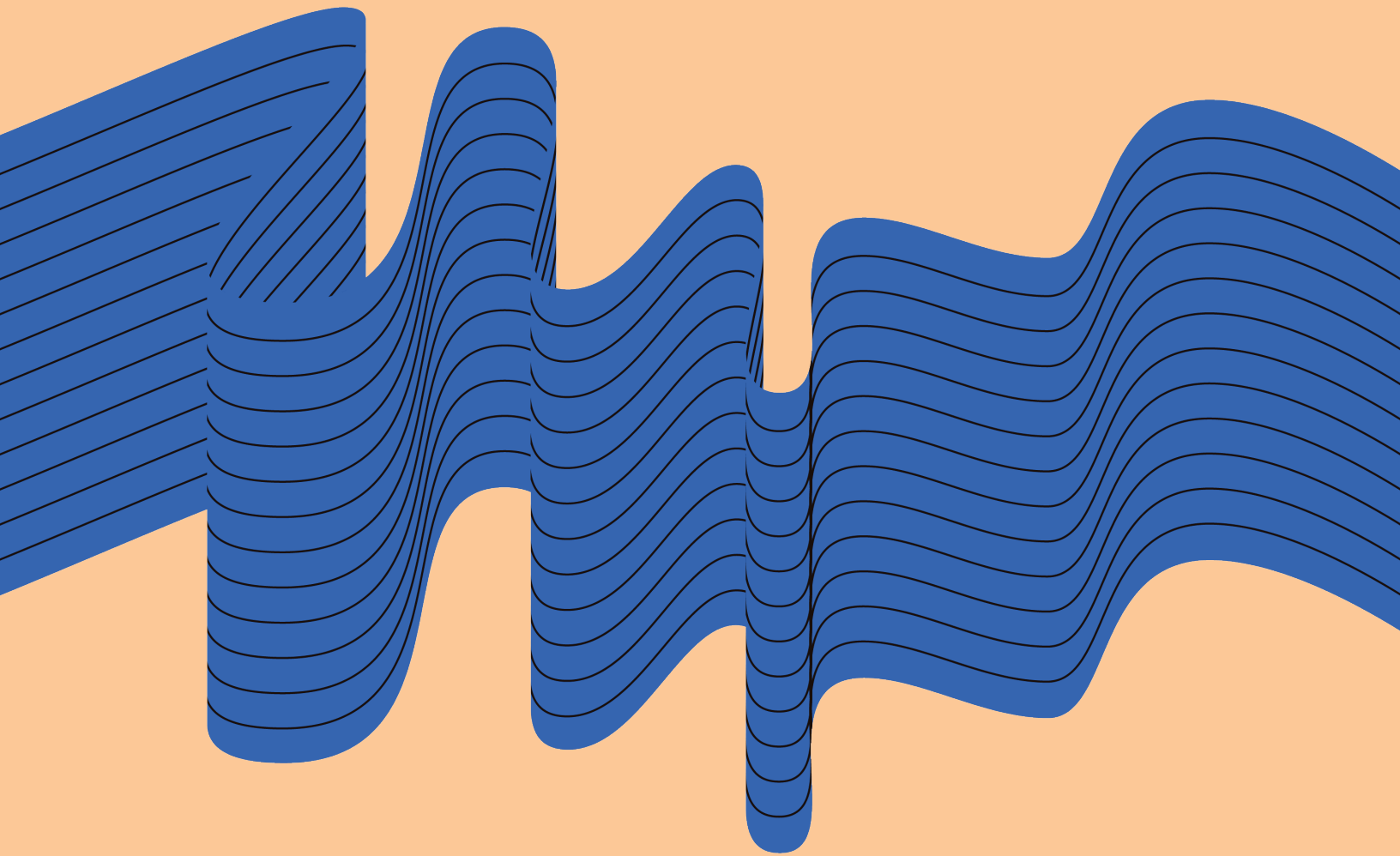# Guild

HR Trends & Insights Report 2024

How to reshape workforce learning and talent mobility

Introduction

Finding opportunity in chaos

Today's talent leaders are no strangers to watershed moments. In many ways, the past few years have been defined by overlapping crises and inflection points: a global pandemic, the war for talent, workforce participation cliffs, the Great Resignation, economic volatility, the proliferation of AI... the list goes on.

Yet where chaos is the norm, adaptability can be both a salve and a remedy.

At Guild's 2023 Opportunity Summit, Chief People and Purpose Officer, Dean Carter, pointed out there are two characteristics that define adaptability and serve organizations well in moments of high pressure and high uncertainty. "Agility and resilience can help you in chaotic moments. HR people know this better than anyone... the people team and the head of HR has more influence than they ever had in this profession."

HR decision makers tend to agree, and this represents a rare moment of opportunity amid a torrent of chaos and urgency: As organizations begin to understand that talent growth strategy IS business growth strategy, HR leaders have an opportunity to improve lives and solve critical business problems like never before.
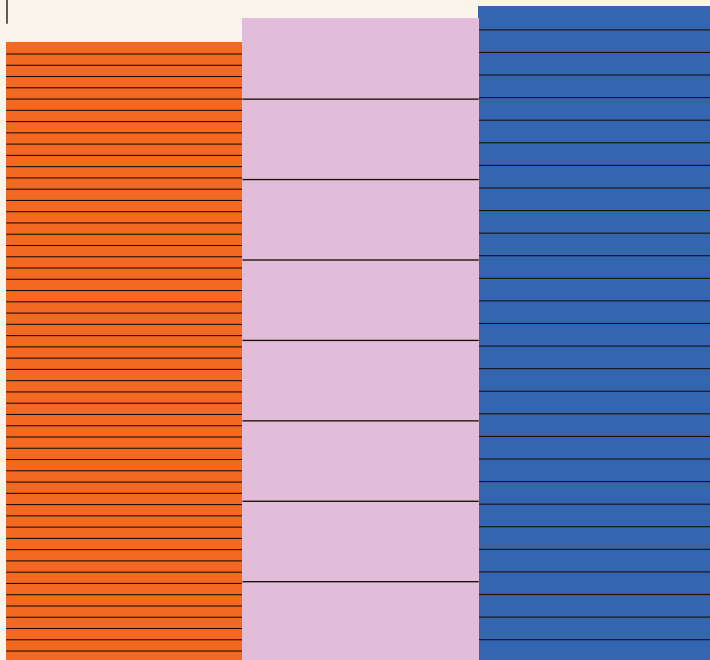
77%
of HR decision makers feel they have more influence than 3 years ago

