The 2023 National Study of
Leadership and Performance Insights

New Research and Discoveries to Drive Performance Results

CAREY LOHRENZ
BE FEARLESS

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INTRODUCTION

Hello, and welcome to the 2023 National Study of Leadership and Performance Insights. This comprehensive study started as a passion of mine to uncover new, missing data on leading with confidence in an era of unprecedented uncertainty.

These insights have never been more valuable for organizations navigating today's turbulent waters.

Leaders everywhere recognize the future is increasingly uncertain and unpredictable. Since COVID-19, uncertainty now governs decisions, behaviors, and performance across the U.S. and worldwide.

Organizations face new problems without clear solutions. In this climate, leaders seek guidance on how to learn, adapt, and thrive in our evolving reality.

In short, leaders of all ages, titles, occupations, and experiences seek ways to learn, navigate, and lead in this new post-pandemic reality.

But what specific knowledge, practices, and actions do leaders need to achieve their potential and drive results?

> *Knowing your value, speaking up, and not flying under the radar— this is what fearless leadership is about.*
>
> **— Carey Lohrenz**

This national study aimed to uncover practical, empowering insights so leaders at every level can lead with greater confidence and impact.

This is the kind of helpful data leaders have wanted but not found—until now.

We are committed to providing the latest insights on leadership excellence and high performance, enabling you to build effective, influential organizations.

Welcome to the 2023 National Study of Leadership and Performance Insights. We're excited for you to explore our findings.

Your partner in leadership,

Carey Lohrenz
Chief Executive Officer
Author of 2 WSJ Bestsellers: *Fearless Leadership*, and *Span of Control*
Carey Lohrenz Enterprises, LLC

CAREY LOHRENZ
—— BE FEARLESS ——

NATIONAL STUDY OVERVIEW

The 2023 National Study of Leadership and Performance Insights is a custom study that my team and I led to uncover missing insights, attitudes, and beliefs that hold leaders back—and propel them forward.

We focused specifically on the role of leaders *and* team members to provide these missing insights.

It was essential we discover data leaders could put into practice immediately, so we carefully selected participants who accurately represent today's working landscape.

The study included 1,003 participants, ages 18 to 65, weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, gender, geography, and ethnicity.

To match the state of the workforce today, all study participants were either employed full-time, part-time, or actively looking for work (the general definition of working America). By focusing on those employed or actively looking, we can see current insights into the workforce and deliver a true Snapshot of Working America.

We are incredibly excited about the study sample and the findings!

My team analyzed a variety of variables, including generation, gender, employment status, job title, household income, and many more.

We're sharing the most meaningful discoveries in this actionable white paper.

As a leader, author, speaker, and board member, research-based insights are important to me to separate fact from fiction in leadership.

This data enables measurable leadership success and results even amid uncertainty.

To solve the challenges of chaos and make our goals, dreams, and commitments a reality, we must understand that to succeed when the pressure is on and improve our performance overall, we've got to know what we can and cannot control.

And having access to the right data? *Priceless.*

Welcome to the study. We're delighted to have you explore these powerful findings.

SECTION 1: NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY, CHALLENGE, AND THRIVING THROUGH CHANGE

Americans now face uncertainty amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic's ongoing impacts—from workforce challenges to inflation, geopolitics, government polarization, and much more. This creates difficulties for Americans in large *and* small organizations, whether being a new employee in a private company, CEO of a global brand, or a volunteer at a non-profit organization.

Lost in this uncertainty is how these experiences directly impact the mindset, motivation, emotion, and confidence needed to pursue dreams, take risks, and persevere.

Our study found that over half of working Americans **(54%)** feel less confident in their future than before the pandemic. That's a majority!

Even more troubling, a staggering **68% of Gen Z** feels *less* confident about their future now than before the pandemic.

As any leader can tell you, confidence is critically important. Losing it threatens creativity, innovation, and more.

FEEL LESS CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR FUTURE NOW THAN BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

54% of working Americans

68% of Gen Z
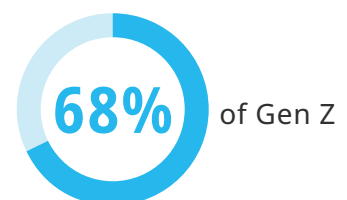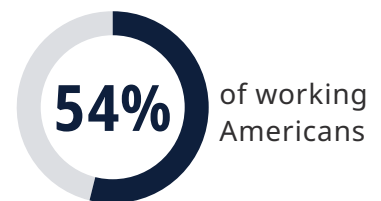
Discovering this loss of confidence in their future should be a wake-up call that leaders and all Americans are having lasting impacts from the last few years of uncertainty, and these are now impacting their attitude about the future.

As we go further into the data, there are even more nuanced insights about the divergent impact of the pandemic and this time of uncertainty that leaders need to know:

Women are most impacted: Coming out of the pandemic, the data revealed that women are impacted **significantly more** than men when it comes to family challenges, mental health challenges, and physical health challenges. It is essential to raise awareness of this greater impact on women as leaders consider resources, solutions, and approaches to helping all those they lead.

Deeper impact of uncertainty: The study found that Working Americans are not very, or not at all, confident in their finances (34%), meeting new people (21%), or with their physical health (21%). This shows the more profound impact of uncertainty—affecting a broad spectrum of perceptions, experiences, and behaviors that will have significant long-term effects, from personal finances to networking, and wellness.

NOT CONFIDENT

34%
in their finances

21%
meeting new people

21%
with their physical health

Challenges can build strength: In a nod to the resilience and determination of Americans, the national study found that 79% say the more change they experience in life, the more confident they feel adapting to it.

So, while the study clearly shows the downsides of recent uncertainty, it also reveals most people are not giving up. Instead, they see challenges as a pathway to building strength.

Change avoidance is real: Which generation most avoids change?

Many would guess older generations with more experience, set in tradition, with ingrained behaviors.

But that would be incorrect.

In a surprise discovery, **Gen Z most says they try to avoid change whenever possible.**

That's right, a vast majority (63%) of the youngest generation avoid change whenever possible.

This contrasts with prior generations who were experiencing a lot of change in earlier adult life stages—such as buying a house, starting a family, etc.

AVOID CHANGE WHENEVER POSSIBLE

63% Gen Z

**Motivation matters:** The study explored what holds people back and what motivates their best work.

Of all the motivations tested, overwhelmingly, Working Americans are most motivated to do their best when they feel good about themselves.

