

# The Real Reason Gen Z Can't Get Hired? It Might Not Be AI

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*Note: the original article is provided as a separate file (attached to the email or downloadable from the website).*

## 1. Reading Passage

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For the past few years, the story about young people and work has had a clear villain. Graduates everywhere – but especially in the US, UK, Canada and Australia – have struggled to land first jobs, and the slump has been worst in white-collar fields like software engineering. The obvious explanation wrote itself: artificial intelligence. Tools like ChatGPT, the argument goes, can now perform the routine tasks once handed to juniors – drafting memos, debugging simple code, summarising documents – while still falling short of what experienced professionals do. Why hire a 22-year-old when a chatbot will do the work for free?

A new working paper by economists Peter John Lambert and Yannick Schindler complicates that tidy narrative. Drawing on roughly 243 million hires and 407 million job postings between 2017 and 2025, the authors searched for another shock that could match the same fingerprint: a force that hurt junior hiring more than senior, white-collar more than blue-collar, and young software developers most of all. Their counter-proposal is the take-off of remote work.

The theory is straightforward. Early-career workers need supervision. They need someone to look over their shoulder, answer a half-formed question, or notice that they are quietly stuck. They also absorb 'tacit' knowledge – the unwritten norms of a profession – by sitting near people who already have it. Remote work adds friction to all of these processes. Bringing a junior up to speed over Slack takes more time and effort than doing it in person, and that extra cost makes firms less willing to take the risk in the first place.

Here's the catch that makes the research more than just another opinion. AI exposure and remote-friendliness are heavily correlated: the same kinds of jobs that AI can assist with are also the kinds that can be done from a sofa. So the two variables had been compounding each other in earlier studies, making AI look guiltier than it was. When Lambert and Schindler control for remote work, the apparent AI effect on junior hiring largely vanishes. The remote-work effect, by contrast, holds up – and crucially, it had already begun shrinking entry-level hiring before ChatGPT's late-2022 debut. Jobs that score high on AI exposure but require an in-person presence, such as receptionist roles, have actually held up comparatively well.

The findings cut against several comfortable assumptions. Not every weird trend in the post-pandemic economy is AI's fault. And the long-running 'return to the office' debate, usually framed as grumpy older bosses versus flexibility-loving Gen Z, looks different in this light. The data suggest that the loudest beneficiaries of an extra day in the office aren't the executives demanding it – they're the juniors who, once back in the building, become visible enough to be trained, mentored and eventually promoted.

The paper does not argue that remote work is uniformly bad. Earlier research by the same author found that fathers in remote-friendly occupations take on more childcare; their partners' earnings and employment rise; remote work has even nudged up birth rates in some places. The story is one of trade-offs, not villains. But for the specific cohort entering the workforce right now, the trade-off has been brutal: a labour market that is merely cool for everyone has been icy for the youngest, and the freezer door, it turns out, may have been propped open not by a chatbot but by a

webcam.

## 2. Explanation

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*Everyone blames ChatGPT for entry-level jobs vanishing. But a new study of 243 million hires says the real culprit is something far less futuristic: working from home.*

### What's Going On?

Across the US, UK, Canada and Australia, hiring of junior workers has been falling steeply since around 2019, especially in white-collar fields like software. The obvious suspect has been AI: tools like ChatGPT can do a lot of the grunt work that used to be handed to new graduates.

But economists Peter John Lambert and Yannick Schindler analysed roughly a quarter-billion hires and 407 million job postings and found that once you control for how 'remote-friendly' a job is, the AI effect on junior hiring largely disappears. The remote-work effect, however, stays strong – and it had already started shrinking entry-level hiring before ChatGPT existed.

### How To Think About It

Think of an office as an apprenticeship machine. Juniors aren't only paid to produce work; they're paid while older colleagues teach them. Remove the building, and the machine quietly breaks.

- Like a hospital teaching ward: medical residents learn by shadowing attendings during rounds. Send everyone home with a laptop and the residents technically still 'work,' but the watching-and-being-watched part – where competence is built – silently disappears.
- Like a restaurant kitchen during service: a line cook becomes a chef by being yelled at, corrected, and copied in real time. Slack messages can't replicate the speed of someone tasting your sauce and saying 'too much salt' before the plate goes out.

### Key Things To Know

- The dataset covers around 243 million hires and 407 million job postings across four countries from 2017 to 2025.
- The mechanism: remote work makes supervising, monitoring and informal learning harder, so firms get less return on training a junior – and hire fewer of them.
- Jobs least exposed to AI but high in 'in-person' tasks (like receptionists) have actually held up relatively well in hiring.
- Counterintuitive bonus finding: in places where fathers work remotely, they take on more childcare – and wives' earnings and employment rise. Remote work has even nudged birth rates up.
- What people get wrong: assuming every weird labour-market trend post-2022 must be ChatGPT's fault. The junior-hiring slump was already underway during the pandemic, well before generative AI went mainstream.