80%
of HR decision makers say their budgets have increased in the last 3 years

81%
of HR decision makers believe other leaders see HR initiatives as important

Source: Guild HR leader survey data, 2023.

Guild

2024
HR Trends & Insights Report

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Pulse check: Where today's workforce stands.

It isn't just today's talent leaders who are looking to find opportunity in chaotic moments. Recent data reveals where employees face barriers to advancement — and what kind of support they're looking for.

Telling employees to own their own development isn't serving them.

Guild research has shown that workers cite missing qualifications or skills and a lack of visibility into career mobility options as the biggest barriers to career advancement.
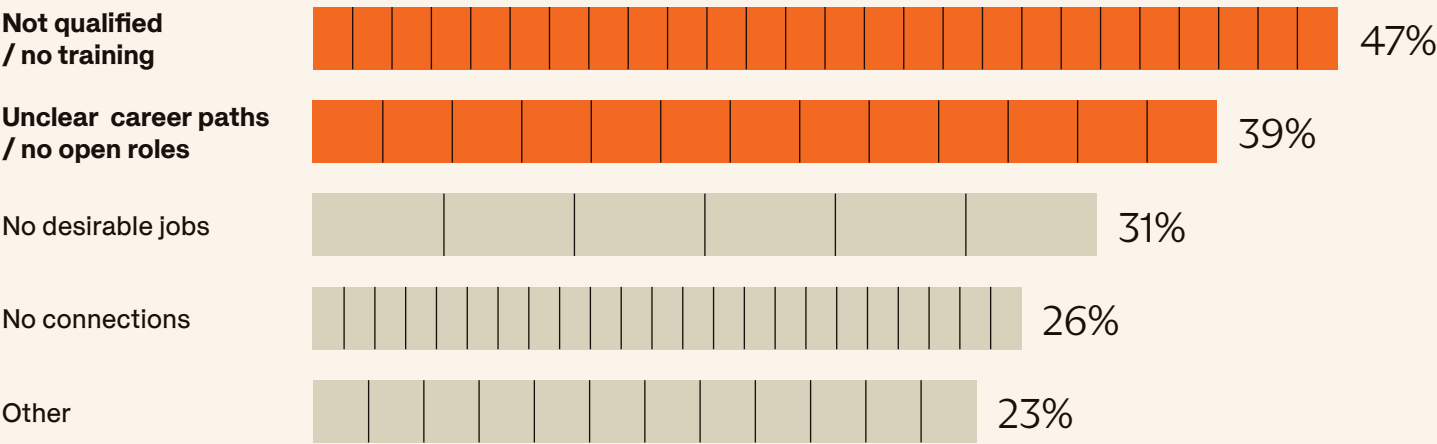
This highlights underlying cultural and logistical challenges that come with telling employees to "**own your own development**."

Culturally, "own your own development" can come from a desire to empower employees to take advantage of their education benefits and steer the path of their own careers. Yet without the right guidance and support, many individuals might not know where to start their journey or what options are available.

Logistically, offering education benefits —even with strong internal mobility pathways — isn't enough to drive career growth if employees don't see the connections between courses, skills, and possible jobs.

Top barriers to career advancement

Source: **Guild American Worker Survey**, 2022. n=1,867

Not qualified / no training	47%
Unclear career paths / no open roles	39%
No desirable jobs	31%
No connections	26%
Other	23%

When it comes to planning for success, employees prefer concrete steps to move into a career path over lists of roles and responsibilities or day-in-the-life videos.

Employees who want to grow their careers value practical support. In a recent survey of Guild members, Guild Research* found that nearly 7 in 10 employees saw greater value in being able to access clear steps to break into a career path than roles and responsibilities or stories of upward mobility.

This doesn't mean that knowing what to expect or seeing colleagues' inspiring stories aren't important — they are — but when the time comes to move from exploring to planning for career mobility, employees want support in turning their goals and ambitions into actionable steps.
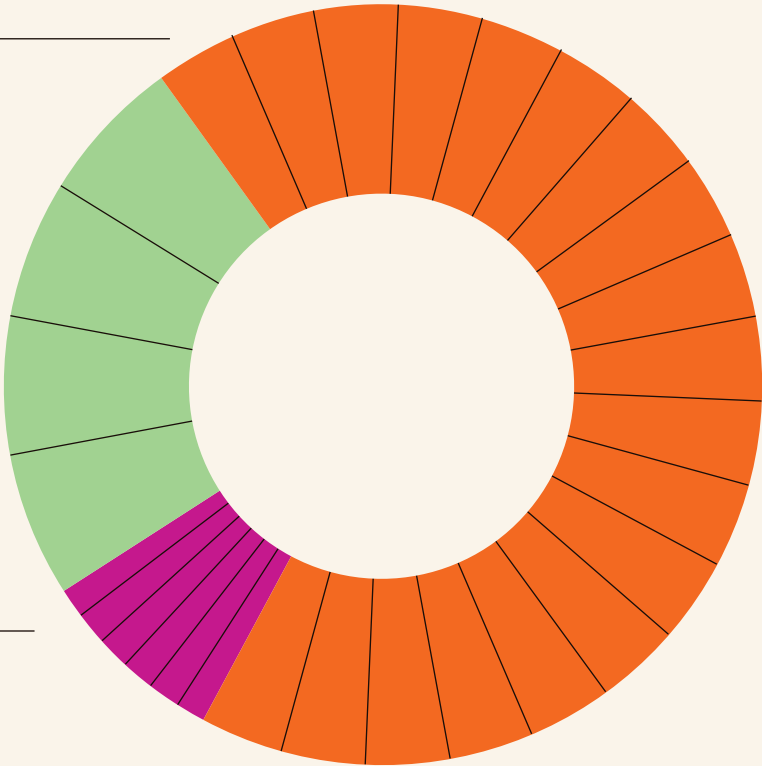

If you wanted to set career goals and plan for success, which of the following would you find most helpful?

