

White Paper

# The Dawn of Generation Z



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As I sit here and contemplate writing this white paper I realize that I have had experience in raising children in three Generations. Being a Baby Boomer myself, I have successfully raised three Generation Y's, two Millennials and am currently working on raising two Generation Z's. As grandparent of many up-and-coming Alpha Generations, I am interested to see how our world will mould them into the adults they will one day become.

As our population ages and Baby Boomers start the retirement process, we might face a serious challenge in the workforce with the new generation that is emerging. Are they prepared and do they have the necessary skills to find work and be productive? Many surveys have been done over the years checking on the relationships between employers and hiring the youngest of Gen Z, sometimes known as iGen, Post-Millennials or Plurals.<sup>1</sup>

## Who are they?

Gen Z are those born from 1995 – 2007 and are just entering the workforce. They are the very first truly digital and global generation. By the year 2020, 20% of the workforce will be Gen Z.

Gen Z's today are growing up in a different world than their predecessor Millennials. They have grown up in a world where they can get information and knowledge at the touch of a button. They are globally and socially connected while being online searching and discovering information.

This online access means that Gen Z's have grown up in a world where news is readily available to them and it makes them more responsible than the generation before them. Their day is filled with information and news feeds from around the world. Youth are no longer shielded from the darker side of the world as images and descriptions of terrorism, financial recessions and global news events fill their hand held devices.

Some well-meaning parents make it their mission to build their children's self-esteem by emphasizing rewards and avoiding negativity. As a result, Gen Z's tend to have high self-esteem and think they can do anything. They take for granted the amount of access they have to data and how quickly they can access it. Then tend to be quick to judge and correct adults because they have the facts available to them.

### Generations Defined

**Generation Z:**  
born 1995 - 2012

**Generation Y/Millennials:**  
born 1977 - 1994

**Generation X:**  
born 1966 - 1976

**Baby Boomers:**  
born 1946-1964

### Personal Note

*One day my father-in-law, who is a confirmed non-internet user, was asked to give a talk at a school regarding Remembrance Day. He spoke about the war and how proud he was to be Canadian and why we have Remembrance Day. When he opened up for questions, one of the children asked why the Canadian flag had two red strips and a red maple leaf on it. He thought quickly on his feet, but wasn't completely sure of his answer. Before he had finished a youngster had done a google search and had the correct answer. Needless to say, he was embarrassed and learned a valuable lesson about this generation... you can't fool them.*



Gen Z's typically have a strong relationship with their parents as they grow up listening to the same music and watching the same programs on television. "This is the generation that's had more guidance, direction, support and coaching from parents, teachers, and counselors than any generation in history," Says Bruce Tugan, founder of Rainmaker Thinking.<sup>2</sup> They are encouraged to follow their dreams and their passions. They learn continually and generally like to give input.

Many Baby Boomers have spent most of their lives at one company and are loyal supporters of them. Gen Z's will not have that same kind of loyalty as they have been through recessions and seen how it has affected their parents and siblings. As a result of the recession they will find themselves competing for jobs with much older adults with more experience. Most Gen Z's, when asked how long they thought it they should stay at a job, suggested about 5 years.

Gen Z's are frequently missing a few skills that older generations accept as important, and therefore will need some coaching and guidance in the workplace. Gen Z's tend not to take personal responsibility for challenges they may be involved in. They want to share the blame or believe it was beyond their control. They don't seem to have the same dedication to being on time and following through on commitments. Gen Z's tend call in sick or not show up at all when they "just don't feel like going to work today!" Gen Z's also believe they are indestructible and don't take care of themselves outside of work so they show up unhealthy and tired.

Gen Z's can be hard worker but they love an atmosphere that they can relate in, one that is interesting, challenging and above all, fun! Although they are the texting and social media rulers, they prefer to do business face to face. Robert Half's study on Gen Z determined that 64% love to collaborate in small groups and would rather work in an office environment while only 3% would rather work off-site or in a home office.<sup>3</sup>



Gen Z's will typically be entrepreneurial rather than employees. They will be looking for companies where they can specialize and contract jobs because they want flexibility in the workplace. They will expect quick results as they want to be in charge, not directed for a long time. If promotions are not readily handed out, they will be quick to deliver their resume elsewhere. They expect that once they have finished their education they should get jobs in a leadership position immediately.

