

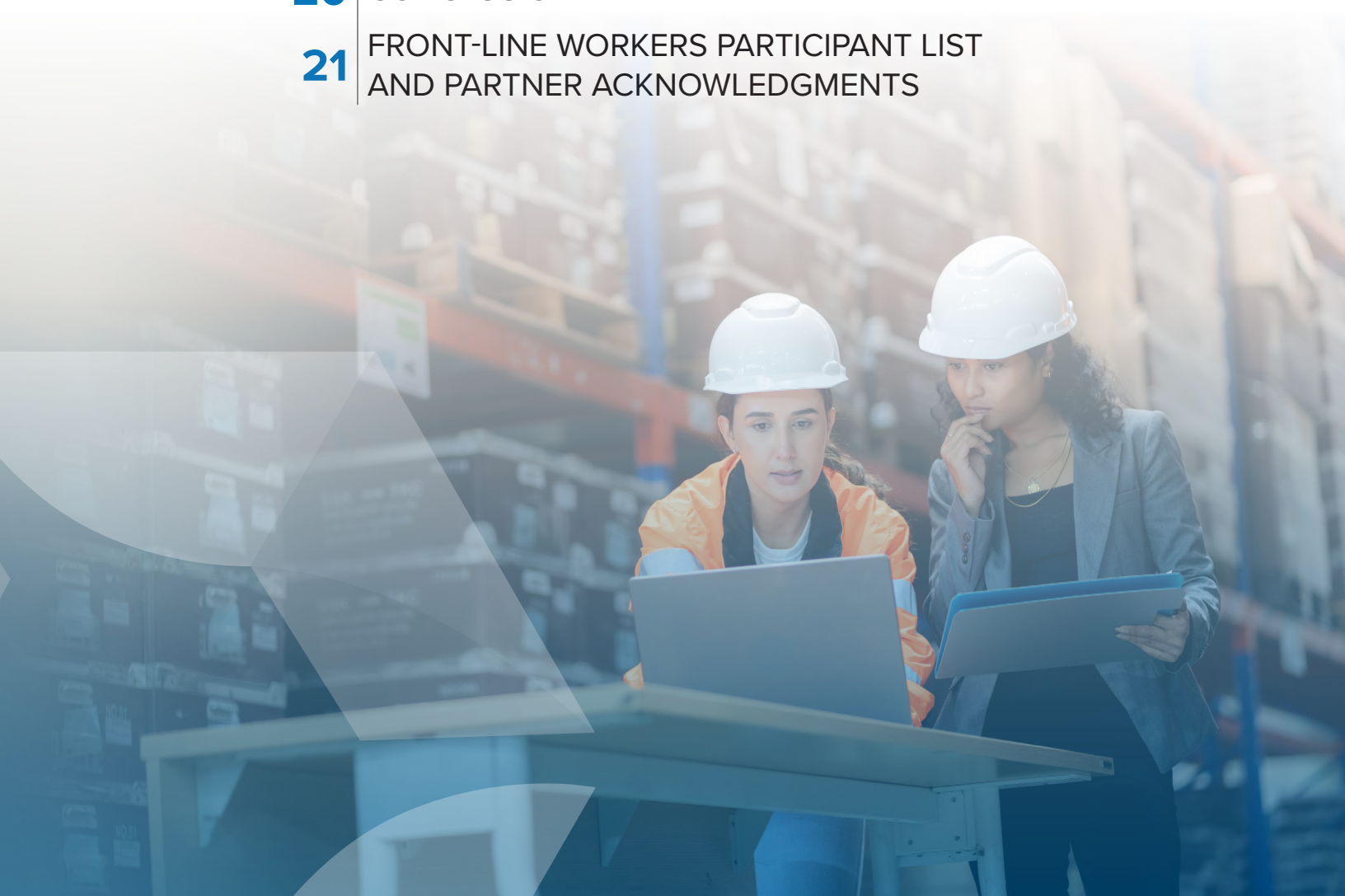


USING TECHNOLOGY TO TRANSFORM THE **FRONT-LINE WORKFORCE**



CONTENTS

03	PREFACE
04	INTRODUCTION
05	PART 1: THE FORCES REMAKING THE FRONT LINE
08	PART 2: HOW TECHNOLOGY WILL ENHANCE THE FRONT-LINE WORKFORCE
13	PART 3: BARRIERS TO ADOPTION
18	PART 4: WHAT EXECUTIVES NEED TO DO NEXT
20	CONCLUSION
21	FRONT-LINE WORKERS PARTICIPANT LIST AND PARTNER ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



PREFACE

**By SHRM President and Chief Executive Officer
Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM-SCP**

The future of workplace technology goes far beyond surface-level improvements. That message came through loud and clear during a recent convening in Las Vegas, where I had the pleasure of joining a select group of CHROs, thought leaders, and innovators to tackle one of the most urgent challenges in business today: How do we ensure front-line employees aren't left behind in the future of work?

Right now, there are approximately 100 million front-line workers in the U.S. alone. They're the backbone of our economy, the individuals who power industries such as health care, manufacturing, retail, hospitality, logistics, and many others. And yet, when we talk about modernization, transformation, and innovation, their needs are often treated as an afterthought. This can't continue. In fact, it won't continue, because the tide is turning.

The conversation I had with HR leaders in Las Vegas in May 2025 revealed a growing consensus: Technology, especially AI, must be harnessed not only to streamline operations, but to serve people. But there's a gap between vision and execution. According to SHRM research, [90% of CHROs](#) said they expect AI integration in the workplace to become more or much more prevalent this year. So, the intent is there. The need is there. But the path forward remains cloudy and complex.