68% How to move into a career path (i.e. steps to take)

24% What to expect in a career path (i.e. roles and responsibilities

8% Stories from upward mobile Guild members

*Source: Guild member survey, 2023, n=564

When it comes to AI, leave no one behind.

HR teams are increasingly integrating AI into their systems, and individuals are beginning to leverage AI to help them in the job application process. This can bring a lot of benefit — yet those most likely to derive the most benefit are employees who already have a bachelor's degree and higher-paying jobs.

As new AI technologies are integrated in 2024 and beyond, HR leaders should ensure new innovations do not further marginalize frontline employees. A key way to achieve that is to ensure all employees can access the upskilling they need.

Trends to *beat:* Ways AI can exacerbate existing equity gaps.

The AI industry is not diverse — and that can have negative downstream effects in AI technology.

Artificial intelligence specialists are overwhelmingly male (~91%) and white (~67%).[1] That lack of gender and racial diversity can contribute to drastic racial and gender disparities in the user experience of AI technologies,[2] as well as severe bias in AI-assisted recruiting[3] and hiring.[4]

## Exposure to new technologies in the flow of work is uneven.

According to Pew Research, **the employees most likely to be exposed to AI tools and technology in their work hold a bachelor's degree or higher and are already in higher-paying fields** that tend to require degrees and analytical skills.[5]

Employees without a bachelor's degree are less likely to use AI to access career mobility.

According to a survey conducted by Guild Research, employees who already have a bachelor's degree are more likely to leverage AI tools to help them gain a competitive edge while pursuing career advancement, from job searches to interview preparation, highlighting a widening skilling delta.

AI tools will likely **make it easier to navigate and land new jobs**

Source: Guild member and learner survey, 2023. n=355

13%	15%	17%	23%

Master's	BA/BS	Some college or AA	High School
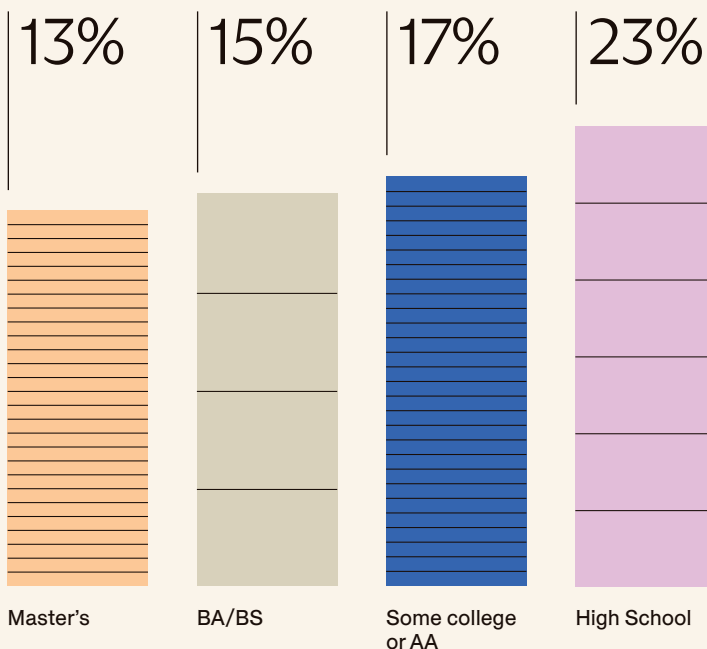
> "I want to stay relevant in an increasingly competitive environment, so **I'm pursuing education in IT/cybersecurity/data analytics…**
>
> I would definitely use **ChatGPT to help me write my resumes and cover letters** when I apply for jobs. **I would also use it to prepare for interviews.**"
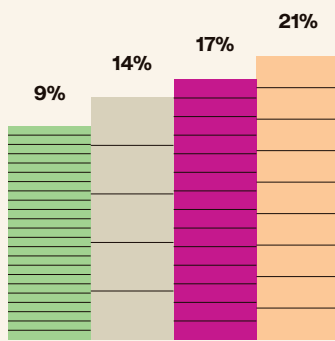>
> Financial Services employee with a Master's degree

Employees with higher levels of education and higher household incomes are more likely to gain further advantages from an increase in AI usage.

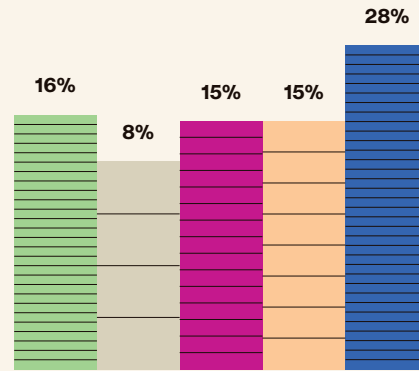Guild Research also uncovered that employees with higher household incomes and higher levels of education were more likely to see AI as a means to make their jobs easier — and as a reason to upskill.

