



The Company You Keep:

The outsized effect of employer practices on pay, promotion, and retention

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Mobility is Architecture

What if we've been asking the wrong question about opportunity in Chicago?

For decades, we've debated which *industries* offer "good jobs." We've steered students toward healthcare for stability, finance for pay, manufacturing for technical pathways, retail for entry points. We've treated sectors as destiny.

This report makes something unmistakably clear: **industry is not destiny. Employers are.**

Drawing on the career histories of more than 700,000 Chicagoland workers across 500 companies and 20 industries, the findings disrupt long-held assumptions. Two people with similar skills, in the same role, in the same sector can experience radically different futures — based on one factor alone: **the company they work for.**

In Chicago, advancement is not primarily shaped by what you do. It is shaped by where you do it. The differences are not subtle. **Workers at top-quartile companies earn nearly 90 percent more than those at bottom-quartile firms.** They are promoted twice as often. They stay longer. These are not abstract statistics — they are the difference between buying a home or postponing it indefinitely, between predictable childcare or constant disruption, between saving for retirement or living month to month.

Just as important, this report shows that opportunity isn't even evenly distributed within companies. **Mobility is not automatic; it is architecture.**

It is how roles are designed.

How performance is evaluated.

How pay structures reinforce growth.

How advancement pathways are built — or blocked.

Roughly one in ten Chicago employers manage to excel across promotion, retention, and pay simultaneously. They are not necessarily the largest or the most high-profile. What distinguishes them is coherence. Their hiring model, compensation strategy, and advancement philosophy align. Promotion strengthens retention. Retention lowers churn. Lower churn makes higher wages sustainable. Higher wages attract stronger talent.

These employers demonstrate that mobility is not an accident of market forces, rather, it is the result of deliberate design.

For Chicago's employers, this moment demands clarity and courage. The data is clear. If advancement is shaped more by firm-level choices than by industry norms, then every employer must confront a fundamental question: **What kind of company are we choosing to be?**

Will we rely on market averages and assume mobility will take care of itself? Or will we intentionally design pathways that allow workers to rise — and in doing so, strengthen our own competitiveness and resilience?

Chicago's future will not be determined solely by which industries grow here. It will be determined by whether our employers choose to build workplaces where opportunity is real, measurable, and shared.

Mobility does not happen by chance. It happens by choice. The choice now belongs to Chicago's employers.

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The outsized effect of employer practices on pay, promotion, and retention

This report has been a collaborative effort by the teams at Burning Glass Institute and Tullman Family Office. Several key individuals have contributed substantially to the report, including Cecilia Joy Perez, Erik Leiden, Reena Patel, Liana Bran, and Cayley Tull. Our thanks also go to our colleagues and organizations who supported the report's development and production: Luke Chen, Cara Collective, and Skills for Chicago.

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The Burning Glass Institute advances data-driven research and practice on the future of work and of workers.

Tullman Family Office advances smart, impact-driven investment by combining data-driven analysis with local expertise, we identify high-potential opportunities and ensure resources go where they're needed most. Their trust-based approach prioritizes impact, breaking down barriers between funding and real change.

Executive Summary

The company for which you work and the role you are in matter more for your advancement than what industry you are in. Burning Glass Institute data show that two workers with similar skills, in the same role, and even in the same industry can experience divergent career trajectories depending solely on their employer. This finding, based on analysis of detailed career histories across 711 thousand Chicagoland workers in more than 500 companies and 20 industries spanning a decade, challenges long-standing assumptions about which sectors offer “good jobs” and makes clear that opportunity is shaped far more by company practices than by industry norms.

Workers often choose industries based on perception: healthcare offers stability, finance pays well, manufacturing provides clear technical pathways, and retail presents multiple access points. But this report demonstrates that those broad categorizations mask far greater variation within sectors than between them. We examined how pay, promotion, retention, and access vary across Chicago employers. What emerges is a Chicago labor market in which firm-level choices, not sector characteristics, determine whether workers rise, stall, or exit.

The differences in outcomes are far from marginal. Workers at top-quartile Chicago companies earn 89 percent more, receive promotions twice as often, and stay with their employers one-third longer than those at firms in the bottom quartile. The real-world implications of these disparities are profound: the difference between buying a home or not, between stable childcare and shifting schedules, between saving for retirement or living paycheck to paycheck.

Importantly, opportunity is not only uneven across firms, but it is also uneven within them. Even among high-performing employers, some roles enjoy clearly defined career lattices while others stagnate. Mobility is not an inherent property of a firm any more than it is of an industry; it is a function of design, reflected in how companies structure roles, evaluate performance, align systems, and facilitate advancement.

A small share of Chicago employers, roughly one in ten, manage to excel across promotion, retention, and pay simultaneously. These opportunity leaders show what is possible when firms intentionally construct environments that enable workers to progress. Their practices have the potential to create a reinforcing cycle: strong promotion systems increase retention; lower churn reduces labor costs; cost savings make higher pay sustainable; and competitive pay attracts stronger talent, which in turn strengthens internal pipelines. This is the power of coherence. Consistent with Burning Glass Institute research recently [published in the Harvard Business Review](#), the top-performing companies aren't necessarily those with the most progressive policies or biggest HR budgets. Rather, they are those where core practices align, where whatever the hiring model, pay structure, and advancement philosophy a company chooses, those choices are highly aligned.

For Chicago's employers and civic leaders, the takeaway is simple: mobility does not happen by chance. It happens by choice.

Why This Matters Now

This report is intended to do more than document variation in pay, promotion, and retention across Chicago employers. It is designed as a starting point for action: a shared diagnostic that employers, civic leaders, and workforce organizations can use to better understand how talent is developed, advanced, and retained across the region. By making firm-level differences visible, the analysis reframes long-standing debates about “good jobs” away from industry labels and toward the concrete practices that determine whether early-career hires become long-tenured, productive employees. In doing so, it provides a foundation for coordinated employer action at a citywide scale.

For Chicago, this insight arrives at a moment of heightened focus on workforce competitiveness and inclusive growth. This report is meant to support those efforts by identifying where opportunity is being built effectively, where it breaks down, and how employer practices shape both worker outcomes and the strength of Chicago’s overall talent base. In that sense, the findings here are not an endpoint, but an invitation: to use evidence on firm practices to guide employer learning, civic collaboration, and the next generation of workforce initiatives in the city.

Key Findings



Company practices eclipse industry effects. Pay differs more than twice as much between firms within an industry as it does across industries. Promotion and retention vary nearly twice as much within industries as between them.



But mobility is unevenly engineered within firms. Some roles benefit from aligned pay, promotion, and retention practices, while others lack the conditions needed to convert employment into advancement.



Mobility practices reinforce one another. Firms that promote more frequently also retain workers about 11 percent longer and pay 18 percent more. Each factor independently predicts stronger retention, showing that advancement and compensation are distinct yet complementary levers.



