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Young People and AI Transformation

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We often think of transformation as something we do. For young people today, it is something happening to them. Five years ago, young people had a sense that if they wanted to do X as a job, they needed to study A. Do extracurricular B. Do well at both. Then, they would have a fairly well-known course of education and working years. With the advent of GenAI, that is no longer true. It is unclear how society will transform to adapt to AI.



Given the uncertainty, what should parents, educators, managers, and executives tell young people? The best message for all seems to have four guiding principles: 1.) try to reduce stress; 2.) study what interests you; 3.) accept that your life is likely to be characterized by an accelerating rate of change; and 4.) try to participate in shaping the transformative adaptations that society will have to make.

Background

The idea that the best way forward is to set a career goal and structure your education around that is well established. Thirty years ago, a young girl decided that she wanted to become a veterinarian. She knew that it would be difficult to get into a vet school. So, she started building a record of strong biological sciences and extracurricular activities working in animal rescue.

More recently, a young man decided that he wanted to become a fireman. He took high school courses that would gain him admission to a community college to take the prerequisites for admission to a fire academy run by a local government.

Another young man decided he wanted to become a plumber. He took an internship at a plumbing company.

All of them were successful. Planning ahead and working to qualify for a particular job worked. But what happens if, while you are preparing, the job disappears?

image

Current Uncertainty

In October of 2024, AIWG (AI Working Group) started researching AI job loss. We started publishing about AI job loss in June of 2025 and AI job loss in the constellation of broader

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concerning societal effects of GenAI in September 2025. By February of 2026, there seemed to be a more general societal recognition of the problem. This can be seen in two publications in that month: the first in the Atlantic and the second in a widely read blog post.

In August of 2025, we started talking with young people about AI and their futures. There is a young man who decided at the age of 9 that he wanted to become a computer scientist and started preparing for that. He is now in the early years of college at a leading university. He tells me that he thinks that his strong STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) will stand him in good stead when he graduates. But will it? Other people who majored in obscure corners of the humanities have found themselves in high demand by the frontier model-building AI companies. The current situation can be best described as troubling. An August 2025 poll showed that 71% said they're worried that artificial intelligence will "put too many people out of work permanently." These fears are not unfounded. A recent study found that workers ages 22 to 25 have seen about a 13 percent decline in employment since late 2022.

Six months to a year ago, some educators started recommending training young people for blue-collar jobs. Unfortunately, it looks like robots with GenAI will be able to do that kind of work too, and now you don't hear so much about that approach.

From the point of view of young people thinking about how to prepare themselves for a successful future life, this is like a game of 52-card pick up. The cards are all in the air, and it is hard to predict where they will land.

Accelerating Rate of Change

There are those who say that the AI revolution is more significant than the industrial revolution. Some maintain that AI will create more jobs than it destroys. Others say that the solution is a guaranteed income for all.

There are a few certainties in this environment. First GenAI is very early in its development. It is going to get better. Higher quality of output. More capabilities. Etc.

The rate of technology change is fast, but it is going to get faster. One of the leaders in the GenAI revolution, Andrej Karpathy, posted in December of 2025 that things are developing so fast that he himself can no longer keep up.

Even Alvin Toffler, the author of the 1970 book Future Shock, might be surprised by what GenAI is doing. And it is only going to get faster. Why? Because AI is going to accelerate it.

A professor at the University of Chicago says that, currently, AI is designing experiments. Conducting the experiments. Writing the papers on the results. Submitting the papers to a journal for publication. The journal sends the draft papers to distinguished reviewers who use AI to do the reviews. An AI takes the results of the reviews, updates the papers, and they are published. The next AI that is trained has these papers in its training data.

The next step is for AI to accelerate the process of converting new science into new technology and commercializing it. Because the economic incentive is there, this will happen. The result will be a rapid acceleration in the rate of technology change. Not just in AI, where AI is already designing the next generation of AI, but across all aspects of our lives.

All of this will strain our social, political, and economic systems / institutions. Will this create a demand for new people to address these problems? Or will AI handle them too? Again, it's hard to predict.

An Approach for Young People Thinking About Their Future

So, what do young people, their parents, advisers, and potential employers do to prepare for the future?

