

Shifting Paradigms

**Attracting
Gen Z to the
Financial Security
Profession**



A GUIDE FOR FINANCIAL SECURITY PROFESSIONALS

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Finseca Foundation
600 13th St NW, Suite 550
Washington DC 20005
(703) 641-9400
[Finseca.org/foundation](https://www.firseca.org/foundation)

Author: Debra L. Grommons | The Write Words, Leesburg, VA
Graphic Designer: Suzanne Schriver | Schriver Graphic Design, Baltimore, MD

Shifting Paradigms

Attracting Gen Z to the Financial Security Profession

A Guide for Financial Security Professionals

**“Everyone was telling me not to do it
(become a financial advisor). But I believe
if your dreams don’t scare you, they’re not
big enough. And I have big dreams.”** –Intern

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Foreword

In Finseca Foundation's last ebook, *Shifting Paradigms: Strategies for elevating the financial security profession*, we explored ways that we can continue to improve the public's perception of our industry. Our research showed that increased focus on customer follow-up, service, and support is not only essential for developing relationships and building trust, it also elevates customer confidence by providing peace of mind. This client-centered approach is at the heart of the paradigm shift.

Interestingly, through our research, we saw unique parallels to another challenge that our industry faces—attracting the next generation to our profession. In our second ebook in this series, we look at the fast-growing population that will make up 30 percent of the US workforce by 2030, Gen Z. In this ebook, we explore:

- What Gen Z is looking for in a profession.
- Factors that discourage them from entering the financial security profession.
- What we can do to attract them to our profession.

Many of the challenges we face with this extremely diverse population are the same challenges we identified with the general public's perception of our profession. But we have an opportunity to overcome these challenges with Gen Z. We must educate Gen Z about who we are and what we do. We must tell a better story about the impact that this profession has not only on the communities we serve but also on those of us in the industry. I know that being part of this profession has helped me to grow both personally and professionally.

If we want to affect change, we must take the lead. We must “be the change we want to see in the world.” There is reason to be optimistic, but there is still much to do. We hope the strategies in this ebook help you to continue to build a more positive perception of the profession and attract the next generation to our noble cause.

Sincerely,

Devin M. Gaffney FSCP, LUTCF

Finseca Foundation Leadership Education and Development Committee Chair
Field Training and Professional Development, AAA Life Insurance Company

About Us

The Finseca Foundation

The Finseca Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to elevating the work of financial security professionals to help drive better outcomes for consumers. The Foundation focuses on three ongoing core initiatives:

1. Conducting and providing research to help financial security professionals better serve the needs of American consumers seeking to achieve financial security.
2. Providing resources for Americans to become more financially empowered consumers of financial products and services.
3. Advancing and championing the next generation of financial security professionals by identifying top talent from diverse communities.

Our contributors

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About this Ebook

Foundation ebooks are digital white papers that deliver tightly focused research results. This ebook will help financial security professionals implement strategies to attract Gen Z candidates to the profession, including

- Identifying what Gen Z candidates are looking for in a profession.
- Implementing strategies to attract Gen Z candidates to the financial security profession.
- Addressing factors that discourage Gen Z candidates from entering the financial security profession.

How We Collected Our Data

To gather a range of perspectives on the factors that influence Gen Z candidates when considering the financial security profession, we spoke with Gen Z members both inside and outside of the industry, including:

- 79 college students from two educational institutions.
- 16 interns from four financial security firms.
- 6 leaders in recruiting and intern development from five financial security firms.

Terms Used in This Ebook

Industry segments often use different terminology to describe their businesses and their people. For example, some people use the term *advisor* while others use *agent* and some use *agency* rather than *firm*. In this ebook, we use the term *financial security professional* to encompass all leaders in financial security and the terms *firm* or *business* to include the different business configurations in the field. While you may use different terminology in your organization, we encourage you to overlook the labels and focus instead on the ideas and strategies shared in this ebook.

Introduction

“I was in a finance program in college, and I still wasn’t aware a position like this even existed. I knew I wanted a job where I could help people in some way. It’s been a surprise to find out I can help people, make money, and have the flexibility I need.” –Intern

In 2022, as the world enters the third year of managing the changes brought about by COVID-19 and comes to grips with the Great Resignation, our profession may face an additional crisis—a shortage of financial security professionals. Cerulli Associates has estimated that approximately 40 percent of financial security professionals will be retired by 2029.¹ Moss Adams has predicted that 2022 will see an estimated shortfall of 200,000 financial security professionals.²

All of this is taking place while leaders continue to address challenges created by consumers’ misperceptions and lack of information about the profession, its products and services, and its people.

