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THE CANADIAN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE IN HONG KONG

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAMBER

As a facilitator of professional development, networking and advocacy, the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong is proud to present the YPC Journals by the Young Professionals Committee. This journal series will explore timely issues relevant to the development of young leaders in Hong Kong. While focused from the perspective of young professionals, the topics explored will resonate across industries, borders and generations. We hope these journals will facilitate broader discourse on how to best build up future generations for an inclusive, sustainable and prosperous society.

MESSAGE FROM THE YPC CO-CHAIRS

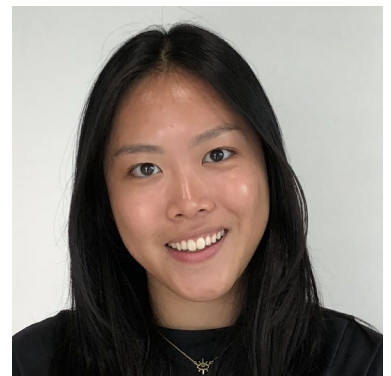
CanCham's Young Professionals Committee is involved with professional development seminars, events with a social cause and networking activities – such as the annual mentorship programme. To stay up to date with events or to get involved, join our [mailing list](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#).



KALE LAW



YVONNE LAU



NIKI LEUNG

THE MILLENNIAL DOLLAR QUESTION: THE MEANING OF WORK

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Societies and workplaces are in the midst of reconceptualising the future of work as technological, social and global disruptions arise. One disruption may be the leadership of Generations Y and Z. These generations are ubiquitously known as the socially conscious and purpose-driven generations.

We talked to four young professionals in Hong Kong to understand how they define and shape meaningful work – and what this means for business. Through these brief conversations, we hope to contribute to and continue the discussion on the future of work.

THE PURPOSE-DRIVEN GENERATIONS

Societies and businesses navigating the future of the workplace and talent. At the same time, Generation Y (born between 1981 to 1997) and Generation Z (born after 1997) are making their mark as the socially-conscious and purpose-driven generations. Headlines show young people around the world campaigning for the environment and equality, mobilising resources for civic action, and engaging in social impact entrepreneurship.

Deloitte's 2019 Global Millennial Survey,ⁱ which interviewed 13,000 young individuals across 42 countries, found that nearly 50% of individuals from Gens Y and Z look to make a positive impact in society. A report by youth consultancy Lovell Corporationⁱⁱ researched professional motivators for Generation Z. They found that purpose, passion and impact are the main drivers. Another recent study of 1,500 Canadian office workers found that half of the millennial respondents prioritised meaningful work over a pay raiseⁱⁱⁱ. Harvard Business Review (HBR) was straightforward – a recent headline read "meaning is the new money."^{iv} They noted that since 2005, "the importance of meaningfulness in driving job selection has grown steadily."^v

The search for meaning, purpose and fulfillment in professional life is not limited to Generations Y and Z. It is an intrinsic human drive. However, the nature of job requirements have shifted. "During the 20th century, most work was algorithmic. Jobs [today] have become more complex, interesting and self-directed. Approximately 70% of new job growth [in the United States

"As societies and businesses navigate the future of the workplace and talent, Generation Y and Generation Z are making their mark as the socially-conscious and purpose-driven generations."

today] comes from heuristic work," says Daniel Pink in 'Drive,' his best-seller on workplace behavioral psychology. Heuristic work is less routine, while requiring more creativity, and its intrinsic motivators are to serve a greater purpose.

Deloitte's same report said millennials and post-millennials are generations disrupted – recent decades have brought radical changes to our daily lives. For instance, technological progress, climate risks, global pandemics, and a non-stop news cycle have contributed to a hyper-aware and high-pressure environment for today's youth generations. This alters the way people live, work and think.

These developments could be the catalyst for change – meaning that Gens Y and Z are uniquely placed and motivated to capitalize on shifting norms. They will be the ones to reshape to current environment to amplify fulfillment and purpose for the future workforce.

DEFINING AND CULTIVATING MEANINGFUL WORK

How then, can organisations and business leaders understand the way these generations define and approach of meaningful work? We talked to four Hong Kong-based young professionals who have successfully cultivated their surrounding business and social environments to create space for impactful work and careers.



ERIK BAINBRIDGE

Erik is a policy affairs specialist on Canada and China. As the project manager of policy research at Asia Global Institute (HKU), he conducts research related to international trade and multilateral relations.

