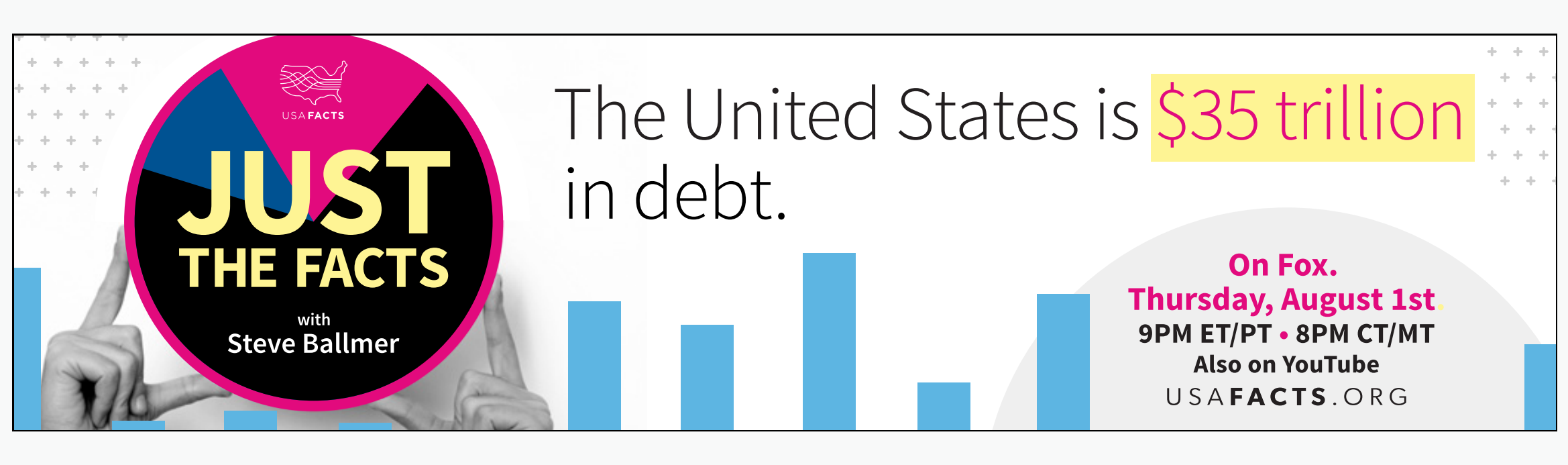

CAREERS

'Unbossing' the workplace could make Gen Zers better at their jobs, hiring experts say

Lindsay Dodgson Jun 3, 2024, 7:29 AM CDT

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The great "unbossing" could make Gen Zers better at their jobs (stock image). Michael H/Getty Images

- **Companies are cutting middle management positions due to cost cutting and other pressures.**
- **The great "unbossing" could make Gen Zers better at their jobs, experts suggest.**
- **Fewer managers might boost Zoomers' productivity and foster workplace autonomy.**

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The great unbossing is underway, with companies cutting middle management positions.

Cost cutting, Gen Z's distaste for management, remote working, and increased pressure on performance are all factors in why middle managers are finding their jobs are most at risk during layoffs.

But while critics think the repercussions of a flatter corporate structure could be less mentorship and feeling more stress coming from above, according to hiring experts, there are also benefits. And one might be that Zoomers get better at their jobs.

Sophie O'Brien, a Gen Z hiring expert and the founder of the recruitment agency Pollen Careers, told Business Insider the role of a middle manager is to effectively "micro-manage juniors."

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"But actually, there's evidence to suggest this is not productive and limits people's learning potential," she said. "The most effective team development is when people are given autonomy and the freedom to fail."

O'Brien said fresh talent is often better equipped to identify issues with traditional ways of working in a company, which could help with shaking up the structure to be more efficient.

She said that not having a micromanager picking apart their work could benefit Gen Zers who don't feel they need to be "spoon-fed."

O'Brien said micromanagers can have a "detrimental impact" on Zoomers' productivity, especially if it's their first job.

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"It can cause them to feel demotivated, doubt or second-guess themself, and make them disengage from their work," she said. "Because if their ideas or work is constantly being rehashed or rejected, they'll naturally lose interest in their role."

Not having multiple layers of management will give Zoomers "more autonomy and flexibility," O'Brien said, "and this can encourage empowerment, creativity, and for them to take full responsibility for their work."

Doing it right

Those who are skeptical of companies axing middle managers say it could mean junior staff won't receive the mentorship needed to climb the ladder.

But issues should only arise with this shift if companies don't handle it properly, O'Brien said.

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One way to ensure young hires feel supported is to introduce mentoring programs, she said, because this will give them first-hand exposure to people from different teams with different levels of responsibility.

They should also be introduced to the leadership team, O'Brien added, so they have visibility within the company.

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"This not only benefits more junior employees but mentors, too," she said.

"We're now in a working world where there can be four generations working together, and the intergenerational divide has never been so vast."

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Making room for more conversations between people at all levels "can make for greater empathy, understanding, and better culture," O'Brien said.

Reverse mentoring can also help bring an organization together, O'Brien said, to help give junior employees access to a variety of senior staff and leaders, so they are not stuck with a "terrible boss."

Overall, it's about "trial and error," O'Brien said, and "making brave decisions."

"Even just making a change and adopting a growth mindset as a business can create positive change, even if it fails, because it shows you want to do the best by people, that you won't just stick to the status quo," she said.

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'Unbossing' can impact anyone

While millennials are currently most likely in the firing line, the great unbossing can come to anyone. So, it may be a wake-up call for those who are coasting, "quiet quitting," or simply in the wrong job.

Catherine Rymsha, a visiting lecturer in management at The University of Massachusetts Lowell, told BI that cutting middle managers "alleviates the time and costs of upskilling and developing them into effective leaders."

Companies are cutting managers to "weed out underperforming talent," Rymsha said, "while promoting the next-gen of leaders to aid in both developing those people and keeping an eye on the bottom line."

According to Joe Camberato, the CEO of the fintech marketplace National Business Capital, it all comes down to who brings value and who doesn't.

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"If you want to protect your job, don't just focus on your title or job description," he said. "Focus on what brings real value to your company, department, or team, and go above and beyond to make that happen."

Camberato said staffers of all generations, from Boomers to Gen Zers, need to evolve, "especially as technology advances."

"You need to embrace change and new technologies to keep bringing value to your company and your position," he said. "If you don't, you risk being left behind without a job."

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