



## GEN Z: FACE THE FUTURE TODAY

Discover the **7 guiding principles** to inspire better connections with young people

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A customer, an employee and an advocate.  
**GENERATION Z** is your future. Different and so distinct from other generations, how exactly does your business best engage with young people post the pandemic?

This report covers the essentials you need to know. We outline **THE 7 Guiding Principles for forward looking brands and businesses to connect with Gen Z**. Our Guiding Principles have been co-created in collaboration with young people, tried and tested thanks to continuous research and put to work by the experts within our consultancy.

The 7 Guiding Principles reflect the need for an evolution of CSR, HR and commercial strategies to accept and embrace the fundamental differences in Gen Z. The latest report also includes our own practical examples of how we have put them into action. This thinking can be applied across all marketing, education, HR or social responsibility youth engagement challenges.

If you want to better engage with this audience the 7 Guiding Principles are designed to supercharge your youth engagement and will give you a competitive edge.





## THE STUDY

Back in 2018 we commissioned an independent study: we wanted to find out what Gen Z cared about compared with earlier generations. What made them tick? What were they passionate about? How did they move through the world?

We used the findings from this to create ‘**7 Guiding Principles of engagement**’ – guiding stars – tried, tested and proven over two decades to help ensure every campaign hits its mark and achieves maximum impact, both for brands and the young people they are designed to engage. Then came a pandemic and seismic global change, and we wondered what might have shifted since then. We’ve caught up with 600 members of Gen Z, to see how they are feeling, and which key things might have changed.

## THE RESULTS?

Well, much of what we found in 2018 still holds true. This is a generation with remarkable adaptability and resilience, one that has never not lived through some sort of crisis, and with the weight of creating a better world sitting squarely on their shoulders.

And they’re looking for brands and employers to actively work with them to make things better.

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# GEN Z: 4 Key Characteristics

## UNFULFILLED

Gen Z are too often unhappy, lonely, lack confidence and are unsatisfied with life

Our updated research shows even more uncertainty about purpose and place in the world, anxiety about the future and reports of finding life less rewarding. We've seen an increased importance in spirituality and faith, and more reliance on social media to stay connected (plus increased concerns about its negative impacts).

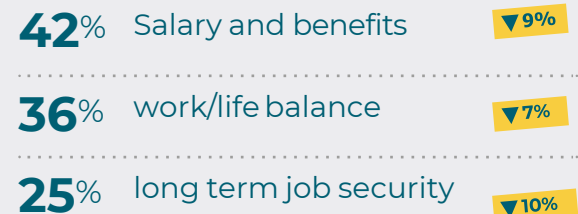


## FINDING CAREER SUCCESS

They place great importance on career happiness

They are still desperate to grow and thrive, and are more attracted to companies that can demonstrate a clear career path. However, we have seen a notable decrease in the perceived importance of salary and benefits, work/life balance and long-term job security - perhaps a sign of Gen Z adjusting to the harsh realities of a post-Covid job market.

Most important aspects when looking for a job/first job with a new employer:



## FIGHTING FOR FAIRNESS

They are concerned about social fairness – particularly diversity & equality

Gen Z remain passionate about issues relating to social equality and diversity, with more actively working in their communities but with less belief in electoral politics as a way to create change. Since 2018, they are more open to communications from brands (and feel their data is more secure), but even more than before, they want to engage with and work for companies that have a good ethical stance.

### Global issues they are concerned about:

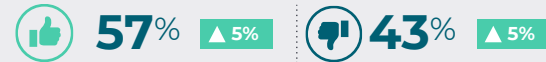


## FLUID AND FLEXIBLE

They are fluid in their interests, views, identities, and career paths

They remain difficult to classify into neat brackets, moving between multiple interests, cultural genres, opinions and even identities, seeking variety in every aspect of their lives, including careers.

When it comes to music and other types of culture I tend to jump between genres



I have a large number of interests



My personality is fairly consistent across different situations



they want to engage with and work for companies that have a good ethical stance

So what does  
that mean and  
how should you  
engage with

**GEN Z**

post-pandemic?



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# Making better connections

## THE 7 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. ACCELERATE THEIR SKILLS

2. EMBRACE AUTHENTIC CO-CREATION

3. MOVE AT THEIR SPEED

4. NURTURE THEIR OPTIMISM

5. FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS

6. MAKE IT REAL

7. RECOGNISE THEIR PROGRESS

Day to day we put these into action for our clients to deliver brand purpose and social impact. We have combined almost two decades of industry CSR, HR and Marketing expertise with key lessons from this latest research. Then we've reviewed and updated these touchstones in order to share them with you.

