

HUMAN RESOURCES

Tuning in to Generation Z

by California Management Review



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✔ **INSIGHT** | NOTE 10 Jun 2019

Some have been quick to dismiss Generation Z, but they’ve already outnumbered Gen X and will soon become a worthy part of any business—but only if managers change their approach. That’s clear to Holly Schroth, author of **“Are You Ready for Gen Z in the Workplace?”** a recent article in California Management Review.

For Schroth, this was more than research for another's benefit. A long-time lecturer at Berkeley Haas, Schroth admits that she wasn't connecting quite as much with this generation as she had with previous students. "It made me wonder about this group and what they respond to," Schroth says.

A Different Era

Members of Generation Z, defined in the article as those born between the years of 1997 and 2013, have spent most of their childhood surrounded by screens. Schroth found that, as a result, many of them missed out on some important opportunities for growth that previous generations normally experienced. In fact, Schroth points to a statistic from *Monthly Labor Review* stating that in 1979, 60 percent of teens had jobs—a number that has plummeted, and is predicted to be only 25 percent in 2024.

"There's already feedback that recent hires are having trouble with the social aspect of work in the corporate world," she says. "But wouldn't it be hard if you didn't have a great deal of practice?"

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Generation Z also puts a premium on the demeanor of superiors. In fact, research from Building Leaders for the Next Decade indicates that 42 percent of Generation Z cited a positive attitude when asked what they want most from a boss in the workplace.

"It's a wonderful hope to get that positivity from your boss. But how often do you have a boss who isn't positive, but you still need to work for them for your future success?" Schroth noted.

Still, this generation is clearly hard-working, she says, and the very definition of tech savvy. "You may be able to say certain things but you can't call them lazy," Schroth admits. "Of course, [being tech savvy] has its bad points. It means too many of them hide behind tech instead of having interactions. They just could benefit from a little help."

New Strategies

Schroth says training needs to be offered which gives examples of social interactions with managers, explaining to Generation Z members why a particular interaction is ineffective and demonstrating better ways for them to proceed. “Many need to be trained to put down the tech and pick up the phone or talk face to face,” she says. “But many are also afraid because they don’t know what to say. Social interaction in the workplace is a language—and, thankfully, it can be taught.”

Bottom line, Schroth was heartened by the fact her research results didn’t scream “this is a lost cause” but that this generation just needs help. “I’m a parent of Generation Z,” she says. “Too often we’re told how worried we should be about them. I would say: ‘help them in the working world, and feel hopeful.’”

To read *Are You Ready for Gen Z in the Workplace?*, please visit:

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