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2 *Rainmaker Thinking – Bruce Tugan*

3 *Get Ready for Generation Z – Robert Half*

## Early Work Experience

Are we ready for this group of youngsters? It's important, that as their future employers, mentors, teachers and advisors that we do our very best to prepare them for the world we live in today.

Often, as parents we think it's important for our children not to have distraction while they are attending their last few years of high school. However, this may not always be the best for them. Teens who start a part-time job and work about 20 hours a week have proven to achieve better jobs in the future, have better lifestyles and have the desire to better their education to achieve their future goals.

Having a job at a younger age can improve their cognitive abilities, skills, knowledge, and problem solving capabilities. They learn responsibility, self-control, and develop the ability to get along with others. As I mentioned before, the characteristics of Gen Z's is one of high self-esteem which can get in the way in a work setting. Taking on part-time jobs during their senior years at school helps them to learn about challenges in the real world and helps them to prepare for their future careers.



In a Youth Development Study (YDS) in St. Paul Minnesota, Jeylan Motimer, among others, determined that those students who worked around 20 hours a week while in high school were more likely to move on to a Bachelor's Degree than those who choose not to work.<sup>4</sup> It was also determined that those who were thought to have a low academic score, were more likely to go college and finish a program or degree.

## Hiring Gen Z?

In the West, our economic situation has changed and, as stated earlier, Gen Z's will be competing with adults much older than themselves for entry level jobs. Of course, Gen Z's are so well connected, have more experience with technology, they learn faster than some older candidates.

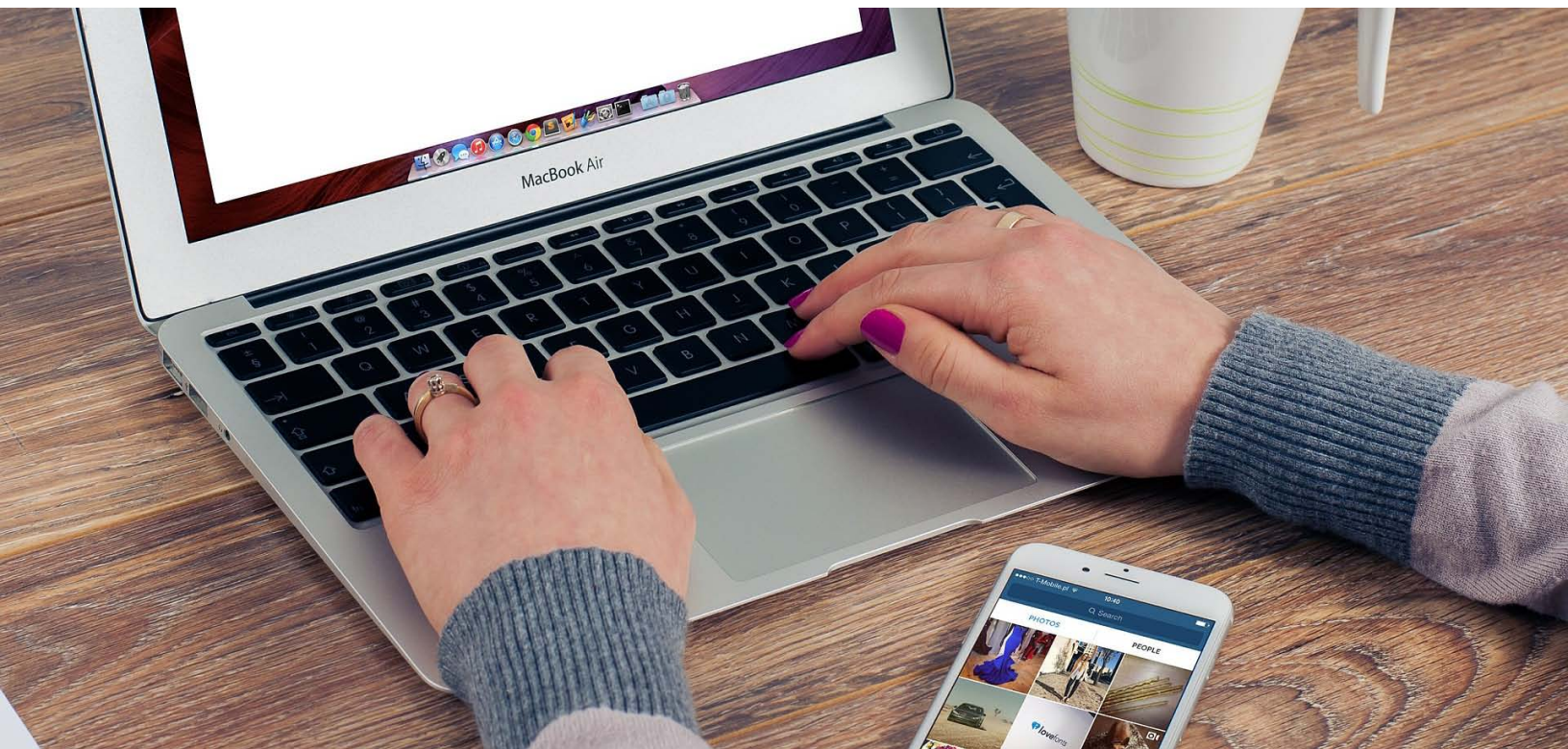
Many employers of primarily Gen Z employees put out personality profile testing as part of the job application process. This requires the applicant to fill out short answer, long answer and multiple choice questions. This might have been great for our Millennials, but Gen Z want quick and easy. Although wonderful information for the employer, Gen Z's don't take the questions seriously, get frustrated when they don't know the answer and they are quick to quit the process. They tend not to take the survey questions very seriously and don't seem to understand the impact of their answers. Employers generally don't take the time to go over what they have done and explain the importance of the profile. Employers may be missing out on good employees because of Gen Z's lack of understanding and patience in filling out the information.

