Bridge the Gen-Y Gap

Survival Tips for working with Generation-Y

Demyan Rossouw

DEMYAN ROSSOUW

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In Japanese, the word '*kintsukuroi*' means "*to repair with gold*". It is the art of repairing pottery with gold or silver lacquer and understanding that the piece is more beautiful for having been broken.

Life often presents us with what we need, rather than necessarily giving us what we want. Life happens **for** us, not *to* us. Our personal responsibility is thus to search for and identify the "gold" – the lesson and the learning in everything that happens 'for' us.

In order to heal or to repair that what seems broken, we could reflect on the question: How can I best work with what happened for me.

As a direct result of our life experiences, we develop particular belief systems or cognitive constructs.

Demyan Rossouw is a Cognitive Behaviour Coach (DragonMuse Coaching) and Leadership Development Consultant (Psychology at Work). His coaching model focuses on what we *can* change, such as our thoughts and behaviour. Demyan uses a very direct coaching and facilitating style which enables clients to shift towards expressing their true Self in a way that creates meaning in what they do, experience and live. His passion is coaching and mentoring "Generation-Y", their managers, colleagues and parents and by offering guidance towards developing Emotional Intelligence and teaching Interpersonal Skills.

Demyan's background includes working as a Cardiovascular Perfusionist (Clinical) and International Business Management Consultant (Corporate). He has been operating as an independent business coach (DragonMuse Coaching) for the past 17 years. In addition, he is also the resident coach and co-facilitator of Interpersonal Intelligence and Corporate Leadership Development for Psychology at Work. He has long-standing coaching relationships with clients across South Africa; Europe: UK; USA; UAE and the Far-East.

Demyan currently resides with his civil partner in Greyton, a picturesque village nestled at the foot of the Riviersonderend Mountains in the Overberg (Western Cape – South Africa). He conducts leadership development programmes in Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban and Bloemfontein. In addition, he also conducts Skype coaching sessions with clients from across the globe.

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1   INTRODUCTION

Do any of these comments and replies sound familiar?

- *"But why do I need to do it this way?"*
- *"I want to work within a team, but leave me to figure it out by myself."*
- *"Don't tell me how to write the report!"*
- *"Your job as my manager is to coach and guide me."*
- *"Have I done well?"*
- *"Sometimes I feel that I am a mere number in this company… I want to be respected as a human being. My opinion matters!"*
- *"Sorry, I can't work late today. I already told my friends that I will catch-up with them at the gym."*
- *"You are a slave driver and you pay too little. There is no scope for career growth in this organisation. I am resigning!"*

1.1   GENERAL CLASSIFICATION OF THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

Yes, these sentiments which are typically expressed by Generation Y are often conflicting and even outright confusing. This could understandably lead to misunderstanding, frustration and even irritation for almost everyone concerned.

This intriguingly unique generation is comprised of people born between (approximately) 1980–2000. Apart from being known as Generation-Y, other popular names are Gen-Y; The Echo Boomers; The Nexters; The Bittersweet Generation; The Millenials; The Dotcom Generation; E-Gen and Cyber Generation. These labels are indeed very descriptive of their attributes.

They are also often labelled as "*being difficult*"; "*too demanding*"; "*lazy*"; "*they don't know what they want from life*"; and even "*extremely demanding and entitled*".

Their unique gifts and the specific challenges this particular generation is presenting with are coming to the fore now that they are starting to move into managerial positions in the corporate workplace. More and more so, senior managers and executives, who are often from the Baby-boomer Generation (born 1940-1960) or Generation X (born 1960–1980), are struggling to relate to Generation Y.

The intention with this book is to help fill the knowledge gap for all the generations who are currently active in the corporate world by providing context, understanding and specific skills on how to relate to, connect and cope with each other. In order for people to better understand Generation-Y, it is vital to understand the motivating factors – as well as some de-motivating factors – that drive the behaviour of Generation-Y.

This book also offers some insight on the foundation of Generation-Y's value systems. There is an inherent reason why they are behaving, thinking and feeling the way they do – therefore it is imperative that the book shares relevant information that could assist leaders, managers, coaches, teachers and parents to better understand, manage and support this generation. Part of understanding Generation-Y is cognition of one's own generation and its drivers. Therefore, the book highlights some common differences between the three main generations who are currently prevalent in the corporate world.

The "*How To*" section of the book offers specific tools for leaders, managers and coaches which could assist with identifying, managing, motivating, rewarding, as well as potentially retaining Generation-Y. Additionally, the book also offers specific tools on how to manage one's own thought processes.

When people are better able to relate to Generation-Y, people can then form better professional and personal relationships with Generation-Y. Everyone can benefit from the unique talents, attributes and skills of all the various generations which we find in the corporate environment and in life.

This book also acts as a useful tool for Human Resources Departments by assisting Human Resources Specialists when identifying and selecting the appropriate person from Generation-Y for the relevant position and the team they will be working in. An added benefit of the book is to provide guidance for leaders and managers who focus on Talent Development.

> ## HE WHO HAS A 'WHY' TO LIVE FOR CAN BEAR ALMOST ANY 'HOW'
>
> **– Nietzsche**

Note: The characteristics described in the book are general. Of course, there are often exceptions to any rule.

2   WHAT MAKES THIS GENERATION SO UNIQUE

2.1   GENERALLY

Every generation is unique and it is in this very uniqueness that our learning awaits. The benefits, of course, are not only in the growth opportunity in learning how to work with our gifts and shortcomings, but there is also great learning to be gained in how to deal with the gifts and imperfections of people from all the *other* generations we live or work with.

Here are some of the more general characteristics that we could expect to be confronted with when dealing with Generation-Y:

2.1.1   OFTEN ASKING "WHY"

While working with people in this particular generation, best is that we get used to the "*why-question*". It is of huge importance for Gen-Ys that they fully understand the reasons why they need to do something, or why they need to do it in a particular manner or why they need to complete it within a specific time-frame. By relentlessly asking "*why?*", it often comes across that they are being obstructive or being difficult. While it is true that the status quo is being challenged, the truer intention is that Gen-Ys want to understand the reasons and benefits of what is expected of them. It needs to make perfect sense to them too. In addition, they need some level of input in the decision-making process and outcome.

2.1.2   UNDERDEVELOPED EQ

Very often Gen-Ys may have a highly developed IQ, but mostly they have a low EQ (Emotional Intelligence). This is due to a lack of life experience, which in turn leads to a lack of the appropriate coping skills, especially if they are still young and potentially lacking in life- or work experience.

2.1.3   REQUIRES INSTANT GRATIFICATION

Gen-Ys demand instant gratification. This leads to quick decision-making, which in turn often results in a frequent and constant change of plans. These true technophiles were born during the Technological Age; therefore, they are technologically very well skilled. They excel at multi-tasking (e.g. simultaneous and constant interaction via computers, smart phones, social media, watching television, playing computer games, chatting to friends).

This is the Google Generation – if they need an answer to a question, they expect to get an *immediate* answer. The subsequent results are that Gen-Ys are often impatient and they frequently suffer from ADD & ADHD, which makes this generation the most-medicated generation ever (e.g. Ritalin, Prozac and recreational drugs). They are inclined to jump from one "source" of fun, enjoyment, advice, activity etc. to another as soon as their expectations are not met or if they remain unfulfilled.

2.1.4   DEMANDING

Gen-Ys demand respect, confidence in their abilities and trust. **Coaching and mentoring** is of paramount importance and is greatly valued - albeit not always well received when meted out by parents or employers.

They thrive on personal growth and development, in particular with the goal of adding meaning to their lives. They sometimes harbour a sense of hopelessness with regard to the future in general. This could be perceived by parents and employers as apathy.

2.1.5   A SENSE OF GRANDIOSITY AND SELF-IMPORTANCE

This often manifests in the form of not wanting to 'work their way up the ranks' but instead wanting to start at the top of the organisation. They harbour the irrational belief that they can achieve anything *(yes, absolutely anything!)* they set their hearts on and without the need to first learn the basics.

2.1.6   LIVING IN A VIRTUAL WORLD

Because Gen-Ys are extremely used to living in a virtual reality (as a result of playing video games and having virtual relationships with virtual people), they could end up living in an idealistic world which seems amazingly perfect, but which is nevertheless false. The virtual world could pale in comparison to the harsh reality of real life and the shock of having to deal with the real world could leave them feeling disappointed, despondent, apathetic and negative. Sadly, many Gen-Ys prefer fantasy to reality.

2.1.7   BELIEVING THEY ARE SPECIAL

Gen-Ys believe that they are truly unique and special. The fact is that most (if not all) generations share the very same sentiment that *they* are unique and special. When they believe that they are special, they demand special treatment. Rules which apply to others often don't apply to them. The dichotomy in this thinking is that, although Gen-Ys fight for fairness and equality in other groups, they want to be treated as the exception.

2.1.8   NEED EXCESSIVE ADMIRATION AND PRAISE

It is not uncommon that Gen-Ys expect awards or praise for performing their duty – even if they don't perform on par. This is partially due to their parents giving them medals for *not* coming first. This expectation can even extend to wanting praise for meeting day-to-day obligation and responsibility like paying bills, mortgages, car payments, etc.

2.1.9   SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT

Gen-Ys have an exaggerated sense of entitlement and are often overly demanding. They "want it all" and they "want it now!" Their main objective is to be happy – they irrationally believe that happiness is the main purpose of life. The feel that they absolutely deserve to be happy and they see no reason whatsoever in doing something if it does not make them feel happy. That emotion of happiness is often dependent on external factors (e.g. a new car; the latest mobile phone; fancy clothes) instead of wanting to achieve a state of joy, which is an internal state of mind.

2.1.10   ARROGANT

Gen-Ys could come across as arrogant. This again stems from the irrational believe that they are special and unique. Added to this is that they are often spoiled while growing up. This may prevent them from being open to learning and admitting to making mistakes.

2.1.11   DREAM BIG

Gen-Ys tend to be unrealistic with dreams and goals, without a rational consideration of how those dreams can be achieved or realised. Therefore, they often lack the foresight, insight and critical thinking which is required to help them achieve their goals and dreams

2.2   PROFESSIONALLY

It is in a professional or work environment that we most often deal with conflict between the generations who are currently and predominantly active in the corporate world (Baby Boomers and Generation Y).

Gen-Ys insist on a having a balance between career, family and friends, therefore "play" is of paramount importance to them. Their motto is "*play while working*", whereas the Baby Boomers believe "*work first, then play*". No distinct line is drawn between the various aspects of their lives, instead they rather seek complete integration. (e.g. working from home or working flexi-hours).

They often question management's decision and ways of doing, because they have the habit of relentlessly asking "*Why?*". They question the way things are done and they persistently challenge the status quo. They ask because they need to understand and it needs to make perfect sense to them. That means they are in constant dialogue – which often comes across more like a debate or an argument – with their employer.

