Welcoming Generation Z to the Workplace

Agents of Change

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It's 1995. The newly minted college graduates hail from Generation X—the "lost" generation. As they enter a workplace that's on the edge of the digital world, a new generation also begins with the babies born that year.

In a few short years, the 2000s will usher in new ways to communicate, collaborate and get work done through the internet and technology. The decade will also welcome the first wave of Millennial employees into the workplace; they will bring a new set of values, preferences and behaviors to organizations.

Over the next two decades, organizations will strive to create multigenerational spaces where all members of the workplace can thrive. In that same time frame, those babies born in 1995 have grown up, completed their education and are about to embark on their next chapter. Generation Z is here and ready to get to work.

Born between **1995 and 2010**

Meet Gen Z
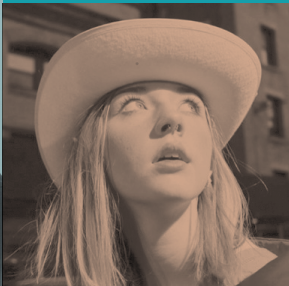
Makes up more than **20% of the U.S. population and 17.6% of the Canadian population**

Who Is Generation Z?

In the U.S., Generation Z is composed of more than 66 million young people born between 1995 and 2010, which makes up 20% of the U.S. population.[1] In Canada, they number 6.6 million, or 17.6% of the population.[2] Globally, members of Generation Z were projected to number more than 2.4 billion and make up 32% of the population by 2019.[3] With Generation Z growing up and beginning to enter the workforce, the question arises: Are organizations ready to attract, support, engage and retain Generation Z talent?

To fully understand Generation Z as employees and team members, it is important to start with recognizing the various societal events and context that have shaped their generational cohort. First, Generation Z has never known a world without the internet. For much of their lives, Gen Zers have actively used smartphones, tablets and mobile technology. While older generations also use these devices, they've had to adapt and learn, whereas internet and mobile technology has been intertwined in Generation Z's upbringing, impacting how they communicate, connect, learn, seek information, behave as consumers and navigate the world.

48% identify as nonwhite

Wield **$143 billion** in purchasing power

81% believe they have the personality to create positive change in this world

Sources: Seemiller & Grace, Pew Research Center, Barnes and Noble College.

Additionally, Generation Z is growing up in a more diverse peer cohort[4] and environments where more mainstream conversations regarding inclusion and equality are taking place. Members of Generation Z have not only lived through the rise of the Black Lives Matter Movement, witnessing its impact across culture and commerce, but many are active participants as well.

Even beyond race and ethnicity, Generation Z is being shaped by the many diverse identities they possess in regard to sexual orientation, gender identity, ability and more. Generation Zers see identity as fluid and intersectional and that binary identity options don't fully capture who they are as individuals or as a peer cohort.

They also experienced the coronavirus pandemic in their formative years, disrupting their academic and social lives. Its long-term impact is yet to be realized, but many expect that this generation's economic prospects will be significantly diminished due to the effects of Covid-19.

Regardless of the environment or scenario, understanding Generation Z's sources of motivation is critical to engaging them as employees and team members. A study of college students found that the primary sources of motivation for Generation Z include relationships, passion and achievement.[5] In regard to relationships, Generation Z is motivated by wanting to make a difference for others and not wanting to let others down.[6] These forms of relational motivation extend beyond just wanting to be liked or to fit in, but stem into the importance of true and authentic relationships and connections. Further, their passion-oriented motivation is associated with wanting to have a cause or issue they can advocate for.[7] These can be large, macro societal issues such as climate change, or smaller, personal concerns such as their neighborhood or workplace, but Generation Z wants to contribute to something that makes a difference. Finally, Generation Z is motivated by achievement in the form of receiving credit for effort and opportunities for advancement.[8]

Understanding Generations

When Gen Zers enter the workplace, they won't be joining organizations solely made up of peers from their own cohort. More likely, they will enter a workplace comprised of employees from at least four different generations. Some workplaces may even include members of a fifth generation, the 4% of the Silent Generation who are still working.[9] Each brings their own set of perspectives, values, behaviors and preferences that will influence how they go about work and how they work with other generations. Getting to know each generation is the first step toward creating thriving, harmonious workplaces where cross-generational collaboration and innovation can take place.

Each generational cohort's shared values, perspectives and behaviors will stem from a number of societal influences. Often looking to technological advancements, social issues, political and governmental events and the economy can help identify the defining effects on each generational cohort, which is an important first step to understanding differences between generations. Simply, the world that each generation grows up in is vastly different than it was for those before and those who

Gen Z Make-Up by Race
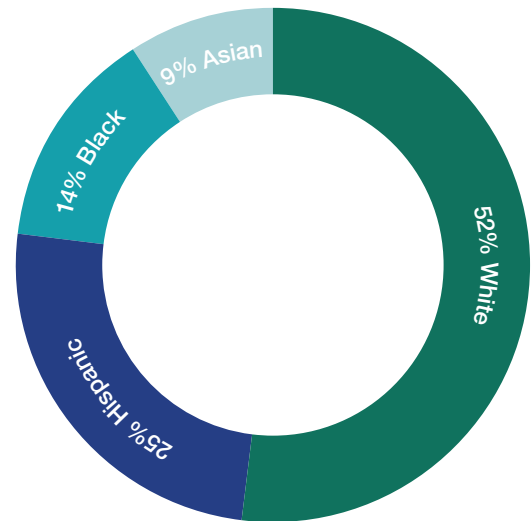
According to the Pew Research Center, diversity is an expectation for Generation Z as almost half of young people consider themselves a minority in terms of race and/or gender identification.

Major Events Shaping the Lives of Generation Z

2001 Events of September 11 bring U.S. to war

2005 YouTube brings DIY video to the masses

2007 iPhone launched, bringing new levels of connectivity and technological mobility

2008 Worldwide financial crises

2009 Barack Obama takes office as first Black U.S. president; Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") signed into law

2010 Instagram launches, adding new ways to communicate, connect and share

2011 TikTok launches in China

2017 Uber launches, exemplifying the gig and sharing economies; MeToo movement gains traction

2020 Coronavirus leads to global pandemic; high-profile racial incidents catalyze expansion of Black Lives Matter activism; Kamala Harris elected first female U.S. Vice President

As identified by Monster and news sources, major world and national events have shaped the viewpoint of members of Generation Z.

