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BUSINESS LAW FIRM FOR AFRICA

UNDERSTANDING GENERATION AT THE WORKPLACE

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As any company, we have a lot of interviews we do, but as the years go by we have noticed the candidates during job interviews seemed more detached, yet more demanding. Most questions were centered on the work environment rather than the salary, focused was placed on how much free time would be available rather than how much extra hours could generate. Most of interviewees wanted to know if their future work place would be a one in which they would be seen, understood, accepted and treated with respect. Candidates who mostly asked these questions were individuals from Generation Z.

Generation Z (commonly referred to as Gen Z) comprises people born approximately between 1996 and 2010.

This generation's identity has been shaped by the digital age, climate anxiety, a shifting financial landscape, and COVID-19…

They are a bunch of definitions that tend to explain or give a better grasp of what Generation Z could actually be but the above terms are the one that are the most recurrent and maybe the most expressive. This definition should however not give us an illusion of negativity, on the contrary, we should keep in mind the idea of *disruptive change*. Gen Z clearly has specific characteristics that are commonly found among them, that represent their strengths, their weaknesses, and simply make them stand out, especially at their various work places:

- Technologically Savvy: Gen Z is considered the first true digital native generation. They have grown up with technology, social media, and the internet as an integral part of their lives. They are adept at using digital tools and are quick to adopt new technologies. Gen Z individuals are often highly skilled in using technology and navigating digital platforms. They are comfortable with the latest gadgets and tools, which can be advantageous in a technology-driven world. In the day to day life;

- Diversity and Inclusion: Gen Z tends to be more diverse and inclusive compared to previous generations. They embrace and celebrate a range of identities, cultures, and perspectives. They are often more open-minded and accepting of differences in race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation;

- Entrepreneurial Mindset: Gen Z individuals have witnessed the rise of startups and entrepreneurial success stories. They tend to be entrepreneurial-minded, seeking opportunities for self-employment and innovation. They are likely to start their own businesses;

- Socially Conscious: Many Gen Z individuals prioritize social and environmental issues. They are known for being socially conscious, and they actively engage in activism, advocating for causes such as climate change, racial justice, and gender equality. They are more likely to support brands that align with their values;

- Individualistic: Gen Z tends to value individuality and personal expression. They often seek unique experiences and strive to stand out from the crowd. They are more likely to express themselves through creative outlets such as fashion, art, music, and content creation;

- Financial Pragmatism: Growing up during economic recessions and witnessing the financial struggles of previous generations, Gen Z tends to be financially pragmatic. They prioritize financial stability and are generally more cautious about their spending habits and saving for the future.

As this generation has grown up in a rapidly changing world and has demonstrated adaptability and resilience in the face of challenges. They are quick to learn and adjust to new situations and are often open to change, tend to be more inclusive and accepting of diversity. They value different perspectives and are often skilled at working in diverse teams, fostering collaboration and understanding. Many Gen Z individuals possess an entrepreneurial mindset. They are innovative, creative, and eager to explore new ideas. This can lead to a fresh approach to problem-solving and a willingness to take risks. It is also logical that individuals from this generation are more inclined than others to turn to entrepreneurship, because in the Cameroonian context, for example, unlike other generations, Generation Z, like Generation Y before them, has had the sad opportunity to witness the pension crisis and the inability of the entire system to take care of retired workers. This has inevitably triggered in them a refusal to depend on state institutions for the organisation of their retirement and a desire to generate income independently in order to have access to another, much more autonomous form of security.

On the other hand, growing up in the age of digital distractions, Gen Z individuals are often associated with having shorter attention spans. This can sometimes make it challenging to maintain focus and concentration for extended periods and while being tech-savvy is a strength, Gen Z's heavy reliance on technology can sometimes impact their ability to disconnect and engage in face-to-face interactions. It can also lead to issues like digital addiction and information overload.
As a relatively young generation, Gen Z may have limited professional experience compared to older generations. This lack of experience can sometimes be perceived as a weakness in certain contexts. Gen Z has grown up in an era of instant gratification and on-demand services. They may need to develop patience and perseverance when faced with long-term goals or challenges.

