



Skift.
RESEARCH

THE STATE OF TALENT IN TRAVEL 2025

THE STATE OF TALENT 2025

INTRODUCTION

WHY THE STATE OF TALENT IN TRAVEL 2025?

Our goal at Skift Research is to discover insights about where the travel industry is headed. Our research should make you better at your job and help you impress your boss. But I'll let you in on a secret: most readers of Skift don't work in human resources. So why go through the effort of creating a travel talent report? Why commission a custom survey, conduct interviews, and analyze hundreds of data points, if our subscribers don't work in HR?

Well, that's because we don't believe that talent is a topic that should be confined to meetings with HR or recruiters. We believe that talent is a board-level conversation and deserves to be treated as such. Hiring, training, and retaining top talent should be a core focus of every travel leader, everywhere.

Want to understand the profitability of your business? Talent. Want to drive tech innovation and AI innovation? Talent. Interested in improving your operations and creating customer loyalty? Talent.

Talent is the key to making the travel industry thrive, but tension is brewing. Workers love this sector, yet many feel they cannot stay and build a long-term career within it. Hiring managers are frustrated by a skills gap. Fair wages butt up against profitability drives. Tech adoption is a must, while the human touch remains an essential part of hospitality.

These talent challenges are the same faced by the travel sector writ large. In many ways, the State of Talent and the broader [State of Travel](#) are just two sides of the same coin. And in that spirit, Skift Research is pleased to present our State of Talent in Travel. This report's 140 slides cover the ins-and-outs of this critical part of the travel industry, as it stands in 2025.

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SURVEY DESIGN

Skift Research conducted two surveys in July 2025 to capture a comprehensive view of talent dynamics in the travel industry, spanning perspectives from hiring managers, employees, and job seekers.

- **Website survey:** Fielded directly on Skift's website, this survey targeted our core readership of senior executives and C-suite leaders across global travel sectors. A total of 105 respondents participated, split primarily between hiring managers and employees, with a smaller number of job seekers also represented.
- **Panel survey (U.S.-only):** Conducted through a trusted third-party panel provider (Cint), this survey captured 440 respondents across U.S. travel sectors, including hiring managers, employees, and a smaller subset of job seekers.

Findings from both surveys were combined to produce a consolidated view. The merged dataset provides global insights into workforce sentiment, recruitment and retention challenges, and broader perceptions of the travel labor market — ensuring that both executive perspectives and on-the-ground employee experiences are represented.

ABOUT

Skift.
RESEARCH

Skift Research provides proprietary research, analysis, and premium data tools for travel industry leaders and their teams to better understand the industry and the outside forces driving change.

Our team uses financial and economic analysis and proprietary survey data to support qualitative observations and travel-focused forecasts. We work with more than 20 data partners from across the travel industry to provide timely insights into the performance of sectors and countries.

By combining extensive industry experience, rigorous quantitative analysis, and access to top executives at nearly every major travel company, we are able to launch over 50 comprehensive research reports annually that aim to help you understand the industry and the outside forces shaping the future of travel.

Interested in subscribing? Learn more [here](#).

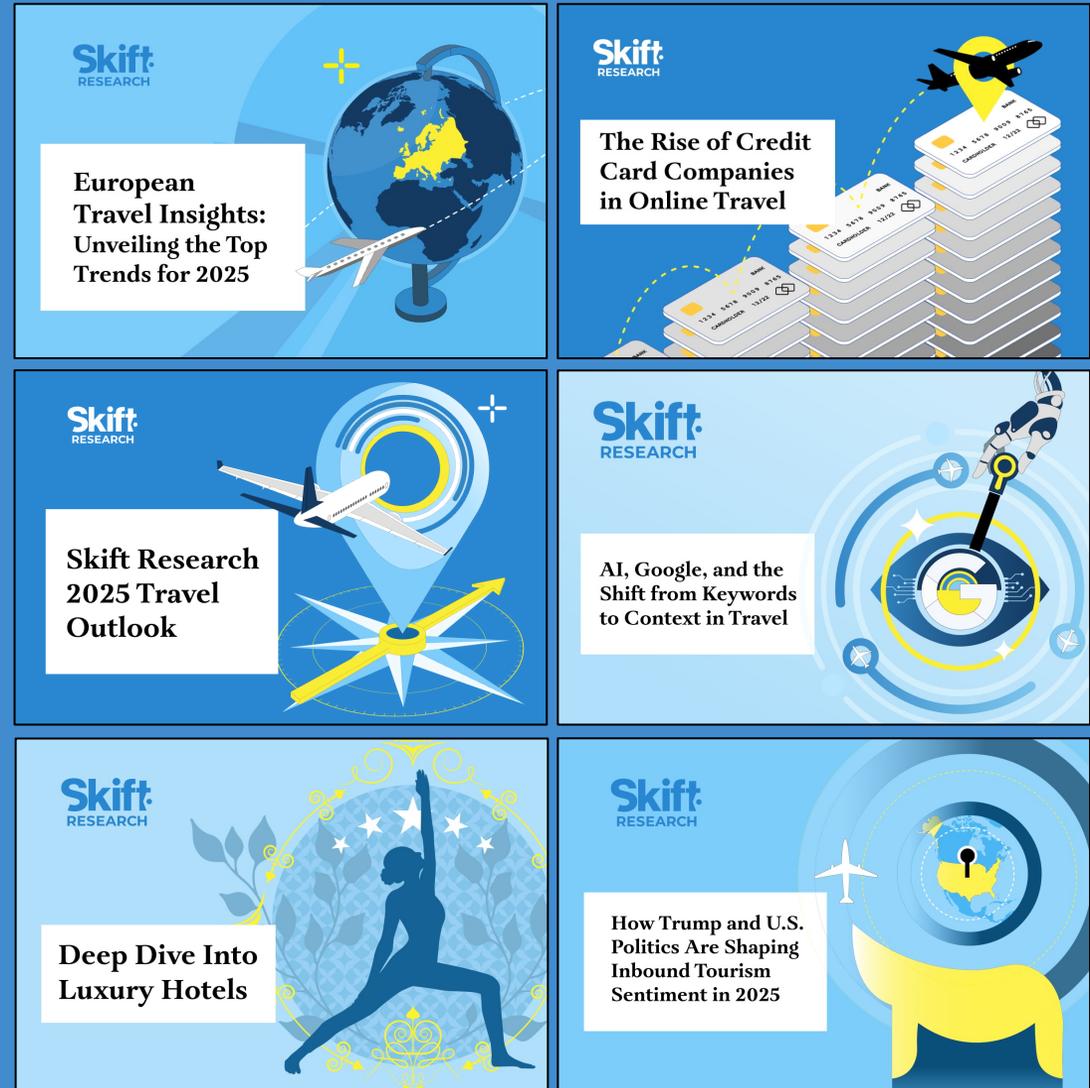
Any questions? Contact us at support@skift.com

Skift. RESEARCH

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- Unlimited access to Ask Skift AI chatbot
- 15% off full-price in-person Skift Live events
- Complimentary access to all virtual Skift events
- Alerts to new Research reports via Slack



For more information about team subscriptions to Skift Research, contact us at support@skift.com



THE FUTURE OF TRAVEL STARTS WITH TALENT



Steve Browne

Director - Exec Search

With over a decade's worth of experience, Steve Browne is spearheading the launch of Skift's Exec Search business. With a profound understanding of the industry's intricacies and armed with Skift's extensive reach, Steve brings a fresh perspective to talent acquisition.

Connect directly with Steve at stb@skift.com

LEARN MORE



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While the author has made every attempt to ensure that the data and analyses presented in this report are reliable and accurate, Skift Research cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions.

The background features a vibrant blue color with abstract, flowing shapes in yellow and light blue. Scattered throughout are simple line-art icons of paper airplanes and hands, suggesting themes of movement, progress, and collaboration. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and energetic.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATE OF TALENT 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For some, talent is an afterthought. Instead, maybe they care about luxury, operations or innovation. But here's the deal: all those initiatives are downstream of talent. Good luck creating a luxury experience without the people. You won't deliver a sharp operation without the right training. And you can't seed innovation across your organization unless the workforce is bought in.

Talent is a board-level conversation. All the topics that your board cares about are really talent topics. But talent is a growing challenge for travel and hospitality companies.

The challenges are many. Wage growth is, in many cases, overdue, but also puts pressure on bottom lines. Our industry has been hit hard by brain-drain as turnover remains dangerously high and workers struggle to imagine a career in travel. Demographics across the world point to an aging population, which could bring an end to cheap labor pools, even in developing nations. Younger Gen Z workers and diverse candidates struggle to see a home for themselves in the travel industry.

But there is also good news. Travel is the most aspirational purchase in the world and that halo effect carries over to jobs in the industry. Nearly three-quarters of travel workers want to remain in their jobs and grow careers within our sector. On a global level, demand for talent remains strong, with 45% of travel managers surveyed globally planning to increase hiring in the next 12 months. This need for travel jobs matches continued resilience of consumer travel demand.

New technology holds the potential to help train staff and make their jobs easier. Over 80% of travel workers surveyed have an optimistic view of AI in the workplace. Tech will be part of the solution, but it will not be the only solution. Tech needs to work alongside a change in travel industry culture.

It's time for all us, across the travel industry, to make talent a priority. To that end, the State of Talent in Travel 2025 will help you understand what is happening within your workforce today and where we are going as an industry tomorrow.

STATE OF TALENT IN TRAVEL

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Demand is rising faster than supply

Travel companies are expanding hiring, but talent pipelines aren't keeping up.

Hiring is harder than ever

Employers face hurdles around skills, talent fit, and flexibility — making recruitment both costly and uncertain.

Retention remains fragile

Employees are passionate about travel, yet churn is chronic. Many want to stay but are actively considering leaving.

The workforce wants more

Pay, flexibility, and career growth are the top asks — and without them, loyalty falters.

Gen Z crunch

The next generation of workers is entering in force, but travel companies aren't prioritizing them.

DEI in practice

While leaders and employees agree inclusion matters, progress is uneven. Leadership diversity lags, and community engagement remains inconsistent.

Tech and AI shift

Employees are ready to embrace AI and expect it to boost efficiency — but organizations lag in readiness, risking a capability gap.

Solutions are emerging

Companies investing in training, supportive leadership, and benefits that align with worker expectations are rewriting the “talent contract”.

The future formula

Success will hinge on combining generational priorities, equity in leadership, and tech-driven flexibility to build a resilient, future-ready workforce.

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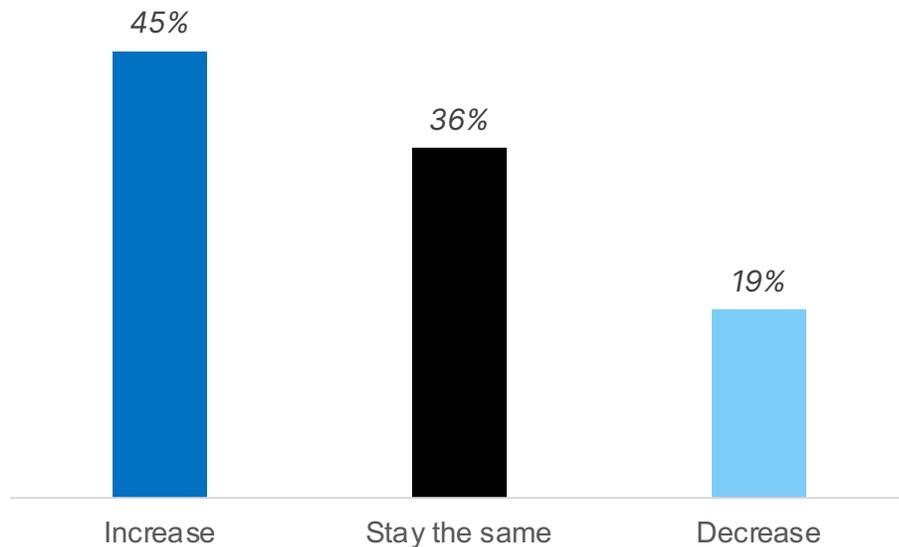
BEST CHARTS

Travel's Talent Demand Remains Strong

Hiring demand across travel is on the rise, showing that employers are confident about future growth. But more demand doesn't mean an easier market — this surge only amplifies the pressure on already limited talent pools. Not all sectors are growing equally. Airlines show stronger hiring momentum, signaling intense demand for skilled talent, while hotels also expect above-average growth.

A Hiring Increase Is Expected Across the Industry

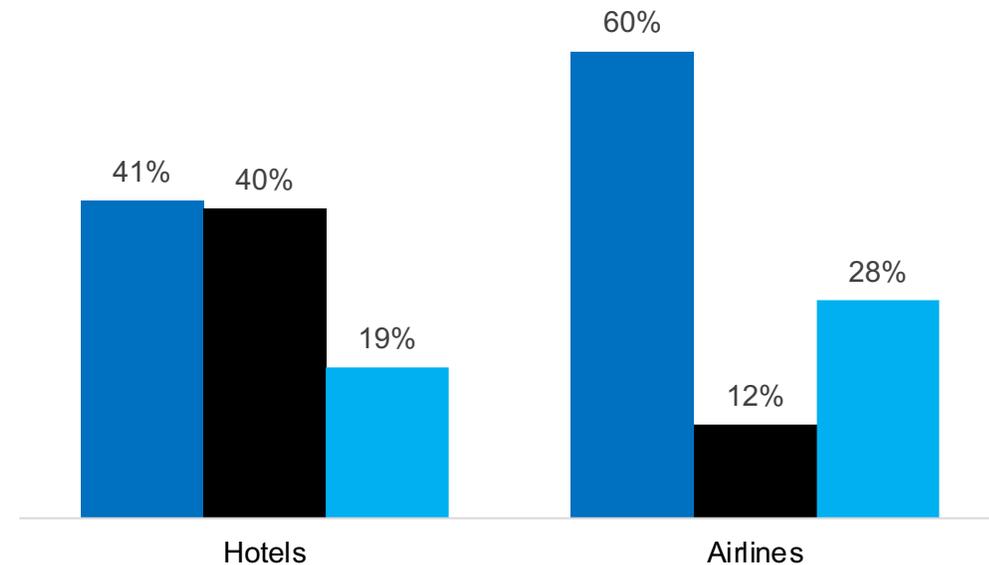
Hiring outlook for the next 12 months
(% of hiring managers)



Hiring Expectations Differ Significantly Across Segments

Hiring outlook for the next 12 months by travel sector
(% of hiring managers)

■ Increase ■ Stay the same ■ Decrease



How do you expect your hiring needs to change over the next year?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Top Hiring Challenges...



COMPENSATION MISMATCH

“Unrealistic salary demands”



LACK OF SKILLS

“Their CV is fantastic, and their interview goes well, too, but when it comes to skill evaluation tools they do not live up to expectation”



WORK ETHIC

“Everybody wants a job, but nobody actually wants to do the work”



CULTURE FIT

“Finding someone who matches the company’s culture is harder than skills”



NO-SHOWS

“Yes — they get hired, start training and quit without a word”



LANGUAGE BARRIERS

“Language skills not up to hospitality standard”



COMMUNICATION ISSUES

“Lack of common sense and lack of guest-service mindset”



LOGISTICS

“Relocation challenges”

Can you give examples of a couple of challenges that you have faced hiring someone?

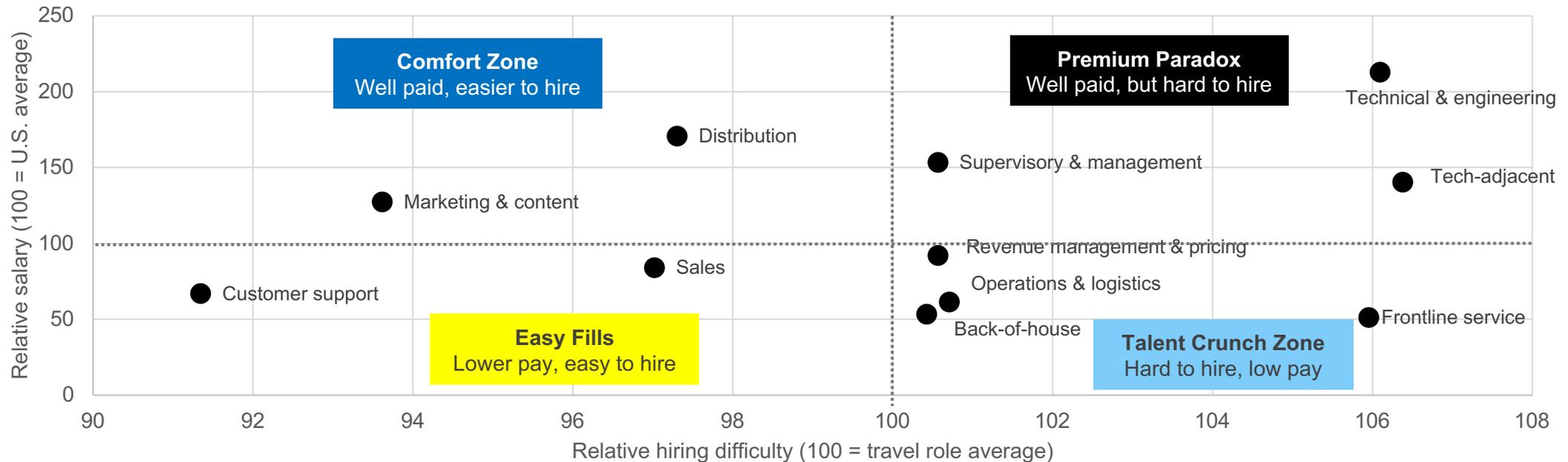
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

No One-Size-Fits-All: Why Travel Defies a Single Hiring Strategy

Some roles are well-paid yet still hard to fill, while others remain easier despite lower pay. This paradox shows that salary alone can't fix the issue — hiring strategies must be tailored role by role.

Distinct Hiring Realities Call for Tailored Strategies

Hiring difficulty indexed to travel role average vs. wages indexed to U.S. mean (100), reflecting global talent pressures



How easy or difficult is it to attract qualified applicants for the following roles in your organization?

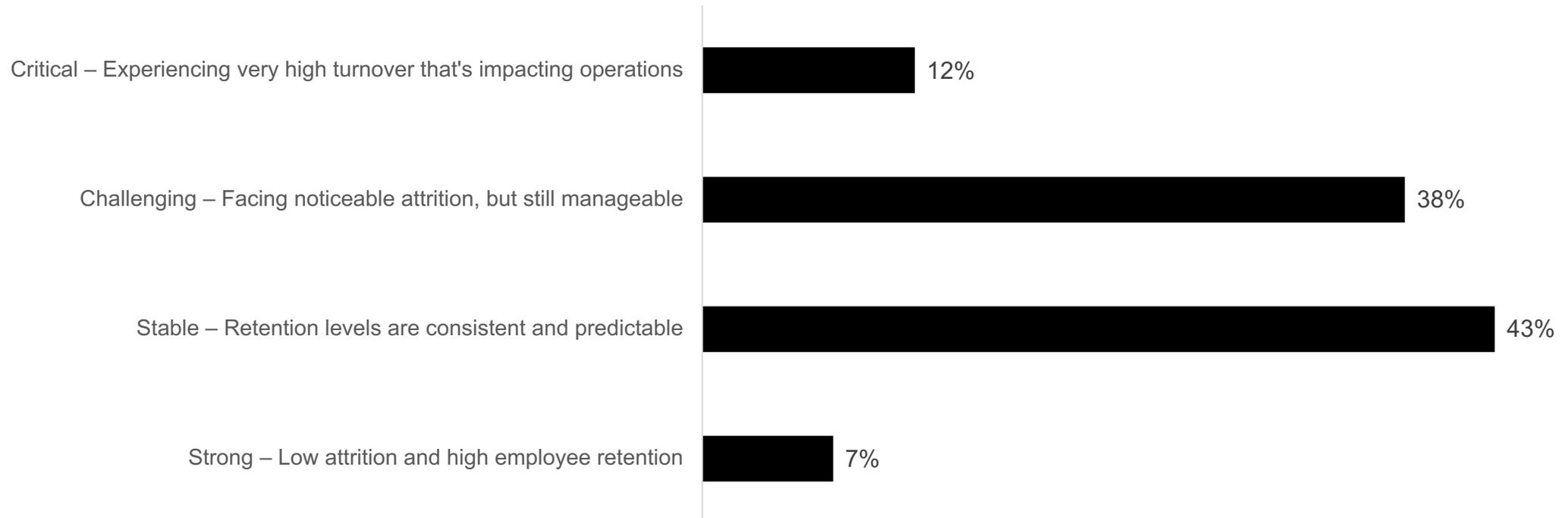
Note: The Hiring Difficulty Index reflects how challenging it is to fill each role, calculated from survey responses on a 5-point scale (1 = very easy, 5 = very difficult). Higher scores indicate greater difficulty in hiring. Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

The Retention Crossroads: 1 in 2 Employers Are Struggling

Half of employers say retention remains a major challenge. This indicates an industry at a tipping point: without stronger retention strategies, the cycle of churn will erode business growth.

Current Retention Perceptions: 50% Say It Is Critical or Challenging

Current employee retention situation (% of hiring managers)

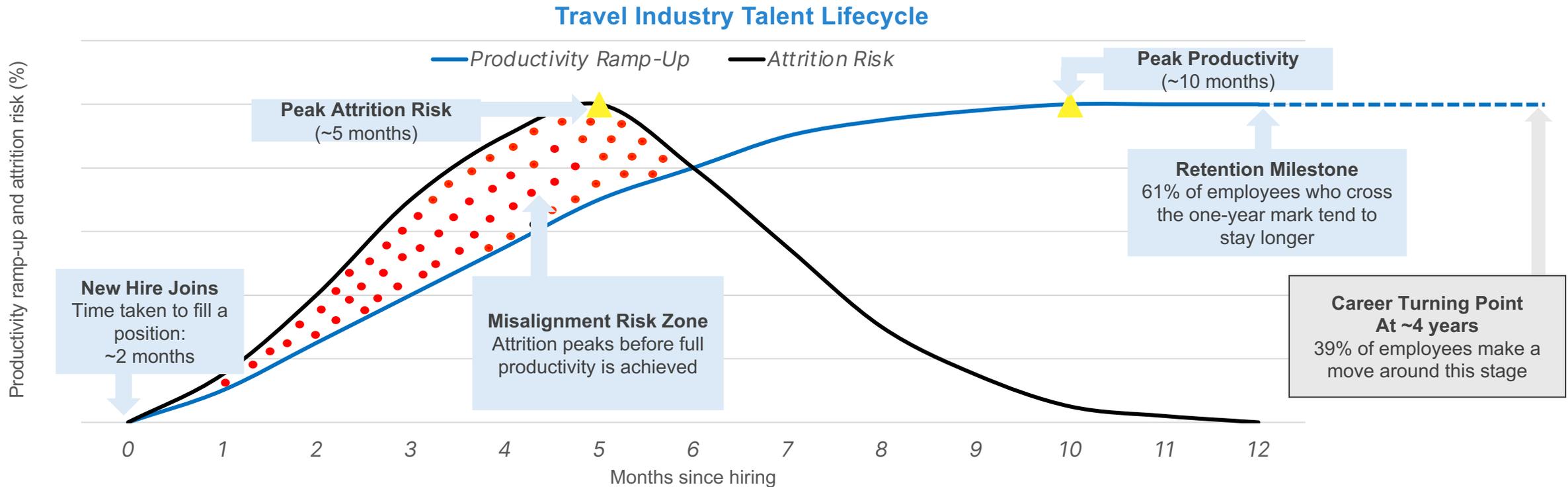


How would you describe your current retention situation?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Ramp-Up Risk: Hiring Is Hard and Attrition Happens Before Productivity

The issue for employers is clear: attrition peaks before employees reach full productivity, creating a gap that demands faster ramp-up, stronger first-year retention, and renewed growth paths around the four-year mark.



Attrition vs. Retention: Two Sides of the Same Coin

The same factors that drive attrition — pay, workload, growth — also power retention when addressed positively. This mirror effect shows employers already hold the levers; the challenge is whether they pull them effectively.

Top 5 Contributors to Attrition

“What do you think causes attrition within your department?”
(by frequency)

Low compensation

Limited growth

Workload and stressful conditions

Management and leadership issues

Expectation–reality gap

Top 5 Measures Taken to Retain Talent

“What’s working well in retaining talent?”
(by frequency)

Compensation and benefits

Growth and career development

Culture and work environment

Flexibility and work–life balance

Leadership and management support

The Retention Paradox: Passion vs. Exit Plans

While 73% of employees say they want to stay in hospitality long term, 4 in 10 have still considered leaving. This contradiction highlights a critical gap: passion keeps workers connected to travel, but pay, stress, and limited growth opportunities often push them out. Employers who fail to address these day-to-day realities risk losing even their most committed staff.

**4 in 10 employees
have considered
leaving the travel
industry**

**Hospitality
workers
average just 2
years in tenure
— half the U.S.
norm.**



Why They Stay

- Love for travel
- Connection with people and meaningful experiences
- Perks (discounts, travel, flexibility)
- Loyalty and comfort with company
- Career investment and growth
- Identity and belonging
- Practical needs (income, convenience)
- Positive environment and coworkers

Why They Leave

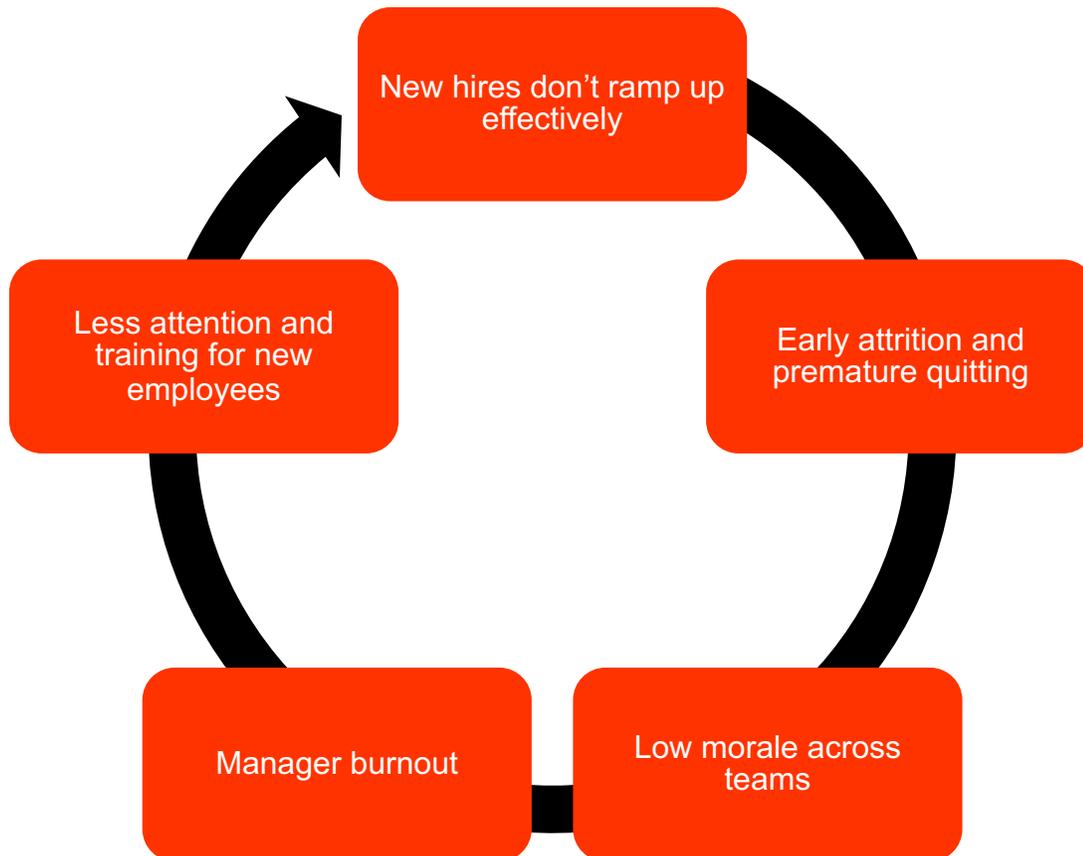
- Low pay and poor benefits
- Stress and burnout
- Lack of growth opportunities
- Work-life imbalance
- Poor management and culture
- Health, age, retirement
- Industry instability
- Exploration / curiosity



Have you considered leaving the travel industry?

The Default in Travel Is Turnover: Organizations Must Change to Build a Culture of Retention

Vicious Cycle of Turnover

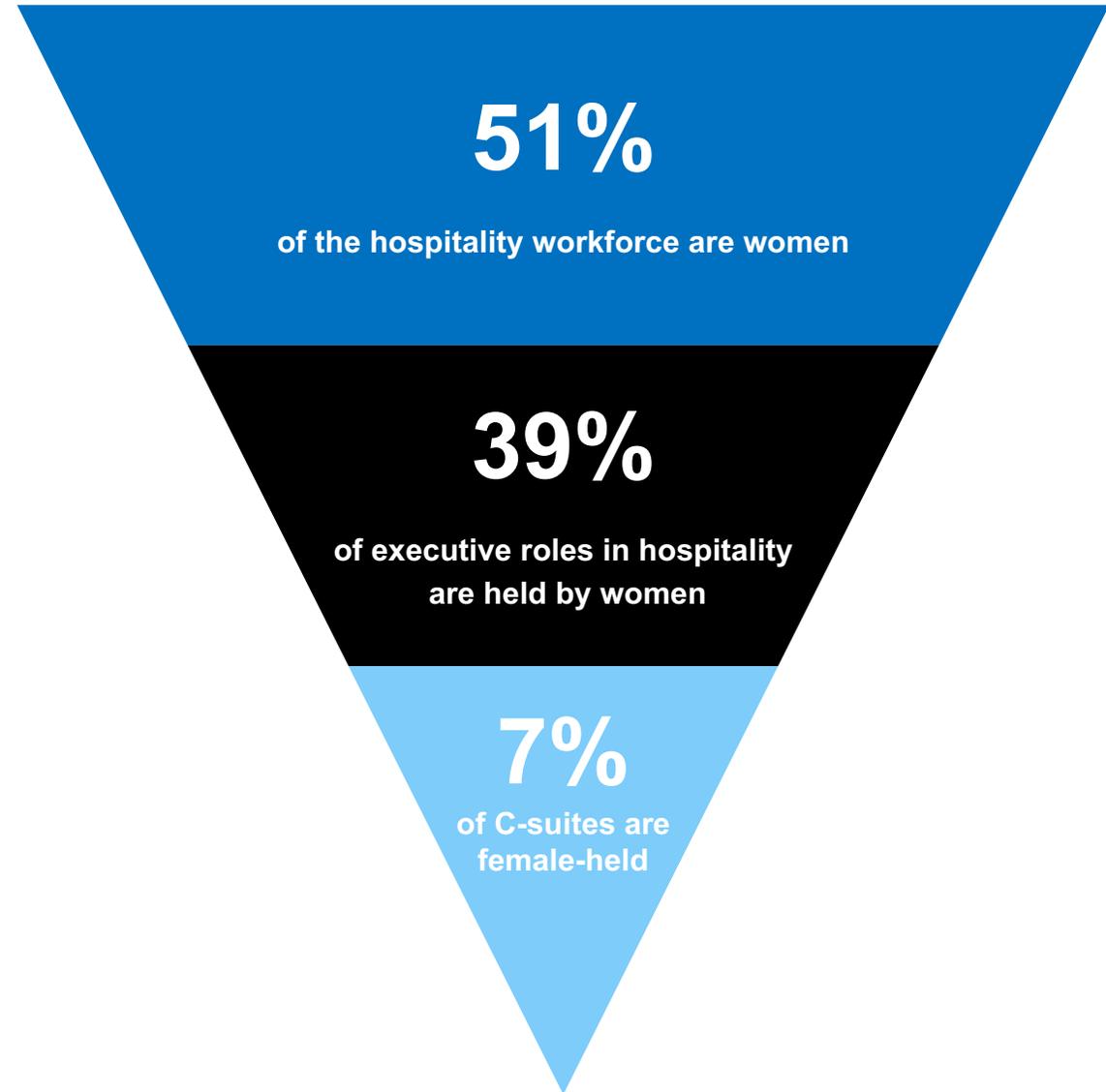


Virtuous Cycle of Retention



The Leadership Gap: Women Still Missing in Hospitality C-Suites

Only 7% of hospitality C-suite roles are held by women — a glaring reminder that inclusion is far from achieved. Without diverse leadership at the top, DEI risks being a box-checking exercise rather than a driver of systemic change.

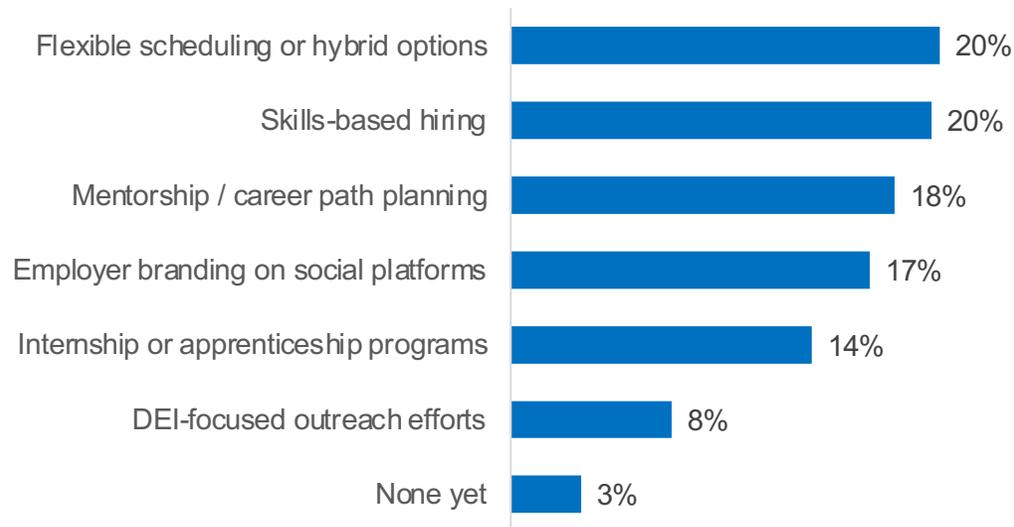


Culture Clash: The Mismatch Between Gen Z Priorities and Employer Practices

Gen Z wants flexibility, values-driven work, and clear advancement opportunities — but most employers emphasize only flexibility. This mismatch suggests companies are failing to leverage what makes Gen Z tick, leaving untapped potential on the table.

