

# TACO BELL EMPLOYEE SURVEY

## Methodology and Results



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by

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### INTRODUCTION

Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender, a Seattle law firm, contracted with the University of Oregon Survey Research Laboratory (OSRL) to conduct the *“Taco Bell Employee Survey,”* a survey of current and former Taco Bell employees in the state of Oregon. The survey’s purpose was to obtain statistically valid and reliable information concerning employees’ experiences at Taco Bell, with foci on possible wage and hours problems, as well as their receipt of letters from Taco Bell Corporation in August 1997 and Spring 1998.

### METHODOLOGY

#### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Survey questions were initially developed by Patricia A. Gwartney, OSRL’s Director, for David N. Mark, Esq. for a self-administered survey instrument. At the behest of Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender, these original survey questions were transformed into a telephone survey instrument and augmented with additional questions based on the client’s information needs. This process is described below.

Dr. Gwartney was instructed by David Mark in a letter of 6/23/98 “to create a document and procedure that someone with [her] expertise would have designed for Taco Bell if it had retained [her]. The letter/methodology must notify current and former Taco Bell employees that Taco Bell will compensate them for wage and hour violations they may have experienced working for Taco Bell in Oregon after August 1, 1991.” She developed a mail-out/mail-back questionnaire and an explanatory cover letter which covered the occurrence and frequency of wage and hour problems, uniform issues, paycheck problems, satisfaction with Taco Bell employment, instructions on how to determine eligibility for compensation, who to call with questions, and assurance of confidentiality.

In an agreement with Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender dated 7/23/98, OSRL created a telephone survey instrument drawn directly from the instrument developed for David Mark. This survey covered the following topics:

1. The occurrence of working off-the-clock, unpaid overtime, unpaid meal breaks, lack of meal breaks, and lack of rest breaks.
2. Frequency of working off-the-clock, unpaid overtime, unpaid meal breaks, lack of meal breaks, and lack of rest breaks.
3. Uniform issues, including hours per week laundering (apart from routine family laundry), shoe purchases, and number of pairs.
4. Receipt of Taco Bell's August 1997 and Spring 1998 letters.
5. Response to letter and, if the respondent did not respond, reasons for not responding.
6. Change of home address since working at Taco Bell, including whether someone the respondent lived with then still lives at that address (e.g., parents), number of moves, and filing change of address forms with the post office.
7. Taco Bell employment characteristics (year started, months worked, current Taco Bell employment, employment as a minor, store worked at).
8. Demographic characteristics (sex, age, race and education).

Subject areas 1, 2, 3 and 8 contained questions virtually identical to the first survey development task. Questions for subject areas 4, 5, 6, and 7 were developed in consultation with Rebecca Roe, Esq., of Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender.

The telephone survey instrument was pretested using OSRL's standard three-pronged pretest procedure. This procedure involves (a) potential members of the survey population, (b) OSRL's Questionnaire Review Committee, comprised of survey experts from our staff and university-wide advisory committee, and (c) potential users of the data, Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender. Individual questions were pretested for clarity, accuracy, validity, and variability of response. The entire instrument was pretested for flow, length comprehensiveness, and factors which affect respondents' cooperation and attention. Based on these pretests, the survey instrument was revised and finalized.

#### SAMPLING

OSRL had no role in the design, development or provision of the sample of current and former Taco Bell employees. The reliability of survey results is dependent upon the quality of the sample design and implementation. Due to OSRL's lack of control or oversight of the sampling processes, we cannot vouch for the reliability of results (i.e., whether the results would be consistent with other surveys of Taco Bell employees). Readers of this report, however, may decide that the results are sufficiently interesting to warrant another survey with a proper sample.

OSRL's understanding of the sampling procedure is that Taco Bell Corporation selected a random sample of 800 employees from the population of roughly 16,500 who worked at the corporation's 40-50 Oregon stores since August 1991. It is our understanding that a list of these 800 names was given to Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender, who in turn employed an organization called Transunion to assist in locating individuals' residential telephone numbers. Telephone numbers were found for 409 names, but, as will be evident below, most of these numbers were inaccurate. For some names, multiple telephone numbers were provided. Schroeter, Goldmark & Bender transferred these names and telephone numbers to OSRL in an electronic format.

Surveys were completely confidential. OSRL obtained human subjects' approval from the University of Oregon, as required by federal law. It is not possible to identify any individual in the survey data set.