How I define meaningful work is making a positive difference in my field. Giving my work purpose helps me to continue working hard even when the path becomes challenging. The most meaningful work endeavour for me was serving on Canada's APEC team during the 2019 Summit, and working as a Canadian Foreign Service intern in Chongqing, China.

During APEC 2019, I was one of the lead writers for Prime Minister Trudeau's briefs and worked with various teams from Global Affairs Canada; in addition to other government departments and multilateral organisations like the World Bank. The work in Chongqing allowed me to see firsthand how Chinese consumers responded to Canadian products; I also assisted with opening new investment opportunities for Canadian companies in Southwest China.

For young professionals in a job search, it's essential to find a position that aligns with your long-term goals, and to ensure that the organisation is also invested in this area. Working with a passionate and motivated team and boss is important to feeling empowered in your job. If the organisation's values are aligned with your own, it's much more conducive to making the difference you want to achieve. Young people should pursue their passions in whichever field, industry and position that speaks to them – do what it takes to identify your passion and find a relevant career to pursue.

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JESSIE HUANG

Jessie works in the start-up and social impact space. She is the founder of inclusive education tech platform, Necessiti, and convenor of Hong Kong's Social Entrepreneurs Meetup. Jessie was WHub's former community developer.

The central thread of my work is the belief that developing and building up others is self-fulfilling – it is the best way to develop yourself. What is meaningful to me therefore, is work that addresses the needs of society, particularly the needs of those that require the most support. I always ask myself first – what is the best and most efficient way to help people? When approaching work, I have the mindset of “build, measure and learn.” With this, I've been able to catalyse my learnings and networks from WHub and previous roles to further develop social impact endeavours.

The idea behind Social Entrepreneurs Meetup is to steer societal resources to solve pressing problems. We have monthly events and a network of 1000+ members. Necessiti is a self-sustaining technology resource platform that addresses education inequality and social mobility in Hong Kong society. The platform links local students from disadvantaged backgrounds to resources which help them develop future-ready skills. For example, Necessiti has already secured the partnership of Microsoft and Xccelerate, a tech-training startup, to bridge this education gap.

To young professionals, it is important to first understand yourself – empower yourself, have a growth mindset and learn how you can best create lasting impact. Believe that someone will support you in your impact endeavours – Hong Kong is unique in its concentration of valuable economic resources and people who want to make a difference.

WILLIAM DU

William is a portfolio manager for Swire Properties. He is involved in various pro-bono work including partnership director for Time Auction; deputy convenor for the Hong Kong Federation of Youth Groups' IDEAS think tank; and outgoing curator at Global Shapers Community Hong Kong, an initiative of the World Economic Forum.



Young people today are not satisfied with only holding a day job – and I adhere to the same belief. I take an active approach in utilising my time and skills for pro-bono work for various charities and NGOs – this allows me to further my passion, which is creating positive community impact through learned professional skills. At some point, every one of us will have to take on work responsibilities that we are not 100% passionate about – but we can still pursue site projects or external pro-bono work. In

the workplace itself, understanding that the work you undertake is meaningful and impactful makes for a genuinely rewarding workplace.

In Hong Kong specifically, I noticed that many young people lack mentorship opportunities beyond school and work, and with inspirational and experienced professionals in society. As a pro-bono partnership director for Time Auction, we promote mentorship and foster a culture of volunteerism in the city. Time Auction asks people to volunteer a minimum of 10 hours for any charity – in return, they can choose to meet an inspiring senior executive from a diverse group of leaders spanning business, government, art and sports. These leaders ‘auction’ their time and spend a few hours to meet, discuss and share with young people who have also volunteered their time for good – an example of collective social impact.



STEPHANIE WONG

Stephanie has spent the past year researching the future of education. her sabbatical has taken her to Peru, Denmark and the US to explore alternative education practices. She has designed leadership programs at AXA and reported on breaking news for TVB.

Impact is very important to me – I need to know how I’m contributing and to see the effect that my work has on other people. How I understand meaningful work relates to the questions that humans have always sought out – how to find a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment – answered through the medium of work. The relationship between work and meaning is dynamic. It can take on different shapes depending on your stage of life.

Passion is also an interesting word. The assumption that everyone has a singular, innate passion can put a lot of pressure on a person. I believe passion to be something that is developed by the effort you put into it, and that more than one passion can exist. Daniel Pink in ‘Drive’ writes about how [the ingredients of genuine] motivation are a combination of autonomy [with accountability], mastery and purpose – these factors are related to how passions can be grown.

