



# **WORK/LIFE**

Helping Gen Z Flourish & Find Balance



 **SPRINGTIDE RESEARCH REPORT**

# ***WORK/LIFE***

Helping Gen Z Flourish & Find Balance



**Springtide™**  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE



# A SPRINGTIDE™

## A PROMISE.



### TO YOU

... who are young; full of wonder and possibility. You who are navigating some of life's most important questions and most tumultuous waters. You who are sometimes flourishing and sometimes floundering and oftentimes both. You who are at once being and becoming.

We dedicate our work to your thriving.

We dedicate ourselves to understanding your inner and outer lives.

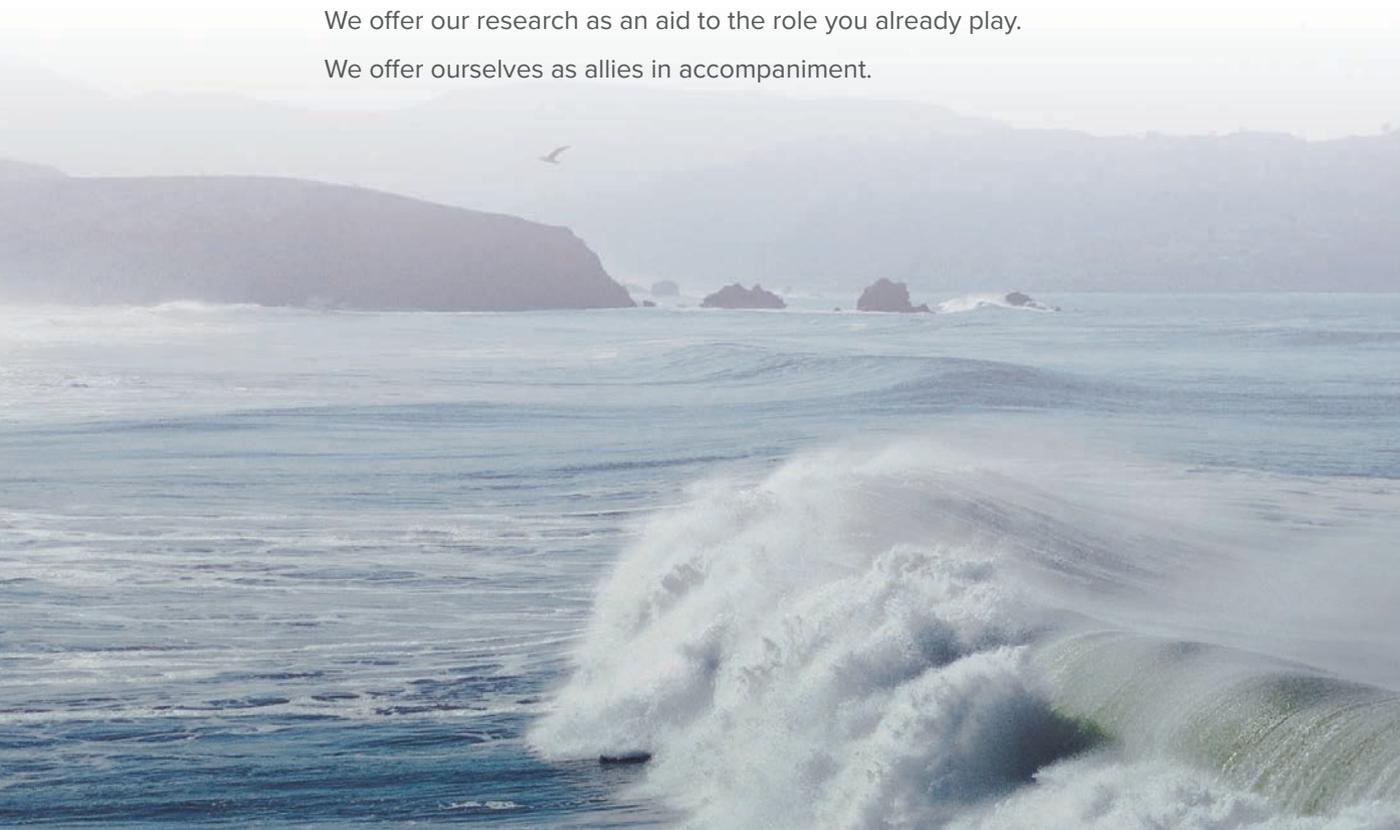


### TO YOU

... who are fiercely devoted to young people. You who advocate for and walk alongside young people with steadiness. You who are unwavering amid the waves.

We offer our research as an aid to the role you already play.

We offer ourselves as allies in accompaniment.



# TRIBUTE. A PLEDGE.



## AND TO

. . . the waves that crash, the currents that bend and beckon, the dark depths and the effervescent crests. To this all-important period of life: worthy of considered listening and faithful retelling, worthy of companionship, worthy of care.

We situate our work at this intersection of human and religious experience in the lives of young people: a space of ebb and flow, of calm and chaos, of clear and murky moments.

A space we are dedicated to exploring and engaging.



## WITH YOU.



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## OUR MISSION

Compelled by the urgent desire to listen and attend to the lives of young people (ages 13–25), Springtide Research Institute is committed to understanding the distinct ways new generations experience and express community, identity, and meaning.