Silent Generation

1926–1945

Workplace Behaviors & Traits

+ Strong work ethic
+ Respect for authority, loyalty

Baby Boomers

1946–1964

Workplace Behaviors & Traits

+ Defined the traditional 9 to 5 workday
+ Technology for productivity, not social interaction

Generation X

1965–1979

Workplace Behaviors & Traits

+ Pioneers of work-life balance
+ Preference for email

Millennials

1980–1994

Workplace Behaviors & Traits

+ Preference for collaborative work
+ First generation to use social media in the workplace

Generation Z

1995–2010

Workplace Behaviors & Traits

+ Fluid in work time and space
+ Preference for independent work

Adapted from Seemiller & Grace (2019)

come after. How generational cohorts react to societal events and context should be looked at through various lenses to determine whether these differences stem from life-cycle effects, cohort effects or period effects.[10] Therefore, how they experience and learn to understand the world is what drives a generation's cohort mentality and behaviors.

While there is no single best way to work with individuals or across different generations, generational research allows us to understand aggregate themes of a cohort, such as emergent trends and changes in collective behavior and shared values and perspectives. While the aggregate nature of generational studies provides a macro-level look at a generational cohort, fully understanding a generation and the true and nuanced experiences of its members can be achieved only through building individual personal relationships. Bridging together the high-level findings with focused understandings of individuals creates a more robust and accurate understanding of a generation, leading to more effective and engaging approaches to working across generations.
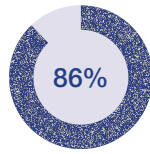
Gen Zers Seek Jobs That Align With Values & Goals

As they set out on their career planning and job searching, Generation Zers are not just focused on finding a role that fits their interests and skills, but also finding an organization that aligns
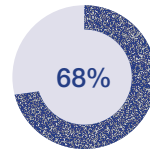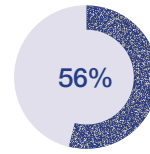
Gen Z Wants a More Accepting Society

91%
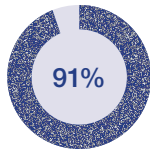
Believe that all people are equal and that they deserve to be treated as such

86%

Believe people should have the freedom to be whatever or whomever they want to be

68%

Believe that their generation is willing to embrace their own individualism more than older generations

56%

Try to participate in or effect social change by getting the word out or actively engage with issues that matter to them

Based on research by Barnes & Noble College Insights, Gen Z wants to be known as the generation that inspired social change for the better to create a society that reached more equality, acceptance and fairness.

with their values and future goals. Generational researchers Corey Seemiller and Meghan Grace identify a number of key areas that Generation Zers are looking for in their careers, including enjoyment and happiness, fulfillment and passion, the ability to make a positive impact, financial stability and opportunities for growth and advancement.[11]

Enjoyment, Happiness & Fulfillment

While Generation Zers may be fiscally concerned, they are still looking for jobs that they will enjoy and be happy doing. For more than one-quarter of Gen Zers, being able to do what they enjoy is what they are most excited about in their first jobs, which is ranked right behind higher pay.[12] A high-paying job is likely attractive, but if it doesn't bring happiness it is not likely a sustainable option for Generation Z employees.

While enjoyment and fulfillment are closely related, they can't be confused or used interchangeably. An employee can be happy at work, but not feel fulfilled for a variety of reasons. Generation Z desires jobs that are fulfilling and have connection to a greater meaning.

In a multigenerational study, nearly three-quarters of Gen Zers— more than any other generation—believe work should have a greater purpose than the financial benefits of a paycheck.[13]
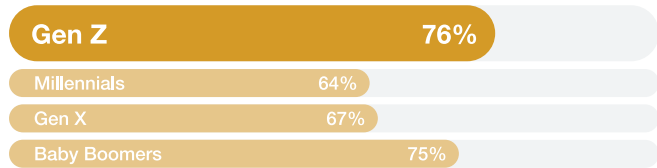
Making a Positive Impact

Motivated by making a difference, it is no surprise that Gen Zers are seeking out jobs that allow them to create a positive impact. Among graduating college seniors, 90% believe having a career that creates positive change in society is important.[14] Further, Generation Z employees rank making a difference as a bigger priority than financial incentives when considering joining a company.[15] While many in Generation Z may have their sights on world-changing contributions, making a positive impact doesn't have to be limited to finding a cure for a disease or developing a life-changing invention. The ability to make a positive impact on others and the world spans across industries and throughout levels of leadership.
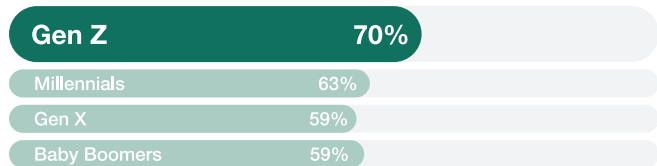
Financial Stability

While seeking greater meaning and leaving a positive impact on the world are strong motivators for Generation Zers, one of

Gen Zers Are Focused, Ambitious and in Charge of Their Careers

Responsible for driving one's own career

Gen Z	76%
Millennials	64%
Gen X	67%
Baby Boomers	75%

Motivated by money

Gen Z	70%
Millennials	63%
Gen X	59%
Baby Boomers	59%

Work has a greater purpose than earning a salary

Gen Z	70%
Millennials	45%
Gen X	40%
Baby Boomers	33%
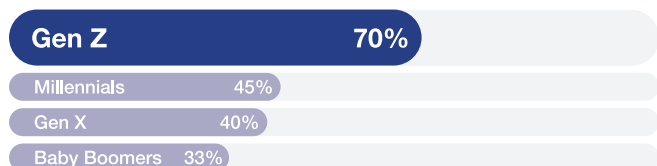
Willing to work nights and weekends for higher pay

Gen Z	58%
Millennials	45%
Gen X	40%
Baby Boomers	33%
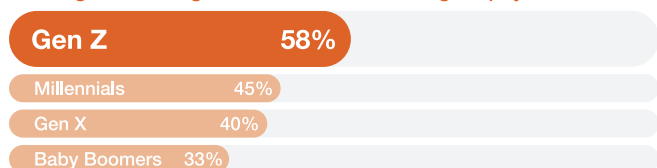
Willing to move for a good job opportunity

Gen Z	74%
Millennials	45%
Gen X	40%
Baby Boomers	33%
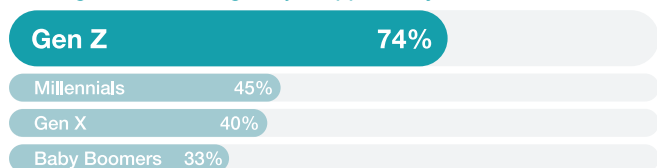
More so than previous generations, Generation Z is self-directed when it comes to career management. While motivated by money, Gen Zers feel work should have a greater purpose than simply earning a living, according to research by Monster.

their greatest concerns in work and beyond is achieving financial stability.[16] For more than half of Generation Zers, having a high-paying job is one of their ambitions, and for a little more than one-third, dissatisfaction with pay would be the top reason for leaving a job.[17]

Financial stability is very different than being extremely wealthy. Many in Generation Z view financial stability as the ability to support a modest lifestyle that is debt-free and affords them the ability to not live paycheck to paycheck. Also, owning a home and having a family—both requiring significant financial resources—are among Generation Z's top ambitions. However, there are other aspects of financial stability that are attractive to Generation Z that are not rooted solely in a paycheck. Many look to employee benefits, such as health insurance and tuition assistance, as another means of achieving financial stability.

