

Background

Y this Generation?

Employers are facing a new challenge, the challenge of integrating Generation Y into the workplace. Generation Y or Gen Y is the term given to people who were born after 1980 and grew up in the 1980s and 90s. They are posing a unique challenge to managers and companies with traditional company structures.

Gen Yers are characterized as being **brash**, ambitious, and confident. They are **no-nonsense** people who know what they want and want to get there on their own terms. They are the computer generation, completely at home with technology.

¹ _____. Generation Yers are the writers of blogs, users of networking sites, and senders of instant messages. Some say they have short attention spans, whilst others claim they are the ultimate multi-taskers, but Gen Yers are always on the go, thinking nothing of carrying on a conversation while zipping off a text message and having one ear attached to their MP3 player. But now the Y generation is coming into the workplace and two worlds are colliding.

The first problem Gen Yers create in the workplace is their short-termism. The Y generation is more interested in short-term gain than the long-term career outlook their parents and grandparents displayed. ² _____. 'If they are not being engaged at work or don't feel that they're getting a fair deal, they're happy to look for a better opportunity elsewhere,' says Jackie Cornell, an employment expert from Toronto. 'They often officially put their decision to leave a job down to a lack of opportunity,' Cornell continues, 'and it is true that over the last few years we have seen companies **strip away** levels of middle management, which means there are fewer opportunities for progress.'

Cornell goes on to point out that **off the record** Gen Yers are far more likely to blame bad management for their decision to leave companies. 'Management and the new generation are likely to **lock horns** over a number of issues,' Cornell explains, 'and this can lead to a tense working environment'. Management consultant Jeff Winderbeck takes up the story. 'Gen Yers are not afraid to say what they think.' ³ _____. They have high expectations of themselves and their bosses and will speak out if those expectations are not being met. This causes obvious conflict with traditional managers who expect their employees to do as they are told and find this questioning attitude **audacious** and rude.'

Winderbeck also claims that the Generation Y employees have problems with traditional working methods. They seem to want to wear what they want to work and work when they want, not when they are told to work. 'The issue of when to work is an important one,' claims Cornell. 'Whereas their parents **paid lip service to** work-life balance, the Gen Yers are far more serious about it.' This computer generation wants to use its computer expertise to allow them to work where they want and when they want.

⁴ _____. Keith Hardy, the MD of a medium-sized company in Perth, Australia, does not have much time for the new generation of workers. 'I've been advised that to appeal to this new generation I should provide dedicated Facebook time, **chill-out** zones, and allow people to wear what they want to work.' ⁵ _____. People need to learn that they come here to work – they can play on their computers at home.' But Hardy's attitude might have to change if he wants to attract and keep a new generation of staff at his company.

Reading file 5

- 1 Work with a partner and discuss these questions.**
 - 1 What do you think 'Generation Y' is?
 - 2 How might it be affecting the traditional workplace?
- 2 Read the text quickly. Compare your answers in 1 with the information in the text.**
- 3 The following sentences (a–e) have all been taken from the text. Read the text again quickly and match the sentences to gaps 1–5.**
 - a But this is a workplace.
 - b If they think that something isn't working they will say so.
 - c Figures suggest that over 90% of people from Gen Y own a computer, while a similar number regularly download music.
 - d That means they are far more willing to move between jobs than their parents were.
 - e They do not want to be slaves to the 9–5 regime.
- 4 Work with a partner. Read the text again and decide if the following statements are true (T) or false (F) or if it doesn't say (D). Give reasons for your answers.**
 - 1 All Gen Y people have access to technology at home.
 - 2 People from Gen Y are focused on now rather than on the future when it comes to work.
 - 3 Gen Y people are very loyal to the companies they work for.
 - 4 Gen Y people tend to speak their mind.
 - 5 Gen Y people think they should be allowed to take year-long career breaks.
 - 6 Keith Hardy does not approve of the attitude of Gen Yers.
- 5 Match the words and phrases in bold in the text to definitions 1–8.**
 - 1 get involved in an argument or a disagreement with someone
 - 2 showing too much confidence in a way that others find rude or shocking
 - 3 someone who likes things to be simple and direct
 - 4 over-confident
 - 5 to say you approve of or support something without proving you support it by what you actually do
 - 6 relaxing
 - 7 an unofficial comment that is not to be repeated or made public
 - 8 to remove anything that is not necessary
- 6 Work with a partner. Make a new sentence for each word or phrase in 5.**
- 7 Look back at the text and choose three words that you could use in your day-to-day work.**
- 8 Work with a partner. Discuss these questions.**
 - 1 If you are a Gen Y person, do you agree with the description of you in the text? If you are not from Gen Y do you think this is a good description of people born after 1980?
 - 2 Do similar problems exist between the generations in your workplace?
 - 3 Do you think Gen Y employees will benefit a company? Why? / Why not?