

Generation Z



*Understanding and Managing Today's
Emerging Workforce*

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Understanding and Managing Today's Emerging Workforce

They've come of age with smart phones, earbuds, and a belief that every answer can be found online. Most are stimulation junkies who have little patience for repetition. Many are reluctant to call someone, let alone interact face-to-face. They are also the future of the US workforce.



With the leading edge now in their mid-twenties, this cohort of seventy-four million is entering the workplace with technology skills that put the Millennials to shame. At the same time, they are not as anxious to take over the world. Having come of age witnessing the Great Recession, they possess a more cautious perspective about careers and advancement. They are, however, just as focused on life balance. They are also extraordinarily concerned with global warming, societal inequities and the plight of the less fortunate.

The members of Generation Z, as they are becoming known, are the offspring of three generations – the youngest baby boomers, Generation X and the oldest Millennials. More importantly, they are the products of today's digital technology, hyper consumerism and the relativistic value structures that have become so widespread. Yet, we cannot look at them and ask, "What's wrong with this youngest generation?" As with all generations, their beliefs, expectations and attitudes are the result of the times in which they have come of age.

As they enter today's corporations, they will compel every organization to find a balance between integrating their approach to work with the time-honored practices that have served the industry for so long. The crucial question is how to make this transition successful.

This paper is divided into three sections. The first provides an overview of Generation Z's beliefs and expectations as we know them up to this point. After all, the majority have yet to come of age. The second section discusses the implications of all this for the tomorrow's corporations. The third section identifies strategies and tactics for melding these emerging contributors into thriving, independent thinkers.

Attitudes and Expectations

So, why "Generation Z?" Several labels have been proposed for this cohort including iGen, Net-Geners and Homelanders. But since those in the media have an out-sized influence on what generations are called, Generation Z has become the prominent designation, at least for now. As with every generation, those researching the subject disagree somewhat on the exact birth dates. Professor Jean Twenge, author of iGen who has been surveying this age group extensively argues that the first members of this cohort were born after the year 1995, while the last members were born in 2012. Using these birth years makes the members of Generation Z are the most racially and ethnically diverse cohort in US history. They presently represent 24% of the US population. Interestingly, those born 2009 and after will be fewer than 50% non-Hispanic white for the first time in US history.¹

As with any generation, there are a host of factors that have been shaping Generation Z since its inception. Let's briefly address each one of these:

Family structure – Family structure is as diverse as this generation's demographics. Where previous cohorts were the products of a more traditional family model, Gen Zers have come of age learning values, expectations and communication skills from a wide variety of



sources, one of which happens to be parents. As a result, it is understandable that their outlook is an average of many influences, including the ones below. When someone has corrected their behavior as children, they may have complied, but thought, “That’s your version of right and wrong.” As they mature, into the workforce and elsewhere, they will bring these values and expectations with them.

Social connections and development – Due to the influence of digital technology, much of this generation’s social development has been conducted through a smart phone, tablet or laptop. This, of course, has impacted the development of their interpersonal skills, especially when it comes to non-verbal communication. More than two thirds of today’s teens prefer to communicate with their peers via a keypad, rather than face-to-face or over the phone, according to Common Sense Media.² They give varied reasons for this. The bottom line, however, is that many will be entering the energy workplace with less-than-refined skills for communicating with those around them.

Emergence of new technology – Obviously, digital technology has been integral to their lives. The Millennials, those currently in their mid-twenties to late thirties, were the first digital natives, having come of age with the proliferation of laptops, cell phones, and menu-driven software. The members of Generation Z have taken this one step further to become the first mobile technology generation. In fact, they are using their smart phones an average of 15.4 hours per week.³ Employers, retailers, the media, and everyone else has discovered that if you want to attract their attention you have to be on their handheld device. Even then, you’re not assured of holding it for more than a few seconds. (More about this throughout the paper.)

Media influence – Over the past twenty years, so-called mainstream media, such as ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN and Fox, has evolved dramatically in both style and content. Since the introduction of the twenty-four-hour news cycle, Americans have had difficulty processing all the information coming at them. This content is increasingly entertainment- and celebrity-focused, not to mention politically polarized. While those in



previous generations have witnessed this evolution, the members of Generation Z have been immersed in this non-stop environment since children. As a result, they've never known anything different.

