



Why Generation Y Won't Settle

The twenties' transition requires action, not stability

by Elizabeth J. Agnew

In high school, you may have been told things like “Oh, you’re going to do so great” or “You won’t have any problem living a comfortable life” or “you’ve got so much *potential*.” This may have even carried into college, where even though hard work was required, the secrets to success were pretty well defined and laid out (i.e., not really secrets at all). Well, it doesn’t work that way after college. Our twenties is the time to start replacing this so-called potential with some action.

This can be scary – What do I really want? Am I really who I thought I was? Now that it’s time to choose, do I really want to do what I thought I wanted when choosing a major? What if things don’t go the way I want and I end up back at square one? This is the age of transition, of questioning, and figuring out what we really want to do with our lives now that we’ve exited the educational tunnel.

Generation Y is becoming more and more comfortable breaking out of the box and valuing our lives. So we’re willing to stop and think about what it is we really want for our lives, and we’re less likely to put up with a job that does not fit in with our dreams.

Let me give you an example. For me, it was: do I really want to be an engineer when I’m forty? Truth is, no. Would I be happy and satisfied? Yeah, maybe by then, if I was a manager and had busy days with lots of people in and out. Would I enjoy the journey? Not as much. Is being an engineer the best contribution I could give the world? Hell, no! The world of course needs engineers, but there are better engineers out there than me, so I’ll leave it up to them, and instead give my unique contribution of coaching. Why fight it? If my arrow’s pointing north, that’s the way I’m going, even if the wind is blowing west.

There are lots of articles out there that attempt to explain how “twixters” (the off-putting term for Generation Y), are lazy, move around a lot or still live with their parents, and are in denial about growing up. There may exist such a breed, but that’s not who I’m referring to here. I’m talking about those of us that are saying goodbye to the rules and conditionings that tell us what we’re “supposed” to do after college (e.g., get a good job with good benefits). We have learned that it’s not only okay, but important, to figure ourselves out before we blindly begin a track of stability and subsequent boredom. This is a track that, if we don’t question it now, may stop us 20 years down the road to think: oh no, where has my life gone! No thanks, I’ll pass on that. Somehow, maybe thanks to our baby boomer parents, we are aware that we should find our passion and live from that place from the get-go.

Generation Y may not know what it is they need to live their life to the fullest, but they understand that *not knowing* doesn’t mean *not questioning*. Our education has taught us that questioning is the catalyst to growth and change, even if the answers are murky now. So maybe

those “twixters” who are lying around aren’t so bad, they just don’t know which way to go and suffer from analysis paralysis. Hey, at least they’re refusing to blindly move forward in an arbitrary direction.

This leads us to why Gen Y won’t stay at a job just because it’s a “good job”. Generation Y isn’t satisfied with just a “good job” like our parents were; we won’t stay if we don’t feel an internal challenge. We need independence and responsibility earlier so that we are free to harvest our creativity and carve the path that fits us best. Loyalty is low on the priority list, as selfishness regarding our career is a virtue that will get us closer to our personal goals. This means employers have to work harder to satisfy our needs, learning to grow and give us room to uniquely define our role.

To us, “career” means much more than climbing the corporate ladder to acquire years and years of experience. I don’t want to advance simply because I’ve put in my time. Instead, an ideal career involves flexibility, variety, some unknown twists and turns, and the opportunity to leave our mark at each step of the way. Some of us may know how all of these chapters are going to fit together in the end, and those of us who don’t are confident that the process itself will show us the way.



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