

NOT EVERYONE GETS A TROPHY



THIRD EDITION

HOW TO BRING OUT THE BEST **IN YOUNG TALENT**

BRUCE TULGAN

BESTSELLING AUTHOR of

IT'S OKAY TO BE THE BOSS and *MANAGING GENERATION X*

WILEY

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This book is dedicated (now re-re-dedicated) to Frances Coates Applegate



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● NEW PREFACE TO THE REVISED AND UPDATED THIRD EDITION

I wrote this book with a clear mission: To help leaders and managers—mostly those who are older and more experienced—bring out the best in their newest new young workforce.

We have been hard at work on that mission since 1993, when I first began the research that led to my first book, *Managing Generation X*, about bringing out the best in those of my own generation when we were the new young workforce. Even as Gen Xers have aged, our work on that mission has continued, based on what is now decades of ongoing research tracking the attitudes and behavior of the ever-emerging ever-“newer” new young workforce.

We began tracking the first-wave Millennials (born 1978–1989) in the late 1990s, when the second-wave Millennials (born 1990–1996) were in diapers. And as the second-wave Millennials were coming of age in the late aughts, we were already trying to figure out where Generation Z begins (after 1996) and followed them into the workplace beginning in 2013 or so. As the pace of change

accelerates and the generational cohorts get smaller, we've kept our finger on the pulse of each new emerging young workforce through many twists and turns.

Of course, there are *some* things about being young and new in the workplace that do remain much the same from generation to generation. Every new generation has its own unique formative history and comes into the workplace challenging—often inadvertently—the current status quo in new, unexpected ways that are largely determined by the accidents of history shaping each new era. Still the trend lines are clear from Generation X to the first-wave Millennials and through the second wave and Generation Z . . . and very likely beyond Gen Z, at least for the foreseeable future.

The publication of this revised and updated third edition of *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy* is happening precisely because there have been so many twists and turns since the second edition of this book was published and also because our research about the new young workforce has proven to be so accurate and the best-practices we've identified have proven to be so effective for leaders and managers. Leaders and managers of young people tell me every day that they have read and reread this book to remind themselves about where young people today are really coming from and where they are going.

So many business leaders have told me that they buy this book for every leader they know who is managing young people today because the book is filled with practical step-by-step solutions for recruiting, onboarding, training, performance-management, motivation, retention, and leadership-development.

But it's not just that. It's also because so many of the other so-called experts on young people in the workplace

have been giving managers such bad advice—starting way back in the early '90s (when I was a young Gen Xer) throughout the era when Millennials were young and now still with the advent of Generation Z. Too many of these experts tell managers they need to praise young workers effusively regardless of performance, help them work only in their chosen areas of passion and strength, reward them with trophies just for showing up, let them work whenever they want, leave them alone to manage themselves, eliminate managers, try to make work “fun”—and all now as more and more workers of all ages are working remotely at least some of the time.

For 99 percent of managers, that advice is nonsense.

Young people are *not* a bunch of disloyal, delicate, lazy, greedy, disrespectful, inappropriate slackers with short attention spans who only want to learn from computers, only want to communicate with hand-held devices, and won't take “no” for an answer. Our research demonstrates clearly—from generation to generation—that most young people with any ambition at all want leaders who take them seriously at work, not leaders who try to humor them; leaders who set them up for success in the real world, not leaders who pretend they are succeeding no matter what they do.

I hear from real managers on the front lines every day and the results are clear. The real-world strategies and tactics in this book (fine-tuned with each edition) are helping managers attract, motivate, and retain the best young workers today:

- Young workers today need strong, highly engaged managers;
- Young workers need structure and boundaries;

- Young workers need guidance, direction, support, and coaching;
- Young workers need clear expectations;
- Young workers need to know that somebody is keeping score;
- Young workers need to understand the quid pro quo of work every step of the way.

Yes, of course, today's young people want more money, more flexibility, more training, more interesting projects, and more exposure to decision makers. Yes, they want more of everything! But they don't expect any of it on a silver platter. They just want to know, every step of the way, "Exactly what do I need to do to earn that?!"

Every day, in our seminars, I teach leaders and managers the strategies and tactics in this book. Nonetheless we are fighting against very strong widespread myths about the emerging workforce—first Gen X, then the Millennials, now Gen Z, and whoever comes next—and a lot of bad management advice. Young people in the workplace are still vastly misunderstood, and leaders and managers struggle every day to attract, motivate, and retain the best.

The Ever-New Ever-Emerging New Young Workforce

How do we recognize a new generation when we see one? Demographers, sociologists, historians, and other "experts" often debate this very question, just as experts differ about the exact parameters of each generation.