However, the pressure to learn new skills as a result of AI is felt everywhere: **1 in 5 employees with a high school diploma agree they need to learn new skills as a result of AI.**

"AI tools will likely **make my job easier or more efficient.**"

9%		High School
14%		Some college/AA
17%		BA/BS
21%		Master's

Percent who agree

16%	Less than $30k
8%	$30,000 - $49,999
15%	$50,000 - $74,999
15%	$75,000 - $99,999
28%	100k or more

Income range

"As AI tools become more integrated, **I will need to learn new skills.**"

21%		High School
26%		Some college/AA
29%		BA/BS
38%		Master's

Percent who agree
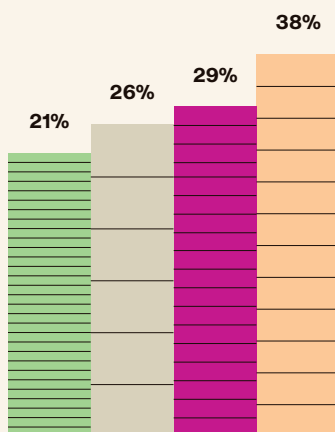
23%	Less than $30k
25%	$30,000 - $49,999
24%	$50,000 - $74,999
27%	$75,000 - $99,999
43%	100k or more
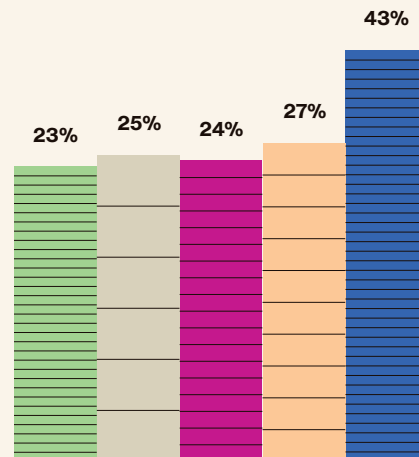
Income range

Source: Guild member and learner survey, 2023. n=355

Trends to *set*:

An accessibility-focused approach to AI can open new doors for today's frontline workforce.

Make AI skills accessible to your entire workforce.

Talent leaders can disrupt unintentional bias and gatekeeping of critical skills for the future by ensuring **education benefits cover AI upskilling** programs that don't have prior education requirements.

Guild recently worked with our network of innovative learning partners to release an **AI skilling bundle of over 40 programs** designed to meet a breadth of AI skills needs — including accessibility. The majority of these programs do not require a prior degree and several require no prior formal education.

A recent survey of Guild members showed that the majority of employees with previous exposure to AI were more likely to feel positive about the potential impact of AI tools.

How do you feel about the impact of AI tools like ChatGPT on various aspects of your life, career, or society as a whole?

Source: Guild member and learner survey, 2023. n=104

■ Excited	■ Optimistic	■ Neutral
38%	**30%**	**18%**

□ Concerned	■ Worried
9%	**6%**
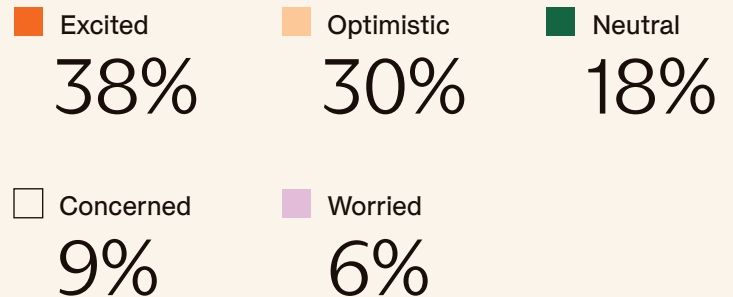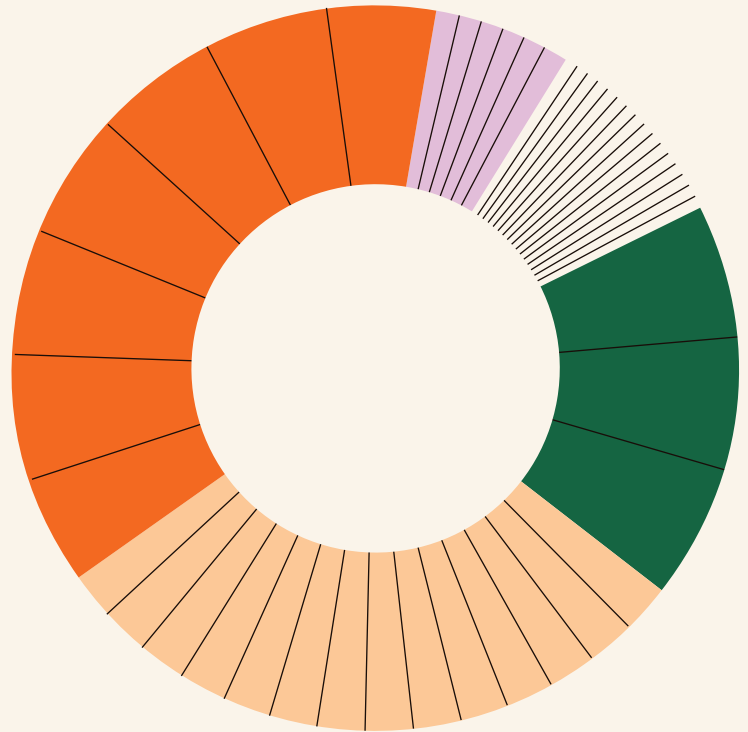
Evaluate the benefits, risks, and drawbacks of AI-assisted talent management solutions.

