

Think Tank: Bridging the generation gaps – Generation Z

Speakers:

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Erica Hanlon: Hi, everyone. You are listening to The Think Tank podcast. This is the final episode in a series we're doing on bridging the generation gaps. And today's episode is all about Generation Z.

My name is Erica Hanlon. I'm a licensed professional counselor and a life coach, and I'm joined by Angela Bell, communications director and Lynn Borteck, licensed clinical social worker. So today, we're talking about Generation Z, and let's be honest, we just don't really know when they were born or what are the beginning years, what are the ending years. It's all conflicting information on the internet. I don't know who makes these rules, but generally speaking, generation Z is somewhere between the end of the 1990s or 2000 and ends somewhere around 2012.

Speaker 1: How it defines my generation? I think, looking at it objectively, the internet age is by far... Technology and technological advancement is like... I guess you could say that for every generation, but living in the internet age, I think, is the biggest factor that's changing all of our decisions or shaping who we are. So for example, I think having a social media is actually... or having a smart device is completely... That's becoming a part of our psyche or a part of our identity, definitely the first generation that experienced that. I mean, experienced growing up in that at least.

Speaker 2: I think we're all becoming a lot more accepting and diverse. I think that as the diversity grows, we become more accepting and it's inevitable to avoid it and we're all coming together, which creates a lot of equality or new waves of it that we've never seen before or ever thought would be possible and it's all happened so fast. I just remember in high school, which was like five-ish years ago, and I remember I was scared to come out as gay because I was just scared. But now, these kids are able to

come out and it's really beautiful to see, as well as the Black Lives Matter movement. I think we are all very passionate and regardless of what side you're on, we're all driven by passion and I think we're all very passionate as a whole and way more conscious than any other generation has been, and it's just going to keep getting better.

Angee: I think that the movements that are going on these days and the things from a lot of different standpoints, politically, environmentally, it could almost feel like probably how it felt for the boomers that they were really making change happen. And it almost, I think, Erica, you mentioned this before, like a cycle, whereas back in the boomer timeframe, change was needed and it was something that generation really needed. And I think it drove change and may change happen. I feel like a lot of the things that have happened between generation X and generation Y have driven the need for more change now, and I think gen Z is really seeing that. They may not really be aware that the boomer generation was going through very similar things and having similar movements back in the day that sadly, almost seem like they're repeating themselves or have grown from a different need and now, they're standing up and supporting these causes.

Lynn: So it's kind of interesting because they lack the experience of knowing that much about what came before them. So while they are in fact inventing the world technologically, and they're completely... they're digital natives, a lot of the social things that they're into like being very green and being very concerned about climate change and all of that kind of stuff is not all necessarily true because there were other generations that had really strong social passions, but maybe the climate change thing is a gen Z feature.

Angee: Yeah. I do think the climate change probably is more distinct to the younger generations because of the fact that the technology of the world, the machinery of the world is causing more of a climate change to occur. So it's obviously becoming more of a focus for these generations.

Erica: Yeah, and I think... Well, the LGBTQ+ piece I think is really interesting and exciting too because with more and more people coming out and being authentically themselves and coming out to friends and family, I think that the acceptance rate for people who identify as LGBTQ+ has been a really rapid change over the last couple... not couple years, 20 or so years or longer, really.

Lynn: I think that that's a really good point because I was listening to Chuck Schumer last night, who is certainly a baby boomer. He made mention of his daughter and her wife, and that's something that, as a baby boomer

until maybe the last 10 years, would have just not been said. So that is definitely a big change, definitely. And the acceptance, just the acceptance of it.

Angee:

Yeah. I agree. I think the technology aspect here is also a little bit different than the gen Y. With gen Z, they're actually born in a time when they may have had a tablet or smartphone to watch a show when they were small children or to play a game when they were small children or in cases, even given a device when they were very, very small, so born around that from birth, really. It was part of their education. More and more technology classes are integrated. There's some students, some schools that have laptops. Actually, I think a lot of public schools are really starting to implement laptops before pandemic timeframe even, a lot of schools were using laptops and it's just become a part of their lives.

