



ALLEGIS
GROUP

Employers, It's Time to Grow Up:

Engaging the Millennial & Gen Z Workforce



ASTON CARTER



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Foreward

Millennials and Gen Zs represent a major force in talent and business today. No longer the most recent age group to enter the workforce, Millennials currently comprise the largest generation at work in the United States, and they are advancing into new roles and leadership positions.¹ Following right on their heels, Gen Z brings the perspective and the skills to excel in a future where data is inseparable from nearly every aspect of life.

Employers have adapted to engage the Baby Boomers and Gen X, and when it comes to engaging Millennial and Gen Z workers, times are changing again. Gen Z has arrived. Millennials have grown up, and the practices that companies use to engage those workers need to mature with them. In short, it's not the workers who have growing up to do; it's the employers.

For employers, connecting across generations is a must, but it is not just about offering perks and fancy break rooms. It's about listening to the talent and understanding their unique wants and needs. It's about engaging them through real relationships built in a complex digital landscape. And, it's about empowering them to achieve goals that are relevant and compelling in terms of today's career and life priorities.

As a strategic talent acquisition partner to top companies around the world, Allegis Group asserts that companies' future success hinges on their ability to forge relationships with Millennials and Gen Zs, who are some of the most capable people in the workforce. With that in mind, we developed this report to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with the Millennial and Gen Z workforce through expert talent acquisition insight and input from a survey of senior HR professionals.

Whether your organization is struggling to recruit across generations or looking for clarity on changing expectations, this report highlights the issues and practices that can move your talent strategy forward. A talent acquisition approach built on respect and an understanding of the workforce will win tomorrow's battle for talent. That need for understanding applies to recruiting talent of all ages, and we are pleased to shed light on the discussion and offer our perspective.

Enjoy the report! I believe you will find it informative and actionable.

Andy Hilger

President, Allegis Group

Introduction:

Meet the Most Powerful Force in the World of Work Today

Millennial and Gen Z populations are reshaping the global workforce. Why should companies care? Consider the facts.

They are big. One study estimates that there are 2.36 billion Millennials and 1.9 billion Gen Zs worldwide.² By 2025, Millennials will comprise three-quarters of the global workforce.³ Gen Zs are expected to grow from 19 percent of the U.S. population in 2015 to 25 percent by 2020.⁴

They are capable. As workers, one generalization about both Millennials and Gen Zs is true: they are comfortable with technology. They are also often seen as flexible, creative, and focused on outcomes — all qualities that are essential to a company’s ability to innovate and grow in a competitive global market.⁵

They are elusive. Attracting Millennials and Gen Zs is proving to be a challenge for employers. Keeping them onboard is also an issue. An Allegis Group survey of 1,000 HR decision-makers found that nearly half (49 percent) of companies are concerned with their ability to attract and retain Millennials and Gen Zs. At the same time, 62 percent believe that issues with attracting and retaining them may lead to negative business impact. This impact may be felt in several areas, including slow company growth, limitations on productivity, obstacles to achieving business goals, curbs on innovation, and costly hiring cycles.⁶

Considering their numbers, their skills, and the concerns companies have about attracting them, tapping into the Millennial and Gen Z workforce is both a priority and a challenge for employers today. Addressing the challenges begins with an understanding of who these workers are and how their perspectives may differ from other generations.



Who are Millennials and Gen Zs?

Every generation is comprised of a variety of individuals. Nonetheless, each generation also shares the experience of growing up in a particular time in history. That experience shapes a distinct perspective on many aspects of work and life.

Millennials: The New Boss: (b. 1980-1995)

While some estimates place 1976 as the starting point, the term “Millennial” generally refers to people born between 1980 and 1995, as the term originally referred to the “Class of 2000.” There are more than 83 million Millennials in the United States, with 44 percent being part of a minority race or ethnic group (a group other than non-Hispanic, single-race white).⁷ Millennials are no longer seen as young and demanding new entrants into the workforce. Many are in their mid-to-late 30s and hold management or leadership roles.

