

# Gen Z: A Generation To Look Up To

2017 Gen Z National Survey

n-gen People Performance Inc.  
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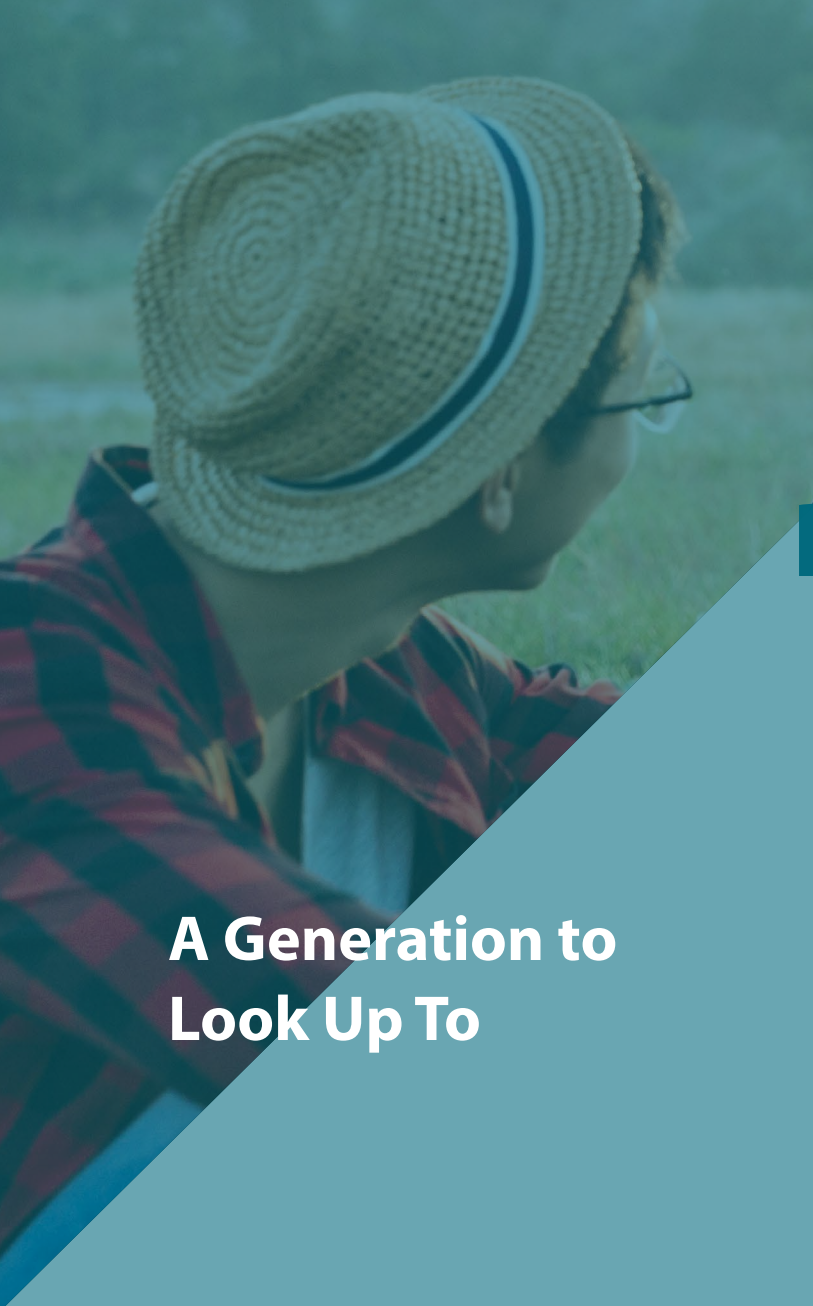


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## A Generation to Look Up To



**P**ositive, optimistic, practical, inquisitive and confident are some of the adjectives we can use to describe Generation Z, the newest cohort to enter our workplaces. While much has been written about Millennials, little is known about Gen Zs. Specifically: what they value, what motivates them and what they expect of employers. This generation is different from Millennials. Many organizations and leaders have feared that the next wave of employees will be more entitled and complacent, and less driven and hardworking; but these fears can be put to rest. Gen Zs might just be a generation to look up to.




Why? Because Gen Zs are realistically optimistic. They know what they need to do to get ahead, and they aren't afraid to do the work. They are well-rounded, with their feet on the ground, while still being able to dream about a great future. They are wise beyond their years, because they have learned from previous generations' mistakes. They understand that things won't always be perfect, but they will have a plan for how to weather the storm. They are self-reliant, aware, and evolving. They understand the impact of their decisions; they will make choices that serve their needs, while still contributing to the greater good. This will be a generation that will make a difference.

The data suggests they will have a work ethic and loyalty similar to the Baby Boomers; the independence of the Gen Xers; and the tech savviness and fluid lifestyle of the Millennials. They will combine these traits into a unique hybrid that powers them forward to their distinctive brand of happiness.

The eldest Gen Zs are just about to graduate from college or university. They are in our workplaces as front-line employees, supervisors, and entry-level leaders. They are making their career expectations known, and organizations and leaders can't afford to ignore them. This generation has come of age in a different environment than Millennials, with the attacks on 9/11 barely memorable, this cohort has grown up with the impact of increased security, cyber-attacks, wiki leaks, climate disasters, reality stars, and all things digital. They were born as digital natives and have evolved into a generation that is fully tech integrated and dependent. They have never known a world where Wi-Fi doesn't exist, where social media hasn't been fully integrated into their lives, where unrestricted access to information isn't readily available, and where wearable devices track, monitor and constantly capture data about their lives in real-time.



