



Zipline

From HQ to the Frontline:

**Five Rules for High-Impact
Retail Execution**

Navigating industry changes is something we're all familiar with working in retail. But lately those changes are coming faster, harder to manage, and having real-time effects we're increasingly pressured to stay on top of.

It's one thing to "expect the unexpected"—but how do you prepare for what you can't predict?

The truth is, you can't. What you can do is equip retail teams with more data, focus, and flexibility to understand and do what's needed, faster.

Store execution matters now more than ever

In-store shopping accounted for [85% of all US](#) retail sales in 2023, and many retailers are investing in larger, experience-driven formats designed to boost customer loyalty. That means exceptional, consistent execution is critical to staying competitive—while industry uncertainty makes it that much more difficult.

That's why we created this handy guide for **bringing more focus, agility, and executional excellence across stores**. Practical, fluff-free, and built on decades of real-world experience.

From HQ to Storefront: Five Rules for Flawless Retail Execution updates the original key principles from the bestselling book *Stores Don't Suck*, with real examples and insights from some of the world's top retailers. It explores how best-in-class brands are **improving execution through smarter communication, meaningful workforce empowerment, and increased accountability**. So you can expect the unexpected—and be confident in handling whatever that may be.



What's in Store?

Introduction

The Five Principles

3

Principle #1

Create an Aligned Organization

4

Principle #2

Create Intent-Based Communication Channels

6

Principle #3

Send the Right Message at the Right Time

8

Principle #4

Empower the Workforce

10

Principle #5

Measure the Execution

12

The Five Principles: A Framework Born from Real-World Frustration

It was 2012. Melissa Wong was leading internal communications at a major global fashion retailer undergoing a critical brand transformation. The company had already refined its marketing strategy, sharpened product mix, and invested heavily in attracting new customers. Its vision and directives were crystal clear.

So, why were teams failing to execute key initiatives?

When Melissa visited stores to find out, she saw firsthand how frontline teams weren't aligned with the priorities of headquarters—displays were incomplete, signage was out of date, and stock was misplaced. When she asked managers why this was happening, the answer was surprisingly consistent:

"We didn't get the memo."

Stores weren't deliberately ignoring direction. Important updates were lost in cluttered inboxes, fragmented across multiple platforms, or buried beneath a pile of conflicting priorities. Teams felt overwhelmed and under-supported.

Finding the problems, creating the solution

Melissa spent months speaking with employees at every level, identifying pain points and observing how messages flowed (or didn't flow) across the organization. She quickly realized the issue wasn't unique to her company: retailers across the industry were grappling with the same challenges.

Her experience became the bedrock for the Five Principles you're reading now: a framework for retailers to **improve communication, support and empower employees, and ensure flawless execution at scale**. It set the foundation for Zipline, a retail operations platform Melissa went on to co-found, and inspired *Stores Don't Suck*, her bestselling book on retail execution.

This playbook builds on those insights, refreshed for today's retail realities.

Keep reading for practical strategies and proven tactics to align teams, engage your workforce, and deliver exceptional in-store experiences. Every. Single. Day.

Principle #1

Create an Aligned Organization

Think of your business as a boat. If every crew member is rowing in a different direction, it'll go nowhere fast. The same is true for retail teams. When headquarters, leaders, and frontline staff aren't working toward the same goals and priorities, execution stalls.

Alignment ensures everyone in the organization is **working from the same set of instructions, with clear expectations and shared goals.**

This means teams can focus on the right tasks, propelling the business forward.

Aligning retail teams sounds simple enough—until you try to do it.

Retail hierarchies are often complex. Information must flow from headquarters, through layers of field leaders, to store managers, and finally to frontline employees. **Each step creates an opportunity for instructions to be muddled or misinterpreted.** By the time the message reaches stores, it's often incomplete or unclear.

Retailers need a system that delivers clear, prioritized instructions. They need to ensure every employee understands how their role contributes to broader company objectives. With this clarity in place, stores can execute confidently, creating better customer experiences and stronger business results.

An operations platform designed specifically for retail, like Zipline, helps manage communications at every role and level, ensuring consistent, outstanding customer experiences that drive loyalty and sales.



