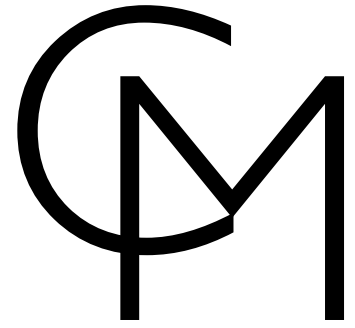


The California Merchant

News for the California Merchant Safety Association



Do you wear too many hats? Avoiding burnout on a small team

Running a small business comes with unique challenges. With fewer than ten employees, each person wears multiple hats, and the pressure to keep things running smoothly can be intense. While this agility is a strength, it can also increase the risk of burnout—when employees (or even the owner) feel physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted by their work. For a small team, the effects of burnout are amplified, as even one person’s stress can ripple through the whole workplace. The good news is that small businesses also have the advantage of being nimble and personal, which makes it easier to put meaningful practices in place to protect employee well-being.

Recognizing Burnout

Burnout often shows up as ongoing fatigue, irritability, lack of motivation, and declining work quality. In small businesses, where everyone depends on each other, these symptoms can quickly impact the team dynamic. Business owners should stay alert for early signs—such as frequent absenteeism, missed deadlines, or disengagement in meetings—and respond with support rather than discipline.

Practical Ways to Prevent Burnout

1. Encourage Work-Life Balance
Small teams may feel pressure to always be “on,” but promoting real downtime is essential. Encourage employees to take regular breaks, use vacation time, and disconnect after work hours. Setting clear boundaries helps everyone recharge and come back more focused.



2. Share the Workload Thoughtfully
When there are only a few employees, it’s easy for the busiest person to get overloaded. Rotate tasks where possible, delegate responsibilities fairly, and consider outsourcing specialized or time-consuming jobs—such as bookkeeping or IT support—so your team isn’t stretched too thin.

3. Foster Open Communication
In small businesses, communication is usually direct, which can be a strength. Make sure employees feel safe bringing up challenges without fear of blame. Regular check-ins—both formal and informal—can give team members space to share concerns before they escalate into burnout.

4. Offer Flexibility
Flexibility is one of the biggest benefits a small business can provide. Adjusting work hours, allowing hybrid or remote days, or accommodating personal needs helps employees manage stress and feel

Please see **BALANCE**, page 2

*September-October 2025
Vol. 37, No. 5*

In This Issue

*Handling COVID
flares at the office*

*Beating the
inventory blues*

*Ins and outs of hiring
seasonal staff*

*How to prevent crime in
your small business*

Effective staff meetings

... and more

Balance: Small teams depend on people

Continued from page 1

trusted. Even small gestures, like letting staff leave early after a busy week, can go a long way.

5. Build a Supportive Culture

When the team is small, culture is everything. Celebrate achievements, show appreciation for effort, and encourage teamwork over competition. Social activities—even something simple like a shared lunch—can strengthen relationships and boost morale.

6. Lead by Example

Owners and managers set the tone. If leadership models healthy habits—taking breaks, respecting boundaries, and prioritizing well-being—employees will feel permission to do the same. Conversely, if the boss is working late every night, the team may feel they have to match that pace.

a resilient, thriving team. Small businesses depend on people, not layers of structure, which makes caring for employees' well-being a direct investment in the company's success. By paying attention to workload, encouraging balance, and creating a supportive environment, small business owners can combat burnout and keep their teams motivated, loyal, and engaged for the long term.

Investing in Long-Term Health

Preventing burnout isn't just about avoiding problems—it's about building

Streamlining inventory management

For small retailers and remote merchants, managing inventory can feel like a never-ending task. Between tracking stock levels, updating online listings, and ensuring that popular items don't sell out, business owners often spend hours each week juggling spreadsheets or scrambling to locate products. But efficient inventory management doesn't just save time—it also prevents costly mistakes, improves customer satisfaction, and frees up energy for growth.



Here are practical ways retail shops and remote merchants can streamline inventory management for greater efficiency and fewer headaches.

