

## **'I am never off the clock': inside the booming world of gen Z side hustles**

**Jenna Zaza, The Guardian, 11/02/26**

Aashna Doshi, a software engineer at Google, is constantly monitoring her headspace. "This way I don't burn myself out," she said. "And I stay a lot more consistent with my podcast and content creation work."

On top of her day job in the tech giant's security and artificial intelligence department, Doshi also publishes social media content about working in tech and her life in New York City, and records podcasts – sometimes all three in a day. She is part of a seismic generational shift: 57% of gen Z Americans have a side hustle, according to recent Harris Poll research, compared with 21% among boomers.

Rather than throwing everything into a single career, many young adults are now spinning plates – using their main job as financial bedrock while directing their passion, and ambition, elsewhere.

"In my side hustles I can finally offer myself an outlet to be creative and express myself without any constraints," said Doshi, 23. "This is probably the biggest thing: I can represent myself as an individual with all these ambitions, skills and passion versus 'Aashna is a software engineer at Google.'"

"From watching our parents' generation pour everything into work, as a generation, we realized we need to pursue something we love and feel fulfilled," said Sen Ho, 25, who works in a stationery store and pulls together digital illustrations in his spare time. "If I wasn't doing my side hustle, I would be very lost in life," he added. "It is what keeps me going."

Most young professionals no longer see a 9-5 job as essential for achieving financial success, the Harris Poll survey found, turning instead to side hustles and investing. A new generation of US workers is prioritizing flexibility, freedom and purpose, which a traditional corporate job may not be able to offer, according to Mark Valentino, Citizens Bank's president of business banking. "Gen Z is thinking in terms of what I call a 'portfolio of careers' – not just one path, but a bunch of different things that bring them fulfilment," he said. "They saw their parents struggle and concluded they'd rather have more balance. They don't believe they can achieve the same financial success as previous generations, so they're refocusing on their goals."

In middle school, Ho sold sketches to classmates for candy money long before he enrolled in art school. What began as pocket change has now become a crucial source of supplementary income.

"I love how art can evoke emotion in people and share a story," he said. "Compared to my retail job, my side hustle gives me a sense of accomplishment. It's more challenging, creative and mentally stimulating and I can have a real impact."

### **'The job market is cooked'**

The money Ho receives for his illustrations helps cover everyday expenses in New York City, where the annual cost of living – including housing, bills and food expenses – approaches \$64,000, according to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Many young Americans are no longer prepared to "rely on a single job for financial security and career growth" as they grapple with an increasingly rocky economy, said Daniel Zhao, chief economist at Glassdoor. "All the traditional pathways to success, like going to college and securing a steady white-collar job, haven't borne out, and now they are left with debt and a tough job market."

The tech industry has been particularly vulnerable to layoffs in recent years, as AI rapidly reshapes the sector. More than 150,000 jobs were cut across 550 companies last year. [...]