



# CANDIDATE EXPECTATIONS VERSUS EMPLOYER REALITIES AND HOW CANDE WINNERS RISE ABOVE

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2023 Candidate Experience (CandE) Benchmark Research



**CANDIDATE EXPERIENCE**  
BENCHMARK RESEARCH  
& AWARDS PROGRAM SM

# The Only Prediction Is Based on CandE Research

At the end of year, especially since COVID-19, we're always asked what the recruiting and candidate experience trends are going to be in the new year. The reality is that we're always hesitant to answer that question; most of us in the business of recruiting and hiring didn't predict the pandemic in 2020 that dramatically changed our personal and professional lives forever. Nor did we predict all the economic volatility since and all the fallout. We went from stable growth to super-high inflation; from massive layoffs to hiring freezes; from talent hoarding in tech to mass layoffs in tech and beyond; from extreme redeployment to extensive recruiter layoffs; and from HR and talent acquisition leader burnout to people leaving our profession altogether.

So, when asked again at the end of 2023 what we think the recruiting and candidate experience trends are going to be in 2024, the only answer we're comfortable giving is this:

*Candidate expectations across the candidate journey (pre-application to onboarding) will seemingly continue to increase, although year after year, most candidates simply desire timely acknowledgement and closure. Unfortunately many employers big and small across industries will continue to marginally deliver recruiting and hiring experiences around the world. Ultimately, this will continue to drive candidate resentment – the percentage of candidates who will no longer be willing to apply again, refer others, have any brand affinity, or make purchases from a company that's consumer-based.*

That's it. We hope we're wrong, but our past and current CandE Benchmark Research tells us otherwise; we feel like employers have lost their North Star of improving and sustaining a quality candidate experience. While we don't literally ask candidates or employers if their expectations are higher or lower, we can extrapolate that sentiment from some of our key ratings data. Pre-covid, the majority of employers around the world rated themselves higher than their candidates did across three of our key ratings: willingness to apply again, willingness to refer others, and willingness to change their relationship with an employer positively or negatively.

The following sections are part of this special CandE report:

- Perception gaps
- The Recruiting Focus Fluctuation
- Contentment Is Down And Resentment Is Up
- The CandE Score: Our Best Kept Stack Ranking Secret
- What Sets the Top CandE Award Winners Apart

**We hope we're wrong, but our past and current CandE Benchmark Research tells us otherwise; we feel like employers have lost their North Star of improving and sustaining a quality candidate experience.**

### Perception Gaps

Each year we ask employers to self-assess across those three ratings referenced in the last paragraph and then compare them against their candidate responses. We first noticed this trend in 2020 when employers hiring across regions rate themselves lower than their candidates on at least one of these three key data points. This trend continued and this year in 2023, most employers rated themselves lower than their candidates did in these key ratings, except for in EMEA.

We also call these differences perception gaps – how employers see their recruiting delivery versus how their candidates say they're experiencing it. Because of all the disruption and volatility in recruiting and hiring over the past three years, we've found most employers have reset their own expectations lower than ever this year of how they recruit and hire while their candidates have most certainly not (see Figures 1-4). We also convert our key ratings to the Net Promoter Score (NPS) scale of +100 to -100. It's interesting how glaring the negative perception gap in EMEA is compared to the other regions, and we'll explore why we think that is in this year's research reports.

**"To be competitive, it is not only enough to understand what candidates are saying but also to react appropriately and intentionally to the insight. The CandE process allows us to stay on top of any candidate trends and, specifically, to hear firsthand in an aggregated way what candidates are saying about their experience with us so that we can put initiatives in place to combat the trends."**

– CandE Winner, Brown-Forman

Figure 1. North American Key Ratings and Perception Gaps

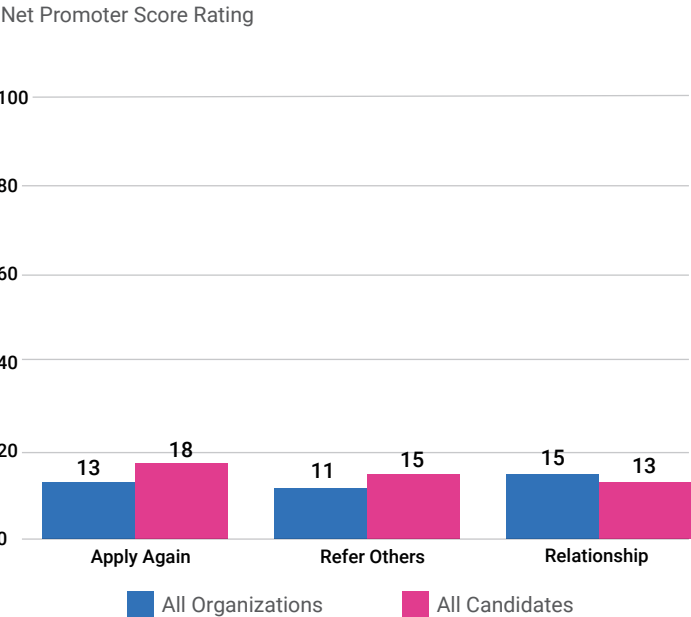


Figure 2. EMEA Key Ratings and Perception Gaps

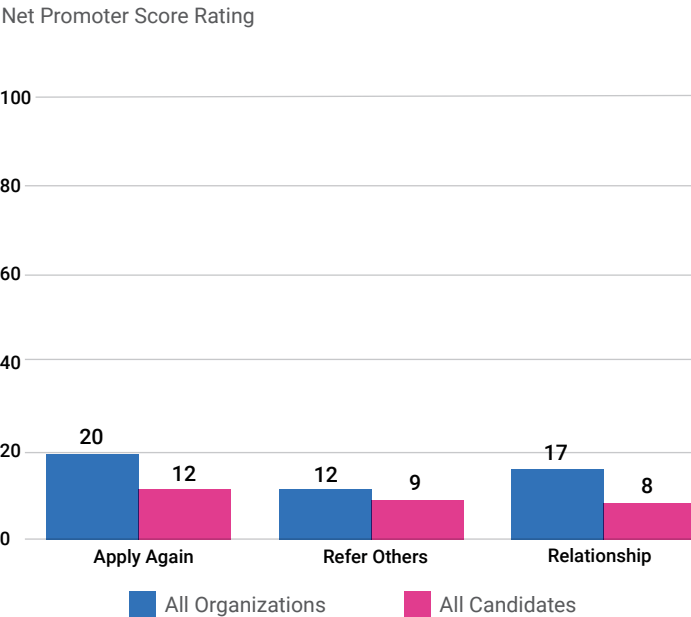


Figure 3. APAC Key Ratings and Perception Gaps

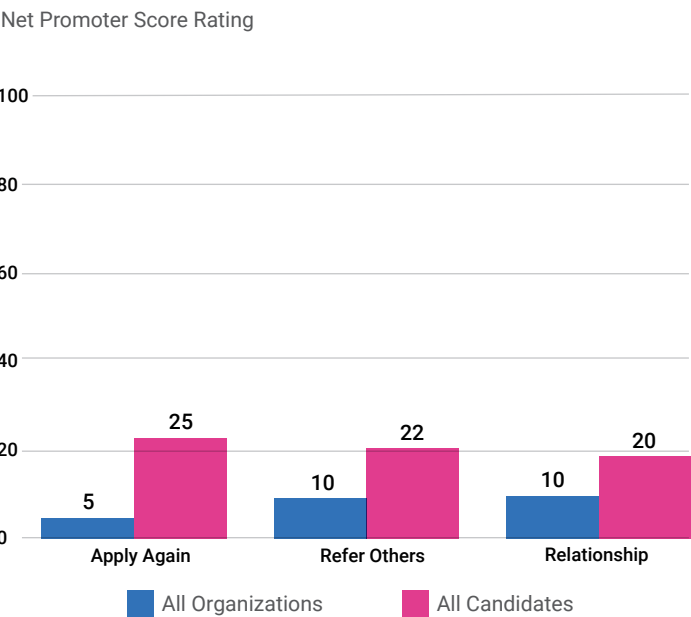
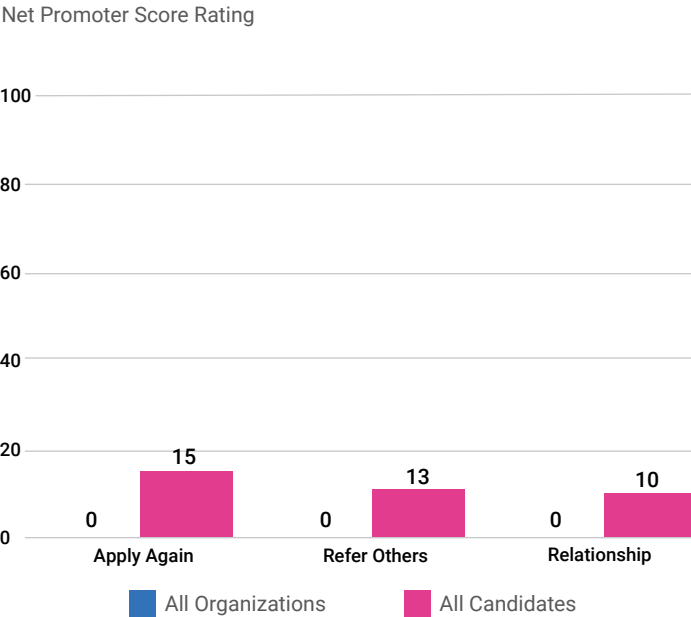


Figure 4. Latin American Key Ratings and Perception Gaps



# The Recruiting Focus Fluctuation

For many years now we've asked employers what their recruiting focus and priorities will be for the coming year. The problem with that, continuing our theme of not wanting to predict what will happen because the world of work changes so rapidly, is the fact that what may be a priority today may not be a priority tomorrow, even if there are constants.

