



Getting the most from the Global Generation

Fresh insights from a graduate
turned graduate recruiter

Written by Lisa Bean

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Getting the most from the Global Generation

Written by a graduate turned graduate recruiter, and informed by the latest thinking on how we attract, recruit and retain our graduates for true market value, this paper provides a detailed and honest appraisal of the true root cause of the disconnect between graduates and employers and outlines a comprehensive model for bridging the gap in a commercial and mutually beneficial way.

What's the problem?

A survey of 24,500 graduates by Graduate Prospects and the AGR found that one in three graduates feel let down by their employers, with their options ignored and their passion for innovation stifled. They said that there is a real disconnect between what is promised on paper and what is delivered in reality.

In the other camp, employers routinely comment that they are let down by the performance of their new recruits; claiming that graduates are poorly prepared for corporate life, spending the bulk of their time adjusting rather than performing.

As a result, the tension between these two camps has been mounting for some time, recently culminating in a

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media frenzy at the height of the recession; "69 graduates applying for every vacancy – up 41% on last year" and "lowest youth

employment records since records began" being two of many over-printed statistics on the topic.

However, despite this attention and despite the ever renewing powerstats - in May 2011, for instance, youth unemployment was quoted as reaching a record all time

high of 1 million - the attrition continues.

Where we might have expected a solution to the problem, what we have seen has been a gradual acceptance with demoralised graduates resting on their misfortune and awaiting a turnaround in the economy, and recruiters continuing to 'play it safe' by taking on graduates with a proven track record rather than those with the highest potential. Ultimately both parties are left wanting and the fundamental problem has not been addressed.

So how do we solve this problem?

Well first of all, we need to ensure we're tackling the right problem. On the surface level, we'd all agree that that the problem seems to go something along the lines of:

- there are not enough jobs to meet graduate demand;
- graduates are not translating their talent to performance quickly enough and yet expect instant gratification;
- employers are not managing the recruitment and on boarding journey to maximum effect, hence they're either not finding the right talent or they're not retaining the right talent once they've found it;
- more time is spent finger pointing and blogging about the problem than actually trying to resolve it; and,

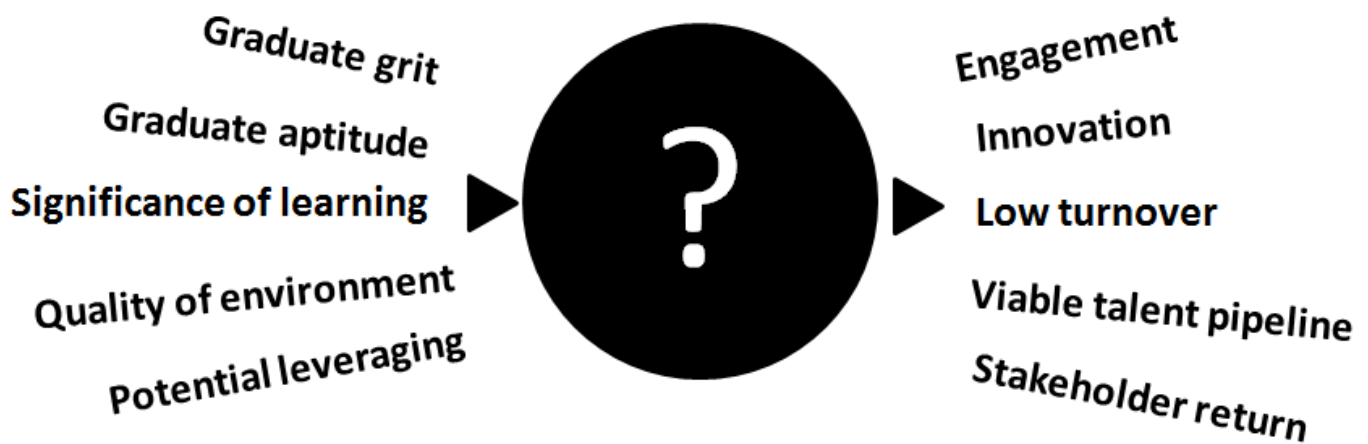


Figure 1: Five core 'superstar' ingredients and the output they produce

- the media highlights the negative 'selling' parts of the story rather than the balanced picture.

