

Move Over Millennials: **FAQ on Gen Z**



For the first time in history, there will soon be four generations in the labor market. Members of Generation Z — those born after about 1997 — are beginning to enter the workforce and will soon have a major role in companies all over the world.

No one knows yet how Gen Z will integrate into the workforce. However, because they are the first true digital natives, we have an enormous amount of information on their behavior as consumers. This may impact how they approach work over the next few years.

This FAQ will answer a few questions about Gen Z as it prepares to take the world by storm.

1. Does Gen Z have realistic expectations of what the workplace will be like?

It's too early to know from published research because Gen Z hasn't been in the workforce long enough. We do, however, know a lot about Gen Z's expectations and desires as consumers. It remains to be seen how this will map onto their work.

2. What security issues related to Gen Z should companies keep in mind?

Because members of Gen Z have been digital all their lives, they may not have the same concept of personal privacy as older generations. They may present heightened security risks and need to be educated on employers' security expectations.

At the same time, Gen Z employees don't want to be spied upon. They want to know that the employer won't be monitoring them surreptitiously. Clear communication and expectations will help.

3. Does Gen Z want to work from home like millennials?

Surprisingly, Gen Z is more interested in working in the office than millennials. It's not quite clear why. Part of the reason may be they see work as a social setting, and they value face-to-face communication more than millennials. It's also possible that, unlike millennials, they don't want to always be reachable.

However, Gen Z also values flexibility and may want to have the option working from home occasionally.

Because Gen Z is so young, it remains to be seen how this may change. Right now, they want to be in the presence of other people at work.

4. If I give Gen Z too much flexibility, how will I know they'll be good hires?

You don't, necessarily. Flexibility should be given in increments. If flexibility works and an employee proves herself, give her more flexibility.

You will have success if you work with Gen Z hires to find the right balance. Gen Z is new and members have a strong incentive to prove themselves. However, members likely won't respond to dictates from "on high."

5. What applications will Gen Z bring to the workplace that companies can learn from?

Many will bring social media platforms that businesses may not be familiar with. Companies may learn from Gen Z employees what social media platforms, for example, their target markets are actually using. This is a potential point of innovation as Gen Z enters the workforce.

Additionally, it has become a trend in recent years to use mobile devices as collaboration tools. Gen Z may innovate here too because they use mobile devices so natively.

6. What challenges exist for older generations working with Gen Z?

The first challenge is job security. Gen Z's technical savvy will be a point of leverage. The more technical a role, the more likely it will be that Gen Z can do what older workers can't.

There will also be a generational challenge with professional behavior. Growing up online has caused Gen Z to develop some lazy habits. This could potentially be a problem with customer-facing roles, providing an opportunity for employee coaching.

But don't underestimate Gen Z's willingness to work hard when they are motivated and valued — and not forced into a model they don't relate to. They are likely to do their jobs well — just differently.