Access and stability often trade off. Companies with the best retention records hire 62 percent fewer entry-level workers. Yet those that combine broad hiring with clear internal pathways can sustain both access and stability.



True mobility leadership is rare but powerful. Only one in ten Chicago employers ranks in the top quartile for each of pay, promotion, and retention. These “mobility leaders” promote internally more than twice as often, retain employees a third longer, and pay 89 percent higher wages than peers.

The Company Effect on Career Outcomes

Conventional wisdom suggests that a worker’s economic progress depends on their industry — for example, that hospitals have different promotion patterns from those of banks, or that logistics firms naturally experience higher churn than educational organizations. But data from Chicago’s labor market show that such assumptions don’t play out in practice. Across the 507 employers analyzed, the forces that most decisively shape worker outcomes stem from **company-specific differences** in how they hire, pay, promote, and retain workers.

This analysis draws on the Burning Glass Institute’s comprehensive career history dataset, covering a decade of worker movement (2015–2024). By focusing on actual career outcomes rather than stated policies, we capture the lived reality of Chicago workers rather than corporate intent. That distinction matters. Many firms articulate commitments to development and upward mobility. Far fewer translate those commitments into measurable advancement gains.

We analyze four pillars of corporate practices: access, promotions, pay, and retention. This framework builds on methods developed for the **American Opportunity Index**, a Burning Glass Institute initiative in partnership with the Schultz Family Foundation and Harvard Business School’s Project on Managing the Future of Work, and is unprecedented in its focus on measuring employee outcomes. While the core of our measurement is on how each of sets of practices bear out in the real-world careers of Chicagoland workers, the framework also reflects corresponding benefits which accrue to firms.

Figure 1: Four Pillars to Measure Opportunity

Promotions	Wage	Access	Retention
Internal promotion: Are workers moving up within the firm?	Wage quality: How well do workers get paid?	Degrees: How likely are people without degrees to get hired?	Retention: Do workers stay?
Promoting out: Do workers move to better jobs when they leave?	Wage growth: How much do workers’ wages rise over time?	Experience: How likely are people with little experience to get hired?	Leadership: Are managers and executives drawn from within?
Benefits Greater mobility ✓	Benefits Reduced turnover costs, better worker output ✓	Benefits Expanded talent pools, faster time-to-fill ✓	Benefits Lower recruiting costs, higher productivity ✓

The analysis is based on the real-world progress of hundreds of thousands of workers of Chicago-based companies. All companies for which we have a statistically valid set of career history data are included in the benchmarking and analysis of employee mobility. We limit our analysis to industries with at least 10 companies or more in the Chicago Metropolitan Statistical Area. In total, we analyze 640 different roles in 507 companies across 20 industries.

Table 1: Industries included in this analysis

Industry	Number of companies
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	88
Insurance Carriers and Related Activities	51
Securities, Commodity Contracts, and Other Financial Investments and Related Activities	45
Educational Services	37
Hospitals	35
Credit Intermediation and Related Activities	32
Chemical Manufacturing	30
Administrative and Support Services	20
Ambulatory Health Care Services	19
Food Manufacturing	19
Software Publishers	19
General Merchandise Retailers	16
Machinery Manufacturing	13
Merchant Wholesalers, Durable Goods	13
Miscellaneous Manufacturing	13
Real Estate	13
Food Services and Drinking Places	12
Clothing, Clothing Accessories, Shoe, and Jewelry Retailers	11
Transportation Equipment Manufacturing	11
Merchant Wholesalers, Nondurable Goods	10

Chicago's labor market, with its mixture of legacy manufacturing, dominant position in logistics, healthcare concentration, retail strength, and professional-service clusters, creates a robust environment in which to observe how firm strategies diverge. In this ecosystem, opportunity is not evenly distributed even when comparing identical occupations. Two customer service representatives, two machinists, or two medical assistants may have radically different experiences depending on whether their employers have built coherent mobility systems or rely on ad hoc pathways that vary by supervisor or shift.

Variation Within and Between Industries

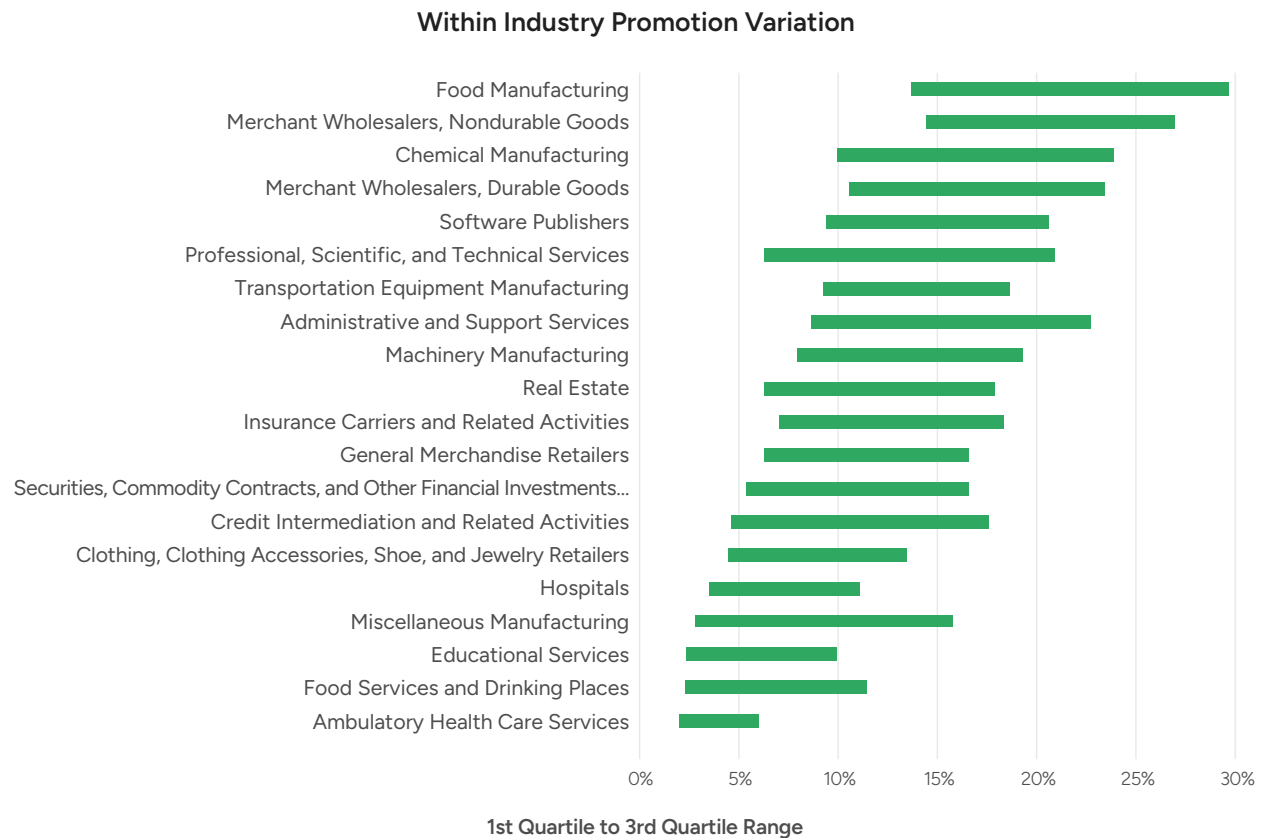
Comparing within-industry and between-industry variation reveals the central fact underlying this report. When we measure pay, promotion, and retention across Chicago employers, the differences **within the same industry** consistently exceed differences **between industries**. In pay, the spread within industries is 2.1 times as large as the difference across them. Promotion rates vary nearly 1.7 times more within sectors than between them, and retention varies about 1.4 times more. The following charts show the variation across company-occupation combinations by industry.

