Why Democrats Should Be Losing Sleep Over Generation Z

Ashley Stahl Contributor
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Aug 11, 2017, 10:00am EDT

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There has been much talk about the Millennial generation being entitled, lazy, and narcissistic. And while Millennials like myself were busy fending off the harsh criticisms and stereotypes constantly flung at our generation, a whole new demographic was slowly emerging from the shadows. Hello, Generation Z! The fiscally responsible, tattoo hating, Republican leaning group, touted by conservatives as their best hope for the future, and as the antithesis of Millennials.

While Millennials still remember cassette players and dial-up Internet, Generation Z grew up hounded by perpetual terrorist threats and school shootings reflecting on them from their Macbook and iPad screens.

They grew up watching Millennials entering the work force with thousands of dollars in school debt, and it seems that they are intent on not making the same mistakes as us.

According to research, Gen Z is more individualistic, more conservative both socially and fiscally, and they're already making waves of impact on our political system. Gen Z, those born in 1995 or later, is possibly the most conservative generation since World War II, and it is worrying that their impact has been completely overlooked during this election. While our fears might be preemptive, we should not make the mistake of disregarding the intriguing yet also possibly worrying world views of Generation Z.

Oftentimes Millennials have been criticized for being notoriously liberal, but it looks like the generation right behind us has completely rebelled. A U.K. Study at The Gild did a survey of almost 2,000 adults and found that on issues like gay marriage, marijuana legalization, transgender rights, and even tattoos, 59% of Gen Z respondents described their views as 'conservative' and 'moderate'.

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This is a radical change from 83% Millennials and 85% of Gen X who state that their views are 'quite' or 'very liberal' on those same issues. What's worrying is that given their more conservative leanings, Gen Z was not taken into account during this election, even though for many of them it was their first. Younger generations are famous for being liberal, therefore we mistakenly assumed that Gen Z would vote Democratic. But studies show that Gen Z's views closely resemble those of Libertarian or Moderate Republicans, and that they related with Donald Trump on issues like national security and job creation.

We can speculate on the reasons why Gen Z differs so much from the previous generations. One facet would be that from the crib they were plunged into the era on the Internet, and grew up in a media obsessed culture that exposed them to terrorism, school shootings, and the staggering budget crisis on a daily basis. They've never had to ask anyone for information, directions, or a recipe.

Being able to research their own opinions on an iPad from the convenience of their couch, Gen Z has turned into a very individualistic generation that relies only on themselves and the Internet to form an opinion. One could argue that this mechanical way of living and not having to rely on others for help could have desensitized Gen Z from other people's struggles, which would help explain their more conservative views on social issues.

One thing us Millenials can be jealous of in regards to Generation Z: they avoid student loans like fire! Generation Z is not only more socially conservative, they are also more fiscally conservative. A new national study by The Center for Generational Kinetics discovered that Gen Z students plan to “work during college, keep clear of any personal debt, and start saving for retirement.”

Shockingly 12% have already already saving for retirement, and a huge 21% of Gen Z had a savings account before the age of ten. Currently 77% of Gen Z earn their own spending money by doing“freelance work, a part time job, or earned allowance.” Jason Dorsey, President of the Center for Generational Kinetics and Gen Z and Millennial expert said of Gen Z, “Their practical and fiscally conservative behavior is making them part of businesses and our economy despite their young age.”

The fact that Gen Z is already having a major impact on our economy and politics, being just out of high school, suggests that we must take them seriously and look closely at the reasons that drive them to be more conservative.

Of course we want the next generation to be better than us. Like older siblings, we care for them and certainly appreciate that they have learned from some of our mistakes, especially in the financial realm. But it is important to pay close attention to Gen Z’s more radical political outlooks. The Republican party usually engages people as they get older, but with Gen Z’s conservative leanings the Republicans have great hope of capturing yet another election. If we don’t want a major upset in 2020 we have to find ways to reach out to the next generation and work together.