1. Adopt an Inventory Management System

Relying on manual spreadsheets works in the very beginning, but as sales grow, mistakes multiply. Affordable inventory management software—such as Square, Shopify, or

QuickBooks Commerce—can track stock in real time, update both online and in-store sales automatically, and generate alerts when items are running low. For remote merchants, these systems often integrate directly with e-commerce platforms, reducing the need for duplicate data entry.

2. Standardize Your Processes

Whether you run a brick-

and-mortar shop or an online store, consistency is key.

Create clear procedures for receiving new stock, labeling items, and recording sales. For remote sellers, this might mean setting a daily routine for updating product counts across platforms. For retailers, it may involve barcoding products and scanning them at checkout. Standardization reduces errors and ensures that anyone on your team can step in and follow the same steps.

3. Use Technology to Reduce Manual Work

Simple tech upgrades can save significant time. Barcode scanners or QR codes streamline checkout and restocking, while cloud-based tools keep records accessible from anywhere. For merchants selling through multiple channels—such as Etsy, Amazon, and a company website—integrated software can sync inventory automatically, preventing the all-too-common mistake of overselling.

4. Implement “Just-in-Time” Stocking Carefully

Carrying too much inventory ties up cash and storage space, while running out of stock frustrates customers. A balanced “just-in-time” approach helps maintain steady stock levels without overordering. Analyze your sales data to understand seasonal trends

See **INVENTORY**, page 4

How to host effective staff meetings

Few things drain morale faster than staff meetings that feel unnecessary or unproductive. For small businesses, where time and resources are limited, every meeting should have a clear purpose and tangible results. Whether your team works in a retail shop, an office, or remotely, thoughtful planning and facilitation can make meetings a powerful tool for communication and alignment rather than a source of frustration.



Clarify the Purpose Beforehand

Before scheduling a meeting, ask yourself: Does this need to be a meeting? If the goal can be achieved through an email, shared document, or quick conversation, skip the calendar invite. Meetings should be reserved for collaboration, problem-solving, and discussions where input from multiple people is essential.

Keep the Agenda Short and Focused

An effective meeting starts with a clear agenda. Share topics with your team ahead of time so everyone knows what to expect and can prepare. Stick to no more than three to five key items—trying to cover too much leads to scattered conversations and missed takeaways.

Start and End on Time

Respecting your team's time is crucial. Begin promptly, even if not everyone has arrived, and set a firm end time. Meetings that drag past the scheduled window frustrate participants and throw off the rest of the workday. A disciplined approach shows that you value efficiency.

Encourage Participation, Not Just Updates

Staff meetings shouldn't be one-way announcements from leadership. Instead, use them to gather ideas, solve

challenges, and strengthen collaboration. Ask open-ended questions, invite quieter employees to share input, and make space for dialogue. If updates are necessary, keep them brief and relevant.

Assign Action Items and Owners

One of the biggest meeting pitfalls is leaving without clarity on next steps. Summarize decisions before closing and assign clear responsibilities with deadlines. This prevents issues from stalling and ensures the meeting leads to measurable progress.

Use the Right Tools for Remote Teams

For businesses with remote or hybrid staff, technology can make or break a meeting. Use reliable video conferencing platforms, ensure everyone has access to the agenda, and keep virtual sessions short to avoid "Zoom fatigue." Recording the meeting or sharing notes afterward helps those who couldn't attend stay informed.

Keep Meetings Infrequent but Valuable

Weekly meetings aren't always necessary for small businesses. Instead, hold meetings only as often as they provide value. A short monthly check-in, supplemented by quick daily huddles or written updates, may be more

effective than a standing weekly meeting.

Effective staff meetings align teams, solve problems, and strengthen communication. Ineffective ones waste valuable time and energy. By keeping agendas focused, respecting time limits, encouraging participation, and ensuring accountability, small business owners can transform meetings into a productive tool rather than a burden. When done right, meetings can energize your team—leaving everyone with clarity, motivation, and a sense of shared purpose.

Sample 15-Minute Staff Meeting Agenda

0:00–2:00 — Quick Wins & Positives
Start with one or two brief celebrations (a sales milestone, a customer compliment, or someone going above and beyond). This sets a positive tone and helps everyone feel recognized.

2:00–8:00 — Key Updates & Priorities
Share only the most important updates for the team—no long reports. Focus on what staff need to know for the day/week ahead. Invite quick input or clarifying questions.

