

HIRE EDUCATION

With competition fierce to snap up top grads, a survey of 30,000 students shows recruiters what the new crop of employees want

Tennyson Cho was two months into a new job at an independent Toronto investment bank when he decided to quit. The then-22-year-old Queen's University commerce grad was tired of 70-hour workweeks and had grown disillusioned with corporate life. Sure, the paycheque was good, and he enjoyed the work. But Cho also felt lost in the relatively unfamiliar world of the daily grind. Almost immediately, he landed a "9-to-4:30" gig at a local insurance company that paid him about half the money, but also allowed him to hit the town with his buddies after work. After just three days there, though, he resigned again—and went back (somewhat sheepishly) to his former employer. Luckily, they took him back. "I realized really quickly that I was just a cog in the wheel at the insurance company," says Cho. "I wasn't being challenged. It would have taken me at least two years before I'd even be considered for a promotion."

Surprising? Well, not exactly, considering Cho's original employer, Westwind Partners, recognized his potential as an

integral part of its investment-banking team. After all, he was whip smart, ready to work hard, and he had gained a new-found appreciation for the opportunity to contribute something meaningful to the company on a day-to-day basis. Cho also had the upper hand in a booming Canadian job market in which companies are becoming increasingly determined to lure smart, young and motivated employees as aging baby boomers begin to retire.

These days, knowing how best to woo this next generation of top talent has become a high-stakes game, where gaining the advantage in recruiting and hiring means understanding—*really understanding*—what young people want in terms of their careers. It also means going a step further and figuring out how to position your business atop all the others vying for top new talent. Are you promoting the right messages in your recruitment drives? What's the most effective way to get those messages out there? Do graduating students want to work for your organization?

To find the answers, we teamed up with two Toronto-based consultancies that specialize in the generation Y set—Brainstorm

BY ERIN POOLEY

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Tennyson Cho likes being an investment banker

and D-Code—to get the inside track on how approximately 30,000 post-secondary students across Canada feel about their prospective careers. The result? A revealing—and somewhat surprising—window into where the young generation wants to work, their career expectations and, importantly, what they value most.

Employers who want to win at the game of getting the best and brightest new crop of university grads on board take note: they're a confident, highly motivated bunch that values opportunities for career advancement above all else. And despite what conventional wisdom would suggest, they just might become dedicated career-long employees—provided you can keep them engaged and offer them the right opportunities.

Generation Y. The millennials. The echo boom. All are terms that have been used to describe today's emerging cohort of future employees. Although there is less consensus on who qualifies as members of this group—with most people agreeing loosely on a birth date of anywhere between 1980 and 1995—one thing is clear: unlike the generation that preceded them, the millennials have grown up with a much rosier outlook on both life and work. And it shows.

"They've been taught that life is going to be creative and challenging and collaborative, and that that's the way work is going to be, too," says Claire Raines, a Denver-based genera-

tional consultant and co-author of the bestselling 1999 book *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*. "They come feeling much more positive and having a lot of high expectations for their jobs and for fair treatment."

Unfortunately, the unbridled optimism many of these young people bring to the workplace is often misinterpreted in a negative light. So instead of being seen as keen and willing to work hard, the millennial generation is sometimes viewed as an overly arrogant bunch who have grown increasingly unrealistic about their path to the C-suites.

Not so fast, say Brainstorm's Graham Donald and D-Code's Eric Meerkamper, who help corporations and university career centres engage and harness the power of the millennial generation by understanding what makes these young people tick in the workplace. By taking a research-based approach, the pair is aiming to slowly dissect some of the stereotypes that pervade this important group.

According to *From Learning to Work: Campus Recruitment Study*, an online survey that polled almost 30,000 students from 143 post-secondary institutions across Canada earlier this year, the No. 1 attribute young people value most when considering full-time employment after graduation is

opportunity for advancement. Other key factors include having good people to work with, good managers to report to and work-life balance. Initial salary, surprisingly, ranked only ninth on their wish list, down from its No. 7 spot when a similar survey was first conducted two years ago.

