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As Summer Approaches, Where Are the Teenage Workers?

Experts: Why Young and Old Fight Over Jobs

Teenage Labor Force Continues to Shrink

OKLAHOMA CITY, May 9, 2018 – With summertime approaching, images come to mind of teenagers heading off to summer jobs or high school graduates searching for their first gigs. But in reality, teenage employment is becoming increasingly rare.

Since 1980, teenage labor force participation has declined by more than 20 percentage points, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Today, barely one-third (34.8 percent) of 16- to 19-year-olds are in the workforce. In January 1980, 57.7 percent were.



What's Keeping Teenagers Away from the Workforce?

What's changed? Why are so few teenagers working? Express Employment Professionals experts

identify a few trends, including increased schooling, mismatched expectations and competition with older workers for entry-level jobs.

According to Janis Petrini, an Express franchise owner in Grand Rapids, Michigan, the youngest workers do not always seek the types of jobs that are available.

“Young adults are in a time of exploration at this age and would love to gain experience working 20 to 30 hours; however, industries are seeking primarily full-time and beyond,” she said. “The oppositional goals contribute to the imbalance of the job market.”

Terri Greeno, an Express franchise owner in Crystal Lake, Illinois, reports that older people are taking entry-level jobs for which teenage workers would be well-suited.

“In our geographic area, we are seeing older workers coming in seeking work,” she said. “We have seen several instances of older workers wanting an assignment with lower levels of responsibility than their previous jobs, where they can go to work every day, earn a paycheck and then go home to pursue their other interests. They are taking some of the entry-level positions that a young person with no experience could be assigned.”

Tight Labor Markets Creating Some Opportunities

Still, tighter labor markets in some areas are creating opportunities, according to Petrini.

“The tighter labor market creates opportunities for young adults to find employment in a greater variety of industries,” she said. “In West Michigan, we see a trend of employers relaxing the ‘experience required’ phenomena and a willingness to train individuals new to the job market.”

Reid Bates, an Express franchise owner in Olympia, Aberdeen and Centralia, Washington, reports that “interest is high among those who are not college bound,” and that “Teenage job seekers with little experience are finding plenty of interest from hiring managers. Despite their lack of work experience, if they can show ambition, work ethic and dependability, there are plenty of avenues available to quickly land a job.

“We see, for example, tourism and lumber manufacturing creating plenty of openings for teenagers this summer in the Pacific Northwest,” he said.

The Gig Economy Helps Teenagers—But in a Surprising Way

As for the effect of the “gig economy,” Bates believes it has been good for teenage workers.

“Ride-hailing services have drawn away a significant number of workers who meet the minimum age of 21 who otherwise would have directly competed with teenagers for lower-skilled jobs,” he said. “This vacuum is creating more opportunity for the remaining workers.”

According to the [BLS](#), teen labor force participation will decline over the next decade as “the rate is projected to drop from 34 percent in 2014 to 26.4 percent in 2024.” The BLS notes that at that point, the participation rate for 65- to 74-year-olds will be greater than teenage participation.

“The American labor force continues to transform before our eyes,” said Bill Stoller, the CEO of Express. “The sharp decline in teenage employment over the past decades is one of the biggest changes in the economic landscape. While it’s certainly a sign of increased schooling, it’s also an indication that work experience is invaluable.”

If you would like to arrange for an interview with Bill Stoller to discuss this topic, please contact Sheena Karami, Director of Corporate Communications and PR, at (405) 717-5966.

About Bill Stoller

William H. "Bill" Stoller is chairman and chief executive officer of Express Employment Professionals. Headquartered in Oklahoma City, the international staffing company has more than 800 franchises in the U.S., Canada and South Africa. Since its inception, Express has put more than 6 million people to work worldwide.

About Express Employment Professionals

Express Employment Professionals puts people to work. It generated \$3.4 billion in sales and employed a record 540,000 people in 2017. Its long-term goal is to put a million people to work annually. For more information, visit ExpressPros.com.