Talent on Demand

Why Good Site Managers Get Passed Over



indeed

About Indeed

Indeed is the #1 job site in the world[1], with 685 million Job Seeker Profiles[2] and 4 million employers globally. For over 21 years, we've helped organisations find and hire the talent they need to grow.

We believe technology should make hiring more human, not less. In today's fast-moving labour market, hiring can feel like a trade-off between speed and quality. Employers are under pressure to move quickly, while still making high-stakes decisions about people, potential, and performance.

Indeed is designed to support both, combining powerful technology with human insight to help you find, attract, and connect with the right talent. Visit au.indeed.com/hire to discover how Indeed can help you hire with clarity and confidence.



1 Comscore, Total Visits, June 2026
2 Indeed data (worldwide), job seeker accounts that have a unique, verified email address

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Methodology

The Site Manager Gap study was conducted online by YouGov for Indeed and That Comms Co between 30 September and 9 October 2026.[3]

This research examines whether site manager hiring is held back by a narrow view of who counts as a suitable candidate. It comprises two matched surveys that asked mirrored questions, so the views of each side can be compared directly:

Site managers: 205 Australian store, restaurant and venue managers with whole-site responsibility, at least five reports and responsibility for at least two core site functions. Fieldwork took place from 1 to 9 October 2026.[4]

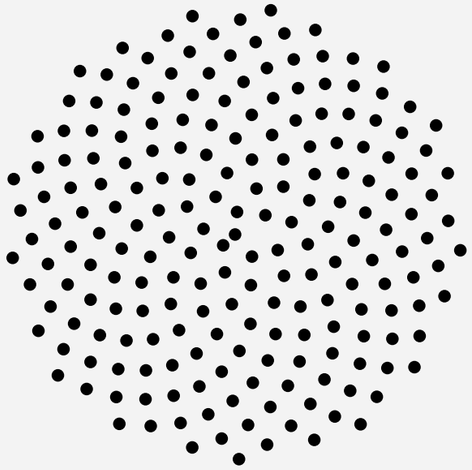
Employers: 206 Australian hiring decision-makers personally involved in selecting site managers (deciding, shortlisting or running the process), across franchisors, franchisees, corporate multi-site and independent operators. Fieldwork took place from 30 September to 9 October 2026.[5]

Both surveys covered six sectors: quick service restaurants (QSR); cafes and restaurants; supermarket and convenience; fashion and general retail; hardware and big box; and fitness and consumer services.[6] Respondents were sourced from the YouGov Australian panel of 71,000+ individuals.[7]

The questionnaire was designed by YouGov in collaboration with That Comms Co and Indeed. The figures are unweighted and are not representative of all Australian site managers or site manager hiring decision-makers. The margin of error is around ±7 percentage points (based on n≈200 and a result of 50%).[8] Comparisons between the two audiences use two-proportion tests and are reported only where they are significant at the 95% confidence level and differ by at least 5 percentage points.[9]

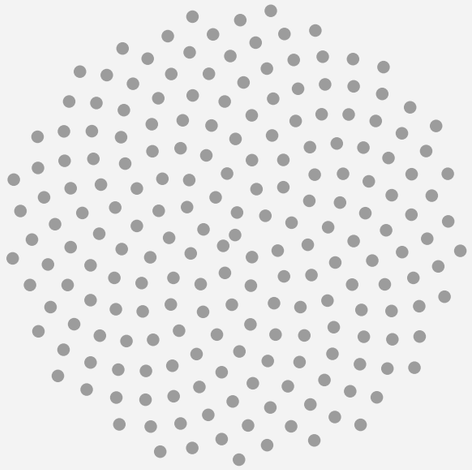
This study was conducted in accordance with ISO 20252:2019 standards, to which YouGov is accredited.[10]

3–10 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206



205

Site managers



206

Employers







Executive summary

Ask employers whether site management skills transfer across sectors and almost all of them say yes. Ask site managers whether they could run a site in a different sector with the right training, and almost all of them say yes too.



















So why do good site managers still get passed over?

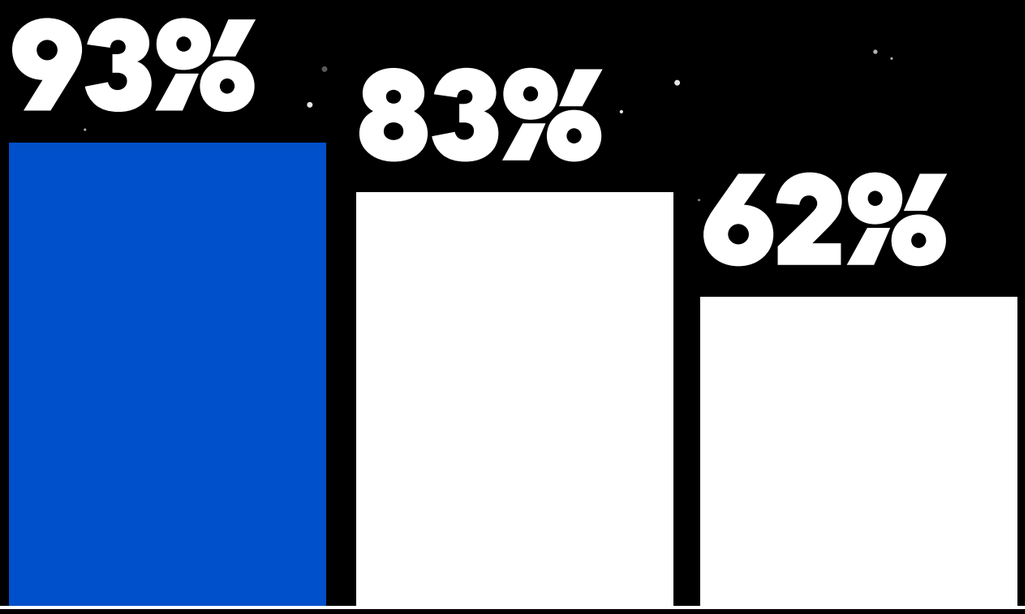
This research surveyed site managers and employers who hire them. Both groups were asked mirrored questions, so their answers can be compared side by side.