We exist at the intersection of religious and human experience in the lives of young people. And we're here to listen.

We combine quantitative and qualitative research to reflect and amplify the lived realities of young people as they navigate shifting social, cultural, and religious landscapes. Delivering fresh data and actionable insights, we equip those who care about young people to care better.

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## FROM SPRINGTIDE'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The world has changed dramatically in recent years. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Generation Z was facing unprecedented alterations to the very building blocks of their social life. We've covered some of those changes (and what you can do in response) in our other work. *Belonging* is a study on loneliness and connection, *Meaning Making* is about the values that drive Gen Z, and *The State of Religion & Young People 2020* is a deep dive into the inner and outer lives of young people today. We've researched responses to social distancing and goals for political engagement. We've presented actionable data on virtual environments and holiday rituals.

Throughout our learning about 13-to-25-year-olds, though, one theme kept rising to the top: the importance of work. In our interviews with young people, our conversations with parents and trusted adults, and our research with employers, the workplace consistently emerged as a space of misunderstanding and disconnect when it comes to what young people want and need today—especially compared to their peers in previous generations.

Structural changes in the economy over the last 40 years mean that people spend more time than ever at work. This is true across the board: whether the work is rural or urban, entry-level or expert. But this uptick in working leaves workers less time and fewer resources for outside pursuits: hobbies, passions, leisure, and more. In effect, more time doing work means work has to do more.



**MORE TIME DOING  
WORK MEANS WORK  
HAS TO DO MORE.**

So it's no surprise that work is increasingly the site where people's identities are lived out. In recent decades, this shift in the basic organization of life around work means young people today are approaching work differently than their older siblings, parents, or grandparents. They may have a different expectation for work than even their employer. The days of relying on work to simply provide a paycheck, while spending free time on more fulfilling pursuits, are rapidly disappearing—if not gone already. Though they hope for more than a paycheck—including meaning, mentorship, and growth, among other things— young people today understand a paycheck as being the bare minimum of what work should provide. But the shrinking of the middle class in recent years means that more people are now working longer hours to either gain that elusive status or hold onto it. Many with lower socioeconomic status have long worked just to earn a paycheck to stay alive.



**Parents, teachers, trusted adults, *and* employers have a responsibility to not only help Gen Z find meaningful work but also help them *find meaning at work*—no matter their job.** The ability to choose a job based on the inherent meaning of the work is a privilege, but pursuing and living a life of meaning and purpose should not be.

We cannot let flourishing belong only to those who have dominant identities or who are wealthy, successful, well educated, or otherwise well resourced. Helping *all* young people to find both *meaningful work* and *meaning at work* is a way to begin making the world more just and equitable. And this is work everyone can do: parents, teachers, trusted adults, religious leaders, coaches, and employers alike.

In fact, all these people have a critical role to play, and one that's often been neglected. For too long, we have left the process of “discernment” or career planning to specialists. We rely on religious leaders to help guide a young person expressing interest in a religious profession, an accounting professor to instruct a young person thinking about becoming an accountant, a farmer to form farmers, an athlete to train athletes, and so on.

This generation is more diverse ethnically and racially and on track to be better educated than any previous generation, according to a 2018 Pew Research Center study, and they won't stay in one career. They are likely to change jobs, and even industries, nearly a dozen times in their working life.

*Work/Life* is a summation of what we've learned at Springtide about the changing nature of work for Gen Z, and how to respond to new realities and needs. We focus on work *and* life because balance between these two is a value young people tell us matters to them. In this report, we show the elements that employees need to

thrive in the workplace—mentorship, meaning, and growth—are the same elements that young people who aren't yet in the workforce need from trusted adults as they prepare for life and work. This report lays out how those elements need to be engaged at different life stages and what you can do to help the young people in your life thrive.

The task of caring for young people in this way is important, whether you're an employer or a trusted adult in the life of a teenager or young adult. The world of work has changed, and Gen Z needs adult guides who can help them flourish in work and in life—no matter what they end up doing.



**Josh Packard, PhD**



As you read and work, please drop us a line [@WeAreSpringtide](#) on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter and use the [#WorkLifeBook](#) or at [springtideresearch.org](http://springtideresearch.org), to let us know how you're helping young people flourish and find balance in their work and life.

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## INTRODUCTION

Though we often treat work and life as separate spheres, they overlap and intersect. Things like remote work and “side hustles” (the recent phenomenon of trying to turn passions into profit in “off hours”) make the line between work and life blurry. So does a shift in the way Americans think about work, which Derek Thompson describes in a 2019 *The Atlantic* article as a shift “from *jobs* to *careers* to *callings*—from necessity to status to meaning.” This shift shows up in our data. In fact, 74% of young people ages 13–25 told Springtide that it’s important that their work—whether current or future—is part of their identity, but 87% said it is important to have a life outside of work. Often life outside of one’s primary work is *more work*, as Sophie remarked in an interview with Springtide:

**I feel like just one job hasn’t been enough for me in my life right now. That’s why I’ve always done other freelance stuff.**

**—Sophie, 23**

Despite this blurry line between work and life (including work that’s chosen in the “off” hours of a regular job), young people insist they want a balance between the two. In fact:



when Springtide asked 18-to-25-year-olds what factors would need to be present for them to want to stay in a job,

