

Tips for Bridging Intergenerational Differences

What do GenZ workers need and want from their employers?

- Authentic connections, feeling cared for and included after spending the COVID years in relative isolation
- Guidance, clarity, coaching, mentoring and focused attention from their managers
- Ability to make informed decisions on their own, with room for experimentation
- Easy, quick access to information
- Frequent feedback
- Learning and growth opportunities, with clear career paths (can be more important than titles and salaries)
- Flexibility - they have proven that they can work from anywhere, at any time
- An organization whose mission and purpose is aligned with their own values, which often include equity, fairness and sustainability
- A clear sense of where they belong and how they can meaningfully contribute
- Honesty, transparency and follow-through from their leaders;
- Caring about their overall well-being, including their mental health

Why are so many leaders struggling to make meaningful connections?

- Experienced managers often assume that the same leadership skills can be used for all generations; many don't have the curiosity or willingness to understand and accommodate today's younger generations
- Many younger workers view their managers with a curious and questioning lens about decisions, processes, communications methods, etc., which often puts their managers on the defensive
- Managers may have a similarly cynical perception about their younger workers, often viewing them as entitled, lazy, demanding, prone to job-hopping, etc., often based on second-hand anecdotes or news articles
- Today's managers are overwhelmed with an unprecedented confluence of challenges that make it hard to give younger workers the time, guidance, attention and autonomy they're craving

Nancy Settle-Murphy, Guided Insights nancy@guidedinsights.com www.guidedinsights.com

Laurie Butson, Cleared to Flourish laurie@clearedtoflourish.com <http://www.clearedtoflourish.com/>

What are some steps employers/managers can take to bridge the generational gap?

Relationship, trust-building, coaching

- **Make 1:1 sessions sacrosanct, and start conversations with a personal check-in.** Show compassion and demonstrate caring with every conversation. Pose relevant, insightful open-ended questions to get a sense where they may need encouragement, guidance or support- include link here to the doc Laura is working on. Listen attentively and take notes. Look into the camera if you're meeting virtually.
- **GenZers expect transparency and honesty.** Demonstrate the values you espouse. Be the kind of role model you wish you'd had when you were a young professional.
- **Provide feedback regularly.** Be specific about what you noticed and avoid the inclination to give someone your advice on "the right way" to do something. Rather than just saying, "Hey, you did this wrong," say, "Let's talk about your thought process while you did X and where you might have gone wrong, and what might work better next time." Make sure to include plenty of positive affirmations, too. Example: "I noticed how you volunteered to help Jeff this week, and that meant a lot to him, and to me."
- **Find ways to enable and encourage autonomy.** For example, be clear which decisions they can make on their own, as well as related criteria. Discuss what kind of risks are acceptable for them to take, and under what conditions. Inform them about communication protocols, especially outside of the team, and note when exceptions can safely be made. Give them a clear sense of where they can "color outside the lines" without seeking approval first.
- **Show how their role and the work they do contributes to the mission/purpose of the organization.** Talk about the impact they are making, how and why their contributions are important, and the impact they are having.
- **Invite honest conversations about mental health, well-being, and burnout.** Make yourself vulnerable by revealing some of your stressors, if you're comfortable sharing. Ask what support they need from you, the organization, their teammates, or someone else. Your employee may be reluctant to ask for unscheduled time off, so make the offer yourself whenever possible.

Nancy Settle-Murphy, Guided Insights nancy@guidedinsights.com www.guidedinsights.com

Laurie Butson, Cleared to Flourish laurie@clearedtoflourish.com <http://www.clearedtoflourish.com/>

Learning and growth opportunities, career development

- **Discuss their desired career trajectory, and find ways to help get them there.** Research and share career and promotional opportunities during your 1:1s. Ask them to do the same so you can collaborate on a plan of action.
- **Together, explore opportunities for learning,** including formal training sessions, job rotation, shadowing, online training, seminars and conferences and informal learning opportunities. Explain your training policies and guidelines,
- **Offer projects that may represent a stretch,** giving them an opportunity for visibility, making connections and learning new skills. For example, you might ask them to present to senior leaders or to devise a new marketing strategy. Offering them a chance to travel for work can be a great growth opportunity.
- **Provide them with opportunities to establish thought leadership, credibility and expertise,** even if it's not directly related to the nature of your team's work. Invite them to share their experiences within your group, with other groups, or externally. Sample topics: Cultural fluency, uses for AI in your industry, creating a great LinkedIn profile, or new features in MS Teams that make it easier to use.
- **Be your GenZer's advocate with senior leadership** when it comes to carving out career and promotional opportunities, training, providing flexible work options, participation in conferences and committees, workplace wellbeing initiatives, etc.

Assimilation into team, department, function

- **Establish a buddy system,** pairing your GenZ employees with someone who can offer support, knowledge and understanding. Make sure both parties understand their respective roles.
- **Create intergenerational discussion groups where people can have an honest conversation in a safe environment.** Example: What assumptions do you have about my generation? How do these assumptions affect how we work together? What do you want me to know about you? Here's what I want you to know about me. How can I support you? Here's how I may be able to support you. What does the term XYZ mean?
- **Establish a GenZ ERG** where members share their questions, perspectives, challenges, opportunities, concerns, achievements, etc. Name an executive sponsor who can act as champion, sharing output (with permission) to help create relevant training, establish new policies and processes, address issues, open up new opportunities and more.

Nancy Settle-Murphy, Guided Insights nancy@guidedinsights.com www.guidedinsights.com

Laurie Butson, Cleared to Flourish laurie@clearedtoflourish.com <http://www.clearedtoflourish.com/>

- **Create a cohort of managers leading GenZ employees** to share experiences, discuss what's working (and what's not), identify learning opportunities, solve common issues, provide mutual support and more.

Programs, Policies, Activities

- **Advocate the need to revisit your organization's policies** around vacation time, PTO, mental health breaks, and other policies which, if revised, would help you organization attract and retain younger
- **Consider incorporating your employees' overall health as part of your corporate values**, and demonstrate your commitment with resources, policies and leadership styles that support the health and well-being of the whole person
- **Make mentorship programs available** to GenZ employees who want them. Mentors may come from anywhere in the organization. Consider reverse mentoring, where younger gens are paired with someone from an older generation. Whether mentorship is informal or formal, setting clear expectations about roles, frequency, etc. is crucial.
- **Explore ways your organization can expand learning and growth opportunities for all.** This may include internal or external formal and informal training, on-the-job training, shadowing, attending seminars and conferences. Examine your official training policies for relevance for today's employees.
- **Set up a program where Genz employees can have lunch/breakfast with a senior executive;** make sure that people working remotely can participate, too

These are just a few steps you and your organization can take to help bridge generational gaps and help make all members of your team feel acknowledged and included, capable of doing their best work.

Use these suggested tips as a springboard for a larger team discussion to generate more ideas and set shared priorities.

Nancy Settle-Murphy, Guided Insights nancy@guidedinsights.com www.guidedinsights.com

Laurie Butson, Cleared to Flourish laurie@clearedtoflourish.com <http://www.clearedtoflourish.com/>