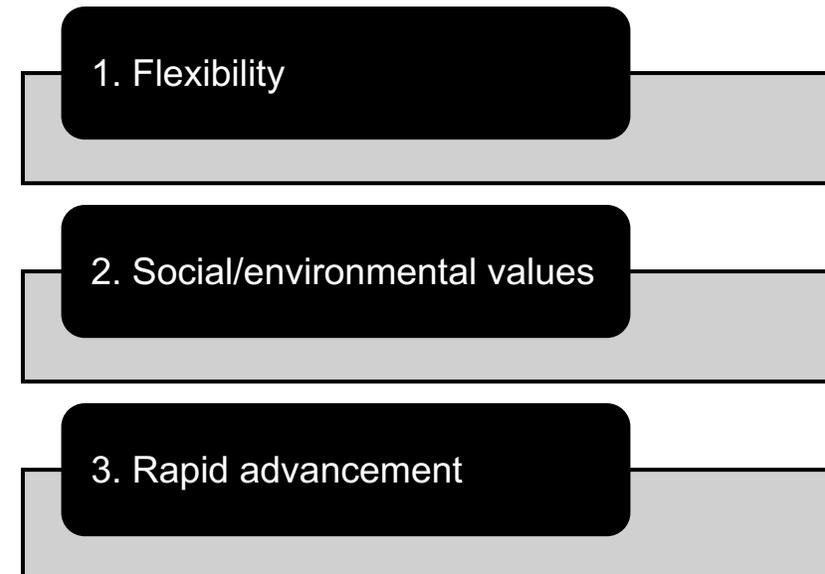
Hybrid Options and Skills-Based Hiring Lead Efforts to Attract Young Talent

Gen Z-focused hiring strategies in travel sector
(% of hiring managers)



Flexibility Tops Gen Z Priorities, Followed by Values and Advancement

Top 3 Gen Z candidate priorities

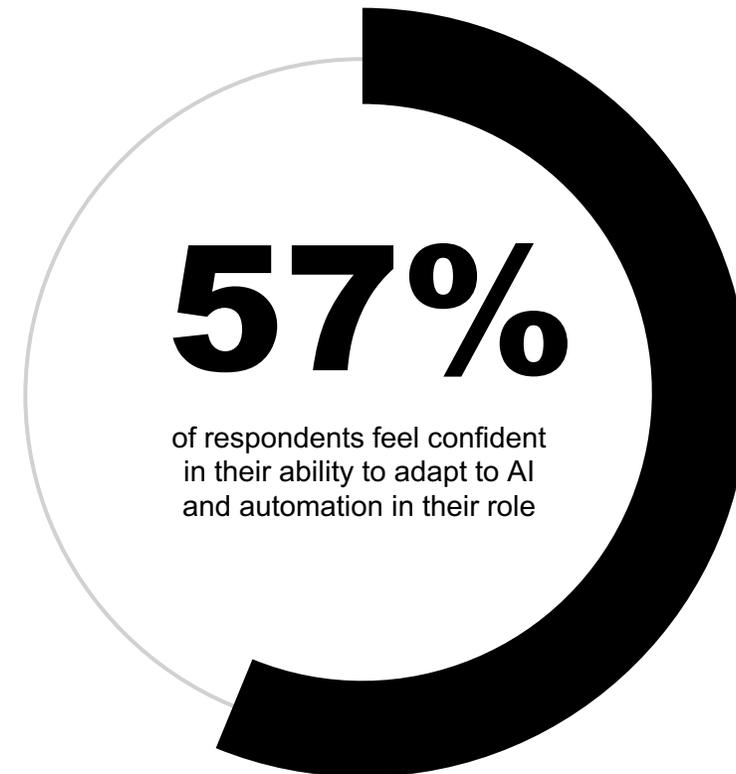
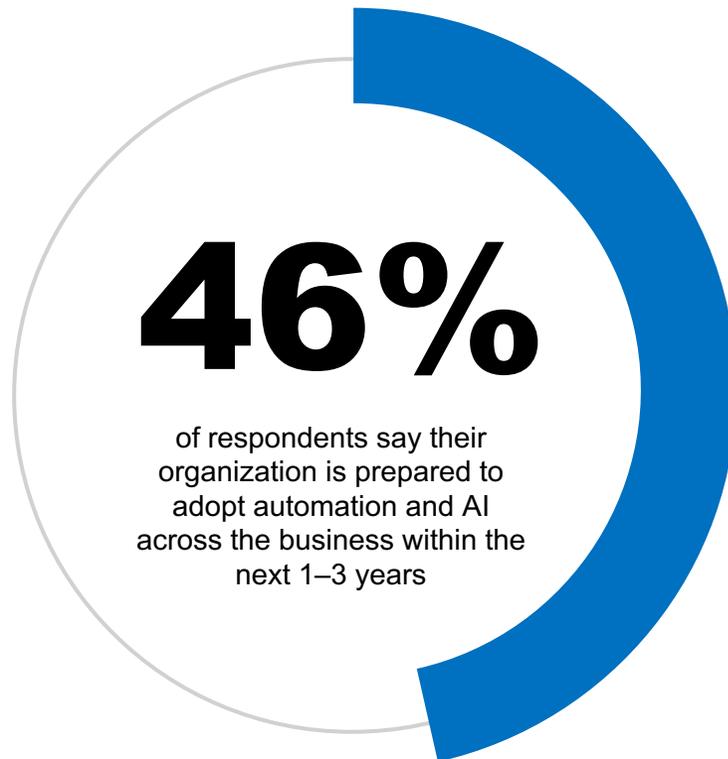


LHS: Which Gen Z-focused hiring strategies have you used? (Select all that apply.) RHS: What do Gen Z candidates value most from employers, based on your experience (top 3)?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

AI Readiness: Workers Are Ready, Leaders Lag

More than half of employees feel confident adapting to AI, yet fewer than half of employers have a clear adoption strategy. This mismatch shows that employees are ready for change — but organizations risk falling behind.



LHS: *How prepared is your organization to adopt automation and AI across the business over the next 1–3 years?* RHS: *"I feel confident in my ability to adapt to AI and automation in my role."*

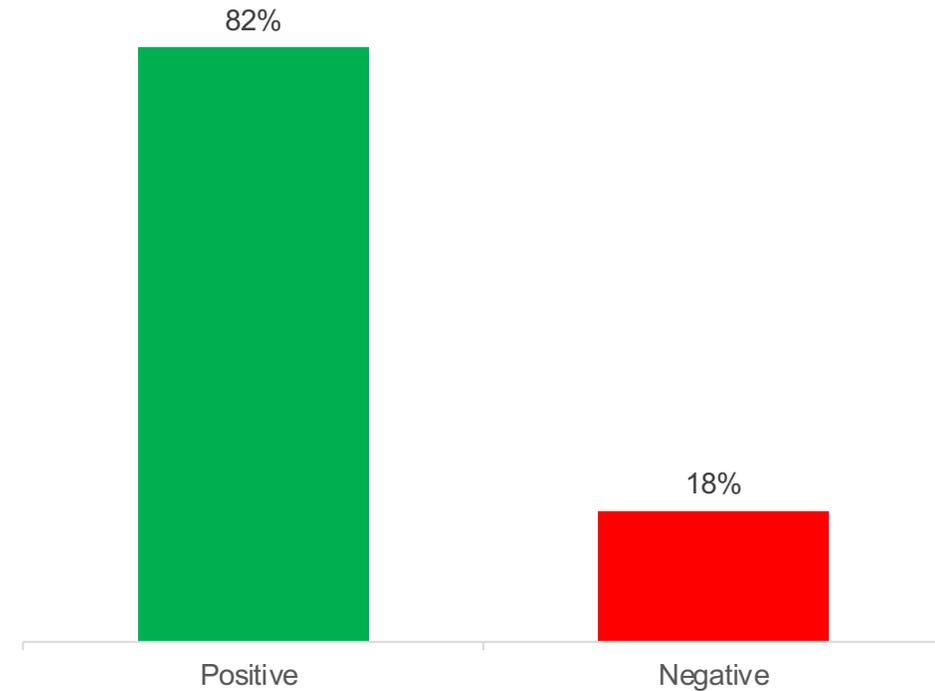
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

AI Optimism: A Tool, Not a Threat

Travel workers are broadly optimistic about AI, seeing it as a way to eliminate mundane tasks and unlock more meaningful work. But concerns about job security and environmental impact remain, signaling the need for transparent communication around AI adoption.

Positive Sentiment on AI in Work

“How do you think the use of AI might change the way you work, positively or negatively?”
(Sentiment analysis of open-ended responses)



How do you think the use of AI might change the way you work, positively or negatively?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

The background features a vibrant blue field with dynamic, wavy shapes in dark blue and bright yellow. Scattered throughout are simple line-art icons of hands and paper airplanes, suggesting movement and collaboration. The overall aesthetic is modern and energetic.

WHY TALENT IS A BOARD-LEVEL CONVERSATION FOR TRAVEL

10 Reasons to Care About Talent in Travel

For some,
talent is an afterthought.
But if you care about...

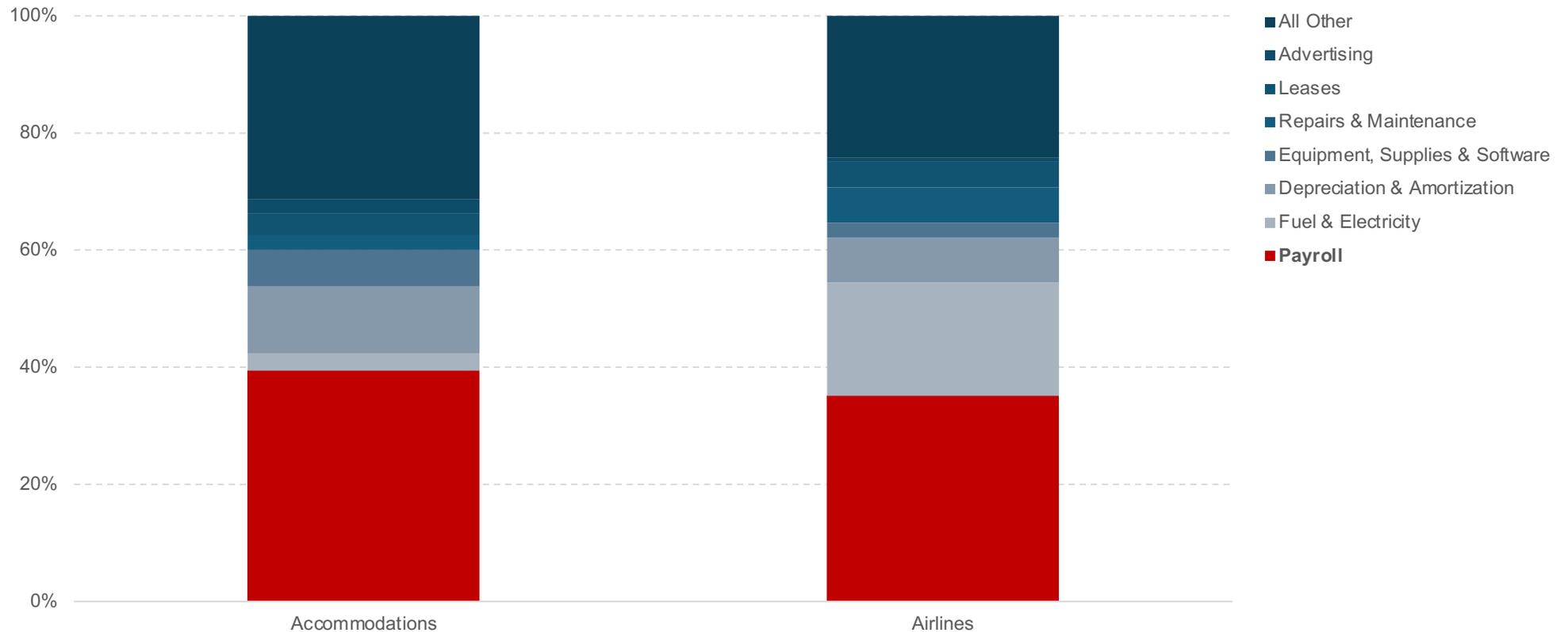
1. Return on investment
2. Loyalty
3. Customer service
4. Operational performance
5. Geopolitics
6. Demographics
7. ESG / overtourism
8. Innovation
9. Artificial intelligence
10. Luxury

Then you care about... **TALENT**

Care About Profits? Talent Is the Main Driver

Payroll Is the Largest Expense for Most Travel Businesses...
#2 Isn't Even Close

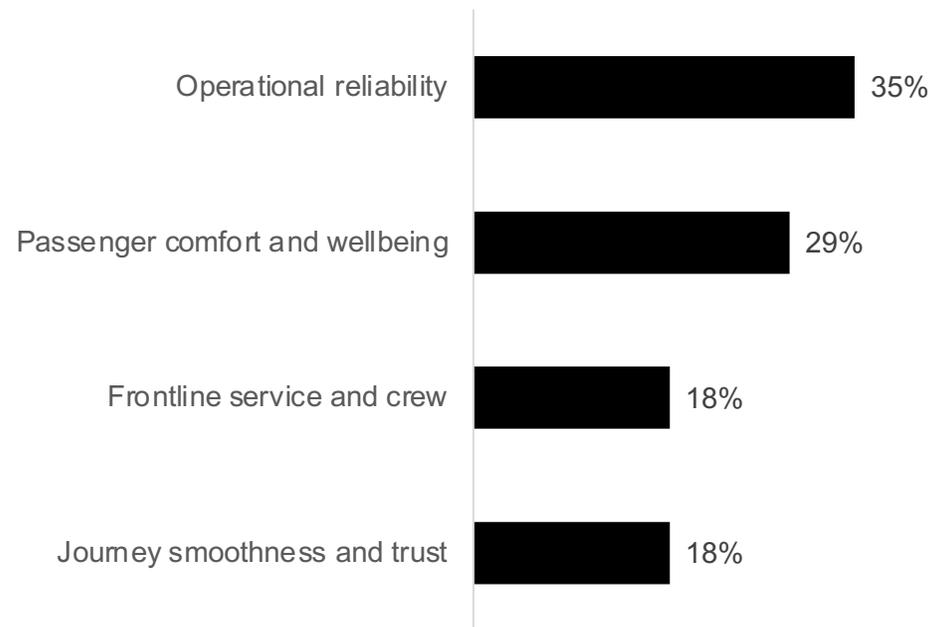
Breakdown of travel expenses by category



Care About Loyalty? Talent Drives Service and Repeat Business

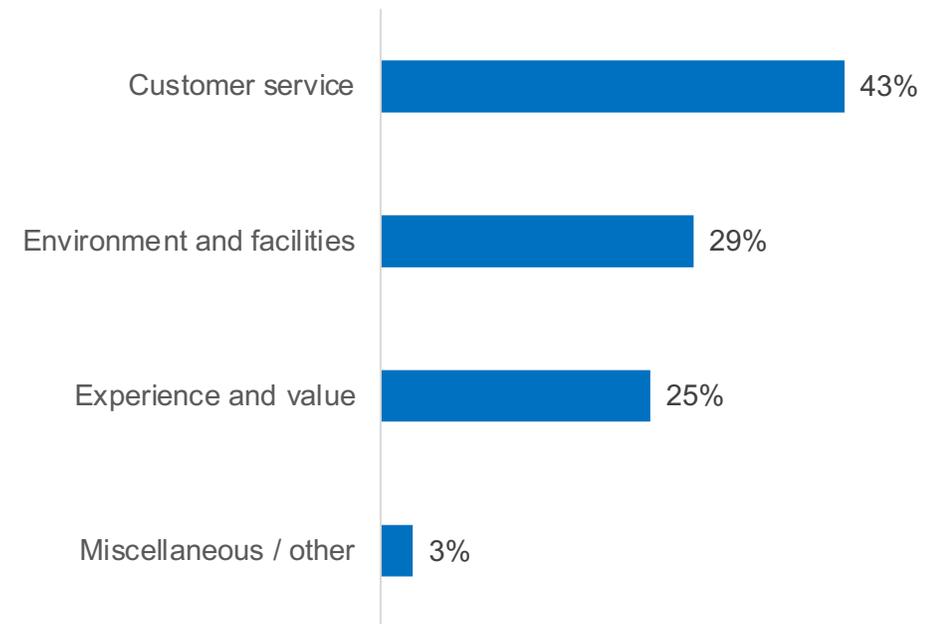
Talent and Service Define Flight Experience

“Could you describe the aspects that left an impression on your flight experience for this trip?”
(% share of mentions)



Talent and Service Define Hotel Loyalty

“Can you describe what aspects stood out in your hotel experience during this trip?”
(% share of mentions)



LHS: Could you describe the aspects that left an impression on your flight experience for this trip? RHS: Can you describe what aspects stood out in your hotel experience during this trip?

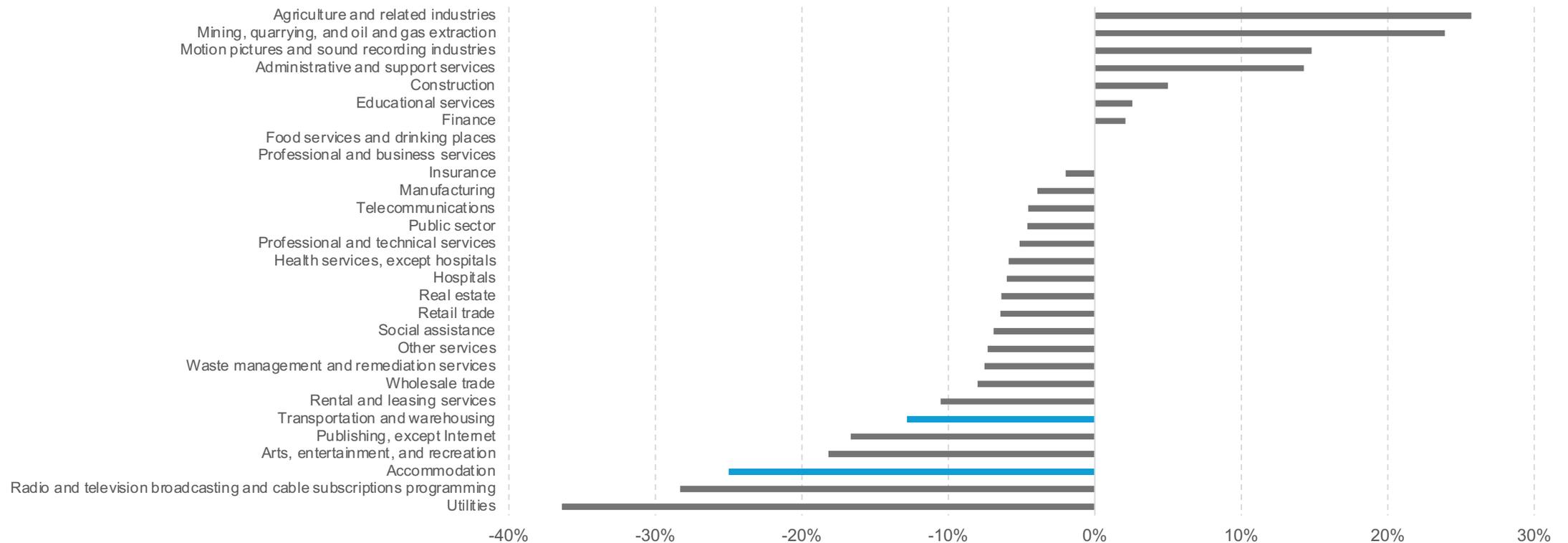
Note: Analysis based on open-ended guest responses. Words and phrases were grouped into key themes, with results shown as percentage share of total responses.

Source: Skift Research, U.S. Traveler Trends 2025, n = 1,002, data as of June 2025.

Care About Operations? Talent Makes or Breaks Your Ability to Execute

Brain Drain: Travel Has Seen Some of the Biggest Drops in Worker Retention Since the Pandemic

Change in worker tenure by sector (2018–24)

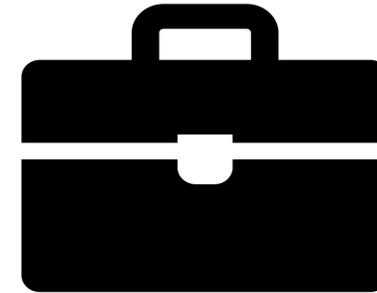


Care About the Global Economy? Travel Is One of the Largest Employers in the World

The travel industry provides jobs in parts of the world that are underserved by other industries. Travel can provide a boost to economic development. But there's a catch: travel must create good jobs with career opportunity if we want to maintain our license to operate across the world.



**Travel and tourism
is 10% of the
world economy**



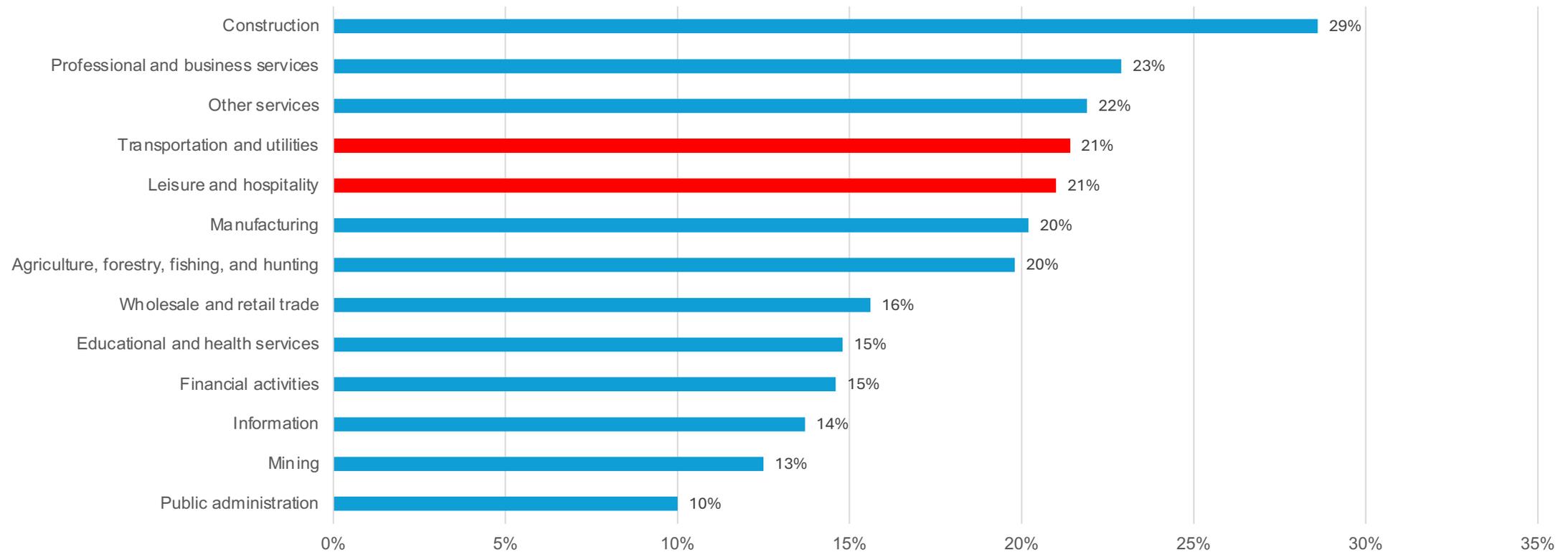
**1 in 10 jobs
worldwide**

357 million jobs

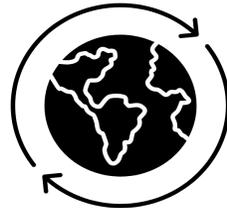
Care About Politics? Immigration Policy Matters for Travel Talent

Travel Relies on Immigrant Labor More Than Most Other Sectors

Percentage share of industry that is foreign-born (2023)



Care About ESG or Overtourism? Engaged Talent Within the Local Community Is Key



SUSTAINABILITY / ESG

Modern sustainable and regenerative tourism standards require knowledgeable and rigorous people to design them and skilled, motivated staff to carry them out.

Sustainability also goes beyond just environmental protection and requires a social element and community buy-in, which also hinges on a harmonious relationship between your workforce and surrounding communities.

The acronym “ESG” specifically emphasized governance and societal factors, an explicit acknowledgement that people and talent are key considerations.



OVERTOURISM

Local staff participation determines whether tourism benefits communities or fuels backlash. Where overtourism becomes most problematic for travel businesses is when populations feel disconnected from or displaced by tourism.

Moreover, community backlashes to overtourism in major destinations have received intense press coverage, increasing the need for community engagement on the part of both destinations and travel businesses. Talent is critical to this as employees act as ambassadors and advocates and, when hired locally, also act as a bridge to the local community.

Care About Innovation? Your Talent Will Need to Buy in and Champion the Cause



Halima Aziz

Head of Hotels, Criterion Capital

“As the organization evolves and it becomes a more technologically mature organization, the [staff need to evolve as well](#) with it.

You [need a system champion in every single system](#) that you operate. [Otherwise, you leave it on the hands of an IT department](#) who have a million other issues to worry about as opposed to how you're using your system. [I really think you do need staff buy in.](#)

[You need to invest in training.](#) It is incredibly important to ensure that you know who those team members are, who will stay with you and grow with you as a company. [As you mature, they also mature with you.”](#)

Care About Luxury? That's All About Talent

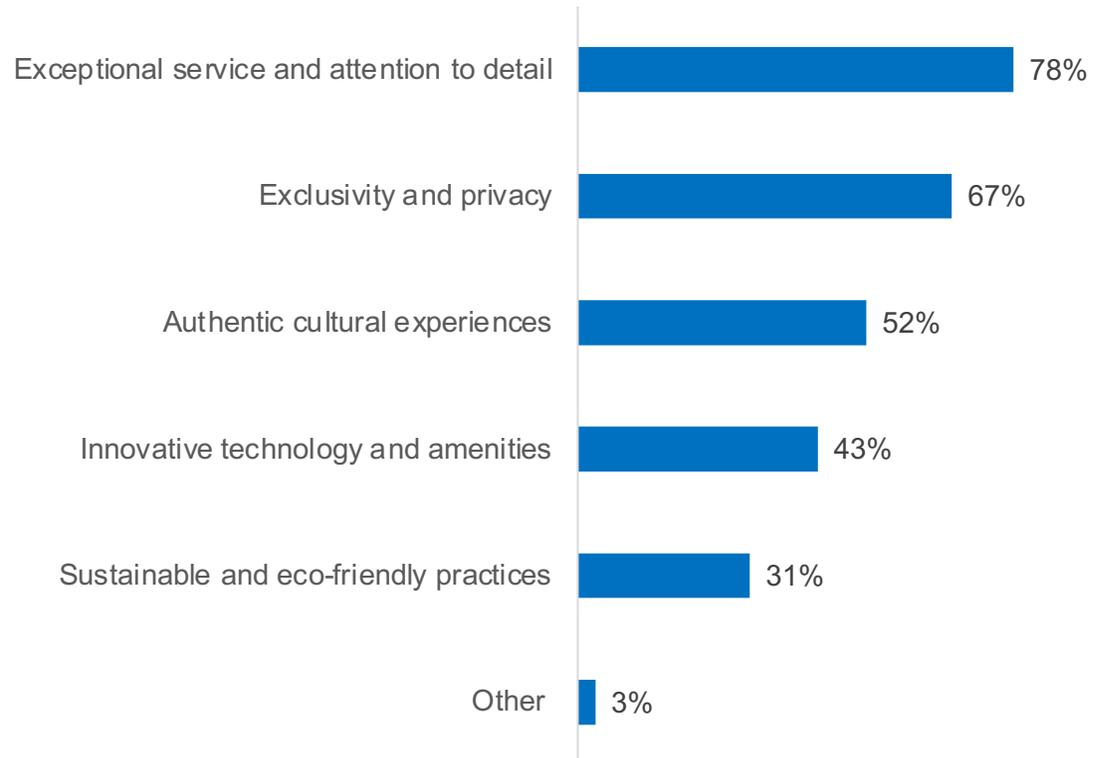
“Day one I said, “We are not servants. We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen. Unless we sentence ourselves to be less, to be servants. That’s in our hands.”

If we are excellent and caring and respectful and so on, then we are ladies and gentlemen. That was the motto. And then, of course, we did the training around it and our process was to hire the right people. Not just hire people but select people and then orient them, not just put them to work but orient them to our thinking. Inviting them to be part of us.”

- Horst Schulze, Founder, former President and Chief Operating Officer, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company

Talent Turns Service Into Luxury

Percentage of travelers associating each element with luxury



Which elements do you associate with a luxury travel experience today? Please select all that apply.

Source: Chief Executive, [Ritz-Carlton Founder Horst Schulze On Creating A Gold Standard](#), March 2019. Skift Research, [The Luxury Traveler: Survey Findings](#), n = ~550, September 2023.

Care About Demographics? Aging Populations Set the Stage for Tighter Talent Market



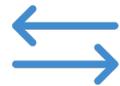
Declining population growth



Aging population

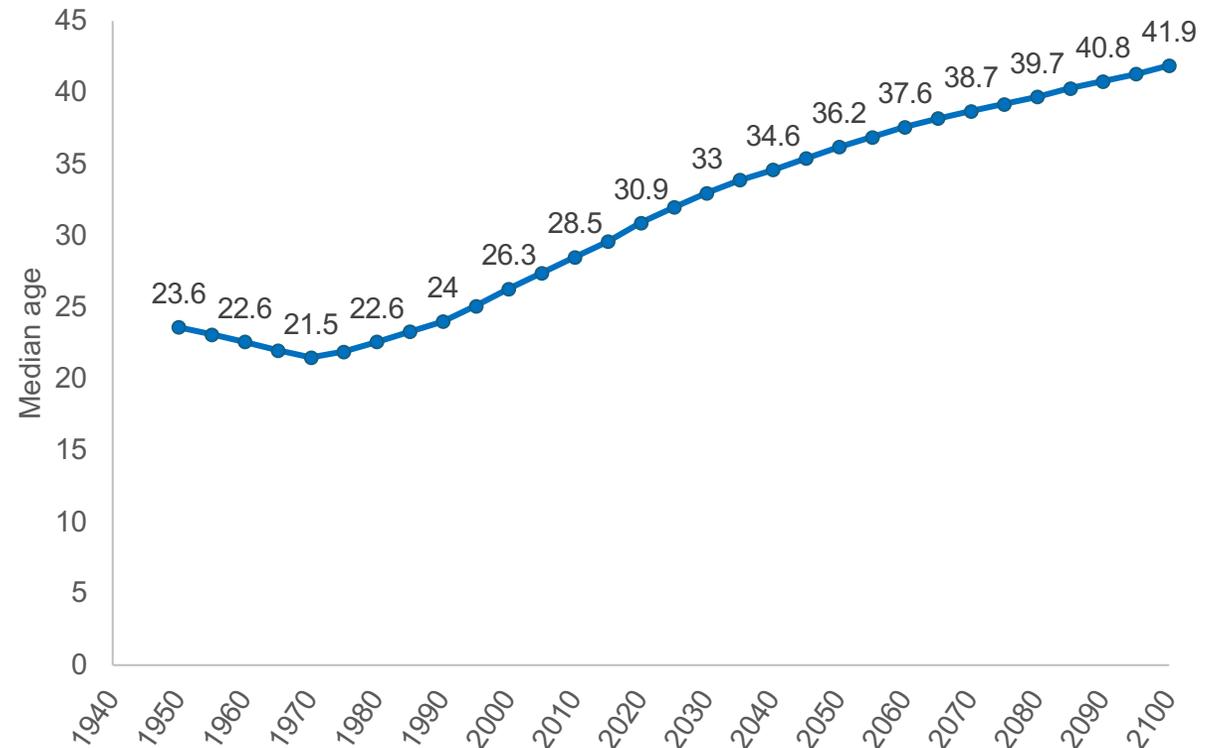


Rising labor costs



Changing workforce expectations

Projected global median age (1950–2100)



CONVINCED YET?

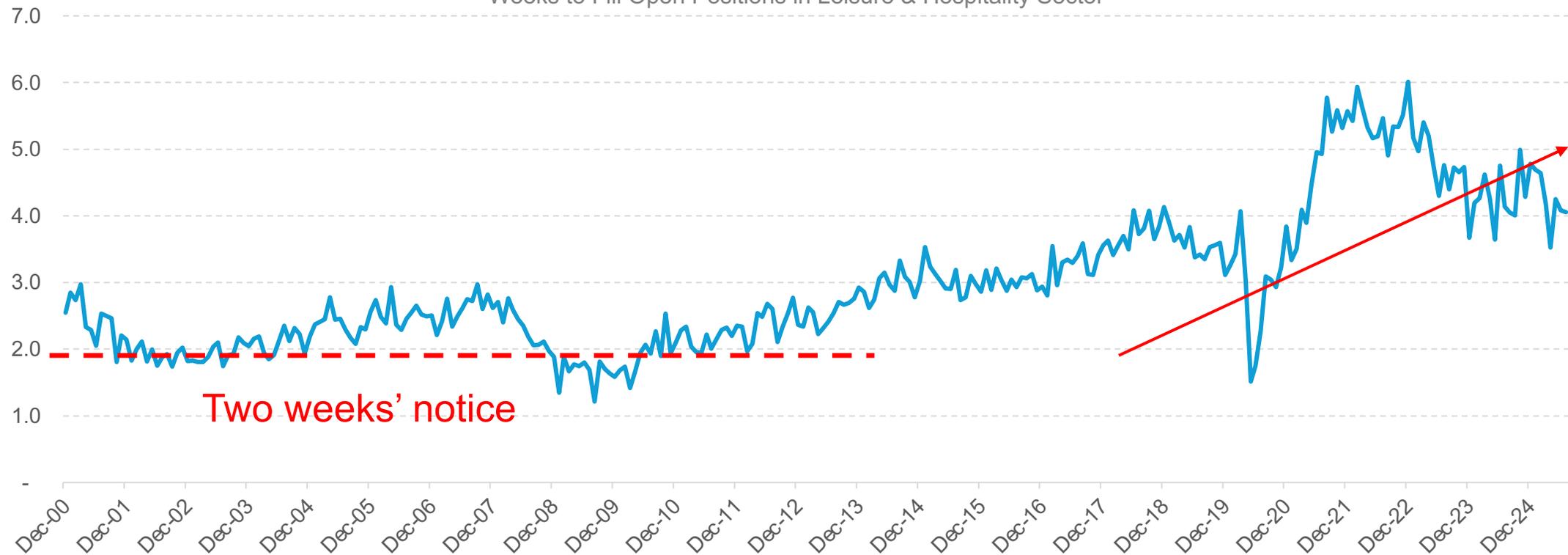
All of the topics that your board cares about are really *talent* topics...
... and talent is a *growing challenge* for travel and hospitality companies

A Talent Crisis Has Been Simmering for Years, But Now It Has Boiled Over

Good Help Is Hard to Find

It's been over a decade since travel was able to fill a role within the traditional two-week notice period

Weeks to Fill Open Positions in Leisure & Hospitality Sector



What's Causing Travel's Talent Challenges?



Too few people



Poor pay



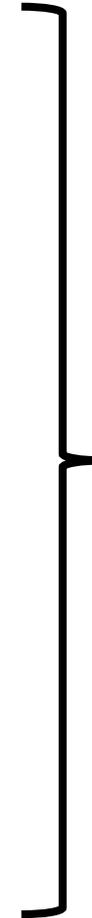
Low tech investment



Little training



No clear career path



- RESULT -
We're not
holding on to
our most vital
asset

Tech Is an Important Part of the Conversation

Tech is an important part of the talent conversation.

