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Preparing the Workplace for Generation Z

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During the next few years, we will see an increase in the number of workers entering the workplace who are part of Generation Z. This generation, born after 1995 and now in their 20s, brings a new perspective on personal and professional values, an inherent understanding of technology and an acceptance of diversity unlike those that preceded it. As the largest generation in the United States, it will alter the workplace for years to come. In order to maintain a strong workforce, businesses and organizations must attract and retain Generation Z workers. Understanding their values and what makes them different from previous generations will be crucial to achieving this goal.

As members of Generation Z enter the workforce, there will be up to five generations working together: Traditionalists, born 1925-1945; Baby Boomers, born 1946-1964; Generation X, born 1965-1980; Millennials (Generation Y), born 1981-1995; and Generation Z, born after 1995. According to a 2017 Nielsen report, Generation Z makes up 26 percent of the U.S. population; Millennials, 22 percent; Generation X, 20 percent; Baby Boomers 24 percent; and the Greatest Generation (Traditionalists), 9 percent.[1] In many cases, a Generation Z individual new to the workplace will be reporting to a Baby Boomer, who, through hard work and long hours, has earned an executive or management position. The dichotomy between these two generations, if not acknowledged and addressed appropriately, will result in workplace disharmony, increased complaints and the potential for legal action.

Who is Generation Z?

A Gen Z was born into a time of social media. They were the first generation to have internet technology available at a young age. According to U.S. consultants Sparks and Honey, in 2014, 41 percent of Generation Z spent more than three hours per day using computers for purposes other than schoolwork, compared with 22 percent in 2004.[2] They have been described as having a "digital bond" with the internet. They view life through smartphones, they share music and photos and they communicate with the touch of a button and purchase products on demand. They have a

considerable capacity for processing large amounts of information.

Individuals in Generation Z are the children of Generation X,[3] which is described as having "the least credence in the concept of the American Dream among adult generations."[4] The Great Recession that began in 2008 taught Generation Z to be independent and led to an entrepreneurial mindset that emerged after they saw their parents and older siblings struggle in the workforce.[5] Generation Z is the most diverse generation in American history and will likely be the last with a Caucasian majority. Hispanic, African-American, Asian and two or more races (multiracial) make up 47 percent of the Gen Z population.[6]

What is Important to Generation Z?

In her book *Generation Z in the Workplace*, Dr. Candace Steele Flippin looks at the personal and professional values of this segment[7]. She conducted a study in which she asked participants to rank six values in order of importance. Gen Z ranked happiness at the top of the list, with career near the bottom:

1. Happiness
2. Relationships
3. Health
4. Financial security
5. Career
6. Faith[8]

When asked to list the most important element of the American Dream, both men and women in Gen Z put being able to achieve goals at the top and home ownership and building a legacy at the bottom: Men Women   1.Being able to achieve goals 1. Being able to achieve goals   2.Financial security 2. Ability to pursue education   3.Freedom of speech 3. Financial security   4.Ability to pursue an education 4. Freedom of speech   5.Building a legacy 5. Home ownership 6.Home ownership 6. Building a legacy[9]

Flippin found that members of Gen Z value "doing well in their role, being able to contribute meaningfully to their workplaces, and making good money."[10]

Gen Z's parents taught them the importance of working hard. They understand there is a need for constant skill development in order to stay relevant, and they are willing to do what it takes – but they expect to be rewarded for their efforts.[11] Unlike many Millennials, members of Generation Z want to work independently rather than on teams or in groups. They like to work alone; prefer to have office space to themselves, rather than an open, collaborative workspace; and want to manage their own projects so that their skills and abilities can shine through.[12] They do not want to depend on others to get their work done.[13]

Their independence and desire for financial security comes, in part, from the effects the economic downturn that began in 2008 had on their family. Many in Gen Z are deciding to forego a four-year college degree to avoid the associated debt, and are entering the workforce straight out of high school with no further education or while taking college classes online. They are entrepreneurial; 72 percent of Gen Z high school students say that they want to start a business, reflecting their desire for independence and financial success.[14] Unlike many Baby Boomers, members of Generation Z are not willing to sacrifice a personal life for career success.