As a talent manager at an insurance company, I launched an entrepreneurial leadership program empowering millennials (but open to all staff) – workshops and experiential learning that allowed participants to build the creative confidence needed to take initiative and transform their environments. I realised through this process the ways in which I could create meaning for myself within the confines of a corporate – making use of the resources at my disposal.

For young professionals in a career search, always ask – how do the organisation’s values manifest in its culture and do they truly care about developing its people? Is your manager willing to work with you and give you candid feedback for

development? Self-awareness is also key – you need to know what gives your professional life meaning and what your strengths are. This often requires a lot of reflection, experimentation and prototyping to create the life and career you want! After a major project, I have found it helpful to reflect on what I've learned about myself throughout the process. Finally, be biased towards action – if there's a skill or area you would like to explore, find small ways to test out if it's something you truly want to devote more time to.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS AND SENIOR LEADERS

Leaders in business and society develop not on their own, but through learning and support from peers, colleagues and mentors. In our conversations with young professionals, an emphasis was placed on mentorship and the mutual learning that it brings.

Jessie, who was handpicked to participate in Wofoo Social Enterprises' mutual mentorship program, hopes that further similar programmes will be held in Hong Kong. More senior leaders should participate in such programmes, Jessie says, and be open-minded in sharing learnings from young people. Erik noted the same: "Senior leaders should be encouraged to connect and reach to younger generations whenever they can. I've been lucky to have a few mentors that have been instrumental in helping me get where I am today."

"Employees, specifically young professionals, are better engaged and invested in an organization that promotes a purpose-driven work culture."

When organisations are invested in a young employee's fulfilment for meaningful work, this generates economic and business value. Employees, particularly young professionals, are more engaged and invested in an organisation that promotes a purpose-driven work culture. Consequently, this allows them to cultivate the necessary skills and mindset to better fulfill business needs.

William explained: "[Giving employees a flexible work schedule] to engage in meaningful work affords them more ownership and motivation to create a positive impact, within their company and beyond. This could be achieved through work-sponsored programmes or other external opportunities."

Stephanie added: "Senior leaders can put in the effort to understand what young professionals' greater aspirations in work and life are – even beyond the organisation. Does your young employee want to run a start-up one day? Great – [develop a career] plan together that allows them to build their dream while also achieving the KPIs you have for the year."

FUTURE OF WORK READY

“Economists are finally realizing that we [the workforce] are full-fledged human beings, not single-minded economic robots,” says Daniel Pink in ‘Drive.’

The enfranchisement of young professionals and the corresponding buy-in from senior leaders will only have positive implications for the workplace. Young professionals (and all employees) are more invested in their organizations when they are engaged in meaningful work. This type of work brings a sense of a higher purpose and allows for autonomy and mastery.

Businesses are preparing their systems, strategies and workforce to be forward-looking and future-ready. Attracting and cultivating young talent while fostering engagement and effectiveness of current employees will be one crucial pillar.

As these conversations have indicated, the objective is clear. Organisations need to foster an environment that values the pursuit of purpose in work. A call-to-action for businesses to:

- Define the values of your organisation. Does this include a focus on CSR, ESG or social impact?
- Nurture a growth mindset. Provide opportunities for further learning and development for young professionals and all employees.
- Ensure your organisations offers young employees the chance to be autonomous and accountable.
- Challenge your organisation’s senior leaders – to participate in mentorship.
- Challenge your organisation’s young professionals – to take initiative to seek out a mentor, and define both their professional values and goals.
- Foster an inclusive and collaborative work culture – across generations, backgrounds, opinions and cultures.

“High levels of engagement, and the associated discretionary effort, occur when our work experiences reflect a clear set of values that we share. For many today, meaning is the new money. It’s what people are looking for at work. Clear company values, translated into the day-to-day work experience, are one of the strongest drivers of an engaged workforce, one primed for successful collaboration.”^{vii}

i. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/ec/Documents/deloitte-analytics/Estudios/deloitte-2019-millennial-survey.pdf>
ii. <https://www.lovellcorporation.com/the-change-generation-report/>
iii. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/millennials-meaningful-work-1.5075483>
iv. <https://hbr.org/2011/03/challenging-our-deeply-held-as>
v. <https://hbr.org/2018/11/9-out-of-10-people-are-willing-to-earn-less-money-to-do-more-meaningful-work>
vi. <https://hbr.org/2010/02/what-motivates-us>
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