



GET READY FOR  
**GENERATION**



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# Introduction

As Generation Z prepares to enter the workforce, is your company ready? It's an important question, as this group, like the generations before it, brings new ideas and expectations to the professional world. But it's not just Generation Z that makes the workforce of the near future so unique: An unprecedented four distinct generations — baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z — will be working side by side, each with their own styles, skill sets and worldviews. So how will they all get along?

Robert Half teamed up with Enactus — a nonprofit organization dedicated to bringing together business leaders, academics and students to inspire entrepreneurialism, to survey more than 770 college and university student-members between the ages of 18 and 25 in the United States and Canada. The goals were to find out how these Gen Z individuals — who through their involvement with Enactus have already demonstrated an early focus on careers — are preparing for the workplace and how other generations can get ready to work alongside these professionals and manage them. The survey, conducted in the first quarter of 2015, focused on Gen Zers' career goals and expectations, along with the challenges and opportunities they anticipate when it comes to being a part of a multigenerational workforce.

# Generations at a Glance

	<b>Baby Boomers 1946-1964</b>	<b>Gen Xers 1965-1977</b>	<b>Gen Yers 1978-1989</b>	<b>Gen Zers 1990-1999</b>
<b>Behavior</b>	Challenge the rules	Change the rules	Create the rules	Customize the rules
<b>Training</b>	Preferred in moderation	Required to keep me	Continuous and expected	Ongoing and essential
<b>Learning style</b>	Facilitated	Independent	Collaborative and networked	Technology-based
<b>Communication style</b>	Guarded	Hub and spoke	Collaborative	Face-to-face
<b>Problem-solving</b>	Horizontal	Independent	Collaborative	Entrepreneurial
<b>Decision-making</b>	Team informed	Team included	Team decided	Team persuaded
<b>Leadership style</b>	Unilateral	Coach	Partner	Teaching
<b>Feedback</b>	Once per year, during the annual review	Weekly/daily	On demand	Consistent and frequent
<b>Change management</b>	Change = caution	Change = opportunity	Change = improvement	Change = expected

Sources: • *The Changing Workforce: Urgent Challenges and Strategies*, 2007, Joe Kristy, associate partner, Human Capital Management Practice, IBM  
 • Bruce Tulgan, founder, RainmakerThinking

# GEN Z Revealed

Generation Z, born between 1990 and 1999, is the first truly digital and global generation. This group has never known a world without the Internet, and many of them can't recall life without a smartphone. Having grown up during a time of great economic instability — more than any generation since the Great Depression — they crave both financial and workplace security more than Gen Y, says Bruce Tulgan, founder of RainmakerThinking and a leading expert on young people in the workplace. Despite this, they're used to change and weather it well, but they're more cautious about navigating it. Gen Z can be described as entrepreneurial, innovative and passionate. Like Gen Yers before them, their parents have had a strong influence in their lives. But that's not to say that this group should be viewed as a new wave of Gen Yers. Instead, this generation exhibits distinct characteristics as they forge their own paths.



# GEN Zers Embark on Their Careers

## CAREER ASPIRATIONS: ONWARD AND UPWARD!

By 2020, 80 percent of the workforce will be post-boomer, and more than 20 percent will be Gen Z, Tulgan notes. Although the first wave of Gen Z is just starting to enter the workforce, members of this group have a clear vision for their careers. Five years out of college, 32 percent of the students surveyed expect to be managing or supervising employees in a corporate environment. Another 24 percent expect to be working their way up the corporate ladder, though not yet among the management ranks. And 20 percent want to start their own businesses. Tulgan cautions that although these aspirations are realistic, Gen Z will need — and want — rigorous training and support to succeed in leadership roles. “They want creative freedom, they want room to prove themselves, but they want to be set up for success,” he says. “So the worst thing you can do is put a young person in a leadership role without doing any work to prepare him or her to play that role.”