The findings point to a gap in translation not a gap in talent. Employers want proof. In their own words, they want a proven track record, transferable leadership skills and signs the candidate can learn the sector quickly. Managers want that track record recognised, and they want support to learn the new sector. Both sides are describing the same capable manager in different words.

This report explores where the message gets lost, what it costs both sides, and how employers and managers can start speaking the same language.



Key Findings at a Glance



Agreement in principle, a filter in practice

93% of employers agree site management skills transfer across sectors, yet 88% say an outsider would take too long to get up to speed.[11] 45% treat sector experience as essential or strongly preferred, and 49% have passed over a candidate for lacking it in the last two years.[12]

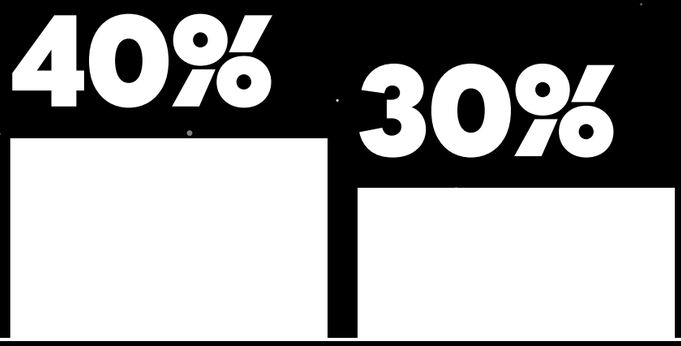
The talent is in the market

83% of site managers are actively looking or open to the right role, and 91% are confident they could run a site in another sector with training.[13] 48% have applied for a role outside their sector in the last two years.[14]

Smaller operators lean hardest on sector experience

62% of employers with up to 20 sites see sector experience as essential or strongly preferred, more than twice the rate of larger networks.[15]

11–15 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206



Slow processes cost both sides

40% of managers have withdrawn from an application because the process dragged on, and 43% of employers have lost a preferred candidate the same way.[16]

Employers underrate training as a reason to move

Managers are more likely than employers expect to rank on-the-job training in their top three reasons to move (30% vs 21%).[17] Employers overestimate the pull of shift and roster flexibility (29% vs 20% of managers).[18]

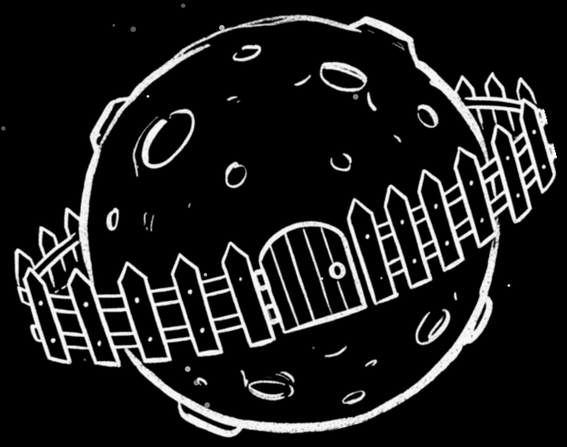
Employers want proof; managers want recognition

In their own words, employers want evidence: a proven track record, transferable leadership skills and signs the candidate can learn the sector quickly. Managers most often say better pay and training or onboarding would make them switch sectors, and some want their existing experience recognised.

16–18 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

1

Saying One Thing, Hiring Another



Both sides agree skills transfer

On the question of transferable skills, employers and site managers are almost entirely aligned. More than nine in ten on both sides agree that the skills needed to manage a site are transferable across sectors:



95% of site managers agree[19]



93% of employers agree[20]

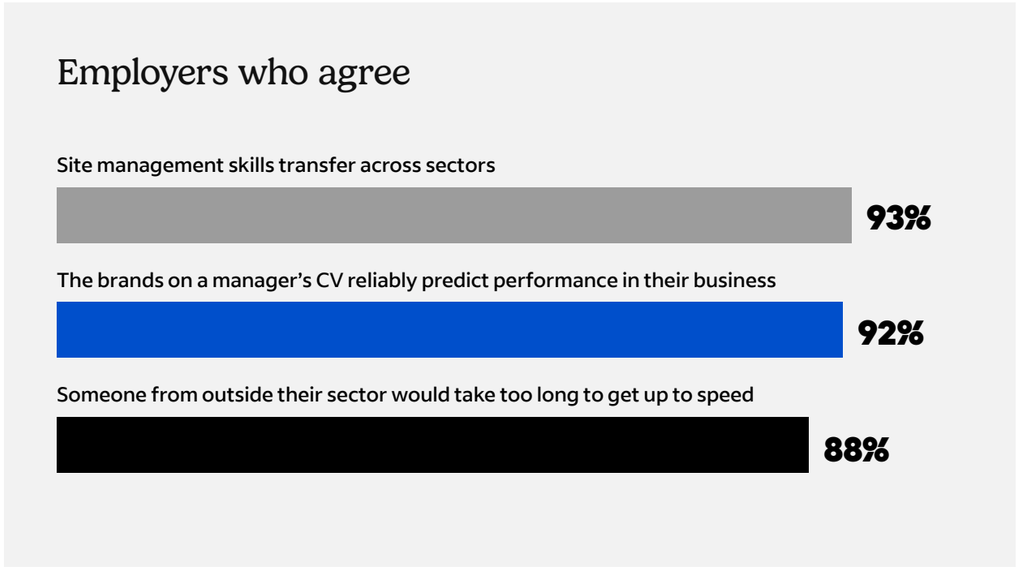
91%

Managers are confident in their own ability to make the move. 91% agree that with training and onboarding they could successfully manage a site in a different sector.[21]

19–21 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

But employers hold competing beliefs

The same employers who believe skills transfer also hold beliefs that work against hiring from outside their sector:



92% agree the brands on a manager's CV reliably predict performance in their business.[22]

88% agree someone from outside their sector would take too long to get up to speed.[23]