This is important for leaders to recognize because Working Americans who feel good about themselves do their best work, a clear message for leaders to hear.
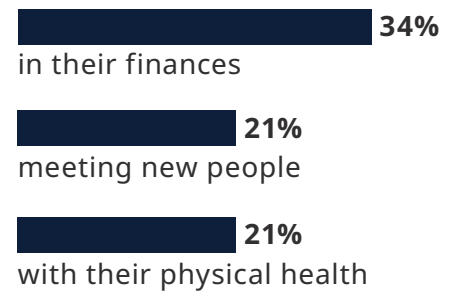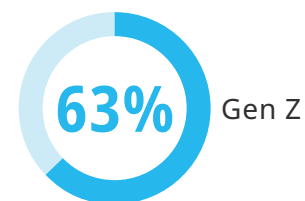
Navigating change varies: When it comes to change, Americans believe that the difficulty of navigating it depends on the type of change confronting them.

What type of change is most difficult for Working Americans?

The study found that Working Americans have the **most difficulty** navigating change regarding their personal finances. *Significantly* more than any other area of their lives tested in the study.

Going deeper into the data from that question was another staggering finding: Americans a*ctively looking* for work experienced more difficulty navigating change than full-time, part-time, or self-employed Americans in ***8 out of the 9*** areas of life tested.

The benefit that wins: Leaders often wonder what the top benefit or outcome is for working Americans when they successfully navigate change.

In a surprise and telling discovery, **the number one benefit** of all those tested was achieving better mental health.

That's right. More than better physical health, confidence, and feeling more in control, working Americans said the top *benefit of navigating change* is better mental health. This is an excellent outcome for Working Americans and the organization counting on them to perform at a high level.

An excruciating cost: In further exploring Working Americans navigating change, what was the biggest consequence of being unable to navigate change successfully?

By an even *larger margin* than the benefit of successfully navigating change, the **most painful** personal consequence of not navigating change well: **worse mental health**.

The polarity of mental health being both the best outcome of successfully navigating change ***and***, by an even larger margin, the worst outcome of not successfully navigating change speaks to the urgency, influence, and emotional impact that navigating change creates.

It's up to leaders to help Americans better navigate change to boost skills, mental health, and confidence for the future.

The gap in confidence and outlook, especially among the younger generation, is concerning, and will significantly affect individuals and organizations.

What should you consider to better prepare to navigate change, avoid the damaging pitfalls of change, and create more positive outcomes amid uncertainty?

In my work with leaders and organizations globally—from Fortune 500s to startups and governmental agencies—I've seen an approach that generates results.

This method sparks conversations and reconnects priorities for learning, resources, and planning:

ACTIONS FOR INDIVIDUALS:

1. **Expand Career Development:** When people lack confidence in the future, they can be less willing to take risks, even when taking smart risks is not only warranted but ideal. Expanding development, especially after times of uncertainty, is critical. It provides skills, confidence, and a learning mindset to pursue new opportunities and invest in oneself.

   This ensures change and uncertainty don't limit an individual's career growth and potential.

2. **Use Mental Health Tools and Resources:** As the research clearly shows, mental health risks come with change.

   The top benefit of successfully navigating change is better mental health. But worse mental health is an even greater risk.

   Providing tools, resources, training, professionals, and support enable people to better navigate stress and anxiety. This enables them to be their best selves at work and in life.

3. **Build Resilience and Adaptability:** Confidence often goes hand in hand with resilience and the ability and willingness to adapt to change.

   Those needing confidence may require help preparing for and navigating uncertainty.

   Leaders can help support resilience by highlighting the strength and stability of their team members, their organization, and the personal journeys of the talent across their organization.

   People often forget their resilience, especially when confidence is low.

   Reminding people, resurfacing those stories, strategies, and memories—shows people they've done it before, and can do it again.

ACTIONS FOR ORGANIZATIONS:

1. **Innovating Talent Attraction and Retention:** The research shows Gen Z workers are the *least confident* in their future after going through such a deep time of uncertainty.

   Addressing this head-on is key to attracting and retaining this emerging generation of talent.

   Gen Z needs to see a clear, attainable future with the company, so their confidence is strong.

   This connection *should be a priority* for all leaders who want to attract and keep this emerging generation long-term.

   If Gen Z doesn't see a clear future with the company, they're more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere. Don't let this happen. Show them they have a future at your organization.

2. **Support Innovation and Smart Risk Taking:** When people lack confidence, they may avoid innovation and change, because of the potential for failure, loss, or disappointment. They defend or support the status quo rather than being open to change and champions for innovation.

   This hinders performance, creativity, and adaptation.

   Leaders often find it difficult to build and sustain a high-performing team in these circumstances.

   Fostering a culture of innovation, smart risk-taking, and elevating learning over failure is key to making it safe to fail, learn, and grow.

3. **Lead by Example for High Performance:** Confidence is closely tied to peak performance. If a significant percentage of the workforce *needs* more confidence in their future, the organization's overall performance, productivity, and results can suffer.

   Now more than ever, leading by example through actions, words, and vision is crucial. Inspire your team to follow you to higher levels of excellence.

   Leading by example has never been more important, especially in times of uncertainty and lower confidence.

Transparent and consistent communication can restore employee confidence at this critical time. (For more strategies, visit page 215 in Span of Control to learn how to communicate an organization's plans, invest in employee development, and support mental health.)

As the first section of the research study revealed, now is a crucial time for organizations to engage with their employees and teammates (such as briefing and debriefing), particularly the younger generation, to understand their concerns and provide the necessary support and solutions.

This builds a confident, resilient, and adaptable workforce better equipped to navigate change and uncertainty.

And now on to Section 2 of the study's findings!

SECTION 2: **THE NEED FOR FEARLESS LEADERSHIP**

As the first section of the study revealed, leadership is needed in new and important ways to navigate this time of uncertainty and drive progress.

But where should leaders most focus their time, attention, talent, and organizational resources?

What matters most to those they lead to unlock the desired performance, loyalty, connection, and results that are critically important in organizations?

In Section 2 of the study's findings, the data reveals the need for fearless leadership and what that looks like from the view of those being led today.

These insights are essential for leaders of *all* levels of experience because new leaders want to get off to a great start, and experienced leaders need to know how to adapt to changes in culture, work environment, and expectations.

The exploration of fearless leadership is also timely as much has been written about the current leadership gap.

But the study uncovered the attitudinal drivers of those being led and what they want—and need—to do their best.