## Which of the following best describes where you expect to be in your career five years out of college?\*



**24%**

Working my way up the corporate ladder although not yet among the management ranks



**20%**

Starting my own business/  
being an entrepreneur



**9%**

Pursuing higher education



**6%**

Working for a nonprofit organization



**32%**

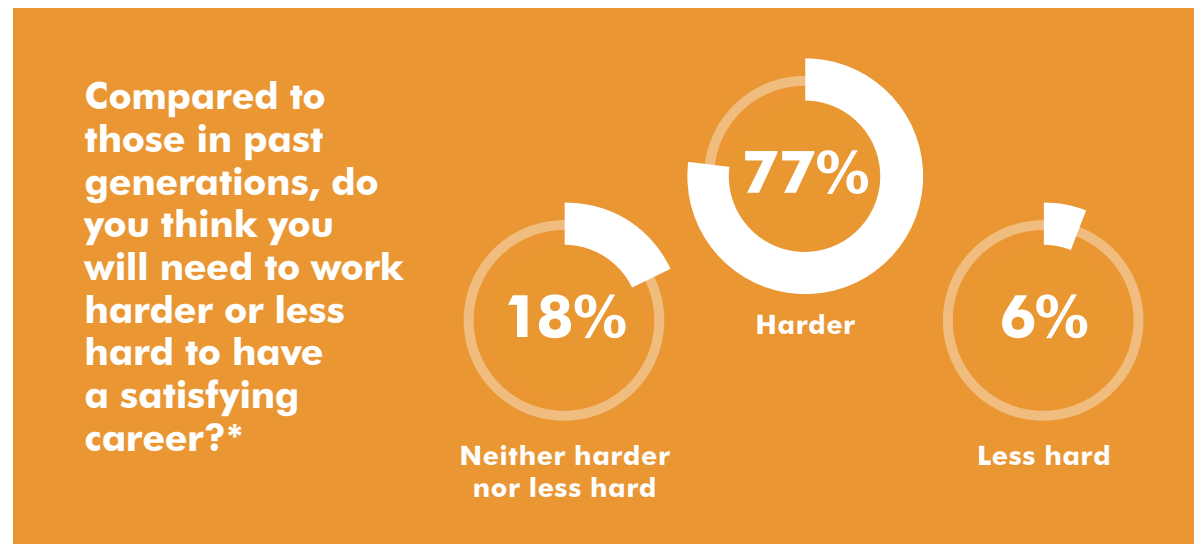
**Managing or  
supervising  
employees in  
a corporate  
environment**

\*Top five responses shown.

## A LONG CAREER ROAD AHEAD

Looking toward their future, nearly 4 in 5 Gen Zers expect to work harder than previous generations to have a satisfying and fulfilling career. Perhaps that's not surprising, given that they have grown up in economically tumultuous times in a fairly competitive environment. "Graduating with a degree doesn't really set you apart anymore," says Kirk Baumann, vice president, career services with Enactus. "You have to think about how you can innovate, how you can make things better, how you can move the organization forward and how you as an individual can develop yourself as a professional."

A little more than half of Gen Zers surveyed expect to work up to age 70, although many of them would like to retire sooner. "They've been front-row observers of the struggles that individuals have had with the financial crisis over the past 10 years," says Paul McDonald, senior executive director for Robert Half. "They've seen parents and grandparents who have had to go back to work, take part-time jobs, or have had their life savings either wiped out or partially wiped out. So I think Gen Z might be described as the 'reality-check' generation."



\*Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## "Follow Your Passion," Advise Mom and Dad

Like Gen Yers before them, Gen Zers have very strong relationships with their parents. So it's no surprise that 82 percent of those surveyed feel their parents/guardians will have some kind of influence on their career decisions upon graduation. "This is the generation that's had more guidance, direction, support and coaching from parents, teachers and counselors than any generation in history," says Bruce Tulgan, founder of RainmakerThinking.

Parents and guardians are particularly powerful influencers of this generation when it comes to education and passion. Students who were surveyed said their parents offered advice such as "Stay in school. You should never stop learning and staying up-to-date with the times," and "Do what you love. The money will follow." Gen Zers also want to be careful not to repeat what they perceive to be their parents' mistakes, including not finishing their education, settling for career or financial stability, failing to pursue their passions and leaving a career for family obligations.



Gen Zers are  
used to being  
taught. They are  
used to being  
constant learners.  
They are used  
to giving input.

