

# Make Way: The New Generation Is Here!

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“Generation Z,” “iGen,” “Those darn kids” – whatever you call them, the youngest generation is changing the rules, challenging our boundaries and recreating a generationally cohesive workforce.

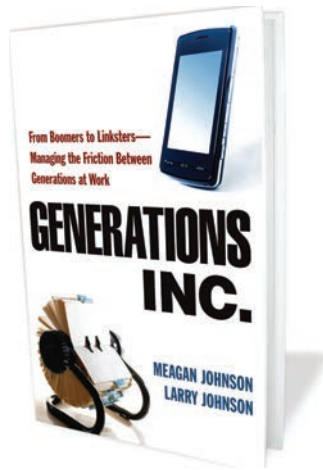
My first job in high school was working at a grim bagel shop called the Bagel Baker. This was pre-Starbucks, which gave being a barista an element of caché. It was before premium baked goods and sleek surroundings to sip your gourmet coffee while streaming the next YouTube sensation. The place I worked was dirty (it was later closed by the health department), the chairs were not comfortable and the tables were cracked.

My manager did not believe in building employees’ esteem. Her management style was intimidation, and her idea of words of encouragement was insults directed at my appearance or my lack of ability to mop properly. As an adult, I would often compare poor work environments or management styles to the Bagel Baker. I nicknamed it Bagel Baker management style. I was 15 – the same age the newest generation entering the workforce is now.

Generation Z, also referred to as iGen or Post-Millennial, is the youngest generation in the generational timeline, just now dipping their toes into the workforce. (My co-author and I called this newest generation the Linkster Generation in our book, *Generations Inc.*, but for simplicity’s sake, I will refer to them as Generation Z or Gen Z throughout this article.)

## Who Are They?

Gen Z are people born after 1996. The oldest Gen Zs are in their early 20s; the majority of this generation is still in their teens. The bulk of Gen Z are part-time employees and interns. According to Monster.com’s survey of Gen Z, over 75% are still in school. Currently,



Gen Z is 65 million people strong – and in four years, they will be 40% of U.S. consumers.

The majority of the Millennial Generation has Baby Boomers for parents. Generation Z marks the transition from the Baby Boomer parent to Gen Xer and older Millennial parents. Similar to Millennials, however, Gen Z looks to parents for career guidance. Generation Z reports their parents have the biggest influence when it comes to job and career decisions, and more than 80% are striving to become leaders.

## What does this mean to you as an employer?

You should invite parents in to meet you and get an opportunity to see where their kids work.

Northwestern Mutual, a financial security firm, hosts an Open House for all their summer interns – and their parents. Each parent is paired with a representative and given a tour of the headquarters. Parents are shown a Power Point presentation explaining the company’s history, and are introduced to the financial advisers with whom their kids will be interning. The advisers explain to the parents what the interns will do during the internship and how each intern will be mentored. Parents learn about the specific goals set for interns and the perks when the intern meets the goals. One of the perks is an invitation to the company’s headquarters in Milwaukee.

This may sound a bit like parent/teacher night when your kids were in school, but remember, Gen Z is often relying on a ride from parents to their place of internship or employment, and you want Gen Z’s parents in your corner when their kids are contemplating calling in sick because of a late night.

## Gen Z’s Gen Signposts Are Different

“Generational Signposts” are events that define and influence a generation. A Millennial Signpost was a high level of parental environment. The term “helicopter parent” was coined to describe the extreme involvement Baby Boomer parents had with their Millennial children. Millennials were also called (some-

times unfairly) “the trophy generation,” stemming from the expectation that everyone on the team gets a trophy just for showing up.

lives. We shop and educate ourselves differently because of 24/7 access to information and social media.

Generation Z came of age in a world

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Gen Z is different. Generation Z grew up post 9/11. Global terrorism, identity theft and mass shootings, though terrible, were not atypical. During Gen Z's formative years, they experienced the Great Recession and Occupy Wall Street. They saw their older Millennial siblings move back home after receiving college degrees – and they also witnessed their families' homes being foreclosed on.

The fallout is that Generation Z is more pragmatic than their Millennial predecessors. A study by the Intelligence Group reported that over 55% of Gen Z would choose saving money over spending it. Seventy-five percent of Gen Z expect to begin their careers at the bottom and work their way up. More than 75% of Gen Z feel propelling their career is their own responsibility and 70% name salary as a high motivator.

Does this mean employers can go back to the Bagel Baker style of management? Not if they want to be successful with Gen Z. Gen Z may be more utilitarian than the previous generation, but they also are connected with each other and the world through social media, and not willing to accept a one-way relationship with an employer.

### Technology's Path

Baby Boomers (think Bill Gates & Steve Jobs) invented much of the technology that impacts the way we live today. The Millennial generation brought technology and connectivity into the cultural forefront and pushed us to integrate the new technology into our day-to-day

where non-stop connectivity and digital information were boilerplate. Previous generations grew up with a land-line telephone (some Baby Boomers may remember party lines), physical phone books, cable TV, learning cursive in school, holding a textbook and waiting for a dial-up connection to access the internet.

Gen Z is the first generation where there is a colossal probability there was no land-line in the house, high speed internet was available non-stop, they did not learn cursive writing in school, they never held a textbook and cable TV is a quaint and archaic way to watch your favorite shows.

### Getting Gen Z's Attention

An evolution springing from this intense connectivity is the eight-second attention span. Gen Z's attention span has shortened to *eight seconds*. If your goal is to motivate Gen Z to click on your link, watch your video or investigate your content, you have eight seconds to achieve it. The number of screens Gen Z utilizes has increased, too. Millennials bounce between an average of three screens; Gen Z uses five: laptop, iPod/tablets, smartphone, TV and desktop.

What does this mean to you as an employer?

First, your online presence has to be up to date.

The words on the company website may claim you are a state-of-the-art employer, but if the site is older than ten

years, Gen Z will sense a disconnect. Your company's presence should be found on multiple social media platforms. Facebook remains the dominant player in the lives of Gen Z; however, Gen Z will check Instagram with greater frequency than YouTube, Snapchat and Twitter.

To develop its new clothing line called Art Class, Target turned to a test group of Gen Zs that included bloggers, athletes, writers and musicians. The Art Class line includes accessories and home apparel items targeted to Generation Z. The goal of Target's development campaign was to create a line that was a true representation of Gen Z.

Employers can take a lesson from Target: Give Gen Z the information they are looking for regarding an employer by showing them the company's “Gen Z employment” style: Ask your Gen Z employees to post videos, images and information about what your company is like as an employer.

Second, if you have not already, ask your current Gen Z employees to help with the content your organization is posting online. Gen Z values sharing information.

The bottom line is that Gen Z is coming – and will have a significant impact on everything you do. Learn what you can about them, give the guidance they need, share information with them, and ask for their help. If you don't, they'll take their precious youth, energy and inquisitiveness elsewhere. ■

*Meagan Johnson tackles generational challenges head-on. Through her own in-depth research, she demonstrates that all generations have differences and strengths that go beyond mere age and appearance. She has been quoted in publications including the Chicago Tribune and U.S. News & World Report, and been broadcast on CNNMoney.com, ABC Talk Live, and National Public Radio. Condé Nast's Portfolio.com profiled her as the “go-to expert” for all things generational. She can be reached at 1-800-759-4933 or [www.MeaganJohnson.com](http://www.MeaganJohnson.com).*