We have to remember Gen Z's are not using laptop computers, rather smart phones and tablets. If the site is not mobile friendly, they will have difficulty applying for the job and they will move on to the next opportunity.

What's more, our teen employees often lack a few behaviours that are valued by employers. For example, they can be unreliable and have higher absences than older adults. They often think the job should cater to them as opposed to taking responsibility for the job.

## Hiring Gen Z: What to Look For

Teens have been known to use their parents to make excuses for them with regards to their work schedule. This tends to become a bigger problem when the parents get involved with the teen's job. Parents who are constantly involved in the employment process are a clear deterrent for employers. Those applicants who show up to interview with their parents in tow, or have a parent drop off their resume are simply not likely to be great candidates.





### Personal Note

*When my granddaughter was looking for her first job at a deli counter last year, in a local grocery store, she called up her Aunt and asked her to run her resume over to the store because she was too busy and her Aunt lived closer. Of course she did not get the job! The reason... they said was because she couldn't be bothered to present herself and they thought she was too co-dependent. She learned a valuable lesson: now she always presents herself in the best way possible, dressed properly, on her own, and always asks for the manager.*

It is recommended that the best candidates are independent minded, or coached by their parents, teachers and mentors on how to present themselves for a potential job.

Surprisingly, some Gen Z's think that showing up with a large following of other teens for support is acceptable for job seeking. Employers have noted that those who do will generally have friends congregating in the work place or hanging around nearby. This was especially noted in retail businesses, malls, and fast food restaurants.