This is resulting in high graduate turnover rates, dissatisfaction in both parties, a waste in resources (time, cost, talent etc.), total inertia around the topic and a general stagnation in the graduate recruitment market.

Now I accept that these are broad and sweeping statements – they always have been and this is part of the problem. But, whatever your exact take on the situation, the 'conclusions' above are no longer valid: this is yesterday's news and quite frankly, we're all rather bored of it.

And here-in we find the true problem: we're managing the graduate attraction, recruitment and retention (Grad-ARR) process for yesterday's circumstances, not tomorrow's needs.

We're relying far too heavily on archaic, traditional competencies (e.g. team working skills) and accepting bog standard competency examples (e.g. weekend job as a bar manager) as evidence of future potential and we're doing it through a formulaic recruitment process that can be cheated. This methodology will not find the future hot talent. If anything, it will keep us trapped in today's world, rather than propelling us to tomorrow's.

What's needed is more openness to the unpredictable; a search for the disruptive; and, an appetite for risk! For instance, how many times do recruiters put through that one 'hunch' recruit – the maverick who doesn't quite fit the bill but turns out to be the superstar of the intake? A guerrilla tactic that works because there is a right reason to 'buy into' a recruit, and a real reason: just like we buy an i-pod because it's practical (the right reason) we also buy it because it is 'cool' (the real reason). In a similar vein, we should 'buy into' a recruit not just because they tick the boxes (the right reason), but because they're truly

talented (the real reason). But...

How do we know when we find our superstars?

Well, this is where it gets tricky. A true superstar is someone who has the *potential* to deliver commercially viable outcomes in the right circumstances. It's not about an individual's knowledge, skills and experience at the time of interview. In fact, I'd argue that 'what they know' and 'what they've done' is only one of five things to consider, as follows (see figure 1 above):

- **Graduate grit** - The intensity of the individual's grit in terms of sourcing, creating and exploiting opportunities, in spite of barriers, challenges and limitations;
- **Graduate aptitude** - The extent of the individual's aptitude for business e.g. problem solving skills, communication skills, commercial acumen, global mind-set etc.;
- **Significance of learning** - The significance of the learning from parents, colleagues, managers, training, coaches and mentors – whether sought or provided, past, present or future;
- **Quality of environment** - The quality of the environment for generating, prototyping, developing and delivering solutions; and,
- **Leveraging of potential** – The extent of the graduate and employer's ability to get to the true core of a graduate's potential as quickly and as effectively as possible.

But wait, there's more....

The Secret Ingredient:

Consider this for a moment. Companies are in place to

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deliver a return to stakeholders - whether this be financial or philanthropic - and delivering a return to stakeholders means satisfying a customer need. Because customer needs are changing at a faster pace than ever before and, due to the immediate availability and plethora of choice in the global, virtual shopping mall; customer demands are at an all-time high.

To stay ahead of the game, we need to find quicker, cheaper and better ways to service those demands ahead of the competition. And how do we do this? We innovate: we bring something new, or seemingly new, to the market place at the right time and in the right way; something that blows the competitors out of the market. Without innovation we stand still and are swiftly overtaken.

An 'ability to innovate' is therefore the secret ingredient to our graduate superstars and it's the core capability to search for and recruit against.