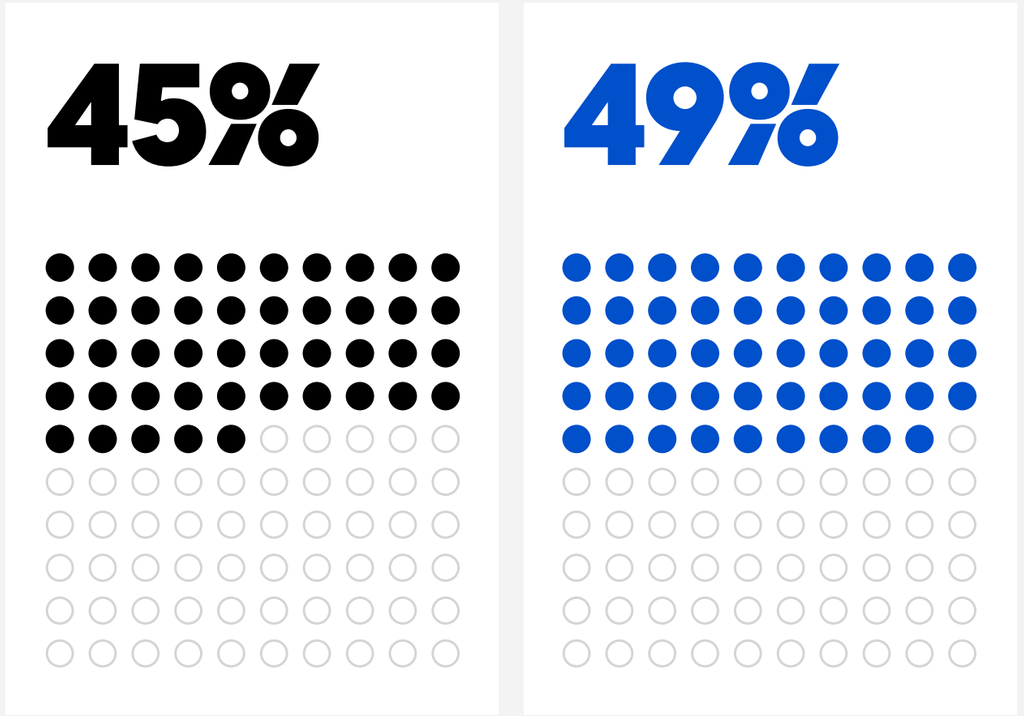
Employers hold all these views with similar conviction. However translation starts to break down when their belief in transferable skills is paired with reliance on CV brands. That's the gap where great talent is overlooked.

The gap lies between how open employers say they are and how they act.



22–23 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Sector experience acts as a gate



When asked which position is closest to how they hire site managers, 45% of employers treat direct sector experience as essential or strongly preferred.[24]

That position shows up in hiring decisions. 49% of employers have passed over a candidate for a site manager role in the last two years primarily because the candidate lacked experience in their specific sector.[25]

But the gate isn't completely closed

Employers are open to cross-sector candidates when they're presented clearly. When shown a candidate with 5+ years' experience managing a site in another sector, with the same team size and the same P&L responsibility, employers were broadly likely to shortlist them, in fact 97% of the time.[26]

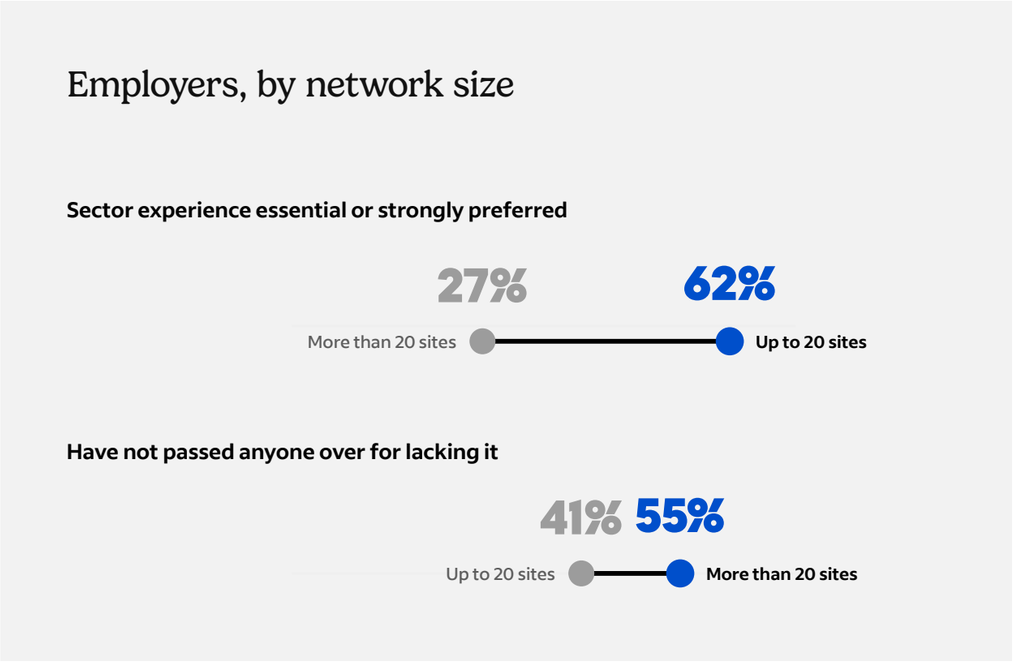
24–26 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

97%

When shown a candidate with 5+ years' experience managing a site in another sector, with the same team size and the same P&L responsibility, employers were broadly likely to shortlist them, in fact 97% of the time.

Smaller operators lean hardest on sector experience

Employers with up to 20 sites are more than twice as likely as larger networks to treat sector experience as essential or strongly preferred (62% vs 27%).[27] Employers in larger networks with more than 20 sites are more likely to say they have not passed anyone over on this basis (55% vs 41%).[28] This may reflect capacity: with more resources to train and onboard, larger networks can afford to look beyond their own sector.



27–28 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

2

Two Languages, One Manager

When employers and managers were asked in their own words what would change their minds, their answers showed the translation gap clearly.