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The Inside Story Of Papa John's Toxic Culture

JAMEL TOPPIN

(((Noah Kirsch))) Former Staff
Forbes Digital Covers Contributor Group ⓘ

Jul 19, 2018, 06:00am EDT

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Two years ago John Schnatter fancied himself untouchable. He was CEO of Papa John’s, the nationwide pizza chain he founded, and served as its ubiquitous TV pitchman. The business had grown to 5,000 stores and $1.7 billion in revenue, and his fortune tallied some $950 million. “We see news story after news story of CEOs who run companies into the ground,” Schnatter scoffed in his 2016 autobiography, which chronicled the business’ rise.

Then Schnatter began to do exactly that. The world already knows of his two biggest flare-ups. Last November, he criticized the NFL’s handling of national anthem protests, calling the whole affair a “debacle.” Papa John’s shares crashed 11% in hours and kept falling, Schnatter lost his CEO title and franchise sales dropped an estimated 5% or more. Then, in July, while reporting this story, *Forbes* learned that Schnatter had used the N-word and made other controversial remarks on a conference call two months prior. On July 11, the day that news broke, he resigned as chairman.

But the problems run far deeper. Based on interviews with 37 current and former Papa John’s employees—including numerous executives and board members—Schnatter’s alleged behavior ranges from spying on his workers to sexually inappropriate conduct, which has resulted in at least two confidential settlements.

To protect himself, Schnatter, 56, installed loyalists in the firm's top ranks, who enabled its "bro" culture. That includes international president Tim O'Hern, a close friend of Schnatter's from Jeffersonville High School, as well as current CEO Steve Ritchie, who worked directly for Schnatter for three years and has run daily operations since 2014. "John got Steve to where he is. Steve is not going to do anything to turn on John," says a former senior executive.

Papa John's founder John Schnatter JAMEL TOPPIN

"Papa John's has effectively been a public company operated like it is privately owned," a veteran employee says. "Nothing is happening there unless John wants it to happen."

Under Ritchie's and Schnatter's watch, multiple insiders describe a laundry list of transgressions: Female employees were mocked and asked if they were menstruating. Male executives made references to "gangbangs" and comments about whether women wanted "to jump on the train." Three former employees say Ritchie was present when these types of remarks were made and just laughed along.

Reached through a representative, Schnatter disputed most of this story. Papa John's did not respond to repeated requests for comment. Ritchie, for his part, did not respond to a request for comment. And O'Hern contested portions of this story, though he confirmed his close ties to Schnatter. After this story originally published, a Papa John's spokesman issued this comment: "As previously announced, a special committee of the Board of Directors, comprised solely of independent directors, has retained an outside firm to oversee an audit and investigation of the culture at the company and to make recommendations for whatever changes may be necessary. We take this matter seriously. If anything is found to be wrong, we are determined to take appropriate action."

Since roughly 2013, corporate employees at Papa John's have signed nondisclosure agreements barring them from discussing Schnatter's personal life. Other confidentiality and nondisparagement contracts and mandatory arbitration agreements further discouraged people from speaking out. So when Schnatter wrote his memoir, *Papa: The Story of Papa John's Pizza*, no one could openly dispute it.

Now the full story is being told for the first time. *Forbes* spent months piecing it all together. No sources cited in this article approached us; all were contacted directly. Most spoke on the condition of anonymity, citing legal shackles or fear of retaliation.

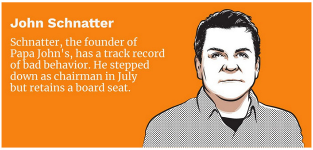
Says a recently departed executive, "The only people that are staying there are the people that can't get a good job elsewhere."

To understand Papa John's current state, one needs to understand how it was built. John Schnatter grew up in Jeffersonville, Indiana, the son of a clerk and a serial entrepreneur. In 1984, he installed a pizza oven at his dad's tavern, Mick's Lounge, and started churning out pies. The pizza sold well, and he opened a stand-alone shop the following year. "I built that first Papa John's. And then we built a pizza empire," Schnatter writes in his book.