In the face of these challenges, a paradigm shift is occurring in the financial security profession. To strengthen public trust in the profession, top-performing leaders are rethinking how they interact with customers and clients.

The first ebook in the *Paradigm Shift* series examined the factors that influence public perception of the financial security profession and identified strategies to deepen relationships and elevate the profession in the eyes of clients and consumers. This second ebook in the series turns its attention to the newest generation entering the workforce—Generation Z.

Attracting and recruiting Gen Z is crucial to the health of the financial security profession. And there is cause for optimism. Some 2019 and 2020 studies indicate a slow but steadily increasing trust in the profession, with trust among the US population reaching an all-time high in 2020.

As Gen Z enters the workforce, seeking stability and financial security during turbulent times, we have an opportunity to change the paradigm with this new generation. In this ebook, we examine the factors that attract Gen Z to the profession as well as the obstacles that drive some away.

Who is Gen Z?

“What I notice most about Gen Z is their huge desire to be part of something bigger than themselves.” –Recruiter

The Pew Research Center sets the birth years for Gen Z as 1997–2010, making the oldest members of Gen Z 25 years old.³ Gen Z accounts for about 20 percent of the US population⁴ and 40 percent of US consumers.⁵ The fastest-growing population, they will make up 30 percent of the US workforce by 2030.⁶

Gen Z is the most racially and ethnically diverse population in the United States and is on its way to being the most educated. In general, they are politically more progressive and socially conscious than prior generations.

Digital natives, this generation was born during a time when information is easily and immediately accessible and social media is ubiquitous. They grew up in a completely connected world—a world where they can learn almost anything by watching a YouTube video or asking Alexa, interact in real-time with people across the globe, and impact a company’s bottom line with an online post.

Gen Z and Money

“It’s important for me to have money in the bank. Something to fall back on if all else fails.” –Student

Having watched their parents struggle during the Great Recession and more recently through the COVID-19 pandemic, Gen Z values conservative spending, stable jobs, and smart investments.⁷

Many members of Gen Z were personally affected during the pandemic. In a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, half of the oldest Gen Zers reported that they or someone in their household had lost a job or taken a cut in pay because of the outbreak.⁸ Further research from the Center for Generational Kinetics (CGK), a leading generational research company, revealed that Gen Z employees—who are at the start of their careers and often in entry-level positions—were the most likely to be let go as companies downsized during the pandemic.⁹

These factors have led to a generation that tends to be frugal, with a concern for financial security and a desire to control their financial future.

Gen Z and Work

“The Gen Z candidates I talk to are looking for a company with stability, one that’s been around a long time where they can stay.” —Recruiter

Unlike millennials, Gen Z does not appear to be a generation of job hoppers. Most likely driven by their desire for stability and financial security, Gen Zers are looking for long-term careers with the same company. They expect to work for an average of four companies during their professional lives, and most would rather explore roles within a company than switch to another.¹⁰

When looking for a job, Gen Zers are more likely to ask family and friends first (making referrals an important recruiting strategy with this cohort). They will check out companies online, but perhaps not in the places many companies expect. Gen Zers are more likely to look for information on Reddit, YouTube, Instagram, and even Snapchat than they are on LinkedIn or Glassdoor.¹¹

Salary is what most attracts Gen Zers to a job, with many expecting a raise in one year or less. After salary, flexible hours and coworkers they enjoy working with have the most influence on Gen Z job-hunting decisions and are also the factors most likely to influence their decision to remain with a company.¹²

That’s not to say that social impact is unimportant to this generation. In one study, 60 percent of Gen Z respondents say they intend to make an impact on the world during their lifetime and 93 percent say their decision to accept a job is affected by the company’s impact on society.¹³ Still, practical and pragmatic, this generation prioritizes their personal well-being first.

Many Gen Zers also have a strong entrepreneurial mindset. They have grown up in a do-it-yourself world, with the tools to start and run a business readily available online. In less than a day, they can create a website, set up a company, and market their products and services to customers around the world. They are not afraid to work hard for success, and many are confident they can succeed through their own efforts.

According to a Nielsen study, about 54 percent of Gen Z say they want to start their own company. Taking control, being debt-free, living a purposeful life, and being good to the planet are what drive their ambitions.¹⁴

What Most Attracts Gen Z to a New Job?

