

How will success be defined in the future?

Gen Z is redefining the future of success both inside and outside of the workplace. The path they are blazing is shifting societal paradigms and putting into question decades-old business assumptions.

■ ■ ■
The better the question. The better the answer.
The better the world works.

For Gen Z, a life filled with purpose, impact and love drives their vision of success

Gen Z, today's 15- to 25-year-olds born between 1997 and 2007, defy most stereotypes of youth. They are not the wide-eyed, invincible teens of generations past, waiting for the future to happen. They are a cohort of doers driven to get things done.

While many assume their personal goals and dreams mirror that of Millennials, Gen Z's values and basic desires more closely resemble those held by the Silent, or Greatest Generation (born between 1928-1946). This resilient generation persevered war, geopolitical turmoil and constant financial strife throughout their formative years. They stood behind their values, offering their service to support the causes they believed in. They sought stability and safety, and were motivated to work hard to build the modest but secure life they desired.

Gen Z, too, have come of age in a time where they have had a front-row seat to unprecedented global crises. They've been forced to learn not to take anything for certain. They are driven. They are purposeful. They want to be loved. And they're not going to conform to past standards.

In this report, we explore how Gen Z envisions their future success, both personally and professionally, and what that means for the companies hoping to hire them, market to them and, ultimately, earn their hard-won trust.

**Within this document, Gen Z is defined as those born 1997-2007 unless otherwise noted.*

Contents

Overview

02

What drives Gen Z?

04

What is the most beautiful life Gen Z can imagine?

07

Creating a successful life

09

Education

10

Finances

15

Home ownership

23

Family life

28

The role of work in a successful life

35

Motivation

36

Leadership and values

45

Balance and flexibility

54

Closing

59

Why does this matter?

60

Methodology

70

Key contacts

71

Gen Z has seen the world fall apart over and over

So they want to take control.

Amid the last decade of economic volatility, divisive politics, mounting social injustices, a global pandemic and now a possible world conflict, Gen Z expects something else to crumble.

They're not going to sit back and take a passive role in their future success. Gen Z is taking control of their future success and setting high expectations in their choices around education, work and society.





They haven't been shielded from the woes of the world

So they crave stability and security.

Unlike past generations, these digital natives have real-time, unlimited and unfiltered access to the world's biggest hardships. This has only heightened their anxiety. Nearly half (42%) of Gen Z participants surveyed said they usually or always felt anxious or depressed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Read more about Gen Z's relationship with mental health in our previous report on Gen Z and Wellness.](#) →

An extravagant life isn't the goal for most Gen Z. They seek a life that's financially and emotionally secure. This is reflected in how they think about home ownership, relationships and managing their money.



They carry the weight of the world on their shoulders

So they are driven to purpose.

This generation is dismayed with the state of the world they've inherited, but they think it's worth saving. They are proactive versus reactive. They are driven to find and implement solutions that impact those around them and will offer a better future for the generations to come.

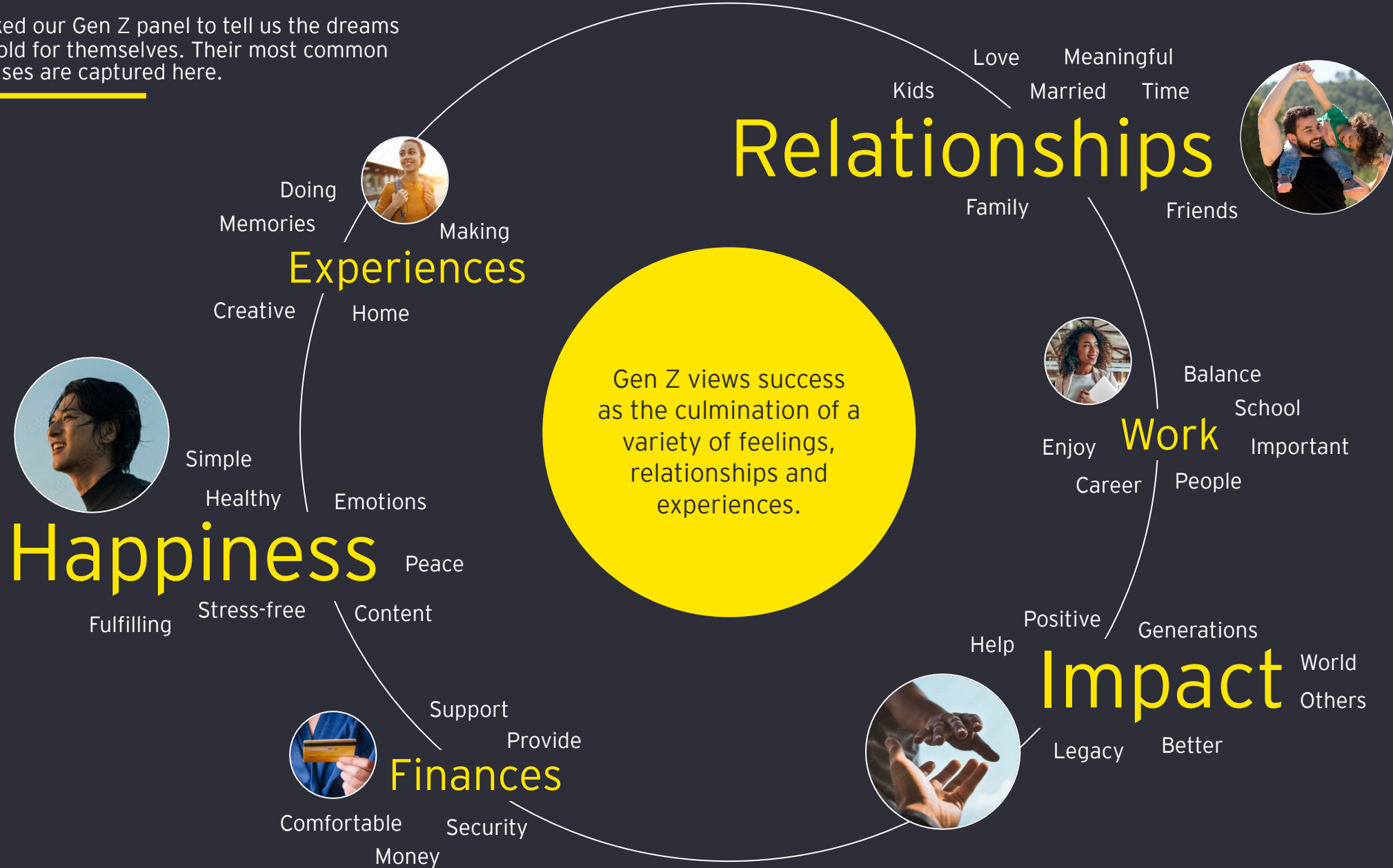
As the men of the Greatest Generation went to war, the women managed the factories, marking one of the greatest professional

