

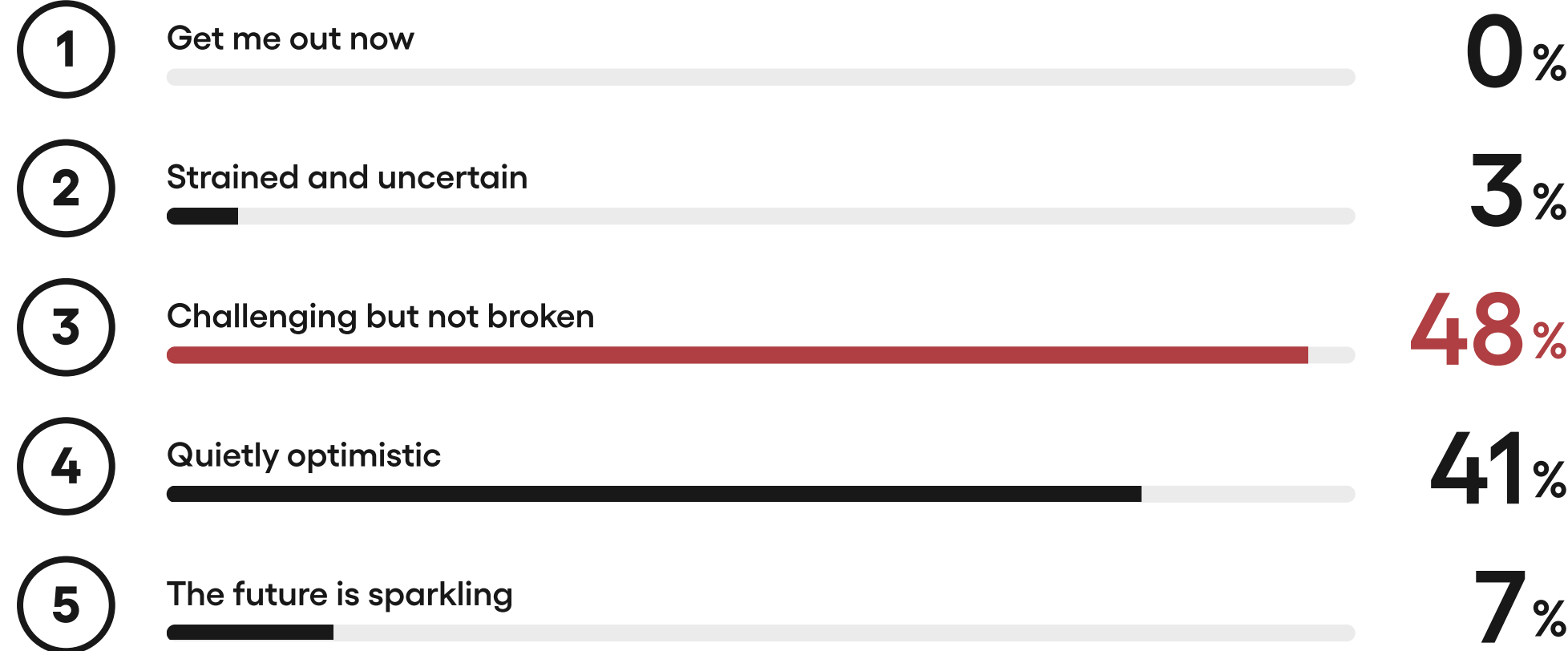
Challenging, but *not broken.*

The next generation of UK drinks has spoken – and the picture is more nuanced than the headlines suggest. Quiet optimism, real frustration and a workforce that is asking for change. We surveyed early-career operators across importers, retail, hospitality and on-trade

5 Questions 312 Responses UK Drinks Industry

OUTLOOK

How optimistic are you about the UK drinks trade as a 20-year career path?



89%

Pragmatic Majority

Land in the middle – challenged but not leaving. The trade has held its workforce.

10%

Frequent Flight Risk

Have considered leaving for another sector more than twice in the past year.

