

CRE talent is ready for takeoff. Is the industry?

2026 BOMA Canada Emerging Leaders
Industry Survey Report



Introduction: Digging into CRE's commitment issues

For a while now, the conversation around talent in commercial real estate (CRE) has been focused on attraction. How do we get people in the door? Our data from the *2026 BOMA Canada Emerging Leaders Industry Survey* suggests a more pressing question: what happens after they're in?

What we're seeing is a group that's already committed to CRE. In fact, they're quite satisfied with their compensation, their colleagues and the fulfillment they get from their work. But they're not sure the industry is committed to *them*.

CRE's emerging leaders are on the precipice of becoming leaders, full stop—in management roles and building their own businesses. Yet as our results show, they're starting to look outside our industry for those opportunities.

Other industries, such as construction, health care and infrastructure, are often clearer, faster and more structured when it comes to growth and development.

How does the CRE industry catch up? The organizations that figure this out early—who create clarity, provide access to development and make progression visible—are the ones that will keep and grow the next layer of leadership.

Critical issues

- CRE has the talent, but can we develop it?
- Mid-career leaders are questioning the long-term industry path
- Growth clarity is weaker in CRE than it is in adjacent industries
- Retention is driven by fundamentals
- The risk is one of slow erosion, not sudden exits



1. Who we heard from

Meet the people deciding CRE's next decade

Before we get into the findings, it's worth noting who responded to our survey: the CRE professionals who make up the layer right behind leadership, a group that's already contributing to the industry and increasingly deciding whether they stay or go.

This cohort falls largely in the 31–40 age range, with 5–12 years of experience. Well past the onboarding stage in their careers, they have a good understanding of the industry and have made connections with their peers and CRE leaders.

Importantly, their expectations for their careers have started to shift. These are managers, senior managers and directors—not on the fringe of the industry, but fully a part of it. How CRE organizations engage with these emerging leaders is central to what the future looks like for the entire industry. Because this cohort is asking the question, “what comes next?”

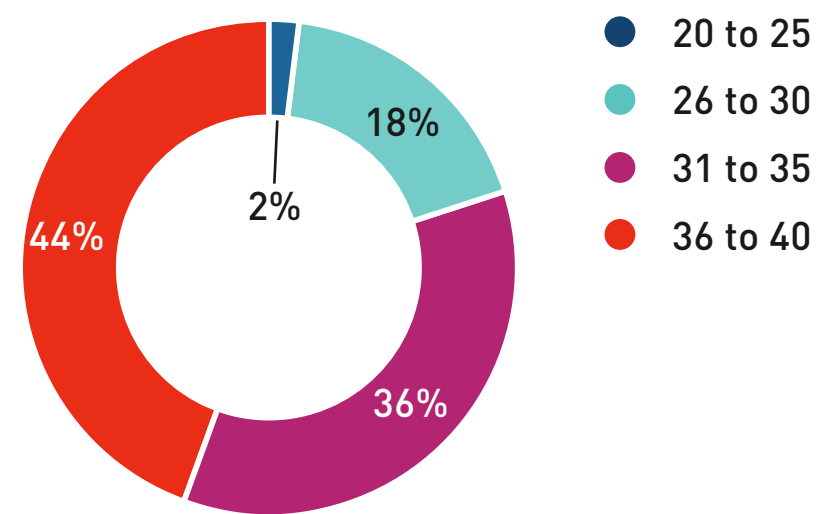


Industry insights

The next layer of leadership is already inside the CRE industry. They've broken in. Now, they want to move up.

