

# RETAIL TALENTS AND FRONTLINE TALENTS IN LUXURY

REPORT 2025



**RETAIL TALENTS  
AND FRONTLINE TALENTS  
IN LUXURY**

## ABOUT



Created in 1954 at the initiative of Jean-Jacques Guerlain, the Comité Colbert is a unique collective.

It brings together 96 French luxury Maisons, 17 cultural institutions, and 6 European luxury Maisons, representing 14 sectors: from perfumery to jewellery, fashion to silversmithing, gastronomy to wines and spirits, as well as design and home decoration.

To passionately promote, sustainably develop, and patiently pass on French savoir-faire and creativity in order to inspire dreams – this is the Comité Colbert's mission and the guiding principle behind all its actions.

These actions aim to contribute to the international influence of the French art de vivre, to the preservation of craftsmanship and creativity, and to their transmission to future generations.

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Founded in 2009, MAD is an independent consulting firm dedicated to the luxury sector.

It supports Maisons in their strategic, cultural, and operational transformation at a time when clients are constantly evolving.

Structured around three entities – MAD Strategy, MAD Academy, and MAD Talent – the firm brings together 60 multicultural talents. It operates across the entire value chain of the sector, from strategy to training, including the recruitment of tomorrow's leaders.

Combining analytical rigour with emotional intelligence, Magic & Logic, MAD champions a unique consulting approach. Its aim is to enhance the influence of the Maisons and the luxury industry as a whole.

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## SYNTHESIS

- In the luxury sector, 60% of Maisons report facing difficulties in recruiting retail or frontline talents. For managerial positions, the situation is even more critical, with 93% of Maisons reporting recruitment challenges.
- The required skills for these retail and frontline talents are becoming increasingly complex, whether it involves omnichannel, clienteling, or sustainability. In supporting this transformation, the role of Managers is central. Yet, 77% of Maisons identify team management as a key skill that needs to be strengthened among their Managers.
- To harmonize expectations regarding these retail and frontline talents and assess them consistently across all entities of a Maison, a competency framework proves to be a valuable tool. 42% of Maisons report having already implemented such a framework at a Global or Group level. By placing skills at the heart of HR decisions, Maisons can boost performance and expand their talent pools. When combined with a culture of continuous development, this approach becomes a key lever for competitiveness.
- Looking into the mastery of skills by retail teams, there are currently weaknesses in clienteling, which 77% of Maisons identify as an area for development. However, needs vary by region, advocating for tailored development plans.
- Conducting a consolidated diagnosis of skills is not straightforward. Due to the lack of unified systems and trained teams for analysis, HR data remains underutilized, leading to limited visibility of internal talent and a tendency to turn to external recruitment, which can cause frustration among internal talents.
- From this perspective, AI and “Talent Marketplaces” offer a promising solution to connect skills, aspirations, and operational needs, thereby promoting talent engagement and retention.
- While 87% of luxury players have not yet integrated AI into talent management, 77% plan to do so within the next three years. Those who are already using it report positive impacts, including significant increases in recruitment volume and notable reductions in turnover.
- In a context of growing disinterest in frontline jobs, Maisons are strengthening their Employee Value Proposition (EVP) and working to translate it into concrete offerings that align with their talents’ expectations.
- Better understanding these expectations has become essential, and 80% of luxury Maisons report conducting regular surveys to identify the priority needs of their retail and frontline teams. This data helps adapt HR policies around three key levers: redesigning career paths, providing greater flexibility, and implementing dedicated well-being initiatives to optimize engagement and retention.
- Sustainably enhancing the value of retail and frontline roles is a key challenge for luxury Maisons, which seek to highlight the richness of the required skills and change the perception of these positions. This effort involves requalifying job titles, better integrating field teams with headquarters, and launching regular recognition and talent celebration initiatives.



## INTRODUCTION

In the luxury sector, **excellence is not only found in the product or location but also in the frontline talents** who, through direct contact with customers, **embody the soul of the brand and shape every moment of interaction.**

In the current economic and geopolitical context, the **challenges of attracting, engaging, and retaining** these talents remain critical, and several key questions arise to address them: How can we **better understand these profiles** to recruit and develop them effectively? How can we make the most of the opportunities offered **by artificial intelligence** in managing frontline talent? How can we **meet the new expectations** expressed by these talents while supporting the ambitions of the brands?

Our 2025 study provides, for the first time, **specific figures for the luxury industry**, reflecting these various questions. They highlight the **challenges faced** and the **responses being explored**, with notable differences between industries. Among the main **levers** activated by brands, the following themes stand out: clarification and enhancement of **skills, personalization** of career paths and employee responsibility, and **symmetry of attention.**



PART 1

# **GAINING A CLEAR VIEW OF SKILLS: A KEY DRIVER FOR TALENT ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT**

## NEW CHALLENGES, NEW SKILLS: RISING EXPECTATIONS FOR FRONTLINE TALENTS

At the heart of the luxury business model, **frontline talents** are a critical population, both for the **client experience** they deliver and for the **economic performance** they support. Frontline talents encompass all **employees who embody the brand and interact directly with clients**, such as client advisors, waiters, maîtres d'hotel, reception hosts/hostesses. They also include back-of-house teams that **ensure the smooth operation** of the point of sale, such as stockists, housekeepers, and kitchen staff.

While the **professionalization** of these teams has significantly accelerated in recent years, due to a **noticeable enhancement in skills**, the **expectations on the floor continue to grow more complex**. For example, if we look at client advisors, beyond the traditional skills related to sales and welcoming, talents must now incorporate new components in **omnichannel, clienteling, and sustainable development**. There is also an increased expectation, particularly for Store Managers, on the ability to **navigate the uncertain context that has become the norm**.

In terms of omnichannel, the **Covid-19 crisis** acted as a **catalyst** as it hastened the transition of brands to meet the new needs of clients and support business activity. As new digital services continue to be rolled out (e.g., click & collect, online booking, appointment scheduling, after-sales initiation, etc.), in-store **digital tools are multiplying**. At the heart of this technological ecosystem, designed to offer a seamless and tailored client experience, lies the ability of frontline talents to integrate these solutions. They must not only master tools that are **not yet fully integrated** but also **manage the operational aspects** of the services deployed (e.g., receiving and transferring packages, assigning and preparing appointments), while **maintaining the highest levels of excellence**.

At the heart of the luxury business model, frontline talents are a critical population, both for the client experience they deliver and for the economic performance they support

From a relational standpoint, it is no longer just about interacting with clients, but also about building **lasting and personalized relationships**, again leveraging **digitalization to support clienteling**. From the start of a store visit, the client advisor must be able **to engage in a conversation** to better understand their client and **personalize their experience**. The digital tools at their disposal are major assets, allowing them to **rely on existing client data**, such as purchase history or past interactions with the brand. Following a store visit, the client advisor can now share with their client the products most likely to appeal to them, in a manner that is both efficient and aligned with the brand's codes. The discussion remains tied to the client in question, and any resulting sales are attributed to the client advisor who initiated the conversation. This allows to track the effectiveness of clienteling through the conversion rate of these **"wishlists."**



On a larger scale, **client journeys** within a brand or even a Group are analyzed to make the **suggestions** as **personalized** and **relevant** as possible. **Big data** analysis allows to decode purchasing behaviors, anticipate future needs, and create increasingly accurate **algorithms** to support **one-to-many communications**, which are then delivered to clients via the client advisors. This **hyper-personalization** of the relationship, extending beyond the store walls, is expected by the client. Not embracing this shift could disappoint the client and lead to lost sales opportunities.

77%

of the brands surveyed  
identify team management  
as a key skill to strengthen among  
Managers and Store Directors<sup>1</sup>

74%

of brands considered the development  
of strategic thinking skills as a priority among  
Managers and Store Directors<sup>1</sup>

Beyond omnichannel and clienteling, retail talents must also develop their skills to address the growing focus on **socio-environmental concerns**. Brands and Groups have made a **series of CSR commitments**, and clients now expect **retail talents to be the voice** of these efforts. This requires, in advance, a deep understanding of the company's commitments and overall policy, along with detailed knowledge of production chains and sources of supply. At the same

time, these individuals are constantly called upon to expand their product knowledge and refine their sales techniques.

In the face of these new requirements, **Store Managers** play a key role in driving change and managing operations. In a more **challenging business environment**, they are expected, more than ever before, to be **business leaders** capable of **analyzing key indicators, defining strategies and action plans, and recruiting, developing, and engaging** talents around an ambition that must continually be adjusted. 77% of the brands surveyed identify **team management** as a key **skill to strengthen** among Managers and Store Directors<sup>1</sup>. The development of **strategic thinking skills** is **also** considered a **priority**, mentioned by **74%** of organizations<sup>1</sup>. These competencies are not entirely new, but they have become particularly critical, as the **quality of profiles directly impacts** store **performance** and talent engagement.

In general, **Store Managers** are a **key element for resilience and agility**. **Recent changes in leadership and artistic direction** within brands represent **another challenge** for them to integrate in the coming months. New artistic directions indeed impact the desirability of luxury brands, and the more they are dependent on Fashion, the more they are at risk of losing or gaining retail talent depending on the success of their artistic director.