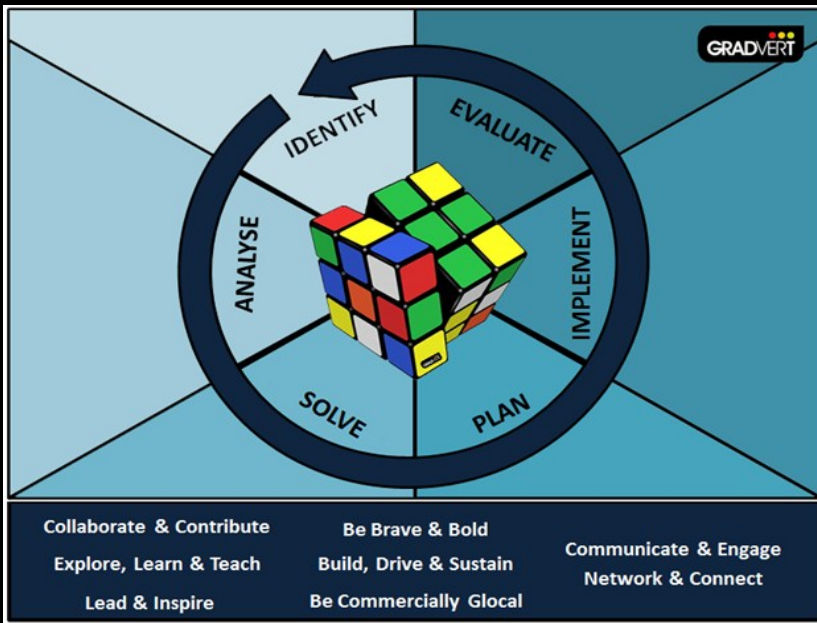
Fortunately for us, the Global Generation is a whole new breed of innovators: having grown up in a world fuelled by technological advances, the prevalence of education, prolific online activity, a global reach and previously unimaginable automation; the term innovation is not

jargon—it's an everyday occurrence.

But what do I mean by an innovative ability? Well, the latest thinking around innovation suggests there are six components to test for:

- **Ability to identify a contradiction**—Spotting a contradiction that needs a solution is where true innovation occurs e.g. people want clean hair without washing it – a contradiction - hence dry shampoo which was invented to soak up grease, not to clean hair. To do this, graduates need to be inquisitive and explorative, connected and networked with the ability to see the link between independent things.
- **Ability to analyse the problem**— Getting to the true root cause of the problem and not falling for the symptoms of it e.g. James Dyson realised the problem of keeping carpets clean was not one of vacuuming debris, but one of separating debris from air – hence his bagless vacuums modelled off technology from a sawmill. To do this, graduates need to gather, collate, classify and organise huge amounts of information and present the implications to people succinctly.
- **Ability to generate potential solutions**— Generating a range of possible solutions that, if applied, would fix the root cause of the problem, not just a bug. To do this, graduates need to be creative and resourceful in finding solutions, perhaps looking to other domains where a similar problem has already been solved e.g. the inventors





One final thing...

As the old cliché goes, the best ingredients in the world won't make a great cake unless you know what to do with them! So, the final thing I want to share is a model for leveraging the full potential of our superstars. This model has been built with the input of graduates, recruiters, employers and coaches and is intended as a model to bridge the gap highlighted previously:

Getting a true return on investment:

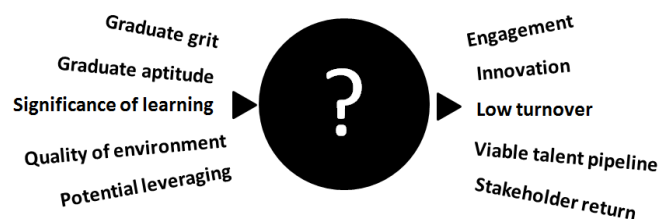
I mentioned earlier that companies are in place to deliver a return to stakeholders by satisfying a customer need. An important point to accept here is that delivering a return for stakeholders can only be sustainable for your superstars if the output is equally rewarding for them i.e. if here is some tangible benefit to them in performing for your company. When this balance is reached, you'll see unshakable engagement, ever innovative solutions, a long term commitment, a viable talent pipeline, a genuine and paced forward momentum and a true stakeholder return.