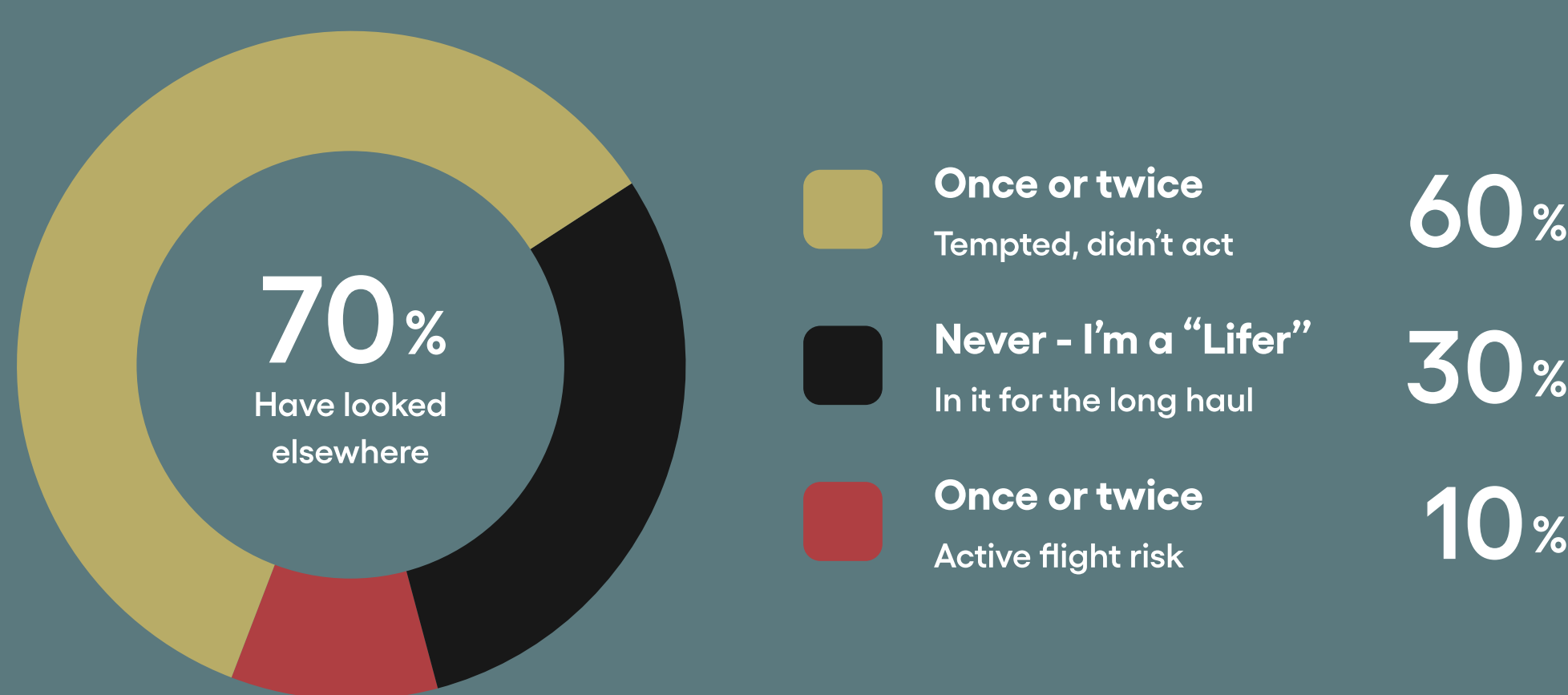
58%

Passion vs Pay

Now say the trade-off has tipped the wrong way – passion no longer covers the gap.

RETENTION

Have you seriously considered leaving drinks for another sector?



COMPENSATION

Does the passion of drinks still justify the lower salaries?

58%

"No, the balance is off"

A clear majority. The passion premium has eroded faster than wages have risen, and rent has outpaced both.