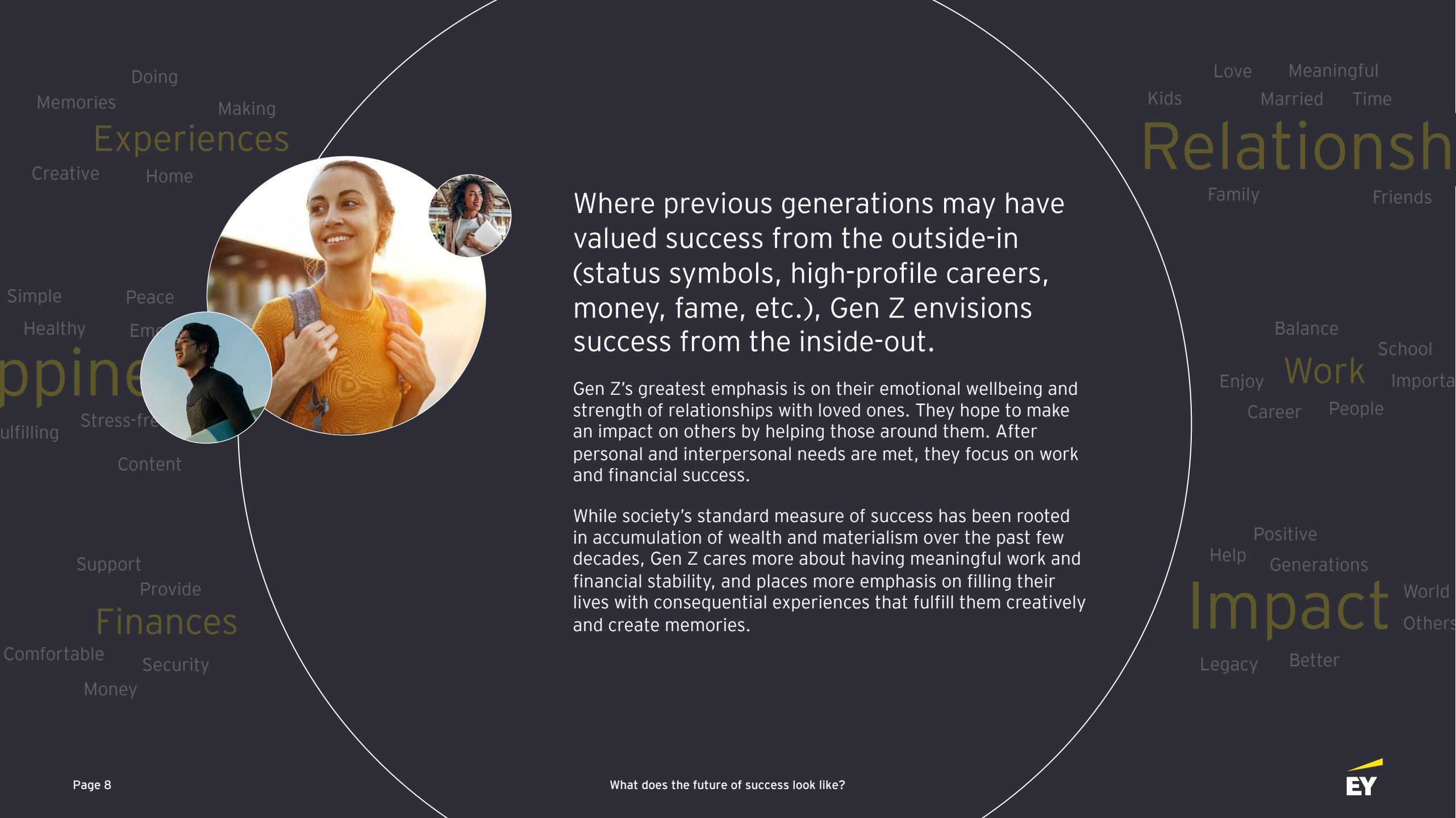
advancements of women in the workplace. Gen Z is also not backing down, and insists on becoming part of the solution toward a better tomorrow.

[Read more about Gen Z's activism in the EY 2020 Gen Z Segmentation Report.](#) →

Making a difference is no longer something they are working toward outside of work. Now, it's why they work. They are motivated to create impact in every aspect of their lives.

We asked our Gen Z panel to tell us the dreams they hold for themselves. Their most common responses are captured here.





Experiences



Where previous generations may have valued success from the outside-in (status symbols, high-profile careers, money, fame, etc.), Gen Z envisions success from the inside-out.

Gen Z's greatest emphasis is on their emotional wellbeing and strength of relationships with loved ones. They hope to make an impact on others by helping those around them. After personal and interpersonal needs are met, they focus on work and financial success.

While society's standard measure of success has been rooted in accumulation of wealth and materialism over the past few decades, Gen Z cares more about having meaningful work and financial stability, and places more emphasis on filling their lives with consequential experiences that fulfill them creatively and create memories.

Relationships

Family Friends

Balance

Work

Enjoy Career People

Positive

Help Generations

Impact

Legacy Better

Section 1 – Personal

Creating a successful life

Gen Z isn't beholden to society's expectations of conformity. Their pragmatic outlook and desire for authenticity will influence their approach to reaching milestones in their personal lives.

1 Education

2 Finances

3 Home ownership

4 Family life

Education: Will college still be the standard?

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, Gen Z was on track to become the most educated generation in history, with higher high-school graduation rates and lower dropout rates than those who came before. Will societal pressures to attend college still prevail, or will financial concerns make college a nonstarter for many?

“

I'm the guy wearing running shoes, next to the guy running barefoot – we're both running from a bear. We're both in trouble, but I feel a little bit more confident.

23-year-old male screenwriter from California
on facing the job market with or without a degree

Since the pandemic, college enrollment rates have dropped.

Prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of young people enrolled in undergraduate and advanced degrees were at their highest in history. Receiving a college degree was perceived as the first stepping stone to guarantee future success in life.

That perception might be shifting slightly, two years after the pandemic took hold. Compared to the fall of 2019, undergraduate enrollment has fallen a total of 6.6% in the United States, the largest two-year decrease in more than 50 years. This sustained decrease leaves many wondering if the perception of college as a necessity to ensure success has shifted among Gen Z.

57%

57% of 18- to 21-year-olds (Gen Z) were enrolled in college in 2018, compared with 52% of Millennials and 43% of Gen X when they were at a similar age.

Source: Pew Research Center

The societal pressure still exists that they *have* to go to college to succeed.

Despite enrollment dropping over the past few pandemic years, the societal pressure to go to college after high school still exists for Gen Z. This social norm is being upheld by their parents, communities and the media. This may stem from the prevalence of college degrees among their parents compared to previous generations – 44% of Gen Z said they live with a parent who has at least a Bachelor's degree, compared to Millennials' 33% at the same age. But that doesn't mean they aren't independently motivated to pursue higher education. A large driver for many in Gen Z to enroll is believing that their desired career requires a degree – so higher education is a necessary means to an end for this driven generation of doers.

Source: Pew Research Center

“

My mom has ingrained into me, 'You have to go to college.' So now I don't even know what I'm going for, but I'm going to college.

17-year-old male band kid from North Carolina

“

I don't feel too much pressure. More pressure comes from myself. This is what I want do and I'm pushing myself forward to go and complete these goals I have.

17-year-old male debate club member from New Jersey

“

I am self motivated. I don't really have a choice. I have to go to college for my career choice for my future career.

15-year-old female skateboarder from Florida

But the cost of education is still the main barrier to entry for many.

Given the rising cost of higher education and financial struggles worsened by the pandemic, many in Gen Z recognize that going to college can rack up debt that's hard to pay back, or it can just be too much time and effort for less in return. While they feel pressure to enroll, there is lessening stigma among Gen Z for those who choose other paths sans degree. The reality is for some members of Gen Z in the US today, it is hard to imagine the possibility of going to college strictly due to finances.

“

College isn't necessarily the fastest way to success. It's more about doing what you're most passionate about and what's something that you could be consistent with.

21-year-old male law student from Ohio

“

Going, 'Oh, you didn't go to college? So you're going to be failure,' is like the height of elitist snobbery in my opinion. And I strive never to be like that.

23-year-old male screenwriter from California

“

I've seen many people who've done very well for themselves without a college education, just drive and motivation and being hungry and eager to want more for themselves.

23-year-old female realtor from California



Finances: How is Gen Z working to ensure a financially stable future?

While past generations focused on building wealth through a traditional “job” or “career,” Gen Z focuses on earning enough to secure financial stability, often through multiple streams of income by the time they enter high school. The “monetization generation” has figured out ways to earn money creatively and judiciously. Now they want to be smart with what they do with it.