### Who Are Gen Z?





-  **Born 1996 – 2012**
-  **6,795,231** In Canada  
(StatsCan 2016 Census)
-  **19% of Canada's Population**  
(StatsCan 2016 Census)

**When it comes to culture, Gen Z considers same-sex marriage a done deal, a black American president reality, and working mothers normal. Its members have grown up in the most diverse classrooms in Canadian history – learning beside fellow Gen Zs of diverse races and religions, and those who face challenges ranging from dyslexia to autism. But what really defines this generation is technology. Gen Z – or iGen, as it is sometimes called – has never known a phone that wasn't smart, or a fact it couldn't Google. They spend their days as confident citizens of a digital world that exists mostly apart from the adults in their lives.<sup>1</sup>**

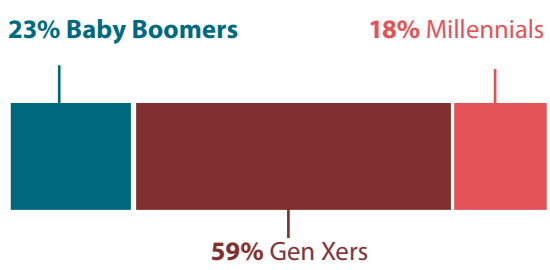
Environmental issues, terrorism, global refugee crises, and corporate greed have all been part of Gen Z's formative landscape. The world they navigate is steeped in technology, yet it is unpredictable and volatile. Because of this, Gen Z recognizes that the workplace is full of opportunities for those who embrace change, who can think creatively, and who can quickly respond to new workplace expectations.

The parents of Gen Z are predominately Gen Xers and, as such, are raising their children with a different parenting style than the Baby Boomers before them. Gen Xers are more focused on being 'stealth' parents (meaning they will swoop in only when needed), rather than hovering like the helicopter parents many Millennials experienced with their parents. These days, 'free range' parenting is becoming more popular. This means that many Gen Zs are being raised with the expectation that they will function independently and with little parental supervision, in accordance with their age of development and with a reasonable acceptance of realistic personal risks. Though a surprising number of Baby Boomers are also the parents of Gen Z, perhaps as a result of second marriages, the Gen Zs of these Baby Boomer parents are likely to have older siblings and be impacted by observing the challenges and successes that their Millennial brothers and sisters have experienced. These experiences and observations will, no doubt, influence the youngest generation's perceptions of both work and life. In addition, some Millennials are now raising Gen Z children, and can provide those Gen Zs with practical and relevant advice about what challenges and opportunities employees face when they enter the work world.

### In Our Study

-  **94%** are students
-  **94%** full time studies  
**6%** are part time studies
-  **22%** employed full time  
**35%** employed part time
-  **47%** private sector employees  
**48%** public sector employees  
**4%** not for profit employees

### Their parents are:







The findings that follow are drawn from n-gen's 'Gen Z Research Study', which is Canada's first national survey about this emerging generational cohort. This data is particularly important, as it is the first time Gen Z's values, expectations, and motivators have been explored.

### **The survey elicited insights from Gen Zs in four categories:**

- 1. Work & Career Expectations**
- 2. Technology**
- 3. Education & Learning**
- 4. Lifestyle**

The data we collected is rich and insightful. Understanding Gen Z and how to tap into their values, expectations and motivations will have implications on organizational strategy, talent management, recruitment, retention, leadership practices, sales, and customer service.

The results of our survey are important for a broad range of industries, including educational institutions, government, private sector organizations, start-ups and not for profits. We analyzed and compared the data across several metrics, including gender, as well as teen Gen Zs (14-17 years old) compared to adult Gen Zs (18-21 years old). Overall, there was very little variance across metrics, revealing a clear consensus in the data.

We collected data from 600 Gen Z across Canada, representative of all provinces and both official languages. All respondents were born after 1996 and 94 percent are full time students and 6 percent are part time students. Twenty-two percent are employed full time, and 35 percent work part-time jobs. An equal number of men and women completed the survey and 1 percent represented all other genders.

We collected data from **600 Gen Z across Canada**, An **equal number of men and women** completed the survey and **1 percent identified as all other genders.**

**The following summary explores the motivators and factors that drive Gen Z. It sheds light on their expectations of employers, leaders, and organizations as a whole. Based on these survey responses, we provide insights that can help shape impactful HR practices, leadership behaviours, and learning and development solutions. In addition, educators and post-secondary institutions can leverage these results to enhance the overall learning experience for this next generation, and prepare Gen Z students to enter into the new world of work.**

We do not recommend, encourage, or promote labeling someone based simply on their age. Use this information as a starting point to better understand generational differences, similarities, and characteristics at a macro level. This should not replace the need to understand someone at the micro level (i.e., their personality, their individual values and beliefs, and their unique identity). Generational identities are influenced by a number of factors, including the life-defining events that happen during a generation's coming of age period (adolescence), as well as the influence of parents, teachers and society at large. We use a behavioural model to highlight the strengths of all generations, while identifying the differences, which means that someone can behave, align to, and possess a mindset that is different than their chronological age. Please don't label simply based on age. Instead, use this generational information in productive ways to tap into the values, expectations and behaviours of Gen Z in order to increase performance, collaboration and engagement across generations.



# Part One: Gen Z's Expectations & Experiences

## Bullish About The Future

As the eldest Gen Zs prepare to launch their careers and enter into the work world full-time, this generation as a whole is full of enthusiasm and optimism about the future. Fifty-nine percent of this cohort believes they are going to be better off than their parents. This is a stark improvement from prior research that found only 27 percent of high school graduates in 2016 agreed with the statement "My generation will be better off financially than my parents."<sup>2</sup>

Our research also reveals that Gen Z feels positive about the opportunities they have, with 65 percent agreeing that, overall, their generation has much better opportunities than previous generations. This is surprising, since nowadays a two income household barely brings home the same income that a one breadwinner household did in the 1970s. Households now are squeezed for income because housing prices have nearly doubled. In fact, young people today will need to save up to three times longer for a twenty percent down payment on a house.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, our data is also surprising because, despite the rapid growth of the gig economy (which offers short term contracts or freelance work, instead of permanent jobs), Gen Z are seeking many traditional goals such as secure employment, long term loyalty, a house, a car, and money for retirement. Forty-four percent of survey respondents are optimistic about the future, and more than a third trust that the government will make the right decisions for their success. Overall, this cohort is bullish about the future.



