

Fill the GAP

**Why your youngest employees are failing and what
you can do about it**

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Finally! You just finished hiring two promising young employees. You've been placing ads, following up on referrals, and even talking to employees from other businesses for months, and today you were finally able to hire the right people. At least it seems like it at this point.

That was Monday. This is Wednesday, your new hires' first day working for you. They start at 8:00 am

You're feeling optimistic, it seemed like this young man and young woman had a lot going for them, that they would be dependable, people who could solve some basic problems, and bring a degree of maturity to your younger staff.

It's 7:55 and you're waiting in your office so you can take some time to orientate them when they come. You've already told your other employees that the new hires are going to be better than the last 5 who didn't make it past the first week. You're pretty pumped by the potential you think you see in these people!

Now it's 8:00 and still no sign of either of them. You have all the safety equipment and orientation information ready to give to them so they're going to be able to hit the ground running today. At 8:05 one of them, Jason, comes walking in the front door. He doesn't seem to have a problem with being late, or even recognizing that you might have an issue with it. But still no sign of Shondra – she's nowhere to be found.

At 8:10 you take Jason into the training room and start his orientation. You are just getting into some of the critical employee expectations when Shondra opens the door and grabs a seat – it's 8:20. Now you start from

the beginning again so she doesn't miss anything important. It doesn't take long and you can tell that Jason is losing interest.

The actual orientation is actually going pretty well, so you open it up for questions just before a 10 minute break. The most pressing question they have is when do they get a raise? Then you find out that Jason is wanting to take a week off 2 weeks from now to go on a lake vacation with some buddies. Shondra doesn't like the way her boots are fitting and wants to know if you will provide her with a better pair.

When they get back from the break Jason asks when lunch is and Shondra asks if you are buying lunch for them. Both employees have their phones out constantly and are scrolling non-stop, even after you tell them that you really don't want them to be on their phones for too long.

Before lunch, Jason tells you that he won't be back until midafternoon, he's going to look at a new puppy with his mom. Shondra tells you that she will likely need a "stress day" later this week because of all the things she's expected to learn in your orientation.

And this is the GAP! It's the difference between what you need and expect when you hire someone, and what most Gen Z employees bring to the table. What we could realistically assume employees would bring regarding basic skills, attitudes and abilities can no longer be assumed.

Maybe these 2 new employees aren't all you hoped they'd be. But at least they're a couple of warm bodies. Is this all you can look forward to for the next 20 years?

20 years?!! Within the next several years the teens and young adults of today (Gen Z) will make up 27% of the workforce. There's no getting around it, you're going to have to hire them at some point. Is there any

way to help them? Or are the issues we saw in Jason and Shondra in our example what we're going to have to deal with for the next 2 decades?

10 years ago most employers would have read my example of Jason and Shondra and fired both of them within the first couple of hours. Or those of us in leadership roles would have thought the example too far-fetched to seriously consider. The idea that any significant portion of a generation in North America could regularly behave this way and make their way through high school, college, university or trade school would have seemed ludicrous. They would have been right. It is ludicrous. But it's the reality today.

The literacy rate, on average, across North America is barely above half of what it was in 1948. Here's an example from Canada. The OECD has a report out evaluating education from all advanced economies around the world.¹ Canada's students are 1 year behind in reading/writing and science. These same students are 2 years behind the rest of the world in math. The US is generally not much better regarding public education.

When our oldest daughter was in grade 5 she came home with math homework. To me, it was like reading Greek, even though I'd always found math easy and fun. It was the "new math", where the correct answer wasn't the most important result – and it's now morphed to where math has often been referenced as racist or sexist. $2+2=4$ is racist? The accurate answer is sexist? Completely nonsensical. Isn't it?

I assumed that universities, trade schools, etc would eventually tell our elementary and high schools to smarten up and teach proper math and improve the literacy rates. And that's exactly NOT what they did.

¹ <https://www.oecd.org/publication/pisa-2022-results/country-notes/canada-901942bb/>

The College of Engineering at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada – which had been a respected training ground for successful engineers for decades – recently got rid of final exams for first year engineering students, because in their words they created “a less stressful and fair grading system”.² “Minimizing academic attrition” are their words used to justify why they made it easier to get through their college.³ A logical assumption is that the most important goal for an engineering college would be to graduate the best and most competent engineers possible. Apparently not any longer. Maybe it’s actually not that critical that the people designing the bridges, buildings and technology of tomorrow need to be as accurate as possible? I think I’ll stick with the bridges designed before 2020.

As a Leadership coach and trainer, I have been in the middle of the changes occurring in the youngest generation in the workforce, watching as foremen, supervisors and managers in almost any field “pull their hair out” when they hire Gen Z employees and approach these new hires with expectations that would have been considered basic and essential a few short years ago, only to discover that for many of these young employees the mere mention of expectations, deadlines and performance causes debilitating paralysis.

I know, I know, it sounds ridiculous, and it is. Our businesses, our institutions, our society cannot function if a significant portion of the workforce panics when they’re given expectations of meeting basic requirements. But this is where we’re at, in so many ways.

Instead of being nervous about starting a new job, many young adults believe that they “have anxiety” and therefore should be entitled to a “mental health day”. Instead of effectively serving your hard-won

² <https://engineering.usask.ca/documents/students/2023-2024-first-year-handbook2.pdf>

³ <https://engineering.usask.ca/be-a-usask-engineer/re-engineered.php>

customers, many new employees provide abysmal levels of customer service – chasing those valuable customers away.

We are looking down the barrel of a dangerous proposition: losing almost an entire generation of valuable members of society to the weakness and woke-ism promoted by people and institutions we should have been able to trust to have the best in mind for our children and society.

I did say, “almost” and entire generation, because there are exceptions, those aberrations we find once in a while who cause us to wonder why all new hires can’t be more like the exception. Today’s exception was yesterday’s rule.

So what do we do about it? What can we do about it? Is there anything we can do about it?

There is. And that’s why I wrote this book – we can help this young generation “fill the GAP” and succeed in their careers and in our workplaces. It’s totally possible, but it’s just not easy.

Some days it’s going to feel like you’re not only a supervisor/manager/foreman, but you’ll feel like a teacher, a parent, and it will get frustrating. It will take more time, energy and effort, to help develop the potential of your employees, but it will be worth it.

What’s the alternative?

Drawing from personal experience as a manager, someone who’s owned businesses, a leader, a leadership coach, and parent to 3 Gen Z young adults I am going to do my best to bring you some of the best ways you can help your youngest employees fill the GAP and become some of your most valuable employees!

See you in Chapter 2!