

# FORGE AHEAD

Industry Insights for Manufacturing

## Understanding Gen-Z

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# The Time Has Come.


Gen Z is entering the workforce. To no surprise, this generation of movers and shakers is ready to make their impact on the world, and they're already starting with the future of work. Attracting Gen Z talent to the workplace is now requiring businesses to reevaluate their current practices and offerings to stay competitive in a fierce Employee's Market. To give companies a head start, this paper provides a thorough overview of how this new generation of workers think, work, and the expectations they have for future employers.

## Who are GenZ?

GenZ, the newest entrants to the workforce, are characterized by having been born between 1997-2012. According to PewResearch, GenZ is considered to be the most racially diverse generation in history and are on track to out-rank Millennials as the most educated generation the US has seen. GenZ also has the largest proportion of LGBT+ identifying members, illuminating the importance of inclusive and welcoming workplace environments. Within the city of Pittsburgh, 8.4% of the population already consists of working aged Gen Z individuals (18-24 years old), with more and more joining the workforce each day.

## What are their perceptions and expectations for employment?

Members of GenZ are resilient, having grown up in a society with rampant gun violence in schools, rapidly alarming climate change, economic uncertainty, decade long wars, and most recently the pandemic. While often criticized by other generations for being sensitive or entitled, the life events that occurred during GenZ's upbringing have created more empathetic and authentic humans. After experiencing the turbulent world around them, GenZ put a higher value on self-care, mental health, flexibility, efficiency, and equality, and they've shown they're ok with going against the grain and challenging the norm to meet those ideals.



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When asked specifically how they thought their view of work differed from previous generations, these were some of their responses:

“I think GenZ has a better time creating and sticking to boundaries when it comes to jobs, especially when managers or bosses try to make them overwork. It’s creating a people over profit ideology.”

“I think previous generations stuck with any job they got and think that it is the persons priority to make the job/higher ups their entire world. GenZ sees a job as momentary, and as disposable, not their priority.”

“Previous generations don’t trust people enough to work from home. They think unless they are under careful watch of a manager, people won’t work. GenZ is already burnt out.”

**“They often do not view themselves as less than their more tenured co-workers and are more likely to voice their opinions and jump at opportunities to lead, grow, and change processes for efficiency. In fact, adapting to change and encouraging change may be one of GenZ’s strongest attributes.”**

“We are more willing to rebel against the norm to get fair treatment.”

“GenZ has more demands from work benefits, such as paid overtime and reasonable pay and hours. This is especially the case as GenZ has greater higher education and living costs than older generations.”

“Older generations think you need to work until you die. I think GenZ knows when to stop.”

GenZ are blunt and true to who they are as individuals, and they’re more likely than others to bring that casual way of life with them into the workplace. Many are looking for employers who value a healthy work-life balance and who will provide a comfortable and human-centric atmosphere. Additionally, GenZ places high value on respect for others regardless of their title, experience, or background, and expects the same level of respect in return. They often do not view themselves as less than their more tenured co-workers and are more likely to voice their opinions and jump at opportunities to lead, grow, and change processes for efficiency. In fact, adapting to change and encouraging change may be one of GenZ’s strongest attributes. When integrating GenZ’s ideals and expectations with the those of current employees, a [Stanford study](#) of over 2000 GenZ members suggested that, “Both the older and the younger colleagues can learn from the other, in each case by listening with more respect, appreciation and trust. The older colleague can learn some helpful new ways of getting a job done, while the younger colleague may learn good reasons for why things have long been done in a certain way. Without that dialogue, we’ll have a wasteful tug of war between the past and the future.” Communication is key in bridging multiple generations together.



## How can they be reached and communicated with?

Members of GenZ were born during the digital age and grew up utilizing technology in almost all aspects of their lives. Constant communication and intake of new information is ingrained into their daily routines. GenZ values transparency and open communication, utilizing face-to-face (Zoom-to-Zoom) conversations for more serious discussions and texts for quick conversation. In a [survey](#) conducted by XYZ University ([xyzuniversity.com](#)), 43% of Gen Z respondents preferred face-to-face communication, 24% texts, 14% phone calls, 11% emails, and 8% social media.

The way in which to find and connect with potential GenZ candidates is also changing. The use of standard paper resumes is dwindling, and according to a 2019 study by Yello, 62% of GenZ job seekers found their jobs by networking and receiving referrals from mutual connections. Online job boards, company websites, and career centers are also effective ways of reaching this candidate pool. Social media companies are also beginning to explore the future of work and are testing recruiting websites where video recordings are used in place of a standard resume. The future of hiring could someday consist of scrolling through videos and finding a personality that fits within the culture of your company.