Let's dive into the findings!

Psychological Safety is Overlooked in the Workplace: Our national study revealed that **39%** of working Americans feel no psychological safety at work—nearly 4 in 10.

The study defined psychological safety as a shared belief held by team members that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.

In a psychologically safe team, members feel accepted and respected.

FEEL NO PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY AT WORK

39% Working Americans

They are comfortable being themselves, expressing their thoughts and ideas and are not afraid of making mistakes or facing negative consequences for speaking up.

Psychological safety is key for innovation, collaboration, learning, and engagement. But many lack this crucial foundation.

Supporting Innovation: When people feel safe to express their ideas at work and in organizations, they are more likely to share innovative thoughts and nontraditional solutions that they might otherwise keep to themselves for fear of criticism or rejection.

Enhancing Collaboration and Teamwork: Psychological safety fosters open communication and collaboration between individuals, groups, and the larger enterprise. Team members are more likely to trust each other and work well together when they feel psychologically safe in meetings, working solo, and relying on each other for the overall organization to function well.

Learning from Mistakes and Setbacks: In a psychologically safe environment, mistakes are seen as opportunities to learn and improve, rather than failures to be punished. This promotes a growth mindset and continuous improvement. In fact, in a strongly psychologically safe environment, mistakes and setbacks are expected and seen as necessary to know that learning, appropriate risk-taking, and growth are happening.

Improving Employee Engagement and Retention: Employees are more likely to be engaged at work and less likely to leave their job when they feel psychologically safe. They also will have a stronger foundation to feel more committed and motivated, which can lead to higher productivity, loyalty, tenure, and lower annual turnover.

LEADERS CAN TAKE MANY ACTIONS TO IMPROVE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN AN ORGANIZATION:

Encourage Open Communication: Foster an environment where everyone feels comfortable expressing their ideas and opinions. This could involve regular team meetings where everyone has a chance to speak and ensuring that leaders are approachable and open to feedback from stakeholders across their organization.

Show Empathy and Understanding: Leaders should strive to understand their team members' perspectives and show empathy towards their experiences and challenges. Leaders should actively listen to employees, validate their feelings, and show understanding and support.

Promote Learning from Mistakes: Rather than punishing or penalizing people for making mistakes, support a culture that sees mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow.
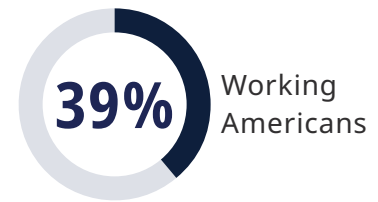
One process outlined in *Fearless Leadership: High-Performance Lessons From the Flight Deck* is Debriefing and sharing Lessons Learned. When a mistake is made, we focus on what can be learned from it and how to prevent it in the future, rather than placing blame. This creates the opportunity for a healthy debriefing where "it's not about who is right; it's about what is right."

Model Psychological Safety: Leaders play a key role—and are often the most critical cultural influence—in setting the tone for psychological safety across their organization. Leaders can show their team that it's safe to do the same by being open, vulnerable, and willing to take risks. A strong leader starts a Debrief with, "I've made this mistake, and I'll fix it."

Celebrate Diversity and Inclusion: Consistently recognize and appreciate team members' diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences. This includes fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and respected.

Leaders can build psychological safety through open communication, empathy, learning from mistakes, and modeling vulnerability.

By cultivating a culture of psychological safety, organizations can reap the benefits of a more innovative, collaborative, and engaged workforce.

Strengthening psychological safety benefits the 39% are currently without—**and** the 61% who work alongside them.

Psychological safety is just one area people want to improve.

What is another?

Risk-taking.

49% of Working Americans say their company culture does not support risk-taking. Almost half of all working Americans feel that their company culture does not support risk-taking, directly impacting *so many* aspects of culture, growth, progress, and teamwork.

When an organization does not support taking risks, the downsides are clear, especially in times of uncertainty.

A lack of risk-taking hinders innovation, engagement, and adaptability.

COMPANY CULTURE DOES NOT SUPPORT RISK-TAKING

49% Working Americans

Innovation Stagnation: Innovation is a critical driver of growth for most businesses and requires a certain degree of risk-taking at every step of the innovation process. Without a culture that supports risk-taking, companies may struggle to innovate, thus losing out on new opportunities and falling behind competitors that support appropriate risk-taking.

Decreasing Employee Engagement: When risk-taking is not encouraged, employees may feel less motivated to bring new ideas to the table or take on new or different initiatives. This can impact overall engagement, productivity, and morale, *and* lead to employees feeling bored or stuck in the status quo at work due to the lack of newness that avoidance of risk creates.

Declining Adaptability: In uncertain times, the ability to take calculated risks is often what allows organizations to identify, strategize, pivot, adapt, and seize new opportunities.

Without a willingness to take risks, companies might struggle to adapt to changing market conditions or delay adapting until they are no longer relevant or viable.

In this context, courage, integrity, planning, and debriefing are all key aspects of, and drivers in, fostering a culture of risk-taking.

Courage is the ability to face fear, uncertainty, or intimidation, and it's crucial for risk-taking. Leaders should exemplify courage and encourage their team members to do the same, ensuring that calculated risks are valued and supported.

Integrity is about being honest and having strong moral principles. Part of leading with integrity is constantly putting the mission before the self.

When a leader remains committed to the mission, and leads by example—that is true fearless leadership.

In a risk-taking culture, risks must be taken with integrity, meaning the leader's values are ethically sound and in line with the company's values.

Calculated risk-taking should involve careful planning. This includes assessing potential outcomes, considering different options, and planning to manage potential fallout.

Companies can ensure that risks are taken strategically and thoughtfully by promoting and valuing thorough planning and debriefing.

How can you apply these ideas in your organization?

By promoting these values and practices, organizations can foster a culture of innovative, calculated risk-taking, which is crucial for navigating uncertainty and driving innovation.

A MISSING CRITICAL COMPONENT: TENACITY

Our national study revealed that 81% of Working Americans believe that tenacity is critical for achieving long-term success. However, **39%** said they don't know how to build tenacity.

Tenacity, defined as being very determined and persistent, is a crucial trait for both individuals and organizations. Tenacity enables people to persevere through challenges, bounce back from failures, and ultimately achieve their goals.

The lack of understanding around building tenacity presents problems on both a personal and organizational level.