"I can't imagine ever owning my own home"  
**50% Disagree**



"I don't plan to own a car because I can use public transit, uber or a car-sharing service"  
**53% Disagree**





## Striking Out On Their Own

In conjunction with an optimistic view, Gen Zs also plan to strike out on their own and build a future that aligns with their values, not necessarily with what others think they ought to do. Perhaps it's the independent spirit of their Gen X parents that has influenced them, or the natural desire to 'break free' from living under their parents' roof. Regardless of their motivations, 39 percent of survey respondents stated they expected that they would not live with their parents when they were twenty-five years old.

The 36 percent who believe it may be a possibility, may be more realistic, since more than one in three (34.7%) young adults aged 20 to 34 were living with at least one parent in 2016, a dynamic that has been increasing since 2001. Among those aged 20 to 24, the proportion co-residing with their parents rose from 58.3% in 2001 to 62.6% in 2016.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless if they are living at home or on their own, Gen Z is the 'do-it-yourself' generation, according to the authors of a new book about Gen Z.<sup>5</sup> This generation has been able to figure things out for themselves their entire lives because they can Google any question they have, or go on YouTube and learn how to do everything. From the latest make-up techniques, to building a car engine, to learning how to play drums. This reality has created a cohort that believes they are capable of doing things themselves and have been spurred on by their independence focused Gen X parents. US researchers note 71 percent of Gen Z said they believe the phrase "if you want it done right, then do it yourself."<sup>6</sup>

Automation, apps, and online access to information have provided Gen Zs with the ability to personalize and control almost every consumer transaction. This is not a generation that is going to use a travel agent to book their next vacation, or hire a financial advisor when they can use a robo-advisor online, or potentially even go to college or university, when they can find an online course/degree that will allow them to learn where and when they want. Striking out on their own, means Gen Zs will forge their own paths and that challenge existing norms.



"I expect to be living with my parents when i am 25 years old "

**39% Agree**



## Practical Savers Born Out Of Necessity

This generation is pragmatic and realistic about what they need to do to get ahead. They grew up during the last recession and witnessed the impact of the housing crisis, the demise of long-standing institutions, and the collapse of economies. The old mantra of ‘saving for a rainy day’ may be making a come back. Gen Zs define themselves as savers, and believe they need to save for the future. In fact, saving for the future was rated in our study as the most important criteria for future success. As the data suggests, they are matter-of-fact about the financial realities they face, and have adopted a realistic view. They know that if they want to afford post-secondary education, or a house someday, they will need to be creative and resourceful. From being an Uber driver at night in order to make extra money, to renting out their apartment on Airbnb when they are away to generate an additional revenue stream.

Focus group data from discussions of Gen Zs in the US reveals a mature understanding of their financial futures, with one 15-year-old who saves his allowance wisely commenting, “I’m going to be, like, \$100,000 in debt when I get out of college,” and he is sceptical of credit cards: “Don’t buy anything you can’t pay for, that’s the number one rule.”<sup>7</sup>

However, their practicality hasn’t dampened their optimism. Our survey data suggests that Gen Z may be less likely to expect the ‘bank of mom and dad’ to fund their futures, especially the 57 percent who plan to start saving for their retirement by the time they are 25 years old. This is in sharp contrast to Millennials, and the population at large, who have been slow to build retirement savings. With 47 percent of Canadians living paycheque to paycheque, almost half report they are saving only 5 percent or less of their pay.<sup>8</sup>

According to a Bank of Montreal report, high levels of student debt, underemployment, and being ill-equipped to pay for unexpected expenses, are all factors that are likely to inhibit this generation from reaching their saving goals as quickly as they wish.<sup>9</sup> However, it is very promising that Gen Zs are taking a practical, conservative approach to spending with a long-term view to their financial health.

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### Save or Spend?

**63% are savers, 37% are spenders**



“I think it’s important to save my money for the future”

**85% Agree**





## Why Not...Yolo

Despite their desire to be practical and realistic about their financial futures, Gen Z have embraced the Millennial mantra of YOLO (you only live once). This approach means the younger generation is more interested in spending their money on experiences, like a dream vacation, instead of purchasing a tangible item now or saving for something, far off in the future.<sup>10</sup>

Despite their practical view, Gen Z aren't willing to sacrifice everything for their work or to focus so much on saving money that they can't enjoy their lives today. The traditional view of work and retirement, which entails working hard for decades before being able to relax and enjoy life, has been obsolete for many years. Millennials have demanded that their lives be balanced enough to enjoy the things they want to do now, without having to postpone their enjoyment years later in the future. The data suggest that Gen Z will continue this trend. Gen Z will prioritize fun over sacrifice, with 74 percent stating it's important to 'have fun now because you only live once.'

Enjoying life was ranked as Gen Z's most important life goal, which surpassed finding a great job or becoming a better person.

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Gen Z expects to enjoy their work, while having time to enjoy doing other things they value. They won't be focused on a work-life balance in the same way that Gen Xers and Baby Boomers have defined it. Building upon Millennials' fluid lifestyle, the data suggests that Gen Z are seeking a career they love. Sixty-nine percent would describe their 'perfect job' as the focus of their life, rather than a necessary evil. However, this doesn't mean young employees will martyr themselves for their employers.

They are eager to build careers that are fulfilling, that they can invest in for many years. Other data reinforces this viewpoint, noting 50 percent of Gen Z say they want to work in a chosen field until they are unable to do so.<sup>11</sup> YOLO means life should be enjoyed in the moment, whether you are at work or on vacation. This generation embraces the belief that 'life is short,' and they aren't going to waste it doing work they don't love or postponing enjoyable experiences until they retire.