There are many ways AI can support talent goals, but, as with any new technology, adoption and use should be a strategic, active, and iterative process — with **solutions designed to make the lives of employees better.**

> *"The most successful companies will be those who harness today's excitement around AI to invest in their people to build the hard-to-obtain skills, knowledge, and capabilities needed in an AI-powered future."*
>
> **Bijal Shah**
> Chief Experience Officer and Head of Platform at Guild

Harvard Business Review recommends a variety of risks and related mitigation strategies, including ensuring diversity and representation across engineering and decision-making teams, examining levels of decision control (e.g. is AI making a recommendation or a choice?), reviewing and building internal processes to identify and address potential biases driven by AI, and more.[6]

Sync career mobility with employees' daily rhythm.

Talent leaders know that employees want and expect **opportunities to grow their careers**. Yet while facing a spate of challenges when it comes to building better career mobility opportunities for their workforces, HR leaders can over-index on challenges related to logistics and decision-maker buy-in rather than what it takes to grow adoption rates among employees.

The result? Employer-centric language that doesn't resonate with employees, campaigns that fail to meet employees where they are in their career journeys, and missing out on the group of people whose perspectives employees tend to value over their own managers.

Instead, taking an employee-centric approach to language, marketing and communication, and a focus on family support yields better adoption rates — and more chances to make career growth aligned with both personal aspiration and business need a reality.
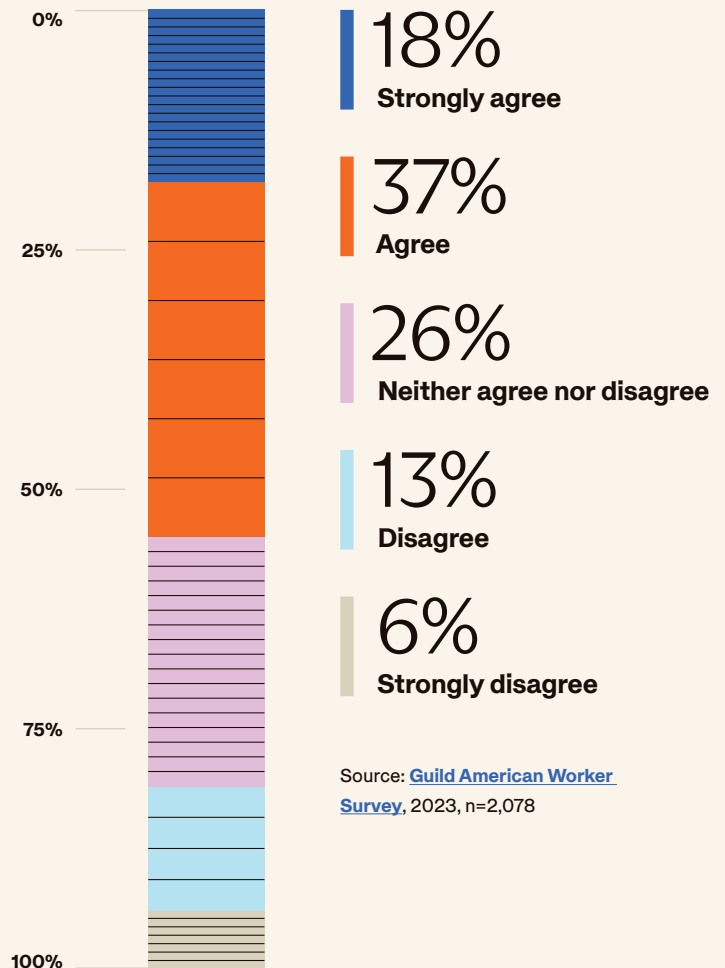
Trends to *beat*:
Career mobility centered on employer needs.

Employer-centric language about internal mobility can lead to employees to believe their career growth isn't a company priority.

Although many companies provide upskilling opportunities, when it comes to career growth, many employees feel their best interests aren't at heart. According to a **recent Guild Research survey** of thousands of American workers, only 18% would "strongly agree" that their employer views their career growth as a priority.

"My employer prioritizes helping me develop my career."

18%
Strongly agree

37%
Agree

26%
Neither agree nor disagree

13%
Disagree

6%
Strongly disagree

Source: **Guild American Worker Survey**, 2023, n=2,078

Employees in frontline roles tend not to view their current position as part of their career journey.

Starting out as a server in a restaurant is not generally viewed as a start of a career, but it does build valuable skills in customer service, multitasking, and much more. When leaders spend time focused on getting people out of frontline jobs, it's easy to forget to celebrate what employees are achieving: a critical step in their careers.
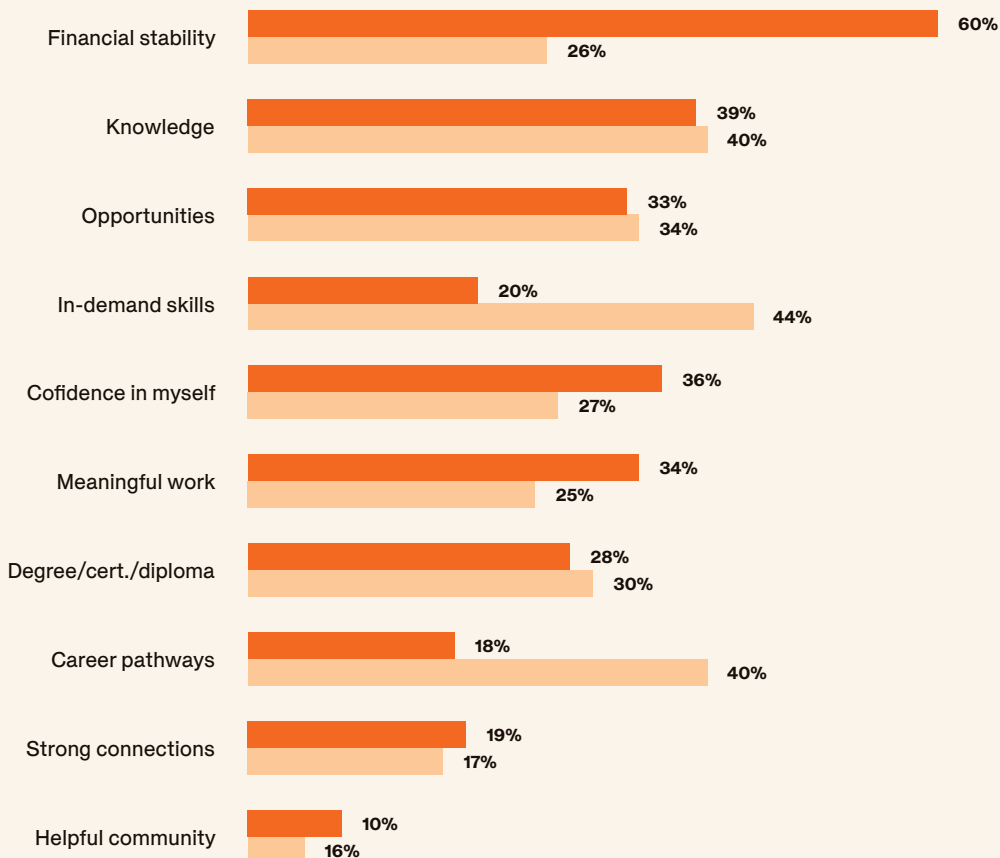
Trends to *set*:
Career mobility centered on employees.