These characteristics and behaviors surely vary across different regions and cultures, and key aspects generally apply to Gen Z in Cameroon too. Gen Z individuals in Cameroon represent this rich diversity and interact with different cultures, languages, and traditions. They contribute to the cultural landscape of Cameroon by embracing and integrating elements from various ethnic backgrounds.

They are known for their entrepreneurial mindset. They are often seen exploring innovative business ideas, starting small ventures, and leveraging digital platforms to create and promote their businesses. This generation is driven by the desire for financial independence and the opportunity to make a positive impact in their communities.

In Cameroon, this generation actively engages in social and political issues and is passionate about promoting social justice, equality, and sustainable development. They utilize social media and online platforms to raise awareness, organize protests, and advocate for change.

Gen Z, also known as the post-millennial generation, is starting to enter the workforce and is already making a significant impact. Unlike their predecessors, their main focus remains work life balance. They prioritize flexibility and seek job opportunities that allow them to have a fulfilling personal life alongside their professional commitments. This can lead to a shift in workplace policies and practices to accommodate this need.

Their approach to work differs and is kind of outstanding, due to various factors such as technological proficiency. They bring a fresh perspective on how technology can be leveraged to improve efficiency and productivity in the workplace. Their entrepreneurial mindset tend to make them more ambitious, independent, and value opportunities for growth and advancement. This mindset can lead to increased innovation and a willingness to take risks in the workplace.

Gen Z is known for being socially conscious and environmentally aware. They are more likely to seek out companies that align with their values and are committed to social and environmental responsibility. This can drive companies to adopt more sustainable practices and engage in corporate social responsibility initiatives.

And finally, Gen Z is accustomed to working in teams and collaborating with others. They value teamwork, open communication, and feedback. This can lead to a more collaborative work environment where ideas are shared and innovation is encouraged.

Companies that recognize and adapt to these characteristics are likely to attract and retain top Gen Z talents.

As people coming from much older generations, we are mostly shocked, embarrassed or disturbed by the work ethic of Gen Z, which doesn't really fit with our approach of work in general. But there's actually a lot to learn from them as we want to keep it up with the fast paced work environment we now face. The work ethic of this generation can teach us several valuable lessons in the workplace we should consider to adapt. Gen Z's proficiency with technology teaches us to embrace and leverage digital tools and platforms to improve efficiency and productivity. They can help us adapt to new technologies and find innovative ways to streamline processes. This generation's entrepreneurial mindset reminds us to foster a culture that encourages creativity, innovation, and risk-taking.

By providing opportunities for growth and advancement, we can tap into their ambition and drive to benefit our respective organizations. Gen Z's emphasis on diversity and inclusion teaches us the importance of creating a workplace that is welcoming and accepting of all individuals. By valuing diversity and promoting inclusivity, we can create a more harmonious and productive work environment. Gen Z's focus on work-life balance reminds us to prioritize the well-being of employees. By offering flexible work arrangements and promoting a healthy work-life balance, we can enhance employee satisfaction and productivity. Gen Z's social consciousness teaches us to be more mindful of our impact on society and the environment. By adopting sustainable practices and engaging in corporate social responsibility initiatives, we can align our organization with their values and attract top

talent. Gen Z's collaborative work style teaches us the importance of teamwork and open communication. By encouraging collaboration, sharing ideas, and providing regular feedback, we can create a more inclusive and innovative work environment.

Gen Z work ethic and workplace practices strangely look alike values and expectations of most of the fast evolving modern companies…And the job is actually done. Well done. Principles of sustainability putting back the human being and his fundamental needs thus his/her well-being at the center of any given organization are being highlighted, and this, not as a mere requirement.

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Author:

Michèle Boulleys, *Operation manager* of Chazai Wamba Law Firm.