Managing Generation Z

Management should be careful not to stereotype employees who fall within a certain generation as always having a certain set of characteristics. It is, however, helpful for managers to be aware of what drives employees and to understand the differences between one generation and the next. Managing Generation Z as if they were Millennials is not likely to be successful, just as managing Millennials the same as Baby Boomers will not work.

The following are some characteristics of Generation Z that employers should take note of when managing them:

→ They are ready and willing to work.

→ They want to be fully engaged in work they enjoy.

→ They are willing to put in the time and effort to expand their opportunities and get ahead in their careers.

→ They need a sense of purpose.

→ They want a boss they can respect.

→ They want some freedom and autonomy to express their ideas.

→ They need to understand their task or assignment and how it fits into the big picture.

→ They want someone to listen to their ideas and take them seriously.

→ They want to be challenged.

This is not a generation that wants to come to work, do the job assigned and go home. Managers should make rote tasks mean something, and illustrate exactly what the big picture is and explain the worker's role in helping realize it.[15] Keeping in mind that a sense of purpose is paramount for these employees, good managers should foster this instinct and point it in constructive directions.[16]

In her study, Flippin asked Generation Z employees to 1) "list one thing you would like your supervisor to start doing to help you be more successful in your role," and 2) list one thing you would like your supervisor to stop doing.[17] The respondents identified the following as things their supervisors could do to help them be more successful:

→ Provide opportunity and encouragement and freedom to take initiative and move ahead.

→ Give clear and detailed communications about directions and expectations.

→ Offer more feedback on things well done.

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→ Offer appropriate and continuing training, including cross-training in other departments.

→ Be a boss who is kind, respectful, supportive and understanding.[18]

Among the actions that Generation Z employees want their supervisors to *stop* doing are micromanaging, playing favoritism, being vague, not being available and treating them like children.[19]

While no employee wants a manager with the above deficiencies, this generation in particular wants clear direction, feedback and communication. Managers should provide opportunities for Gen Z employees to increase their skills and share their ideas. They should trust the employee's abilities unless proven otherwise, and provide regular feedback, not only as to how the employee is performing, but also how his or her performance affects the team, project and organization as a whole. Simply providing a numbered score or a "needs improvement" on an evaluation without further feedback is not effective management.

For those supervisors who understand what motivates a Generation Z employee, and who manage accordingly, the reward can be a hardworking and successful employee who makes a valuable contribution to the organization. Given the attributes that are important to Generation Z employees, they are likely to become successful managers of those who follow.

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[1] Nielsen Total Audience Report: Q1 2017, July 12, 2017, http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/reports/2017/the-nielsen-total-audience-report-q1-2017.html

[2] Sparks and Honey, "Meet Generation Z: Forget Everything You Learned About Millennials," June 17, 2014, p. 39.

[3] Williams, Alex, "Move Over Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z," The New York Times, September 18, 2015.

[4] Frank N. Magid Associates, "The First Generation of the Twenty First Century." Archived 4 March 2016 at the Wayback Machine. 30 April 2012

[5] Dupont, Stephen, "Move Over Millennials, Here Comes Generation Z: Understanding the 'New Realists' Who Are Building the Future," Public Relations Tactics. Public Relations Society of America, December 10, 2015.

[6] Villa, Jose, "Multiracial Gen Z And The Future Of Marketing," Media Post, September 3, 2015 (https:// www.mediapost.com/publications/article/257641/multiracial-gen-z-and-the-future-of-marketing.html).

[7] Flippin, Dr. Candace Steele*, Generation Z In the Workplace,* 2017, pp. 12 – 13.

[8] *Id.*

[9] *Id* at pp. 16 – 17.

[10] *Id.* at p 27.

[11] Patel, Deep, "8 Ways Generation Z Will Differ From Millennials In The Workplace," forbes.com, September 21, 2017.

[12] *Id.*

[13] *Id.*

[14] *Id.*

[15] Costa, Jose, "Gen Z Is Officially Here. How Will We Manage?" Forbes, September 10, 2018.

[16] *Id.*

[17] Flippin, Dr. Candace Steele, *Generation Z In the Workplace,* 2017, p. 48

[18] *Id.*

[19] *Id.* at p. 49.