A variety of economic, social, and cultural factors influence the Millennial view. In the United States, the events of 9/11 are a defining, historic point for them. Millennials came of age during the “great recession” in 2008. It is often said that Millennials grew up with more parental involvement and have a heightened sense of environmental awareness. Busy, highly planned lives are all seen as part of the Millennial experience.⁸

Beyond the cultural and historical factors, one development plays a key part in shaping the Millennial experience: new technology. The Internet, mobile devices, video games, and social media have been

a major part of their lives since their early years. Not surprisingly, they receive most of their information through the Internet (72 percent), with television, radio, and newspapers lagging far behind at three to 15 percent,⁹ and 81 percent access the Internet primarily from their phones.¹⁰

49%

of HR decision-makers are concerned with their ability to attract and retain Millennials and Gen Zs.

The influences of history, upbringing, and interactions with technology have understandably created a strong perspective on what makes a great employer. A 2017 study found that Millennials happy with their jobs cite six different factors. These include company culture and transparency, relationships with colleagues, manager support and recognition, career development opportunity, flexibility, and work-life integration.¹¹ These values represent a perspective based on a highly connected life and comfort with blurred boundaries of life and work.



Millennial Perspective

Telling an Employer Brand Story That Attracts Great Talent

Kathryn Minshew

*Cofounder & Chief Executive Officer
The Muse*

There is no “one size fits all” employer brand that is guaranteed to attract all of today’s top talent. Every organization is different and, as such, every employer brand has to reflect what makes the culture, values, and mission unique. Above all, however, an employer brand has to be authentic. Candidates want to see that the story they hear during the recruiting process matches the reality of their day-to-day when they come on board (and if the two don’t match up, they will be a lot less likely to stick around).

At The Muse, we’ve seen how companies struggle to convey their employer brands in ways that resonate with the right people – those who are aligned with their core values and identify with their culture – with Millennial candidates being especially hard to reach. We understand it is a process that can oftentimes be overwhelming, but we’ve helped over 700 companies get it right, and we’ve picked up a few insights and tips about what really works along the way.

Be Intentional: Don’t Guess or Make Assumptions

There are many stereotypes surrounding Millennials, and one of the biggest mistakes employers can make is immediately operating on those mistaken assumptions. For example, touting “cool stuff” like a ping-pong table and free lunch isn’t going to get their attention. And, using flashy perks as a tactic to attract Millennials ultimately makes it more difficult to connect with them as candidates (and as individual people) in an authentic way.

Rather, Millennials want to feel like their careers have a real impact. They look for employers with values that match their own and companies where they can see themselves learning and growing. That’s why it’s so important to have a strong employer brand. When companies know who they are and what they stand for, they can appeal to the best-fit candidates and hire people who want to stay on board and become top-performing employees and advocates.

Part of employer branding as a successful strategy is also accepting that your company and culture won’t be the right fit for everyone, and that’s totally fine. Employers that focus on finding cultural and experiential fits will be empowered to make more intentional and considerate hiring choices.

Be Honest: Focus on Qualities That Make a Great Relationship

The best workplace experiences are built around an understanding of fundamental relationship dynamics (i.e., values, trust, vision, effort, and selflessness). The same rules apply to creating meaningful and lasting relationships with candidates.

Start by putting forth an authentic employer brand story. Be honest about company culture, values, and what it’s like to come into work every day so potential employees can make informed decisions about whether to apply. An honest story not only brings in a stronger pool of applicants, but it also allows employers to be more aware of which candidates are a good fit.

Be transparent and communicate with applicants throughout the entire candidate experience rather than treating it like a purely transactional process. Let them know their application has been received (even if that means setting up an automated email reply). Send an agenda ahead of scheduled interviews so they can research who they'll be meeting with and know how long they can expect to be on site.

