

SOUNDING THE ALARM: THE NARROWING PATH TO WORK

WHY PROTECTING ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS MATTERS FOR
WORKFORCE READINESS AND LONG-TERM ECONOMIC HEALTH



Express[®]
EMPLOYMENT PROFESSIONALS

Respecting People. Impacting Business.™

ExpressPros.ca

SOUNDING THE ALARM: THE NARROWING PATH TO WORK



“Entry-level work is evolving, and employees and employers need to be aware of the rapid shift so they are not left behind. It is right to sound the alarm that we are in a world of dramatic change, but fears that entry-level work will disappear entirely are misguided. From our perspective, the challenge before us is twofold: job seekers need to reset their expectations and employers need to remember how critical entry-level work is—both to their success and the economy’s success.”

— Bob Funk Jr., CEO, President, and Chairman of the Board
Express Employment International

CONTENTS

What Is Entry-Level Work?	5
What Requirements Have Changed?	6
Why Is This a Problem?	8
What Is the Importance of Entry-Level Jobs?	8
What Skills Should Entry-Level Job Seekers Possess?	10
Who Is Responsible for Training Entry-Level Workers?	12
The AI Problem: Efficiency Gains, Entry-Level Pressure	13
How Job Seekers Can Stand Out	15
The Express Advantage: Building Experience Through Multiple On-Ramps	15
Conclusion and Practical Takeaways	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Entry-level work is not disappearing. It has always been—and will remain—a foundational part of the Canadian labour market. What is changing is the availability and accessibility of *true* entry-level roles: positions designed to provide a first foothold, build basic workplace capability, and create momentum toward long-term economic mobility.

Across industries, automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and organizational restructuring are compressing the bottom rungs of career ladders. In practice, this looks like fewer entry-level openings, higher skill expectations for “entry-level” postings, and reduced tolerance for on-the-job learning curves. For job seekers—especially young adults, first-time workers, and those changing careers—this makes it harder to gain early work experience that builds confidence, communication, reliability, and other foundational skills.

Express Employment Professionals commissioned survey research from The Harris Poll to understand how hiring decision-makers and job seekers perceive these shifts. The findings, combined with the insights of Express franchise owners working directly with local employers, point to a two-part challenge: **the runway is shorter** (employers still value entry-level hiring, but increasingly expect candidates to arrive “work-ready”) and **the floor is rising** (technology can remove routine tasks while elevating the importance of judgment, adaptability, and communication).

This matters beyond the immediate hiring market. When entry-level pathways narrow, individuals may find it difficult to connect with job opportunities, and communities can feel the downstream effects through reduced labour force attachment, slower mobility, and weaker talent pipelines. This white paper explores what entry-level work is, what is changing, why it matters for workforce readiness and long-term economic health, and what employers, educators, policymakers, and job seekers can do to preserve and modernize entry-level opportunity in a changing economy.

Recent indicators help explain why the entry-level conversation feels urgent. A recent KPMG survey of Canadian business leaders found that 34% strongly agree and 48% somewhat agree that their organization plans to or is already redesigning or restructuring jobs, roles and activities to realize the value of generative AI.¹ The Labour Market Information Council reports that while the number of young Canadians with a university degree has increased, vacancies for jobs requiring a bachelor’s degree and fewer than three years of experience have dropped by more than half since the beginning of 2024.² According to Statistics Canada employment data, the unemployment rate for Canadians under the age of 25 with a university degree (recent graduates) was 10.6%, the highest level in 30 years outside of the COVID-19 pandemic.³

“Our analysis of recent Statistics Canada data shows a sharp deterioration in labour market conditions for young university graduates. Entry-level jobs that once welcomed bachelor’s degree holders appear to be vanishing, and the relative advantage that such degrees once conferred is eroding. The trends suggest not a temporary cooling, but a structural realignment of early-career work—one driven by automation, shifting employer preferences, and an uncertain global economic climate.”

— Labour Market Information Council

High-alarm signal: In February 2026, Bank of Canada governor Tiff Macklem warned that while there may be increased demand for workers with AI skills, the “flip side is we may be seeing some early evidence that AI is reducing the number of entry-level jobs in some occupations” – a warning that reflects the level of concern around how quickly entry-level tasks could be automated.⁴



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The modern economy is putting a squeeze on entry-level jobs, reducing opportunities while increasing expectations for “entry-level” candidates.

Employers and job seekers broadly agree that entry-level roles now require more skills than in the past.

AI adoption is accelerating and is a meaningful factor in the pressure on entry-level tasks and headcount.

Entry-level work remains essential for building future talent pipelines, soft skills, and long-term employability.