Gen Z is creatively finding new opportunities to make money.

From reselling clothing to freelance creative services to DIY craft businesses, Gen Z finds ways to make extra money – and technology has only made it easier. While adolescent jobs are not new (think babysitting, lawn services or newspaper routes), Gen Z has employed digital access points to profit off a much larger network of society, making extra spending money or saving toward that level of financial security they need.

“

The money I make in my full-time job is not enough. Inflation is real and spiking at unreal rates. Job salaries are not keeping up with it. There is a huge gap to fill for sure. Making money outside of my full-time job makes me feel more confident about meeting my financial goals. It also helps to keep brushing my skills on different topics and gives me exposure.

24-year-old male tech enthusiast from Utah

“

Economic diversity! It's always good to diversify where your money comes from so that if one source depletes, you'll still have the others. Also, there are a lot of ways to make quick money on the side, so you might as well take advantage of those!

18-year-old male pilot from California



Gen Z is helping drive new sectors of industry.

Gen Z is savvy when they spend their money – and are using their know-how to drive new sectors of industry like resale, reuse, rental and sharing into mass adoption.

Pre-Owned

Items like clothing, books and furniture are frequently bought pre-owned. However, they're hesitant to trust the quality, especially of second-hand tech.

“

Buying something pre-owned can help with preventing things from going to waste by finding a better use for them... Upcycling and recycling, when you can, are both great methods of helping out the planet and your community.

15-year-old female skateboarder from Florida

Rented or Shared

Short-term use items are frequently rented or shared, like textbooks, scooters and rideshare. This also gives them the ability to change their mind. In the city, renting or sharing is much more common because of the ease of access and lack of storage.

“

I think [renting] is just a much better way of using resources. Just sharing instead of everyone having this mindset of needing to own things. But in reality, you probably don't use things as often as you think you will.

24-year-old female second grade teacher from Montana

71%

A large majority (71%) of Gen Z reported buying or having someone buy for them at least one used or pre-owned clothing item over past year.

Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Gen Z understands the value of holding on to their money.

While fighting the impulse to spend newly earned cash is often a struggle, Gen Z sees the value in saving money. Some are actively trying to limit their spending by setting aside certain days for spending or second-guessing the necessity of every purchase, but many acknowledge they could be doing better.

They're looking at their short-term spending practices and balancing that with the desire to save for their future homes and families. Creating a budget remains a skill Gen Z wants to investigate and eventually master.

“

Every time it's like, 'Okay, do I go out or not?' And if I go out one night, how much can I spend? It's very stressful trying to survive off the basic minimum.

23-year-old female student teacher from New York

“

I knew it's something that I've always had to do. I wish I was better at specifically budgeting.

24-year-old female second grade teacher from Montana

67% of Gen Z worry about not having enough money.

63% of Gen Z are savers.

28% lost their job or had someone in their family lose a job due to COVID-19.

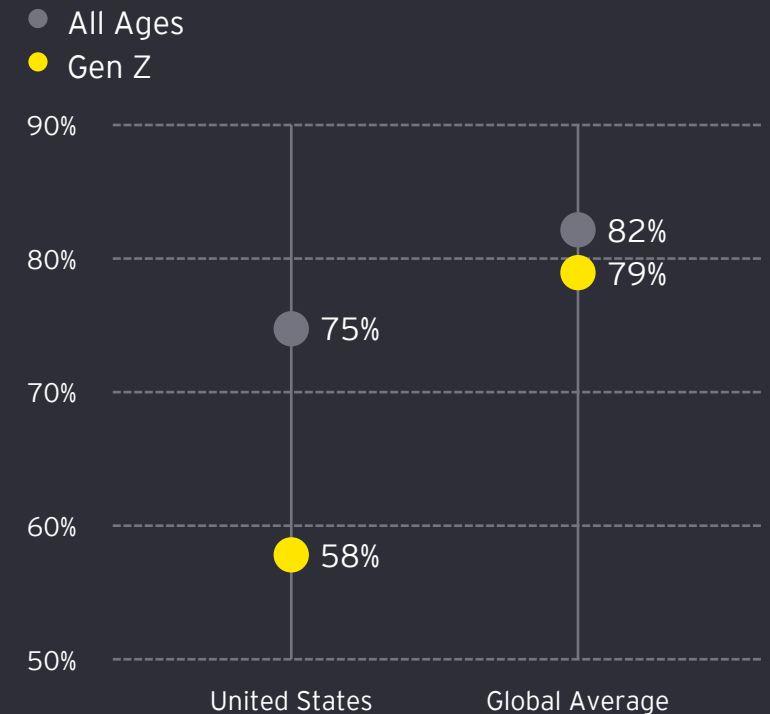
Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Financial literacy is a must-have for Gen Z ... but they don't trust traditional means.

Growing up with financially driven parents and exposure to the economic insecurity of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Great Recession, Gen Z is hyper-aware of the importance of smart financial decision-making. Over 49% of Gen Z's most affluent segment say they have "high" financial literacy, according to EY's 2022 Emerging HNW Consumer Research.

But while they worry about accumulating money, they don't trust the financial institutions that so many past generations have relied on for advice. They are actively seeking out guidance from loved ones and online experts to educate themselves. They only want to deal with organizations that "have already helped them with progressing or reaching their financial goals." But there is still hope for those looking to attract this generation of skeptics – 81% of Gen Z say personalization could deepen financial services relationships (2021 EY Global NextWave Financial Services Study).

Consumers who completely or mostly trust their primary financial relationship (PFR), Gen Z and US vs. all



Source: [2021 EY Global NextWave Financial Services Study](#)

Note: All participants surveyed here are between 18-64 years old. Gen Z was indicated as age 18-24 at the time of this survey.

“

Everything was a foreign language to me. Over time, listening to [financial news] every day, it became normal. It grew on me to the point where now I understand what they're talking about and what's going on. It just started small from getting up every day and dedicating myself to say, 'I'm going to learn something every day until I understand what's going on.'

23-year-old female realtor from California

They are eager to invest what they can.

Many in Gen Z see investing as a crucial step toward providing for a stable future. It's easier than it has ever been to get started in growing their wealth – even if it's a small amount at this point in their lives. Real estate and the stock market appeal to Gen Z as good investments, whereas the newness of cryptocurrency and other digital investments have drawn both intrigue and skepticism.

“

I have always said that I should be able to make money while I sleep, not while I'm awake. When I'm awake, I should probably be enjoying my life.

22-year-old female rideshare driver from New York

“

I think investing and saving your money is very important, regardless of how much you make.

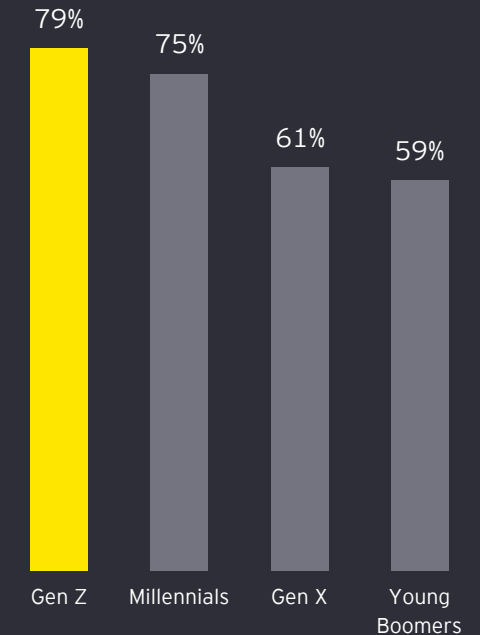
15-year-old male gamer from Georgia

“

I'm passionate about crypto, because I think with the advent of a new global financial system, you give people who never really had the opportunity before a chance to equal the playing field.

