

How to Maximize Young Professional Talent and Drive Gen Z Performance

Three factors can propel recruitment and retention

As Generation Z enters the workforce, companies must adapt to attract, retain, and unleash the potential of this cohort. This report reveals key strategies executives should implement to maximize Gen Z performance.

Flexible work arrangements, mental health support, and a commitment to sustainability are highly desired employer attributes for Gen Z. Executives who leverage these factors will be primed to boost recruitment, enhance employee experience, and future-proof their talent pipelines.

Soon to surpass Baby Boomers as a proportion of total workers in the job market, tech-savvy and adaptable Generation Z is already shaping the future of employment. Dubbed by Forbes as “the most purpose-driven generation,” this cohort pri-

oritizes “more than a good salary.”¹ Austin Smigel, chair of Creative Business Leadership at SCAD observes, “Most Gen Z students seek employers with a clearly defined balance. They are dedicated to their work and mindful of maintaining physical and mental health to keep their creative energies at their peak. Additionally, they look for an environment that offers creative autonomy and a purpose within the constraints of the business or brand.” In order to guide employers as they align their organizations’ cultures with Gen Z expectations, SCADask surveyed SCAD students in their final two years. 76 students across 17 creative disciplines shared the employer attributes that resonated the most in their job search.

Gen Z embraces flexibility, mental wellness, and sustainability

Flexible and hybrid work environments

Nearly all of the survey respondents articulate a clear preference for employers who embrace a flexible or hybrid work environment. This sentiment is substantiated by SCADask’s secondary research

that includes a 2023 Deloitte survey that reveals many Gen Z and millennials “now work in hybrid or remote work patterns, a benefit they value deeply.”

¹ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2023/09/15/engaging-gen-z-our-most-purpose-driven-generation/?sh=3ca9f6d572a2>

Employers should embrace
a flexible/hybrid work environment



Mental health and well-being

More than half of the SCADask survey respondents indicate that they favor companies that support mental health and well-being. The good news is that employer thought leaders like the Society for Human Resource Management promote the importance of mental wellness support, especially for

younger generations impacted by disruptive events like the COVID-19 pandemic. Their research found that 61% of Gen Z respondents would strongly consider leaving their current job if offered a new one with significantly better mental health benefits.²

Employers should embrace
mental health and well-being



Sustainability

A majority of respondents express a clear preference for employers who prioritize sustainability. The desire for employers to practice climate consciousness extends beyond Gen Z to other generations as well. The Wall Street Journal, reporting on a

2023 Deloitte survey, says, “Over half of Gen Zs (55%) and millennials (54%) say they research a brand’s environmental impact and policies before accepting a job from them.”³

Employers should embrace
sustainability



² <https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/gen-z-expects-mental-wellness-support-employers>

³ <https://deloitte.wsj.com/cmo/gen-zs-millennials-look-to-employers-to-address-climate-concerns-lbc826b2>

Paving the way for Gen Alpha

As Gen Z transitions from academic to professional realms, employers mindful of their preferences can maximize employee retention and performance by prioritizing flexible work environments, mental wellness, and sustainability. This awareness of emerging trends and expectations will also pave the way for employers to welcome Gen Alpha. Academic institutions like SCAD are already researching how to prepare incoming cohorts for employment. Although Gen Z “rules the SCAD universe,” accord-

ing to SCAD president and founder Paula Wallace, Gen Alpha “is also likely to extend the altruism of Gen Z, seeking careers and professions that will make the world better for all.” When companies embrace Gen Z, they’re also planning ahead for workers poised to be even more purpose-driven than their predecessors.

SCADask is an applied research unit of the Savannah College of Art and Design that generates actionable insights for business and design leaders. To learn more, or to partner with SCADask, contact research@scad.edu.