For individuals, lacking tenacity may result in failing to reach major goals or important milestones along the way.
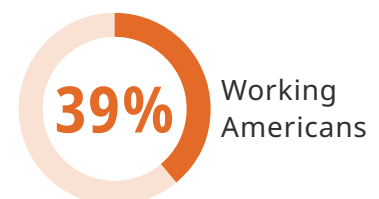
Without tenacity, people may give up too easily when facing obstacles or setbacks, limiting their ability to reach personal or professional goals.

Lacking tenacity also leads to reduced resilience, or the ability to recover after adversity.

BELIEVE THAT TENACITY IS CRITICAL

81% Working Americans

DON'T KNOW HOW TO BUILD TENACITY

39% Working Americans
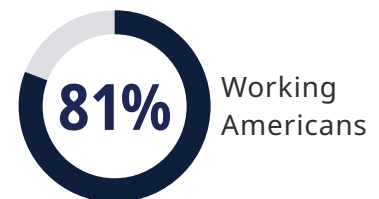
For organizations, promoting tenacity can encourage employees to fully commit to their ideas and see initiatives through, even when there are roadblocks or uncertain outcomes.

There's no better way to build the tenacity you need to lead than by building a predisposition for *doing*—a bias for action.

To become more tenacious, a leader must have the confidence to go out and do it—and the "doing it" comes first. When leaders learn to act even when they feel stuck, frustrated, or intimidated, they increase their ability to get through situations that demand commitment.

There are tangible ways leaders can build tenacity, including: setting clear, aligned goals; developing a growth mindset and learning culture; practicing persistence deliberately; and seeking guidance and support from others when faced with difficulty.

Here are four tangible ways to build tenacity:

1. **Set Clear Goals:** Having clear, well-defined goals can provide the motivation to persevere through challenges. These goals should be challenging yet achievable and aligned with a person's values and the organization's mission.

2. **Develop a Growth Mindset:** Cultivate a growth mindset which is the belief that abilities and intelligence can be developed with effort, learning, and commitment. This can foster resilience and tenacity.

3. **Practice Persistence:** Like almost any skill, practice increases tenacity. This might involve deliberately taking on challenging situations or persisting in the face of difficulty, even when it would be easier to give up.

4. **Seek Support:** A key to developing tenacity is to ask for help, whether that is from a mentor, coach, leader, or supportive colleague. This support can provide guidance, encouragement, and a different perspective when things get tough.

By *purposefully* fostering tenacity, both individuals and organizations can become better equipped to navigate challenges, adapt to change, and stay the course to achieve their goals amid uncertainty, increased competition, and rapidly changing situations.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE?

An often-repeated leadership principle states that leaders must lead by example.

However, the national study data revealed that **33**% of Working America say leaders at their companies do not lead by example.

With one out of every three leaders perceived as *not* modeling expected behaviors, substantial negative consequences can result:
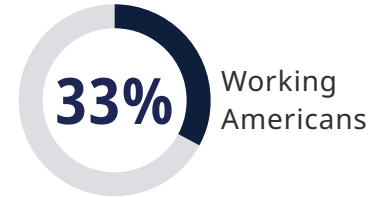
Trust Erosion: One of the fastest ways to erode and destroy trust in an organization is for leaders to say one thing and do another. This inconsistency can make employees doubt their leaders' integrity, sincerity, and trustworthiness, undermining their confidence in the leadership and the entire organization.

COMPANY LEADERS DO NOT LEAD BY EXAMPLE

33% Working Americans

Confusion and Misalignment: Leaders need to model the behavior they expect from their teams, to ensure clarity around what is expected, valued, and rewarded. Not doing so can lead to misaligned actions and goals across the organization, reducing efficiency and effectiveness.

Culture Degradation: Organizational culture is heavily influenced by the behavior of its leaders. Cultural decline always follows when leaders don't match stated organizational values and approaches.

This failure to model positive behaviors can even result in other employees also engaging in poor or inappropriate behaviors, potentially leading to issues with performance, collaboration, and workplace culture.

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE?

Leading by example ensures clarity, alignment, and a positive culture. But, today's leaders must recognize that 1/3 of the workforce believes their leaders don't walk their talk.

This makes modeling expected behaviors even more important. Reinforcing leadership by example across the organization is critical for culture, trust, morale, engagement, and overall performance.

The influences and impact of leaders drive workplace performance, beliefs and attitudes, and talent acquisition.

Our study uncovered that **63%** of Working Americans would switch companies with no pay raise if they believed more in the new leader.

Over six in ten people would leave their job without a pay bump for **better leadership**.

This is a fascinating and unexpected wake-up call about the current employment reality where a focus on wage inflation and turnover garner headlines.

This underscores leadership's huge impact on employee satisfaction, engagement, and retention.

It matters for several reasons and can have far-reaching implications for an organization's leadership pipeline, culture, and ability to navigate uncertainty.

Leadership Pipeline Impact: Organizations risk losing valuable talent if employees are willing to leave due to a lack of trust or belief in their leaders. This can strain the leadership and talent pipeline, potentially leading to skill gaps and a lack of succession planning. It could also make it harder to attract new talent if the organization gains a reputation for poor leadership.

Organizational Culture Influence: Leaders play a significant role in shaping, maintaining, and guiding an organization's culture. If employees don't believe in their leaders, the organizational culture suffers, affecting morale, performance, and engagement.

A poor culture can also affect an organization's reputation, making attracting and keeping talent harder.

Weakness in Times of Uncertainty: During uncertain times, trust in leadership becomes even more crucial.

Leaders are responsible for setting the strategic direction, making tough decisions, and communicating those decisions to the rest of the organization.

Employees lacking trust or belief in their leaders can cause anxiety, confusion, and inability to change, making the organization weaker and navigating uncertainty much harder.

To benefit from these insights (that 63% of Working Americans would move to a new company with no pay raise if they believed more in the new company's leader than their own) organizations should **prioritize leadership development** and **build a culture of trust and transparency**.

This involves leadership training, establishing clear channels of communication, and ensuring that leaders are held accountable for their actions. It's also crucial to solicit and act on employee feedback, as this can help to identify and address issues with leadership early on.

POSITIVE INSIGHTS TO BUILD ON

While some findings are concerning, many others offer positive insights that leaders can build on
right away.

Our study found that 75% of working Americans believe they can accomplish their leaders' goals.

This confidence in accomplishing goals is critical for working toward objectives large and small.

Additionally, 64% say their leaders excel at building and maintaining trust across all teams and channels.