- Salary
- Scheduling Flexibility
- Workplace Culture and Benefits

The State of Gen Z 2020: Gen Z as Employees and Emerging Leaders, The Center for Generational Kinetics.



Gen Z's Perception of the Financial Security Profession

“We have to work hard to brand ourselves the right way when we are in front of students. They have a perception that it’s all sales and cold calling, and it’s corporate and cutthroat.” —Recruiter

Similar to findings from our first study, lack of knowledge about financial security products and services and misperceptions about the profession also influence Gen Z. In one 2021 study, Gen Z respondents said they believe financial security companies are “nontransparent, difficult to comprehend, and untrustworthy.”¹⁵

The financial security profession also continues to suffer an image issue with Gen Z. Many students in our study said that the negative image of the profession is a major deterrent for them seeking a career in financial security. However, this may be more of an inherited perception—reinforced by old stereotypes and media images (and possibly parents)—rather than one derived from direct experience. A few interns in our study indicated that they receive more negative feedback about the profession from older generations than they do from their peers.

Many Gen Zers have little direct experience with financial security services. Their exposure is often limited to property and casualty insurance—auto and, possibly, renters or homeowners insurance—and for younger Gen Zers still on their parents’ policies, the experience may be even more indirect.

Those experiences, direct or indirect, do matter, though. How Gen Zers experience financial security services, either as consumers or through personal experiences, influences their perception of the profession.

Gen Z as Consumers of Financial Security Services

“If you pay for insurance your whole life and never need it, what’s the point? It seems like a waste of money.” —Student

According to one 2021 property and casualty study, Gen Z customers have less trust in insurance providers than any generation before them and are more likely to believe they are being treated unfairly. The report also indicated that, because they have less experience, Gen Zers are six times

more likely than older customers to have difficulty completing tasks during their first interactions—a frustrating experience for a generation that expects convenience, intuitive processes, and fast resolutions.¹⁶

Students in our research expressed similar frustrations, with many viewing insurance as a necessary evil at best or a waste of money at worst, rather than a way to achieve financial security or protect against potential risks.

While the findings from the 2021 study are directed at property and casualty providers—the sector of the financial security profession most familiar to Gen Z—it is fairly safe to infer the same frustrations would apply to other sectors of the profession. In fact, life insurance fared equally as poorly in our research. Students we spoke to share many of the misperceptions that the general public holds about life insurance, viewing it as expensive and only needed for end-of-life expenses.

It should be noted that some of these sentiments may be related more to life stage than specific to Gen Z. Risk and death are generally not top of mind for young adults of any generation. Many Gen Zers, like other generations at that same age, are focused on their present reality—establishing their personal independence and professional identity—rather than the future possibility of risk or death.

What's in a Name?

We asked students to share their reactions to different terms used in the profession. While there was no overwhelming majority for any one term, financial security seemed to be the most favored by students in our study. Here are some of their reactions.

Financial Planning/ Financial Advisor	"This sounds more positive to me (than the other terms), but I don't have enough money to need a financial advisor."
Financial Security	"This feels like it's about planning for the future." "I like that it focuses on the positive rather than the negative."
Financial Services	"Sounds like banking and mortgages to me." "This makes me think of government programs, like social services."
Insurance/ Insurance Agent	"Whenever I hear my parents talking about insurance agents, they are usually frustrated."
Wealth Management	"Wealth management sounds like something only rich people need."
Risk Protection	"This focuses too much on the negative; like you're going to do something risky."

One Thing

We asked students to identify one thing we should do to attract more Gen Z into the profession. Here are some of their responses.

- Offer a base salary to start.
- Don't focus on the money it will take 15 years to make. Tell me what I will make now.
- Educate high school and college students about the profession and products.
- Provide better work-life balance.

Gen Z Personal Experience with Financial Security

“Money wasn’t talked about in my family. It came to a point where my parents couldn’t afford to pay for my college anymore. It was very stressful. I realized I wanted to learn more about finance so I could create a different future for myself.” —Intern

Not surprisingly, Gen Zers in our study who had personal experiences that demonstrated the value of financial security products and services also had more positive perceptions of the profession. Some were familiar with the profession because their parents used financial professionals. Some had experienced the loss or disability of a family member and knew first-hand the benefits provided. And in more than one instance, financial hardships within the family were the catalyst for Gen Zers in our study to seek out opportunities to take control of their own financial futures.

