

# Gen Z need help or AI will take their jobs

*Combination of bad attitude, clever tech and more rights for workers makes hiring youngsters less attractive to bosses*

by Alice Thomson, The Times  
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‘I have given up employing the young any more, it’s too much effort,’ one advertising company CEO tells me. ‘My last PA sued us for wrongful dismissal after she’d claimed several grandparents’ deaths in a year and cited two dogs dying as reasons not to come into the office. When we eventually rumbled her, she blamed her ADHD drugs for causing her forgetfulness and erratic hours, and her social anxiety for needing to work from home.’

The company eventually paid her off after she claimed she was being bullied, the CEO says. ‘ChatGPT can do the job more efficiently, it can plan my holiday too and it isn’t always off for hen nights, doctor’s appointments and mental health days.’

His views are echoed by executives around the country. In the law, accountancy, management consultancy, the media, engineering, graphic design and coding, AI is now capable of performing the entry-level tasks that were once the preserve of new recruits and trainees. Initially only the young knew how to control the tech tool, using it to their advantage so they could finish work early and go to the gym. But now managers have become adept at getting ChatGPT to run their work and home lives and Deloitte says that a quarter of office employees pay for it themselves. As one says: ‘ChatGPT is better educated, I’m not embarrassed to ask it for help with my children’s homework, as well as office projects, and I’ve even used it as my therapist.’

Meanwhile, employing people is increasingly seen as expensive and risky. Angela Rayner’s Employment Rights Bill, now reaching its final stages of debate in parliament, will soon give workers full rights from day one, including maternity and paternity leave, sick pay and, most worryingly for many CEOs, protection from dismissal – and that’s on top of national insurance hikes rises, minimum wage increases and US tariffs.

It’s not difficult to see why chatbots are the safer bet. Yesterday the Office for National Statistics said the number of jobs on offer fell to 781,000 in the first three months of the year, while payroll numbers also declined by 78,000. Employers are jettisoning staff who might be problematic or abuse the system.

Gen Z in particular are not making it easier for themselves with their demands for a cushier workplace culture, failing to realise that their jobs are first in the firing line.

Entry level means insignificant, negligible, trivial and unimportant, according to ChatGPT’s thesaurus. Poor them, you might say, why should we care? But this matters to everyone. There are already more than a million 16 to 24-year-old so-called NEETs (not in education, employment, or training), often languishing at home, unable to afford to move out, and with 158 graduates chasing every job.

Yet companies and professions don't seem to have realised that it could also be disastrous for them. If they don't train up the younger generation and help them progress, where will they find the experienced accountants, engineers, analysts, lab technicians and solicitors in a decade's time? First jobs are where you learn the basics – they provide the foundations on which successful careers are built.

In his book, *'The Skill Code: How to Save Human Ability in an Age of Intelligent Machines'*, Matt Beane writes that the working bond between learners and experts has for millennia been crucial in the development of humanity's ability to pass on expertise and create a sense of progress. He says that novices, once seen as a vital resource for all crafts and professions, are now viewed as increasingly "optional and distant participants" in many specialists' working lives.

This is even more true now that so many of us work online from home. Without this novice-expert bond, the young are finding it increasingly difficult to master new challenges and complexities and make the connections that they need.

How do we solve this conundrum? ChatGPT, for once, seems flummoxed. First, Rayner needs to water down her Employment Rights Bill to allow companies to try out new recruits without the anxiety of knowing they can't be dismissed if they are the wrong fit.

In return, senior employees need to take on more responsibility for training up the next generation. It should be part of a manager's remit, not just a hazy promise to mentor. We already have apprenticeships but companies have been hamstrung in how they can use the apprenticeships levy and, in most cases, have failed to take the scheme seriously.

The result is a 41% decline in apprenticeships in five years and a 54% dropout rate.

The medieval guilds system might be a better model, where professions took on the responsibility of nurturing future talent. Or the Elizabethan system whereby anyone "exercising any art, mystery or occupation" from glove-making to medicine would spend seven years doing a pupillage under Elizabeth I's Statute of Artificers.

Even the Victorians had a stronger apprenticeship system, used by Brunel and Faraday, among others, helping them to foster the skills to drive industrial progress.

Employers should encourage the new cohorts to be innovative, curious, intuitive, sympathetic and flexible – all attributes missing from ChatGPT. In return for this help and for feeling part of a team, the young need to become more realistic and co-operative in their approach to work. They're not expected to sleep under their desks in the 21st century but they do need to prioritise earning a living, while we all take responsibility for ensuring there is a future for humans at work.