Early employees credit Schnatter for fueling growth. "It was the American dream. We went from 23 stores to 900, and they continued to grow after I left," says former president Dan Holland, who helped take the company public in 1993 and departed two years later.

Money changed things. Schnatter moved the firm into a luxurious new headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky, in the late 1990s. When he commissioned a fresco for one of its ceilings, he had his face painted into the plaster. His own office was outfitted with black marble and a fireplace. Schnatter sometimes conducted meetings from his exercise bike and was prone to outbursts. In one case, he moved a scorned executive's parking spot to the very back of the garage. (Reached through a representative, Schnatter denied the incident.) "John had this tendency: When he was done with you, he was done with you," says Donna Alcorn, who left Papa John's in 2010 as a senior vice president and says she had a positive experience overall. "That's why he's gone through so many executive teams in his life."

One former executive says the married Schnatter would disappear for days on work trips, stirring suspicion that he was "hooking up with girls." (Schnatter denies this.) In 1999, a mobile phone representative named Lesli Workman filed a lawsuit alleging that Schnatter groped her after meeting her at a party in a Louisville park, proceeded to stalk her, then asked her boss to send her to Papa John's to discuss a possible phone contract. Schnatter denied the allegations and filed a counterclaim alleging that she tried to extort $5 million from him and Papa John's. The case ended with a confidential settlement.


John Schnatter

Schnatter, the founder of Papa John's, has a track record of bad behavior. He stepped down as chairman in July but retains a board seat.

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In 2005, after three years of falling profits, Schnatter stepped down as CEO for the first time. Nigel Travis, then the president and COO of Blockbuster, was hired to fill the role. Schnatter remained chairman but was relocated to offices 20 minutes away. In exile, he fought for control. During annual budget meetings with the board, for instance, he would draft separate budget proposals and force board members to choose between him and his CEO. (Schnatter says his budget ended up being more accurate.) In another case, at the eleventh hour he torpedoed an agreement with franchisees that Travis had spent months negotiating. When asked about the friction, Travis is diplomatic. “Most of the time John and I had a very cordial relationship,” he says.

Over time, Schnatter started to visit the main campus more often to learn what was going on. He allegedly recruited Papa John’s employees to spy on their colleagues. He read workers’ emails, according to two sources with knowledge of the episodes, and sometimes conducted business from disposable phones. Schnatter denies that he accessed emails or recruited employees to spy on each other, but admits he occasionally used disposable phones for reasons of “corporate security.”

Travis left to become CEO of Dunkin’ Brands in 2008, and Schnatter returned to power. He quickly installed new executives. Among them was his former schoolmate Tim O’Hern, who had spent the previous few years working for a small real estate company owned by Schnatter. O’Hern had served as a Papa John’s vice president until the mid-2000s, when he was allegedly asked to leave the company for mistreating employees, a former senior executive says. (O’Hern disputes that allegation, saying he never mistreated anyone and was never asked to leave the company, though he acknowledges that an investigation into his conduct took place around the time he departed. He says he does not recall the nature of the inquiry.)

Tim O’Hern

O’Hern is the current president of international operations and one of founder John Schnatter’s closest friends. He worked for Schnatter personally in the mid-2000s and never left his side, becoming one of the enablers of the firm’s “bro culture.”

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Either way, after returning to Papa John’s in 2009, O’Hern became a central figure in the Schnatter orbit. And he never left. “He’s John’s hench guy that does whatever John wants,” a former executive says.

Just after reclaiming CEO duties, Schnatter attended the NCAA Final Four in Detroit. During the trip there was an incident with a 24-year-old female Papa John’s marketing employee that resulted in a second confidential settlement and the employee’s swift departure. Three sources tell *Forbes* they know of additional settlements between Schnatter and women involving inappropriate conduct, though details could not be confirmed by publication time. (Schnatter disputes this.)

