



THE ANNUAL BLUE COLLAR REPORT
POWERED BY JOBBER

GEN Z AND THE BLUE COLLAR REVOLUTION

2025



The Annual Blue Collar Report exists to raise the status of the trades in the hearts and minds of the people who are unaware of their critical importance.

This report is an effort to advocate for blue collar small business owners. We highlight why these industries are critical to the proper functioning of society and why they offer one of the best ROI opportunities for young people today.



THE OPPORTUNITY: BLUE COLLAR CAREERS IN AN AI-DRIVEN ECONOMY

Last year's Annual Blue Collar Report revealed that Gen Z is highly interested in what blue collar careers offer—job stability, flexibility, and a path to entrepreneurship.

But despite growing appeal, widespread stigma, lack of exposure, and outdated influences from parents and media continue to steer young people away from the trades as a serious career option.

Since then, we've seen a surge in social media activity, especially on TikTok and Instagram, where tradespeople are sharing their work, career journeys, and success stories, as well as a noticeable uptick in media coverage spotlighting the trades. These narratives are helping to reshape the cultural conversation around skilled trades in real time, and we can consider it a good start: spring enrollment at vocational schools is up 12% compared to 4% for undergraduate university enrollment.¹

While stigma around vocational school has dropped five points this year, 71% of Gen Z say it still exists.

The question is whether perception is changing fast enough to keep up with the rapid pace of economic and technological disruption.



In search of answers, we surveyed Gen Z and their parents and found that both groups know that the traditional workforce is being disrupted and regard the trades as a safe, lucrative choice, but their actions haven't caught up.

Given that the majority of Gen Z continue to commit to four-year college degrees, time is not on Gen Z's side.

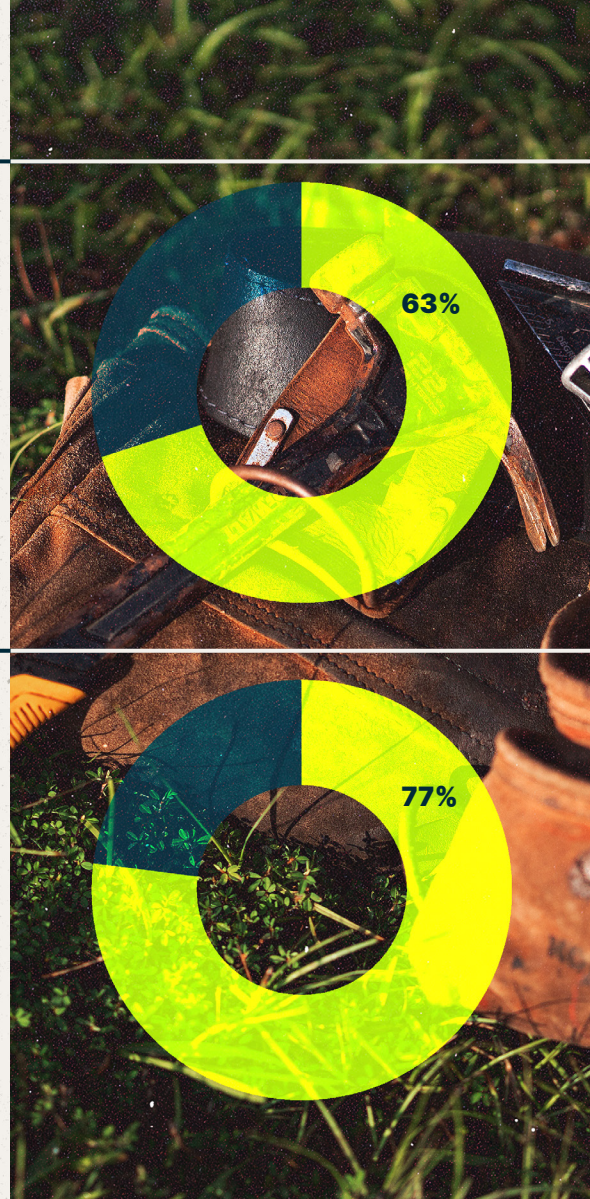
In the face of accelerating disruption, **we don't just need a mindset shift, we need a movement—a revolution.**

Gen Z deserves better data, more visibility into vocational options during high school, and a redefined narrative that reflects the future they're walking into. The trades need more than a seat at the table.

The trades need a spotlight.

63% of Gen Z parents agree that AI is making it harder for young people to break into the workforce.

77% of Gen Z say it's important to choose a career that's difficult to automate.



With rising demand and resilience against automation, there's never been a better time for Gen Z to choose the trades.

Employment demand is high. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, projected demand for skilled trades from 2023 to 2033 is rising much faster than the 4% average for all occupations². Electricians (11%)³, plumbers (6%)⁴, and HVAC technicians (9%)⁵, represent some of the most in-demand and hardest-to-fill roles.

AI is an enhancement, not a replacement, for the trades. While advancements like robo-mowers, drone imaging, and automated tools are streamlining some tasks in the field, the core, skilled labor behind blue collar

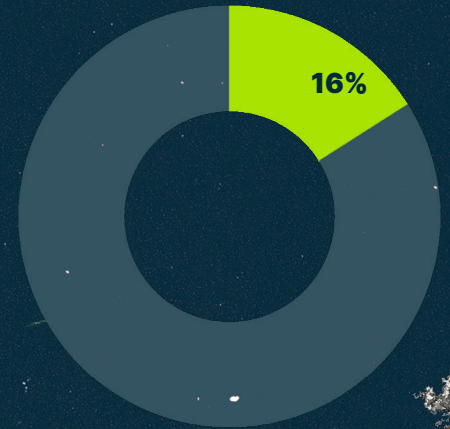
work remains deeply human. Jobber AI is helping pros quote, schedule, and communicate more efficiently, and giving business owners access to powerful insights, but the physical work and problem solving still rely on trained professionals. In the trades, AI supports the worker. It doesn't substitute for them. This makes the trades one of the few categories where both the sector and its workforce can grow stronger together.