Donald, Brainstorm's president, cautions against interpreting the desire among students for promotion as a power-hungry grab for the top job. "They understand the principle of building experience and learning and developing," he says. "They understand the notion of putting in time, contrary to the thought that they're very spoiled."

In fact, advancing horizontally within an organization, whether it means rotating between departments, taking on more (or different) responsibilities and participating in interesting, new training programs can be equally satisfying for a generation hungry for constant change, Donald says. "Promotion—whether it's vertical or horizontal—is a language that they can look at and know they've excelled."

The "people factor" is also huge, adds Meerkamper, pointing to the No. 2 and No. 3 results on the list. "It's just that this generation is very much loyal to people, as opposed to places or organizations, because they saw the contracts of lifetime employment being questioned when it came to their parents," says the D-Code partner, whose firm published the bestselling book *Chips and Pop: Decoding the Nexus Generation*, in 1998. "For example,

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SO WHERE DO YOU WANT TO WORK WHEN YOU GROW UP?

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS SURVEYED WERE ASKED, IN AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION, TO LIST THE TOP 5 COMPANIES OR ORGANIZATIONS WHERE THEY WOULD MOST LIKE TO START THEIR CAREERS. THE RESULTS:

AS RANKED BY ALL STUDENTS	AS RANKED BY BUSINESS STUDENTS	AS RANKED BY ENGINEERING STUDENTS
1. IBM	1. KPMG	1. Microsoft
2. Government of Canada	2. Deloitte	2. IBM
3. Microsoft Canada	3. TD	3. Research In Motion
4. Deloitte	4. PricewaterhouseCoopers	4. Ontario Power Generation
5. KPMG	5. RBC	5. Google
6. PricewaterhouseCoopers	6. Ernst & Young	6. Toyota
7. RBC	7. CIBC	7. ATI
8. Ernst & Young	8. Bank of Montreal	8. GM
9. TD	9. IBM	9. Shell
10. Google	10. Procter & Gamble	10. GE

a manager might leave an organization and very shortly after, three or four people will follow them because they'll say, 'It's my team I'm working with.'"

The desire for work-life balance, which ranked fourth on the list, is also an important factor. That does not mean, however, that all students are desperate to punch out when 5 o'clock swings around. Rather, they are looking for employers who provide fluidity between work and play, so employees don't feel handcuffed by the rigidity of corporate life. Instead of cigarette breaks, for example, Meerkamper says some companies encourage scheduled "MSN Messenger breaks" that permit young employees to fire off a bunch of messages to friends, provided it doesn't interfere with their day-to-day work.

Such flexibility, and the trust relationship it underscores, is one of the things Westwind's Cho likes about working at a smaller investment boutique firm, rather than a larger bank. "One of the big draws about Westwind is they're not about face time," he says. "In big banks, if your boss is in, you're expected to stay until your boss leaves, whereas as at Westwind, if you've done your work, you can go."

Although it may seem like small potatoes to some employers, giving young people the flexibility to set some of their own rules (and goals) in the workplace can go a long way. Banning personal e-mails and phone calls during the day, for example, could actually backfire, particularly for a generation that has grown up communicating electronically.

According to Universum, a U.S.-based global employer branding specialist, American students value many of the same workplace attributes as their Canadian counterparts. A 2006 Universum study surveying students from both countries found top characteristics on wish lists for ideal future employers include a progressive work environment, high ethical standards, innovation and social responsibility. Camille Sautner, Universum's Canada country manager, says those study results should serve as a major wake-up call for employers when it comes to recruiting and putting their brands on display. "We really need to emphasize to employers how much of a learning curve there is out there when it comes to the millennial generation," she says. "There does need to be some relearning in terms of their target audience, the way employers go to campus, the messages they put out there



IBM: SETTING THE HOOK FROM DAY 1

Quick. What's the first thing that comes to mind when you think of IBM? If you're like most people, you probably said, "Computers." If you're a graduating student assessing your career options, however, you might also associate the global technology giant with being a great place to work. According to Brainstorm and D-Code's latest online campus recruitment study, IBM came out on top, based on a survey of about 30,000 students who were prompted in an open-ended question to list five companies where they'd like to start their careers. The results, say survey authors Graham Donald and Eric Meerkamper, demonstrate that IBM is doing something right when it comes to engaging potential young hires, particularly because of the stiff competition it faces from other companies with infor-

mation-technology and business-consulting functions.