Social media, whose introduction is less than a decade old, has become a primary source for news and social connections. Overall, 43% of adults rely on Facebook for news according to Pew Research.⁴ Where those 35 and over are likely to first go to a news site (39%), the members of Gen Z are more likely to turn to social media and messaging apps (57%).⁵ As a result, they receive most of their knowledge about current events through the filter of their friends.

Like everyone, these young people struggle to manage the volume of information coming at them daily. Unfortunately, this has resulted in many being unable to discern facts and draw accurate conclusions. At more than half of the 77 American colleges and universities surveyed by The Wall Street Journal in 2017, at least one third of seniors were unable to assess the quality of evidence in a document, make a cohesive argument, or interpret data in a table.⁶

So integral is social media to the teens in this generation that 29% sleep with their smart phones. Forty percent check their smart phones within five minutes of going to sleep. Thirty-two percent check within five minutes of waking in the morning and 36% check at least once during the night.⁷

Social trends – The past two decades has seen dramatic shifts in the way American society views and reacts to social issues, including immigration, religion, gender rights, economic equality, and climate change. One could argue that this has affected the members of Generation Z more than previous cohorts since they have come of age immersed in it. Unfortunately, they do not possess the broader context of older generations. On top of this, episodic violence has shocked them and raised their level of everyday anxiety because of the emphasis on possible threats and security. In one study by the American Psychological Association, 54% of workers under 23 said they experienced anxiety in the preceding month, compared with 34% nationally.⁸

The civic, religious, and political views of Generation Z have been heavily influenced by the ever-present media stream. Terms such as inclusion, social-justice, terrorism, discrimination and climate change are front and center in their lexicon. As a result, many are more outspoken about causes they believe in, whether it's in the classroom, on social media, or in the workplace. At the same time, the volatility of these issues has also engendered a sense of anxiety and frustration among many because of their difficulty in navigating conflicting arguments. Their apprehension about saying something with which someone else might take offense has discouraged the healthy discussions essential to the development of their civic participation.



Education and education policy – The members of Generation Z are the most formally educated generation in US history. More than 70% of high school graduates continue on with some post-secondary education. But only 37% have graduated eight years later according to the US Department of Education.⁹ Of those who have attended college, but not graduated, millions are paying off student loans with balances of as much as \$100,000. As this situation has reached critical mass and received national attention, those in this cohort are beginning to question the value of earning a degree.

In addition, policymakers have compelled public education to place ever-increasing emphasis on testing. This includes annual state assessments at fourth, eighth and twelfth-grade levels along with teacher reviews. In many cases, district funding is tied to these metrics. Educators have adapted to this scrutiny by “teaching to the test,” and adding more content to already packed curriculums. The result has been a generation of students graduating “content smart,” but having missed the opportunity to apply what they have learned in a practical manner. In other words, they are book-smart but not work-smart.

Money and consumerism – With the introduction of on-line shopping, a tremendous amount of retail commerce has shifted to point-and-click technology. This has coincided with the advent of the smart phone and Generation Z’s coming of age. The members of this cohort see consumerism and spending through a lens of what they can

find with the touch of a screen. In other words, if it is not available on line, it must not exist. They are now bringing these beliefs into the energy workplace and elsewhere. The same is true with money and personal finances. At the same time, though, studies indicate their overall economic literacy is lacking.

According to the American Psychological Association, 80% of leading-edge Gen Z consumers say that money matters are a major cause of stress. Price Waterhouse Coopers has found that young employees who are stressed about their finances are almost five times as likely to be distracted by their finances at work.¹⁰ EverFi found that half don’t know how to compute their net worth, only 29% understand that having too many credit cards can hurt your credit rating, and four out of ten with checking accounts admit they haven’t checked their balance in the past year.¹¹



All of these elements are interconnected, of course, more so now than in previous generations due to technology and today’s global society. In fact, it would be safe to say that the members of Generation Z have formed their values, expectations and outlook by taking an average of all of these influences and producing an outlook and belief system that is unique to this cohort.

Implications for Tomorrow

So, what will the entry of Generation Z mean for the workforce? As this cohort begins working within corporations across the US, they will compel these organizations to modify their practices and policies. This transition will require a balance. Some long-time employees may be troubled, or even resentful of these changes. But their willingness to both flex with these changing times and help this new cohort learn the industry will ensure a smooth evolution. Let's briefly explore several of these implications.