#### DATA COLLECTION

The "***Taco Bell Employee Survey***" was conducted with the use of OSRL's computer-aided telephone interviewing system (CATI). In the CATI system, sampling, interviewing and data entry is accomplished interactively and seamlessly. The programmed survey instrument contained all survey questions, interviewer probes for consistency, and pre-coded answer categories. Skip logic was programmed into the system, preventing inappropriate or incorrect questions from being asked.

In administering the survey, trained interviewers use telephone headsets in sound-reduced carrels at computer workstations connected by a Novell network. Randomly distributed telephone numbers appear automatically at each workstation and are mated to pre-programmed survey instruments. Telephone calls are placed with a computer keystroke, effectively preventing dialing errors. As interviewers ask and respondents answer questions, the data are input into the CATI data file. As the data are entered, names and telephone numbers are stripped from the interview data, to ensure absolute confidentiality. The CATI system eliminates out-of-range responses and wild codes by validating each response interactively and not allowing inappropriate responses to be entered. Thus, the CATI system eliminates many routine and error-prone coding and data entry tasks and enables OSRL to maintain the highest standards of quality control.

Interviewer training for this study was conducted July 28, 1998. Only experienced interviewers collected the data; interviewers for this study have worked on multiple OSRL projects for seven months to five years. Interviewing was conducted from 8:00 a.m. to 9:15 p.m. July 30th to August 3rd. Altogether, 2,076 telephone calls were made to complete 65 interviews, or 32 calls per completed interview, on average.

Among the original 409 names for which telephone numbers were supplied, 271 (66%) were unusable because the number was wrong, disconnected, non-working, non-residential, fax/modem, or no one in the household had ever worked for Taco Bell. Another 20 (5%) were unusable because the respondent was out of town or too ill to interview during the survey dates, did not speak sufficient English, or was a minor. (OSRL does not interview minors without special provisions for parental permission, which were impossible to obtain under the tight time limits of this study.)

Thus, 118 telephone numbers were available for interviewing. Of these, 65 interviews were completed, for a 70% CASRO response rate.<sup>1</sup> The refusal rate was 9%. The sample coverage rate was 77%.

#### RESULTS

The remainder of this report is a summary of the survey findings, organized into four sections. Section 1 summarizes the demographic and employment characteristics of the

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<sup>1</sup> CASRO response rates, the most rigorous industry standard, are calculated in following manner. Completed interview / (Eligible sample + ((Eligible sample / (Eligible sample + Ineligible sample)) \* Sample with unknown status)).

survey respondents. Section 2 discusses respondents' reported experiences with wage and hours problems during their Taco Bell employment. Section 3 discusses uniform issues. And Section 4 summarizes respondents' receipt and perceptions of Taco Bell's letters, as well as residential moves which may have prevented them from receiving the letters.

## SECTION 1: DEMOGRAPHIC AND EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

*Sex:* Men comprise 49% of the sample and women comprise 51%.

*Race/Ethnicity:* Non-Hispanic Whites constitute 82% of respondents. Other races and ethnicities of respondents are Blacks 0%, Asians/Pacific Islanders 12%, Latinos/Hispanics 3%, American Indians 2%, mixed race 2%.<sup>2</sup>

*Age:* The median age of respondents is 23, with a range of 18 to 68. Teenagers comprise 8% of the sample, persons in their twenties comprise 73%, thirties 9%, forties 5%, and those in their fifties and sixties comprise 5% of the sample.

*Education:* The sample's modal educational attainment is "some college, no degree," at 42%. Nine percent achieved a bachelor's or master's degree and 6% an associate's degree. Twenty-eight percent stopped their education with a high school diploma, and 15% did not complete high school.

*Year Began Working at Taco Bell:* In this sample, 31% began work at Taco Bell in 1991, 15% in 1992, 26% in 1993, 9% in 1994, 5% in 1995, 5% in 1996, 8% in 1997 and 2% in 1998. (Note: Those who worked at Taco Bell multiple times were asked in what year their *most recent* work spell began.)

*Months or Years Worked at Taco Bell:* The median time worked at Taco Bell for this sample was nine months; that is, half the sample worked less than nine months and half worked more. Nearly one-third (29%) worked three months or less, and 29% worked 2 years or more.

*Current or Former Employee:* Just 2 of the 65 survey respondents (3%) are current Taco Bell employees, and 97% are former employees. In the course of data collection, several potential survey respondents told OSRL interviewers that they had been forbidden by their Taco Bell managers from taking part in this confidential research project.

