

Gen Z May Change How You Manage Employees

Is your workplace ready for Generation Z? Lately, many demographers and generation-focused marketing experts have been vocal about what they observe in Gen Z, the newest additions to the job applicant pool.

With every new generation, there's an element of rebellion against the attitudes, lifestyles and tastes of previous generations. But to a large extent, the differences in generations may have more to do with the world they were raised in. For Gen Z, the two primary formative experiences have been 1) dealing with the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008, and 2) growing up as "digital natives."

How have these and other factors influenced today's younger employees? Here are some ways they may differ from the Millennials you now employ.

Eye on the Future

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The psychological consequence of growing up during a financial crisis is a cautious, conservative attitude toward employment matters. For example, the prospect of job security with predictable growth in income may be more appealing to Gen Z than to Millennials.

You can't guarantee anyone lifetime employment. But Gen Z may respond positively to the message that your goal is to maintain a stable workforce.

Also, Gen Z employees may be more focused on the retirement benefit programs than Millennials are. If you sponsor a retirement plan, be sure to emphasize it when describing the advantages of working for your organization. And Gen Z workers who are skeptical about an impending funding crisis for Medicare and Social Security may be particularly interested in retirement savings opportunities.

In addition, Gen Z tends to be more pragmatic about money matters than Millennials. Witnessing the weighty financial burden of student debt incurred by Millennials, fewer Gen Zers are seeking graduate degrees before entering the workforce. That will alter the pool of applicants you can choose from. If you currently set a master's degree as the bar for jobs that don't require that level of education, you may want to reconsider if it's truly a necessity.



Defining Gen Z

The first question many people ask is: What's the cutoff for Gen Z? There's currently no consensus about when this generation began. Some say the dividing line between Millennials and Gen Z was as early as 1993 and others say it's as late as 2000.

That means the oldest members of this group may be 25 years of age, or as young as 18. In any case, they'll soon become a significant part of the American workforce.

Consistent with their higher level of pragmatism and financial focus, Gen Z workers are eager to pursue opportunities to obtain new skills at work. That may help them remain valuable members of your staff long into the future. So, consider creating online training opportunities to attract and retain Gen Z workers.

Though Gen Zers don't seem to have a lot in common with Millennials, here's one common denominator: Both groups tend to seek advancement opportunities. If they don't see the potential to grow in one job, they may not hesitate to change jobs quickly.

Growing Up Digital

Gen Zers tend to have a large capacity for multitasking. They've always "lived in a connected world" with dozens of apps that are constantly updated, says marketing consultant Deep Patel. "Switching between different tasks and paying simultaneous attention to a wide range of stimuli comes naturally to them."

The downside is that multitasking Gen Zers may find it difficult to focus deeply on one task for a long period of time. So, make sure you evaluate that capacity if you're hiring Gen Zers for a job that requires a long attention span.

An unexpected attribute of this digitally in-tune generation is a preference for face-to-face communication, according to a survey by consulting firm Millennial Branding. Among Gen Z respondents, 53% would rather communicate with managers in person, while 18% would rather email and 11% preferred instant messaging. While more time-consuming than the last two methods, face-to-face communication provide for a more dynamic exchange, including the exchange of nonverbal cues. This can be essential when dealing with substantive issues.

Competitive Individualists

Another significant difference between Gen Zers and Millennials is how they maximize productivity. Millennials tend to like collaboration and teamwork. Gen Zers, on the other hand, are marked by two complementary traits — competitiveness and individualism.

Rather than working on teams, Gen Zers may prefer working on their own and receiving credit for individual efforts. Put simply, they don't want to depend on others to get their work done.

Of course, that preference doesn't mean that you should isolate younger workers. But it might be a good idea to consider flexible working arrangements, if possible, rather than force-feeding teamwork when it isn't vital. Doing so will help maximize productivity and minimize turnover.

Coming Soon

You may already have Gen Z employees trickling into your workforce. As time marches on, you'll encounter more Gen Z applicants.

No bell will ring to signal that Gen Z has reached a critical mass at your organization. But staying attentive to changes in attitudes and priorities of the youngest members of your staff will make it easier for you to maintain a dynamic and productive workforce

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