

## 5 Myths About Gen Z Workers



For several years, it was nearly impossible to open a trade journal, read a newspaper or watch the news without hearing about the millennial generation. It's true that they make up most of today's workforce and HR teams need to customize their offerings to appeal to them. But now, there's a new set of fresh faces entering the workplace: Generation Z — those in the 18- to 24-year-old range. In less than a decade, these young people will make up about 20% of the U.S. workforce.

Last summer, two benefits companies took a deeper dive in understanding what this newest generation is interested in from their employers, what they want out of a career and some of the key workstyle differences from older generations. We gathered information via an online survey of 1,500 Gen Zers, 950 employees across other generations, and online focus groups with members of Gen Z to discuss their attitudes toward work, challenges and financial security.

As with all newcomers in the workforce, Gen Zers often are stereotyped long before they can show their true colors to employers. While we certainly don't understand everything about Gen Zers, there are several myths we can dispel about their workplace preferences.

**Myth 1: Gen Zers want freelance/gig work arrangements.** Among leading-edge Gen Zers, only 4% want freelance/gig economy jobs, and most prefer some sort of traditional work arrangements in the future. The overall lack of interest in joining the gig economy among young workers is largely explained by the burden of the educational debt they face. The unpredictability of finances and certainty of student loan repayments are hard to balance, and the bigger the student loan debt, the greater the interest in full-time traditional employment.

**Myth 2: Gen Zers prefer remote work settings.** Not only are the newest entrants to the workforce looking for traditional full-time employment, a surprising number of them also are looking for a traditional in-office environment. Unlike older generations, Gen Zers say they prefer the human interaction and in-person collaboration that an in-office setting provides that remote arrangements often do not.

**Myth 3: Gen Zers do not want frequent feedback.** Sharing the bigger picture and avoiding micromanaging works best for Gen Zers. At work, they certainly look for autonomy and independence. Yet, at the same time, they want frequent feedback on their progress as a confirmation that they are moving in the right direction. These preferences often reflect their previous academic experience that included receiving regular grade reports.

**Myth 4: Gen Zers are solo players.** Many in this generation carefully balance independence with a team environment. Even those who plan to work independently — for example, starting their own business or freelancing — prefer a collaborative work setting.

**Myth 5: Gen Zers avoid in-person communications.** As digital natives, Gen Zers often are stereotyped as a generation entrenched solely in digital communications. Yet technology has made this generation weak writers. As a result, many Gen Zers favor in-person communications over emails or other electronic messages to make sure they are perceived professionally at work. Face-to-face communication also helps them convey the intended tone in their own communications and interpret it in others, as well.

In short? Many of the stereotypes ascribed to Gen Z are based on unwarranted assumptions, and Gen Z, like previous generations, will eventually leave them behind. Gen Zers certainly have unique qualities, but they are not wholly different from earlier generations when it comes to their preferences for a work environment and means of communication.

By Matthew Barnett