

Fortune 500 CHROs: A Decade to Develop... Four Years to Lose

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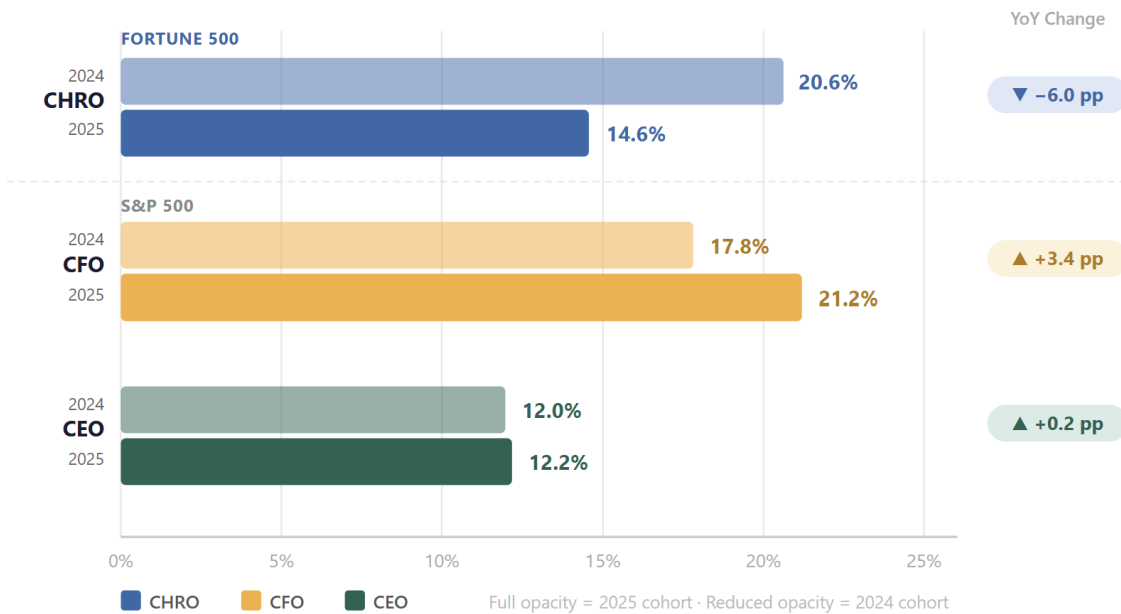
June 25, 2026

Executive Summary

Turnover in the Fortune 500¹ CHRO ranks declined by six (6) percentage points in the past twelve months indicating stabilization. As a comparison, CFO turnover has increased YoY and CEO turnover has been flat. The good news is that F500 companies have largely solved the CHRO pipeline problem. The majority of new CHROs in the past year (60.9%) were promoted from within. These are executives who already know the business, the culture, and the people. A sign of healthy succession planning in action.

C-Suite Turnover: 2024 vs. 2025 Cohorts

Annual turnover rate by role



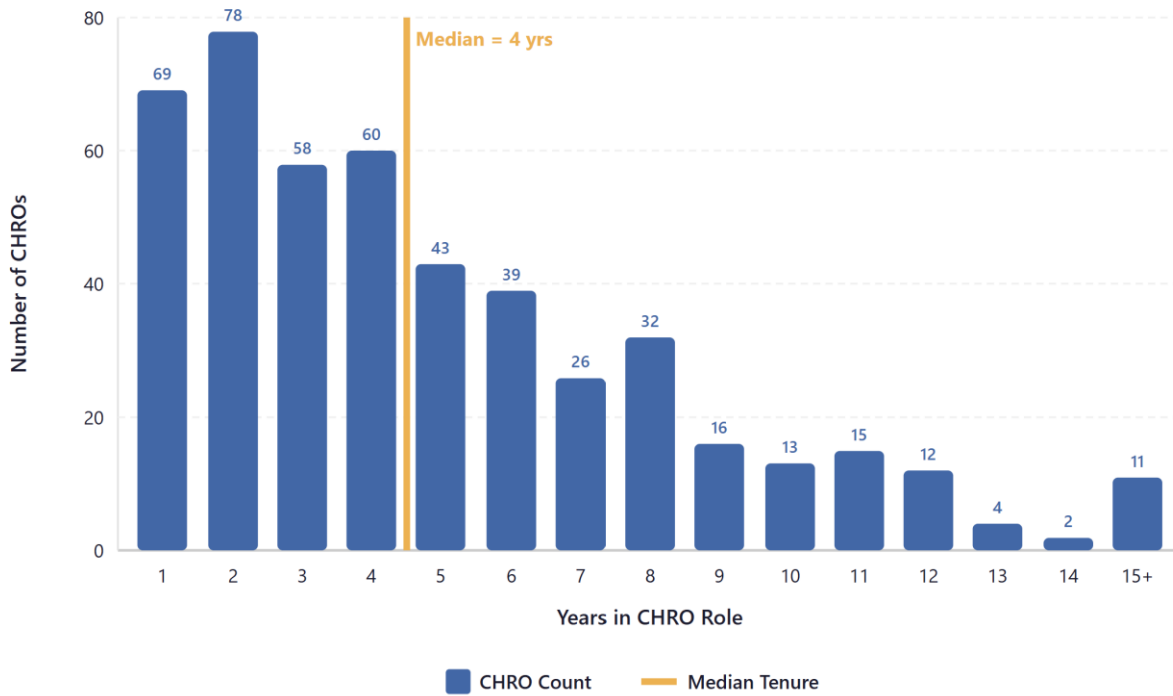
Sources: CHRO data — FlemingMartin Fortune 500 C-Suite Turnover Analysis.
 CFO and CEO data — S&P 500 benchmarks from Russell Reynolds Global CEO and CFO Turnover Indices for comparative context.

