



## MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

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# TOP TIPS FOR ATTRACTING AND MANAGING GEN Z EMPLOYEES

BY CHRISSY CARROLL, MPH, RD

**MOVE OVER, MILLENNIALS.** There's a new generation entering the workforce, and that's Gen Z. Every new generation brings fresh challenges in attracting and managing employees, but you can implement forward-thinking strategies to position yourself for success with your Gen Z staff.

### WHO IS GEN Z?

Gen Z is an example of a generational cohort, which represents groups of individuals categorized by their birth years. Gen Z is loosely defined as those born between 1996 and 2010; these folks currently range in age from 14 to 28 years old.

Each generational cohort is molded by cultural and global events of their time, giving rise to some similarities in values, opinions, and characteristics. Of course, these are broad generalizations, so not every person that falls into the cohort will share these traits.

In general, though, here are some important Gen Z attributes, which will influence communication and work preferences:

- Gen Z are digital natives, having grown up with access to the Internet, smartphones, and social media. In fact, their largest news source is typically social media (Ketchum PR., 2023). They are likely to be early adopters to new technologies, which could benefit your department.
- Research shows Gen Z may prefer communicating with texts, emojis, and gifs (Rue, 2018). However, they might still prefer face-to-face conversations with superiors in the workplace, despite possibly struggling with this communication type (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).
- As the most racially and ethnically diverse generation, they are passionate about the ideals of equality and diversity (Rue, 2018).
- Gen Z has grown up with instantaneous answers on the Internet, which can sometimes translate to expecting quick solutions to problems. If problems require bureaucratic policies or longer troubleshooting, this may become frustrating to Gen Z.
- This generation experienced part of childhood during "The Great Recession" of 2007 to 2009, as well as the uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic – making economic stability a concern as they start their career.
- Gen Z is on track to be the most educated generation yet. However, this focus on high-stakes educational opportunities means that fewer teens and young adults are engaging in early employment experiences compared to past generations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020). Your organization may be their first job.



- Of teens who *have* held a job, though, a majority report their first paid work experience was in a restaurant (National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, 2018). Many skills built in restaurants extend to noncommercial settings.
- Gen Z and millennial employees spend less time at one job position compared to older employees (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). This might be due to salary, the desire for growth, boredom, or work-life balance. Gen Z tends to believe companies only care about employees superficially, so they may not have organizational loyalty (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

#### HOW CAN YOU BETTER RECRUIT GEN Z EMPLOYEES?

Now that you've got the facts about Gen Z employees, how do you get them in the door? Try these tips:



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compared to older employees. This might be due to salary, the desire for growth, boredom, or work-life balance.

#### Look at your compensation package.

Among recent college graduates, 62 percent report that salary is the most important aspect of a job (2023 State of the Graduate Report, 2023). Compare your compensation to other foodservice jobs, both organizational and commercial, and see where you stand.

For example, Sean Blair, a Gen Z line cook, tells us "I'd be interested in noncommercial food service if they were offering higher pay with less hours, and benefits that could be sustainable until retirement" (S. Blair, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

Similarly, Miranda Tollefson, a Massachusetts-based Gen Z woman, noted, "The starting pay of 90 percent of entry level jobs does not come anywhere close to being able to afford



# LIKE

## USE SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

to advertise jobs, like sharing opportunities on LinkedIn, creating a promoted post on Instagram, or sharing job postings in local town Facebook groups.

rent, food, and utilities. The largest killer of work ethic is the lack of reasonable pay. Why would you pour yourself into work if you can't afford necessities of living?" (M. Tollefson, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

If your salary is below a living wage or market rate—which will vary by area—see if you can work with administrators to increase your labor budget. If that is not an option, figure out how to maximize other employment perks such as tuition remission, continuing education, flexible schedule, exceptional health benefits, free meals, etc.

### Advertise jobs in multiple ways.

Surveys found Gen Z employees are likely to look for jobs via word of mouth, online search engines, and social media (National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, 2018).

Let your personal network know that your department is hiring, as they may have friends or neighbors looking for positions. Use social media networks to advertise jobs, like sharing opportunities on LinkedIn, creating a promoted post on Instagram, or sharing job postings in local town Facebook groups—along with posting on classic job websites like Indeed.