Beyond the new skills required for all retail teams, we also see the development of **new roles in stores**. **Roles dedicated to hospitality** are strengthening, with **Hosts, Welcome Managers, and Client Experience Managers**. **Clienteling**, meanwhile, is managed and structured in stores by **Clienteling Specialists** or **Client Development Managers**, ensuring an increasingly personalized follow-up with clients, particularly local clients and VICs. As after-sales service becomes a stronger marker of engagement, **after-sales specialist teams** are also expanding, and **artisans** are joining stores to embody the excellence of the brands and provide on-site service, staying true to their exceptional promise. This is a **particularly strong reality in the Fashion and Leather Goods sector**, where **52% of brands** surveyed identify after-sales as a new key role.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

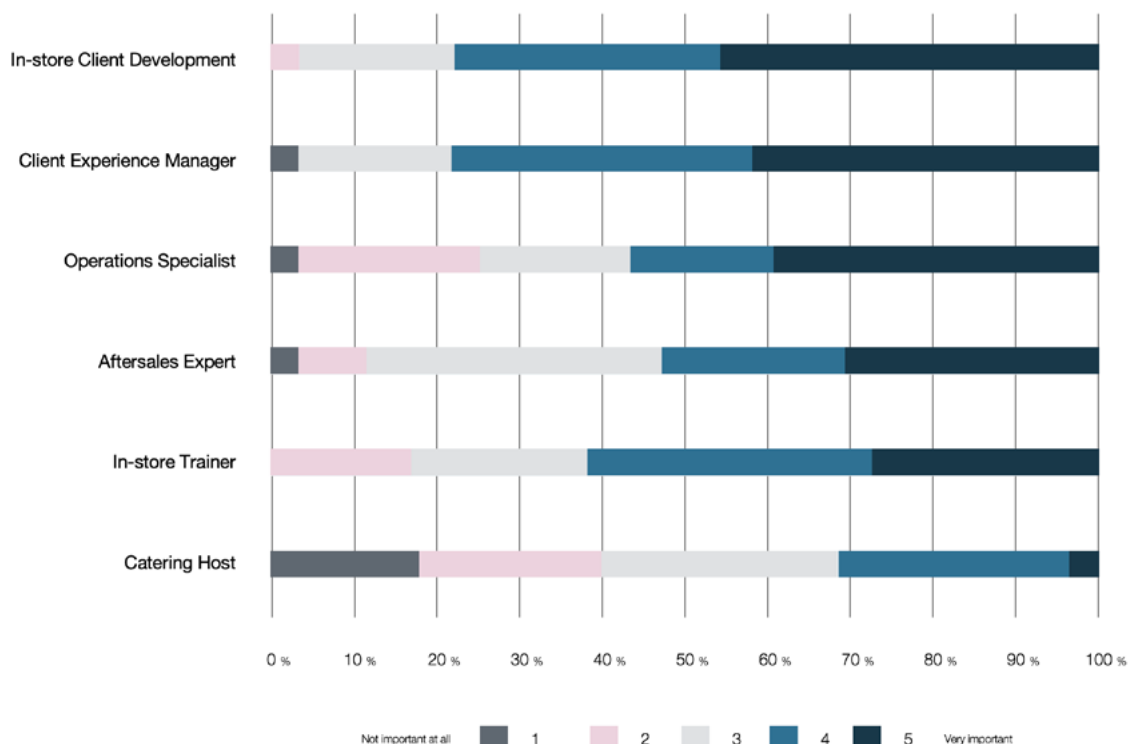
To ensure continuous **training** for teams, stores are also hiring **in-store trainers**. Finally, the roles of **Operations Specialist** and **Operations Director** help **strengthen operational expertise**, in stores with large teams (more than 20 people), and alleviate the workload of Store Directors. **Once exclusive to flagship stores**, these various roles are now being **implemented in smaller store formats**, sometimes relying on part-time staff. The challenge for brands, and particularly for Managers, is to **ensure team cohesion**, with those new roles having dual reporting, and to manage them all to **maximize client experience and commercial efficiency**.

To help frontline métiers face new challenges and enable them to develop new skills, it is **necessary** to **support them on the floor and provide them with**

**appropriate training**. The starting point for this is to **understand the strengths and gaps in terms of skills** within the teams, in order to **precisely target their needs**. However, luxury brands, particularly in retail, often have **fragmented information about their frontline population**. It is not uncommon to find that **annual performance reviews are not systematic**. And when they do exist, they often vary depending on the context and local culture, complicating the tracking and consolidation of data on a global scale. Existing **HR reporting tools** are also **limited** as of today, **focusing more on tracking commercial performance**. Lastly, as the retail sector is characterized by **high turnover**—below 20% for the least exposed brands, and up to over 70% in the most exposed regions and industries—it can be **difficult to maintain accurate and up-to-date data** reflecting the evolution of talent in the long-term.

## <sup>2</sup> Which new in-store roles do you think will become more important in the future?

(on a scale from 1 to 5 - 5 being very important)



<sup>2</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

## THE SKILLS REFERENTIAL: AN ESSENTIAL FIRST BUILDING BLOCK

**Three strategic levers** can be activated to facilitate the understanding and provide an overview of talent skills.

The first one is the **creation of competency frameworks**, which establish a **common language** across all entities of a brand, across all its geographies, thereby **ensuring the harmonization of expectations and standards**. The competency framework **details the macro skills required for each role**. It generally includes the nature of the required skills, their level of mastery, and the associated evaluation criteria. This approach is a prerequisite **for standardizing the assessment of team performance, identifying development needs, and better targeting** internal and external **recruitments**.

The competency framework helps establish a common language, ensuring aligned expectations and standards across all entities within a Maison.

42%

of the luxury brands surveyed state that they have a competency framework at the Global or Group level<sup>3</sup>

29%

of organizations having implemented a framework at the Regional or Market level<sup>3</sup>

In some Groups, the retail competency framework aligns with a broader **Group framework** that defines the **macro-skills valued within the group culture**. In fact, 42% of the luxury brands surveyed the current state of their **competency framework at the Global or Group level**. However, this practice is also developing at the local level, with 29% of organizations having implemented a framework **at the Regional or Market level**<sup>3</sup>. The task of **updating the frameworks** has been brought back to the forefront with the growing importance of **new required skills** and the emergence of **new roles**. Beyond the ones mentioned earlier, we cannot overlook the role of the **Grands Vendeurs**, which is key to supporting the High-End ambitions of brands, particularly in Jewelry of course, but also increasingly central in Fashion and Leather Goods.

<sup>3</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

Once the skills and performance criteria are clarified, a **second lever** can be strengthened: **performance tracking**. This can take various complementary forms, from **coaching on the spot** and regular **individual check-ins** to more **formal evaluations**, which are increasingly taking place according to a unified schedule within a brand, or even within Groups. Regardless of the format, the goal is to **shift from a reactive approach**, focused on past performance, **to a proactive approach** that not only focuses on strengths and areas for improvement in terms of skills but also on talent development and aspirations. In the current context, in order to better inform decisions and optimize training expenses, **additional evaluation methods** are being added to traditional forms: **self-assessment** and **360° evaluations**.

The objective is now to have access to reliable, detailed, real-time data to identify the strengths and development areas of retail teams.

In the first case, each retail talent evaluates their own skills, **fostering introspection and accountability**; in the second case, each talent is evaluated by different colleagues in their work environment (managers, HR, peers, front-of-house, and back-of-house staff), allowing for a **more comprehensive and nuanced analysis**. The organization of **annual talent reviews**, used by brands to **assess competencies, performance, and potential**, further enriches this evaluation process. This process allows for the identification of key talents, the detection of skill gaps, and the long-term planning of talent management.

When the foundational elements are in place – competency framework, performance indicators, and personalized tracking – a **third lever** comes into play: the **consolidation and analysis of retail talent data**. In recent years, brands have invested in **digital tools and platforms** to streamline and **support the collection of this data** at retail talents level. Beyond the regulatory requirements that mandate reporting on talent data tracking, the goal now is to have reliable and detailed information in real-time to **identify the strengths and areas of development** of retail teams. From this assessment, brands can also **track the impact of training**, anticipate **changes**, and plan for **recruitment**. There are still **challenges** related to this data collection, such as the **coexistence of different tools** or a **lack of alignment on the key indicators** to track. However, environments are evolving quickly, and **AI** in luxury will undoubtedly accelerate change even further, as it has already done in other sectors in recent years. For larger Groups or brands, AI will particularly **facilitate the anticipation of departures and shortages in certain skills through effective predictive analytics**.



## FROM DIAGNOSIS TO ACTION PLAN: DRIVING TARGETED UPSKILLING

What is the current state of skills in retail today? The purpose here is to highlight the strengths and areas for improvement, with regional focuses where relevant.