However, a deeper dive into the F500 CHRO data reveals a problematic **“tenure gap.”** The median F500 CHRO has been with their company for ten years and has held the CHRO title for just four. That means the typical path is six or more years in supporting HR roles, followed by a relatively brief run at the top. Companies are investing nearly a decade in developing these leaders, then losing them within four years of their CHRO promotion.

¹ The Fortune 500 is an annual list published by Fortune magazine ranking the 500 largest U.S. companies by total revenue. “Fortune 500” is a registered trademark of Fortune Media IP Limited, used herein for informational purposes only.

F500 companies do not have a pipeline problem. CHRO turnover is a leadership investment problem that CEOs and boards can solve. The CHRO role has fundamentally changed in the past ten years. CHROs are now expected to drive workforce AI strategy, navigate return-to-office politics, serve as a cultural voice externally, and function as a business partner to the CEO and broader executive team. The promotion to CHRO often comes without a commensurate increase in resources, authority, or support. **The promotion is real. The infrastructure around it frequently is not.**

CHRO Tenure (in Years)



A Recommendation

Within the next 90 days, CEOs and boards should ask one question of their current CHRO: **What would enable you to thrive in your CHRO role for the next five years?** The answer will almost certainly reveal gaps in resources, organizational authority, or peer support that no succession plan addresses. The companies that address those gaps now are the ones that won't be replacing their CHRO in the next year.

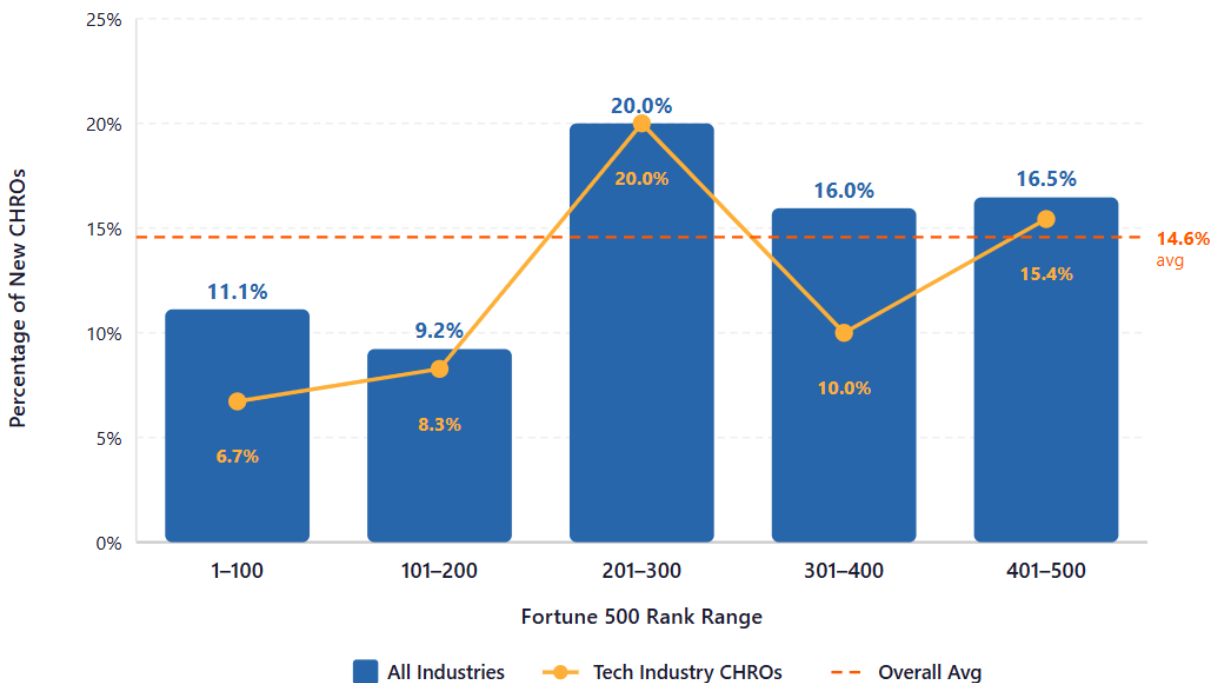
<h1>14.6%</h1> <p>F500 CHRO TURNOVER RATE, 2025-2026</p>	<h1>4 Yrs</h1> <p>MEDIAN TENURE BEFORE DEPARTURE</p>	<h1>69</h1> <p>NEW CHROS APPOINTED IN 2025- 2026</p>
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Turnover by Size of Company

Two years ago, the 200 largest F500 companies experienced higher turnover than the bottom 300 companies. So, it is not surprising that the past year trended towards higher turnover in the bottom 300 companies.

For technology companies, CHRO turnover was significantly reduced in the past year and only seven (7) technology companies out of 60 total added a new CHRO. There were 16 technology companies that turned over their CHRO the prior year.