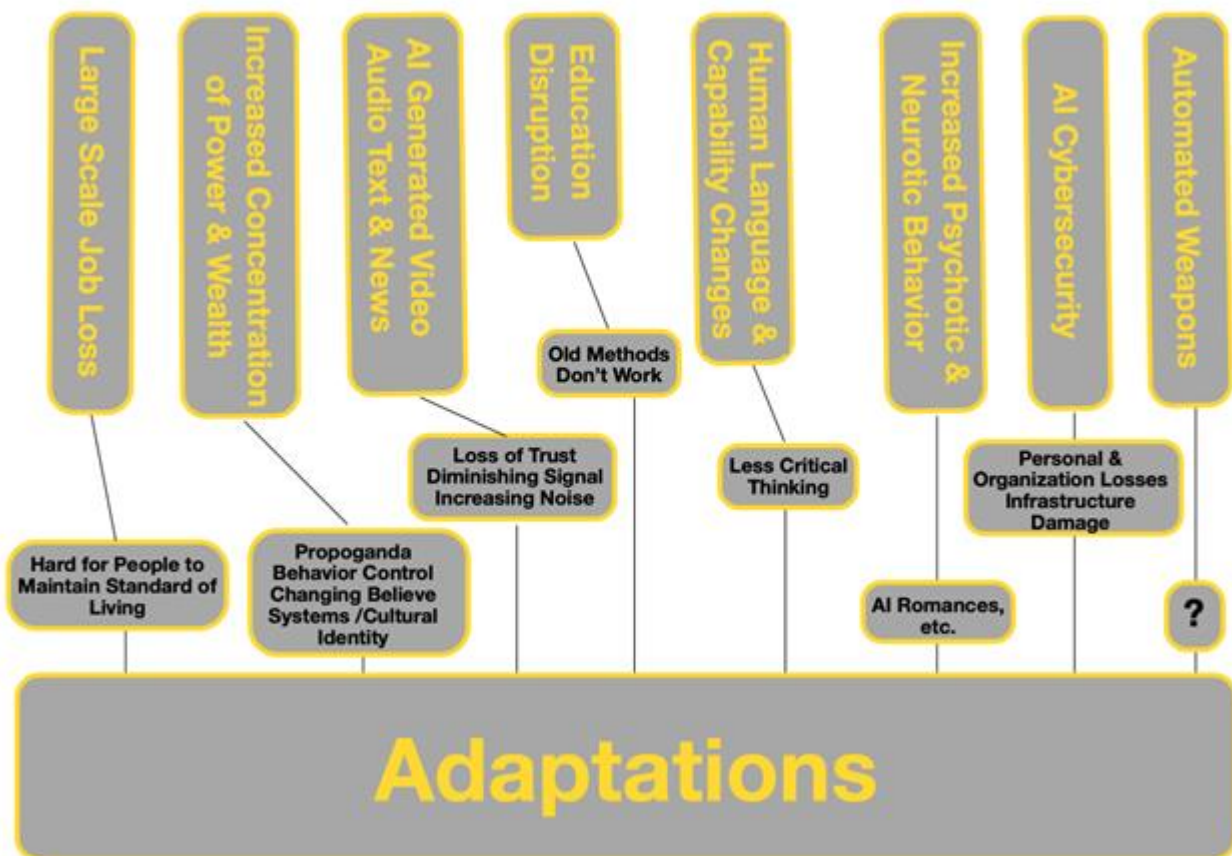
1.) First and most importantly, try to keep anxiety as low as possible. Worrying about it won't make it any better. In fact, getting anxious about it will make all of us less able to manage the transition we are going through.

2.) Closely related to lowering anxiety is understanding that you can't predict with much certainty how the transition will unfold. Therefore, focus on following your interests. Learn about what interests you. Follow your passion. If you don't think you have a passion right now or don't know what interests you, try a lot of different things. Experiment. 3.) No matter what happens, understand that you are likely going to have to learn new things and follow new and different paths many times in your life. Therefore, try to develop a sense of your identity and self-worth that is independent from work.

4.) If you are a young person, don't be passive. In the next few years, not just jobs, but the shape of the world (see illustration below) you will spend the rest of your life in will start to gel. Pay attention to what is happening and try to find ways of having a voice in how our institutions will be transformed.

These four guiding principles can be regarded as the signposts on the journey that young people are taking.

AI Adaptive Transformations



How Adults Can Help Young People

If you are a parent, educator, etc., encourage young people to use the four guiding principles to start discussions. Ask them how they are thinking about their futures.

If you are a manager working with interns, start conversations about how AI is likely to transform your business while encouraging them to follow the four guiding principles.

If you are an executive, you should be thinking about how to lower AI anxiety in your workforce to keep up productivity. As part of your program to do that, include help and resources for young people, parents, and educators in understanding and adapting to AI.

Conclusion

Five years ago, young people felt that there were pretty clear roadmaps for preparing for an adult work life. With the advent of GenAI, that is no longer true. It is unclear how society will transform to adapt to AI. Given the uncertainty, what should parents, educators, managers, and executives tell young people? The best message for all seems to have four guiding principles: 1.) try to reduce stress; 2.) study what interests you; 3.) accept that your life is likely to be characterized by an accelerating rate of change; and 4.) try to participate in shaping the transformative AI adaptations.