WHAT THE FUTURE
SUCCESS

How brands can **redefine victory for the modern consumer**, from a DIY CEO, a financial marketing chief and a startup founder

Ipsos

CONTENTS

68%

of Americans believe in the American Dream, the same as in 2025, but more Americans say it is harder to achieve than in 2025.

Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults; and The Ipsos Consumer Tracker, conducted July 15-16, 2025, among 1,083 U.S. adults.

WHO WINS WHEN CUSTOMERS SHIFT THE MILESTONES OF SUCCESS?

What brand doesn't want its customers to succeed? Put another way, what brand doesn't succeed when its customers do?

Success is a vibe. In the early 1990s, the Northwestern University football team was historically, generationally, not good at football. Wikipedia describes the team at the time as a "perennial doormat." A new coach, Gary Barnett, took over, and like most new coaches, swore things would be different. It started with a mantra, "Expect Victory," which, as you can imagine, was a massive mind-shift after decades of losing three games for every win. It shifted not just the mentality of the players, but also the fans. And it worked. In 1996, the team went to the Rose Bowl and graced a Wheaties box.

When my twins were born and we suddenly had three kids under age 3 in the house, my family pivoted that slogan to "Redefine Victory." Some days that meant no more than, "Hey, we made it and everyone got fed on time."

America hasn't necessarily adopted my catchphrase but nonetheless victory today means something different or happens on a different timeline than it used to. If you're a marketer, you really should be paying attention to these shifts.

Success = money + happiness, say Americans

Q: When you think about what it means to be successful in America, how do you define personal success for yourself. What three words come to mind?

Source: Ipsos Online Community discussion conducted May 19-June 9, 2026, among 1,000 U.S. adults. (Gender split 55:45 female to male)

A new timeline of success

I was in my 30s when we made the jump to three kids. That's not uncommon these days. Marriage used to be something one did soon after graduating high school. Kids naturally followed soon after that. And after a couple of years in the workforce, folks tended to buy a home and settle down. Each of those milestones led to massive changes in how people spent and saved. And they still do; they're just all happening later, if at all.

These are some ways that we have redefined success since 1970 or so. Now, for four times as many people as then, it includes a college degree. That alone pushes out our milestones. It takes us longer to get established, especially as debt comes with that degree for many.

But play this out. If we get married and have kids at 30 instead of 21, we'll be partway into our careers. We'll have different childcare needs. We'll have different needs for flexibility. We'll likely still be renting, as the age of our first home purchase is now close to 40. When we get to our home, we'll have older kids than we used to. We'll have grandkids much later in life, while we're also taking care of our aging parents.

Teens say "So real"

Q: When you think about what it means to be successful in America, how do you define personal success for yourself. What three words come to mind?

Source: Ipsos Online Community discussion conducted May 19-June 9, 2026, among 1,000 U.S. adults. (Gender split 55:45 female to male)

Same dream, tougher climb

All that said, we haven't totally redefined success. Younger Americans, and in fact, younger folks the world over, aspire to many of the same milestones previous generations did.

The problem is that, as we saw in the [What the Future: American Dream]issue last year, while a majority believe in the dream, a larger majority think it's harder to reach than it used to be. For the young Gen Zers, there was a **whopping 22-point rise since just last year** in their agreement that the economy is rigged to the advantage of the rich and powerful.

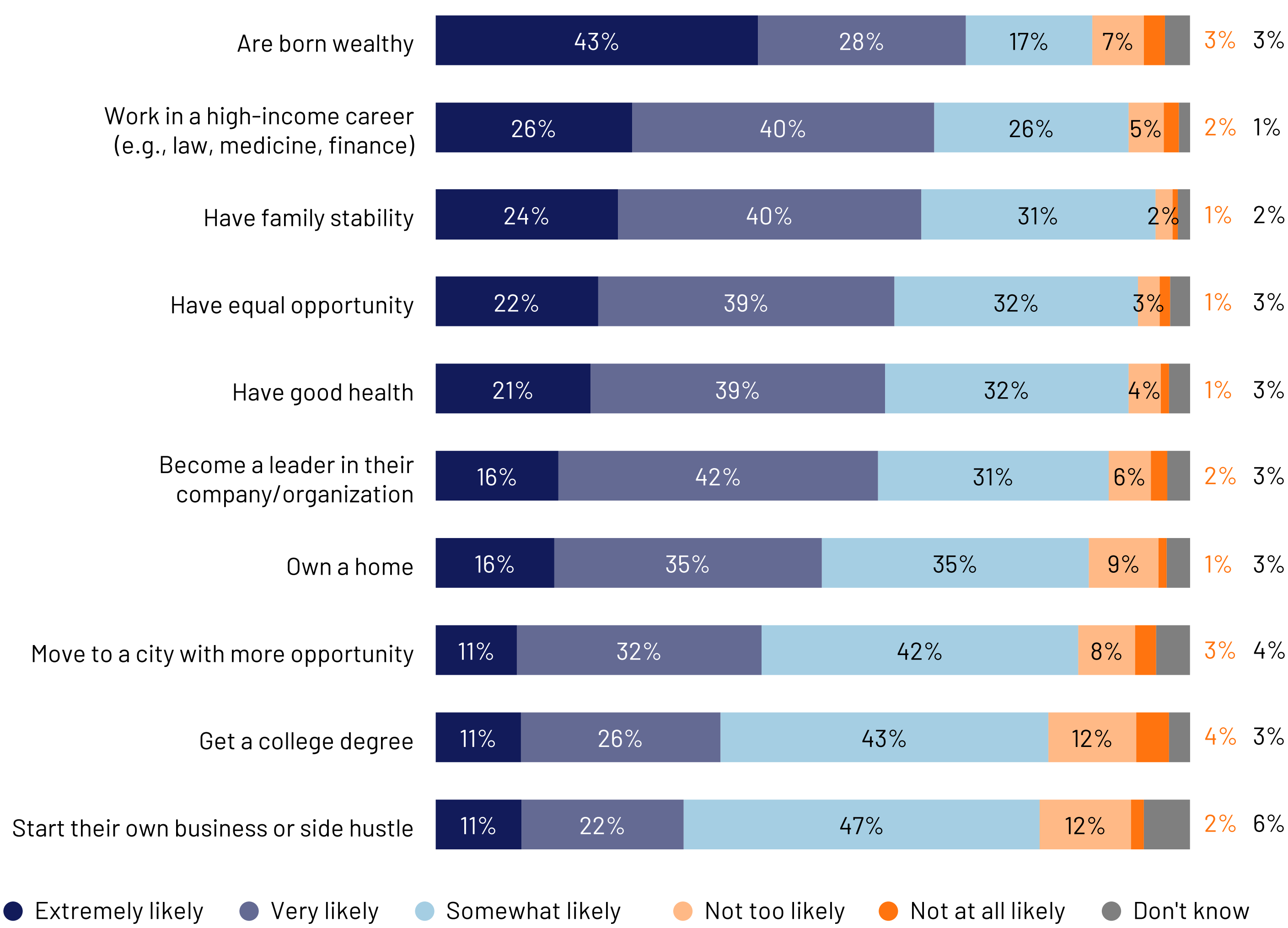
22 points

is the rise in the opinion among Gen Zers that the U.S. economy is rigged to advantage the rich and powerful

Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults; and Ipsos Future of the American Dream survey, conducted April 28-29, 2025, among 1,198 U.S. adults.