On a global scale, it is evident in **retail** that while client advisors **master traditional sales techniques**, they are often **less familiar with clienteling practices**. **77%** of luxury brands surveyed identify **clienteling** as one of the main **missing skills within their frontline teams**<sup>6</sup>. The ability to retain a client beyond their visit to the store, by anticipating their needs and offering a personalized experience, remains a challenge for many advisors. Additionally, **product storytelling is often well-integrated**, but **brand, store, and CSR storytelling are still underutilized: 55%** of the brands surveyed highlight **storytelling** as a **missing skill within their frontline teams**. Yet, these elements are key levers for engaging clients on an emotional level and building loyalty. **Operational skills and sales techniques**, in comparison, appear as second-tier priorities.

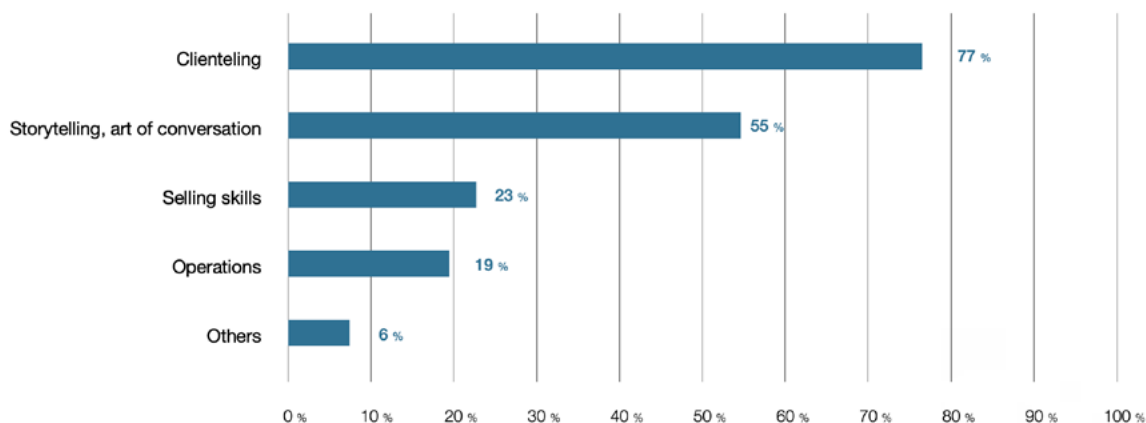
# 77%

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missing skills within their frontline teams<sup>4</sup>

# 55%

of the brands surveyed  
highlight storytelling as a missing  
skill within their frontline teams<sup>4</sup>

### <sup>4</sup> On retail/ frontline skills, where are the biggest gaps according to you regarding Client Advisors / Frontline Talents?



<sup>4</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

Development needs, however, **vary significantly depending on regions, cultural specificities, and local dynamics**. For luxury brands, understanding and anticipating these differences allows for the adaptation of development plans and tools used to enhance team skills.

26%

of luxury brands cite recruitment as one of the most effective levers to address skills gaps among their retail/frontline populations<sup>5</sup>

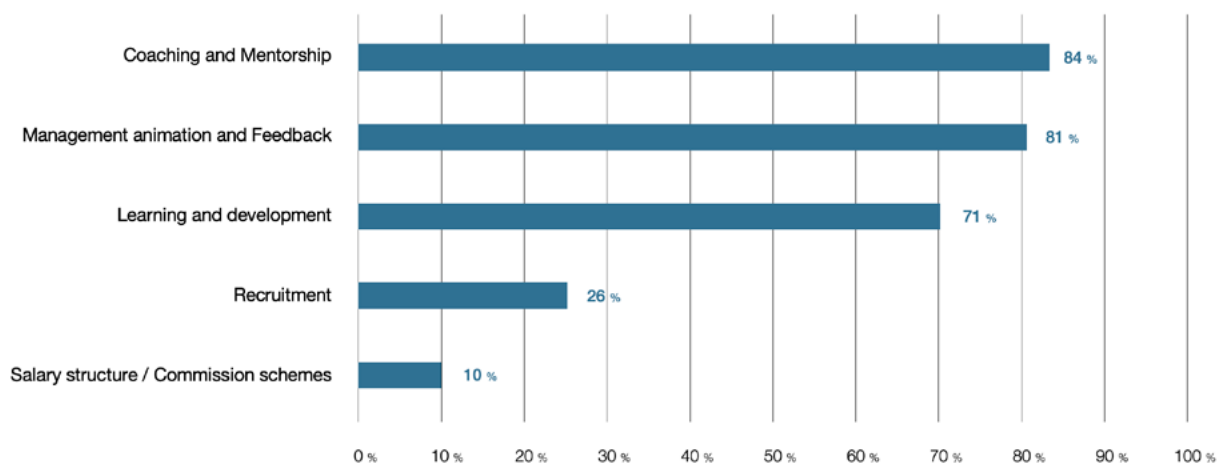
In **Europe**, the proximity of retail teams to their parent company typically translates in-store into **more consistent execution** of brand experiences, **better mastery of storytelling**, and **greater attention to detail** in client treatment, particularly through branded catering services. It is also observed that the **cultural specificities** of each region **influence the perception of the client experience**. For example, in the **United States**, the client experience tends to be **more casual and transactional** compared to the rest of the world, while in **Japan**, teams adopt a **more formal and precise ceremonial** approach. Furthermore, Japan stands out for its **exceptional quality of hospitality** and

**high standards of service** in stores. In China, where the luxury market has experienced strong and rapid growth, the client experience has **historically** been very **transactional**. However, in the current economic context, brands are making extra efforts to adopt a **more relationship-oriented approach**, intensifying clienteling and enriching the client experience to make it more engaging and memorable. The **challenge** for brands is to **develop client experiences** that are both **consistent** across their network **and tailored to the local specificities** and client expectations of each market.

In light of this situation, luxury brands have **two main options** to address their skills needs: **external acquisition** through new hires, or **internal talent development**. Only **26%** of luxury brands cite **recruitment as one of the most effective levers** to address skills gaps among their retail/frontline populations<sup>6</sup>, since it is often a costly and time-consuming process for organizations. Brands are increasingly focusing on **talent development**, implementing **tailored strategies to strengthen skills within their frontline teams**.

**Not all skills are developed in the same way.** Some grow through training, while others are acquired on the ground, through practical experience and interactions with other talents encountered daily. This is why **an approach combining multiple levers is necessary** to create effective development plans.

## <sup>6</sup> What are the most impactful levers to close those skills gaps?



<sup>5,6</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

Among the various levers identified for developing skills, **mentoring** is increasingly valued and structured to **support and develop talents**. For example, **Marriott**<sup>7</sup> has implemented a mentoring program for its employees, the ‘**M + E Mentor Program**,’ aimed at promoting professional development and employee empowerment. This program is **supported by the MentorCloud platform**, which facilitates the connection between mentors and mentees based on their career goals, skills, and development areas, and allows for personalized and ongoing progress tracking.

Mentoring  
is increasingly  
valued and structured  
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and develop talent.

The trend towards personalizing the development approach is gaining momentum. It is observed that the **offerings are tailored to specific profiles**: for all retail profiles, **targeted training**, **temporary assignments**, and for managers in particular, **co-development**, **cross-functional projects**, or even **accelerated paths**, whether at the brand or even at the group level. These **accelerated paths**, already **well-established within Fashion and Leather Goods and Beauty sectors**, are now expanding into other industries such as hospitality. In June 2023, **Accor Group**<sup>8</sup> launched **Reveal Talent**, an intensive training program lasting six to ten months, aimed at employees with the potential to move into managerial or leadership positions. This immersive program allows them to explore various services, discover different management styles, and follow a wide range of training courses. This diversification of methods helps **specifically address the needs of retail** by promoting **dynamic and adaptable learning**, tailored to a sales environment

where the pace is fast and time for training is limited.

The boundaries between training programs and **engagement programs** are becoming increasingly blurred, with the goal of **strengthening the sense of belonging and pride** among frontline teams. New formats are being developed to create closer connections between these teams and those at headquarters. Some brands focus primarily on their population of Managers or Store Directors, while others expand the initiative to Client Advisors.

For example, Maison Christofle chose to send retail teams from the United States to Paris for an immersive experience: a visit to the Normandy workshop, an architectural tour of the iconic Parisian landmarks that host the brand's creations, and a discovery of the exhibition organized at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs to celebrate the history of Maison Christofle. This spirit is extended to the rest of the retail teams through the sharing of a video documentary created about the exhibition by the person in charge of Heritage.

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In terms of technology, the landscape is also evolving. **Mobile learning and micro-learning solutions are now well-established, with Covid accelerating the transition**. Many training materials are now optimally

<sup>7</sup> MentorCloud.com, 2025

<sup>8</sup> « Le programme Reveal Talent de Accor, accélérateur de talents pour les leaders de demain », AccorHotel career website, 2024

accessible on smartphones, tablets, or computers, allowing talents to integrate learning into their daily routine by optimizing available moments for these trainings.

New platforms are going further by offering a **broader ecosystem that combines not only training but also communication and “tasking”** (task sharing and execution tracking). The next step, already initiated by some luxury players, is to integrate AI into mobile learning or micro-learning.

