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**From:** Nathan Richter, Senior Partner, Wakefield Research  
**Date:** 1.12.18  
**Regarding:** Public Opinion Analysis of the Phrase “Side Hustle”

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**The “Side hustle” is worthy of exploration because it is bound to some of the most significant changes occurring in society today.** It is associated with topics such as stagnating wages, the impact of new technologies, the increasing cost of living, and the changing nature of work itself.

In short, it’s a nifty window into some pretty big social issues.

This research examines Americans’ experience with, and opinions of, the side hustle. It takes a look at who is working a side hustle and why. It sheds some light on how we view “hustlers” and on how those hustlers view themselves.

The side hustle landscape is complicated. It turns out that the side hustle is an American tradition spanning generations. Yet this buzzword is often a short-hand for a new way of working, and for the struggles facing young workers that make a new way of working a necessity.

The following provides an initial summary of the research findings.

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## Who's Hustling?

“Side hustle” might be a trendy buzzword, but like a lot of such phrases, it’s a new phrase for an old idea. The concept of the side hustle is largely used to mean having a side job or an alternative source of income in addition to a primary job.

Our research shows that everyone has hustled. **Every living generation of Americans has had a “side job” or a “hustle” at one time or another: 61% of Americans have either had a side job, or currently have a side job.** Side jobs are a part of the shared American experience. Women, men, Millennials, Gen Xers, Boomers, white, black, lower, middle and upper-income Americans have all hustled.

<i>Have you ever had a “side job”? Meaning, something you did for money in addition to your primary job.</i>										
	Gender		Generation			Race		Household Income		
	Male	Female	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	White	Black	LT \$35k	\$35k-LT\$75k	\$75k+
Yes (net)	66%	56%	64%	64%	56%	59%	63%	59%	65%	58%

## Why Are They Hustling?

The side hustle might be as American as apple pie, but the concept of hustling seems to have taken on a new urgency in today’s economy. So much so that **a majority (56%) of US adults believe that it’s hard to succeed in America *without* a side hustle.**

This notion is particularly prevalent among populations that are traditionally economically vulnerable: the young and racial minorities. **Among Millennials, 66% believe that it’s hard to succeed without a side hustle.** Less than half (47%) of Boomers feel this way. African-Americans are also far more likely to doubt success without the side hustle: 71% believe it’s hard to succeed without a side hustle, compared to 51% of whites.

It’s therefore not a complete shock to find that Americans hustle for the same reasons they pursue more conventional work: they need the money. When asked why they worked a side job, **81% said “to make more money.”** That trend holds across generations, gender, and racial backgrounds.

<i>Which of the following explains why you worked your most recent side job?</i>							
	Gender		Generation			Race	
	Male	Female	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	White	Non-White
To make more money	78%	84%	77%	81%	85%	84%	74%



## Side Hustle in Media & Popular Culture

The side hustle in popular culture is often portrayed in an exclusively positive light. It's depicted as aspirational, and the hustlers are often viewed as future moguls in the making. One even hears hustlers boasting about their side hustle, and about the amount of effort they invest in it (the implication often being that major success is right around the corner). In this world, one's side hustle is a badge of honor.

We see evidence of this in how the phrase "side hustle" is viewed by Americans, and by how it is used in media and in conversations with others. **60% of Americans who are familiar with the phrase feel that it is used positively when they hear others using the term**, for example on the news or in conversation. That trend is consistent across generations. African-Americans and other non-whites are even *more* likely to hear the term used positively.

*In general, when you see or hear other people using the term "side hustle," for example on the news or when talking with others, is the term mostly used positively or negatively?*

	Generation			Race	
	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	Black	Non-White
Positively	63%	61%	55%	69%	69%

The good vibes extend beyond popular culture. **Americans themselves have a positive view of the side hustle.** Among those who are familiar with the term, 68% feel that it is a positive phrase. As one gets older, positivity decreases, but the percentage never dips below a majority.