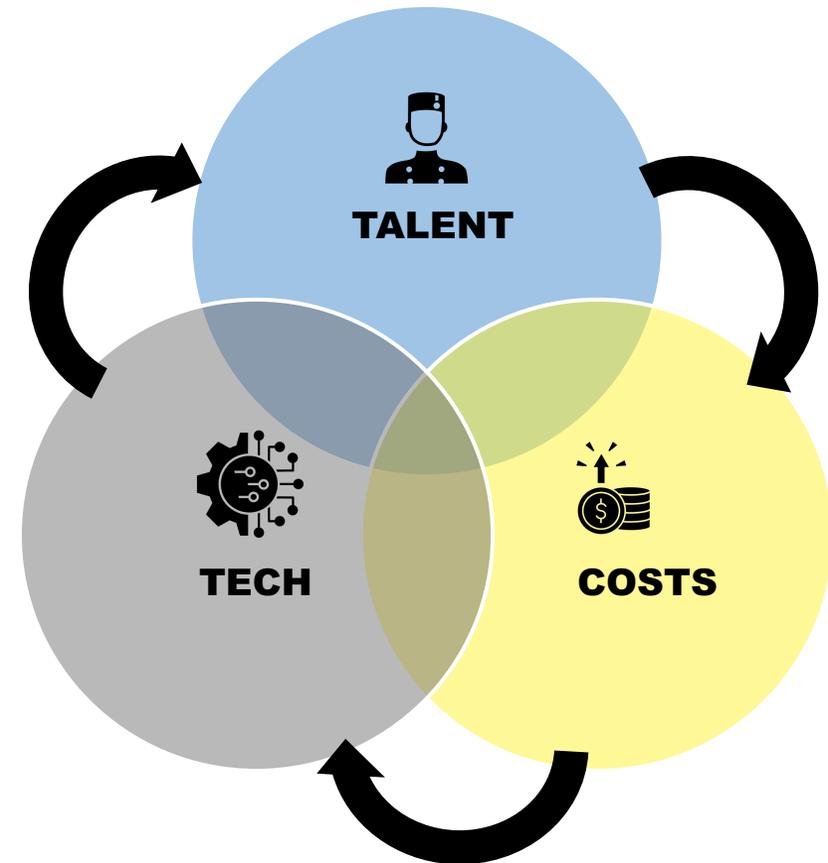
Labor shortages and rising payroll are a fact of life for the travel industry and it is inevitable that technology will have an important role to play in driving results.

Tech can be a force multiplier that makes workers happier and more productive when done well.

But bad tech integration makes employees feel like they are hitting their head up against a wall. Poor systems lead to steep learning curves, exacerbate turnover, and constrain individual initiative-taking.

Tech can help fill labor shortages and improve employee's lives. For better or worse, it can also replace certain jobs outright.

Tech is not inherently good or bad, but needs to be developed and deployed with talent and cost considerations in mind.



But Tech Alone Won't Solve the Problem (and Might Actually Make Things Worse)

It's mandatory that today's travel companies invest in tech. But innovation needs to be paired with empathy and understanding. It's not just what the tool does, but how you position it. Tech and AI adoption must elevate the experience of both travelers and workers alike, if it is to be successful in driving long-term growth.

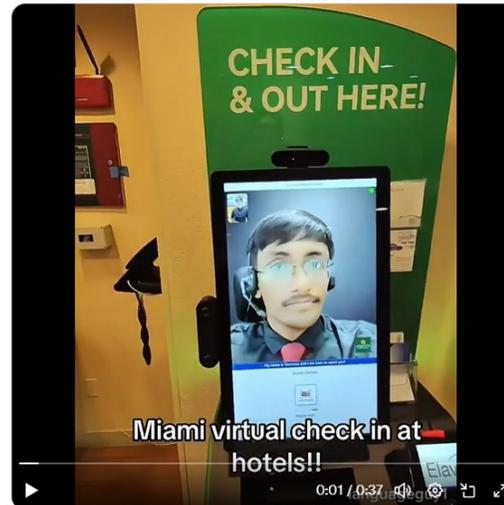
Airport self-check-in kiosks

vs.

Hotel self-check-in kiosks

=

Similar tech, but different contexts created brand backlash



NEW YORK POST

BUSINESS

Major hotel chain faces backlash for allegedly outsourcing check-ins — to India

USA TODAY

No front desk staff, just a tablet. Guest's hotel check-in video goes viral.

The kiosk will be removed, a Wyndham Hotels representative said.

~~Tech or Talent~~
Tech *and* Talent

What Will Define the Travel Workforce in 3–5 Years (According to Execs)



Technology and AI adoption is the most dominant theme, emerging six times. Leaders highlight AI not only as an operational efficiency tool, but also as a critical future skill, reshaping distribution models, workforce needs, and customer interactions.



Workforce flexibility and remote work surfaced in three interviews, underscoring the continued importance of flexible schedules.



Industry consolidation and competition were mentioned three times, with executives noting the shift from fragmented local operators to larger national and global players, raising both opportunities for scale and risks of reduced creativity.



Economic and business model pressures were raised three times, especially around managing seasonal demand, building ancillary revenue streams, and adapting to new distribution dynamics as AI reduces traditional web traffic.



Geopolitics and global talent mobility emerged twice, reflecting growing concerns over deglobalization, shrinking labor pools, and constrained career opportunities, which may accelerate uneven adoption of AI and automation.



The **human element and culture of hospitality** were emphasized twice, with leaders stressing that while AI offers efficiency, the human touch remains central to the hospitality experience and long-term industry stability.



Shifts in workforce skills and roles were noted twice, emphasizing the transition from specialist to generalist capabilities and the necessity of AI literacy as a baseline competency for the future workforce.

A Culture of Experimentation and Collaboration are Key To Success in a Tech-Driven Future of Travel



Marilyn Markham

Vice President AI and Automation
Strategy, American Express Global
Business Travel

“We are currently experimenting with agentic AI internally and [one of the places it’s being used is by the people who are building it — the tech teams, beginning with internal tools.](#)”

We’re also implementing it into [customer-facing products](#) and starting to see how we can [improve the user experience.](#)”

[Anyone who comes up with an awesome prompt](#) that really helped them adds it to the shared page, which ideally [makes AI-related tasks easier](#) for everyone else.”

What Solutions Are Emerging?



Flexibility + AI = workforce transformation

Travel companies are blending workplace flexibility with AI to streamline operations and cut repetitive tasks. Flexible scheduling helps meet worker expectations, while AI automates low-value work so staff can focus on higher-impact, guest-facing roles.



Diverse hiring practices

Broadening recruitment pipelines is essential — targeting underrepresented groups, second-career workers, and younger generations expands the talent pool and builds teams that better mirror today's travelers.



Locality and community

Employers are strengthening pipelines by investing in local talent through partnerships with schools, training centers, and community groups. This not only sustains employment but also ensures tourism benefits flow back to residents.



Skill development and training

Continuous learning is becoming non-negotiable. Upskilling in digital literacy, service, and sustainability prepares staff for evolving roles, while clear career pathways reduce churn and position travel jobs as long-term careers.



Supportive leadership

Retention depends on managers who lead with communication, empathy, and wellbeing. Embedding leadership training across all levels fosters a consistent culture of support.



Benefits that match expectations

Pay alone isn't enough. Competitive compensation, healthcare, flexibility, childcare support, and wellness programs are now baseline expectations. Aligning benefits with employee values builds loyalty and sets employers apart.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Talent is foundational to the industry

...cutting across every major travel vertical and horizontal. If you care about anything pertinent to travel, you care about talent.

We face a burgeoning talent crisis

Travel is understaffed, under-paid, and facing a demographic cliff.

Technology will not solve the crisis

It is a force multiplier, but the human touch remains essential to travel.

Travel remains an exciting sector

Top talent wants to work in travel! It is fun and exciting. In parts of the world, it is a critical stepping-stone toward wealth.

Culture, tech, and career paths are key

The demand for workers is there. The desire for talent to work in travel is there. It's on travel leaders to create the right culture, deploy the right tech, and create sustainable career paths in travel.

The background features a light blue field with abstract, flowing shapes in dark blue and bright yellow. Interspersed among these shapes are stylized white hands and paper airplanes, suggesting movement and industry. The overall aesthetic is modern and dynamic.

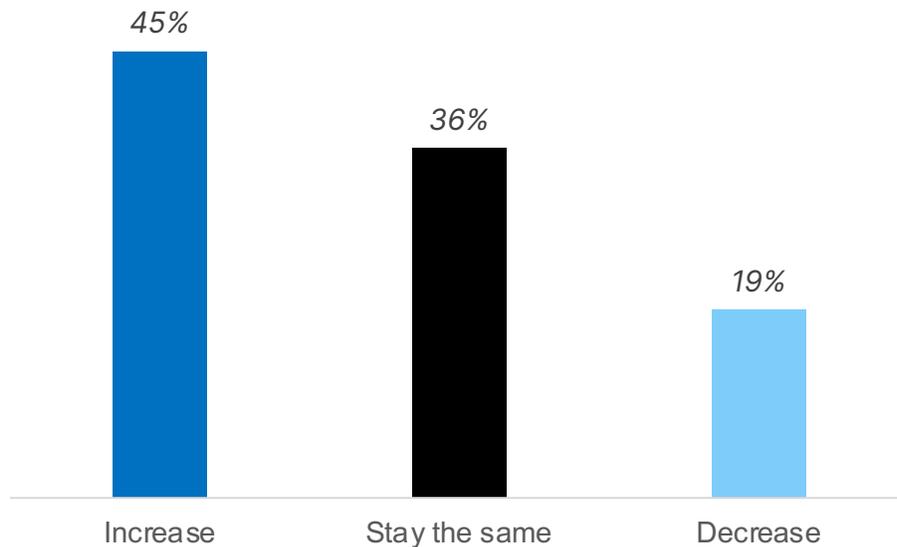
THE LABOR MARKET FOR TRAVEL

Travel's Talent Demand Remains Strong

Hiring demand across travel is on the rise, showing that employers are confident about future growth. But more demand doesn't mean an easier market — this surge only amplifies the pressure on already limited talent pools. Not all sectors are growing equally. Airlines show stronger hiring momentum, signaling intense demand for skilled talent, while hotels also expect above-average growth.

A Hiring Increase Is Expected Across the Industry

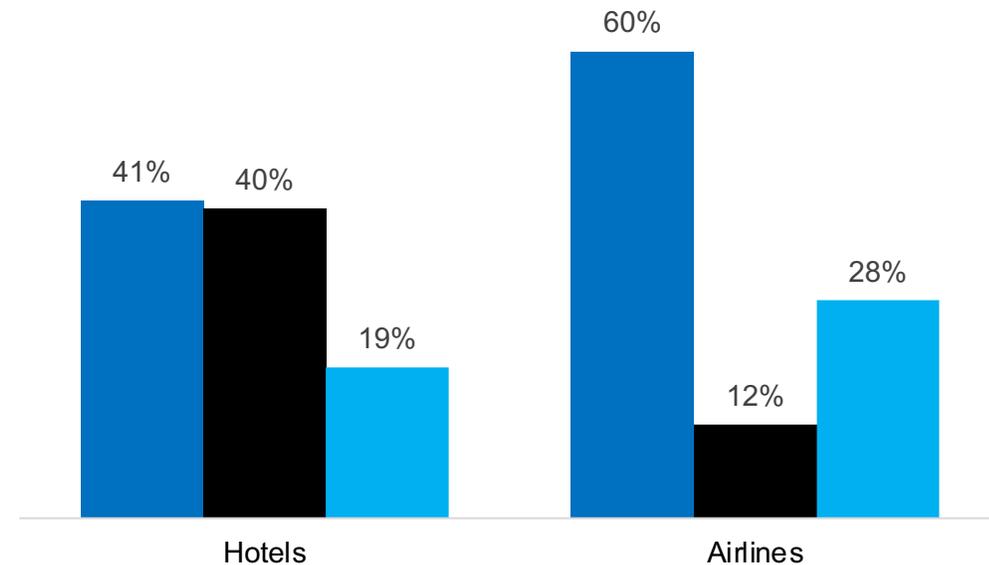
Hiring outlook for the next 12 months
(% of hiring managers)



Hiring Expectations Differ Significantly Across Segments

Hiring outlook for the next 12 months by travel sector
(% of hiring managers)

■ Increase ■ Stay the same ■ Decrease



How do you expect your hiring needs to change over the next year?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

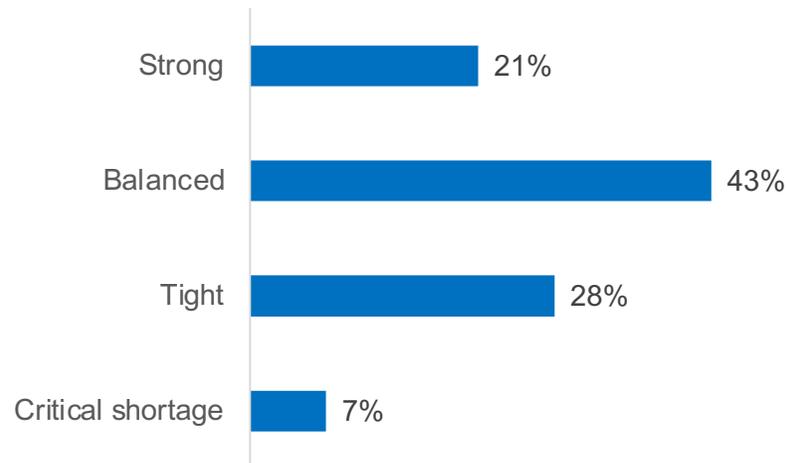
Talent Supply Is Running Dry

The travel workforce is running tight, with shortages outweighing surpluses. Gaps are broad-based — from technical to mid-level to entry roles — signaling not just a hiring issue but a skills alignment challenge. Addressing this will require better pipelines, stronger retention, and focused upskilling.

Travel Talent Supply Under Strain

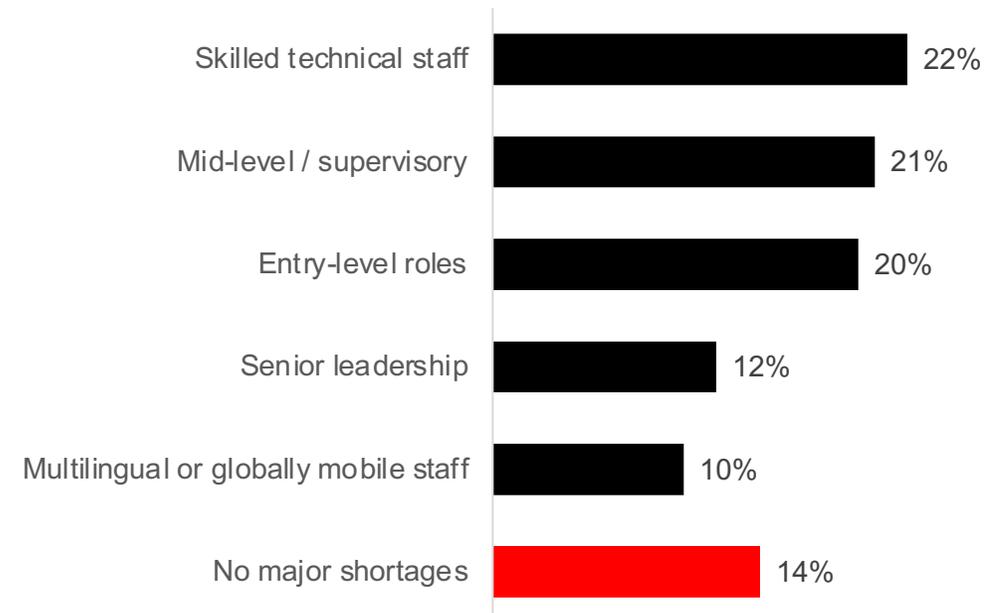
Current talent supply for key travel roles
(% of hiring managers)

Strong – more candidates than roles
Balanced – supply meets demand
Tight – fewer qualified candidates than needed
Critical shortage – very hard to find candidates



Shortages Felt Across the Workforce Spectrum

Areas experiencing talent shortages
(% of hiring managers)



LHS: How would you describe the current talent supply for key travel roles in your region? RHS: Are you currently facing a shortage of talent in any of the following areas? (Select all that apply.)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Hiring in Travel is Rebounding But There is Still Work to be Done on Diversity



Hannah DeMaio

Vice President, Brand Strategy, Women
Leading Travel & Hospitality

“Hiring in travel has bounced back, with a clear shift toward digital, sustainability, and customer-focused roles.

What’s most surprising is that despite women making up over half the workforce, they’re still not moving into leadership at the same pace, only about 39% of VP or executive roles are held by women.

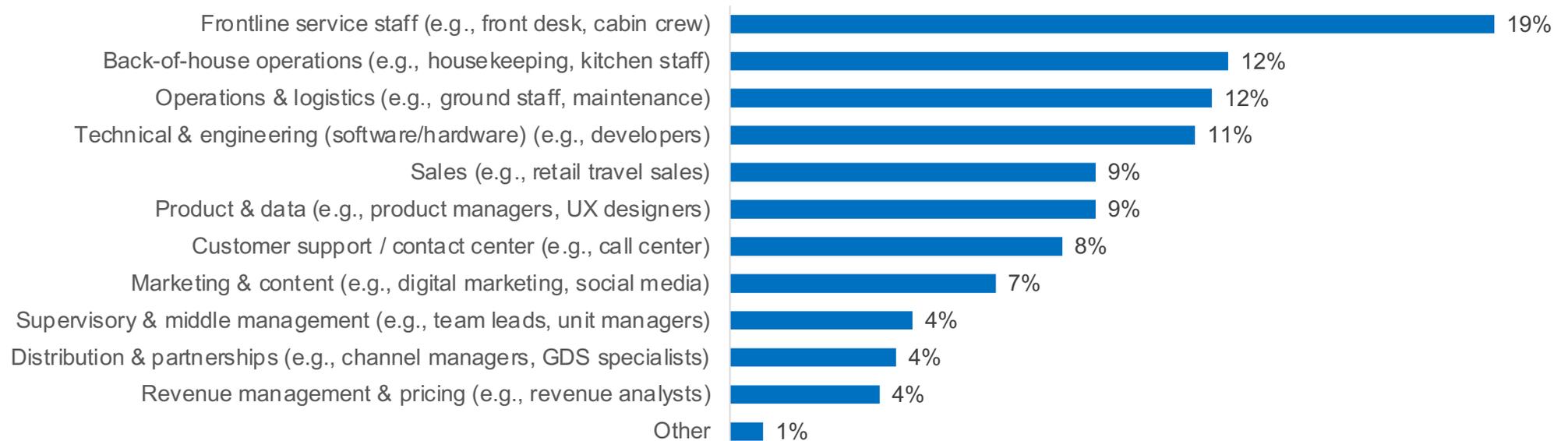
Progress is happening, but it’s slower than expected, and companies are being pushed to rethink how they promote and support women into top roles.”

Hiring Manager View: Urgent Demand in Frontline and Operational Roles

The greatest demand is in frontline and operational roles, the very positions that often face the highest turnover. This concentration of hiring in vulnerable areas shows why retention, not just recruitment, is the industry's biggest challenge.

Frontline and Operational Roles Top Hiring Demand

Share of hiring managers planning to recruit for each role in the next 12 months
(% of hiring managers)



Which departments or roles will see the highest hiring demand in the next 12 months? (Select up to three.)
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Executive View: Strategic Demand in Revenue, Sales, Tech and Leadership

Immediate demand centers on frontline and operations. Future success depends on revenue, sales, and tech leadership.



Revenue Management

“Revenue management is especially vital, since pricing, demand, and occupancy strategy directly determine success for both the company and homeowners.”

- Michael Friedman, CEO, The Simple Life Hospitality



Business Development / Sales

“Sales is a priority for everyone right now — whether in hotels or in transportation companies like the one I lead.”

- Alexander Mirza, CEO, Carey



Tech / Data Science / AI

“Data scientists — and, increasingly, machine-learning engineers — have been in high demand for the past five years and continue to be a priority.”

- Steve Hafner, CEO, Kayak



General Managers

“GMs need deep expertise in sales, marketing, market positioning, revenue management, and pricing. Increasingly, they also need to understand e-commerce, distribution, and the influence of social media.”

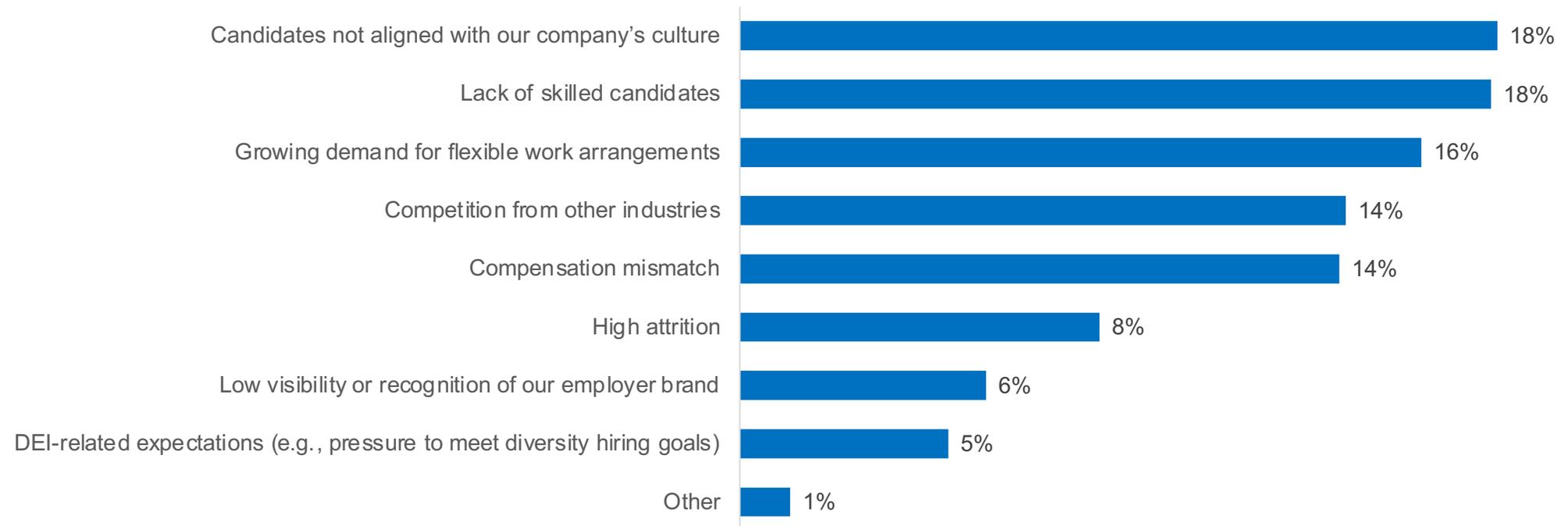
- Craig Cochrane, Chief People Officer, Minor Hotels

Why Hiring Is So Hard: Skills, Fit, and Flexibility

The biggest hiring hurdles come down to fit, skills, and flexibility. Employers aren't just struggling to find enough candidates — they're struggling to find the right candidates with the right skills who can also adapt to flexible, often unpredictable work demands.

Talent Alignment, Skills Gaps, and Flexibility Drive Recruitment Challenges

Biggest hiring challenges (% of hiring managers)



What are your biggest hiring challenges right now? (Top 3)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Top Hiring Challenges...



COMPENSATION MISMATCH

“Unrealistic salary demands”



LACK OF SKILLS

“Their CV is fantastic, and their interview goes well, too, but when it comes to skill evaluation tools they do not live up to expectation”



WORK ETHIC

“Everybody wants a job, but nobody actually wants to do the work”



CULTURE FIT

“Finding someone who matches the company’s culture is harder than skills”



NO-SHOWS

“Yes — they get hired, start training and quit without a word”



LANGUAGE BARRIERS

“Language skills not up to hospitality standard”



COMMUNICATION ISSUES

“Lack of common sense and lack of guest-service mindset”



LOGISTICS

“Relocation challenges”

Can you give examples of a couple of challenges that you have faced hiring someone?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

One Challenge No One Talks About in Hospitality Hiring Is...

Career Commitment

“One challenge no one talks about in hospitality recruitment is the lack of long-term career commitment: many candidates see hospitality as a temporary job rather than a long-term career. This makes it difficult to attract and retain motivated talent, especially for demanding service roles.”

Compensation and Benefits

“Lowest compensation amongst other industries. Difficult to make it attractive enough for the next generation.”

“The lack of funding to pay great talents well.”

Service Mindset and Soft Skills

“How uncommon common sense is. Hospitality is very natural. We need to develop talent to care, rather than just service.”

“While technical skills can be trained, finding candidates with the right attitude, empathy, and service mindset is rare.”

“The industry’s emphasis on providing exceptional customer service and maintaining a positive demeanor can be emotionally draining.”

One challenge no one talks about in hospitality hiring is...

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Pay Pressures: Compensation Remains Travel's Achilles Heel



Michael Friedman

CEO, The Simple Life Hospitality

“Compensation also plays a role. This industry hasn’t always been known for paying competitive wages, especially for seasonal or front-line labor.

To attract quality talent, we often have to pay above market rates, particularly for roles like revenue management or business development, where experience and expertise really matter.

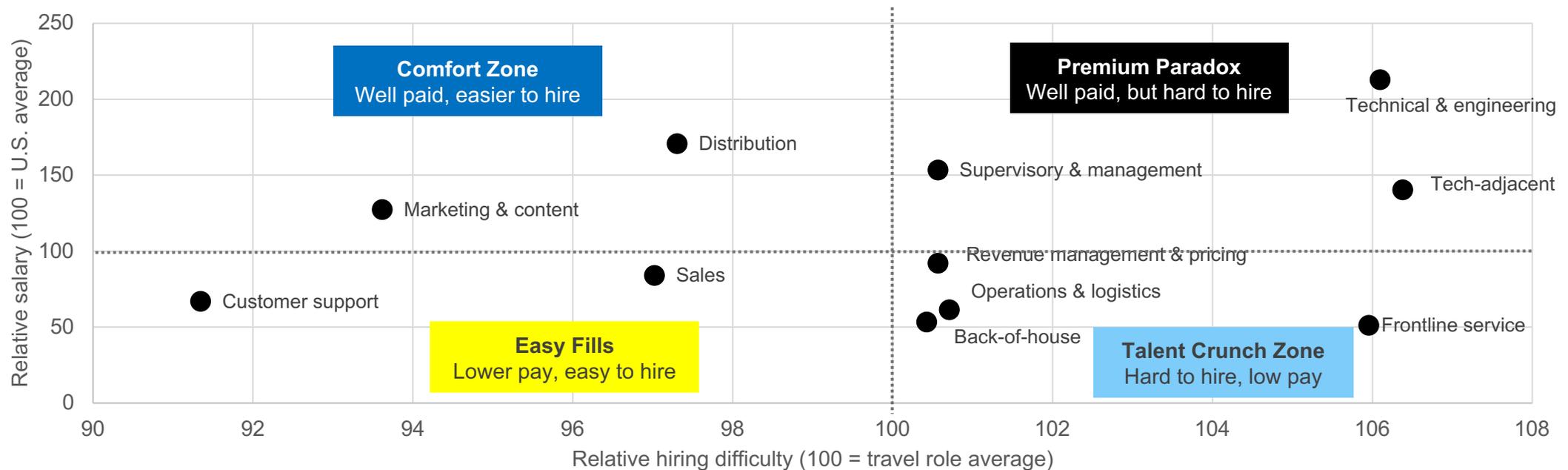
We’re not afraid of that — we believe in paying for talent and backing it up with bonuses and benefits to retain people. But at the end of the day, the hardest part remains securing that seasonal labor force that can support operations during peak periods.”

No One-Size-Fits-All: Why Travel Defies a Single Hiring Strategy

Some roles are well-paid yet still hard to fill, while others remain easier despite lower pay. This paradox shows that salary alone can't fix the issue — hiring strategies must be tailored role by role.

Distinct Hiring Realities Call for Tailored Strategies

Hiring difficulty indexed to travel role average vs. wages indexed to U.S. mean (100), reflecting global talent pressures



How easy or difficult is it to attract qualified applicants for the following roles in your organization?

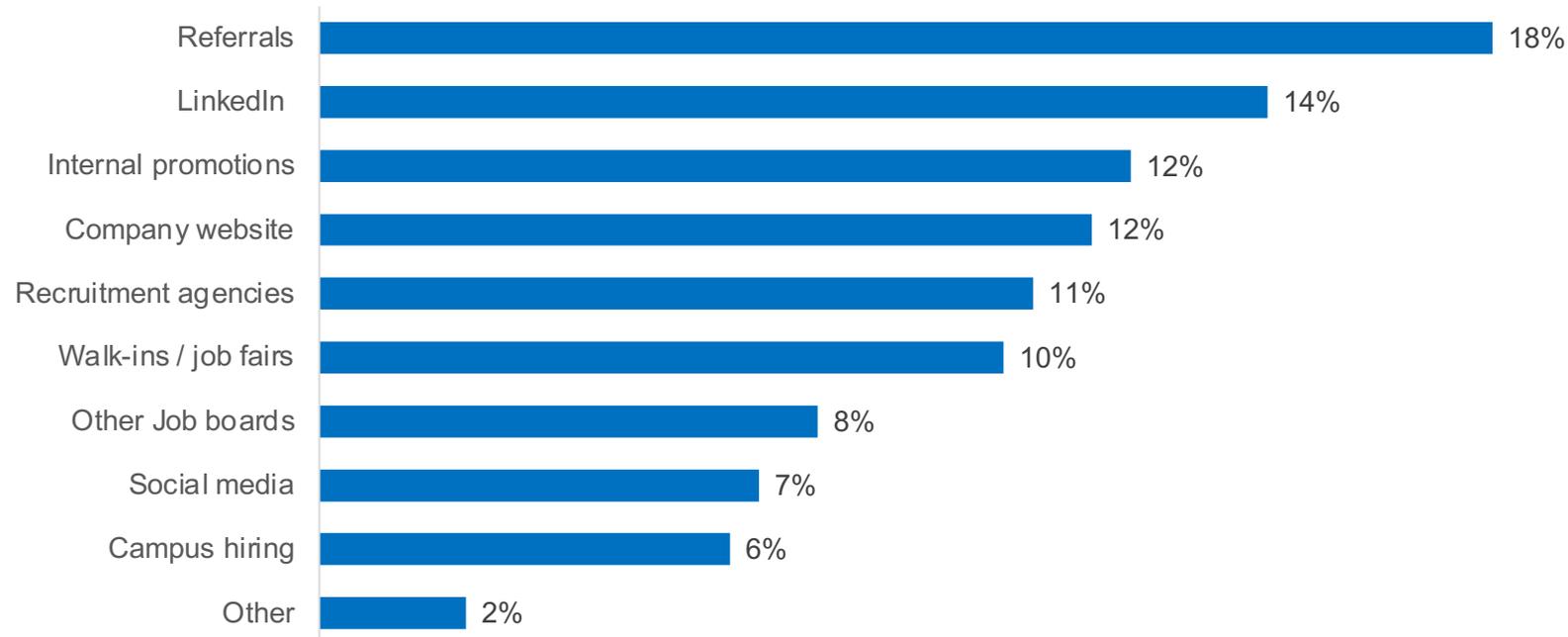
Note: The Hiring Difficulty Index reflects how challenging it is to fill each role, calculated from survey responses on a 5-point scale (1 = very easy, 5 = very difficult). Higher scores indicate greater difficulty in hiring. Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

What Works: Referrals, Networks, and Internal Pipelines

Despite the challenges, managers find success through referrals, professional networks, and internal promotions. These approaches highlight that trusted relationships and career pathways deliver better outcomes than traditional job postings alone.

Employee Referrals and LinkedIn Drive the Most Hiring Successes

Sources of most successful hires (% of hiring managers)



Where do your most successful hires come from? (Top 3)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Hiring demand is surging, supply remains tight. Employers across airlines, hotels, and beyond are planning more hires — yet talent pipelines are thinner than ever, creating fierce competition for skills.

The frontline is both the biggest need and the biggest risk. Operational roles drive the bulk of demand, but high turnover makes this the weakest link in the system. Recruitment without retention will only deepen the cycle.

Money matters, but it is not enough. Even high-paying roles are hard to fill. Leadership, revenue management, and tech positions remain scarce despite above-market wages — proving that money alone cannot close the gap.

The real crisis is skills, fit, and commitment. Employers aren't just short on candidates, they're short on the right candidates. Culture, service mindset, and long-term commitment are now as critical as technical ability.

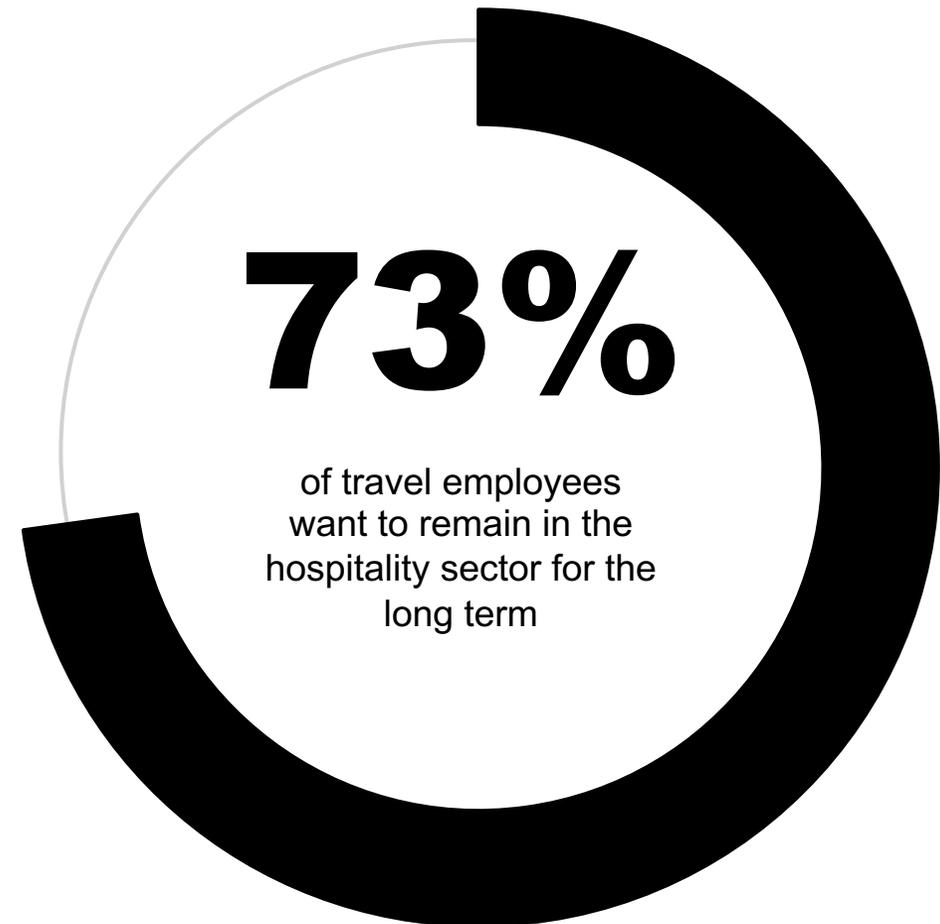
Networks and career paths, not job boards, deliver results. Referrals, internal pipelines, and professional connections outperform traditional postings — underscoring that relationships and growth opportunities win in a tight market.