Advancement & Growth Opportunities

Motivated by achievement, Generation Z is seeking roles that will provide experience for growth and advancement as they desire opportunities to "level up" and receive credit for their efforts.[18] This means they will be looking for jobs that afford them professional development experiences and responsibilities that will require learning new skills and expand professional knowledge. A study conducted by Deloitte found that among working members of Generation Z, one-third list not having enough opportunity to advance as their top reason for planning to leave their current job.[19]

Another key component of advancement is having a clear idea of what promotions, raises or other incentive structures look like within a role. A study by InsideOut Development found that three-quarters of Generation Zers believe they should receive a promotion within a year of being in a position. While a promotion within a year might not be feasible for all Generation Z employees, having information about how, when and why promotions are granted can alleviate frustration and set clear expectations. And, that could assist in ensuring Generation Z talent sticks around. Having these components of advancement clearly articulated allows Generation Z employees to level up by charting a path and identifying ways they can develop new skills, contribute and prepare for the next steps in their career within the company.

Learning in the Workplace

Whether it involves attending a professional conference or providing an in-company training program, learning and developmental experiences need to align with Generation Z's learning preferences and styles. Generation Z prefers a balance of intrapersonal learning and experiential learning.[20] Intrapersonal learning allows individuals to self-pace and gear their learning toward their personal preferences by exploring information on their own through reflection, reading, watching a video or completing a module. More than two-thirds of Gen Zers want to try to figure out a problem on their own utilizing the internet, books or other resources.[21]
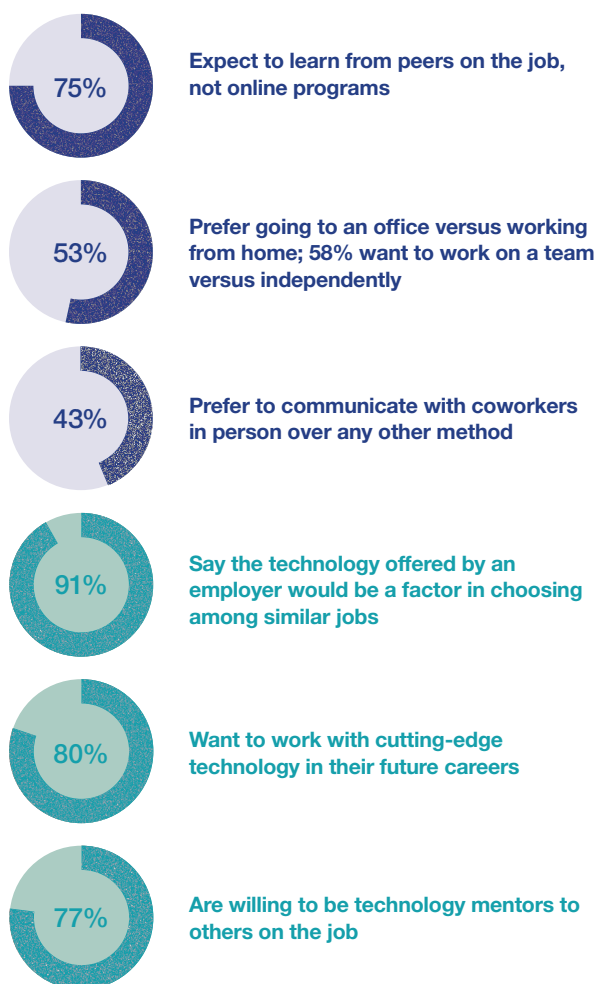
Experiential learning, such as an activity, case study or discussion, reiterates the concepts they explore individually through intrapersonal methods in hands-on and group settings. This

Key Drivers for Gen Z on the Job

70% Money/Pay

46% Ability to Pursue Passion

32% Job Security
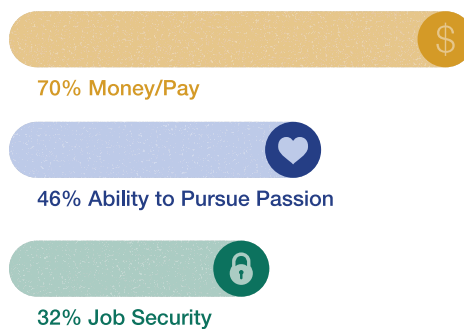
Monster.com found that money is the top motivator for Generation Z, followed by the ability to pursue their passion.

While Tech Is Important, Gen Z Yearns for More Human Connection

75% Expect to learn from peers on the job, not online programs

53% Prefer going to an office versus working from home; 58% want to work on a team versus independently

43% Prefer to communicate with coworkers in person over any other method

91% Say the technology offered by an employer would be a factor in choosing among similar jobs

80% Want to work with cutting-edge technology in their future careers

77% Are willing to be technology mentors to others on the job

Dell Technologies surveyed more than 12,000 Gen Z secondary and post-secondary students, representing 17 countries around the globe. Its research found that while technology is important to appeal to Gen Zers, the human experience is more important to their daily work experience.

allows them to prepare in ways that feel comfortable while also encouraging social interaction and human connection.

Video is also a prominent and preferred method of learning for Generation Z.[22] A study conducted by Pearson found that 82% of members of Generation Z use YouTube and nearly 60% utilize it as their preferred learning tool.[23] Video is a perfect example of an intrapersonal medium that allows Gen Zers to self-pace and engage with content on their own terms. Video is preferred by Generation Z because it is often quicker and more engaging than other methods of learning.