Americans think the best way to be successful is to be born that way

Q: How likely do you think someone is to be successful if they: (% Likely)



Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

The ladder to success in America historically has involved education, homeownership, mobility and often entrepreneurship. Being born on a higher rung certainly helps. It's seen as the most likely way to be successful, according to 71% of Americans.

Who the traditional path actually works for

So, in reading the data in this issue one way, the system works. Those who are more affluent or more educated tend to say they are successful at a higher rate than those who aren't.

Reading the data another way, the system has worked for those it was designed to work for.

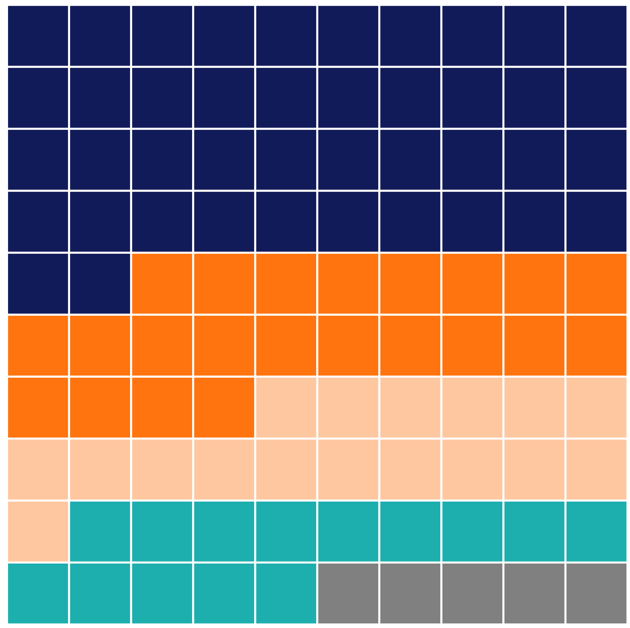
One in five (22%) says that the traditional path is outdated and is no longer a guarantee of success. Another 17% say it's flawed and can leave people less successful if they try to follow that path. A plurality (42%) say it works for some people, but also that there are a lot of other paths that also can lead to success. Just 14% say it's still the most reliable way to make it in America.

What is replacing this path? For some, it's multiple jobs. Call it the "1099 economy" or the "gig economy," these jobs typically tout flexibility if not high wages. ADP estimates one in ten American workers are working these jobs in a typical month, but that one in four takes on some sort of gig job over the course of a year. But just because people are working these jobs, it doesn't mean they think they lead to success. A plurality (43%) of Americans would prefer the traditional model of one full-time job. And a sizeable majority (70%) say that companies have a duty to pay their workers livable wages to help them succeed.

The problem for so many is that whatever our goals — from health to financial security to setting the next generation up for their success — we feel as though we are falling short.

Few Americans see the traditional path to success as the most reliable

Q: Thinking about the traditional American path to success (e.g., getting a college degree, climbing the corporate ladder, buying a house), which of the following comes closest to your view? (% Selected)

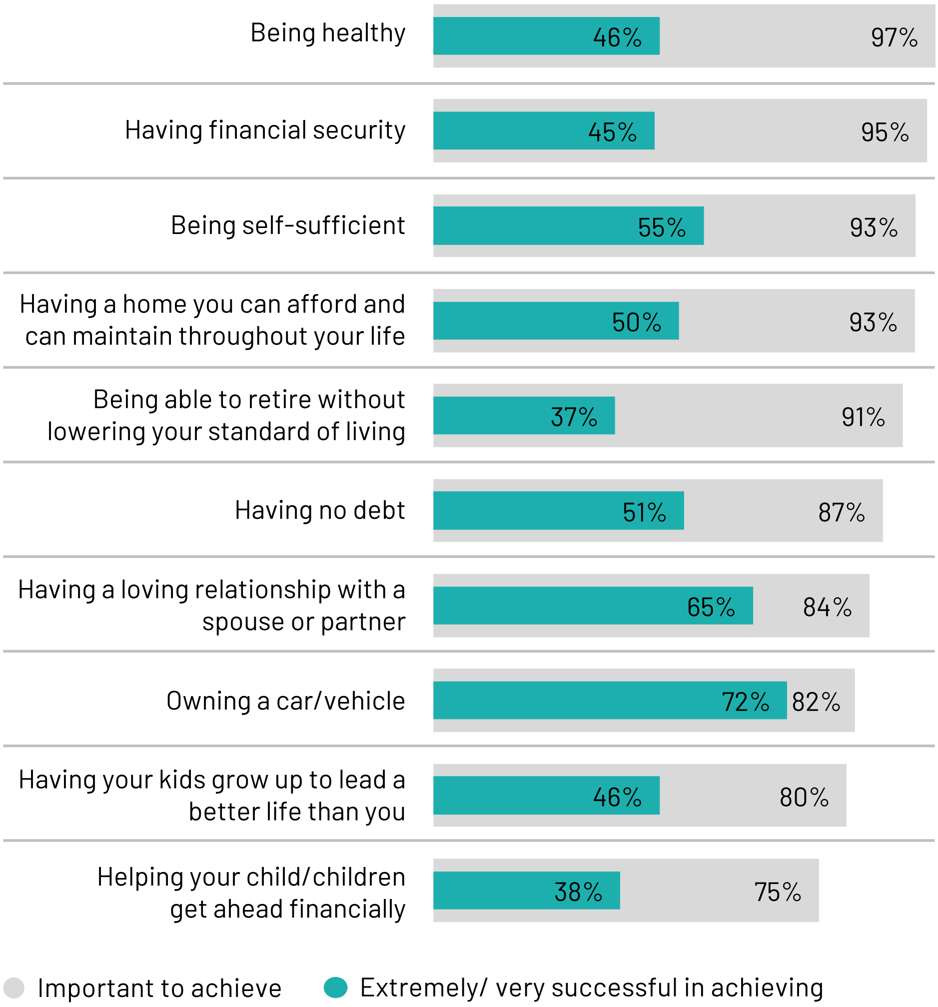


- It works for some people, but there are other equally good paths to success
- It is outdated and no longer guarantees success or financial stability
- It is fundamentally flawed and often leaves people worse off (e.g., in debt or burned out)
- It is the most reliable path to achieving success and financial stability
- Don't know

Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

We are falling short at the things we care most about for success

Q: How important are the following goals in making you feel successful in life? / Q. How successful do you feel you have been so far in achieving these goals? (% Important to achieve/Extremely or very successful in achieving)



Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults, including 1,079 U.S. adults who say the goal is important to feeling successful.

Redefining victory for your brand

So how can you, as a brand or policy leader, help people reach success in the constellation of these modern milestones?

That's what we'll dig into in this issue of What the Future. Helping your customers succeed can build the relationships that will help you succeed in the future, too. Define that victory how you will and redefine it as needed. But it all starts with a deeper understanding of today's consumer.

Matt Carmichael *is editor of What the Future.*

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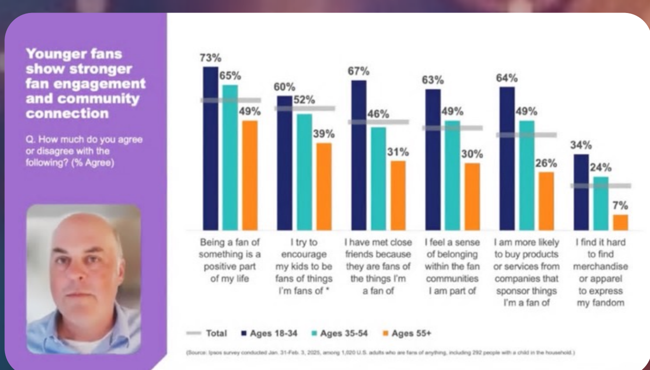

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you ask better questions today.

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HOW WILL AI HELP CONSUMERS DIY THEIR OWN SUCCESS?

John Paul Marcantonio

President and CEO, Bosch Power Tools North America

Whether for the joy of it or the economic reality of it, the do-it-yourself spirit has run deep in America. Homes in the U.S. are often referred to as the "nation's piggy banks." Today, homeownership has become out of reach for many but sweat equity has often been part of the path to success.

Bosch is a massive international company that builds a variety of items, from car sensors to power tools, home appliances and cellphone tech. John Paul Marcantonio is president and CEO of the Power Tools Division in North America, and between Bosch and its Dremel brand, its products literally power (and recharge) many of the DIY projects for today's homeowners and renters alike. Artificial intelligence will shift the DIY space even further. Here's how Bosch is adapting to new definitions of success.

47% of lower-income Americans DIY out of financial necessity.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.)

Matt Carmichael: How are shifts in homeownership, like buying later and being less able to buy, impacting the way we use DIY for our success?

John Paul Marcantonio: If you're somebody who may not be able to purchase a home and you're a renter, the personalization of that space for your family or for yourself becomes an important part of creating a home environment. The data we're seeing suggests that projects for smaller home improvements are significantly outstripping larger projects to increase space and size. We see a higher frequency of purchase on DIY items that are lower in dollar value and less technical. But if you look at any curve through the last 100-plus years in the U.S., the housing cycle will come back at some point and that will shift again. We have to make sure that we're ready for when that transition occurs, too.

Carmichael: Our data shows that some people who undertake DIY do so for the satisfaction while others do it more for economic necessity. How do you help both those audiences feel successful?

Marcantonio: If you have to make that improvement project because you're looking to save money and do it yourself, we don't think it should be hard. So we're trying to democratize the ability, the understanding and the information for people to be able to do that in an easier or more cost-effective way. For those who want to do it, it's creative and enjoyable. Psychologically, it's rich ground for marketers and brand builders, because by meeting people where they are and taking the on-trend and aspirational ways of improving, beautifying and creating, and being able to give people the tools to do that easily is an awesome opportunity.

As wealth increases, DIY shifts from need to strategic lifestyle choice

Q: People often have to be resourceful to get ahead or maintain their standard of living. When it comes to getting things done, which of the following best describes if or why you would take a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach? (% Total)

	Total	Household Income Under $50K	$50K-<$100K	$100K+
To save money so I can afford other things I want	54%	47%	50%	58%
For the satisfaction of making or fixing something myself	37%	31%	33%	43%
Because I simply cannot afford to hire someone else to do it	35%	47%	39%	28%
Because I can probably do it as well as a professional	19%	17%	18%	20%
None of the above	5%	5%	5%	5%
I don't take a DIY approach to getting things done	9%	11%	13%	5%

0% 100%

Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

Carmichael: How can people turn their DIY spirit into a path to success?

Marcantonio: By any measure, we are significantly short on skilled tradespeople on the pro side of the market. It's an enormous opportunity for young professionals entering the early stages of their careers for the next several decades.

Carmichael: How will AI change DIY?

Marcantonio: AI is going to be a force multiplier. A lot of physical tools will have AI overlays or interfaces.

To give you a concrete example, if you're a professional entering the trades or doing a remodeling project, or you're a homeowner who has to install something in a wall, today's methodology is pretty crude. We now have a tool that has radar technology that can understand the material types that are behind the wall, then can overlay a picture that looks like you're looking in 4K resolution through the wall, which is outstanding. It's able to increase the speed and the accuracy of what you do instead of substituting the work that a human does. In the trades, AI has enormous potential to help people to develop careers.

Carmichael: When it comes to social media and DIY influencers, how much of what they're demonstrating is something we can actually do in our homes and rentals?

Marcantonio: The DIY audience is skewing younger, but it's not defined by age — it's defined by a mindset. If you rent, you can't knock down a wall unless you get approval. But you can beautify and personalize that space by creating things that you can hang on the wall or change out things like cabinet hardware. There's a lot of overlap with first-time homeownership because people are spending a lot more money on down payments, so they typically don't have a ton of disposable income left to be able to do major improvements early on. With this in mind, DIY influencers play a critical role in building confidence in their audience by showing how projects are completed, making tasks less intimidating.