Applying the **7 Guiding Principles** will better recruit, retain and motivate Young People. They can help brands earn deeper respect to build more lasting relationships. Education experiences with them at their heart will feel more relevant, valuable and motivating.

If you want to face your future, it's today's young people that hold the key to tomorrow's success.

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# 1 ACCELERATE THEIR SKILLS

Young people are driven to learn and develop. Every engagement with a young person is an opportunity to help them develop a critical skill or attitude to build shared growth and a more successful future, for them and you. Maximise those opportunities; waste none.

Despite small % decreases the following skills related comments remain in top ten:

- 24% Learning a wide range of skills ▼4%
- 26% Helps me reach my full potential ▼5%
- 22% Helps me get other jobs in the future ▼2%
- 22% Leaders I can respect and learn from ▼4%



## Sky

We worked with Sky to bridge the skills gap within the media industry, re-appraising their existing range of youth education initiatives and focusing them on six key identifiable employability skills. To help develop these critical skills in young people, Sky Academy was created - a ground-breaking, immersive initiative with practical workplace challenges to encourage learning and development. The results have been transformative not just for Sky but also for the Gen Z participants.

Employability skills of young people participating increased by 81%. Sky employee pride rose by 80%. Sky Academy was also recognised as a best in class initiative, winning GOLD for Learning with Technologies at the National Learning Awards.



## NatWest

As part of rebuilding trust in the bank, NatWest is helping millions of young people and their families improve their skills and gain a better understanding of money, through MoneySense – an always-on program of interactive learning tools, events and games for use at school and home, with support from thousands of NatWest volunteers.

Since 2015, our skills focused program has reached 10 million young people and their families, working in 20,000 schools. We have arranged 9,000 volunteer-led workshops, and the bank has seen brand value grow by nearly 100% (The Banker Top 500).



## Deloitte 'Futures Month'

As part of Deloitte's volunteering initiative – 'Futures Month' – we designed and delivered virtual volunteering sessions, pairing Deloitte volunteers from across the business with young people to accelerate their employment skills in a post-COVID-19 world.

We delivered sessions to over 150 young people – helping them to identify their own skills and which roles would be most suitable for them, to writing their CV and applying for jobs, as well as preparing them for interviews.

we caught up with them after the sessions the results were really positive. 95% felt more optimistic about the future, and 89% told us the sessions helped them move forward in their search for meaningful employment.



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## 2 EMBRACE AUTHENTIC CO-CREATION

Young people are very quick to dismiss poorly conceived or inauthentic attempts to connect with them. The solution is to listen far more and ask them to reveal the world from their perspective. Put genuine co-creation at the heart of what you do - stay relevant.

**58%** My place of work/education would be much better if they listened to my ideas for improvement **▲3%**

**58%** I would be more attracted to a brand or business who wanted to listen to my point of view and let me help shape their product or service **▼3%**

**56%** Businesses and organisations don't listen enough to what we have to say **▲1%**



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## Samsung

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Samsung Solve for Tomorrow: Next Gen positions Samsung as a global tech leader with local market understanding that aims to bridge the digital divide. The program harnessed the power of co-creation in interactive design sprints, seeking innovative ideas exploring the use of technology to make the world a better and more sustainable place.

Through We are Futures' unique network of education experts acting as ambassadors and co-creators, the program had direct access to every school in the UK.

The pilot exceeded our schools recruitment target by 152%, engaged 9000 13-14 year olds and reached 14,000 parents with 150 competition entrants.

In October 2021 Samsung was ranked fifth in Interbrand's 100 Best Global Brands with a brand value of USD 74.6 billion, achieving a 20% increase compared to 2020. Its ongoing efforts for sustainable development, including various campaigns guided by its CSR vision, 'Together for Tomorrow! Enabling People,' was cited as one of the key factors in that increase.

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## Heathrow

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Within the 'World of Work' program for Heathrow airport to better connect with local communities, a youth employment movement was created to inspire, upskill and empower young people to unlock their career potential at Heathrow and beyond.

Co-creation was at the heart of the 'World of Work' strategy, bringing education, employment and skills partners together in collaboration. In its development we tapped into youth forums to formulate a program that included schools initiatives, interactive behind-the-scenes airport tours, and an online hub to unite parents, teachers and young people.



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## Engineering UK

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Engineering UK was looking to increase the diversity of the talent pipeline for the engineering industry. In reimagining the existing Energy Quest program the voices of the key audiences were brought into the DNA of our activity through collaborative sessions with our Young Leaders Network.

