Seven Characteristics That Distinguish Generation Z By Dr. Tim Elmore

One question I often get asked is: How is Generation Z (the youngest population being assessed today) different than Millennials? The answer? They’re distinctly different. If we have any hope of partnering with these students, we would do well to understand them. Below is an excerpt from our [new book](https://www.generationzunfiltered.com/), Generation Z Unfiltered: Facing Nine Hidden Challenges of the Most Anxious Population. These seven descriptors spell the word: PARTNER.

**1. They are more PRIVATE**

Generation Z learned much from Millennials, the generation before them. Because Millennials were the first generation to experience social media as adolescents, they were also the guinea pigs to all of its benefits and consequences. One of the many penalties of social media platforms is their allure for users to crave followers, likes, shares, views, and retweets. In their appetite for all of those, Millennials fell prey to stalkers, bullies, and even employers who saw their posts on Instagram or Facebook before a job interview and chose not to hire them because of those posts. In response, Generation Z is more private than previous generations. According to [Global Web Index](https://www.globalwebindex.com/reports/generation-z), Gen Z kids are more secretive than Millennials about their information and profile, and nearly six out of ten are making a conscious effort to spend less time on social media sites. They are more individualistic and independent, with the majority preferring to learn alone and be alone than past generations of kids. And, they’re more prone to share a vanishing message (like Snapchat) than older generations.

**2. They are more ANXIOUS**

This reality is almost a “norm” in the life of Gen Z kids. This generation of children and teens suffers from more mental health problems than any other generation in U.S. history. Both secondary schools and colleges report an insufficient number of counselors available to serve the students seeking help on campus. Many adults can’t understand this angst, saying: “What do they feel stressed about? This is the most convenient time in earth’s history to be alive.” While that’s true, Gen Z lives with a paradox. These kids’ lives are both easier and harder. Life is easier and quicker to navigate technologically but more difficult to navigate psychologically and emotionally. Let me illustrate. If I had a negative interaction at school or encountered a bully on campus, once I got home, I got relief. Today, Gen Z kids get no relief. The bullies remain on social media. The trouble stays in their faces. Further, since kids are exposed to world tragedies daily on a smartphone, they face information they may be unready to handle emotionally.

**3. They are more RESTLESS**

Gen Z’s lifestyle and sense of identity are shifting consistently based on the realities around them. They are a fluid generation. Our focus groups revealed that a large percentage of middle school students derives its sense of identity from social media, which destines them to be on an emotional roller coaster. Millions are restless at night, on a screen instead of sleeping, and restless during the day, always changing in response to circumstances. [Eleven percent](https://www.inc.com/christine-lagorio/entrepreneurial-generation-z.html) of Generation Z has been diagnosed with ADHD. As a kid, my sense of identity came from my family, my sports team, and where I sat in the lunchroom. Today, it’s online. In one sense, a shifting sense of identity is normal for teens. Hormones rage as their brains prune themselves, moving from childhood to adulthood. What is concerning to me is their lack of congruency. I believe we humans are at our best when we have a sense of integrity and congruency about ourselves — when we’re not duplicitous. The good news and bad news about culture today is that there are so many options with which a kid can explore the world and their own identity. What’s troubling is that the stakes are high when it comes to a shifting and volatile self-image.

**4. They are more TECH SAVVY**

This probably doesn’t surprise you. Generation Z is more at home on a screen than previous generations. They spend the equivalent of a full-time job (nine hours a day) on their devices, not including school assignments. According to a 2018 [study](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-12-10/screen-time-changes-structure-of-kids-brains-60-minutes-says) by the National Institutes of Health, kids who use smartphones, tablets, and video games more than seven hours a day are more likely to experience premature thinning of the cortex, the outermost layer of the brain that processes thought and action. According to marketing research from Sparks and Honey, Gen Z kids multitask on five screens, not two as Millennials did. They use various social media platforms, each for different reasons and sometimes for different audiences. Many have a girlfriend or boyfriend they’ve met online but not face to face. This is, of course, where the text message code “LMIRL” came from: “let’s meet in real life.” It’s fostered an early entrance of skepticism and cynicism.

**5. They are more NURTURED**

On the one hand, Gen Z is growing up in a world of ubiquitous information; millions of these kids are savvier about culture and world events than previous generations at their age. Obviously, this is not inherently bad. My concern is that this awareness has caused caring adults to become preoccupied with the safety, self-esteem, and success of Gen Z kids. Parents became helicopters as they raised the Millennial generation. They became snowplows now that they’re raising Gen Z. Dads and moms are consumed with the fears of school shootings, terrorism, and whether their kid will get into their preferred college. This has caused a reciprocation on the part of the kids. Data relayed by Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace [reveals](https://books.google.com/books?id=v_d1DwAAQBAJ&pg=PP51&lpg=PP51&dq=teens+are+motivated+by+%E2%80%9Cnot+wanting+to+let+others+down,%E2%80%9D&source=bl&ots=XJojrO3Nfx&sig=ACfU3U0c9nTmQCiAv4IgP_7H2mEA15DqkA&hl=en&ppis=_c&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjOzYOjvvvlAhVBmlkKHcvUBnAQ6AEwAHoECAwQAQ#v=onepage&q=teens%20are%20motivated%20by%20%E2%80%9Cnot%20wanting%20to%20let%20others%20down%2C%E2%80%9D&f=false) that teens are motivated by “not wanting to let others down,” which can be positive but can also create a volatile trap of people-pleasing. The 2015 Grammy award-winning song from Twenty One Pilots “[Stressed Out](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXRviuL6vMY)” says it all: “My name’s Blurryface and I care what you think.” The more kids take in information, the more protective and nurturing concerned parents become.

**6. They are more ENTREPRENEURIAL**

Generation Z has learned from the Millennials before them. Millions of Millennials simply believed what their parents told them about how going to college would result in a great job — and found that it wasn’t true. Generation Z witnessed this reality check and now feels empowered to simply bypass climbing the corporate ladder and create their own company or freelance through their twenties. A 2014 [study](https://www.slideshare.net/sparksandhoney/generation-z-final-june-17) from the consultancy firm Sparks and Honey found 72 percent of high-school students wanted to start a business and nearly one third of those ages sixteen to nineteen had already begun volunteering their time. No doubt, some will be white-collar workers and others blue-collar workers, but a majority plan to be “no-collar” workers. They want to create something new from home as their expectations for work have been dashed by two recessions since 2000. Their problems with this paradigm are their struggles with confidence and risk aversion. More on this later, as well.

**7. They are more REDEMPTIVE**

This characteristic is an identifying concept for Gen Z. They are more inclusive and accepting of different races, sexual orientation, backgrounds, or gender than any U.S. generation before them. Equality has become a top issue for kids today, just like global warming was for Millennials: racial equality, gender equality, and equality regardless of sexual orientation. They want everyone to feel respected, no matter who they are. For many, acceptance of the LGBTQ community is tightly linked to their innate individualism. Keep in mind — the first African-American president was elected during their childhood, gay marriage became legal, and the #MeToo movement was launched. They believe they can change the world because they’ve grown up in a world that’s already changing. In March of 2018, over 400,000 teens participated in the March For Our Lives across the country on behalf of gun control. In a 2017 global [survey](https://universumglobal.com/race-next-generation-talent-generation-z-indonesia/) by Universum, Generation Z has a keener interest in leadership than the previous three generations.