21-year-old male law student from Ohio

Individuals somewhat or very interested in learning more about investing, by generation



Source: Vanguard Digital Advisor Survey, May 2020

n=1,568 | All participants surveyed here are between 18-64 years old. Gen Z was indicated as age 18-24 at the time of this survey.

In Gen Z we continue to see a cultural shift away from the buying of things, preferring to spend money on experiences.

Gen Z is authentic and relationship-oriented in almost everything they do – and that includes spending. They prefer to spend money on experiences that create memories and connections. Most commonly, that means eating out with friends.

Future purchases are expected to be equally experiential. Gen Z sees travel as an important piece of success, along with outdoor adventures, thrill-seeking activities and live music. Even when asked what they would spend on if they won the lottery, the consistent answers were around being smart with the money and making a difference – donating to charities or helping their families.

“

When you buy something, there's immediate gratification. But down the road, it doesn't necessarily bring you as much joy as an experience.

20-year-old female nursing student from Minnesota

“

I think oftentimes we get caught up in that consumerism and material things. I don't think that that makes you happy.

24-year-old female nutritionist from New York



Home ownership: What does Gen Z think about their home of the future?

With the housing market becoming more expensive than ever, does Gen Z feel home ownership is important or achievable?

“

It's just having a place where it's yours. This is your home. This is your peace. This is your safe haven from everything that's going on with the world. And it's claiming that it's yours. Nobody could take it.

24-year-old female nursing student from Texas

Beyond an asset, a home is their source of stability.

While Gen Z sees the logical, financial value of owning a home and having an asset to pass on to their family, more are concerned with the emotional security and stability a home provides. It's a safe haven.

In contrast with renting, Gen Z finds it important that they can make a home their own and have something no one can take from them. They also see it as a symbol of success.

“

Owning a home is really important for me because having a central place you can return to, I think, has so much emotional and financial value.

24-year-old female second-grade teacher from Montana

“

I like to see it from an investment point of view. Owning a home is something that you can pass on to your loved ones in case anything happens.

21-year-old male law student from Ohio





They are optimistic that they'll own a home ... *eventually*.

While the current home-buying market is difficult, Gen Z remains confident in themselves that they will reach this milestone. With this generation's curiosity about finances and disposition for planning, don't underestimate them. While many might not yet have the financial capacity to buy a home, the intent is there.

“

I think honestly it's mostly achievable. I'm just worried about not being able to afford it. But I don't plan to get a super huge house. So I don't really think it's super unachievable. Maybe it's just not as early as I want it to be.

17-year-old female TikTok microinfluencer from New Jersey

Where will they gravitate? Urban, suburban or rural?

It depends. Gen Z wants to live where they personally will feel most secure - for some that means the fast pace of city life, for others the quiet of rural or suburbia. City living brings lots of job opportunities, a variety of activities, walkability and the ability to meet people. However, the suburbs are seen as a balance between the convenience of the city, but quieter and less expensive.

It's not surprising that this diverse generation has divergent views on where they want to see themselves starting their futures.

“

I currently live in the city and I really like it. I love the interesting people, the walkability, and the events that are hosted.

19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia

“

I would like to live in the suburbs because it is the perfect balance between the city and a rural location. Specifically, it is not completely isolated, but it also isn't completely packed like the city often is.

23-year-old male screenwriter from California



Family life: How is Gen Z shifting the norms around marriage and children?

Gen Z places heavy emphasis on relationships and loved ones – so how do they see romantic relationships and children playing a part in their vision of a successful life?

“

I think love is important to everyone. I don't think that's a super difficult thing to understand. Everyone wants love in some way, shape or form.

16-year-old male musician from Georgia

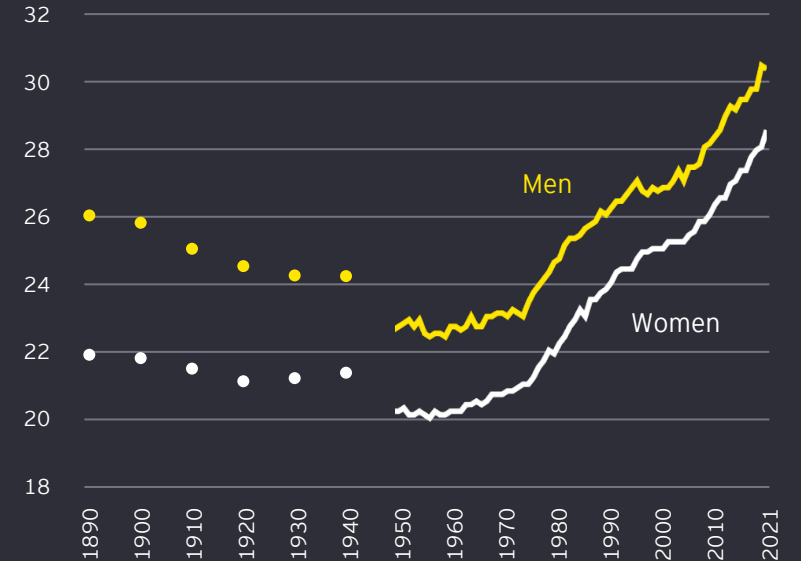
Gen Z feels the power to decide whether marriage and children are right for them.

With every passing generation, Americans are getting married and having kids at an older age. In 2019, men and women got married for the first time at 30 and 28 respectively. In 1960, the average ages were 23 and 20.

Gen Z is not making decisions based on the expectations passed down from previous generations. They are evaluating their personal circumstances and belief systems when choosing to build a family.

Source: Pew Research Center

Median age at first marriage, from 1950 to present



Source: US Census Bureau, Decennial Censuses, 1890 to 1940, and Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplements, 1947 to 2021.

Note: Starting in 2019, estimates for marriages now include same-sex marries couples.

Is the traditional commitment of marriage outdated?

Less than half of Gen Z says marriage is very or extremely important, with the ideal age being 27. But if Gen Z places so much emphasis on meaningful relationships, why aren't more prioritizing marriage as part of their future?

A majority take the commitment of marriage seriously

Gen Z experiences the challenges of modern dating and sees examples of the unhappy relationships around them, so you can see why they're afraid to make a bad choice. This fear leads Gen Z to look at marriage as a nice-to-have, but not always a necessity.

“

I have no pressure on getting married. I don't see it as a priority right now.

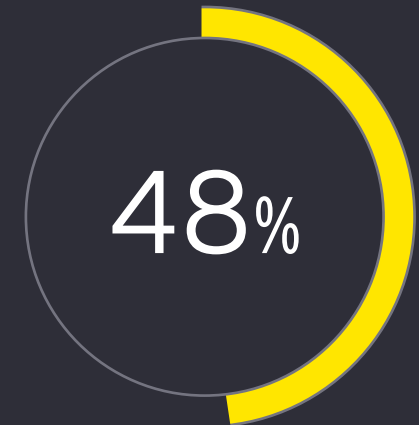
19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia

“

I think I'm a bit jaded with dating after using all these dating apps.

24-year-old male marketer from New York

It is very or extremely important to get married someday



Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Q: How important is it to you to get married someday?
n=1,469 | The 3% who are already married are excluded from this analysis.

Q: At what age would you most like to get married?
n=1,297 | The 3% who are already married are excluded from this analysis.

But some distrust the legal contract and cost

Things like being legally bound in a government contract, paying for a wedding, taking a new last name – are losing meaning with many Gen Z. Marriage, for some, is viewed as a piece of paper and an excuse to have a party. This doesn't mean they don't want deep, committed relationships, just that the traditional symbolism of marriage isn't a requirement.

Even though the idea of a life partner is still very much valued

Gen Z wants to share their life with someone – to not be lonely. They like the idea of having a stable partner to rely on and grow together with.