The background features a light blue field with abstract, flowing shapes in dark blue and bright yellow. Several stylized hands are shown reaching out or holding onto these shapes. Scattered throughout are simple line-art paper airplanes, some appearing to fly across the scene. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and dynamic.

RETENTION AND EMPLOYEE SENTIMENT

The Good News... Employees Love Working in Travel

Nearly three-quarters of employees say they want to stay in hospitality for the long term, proving that passion for the industry runs deep. But intent doesn't always translate to reality, as ongoing churn shows.



The Retention Paradox: Passion vs. Exit Plans

While 73% of employees say they want to stay in hospitality long term, 4 in 10 have still considered leaving. This contradiction highlights a critical gap: passion keeps workers connected to travel, but pay, stress, and limited growth opportunities often push them out. Employers who fail to address these day-to-day realities risk losing even their most committed staff.

**4 in 10 employees
have considered
leaving the travel
industry**

**Hospitality
workers
average just 2
years in tenure
— half the U.S.
norm.**

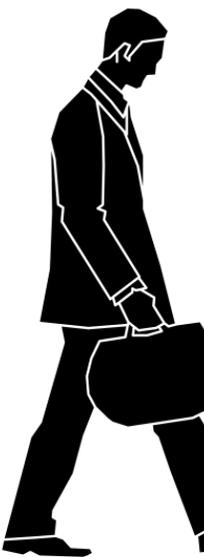


Why They Stay

- Love for travel
- Connection with people and meaningful experiences
- Perks (discounts, travel, flexibility)
- Loyalty and comfort with company
- Career investment and growth
- Identity and belonging
- Practical needs (income, convenience)
- Positive environment and coworkers

Why They Leave

- Low pay and poor benefits
- Stress and burnout
- Lack of growth opportunities
- Work-life imbalance
- Poor management and culture
- Health, age, retirement
- Industry instability
- Exploration / curiosity



Have you considered leaving the travel industry?

The Retention Crossroads: 1 in 2 Employers Are Struggling

Half of employers say retention remains a major challenge. This indicates an industry at a tipping point: without stronger retention strategies, the cycle of churn will erode business growth.

Current Retention Perceptions: 50% Say It Is Critical or Challenging

Current employee retention situation (% of hiring managers)



How would you describe your current retention situation?

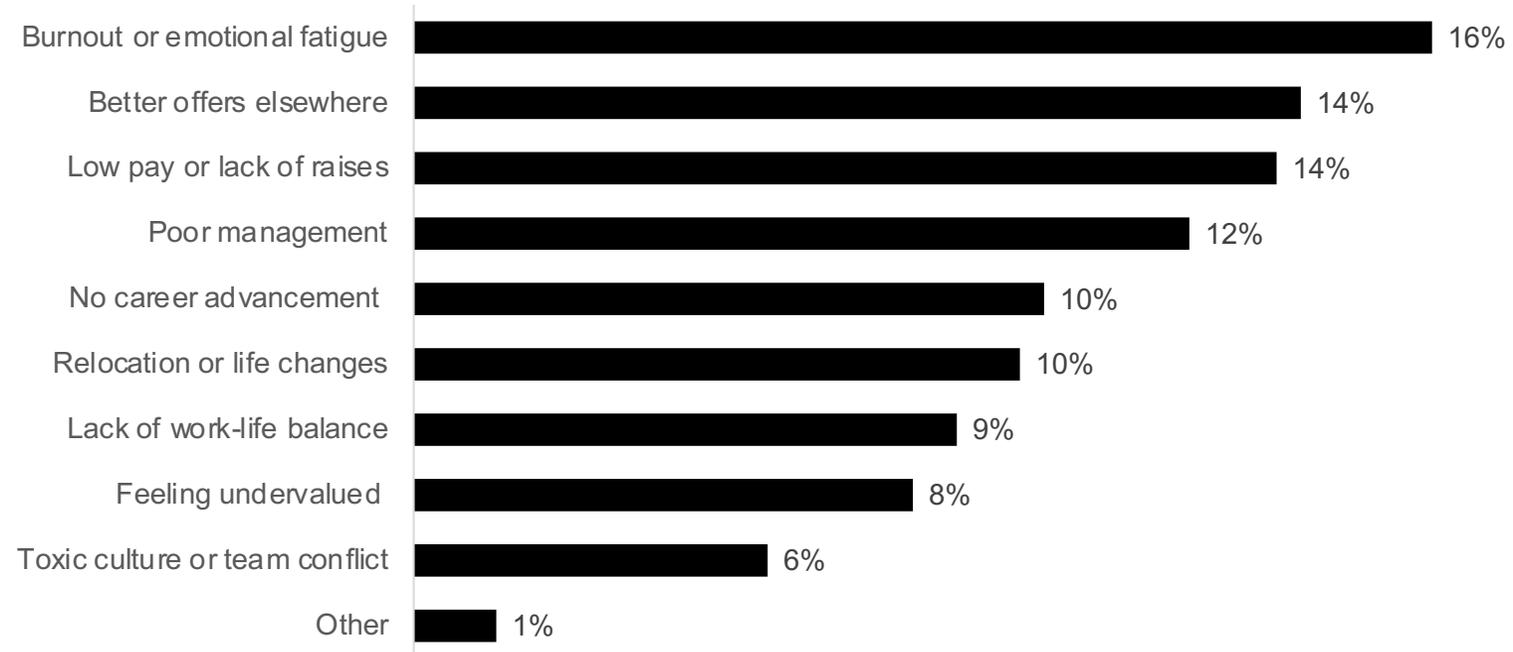
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Attrition Drivers: Pay, Opportunities, Workload, Burnout

Pay gaps, lack of career growth, and unsustainable workloads remain the leading reasons employees quit. These drivers align closely with what workers say they want, reinforcing that employers know the problems but haven't solved them.

Employee Perspective: Top Contributors to Attrition — Burnout, Better Offers, and Low Pay

Reasons why employees quit organizations (% of travel employees)



What are the most common reasons people quit in your organization?(Select up to three.)

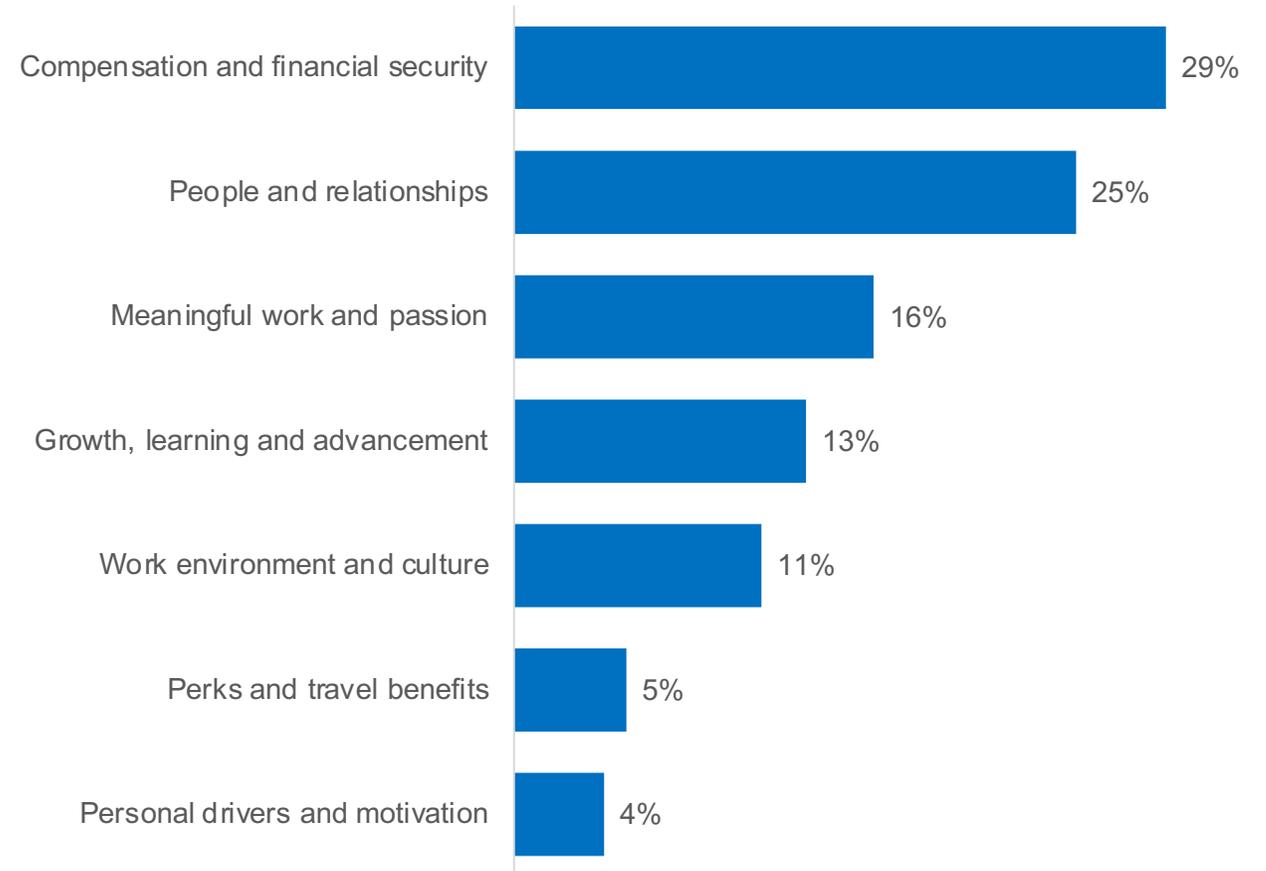
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

The Motivation Mix: Pay, People, Passion

Employees cite three main motivators: fair pay, supportive colleagues, and meaningful work. The lesson for employers is clear: motivation is multi-dimensional and neglecting any of these factors risks disengagement.

Top Motivators for Hospitality Employees: Pay, People, Passion

“What keeps you motivated at work?”
(% share of mentions)



What keeps you motivated at work?

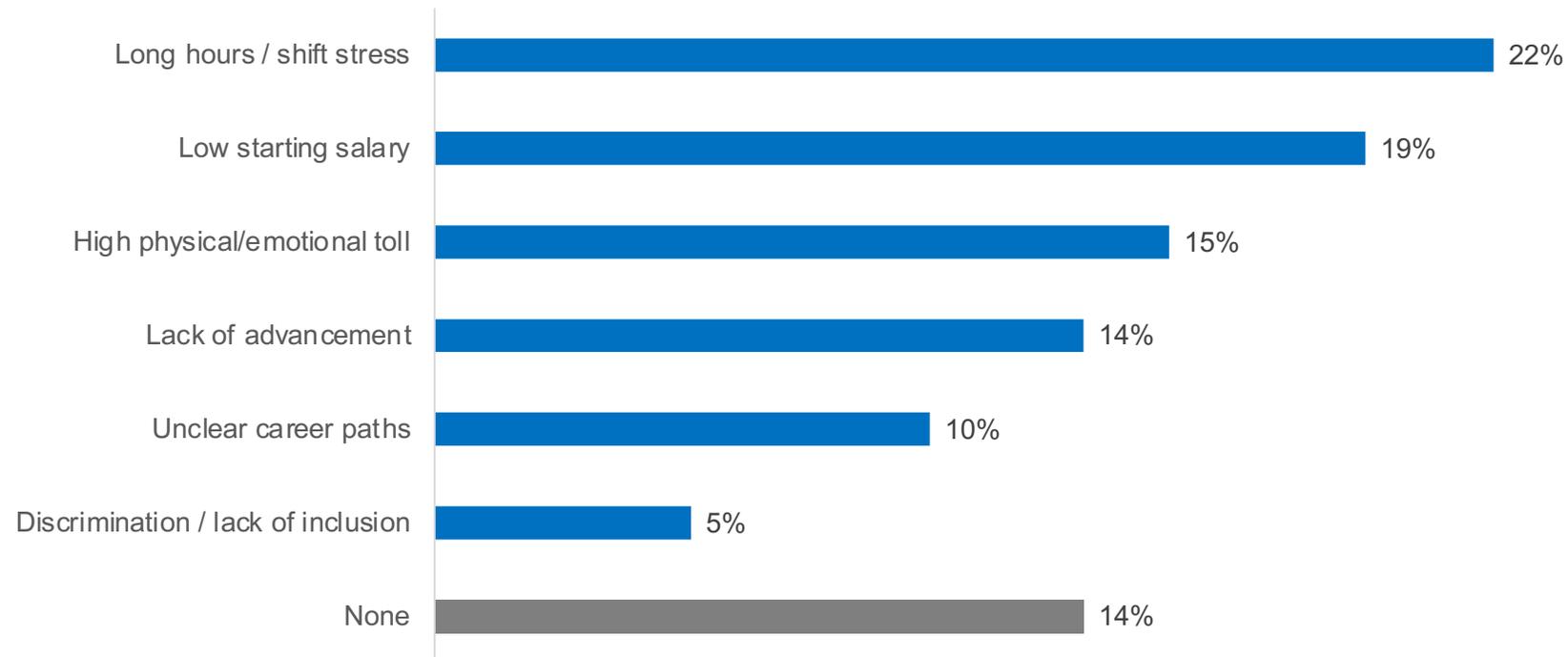
Source: Skift Research survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Reality Check: Long Hours, Low Pay, Limited Growth

Employees consistently flag structural issues such as long shifts, low wages, and lack of advancement. These barriers make it difficult to convince workers that hospitality can be a sustainable career path.

Shift Stress, Compensation, and Limited Growth Top Employee Concerns

Barriers experienced by hospitality employees (% of employees)



Have you experienced any barriers working in hospitality? (Select all that apply.)
Source: Skift Research survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Working in Travel: A Calling or a Stopover?

For some, hospitality is a calling rooted in human connection.
But for others, limited growth and pay make it a stopover.

This split explains why the industry struggles to retain talent long enough to build deep expertise.

A response from our survey that reflects this concern:

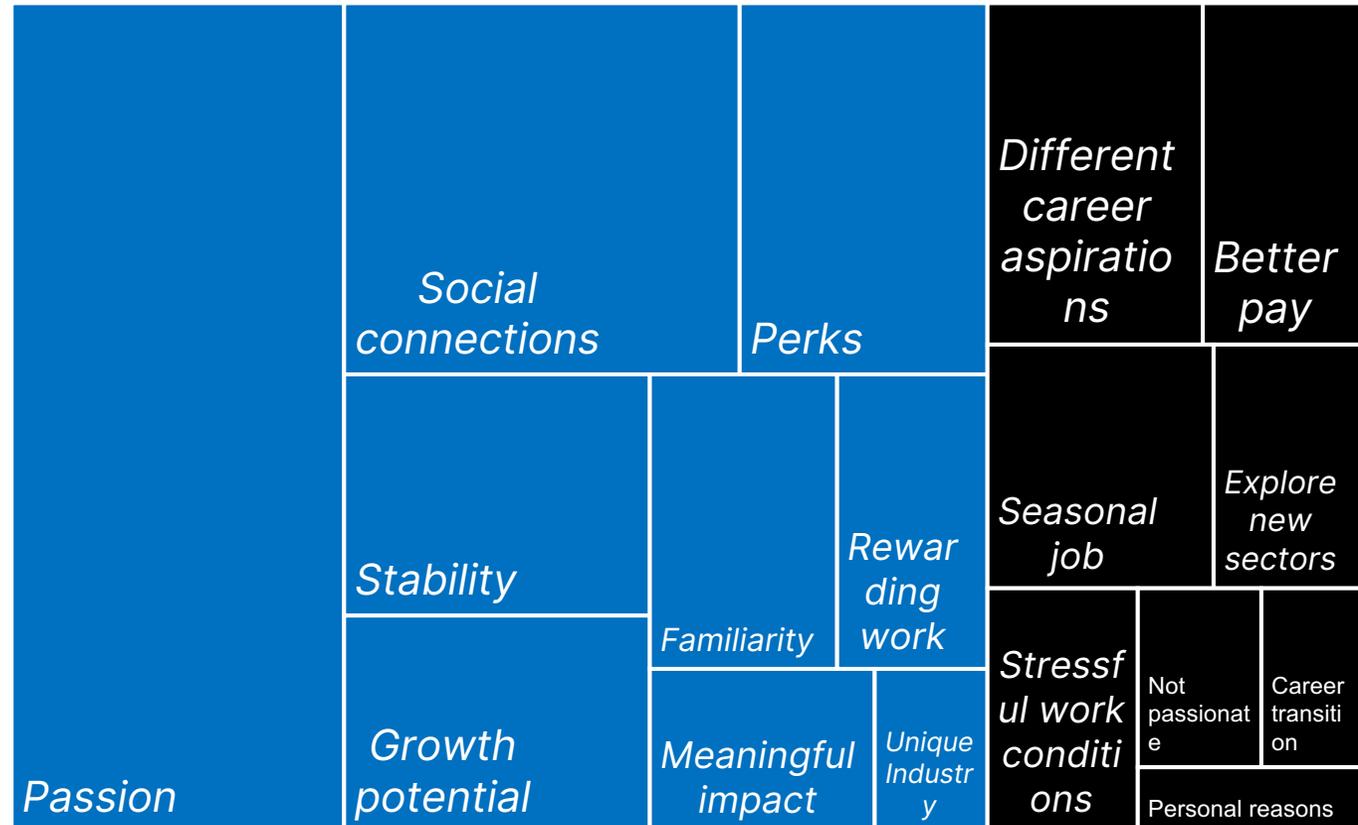
“Long-term growth in the industry doesn't seem suitable. Salary will always remain better in industries other than hospitality.”

- Anonymous respondent, Skift Research survey

Why Talent Stays or Leaves Hospitality in the Long Term

Themes from open-ended responses on staying in hospitality long term and not (sized by frequency)

■ Want to Stay Long Term ■ Do Not Want to Stay Long Term



Would you prefer to stay in the hospitality sector long term, why?

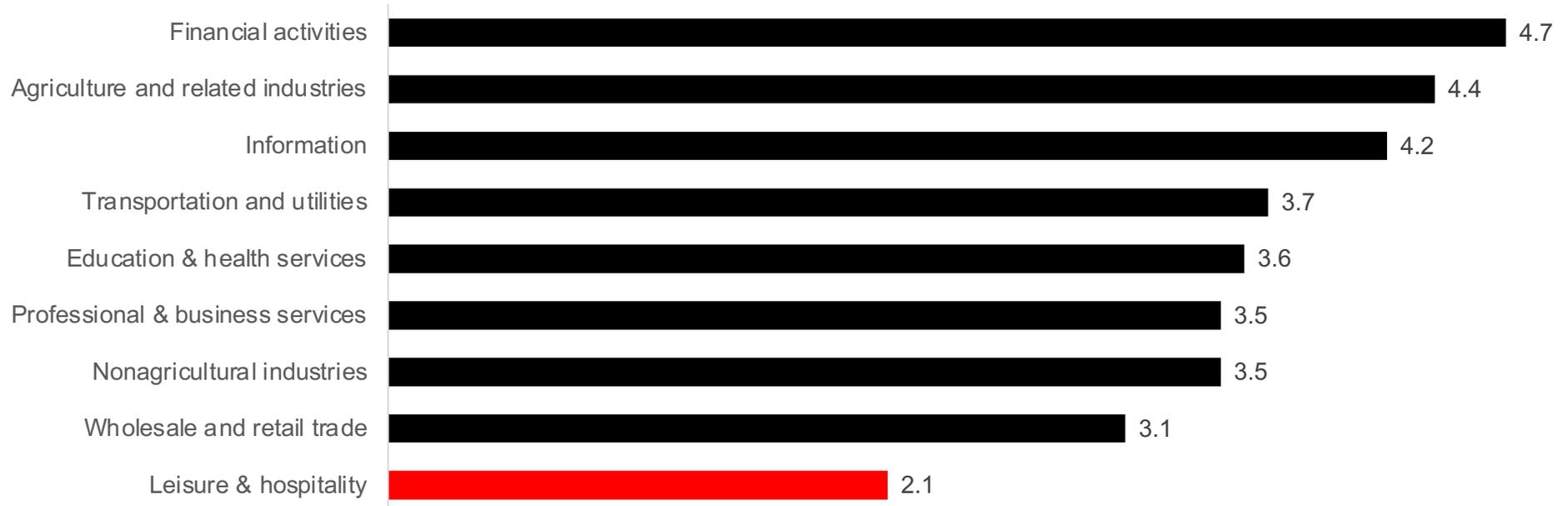
Source: Skift Research survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Structurally Short Tenure: Travel's Chronic Retention Challenge

Hospitality workers average just two years in tenure, which is half the U.S. norm. This isn't a temporary blip but a structural reality, meaning employers must design for constant mobility rather than expect stability.

Leisure and Hospitality Workers Stay an Average of Just 2.1 Years, the Shortest in the Private Sector

Average employee tenure by industry (2024)

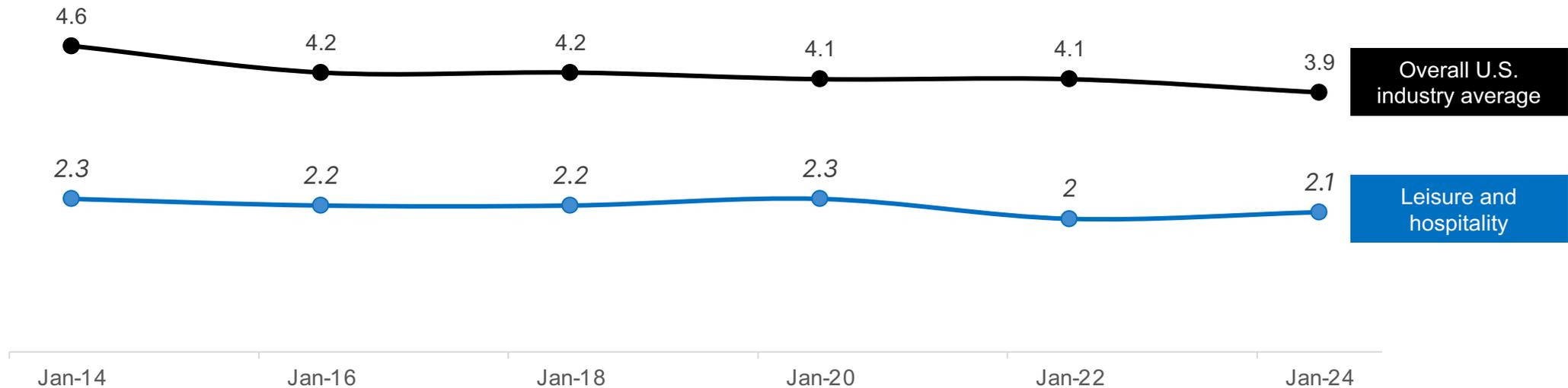


The Leisure and Hospitality Sector Faces Chronic Retention Challenges

Leisure and hospitality is structurally short-tenure, with workers staying about two years on average — roughly half the U.S. norm — a gap that has persisted from 2014 to 2024. Across the economy, tenure is also declining (4.6 years in 2014 to 3.9 in 2024), reflecting greater labor mobility and shifting worker expectations. For hospitality, this translates into chronic churn rather than a cyclical issue. Workforce strategies must therefore plan for high mobility, emphasizing continuous pipelines, faster onboarding, and incentives that make even small tenure gains meaningful.

Leisure and Hospitality Workers Stay About Half as Long as the U.S. Average, Highlighting Chronic Retention Challenges

Average employee tenure by industry in years (2014–24)

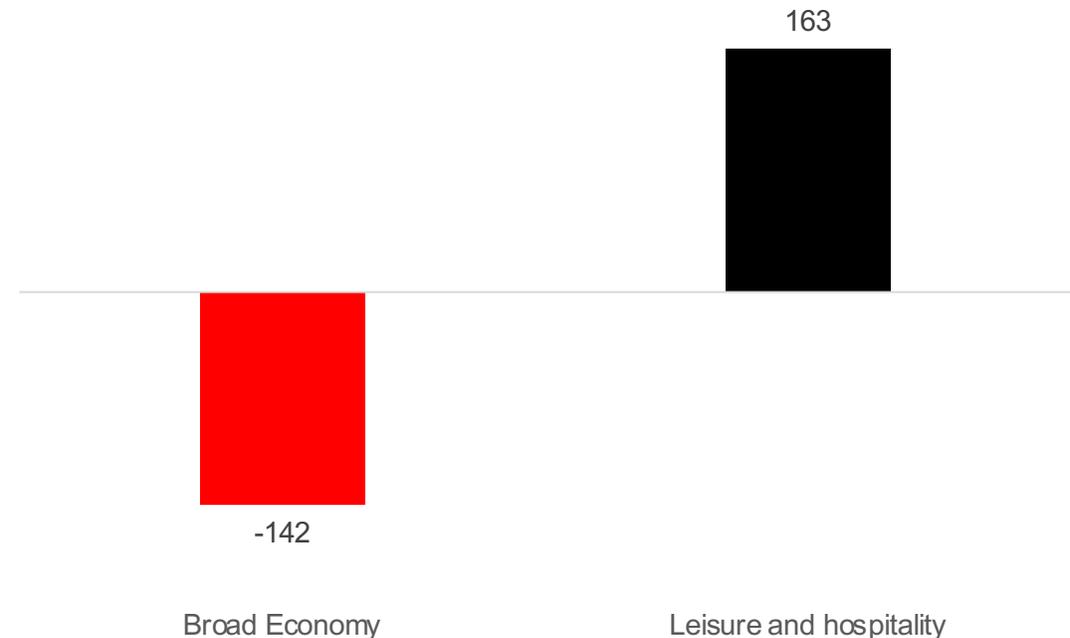


Churn Persists in Travel, Even as Other Sectors Stabilize

The leisure and hospitality sector remains an outlier in workforce stability. While most industries see fewer resignations, this sector is facing heightened churn, reflecting persistent retention challenges. Employers here cannot rely on the same easing pressures as the broader economy and must double-down on engagement, career pathways, and retention incentives.

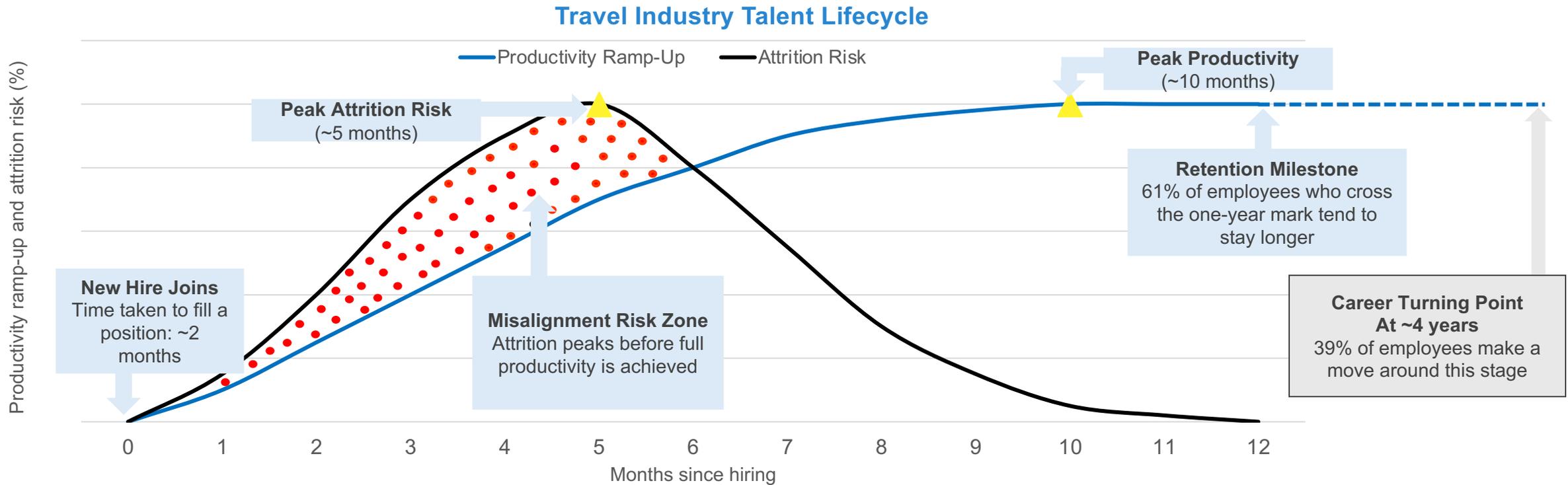
Rate of Turnover Rises in Hospitality, While the Broader Economy Sees More Job-Hugging

Change in quit levels (in thousands)
June 2025 vs. June 2024



Ramp-Up Risk: Hiring Is Hard and Attrition Happens Before Productivity

The issue for employers is clear: attrition peaks before employees reach full productivity, creating a gap that demands faster ramp-up, stronger first-year retention, and renewed growth paths around the four-year mark.

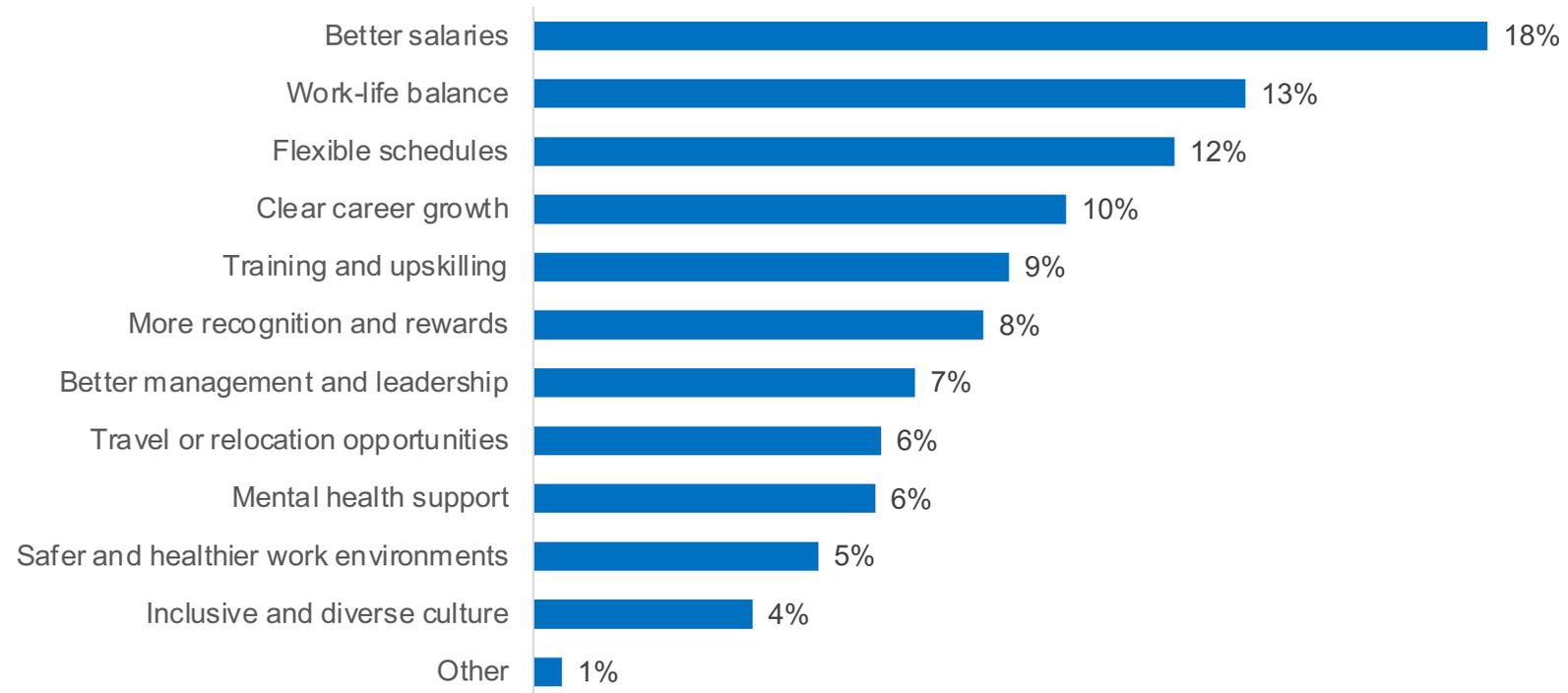


What Workers Want: Pay, Flexibility, Growth

When asked what would make them stay, employees prioritized compensation, work-life balance, and growth opportunities. These responses confirm that meaningful retention requires both financial and career-development investments.

Better Salaries, Work-Life Balance, and Flexibility Top the List of Improvements

Factors that could make hospitality a more attractive career (% of travel employees)



Have you considered leaving the travel industry? What would make hospitality a more attractive career for you and others? (Select all that apply.)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Retention Is a Deeper Systemic Problem Than Employees Lacking Passion for the Industry



Alexander Mirza
CEO, Carey International

“Hospitality suffers from an [extraordinarily high turnover rate](#) — typically between 40% and 60%. Many people are drawn to the industry because they’re passionate about travel, hotels, or restaurants, but for most it remains a stepping-stone. They enter to earn a living and then move on, making a high level of churn inevitable.

The [deeper issue is not turnover itself, but the absence of structured career pathways and genuine pay-for-performance compensation](#). Employee ownership and profit-sharing — standard practices in other industries — are almost nonexistent in hotel real estate. [Third-party managers rarely invest in systematic talent development](#), particularly the pipeline of general managers, in the way brands once did.

Meanwhile, [the industry’s fragmented governance](#) — owners, asset managers, third-party operators, and brands pulling in different directions — [leaves employees without consistent mentorship or clarity on advancement](#). One day the management company calls the shots, the next the owner, and then the brand intervenes.”