On top of that, the social media aspect of being able to create a social media account and have your presence out there on the internet, obviously that has to be monitored much more by parents and it makes a parent's job very different from what it was when they were young. I remember my daughter wanting to have a social media account when she was very, very young and we had to go back and forth with that because I was not comfortable with it, but it's something that I think it changes the mentality of how we do things, how quickly we gather information and how people really view you from your community online.

Erica:

Yeah. Parenting three late gen Z-ers, so very young gen Z-ers, they have technology as one of the specials in their school. Just like you take art class or drama class music class, technology is one of those. So as young as kindergarten, my daughter was learning about safety rules online and what information to share and what information not to share, and they're learning coding. So they're learning things that again, I learned how to type on the typewriter. So it's a little bit of a challenge keeping up with as somebody who did not grow up with all of this technology. I think we're trying to figure it out as parents. I know that there is a new campaign Wait Until 8th, which is encouraging parents not to give their children a smartphone until at least eighth grade to help with some of these transitions and these changes in their development.

To switch gears really quickly, one thing that I read that I thought was really interesting is how technology has contributed to social anxiety because young people are so used to interacting online, that when they are dating or trying to meet somebody face-to-face, that there's so much anxiety about that face-to-face interaction and that in-person interaction that they're drinking a lot of alcohol to try and manage the anxiety. So it's

really interesting, that ripple effect of the interaction being predominantly online.

Lynn: Yeah, because when they finally meet in person, it can be kind of awkward because it's not... you're there as a whole person. It's not just your face on FaceTime or whatever. You're there as a person. You have to manage your entire being and it may feel... I could understand where it would feel very awkward. I think that gen Z-ers may be really prone to FOMO, like fear of missing out, because everything is online, everything is on social media. So they're the first to know if something happens and they aren't part of it and wish that they were. So I think that FOMO can be a really big factor in their lives. They're comparing themselves to other people all the time.

Erica: Yeah, because it's really social media driven and they're young and they're seeing their friends. It was one thing in high school if all the cool kids went to a party or even my friends went to a party and they left me out, I wouldn't necessarily find out about it unless I overheard somebody talking about it. But now nowadays, if everybody went to a party and you weren't invited, you're going to see it online. You're going to see photos, maybe video, people posting about it and you'll be sitting at home like "Wah wah" because you didn't get to go. Well, then you had this idealistic version of what people are putting online. So there is this impression. It's easy to get the impression that everybody else has it together or they're so glamorous or their lives are so amazing, and here you are in your life that seems not so amazing because you're dealing with reality.

Angee: Yeah, and I think you definitely have to watch out for signs of depression that could result from that FOMO.

Lynn: For sure. And we're not even talking about yet, the effects of the pandemic, which are definitely going to be visible on this generation. They're very much being affected by it.

Angee: I think on the flip side though, that this generation has so much to offer to the workforce. I think their technology skills and what they're bringing to the table, it's amazing. I work actually with a couple of gen Z-er who are part of a special program at our company and they never fail to impress me. They're always extremely motivated and energized to help out and do new projects, and they always bring up these different platforms that we can use to connect everybody and to connect a project to share documents online, and I think they really add a lot of value to a workforce and to a team.

Speaker 1: I've had jobs, for sure, that's kind of gone the whole gamut of generations. I think a pro is just working with people of other generations. Typically, there's a common goal. So I think you're more inclined to get along with people of various generations if you're working in a multi-generational workplace, as opposed to just working with peers. I think, yeah, the big thing, again, the internet age, that is creating the biggest gap between generations. I think that's why there is such a, almost a hostility between certain generations and others; just how rapidly we're advancing as a species and what we grew up with and then versus what they're going up with when it comes to technology and just things that we grew up with and maybe take for granted that a generation before didn't have.

Or even vice versa, not saying that constantly, generations are getting more and more. I definitely think there's something that has been lost maybe in boomer and then the generation right after that, not saying that technological advancement is always good. I think there's a lot being lost and taking the human out of interaction or a lot of social interaction.

Speaker 2: I used to be a camp counselor for four years and I was watching kids, taking care of kids from ages like seven to as old as 16. That by far, was the best experience I've had. The cons are still pros of the end of the day because kids will teach you more than anyone else ever could. I currently work with people age 18 to until they want to retire. There are a lot of pros. I feel like there's a lot to be learned from everybody. There are some differences in the generations. I get along with everyone, but there is a lot of like, I don't know, just differences in perspective and passion.