So, we decided to start a monthly CandE Pulse survey asking employers what their priorities are that month, as opposed to asking them to project for the next year. At the time of this research report writing, you can see what those priorities have been through November 2023 and how they have varied month to month this year (see Table 1).



## What's Up With CandE NPS?

When converting a 4-point scale to NPS, you subtract the 1 score (lowest) from the 4 score (highest). For example, when we ask candidates how likely they are to refer others, the scale looks like this:

### 4 — Extremely Likely

3 — Likely

2 — Unlikely

### 1 — Definitely Not

The resulting score is the NPS. For a 5-point scale, you subtract the 1 and 2 scores from the 4 and 5 scores, and that's the NPS we use in our research.

In traditional NPS, respondents are grouped as follows, based on their responses:

- **PROMOTERS** (score 9-10) are loyal enthusiasts who will keep buying and referring others, fueling growth.
- **PASSIVES** (score 7-8) are satisfied but unenthusiastic customers who are vulnerable to competitive offerings.
- **DETRACTORS** (score 0-6) are unhappy customers who can damage your brand and impede growth through negative word of mouth.

Subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters yields the NPS, which can range from a low of -100 (if every customer is a detractor) to a high of 100 (if every customer is a promoter).

Because our benchmark research has a very negative skew due to the fact that most job candidates don't get hired for any given job they're applying to, we look at the converted NPS ratings a little differently. We change how we group our CandE benchmark research NPS results as follows:

- **AMAZING** (scores above 50) are loyal candidates who will most likely keep referring others based on their experience.
- **OKAY** (scores between 0-50) are candidates who are satisfied but may or may not be enthusiastic about referring others based on their experience.
- **NOT SO GOOD** (negative scores) are unhappy candidates who can damage your brand and impede growth through negative word of mouth.



Table 1. Top 5 Recruiting Priorities

Dec-2022 Recruiting Focus	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23
Onboarding (41%)	Candidate Experience (53%)	Candidate Experience (42%)	Screening & Interviewing (39%)	Screening & Interviewing (39%)	Candidate Experience (48%)	Candidate Experience (33%)	Candidate Experience (53%)	Screening & Interviewing (39%)	Candidate Experience (39%)	Screening & Interviewing (35%)	Targeted Sourcing (36%)
Candidate Experience (39%)	Employer Branding (51%)	Screening & Interviewing (40%)	Candidate Experience (42%)	Diversity & Inclusion (34%)	Screening & Interviewing (42%)	Employee Referrals (33%)	Screening & Interviewing (35%)	Candidate Experience (40%)	Employee Referrals (36%)	Candidate Experience (32%)	Screening & Interviewing (34%)
Diversity & Inclusion (38%)	Recruitment Marketing (48%)	Diversity & Inclusion (32%)	Diversity & Inclusion (32%)	Candidate Experience (31%)	Diversity & Inclusion (35%)	Employer Branding (32%)	Targeted Sourcing (31%)	Diversity & Inclusion (32%)	Diversity & Inclusion (35%)	Analytics & Data Management (31%)	Candidate Experience (32%)
Employee Referrals (37%)	Targeted Sourcing (44%)	Employee Referrals (32%)	Analytics & Data Management (36%)	Employer Branding (29%)	Employee Referrals (35%)	Screening & Interviewing (32%)	Application Process (31%)	Employee Referrals (27%)	Analytics & Data Management (32%)	Pre- boarding / Onboarding (30%)	Employee Referrals (29%)
Screening & Interviewing (29%)	Diversity & Inclusion (43%)	Employer Branding (31%)	Targeted Sourcing (33%)	Recruitment Marketing (28%)	Employer Branding (32%)	Pre- boarding / Onboarding (26%)	Employer Branding (30%)	Recruiting Events (27%)	Employer Branding (29%)	Employer Branding (27%)	Social Recruiting (26%)



“As a public sector employer, we have a somewhat tedious and lengthy hiring process. Because we know our process is longer than what candidates find in the private sector, we wanted to make sure that, for however long they’re in our pipeline, they feel valued and well-informed. We’re working on our time to hire and hope to create more efficiencies, but we wanted to start with people-focused improvements before process-focused ones.”

– CandE Winner, City of Raleigh

One of the constants that we've been happy to see in the top 5 priorities is that "candidate experience" has been #1 and #2 for nearly the entire year, except in November, and even then it's still at #3. But when you review what comes and goes from the list – Pre-boarding / Onboarding, Diversity & Inclusion, Application Process, Social Recruiting, and others, it's clear that priorities can change. A lot. You can see the complete list of priorities employers choose from in Table 2.

One of the constants that we've been happy to see in the top 5 priorities is that "candidate experience" has been #1 and #2 for nearly the entire year.

Our CandE Pulse survey respondents represent over 100 employers each month, with an average of nearly 50% of respondents that were from employers 2,500-100,000+ in employee size, and across many industries including technology, healthcare, education, government (public sector), nonprofit, manufacturing, finance and insurance, services, and many others.

In addition to asking what employers' priorities are month after month, we also ask them how they are going to get all the work done (see Table 3). Out of the top 5 each month, the most regularly recurring one is "Improving Processes". This makes sense since it is where companies should tackle priority improvement and implementation first and foremost. The next regularly recurring activity is "Candidate / Employee Experience Survey Feedback", which also resonates with us and the benchmark research work we do, and of course to be able to measure the impact of candidate/employer experience on employers and their brands. You can see the complete list of ways employers are getting it all done in Table 4.

Table 2. The Complete List of CandE Pulse Recruiting Priorities

Analytics and Data Management
Application Process
Candidate Experience
Career Site Development
Current Technology Stack Optimization
Diversity and Inclusion
Employee Referrals
Employer Branding
Internal Mobility / Retention
New Technology Implementation
Pre-Boarding / Onboarding
Recruiting Events
Recruitment Marketing
Screening and Interviewing
Social Recruiting
Targeted Sourcing



Table 3. Top 5 Ways to Get It All Done

Dec-2022 Recruiting Focus	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23
Improving Processes (49%)	Improving Processes (67%)	Current Staffing (51%)	Improving Processes (56%)	Improving Processes (47%)	Improving Processes (59%)	Current Staffing (46%)	Current Staffing (43%)	Improving Processes (53%)	Improving Processes (46%)	Current Staffing (42%)	Current Staffing (42%)
New Technologies (40%)	Current Staffing (59%)	Improving Processes (50%)	Current Technologies (47%)	Current Staffing (40%)	Current Staffing (36%)	Improving Processes (38%)	Improving Processes (38%)	Current Staffing (46%)	Current Staffing (38%)	Improving Processes (36%)	Improving Processes (36%)
Current Staffing (38%)	Current Technologies (51%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (32%)	Current Staffing (43%)	Current Technologies (39%)	Current Technologies (32%)	New Technologies (29%)	New Technologies (31%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (33%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (29%)	Current Technologies (32%)	New Technologies (30%)
More Staffing (32%)	New Technologies (34%)	Current Technologies (30%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (31%)	Flexible Work Schedules – Remove / Hybrid (30%)	New Technologies (27%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (29%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (30%)	Current Technologies (32%)	More Staffing (26%)	Flexible Work Schedules – Remove / Hybrid (30%)	Current Technologies (27%)
Flexible Work Schedules – Remove / Hybrid (32%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (33%)	New Technologies (26%)	New Technologies (34%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (25%)	Candidate / Employee Survey Feedback (27%)	More Staffing (28%)	Current Technologies (27%)	Flexible Work Schedules – Remove / Hybrid (29%)	New Technologies (26%)	New Technologies (27%)	Flexible Work Schedules – Remove / Hybrid (23%)

Table 4. The Complete List of Ways to Get It All Done

Candidate and/or Employee Survey Feedback
Current Staffing
Current Technologies
Flexible Work Schedules (remote/hybrid)
Improving Recruiting Processes
More Staffing
New Leadership
New Technologies
Outsourcing (individual consultants and/or consulting firms)
Outsourcing (recruitment process outsourcing)
Outsourcing (staffing agencies)



The good news is that throughout the past year of conducting CandE Pulse surveys, responding employers have said they're hiring (see Figure 5). The percentages have been consistently in the 70's to low 80's. Granted, the mix of employers responding do vary each month, but seeing stable hiring month after month is promising. However, we have seen regular monthly fluctuations in those freezing hiring, laying, and redeploying. And the hiring that's been happening hasn't been all net new either as many employers are back-filling open positions.

