AI in the Workplace:
What Frontline Retail Workers Are Saying

In December 2025, United for Respect Education Fund (UFREF) launched a survey targeting low-income retail and fulfillment center workers, primarily those working for Walmart and Amazon. This survey explores how frontline workers are encountering the introduction of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies in their workplaces, as well as their perceptions and feelings about these tools. After publishing initial survey results in a May 2026 *Fast Company* exclusive, UFREF continued gathering additional responses and worker insights as the use of these technologies became even more widespread, closing in August 2026 after engaging with more than 350 retail associates. **The purpose of this research is to center and amplify the voices of the workers who are directly experiencing the impacts of AI on the job and to support the safe, regulated use of technology in the workplace.**

Top Survey Findings

- 64% of respondents are very worried, worried, or somewhat worried about their job disappearing in the next 1-2 years because of automation/advanced technology.
- 55% of respondents observed staffing levels at their workplace reduced as the result of automation and advanced technology.
- The top three things that scare frontline workers most about AI use in their workplace are *(in a multi-selection question)*:
    - Robots making HR decisions *[hiring, wage reviews, time off requests, etc]* (75%)
    - Having less contact with managers and coworkers (63%)
    - AI penalizing me if I make a mistake (53%) / Monitoring & Surveillance (52%)

Upon closing the survey in August 2026, we received a total of 357 responses. Our findings show that **64% of respondents are very worried, worried, or somewhat worried about their job disappearing** in the next one to two years because of advanced automation and technology. **Another 49% of respondents rank losing their job to a robot as one of their top fears** with the uptick of AI use in workspaces.

"I'm worried about AI making errors when identifying someone through surveillance. I'm worried about it taking over and removing the need for my role all together," said one Walmart employee in Louisiana.

While job loss remains a major concern, the number one fear reported by workers was the loss of connection with real people in the workplace. **More than half of respondents (63%) reported reduced access to a human manager** when issues arise, or less contact with human coworkers. **Three quarters (75%) identified automated management systems as one of their top fears where algorithms or robots are making human resource**

decisions on hiring, wages, and time off requests. Many workers have expressed how they are already being impacted:

One Amazon associate in Georgia said that her top concern was, *"We have no way to report when technology makes errors in judgement or when technology cannot see the complete picture. So, we are forced to work within unfair, unsafe systems."*

A Walmart worker in Arizona told us, *"My coach (a mid-level management position) had to delete AI generated attendance points quite a few times to keep me (because) she knew I was a good worker…"*

A retail employee based in California commented that, *"We need jobs and hours. We have people who need jobs. Don't put robots in (the) workplace. Also I do not want to talk to a robot or have a robot make decisions about me and my work performance."*

Workers were also asked about changes in staffing levels following the introduction of automation technologies in their workspaces, with 55% reporting they've experienced a reduction in staff at their facility.

A Walmart associate in Connecticut believes that, *"Eventually AI will reduce (the) work force by three quarters."*

Workers also had ideas of how AI use in their workspaces could be used to improve safety standards:

"AI is not being used at all to make (the) workplace safer…AI should stop production when building wide safety drills are not performed on a regular basis. AI monitoring should be used to monitor walking areas for obstructions such as pallet jack forks protruding from pallets when parked under working pallets being loaded. Air monitoring should be done around parked trucks still running, especially in loading dock areas and inside trailers," an Amazon worker based in Tennessee advised.

