

“Can we do it? Yes we can! ... Developing Generation Y Graduates for Unprecedented Change



A dose of Generation Y confidence may have helped your graduates face challenges in the past. **In 2009 things are different.**

If all the recent talk of recession and redundancies hasn't been enough, when their confident rock-star world leader Barak Obama drenches his inauguration speech with a call for **unprecedented change, resilience and hard work**, even the most confident of your graduates will hesitate.

The need for structured graduate development, quality line manager coaching and inspirational senior mentoring to help them through turbulent times, deal with change and come out back on top has never been so high.

This year, some graduates are being faced with changes to their personal and career plans through recent high profile job cancellations or deferment packages. Such turmoil and uncertainty has not been experienced by graduates since the dot com bust and September 11 attacks at the turn of the millennium.

Only a minority of graduate employers are involved in high profile cancellations and deferments. However, this news coupled with rising unemployment and weekly announcements of redundancies across several industries all send an abrupt reality check to a generation who have grown up in prosperous times. Their baby-boomer parents have driven a culture of spending, with seachange, treechange, McMansions and high consumerism for the past 20 years¹.

Inevitably, questions will be asked (if not already) as uncertainty spreads through the minds and the facebook pages of Generation Y graduates.

They may not question the likelihood of their long term career success, but they will question their immediate job security and how they personally, will be impacted in the short to medium term.

Are you ready to answer their queries? Can you anticipate what it is that they want to hear, when in truth, you *can't* guarantee their roles beyond the structured graduate program?

My advice is to be honest, with only minimal (if any) sugar coating. Seek counsel from others in your network, and don't be fooled - there is a fallacy in the business world that Generation Y, in this case graduates, love and embrace 'change'.

As a member of Generation Y myself, the truth is that unless 'change' fits in our pocket and keeps us entertained, sits in a browser and keeps us connected, or stands on a podium and inspires us and the world over, our desire for change is no different to anyone else of any other generation.

Even in the best of times, there are questions over how ready Generation Y graduates are for the real world. Now there are real concerns about graduate's commitment and resilience to change in times of economic downturn and uncertainty. Graduates are feeling the fear.

And they have every right to be afraid. A simple Google search on graduate redundancies will cite disaster stories of redundancies by voicemail and other atrocious 21st century acts that lead to irreparable reputational damage to the employer. Some graduate employers have spent the past 8 years rebuilding trust in the graduate market and some risk losing it all over again.

As a graduate who was paid to go away by a large professional services firm in 2001, I was given **structured and unstructured graduate development, strong line manager coaching and mentoring from inspiring senior leaders** in the firm when I eventually did commence my role.

¹ Bernard Salt, April 2008, The Big Shift: How Global Demographic Trends are Shaping Labour Markets

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The combination of all three elements made a huge difference. Each was critical in **managing my ambitious expectations**, **building resilience** during a downturn, **taking responsibility** and **getting on board with change**. As a result I had an amazing experience and 8 years on I am very proud to have a strong association with that firm.

What development programs are you providing your graduates to ensure they will say the same? How capable are your line managers and senior mentors and are they equipped for the current challenge of Generation Y in the current environment?

Avoid damage to your brand (and your sanity!) and take the responsible course of action. Deliver on your promises of training and development you made during competitive graduate recruitment. Sometimes budget cuts mean your graduates may bear the brunt, so where you can't deliver; explain to your graduates why not. Use the current environment to **develop your graduates as leaders of uncertain times**. Give them the tools to navigate the changing landscape.

The need to provide cutting edge graduate development, quality line manager coaching and inspirational senior mentoring to Generation Y graduates has never been so high.

Can we do it? In the words of the 44th American President, “**Yes we can**”.

Josh Mackenzie
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Top 10 Tips for the first 30 days

Not only is on-boarding a crucial step in delivering on your brand promise, effective on-boarding has been shown to lead to increased levels of discretionary effort.

To ensure your graduates have a smooth transition into working life in their first 30 days, you should ensure they receive the following at a minimum:

1. a computer, systems access, and phone (a name plate is a nice touch too) per graduate;
2. a welcome pack that contains information on company structure, strategy, intranet, policies, procedures and staff benefits;
3. a welcome address (in person or dvd) from your CEO or someone in senior leadership;
4. business cards already printed and ready for each graduate where appropriate;
5. a welcome morning tea with colleagues on the floor;
6. a meaty piece of work they can get started on straight after your induction program;
7. a dedicated 'buddy' (ideally a grad from a previous years intake) who can help with queries;
8. weekly one-on-ones with their line manager, including detailed outline of performance expectations;
9. series of structured learning sessions and opportunities (workshops, downloadable short videos with activities or BYO lunch sessions) covering business acumen, soft skills, briefings on company strategy;
10. formal briefing from HR graduate managers on the structure and timing of your graduate development program throughout the year.

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