We also ask employers each month whether they've increased or decreased the size of their recruiting team this month. While it decreased significantly during the summer months, it's now up again to 25% stating they're increasing their recruiting team size (see Figure 6).



Figure 5. Hiring Status

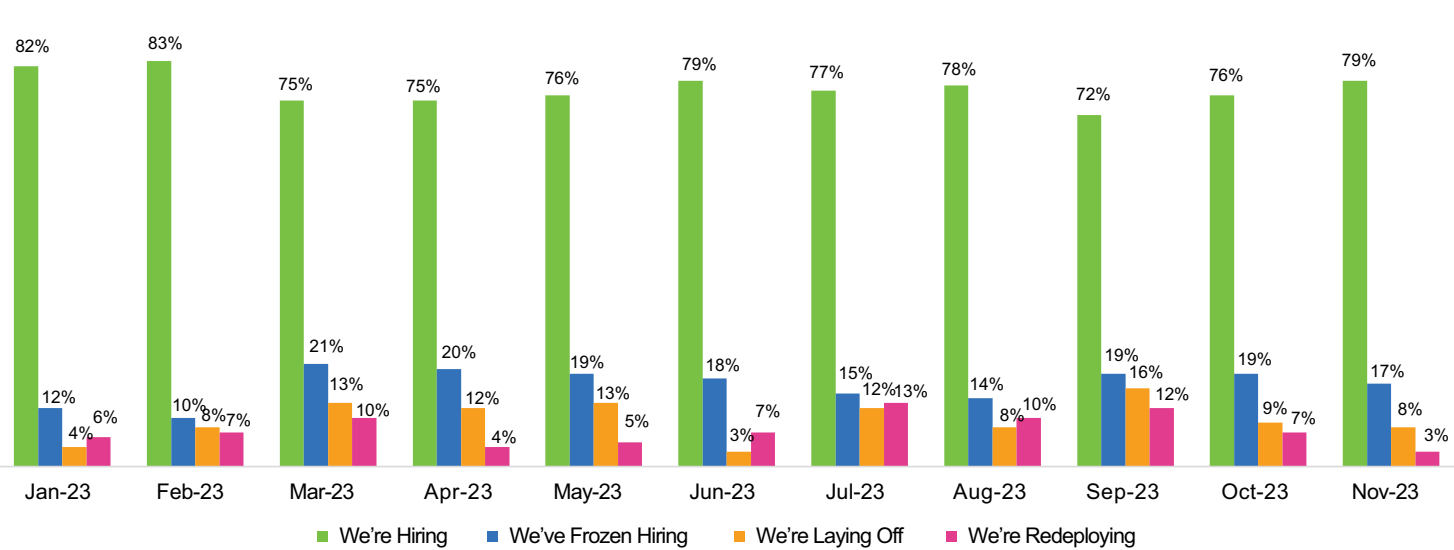
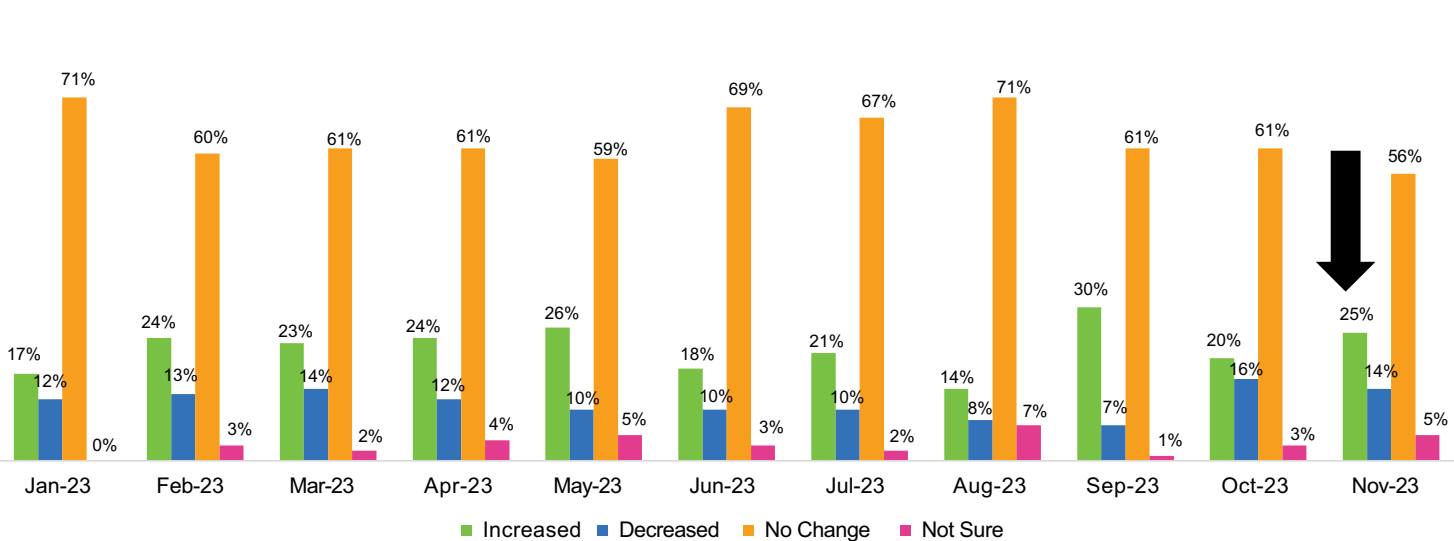


Figure 6. Increased Or Decreased Recruiting Team Size





We also ask each month about the job requisition load, and the monthly average has gone from 77% stating they manage up to 30 reqs each per recruiter in January 2023, to 59% managing up to 30 reqs each per recruiter in November 2023. Those carrying 31-50 reqs each is up significantly in November 2023 compared to the rest of the year. Of course, while we want to assume this could be one factor as a sign of hiring growth, we understand that req loads always vary by job type, industry, and employer size, and again the fact that many recruiting teams are stable but leaner these days (unless they're rebounding again based on what our CandE Pulse revealed above).

And as we do each year in our benchmark research, and now monthly in our CandE Pulse surveys, we again highlight how employers self-rate their own recruiting and candidate experience and whether or not their leading, competing, improving, or lagging (see Figure 7). When we compare the 2022 benchmark self-ratings to 2023 (we ask participating benchmark employers the same question each year), those companies that felt like they were competing and improving were much closer together (48% and 40% respectively compared to 63% and 23%) in this year's benchmark than last. Otherwise, it was similar for those who said improving and lagging was where they were at. When we look month by month throughout 2023, there were consistent self-ratings with some fluctuations in July, August, and September.

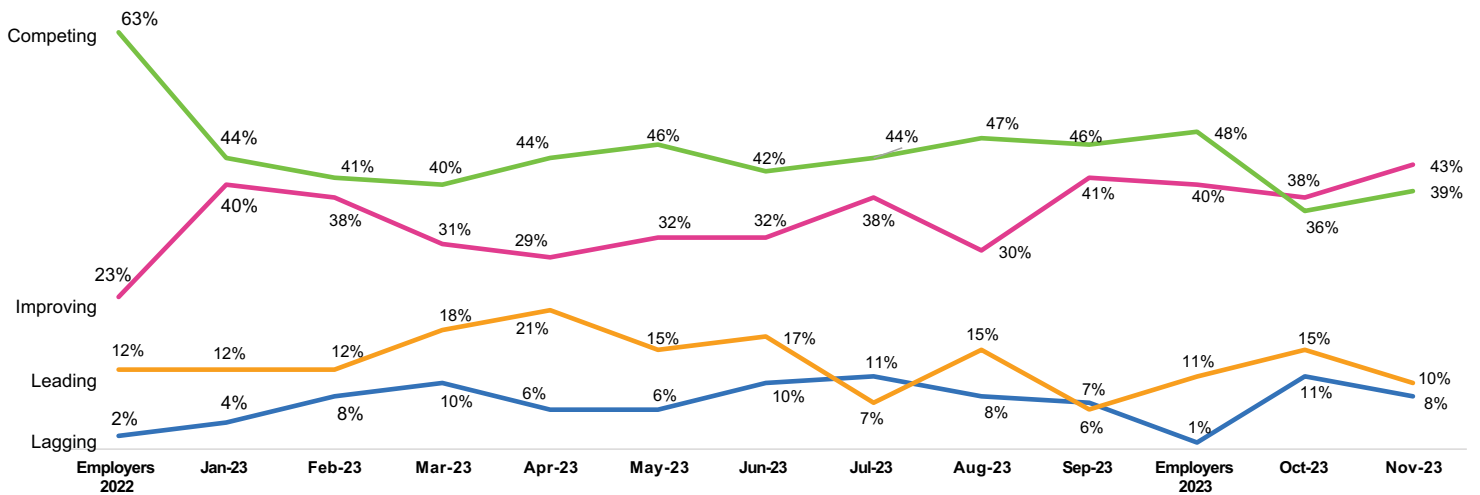
**And as we do each year in our benchmark research, and now monthly in our CandE Pulse surveys, we again highlight how employers self-rate their own recruiting and candidate experience and whether or not their leading, competing, improving, or lagging.**

