

The Attention Apocalypse is Upon Us



Zena Consulting
Founder / Owner

In June I wrote about older workers' age-related discrimination and covered the same topic from younger people's perspective in July. This month's focus is on the lack of focus caused by tech, generational differences around the problem, and what leaders can do about it.

Jonathan Haidt is a NYT bestselling author of *"The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness"*, (2024). In a recent [LinkedIn article](#) he warns that we are living through the biggest "civilizational shift" since the printing press was invented. But these changes have unfolded in just 15 years- not over centuries.

Haidt notes that billions of brains are now tethered to the "meta-world". Smartphones have transformed cognition, social norms, and mental health-- yet provided almost zero protection for young, developing brains.

These devices have rapidly rewired human attention- with an emphasis on novelty, validation, and 24/7 stimulation. Shorter attention spans result in lower levels of conscientiousness and sustained focus; traits that are tied to responsibility, follow-through, and self-control, (see chart, right.)



[Image link](#)

How to Help Analogue / Digital Teams Be More Productive

Leaders of teams can bridge the tech gap and strengthen outcomes with these simple strategies:

- 1. Normalize Deep Work:** Encourage "focus blocks" or device-free time where teams can work without interruption but also get a chance to talk directly with each other, in real time.
- 2. Rethink Meetings:** Establish phone-free or laptop-closed meetings to promote active listening and engagement. You'll quickly learn who pays close attention and truly participates.
- 3. Mentorship Across Generations:** Pair digital natives with digital immigrants to balance adaptability with deep focus and follow-through. Remember, Gen Alpha can't relate to life without the internet.
- 4. Build Digital Hygiene:** Offer attention management training, with tips to reduce notification overload.
- 5. Redefine Productivity:** Shift away from "always-on" culture toward outcomes and quality of work.

206.368.9608 | LEE@ZENACONSULTING.COM | SEATTLE | BELLINGHAM | WASHINGTON | USA