Figure 2: Within Industry Pay Variation



Source: Burning Glass Institute

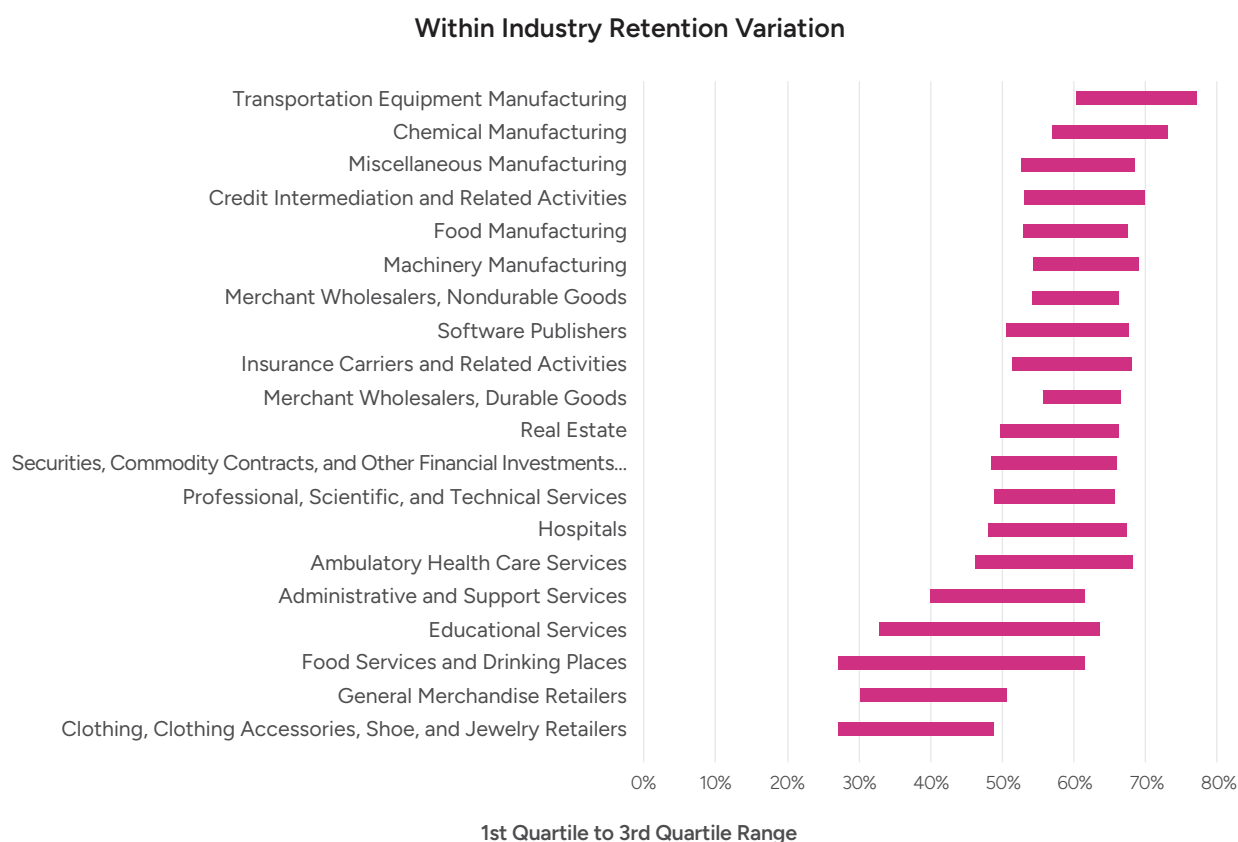
Figure 3: Within Industry Promotion Variation



Source: Burning Glass Institute

Take advanced manufacturing and distribution, where roles are standardized and progression ladders appear fixed. Yet, nevertheless, employer practice can reshape workers' trajectories significantly. Grainger offers a clear example. Unlike competitors that frequently hire supervisors from the outside, Grainger prioritizes developing internal talent. Workers feel that investment. Sales Representatives at Grainger are promoted within five years at more than twice the rate of those in the same role at a major industry peer. The gap is even more striking in logistics: nearly 60 percent of Grainger's Logistics Analysts move up within five years, compared with about half that at another leading employer with the same jobs and similar operations. The work itself may look identical, but the experience is not. At Grainger, structured skill development and visible pathways translate into upward mobility. At others, siloed roles and opaque advancement keep workers stuck. Same industry. Same jobs. Two very different futures.

Figure 4: Within Industry Retention Variation



Source: Burning Glass Institute

Even in food service, a sector with some of the highest turnover in the economy, employer practice can fundamentally reshape whether workers stay or churn. Consider McDonald's restaurants that participate in Archways to Opportunity, the company's education and career advancement program. These franchises offer predictable schedules, tuition assistance, English-language classes, and clear internal steps from crew to shift manager. The result is tangible: McDonald's leads the pack in retention for Food Service Managers, with 69% still at McDonald's after three years.

