

Los Angeles Hospitality Worker Town Hall



LEARNINGS

& RECAP

BACKGROUND CONTEXT

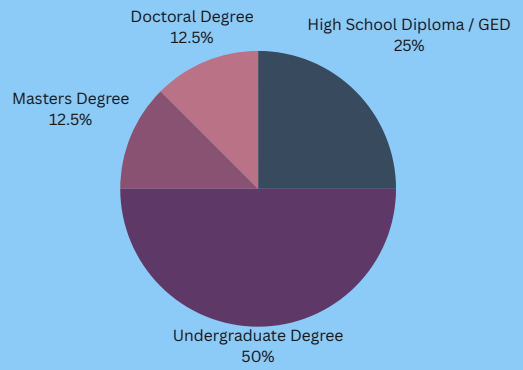
Studio ATAO's Hospitality Worker Town Halls are a nationwide series to foster dialogue, solidarity, and liberation for hospitality workers. We aim to document & amplify workers' recommendations for a more equitable industry.

At each Town Hall, we ask the same three questions to aggregate & analyze responses at a local, regional, and national level.

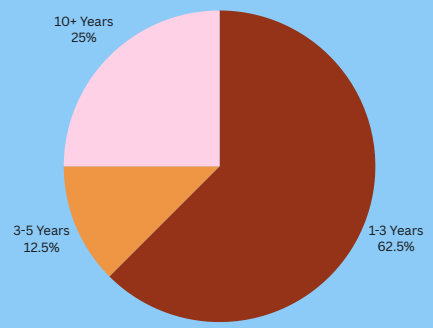
DEMOGRAPHICS

Over the course of 2022-23, we have heard from over 50 frontline workers across Chicago, New York City, and Los Angeles. *Below is the breakdown of demographics specific to Los Angeles.*

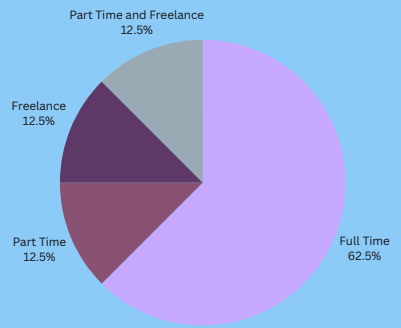
Highest Level of Education



Tenure in Industry



Employment Status



Note: Participants are all currently in non-managerial roles at their workplaces.

QUESTION 1

How is **conflict** addressed in your workplace, and what **mediation process** exists, if there is one?



Transparency emerged as a common thread, with workers valuing **open & honest communication** as the foundational requirement for conflict resolution.

- ① Many expressed frustrations about the lack of transparency to conflicts that were managed “behind-the-scenes” without others present or “resolved” without any realizable outcomes.
- ② Workers question the motivations behind keeping informal, ad-hoc conflict resolution processes when that makes it easy for management to push staff out or replace them.

“Working on a small team, we’re encouraged to follow this ‘honor system’ that implies we can’t ever be in conflict with one another. But this only ends up hurting us in the long run.”



Workers desired structured changes to embed **psychological safety** in conflict management:

- Regular pre & post-shift communications around challenges & conflicts
- Publicly available & agreed-upon timeline & expectations on how the conflict would be addressed

“The industry is small. People talk. The use of ‘blacklisting’ as a restaurant loyalty code removes the safety of engaging in conflict.”

QUESTION 2

What is one thing that needs to happen for you to **feel good** about staying at your **current workplace**?



Workers agreed on the need for **pay equity** & transparency across FOH & BOH.

- 1 Publishing a clear pay structure across the workplace alongside open communication around tip-out amounts keeps owners accountable.

"It falls on workers to figure out what their take-home is, what percentage of tips go to BOH, etc. because it's so risky to ask about pay. It makes it difficult for us to plan our lives."



Workers demanded upfront communication about their rights as individuals & a collective.

- 2 A "workplace manifesto" can be used to detail management's commitment to workers' job security, right to unionize, paid leave, overall safety (e.g., closing down a cash register at night).

"Without HR we are vulnerable as workers, but when we do have HR they aren't on our side. Who is meant to advocate for us?"



Workers also stressed **expanded benefits** such as healthcare, plus **skill & career development opportunities** that create pathways to ownership.

"Just because someone was promoted to manager doesn't mean they have the tools to lead or a model [to follow]. Sometimes they end up making less & that starts the hazing downwards."

QUESTION 3

What does **accountability mean to you**? What accountability system would you want to see implemented at your workplace?



Workers recognized a need for **proactive** accountability systems that did not end with addressing harm but prevented future harm.

①

Practice sincere apologies.

A culture that minimizes or ignores emotions leads to workers feeling dismissed & not prioritized.

“Decision-makers need to be trained on how to do emotional self-work!”

②

Respond promptly & collectively.

Instances of harm must be addressed quickly.

When issues linger unresolved, workers are less likely to bring up issues in the future.

“A public timeframe takes the guesswork out of how much followup is appropriate, and when that should take place.”

③

Commit to long-term change & growth.

Accountability is earned: each action of change are examples of management’s acceptance of personal responsibility and capacity to learn from & growth with their staff.



“I love my work, but it is hard to continue to care for others when it doesn’t feel I’m being cared for.”

IDEAS FOR BUILDING BETTER



Establish a code of conduct for the workplace that is updated annually **with staff input** on acceptable behavior & its impact on work culture. *Note: this extends to how guests are expected to treat workers as well!*



Introduce a democratic decision-making structure. Workers deserve a say in how decisions are made when they are the most affected by it.



Invest in community-building efforts beyond the workplace. Encourage workers to connect with each other & the wider industry network to build stronger ties and a community of care.



Create opportunities for workers to express their creativity & experiment at the workplace. This can be anything from putting a dish on the menu to leading facilitated conversations. Management can also offer their networks to provide informational interviews for interested workers to learn from experts outside of the workplace.



Encourage idea sharing among the team by hosting open-forum discussions. Recognize that trial periods are necessary for new ideas & processes to take place within a business.

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