



2026

ELEMENTS UNLOCKED

Edition 1:

Senior Talent Insight Report
How senior professionals decide
where to commit their capability

Introduction

I am pleased to introduce the first edition of Elements Unlocked. This series has been created to bring clear insight to the people and businesses that shape Western Sydney. Each edition will explore a different area of our community yet the purpose remains the same. To give leaders access to evidence, context and lived experience that strengthens decision making.

We begin with a focus on senior candidates because their influence sits at the centre of every organisation. Senior talent steady teams and guides decision quality. They interpret risk with accuracy and they bring a depth of experience that cannot be replicated through systems, operations or technology. Understanding what drives them is essential for any business that relies on strength at the top.

The insight we gathered for this edition reveals a clear shift. Senior professionals are more intentional and more selective than ever. They want meaningful work with clarity from leadership. They value balance because it sustains performance over time. They look for cultures built on trust and they choose environments that recognise the weight they carry.

At Elements we see these patterns every day. We hear what senior people are willing to say in interviews and what sits underneath those conversations. We see where they hesitate and where they move quickly toward opportunity. We know what signals create confidence and what signals break it.

This edition brings that understanding forward. It reflects what senior professionals value most and highlights the gap between their expectations and the conditions many organisations still offer. It provides employers with evidence they can act on and it gives senior talent a voice that is often missing from wider workforce conversations.

Thank you to everyone who contributed their perspective. Your insight helps us support the people and businesses that make up our community.

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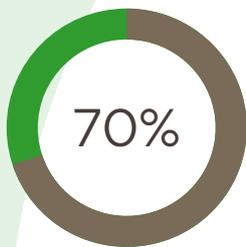


What Senior Talent Values When Considering a Move

Senior candidates were asked what matters most when assessing a potential role. While they could select multiple factors, their responses formed a clear order. The results point to a tight set of priorities that reflect how senior professionals make decisions and what they now expect from employers.

Senior professionals assess organisations using a consistent set of signals at every stage of decision making. This report looks at those signals across attraction, assessment and retention to show where confidence builds and where it breaks.

Balance and Flexibility



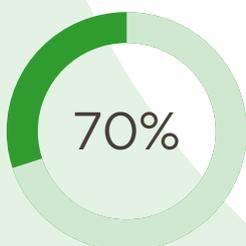
Senior professionals are not asking for lighter workloads. They are asking for conditions that allow consistent high performance. At Elements we see this across Western Sydney. Senior people commit when expectations are clear and the environment is structured. What they will not accept is a culture built on crisis management and reactive pressure.

For Senior Talent balance means

- Trust to manage output not hours
- Space to think not constant task switching
- Freedom to manage life without penalty

Seven in ten senior professionals now see this as a baseline expectation. When it is missing, employers lose strong candidates before the process properly starts.

Competitive remuneration & Benefits



Pay comes after purpose and culture, but it still sets the baseline. Senior professionals understand the weight they carry. They manage risk and own outcomes that shape long term performance.

At Elements we regularly see strong senior candidates decline offers that sit below market, even when the role itself is appealing. It is rarely about the number alone. It is about what the number communicates. A low offer signals how experience is valued and how responsibility will be treated over time.

For Senior talent competitive remuneration means

- Pay aligned with actual scope
- Benefits that match responsibility
- Clear frameworks that show how progression is rewarded

Senior candidates read pay as a signal of organisational intent. When the package is out of step, it becomes a structural warning sign long before it feels like an opportunity.

Where Senior Candidates Lose Confidence

Senior professionals were asked to identify the single most frustrating part of the hiring process. Four clear signals emerged. Each one points to deeper organisational risk, not minor inconvenience. These frustrations shape how senior candidates judge employer capability long before an offer is discussed.

40%

Limited visibility of senior opportunities

This was the strongest frustration across the dataset. When a senior role is vague or hidden behind generic language, it signals internal misalignment. Senior professionals read this as unclear remit, uncertain ownership or a lack of strategic direction. When opportunities are hard to find, they interpret it as a business that is unsure of its priorities or not confident communicating them. When visibility drops, confidence drops with it.

30%

Lengthy or inefficient processes

Slow or inconsistent timelines are not viewed as operational delay. They are read as unclear authority, weak communication or fragmented decision making. Senior candidates assume the hiring process reflects how the organisation operates. When steps feel disorganised or next actions are unclear, candidates withdraw early because they expect the same friction once inside the business.