**AI-powered conversation and sales technique training tools** are also emerging as a key lever in frontline team training. These tools allow for the **simulation of realistic interactions** with clients and offer **personalized coaching**. Hilton<sup>9</sup>, in partnership with SweetRush, has developed a solution based on generative AI, specifically designed for customer service training. This platform provides a **secure training space** where hotel staff can **practice handling delicate situations without risking the brand’s image**, while receiving **real-time coaching**. Three scenarios are addressed: responding to a complaint from a client disturbed by the noise of the air conditioning, managing a client dissatisfied with missing breakfast due to a business meeting, and handling a complaint from a client whose special room arrangement request was not taken into account. The content is accessible through a VR headset for added realism, or directly via a browser on a smartphone, tablet, laptop, or desktop.

**Talent development** is not limited to **filling missing skills at an equivalent position**; it is also a **crucial challenge** for luxury brands to **anticipate successions for strategic roles**. **93%** of the luxury brands surveyed admit to **facing difficulties in filling Manager and Store Director positions**<sup>10</sup>. Lacking internal talent pools, they often have to resort to **external recruitment**. For some brands, this can represent between **50% and 100% of appointments for these roles**. This **lack of talent pools and the absence of succession pipelines** remains a **persistent challenge**: nearly **67%** of the brands surveyed expect this **situation to remain unchanged or worsen over the next three years**<sup>10</sup>.

93%

of the luxury brands surveyed admit to facing difficulties in filling Manager and Store Director positions<sup>10</sup>

67%

of the brands surveyed expect this situation to remain unchanged or worsen over the next three years<sup>10</sup>

97%

of luxury brands report having deployed pilot, local or global initiatives designed to foster the development of managers and store directors<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> « Soft Skills, High Tech: How Hilton And SweetRush Created A Generative AI Coaching Experience For Guest Service Training », Étude de cas par eLearning Industry, 2025  
<sup>10</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

*“Among all the Store Managers  
we have recently recruited,  
none were already within the brand.  
The talent pool is quite limited  
for these key roles.”*

Region or Market GM, Region or Market Retail Director  
(Watches & Jewelry, EMEA)

To overcome this challenge, brands are implementing **targeted programs** specifically aimed at **developing managers, leaders, and future leaders**: 97% of luxury brands report having deployed **local or global initiatives** designed to **foster the development of managers and store directors**.<sup>10</sup>

These initiatives can take various forms: for example, **Rituals**<sup>11</sup> offers a multi-month training program dedicated to regional managers, store directors, and assistant directors. This **“Retail Leadership Fundamentals Program”** aims, through eight modules, to develop their leadership and team management skills.

Some programs are more specifically aimed at **managers of the most strategic stores**, who face particularly complex challenges: in 2021, **LVMH** launched the **THINK Retail**<sup>12</sup> program, dedicated to store directors leading the most important or complex stores across all product categories within the group. Through online and in-person sessions, this program allows them to share experiences and collectively find solutions to the challenges faced in their stores. It also offers individual coaching, group work, and plenary sessions with speakers from the Group and its brands. The objectives are multiple: to **provide participants with a diverse view of retail, strengthen their leadership skills, connect them with their peers from different brands within the group, and support them in developing their professional aspirations**.

<sup>10</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

<sup>11</sup> “Programme retail des fondements du leadership chez Rituals,” Rituals’ career website, 2025

<sup>12</sup> LinkedIn, 2024





PART 2

# **RETHINKING TALENT ALLOCATION AND RECRUITMENT: A NECESSARY REFOCUS ON SKILLS AND UNLOCKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES WITH AI**



## THE SKILLS-BASED APPROACH, A KEY TO EFFECTIVE TALENT ALLOCATION

In a luxury market where competition for frontline talent is intensifying, brands are seeking **new strategies to secure qualified teams** capable of supporting their growth. **60%** of the luxury brands surveyed report facing **difficulties in filling frontline positions**, while **40%** struggle to **retain them**<sup>17</sup>.

60%

of the luxury brands surveyed  
report facing difficulties  
in filling frontline positions

40%

of the luxury brands surveyed  
report struggling to retain frontline teams

To meet this challenge, they are drawing inspiration from high-impact models developed in other sectors. Among the innovative practices, the **transition to a skills-based approach** is particularly interesting for luxury, especially for improving efficiency in retail staffing. The idea is to place central importance on

skills, whether attached to a role or to a talent. **In the case of a talent**, for example, the focus will be more on the skills they have developed rather than just their education or previous roles. Individual abilities and potential will be valued. In the case of a role, the focus will be on **clarifying the required skills** beyond the various responsibilities involved. The relevance of a talent for a role will be assessed based on these skills. This skills-based approach optimizes the **alignment between the required skills and the skills available**.

**In the short term**, having a clear and reliable understanding of the skills mastered by existing teams and the skills required for each role enables brands to **optimize talent allocation**. The skills framework helps **clarify and accelerate decisions** regarding mobility and career development—it proves particularly useful for luxury brands to **quickly address vacancies**. It also **reduces the adaptation periods** for employees, which are often long and costly, by rapidly increasing their productivity and accelerating their performance in their roles. With talents taking on roles that best match their abilities, **both individual and team performance are maximized**.

**In the long run**, and beyond the effective allocation of individual talents, the skills-based approach enables the organization to **be more responsive to market changes and the reorganization needs** of brands. A clear view of existing skills allows for the rapid redeployment of talent to other roles. Finally, when anticipating **major transformations**, the skills-based approach is also a valuable asset, particularly when **combined with a structured development program**.



In 2021, **IKEA**<sup>13</sup>, integrated an AI-powered chatbot to handle part of its customer service, reducing the need for staff in its call centers. Rather than resorting to layoffs, the company made the strategic choice to **retrain over 8,500 employees as “interior design advisors.”** These employees already had key skills: the ability to advise clients, understand their needs, propose tailored solutions, and manage complex situations with calm and professionalism. Targeted training in sales techniques and product knowledge helped fill skills gaps, turning them into qualified experts in a new field. This allowed IKEA to **strengthen its salesforce to support its retail expansion and growth.**

Organizational agility **promotes internal mobility.** **Career progression** now **relies on the acquisition and valorization of skills** rather than predefined paths, **opening new development opportunities** for employees. The traditional promotion model is evolving toward **personalized career paths**, both vertical and lateral, based on the key skills of the talent. This is a **strategic lever for fostering engagement and retaining** frontline talents, as these populations often suffer from a lack of attractive development opportunities.

While it is an asset for internal talent allocation, the skills-based approach is also a key lever to **maximize the efficiency of external recruitment.** In recruitment, it is often observed that the most critical populations are those of Managers and Store Directors. Clearly and precisely defining the skills expected for these key roles is essential, on one hand, to **identify potential candidates more quickly and efficiently**, and on the other, to **widen talent pools** by integrating candidates with more diverse experiences, thus reducing recruitment costs and timelines.

It is important to note that this skills-based approach primarily **relies on the continuous development of skills** through methodically defined individual development plans. Therefore, by combining a skills-based approach with a **culture of continuous development**, brands will create an operational workforce **capable of responding precisely to the demands of an ever-evolving luxury market and to internal organizational transformations.** Well executed, this transition to a skills-based approach not only ensures high performance from teams on the floor but also **guarantees sustainable growth for the brands.**

*“The competition is fierce in the luxury industry, and it is difficult to find Store Directors who embody the brand’s culture, possess management skills, customer relations expertise, problem-solving abilities, and KPI management”*

Global HR, Watches & Jewelry

<sup>13</sup> « Unleashing AI's Upside : A Blueprint for Workforce Transformation », Forbes, 2024

## TRACKING KEY METRICS, A POWERFUL YET UNDERUSED STEERING TOOL

In recruitment and talent staffing, as in other areas, **tracking indicators is central**. While it is common for brands to monitor **turnover**, particularly turnover in the year following a new hire, or mobility rates, it is rarer for them to easily track the **average time and cost of their recruitments**. However, the stakes are significant in a more challenging economic context. In terms of **attractiveness**, LinkedIn provides brands with better visibility, especially on the **conversion rate between talents** who view a job posting and those who apply. However, although this indicator exists, it is still rarely considered. On the issue of **diversity**, brands are aligned and generally see it as a **source of agility and performance**. However, once again, the indicators to follow are not always clear or shared. This was particularly evident in recent months in Japan, where the return of Chinese tourists revealed that the sales teams lacked diversity in terms of profiles and language skills.

When brands recognize the importance of tracking these indicators, they are often faced with **difficulties in reading and analyzing them**. The **fragmentation of information systems** makes it particularly complex to collect and consolidate data from different stores. Additionally, **data entry is not always consistent** from one store to another. With many managers throughout the chain, **there is often a lack of animation around the topic** to clarify respective responsibilities. Finally, when indicators are available and relatively reliable, another common challenge is the **HR teams' ability to process and analyze this data** to inform decisions. Teams are **often not trained in monitoring and analyzing indicators**, so they are frequently unable to take over on this topic or fully leverage the available information.

The lack of visibility on internal talent compared to external profiles represents a major challenge for luxury Maisons in retail.

