

PPE – The New Frontier in Staff Retention?

Tarek Hayat Managing Director of Goldfreeze Ltd, explores an emerging relationship between staff morale and PPE.

Cold Store and Freezer PPE at sub-zero temperatures are an absolute requirement, time critical and need to be fit for purpose. Its how its always been. However we are seeing growing evidence from our customers that in the new post Brexit and post COVID landscape, of the emergence of PPE provision as a factor in staff retention, engagement and morale. With labour markets tightening, staff retention and recruitment are becoming perhaps the most significant operational risk factors within the cold chain. Can specialist PPE help organisations retain staff?

Industry sources suggest the cost of recruiting a new cold store staff member is approx. £2000. This includes advertising, agency fees, training, and specialist PPE. Working at -25c is not for everyone, and there is natural wastage from staff that simply can't work in the cold.

However, we've had anecdotal reports of retention rates of 50% or less after 30 days. This is both costly and operationally disruptive. As the expedient shift from High Street retail to home shopping continues and new warehouses are breaking ground at a significant pace, the choice for staff between working at -25c or an ambient warehouse with flexible working, childcare and other perks may further increase pressure on staff recruitment and retention in the Cold Chain.

We recently worked with a major UK multi-site cold chain distribution organisation who, in response to staff feedback via a survey, discovered staff felt a perceived lack of engagement, inconsistencies in conditions and poor quality, old PPE, had led to a low overall morale score. The senior management team took forward the feedback and as part of its response implemented a staff engagement programme issuing new PPE to every colleague at all sites. Pulse check feedback after the roll out suggested staff were much happier with a higher morale score and crucially they 'felt listened to' At this point it would be very easy to spin that our PPE made the difference, but that would be to miss the point.

Good quality PPE that works is a message from management that staff are being invested in.

It's a physical demonstration of commitment to staff that they are important, as much as good toilet, locker, and rest area facilities.

This is one example of wider conversations



and projects we have engaged in with other customers. Changes in demographics, part time and flexible working and incentive schemes against a background of labour shortages will challenge the cold chain for the foreseeable future.

There is very little data or comparative data on staff retention in the Cold Chain that I am aware of. This is an area that I firmly believe needs exploring and further research. As an industry, a key driver to success is finding a way to make working at sub-zero temperatures aspirational as a specialist field of work; at a stretch comparative to the fire service.

Firefighters undergo specialist training and have a covenant with their employers that their PPE is fit for purpose. Perhaps it is time to take their lead and set minimum standards and specialist qualifications to attract talent to a cold chain career path?

Goldfreeze Ltd is one of the UK's biggest specialist providers of cold store, freezer and chill PPE products to the cold chain and a member of the CCF.

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