

How to make sure Gen Z wants to work for you

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Gen Z – those born between 1995 and 2009 –make up almost 30% of the Australian workforce, a proportion that’s set to rapidly grow. These workers already account for [more than half](#) of our retail workforce.

“This generation may be perceived to job-hop, lack motivation and appropriate workplace etiquette and effective communication skills,” says Hazel Stewart, Director of Innovate Learn, a Melbourne-based distributor of Wilson Learning Worldwide professional services.

“The reality is that these tech-savvy and creative workers will shortly make up the majority of the local workforce, at a time when innovation, digitalisation and automation are pivotal to organisational success. If you’re looking to hire within this demographic the front-of-mind question is ‘what do we need to do to make them want to work for us?’”

Understanding Gen Z

The first step in successful engagement with Gen Z is understanding what drives them. Hazel outlines four key traits of Gen Z employees:

- **Autonomy and stability:** Gen Z has witnessed the effect of the rising cost of living. They have also been impacted more than any other generation by the COVID-19 pandemic. They want to be in control of their work and be assured of their financial stability.
- **Flexibility and individualism are important:** The traditional 9 to 5 desk job won’t satisfy the Gen Z employee, who wants to be able to fit hobbies or other interests into their days in the name of achieving work-life balance and improved mental health. Gen Z is also more likely to enforce the soon-to-be-legislated Right to Disconnect [laws](#).
- **They value meaningful human connection and community:** It’s important for them to build relationships with their colleagues, and to build communities. “Remember, this generation has grown up with social media. They seek out communities, both virtual and in real life as spaces where they have a sense of belonging and engagement, and add value to others,” adds Hazel. “Recent studies found that [73% of Gen Z](#) report feeling alone or lonely – more than any other age group. Employers should take extra measures to facilitate the real-world physical connections that promote good mental health”.
- **They support a commitment to diversity and social causes:** Ethics, sustainability and diversity are particularly important to Gen Z. Studies have established that they would rather earn less than work for an organisation that doesn’t engage in social responsibility and transformation.

Seven strategies to attract and train Gen Z

1. **Have them participate in the design of their job:** Job crafting, as it's called, sees the employee 'design' their role based on their strengths and skills. "Instead of hiring employees to fit in the box of the traditional job role, hire smart individuals who have a deep interest in helping you meet your goals. Work alongside them to match them to a job role, or to create one that aligns with their skills and knowledge. Give them autonomy over the role and the deliverables, and flexible working hours. Measure them based on their output and results, rather than the number of hours they're at the office," suggests Hazel.
2. **Prioritise health and wellbeing:** Gen Z aren't interested in traditional company perks like free Friday lunches. Instead, they value initiatives that help them achieve improved mental health and wellbeing. This might be more paid time off, a gym membership or access to robust mental health resources (e.g. psychological counselling or programs that prevent loneliness) or mental health insurance.
3. **Consider community-centric onboarding:** Traditional employee onboarding programs may not foster the sense of community belonging that Gen Z is looking for. Instead, develop an onboarding process with a community-centric approach that builds relationships and drives engagement. It's about introducing the new member to everyone in the group, clarifying everyone's roles and explaining the 'community guidelines'.
4. **Promote reverse mentorship and peer learning:** In a collaborative community, everybody contributes to the learning process. This calls for peer mentorship, leadership development and reverse mentorship. This happens for example, when younger Gen Z workers help senior colleagues develop new skills or learn about new tools or technology. "This type of initiative will prompt further collaboration and communication and becomes a springboard for idea-generation or innovation."
5. **Create personalised skills development and career succession plans:** Gen Z values skills development – but not necessarily in keeping with the traditional career development ladder. Start by understanding which skills each employee wants to develop, and how they visualise their career development. For example, you may find that the graphic designer you hired is also interested in developing their content writing skills.
6. **Focus on equity, inclusion and diversity:** Consider how your company can tap into the unique strengths and perspectives of diverse Gen Z candidates – including women, differently abled and neurodiverse individuals. "It's essential that you create a supportive environment that will help these individuals thrive, through the use of specific accommodations. And remember that equitable pay is a non-negotiable,".
7. **Become renowned for your company ethics and positive social impact:** Ensure your company ethos and practices are based on genuine values of respect and care, and a desire to make a positive impact on the lives of employees as well as customers and shareholders. If your company doesn't already have one, establish a corporate social responsibility (CSR) program that yields tangible and transparent benefits to community members.

Gen Z's traits, skills and attitudes are absolutely essential for business success. "In an increasingly uncertain and highly competitive marketplace, employers will find they need Gen Z, with their tech-savvy and creative attributes, more than ever before. Businesses that don't adapt to attract and retain this generation of workers will find they're left behind," concludes Hazel.

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