What employers say: show me

Asked what would need to change for them to seriously consider shortlisting a site manager from another sector, employers' answers fell into these themes:

1. **Proven track record managing teams, budgets and results.**
2. **Transferable leadership and people skills.**
3. **Operational and customer know-how.**
4. **Ability or willingness to learn the sector quickly.**
5. **Training or onboarding support in place.**
6. **References or recommendations.**

Above all, employers want evidence.



> "Experience managing a similar sized team with similar budgets and performance targets would be more valuable to me than knowledge of a specific industry."[29]
>
> **Employer**

> "If the management experience is solid enough, the sector gap becomes less of an issue."[30]
>
> **Employer**

> "They'd need to show they can run a busy site, not just manage people on paper."[31]
>
> **Employer**

> "The candidate needs to show me actual floor presence. Because I can't stand site managers who hide in their office looking at spreadsheets."[32]
>
> **Employer**

What managers say: recognise me

Asked for the one thing an employer could do to make them seriously consider a role in a different sector, managers' answers fell into these themes:

1. **Training, onboarding or mentoring.**
2. **Better pay or benefits.**
3. **Career progression.**
4. **Recognition of existing management experience.**
5. **Work-life balance, hours or flexibility.**
6. **More authority or responsibility.**
7. **Support from management or adequate staffing.**
8. **Clear expectations or role scope.**

Managers want to be paid and supported for the move, and some want their existing experience recognised.

"Instead of treating me as a novice because of my different background, recognise the experience I have in managing people."[33]

Site manager

"Transferable leadership experience should be recognised rather than focusing solely on sector experience."[34]

Site manager

"Instead of expecting direct sector knowledge from day one, I would seriously consider it if the employer stressed my management experience."[35]

Site manager



Each side asks the other to explain

The clearest sign of a translation gap is that each side is waiting for the other to explain.

Employers ask candidates to show they can do the job. Managers ask employers to show that their experience counts. Both are describing the same capable manager.

> "Customer service, staff performance, budgets, and operating targets can be understood by those with no direct retail experience."[36]
>
> **Employer**



36 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

The universal language of site management

The employer answers show what employers are listening for, and very little of it is specific to one sector. As one employer put it:

The table below organises employers' own words into the areas of evidence they mention.

What employers are listening for	In their words
People and team size	"Having managed similar numbers of staff would make me more comfortable."
Staffing problems and busy periods	"I would be more confident in shortlisting them if I could see examples of how they handled staffing problems and busy periods."
Budgets and costs	"I need to see if they can manage site spending and avoid budget overruns."
Targets and results	"The candidate must be able to demonstrate the ability to hit the KPIs and manage the customers well."
Turning a site around	"Someone who has taken over a struggling site and improved its performance would be worth speaking to."
Customers	"A good record with staff and customers would get my attention."
Stock	"You need to know how to manage inventory. In our business, if the shelves are empty or the losses are too high, we can go bankrupt in just a few days."
Compliance and safety	"Someone from a different sector could be considered seriously if he or she demonstrated practical knowledge of compliance safety and site operations."
Ability to adapt	"References that demonstrate how quickly they adapted to unfamiliar work would be extremely valuable."
Floor presence	"The candidate needs to show me actual floor presence."

Source: Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Every site manager in every sector works in these areas. The vocabulary is shared, but it often isn't used when it counts.

Both sides point to the first few months

Employers and managers also describe the same solution: onboarding support.



○ Employer says **Site manager says ●**

"Having an experienced manager available to support them during the first few months would ease my main concern."

"It would be easier to manage the move if I had an experienced mentor during the first few months."

"A clear onboarding plan to bridge their industry knowledge gap."

"Provide me with appropriate training so that I can learn the new sector without having to know everything from the very beginning."

"Having a well-structured onboarding plan from the employer would make it easier to shortlist candidates from a variety of fields."

"Assuring me of an experienced mentor during my first few months would provide me with the confidence to take on this new challenge."

"With a practical interview task, I would be able to evaluate their ability to deal with the situations they will encounter at our sites."

"Show that my existing leadership skills are valued and provide proper support during the transition."

Source: Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Both sides want a plan, even if they describe it differently.

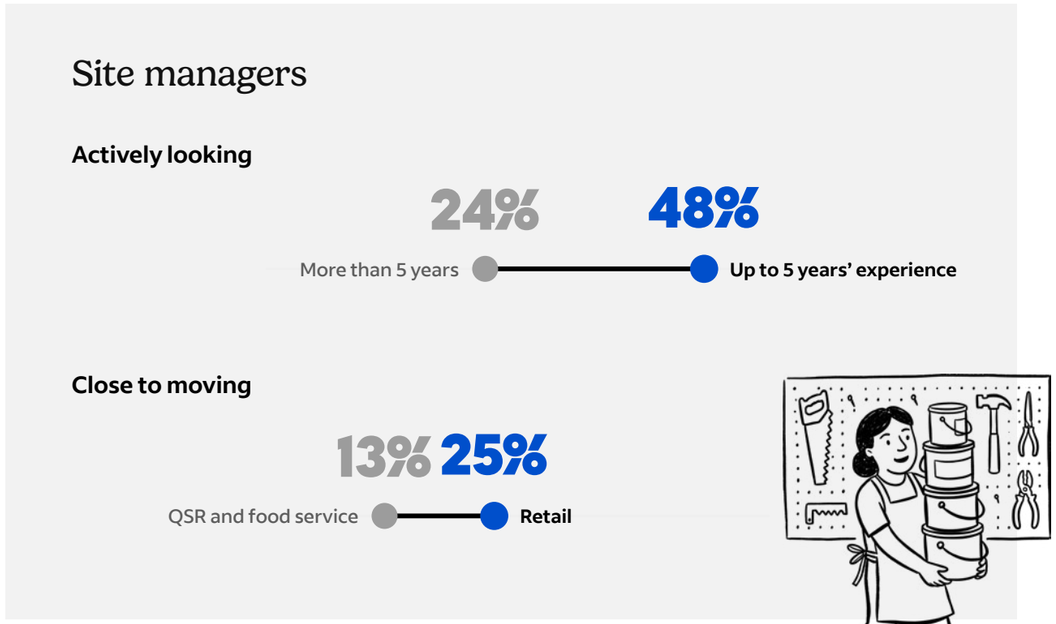
3 Good Managers, Already in the Market



83% of site managers are actively looking or open to a move.