These are two perceived strengths of leaders in organizations today that can underpin efforts to foster psychological safety, smart risk-taking, and leading by example to drive growth, collaboration, innovation, and retention.

Experienced leaders know that amid uncertainty, build on what is working while controlling what
you can.

This leads us directly into the third and final section of the national study focused on leaders optimizing their Span of Control.

BELIEVE THEY CAN ACCOMPLISH THEIR LEADERS' GOALS

75% Working Americans

BELIVE THEIR LEADERS EXCEL AT BUILDING AND MAINTAINING TRUST

64% Working Americans
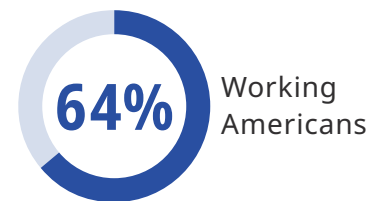
SECTION 3: WHY FOCUS ON SPAN OF CONTROL

A major opportunity emerging from uncertainty is learning to overcome challenges instead of being overwhelmed by them.

My book, Span of Control, focuses on how leaders can achieve high performance in a variety of environments and situations, from work and personal lives to tackling market competition and new organizational threats.

Everything outside your Span of Control can distract from solving problems and achieving goals—leading to overwhelm and task saturation.

The national study explored the Span of Control framework to bring new data and a deeper perspective to each of the three key components by asking questions related to each of them but from a research-based perspective:

- **FOCUS** on what matters most

- **FORMULATE** a flight plan for success

- **COMMUNICATE** what's possible

The first Span of Control area the national study explored was a focus on confidence.

Confidence is critical to each step in the Span of Control framework, and the study findings should garner concern from every leader and organization.

Our national study found that **72%** of all working Americans would take more risks if they were more confident overall.

Confidence is critical at every step of effective leadership and organizational success. Leaders have the ability to either build confidence steadily over time or chip away at confidence through inaction and poor leadership approaches.

WOULD TAKE MORE RISKS IF THEY WERE MORE CONFIDENT OVERALL

72% Working Americans

When employees lack adequate confidence within an organization, it can lead to numerous detrimental outcomes that negatively impact virtually every aspect of operations *and* culture:

Poor Decision-Making: Employees low in confidence often struggle to make decisive choices, especially under uncertain or challenging conditions. They may end up second-guessing themselves or falling into "analysis paralysis," unable to move forward confidently. This indecisiveness can stall progress, reduce efficiency, and hinder performance.

Ineffective Leadership: For those in leadership roles, a lack of confidence can impair their ability to lad groups, teams, divisions, and entire organizations. Leaders without confidence may struggle to inspire their team, manage effectively, or set a compelling, clear vision for the company's future. This void in leadership will be felt widely, and can also frustrate colleagues who end up unable to rely on these leaders to deliver **results**.

Limited Growth Opportunities: When employees lack confidence, they may shy away from advancement opportunities, taking professional risks, or committing to personal development outside their comfort zone. Their fear of failure or avoidance of discomfort can severely restrict professional and personal growth period. It also limits the organization's ability to develop talent and evolve.

Confidence amongst team members is integral for a thriving organizational culture of engagement, learning, innovation, and productivity.

There are specific steps leaders can take to boost confidence, including detailed preparation, clear goal-setting, and mental and physical rehearsals of processes and desired outcomes.

Detailed, consistent preparation: Investing the time to prepare increases confidence, digs into the details, and creates an understanding of the steps and components that boost the confidence of those taking action.

Better goal setting: Unclear or murky goals lead to confusion, lack of understanding, and decreased confidence by making team members feel like they don't know what success looks like and therefore are more likely to fail. Better goals inspire clarity and confidence through alignment and understanding.

Mental rehearsal or process visualization: One of the often-overlooked ways to increase confidence is for leaders to help their teams rehearse mentally and physically for the work to be undertaken. This can include visualizing the steps, process, obstacles, and outcomes and then working through each of
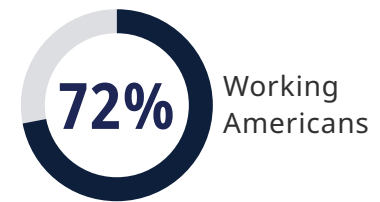
them to the right conclusion. Physical rehearsal can be role-playing what is to happen and the desired outcomes to build muscle memory and corresponding confidence that comes with aligned practice.

With confident individuals and teams, an organization gains empowered talent willing to take smart risks and actualize their potential. Leadership plays a profound role in fostering confidence.

OVERWHELM AND STRESS WIDESPREAD

Overwhelm and stress at work directly impact focus, planning, and communication leading to all kinds of breakdowns.

The national study uncovered a concerning trend—**54%** of all working Americans report often feeling overwhelmed at work.

Looking generationally, 66% of Gen Z (18-26) say they have experienced higher stress due to burnout at work over the past year. This was the highest percentage of any generation.

Additionally, 61% of women say they have experienced higher stress because of burnout at work over the past year, **a significantly higher percentage than men** at 55%.

These findings signal a broader leadership and organizational culture issue that requires attention.

Prolonged feelings of stress, overwhelm, and burnout can lead to serious mental and physical health problems, including depression, cardiovascular disease, and weakened immune function. It also reduces productivity, performance, accountability, and engagement.

In Span of Control, workplace wellness is a crucial area for leaders to support, and it directly improves employees feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and burned out.

The data also suggests women may be juggling more responsibilities both at work and home, encountering more workplace stressors like unequal treatment, or managing unbalanced expectations.

FEELING OVERWHELMED AT WORK

54% of working Americans

HAVE EXPERIENCED HIGHER STRESS AT WORK

66% Gen Z

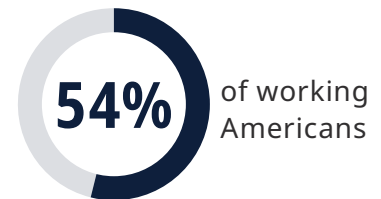**HAVE EXPERIENCED HIGHER STRESS AT WORK**

61% Women

Addressing this gender disparity is critical for organizations to thrive not only in periods of uncertainty but in any period as women increasingly advance in the workforce.