Transformation isn't just about new technology, it's about mindset. Culture. Skills. Budget. And leaders are rightfully cautious. They're asking hard questions about ROI, workforce readiness, and how to preserve the human element in an increasingly digital environment. These aren't roadblocks, they're responsibilities. SHRM research shows 53% of HR professionals say [retaining these workers](#) is most difficult within their first year of employment. This kind of churn doesn't merely hurt morale, it drains resources, stifles innovation, and erodes trust. But this isn't just a labor issue — it's a leadership one.

Technology has the power to transform — not by replacing people, but by enabling them to adapt, upskill, and thrive. AI is already delivering personalized training, on-demand support, and tools that simplify repetitive tasks. These are practical strategies driving retention, boosting performance, and showing front-line employees they matter.

As we move forward, I challenge leaders to think boldly yet empathetically. Transformation happens together, with a shared goal: to make work better for everyone.



EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

In May 2025, SHRM joined some of the world's leading CHROs and thought leaders in Las Vegas for a focused discussion on how work is changing for front-line employees and how organizations can leverage technology to redefine the future of work. Throughout this SHRM report, we've included several **Executive Insights** from that event, including thought-provoking quotes and nuggets of wisdom from leaders in the room.

INTRODUCTION

Technology and AI are dramatically transforming organizations by automating repetitive tasks, unlocking deeper insights through data analysis, and empowering workers to learn new skills. Yet, as business leaders look to harness the power of AI to improve efficiency and decision-making, they need to balance technological innovation with the irreplaceable value of human connection.

This technological paradigm shift will bring unique challenges to the country's front-line workers, who make up more than 70% of U.S. jobs and represent about 100 million employees. This shift presents both an opportunity and a responsibility to adopt AI and automation as a strategic tool that enhances the front-line workforce while maintaining the empathy and personal touch that define the best workplaces.

IN BRIEF

The Challenges: Front-line workforce management is at a crossroads, with labor shortages, skills gaps, and technological disruption reshaping the landscape.

The Opportunities: Leveraging new technologies such as AI can improve hiring, drive productivity, increase retention, and help upskill workers.

The Barriers: High costs, cultural challenges, and a lack of strategic focus, among other factors, keep organizations from making successful technological transformations.

The Next Steps: Leaders must prioritize strategic investments in HR technology, workforce development, and leadership to future-proof their organizations.



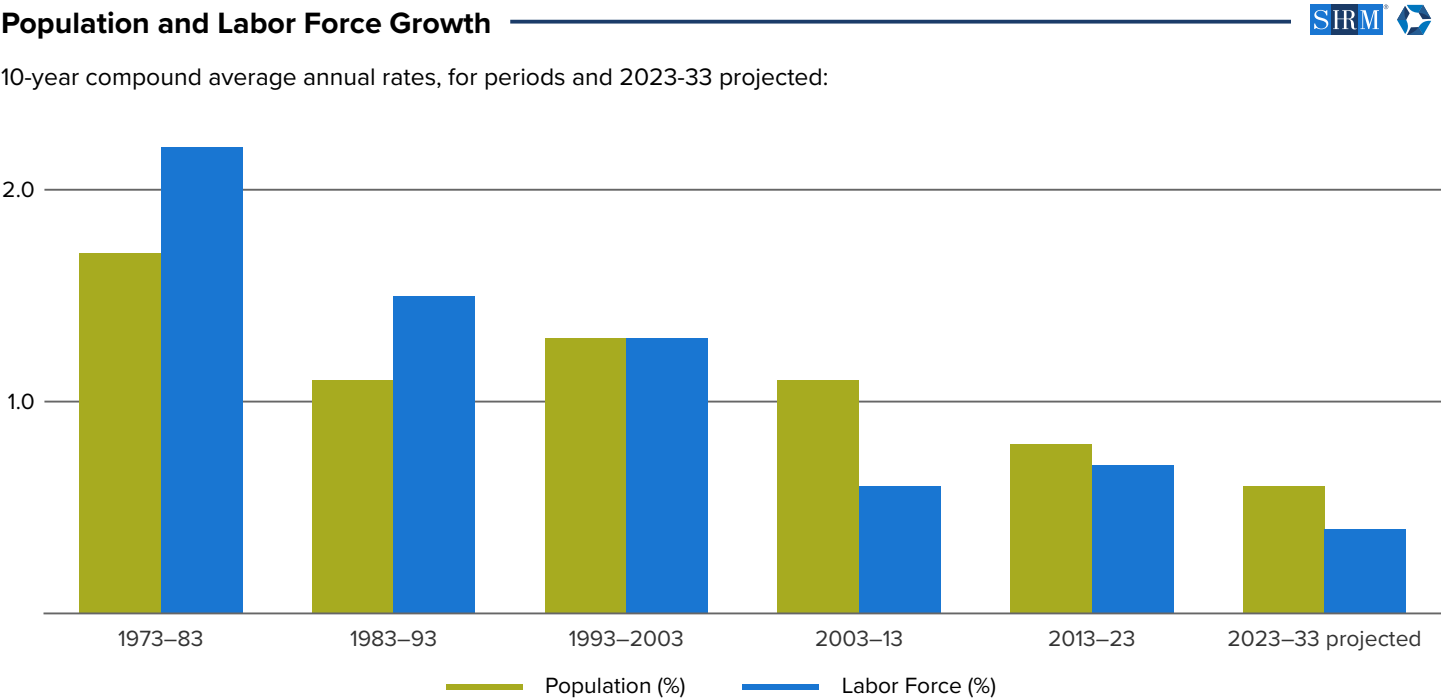
PART 1: THE FORCES REMAKING THE FRONT LINE

Today’s organizations face unprecedented challenges that are reshaping how they attract, retain, and develop their front-line workforce. Economic volatility, emerging skills, and profound demographic shifts have converged, creating a pressing need to invest in workforce enhancement through technology. These investments are essential to combat a persistent labor shortage, address worker skill gaps, and use the latest technologies.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

The U.S. has been experiencing a labor shortage since [March of 2018](#). Outside of a brief period in the first year of the COVID-19 crisis, job openings have consistently outpaced the number of available workers. This shortage would be even more extreme without a steady stream of [foreign-born workers](#). There are signs that the labor market is starting to soften when considered in terms of the ratio of unemployed workers to job listings. Still, a skilled labor shortage is likely to persist, particularly in industries such as health care, where many roles require specialized training.