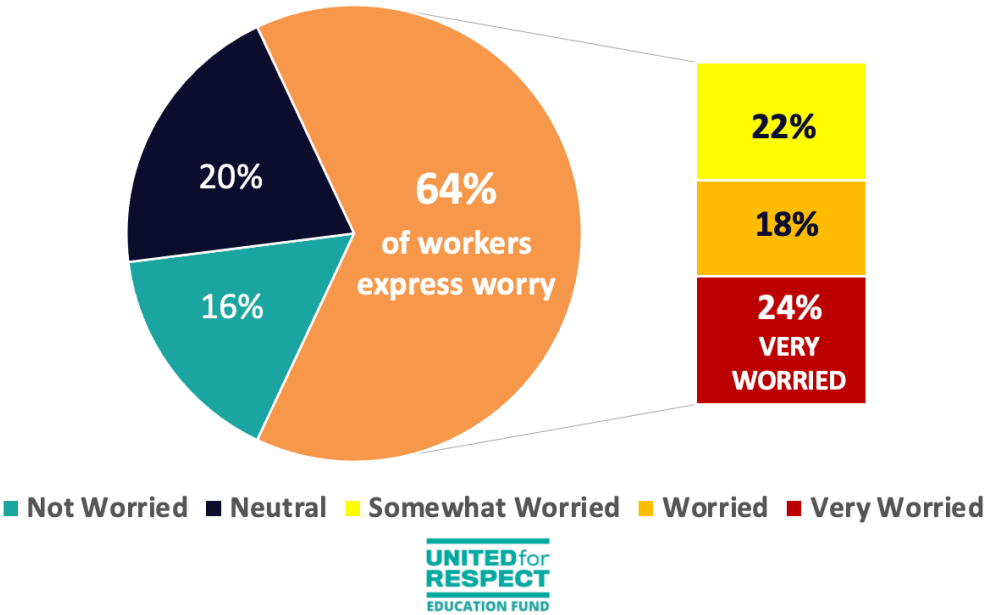
"I 'hope' AI will be used to eliminate menial/repetitive tasks and to make work easier, but I honestly do not believe it will be. I truly believe AI will only be used to increase profits higher up," said a Walmart worker in Arizona.

In conclusion, a sizable majority of workers surveyed expressed concerns about how AI is being introduced into their workplaces today, while also recognizing its potential to benefit workers — and not only the companies they work for — in the future.

Note: Some survey responses were collected in partnership with Beth Gutelius, Athena Coalition, Amazon Labor Union, For the Many, and Missouri Workers Center.

ATTACHED: Survey Questions & Responses through August 11, 2026

How worried are you about your job disappearing in the next 1-2 years because of AI and other advanced tech?



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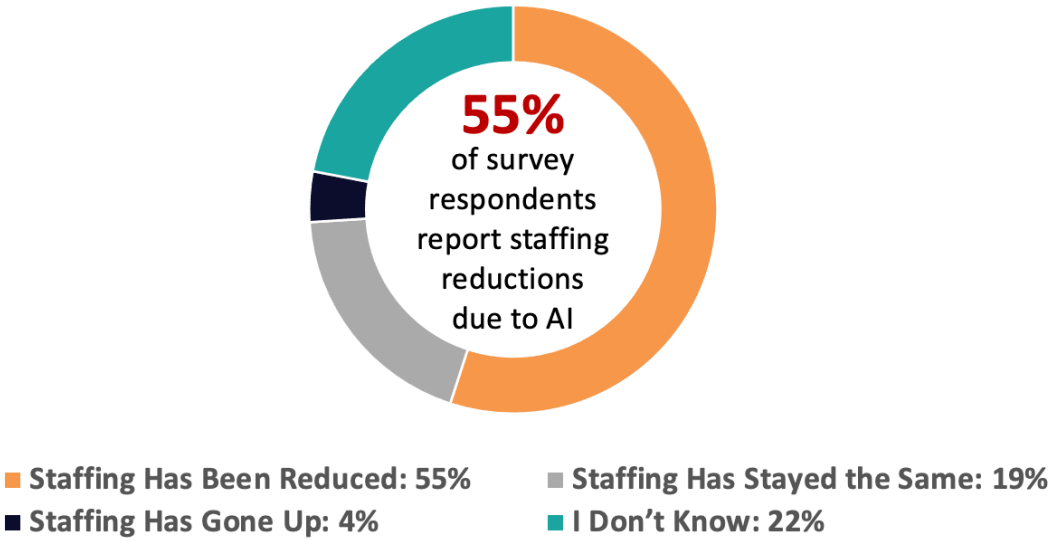
Has automation and other advanced tech led to a change in staffing levels at your facility?