**"We strive to maintain a small-company mentality, providing individual candidate attention and feedback despite our growth this year, and we want our candidates to feel like they are part of something special. Both talent acquisition and leadership recognize that our ability to continue growing begins with a strong, responsive candidate experience."**

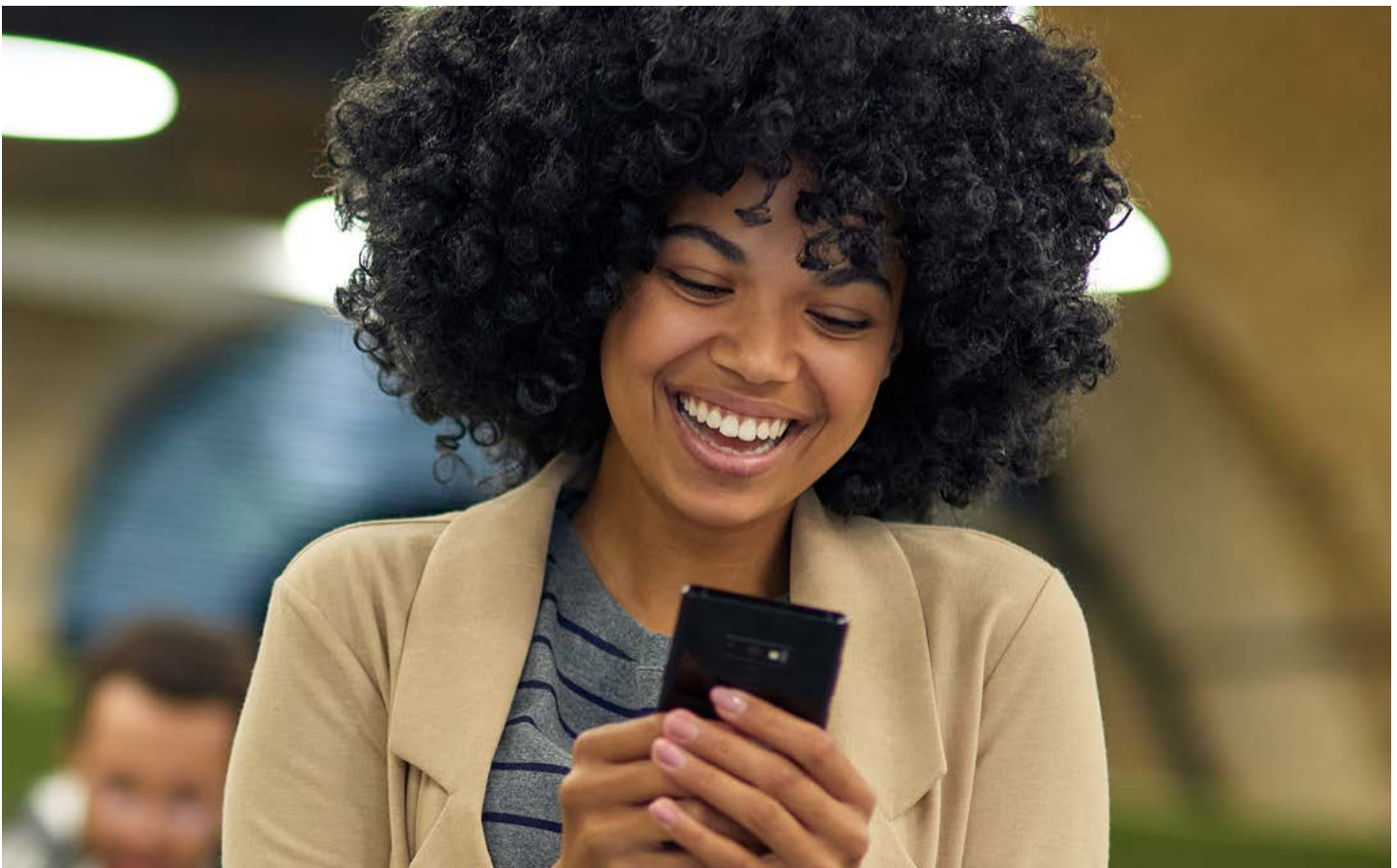
– CandE Winner, MindPoint Group



Figure 7. Self-Rating Recruiting and Candidate Experience



The employers that respond to our CandE Pulse surveys each month vary, but we do know that no matter the mix, consistent recruiting and hiring while sustaining a quality candidate experience is difficult for most employers. However, we've seen many [multi-year CandE Award Winners](#) do it year after year (those employers that have above average ratings in our benchmark research). We'll cover the CandE Winner differentiators throughout this research.



# Contentment Is Down And Resentment Is Up

Another reason why we feel our candidate expectation prediction has merit for 2024, is because in 2023 the overall positive candidate experience, what we’re now calling candidate contentment, declined sharply while candidate resentment, the very negative experience, increased globally. Even in historically positive skewed regions like APAC and Latin America.

...in 2023 the overall positive candidate experience, what we’re now calling candidate contentment, declined sharply while candidate resentment, the very negative experience, increased globally.

This data is based on one of the four key ratings we analyze every year in our benchmark research. The literal question we pose to the candidates is as follows:

**Based on your experience with COMPANY NAME, how likely are you to change your RELATIONSHIP status (whether or not you’ll keep your brand alliance, apply again, refer others and/or make purchases if applicable)?**

- Negative - I will definitely take my alliance, product purchases, relationship and/or referrals somewhere else
- Neutral
- Pretty good
- Great candidate experience - I will definitely increase my relationship through brand alliance, product purchases, networking and/or making referrals

The “Great” responses are what make up the candidate contentment rate, and the “Negative” responses are what make up the candidate resentment rate (see Figures 8-9).

Figure 8. The Candidate Contentment Rate

## Candidate Contentment (Great Experience)

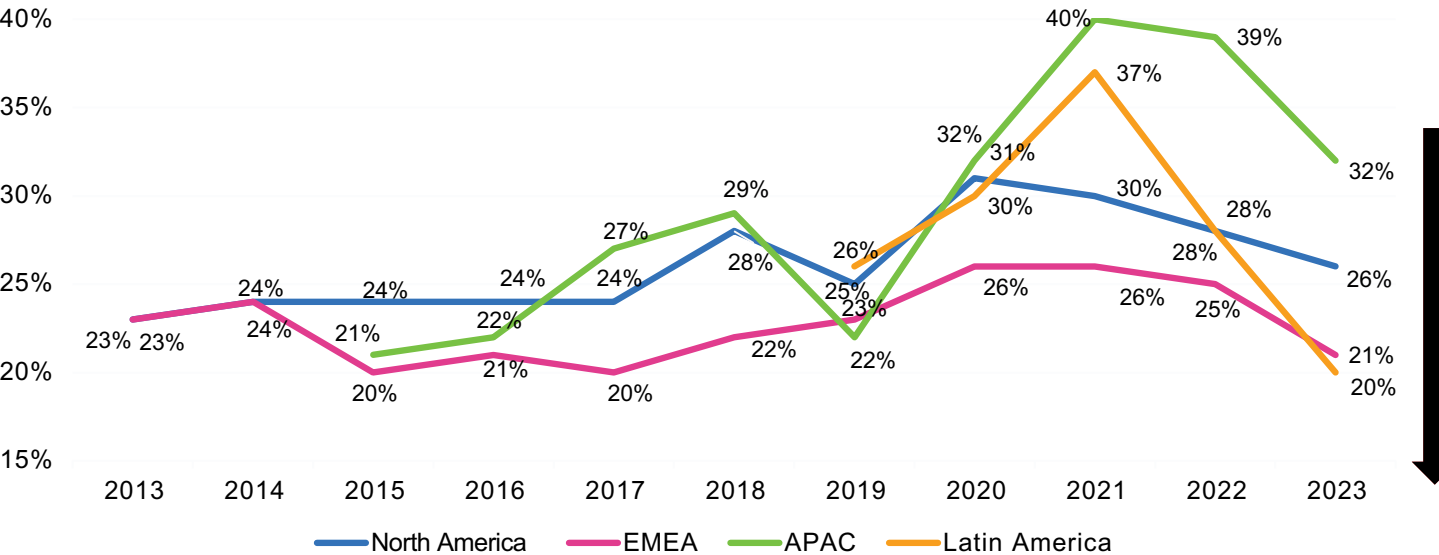
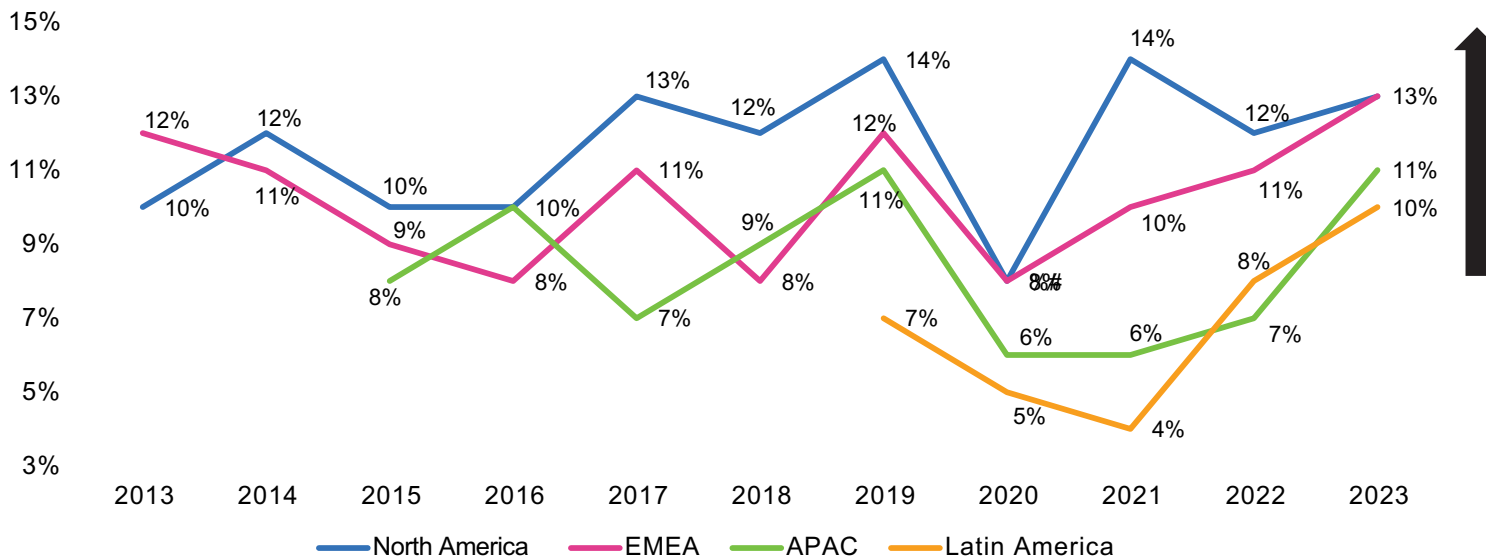