"Owning a trades business has given me a life I never imagined possible. Working in the trades provides good money, but running your own business takes it to another level. It's made me more confident, financially secure, and truly happy, all because I chose to build my future in the trades."

Hunter Patrick,
Owner of Dumpire Junk Removal

Only 16% of Gen Z parents now believe a college degree guarantees long-term job security.



COST, RISK, AND REALITY: WHY COLLEGE ISN'T THE CLEAR CHOICE ANYMORE

For decades, a four-year college degree was viewed as the most reliable path to financial stability.

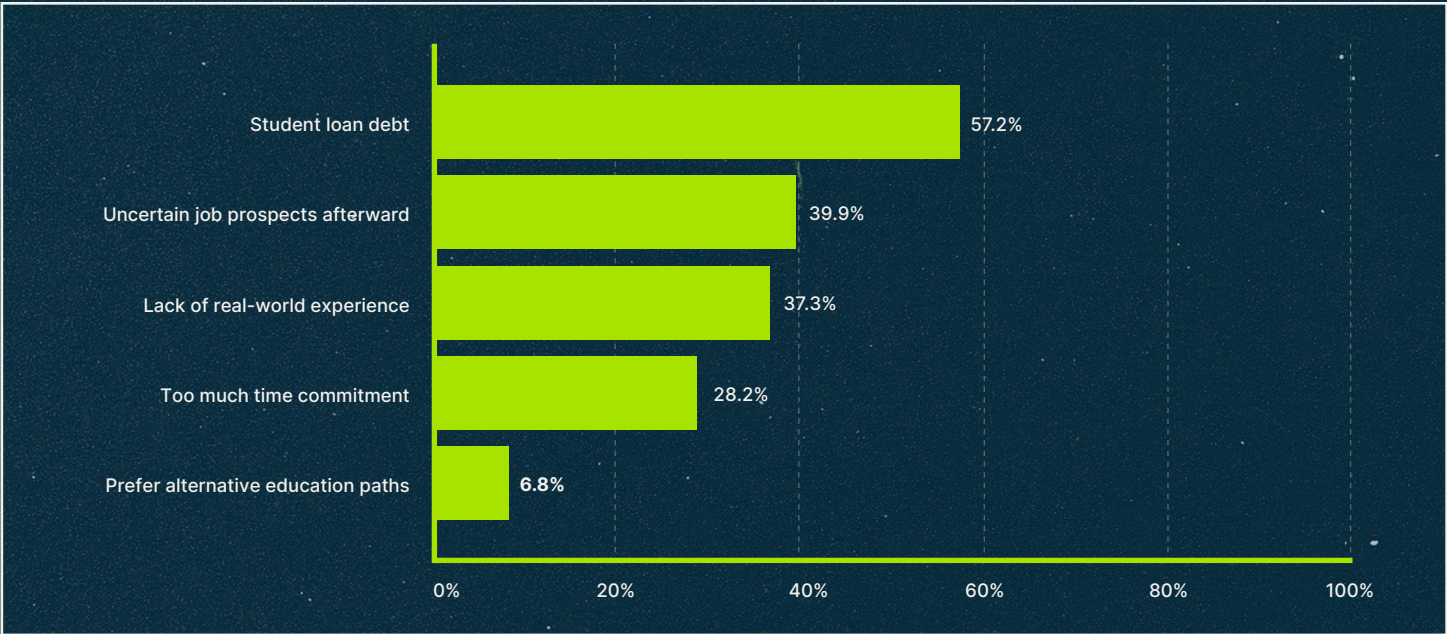
In response to today's rapidly changing economy, both Gen Z and their parents are beginning to question that long-held belief. The hesitation is marked by:

- Soaring tuition costs that have more than doubled over the past two decades⁶, with bachelor's degrees costing in excess of \$500,000⁷ when factoring in student loan interest and loss of income
- Unstable white collar job prospects, with the hiring rate for those making more than \$96,000 at its lowest level since 2014⁸
- The accelerating impact of AI that is expected to fully automate 30% of U.S. jobs by 2030⁹

In fact, our research indicates that **only 16% of Gen Z parents now believe a college degree guarantees long-term job security**, a stark reflection of growing disillusionment with the traditional route.

For Gen Z, practical concerns are fueling this shift. An overwhelming 91% say the rising cost of living is influencing their career choices. Of the options presented to Gen Z parents, student loan debt (57%) was cited as their biggest worry when it comes to higher education. But that's not all. Nearly 40% fear uncertain job prospects after graduation, and 37% express concern about the lack of real-world experience gained through college alone.

? We asked Gen Zs: What are your biggest concerns about going to college?