The data also suggests that younger employees, particularly those from Generation Z, are experiencing higher levels of work-related stress and burnout.
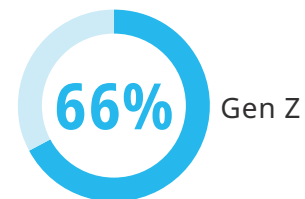
This could indicate a need for businesses to reconsider their orientation, onboarding, management practices, and support systems to better address the needs and expectations of younger generations. **This is particularly critical if organizations want to retain and develop younger generations as their emerging leaders and future workforce guides**.
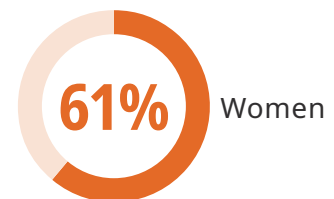
Ultimately, stress, overwhelm, and burnout often stems from a lack of support, understanding, resources, and empathy from those around the person feeling overwhelmed—**which amounts to a leadership problem**.

Their colleagues, teammates, and direct reports are not only being exposed and likely affected by the stress and overwhelm but also by the demoralization that comes from feeling like one's basic work needs are not being met.

For all these reasons, it's crucial for leaders and organizations to address stress, overwhelm, and employee burnout proactively and consistently.

This can include:

• Implementing wellness programs for employees at all levels,

• Fostering a supportive culture where people feel safe asking for help,

• Providing mental health resources,

• Ensuring equitable work practices across genders and generations,

• Realistic balancing of work expectations with employees' bandwidth

STRESS CROSSING WORK LOCATIONS

Besides the stress of working within an organization, where people physically work can also create additional stress, uncertainty, or challenges.

Even with more workplace flexibility, working from home can be stressful for many Americans.

In fact, 33% of all working Americans say working from home is more stressful to them than going into an office or shared workspace—and that number jumps to 50% for Gen Z (18-26)!

This insight starkly contrasts a common media narrative that working from home universally reduces stress.

This is an important insight for leaders to realize that simply giving employees the option to work from home doesn't mean their employees' work experience is automatically better or less stressful, but that it creates its own stress amidst a different physical experience.

In addition to *where* a person works, how they approach work also creates alignment, or a lack thereof, that can grow over time.

WORKING FROM HOME IS MORE STRESSFUL

33%
all working Americans

50%
Gen Z

PLANNING LACKING

One of the best ways to support alignment is to have clear objectives at work.

But, the national study revealed that having a clear plan and objectives was not as common as one might expect.

The national study uncovered that **50%** of working Americans report that they do not have a 30, 60, or 90-day work outlining their objectives and desired results.

That means half of everyone in the workforce today doesn't have a defined focus on what they are supposed to achieve in the next one to three months.

This absence of planning impacts performance, alignment, teamwork, and achieving critical goals.

Investing the time to plan is one of the most important ways leaders can create a culture of alignment, continuous learning, and pursuing excellence even in extremely challenging conditions.

The experience of clarifying, agreeing upon, and then being able to measure progress is important for team members to track their progress and make decisions as well as for leaders to be able to confirm every team member is on the right track, confidently—or provide help and resources if they are not.

However, there are many common reasons that leaders do not invest the time to plan and work with their team on individual plans and priorities. Common excuses that surface from leaders include:

> *Everyone knows our strategy.*
> *We don't need to plan. We are a creative group and need flexibility.*
> *Strategy? Planning? Ugh! That happens behind closed doors.*
> *We're too busy doing the work of running the company.*

Underneath these common excuses to avoid planning is the reality that many leaders don't understand the value of planning, they don't know how to do it, or they want immediate gratification—they want the payoff, and they want it now.

However, this commonly held attitude by leadership can hold an organization and its performance back.

Often, even a small, dedicated amount of effective planning can save a ton of execution errors down the road.

Interestingly, while the outcome of planning is extremely valuable, the planning process is as important as the outcome because when everyone is involved, the result is both understanding and buy-in of the plan created.

The absence of a clear, structured plan on an individual level can significantly impact a team's work performance and, by extension, the overall performance of an organization.

Here are three reasons why planning matters:

1. **Clear Goals and Direction:** A plan provides a roadmap toward achieving agreed-upon objectives. It offers clear goals, the steps needed to reach them, and a timeframe in which to do so. Without this clarity, employees may struggle to understand what they are working towards and how their individual tasks contribute to broader organizational goals.

2. **Efficiency and Accountability:** A well-crafted plan serves as a guide that can help individuals manage their time effectively, prioritize tasks, and allocate resources efficiently. This can significantly boost productivity and ensure that important tasks are not overlooked. Conversely, the absence of a plan can lead to inefficiency, missed deadlines, and wasted resources.

3. **Motivation:** Plans often provide milestones that can motivate employees as they work towards achieving them. Without a plan, employees may feel lost, less motivated, and unsure about their role within the organization.

As leaders work to foster a great culture, tap into their team's potential, and drive innovation in a time of uncertainty, organizations must commit to planning and goal setting and provide the necessary tools and training to facilitate this.

Remember, the national study found that half of working Americans did not have a 30, 60, or 90-day plan to meet their objectives at work!

Especially amid uncertainty, organizations must commit to planning and providing the necessary training and tools. Thoughtful planning pays dividends by saving significant headaches down the road.

Another important lesson from the study builds on planning, and delivering the "right" amount of, and approach to, leadership and management.

LEADERSHIP STYLE DISCONNECT

The national study revealed over half (56%) of working Americans feel micromanaged by their leaders.

Further, **57% of working Americans say their leadership team avoids transparency**.

Whether micromanaging, avoiding transparency, or a combination of both, the reality is that these leadership approaches **do not effectively build the culture of trust, personal accountability, and high performance that organizations critically need**.

LEADERSHIP TEAM AVOIDS TRANSPARENCY

57% Working Americans

Additionally, while 75% of working Americans agree failure is a critical part of their success journey, 36% say **their leadership team does not support the vulnerability and mistakes required for innovation**.

The intersection between leaders micro-managing and lacking transparency vs. team members feeling a conflict between needing to fail as part of the innovation process yet not being supported to take the risks that might result in failure en route to innovation paints a picture of working America navigating a tricky work reality.

The research data suggests a *significant* disconnect between employees' need to be trusted and empowered to perform their best, and leaders not supporting the role of failure in innovation and the support needed to take the risks that lead to breakthroughs.

The negative impact of this leadership dynamic is less innovation and experimentation, lower risk, and a culture of playing it safe.

This disconnect is ultimately quite costly when other competitors in the same market *are* **taking the risks necessary to move forward**.