F500 Companies with a New CHRO in the Past 12 Months



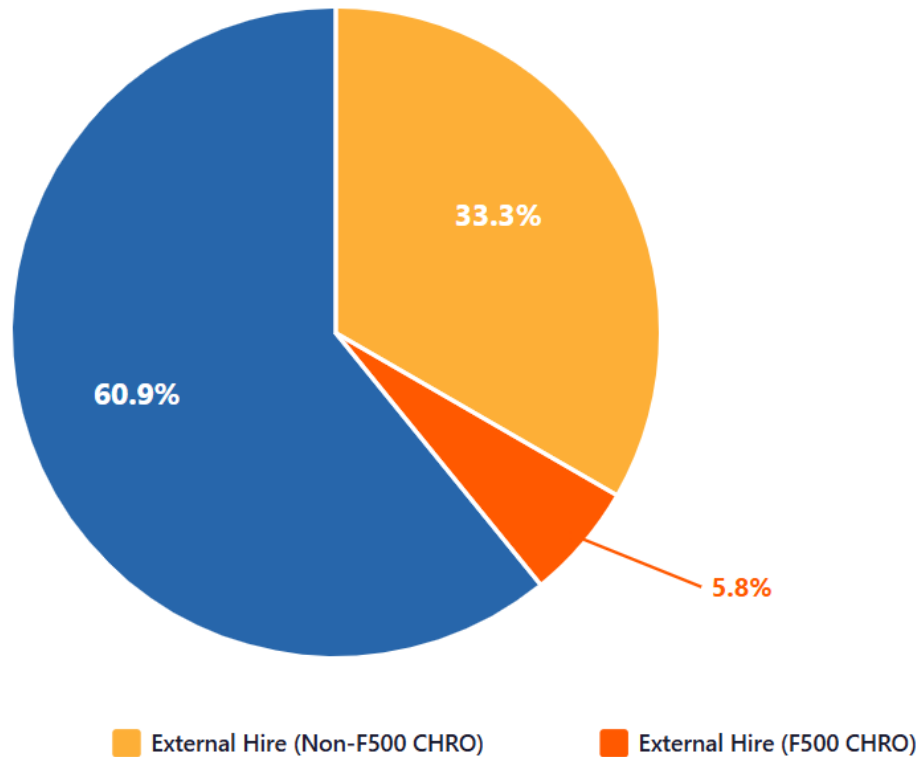
Internal Promotions vs. External Hires

Internal promotion rates for the F500 decreased from last year (60.9% versus 66.0%). Most of the change is attributable to the Bottom 100 of the list (401-500). The Bottom 100 were more likely to hire externally (53%) than promote from within. By contrast, the Top 400 companies promoted from within 65% of the time. This difference is most likely attributed to less depth of internal HR talent at the lower end of the F500 list.

Internal promotions are even more strongly correlated to market value. The F500 companies in the Top 20% of market value promoted internally at a 78.6% rate versus the Bottom 20% that promoted internally at only 50.0%.

The final notable change in year-over-year comparisons is in the number of F500 CHROs that were directly recruited from another F500 company: only four (4) this year versus ten (10) the prior year. None of the four moved to a Top 200 company whereas seven of the ten two years ago moved to a Top 200 company.

Source of New F500 CHROs



Traits of the 2025–2026 F500 CHRO Cohort

ONE THING TO WATCH FOR NEXT YEAR

3.9%

Only 1 in 26 F500 CHRO biographies mentions AI.

At a moment when boards are pressing CEOs on workforce AI strategy, the CHRO role sits at the center of that mandate. Yet the public-facing profiles of the executives charged with leading it have almost nothing to say on the subject. A striking gap — and one worth revisiting in next year’s data.

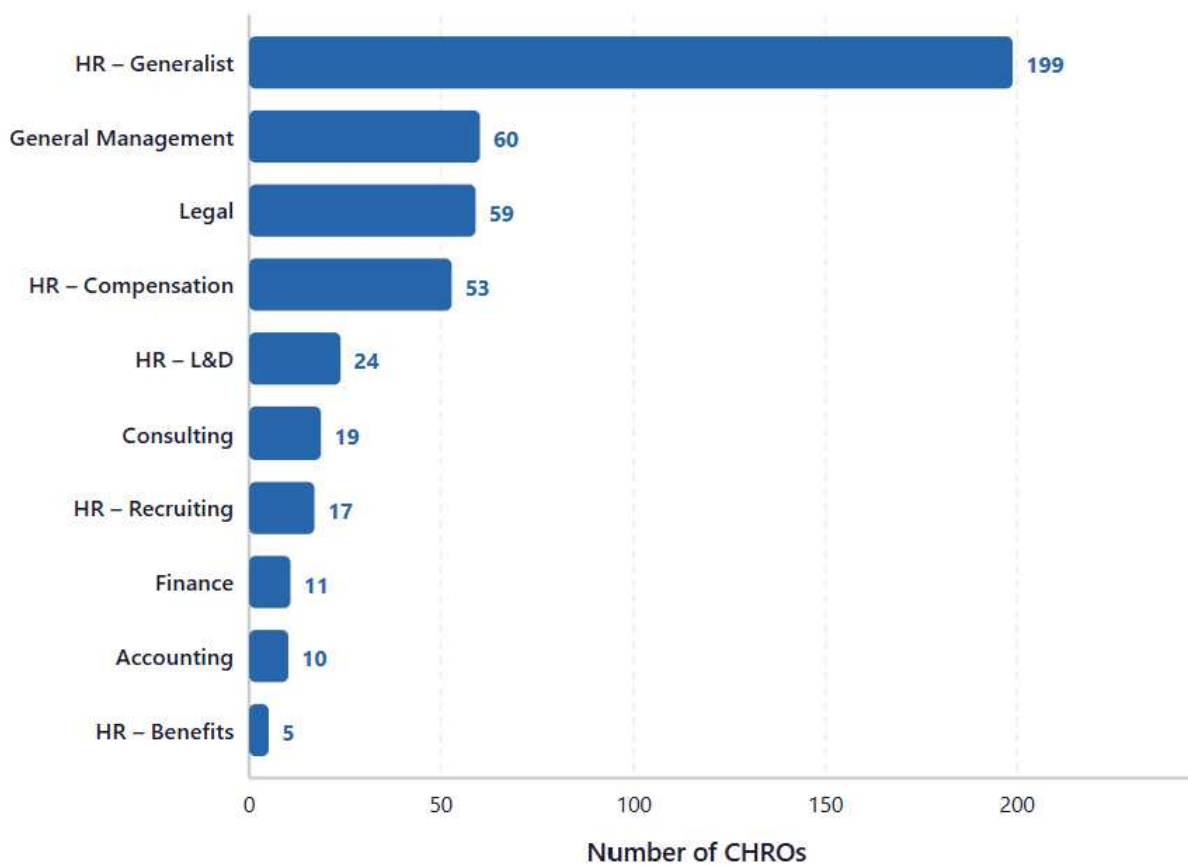
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Early Career Focus – Where Did They Start?