“

I've always thought a marriage as an excuse to throw a party, because it's really just a piece of paper and you're still in the same relationship that you were in before.

19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia

“

Having a life partner to basically share your life and all of your experiences and everything with is very important and it helps you grow as a person as well.

24-year-old male tech enthusiast from Utah

“

I don't want to be lonely when I'm older. I want to be able to have someone who I can give myself over to and who will give themselves over to me to share ideas of life.

18-year-old male pilot from California

Gen Z has mixed views on raising a family.

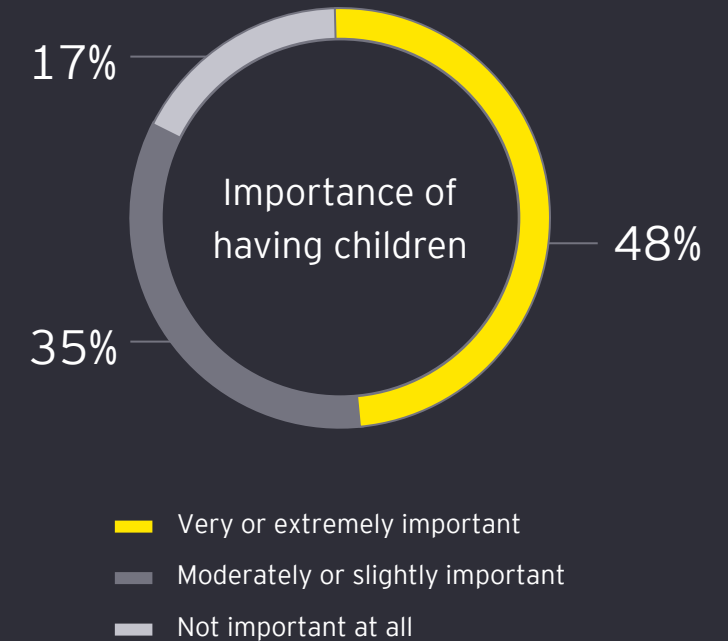
According to the [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#), less than half of Gen Z say it is very or extremely important to have children, with the median age to start having children being 30.

Many have a strong desire for children.

Those who are more passionate about having children see them as a big part of the future vision for their life. They often grew up in a very family-oriented way and want to pass on what their parents taught them.

Timing is key.

Members of Gen Z are hoping to achieve different milestones before having children, varying from 'Once I finish my education,' to a more elusive 'When I feel settled.' These are indicators of stability that enable them to feel ready to begin a family, once they feel financially and work-life ready. They also just don't want to mess it up. They prioritize their mental health when considering big decisions.



Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Q: How important is it to you to have children someday?
n=1,457 | The 3% who already have children are excluded from this analysis.

Q: At what age would you most like to have children?
n=1,209 | The 3% who already have children are excluded from this analysis.

Existential concerns diminish the desire for children.

The most common reason given for planning not to have children was the state of the environment. 81% of Gen Z believe climate change is a medium or large problem. Add on the expense of having children and it's easy for them to justify not bringing children into the world.

Some are still unsure.

For those sitting on the fence, again the most common reason was the environment.

Interestingly, participants who said they don't want their own children or who are undecided about having children still want to find ways to support the next generation, through activities like foster care, coaching or mentoring.

Source: 2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study

“

If we're going to see more natural disasters, more devastation, and more environmental changes, what's the point of bringing in more kids into the world if it's not going to be pleasant?

24-year-old female second-grade teacher from Montana

“

I like committing to goals, but I don't like committing to life. Having a child? That's commitment in the most extreme sense because that will always be your child.

19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia

“

With kids, not everyone wants kids. And I'm all right with having kids if my partner ever really wants one.

16-year-old male musician from Georgia

Section 2 – Professional

The role of work in a successful life

Gen Z has benefited from unprecedented shifts in work culture along with broader society, giving them the confidence to voice how, why and who they want to work for.

- 1 Motivation
- 2 Leadership and values
- 3 Balance and flexibility

Motivation: What does Gen Z value in a career?

A healthy salary isn't the only thing to consider when hiring Gen Z. They're motivated by a deeper set of values, impact and purpose.

“

I want to enjoy my work. I feel like I've heard stories where people only chase after money and not happiness in their work and they dread every day trying to wake up and go to work.

15-year-old male short film director from Tennessee

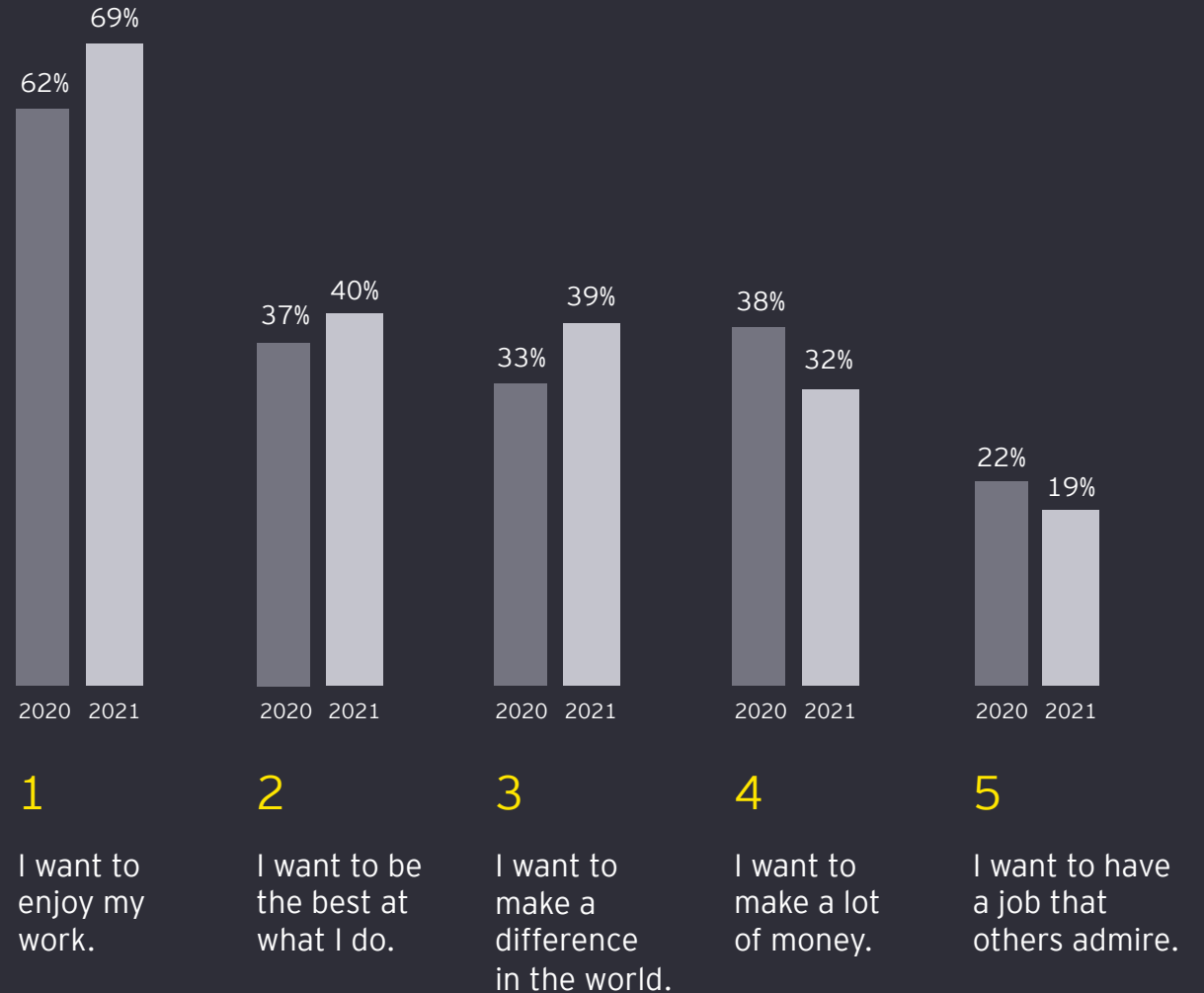
Gen Z prioritizes a fulfilling career over making a lot of money or having prestige.