Eight in ten are open to a move

The managers who get lost in translation aren't hard to find. 83% of site managers are actively looking or open to a move.[37]



Managers with up to 5 years' experience are twice as likely to be actively looking (48% vs 24% with more than 5 years).[38]

More experienced managers are more likely to be passively open (65%), which makes them a less visible pool.[39]

Retail managers are more likely than QSR and food service managers to be close to moving (25% vs 13%).[40]

37–40 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

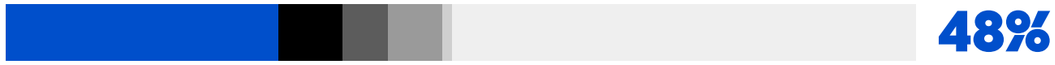
Managers expect to be considered

86% of site managers agree that employers in other sectors would seriously consider them.[41]



Many have already tried

48% of site managers have applied for a site manager role in a sector they had no direct experience in during the last two years[42]:



Outcome of most recent cross-sector application (Site managers)

30% Yes, and I was hired
7% Yes, interview but no offer
5% Yes, still in progress
6% Yes, but I withdrew or declined
1% Yes, rejected or never heard back

Source: Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Cross-sector moves already happening

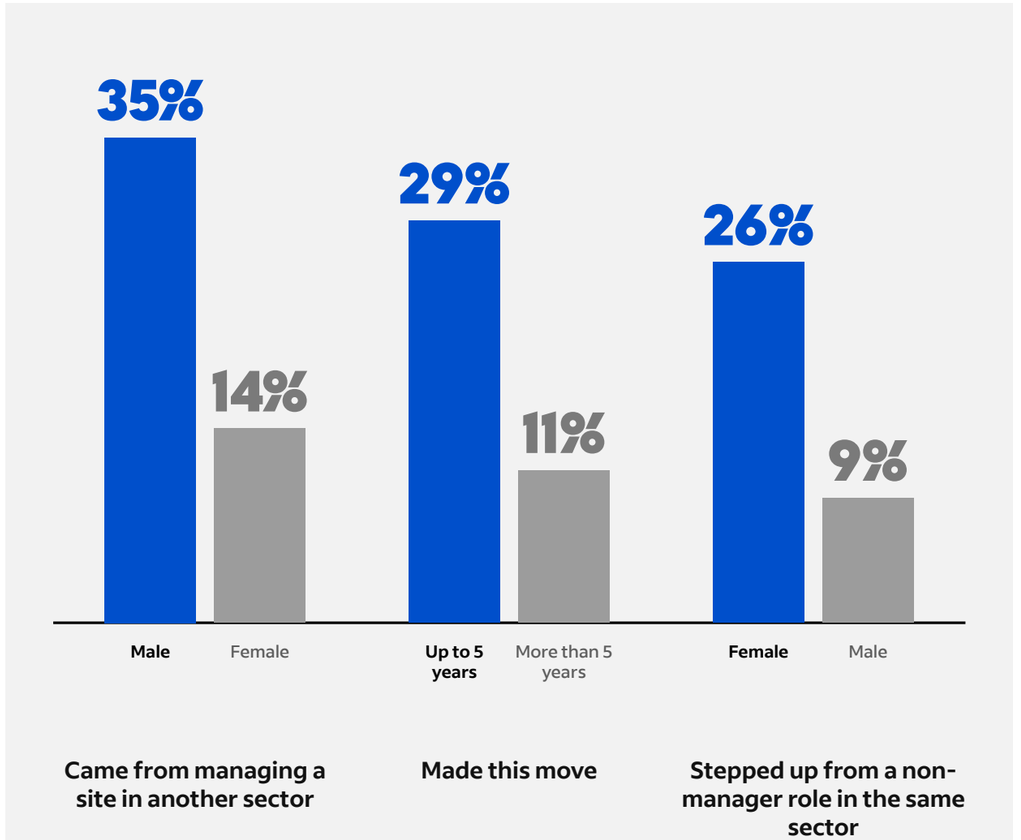
Crossing sectors is already common. One in four site managers (24%) was managing a site in a different sector immediately before their current role.[43]



Employers see this too. Asked roughly what percentage of their current site managers were managing a site in a different sector immediately before starting, most employers estimate between 11% and 40%[44]:

41–44 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Some differences stand out:



Male managers are more likely than female managers to have come from managing a site in another sector (35% vs 14%).[45]

Managers with up to 5 years' experience are more likely to have made this move (29% vs 11% with more than 5 years).[46]

Female managers are more likely to have stepped up from a non-manager role in the same sector (26% vs 9%).[47]

45–47 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

4

Lost in the Process

Even when the translation works, good managers can still be lost to a slow process.



Slow processes cost both sides

Around four in ten on each side have felt the cost of a slow hiring process in the last two years:



40% of site managers have withdrawn from an application because the hiring process was slow (11% more than once).[48]

43% of employers have lost a preferred candidate because their process took too long (8% more than once).[49]

Male managers are more likely than female managers to have withdrawn because of a slow process (48% vs 32%).[50] QSR and food service employers are more likely than retail employers to have lost a preferred candidate (49% vs 32%).[51]

