

Employers! Does iGen Require Parenting?

By **Robert W. Wendover**, *Principal of Common Sense Enterprises*



Yes, you read that question right. In her brand new book, *iGen*, San Diego State University psychologist and author, Jean Twenge maintains that, “Maybe today’s teens and young adults have an underdeveloped frontal cortex because they have not been given adult responsibilities.”

The brain’s frontal cortex, of course, functions as our center for reasoning and judgment. (*iGeners*, by the way, are defined as those born 1995 and later, making the oldest 22 this year. Others have labeled them *Nexters* and *Generation Z*.) While this is a rather explosive hypothesis, Dr. Twenge has the research to back it up. Historically employers have assumed that young applicants arrive with basic life skills, this is no longer the case for many.

Teen participation in the workforce is also at a fifty-year low, meaning that the majority of new high school and college graduates applying for jobs have little, if any, understanding of the rigors and rhythm of full-time work. If you hire them, anticipate another level of complexity to your already busy days.

A business owner recently told me he started a newly-minted engineering graduate on a Monday. The next day was a payday for the organization. This young man asked why he didn’t get paid. The owner explained that payday is every other Tuesday and if he completed his time sheet every day, he would be paid in the next cycle. After two weeks, this young professional complained he still hadn’t been paid. Upon investigation, the owner discovered that no time sheet had been submitted. “Why do I need to complete a time sheet?” this engineer objected. “You see me in the office every day.” Does this sound familiar? Brace yourself. It will become more widespread.

So what should you do? Here are three quick and easy suggestions:

Send them an orientation video before their first day. Assume every new hire possesses little, if any, work experience. Include items like, what to wear, what time to arrive, where to park, where people eat lunch, what to expect the first week, and so on. Need

ideas? Ask those hired the past six months what they wish they would have known beforehand. But the way, the video should “star” one of their age peers, not the HR manager or a top exec.

Be extraordinarily specific in your instructions for the first 30 days. The nature of communication has become more transactional. This means that many young people struggle understand nuance and are uncomfortable inferring what to do from off-handed instructions. Simply saying, “figure it out” may result in an employee who fails to act and is afraid to ask for clarification. This doesn’t mean you have to conjure up your inner control freak. As employees assimilate, back off from these specific instructions as they become more comfortable thinking for themselves.

Buddy them with a recent newcomer for the first few weeks. Those who have joined the organization within the past twelve months still possess empathy for those to the job. No only will this provide a bit aid and comfort to the new contributor, but it might also give you a quick look at how the buddy coaches and even trains others.

The iGen experience has been significantly different than that of previous generations, including the Millennials. Take time to get ahead of the attitudes and practices of this new cohort before they become a force to be reckoned with.



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