Find a common language.

Jargon-heavy and employer-centric language can alienate talent. Instead, look for areas of overlap to help employees see themselves in the opportunities available to them.

A recent Guild Research survey showed that employees care more about "knowledge" and "opportunities" than they do more employer-centric terms like "career pathways" and "in-demand skills."

Say it in surround sound.

Leverage both formal and informal channels to communicate opportunities. Although formal channels like HR, the company website, and job descriptions are useful, informal channels, like conversations with supervisors or coworkers, company reviews, and interviews dominate how career advancement information is communicated.[7]

Bring intentionality to your marketing cadences to drive employee awareness (e.g. leverage seasonal windows, more targeted messaging when possible).

	Member preferences	Employer preferences
Financial stability	60%	26%
Knowledge	39%	40%
Opportunities	33%	34%
In-demand skills	20%	44%
Cofidence in myself	36%	27%
Meaningful work	34%	25%
Degree/cert./diploma	28%	30%
Career pathways	18%	40%
Strong connections	19%	17%
Helpful community	10%	16%

Member preferences
– Financial stability
– Self-confidence
– Meaningful work

Employer preferences
– Career pathways
– In-demand skills

Both
– Knowledge
– Opportunities
– Degree/certificate/diploma

Neither
– A helpful community
– Strong connections

Source: "How did you receive/provide information regarding potential for 'career advancement'? from McKinsey and data from Cara Plus Frontline Employee Survey (n=2,154,) and Guild Frontline Employer Survey (n=305).

Equip employees to have career conversations with their loved ones.

Although conversations with managers are critical in enabling and encouraging employees to upskill, a recent Guild Research survey revealed that a top motivator for employees to enroll in a program is friends and families.

Helping managers drive meaningful conversations about career opportunities can help employees see their current role as part of their career journey, clarify options, and share the steps employees can take to grow. Best-in-class coaching ensures a holistic, whole person approach to career mobility that can help employees consider their options in context — and in turn help them share and discuss their goals with family and friends.

Trendsetter Case Study:

How Waste Management forges connections between frontline roles and career journeys.

Challenge:	Solution:	Early impact:
WM sought to find ways to retain more frontline talent, specifically drivers and technicians, by making connections between current roles, skilling, and growth opportunities — not just for employees, but for their families, too.	**WM partnered with Guild to offer over 36,000 full-time U.S. employees access to 170+ fully-funded programs and to build a catalog specifically for dependents.** This includes undergraduate and graduate degrees, technology and business short-form certificate programs, and high school completion.	**High frontline enrollment + talent attraction** → 65% of WM employees enrolled in education programs are frontline employees* → 76% of dependents enrolled are dependents of frontline employees* → 50% of surveyed applicants in a Waste Management hiring campaign cited tuition-free college as a reason for applying** *As of May, 2021 **As of August, 2022

"A large part of me wanted to have a better career so that I can provide more for my family."

—Robert G., Guild member promoted from Dispatch to Pricing Analyst at WM

Turn talent acquisition and development into a flywheel.

In pursuit of cost savings, leaders are looking for ways to free up cash and reduce duplicative spend. To do that, many organizations will examine platforms to determine if there is enough overlap to discard one. (If this happens at scale, look out for further consolidations within the EdTech industry as smaller startups struggle without sufficient runway to make up for lost revenue.)

While it's important to combat tech stack bloat, HR leaders have an opportunity to drive significant cost savings through de-siloing talent acquisition and development and considering **career mobility platforms** in terms of employee experience.

Trends to *beat*:

The cost of leaving talent goals and tech unconsolidated.

Treating talent acquisition and development as separate gears misses significant savings.

When organizations aren't thinking about career mobility, they tend to treat talent acquisition and talent development as separate motions: one externally-facing, and one internally-facing. This misses the strategic financial advantage of career mobility: the savings that comes from building internal pipelines to fill roles that would normally be filled externally.

Those missed savings have major **ROI implications**. Experts estimate up to 60% of the cost of recruitment consists of indirect costs that can have widespread business impacts, such as the time managers and business leaders sink into supporting HR-specific roles during the hiring process.[8]

Siloed talent acquisition and development also limits operating models and the employee experience.

A recent survey conducted by The Josh Bersin Company shows that just 17% of HR teams and professionals say that their organization has a process to prioritize resources to problems, and **only 18% believe HR tech is focused on the employee experience.**[9]

A fragmented approach that fails to prioritize the employee experience stifles the agility and internal mobility that organizations need.