**78%** told us that work/life balance is critical.

*This percentage is higher than for any of the other sixteen factors we asked about!*

**But what does it mean to flourish and find balance in work *and* in life for young people today?**

**What do they *expect* if they're not yet working, and what do they *experience* if they are?**





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## WORK & LIFE

### Personal Values & Professional Stakes

The blurring of work and life often means the blurring of the personal and the professional. For example, young people might have a presence on the internet or social media easily found by potential employers, requiring them to keep in mind how their personal life or values “look” online before ever arriving at an interview. Likewise, organizations, companies, and the people who lead them are increasingly expected to adopt what used to be considered merely personal values, rather than corporate ones. Nowadays, it’s common for companies to make public, strategic commitments to the values of their stakeholders and shareholders—commitments to things like diversity, equity, and inclusion. Responding to the cultural reaction following the killing of George Floyd in May 2020, diversity and inclusion in jobs in the US “rose 50 percent in June on Glassdoor, the largest percentage increase over a four-week period since January 2016,” Jena McGregor writes in *The Washington Post*. Companies all over the country were responding to the demand for a public demonstration of clear cultural values.

Stakeholders and shareholders—including present and future employees—also want to see their values reflected in other ways than just diversity; for example, in a company’s environmental commitments. In a 2016 *Harvard Business Review* article by Tensie Whelan and Carly Fink, the authors report:

One study found that morale was 55% better in companies with strong sustainability programs, compared to those with poor ones, and employee loyalty was 38% better. Better morale and motivation translate into reduced absenteeism and improved productivity. Firms that adopted environmental standards have seen a 16% increase in productivity over firms that did not adopt sustainability practices.

Working for organizations that reflect their values isn’t just what young employees want for their workplaces—it should matter to companies just as much. Given the impact on employee loyalty, morale, and motivation, this kind of shared value system directly impacts things like turnover and engagement. Employee engagement is one of the most important things a workplace can try to foster.

## Fostering Employee Engagement

Gallup has been tracking employee engagement (defined as employees feeling “highly involved in, enthusiastic about, and committed to their work and workplace”) for decades. Higher engagement among employees has important bottom-line consequences for companies. In the Gallup article “4 Factors Driving Record-High Employee Engagement in U.S.,” Jim Harter discusses these benefits:

In short, team members with higher levels of engagement:

- produce substantially better outcomes
- treat customers better and attract new ones
- are more likely to remain with their organization than those who are less engaged

Employee engagement doesn't come easily though. Deliberate efforts to foster engagement *must* be a priority if businesses want to succeed at this. Gallup's research about what employers can do to increase engagement largely matches Springtide's findings around flourishing, as they note (using different terms), mentorship, meaning, and growth as key factors for engagement. Though its research isn't limited to young people, Gallup notes that work relationships (especially trading the traditional "boss" role for something more like a "coach"), a sense of meaning and purpose, and opportunities for development are all important practices for increasing and maintaining employee engagement.

## The Impact of COVID-19

Employee engagement became a concern at the emergence of COVID-19, when nearly half of all workers in the US moved from in-person work to remote work. An article by May Wong highlighting Stanford economist Nicholas Bloom's research on the work-from-home phenomenon reports that in June 2020, 42% of the US labor force worked from home full-time, with about another 33% not working at all. The final 26% of workers remained on-site for work, most of which were considered essential service workers. Research on human resources practices from MIT Sloan, reported in the article "Five Ways Leaders Can Support Remote Work," found:

One-fifth of all HR leaders mentioned the general challenge of transitioning from onsite to remote work, and others listed specific concerns, including keeping remote employees engaged (17%), productive (7%), and connected (5%).

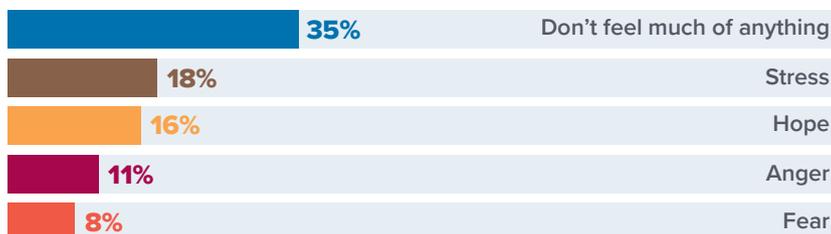
Remote work further blurs the boundaries between work and life, as young people work from their couches or kitchen counters. Those young people still showing up to workplaces during COVID-19 have no doubt also felt the merging of the personal and professional, as the individual choices of a coworker or customer (like the choice to wear a mask or not, to come in sick, to go to a party the night before) have vivid repercussions for many essential workers.

Whether essential or remote workers, whether in school or working, whether furloughed, fired, or trying to find work, most young people have been impacted by these COVID-related conditions. Many students, in particular, watched their teachers work from home while parents down the hall worked as well. And students “worked” from home on their studies, shifting to the new circumstances while the adults in their lives did the same. From kindergarten to the cusp of college graduation, students adjusted to stay safe.

