



What boards can expect as iGen joins the workforce

Board perspectives



Just when boards and management think they have finally figured out how to accommodate millennials as employees and customers, along comes iGen to reverse many millennial trends.

As the first generation to spend their entire adolescence in the age of smartphones enters the workforce, professor and author Jean Twenge, a social psychologist who wrote the book on iGen, offers some insights based on her research about what companies can expect. She shared her views in an interview with the KPMG Board Leadership Center. Below are edited excerpts.

KPMG Board Leadership Center (BLC): *If you were talking to a corporate board, what would you tell them about how to engage iGen as a customer? As an employee?*

Jean Twenge: iGen is very concerned with safety, so anything that appeals to their desire to be safe, to feel protected, and to relieve stress will appeal to them. As consumers in the digital age, they have high expectations for customer service, convenience, and speed—they take it for granted that information can be found, and products ordered, within seconds. Anything less and you will lose them instantly.

As employees, iGen'ers are interested in stable jobs where they can build their skills in a nurturing environment. They are still interested in work-life balance like the millennials before them but are more realistic and are more likely to realize that it takes hard work to succeed.

It's important to know that today's college students and young college graduates are not millennials anymore—they are iGen, and they are different. Recognize that your young consumers and entry-level employees are

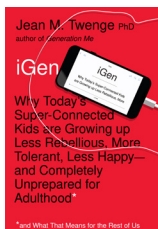
no longer the optimistic, overconfident young people you'd grown accustomed to—increasingly, they are part of a new generation with different attitudes and needs.

BLC: *In iGen you discuss a shift in the view of education. Let's call it vocationalism vs. humanism. How do you think that this view of education informs the progression of iGen into the workplace?*

Twenge: iGen—born after 1995—is more likely to go to college to get a good job; compared to previous generations, they are less interested in learning for learning's sake. Although it's great that iGen is motivated to find good, stable jobs, they may also be missing out on some of the inherent joy that can come from learning and working. It may take some time for them to enjoy work instead of focusing on meeting the next goal. The baby boomer idea to enjoy the journey and not just the destination is new to them.

BLC: *In your book, you talk about how managers should approach iGen regarding engagement and compensation. Without giving away too much, what are some aspects that corporate directors, who oversee companies and managers, should understand about iGen at work?*

Twenge: Get ready for a new generation. Although iGen shares many attributes with millennials—born from 1980 to 1994—such as valuing equality, they have reversed many other millennial trends. iGen'ers are less self-confident and less optimistic than millennials were at the same age, and their expectations are more realistic. They are ambitious and hardworking but may need more guidance and nurturing. Also expect to see more issues around social skills—iGen spends less time communicating with their friends in person and, thus, arrives at the workplace with less experience with face-to-face social interaction.



BLC: Do you believe that the characteristics you observed in iGen will be persistent? Are there any signs of change? Do they differ based on socioeconomic status or culture?

Twenge: iGen is growing up more slowly, spending more time with screens, experiencing more anxiety and depression, and spending less time with their friends in person. These trends appear across socioeconomic groups, regions of the country, and racial and ethnic groups—they are very pervasive. These trends are continuing as iGen'ers move through college, with more college students reporting higher levels of anxiety and depression. There are only a few studies from other cultures right now, but they also show increases in mental health issues after 2012.

BLC: You observed iGen as more libertarian but less politically affiliated. Do you see this changing?

Twenge: iGen is less likely to identify with a political party than previous generations were when they were young; they are much more likely to instead say they are political independents. In terms of specific beliefs, they support individual rights and are against government regulation in most cases. One place where this might be changing is in gun rights; although polls show less support for gun control among this group, the tide might be turning for restrictions supported by most Americans, such as more stringent background checks, bans on assault rifles, and raising the age for legally buying a gun from 18 to 21.

BLC: On mental health and inclusion, what are some societal, workplace, or community practices you have observed that are trying to challenge the “in-person deficit” posed by iGen?

Twenge: iGen'ers want to connect with other people—that is a generational universal. Many try to do that online but find it's a poor substitute. Anything that can engineer real, face-to-face interaction will help. In a recent study, people were asked how much they thought they would enjoy talking to a stranger on a train. Most thought they wouldn't like it. But when they did talk to someone they didn't know, they enjoyed it. Imagine how much bigger that effect would be with talking face to face with people you do know.

BLC: How does iGen respond to professional feedback? Is peer or familial feedback handled differently?

Twenge: Both millennials and iGen'ers were carefully protected by their parents, but iGen also experienced the Great Recession as children and adolescents and saw early on that life was not fair. Perhaps as a result, iGen'ers are more realistic than millennials were at the same age. That has affected how they expect and respond to praise: While millennials sought praise because they expected it, iGen needs praise for reassurance.

BLC: How might iGen attitudes toward social media, socialization, religion, sex, and politics bring about changes in the workplace? In how companies understand this generation as customers?

Twenge: Having grown up with smartphones, iGen hasn't had to wait for anything, so convenience is key, and anything that creates more stress for them is out.

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