

# Data-Driven Workforce Trends to Elevate Your Hiring Strategy

Spring 2026 EDITION

**JobInsights**  
US REPORT

**Express**  
EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS



## 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:

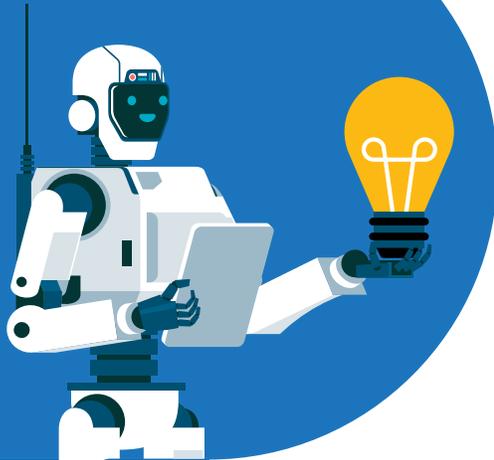


*\*\*i.e., due to concerns of a recession or economic downturn and/or changes in government policies.*

“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.**

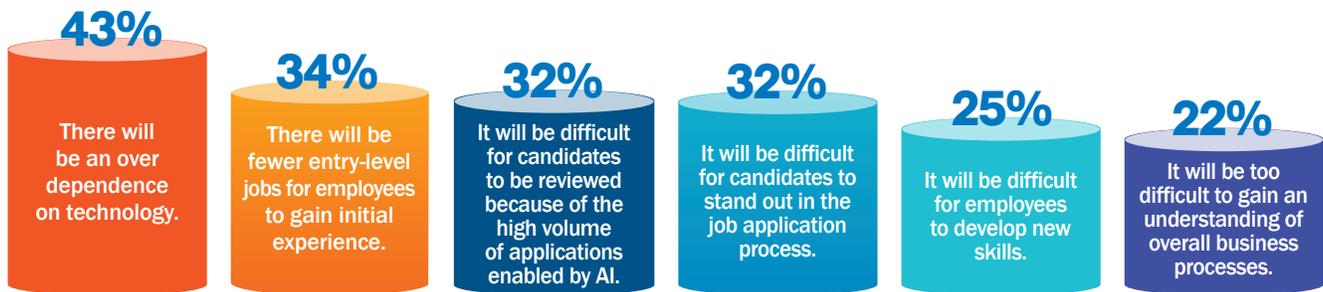
CEO, President and Chairman of Express Employment International



## AI Concerns and Opportunities for the Next Generation

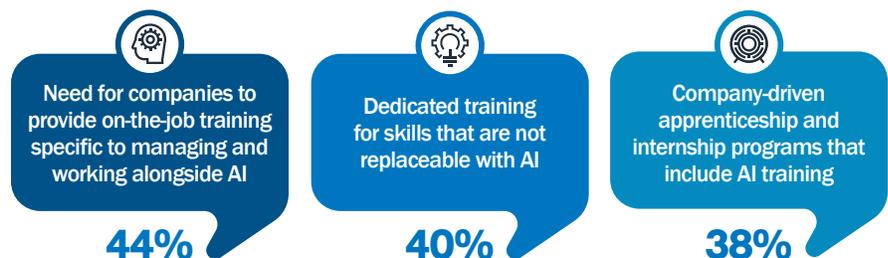
AI adoption is widespread across companies and usage continues to grow, as 79% of companies use AI in the workplace with 43% reporting it's used on a regular basis. While policies can provide useful guardrails, training will be critical. Eighty-six percent of hiring decision-makers feel companies need 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.



