

What HR Needs to Know About Tech-Savvy Generation Z Workers

Generation Z doesn't remember a time without cellphones or Google because they weren't born yet.

As technology natives, the newest generation to hit the workforce will bring efficiency and innovation to their employers, says Mark Beal, a marketing professional and professor at Rutgers University. He argues that some companies may have difficulty integrating these employees because of competing communication styles.

Around 65 million Americans belong to Gen Z, according to Beal, author of "Decoding Gen Z: 101 Lessons Gen Z Will Teach Corporate America, Marketers and Media." The oldest members of this generation graduated college in the spring, while the youngest ones just turned 6. They'll be filling entry level jobs for the next 20 years.

Beal spoke about strategies for incorporating and retaining this new generation of workers.

What do companies need to know about Gen Z?

Mark Beal: They are digital natives, community minded, socially conscious and driven. They're looking for companies that have evolved tech wise, but they don't want to be just a cog in the machine. They're competitive and want to feel like they're helping a company work toward a goal.

Companies need to realize these are people who will ask why. Gen Z is always looking for a better, more efficient way to do things, so they'll speak out and suggest ways to change the status quo. Working with technology comes natural to them, but they do

struggle with writing for business and giving presentations because they text so much; these are areas older generations can help them with. They want to work with mentors, not managers.

So, what's the difference between Gen Z and millennials?

Beal: With millennials being the older siblings of Generation Z, these two generations are very closely related. Millennials witnessed the rise of technology at a young age, but Gen Z had it in their hands at ages 1, 2 and 3.

When I was conducting research for my book on Gen Z, I found they have different attention spans and multitasking abilities than millennials. The average millennial attention span is 12 seconds, compared to 8 seconds for Gen Z. But Gen Zers are better multitaskers; they can juggle working off five devices at once, while millennials can work off three.

What does this mean for HR?

Beal: This is going to be a highly competitive generation. Gen Z wants flexible work hours and prioritized work-life balance. I used to commute two hours to the city for my first job, but they'll have none of that. They're big proponents of remote positions.

Also, Gen Z is so reliant on technology and phones that there's a strong desire for human interaction. It sounds contradictory, but they crave it. They're going to need social programs and community-based opportunities if companies want to retain them.

I think Gen Z is interested in any and all programs that contribute to a greater culture and a better, more rewarding experience. They want to connect with their colleagues for more than work assignments, so it would be a good idea for companies to form clubs and interest groups where coworkers can interact outside the office.

What should HR teams do differently?

Beal: Your most recent hires are Gen Z; the first thing I'd do is go on a listening tour. As an HR professional, you will get more feedback than you could ever imagine to things you didn't think about, or didn't think was important. They'll tell you why they might leave your company for another, as long as you create a comfortable environment to do it.

As you recruit more Gen Zs, I'd incorporate the ones you already have into the interview process. Prospective hires need to meet with upper level execs of course, but your Gen Zers can be your biggest advocate for attracting new talent. When you have a young candidate you're really interested in, have one of your Gen Z employees talk to them about why they love working at your company. This generation is more likely to shop around for jobs, but your younger employees can reassure them that the company holds the values they care about.

Gen Z also communicates differently from older generations. HR teams might want to adapt their communication strategies to make sure their message gets across to this generation.

What technology should HR use to communicate, recruit and engage with this generation?

Beal: I've learned from my students that email is not a preferred method of communication for Gen Z. They're going to push more toward group chats and the idea of groups being able to collaborate in real time. Google Drive, GroupMe and Slack are popular platforms for communicating and working on group projects.

For scheduling interviews, Gen Z prefers texting over phone calls and email from an efficiency standpoint. Some companies are starting to use scheduling platforms that alert applicants through text. These are really popular because Gen Z doesn't check their

emails frequently. They're also open to doing digital interviews over Skype and FaceTime.

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