This dynamic will only grow more challenging. On average, 11,400 Americans turn 65 daily in 2025, fueling a wave of retirements. At the same time, population growth is slowing and workforce participation is expected to dwindle, while the U.S. economy is projected to continue adding new jobs. These trends are expected to decrease the labor force participation rate from [62.7% in August 2024 to a projected 61.2% in 2033](#).



SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS

RETENTION CHALLENGES

Organizations increasingly face a labor market where staff retention is critical because replacing talent is a slow process. On average, hiring a new employee costs nearly \$4,700, including hard costs such as advertising for the position and onboarding expenses. However, [the total expense](#), including the time managers devote to the job search, can climb to as much as four times the employee's annual salary.

Front-line roles are among the hardest to fill, with 56% of HR professionals citing challenges in retaining deskless workers, according to the SHRM report [From Turnover to Tenure: Insights for Retaining Deskless Workers](#). Deskless workers face unique retention challenges, with 75% of HR professionals reporting that retaining them is harder than retaining office-based employees. Retention challenges are most acute in the first year of employment: 53% of HR professionals said this period is the hardest for retaining deskless workers, compared with 26% who said the same for office-based workers.

Organizations that fail to address these dynamics risk falling behind competitors who are intentionally designing workforces for resilience and adaptability. Most HR managers (86%) believe training is critical for retaining employees, according to the [2022 Workplace Learning & Development Trends](#) report by SHRM and TalentLMS. Most workers (76%) say they're more likely to stay at a company that offers continuous training. Yet most companies (66%) spend \$3,000 or less per employee each year on learning and development.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Retention Starts with Investment.

"If you're having problems actually staffing and getting the people you need in your organizations, that means you need to be investing in the people who are already in your organization so they're not spending their time on an app at night looking for a new opportunity."

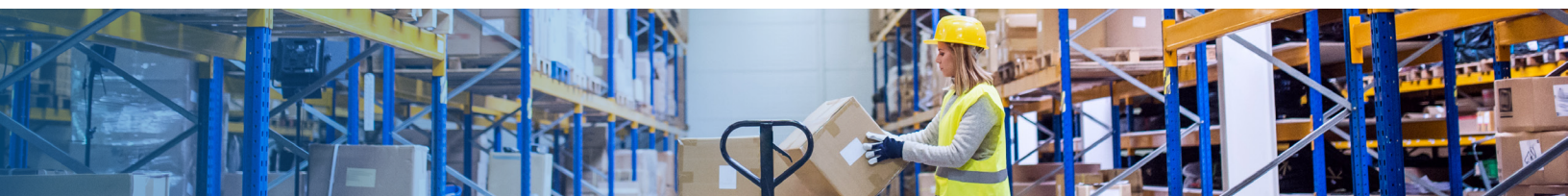
— Bijal Shah, CEO of [Guild](#)

SKILLS SHORTAGES

However, retention isn't the only reason to invest in the workforce. New technologies such as AI disrupt the labor force, creating challenges and opportunities. New automation and analysis tools will [increase productivity](#) but fundamentally transform work processes and alter the skill sets required to thrive. Technological disruption is expected to impact [300 million full-time jobs globally](#), underscoring the urgency for reskilling.

"Perhaps the most impactful technology right now is the one we're all talking about: generative AI. Its advancement and adoption will indiscriminately change the world of work as we know it, and we're just starting to pull back the curtain on the possibilities this revolutionary technology brings," [wrote](#) SHRM President and Chief Executive Officer Johnny C. Taylor, Jr., SHRM-SCP. "We can only imagine what is to come. However, as leaders, we must position ourselves on the front line of adoption and start incorporating new technologies into our everyday work. It's our responsibility to prepare our employees for the future so they don't come up short in the high-tech world we're entering. To do so requires upskilling, reskilling, and cross-skilling our employees now, so they're prepared for the future."

These new tools will require [nearly half of an individual worker's skills to be updated](#) over the next decade, as skills can become outdated in just [two years](#). Workers in some fields are [particularly vulnerable to automation](#) and may need to retrain for entirely new skill sets.



IMAGINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF WORKERS

Together, these forces create a critical inflection point. Front-line employees are the backbone of many industries, directly influencing customer experiences, operational outcomes, and organizational health. To secure a competitive advantage in this complex and evolving landscape, organizations must view front-line workforce enhancement as more than an operational necessity. It is an opportunity to invest in the people who drive their success. From leveraging skills-first hiring practices to adopting learning technologies that align with business goals, the strategies outlined in this report are designed to equip leaders with the tools and insights they need for sustainable growth and workforce resilience.

“When SHRM talks about the future of work, we mean looking beyond the next few years to a future where today’s workforce and the next generation are equipped with the skills they need to succeed,” wrote Taylor in an [open letter](#) to the Trump administration. “We need policies that address AI-driven job displacement and the growing skills gap. We must invest in upskilling, reskilling, and education reform. AI isn’t just a disruptor; it’s a tool that, when paired with human intelligence, can unlock new opportunities and drive innovation.”

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Breaking the Paper Ceiling.

