

Gen X: Overlooked and Underserved

Employers have spent a lot of time focusing on the workforce's youngest employees: millennials and the new Generation Z. They've also spent a lot of time focusing on baby boomers, especially when it comes to helping them plan for retirement.

But there's one generation of workers employers haven't engaged enough — and it's a group that is in need of some serious financial help: Gen X.

That's according to an annual employee benefits trends study, which found that while employees across all demographics name personal finances as their No. 1 source of stress, just 59% of Gen X workers are confident in their finances, compared to 67% of millennials and 65% of boomers.

"[They are] the generation that's been forgotten," Todd Katz, executive vice president of group benefits said Monday during his company's annual benefits symposium. "And they're a third of our workforce."

"Going back 15 years ago to our third study, we were talking about baby boomers and when they'll retire," he said. "And for the past 10 years, the conversation has been about millennials."

Gen X workers are experiencing a number of financial issues, according to the new study: Just over half say they have a savings cushion of three months' salary, compared to 58% of millennials and 60% of boomers who said the same. This, combined with the fact that 48% of Gen X employees

report living paycheck to paycheck, puts this generation in the danger zone when it comes to preparing for the unexpected and planning for the future.

“They also believe they’ve missed out on career opportunities and feel less empowered at work,” Katz noted. “With record low unemployment and employers competing in a war for talent, those who can understand their workforce’s pain points will be best positioned to both attract and retain experienced, highly skilled workers.”

Overall, one in three employees admit to being less productive at work due to financial stress.

These statistics point to the fact that employers need to step up to help their workers, Katz says.

In general, the importance of employee happiness cannot be overlooked by employers, as 90% of happy employees say they are loyal to their employer, the study notes.

Although employers attempt to show employees appreciation through many channels, Gen X workers are not feeling the impact. Relative to their millennial colleagues, Gen X workers believe employers are not providing them with timely promotions, exposure to senior leadership and meaningful work projects, the study notes.

Employers, though, don't see this as a problem — only 18% of employers believe a top challenge they face is creating an inclusive environment for all generations.

“There are people doing important jobs for our companies,” Katz said of Gen X workers. “We need to recognize them differently. If we can do things a little different, we can engage in loyalty.”

The study pinpointed areas where employers can focus to increase employee happiness:

- Employee trust in company leadership
- Employer's commitment to employees and their success
- A culture where employees are encouraged to share ideas and individual options
- A workplace where coworkers feel like family and friends
- Benefits customized to meet employee needs

“Two lines here are important: Customized and meeting my individual needs,” Katz said. “A few years ago, benefits were pretty much one size fits all, but that is changing.”

The study shows there are significant gaps between employers' priorities and employee expectations, especially among Gen X, who will continue to be a core segment of the workforce for decades to come, Katz added.

“Employers have an opportunity to foster engagement among these employees and make them feel valued unlike ever before. By building workplaces that address all employees’ needs, employers can build a more loyal and productive workforce.”

By: Nick Otto