**PAUL MCDONALD**  
SENIOR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
ROBERT HALF

### SKILLS: FIRST, THINK INSIDE THE BOX

According to McDonald, good listening skills are underestimated in every generation, but Gen Z professionals are particularly poised to develop them. “Gen Zers are used to being taught. They’re used to being constant learners. They’re used to giving input,” he says. “If they hone those listening skills, they’re going to go further in their careers by being able to settle down and listen to what others are saying and then executing based upon the facts that they have gathered.”

Creativity is another strength this generation brings to the table, Tulgan notes. “They’re great at looking for ways to change, improve and improvise, which does lead to innovation. Also, the diversity of this generation, and their mindset about diversity, will be a huge driver of their innovation,” he says.

However, cautions Tulgan, Gen Zers don’t always rely on proven solutions and existing best practices, which leads to reinventing the wheel and other forms of false innovation. “Before thinking ‘outside the box,’ you need to be able to think ‘inside the box’ and drill down further so you are extrapolating from proven best practices,” he adds.

Although this generation adopts new technology with ease, Gen Z has been criticized for having poor writing skills. Much of this has been attributed to their growing up in an age of shorthand via social media. Abbreviations, emoticons and lack of punctuation are advantageous on social media, but they may raise concerns in the workplace.

“It will be important for employers to coach Gen Zers about adapting their communication style to their audience and being able to recognize the need for formal communication styles in certain settings,” says Bev Graham, Ph.D., vice president, Enactus USA programs.

When it comes to preparing for the workforce, organizations like Enactus are focusing on developing Gen Zers’ communication skills, problem-solving and project-management abilities and giving them opportunities to apply those skills to real-world situations. In school, they’re learning about collaboration and how to work both as part of a team and individually, according to Graham.



Although this generation will be ready to amply fill the technology gap, they may enter the workforce with a soft skills gap, according to Tulgan, author of *Bridging the Soft Skills Gap* (September 2015). His company has identified a catalog of missing soft skills, including the five key traits listed on the right that hiring managers say are missing in today's young talent:

## Mind the Soft Skills Gap



**Rigorous  
self-evaluation**



**Taking personal  
responsibility**



**Maintaining a  
positive attitude**



**Taking good care of  
themselves outside  
of work so they come  
to work healthy**



**Self-presentation:  
timeliness, organization  
and productivity,  
quality, follow-through,  
and initiative**



# Rolling Out the Welcome Mat

## WORK EXPECTATIONS: DRIVEN, AND WILLING TO DRIVE

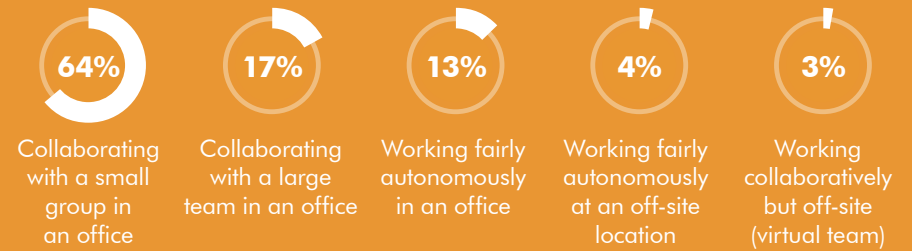
On average, Gen Zers expect to work for four companies in their lifetime, the research showed. That's because they want a robust work experience, and although they may be able to get that from one or two companies, it will more likely need to come from working at a variety of organizations, according to Baumann. McDonald adds that companies need to both talk about and show Gen Zers clear paths to new opportunities and promotions. Otherwise, these young workers won't hesitate to start looking elsewhere for growth and new experiences. When discussing the number of companies they anticipate working for during their careers, comments such as, "There's really no limit. As many as it takes for me to be happy," and "If I find a company that offers what I'm looking for, I don't see the need to work for another company," show that Gen Z professionals will look to personal growth potential first when making career decisions.

When it comes to preferred work settings, Gen Zers do not want to work in isolation. Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) prefer to collaborate with a small group in an office. Their least favorite work environments include being fairly autonomous at an off-site location (4 percent) and working off-site on a virtual team (3 percent). Perhaps surprisingly, given the proliferation of open work spaces, most Gen Zers prefer a closed-door option: 45 percent would like their own private office within a company.