A female employee says that Schnatter asked about her bra size and whether she’d slept with her previous boss, and that he never let her pass in a hall without giving her a hug. (He denies this.) A male executive recalls going out to dinner with his wife and bumping into Schnatter at the bar. Schnatter allegedly told the executive that he “had a cute wife, if she’d lose some weight.” Schnatter didn’t remember the incident when confronted by the executive later, and Schnatter now says it didn’t happen.

Schnatter tapped a former executive from Anthem insurance, Jude Thompson, to help run Papa John’s as co-CEO in April 2010. Two former executives claim he got the job because he was one of Schnatter’s buddies. Schnatter denies this. Thompson also disputes that’s why he got the job, saying that he has “a pretty distinguished business career.”

Thompson brought a woman who was not his wife to company events, including the Super Bowl. “That type of behavior would be not just allowable, but encouraged,” a senior executive recalls. Thompson denies the incident. Schnatter tells *Forbes* that Thompson did indeed bring a mistress to the Super Bowl.

Thompson departed in 2011, after just 12 months as co-CEO. Schnatter tapped a senior vice president, Tony Thompson (no relation to Jude), to be chief operating officer and then president, which multiple sources say ushered in a brief cultural respite. Schnatter stepped back from the day-to-day and the business hummed along. But when Tony Thompson left to run Krispy Kreme in 2014, things changed.

Schnatter installed longtime staffer and vice president Steve Ritchie—who started out as a Papa John’s customer service representative—to be chief operating officer and run daily operations. Ritchie had once worked with Tim O’Hern opening some Papa John’s franchises, then spent 2008 to 2011 consulting at Schnatter’s side investment, a sandwich concept named Calistoga Bakery Café. By 2015 he was Papa John’s president.

Steve Ritchie

Before taking over for founder John Schnatter as CEO in January, Ritchie served as chief operating officer and president, and he has run day-to-day affairs for years. Under Ritchie’s watch, the culture at Papa John’s devolved.

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Six former executives question Ritchie's qualifications for the job of president, let alone CEO. His one redeeming trait, they say: fealty. When a Louisville publication named him to its Forty Under 40 list in 2013, Ritchie was asked to name his role model. "John Schnatter," he answered.

Ritchie's watch brought an end to the respite. "The longer he was in that position, the more rapidly the culture declined," says a recently departed executive. At company off-sites, execs made their crudest jokes, the ones about "gangbangs" and women wanting to "jump on the train."

But it manifested even back in Louisville. Multiple sources say meetings were filled with profanity and inappropriate comments. Ritchie allegedly never intervened. "These things would happen in meetings and conference rooms and whatever. Steve would just laugh. He would just laugh," says an individual present during such incidents.

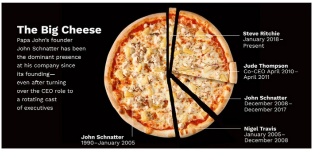
The conduct of Dustin Couts, a longtime operations leader and close friend of O'Hern's, is one example, three sources say. In one alleged instance, he discussed porn with a female junior employee, one source says; in another he showed inappropriate images to colleagues on his cell phone; in yet another he asked a coworker if she was on her period after she disagreed with him. And he once asked a male colleague, in front of a woman, whether his wedding ring was actually his "cock ring." Couts didn't respond to a text message and a phone call requesting comment. Papa John's also didn't respond to questions about the allegations.

Ritchie allegedly knew of these types of improprieties. At one company town hall, he referred to Operations Support and Training, the unit Couts headed at the time, as a "frat." Meanwhile, Couts seemingly suffered no consequences. In fact he got a new title. In May 2018, he was named regional vice president of Papa John's Asia/Pacific, according to his LinkedIn page.

The culture impacted the business. "[Ritchie] promoted people based on his personal relationship with them versus their results," says a former executive. Among the inner circle: Tim O'Hern, who was named president of international in May; VP of global technology operations Tim Newton; senior vice president of North American operations Edmond Heelan; and Couts. Some of them are also tight with Schnatter. O'Hern would travel to his lake house using Schnatter's helicopter, with Couts sometimes tagging along.