See it in action:

How Warby Parker achieved cross-company alignment

The trailblazing eyewear brand Warby Parker faced a challenge familiar to many growing companies: as the business expanded, keeping stores and customer service teams aligned became increasingly difficult. Multiple departments competed for employee attention, leaving frontline teams overwhelmed and unsure how to prioritize their work.

To overcome this, the retailer first introduced a **clear guiding principle** called *“One Frame of Mind.”* It became a rallying cry for their retail and customer service (CX) teams, reminding them that no matter where customers interacted with the brand—in-store, online, or over the phone—**the experience should feel seamless and consistent.**

Warby Parker also **built a deliberate process** to focus on what mattered most. By introducing a dedicated communication team to act as gatekeepers, only the most essential, actionable information reached stores. This team worked closely with organizational partners to understand upcoming priorities, coaching leaders to think carefully about what messages needed to be shared, and when.

Cross-functional meetings gave HQ partners a clear view of what was happening in stores and on the CX side. **This two-way dialogue helped them shape messages that were relevant, timely, and clear.** Teams felt more confident in their day-to-day decisions, and the business was better equipped to deliver consistently excellent customer experiences.

Tactic: Align your retail organization with shared goals

Step 1: Unite behind a rallying cry that gives employees a clear sense of purpose

- ✓ **Define your North Star:** Identify a simple, memorable phrase that reflects your brand's core mission and customer promise.
- ✓ **Make it meaningful:** Connect the motto to real, everyday actions. Employees should understand how their daily tasks contribute to achieving this shared goal.
- ✓ **Reinforce it often:** Repeat the motto in team meetings, internal communications, and training sessions to keep it top of mind.

Step 2: Appoint a “gatekeeping” team to ensure stores only receive relevant, actionable information.

- ✓ **Create a communication pipeline:**
Assign a team to act as the link between headquarters and the field, whose role is to filter messages, ensuring only essential information is sent to stores.
- ✓ **Prioritize ruthlessly:** Encourage HQ teams to work with the gatekeeping team before sending messages to ensure the right information reaches stores at the right time.
- ✓ **Guide HQ teams:** The gatekeeping team should proactively educate departments on how to write clear, actionable updates that stores can quickly absorb and act on.

Step 3: Implement a structured communication process to improve consistency and accountability.

- ✓ **Hold regular cross-functional meetings:** Align business partners by hosting meetings that provide updates on what's happening in stores and within customer support teams.
- ✓ **Create a single source of truth:** Centralize all customer-facing resources, policies, and updates in one platform.
- ✓ **Establish clear prioritization rules:** Define what qualifies as urgent, what's considered informative, and what can wait.

Principle #2

Create Intent-Based Communication Channels

Retail's challenge isn't always too much communication—it's communication that's poorly organized. Store teams are often flooded with messages, leaving them unsure of what's urgent, what's nice to know, and what needs to be *done*. **Employees waste time sifting through information instead of serving customers or completing key tasks.**

Intent is essential in retail communications. By separating messages according to their purpose, retailers can help employees quickly grasp what needs immediate action, what serves as reference material, and what's purely for inspiration. **Successful retailers organize communication into four distinct types:**

1. **Nice to Know:** Inspirational updates that build engagement, such as employee spotlights, leadership messages, or social media content.
2. **Need to Do:** Clear, time-sensitive instructions that drive execution, like promotional changes, compliance tasks, or visual merchandising updates.
3. **Evergreen Content:** Long-term resources, such as policy documents, product guides, or training materials, which employees can access as needed.
4. **Dialogue, Discussion, and Debate:** Collaborative spaces for employees to share ideas, ask questions, and engage in conversation with colleagues or leaders.

With each type of information in its respective channel, employees know *exactly* where to go to find what they need. They can quickly determine what needs addressing immediately and what can be saved for when the floor isn't quite so busy.

Go a step further by housing all communication types within a single platform (like Zipline), where employees can seamlessly switch between tasks, customer interactions, and reference materials without losing focus.



See it in action:

How an auto retailer drove engagement through intentional communication

Maintaining employee engagement across thousands of store locations was proving difficult for a leading automotive retailer. Teams were **overloaded by operational messages and task-focused directives**, leaving little space for content to inspire employees and connect them to the company's mission.