35%

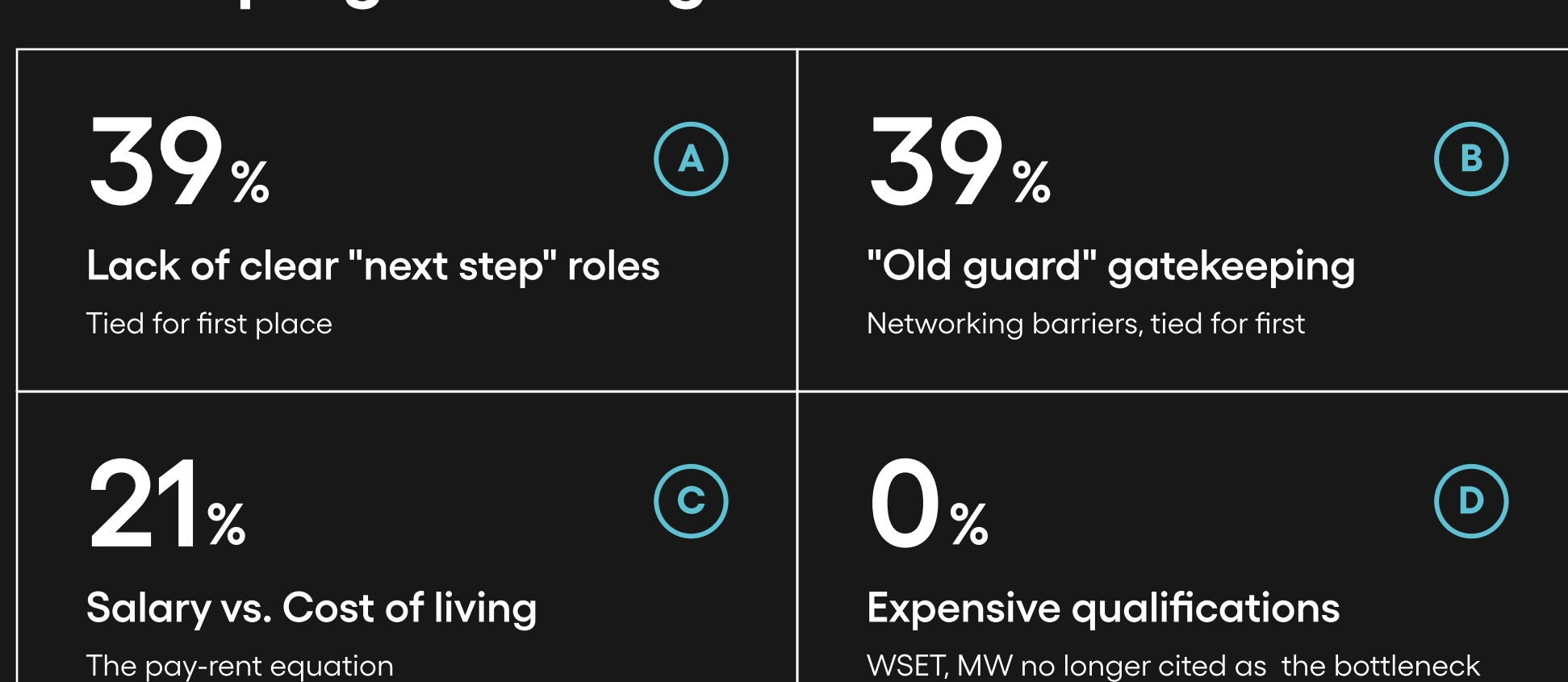
"Mostly, but it's getting harder."

Holding on, with caveats. Reluctance is creeping in where conviction used to sit unchallenged.



PROGRESSION

What is the biggest obstacle to your career progression right now?