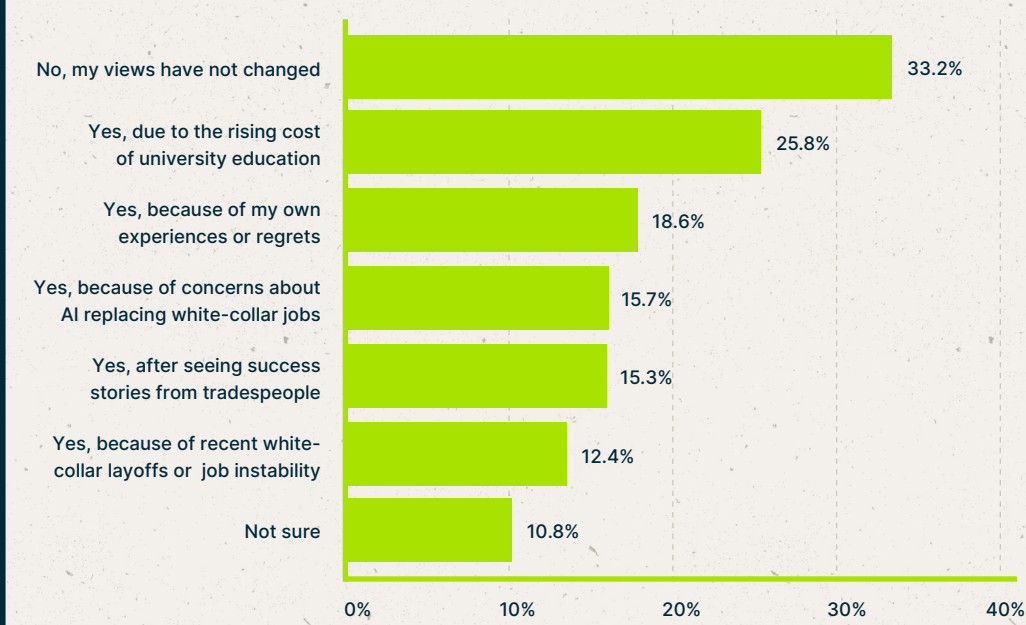


These anxieties are no longer hypothetical—they're informed by recent trends, including sweeping layoffs in traditionally "safe" white collar sectors. The tech industry alone eliminated nearly 153,000 jobs in 2024, while layoffs in industries like financial services surged to 145% in March 2025¹⁰. This follows headlines warning of AI's growing role that could wipe out half of all entry-level white collar jobs, according to Anthropic's CEO.¹¹

Parents are taking notice, too. In fact, many say they're rethinking the type of career path they want to encourage for their children, citing the rising cost of university education as the biggest factor.

In this climate, the traditional college path no longer feels like the sure bet it once was. Instead, more families are beginning to look for resilient alternatives, career options that offer hands-on skills, long-term stability, and a better return on investment. That search is leading families toward the trades—careers that offer a better return on investment and a clearer path to stability.

? We asked Gen Z's parents: Have recent trends or developments caused you to reconsider the type of career path you'd encourage your child to pursue? (Select all that apply):

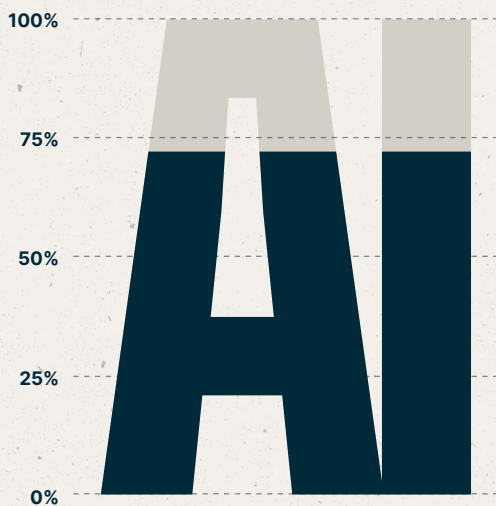


"A major misconception about the trades is that they're a fallback, not a first-choice career. People overlook the skill, stability, and opportunity they provide. The trades offer financial security, independence, and purpose, yet still don't get the respect they deserve. Too many underestimate how lucrative they can be."

Itzcoatl Aguilar,
Owner of E's Heating & Air



HOW AI IS STEERING GEN Z AND THEIR PARENTS TOWARD THE TRADES



Nearly 72% of parents say they've talked to their children about how automation could affect their careers.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping how families think about the future of work.

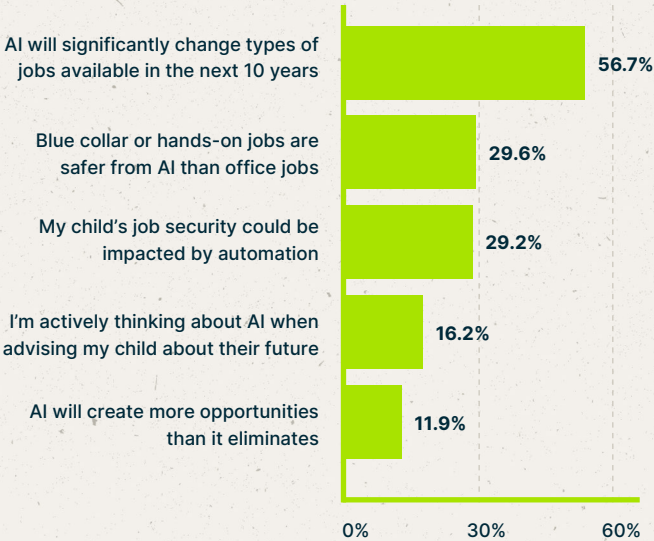
Nearly 72% of parents say they've talked to their children about how automation could affect their careers. For Gen Z, these conversations are happening early and often, shaping how they evaluate job paths in a shifting economy.

