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
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.  

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. 

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

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. 

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. 

Young careerists are not loyal. 

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.”
**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

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**ENDNOTES**

⁷ Ibid.
⁹ http://www.youngworkerunited.org/article.php?id=39