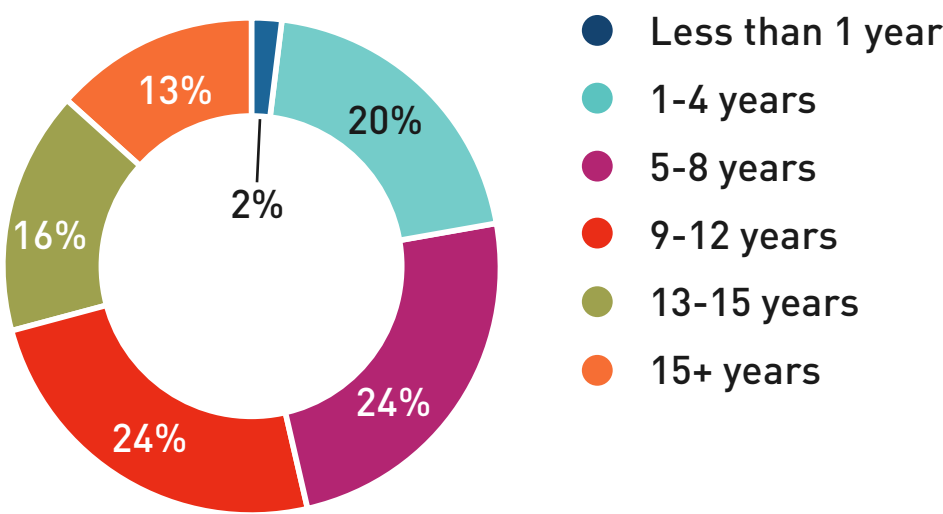
Who are today's emerging leaders in CRE?

What is your age?



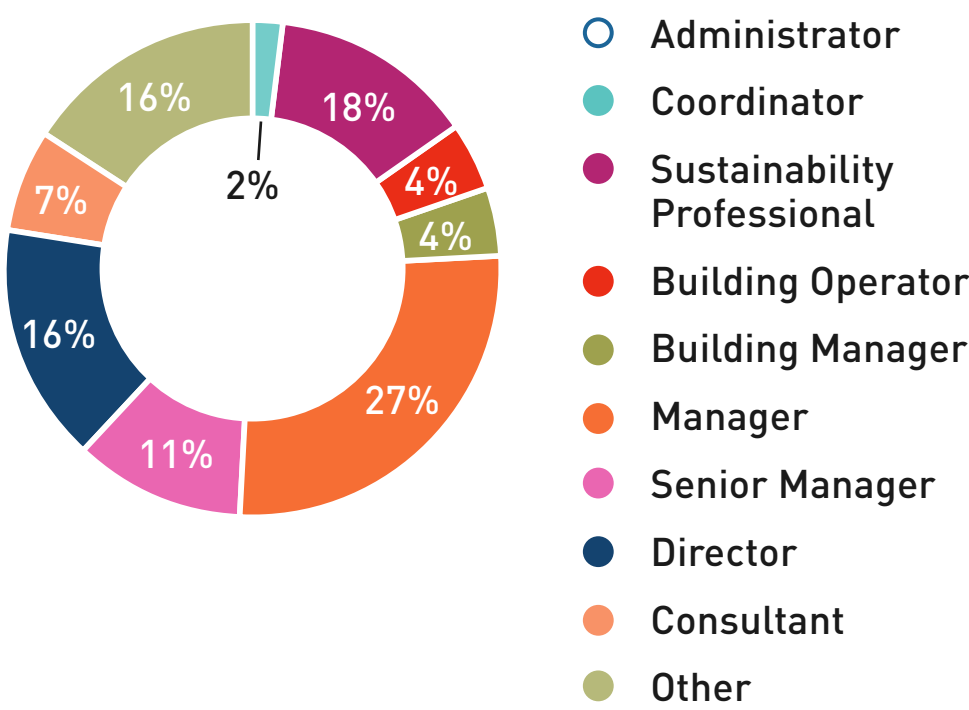
Survey respondents are mid-career emerging leaders, with the majority being aged 31–40.

Q. How long have you been working in commercial real estate?



Tenures are clustered in the 5–12 year range, meaning they're past onboarding, but not yet at the top.

Q. What is your role within your organization?



Roles skew toward managers, senior managers and directors.

Q. Is this your full-time job or part-time job?

Respondents were 100% full-time employees, meaning this is a committed, career-oriented cohort.

