

Retaining Gen Z in the Workplace: Blending the Ingredients that Matter Most



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Article Summary:

This article examines how managers can better retain Gen Z employees by *blending* key *ingredients* like communication, flexibility, motivation, and collaboration. Strong, consistent communication, especially face-to-face, lays the foundation for building trust and conveying company culture. Flexibility is critical, as Gen Z craves customizable work schedules beyond the traditional 9 to 5 model. They also place a high value on work-life balance, often preferring meaningful rewards over traditional social activities. Motivation must be personalized, recognizing that individuals define success differently and that building trust during onboarding is essential. Creating opportunities for self-paced learning through gamification can also engage Gen Z employees and encourage continuous skill development. By fostering diverse teams and embracing new learning approaches, managers can help Gen Z find meaning and purpose in their work.

Imagine your management style as a personalized approach, like crafting the perfect smoothie with a unique blend tailored to each employee's taste.



For the first time in history, five generations—from Traditionalists to Gen Z—are working together, shaping a more diverse and multi-generational workforce. When a new generation transitions to the workforce, organizations must shift to think creatively about supporting this new group of employees in new ways. Each generation has characteristics and qualities which make their population unique. As Generation Z begins transitioning to entry-level jobs, managers must start analyzing what that means for daily operations and workflow to ensure this generation feels welcomed and supported!

WHO IS GENERATION Z?

Generation Z, or Gen Z as they are often referred, are typically individuals born between 1995 and 2010. Gen Z is the most racially diverse generation to date. They tend to be passionate about inclusion because of personal experience with racial and religious discrimination. Traditionally, research has shown that employees prefer to interact with employees of the same identities to have a sense of similarity with others. However, Gen Z values learning from one another and incorporating diverse perspectives when creatively problem-solving.

When considering each generation's characteristics it is beneficial to consider significant events they have experienced that may influence personal values and world views. This generation experienced the tragic attack on September 11th, 2001, witnessing the economic crash at an early age. Gen Z watched loved ones struggling with job insecurity and, as a result, learned from a young age that even loyal employees with a strong work ethic might not get a job or lose a job. This increased anxiety around job security for this generation.

Another significant event for this generation is that some members of Gen Z began transitioning to the workforce during a global pandemic. With increased job insecurity, Gen Z has proven to be one of the most entrepreneurial generations yet. Researchers believe we will continue to see increases in self-employment opportunities thanks to this generation. But whether employed at a company or self-employed, research has found that the majority of Gen Z hoped to seek careers that positively impact the world. Gen Z often present with a strong work ethic, loyalty, compassion, thoughtfulness, open-mindedness, and determination.

BLENDING GENERATIONS

Knowing these characteristics and concerns of Gen Z is valuable to help employers think strategically about creating opportunities to retain. Each generation has its own unique identities, values, and preferences. Because of these qualities managers often face the challenge of bridging the gaps between team members, for example, one generation may prefer face-to-face conversations while others thrive on digital platforms like Slack.

Imagine your management style as a personalized approach, like crafting the perfect smoothie with a unique blend tailored to each employee's taste. Everyone has a different preference, so customizable options are essential. By embracing these diverse preferences, you can create a team that thrives! This article will explore the key ingredients for engaging and retaining Gen Z talent. Think of it as your smoothie recipe for building a thriving, multigenerational team.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION: COMMUNICATION AS THE KEY INGREDIENT

Research has found that communication is one of the greatest values to Gen Z. It is helpful for managers to communicate the organization's working expectations to be transparent with employees. Frequently communicating clear goals helps this generation better understand what to work towards. For a generation that grew up surrounded by technology, you may be surprised to learn that Gen Z prefers face-to-face communication with supervisors and colleagues. To foster smooth and consistent interactions with your team, clarify your communication expectations.

Research has shown that consistent and frequent communication is ideal for this generation as they seek clear expectations and goals.

In-person communication has incredible benefits:

- Conveying company culture
- Building camaraderie among teams
- Picking up on non-verbal cues

TIP FOR MANAGERS

Consider communication as the base of your smoothie – the essential foundation that supports the remainder that follows.

BLENDING FLEXIBILITY: CUSTOMIZING WORK SCHEDULES FOR GEN Z

In response to COVID-19, companies adapted to virtual work quickly, allowing employees to experience the advantages of a flexible schedule. However, that does not mean everyone who experienced this world event felt that working remotely is the best strategy for themselves or the organization.

Research found that Gen Z doesn't want to be tied to a desk during a 9-to-5 job. They enjoy learning, working, and studying whenever and wherever desired.

Managers should consider different customizable options, including:

- Specific in-office days to focus on collaborative projects.
- Hybrid models where employees are encouraged to work on their independent project management on remote days.
- Flexing the typical 9-to-5 hours that accommodate an employee's preferred work schedule (for companies that are non-client facing).

We all have different preferences.
What might you add?