So what exactly is IBM's secret to brand success among the millennial generation? Dave Scott, national campus programs manager for Markham-based IBM Canada, points to several initiatives designed specifically to hook students from the moment they step in the door. For starters, there's Extreme Blue, IBM's "premier" internship program that pairs one MBA with three IT or engineering students and charges them with the task of designing their own IT solution to an existing business problem. Scott says recruits are "amazed at how fast they're able to work on these high-profile projects," a career trait Meerkamper and Donald say is increasingly important to the latest generation of job seekers. IBM also encourages all employees—particu-

larly its young hires—to jump between different departments, recognizing that generation Y's hunger for constant change in the workplace is a key retention strategy.

By getting these key messages out during campus recruitment drives, Scott says students have learned to identify IBM as a company that is committed to their long-term career goals. Most importantly, he adds, IBM has made it clear that a temporary internship or co-op position with the company will almost always translate into something more permanent. "We hire strategically from the start. We don't hire a student just to come in for the summer," Scott says. "We hire them with the hopes that when they do graduate they're going to join IBM as full-time employees. We've got a motto: Recruit once. Hire twice."

and whether they're saying the things students are interested in hearing about. The millennials are very different from the generation before them."

Unfortunately, says Meerkamper, many companies have let their assumptions about what the millennials want—or don't want—guide their recruiting and hiring decisions. Lots of employers, for instance, just assume this generation isn't interested in hearing about a long-term career track at an organization because they'll probably jump ship to another firm in a couple of years. Not so, says the Brainstorm-D-Code study, which indicates half of all students surveyed would actually prefer to find a suitable company where they could spend their entire career.

Donald says another mistake many companies make is trumpeting the fact that they're No. 1 in their industry or a "leader in their field." "Frankly, we found that many students don't care too much about the hard sell," he says. "They're more interested in figuring out what it really *feels* like to work someplace." By giving students a "taste test" of corporate life—something that can be accomplished through internships or co-op positions—companies are much more likely to attract top-notch student talent in the long run.

Another no-no? Relying on those glossy and expensive brochures—the ones that often get handed out at job fairs or university career centres—to deliver key messages about a company. The reality, says Meerkamper, is that good old-fashioned word-of-mouth often works much more effectively. Smart companies, he adds, have figured this out by appointing student ambassadors—paid or not—that can engage in their own form of buzz marketing to help potential hires get a realistic snapshot of what it's really like to work at a particular company. In fact, Universum's Sautner says many Canadian companies are moving away from career fairs all together, preferring instead to focus on more personal, touch-point recruiting instead of overwhelming, and often impersonal, group gatherings.

It's important to be honest, too. If you expect your young associates to put in 80-hour workweeks, don't try to sell them on the

fact that you offer work-life balance. Differentiate your firm on one or two key attributes, whether it's a great training program or flexibility in the workplace, and get the message out by telling effective stories through the eyes of people who actually work for you.

The good news for many employers is that, although the majority of students surveyed said they knew which industry they wanted to work in after they graduated, less than a third knew which specific company they wanted to work for.

Donald and Meerkamper say those numbers represent a significant opportunity for employers hoping to be front-of-mind when it comes time for students to make decisions about where they want to work. Those companies that want to win at attracting the cream of the crop need to think seriously about what it is that differentiates them from their competition. "Take the financial-services industry, for example," says Meerkamper. "Frankly, those who are going to come, are going to come anyway to that industry. So why should they come to RBC versus TD versus CIBC or whatever it might be?"