Gen Z as Candidates

“Gen Z seems more open to the idea of commissions. They’re used to counting on themselves. They believe in themselves, and they’re willing to bet on themselves more than I’ve seen with some people in past generations.” —Recruiter

Gen Zers are as different from one another as any other large group of people, and the recruiters in our study had varied experiences with what most attracts them to our profession. Some are drawn by the flexibility and independence the profession offers. Others are more interested in the income potential. Some are unconcerned about commission-based compensation; others find it a deterrent.

There is one common theme that emerged, however. Gen Z candidates are seeking financial security. How they define financial security may differ—the stability of well-established companies and firms attracts some candidates, while others are excited by the entrepreneurial aspects of building their own business. Building a business from scratch may not seem a likely choice for people seeking financial security, however, these two groups share a common goal—taking control of their financial futures.

One recruiter noted the abundance of videos on TikTok (one of Gen Z’s social platforms of choice) providing advice for becoming financially secure. There are videos on topics from budgeting, to investing, to starting a business. She feels this has attracted more Gen Z to the profession. “They want to be financially secure themselves, and they like the idea of being able to teach those skills to others.”

Not surprisingly, candidates are also more attracted to the investments side of the profession. “They’re into bitcoin and buying



stocks and doing their own investing,” another recruiter told us. “But, they aren’t drawn to it only because investing sounds more exciting than insurance. It’s part of their conviction around long-term investing and saving.” Like many, Gen Zers are often unfamiliar with the profession and the variety of financial security products and services available. “We explain to them that we do comprehensive planning,” the recruiter continued. “Investments are a piece of that, but there are other equally important pieces.” The planning aspect along with their belief in the importance of financial security and the opportunity to help others appears to be a big draw for Gen Z candidates.

One Thing

We asked recruiters to identify one thing we should do to attract more Gen Z into the profession. Here are some of their responses.

- Make them aware of the impact they can have on other people and their communities.
- Emphasize the long-term stability of the profession.
- Show them that commissions can be a stable source of income over time.
- Create rewards and recognition that are meaningful to Gen Z.
- Provide personal support along with professional development (for example, helping new professionals handle daily rejection).

A Defining Moment for Gen Z

According to the generational experts at CGK, a defining moment for a generation must do two things. It must take place during the formative time in a generation’s coming of age experience, and it must create a powerful, unforgettable emotional impact, usually tied to fear and uncertainty.¹⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic was that moment for Gen Z.

Amidst the fear and uncertainty, there is a silver lining, however. The pandemic has created a strong desire for financial security in Gen Z. A 2021 Goldman Sachs survey reported that 68 percent of Gen Z respondents said they prioritize their financial fitness above their physical fitness, and 70 percent would rather hire a financial advisor than a personal trainer if the cost were the same.¹⁸

It is up to us to turn that desire into a passion for the financial security profession.

The Three I's— Income, Independence, and Impact

“I was surprised by how quickly I was able to experience the three I's—the commissions checks coming in, taking a Friday off if I didn't have meetings, and being able to make a difference in someone's life as an intern—it was all a little surprising to me and more than I expected coming in.” —Intern

Given their interest in the three I's of the financial security profession—income, impact, and independence—why is the profession not attracting more Gen Z candidates? Gen Z students in our study reiterated the same obstacles we identified in the first *Shifting Paradigms* ebook on the public's perception of the profession:

- Negative image of financial security professionals.
- Uncomfortable with the idea of selling.
- Lack of information about the profession.
- Fear of commission-based compensation.



Remember, however, that students in our study were not screened as potential candidates, and they wouldn't all be a good fit for the financial security profession. Approximately one-third of the students we spoke to are pursuing their designation as certified financial planners, and their view of the profession is naturally very positive. Of the remaining 50 or so students without a background in finance, a handful were excited by the entrepreneurial aspect of the profession and not daunted by commission-based compensation—potentially a good fit for the profession. A few were definitely not interested and were not a good fit. And the rest fell somewhere in between.

A Candidate Matrix

“We can’t ignore Gen Z and what’s important to them. But the reality is our opportunity isn’t changing. We’re still looking for people who are coachable with a strong work ethic. We have to be honest about what the job is and what it is not.” –Recruiter

If we group candidates based on fit (what we are looking for in candidates) and interest (what Gen Z is looking for in a profession), we can segment them into four quadrants:

Quadrant 1: Those who are a good fit and have a high interest in the profession or are predisposed to the position through personal experience.