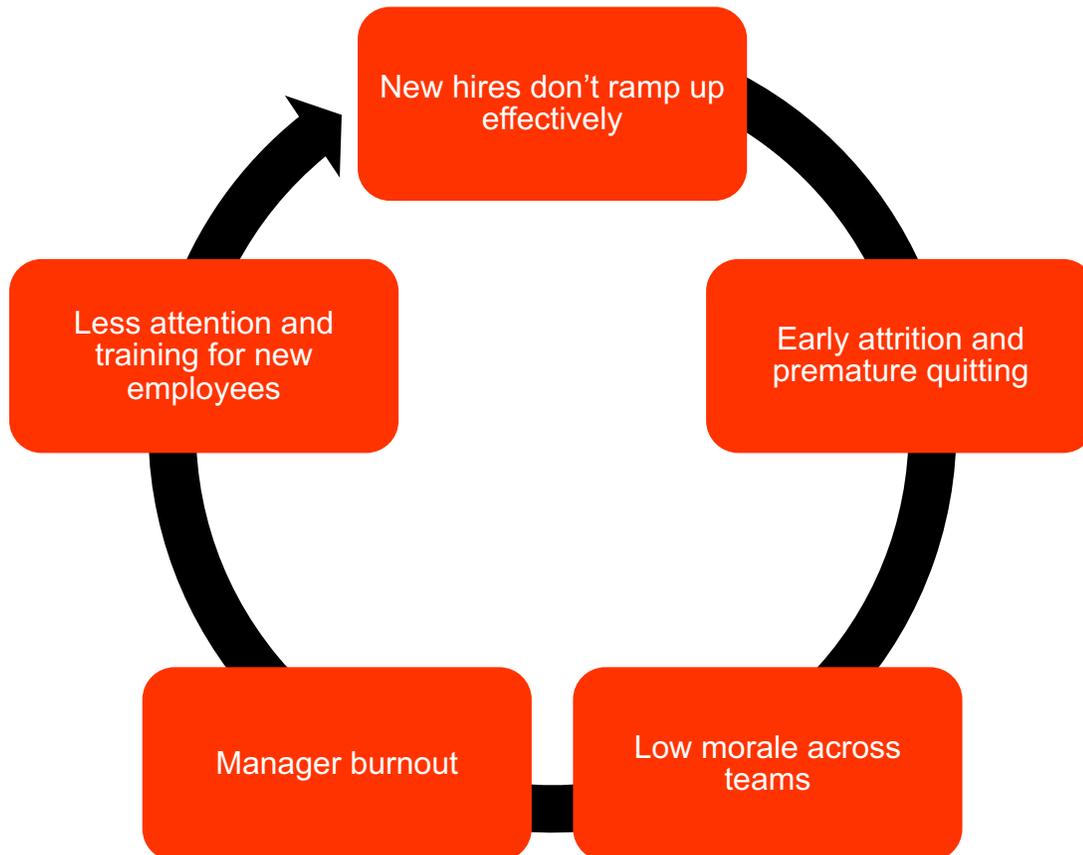
I would stay in this industry if....

- ✓ “I had more flexibility and remote options”
- ✓ “Compensation matched effort and hours”
- ✓ “Customers weren’t so rude”
- ✓ “Leadership recognized hard workers”
- ✓ “There were more opportunities for career growth”
- ✓ “Workload was reduced to a manageable level”

I would stay in this industry if...

The Default in Travel Is Turnover: Organizations Must Change to Build a Culture of Retention

Vicious Cycle of Turnover



Virtuous Cycle of Retention



TRAVEL'S CHRONIC RETENTION CHALLENGE

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Passion is strong, but retention is weak

Nearly three-quarters of employees say they want to stay in hospitality long term, yet churn remains high — showing intent doesn't translate into tenure.

The paradox

People love travel, but they leave anyway. Pay, stress, and limited growth push even the most passionate workers to consider exit plans.

Hospitality is structurally short-tenure

Average tenure is just two years — half the U.S. norm — making churn a built-in feature of the industry, not a temporary challenge.

Barriers are systemic, not personal

Long hours, low wages, and scarce advancement opportunities shape employee decisions more than attitude or passion.

Retention depends on redesigning the career path:

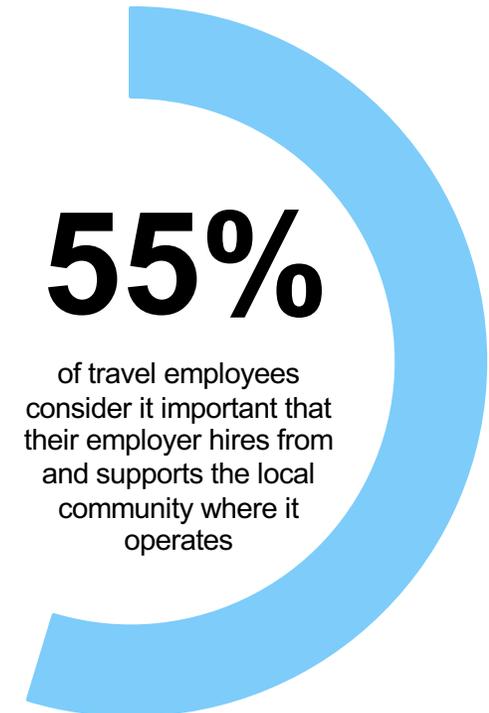
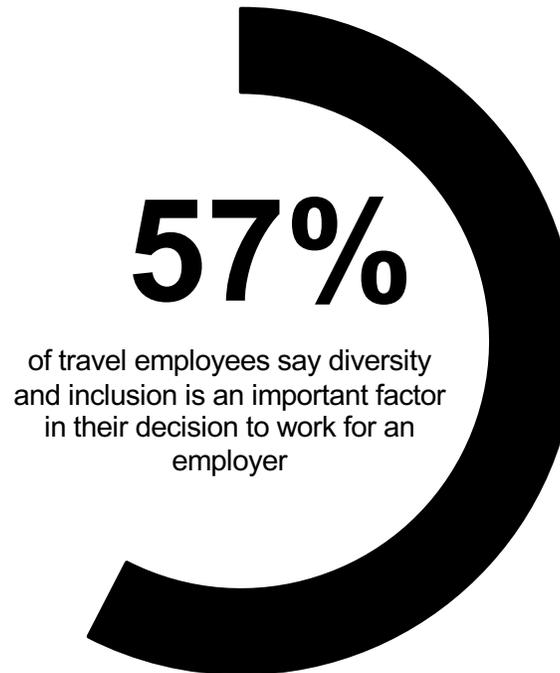
Employees consistently ask for three things: fair pay, work-life balance, and real growth opportunities. Without these, churn will persist even in the best of times.

The background features a light blue field with abstract, flowing shapes in dark blue and yellow. Several stylized hands are shown reaching out, and several paper airplanes are scattered throughout, suggesting movement and collaboration. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and positive.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

DEI: Shared Priority, Uneven Execution

DEI is one of the few areas where employers and employees align — both groups see it as critical to the workplace. But alignment on principle doesn't guarantee action, and the next slides reveal significant gaps in execution.



Our organization has a mature and well-defined diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy.

How important is diversity and inclusion in your decision to work for an employer?

How important is it to you that your employer hires from and supports the local community where it operates?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Diversity Is Essential to Business Because the Industry Is Diverse by Definition



Alexander Mirza
CEO, Carey International

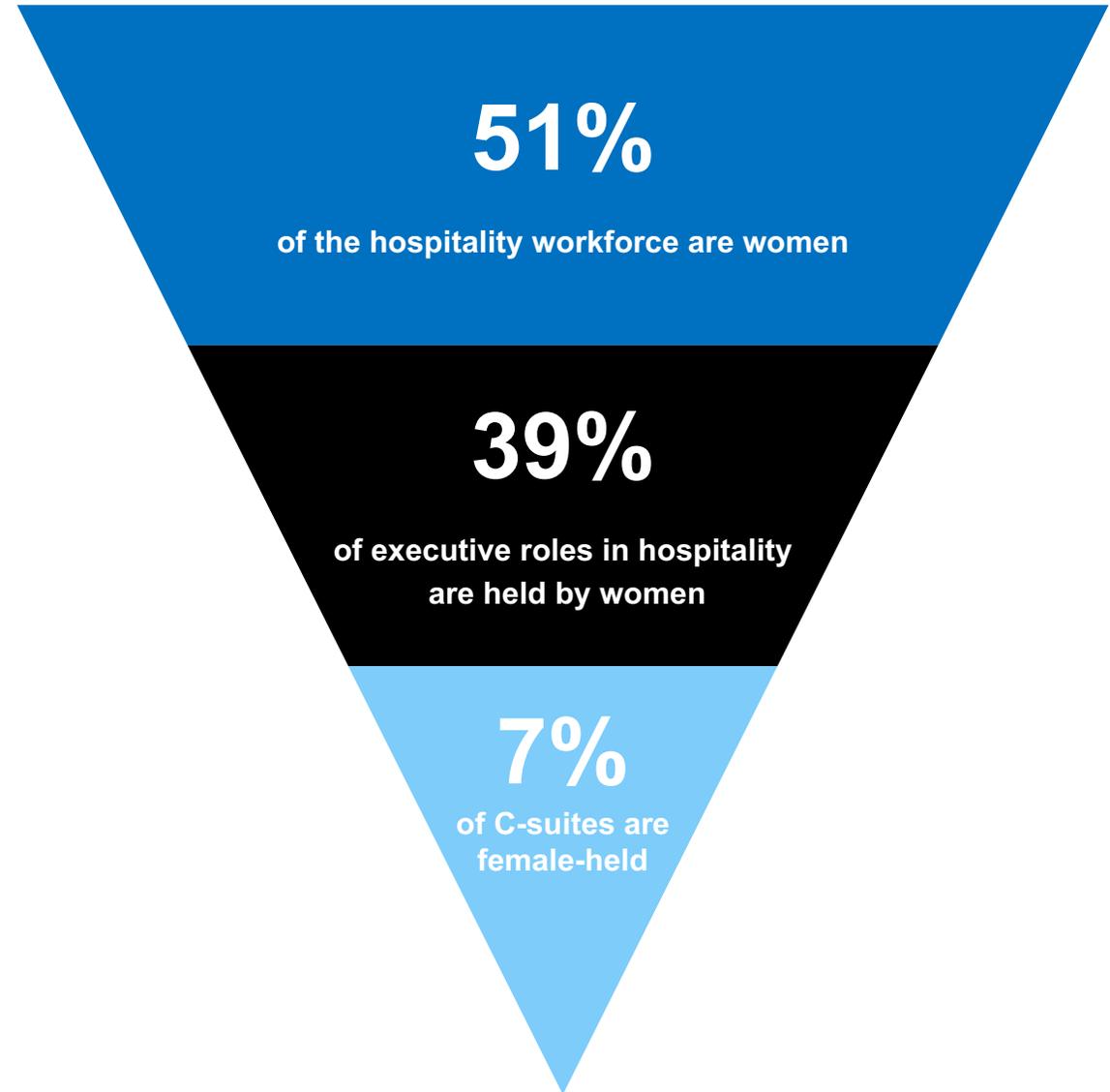
“In travel, diversity is not a moral aspiration but a strategic imperative. The most valuable customers are increasingly diverse, making the work inherently human-centered and cross-cultural.

Employees from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds bring distinct world views, values, and sensitivities. Without that diversity of perspective, a global travel business risks missing critical cultural insights — from menu design to gender-sensitive room layouts — that directly shape the guest experience.

Diversity is not optional; it is essential to competing at the highest level. A workforce that mirrors the world’s cultural mosaic enables brands to anticipate guest needs, avoid costly blind spots, and create authentic connections. In an industry built on service, diversity is not an adjunct to performance — it *is* performance.”

The Leadership Gap: Women Still Missing in Hospitality C-Suites

Only 7% of hospitality C-suite roles are held by women — a glaring reminder that inclusion is far from achieved. Without diverse leadership at the top, DEI risks being a box-checking exercise rather than a driver of systemic change.



Many Roles That Represent a Path to Leadership Are Still Largely Male-Dominated



Hannah DeMaio

Vice President, Brand Strategy, Women
Leading Travel & Hospitality

“A big part of the problem is that women are often in roles like customer service or HR, which don’t usually lead to executive positions.

Meanwhile, the paths to the top like tech, finance, and product are still dominated by men. Bias in promotions, lack of strong sponsors, and inflexible work setups all add up.

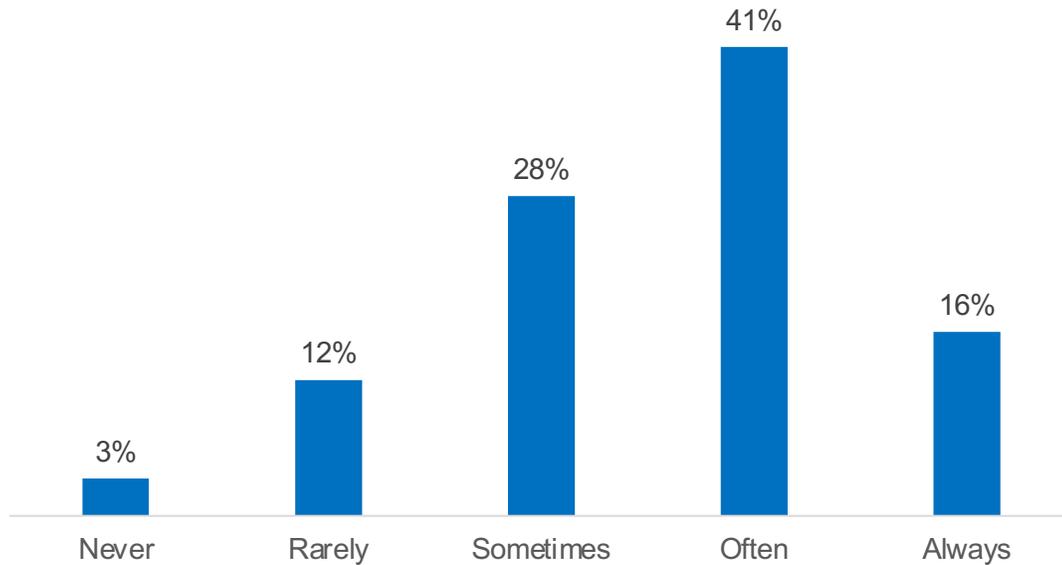
Even though women are showing up in big numbers, they’re still missing from the rooms where decisions are made.”

Local Hiring: Promises Outpace Practice

Employees value local hiring and community engagement, but most companies only deliver these practices inconsistently. This creates a perception gap, where organizations talk about community support but struggle to embed it into day-to-day operations.

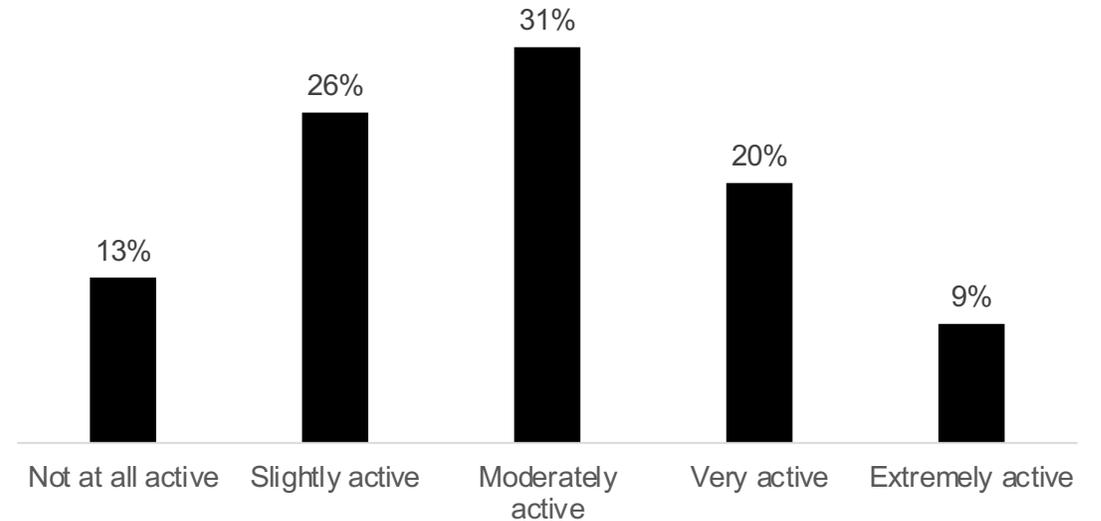
Most Employers Hire Locally, But Few Always Do

Frequency of local hiring reported by employees
(% of travel employees)



Community Engagement Is Common, But Few Companies Are Extremely Active

Level of community engagement reported by employees
(% of travel employees)



LHS: How often does your organization hire talent from the local community in areas where it operates?

RHS: How actively does your organization participate in community engagement initiatives (e.g. partnerships with local schools, sponsoring events, sourcing local vendors)?

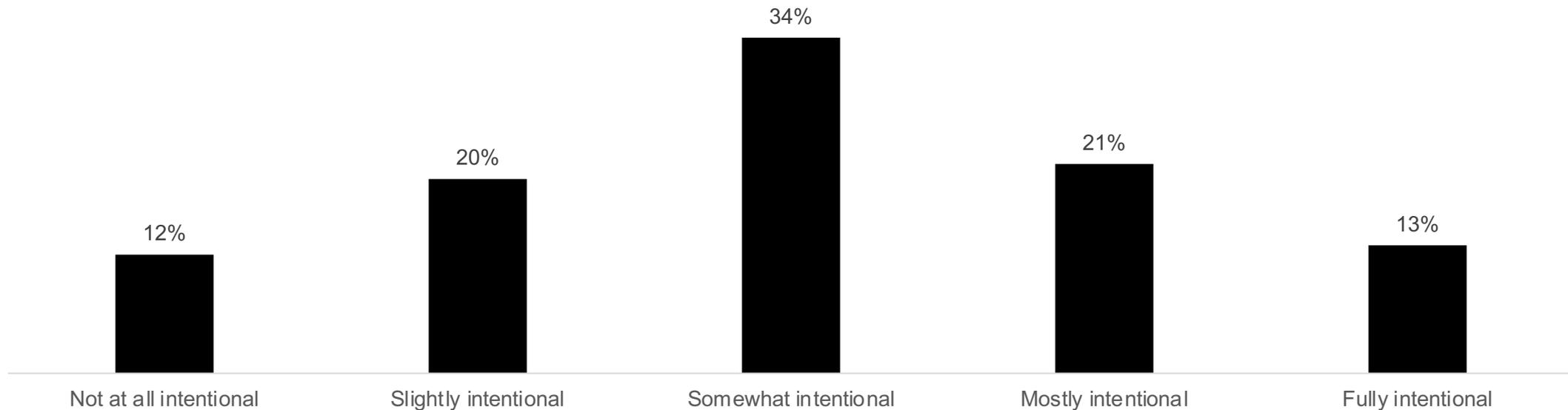
Source: Skift Research survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Community Commitment: Still an Afterthought

Strategies to reduce negative community impacts remain weak and unintentional. Without deliberate investment in local talent pipelines and cultural sensitivity, companies risk fueling resentment in the very destinations they rely on.

Most Organizations Take Only a Moderate Approach to Limiting Negative Community Impacts

Intentionality of workforce strategies to reduce community impacts reported by employees
(% of travel employees)



How intentionally does your organization shape its workforce development and hiring strategies to reduce negative community impacts (e.g. overtourism, displacement, local resentment) in the destinations where it operates? Note: This includes practices like hiring local talent, reducing reliance on imported labor, ensuring cultural sensitivity, and supporting local capacity-building.

Source: Skift Research survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

DIVERSITY IS NOT OPTIONAL IN TRAVEL

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

DEI is recognized, but execution lags

Most employers claim to have mature DEI strategies, and employees say it matters deeply — yet action is inconsistent and often surface-level.

Leadership diversity is still missing

With only 7% of hospitality C-suites held by women, the industry's leadership remains far from representative, undermining the credibility of DEI commitments.

Local hiring promises outpace practice

Employees value community engagement, but companies rarely deliver consistently, creating a trust gap between rhetoric and reality.

Community impact strategies remain weak

Without intentional investment in local talent and cultural sensitivity, travel businesses risk fueling resentment in the destinations they depend on.

In travel, diversity is not optional — it's a business imperative

Because travel is inherently global and human-centered, lack of diversity isn't just a social shortfall, it's a competitive disadvantage.

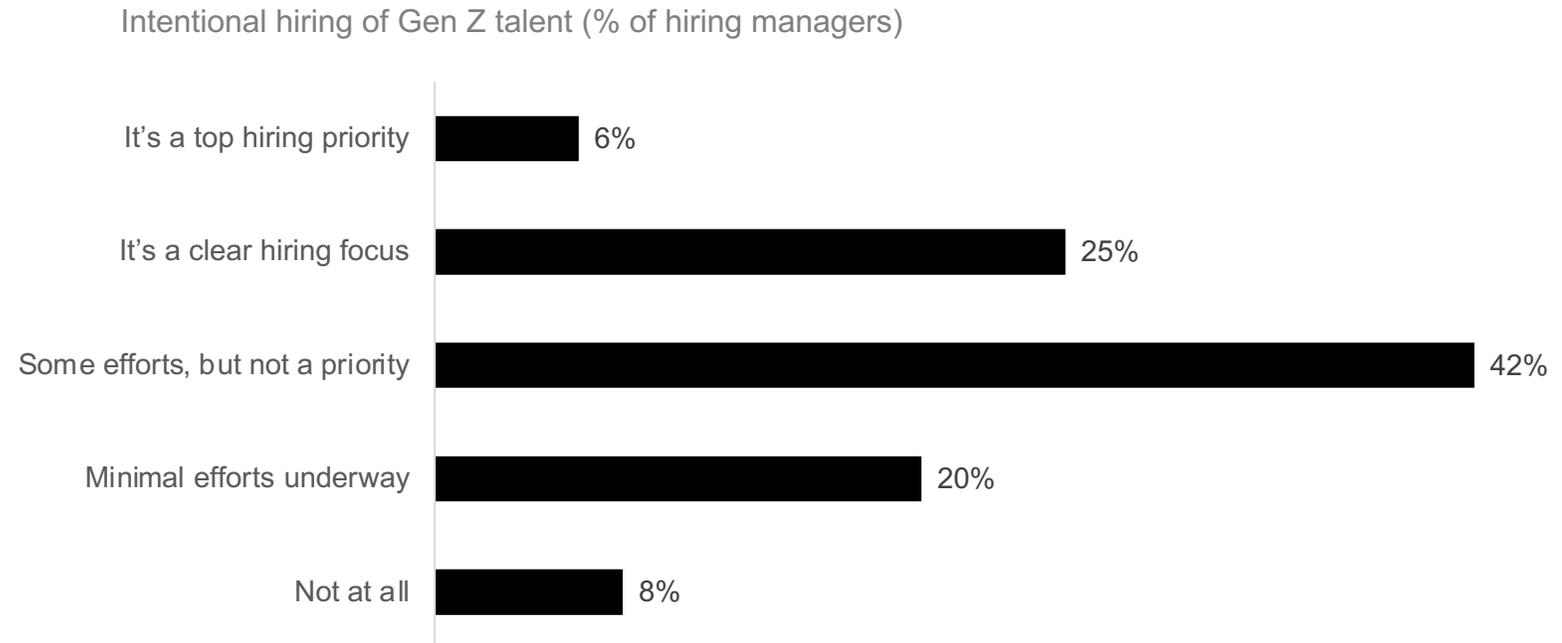
The background features a light blue field with abstract, flowing shapes in dark blue and bright yellow. Scattered throughout are simple line-art icons of hands and paper airplanes. The text is centered on the right side of the image.

GEN Z AND TRAVEL'S FUTURE WORKFORCE

Are You Ready for the Next Gen of Talent?

Gen Z is entering the workforce in large numbers, yet not enough travel employers are making them a hiring priority. This lack of intentionality risks a future labor crunch, as the industry overlooks the very generation that will shape its long-term workforce.

While Nearly One-Third of Hiring Managers Prioritize Gen Z Recruitment, Most Efforts Remain Limited



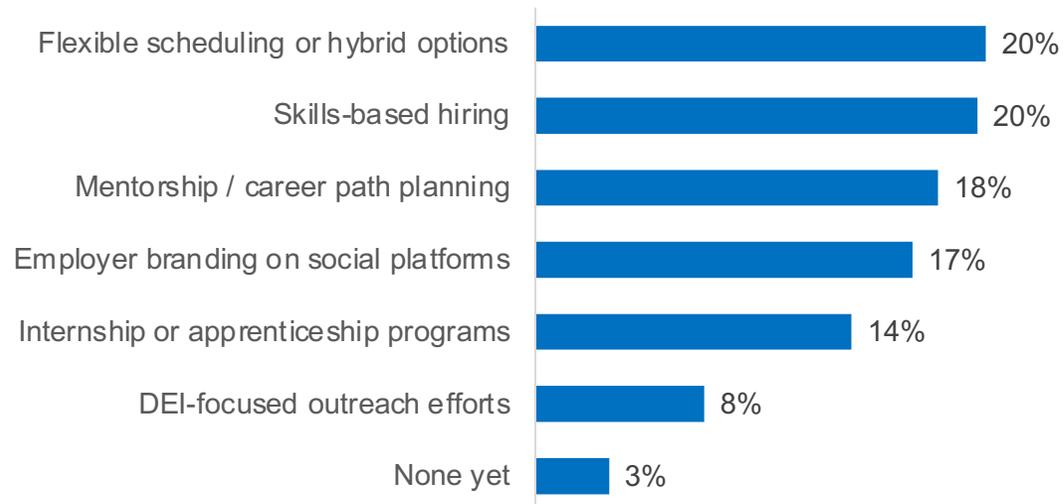
To what extent is your organization intentionally hiring (or planning to hire) more Gen Z talent (born 1997–2005, currently aged 18–28)? (Note: This focuses on Gen Z candidates of working age.)
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Culture Clash: The Mismatch Between Gen Z Priorities and Employer Practices

Gen Z wants flexibility, values-driven work, and clear advancement opportunities — but most employers emphasize only flexibility. This mismatch suggests companies are failing to leverage what makes Gen Z tick, leaving untapped potential on the table.

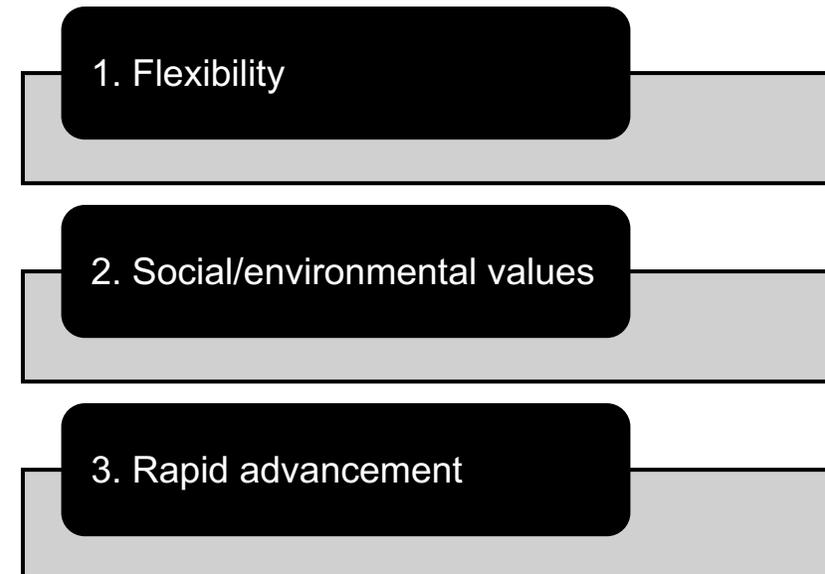
Hybrid Options and Skills-Based Hiring Lead Efforts to Attract Young Talent

Gen Z-focused hiring strategies in travel sector
(% of hiring managers)



Flexibility Tops Gen Z Priorities, Followed by Values and Advancement

Top 3 Gen Z candidate priorities



LHS: Which Gen Z-focused hiring strategies have you used? (Select all that apply). RHS: What do Gen Z candidates value most from employers, based on your experience? (Top 3)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

What Gen Z Tells Us: Flexibility, Autonomy, Career Growth



Dustin Abney
CEO, Portoro

“I would say that Gen Z tends to **prioritize flexibility, autonomy, and a clear career path**. When we speak with candidates from this group across various roles, a common priority is the ability to work from home or adopt a hybrid schedule.

Flexibility also extends to time off — understanding whether they’ll have **nights or weekends free is important, especially in a sector like hospitality** that often operates around the clock.

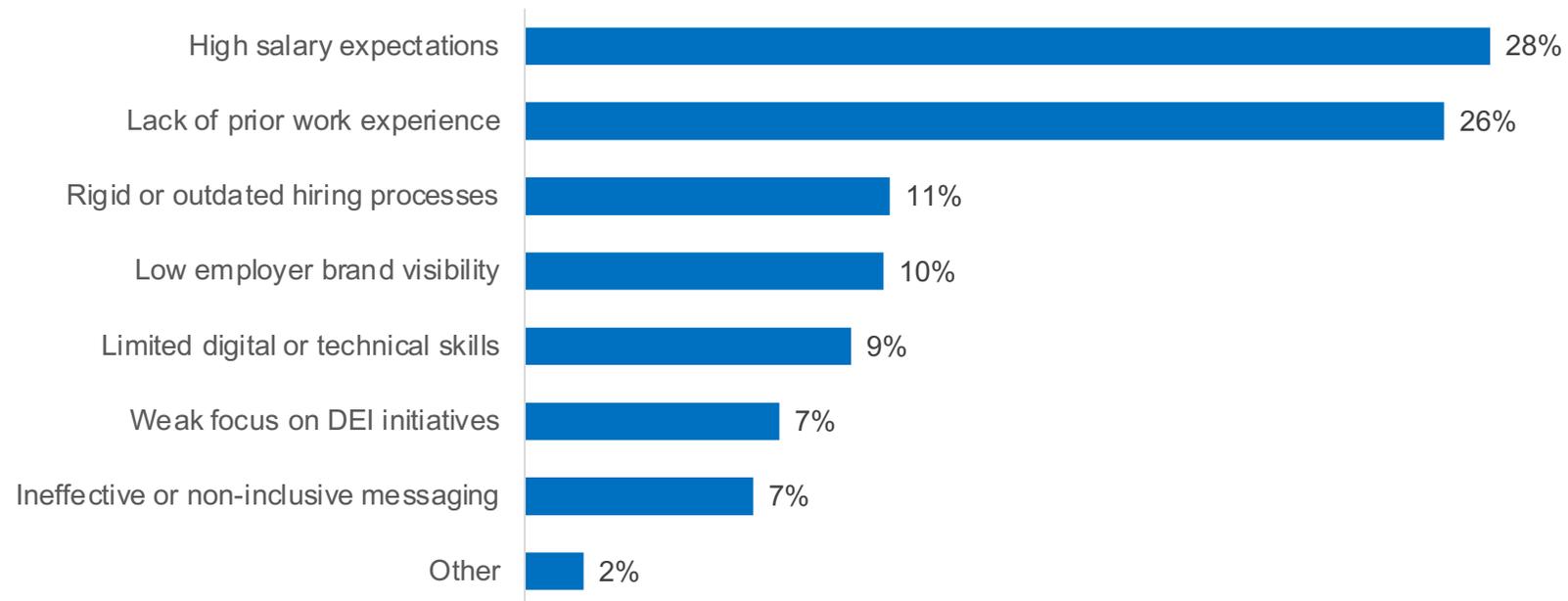
Career development is another major focus. Many **want to know what skills they’ll build in the role and what future positions they can work toward**. These topics — **flexibility, work-life balance, and growth opportunities** — tend to dominate our conversations with them.”

The Disconnect: Employers and Gen Z at Odds

Employers cite pay demands and lack of experience as barriers to hiring Gen Z. The result is a standoff: young talent feels undervalued, while employers see them as unprepared — creating a disconnect that slows generational renewal in travel.

Compensation and Experience Are the Biggest Obstacles to Hiring Gen Z

Barriers to hiring Gen Z talent (% of hiring managers)



What are the biggest barriers to hiring Gen Z candidates? (Select up to three.)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Gen Z at Work: Beyond the Stereotypes

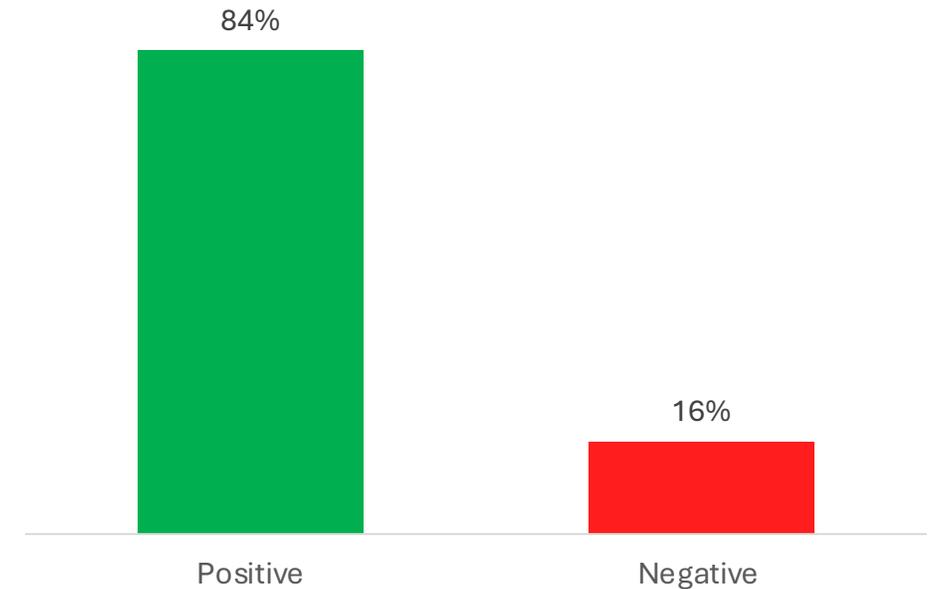
Top Themes Around Attracting and Retaining Gen Z Talent

Extracted from open-ended responses and ranked by frequency

1. Flexibility and work–life balance
2. Career growth and purpose
3. Caution around generational stereotypes
4. Balancing fresh ideas with experienced talent
5. Cultural and behavioral shifts pose challenges
6. Pay, benefits, and values still matter

Employers Mostly See Positives in Attracting Gen Z Talent

“What has your experience been like in attracting and retaining Gen Z candidates?”
(Sentiment analysis of open-ended responses)



Experts Urge: Treat Employees as Individuals, Regardless of Generation



Craig Cochran

Chief People Officer, Minor Hotels

“I’ve read a lot about generational talent differences, and I don’t buy into it at all. People are people and socio-economic background has a far greater impact on career aspirations, pace of progression, and priorities than the year you were born.

I think the whole idea of defining people by their generational label is not only oversimplified but potentially dangerous.

For me, the key is to treat every employee as an individual. Generational labels don’t tell you how someone will behave or what they value.”

FUTURE WORKFORCE IS AT RISK

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Gen Z is entering the workforce — but not being prioritized

Despite being the largest wave of new talent, few travel employers intentionally target Gen Z, risking a future labor crunch.

Flexibility alone won't win them

Gen Z values flexibility, but they also want purpose, career growth, and autonomy. Employers focusing only on schedules are missing the bigger picture.

