

Recruiting and Retaining Generation Z in the Workforce¹

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Introduction

Generations are a multi-faceted dynamic to any work environment. We are currently existing in a time where we see more generations engaged in the workforce or as a consumer than ever before in American history (Pew Research Center, 2020). By 2030, Generation Z will reach 30% of the workforce as we experience 10,000 Baby Boomers reaching retirement age daily (Sathesh Kumar, 2023). The newest generation to enter the conversation is Generation Z, individuals born between 1997–2012 (Pew Research Center, 2015). As we adapt our workforce to meet the needs of the upcoming generation, it is imperative to know how to recruit and retain these individuals while balancing a shortage of available employees. This publication focuses on strategies of recruitment and retention of Generation Z employees for people positioned to manage and hire within the agriculture and natural resources industry.

Generation Z

Members of Generation Z have unique circumstances that have influenced their development, similarly to every generation before them. The main difference is the access and ease of navigability with technology (Racolta-Paina & Irini, 2021; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Generation Z are true digital natives and likely do not remember a world without cell phones or instantaneous communication. This has exacerbated their interest and desire for flexible workplace

accommodations and the rise of remote work. The members of Generation Z are the most diverse generation to date (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). They value diversity and expect workplaces to foster an inclusive environment to all. The COVID-19 pandemic is potentially the most influential event that impacted Generation Z. The pandemic likely derailed years of their schooling and shifted the reality of what education looks like. This has impacted their mental health and has created a lack of work-life boundaries due to ease of connectivity.

Best Practices for Recruitment of Generation Z Employees

Identify Transfer Students as a Potential Audience.

University costs continue to rise. Being the most educated generation to date does not necessarily equate with having access to a four-year degree (Racolta-Paina & Irini, 2021). Students who complete a two-year degree, typically an associate degree, at a state college have the opportunity to transfer to a four-year university and receive a bachelor's degree. At four-year institutions, these students are referred to as transfer students due to their shortened time on-campus. When comparing resumes of a student who is considered a transfer student with a four-year university student, there is no difference in the degree or the diploma. However, this shortened timespan may result in less

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opportunity to engage in extracurriculars and internships compared to four-year degree recipients who are at one university for the entirety of their degree. Make job postings “transfer-friendly” and highlight the need for students who have a good work ethic in lieu of a strong extracurricular resume.

Look Beyond Collegiate Degree Recipients.

The rising cost of university tuition continues to be a barrier for students. Many students have interest in working in fields where specialty skills are prioritized, and they are foregoing the traditional degree in lieu of trade schools. If you are looking for an employee with a specialized skillset, recruit these students by partnering with local career and technical organizations in the secondary school system. Many students are looking for career opportunities and are willing to explore fields beyond academic futures.

Highlight Your Organization’s Values.

Generation Z is value-driven (Stahl, 2021). Rather than knowing an organization’s values, Generation Z is committed to ensuring organizations live up to what is stated in their policy. When recruiting these individuals as employees, publicly display your values but also be prepared to share how you demonstrate them. In the eyes of Generation Z, values must be living elements of your organization rather than an organizational checkbox.

Do Not Let a Young Employee Deter You.

While age should never be a determining factor in a hiring decision, it is important to keep check on your personal biases. Generation Z are joining the workforce at younger ages as they have many opportunities to engage with collegiate coursework before high school graduation (Racolta-Paina & Irini, 2021). They are often entering the workforce over-educated and under-qualified. To accommodate this, think about your organization’s onboarding system. How are you preparing individuals new to the workforce to be productive, successful employees?

Best Practices for Retention of Generation Z Employees

Outline Opportunities for Advancement in Your Organization.

In previous generations, the best way to advance was to stay in an organization since loyalty was rewarded with promotions. In recent years, it has proven to be more prosperous

to jump from opportunity to opportunity to advance your salary and position. With a well-structured succession plan or organizational structure, members of Generation Z are more likely to stay (Sathesh Kumar, 2023). This generation is hyperaware of outside opportunities and will expect to be compensated accordingly.

Highlight Opportunities for Professional Development.

Generation Z will likely need to freshen up their professional skills upon entrance into the workforce. As young employees, it is likely they have less experience networking and navigating the political climates of organizations. Finding ways to train or expand on professional skills is something that members of Generation Z see favorably due to their competitive spirit (Sathesh Kumar, 2023). Consider coordinating internal professional development opportunities or offering training stipends to allow employees to find trainings that meet their specific needs.

Establish Personal Connections.

Generation Z highly values face-to-face relationships (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). As a generation who was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, many members of Generation Z have reported wanting to make up for lost time in the workforce. Consider implementing a formalized mentorship program at your workplace. This allows members of Generation Z to have a safe space to go asking professional questions which can make navigating the professional workplace feel more personal. Beyond a formalized program, consider inviting members of Generation Z to one-on-one interactions like coffee or lunch to learn more about them beyond their existence as an employee.

Keep Health as a Priority.

Generation Z is highly focused on health—both physical and mental. Rather than going with the status quo, members of Generation Z expect radical change to be made to disrupt broken systems (Racolta-Paina & Irini, 2021; Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Encouraging employee well-being and supporting those who engage in those systems are viewed positively. Encourage a healthy work-life balance among your employees through a stigma-free work culture. Encourage use of paid time off and highlight wellness events around your organization’s location.

Conclusion

Generation Z is making their presence known in the workforce. As they continue to push on organizational policies, consider how much your organization can flex to

try novel concepts. Continuing labor shortages need all available employees to find their space in an organization, particularly in our nation's most vital industries. Explore how you recruit members of Generation Z through creating alternative paths to employment, highlighting organizational values, and considering a diverse candidate pool. Retention is just as important as individuals continue to want pathways for advancement, opportunities for training, and commitment to health. Today's new employee will be tomorrow's future executive.

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