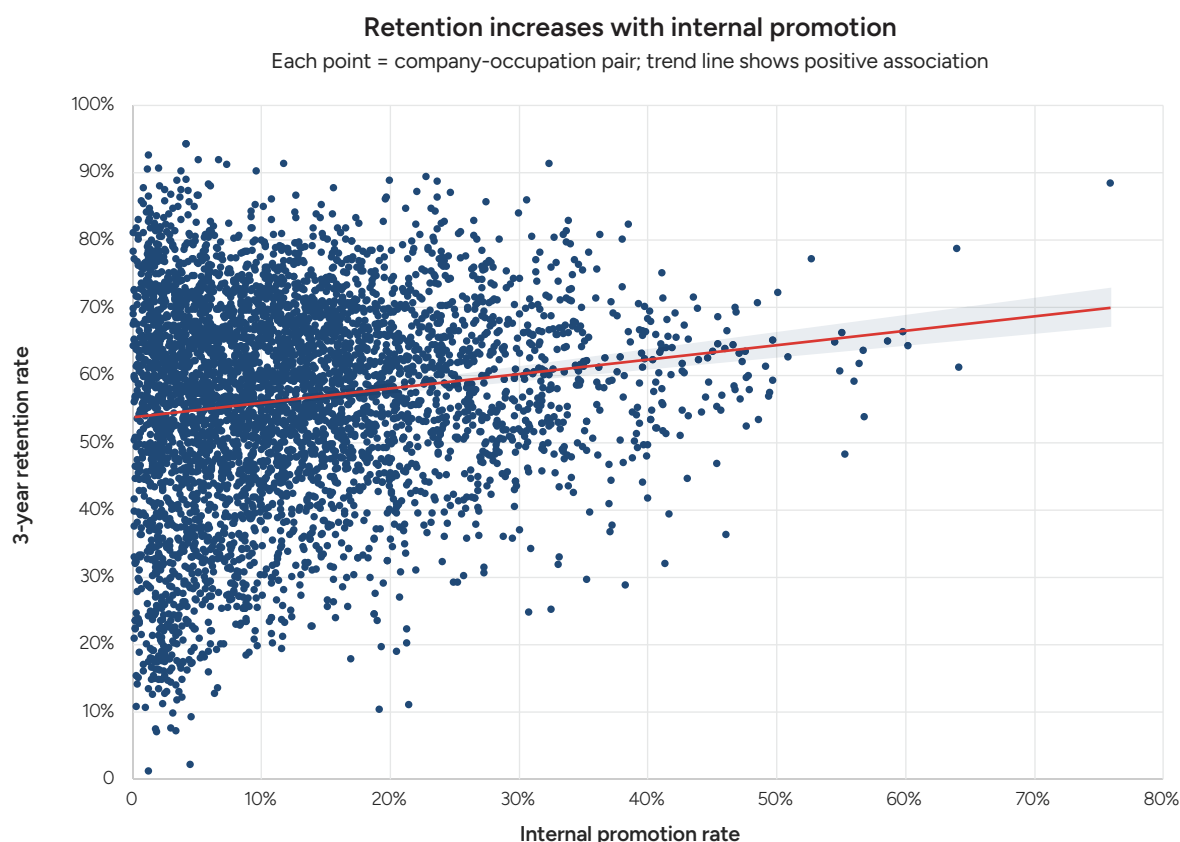
But many restaurants do not offer these supports. Hours fluctuate week to week, training is minimal, and advancement is largely informal. Workers move on quickly, often cycling through multiple food service jobs in a year. On a wage basis, these roles may look identical, but the experience on the ground, and the path to mobility, is defined by whether an employer chooses to invest in growth or simply refill the entry-level pipeline.

The implication is straightforward: switching employers within an industry may yield larger career gains than switching industries entirely.

How Pay, Promotion, and Retention Reinforce Each Other

Although pay, promotion, and retention are often managed as distinct organizational metrics, in practice they operate as an integrated system with mutually reinforcing effects. Our analysis shows that firms with higher promotion rates retain employees roughly 11 percent longer than their peers. Similarly, firms offering higher wages see retention improve by nearly 18 percent. Each of these levers independently predicts stronger retention even after controlling for the other.

Figure 5. How Promotions and Retention Reinforce Each Other



Source: Burning Glass Institute

This dynamic becomes particularly visible in frontline and middle-skill roles, where career progression and economic stability are tightly linked. Workers are more likely to stay when they understand how they can advance, and when their wages keep pace with the cost of living in the Chicago region. Pay without advancement may boost retention in the short term, but these gains are rarely sustained. Similarly, advancement without competitive pay risks accelerating exits as skilled workers leverage their experience to secure better compensation elsewhere.

Mobility Happens When Advancement Is Visible From Day One: Rasheed's Path At an Insurance Firm

What advancement looks like when early-career roles are structured for skill growth.

Rasheed's experience at an insurance brokerage shows what mobility looks like when early-career roles are designed for growth. Hired into a project coordination role in April 2024 through Skills for Chicago, he benefited from clear expectations, frequent developmental feedback, and transparent access to internal job postings. Within roughly 18 months, he earned a promotion. That stability has allowed him to pursue major personal goals, including preparing for law school and publishing a book of poetry, while continuing to advance within the firm. Rasheed's path illustrates how a transparent structure from day one can transform an entry-level job from a holding pattern into a true stepping stone.

In companies where promotion systems are clearly communicated and tied to structured developmental milestones, retention improves not merely because workers advance, but because they see credible signs that advancement is possible.

The Access Paradox

A key insight from our analysis is the tension between access to opportunity and workforce stability. Firms that retain workers most effectively tend to hire a smaller share of entry-level workers. Because high-retention firms have fewer openings overall, and because the roles they do fill often require specific experience, early-career workers face fewer points of entry.

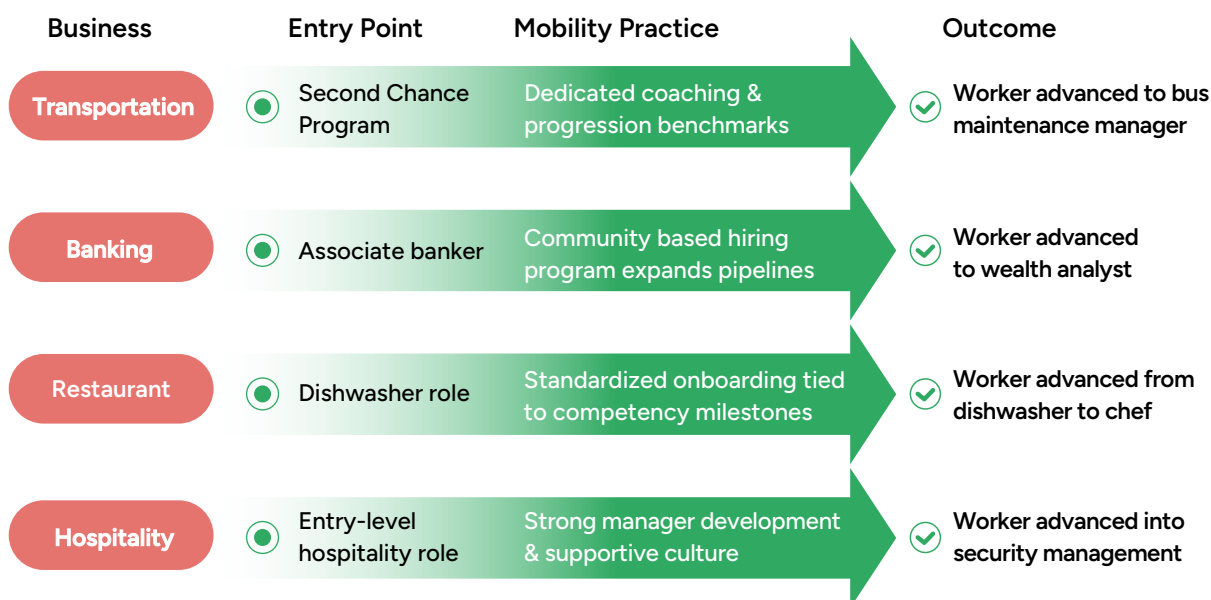
On the other hand, firms that hire broadly, pulling in large numbers of early-career workers, often experience rapid churn unless they invest simultaneously in strong internal mobility structures. When early-career workers cannot see a path to advancement, their tenure is short, regardless of wages or scheduling.