The “human touch” is not going away; as automation expands, human judgment and relationship-based work increase in value.

Job seekers can stand out by developing relevant soft skills, gaining practical exposure to tools (including AI), and pursuing experience through multiple on-ramps—especially short-term and varied roles.

Staffing partners can help individuals build work experience through multiple assignments that develop foundational skills and credibility.

Contract roles can serve as an accessible pathway for individuals to build skills, gain experience, and establish credibility with employers.

ABOUT THE SURVEYS FROM EXPRESS AND THE HARRIS POLL

Survey of Hiring Decision-Makers

The research was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from November 3 - 19, 2025, among 504 Canadian hiring decision-makers (defined as adults ages 18+ in Canada who are employed full-time or self-employed, work at companies with more than 1 employee, and have full/significant involvement in hiring decisions at their company). Data are weighted where necessary by company size to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Survey of Job Seekers

The research was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from November 7 – 21, 2025, among 502 adults ages 18 and older who are employed but looking for a new job, or not employed and looking for work (“job seekers”). Data are weighted where necessary by education, age by sex, race/ethnicity, region, household income, size of household, marital status, and employment status, to bring them in line with their proportions in the population.

SOUNDING THE ALARM:
THE NARROWING PATH TO WORK



WHAT IS ENTRY-LEVEL WORK?

How Express Defines “Entry Level”

Entry-level roles are generally defined as positions that require zero prior work experience or, at most, one to two years of experience. In practical terms, an entry-level role is one that a job seeker can reasonably qualify for without having a formal work history. This aligns with the traditional understanding of true entry-level work, where employers are primarily looking for basic competencies, education, reliability, and a willingness to learn rather than prior industry- or job-specific experience.



“Entry level roles are foundational to a person’s future success. These opportunities provide the baseline knowledge of how industry works, employer expectations and a sense of purpose. People who miss these early experiences miss the development opportunities required to build confidence and job readiness.”

– Christine Martin, Express Franchise Owner, Calgary, Alberta

A recent Express Employment Professionals–Harris Poll study found that entry-level roles are commonly defined as jobs in which the employer teaches/trains you in basic work skills (56%) and provides a starting point for a career (56%).⁶



Entry-level work is not limited to teen employment. It includes first-time adult workers, recent college or career-tech graduates, career changers, individuals returning to work after time away, and workers entering new industries. These roles are often where people first learn how to communicate professionally, show reliability and accountability, navigate workplace expectations, and build confidence through real responsibilities.

One emerging risk is an imbalance between the number of individuals seeking their first paid work experience and the number of roles that remain truly accessible at the entry level.

When employers raise experience, credential, or skill requirements for positions that have traditionally served as first-step opportunities, the pool of available openings narrows for first-time job seekers.

Over time, this can create an “experience gap,” where individuals can’t secure work because they lack experience, and can’t gain experience because initial opportunities are constrained. Express addresses this risk by educating employers on the value of hiring and training new workers, advocating for realistic experience requirements, and connecting job seekers to upskilling opportunities that help them remain competitive as baseline expectations evolve.

WHAT REQUIREMENTS HAVE CHANGED?

Can a Job Evolve Out of Being Entry Level?

A job can absolutely evolve out of an entry-level classification—although not always for the reasons people expect.

One of the most significant shifts we have observed is that employers are raising expectations for roles that should be accessible to first-time workers. In many cases, this accelerated in the aftermath of COVID, when pay rates rose quickly, and some employers began expecting more from candidates because they were paying more.

When job openings require several years of experience, advanced technical skills, or specific certifications for positions that have traditionally served as a first step into the workforce, those roles no longer function as true entry-level opportunities.

The warning sign is not that entry-level work is “gone,” but that the **definition is drifting**: more roles labeled as “entry-level” increasingly require skills, experience, and immediate productivity that historically were developed through entry-level employment.



These shifting expectations are unfolding alongside broader economic adjustments. After the post-pandemic rebound, many organizations began rebalancing headcount—slowing hiring as they prepared for economic headwinds. At the same time, public discussion about AI-driven disruption has intensified, adding to job seeker uncertainty and fueling a sense that the “first rung” is getting harder to reach.

More than 4 in 5 Canadian hiring decision-makers (81%) agree entry-level jobs require candidates to possess more skills than they have in the past.⁸ More than 4 in 5 Canadian job seekers (82%) agree that entry-level jobs require candidates to possess more skills (i.e., hard and/or soft skills) than they have in the past.⁹

SURVEY SAYS



81%

of **hiring decision-makers** agree entry-level jobs require candidates to possess more skills than they have in the past.