A disconnect is slowing renewal

Employers see Gen Z as inexperienced and demanding; Gen Z sees the industry as undervaluing their potential. This standoff blocks generational renewal.

Generational stereotypes won't solve it

Leaders warn against boxing Gen Z into clichés — they want to be treated as individuals, with clear pathways and respect for their values.

The future workforce is already here

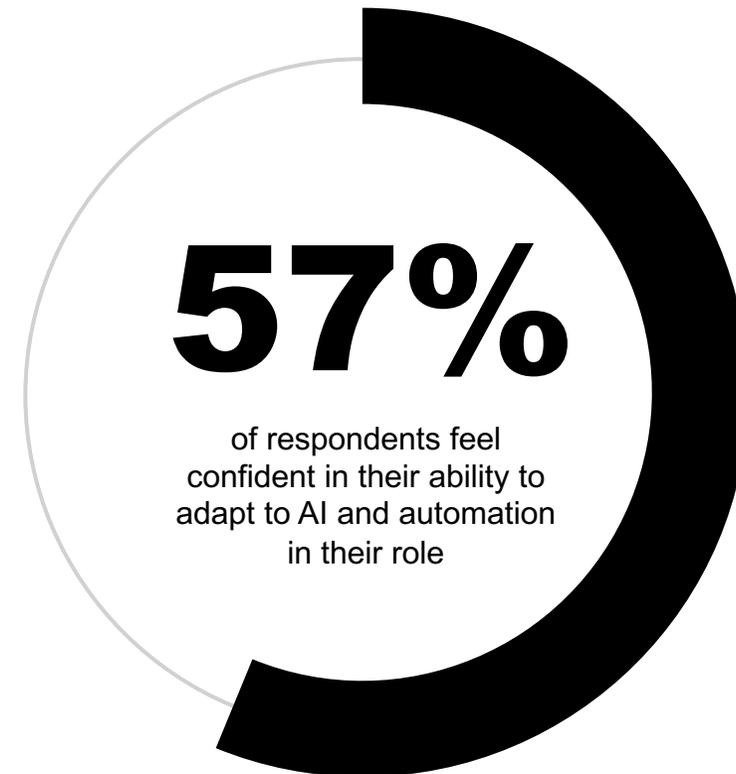
Ignoring Gen Z today means the industry will struggle tomorrow. Travel must adapt its hiring and retention strategies now or risk losing an entire generation of talent.

The background features a light blue field with several thick, dark blue wavy lines that meander across the space. Interspersed among these lines are bright yellow curved shapes. Scattered throughout the composition are stylized white hands with dark outlines, some appearing to hold or interact with the blue lines. Additionally, several simple black paper airplane icons are positioned at various points, suggesting movement or direction. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and dynamic.

TECH SKILLS AND AN AI-READY WORKFORCE

AI Readiness: Workers Are Ready, Leaders Lag

More than half of employees feel confident adapting to AI, yet fewer than half of employers have a clear adoption strategy. This mismatch shows that employees are ready for change — but organizations risk falling behind.

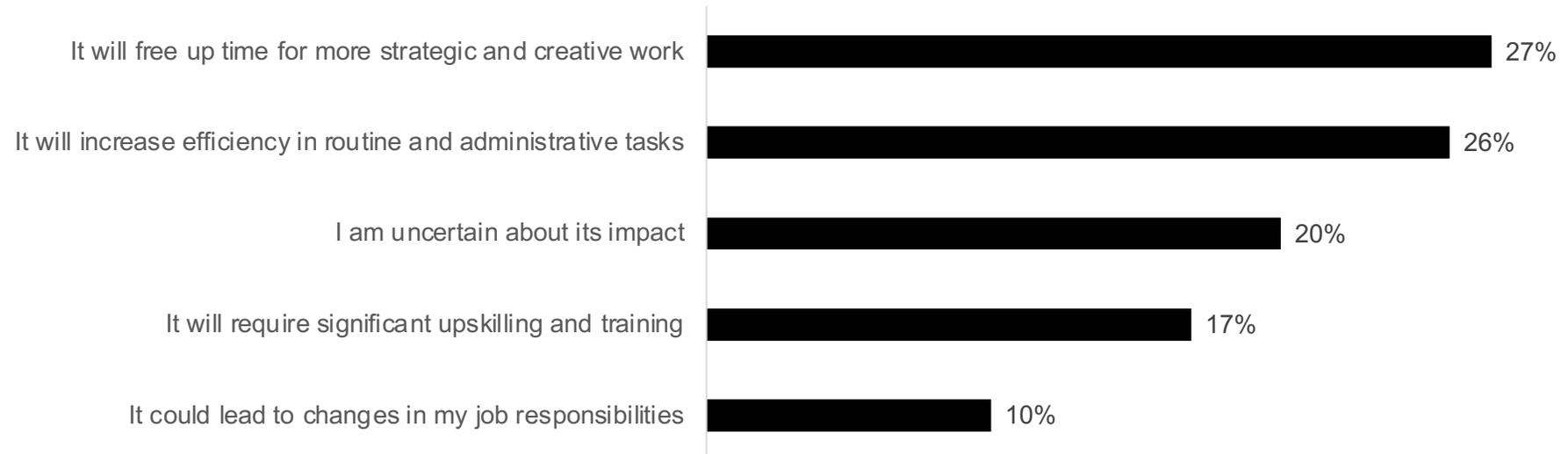


AI Promises Efficiency, But Trust Gaps Remain

Most employees see AI as a tool to boost efficiency, yet uncertainty lingers about its real-world impact. Until trust in reliability and fairness is built, enthusiasm will remain cautious rather than transformative.

Employees See Efficiency and Time Savings as the Main Benefits, Although One in Five Remain Uncertain About Its Impact

Primary expectations from AI adoption (% of travel employees)



What is your primary expectation regarding the adoption of AI in your role? Select one option.

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

Preparing for AI: Upskilling and Buy-In



Steve Hafner
CEO, Kayak

“Part of the reason we encourage three days a week in the office is that it’s much easier to **learn from one another in person**.

For example, if someone is brainstorming brand names for a new feature, sitting side by side **allows them to collaborate** on prompt engineering **in real time**.

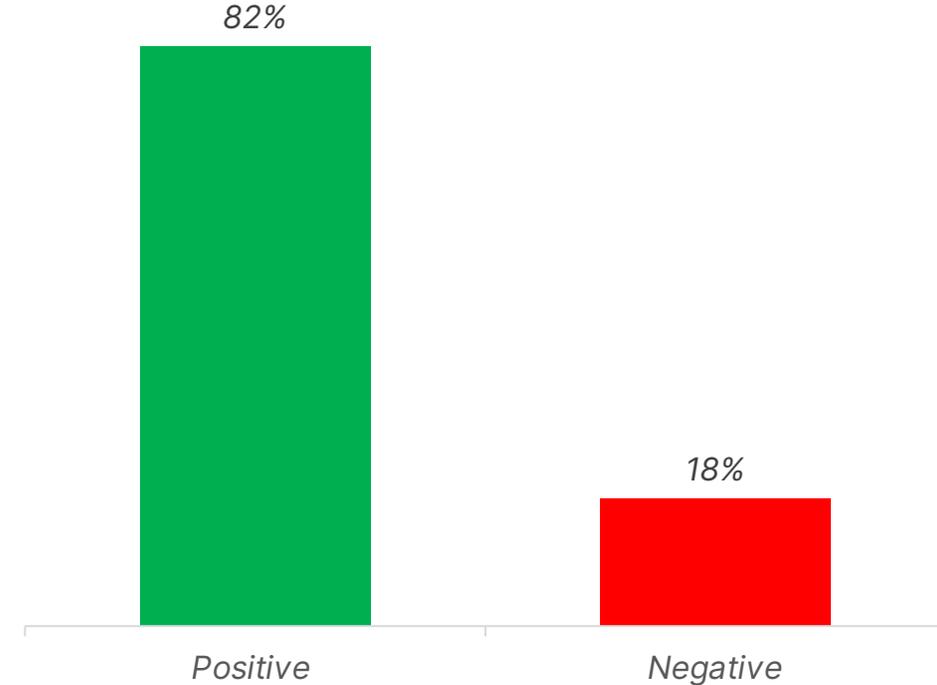
AI doesn’t replace the creative process, but it takes you five steps ahead, so you can spend more time on higher-value ideas instead of grunt work.”

AI Optimism: A Tool, Not a Threat

Travel workers are broadly optimistic about AI, seeing it as a way to eliminate mundane tasks and unlock more meaningful work. But concerns about job security and environmental impact remain, signaling the need for transparent communication around AI adoption.

Positive Sentiment on AI in Work

“How do you think the use of AI might change the way you work, positively or negatively?”
(Sentiment analysis of open-ended responses)



How do you think the use of AI might change the way you work, positively or negatively?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225) and survey of travel employees and job seekers (n = 320), August 2025.

AI: The Defining Skill for Future Business Success



Michael Friedman
CEO, The Simple Life Hospitality

“For us, **AI is going to be critical**. We’re moving to a property management system that’s more AI-driven and will be providing **specialized training** for each staff member on how to use AI in their role.

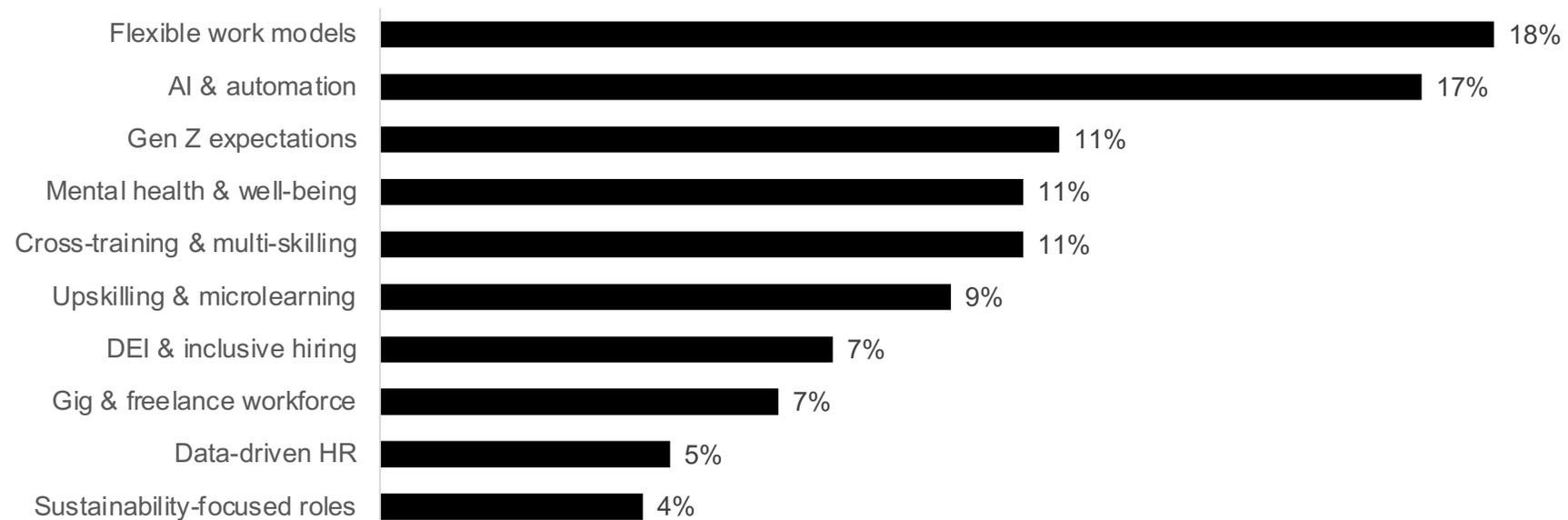
That learning process — adopting AI and **equipping people to work with it** — **is going to be a major focus** for our company and, I believe, for the industry as a whole.”

Future Formula: Adaptability + AI = Workforce Transformation

A mix of workforce trends (like Gen Z expectations, well-being, DEI) and innovations (such as AI, automation, and data-driven HR) are set to redefine hospitality talent over the next five years. In this in-person industry, flexibility means adaptive schedules, roles, and skills — not remote work.

Adaptable Work Models and AI Seen as Top Talent Shapers

Percentage of hiring managers pointing to trends and innovations shaping talent over the next five years



What workforce innovation or trend do you think will most shape hospitality talent in the next five years? (Select top three.)

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Tech Adoption Should Free Up Staff to Focus on High Value Tasks and Customer Engagement



Marilyn Markham

Vice President AI and Automation
Strategy, American Express Global
Business Travel

“In travel, you have all these systems that don’t talk to each other.

Humans can sometimes feel like they’re having to spend time acting as ‘middleware’ that call on the various applications and transfer results from one over to the next.

We want to free our teams to focused on complex customer queries, and on more valuable tasks.”

AI, System Integration and Cybersecurity Will Define the Next Wave of Talent Needs

The hospitality industry is entering a tech-driven phase where success depends on hiring or training for technical integration, AI fluency, cybersecurity, and change management. These aren't just "nice to have" roles — they'll be core to competitive advantage and operational stability.

System Integration

"Looking ahead, as more technology is adopted — whether that's integrating systems with the PMS, switching to a new PMS, or leveraging AI — it will be increasingly important to have someone technical to implement and manage these tools. This need isn't just at the corporate level; local property managers adopting more technology will likely require similar expertise."

- Dustin Abney, CEO, Portoro

Artificial Intelligence

"For us, AI is going to be critical. We're moving to a PMS that's more AI-driven and will be providing specialized training for each staff member on how to use AI in their role."

- Michael Friedman, CEO, The Simple Life Hospitality

AI Manager, Cybersecurity and People Engagement

"Over the next few years, I see AI-related skills, roles such as AI Manager or Lead Agent, as well as cybersecurity and people engagement-focused roles becoming increasingly important."

- Adolfo Penzato, Head of People – EMEA, Intrepid

What new skills or roles do you think will be most important to your business over the next few years?

Note: PMS = project management system. Source: Skift Research, direct interviews with executives in the travel industry, September 2025.

Tech Adoption as a Workforce Enabler, Not a Replacement

AI and other tech advancements should enhance — not replace — travel jobs, pushing staff toward guest-facing, tech-enabled roles that demand digital fluency and adaptability. The real risks lie in culture and change management, with retention hinging more on workplace policies than automation.

1. AI Can Enhance Human-Centric Approaches

Across travel, but particularly in sectors such as hospitality that emphasize service, tech adoption can free up employees to focus more on the human touch.

2. Change Management and Culture Shift Are Critical

Successful adoption depends on workforce alignment and communication. Travel businesses need a cultural shift that embeds technology into both traveler and employee experiences, fostering openness to change, thoughtful design of staff-tech interactions, and a willingness to experiment.

3. Tech Adoption Should Empower Employees

While there is some pressure on employees to keep up with tech advancements, doing so future-proofs their careers and enables them to develop new skillsets.

4. Technology Empowers But Raises Skill Threshold

In order to thrive in this new landscape, employees must be digitally literate, data-savvy, and adaptable to new tools. Tech upskilling of employees should track rising traveler tech adoption and increased expectations around tech solutions.

AI Can Liberate Staff from Manual Tasks While Empowering Staff to Make Final Decisions



Naveen Manga

Global Chief Information Officer, Marriott

“This technology is now getting ready for general deployment. So, essentially, [taking hours of manual labor](#) and heads-down work that the associates do, and [in a fraction of a second, 1.2 million rooms can be assigned](#).

Now, where the human comes into the loop is, is still [giving the power to the front desk associate to override that and make a decision on the fly](#), but then the feedback loop goes back into the machine learning algorithm.

So, to me, I think that’s a [great example of how you can grow AI experiments to scale and then get the benefits out of it.](#)”

Technology Is a Solution, But Only Through Thoughtful Strategic Adoption



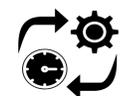
Training, Coaching, and Education

Nearly all respondents emphasized structured learning, from formal training sessions and LinkedIn Learning access to ongoing AI coaching programs tailored by role. This reflects a strong recognition that workforce readiness hinges on continuous upskilling.



Operational Integration of AI

Companies are introducing AI in low-risk, efficiency-driven tasks (email drafting, revenue management, content creation) before expanding into core operations, signaling a measured, test-and-learn adoption path.



Cultural Adoption and Change Management

Leaders noted generational differences in openness to AI, addressing resistance through coaching, group experimentation, and emphasizing AI as a complement, not a replacement for human work.



Strategic Restructuring and Workforce Design

Some executives anticipate an AI-driven future, where fewer but higher-paid and more meaningful jobs replace large, repetitive workforces, framing automation as both inevitable and positive.



Balanced Use of AI

Leaders stressed keeping guest- and client-facing interactions as human-led, reserving AI for back-end processes to protect service quality and premium positioning. They also cautioned against overhyping AI, framing it as a task optimizer, rather than a replacement for judgment, empathy, and complex human decision-making.

AI LITERACY IS THE NEW CURRENCY

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Enthusiasm for AI, but strategy lags

Over half of employees feel confident adapting to AI, yet fewer than half of organizations have a clear adoption plan — leaving a leadership gap.

AI is seen as a tool, not a threat

Employees expect AI to remove mundane tasks and create space for meaningful work, but concerns over fairness, job security, and impact remain.

Trust will set the pace

Without transparency and communication, optimism may turn into resistance, slowing AI's transformative potential.

Upskilling is the missing link

AI literacy is emerging as a defining skill, but structured training programs are limited, forcing employees to self-navigate.

Future workforce = adaptable + AI-enabled

Hiring managers agree: adaptability and AI fluency will shape hospitality talent. The winners will be those who invest now in skills and trust-building.

The background features a light blue field with several thick, wavy lines in two shades of blue and one in yellow. These lines curve and loop across the frame. Interspersed among these lines are stylized white hands with black outlines, some appearing to hold or guide the paths. Additionally, several simple line-art paper airplanes are scattered throughout, some pointing towards the center and others towards the edges. The overall composition is dynamic and suggests movement and forward progress.

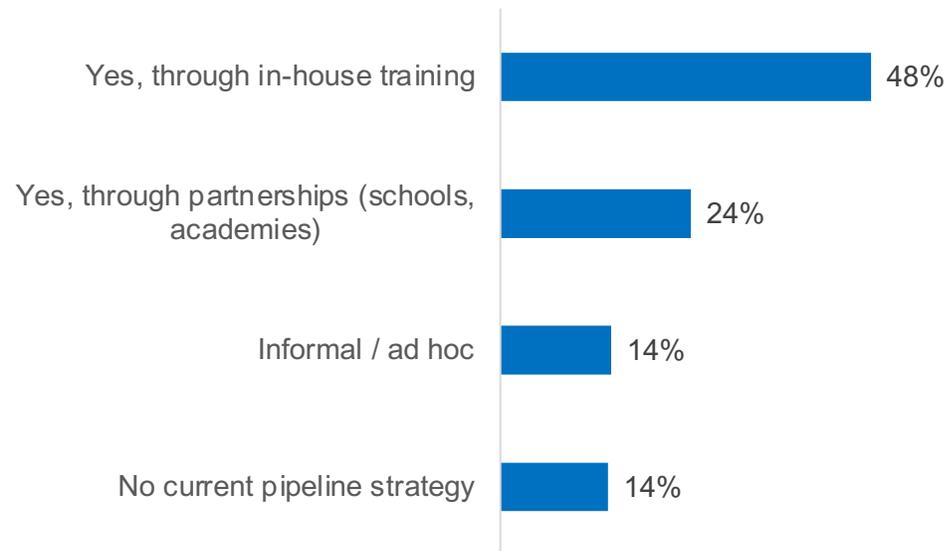
LOOKING
AHEAD

Future-Proofing Talent: Training, Tech, and Service Skills

Employers know the solution isn't just hiring more, but equipping staff with future-ready skills. Tech literacy, customer engagement, and structured training pipelines are increasingly seen as non-negotiables for competitiveness.

In-House Training and Partnerships Drive Talent Pipeline Development

Organizational strategies for building future talent
(% of hiring managers)



Top 5 Skills Seen by Hiring Managers as Most Critical for the Future of Hospitality

Extracted from open-ended responses
and ranked by frequency

1. AI and automation
2. Tech support / IT skills
3. Digital literacy
4. Customer service and human interaction skills
5. Sustainability roles

LHS: Does your organization have a structured pipeline or strategy to build future talent? RHS: What future skills or roles do you foresee becoming more critical in hospitality?

Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Leaders Should Focus on Bringing Talent on Board with Tech so it can Empower not Replace Them



Marilyn Markham

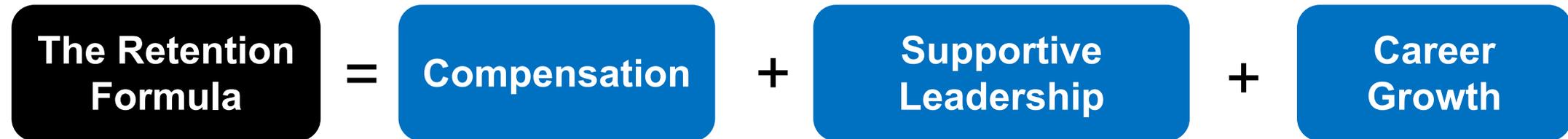
Vice President AI and Automation
Strategy, American Express Global
Business Travel

“I always say, *because you can doesn't mean you should*, and it's still in our hands as leaders to *decide whether we're replacing people or adding power to what they do*.

It takes a lot of town halls and meetings to bring people along [with a new tech initiative like AI]. *Sometimes it takes just giving them a taste and getting them a little addicted* and going, 'oh, this is amazing. It helps me.'”

The Retention Formula

Retention success comes from combining fair compensation, supportive leadership, and career growth opportunities. Companies that strike this balance see tangible improvements in loyalty and morale.



Attrition vs. Retention: Two Sides of the Same Coin

The same factors that drive attrition — pay, workload, growth — also power retention when addressed positively. This mirror effect shows employers already hold the levers; the challenge is whether they pull them effectively.

Top 5 Contributors to Attrition

“What do you think causes attrition within your department?”
(by frequency)

Low compensation

Limited growth

Workload and stressful conditions

Management and leadership issues

Expectation–reality gap

Top 5 Measures Taken to Retain Talent

“What’s working well in retaining talent?”
(by frequency)

Compensation and benefits

Growth and career development

Culture and work environment

Flexibility and work–life balance

Leadership and management support

Technological Investment, Flexibility, and Inclusion Will Be Critical in Shaping the Future of Travel



Hannah DeMaio

Vice President, Brand Strategy, Women
Leading Travel & Hospitality

“The **biggest drivers** will be **tech, flexibility, and inclusion**. As the industry goes more digital, companies will need tech talent and that means building inclusive teams to attract and keep that talent.

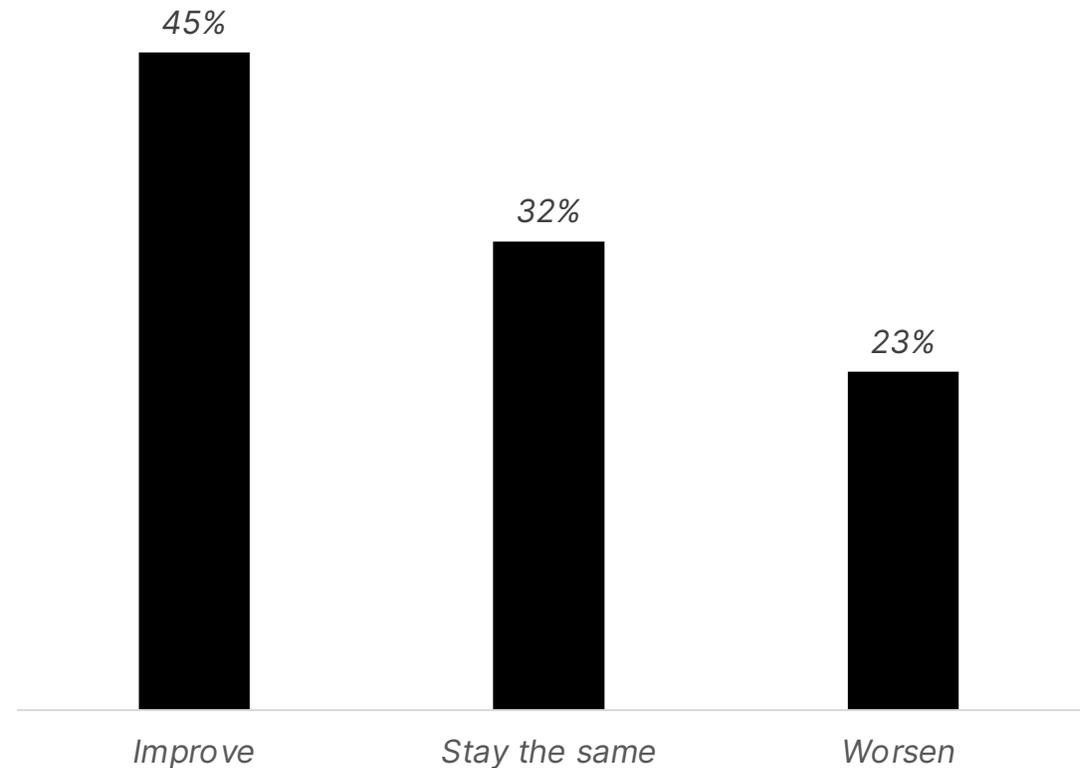
Flexibility will matter more than ever, **especially for women and caregivers**. Companies that **commit to diverse leadership** and **adapt to new ways of working** will have the edge.”

Employers Expect Change Ahead... But Brace for Uncertainty

Looking forward, managers are divided: some expect talent pressures to ease, others predict worsening conditions. This uncertainty underscores the need for flexible workforce strategies that can adapt quickly to shifts.

Most Expect Conditions to Improve; Only a Few See Them Worsening

Outlook on talent challenges, 12–18 months
(% of hiring managers)



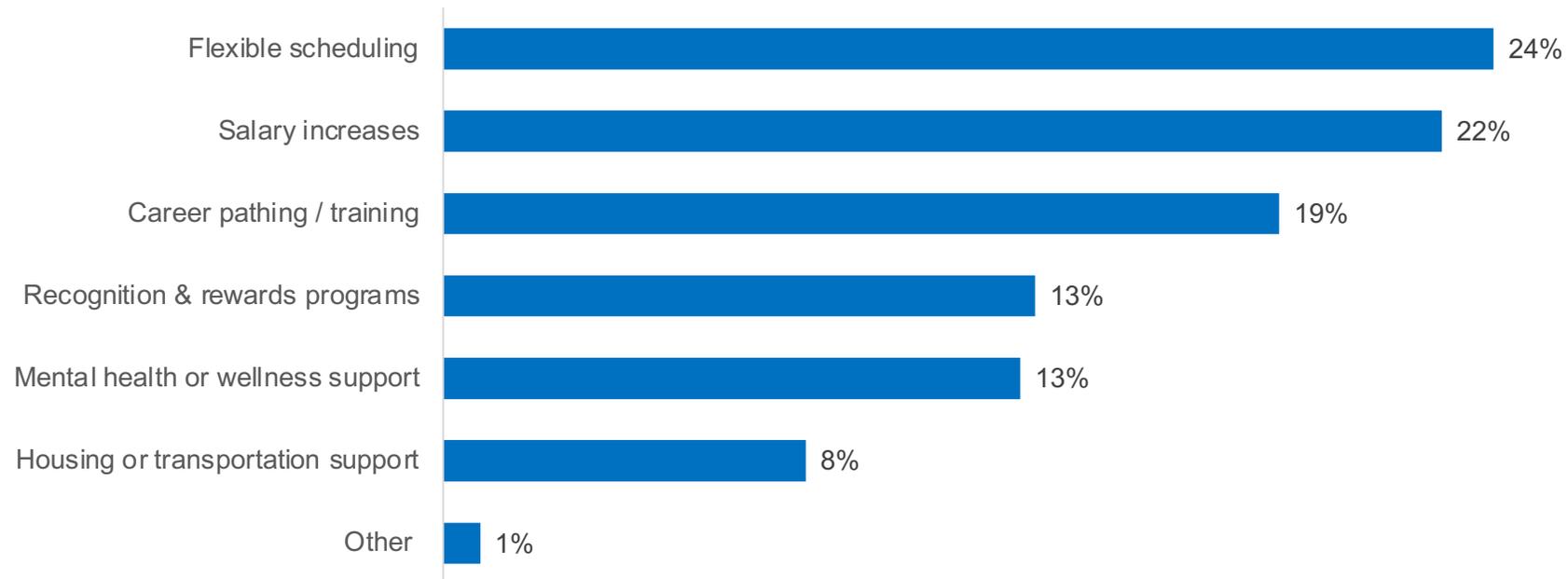
Do you believe the challenges in finding and keeping good talent will improve or worsen over the next 12–18 months?
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Rewriting the Talent Contract: Benefits That Stick

Employers are increasingly leaning on tangible benefits, from flexibility to recognition programs, to strengthen loyalty. The most effective organizations are those aligning benefits directly with worker expectations, creating a modern “talent contract”.

Flexible Scheduling and Pay Increases Lead Retention Efforts

Retention benefits and policies (% of hiring managers)



What benefits or policies have helped boost retention in your organization? (Select all that apply.)
Source: Skift Research survey of hiring managers across various travel industry sectors (n = 225), August 2025.

Culture and Values: The Real Retention Engine



Craig Cochran
Chief People Officer, Minor Hotels

“Ultimately, it comes back to [getting the basics right](#).

[Retention](#) often comes down to [psychology and culture](#).

If people [feel appreciated](#), [believe they're on the right career path](#), [have responsibilities suited to their life stage](#), enjoy the people they work with, and feel proud of their organization, they are far less likely to leave.

Even when people leave for higher pay, many return after realizing those intangible factors matter more. [Aligning culture, ways of working, and the right level of responsibility is more of an art than a science](#), but when it's right, retention follows.”

HIRE, RETAIN, ADAPT: THE NEW TRAVEL WORKFORCE EQUATION

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Future-proofing means more than hiring

Employers know the answer isn't just adding headcount — it's building structured pipelines and equipping staff with tech, service, and leadership skills.

Retention remains the tipping point

Half of employers report major retention struggles. Without stronger strategies, churn will erode growth, no matter how strong the hiring pipeline.

The same levers drive attrition and retention

Pay, workload, and career growth push people out when neglected — but pull them in when addressed. Employers already hold the levers; execution is the challenge.

There are no shortcuts — basics still matter most

Fair pay, good leadership, quality training, and strong values remain the foundation. Flashy recruitment campaigns can't compensate for weak fundamentals.

The future talent contract is shifting

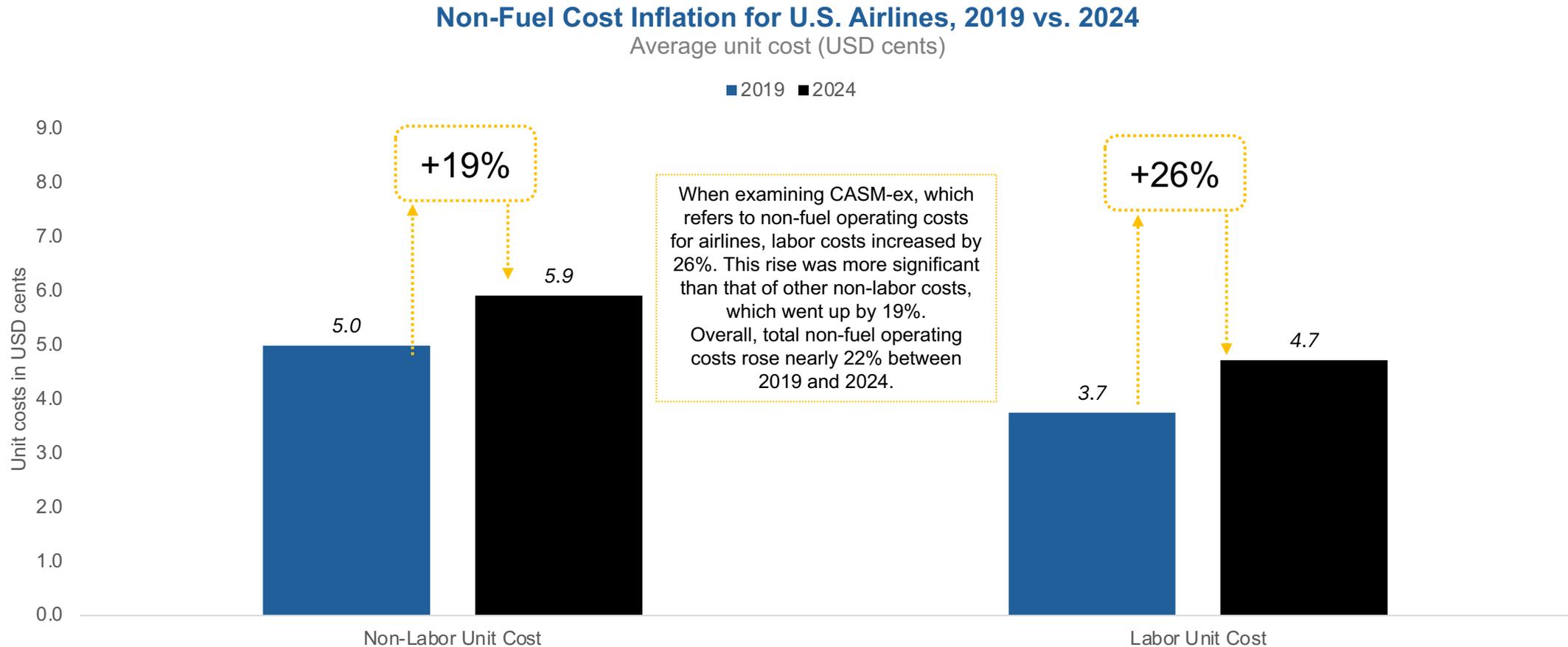
Employees expect benefits, flexibility, and culture that align with their lives and aspirations. Organizations that rewrite the contract around values and growth will keep their edge.

The background features a dark blue field with several thick, wavy, ribbon-like shapes in light blue and bright yellow. Scattered throughout are white line-art icons of paper airplanes, some pointing upwards and others downwards. The overall composition is dynamic and modern.

