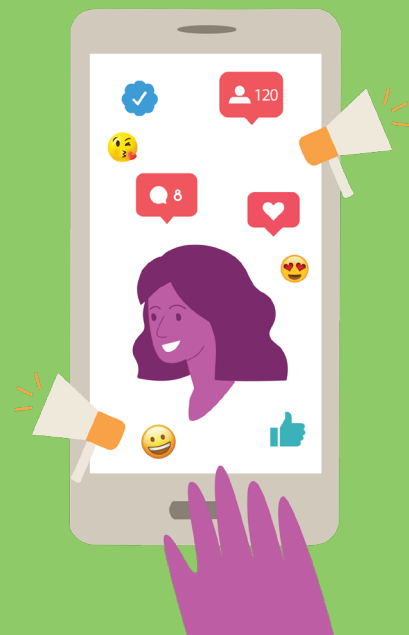# Tea & Toast

Generation Z: the youngest generation at work

Presented by: Kristen Gyorgak

Do generations matter?

Yes. Generations are defined by events and experiences. Each generation has access to particular knowledge, experiences, and opportunities during its most formative years that prior and future generations do not.

And this matters. Pew Research Center noted the following in a 2015 research summary:

'An individual's age is one of the most common predictors of differences in attitudes and behaviours...Age tells us two important things about someone: **their generation and approximate place in the lifecycle.**

These experiences have a significant and lasting impact on how people live, work and interact with others.

Who is Generation Z?

Generation Z (GenZ), iGeneration, NetGen, Zoomers, Homeland Generation - they've been called a lot of things. For ease of reference, I'll use Gen Z throughout these notes.

There is no exact agreed upon age range to generations, but most definitions say Gen Z:

- **BORN:** between 1997 – 2015
- **AGE:** roughly 7 - 25 years old

In event terms: Too young to remember Y2K or September 11th terrorist attacks, but old enough to remember the Covid pandemic.

Data tells us they are:

- the most diverse generation
- the most well-educated generation
- the most connected generation
- more likely to recognise and report mental health concerns
- more aware of inequalities

They are the true digital natives. They've grown up in a rapidly connecting world - where personal technology has provided individual voices with massive platforms.

In many cases, their reality is digital. A lot of experts describe technology as being almost invisible to them - it's so well integrated into every part of their lives.

"In the same way that you expect a bee to sting, a dog to play, a bird to fly when approached, a child born into Gen Z expects objects to have behaviours and personalities"

– THOMAS KOLOPOULOS

Their connectedness has made them much more empathetic to others but this has also come at a personal cost. Although younger generations are physically safer than ever, they are more mentally vulnerable.

Dr. Jean Twenge's research (2017) has highlighted some interesting social trends with Gen Z teenagers. Compared to previous generations, they are less likely to:

- drink alcohol
- have a paid job in high school and
- experience the freedom of being out of the house without their parents.

We can all be Gen Z

One way to think of generations is less about specific ages and more about the effects the relevant time period had on everyone. This is the approach Thomas Koulopoulos and Dan Keldsen take in their book, *The Gen Z Effect*.

They argue that Gen Z is not a birthright, but rather **a shared set of behaviours that can be adopted by anyone through conscious change**.

In embracing the Gen Z Effect you become part of Gen Z. The barriers and the artificial perimeters of generational boundaries no longer limit your ability to be part of the future - only you can do that! (p. 5)

They've recognise the massive shifts that have defined the younger generation <u>and</u> how these shifts have shaped everyone else as a result. Here's a breakdown of the Gen Z effect:

	Before Gen Z		Transition to Gen Z
Internet access	a privilege	→	a human right
Influence	purchased	→	earned
IP/Patents	value creators	→	barriers
Failure	avoided	→	embraced
Gaming	non-value-add-play	→	foundation for engagement
Uncertainty	prepared for	→	predicted
Retirement	a destination	→	a journey
Connectivity	a luxury	→	a necessity

KOULOPOULOS & KELDSEN

The lasting result of the Gen Z Effect is that the fabric of technology is being woven into every aspect of our lives.

Koulopoulos & Keldsen define **six forces at play that will become pervasive and profound in the way they shape every aspect of life, no matter your age**: *breaking generations, hyperconnecting, slingshotting, shifting from affluence to influence, adopting the world as a classroom and lifehacking.* These are not subtle shifts. Take a look yourself:

Six forces shaping our future	
Breaking generations	One of the first effects is the broken generation model. This seems to be for a few reasons: 1. Population will redistribute so every five-year band is roughly even by 2080. 2. Technologies are changing so quickly that micro-generations are starting to appear. 3. Technology that once separated generations now connects them.