Gen-Ys require a constant change in routine and variety in their work environment, responsibilities, etc. They require information to be presented in bite (byte) sized portions. This is due to their short attention span.

They tend to move from one employer or career to another if personal or professional expectations are not being met, or if their career lacks meaning. They tend to put emphasis on making career choices which allow them to spend time with friends.

Gen-Ys attach great importance to being treated with respect; on people having confidence in their decisions and abilities; and being trusted. These values and needs are even more prevalent when Gen-Y are receiving mentoring and coaching from their manager. They accept mentoring and coaching when it is offered in response to them requesting it. The mentoring or coaching should then be conducted with the utmost respect for their needs and while honouring strict confidentiality.

2.3 SOCIALLY

Gen-Ys present a whole range of varying and often even conflicting behaviours on a social level.

In general, they tend to come across as self-assured, confident and at times arrogant or overly self-assured. Often, they are indeed overly self-assured due to a lack of life experience and because they might lack humility. When this happens, they cover up for low self-esteem by presenting as overconfident.

It was previously mentioned that they excel at using social media. This often leads Gen-Ys to prefer having cyber-relationships over having "face-to-face" relationships. Understandably, this is counter-productive to building social skills and authentic self-confidence.

Their friendships are of paramount importance and therefore they value the opinion of friends more than they value the opinions of parent or employers. If a friendship does not meet their expectations, then they readily move on to the next.

As a result of feeling so special, it could be a difficult push for Gen-Ys to feel empathy towards another person in need. This could manifest as a lack of true intimacy in personal relationships and having a great difficulty in making long-term commitments.

Gen-Ys are group orientated and thus they place a high value on universal human rights. What they do and how they do it matters to them on a global level too. They care for the earth, for minority groups and for the people who don't have a voice.

3   VALUES AND DRIVERS

It is important to be cognisant of what the key drivers and values are for Generation-Y. Our values drive our behaviour – therefore, if an employer can determine if there is an alignment between the values of the organisation and the values of Gen-Y, then the possibility of achieving professional success and collaboration is enhanced.

3.1   SOME POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- Great adaptability – due to their fast pace of living, social connectedness and their alert minds.
- A high technological orientation – due to their frequent (almost consistent) use of technology while connecting socially and gathering information.
- Open-minded and open to learning new experiences – because Gen-Ys welcome new concepts and they love to challenge the status quo.
- Excellent at multi-tasking – due of their use of social media and technology. *(Note: It is a misconception that humans are neurologically equipped to multitask. The brain prefers to consciously focus on one task at a time. The more scattered our focus becomes, the easier it is to make mistakes or to miss vital information that could help us to make well-informed decisions. Within this context, we could safely still argue that Gen-Ys are better equipped to multitasking than most other generations)*
- Supports diversity – because of their innate sense of fairness. This is a result of them being brought up in an era of human-, woman-, gay- and other minority rights.

3.2   SOME CHALLENGING CHARACTERISTICS

- Impatient – because they are used to the fast speed and delivery of technology and the internet, which provides immediate feedback and gratification.
- Sceptical – because of fallible role models, corruption in society and the questionable morality of society in general.
- Abrupt, blatant and even rude – due to their exaggerated need for self-expression. In addition, due to their preference for cyber-connections e.g. in chat rooms, the web, etc., they may well lack properly developed interpersonal relationships when dealing face-to-face with real people.
- Extremely image conscious – because of their need to express their individuality or uniqueness (and their need for self-expression) which is often directed by the group mentality and contradictory to their need for individuality.

3.3   NOTICEABLE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE VALUES OF THE "CONFLICTING" GENERATIONS AND HOW THEY COULD PLAY OUT

In order to understand some of the most significant and noticeable differences between the (currently main) generations, it could be beneficial to look at these differences when presented side-by-side. This could help both generations in becoming aware where they respectively need to shift "to" or "from".

Baby-Boomer Generation (often the employer or parent)	Generation-Y (often the employee or child)
The Book Readers	The Screen-agers

- This could impact on how information is presented – either in thick volumes of printed reports with loads of supplementary information; or using short, concise bullet-points presented with the aid of a PowerPoint® presentation.
- It also impacts on how we prefer to learn – do we prefer to learn by studying a book, or do we prefer to learn by watching a video or a lesson filled with dynamic sounds and graphics.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Changes and updates that need to be incorporated, can be done in real-time and while on the run. The digital sharing of information is also much more effective and faster than sharing printed material.

Work hard – play later	Work smart – play hard

- This conflict in values or way-of-doing could cause great discord between managers and team members. The Baby-Boomer manager may feel that the team is "goofing off" and not taking their work seriously enough, while the Gen-Y team members may believe that the manager is too serious and stuck-up.
- The Baby-Boomers would like to separate work and play – first do your work then we will have fun (preferably outside of the work environment). The Gen-Ys want to have fun while they are working and, in doing so, make the execution of the tasks even more fun.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
We are at our most creative when we are at play. When we allow the Free-child to come out and play, we are inviting the team to think of amazingly inventive and ingenious, ideas, concepts and solutions.

Baby-Boomer Generation	Generation-Y
Think straight in a linear fashion	Think 'loopy' in hyper-link fashion

- This divergent way of doing things could lead to frustration being experienced on both sides.
- Baby-Boomers tend to think 'either-or' and one thing needs to happen before another thing can happen; whereas Gen-Y think 'also-too' and that many things could happen simultaneously.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Sometimes there is great value – and even freedom – in what could be perceived as chaos. There are benefits to both approaches – focus on tapping into each other's strengths.

Listen & learn (theoretical)	Do & learn (experiential)

- Baby-boomers often need to understand and grasp the theory, before they can apply the learning.
- Gen-Ys prefer to learn "on the fly" through a process of trial and error.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
There is great learning in making mistakes. Offer assistance that will enhance the learning that could result from experimentation and potentially making mistakes.

The manager/parent/teacher is the most important	The employee/child/student is the most important

- Most of us want to feel that we matter and some of us even want to feel important – that is the ego that comes out to play.
- The challenge is to allow a healthy ego to exist without causing conflict between egos.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Creating a space for the (younger) person will make them feel that their opinion matters and result in much better buy-in as well as improved listening skills. Ask questions instead of telling.

Baby-Boomer Generation	Generation-Y

Living by a Mission Statement	Living by an Image Statement

- Baby-Boomers tend to measure success based on deliverables, whereas it seems of greater importance to Gen-Ys how they feel about the project or what the possible appearance to or perception of other could look like.
- Peer opinion is of high value to Gen-Y, hence the emphasis on appearances and impressions.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Help Gen-Ys to have a better understanding of the overall intention, value and benefits of a project, while still allowing the individual(s) to stand out and shine.

Think big	Think fast

- Size matters if you are from the Baby-Boomer Generation.
- Speed matters if you are Gen-Y.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Speed is indeed of vital importance these days – speed of processing, speed of gaining information, speed of delivery. Tap into the Gen-Ys strengths and let the project benefit from their drive and speed.

Survival of the strongest/biggest	Survival of the fastest/smartest

- Again, the size of the organisation or team or project is a measure of success or productivity for Baby-Boomers.
- Adaptability, frequent change and speed is of greater importance for Gen-Ys.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
The corporate wheel often turns too slowly for Generation-Ys' liking. By fast-tracking the process and by allowing for quick changes when needed, the Gen-Y team will feel more in control and less frustrated.

Baby-Boomer Generation	Generation-Y
First learn the theory then do it	**Learn as we go along**

- Baby-Boomers feel that one first needs to have a solid understanding of the theory before one can apply it in practice.
- Gen-Ys take an approach of "I know how to do it, so let me get on with it" and "What I don't know I will learn in my own way".

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Both knowledge and experience are necessary. Make some allowance for mistakes – at times even encourage it – since there is great learning in making mistakes and benefitting from them.

'Who I am' is defined by status and career	**'Who I am' is defined by friends and meaning**

- Baby-Boomer: Judge me by what I have achieved in life. Look at **what** I am.
- Gen-Y: Judge me by the difference I make to this world. Look at **who** I am.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
The ideal way to get the buy-in from Gen-Ys is to link the process and outcome of a project to a greater goal, preferably a goal that has an impact on a larger group of people or even on a global scale.

Work 9–5 and then play	**Work anytime while playing**

- This could cause potential conflict between the expectations of the employer and the needs of the employee.
- In addition, the "seriousness" or professionalism which the Baby Boomers might expect from an employee, could be restrictive to the Gen-Y way of working.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Some companies (e.g. Google and Face Book) are renowned for accommodating the playful needs of Generation Y. This is done in the form of chill rooms, games rooms and even slides instead of staircases, etc. Perhaps the Baby Boomers could partake in the some of these stress relieving, light hearted moments. This could aid improved creativity and better collaboration between management and the team.

Baby-Boomer Generation	Generation-Y
Lives in an 'either-or' world	**Lives in an 'and-also' world**

- Baby-Boomers can be prone to black-and-white thinking, where something is either right or wrong; or having a 'my way or the highway' mind-set.
- Gen-Ys like to think laterally and explore weird and wonderful solutions; they are therefore more open to exploring uncharted and inventive territory.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Restrictive thinking leads to restricted problem solving. An open mind-set is hugely beneficial when inviting and even encouraging creative 'out of the box' thinking.

Wealth is the hope of the future	Connectivity is our future hope

- Baby-Boomers may have a belief that the solution to most of the world's problems is money.
- Gen-Ys believe that it the solution is to connect with each other, to co-create; to share and support.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
In today's age, people need to know that they matter. It is vital to allow wealth creation with the intention of being of benefit to the whole of humanity.

Think and feel by formula/proof	Think and feel by hope/intuition

- Baby-Boomers rely on facts, figures, evidence and past experience to reach a conclusion or to make decisions – "Does it calculate correctly?".
- Gen-Ys are more intuitive and rely on their feeling when having decide – "Does it feel right?".

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
By looking at future solutions, rather than focussing on past empirical facts and evidence, it inspires hope and aids creative thinking.

Baby-Boomer Generation	Generation-Y
Follow hierarchical models	**Follow flat, distributed models**

- It is important for Baby-Boomers to follow the "chain of command" and to stick to the hierarchical model of corporate responsibility and reporting. That often leads to a slow turn-around on decision making.
- Gen-Ys prefer to fast-track the process by going directly to the top. That enables them to get quick answers and to deliver promptly.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
Direct, simple communication and reporting systems are extremely effective and it helps workers to make informed, fast decisions. In addition, it also improves transparency.

Defines self by 'What I know'	**Defines self by 'Who I am'**

- The Baby-Boomer mantra is "I am successful because of what I have learned and what I know".
- Gen-Ys believe that "I am unique and add meaning in what I do and in how I live".