Employees need actionable steps to access mobility — not ten logins to remember. When employees have to navigate disjointed systems to understand their benefit, explore careers, find the right program, and access the support they need to pursue career growth, talent goals suffer.

Trends to *set*:

Turn talent acquisition and development into a flywheel.

Help recruiting and workforce development functions work in tandem to drive savings and create opportunity.

Talent development and talent acquisition teams should inform one another's efforts through sharing critical information about skills gaps and pipeline.

Closing this loop can unlock internal pipelines, drive employee retention and engagement, and broaden access to opportunity.

> "So many of our talent acquisition, recruitment industry is heavily focused externally, it's on stealing talent from your competitors. And **that's a fundamentally different skillset from growing your own people.** It's also fundamentally different than helping folks who are new to the industry grow within it.
>
> **An internal mobility team enables the recruitment team to go out and hire inexperienced folks, bring them into entry point seats, and then help them grow and grow in a way that they wouldn't be able to do on their own.**"

Jeff Johnson
Director for Workforce Pipelines, Bon Secours Mercy Health

Become an impact multiplier by sharing what your organization is testing and what's working for talent mobility.

Although every industry has esoteric challenges and areas of focus, workforce development and talent mobility challenges tend to rhyme. When larger scale companies develop **strong communities of practice for HR leaders** to develop and share what they are testing and iterating on, organizations can remove guesswork, reduce spend, and make improvements that result in better outcomes for people and for business.

Make a strategic case for internal mobility.

In an economically uncertain time, it can be especially difficult to foster enough buy-in for an internal mobility initiative to get off the ground. Any decision-maker will hesitate to spend money on programs they can't prove will be effective. This makes understanding which **proof points colleagues need** a crucial input for talent leaders.

At Guild's 2023 Opportunity Summit, HR and talent leaders from leading companies in three separate industries joined Guild's Chief Customer Officer, Jonathan Marek, to share their approaches to champion talent mobility initiatives among internal stakeholders.

Trends to *beat*:
Ideas over data

Failing to impress urgency keeps progress on hold.

In an economically uncertain time, decision-makers need to understand urgency in order to effectively prioritize talent initiatives. Although the macro causes of talent shortages are important to drive home the point that talent shortages are not only urgent but poised to persist and worsen for years,[10][11] **organizational data is essential to helping colleagues understand the outcome of inaction.**

Overlooking decision-makers' contexts can lead to misalignment between short- and long-term priorities.

In a moment of urgency, it can be easy to overlook the broader context colleagues must bring with them into their decision making. Even when the urgency of talent challenges is clear, overlooking the concerns and context of other leaders brings a significant risk of missing the data points that matter the most to them.

Outside of HR and people teams, a common misconception about internal mobility initiatives is that they are solely a long-term play. The **right contextual data** can help different leaders understand both near and long-term value. Take retention, for example: new hires who become Guild members are 2.5x less likely to leave in their first year than new hires who don't engage with their benefit.[12]

Trends to *set*:

Bring data — and empathy — to the table.

Have proof points ready.

In addition to urgency (the why), be prepared to share outcomes data from comparable initiatives (the what), and how this stands to impact business outcomes (the result).

Expert advice:

"When you talk to finance people, always go back to data. A story not supported by data will look like fluff. They want to see what it will do and how it will drive the bottom line."

Beth Biggs
Group Vice President, Benefits & ESC, Charter Communications

Know what matters most to your colleagues and empower their decision-making through your expertise in the employee experience.

Although talent-focused initiatives should put a stake in how they will move HR metrics, understanding how these outcomes can help alleviate pain points across the business is a winning strategy.

Be prepared to share how key metrics — like time to acquire talent and percentage of job roles open — and key outcomes — like expected gains in engagement and retention — translate across colleagues' areas of concern.

Expert advice:

"Know what your CFO's pain points are and what they are responsible for. The more you put yourself in those shoes, the better you are at understanding what they want their HR partner to come and speak with them about. Come in with a bit of a framework and a plan rather than a concept."

Sarah King
Chief People & Diversity Officer, Darden

Common areas of concern by role:

– CEO - Will it better enable us to deliver on **business strategy?**

– CFO - What is the plan, and how will it impact our **bottom-line ROI**?

– Business Unit or Divisional Leader - How long will it take, and will I lose **talent**?

– CHRO - How will this work within our existing structure and feed into the **integrated employee?**

Know what comes after skills-based hiring.

Skills-based hiring predominantly relates to a recruitment strategy in which companies look at a candidate's skills, rather than traditional signals of skills (i.e. a college degree), to determine their fitness for a job.

On the whole, this is a good thing: Skills-based hiring can make recruiting and hiring more equitable by making it easier for people with the right skills but no degree to be considered for roles that may have previously been inaccessible to them.

In practice, removing degree requirements entirely takes time, and a lack of strategy to achieve the next skillset leaves employees without access to credentialed learning and the durable skills they bring — and still keeps talent leaders stuck in job matching (with a more complicated framework).

Instead, a pathways-centric approach opens the floodgates for internal talent, helps them gain recognition for the skills they do have, gain the skills they're missing, and access the mobility they want into the roles your organization prioritizes.

Trends to *beat*:
How internal talent can be overlooked in skills-based hiring.

There is no universal taxonomy for skills (that includes AI).

Defining the skills required for a job is challenging, and it requires a significant investment of time and resources. Scaling that process can increase that complexity by an order of magnitude.

As a result, two things tend to happen:

1.) Own your own skills-based hiring: Relying on individual business units to determine their own approaches to skills-based hiring, resulting in inconsistencies and a fractured approach to talent recruitment and

2.) Tech-enabled solutions (and their malcontents): Relying on algorithm and AI systems to provide structured ways to think about skills families (and even to evaluate candidates) can challenge companies to look beyond credentials to candidates themselves. However, tech-enabled skills-based hiring is not free from bias risk[13] — or the risk that hiring managers mistrust decisions made through algorithms or AI-assisted technology.