The result was a 3 year program with new content designed in collaboration with students each year. The results of the initial research was then published by Engineering UK to guide other organisations to better engage with underrepresented groups.





## 3 MOVE AT THEIR SPEED

Recognise how swiftly they move through jobs, life stages and changes in their early life. You can never stand still. Be reactive, be culturally relevant and understand the real-life context of every age group.

**44%** By the time I am 30, I expect to have changed jobs more than four times ▲ 2%

**46%** In the future, it's likely that I'll have more than one job at the same time ▼ 1%

Young people have the power to bring about swift and highly impactful social movements that can have significant almost instantaneous effects, positive and negative, on the reputation of businesses and brands. This makes it critical for organisations to communicate with them in a way that they understand and that acknowledges their views and values.

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### Young Leaders Network

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In order to stay connected with young people and ensure the insights we offer our clients remain up to date and relevant, young people are embedded in every project team, cocreating content with young creative talent.

Our own Young Leaders Network offers young people work experience, a dedicated digital hub to share ideas and the opportunity to get involved in our work and develop their own skills at the same time. The result is a win-win situation.



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### Sky: Keep Connected

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As the pandemic kept people at home, our work positioned Sky as a force for good by helping to support young people and their families during lockdown. Building on the success of Sky Academy Studios, we created #keepconnected.

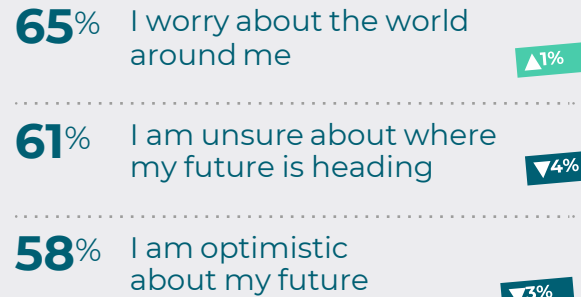
This inspiring social-first campaign was quickly designed to give young people a voice, inviting them to share their experiences and encouraging them to use creativity and communication skills to bring their stories to life.

The campaign reached over 3 million young people and 100,000 teachers, generating over 500 video entries in just a 4-week period.



## 4 NURTURE THEIR OPTIMISM

Young people are more anxious than ever. Be more positive. Emphasise a brilliant future of limitless possibilities and go on an optimistic journey of shared values to keep the fire of hope going. Demonstrate faith in their potential and show the real improvements and developments in the world around them.



## Always: About You

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For Always and Tampax we help to reach and support teenage girls, and their parents, during puberty with the 'About You' puberty education program. Designed to inspire positivity and build confidence and resilience through education, advice and product sampling, it also drives awareness and trial at POME. Making this a legacy program for the family market, reaching 600,000 11-14 year old girls and their parents every year, nurturing optimism at a crucial stage of development.



## Duracell

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By enrolling and empowering young people to instigate the change at home with their parents, our program was able to drive awareness and attitudes of battery recycling with families.

The Big Battery Hunt inspires and promotes positive action. It explains the benefits of recycling through fun maths-based activities, and challenges families to get recycling through a nationwide competition – supported by films, leaderboards and in-home branded recycling boxes.

1.2m families now participate annually, each contributing to making a genuine difference. with 14m batteries recycled so far.



## Unite Students

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In recognition of their 30th year as a business, and its renewed Sustainability vision, Unite Students is helping nurture young peoples' optimism about their future by supporting the transition from school into their next steps through its Leapskills program. The majority of students using Leapskills will be heading to University, but the materials are supportive for those who are unsure or moving out from home for the first time.

Unite Students, as a Group, have a commitment to providing 'opportunities to all' and currently provide a 'Home for Success' to 74,000 students every year in over 173 properties across 25 towns and cities. By helping bridge the gap at such a key life stage young people feel supported in exploring their potential and the opportunities that lie ahead.



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## 5 FIGHT FOR FAIRNESS

Young people believe passionately in complete and natural fairness and equality. Show you share their expectation of a fairer world. Go even further to champion diversity and equal opportunities, making them a natural feature of your culture and communications. Create and communicate true commitment in all you do and say.

- 43%** I often find myself telling others not to buy a brand for ethical reasons **▲ SIGNIFICANTLY 6%**
- 54%** I am prepared to pay more for ethical or environmentally friendly products **▲ 5%**
- 59%** I think brands should share the responsibility for solving society's problems **▲ 3%**
- 56%** I am more likely to buy products from companies that give something back to society **▼ 2%**



“You can tell the difference between tokenistic diversity and when it’s genuine. You can walk into one office and see people integrated, sitting together, laughing and chatting. That’s when it’s natural. In another you end up with all the people of colour sat next to each other, out on their own.”

