

# Vibe and Slay Generational Differences in the Workplace:

# Get the tea on how to retain Gen Z

BY STEPHANIE RILEY

Do you understand the title of this article? If not, you are most likely not a part of Generation Z nor a young Millennial. Essentially, the title translates to get along and do exceptionally well with different generations in the workplace and secrets about how to retain Generation Z. Today, those born between the years of 1997 and 2012, depending on the source, are part of Gen Z, and they are rapidly joining the workforce in every industry and profession. In fact, we are in an unprecedented time where five different generations are in the workplace simultaneously — Traditionalists (1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Millennials (1981-1996) and Generation Z. According to an April 2023 article on Zurich.com, Gen-Zers are expected to form 27% of the workforce by 2025. It's clear that multiple generations will continue to contribute to





the workforce for years to come, and instead of assuming an age gap is negative, Elizabeth Perry suggests in her August 2023 BetterUp online article that generational diversity can be a competitive advantage because when you “find value in everyone’s perspectives, you’ll see a stronger teamwork, productivity and creativity.”

No one asks to be born into a particular generation — we are simply born into the generation chosen for us. So, why should we reproach Gen Z for being born into a tech-driven world? This article aims to provide insight to employers, companies and/or brands and organizations, like IRWA, about how to market to, and work with, these fresh-faced, young professionals and accept the positive attributes they are sure to bring to the economy and the workplace.

### Born Digital

The first thing to keep in mind about Gen-Zers is that they were born in a fully digital age. They do not know life without the internet, and their first communication device was most likely a smartphone, essentially, a handheld computer. But just because these youngsters grew up in front of a screen doesn’t mean they don’t long for genuine connection. Professionally speaking, a lot of Zoomers launched their careers during technological shifts and a global pandemic, which led to most of them generally being entrepreneurial, independent and having the ability to adapt. It

also means that, according to Later’s Social Media Marketing Blog’s December 2023 entry, “Gen Z is the loneliest generation in America, so they’re actively looking for ways to engage and connect with like-minded individuals.” To do this, employers, companies and organizations must create and build a strong community and corporate culture, emphasize their purpose and promote citizenship.

The decline in interpersonal interactions has left working Gen-Zers yearning for a strong sense of community and acceptance. Gen Z is the most diverse generation in U.S. history, and as such, the company they work for, product or service they use or organization they belong to will need to exhibit a welcoming culture and a community that celebrates diversity, equity and inclusion. My younger sister and 21-year-old college student Audrey Lee, in our interview for this article, declared, “The people working around [me] and the dynamic of the office will strongly impact my decision and desire to work somewhere.” Lee also says her ideal job would be at a smaller company because although resources and pay could be lower, “the connection to co-workers and clients becomes much stronger, which is more important to me.”

Inclusion can also relate to the decision-making processes in the workplace. “[E]ncourage us to chime in so we feel encouraged and freely able to share our thoughts,” Lee said. She continued to explain that employers need to create an environment where Gen-Zers feel supported and heard. “We have a unique perspective and can bring a lot of innovation and creativity to a team.”

Along with their strong sense of community and belonging, potential employers and brands looking to attract Gen-Zers should emphasize their civic involvement and demonstrate commitment to sustainability, climate change, public health and other global causes Zoomers hold in high importance. A Deloitte survey revealed that Gen Z is the only generation that prefers purpose over pay, and Gen Z expert Larry Milstein, a Gen-Zer himself, says in the aforementioned Later article, “We’re 3x more likely than older generations to believe a company has a role in improving society.”

For IRWA and the right of way industry, the continuous marketing for education and designations gives Gen Z a strong sense of community and allows for mentorship and the ability for a young professional to learn and grow.

IRWA Young Professionals Committee Vice Chair and Chapter 31 member, Janielle Edge, RWA, remarked, “[Older generations] think we don’t need them, but we do need them. We need and want mentors.” Edge, a young Millennial, said she will continue to dive into learning and take the path to obtain her SR/WA designation.