Hyperconnecting	This effect describes the exponential hyperconnectivity among people, computers, machines and objects across various platforms. This connects the 'me' to the 'we.' The technology today is connecting people across locations and age, instantaneously for the first time - with no chance of returning back to our unconnected ways.
Slingshotting	Technology is continuously advancing. Early versions might be painful and clunky. By the time they're mainstream those pain points have been smoothed over. When the product has a great user experience and is affordable, cutting edge technology becomes a new normal. This allows large segments of the population to catch up, seemingly overnight, with the early adopters. Technologies slingshot when they are simple, accessible and collect your data for learning (the last point is sad, but true).
Shifting from affluence to influence	Leverage the ever increasing ability to influence world events through communities that cut across age and other demographic boundaries, without the benefit of access to large pools of capital. Gen Zers are powerful. They have a built-in media channel to billions in the form of the Internet. And they know how to disrupt. In other words, they know how to mess things up if they don't get what they want. You can look at it as entitlement. You can look at it as being spoiled. Call it what you want; the reality is that when influence is diffused throughout a population rather than concentrated, the effect is a disruption of the balance of power in nearly ever existing institution - social, business, and government. (p. 27)
Adopting the world as a classroom	Education is becoming more available and affordable globally. This effect highlights the belief that all ages and stages of schooling should be accessible to everyone. The Gen Z effect highlights that learning can happen anywhere, anytime on any device and medium. The recent trend shows the push for personalised and accelerated education to overtake mass education. "Education is not about picking a career for life; instead, a career is about picking education for life." (p. 143)
Lifehacking	Lifehacking is breaking through barriers, taking shortcuts and otherwise outsmarting the system. The goal is to focus on outcomes rather than processes, making meaning and purpose the centre of our personal and professional experiences. Three disruptive hacks: funding, manufacturing, intellectual property. You can think about crowdsourcing, 3D printing, and open sourced data as examples, respectively.

Be Gentelligent

Gentelligence champions every generation and is born from intergenerational curiosity. It's a willingness to understand how people who have grown up under different times view things in different and meaningful ways... Gentelligence pushes back on the idea of generational competition, replacing it with the idea that people of all ages can benefit from the potential of intergenerational power."

Dr. Megan Garhard

Recognise trends

Dr. Candace Steele Flippin discusses the major influences that shaped Gen Z in her book *Generation Z in the Workplace.* Her research and examples come from the USA, but many of the insights apply universally.

Events of influence:

- September 11th World Trade Center Attached

- More families in financial crisis (post 2008)

- Rise of personal, powerful technology and social media

- Publicity around racial and ethnic tensions

- Rise of 20-something billionaire entrepreneurs

- First black president elected in USA

- Gay marriage becoming commonplace

- Housing and rent unaffordability

Here are some workplace trends:

- Increase in hiring and wages (*but not at the same rate as non-discretionary items)*

- Increase in remote and flexible working opportunities

- Retirement of Baby Boomers, but not at the rates expected

- Greater impact of technology in positive (productive) and negative (distraction) ways

- Rise of the 'gig economy'

- Expectations for mental health / well-being days

Once a large, generational event happens, it's only a matter of time before the effects spread into the workplace. In the case of a global pandemic like Covid-19, it happens immediately.

And of course, innovations now quickly become expectations for the future. Let's explore two major ways the Gen Z effect has already been seen in our organisations.

Wellness and equity at the forefront

One area that generational research highlights over and over is the increased need for, and use of, mental health services. The expectations of organisations is to respond to this with their policies.

As noted, more people now believe that mental health and well-being days should be provided in the same way that sick days are. This highlights the powerful connection between social influences and workplace trends.

Gen Zers were largely raised on a new set of rules. These social rules pushed us to go beyond diversity to inclusion - and beyond inclusion to equity.

This isn't just lip service. A nice poster on the wall isn't enough. They're looking for strong inclusion and wellness strategies and initiatives embedded into the ways people work and the organisation operates.

The fuzzy edges of work

Even before Covid hit, workplaces were starting to grapple with where work starts and where it stops.

