When Tom Brokaw coined the phrase the “Greatest Generation,” he was referring to people who grew up in the Great Depression, fought in World War II and through it all persevered to earn this title. Sound familiar? The generation entering the workforce post- 9/11 faced the United States’ deadliest terrorist attack in the country’s history, the worst unemployment rates and economic conditions since the Great Depression and knows little else than a country at war. The people who are in their 20’s and 30’s have persevered through similar events and this time Tom Brokaw is not writing a book. Instead, the media and others like to bash this generation by referring to them as being entitled, lazy, praise-seeking and technology dependent.

At a dark point in our country’s history, this generation has an opportunity to earn the same noble reputation as our grandparents before us. For the generations leading up to ours, hard work or furthering one's education came with a promise of career opportunity and stability. Our generation was presented the illusion that a college education entitles one to career success or at least stability. I can say from personal experience, that sense of entitlement ended the first time reality smacked me in the face. When I entered the work force in 2001, the jobs available to me were next to nothing while a college roommate of mine graduated in 2000 (during the tail end of the Tech Bubble), landed a job at HP paying $80K right out of school. Those types of jobs have been all but non-existent for college grads in a post tech bubble and 9/11 world.

Some of the great innovations of this generation like Facebook, LinkedIn, and Zappos seem to be overshadowed by negative perceptions. These organizations and many like it are not run by lazy, entitled babies
but rather determined and highly intelligent individuals. With the retirement of the baby boomers, even much of the Fortune 500 has senior leadership from this group. They have mastered social media, social networking, ecommerce and effectively made the world much smaller. An entrepreneurial spirit and a technical aptitude armed our generation with the ability to innovate and create.

Tech dependent? Maybe, but it makes this generation the most efficient to date. We may have smart phones glued to our hands at the dinner table, but for this generation, work never stops. The days of two hour lunch breaks with a whiskey on the rocks are long past and substituted are 10-12 hour work days, no lunch breaks and working on Saturdays. We’ve witnessed what can happen to a stagnant workforce, and fear may be the exact motivator to create a generation that leads a country out of distress.

Successfully bucking the norm, our generation has made strides in the way women and minorities are viewed in the workplace. We have recognized the importance of inclusion and the harm of exclusion. It is hard to imagine that there was a time when women were seen as second class citizens in the workplace. In fact, women ages 18-29 see significantly more potential in their careers than any time in history. Specifically, Yahoo! recently named a new CEO, Marissa Mayer, who also happens to be pregnant. Would that have happened 20 years ago?

While the history books (or e-readers) have yet to be written on this generation, we have seen our share of adversity and are preserving. It may not be the same way our grandparents did it, but what would you expect from a group that doesn’t know how to mail a letter or read a map?

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