One former executive describes Ritchie's leadership style as "knee-jerk," and says that he doesn't consult data. Another says he repeatedly failed to address logistical issues at Papa John's, for fear of angering Schnatter, who considers himself a master of operations. "You would look at our metrics and find that we had a huge percentage of people getting an inaccurate order," the executive recalls. But nothing was done. Infrastructure at Papa John's also lagged behind. "From a technology perspective, it wasn't the easiest company to work for," says Mark Nance, who left as vice president of digital solutions in 2016.

The rumor at Papa John's is that Schnatter made his NFL "debacle" comments in November 2017 to support his close friend Jerry Jones, the owner of the Dallas Cowboys, who was reportedly feuding with the league's commissioner, Roger Goodell. (Schnatter denies that was his reason.) In a subsequent all-staff meeting, Schnatter told employees that he wanted to tell Goodell "to get off his ass and show some leadership," according to an individual who was there. (Schnatter admits he used "words to that effect.") Partly as a result of his NFL comments, corporate revenue fell 5% in the first quarter versus the prior year. Net income, meanwhile, was down 40%. One Papa John's franchisee says that, in an attempt to win back lost customers, in recent months the company has implemented more discounting than at any point in its history, and that more operators are positioning to sell than ever. "Things went to hell" after Schnatter's remarks, recalls an executive who left earlier this year.



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Schnatter handed the CEO role to Ritchie on January 1, leading many to believe that he had backed away from the business. In truth, little changed, since Ritchie already ran the day-to-day. If anything, Schnatter actually became "more involved than ever" in an attempt to manage the crisis, says a source close to the company's top ranks.

This spring, Schnatter feuded with Brandon Rhoten, who was then Papa John's chief marketing officer, over efforts to reduce Schnatter's presence in TV advertisements. (Schnatter denies this, and claims Rhoten proposed putting him back in ads; Rhoten did not respond to multiple requests for comment.) Schnatter allegedly bristled at the suggestion. According to a source close to the company, he personally hired a marketing agency to develop ads featuring him that would air in key markets. Rhoten was fired in May. "As soon as he tried to remove John from those commercials, his goose was cooked," says an individual close to the situation.

Also in May, Schnatter participated in a conference call with marketing firm Laundry Service, in a role-playing exercise intended to avoid another public-relations kerfuffle. During that call, when asked how he would distance himself from racists, Schnatter made remarks he thought were simply practice, but that multiple individuals on the call found offensive, according to a source familiar with the situation. He downplayed his

NFL snafu, saying that “Colonel Sanders called blacks n-----s” yet never faced public backlash. He also made reference to his upbringing in Indiana, where, he said, people used to drag African-Americans from trucks, in an apparent attempt to illustrate his aversion to racism. Laundry Service quickly moved to cancel its contract with Papa John’s, says a source with direct knowledge of the situation. (Schnatter says that Papa John’s revoked the contract and that “in both of these contexts, [he] was making a strong statement against racism.”)

After *Forbes* reported on the incident earlier this month, Schnatter confirmed his use of the N-word and apologized, “regardless of the context.” He stepped down as chairman that night. But two days later, on a TV interview, he walked back the apology and blamed Laundry Service for inducing his use of the slur. “They were promoting that kind of vocabulary,” he said, later adding that, “You know, *Forbes* is gonna lie.”

The next chapter of the Papa John’s saga is unfolding in real time. As of last week, the company’s partnership with Major League Baseball was indefinitely suspended. Its name will come off the University of Louisville football stadium. Rumors of a buyout are percolating. And Schnatter has vanished from all advertisements. Nearly everyone expects Papa John’s to move on without him.

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Papa John's founder John Schnatter JAMEL TOPPIN

Except those closest to Schnatter. He is still on the board, owns nearly 30% of shares and has Ritchie, O’Hern and the rest in command. Even if he does back away, the relics of his culture remain.