Figure 9. The Candidate Resentment Rate

### Candidate Resentment (Poor Experience)



Candidate contentment has usually been the highest on average in APAC and Latin America (with some exceptions), and candidate resentment has always been the highest in North America followed by EMEA. One of the main reasons we've found these differences is that culturally candidates in many of the countries in APAC and Latin America are less likely to share negative feedback than their peers in North America or EMEA, something that candidates and employers alike have validated for us over the years.

A note about candidate resentment – it is a major indicator we track each year and one we recommend employers track as well. Candidate resentment impacts a business and its brand because candidates who report having a very poor recruiting experience are less likely to apply again, refer others, have any brand affinity, and/or make purchases if the employer is a consumer-based company. Ultimately a poor candidate experience can cause employers to lose revenue and referrals, two things vital to a healthy organization. We've updated our candidate resentment calculator and you can use it to check on what your financial impact might be.

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**"Through our involvement with the Candidate Experience Benchmark Research Program, we are able to demonstrate the value that a strong Candidate Experience brings to an organization like Southwest Airlines." – CandE Winner, Southwest Airlines**



To date we've worked with over 2,000 employers big and small across industries, and we've surveyed over 1.6 million candidates. Our CandE Benchmark Research uses 4- and 5-point rating scales each year to determine general candidate sentiment that are easily converted to net promoter score (NPS) ratings as mentioned above. This year, employers in all four regions where we surveyed candidates posted positive net promoter score key ratings (NPS ratings on the +100 to -100 scale). Meaning, none of the aggregate key ratings were negative.

Although the overall ratings aren't extremely high and actually down in every region this year, we consider anything positive to be good, given that these numbers are largely from candidates who have been rejected by employers (and many who didn't advance past the application stage). Except for our highest rated participating employers, most employers will only see scores of 50 and above from the candidates who got hired.

Out of the 240,000 global candidate responses this year, 90% of them were those who were ultimately dispositioned (rejected). That's usually the average globally each year with a few exceptions – for example, in 2022, APAC had only 70% of candidates who weren't hired, which contributed to the positive skew in ratings last year. Table 5 shows what the key ratings by NPS were and what the resentment rates were over the past three years in each region.

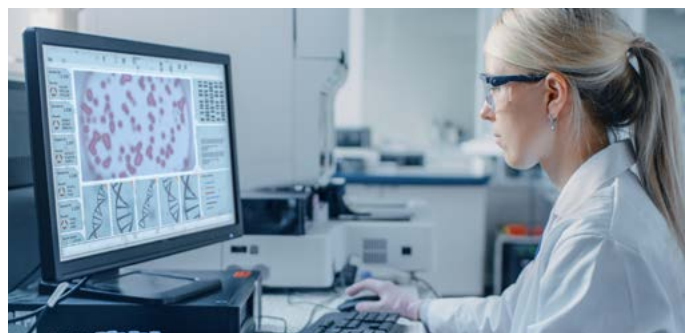


Table 5. Overall Global CandE Benchmark Key NPS Ratings

### Overall Benchmark Key NPS Ratings

North America	2023	2022	2021
<b>CandE Score</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>
Overall Rating	28	30	22
Apply Again	18	19	19
Refer Others	15	18	17
Relationship	13	16	14
Hired	<b>73</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>73</b>
Resentment	<b>13%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>14%</b>

APAC	2023	2022	2021
<b>CandE Score</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30</b>
Overall Rating	38	51	53
Apply Again	25	37	39
Refer Others	22	35	37
Relationship	20	32	34
Hired	<b>79</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>84</b>
Resentment	<b>11%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>6%</b>

#### NPS Ratings

- **Amazing** – 50-100 (where hires should always be)
- **Okay** – 0-50 (positive NPS for rejected candidates is good)
- **Needs Work** – Below 0 (negative NPS)

EMEA	2023	2022	2021
<b>CandE Score</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>26</b>
Overall Rating	13	25	29
Apply Again	12	20	19
Refer Others	9	18	19
Relationship	8	14	16
Hired	<b>78</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>85</b>
Resentment	<b>13%</b>	<b>11%</b>	<b>10%</b>

Latin America	2023	2022	2021
<b>CandE Score</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>40</b>
Overall Rating	13	31	53
Apply Again	15	23	40
Refer Others	13	25	43
Relationship	10	20	33
Hired	<b>85</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>89</b>
Resentment	<b>10%</b>	<b>8%</b>	<b>4%</b>

#### How to Get NPS Ratings

- **5-point scale:** Subtract 1 & 2 scores from 4 & 5 scores
- **4-point scale:** Subtract lowest score (1) from highest score (4)

# The CandE Score: Our Best Kept Stack Ranking Secret

Now that we've merged with ERE Media, we want to continue to evolve our benchmark research program, providing more value to employer participants and to the greater recruiting industry. This will include highlighting our differentiating CandE Score even more.

CandE Score? We've been conducting our benchmark research for over 12 years now, and in the early years, we tinkered with our ratings methodology and how we would differentiate above average candidate experience delivery. In 2015 and 2016, our methodology evolved when we created a CandE Score calculation that included the first four key ratings in the candidate survey (see Table 6).

Our CandE Score is a unique rating in our industry, as there is no other comprehensive cumulative NPS-like rating that captures candidate sentiment and perception of fairness like it. Ultimately, the CandE Score is an NPS rating that falls on the +100 to -100 scale.

