

# HEATHER BOULGER | INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

## Beyond the diploma: Advice for the Class of 2026 and what today's graduates really want

By Heather Boulger Jun 12, 2026



Lee High School graduates throw their caps after last weekend's graduation ceremony at Tanglewood in Lenox. A slowing economy, increased competition, and a tighter labor market may present hurdles for graduates seeking employment, but opportunities exist for those willing to be persistent and flexible.  
STEPHANIE ZOLLSHAN — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Congratulations, Class of 2026! Your hard work, determination, and perseverance have paid off. Earning a degree is a significant accomplishment, and you should take pride in reaching this milestone. Now comes the next challenge: launching your career.

The job market presents both opportunities and obstacles. A slowing economy, increased competition, and a tighter labor market may make the search more challenging for some graduates. However, opportunities are available for those willing to be persistent and flexible. Graduates in nursing and health sciences are likely to find employment quickly, while others may need a little more patience as they begin their careers.



McCann Technical School students received their diplomas last month at a ceremony in MCLA's Campus Center Gym. Graduates in nursing and health sciences are likely to find employment quickly, while others may need a little more patience as they begin their careers.

GILLIAN HECK — THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Recently, a family member asked me what advice I would give to a new graduate. It made me reflect on what I wish I had known when I was starting out. Here are five lessons worth remembering:

- **Be a lifelong learner.** Graduation marks the end of formal education, not the end of learning. Continue developing your skills through books, workshops, webinars and new experiences. The most successful people never stop learning.
- **Build your network.** Stay connected with classmates, professors, mentors and colleagues. Professional opportunities often come through relationships, and your network can become one of your greatest assets.
- **Learn from every experience and embrace AI.** Successes and setbacks both provide valuable lessons. Take responsibility for mistakes, learn from them, and use them as opportunities for growth. Use AI as a workplace tool and highlight transferable skills.
- **Stay flexible.** Career paths rarely follow a straight line. Be open to new opportunities and willing to adapt when circumstances change. Flexibility can open doors you never expected.

- **Know your strengths.** Focus on becoming the best version of yourself. Don't fear failure; view it as part of the learning process. Celebrate progress, practice gratitude, and enjoy the journey.

For graduates entering the workforce, resources can make a difference. MassHire Berkshire Career Center offers assistance with resumes, job searches, interview preparation, salary research and career exploration. Job seekers can also visit JobQuest, MassHire's online job bank, to find opportunities throughout the Berkshires and beyond.

What do today's graduates want from employers? According to a recent graduate report, young professionals are entering the workforce with optimism and clear expectations.

Despite economic uncertainty, 83 percent of graduates are confident they will find employment, although many expect their search to take four to six months. Competitive pay remains a top priority, with nearly half saying they would not accept a job that lacks strong salary and benefits. Work-life balance is equally important, with more than half unwilling to accept a position that doesn't support a healthy balance between work and personal life.

Career growth also matters. More than half of graduates said they would reject jobs that offer limited advancement opportunities. Flexibility continues to shape workplace expectations as well, with many preferring remote or hybrid work options over traditional full-time office environments.

Company culture and values are increasingly important. Graduates want inclusive workplaces that support employee well-being, provide opportunities for growth and align with their personal values.

The Class of 2026 is entering a workplace that is evolving rapidly. Success will require adaptability, resilience, and a commitment to continuous learning. Keep an open mind, invest in yourself, and embrace opportunities as they come.

Congratulations on your achievement, and best wishes for a future filled with growth, purpose and success.

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