Quadrant 2: Those who are a good fit and have low interest due to lack of information or negative perceptions of the profession.

Quadrant 3: Those who are not a good fit but have a high interest in the profession.

Quadrant 4: Those who are not a good fit and have low interest in the profession.



Of course, the goal is to attract and recruit candidates from quadrants one and two and screen out candidates from quadrants three and four.

Screening out candidates from quadrant four should be straightforward assuming you need to do any screening at all. These candidates generally self-select out of the process early on. Screening out quadrant three candidates may be more difficult as candidates who are highly interested in the profession may appear to be a good fit. Diligence is required, however. These are often the people who come into the profession for the wrong reasons and perpetuate the negative image.

Recruiting candidates from quadrant one should be easy. But several interns in our study told us they had no knowledge of the profession before learning about the internship opportunity. As one intern said, “I didn’t know this job existed. It was just dumb luck that I found out about the internship.” Yet, all of these interns have the qualities we look for in top candidates and are excited about the path they are now on.

Recruiting candidates from quadrant two requires changing their perception of the profession. These are candidates who possess the characteristics of top performers but may have negative feelings about the profession, sales, or commission-based compensation.

In the following section, we examine what attracts Gen Z candidates from quadrants one and two through the lens of the three I’s of the profession—*income, impact, and independence*.

Income

“I would rather have a guaranteed \$50,000 salary than the potential of maybe making \$250,000.” –Student

According to the Center for Generational Kinetics, salary is the No. 1 factor that attracts Gen Zers to a job. In our conversations with Gen Z students and interns, salary was certainly important. However, participants were more concerned with how they would be paid than how much they could potentially earn. In fact, a few students felt that promoting “unlimited income” as a benefit of the profession sounded like a “scam” or “pyramid scheme.”

Two Perspectives

Not surprisingly, commission-based compensation was the main concern expressed by many students in our research. Neither the amount of support and training provided nor the possibility of working on a team (where commissions might be shared) outweighed the risk some students associated with commissions.

One recruiter spoke of a high-potential candidate who seemed to be a perfect fit for the profession: “She was smart and personable; she even had all of her licenses. But she was working in a support role. I asked her why she wasn’t in a client-facing position. She told me she missed having client conversations and the rapport that she built with clients. She said she loved learning clients’ stories and being able to give them solutions. She could have been wonderful in this profession. But she was terrified of giving up a salary and building her own book. The ones I lose are the ones who don’t have confidence in themselves.”

“I like the idea of commissions because I get to choose how much I make. If I succeed, that’s all me. If I don’t, I can’t blame anyone else for my mistakes.” –Student

A handful of students we spoke to were open to commission-based compensation, drawn by the opportunity to control what they earn based on their performance. One student explained it this way, “People my age are used to getting paid hourly, and most feel they aren’t paid enough for what they do. With commissions, what you put into it is what you get out. But most people don’t know how to find these jobs.”

Address Q2 Candidates’ Fears About Commission-based Compensation

“We emphasize that the internship is 50 percent professional development where they will learn a wide variety of business skills, not just sales and financial advising. They’ll learn how to market themselves and how to network. They’ll learn communications skills and entrepreneurial skills. Skills they can take with them wherever they go.” –Recruiter

For a generation concerned with financial security, commission-based compensation can be a scary proposition. This was the No. 1 concern expressed by students in our study, and several interns said they initially felt at least some hesitation about commissions. Some strategies recruiters use to help candidates overcome their concerns include:

Breaking Down the Financials. Consistency was the concern most often raised about commissions. It's difficult to plan if you don't know what your income will be from month to month. One recruiter explains how commission-based compensation can become as consistent as salary-based pay over time with renewals and consistent activity.

Leveraging the Gen Z Life Stage. Several interns told us that, because they were still in school and had limited expenses, they were willing to try out the profession. Recruiters highlight the fact that interns will be building their clientele at a time when commission-based compensation is less of a risk.

Emphasizing Business-Building Skills. Internship programs by nature are designed for students to gain experience while trying out a career. Recruiters point out that the business-building skills interns will gain can be applied in other professions if they decide this isn't the career for them.

Focusing on Performance. Students and interns who were open to commissions focused more on being paid based on their performance, while those who expressed concerns about commissions focused more on the money. Emphasizing performance-based compensation rather than commission-based compensation can help high-potential candidates who are confident in their abilities feel more comfortable.