82%

of **job seekers** say the same.

SOUNDING THE ALARM:
THE NARROWING PATH TO WORK



Qualitative Feedback Underscores the Same Pattern:

“Compared to five years ago, entry-level roles today often demand far more than just basic qualifications. Employers now expect candidates to have a mix of technical and soft skills right from the start—things like data literacy, digital communication, and familiarity with remote collaboration tools.”

— 41-year-old male hiring decision-maker at a company with 1,000–2,499 employees

“Over the past five years, the expectations for entry-level roles have increased dramatically. Employers today look for candidates who not only have a basic academic foundation but also come in with practical, hands-on experience—whether from internships, personal projects, or self-taught skills.”

— 29-year-old male hiring decision-maker at a company with 100–249 employees

“Entry-level employees are expected to already know how to do the job.”

— 40-year-old female hiring decision-maker at a company with 2–4 employees

Express franchise owners see the change in day-to-day hiring:



“Entry-level roles used to be defined by your potential to be a contributor and your enthusiasm to be successful in the role. Employers expected attitude, reliability, and a willingness to learn. Any other specific skills would be developed over time and most often involved learning on the job from a seasoned, skilled mentor. Today, employers tend to be more selective in entry-level roles, looking for individuals who have an education that closely aligns with the role, and who already have some experience, such as an internship or cooperative participation.”

— James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario



“An entry-level job was one where experience did not matter much, but training was provided. It really became more of a proving ground for future opportunities. Now, many roles already require some level of experience. Entry roles now require essential software skills for office-based roles like accounting, or in the case of Light Industrial roles, require additional certifications, like forklift certification and skill trades experience.”

— Hanif Hemani, Express franchise owner, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?

When entry-level pathways narrow, the impact cascades—first to individuals, then to employers, then to communities and the broader economy.

1 Workforce Readiness and Skill Development

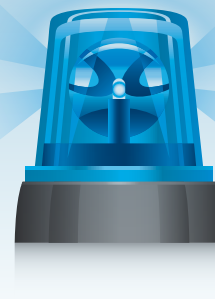
Entry-level jobs are where people develop foundational workplace behaviors and soft skills, often the “hidden curriculum” of employment. When people can’t access early roles, it becomes harder to build the habits, confidence, and professional identity they’ll use in the future. Over time, this can contribute to the very “skills gap” employers report, because fewer workers get the early, supervised experience that builds communication, judgment, and problem-solving.

2 Talent and Leadership Pipelines

Entry-level roles feed internal development. Reduced entry-level hiring can weaken an organization’s future bench strength and raise long-term recruiting and retention costs. A majority of Canadian hiring decision-makers report entry-level jobs are absolutely essential/very important for developing future talent at their company (60%) and agree they are fundamental to their company’s future success (84%).¹⁰

3 Community and Economic Effects

When individuals can’t gain a foothold, they can disengage from work or cycle through unstable employment. Over time, this can reduce local economic momentum, slow mobility, and shrink the pool of experienced workers. Without accessible early-career “on-ramps,” companies face talent shortages, new workers face stalled career pathways before they even begin—and the cycle repeats itself.



WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS?

Entry-level employment is not optional—it is foundational to workforce readiness, economic mobility, and long-term economic health. Any disruption to entry-level employment should alarm all Canadians, not just those currently seeking entry-level work.

These roles are where workers build essential skills, learn workplace norms, and begin forming professional confidence and networks. That, in turn, builds a talent pool for future mid-level and senior employees. Without that talent pool, upward career mobility is constrained, increasing the risk of a supervisor and leadership gap over time, as Express previously explored in its [supervisor white paper](#).

As a recent study on entry-level work from PwC and the World Economic Forum points out, “Entry-level jobs have long been the foundation of the workforce and future talent pipelines.”¹¹

Express and Harris Poll findings reinforce the broad consensus.

Nearly all hiring decision-makers (95%) report entry-level jobs are important for developing future talent at their company,¹² and nearly all job seekers (96%) report that entry-level jobs are important for ensuring workers grow within a company.¹³

SOUNDING THE ALARM:
THE NARROWING PATH TO WORK





“Companies are already complaining about having a hard time finding talent. If young people do not have access to entry-level jobs, we will struggle to fill the skills gap being created by our aging and retiring population.”

– Christine Martin, Express Franchise Owner, Calgary, Alberta

Most hiring decision-makers (84%)¹⁴ and job seekers (91%)¹⁵ agree entry-level jobs are fundamental to their company’s future success. And 82% of hiring decision-makers¹⁶ and 85% of job seekers¹⁷ assert entry-level positions provide crucial networking opportunities that are vital for future career growth.

