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## Feature

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### **5 Reasons Gen Y May Survive Recession, Layoffs Better than Gen X and Boomers**

– Meridith Levinson, CIO

You'd think Generation Y professionals would be the least equipped to weather a recession and layoffs. After all, this is the generation whose "helicopter parents" hovered over their every move, catered to their every caprice and taught them that they were all winners.

This is also the generation that's proven very demanding in the workplace. According to a CareerBuilder survey from 2007, 74 percent of employers say Gen Y workers expect to be paid more; 56 percent of employers say Gen Y workers expect to be promoted within a year; and half say Gen Y professionals expect more vacation and personal time than older generations.

Generation Y is totally different from the generation that preceded it, the scrappy, do-it-yourself latch-key kids (like myself) who make up Generation X. As a result, they seem ill-prepared to handle the vicious vicissitudes of corporate life during an economic downturn.

But we may be underestimating Generation Y. Workplace and Gen Y experts say this group of whippersnappers may actually be better prepared to weather a recession and handle a layoff than Generation X and Boomers. Here's why.

For the other side of this story, see [5 Reasons Gen Y is Unprepared to Survive Recession, Layoffs](#).

#### **1. They have weaker ties to corporate America.**

Gen Y professionals are known for not feeling the same sense of loyalty to their employers that has bound members of Generation X and Baby Boomer to their jobs, says Lisa Orrell, a generational relations expert and author of *Millenials Incorporated*. That's because Generation Y saw first-hand what their Baby Boomer and older Gen X parents got for their loyalty to their employers during economic downturns: bupkus. They saw their parents get laid off. They saw their parents' pensions disappear. They saw their parents get meager severance

requently, says Orrell, these older generations taught their Gen Y kids to put their own well-being before their employers' needs.

"Their parents are preaching, 'Don't make the same mistakes your mom and I did. Your father put 22 years into XYZ company only to be laid off'," says Orrell. "Their parents are telling them. 'Look out for yourself and life is too damn short. If you're not feeling valued and respected in your job, even in an entry-level position, get the heck out and find another one.' "

Rosemary Haefner, CareerBuilder VP of human resources, notes that this cavalier attitude Gen Y has toward its employers might make it easier for Gen Y to cope with layoffs or to decide to find a new job before they get the axe.

"What we know around Gen Y workers is that they're not bound to one place, one employer, one job," says Haefner. "In a time of uncertainty, that might help them work through what's happening with less emotional trauma. They might not be as emotionally tied [to the job] and it might help them make decisions quicker."

## **2. They work cheap.**

It's no secret that companies sometimes cut higher-paid workers during a layoff to save some money in the short term. So Generation Y professionals may be better positioned to survive a layoff based purely on the fact that because they're younger and less experienced, they're paid less, says Orrell. They might even get a promotion out of it.

"Companies might get rid of senior executives and front line managers who are being paid higher salaries to cut fat and where they could move a younger person into those positions for less pay," she says.

## **3. They don't have the financial burdens of Boomers and Gen X.**

While many Gen Y students are saddled with more college debt than their parents ever saw, the typical 22- or 23-year-old doesn't have a mortgage payment or have to pay for daycare, says Orrell. She notes that many young Gen Y professionals still live at home, which makes surviving a layoff much easier for them emotionally and financially than it is for their Generation X and Baby Boomer co-workers.

## **4. They've been multitasking since they were kids.**

Between school, soccer practice, student council meetings and drama club—and all while text messaging their friends—members of Generation Y have been juggling multiple responsibilities since they could walk. Consequently, says Haefner, they're well prepared to handle extra work if they're the ones who remain standing after a layoff.

comfortable multitasking, with dealing with change as it's happening that they might have an upper hand because they're comfortable taking on double duty and handling multiple tasks being thrown at them at a time when their organization is going through change," says Haefner.

### **5. They may be spoiled but they're not stupid.**

Generation Y professionals may be exasperating, but they do understand how bad the economy is now.

"I know that they are aware and concerned about the economic crisis," says Mary Crane, a business consultant who's also worked with graduating MBA students. "They're smart enough. They have their cell phones on. They know there's a downturn in the economy."

They also have good judgment, and many of them realize that they won't be able to make the demands for raises, promotions, training and the hottest technologies during a recession that they've previously made on their employers, says Orrell.

"I think the Millenials are aware enough of what is happening in this business climate. They're not stupid," she says. "If an employer has to let 10 percent of its workforce go to cut costs, they will understand things are amiss and that it's up to them to be good employees. I don't think their demanding behavior will continue if they're seeing people being let go and lives being devastated. As demanding and spoiled as they can be, the Millenials are also extremely mindful and caring of others."