The Top 100 ranked companies overwhelmingly favor specialist HR backgrounds over other career tracks with a 66.7% concentration of core HR career paths. Notably, the Top 100 ranked companies have the highest rate of CHROs with a compensation background (16.2% vs. 9.7% for the rest of the F500).

The trend is more pronounced when analyzed by market capitalization. CHROs with deep compensation backgrounds were 19.3% of the Top 25% by Market Value versus 9.1% for the Bottom 75%. The largest companies appear to value deep, technical HR expertise, particularly compensation specialists, to lead the function.

Top 10 Career Paths to F500 CHRO



The further down the rankings, the more likely the CHRO rose through general operating roles rather than HR specialty tracks. Business/Finance backgrounds are nearly twice as common in the lower half of the F500. For 1–200, roughly 16% come from Business/Finance paths (General Management, Consulting, Finance, Accounting) versus ~28% for 301-500. General Management backgrounds trend toward the bottom of the list as well.

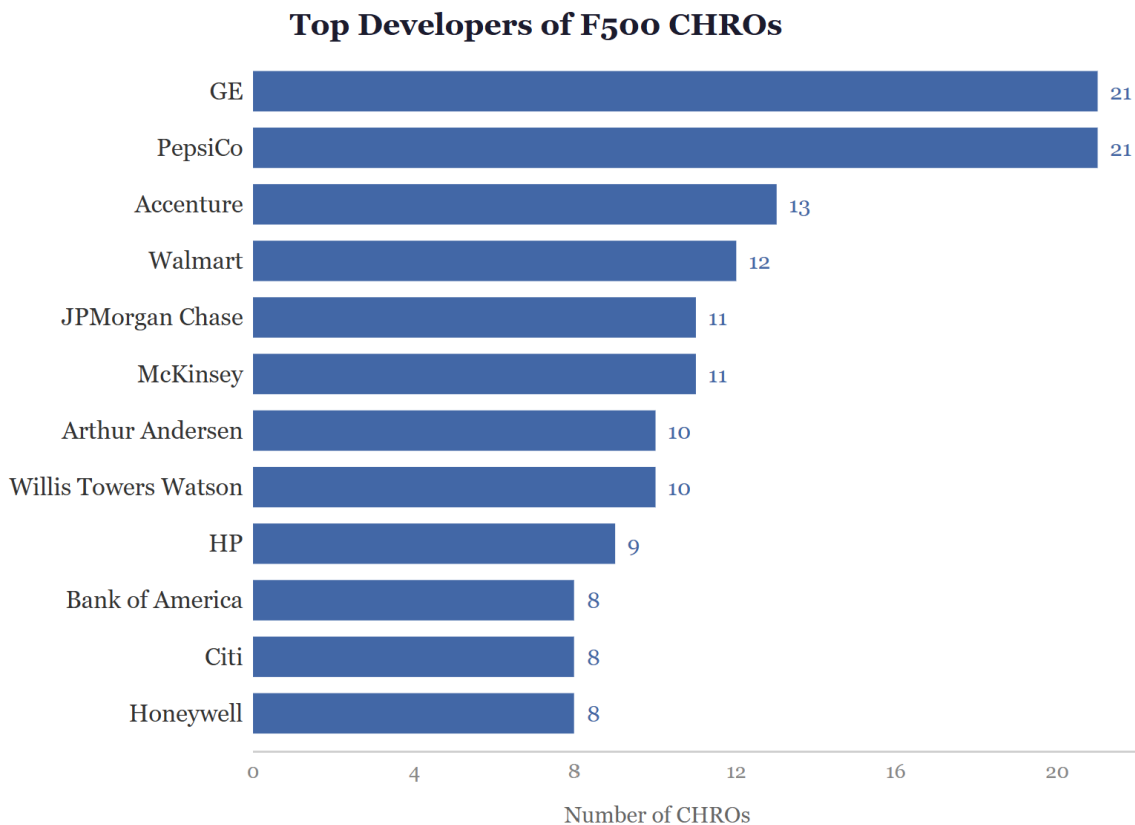
For the Top 250, 10.2% come from General Management whereas the Bottom 250 is 14.9%. These numbers suggest that smaller F500 companies are more likely to appoint CHROs who cut their teeth outside of HR, because they need executives who can wear multiple hats or speak the language of the business more directly.