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
In a world of uniformity, uniqueness is often the key ingredient which allows one organisation (or team) to stand out from another.

Seeing is believing	**Believing is seeing**

- Baby-Boomers rely on evidence and facts.
- Gen-Ys rely on hope and trust that they can create anything they believe they can.

Benefits of the Gen-Y way of acting:
The past cannot change – therefore evidence based on past events cannot change. The future is fluid – therefore what happens next is influenced by hope, creative thinking and trust in one's own abilities.

4   HOW TO DEAL WITH GENERATION-Y

4.1   BECOME AWARE OF AND MANAGE YOUR OWN THOUGHTS

We often work from the premise that in order to better get along with someone else, **they** need to change and adapt in order to fit in with our values and our preconceived way of how they should be acting or thinking. Not surprisingly, that approach is most often hugely ineffective. We all have our own set of values or beliefs which we live by – our own truth. Realistically that does not mean that everyone has the same set of values or beliefs – they have their own truth. While we are similar in many ways, we are also all very different – and that is *the* truth!

This is most evident when we look at the different – and often divergent – values from one generation to another. Add to that the differences between genders, cultures and groups and we have an extremely complex reality to deal with.

We believe that almost everything we think or feel is right and that other people – whose beliefs do not fit in with our preconceived beliefs – are wrong. That means that *they* have to change – not us. Reality dictates that we cannot force anyone change. Every person has the right to their own beliefs, their own values and their own behaviour.

At the end of the day, there are very few things directly under our control. However, the singular aspect which is always under our own control, is what we think – our thought processes and the stories we tell ourselves. As Victor Frankl so eloquently writes in his book 'Man's Search for Meaning': ***"Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."***

Let me also explain how this works on a neurological level.

A belief is a set of thoughts, which is a group of neurons in the brain working together. Every time we have an existing thought, we 'walk' an existing neural pathway. When we have a thought and a set of neurons are firing, a layer of myelin is deposited on that specific neural pathway. The layer of myelin acts as an insulator. It helps the electrical current between those neurons to transfer faster and more effectively. The brain likes to keep things 'automatic' in order for it to spend energy on other more important things, like executive function or critical thinking.

Therefore, the more we think the same thoughts, the more we 'walk' the same neural pathway, and in doing so that layer of myelin becomes thicker – even concrete after a time. After a while, it takes less effort to think that thought and typically the behaviour turns into a habit – then we start doing things automatically. Think of when you are brushing your teeth: because you do it at least twice a day, you don't need to think about which hand to use or how to apply the toothpaste to the toothbrush – you do it automatically and almost unconsciously. The up-side of this is that we can focus our attention on more important things, like critical thinking and creative problem solving. The down-side is that that sometimes those thoughts are no longer serving us to our best benefit. The longer we think the same thoughts, the more difficult it is to think different thoughts. Therefore, it is of vital importance that we continue to learn how to think differently. Some of the most effective ways to do this is to learn a new language, or to learn how to play a musical instrument, or to have lively debates and conversation with people about matter on which we potentially disagree. That forces our brains to 'walk' a new neural pathway. This process is call 'neuroplasticity' – the ability to form new neural pathways and by learning new skills and new ways of thinking.

The popular saying is 'neurons that fire together, wire together'. A relevant example is someone who says that in general they have stopped smoking, but as soon as they have a glass of wine or a drink, then they need to smoke a cigarette. Most probably, that person used to smoke while enjoying a drink. Therefore, the 'smoking' and 'drinking' neurons are now wired together. Then, when they have a drink, the neurons which tempt them to have a cigarette, are now also firing. That is one of the reasons why it is so difficult to break an existing or long-standing habit. But, again because of neuroplasticity, it is not impossible to learn new habits and a new way of doing. It just takes more – and consistent – practice.

4.1.1   RATIONAL EMOTIVE BEHAVIOUR

The basic principles of the Rational Emotive Behaviour Model dictate that our thoughts form our belief systems; and our beliefs and values dictate what we do and how we do it. These two factors – thoughts and behaviour – have a direct impact on our emotions. Our emotions are most often influenced and dictated by our thoughts and our behaviour. Therefore, if we want to change how we feel, we thus need to focus on becoming aware of what we are thinking and what we are doing.

Let us briefly look at our emotions. Our feelings are often the result of a set of hormones which are produced by the body: e.g. anxiety and fear are the result of the hormones adrenaline and cortisol; the feeling of love or connection is the result of the hormone oxytocin; the feelings of happiness and joy are as a result of the hormones dopamine and serotonin. *(Note: For the sake of clear understanding, this is understandably a simplistic – yet accurate – explanation. Often our emotions are indeed more complex than depicted here)*

When I think fearful or worrying thoughts or focus on problems, my brain most often responds by producing adrenaline (over the short term) or cortisol (over the long term). Adrenaline is called the 'fight or flight' hormone and it causes the feelings of anxiety or fear. The long-term production of cortisol suppresses the immune system, which could lead to various health concerns. That is the biggest reason why stress is the cause of many diseases.

In addition, people who are suffering from fear, worry, depression, stress or anxiety are often less active. They tend to move less. This behaviour also acts as a feedback system to the mind, which in turn affects the production of hormones.

When I think positive, rational and solution-focussed thoughts, my mind responds by producing serotonin, dopamine or oxytocin. I then tend to feel positive, happy, accomplished and hopeful. I also tend to be more active and move more frequently. This behaviour will also act as a bio-feedback system to the mind, which in turn affects the production of more 'feel-good' hormones.

In short – if I want to change what I am feeling, I need to focus on and become aware of what I am thinking and doing.

Rational Emotive Behaviour Model

What I THINK
Thoughts

What I FEEL   What I DO
Emotions   *Behaviour*

Thoughts
create
feelings

Feelings
create
behaviour

Behaviour
reinforces
thoughts
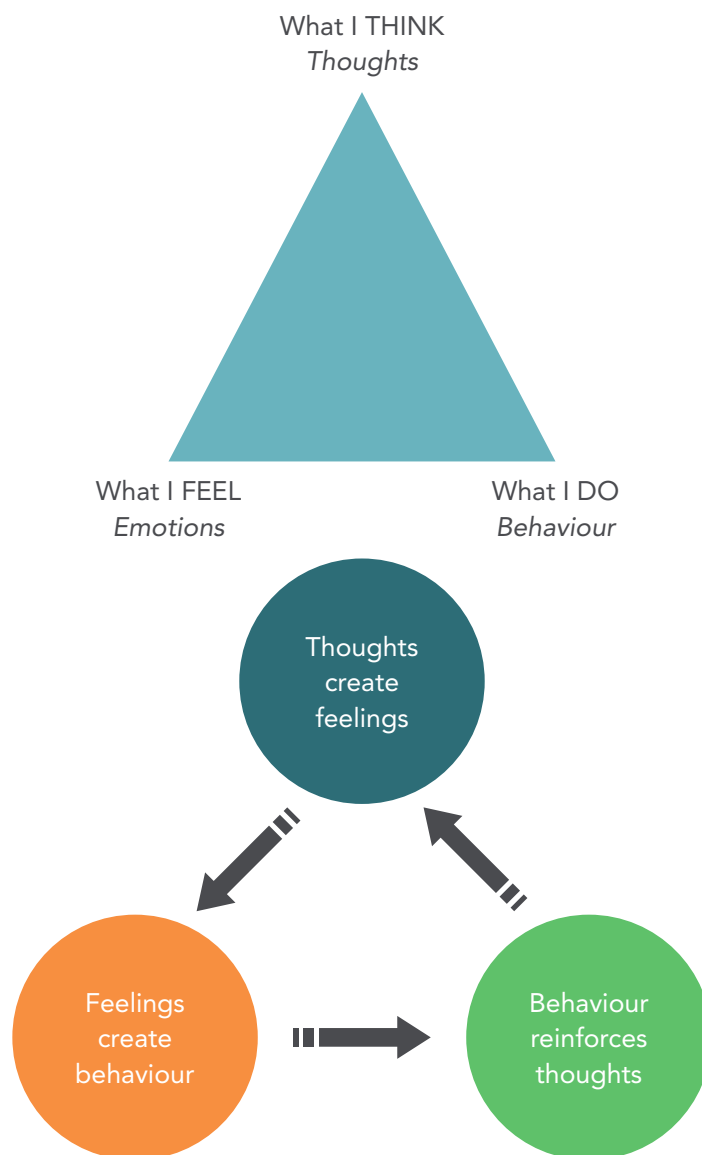
Our thoughts or belief systems can therefore be either Rational or Irrational. Irrational beliefs and thoughts lead to us making irrational decisions which often lead to irrational consequences. Whereas rational beliefs which are based in evidence, facts and rationality enable us to make rational decisions, which lead to more rational consequences. We mistakenly think that a specific event, occurrence or person causes us to feel or do something in a particular manner.

For example: When I receive a telephone call and the person invites me to address a large crowd of people, I become anxious. I then mistakenly assume that public speaking makes me feel anxious.

The actual truth is that it is my belief system or thought about speaking to large crowds that make me feel anxious or nervous. Those irrational thoughts or beliefs could make me think the following thought: I need to do it perfectly right or else I might as well not even bother to try; or someone will ask me a question to which I don't know the answer and that will be absolutely devastating and I will not be able to cope with it; or I really, really feel nervous so that must mean that I am not good at public speaking. A possible (irrational) consequence could then be that I decline the invitation and thus make an (irrational) career limiting decision.

When I change those irrational thoughts to more rational, helpful, solution-focussed thoughts, then my emotions will shift accordingly. More rational, realistic thoughts – with some solutions in mind – would help me think these thoughts instead: I can declare that I am new at this and invite the audience to offer feedback in order to help me improve my speaking skills – I don't need to do it perfectly; or if someone asks a question to which I don't know the answer, I will request input from the audience or use it as an opportunity to connect by requesting the questioner's email address, so that I can get back to them with an appropriate answer; or I am feeling nervous because I am not well prepared, but I could prepare well and practise, thus getting better at public speaking. A possible (rational) consequence could then be that I prepare properly, do my research and get even better at public speaking, which will help me to improve my skills and my career options.