Internal skills-based hiring without an upskilling plan will overfocus on job matching instead of workforce development.

Removing a degree requirement can drive more equitable hiring practices. Removing an employee's benefit to obtain a degree as a result achieves the opposite effect.

Approaching skills-based hiring as a job matching initiative that removes the responsibility to make long-term upskilling possible results in one-time job mobility — with no on-ramps to skill into other high-demand and destination roles.

74%

of polled US workers said they would be "likely" or "very likely" to leave if offered education and career opportunities elsewhere.

Source: **Guild's American Worker Survey Report**, 2022
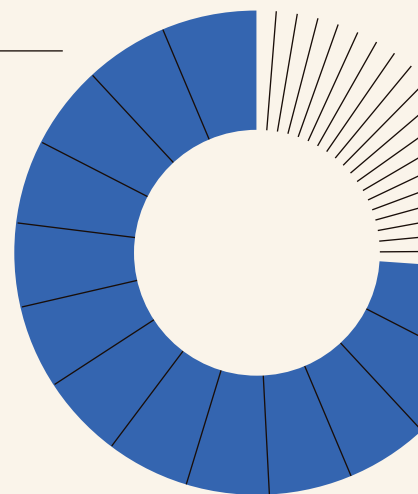
Following skill-based hiring, employees must be able to access the next set of skills. Without this, talent strategies will unintentionally engineer another supply chain problem that can only be solved through external hiring.

Trends to *set*:

How to make skills-based hiring part of an equitable, scalable talent strategy

Focus on skills-based *pathways*.

Most employees who want career mobility want to find ways to achieve it with their current employer. To do that, they're relying on their organizations to lay out the steps that will lead them into priority roles and the mobility that comes with them.

2/3

of workers want to move into a new role. More than half of them hope it's at their same company.

Source: Guild American Worker Survey, 2022. n=1,867

This is what makes **skills-based pathways** so important. Pathways meet employees where they are, currently, and outline the career steps and related learning that can take them from their current job into high-demand positions, and eventually destination roles.

Skills-based pathways have overlap with skill-based hiring in that they draw critical connections between the skills employees already have and where they can be better leveraged. What makes pathways more desirable is they help employees bridge their skills gaps through credentialed learning. **Rather than 1:1 job matching, skills-**

based pathways are about scalable job movement by operationalizing internal talent pipelines and making career mobility accessible to more employees.

Start with internal talent.

It would be difficult to argue that any talent strategy is built for equity if it excludes internal talent. Current employees include a pool of potential candidates with embedded learning from their current roles and familiarity with the organization, its culture, and policies — and a willingness to grow their skills.

Uncovering connection points between frontline and gateway roles can be a powerful unlock for internal pipelines. Thinking of a frontline job as part of a career is not the norm, yet.

Destination

High demand roles with relative stability: significant upward mobility into highly skilled jobs through upskilling and gaining years of experience in the field.

Requires significant prior experience
Ex. Software Engineer, Data Analyst, HR Manager

Entry Level

Providing significant earnings potential and upward/lateral mobility: often-require a Bachelor's degree or formal support for entry talent, like an internship program.

Requires brief prior experience in skill set
Ex. Asst. Software Eng, HR Coordinator, Branch Mgr.

Gateway

Managerial upskilling from frontline roles or roles that are well-positioned to allow career advancement into entry level positions through education/training.

Requires skills but no prior experience
Ex. IT Support Specialist, Frontline Manager

Frontline

Not upwardly mobile without further education; low wages: and are particularly vulnerable in the present economy.

Does not require prior experience
Ex. Tailors, Customer Service Representative, Stockers

Typically, non-exempt. "frontline" roles   Typically exempt, "corporate" roles

Conclusion

What HR leaders can do today

Successful talent strategies center on the most important part of any organization: people.

Employees have been through the same external chaos that leaders have been working to alleviate: they experienced a global pandemic, were at the epicenter of the war for talent, bear much of the day-to-day burdens of the Great Resignation, and face daily uncertainty stemming from an unpredictable economy to the potential impact of new technologies on their careers.

The increased influence talent and HR leaders feel today is an opportunity to make life better for a workforce that continues to make success possible in the face of unprecedented challenges.
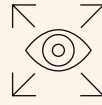
Improve employee awareness

– Challenge the use of language of employers versus the language of your employees

– Bring intentionality to your marketing cadences to drive employee awareness (e.g. seasonal windows, specific messaging)
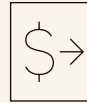
Foster buy-in

– Bring the right data and a well-articulated plan

– Bring empathy for the responsibilities and outcomes your colleagues have

Improve mobility

– Challenge the dichotomy between structured development and "owning your own" development

– Desilo talent acquisition and talent development:

– Add skills-based mobility to your skills-based hiring strategy: work with core business units to determine core, transferable skills, pathway entry points, and offer appropriate upskilling opportunities

Helpful resources

For making career mobility accessible to your entire workforce

- Getting started guide: Prepare to build career mobility for your entire workforce
- Career Mobility Fundamentals Workbook

For evaluating and championing talent mobility solutions

- [Buyer's Guide] How to evaluate a talent mobility platform
- The Career Mobility Champion's Toolkit

For insights from today's HR & talent thought leaders

- Guild Opportunity Summit 2023 Trends & Insights
- CHRO compass

Schedule a demo with an expert and see how Guild's Opportunity Platform™ can impact your organization's talent development goals.

Sources

1   Zippia, Artificial Intelligence Specialist Demographics and Statistics in the US, accessed 7 November 2023.

2   Buolamwini, Joy, Artificial Intelligence Has a Problem With Gender and Racial Bias. Here's How to Solve It, TIME, 2023.

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