Too often, the answer comes down to a bias in favor of four-year college degrees. “We tell our kids to go to brand name colleges for their degrees. How are we then not perpetuating the system that undervalues the people who make the system work?” asked Kaleen Love, U.S. chief people and culture officer at PMI. “If you’re going to be part of the solution, it requires partnering as part of an educational ecosystem that works with the community and technical colleges to start to break that paper ceiling.”



Pictured: Sam Schlimper, managing director, talent advisory, Randstad

PART 2: HOW TECHNOLOGY WILL ENHANCE THE FRONT-LINE WORKFORCE



The emergence of new technologies such as AI will change the workplace by improving productivity, enhancing upskilling, increasing personalization, and enhancing an organization's analytical and predictive capabilities. These effects will become more noticeable as AI becomes more established. While [92% of businesses plan to increase their investment in AI](#), only 1% say their AI usage is mature.

But AI will not do any of this on its own. In each case, the raw power of AI tools must be channeled by human beings, who will use their ethical judgment, creativity, empathy, and social skills to guide the work AI is doing, effectively [combining AI with human intelligence](#).

INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY

Front-line productivity may be where businesses will benefit most from investments in technology. Technologies such as generative AI, wearable devices, and robotics have the potential to streamline operations and reduce manual labor. Instead, workers will be responsible for [overseeing AI-enabled tools](#).

More than half (58%) of employers expect robotics and automation to transform their businesses within the next five years, according to the World Economic Forum's [The Future of Jobs Report 2025](#). For instance, AI-driven robotics could revolutionize manufacturing and logistics tasks such as product assembly, quality control, and pick-and-pack operations. Warehouse efficiency could be bolstered by autonomous guided vehicles, which transport goods safely and reliably, minimizing downtime.

Similarly, self-driving tractors, trucks, and even robotic lawn maintenance systems could transform traditionally labor-intensive roles in industries such as agriculture and landscaping. Additionally, aerial drones could be employed for time-sensitive tasks, such as delivering packages, conducting security sweeps, monitoring crops, and inspecting critical infrastructure.

AI's impact on productivity is also particularly evident in human resources. About 1 in 4 organizations use AI in their HR departments, and of those, 64% use AI to streamline recruitment, interviewing, and hiring processes, according to the [SHRM 2024 Talent Trends](#).

[Artificial Intelligence in HR](#) survey. By automating early-stage hiring tasks, these tools save time and enhance hiring quality through reduced bias and improved candidate-matching algorithms. According to the same report, companies using AI are 16 times more likely to enhance roles than displace them, reflecting a commitment to job enrichment over elimination.

Beyond hiring, AI can support strategic workforce planning by reducing the time HR departments spend on [repetitive manual tasks](#) and improving communication. SHRM research also finds 56% of HR professionals are optimistic about the potential for AI tools to [increase collaboration](#). This shift can give HR professionals more time to work together on analyzing patterns of employee engagement, predicting turnover risks, and developing proactive retention strategies.

GREATER PERSONALIZATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Employees enjoy personalized experiences whenever they shop, stream video, or browse online. This creates an expectation of [personalization](#) that many workplaces still fail to live up to. By investing in the right tools, organizations can engage more meaningfully with workers throughout their employment experience. Some ways AI tools can enhance workplace personalization include:

- » AI-powered chatbots that deliver immediate, tailored responses during recruitment, setting a positive tone for prospective employees.
- » Customized onboarding plans that reflect the role a new employee was hired for and their past experiences.
- » Real-time feedback that highlights areas for growth ahead of official performance reviews.
- » Assessment tools that help workers make the most of their benefits.

Each AI interaction helps employees feel the organization understands their needs and helps them grow without creating a further administrative burden on the organization's HR department.

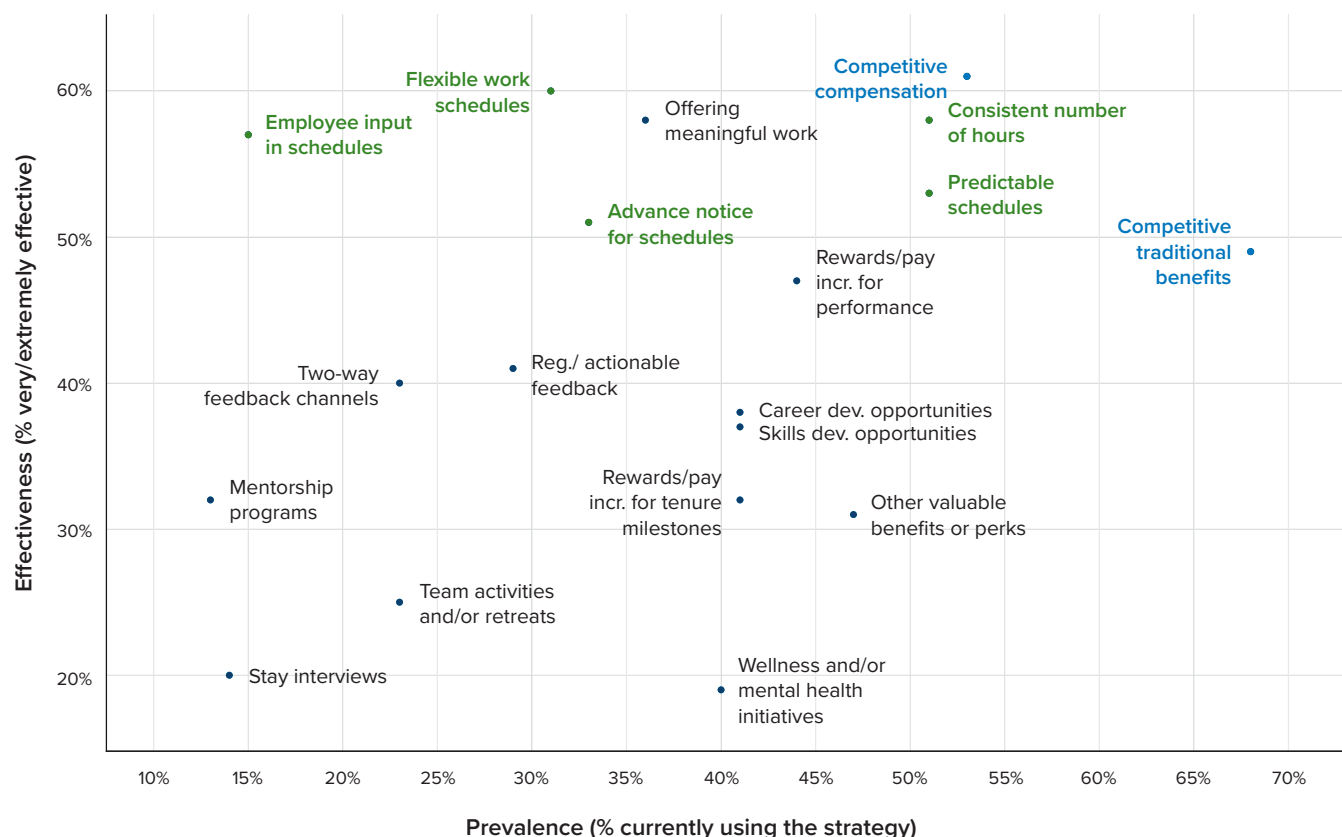
For hourly front-line workers, AI could also assist with personalized scheduling. Flexible scheduling can be one of the great benefits of hourly work, as just 12% of hourly workers say they would prefer a [9-to-5 schedule](#). But that doesn't mean hourly workers don't care when they work. A SHRM survey of HR professionals found that [five of the top seven most effective retention strategies for hourly workers relate to scheduling](#), including offering flexible work schedules, having consistent hours week-to-week, allowing employee input on schedules, providing predictable schedules, and giving advance notice of schedules.

