City & Guilds

ATTRACTING THE NEW GENERATIONS OF TALENT

Gen Z & Gen A

By Chloe Combi



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Author, speaker and columnist Chloe Combi is one of the world's foremost experts on Generation Z and Generation A, writing the first book on them: 'Generation Z: Their Voices, Their Lives.' She has now interviewed over 20,000 members of the youngest generations and utilises that expertise to help companies, governments and schools to understand and prepare for the present and the future.



What's new?

By 2030, in an unprecedented time in human working industry, there will be five generations in the workplace, with the potential for 40 to 50 years' age gap between the youngest and oldest employees. This is sometimes represented as something negative but just think of the opportunity! All that experience and those different skills under one roof!

Who are they?

Gen A (2013–2024)

Gen Z (1997–2012)

Millennials (1981–1996)

Gen X (1965–1980)

Boomers (1948–1964)

Unrepresented: Generation Beta (born from 2025) and Silver Surfers (retired)





Finding you

First of all, you can never attract the brightest and the best of new talent if they can't find you! The vast majority of people under the age of 30 never look in traditional spaces like the job section of a newspaper or even at the Job Centre.

Most young people search for jobs using AI tools, Google and, most importantly, on social media. So make sure that your SEO (search engine optimisation) is on point and that your adverts on social media look exciting and will excite the people searching.

This means that job adverts shouldn't just have a print component, but also a video component, with both short and long form content. You will get most young eyeballs on YouTube, TikTok and Instagram, with older Gen Zs and younger Millennials also using LinkedIn more. Don't be tempted to use AI tools to create job adverts – ideally, they should look human and real, represent the company and not look like everyone else's content.



Overcoming AI applications

Many companies and industries are asking young applicants not to use AI tools to write CVs and apply because they don't give a true sense of the applicant. This is a reasonable request. All companies should return this favour, by using humans at your company to communicate with applicants and interview applicants. Using an AI bot to do this is inhuman and alienating!

Job hunting for Gen Z can be an alienating experience, so having an actual human answer and interact with them makes companies who still do that stand out, in very positive ways.

Early stages: The interview

After an applicant has been called to interview, this is often when the real fear starts.

We now live in a world where the youngest of Gen Z are coming into the workplace with little or no realworld work experience and little emotional and practical confidence.

The key goal of the interview should be to learn about the candidate but also give the candidate some insight into your company, including whether they think they would work well in your organisation.

Young recruits say that the best interviews gave a clear sense of what the company was all about and were conducted in a friendly, professional manner.

Do's

- Ask questions that are related to the job.
- Give the candidate a clear insight into job requirements and company culture.
- Look at skills over privilege.
- Be very clear about expectations and process – time, place, dress.
- Reimburse the candidate. For a lot of young people, a train or bus fare represents a high expense. Helping them to get there if the meeting is in person exponentially raises the number and quality of candidates.

Don'ts

- Cancel interviews last minute; this is unfair and unprofessional.
- Be unkind, impatient or seem bored with the process. You'd be amazed how often young people have an unpleasant or traumatising first interview experience!



The first year

The first year in a job is one of the most important in anyone's working life. A good, solid first year is the difference between a young person leaving and a young person building the kind of foundation where they stay and become a future leader themselves.



What does good training look like?

Transparency

Nothing sets up an early culture of trust like transparency. This means transparency about salary, job expectations, hours and job arrangements.

Mentoring

This is one of the most important components of quality, modern training. A mentor who can model the job, share skills and give frequent feedback in real time is one of the most valuable assets of a good company culture.

Ongoing feedback

Having a 6-month or 12-month review is an anachronistic practice with limited success and one that doesn't work for Gen Z and Gen A who've grown up with perpetual feedback. Also, who remembers what they did 12 months ago? Giving frequent feedback via a mentor makes much more sense, as constructive criticism and encouragement can be given in real time, which is much more meaningful for professional development in those early years.

Who works well together?

Being thoughtful about this question is important. Quite often there's a temptation to pair the younger generations together, particularly for professional development. This is often a catastrophic combination! What actually works better is a slightly older mentor working with young recruits. They won't see each other as competitors and slightly older generations might be more patient, experienced and might learn more themselves from a younger perspective! Think about it like this:
Gen Z + Gen X = Awesome!

What's in a handbook?

Older generations sometimes view detailed work manuals as excessively nannying and prescriptive. Young people, who are often coming into the workplace for the first time, don't!

In the early days, companies can't give young people – who don't come from education or parenting environments that encourage initiative – too much information!

Whether it's texting etiquette, tearoom etiquette, phones in work, what to wear or where to go, if they're worried about something at work or their mental health, you can't be too clear or give too much information.



The future

Ideally you want your brilliant new recruits to flourish and stay in the company. These are the things that make this exponentially more likely:

- A clear overview of how to achieve promotion. This shouldn't be about rewarding time (which breeds complacency) but excellence.
- A liveable wage that gives a reasonable standard of living. This is the single biggest reason young people leave a job – they can't afford to live on what they're being paid. Remember that the cost of living is very different now to what it was even in 2015.
- Excellent mentorship. This is so important.
- Great training and modelling quashes imposter syndrome and anxiety in younger recruits and makes them more likely to soar!
- Excellent office/work culture. The question we should all be asking in rebuilding work culture post-pandemic is not when but why. If people of all ages feel like what happens in the workplace is different to what they can do at home – and there's skill-sharing, projects, stimulating work and mentoring – that builds a place where people want to come and do great work.



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But you might not know the breadth of dedicated solutions we offer employers.

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Tom Arey, Director, PfP Thrive

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We work with Governments, employers, training providers, colleges and industry stakeholders to design and deliver high-quality training, qualifications, assessments and credentials that lead to meaningful career progression. We understand the life changing link between skills development, social mobility and success. Our solutions span critical sectors including construction, engineering, transport, energy and electrical, serving over 1 million learners annually.

Through our comprehensive portfolio of brands and trusted global network, we set industry-wide standards for technical, behavioural and commercial skills to improve performance and productivity. We believe you can achieve your potential - and we're here to help make it happen.

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