Gen Z has grown up with rapid technological change and is keenly aware of what's at stake. 77% say it's important that their future job is hard to automate. In fact, job security now ranks as the top career consideration for Gen Z, above passion or even salary. They're looking for long-term stability, not just personal fulfillment.

Parents share their concerns. More than half (51%) say the risk of AI-driven job loss influences the advice they give their kids, and 57% believe AI will significantly impact job



We asked Gen Z's parents: Which of the following statements do you agree with? (Select all that apply)



availability in the next 10 years. As automation threatens many traditional white collar paths, families are starting to look elsewhere.

Nearly 40% of parents say they'd actively encourage a vocational path if it meant more AI resilience.

And when asked which careers feel safest from automation, they overwhelmingly point to the trades: 56% list carpenters, 54% plumbers, and 51% electricians. Fewer see future-proof potential in digital roles, with just 18% naming software developers, 14% data analysts, and only 11% accountants.

As AI transforms the workforce, Gen Z and their parents are recalibrating their expectations, and the skilled trades are emerging not just as practical choices, but as the most future-forward, strategic bets on job security and autonomy.

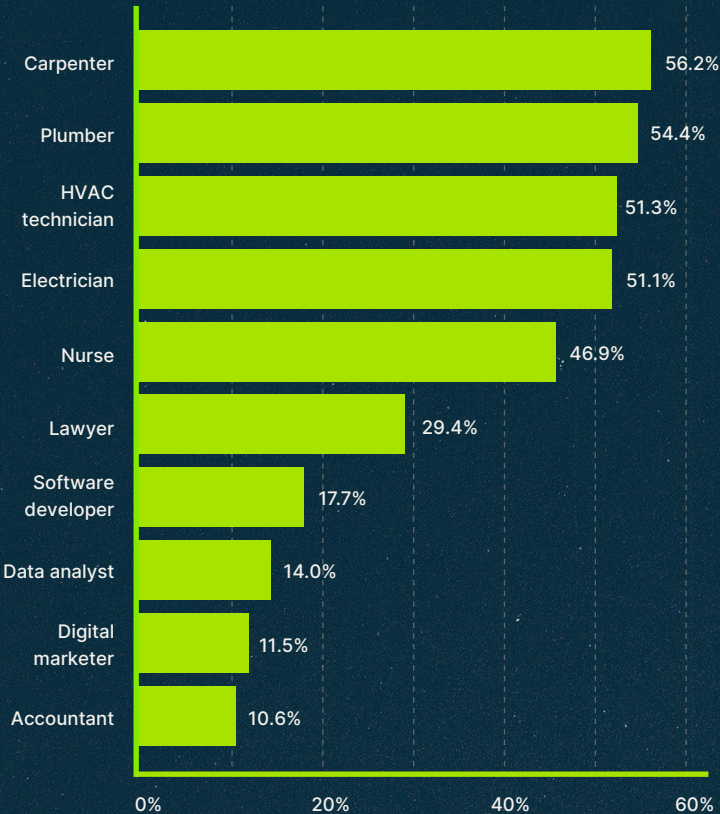


"I'm excited about AI in construction because it takes on the tasks I don't enjoy, like paperwork and office work, so I can focus on what really matters. AI will never replace the skilled, hands-on work we do. Until a robot can install a roof or lay stormwater pipe, our jobs are secure. The real opportunity is using AI to make our lives easier and give us more time to excel in the field."

John Seaman,
Owner of JC Property Professionals



We asked Gen Z's parents: Which of the following careers do you believe are highly resistant to AI disruption? (Select all that apply)

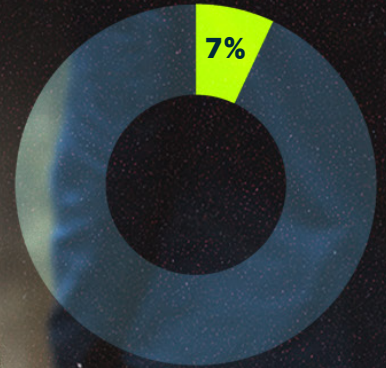


SKILLED, RESILIENT, AND STILL OVERLOOKED: THE PERCEPTION PROBLEM FACING THE TRADES

The skilled trades are quickly emerging as one of the more strategic career options in today's changing job market.

With work that's hard to automate and growing demand across industries, trade careers offer stability, mobility, and entrepreneurial upside. Parents are starting to see the potential, with 73% saying they believe a trade entrepreneur has more long-term security than a tech employee at a major company.

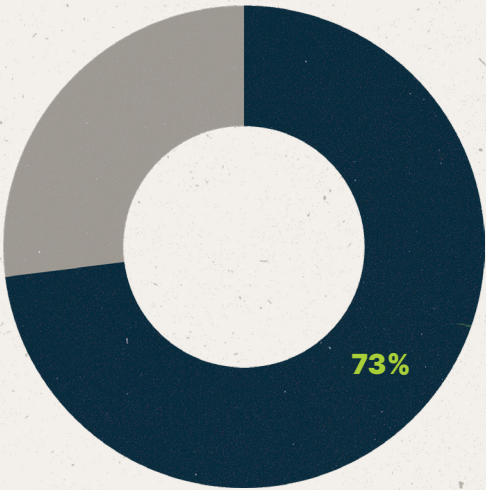
Only 7% of Gen Z parents say they'd prefer their child pursue a trade or vocational program.



Yet, that belief doesn't always translate into action. Only 7% of Gen Z parents say they'd prefer their child pursue a trade or vocational program.