Consulting backgrounds also concentrate in the lower half, Top 100 (4.0%) versus 301–500 (7.0%). This disparity likely reflects that top-tier companies build CHRO pipelines internally, while smaller F500 companies are more likely to bring in external strategy talent.

Legal backgrounds are remarkably consistent. CHROs with legal backgrounds represent roughly 10–14% across all rank bands. The legal executive as CHRO appears to be a consistent feature regardless of company size.

Companies That Helped Develop the Most F500 CHROs

When it comes to CHRO talent factories, it is the usual, large companies that one might expect. (See Chart)



New: **Honeywell** Dropped: **Deloitte** GE is now (GE Aerospace, GE Healthcare, and GE Vernova)

Arthur Andersen ceased operations on August 31, 2002

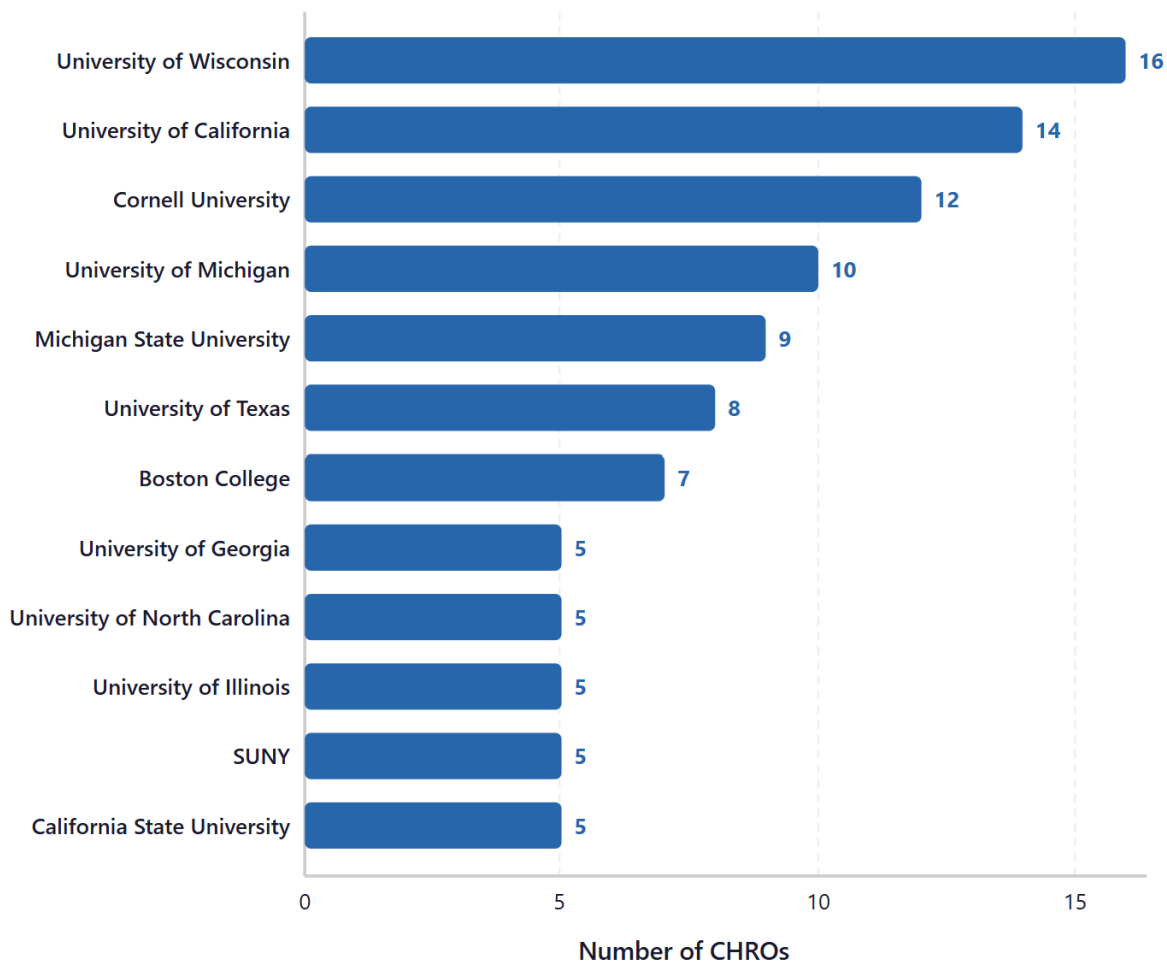
Higher Education Findings

MBA's are more common in the lower half of the F500². The MBA's 8-percentage point premium at smaller F500 companies suggests those organizations are credentialing their way to strategic credibility that larger firms build through internal specialist pipelines--a meaningful distinction when evaluating external candidates.