### Why It Matters

If you're picking a college major, an internship, or a first job, this reshapes the calculus. The fully-remote dream role might actually be the riskiest move early in your career – not because you're lazy, but because the people who could promote you literally won't see you working. Burn-Murdoch's

blunt line: the biggest beneficiaries of an extra day in the office aren't the bosses demanding it. They're the juniors.

### **The Bigger Picture**

The 'return-to-office' culture war has mostly been framed as old bosses vs. young workers. This research scrambles that story: it suggests Gen Z may have negotiated themselves out of the exact environment where careers are built. Watch for hybrid schedules to harden, for companies to start advertising mentorship as a perk, and – if the pattern holds – for a 'lost cohort' of workers in their 20s who entered the labour market just as the apprenticeship ladder was being quietly dismantled.

### 3. Key Terms Glossary

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#### **Junior / entry-level hiring**

Recruitment of workers who are new to a profession — typically recent graduates or people with under two years of experience in the role.

#### **White-collar work**

Office-based, knowledge-heavy jobs (law, finance, software, consulting), as opposed to 'blue-collar' manual or trades work.

#### **AI exposure**

A measure of how much of a given job's tasks could plausibly be done or assisted by current AI tools like large language models.

#### **Controlling for a variable**

A statistical technique that holds one factor constant so you can see whether a second factor still has an effect. Used here to separate AI's impact from remote work's impact.

#### **On-the-job learning**

Skills picked up informally by doing real work alongside experienced colleagues — not from a classroom or training course.

#### **Counter-proposal**

An alternative explanation offered in place of a dominant one — here, remote work offered instead of AI as the cause of weak junior hiring.

#### **Hybrid arrangement**

A work schedule that mixes remote and in-office days, often two or three days a week in the workplace.

## 4. Reading Comprehension Quiz

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Circle the best answer for each question.

**Q1.** The passage most directly argues that:

- A) Artificial intelligence has already eliminated most entry-level white-collar jobs.
- B) Remote work, more than AI, helps explain the recent drop in junior hiring.
- C) Young workers prefer remote roles because they pay better than office ones.
- D) Blue-collar industries are now hiring more graduates than white-collar ones.

**Q2.** According to the passage, junior hiring began to weaken:

- A) Only after ChatGPT was released to the public in late 2022.
- B) Mainly in countries that rejected remote work after the pandemic.
- C) Before the AI boom, around the time remote work became widespread.
- D) Because employers wanted to cut salaries paid to senior staff.

**Q3.** As used in the passage, 'icy' most nearly means:

- A) Frozen solid
- B) Emotionally cold
- C) Especially harsh
- D) Slippery and dangerous

**Q4.** As used in the passage, 'pullback' most nearly means:

- A) A physical retreat
- B) A decline or reduction
- C) A military withdrawal
- D) A delayed payment

**Q5.** Which statement about the relationship between AI exposure and remote work can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

- A) Jobs highly exposed to AI also tend to be ones that can be done remotely.
- B) AI exposure and remote work have no statistical relationship at all.
- C) Remote work causes companies to adopt AI tools faster than office work.
- D) AI tools are designed specifically to replace remote workers first.

**Q6.** The passage suggests that one reason firms hire fewer juniors when work is remote is that:

- A) Junior workers refuse to accept remote-only positions.
- B) Remote managers must spend more time and resources supervising them.
- C) Companies legally cannot promote workers they have not met in person.
- D) Senior workers demand higher salaries when they work from home.

**Q7.** The author's tone when discussing the 'return to the office' debate is best described as:

- A) Sarcastic and dismissive of younger workers
- B) Neutral but quietly sceptical of the dominant narrative
- C) Alarmed and urgently calling for new laws
- D) Nostalgic for the pre-pandemic workplace

**Q8.** The author's primary purpose in the passage is to:

- A)** Persuade students never to accept a remote job offer.
- B)** Defend AI companies from accusations of replacing workers.
- C)** Reframe a public debate using new research evidence.
- D)** Predict that remote work will be banned within a decade.

**Q9.** Which of the following can most reasonably be inferred about the broader social effects of remote work, according to the passage?

- A)** It harms juniors but produces some positive effects elsewhere in society.
- B)** It is uniformly bad for everyone who experiences it.
- C)** It has no measurable effect outside the labour market.
- D)** It primarily benefits company shareholders and CEOs.