The **lack of visibility on internal talents compared to external talents** is a significant issue for luxury brands in retail. In the absence of a centralized system to track employees' skills, aspirations, and performance internally, companies often **struggle to identify available talents within their teams**. This leads to **underutilization of internal talents**, which is often overlooked in favor of external recruitment, even though it would be more cost-effective and strategic to develop and promote them within the company.

This situation not only **limits internal mobility opportunities** but also **harms talent retention**, as employees may lack career prospects within the organization.

skills, aspirations, and opportunities through artificial intelligence, these platforms facilitate the connection between talents and available positions. They promote **smoother and more transparent internal mobility**, thus **improving engagement and retention of retail populations**.

This situation not only  
limits internal mobility  
opportunities  
but also undermines  
talent retention.

To better manage indicators related to recruitment and retail talent management, brands have **several levers** they can activate.

The first is to **invest in advanced HR technologies** that enable real-time data centralization and updates. However, this requires first **standardizing recruitment and internal mobility processes** and **clarifying the roles and responsibilities** of managers and HR teams in collecting and monitoring indicators.

It is becoming crucial for brands to **anchor a data-driven culture** at the heart of their HR strategy. Some companies, such as Lego<sup>14</sup>, are taking a step further by **structuring teams fully dedicated to People Analytics**. This internal expertise allows them to turn data into a strategic lever for engagement and performance. This evolution of HR organizations is already evident in luxury brands, particularly in larger ones.

Finally, with AI, the implementation of **Talent Marketplace platforms** will **strengthen visibility into internal talents** and leverage available data to **support optimal talent staffing**. By connecting

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<sup>14</sup> "The LEGO Group People Analytics Journey", Visier.com, 2025

# AI IN TALENT MANAGEMENT: A CATALYST FOR PERSONALIZATION AND EFFICIENCY

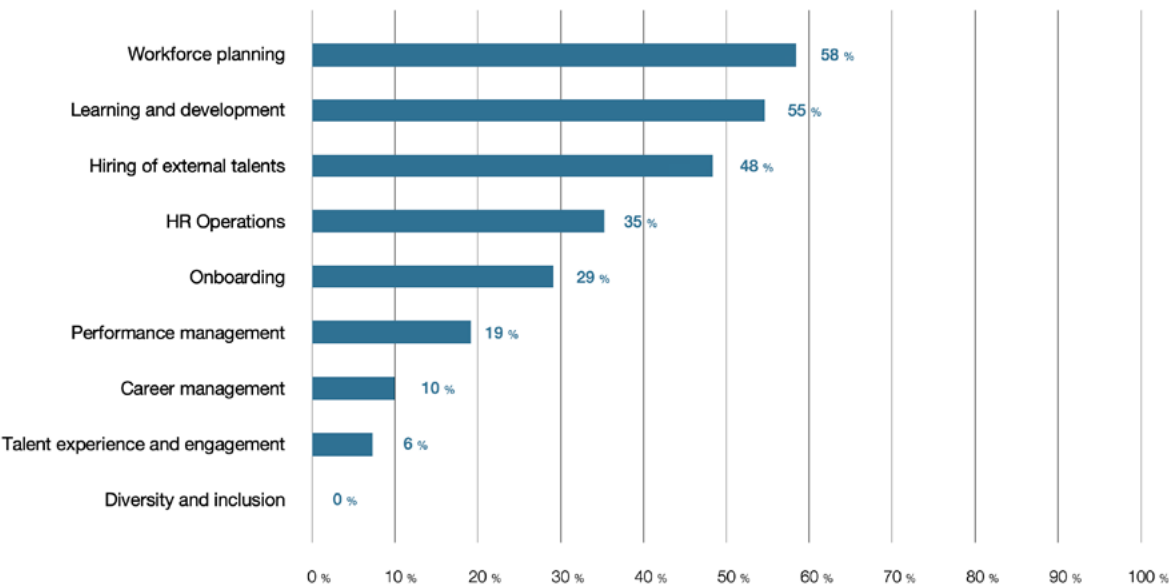
Beyond tracking and analyzing KPIs, the **systematic and structured collection of talent data is the essential foundation for integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into HR processes**. It is the raw material on which AI can rely to optimize recruitment, anticipate future skills needs, and offer personalized development paths at scale.

**Today, 87% of luxury industry players surveyed report not using artificial intelligence in talent management**. However, among them, **77% plan to use it within the next three years**. Indeed, among those who have already leveraged AI in their HR strategy, **100 % highlight its positive impact**.<sup>15</sup>

87%

of luxury industry players surveyed report not using artificial intelligence in talent management<sup>15</sup>

**16 In which area do you expect AI to have the most impact on Retail Talents / Frontline Talents management?**



<sup>15, 16</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

## AI IN RETAIL / FRONTLINE TALENT RECRUITMENT

Recruiting frontline talent in luxury requires identifying qualified profiles that align with the brand's codes. **AI can significantly improve the efficiency and quality of these recruitments.**

One of AI's main contributions lies in the **automation of time-consuming tasks**. Recruiters can now rely on **Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)** capable of automatically filter applications based on predefined criteria. For companies receiving thousands of CVs per job posting, this technology is a considerable asset, speeding up the pre-selection process while improving the relevance of the sorting. In 2024, **Starbucks Australia**<sup>17</sup> introduced Sapia.ai, an AI technology integrated into the **SmartRecruiter** recruitment platform. Candidates can now submit a quick application and are directed to a 30-minute interview, consisting of five questions. The AI then analyzes the responses and selects the most relevant profiles, which are forwarded to the recruiters. For Starbucks, the **results are immediate**: recruitment volume doubles, while the time spent sorting profiles drastically decreases, freeing up nearly two days per week for each recruiter, allowing them to focus on other strategic tasks. At the same time, the **quality of hires improves**: this innovative selection method highlights talents who, in a traditional process, might have been overlooked due to a lack of direct experience, but who possess strong interpersonal skills. The result: **increased engagement and a 56% reduction in turnover among new hires.**

AI significantly enhances the efficiency and quality of recruitment processes.

In October 2024, the restaurant chain **Chipotle**<sup>18</sup> also announced the launch of a new AI-based recruitment platform, developed in collaboration with the company Paradox. At the heart of this system is **a chatbot named "Ava Cado," acting as a virtual recruitment assistant**. It is responsible for collecting basic information about candidates, scheduling interviews based on mutual availability, and sending offers to candidates selected by recruiters. Ava, multilingual, can interact in English, Spanish, French, and German. With this automation, managers can devote more time to the operational management of restaurants rather than repetitive tasks like interview scheduling or information gathering. The expected impact is a **75% reduction in the time required to fill a position**. Moreover, this new system helps **enrich and streamline the candidate experience**. By simplifying the recruitment process and facilitating interactions from the early stages, Chipotle strengthens its attractiveness and employer brand.

**To further streamline and enrich the candidate experience**, many companies are also introducing **chatbots** capable of answering candidates' questions instantly and personally, 24/7. This is the case for **Marriott**<sup>19</sup>, which has deployed "Olivia," a chatbot available on its career site in certain regions, and **L'Oréal**<sup>20</sup>, with its chatbot "Ollie." These AI-powered virtual assistants help recruiters coordinate interviews, answer candidates' questions, and share relevant information about the company and recruitment processes.

## AI FOR PROACTIVE TALENT MANAGEMENT

Generative AI now enables certain companies to **anticipate key phenomena**, such as the risk of employee departure, the likelihood that a candidate will accept an offer, or even the future performance of a new hire. This predictive capability allows for a **proactive approach to human resource management**. For instance, the identification of a potential departure can lead to the **implementation of preventive measures**: adjusting compensation, changing roles, and initiating tailored dialogue with the manager.

<sup>17</sup> « Starbucks Australia Success Story: Finding baristas who stay longer at Starbucks », Étude de cas par Sapia ai x Smartrecruiters, 2025

<sup>18</sup> « Chipotle introduces new ai hiring platform to support its accelerated growth », Publication de presse Chipotle, 2024

<sup>19</sup> « An Inside Look at Our Job Application & Hiring Processes », Site carrière Marriott, 2024

<sup>20</sup> L'Oréal career website, 2025

In sectors with particularly high turnover rates such as retail, hospitality, and catering services, especially among frontline employees, this approach is a major advantage. By **limiting attrition, it reduces recruitment and training costs while ensuring better team stability.**

AI's predictive capabilities enable a proactive approach to human resources management.

#### AI FOR INTERNAL MOBILITY AND PERSONALIZED CAREER PATHS

By focusing on employees' skills, AI becomes a **catalyst for internal mobility**, driving engagement and retention, particularly for frontline talent.

With AI, the skills of a retail employee, their aspirations, and past performance are matched with the organization's needs to offer the employee **targeted training programs, internal mobility opportunities, or cross-functional projects** that allow them to develop in other areas of expertise. These **personalized recommendations** help each talent **build an evolving career trajectory**. By automating the connection between talents and opportunities, AI **streamlines internal HR processes and minimizes the loss of key talents**. Finally, it broadens the scope of career opportunities for employees, opening doors to other product categories, geographies, areas of expertise, or even different roles within retail.