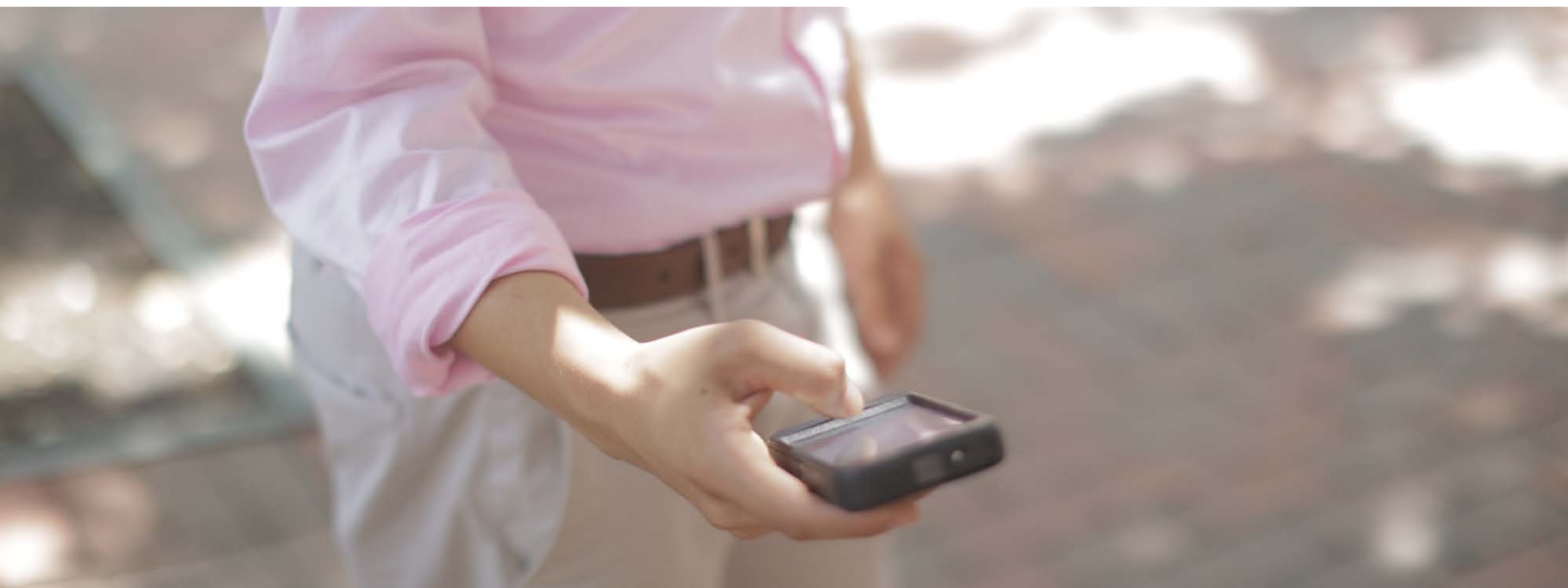
As we have said throughout this paper, Gen Z's are connected as if addicted to their cell phones, text messages and technology. Many will suffer separation anxiety by being apart for long periods of time from their devices. Those employers who allow the teens to keep the device with them find them to be unproductive employees as they might start a task and stop in the middle to answer a text message... and it's never resolved with one reply. It then takes longer to get the task completed. Many companies are adopting a "no cell" policy because this behaviour is getting out of control.

Furthermore, some Gen Z's can be a little unpredictable: some will accept a job, work a shift or two and then never show up again. They didn't like the job, maybe the work, or didn't feel they were treated well. They may not even stay until they get their first paycheck. Instead of talking to the employer they simply walk away and never come back, leaving the employer not knowing if they need to look for a new hire. This can make hiring young adults somewhat risky and expensive. While not a unique behaviour to this age group, it is worrying to see this lack of dependability at the beginning of a career.

In addition, Gen Z's are generally weak in their verbal communications skills and would rather text their notice than have to tell the employer face to face. It's important that employers of Gen Z's do their best to open up the lines of communication by communicating in a way they are comfortable with and understand.

### Personal Note

*Recently my daughter got a job at a restaurant that hired mostly Gen Z's. The employer set up a program that in order to get their first paycheck the employee had to show up for at least three shifts. This stopped new employees for showing up for one shift and never coming back. They also set up an online schedule. Once the schedule was made, if an employee couldn't make a shift they put it up for someone to swap or take. The employee was responsible for getting someone to work their shift or they were required to show up. If they missed they ran the risk of being let go. Each employee signed and agreed to the terms prior to their employment. This system worked well as text messages were sent out when shifts became available and they were generally picked up without creating a problem with missing staff. This system speaks to the way Gen Z communicates with each other and seemed to work very well.*



## Hiring Gen Z: Best Practices

Hiring teens has its own set of challenges and finding the right employees is sometimes a hit or miss experience. Most employers shouldn't rely on only their gut instinct or first impressions but should go through some best practices to ensure that they are hiring the right employee. Some examples of these best practices would be:

- A. Educational achievements and career goals
- B. Reference checks
- C. Connectibility
- D. Flexible schedules
- E. Interviews

## A. Education and Work Experience Programs for Teens

Students who enroll in work experience programs generally have a strong desire to work and be a part of the workforce. As seen in studies, one of the problems employers have with teen hires is the fact that they did not know how to work to a high standard. When teens make the decision to enroll in work experience programs though their schools their achievement is graded and they have more drive to succeed. Work experience generally puts the teens in areas that they are genuinely interested in, such as retail sales, carpentry, construction or mechanics. Finding out their long term goals and desires down the road helps them to make better choices as adults. If a teen is interested in mechanics, they might not be the best person for the job in the fast food restaurant. When hiring, try to gauge the interest level of the candidate, and their reason for applying to your job.