**"NPS scores are well recognized by Key executive leaders as a way of measuring success in client attraction. It's important for HR to speak that same language and use survey results as a vehicle for driving organizational understanding of the role positive candidate sentiment plays in our ability to be competitive."**

– CandE Winner, Keybank

Table 6. CandE Score Key Ratings

**7. Rate your OVERALL experience as a candidate with COMPANY NAME where the highest possible rating is 5 stars.**

- 1 Star – *Very dissatisfied: My experience was very negative*
- 2 Stars – *Dissatisfied*
- 3 Stars – *Satisfied*
- 4 Stars – *Very satisfied*
- 5 Stars – *Delighted: My experience was very positive*

**8. Based on your recruiting experience with COMPANY NAME, how likely are you to APPLY AGAIN in the future?**

- *Definitely Not - My experience was very negative.*
- *Unlikely*
- *Likely*
- *Extremely Likely - My experience was very positive.*

**9. Based on your experience with COMPANY NAME, on the scale below, how likely are you to REFER someone to work at COMPANY NAME?**

- *Definitely Not - My experience was very negative*
- *Unlikely*
- *Likely*
- *Extremely Likely - My experience was very positive*

**10. Based on your experience with COMPANY NAME, how likely are you to change your RELATIONSHIP status (whether or not you'll keep your brand alliance, apply again, refer others and/or make purchases if applicable)?**

- *Negative - I will definitely take my alliance, product purchases, relationship and/or referrals somewhere else*
- *Neutral*
- *Pretty good*
- *Great candidate experience - I will definitely increase my relationship through brand alliance, product purchases, networking and/or making referrals*

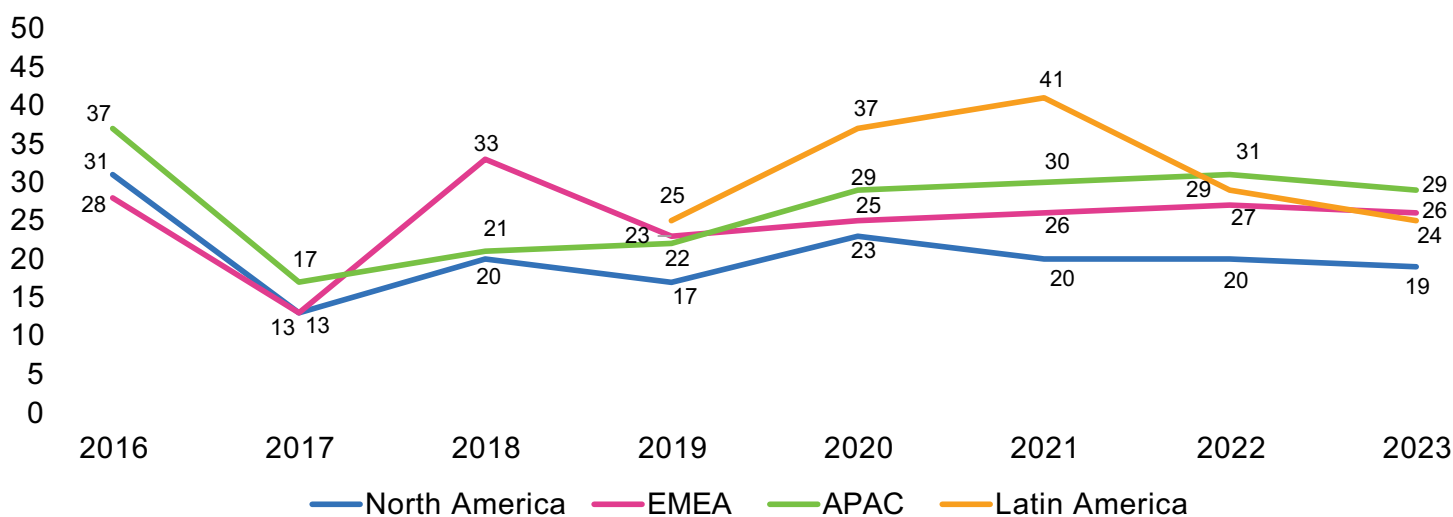
It's important to note that the CandE Score is normalized to a standard ratio of those "Not Hired" versus those "Hired" (80/20) to eliminate any "halo" effects. We recommend that employers only include up to 20% (or fewer) of their hired candidates in the survey process. The "Hired" percentage could be higher than 20%, but it would affect the final CandE score and ranking, primarily because we weigh the calculation more heavily on those who were "Not Hired" – always the bulk of candidates for employers year after year. The simplified CandE Score calculation is as follows:

$$20\% \text{ Hired} * (\text{Apply} + \text{Refer} + \text{Overall} + \text{Relationship NPS}) / 4 + 80\% \text{ DNK} * (\text{Apply} + \text{Refer} + \text{Overall} + \text{Relationship NPS}) / 4 * 100$$

After the CandE Scores are calculated for all participating employers, we then stack rank those ratings and select the winners that have CandE Scores that are on or above average in each region. Figure 10 shows the average CandE Scores in each region since 2016.



Figure 10. Average CandE Scores By Region



To qualify for a CandE Award, each participating employer has to commit to a specific, statistically significant candidate response and a set standard for the proportion of randomly selected respondents who were not hired. This means each company has to first meet a minimum qualification for responses based on the size of the candidate population plus a minimum percentage of those not hired. These candidate responses include multiple touch points from the pre-application to onboarding.

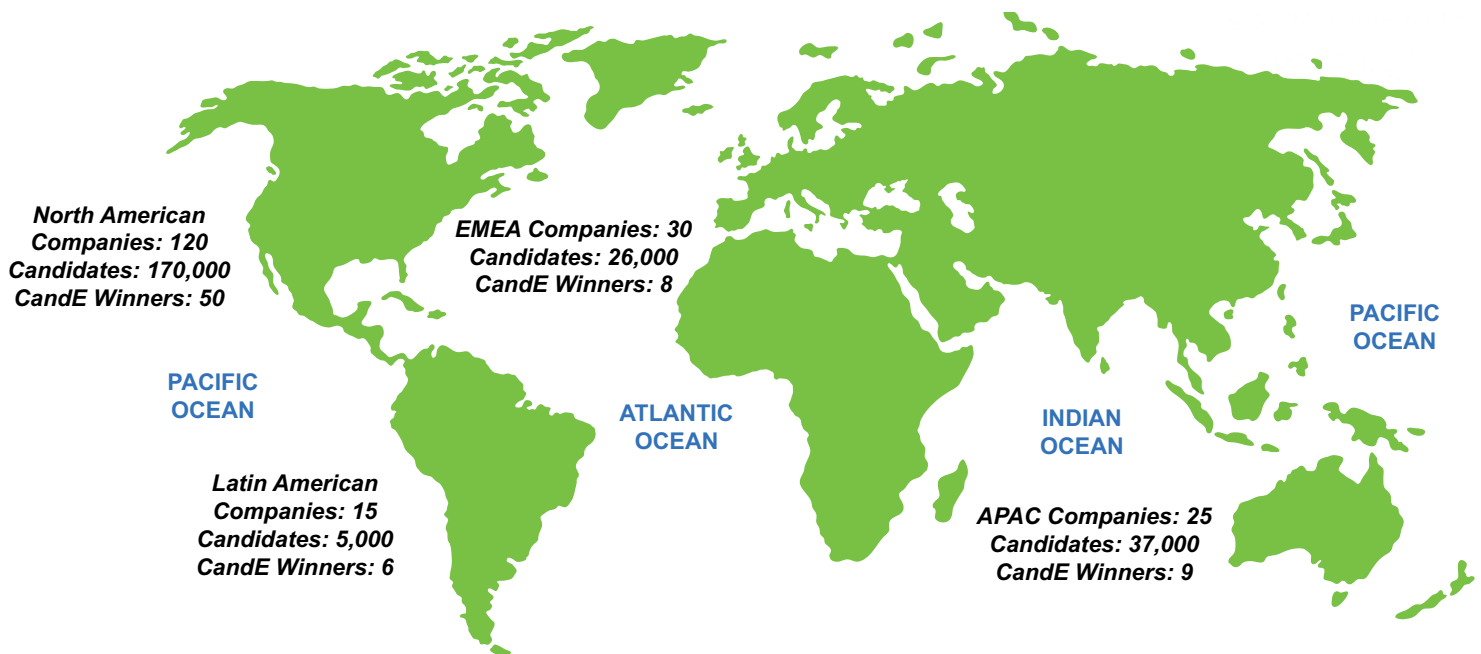
The CandE Score is the definitive recruiting industry single rating that captures candidate sentiment, perception of fairness, and their willingness to engage your business and your brand.

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# What Sets the Top CandE Award Winners Apart

Every year there are those employers that have above average CandE Scores, and those are the employers that win our coveted CandE Awards. There were 60 unique companies from around the world that won CandE Awards in 2023 (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. 2023 Global CandE Benchmark Totals



The big-picture differentiators never change, however, and these are the key competitive differentiators we find in the data year after year:

- Consistent and timely communications from pre-application to onboarding
- Consistent and timely expectation setting about the entire recruiting process
- Consistent and timely engagement and follow through throughout the candidate journey
- Asking candidates for timely feedback and providing timely feedback to finalists
- Being transparent and more accountable about the entire recruiting and hiring process

But what exactly does it mean to be a CandE Award Winner? And what differentiates CandE Winners from all the other participating companies?

These are questions we get each year, and each year we do our best to find those granular global insights and share them in our annual benchmark research resorts.

All of these, when practiced consistently and sustained over time, ensure a higher level of perceived candidate fairness, which we know is subject. But if your candidates feel their recruiting experience was positive and fair, even when they're not hired, then they're most likely to continue to engage your business and your brand.



Based on the final CandE Score, we stack rank the companies that have above-average ratings. Each year, the CandE Award Winners exemplify best practices for improving recruiting, hiring, and the candidate experiences.

It's even more evident in the highest rated companies across regions, employer sizes, and industries. Each year, we look closer at the top 10 Candidate Experience (CandE) Award Winners in North America by overall ranking, and the top 10 by employer size, in addition to the highest-rated companies in the other regions we track.