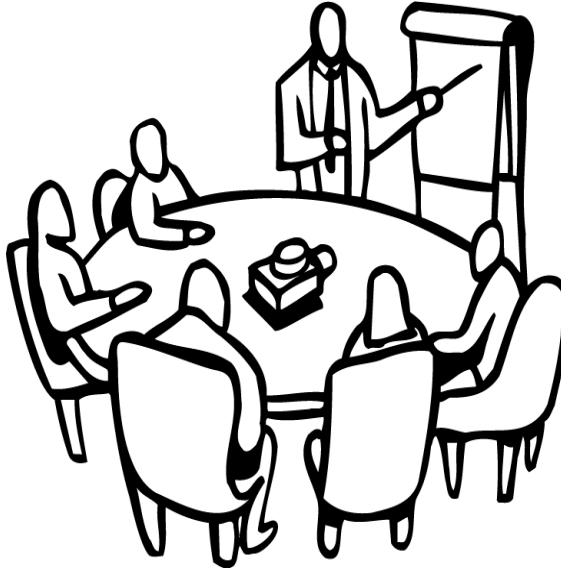
8:00–12:00 — Discussion / Problem-Solving
Pick one focused topic that needs group input (e.g., resolving a recurring customer issue, planning a promotion, or improving workflow). Keep it practical and time-limited.

12:00–14:00 — Action Items & Assignments
Summarize next steps, who is responsible, and deadlines. Confirm everyone knows their role before leaving the meeting.

14:00–15:00 — Closing Note
End on a motivating or encouraging remark—something that reminds the team of the bigger picture and sets the tone for the day or week.

Dos and don'ts of an effective staff meeting

Following these simple guidelines can turn your meetings from a chore into a positive part of everyone's day. Preparation, enthusiasm, and structure are key.



Do:

- Set a clear agenda and share it ahead of time.
- Start and end on time—show respect for everyone's schedule.
- Celebrate small wins to build morale.
- Keep updates brief—focus only on what's essential.
- Encourage participation so every voice can be heard.
- Summarize action items with names and deadlines.
- End on a positive note to energize the team.

Don't:

- Overload the agenda—stick to a few key topics.
- Turn meetings into lectures—make it interactive.
- Allow side conversations that derail focus.
- Use meetings for information-sharing only—send an email instead.
- Let meetings run long—time limits keep them efficient.
- Skip follow-up—without accountability, progress stalls.

Inventory: Spend more time on sales and growth

Continued from page 2

and top sellers, then plan restocks accordingly. For remote sellers with limited storage, this practice can be especially valuable.

5. Schedule Regular Inventory Audits

Even the best systems need checks. Plan monthly or quarterly inventory audits to reconcile physical stock with your system records. For small retail shops, a quick shelf count outside of peak hours can prevent surprises. For remote merchants, periodic spot checks on your most popular products can



catch discrepancies early. These small time investments prevent bigger problems later.

6. Automate Where Possible

Automation saves time and reduces stress. Set up

reorder alerts for fast-selling items, automate purchase orders with trusted suppliers, and use analytics features in your software to forecast demand. For e-commerce merchants, automated messages can update customers when an item is restocked, turning inventory management into a sales tool.

7. Train Your Team (or Yourself) Well

Inventory systems are only as good as the people using them. Train staff thoroughly on your chosen processes and tools, and for solo entrepreneurs, set aside time to learn the features of your software. Investing in

training up front saves countless hours down the road and ensures smoother operations when sales increase.

Streamlined inventory management allows small retailers and remote sellers to spend less time buried in stock counts and more time focusing on sales, customer experience, and business growth. By leveraging affordable tools, standardizing processes, and making smart use of automation, even the smallest businesses can operate with the efficiency of much larger companies. In today's fast-moving retail environment, saving time isn't just a convenience—it's a competitive advantage.

Best practices for hiring seasonal staff

Many businesses—from retail shops to restaurants, hospitality, and even remote operations—rely on seasonal staff to meet demand during their busiest times of year. Whether it's extra help for the holiday shopping rush or summer workers to support tourism and outdoor events, seasonal employees can be the key to maintaining smooth operations. However, hiring temporary staff comes with unique challenges. By approaching seasonal hiring strategically, businesses can maximize benefits while avoiding common pitfalls.