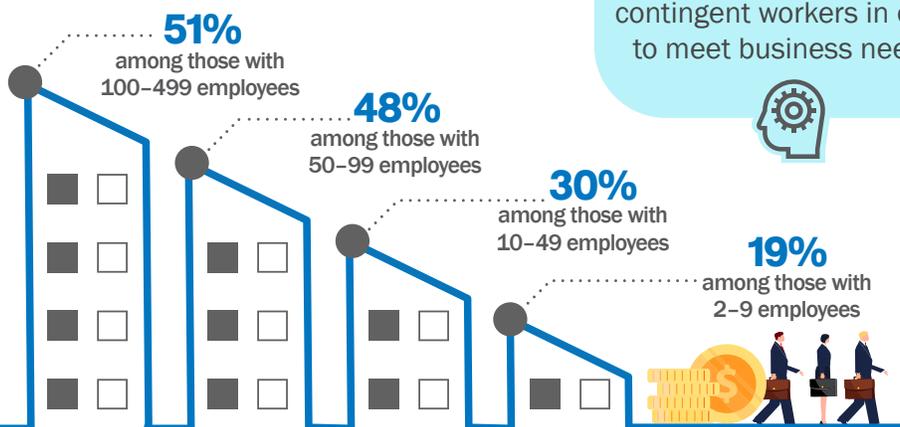
Hiring decision-makers in white collar work are more likely than those in blue collar work to report concerns that there will be an over-dependence on technology (46% vs. 32%).

## Turnover Increases May Lead to Higher Wages

Companies may see a shift in their headcount in 2026, as 50% of hiring decision-makers report employee turnover will increase. Forty-two percent say it will stay about the same/not change.

The anticipated increase in turnover is mainly due to increased work demands (37%), the competitive job market (35%), and better pay/benefits being offered elsewhere (32%). Such turnover is expected to cost companies more than \$45,000 annually on average, up from more than \$36,000 in fall 2024.

Larger companies (i.e., those with 500+ employees) are more likely than their smaller counterparts to expect increased turnover (64%).

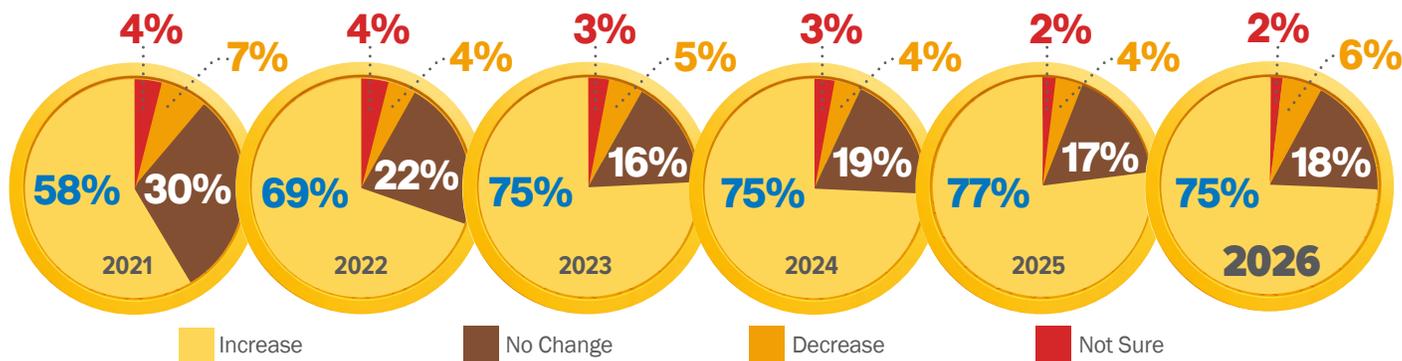


**83%** of hiring decision-makers say their company is willing to hire contingent workers in order to meet business needs.



## Expectations for How Average Wages Will Change

Three-quarters (75%) of hiring decision-makers anticipate their company will increase average wages, perhaps in response to turnover.



The Job Insights survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals among 1,002 U.S. hiring decision-makers (defined as 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). The survey was conducted Nov. 3-19, 2025. Data are weighted where necessary by company size to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. For full survey methodology, contact [Communications@ExpressPros.com](mailto:Communications@ExpressPros.com).



[ExpressPros.com/JobInsights-US](https://ExpressPros.com/JobInsights-US)



[Facebook.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://Facebook.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational)



[LinkedIn.com/company/ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://LinkedIn.com/company/ExpressEmploymentInternational)



[Instagram.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://Instagram.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational)



[YouTube.com/@ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://YouTube.com/@ExpressEmploymentInternational)

For more fresh ideas for today's business leaders, visit [ExpressPros.blog](https://ExpressPros.blog).

For the latest commentary on the state of employment in America, visit [ExpressPros.com/AmericaEmployed](https://ExpressPros.com/AmericaEmployed).