Recruitment – It is critical to remember that you will be competing for “share of mind” with everything else coming at these individuals on the screen in their hands. As a result, corporations will be compelled to shift their efforts to these platforms. Those targeting this age group will have to be more proactive in connecting with them where they congregate. This is primarily in social media. (More about this and how to do so in this paper's third section.)

Social Connections and Communication

– Those coming of age in the past decade have become more and more dependent on digital communication. As a result, they can be uncomfortable with face-to-face interaction and initiating phone calls. In fact, there are indications that pre-teens' ability to read non-verbal cues significantly improve when smart-phone and tablet technology is removed from the environment.¹²

Since the workplace still relies on face-to-face and verbal communication to function, these emerging contributors will find themselves compelled to master these practices in short order. This is not to say that this generation won't quickly develop these skills. It's just that employers should be prepared for this transition and work to ameliorate these gaps.

As with previous generations, Generation Z will naturally gravitate toward their age peers for social support. This is to be expected. But employers should make a conscious effort to involve them through cross-generational teams, coaching and opportunities to learn and socialize with other age groups.



Career aspirations – Many of those coming of age do not develop a clear reasoning for their career choice. This is not unlike past generations. They might enjoy math or engineering. They might have grown up with a parent who is a marketing executive. They might have discovered how much they enjoy solving problems in a summer job. Perhaps someone they trust advised them to work in your industry. Whatever the reason, strive to capitalize on these interests by offering messages that demonstrate how they can find a home in your firm. “Now hiring” is not sufficient. Appealing to something they value will capture their attention. Once on the job, savvy employers will work to reinforce their choice by offering opportunities for personal development and industry education.

Compensation and financial security – The members of Generation Z are more circumspect about career choices. This is due to their experience with recent economic fluctuations and expansive coverage about college loan debt. They have run the numbers on income, college costs and living expenses. As a result, they are more open to careers in industries that offer predictable employment and a healthy paycheck. At the same time, they will be careful to focus on long-term outcomes. For employers, this will provide an opportunity for longer job tenures and less impatience than they have been experiencing with Millennials. To this cohort, however, a job is still a contract. They will be open to staying longer, however, if treated well. They will also be willing to pay some “dues” if they see the potential payoffs. Like Millennials, however, they will remain well-connected to peers and not hesitate to move if the right opportunity comes along.



Approach to work – Gen Z has come of age in an environment that preaches convenience, speed, and immediate gratification. Therefore, it is easy to understand that patience and perseverance are not necessarily one of their strong suits. Their desire to navigate their way through the work day with their thumbs and a screen, has been conditioned into them for years. For employers, this will sometimes mean a struggle with the tension between their impatience for results and the discomfort of learning how to make complex workplace decisions. (More about this later in the paper.)

There is also the initial integration into the workplace. As mentioned above, many are waiting until their early twenties to work in their first wage-paying job. This will require hiring managers to assist them with job basics previous generations experienced working in fast-food, amusement parks, or other front-line positions. That said, initial surveys indicate that the members of Generation Z, are willing to work hard are open to learning without the expectation for immediate promotion so prevalent among the Millennials. This is in part because of their concerns about financial security. More than 80% of college freshmen prioritize becoming “well-off” according to a recent nationwide survey conducted by UCLA. This is the highest level since the school began asking the question in 1966.¹³

Problem solving and decision making – History is rife with complaints about the youngest generation struggling to think critically. In the case of Generation Z, we have documented evidence of this. The Council for Aid to Education assessed nearly 32,000 graduating seniors at 169 colleges and universities. It found that 40% did not possess the reasoning skills to manage white-collar work. This includes such tasks as being able to read a scatterplot, construct a cohesive argument or identify a logical fallacy.¹⁴ Due to society’s focus on convenience, endless menu options, parents’ protectiveness and other influencers, this cohort has not been compelled to solve many of the everyday problems faced and overcome by previous generations. In other words, they just weren’t compelled to “figure it out.”

As these individuals enter the workplace, employers should be prepared to help these young contributors bridge the gap between content knowledge and application. This gap manifests itself in different ways. Some will not be comfortable acting without clear instructions. Others will ask endless questions. Many will struggle to infer and extrapolate options and solutions in a given situation.