Hiring decision-makers (92%)¹⁸ and job seekers (89%)¹⁹ also overwhelmingly agree that entry-level jobs provide workers with skills that are critical to career progressions, especially problem-solving, communication, critical thinking, general work experience, and increased confidence.

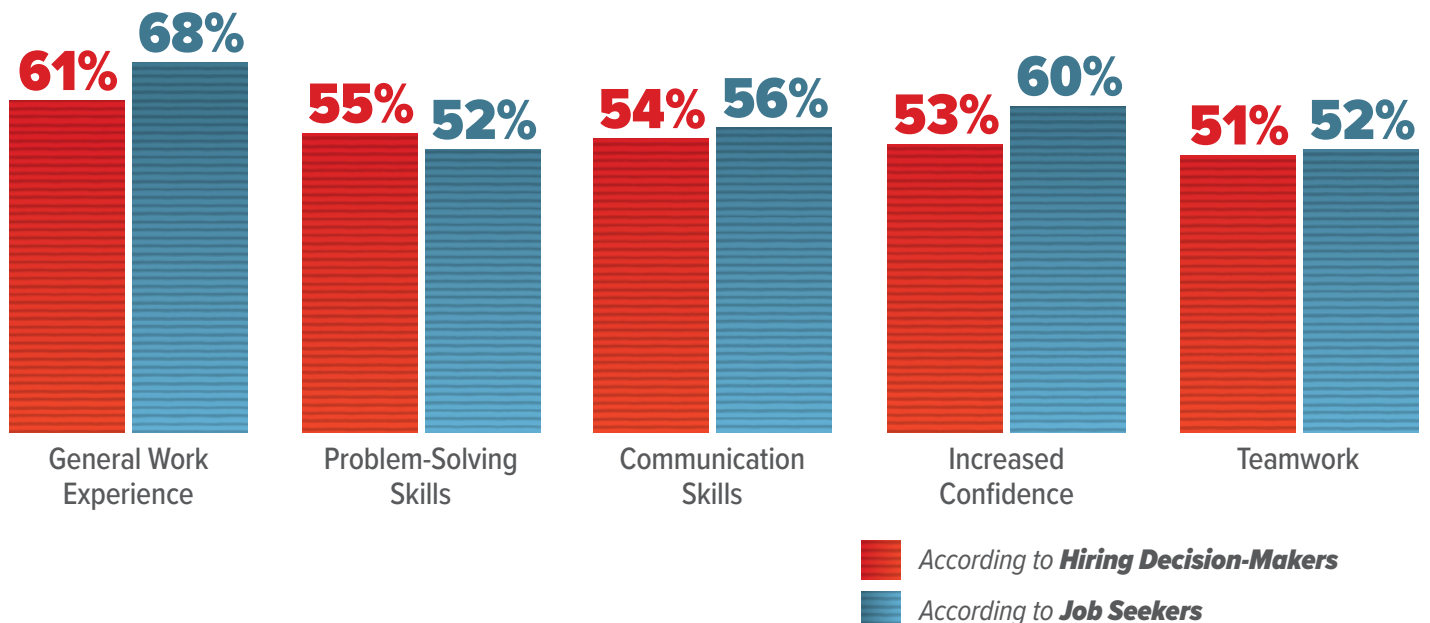


“New graduates may experience slower wage growth and more limited career mobility as entry-level roles demand more complex knowledge and job-specific skills. When organizations hire only “ready-made” talent, they reduce opportunities to develop individuals internally. Traditionally, leadership was built over years. Employers need to consider that investing in better in-house training to support internal development of entry-level employees can reduce employee turnover and help with long-term succession planning.”

– Michael Elliott, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario

HOW FIRST-TIME WORKERS BENEFIT FROM WORKING ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS

Hiring decision-makers (92%) and job seekers (89%) agree entry-level jobs provide workers with skills that are critical to career progression:²⁰