*In your opinion, do you think that the term "side hustle" is a positive or negative term?*

	Generation			Race	
	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	White	Non-White
Positive (net)	74%	68%	59%	60%	83%



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Furthermore, “hustle’s” reputation has improved from the days when it mostly described deceitful dealings. Among those familiar with the phrase, **65% say side hustle describes honest work, done by someone who is working hard to make money.** Only 35% say it describes work that is illegal or a scam, done by someone who is immoral. This trend is consistent across generation and race.

<i>Which of the following best describes what the term “side hustle” means to you?</i>					
	Generation			Race	
	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer	White	Non-White
It describes honest work, done by someone who is working hard to make money	65%	64%	64%	60%	75%

### The Truth Behind the Side Hustle

Americans should be proud of their side hustles. It’s an American tradition viewed positively by every segment of society. **Yet the truth is more complicated.**

First, most side hustles are a secret. **Americans working a side hustle don’t tell most of the people they know about their hustle.** On average, they keep their side hustle a secret from 55% of their family, friends and coworkers. More than a quarter (26%) don’t tell *anyone* at all – not a soul – that they have a side hustle.

**Millennials are even more reticent when it comes to disclosing their side hustle.** On average, they tell just 37% of their social circle about their hustle, and 36% – more than a third – don’t tell a single person about their side job.

In fact, when those who have ever had a side hustle are asked whether they are prouder of their side job or their regular job, **most (57%) are prouder of their regular job than their side hustle.** Among those currently working a side hustle, it’s a statistical dead heat between those that are prouder of their regular job or their side hustle (48% vs. 52%).

Another truth about the side hustle: **they are stressful.** A majority (52%) of those currently working a side hustle feel that their hustle is *frequently* a source of stress. (



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### **Where Does Side Hustle-Shame Come From?**

It takes character to work hard for additional income. Yet, the actual experience of the side hustle is a few degrees removed from its portrayal in popular culture. This contrasts with the imagery of the side hustle in popular culture – and particularly in media – where the side hustle is portrayed as a means to pursue our passions, to learn new skills, and to get ahead.

### **One explanation may be that hustlers are unaware that everyone else is doing it, too.**

Though 61% of Americans have had, at one time or another, a side job or a hustle, those who currently have a side hustle say that only 31% of the people they know are doing the same. In fact, 25% of hustlers don't know *anyone* with a side hustle. That probably feels rather lonely at times.

Additionally, they may not feel like boasting about their side job. **Not all side hustlers are developing the next big app, or pursuing a creative passion.** The top 3 most common side hustles are working in sales/retail, manual labor/landscaping, or as office workers. This is respectable work, though it may not reflect workers' life ambition.

### **The Sunny Side of the Side Hustle**

Though economic gain is the primary motivator for a side hustle, there are other reasons Americans hustle.

Among those currently working a side hustle, nearly half (49%) cited a reason other than, or in addition to, making more money. **Passion plays a role, albeit a far smaller one than economics:** 27% are working a side hustle to do something they're passionate about. Nearly as many are hustling to do something more fulfilling or interesting than their current job (23%) or to learn something new (17%).

If Americans' side hustles are a secret, they can still be satisfying. **Most current hustlers (58%) find their side hustles more satisfying than their regular jobs.**

Why so many hustlers keep their side jobs a secret, and why they are prouder of their regular jobs while feeling that their side hustles are more satisfying, is beyond the scope of this research.

Perhaps it's satisfaction in a job well done, or satisfaction in knowing that you are doing all that you can to provide for yourself and your family. Regardless of the reason, it's good to know that so many millions of Americans aren't toiling for nothing. That on a personal level, they derive value from their side hustle.



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**Methodological Notes:**

The Side Hustle Survey was conducted by Wakefield Research ([www.wakefieldresearch.com](http://www.wakefieldresearch.com)) among 2,000 nationally representative U.S. adults ages 18+, between December 13 and December 20, 2017, using an email invitation and an online survey. Quotas have been set to ensure reliable and accurate representation of the U.S. adult population 18 and older.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. For the interviews conducted in this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 2.2 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.