## Working from Home

The working-from-home phenomenon doesn’t bother Gen Z, though. Springtide data show that thirty-five percent of young people said they don’t feel much of anything about the possibility of working from home, either now or in the future. Far fewer young people expressed negative emotions—stress (18%), anger (11%), and fear (8%)—about this possibility. Sixteen percent said the possibility of working from home made them feel hopeful.

### Feelings about the possibility of working from home



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Knowing how young people felt about working from home, we were interested in whether that matched employer expectations. To find out, we asked Angela Cain, CEO of CoreNet Global, a professional association for corporate real estate professionals. She told us that her members—the people who plan the future of office space for major corporations—are planning on working from home as a permanent part of the future of work. But she also noted some unique challenges:

What we see emerging is a hybrid approach of 3 days in the office and 2 days at home, or some version of that. The primary purpose of the office will be for collaboration and team building. This pandemic has proven that people can be productive at home, but there has got to be more flexibility at home, and that's something employers have to adapt to. But workplace culture is so important, and employers are worried about losing that. There's so much emphasis on workplace wellbeing, not just physical health, but mental health as well. So employers must be responsive to all of these things—which are sometimes in tension.

Remote work, whether full-time or some hybrid with a collaborative office space, may very well be the “new normal”—something many young people expect in future jobs. Employers must be prepared for these expectations, building resources that will keep engagement high without daily access to a workplace culture.

## The Job Market

The May 2020 graduation of four million college students coincided with one of the worst job markets since the Great Depression. A *CNN Business* article from that month describes the bleak circumstances:

National unemployment stands at a jaw-dropping 14.7%, but the rate raises to 25.7% for those aged 20–24, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. And that's before the potential workforce is boosted by those leaving college. Even for those in Generation Z who do find work, research suggests their careers and earnings will be impacted for more than a decade.

The ability to secure a job in the first place is *presumed* when young people tell us they're seeking balance in work and life, because it implies having work to balance with other aspects of life. The economic recession dramatically affecting the availability of jobs no doubt impacts the experience and expectations of Gen Z as they enter or anticipate work.



I want work to be a significant part of my life. I want to feel like I have dedicated my life to something, that I have done something meaningful. When I'm doing things that are not really elevating my career path or my path of meaning, then I'm not very happy. I think having a meaningful job means having a meaningful life, and having a meaningful life makes you feel more fulfilled and makes you feel happier. And I think happiness is what we should strive for.

—Peter, 24



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## HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE FLOURISH & FIND BALANCE

Striking the work/life balance doesn't necessarily mean leaving one's workplace at 5 p.m. to be home for dinner. It doesn't even necessarily mean leaving the night shift at 6 a.m. or the school building at 3 p.m. As we point out in the many instances of blurriness in the previous section, work extends beyond those designated times, and "life" slips into working hours. Even looking for work—filling out applications, arranging for transportation, preparing whatever materials are requested, interviewing, following-up—can be a full-time job in itself. So what does "work/life balance" look like amid these blurry lines?

For Springtide, it means that both a young person's work and their life outside of work contribute to personal and professional flourishing and well-being. We mean that they are doing their best work and being their best selves.

**THEY ARE DOING THEIR BEST WORK  
AND BEING THEIR BEST SELVES.**



Measuring these realities can be difficult, but it is possible to recognize indicators. Those who flourish tend to have a positive emotional state, a sense of vitality, optimism about the future, resilience, and healthy self-esteem. In environments conducive to flourishing, a young person will feel engaged and competent; they will have positive relationships and a sense of meaning.

## How Do We Measure Flourishing?

It's not easy to measure flourishing because the hallmarks may differ from person to person. But social scientists have come up with ways to gauge overall flourishing and have several scales that ask, in various ways and from various angles, about factors such as vitality, resilience, optimism, connection to others, self-esteem, engagement, physical health, mental health, and more. (To learn more about the research and studies we relied on when building our scale, refer to the appendix "Research Methodology," on page 72.)

To understand how young people perceive their flourishing in both work and life, we asked them about different parts of their lives: Are you flourishing in your relationships? Do you consider yourself flourishing at work? We asked them whether certain

elements that sociologists associate with flourishing (opportunities for growth, someone they can talk to about big decisions, hobbies that fulfill them, etc.) were present in their work or life. This enabled us to explore the presence or absence of these elements in the lives of those who report flourishing (or not).

Our scale for measuring flourishing proved valid: young people who have strong relationships with people who practice care (in a variety of ways), who are growth-oriented, who want to make a difference in the lives of others, and who seek meaning and purpose are more likely to report that they feel they are flourishing. Turn to pages 24–25 to see some of the breakdowns and data on flourishing.