### Make the application process quick and easy.

Can job hunters quickly find your open positions online? Is there a clearly visible “apply” button? And perhaps most importantly, can the application be completed on a mobile device, which is where many Gen Z folks may do so?

Research from Glassdoor found almost 65 percent of foodservice job seekers use mobile devices to apply for positions – higher than any other industry in their internal

research (Zhao, 2019).

Similarly, consider the length of the application. Research from Glassdoor found that cutting application time by 10 percent was linked to a 2.3 percent increase in job applications on mobile devices and 1.5 percent bump on desktop devices (Zhao, 2019).

In other words, the longer the application and the more difficult it is to complete on a phone, the more potential applicants you're losing.

### Emphasize stability.

Growing up during times of economic uncertainty and a worldwide pandemic, members of this generation are often considered more pragmatic and less idealistic than their predecessors, the millennials.

In fact, research published by McKinsey & Company noted “Many Gen Zers are keenly aware of the need to save for the future...They already show a high preference for regular employment rather than freelance or part-time work, which may come as a surprise compared to the attitude of millennials” (Francis & Hoefel, 2018).

In organizational food service, you can use this to your advantage. Unlike the uncertainty of restaurants where tips can make or break a shift, working in school food service or a long-term care facility offers steady paychecks. Applicants can also take comfort in the fact that employees are always needed to prepare and serve meals in noncommercial settings.





## REFERENCES

Scan QR code to view the list of resources for this article.

### Create an inclusive and diverse work environment.

Numerous surveys and articles note the importance of diversity and equality among Gen Z employees (National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, 2018; Rue, 2018). It is important that your organization upholds these standards if you hope to attract and retain Gen Z staff.

### Offer continuing education opportunities for career growth.

Among recent college graduates, 54 percent would turn down a job without the potential for growth and advancement (2023 State of the Graduate Report, 2023). This can be a challenge in food service, where there may be limited growth opportunities within one setting.

However, you can still offer continuing education opportunities for your employees that allow them to grow in transferable knowledge and skills—for example, leadership training. You can play up the fact that many skills in foodservice, like customer service or conflict resolution, translate to other industries.

Also, consider covering training programs to become a CDM, CFPP. There is a perception that foodservice and hospitality jobs are more of a “temporary occupation as compared to a well-defined career pathway” (Goh & Okumus, 2020). Providing an opportunity to earn a credential breaks that notion and advances career outlook.

### HOW CAN YOU BETTER MANAGE GEN Z EMPLOYEES?

After hiring, here are a few strategies to set up your Gen Z employees for success:

#### Set clear expectations.

Fewer Gen Z employees are starting adulthood with previous work experience compared to past generations (Parker & Igielnik, 2020), so their role at your organization may be their first forte in a professional setting.

Lexie Mahoney, a Gen Z foodservice employee, notes “I worked in the



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dietary department in a nursing home and found many people my age don’t know professional etiquette. For example, they may call out instead of finding shift replacements or wear AirPods during their shift” (L. Mahoney, personal communication, January 19, 2024).

Be clear about workplace etiquette and behavior. Even if it seems like

common sense to you, it still needs to be verbalized during training and provided in written guidelines.

#### Embrace their technology skills.

As digital natives, Gen Z knows technology. Managing a school nutrition program? Why not have your Gen Z employee help with developing social media content. Working in long-term care? Maybe your Gen Z employee can be involved in implementing or testing new tools, like service robots or remote temperature sensors.

#### Be an authentic, open-minded leader.

Gen Z is thought to value honesty and open dialogue with their managers. They want their ideas to be heard and valued (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022).

Tollefson mentions, “Most of Gen Z has wonderful problem-solving skills for difficult tasks...They may find a better way to perform a task and teach it to their peers. Older generations will sometimes give push back on new ideas from younger generations, hindering their work ethic” (M. Tollefson, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

Are you giving your employees a chance to provide feedback? Are you showing true interest in their ideas or solutions? Are you acting on their feedback when feasible? Not every solution will be one that can be implemented, but a key sentiment is to be authentically open to new ideas.