Then the retailer introduced **a dedicated communication channel designed specifically for non-urgent, morale-boosting content**. They launched an internal podcast to deliver stories, insights, and leadership updates, that employees could listen to on their own time. **Positioning this content as “nice to know” gave employees a way to connect with the brand**—without overwhelming them with yet another task to complete.

The podcast team took a thoughtful approach to making it engaging and accessible. Seeking feedback and suggestions directly from employees, episodes on everything from leadership success stories to practical tips for managing day-to-day challenges (like complex planogram re-sets) were launched to great reception.

For intent-based communication to be effective, employees must be able to easily switch between channels throughout their day. Each podcast episode was **published alongside operational messages in the company's internal communication platform**. Employees could listen whether they were on the floor, in the back office, or on a break.

The results? Nearly 40,000 plays, showing just how eager employees were to engage with this type of inspirational content. It just needed to be clearly separated from the “need to know” information they relied on for daily tasks. **Frontline employees gained a meaningful way to connect with the brand, without disrupting operational focus.**

Tactic: Boost employee engagement with intent-based communication

Step 1: Identify your “Nice to Know” content

- ✓ **Determine content types:** Focus on content that informs, inspires, or celebrates your people, rather than driving immediate action.
- ✓ Examples include: leadership updates, employee spotlights, success stories, or insights that connect workers to your brand's purpose.
- ✓ **Keep boundaries clear:** Avoid blending these messages with operational or task-related information.

Step 2: Choose the right format based on employee preferences

- ✓ **Put yourself in their shoes:** A podcast is ideal for busy retail teams because employees can listen on the go or during downtime.
- ✓ **Use multiple formats:** Alternatively, video updates, newsletters, or interactive dashboards can work just as well (if they're engaging and accessible).
- ✓ **Keep it organic:** Prioritize a format that feels natural for your audience and fits seamlessly into their day.

Step 3: Make this type of content easy to access

- ✓ **Consolidate access portals:** Use your internal communication platform to house the new channel alongside task-based messaging, so it's always top of mind.
- ✓ **Make it stand out:** Create visual cues (like a prominent dashboard link) to encourage adoption.
- ✓ **Keep it on-the-go ready:** Ensure content is mobile-friendly so employees can engage whether they're on the floor or on a break.

Principle #3

Send the Right Message at the Right Time

In retail, timing is everything—that includes communication. Keeping stores informed without overwhelming them requires a careful balance between sending timely updates and ensuring those updates are actionable. But how?

Retail communication teams often attempt to manage message volume by creating a weekly update cadence. Efficient in theory, it rarely works in practice. **Urgent messages inevitably pop up**—surprise competitor launches, delayed shipments, emergent product issues—turning that weekly cadence into a string of disruptive, ad-hoc updates.

Others default to sending information the *moment* they have it. It's speedy, yes, but this practice bombards employees with messages and **forces them to step away from the store floor to stay informed**. Valuable labor hours end up wasted, and the customer experience suffers.

We've found the most effective solution to be a structured *daily* communication cadence, built around the concept of message “bundles.” **Rather than sending updates at random throughout the day, a bundle consolidates essential information into a single update** at the start (or end) of each shift. So employees know when to check for updates and develop a consistent habit of reviewing information at predictable times.

Use a digital solution, like Zipline's Day Sheet, to establish a regular cadence of communications from HQ, reinforcing the frontline “ritual” of checking for urgent messages and tasks at the start of every shift.



See it in action:

How daily updates led to dramatic execution upgrades

One **global fashion retailer** substantially improved execution—simply by changing how and when they delivered information to stores.

Before adopting a daily communication cadence, they relied on frequent reminders and repetitive messages to get key tasks completed. This well-intentioned approach turned out to overwhelm frontline teams with unnecessary noise, causing them to miss important updates and lose focus.

That all changed with the introduction of Zipline's *Day Sheet*, which **brings together all essential information—urgent updates, reminders, and priority tasks— into one clear, easy-to-follow checklist**. Published overnight, it's ready for employees when they arrive for the day, creating a simple yet powerful habit: starting their shift by checking the Day Sheet and finishing it by checking all tasks are complete.