All questions taken from the 2026 BOMA Canada Emerging Leaders Industry Survey. All figures in the graphs have been rounded to the nearest percentage point. In some cases, this may result in the total percentages adding up to slightly more or less than 100%.



In their own words

"I believe it is important we welcome newcomers from all walks of life, those who are eager to learn the industry. It is important for us as an industry to train, mentor and develop the next generation of leaders who want to thrive. People need a path forward and experienced individuals help get them there!"

—Survey respondent

2. Where are they going?

Shifting expectations

For an industry built on long careers and steady progression, this generation is looking at things differently. Contrary to what some believe, there is a very strong sense of ambition among emerging leaders, but it comes with a price. They’ve moved beyond asking “how do I grow here?” and are now wondering “where is the best place for me to grow?”

This is reflected in the broader market beyond commercial real estate. When asked, “If you were to leave this industry, what would be your next step?,” 60% of professionals under 40 expect to change roles or industries within five years. In response to the question, “What factors most influence your decision to remain with your current employer?,” more than 70% prioritize growth and skill development over stability.

At the same time, industries like tech, health care and infrastructure are signalling faster movement and clearer progression, potentially pulling this cohort’s focus away from CRE.

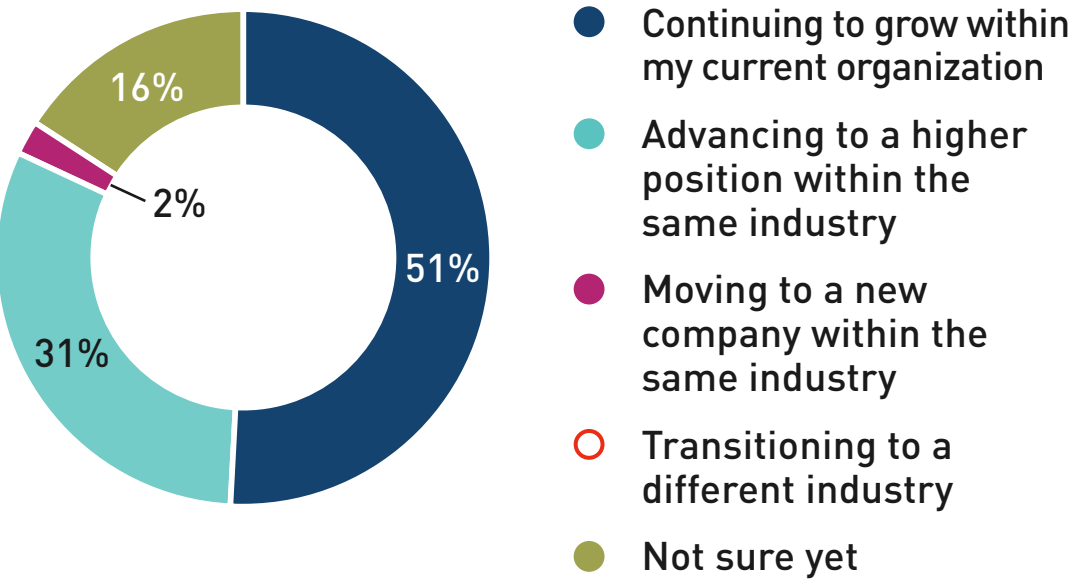
This is not to say CRE is losing ground. Over 80% of respondents see themselves growing or advancing within the industry. But their devotion to CRE faces external pressure from adjacent or high-growth industries such as construction, consulting, tech and health care, where paths for progression are clearer and faster.

The bottom line? Emerging leaders are willing to stay in CRE, but it’s no longer a guarantee.

Where do emerging leaders want to go, and how confident are they in getting there?

