

Hireology: Will there ever be enough skill—and what can we do about it?

The hotel industry has made significant strides in rebuilding its workforce post-pandemic, yet staffing shortages remain a persistent challenge. According to a recent survey by the American Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA), nearly 65% of surveyed hotels continue to experience labor shortages, despite efforts to enhance compensation and benefits.



While the hospitality sector has largely rebounded from the disruptions of the pandemic, employment levels remain nearly 10% below pre-pandemic figures. AHLA President and CEO Rosanna Maietta highlighted the industry's ongoing commitment to workforce development, stating, “The hospitality sector is dedicated to attracting and retaining talent, investing in career growth, and advocating for policies that support long-term workforce sustainability.”

Hotels globally have implemented various strategies to attract and retain employees, including increased wages, flexible work schedules, remote working, and expanded benefits. These measures have led to gradual improvements, with the percentage of hotels describing themselves as “severely understaffed” dropping just about 5% in the last 6 months.

Despite these improvements, hiring challenges persist. More than 71% of surveyed hotels reported difficulties filling open positions, with an average of six to seven vacancies per property. Housekeeping remains the hardest role to fill, with 40% of hotels citing shortages in this department. Front desk staff (30%), culinary workers (15%), and maintenance personnel (15%) are also in high demand.

It was emphasised the need for long-term solutions beyond wage increases. “The hospitality industry faces a dual challenge: staffing shortages, particularly in key operational roles, and the need to retain existing talent. While higher wages help, career advancement opportunities and structured growth pathways are essential to building a sustainable workforce.”

Hotels we have polled have adopted a range of strategies to combat labor shortages, including:

- **Higher Wages:** 50% of surveyed hotels have increased pay to attract workers.
- **Flexible Schedules:** Most now offer more adaptable work hours, with some even allowing partial remote work where possible.
- **Employee Perks:** Many brands provide hotel discounts, approved education reimbursements, travel reimbursements, and discounts at hotel restaurants.
- **Recruitment Initiatives:** Many hotels participate in job fairs and run advertising campaigns. Others offer cash incentives if you refer a new employee — referral bonuses aimed at encouraging staff to help with recruitment.

Despite the challenges, industry sentiment remains optimistic. A strong majority (72%) of hotel employers believe that career opportunities in hospitality are as strong as they were before the pandemic or have improved.

Additionally, the AHLA Foundation administers various workforce development initiatives, including:

- **Hospitality Sector Registered Apprenticeship Program:** A partnership with the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, to provide structured training and career development.
- **Empowering Youth Program:** Designed to recruit young adults into entry-level hotel positions, working with community organisations to provide essential training and resources for long-term career success.

While the industry has made meaningful progress, sustained efforts are required to ensure a thriving and resilient hospitality workforce in the years ahead.