Generation Z's preferences for learning also have strong connections to growing up alongside the rapid expansion and evolution of video games. Video game concepts—such as mastering one level at a time before advancing to the next "world"—are now integrated into learning platforms. These gaming elements are incorporated as milestones in workplace training modules and skill development and other nondigital settings. Gamification, whether digital or not, can lead to positive effects on employee motivation, happiness and productivity in the workplace.[24]

Meaningful Relationships & Mentors

Generation Z will be seeking out meaningful and strong relationships in the workplace. More than just a matter of being able to make friends in the workplace, Gen Zers are also looking for workplace relationships that can be developmental to their current roles and their future career pursuits. In a study by Rainmaker Thinking, having positive relationships at work was ranked as one of the most important factors in a job, with more than one-quarter saying they wouldn't take a job without it.[25]

In regard to positive professional relationships, Generation Z hopes for strong mentorship within the workplace, with one-third indicating mentorship would be an important employee benefit.[26] Further, more than half of Gen Zers believe mentors are important for learning and personal development.[27] But mentoring is not a one-way transfer of knowledge and experience from mentor to mentee. Co-mentoring or reverse mentoring allows both people in a mentoring pair to learn and grow. Generation Zers' ease with technology and passion for causes are some ways they add value to a mentoring relationship with more senior associates.
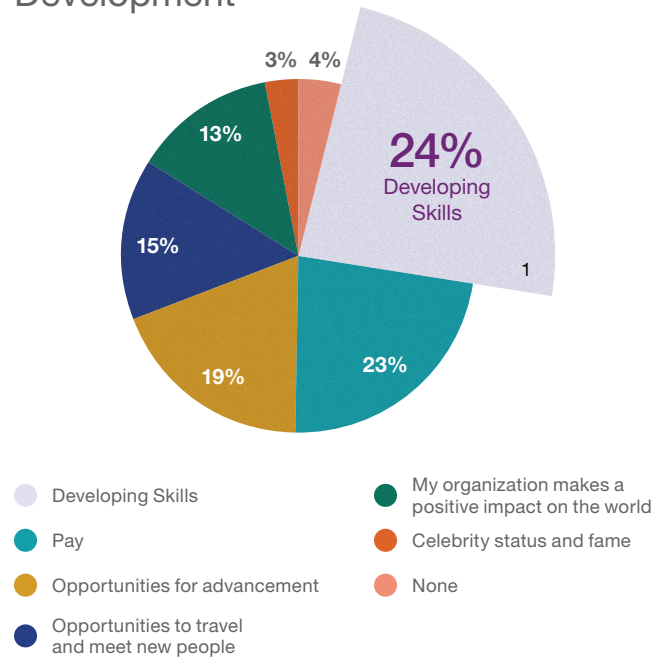
Company Traits That Appeal to Gen Z

Welcoming, Diverse & Inclusive Workplaces

Generation Z is a diverse cohort that places great value on being accepting and inclusive. Being able to express their identity and be welcomed for their individuality is something they not only hope for but expect. This stems from Generation Z being the most diverse generation to date. However, diversity does not stop at their racial or ethnic backgrounds as they view identity as intersectional and multifaceted, spanning gender, neurodiversity, ability and other characteristics.

Notably, Generation Z is championing the movement around gender identity expression and equality. They believe gender is a fluid and nonbinary identity and that society's changing

Gen Z's Top Factors for Career Development

- Developing Skills — 24%
- Pay — 23%
- Opportunities for advancement — 19%
- Opportunities to travel and meet new people — 15%
- My organization makes a positive impact on the world — 13%
- Celebrity status and fame — 3%
- None — 4%
- 1

According to research by the Varkey Foundation, members of Generation Z prioritize new-skill development, pay and opportunity for advancement when it comes to their career development.

Gen Z Values Leadership and Relationships at Work

Job factors ranked in order of importance

1. Supportive Leadership
2. Positive Relationships at Work
3. Scheduling Flexibility
4. Comfortable Workplace
5. Chance to Learn Real Skills
6. Meaningful Roles & Responsibilities

According to research by Rainmaker Thinking, of more than 4,000 respondents ages 16–23, Supportive Leadership and Positive Relationships at Work ranked as Gen Zers' top two most important factors to consider in a job.

perspective and acceptance of gender identity is positively allowing people to be more expressive of their true selves.[28] Further, the majority of Gen Zers believe in equal rights between men and women and are supportive of equal rights for transgender people.[29] While they believe in equal rights, many believe there is still work to be done to further acceptance and inclusion in regard to gender identity. Even though they personally may not identify as transgender or nonbinary, half of Generation Zers believe that society is not accepting enough of people who identify as nonbinary.[30]

Gender identity expression and conversations around how to practice gender inclusion will continue to arise as Gen Zers enter the workplace and find their fit in their careers.

Generation Z has equally strong expectations for racial equality. In the case of Black Lives Matter, Gen Zers leveraged social media to educate themselves and others about systemic racism in hopes of creating greater equity and inclusion in their lifetime.

Generation Z has grown up in an era with record numbers of individuals diagnosed with special needs, many of whom were educated in mainstream settings. Thus it would not be unusual for anyone in this generation to have grown up with peers—classmates, friends, siblings or other relatives—with ADHD, on the autism spectrum or with another condition, contributing to high awareness and tolerance of neurodiversity and other conditions.[31]

Nearly two-thirds (64%) believe good bosses and leaders make diversity and inclusion a top priority, and more than one-third of Generation Z employees believe a weak culture around diversity and inclusion would be a motivating factor in leaving a company.[32] Further, one-third believe equality is the most important cause employers should be supporting.[33] Generation Z will be looking for and sticking with companies and organizations that value diversity and practice inclusion to create a welcoming workplace culture. For a generation that cares deeply about identity expression and inclusion, a workplace practice that isolates them or their peers may be what drives them away from an organization.

Flexible Work Structure

For Gen Zers, time and space are fluid, as they don't see working hours as strictly between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m., with more than half reporting working in the evenings and on weekends if needed.[34]

In a study by Glassdoor, flexible work hours were listed in the top three "pros" of working at their job, right behind the work environment.[35] Flexible work options are attractive to Generation Zers as they can structure their work and personal life to fit their needs and interests. In one study, having work-life balance was ranked as one of the most important factors among Gen Zers when deciding to join a company.[36]
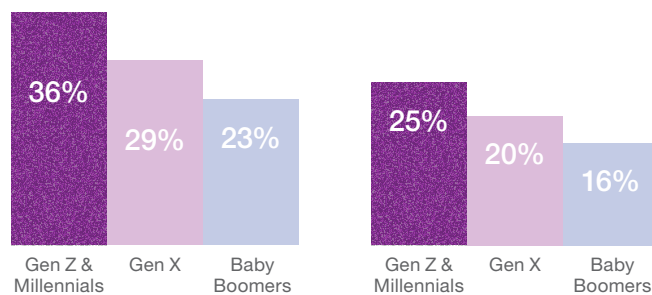
At the same time, digital technology has enabled more opportunities for remote work or hybrid work options. However, while they desire a flexible work structure, Gen Zers do not necessarily embrace a remote work culture. As Covid-19 drove the world's largest remote work experience, Generation Zers, despite their technological prowess, found working from home much more