Here is a graphical representation of what this process looks like:
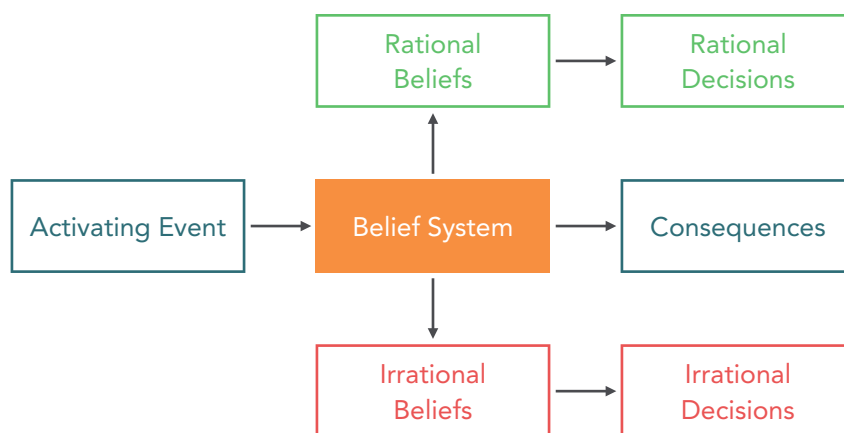
A – **Activating agent** – *e.g.: A young member of my team insists that they prepare a presentation without my valuable input and guidance.*

B – **Irrational Beliefs or thoughts** – *e.g.: "These Gen-Ys are all the same – disrespectful, insufferable and they always know better. Why should I even bother to care!"*

C   –   **Irrational Emotional Consequence** – *e.g.: I feel disrespected and I tell them to do as I instruct them or there will be dire consequences. In addition, it will be noted that they are not team players.*

<div align="center">**OR**</div>

A   –   **Activating agent** – *e.g.: A young member of my team insists that they prepare a presentation without my valuable input and guidance.*

B   –   **Rational Beliefs or thoughts** – *e.g.: "Let me see if he has a unique and new way of doing things. I can also use the opportunity to assess his leadership abilities".*

C   –   **Rational Emotional Consequence** – *e.g.: I feel motivated and I request him to first present it to me as a trial run so that we can look at possible things which require changes. In addition, I can prove to the other team members that I am open to their creative input and that I welcome their participation and collaboration.*

> Your **thoughts** about a situation or a person determine how you feel!

4.1.2 HOW DOES ALL OF THIS APPLY TO WORKING AND DEALING WITH GENERATION-Y?

Can you imagine how you would feel if you told yourself: "*These youngsters are so difficult to work with*" or "*Why are they so obstructive and difficult?!*" or "*I wish they would grow up and learn to do things my way*" or "*Why even bother to help them, they will do as they please*".

Those thoughts would most probably lead to feelings of anger, frustration, hopelessness and stress. That in turn could lead to behaviours like lashing out, non-cooperation and arguing.

And the more often we repeat the same destructive message to ourselves, the more we find supporting evidence to confirm what we already believe.

The mind is an amazing and powerful system, but we are often at the mercy of it too. **The mind will always find collaborative information which supports our current belief system, rather than looking at evidence that challenges our current belief system.**

The process of changing those 'automatic' negative thoughts could be difficult, but it is not impossible. If we establish new neural pathways which are positive, rational and solution-focussed, that may lead to feelings of hope, collaboration, willingness, meaningfulness and perhaps even joy. That will in turn lead to asking questions with the intention of helping or teaching ways to find solutions – and perhaps even offering an authentic smile.

> **While learning how to deal with Generation-Y, the most valuable and effective skill we could learn is to become aware of and change own beliefs and thoughts about Generation-Y.**

4.2   HOW TO CHANGE THOUGHT PATTERNS

4.2.1   BREATHE

One of the most effective – and easiest – things we can do, is to take a deep breath.

In order to explain the value of deep, belly-breathing, we need to do a quick re-visit of the brain and brain function. Various regions of the brain are responsible for a number of functions, e.g. the occipital lobe is active during vision; the parietal lobe is registering touch and pressure; and the temporal lobe is active during hearing sounds; etc.

For the sake of clarity and simplicity, let us focus only on the following four regions or systems in particular. All four of these regions work in unison with each other and that is part of the reason why they are so powerful.

The **PRE-FRONTAL CORTEX** is located at the very front of our brain. It is located in the round part of the skull, right above and behind the eyes. We use the pre-frontal cortex for **rational reasoning, foresight, insight and problem solving**. Rational reasoning is the cognitive function of assessing reasonable facts, thought processes and making judgments. Foresight is the process of using our forward-thinking processes in order to make rational, responsible decisions; e.g. if I drive at a high speed on a wet road, will I be able to stop in time in case of an emergency. Insight is the ability to think deeper and with insight, in relation to the situation and context; e.g. if I tell someone with a low esteem that the dress she is wearing looks hideous, then it might hurt her feelings.

An interesting fact about the pre-frontal cortex is that it starts rapid development once we enter puberty and it is fully developed only at the age of 22–24. That explains why it is so ineffective – and frustrating – to reason with a teenager. When we ask them to think rationally, we are asking them to access a part of their brain which is not yet fully developed.

Therefore, as a responsible parent, you sometime need to lay down the rules without the teenage child necessarily appreciating the reasons. However, that does not mean that we cannot encourage rational reasoning and help them to think critically – even while they are young. This late development of the pre-frontal cortex is also one reason why insurance premiums for younger drivers are higher than for older, more experience drivers.

The **HIPPOCAMPI** are responsible **for storing emotional memories**. The hippocampus is shaped in the form of a seahorse and one is located above each ear. Whenever something happens to us that leaves a strong, emotional memory, that memory is stored in either of the hippocampi.

The **AMYGDALA** is responsible for our **protection**. It is a small area of the brain, approximately the size of a walnut, which is located almost in the middle of the brain. It is also called the **'fear centre'**. The amygdala is responsible for the production of the 'flight or fight' or 'freeze' hormones adrenaline and cortisol.

Adrenaline prepares the body for running away from a (real or perceived) threat, or to fight it. The production of adrenaline last for 90 seconds only, then it shuts off. The effect of adrenaline on the body is dilation of the pupils (so that we can see better); increase the heart-rate (so that more blood is provided to the muscles); and faster breathing (so that more oxygenated blood is supplied to the muscles). It also directs blood away from some of the vital organs like the brain, stomach, kidney and liver; and instead it re-directs the blood to the muscles in the arm and legs. That is one reason why we are prone to experiencing a tight knot in the stomach when we are stressed or fearful, or the formation of stomach ulcers when under prolonged or frequent periods of stress. Some animals will even void the contents of their stomach and bladder when they get a fright, which helps them to run faster.

When we are under prolonged stress (lasting for weeks and moths), then the body produces cortisol. Cortisol suppresses the immune system and then we are more prone to illnesses and diseases. (e.g. fever blisters; colds and flu; some autoimmune diseases etc.)

Both the amygdala as well as the hippocampi form part of the limbic system. The **LIMBIC SYSTEM** is a complex system of brain regions and it is located at the base of the skull. In addition to many other things, it is also responsible for vital functions like controlling heartrate, breathing and muscle contraction. The limbic system is autonomous and it works all the time, even without our conscious permission. That is just as well, since it allows our heart to beat and lungs to breathe even when we are sleeping or when we are unconscious. Since the amygdala and the hippocampi are part of the limbic system, it means that the amygdala and hippocampi are *also* active without your permission.

So how do these systems work together to project us and how does it affect us?

Let's say, for example, that you are sitting at your desk while working on a report. You are focussed on the task at hand. All of a sudden, a bird flies into the window behind you and there is a resulting loud, unexpected bang. Within milliseconds your amygdala, which is always alert, is activated. It immediately searches for a memory stored in the hippocampi, in particular a memory that relates to a sudden, unexpected loud sound. If there is no memory stored, you will most probably respond by turning around and investigating – with some curiosity – what caused the loud bang. However, if perhaps during your childhood, someone set off fireworks close to you and it frightened you, that memory is now stored in the hippocampus. As a result, your 'flight, fight or freeze' system is activated, your body is flushed with adrenaline and you might react by jumping up from your chair and running away, or turn around and launch the nearest object at the window; or just sit still – frozen while your heart is pounding in your chest.

How does this protection system relate to the importance of breathing?

In order for the amygdala and hippocampi to do their job and protect you, they need blood (as any other system in the body does too). The closest source of oxygenated blood is the pre-frontal cortex. So, we experience an 'amygdala hijack' and blood is directed away from the pre-frontal cortex to the amygdala.

And *that* is the reason why, after a huge fright, or when very angry, we often react by doing something potentially senseless and afterwards say: *Why did I do something so stupid…what was I thinking?* The answer to that question is: you said or did that "something stupid" because you weren't thinking with your pre-frontal cortex – hence very limited rational reasoning, foresight and insight. You could not access your pre-frontal cortex because there was no oxygenated blood in that particular part of your brain.

When we take a deep, belly-breath – and count to 10 – we allow fresh, oxygenated blood to flow back to the pre-fontal cortex, which enables us to make more rational, solution-focussed decisions. It also helps us to control our emotions more rationally and effectively.

It is important to development the habit of practising regular deep, belly-breathing. When we become anxious or stressed, our breathing becomes shallow and rapid. Then there is an even higher possibility of experiencing an amygdala hijack. Regular cardiovascular exercise, or mindful practices (for example mediation or yoga) which encourage conscious breathing, help us to develop the habit of deep breathing.

Below is an additional exercise called Square Breathing which you could also try:

4.2.2   SQUARE BREATHING

1. Lie flat on your back on a firm surface or sit upright in a chair with both feet grounded
2. Take a few deep, relaxing breaths while focussing on your belly. Become aware of the movement of your tummy. Just observe.
3. Begin the Square Breathing Exercise…

   INHALE for **4** counts…
      HOLD that breath for **4** counts… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE that breath for **4** counts…
      HOLD that breath for **4** counts…
   INHALE for **3** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **3** counts… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE for **3** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **3** counts…
   INHALE for **2** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **2** counts… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE for **2** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **2** counts…
   INHALE for **1** count…
      HOLD the breath for **1** count… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE for **1** count…
      HOLD the breath for **1** count

4. Now reverse the process by…
   INHALING for **1** count…

      HOLD that breath for **1** count… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE that breath for **1** count…
      HOLD that breath for **1** count…
   INHALE for **2** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **2** counts… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE for **2** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **2** counts…
   INHALE for **3** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **3** counts… *(gently!)*
         EXHALE for **3** counts…
      HOLD the breath for **3** counts…
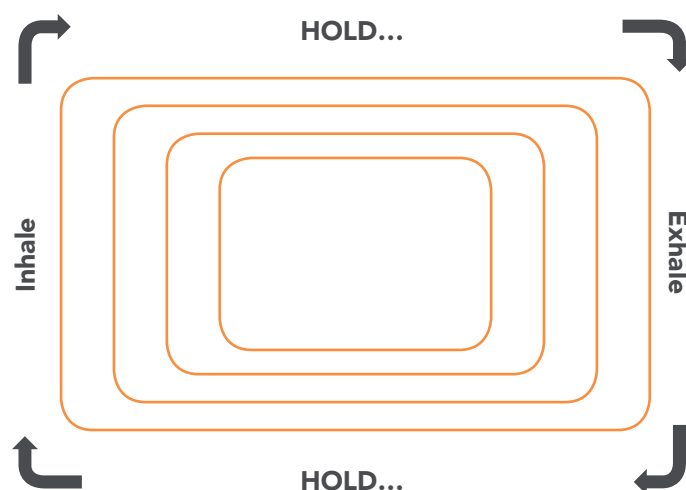
INHALE for **4** counts…
HOLD the breath for **4** counts… *(gently!)*
EXHALE for **4** counts…
HOLD the breath for **4** counts…and then breathe normally and with a relaxed mind.