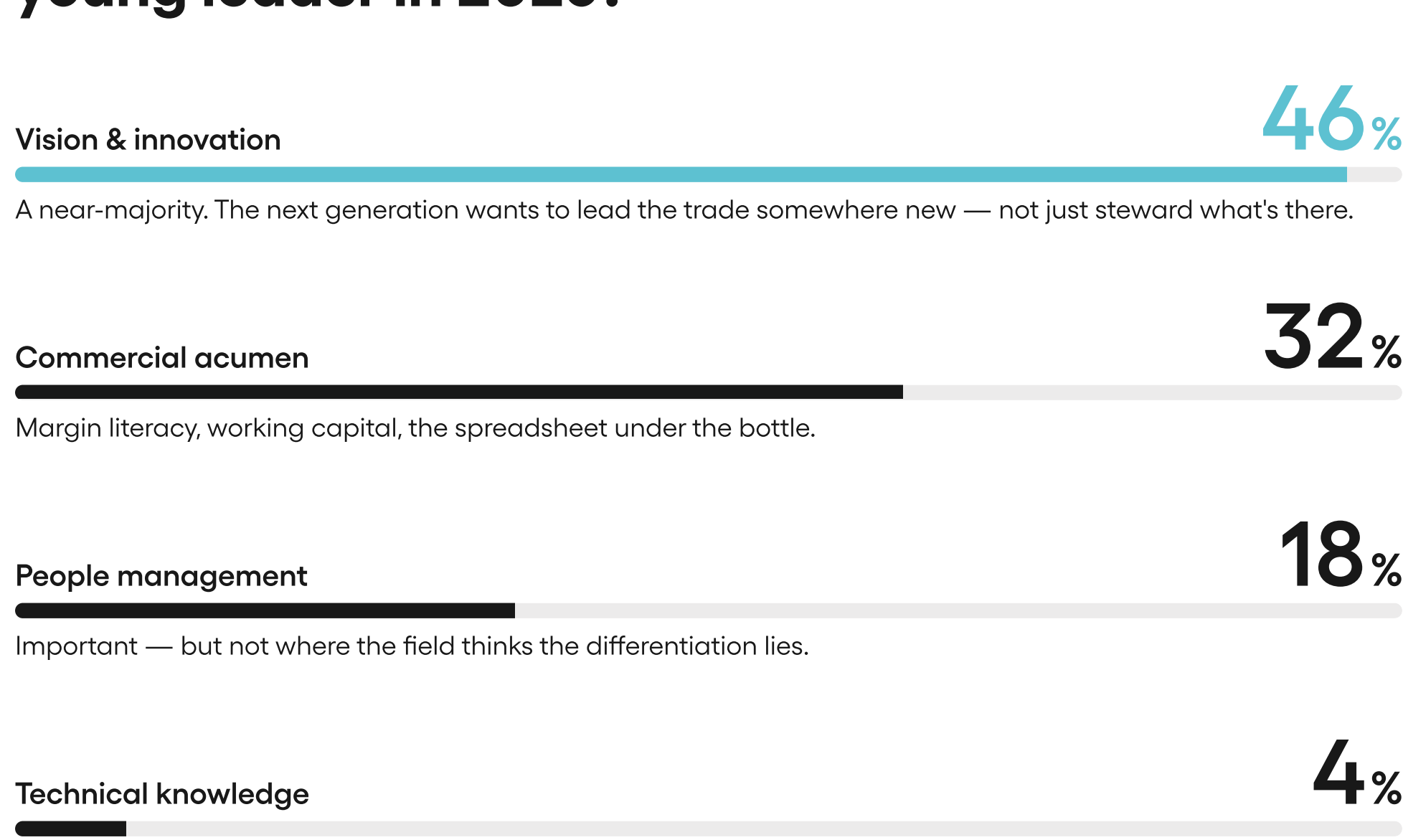


78%

Of cited blockers are **structural** – pathways, gatekeepers, pay rather than knowledge gaps. The trade's barriers have moved from the classroom to the office.

SKILLS

Which skill is most vital for a young leader in 2026?



Source: Fero's UK Wine Trade Young Leaders Survey, Q1 2026. n = 312, fielded across importers, retail, hospitality and on-trade. Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Fero is the operating system for the drinks industry — modernising how the trade flows.