



Week 1: Meet Gen Z - your newest colleagues aren't who you think they are

#GenZ #FutureOfWork #HR #Leadership #GenerationalDiversity

Before I say anything else, let me name what you're expecting.

You're expecting a list of generational frustrations. You're expecting me to describe Gen Z as entitled, impatient, addicted to their phones, allergic to hard work, and impossible to manage. You're expecting validation for the things your managers have been saying in exasperated one-to-ones.

I'm going to disappoint you.

Not because those experiences aren't real - some of them are, though they're more complicated than the stereotype allows. But because starting from a place of generalised frustration about a group of people who are simply at an earlier stage of their working lives than you are, is both ungenerous and strategically counterproductive.

Gen Z - broadly those born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, now entering and establishing themselves in the workforce - are going to comprise the majority of your working

population within the next decade. Understanding them accurately, rather than caricaturing them conveniently, is not a HR nicety. It is a business imperative.

Who are they, really?

Gen Z are the first generation to have grown up with the internet as a given rather than a novelty. They have never known a world without a search engine, a social media platform, or a smartphone. This shapes not just their habits but their cognitive style: they are accustomed to rapid information, multiple simultaneous streams, peer-sourced knowledge, and a world where anyone can publish, create, or build a platform.

They are also the generation that came of age during COVID-19. Many of them finished secondary school or entered university during lockdown. Their formative workplace experiences - internships, first jobs, early career relationships - were disrupted, remote, or simply absent. This has left a mark. It has made them particularly hungry for genuine connection and genuine purpose at work, and particularly clear-eyed about environments that provide neither.

They grew up watching financial crises, climate anxiety, social justice movements, and the steady erosion of the trust that previous generations placed in institutions. They are, as a result, a generation with high scepticism of authority and low patience for what they perceive as inauthenticity. They do not automatically give respect because of a title. They extend trust based on demonstrated behaviour.

What they are not

They are not lazy - they are selective. There is a difference. Gen Z employees who are disengaged in your organisation are not incapable of hard work; they are signalling that this particular work, in this particular environment, has not yet earned their full engagement. That is worth understanding rather than dismissing.

They are not disloyal - they are honest. When a Gen Z employee leaves after eight months, they are not breaking a social contract. They are exercising the same pragmatic relationship with employment that many organisations have modelled in their treatment of staff for decades. If you want loyalty, you need to earn it through the things they care about: genuine development, psychological safety, meaningful work, and decent management.

They are not fragile - they are aware. The willingness to name mental health struggles, to have boundaries, to decline work that feels ethically compromised - this is not weakness. It is a different relationship with self-knowledge and self-advocacy than earlier generations were typically permitted to have.