Issues Gen Zers Want to See Their Employers Support

36.3%
Equality

19.2%
Health

19.1%
Environment

15.4%
Students

10%
Poverty
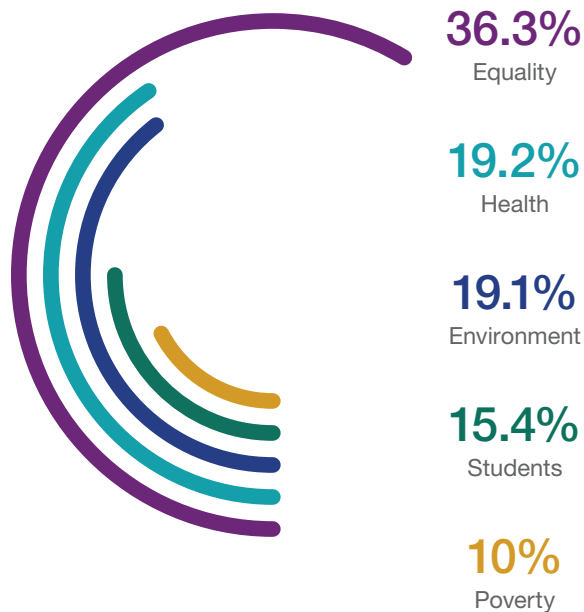
According to research conducted by Door of Clubs, a platform with more than 75,000 students from 300-plus colleges and universities, the number one cause that Gen Zers want to see their employers support is equality (36%), with women being more likely than men to choose that as their top cause.

Younger Workers Report Challenges Working From Home, Despite the Desire for Mobile Work

36%	29%	23%		25%	20%	16%
Gen Z & Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers		Gen Z & Millennials	Gen X	Baby Boomers

36%
Find Working From
Home Stressful

25%
Produce Less Work
at Home

According to research conducted by Gensler of 2,300 U.S. workers, Gen Zers—notwithstanding their technological preparedness and appreciation for more flexible work—found working from home during the pandemic more stressful and less productive than their older peers.

Why Gen Z Would or Would Not Join the Gig Economy

Attractions   **Negatives**

Earn more money/increase income	53%	$	36%	Unpredictable income
Create own schedule	45%	🕐	29%	Irregular hours
Better work-life balance	32%	⚖	28%	Difficulty planning

While more than 80% of Gen Zers would consider joining the gig economy, Deloitte found that Gen Zers recognize both the attractions and the negatives of gig work.

challenging than their older peers, reporting lower productivity and satisfaction. Gensler found younger workers were less likely to feel as if they made a difference or completed their work on a daily basis. And as a cohort that desires their work to align with their company's mission, working from home may have had an alienating effect on young workers.[37]

Inspiring Their Entrepreneurial Spirit

With more than one-third of workers in the U.S. participating in some form of the gig economy,[38] entrepreneurship is an attractive avenue for employment in the modern world of work. More than 80% of Gen Zers indicate an interest in participating in the gig economy,[39] and 41% plan to be entrepreneurs.[40] Considering that they self-identify as wanting to challenge the status quo[41] and have a desire to create change and positive impact, entrepreneurship allows Gen Zers to solve problems and partake in innovation to further a concept, project or product, which means they can leave a legacy by improving something they care about. But an entrepreneurial spirit does not mean that all members of Generation Z will want to start their own company. Some may take this route, but this can be seen as risky. One-third of Generation Z reported being concerned about unpredictable income and business, and more than 40% believed the rights of freelancers and contractors are less protected and respected.[42]

Credible, but Authentic Leaders

Generation Zers place a lot of value in those who are authentic, as they feel like they can build real relationships. This extends into their view of leaders and leadership, as they desire leaders who are not only credible and professional but can also show their authentic selves. Generation Z is motivated by relationships,[43] so the ability to build relationships with leaders will be important for Generation Z to feel brought in and connected to organizational leadership. Being able to trust an organization leader is the most valued trait among Generation Z employees,[44] echoing their demand for leaders who are authentic and have integrity. In the eyes of Generation Z, credible and authentic leadership shouldn't just exist at the C-suite, but should be practiced throughout the organization by leaders at all levels.

Generation Z as Employees & Teammates

Top 6 Factors that Contribute to Overall Happiness

1	Physical + mental health
2	Positive family relationships
3	Positive friendships
4	Fulfilled in studies and work
5	Joyful social life
6	Financially stable

Studies by the Varkey Foundation of more than 20,000 15-to 21-year-olds across 20 countries found that the most important factor contributing to young people's happiness was feeling healthy both physically and mentally.

Career Exploration Mode Engaged

Generation Zers are concerned about the future landscape of employment and are not leaving their successes to chance. Gen Zers are always looking to the next stop on their list of goals, and their careers serve as a primary source of their focus. As team members and employees, they are looking to gain skills and experiences that will help them progress toward their career goals, whether that is within their current role or organization or beyond, to their next employment opportunity. Regardless of whether they plan to stay in the company for three months as an intern, three

years as an entry-level employee or three decades as an industry expert, we can't expect career exploration and development to stop once they get a job as Generation Zers are hungry for experiences to grow and gain new skills.

Desire to Make an Impact

Greatly motivated by their desire to make an impact and advocate for something they believe in,[45] Generation Z employees and teammates will be looking for ways to contribute and create positive change. Generation Z is already seeking out ways to give back either through advocacy, activism, volunteerism, invention or entrepreneurship. Even though they are financially conservative, and most are not at their highest earning potential, many still support causes they care about through philanthropy, as more than 40% have donated to charity.[46]

One area where Gen Zers may focus their attention is environmentalism and sustainability. Multiple studies have found that the environment is one of Generation Z's biggest societal concerns.[47] Not only do they believe leaders should be focusing on policies and programs to protect the environment, they are engaging in personal lifestyle behavior changes to support their beliefs about the environment. From recycling and advocating for reusable straws to divestment and conscious consumerism, Gen Zers make environmental issues a priority. As they have committed to these values in their personal lives, we can expect they will bring these ideas and values into the workplace.

**Seeking a Healthy Mind, Body & Soul**

With 90% of Millennials and Generation Zers reporting that they would participate in incentivized wellness programs, it's clear that they are motivated to focus on their personal health.[48] While Generation Zers value personal health and well-being, their perspectives on health practices don't end with ensuring physical health is maintained. Globally, 94% of Generation Z believes that happiness is related to being healthy both physically and mentally.[49] Generation Zers view health as holistic and inclusive of various aspects of well-being such as mental, emotional or spiritual health.