Schnatter seems intent on retaining influence. He pays for his office space at Papa John’s headquarters, which began as a way to keep a private staff on site. The company is attempting to terminate the agreement, but Schnatter’s representatives say it has no grounds. And on July 12, the day after he resigned as chairman, Schnatter showed up to work as usual.

With additional reporting from Susan Radlauer.

Reach (((Noah Kirsch))) at nkirsch@forbes.com. Cover image by Jamel Toppin for Forbes.

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(((Noah Kirsch)))

I've been a reporter at Forbes since 2016. Before that, I spent a year on the road—driving for Uber in Cleveland, volcano climbing in Guatemala, cattle farming in Uruguay, and lots of... **Read More**

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Piggy
17 November, 2022

Wow, great article, a really compelling profile. I'm sure it took quite a bit of time to put together. It really shines a light on what our "culture" or mass consciousness is willing to find acceptable and/or tolerable if it comes from someone in power...blatant sexism, racism, and who knows what e...

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Jumpthestock
5 December, 2022

If you can't or won't name your sources, then all you report is hearsay . I've worked for people like this guy. I'm sure that most of what you report has a lot of truth to it, but “unnamed sources” degrades the article.

Reply · 55 · Share

Jan Wade
19 January, 2023

So, I put myself in the place of the off-the-record commenters.

I am trying to maintain a career. I have built a lifestyle for my family and me. A reporter wants to talk about the toxic culture I find myself in. In truth, I know that continuing to work here shows that I have sold out to some d...

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sCarlet
21 December, 2022

If you HAVE to name your sources, then all you have is another Gestapo.

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V **Voltron111**
27 November, 2022

This is very common for guys to build successful businesses and then can't get over their ego and let someone more qualified to continue the growth

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LEADERSHIP

UNICEF Mobilizes Relief Efforts After Cyclone Freddy Slams Mozambique And Malawi

Maryanne Murray Buechner Brand Contributor
UNICEF USA BRANDVOICE | Paid Program

Mar 17, 2023, 02:48pm EDT

With vulnerable families and communities reeling in the wake of a devastating tropical cyclone, UNICEF is on the ground working with partners to provide lifesaving supplies and other humanitarian assistance.

A mother and her two sons were among the hundreds of families who have taken shelter inside Manhaua Primary School in Mozambique after Tropical Cyclone Freddy made landfall a second time on March 12, 2023. © UNICEF/UN0801981/ZUNIGA

The latest weather disaster in a series of climate shocks for southeast Africa

Mozambique continues to suffer with the return of the longest-lasting tropical cyclone ever recorded, Tropical Cyclone Freddy, which made landfall in the country for a second time on March 12, the latest in a series of extreme-weather related climate shocks for southeast Africa.

Freddy first hit the town of Vilanculos on Feb. 24, bringing strong winds, heavy rains and high seas, wreaking havoc on the coastal community and endangering children and families.

Parts of Malawi have also been affected. At least 225 people have died, many homes have been destroyed, and damage to roads has made affected areas difficult to access, Heinrich Mutsinzi Rukundo, Education Specialist for UNICEF Malawi, told MSNBC. Schools have been closed or repurposed as shelters for the displaced. Health centers are damaged and in some cases shuttered, Rukundo said.

At Manja Camp in Blantyre, Malawi, families affected by Cyclone Freddy receive water, sanitation and hygiene supplies provided by UNICEF. © UNICEF/UN0802853/

The situation has increased risks of cholera and other waterborne diseases, which tend to gain traction in the wake of disasters like this as access to safe water becomes limited. Both Malawi and Mozambique were already fighting cholera outbreaks before Freddy; disaster conditions only complicate prevention and containment measures.

UNICEF spokesperson Guy Taylor was on the ground in Quelimane, in east coastal Mozambique, when the storm hit.

"That was a pretty terrifying experience," Taylor said from Maputo in an interview with The World, during which he described extremely strong winds and heavy rains that toppled trees and tore roofs off buildings, schools and hospitals.