At the same time, most of these newcomers will be very comfortable learning technology and even finding more efficient ways of accomplishing tasks that may have bedeviled

long-time employees. They will also embrace the expertise of seasoned managers and be more comfortable being coached and mentored than their older siblings, the Millennials.

Savvy employers will augment selection processes by assessing for these problem-solving skills and the confidence to work independently. In this time when qualified applicants are at a premium, they may still hire someone with less than adequate problem-solving skills. But the employer will have a clearer picture up front of where to begin the development process. Secondly, they will find that close-in supervision will be required at first, with an emphasis on job basics. Finally, supervisors will find that a culture of encouragement will yield more productivity from these newcomers than some of the traditional techniques so prevalent up to this point. After all, many of the members of Generation Z, have come of age hearing the “you are special” type messages that Millennials heard as well.



Generational relations – The Millennials roared onto the scene 15 years ago with impatience and demands to be CEO within six months. As a result, they have been less-than-well-received by many seasoned employees. The members of Generation Z appear to be more low-key about their growing influence in today’s society and workforce. That said, they will still expect to be recognized for their contributions. This cohort will have a respect for seasoned contributors’ knowledge and experience, but not necessarily their long stories. They will be comfortable

with teamwork and collaboration, having been compelled to work on group projects throughout formal education.

Employers will find that integrating Zers with older members on projects and assigning work that will make them stretch will compel them to reach outside the smart phone and tablet environment. At the same time, encouraging seasoned contributors to embrace this cohort’s expertise and confidence in learning digital technology will be an effective way to foster a mutual connection.

Training and development – Being an uber-mobile age group, Generation Z will expect training and development to revolve around easy-to-use, easy-to-access content they can wear on their wrists or carry in their hands. While much of this technology already exists, most of it is still in its infancy. Employers may be surprised at the facility with which the members of this generation will cobble together solutions for learning on their own using available technology



and sharing. Seasoned workers may struggle at times to embrace developments such as artificial intelligence, gamification, and 5G networks. The members of Generation Z feel immediately comfortable learning these technologies. The obstacle for many employers will be getting these newcomers to accept that not every solution can be found on an app or a screen.

This generation will expect training to be delivered through learning management systems that include video, quizzes, games, and other visually



stimulating elements. They will also expect it to be mobile, accessible on a tablet or smart phone from anywhere at any time. Instructional videos and content will not have to be highly produced. These young contributors have been watching entertaining and provoking videos clips for years. Employers' time will be better spent producing many short instructional segments, using a smart phone and a selfie-stick.

Outside of instructional technology, this generation will embrace opportunities for coaching and mentoring. They, more than previous generations, will be comfortable doing so using platforms such as Skype, Zoom, or the organization's proprietary application. They will recognize the need to build and hone the wide variety of skills necessary to thrive long-term. Like the Millennials and Xers before them, they are impatient to learn. They recognize the value of certificates, credentialing, and other indications of expertise. These will enable them to enhance value to the organization and, at the same time, build leverage for increased compensation, better positions and career opportunities.

Corporate Social Responsibility – The members of Generation Z have come of age hearing a diversity of messages about how corporations contribute, or should contribute, to the community. All of this has been rolled into the term “corporate social responsibility.” As young workers evaluate potential employers, one of their litmus tests will be whether they perceive the organization as a good corporate

citizen.¹⁵ They will expect the organization to be community focused, environmentally responsible and “woke” when dealing with the diversity of people on its payroll. These responsibilities include concerns about the climate, recycling, social justice, along with efforts to end inequality. Most young employees are not radical in their expectations about these issues. But they still expect the corporation they work for to take an active role in these topics. The leaders of most organizations understand this. Far fewer do an effective job communicating it to those working for them.

Strategy and Tactics

Here's what we recommend for integrating these young contributors into your team:

Recruiting must be stimulating and engaging – This cohort has come of age immersed in non-stop distractions, messaging and entertainment. As a result, everyone trying to connect with them has a difficult time getting and keeping their attention. Now it's your turn. Regardless of the position they are applying for, most will begin on a mobile device. Therefore, your website needs to be [mobile-optimized](#) since these individuals turn to the device in their hands first. (If the pages on your website need to be squeezed and expanded with a thumb and forefinger on a smart phone, your site is not mobile-optimized.) Hint: Ask a small group in their early twenties to critique your site over a pizza. Then implement their suggestions.

