

# The Challenges of a Young Worker

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## **The New World of Work**

Ever since the start of the technological boom, which began in the 1990s, the workplace has been a rapidly evolving environment [1]. Making use of advanced computing software to improve efficiency, personal computers, tablets, and cell phones have become commonplace in most office spaces, which in turn has ushered in the age of paper-free businesses. Even social media has found its way into the professional field, with such apps as LinkedIn® and Indeed® becoming a reliable source for recruitment and job-searches, linking the modern workforce to employment opportunities around the globe. This means that the typical office dynamic encountered by those of the Generation Y, or “Millennials”, is vastly different than that of the previous generation of workers, Generation X. This, in hand with a grossly inflated economy, can be directly correlated to the challenges, which many young workers (those under the age of 35 [2]) and their management must attempt to manage. Such challenges include expansive job competition, inflated student debt, and an increasingly sedentary lifestyle [3].

### **Job Competition**

Thanks to the globalization of the job market, qualified young individuals now have the ability to apply for jobs in almost any country on earth [3]. Vice versa, the Canadian job market is now open to billions of workers. However, it is not only international candidates that today’s young workers much compete against, it is also our elders. While workers over the age of 60 years made up only 8% of the Canadian workforce in 2012, they have filled one third of new job creation since the recession and are two times more likely to land a job than they were 35 years ago [3]. This is a problem that younger workers cannot handle their selves. Government mandated incentives to hire local talent have proven successful, such as the GNWT’s priority system, in which those born within the territory are prioritized over outsiders during the hiring process. Similar solutions can be found to decrease the age disparity,

which is important now more than ever, especially when considering the greater debt of Generation Y versus that of Baby Boomers and Generation X, due to youth seeking job qualifications from a higher education.

## **Student Debt**

The average university tuition in 1990 was \$1,464, which has since seen an annual increase of 8% on average [3]. This makes paying for your own education in Canada dauntingly more difficult each year, without resorting to taking out student loans. As a result, young workers must more so prioritize paying off this debt than generations of the past, meaning they can't save as much for a house or to invest in their future, making an early retirement less financially viable than ever, which is evident in the fact that baby boomers are nine times richer than millennials [3]. For this very reason, both social and political discussions regarding government-funded elimination of student debt have become popular. Other provinces and territories could take a cue from the GNWT's very own Student Financial Assistance (SFA) program. Thanks to SFA, I am fortunate enough to not have the added stress of working a part-time job while studying at university, which is a privilege that many of my southern friends aren't able to appreciate, as I do, and I won't have nearly as much debt to work off after I graduate. Having to deal with the burden of student debt can be extremely stressful, which as a mental health issue should be addressed by the government, since Millennials are already dealing with a less physically healthy office space.

## **Sedentary Lifestyle**

With the widespread implementation of email correspondence, phone calls, and online/server documentation storage, young workers have fewer reasons to get up from their desks, circulate around the office, and socialize with their colleagues and peers. This has led to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle, which can cause many health issues, including mental health problems [4]. With the ability to

communicate all business matters over phone or through email, and without the need to print and distribute documents in paper-free offices, which are now easy to establish, Millennials are spending much more of their waking hours in front of a screen, without even considering their spare time spent using mobile devices. Drastically long screen-time can cause optical organ and nerve strain, postural deficiencies, and weight gain, and the lack of daily social interactions can lead to social anxiety, and even cause depression. Management can implement various policies to address this challenge and help to prevent its effects on young workers, such as regularly scheduled meetings to discuss work, and by encouraging their employees to take “micro-breaks”, which entails leaving their workstation for up to 5 minutes every hour to, for example, walk around, grab a drink of water, or have a short conversation. Personally, I have found that the days that I take part in such micro-breaks to talk to my coworkers are incredibly more enjoyable and even surprisingly more productive, than the days that I spend at my desk for hours on end.

### **Hope for the Future**

The current challenges of young workers are not to be taken lightly, but we are not without hope to manage them and improve the working lives of Millennials. Job competition can be leveled by creating a greater opportunity for the Generation Y to secure the emerging jobs of the future, student debt can be elevated through government funded financial support programs, and the lifestyle in workplaces can be revitalized by encouraging movement and discussions around the office. In turn, health, both physical and mental, will be improved, and the prospects of a successful career will be improved for new and/ or struggling entrants into the workforce.

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