Understanding the Need for Seasonal Staff

Seasonal hiring typically spikes around two times of year:

- Winter holidays – Retail stores, shipping services, event venues, and customer service centers often see a surge in activity from November through January.
- Summer months – Restaurants, tourism businesses, camps, and agricultural operations require additional hands when customer demand and workloads peak.

For both seasons, planning ahead is essential. Waiting until the rush has already started often results in rushed hiring and less qualified candidates.

Best Practices for Hiring Seasonal Staff

1. Start Recruiting Early
Post job openings well before the busy season begins. For holiday help, this might mean beginning in September or early October. For summer roles, start seeking applicants in spring. Early recruitment widens the candidate pool and gives you time to train new staff properly.

2. Write Clear Job Descriptions
Be specific about schedules, expected duties, and the duration of the position. Seasonal employees often juggle school, other jobs, or travel, so transparency helps attract the right fit. Include details like weekend or holiday requirements to

avoid surprises later.

3. Streamline the Application and Onboarding Process
Seasonal roles need to be filled quickly. Simplify applications, conduct group interviews when possible, and keep paperwork light. Provide efficient training programs that prepare staff without overwhelming them—this ensures they can become productive as soon as possible.

4. Build a Positive Employee Experience
Even though seasonal roles are temporary, workers who feel respected and supported perform better. Provide fair pay, reasonable schedules, and recognition for hard work. A positive experience increases the chance that strong seasonal employees will return in future years, saving time and money on rehiring.

5. Maintain Flexibility
Seasonal workers often have unique scheduling needs. Offering flexible shifts or the possibility of part-time hours can attract high-quality candidates who might otherwise not apply. Flexibility is especially helpful during the winter holidays, when family and school obligations compete with work schedules.

6. Treat Seasonal Workers as Part of the Team
Incorporating temporary staff into the workplace culture reduces turnover and boosts performance. Invite them to staff meetings, pair them with experienced employees, and encourage feedback. Seasonal employees who feel like they belong are more likely to deliver excellent service.

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

1. Waiting Too Long to Hire
The most qualified seasonal workers are often hired early by businesses that plan ahead. Late hiring can lead to a shallow candidate pool, resulting in understaffing or mismatched hires.

2. Underestimating Training Needs
It's tempting to throw seasonal staff into the workflow with minimal instruction,

but this often backfires. Poor training leads to mistakes, customer frustration, and higher turnover. Even a brief, focused onboarding session can make a big difference.

3. Offering Inflexible Schedules
Demanding full availability without flexibility can limit your hiring options. During the holidays or summer, many workers balance other commitments—ignoring this reality can leave positions unfilled.

4. Failing to Plan for Transitions
When seasonal workers leave, businesses may experience sudden gaps in coverage. Planning for smooth transitions—whether by staggering end dates or cross-training permanent staff—prevents disruptions when the season winds down.

5. Overlooking Legal and Compliance Issues
Seasonal hiring still requires compliance with labor laws, wage requirements, and (for minors) specific restrictions on hours. Failing to follow these rules can result in fines and reputational harm.

The Long-Term Value of Seasonal Hiring

When managed well, seasonal hiring is more than a short-term solution—it's an opportunity. Many businesses find some of their best long-term employees among seasonal staff. By treating temporary workers with the same respect and care as permanent employees, companies not only meet seasonal demand but also build a pipeline of future talent.

Whether you're gearing up for the winter shopping rush or preparing for summer crowds, seasonal staff can make or break a business's busiest months. By planning ahead, training effectively, and creating a positive employee experience, employers can avoid common pitfalls and build stronger teams year after year. Seasonal hiring done right doesn't just fill shifts—it strengthens the business for the future.

Preventing crime in your small business

Employee training to avoid crime-related exposures should be an ongoing process. The security techniques included here may help prevent not only the loss of money but also—more importantly—harm to employees and customers. Creating a culture of safety requires consistent vigilance, clear procedures, and strong communication.

Lighting and Access Control

Good exterior lighting is one of the best preventatives. After dark, lighting should be increased both inside buildings and in parking areas. Check to make sure exterior lights are working properly at all times. Back doors, side doors, and windows should remain locked at all times. Exterior doors should also be secured with buzzers that can be heard throughout the building in case employees are away from the main reception area.