Hyperconnectivity + Covid pandemic = slingshotting to flexible working arrangements

It is no longer just the progressive organisations that are offering flexible location / time arrangements. And while this might seem like an innovation for many of us - this way of working is now expected from Gen Z.

This flexibility makes it even more imperative to be clear on what aspects of your work are business necessities and what's able to be flexed or adapted.

Tools in the toolkit

Many people have asked how to better collaborate with and lead younger people at work. Luckily - a lot of these tips are cross-generational and are more *people* tips with a generational lens.

Be a coach

Get to know the individual person you're working with; it's the best way to avoid putting people into boxes. Regardless of age, ask questions that matter in your coaching sessions. This will help you understand what brings the best out of the person. Here are a few suggestions to start:

- How do you work best?
- What ways of working don't bring out the best in you?
- What do you enjoy doing / strengths do you have?
- What does it look like when you get stressed?
- What's your communication / conflict style?
- How do you like to be recognised?
- What experiences impact how you show up at work and what do you expect from others?
- How can others get the best out of you?
- How do you like to collaborate and brainstorm?
- How will I know if you're upset with me?
- How will I know if you're happy and content?
- What expectations do you have of me, as your leader?

Check your bias

Dr. Megan Garhard and her *Gentelligence* co-authors suggest applying the D-I-E technique as a way to check your bias. Describe, interpret, explain. **Describe the behaviour. Recognise your automatic interpretations. Evaluate alternative explanations.** Here's an example in action:

Describe the **behaviour**	Michelle is pulling out her laptop and typing, even though we are having a team meeting right now.
Note the automatic **interpretation**	She's being rude. She isn't paying attention to what's going on and is probably working on something else.
Evaluate alternative **explanations**	She does seems to be engaged in the meeting - she's asking questions and offering input. Maybe she's taking notes to use later.

A lot of these misinterpretations boil down to clarity. **Have you and your teams set clear expectations of behaviours and ways of working?** Haydn Shaw's generational sticking points can help here. Review these twelve areas in your team to make sure there aren't tensions or misinterpretations within your team:

communication	decision making	dress code	feedback
fun at work	knowledge transfer	loyalty	meetings
policies	respect	training	work ethic

Apply Gentelligence

Here are 4 examples of how we can connect the *influence of the time* with people's work expectations:

Area	Influences	What this means at work
On-boarding	Seamless on-boarding is built in as an expectation. When you first download or install a new game, app or programme, there is a walk-through that demonstrates what the person needs to do and how they can do it. People may have to complete a series of tasks to demonstrate they have the knowledge and skills before they can go off.	There is a high expectation for on-boarding to be well-thought through, with a good experience. Whether it's the first day of working at the company or the first time using a new software, people want the steps to be intuitive and easy. Think about new processes, systems and tools you use at work. What support do you have to bring people up to speed (knowing this should be adjusted based on the level of support the person needs.
Feedback	Technology provides instantaneous and gamified feedback. Whether the metrics are social or technical, the feedback is quick and personalised. You are constantly aware of how well (or poorly) you're doing - the results are at your fingertips.	If you haven't already – this is your loud and clear message to give feedback more often. Much more often. As one HBR article put it, The Future is Feedback. Don't keep people guessing. Tell them often how they're doing and connect your feedback specifically to their work. Find out how people like to receive their feedback. Read more about how you can speak the [five appreciation languages at work.](#)
Collaboration	Collaboration looks and feels different now. The youngest work generation at work had real-time collaboration integrated into their schooling - using platforms like Google Classroom. Collaboration can happen anytime and anywhere - you just need a good wifi connection.	Work which was once done in person, can now be done remotely. This cohort of workers has been operating in this way for a while. Be clear on what channels there are for formal and informal collaboration. Where, when and how does it happen?
Communication	As the first true generational of digital natives, they know that communication never sleeps. They're hyper-connected. Despite first thoughts, data shows this generation prefers to communicate face-to-face, but that doesn't mean in person. Apps like Snapchat, Instagram and Tik Tok have made short-form, vibrant and entertaining communication the key to influence.	Reflect on the communication expectations of your team. How is information collected? Formatted? Shared? What other channels and mediums can you use? How formal / informal can people be on these different channels? To avoid work creep and burnout, set boundaries around where, when, and how communication should happen - and when it shouldn't.

The Training Practice
Tea & Toast: GenZ - the youngest generation at work

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