

Staffing Trouble Brews at Starbucks

A NATIONAL SURVEY OF
STARBUCKS WORKERS
SEPTEMBER 2025



STRATEGIC
ORGANIZING
CENTER



Photo by Elliot Stoller

Staffing Trouble Brews at Starbucks

**A NATIONAL SURVEY OF STARBUCKS
WORKERS, SEPTEMBER 2025**

ABOUT THE STRATEGIC ORGANIZING CENTER

The Strategic Organizing Center (SOC) is a mission-focused center developing strategies and implementing tactics on transformational campaigns that confront corporate power. We partner with workers and our affiliates — the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Communication Workers of America (CWA), and the United Farmworkers of America (UFW) — who are united in building a strong, vibrant labor movement through organizing workers hungry for change. The SOC acts with workers and unions driving strategies and tactics that support many of the largest organizing initiatives being conducted in the United States today.

Learn more at thesoc.org

ABOUT STARBUCKS WORKERS UNITED

Starbucks Workers United is a growing, nationwide movement of more than 12,000 baristas who have won their union at more than 600 locations in 45 states and the District of Columbia. Partners with Starbucks Workers United are organizing to build a better Starbucks and are affiliated with Workers United.

To learn more, visit SBWorkersUnited.org



**STRATEGIC
ORGANIZING
CENTER**

The SOC conducted an online survey of Starbucks baristas and shift supervisors across the United States to gather insights into their experiences with staffing and scheduling, and to assess the impact of recent corporate policy changes on the worker and customer experiences at Starbucks stores. The survey was conducted between August 4th and August 17th, 2025.

SURVEY BACKGROUND

A total of 737 current Starbucks workers participated in the survey, 69% of whom self-identified as baristas and 31% as shift supervisors. Respondents were recruited through advertisements on Facebook and Instagram.

Participants in the survey included workers in 47 states and the District of Columbia.¹ In addition to geographic diversity, respondents also represented a wide array of tenures at Starbucks, with 7% working at the company for more than 10 years, 19% for 5 to 10 years, 44% for 2 to 5 years, 18% for 1 to 2 years, and 11% for 3 months to 1 year.

KEY FINDINGS

91% of surveyed Starbucks workers report understaffing at their stores, along with other substantial workplace issues.

To understand the recent workplace experiences of Starbucks baristas across the United States, respondents were asked whether they had experienced various workplace issues at their Starbucks stores in the past three months. These issues included understaffing, overwhelming work pace, scheduling problems, high staff turnover, and safety risks. Table 1 depicts the share of respondents who reported experiencing these workplace problems at their Starbucks stores.

91% of Starbucks respondents report understaffing.



Startlingly, 91% of Starbucks worker respondents indicated that they experienced understaffing at their stores in the past three months. Additionally, more than three in four baristas (76%) reported that they experienced an overwhelming pace of work managing drive-thru, in-store, mobile and delivery orders. Scheduling was another issue for baristas and shift supervisors, with more than two-thirds of respondents experiencing uneven and mismanaged scheduling (69%) and erratic and/or unpredictable scheduling (65%) at their Starbucks stores. In addition, four in ten respondents indicated that high staff turnover (41%) and safety conditions (41%) were issues in their stores. In fact, only 3% of Starbucks worker respondents indicated they had no in-store issues in the past three months.

Table 1: Share of Starbucks Respondents Indicating Experience with In-Store Issues, August 2025 Survey of Starbucks Workers (n=737)

In-Store Issue	Share of Respondents (%)
Understaffing	91%
Overwhelming pace of work managing drive-thru, in-store, mobile and delivery orders	76%
Uneven and mismanaged scheduling	69%
Erratic and/or unpredictable scheduling	65%
High staff turnover	41%
Unsafe conditions (i.e. slippery floors, burns from hot liquids, blocked exits)	41%
Threatening interactions with customers	38%
Uniform infractions leading to missed shifts or understaffing	31%
Unsanitary bathrooms	26%
No in-store issues	3%

According to surveyed Starbucks workers, understaffing is the top workplace issue at Starbucks, impacting the store experience for customers and baristas alike.

In addition to identifying issues impacting them as workers, Starbucks worker respondents were asked to select the *most critical issue* they faced in the past three months at their Starbucks job.² Nearly half (47%) of Starbucks worker respondents indicated that understaffing is the most critical in-store issue for them, followed by scheduling issues (19%) and overwhelming pace of work (16%).³

Understaffing has consequences for both barista safety and customer satisfaction. A shocking 88% of Starbucks worker respondents reported that understaffing at their stores had resulted in an unsustainable work pace and/or unsafe working conditions for baristas and other staff.