Reframing the Conversation. Gen Zers are more comfortable with the idea of starting their own business than other generations were at the same age. (One intern we spoke with started his own bitcoin company in college.) One recruiter noted, "Social media has redefined what it means to be a business owner. Some people we talk to don't think of themselves as entrepreneurs, but suddenly their Instagram is taking off and it's a source of income for them, or they build a fitness app that sells. They aren't all the right fit for our profession, but they understand start-ups." Reframing the compensation conversation to focus on what it takes to launch a business, can make commission-based compensation seem less daunting to this group.

Mitigating the Risk. Companies and firms that provide a stipend or base salary while new financial security professionals get established are more attractive to high-potential candidates who consider commission-based compensation risky. A few students we spoke with indicated that they would be interested in the financial security profession if they could count on at least some income in the initial stages of their careers.

Focus On The Entrepreneurial Aspects Of The Profession For Q1 Candidates

"People say this career is high risk/high reward. But, being this young, I think it's actually low risk because we come out of here with crazy experience. So, regardless, we're getting high rewards." —Intern

Some recruiters said that the Gen Z candidates they speak with seem more open to commission-based pay than prior generations. This was certainly true of many of the interns who participated in our research. Income was not the primary attraction to the profession for most of them.

That isn't to say that this group doesn't care about income. But their entrepreneurial mindset and confidence in their ability to achieve goals through their own efforts outweighed the concerns they may have had about commission-based pay.

One group of interns, all of whom had backgrounds in college athletics, explained it this way. "The work you put in is what you get out. As athletes, we understand what that looks like. We're

always looking for that next step. What else can I conquer? How can I take this to the next level? How can I win this? That's attractive to us. It's part of our competitive nature to push ourselves to see what we can get out of it."

This group also understood and accepted the concept of delayed gratification—a characteristic not often applied to Gen Z. One intern explained it this way, "I'm willing to grind it out now knowing that I'm building a business. The income will follow."

Independence

"You get to be your own boss. You don't have to punch a time clock for somebody else. And no one can put a cap on your potential or your growth." —Intern

The independence afforded by the financial security profession was a big attraction for all of the interns in our study. They like having a flexible work schedule that allows them to adjust their hours rather than working a "nine-to-five job." Here, too, this group expressed a willingness to delay gratification, putting in the hard work required now for the ability to set their own schedules and have ample free time to spend with future spouses and children.

Students in our study—who were likely a mix of all four quadrants—were also mixed in their attraction to the independence the profession offers. Work-life balance was more important than flexibility to many of them. One student equated flexibility with being an Uber driver. "Your schedule is flexible, but you have to work 60 to 70 hours a week to make a living."

Emphasize The Opportunity To Build Their Own Business To Q1 Candidates

"I'm building something completely from scratch. I'm getting a roadmap and guidelines for how to do it, but I can create the business I want. My business won't be exactly the same as anyone else's." —Intern

Several interns in our study spoke about a different kind of independence—the opportunity to build something that is uniquely their own. The entrepreneurial aspects of the profession, building and running their own business rather than working for a corporation, and the idea of creating their own success is exciting to them and was a big part of their decision to join the profession.

Let Q2 Candidates Know They Are In Business For Themselves But Not By Themselves

On the other hand, the idea of building and running a business was new and a little daunting to some of the interns in our study. Several had planned on different careers, in teaching, for example, and were concerned they might not have the skills required to build a business. For this group, knowing there is a roadmap, extensive coaching and training, and a support structure in place to help them succeed increased their confidence and their attraction to the profession.

Impact

“Impact is the most important of the three I’s to me. I love the idea of helping people with their finances and getting into conversations with them every day. Even if this was a low-paying profession, I would still want to do this.” —Intern

The ability to have an impact on people’s lives was a draw for all interns in our study as well as for the students pursuing careers as financial security professionals. Both groups are drawn to the relationship-building and helping aspects of the profession. Those who had prior experience with financial security products and services (for example, their parents used a financial professional or they were exposed to financial planning through school) are excited to share their knowledge with others. And several who grew up in households where there were financial challenges expressed a desire to help others avoid similar situations.