The reason? Stigma. A large majority of Gen Z (71%) say vocational school carries more stigma than college, and 63% of parents agree. Despite recognizing the value of the trades, many parents remain reluctant to promote them, possibly because they never saw the trades positioned as a path to success when they were growing up.

73% of Gen Z parents believe a trade entrepreneur has more long-term security than a tech employee at a major company



The trades present strong earning potential for entrepreneurial Gen Zs. Here is the median revenue for businesses in five blue collar industries, according to Jobber's data of more than 300,000 service pros.

Industry	Total revenue from all sales	% of businesses earning over \$1M
Plumbing	\$416,120	20.72%
HVAC	\$390,594	21.03%
Electrical Contractor	\$328,910	16.82%
Construction & Contracting	\$247,004	16.71%
Landscaping Contractor	\$236,900	14.71%

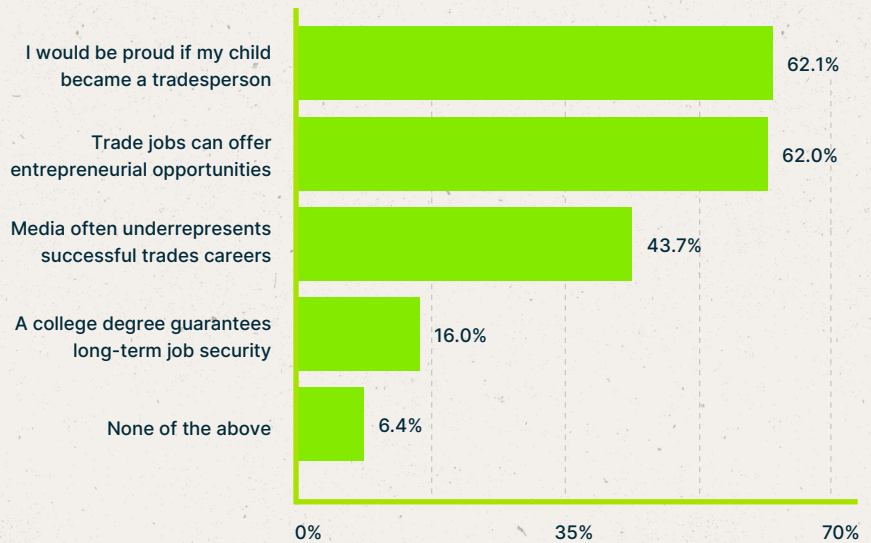
Perception is improving, but action isn't keeping pace.

Over 62% of parents say they'd be proud if their child entered a skilled trade, and an equal percentage believe trades offer real career growth and a path to business ownership.

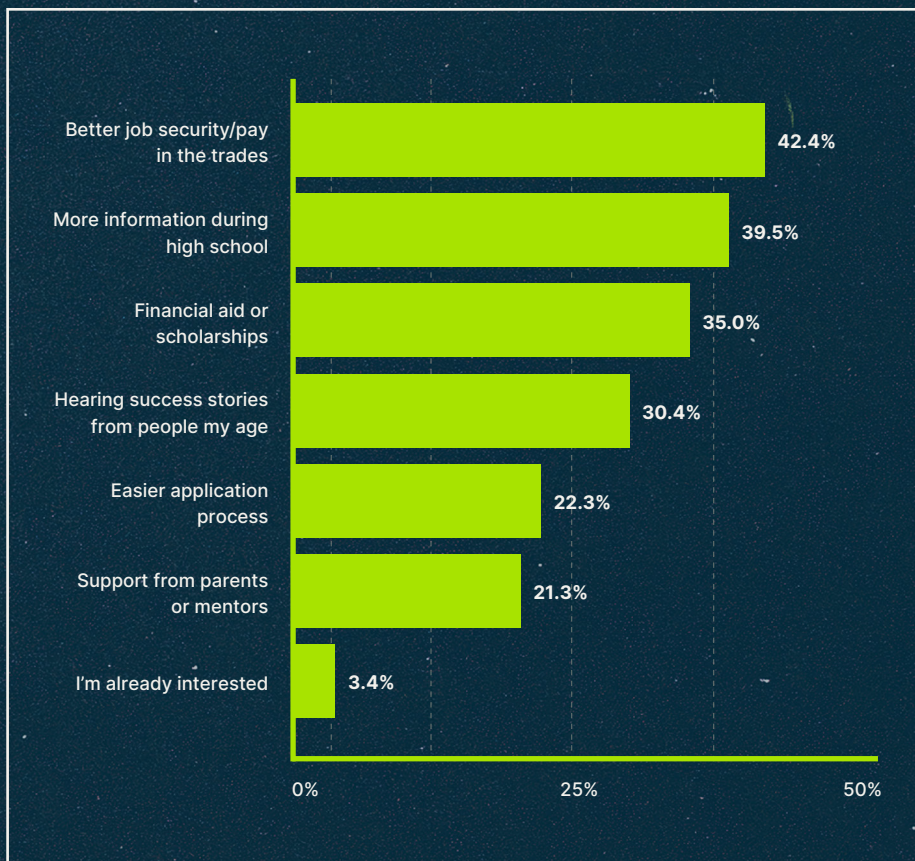
The problem isn't a lack of interest but a lack of information about earning potential, financial aid, and more as it relates to the trades. Gen Zs say better job security/pay in the trades (42%), more information during high school (40%), and hearing success stories from people their age who work in the skilled trades (40%) would help reshape perceptions. Until those messages become more visible, Gen Z will continue to overlook one of the most powerful and practical career opportunities of their generation.