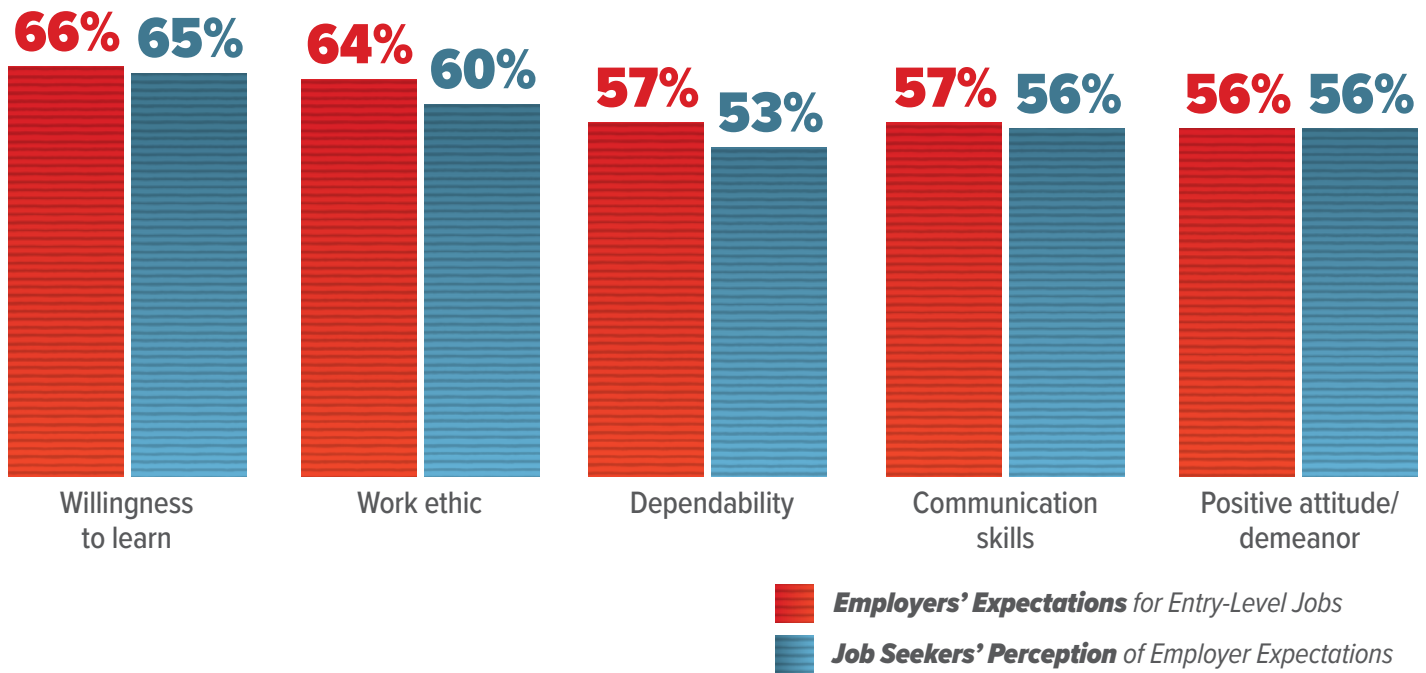


WHAT SKILLS SHOULD ENTRY-LEVEL JOB SEEKERS POSSESS?

In today's more competitive entry-level environment, employers are looking for more than minimum qualifications. They want candidates who can adapt, communicate, and learn quickly, often on leaner teams with more tech-enabled workflows. A willingness to learn (66%), work ethic (64%), dependability (57%), communication skills (57%) and positive attitude/demeanor (56%) are among the top skills companies expect candidates to already possess when applying for an entry-level job.²¹

From the job seeker perspective, the most common expectations they believe employers hold include a willingness to learn, work ethic, positive attitude/demeanor, and communication skills, along with adaptability, dependability, and teamwork.²²

EXPECTATIONS FOR ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS



“Young people with initiative and drive who embrace change and learning will succeed in the world of AI and automation. Most people now only know how to use AI from an information research perspective, but knowing how to use AI agents is becoming a real game changer.”

– Niven Lee, Express Franchise Owner, Delta, British Columbia



“Soft skills are becoming more and more important. Employers are looking for employees who can use AI to ‘problem solve,’ so analytical and problem-solving skills will play an even bigger role. These are the skills that humanize interactions in an AI-driven world. Where human oversight and interaction are needed, those with strong soft skills can not only utilize AI to improve their productivity and output, but also apply these skills effectively in people-to-people interactions.”

– Hanif Hemani, Express franchise owner, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan



“Human skills will be the differentiator for employees who can demonstrate strong communications, critical thinking, and positive contributions to their respective teams.”