Education disrupted as damaged schools close, others become shelters

Out in the countryside, Taylor said, where many people live in structures made of wood, mud or adobe, the situation was even more serious, with many homes completely destroyed by flooding and mudslides.

Early reports suggest that more than 16,000 homes have been partially or full destroyed in Quelimane and surrounding areas.

An estimated 600 classrooms have been either partially or completely destroyed as well, Taylor noted.

"This is of huge concern for us at UNICEF, children being cut off from education for potentially prolonged periods of time," Taylor said.

A drone shot dated March 13, 2023 of the city of Quelimane, in Zambezia province, Mozambique, showing the enormous impact and devastation caused by Cyclone Freddy. © UNICEF/UN0801710 /ZUNIGA

To support the emergency response, UNICEF is mobilizing critical supplies like safe drinking water and water purification supplies, medical supplies, tents and hygiene kits; coordinating with local partners to keep children safe and protected and to get them back to learning as quickly as possible; and continuing to support anti-cholera efforts.

UNICEF priority in Mozambique: building climate resilience

Taylor spoke to how Mozambique's vulnerabilities steer UNICEF's work in the country.

"Mozambique is really bearing the brunt of extreme weather and of manmade climate change," he said. "Mozambique is hit, well, really on an annual basis by these tropical storms and tropical cyclones, and all the science suggests they are getting more and more serious. ... The people of Mozambique are really bearing the brunt of climate change here, to which they contributed very little."

"For example: we construct schools that can stand up to this kind of storm, so they won't get blown down. Making sure health care centers and health facilities are also built to withstand this kind of impact, but it really is a challenge. It is very difficult for a country like Mozambique to be resilient against such a constant barrage of climate impacts."

School is closed for the time being for sisters Dercia, 12, and Dusma, 10. Their family's village, located about 20 miles outside the city of Quelimane, Mozambique, flooded when Tropical Cyclone Freddy made landfall a second time on March 12. © UNICEF/UN0801964/ZUNIGA

An estimated 1 billion children worldwide are at extremely high risk due to climate impacts, including climate-related disasters. These include extreme weather events, which have grown more intense and more frequent as a result of climate change.

Every year, UNICEF responds to hundreds of emergencies in dozens of countries. Your unrestricted contribution helps UNICEF stay at the ready to help children when they need it most. Please donate.

Maryanne Murray Buechner

Maryanne Murray Buechner is Deputy Editorial Director at UNICEF USA. Based in Hastings-on-Hudson, NY, she is a former daily newspaper reporter... **Read More**

12 Tips To Help Employers Offer The Best Salaries And Employee Benefits Packages

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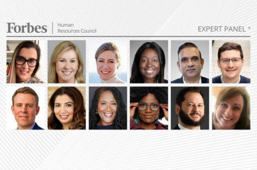
Mar 17, 2023, 01:15pm EDT

In a competitive marketplace, it's understandable for employers to be concerned about whether their company has the ability to meet the industry standards for equitable compensation and benefits packages. The key is to not stress so much about measuring up to what other companies have the ability to offer current employees and rising new talent. It's more important to first find out what kind of total rewards your staff members are in need of, in addition to doing survey analyses of current practices.

Below, 12 experts from Forbes Human Resources Council share tips to help company leaders ensure that they're offering the best salaries and benefits packages that are practical for their employees and within the company's means.



Members pictured from left to right. PHOTOS COURTESY OF INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS.

