



Building a Winery Team That Stays



Practical Strategies for Retaining Great Employees and Creating a Stronger Guest Experience

Introduction

42% of employees who voluntarily left their organization said their manager or employer could have done something to prevent them from leaving.*

Ask almost any winery owner or manager about their biggest operational challenges and employee retention will likely make the list.

Finding talented employees has become increasingly difficult. Keeping them can be even harder.

For many wineries, the conversation quickly turns to compensation, benefits, and labor shortages. While those factors certainly matter, they rarely tell the entire story.

The wineries that consistently retain great employees understand something important: People rarely leave jobs because of a single bad day.

More often, they leave after experiencing months or years of unnecessary frustration, unclear expectations, ineffective training, operational inefficiencies, and a work environment that makes success feel difficult.

Highly engaged teams experience 21% less turnover in high-turnover organizations and 51% less turnover in low-turnover organizations. **

The Good News:

Many of the factors influencing retention are entirely within a winery's control.

This guide explores practical strategies wineries can use to create an environment where employees feel confident, supported, productive, and motivated to stay.

*<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/646538/employee-turnover-preventable-often-ignored.aspx>

**<https://www.gallup.com/workplace/236366/right-culture-not-employee-satisfaction.aspx>

Why Employee Retention Matters

Replacing an employee is expensive, and the true cost extends far beyond recruiting, interviewing, and onboarding a replacement.

Every departure creates disruption that ripples throughout the organization, often in ways that are difficult to measure on a balance sheet. Existing team members must absorb additional responsibilities while the position remains vacant. Managers spend valuable time recruiting, interviewing, training, and supervising new hires instead of focusing on strategic initiatives, guest experience improvements, or revenue-generating activities. Productivity often slows as teams adjust to staffing changes, and institutional knowledge that took months or years to develop walks out the door with the departing employee.

The New Reality of Winery Employment

Compensation matters, but it is no longer the primary driver of retention.

- Employees increasingly evaluate their overall workplace experience, including support, growth opportunities, and their ability to succeed.

Employees want to feel successful and valued.

- Recognition, trust, communication, and meaningful work often have as much impact on retention as pay and benefits.

Confidence is one of the strongest predictors of employee engagement and retention.

- Employees who feel confident are more likely to deliver exceptional guest experiences, recommend products, and contribute to business growth.

Operational challenges can erode confidence over time.

- Poor training, unclear processes, disconnected systems, and difficulty accessing information create frustration and make employees less likely to enjoy their work.

The wineries that retain great employees create environments where success feels achievable.

- Clear expectations, strong onboarding, supportive leadership, accessible information, and effective tools help employees feel capable, supported, and motivated to stay.

Why Employees Really Leave

When wineries experience turnover, labor market conditions often receive the blame. In reality, the causes are frequently much closer to home.

Common reasons employees leave include:

Lack of Training

Employees cannot feel confident if they are unsure how to succeed.

Operational Frustration

Disconnected systems, duplicate work, and confusing workflows create daily stress.

Poor Communication

Employees become disengaged when expectations are unclear.

Lack of Recognition

People want their contributions to be noticed and appreciated.

Limited Growth Opportunities

Employees are more likely to stay when they can see a future within the organization.

Burnout

Constant pressure combined with inefficient processes eventually takes a toll.

Many of these issues can be addressed long before an employee starts considering leaving.

The Hidden Impact of Operational Friction

One of the biggest contributors to employee frustration is operational friction. Operational friction occurs when employees spend unnecessary time managing systems, processes, and administrative tasks instead of serving guests.

Examples of Operational Time Sucks

- **Duplicate data entry**
- **Manual reporting**
- **Multiple customer databases**
- **Disconnected reservation systems**
- **Repetitive administrative work**
- **Constant system switching**

Individually, none of these activities seem particularly significant. A few extra clicks here. A few minutes updating customer records there. An employee exporting reports into a spreadsheet at the end of the day. Because these tasks have become part of the daily routine, many wineries simply accept them as "the way things have always been done."

These activities consume time without creating meaningful value. Employees rarely join the wine industry because they enjoy spreadsheets. They join because they enjoy hospitality, wine, storytelling, and guest engagement.

The more friction that exists, the harder it becomes for employees to focus on the parts of the job they love.



Creating Confidence Through Better Training

Winery Story & Brand

Employees should understand who you are and why you exist.

Wine Education

Product knowledge builds confidence.

Hospitality Standards

Teach employees what exceptional service looks like.

Expectations

Employees should never have to guess what good performance looks like.

One of the greatest gifts a winery can give a new employee is confidence.