Generation Z reports high levels of anxiety and depression. Some 70% consider anxiety and depression a major issue among their peers, according to the Pew Research Center.[50] They are more likely than other generations to report their mental health as "fair" or "poor" (27% compared to 15% for Millennials and 13% for Gen Xers).[51]

Growing up in an environment where mental health was discussed with greater openness and without the stigma experienced in previous times, Gen Zers are more likely to seek out help, with 37% reporting they had received treatment from a mental health professional, compared to 35% of Millennials, 26% of Gen Xers, 22% of Baby Boomers and 15% of older adults.[52]

As college students, nearly one-third of Generation Z graduating seniors reported having utilized counseling or therapy services in the last year,[53] practices they will likely take into their careers. A study by the American Psychological Association found that

Gen Z Least Likely Generation to Report 'Very Good' Mental Health

Gen Z 45%

Millennials 54%

Gen X 51%

Boomers 70%

Older adults 74%
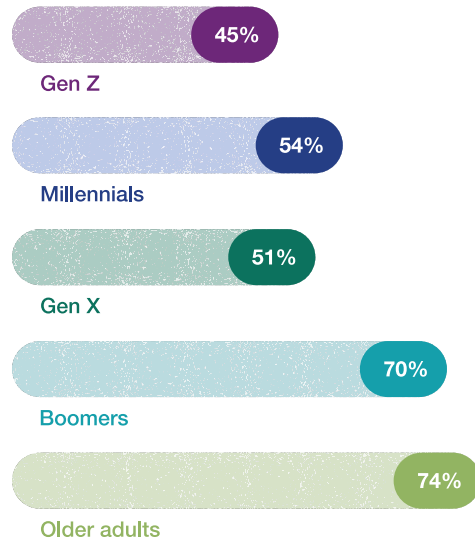
The American Psychological Association found that members of Generation Z report high levels of stress and, compared to other generations, are the least likely to report "very good" or "excellent" mental health.

Generation Z young adults report the highest level of stress compared to other generations.[54] So, having a workplace that is supportive of their mental health practices will be important. If unaddressed or unsupported, mental health concerns could be a threat to their belongingness at work as well as their workplace performance. In fact, Generation Z employees may already feel that way, as one-third report that their anxiety creates a barrier to their workplace success.[55]

A Workplace Where Gen Z Can Thrive

Creating strategies that align with Generation Zers' motivations and address their concerns and preferences will help to not only attract and retain young talent, but also help them thrive as employees.

The physical environment plays an integral role in supporting Gen Zers once they get to the workplace. Like all individuals, Generation Z employees thrive in an environment that supports the whole person: the personal, the communal, the mental and the physical.

Following are some examples of how to put these priorities into practice.

1

Invite Potential Generation Z Employees to Experience Your Workplace

Starting their career exploration at earlier ages[56] is allowing Generation Zers to home in and gain clarity on what they want to do for work. Creating opportunities for future Generation Z employees to experience your workplace allows them to gain more insight on your industry and make plans to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to perform as members of your organization. Don't limit your organization's exposure opportunities to internships reserved for college juniors or seniors. Mentoring is one of a number of ways to promote your organization to younger students who are looking for career development experiences.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

+ Design a robust internship program that engages students of various ages and experience levels.
+ Provide shadowing opportunities for local students in high school and college.
+ Partner with local schools to develop career mentoring programs matching employees with current students.
+ Develop a formalized mentoring program.

PLACE

+ Incorporate elements of hospitality, such as a concierge to welcome visitors, coffee bar for casual exchanges and outdoor gathering areas.
+ Create a community space to be the heart of the office, such as a central open staircase or café, surrounded by a mix of gathering areas—conversation nooks, lounge areas with soft seating, etc.

IN PRACTICE

Premier Health offers a job shadowing program for high school and college students to learn about healthcare careers in real time. Students are paired with a healthcare professional to observe everyday responsibilities, communication and skills needed in clinical and nonclinical settings.

For *Emersion Design,* making a first impression with future employees starts long before an interview or a handshake at a networking event. A key component of Emersion's exposure initiatives is rooted in relationships that have been created with local universities through co-op and internship programs as well as by serving as guest lecturers for undergraduate classes. Emersion even opens up its doors to those who want to experience the organization through shadowing days, allowing students to spend time interacting with Emersion's team members and getting to experience their organizational culture firsthand.

2

Promote Development Opportunities and Paths for Advancement for Employees

Driven by achievement to level up, Generation Z sees work as an opportunity to learn new things and gain new skills. Creating and communicating paths for advancement allows Generation Z employees to envision and plan for a future within their current workplace and beyond. Certainly professional development can and should be tailored to individuals, but there are ways to prepare and promote these opportunities from early conversations with Generation Z employees.

Discussions regarding advancement and growth should start before hiring. Conversations regarding development opportunities and pathways toward advancement during recruitment and interviewing can be a critical way for potential Generation Z to decide whether to accept a job. But once they are hired, continue to make space to revisit these conversations during regular check-ins to ensure hiring expectations are meeting employee experiences.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

+ Design and articulate performance review and promotion processes to set expectations during recruitment and onboarding.
+ Provide suggested internal and external developmental opportunities to guide employees toward meaningful learning experiences.

PLACE

+ Offer community spaces that promote collaboration and a sense of belonging, with opportunities to converse, meet and engage in team and social activities.
+ Build transparent settings that support learning by observation, such as open spaces or glass-walled offices and meeting rooms.
+ Plan spaces for in-person mentoring to happen, such as private offices, meeting rooms or comfortably equipped enclaves for two to three people to chat.
+ Create gathering spaces with teaming tools to facilitate collaboration, ideation and problem-solving, such as mobile marker boards; large, wall-mounted monitors; and/or bulletin boards.

IN PRACTICE

At *Caterpillar*, all new hires are assigned a mentor for their first three years. That person provides guidance on career exploration, corporate culture, soft-skills development, organizational understanding, internal enterprise awareness, work-life balance and community knowledge.

Additionally, all employees have the opportunity to rotate among departments, providing opportunities to gain immersive experience in different fields and connect with department leaders. Tana Utley, vice president of Caterpillar's Large Power Systems Division, notes that "simply engaging purposefully with others in the interest of continuous improvement can spark positive growth…both personal and professional. Caterpillar is a rich source of human connection."

Caterpillar also practices reverse mentoring, in which junior employees mentor senior employees. According to Utley, "reverse mentoring can expose more senior people to generational, geographic, gender-unique or technologically informed perspectives that can help them better navigate our ever-evolving workplace."[57]

While professional training and conference attendance is standard in the design industry, design firm *GBBN* puts mentoring at the center of its development and advancement-experiences culture. Co-op students from nearby universities are paired with professional mentors who they can turn to throughout their time with GBBN. But mentoring doesn't stop after the co-op experience. New hires and employees are paired with a colleague who helps with introductory experiences to the organization as a "big brother" or "big sister."