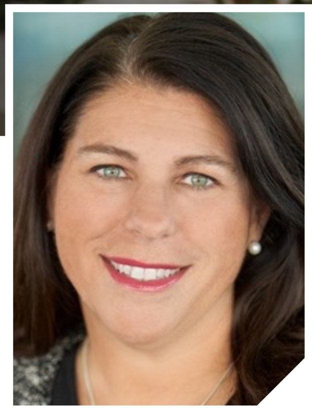
Carmichael: Why is success especially important now?

Marcantonio: It's really easy to get caught up in news cycles. When things are tough, typically we find a way to improve. It's important that we also reflect on what is working and how we can improve it, not only what is wrong and how we need to change it.

***Matt Carmichael** is editor of What the Future.*

> **You have the democratization of information now, and with AI, you also have the physical tools to be able to create in a new way."**
>
> - John Paul Marcantonio, *Bosch Power Tools North America*

WHAT HAPPENS TO FINANCIAL GOALS WHEN TRADITIONAL MILESTONES SHIFT?



Jill Perlberg

VP, head of marketing at Northwestern Mutual

Decades of demographic change because of the shifted timelines of marriage, child-rearing, homeownership, caregiving and retirement mean Americans now and tomorrow are going through new life stages. But as these modern milestones emerge, our views of success don't change wholesale.

For Jill Perlberg, vice president and head of marketing at 170-year-old financial services firm Northwestern Mutual, the future challenge is adapting to meet customers at the new times in their lives, which still drive a lot of spending and savings changes.

41% of Americans believe that real estate or 401(k) / individual retirement accounts are what they need most to build wealth or protect their success.

(Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.)

Matt Carmichael: Do you see customers' goals shifting, whether in the timing of when they aspire to them or when they actually reach them?

Jill Perlberg: Yes, but when the world feels unsettled, you have a number of things you want to achieve, but you're not entirely sure what's achievable or how to go after it. Maybe it's all achievable, but what's the time frame in which those pieces are achievable? Having a plan helps from an anxiety and an emotional side.

Carmichael: How are the timelines of today's modern milestones impacting how you help customers succeed?

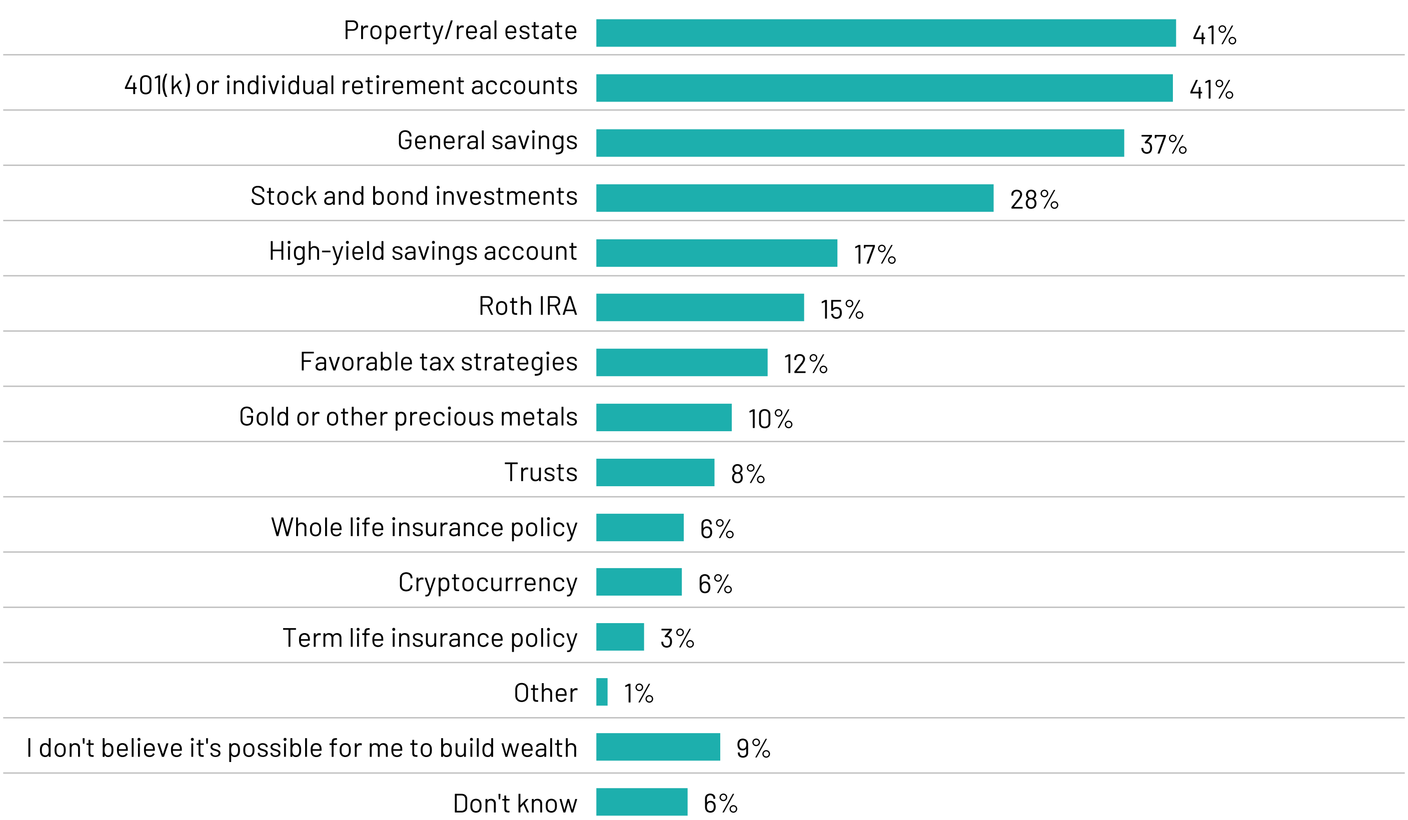
Perlberg: Life events tend to happen in clusters. Those clusters are either happening later, or not in the sequence that you would traditionally find. So the way in which you target and reach people is fundamentally changing. But also, what are the other milestones we need to start thinking about that are happening before those? How do you get involved with people earlier?

Carmichael: Whether by true ambition or in response to economic realities of not being able to achieve things that previous generations dreamed of, some younger people are saying that they want to spend more on experiences than on "stuff." How does that change how they save?