But these two forces need not be in competition. Several Chicago employers demonstrate that structured advancement systems can convert high-access hiring into long-term retention. Through clearer onboarding pathways, early supervisory touchpoints, mentorship programs, and visible job ladders, these firms create a bridge between entry-level access and mid-career stability.

These employers demonstrate that when entry-level hiring is combined with structured support, workers not only get in the door but continue to advance. This is particularly true when firms partner with community hiring intermediaries, such as Cara Collective and Skills for Chicago. These organizations expand access to frontline roles while establishing the scaffolding workers need to succeed: clearer onboarding, early coaching, and visibility into upward steps. In 2024, Skills for Chicago placed 62 Chicagoans into full-time roles. One year later, two-thirds of them had not only stayed but also advanced, with many earning significant wage increases or moving into higher-level positions.

The following examples highlight how major Chicago employers, working directly with community partners, are turning high-access hiring into real mobility.

Structured access: multiple employers are showing the way by partnering with community partners



Source: Cara Collective

Community Partnership Effect

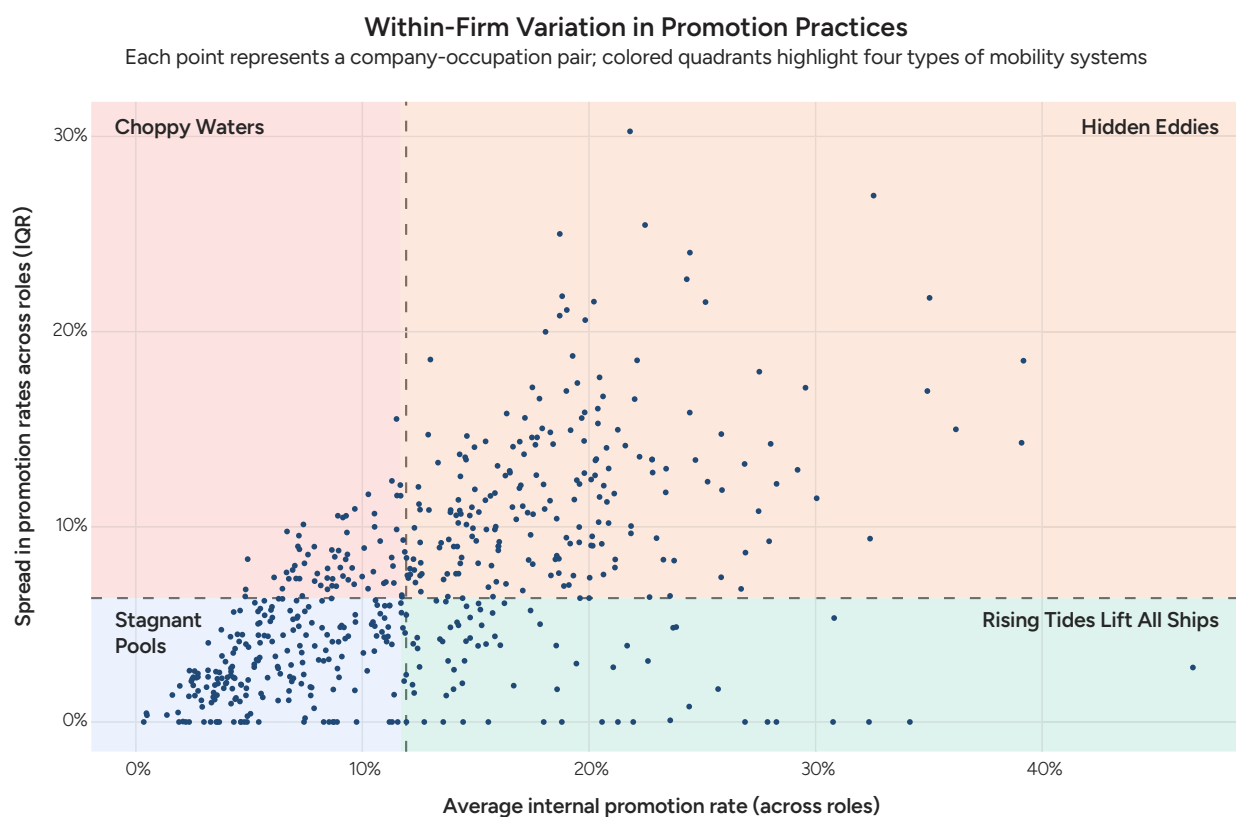
Northwestern Medicine has hired nearly 150 Skills for Chicago candidates over the past five years—including more than 50 individuals in the Certified Nursing Assistant role, a position that is a challenge for many hospitals. Hiring with community partners is a “win-win” as a Talent Acquisition leader at Northwestern Medicine describes. “Hiring from our communities and partnering with organizations such as Skills for Chicago not only opens doors to long tenured careers in healthcare, but it has also helped us fill roles that were previously very difficult to staff with talented, mission driven individuals.”

Uneven Opportunities Within Firms

Popular discourse has tended to draw a distinction between “good” and “bad” employers. Yet, the dynamics of opportunity, pay, and mobility play out within each role even in the same workplace. Business units can have distinct cultures, managers can display varying strengths, and firms can have different underlying perceptions of the ability for entry-level talent to advance. As such, even firms that perform well overall display significant internal disparities across roles.

Our analysis categorizes employers along two dimensions: overall promotion rates and the consistency of promotions across occupations within the firm. This yields four types of firms:

Figure 6: Uneven Opportunity Landscape



Source: Burning Glass Institute

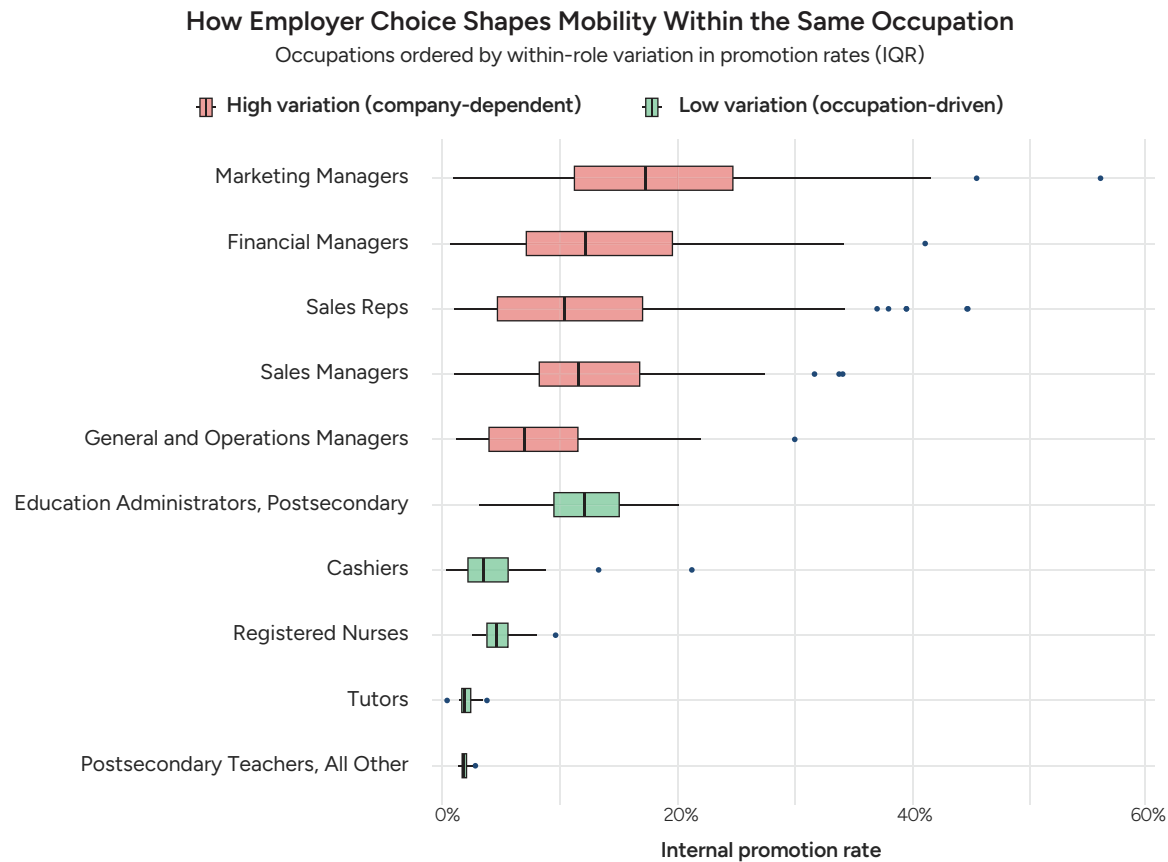
- **Rising Tides Lift All Ships**, where mobility is consistently strong across roles.
- **Hidden Eddies**, where, despite positive performance overall, workers in some roles may stagnate.
- **Choppy Waters**, where widely divergent worker experiences contribute to a culture of low firmwide mobility.
- **Stagnant Pools**, where mobility is consistently weak across occupations.

Although this categorization provides analytic clarity, the most important insight is that not all workers experience the firm evenly. Rather, they experience the job they were hired into. An employer may be a mobility leader for warehouse technicians but a mobility laggard for call center agents.

Occupation-Level Differences

Across occupations represented in Chicago’s labor market, variation in mobility reflects a combination of market-level regulation, job design, employer discretion, and labor supply dynamics.

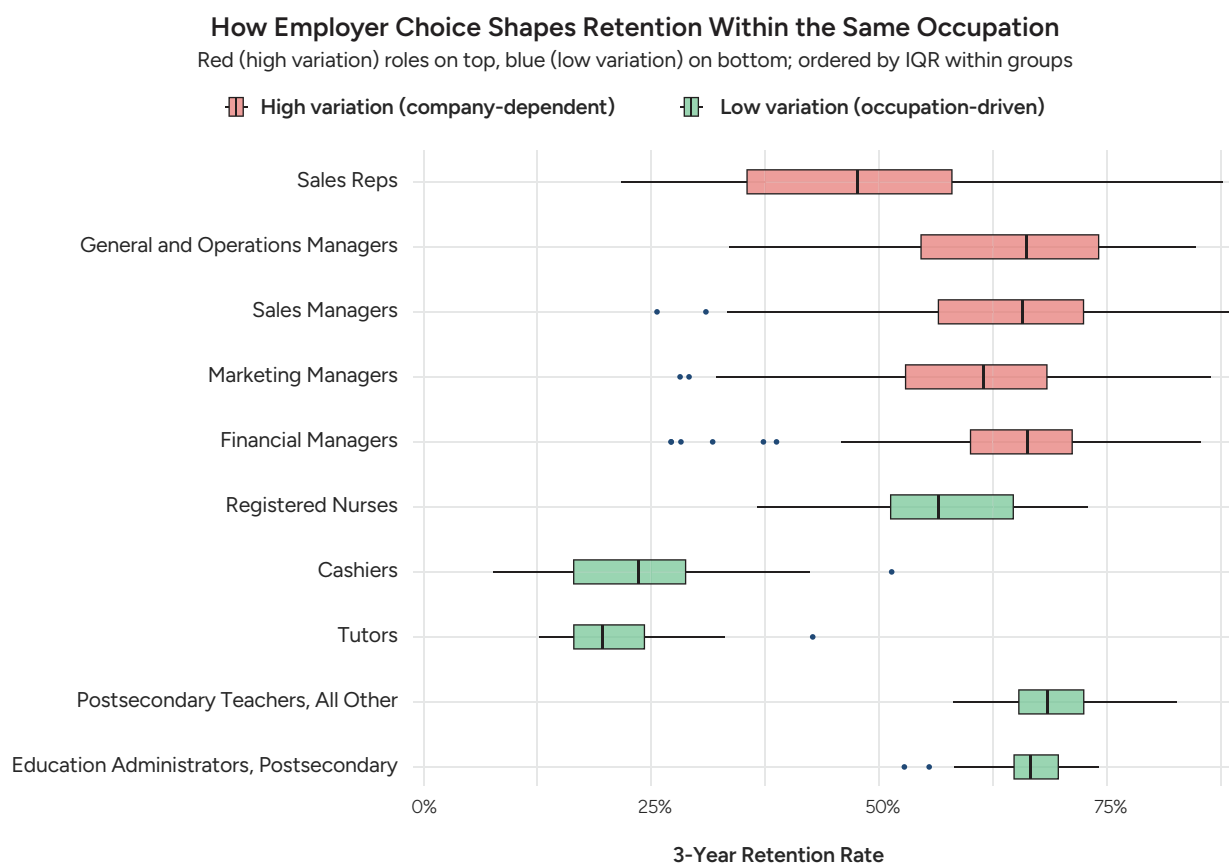
Figure 7. Internal Promotion Rate Variation Within Occupations



Source: Burning Glass Institute

Occupations characterized by discretionary advancement, such as sales representatives, administrative supervisors, and retail or logistics managers, exhibit wide dispersion in pay, promotion rates, and tenure. Some employers reward employee persistence by considering each job as a stepping-stone that builds skills and prepares workers for increasing responsibility and leadership. Others rely on external hiring for supervisory positions, limiting opportunities for internal movement.