This shift in behavior transformed store execution. Instead of relying on multiple reminders or parsing lengthy email chains, HQ could confidently place a task on the Day Sheet the night before and know, with certainty, it would be actioned the following day. This led to a massive improvement in execution rates—**same-day and next-day task completion skyrocketed to above 90%.**

Tactic: Improve execution with timely, actionable communication

Step 1: Create a single source of information

- ✓ **Bring everything into one easy-to-access place:** Consolidate key updates, reminders, and urgent instructions in a single place.
- ✓ **Include to-dos and to-knows:** Both actionable tasks (e.g., promotions to update) and important reminders (e.g., policy updates or upcoming deadlines) need a place.

Step 2: Surface actionable tasks in a daily checklist

- ✓ **Stay on top:** Review daily communication and identify the “need to do” direction for stores.
- ✓ **Keep it simple:** Write clear, concise task instructions and prioritize for impact.
- ✓ **Place your checklist in a central, highly visible location:** Choose a dedicated internal platform page or or a digital task management tool, wherever employees know to check at the start of every shift.

Step 3: Establish a daily communication routine

- ✓ **Keep timing consistent:** Designate a set time each day (ideally overnight or early morning) for sending your daily updates.
- ✓ **Support positive habits:** Encourage teams to build a habit of checking this daily update first thing when they arrive.
- ✓ **Reinforce focus:** Keep a team's attention through huddles, manager coaching, and visual reminders in break rooms or employee areas.

Principle #4

Empower the Workforce

Give retail employees the knowledge and context to feel confident in their roles and make decisions aligned with company goals.

Not just *what* to do, but *why* it matters, to feel more connected to the brand's success. This sense of purpose drives engagement and motivates employees to take ownership of their performance.

In retail, this connection is often missing. The industry's size and high turnover make it a struggle to give frontline teams sufficient context to make informed decisions. Information gets filtered through layers of leadership, with **managers left to interpret what's important.** Employees may complete tasks without fully understanding how their actions impact the broader business, limiting their ability to adapt, innovate, or make decisions on the spot.

The key to empowering employees: build systems that clearly connect their day-to-day actions to company goals. This means sharing the “why” behind key decisions—whether it's a major promotion, a product launch, or a shift in visual merchandising. When employees understand the bigger picture, they can make better judgment calls, even when unexpected situations arise.

Strengthening the employee-brand connection starts with a communication structure designed to help employees understand the “why” behind the business. Zipline turns internal resources into engaging experiences that help them see the bigger picture.



See it in action:

How Visionworks brought company purpose into focus

When Visionworks discovered store teams were frequently unprepared for sales events, they knew they needed to take action. Too many updates overwhelmed employees, who were struggling to tell what was urgent and what was background noise. Even with clear instructions, marketing's efforts to infuse purpose and fun into customer-facing event communications got lost—and sales lagged.

They took to reimagining their internal resource library, creating a centralized hub that gave employees **the “what” and “why”** behind major sales initiatives.

Rather than simply listing out tasks and deadlines, Visionworks used **colorful, visually engaging landing pages to highlight key promotions and operational updates**. During peak periods like back-to-school and the holidays, these dedicated “hubs” pulled together everything employees needed to know—from product details to marketing campaigns. As a result, frontline workers understood which actions to take and why those actions were critical to driving sales.

Teams felt more engaged because they understood their role in the company's success. With the right vision, employees felt empowered to “run it like they own it,” taking greater accountability for outcomes and finding creative ways to deliver on sales goals.

Tactic: Empower employees with context

Step 1: Identify key moments that require context

- ✓ **Pinpoint the types of updates where context is critical:** These typically include major sales events, product launches, and new policy/procedure updates.
- ✓ **Ask yourself:** *What's at stake if employees don't understand the “why” behind this information?* If the answer is confusion, poor execution, or missed opportunities, that's a sign to add context.

Step 2: Incorporate context into your communication structure

- ✓ **For every message or task, include:**
 - **The “What”** – Clear instructions on what action needs to be taken.
 - **The “Why”** – Background information that explains why this action is important and how it will affect the store, team, or broader company goals.

Step 3: Centralize information in an accessible hub

- ✓ **Create a centralized hub:** Consolidate product information, campaign details, visual merchandising guides, and FAQs to help employees handle customer inquiries around key sales events.
- ✓ **Provide easy-access knowledge:** Create an internal resource library or intranet with dedicated sections to house everything related to that event.