There is plenty of debate among demographers about where Generation X begins and ends—and the Millennials;

and Generation Z. The definitions are always in flux because the boundaries are fuzzy.

Even the parameters of the Baby Boomers are subject to debate: While the general consensus is that the Boomers were born 1946–1964, there are huge differences between those born early in the Baby Boom (who were teenagers in the late 1950s and early 1960s) and those born late in the Boom (who came of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s).

Similarly, the great Millennial cohort (whether one marks the beginning with 1978, as we do, or 1981, like some others) simply must be treated as two distinct waves, coming of age in two very distinct decades. It is something of a moving target. But we now define the first wave Millennials as those born 1978–1989 and the second wave as those born 1990–1996, with the post-Millennial generation starting with the birth year 1997, known to most as “Generation Z.”

Gen Zers were tiny children on 9/11/2001. They started high school at the end of the deepest and most protracted global recession (2008–2010) since the Great Depression and (maybe) attended high school (or college or university) during the disruptions of the global pandemic. They are entering the workforce in a post-pandemic “new normal” of remote and hybrid work, permanently constrained resources, increased requirements placed on workers, and fewer promised rewards for nearly everyone. From day one, they find themselves bumping up against a crowded field of “career-delayed” Millennials, not to mention plenty of even older workers who themselves may have faced their own career setbacks. Meanwhile, Gen Zers—unlike any other generation in history—can look forward to a lifetime of interdependency and competition with a rising global youth-tide from every corner of this ever-flattening world.

While the Millennials (especially first-wave Millennials) were children of the peace and prosperity of the 1990s, Generation Z are children of the war and uncertainty and recession and pandemic of the 2000s. They have been indelibly shaped by an era of profound change and perpetual anxiety.

As a whole, Generation Z—and those new young workers who will follow—represent a continuation, and perhaps the culmination, of much larger historical forces driving the transformation in the workplace and the workforce that will redefine the experience of workers of all ages in the decades to come:

- Globalization
- Constantly advancing technology
- The death of the myth of job security
- The never-ending ever-expanding information firehose
- The accelerating pace of everything
- Increasing human diversity in every dimension

In that sense there is great continuity in the long Generational Shift from the Boomers to X to the Millennials to Z and beyond. After all, regardless of generation, we are all living through these historical changes together.

In another sense, Generation Z represent a whole new breed of worker, who will usher in the final stages of the great generational shift under way in the workforce.

Advances in information technology have made Gen Z the first generation of true “digital natives.” They learned to think, learn, and communicate in an environment defined by wireless Internet ubiquity, wholesale technology integration, infinite content, and immediacy. They are totally plugged in—through social media, search engines,

and instant messaging—to each other as well as anyone and everyone, and to an infinite array of answers to any question at any time. As a result most Gen Zers grew up way too fast. That’s why they seem so precocious.

At the same time, helicopter-parenting reached a new apex during their childhoods. Partly for that reason, relationship boundaries have blurred: Gen Zers have seemingly grown accustomed to being treated almost as customers/users of services and products provided by institutions and authority figures. Parents and their parenting-posses (relatives, friends, teachers, coaches, counselors, doctors, and vendors in every realm) are mobilized to supervise and support every move of children, validate their differences, excuse (or medicate) their weaknesses, and set them up with every material advantage possible.

As the Baby Boomers (especially first wave Boomers) are steadily exiting the workforce, the simultaneous rising global youth-tide of Generation Z and beyond represents a tipping point in numbers, norms and values.

Sorry to say, this book offers no easy solutions. The book does offer many, many difficult partial solutions for recruiting the best young talent; helping them get on board and up to speed in your organization; form new bonds with your organization, their new colleagues, and their managers; perform successfully, add value, keep learning and growing and earning more and more of what they need and want. If you want high performance out of young workers, you had better commit to high-maintenance management. That is, ultimately, the message of *Not Everyone Gets a Trophy*.

—Bruce Tulgan

● CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS IT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE WORKPLACE?

They keep telling me, “Here’s what you get in five years, ten years, twenty years . . .” But they expect me to come back to work tomorrow. What do I get *tomorrow*?

—*Twentysomething*

Not long ago, the president of a health care consulting firm told me he had just interviewed a twenty-five-year-old man for a job in his firm. The young candidate came to the interview armed with a number of ordinary questions about job duties, salary, and benefits. When these questions were answered, he made a request: “You should know that surfing is really important to me and there might be days when the surf’s really up. Would you mind if I came in a little later on those days?”

• • •

At a major food conglomerate, summer interns are usually given an assignment, such as a big data-entry project, that they can complete during the course of their summer employment. An executive there shared with me the story of one of his latest interns: “On the first day, she announced she had invented a new cereal. She had a box, complete with artwork and a bag of her cereal inside, that she called her ‘prototype.’ Clearly she had gone to great lengths, including the recipe and nutritional information and preparing a slide show. She wanted to know when she would be able to pitch her idea to senior executives. ‘The sooner the better,’ she said.”