The overwhelming majority of F500 CHROs have an undergraduate degree (95.6%) and nearly two thirds have an advanced degree (67.2%).

That CHROs with Recruiting (17.6%) and Benefits (20%) backgrounds are the least likely to hold advanced degrees while Legal (98.3%) and L&D (91.7%) are the most likely, maps closely to which career paths CEOs and boards see as strategic versus operational. That perception gap has real consequences for succession planning.

Top 10 Undergraduate Universities of the F500 CHROs



University of Wisconsin, University of California, State University New York (SUNY), and California State University span multiple campuses.

² For F500 companies 1–200, 25% have an MBA and for companies 301–500, 33% have an MBA.

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Eight current F500 CHROs hold undergraduate degrees from HBCUs.

That number is small relative to the cohort. The underrepresentation at the top reflects decades of executive search defaulting to familiar networks and not a shortage of qualified candidates. CEOs and boards who ask their search partners to expand sourcing will find talent that has been there all along.

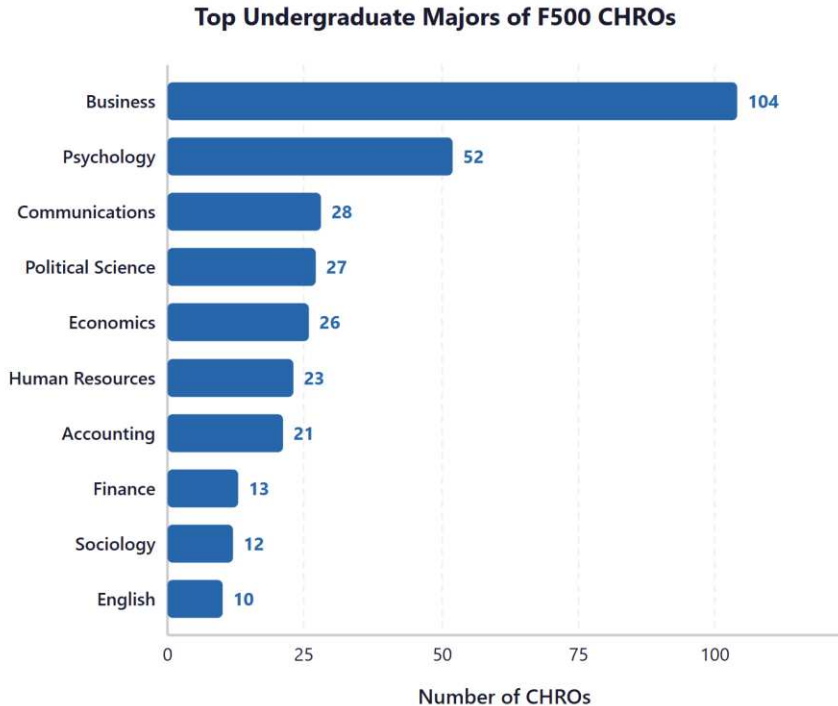
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Most CHROs did their undergraduate studies in the Midwest (27.1%) and Northeast (26.9%) followed by the South (21.7%), the West (12.6%) and internationally (11.5%). Notably, the West is well represented at the top. West-educated CHROs land at Top 100 companies at 24.1% — the highest rate of any region.

53 CHROs earned their undergraduate degree outside of the United States. Top countries:

United Kingdom (12)	Canada (10)	India (6)
Brazil (5)	France (4)	Ireland (3)
Australia (2)	Belgium (2)	China (2)

Undergraduate Majors



31.9% of Midwest-educated CHROs majored in Business vs. 24.0% overall. The Northeast is defined by Industrial and Labor Relations — almost exclusively due to Cornell. CHROs educated in the Western U.S. over-indexed on Psychology (17.3% vs. 12.4% overall) and Engineering (7.7% vs. 1.4%). International

