

Generation Z:

Two billion people coming of age

Soon I'll be delivering the commencement address at the large university I attended in the heartland of the US. Just as I was about to go to work on my speech serendipity came calling during a recent cross country flight when an inflight magazine in front of me plopped open to an article titled, *The Next Generation Gap*. The article reminded me that that the young people graduating this year are the first members of Generation Z (aka the iGen and born between 1997 and 2012) to enter the workplace. I became even more intrigued when a Google search revealed the sheer magnitude of Gen Z; there are more than 2bn of them worldwide.

Because the worldwide workplace has struggled for years to attract, engage, accommodate and retain millennials and never quite figured it out, I started wondering about what traits and characteristics social scientists attribute to Gen Z and exactly how the business world should prepare for the avalanche of this generation into the marketplace.

Here are eight traits the various generational social scientists with whom I've recently spoken say the marketplace will confront and deal with in recruiting and retaining Gen Z's.

Realistic

Gen Z's are not idealistic and jaded like their predecessors the millennials. They know that retirement plans don't always grow, companies routinely off load people and trophies and ribbons aren't awarded for merely showing up. They have a very realistic view of what awaits them.

Private

Their preferred method of communicating is via Snapchat

and Whisper. Don't look for them on mom and dad's or grandma and grandpa's Facebook. They want their messaging to be untraceable and disappear in a poof. And, here's a big one; the majority want to have a private office instead of a communal workplace.

Cause and value driven

They are cause driven and want to work for companies that align with their values. Almost 30 per cent of them already regularly volunteer and 60 per cent want jobs where they can make the world a better place. If your company is unable to succinctly and convincingly explain your purpose, your values





JASON JENNINGS

Jason Jennings is the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and USA TODAY bestselling author of eight books on leadership. His two most recent titles are, *The High Speed Company*, and, *The Reinventors – How Extraordinary Companies Pursue Radical Continuous Change* and USA TODAY has called him one of the three most in demand business speakers in the world. www.jason-jennings.com

and how what you're doing will positively impact the world they won't want to work for you.

Entrepreneurial

They are far more entrepreneurial than millennials and, according to 360i research, a staggering 72 per cent of them want to start their own company. They plan to get started by having a say in writing their job description and coming up with their title.

Hyper Aware

If Gen Z's don't look you in the eye when they're talking to you it doesn't necessarily mean they aren't listening, it simply means that they are multitasking and paying as much attention to the multiple screens in front of them as they are to you.

Boundless curiosity

It's estimated that 25 per cent of Gen Z's post an original video weekly. These are people who can reimagine your products and services and then shoot and post the video (what television commercials are going to become) and identify markets you'd not previously considered.

Discoverers

This is the first generation that rebelled against rote memorisation as the way they were willing to be educated and instead they prefer to discover on their own terms at their pace.

Technology as a right

One of the most surprising things about Gen Z's is that they place the same importance on technology as they do oxygen and water and consider it an inalienable right for everyone.

What do these eight characteristics of Gen Z's mean and how will it all play out?

I got a glimpse of the future last week while talking to a

doctor friend of mine. His son is a sophomore attending a prestigious US university and had been having difficulties landing a summer internship so his father pulled a lot of strings, called in a lot of favours, identified a possible opportunity and even set up the interview with the head of HR.

I told him how nice it was that he'd gone out of his way to help his son that way. He said, "No, wait, you have to hear the rest of the story," and went on to explain that a few minutes before the interview was scheduled to start his son had called the head of HR and asked for her Skype address so they could have their chat. Later, the patient father – more patient than I probably would have been – explained to his son that he wasn't supposed to have a chat; it was actually a job interview and he was supposed to show up in person for something so important.

The son's response was an emphatic, "You don't get it. I was there Dad," adding an exasperated, "I was there physically," further explaining to his father that showing up physically or digitally on someone's screen are both the same thing.

Business leaders would be wise to remember the way they blew the opportunity to embrace the traits and characteristics of the millennials and how they squandered a decade bemoaning how different they were and wasting precious time and resources trying to force them to conform to their view of what they should be and how they should act.

This time around business should rejoice in what the Gen Z's will bring to the table; realism, being true to what they believe in, a shoot for the stars entrepreneurial spirit, boundless curiosity and being the most tech savvy group of people on the planet.

Now, I'm really looking forward to spending a graduation and commencement with thousands of Gen Z's. Aside from the little bit of life advice I'll offer in my speech I can't wait to spend the weekend hanging out and learning from this remarkable group of people. I've had a peek at the future and I am excited. ■