Perlberg: If you look back 10 to 15 years, what consumers often cite is not wanting to get involved in financial planning because they feel like they're going to deprive themselves today for long-term value tomorrow. But when you have a plan in place, it allows you to actually live more today because you've got the plan taken care of for the future and you're on the right track. It's not about depriving yourself today; it's about making sure that you're maximizing your life today and taking care of the things that you need to do so that you can not only live the life you want today, but also in the future.

Americans prefer traditional assets to build and protect wealth

Q. Which of the following, if any, do you believe you need most to build wealth and/or protect the success you have? (% Selected)



Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

Carmichael: Will AI replace human advisors in helping people find financial success?

Perlberg: You can put a lot of things in an AI engine, but that engine, or even mass media financial experts, are not going to know you as a person, how you show up emotionally, what keeps you up at night. Empathy is so critically important as to how the consumer is generally feeling. Advisors and companies in general need to show up with that empathy.

Carmichael: We see in our data that younger people trust more, and many different, types and sources of information about money and investing. How does that change the role of an advisor in helping people succeed?

Perlberg: One is that you have to be part of the conversation where it's happening. The second is the evolution of the advisor as the sense-maker. Our advisors value when clients bring them questions that came up in the AI chat or on social media, because they can address it head-on, like "You're probably getting conflicting information. So let's talk about it."

Carmichael: We've talked a lot about younger people and their aspirations, but overall, we're an aging population. How does that affect how you work with clients?

Perlberg: With older customers, it's a matter of taking all the amazing work that someone has done in their lifetime and saying, "How do we help you continue to realize your goals and make that money work as hard for you as it can in your retirement years?" It's a similar conversation to the one you have with younger investors. You think, "I've got 40, 50, 60 years to save. I've got potentially 30 to 40 years to spend down."

Carmichael: Part of succeeding is often passing your success along to the next generation. How do you see wealth transfer playing out in the coming decades?

Perlberg: I don't think it's going to be a life-changing moment for a pretty big population of folks, as much as it will help them pay off that credit card debt or live a little more comfortably in their day-to-day. That said, there's a fairly large amount of wealth that's going to go from one generation to the next. Generational planning is mission critical. Just because you grew up in a more affluent household doesn't mean that next generation has the money-management skills and financial-planning acumen that their parents or grandparents had. So how do you start the conversations early across the different generations to make sure that next generation is prepared for that to come?

Matt Carmichael *is editor of What the Future.*

> **Life events tend to happen in clusters. Those clusters are either happening later or not in the sequence that you would traditionally find."**
>
> \- Jill Perlberg, *Northwestern Mutual*

ARE YOUNGER AMERICANS REDEFINING SUCCESS OR RESCHEDULING IT?

What success means to Gen Z falls in line with prior generations — but how and when they achieve it is changing. Brands and institutions can earn trust and loyalty if they understand modern life stages.

WHY WE ASKED:

Many have argued that Gen Z is "redefining success" and no longer aspires to homeownership, parenthood or other traditional goals. But data from the 2026 Ipsos Generations Report indicates that what's changed isn't what success means to Gen Z, but how and when they achieve it.

Rather than viewing younger Americans as delayed in their development, Ipsos research suggests their lives should be understood through the lens of "Modern Milestones."

WHAT WE FOUND:

Many younger Americans are approaching life milestones differently and on a different timeline, from getting married to getting their driver's licenses. An Ipsos poll for Thrivent found that only 46% of 18- to 35-year-olds say they've moved out of their parents' house.

But that doesn't mean their aspirations have changed. Gen Z and Millennial Americans are actually more likely than older generations to identify marriage or a full-time job with success, according to the 2026 Ipsos Generations Report. This is true of both their values and their expectations: 70% say they plan to hold down a full-time job or move into their own home, and half expect to become parents.

The less linear and conventional paths Americans are taking toward these goals make up a new life stage: the "Twentysomething" period between adolescence and the responsibilities of a career, marriage or homeownership.

As What the Future Editor Matt Carmichael notes, mistaking this new life stage for permanent generational traits is "natural but can be misleading strategically" — and brands that conflate them risk losing sight of what people actually need today and tomorrow.

For many younger Americans, what's changing isn't the destination but the path leading to it. For brands and institutions, that means looking beyond age-based assumptions and understanding how shifting life stages are reshaping needs, expectations and purchasing decisions.

Christopher Good *is a staff writer for What the Future.*

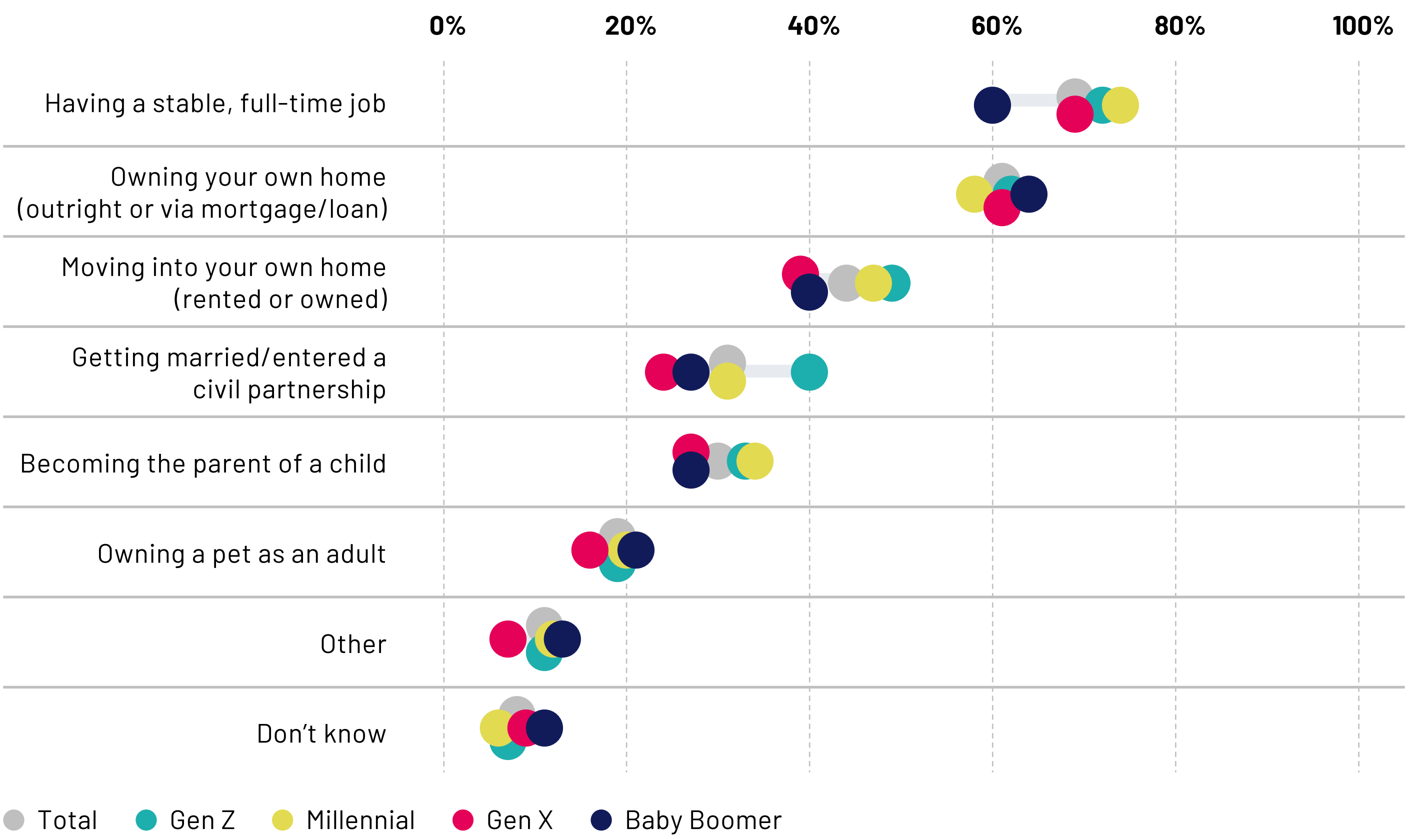
Companies can position themselves for success today by:

- Using qualitative research and behavioral science frameworks to understand how attitudes on success diverge along demographic and economic lines.
- Testing communications to ensure they align with life-stage priorities or tap into cross-generational values.
- Developing products that fulfill Americans' traditional aspirations on different budgets or timelines.
- Using scenario planning to prepare for how generational shifts impact consumer spending.

By understanding how the path to success is changing across generations, brands and institutions can better anticipate evolving consumer needs, design more relevant products and services and build stronger relationships with the people they serve.

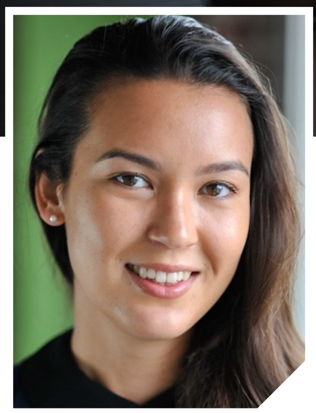
Gen Zers desire traditional success markers more than older peers

Q: Which, if any, of the following would you say are important signs of living a successful life these days? (% Selected)



Source: Ipsos Global Advisor survey conducted Feb. 20-Mar. 6, 2026, among 1,002 U.S. adults.

WHAT DEFINES THE ENTREPRENEURIAL DREAM IN AN AI-FIRST WORLD?



Laura Behrens Wu

Founder and CEO of Shippo

The promise of success draws people to entrepreneurship. And there's no place where success feels as possible to achieve this way as it does in the U.S., and especially Silicon Valley. Laura Behrens Wu, founder and CEO of shipping platform Shippo, is a modern example. She pivoted her own early e-commerce challenges into a logistics platform to empower small businesses to compete with retail giants. Now, as AI reshapes business, entrepreneurs like Behrens Wu and her customers face a new future of competitive challenges.

AI not only makes it easier than ever to start a business, it also creates fresh disruptions. Behrens Wu acknowledges AI's potential impact on her business and how it could shape her dream. "We know that logistics will be done differently in an age of AI, but we don't really know how just yet," she says. But she asserts that human creativity and authenticity will be critical differentiators, even in an AI-first world.

14% is the share of Americans who express entrepreneurial drive, led by middle-class and Hispanic Americans (at 18% each).

(Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.)

Kate MacArthur: AI is making it easier for anybody to start a business, but corporate giants are getting bigger. What does that tell you about the future of American capitalism?

Laura Behrens Wu: Companies that are getting started have that advantage of not working with all the baggage built up over years. They're able to be nimble from Day 1 and rethink and design processes in an AI-first way. E-commerce is not going away, and in a world of AI, people want to be human. They want to stand out and buy things that are made by other humans.

MacArthur: How has your idea of the American dream shifted since starting Shippo 10 years ago?

Behrens Wu: I'm originally from Germany. My co-founder is from Germany as well. We came to the U.S. both as interns for other tech companies. And we managed to start our own business and raise venture funding for ourselves and grow a company to the size it is right now with roughly 300 employees all around the U.S. and some internationally as well. I'm really honored to be living the American dream. This is something I don't think we could have accomplished in any other country. Entrepreneurs are taken seriously here in America, or in San Francisco, more so than in any other place around the world.

MacArthur: AI can create a sea of sameness. How might this shape entrepreneurship going forward?

