



44% of Employers Report Unfilled Roles as Hiring Process Takes Longer

Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey finds 1 in 5 open positions close without a hire as job seekers struggle with automated hiring systems.

OKLAHOMA CITY, Aug. 12, 2026 — The hiring process itself may be getting in the way of filling open jobs, as U.S. companies report more unfilled roles, longer timelines and positions closing without a hire while job seekers say automated systems are making it harder to feel heard, according to a newly released Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey.

The disconnect comes as 44% of U.S. hiring managers say their company currently has open positions they cannot fill, significantly increasing from 36% in the fall of 2025 and the highest level since the fall of 2023.

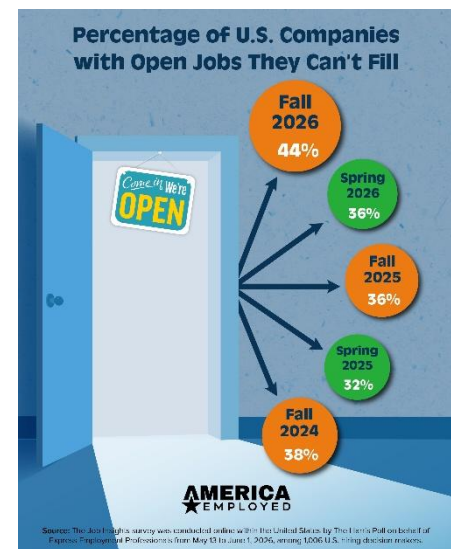
Open Roles Are Stalling Before They Are Filled

The hiring process also takes longer than it did two years ago, even as some open roles go unfilled.

More than 2 in 5 hiring managers say the amount of time it takes to hire a candidate at their company has increased (43%), and more than 1 in 4 say it takes at least four weeks to hire a candidate when factoring in resume reviews, interviews and final decisions (26%).

At the same time, hiring managers report, on average, more than 1 in 5 open positions are closed without a candidate filling the role (21%). More than 1 in 4 say more than a quarter of their open positions go unfilled entirely (27%).

While timelines have stretched, companies appear to be conducting fewer interviews before making a decision. Hiring managers say candidates go through an average of four interviews before receiving an offer, down from five when the question was last asked in the spring of 2023.



Job Seekers Say the Process Feels Less Human

For job seekers, the same hiring process can feel difficult to navigate before they ever reach an interview.

Nearly one-third report that navigating an automated hiring process instead of feeling heard by people during the hiring process is a challenge in their job search (31%). The same share believe companies are claiming to hire but only collecting resumes to review, standing in the way of their next employment opportunity (31%).

Job-fit issues only add to the frustration. More than 1 in 4 job seekers say being overqualified complicates their search (28%), while more than 1 in 5 say being underqualified holds them back (22%). Another 1 in 5 believe AI is taking open positions and affecting their next job opportunity (21%).

As employers look to fill open roles, the experience candidates have during the hiring process may be just as important as the position itself.

“Hiring has become more complex, and employers are working to balance speed, quality and the right fit,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, president and chairman of Express Employment International. “Technology can help streamline the process, but it delivers the greatest value when paired with thoughtful, human interaction. That makes communication more important than ever. When the process is clear and timely, employers can keep business moving, and candidates can better understand whether an opportunity is the right fit.”

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Survey Methodology

The Job Insights survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from May 13 to June 1, 2026, among 1,006 U.S. hiring decision-makers.

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from May 19 to June 8, 2026, among 1,000 adults ages 18 and older who are employed but looking for a new job or not employed and looking for work.

For full survey methodologies, please contact Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com, Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena.Hollander@ExpressPros.com, Director of Corporate Communications & PR.

About Robert (Bob) Funk Jr.

Robert (Bob) Funk Jr. is the Chief Executive Officer, President and Chairman of Express Employment International, a global staffing franchisor founded and headquartered in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He leads a portfolio of workforce solution brands, including the flagship Express Employment Professionals franchise, along with several affiliated brands serving specialized markets. The Express franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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