

# Data-Driven Workforce Trends to Elevate Your Hiring Strategy

Spring 2026 EDITION



**SPECIALIZED**  
RECRUITING GROUP

## HIRING SENTIMENTS HOLD STEADY AND CHALLENGES PERSIST

Sentiments regarding the 2026 hiring outlook appear to be steady, yet continuing to slowly decline, largely driven by increased workloads. As companies anticipate challenges in finding qualified candidates and navigating AI use in the hiring process, 67% of hiring decision-makers feel positively about their company's hiring outlook, while 47% feel negatively. Sentiments regarding hiring appear to be steady, including descriptors such as hopeful (36% Fall 2025, 32% Spring 2025, 32% Spring 2024), optimistic (36%, 34%, 38%), and confident (27%, 31%, 33%).\*

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to the acceptance of multiple responses.

Forty-four per cent of hiring decision-makers report their company plans to increase the number of employees in the first half of this year. The top reasons for increasing headcount in 2026 are:



## TOP CHALLENGES COMPANIES EXPECT TO FACE

Plans to increase headcount are met with anticipated hurdles, as 86% of Canadian hiring decision-makers expect their company will face hiring challenges over the next year, down from 90% in spring 2025. These include:



“In 2026, hiring will be selective but optimistic,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, President, and Chairman of Express Employment International. “AI will help plan labour needs and find qualified candidates faster, yet we must guard against overdependence. Fewer entry level jobs can make it harder for the next generation to develop new skills, so investing in training will be critical.”

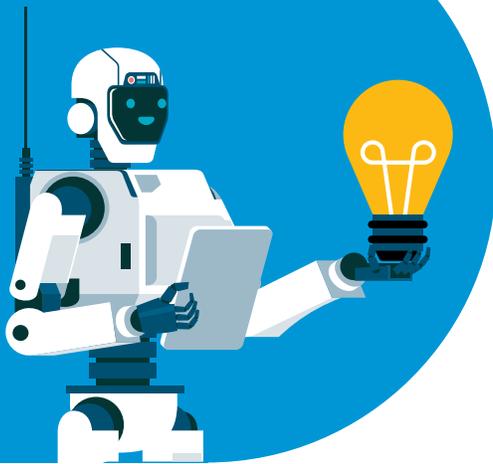
— **Bob Funk Jr.**

CEO, President and Chairman of Express Employment International

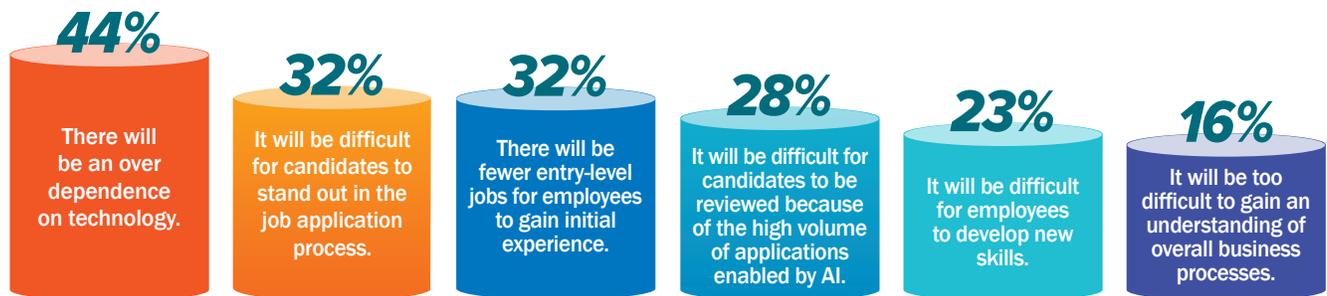


## AI CONCERNS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

AI adoption is widespread across companies and usage continues to grow, as 63% of companies use AI in the workplace and 19% report it's used on a regular basis. AI is perceived to have a wealth of benefits, including having a positive impact on making some processes more efficient (67%), freeing up employee time (65%), and enhancing customer service (52%). Despite these benefits, 79% of hiring decision-makers have concerns about the impact of AI on career opportunities in their field/industry for the next generation.



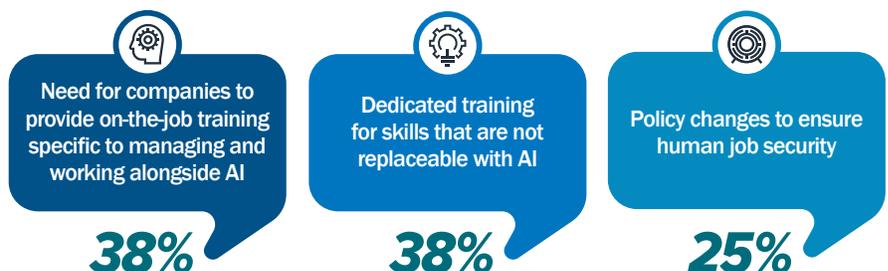
## CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACT OF AI ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR NEXT GENERATION



## PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION FOR AI

To help prepare the next generation for a career in their field/industry amid the impact of AI, hiring decision-makers commonly cite the need for training.

Fifty-five per cent of hiring decision-makers feel AI-driven automation threatens to diminish their company's brand personality; 57% of hiring decision-makers in white collar and 48% in blue collar agree.



# MAINTAINING A HUMAN TOUCH AMID AI USE IS A PRIORITY

Eighty-two per cent of hiring decision-makers say using AI will never replace the need for actual employees at their company. Most (89%) say their company is dedicated to ensuring there will always be a human-touch element at their company (i.e., ensuring AI/automation does not fully replace human interaction). Among those who use AI, 79% feel the personal connection between their employees and clients remains unaffected by their use of it.

## TOP FUNCTIONS WITH A PRIORITIZED HUMAN-TOUCH ELEMENT



**Human Resources**  
**68%**



**Customer Service**  
**58%**

## IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING HUMAN-TOUCH ELEMENT IN CERTAIN TASKS

Hiring decision-makers believe it's absolutely essential/very important to maintain a human-touch element in many situations.



The Job Insights survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment International, parent company of Specialized Recruiting Group, Nov. 3–19, 2025, among 504 Canadian hiring decision-makers (adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than one employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data are weighted where necessary by company size to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. For complete survey methodology, please contact [Communications@ExpressPros.com](mailto:Communications@ExpressPros.com).



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