Principle #5

Measure the Execution

Smart retail ideas and well-crafted strategies only drive results if they're successfully executed in the store. From major product launches to promotional events, flawless execution is what ultimately determines success. Yet many retailers lack visibility into directives being carried out correctly—or at all.

Unlike online, where performance data is tracked in real time, brick-and-mortar execution often feels like a guessing game. Sales data or anecdotal feedback is relied on to measure success, but only tell part of the story. **By the time leadership realises something hasn't been implemented properly, the moment to course-correct has already passed.**

Store execution is improved by measuring it. Systems that track whether instructions have been received, understood, and actioned give retailers the ability to spot gaps *before* they impact results. Say, if a product test is running in select stores, **tracking location-specific compliance ensures you're working with clean data.** And can trust the results to make informed decisions.

Visibility then drives accountability. When actions are tracked, employees are more likely to take ownership of their responsibilities. **Leaders spend less time chasing down incomplete tasks and more time focusing on coaching, development, and customer experience.** Ultimately, retailers that measure execution consistently are better equipped to adapt quickly, respond to market shifts, and deliver a seamless in-store experience—which is exactly what today's competitive retail landscape demands.

It's not always possible to visit every location, and even when you can, identifying problems can be tricky. Real-time data reporting from platforms like Zipline helps headquarters pinpoint issues and uncover opportunities for greater compliance or efficiency.



See it in action:

How Uncle Giuseppe's measured and maximized results

Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace, an Italy-inspired grocery chain, ensured execution with one simple strategy: requiring photo evidence to confirm task completion. This decision came after facing frequent issues with inconsistent execution. Teams often claimed to miss instructions or misunderstand the steps involved—leading to promotional displays, product launches, and compliance being delayed or incorrectly implemented.

Photo confirmation guaranteed accountability for finishing tasks correctly and on time. For example, when they launched a new sandwich recipe, they asked stores to submit photo evidence confirming several key steps had been followed:

- Updated product labels with correct ingredient information
- Correct use of the specified recipe and preparation method
- A final presentation photo to ensure product consistency across all locations

The impact at Uncle Giuseppe's was immediate. Shore managers were more actively involved in carrying out directives correctly. This improved compliance and prompted better communication between managers and department leads.

And had the bonus effect of sparking valuable conversations. When a manager identified challenges with certain product preparation steps, they flagged the issue to their leadership team. **This feedback loop allowed the retailer to adjust processes in real time, improving overall efficiency.**

Tactic: Drive accountability through measurement

Step 1: Identify critical tasks that require verification

- ✓ **Prioritize key tasks:** Focus on ones that directly affect customer experience, or are tied to compliance or safety standards.
- ✓ **Identify focus areas:** Require verification for tasks that most suffer from inconsistent execution, whether they are "critical" or not.

Step 2: Establish what "good" looks like

- ✓ **Define success:** Clarify what successful execution should look like for every task.
- ✓ **Show, as well as tell:** Where possible, provide visual examples (photos, videos) of precise execution, so store teams can easily emulate.

Step 3: Integrate photo confirmations

- ✓ **Ask for proof:** Using a task management or audit platform, request photo confirmations of your brand's most critical tasks.
- ✓ **Account for timing:** Set deadlines for submissions to encourage timely follow-through.
- ✓ **Lead by example:** Highlight examples of top-performing stores in future internal communications to emphasize best practices and motivate teams.

Operational Excellence Starts with Zipline

Great store execution doesn't just happen—it takes clear communication, consistent processes, and the right tools to keep everyone on the same page. When your teams are aligned and empowered, amazing things follow: smoother operations, stronger results, and happier customers.

That's where Zipline shines.

Used by top brands like Sephora, American Eagle Outfitters, and The Fresh Market, Zipline brings communication, task management, and store insights together in one sleek, mobile-friendly platform. Frontline employees get real-time direction and clear priorities right in their dashboard, while HQ gets total visibility into what's happening on the ground—so initiatives roll out on time, every time.



If you're ready to drive better execution and unlock the full potential of your stores, let's talk.

See Zipline in action—schedule your demo today

Zipline