### Fox: Malala

When Fox Searchlight made the film ‘He Named Me Malala’, based on the life of Malala Yousafzai, they wanted to amplify the film’s inspirational message, empowering young people to develop their campaigning skills and supporting them to become active citizens.

Our Malala Youth Voice competition challenged young people to create user-generated content including videos campaigning on issues such as human rights and the right to an education. By enabling students to express their creativity in this way, we not only reached over 600,000 students but, together with the students, achieved an additional social reach of over 140,000.



### Sky: Diversity

Sky was looking to improve the diversity of its grad intake, summer internships and apprenticeships, by ensuring their employer brand was reaching and landing with more diverse young audiences.

By co-creating a strategy with our Young Leaders Network, we brought the insights and voices of young people into their positioning, process and communications, ensuring their commitment to diversity and equal opportunities was clear. The approach championed equal opportunities and fairness. There was an overall 60% increase in applications to their grad program, with 50% of those applications being from BAME applicants.



## 6 MAKE IT REAL

In a digitally-led, post-lockdown reality, memorable real-life encounters deliver greater value and impact than ever. Real people, real role models and face-to-face interaction can deliver far greater impact.

Top three role models stayed the same – parents/family/friends, celebrities/cultural icons & activists

▲ 2%



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## Into Film

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We ran the Into Film Festival for several years, a huge interactive series of events designed to grow family cinema audiences, and an interest in watching, making and working in the Film industry.

Through a 'real world' approach, embracing the power of face to face interaction, film screenings, talks and hands-on workshops by actors and industry professionals we inspired a new generation of film goers. Growing the Festival attendance each year to around 500,000 young people, running 3000 screening events at cinemas, 150 special events featuring actors, directors and more, and achieving a 26% redemption of vouchers for return cinema visits for Vue Cinemas.



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# 7 RECOGNISE THEIR PROGRESS

Young people benefit greatly from recognition. Help them track their progress dynamically. Recognise their achievements and celebrate their individual and collective success. Give them evidence of their progress that they can share with others.

**59%** Being a success at work and earning more status is very important to me **SAME**

**71%** It is important I feel valued at work **▼1%**



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## Samsung Solve for Tomorrow: Next Gen

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For Samsung Solve for Tomorrow: Next Gen we connected with 13-15 year olds through interactive design thinking sprints, focussed on creating innovative ideas that explore the use of technology to make the world a better and more sustainable place.

Sustainable tech ideas were built out from the initial concepts and submitted to a nationwide competition. We rewarded each stage of development, providing feedback, acknowledgement and badges for each stage achieved. This highlighted successes and confirmed the valuable insight gained into creative tech job roles, across research & development, design, sales, and marketing functions.

The pilot exceeded all recruitment targets, engaging 9000 13-14 year olds and 14,000 parents with 150 competition entries.



## EE PhoneSmart

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We at Futures worked with EE to create the PhoneSmart program which supports young people to build the skills to stay safe as they take possession of their first phone.

PhoneSmart features a range of visual storylines and interactive quizzes to highlight both the benefits and dangers of tech use, while helping young people understand how to identify and report instances of online abuse, hate, discrimination and cyberbullying. The content covers topics such as; digital wellbeing, staying safe online and digital and media literacy.

Working with parents and young people the scheme champions the strategies that can be used to fully enjoy mobile phone ownership in a fun way. It acknowledges this key life moment providing badges to celebrate each stage of learning so they can share the competencies they have achieved with family and friends.



At **We Are Futures** our mission is not just to help you get your future-facing purpose right, it's to deliver it directly to the young people who will make up the mass markets of tomorrow.

No-one is better placed if you want to put the full weight of your organisation behind the right issues and have a real impact on young lives. For two decades it's all we've done. In that time, we've built a unique set of networks and partnerships, giving us unrivalled access and insight into the lives of young people, their schools, teachers and families.

The result: we know Generation Z better than anyone. And as experts in education and behaviour, as well as activation, we know how to turn this understanding into life-shaping, sometimes even life-changing actions. That's why we KNOW our 7 Principles work.

Want to engage young people as employees, customers or even cheerleaders of your product or brand in the future? Want to find out more about the ways we work to deliver purpose-led projects and campaigns with outstanding outcomes? Drop us a line and let's talk about how you can start to build a lasting, meaningful relationship with the next generation:

**[hello@wearefutures.com](mailto:hello@wearefutures.com)**

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Thank you

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