We asked Gen Z's parents: Which of the following statements do you agree with? (Select all that apply)



We asked Gen Z: What would make you more likely to consider a vocational path? (select all that apply)



"The biggest misconception about the trades is the earning potential. I once thought \$100,000 was the ceiling, but the reality is much higher. Along with the income, the trades have sharpened my communication skills, allowed me to provide for my family, and given me a deep sense of accomplishment I truly earned."

Chase Stetson,
Owner of Mike's Lawn Care LLC

HOW SCHOOLS ARE FAILING TO PREPARE GEN Z FOR FUTURE-PROOF CAREERS



If skilled trades offer security, earning potential, and resilience against automation, why are 75% of Gen Z still planning to attend a four-year college or university?

The answer isn't necessarily about preference or even stigma. It's about what Gen Z is, and isn't, being told.

High schools continue to overwhelmingly promote university as the "right" path forward. In our research, 76% of Gen Z respondents said that a four-year college was actively encouraged in high school. In contrast, only 31% reported that trade school received any promotion at all. Even more concerning, just 40% said a counselor ever discussed a skilled trade as a viable option.

Despite the risks and realities explored in this year's report, three out of four Gen Z are planning to attend a four-year college.



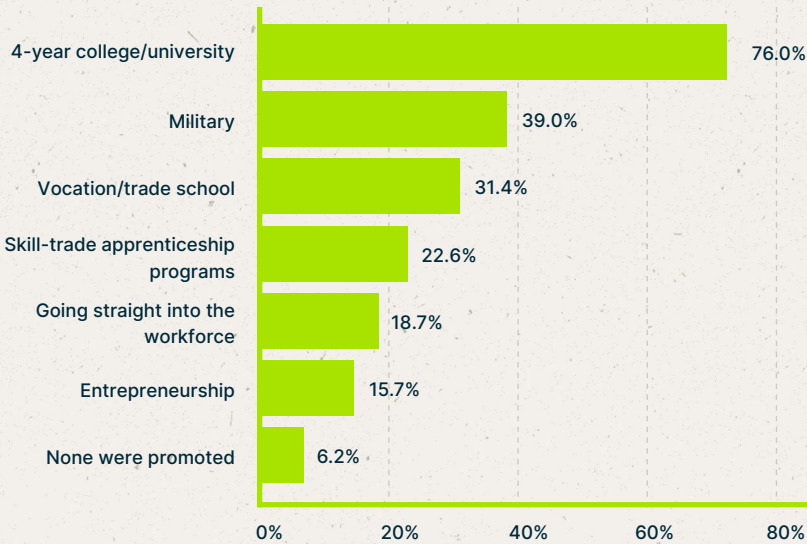
This absence of representation comes at a cost. Among Gen Z respondents who didn't apply to apprenticeships, more than half (59%) said it was simply because they didn't know enough about them. It's not that these students are unwilling to explore trades: they've never been given the opportunity to understand them.

Interestingly, it's not just students who need better guidance. Nearly 40% of Gen Z parents said they would definitely encourage their child to consider vocational education if it led to a career that was more AI-resilient, which the trades are. The interest is there. But the knowledge gap persists, and schools aren't filling it.

Gen Z isn't rejecting the trades; they're simply not being shown what's possible. Until trade school pathways are treated with the same respect and visibility as traditional academic routes, students will continue to default to what they've been shown, not necessarily what's best for their future.



We asked Gen Z: Which of the following were actively promoted to you in high school as post-graduation options? (Select all that apply)

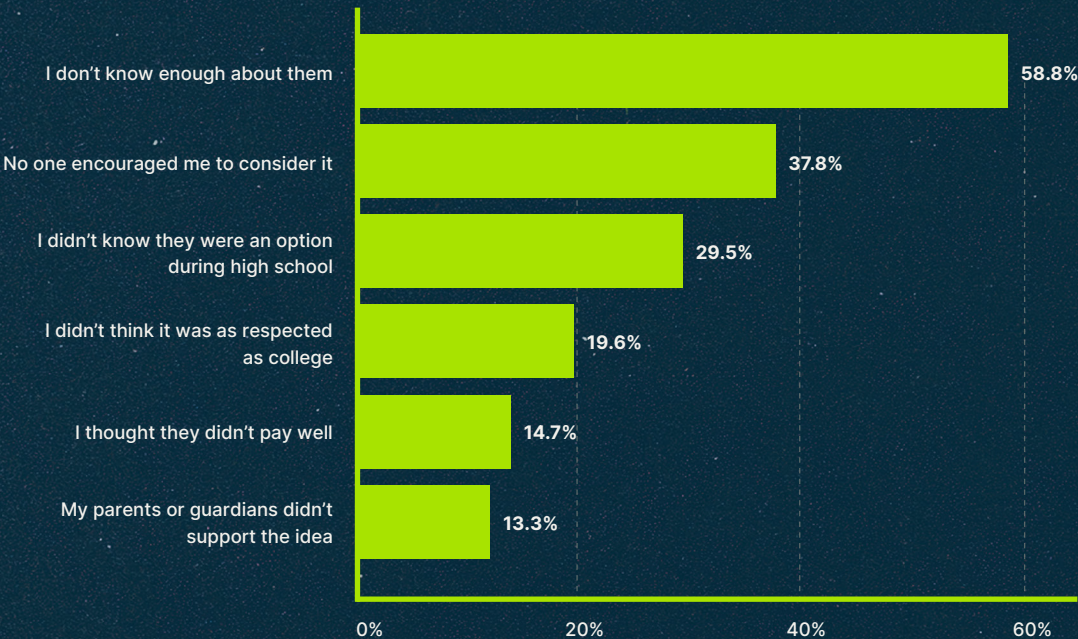


"In school, the trades were dismissed as jobs for 'failures,' but running my plumbing business has shown me otherwise. The income is far beyond what I imagined, and the work is stable, flexible, and deeply skilled, nothing like the misconceptions people still have about trades careers."