Further, at GBBN, mentoring is not viewed as a one-way transfer of knowledge. Rather, the firm maintains a philosophy that everyone can learn from and teach others, and professional development and growth is an ongoing, everyday aspect of its culture.

3

Offer Project-Based Work and Intrapreneurial Opportunities

In order to thrive, Generation Zers need opportunities to take ownership. Provide a path that allows them to be in control, and they can identify their own opportunities.

While Generation Zers express strong interest in the gig economy and entrepreneurship, they maintain a strong desire for financial stability. Fortunately, there is ample opportunity to engage Generation Z employees in entrepreneurial activities within an existing company. Engaging Gen Zers in organizational problem-solving or tasking them with improving a process or system allows young employees to utilize entrepreneurial skills of creative thinking and innovative problem-solving within the safety of an existing organization.

Taking a page from startup culture, intrapreneurship ventures can help spur innovation and create value within a company. They also provide an opportunity for young employees to develop and advance within an organization while also appealing to their entrepreneurial nature. Encouraging them to take ownership of a project allows them to develop leadership skills and learn how to manage resources, as well as practice innovative concepts that they can take into their next role and beyond.

This is a win-win for organizations looking to evolve practices and for Generation Zers who want to engage in creative problem-solving.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

+ Conduct regular hackathons that bring together cross-functional teams to solve a real or imaginary company challenge.
+ Designate work time to engage in gig work or other personal passion projects.

PLACE

+ Provide settings with movable furniture that allow users to shape their environment.
+ Utilize open wall systems that demarcate teaming spaces to allow easy flow from morning scrum meeting to heads-down focus work throughout the day.
+ Plan team spaces that provide a variety of surfaces for ideation and strategizing, such as markerboards and pinup space.

IN PRACTICE

At *W.L Gore*, the materials science company best known for Gore-Tex fabric, employees receive "dabble time" of 10% of their workday to develop new ideas and work on personal projects. An employee discovered that Gore's ePTFE product, a coating for push-pull cables, could also be used to make guitar strings that are more comfortable to play. While the coated strings proved to be only marginally more comfortable, they did keep their tone longer than conventional guitar strings. W.L. Gore launched them under the brand name Elixer Strings, which is now the top-selling acoustic guitar string.[58]

Ad agencies such as *Deutsch* and *Anomaly* foster entrepreneurship with formalized programs that leverage their creative cultures. Both agencies run *Shark Tank*-style incubator programs for employees to pitch their ideas to the agencies for potential backing. At Deutsch, where employee ventures go through a formal resource assignment process similar to other projects, a floral-delivery service called Bouqs and an independent movie (*Between Us*) were selected.

Anomaly often partners with other firms to maintain focus, drive and urgency to bring projects to fruition, such as EOS lip balm and the dosist cannabis pen, two ventures it developed. More recently, Ranch Water hard seltzer won the internal competition, allowing the Lone River Beverage Company brand to grow using the agency's creative and strategic resources. "The culture itself really celebrates the side hustle," Ranch Water founder and Anomaly alum Katie Beal Brown told *The Wall Street Journal*.[59]

Saxbys Coffee runs an Experiential Learning Platform (ELP) designed to embolden the next generation of changemakers by providing undergraduates with entrepreneurial opportunities as a supplement to traditional classroom learning.

Every Saxbys ELP Cafe is exclusively student-run and helmed by a student cafe executive officer (SCEO) who is empowered to develop their peers into team leaders, ideate and implement creative marketing initiatives, strengthen relationships with community organizations and enact change with meaningful social impact outreach. All the while, the students are responsible for managing their peers, overseeing all cafe operations and presenting profit-and-loss statements monthly to Saxbys' executive team, including CEO Nick Bayer.

4

Provide Opportunities to Make an Impact

Those who want to attract and retain Generation Z employees need to identify the potential a specific role has to create positive impact—big and small. This can take place during the interview process but should also happen during regular check-ins after hiring. Even further, recognizing Generation Z employees for their contributions that make an impact on the organization or the clients they serve connects with their motivation to make a difference.

Similar to having focused conversations on how roles can create positive change, it is necessary to discuss the ways in which roles and daily responsibilities fulfill a purpose within an organization. This can make some mundane aspects of a job more important to those completing the work.

As an altruistic cohort, Generation Z may be eager to see the fruits of their labor and feel as though they are producing meaningful and impactful work. As leaders and coworkers, it is important to discuss the potential impact their role's activities can yield as well as reflecting on successes. Helping Generation Z employees identify the impact of their work and recognizing their contributions for positive change will help them create meaning and purpose in the organization. Further, recognizing their contributions, even through individual interactions and small group settings, could lead to greater organizational loyalty among Generation Z employees.[60]

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING
+ Offer organized volunteer days where cross-functional teams gather together to make a difference for an organization.
+ Create opportunities for pro bono consulting work.
+ Provide company matches to individual donations to select charities.
+ Adopt a cause as an organization and empower employees to designate how to support it.

PLACE
+ Celebrate philanthropic efforts visually: an oversize thermometer with fund-raising goals, a photo montage of efforts that loops on company news monitors, a bulletin board with thank-you notes and photos of people and programs supported.
+ Make conscious choices for environmentally friendly furnishings and materiality such as wood furniture and textiles produced from recycled materials.

IN PRACTICE
AIG celebrates Global Volunteer Month every April, providing employees everywhere the opportunity to support the causes that matter most to them. In April 2019, more than 4,000 employees donated over 14,000 volunteer hours to serve those in need. AIG's programs enable employees to give back to their communities by offering 16 hours volunteer time off per year. Additionally, the Matching Grants Program matches employee donations 2:1. Whether it's taking part in autism awareness walks in Tokyo or Montreal, classroom volunteering in São Paulo or caring for the elderly in Bangalore, tens of thousands of AIG employees give their time, energy and passion to their local communities annually.[61]

5

Celebrate Diversity and Commit to Inclusion

To attract and keep Generation Z talent, it is important to assess practices, policies and protocol that may be exclusionary to various identities.

Due to their diverse identities and inclusive values, Gen Zers will be seeking out employers and organizations who not only celebrate diversity but commit to creating inclusive environments. Organizations should start by looking at their recruitment and hiring practices to ensure a diverse candidate pool is engaged, but it is also critical that inclusive values are espoused and practiced after hiring to increase retention of Generation Z employees of all backgrounds.
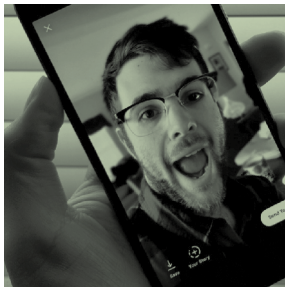
POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

+ Form training and educational programming on day-to-day inclusive practices.
+ Embrace programs that allow for team members to share and celebrate various aspects of their identities.
+ Engage team members from various identity groups to assist in examining policies and processes.
+ Celebrate birthdays and other occasions equally with on-site employees and remote workers.