Here are three actions leaders can take to better navigate the potential for micro-managing, lacking transparency, and supporting the risk of failure necessary for innovation:

1. **Courage and Candor:** Leaders need to model courage and candor by taking calculated risks and being open about mistakes made on the path of progress. This action encourages a culture of learning from failures.

2. **Leading With Integrity:** Trust is built on honesty, integrity, and personal responsibility in the workplace. Leaders need to model the integrity they want from employees and take personal responsibility for their actions and results. This helps build trust without micromanaging others.

3. **Reinforcing Teamwork:** Effective leaders share problem-solving responsibility across teams versus trying to solve every challenge alone. This reduces overall risk in an organization and reinforces teamwork.

With the right leadership balance of empowerment, support for smart risk-taking, and accountability, employees will feel inspired to help the organization succeed.

This is particularly important when we consider what the study found when it came to continuous learning.
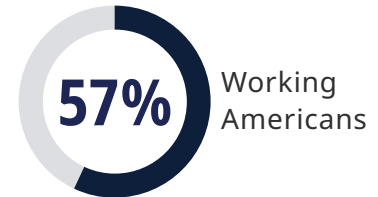
CONTINUOUS LEARNING CULTURE LACKING

31% of working Americans say their workplace lacks an ongoing culture of continuous learning, growth, and adapting. Without focus in this area, organizations risk stagnation.

However, 69% of working Americans believe their company currently supports continuous learning—a strong foundation from which to build for the leaders ready to go from learning to leadership and high performance!

COMPANY SUPPORTS CONTINUOUS LEARNING

69% Working Americans
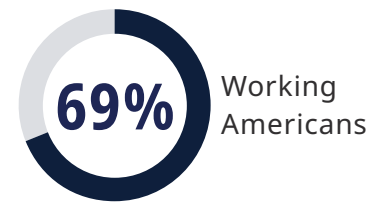
THE CHALLENGE OF DIMINISHED EXPECTATIONS

I saved this research discovery to be the last one in this white paper because it is both a cautionary tale and a clear call to action.

In the current climate, inspiring innovation, teamwork, and new thinking is more essential than ever.

This is because expectations have notably declined.

The national study found that **56%** of working Americans say they are now more willing to settle for something 'less than' what they wanted only two years ago… because it feels safe—and that number jumps to a staggering **71%** for Gen Z (18-26)!

This means that *the majority of all workers in the US* are willing to settle for less coming out of the pandemic.

This "settling" is a hidden risk factor in businesses large and small, non-profit organizations, and every company and leader that aspires for growth and greatness.

WILLING TO SETTLE FOR SOMETHING 'LESS THAN'… BECAUSE IT FEELS SAFE

56%
all working Americans

71%
Gen Z
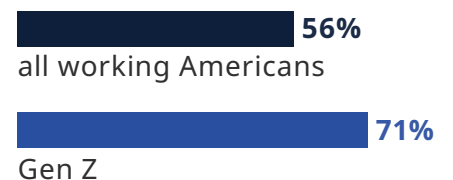
Settling for less, rather than striving for one's potential, risks disengaged, ambivalent employees, stalled innovation and creativity, and the turnover of ambitious talent.

Leaders must proactively address this challenge of diminished expectations.

When individuals are willing to settle for less, especially less than they were only two(!) years ago, this trend can lead to significant downsides.

Two areas are particularly vulnerable for individuals who settle: **career development** and a **lost commitment to learning**.

When people settle for less, especially Gen Z, who are very early in their careers, they may become unwilling to take the risks necessary to advance their careers, seek opportunities, take on new challenges, and find out what they can do in their career and as a result, create an unnecessarily low ceiling for their future.

These same individuals can also not commit to learning because they are settling for less and, as a result, avoid the situations, experiences, and learning programs that amplify their talent and put a future that is possible within reach.

The impact on organizations is even more stark when settling for less takes hold of their workforce.

Innovation and risk-taking immediately become much less of a priority and this can result in everything from lost sales and market share to lost creativity and drive.

In addition, losing that zest for the future by "settling for less" can also make a company and its culture become stale, risk-averse, and feel both stuck in the past *and* limiting for those who do want to move forward.

The result can be a turnover of ambitious employees and a loss of excitement in recruiting, which can become a cycle of mediocrity that is hard to escape.

This discovery means that leaders need to be aware that workers choosing to settle for less than their goals from only two years ago, is now unexpectedly pervasive within the U.S. workforce, and something leaders must actively address so as not to derail their success.

This is especially urgent and important for engaging younger employees, who will make up a significant proportion of the workforce in the coming years—and eventually become managers and leaders!

RESEARCH STUDY CONCLUSIONS: THE TIME IS NOW

The world has transformed dramatically in recent years. Most leaders were not ready. Most employees were not ready. Most organizations were not ready. Now is the time to dive deep and find research-driven truth in the current experience, unmet needs, and leadership priorities. Results matter now more than ever.

This national study revealed numerous shocking discoveries, important insights, actionable data points, and key trends that leaders must act on immediately.

The findings touch on every aspect of culture, performance, leadership, wellness, innovation, goal setting, planning, and outcomes.

Leading a study of this depth and complexity was a major undertaking. But the discoveries are incredibly valuable for strategic decisions to drive the organization forward through uncertainty.

One thing is clear: **leadership grounded in data and insights is critical**.

This is why I lead this global work, write books, speak, and advise leaders worldwide.

Together we can use this data and these discoveries to create the plans, strategies, and approaches enabling fearless leadership and optimizing your Span of Control.

I'm committed to these goals and am excited to provide this study at no cost, so you can implement these findings for real results.

Reach out to see how we can work together to drive the results you and your organization need right now. Together we have the experience, expertise, and now the data to lead in uncertain times for outcomes you can rely on.

THREE ACTIONS TO LEAD FEARLESSLY AND TAP INTO YOUR SPAN OF CONTROL

1. Download your free chapters from Fearless Leadership and Span of Control here:
   https://careylohrenz.com/free-chapters/

2. Watch my latest videos at: **https://www.youtube.com/@CareyLohrenz/videos**

3. Contact my team for an in-person keynote or leadership program at **www.CareyLohrenz.com** or **BookCarey@CareyLohrenz.com**

FOR MORE TOOLS, RESOURCES, AND MEDIA INQUIRIES CONTACT US AT:

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CAREY LOHRENZ
— BE FEARLESS —

About Carey Lohrenz
Fighter Pilot, Bestselling Author, Keynote Speaker

As one of the first female F-14 Tomcat fighter pilots in the U.S. Navy, Carey Lohrenz knows firsthand how inconsistent execution can generate catastrophic results in high-stakes, fast-moving environments.