• • •

An experienced nurse-manager in a busy hospital told me she stopped a new young nurse from administering the wrong medicine by intravenous drip to a patient. The manager pulled the young nurse aside and explained emphatically how serious a mistake she almost made. “I explained that this is how patients die unnecessarily. I told her, ‘You need to check the wrist bracelet, then the patient’s chart, then the charge list, then the IV bag. Then you need to check them *all* again.’” Before she was finished, the young nurse interrupted her. “Actually, you are doing this conversation wrong,” she told her boss. “You are supposed to give me some positive feedback before you criticize my work.” How did the manager respond? “Okay. Nice shoes. Now, about that IV bag . . .”

• • •

A group of executives in the U.S. Peace Corps reported that program administrators receive e-mails on a regular basis from parents making suggestions and requests about the living accommodations and work conditions of their children stationed on missions around the world. One of the Peace Corps executives told me, “I just got an e-mail from a parent saying the meals being provided don’t meet his kid’s dietary needs. Could we get this young man on a nondairy diet?” The funny thing is that generals in the U.S. Army have told me similar stories about the parents of soldiers.

• • •

Another experienced manager, this one in a retail organization, told me an even more striking story. This

manager was trying to correct a young associate who had just spoken rudely to a customer. The young man turned to his boss and said, “You know what? I’m thinking about buying this place. And the way you are going, you are going to be the first one out of here!”

• • •

Managing people has never been easy. Stuck between employer and employees, managers are tasked with the tough job of negotiating their (often) competing needs and expectations. But as these stories illustrate, being a manager is even more difficult whenever a new generation enters the workforce—which is . . . *always*—bringing with it new attitudes and behaviors. Every day, leaders and managers in organizations of all shapes and sizes in just about every industry all over the Western world tell me stories of consternation about working with the newest generation of young employees.

Managers have been telling me, now, for decades . . . and I expect they’ll be saying these things for decades henceforth as well:

“New young workers walk in the door on day one with very high expectations.”

“Young people today don’t want to pay their dues and climb the ladder.”

“They walk in the door with seventeen things they want to change about the company.”

“They only want to do the best tasks.”

“If you don’t supervise them closely, they go off in their own direction.”

“It’s very hard to give them negative feedback without crushing their morale.”

“They walk in thinking they know a lot more than they know.”

And, of course, since the early 2000s, I’ve been hearing this one with increasing frequency:

“They think everybody is going to get a trophy in the real world, just like they did growing up.”

The vast majority of leaders and managers seem to think young people have an attitude problem and it seems this is always the case whenever a new generation is entering the workforce.

Does every new generation of young workers irritate the older, more experienced ones?

At the early career stage of life, young people are just learning to break away from the care of others (parents, teachers, institutions) and taking steps toward self-sufficiency and responsibility. Some do it more slowly than others. As they move into the adult world with the energy and enthusiasm—and lack of experience—that is natural at that stage—they are bound to clash with more mature generations.

And yet as much as human experience—such as the rite of passage into the workforce—stays the same over time, the world doesn’t. One epoch may be defined by an ice age, another by global warming. What makes each generation different are these accidents of history that shape the larger world in which human beings move through their developmental life stages. While every generation rocks the boat when they join the adult world, they also bring with them

defining characteristics that alter the rules of the game for everyone going forward.

Young people in the workplace of the past may have been expected to grow up, settle down, and become more and more like the grown-ups. Not so with young people entering the workforce these days. Their “attitudes” are probably not likely to become more like attitudes from the workplace of the past; their high-maintenance reputation is all too real. Still, the whole picture is more complicated. Yes, for the foreseeable future, young people will be more difficult to recruit, retain, motivate, and manage than new generations in the past. But they also bring the capacity to be the most high-performing workforce in history for those who know how to manage them properly.

Generational Change Is Real

I began conducting in-depth interviews with young people in the workplace back in 1993, when I was myself a young person in the workplace. Way back then I was a lawyer at Number Two Wall Street in New York City!

For decades now, we’ve been tracking the ever-emerging ever-“newer” new young workforce. By the late 1990s, we started tracking the first wave of the great Millennial cohort (born 1978–1989); by the early 2000s, we were tracking the second wave Millennials (born 1990–1996); and in 2013, we first began looking at Generation Zers, when they first entered the workforce as teenagers in part-time jobs. We’ve been following Generation Z ever since.

Since 1993 and every step of the way, we’ve kept our finger on the pulse of the new young workforce, maintaining a comprehensive picture of where they are coming from and where they are going in the changing workplace.