Beyond overwhelming baristas behind the counter, understaffing directly contributes to a key customer complaint at Starbucks: wait times.⁴ More than nine in ten (93%) of Starbucks worker respondents agreed with the following statement: “In the past three months, my store has been understaffed, resulting in long wait times for customers in the store and/or drive thru.” In fact, 67% of respondents *strongly* agreed with that statement. A mere 4% of worker respondents disagreed with the statement.

In addition to understaffing, high employee turnover also contributes to customer and worker dissatisfaction, according to Starbucks worker respondents. A notable 60% of Starbucks worker respondents indicated that employee turnover had increased, resulting in long wait times for customers in the store and/or drive-thru. Also, 56% of respondents agree that an increase in employee turnover has resulted in an unsustainable work pace and unsafe working conditions for Starbucks baristas.

These consequences of understaffing and high turnover should not be overlooked, especially when highlighted by those who staff Starbucks stores every day. The company has claimed improvements in speed, shift completion, and turnover to investors, and promises that it has addressed staffing issues, but baristas point to a different day-to-day reality in their stores.⁵



Photo by Franklin Heijnen

Although Starbucks workers report that new corporate policies have been implemented in most stores, these changes have largely failed to improve the customer experience.

In the past year, Starbucks has touted its “Back to Starbucks” turnaround plan.⁶ The plan consists of new corporate policies, including an updated mobile-ordering algorithm, changes to its staffing model, new mandates around baristas writing names and notes on cups, a new barista uniform policy, menu simplification, and restricting bathroom and water access to customers who make in-store purchases.⁷ And according to Starbucks worker respondents, these changes have been widely implemented across its store footprint. Specifically, respondents report the implementation of these recent Starbucks’ mandates at their stores, ranging from 67% to 97% per mandate. Starbucks has defended and uplifted the plan in the press and to investors, promising that it has “made meaningful progress” and is “ahead of expectations.”⁸ However, Starbucks worker respondents are telling a different story.

Despite corporate management touting the impact of these corporate policy mandates, Starbucks worker respondents indicate that these changes have done little to move the needle on the company’s efforts to win back customers and turn around its sales slump.⁹ Same-store sales have fallen year-over-year for six straight quarters despite the new policies in the stores.¹⁰ A stunning 93% of Starbucks worker respondents indicated that the policy changes, taken together, either had no impact or worsened the customer experience. In fact, only 7% of respondents indicated that these changes, taken together, improved the customer experience.

Table 2 displays the impact of each new corporate policy change on the customer experience, according to Starbucks worker respondents.

Moreover, Starbucks worker respondents indicated that none of the individual corporate policy changes have meaningfully improved the customer experience. Even for the policy change rated most positively by Starbucks worker respondents — the updated mobile-ordering algorithm — only 15% of respondents said it had improved the store experience for customers.

93% of Starbucks respondents report that the policy changes, taken together, either had no impact or worsened customer the experience.



Table 2: Share of Starbucks Respondents who Indicated Direction of Impact on Customer Experience of Recent Starbucks Corporate Policy Changes, August 2025 Survey

Starbucks Corporate Policy Change	Improved Customer Experience	No Impact / Worsened Customer Experience	n
New barista uniform policy	4%	96%	610
Restricting bathroom and water access to customers who make in-store purchases	5%	95%	595
Menu simplification	6%	94%	582
Changes to staffing model	6%	94%	542
New mandates around writing names and notes on cups	13%	87%	611
Updated mobile ordering algorithm	15%	85%	546

Starbucks’ new policy changes are worsening the work experience for Starbucks workers.

Starbucks’ recent corporate policy changes are not only failing to improve the customer experience, but the mandates are also worsening the work experience for Starbucks baristas and shift supervisors. 88% of Starbucks worker respondents reported that, taken together, these new corporate mandates worsened their work experience, while only 5% said that these changes improved their work experience. It is difficult to square these results with the message pushed by the company that a major part of its turnaround plan is to “regain faith among its employees.”¹¹ Table 3 shows how each policy change has impacted baristas’ work at Starbucks.

88% of Starbucks respondents reported that the policy changes, taken together, worsened their work experience.