Suppose your organization can use AI to better manage hourly workers' schedules. In that case, your organization is operating at a distinct advantage over competitors, particularly if you can give advance notice for schedules, offer flexible work schedules, or take employee input. These three factors significantly impact worker retention but are all offered by only one-third of employers or less.



Pictured: Blair Bennett, senior vice president, global talent acquisition, PepsiCo

Effectiveness and prevalence of strategies for retaining deskless workers, according to HR professionals.



FROM TURNOVER TO TENURE: INSIGHTS FOR RETAINING DESKLESS WORKERS, SHRM AND FIDELITY INVESTMENTS, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](https://www.shrm.org/research) TO LEARN MORE.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Win the Race to Day One.

“Whenever we talk to clients with front-line workers, we’re seeing them start to change the playbook and how they think about technology. There’s a fundamental shift happening — an understanding that AI is going to enable these workers to do something different. It opens up new potential for front-line workers in a way that just wasn’t possible before. And that gives me real hope, because I can actually see the system beginning to change. More and more of our clients are asking us to help with that change. So, while it’s a challenging space, it’s also a really exciting one.”

— Sam Schlimper, managing director, talent advisory, Randstad



ENHANCED UPSKILLING AND RESKILLING

AI's ability to personalize the workplace doesn't stop with current challenges; it extends into training and development to address future needs. Over half (53%) of CHROs [anticipate increased investment in rapid skill development](#) to help workforces adapt to emerging technologies. Technology will require workers to learn new skills, but it will also help them attain those skills faster if [used correctly](#).

Upskilling isn't as simple as deciding everyone in an organization needs a new skill and rolling out a standard training module to teach it. Different roles have different skill requirements, and workers will show varying aptitudes for acquiring particular skills. They may learn best in a specific way, suggesting the need for a [holistic learning and development strategy](#).

If an organization uses AI to develop custom training modules to address individual learning styles and skill levels, it can ensure employees receive relevant and practical education. This approach is particularly valuable for [deskless workers](#), whose roles often require niche skill sets or rapid training updates to changing technologies.

This approach can be further enhanced with other technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR). These tools can be integrated into training programs to offer immersive, hands-on learning experiences, particularly in construction, health care, and manufacturing. Workers can practice complex or high-risk tasks without fear of real-world consequences, significantly reducing the learning curve while building confidence and competence.

Implementing advanced technologies across industries raises the demand for employees to develop their skills continually. AI is critical in identifying skills gaps and aligning workforce development efforts with future business needs. According to SHRM research, 19% of organizations leverage AI for [upskilling and reskilling programs](#).

Forward-thinking organizations are also investing in predictive models to align workforce training with broader strategic objectives, creating a pipeline of talent ready to meet future challenges. The same SHRM research finds 12% of organizations leverage AI to identify skills gaps within their organization. This proactive approach ensures that employees remain adaptable in rapidly evolving markets.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Speedier Hires, Stronger Teams.

Emilee DeMartino, senior vice president, chief people officer for international markets at McDonald's, notes, "McDonald's is committed to building restaurant team confidence through a seamless and modern learning technology experience. Our platform delivers immersive learning opportunities — accessible on the device and in the environment that work best for each individual."

She added, "Beyond the restaurant, our Archways to Opportunity program enables crew and managers to access tuition assistance and language training. Together, these resources accelerate speed to productivity, improve retention, and help us deliver an outstanding customer experience."



Pictured (Left to Right): Sean Behr, CEO, Fountain; Bijal Shah, CEO, Guild; Emilee DeMartino, senior vice president, chief people officer, international markets, McDonald's

IMPROVED ANALYTICS AND PREDICTION

Years ago, the role of HR was primarily about the past, as HR teams spent their time documenting and addressing actions that had occurred days or weeks earlier. Today, much of HR work is about the present and responding to challenges in real time. However, the [future of HR](#) will be about, well, the future, as organizations increasingly use AI to analyze workforce data, spot potential issues, and offer actionable insights before problems emerge.

