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New Survey from Business for Good Foundation By The Harris Poll Finds Four in Five Americans Are Choosing Trade Skills Training Over a Four-Year College Degree

75% Say That What They Consider a “Good Job” Today is Very Different Compared to Five Years Ago

ALBANY, N.Y. [February 3, 2026] Business for Good Foundation, a non-profit committed to bridging the wealth gap in America, today released the results of a survey commissioned by Business for Good Foundation and conducted by The Harris Poll among over 2,000 consumers and found that four in five Americans (80%) agree that more people today are choosing trade skills training and certification programs over a traditional four-year college degree, and 75% say that what they consider a “good job” today is very different compared to five years ago.

“We’re seeing a real shift in how Americans define success at work,” said Maire Masterson, Executive Director of the Business for Good Foundation. “More and more people are choosing practical skills that can lead to real opportunities. At Business for Good Foundation, we are focused on empowering individuals with the skills needed to build a viable career and to help close the wealth gap in communities across the U.S.”

The survey found a strong acceptance of practical experience with 75% of Americans agreeing that hands-on skills and practical experience matter more than formal degrees when it comes to career success in today’s economy. According to Goldman Sachs Research, the urgency around workforce development is accelerating with AI potentially automating tasks that account for 25% of all work hours in the U.S., thus raising concerns around widespread and permanent job loss.

As the workforce continues to evolve, and more career pathways that center around trade skills, this will require training that is more accessible. Built to address these systematic issues, Business for Good Foundation is prioritizing work in local communities and partnering with organizations that are removing barriers and creating pathways for a mix of talent. Areas of focus include access to skills training for youth, work experience, and career readiness resources, along with individuals reentering the workforce and workers facing systemic barriers who need a second chance at building a successful career path.

As the U.S. labor market continues to shift rapidly due to automation and evolving employer expectations, there is a growing demand for trade skills training – and not just at the entry-level. Notably, the survey found that more than three-quarters of Americans (76%) agree that jobs relying on hands-on or trade skills are less likely to be replaced by AI than many other types of work, further signaling confidence in the long-term resilience of trade skills.

Because white-collar jobs typically require higher education and specialized skills, they have long been the default path for recent college graduates. However, the survey revealed perceptions of trade and blue-collar work are seen favorably across income levels. Overall, 78% of Americans believe that the stigma around trade or blue-collar work is declining as society recognizes the importance of hands-on skills. Among Americans with a household income of less than \$50,000.00 annually, 70% agree the stigma around trade or blue-collar work is declining as society increasingly recognizes the importance of hands-on skills. That figure rises to 83% among Americans with household incomes of \$100,000.00 or more.

“Unlike some entry level jobs, the skilled trades won’t be easily displaced by AI,” added Ed Mitzen, Co-Founder, the Business for Good Foundation. “These hands-on jobs require a human touch that robots can’t emulate.”

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Business for Good Foundation from January 13–15, 2026, among 2,085 adults ages 18 and older. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 2.5 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

About Business for Good Foundation

The Business for Good Foundation [BFGF] was co-founded by Ed and Lisa Mitzen to give individuals, small businesses, and communities the opportunity to thrive — creating a stronger ecosystem that generates opportunity for all. Located in New York’s Capital Region, BFGF is committed to removing barriers that surround economic access, housing affordability, community development, and business growth. To learn more, visit www.bfg.org.

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