Angee: So it's interesting to hear from both speakers, that they're thinking there's a lot to learn from even younger generation that's just now emerging, that's just now being born and the older generation as well, and then also acknowledging the conflict that there is, that exists between the older generations and their generation. I think there are going to be differences and it can be challenging to at times, to find ways for those generations to all work successfully together. I think that's part of the challenge that employers face from time to time. I don't think it's always the case. I think a lot of times, it works out really, really well, but there are those times when it really can be challenging. I don't know if you guys have any thoughts or tips for things that people can do to try to help improve those working relationships.

Erica: I think just for one, being patient and being understanding and just being curious about somebody who may come from a different generation and not assuming that just because you know something, that the other person knows it.

Angee: Yeah. Yeah. That's a great point. I think a lot people are going to disagree on different points, not only from generation to generation, but from people to people. It may seem to stand out a little bit more from generation to generation, and I think sometimes we have to agree to not agree and understand that there are going to be differences in opinions and differences in thoughts, but like you said, being curious and learning more can only help us grow and work better together and collaborate.

Erica: Right.

Lynn: That sounds true. And I think it's great that she has a respect for people younger also when she mentioned that you can learn so much from children. That's certainly true.

Angee: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. For sure. I remember when I was, I don't know, I was feeling down one day and my daughter, she was a younger girl at the time and she said... I don't know. I was just feeling old and it's was a long time ago, so I know I wasn't that old, but I still felt that way, and she was just six or so and she said, "Mommy, you're never old if you can still have fun." And I love that. I love that quote, and I wrote it down in my journal back in the day. I constantly think of it even today because it's so true. Age is a number and our spirit and our intentions and our mind almost sometimes can seem ageless.

Lynn: Yeah, and I think remembering that really, in the end, we have more in common than those things that are different and separate us.

Erica: Agree.

Angee: I also liked how the other speaker mentioned that technology isn't always a good thing. As we mentioned before, in some cases, technology is cutting down our human interaction and is cutting down some of that time that we spend really talking with each other in person. I think there's so much to be gained by a conversation in person; body language, watching someone smile. You can only get so much through video. I know with the pandemic these days, we're definitely having to find new ways to work around meeting in person, but I think practicing social distancing and using the appropriate masks and things like that, we should still take advantage of trying to see people in person when and where we can safely.

It's funny. I know even myself, I'm guilty of texting people too much because sometimes I'm like, "I don't feel like talking. I'll just text.!" I'll just text, and before I know it, I'm five or six texts in and I'm thinking, "Wow. Why don't I just pick up the phone and call this person and talk to them

and make it an easier conversation?" and probably get a little bit more value out of it from talking to them on the phone.

Erica: Yeah. I was listening to somebody who was a manager, I think, in a podcast getting interviewed and she was talking about supervising younger people and encouraging them just to get on the phone and connect with somebody on the phone as opposed sending emails. The person had resistance to that because they weren't used to talking on the phone. So I think learning how to connect with people, finding those connections however you can, but as much as possible, trying to interact face-to-face, voice to voice video, to video, those connections are so important.

Lynn: I couldn't agree more.

Angee: There's pros too, though. To the technology, I know a lot of companies are using group texting and things like that. Definitely might be quicker than sending a group email where you have to wait for somebody to actually get the email. When you're texting someone, it's right on the phone, it's instantaneous, things like that. I know they're doing different things with payroll and stuff through different kinds of banking cards and things like that. So there's a lot of neat options that have come up with the technology as well.

Lynn: When all is said and done and we've listened to all of these people from different generations, I think the bottom line is we all have a lot to learn from each other and the key is to keep in mind that we're all probably a little bit more the same than we are different, but we can definitely learn from our differences.

Erica: So no matter what generation you're a part of, we hope that you enjoyed this series on bridging the generational gaps. Join us next month when we will talk about how to worry less and enjoy more. Thanks, everyone. Bye.

Angee: Bye!

Lynn: Bye-bye.

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