As Donald puts it, graduating students "are, in a sense, a blank slate." He advises organizations to take advantage of every opportunity they can to promote their company—and its unique benefits—to potential young hires. (*See sidebars for examples of how some leading organizations are accomplishing just that.*)

Effective ways of getting the message across are by sponsoring industry-related events, offering up the services of existing employees to help students with resumé writing and interviewing skills and by sending engaging guest speakers to classes on campus.

That's precisely how 24-year-old Elaine Callighen, a Queen's commerce graduate like Cho, ended up in a two-year training program to become a trade commissioner with the federal Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade. Callighen—who hadn't considered a career with the Canadian government until a lawyer from the department showed up as a

STABILITY. CONSISTENCY. LESS RISK. CAN THESE REALLY BE WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE NOW WANT?



DELOITTE: THE VALUE OF FEEDBACK AND CHOICE

Contrary to what you might think about their generation, twentysomethings value structure and feedback as part of their day-to-day working lives. That's why global professional services firm Deloitte provides a performance coach to each intern, co-op student and full-time employee to help set realistic goals, and track against them on an ongoing basis. That initiative may be one of the reasons business students surveyed as part of Brainstorm and D-Code's national campus recruitment study ranked Deloitte second in terms of companies they'd like to work for upon graduation. "We work with them to really understand whether their development needs are being met," says Tara Winslow, the firm's senior man-

ager of national campus recruitment. "That, and to provide overall support and guidance when someone starts."

Study co-author and D-Code partner Eric Meerkamper says large international consulting firms such as Deloitte also fared well among students because of the diversity of choices they offer. With so many practice areas to choose from—including tax, audit, enterprise risk, consulting and financial advisory—employees have the opportunity to experience different parts of the business during their careers at Deloitte.

Another huge bonus? A recently launched global internship program that sends a select group of new recruits to places such as Australia, the Netherlands and the United States to work with one of

Deloitte's global member firms for eight to 12 weeks. All full-time employees are also eligible to participate in the firm's popular Global Development Program, which enables short- or long-term work placements in locations around the world. Finally, says Winslow, Deloitte makes sure to practise what it preaches when it comes to work-life balance—a key attribute of professional life for the millennial generation. As part of the firms' wellness initiative, Deloitte will cover a portion of the costs for expenses ranging from gym memberships and personal trainers to book-club fees and weight-loss programs. Heck, they'll even reimburse you for dog walking, grocery delivery, lawn care and home-cleaning services. Nice work if you can get it.

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guest lecturer at one of her fourth-year classes—says the opportunity to travel, learn languages and become a career-long diplomat was simply too good to pass up. “To be honest, I didn’t think much about working for the government,” she says. “I wanted to work in the private sector. But after learning more about the program, I realized the job provides so many personal-development opportunities that I didn’t feel would be accessible to a person of my age coming right out of university.”

Perhaps even more revealing is the fact that Callighen is not alone when it comes to her generation’s top picks for places to work. In fact, the Government of Canada ranked second among students polled in Brainstorm–D-Code’s online survey when asked in an open-ended question to list five companies or organizations where they’d like to start their careers. Other industries that came out on top include education, health care, academic research, engineering and advertising/marketing. (For a list of company brand and industry rankings, see charts on pages 120 and above.)

“We were really surprised that government did so well,” says Meerkamper. “Often, we associate government with stagnation. But there’s a positive side to the stability that large organizations and government can provide. Although [the government] might not pay as much as some of the higher-risk areas like financial services, it is fairly consistent.”

Stability. Consistency. Less risk. Can these really be the attributes today’s allegedly fast-talking, attention-craving, ladder-climbing young people value most in the workplace? And if so, what gives? “With students graduating with significantly higher debt

WHERE, WHY AND WHO

Q: Which industry would students most like to start their careers in? (Top 20 responses shown*)

Industry	(%)
Education	21.9
Health care	19.9
Government/public service	19.7
Academic research	19.0
Engineering	16.0
Advertising/marketing	12.9
Financial services	11.8
Environment/conservation	10.4
Social services	10.0
Computer software	9.9
Law	9.6
Not-for-profit	9.3
Media/publishing	8.9
Accounting/auditing	8.4
Management consulting	8.4
Pharmaceutical/biotech	8.1
Information technology	8.1
Energy/power	7.5
Internet/e-commerce	7.0
Electronics	7.0

Q: Which attributes do students consider important when considering full-time employment with an organization immediately following graduation?