For example, in 2023, the industrial group **Safran** launched "**Selia Skills**"<sup>21</sup>, a Talent Marketplace developed in collaboration with the French company Neobrain. On this platform, each employee has a personalized profile, which is continuously updated with their skills and ambitions. AI then provides tailored recommendations: internal positions aligned with their skills, targeted training to accelerate expertise development, and strategic career paths aligned with their professional ambitions. This initiative addresses a dual strategic challenge for the group: **facilitating internal mobility** by enhancing **transparency** on available opportunities and **providing employees with the tools they need to shape their careers** by developing the key skills for progression.

In retail, luxury hospitality, or fine dining, where professional development is often seen as linear and predefined, Talent Marketplaces **provide a response to the growing expectations of employees** regarding career development and progression, with an increasingly personalized approach to career paths and support.

However, Talent Marketplaces are still rare in luxury brands and groups. Some more advanced explorations are underway in the Fashion and Leather Goods sector, but other sectors are currently reserving AI for **other applications, such as creation, supply chain, and clienteling**. In any case, brands are proceeding cautiously, **keeping the human element at the center of retail talent management**.

By building on talent competencies, AI becomes a catalyst for internal mobility, a driver of engagement and retention, especially for frontline talent.

<sup>21</sup> "Safran choisit Neobrain comme plateforme dédiée aux carrières et à la mobilité", Neobrain.com, 2025









PART 3

# **REINVENTING THE EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION: A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN TOP TALENT IN A COMPETITIVE MARKET**

## EMPLOYER VALUE PROPOSITION: THE CORNERSTONE OF AN APPEALING TALENT STRATEGY

The luxury market is evolving in a **complex economic context**, forcing brands to **equip themselves with the best retail talent more than ever to support their business ambitions**. **Competition among brands** to attract and retain these profiles **is intensifying**, in a context of **growing disinterest** in retail jobs, particularly among younger generations.

**messaging** conveyed by the brands across all their HR commitments. **In a way that is unique to them, brands are developing a number of initiatives** aimed at improving **compensation, flexibility, well-being, and career growth** for their employees. LVMH, Hermès, and The Ritz-Carlton, to name just a few, have recently rethought their EVP.

*“Since the Covid crisis, a number of talented frontline employees are seeking to transition into office-based roles.”*

Retail Director, Fashion & Leather Goods

Luxury brands, aware of these challenges, are **formalizing or readjusting their Employee Value Proposition (EVP)**. The issue goes beyond the simple **attractiveness** of the employer brand: it is about **ensuring the consistency and alignment of the**

In September 2024, **LVMH<sup>22</sup>** launched an **employer branding campaign** built around the slogan **“Where Dreams Become Careers.”** Through employee testimonials, the group highlights its values and **the richness and diversity of career paths,**

<sup>22</sup> « LVMH dévoile sa nouvelle campagne de marque employeur : Where Dreams Become Career », LVMH.com, 2025

focusing on **mobility opportunities** across the various brands within the group.

Each market presents its own cultural and regulatory specificities that must be taken into account for the EVP to resonate meaningfully with local talent.

**Hermès**<sup>23</sup>, on the other hand, has built its EVP around the notion of “**All Artisans**,” a philosophy that fully embodies its commitment to craftsmanship and excellence. The company’s communications around its employer promise place a strong emphasis on **skills development, knowledge transfer**, and the creation of “**hand-crafted**” career paths.

Finally, luxury hotel chain **Ritz-Carlton**<sup>24</sup> uses its slogan “**We are Ladies and Gentlemen serving Ladies and Gentlemen**” to highlight its commitment to offering an exceptional experience to its employees, just as they are committed to providing an exceptional experience to their clients. This philosophy, which promotes **symmetry in attention** and **recognition of the work of frontline talents**, resonates particularly in the current context, addressing **the need to revalue hospitality métiers**.

**While the EVP is meant to provide consistency, it must also be translated locally** in a unique way. Each market has its **own cultural and regulatory specificities**, which must be taken into account for the EVP to resonate concretely with local talent. **Tangible**

**benefits**, such as compensation or flexibility, **must align with the country’s legislation and standards**.

Just as the EVP is localized, there is also work to be done to **make it resonate specifically with retail talents**. Working in a luxury store is particularly demanding both emotionally and physically, and sales teams must also currently manage additional pressure due to sales targets that are more difficult to meet than in the past.

Therefore, brands must be able to **offer tailored responses** that align with the specific expectations and constraints of frontline talents.

<sup>23</sup> Hermès career website, 2025

<sup>24</sup> “We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen”, Ritz-Carlton always setting the bar high”, Business Review, 2021

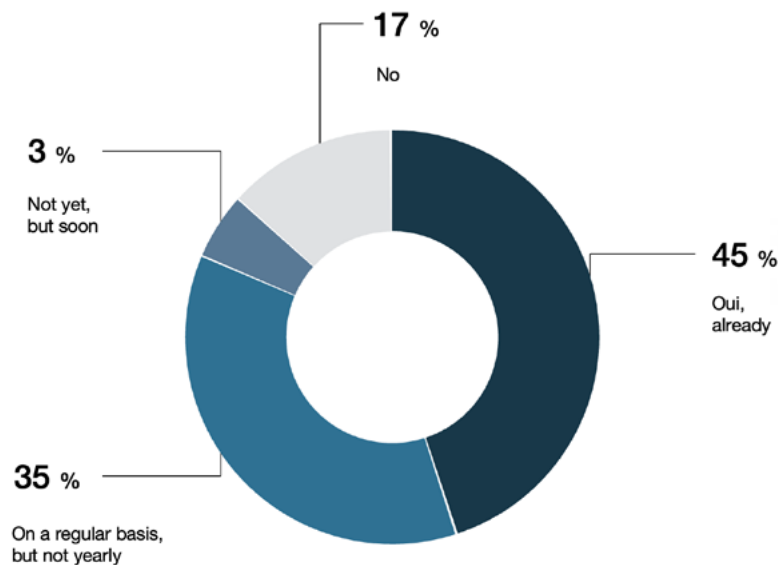
## A TAILORED APPROACH TO MEET THE NEW EXPECTATIONS OF FRONTLINE TALENT

The **aspirations of retail talent have evolved in recent years**, with a paradigm shift following the Covid-19 pandemic. They are not fundamentally different from those of other luxury profiles, but they are framed by **very specific constraints**, such as store **opening hours or coverage rates**. In order to better understand these specific needs, brands have deployed annual **listening surveys** that provide these employees with a dedicated platform to express their expectations and needs. As such, **80%** of brands report **conducting regular or annual listening surveys** with their **frontline/retail teams**<sup>25</sup>.

# 80%

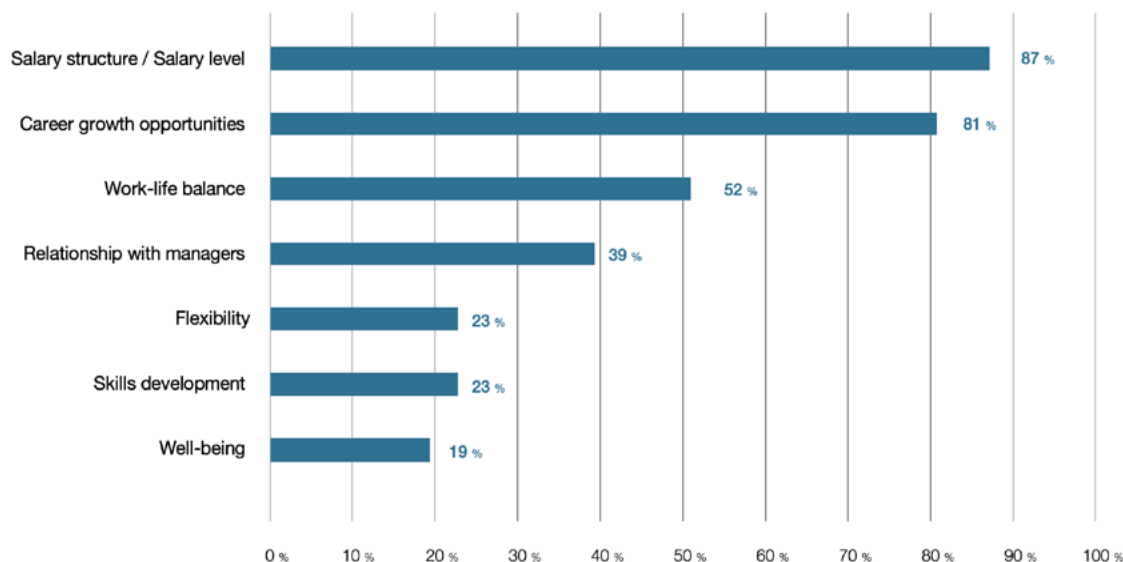
of brands report conducting regular or annual listening surveys with their frontline/retail teams<sup>25</sup>

### <sup>25</sup> Do you conduct annual listening surveys of your Retail Talents / Frontline Talents?



<sup>25</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

## Which initiatives do you consider most impactful to attract, engage and retain Retail Talents / Frontline Talents?



Beyond the **traditional expectations in terms of salary**, which remain central, especially in the current economic context, common themes expressed consistently from one brand to another include **career development, work-life balance, and well-being**.