Your goal should be to “stop the scroll.” In other words, what online videos, images, or words will compel your targeted job prospects to stop and read or watch what you have to say? This is true on both your website and in social media. Understandably, this is a process of trial and error. Hint: Get the twenty-somethings on your team to participate. What kind of messaging would attract their attention?

Consider posting short video testimonials from those who find their jobs rewarding. These do not need to be highly polished productions. Simply walking around the workplace with a smart phone will suffice. Capture the genuine enthusiasm and words from those you approach. Get them to talk about the culture, teamwork, friends, compensation, and career opportunities. Take the best clips and edit them into a three-minute video you can post on your website and social media. There is nothing better than “social proof” to connect with the members of Generation Z.

Make the application process as seamless as possible. Generation Z, like most of us, have little patience for completing steps they view as unnecessary. “If companies like Amazon, Target and Walmart can deliver a product or service with one click,” they wonder, “Why can’t I apply for a job in the same way.” Whether this is fair, it is today’s reality. Be sure you have an “employment opportunities” tab or button on your home page. This should link to a robust landing page that sells prospects on the idea of working for you, rather than just providing an application. For example, accounting firm Price Waterhouse Coopers now allows applicants to interview online by answering questions on video.

Review the recruiting efforts of other organizations competing for the same talent and use similar approaches. If you are a smaller firm, learn from your larger competitors. They’ve spent a lot of time and treasure developing their approaches to these individuals. Some larger firms, for instance, employ social media recruiters to seek out potential candidates. If your organization does not have the resources for this, you can still offer [live chat](#) technology to instantly engage those who want to ask a couple of questions or find out more. The cost for this service is generally about \$100 per month. You and your colleagues

can take turns monitoring it. In some cases, your organization may already be using live chat to handle customer inquiries. Hint: Develop a list of typical questions prospects ask along with suitable answers to assist those staffing live chat. This will also maintain accuracy and consistency.

Develop relationships with schools and faculty in the community. As with previous generations, a good word from a trusted instructor may be just what it takes to push a top engineering, chemistry or marketing student in your direction. Visit local colleges. Make your presence known through sponsorships. Offer facility tours. Offer internships. Recruit students to work on projects. Sponsor engineering contests. Ask instructors about teaching classes and making presentations that will bring you in contact with students.

Be timely. Prompt responses to on-line applications and inquires will get these relationships off to a good start. There may be a shortage of talent ready to join your ranks, but job search is still a lonely and emotional process. Recruitment and selection are more about the right match than the right credentials. Even a short message acknowledging the submitted application lets candidates know that they not being dropped into a black hole in human resources. Hint: Applicants talk to each other. Become the organization known for having outstanding and timely communication.

Make onboarding a positive, but basic experience – For many members of Generation Z, the job they accept out of high school, or even college, will be their first wage-paid employment. As a result, they will be unfamiliar with many job essentials. These include such basics as what to wear, how to read a paycheck, and conventions about attendance and punctuality. Creating a short video that outlines these essentials accomplishes three objectives: 1) It provides basic information that will help new hires arrive on the first day with an understanding of how your workplace works, 2) It saves staff time and provides a consistent message, and 3) It can be sent ahead of the first day, so new hires will feel more comfortable when they arrive.

Be granular in this video. Topics should include what to wear, when to arrive, where to park,

mobile phone use on the job, when people are paid, and any other insights you think would be helpful. The video itself does not have to be highly produced. In fact, an informal production may be more effective, since this is the type of thing Gen Z is used to watching. Make sure it is hosted by someone in their twenties. (Middle-aged HR managers and senior executives need not apply.) Hint: Ask people who have been hired in the past six months what they wish they would have known as they arrived on the first day. Then include these items.

Make training stimulating, basic and mobile

– The members of Generation Z have been educated in a digital world. Rather than reading books, they’ve watched videos. They’ve written term papers on smart phones. They’ve played instructional games. They’ve created multi-media slide shows instead of traditional presentations. Along the way, they’ve been rewarded with points, tokens, trophies, and other kinds of recognition. This is a far cry from the talking-head lectures and four-inch text books previous generations endured. As they enter the energy industry and your organization in particular, they will expect to learn this same way. Many companies are already working to integrate these applications and approaches into the training and development provided in all aspects of the work. But due to time and expense, this will be a long and evolutionary journey.