48–51 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206



Employers misjudge how long candidates will wait



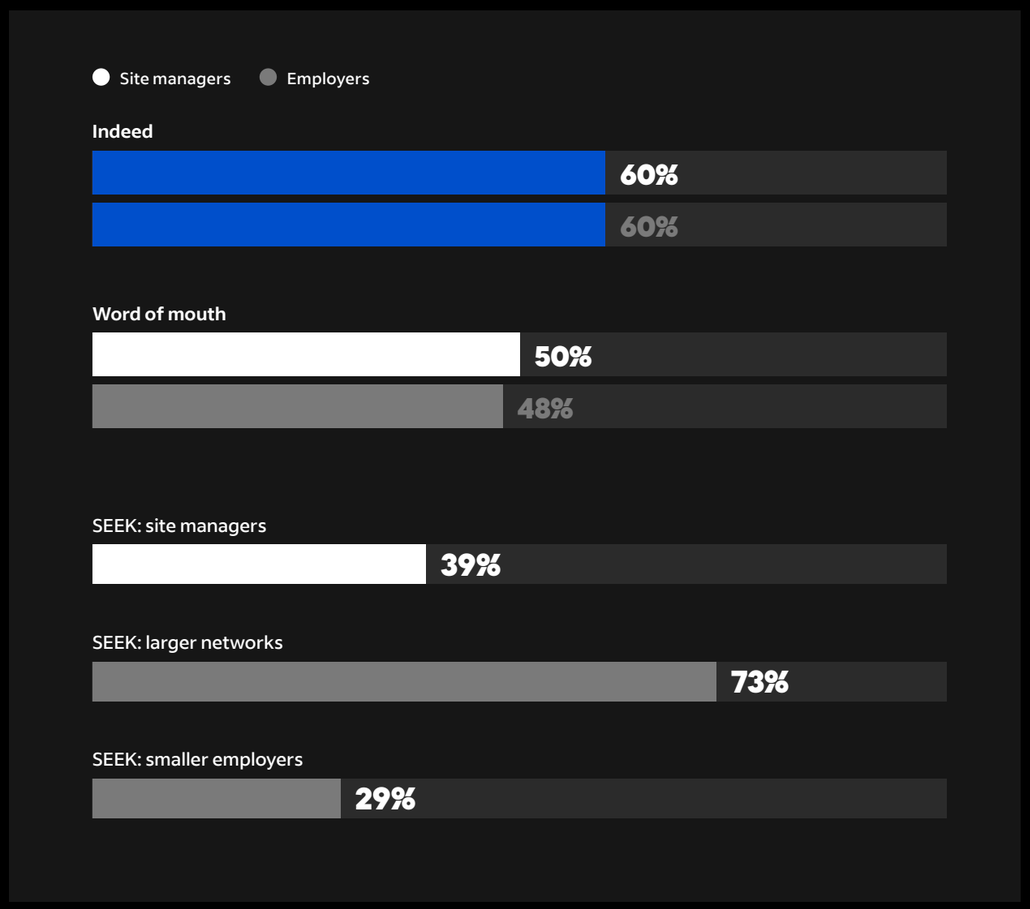
51% of employers think candidates expect to hear back within 3 days, but only 43% of employers actually respond that fast.[52]

But 19% of employers typically take more than a week to respond personally to a strong candidate, while only 12% of managers see that as reasonable.[53]

52–53 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Where managers and employers meet

Employers are leaning on SEEK, but many site managers aren't there. Only 39% of site managers use SEEK, compared with 60% on Indeed.[54] Indeed is also the only major channel where use is the same on both sides,* at 60% of employers and 60% of site managers.[55] LinkedIn matters more at the senior end, where it's a key channel for site managers with 5+ years' experience.[56]



Word of mouth is still prominent for how people find jobs in this industry. 50% of site managers and 48% of employers say so.[57] Recruiters also play a part in this space.

Beyond that, site managers are more likely to check an employer's own careers site. Employers split by size: larger networks rely most on SEEK (73% vs 29% of smaller employers), while smaller employers turn to Facebook and walk-ins.[58]

54–58 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Lost in the Process



5

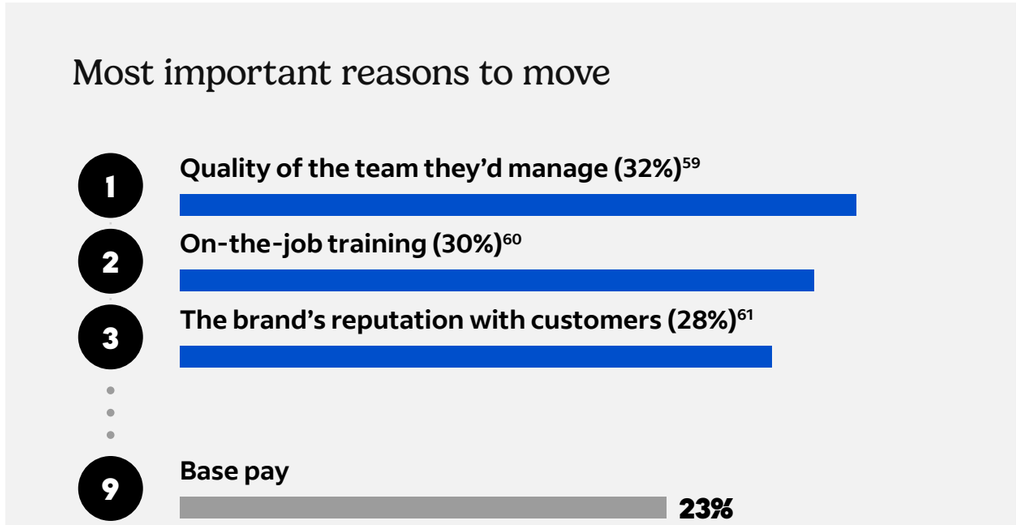
What Managers Want to Hear

Translation works both ways. Employers also need to speak managers' language when they describe the role.



Team, training and reputation come first

When site managers ranked their most important reasons to move to a role at a different business, three factors came out on top:



Salary isn't in the top three. Base pay ranks ninth, with just 23% of managers placing it among their top three reasons to move.[62] Managers are looking for a strong team, support to learn the role, and a brand they're proud to represent.

