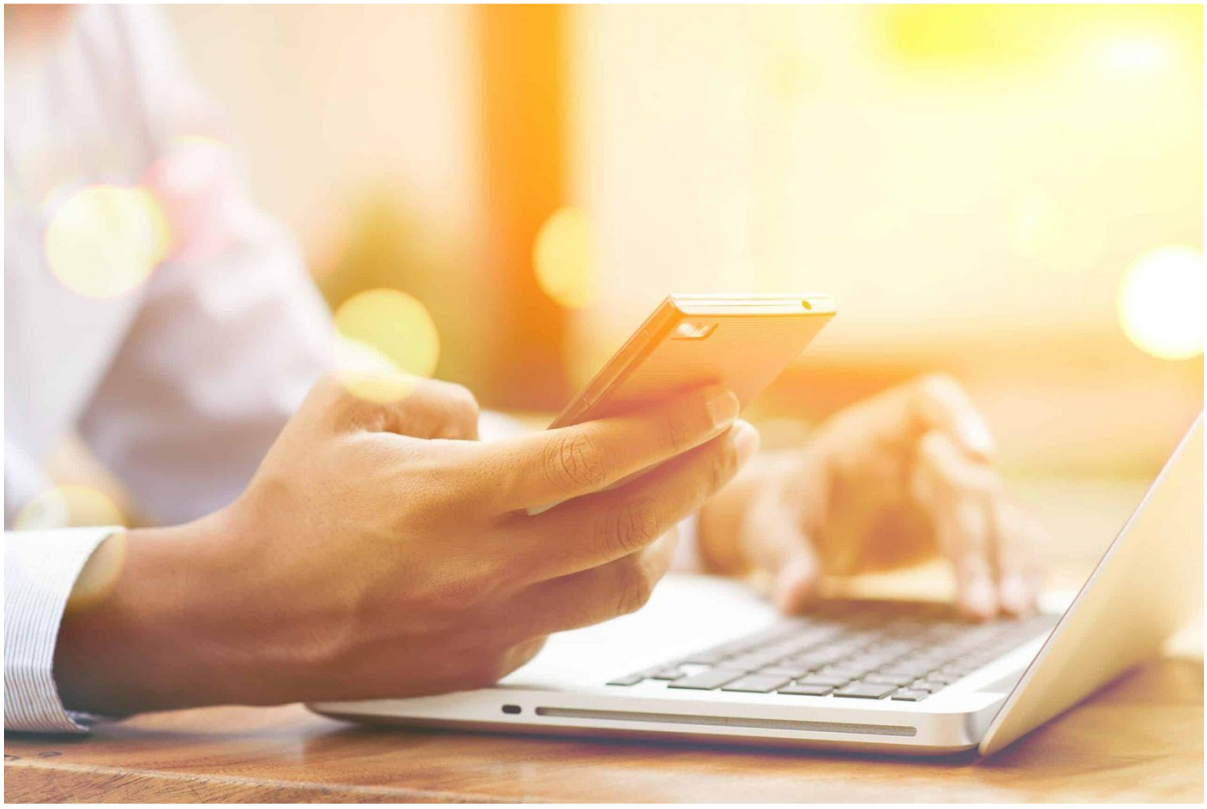
A Ride through the History of the American Workforce

A lot can change in 100 years - especially in the workforce. As we enter a new decade, we decided to take a ride through the history of the American workforce

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As a very privileged Gen Zer, I have taken workplace safety for granted. This is because I know that everything was tested before its release to the general public and that there are strict laws and regulations that protect me. However, it was not too long ago that safety conditions in the workplace were flat out terrible. Other things that I have taken for granted are the Department of Labor, equal rights, and access to technology. Let's hop into a time machine and take a ride down memory lane and through the history of the ever-changing workforce. **"4,000 Silk Workers out on strike to wipe out the three and four loom systems" The Paterson Evening News, February 20, 1913.** Yes, you guessed it. Based on that headline from the New York Times, we have landed in the early 1900s, where low wages, long workdays, and poor working conditions are the norm. Our first stop, a silk factory. Over there, you can see a small child, probably 5 or 6 years of age, working the machinery. No surprise there, 18 percent of all American workers in 1900 were under the age of 16.