Insufficient or lack of feedback

For senior professionals feedback is a marker of leadership maturity. They invest heavily in preparation and want clarity on how decisions are made. Silence suggests avoidance or poor communication rather than professionalism. When organisations fail to provide meaningful feedback it damages credibility and signals that transparency is not part of the culture.

19%

Overly complex or multi stage processes

Senior candidates interpret excessive stages as a sign of internal friction. They assume competing decision owners or low trust. The more complex the process the faster withdrawal rates climb. Complexity is not viewed as rigour. It is viewed as uncertainty about what capability the organisation actually needs.

11%

Why This Matters

Together these insights reflect a single theme. Senior candidates evaluate employer quality long before an offer is discussed. Senior candidates describe a market that feels unclear, unpredictable and at times disconnected from the expectations placed on them. The way recruitment is structured communicates leadership strength, cultural maturity and operational confidence. When those signals are weak senior talent steps back regardless of the opportunity.

What Senior Talent Values When Considering a Move

Beyond these top drivers the data shows strong emphasis on leadership and culture.

59%

Stability and security

61%

Quality of leadership

59%

Progression and long term growth

Beyond balance and remuneration, the data shows strong emphasis on leadership, progression and stability. These drivers carry near equal weight and shape how senior professionals assess risk and commitment.

Quality of leadership (61%)

Leadership is assessed before role titles. Senior professionals look for clarity, steady judgement and the ability to communicate direction with reason. They watch how leaders respond under pressure and whether decisions remain consistent over time. Weak or unclear leadership is one of the fastest ways to lose senior interest because it introduces risk outside their control.

Progression and long term growth (59%)

Progression matters, but not in the traditional sense of climbing a ladder. Senior professionals want roles that stretch scope rather than inflate hierarchy. They look for opportunities to shape outcomes, mentor others and apply the depth they have built over time. Growth at this level is about influence, capability and contribution. When a role cannot offer that, disengagement follows quickly.

Stability and security (59%)

Stability is assessed through behaviour, not messaging. Senior professionals choose environments where leadership is consistent rather than performative and where decisions reflect stated values. Culture becomes a credibility test long before any offer is considered.

Together, these three signals determine whether senior talent moves toward an employer or steps away early. Culture indicates whether the environment is healthy. Leadership signals whether direction is stable. Progression shows whether capability will be used with purpose. Employers who understand this make stronger hiring decisions and create conditions where senior talent can thrive.

How Senior Candidates Compare Employers

Survey Question: “When weighing up one employer against another, what would most influence your decision?”

Senior professionals do not compare job titles. They compare conditions.

When senior professionals evaluate two potential employers they look past titles and branding. They focus on the structures that shape how they will work day to day. The data reveals five decision points that sit close together which means employers cannot rely on a single strength. Senior candidates assess the full environment before making a commitment.

30%

Flexibility in working arrangements

Flexibility remains the strongest differentiator because it shapes how effectively senior talent can operate. This group carries sustained responsibility and they know the cost of constant urgency. Flexibility signals maturity in planning and clarity in expectation. It reflects a culture that values output rather than presence which enables sustained performance rather than short bursts of activity.

28%

Strength and quality of leadership

Leadership is assessed long before senior candidates accept an offer. They pay attention to decision logic. They notice how leaders communicate under pressure. They look for clarity in direction and consistency in behaviour. Senior professionals join leaders more than they join brands which means leadership quality remains one of the strongest predictors of whether a candidate commits or steps back.

26%

Clear pathways for development and growth

Development for senior talent is not about climbing. It is about stretch. They want opportunities that allow them to deepen capability and influence outcomes. They look for organisations where progression is purposeful not performative. Growth that expands thinking and scope is what keeps senior professionals invested over the long term.

21%

Purpose and values alignment

Senior candidates look for cultures grounded in behaviour rather than slogans. They assess whether values are lived in decision making and whether purpose is reflected in priorities. Alignment here increases engagement and reduces the risk of early movement because senior professionals commit more deeply when they believe in the direction of the organisation.

17%

Competitive remuneration

Pay is not the primary differentiator at this stage but it still matters. Once conditions, leadership and culture feel aligned remuneration confirms whether the organisation values the responsibility attached to the role. A misaligned package introduces doubt which is often enough to shift a senior candidate toward a more compelling opportunity.