### Top 3 Priorities:

1. Enjoying Life
2. Finding a great job
3. Becoming a better person



## Trigger Warning

Despite their positive attitude, their focus on independence, and a desire to be financially prepared for the future, life isn't all rosy for Gen Z. They experience high levels of stress. They face issues such as bullying. At the same time, social media comes with the pressure to present an image of a happy, perfect life, while glossing over, or completely ignoring the struggles they face. The number of students accessing mental health services at post-secondary institutions across North America has sky-rocketed, which, according to the editor-in-chief of Psychology Today, is due to a childhood that was completely devoid of failure and which protected children from experiencing bumps in the road of life. This translated into young people who have low distress tolerance. Today, they attend university classes where trigger warnings – cautions about presentations, speeches or even required reading that may be upsetting to certain people – is a reality.

According to the 2016 National College Health Assessment Survey, the most critical issues facing students in post-secondary education are stress (42%), anxiety (33%) and depression (21%).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, 57 percent of our survey respondents agreed with the statement “I often find myself worried and stressed.” Female Gen Zs rated higher than males on this question. As well, older Gen Zs (18-21 years old) were more likely than younger Gen Zs (14-17 years old) to feel stressed or worried. This may be due to several factors; since adult Gen Zs are in college and university, they may be feeling more pressure and are more likely to also be working (which can add additional stressors).

Also, the older Gen Zs may be the children of Baby Boomers and are more likely to have been exposed to 'hot house' parenting, where their parents shielded them from all challenges. This means that they are only now, later in life, facing obstacles that are causing them stress. This is similar to the reality that Millennials faced with their helicopter parents, so it makes sense that older Gen Zs may have also experienced this protective environment.



**“I often find myself worried and stressed.”**

**57% Agree**



**Female Gen Zs rated higher** than males on this question



**Older Gen Zs (18-21 years old) were more likely** than younger Gen Zs (14-17 years olds) **to feel stressed or worried**





## Connecting Through A Screen

The most important life-defining event for Gen Z has been the proliferation of technology and the digital economy. From birth, many Gen Zs have had a social media presence. Every step of their lives has been captured, posted and shared with friends, family and followers. This generation has been observing, evaluating and living life through a screen. The patience once required to take pictures on film and develop it, is gone. The time required to stay in touch with friends across the country or around the world, has been eliminated. The need to engage people face to face has been replaced with live streaming video or group chat using a range of apps. Our data suggests that Gen Z will prioritize communication that is highly sensory, leveraging video technology when possible. Seventy-one percent agreed with the statement “regardless of the technology I use to communicate, it is important for me to see and hear who I am communicating with.” However, just because digital technology is easy and comfortable, it doesn’t mean this generation doesn’t want face time.

The authors of Gen Z @ Work note that 84 percent of Gen Z prefer communicating face-to-face with a boss and 78 percent want to communicate that way with colleagues.<sup>13</sup>

When it comes to privacy on social media sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr or Twitter, a recent survey showed that teens are far less guarded than Millennials and Gen Xers. This is in opposition to our research, which revealed that 88 percent of Gen Z agreed with the statement “protecting my privacy is very important to me.” The Gen Zs we have worked with, speak openly about the need to protect their information and be safe online. They make sure to cover up the webcam on their laptops or tablets to avoid the risk of someone hacking their camera and they are cautious about what they post online since they know the risks of having their photos, videos or information shared and used against them. Gen Z prefers to “create more anonymous and more private content through apps like Snapchat, Whisper, Yik Yak or Secret. We still post what we are up to, but we are very selective about who sees it as well as how long it is posted.”<sup>14</sup>

Older generations often scoff at the incessant use of technology by younger generations. Some feel Gen Z are addicted to their technology and can’t unplug. One study revealed that Gen Z think that everyone should get a smartphone at age 13, and that it is acceptable to use it basically anywhere — at a family dinner, during a religious service, even at weddings (even their own wedding).<sup>15</sup>

However, being raised in an environment where smartphones, apps and online groups have always existed means that this generation has gained several skills.

### ***Gen Zs believe that because of their access to technology they can:***

- Easily understand how technology works
- Leverage technology to find anything they need
- Problem solve
- Be more adaptable and independent<sup>16</sup>



## The Flip Side Of Being Social

Despite the skills gained from being a tech-savvy generation, the prolific use of technology is also having some negative impact. One in 10 students typically spend 5 or more hours each day posting or browsing social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram.<sup>17</sup>

This level of technology use can have consequences. “We know that the more time spent on social media sites, the greater the risk of cyber bullying and related mental health issues,” said Dr. Hayley Hamilton, scientist with CAMH’s Institute for Mental Health Policy Research.<sup>18</sup> Our data suggests that the trend of high level of technology use will continue. More than half of the survey respondents (53%) agreed that they use their smart phones more often than others they know.

How Gen Z engage with each other and foster relationships is also being influenced by technology. While research has revealed that 37 percent of Gen Z believes that communication with technology has had a negative impact on their ability to develop good people skills,<sup>19</sup> our data suggests that this hasn’t influenced their perceptions of the quality of those relationships. Almost half of respondents in our study (47%) agreed that their virtual friends are as valuable to them as the friends they know in person. Male respondents rated this even higher than females. This may be due to a gaming culture that allows live group interactions and playing with friends that are across the country or around the world. However, this can also be concerning since an estimated 13 percent of students report symptoms of a video gaming problem, which includes preoccupation, loss of control, withdrawal, and disregard for consequences.<sup>20</sup>

## Do you use any of the following social media sites daily?



**YouTube 71%**



**Facebook 68%**



**Instagram 56%**



**Snapchat 56%**



**Twitter 26%**





## Part Two: Gen Z's Expectations Of Work

### Loyalty Is Back

In our first book, *Loyalty Unplugged: How to Get, Keep & Grow All Four Generations*, we explored how generational identities and differences impact employee behaviours, including loyalty. Unplugging loyalty meant understanding how each generation defines loyalty, and where they place their loyalty. Since then, we have worked with hundreds of clients and presented to over 60,000 people globally and consistently the discussion about loyalty remains. How do we get employees to stay? How do we attract people who align with our organizational values and will integrate well into our teams? How do we create a work environment that engages and retains our top talent...especially younger employees?