*Employment as a Minor:* Fifty-one percent of persons interviewed worked at Taco Bell as minors, at least part of the time (i.e., 46% said they worked as a minor and another 5% volunteered that part of the time they worked at Taco Bell they were a minor). Forty-nine percent of the sample worked at Taco Bell only as adults.

## SECTION 2: WAGE AND HOURS PROBLEMS

Current and former Taco Bell employees were asked "about wage and hour problems [they] may have had while working at Taco Bell." A series of five pairs of questions followed, concerning off-the-clock work, overtime, meal breaks, rest breaks for short shifts, and rest breaks for long shifts. The first question in the pair asked about the occurrence of such employment problems (see Graph 1). The second question asked

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<sup>2</sup> Note: Due to rounding, percentage totals in this report occasionally do not add to exactly 100%.

about the frequency of such problems (see Graph 2). We did not assume that the survey respondents would necessarily know what “counts” as a wage or hour problem. Thus, for each question we presented a few vignettes or examples.

Overall, Taco Bell employees reported experiencing a range of wage and hours problems during their employment at Taco Bell with considerable frequency. Forty-nine percent or more of current and former Taco Bell employees reported working off-the-clock, working six hours or more without a meal break, working without a rest break on short shifts, and working without two rest breaks on long shifts. When these occurred, respondents experienced them with considerable frequency. Half or more said they “always” or “often” were not paid for overtime; had shortened, interrupted or no meal breaks; and did not get full rest breaks or any rest break at all. These results are discussed in greater detail below.

*Off-the-Clock:* Fifty-one percent of current and former Taco Bell employees said that they had worked off-the-clock. Examples of such incidents presented in the survey question included: punching out and then continuing working; coming to work early and working before punching in; punching out and then waiting for a manager to count their till; and arriving for a scheduled shift on time but being asked to wait until business was busier to clock on. Among those who said they had worked off-the-clock, 9% said it happened “always,” 29% said “often,” 26% said “sometimes,” and 32% said “rarely.”

Graph 1 about here

*Overtime:* Twenty-two percent of current and former Taco Bell employees said that they had either “work[ed] overtime and [were] not paid extra for it or [were] not paid for it at all.” Among those with unpaid overtime, 7% said this occurred “always,” 43% said “often,” 36% said “sometimes,” and 14% said “rarely.”

*Meal Breaks:* Forty-nine percent responded affirmatively when asked “Did you ever work 6 hours or more in a day and not get a 30 minute meal break? Include times when you took a meal break of less than 30 minutes and did not get paid for it. Include times when you took a meal break on the restaurant property so that you could be called back to work, even if you were not called. Also include times when you did not get the meal break at all or your meal break was interrupted.” Among those with shortened, interrupted or no meal breaks, 31% said it happened “always,” 25% said “often,” 31% said “sometimes,” and 13% said “rarely.”

Graph 2 about here

*Rest Breaks on Short Shifts:* Over three-fifths (62%) of current and former Taco Bell employees said that they had “work[ed] three hours or more in a row without a full 10-minute rest break.” Among those, 28% said it happened “always,” 35% said “often,” 23% said “sometimes,” and 13% said “rarely.” But these results combine the experiences of persons who worked at Taco Bell as minors and those who did not. Since special laws apply to minors, we asked the question slightly differently for them.

For those who said they had worked at Taco Bell as a minor, this question was automatically modified in progress by the CATI system for interviewers to read: “*When you were a minor, did you ever work three hours or more in a row without a full 15-minute rest break.*” Fully 73% responded “yes.” Of those, 23% said it occurred “always,” 46% said “often,” 14% said “sometimes,” and 14% said “rarely.” For those who worked at Taco Bell only as adults, the parallel figures were 50% responding “yes,”

and the frequency with which it happened was 31% “always,” 19% “often,” 38% “sometimes,” and 13% “rarely.”

*Rest Breaks on Long Shifts:* Over half (51%) of current and former Taco Bell employees said that they had “work[ed] six hours or more in a row without a full 10-minute rest breaks.” Among those, 31% said it happened “always,” 28% said “often,” 19% said “sometimes,” 17% said “rarely,” and 6% did not remember.

### SECTION 3: UNIFORM ISSUES

*Uniform Laundry:* Survey respondents were asked to “take a few minutes to think about your Taco Bell uniform. How much time per week did you usually spend washing your Taco Bell uniform, apart from time spent on regular laundry for you or your family?” One fifth reported that they did not spend any extra time washing their uniforms. Among those who did, the median reply was two hours per week. Seventeen percent said they spent an hour or less per week washing their uniform, 12% report one hour per week, 23% said 1.25 - 2 hours per week, 20% said 2.5 - 5 hours per week, and 8% said 5.25 - 10.5 hours per week. In the “Narrative Responses to Open-ended Questions” section of this report, an interviewer reports that one respondent routinely took other employees’ uniforms home to wash and fold.