ADDING FLAVOR: MOTIVATING THE YOUNGEST WORKFORCE

Understanding what drives an employee's work ethic can be beneficial when thinking about how to motivate supervisees. Motivation thrives on positive job satisfaction and on job security. Knowing that job insecurity is a sensitive area for Gen Z who is transitioning into the workforce during a challenging time, employers might benefit from reassuring Gen Z employees during the hiring and onboarding process to build trust with these individuals.

Research on generational values reveals complexity. While some prioritize family, friends, and leisure, others focus on intrinsic motivation. These contradictions remind us that individuals define success differently – we can't assume we know something about someone based solely on their generation.

Like preferred smoothie flavors motivation influences everyone differently.

TIP FOR MANAGERS

Get to know your employees.
How do their strengths motivate them?
Delegating tasks and responsibilities based on strengths and motivations will ensure a high-performing team.



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UNIQUE TOPPINGS: FINDING ALTERNATIVE WAYS TO STAY CONNECTED

While getting to know your colleagues outside of the work setting used to be welcomed, this is not as appealing for all members of Gen Z. Think of these gatherings like extra toppings in your smoothie; opinions are divided.

Despite growing up with social media at their fingertips, Gen Z prefers keeping their personal lives private from their work colleagues. They have seen the challenges their parents have navigated when it comes to work-life balance, and they strongly prioritize that division.

Based on your conversations with Gen Z, you may find they are more motivated if funds support their overall compensation rather than fleeting socialization activities.

Remember, as the workplace continues to evolve, so are employee expectations and values.

TIP FOR MANAGERS

Get to know your team and what they prioritize. This knowledge can help influence what social events look like to celebrate your team and their accomplishments.

Through strong communication, customization, motivation and collaboration, you can have a nutritious, delicious smoothie with plenty of sustenance to help you support your employees from various generational identities!

REASSESSING THE RECIPE: THE ROLE OF GAMIFICATION IN LEARNING

One of the largest areas of generational difference is technology since each generation has had a different level of exposure to the ever-changing hardware. With technology at the fingertips of this generation they can self-learn by using platforms such as Google and YouTube to get an answer almost immediately. Incorporating technology into the workplace can help Gen Z continue to learn in an instant.

Gamification is on the rise as it supports multiple learning preferences by utilizing technology for self-paced learning. Creating learning opportunities that are embedded in technical platforms can motivate this generation to explore and complete additional training opportunities outside of their structured workflow.

Depending on what training looks like for your employees, managers might consider utilizing a tool that can adapt training processes to a gamification platform.

TIP FOR MANAGERS

Explore platforms to help foster skill development and enrich one's experience at a company. What else can your employees learn?



BALANCING THE BLEND: BUILDING DIVERSE, COLLABORATIVE TEAMS

With Gen Z being one of the most diverse generation we have seen. These employees value different perspectives in group settings. In the workplace, Gen Z views colleagues as someone to collaborate with rather than working for, prioritizing equality and teamwork over hierarchy. Moments of collaboration from employees in various departments allow teammates to work together to creatively solve a problem for the company, which is something Generation Z values.

In other words, let's make our smoothies and share them with one another! When working collaboratively, prioritizing equality and teamwork is necessary to ensure that all perspectives are considered and that skilled employees are working on tasks that align with their strengths.

TIP FOR MANAGERS

Creating diverse groups and allowing time for employees to share what they have learned will only contribute to learning and collaborating with their colleagues.

BLENDING IT ALL TOGETHER

When working to support individual employees with multiple backgrounds and perspectives, it is impossible to have a one size that fits all model for the benefit of every employee on staff. Instead, through strong communication, customization, motivation and collaboration, you can create a blend that helps support your employees from various generational identities!



A CALL TO ACTION

While each smoothie will look different depending on how you customize it, so will each supervisory style. Consider these four tips that can help influence change with your team:

1. Emphasize the importance of an in-office day where teams can collaborate face-to-face to enhance the learning and creativity among diverse teams.

2. Get to know your staff! What are their values? What motivates them? This will help managers customize their supervisory style.

3. Actively listen to your employees to understand what they value. What is the best way to recognize your team and foster connection? Would a happy hour work? Or maybe a catered lunch?

4. Prioritize diverse groups when working towards a goal together. This allows for different perspectives to be represented when solving problems.

MEET THE AUTHOR

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Paige is a dedicated higher education professional with a specialization in career development. She earned her MA in Student Affairs in Higher Education from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and began her career as a Career Advisor for Arts, Creativity, and Media at Colgate University. Transitioning to full-time work during the global pandemic presented unique challenges and sparked Paige's interest in how the workforce adapted to these unprecedented circumstances. Her passion and insights led her to Villanova University, where she now serves as the Assistant Director of Professional Development in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Paige is enrolled in the MS in Human Resource Development at Villanova University. She is expected to graduate in Spring 2026 and aims to integrate her academic studies with her professional role to make a significant impact in the field of professional development.