In light of these expectations, **three key levers** are now being prioritized to attract, engage, and retain retail talent: **redesigning career paths, providing greater flexibility, and implementing initiatives dedicated to well-being**. It is observed that needs and responses take specific forms **depending on roles, generations, genders, or life stages**.

### REDESIGNING CAREER PATHS

Retail/frontline talents, particularly younger generations, are placing increasing importance on **career development opportunities**. They express dissatisfaction with the lack of opportunities

**and aspire to more mobility**, whether it is towards other roles in-store, other countries, other brands within a group, or from retail to corporate functions, the relationship with time has evolved for younger generations, who now aspire to become Store Directors within five years of joining a brand.

To meet these expectations, brands are working to **better equip their talents on the subject of careers**, while reminding them that the **trajectory ultimately remains in the hands of each employee**. One of the initiatives being implemented is the formalization and communication of **clear and engaging career paths**, illustrated by concrete **individual career trajectories**. The goal is to highlight possible paths, offering talents **not just linear vertical progressions but customized evolutions** aligned with their skills and aspirations. To enable talents to take control of their careers, more and more brands are now offering dedicated moments throughout the year.

For example, **Van Cleef & Arpels** organizes “**Learning Weeks**,” a key event designed to highlight possible career paths within the brand and to promote training and mobility programs. The shared message is clear: each employee is the master of their destiny and responsible for their employability, and they must make choices and express them. Particular emphasis is placed on **international mobility**, as the brand is convinced of the benefits for both the talent and the department involved.

For certain profiles identified as **high-potential talents**, **rotational programs** or fast-track programs have also been developed. These initiatives resonate particularly with the expectations of younger generations, who tend to progress faster and are less loyal to their employer. Specific initiatives for them include **graduate programs and V.I.E** (International Volunteer in Business), which are 12 to 18-month programs involving multiple job rotations. For example, **Accor Group**<sup>26</sup> launched the **INSPIRE** program, an 18-month graduate program that allows young graduates to be immersed in one of the group’s prestigious establishments. Through discovering various functions, they gain a broad view of hospitality, enhance their versatility, and accelerate their skills development.

In the era of remote work and flexible schedules, flexibility is also a key lever to sustain the appeal of frontline roles.

#### THE NEW IMPERATIVE OF FLEXIBILITY

In the era of remote work and flexible hours, **flexibility** is also a key lever to maintain the appeal of frontline roles. For certain populations—managers, young parents, or senior profiles—it has even become a **key factor in decision-making**.

57%

of them report having implemented flexibility initiatives for their retail/frontline teams<sup>27</sup>

In response to this new imperative, **some luxury brands have addressed the issue: 57%** of them report **having implemented flexibility initiatives for their retail/frontline teams**, whether they are local, global, or pilot programs. Even for **the most strategic populations**—such as managers and store directors—the efforts are significant: **54%** of brands have implemented flexibility initiatives aimed at these populations.<sup>27</sup>

For example, the upscale restaurant chain LPM<sup>28</sup> (La Petite Maison) introduced a **four-day workweek** in its Dubai and Abu Dhabi locations in 2023. Another example is Hermès’ policy in France, which, despite commercial pressures, continues to **keep its store network closed on Sundays** (except during the Christmas period), allowing employees to enjoy a day of rest with their loved ones. **Preserving weekends and adopting more flexible working hours** are particularly crucial issues in the **Middle East**, where professional rhythms are often intense. During certain periods, such as Ramadan, it is not uncommon for stores to remain open until one or two in the morning, further increasing pressure on employees. The initiatives will then focus more on **preserving certain weekends** rather than adopting condensed weeks.

When discussing **personas**, and particularly **senior profiles**, it is worth mentioning the initiative of the **Lucien Barrière**<sup>29</sup> hotel and restaurant group. In 2023, the group implemented **contracts specifically designed for senior profiles and young retirees**. These contracts guarantee **continuous working hours, reduce night shifts**, and offer significant **flexibility regarding weekend work**.

<sup>26</sup> “INSPIRE - BE The Future of Hospitality”, Accor’s career website, 2019

<sup>27</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

<sup>28</sup> “Dubai teste la semaine de quatre jours et réduit les heures de travail pendant l’été”, DRN Real Estate, 2024

<sup>29</sup> “Les seniors ont de la patience et du recul”, France Travail.com, 2024

For example, some employees choose to work on Saturdays and Sundays to be available during the week for their grandchildren, while others prefer to spend their weekends with their families. Thanks to this inclusive policy, seniors now represent 10% of the group's workforce. This initiative, aimed at senior profiles, deserves to be highlighted, as the **over-50s demographic in retail is still largely overlooked** by organizations. Only **8% of luxury brands report having implemented actions specifically targeting this age group**<sup>29</sup>.

8%

of luxury brands report having implemented actions specifically targeting people over 50<sup>29</sup>

Other inspiring flexibility initiatives can also be found outside the luxury sector: **Marks & Spencer**<sup>30</sup>, for instance, offers **job-sharing contracts**, a practice that allows two employees to share the responsibilities of a management position. This initiative not only enables employees to enjoy **better work-life balance** and become more effective in their roles, but also allows the organization to **use the diversity of skills** to enrich decision-making and managerial management.

Finally, while we see that tests and deployments are taking place in Hospitality, Fashion, and Leather Goods, the **reality remains relatively mixed in Watches and Jewelry**, which primarily focuses on other levers than flexibility and naturally turns towards the physical and mental well-being of its teams.

Indeed, while **88% of Fashion and Leather Goods** companies report having deployed initiatives whether local, pilot, or global. This figure drops to **42% in the Watches and Jewelry sector**<sup>31</sup>.

88%

of Fashion and Leather Goods companies report having launched pilot or local initiatives in terms of flexibility<sup>31</sup>

42%

of Watches and Jewelry companies report having launched pilot or local initiatives in terms of flexibility<sup>31</sup>

In the **current economic context**, although **brands strive to maintain flexibility** for frontline populations, **they must adapt their operational responses** to the new staffing constraints, which are more challenging than before.

## WELL-BEING AS A LEVER FOR ENGAGEMENT AND PERFORMANCE

In terms of well-being, two dimensions must be considered: **physical well-being** on one hand, and **mental well-being** on the other. Whether in retail, luxury dining, or hospitality, frontline talents express an **increasing need for support in the face of the demanding realities of the job**. These concerns are particularly pronounced among **younger generations**, for whom well-being, mental health, and work-life balance have become essential criteria in choosing an employer. They demand a **clear and tangible commitment** on these issues.

To meet these expectations, brands are testing and deploying a local range of **initiatives dedicated to the well-being of their retail/frontline teams**: **79%** of the brands surveyed report having **implemented actions aimed at improving the well-being** of these teams, and **72%** have also launched initiatives specifically aimed at **improving work-life balance**<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> "Dubai teste la semaine de quatre jours et réduit les heures de travail pendant l'été", DRN Real Estate, 2024

<sup>30</sup> "M&S Launches New Flexible Offering for Store Colleagues", Marks & Spencer.com, 2022

<sup>31</sup> Survey Comité Colbert and MAD, 2025

Among these initiatives, we find funding for sports or relaxation classes, granting additional leave days, and programs dedicated to mental health. **IKEA in Canada**<sup>32</sup>, for example, has been offering a training program, **Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) at Work**, since 2020, aimed at executive teams, store managers, and all retail teams. The goal of this program is to **provide the necessary tools** to identify and support employees in mental distress, **equipping them with the appropriate vocabulary** to approach these sensitive issues with care. In parallel, IKEA Canada's teams also launched the **"Are you OK?" campaign**, aimed at continuing to empower employees and encouraging them to **have regular well-being conversations**. Support structures can also be put in place. **Target**<sup>33</sup>, for example, has implemented the **Team Member Life Support** program in the United States, a global mental health support initiative. This structure includes free consultations with psychologists, a "Moments Library" with exercises to manage stress, anxiety, or promote sleep, and a 24/7 helpline to address emergencies.

**The design of back-of-house spaces** is also emerging as a key lever to improve working conditions. In stores, shops, and hotels, **dedicated relaxation and rest areas** are becoming essential to provide employees with recovery time. **Marriott**<sup>34</sup>, for example, has made relaxation zones standard in most of its establishments. Others are going further: in China, **Walmart**<sup>35</sup> has created "health corners" in its stores, equipped with blood pressure monitors and pulse oximeters, allowing employees to monitor their health at any time.

By deploying these initiatives, brands create a **healthy and sustainable work environment**, recognizing that

the **well-being of employees is intrinsically linked to their engagement and professional performance**.

Although initiatives aimed at Managers, Store Directors, sales teams, and frontline populations are increasing, they remain **largely inaccessible to back-of-house teams**. However, **65%** of the brands surveyed **plan to adapt their approach to better target these populations** within the next three years.

25%

of the brands surveyed report having implemented targeted actions for women related to well-being, flexibility, or career development

**Support and assistance for women** in these environments is also an area that deserves special attention. Although progress has been made, only **25% of the brands** surveyed report **having implemented targeted actions related to well-being, flexibility, or career development** to ensure equal opportunities and support the professional advancement of women within their brands.