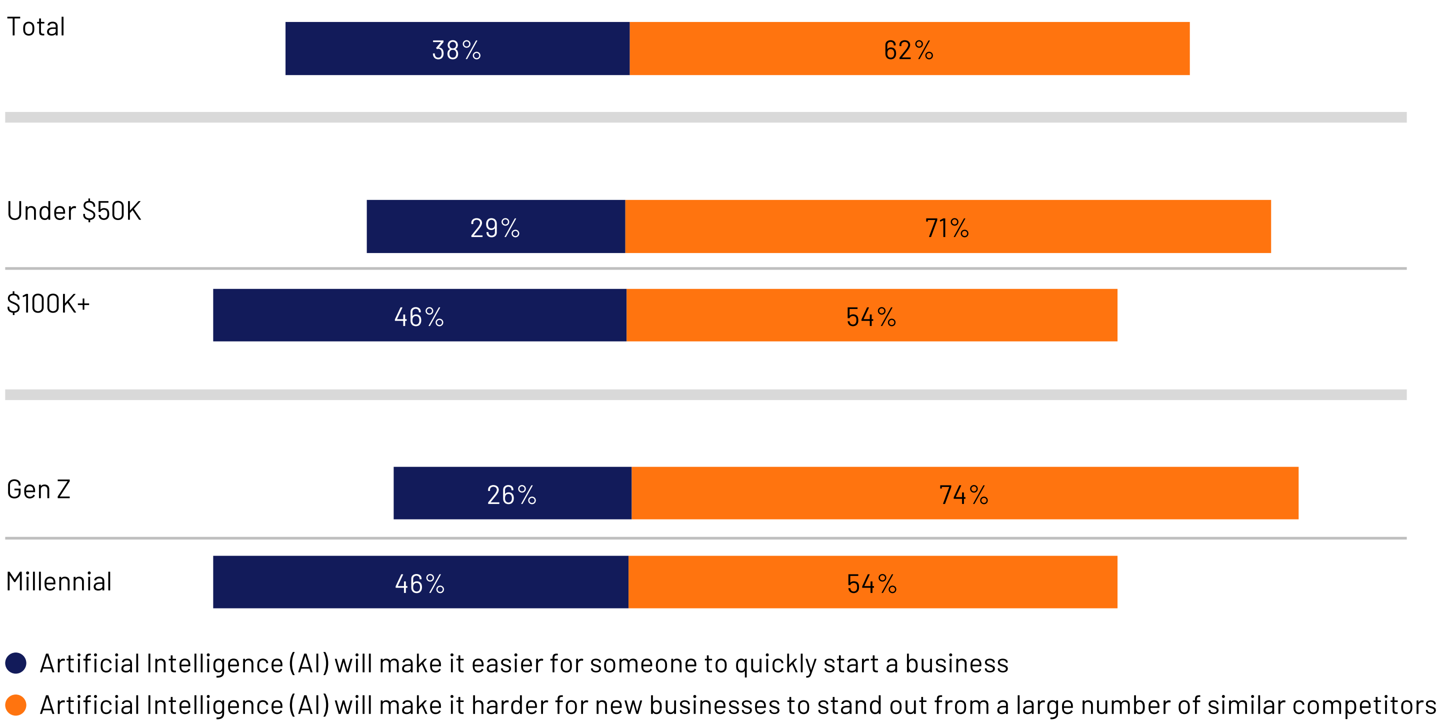
Behrens Wu: Right now, everyone's applying AI to their product somewhat randomly. Within the next year, we'll see which of those applications are actually useful and which were just chasing the buzz.

MacArthur: What do you consider success?

Behrens Wu: We've built a lot of products our customers are satisfied with, but this AI revolution is making me a little nervous. What are the right shipping products for the future of logistics? It's a never-ending treadmill to constantly adapt to market needs, customer needs and new technology.

Millennials and wealthy see AI as launchpad but Gen Z and working class fear a sea of competition

Q. For each of the following pairs of statements, please select the one that comes closest to your view, even if neither statement is exactly right. (% Total)



Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

MacArthur: What about as a person?

Behrens Wu: I had a kid recently, and I look at my kid and feel extremely successful. I've made the most beautiful kid out there.

MacArthur: The agentic shift seems to be the future. How are you factoring trust into that innovation?

Behrens Wu: We've started talking about how to appeal not just to a human customer, but to Claude or ChatGPT, which are making those recommendations. In the future, there might be a final human decision-maker, but all the research about what tools are best to use and bringing forward a recommendation will be done in an agentic way. And probably eventually the final decision will be done in an agentic way.

MacArthur: Is there a difference between the global definition of business success and how it's viewed in America?

Behrens Wu: In Germany, in order to be taken seriously or to raise funding, you have to have a track record. We were first-time founders. We didn't come from prestigious U.S. universities. The first Shippo investor literally said, "I'm not sure your idea makes sense, but you have that entrepreneurial sparkle in your eyes," and wrote us a $25,000 check. And people believe more in that entrepreneurial drive. Failing and learning from your failure is not as stigmatized in the U.S. compared to other countries, where you don't get a second chance.

MacArthur: What opportunities make it easier to be successful as a founder?

Behrens Wu: As long as you're solving a problem that customers really have, you get a lot of open-mindedness from the customer to use a product that is new and less proven. Of course, San Francisco is full of other startups, so being able to tap into a hiring market of people who have worked at companies of a similar stage before and working at an early-stage company is pretty intense.

MacArthur: What barriers make it harder for future entrepreneurs?

Behrens Wu: Right now, the AI craze. Everyone is looking to invest in AI, and everyone is trying to figure out what's going to happen with these new tools. I think people are going to remain creative, and human creativity is probably the main thing we'll ask for.

Kate MacArthur *is managing editor of What the Future.*

> **I'm really honored to be living the American dream. This is something I don't think we could have accomplished in any other country."**
>
> \- Laura Behrens Wu, *Shippo*

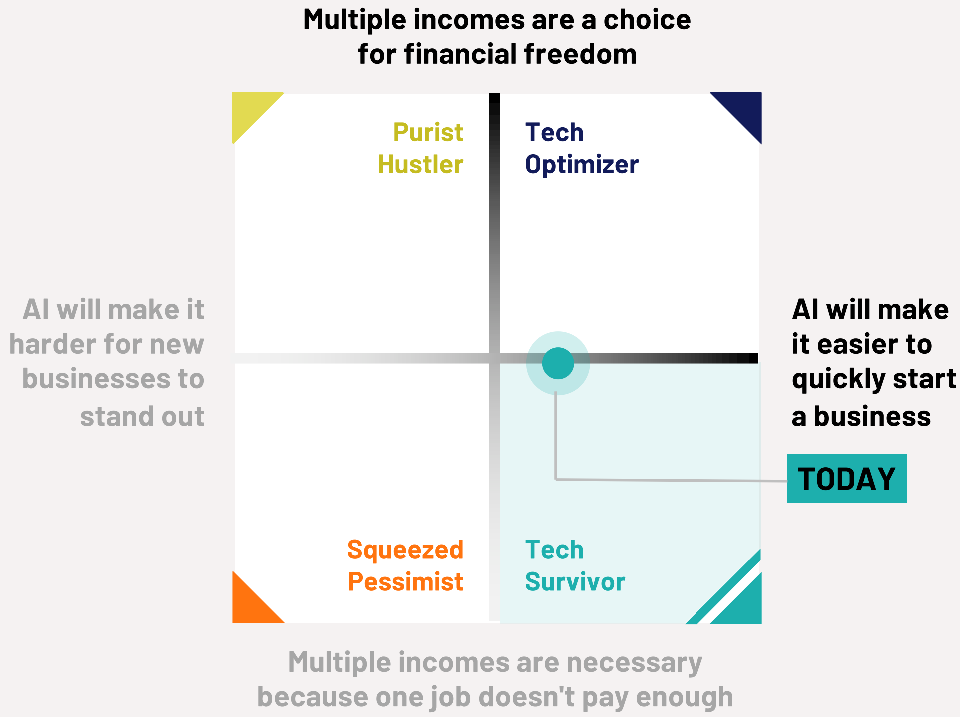
TENSIONS

The future is always in tension. We can measure those contradictions today with forced-choice questions.

