

Is South Africa's youth lost in translation?

By  David Blyth

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Last year's matriculants, who form part of the Millennial generation, represent a new way of thinking, working and interacting in the workplace. It is also becoming increasingly clear that they will face some tough challenges on the road ahead... and employers need to take these challenges into account.



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Yellowwood recently published a White Paper, *A Youth Lost in Translation*, which seeks to understand the dynamic and complex youth of South Africa, based on the findings of HDI Youth Marketeers' research, specifically the Sunday Times 'Generation Next Study'.

This provided interesting statistics and insights of the views of 5,400 urban and peri-urban youth, including children between the ages of three and 12 (Generation Z), teenagers between 13 and 18, and young adults from 19 to 23 (Millennials). The study revealed what young South Africans are passionate about, worried about and dreaming about.

A key insight that came out of the report is that many youngsters feel huge pressure to succeed, with their most aspirational future job title being that of CEO. Significantly, the Generation Next Study found that finding a job entered the top fears of young adults for the first time in the history of this study, and despite high ambitions, one 16-year-old respondent noted that, "One of the biggest fears for me is not being successful. It scares me so much, it gets to the point where you do everything you think you should do in order to be successful because you are told that if you do these things then surely you will be successful..."

In tandem with this, many of them feel that the education available to them in public and private schools is insufficient to equip them with practical, usable skills for their future in the workplace. When asked what they would improve if they were made President, education came first across all racial groups, ahead of child abuse, crime and housing.

The report goes on to describe how employers employing Millennials and later Gen Z need to realise they are not getting their old-school first time jobbers with the expected skills. These Millennials will not work regular or long hours; they are not adept at spelling or playing by the rules, but rather the logic behind the rules. Therefore, unless the Millennials get why any company policy is logically worthwhile, they will not accept it as necessary. However, employers will get far better multi-great at research and processing information.

These youngsters are innovators and have vast skills employers have not even considered – the question is whether the workplace is ready to adjust their structures to make it easy for Millennials to navigate and add value to the workplace.

Gaming influences youth workforce

The study also touches on the fact that as many as 78.3% of South African males under the age of 23 play console games a few times a month. Around 25% of these gamers play every day. According to a 2010 Toronto University study, playing computer games develops the same mental agility as learning multiple languages.

Research also shows that when gamers enter the job market, they have an uncanny ability to multitask, solve problems and lead. Ray de Villiers, a TomorrowToday global consultant on the future world of work and expert on Millennials and Generation Z, says, “Gaming enhances their brain flexibility and strategic mind and enables them to adapt to the context. It makes them very competitive and increases their ‘can do’ attitude.

“They learn real skills through gaming and if they say they can do something that may seem beyond them, they most likely are able to because they have learnt to do it while gaming.”

Dipping youth happiness

The drive for success, paired with frustrations around access to education and concerns around safety, has had a marked impact on the youth’s overall psyche.

Research shows that youth happiness has dipped over the past few years. In 2010, 73.2% of respondents said they felt happy most of the time. However, that figure fell to 64.3% in 2013 and stood at 67.4% in 2015 - 7.7% of the 2015 respondents said they often feel depressed and only 41% feel they get enough sleep.

An unhealthy obsession with materialism and status brands has also impacted satisfaction levels of the youth, although they generally don’t live on credit - as most spend in cash (even though they have bank accounts). Interestingly, 25% are using mobile technology to make payments.

Despite some of the more challenging trends among South Africa’s youth, they are a group that values being listened to and believe that what they have to say matters. That combined with their drive to succeed and their awareness of social and political issues makes them a potent force to lead the countries workforce into the future.

For more information, go to www.ywood.co.za.

ABOUT DAVID BLYTH

David Blyth is CEO at Yellowwood. His focus at Yellowwood to date has been on building thought leadership and a pan-African client footprint. David is a prior chairman of 'think' (South African Communication Design Council), the Digital Interactive Media Association and is a current director of the Brand Council of South Africa (BCSA). Follow @dvblyth on Twitter.

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