We segment CandE Winners (and all employers) as follows: Small 501-2,500 employees; Medium 2,501-10,000; and Large 10,001+. Broken down by industry, the greatest concentration of CandE Winners overall included healthcare, finance & insurance, technology, services, consumer goods, and manufacturing. CandE Winners also had 21% more hourly candidates than all other employers. The top 10 CandE Award Winners in North America across company sizes are most concentrated in education, finance & insurance, healthcare, hospitality, manufacturing, and technology.

The top 10 North America CandE Award winners have higher candidate experience ratings than all other surveyed companies combined.

**The following pages will highlight what sets this elite group apart this year, including:**

- **Recruiter Accountability**
- **Recruiting Technologies**
- **Timely Dispositions**
- **Waiting on Next Steps**
- **Structured Interviews and Interview Fairness**
- **Candidates Withdrawing Due to Time Disrespected**
- **Recruiter and/or Hiring Manager Follow-ups for Finalists**
- **Giving Finalist Feedback**



**“To build support within our organization, we’ve tied our candidate experience to the guest experience which is vital to our business. By explaining that a poor candidate experience can result in the loss of a guest for our businesses, we were able to put a dollar amount on the potential loss of revenue due to poor candidate experience.”**

– CandE Winner, Delaware North

# Recruiter Accountability

Recruiting professionals have been through a lot the past few years since the pandemic, and 2023 was definitely a rough year with both involuntary and voluntary turnover on the rise. Recruiters are still the face of candidate experience, however, and the highest rated employers in our research are more likely to align recruiter performance with candidate experience. APAC CandE Winners had the smallest percentage of alignment, but it was still nearly 10% more than all participating APAC employers (see Table 7). Using candidate experience as a signifier of performance demonstrates how important it is and incentivizes recruiters to maintain a good experience throughout the candidate journey.

Table 7. Aligning Recruiter Performance With Candidate Experience

Employer Segment	% Aligning Recruiter Performance With Candidate Experience
<b>North America</b>	
Top 10 Overall	100%
All CandE Winners	71%
All Employers	61%
Top 10 Large	80%
All CandE Winners	71%
All Large	64%
Top 10 Medium	70%
All CandE Winners	71%
All Medium	59%
Top 10 Small	80%
All CandE Winners	71%
All Small	61%
<b>EMEA</b>	
CandE Winners	75%
All	60%
<b>APAC</b>	
CandE Winners	63%
All	58%
<b>Latin America</b>	
CandE Winners	63%
All	58%

## Top-Rated Global CandE Winners

### Top 10 Overall North America CandE Winners

1. D2L
2. Syndax Pharmaceuticals
3. NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital
4. Enterprise Holdings
5. Hoag Health System
6. Conagra Brands
7. Virtusa
8. Ritchie Bros.
9. Stantec
10. Ford Motor Company

### Top 10 Large North America CandE Winners (10,001+ employees)

1. NewYork-Presbyterian Hospital
2. Enterprise Holdings
3. Conagra Brands
4. Stantec
5. Ford Motor Company
6. Waste Management (now WM)
7. Southwest Airlines
8. Delaware North
9. Travel + Leisure Co.
10. Inspire Brands

### Top 10 Medium North America CandE Winners (2,501-10,000 employees)

1. Hoag Health System
2. Virtusa
3. Messer North America, Inc.
4. Holland America / Princess
5. UST
6. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota
7. GuideWell
8. City of Raleigh
9. Deluxe
10. Atlantic Health System

# Recruiting Technologies

The highest rated employers this year tend to leverage recruiting technologies like texting and artificial intelligence (AI) to improve recruiting and the candidate experience, more than all other participating companies (see Table 8). Both texting and smart technologies can help improve communication and feedback loops with candidates throughout the candidate journey.

The top 10 large and medium CandE Winners are more likely to utilize texting and artificial intelligence (AI) recruiting technologies in North America, with large employers leading the pack this year. EMEA and APAC CandE Winners are as well, but not in Latin America. This may be due to the much smaller number of participating employers and winners that aren't fully representative of the region.

The impact of artificial intelligence and what's called generative AI on recruiting technologies has only just begun. The sophistication of technology and the learning algorithms (AI) that process mind-bending amounts of data to improve their purported software outcomes constantly. For example, AI is helping automate candidate outreach and communication like never before. It's also being used to scan resumes for keywords and phrases that match the job requirements, helping recruiters quickly identify the most qualified candidates, with candidate matching, where AI is used to match candidates with open positions based on their skills, experience, and other factors, helping recruiters identify the best candidates for each role they're hiring for.

However, selection bias has always been a concern in recruiting, and even with the potential bias reduction leveraging advanced recruiting technologies, the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's \(EEOC\) new guidance](#) states that AI tools used for employment selection should be assessed under their guidelines' adverse impact standards.

It's also important to note that AI in recruiting and hiring is still in its infancy, and laws like NYC's Automated Employment Decision Tool law are one of many coming, telling employers who use AI in hiring they have to tell candidates they are doing so. They will also have to submit to annual independent audits to prove that their systems are not racist or sexist. [President Biden also issued an Executive Order](#) that establishes new standards for AI safety and security, protects Americans' privacy, advances equity and civil rights, stands up for consumers and workers, promotes innovation and competition, advances American leadership around the world, and more.

## Top-Rated Global CandE Winners (cont.)

### Top 10 Small North America CandE Winners (501-2,500 employees)

1. D2L
2. Syndax Pharmaceuticals
3. Ritchie Bros
4. YKK AP America Inc.
5. Auburn-Washburn USD 437
6. AppFolio
7. Grant Thornton LLP
8. Mphasis
9. Dr. Reddy's Laboratories
10. Crum & Forster

### EMEA CandE Winners

1. Virtusa
2. Mphasis
3. HangiKredi
4. Enterprise Holdings
5. Broadridge
6. Brown-Forman
7. Société Générale
8. Mettler Toledo

### APAC CandE Winners

1. TTEC
2. Virtusa
3. Broadridge
4. Intel
5. UST
6. Flex
7. Synopsys
8. IDP Education Ltd
9. Avanade

### Latin America CandE Winners

1. Messer Gases Brazil
2. UST
3. Schneider Electric
4. Western Union
5. Intel
6. Flex

# Timely Dispositions

For the past few years, the highest rated employers have been more consistent and timely with their dispositions. In fact, most had told us they were required to review applications within 3-5 days to reject or move forward. While this is still a differentiator for CandE Winners around the world, the overall percentage of top-rated employers doing this within 3-5 days has decreased.

For example, over 80% of the top-rated North America employers said their disposition within 3-5 days in 2022, but this year, that's dropped to 50% or lower. Only 56% of all 2023 North America CandE Winners said they disposition within 3-5 days, but last year it was 63%, an 11% decrease. The mix of participating employers does change each year, but the reality for many employers this year was that their applications increased while their recruiting teams decreased.

Even if their rejection timeliness deteriorated somewhat, the top-rated employers are still more consistent about rejecting candidates than all other employers in our research. This is true in EMEA, APAC, and Latin America as well.

**"Every candidate deserves an answer. We truly respect their interest in our company, and the time they spend applying and going through the recruitment process. It's why we commit to not having more than 25% of our candidates waiting to hear back from us (dispositioning or advancement in the process)."**

– CandE Winner, Schneider Electric

**Even if their rejection timeliness deteriorated somewhat, the top-rated employers are still more consistent about rejecting candidates than all other employers in our research.**

Table 8. Texting and AI Technologies Utilized

Employer Segment	% Texting	% Using AI Tech
<b>North America</b>		
Top 10 Overall	60%	80%
All CandE Winners	64%	20%
All Employers	53%	21%
Top 10 Large	80%	80%
All CandE Winners	64%	20%
All Large	70%	25%
Top 10 Medium	70%	60%
All CandE Winners	64%	20%
All Medium	46%	18%
Top 10 Small	20%	60%
All CandE Winners	64%	20%
All Small	24%	14%
<b>EMEA</b>		
CandE Winners	43%	36%
All	33%	22%
<b>APAC</b>		
CandE Winners	25%	26%
All	21%	18%
<b>Latin America</b>		
CandE Winners	0%	19%
All	18%	17%



# Waiting on Next Steps

Another key differentiator of a positive candidate experience is not having to wait on next steps after applying. The longer candidates have to wait, the more negative their experience becomes. Keeping candidates in the loop helps them see where they stand and demonstrates respect for their time. That's something that many of the larger top-rated employers are keen to do – and they have fewer candidates still waiting on next steps 1-2+ months after applying.

But not all of them this year. The increase of applicants across industries combined with the decreased recruiting

team sizes (and for smaller companies that already had limited recruiting professionals) has contributed to the deterioration of timely dispositions. The top 10 medium and small North American CandE Winners definitely had more candidates waiting, as did candidates in APAC and Latin America. However, this surprisingly didn't increase candidate resentment, which remains much lower for CandE Winners than all other companies. This is mostly likely due to brand affinity and the consistency across the candidate journey CandE Winners are delivering.