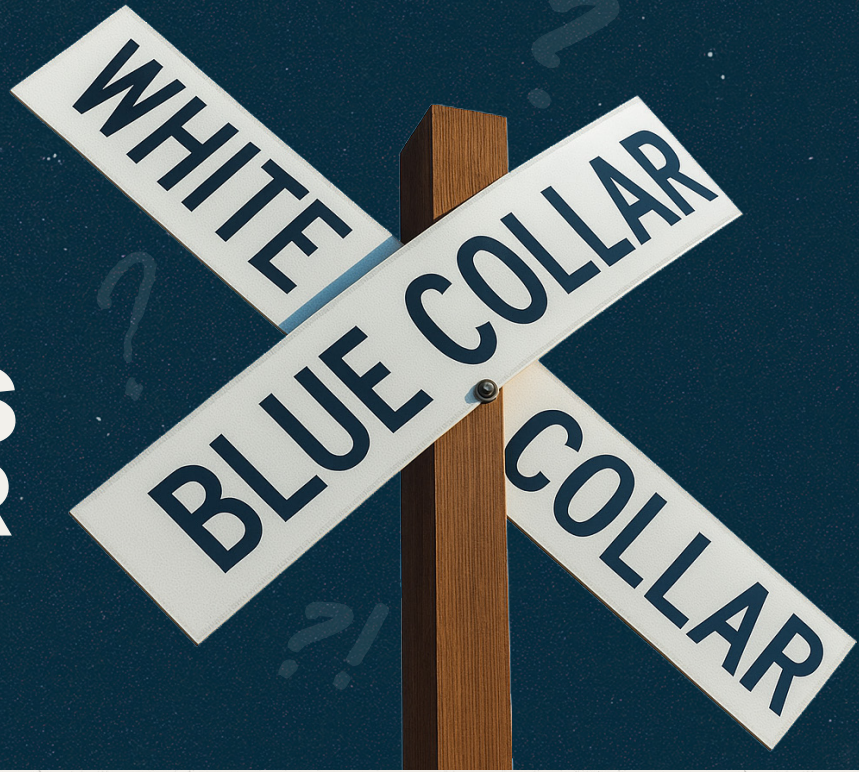
Mary-Anne Bowcott,
Owner of Westcom Plumbing & Gas



We asked Gen Z: Why haven't you applied to a skilled-trade apprenticeship opportunity?



A CROSSROADS MOMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK



Gen Z is entering adulthood amid a rapidly changing economy, accelerating technology, and evolving ideas of success.

The traditional path to upward mobility—university degrees, corporate jobs, and white-collar security—is no longer a guaranteed formula.

Student debt is climbing, entry-level jobs are disappearing, and AI is redefining which roles will exist at all. But in this shifting landscape, a clear path forward is emerging: the skilled trades. These careers offer hands-on work, long-term resilience, and entrepreneurial opportunity.

Parents who once dismissed blue collar jobs are beginning to rethink their advice. In fact, 45% of parents admit that, looking back, they wish they'd been more encouraged to consider a trade when they were younger. However, many still instinctively point their children toward four-year colleges, yet growing numbers recognize the trades as a more stable, fulfilling, and financially promising alternative, particularly in a world where automation is transforming the white collar workforce.



Still, the broader system, from schools to guidance counselors, continues to promote a dated playbook. Vocational education is under-promoted, trade careers are often dismissed due to outdated stereotypes, and reliable information about business opportunities, job security, and advancement opportunities in the trades is hard to find.

This moment demands more than small changes. It demands a revolution.