#### Teach them culinary skills.

Even among nutrition students and Gen Z RDs, research from Ketchum shows that many don’t feel equipped to cook in the kitchen. This generation may not be as comfortable with

preparing traditional recipes; to them a meal may simply be a pairing of ready-to-eat foods or something that's quick to prepare (Ketchum PR., 2023).

If your Gen Z employees are going to be involved in food preparation, you may need to teach them the basics of recipe preparation—including why changes cannot be made on the fly for dietary reasons—and how to use commercial cooking equipment.

#### Offer flexibility.

Some Gen Z employees may still be in college or juggling a second job, which can make it tough to work on a set schedule. Consider offering flexible shift schedules that allow them to fit the job within the realm of their life as a whole.

Or, perhaps you create an online schedule that allows employees to claim shifts they want or swap with

another employee (Massart, 2022). These can be more difficult for you to manage, so they require careful evaluation of feasibility prior to implementation.

#### Act as a mentor to build their confidence.

Among Gen Z nutrition professionals, 64 percent named imposter syndrome as something they wanted to work on, meaning they may not feel confident in their role (Ketchum PR., 2023). Mentoring younger employees can help build their skills and confidence, with over 40 percent of Gen Z folks in one survey agreeing that mentors help with this (National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, 2018).

Blair says, “Managers should understand that they are dealing with a highly impressionable person, and

are likely a big part of them growing up and leading to their path of success through life. Managers should understand that Gen Z employees do not know as much, and help them with career development skills and planning for their future” (S. Blair, personal communication, January 22, 2024).

#### THE BOTTOM LINE

Successfully recruiting and managing Gen Z employees requires acknowledging their shared values and characteristics, while simultaneously remembering that every individual does not fall into these societal averages. Across the board, though, a simple application process, clear expectations, proper training, growth opportunities, and mentorship will go a long way in getting the newest generation in the door and set for success. **E**



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## ACE GRANT OPPORTUNITY

The Nutrition & Foodservice Education Foundation is pleased to offer a grant opportunity to one member of ANFP to attend the Annual Conference & Expo (ACE) in Reno, Nev., June 10-13! This grant will pay for the recipient's priority registration fees. Application deadline is March 31, 2024.

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## CE QUESTIONS | MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



This **Level II PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS** article assumes that the reader has a thorough knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to facilitate application of knowledge into practice by drawing connections among ideas and using information in new situations.



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- Which of the following is *true* regarding patterns of shared characteristics among Gen Z? (Keeping in mind these are generalizations across groups and not individual characteristics).
  - Gen Z doesn't care about economic stability
  - Gen Z is not concerned with diversity or equality compared to past generations
  - Gen Z is used to quick solutions to problems
- Which of the following is *false* regarding Gen Z's work experience?
  - There are fewer young adults working at a particular age compared to past generations
  - Gen Z is likely to leave a job sooner than older generations
  - Of Gen Z teens that had a job, very few were in any type of food service or hospitality
- Among recent graduates, what percent report that salary is the most important part of any job?
  - 62 percent
  - 36 percent
  - 13 percent
- Which of the following changes to your recruitment process would *not* encourage more applications from Gen Z candidates?
  - Require applicants to stop by in person to get an application
  - Make applications mobile-friendly, so they can be completed on a phone
  - Advertise positions through word of mouth, online job postings, and social media
- Research from Glassdoor found that cutting online application time led to what changes?
  - Decreased mobile and desktop applications submitted
  - Increased mobile and desktop applications submitted
  - Decreased mobile applications and increased desktop applications submitted
- According to patterns in generational cohorts, which of the following is most likely to be a strength among Gen Z? (Keeping in mind these are generalizations across groups and not individual characteristics).
  - Culinary skills
  - Organizational loyalty
  - Digital technology skills
- What is imposter syndrome in the context of this article?
  - An employee pretends to have a different job in your organization
  - An employee does not feel confident or does not feel like they belong in their role
  - A leader takes on a dictator-like approach to management
- According to a survey from the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation, what percentage of Gen Z employees believe mentorship helps build skills and confidence?
  - 60 percent
  - 40 percent
  - 20 percent



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