So, how do you deliver stakeholder returns in a way that optimises personal fulfilment? The Gradvert 4M Model outlines the key steps:

1. Make it worth it:

Commercial Goals:

First and foremost, give your graduates real and measurable goals that are aligned to the goals of the



company – something they can own, report on and for which they can receive recognition. When a graduate can see how their work impacts the greater whole, they are much more likely to feel motivated because their work has true purpose.

Plus, if your graduate understands the direction in which the company is heading, the challenges / contradictions they spot and the ideas they generate are more likely to have a place in the companies' future. What you want to avoid is a graduate coming up with a great idea that fails to get traction: one that they take home and either file or develop for themselves.

Figure 2: The 6 steps of innovation

of Google realised that the problem they were trying to solve was one of categorisation so they looked to library systems and applied the existing categorisation solution to their own problem. They will also need to be able to work with others, leveraging the group's creative thinking whilst considering the Glocal – local applications of global solutions - market place.

- **Ability to select and plan the solution**—Selecting the most appropriate solution to *that* problem rather than the sexiest or most accessible solution at the time e.g. the Zedwig failed as it was expensive and not really all that useful for most people: it was about invention not innovation. This means being ruthless and results focused not output focused. It also means having effective project management skills.
- **Ability to implement the solution**—Making it happen at the right time and in the right way, bringing people and customers along for the journey. This means being able to communicate effectively to stakeholders, sell the benefits, secure resources and lead a team to build, drive and sustain a solution.
- **Ability to evaluate the solution**—Being able to critically appraise the solution using real and meaningful customer feedback, and acting on it for the better e.g. Nintendo added new and improved straps to the remote of their innovative product, the Wii, following hundreds of cases of broken TVs etc. To do this, graduates will need analytical skills, communication skills and a decision making ability.

Right Incentives:

We know that graduates are becoming increasingly more sophisticated when searching for work; often looking far beyond salary and other financial rewards to impactful leadership, learning prospects, quality of challenge and a work environment that lives up to their expectations. Despite this, the word 'incentive' still screams salary, bonuses, company car etc. We need to look beyond the immediate, financial rewards and provide an incentive that truly motivates; one that gets them out of bed in the morning, every morning!

So, sit down with your graduates and understand from them what they truly want from their life, their career and their daily engagements at work and develop real and personal incentives and keep them fresh: a satisfied need no longer motivates.

2. Make it possible:

Resources:

Providing challenges and opportunities is one thing; making them realistic is quite another. Too often graduates are given a job to do without the right team, without the latest technology, with no budget and without the relevant tools. What's the point? Rubbish in: rubbish out. It's like running a brain storming session with everyone in your team for the sake of being inclusive rather than going outside your team to find the most creative thinkers: anyone can have an idea but it takes creative thinkers to have good ideas!

If you want market shaking results, give your best thinkers the best resources and watch what happens. For example, let them pick their own virtual team of volunteers to support a given project from a rich source of talent

across the entire department or even organisation – why not?

Right Opportunities:

Too often graduates are given 'to do lists' to crack on with for the duration of their placement. There is little exploration of what they're truly capable of and therefore valuable knowledge, skills and experience are wasted and go undeveloped. It is in these situations that managers are surprised to learn their graduate is running a successful online business outside of work, or is naturally adept at selling.

Therefore, we have to make sure we're giving our brightest recruits the opportunity to shine – put them in front of senior people; give them a budget or a team to manage; give them a broad and bold objective and just see what they do. What's the worst that can happen?

Another angle to this is making sure other managers and senior individuals are aware of your graduates and their abilities. Create sponsors around the business and rustle up an interest in what's happening in your Global Generation lab through e.g. quarterly presentations, blogs and networking events to make sure your graduates have a profile and a platform for moving onwards and upwards.