This what it would look like graphically:

This skill does not only apply when dealing with Gen-Y only; but instead it will serve us well to apply it in all areas of our professional lives as well as our personal lives. The only thing which is always under our control, is our mind-set or thinking. Change happens from within – change happens when we become aware of and change what we are saying in our heads about a situation or a person.
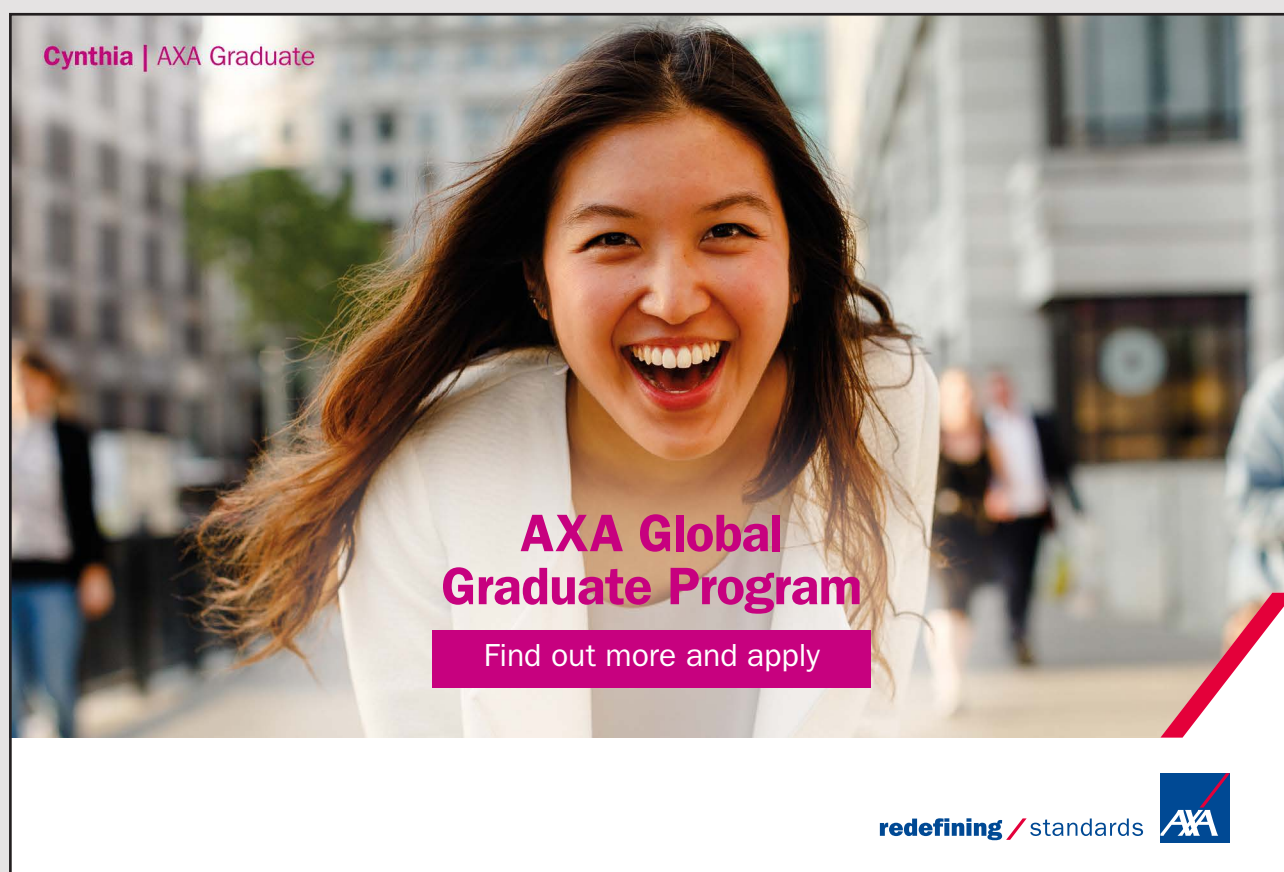
> The very first – and most effective – way to deal with Generation-Y is to become aware of our own belief systems or thoughts about Gen-Y; to check if those beliefs and thoughts are rational or irrational; and to ensure that your thoughts are rational, realistic, and solution-focussed.

Tips:

1. Develop the habit of deep, belly-breathing. It will serve you well in any situation.
2. Become aware of your 'head-tape' – the story you are telling in your head.
3. Use your emotions as a compass to assess the level of your thinking.
4. Negative emotions are most often a result of irrational thinking. In order to change what you are feeling, check your thinking.

A manager tells the team what to do, how to do it and by when to do it. A true leader asks the team questions which encourages them to come up with their own creative ideas, based on their own value systems and own competencies. The risk with instructing people is that we discourage them from using their brain and we prevent them from applying critical thinking. It is for this very reason that we often hear managers say: *"What is wrong with my team – they cannot think for themselves!"* When we are being told what to do, or how to do it, or what to think, we are not using our brain effectively. For example: If I am telling you that it is cold outside, then there is no need for you to think about it.

When we ask questions with the intention of gaining a better understanding and for the other person to apply critical thinking, with the end-goal of coming up with creative solutions, then there is a tremendous amount of neural activity. A hugely valuable benefit is that we then already have the buy-in of the other person, because they come up with their own ideas and solutions. The leader may also ask questions around potential pitfalls, what is required, what are the consequences of not delivering, etc. By asking questions, we are inviting the other person to apply critical thinking. For example: If I ask: *"What is the weather like outside?"* then you would apply critical thinking – even if you don't answer the question.

One difference between a manager and a leader is that the manager cannot afford to take leave of absence, because nothing will get done while they are on holiday. When the leader can go on holiday and things are running so smoothly that almost no-one misses them, then that is a sure sign that the team is thinking for and by themselves.

> Gen-Ys are highly resistant to being told what to do, how to do it and by when they should do it. By adopting the habit of asking more questions, we can allow and develop critical thinking, as well as creative problem solving. It also makes life so much easier for the leader since there is less pressure on them to do all the thinking! A good leader helps Generation-Y to think creatively by asking questions.

Tips:
1. Start by asking open ended questions followed by additional closed-ended questions.
2. Refrain from asking "why" since that invites justification and feeble excuses. Rather ask "what is the reason…" which will allow an answer that addressed the actual reasons. Also, a 'why question" comes across as interrogatory and critical.
3. Ask questions which focus on the solutions more than on the problem.
4. Reflect (paraphrase) what the other person has said. This will prove that you have listened and help you check if you have the correct understanding. An added benefit of reflecting is that the other person will hear what it is that they have said (in case they want to correct a possible miscommunication or misperception).

Here is a list of some valuable questions a leader or coach could ask:

- Please help me understand where you are coming from. Walk me through your thinking.
- What do you need to happen next? What would you like to do differently?
- What is the reason that you are saying that/doing that?
- What are the risks with the current way of thinking/doing things/dealing with issues?
- What does a different way of thinking look like for you?
- What major concern would you be addressing if you…?
- What other options or solutions can you think of? What is the worst/best thing that could happen?
- What is preventing you from doing it?
- What are the potential benefits of doing that in such a manner? How would it matter?
- How would that impact on you or the team?
- How would doing this help you achieve your goal?
- How does this relate to what we have been discussing/to what happened/is happening?
- How can you say it differently so that I have a better understanding?
- In which other way could you have responded to the situation/comment?
- Do you know that for sure or do you believe it to be true/factual?
- If you did know the answer, what would it be?
- If what you tell me is the topic, what is the real issue?
- What is the reason you are telling me this? What do you need me to do?

4.4 CREATE A SAFE SPACE WHERE PEOPLE ARE ALLOWED TO MAKE MISTAKES

The inventor of the lightbulb, Thomas Edison, famously said: "*I am a success because of my failures*". Note that he did not say that he was successful *despite* his failures. There is great learning to be gained from making mistakes. Often, mistakes are made with resulting pain, suffering, loss or embarrassment. If we think about our greatest lessons learned, we remember those most where there was a level of discomfort associated with the learning experience.

By creating a safe space for Gen-Ys to make mistakes, we are inviting creative thinking and ingenious solutions are often the result. The leader's responsibility is to assist the person who is making the mistake, to focus on the learning and on what to do ***differently*** in future, instead of harping on about what was done wrong. This process, again, is most beneficial if we do it through a process of asking insightful questions rather than telling. By allowing a space and an opportunity for making mistakes, we encourage exploration and ingenuity. The corporate environment and the world is never static and ever changing. In order to remain fluid, dynamic and ahead of the curve, we need to change how we do things. That calls for creative experimentation – which is often accompanied by mistakes and mishaps. As long as we can help Gen-Y to focus on the "golden nugget" in the failure, then we can turn than mistake into a valuable and a lasting learning experience. That, however, does not mean that there should be no consequence to making a mistake! The risks and possible negative outcomes need to be addressed and discussed, preferably in a process of asking questions.

> By allowing and even inviting Gen-Y to make mistakes, we teach the skill of how to turn a mistake into a learning experience; how to develop grit; and very importantly, how to deal with disappointment and failure without becoming despondent or negative.

Tips:

1. Celebrate failures as well as successes, as long there is learning associated with the mistake.
2. Actively invite experimentation, out-of-the-box thinking and 'messing up' – with consequences and responsibilities that may ensue.
3. When they experience negative feelings as a result of the failure, allow them to feel it – without allowing them the opportunity to wallow in a 'victim' mind-set.

4.5   BE THE COACH

Generation-Y learn best when they are allowed to design their own path forward. When we teach, even with the best intention, we often disallow critical thinking to develop. Also, we teach from a space of what the teacher knows – and that knowledge might be limited. When we mentor, we teach or instruct from a position of experience and expertise. This too could potentially discourage critical thinking. When we coach, we are facilitating the process of learning. The learner then learns at their own pace, within their own value system and abilities, and within the context of their own frame of reference. We can change that thought process by asking more questions (80% of the time) rather than telling (only 20% of the time).

> Generation-Y thrive on a coaching style of leading. It aids their empowerment, it makes them feel valued and respected; and often it allows the coach to learn from the learner too – we all can do with some further development!

