

Business and Professional Women's Foundation

Understanding a New Generation

Many myths persist regarding younger generations, such as Millennials (born 1981–99) and Gen Xers (born 1965–80), which can have a negative effect to how these young careerists are perceived and treated in the workplace. (As defined by Business and Professional Women's Foundation, young careerists are between the ages of 18 and 35.) While opportunities abound, young careerists—especially women—must confront lingering prejudices, limitations, stereotypes, expectations and difficult choices. Employers and managers should recognize that these young workers are the future of organizations, and acknowledge that these emerging leaders have much to offer the burgeoning global labor force.

MYTH

The playing field has been leveled: women and men have essentially the same opportunities to secure successful, profitable careers.

FACT

Women are still over-represented in low-paying jobs.

- » Forty-four percent of employed women work in technical, sales and administrative support jobs.¹
- » Women are more likely to have white-collar jobs as professionals (23 percent versus 16 percent for men) and in administrative support (22 percent versus 8 percent for men), which typically offer a lower wage.²

MYTH

The percentage of female students enrolled in higher education now outnumbers that of males.

FACT

Higher enrollment rates of women at the undergraduate level—57 percent of bachelor's degrees are obtained by women, versus 43 percent by men, according to the Department of Education's latest statistics—have not translated into equal graduate enrollment rates.³

MYTH

Young careerists today are, on average, the most educated generation to enter the workforce, and particularly regarding their technological skills, it is not difficult for young people to obtain secure jobs within the labor force.

FACT

Fifty-three percent of all temporary or intermittent workers are under age 35.

- » Temporary jobs on average pay lower wages.
- » Temporary employees are more likely than permanent workers to experience periods of unemployment and to live near the poverty line.⁴

MYTH Female young careerists have many more opportunities to attain high level jobs because men and women typically have the same prospects to achieve management positions.⁵

FACT While the occupational profile of employed women has diversified and improved since the late 1970s, this progress has not resulted in similar growth within the upper levels of management.

MYTH Employees from the younger generations are apathetic and self-centered.

FACT Young careerists tend to be accepting of multiculturalism and the broadest definitions of diversity, while exhibiting a willingness to fight for social justice both within the workplace and the broader community and world.

MYTH Young careerists are idle and exhibit limited drive to excel in their jobs.

FACT Dedication to goals, a self-starter mentality and pursuing passions are key skills that young careerists bring to the workplace.

» Raised in an environment where they were told to pursue their passions, young careerists tend to be more confident and willing to take risks to pursue their interests entrepreneurially.

» The Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that the self-employed category will grow 5 percent between 2004–14, compared with 2 percent growth from 1994–2004.

MYTH Young careerists expect to have challenging, meaningful work right from the start of their first job, and are reluctant, or even averse, to more mundane tasks.

FACT Young employees recognize that even mundane office duties have to be done by someone; they just don't want mindless tasks to comprise the entirety of their workday.

» Today's workplace is transactional.

» Successful managers can best engage young careerists by offering short-term growth opportunities, rather than expecting young careerists to stick it out on the promise of more interesting work based on long-term residency.⁶

MYTH Young careerists are not loyal.

FACT Even though young careerists switch jobs frequently, this should not be interpreted as disloyalty.

» Young careerists change jobs because of dedication to the values instilled in them by their parents: valuing their time, learning new things and finding personal fulfillment through one's work. Therefore, they leave jobs when they do not experience personal growth.

» Because of their team mentality, young careerists are generally willing to ask for help and advice, and they tend to feel committed to their colleagues and employer.

» Even if they don't have qualms about leaving the organization as a whole, young careerists are generally concerned about jilting their workplace "team."⁷

MYTH

With the influx of working mothers in the labor force, workplaces have widely adopted more accommodating policies, so when young careerists choose to leave their jobs, it is the result of a personal decision to place familial responsibilities over career advancement.

FACT

Most women—86 percent—who leave their careers cite workplace constraints, such as inflexible jobs or maternal profiling, as the primary reason why they left the labor force.⁸

MYTH

Mature employees often feel edged out of the workplace to make room for younger, more technologically savvy careerists.

FACT

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act protects only workers over age 40, so young careerists—not their older colleagues—are most at risk for age discrimination.⁹

- » Young careerists are more likely to be laid off than mature workers.
- » In September and October 2001, workers ages 16–24 suffered 95 percent of all job losses.
- » Young employees are six times more likely than their older counterparts to be unemployed.¹⁰ *SWD*

Young careerists tend to be accepting of multiculturalism and the broadest definitions of diversity.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Women's Bureau of the United States Department of Labor. (1993, June).
- ² 2006 Statistics, Canada.
- ³ Clune, M., Nunez, A. & Choy, S. (2001, May).
- ⁴ Jorgensen, Helene. 1999. *When Good Jobs Go Bad: Young Adults and Temporary Work in the New Economy*. Washington DC: The 2030 Center.
- ⁵ Bond, J., Thompson, C., Galinsky, E. & Protzas, D. (2003), p. 7.
- ⁶ <http://blog.penelopetrunk.com/2007/06/21/trying-to-keep-young-workers-from-quitting-your-job-its-not-about-money/>
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Williams, J., Manvell, J. & Bomstein, S. (2006). *'Opt Out' or Pushed Out?: How the Press Covers Work/Family Conflict: The Untold Story of Why Women Leave the Workforce*, p. 4. The Center for Work-Life Law at The University of California, Hastings College of Law, www.worldlifelaw.org.
- ⁹ <http://www.youngworkersunited.org/article.php?id=39>
- ¹⁰ Sum, Andrew, Taggart, Robert, et al. *The National Economic Recession and Its Impacts on Employment Among the Nation's Young Adults (16–24 Years Old): The Untold Story of Rising Youth Joblessness*. Center for Labor Market Studies, Northeastern University, Boston, February 2002.