Opportunities for advancement in position:	46%
Good people to work with:	42%
Good people to report to:	41%
Work-life balance:	37%
Initial salary:	29%

Q: Who has the most influence on students’ career plans?

Friends/acquaintances:	44%
Parents:	39%
Online resource materials:	35%
Professors:	32%
Co-op/internship adviser:	19%
Printed resource material:	14%
Campus career centre staff:	13%
Other:	9%

*FOR COMPLETE LIST SEE WWW.CANADIANBUSINESS.COM/MAGAZINE

than they did five or 10 years ago, they are facing realities that didn’t exist before,” says Meerkamper. “When you have \$30,000 in debt, you have to make certain decisions regarding your career.”

Add to that a greater desire for work-life balance, coupled with the ability to make a difference in the workplace, and it begins to make sense why students are increasingly favouring the slow-but-steady pace of life in the government or social-services sectors rather than the more thrilling ride that goes along with an entrepreneurial startup or smaller business. In fact, Meerkamper says the opportunity to complete “intra-preneurships,” or rotational placements that allow students to jump between different departments within a

larger institution, offers the same excitement of a startup without the risk that goes along with it.

It’s great news, no doubt, for the public sector, but less encouraging for big and small businesses alike. Could the real war for top young talent become a tug-of-war between the public sector and everyone else?

Well that, of course, is where Brainstorm and D-Code come in. By helping campus recruiters and companies of all sizes to truly understand what their key strengths are and how they can market them to the millennial generation, they’re hoping to help facilitate a perfect match between the workers of today and tomorrow. “Really, the trick of recruiting these days is to think about it more like a courtship than a blind date,” says Meerkamper. “It’s more about forming a relationship than completing a transaction.” ☐



RESEARCH IN MOTION: THE POWER OF CO-OP

As far as company brands go, it’s not hard to see why RIM, based in Waterloo, Ont., has a head start among students. It is, after all, the tech firm that invented the popular BlackBerry wireless e-mail device, a must-have gadget for today’s upwardly mobile professional. It’s also a cool place to work, says Elizabeth Roe Pfeifer, RIM’s vice-president of organizational development. She notes that RIM offers about 1,000 co-op and internship positions annually, and hires up to 150 new grads each year. In fact, engineering students surveyed as part of Brainstorm and D-Code’s 2006 campus recruitment study gave RIM high marks as a place they’d like to work upon graduation.

Roe Pfeifer says a major selling point for many members of the millennial generation is a chance to be a part of the ongoing “RIM success story,” including the opportunity to get their hands wet on real-life software solutions. “Certainly, from an engineering perspective, we’d like to have a co-op student be able to say when they get back to campus that, ‘I’m the guy or girl who wrote the program for this on the BlackBerry,’ and show their friends, because that is so cool,” she says.

With large Canadian and U.S. software engineering and technology companies nipping at RIM’s heels when it comes to recruitment drives (particularly at the University of Waterloo), the Ontario company has worked hard to differentiate

itself from its competitors. In addition to providing tons of feedback to students during their four-month co-op stays and promoting the fact that they should experience as many different aspects of the business as possible, RIM also provides access to the company’s legendary co-chief executives, Mike Lazaridis and Jim Balsillie, through frequent company meetings. “Those two really know how to light up a room. Mike Lazaridis was a University of Waterloo co-op student and a lot of the things he got from his co-op experience he’s been a proponent of offering here,” says Roe Pfeifer. Of course, it does not hurt that all students get a free BlackBerry—and monthly service—for the duration of their stay.