

# Networking, competition and busy living have changed labour scene

A friend who is a talented lawyer, recently resigned from a top local law firm to set up his own. Apparently he had reached the limit with what he termed as the rigidity of the partners of the firm who he described as laggard “wazees”. Apparently, most of the ageing partners were still stuck somewhere in the 1950s and still conducted dictation with their secretaries in this modern day and age. Over and above this, they kept on criticising my friend for coming to work at 9am daily and for taking a one-and-a-half hour lunch break which he used to get a workout at the gym.

## Job market

This unfortunately is the inter-generational conflict that is found in the workplace today. The older folks who love to tell stories of how they walked to school barefoot for 10 kilometres everyday have totally different work ethics from their younger colleagues. Most of these older folks are married to their jobs and their whole identity is linked to their workplaces. When you meet them, the first question they ask is “Where do you work?” Once they know, they then process it and try to compartmentalise



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you in to predefined categories. They are creatures of habit and work daily from eight to five as they have done for last 30 to 40 years.

The older folks are in constant conflict with Generation ‘Xters’ and Generation ‘Nexters’ who they simply do not understand. ‘Nexters’ were born between 1980 and 2000. Some have entered the workplace and others are preparing to. On the other hand, members of the Generation Xters were born between 1965 and 1980.

Both of these generations are learning more today than the old folks used to in much less time. In the good old days, the old folks used to take one professional course at university or college and then rush off to the job market to start their careers. In contrast, it is not uncommon to find Xters and Nexters

who have completed both a university degree and a professional qualification all within a span of four years. Gone are the days when relatives of the old folks used to converge in droves at the airport to see their privileged son or daughter off to take a job posting in Lusaka.

In this day and age, the Xters and Nexters hope onto planes so frequently that they practically perceive them as matatus in the air. The standards of global networking, competition and busy living have changed the labour landscape. Understanding the big picture as it relates to the new rules of the workplace will help the older folks decide how well their management strategy dovetails with modern worker needs.

Xters and Nexters have inherited a workplace that has no long-term se-



**The young mid-career professionals operate under market conditions that have been transformed in a rewired, technology-driven world.** REUTERS

curity. They simply cannot relate with the fact that the old folks were willing to work all their lives with one employer only to be rewarded with a spade and a wheelbarrow when they retired.

As far as the younger generation is concerned, they work to live and not the other way round. They want to have a more rewarding lifestyle outside work.

A normal workday to them entails a more relaxed work environment, time to exercise or take care of personal business. A generation ago, these activities were frowned upon or strictly forbidden. The older folks need to know that in the coming years, employees who are climbing early-career or mid-career professional ladders will operate under market conditions that have been transformed in the context a rewired, technology-driven world.

The age of secretaries taking dictation is long gone. Anybody worth their salt is now up to speed with the latest office software applications and most of the younger generation do not know what to do with a secretary when they are provided with one.

## Study traits

The Nexters and Xters promise to flavour the world of work differently. Studying their traits, talents and preferences can help the old folks in significant ways.

The more they know about the mindsets of these two generations, the more they will benefit on both fronts. To them, job flexibility is a right, not a perk. Their morale will grow because they know you are thinking of them as people rather than just tools of productivity for the company.