1. Conduct Market Research And Employee Surveys

Leaders should regularly conduct market research to understand the industry standards and the compensation offered by similar organizations. Survey employees to gather feedback and assess satisfaction with current offerings. Browse benefit marketplaces like Bennie or Nava Benefits to get an understanding of the newest offerings like bereavement care services. - Cara McCarty, Betterleave

2. Discuss The Total Rewards Package With Employees

Most companies conduct regular market analyses to ensure that their salary and benefits are competitive. But to me, it is key that companies foster transparent conversations with employees about the total rewards package being offered. Usually, employees think about their compensation as salary and bonus, but we also need to shift the discussion to the total value they receive through benefits like 401(k) matches, health plans and more. - Eva Majercsik, Genesys

3. Utilize Data To Gauge The Benchmark

To stay competitive, employers must proactively evaluate their compensation offerings and keep up with shifting employee expectations. Since today's employees are calling for fair and transparent pay and benefits, employers will benefit from utilizing data to benchmark against industry competitors and evaluating their current pay strategy to ensure it stacks up against industry standards. - Tanya Jansen, beqom

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4. Assess The Company's Budget And Work Within Your Means

The first thing an organization needs to do is find out what it can afford financially. Once this is completed, a compensation strategy can be designed and developed. Many times organizations believe that in order to be competitive they must pay in alignment with other organizations. This is not the case. The compensation strategy must be in accordance with the company's goals and revenue. - Nakisha Griffin, Neustar Security Services

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5. Be Willing To Make Package Adjustments

In our company, we take several steps, such as conducting regular market research, using compensation survey services and best practice studies. We also communicate openly with our employees and offer them opportunities for professional development and career growth. In addition, we provide extra perks and enable work flexibility that includes but is not limited to regular reviews for all staff and adjusting packages for certain key talent. - Raj Tanwar, ADVANTAGE CLUB TECHNOLOGIES PRIVATE LIMITED

6. Address Demographic Equity Imbalance

It's essential for HR leadership to integrate employee feedback and demographics into the equation. For example, here are some questions to factor into your decision-making process as it relates to your employees: Are they in childbearing years? Are they members of underserved communities? Addressing these items is key to ensuring benefits are equitable for all employees. Leaders should also consider where the industry momentum (e.g. family-friendly policies, paid leave) is turning toward. If you want to be competitive, remain relevant. - Dirk Doebler, Parento

7. Don't Chase Trends

Headlines are distracting, so avoid chasing trends and, instead, talk to your employees. Remote work is a great example of this. The expectation based on the LinkedIn feed far outpaced reality. Listen to your employees because they will often tell you what they want and why it is important if you ask. - Rick Rittmaster, CorTalent

8. Calibrate Exit Data With New Hire Data

Make sure you look at your external benchmarking data. This is critical to understand and clearly outline your external benchmarks—but also review your exit data. It's important to calibrate your exit data with your new hire data to ensure you are staying competitive. This allows you to look at the complete picture. - Rohini Shankar, Nations Benefits

9. Ensure That Roles Are Current And Competitive

Ensure HR compensation and benefits professionals, along with employee benefits providers and brokers, survey the workforce to understand their desires associated with benefits, awards and recognition. Ensure that roles and responsibilities are current and compensation is competitive. - Deborah Stallings, HR Anew

10. Rely On Your Network Of HR And Financial Experts

Engage experts to benchmark the data, while also staying abreast of trends. It's important to remember that your competitive advantage many times lies in the intangibles, such as autonomy, professional development opportunities and inclusive benefits. Building a trusted network of human resources and financial experts is key. - Domonique Revere, Adjaye Associates

11. Consider Generational Differences And Priorities

Keep a pulse on trends that might have an impact on the roles you hire for. Using a variety of research tools to evaluate compensation for the markets you hire in is critical to ensure your compensation doesn't lag behind. Survey your staff to understand what aspects of benefits packages are important to them. Staff in their twenties will have different priorities compared to those in their forties. - William Stonehouse, Crawford Thomas Recruiting

12. Focus On What Makes Your Employees Happy

Perhaps it's about meeting our own employees' needs rather than competing with other companies. For example, if a compensation or benefits package exceeds my expectations at my company and fits my household desires, then I'm not shopping for other packages at other companies because it's a non-factor. As long as our employees are happy, that is the best indicator that our comp and benefits packages are solid. - Christina Hobbs, Force Scaling

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