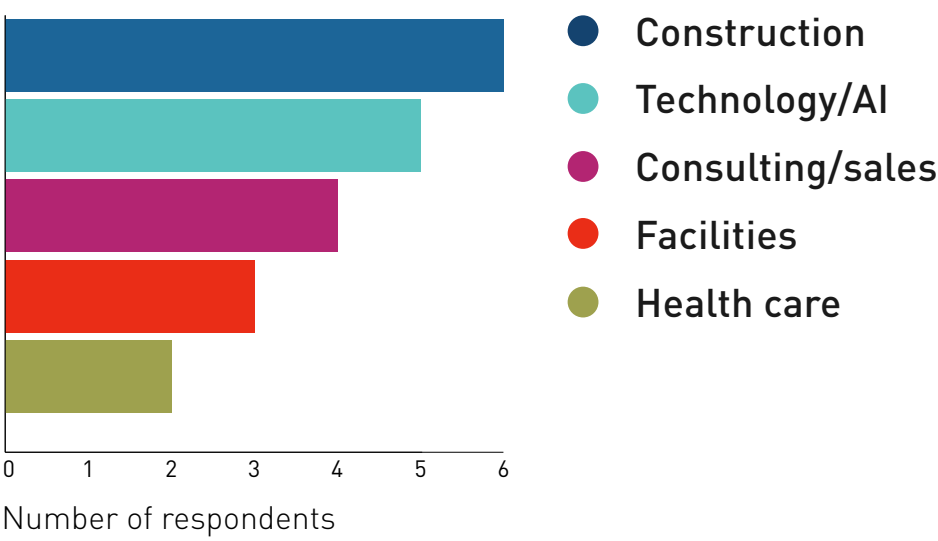
One goal of our survey is to understand this cohort’s career trajectories, ambitions and preferences, both inside and outside CRE.

Q. Where do you see yourself in five years?



Strong internal ambition: ~82% want to grow or advance within CRE, with very low intent to switch industries outright.

Q. What other industries would you consider?



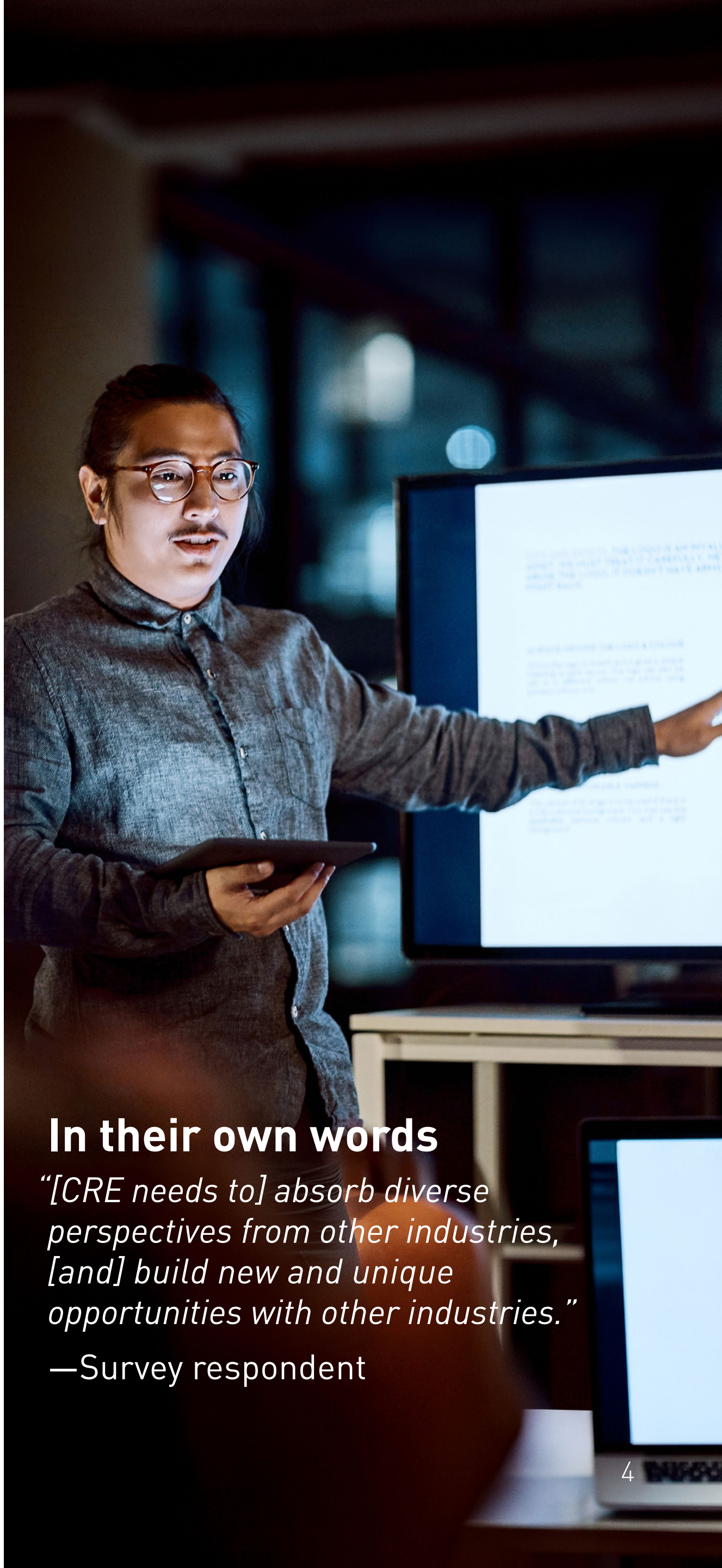
A meaningful portion would consider adjacent industries and high-growth sectors.