Predictive analytics and real-time data collection enable organizations to make informed decisions regarding workforce management. For front-line teams, this means better resource allocation, improved safety, and enhanced job satisfaction. According to SHRM research, 82% of organizations use people analytics platforms to [track worker retention and predict turnover](#), with 72% of their HR leaders saying this area is where the technology adds the most value to their organization.

Combined with [wearable devices and mobile communication tools](#), AI can go beyond simply tracking a worker's performance and offer guidance to help them become more efficient and effective. This approach can improve worker safety by helping identify risky behaviors before they become problematic. However, like all of the advancements detailed in this section, organizations must make sustained cultural and operational changes to turn the possibility of an AI-enhanced workforce into a reality.



PART 3: BARRIERS TO ADOPTION



While advanced technologies promise to radically improve the front-line workforce, widespread adoption faces significant barriers. These range from financial and technical challenges to cultural resistance and strategic missteps. Understanding and addressing these obstacles is essential for organizations to fully harness the benefits of innovation while minimizing risks and unintended consequences.

HIGH IMPLEMENTATION COSTS AND LEGACY SYSTEMS

One of the most immediate and visible barriers to technology adoption is the [high cost](#) associated with implementation. Investing in cutting-edge tools such as AI, predictive analytics, and robotics often requires significant capital outlays, particularly for smaller organizations and those operating in resource-constrained environments. A SHRM survey of HR leaders who have implemented AI finds that [lacking resources](#) was the most common barrier they faced when introducing AI, with 40% citing the issue.

Beyond direct costs, integrating new technologies with existing legacy systems compounds the challenge. Many organizations rely on [older technology infrastructure](#) that was expensive to implement but is now incompatible with advanced tools, requiring additional expenditures on system upgrades or replacements. The complexity of this process can slow implementation, increasing not only costs but also frustration among stakeholders.

HR LEADERS NEED PRACTICAL AI EXPERTISE

Although AI is transforming workforce management, many HR leaders lack the proficiency to deploy these tools effectively. While 92% of businesses indicate plans to [increase AI investments](#), most HR executives (97%) say they have only a beginner or intermediate [understanding of AI](#).

This skills gap hinders organizations from fully leveraging AI's potential, leaving promising functionalities underutilized. Without adequate training and exposure, HR teams will struggle to design and oversee AI-driven solutions that align with workforce needs, limiting the impact of these technologies on the front lines.

LACK OF A COHESIVE TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY

A significant hurdle to streamlined adoption is the absence of a cohesive technological vision within many organizations. While AI can [achieve cost savings](#), these improvements do not occur overnight. They require a sustained, intentional, strategic vision for deploying these tools throughout an organization.

Too often, employers proceed with [piecemeal technology implementation](#), rather than a long-term strategy that ensures alignment with broader business objectives. Without a clear road map, organizations risk redundancy, inefficiency, and confusion. A comprehensive approach ensures that every piece of technology supports not just individual tasks but organizational culture, employee experience, and workforce development goals cohesively.

CYBERSECURITY CONCERNS

Cybersecurity is another pressing concern that looms large over organizations adopting new technologies. With greater reliance on AI and digital platforms comes an increase in potential vulnerabilities, and 41% of HR executives say they're [more concerned about cyberattacks](#) because of AI.

HR data, for example, often includes sensitive employee information that requires advanced safeguards. Failing to address cybersecurity risks exposes organizations to external threats and [erodes worker trust](#), making technology adoption more difficult.

HR has an [increasing role](#) in cybersecurity, serving as a critical partner for more technical teams. Organizations need to engage HR in training workers on using new technology and partnering to create security policies and [manage communications following a cyberattack](#).

RUSHED IMPLEMENTATIONS

Hastily deploying advanced technologies without careful planning can do more harm than good. Rushed implementation of AI and automation tools can inadvertently [decrease worker engagement or erode trust](#).

Front-line workers forced to adapt to poorly executed systems may experience frustration, mistrust, or even diminished morale, undermining the solutions' intended benefits. Additionally, organizations prioritizing speed over strategy often miss opportunities to customize technology solutions to meet unique operational or cultural needs, decreasing their overall efficacy. A [more measured approach to implementation](#) can yield long-term benefits, using [pilot programs](#) to build on successful use cases and achieve scale.





Pictured (Left to Right): Cathy Peterman, chief people officer, tech, product, and design, Wayfair; Adam Holton, chief people officer, GE HealthCare; David Landman, co-founder, HR Elevate

CULTURAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESISTANCE

Cultural resistance to technological change also plays a significant role in slowing adoption. Many employees and even leadership teams harbor skepticism toward unfamiliar tools due to fears of disruption and the lack of a [transformation mindset](#).

When resistance is deeply embedded in organizational culture, efforts to implement new tools and processes face greater challenges, requiring intentional change management and transparent communication strategies to gain acceptance. [Leadership buy-in](#) is critical to overcoming barriers and fostering a culture of technological growth. Without executives' support, technology initiatives often falter due to a lack of vision, prioritization, or sufficient resource allocation.