There is good news for organizations, HR, and leaders; Gen Z cares about loyalty. This is a big shift, which will have a profound impact on recruitment and retention efforts. The data suggests that Gen Zs want to work for an employer for the long term. They want work that is secure, and they don't believe they need to work for several different companies in order to be successful. They ranked 'working for many different companies' as the least important criteria in moving ahead in their careers. They want employers to commit to them and, in return, they will do the same. In fact, 67 percent of Gen Zs believe that when getting a new job, they would feel lucky to have that job, versus believing the company would be lucky to have them as an employee.

That practical perspective is also revealed in how this cohort perceives their role in the workplace. Eighty-four percent of Gen Z believes it is very important or somewhat important to be able to follow company rules and expectations. In addition, they understand the need to follow direction, respect authority and pay their dues with 74 percent of survey respondents indicating that it is important to 'do what your boss tells you to do' in order to advance. Other research supports this notion of a realistic view of employees' roles and what is expected of them. A national US study discovered that 76 percent of Gen Z are willing to start at the bottom and work their way up by paying their dues, provided those dues are reasonable and specific.<sup>21</sup> Our data confirms that this generation understands that to get ahead they need to contribute to the organization and the team.

**Gen Z holds a realistic view of what is required to be successful, ranking the top 3 most important factors needed to progress in their careers as:**

Ability to adapt to change **88%**

Being a great team member **87%**

Being innovative and solving problems **86%**



In addition, our survey respondents revealed clarity around business realities. They ranked 'making customers happy' as a key factor (85%) in their success, which demonstrates maturity as it relates to meeting business needs. They are also pragmatic enough to acknowledge the impact that technology will have on the economy. Almost 75 percent of Gen Zs indicated that they agree that in the future, technology is going to eliminate a lot of jobs. With the introduction of artificial intelligence (AI) and the automation of work, Gen Z is going to be the first generation to face significant competition from robots for entry-level work. Estimates of how many jobs robots will wipe out, and when, vary wildly. Economists predict somewhere between 9 percent and 47 percent of workers in the West could lose jobs to automation over the next two decades or so.<sup>22</sup> What often remains for Gen Zs entering into the workforce are jobs requiring higher-order critical thinking and reasoning skills.

A Deloitte report suggests, that they may be expected to interpret data/analytics, derive insights, and formulate recommendations earlier in their careers, which their prior experience may not have fully prepared them to do. Thus increasing the skills gap between employer needs and employee competencies.<sup>23</sup>

So, while the Gen Zs in our study recognize the risks of AI and the changing economy, they still believe they are going to have great careers, are optimistic about the future and believe they will be more successful than their parents. If automation is going to eliminate jobs, they just don't think it will be theirs. The data suggest this generation is insightful about their need to adapt and may be more resilient to market changes as a result. Their optimism converts into confidence, with Gen Z being bullish not only about the future, but also their abilities. Eighty-four percent believe that they have the skills necessary to be successful in a professional environment.<sup>24</sup>

### What is most important to Gen Z ?

- A job that is secure **89%**
- A job that will help me develop new skills and learn new things **89%**
- A job with great benefits **88%**
- A job working in an industry that I believe in, or that matches my personal values **86%**
- A job that I can stay at for a long time **85%**



## Show Me The Money... Plus More

Perhaps it's because Gen Z has grown up with parents who were impacted by the 2008-2009 financial crisis, or maybe it's because they have watched Millennials struggle to find work and pay off high levels of student debt, but this generation is focused on finding work that pays... but they also want more. The data suggests that they want a great leader and they want to work for an organization they respect and that aligns with their values.

### How important is a job...

with great benefits **88%**

that pays a lot of money **85%**

that pays a competitive salary **82%**

They want to work in an environment that will allow them to be flexible and that embraces their diversity. Overall, they seek a dynamic workplace that is both financially rewarding and intrinsically motivating.

For this generation, work is more than just a paycheck. Money and security are key drivers for them, but so is employment where they can grow, develop and make a positive contribution. A friendly and innovative environment; meaningful work; and high salary is noted by other researches as the top three most important criteria to Gen Z when choosing a job.<sup>25</sup>

This generation won't select employers simply based on their financial offering; the organization's brand and market position will also matter. Seventy-eight percent rated working in a job where they can make an important contribution to their community, country and the world as very important or somewhat important.

They value what a company stands for more so than what the products or services they sell. Sixty-three percent want to work for a company that is a leader in its field. The data supports the notion that Gen Z will not sacrifice engagement and growth for money. They expect they can receive both and will seek out employers who provide interesting and challenging work, while being strong corporate citizens.

In fact, this generation is less likely to want to work for a large organization like a bank or teleco, with survey respondents ranking this last on the list of what is important for them as it relates to work. Yet this generation does want security, and a job with opportunities for career advancement and more responsibility (81%). So, they may find it difficult to find work that is stable, provides great pay and benefits, with career progression if they don't join a larger organization. In fact, working for themselves was rated as one of the least important factors to Gen Z, highlighting that they are likely to be loyal to an employer if they can find work that is secure, stable and taps into their desire to be innovative problem solvers.





**76%**

**Rank a job in a workplace that is diverse and inclusive as important**

Interestingly, there was a 50/50 split between respondents wanting to work for a smaller company, like a start-up where they can do many different types of roles and can gain a wide range of skills, versus and a larger organization where they can specialize in an area of expertise and define themselves as an expert. This is following a trend where fewer people under the age of thirty own private businesses and there is an overall reduction in the desire to take risks among young people.<sup>26</sup> It remains to be seen how Gen Z will leverage their knowledge, skills and creativity to create career opportunities, and if they will ultimately want to, or need to, chose a more entrepreneurial path.

Gen Z's desire for more than just money also includes a desire to work in a dynamic environment where diversity and inclusion is the norm. It is about being able to be your 'true self' and be your 'best self' at work. The data suggests that an organization's level of diversity impacts Gen Z's desire and willingness to work there. However, understanding how this cohort defines diversity is more dubious.

