



CHIEF CONTENT OFFICER  
JONATHAN DAHL

## Joining the Youth Movement

In corporate circles, criticism of the younger generation is as ubiquitous as political potshots on late-night TV. We've all heard the descriptions of twentysomethings ("lazy," "self-involved," "entitled"), and we've seen the surveys. Three-quarters of managers say Gen Zers are the most difficult generation to work with—so difficult that 12 percent report they've had to fire a Gen Zer during their first week at work. Almost a third of hiring managers admit to steering clear of young job candidates altogether.

Gen Z led the Great Resignation and "quiet quitting" movements, both of which threw companies into sheer panic and forced them to dish out bonus and salary increases they now regret. These days, in a more stable job market, managers complain that Gen Zers come into interviews wholly unprepared and clearly disengaged—not even making eye contact.

So you can understand why

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corporate leaders might look further afield to fill job shortages—specifically, to aging baby boomers who are "unretiring" (or never retired in the first place). Memories are short, and today the silver-haired crowd—you know, the ones who have never heard of "work-life balance"—tends to get favorable reviews. To many leaders trying to boost earnings, going older might seem like a sound strategy.

But that would be a grave mistake. Dismissing Gen Zers as key players and ignoring their viewpoints means losing out not only on what they bring to the table, but also on what we can learn from them.

Let's face it: Gen Z, like all up-and-coming generations, is telling us things we don't want to hear. In the view of these twentysomethings, it's completely wacky to pursue your primary purpose in life by dedicating your life to a corporation. Gen Z looks at today's regular rounds of layoffs and points out that for every

person who rose through the ranks by burning the midnight oil, there are many more who never did, despite sacrificing all that family time. How, they argue, can anyone commit themselves to a grind whose rewards will probably elude them?

Sure, Gen Zers may seem oblivious during job interviews, but that's because they doubt that questions like "What's your biggest weakness?" or "Where do you see yourself in five years?" offer a meaningful way to judge someone. If Gen Zers seem rude at times during these chats, well, how polite is it when a company doesn't respond to a job application or ghosts someone after an interview?

To me, Gen Zers are incredibly resilient. They came of age during the pandemic—can you imagine? And now their own employers are tracking their security-badge swipes. It's time to rethink how we look at the young. ▀