Similarly, Gen Z right of way agent and IRWA Chapter 4 member Joey Ferguson recommends companies “establish a clear mentor program, match up with experienced professionals and allow them to grow with the help of one another.” The variety of IRWA education paths, course options and credentials provide these youthful right of way professionals training and growth opportunities, and like Perry says, “Training is a tool to unite older and younger groups. Everyone has plenty to teach one another.”

## Born Inundated

These days, there are virtual vehicle test drives, augmented reality headsets and an ever-growing network of social media platforms in our current digital landscape. As a result of Gen Z growing up with technology at their fingertips, one can expect these young professionals to do their proper online research before looking into a job, service, or product. “They’ll do a deep dive into a brand’s website, scroll through their social media accounts, and read comments and reviews,” claims the Later Blog. Because of this generation’s due diligence, it is important for companies and organizations to be transparent and market in a way that is easily digestible, fun and quick. For professions and industries like right of way, Ferguson adds, “the most important thing is to create a positive impression of the right of way field.”

While a transparent environment should be positive and engaging, it also includes the encouragement of open communication, providing regular feedback, upholding standards and taking accountability. “Trust is only second to price in terms of determining what brands we’re going to support,” Gen-Zer Milstein says. We have all seen popular brands and companies blasted negatively in the media for not upholding the standards that they seem to communicate through their marketing and advertising, which can be avoided, according to the Later blog, by having your Gen Z marketing strategy “be transparent and publicly take accountability for any missteps.”

Gen-Zers are also inquisitive, partly because they are used to getting answers with one click. So, in person, if they don’t know or can’t get the answer from the internet, they simply want a comfortable environment to ask. Either way, how openly older generations answer these youngsters’ questions is important to make them feel accepted and equal. Edge poses, “There’s a gap between [young professionals] and those 50+, and how do we keep that cycle flowing?”

Well, since you just read that a robust corporate culture is important to Gen Z, transparency and open communication can improve the flow of information and the cycle of workers to maintain professional skills and experience across generations. Ferguson believes “there is a responsibility of both the employee and the employer to find a conducive style in which the company is meeting deadlines, and the employees are happy.” However, he advises, “Working with each individual employee will be key to developing a plan that meets both parties’ needs.”

## Born Fun and Free

Because they were born digital and born inundated, Gen-Zers have an uncanny ability to filter content and information. Milstein states, “you have around 8 seconds to essentially tell us why we should pay attention before we move on.” Companies and organizations can easily and effectively market to this trait by incorporating fun, quick tutorials or videos, humorous memes or conversational quips on their social media accounts, websites, circulated newsletters and internal emails. Integrate social activities, video calls and open conversations to give Gen-Zers a chance to build stronger interpersonal relationships that they so deeply desire. “Bringing people together in person is still a very important aspect [to Gen Z] of creating a positive workplace,” Ferguson says.

These younger employees also seek nontraditional work schedules and the flexibility to work from home and get out of the office. “I love to be out in the field,” Edge explains, “it’s just been fun to see different parts of the state. One day is never the same, so our brains are out and not stuck behind a desk.” Ferguson agrees and dotes, “The freedom to explore my amazing and complex career is extremely rewarding.”

Let’s be honest, each generation tends to believe that the one after it is lazy or doesn’t work as hard. “We aren’t lazy. All of the things we have to assist us allow us to not work to the bone. We’ve evolved,” Edge says. Edge and Lee both expressed that instead of looking at Gen Z’s use of the evolution of technology as “lazy,” that it should be looked at as resourceful and innovative.

So, there you have it. Industries, companies and organizations including IRWA, can attract, engage and retain Gen Z if they can create and market a positive and inclusive work environment, communicate with transparency and give Gen-Zers the freedom to explore and be inquisitive. As Ferguson puts it, “[Gen Z] are the future of any given career field, and we need to be given the opportunity to break the stereotypes in order for us to help progress these professions for the better.” 🌟



*Stephanie Riley is the director of communications and marketing for Yasmin L. Stump Law Group, PC where she oversees the firm’s business development and marketing initiatives, website, and social media. She is currently a member of IRWA’s International Marketing and Membership Committee and heads its Marketing Subcommittee. Stephanie is also the current IRWA Chapter 10 webmaster, social media manager and chair of its Communications and Relations Committee.*