Consistently, qualitative and quantitative data has supported the notion that Gen Z does not want to be defined or labeled by limiting terms or concepts of diversity. It's not about 'checking a box' to define yourself by your race, ethnicity, cultural background, gender identify or religion. It's about bringing your full self to work and being authentic. As a Gen Z author notes "how we define ourselves is so customized that there could never be enough boxes to us to check."<sup>27</sup> This generation will push the boundaries of what it means to be accepting of differences and truly embrace diversity. For example, a Gen Z may identify themselves as Muslim, straight, female, scorio, ENFJ, mother to 2 fur-babies, and a marathon runner.

As the concept of diversity expands to include a wider range of identifying characteristics, the desire to be part of inclusive environments will also increase. Inclusion and belonging will become less about organizations establishing affinity groups and special programs to promote one self-identified diversity group more than another, and will evolve into a workplace culture that is open, accepting, supportive,

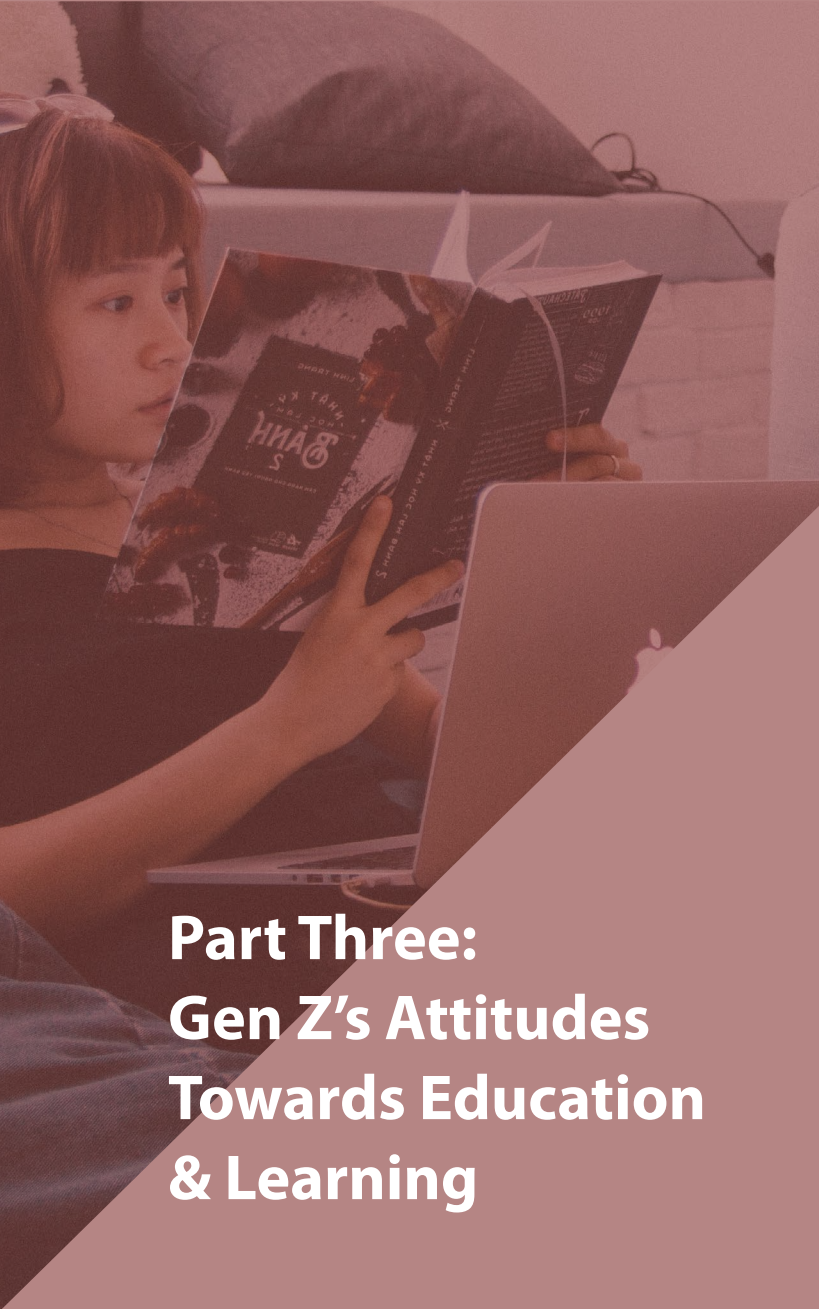
respectful and embracing of all the ways we are unique. This translates into an environment where diversity is inherent in the makeup of our communities, classrooms, workplaces and political parties. Sixty-nine percent of Gen Z in our study agreed with the statement 'I want to live and work in a diverse community,' so we can expect this generation to push the diversity and inclusion agenda forward through collectivist actions versus labels or segmented strategies.

### **Gen Zs want a job that...**

has a great boss **84%**

allows them to work where and when they want **76%**

lets them be part of a team **74%**



## Part Three: Gen Z's Attitudes Towards Education & Learning

### Life Is Learning

Gen Z has made the connection between investing in their own knowledge and skills through formal education and the ability to achieve their goals. Eighty-seven percent of survey respondents believe that completing a post-secondary diploma or degree is important to getting ahead in life. This is good news for educators, teachers, parents and society at large. A more educated workforce will produce more creative problem solvers, more adaptable employees and a more high performing economy. Consistently, bachelor degree and college graduates earn considerably more than high school graduates, earning between 1.3 and 1.7 times more for men, and more educated women earn between 1.4 and 2.1 times more than their high school graduate counterparts.<sup>28</sup>

This generation is eager to invest time and energy to learn new things that will help them achieve their career goals, but they also value education and knowledge in a broader context. The data suggests that the notion of being a life-long learner has taken hold with Gen Z. They understand that learning doesn't just happen at school, that teachers aren't the only credible source of knowledge, and that you can always find information about what you want to learn about online. Life is all about learning.