Balance Impact And Independence For Q1 Candidates

“People have such busy lives. They work hard to take care of their families. Relieving some of that pressure by letting them know their finances are taken care of is a big part of why I want to do this. But I also really like the idea of being able to build my own practice the way I want it with the freedom to create something that isn’t exactly how anyone else is doing it.” —Intern

For some interns with a strong entrepreneurial drive, impact placed a close second to independence. As one intern said, “Looking in from the outside, you’re thinking about the income and the fact that you can make as much as you want. But once you start doing it, it’s all about the impact and putting clients first. When we’re presenting or making a proposal, we aren’t thinking about the commission we’re going to get; we’re thinking about what’s right for the client.”

The opportunity to build their own business brought some interns in. The ability to change people’s lives has given them purpose beyond their personal goals.

Emphasize Making An Impact Over Making A Sale For Q2 Candidates

“I had a fear that being a salesperson meant taking advantage of people and trying to make a quick buck. But the reason I fell in love with this job and now want to make it my career is that I see now that I’m building relationships with people who will be with me for my whole life.” —Intern

Interns in our study who had little or no prior exposure to financial security products or services often initially viewed the profession as sales-focused rather than relationship-focused. One intern noted, “I was very reluctant to take the internship. I didn’t have any experience in sales, and my friends weren’t very encouraging. But the recruiters stressed the impact I could have on people so I decided to give it a try. I never thought I’d still be here two years later.”

That mindset shift can be the difference between a high-potential candidate remaining in the profession or walking away. Another intern explained how knowing he’s making a difference in people’s lives helped him through some of the difficult aspects of the profession. “There’s a point where you have to reach out to family and people you know,” he said. “And that was

something I struggled with at the beginning. The faster you get into the mindset that you're helping people, the faster you're going to get more comfortable with reaching out to people. My leader really helped me with that."

Students in our study were skeptical about the ability to have an impact on people's lives as an important part of the profession. One student noted, "It might be a side benefit, but it isn't the core. It's about making a sale."

Interns who were skeptical at first came to understand the value of the profession through their personal experiences in the internship program. But changing mindsets one intern at a time may not be enough to overcome the recruiting challenges confronting the profession.

To shift paradigms on a grander scale, the profession must focus on a fourth I: Image.

One Thing

We asked interns to identify one thing we should do to attract more Gen Z into the profession. Here are some of their responses.

- Focus on the entrepreneurial aspects of the profession.
- Spread the word. Get involved with colleges beyond career fairs.
- Educate people about the benefits this profession offers—that you can make as much as you want to, you can control your schedule, and you don't need to be an expert. Anyone can learn if they put the effort in.
- Let people know you make money by building relationships and helping people. When we promote who is successful, it should be about who helped the most people, not who made the most money or got the most sales.
- Talk about the culture more. It isn't what I expected. It's fun and these people truly care about me.
- Market the experience, not just the end goal—how this profession helps you grow personally and professionally.
- Information about the profession needs to be digital and more interesting. People have short attention spans and much of the material available is boring.

The Fourth I— Image

“The culture is so good here, I’d be scared to even think about leaving. I wouldn’t want to do this anywhere else.” —Intern

It’s clear from both of our *Shifting Paradigms* studies that much of the general public, including Gen Z, has a negative image of the financial security profession. This Gen Z study also reveals a significant difference in perceptions between students who have little or no experience with the profession and the interns and students who do. People who have experience working with financial security professionals or who have benefited from financial security products and services understand and appreciate the work that we do.



Experience matters. And, given that Gen Z has little or no experience with the profession or its products and services, it’s not surprising that many of the students we spoke with have a neutral image of the profession at best or a negative image at worst.

What can we do to change Gen Z’s perception of the profession so that image becomes an attractor to the profession along with income, independence, and impact?

Increasing Awareness of the Profession

“I’m sure our parents and grandparents ran into some shady insurance salespeople. But I don’t think that’s true for my generation. Most people my age don’t know anything about the profession.” —Intern

The first step is to increase awareness about the profession among Gen Z. Most of the students we spoke with had very little knowledge about the profession. Even students who indicated that financial stability was important to them did not view financial security products and services as a means to help them achieve their goals. And many of the interns in our study who are now

happily pursuing careers as financial security professionals had never heard of the profession before being approached by a recruiter.

As suggested by one group of interns, financial security professionals need to become involved with colleges beyond career fairs. Showing up a few times a year to recruit candidates is not going to create lasting change. Teaching courses or giving presentations as guest speakers are the most direct ways to become involved. These interns also recommended attending and sponsoring other events. Companies that have a consistent presence on campus stay top of mind with students, and students are more likely to explore career opportunities with those companies.

