

## Workforce 2030: Employing Gen Alpha Panel Recap

As we learn from the business world, we want to share that information with our community of educators and business professionals. This month, MBA Research & Curriculum Center hosted a Future of Work session focused on developing the future workforce and implications for preparing the next generation of workers. Panelists with extensive experience in various industries discussed the challenges, trends, and requisite skills that will shape the workforce experience of the youngest generation, Generation Alpha.

The following Action Brief recaps this fascinating dialogue and continues the discussion surrounding the evolving workplace landscape and opportunities for younger generations to gain essential skills and knowledge.

### The Next, Next Generation

Our [last Action Brief](#) covered the generation currently entering the workforce—Generation Z—and the challenges both they and their employers are encountering. But what about the generation that is still preparing for the workplace? This generation—[Generation Alpha](#)—comprises anyone born between the early 2010s and 2025. And while business professionals are coming to terms with the preferences and interests of Gen Z, there is still considerable uncertainty surrounding their successors.

The Workforce 2030: Employing Gen Alpha panel at [MBA Research Conclave: A Curriculum & Teaching Conference](#) sought to better understand Gen Alpha and emerging trends in educating and recruiting the professionals of tomorrow. Panelists from healthcare, retail, finance, and economic development weighed in on their view of Gen Alpha and how the business world could look when they enter the workforce. Here are some of the challenges and trends they've noticed:

### **“Gen A Needs to Be Comfortable with Change and Ambiguity” –Adam Lukoskie, National Retail Federation**

This was a recurring sentiment throughout the session. Panelists noted that as cultural and political polarization deepens in the United States, the ability to work with different people is all the more important. According to panel participants, today's young people are quick to speak on what they believe. While panelists appreciated their boldness, they worried it could pose challenges in a work environment where future generations—including Gen Alpha—are bound to encounter perspectives or ideas they don't agree with.

Gen Alpha also needs to be comfortable with ambiguity when it comes to their work expectations. As they prepare to enter the workforce, many young workers expect to be paid top dollar with maximum [flexibility](#) immediately. They often have an unrealistic view of the job itself (for example, aspiring nurses not wanting to work any weekends or nights) and are unwilling to do the less glamorous and more tedious aspects of a job such as administrative work. In the future, panelists encouraged Gen Alpha to remain flexible, curious, and diligent. Change and uncertainty are inevitable in the workplace, and young

professionals can stand out from the crowd when they embrace ambiguity and adapt to whatever circumstances arise.

**“Kids Don’t Know What They Don’t Know” –Savannah Allen, Union County-Marysville Economic Development Partnership**

Panel participants also noted that many in Gen Alpha are simply not aware of the numerous career possibilities. Young students tend to have a very limited outlook on potential jobs and career paths, which is understandable given they simply haven’t been exposed to many outside the universally recognized club of mainstream careers (e.g., doctor, lawyer, engineer). Panelists encouraged Gen Alpha—and their teachers—to investigate the business world simply to see the vast variety of jobs that are out there.

This includes not just the careers themselves, but the track to arrive at that career. Panelists emphasized that a four-year college degree is simply not the ultimate standard for employability that it once was. Colleen McConahay from Nationwide Financial referenced how companies “need to encourage a diversity of background” when it comes to job qualifications. [Industry-recognized credentials, delayed college](#), and other alternative forms of education are becoming more and more accepted in the current business environment. If a traditional bachelor’s degree isn’t the right fit for a student, they have plenty of other avenues to receive the education and training they need to excel in the workplace.

**“We Need to Start Looking at AI as a Tool for Productivity” –Fredrick Martin, University of Kentucky HealthCare**

The session’s panelists were fully aware innovations in technology, especially artificial intelligence, will shape the industries and careers of the future. Gen Alpha has an exciting opportunity to be the leading generation on AI in the workplace. Panel participants mentioned that as organizations—including their own—become more AI-compatible, Gen Alpha will be the experts, educators, and leaders on this front.

Panelists also talked about how a growing reliance on AI will give Gen Alpha the opportunity to bridge generational gaps in the workplace. Just as older generations can teach Gen Alpha established skills and tools, Gen Alpha can teach older generations cutting-edge tools like artificial intelligence. This process is called [reverse mentoring](#) and can be a valuable form of professional development.

**“The Number One Thing an Employer Is Looking for Is Work Experience” –Adam Lukoskie, National Retail Federation**

Panel participants also strongly encouraged students to, as one panelist succinctly put it, “just go get any job.” Whether it be waiting tables at a local restaurant, stocking shelves at a retailer, or mowing lawns in a neighborhood, any job experience is good experience in the minds of employers. Working a job even at the most entry-level [builds social skills](#), problem-solving skills, and work ethic, all of which are appealing to businesses.

Panelists noted that many teens today simply weren't working. But even if they were waiting for a "real" job, professionals can still spot the difference. One panelist explained there was a noticeable difference between two employees with the same exact education, but with different work histories. The employee who had lots of previous experience, even if that experience was flipping burgers and delivering packages, was appreciably more capable, efficient, and trustworthy.

#### **Links for Further Reading:**

- ["What Is Generation Alpha? Meaning, Characteristics, and Future"](#)
- ["The Young and Restless: Generation Z and the Workplace"](#)
- ["15 Interesting, Unique, and Unusual Jobs"](#)
- ["Gen AI and Gen Alpha: The Impacts of Growing Up in an Innovation Cycle"](#)
- ["The Benefits of Experience: New Study Finds More Work Experience Benefits for Youth"](#)

#### **Discussion Questions:**

- How can young professionals balance being outspoken about their beliefs with respecting others' beliefs in the workplace?
- Do you know of any overshadowed or underrated careers? Why are those careers important? Share your identified careers with your classmates.
- Why might ethical behavior be important for Gen Alpha? What role could ethics play in the development of new technology, such as artificial intelligence?
- Brainstorm potential benefits of early work experience for younger generations.
- What are some skills or knowledge you have that you might be able to share with older generations in the workforce? What are some things you think older generations can teach you?
- Do you think younger people are actually working less? Why or why not? If you think they are, why do you think that might be? If you think they aren't working less, why do you think older generations see things differently?

#### **Sources:**

- ["Understanding Generation Alpha"](#)
- ["Exploring Remote Work Trends: Millennials + Gen Z Lead the Way"](#)
- ["The Future of Work and Credential Validation and Tracking"](#)
- ["Should You Delay College: Is a Gap Year a Good Idea?"](#)
- ["Why Reverse Mentoring Works and How to Do It Right"](#)
- ["Gen Z and Gen Alpha: What Motivates Them in the Workforce?"](#)
- ["What Are the Benefits of Work Experience?"](#)