This is supported in our data as well as other research, which indicates almost half of high school students believe what they learn outside of the classroom is more important in preparing them for their future.<sup>29</sup>

### As it relates to learning preferences, Gen Z is most inspired by learning that is focused on 3 things:

1. Doing or creating
2. Observing or watching
3. Researching online



I learn best when i can create something that i can share with others

**66% Agree**





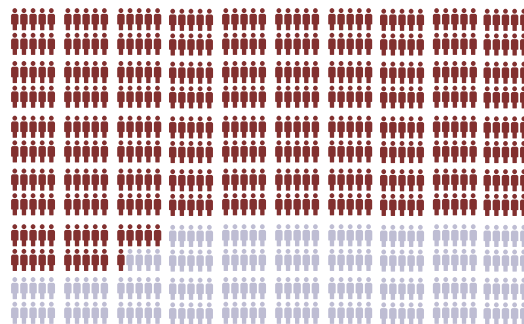
Yet, this is in contrast to much of what students experience in the classroom, which tends to focus on listening, writing and reading.<sup>30</sup> The desire for a tactical learning experience is further supported by our data that reveals that being able to apply learning by creating something physical is a major motivator for Gen Z. More than half of survey respondents (57%) feel it is important to have a job where they can work with their hands. Co-op programs, job rotations, and lectures from industry professionals are all highly appealing to a generation that is practical enough to realize that education can, and must, deliver a return on its investment. More and more, the value of going to college and university is being scrutinized given the high costs, time investment and dismal job opportunities upon graduation.

There has also been a lot of criticism that college and university curriculum do not accurately reflect the current state of business or prepare students to enter into the work world with the knowledge and skills required to excel.

A recent poll of 823 business leaders by Modus Research Inc. found that just 41 percent believe universities are doing a good job of preparing graduates to address the needs of employers, while 31 percent say they are doing a poor job.<sup>31</sup>

### What is Education For?

**71%** believe that **education is much more important for developing critical thinking skills** than for just qualifying for a job



**29%** believe that **education is only useful if it helps me launch or advance my career**

Yet, there has been a focus on building entrepreneurial skills and an entrepreneurial mindset in high school students. This is likely influencing Gen Zs' perceptions about innovation and creativity. They recognize that being innovative, being creative, and focusing on problem solving will be critical skills required to get and keep a desirable job in the future. They are aware that being a high performer in the workplace will be dependent on both academic knowledge as well as the ability to put theory into practice.

**According to a 2016 study of Gen Z students and educators, there is agreement that students today:**

- Believe they are only somewhat prepared for their future
- Want a greater focus on creativity in the classroom
- Believe creativity will play a big role in future success and solving today's challenges





The good news is, that learning for learning's sake is still valued. It's not just practical knowledge that inspires Gen Z, they are also inquisitive and engaged in learning that sparks their interests and provides a broad base of knowledge. Seventy-three percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement "I love learning new things even if they are not practical or won't help me get a job."

They value gaining new knowledge, not just the tangible employment opportunities that come with higher level education. This desire for continuous learning has created a generation that has a strong growth mindset. When people possess a growth mindset they believe that their most basic abilities can be developed through dedication and hard work. This view creates a love of learning and a resilience that is essential for great accomplishments.<sup>32</sup>

***This supports the data that Gen Z students describe themselves as:***

- Smart
- Creative
- Hard working<sup>33</sup>

This generation is focused on accessing learning, interpreting information and taking advantage of all types of education on a need-to-know basis. They seek learning that is practical, relevant and grounded in the 'real world.'

**Gen Z rated the following as the 3 most important statements about learning:**

I expect that I will need to learn new things throughout my life **89%**

I learn best when I have a say in what my learning experience is like **71%**

I often go online to answer questions about the world around me **70%**



## Conclusion: Implications & Questions

The data we have compiled has provided us deep insights into what Gen Zs value, what their expectations are of the future and sheds some lights on the type of students, employees and citizens this generation will become. There are implications for a wide range of audiences. Employers, recruiters, leaders, educators, colleges and universities and learning and development professionals can leverage the research to enhance and upgrade their practices.

### Implications For Employers

If you are an employer, consider the following implications to how you get, keep and grow your future workforce. We have provided some questions to help guide your organization's thinking and planning in the areas of recruitment, engaging work environment, and leadership practices.

### Recruitment

As with all recruitment efforts, an organization's branding must resonate with its target market. If the goal is to attract Gen Z as summer students or new hires directly from college and university, an organization's recruitment messages must align with what Gen Zs' are seeking and its brand must be appealing to this generation.

#### *Consider the following questions to adapt your key messages and branding:*

- How does your unique value proposition enhance your brand in the marketplace? How are you a trailblazer?
- What key messages about your organizational values, culture, work environment, employee wellness and technology will be important to weave into your job posting and overall recruitment messaging?
  - How can you tap into Gen Z's desire for security and a job they can stay at for a long time?



- What type of career-pathing process will support Gen Z in being loyal to your organization?
- How does your organization tap into employees' creativity and innovation?
- What benefits and pay level do you offer that will help Gen Z's attain short and long term goals?
- What learning and development opportunities exist to acquire broad skills?
- How are you a good corporate citizen and how is your corporate social responsibility aligned to what Gen Zs value?
- How can you personalize your recruitment process to align to top candidates' personal values?

### **Work Environment**

While we didn't explicitly survey Gen Zs on their ideal work environment, we did ask about their expectations of how they would like to work. From this data we can infer a number of things that will be important to Gen Zs as they enter into the work world.

***Evaluate how your work environment stacks up against Gen Z's values and expectations by answering the following questions:***

- How does your reward and recognition, career development, and performance management processes support on-going growth and career advancement of employees?
- How does your work environment provide opportunities, and encourage independent work as well as team collaboration?
- What options are available to employees to work in a flexible way that allows them to choose where and when they work based on their unique needs and project requirements?

- How does your environment – physically and technologically - protect employees' privacy and confidentiality?

### **Leadership Practices & Engagement**

Regardless of which generation a leader is trying to engage, his or her leadership practices must tap into the values, expectations and behaviours of that cohort. The Gen Zs we surveyed provided us some great direction on how they want to be engaged and what leadership practices will be most important to them.