**Q10.** Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

- A)** The reference to AI being unable to replace 'seasoned professionals.'
- B)** The mention that fathers in remote jobs take on more childcare and wives' earnings rise.
- C)** The claim that software roles have been hit hardest of all.
- D)** The statement that receptionists have held up better in hiring.

**My Score:** \_\_\_\_\_ / 10

## 5. Answer Key with Explanations

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**Q1.** The passage most directly argues that:

**Answer: B**

The passage's core claim, drawn from Lambert and Schindler, is that once you account for remote work, the AI effect on junior hiring largely disappears. A is the popular narrative the passage is rebutting (Trap A: right scope, wrong direction). SAT Tip: for 'primarily argues' questions, look for the sentence that says 'but' or 'however' – the author's real thesis almost always sits right after a pivot word.

**Q2.** According to the passage, junior hiring began to weaken:

**Answer: C**

The passage notes the entry-level share of hires was 'falling steeply before AI arrived,' aligning with the take-off of remote work. A is tempting because ChatGPT is famous, but it contradicts the timeline (Trap B: right vocabulary, wrong combination). SAT Tip: when a question asks 'when,' scan the passage for explicit dates or sequence words ('before,' 'after,' 'during') rather than relying on what you already believe about the topic.

**Q3.** As used in the passage, 'icy' most nearly means:

**Answer: C**

The passage contrasts a 'cool' labour market for everyone with an 'icy' one for the youngest, using temperature as a metaphor for severity. A is the literal meaning (Trap C: true in the real world, wrong in context). SAT Tip: on vocab-in-context, substitute each option into the sentence – the right answer preserves the original meaning of the passage.

**Q4.** As used in the passage, 'pullback' most nearly means:

**Answer: B**

'Early-career hiring pullback' refers to a drop in the number of juniors being hired. A and C use the literal/military sense (Trap C: real-world meanings unrelated to this context). SAT Tip: business and economics passages reuse everyday words as jargon – 'pullback,' 'correction,' 'softening' all just mean 'going down.'

**Q5.** Which statement about the relationship between AI exposure and remote work can most reasonably be inferred from the passage?

**Answer: A**

The passage explains that the two variables were 'compounding' in the data – you only see remote work's true effect once you separate it from AI exposure, which implies they overlap heavily. B contradicts that overlap (Trap A: wrong direction). SAT Tip: 'inferred' answers must follow logically from the passage but won't be stated word-for-word – eliminate options that go further than the text supports.

**Q6.** The passage suggests that one reason firms hire fewer juniors when work is remote is that:

**Answer: B**

The passage explicitly notes that remote work 'adds friction' to onboarding juniors, making them costlier to bring up to speed. C invents a legal restriction the passage never mentions (Trap C: not in the text). SAT Tip: if an answer choice introduces a new concept (law, regulation, statistic) that wasn't in the passage, it's almost always wrong, no matter how plausible it sounds.

**Q7.** The author's tone when discussing the 'return to the office' debate is best described as:

**Answer: B**

The author calmly presents evidence that complicates the standard 'bosses vs. workers' story, ending with the wry observation that juniors – not bosses – benefit most from office time. C overstates the urgency (Trap B: right field, wrong intensity). SAT Tip: tone questions are about word choice, not topic – look at adjectives and qualifiers ('fascinating,' 'counter-proposal,' 'bear in mind'), not the seriousness of the subject.

**Q8.** The author's primary purpose in the passage is to:

**Answer: C**

The passage uses the Lambert-Schindler paper to challenge the conventional 'AI is killing entry-level jobs' story. A is too prescriptive (Trap B: stretches a real point into an extreme command). SAT Tip: 'primary purpose' is usually a verb like 'reframe,' 'compare,' 'analyse' – pick the option whose verb matches what the passage actually does, not the most dramatic option.

**Q9.** Which of the following can most reasonably be inferred about the broader social effects of remote work, according to the passage?

**Answer: A**

The passage notes that remote-working fathers do more childcare, that mothers' employment and earnings rise, and that birth rates have ticked up – even as junior hiring suffers. B ignores the positive findings (Trap A: right field, wrong direction). SAT Tip: when a passage explicitly lists trade-offs ('but,' 'however,' 'on the other hand'), the correct inference answer almost always acknowledges both sides.

**Q10.** Which choice provides the best evidence for the answer to the previous question?

**Answer: B**

This is the only line that supports a positive social spillover from remote work outside the labour-market harm to juniors. D and C describe labour-market effects only, not broader social ones (Trap B: relevant vocabulary, wrong question). SAT Tip: on evidence-pairing questions, locate the passage line that proves your previous answer first, then pick the option that quotes or paraphrases exactly that line.