These digital natives are also apt to prefer more traditional forms of communication on the job: The majority of future Gen Z employees surveyed said they prefer to communicate at work through face-to-face conversations versus text, instant message, email or social media. These professionals likely seek connectedness and context because they thrive on genuine relationships, especially with authority figures, notes Tulgan.

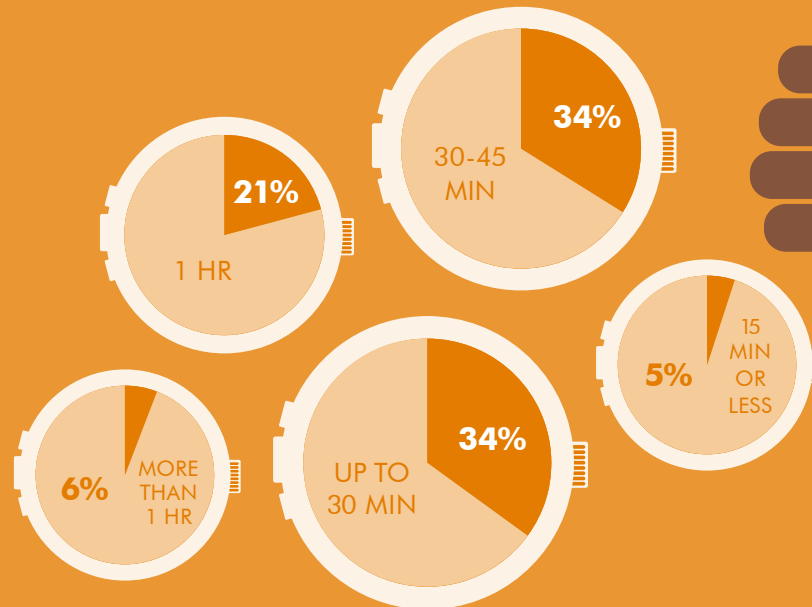
Gen Zers are willing to commute for their jobs, with 34 percent willing to travel up to 30 minutes, and another 34 percent willing to travel 30 to 45 minutes to their workplaces. Their preferred mode of transportation is driving (65 percent), followed by carpooling with coworkers (30 percent).

### What kind of work environment do you prefer?\*



\*Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

### In general, what is the maximum amount of time you are willing to spend each day on a one-way commute to work?



The big question on their minds is, what role is this job going to play in my life story right now? Not where am I going to fit in your company, but where are you going to fit in my life?

**BRUCE TULGAN**  
FOUNDER  
RAINMAKERTHINKING

## RECRUITING AND RETAINING GEN ZERS: HOW DO YOU FIT INTO THEIR LIVES?

Gen Z workers rank career opportunities (64 percent) as their number-one consideration in pursuing a full-time job, but those opportunities must align with their personal goals and belief systems. “The big question on their minds is, what role is this job going to play in my life story right now?” Tulgan says. “Not where am I going to fit in your company, but where are you going to fit in my life?” He adds that Gen Zers want to know what your company can offer on day one, week one, month one, year one and year two. “When your attraction message focuses on that, you’re going to be really speaking to them in an authentic way that is meaningful to them,” he says.

In fact, authenticity is vital to making connections with this generation, so be careful not to oversell or undersell a position you’re looking to fill, and make sure Gen Zers understand your company culture and higher purpose, advises McDonald.

Though career opportunities reign supreme for Gen Z, salary is a big concern, too. Generous pay was the second-highest career priority (44 percent) for those surveyed, with respondents revealing that they expect to make an average of \$46,779 at their first job out of college.

Because they grew up in the economically and politically tumultuous early 2000s, this generation has more in common with Depression-era children than their slightly older Gen Y counterparts when it comes to money, Tulgan says. Baumann already sees evidence of their concern for fiscal security. “They’re being more selective in what college they choose and what types of debt they do incur, and so I think they have a better plan to either pay that off or not to incur that debt,” he says.