While we saw a shift in Millennial behavior toward seeking careers of passion (especially creative side hustles), Gen Z also wants a career that has meaning. However, Gen Z's pragmatism grounds them in the belief that they will have to work hard to achieve the purposeful work life they desire. They do not expect to do well without putting in the effort to succeed.

Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Q: What is most important to you in a future job or career? Please rank EACH of the following statements with 1 being the most important to you in a future job or career, 2 being the next most important, and so on.
2021 n=1,509 | 2020 n=2,054

Gen Z work priorities ranked



I want to enjoy my work.

1

2

3

4

5

Gen Z wants to enjoy what they do. At least, they don't want to hate getting out of bed.

Enjoying work is the highest career priority for Gen Z. They don't want to spend their time doing something they aren't passionate about. Enjoying their work empowers them to perform at their highest and contribute fully. Enjoyment comes from the people they work with and the general field they choose.

Not everyone prioritizes enjoying work over tangible benefits like money. A smaller segment of Gen Z takes a more realistic view that work will always be work – and sometimes money is simply more important.

“

I want what I'm doing to bring a smile to my face every day. I don't want it to be just purely for money, because that's when you start to develop a toxic relationship with money.

21-year-old male law student from Ohio

“

I love what I study and I'm really looking forward to what I'll do. And I think that's going to make a big impact on my success and how I approach my job every day.

24-year-old female nutritionist from New York

“

I want there to be at least a degree of passion for what I do, but at the same time, some days you are just going to sit down and hate life. And, you know, that's just kind of how it is.

23-year-old male screenwriter from California

I want to be the best at what I do.

1 2 3 4 5

Gen Z doesn't have to *be* the best, but they want to *do* their best.

Work ethic has become a connective trait of Gen Z, both from those who have already entered the workforce, and those preparing ahead in school to succeed. Gen Z associates this drive as a reflection of their character. They recognize someone else will always be better and there's always more to learn – but showing up and being reliable, that's what matters.

“

If you're going to do something, do it right and give it your all. That's what I believe.

23-year-old female realtor from California

“

It's not really my goal to be better than everyone. Obviously, I'll work hard to be the best that I can be, but [being the best] is not my goal as a nurse.

20-year-old female nursing student from Minnesota

“

I think [being the best is] impossible. Really. It's not a great mentality to have in the first place, because then it limits your growth.

23-year-old female student teacher from New York

I want to make a difference in the world.

1 2 3 4 5

Gen Z wants to make an impact, even if it's small or indirect.

Gen Z seeks to make a difference in the world through the work that they do. It can be direct impact such as empowering or healing someone. Or it can be indirectly impactful through something they've helped create or a service they can provide.

Being able to make a difference is why some are choosing the specific field they are, have left jobs in the past, or see entrepreneurship as an important opportunity.

“

I feel like as a person, it's kind of like my duty to, in one way or another, try and impact the world in a positive way. And I think a good way of doing that through like my career in some way.

17-year-old male sneaker collector from North Carolina

“

I was learning a lot on [at my previous job]. All of the experience was great, but I was not really making an impact on anything. And that's why I made the shift to a service-oriented industry.

24-year-old male tech enthusiast from Utah

I want to make a lot of money.

1 2 3 4 5

Gen Z requires enough income to be comfortable.

Gen Z seeks stability. They don't all desire lavish luxuries or fame – they are more inclined to lean toward a modest idea of the future. If they can afford the things they want (like the ability to travel or raise a family) and not have to worry about money, they will count it a success.

“

I don't think money defines who you are. Obviously, it's important. And I would love to be successful, but I think money also brings bad with it.

24-year-old female nutritionist from New York

“

I do want to make a lot of money one day. I don't know how I feel about that sentiment because I shouldn't necessarily lust for money, but the plain fact is that you need a lot of money to make more money and sustain that.

21-year-old male law student from Ohio

“

I do want to make a lot of money. A lot of my motivation stems from my childhood and having a lack thereof. So, because of that, it motivates me to want more as a young adult and as a woman, to be able to have resources, to do what I want without having to worry about the cost.

23-year-old female realtor from California

I want to have a job that others admire.

1 2 3 4 5

To Gen Z, it doesn't matter if others admire what they do. It matters more what they think of themselves.

Being admired for their work was hands down the lowest priority among Gen Z. They're not looking for outside approval, rather they seek internal satisfaction. But still, they expect to be valued and respected within their workplace by peers and leadership.

“

I don't really care what anybody else thinks about the job I have. If someone doesn't like the job I have, like that's their problem, not mine.

17-year-old female TikTok microinfluencer from New Jersey

“

I really don't think it matters that you have a job that others respect. I think it's a job that YOU respect that matters the most.

19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia

“

The people you end up spending a lot of your life with come from work. So, I feel like if I go into a job where I respect and admire the people around me, I'll also be respected and admired.

17-year-old male varsity athlete from Maryland

But Gen Z is not a monolith. Work priorities still vary by segment.

[Read more about Gen Z segmentation in the 2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study.](#) →



Stressed Strivers (35%)

These workers prioritize being the best, being admired and making a difference. However, they place the lowest priority of all segments on enjoying their work and are less concerned with making a lot of money.

Their work priorities ranked:

1. Be the best
2. Be admired
3. Make a difference
4. Enjoy my work
5. Make a lot of money



Authentic Activists (22%)

The purpose of their work is genuinely to make a difference. They want to enjoy what they do, but they're not in it for the admiration or the money.

Their work priorities ranked:

1. Enjoy my work
2. Make a difference
3. Be the best
4. Be admired
5. Make a lot of money



Secluded Perfectionists (20%)

Secluded Perfectionists place a decisive emphasis on enjoying their work and being the best. They're not seeking recognition or admiration for their work. But they do want to make a difference - and a lot of money.

Their work priorities ranked:

1. Enjoy my work
2. Be the best
3. Make a difference
4. Make a lot of money
5. Be admired



Big Dreamers (18%)

They want to do something they enjoy and make a lot of money, but they aren't putting in as much effort as other segments. They are also the segment that is least focused on making a difference through their work.

Their work priorities ranked:

1. Enjoy my work
2. Make a lot of money
3. Be the best
4. Be admired
5. Make a difference



Carefree Constituents (5%)

While their work rankings roughly mirror the Big Dreamers, they are more evenly distributed across these work values which, true to form, shows their priorities are still being formed.

Their work priorities ranked:

1. Enjoy my work
2. Make a lot of money
3. Be admired
4. Be the best
5. Make a difference

Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Leadership and values: Who does Gen Z want to work for?

Gen Z is looking for employers who share their values, empathetic bosses who reward hard work, and teams that are social and competent. Their enterprising spirit gives them an entrepreneurial mindset, even if they choose to work for others.

“

I want a boss that is so good at leading that I don't even realize they're my boss. Most importantly, though, I want to work under someone who inspires and motivates me to produce high-quality work. I want to enjoy what I do and who I work with.

18-year-old male pilot from California

They want employers who share their values.

Gen Z is searching for companies that respect their employees and share their values. As such, they expect to see an authentic and sustained commitment to sustainability and human rights from their employers. Gen Z wants to be aligned with the mission of the company, and they believe they will do better work if their values align.