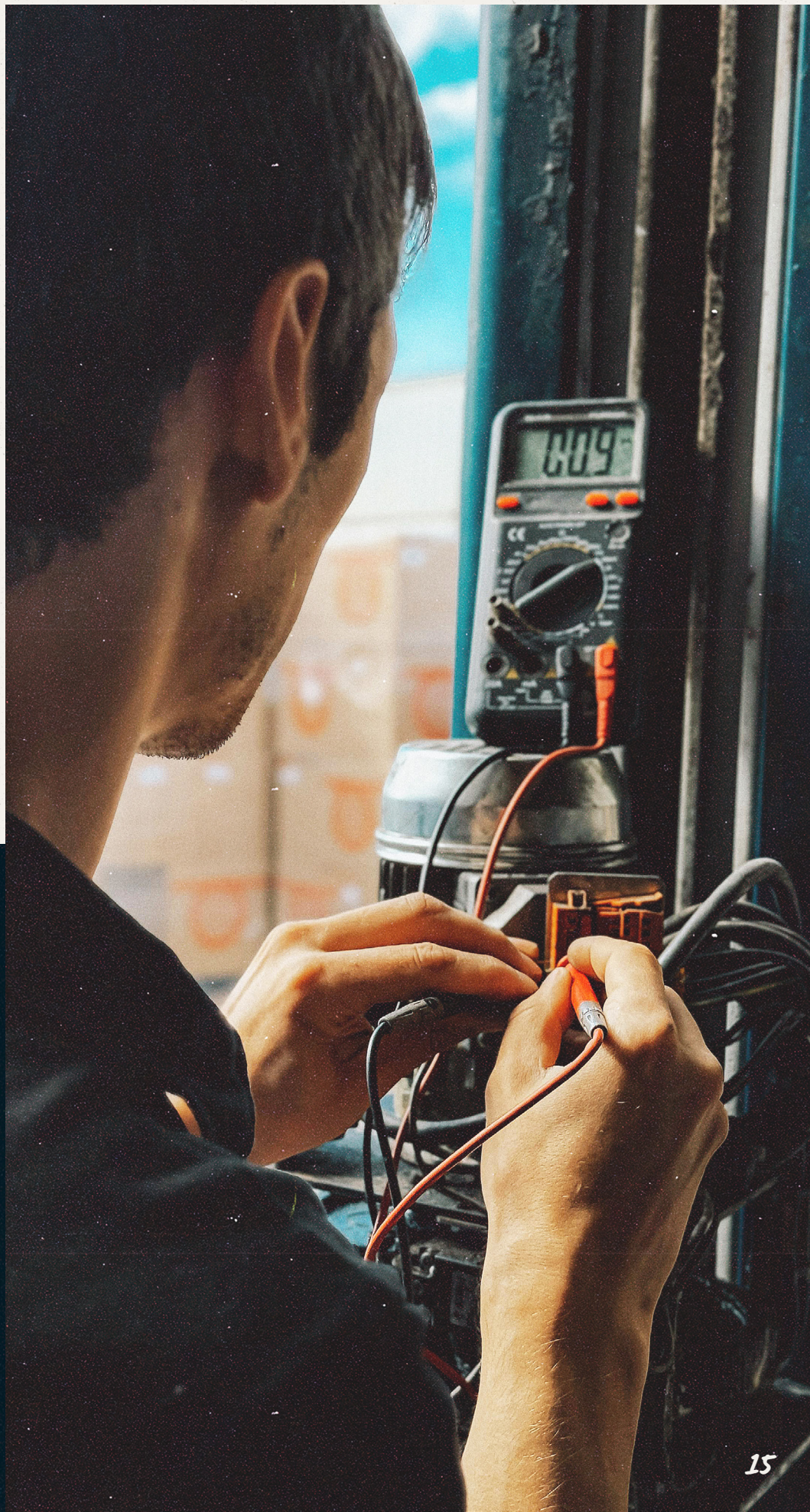
- A revolution in how we define success, where trade school sits alongside university as a respected, ambitious path.
- A revolution in how we advise students, where counselors are equipped to talk about AI resilience, earning potential, and real-world skills.
- A revolution in how we tell stories, where the trades are seen not as a fallback, but as a powerful, future-forward choice.

This is a generational opportunity. By closing the information gap and updating how we define career success, we can ensure Gen Z enters the workforce empowered, not disillusioned.



"What excites me most about the next 5–10 years in the trades is the rise of online sharing and community. These networks are motivating pros to run smarter businesses and deliver higher-quality work, while also showing younger generations that the trades offer a rewarding and meaningful career path."

John Seaman,
Owner of JC Property Professionals



Data Sources and Methodology

1. The vocation school enrollment metric and undergraduate university enrollment metric were sourced from National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
<https://nscresearchcenter.org/current-term-enrollment-estimates/>
2. The demand for skilled trades metric was sourced from U.S. Department of Labor Blog.
<https://blog.dol.gov/2024/09/06/new-bls-employment-projections-3-charts>
3. The projected employment among electricians from 2023 to 2033 was sourced from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
https://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/electricians.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com#
4. The projected employment among plumbers from 2023 to 2033 was sourced from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
https://www.bls.gov/ooh/construction-and-extraction/plumbers-pipefitters-and-steamfitters.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com
5. The projected employment among HVAC technicians from 2023 to 2033 was sourced from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.
https://www.bls.gov/ooh/installation-maintenance-and-repair/heating-air-conditioning-and-refrigeration-mechanics-and-installers.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com
6. The doubled tuition cost metric was sourced from the Education Data Initiative.
<https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college?>
7. The cost of a bachelor's degree metric was sourced from the Education Data Initiative. <https://educationdata.org/average-cost-of-college?>
8. The white collar job hiring rate data was sourced from Vanguard.
https://corporate.vanguard.com/content/corporatesite/us/en/corp/articles/labor-market-pulse-hiring-strength-lower-income-workers.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com
9. The accelerating impact of AI metric was sourced from the National University.
https://www.nu.edu/blog/ai-job-statistics/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
10. The white collar layoffs metric was sourced from Integrity Research Associates. <https://www.integrity-research.com/wall-street-layoffs-continue-to-rise-in-march-2025/>
11. The quote from Anthropic's CEO appeared in an Axios article dated May 28, 2025.
<https://www.axios.com/2025/05/28/ai-jobs-white-collar-unemployment-anthropic>
12. The Gen Z study was commissioned by Jobber and is based on a 2025 survey conducted by Conjointly of 1,042 high school and college-age individuals in the U.S. between the ages of 18-20, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 90% confidence level.
13. The Gen Z parents study was commissioned by Jobber and is based on a 2025 survey conducted by Conjointly of 1,336 parents with high school and college-age individuals in the U.S. between the ages of 18-20, and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3 percentage points at the 90% confidence level.

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