*"Happy client advisor,  
happy client"*

Watch & Jewelry Commercial Director

<sup>32</sup> "Case Study: Ikea and Mental Health First Aid", Mental health Commission of Canada, April 2021

<sup>33</sup> Target career website, April 2025

<sup>34</sup> "4 Examples of Employee Well-Being Programs in Hospitality", Hosco.com, 2021

<sup>35</sup> "Walmart China Once Again Recognized as 'Top Employer 2024'", Walmart.com, 2024



## TRANSFORMING THE PERCEPTION OF RETAIL AND FRONTLINE JOBS, A LONG-TERM IMPERATIVE

These new expectations highlight a fundamental issue that luxury brands must now face: **revaluing retail and frontline métiers, and sustainably changing the perception of these jobs, both internally and among the general public.**

The first step in this revaluation is the **recognition and highlighting of the specific skills associated with retail positions.** Long associated with a purely transactional role, these positions actually require a **much broader range of skills**—and deeply human ones. Frontline talents are the **guarantors of the connection between the brand and its clients.** They convey the brand's codes and expertise, build lasting and personalized relationships, and accompany key moments in their clients' lives. This wide range of skills is **now being highlighted in the job descriptions** of major brands. At CHANEL<sup>36</sup>, for example, the client advisor is seen as both an experience creator, a style ambassador, and a contributor to performance. At Van Cleef & Arpels<sup>37</sup>, they are described as true ambassadors of the brand, tasked with transmitting its refinement, elegance, and spirit of innovation. In some brands, the expectations are even more specific. In the field of silverware or crystal, for example, **profiles that are sensitive to art and history** are sought, with the ability to share their **passion for beauty**, in addition to the more traditionally sought-after skills for a client advisor.

In this dynamic, **semantics** plays a strategic role. By **replacing traditional titles with more rewarding terms that align more closely with the reality of the roles**, brands participate in a symbolic redefinition of roles. At Disneyland Paris<sup>38</sup>, for example, employees are called “Cast Members,” referencing the world of theater, highlighting their active role in creating an

immersive world. Palais des Thés refers to its client advisors as “Tea Sommeliers,” true ambassadors of the brand, responsible for sharing their passion and expertise of tea with customers, far beyond the act of making a sale<sup>39</sup>. These lexical choices help to **strengthen the pride and engagement of the teams.**

The expectations expressed by talent highlight a fundamental challenge luxury Maisons now face: to revalue frontline roles and permanently shift its perceptions, both internally and among the general public.

<sup>36</sup> “Conseiller de Vente Mode – Roissy F/H”, Chanel career website, April 2025

<sup>37</sup> “CDD Conseiller de vente - Galeries Lafayette H/F”, Van Cleef & Arpels career website, April 2025

<sup>38</sup> Disneyland Paris career website, April 2025

<sup>39</sup> “Vendeur / Tea Sommelier 35h H/F - Boutique Antony CDD”, WelcomeToTheJungle.com, Avril 2025

This repositioning of skills is accompanied by **a change in perspective**: these roles are now recognized as **positions of excellence**. The LVMH<sup>40</sup> group, for instance, has integrated retail and client experience functions into its **LVMH Métiers d'Excellence** initiative, alongside the métiers of Creation and Craftsmanship. This is a powerful way to place service and customer interaction on the same level as artisanal expertise, highlighting their role in the uniqueness of a brand.

This repositioning of skills goes hand in hand with a shift in perception: these roles are now recognised as professions of excellence.

It is also supported by **communication and visibility efforts**. Many brands now choose to highlight retail positions **at the forefront of their career sites**. This is the case with Louis Vuitton<sup>41</sup> and Cartier<sup>42</sup>, where these roles appear first in the sections dedicated to the brand's professions. In parallel, **partnerships with academic institutions** are multiplying: school conferences, participation in recruitment fairs, mentoring, or dedicated programs. The goal is to **attract young talents by showing that retail is a genuine career choice**, not just a temporary job by default.

This revaluation work should not only be focused externally; it also requires **a transformation of internal practices**, with a genuine effort to integrate, listen to, and recognize the expertise of retail/frontline populations.

The integration of retail populations internally begins with **bringing frontline jobs closer to corporate functions**. The goal is to **foster a sense of belonging and create unity** between field teams and central functions. This can be achieved through temporary **immersion initiatives** in the field: IKEA, for example, has implemented **Front Days**<sup>43</sup>, a program allowing headquarters employees to spend several days a year in stores, with the objective of enhancing mutual understanding of the different functions and bringing field feedback more directly. Some brands **integrate store experience into their onboarding programs** to ensure that every employee can benefit from this on-the-ground experience in their role. Establishing **bridges between retail and corporate functions** is another way to strengthen the proximity between headquarters and retail: these bridges are especially possible for functions such as client development, operations, and management control, which now exist both at headquarters and in stores.

The challenge is to attract young talent by showing that retail is a genuine career choice not just a default or temporary job.

**Better information flow** is also sought. Frontline teams often do not have a clear view of the overall strategy, which can create a sense of distance or even devaluation. This is why **brands are working to improve communication about their strategic objectives**, relying in particular on internal management relays, or addressing frontline teams directly through townhalls.

<sup>40</sup> "Les Métiers d'Excellence LVMH", LVMH.com, April 2025

<sup>41</sup> Louis Vuitton career website, April 2025

<sup>42</sup> Cartier career website, April 2025

<sup>43</sup> IKEA career website, April 2025

Along with this integration challenge, there is also **a need for recognition** of the work and expertise of frontline métiers.

This begins with **listening to and considering the ideas and feedback from the field**. For this purpose, Walmart has created the **MyIdeas** platform, allowing each employee to propose improvement initiatives in terms of processes, customer experience, or technological innovations. Over 32,000 ideas were collected in 2024, with each idea being processed and receiving feedback on its implementation. This listening dynamic is also embodied by regular visits from top management to the field or the organization of exchange sessions with frontline teams.

It is also essential to **dedicate time to celebrate the success of retail teams**. These initiatives, whether in the form of awards, seminars, or company events, **highlight the importance of the daily work on the floor**. Many brands, especially in the jewelry sector, invite their best client advisors to **exclusive weeks**, dedicated to visiting workshops, historic boutiques, exhibitions, or archives. These special moments allow them to **enrich their knowledge of the brand, meet artisans and headquarters members, and celebrate their success**. In hospitality, many inspiring initiatives are also in place: **Marriott**<sup>44</sup> organizes an annual **Associate Appreciation Week**, a week celebrating its employees. During this week, various events are held to thank employees for their commitment, such as competitions, presentations, community service projects, and award ceremonies, including the prestigious “Awards of Excellence” given to the top performers.

These initiatives show how recognition in retail can go **beyond simple material rewards**. They contribute to **building a strong company culture**, where **each employee feels valued and recognized** for their skills and their crucial role in the customer experience.

In retail, employee recognition can go well beyond material rewards, fostering a real sense of belonging and value.

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<sup>44</sup> “We Cracked the Top 10 in the Fortune® 100 List & More Workplace Awards”, The Life at Marriott blog, 2023

## CONCLUSION

For several years now, luxury brands have been adjusting their approach to frontline talent. The **current economic context** both **reinforces the major directions taken and requires certain adjustments**.

To attract, engage, and retain these frontline talents, luxury players continue their work of **clarifying competencies** through frameworks that allow them to move from diagnosis to targeted action plans. They are **adjusting their EVP, communicating more** on this topic, and **translating their commitment into concrete actions that align with the expectations expressed by frontline talents**, who are increasingly surveyed each year.

The **shift towards a skills-based approach** has become a key element in managing frontline talent. It is reshaping **organizations, processes**, and the monitoring of **indicators**, while laying the foundations for future **talent marketplaces, supported by artificial intelligence**. It is likely that **the economic context and its efficiency demands will accelerate this transition**, particularly among larger players. However, the **human element will remain at the center, with the goal of making AI a tool that serves the teams**, whether in HR, business, or frontline functions.

The various initiatives being undertaken will, in all cases, help **revalue frontline jobs**. They support **a culture where every frontline talent is celebrated and recognized** for their skills and for their crucial role in the performance and image of the brands.

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## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted jointly by MAD and the Comité Colbert between April and June 2025. It relies on three main data sources.

1. An online questionnaire addressing the current dynamics of Luxury Retail Talents / Frontline Talents, focusing on current challenges met and most relevant initiatives to attract, engage and retain those Talents.
2. Interviews with leaders from the luxury industry to deep dive into the current challenges met and most relevant initiatives implemented to attract, engage and develop Frontline Talents.
3. Various document research and the MAD expertise.

In analyzing the questionnaire, the responses of all participants were considered for each question (N=31 participants). The responses were analyzed depending on the product category (Fashion & Leather Goods, Fragrance & Cosmetics, Watches & jewelry, Hospitality, Interior Design, Tableware) and size of the frontline teams (Less than 10 people, 10-20 people, 20-50 people, 50+people).