The economic turbulence they’ve experienced in their short lives may be what’s prompted Gen Z professionals to latch on to larger companies that can offer more stability and opportunity for advancement. In fact, the overwhelming majority of students surveyed said they would most like to work at a midsize company (41 percent) or a large international corporation (38 percent). While they may initially gravitate toward the security midsize and large companies can offer, McDonald predicts that they will leave for new opportunities — even with smaller companies and startups — if growth opportunities don’t arise quickly or if they aren’t treated with respect once they become comfortable in the workforce.



“From the day you start recruiting them, you should be looking at retention,” McDonald says. “These professionals appreciate stability, but they also want to make their marks, and if they feel like they have hit a roadblock on the learning curve, they’re going to look around for something better.”

Where Gen Z professionals are similar to Gen Yers is in their quest to make a difference and have a positive impact on society (40 percent). And given their global mindset, many won’t hesitate to travel for their jobs or work internationally.

## 5 Keys to Recruiting Gen Z

1

**Become highly engaged  
in the hiring process.**

2

**Highlight examples  
of personal and  
corporate integrity in  
the conversation.**

3

**Demonstrate genuine  
ties to community and  
social responsibility.**

4

**Show (don’t just tell) them  
there are opportunities  
for advancement.**

5

**Think about how you’ll  
retain them while you’re  
recruiting them.**

## Which of the following best describes your ideal work environment?\*



**38%**

Large, international  
corporate or nonprofit  
organization



**41%**

Midsize business/  
organization



**6%**

Working for myself as a  
consultant/freelancer



**13%**

Entrepreneurial  
firm/startup

**1%**

Other

\*Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

## What are your top three priorities when seeking a full-time job?\*

- 
- 64%** Opportunities for career growth
  - 44%** Generous pay
  - 40%** Making a difference or having a positive impact on society
  - 38%** Structured/stable work environment/job security
  - 25%** Good healthcare benefits/insurance
  - 23%** Flexible hours/remote work options
  - 21%** A manager I can learn from
  - 12%** Working for a high-profile company
  - 11%** Generous paid time off/vacation time
  - 9%** Philanthropic or social service opportunities
  - 6%** Short commute
  - 3%** An impressive job title

\*Multiple responses were permitted.





# Working With GEN Z

## THE BOSS: GIVE IT TO THEM STRAIGHT

Gen Zers most valued characteristics in a boss are honesty and integrity, cited by 38 percent of respondents. McDonald advises boomer and Gen X managers, in particular, to keep a close eye on turnover. If it's high, there's a good chance these professionals are calling foul when it comes to these core values. "Top-down management techniques that other generations might be accustomed to can strike Gen Z as inauthentic," McDonald says. "Gen Z professionals are questioners, and if they can't find answers to their questions, or the company seems withholding when it comes to information, that sets off alarm bells."

The second most popular trait Gen Zers most value in a leader is mentoring ability (21 percent). Although this generation is entrepreneurial and can work independently, they want to be given the tools and input up front to help them succeed. They also want lots of feedback along the way. "Their round-the-clock access to technology from a very young age has made them constant learners, but managers will need to coach them toward what's relevant and what's not relevant because they're being bombarded with information all the time," McDonald says. "Take a firm interest in their career paths, help them map out where they could go, ask for input, and make sure it's a two-way conversation," he advises.

As Gen Y moves into management alongside Gen X and younger boomers, what's the best way for these new managers to lead Gen Zers entering the workplace? First, Tulgan says, there are three big misconceptions about Gen Z that need to be dispelled in order to help them thrive:

1. They just want to work with their peers and don't want to work with authority figures.
2. They only want to interact by using their handheld devices and don't want to communicate face-to-face.
3. They want to be left alone to figure things out on their own.

What they actually want, Tulgan says, is to be set up for success and then given the room to succeed. They want guidance, direction, support and coaching. They don't want to just learn from computers and communicate via handheld devices; they want the human element. In short, those leading the newest workforce need to be prepared to be hands-on, coaching-style managers who customize and calibrate their direction and feedback for their Gen Z employees.

## Which single characteristic among the following do you most value in a leader/boss?\*



“There is a great generational shift underway in the workforce today.”