Environmental

Gen Z wants companies to commit to sustainable practices. They want their offices to conserve energy and reduce waste. They believe products should be manufactured with processes that do as little damage as possible to the Earth.

“

I don't want [my company] to completely disregard it and just say 'It's not any of our concern.' We're not going to have this world one day if we don't take care of it right now.

15-year-old male short film director from Tennessee

Social

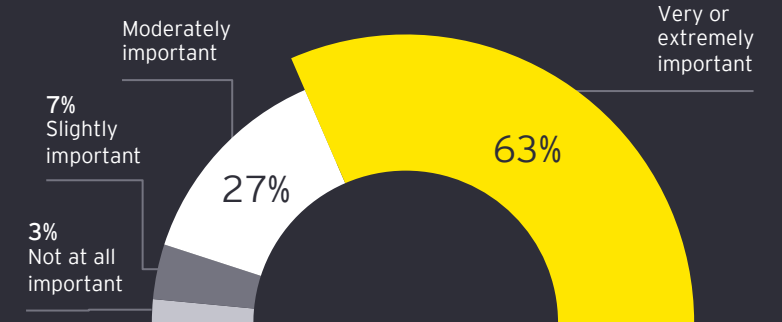
Gen Z says they can't work for companies that are doing significant harm in the world. Some refuse to work at perceived racist or anti-LGBTQ+ companies. They're against working at organizations that support corrupt politicians or governments with oppressive human rights track records.

“

I'm not going to work for a place that I know is racist. I'm not going to work for a place that I know is homophobic.

17-year-old female TikTok microinfluencer from New Jersey

Importance of sharing values with an employer



Nearly two-thirds (63%) of Gen Z want to work for an employer that shares their values.

Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

Politics should be left at home - unless we're talking about environmental and social issues.

Gen Z doesn't consider climate change and human rights to be political – they are united in their belief that these issues need to be addressed, regardless of political affiliation. But for the issues they do see as political, they don't think they need to be discussed in the workplace. They expect their coworkers to have varying political orientations and prefer to avoid conflicts at work arising from clashing opinions.

“

LGBT rights is not political. Well, it is, but it shouldn't be. That's just taken as human rights.

17-year-old male band kid from North Carolina

“

The country's been so divided for so long now, life goes on. You can be one party and work for [people who support] some other party and you're still gonna get paid at the end of the day.

17-year-old male varsity athlete from Maryland

“

So, politically I don't care. I really don't. Unless you are politically incorrect. Now there is a difference, right? I will not stand for that.

15-year-old female skateboarder from Florida



Gen Z wants leadership that trusts them and rewards their hard work.

Thanks to smartphones, this digitally connected generation has grown up with full access to an adult world. They enter the workforce as seasoned creatures of the world, versus the wide-eyed newbies of generations past. They were raised by parents who treated them as advocates and equals – versus sheltering or overprotecting – monitoring, assessing and course-correcting as needed.

Gen Z expects to work for leaders who advocate on their behalf and are dedicated to helping them grow. Recognition at work is important to Gen Z, especially when it means they are seen as humans and not just worker bees.

Having a healthy relationship with their leaders is important to Gen Z because they believe it dictates how comfortable they will feel in their work. They want to have mutual respect with their bosses, where they can talk freely about anything and are trusted to do their work without excessive oversight.

“

I would like a boss who is passionate about the work and recognizes the hard work of their employees.

23-year-old female student teacher from New York

“

I would like my future boss to be one of my biggest supporters. I think having a great relationship with them and them being there for me.

20-year-old female nursing student from Minnesota

Teams can make or break their experience.

To Gen Z, the relationship between coworkers can be just as or more important than the overall company culture. While some may say people don't quit companies, they quit bosses – we venture to say they quit bad teams.

Gen Z is incredibly relationship-driven and, when it makes sense, they want their future work to be collaborative among people they can see as friends. They want to know they can trust their teammates to pull their own weight, especially after frustrating experiences working with groups in school. When it comes to workplace culture, they expect to feel comfortable and treated with empathy and dignity.

“

I'm not loyal to organizations as that is shown to not be a good game plan. But being "loyal" to people in a certain sense has dividends. These personal and/or professional relationships can keep you somewhere for longer versus not having any friends at work.

24-year-old male marketer from New York

“

I want to work with a big team that is all like super close and we all contribute and bring something unique to the table.

18-year-old male pilot from California



Their enterprising spirit motivates some to work for themselves - or at least find companies that encourage entrepreneurial thinking.

Gen Z's interest in entrepreneurialism has risen since the start of the pandemic, but their need for financial stability and security might impede them from actually branching off and starting their own business. We've already seen that Gen Z knows how to make money outside of a "normal" job like creative digital selling or exploring new investing opportunities. A large number want to take that self-starter attitude into their place of work, if allowed the opportunity to thrive without the typical rigid boundaries of the traditional workplace.

“

I see myself working somewhere where I can work with people, but also kind of be my own boss.

19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia

“

[Getting my pilot's license], I did that all on my own. I started when I was 15 and by 17 I had worked to fund it. It cost me like \$25,000 in the end.

18-year-old male pilot from California

45%

Almost half (45%) of Gen Z report being very or extremely likely to start their own business.

Source: [2021 EY Gen Z Segmentation Study](#)

To Gen Z, entrepreneurship would offer control, stability and purpose in their work...

Control

Gen Z is attracted to the independence that comes from being their own bosses. With control comes the flexibility of where, when and how they work.

“

I do see myself starting off, maybe putting in more hours, but as time goes by and I get more experience under my belt, I wouldn't have to constantly be there and I can be more flexible with my schedule.

23-year-old female realtor from California

Stability

If they own a successful business, they assume they will be financially stable, and therefore can have more balance in their lives.

“

One of my moonshot goals is to accumulate enough wealth to eventually quit my 9-to-5 and open a coffee shop somewhere and just like chill, but still have some sort of revenue stream.

24-year-old male marketer from New York

Purpose

Gen Z is drawn to work that is meaningful to them and that has a positive impact on the world, even if they have to create it for themselves.

“

I do really have a goal to be self-sustained. I don't want to be employed by someone else forever. And I really enjoy the idea of creating opportunity for people.

21-year-old male law student from Ohio



...but the weight of all the responsibility falling on their shoulders scares them.

Gen Z is overwhelmed by the stress and responsibility of being an entrepreneur. They're concerned with the huge financial risk required to get a business up and running. For some, being an entrepreneur requires a specific personality that isn't authentic to who they are.

It's not for everyone. Some members of Gen Z are simply content with working for other companies, where the promise for a good income and stability is far less risky than going off and doing it on their own. But they will bring their desire for control, stability and purpose with them to those companies, regardless of whose name is on the building.

“

The first few years getting started, he took no salary whatsoever. And everything he earned went back into business. Like, you do have to make a lot of sacrifices.

17-year-old male varsity athlete from Maryland

“

You also have to get support from investors, and you have to ask people to believe in you. And that's very scary to me.

19-year-old female amateur chef from Georgia



Balance and flexibility: Weighing personal and professional priorities

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced the masses to flexible working models. Are they here to stay?

“

I want to have some degree of work-life balance... because otherwise what's the point of getting all this money and trying to acquire a degree of financial freedom and stability, if you can't ever relax and spend time with people who are important to you?

23-year-old male screenwriter from California



Because Gen Z is so driven to succeed, balance can be a struggle to achieve.

The value they place on experiences, relationships and family outweighs the value they place on work, yet many in Gen Z struggle to “disconnect.” They are hard-wired to get ahead in life and continuously concerned about their financial security. Providing flexibility in where and when they work can empower Gen Z to find the balance that works for them.