Unsurprisingly, when we asked young people about where and when they experience aspects of flourishing, we found that it's possible and important to thrive in both work and life. **Indeed, nearly three out of every four young people agree that if they are flourishing in their life, they will flourish at work.**



**I don't have the mentality that I live to work. I definitely work in order to live. There are a lot of things that I enjoy doing outside of work, but I still want work to be challenging—challenging, but *attainable*. Interacting with my coworkers and being able to have more personal relationships with coworkers, rather than sterile work-only relationships, is very important to me. I don't like just keeping with the status quo.**

**—Brianna, 23**

Brianna expects her work to suit or serve her lifestyle, not the other way around. But she points out what she *does* expect from work: a bit of challenge, positive relationships, and what we might sum up as a sense of purpose in how she wants work to add to her life, not detract from it. Flourishing and finding balance will look different depending on the circumstances of a young person's home life and work situation, as well as their age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status. But all young people, like Brianna, need and deserve environments in both work *and* life that include opportunities for **mentorship, meaning, and growth.**

The hope that young people will flourish and find balance in *both* work and life is the reason we've written this report in two parts: Part I presents data and insights primarily for those serving the “work” part of a young person's world: hiring committees, human resource representatives, internship directors, college career services, and others. Part II explores the same needs, but with data and insights related to life outside of work, for the people who want to foster mentorship, meaning, and growth in that sphere. We encourage you to “listen in” to ways the conversation unfolds in both

parts, whether you're a parent, employer, religious mentor, recruiter, coach, or teacher. In order for Gen Z to do their best work and be their best selves, they need adults who understand what will help them flourish and find balance in work and life.

Before the analysis and application in parts I and II, though, we turn to a glimpse at the state of work and life overall in the lives of young people today. In the section that follows, we present a snapshot of the current work/life landscape for 13-to-25-year-olds. With findings and insights on expectations, experiences, flourishing, and finding balance in work and life and across demographic factors, this context lays the groundwork for how to begin thinking about flourishing and finding balance.



### **WHAT IS MENTORSHIP?**

*Mentorship* is about relationships that model what's possible and encourage the potential in young people.



### **WHAT IS MEANING?**

*Meaning* is about grasping for more, moving beyond what's expected, pursuing the big questions and living them out.



### **WHAT IS GROWTH?**

*Growth* is a disposition of curiosity and learning as well as a capacity for flexibility and adaptability.

# WORK/LIFE

## SNAPSHOT: YOUNG PEOPLE & WORK

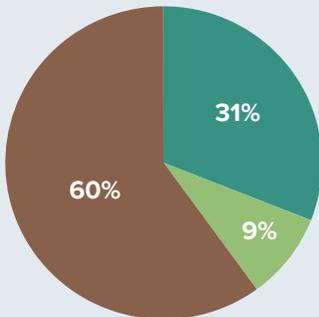
### Who's Working?

*A quick look at young people preparing for or already in the workforce today*

#### Workers by Age

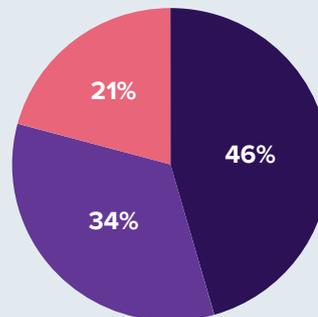
##### Ages 13–17:

- 1–30 hours/week
- 30+ hours/week
- Not working

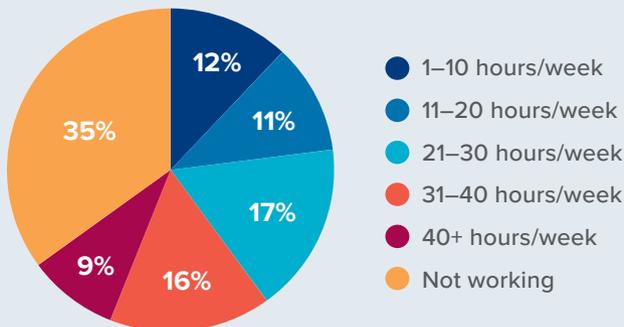


##### Ages 18–25:

- 1–30 hours/week
- 30+ hours/week
- Not working



#### Hours Worked (All Ages)



# SPRINGTIDE KEY FINDINGS

## Who's Not Working?

Work patterns vary by race:

- 30+ hours/week
- Not working

White



Hispanic or Latino



Black or African American



**About one-third** of young people say they have worked at jobs that **gave them ideas about what they'd like to do for future work or gave them insights about their capabilities.**

“

So it kind of goes back to the “life or work” sort of thing. I think I do put a lot of meaning in making sure my work has some sort of positive impact.

—Paul, 23

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**PART I**  
**WORK**



”

It's knowing that you're not just working to make money for the rest of your life and then die. I think that you need to have some fulfillment in your work, because if you don't, I mean, that's what you're spending the majority of your time doing. That just seems really sad. It's a very short life and if that's all that you've got, it's pretty depressing.

—Sophie, 23

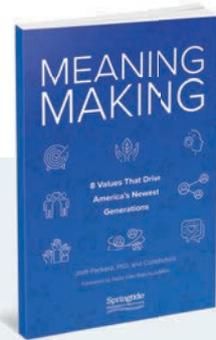
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## INTRODUCTION

Young people entering the workforce today and in the coming years are different than previous generations. This generation has watched parents lose jobs in the 2008 recession and again in the 2020 recession. The older range of Gen Z may have lost jobs and job opportunities themselves. They want mentorship, meaning, and growth from work—but they also want stability. We know from our study of values, reported in *Meaning Making: 8 Values That Drive America's Newest Generations*, that young people today want the organizations they join to reflect and uphold their personal values. So when it comes to work, many are seeking spaces that can support and sustain them.