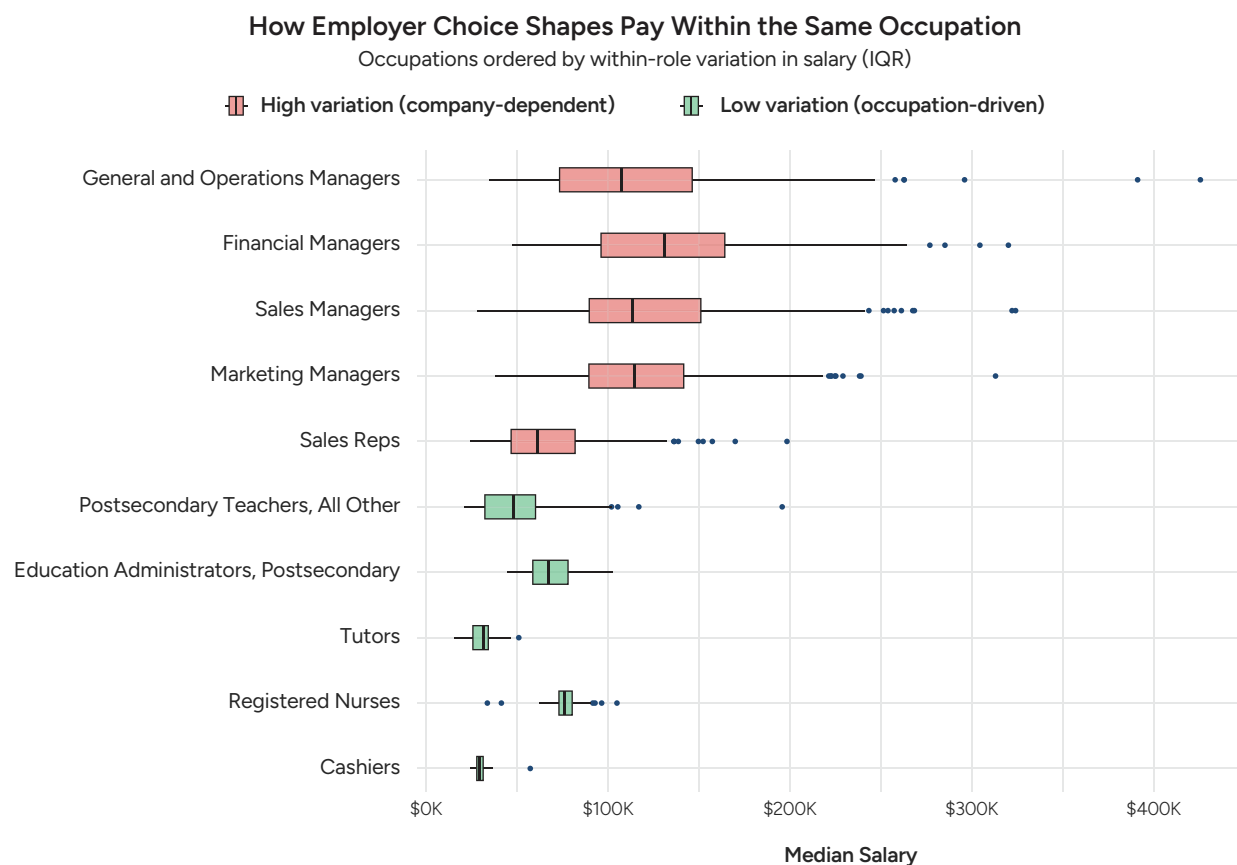
Figure 8. Retention Rate Variation Within Occupations



Source: Burning Glass Institute

Frontline service roles, such as cashiers and stock clerks, have the highest attrition. In these roles, factors such as scheduling practices, team structures, and manager quality tend to influence retention more than formal mobility pathways. Take the example of tutor positions, which are often designed to be temporary and are commonly filled by high school, college, or graduate students seeking supplemental income while they study. By contrast, teachers show the opposite pattern: they remain in their roles consistently, reflecting a career path in which longevity is rewarded with stable, predictable pay.

Figure 9. Pay Variation Within Occupations



Source: Burning Glass Institute

In roles governed by licensure or standardized pay systems, such as registered nurses, or clinical technicians, salaries and advancement structures are more tightly clustered. Chronic labor shortages in these roles do not command pay premiums despite demand. Differences across employers still exist, particularly in retention, job quality, and supervisory environments, but the magnitude of variation is smaller.

By contrast, roles with revenue responsibility or performance-based compensation exhibit much wider dispersion in both pay and advancement. Sales managers, marketing managers, and financial managers typically operate within systems that explicitly tie rewards to output, combining target attainment with the scale and strategic importance of the business line they support. Employers differentiate sharply based on performance, competitive pressure for talent, and demonstrated ability to generate growth.

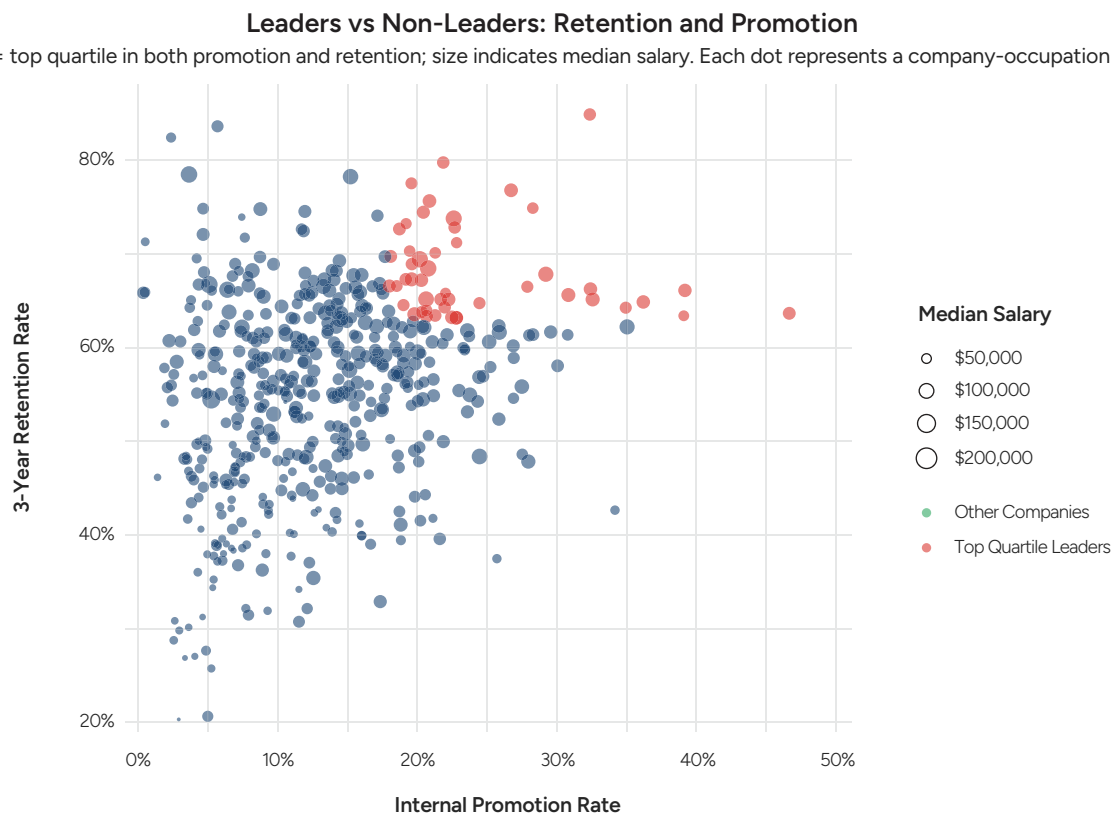
What matters is not the presence of variable pay itself, but what it reveals about how talent is understood. In these roles, labor is treated as a productive asset rather than a fixed cost. Variation is tolerated and even encouraged because differentiation is the mechanism through which firms identify, retain, and reinvest in high performers. Mobility, in this context, is not a perk or a retention tool; it is a growth strategy.