## B. References

It is important to check any candidate's references, and teens are not an exception. References should be from past employers, school teachers, sports coaches, or mentors.

References from school teachers are generally the best at providing an unbiased view of a potential employee. In a survey done by Commonwealth Corporation in 2013,<sup>5</sup> they determined that nearly 70% of employers who responded to the survey reported that a reference from a teacher could influence the decision to hire a young person for an entry-level position. From a teacher's perspective, they can speak about the ability to get tasks completed, attendance and reliability: things that a parent or family member might not see.

## C. Connectivity

Gen Z is the generation that has never been without a connection to the internet. They are problem solvers and love to find things out for themselves. They will turn to the internet, video platforms such as YouTube to watch tutorials and troubleshoot their problems rather than ask for help. They spend much of their time on social media sites, so the challenge for employers looking for the best talent is to find innovative ways to capture their attention. Their preferred networks are constantly changing: last week it was Instagram, today it's Snapchat, tomorrow there will be something new. You will need to be clear, concise and transparent as to what you are looking for as this generation has learned to be very skeptical of marketing campaigns.

## D. Flexible Work Schedules

As Generation Z comes into the workforce they will be looking for more flexible schedules than those they've seen with most adults in their lives. They will not want to work the traditional 9 – 5 work day; instead, they will be focused on a more balanced lifestyle with the ability to work varied hours. This may cause companies to re-evaluate their current policies with regards to work hours. Some Gen Z's may choose to work several part-time jobs rather than give up the flexibility.



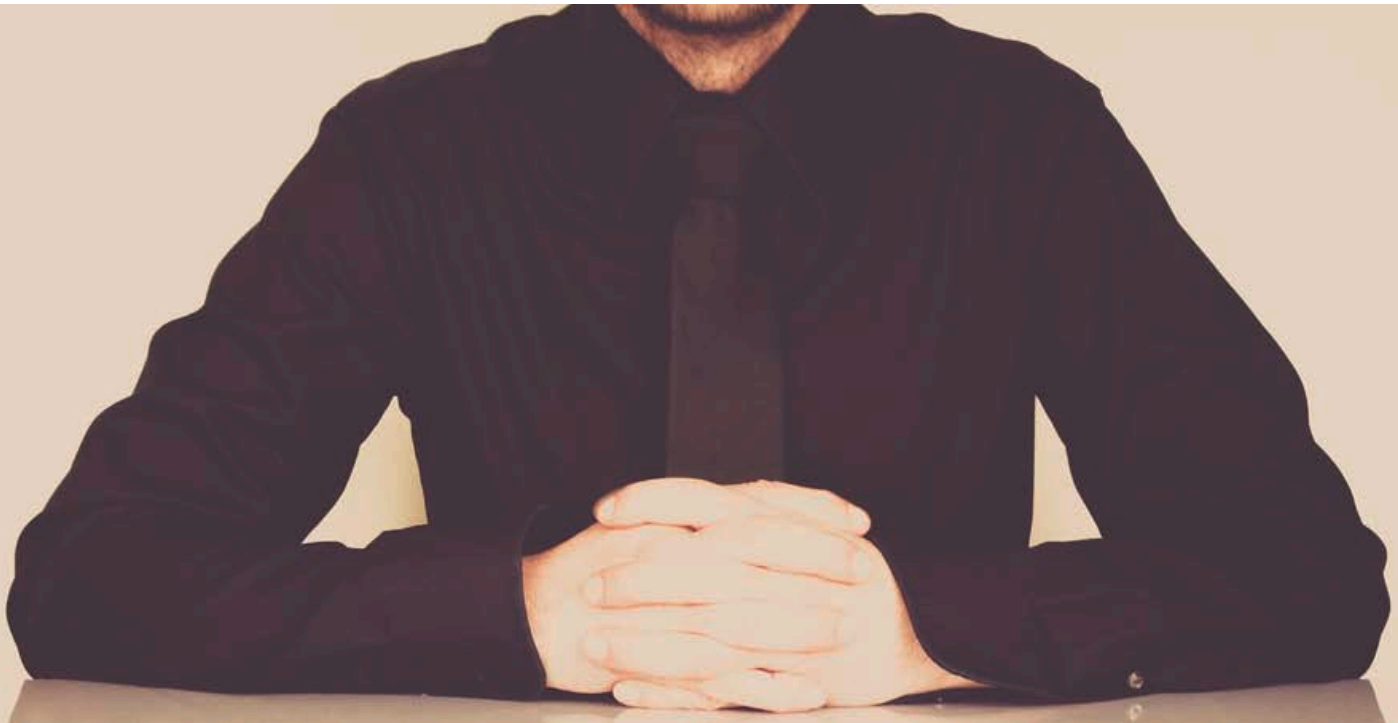
Studies have shown that 42 % of Gen Z want to own their own business and that 83% of them will only stay in their first job for 3 years or less. They will leave sooner if there is no flexibility or if they are not promoted quickly enough, among other reasons.<sup>6</sup>