Helping young people flourish and find balance is an important value for Gen Z *and* should be a value for the organizations they work for. Young people's morale, loyalty, and motivation all increase when their workplace reflects the values they care about most. Whether working or not yet, young people expect work/life balance and value it when choosing a job or choosing to *stay* at a job. This sense of balance is a critical part of their overall experience of flourishing. But right now, **over 1 in 4 young people who currently work (27%) report not flourishing at work.** This means retaining employees is on the line.

How can workplaces foster balance and help young people flourish? By creating opportunities for mentorship, meaning, and growth.



### ➔ MEANING MAKING

In *Meaning Making: 8 Values That Drive America's Newest Generations*, Springtide surveyed young people nationwide to discover what matters to them: what kinds of values they want to practice and uphold. The eight values highlighted in this book—accountable, inclusive, authentic, welcoming, impactful, relational, growthful, and meaningful—emerged as all-important for both young people and the organizations they join to practice and embody.

## HOW CAN WORKPLACES FOSTER BALANCE AND HELP YOUNG PEOPLE FLOURISH? BY CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MENTORSHIP, MEANING, AND GROWTH.



At work, hallmarks of **mentorship** may include coaching, caring about young employees' future, being supportive without intervening in their responsibilities, creating a space for authenticity, encouraging career advancement, and connecting as people, not just as coworkers.



Finding **meaning** in work is often associated with having a sense of purpose, feeling one belongs to something larger than one's self, and being able to live in sync with one's priorities. Meaning in work might emerge when one can serve others and make a difference, but it's not just about the nature of one's job responsibilities. An employer's values and the workplace culture are significant factors in whether a young person will find meaning in their work.



Work environments conducive to **growth** often feature regular feedback, increasing responsibilities, and new experiences, as well as many connections with colleagues. Work significantly influences young people's personal sense of identity, so their sense of flourishing and growing as a person is regularly experienced as growth in the context of their job.



**The goal of mentoring, nurturing meaning, and fostering growth is to help young people be their best and do their best.** Employers who care about these things will create environments that help young people flourish and find balance, and those who prepare Gen Z for work will help prepare young people to find such environments.



## MENTORSHIP AT WORK

Mentors foster flourishing when they help a young person feel connected, seen, encouraged, and guided when it comes to career advancement. And when young people feel invested in, they are willing to invest back. We know that 76% of young people ages 13–25 say that they want to do a good job for their employer when that employer has invested in them, and 73% of this same age demographic say they want to do better work when they know their boss cares about them.

Natasha, a woman interviewed by Springtide for this report, discussed the role a mentor had—and continues to have—in her work as a nurse and after.

**I did have a mentor during my nursing career. Susan was a nurse—she had her doctorate as a nurse practitioner and her master’s in public health. She was one of the people that noticed my passion, and she would notice if I got upset because my classmates were talking rudely about patients. We would talk, and she kind of took me under her wing; even after I graduated, we met up for lunch a couple of times. . . . She was definitely the mentor in all of this.**

**—Natasha, 23**

Natasha’s mentor did something a majority of young people express a desire for: she helped Natasha thrive professionally but also cared about her personally.

**As someone committed to helping young people flourish and find balance in the workplace, you must connect them with mentors—or be a mentor yourself.** When surveyed, 82% of young people say that it’s important that their supervisor or future supervisor helps them set performance goals and achieve them at work *and* relate to them as a person.

For many young people, mentorship and meaning (explored in depth next) are combined: they thrive and flourish at work *because* of their relationships, *because* they have the sense they belong, and *because* their connections with others are *authentic*, not just transactional. Leah, 20, told Springtide that “creating an environment where relationships are fostered is one huge way to find meaning because if you feel alone in a job, it’s way harder than if you’re doing it with others. I think that’s a huge way people find meaning. By making work more relational.”



## TIDE-TURNING TIP

As someone committed to helping young people flourish and find balance in the workplace, you must connect them with mentors—or be a mentor yourself.

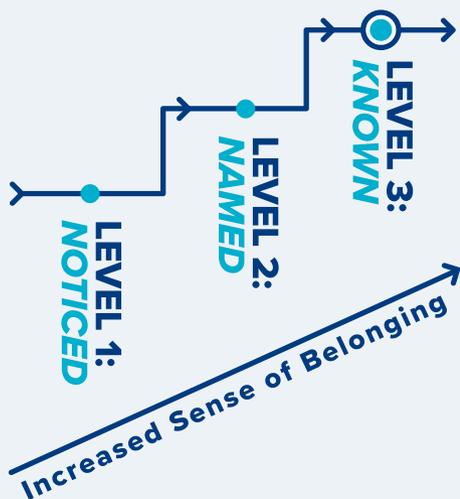
## Building Trust

Relational Authority is a data-driven framework for forging bonds of trust with Gen Z today, especially amid shifts in the cultural landscape. Here’s what you need to know: **Be transformational, not just transactional.** In order for Gen Z to flourish at work—and therefore do their best work—they have to know that you care about *them*, not just the organization you work for or represent. (For more on Relational Authority, see Springtide’s *The State of Religion and Young People 2020: Relational Authority*.)

