

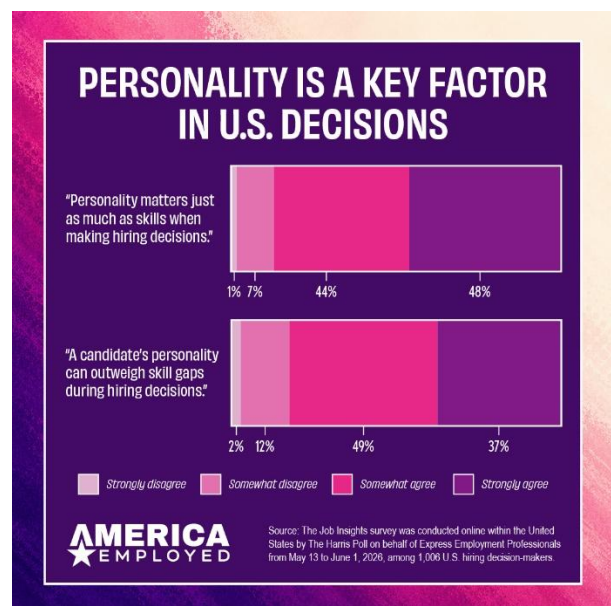


86% of Hiring Managers Say Personality Can Overcome Skills Gaps, 99% Say It Can Accelerate Careers

Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey reveals first impressions carry lasting weight as employers connect personality with hiring, performance and advancement.

OKLAHOMA CITY, Aug. 26, 2026 — Personality may be the new hiring advantage, with 91% of U.S. hiring managers saying it matters as much as skills, and 86% saying it can outweigh a candidate's skills gap, according to a recent Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey.

Its influence extends beyond the hiring decision, with 78% of hiring managers and 72% of job seekers saying personality is at least very important to thriving at a company. That includes 29% of hiring managers and 20% of job seekers who consider it absolutely essential to long-term success.



First Impressions Carry Lasting Weight

Employers often rely on moments outside prepared interview questions to assess whether a candidate's personality fits their company culture. Informal interactions, including small talk before or after an interview, email tone and how candidates interact with administrative staff, are the most common methods, cited by 61% of hiring managers.

Those early exchanges can be decisive, as 87% of hiring managers say they can tell from the first conversation whether a candidate will succeed at their company, including 38% who strongly agree. That pressure is not lost on job seekers, with 61% worrying about how their personality comes across during an interview.

Nearly all job seekers (94%) say companies have evaluated their personality during the hiring process, most commonly through:

- Informal interactions: 47%
- Situational questions: 46%
- Behavioral interview questions: 45%
- Reference checks: 43%
- Personality assessments: 37%

Employers and Candidates Agree on What Matters

Regardless of how personality is assessed, hiring managers and job seekers largely agree on the traits employers value most:

- Reliability: 66% of hiring managers and 65% of job seekers
- Honesty: 63% of hiring managers and 58% of job seekers
- Adaptability: 55% of hiring managers and 51% of job seekers
- Flexibility: 54% of both groups
- Self-motivation: 54% of hiring managers and 46% of job seekers

Job seekers also report possessing these traits at similar rates, led by honesty and reliability at 63% each, flexibility and adaptability at 54% each and self-motivation at 49% each.

However, perceptions vary by generation. Gen X and baby boomers are more likely than Gen Z and millennials to see themselves as having these traits. Baby boomers are also more likely to believe companies value each trait on the list except flexibility.

Hiring managers place similar emphasis on the workplace behaviors behind these traits. Six in 10 consider work ethic absolutely essential, up significantly from 54% in spring of 2025, while 59% say the same of dependability and 57% of willingness to learn.

Personality Can Shape a Career After the Hire

Those traits continue to carry weight once an employee is on the job, as 94% of hiring managers and 91% of job seekers say personality shapes how performance is perceived.

Personality may also affect how quickly employees move forward in their careers. Nearly all hiring managers (99%) believe a positive or approachable personality can directly accelerate career advancement, a view shared by 90% of job seekers.

“Every employee has an effect on the workplace beyond the responsibilities listed in a job description,” said Bob Funk Jr., CEO, president and chairman of Express Employment International. “The right personality can build trust, make change easier to navigate and raise

the standard for how a team works together. That is why employers see personality as more than a hiring advantage. It is representative of the business culture.”

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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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