

Why Gen Z Isn't Lazy And How to Hire and Retain Them Effectively



MATT HAVENS

Why Gen Z Isn't Lazy – And How to Hire and Retain Them Effectively

It's happening again.

And it feels like déjà vu

I remember back in 2008 being a senior analyst for a multi-billion dollar company and getting asked how we help attract and retain a Millennial workforce – because frankly, nobody could figure them out. I was indeed a Millennial myself, so the prevailing thought must have been I would know the inner workings of the Millennial mind and I could help make sense of their entitlement, lack of interest in anything work-related, and their penchant for “work/life balance.”

Fast forward to today, and just as the Millennials before them, Gen Z is now facing the same criticisms. Every generation entering the workforce is met with skepticism from those who came before. But let's be honest—how often have we heard the same complaints about younger employees throughout history?

The truth is, Gen Z isn't lazy. I know that because Millennials weren't lazy either, despite the labels placed upon them. They simply had different values, priorities, and expectations in the workplace and the time has finally come where Gen Z gets to take the spot of new-entrant to the workforce.

Instead of dismissing this generation, companies should focus on understanding why Gen Z might value a different way of working and take a critical eye to the emerging opportunities to adapt. Doing so will lead to better hiring, retention, and overall workplace engagement for all ages. Here's a few places to start:

1. Rethink Traditional Work Structures

Gen Z grew up in an era where remote work, gig jobs, and digital entrepreneurship were the norm. Just ask how many Gen X'ers knew what an “influencer” was growing up and I think you'll see my point. Gen Z has never been attached to the traditional 9-to-5 office structure. And despite what many companies are doing related to return-to-work mandates, if companies want to attract and retain Gen Z employees, they should be considering opportunities for [flexibility instead of mandates](#).

- Remote or hybrid work options
- Flexible hours based on productivity rather than a strict schedule
- Outcome-based performance measurement rather than time spent in the office

This doesn't mean Gen Z doesn't want to work. It means they value efficiency and autonomy over rigid processes.

2. Prioritize Meaningful Work and Career Growth

Gen Z is highly purpose-driven.

And so were the Millennials before them.

And so were the hippies of the 1960's who wanted to do something which mattered.

Being highly purpose-driven is not new. It's always the case with young people and will likely always be the case for anyone new to the workforce. Young workers want to work for organizations that align with their values and provide meaningful contributions to society. If they feel their work lacks purpose, they're more likely to disengage or seek opportunities elsewhere, so it's more critical than ever for employers to be vocal and even consider marketing their efforts in this space.

3. Offer Competitive Pay and Benefits—including Mental Health Support

In my first real job in 2005, I was given 10 days of PTO and 5 sick days. Neither then, nor now, could I understand the need to dilienate between the two since they operated essentially the same way. Any way you look at it, there could be 15 days I'm not working that year (and I'm ignoring the fact the sick days accrued just like PTO, furthering my confusion).

Why then, in today's world, is it such a issue Gen Z feels mental health days should fall into a similar category as sick days? Aren't they simply saying, "I'm not able to work today and be my best?" Yet repeatedly, I hear gripes from the older generations that Gen Z would rather prioritize mental health at the expense of productivity. I'd argue they simply understand that well-bring and performance go hand-in-hand.

As an employer or leader, you should be considering:

- Competitive salaries that reflect the cost of living. Financial security plays a huge role in job satisfaction, but also in reducing stress, anxiety and depression.
- Mental health resources such as therapy benefits or wellness stipends, or at least matching any physical health support (gym memberships, health subsidies) on the mental side.
- A culture that encourages work-life balance rather than burnout

When employees feel supported, they perform better. It's not about avoiding work—it's about sustaining long-term success.

We have to stop looking at the workforce as a group of separate and completely different entities. We're all human – and generally want similar things from work and our lives. Gen Z is no different, just like the Millennials were no different 15 years ago.