We plotted two responses against each other in a classic 2x2 grid. If nothing changes, we'll stay where we are. But this way, you can see how far opinion would have to shift to move us into a different quadrant in the future.

Q. For each of the following pairs of statements, please select the one that comes closest to your view, even if neither statement is exactly right. (% Total)

1. MANAGING THE SIDE HUSTLE IN AN AI-DRIVEN ECONOMY



Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

Tech Survivor:
Today, 49% of Americans call multiple incomes a necessity, and 38% believe AI makes starting a business easier. This lands us barely in this starting mindset. If nothing changes, we stay here.

Tech Optimizer:
An economic boost could lift people into this mindset, where multiple incomes are viewed as wealth-building choices rather than necessities.

Purist Hustler:
If AI floods the market with automated rivals, people may reject it, moving to the upper-left box where human authenticity is the premium differentiator. We're already seeing signals of people leaning into humanity.

Squeezed Pessimist:
If severe inflation wipes out savings, people's views could shift them into the lower left as they rely on a patchwork of gigs. But government safety nets or AI upskilling could ease fears, looping us back to where we started.

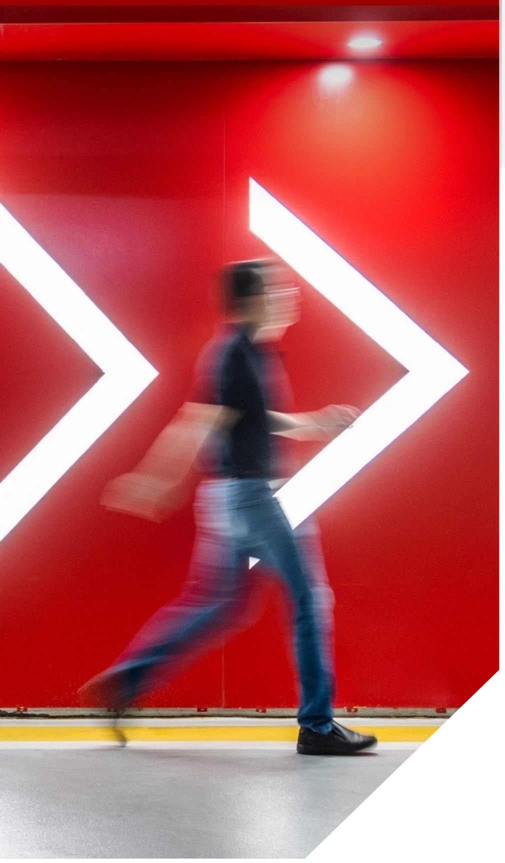
***Kate MacArthur** is managing editor of What the Future.*

TENSIONS

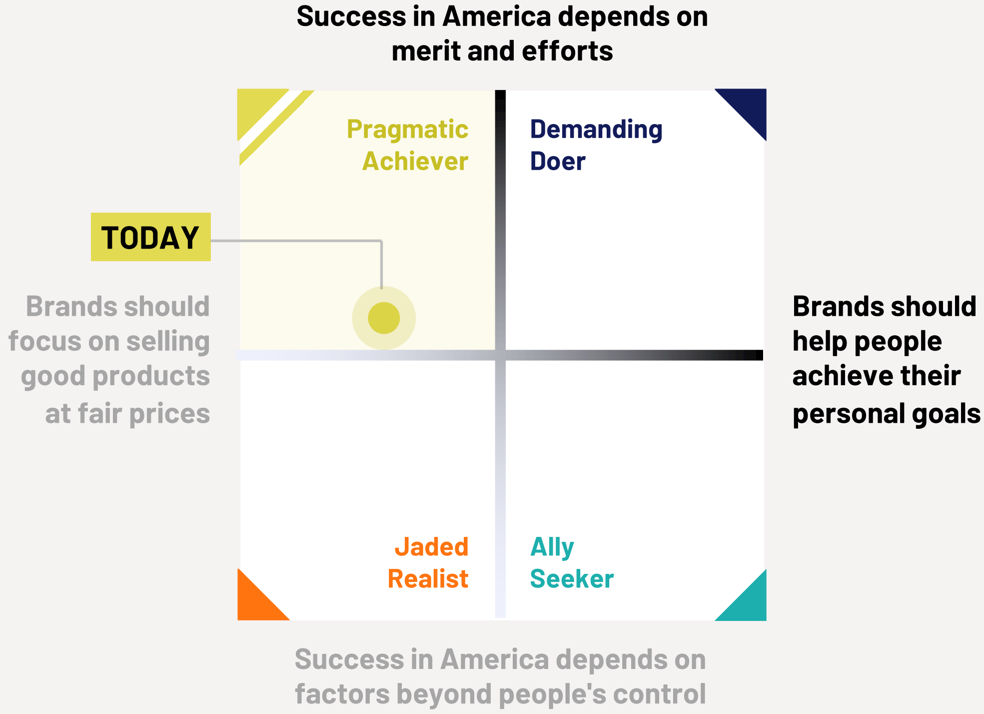
The future is always in tension. We can measure those contradictions today with forced-choice questions.

We plotted two responses against each other in a classic 2x2 grid. If nothing changes, we'll stay where we are. But this way, you can see how far opinion would have to shift to move us into a different quadrant in the future.

Q. For each of the following pairs of statements, please select the one that comes closest to your view, even if neither statement is exactly right. (% Total)



2. BALANCING SELF-RELIANCE WITH BRAND INTERVENTION



Source: Ipsos Future of Success survey, conducted June 4-5, 2026, among 1,112 U.S. adults.

Pragmatic Achiever:
In this tension, 57% of Americans believe merit drives success, and 72% want brands to simply sell good products at fair prices. This puts us firmly in this upper-left block, where they value self-reliance and basics.

Jaded Realist:
If a soft economy fails workers, they could lose confidence and shift down here, feeling the system is rigged and still rejecting brand intervention.

Ally Seeker:
Brands that consistently deliver can earn trust. This could warm jaded shoppers into this space, where they actively want companies to support their personal goals.

Demanding Doer:
As people start hitting those goals, they may be motivated to work harder and rise up to this quadrant, expecting both personal success and brand support.

***Kate MacArthur** is managing editor of What the Future.*

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