

Data-Driven Workforce Trends to Elevate Your Hiring Strategy

Spring 2026 EDITION



HIRING SENTIMENTS REBOUND, YET CHALLENGES PERSIST

This year appears promising for many as two-thirds of companies plan to increase hiring, reflecting a rebound of sentiments around hiring outlooks. However, such positive sentiments may be cooled by perceptions of challenges ahead, particularly navigating AI use.

The majority of hiring decision-makers feel positively about their company's hiring outlook citing feelings of optimism (53%), hopefulness (51%), and confidence (51%), which have increased since spring 2025. However, 37% feel negatively about their hiring outlook.*

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

Reflecting a significant increase from spring 2025 (58%), 66% of hiring decision-makers report their company plans to increase the number of employees in the first half of the year. The top reasons to increase headcount are:



TOP CHALLENGES COMPANIES EXPECT TO FACE

Plans to increase headcount are met with anticipated hurdles, as 91% of hiring decision-makers expect their company will face hiring challenges over the next year. These include:



**i.e., due to concerns of a recession or economic downturn and/or changes in government policies.

“In 2026, hiring will be selective but optimistic,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, President, and Chairman of Express Employment International. “AI will help plan labor 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.”

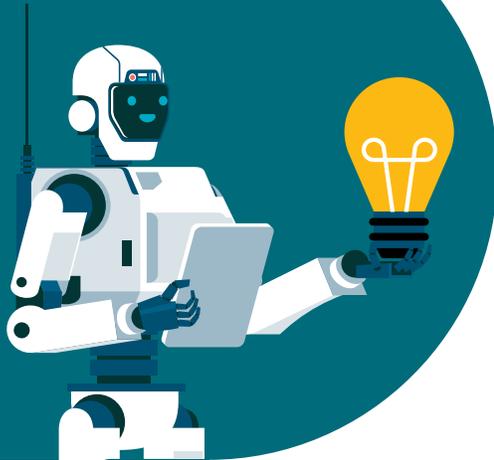
— **Bob Funk Jr.**

CEO, President and Chairman of Express Employment International

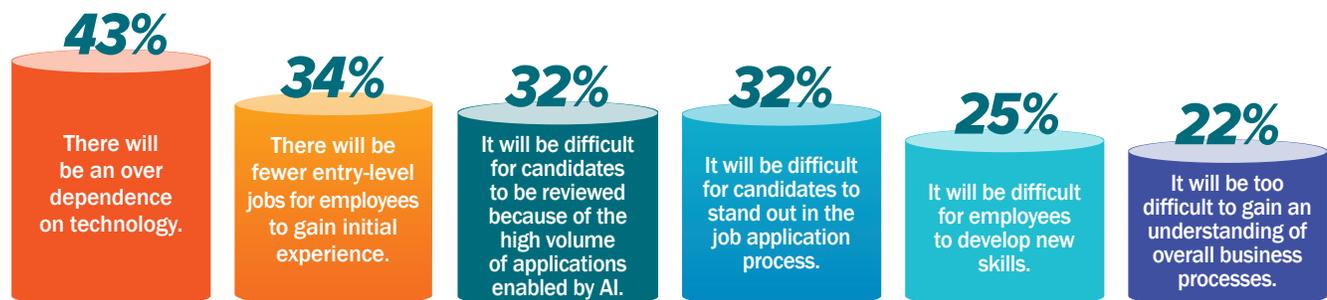


AI CONCERNS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

AI adoption is widespread across companies and usage continues to grow, as 79% of companies use AI in the workplace with 43% reporting it's used on a regular basis. While policies can provide useful guardrails, training will be critical. Eighty-six percent of hiring decision-makers feel companies need to focus on formally training employees on how to best use AI in their day-to-day work, rather than expecting them to learn on their own. Despite concerns about AI impacting career opportunities (80%), most report AI has enhanced employee productivity (44%), company efficiency (38%), and employee creativity (38%) at their company.

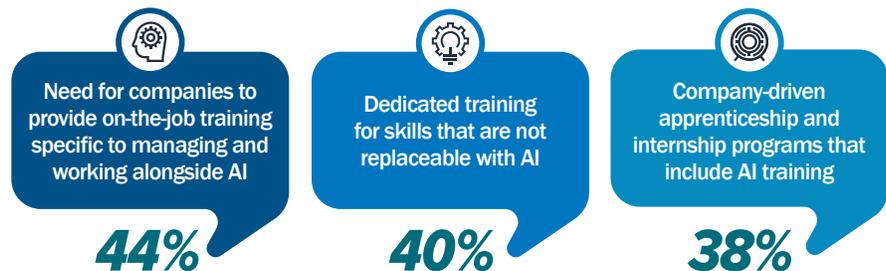


CONCERNS ABOUT IMPACT OF AI ON CAREER DEVELOPMENT FOR NEXT GENERATION



PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION FOR AI

Eighty percent of hiring decision-makers are concerned about the impact of AI on career opportunities in their field/industry for the next generation. 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.



Hiring decision-makers in white collar work are more likely than those in blue collar work to report concerns that there will be an over-dependence on technology (46% vs. 32%).

MAINTAINING A HUMAN TOUCH AMID AI USE IS A PRIORITY

The vast majority of hiring decision-makers (90%) say using AI will never replace the need for actual employees at their company. Ninety-two percent 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, 85% 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
59%



Customer Service
57%



Ethics and Compliance
47%

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 the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment International, parent company of Specialized Recruiting Group, Nov. 3–19, 2025, among 1,002 U.S. hiring decision-makers (adults ages 18+ in the U.S. 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.



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