Tips:

1. Make the process about the learner (Gen-Y) and focus on their needs more than your own needs. Discover that win-win space where the needs of all the parties are met.
2. Encourage them to find their own path – even when they ask for advice. First let them try to find the answer on their own while offering guidance in the form of questions and only then offer advice.
3. Assist them to focus on the valuable lessons when they make mistakes.

5 HOW TO RELATE TO GENERATION-Y

The dichotomy here is that, in an attempt to identify with someone, we are often not separating the person – which is dictated by personality, genes, past events and culture, from their behaviour – which is derived from their values, experience and learning. Personality does not change. Each person learns to work within the frame of their personality and we do the best we can with what we are born with. It is thus futile and frustrating to try and identify with the person if their personality is in direct conflict with our own personality. Therefore, it is much more effective and solution-focussed to concentrate on behaviour – our own behaviour relative to that person, as well as their behaviour in response to our own.

Because we work with people from different generations, it is a given that we are working with people with a wide range of – and often conflicting – value systems and hence beliefs. This will make it difficult to identify with the person as much as we ideally would like to or are expected to. What we can then focus on is to rather identify with the common goals and needs which we share. In working for the same organisation or on the same team, it is highly likely that we share common goals and objectives. The "how we get there" might often look different to each person from each generation.

It is also important that employers and managers identify what the inherent needs are of their staff, even more so if the staff are from Generation-Y. That is the most effective way to get their buy-in and hence tap into their best delivery. Affirm their needs and your commitment to help them realise their needs – and ideally ensure that the outcome also meets our own needs.

Tips:

1. Focus on behaviour (which can and should change) rather than on personality (which cannot change).
2. Start from the place where you are already in agreement, before focussing on those areas where you differ.
3. Identify with the common goals and objectives which you are sharing, then work towards finding solutions which will enable you to achieve those goals.

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6 HOW TO MANAGE GENERATION-Y

Leading and managing Generation-Y can – *at times* – be a daunting task. Allow me to share some proven and highly effective tools and tips which could assist you in effectively managing Generation-Y:

6.1 ASK QUESTIONS

- Ask questions with the intention of reaching a better understanding
- Ask questions which invite and enable crucial thinking
- Ask questions which assist with creative problem solving

6.2 LISTEN WHEN THEY SPEAK

- Apply active listening and listen to the meta-messages too
- Listen with the intention of identifying what the real issue is
- Listen in order to show respect and engagement

6.3 REFLECT

- Reflect back what was said in order to prove active listening
- Reflect so that the other person hears what they said, so they can correct potential miscommunication or misperceptions
- Reflect the emotion and use empathy if they express emotions while talking. This leads to an instant feeling of connection

6.4 ANSWER THEIR QUESTIONS AND ADDRESS THEIR REAL CONCERNS

- Directly and succinctly answer questions without lecturing
- Address the real concern or the real issue
- Ideally, follow-up with another question so that they remain engaged

6.5 ADMIT TO IT IF YOU DON'T KNOW THE ANSWER OR SOLUTION TO A PROBLEM

- Honesty will earn their respect and confidence in your decisions and opinions
- Show humility and even vulnerability
- Hold them accountable to help find the answer to their questions

6.6　CREATE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONTEXT AND THE "BIGGER PICTURE"

- Explain how the task or job facilitates a difference for the greater good of humanity or other groups, since they have a need to make an impact on a global scale
- Make it more than ROI (return on investment) – rather connect a sentiment or emotional outcome to the task
- Treat them like a person, not like a number or an employee

6.7　TREAT THEM WITH RESPECT

- Treat matters they discuss with you in strictest confidence
- Refrain from gossiping or rescuing
- Model integrity and a high level of ethical conduct

6.8　DON'T OFFER REWARDS JUST FOR THE SAKE OF IT

- Rewards will be more appreciated when earned
- Refrain from using rewards as an incentive – they could start expecting it
- Ask what form of reward they would value most – don't assume that their reward system is the same as yours or everyone else's

6.9　PROVIDE DIRECT FEEDBACK, ADVICE AND COACHING

- Don't harbour any expectation that your advice or guidance will be heeded
- Ideally, coach by asking questions
- Separate giving praise and giving criticism in the same session. Focus on behaviour when giving criticism or praise, so that they know what they were *doing* which earned the feedback

6.10　BE HONEST AND SINCERE

- Be direct and succinct when talking or asking questions
- Be clear of your own intentions – it is advisable to declare your intention
- Refrain from being "nice" – rather be sincere

6.11　SUPPORT THE EXPRESSION OF INDIVIDUALITY

- Make them feel special – when earned!
- Ask what will make them feel special – don't assume
- Focus on their USP (unique selling points) and develop them within that particular context

6.12 PROVIDE AND SUPPORT FREQUENT CHANGE

- Keep it dynamic and fast paced
- Ask how you can accommodate their need for change
- Be inventive and keep it fun

6.13 TEACH THE SKILLS OF EFFECTIVE AND SOLUTIONS FOCUSSED CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

- Reframe conflict as an opportunity to learn and grow
- Use regular and real-time giving and receiving of feedback as a tool to become less sensitive or emotional about conflict
- Refrain from harbouring grudges and be open to feedback from them too

6.14 HELP THEM LEARN THE SKILLS OF GIVING AND RECEIVING DIRECT FEEDBACK

- Provide regular and real-time feedback
- Focus on behaviour, not personality
- Invite and request feedback on your own behaviour too, then model the correct way of receiving it

6.15 HELP THEM TO BECOME RESILIENT TO CHANGE, DISAPPOINTMENT AND HARDSHIP

- Provide tools and coping skills that will help them build resilience
- Assist them in moving on by applying creative solutions
- Help them to avoid playing the victim

6.16 TEACH THEM A COMPREHENSIVE EMOTIONAL VOCABULARY

- Give empathy when required – that will help them learn emotive words
- Help them to express what they are feeling
- Make offering empathy (not sympathy!) a habit and use it to forge an instant connection

6.17 ALLOW THEM AND HELP THEM TO CREATE A WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Assist them in maintaining a heathy balance between work and play
- Offer rewards which will enable them to maintain that balance
- Help them to define and honour healthy boundaries

6.18 ALLOW FOR SOME PLAY WHILE PERFORMING THEIR DUTIES

- Develop skill-sets which make work feel like play. When appropriate, combine work and play
- Allow (responsible) fun time
- Use appropriate humour often and relentlessly – in particular in times of stress

6.19 ALLOW THEM TO EXPLORE AND IMPLEMENT THEIR OWN WAY OF DOING THINGS

- Allow them to do it their own way – as long as they deliver on the agreed outcome and within the agreed time frame
- Allow them to work at their own pace and time – as long as they deliver within the agreed time frame
- Allow them to work with the team of their choosing – as long as they deliver on the agreed outcome

6.20 ALLOW THEM THE OPPORTUNITY TO TRAVEL

- Use it as a potential reward system
- Allow them to transfer to other offices or branches within the organisation
- Virtual travel (connecting with international teams) is also an option that could help them connect on a global level

7 HOW TO RETAIN & REWARD GENERATION-Y

Everybody needs to and wants to be rewarded for hard work and for being reliable. Often employers think that paying the employee a salary or an hourly fee is adequate remuneration and reward. For some people, earning a salary might be satisfactory. But because different people (and generations) have different value systems, it is vital that employers reward employees in a manner – or currency – that makes them feel valued an appreciated. Showing appreciation for employees' efforts and investing in them, go a long way toward ensuring employee retention, dedication, loyalty and joy in the workplace.

Here are some ways in which employers could reward Generation-Y employers:

7.1 COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION

We all have a need to be heard and Gen-Ys have the same need, even more so. When we ask for their input on matters that require their participation, or on matters that affect them or the performance of their duties, then they collaborate by offering their input, creative ideas and dedication. They appreciate, in particular, using technology to provide information or to assist with something. In addition, they will also show their cooperation by making use of social media, connecting with others and bringing a fresh, invigorating energy to the team. They love to collaborate on product designs, in particular if the target audience is their generation or younger; or if the product or service addresses global concerns.

Suggestions:

1. Actively invite input from your Generation-Y team members.
2. Allow them to choose the team of their liking and to choose how they contribute to that team.
3. Ask how they would like to do things rather than telling them how they should be doing it – this will greatly help towards getting their buy-in.

7.2 TRANSPARENCY

One sure way of losing the trust of Gen-Y is to withhold relevant information from them or to play mind-games on them. It makes them feel suspicious and the result is mistrust and despondency.

When you need their buy-in on a project, sell them on the benefits of the project rather than on the features. They want to know how it will make a difference to them and how it will add value to the global community. They also want to know how it will make them "shine". It is imperative that they make up their own minds on if and how they want to participate.

Suggestions:

1. Be open, honest and relevant with what is communicated to them.
2. When you don't know the answer, admit it. If you make a mistake, own up.
3. Be transparent and explain in detail what their career progression within the organisation looks like; how you will assist them in getting there and in what way they will be rewarded.

7.3   CREATE CONTEXT

Gen-Ys needs to know the context of how what you are expecting from them, fits into the bigger picture. The "why" matters more than the "how". When they have a clear understanding of the reasons and the context (the 'why') then they can come up with a 'how' that works best for them.

Suggestions:

1. When instructing Gen-Y how to perform a task, ensure that they also understand the "why" of performing the task in that specific manner.
2. Help them to appreciate how performing the task ties in with the bigger objectives and goals of the company. Help them realise that they play a vital part in reaching those goals.
3. Focus on the benefits of the outcome, not only the details of the task.

7.4 SHINING BRIGHT

They like feeling important and being the centre of attention – hence the prevalence of taking "selfies" and posting it on social media. This isn't because they are conceited, but rather because they love being part of something big, impressive and important.

Suggestions:

1. Reward often and even before they ask for rewards.
2. Reward in an unexpected way, perhaps by offering fun experiences rather than just money.
3. Identify ways in which a particular person stands out from the rest and publically celebrate their uniqueness and achievements.

7.5 FAIRNESS

Fairness is a debatable issue since fairness is hugely interpretive and subjective. What is fair for one person is not necessarily fair for another person. *(e.g.: If I lock the door to my house at night, I think I am being fair and reasonable; however, the burglar who is trying to gain access might not think the same and reckons I am being unfair and unreasonable)* Therefore an employer needs to know what is deemed fair treatment for Generation-Y. If the employer and/or manager treats them fairly and reasonably, Gen-Y gives you a second and possibly even a third chance, if necessary. Fair treatment includes things like offering training and coaching; additional benefits; treating them well and paying a market-related wage. If they feel that you are not treating them fairly, they will move on to greener pastures.