## Action Items and first steps towards being a sought-after employer of choice

The job market is currently very competitive for employers to attract, hire, and retain employees. In fact according to SHRM, the US is experiencing the largest [talent shortage](#) seen in the past 15 years, with many individuals retiring, quitting, or finding new jobs with higher/more livable wages. Throughout the pandemic, employees were shown just how valuable they were to the businesses they worked for, and now many are demanding better pay, better benefits, and a schedule that truly allows for a work-life balance. Those demands were evident in our survey as well, as a large majority of GenZ preferred a hybrid or fully remote work experience over full-time in person work.



GenZ's also shared how their view of work has changed since the pandemic, with many overlapping themes of a desire for flexible and dignified work:

"There should be a clear-cut line between work and rest."

"Work is flexible, not as rigid as it has been previously."

"It made me realize that its ok to take breaks, and that you don't need to "earn" taking breaks."

"Now when I think of work, I think of something that funds my life to do the things that I want. But I also see it as something that isn't forever, and that if it doesn't work for me, I will change it. My happiness is more important than any job."

"Almost all work can be work from home."

"Corporations were willing to sacrifice my health and well-being to save money."

**"Roughly 70% of GenZ surveyed shared that working in an inclusive environment was "extremely important" to them. This includes being LGBT+ friendly, racially inclusive, and adaptive for those with varying abilities. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training (DEI) is a fantastic learning opportunity to create a work culture where everyone feels welcome to be who they are."**

To stay competitive and to attract new and younger talent, it is important for businesses to recognize what candidates are looking for and to set their bar high by becoming an Employer of Choice. An Employer of Choice is a business that actively works to become the best employer they can be for the type of employees and talent they are looking to attract. To help set both employers and their employees up for success, Catalyst Connection has curated a robust offerings list, from Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion trainings to Pre-Apprenticeship programs. The goal of these programs is to give businesses the tools and resources they need to be a sought-after place of work.

For GenZ specifically, inclusiveness is a must. Roughly 70% of GenZ surveyed shared that working in an inclusive environment was "extremely important" to them. This includes being LGBT+ friendly, racially inclusive, and adaptive for those with varying abilities. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training (DEI) is a fantastic learning opportunity to create a work culture where everyone feels welcome to be who they are. Some immediate items companies can implement to be more inclusive include floating holidays, parental leave for all family structures, diverse hiring practices, etc. Companies flourish when they have teams of diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences, and over 50% of the GenZ we surveyed reported that they look at company websites/staff for diversity (age, race, gender, ethnicity) when considering a potential company to work for.



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Connecting with younger employees doesn't have to wait until they're on a job hunt – in fact it shouldn't. GenZ begin looking for and accessing companies they want to work for starting as early as high school. Getting involved with programs like the [Manufacturing Innovation Challenge \(MIC\)](#) allow companies to connect with local high schools and trade schools in their community. They're able to build relationships with students still in school, creating a talent pipeline while giving their businesses exposure. Another way to connect with students is through the [Pre-Apprenticeship Program](#), which connects employers with high school students working on higher level skills needed for full apprenticeship programs.

GenZ is progressing the future of work in ways that have not been seen before, and rather than avoid the demand for change, there are many action items companies can do to improve the workplace for all employees. Mutual respect, flexibility, open communication, and intentional leadership are all free to implement and can have a lasting impact on a company's ability to attract, hire, and retain talent from GenZ and beyond.

### **Author – Emily Siegel**



Emily Siegel joined Catalyst Connection in October of 2023 after working as an intern with the Human Capital team.

Her background is in the startup space, having run her own Pittsburgh-based startup, Trek Gum, since 2019. She has won Pitt's Randall Family Big Idea Competition, the ALG Regional Hardware Cup, and other various business pitch competitions over the past few years. After participating in the nationally-ranked Alpha Lab Gear accelerator program, Emily went on to raise a 6-figure seed round from VC firms to help her startup company grow.

Emily brings a new perspective to Catalyst's team by being able to assist other startups and smaller businesses in the area with

her first-hand knowledge of running a lean company and sharing the resources available to them. As a Workforce Specialist, Emily has been focused on finding innovative ways to reach and welcome GenZ into the manufacturing community by breaking the stigma around manufacturing and using new tools like TikTok to encourage younger individuals to consider being a "maker" or a "creator" as a career choice.

Emily holds a B.S. in Chemical Engineering and a B.S. in Biological Sciences from the University of Pittsburgh (2019), as well as a certificate in Non-Profit Management. Additionally, she frequently judges pitch competitions and the Design EXPO at Pitt and gives talks to current students interested in entrepreneurship and innovation.



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