

CHAPTER 1

Fill What GAP?

Your eyes snap open in the middle of the night! It's pitch black in your room, and you're almost deafened by the screaming of the smoke alarm! FIRE! Now you smell the smoke!

You scramble out from under the covers that seem to be trying to trap you in your bed, and run to the window. You open it, roll out the ladder that will take you down to safety, then you and your spouse climb down to the grass below.

Safety. You exhale a huge breath; you didn't realize you hadn't allowed yourself to breathe since you stepped out of the window. But your family is safe, the damage will only be to stuff and stuff can be replaced.

You've trained your teenage and adult children who live with you what to do in case of a fire, so you're confident they're already outside waiting for you. As you turn around to look for them, anticipating a huge hug, you hear their terrified screams for help!

THEY'RE STILL TRAPPED INSIDE THE HOUSE!

They couldn't escape, the floor was weakened by the flames, the walls and ceilings had caught on fire, and they couldn't get to their windows. Trapped!

You frantically look around for someone to save your children! There's nobody. The firefighters – the people you trust to rescue your family and save your home from

fire – aren't helping, it actually looks like they're adding fuel to the fire! What are they doing?!!!

Your neighbors are standing across the street, watching and listening to the cries for help from your children. But they're not interested in helping either. You hear one of them whisper that it's likely your children's fault that they're trapped anyway. Another says loudly that they had to deal with childhood challenges too, so your children need to be able to figure out their exit for themselves.

You are the only hope for your children! Literally!

What would you do? Absolutely anything!

What would be too much to ask you to do? Nothing!

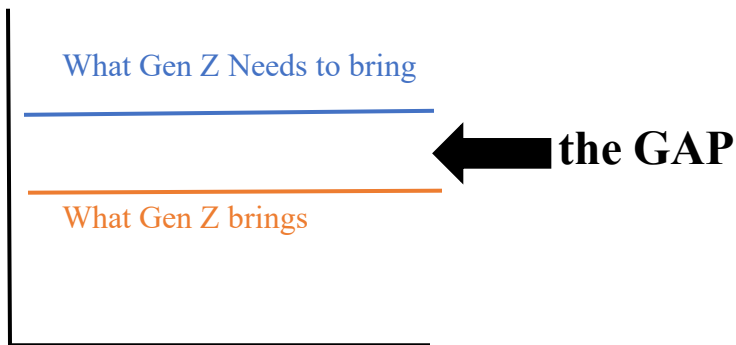
What a horrible picture! Just the thought of this scenario, terrifies any good parent. Hopefully none of us ever have to deal with that as a reality.

But, the reality is, if you're the parent of a Gen Z – someone born between 1996 and 2011 – there is a reason to be very concerned! Our children are at risk, right now. I call it "The Gap". And similar to the firefighters who seemed to be making a bad situation worse, the institutions and some of the teachers who are a part of them appear to be working against the best interests of our children!

The people who will employ, manage and supervise our children as they enter their careers, have a baseline of expectations from new employees, they assume they will bring a certain level of value. But Gen Z employees often don't bring that level of skill, understanding, knowledge,

value, or emotional stability into the workforce. This disparity between the expectations from employers and the reality of what Gen Z brings to the workplace is what I call “The Gap”.

And you are quite possibly the only one who will care enough to help your children fill that gap.



I’m a dad and a leadership coach/trainer. All 3 of my children are between the ages of 17-27 – so they’re all Gen Z. To say I have a vested interest in this generation is an understatement. As a coach to supervisors and managers, I also get to hear about the challenges faced by employers on a regular basis, and I hear about “the GAP” almost daily.

What exactly are some of the things we’ll find inside the GAP? Here are some of the things that cause frustration for supervisors and problems for Gen Z:

1. Basics like math, reading and writing. Simple math is out of the skill set of enough Gen Z university students that Engineering colleges are doing away with final exams in their first year to lower the failure rate. Our children are falling behind in math

proficiency, this will impact our countries for generations.¹ As if that isn't enough reason for concern, if we examine literacy rates we find they are significantly lower now than they were back in 1948.