Table 3: Share of Starbucks Respondents who Indicated Direction of Impact on Worker Experience of Recent Starbucks Corporate Policy Changes, August 2025 Survey

Starbucks Corporate Policy Change	Improved Worker Experience	No Impact / Worsened Worker Experience	n
New mandates around writing names and notes on cups	3%	97%	612
New barista uniform policy	4%	96%	609
Restricting bathroom and water access to customers who make in-store purchases	7%	93%	591
Changes to staffing model	7%	93%	537
Menu simplification	8%	92%	580
Updated mobile ordering algorithm	19%	81%	546

CONCLUSION

In the past year, Starbucks has made extensive promises to workers, customers, and investors to fix its in-store issues.¹² However, between declining sales and this report from Starbucks's own workers, it is clear that these policy changes are not working. To address the problems that persist at its stores for both customers and workers, Starbucks needs to address its most serious problem, understaffing, with real solutions. In fact, 76% of Starbucks worker respondents indicated that increased and/or stabilized staffing levels would be the most effective policy change to fix the in-store issues at Starbucks.

Despite Starbucks' claims that its corporate policy changes address both workplace issues for its baristas and customer complaints like long wait times, these survey results show that the company has failed to resolve major issues facing workers and customers.¹³

ENDNOTES

- 1** No respondents indicated they resided in Idaho, North Dakota or Vermont.
- 2** The denominator for the 'most important problem' question excludes 23 respondents who indicated they had no in-store issues.
- 3** The 19% of respondents who indicated scheduling issues as their most important in-store issue included respondents who indicated "uneven and mismanaged scheduling" (11%) or "erratic and/or unpredictable scheduling" (8%).
- 4** <https://retailwire.com/starbucks-speed-goals-reduce-order-times/>; <https://www.fastcompany.com/91226415/why-a-4-minute-wait-is-the-magic-number-for-starbucks>; <https://fortune.com/2024/12/06/starbucks-ceo-brian-niccol-coffee-wait-time-30-seconds/>; <https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/starbucks-hatches-plan-cut-customers-214043691.html>
- 5** https://s203.q4cdn.com/326826266/files/doc_financials/2025/q3/SBUX-3Q25-Corrected-Transcript.pdf; <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/15/starbucks-news-turnaround-plan-focuses-on-employees.html>
- 6** <https://fortune.com/2025/01/29/starbucks-new-ceo-reveals-plans-to-overhaul-strategy-slash-menu-items-and-double-stores-in-the-u-s/>; <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/15/starbucks-news-turnaround-plan-focuses-on-employees.html>; <https://www.reuters.com/business/starbucks-ceo-details-brand-reset-plan-turnaround-efforts-drive-sales-beat-2025-07-29/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/30/business/starbucks-customers-brian-niccol.html>
- 7** <https://fortune.com/2025/01/29/starbucks-new-ceo-reveals-plans-to-overhaul-strategy-slash-menu-items-and-double-stores-in-the-u-s/>; <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/15/starbucks-news-turnaround-plan-focuses-on-employees.html>; <https://www.reuters.com/business/starbucks-ceo-details-brand-reset-plan-turnaround-efforts-drive-sales-beat-2025-07-29/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/30/business/starbucks-customers-brian-niccol.html>
- 8** https://s203.q4cdn.com/326826266/files/doc_financials/2025/q3/SBUX-3Q25-Corrected-Transcript.pdf; <https://fortune.com/2025/01/29/starbucks-new-ceo-reveals-plans-to-overhaul-strategy-slash-menu-items-and-double-stores-in-the-u-s/>; <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/15/starbucks-news-turnaround-plan-focuses-on-employees.html>; <https://www.reuters.com/business/starbucks-ceo-details-brand-reset-plan-turnaround-efforts-drive-sales-beat-2025-07-29/>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/10/30/business/starbucks-customers-brian-niccol.html>
- 9** <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/07/29/starbucks-sbux-q3-2025-earnings.html>
- 10** <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/07/29/starbucks-sbux-q3-2025-earnings.html>
- 11** <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/15/starbucks-news-turnaround-plan-focuses-on-employees.html>
- 12** https://s203.q4cdn.com/326826266/files/doc_financials/2025/q3/SBUX-3Q25-Corrected-Transcript.pdf
- 13** <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/06/15/starbucks-news-turnaround-plan-focuses-on-employees.html>