Montana	7.84%
8	Louisiana	7.17%
9	Wyoming	7.05%
10	Alabama	6.95%

Arkansas (12.68%) and New Hampshire (12.31%) report the highest stress and frustration in the country, followed by the District of Columbia (11.11%) and Minnesota (10.52%). In these markets, a mix of economic pressure, industry composition, and limited scheduling flexibility appears to be weighing on frontline morale.

Most striking are the states that appear on both lists. Arizona (7th happiest, 5th unhappiest), Montana (4th happiest, 7th unhappiest), and Alabama (8th happiest, 10th unhappiest) all rank highly on positive and negative sentiment at once. This points to deeply divided workforces, strong satisfaction for many workers coexisting with acute frustration for others, often reflecting uneven conditions across different industries within the same state.

The takeaway echoes last year: where people live still heavily influences how they feel about their work. No single national strategy will lift sentiment without accounting for these local realities; and the locations that succeed tend to pair a healthy industry mix with predictable, supportive working conditions.

Generational sentiment

For the first time, this year's report segments U.S. sentiment by generation; and the pattern is striking. Happiness does not decline neatly with age; instead, the youngest workers are by far the happiest, sentiment dips through the mid-career generations, and the most stress and frustration land squarely on Generation Z and Millennials. Reading the two rankings separately reveals a workforce divided as much by life stage as by industry.

Happiest generations

1	Generation Alpha	88.88%
2	Generation Z	78.42%
3	Baby Boomers	77.50%
4	Generation X	75.92%
5	Millennials	74.52%

Generation Alpha (88.88%) represents the newcomers to the hourly economy. They exhibit the highest level of positivity in the dataset, leading the following group by nearly ten percentage points. For these individuals, the start of a professional career often introduces newfound independence and social opportunities, a sense of novelty that is clearly reflected in their high sentiment scores.

In the middle of the happiness spectrum are Generation Z (78.42%) and Baby Boomers (77.50%). These groups represent opposite ends of the career journey, one characterized by the optimism of youth and the other by a more stable, seasoned perspective.

Generation X (75.92%) and Millennials (74.52%) report the lowest positivity. As the mid-career core of the workforce, frequently balancing shift work with family, caregiving, and financial commitments, they shoulder competing pressures that can dampen day-to-day satisfaction.

Most unhappy generations

Ranked by negativity %

1	Generation Z	8.04%
2	Millennials	7.66%
3	Generation X	5.32%
4	Baby Boomers	5.14%
5	Generation Alpha	3.65%

Generation Z (8.04%) carries the highest negativity of any generation, despite ranking second on happiness. This combination of high highs and high lows points to a cohort that is emotionally invested in work but also more exposed to its frustrations, frontline customer roles, poly-employment, and pressure around hours and pay.

Millennials (7.66%) sit close behind and post the lowest happiness score as well, the only generation near the bottom of both rankings. The mid-career squeeze of family and financial obligations appears to weigh especially heavily here.

Generation X (5.32%) and Baby Boomers (5.14%) report moderate, stable negativity, while Generation Alpha (3.65%) records the lowest of any generation, the mirror image of its top happiness ranking.

EMPLOYER INSIGHTS

The experience of the same role varies significantly across a multi-generational shift workforce. While the youngest staff contribute energy and optimism, they require assistance in navigating frustration. Conversely, mid-career Gen X and Millennials need support managing the diverse pressures that dampen their morale, while older employees provide the stability necessary to ground a team. Tailoring scheduling, recognition, and professional growth to these distinct generational needs is emerging as a critical competitive edge.

CONCLUSION

Frontline sentiment and the bottom line

The American shift workforce remains resilient, maintaining an overall positive outlook as nearly 80% of employees end their shifts on a happy note. While year-over-year declines in stress and frustration are encouraging, this high-level stability masks a growing “neutral middle” and significant sentiment gaps across industries, geography, and for the first time, generational groups.

Actionable drivers are at the heart of this divide. Positive sentiment is bolstered by autonomy, predictability, robust team cohesion, and genuine interpersonal connections. In contrast, factors such as chronic understaffing, physical exhaustion, low-control environments, and high emotional labor continue to dampen morale. Retail and Hospitality sectors exemplify the success of prioritizing flexibility and culture, while Healthcare continues to face the most intense pressure.

For leadership, the path forward involves leveraging these insights to sustain low-negativity conditions, re-energize the neutral workforce, and offer tailored support for a multi-generational staff.

Worker sentiment is a vital leading indicator; organizations that embrace daily listening over annual surveys will be best equipped to retain talent and ensure long-term performance.

Deputy’s Shift Pulse feature helps businesses easily capture continuous feedback from employees with a simple, one-step way for teams to share how they’re feeling after every shift. With these valuable insights, managers can make changes to improve their team’s effectiveness and create a thriving workplace.

731,805

Shift Pulse survey responses were analyzed for this report.



**Improving the world of
work, one shift at a time.**

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