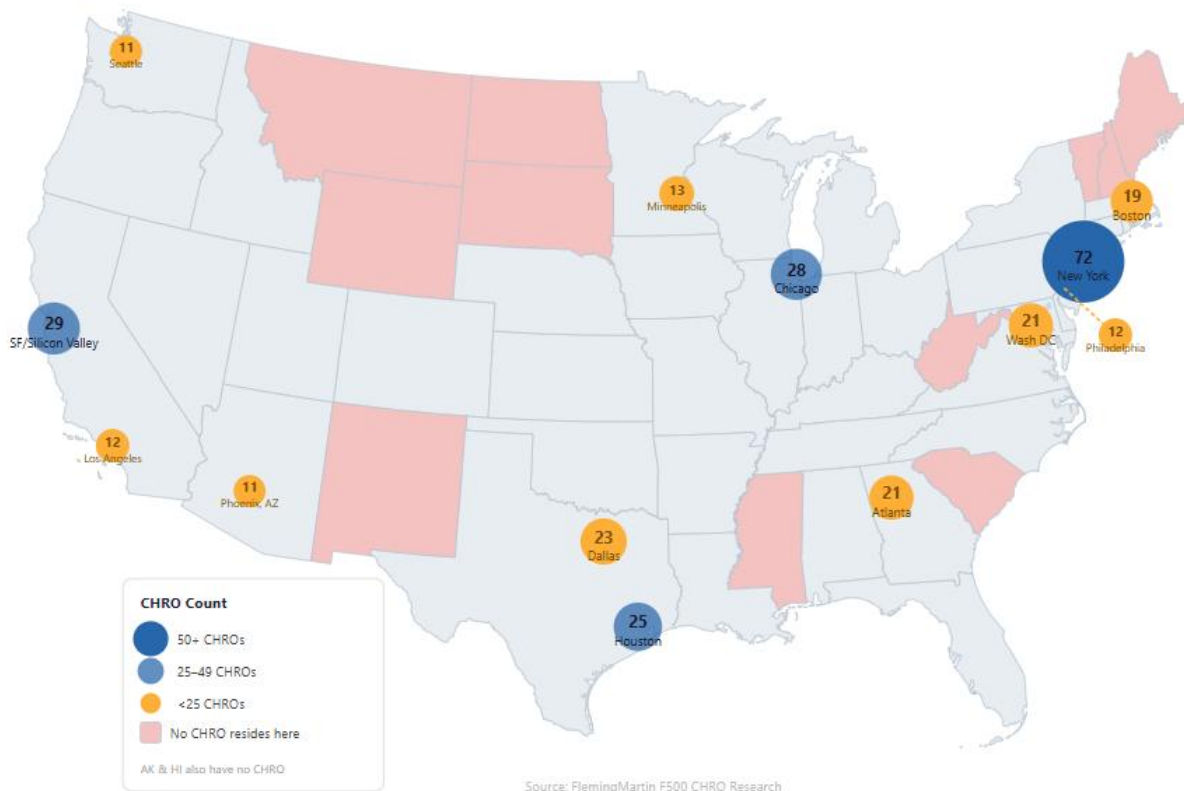
graduates skew strongly toward Business (32%), HR (12%), and Law (8%). Accounting is a Northeast (8.3%) and South (8.5%) specialty that is nearly absent in the Midwest (1.7%). The South's CHRO pipeline is the most diversified across majors of any region.

Where Do F500 CHROs Live?

The New York City metro area continues to dominate with 15% (72) of the F500 CHRO population. The Sun Belt migration trend shows no sign of reversing with Houston (25), Dallas (23), Atlanta (21), and Phoenix (11) reflecting the growth of F500 companies in those markets. SF/Silicon Valley (29) tops Los Angeles (12), and Seattle (11) reflecting the tech HQ concentration in the Bay Area. Chicago leads the Midwest with twenty-eight (28) and Minneapolis punches above its weight at thirteen (13), driven by a cluster of major F500 companies headquartered there. Washington, D.C. (21), Boston (19), and Philadelphia (12) round out the list.

Ten (10) CHROs live outside the U.S. in seven different countries: Canada — 3 (Montreal, Vancouver, Alberta); UK — 2 (both London area); and one each for Switzerland (Lausanne); the Netherlands; Denmark; China (Shanghai) and Sweden (Stockholm). Global enterprises are increasingly comfortable with a CHRO who isn't physically anchored to a headquarters location.