– James Norris, Express franchise owner, London, Ontario

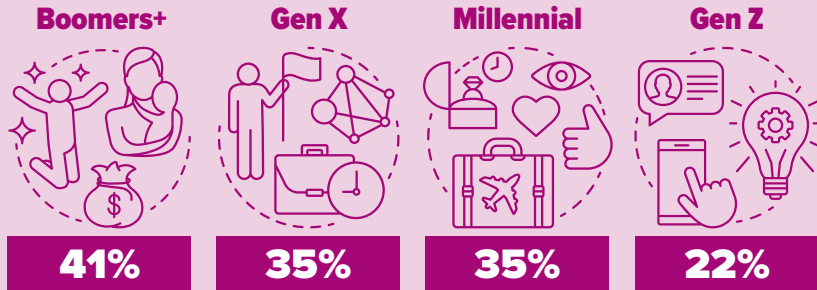


WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR TRAINING ENTRY-LEVEL WORKERS?

As expectations rise, the question becomes: who should close the gap?

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCE²⁴

Percentage of job seekers agreeing that **workers are primarily responsible** for preparing themselves to enter the workforce:



More than a third of hiring decision-makers (42%) say workers themselves are primarily responsible for preparation to enter the workforce, while one-quarter (23%) believe it is the responsibility of the job/company the worker is applying to.²³

At the same time, nearly all companies (91%) say they train their entry-level employees for success in their current roles and future advancement, most commonly through on-the-job training by other employees (57%) and company-led training sessions (53%).²⁵

Job seekers also express clear preferences about how training should occur:²⁶

- On the job training from other employees (61%)
- Company led training programs (57%)
- Mentorships (49%)
- Partnerships with third party training providers offering courses during work hours (39%)

In practice, this is shared responsibility: employers, educators, community leaders, and workers all influence whether entry-level opportunity functions as a real on-ramp—or becomes a barrier.

COMPANY LED TRAINING

57%

of job seekers say training should be conducted by companies.



ON THE JOB TRAINING

61%

of job seekers say training should be conducted on-the-job by other employees.



THE AI PROBLEM: EFFICIENCY GAINS, ENTRY-LEVEL PRESSURE

AI adoption is widespread and accelerating. Many employers believe it enables them to operate with fewer workers, placing particular pressure on entry-level roles that historically included routine, repeatable tasks.

Half of hiring decision-makers (49%) say implementing AI tools/technologies would allow them to reduce the size of their workforce, and close to half (45%) say it is more efficient to use AI to do entry-level tasks than to hire and train a candidate.²⁷

External research points in the same direction. Recent research suggests that entry-level jobs are particularly vulnerable to AI because they involve routine tasks and lack the complexity that makes higher-skilled roles more complementary to AI technologies.²⁸ One U.S. study analyzing data from 285,000 companies found that after a firm adopts generative AI, junior employment drops by 9–10% while senior employment holds steady—suggesting the lower rungs of career ladders may be eroding if AI substitutes disproportionately for entry-level tasks.²⁹

Tasks AI Can Increasingly Handle

Many entry-level tasks are routine, rules-based, or repetitive—characteristics that make them easier to automate. Examples include:

- Basic data entry and record updates
- Scheduling meetings or appointments
- Initial customer service responses and ticket routing
- Document summarization and note-taking
- Drafting routine communications
- Assisting with initial application intake and sorting
- Basic research and information gathering
- Invoice and expense processing
- Transcription of meetings or calls
- Identifying errors or inconsistencies in structured datasets

AI can increase efficiency, but it can also remove some of the tasks traditionally used to train early-career workers, shrinking the number of “practice reps” where people learn how work works.

Tasks AI Is Unlikely to Replace Soon

At the same time, many responsibilities that define workplace readiness remain deeply human. AI still struggles with tasks requiring:

- Relationship building and trust
- Interviewing and evaluating job candidates
- Negotiation and persuasion
- Creative problem solving in ambiguous situations
- Situational awareness in physical environments
- Hands-on operational work
- Mentoring and peer training
- Ethical judgment and decision making
- Cultural awareness and team dynamics
- Accountability for real-world outcomes

AI TASKS

- Basic data entry and record updates
- Scheduling meetings or appointments
- Document summarization and note-taking
- Basic research and information gathering

HUMAN TASKS

- Relationship building and trust
- Interviewing and evaluating job candidates
- Negotiation and persuasion
- Creative problem solving in ambiguous situations

These capabilities are developed through experience, and entry-level roles are where most people first begin to build them.

The entry-level challenge is not simply that AI is “making people work less.” In many workplaces, it is making teams more efficient and shifting human work toward higher-level coordination, judgment, and strategy.

But if efficiency gains reduce the number of accessible first-step roles—or if entry-level expectations rise faster than training and opportunity—the on-ramps into the workforce narrow.