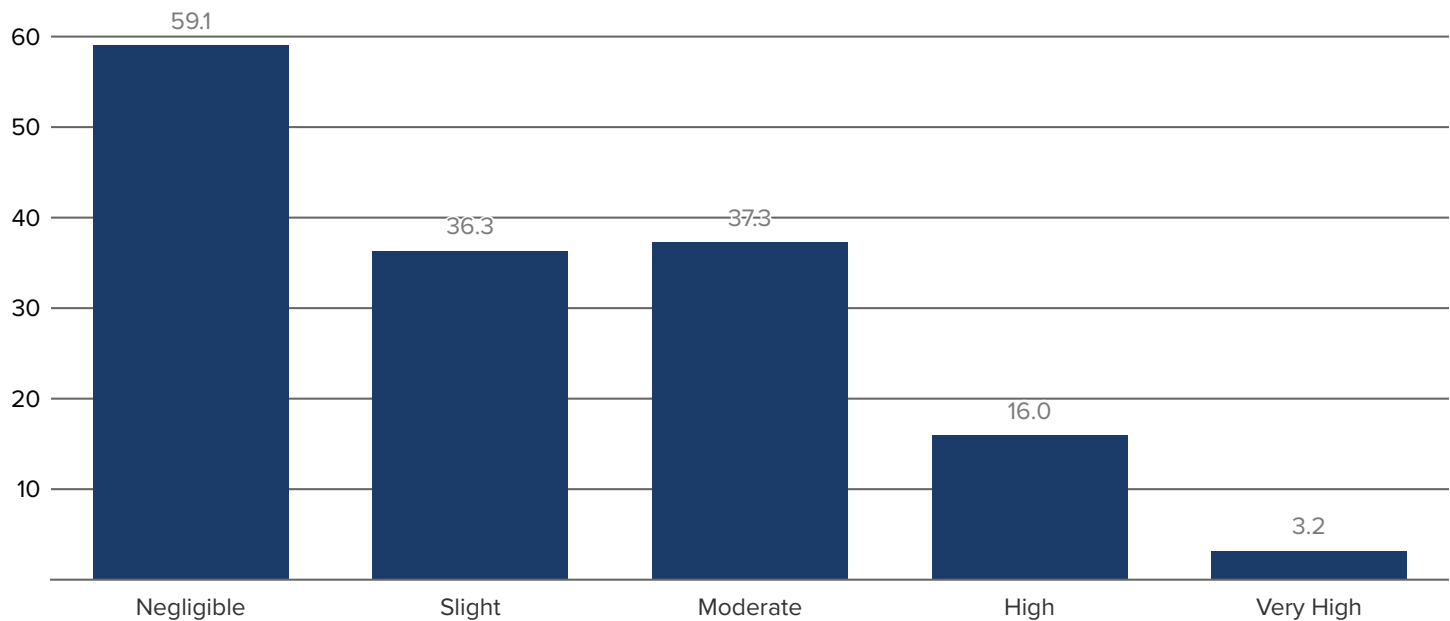
WORK DISPLACEMENT WORRIES

Finally, fears surrounding work displacement remain a psychologically and socially significant barrier to adoption. Automation and AI have generated widespread concern over the potential for job losses, particularly among front-line workers whose roles may appear most at risk.

SHRM research finds that organizations using AI are 16 times more likely to enhance jobs (32%) than to displace them (2%), yet concerns about job reductions persist, often slowing buy-in from staff. To [mitigate these fears](#), organizations must prioritize transparency, communicate clearly about the intended role of technology, and emphasize how these tools will empower workers rather than render them obsolete.

By proactively addressing these barriers, organizations can create a more supportive and productive environment for technology adoption. These efforts ensure that technologies are introduced and fully integrated to enhance organizational performance and the front-line workforce's experience.

Estimated Distribution of Current U.S. Employment Across Levels of Automation Displacement Risk (Millions of Workers)



JOBS AT RISK — U.S. EMPLOYMENT IN THE NEW AGE OF AUTOMATION (PART I), SHRM, 2025. VISIT [SHRM.ORG/RESEARCH](https://www.shrm.org/research) TO LEARN MORE.

Source: Calculations based on O*NET 29.1 database (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration) and employment data from the BLS May 2023 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates, a product of the BLS Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) program.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

The Human Touch in Hiring.

Instead of constantly asking, “What will AI do?” try instead asking, “What will AI not do?” suggested Maggie Ruvoldt, CHRO of LEARN Behavioral.

Consider workers’ concerns about the adoption of AI. What AI won’t be able to do is provide the human-to-human connection and ability to tap into a person’s network during hiring. For example, you may have someone in mind who might be good for a role, but they don’t have every qualification on paper. The ability to advocate for that person is precisely the personal touch that AI simply cannot replicate. By reframing our thinking around AI, leaders can quell worries and provide new ways of thinking about technology in the hiring process.



DATA GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

One of the most pressing [ethical challenges](#) in adopting AI is the [risk of bias](#) in AI algorithms. AI systems are only as objective as the data on which they are trained. If the data used to develop these systems includes historical biases, the AI may perpetuate or even amplify them. For instance, recruitment algorithms trained on data reflecting past hiring decisions may prioritize specific demographics while disadvantaging others.

HR leaders [should audit AI systems](#) to identify and mitigate these biases. Implementing processes that check the impact an AI tool is having on a wide variety of groups and ensuring the outcome is fair and consistent can help reduce the potential for discriminatory outcomes.

[Data privacy and security](#) also pose serious concerns. AI systems often require vast amounts of employee data to function effectively. HR leaders must ensure that [sensitive information](#), such as performance reviews, health data, and personal identifiers, is stored and used according to stringent security protocols. Organizations should have transparent data governance policies and adhere to data privacy regulations such as the EU's General Data Protection Regulation. Communicating these measures to employees builds trust and demonstrates organizational accountability.



PART 4: WHAT EXECUTIVES NEED TO DO NEXT

To overcome all these barriers to using technology to enhance their workforce, executives must adopt a comprehensive approach that directly tackles financial, cultural, and operational challenges. By aligning technology initiatives with broader organizational strategies and engaging employees at every level, leaders can unlock the transformative potential of advanced tools while empowering their front-line workforce.