Given the ease and affordability of video technology and learning management platforms, “develop your own” training resources are a viable and cost-effective option. Instruction delivered via video offers several advantages:

- 1) It responds to Gen Z’s desire to watch instead of read,
- 2) Segments can be watched numerous times for reinforcement,
- 3) Content can be delivered on mobile devices in any environment,
- 4) It saves staff time and expense,
- 5) The content is delivered consistently.

Restaurant chain, Ruby Tuesday for example, provides phone-based videos to teach young workers how to prepare its menu items. 6) Outcomes can be measured using a [learning management system](#) (LMS). Currently, there are more than 100 LMS platforms offered online for as little as \$100 per month. There are also a host of LMS developers available to build your courses and teach you how to modify them as content evolves.

Provide clear and specific communication protocols

– The members of Generation Z have been well documented about their hesitation to make phone calls or speak with others face-to-face. While they may have been able to escape these practices in school, today’s workplace still relies on this type of communication to do business. The emergence of this hesitation can be attributed to a number of sources. The bottom line is that many in this generation will need to be instructed on the appropriate form of communication for working both internally and externally.



Create a basic outline of how day-to-day communication is conducted within your organization. Having grown reliant on texting and social media platforms, the members of Gen Z will find this helpful as they learn to navigate your workplace. These should be guidelines, of course, not rules. Include them in new employee orientations and provide a few examples: “This is when we typically send an e-mail. This is when we typically write a letter. This is when we typically make a call. This is when it is okay to text.” While this may appear to be overly simplistic, it will prevent some frustrations and awkward moments. It will also encourage these young contributors to be more proactive in communicating with others.

Compel the development of decision making

– Sadly, managers are finding that many members of Generation Z struggle to think and act independently. Employers, in general, rate just 22% of college graduates as being well prepared to think critically, according to the American

Association of Colleges and Universities.¹⁶ While this phenomenon can be attributed to a number of sources, supervisors will find that substantial coaching may be required when it comes to problem solving and critical thinking.



Begin by assessing these skills during the selection process. (Graduating with great grades does not mean you're a good problem solver.) Extended simulations are the best way to evaluate an applicant's ability and confidence in working independently. Extended simulations compel applicants to deal with what will happen regularly on the job. Virtually anyone can survive a ten-minute role play or exercise. Two hours of dealing with "customer" calls, developing plans for a project, or facilitating a meeting goes a long way toward demonstrating their patience, creativity, confidence, perseverance, skills, and ability to deal with setbacks. You may complain that implementing this kind of process is time consuming. But remember that hiring can be a \$50,000 decision, just for the first year of employment. In a tight labor market, you may still choose to hire those who struggle in these simulations. But at least you'll know where to start when bringing them up to speed.

Once each person is on board, provide instruction on how decisions are made within the organization. Discuss case studies with young professionals. Pose practical problems that compel them to think on their feet. Assign

a project and ask them to develop a solution or approach and then explain their reasoning. The purpose here is not to trip them up, but rather to help them build on processes they learned in school. Ask managers and supervisors to meet regularly with new hires to coach them on their critical thinking. This does not have to be in an office or conference room. It can be over coffee, in the field, during a conference, after a meeting, anytime you perceive there is a teachable moment. Hint: Work with managers and supervisors on how to do this in a supportive and non-judgmental way. The members of Gen Z will not respond well to the traditional "baptism by fire" that many seasoned workers endured in the past.

Like all newcomers to your organization, the members of Generation Z will require some time to adapt to the manner in which day-to-day decisions are made. This may be more of a stretch for some however, since many lack the experience of previous jobs. After all, solving technical problems is one thing. Learning how "work works" is something else.

Meet Generation Z where it is during supervision. Today's supervisors will need to maintain a balance between the management style they may have grown up with and the strategies for connecting with today's young people. This does not mean you have to meet all their expectations, of course. Expressing an empathy for the transition they are making from school to work will go a long way to developing the trust that compels them to throw themselves into the job. As mentioned above, anxiety is an ongoing concern for many members of this age group. So much so, that employers are making provisions for handling it. Accounting firm Ernst & Young, for example, offers "We Care," a mental health program that provides a hotline for struggling workers.¹⁷

Being completely honest from the get-go is the best strategy. This may cause some discomfort at first. Most will rise to the occasion within few days or weeks, however. Provide clear and specific instruction. Increase the frequency of your feedback and focus on specific examples of what they're doing right. Rather than saying, "You're doing a good job," say, "I was impressed with how strategic you were in the way you designed that



project.” Rather than saying, “You’re doing okay in talking with customers,” say, “I liked the way you handed that impatient customer. You didn’t let her emotion get to you.” Providing specific examples demonstrates that you’re focused on performance.