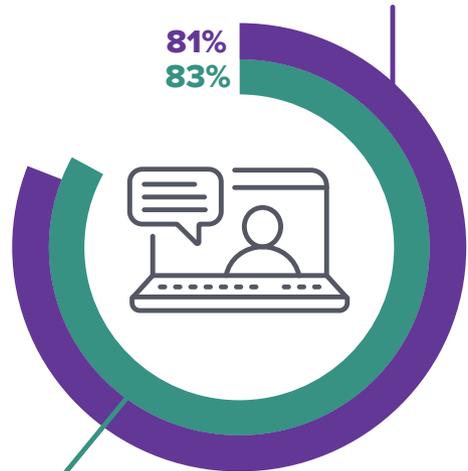
## MISSION BUY-IN & BELONGING

Belonging comes before believing . . . and this includes believing in a company's mission and investing in it as an employee. Your mission matters, but true buy-in from employees over the long haul will require intentionally fostering community. To make *any* work meaningful, even the most menial, focus on building community. Springtide developed a data-driven model for building trust and connections with young people, called the Belongingness Process. It has three stages: *Noticed*, *Named*, *Known*.

### THE BELONGINGNESS PROCESS



**81%** of 18-to-25-year-olds want to **feel comfortable talking with their employer about the future.**



**83%** say **it's important that their supervisor cares about their life.**

When young people have mentors at work, they flourish. We know from our data and the decades of research that Gallup has done on the workplace that when young people have these kinds of relationships at work, they feel engaged, supported, and more invested in the work and the workplace, even going above and beyond what's asked of them. Organizations that want to attract and retain Gen Z workers will do well to put in place a mentorship structure, whether formal or informal.



## MEANING AT WORK

Meaning comes from many parts of life. Religion, relationships, hobbies, and (of course!) *work* can all be sources of meaning, purpose, and significance in the lives of Gen Z. Work may even be part of how they define or understand themselves; in fact:



when thinking about their current or future work, **nearly 3 out of 4** young people today say that what they do for a job is a part of their identity.

For many, a job is more than just a way to make money—though that’s a baseline expectation for most young people. Young people see work as a stepping stone, a chance to network, an opportunity to do good in the world, or the means to support a passion, an education, or a family. Jonah, 22, remarks, “I think work is better when it’s meaningful. I think that if I have the privilege to choose a job I want, where money is not the *main* factor, I’d rather take a role where I can make a difference in someone else’s life.”

**Meaning is so important to young people that 70% of 13-to-17-year-olds tell us they believe that work is not worth doing if it is not meaningful to them.**

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**PART 2**  
***LIFE***



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When I think of future work, I'll ask: Will it take me away from my family, in terms of location? If so, can I travel and get time off work to visit family and spend time with family? That would be a big factor. Just like—work/life balance, and how much work you do outside of work. Are you ever able to turn work off? Things like that.

—Rachel, 24



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## INTRODUCTION

Setting up young people to flourish—in work and life—starts by giving them the support and fostering the skills they need *before* work is on the immediate horizon. Young people recognize this too, as 71% of 13-to-25-year-olds believe if they are flourishing in life, they will flourish at work. And 87% percent of young people (ages 13–17) tell us they believe they are responsible for making their own meaning at work. The sense of responsibility these young people have in creating their purpose means they don't expect it to simply *come from* work—a disposition they have fostered in their life outside of work.



**THE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY THESE  
YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE IN CREATING  
THEIR PURPOSE MEANS THEY DON'T  
EXPECT IT TO SIMPLY COME FROM WORK.**

The same relationships and values that foster balance and flourishing in the workplace are factors that help Gen Z thrive in life *outside* of work. Young people with adults in their lives who nurture mentoring relationships, meaning, and growth in the nonwork aspects of their life are set up to thrive in both environments.



In a young person's life outside of work, a good **mentor** will listen, care, help work through something difficult, share experiences, step in and take action when needed, help with difficult decision-making, and model positive actions for success in things like workor relationships.



In life—for example, through volunteering, hobbies, relationships—a young person might find **meaning** when they have a sense of positively impacting others, when they feel appreciated, when they connect with others, and when they have a sense of support and purpose in their daily activities.



**Growth**, outside the context of work, can mean developing new skills and having new experiences, forging through challenging or uncomfortable circumstances rather than remaining comfortable or standing still, and both setting goals and striving toward them.



## MENTORSHIP IN LIFE

A mentor outside of work is important for young people to flourish and find balance. Because a mentor models what's possible and encourages a young person in their pursuits and passions, this kind of adult relationship is imperative for helping Gen Z discern the kind of work they'd *eventually* want to do or the kind of work they might try *next* if a current job isn't working. Adult mentors are a safe sounding board for exploration and ideas about expectations and experiences at work, and they can model how to thrive in the work environment when a young person lands in a certain industry.

**But Springtide data indicate that most young people lack mentors.**



**Only 38%** of young people have someone who models positive actions for a successful life—things like work ethic, healthy relationships, and so on.