Overall, the occupation-level data underscore the interplay between market structure and firm strategy. Where regulation establishes a floor, firm practices determine the ceiling.

Mobility Leadership in Practice

The firms that excel in pay, promotion, and retention simultaneously represent a small but influential segment of Chicagoland industry. Only nine percent of employers fall into this category, yet their practices offer a model for what mobility-oriented workforce design can achieve.

Figure 10.



Source: Burning Glass Institute

These firms do not succeed because of sector or size alone. Instead, they share a set of structural characteristics: transparent internal job postings, regular performance reviews tied to developmental milestones, predictable pay progression, and a deliberate emphasis on developing early-career talent. Workers at these firms are promoted internally more than twice as often as those at other companies, retained a third longer, and paid 89 percent more.

The result is not merely improved worker outcomes but also strengthened organizational performance. Lower churn reduces recruiting costs and operational strain. Stronger pipelines reduce the need for external hiring. Higher engagement supports productivity. These employers demonstrate that mobility is not just compatible with business performance and its fruits don't simply accrue to workers. Rather, they show through everyday practice that creating opportunity for workers creates real competitive advantages for firms themselves.

From Insight to Action: What Chicago Employers Can Do Next

This report shows that differences in pay, promotion, and retention are not driven primarily by industry dynamics. They are driven by employer practice. Firms with similar jobs, operating in the same market, produce sharply different outcomes depending on how they design roles, manage performance, and build internal pipelines. These differences are not marginal. They shape costs, productivity, and long-term access to talent. Because these practices are observable and measurable, they are also actionable.

Make Talent Development a Core Operating System

For employers, the central lesson is that pay, promotion, and retention function as a single system. Firms that align these elements retain workers longer, promote more frequently, and sustain higher wages. Firms that manage them separately rely more heavily on external hiring, experience higher churn, and face persistent pipeline gaps.

Effective action starts with making advancement visible and predictable. Internal job pathways should be clear. Performance expectations should be tied to skill development, not tenure alone. Compensation should progress with responsibility. The goal is not simply to pay more, but to treat compensation as a lever for strengthening human capital. When pay is competitive, consistent, and tied to progression, it becomes a growth engine, supporting retention, improving performance, and reducing the costs associated with churn and external hiring.

Focus Diagnosis Where It Matters: At the Role Level

Firmwide averages conceal where opportunity and performance break down. Workers experience the role they are hired into, not an organization's overall reputation. Even strong employers often show uneven outcomes across occupations.

Employers should therefore assess promotion rates, wage growth, and retention by role. Identifying a small number of high-churn or low-mobility roles often reveals where redesign can deliver the greatest return. In

many cases, targeted changes to role architecture, supervision, or progression criteria yield more impact than broad, companywide initiatives.

Shift the External Conversation from Sector to Practice

At a city level, this analysis challenges the assumption that opportunity is determined by industry. Variation within sectors consistently exceeds differences between them. Sector labels obscure where effective talent development is actually happening.

Leveraging labor market data can help employers move faster by normalizing benchmarking and facilitating peer learning. The value is not in ranking firms, but in reducing the cost and risk of adopting proven practices. Employers learn fastest from other employers facing similar constraints.

Use Intermediaries to Turn Hiring into Retention

Broad entry-level hiring does not, on its own, produce stable pipelines. Without structure, early-career roles turn over quickly, increasing costs and operational strain.

Workforce intermediaries such as Skills for Chicago and Cara Collective help employers close this gap. When paired with internal commitment, these partners support onboarding, early coaching, and supervisory capacity, enabling firms to convert hiring into long-term performance. In this role, intermediaries function as operational partners that strengthen employer capability, not simply as sources of candidates.

Why This Matters for Chicago's Competitiveness

A small share of Chicago employers already demonstrate that strong pay, frequent promotion, and high retention can coexist. Scaling these outcomes requires coordination rather than isolated effort. Employers must be willing to examine and adapt their internal systems. Civic organizations must support learning and diffusion. Intermediaries must continue translating access into advancement.

When these elements align, the benefits compound: lower churn, stronger internal pipelines, and a deeper regional talent base. Over time, firms become more resilient, and the Chicago labor market becomes more competitive. The evidence in this report provides a practical foundation for employer-led action at scale.

Implications for Chicagoland

When employers design advancement deliberately, align pay with progression, and invest in internal pipelines, the effects extend well beyond individual firms. At scale, these practices reshape the structure and performance of the regional labor market.

For workers, clearer advancement pathways translate into greater stability. When progression is visible and supervision is strong, employees are more likely to remain with an employer, build skills over time, and experience sustained wage growth. Mobility becomes empirically observable: not a single leap or job change, but a sequence of steps that allow workers to advance without being forced to reset, relocate, or

exit the labor force. That stability supports broader life outcomes, including housing continuity, educational consistency for children, and long-term financial planning.

For employers, these dynamics strengthen the talent base on which the regional economy depends. Lower churn reduces recruiting and training costs. Internal advancement produces workers with firm-specific knowledge and stronger performance over time. As more firms adopt these practices, competition for talent shifts away from poaching and toward development, improving labor market efficiency and resilience.

At the city level, the cumulative impact is significant. When talent development becomes a consistent strategy across employers, skills compound across the workforce. Career transitions become smoother, pipelines more predictable, and mismatches between hiring demand and worker readiness less severe. Rather than renewing itself through churn, Chicago's labor market renews itself through growth.

In this context, mobility is not only a firm-level strategy but a city-building force. Employers that invest in advancement are not simply improving their own outcomes; they are contributing to a more competitive regional economy and a more durable civic fabric. Over time, these choices shape a Chicago in which opportunity is more widely distributed, talent is more deeply developed, and economic growth is anchored by workers who can build long-term futures in the region.