**Column: High-maintenance Generation Z heads to work**

**By Bruce Tulgan**

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After every commencement season, there's another right of passage. Employers welcome that new crop of graduates, with their new attitudes and behaviors. This year, welcome the leading edge of "Generation Z."

**Too much too soon**

In one sense, these children of the 2000s grew up way too fast. In another they never grew up at all. As young teenagers, they were chauffeured from activity to activity, all the while plugged in to the Internet through handheld devices. Even stuck at home they were still totally "connected" to their peer ecosystem through social media. With parents, teachers and counselors focused on keeping them safe and scheduled, they have nonetheless been privy to unprecedented information from a painfully young age.

So this year's 2.6 million freshly minted college graduates (holding associate's or bachelor's degrees) and 3.2 million graduates from high school are different from their immediate elders. Most are thinking about their future more like children of the 1930s and '40s than like Gen Yers in the late '90s. Nearly half of the new grads will join the workforce in the coming months, competing for jobs with millions of people their parents' age and older.

Since 1993, I've been part of a group conducting in-depth interviews with young people in the workplace. Throughout the booming 1990s, we monitored the shift from [Generation X](http://content.usatoday.com/topics/topic/Generation%2BX) to Generation Y. Now we are seeing a shift of equal measure to Generation Z.

**What we know about Zers**

So just how are they different?

Gen Zers entering the working world tell us they are dubious about their long-term prospects, but especially fearful about tomorrow.

They are less likely to resist authority than Yers, but will gravitate to people and institutions showing the ability to care for them, almost in *loco parentis*. Gen Zers are much less likely than Gen Yers to tell the boss when they disagree but more likely to share those views online. Gen Zers are much more likely than Gen Yers to be obedient to their immediate supervisors' rules, but more likely to persistently seek exceptions to inflexible employment conditions and seniority-based rewards.

Gen Zers have never known a world in which one could not be in conversation with anyone anywhere any time, and they have an even lower tolerance than Gen Yers for being digitally cut off. For Generation Yers, uniqueness was cool. They wanted to distinguish themselves as individuals. Generation Zers like to connect with others who share their interests and are doing the same things (through social media primarily).

Gen Zers are much less likely to fall into recognized opinion categories and much more likely to mix and match various points of view. Don't be surprised to find gun-toting vegans and religious fundamentalist feminists, political conflicts that would have isolated young people before the advent of social media.

We're about to find out just how worldly and precocious, but fragile and needy, Gen Zers really are. They'll be America's most high-maintenance workforce, a change for which we are unprepared

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http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-06-27/generation-z-work-millenials-social-media-graduates/55845098/1