Suggestions:

1. Make sure that you know what they deem as fair. Fairness is subjective and what is fair to one person might not be fair to another.
2. Ensure that there is consistency and balance in rewards offered; in boundaries which are dictated and in consequences applied. Consistency = fairness.
3. Consistently deliver on promises made.

7.6   TECHNOLOGY IS A GIVEN

The provision of the latest technology is not seen as a reward or a special benefit – it is a necessity. Gen-Ys don't like it when technology doesn't work and when it prevents them from performing their duties. They have an expectation that it should work and work well and work every single time.

Suggestions:

1. Ensure that they have access to the latest and news technology, relevant to the industry they work in.
2. Allow them to provide input on the tools and technology they need to perform their duties.
3. Refrain from offering the use of latest technology as a reward – it is not a reward, it is an expected necessity.

7.7   SOCIALIZING IS PART OF WORK

Work should be fun and what is more fun than connecting with your friends while you are working. It does not matter if they connect face-to-face with colleagues or other members of their team, or via social media or email or text messages – as long as they can connect and share their thoughts, experiences and even woes. Gen-Y's prefer to never be alone – not even in their thoughts.

Suggestions:

1. Create some physical spaces (e.g. chill rooms; coffee corners; games rooms) where employees can connect and socialise.
2. Make use of social media (e.g. WhatsApp; Facebook; Instagram; Snapchat etc.) when communicating with the team and to encourage communication between team members.
3. When appropriate, allow the use of social media in the marketing of products or services.

7.8   THRILLS AND ADVENTURE

As much as Gen-Y enjoy having the latest gadgets, wearing the latest fashion or playing with the new technology, another element which is as important, is having a "good time" in the way of having fun and excitement. That is one reason why travel is of paramount importance to Gen-Y. They need to try new food, meet different cultures and learn new things. They even prefer a little danger, as long as it means having an experience of a lifetime.

Suggestions:

1. When offering rewards, ensure that the results are fun and exciting – think out-of-the-box and be daring.
2. When possible, help them to make the performance of their duties as much fun as possible. If not possible to make if fun, at least make it exciting.
3. Keep things alive, dynamic and fast-paced.

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8 RECOMMENDATIONS ON SUPPORTING GENERATION-Y

How can employers, managers, leaders, teachers and even parents assist Gen-Y in the most responsible manner?

8.1 ASK QUESTIONS RATHER THAN TELL OR INSTRUCT

The benefits of doing this are:
- Identifying the real issue rather than focussing on the topic
- Gaining insight
- Helping identify creative solutions
- Getting better buy-in
- Better connection
- Better team work
- Improved brain development and neural utilisation

8.2 SHOW SINCERE AND AUTHENTIC INTEREST

The benefits of doing this are:
- Deep, sustainable connections
- It builds respect, commitment and loyalty
- It creates sincerity and trust

8.3 BE CONSISTENT

The benefits of doing this are:
- It builds trust
- It will be seen as fair treatment
- By being consistent, we avoid confusion and discord

8.4 SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

The benefits of doing this are:
- It builds trust
- It helps to clarify what is okay and what is not okay
- It creates an invitation to do what is best and most responsible

8.5   BE SOLUTION-FOCUSSED

The benefits of doing this are:
- Focussing on finding a solution to a problem, rather than amplifying the actual problem
- It aids creative and critical thinking
- Tasks are completed much more effectively and efficiently

8.6   BE SUCCINCT

The benefits of doing this are:
- It prevents coming across as critical or lecturing
- It aids better understanding
- It encourages effective communication

8.7   GIVE DIRECT FEEDBACK ON BEHAVIOUR

The benefits of doing this are:
- Problems or misperceptions can be corrected in real time
- It is vital for personal and professional development
- It builds trust

8.8   BE TRANSPARENT

The benefits of doing this are:
- It builds trust
- It allows effective communication
- It demands respect

8.9   COLLABORATE

The benefits of doing this are:
- It is easier than doing everything yourself
- It is a wonderful way to get buy-in
- It invites critical thinking and creative solutions

8.10 ACCOUNTABILITY

The benefits of doing this are:
- It helps people to behave responsibly and to deal with the consequences of their actions or decisions
- It builds trust when we hold ourselves accountable too
- It is responsible and effective leadership

9 CONCLUSION

My intention with writing this book was to create a better understanding of this very unique generation. My hope is that you as the reader have gained some new knowledge and learned a few new ways of managing Generation-Y.

The one-size-fits-all approach does not apply when working with Generation-Y. As a manager or team leader, you have to be creative, inventive and courageous enough to explore new ways of doing things, even if it means trying things which you have not tried before.

Look at each person for who they are and work with their unique talents. That will enable you to get the best from them. In addition, by working within the context of their uniqueness, it could help you meet your expectations as well as meeting their expectations – a wonderful win-win.

Create a space and some opportunity for them to make mistakes – a space where they can try new things and if it does not work, to land and fail safely.

Choose the perfect position for that individual – a job, a responsibility or project which is aligned to their unique skills and talents. Work with what you have and turn it into gold.

Engage with Generation-Y rather than merely over-seeing their performance. Forge a connection and let them know that they matter. They also need to know that what they do, matters too.

Allow them the opportunity to apply expansive and creative problem solving. They want to use their "whole brain" and they need to be challenged with new, inventive, way-out, never-been-done-before ways of doing.

Give them the opportunity to grow within the company and offer rewards within their own value systems and needs – even before they ask for it. It will make them feel valued and appreciated. In return, they will reward you with loyalty and dedication. Allow them do entrepreneurial things within the organisation.

Arguably the most well-known and one of the most successful Gen-Ys is the founder of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg. This is what he said about his commencement address at Harvard University when he graduated in 2017: *Today I delivered the commencement address at Harvard. This speech was personally important to me, and I've been writing it for a long time.*

While delivering his commencement address he stated that his message was about purpose. As millennials, finding their purpose is not enough. The challenge for this specific generation is to create a world where every single person has a sense of purpose. That's the key to true happiness and the only way they feel they will keep society moving forward. He defined purpose as "*that sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, that we are needed, that we have something better ahead to work for*".

He feels that purpose is what creates true happiness.

But he also said that it is not enough to have purpose oneself, but rather one has to create a sense of purpose for others, firstly by taking on big meaningful projects and secondly by redefining equality to give everyone the freedom they need to pursue purpose.

> WHAT A SPECIAL GIFT AND WHAT AN PRIVILEGE IT WOULD BE WHEN EVERY MANAGER, LEADER, HR PERSON AND COLLEAGUE CAN BE PART OF THIS VISION AND CO-CREATE A BETTER AND MORE JOYFUL WORLD TOGETHER

Here is the full transcript of the commencement address, as posted in the Harvard Gazette on the official Harvard University website. The video of the Marc Zuckerberg delivering his commencement address can also be viewed on YouTube.

I strongly recommend reading it, since it will offer wonderful insight into the mind of Generation-Y, what they stand for, what they value and what they want to accomplish.

Mark Zuckerberg Commencement Address | Harvard Commencement 2017

Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg gave his address at Harvard's 366th Commencement on May 25, 2017 at Tercentenary Theatre.

President Faust, Board of Overseers, faculty, alumni, friends, proud parents, members of the ad board, and graduates of the greatest university in the world,

I'm honored to be with you today because, let's face it, you accomplished something I never could. If I get through this speech, it'll be the first time I actually finish something at Harvard. Class of 2017, congratulations!

I'm an unlikely speaker, not just because I dropped out, but because we're technically in the same generation. We walked this yard less than a decade apart, studied the same ideas and slept through the same Ec10 lectures. We may have taken different paths to get here, especially if you came all the way from the Quad, but today I want to share what I've learned about our generation and the world we're building together.

But first, the last couple of days have brought back a lot of good memories.

How many of you remember exactly what you were doing when you got that email telling you that you got into Harvard? I was playing Civilization and I ran downstairs, got my dad, and for some reason, his reaction was to video me opening the email. That could have been a really sad video. I swear getting into Harvard is still the thing my parents are most proud of me for.

What about your first lecture at Harvard? Mine was Computer Science 121 with the incredible Harry Lewis. I was late so I threw on a t-shirt and didn't realize until afterwards it was inside out and backwards with my tag sticking out the front. I couldn't figure out why no one would talk to me — except one guy, KX Jin. He just went with it. We ended up doing our problem sets together, and now he runs a big part of Facebook. And that, Class of 2017, is why you should be nice to people.

But my best memory from Harvard was meeting Priscilla. I had just launched this prank website Facemash, and the ad board wanted to "see me". Everyone thought I was going to get kicked out. My parents came to help me pack. My friends threw me a going away party. As luck would have it, Priscilla was at that party with her friend. We met in line for the bathroom in the Pfoho Belltower, and in what must be one of the all time romantic lines, I said: "I'm going to get kicked out in three days, so we need to go on a date quickly."

Actually, any of you graduating can use that line.

I didn't end up getting kicked out – I did that to myself. Priscilla and I started dating. And, you know, that movie made it seem like Facemash was so important to creating Facebook. It wasn't. But without Facemash I wouldn't have met Priscilla, and she's the most important person in my life, so you could say it was the most important thing I built in my time here.

We've all started lifelong friendships here, and some of us even families. That's why I'm so grateful to this place. Thanks, Harvard.

Today I want to talk about purpose. But I'm not here to give you the standard commencement about finding your purpose. We're millennials. We'll try to do that instinctively. Instead, I'm here to tell you finding your purpose isn't enough. The challenge for our generation is creating a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

One of my favorite stories is when John F Kennedy visited the NASA space center, he saw a janitor carrying a broom and he walked over and asked what he was doing. The janitor responded: "Mr. President, I'm helping put a man on the moon".

Purpose is that sense that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, that we are needed, that we have something better ahead to work for. Purpose is what creates true happiness.

You're graduating at a time when this is especially important. When our parents graduated, purpose reliably came from your job, your church, your community. But today, technology and automation are eliminating many jobs. Membership in communities is declining. Many people feel disconnected and depressed, and are trying to fill a void.

As I've traveled around, I've sat with children in juvenile detention and opioid addicts, who told me their lives could have turned out differently if they just had something to do, an after school program or somewhere to go. I've met factory workers who know their old jobs aren't coming back and are trying to find their place.

To keep our society moving forward, we have a generational challenge – to not only create new jobs, but create a renewed sense of purpose.

I remember the night I launched Facebook from my little dorm in Kirkland House. I went to Noch's with my friend KX. I remember telling him I was excited to connect the Harvard community, but one day someone would connect the whole world.

The thing is, it never even occurred to me that someone might be us. We were just college kids. We didn't know anything about that. There were all these big technology companies with resources. I just assumed one of them would do it. But this idea was so clear to us – that all people want to connect. So we just kept moving forward, day by day.