Industry insights

While CRE is still seen as a viable long-term career, adjacent industries are also looking for similar skills. These alternatives offer a clearer path and faster movement. While people aren’t actively looking to leave, they’re no longer assuming they’ll stay. If our efforts at retention are running on autopilot, they will look elsewhere.

To keep this next wave of CRE leaders, we need to make growth inside the industry as clear and compelling as it is outside of it.



In their own words

“[CRE needs to] absorb diverse perspectives from other industries, [and] build new and unique opportunities with other industries.”
—Survey respondent

3. Why they'll stay (and why they won't)

The gap between “good job” and “good future” is where talent leaks out

Retention is often looked at as an overall industry challenge, but it needs to be addressed much closer to home. Emerging CRE leaders don't make career decisions based on the industry in the abstract. They make their decisions based on their day-to-day experience, how they're paid, how they're led and whether they can see a clear path forward.

We looked at what's actually driving those decisions—what keeps this cohort in the CRE industry, what keeps them in their current position and what makes them start looking elsewhere. It's the gap between those last two where most organizations lose people, often before they realize it.



Industry insights

While professional perks and policies matter, emerging leaders care most about fundamentals—compensation, leadership, career growth and team culture are the clear opportunities that need to be invested in.

When those components are in place, people stay; when they're inconsistent or missing, friction builds, and accumulates, over time.

What keeps people in, and what quietly pushes them out?

Respondents identified the core retention drivers and systemic risks to the industry.

Q. What factors most influence your decision to remain with your current employer?

Top retention drivers (highest scores):

24%: Management and leadership

20%: Compensation/pay

16%: Colleagues and team culture

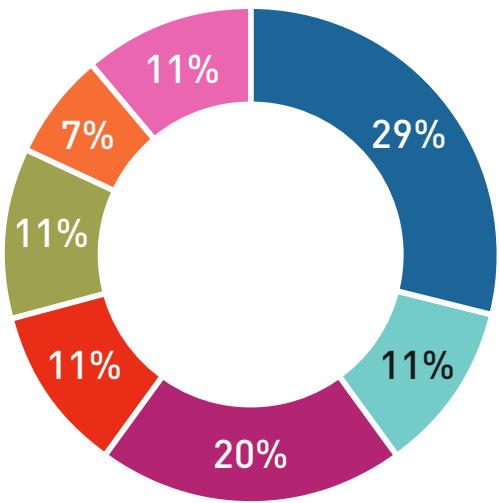
16%: Opportunities for career growth

Lower impact factors:

7%: Job security

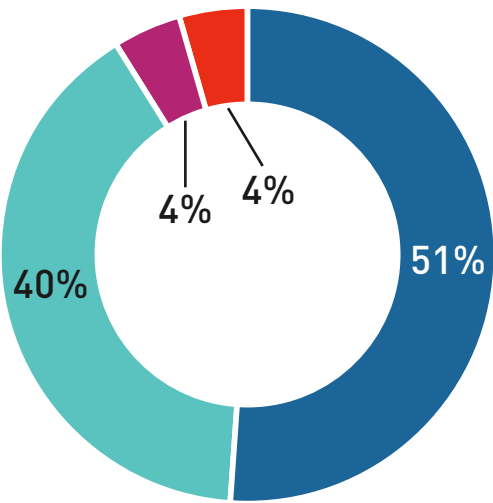
0%: Hybrid office and flexible work schedule

Q. What factors would most influence your decision to leave this industry?



- Compensation or financial considerations
- Work-life balance challenges
- Limited opportunities for career growth
- Leadership or management challenges
- Industry changes or instability
- Lack of support, mentorship or resources
- Other

Q. Are the positive aspects of your current role strong enough to keep you in the industry long-term?



- Yes
- Yes, for now
- Unsure
- Probably not
- Definitely not
- I have future plans to transition



In their own words

“Compensation and benefits packages.”

“More \$.”

“More leadership training.”

—Survey respondents

4. What the industry needs to fix

A leadership pipeline without a playbook

Is CRE set up to develop the talent we already have?

Our respondents suggest there’s plenty of interest in doing so, but a lack of infrastructure for this development. The essentials needed to support early and mid-career growth aren’t as clear, accessible or consistent as they need to be.

Here, we looked at what emerging leaders are asking for: where they’re looking for support, where they’re not getting it, and where the industry has an opportunity to step in with something more structured and more useful.

What does this generation need from the industry?

Respondents helped show the gaps in industry infrastructure—pointing to where BOMA (and others) can step in with real value.

Q. How could the industry better support people who are just starting their careers?

- Mentorship (the dominant signal)
- Training and education (formal and practical)
- Networking and early exposure
- Clear career pathways

Q. What topics or themes would you like to see covered in future events/programs from BOMA Canada?

- AI, PropTech and data-driven operations
- Sustainability and decarbonization
- Real-world operations training
- Career navigation (raises, pivoting, leadership)
- “Tell me the real story” (less polished, more practical)



Industry insights

Emerging leaders are asking for structure, access to the right people, clarity on how to grow and learning that reflects how the industry operates day-to-day.

Right now, those pieces exist. Unfortunately, they are inconsistent and often hard to find.

As an industry, we’ve opened the door. Now we need to build the stairs: to make CRE career development more visible, more practical and easier to access.

In their own words

“Provide lots of mentorship, third-party training opportunities; be mindful of employee/colleague work-life balance needs and help them achieve it.”

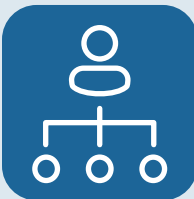
—Survey respondent

5. Key takeaways



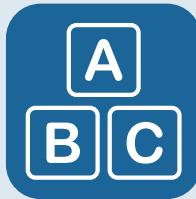
CRE has a retention and development challenge, not an attraction issue

The industry isn't facing any struggles in attracting people. Instead, the challenges lie in developing and retaining the talent we already have.



Emerging leaders are committed, but increasingly taking a second look

This engaged, ambitious group is actively comparing their growth trajectory against adjacent industries with clearer paths and faster progression, such as tech, construction and health care.



Fundamentals—not perks—are driving retention

Compensation, leadership, team culture and career growth remain the defining factors. When these are strong, people stay. When they're not, other industries start to look more attractive.



Career development infrastructure needs a playbook

While mentorship, training and career pathways do exist, they're difficult to navigate, and not available early enough in a career.



