

Hacking Gen Z: Leadership Strategies to Better Engage Young Workers

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As each new generation joins the workforce, leaders find themselves navigating new challenges. The arrival of Generation Z—those born between 1995 and 2015—has brought its own set of complexities, leaving many in leadership roles searching for effective strategies to engage and motivate these young workers. Gen Z is unique, shaped by a world vastly different from that of previous generations, and understanding their perspectives is crucial for successful management.

Understanding Gen Z: Shaped by Uncertainty

To engage Gen Z effectively, it's important to recognize the context that has shaped their worldview. This generation grew up amid significant global upheaval and change, from the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks to the financial crisis of 2008, and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic. These events have instilled a strong desire for security in many young people. They crave stability in their personal and professional lives, seeking clear career paths and financial security.

Another crucial aspect to consider is the role their parents played. Parents played a role similar to that of an executive assistant, they have meticulously managed their children's schedules and responsibilities, ensuring they were in the right place at the right time with the necessary tools. While this support system has equipped Gen Z with many advantages, it has also left them with gaps in fundamental life skills such as time management and prioritization. This background necessitates that leaders provide more structured guidance in these areas.

Resilience, a critical attribute in today's fast-paced world, is something that takes time to develop. At Shattered Glass Leadership, we refer to this as “building floors” – creating solid foundations through reflection and application of experiences. However, Gen Z's experience has often felt like a never-ending series

of global crises, preventing them from progressing beyond the “sore” stage of personal growth. It’s akin to the muscle soreness one feels after a strenuous workout; without time to recover and build strength, they remain in a perpetual state of strain without reaching the stage where they see the gains.

Managing Gen Z: Pay and Value Perception

When it comes to managing Gen Z in the workplace, compensation is a baseline expectation. This generation expects fair pay that reflects their contributions and skills. However, they often struggle to separate their personal value from the value they bring to their roles within the organization. For them, transparent pay structures and clear discussions about career advancement are non-negotiable. They need to understand how their efforts are recognized and how they can grow within the company.

Moreover, organizations should prepare for shorter job tenures with Gen Z employees. In an ideal work environment with exceptional culture and leadership, Gen Z may stay for 3-5 years, which is considered long-term by their standards. Leaders should focus on creating meaningful experiences and development opportunities during this period to maximize engagement and contribution.

Strategies for Engaging Gen Z Workers

To effectively engage and retain Gen Z employees, organizations must adapt their strategies to meet these young workers' unique needs and expectations. Here are key approaches to consider:

1. **Clear Onboarding Processes:** Onboarding should be thorough and structured, helping new employees understand not only their role but also the organization’s expectations and culture. Including training on time management and prioritization can be particularly beneficial for Gen Z, given their upbringing with highly managed schedules. This initial phase sets the tone for their future within the company and provides the tools they need to succeed.
2. **Transparent Communication:** Open and honest communication is essential. Gen Z values feedback and wants to know how they are

performing and how they can improve. Regular check-ins and clear performance metrics help them feel connected and valued. Additionally, discussing career paths and potential growth within the company can align their personal goals with organizational objectives.

3. **Emphasize Stability and Security:** Given their history of experiencing global uncertainty, providing a sense of stability at work is crucial. This can be achieved through consistent policies, supportive leadership, and clear career progression. Assurance of job security and opportunities for advancement can help alleviate their anxiety about the future.
4. **Foster a Culture of Resilience:** Encourage a growth mindset and resilience by providing opportunities for learning and reflection. Allowing Gen Z to take on challenging projects and supporting them through failures can help them build the necessary skills to navigate and thrive in a rapidly changing world. Mentorship programs can also play a significant role in fostering these qualities.
5. **Adapt to Flexible Work Preferences:** Flexibility in how and where they work is important to Gen Z. Whether it's remote work options, flexible hours, or hybrid models, accommodating their preferences can lead to higher job satisfaction and productivity. Balancing these flexible arrangements with clear expectations ensures that work remains effective and goals are met.
6. **Leverage Technology:** As digital natives, Gen Z is comfortable with technology and expects it to be seamlessly integrated into their work. Leveraging modern tools for communication, collaboration, and project management can enhance their efficiency and engagement. Organizations should invest in technology that supports a dynamic and connected work environment.

The Path Forward: Evolving Leadership

Engaging Gen Z requires leaders to evolve continuously in their approach to managing people. This generation's diverse values, needs, and communication styles demand a nuanced and empathetic leadership style. By embracing these strategies and fostering an inclusive and adaptive work culture, leaders can

unlock the potential of their Gen Z workforce and drive their organizations forward.

The key to successfully engaging Gen Z lies in understanding their unique perspective and creating an environment that supports their growth and aligns with their values. As we navigate this generational shift, thoughtful and proactive leadership will be crucial in harnessing the energy and innovation that Gen Z brings to the table.

By reflecting on these strategies and adapting to the needs of Gen Z, organizations can ensure they not only survive but thrive in an ever-evolving landscape.