Senior candidates do not compare employers in the traditional sense. They compare the conditions that shape their ability to perform. The data shows five closely ranked decision points that influence which organisation they choose to move toward. Flexibility remains the strongest signal because it reflects clarity of planning and respect for capability. Leadership quality follows at a similar level which reinforces the idea that senior professionals join people not brands. Development then becomes the measure of long term commitment. Purpose and values act as cultural alignment filters. Remuneration confirms whether the responsibility of the role is understood.

What this shows

Senior candidates are not competing for employers. Employers are competing for senior candidates. Senior professionals choose environments that support sustained performance rather than assumptions that no longer match how they work or decide.

If you want to attract and retain senior talent that lifts decision quality across your organisation, align these five signals with intention. Elements can help you identify what is already working and where small changes will lift engagement fast. If you want to talk through what this means for your leadership hiring, reach out to the Elements team. We can help you build conditions senior professionals choose and stay for.



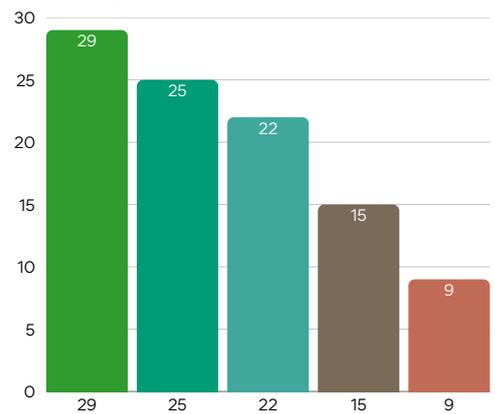
What Keeps Senior Talent Committed Over the Long Term

Senior candidates were asked which factors matter most in keeping them engaged and committed over the long term. Their responses point to a clear pattern that goes beyond job titles and surface level perks.

Senior professionals stay where their capability is used with purpose. They want work that stretches them, leaders who provide clarity and backing, and autonomy that matches the responsibility they carry. They commit when expectations are clear, decision making is steady and progression feels real in scope, not just in title.

They step back when their role narrows, when decisions are slow or unclear and when their work becomes maintenance rather than meaningful contribution. When senior talent cannot influence outcomes, disengagement starts quietly and movement becomes only a matter of time.

- Work that stretches capability and adds strategic val...
- Access to strong leadership mentoring and coaching
- Transparent progression opportunities
- Autonomy and trust in decision making
- Recognition and rewards for performance



✓
Work that stretches capability and adds strategic value

29%
This is the core driver of long term commitment. Senior professionals want work that challenges thinking and deepens impact. They do not stay for maintenance roles. They stay for environments where their experience sharpens decisions and where strategic value is recognised not assumed. Stretch is read as trust. When the work is meaningful senior people invest.

What Keeps Senior Talent Committed Over the Long Term



Access to strong leadership mentoring and coaching

25%

Leadership quality shapes retention more than most employers realise. Senior candidates want leaders who listen with reason, communicate direction with clarity and hold space for challenge. The presence of strong leadership signals stability, safety and growth. The absence of it signals constraint. When senior professionals feel guided and backed they commit for longer and operate at a higher level.



Transparent progression opportunities

22%

Progression for senior people is not about titles. It is about scope. Visibility of growth pathways indicates that the organisation understands the depth of senior capability and intends to utilise it well. When progression is unclear senior people assume they will eventually stagnate which increases the risk of quiet disengagement and early movement.



Autonomy and trust in decision making

15%

Autonomy is not optional at senior level. It is a structural requirement. Senior professionals carry responsibility that demands independence and judgement. When autonomy is restricted it is interpreted as weak leadership or poor organisational confidence. When autonomy is present it accelerates performance and strengthens loyalty.

What Keeps Senior Talent Committed Over the Long Term



Recognition and rewards for performance

9%

Recognition is not about praise. It is about acknowledgement of contribution, influence and accountability. Senior people do heavy intellectual and relational work that is often invisible. When this work is recognised fairly they stay. When it is overlooked they question whether their impact is understood at all.

What the Pattern Reveals

The distribution of this data tells a clear story.

Senior talent does not remain committed because of a single condition. They remain committed when the role stretches them, when leadership is strong, when growth is visible and when autonomy supports the level they are trusted to operate at. Recognition then acts as reinforcement.

Long term retention is not built through surface level initiatives. It is built through structure. Consistent leadership. Clear decision making. Roles designed to use senior capability properly. Senior professionals watch how authority is held, how priorities are set and how quickly decisions move. They notice whether influence is invited or contained.

When one anchor is weak, engagement drops. When several are weak, exit becomes the rational choice. Senior talent do not wait for things to get worse. They move toward environments that protect performance and make contribution possible.