## E. Interviews

Interviewing is one of the most important steps; pay particular attention to:

- a. Whether or not they make eye contact and shake hands
- b. Their overall appearance
- c. Whether they ask questions
- d. What does their availability schedule look like?
- e. Parental Involvement

**a. Whether or not they make eye contact** – Making eye contact is an excellent way of communicating. Those that are insecure and afraid to make eye contact may not be the best candidates for a customer focused role. Many have forgotten the importance of a handshake and how it fits into the interview. Those who come in, make good eye contact and shake your hand have done their research and are deliberately sending positive messages to their prospective employer.



**b. Their appearance** – Take a close look at how they present themselves. In today's liberal world, it will not be uncommon to see this generation with tattoos and piercings that are very visible or with traditionally negative images. Although many are tastefully done, for some reason it seems important to the younger generation to show off their body art by wearing inappropriate clothing. More conservative employers have had to let some workers go as these employees continually show up with body parts exposed to display their tattoos. Make a clear concise plan with regards to your company policy on how to handle the appearance of tattoos and body piercing and make sure all employees understand it. Keep in mind, just because they have visible tattoos, does not make them bad candidates. However, if they are boldly displaying them at the interview, they likely will do the same once they are employed.

**c. What does their availability schedule look like?** – Teens in general, and Gen Z in particular, like their freedom, and as we said before, they are focused on life and not just work. They like flexibility in their schedule. One mistake generally noticed, is telling an employer when they are available and what their schedule looks like, rather than putting the job first. Parents of Gen Z encourage them to participate in different activities and often encourage them to miss work to keep their commitment to their sporting events, or social activities. When interviewing, pay close attention to what the candidate believes their constraints are instead their availability.

**d. Parental Involvement** – Gen Z's have a closer relationship with their parents than other generations. Often, parents will drop off resumes instead of the job seeker. Sometimes parents will come along on interviews with the candidate! The best thing to do in this situation is to separate the parents from the teen and if that is not going to happen, the interview should not proceed. Parents, who are very involved in the job seeking process, call and harass the manager when their child does not get the job. Certain parents don't hesitate to call and make complaints when they feel their child has not been treated fairly; but they have only heard one side of the story: the teen's side. Allowing too much parental involvement will lead to a poor hire.<sup>7</sup>

Although we don't know everything about Gen Z yet, as they are just entering the workforce, it's clear to see that there are going to be some changes to work environments. These young people are more cautious, more aware of the political unrest and country economics. They have learned to use the technology and the tools that have been available since their birth. They are cautious about debt and worry about it, but still know the importance of a good education. It's my opinion that they will not be followers for long, as they aspire to be teachers, leaders and mentors quickly, especially as they hunt to find their dream job. The next few years will be interesting to see how our current work environments will change with this new generation and what trends will arise in the next 4 to 5 years.

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