AIRLINES

Labor Cost Inflation Outpaces Total Cost

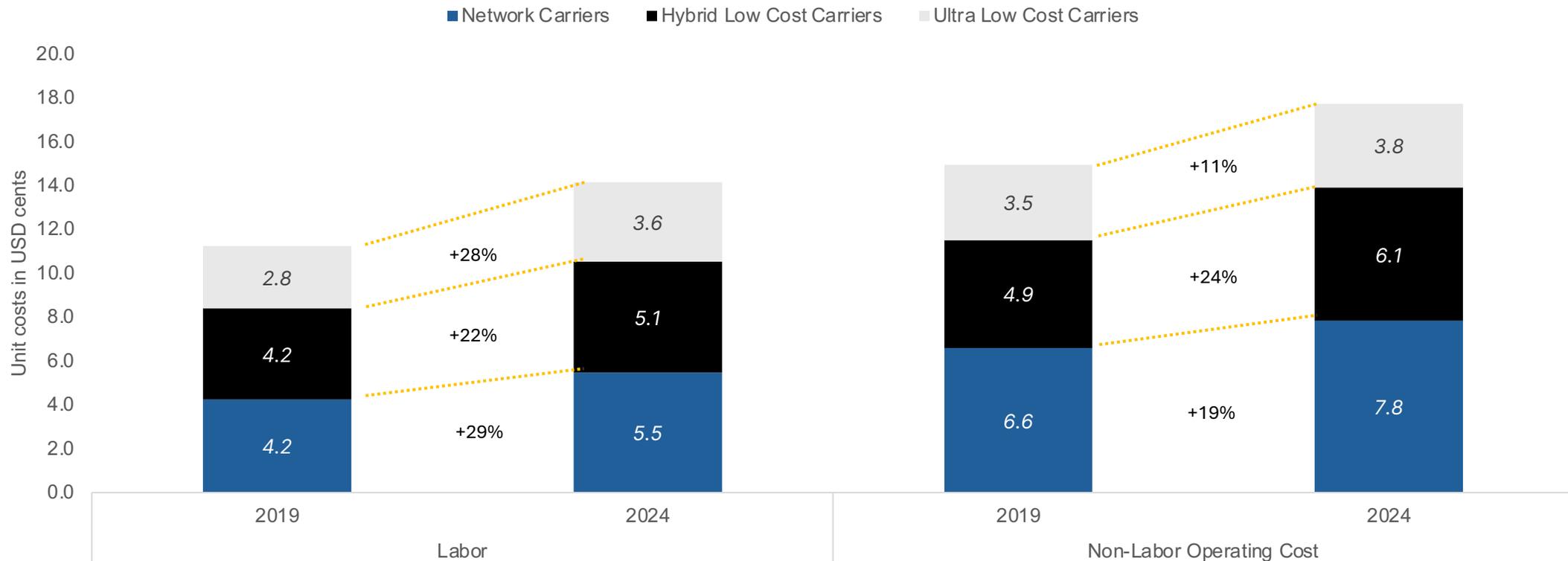
When examining CASM-ex, which refers to non-fuel operating costs for airlines, labor costs increased by 26%. This rise was more significant than that of other non-labor costs, which went up by 19%. Overall, total non-fuel operating costs rose nearly 22% between 2019 and 2024.



From Delta to Frontier, All U.S. Carriers Have Faced Challenges With High Labor Costs

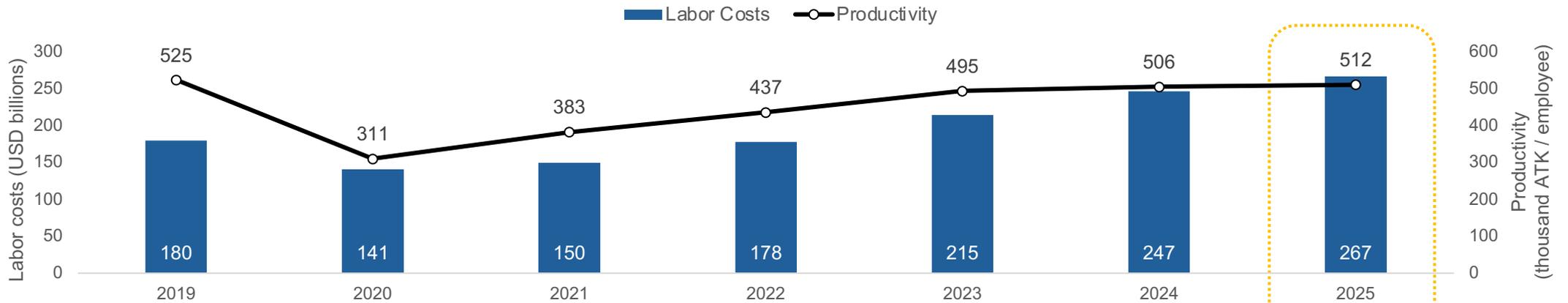
Cost Inflation (Labor vs. Non-Labor) for U.S. Carrier Groups, 2019 vs. 2024

Average unit costs (USD cents)

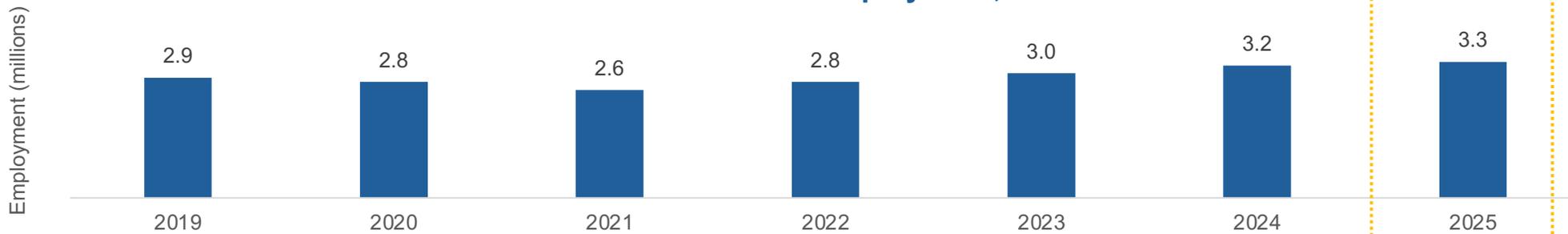


Labor Productivity Remains Below Pandemic Levels, Despite Record Employment and Costs

Global Labor Costs and Productivity, 2019–25



Total Global Airline Employment, 2019–25



AI in Airlines: Expect Labor Churn, Not Just Efficiency Gains

AI adoption is set to accelerate over the next 5 to 10 years in both frontline and back-office roles, with predictive and hyper-personalized tools becoming standard. This shift may increase turnover in routine jobs, while boosting demand for tech-savvy and strategic positions.

Impact of Technologies on Airline Functions

Technology ↓ / Dept →	Hard product (cabins, fleet)	Soft product (service, food)	Network and revenue management	Sales and marketing	Loyalty
Mobile apps	Low	High	Moderate	High	High
Biometrics	Moderate	High	Low	Low	Low
In-flight connectivity	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	Low
In-flight entertainment	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Artificial intelligence	Moderate	High	High	High	High

LABOR COSTS ARE A UNIVERSAL CHALLENGE FOR AIRLINES

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Labor cost inflation is climbing at a faster rate than total operating costs, having jumped 26% since 2019.

Mounting labor costs are universal across carrier classes, from major network carriers to ultra-low-cost carriers.

Despite these increasing employment costs, productivity is still below 2019 levels. If not addressed, this could pose a serious risk to the airline industries' return on its talent investments.

AI is expected to spread across both frontline and back-office roles, making predictive and hyper-personalized tools the norm.

Routine jobs may face higher turnover, while demand grows for more strategic and tech-skilled positions.

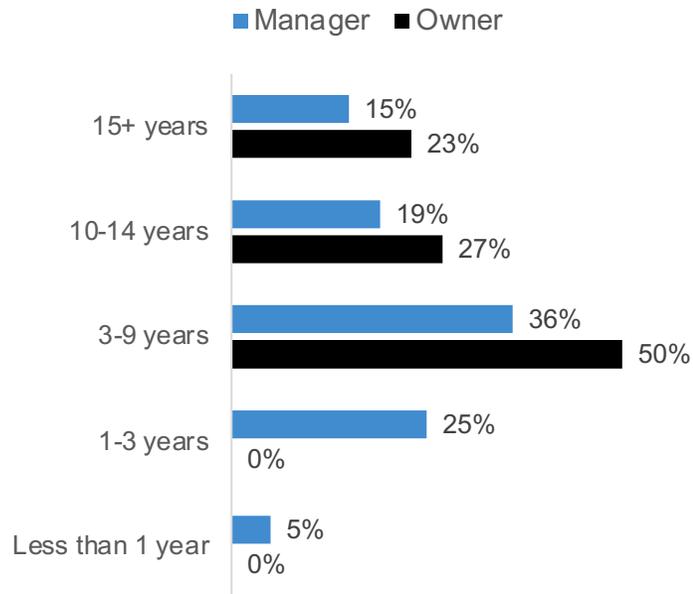
The background features a dark blue field with abstract, flowing shapes in various shades of blue and bright yellow. Interspersed among these shapes are white line-art icons of hands and paper airplanes, suggesting movement and communication. The overall aesthetic is modern and dynamic.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Recruitment and Retention Is the Most Common Pain Point for Hotel Managers

Most decision-makers in the accommodation industry (owners and managers) have 3–9 years of experience in the industry. When asked what their most common pain points are, recruitment and retention came out top for managers at 42%, but third for owners, after work-life balance and managing costs and profitability.

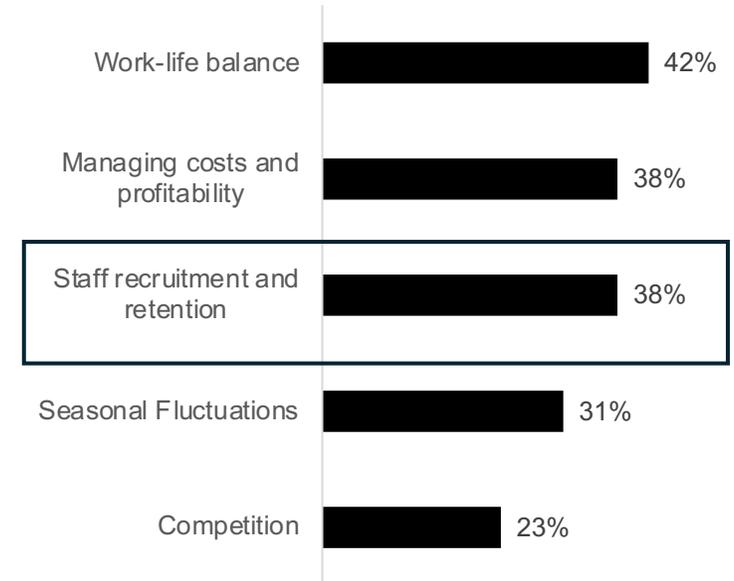
Accommodation Decision Makers:
Level of Experience



Most Common Manager Pain Points



Most Common Owner Pain Points



Source: Expert Market, Accommodation Industry Report 2025.

Survey of U.S.-based accommodation professionals (including establishments such as hotels, motels, campsites, etc.) at a manager level or above (n = 417), conducted in June 2024.

Retention and Recruitment Is the Top Challenge for Franchises and Professionals

Top Challenges for Independent Professionals



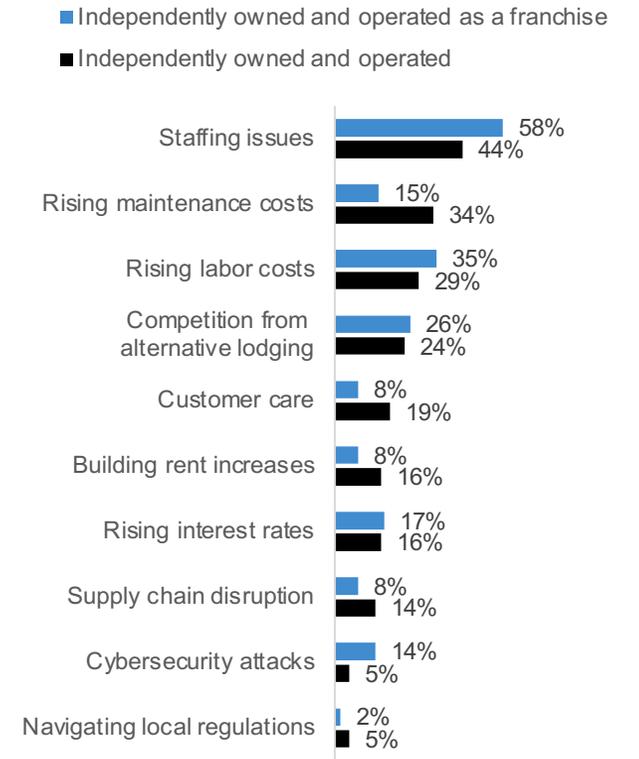
Top Challenges for Franchise Professionals



Areas of Investment Reduction Due to Rising Business Costs



Perceived Significant Operational Risks in Next 12 Months



Source: Expert Market, Accommodation Industry Report 2025.

Survey of U.S.-based accommodation professionals (including establishments such as hotels, motels, campsites, etc.) at a manager level or above (n = 417), conducted in June 2024.

The Average Number of Hotel Jobs in the U.S. Has Not Surpassed 2019 Levels

The number of jobs in the hotel industry have not recovered to 2019 levels. Wages and salaries paid, however, have well surpassed 2019, indicating that inflation has overtaken rate of job increases. The majority of the jobs comprise cleaning, maintenance, serving, and administrative roles. The American Hotel & Lodging Association projects the addition of 14,000 new hotel jobs in the U.S. in 2025. While the industry lost over 680,000 workers during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has added over 467,000 direct jobs over the past four years.

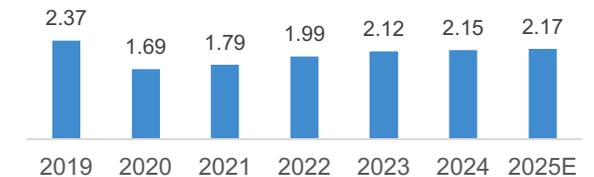
Total Accommodation Employees (May 2024, thousands)



Accommodation Annual Mean Wage (May 2024, thousands)



U.S. Hotels' Number of Jobs (Millions)



U.S. Hotels' Wages and Salaries Paid (USD billions)

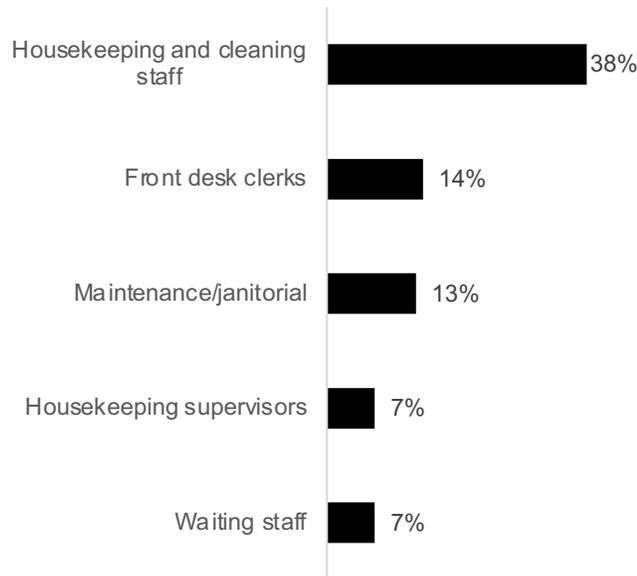


Housekeeping Staff Are the Hardest Roles for Hotels to Fill

Housekeeping and cleaning staff are the most difficult roles to fill in the accommodation sector. To ease staffing challenges, businesses report raising wages, offering training, introducing retention incentives, and expanding guest self-service options. Still, 27% of hotel professionals say they've taken no action. When asked about future changes, hoteliers predict relying more on apps, automated room amenities, and increasing the use of sustainable technologies. The use of AI chatbots is relatively low down the list.

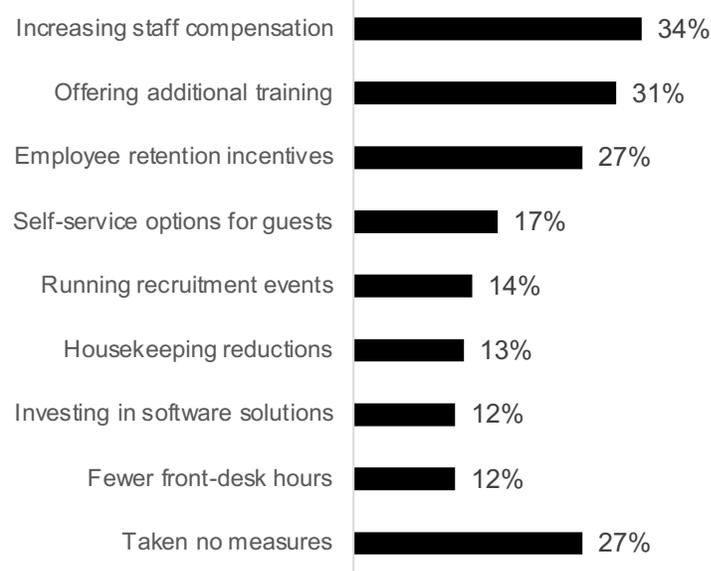
Hardest-to-Fill Roles:

“Which roles have been the hardest to fill at your establishment?”



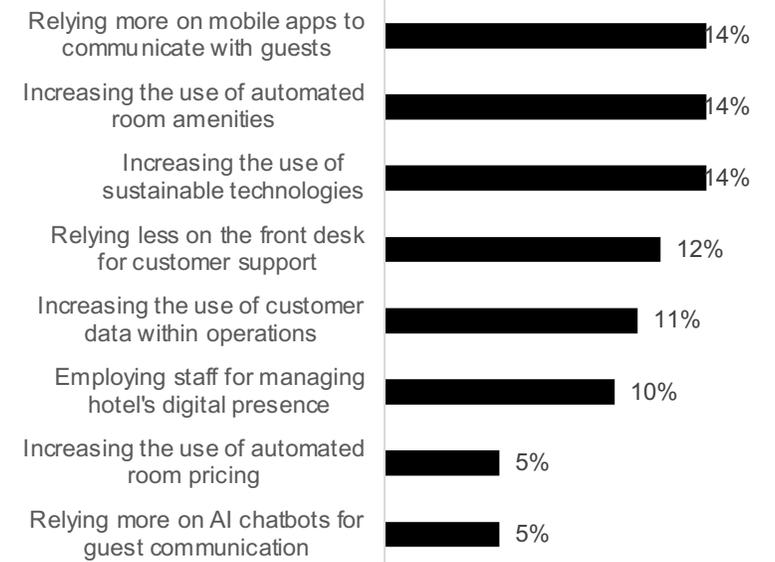
Measures to Alleviate Staffing Issues:

“Has your establishment taken any of the following measures to alleviate staffing issues?”



Changes in the Pipeline:

“Looking ahead to the next five years, which of the following changes do you expect your establishment to make?”



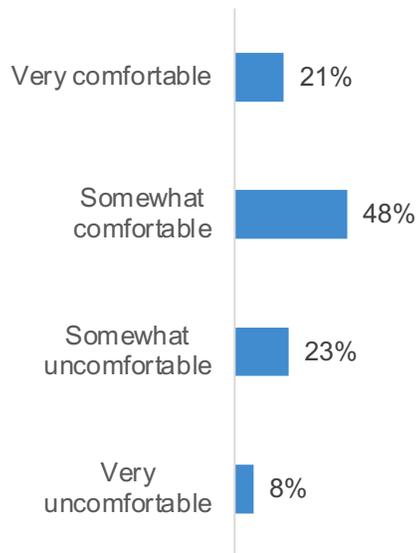
Source: Expert Market, Accommodation Industry Report 2025.

Survey of U.S.-based accommodation professionals (including establishments such as hotels, motels, campsites, etc.) at a manager level or above (n = 417), conducted in June 2024.

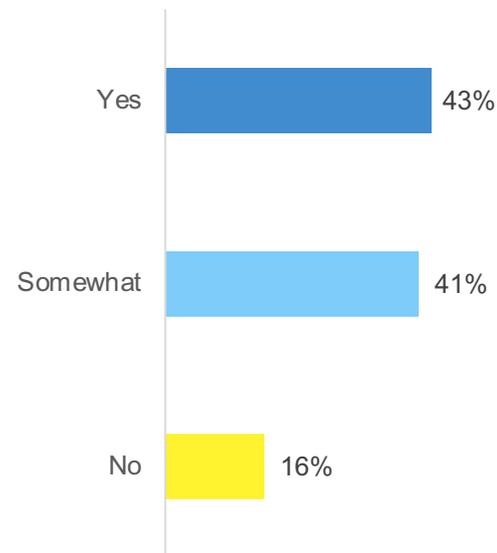
Hoteliers See AI as a Nascent Recruitment Tool, Though Concerns Remain

Concerns about AI persist. Over half (53%) worry about AI bias, understandable in a field as personal and nuanced as HR. Despite this, more than half of respondents already use AI in some aspect of their role, the highest rate across surveyed industries. When asked where AI could add the most value, 17% were unsure, but about one-third cited writing job descriptions.

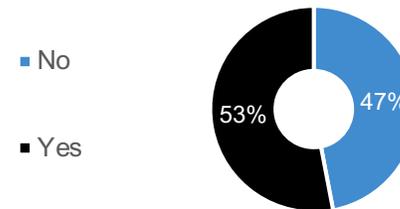
How comfortable are you with the idea of using AI in recruitment in any capacity?



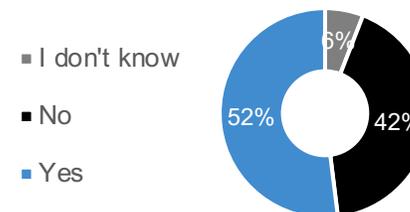
Do you feel you understand the possibilities and impacts of AI as it relates to recruitment?



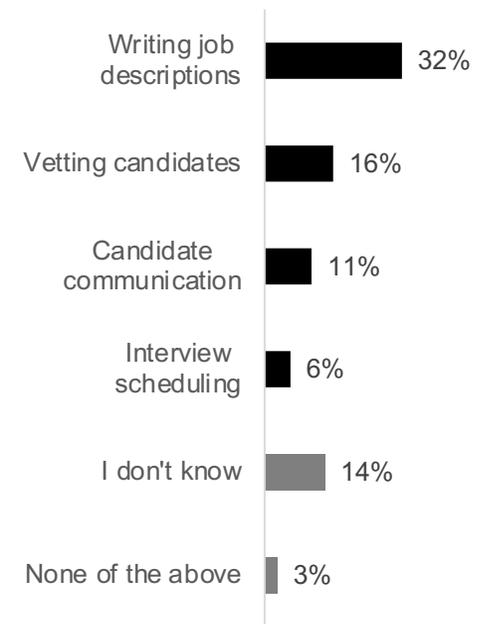
Do you have concerns about biases as it relates to AI in recruitment?



Do you use AI in any capacity in the hiring process right now?



In your opinion, where would AI be most useful in the hiring process (if at all)?



Source: Expert Market, Accommodation Industry Report 2025. Survey of U.S.-based accommodation professionals (including establishments such as hotels, motels, campsites, etc.) at a manager level or above (n = 417), conducted in June 2024. Hireology, The Future of Hospitality and Hiring, 2024.

Hotel Recruitment Needs to Evolve to Leverage New Opportunities

Recruitment must evolve

Employers are encouraged to broaden their reach, by tapping into adjacent industries, leveraging employee referrals, engaging in digital outreach, and building proactive talent pipelines before roles open up.

Speed and communication are key

A slow, impersonal hiring process often drives candidates away. Simplifying applications, using technology like video interviews wisely, and maintaining timely, respectful communication throughout the process are now non-negotiables.

Company culture matters more than ever

Successful employers foster supportive leadership, clear values, recognition programs, and real investment in training and employee well-being. Flexibility, mental health support, and work-life balance have become top candidate priorities.

Compensation and benefits must be competitive

Baseline pay is no longer enough. Benefits packages must include robust wellness programs, scheduling flexibility, career development funds, and meaningful perks such as bonuses and paid time off.

Retention is the new recruitment

Structured onboarding, regular feedback, stay interviews, and clear internal growth paths are crucial. Employees need to feel seen, heard, and appreciated to remain engaged and loyal.

“One of the biggest shifts is that modern property-management systems now handle the bureaucratic stuff. You don’t need employees with 10 years of data-entry experience — [hire for personality](#) and let tech take care of the paperwork [so your team can focus on guest happiness.](#)”

Matt Welle, CEO, Mews

“The hospitality sector has made significant strides in rebuilding its workforce and creating opportunities for career advancement, but [staffing shortages continue to present significant challenges](#). The good news is that hotels have never been more competitive, offering strong wages and expanded benefits and focusing on employee satisfaction.”

Rosanna Maietta, President and CEO, AHLA, 2025

HOTEL STAFFING STRATEGIES NEED TO EVOLVE

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Recruitment and retention are the primary pain points for hotel managers, across both franchise and independent hotels, with further challenges to come, predicted by hoteliers. Total employment has not fully recovered since the pandemic.

Demands on hotel staff are high, given the emphasis on service. Maintaining consistent quality is seen as a challenge.

While AI can help with back-of-house and repetitive admin tasks, it won't replace people. This is again due to the importance of service and human connection in hospitality.

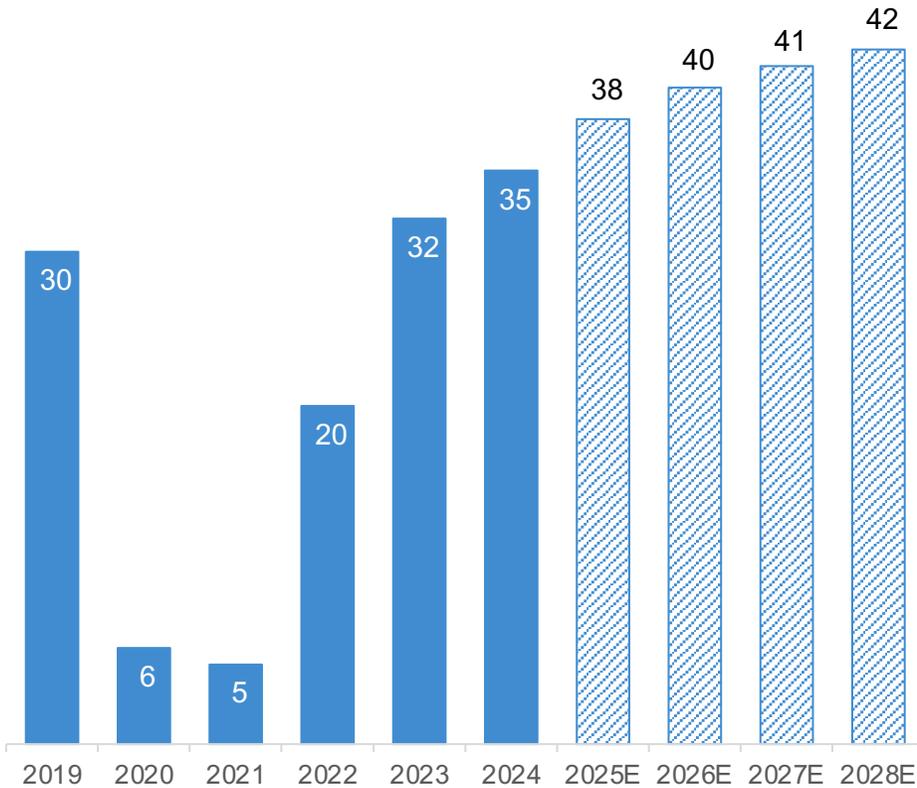
Hotel staffing needs to evolve, with greater emphasis on retention than recruitment, and more training and staff support structures.

The background is a dark blue field filled with abstract, organic shapes. There are several thick, wavy lines in various shades of blue and bright yellow. Interspersed among these lines are white line-art icons of hands and paper airplanes. The overall composition is dynamic and celebratory.

CRUISES

Growing Talent Requirement in the Cruise Industry

Global Cruise Sector Passenger Volumes
No. of passengers (millions)



2023 Global Economic Impact



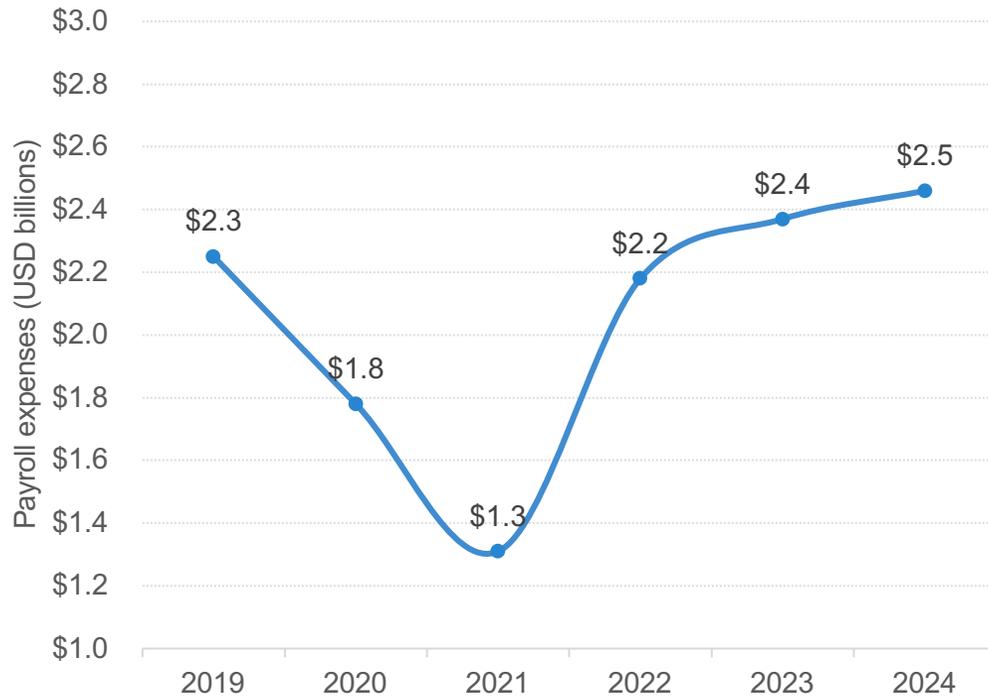
2023

Every
30 PASSENGERS
worldwide support
1 full-time job

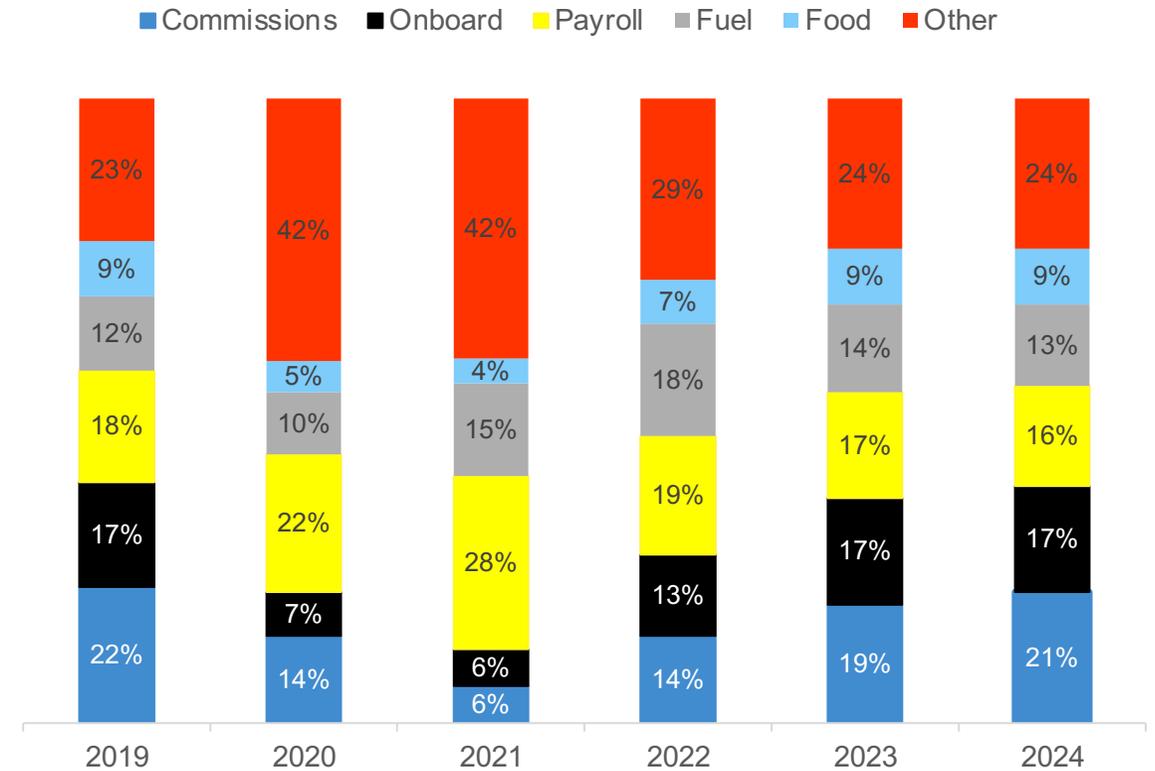
The cruise industry
will support 2.1 million
jobs by 2028

Payroll Accounts for a Significant Chunk of Cruise Operating Expenses

Carnival Corporation Payroll Expenses
USD billions



Carnival Corporation Split of Operating Expenses by Segment

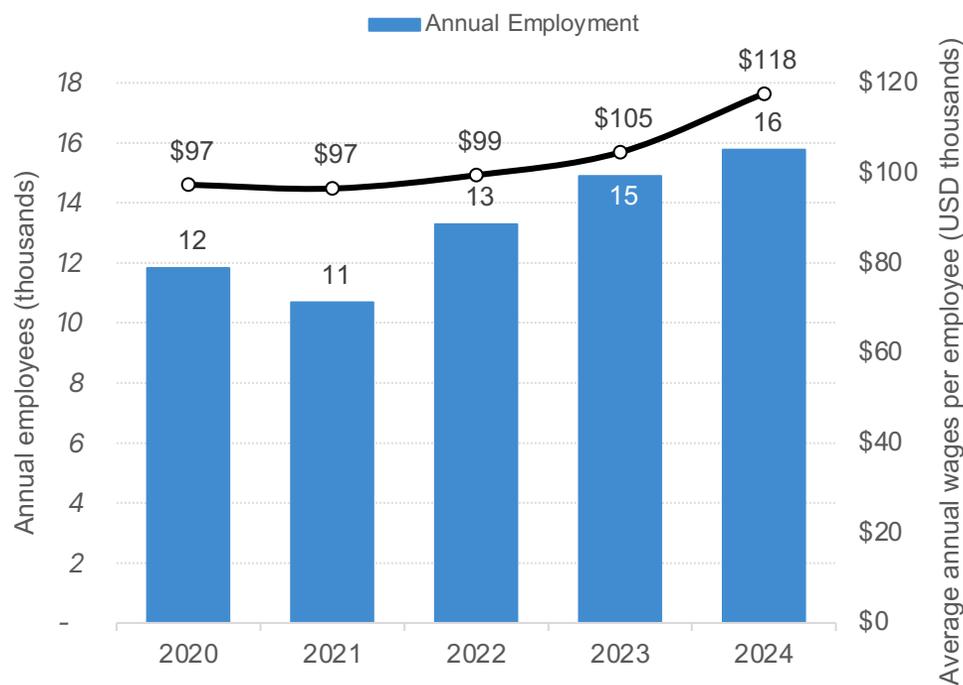


Cruise Industry Talent Flow and Challenges

The cruise industry is experiencing a rising demand for talent, and average annual wages per employee have grown significantly since the pandemic. While the pandemic has passed, some challenges such as long hours, inadequate breaks, and poor work-life balance continue to drive high turnover and retention issues within the sector.

