



Unemployment Causing Significant Challenges for Canadian Job Seekers

Skills Deterioration and Resume Gaps Causing Difficulty Finding Work

TORONTO, April 9, 2025 — In a rapidly changing job market, the consequences of prolonged unemployment are taking a significant toll on job seekers, affecting not only their skills and confidence but also their mental health and networking opportunities, according to an Express Employment Professionals-Harris Poll survey.

The primary reasons for unemployment include needing to quit or voluntarily quitting (33%) and being laid off (17%). Over one-quarter of unemployed job seekers (27%) have been out of work for more than two years. While this is lower than 38% in the Spring and Fall of 2023, the proportion is still relatively high and the impacts can be severe.



Impacts of Extended Unemployment

Extended periods of unemployment have both practical and mental impacts on job seekers. The most common effects include:

- **Gaps in Work Experience:** 44% cite gaps on their resumes as a significant issue.
- **Deterioration of Skills:** 42% of job seekers report a decline in hard or soft skills.
- **Decreased Confidence:** 40% experience a loss of confidence.
- **Reduced Networking Opportunities:** 30% find it harder to network.
- **Decreased Awareness of Industry Trends:** 29% feel out of touch with current practices.

The concerns of unemployed Canadians align with the issues Canadian companies face in finding candidates. One in three Canadian companies (32%) report having open positions they cannot fill, which they attribute mainly to a lack of applicants with relevant experience (45%), a lack of applicants with hard skills (44%) and a lack of applicants with soft skills (32%).

Two-thirds of companies (66%) say that deterioration of both hard and soft skills is a main impact of being unemployed for an extended period of time, especially for young adults (ages 18-26).

Expert Tips for Job Seekers

As a staffing industry expert and Vancouver Express franchise owner, Brent Pollington frequently witnesses both the joy of employment and the heartbreak of job loss that is unavoidable.

“The biggest impact of unemployment I see is on mental health; a lot of job seekers feel deeply frustrated by how hard the process is,” said Pollington. “What can be most disheartening is the sheer volume of rejection, especially for people who aren’t in roles where rejection is a regular part of their work. It can feel deeply personal and defeating.”

Pollington says one of the biggest challenges rarely discussed is the overwhelming amount of disinformation circulating online. Job seekers are being bombarded with messages that don’t reflect the reality of today’s hiring market. His examples include:

- The reason they didn't get hired was due to the online application system; in reality, their resume is often seen by a real person, but it just doesn’t stand out.
- They’re missing out on a hidden job market because they don’t know the right people. However, most companies post their jobs.
- Using the “Open to Work” banner on LinkedIn can make them appear desperate, but it’s a helpful signal that they’re available and actively looking.
- Success comes down to luck. While there is always some element of luck involved, it also comes down to strategy, persistence, and adaptability.

“When job seekers are surrounded by messages blaming external forces, even though that can be true in some instances, it can make it harder for them to reflect, adapt and respond to what the market is actually looking for,” said Pollington. “Job seekers are trying to navigate a very real emotional and financial stress while being misled by advice that keeps them stuck. What they need is honest guidance, practical tools and a better understanding of how hiring works today.”

Turning Unemployment into a Learning Opportunity

According to Pollington, job seekers who find success are those who use rejection as an opportunity to reassess their job search strategy, their resume, outreach and LinkedIn profile.

“The people who stand out in today’s job market aren’t just upskilled — they’re aligned,” Pollington said. “They’ve taken the time to understand what drives employer decisions, what catches attention in a sea of resumes and how to tailor their approach to speak directly to what companies need.”

Pollington says what’s holding many job seekers back is that they’re still applying the same way

that worked five or even 10 years ago. His advice to job seekers is that the “spray and pray” approach is no longer effective. Thoughtful, strategic applications are what stand out now, especially in a noisy market.

“Don’t apply to everything. Don’t fire off the same resume and cover letter over and over,” said Pollington. Instead, apply only to roles that closely align with your interests. Take the time, effort and energy to build a highly tailored and purpose-built application, and include a focused cover letter and a resume that speaks directly to the role and the company.”

Pollington suggests job seekers try to step into the mindset of the people making hiring decisions and learning to see the process through their eyes.

“Most of the answers are available online, often for free, but it takes a lot of persistence, clarity and effort to wade through all of it and find the right ones at a time when unemployment can take a huge mental and physical toll,” Pollington said. “Do your research and then use it to build a specific, thoughtful, and aligned application for a job for which you’re a close fit.” That’s what gets noticed. That’s what gets you in the door.”

Staying positive in the face of adversity can be a powerful catalyst for change, according to Express Employment International CEO Bill Stoller.

“By focusing on skill development and networking, job seekers can turn this period into a stepping stone for future success,” he said.

Survey Methodology

The Job Insights survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between Nov. 11 – 26, 2024, among 505 Canadian hiring decision-makers.

The Job Seeker Report was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals from Nov. 21 to Dec. 6, 2024, among 505 adults ages 18 and older.

For full survey methodology, please contact Ana Curic at Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

If you would like to arrange for an interview to discuss this topic, please contact Ana Curic at (613) 858-2622 or email Ana@MapleLeafStrategies.com.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment International. Founded in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, the international staffing franchisor supports the Express Employment Professionals franchise and related brands. The Express

franchise brand is an industry-leading, international staffing company with franchise locations in the U.S., Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

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