What Senior Candidates Want Employers To Understand

Question Asked

If you could share one insight what do you wish employers understood better about senior candidates like you.

Senior professionals used this question to articulate what is rarely said directly. Their responses were clear, direct and consistent. Senior candidates want employers to recognise the depth of capability they bring and the conditions required to perform at the level they are accountable for. The themes that follow represent the strongest and most consistent patterns across the insight.

01. Experience is not age. Experience is value.

Senior candidates repeatedly emphasised that their depth allows faster decisions fewer errors and stronger judgement under pressure. They have carried responsibility through complex environments which means their experience is not a cost. It is a performance accelerator. Many expressed frustration that employers underestimate capability or view it through the lens of age rather than contribution.

Key message: Senior capability protects performance and reduces organisational risk. Employers who overlook this lose a competitive advantage.

02. Trust is the foundation of senior performance

Autonomy was one of the most dominant themes. Senior professionals do not need supervision. They need clarity. They want the freedom to execute at the pace and standard they know drives results. When trust is withheld they disengage quickly because it signals deeper cultural issues and weak leadership confidence.

Key message: Trust is not optional. It is required for senior performance.

How Senior Talent Interprets the Environment.

Senior professionals stay when the environment matches their capability. They stay when decisions are clear and leadership is steady. They stay when expectations are aligned and when challenge and recognition move in balance. When these elements weaken, senior talent begins to explore external opportunities, often quietly and early. By the time a resignation lands, the decision has usually already been made. When these elements strengthen, senior capability becomes one of the most stabilising forces inside a business.

What Senior Candidates Want Employers To Understand

03. Communication is culture in action

Senior candidates said clarity from leaders influences commitment more than any single incentive. They want transparency around priorities workforce challenges and organisational direction. When communication is inconsistent they assume misalignment or internal conflict which reduces trust and weakens engagement. Senior professionals evaluate culture through what leaders explain not what they promote.

Key message: Clear communication builds confidence. Silence or inconsistency does the opposite.

04. Capability is broader than job titles

Many senior professionals stressed that transferable skills are undervalued. They described environments where narrow role definitions limit contribution. Senior candidates want employers to recognise adaptability strategic thinking and the ability to influence outcomes across functions. When capability is assessed narrowly senior professionals feel restricted and undervalued.

Key message: Employers who recognise broad capability attract stronger senior talent and close skill gaps faster.

Why This Insight Matters

These four themes show how senior professionals assess risk, value and leadership quality. They also reveal the signals that build confidence and the signals that break it. Most organisations focus on the offer stage, but senior talent makes decisions much earlier. The way a role is defined, the way leaders communicate and the way authority is held all shape whether senior candidates lean in or step back.

For employers, the opportunity is clear. Strengthen these signals early and you improve attraction, reduce drop off during hiring and increase retention once someone is in seat. Ignore them and you lose strong senior talent long before the process has a chance to work.



What This Means for Employers?

This whitepaper brings into focus how senior professionals are making decisions today and why many organisations are losing them earlier than they realise. The data shows a clear shift. Senior talent is more intentional, more selective and more decisive. They evaluate leadership, structure and trust long before an offer is discussed.

Across attraction, assessment and retention, the same signals determine whether confidence builds or breaks. Balance and flexibility have become baseline expectations. Leadership quality is assessed before role scope.

Recruitment processes are read as indicators of organisational maturity.

Progression is measured by influence and stretch, not title.

When these signals are unclear or misaligned, senior candidates disengage quietly and early.

For employers, this changes the challenge. Securing senior capability is no longer about competing on role titles or speed alone. It is about demonstrating clarity, intent and leadership quality from the first interaction. Organisations that get this right attract stronger candidates, lose fewer through the process and retain senior talent for longer.

Our team work at the intersection of leadership hiring, market insight and organisational clarity. We help employers pressure test role scope, identify where confidence is breaking in their hiring process and strengthen the signals senior professionals look for when deciding where to commit their capability.

Senior talent has the power to stabilise teams, sharpen decisions and lift performance across a business. The organisations that succeed are the ones that match the depth of the people they want to hire and create environments where that capability can genuinely perform.

If you want support turning these insights into action, our team can help you.

Ready to partner?

Elements partners with organisations that want to hire with accuracy and lead with credibility. If you want support improving senior attraction or need guidance interpreting how these insights apply to your workforce we are here to help.

Strong senior talent changes the course of a business. We can help you secure it.

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