I know a lot of you will have your own stories just like this. A change in the world that seems so clear you're sure someone else will do it. But they won't. You will.

But it's not enough to have purpose yourself. You have to create a sense of purpose for others.

I found that out the hard way. You see, my hope was never to build a company, but to make an impact. And as all these people started joining us, I just assumed that's what they cared about too, so I never explained what I hoped we'd build.

A couple years in, some big companies wanted to buy us. I didn't want to sell. I wanted to see if we could connect more people. We were building the first News Feed, and I thought if we could just launch this, it could change how we learn about the world.

Nearly everyone else wanted to sell. Without a sense of higher purpose, this was the startup dream come true. It tore our company apart. After one tense argument, an advisor told me if I didn't agree to sell, I would regret the decision for the rest of my life. Relationships were so frayed that within a year or so every single person on the management team was gone.

That was my hardest time leading Facebook. I believed in what we were doing, but I felt alone. And worse, it was my fault. I wondered if I was just wrong, an imposter, a 22 year-old kid who had no idea how the world worked.

Now, years later, I understand that *is* how things work with no sense of higher purpose. It's up to us to create it so we can all keep moving forward together.

Today I want to talk about three ways to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose: by taking on big meaningful projects together, by redefining equality so everyone has the freedom to pursue purpose, and by building community across the world.

First, let's take on big meaningful projects.

Our generation will have to deal with tens of millions of jobs replaced by automation like self-driving cars and trucks. But we have the potential to do so much more together.

Every generation has its defining works. More than 300,000 people worked to put a man on the moon – including that janitor. Millions of volunteers immunized children around the world against polio. Millions of more people built the Hoover dam and other great projects.

These projects didn't just provide purpose for the people doing those jobs, they gave our whole country a sense of pride that we could do great things.

Now it's our turn to do great things. I know, you're probably thinking: I don't know how to build a dam, or get a million people involved in anything.

But let me tell you a secret: no one does when they begin. Ideas don't come out fully formed. They only become clear as you work on them. You just have to get started.

If I had to understand everything about connecting people before I began, I never would have started Facebook.

Movies and pop culture get this all wrong. The idea of a single eureka moment is a dangerous lie. It makes us feel inadequate since we haven't had ours. It prevents people with seeds of good ideas from getting started. Oh, you know what else movies get wrong about innovation? No one writes math formulas on glass. That's not a thing.

It's good to be idealistic. But be prepared to be misunderstood. Anyone working on a big vision will get called crazy, even if you end up right. Anyone working on a complex problem will get blamed for not fully understanding the challenge, even though it's impossible to know everything upfront. Anyone taking initiative will get criticized for moving too fast, because there's always someone who wants to slow you down.

In our society, we often don't do big things because we're so afraid of making mistakes that we ignore all the things wrong today if we do nothing. The reality is, anything we do will have issues in the future. But that can't keep us from starting.

So what are we waiting for? It's time for our generation-defining public works. How about stopping climate change before we destroy the planet and getting millions of people involved manufacturing and installing solar panels? How about curing all diseases and asking volunteers to track their health data and share their genomes? Today we spend 50x more treating people who are sick than we spend finding cures so people don't get sick in the first place. That makes no sense. We can fix this. How about modernizing democracy so everyone can vote online, and personalizing education so everyone can learn?

These achievements are within our reach. Let's do them all in a way that gives everyone in our society a role. Let's do big things, not only to create progress, but to create purpose.

So taking on big meaningful projects is the first thing we can do to create a world where everyone has a sense of purpose.

The second is redefining equality to give everyone the freedom they need to pursue purpose.

Many of our parents had stable jobs throughout their careers. Now we're all entrepreneurial, whether we're starting projects or finding or role. And that's great. Our culture of entrepreneurship is how we create so much progress.

Now, an entrepreneurial culture thrives when it's easy to try lots of new ideas. Facebook wasn't the first thing I built. I also built games, chat systems, study tools and music players. I'm not alone. JK Rowling got rejected 12 times before publishing Harry Potter. Even Beyonce had to make hundreds of songs to get Halo. The greatest successes come from having the freedom to fail.

But today, we have a level of wealth inequality that hurts everyone. When you don't have the freedom to take your idea and turn it into a historic enterprise, we all lose. Right now our society is way over-indexed on rewarding success and we don't do nearly enough to make it easy for everyone to take lots of shots.

Let's face it. There is something wrong with our system when I can leave here and make billions of dollars in 10 years while millions of students can't afford to pay off their loans, let alone start a business.

Look, I know a lot of entrepreneurs, and I don't know a single person who gave up on starting a business because they might not make enough money. But I know lots of people who haven't pursued dreams because they didn't have a cushion to fall back on if they failed.

We all know we don't succeed just by having a good idea or working hard. We succeed by being lucky too. If I had to support my family growing up instead of having time to code, if I didn't know I'd be fine if Facebook didn't work out, I wouldn't be standing here today. If we're honest, we all know how much luck we've had.

Every generation expands its definition of equality. Previous generations fought for the vote and civil rights. They had the New Deal and Great Society. Now it's our time to define a new social contract for our generation.

We should have a society that measures progress not just by economic metrics like GDP, but by how many of us have a role we find meaningful. We should explore ideas like universal basic income to give everyone a cushion to try new things. We're going to change jobs many times, so we need affordable childcare to get to work and healthcare that aren't tied to one company. We're all going to make mistakes, so we need a society that focuses less on locking us up or stigmatizing us. And as technology keeps changing, we need to focus more on continuous education throughout our lives.

And yes, giving everyone the freedom to pursue purpose isn't free. People like me should pay for it. Many of you will do well and you should too.

That's why Priscilla and I started the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and committed our wealth to promoting equal opportunity. These are the values of our generation. It was never a question of if we were going to do this. The only question was when.

Millennials are already one of the most charitable generations in history. In one year, three of four US millennials made a donation and seven out of ten raised money for charity.

But it's not just about money. You can also give time. I promise you, if you take an hour or two a week – that's all it takes to give someone a hand, to help them reach their potential.

Maybe you think that's too much time. I used to. When Priscilla graduated from Harvard she became a teacher, and before she'd do education work with me, she told me I needed to teach a class. I complained: "Well, I'm kind of busy. I'm running this company." But she insisted, so I taught a middle school program on entrepreneurship at the local Boys and Girls Club.

I taught them lessons on product development and marketing, and they taught me what it's like feeling targeted for your race and having a family member in prison. I shared stories from my time in school, and they shared their hope of one day going to college too. For five years now, I've been having dinner with those kids every month. One of them threw me and Priscilla our first baby shower. And next year they're going to college. Every one of them. First in their families.

We can all make time to give someone a hand. Let's give everyone the freedom to pursue their purpose – not only because it's the right thing to do, but because when more people can turn their dreams into something great, we're all better for it.

Purpose doesn't only come from work. The third way we can create a sense of purpose for everyone is by building community. And when our generation says "everyone", we mean everyone in the world.

Quick show of hands: how many of you are from another country? Now, how many of you are friends with one of these folks? Now we're talking. We have grown up connected.

In a survey asking millennials around the world what defines our identity, the most popular answer wasn't nationality, religion or ethnicity, it was "citizen of the world". That's a big deal.

Every generation expands the circle of people we consider "one of us". For us, it now encompasses the entire world.

We understand the great arc of human history bends towards people coming together in ever greater numbers – from tribes to cities to nations – to achieve things we couldn't on our own.

We get that our greatest opportunities are now global – we can be the generation that ends poverty, that ends disease. We get that our greatest challenges need global responses too – no country can fight climate change alone or prevent pandemics. Progress now requires coming together not just as cities or nations, but also as a global community.

But we live in an unstable time. There are people left behind by globalization across the world. It's hard to care about people in other places if we don't feel good about our lives here at home. There's pressure to turn inwards.

This is the struggle of our time. The forces of freedom, openness and global community against the forces of authoritarianism, isolationism and nationalism. Forces for the flow of knowledge, trade and immigration against those who would slow them down. This is not a battle of nations, it's a battle of ideas. There are people in every country for global connection and good people against it.

This isn't going to be decided at the UN either. It's going to happen at the local level, when enough of us feel a sense of purpose and stability in our own lives that we can open up and start caring about everyone. The best way to do that is to start building local communities right now.

We all get meaning from our communities. Whether our communities are houses or sports teams, churches or music groups, they give us that sense we are part of something bigger, that we are not alone; they give us the strength to expand our horizons.

That's why it's so striking that for decades, membership in all kinds of groups has declined as much as one-quarter. That's a lot of people who now need to find purpose somewhere else.

But I know we can rebuild our communities and start new ones because many of you already are.

I met Agnes Igoye, who's graduating today. Where are you, Agnes? She spent her childhood navigating conflict zones in Uganda, and now she trains thousands of law enforcement officers to keep communities safe.

I met Kayla Oakley and Niha Jain, graduating today, too. Stand up. Kayla and Niha started a non-profit that connects people suffering from illnesses with people in their communities willing to help.

I met David Razu Aznar, graduating from the Kennedy School today. David, stand up. He's a former city councilor who successfully led the battle to make Mexico City the first Latin American city to pass marriage equality – even before San Francisco.

This is my story too. A student in a dorm room, connecting one community at a time, and keeping at it until one day we connect the whole world.

Change starts local. Even global changes start small – with people like us. In our generation, the struggle of whether we connect more, whether we achieve our biggest opportunities, comes down to this – your ability to build communities and create a world where every single person has a sense of purpose.

Class of 2017, you are graduating into a world that needs purpose. It's up to you to create it.

Now, you may be thinking: can I really do this?

Remember when I told you about that class I taught at the Boys and Girls Club? One day after class I was talking to them about college, and one of my top students raised his hand and said he wasn't sure he could go because he's undocumented. He didn't know if they'd let him in.

Last year I took him out to breakfast for his birthday. I wanted to get him a present, so I asked him and he started talking about students he saw struggling and said "You know, I'd really just like a book on social justice."

I was blown away. Here's a young guy who has every reason to be cynical. He didn't know if the country he calls home – the only one he's known – would deny him his dream of going to college. But he wasn't feeling sorry for himself. He wasn't even thinking of himself. He has a greater sense of purpose, and he's going to bring people along with him.

It says something about our current situation that I can't even say his name because I don't want to put him at risk. But if a high school senior who doesn't know what the future holds can do his part to move the world forward, then we owe it to the world to do our part too.

Before you walk out those gates one last time, as we sit in front of Memorial Church, I am reminded of a prayer, Mi Shebeirach, that I say whenever I face a challenge, that I sing to my daughter thinking about her future when I tuck her into bed. It goes:

"May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us, help us *find the courage* to make our lives a blessing."

I hope you find the courage to make your life a blessing.

Congratulations, Class of '17! Good luck out there.

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