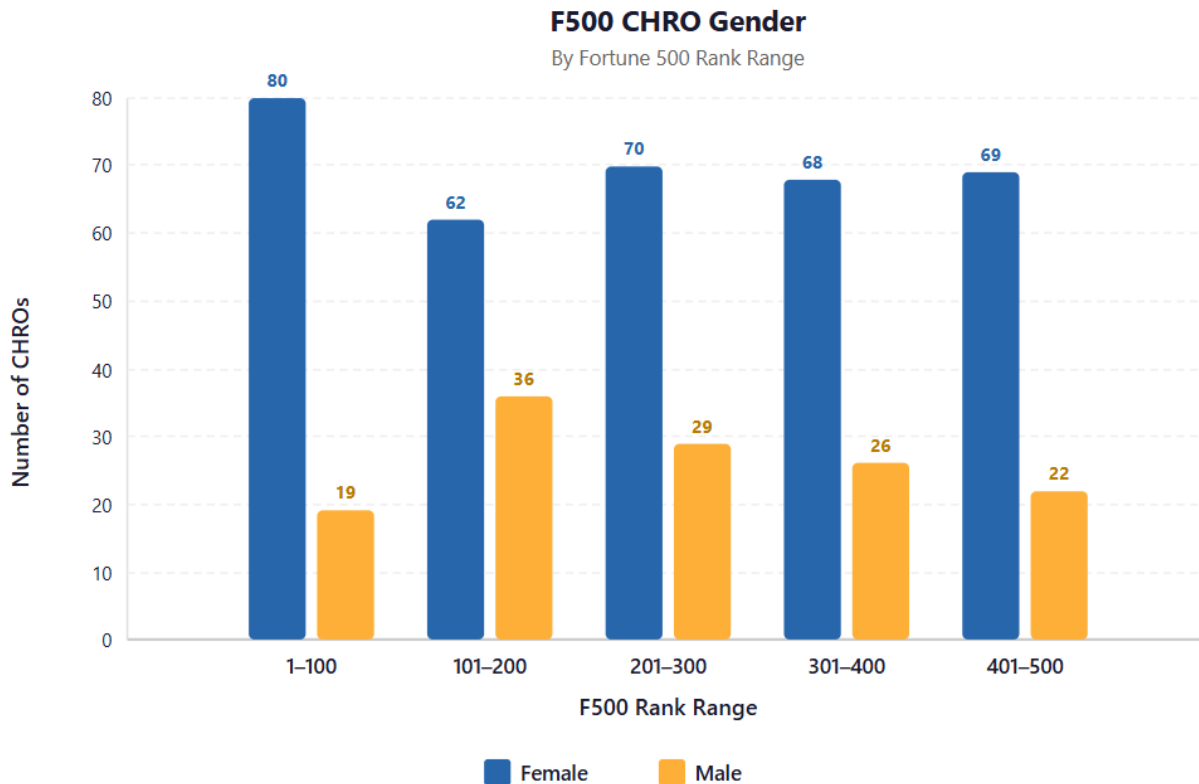
Top 12 Metro Areas — F500 CHROs



Gender

Of the F500 CHROs, women (72.6%) are more represented than men (27.4%). The gender split is nearly identical across tech and non-tech. The Top 100 companies stand out sharply — 80.8% female, nearly eight (8) points above the overall average of 72.6%. Only two men are in the Top 25 (#20 and #25). Additionally, nine of the ten most highly valued companies have female CHROs. The most valuable companies (Apple, Microsoft, Nvidia, Amazon, Alphabet, Meta) all have female CHROs with relatively short tenures of 2–6 years — suggesting recent appointments at the highest-profile companies.

One other notable finding was that male CHROs are more likely to have an advanced degree (72.7%) than women (65.0%). This gap likely reflects generational credentialing patterns more than current hiring preferences. For a CEO or board reading this in the context of a search, the practical implication is that screening for advanced degrees in a CHRO search brief will disproportionately filter out female candidates without any evidence that the degree predicts CHRO performance.

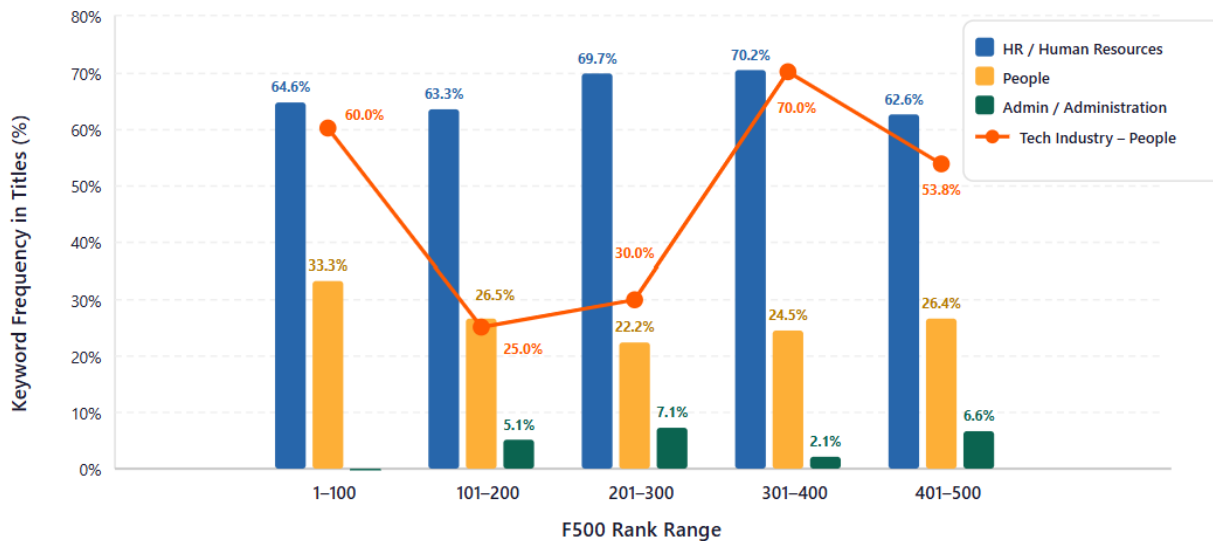


CHRO Job Titles (HR vs. People)

“Human Resources” is still more common than “People” and “Administration” is a distant third. Two tech company CHROs include “AI Enablement Officer” in their titles. **CHROs from technology companies are more than twice as likely to use People in their titles** versus their peers from non-technology companies (48.3% versus 23.5%). Notably, not a single tech company CHRO uses Admin in their title.

Keyword Frequency in F500 Titles

% of CHROs by title keyword



Note: "Other" (3.1% overall) includes Chief Talent Officer and similar titles - not shown

FINAL TAKEAWAY FOR CEOs AND BOARDS

The “People” title isn’t just a branding preference. It reflects a genuine philosophical divide about whether HR is a compliance function or a cultural one, and CEOs hiring from outside their sector should account for that preference when evaluating candidates.

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Methodology

LinkedIn and corporate biographies served as the primary sources. Additional sources include SEC filings, direct outreach to company representatives and CHROs, social media, and articles in the public domain. Gender was determined using pronouns in biographies and published articles. Locations reflect self-reported data from LinkedIn profiles and corporate biographies; headquarters locations were used when no personal location was listed. CHRO titles from company management pages were prioritized over LinkedIn. All data was finalized on May 31, 2026³.

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³ At the time of publishing, 479 of the F500 companies had an identifiable CHRO. For the remaining 21: One company had a vacant CHRO role; nine companies do not have an executive HR leader; and 11 companies were acquired during the year and excluded from the analysis. Two companies have Co-CHRO arrangements and all four were included in this analysis. Eighteen (18) companies do not publish a leadership webpage and 46 do not list their CHRO on their leadership webpage — for those 64 companies, the figures reflect the person that is most likely the CHRO based on available information.