



Career advice Generation Z needs to hear

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We've all heard about Generation Z. Some readers no doubt wear the label proudly.

And while each generation has unique cultural markers shaping their attitudes toward relationships, politics, and previous generations, what I want to focus on here is how those among us who were born after 1997 or so view work.

We all want to be successful in our lives and careers. As such, I thought it would be helpful to provide a few pointers that might help Generation Z better navigate the complex and often confusing employment landscape.

I'll do this by highlighting some of the phrases I've heard members of Generation Z use – phrases indicating a potential lack of understanding of the occupational realm.

“I want to be successful, but I don't want to work that hard.”

OK. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but there is a strong correlation between hard work and success, financial and otherwise. Not for you? No problem. Just don't expect the same level of success as those who do.

It turns out several rigorous, empirical, scientific studies have found a strong link between effort and results.

These next three are related to one of my favorite topics: being on time.

“I'll get there when I get there,” or “I'll get to it when I get to it.”

Newsflash: You are generally not in control of the schedule, your employer is. So don't be surprised when you show up late and no longer have a job. Companies are looking for folks they can depend on, which means “getting to it” when your supervisor wants it done. You don't want to discover the door you entered has become an exit.

“I want to take time for me whenever I need it.”

Go ahead. And if you do it too often, eventually you'll have all the “me” time your heart desires.

“I need time to play my video games.”

Why do you think God invented weekends? We had video games, too, back in the day. But we always understood they were a hobby, not a lifestyle. Being an adult means making tradeoffs sometimes. But the more time you spend in the proverbial “real world” as opposed to the one that only exists on a screen, the more prepared you'll be to handle life's challenges.

“Assignments are optional.”

Apparently, some of my students believe this. And then they are shocked when they don't get any credit for work they didn't turn in. This one obviously defies logic, but not everything is negotiable.

“I want you to be my friend as well as my boss.”

Yes. And I want to be an astronaut. Regardless of how much your employer portrays the working environment as a family affair, always remember that when push comes to shove, budget realities trump interpersonal relationships.

“I just do whatever works.”

Well, if that includes lying, cheating, or stealing, you might want to re-think this maxim. If you don't have a moral compass, and believe the end always justifies the means, you are a lawsuit waiting to happen. And employers generally don't like being sued.

“I need my phone in my hand at all times.”

This type of attitude usually means you have confused “wants” with “needs.” Sit down and pay attention: There are times when you are going to have to leave your phone by itself while you focus on getting your work done.

“I deserve to be happy.”

Your happiness is your responsibility; the world doesn't owe you anything. The sooner you realize this, the happier you will be.

I know all of this can seem a bit overwhelming; certainly, it's not what many of you were taught. The good news is you're not obligated to do any of this stuff.

You are perfectly welcome to continue living in your parents' basement for as long as they let you - and you can keep blaming everyone and everything else for your less-than-ideal life circumstances.

In fact, I know several people in their 30s and 40s who still yell up the stairs every evening asking what's for dinner. No shame. Some of my friends peaked in high school, too.



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