

Generation Z Is Eager To Take Up the Call To Fill the Skilled Trades Shortage – But Training, Waitlists and Other Obstacles Stand in the Way

It's widely reported that Generation Z, recently dubbed the "toolbelt generation" by *The Wall Street Journal*, has been embracing the trades at a much higher rate than their Millennial counterparts – be it to avoid college debt, the appeal of competitive salaries out of high school, or a perceived path to owning a business. Gen Z, made up of those born between 1997 and 2012, is ready for the skilled trades. But with students facing training enrollment waitlists and other barriers, is the industry ready for them?

DEWALT®, a Stanley Black & Decker (NYSE: SWK) brand and leader in total jobsite solutions, fielded a national survey of high-school-aged students enrolled in skilled trades programs to better understand their career aspirations and what obstacles might stand in the way of them establishing a lifelong career in the field.

The study, *Gen Z in the Skilled Trades*, found that young people are fully committed to their future career but face several obstacles – access to critical training is foremost among them, with **52% of students reporting they were placed on a waitlist for technical or vocational program enrollment.**

As a leading advocate for the trades, DEWALT knows that addressing that obstacle and other barriers – which are missing from the national conversation – is necessary for the industry to build the pipeline of future talent. Survey results can help the industry look at the next generation through a new lens, one that understands their practical, cultural and attitudinal needs.

About the Study

Survey participants, all pre-apprentices in the U.S., numbered 225. They are students ranging in age from 14 to 18. Half of the participants are 18 years old and another 30% are 17 years old. All students are enrolled in either a trade/vocational school program or a skilled trades training program at their local high school.

Participants are studying a wide range of skilled trades, from automotive maintenance to welding, with technology (including artificial intelligence [AI] and machine learning, informational technology [IT], and software development) being the most represented at more than 30%, followed by HVAC (just under 30%), electrical (25%), and plumbing (24%).

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Key Findings



Gen Z Is Gaining Early Exposure and Is Full of Optimism

Survey findings show that **80%** of students are first introduced to a career in the trades by the time they're 15 years old, with **27%** being exposed at age 13 or younger (typically middle school years).

Schools play a critical role in making students aware of the trades. Thirty-one percent of students say they first heard about careers in the trades at school, via a teacher or guidance counselor or during career day.

Personal acquaintances play a significant role as well. Thirty-one percent of students say they first heard about careers in the trades through someone they know (e.g., a family member or friend working in the trades). Further, 78% report that they've had a one-on-one conversation with someone in the trades about their experience working in the field.

Findings demonstrate the commitment and optimism in a trade career among this group, which has been described as the demographic to address the country's skilled labor shortage. Sixty-eight percent of students enrolled in the skilled trades are fully committed to their career choice, and 77% are somewhat or extremely optimistic.

Those around them, particularly their parents as well as their friends, are also positive about careers in the trades. In fact, 80% of respondents say their parents view careers in the trades somewhat to extremely positively, and 71% say the same of their friends.

Strong Employment Opportunities Are Underway

Students are also optimistic about their job prospects. Most respondents (84%) believe they will be hired immediately following graduation. Two-thirds (67%) have already had conversations with potential employers who expressed an interest in hiring them.

What appeals to them the most about a potential career in the trades?

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| 47% | ▶ Working with their hands; making or building things | 36% | ▶ Flexible work schedule/ work-life balance |
| 43% | ▶ Potential to own their own business | 35% | ▶ Potential to earn a solid income without college debt or long schooling |
| 37% | ▶ Working with technology | | |



Key Barriers: Training Access and Cost

While excited about entering the skilled trades, the students in the survey have doubts and concerns. Findings show nearly three-quarters of participants are concerned about choosing a career in the trades, with half citing "somewhat concerned" and 24% citing "extremely concerned."

Access to training is their primary concern. They raised a range of other concerns:

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| 43% | ▶ Upfront costs for trade school | 29% | ▶ Time commitment to train |
| 39% | ▶ Availability of networking opportunities, co-ops or internships providing hands-on experience | 29% | ▶ Firsthand access to people working in the trades for instruction or mentoring |
| 35% | ▶ Finding time to attend class and complete related class work | 29% | ▶ Support of family and friends |
| 33% | ▶ Access to tools and equipment | | |

Once enrolled in training, 55% participated in internships, 47% benefited from mentorship opportunities, and 46% have had real work experience – highlighting the value of technical training programs in fostering skilled career development.

Supporting Gen Z's Longevity in the Trades

Survey results also show that another set of barriers awaits the Gen Z cohort once they are in full-time positions. Gen Z's value system – as several studies have illustrated – differs from that of Boomers and Generation X, the generations they'll encounter in many management positions.

Respondents, for example, rated having a positive work-life balance (85%) and having a caring boss (79%) as "somewhat important" or "extremely important" expectations of a future job.

For one-third of the respondents, these expectations were more than a wish list.



One of every three survey participants said they won't stay in a job – and will leave the skilled trades entirely – if they can't achieve a positive work-life balance (37%) or do not have a clear path to advancement (35%).

What's an Industry to Do?

Embracing Gen Z's interest, commitment and enthusiasm will call on the industry to think differently than it has in the past. First, the industry can continue to expand training and apprenticeship programs to meet the growing interest of the generation and shorten waitlists. Gen Zers will also need financial support to commit to schooling.

Finally, employers should consider prioritizing career development, mentorship and benefits to meet the needs of this generation that prioritizes a highly different set of values than previous generations. Is the industry ready to meet the challenge?

DEWALT Is Committed to Helping Meet the Demand for Training

As part of its Grow the Trades initiative, a \$30 million commitment to empower tradespeople, DEWALT is awarding trade scholarships to pre-apprentices and those pursuing trades education. The company recently opened applications for its 2025 DEWALT Trades Scholarship. Applications are open here: [DEWALT Trades Scholarship](#). Through its annual Grow The Trades Grants, DEWALT is investing in organizations that are expanding their technical education programs to help meet the demand for trades training.

Methodology

The survey includes 225 respondents, representing students aged 14 to 18 who are enrolled in vocational schools (33%) or skilled trades training programs in high school (67%) across the United States.

Respondents were enrolled in training programs across a variety of skilled trades, including automotive maintenance and repair, building maintenance, carpentry, concrete, drywall, electrical, HVAC, masonry, metal fabrication, plumbing, renewable energy, roofing, technology (e.g., AI/machine learning, IT, developer, analyst), and welding.

The research was fielded online between October 23 and November 4, 2024.

A sample size of 225 provides a confidence level of 95% +/- 6.5%.



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