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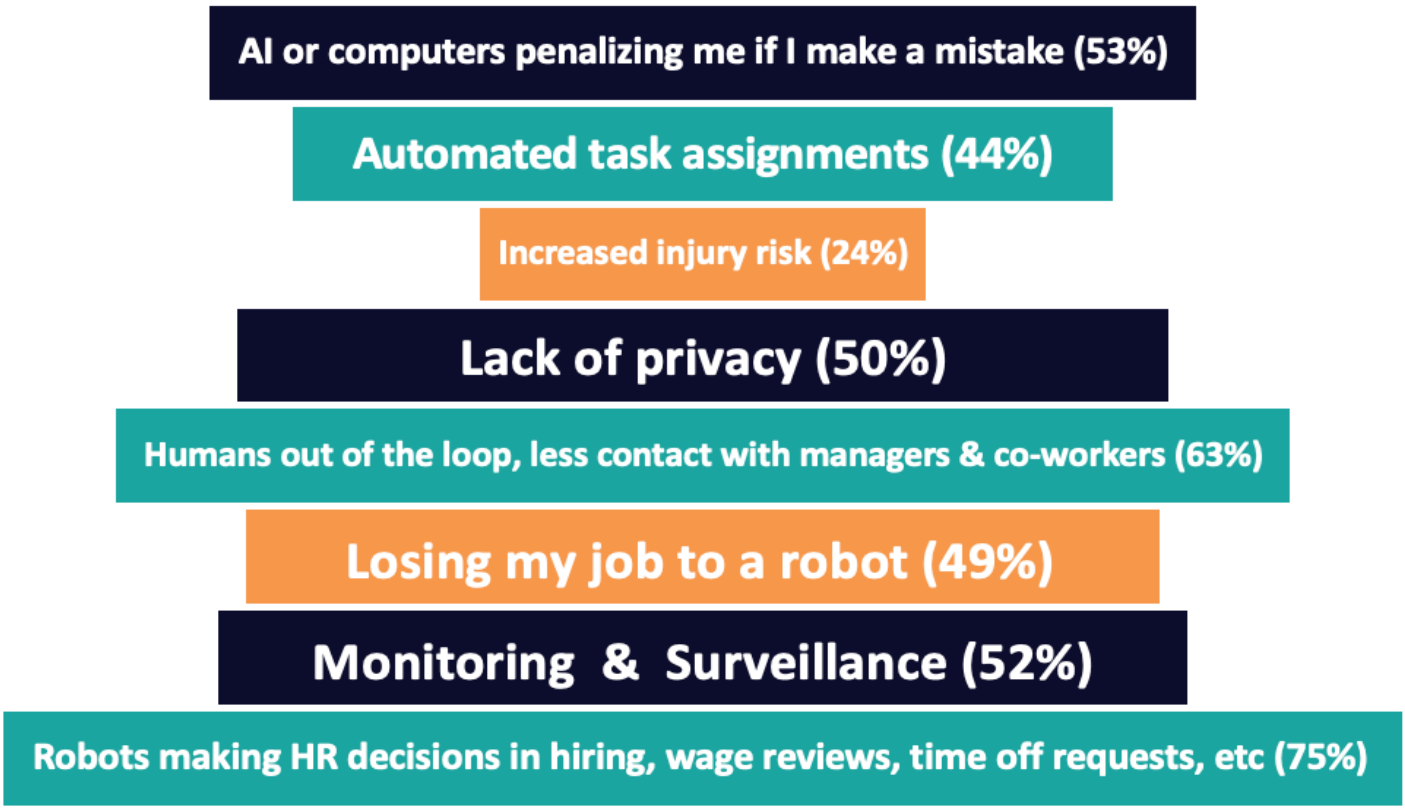
What scares you most about AI in your workplace?

(Select all that apply.)



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