Children worked long hours under dangerous conditions for very little pay. Many children and adults were seriously injured or lost their lives due to these unsafe conditions, lack of protections, and the exhaustion from using machinery for 12-16 hours a day. In 1913, strikes like the one in Paterson, NJ were very common. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics documented approximately 23,000 industrial deaths among a workforce of 38 million, approximately 61 deaths per 100,000 workers. On March 4, 1913, President William Howard Taft signed the Organic Act and created the U.S Department of Labor: a huge win for workers' rights and workforce safety. **"Stock Prices Slump $14,000,000,000 in Nation-Wide Stampede to Unload; Bankers to Support Market Today" The New York Times, October 29, 1929.** OH NO! Seems like we landed in the middle of Wall Street during Black Tuesday. Traders are hollering and screaming everywhere. Every time the Radio or Steel or Auburn takes a tumble, you'll see someone collapse on the floor as the market plummets down. The Roaring 20s was a period of prosperity, consumerism boomed, and injuries and death in the workplace declined; however, the Market Crash in 1929 marked the ending of the good times for the U.S. and the rest of the world. This was a terrible time for Americans. In such a short period of time, the standards of living had dropped, and the unemployment rate was up by 25%. Despite high unemployment in the nation, the demand for women in the workforce increased and saw the rise of employed women increase by 24%. The Great Depression and the policy responses brought big changes to the workforce: labor unions and welfare expanded, the first federal minimum wage was established, and rights were enacted that protected employees from certain harmful private sector labor and management practices. **"Dodgers Purchases Robinson, First Black Person in Modern League Baseball" The New York Times, April 10, 1947.** Now, let's change our time clock and move forward to the 1940s and 1950s – the post-Depression era. Businesses started to be rebuilt, and with the new era came The Employment Act of 1946. This new change put the onus of economic stability of inflation and unemployment on the federal government. In the 1940s, the thought of workplace inequality and civil rights was far from America's mind. This was soon to change in 1947 with Jackie Robinson breaking the color barrier in baseball. **"Rights Bill Becomes Law" The Chicago Tribune, July 3, 1964.** We landed in a great decade, the 1960s and are about to witness a big win to The Civil Rights Movement. Some progress with civil rights had been made in the prior decade, with the U.S. Supreme Court striking down the "separate but equal" doctrine for public education institutions, but further major victories came this decade. In 1964, The Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed, outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. The previous year had also seen the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which abolished wage disparity based on gender and helped increase gender diversity in the workplace. The Civil Rights Act also gave way to the creation of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in 1965, in order to combat workplace discrimination. **"The Executive Computer; A Growing Internet Is Trying to Take Care of Business" The New York Times, December 2, 1993. "Attention Shoppers: Internet Is Open" The New York Times, August 12, 1994.** Yes, you guessed it! This is the 1990s, my favorite era, and no, not because I was born in the 90s. It's because of the birth of the world wide web. What would we do without it? It gave everyone, from children to adults, from small companies to big companies, the ability to explore their horizons and go global. Then 2012 gave birth to the era that gave power to the employee. Workplaces became more conscious of their work environments, job

satisfaction, engagement, and retention. **"Young People Are Going to Save Us All From Office Life - Gen Z-ers and millennials have been called lazy and entitled. Could they, instead, be among the first to understand the proper role of work in life" The New York Times, September 17, 2019.** And now, once again, we are experiencing a revolution in the workplace with the rise of three new generations. Millennials and their younger counterparts, Gen Zers (whom are just entering the workforce), are disrupting the dynamics of what was once expected in the workplace. For these new faces, salaries are not their main motivators. Rather, the ability to have a passion for what they do, have work flexibility, work remotely, and work freelance jobs is what drives and characterizes them. While you are still learning to get used to millennials and prepare for Gen Z, there is another generation that is getting more intelligent and most likely already running your business: Artificial Intelligence (AI). Don't worry, the robots will not come after you (like in I Robot) – but AI-like automation has been advancing for decades. AI has become so important in assisting our lives, all I need to say is "Alexa...". We are always striving to make our lives easier, and that means using AI to make our lives simpler and more efficient. So, who knows what the next 100 years will bring? In 2120 and ten more generations, the progress we are making now will set the stage for future workforces to come. As we celebrate the new year and a new version of the roaring 2020s, take time to appreciate how far we've come and how far we have yet to go.

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