***Leaders should consider the following questions:***

- Would Gen Z employees describe you as a 'great boss'? If yes, why? If not, why not? What actions would you need to take to change their perception of you?





- Do you consistently provide coaching and feedback that is quick and relevant?
- How do you encourage employees to develop new skills and provide opportunities to learn new things?
- How do you create an inclusive environment that leverages diversity?
- What more could you do to engage Gen Z employees in solving current business problems?
- How can you increase the richness of your communication and interactions with employees through technology?

## Implications for Educators and Learning & Development

If you work in the education field, or deliver learning to corporate employees, your work will likely be impacted by the data we have collected. Specifically, the new expectations that Gen Z learners will bring into the classroom, online learning space, and/or learning portal will influence the design, content and delivery of learning experiences.

Possessing a curious mindset, viewing learning as a life-long journey, and desiring to be actively involved in the educational process are all strong characteristics of Gen Z and will require traditional instructional design and delivery methods be upgraded to engage this generation.

*Key insights from our data can guide educators and organizational learning and development teams by designing educational experiences that align to Gen Z's top five learning preferences:*

1. Self-directed learning which allows learners to have a say in what and how they learn
2. Collaborative problem solving which connects learners with colleagues across the organization
3. Practical and real-world focused learning that addresses just-in-time learning gaps
4. Integration of external sources of information to ensure content is current, up to date, and provides a fresh perspective
5. Leverages technology to make learning easier, faster, and more collaborative between learners



Learning and development teams should evaluate their courses/workshops/e-learning offerings to determine if, and how, they can be upgraded to address the needs of Gen Z learners. As corporate learning shifts towards more targeted, chunked, and just-in-time experiences, this will resonate with new hires from Gen Z. This cohort will also expect to have access to the latest technology while participating in learning. Short, targeted, practical and digital learning will be most effective in developing the knowledge and skills of new entrants into the workforce.

***The following questions will help evaluate learning experiences to ensure alignment with Gen Z's learning preferences:***

- How is the learning tied to getting a job or promotion?
- What activities are included to provide practical application, critical thinking, and skills transfer?
- How do you integrate learners' experiences and knowledge?
- How can learners blend both making and learning, to solve real challenges the world is facing?
- What options are available for self-directed learning?
- How learner-centric and personalized is the content?
- In what ways can learners create something that can be shared with others? How is their creativity tapped into?
- How can the learning experience be more social with internal and external groups?
- What activities encourage and require collaborative learning?
- How does the learning experience leverage the expertise of the educator/trainer in an open, adaptable and learner-centric way to help navigate the complexity of the world they life/work in?
- Is the learning re-framed to focus on the learner's mission, which evolves throughout ones life and career?
- How does the learning experience leverage the expertise of the educator / trainer in an open, adaptable and learner-centric way to help navigate the complexity of the world they life/work in?
- Is the learning re-framed to focus on the learner's mission, which evolves throughout ones life and career?



## Continue The Dialogue

We are excited to collaborate with you to further explore the data and evaluation questions presented. We look forward to providing your organization with recommendations for how to increase recruitment, retention and engagement of Gen Z employees, consumers and students.

**Contact us at [info@ngenperformance.com](mailto:info@ngenperformance.com) to:**

**Deliver a highly engaging and interactive keynote** or workshop on how to recruit, lead, engage or educate Gen Z. See program outline at [ngenperformance.com/gen-z](http://ngenperformance.com/gen-z)


**Benchmark your organization against our national data.** We can deploy our survey, or build a customized version to collect data from your internal Gen Z employees or external clients/customers. We will identify specific strengths and insights from your target group; compare and contrast the results with the existing data on Gen Z; and provide key insights and recommendations.

**Mine our existing data,** to identify and analyze unique data points/cross-tabs and statistically significant results that are relevant to your business, industry or key roles.

### About n-gen People Performance Inc.

n-gen People Performance Inc. is an HR consultancy and training company dedicated to building strategies and programs that help organizations target, motivate and engage employees in order to increase performance and productivity. Over 60,000 people globally have experienced one of n-gen's 27 learning programs and have benefited from our 15 years of research devoted to the impact generational differences have on organizational performance.

To learn more about our presentations, workshops and research visit [ngenperformance.com](http://ngenperformance.com)

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### Research Study Methodology

This research study was led by n-gen People Performance Inc., though a national online survey of 600 Gen Zs ages 14-21 deployed by Environics Research. We sampled to census for region and gender. We also collected a representative number of French respondents. The survey was conducted online from July 19 – 28, 2017, with 362 re-interviewed from August 31 - September 14, 2017.

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As president and co-founder of n-gen People Performance Inc., Giselle is dedicated to building strategies and programs that help clients target, motivate and engage employees in order to increase performance and productivity. She is a sought after resource to industry leaders, having worked with 18 of the top Fortune 500 companies across North America. With 20 years of experience in learning and development, she has devoted more than fifteen years to researching the impact that generational differences have on organizational performance. She has created solutions and programs in five practice areas – sales & customer service, leadership, team building, new hires, and human resources. She has co-authored two books: *Loyalty Unplugged: How to Get, Keep & Grow All Four Generations* and *Upgrade Now: 9 Advanced Leadership Skills*. As a human resources expert, Giselle is regularly quoted in national publications and appears on television and radio. Giselle has a Master's degree.



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Rob is an educator, business leader, talent management thought leader, and filmmaker. During the tech boom, Rob held senior leadership roles in several Ed Tech start-ups and then took on the lead of the Learning and Customer Experience practice at Maritz Canada, a US based marketing services company, now Bond Brand Loyalty. Rob then served as CEO at the Institute for Performance and Learning, a not-for-profit association focused on workplace learning, and is currently Director, Executive and Corporate Learning at The Ted Rogers School of Management. Rob holds a Ph.D. in Instructional Systems from Syracuse University and an MBA from the Rotman School of Management

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