The risk is gradual but growing

Mass exits are not looming on the horizon, but we will face a slow erosion of talent if career expectations are not met.



The opportunity is clear

Organizations that step up and provide access, clarity and practical development will have a measurable advantage in retaining and advancing the next generation of leaders.



Conclusion: Looking for a leader

What “good” looks like

Right now, career development for teams and individuals in CRE exists, but it’s hard to access because it is scattered across a range of different organizations and channels. Worse, what’s clear from this survey is that many emerging leaders have to go out and find development opportunities themselves.

In a stronger model, emerging leaders would be able to locate mentorship, training and exposure opportunities intuitively—at a practical level rather than a theoretical one, with identifiable pathways connecting to the roles people are actually doing.

To correct this situation, we need to build a structure around what already exists and make it more visible to those who need it.

- **Career pathways, in particular, need to be clearer** so that newer members of the industry understand what progression actually looks like, what’s expected at each stage and how to move forward.
- **Retention doesn’t sit with HR, it sits with managers.** The organizations that get this right are the ones where leaders know how to develop people, not just manage them.
- **The final piece is access.** The talent, knowledge and desire for growth is here. It’s just a bit scattered. Making development easier to find and easier to navigate will close the gap.

Emerging leaders are doing their part. They’re showing up and staying open to the industry. Now, the industry needs to meet them halfway: with structure and intentional leadership.



Conclusion: Looking for a leader (cont.)

Where do we go from here?

CRE needs to define what these trends actually mean beyond the people side of the equation.

Namely, how do these trends affect business? High-potential leaders don't leave because they're disengaged. They leave because they can't see what's next, or how their growth connects to the future of the business.

There's no clear line to performance, no defined ownership of who is responsible for addressing retention issues and not enough specificity on where things are breaking down in practice.

To create change, someone needs to own this. Today, the responsibility largely sits at the company level. But the signals from our research suggest it is becoming an industry-wide risk— and opportunity.

The loop needs closing.

Intentionally connecting talent development to progression and leadership readiness is the key to retaining CRE's emerging leaders. Organizations that do this successfully will be best positioned to compete in changing markets.



Resources: Additional information and tools

At BOMA Canada, we’re committed to supporting CRE professionals at every stage of your career. We encourage you to explore the following resources for further insights:

[AI Report *\(2025 Trends in CRE Survey\)*](#)

[AI4CRE](#)

[BOMA & ME Videos](#)

[BOMA BEST](#)

[BOMA Canada National Awards](#)

[BOMEX](#)

[Education](#)

[Emerging Leaders](#)

[Guides & Publications](#)

[News Articles](#)

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Appendix: Survey methodology and questions

Survey methodology

The survey was conducted in January 2026, via email invitation. A total of 45 respondents included representation from the following roles:

- Property Management Firm (13)
- Property Owner (10)
- Consulting Firm (10)
- Supplier/Vendor (7)
- Not-for-Profit (2)
- Construction (1)
- Government (1)
- Design Build Mechanical Contractor (1)

Questions:

1. *What is your age?*
(Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
2. *How long have you been working in commercial real estate?*
(Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
3. *What type of organization do you work for?* (Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
4. *What is your role within your organization?*
(Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
5. *Is this your full-time job or part-time job?* (Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
6. *What is your educational background?*
(Answered: 44 | Skipped: 1)
7. *Where do you see yourself in five years?* (Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
8. *What factors most influence your decision to remain with your current employer?* (Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
9. *Are the positive aspects of your current role strong enough to keep you in the industry long-term?*
(Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
10. *If you were to leave this industry, what would be your next step?*
(Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
11. *What factors would most influence your decision to leave this industry?*
(Answered: 45 | Skipped: 0)
12. *What other industries would you consider?* (Answered: 34 | Skipped: 11)
13. *How could the industry better support people who are just starting their careers?* (Answered: 35 | Skipped: 10)
14. *What topics or themes would you like to see covered in future events/programs from BOMA Canada?*
(Answered: 27 | Skipped: 18)





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