

to be structured with more responsibility than similar roles overseas, where a teamwork approach is favoured. Admittedly, international salaries may initially be more attractive, but you may well find more space for development in your chosen career right here.

That said, there's no denying that jobseekers may encounter some obstacles. For instance, white graduates may be concerned that affirmative action (AA) policies threaten their chances for employment. But, counters Schaffer, companies need skills. An affirmative candidate may be preferable, but there's little likelihood that they'll favour AA over filling vacancies.

And what about the other negatives facing South Africa, such as crime and the uncertain political situation? Schaffer is able to point out the silver lining here, too. 'We tend to see ourselves in isolation, and imagine that the challenges facing us are ours alone. But all countries are struck by the skills shortage, and all countries have to overcome economic and political issues – look at the United States' recent meltdown over housing prices, for example.'

Schaffer dispels any misgivings that South Africa might become 'another Zimbabwe', observing that we have a triple layer of protection: the first is our remarkable constitution; the second is our active civil society, which has an active voice; and the third is 'Big Business', which is aware that there is too much to lose if we deviate from our current path. 'Yes, we undoubtedly have a tumultuous time ahead. We cannot lose sight of the fact that we are a young democracy, and that we're faced with the significant challenge of changing years of an entrenched mentality,' she points out.

'But while we angst over the problems affecting society, it's important to remember that these problems are not new. We had rampant inflation under the Apartheid era, which was made worse by sanctions. Similarly, corruption was just as bad back then. We weren't aware of it, though, because we did not have a free press to report it.'

Yes, there are opportunities abroad – especially for South Africans, who have a reputation for being well educated and hard working. But don't forget that South Africa's potential is just as rich. With a number of multinational corporates – including the likes of IBM and Microsoft – making their home here, graduates can find themselves part of the exciting world of global business. And, because many of these companies offer secondments to other countries,

### WHY DO YOU ENJOY WORKING IN SOUTH AFRICA?

'The publishing industry in South Africa is one of the most exciting places to be working in right now. Not only because we operate under such challenging market conditions, but also because we are developing digital publishing projects that are seen by our counterparts in the US as groundbreaking. It's only in emerging markets that you get opportunities to try things (often at a very young age) that seem way out of your league in developed markets.'

– Natalie Dixon, publisher, 8 Ink Media

'South Africa is bursting with creative talent. We have a very particular way of looking at the world, and this has helped create a unique humour and culture. This has, in turn, nurtured our innovative spirit.'

– James Cloete, creative director, The Jupiter Drawing Room

'I love working in South Africa because I can work with people of different cultures and races. I can be part of a new generation of the young people that are evolving within the country with new ideas for the future. After what South Africa has been through in the past, I'm excited to be a part of the change that's happening and influence decisions made in the future of my beautiful country. I love it here.'

– Lolita Ngobeni, finance graduate trainee, Anglo Platinum

they're able to gain international exposure and experience, too.

Schaffer says that it's not just companies who want South African skills to stay right here. Government is considering the issue in a most serious light, she reports, and bodies like the National Treasury and the Department of Education are doing their utmost to ensure that they do. So, while Schaffer is enthusiastic about the idea of people gaining international experience to expand their worldview and hone new skills, she's even more enthusiastic about them bringing those skills back home.

## Generation next

GREEN ISSUES, CULTURAL CLASHES, SUPERSPEED TECHNOLOGY AND BRAND ICONS. THESE ARE JUST SOME OF THE FACTORS THAT HAVE SHAPED YOUR WORLD, AS GENERATION Y. THEY'VE FASHIONED A MINDSET THAT IS QUITE UNLIKE ANY GENERATION THAT HAS COME BEFORE YOU, CREATING NEW SETS OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOU, IN THE WORKPLACE?

Generation next, Echo boomers, Generation Y, the Millennial Generation...call them what you will, these are the kids born between 1980 and 2000 – in other words, you. Their outlook is entirely unique, and while that has definite advantages, it also makes for potential conflict, especially in workplace environments where old standards are still in place.

So, who is Generation Y, and how do they think? For a start, says Quentin Weldon, a youth research consultant at Youth Dynamix, the 'drive-thru culture' which typifies our current reality has had a rather significant impact. 'Today's youth are not necessarily concerned about what things will be like in the far-distant future. They're used to acquiring things instantly, and are therefore impatient,' he says. This means that young adults expect their demands to be met instantly, and battle to keep a long-term view. For example, Youth Dynamix's most recent research study, BratTrax@ 2007/8, found that only 50% of their research sample save any money. 'Their main expenses are food, entertainment and cell phone expenses,' Weldon says.

before they make decisions. They are astute, clued-up and highly suspicious of marketing activity.' Their preference for fast, convenient means of communication (like Mxit and Facebook) means that they are always well informed and connected.