Burglaries often occur when entry is gained through the rear door. For this reason, a peephole should be installed so the door never has to be opened without knowing who is outside. Employees should also avoid taking trash out of back doors after dark, when risks are greater.

Cash Handling Procedures

Robberies are usually planned in advance, so it is critical to limit opportunities. Do not count money in front of non-employees, even if the person is a friend or relative of an employee. Do not allow customers or friends of employees in back rooms for any reason. Make deposits daily, or more often if cash exceeds a predetermined amount. Never keep more money in cash drawers than is necessary.

Alarm and Security Systems

The facility should be secured by an alarm system that detects unauthorized



opening of doors, the breaking of windows, and movement through interior areas when the business is closed. Managers and supervisors should keep accurate records of who has keys and who knows how to disarm the alarm system. As personnel turns over, keys should be collected or cancelled, and safe and lock combinations should be changed periodically. A systematic procedure for locking all doors and activating alarm systems should always be followed when closing.

Technology can also enhance crime prevention. Surveillance cameras, panic buttons, and remote monitoring systems provide additional layers of protection and can serve as deterrents to potential criminals. Video footage can also be a critical tool for police investigations and insurance claims.

Reporting Suspicious Behavior

Employees should be encouraged to report any suspicious activities, even if they just have a hunch or a gut feeling that something is wrong. Special attention should be given to anyone who asks unusual questions about company security, the amount of money the business makes, company hours, or who has keys and responsibilities for opening and closing. These are classic signs of pre-robbery “casing” behavior.

Responding to a Robbery

When a robbery does occur, employee safety must come first. Never resist when a robbery is taking place. If robbers are armed, assume that they are willing to use their weapons. Immediately notify police, company supervisors and owners, and appropriate insurance agents. Since the police report will be fundamental to any insurance claim, cooperate with police and answer all questions fully.

Do not inform anyone other than police and insurance personnel about the amount of cash taken. Media reports should indicate only that an “undisclosed amount” of cash was stolen.

Shared Responsibility

Crime prevention is a group effort. Managers, supervisors, and frontline staff all play an essential role in maintaining a secure workplace. Careful attention to security procedures reduces theft, makes everyone’s job safer, and helps ensure the long-term profitability and stability of the business.

SAFETY ... IT PAYS



Best practices for a shared workspace

The COVID-19 landscape continues to evolve—even in 2025, California is experiencing a late-summer surge driven largely by a new Omicron subvariant known as XFG or “Stratus.” Test positivity rates have jumped to around 11–12 percent, wastewater data across the state shows high viral concentrations, and children and seniors are seeing upticks in case counts and emergency visits. Although the Stratus strain does not appear to cause more severe illness than previous Omicron variants, its increased transmissibility, especially in school and elder care environments, underlines the importance of renewed vigilance in communal settings. Despite availability of updated vaccines, access remains restricted to older adults and high-risk groups—adding urgency to preventive workplace strategies.

Here are some best practices for preventing illness in shared workspaces:



Promote Frequent Hand Hygiene

Hand hygiene has always been a cornerstone of illness prevention, but the pandemic highlighted its importance. Encourage employees to wash their hands regularly for at least 20

seconds using soap and water, or provide hand sanitizers with at least 60% alcohol in easily accessible locations. Add signage around workspaces to remind staff of the importance of handwashing, especially before eating or after touching commonly used surfaces like door handles or printers.

Encourage Regular Disinfection of Shared Surfaces

From keyboards and desks to light switches and coffee machines, shared surfaces can harbor germs that spread easily. Introduce cleaning stations with disinfectant wipes or sprays near commonly touched areas, and ask employees to disinfect their immediate workspace before and after use. Regular deep cleaning should be scheduled throughout the office, with special attention to high-touch surfaces.

Improve Ventilation and Air Quality

Proper ventilation is essential to reducing the spread of airborne illnesses. In the post-COVID world, it’s critical to ensure good airflow in indoor spaces. Consider upgrading your HVAC systems with high-efficiency filters, like HEPA filters, that can trap harmful particles in the air. If possible, open windows to increase natural airflow or invest in air purifiers that clean the air in shared spaces.