**“We were seeing delays in not getting to our candidates fast enough and changes in the market impacting candidate behavior. Therefore, we implemented a no more than 7-day rule to respond back and disposition candidates.”**

– CandE Winner, GuideWell



# Structured Interviews and Interview Fairness

Our CandE research has always shown that structured interviews, including the prep prior and the follow-up after, always result in more positive candidate experience ratings and a higher perception of fairness.

A structured interview process is a systematic and standardized approach to conducting job interviews, and while that may vary across job types, the goal is still to ensure fairness and consistency in evaluating candidates by asking all applicants the same set of predetermined questions and using a standardized scoring system. Structured interviews are contrasted with unstructured interviews, where questions may vary between candidates, and the interview may be more conversational. While unstructured interviews may allow for a more personalized interaction, unstructured interviews can be a hot mess depending on the hiring managers and can increase bias and subjectivity dramatically.

Overall, 50%-70% of the top 10 CandE Winners across company sizes, CandE Winners, and even all other companies told us this year they conduct structured interviews. Globally that's the same, except for APAC, where less than 40% of the CandE Winners there said they did. Again, this is a big driver of more positive candidate experience ratings and a higher perception of fairness.

It's even more evident when we look at how candidates rated interview fairness. Fairness is subjective, we know, but the highest rated employers in our research definitely have higher interview fairness ratings (see Table 9). For example, the top 10 overall North America CandE Winners had a 40% higher interview fairness rating than all other employers. The top 10 small North America employers had an even higher interview fairness rating – 31% higher than all other employers.

Table 9. Interview Fairness NPS Ratings

Employer Segment	Interview Fairness NPS Ratings
<b>North America</b>	
Top 10 Overall	85
All CandE Winners	67
All Employers	57
Top 10 Large	71
All CandE Winners	67
All Large	53
Top 10 Medium	72
All CandE Winners	67
All Medium	55
Top 10 Small	89
All CandE Winners	67
All Small	65
<b>EMEA</b>	
CandE Winners	85
All	60
<b>APAC</b>	
CandE Winners	88
All	67
<b>Latin America</b>	
CandE Winners	72
All	67

**“We regularly read interview reviews on various platforms and identified two critical opportunities for improvement. We found a chance to streamline the interview process across the company and an opportunity to speed up the hiring process as a whole. Our interview training helped make a difference in these two themes and we are excited to continue to make improvements that directly impact how we are showing up for our candidates.”**

– CandE Winner, AppFolio

# Candidates Withdrawing Due to Time Disrespected

When it comes to candidates withdrawing themselves from the recruiting process, there are many reasons as to why. When we look at the CandE data, the three most negative reasons candidates withdraw themselves globally in North America in 2023 were once again:

1. My time was disrespected during the recruiting process.
2. The recruiting process took too long.
3. Salary didn't meet expectations.

It's similar in the other global regions, just not the same order, but "time disrespected" is most certainly a common theme we hear in the candidate comments year after year. Based on what we know each year, the top-rated employers have a much lower percentage of candidates withdrawing because their time was disrespected (see Table 10). The difference is significant – the top 10 overall North America CandE Winners had dramatically fewer candidates withdraw than even all CandE Winners in North America. The least amount of difference was in Latin America this year, although that was a very small group of employers compared to North America and the other regions.



Table 10. % Candidates Withdrawing Due to Time Disrespected

Employer Segment	% Candidates Withdrawing Due to Time Disrespected
<b>North America</b>	
Top 10 Overall	3%
All CandE Winners	28%
All Employers	28%
Top 10 Large	14%
All CandE Winners	28%
All Large	26%
Top 10 Medium	12%
All CandE Winners	28%
All Medium	24%
Top 10 Small	0%
All CandE Winners	28%
All Small	25%
<b>EMEA</b>	
CandE Winners	10%
All	26%
<b>APAC</b>	
CandE Winners	10%
All	15%
<b>Latin America</b>	
CandE Winners	23%
All	24%

**"Time disrespected" is most certainly a common theme we hear in the candidate comments year after year.**

# Recruiter and/or Hiring Manager Follow-ups for Finalists

Nothing is more frustrating than to be a job candidate who makes it to the finalist stage, but then doesn't hear back from the recruiter and/or hiring manager about next steps, especially when they were told they'd be followed up with. When candidates are followed up with as they said they would be, their positive sentiment about their experience grows and their perception of fairness is higher.

The top-rated employers are consistently delivering on the follow-up promises more than all other employers in our research. The biggest difference being the top 10 large and medium employers in North America following up with finalists 43% more often than all other employers. Again, communication and feedback are the critical differentiators here.

**"Throughout the recruiting process, we prioritize personalization, fairness, timeliness and communication – all of which impact the candidate experience and perception of our brand."**

– CandE Winner, Ford



Table 11. % Recruiter and/or Hiring Manager Follow-ups for Finalists

Employer Segment	% Recruiter and/or Hiring Manager Follow-ups for Finalists
<b>North America</b>	
Top 10 Overall	50%
All CandE Winners	53%
All Employers	45%
Top 10 Large	70%
All CandE Winners	53%
All Large	42%
Top 10 Medium	70%
All CandE Winners	53%
All Medium	39%
Top 10 Small	60%
All CandE Winners	53%
All Small	57%
<b>EMEA</b>	
CandE Winners	63%
All	56%
<b>APAC</b>	
CandE Winners	63%
All	58%
<b>Latin America</b>	
CandE Winners	50%
All	36%

**When candidates are followed up with as they said they would be, their positive sentiment about their experience grows and their perception of fairness is higher.**



# Giving Finalist Feedback

We can't emphasize enough how important giving feedback to finalists is. Finalists getting feedback are 30%-50% more willing to refer others than those who don't get feedback. It truly is one of the biggest communication differentiators we see every year.

The top-rated employers and all CandE winners for that matter are giving more feedback to finalists than all other employers in our research (see Table 12). This is a tricky one for many companies and one of the first questions we are asked about this is: What kind of feedback are you talking about?

We're not talking about culture fit feedback or anything else deemed "personal attributes". No, we're talking about job fit and qualification status feedback. The "why" the candidate didn't get the job offer in the end. Usually these responses are brief calls and/or emails that tell a candidate: "There were so many qualified finalists, including you, but in the end we went with another candidate because you didn't have X, Y, or Z. We recommend you go get X, Y, and Z, and in the meantime, you might consider one of these other roles at our company [insert jobs]."

That's oversimplifying the exchange, but the highest rated employers are doing this consistently across job types and reaping referral benefits from it year after year.

**We can't emphasize enough how important giving feedback to finalists is. Finalists getting feedback are 30%-50% more willing to refer others than those who don't get feedback. It truly is one of the biggest communication differentiators we see every year.**

Table 12. % Candidates Getting Feedback

Employer Segment	% Candidates Getting Feedback
<b>North America</b>	
Top 10 Overall	44%
All CandE Winners	26%
All Employers	23%
Top 10 Large	26%
All CandE Winners	26%
All Large	23%
Top 10 Medium	42%
All CandE Winners	26%
All Medium	24%
Top 10 Small	63%
All CandE Winners	26%
All Small	24%
<b>EMEA</b>	
CandE Winners	56%
All	35%
<b>APAC</b>	
CandE Winners	54%
All	36%
<b>Latin America</b>	
CandE Winners	24%
All	23%

"We are committed to providing personalized interview feedback for each candidate. Our goal is to leave them in a better position than when we found them. Additionally, we've created over 20 email communication templates that allow for a more personalized response when regretting candidates upon resume review (which represents about 90% of applicants)." – CandE Winner, Room & Board



# Contentment and Resentment Fluctuations Abound

As we delve further into 2023's CandE Benchmark Research, it's clear that too many employers have lost their North Star of improving and sustaining a quality candidate experience, even as it remains a high priority according to our monthly CandE Pulse surveys. Even the CandE Winners this year have candidate communication timeliness slipping away from them because of the continuing hiring market volatility, team voluntary and involuntary, lack of recruiting technology optimization, and constant business changes that ultimately impact recruiting and hiring delivery.

But as we've already noted in this first special report from the 2023 CandE Benchmark Research, the top-rated employers are doing their best to create a positive and fair candidate experience for all their candidates, and reaping the benefits of increased referrals, revenue, and brand advocacy.

**"We've launched organization-wide training sessions and internal campaigns to emphasize the importance of treating candidates as human beings. This includes empathy-building exercises and understanding the impact of a positive candidate experience on our employer brand."**

– CandE Winner, UST

## About the CandE Benchmark Research Program

The Candidate Experience (CandE) Benchmark Research Program is the first program of its kind focused on the elevation and promotion of a quality candidate experience. Also known as The CandEs, the program was founded by Talent Board in 2011 and is now part of ERE Media. The CandE Benchmark Research Program delivers annual recruiting and hiring industry benchmark research that highlights accountability, fairness and the business impact of candidate experience. More information can be found at <https://www.eremedia.com/candidate-experience>.