“

Balance is something that I'm really working on at the moment. School can be really stressful and then working part-time on top of that and all these other things you commit to, it can be really hard to find that balance. But when I do, I really feel my best.

24-year-old female nutritionist from New York

“

Obviously, I want to work hard and do my job, but I don't want it to take over every single thing that I do. I shouldn't have to work 70-hour weeks. There should be a balance between fun on the weekends and working hard during the week.

17-year-old male sneaker collector from North Carolina

How does Gen Z feel about working from home?

With WFH mandates changing daily from company to company, Gen Z appreciates the benefits to both working from home (flexibility, productivity, downtime) as well as in-person (social connection, collaboration, creativity). One-size-fits none. While some are staunchly on one side or the other, a growing segment want the ability - and control - to choose to do both.

Why offer a work-from-other option?

Gen Z wants to feel comfortable in their work environment. Working from home option gives them the freedom to work from anywhere. They can be more productive, gaining focused time. They want to be close to their friends and family without sacrificing their career path.

“

[I prefer] writing at home because I like where I live. I have my dogs, I have a couch. I can listen to music without worrying about bothering people. I like having a degree of familiarity.

23-year-old male screenwriter from California

Why offer an in-person option?

For some, working or schooling from home hasn't given Gen Z the structure they say they need to be productive. The social and collaboration aspect of work is important to many Gen Z, and some suggest team bonding isn't as strong virtually.

“

I think face-to-face connection is vital to creativity. Without in-person connections, we'd never get to know the real personalities of our peers.

18-year-old male pilot from California



Where is the nine-to-five workday headed?

Gen Z isn't outright saying they want to radically change up the hours worked in a traditional workday. They just want a say in when they work. When given the opportunity to work consistent hours that coworkers also have or to work anytime if they reach deadlines, Gen Z is relatively split.

Why do they want a flexible schedule?

Gen Z wants the freedom to choose how they structure their day, especially if they plan on raising a family. They believe this flexibility would allow them to be less stressed with work.

“

I feel completing the job properly is more important than how it's done. I want to have the freedom to choose when I work and not be constricted to certain hours.

15-year-old male gamer from Georgia

Why do they want a consistent schedule?

Those wanting to keep traditional hours like the structure to hold them accountable. It helps them separate their work and their personal lives and feel like a part of a team.

“

Routine, even if I hate it, is necessary for me if I intend to accomplish anything. Though working whenever I want with deadlines sounds like a dream, I likely wouldn't get much done and would feel anxious and frustrated all the time.

15-year-old female skateboarder from Florida



A man with a beard, wearing a light blue denim shirt over a white t-shirt, is focused on adjusting a component of a large, white and blue industrial robot arm. He is holding a white rectangular object, possibly a control panel or a part of the robot. The background is a blurred industrial workshop with various tools hanging on a wall.

Gen Z is ready to get to work. Are you?

Like it or not, Gen Z is coming. They are beginning to enter the workforce and their purchasing power and influence are only increasing. If your organization doesn't listen to their voice and prepare for their high expectations, what do you risk? But if you listen and take action, what could you gain?

Why does this matter?

Gen Z: The core accelerator of societal change

Businesses looking to ready their solutions, services and workforce for what's coming next can greatly benefit from focusing on the drivers of change. Gen Z is amplifying and accelerating cultural shifts across society, technology, sustainability, economics and politics.



Why does this matter?

Continuous learning will enable security.

Higher education feels like it's not enough – or maybe it isn't the right answer at all. But Gen Z is motivated to continue learning and building on their skills to be prepared for the future. This thinking has been engrained in them practically since birth. That may come in the form of advanced degrees, or may take shape in experiential learning, on-the-job training and upskilling, or volunteer apprenticeships to satiate their quest for knowledge.



Why does this matter?

Experiences will drive spending.

Gen Z values spending money on experiential over material things. But it's not the Instagram-worthy experiences that Millennials brought to the forefront (joy, escape, fun, projecting) that they're buying - it's experiences that help them connect, learn, grow or enable wellness. Experiences that offer comfort and safety (eating out with friends) that enable them to make memories or help them grow, improve and have impact will motivate them to open their wallets.



Why does this matter?

Financial stability drives them.

They are a generation that values saving and invests time and energy into improving their financial literacy. Gen Z is striving to achieve financial stability and sees home ownership as the ultimate indicator of security and success.



Why does this matter?

A one-size-fits-all work approach fits none.

Businesses will not win if they try to control this generation – but they can help them gain control by understanding their individual values. Organizations need to focus on the team dynamics and collaboration as a winning factor in attracting and retaining.



Why does this matter?

Untraditional is the new tradition.

Gen Z doesn't feel trapped by traditional ideals. The "traditional" family timeline for marriage and children feels outdated to Gen Z, just as the traditional views of marriage (between a man and a woman, with women taking care of the household at home) feel outdated. Mental health will be a major component on when (or if) they settle into their successful life, to feel willing to share life with their partner, and give life to their future children.



Why does this matter?

Employees seek control through freedom and flexibility.

Everyone is looking for something different out of their work schedule, so it's important to give employees options to find the solution that works best for each individual. Gen Z desires the flexibility to be in control of their workday, versus succumbing to it. It is not work-life balance that they seek, but true work-life integration, and in a way that works for the individual. Think about true productivity and collaboration/teaming goals for your organization, and recognize that there is no magic hour that works for all.



Why does this matter?

Fair, quality childcare will become baseline.

Most of Gen Z have not yet been hit with the reality of the high cost and lack of options for childcare as they venture into the workforce. As both men and women equally continue entering the workforce, childcare and the health and wellbeing of children everywhere is fueled to become a become a major social movement. The next generation of children will need proactive support, even when both of their parents are an active part of the workforce. Even for Gen Z who choose not to have children, it fits their narrative on ethics and fairness. How can your organization become part of the solution, versus fueling the problem?



Why does this matter?

Empathetic leaders will empower purpose.

Finding a sense of purpose is no longer something that's done solely outside of work, but *through* their work. Leadership skills will be critical. Gen Z employees want to feel trusted, respected and recognized. What does good leadership look like? Perhaps someone who admits when they are struggling and encourages their team to do the same. Leaders who encourage mental downtime as much as they drive personal accomplishment - this is the mentorship relationship that will connect with Gen Z.



Why does this matter?

Harness their entrepreneurial spirit to unlock growth.

What could you accomplish if you harnessed Gen Z's savvy for side gigs at work in your organization? It may be possible to combine the perks of running one's own business with the stability of an established one. How might your company allow your young employees to have control in how they work? How might your company let them choose when they work? How might your company create meaningful employment where employees can make a positive, purposeful impact on their community?



Methodology

We glean insights from conversations with our 25-member panel of leading-edge Gen Z participants to provide the basis for understanding where Gen Z will go next, and anticipate the implications for all generations.

Research participants

Gender	13 men, 11 women and 1 non-binary
Race	7 White, 7 Hispanic or Latino, 6 Asian 3 Black or African American, and 2 Multiracial
LGBTQ+	14 straight, 7 bisexual, 4 genderqueer/gender-nonconforming 2 not listed, 1 gay or lesbian, 1 transgender and 1 prefer not to answer
Politics	1 very conservative, 5 conservative, 6 moderate, 8 liberal, 2 very liberal and 3 unsure

*Participants were screened to align more closely with the demographics of the Gen Z generation versus society as a whole.

Methodology

Ernst & Young LLP interviewed a sample of 25 members of Gen Z from across the United States. In-depth interviews were completed between 24 January and 2 February 2022.

To be considered a member of Gen Z, a person had to have been born between 1 January 1997 and 31 December 2007.

All quotes come from panel participants and have been edited for clarity and brevity.

[Explore more details](#) about Gen Z in our content library on EY.com.

www.ey.com/GenZ →

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