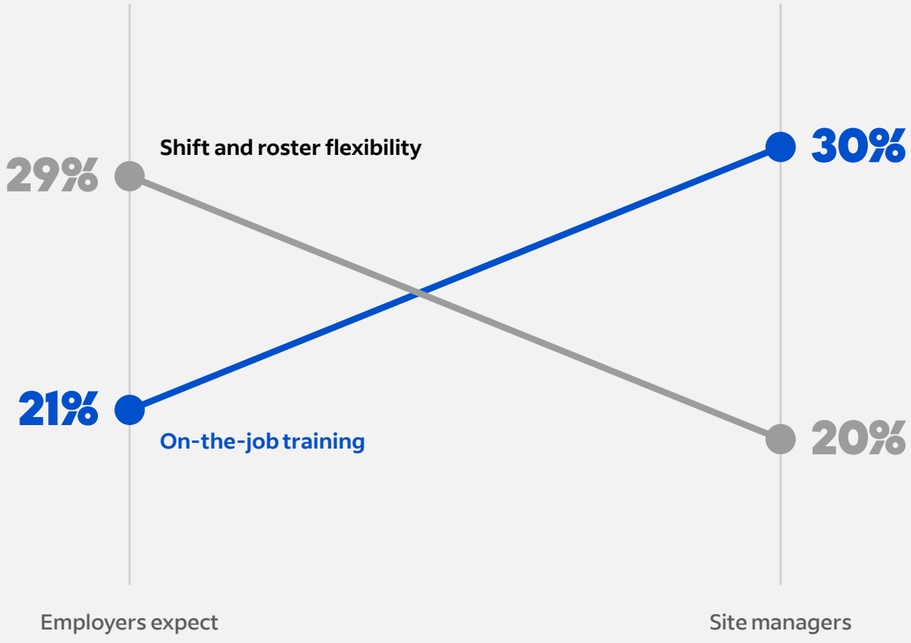
Pay still matters. In their own words, managers often mention better pay as something that would make them switch sectors. But when weighed against everything else on offer, it isn't what tops the list.

59–62 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Employers underrate training

Managers are more likely than employers expect to rank on-the-job training in their top three (30%).[63] Employers overestimate shift and roster flexibility (29% vs 20% of managers).[64]

Ranked in the top three reasons to move



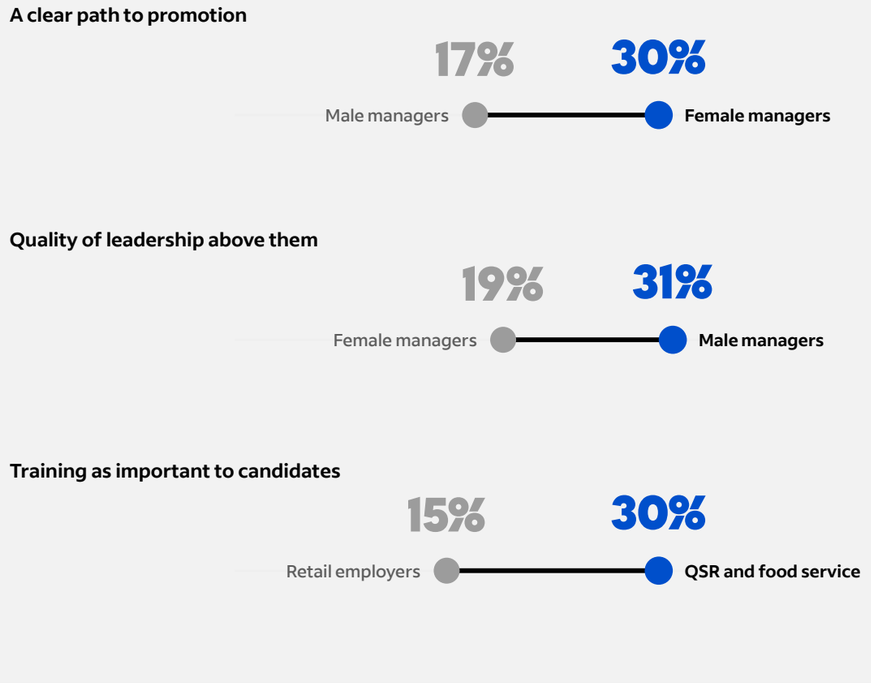
This matters for the translation gap. Training is what managers say would help them cross sectors, and a training plan is what employers say would make them more comfortable shortlisting someone from outside.

63–64 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

> "I would be more comfortable considering candidates who are new to our industry if we had a proper training program in place."[65]
>
> **Employer**

> "I'll be interested if I'm told upfront about the tech stack and provided with actual vendor training on their ERP/POS systems."[66]
>
> **Site manager**

Different managers, different priorities



Female managers are more likely to rank a clear path to promotion as important (30% vs 17%).[67]

Male managers are more likely to place importance on the quality of leadership above them (31% vs 19%).[68]

QSR and food service employers are more likely than retail employers to rank training as important to candidates (30% vs 15%).[69]

65–69 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

In their own words, pay and support lead

In their open-ended answers, managers most often say that better pay and training or onboarding would make them switch sectors, ahead of career progression.

"Better pay would make me seriously think about switching sectors."[70]

Site manager

"Make sure I can have a day off on the weekend to be able to spend time with my children. Don't always expect me to be on call and ready to reply to emails at any time."[71]

Site manager



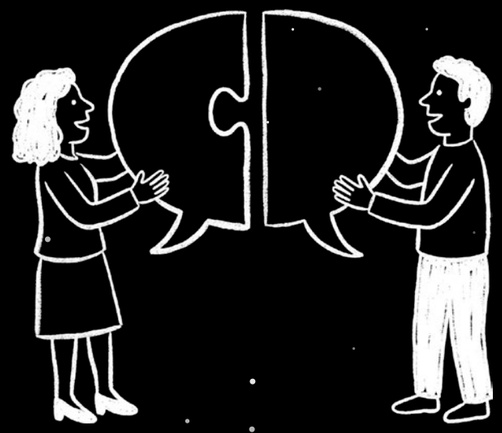
70–71 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

What Managers Want to Hear



6 Finding a Shared Language

The research suggests employers and site managers aren't far apart. More than nine in ten on both sides agree on skills transfer. Both name training and onboarding. Both point to the first few months. What's missing is a shared language that turns a manager's experience into evidence an employer can trust.



