

Stop Worrying! Here's How to Embrace Gen Z at Work

by Phyllis Weiss Haserot



We've heard more than enough about every action and attribute of Millennials. In an effort to mitigate similar, often erroneous, perceptions of the serious, hardworking (and very different from Millennials) Gen Zers, also known as iGen, this article provides a briefing on their upbringing and education as a foundation for their expectations and behaviors as they begin to enter the full-time workforce.

It's time to prepare for embracing the new generation entering your gates. Will the Gen Zers, roughly age 22 and younger in 2018, be labeled "entitled" like the Millennials and Gen Xers before them? Have you considered what leads to that usually disparaging perception?

One could argue that every baby is born entitled to be served and taken care of without doing anything to earn it. But more significantly are what they are given and how they are treated as they grow and learn. Since my experience working with and knowing

Millennials has been largely positive, I think much criticism is born of misunderstandings and misinterpretations – and sometimes fears.

After reading [“The iGen Shift”](#) article in the New York Times, I decided to project what colleges are doing to accommodate what they think that cohort of students wants and needs to how those experiences will influence their expectations at work. Following are some of Gen Z’s attributes resulting from their formative influences we need to consider.

10 common and generalized observations about Gen Z:

- They want to solve, not just talk about, the world’s problems
- They’re ambitious, focused on career development and job-relevant education
- They’re frugal, not attracted to, or taken in by, traditional advertising
- They want conveniences and to do things on their own time and schedule
- Like Millennials they fear failure, but for somewhat different reasons, and they are concerned about safety, as terrorism has been a prominent factor in their lifetime
- The most diverse generation ever, they dwell on their personal identity. They very much want to be treated as individuals, receiving customized offerings, which they are used to getting based on the analytics of online retailers and even college recruiters.
- Their learning and interaction focuses on social media
- They feel stressed and isolated
- They dislike learning in groups, unlike Millennials. They like to think thorough information and have some hand-holding to be sure they got it right.
- Students are eager for face-to-face interaction with humans, though many are not good at it.

What some colleges have instituted

to meet what they have determined are Gen Z students’ wants and needs:

- Ohio State University, some examples: taking attendance via Twitter hashtags; late night office hours by video conference (on Zoom); assignments posted on the Slack app.
- Ohio State also opened a Stress Management & Resiliency Lab for mindfulness and deep breathing to lower anxiety measured by a biofeedback monitor in order to address the mental wellness problem reported by the Gen Z age group. Other schools also promote mindfulness and meditation.
- Schools are revamping courses to be more engaging to a social media addicted generation eager to self-express and show what they know.
- School libraries are adding cafes; academic departments are adding lounges with tables and shared public spaces for tutoring rather than a “country club, mostly playful, atmosphere that was designed for Millennials.
- Colleges are paying attention to tone and quality of their messages to convey authenticity and transparency, a personal and animated voice.
- Schools have an active presence on the social media favored by Gen Z.
- They are making everything Instagramable to meet the “photo or it didn’t happen” mindset.

Why You Should Care

As a result, the above is an indication of what college-educated entry level workers will be used to and expecting from employers. These changes are costly to educational institutions (so tuition keeps rising) and will be costly to employers as well as they seek to compete and prepare for young workers. Be advised now. As an employer, there will be pressure to change again what you recently changed to meet what you thought Millennials want. This suggests considering what works for all generations together in design, services and policies, rather than laser focusing on only one.

Don't call Zers "entitled." What they have experienced so far in their young lives creates their expectations for the future.

I suggest thinking this through in advance, decide what you are prepared to do, and build in discussion of expectations to employee orientation and training. This new talent is eager to work hard if they feel appreciated, respected and get their most important needs met for the success and security they crave.

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Please send your comments to pwhaserot@pdcounsel.com and contribute to this conversation on social media. #ExpectingGenZ #GenZatWork

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