Shifting Focus from Outcomes to Experience

“The more I continued through the process, the more I fell in love with working here. The people really care about me. Everyone is welcoming and wants to help me out.” —Intern

When talking about the financial security profession, we often focus on the outcomes— independence, impact, and income—as major benefits of the profession. And these continue to be important conversations to have with candidates. But many of the interns in our study also spoke passionately about the experiences they are having within their firms.

Culture—what candidates can expect to experience now—is as big a draw to Gen Z as the outcomes they can expect in the future. Consider Google, LinkedIn, or Zoom; they’re known for their company cultures, and it draws applicants to them. How does Gen Z view the culture in our profession? The students we spoke to said “stuffy,” “boring,” and “old fashioned.” Yet, interns had an entirely different experience.

Don’t worry. Candidates aren’t all looking for free meals, car washes, and an on-site masseuse (as offered by one of the aforementioned companies). The interns we spoke with are attracted by the strength of the relationships they build within their firms. They appreciate knowing that their teams genuinely care about them. And they are inspired by the passion and purpose their more experienced colleagues demonstrate day after day.

This is a generation that grew up with YouTube, Instagram, and reality TV; one that has been interacting with much of the world virtually for the past two years. They recognize and value genuine connections.

“I was at the annual meeting and met some experienced advisors for the first time. They had this energy and vision that was completely magnetic. You’re surrounded by these great forward-thinking leaders that are so inspiring. That had a huge impact on me and my career choice.” —Intern

Call to Action

“You have to have confidence in yourself and in your ability to work hard. You have to come into this believing you’re going to make it. It’s a business that’s going to bring everything out of you. It’s going to show you who you really are.” –Intern

We hope you are both inspired and disturbed by the information you learned in this ebook. Inspired by the passion and purpose the interns in our study feel for their new profession. And disturbed by the perceptions many of the students in our study have about what we do and who we are. These perceptions are especially disturbing given that research tells us Gen Zers are seeking careers that provide financial security, flexibility, and the opportunity to make a positive impact in the world. Three things we know this profession provides in abundance.

Bridging the gap between what these interns know and what the students believe is up to us. Research by the Finseca Foundation and other leading industry organizations shows time and again that many people have little knowledge about the financial security profession and the products and services we provide. We must do a better job educating the public so that they can make informed decisions about their financial futures. We must get better at telling our story to younger generations who are searching for meaningful careers, explaining the impact, independence, and opportunity for growth inherent in the profession for those willing to put in the work.

If every financial security professional were to volunteer to speak at a local school, college, or university—to educate, not to sell or recruit—how many perceptions might we change? How many students could we attract who might otherwise never have known about this profession?

If every financial security professional identified and executed just one idea to change public perception of the profession, how many more lives could we impact?

We can continue to affect change one candidate at a time, or we can work together to shift paradigms.

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Benjamin Bartusek

Financial Advisor
Northwestern Mutual—Twin Cities Group

Temí Carda

Financial Advisor
North Star Resource Group

Chloe Cumbee

Financial Representative
Northwestern Mutual—Twin Cities Group

Tim Dörner

Financial Representative
Northwestern Mutual—Eastern Pennsylvania

Gloria Eddy

Director of Recruiting
Wealth Strategies

Elizabeth Gaspari

Financial Representative
Northwestern Mutual—Eastern Pennsylvania

Kaitlin Greene

Chief Recruiting Officer and Internship
Development Officer
RPS Financial Group Inc.

Jack Grimm

Financial Advisor
North Star Resource Group

Brandon Keeley

Financial Representative Intern
Northwestern Mutual—Twin Cities Group

Caroline Kelly

Director of Internship Development
Northwestern Mutual—Twin Cities Group

Krista Koenig

Financial Representative Intern
Northwestern Mutual—Twin Cities Group

Grace Liparini

Associate Director of Internship
Development
Northwestern Mutual—Eastern Pennsylvania

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RPS Financial Group Inc.

Michael Norum

Financial Representative Intern
Northwestern Mutual—Twin Cities Group

Regina Reiff

Business Development Director
WestPac Wealth Partners

Dean Roberts

Financial Representative
Northwestern Mutual

Braydon Ruiz

Financial Representative
Northwestern Mutual—Eastern Pennsylvania

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Endnotes

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