When we asked in interviews about mentors in young people's lives outside of work, two types of trusted adults came up most often: teachers and parents. Christopher, a young man in the early part of his career search, told us about his teachers:

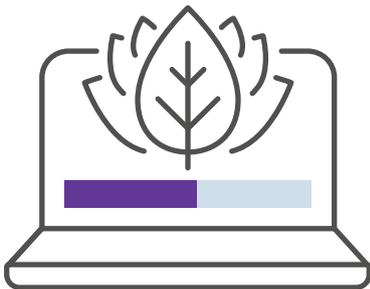
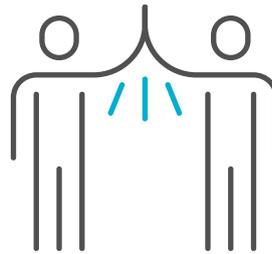


**My teachers are my mentors. Anytime I have a big decision to make, I always get different opinions. And even if it's a little decision, I'm able to have a conversation with them. I let them know what I plan on doing and they listen. I'm able to have a bunch of mentors who help guide me, help me figure things out until what we think is the best position for me is clear. Not just for sentimentality, but concrete—like they know exactly who I am and what works for me because of our relationship.**

**—Christopher, 23**

Christopher values the way his teachers can be straightforward, perhaps in ways parents at times can't be or aren't. His teachers aren't clouded by sentiment—instead, they can give him concrete advice based on what they know about the world and know about him. **Seventy-four percent of young people feel more connected to the things they do outside of work to enrich their lives when they can do them with the people who support them.** Life outside of work depends on sharing enriching experiences with trusted, supportive people.

Those who say they have a **role model for a successful life are more likely to report they are flourishing.**



**Over half** of young people who report they are “**flourishing a lot**” also say they have someone in their life who uses their expertise to help them solve a problem.



## TIDE-TURNING TIP

Seventy-four percent of young people feel more connected to the things they do outside of work to enrich their lives when they can do them with the people who support them. Life outside of work depends on sharing enriching experiences with trusted, supportive people.



## Bridging Social Capital

If you want to effectively mentor a young person in their career choices, you may have to encourage them to venture beyond their established networks. A significant number of young people choose future career paths based on the jobs that are held by the people they know. Emphasizing *bridging social capital*—that is, *the parts of a network that are made up of acquaintances rather than close friends*—can get a young person exposed to more types of people and more types of jobs so they can imagine and consider a broader array of careers.

However, the benefit of bridging relationships doesn't stop there. Social scientists document the importance of bridging networks when it comes to landing jobs, with some estimates as high as 75% of jobs in a given year coming through bridging connections. Bridging social capital is especially crucial for young people who might otherwise lack access to resources because of age, gender, race, or socioeconomic status. Their networks likely contain very few bridging connections that could help them imagine and obtain secure, meaningful employment.



# APPENDIX: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Springtide Research Institute collects quantitative data through surveys and qualitative data through interviews. The quantitative data tell us *what* is happening. The qualitative data tell us *why* and *how* it is happening.

For the quantitative data in this report, we conducted these primary studies over the last year, beginning in March 2020. While the specific phenomenon of each study varied, all projects contained a set of repeating, foundational questions to measure demographics, relationships, trust in people and institutions, loneliness and belonging, meaning, religious affiliation, and religious practices. We surveyed a nationally representative sample of 13-to-25-year-olds in the United States, totaling 6,897 participants. The sample was weighted for age, gender, race, and region to match the demographics of the country and produced a margin of error of +/- 3%. The age, gender, racial, and regional demographics of this sample are as follows:

Age	Valid Percent
13 to 17	32%
18 to 25	68%
Total	100%

Gender	Valid Percent
Girl/Woman or Transgender Girl/Woman	49%
Boy/Man or Transgender Boy/Man	49%
Non-binary	2%
Total	100%

Race	Valid Percent
White	52%
Hispanic or Latino	14%
Black or African American	21%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Asian	9%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	1%
Other	3%
Total	100%

Region	Valid Percent
Northeast	18%
Midwest	21%
South	37%
West	24%
Total	100%

*Tables may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding.*

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

For the qualitative research, we conducted 117 in-depth interviews either in person, via telephone, or via video. Interviews focused on understanding the relationships that young people lean into when they are looking for belonging, making decisions about their future, developing their worldview, and establishing their value systems. Conversations were guided but open-ended, allowing for as much direction as possible from the interviewee. Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed thematically.

Interviews and survey responses are confidential, and all names of research participants in this report are pseudonyms. For more information or to obtain the survey instrument or request access to the data sets, please contact us at [research@springtideresearch.org](mailto:research@springtideresearch.org).

Our questions about the dimensions of flourishing were inspired by the validated categories in the Netherlands Mental Health Survey and Incidence Study-2, as featured in an analysis of flourishing factors by Schotanus-Dijkstra et al. (2015). To construct our flourishing scale, the dimensions were combined in a similar manner to the NEMESIS scale and used as an overall measure of flourishing.



**Work. Life. *And all the spaces in between.***

**78% of Gen Z told us they need work/life balance.**

***Let's help them flourish.***

A steady uptick in how much time people spend working in recent decades means that workers have less time and fewer resources for outside pursuits: hobbies, passions, leisure, and more.

And more time doing work means work has to *do more*. Young people's expectations and experiences for work are changing.

Parents, teachers, trusted adults, and employers all have a responsibility to help young people flourish and find balance in both work and life. The elements that young people need to thrive in the workplace—mentorship, meaning, and growth—are the same elements that young people who *aren't* yet in the workforce need from trusted adults as they prepare for life and work.

*With data, insights, and tips throughout, you'll be prepared to help Gen Z do their best work and live their best lives.*



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