TOP FIVE JOB FUNCTIONS WHERE THE HUMAN-TOUCH ELEMENT IS PRIORITIZED³¹

According to hiring decision-makers, these are the top job functions where their companies prioritize a human-touch element:



There's Still Value in the Human Touch

Technology can replace some tasks, but not the full scope of work, especially where judgment, ethics, relationship-building, and nuance matter. Even with strong AI adoption, most hiring decision-makers say using AI will never replace the need for actual employees at their company (82%) and that their company is dedicated to ensuring there will always be a human-touch element in the workplace (89%).³⁰

The goal is not “humans vs. AI.” The goal is to modernize entry-level roles so they empower people while integrating tools responsibly.



“AI and automation are changing certain entry-level tasks. Some repetitive administrative or clerical functions are being reduced or augmented by technology. However, rather than eliminating opportunity, AI is shifting expectations. Entry-level employees still have a role, but they must learn to work alongside technology. The onus is increasingly on candidates to leverage tools rather than compete against them.”

— Jessica Culo, Express franchise owner, Edmonton, Alberta

IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING HUMAN-TOUCH ELEMENT IN CERTAIN TASKS³²

— Canadian Hiring Decision-Makers —



HOW JOB SEEKERS CAN STAND OUT

In a more competitive entry-level market, standing out requires more than meeting minimum qualifications. Employers are looking for candidates who demonstrate adaptability, problem-solving, and a willingness to learn, often through nontraditional pathways such as self-taught skills or varied work experiences.

Higher expectations do not always mean job seekers need more formal education. Hiring decision-makers (51%) say self-taught skills acquired through informal online platforms are credible,³³ and job seekers (52%) say the same. Nearly one-third of job seekers (31%) say they've taught themselves skills using informal online platforms.³⁴

Tips for Entry-Level Job Seekers

Sharpen your soft skills and know how to talk about them.

Prepare examples that demonstrate adaptability, willingness to learn, accountability, and teamwork.

Build familiarity with core tools (including AI where relevant).

Employers may not expect “AI experts,” but they do value comfort with technology and digital workflows.

Start where the runway is longer.

Some smaller employers or growing sectors may offer more accessible entry points and training.

Do not inflate your resume.

Be ready to demonstrate the skills you claim with examples and outcomes.

Understand where opportunities are expanding.

Target growing industries and roles where demand is resilient.

Leverage referrals and relationships.

Recommendations can open doors that online applications may not.

THE EXPRESS ADVANTAGE: BUILDING EXPERIENCE THROUGH MULTIPLE ON-RAMPS

A staffing company like Express Employment Professionals can help entry-level workers by providing exposure to a broad range of job opportunities. Temporary or contract roles can help job seekers rapidly build experience, credibility, and foundational workplace skills that transfer across industries.

This “multiple-job exposure” approach can be especially valuable for people who need experience but may not yet have a long work history. Even when the work is not highly specialized, it builds the soft skills employers increasingly demand—communication, reliability, teamwork, professionalism, and learning agility—while allowing workers to explore pathways and discover strengths.

CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL TAKEAWAYS

Entry-level work is not disappearing—but it is changing.

The labour market is tightening at the bottom rung: fewer opportunities in some sectors, higher expectations for “entry-level” applicants, and growing substitution of routine tasks through technology. That combination is why we are sounding the alarm, because when the first rung weakens, the entire ladder becomes harder to climb.

Rather than operating from fear, stakeholders can act with clarity.

- Employers can protect their talent pipelines by maintaining true entry-level pathways and aligning job requirements with real training and supervision.
- Educators and workforce partners can strengthen work readiness by emphasizing soft skills, digital fluency, and work-based learning experiences.
- Policymakers and community leaders can expand and modernize entry-level access while ensuring innovation strengthens—not erodes—economic opportunity.
- And job seekers can increase their competitiveness through skill-building, credible experience (including short-term roles), and strong communication of applied capability.

The fact remains: entry-level jobs are not optional—they are foundational to workforce readiness, economic mobility, and long-term economic health.

Recommendations for Employers

- **Protect true entry-level “on-ramps.”** Maintain roles that are accessible with 0–2 years of experience and are designed to build work habits and confidence.
- **Align job requirements with real training.** If a role is labeled “entry-level,” ensure the expectations match what can be learned with structured onboarding and supervision.
- **Design roles around growth, not just efficiency.** When automating routine tasks, intentionally preserve the “practice reps” where early-career workers learn workflows, customer interaction, and professional communication.
- **Invest in managers as developers.** Equip frontline supervisors to coach, give feedback, and develop early-career talent—especially in lean teams.
- **Use skills-based hiring responsibly.** Prioritize demonstrated capability and potential over inflated credential/experience requirements that exclude first-time workers.
- **Build multiple pathways into the organization.** Expand internships, apprenticeships, job rotations, and short-term assignments that convert into longer-term roles.
- **Partner with workforce and staffing organizations.** Collaborate with providers that can help candidates gain experience, validate readiness, and build the foundational skills employers need.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Educators