**KIRK BAUMANN**  
VICE PRESIDENT  
CAREER SERVICES  
ENACTUS

### THE COWORKERS: TAKE THEM SERIOUSLY, PLEASE

Though this generation feels that working with Gen Yers will be very or somewhat easy (79 percent), they believe working with the baby boomer generation will be very or somewhat difficult (45 percent). Survey respondents anticipate different work ethics, values and expectations will be the greatest challenge for them in working in a multigenerational workforce (50 percent). They also worry that boomers will view them as “kids” and not take their ideas seriously.

“There is a great generational shift underway in the workforce today,” Baumann says. “More experienced people may be a little put off by the attitude and behavior of the new workforce. So part of that may be a reaction to how more experienced people respond to them.”

McDonald also says that although Gen Zers may look at boomers and think, “I can’t learn anything from them,” they also fear that boomers will feel the same way about them. To combat this concern, he advises both boomers and Gen Xers to respect Gen Z employees, to value their ideas and to share their passion.



RainmakerThinking's Tulgan sheds light on the damage older, more experienced workers can cause when they treat younger, less-experienced workers like they're immature, are in too much of a hurry, or their youthful energy and enthusiasm is "too much." He recalls the following story one young person told him in an interview:

"Somebody took a young professional aside and said, 'Cool your jets. You seem too enthusiastic. It makes you seem immature. Don't you realize? Nobody takes you seriously until you've been here for a couple of years.' And you know what she said? She said, 'I thought it was so weird they thought I would stay some place for a couple of years where no one was taking me seriously.'"

## 5 Tips to Connect With Gen Z

1

**Show them that you value their ideas and respect them.**

2

**Stay up to date with the most relevant technology.**

3

**Talk to them face-to-face. Make genuine connections that go beyond technology.**

4

**Give them input and feedback.**

5

**Be authentic.**



## Conclusion

Gen Z represents a tipping point as baby boomers move out and Gens X and Y move up, Tulgan says. Gen Zers are eager to contribute and make their mark. The key is to respect them, nurture them, and help focus their energy and enthusiasm. Companies that embrace Gen Zers and step up retention efforts will be rewarded with their hard work, good ideas and passionate engagement.

"You're not going to hire a young, self-starting, high performer today who's going to want to come in and get a feel for the place for a couple of years," Tulgan says. "They want to hit the ground running and add value right away, and they want to invent new things; they want to make existing things smarter, faster and better. They want to do things better, they want to identify problems nobody else has identified, and they want to solve problems that nobody else has solved."

**Get ready to cultivate the potential of Gen Z.**



# Acknowledgments

Robert Half would like to recognize and thank Enactus for its collaboration and contribution to our *Get Ready for Generation Z* report. We also would like to acknowledge Bruce Tulgan of RainmakerThinking, Kirk Baumann and Bev Graham of Enactus, and Paul McDonald of Robert Half for their analysis of the survey data and the valuable insights contributed to the study. And finally, we would like to express our appreciation to the hundreds of student-members of Enactus who participated in our survey.



# About Enactus

Enactus is a community of student, academic and business leaders committed to using entrepreneurial action to transform lives, improve livelihoods and shape a better, more sustainable world. The organization provides a platform for teams of university students to create innovative projects that put people's own ingenuity and talents at the center of improving their lives, livelihoods and communities. Guided by educators and supported by business leaders, students depart the comfort of the classroom, the ambiguities of academic theory and engage in real-world projects to improve the lives of others.

**To learn more, visit [enactus.org](http://enactus.org).**





# About Robert Half

Founded in 1948, Robert Half is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm and a recognized leader in professional consulting and staffing services. The company's specialized staffing divisions include Accountemps®, Robert Half® Finance & Accounting and Robert Half® Management Resources, for temporary, full-time and senior-level project professionals, respectively, in the fields of accounting and finance; OfficeTeam®, for highly skilled administrative support professionals; Robert Half® Technology, for project and full-time technology professionals; Robert Half® Legal, for project and full-time staffing of lawyers, paralegals and legal support personnel; and The Creative Group®, for interactive, design, marketing, advertising and public relations professionals. Robert Half also is the parent company of Protiviti®, a global consulting firm that helps companies solve problems in finance, technology, operations, governance, risk and internal audit.

Robert Half has staffing and consulting operations in more than 400 locations worldwide.

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