1. Start With Your Story
2. Build Product Knowledge Gradually
3. Define What Great Hospitality Looks Like
4. Create Clear, Repeatable Workflows
5. Teach Technology as a Tool, Not a Task
6. Define Success Clearly
7. Training Is an Investment in Retention

Every opportunity to teach, coach, encourage, and support an employee builds confidence. Every confident employee creates better guest experiences. Better guest experiences strengthen customer loyalty, increase wine club growth, and contribute directly to the long-term success of the winery.

Ultimately, employees who feel prepared, supported, and capable are far more likely to enjoy coming to work each day. And employees who enjoy their work are far more likely to stay.

Empower Employees With Information



One of the fastest ways to improve employee confidence isn't by hiring more people or adding more training. It's by making information easier to access.

Every guest interaction is an opportunity to build relationships and loyalty, but that becomes difficult when employees spend more time searching for customer information than engaging with the guest in front of them. Today's visitors expect personalized service, whether it's recognizing them as returning guests, understanding their wine club status, or recommending wines based on previous purchases.

When employees have immediate access to that information, they can focus less on finding answers and more on creating the memorable, personalized experiences that keep guests coming back.

Two Employees. Two Very Different Experiences.

Employee A

The guest mentions they visited last fall and asks about a bottle they purchased during their previous trip.

- Searches multiple systems to answer a simple guest question.
- Purchase history, club status, reservations, and customer notes are stored in different places.
- Spends valuable time switching between screens instead of engaging with the guest.
- The conversation loses its natural flow while the guest waits for answers.
- A personalized experience quickly becomes a transactional interaction.

Employee B

Same guest, same question

- Instantly accesses a complete customer profile from a single system.
- Sees purchase history, wine club status, reservations, preferences, and previous visit notes in one place.
- Confidently makes personalized recommendations based on the guest's history.
- Keeps the conversation natural, engaging, and guest-focused.
- Creates a memorable experience where the guest feels recognized and valued.



Building a Culture People Want to Stay In

Culture is often discussed in abstract terms.

In reality, culture is simply the sum of everyday experiences.

Employees ask themselves questions such as:

- Do I feel supported?
- Can I do my job effectively?
- Does leadership communicate clearly?
- Are my contributions valued?
- Do I enjoy coming to work?

Positive cultures are built intentionally.

Simple practices include:

Recognition

Celebrate wins both large and small.

Inclusion

Invite feedback and suggestions.

Communication

Keep employees informed.

Development

Invest in employee growth.
People stay where they feel valued.

Transparency

Explain decisions when possible.

Reducing Burnout Before It Starts

**Burnout rarely appears overnight.
It develops gradually through repeated frustration and stress.**



Common warning signs include:

- Declining engagement
- Increased mistakes
- Reduced enthusiasm
- Higher absenteeism
- Negative attitudes
- Lower productivity

To reduce burnout:

- Eliminate unnecessary tasks
- Simplify workflows
- Improve communication
- Provide adequate training
- Automate repetitive work
- Ensure employees have the tools they need

**The goal is not to make employees work harder.
The goal is to remove work that should not exist in the first place.**

The Winery Retention Checklist



Review your operation and ask:

Leadership

- ❑ Expectations are clearly communicated
- ❑ Employees receive regular feedback
- ❑ Team accomplishments are recognized

Training

- ❑ New employee onboarding is documented
- ❑ Wine education is ongoing
- ❑ Systems training is consistent

Operations

- ❑ Customer information is easy to access
- ❑ Duplicate data entry is minimized
- ❑ Administrative work is streamlined

Technology

- ❑ Systems support employees rather than frustrate them
- ❑ Staff can find information quickly
- ❑ Reporting is accessible and accurate

Culture

- ❑ Employees feel valued
- ❑ Communication is transparent
- ❑ Team members understand how their work contributes to success

Final Thoughts

The wineries that retain great employees are not necessarily the ones offering the highest wages or the largest benefits packages.

More often, they are the wineries that make it easier for employees to succeed.

- They invest in training.
- They simplify operations.
- They reduce frustration.
- They provide clear expectations.

They create environments where employees can focus on hospitality rather than administrative work.

Because retaining great people is not about convincing them to stay.
It is about creating a workplace where they want to stay.

Next Step: Evaluate Your Winery Operations

Employee retention and operational efficiency are deeply connected.

When employees spend less time navigating systems and more time engaging guests, job satisfaction improves, onboarding becomes easier, and teams become more productive.

Schedule an OrderPort Winery Operations Review to identify opportunities to reduce operational friction, streamline workflows, and build a stronger foundation for employee retention, guest experience, and long-term growth.

Because the best way to keep great employees is to give them the tools, information, and support they need to thrive.