Lohrenz has translated her pressure-tested leadership and strategy experience to help business leaders thrive in today's competitive business environments. Lohrenz has appeared on CNN, MSNBC, NBC, CBS, ABC, and NPR, and in Vanity Fair, Inc., Time, Huffington Post, and more, and has delivered her high-impact keynotes and programs to thousands of Forbes Global 2000, Fortune 500, and other companies worldwide.

A CEO, board member, business owner, and mom to four kids, Lohrenz inspires individuals and teams how to summon the courage, tenacity, and agility required to execute with excellence amidst adversity. By following her approach, they learn to navigate complexity, lead change, and deliver results when it matters most.

CAREY'S BESTSELLING BOOKS

Fearless Leadership

In "Fearless Leadership: High Performance Lessons from the Flight Deck," she walks readers through the three fundamentals a leader must possess to exhibit real fearlessness: courage, tenacity, and integrity. Lohrenz then reveals what fearless leadership looks like in action, offering advice on how to set a bold vision, bring the team together (as wingmen, not Top Gun Mavericks), execute effectively, and stay resilient through hard times. Whether they're stepping into their first leadership role or looking to get out of a longstanding rut, readers will find this resource to act like an afterburner, rocketing them to ever-higher levels of performance.
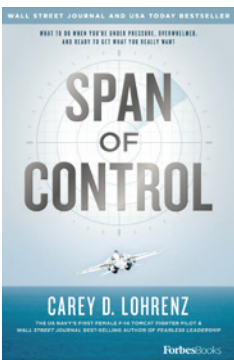
Span of Control

In Span of Control, Lohrenz picks up right where Fearless Leadership left off—encouraging readers to develop resilience for facing hard times. Span of Control offers a collection of moving stories, actionable tools, and opportunities for reader reflection, all of which can be applied immediately in businesses, on teams, and in readers' personal lives. The central tenet of this book—that we focus our attention and effort explicitly and relentlessly on a limited number of priorities that we can, and should, control—offers a clear path out of the chaos and overwhelm that can accompany our biggest challenges and our moments of greatest distress.

THE CENTER FOR GenerationalKinetics®

About The Center for Generational Kinetics
Custom Research for Thought Leaders

The Center for Generational Kinetics, LLC (CGK) is a global research firm focused on uncovering change, trends, generations, and behavioral insights. They have led more than 100 custom research studies for clients around the world. CGK's team has worked with over 700 organizations.
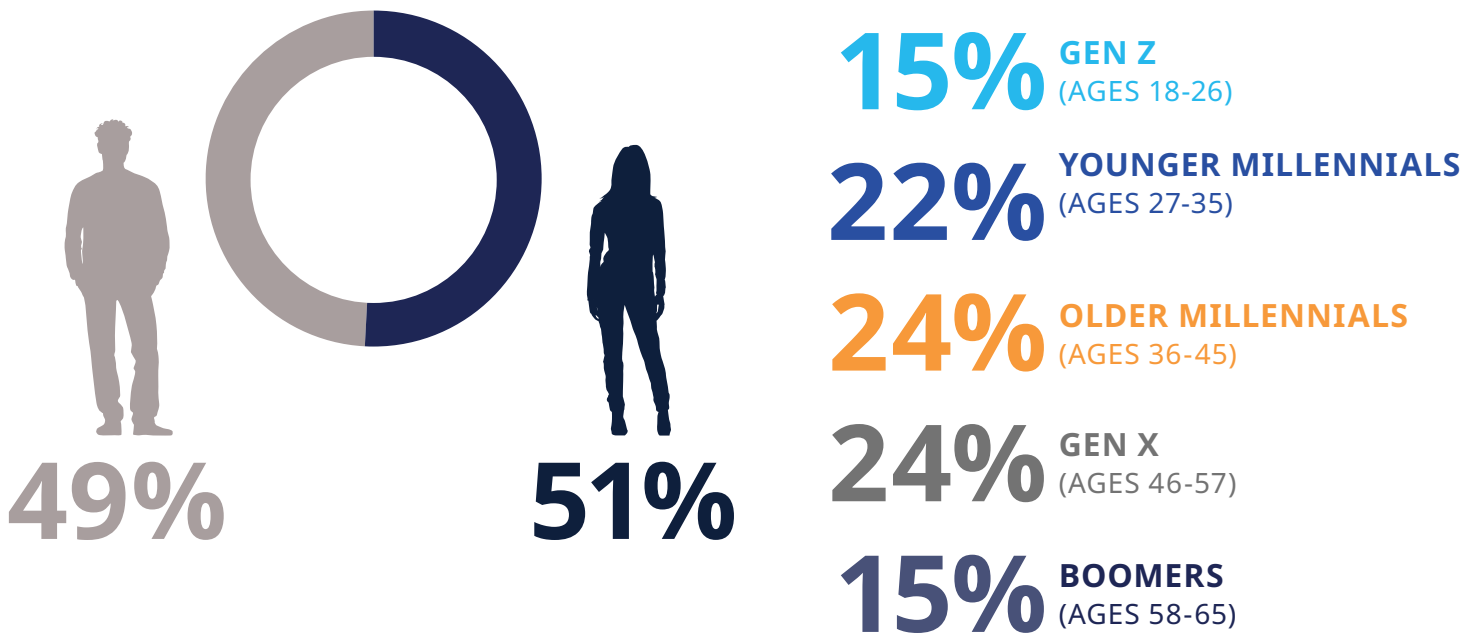
Learn more about CGK's pioneering research at **GenHQ.com**.

NATIONAL STUDY METHODOLOGY

The research study included a total of 1,003 U.S. participants ages 18-65, who are currently employed full-time, part-time, or actively looking for work. The study is weighted to the 2020 U.S. Census for age, region, gender, and ethnicity.

The research study was conducted online from October 18, 2022, to November 7, 2022. The margin of error is +/-3.1 percentage points.

CUSTOM 25-QUESTION SURVEY COMPLETED BY **1,003** US PARTICIPANTS (AGES 18-65)

49% **51%**

15% GEN Z (AGES 18-26)

22% YOUNGER MILLENNIALS (AGES 27-35)

24% OLDER MILLENNIALS (AGES 36-45)

24% GEN X (AGES 46-57)

15% BOOMERS (AGES 58-65)

CAREY LOHRENZ

BE FEARLESS