PLACE

+ Consider neighborhood-style planning for departments or teams.
+ Select round tables where everyone has an equal seat—i.e., no "head of the table."
+ Encourage all attendees of hybrid meetings to use individual monitors or other technology to create an equitable meeting experience for on-site and remote participants.

IN PRACTICE

The *Government of Canada* has worked to celebrate diversity and promote inclusion through the creation of a task force to provide recommendations on how the government as an agency can strengthen diversity and inclusion. To align with the country's increasingly diverse population, the task force was charged with exploring issues of diversity and inclusion in its communities. After surveying and listening to community constituents, the task force put forth recommendations and initiative that focus on people management (e.g., outreach, recruitment, staffing and human resources practices), leadership and accountability, education and awareness and implementing a diversity and inclusion lens. These areas have served as a guide for government agencies to provide more inclusive public service.

Microsoft has an enduring commitment to accessibility and inclusion for its users and employees that includes not only products and services but also community and civic involvement that serves the needs of people in communities worldwide, including those with disabilities. The Supported Employment program furthers these goals by creating opportunities for workers with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) to be employed by Microsoft vendors. To enable employment diversity and inclusion, it partners to create job opportunities with people with intellectual and developmental disabilities at Microsoft facilities across the globe.[62] Other programs include an autism hiring program and ability hiring events, mentoring and training and "ability hacks," hackathons focused on empowering people with disabilities and solving unique challenges. Microsoft hosts an annual employee conference to bring together employees, allies, parents of children with disabilities, friends, engineers, designers and accessibility professionals from every organization across Microsoft.

6

Promote and Practice Holistic Well-Being Initiatives

Having employers and team members who support holistic health practices communicates an organizational commitment to employee well-being and happiness. To attract and retain Generation Z talent, a holistic approach to promoting health and well-being should be a priority. More than just physical space and employee benefits, organizations should be working to develop and support cultures that promote personal well-being. Because of Gen Z's comfort with discussing mental health issues, employers, supervisors and teammates should be ready to openly discuss and support the health and overall well-being pursuits of their youngest employees. In doing so, they can help build a culture of support within the workplace that benefits team members of all generations.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

+ Reward and incentivize proactive holistic health programs.
+ Develop and articulate an organizational philosophy regarding health and well-being.
+ Host on-site health events to provide education and resources.
+ Incorporate programming and policies that promote mental health and well-being.

PLACE

+ Use physical design elements that support mental health and well-being, such as sanctuary areas for respite and recharging, and indoor and outdoor circulation paths for walking.
+ Designate areas for wellness-focused pursuits such as yoga and meditation.
+ Provide outdoor spaces furnished for gathering and relaxing.
+ Utilize walls of windows that bring in natural light, with layouts that allow all employees to enjoy it.
+ Consider generous plantings throughout work spaces that bring nature and the outdoors in.

IN PRACTICE

Health and wellness are at the heart of *Humana*, not only in helping its clients access the healthcare they need, but also through its internal organizational practices. From a dedicated Health and Wellness team within the human resources department to focusing on physical design elements to support well-being, Humana models a commitment to health and well-being within the company. Proactive health practice is a primary focus at Humana; educational opportunities that emphasize holistic wellness include courses in nutrition and financial well-being. Humana also makes practicing wellness fun by utilizing gamified programs that incentivize healthy habits, such as awarding points for walking 10,000 steps a day or getting a flu shot. Employees can earn points that can then be cashed out for financial rewards such as gift cards.

7

Provide Flexible Work Options

Flexible work options may mean allowing employees to work a few days per week or remotely to focus on projects, paired with spending one or two days in the office for in-person meetings or collaborative work sessions. This balances Generation Zers' interest in flexibility as well as their desire to connect with people in person.

Unlike some of their older coworkers, Gen Zers reported challenges when working from home during Covid quarantine, so organizations may want to consider some additional strategies when adopting remote work programs for their youngest employees. Kate Lister, president of Global Workplace Analytics, suggests a buddy system so newer employees have someone to confer with.

Whatever the program components, it's important to note that flexibility is not a program or policy. It's a culture and way of working, according to Cali Williams Yost, CEO and founder of Flex Strategy Group. "We tend to think of flexibility as something managers are responsible for, but actually in a flexible work culture, individuals, teams and managers all play a role," she related.

POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

+ Institute a flexible work policy that allows employees to work remotely a set number of days per week.
+ Develop a remote work structure that begins with a dialogue on expectations and includes team input for developing a realistic framework.
+ Instead of "face time," consider keeping a pulse on progress via designated metrics and clear expectations for productivity and team member accessibility.

PLACE

+ Provide workplace settings that offer ample space for individuals and teams to move freely, with furnishings that invite interaction.
+ Offer a stipend to equip a home office with ergnomic furniture and technology.
+ Consider a distributed workforce strategy that utilizes satellite offices and coworking spaces as alternatives to headquarters locations.

IN PRACTICE

Netflix operates under the assumption that work and personal time are frequently intermixed and doesn't maintain a prescribed 9-to-5 workday. Likewise, holidays and vacation times are not set. Salaried employees are encouraged to observe what is important to them, and take breaks whenever the mind or body needs it without any preset limits on days off.[63] Moreover, senior executives are encouraged to share news of their vacations, signaling and shaping a culture where taking time off is supported and celebrated. With a belief in working smarter, not harder, the organization's policy is "Freedom and responsibility—you do what works best for you and Netflix. As long as you are performing successfully and making an impact, you can create your own schedule."

"We tend to think of flexibility as something managers are responsible for, but actually in a flexible work culture, individuals, teams and managers all play a role."

CALI WILLIAMS YOST
CEO & FOUNDER, FLEX STRATEGY GROUP

Looking Ahead

While the very oldest in Generation Z have recently begun to enter the workplace, it can be expected that their influence and impact will continue to grow in coming years as they begin to make up a larger share of the workforce. Organizations that want to thrive and maximize potential with Generation Z can act now by identifying aspects of their company that can be adapted to meet the demands of a new multigenerational work environment. Becoming more inclusive, more focused on development and more values-driven in the impact they create are some of the first steps organizations can take to help attract and keep Generation Z talent. ⬛

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Through research, Knoll explores the connection between design and human behavior, health and performance and the quality of the user experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their physical environments.

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