PUT STRATEGY FIRST

The foundation of any successful technological integration lies in a clear and cohesive strategy. Executives should begin by defining how new tools align with their organization's objectives, ensuring that every investment is [customized to their needs](#) and supports long-term priorities.

A [strategic approach](#) prevents the inefficiencies that result from piecemeal implementation and creates clarity for all stakeholders. For instance, prioritizing AI tools that enhance recruitment, learning, and planning ensures technology investments meet immediate workforce needs while addressing broader business goals. AI-powered platforms, such as those that analyze skills gaps or streamline the hiring process, offer scalable solutions that drive productivity and empower employees.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Reward the Change Leaders.

In this fast-evolving environment, future-forward workers who understand the value of remaining open and nimble to change will be the ones to advance and be recognized. That's why, as Blair Bennett, senior vice president of global talent acquisition for PepsiCo, suggested, companies should recognize and reward those who are changing with the times and helping their peers with change, too. "They're doing work that nobody has ever done before. That is critical for us all to raise the next generation. How do we recognize that? Investing in their potential is one key way," she said.

FOSTER TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION AND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Transparent communication plays a critical role in alleviating fears surrounding technology adoption. Workers need a clear understanding of how new tools will impact their roles, with reassurance that they are being adopted to enhance, not threaten, the workforce.

While AI can streamline processes, leaders should ensure that [human expertise remains central](#), especially in recruitment and employee engagement. Create a culture where employees are encouraged to explore and embrace AI technologies. This helps reduce fear around AI replacing jobs and promotes innovation.

Executive leaders should [consistently communicate](#) the benefits of these technologies, emphasizing improved working conditions, career development opportunities, and streamlined processes. Employee involvement in the adoption process further builds trust and encourages buy-in. Leaders can convene focus groups or surveys to gather insights from front-line workers, ensuring solutions address real challenges and are met with less resistance.



ADDRESS SKILLS GAPS THROUGH TARGETED HIRING AND TRAINING

[Closing skills gaps](#) is fundamental to successful technology integration. Executives must develop training programs that are both scalable and personalized, addressing the diverse learning needs within their workforce. AI-driven tools can facilitate this by providing training modules to enhance specific skills or fill emerging gaps.

Executives should also rethink hiring practices to [focus on skills](#) rather than traditional credentials. Integrating AI into hiring processes can help identify candidates whose abilities align closely with organizational needs, regardless of formal qualifications. This shift optimizes recruitment and creates opportunities for a more diverse talent pool. By leveraging AI to identify and nurture potential, organizations can balance external hiring with internal development, ensuring both short-term readiness and long-term career growth.

EMBED ADAPTABILITY INTO ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Executives must prepare their teams for future challenges by fostering a culture of adaptability. This involves actively [redesigning job roles](#) to integrate human and technological capabilities seamlessly.

Automation and AI aren't intended to replace workers but to augment their abilities, creating more efficient workflows and freeing up employees to focus on higher-value tasks. Executives must clearly articulate this vision to their workforce, framing technology as a partner in achieving shared goals.

[Proactive leadership](#) is critical in addressing labor and skill shortages, compounded by the rapid pace of technological change. Executives who demonstrate accountability, yet demonstrate flexibility as conditions shift, inspire confidence among employees, ultimately driving greater adoption of new tools.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Communicate What Matters.

Todd De Ocampo-Sargent, director of organization development (executive) at The Walt Disney Co., said it's important for companies to identify what they value and what stories they tell. For companies with strong communications and engagement, it's essential to share the narrative of how these changes are being embraced by the workforce and highlight the value of these changes.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Leading at the Edge of Possibility.

"True leadership lives at the edge of what's possible. Right now, we're standing at the edge of more possibilities than ever before. It's not just the new technology that's exciting — it's what that technology helps unlock in all of us: creativity, connection, and new ways of thinking. After this conversation, I feel hopeful. Sure, we've got some big challenges ahead, but the future is bright. I truly believe we'll solve whatever challenges come our way."

— Sean Behr, CEO of Fountain, an HR technology company



CONCLUSION

The front-line workforce is at a pivotal moment, shaped by labor shortages, skills gaps, and the disruptive potential of new technologies. While these challenges are significant, they present equally compelling opportunities for transformation. By leveraging AI tools, prioritizing skills-based hiring, and embedding upskilling and reskilling into organizational culture, companies can address critical gaps while building a workforce equipped for future demands.

Strategic leadership is key to driving this transformation. Executives must adopt cohesive technology strategies that align with organizational goals, foster transparent communication to build trust, and engage employees in the adoption process. Cultivating a culture of adaptability is equally essential, ensuring that job roles and organizational systems are redesigned to seamlessly integrate human ingenuity with technological advancements.

When approached thoughtfully, technology can empower the front-line workforce, enhancing productivity, personalizing employee experiences, and improving retention. With targeted leadership, inclusive strategies, and a commitment to readiness for the future, organizations can turn technological disruption into an opportunity for resilience and growth, ensuring their people remain at the heart of their success.

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

Reimagining Work, Together.

“HR Elevate was built around the simple idea that all of us are seeking opportunities to learn and to connect in a more meaningful way that deepens relationships and creates community. When we are in service to each other, trust is built and we can further our collective impact for those we work hard to support every day. This was the case when we had the privilege to convene HR leaders from some of the biggest companies and organizations in the world to discuss the future of work and the impact technology will have on front-line workers. Having anchor companies like Fountain and Guild, who are leading the way on reimagining work, created a wonderful backdrop to explore content that can help leaders and HR professionals everywhere. We are so grateful to SHRM and Randstad for capturing this discussion and creating thought leadership for this critical population of American workers.”

— Mike Clementi, co-founder, HR Elevate

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