

Mind the generation gap

Employers' attitudes towards today's teenagers mean that the mature, conscientious and smart are held back, says 16-year-old Charlotte Lytton writing in The Guardian.

It seems that nothing is ever good enough in today's society; we're a nation obsessed by perfection and not even the best seems acceptable anymore. GCSEs are an example of this fixation. Not only are there news reports seemingly daily about how easy they are, but it seems they count for nothing when 16-year-olds decide to venture out into the working world.

Coming from a school where hairdressing and catering were offered as vocational courses alongside more traditional subjects, I can see the value and importance of offering a wide spectrum of qualifications as many people choose different career paths after compulsory education. However, employers are now turning away teenagers straight out of school on the grounds that they don't know enough, or they're too young or they simply don't look the part.



But when are we supposed to learn all of these additional skills for the world of work? From reading the papers, it seems pupils are working their socks off at school to be met with disgruntled employers who sack them because they turn up for work five minutes late or their shirt isn't tucked in. After a six-hour school day that can sometimes include double history and mathematics, when do they expect kids to learn the protocol of the work place? Is actually gaining knowing and being good at the job worth anything anymore?

Even getting a summer job can prove unnecessarily difficult. The competition between teens to get the last place behind the burger counter has sky rocketed, which isn't helped by the fact parents always seem so keen to remind us about the various jobs they had at our age.

Young people can't be expected to be at the same standard as adults when they leave school. It seems 16-year-olds are just thrown in at the deep end and employers have little or no understanding that kids are just being kids. It worries me that school-leavers are being forced to grow into adults prematurely. They want to look back on their lives and realise they enjoyed themselves instead of thinking they slaved away doing full time hours from the age of 16 to 60.

The negative feedback from kids leaving school at 16 to find work is hardly reassuring when I know I'll be in that position in the not-so-distant future. The demand for excellence is so great that I feel nervous turning up to babysitting jobs without a masters degree from Oxford.

At 16, some people are a heck of a lot more mature than they're given credit for. Sure, you'll still get the odd few who like to throw bottles at pigeons and watch the Cartoon Network, but maybe if employers invested just a little bit more time and had a little bit more faith in today's secondary-school kids, they would be more than just pleasantly surprised.

About this story

This story was produced by Charlotte Lytton, aged 16. It was published on the [Guardian](#) website

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I read your article in the Guardian, and don't know exactly what you are complaining about. You say that many teens are mature and capable of being in the workplace - I totally agree. However, you go on to say that employers need to give more flexibility to 16 year olds because they are kids. Sorry, when I was 16 I knew that I needed to tuck in my shirt when at work. I never turned up late either. You see, unlike GCSEs, A-levels or even degrees, all of which you can turn up late for, in the workplace you can't. When do you learn such protocols? Well, you can observe many by looking at others in the workplace. Or you can learn the hard way, by the way your employer frowns upon your lack of etiquette or ultimately lets you go. You also state that children should not have to grow up into an adult at such a young age. The problem is that 16 is not a young age. Go back just 50 years and you will find people were leaving school at 12 and 14 and quite capable of getting jobs and adhering to the workplace ethic. The problem today is that kids are forced, by the media, to lose their real preteen childhood, and then spend an ever increasing time in the adolescent phase - often into their 20s. So what things do employers want? Well before any skills or qualifications they want someone presentable, who will turn up for the job and is reliable. After that they'll look at what you can actually do for them. I know many teens, and fortunately I know that huge numbers are very capable and will survive well in the work place. However, none of them seem to think that turning up late and being unpresentable are fine for the workplace. Stop whining about the workplace. Blame anyone else if you want. Ultimately, though it sounds like the reason that people like you can't get and keep a job is because you haven't yet learnt that the problem lies with yourself.

Anon from England, 30 December 1899 00:00

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This article really hit home with me. I remember the difficulty of finding a good job when I left school and it seems that things have only got worse. It may be true that 50 years ago people left school at 12 or 14, but 50 years ago, people also died 20 years earlier. Charlotte, if only all young people were like you, I'm sure that the attitudes of employers would be very different. It's just a shame that all young people are tarred with the same brush. Thank you Charlotte, for an enlightening article.

Alice Owen (age 27) from Potters Bar, 30 December 1899 00:00

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