*Uniform Shoes:* Shoes of “a certain kind or color” were specially purchased for work at Taco Bell by 71% of respondents. Of these, 39% bought one pair, 24% bought 2 pairs, 16% bought 3-4 pairs, 0% bought 5 pairs, 17% bought 6 pairs, and two people (4%) bought 9 or more pairs of shoes. Not surprisingly, the number of pairs of shoes specially purchased varies directly with length of employment at Taco Bell. One respondent commented that he was also required to purchase special socks.

### SECTION 4: RECEIPT AND PERCEPTION OF TACO BELL’S LETTERS

*Receipt of Letters:* Taco Bell reportedly sent letters to all Taco Bell employees employed since August 1991. One letter was dated August 1997. Another was reportedly sent out sometime in the Spring of 1998. Respondents were asked if they had received these letters. If they hesitated or were unsure, interviewers used two standard probes: “The letter was about any wage or hours problems you may have had when you worked for Taco Bell.” “(It/The letter) asked Taco Bell employees to write to the company if they had any wage and hour problems.”

Over half, 54%, of the survey respondents said they received the August 1997 letter, while 45% said they did not, and one respondent did not know (see Graph 3). Just 12% said they received the Spring 1998 letter, while 82% said they did not, and 6% did not know.

Graph 3 about here

*Residential Moves Did Not Hamper Letter Receipt:* Receipt of the letters could have been impaired by residential mobility: fully 68% of respondents no longer live at the same address as they did when they worked for Taco Bell, and 43% moved three or more times. But 43% reported that someone they lived with at that address still lives there, probably parents. No substantial differences exist between receipt of the first letter and whether the respondent lives at the same address as they did when working at Taco Bell: 52% of those who live at the same address received the first letter, compared to 55% of

those who moved. For the second letter, substantial differences exist: none of those who live at the same address reported receiving it, while 18% of those who moved received it. Those who filed changed-of-address forms at the post office were substantially more likely to receive both letters than those who did not.

*Response to Letters:* Taco Bell Corporation's letter requested a reply from current and former employees who felt they may have experienced wage and hours problems on the job. Among those who received one or both letters, just two survey respondents (5%) said they answered the letter. These two employees began working for Taco Bell in 1991 or 1992, worked as minors, worked there for longer-than-average time periods, are older-than-average now, are no longer employed by Taco Bell, and are both males with some college education.

*Reasons for Not Responding:* Those who did not reply to Taco Bell's letter were provided with eight statements asking why. For each, they were asked to indicate "if it was important in your decision to not answer the letter." The first statement was "I didn't have any wage or hour problems when I worked at Taco Bell." Over half (53%) of those who did not respond to the letter answered this "yes" (see Graph 4). More closely examining this group reveals some interesting patterns, for in an earlier section of the survey, many actually reported wage and hours problems: 47% working off the clock, 11% not paid for overtime, 42% missed meal breaks, 37% missed rest breaks on short shifts, and 21% missed rest breaks on long shifts. The meaning of these patterns is open to interpretation. Those reporting no problems in this question were skipped past the next seven reasons for not responding to the letter.

Graph 4 about here

Seventy-one percent said they did not respond because "It didn't seem worth it to answer the letter, because I didn't think anything would come of it." Fifty-nine percent agreed with the statement "It was just my word against theirs. I didn't have proof." Eighteen percent said that they "had questions about the letter and there was no telephone number to call." Twelve percent said they are "not very good at writing letters." Only one respondent did not respond because the letter was "difficult to understand." No one agreed with the statement "I was afraid they would get back at me somehow if I complained," although one was unsure. Another 35% gave additional miscellaneous other reasons in open-ended comments, such as losing the letter and not having enough time.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is not within the scope or purpose of this report to make recommendations or to editorialize. Rather, the purpose is simply to summarize the survey results within the context of what we know of the larger endeavor. We are confident of the validity of the survey results. All efforts were made to ensure that the survey questions accurately measure the underlying concepts. We are not confident of the reliability of the results. Because OSRL had no control over the crucial stages of sample selection and development, we cannot apply our usual statistical standards to assess the repeatability and consistency of results. Thus, we urge readers to exercise caution in generalizing back to the population of all current and former Taco Bell employees.