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61 million members of Gen Z are about to rock the workforce

Chris Morris

A new generation is starting to enter the workforce, and the office as you know it could be about to change dramatically. [Generation Z](http://www.cnbc.com/id/105118075?__source=msn|money|inline|story|&par=msn&doc=105174930) — people born after 1996 — is about to hit the working world in a big way. Consulting firm [BridgeWorks](http://www.generations.com/2017/03/08/generation-edge-101/) estimates that Gen Z accounts for 61 million people in the U.S., a number that's already larger than [Generation X](http://www.cnbc.com/id/105122921?__source=msn|money|inline|story|&par=msn&doc=105174930) and two-thirds the size of the [baby boomers](http://www.cnbc.com/id/10001238?__source=msn|money|inline|story|&par=msn&doc=105174930).

Gen Zers have lived a much different life than their parents and millennials. They're a generation that, in many cases, can't remember a life without a smartphone in their hand — and they have no memory of the 9/11 attacks, beyond the classroom. As a result, companies looking to recruit and retain them may need to adjust their tactics.

The [Center for Generational Kinetics](http://genhq.com/) has extensively studied this segment of the population. The good news for companies is this appears to be a group that wants to work hard and learn. They're also a generation that's thinking about their own financial future.

"These Gen Zers have seen their parents struggle financially [due to the recession and student loan crisis], so parents are having conversations about finances, money and debt with kids earlier. They're having conversations older generations never really had before," said Denise Villa, founder of The Center for Generational Kinetics.

Thirty-five percent of the people surveyed in the center's most recent study said they plan to start saving for retirement in their 20s. Twelve percent (and keep in mind, many of the people in this survey were still teens) say they've already started saving.

The new hiring paradigm

Hiring these people isn't just a matter of placing a want ad, though. Recruitment, said Heather Watson, behavioral designer at The Center for Generational Kinetics, is about to become more of a marketing effort.

"Think of your company as a brand," she said. "What makes it unique? What makes it fun? How do you visually show that?"

Ryan Marshall, regional manager of human resources at Convergint Technologies, agreed. He leads the company's Convergint Development Program, which recruits and trains college graduates for careers in the technology systems integration industry, and said the key to hiring Generation Z is less about benefits packages and more about the day-to-day work experience.

"One of the things we do is sell our culture," he said. "It seems to be that this generation is first and foremost looking for the best cultural fit for them. They're looking for a company where they're not just a number, but they're somewhere they can contribute to the company."

Gen Z also voraciously reads reviews — particularly those of a company they're considering. [Glass Door](https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm) is a valuable source of information for them, so it's wise to regularly check in there to see how employees (and ex-employees) paint a picture of your company.

The top thing Gen Z looks for is a fun place to work, with a flexible schedule and paid time off also ranking high. But while they want to have fun, that doesn't mean they're not serious, said Villa.

"They want to work," she said. "They want to do a very good job at that position. They're not looking at climbing the ranks quickly. They're looking at getting value quickly."

Employers' ROI

Marshall said that eagerness to work translates to a quicker return on employee investment.

"This generation is very, very savvy with technology," he said. "I think what has been most shocking to me is how quickly they pick up on things and how fast they contribute directly to our business and our bottom line."

But first, many will need to be trained on the skills that boomers and millennials take for granted, like handling calls and writing emails.

That's because Generation Z has been less about face-to-face communications— they more commonly communicate via text, emoji and video — and they're unprepared for a field such as customer service, where they could interact with irate people.

A different type of training required

"When you're thinking about retention and training, think about the soft skills these people need to be successful," said Villa. "They want to come in and do a really good job; they just need skills we grew up with that they didn't."

Other forms of training will have to take place in different ways, too, added Watson. Short YouTube-like instructional videos are especially effective.

The entry of Gen Z into the workforce could also shift the paradigm of the employer-employee relationship. The line between work and life that some companies encourage could fade.

"If you manage Gen Z, you're not only managing their skill performance, you're also kind of coaching their life as well," said Watson. "They want buddies and friends, which goes against everything you're taught in management class. They want to be socially connected with everyone. They want to be socially connected with their boss as well."

They also want feedback regularly. Having been raised in an instant-reaction world (with Likes and other social media rewards), 40 percent surveyed by the center say they want daily interactions with their boss — and if they don't get it, they often think they've done something wrong.

That's got some employers worried. In a [national survey of workplace managers by APPrise Mobile](https://www.glassdoor.com/index.htm), a mobile communications firm, almost one-third of millennial respondents say that it will be more difficult to manage employees from Gen Z compared to older generations. And 28 percent say it will be more difficult to train Gen Z employees.

*Related video: Analyst: These are the hottest brands for Gen Z and millennials*