For employers: translate the role

1 Describe the job, not the sector.

Write job ads and selection criteria around the areas of evidence employers themselves named: team size, budgets, targets, busy periods, customers, stock, compliance and floor presence. Where sector experience isn't essential, say that candidates from other sectors are welcome.

> "Hiring criteria should place an emphasis on management skills so that I can consider candidates from a variety of industries."[72]
>
> **Employer**

2 Ask questions any good site manager can answer.

Move screening and interview questions away from "which brands have you worked for?" and toward the situations every site manager faces, such as staffing problems, peak periods, costs and results. Consider a practical task.

> "By conducting a practical interview, I would be able to gauge their abilities without being overly dependent on their industry experience."[73]
>
> **Employer**

3 Lead with training and a plan for the first few months.

Managers rank on-the-job training higher than employers expect, and employers say an onboarding plan would make them more comfortable shortlisting. Put the training plan and the support on offer in the job ad.

4 Recognise experience in the offer.

Managers say they want existing experience recognised and the move to be worth it. Make that recognition visible in how the role, pay and support are described.

5 Respond within a week.

Most managers (88%) see up to 7 days as a reasonable time to hear back, yet 19% of employers take longer than a week, and 43% of employers have lost a preferred candidate to a slow process.[74]

72–74 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

For site managers: translate your experience

1 Speak in evidence, not sector.

Describe your experience in the terms employers said they listen for: the size of the team you led, the budget you managed, the targets you hit, and how you handled staffing problems and busy periods.

2 Show a site you've improved.

Employers say a manager "who has taken over a struggling site and improved its performance would be worth speaking to."[75] Show before and after.

75 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206



"References that demonstrate how quickly they adapted to unfamiliar work would be extremely valuable."[76]

Employer

3 Show how fast you learn.

Employers value evidence of adaptability. Choose referees who can speak to how quickly you learned something new.

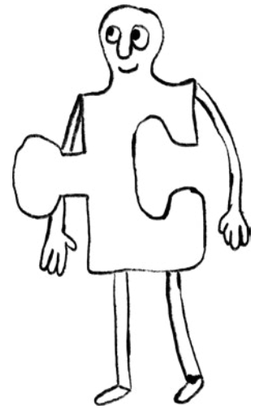
4 Don't rule yourself out.

More than one in four managers (27%) were looking but chose not to apply outside their sector.[77] Employers are broadly open: between 77% and 86% are likely to shortlist a manager from each other sector when team size and P&L responsibility match.[78]

76–78 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206

Finding a Shared Language

Meeting in the middle



Employers can...		Site managers can...
Describe the role in universal site management terms	●	Describe their experience in universal site management terms
Ask about team size, budgets, targets and busy periods	●	Bring evidence of team size, budgets, targets and busy periods
Use a practical task to see skills in action	●	Show floor presence and practical know-how
Offer a clear plan and support for the first few months	●	Show they can learn a new sector quickly
Respond within a week	●	Apply outside their sector instead of ruling themselves out











7

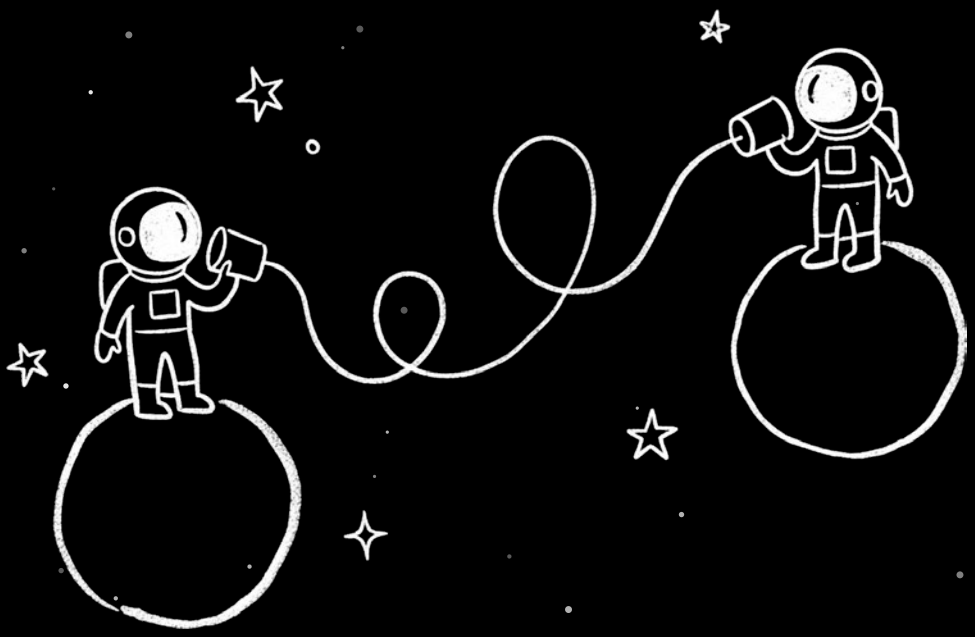
How Indeed can help

Good site managers are already in the market: 83% are actively looking or open to the right role. Indeed is where both sides meet, used by 60% of site managers and 60% of employers.[79] The challenge is making sure capable managers aren't lost in translation along the way.

Indeed's connected set of tools is designed for decentralised hiring, helping franchise networks attract, screen and hire the right people consistently across every location. Smart Screening scores applications against the criteria you define, so you can screen for proven capability rather than sector history. Interview on Demand then lets managers talk to applicants who pass their screening questions straight away, in minutes rather than days.

Indeed also helps networks show managers what matters to them. Their top reasons to move are the quality of the team (32%), on-the-job training (30%) and brand reputation (28%).[80] The Employer Branding Suite brings every role in the network into one place that looks and sounds like your brand, so candidates see one brand, one standard and one story. Whilst Sponsored Jobs increases your job ad visibility putting each location's roles in front of active job seekers. Speak with an Indeed Specialist to build a stronger, more consistent hiring engine across your franchise network.

79–80 Indeed Survey with YouGov 2026. Total Site Managers n 205, Employers n=206



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