3. Make it happen:

Right Support:

Whilst giving graduates opportunities is important, and making them feel uncomfortable is part of learning, we have to be careful not to push too far. Optimal performance happens when graduates are in their stretch zone: beyond their comfort zone but not into their panic zone. Moving graduates into their panic zone demobilises

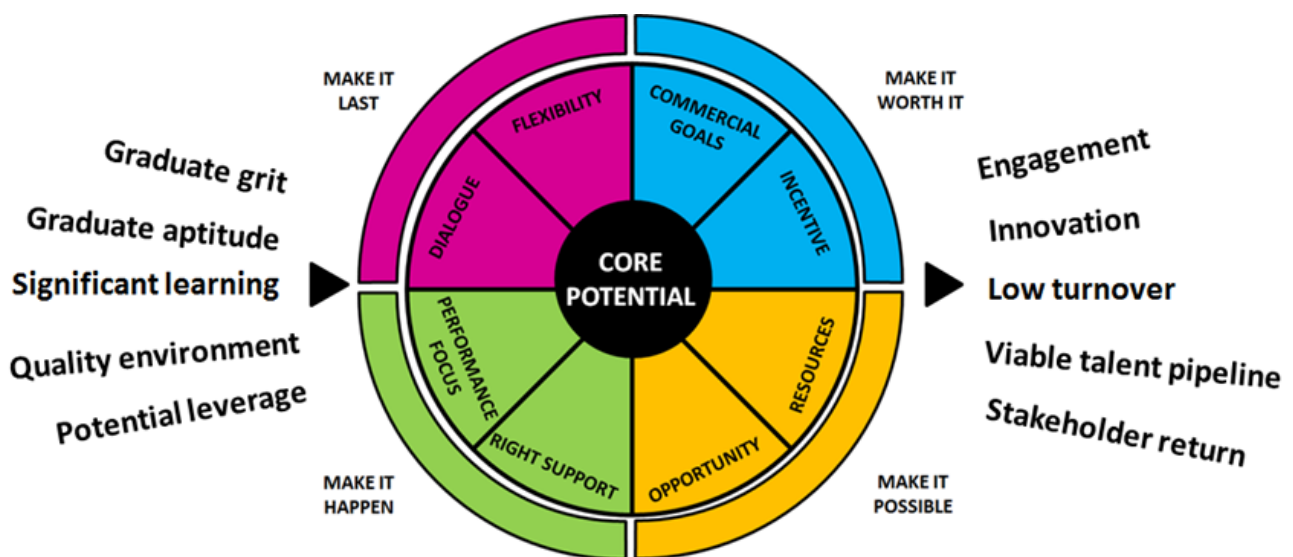


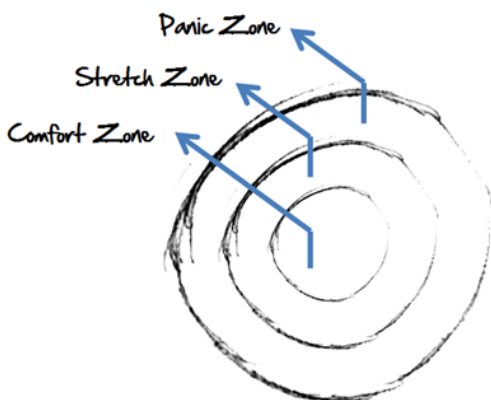
Figure 3: The Gradvert 4M Model

and inhibits performance altogether.

If you're going to set challenging – but SMART - goals, be ready to help them get there by being accessible, being inspirational, being approachable, being supportive and by being genuinely interested in helping them progress. Have regular check in sessions to give your graduates the chance to reflect on their progress and raise any issues.

Performance Focus:

The Global Generation are in a constant feedback loop characterised by the need for instant gratification and feedback, diversity and a balance between self, work and life. They want to be given goals and targets but want to be left to their own devices to get the job done. Therefore, a huge part of helping a graduate to progress in a sustainable way is effective performance management, but in many organisations, performance management practices are too slow, too bureaucratic and too hierarchical. Graduates want to learn fast, to adapt with speed and to change tack quickly. To do this they need smarter goals, more frequent feedback and more support and mentoring.