U.S. Cruise Industry Annual Employee Volumes and Annual Wages per Employee

No. of employees (000s) and annual wages (USD 000s)

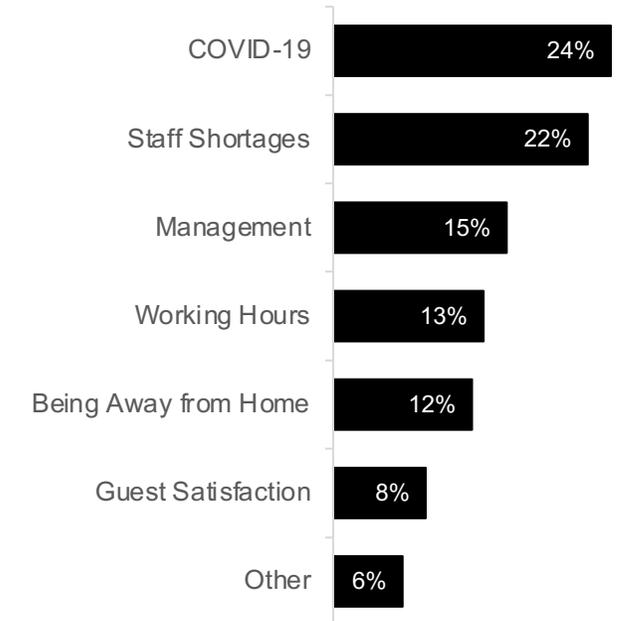


Cruise Employee Challenges and Concerns

- Poor management
- Poor leadership
- No work-life balance
- Long working hours
- Temporary contracts
- Time away from family
- Layoffs
- High turnover
- Short/no breaks
- Overtime not compensated
- Small, noisy living conditions

Factors Causing Stress to Seagoing Cruise Employees (2022)

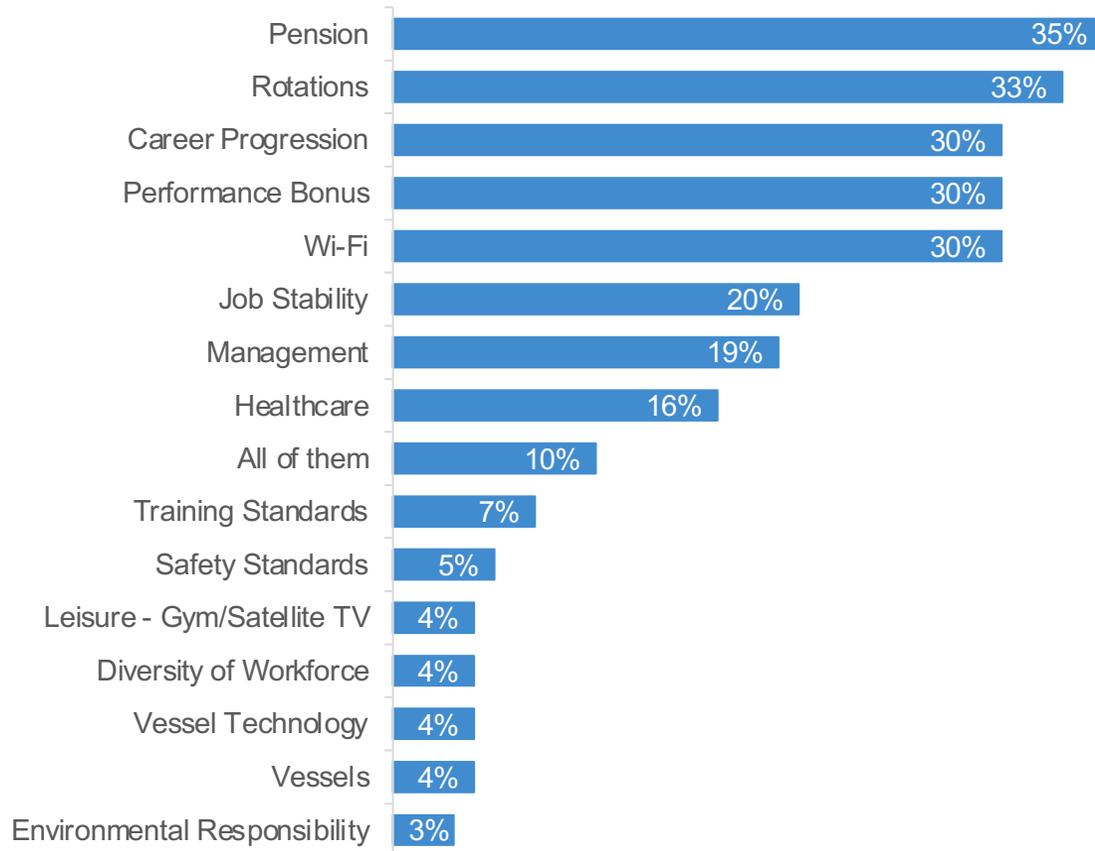
(% of total respondents)



Source: (LHS-RHS) 1. Skift Research with data from [U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (Industry: Deep Sea Passenger Transportation); 2. Skift Research analyzed keywords from cruise employee reviews from [Glassdoor](#) and concerns listed by [Roundtable Human Rights in Tourism](#), 3. Cruise lines 'pushed to their limits' on staffing, recruiting, [Seatrade Cruise News](#) with data from [Faststream Recruitment Group](#).

Areas of Improvement for Cruise Lines

Top Areas Employees Want Cruise Lines to Improve
(% of respondents)



“I believe we need a breath of fresh air in this industry, especially at the top. We need people ready to take the sector into the 21st century. I feel at times we are still doing business as if it were the 1970s: manual processes and the lack of real digital solutions, at least in my area of activity, is becoming a real burden.”

- Employee in an executive position (in 2022)

“Over 85% of cruise professionals now believe the sector will be facing a shortage of talent in the next five years, despite the difficult time the sector has faced through the pandemic. If this is true, cruise businesses will need to be acting now. It is mission-critical that the cruise sector ensures it maintains a strong value proposition for young people going forward. We aren’t there just yet, but more cruise businesses are starting to hire more proactively. Gen Z wants blended lives between work and their home life; they want fulfilling work. It is our job as members of this sector to make this a reality. We cannot let skill shortages create another bust for the cruise sector in the future.”

- Mark Charman - CEO and Founder of Faststream Recruitment Group (in 2022)

AI and Automation in the Cruise Sector

Roles Being Automated by AI

Guest services / concierge staff

With AI-powered virtual assistants, such as MSC Cruises' *Zoe* providing answers to FAQs, schedules, and booking services, and Royal Caribbean's *Royal IQ* app offering personalized recommendations, the need for human staff handling routine inquiries and basic concierge tasks may decrease.

Pricing analysts / revenue managers

AI's dynamic pricing algorithms that adjust fares in real-time could reduce human involvement.

Routine maintenance technicians / inspectors

While predictive maintenance, like Carnival's *OCEAN Medallion*, helps engineers, it might reduce the need for manual, scheduled inspections or reactive repairs.

Navigation officers

AI algorithms for route optimization could automate fuel-efficient route-planning, potentially reducing the responsibilities of officers traditionally involved in this.

Check-in staff / security personnel

AI-based facial-recognition technology can speed up and automate passenger identity verification, potentially reducing the number of staff required at check-in terminals.

Waste sorting / management laborers

AI-based waste management systems that identify and sort waste items could automate tasks previously done manually.

Administrative roles

AI-powered crew-management software streamlines task allocation, making job roles related to crew scheduling and management redundant.

New Roles and Roles Gaining Importance Due to AI

AI system managers

To oversee and troubleshoot complex AI systems.

Guest experience managers (high-touch)

To provide empathetic, personalized service for complex requests or complaints and create human-centric experiences.

Cybersecurity experts

To protect AI systems from threats.

Skilled technicians

For complex repairs, programming, and integrating AI with other systems.

Staff management

To train staff and manage transitions in an AI-integrated environment smoothly.

THE TALENT POOL DEMANDS BALANCE AND FLEXIBILITY

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Talent demand in the cruise industry is significant and mounting. It is expected to support 2.1 million jobs by 2028, up from 1.6 million in 2023.

While demand is rising and annual wages are growing significantly, the industry is facing retention challenges. This is driven by employee stress, due to factors such as long working hours and poor work-life balance.

This is also reflected in the changing expectations of the next generation of talent, with Gen Z prioritizing flexibility and blended work lifestyles.

AI is automating some manual roles in the cruise industry, but overall talent demand is still growing, with new tech-oriented roles in increasing demand as AI is rolled out.

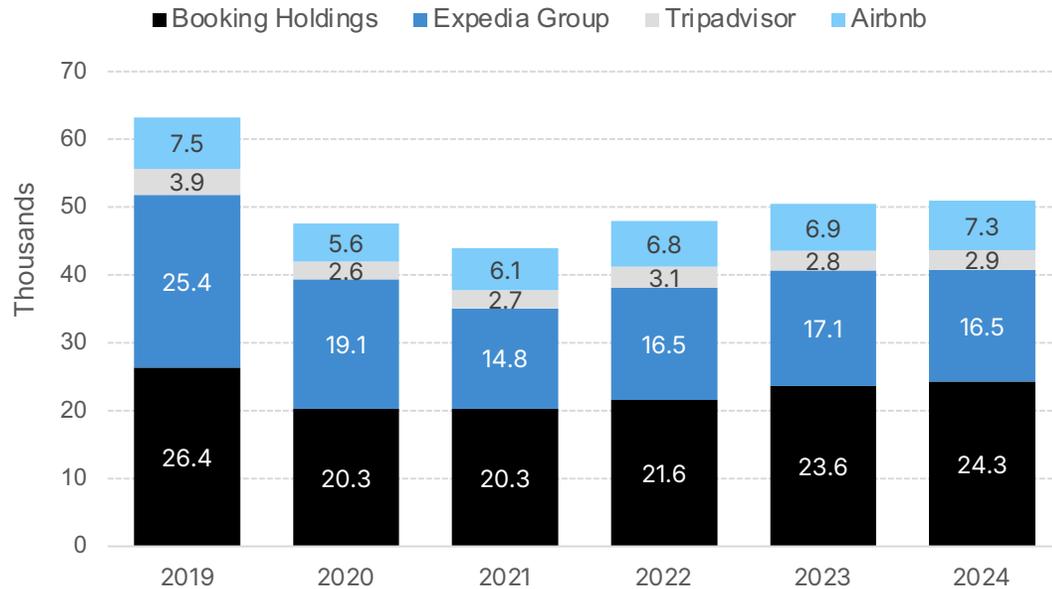
The background is a dark blue field filled with abstract, flowing shapes in various shades of blue and bright yellow. These shapes resemble stylized waves or ribbons. Interspersed among these shapes are several white line-art icons of hands, some appearing to hold or interact with the flowing forms. The overall aesthetic is modern and dynamic.

TRAVEL AGENCIES

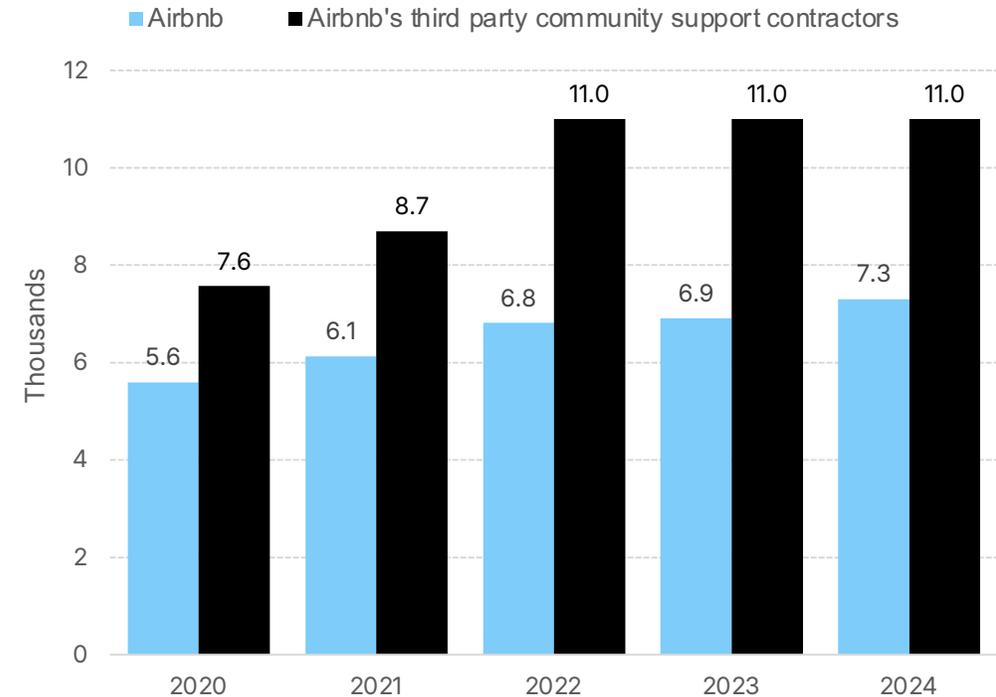
Major Online Travel Agencies Have Large Workforces

Large online travel agencies such as Booking Holdings and Expedia maintain sizable workforces, with Booking employing over 24,000 people in 2024 and Expedia more than 16,000. A significant share of these roles are in technology: at Expedia, the proportion of employees in tech has grown from over one-third in 2020 to about half by 2024. Companies like Airbnb have a relatively smaller workforce: 7,300 thousand employees as of 2024. However, they also report an additional 11,000 third-party contractors responsible for community and customer support.

Workforce Size of Major Online Travel Agencies and Metasearch Companies



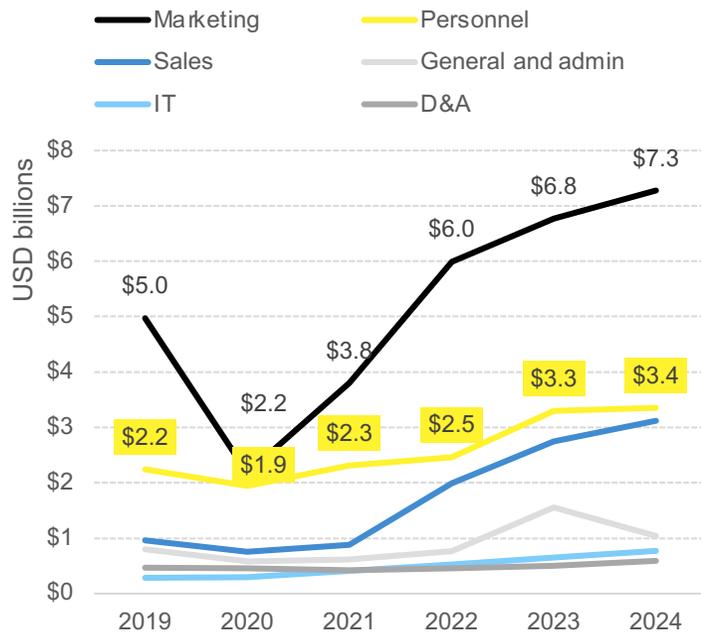
Airbnb Employees vs. Contractors



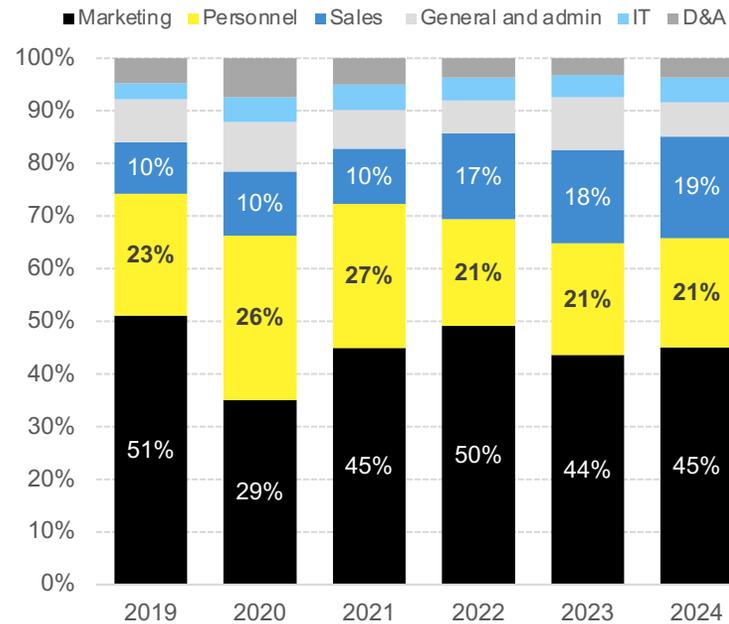
Personnel Accounts for Significant Share of Operating Costs

Personnel is Booking Holding’s second-largest operating cost behind marketing, accounting for 21% of total costs in 2024. The company spent \$3.4 billion on personnel costs in 2024, up from \$2.2 billion in 2019, despite reducing its workforce from 26,000 employees in 2019 to 24,000 employees in 2024. Booking is therefore spending more on each employee today than it did in 2019: in 2024, it spent an average of \$138,000 per employee, more than 60% higher than the average of \$85,000 in 2019.

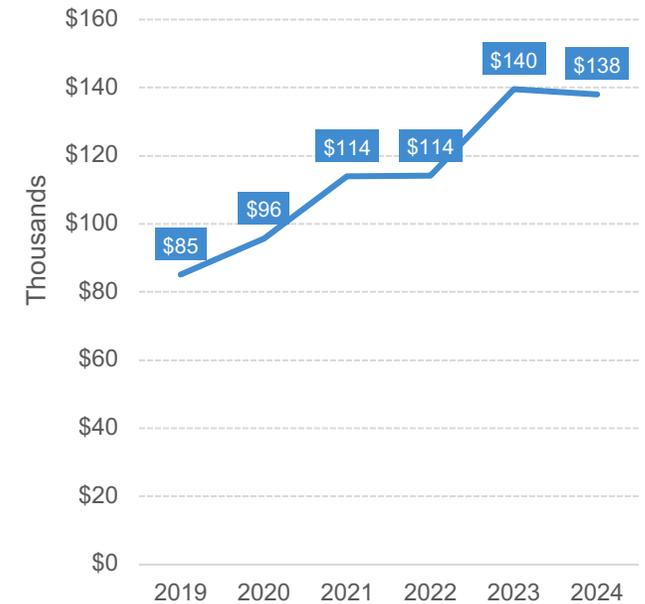
Booking Holdings: Operating Expenses by Line Item



Booking Holdings: Split of Total Operating Expenses



Booking Holdings: Average Personnel Cost Per Staff Member (USD thousands)

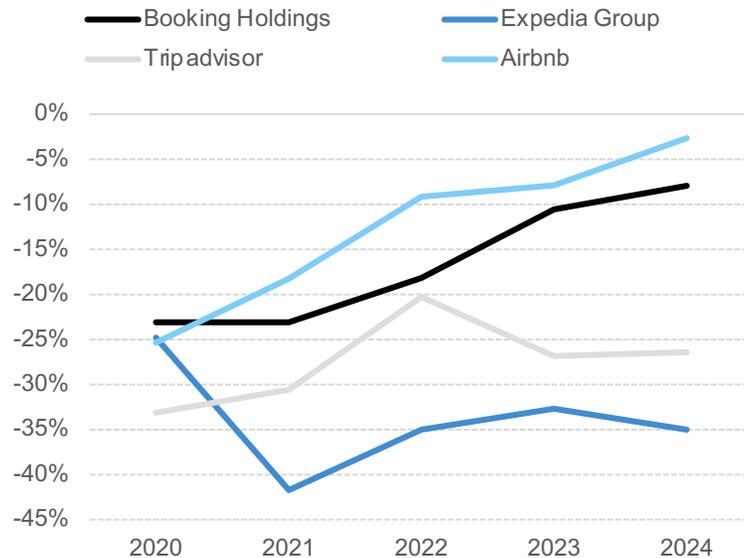


Note: Personnel costs include share-based compensation. Source: Company filings, Skift Research. Data as of 2024.

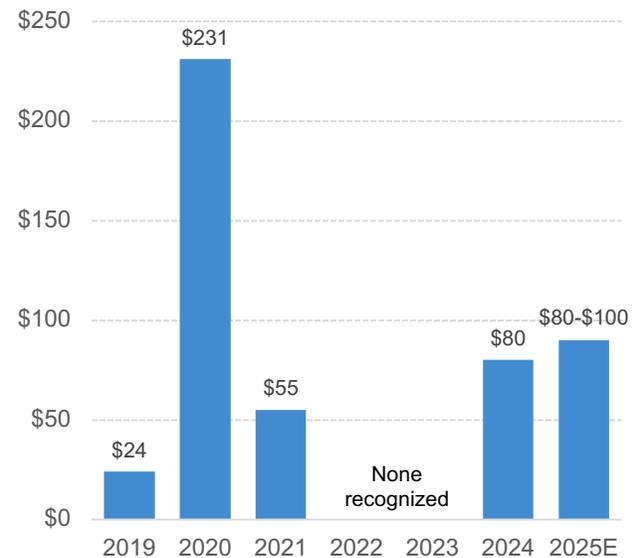
Restructuring Costs Can Be Significant

The major online travel agencies made large cuts to their workforces due to the pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Although some companies, such as Airbnb and Booking Holdings, have re-hired employees over the past three to four years, some companies like Expedia have a smaller workforce today than they did in 2020. Significant hiring cuts and workforce restructuring can directly affect companies' business and financial conditions, with Expedia noting \$231 million of restructuring charges in 2020, \$80 million in 2024 and another \$80-100 million expected in 2025. In a press release from 2020, Airbnb also reported the need for restructuring, saying that workforce reductions had led to increased attrition and reduced employee morale and that it could see problems with recruiting employees in the future.

Workforce Size of Major Online Travel Agencies Growth vs. 2019



Expedia: Restructuring Charges (USD millions)



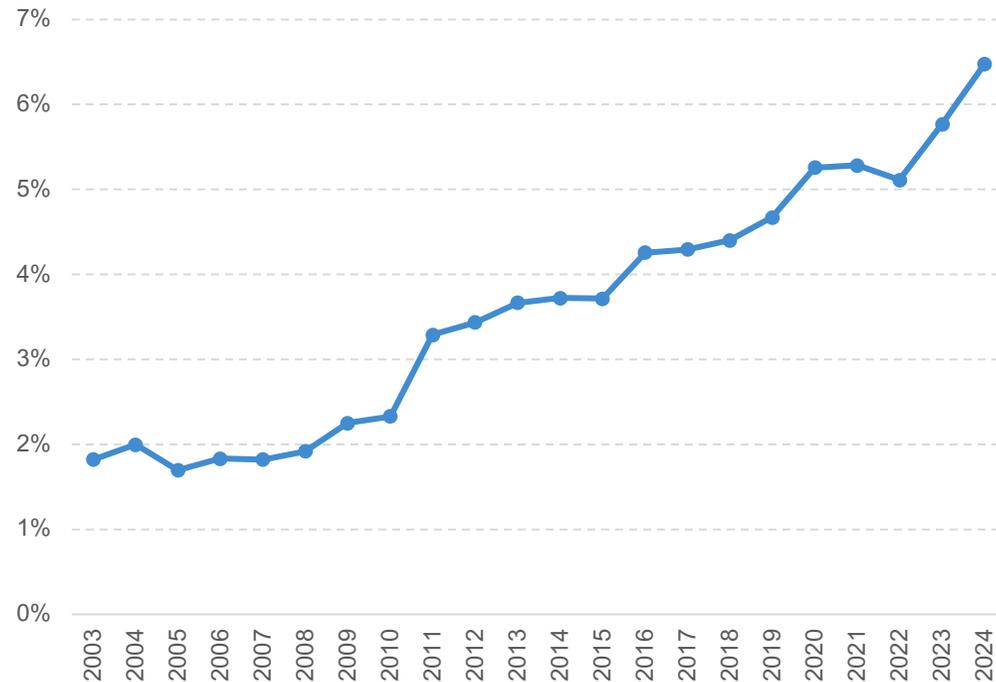
“In May 2020, we announced a reduction in our workforce of approximately 1,800 employees. This has led to increased attrition and could lead to reduced employee morale and productivity and problems retaining existing and recruiting future employees, which could have a material adverse impact on our business. The reduction in force and other restructuring activities are expected to result in charges of \$135 million to \$150 million in 2020.”

Airbnb press release from 2020

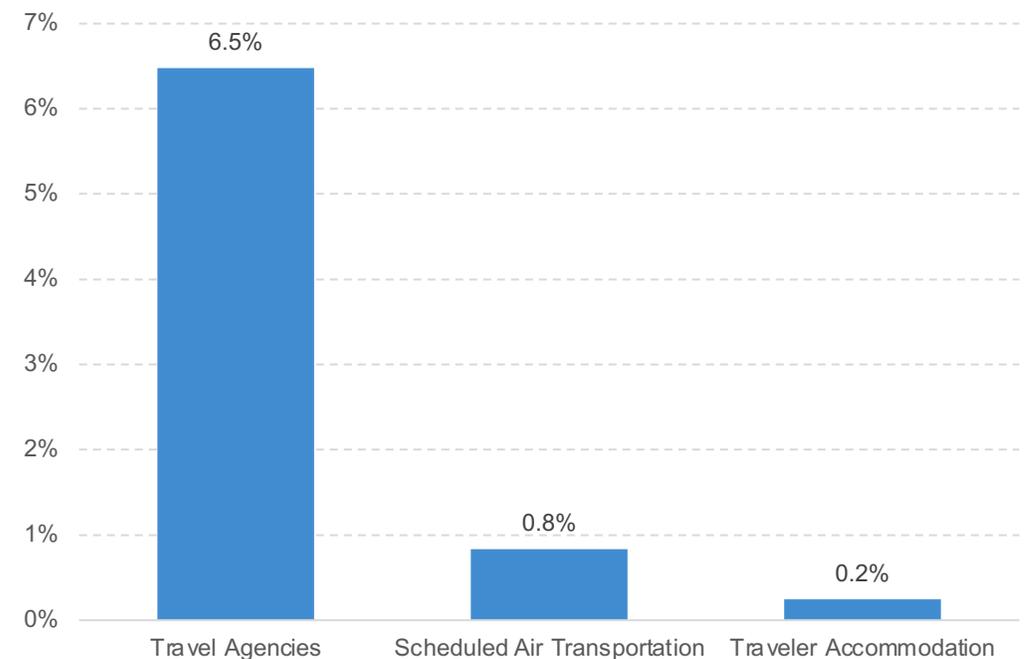
AI and Automation's Impact: Travel Agencies

Travel agencies are increasingly deploying technology in their labor force. Once a poster child for the analog business, travel agencies now devote nearly 7% of their total employees to tech roles, up from less than 2% in 2003. However, not all parts of the industry are moving at the same pace: core suppliers such as airlines and hotels continue to have low levels of in-house tech staff, just 0.8% and 0.2%, respectively, with these sectors remaining heavily reliant on manual roles such as pilots and housekeepers.

Tech Roles as a Percentage of Travel Agency Sector Employment



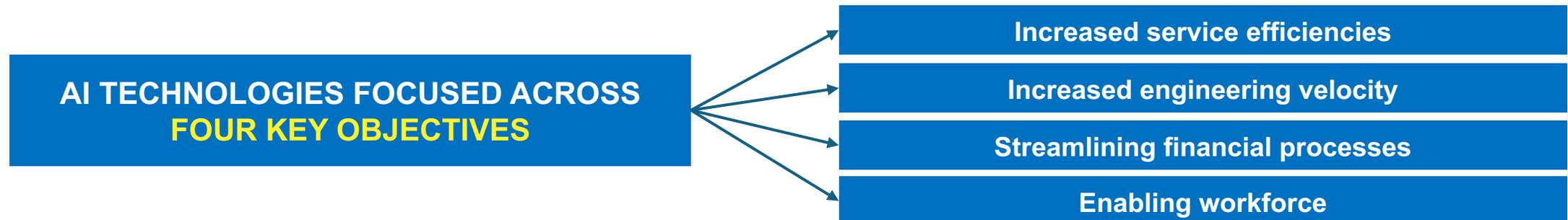
Tech Roles as a Percentage of Sector Employment



AI and Automation's Impact: Amex GBT Case Study

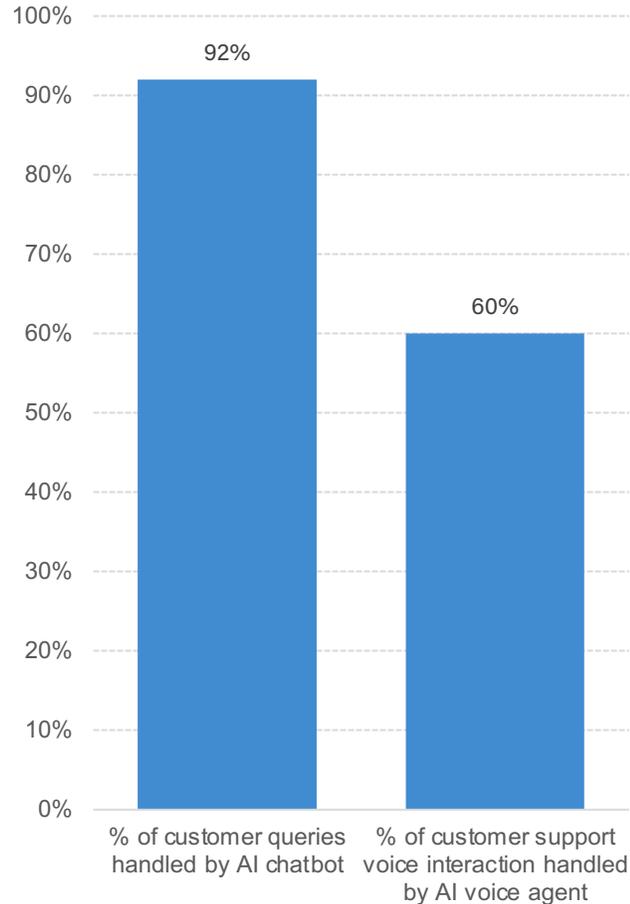
In an earnings call in August 2024, David Thompson, chief information officer for Amex GBT, discussed in detail how the company is moving AI pilots into the implementation phase. The company expects to realize a component of \$100 million in savings opportunities this year, commenting, "We are adopting next-generation AI technologies focused across four key objectives: increased service efficiencies, increased engineering velocity, streamlining our financial processes, and enabling our workforce. These four areas account for approximately 70% of our total adjusted operating expenses, representing a huge opportunity to continue driving productivity improvements."

At Skift's Data & AI Summit in June 2025, Marilyn Markham, VP, AI strategy and automation at Amex GBT, commented that although the "cost per transaction [to implement AI pilots] is decreasing" there are still factors that need to be considered in the financial equation, noting that the "investment to transform the systems still needs an ROI. So, because of that, it doesn't automatically decrease the price of service, because it takes investment to actually get to that point and maintain it. And all of that is done by people, so it's displacing where the cost actually is for servicing our customers."

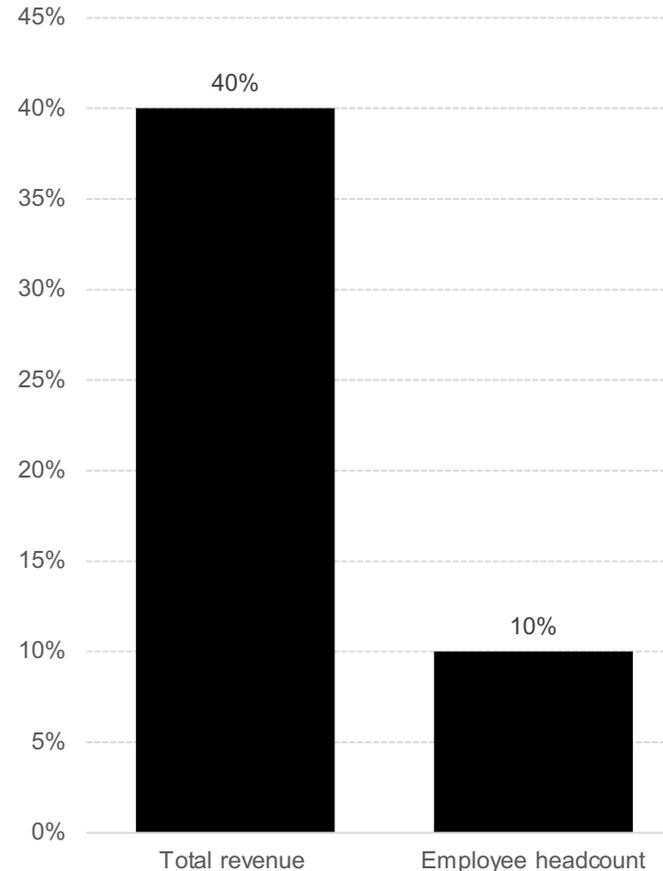


AI and Automation's Impact: Ixigo Case Study

Ixigo: Use of Autonomous Agents In Customer Service



Ixigo FY 2025 Year-on-Year Growth: Revenue vs. Employee Headcount



Ixigo's chatbot, Tara, handles 92% of queries and over 60% of Ixigo's customer support voice interactions are now handled autonomously by AI agents.

"These voice agents don't just respond, they proactively call customers... This is saving time, improving service levels and enabling proactive customer care at scale". In the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2025, Tara resolved 2.11 million queries, "Work that would have required a significantly larger human support team."

"The idea isn't to replace humans but to let AI handle the repetitive and time-sensitive parts efficiently."

"In FY25, we managed to grow our revenue nearly 40%, while growing our employee base by less than 10%, in spite of adding newer business lines like hotels, food on trains, etc., which will require a couple of years to scale. This is only possible if the mindset inside the team is to use technology and AI instead of just hiring more people."

- Ixigo Co-CEO Rajnish Kumar, Q1 2026 earnings call

TRAVEL AGENCIES ARE LARGE-SCALE EMPLOYERS — BUT ALSO FACE ATTRITION CHALLENGES

➤ ACCORDING TO SKIFT

Online travel agencies are significant employers and have also seen a marked increase in tech-oriented roles since 2020.

Personnel costs are mounting for travel agencies, with cost per employee considerably surpassing 2019 levels and talent more valuable than ever.

Post-pandemic restructuring has cost businesses in morale and attrition; this could be a risk multiplier for future talent acquisition.

AI presents opportunities for significant revenue boosts and cost savings through efficiency, as shown in the Amex GBT and Ixigo examples. However, there could be risks of workplace reductions and travel employees are often anxious about AI.

Skift. RESEARCH

PROVIDES PROPRIETARY RESEARCH,
ANALYSIS, AND PREMIUM DATA TOOLS
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