Establish Clear Sick Leave and Remote Work Policies

While promoting a healthy workspace is important, companies should also encourage employees to stay home when they feel unwell. Update your sick leave policies to make it easier

OSHA CORNER

Please visit the following address on the web to download helpful safety posters, guides and pamphlets for a safer workplace.

<https://www.osha.gov/publications>



Please see HEALTH, page 8

Health: Promote regular check-ups

Continued from page 7

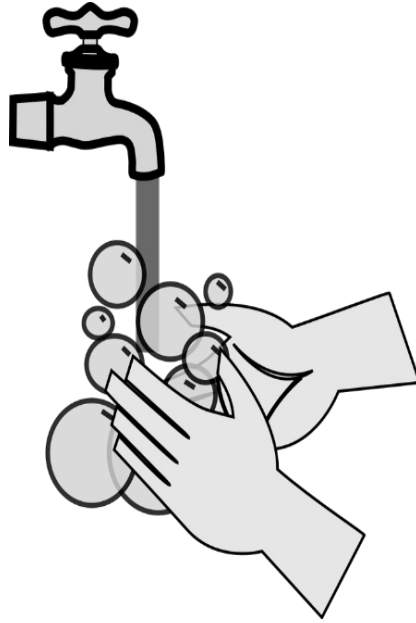
for employees to take time off without fear of penalties. Clear remote work policies should be in place so that workers can transition to working from home if they are feeling unwell or have been exposed to illness.

Create Space for Social Distancing When Possible

Although social distancing may not be a strict requirement anymore, maintaining physical space can still play a role in reducing the transmission of illness. When designing office layouts, try to give employees ample space between desks or consider using dividers to create personal barriers. Meeting rooms should have capacity limits, and video conferencing tools should be the default for group meetings to minimize in-person gatherings.

Implement Touchless Technology

Leveraging touchless technology can help reduce the spread of germs from surfaces. Contactless entry systems, like keycards or biometrics, eliminate the need to touch door handles or keypads. Similarly, integrating touchless faucets, soap dispensers, and paper towel holders in bathrooms can significantly decrease exposure to germs. Consider implementing digital tools for everything from check-in procedures to conference room reservations, minimizing the need for physical paperwork or shared equipment.



Encourage the Use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Where Needed

While mask mandates have largely been relaxed, PPE is still a valuable tool in shared spaces, especially during flu season or in environments with high foot traffic. Provide masks, gloves, or face shields for employees to use as needed. Encourage staff to wear them in common areas, especially when physical distancing isn't possible.

Support Employee Mental Health

While the focus is often on physical health, mental well-being has also taken a hit post-COVID. The stress of navigating new office protocols and concerns about illness can contribute to burnout and fatigue. Create an environment that supports mental health through employee wellness programs, open communication, and access to

counseling or stress-relief resources. A happy, healthy workforce is less likely to spread illness, both physically and emotionally.

Promote Vaccinations and Regular Health Check-ups

As the world continues to battle seasonal illnesses, such as the flu, employers can encourage employees to stay up-to-date on vaccinations. Offering access to flu shots, COVID-19 boosters, or other preventative health measures can help reduce the risk of outbreaks in the workplace. You can also provide employees with resources on maintaining overall health, from fitness initiatives to healthy eating programs.

Foster a Culture of Health Awareness

Finally, creating a culture of health awareness is key to a successful illness prevention strategy. Educate employees on the signs of common illnesses like colds, flu, or COVID-19, and provide them with the tools to protect themselves and their coworkers. Encourage open communication about health concerns and let employees know that their well-being is a top priority.

By integrating these post-COVID best practices, employers can ensure that shared workspaces remain safe and healthy environments for everyone. Prioritizing hygiene, ventilation, social distancing, and mental health will not only reduce the risk of illness but will also foster a more productive, engaged workforce. In today's world, a proactive approach to health and wellness is a critical investment in the success of any business.

"The CALIFORNIA MERCHANT" is a published bi-monthly newsletter of The California Merchant Safety Association. Annual subscription is available with membership in the California Merchant Safety Association. For membership information, call (562)446-0013.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to "California Merchant Safety Association" at 12501 Seal Beach Blvd. Suite 250, Seal Beach, CA 90740.