Tembo continues, 'These are people who question the things around them. They cut and paste from their own cultures and those that they are exposed to, on a daily basis forming new identities that help them survive the social pressures of today. They don't exercise blind adoption of western world trends and lifestyle in the same way we saw 10 years ago – they have a more developed filtering system, they don't necessarily believe what they are told, they don't use the media they are "supposed" to be using and they don't watch or read all that was intended for them.'

Tembo calls these people 'life badgers': individuals who look to life experience to provide them with the badge status they need to be credible among social peers. And it's all about experience: 'We have young ladies in Jozi going beer tasting, joining motorcycle clubs and playing lawn bowls with elders for the novelty value.'

'Masspiration' is another hallmark of today's youth culture: 'Youth aspire to the "high life" no matter what their situation,' says Tembo. This is largely a product of South Africa's recent economic boom, but it's matched by a counter-trend of 'keeping it real'. 'This will rise and fall as youth fall in and out of love with aspirational products and branding,' Tembo maintains.

This has particularly interesting implications for South Africa's black youth. 'Township kids go through a unique and often memorable experience growing up. Memories of fun cultural memories hold strong, especially for those who left the township,' Tembo notes. While this doesn't necessarily indicate a desire to return to the location, it is

‘The youth of today are ‘prosumers’ – proactive consumers of all that is around them’

The Internet has, naturally, played a major role in shaping their views. Linked to this – and to the fact that information is available 24/7 – the youth have become enormous consumers of information, whether it's from TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, cell phones or the Net. But the Internet has done more than simply change media consumption patterns: 'The pervasiveness of technology in the lives of youth has created a need in them to be connected all the time,' explains Weldon, 'so almost every aspect of their lives is linked to this plugged-in culture. Technology (especially cell phones) is regarded as an extension of the self – most youth feel lost without it.'

Dali Tembo of Instant Grass, a consultancy specialising in youth marketing, notes that there have been other impacts, too. 'The youth of today are 'prosumers' – proactive consumers of all that is around them. They seek information at all levels of communication

### WHO IS GENERATION Y?

- They question authority, whether it's their parents or their bosses.
- They thrive on change.
- They might work hard, but they expect the flexibility and work/life balance.
- They have high expectations – of their jobs, their superiors and their lives.
- They relish new experiences.
- They want it all – now.



Martine Schaffer, who heads the Homecoming Revolution, believes that the South African working environment offers exciting and diverse challenges for employees.

a sign of what Tembo calls 'township nostalgia', 'a sense of pride and love for things uniquely memorable to township life', like listening to old men's hero stories or jamming to old kwaito.

This is linked to another trend that Weldon has identified: 'My Family' sees youth turning away from celebrities as role models, and looking to their family members for inspiration instead.

How do these traits come together in the workplace? Tembo says that the rise of 'creative collaborations' is one of the best demonstrations of youth culture. 'It's exemplified by the collaborations between big brands and very small creative brands, formed by youth who have become tired of their everyday circumstances.'

He points to Pretoria's youth culture as an example. 'The establishment of so many rock bands and hip hop groups in this city serves as testament to how young people are beginning to realise that their creative abilities are avenues that they can use to earn an income. These creative abilities have been nurtured by the open source revolution, making it easier to get the information needed to acquire the skills to promote oneself.' As a result, Tembo anticipates that the creative industries will become an area that attracts more interest in the youth going forward.

Weldon's research reveals other trends. He reports that 81% of South Africa's youth would prefer to own their own businesses, rather than working for someone else. On the other hand, 86% want to work for a big company where they can earn a salary, but sadly, as many as 74% believe that it is impossible to find employment in South Africa. Other interesting statistics include the fact that 44% of respondents interviewed believed it was important to have money, no matter where it comes from; 94% believe that a sound education is the only way to secure a good job. 96% expressed the belief that women are moving into more powerful positions in government and business, reflecting a general perception that women are becoming more forceful and expressing themselves. 'Generally, this

generation is confident in its abilities. As much as 91% agree that they always feel in control of their lives and know where they are going,' Weldon says.