When it comes to correcting performance, be just as strategic in what you say. The members of Generation Z, like everyone else, will appreciate clear insights on how they can improve, rather than generic comments like, “You’ve got to do a better job.” As much as some have complained of their fragile temperaments, be careful with your assumptions. In most cases, clear expectations for improvement will be met with enthusiasm for getting “it” right the next time.

Finally, recognize that the members of Generation Z will be intimately connected with their peers, both inside and outside the organization. In other words, they talk to each other about supervision styles, managers, projects, and other topics. Rumors, hearsay, and negative comments via social media can impact morale, along with recruiting and retention efforts.

Communicate a clear vision of career progression
– The media is rife with stories of people who have earned unbelievable money simply by launching

a new product or building a new app. Where the Millennials embraced these visions, the members of Generation Z aren’t so sure. More than Millennials, Generation Z is circumspect about their opportunities in the marketplace. Having lived through the economic downturn of a decade ago and watched older siblings struggle to find work, they recognize that there’s no such thing as job security.

In addition, many are saddled with thousands in student loan debt, which will hinder their ability to make larger life and purchasing decisions for quite some time. This phenomenon has focused their minds about making job-related decisions that will serve them well in the future.

At the same time, this generation perceives employment through a contractual lens. They are willing to work hard and invest their energy. But they will not hesitate to move on if a better opportunity presents itself. They will be happy to put in extra hours if they know there is a payoff. They recognize that some seasons in the year require more effort, for instance. They will be okay with that, if they know they will receive compensatory time to make up for it later. The top performers will see this as an investment in their careers. But it’s helpful to make their outcomes clear.



Clear and consistent communication will ensure better productivity and retention. The members of this cohort will be anxious to embrace the opportunities around them and earn a good standard of living. Managers and supervisors should make a point of having formal conversations about each person's career aspirations and the opportunities within the organization at least once per year. In addition, informal conversations will keep supervisors abreast of how each one of their aspirants is feeling about the job, organization and their prospects.

Provide both formal and informal opportunities for growth and development. As with the Millennials, the members of Generation Z equate credentials with their value in the marketplace. The more degrees, internships, certificates and other accomplishments they can earn, they more leverage they believe they will have when the next opportunity comes along. Staying on top of this phenomenon enables top employers to retain the best of their talent for a long time.

Tout the organization's role in the community

– As mentioned above, the members of Generation Z are more concerned with the organization's contributions to the community than previous age groups. This interest in "corporate social responsibility" may drive their decision about working for your organization.

In addition, it will be a part of their expectations once on board. Explore what you can do to demonstrate the organization's active interest and involvement in the community. There is no need to take a political stand. Simply supporting these issues through community sponsorships, promotions, time off for volunteering and the like, will communicate to these emerging contributors that your company is a socially responsible organization.

A final note: Avoid lumping Millennials and Gen Z together

– The Millennials have had an outsized impact on our society over the past decade. This is partially because of their numbers and partially because of their mastery of social media. Then there is their claim to be "America's next great generation," as the book Millennials Rising was subtitled 15 years ago. But all of this should be kept in context.

The members of Generation Z are not proving to be as outspoken about their generational identity as the Millennials. Of course, we have only seen the leading edge of this cohort enter the workplace. Employers sometimes lump anyone in their thirties and younger into the Millennial category because the term has become so pervasive. While this may not be a big issue right now, the nation's 74 million "Zers" will demand to be differentiated over time. So, saying things like, "All these Millennials are driving me nuts," or "How do you think the Millennials will like this?" will not be well received by those who see significant differences. After all, even the older Millennials are starting to say, "What's wrong with this younger generation?"

Over the next decade, the US workforce will change dramatically as seasoned contributors are replaced by both Millennials and the members of Generation Z. This transition, like many, will evolve slowly but steadily. The organizations that grasp the reality of these changes and respond in a timely way, will be rewarded with a pool of talent well-prepared worker as the industry itself continues to evolve.

How about yours?

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