Coaching is a huge part of this because it teaches graduates how to manage their own learning, how to articulate their needs and how to go after what they want in the most effective ways. It teaches them independence in performance management and removes the 'waiting for help or opportunity or permission' mind-set. Frequent coaching and mentoring also encourages graduates to take on greater responsibility and crucially, shows them how to learn from their mistakes. Invest in coaching early on and show your graduates how to take responsibility for their own performance.

4. Make it last:

Dialogue:

Engaging honestly and openly with this generation is paramount. The parental, 'do as your told' style of

management does not have a place in this generation because the Global Generation do not respond to formality, hierarchy and 'opportunities' in the same way as previous generations did. They have high expectations of their employers, they actively seek out new challenges frequently, they are not afraid to question authority and they are certainly not afraid to leave one role or environment for another. Therefore, satisfy their need to feel part of what is going on; part of the decisions being made.

Of course, graduates can't have it all their own way, but catching them when they're faltering and agreeing the necessary changes is a sure fire way to prevent them looking elsewhere.

Flexibility:

The Global Generation is incredibly independent and insistent on being judged on the outcome of work, rather than 'face-time' i.e. being seen to be there. This generation is online 24/7 and if they are truly committed, they will work far beyond 9-5. Therefore, flexible contract arrangements are key, even if it's limited to simple things such as removing restrictions to the internet and allowing time back in lieu. It's all about creating a 'sustainable working experience'.

Make sure, too, that your graduates have the freedom to move between teams, managers and projects to satisfy short and long-term objectives. This is how the Global Generation operate—through a rich social capital; don't limit this power to their personal lives - thrust into your organisation. Today.

Interested to learn more?

The Gradvert 4M model attempts to provide a bridge between graduate talent on one side and stakeholder returns on the other—it acts a catalyst for leveraging the full potential from the Global Generation.

If you would like to discuss the application of the model in specific relation to your company then please contact:

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Change starts with one person.

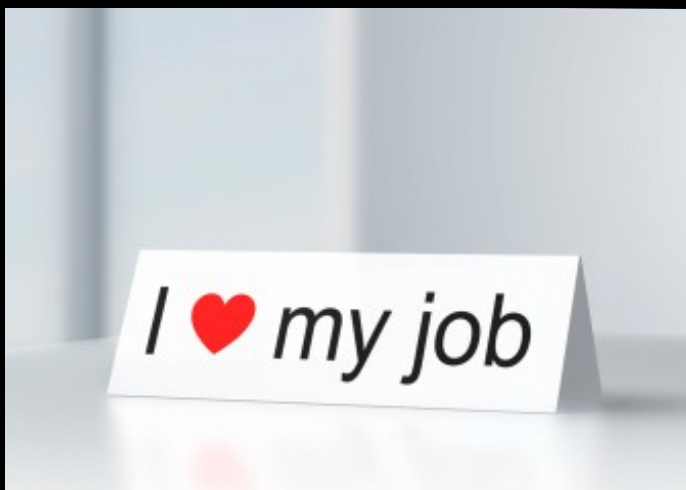
About Gradvert

Gradvert is a catalyst for change in the graduate attraction, recruitment and retention space.

Set up by a team of ambitious, experienced and entrepreneurial professionals, this fresh and inspiring company shows graduates, universities and companies how to leverage the full potential from the Global Generation.



About Lisa Bean



A 2007 graduate of Newcastle University, Lisa Bean is the award winning founder of Gradvert.com and she is taking the graduate recruitment market by storm.

Lisa has a background in Financial Services, corporate coaching and leadership development. She has also had significant exposure to innovation and transformation consultancy methodologies.

Building on in-house company training with Coaching Academy Accreditation, Lisa is an experienced and practiced career coach specialising in student and graduate careers and job applications.

As well as running Gradvert, Lisa now moderates graduate interviews and assessment centres, delivers talks at graduate events and coaches / mentors new graduate recruits.

Find out more at www.gradvert.com.