- Expand work-based learning opportunities such as internships, apprenticeships, and paid entry-level programs.
- Align education and training with entry-level job readiness, emphasizing soft skills and digital fluency alongside academics.
- Incentivize employers to hire and train entry-level workers through public-private partnerships, grants, or tax credits.
- Reduce unnecessary credential and experience requirements that limit access to first-time employment.
- Improve early career navigation so students understand career pathways, in-demand fields, and multiple routes into the workforce.



REFERENCES


1. KPMG, “Canadian businesses adopting AI, but few are seeing ROI”, November 19, 2025, https://kpmg.com/ca/en/media/2025/11/canadian-businesses-adopting-ai-but-few-are-seeing-roi.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
2. Labour Market Information Council, “Eligible Bachelors: Canada’s newest university graduates face an increasingly challenging job market”, October 2, 2025, <https://lmic-cimt.ca/eligible-bachelors-canadas-newest-university-graduates-face-an-increasingly-challenging-job-market/>.
3. Statistics Canada, “Unemployment rate, participation rate and employment rate by educational attainment, annual”, January 9, 2026, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410002001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.8&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=5.2&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=1990&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2025&referencePeriods=19900101%2C20250101>. <https://www.cengagegroup.com/news/press-releases/2025/cengage-group-2025-employability-report/>.
4. Tiff Macklem, Remarks “Structural change—Canada at a crossroads”, Feb. 5, 2026, <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/2026/02/structural-change-canada-at-a-crossroads/>.
5. Uday Rana, “AI may be killing entry-level jobs, Bank of Canada governor warns,” Global News, Feb. 5, 2026, <https://globalnews.ca/news/11654278/ai-killing-entry-level-bank-of-canada/>.
6. The Harris Poll. Survey conducted online within Canada on behalf of Express Employment Professionals among 504 Canadian hiring decision-makers, Nov. 3–19, 2025. (Internal survey methodology; topline results referenced throughout.)
7. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Survey, Nov. 3–9, 2025.
8. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
9. The Harris Poll. Survey conducted online within Canada on behalf of Express Employment Professionals among 502 Canadian adults ages 18+ who are employed but looking for a new job, or not employed and looking for work (“job seekers”), Nov. 7–21, 2025. (Internal survey methodology; topline results referenced throughout.)
10. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
11. “How AI Is Changing Early Careers: A View from Entry-Level Workers,” PwC and World Economic Forum, Jan. 2026, <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/workforce/ai-entry-level-careers.html>.
12. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
13. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
14. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
15. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
16. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
17. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
18. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
19. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
20. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025; Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
21. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
22. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
23. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
24. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
25. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
26. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.
27. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
28. Future Skills Centre and The Dais, “Right Brain, Left Brain, AI Brain: Implications of AI on Jobs and Skills Demand in Canada”, January 2025, <https://fsc-ccf.ca/research/ai-brain/>.
29. Seyed Mahdi Hosseini Maasoum and Guy Lichtinger, “Generative AI as Seniority-Biased Technological Change: Evidence from U.S. Resume and Job Posting Data,” SSRN, Aug. 31, 2025, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5425555>.
30. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
31. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
32. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
33. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Insights Survey, Nov. 3-19, 2025.
34. Express Employment Professionals—Harris Poll Job Seekers Survey, Nov. 7-21, 2025.

About Express Employment Professionals

At Express Employment Professionals, we're in the business of people. From job seekers to client companies, Express helps people thrive and businesses grow. Our international network of franchises offers localized staffing solutions to the communities they serve across the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand, employing over 11 million people since its inception. For more information, visit ExpressPros.ca.

About Express Employment International

Express Employment International supports the Express Employment Professionals franchise and affiliated brands, including Specialized Recruiting Group and Express Healthcare Staffing. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, Express Employment International oversees a global network of sales and support teams.

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

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

 [@ExpressEmploymentInternational](https://www.instagram.com/ExpressEmploymentInternational)

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

All Express offices are locally owned and operated.
For information about franchise opportunities,
visit ExpressFranchising.com.



We're locally owned and operated with the support and stability of an international headquarters with four decades of staffing and HR expertise. It's the best of both worlds—small business flexibility, big company resources.



ExpressPros.ca

©2026 Alamo Franchise Services, LLC, a subsidiary of Express Services, Inc.
All rights reserved. 5/26