“according to the most recent “Nation’s Report Card” by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The NAEP reports that roughly just one-third of students in fourth, eighth and 12th grades are proficient in reading and have “solid academic performance and demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter.”²

2. Teens and young adults often struggle with meeting deadlines. Even the mention of a deadline can cause a sense of panic among some young employees. When an employer needs something done by a specific time, the excuse of not being comfortable with deadlines doesn't cut it.
3. Being on time for work, and even something as basic as showing up for shifts regularly is a challenge for many Gen Z's. What used to be assumed – a baseline item in other words – is now uncommon enough that someone who shows up on time is almost a “rock star”. Ok, not quite that bad, but it's close.
4. Communicating effectively with another person face to face is often a challenge. And then throw in a little

¹ <https://edmontonjournal.com/opinion/columnists/david-staples-extremely-disturbing-alberta-students-three-times-more-likely-than-in-2003-to-be-math-illiterate>

² <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sponsor-story/lexia-learning2022/2022/03/02/illiteracy-costing-america-heres-why/6848450001/>

bit of conflict and WHAM! “Anxiety” is the result. The lockdowns during Covid made this problem much worse. (We’ll get into this in more detail in Chapter 2)

5. The expectation of wage increases and promotions is unrealistic – an overinflated concept of the value Gen Z contributes to a team is often to blame here. The idea of earning a raise or promotion through performance as a concept is missing in many younger employees.
6. Constant distraction because of smart phones causes large amounts of frustration for the supervisors of Gen Z employees.. It’s not only about lost time for the employer, the distraction also causes significant safety concerns. I walked through a manufacturing plant two years ago, where a young employee had been killed by a grinding machine prior to my tour because he was reaching for a cell phone he’d dropped on a conveyor belt. His clothes got caught and dragged him into the machine, crushing him. Cell phone addiction creates safety risks and low production.
7. Gen Z employees often possess less of an ability to problem solve than the previous generations of employees. Gen Z’s can become almost paralyzed with uncertainty when they don’t have specific answers. Employers are needing problem solvers, especially during uncertain economic times.

8. Learning from failure isn't something many teens and young adults do. Instead, what I hear from their supervisors is that if young adults try something new and don't succeed right away, they will give up in defeat and refuse to try again. Schools closing during covid, "teaching" online and passing students whether they did the work or not – often whether they showed up or not have damaged a generation. As a result, students haven't had to deal with failure head-on. They don't magically learn how to learn from failure when they hit the workplace, or adulthood.

The challenges above are setting our teens and young adults up for failure. Pair those challenges with the other problems in the world today – inflation, threats of war, boys and girls being convinced that they need to be castrated or sterilized, deep government debt, the potential of economic collapse similar to the Great Depression, and we realize that the obstacles facing our youth and young adults are greater than any generation since perhaps the WW2 generation. At least the generation from 80 years ago usually had a more stable family situation than Gen Z does.

Where in the world did the problems above originate? What or who caused this? The causes are many and go much deeper than just the last 4 years of covid. That's where we're going to start in chapter 2. Who and what is behind the GAP? Why are we seeing the weaknesses above in so many people from the same generation? We'll dig into that in just a few minutes, because there's a much bigger question we need to ask:

WHAT DO WE DO TO HELP OUR CHILDREN?!!!

We're going to spend the rest of this book looking at practical answers to that question.

But, before we move on, I want to draw your attention to the questions at the end of every chapter. Please take the time to go through them, and if you're going through this with a teen or young adult, please make certain you both wrestle with the questions because they will help you bring your own experience and insights to help any younger person apply the material from that chapter.

See you in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 1 QUESTIONS

1. When your child was born what were your hopes and dreams for them?
2. What excites you about the future for your child?
3. What causes you concern about the future for them?
4. Ask your child what their dreams are for their future.
5. What are the challenges to making those dreams happen?