This translates into certain challenges for management, as a 2005 article in *Business Day* points out. The members of Generation Y are likely to be working alongside Generation X'ers and Baby Boomers, and each has a very specific approach to work. Most notably, Generation Y individuals are not as kindly predisposed to taking orders, or doing things because 'that's the way they have always been done'.

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*USA Today* journalist Stephanie Armous, writing in an article titled 'Generation Y: They've arrived with a new attitude', cites Bruce Talgan when she describes Generation Y as 'Having high expectations of self (aiming to work faster and better than other workers); high expectations of employers (they desire fair and direct managers who are highly engaged in their professional development); ongoing learning (seeking out creative challenges as resources in order to gain knowledge); immediate responsibility (seeking to make an impact from day one) and goal-oriented (wanting small goals with tight deadlines so they can build up ownership of tasks).'

It's certainly a brave new world.

## You and the working world

IT COULD BE ARGUED THAT THERE IS NO LONGER SUCH A THING AS 'BUSINESS AS USUAL'. EMPLOYEES' EXPECTATIONS HAVE CHANGED, BUT SO TOO HAVE THOSE OF THE ORGANISATION. SO, WHAT DOES THIS NEW WORLD OF WORK LOOK LIKE, AND HOW CAN YOU SUCCEED IN AN EVER-CHANGING LANDSCAPE?

Extremely goal-oriented, with high expectations, a thirst for challenges and a burning desire to make your mark. Sound familiar? That's because you, as a member of Generation Y, are typical of a new mindset that is, well, anything but typical.

Says Elsabe Manning at Success Factory, 'Today's employees are well-educated with an almost arrogant, what's-in-it-for-me attitude. They may reject or resent authority, and their challenging behaviour and confidence is just as likely to propel them up the career ladder as to cause conflict with management and colleagues.'

It may not be a flattering description, but there's no doubt that many of these traits serve well in a work environment that has altered drastically from the time our parents took home their first pay cheques. 'Companies have woken up to the fact that they can demand higher competence from their staff, and that through a performance management process they can work out under-performing employees. Not only is the pace faster, but an employee really needs to stand out in order to be noticed and promoted,' Manning comments.

Vanessa Bluen, managing director of training specialists The Consultant Powerhouse, also notes that there are significant differences between 'the old deal' and the current working reality.

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'The old deal was based on the principle that a fair day's pay would be given for a fair day's work. Employees who were loyal, worked hard and did as they were told could expect a secure job, steady pay increases and financial security in a staid organisation,' she explains.

So, what's changed? 'The new deal is based on partnership, and a flexible, mutually beneficial one at that,' says Bluen. Today, employees are expected to develop competencies that the organisation needs, and apply them to ensure the organisation's success. They're also expected to behave consistently with the company's values. The organisation responds by providing a challenging work environment and support for the individual's professional development, which makes them more employable. 'Yes, there's less certainty, but the

### MAINTAINING A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE

Professionalism affects all aspects of your working persona, from the way you dress to how you answer the phone, says Elsabe Manning of Success Factory. Follow her tips for striking the right professional chord:

- Your image should be aligned to that of your organisation. Learn the 'jargon' of your industry so that you appear knowledgeable, and make sure that all communication – whether written or spoken – reflects sound grammar and language. That means no swearing or slang. E-mails and memos should have flawless spelling.
- Always display good manners and good judgement.
- Do not interrupt people when they are speaking, and never raise your voice.
- Be respectful at all times, even if you disagree with your conversation partner.
- Write your own self-branding strategy. Implement it in order to become a well-known, respected, sought-after employee.
- Build trusting relationships with everyone you come into contact with. These will stand as the foundation of your success in the workplace and the business environment.
- Never gossip with colleagues, as this erodes trust. On the other hand, make the distinction between giving feedback and gossip, and don't hesitate to give constructive criticism when it is requested.
- If you want a promotion, you need to obtain the key performance areas of the job you have your eye on. This knowledge will enable you to obtain the skills required for the job; 'there will be no question as to your ability when the job becomes available,' Manning says.
- Be reliable. Keep your promises and do what is expected of you.
- Strive to develop emotional maturity. 'This is one of the most important factors for advancement in the workplace,' Manning states. Developing maturity means being willing to acknowledge your flaws and being open to changing those behaviours that do not serve you, or others.



South Africa's youth live in a 'drive-thru' culture, says Youth Dynamix's Quentin Weldon: they're used to acquiring things instantly and have a 'right here, right now' mentality.