And give timely, honest feedback! As soon as you know you're no longer considering a candidate, let them know so they can move on. (Seriously, candidates much prefer a rejection email than silence.) Show up in a human way, and you'll build better relationships with candidates whether you hire them or not. After all, candidates talk, and your silver-medal candidate today may be tomorrow's dream hire.

Dig Deep: Take Time to Understand Your Company's Real Story

We started The Muse because we wanted to give people the tools to make informed decisions about their careers. Our company profiles are a huge part of this mission because they give candidates visibility into what an office environment actually looks like, and allow job seekers to hear directly from current employees of companies they're interested in.

For us to create content that accurately represents an employer's brand, we first have to capture key insights about what it's really like to work for a particular company. Our client-supporting teams are trained to be more like employer branding consultants, and are truly able to help clients shape or reshape their stories, diagnose underlying problems, and share best practices that have worked for others.

In the past year, we've focused on expanding the storytelling aspect of our profiles; specifically, how to tell an authentic and compelling story so organizations can better recruit for fit and alignment, rather than just to fill seats. Our acquisition and implementation of BrandBuilder has been integral to the evolution of our capabilities. It is a brand-building tool that enables companies to collect data and actionable insights on their culture, values, and employee sentiment, which they can use to develop employment marketing assets.

BrandBuilder has enabled the employers we work with to uncover unique information about their employees that they otherwise would not have been able to bring to light. And they've been able to use those insights to refine their hiring processes and implement new initiatives. For example, one company used their BrandBuilder findings to inform their employee resource groups and identify people with expertise in certain skills that other employees could tap into when they needed help. Another has relied on the data to brainstorm more tailored rewards programs and offsite events. We have also seen organizations benefit from increased transparency, more informed candidates, more detailed and accurate job descriptions, new employee advocates, and an improvement in candidate experience scores from interviewees.

Understanding and defining company values, creating a positive candidate experience, uncovering and empowering employee brand advocates: these efforts all tie back to attracting people who are the right fit to join your team. We have seen companies benefit in big ways from being honest and transparent – and be able to create a better overall work experience in the long run.

Gen Z: Digital Natives (1996-Present)

Born in 1996 or later, the U.S. Gen Z population stands at 23 million strong, and is expected to become the fastest growing generation in the workplace in the next five years.¹² Like Millennials, they are much more diverse than older generations in the United States, with 48 percent being non-Caucasian.¹³ The social and cultural factors influencing the Gen Z perspective span the last decade. For example, as children and young adults, Gen Zs experienced the 2008 recession, the student loan debt crisis, passing of the Affordable Care Act, growing up with a black U.S. president, and the legalization of same-sex marriage.¹⁴

Technology also plays a central role in Gen Zs' lives. Sometimes referred to as "digital natives," Gen Zs are the first generation that has never known a time without social media, mobile technology, or instant connectivity with people and ideas anywhere and anytime. They expect immediate access to information. They are comfortable with multi-tasking, and the ability to learn quickly and independently is a frequently cited characteristic for a generation born in a digital world.

Based on their comfort with autonomous learning and expectations of quick accomplishment, Gen Zs are inclined to value independence and control as part of their career experience. One study found that 72 percent of teens want to start their own businesses.¹⁵ They value flexibility, independence, and the ability to tackle specific problems to achieve concrete outcomes. As they enter the workforce, Gen Zs are often less concerned about titles, salary, and career paths and more concerned with learning new skills and achieving tangible accomplishments to demonstrate their strengths.

62%

of HR decision-makers believe issues with attracting and retaining Millennials and Gen Zs may lead to negative business impact. This impact may be felt in several areas, including slow company growth, limitations on productivity, obstacles to achieving business goals, curbs on innovation, and costly hiring cycles.



Gen Z Perspective

Employers: Be Amazing to the People You Hire

Bobby Thakkar

Brand Manager, Entrepreneur, College Student & Noted Speaker

I was born in 2000. While still in high school, I gave TED Talks about entrepreneurship. (Looking back, I don't always agree with them!) I attend the University of Texas at Dallas and recently launched a startup consulting company, Grupacity, which connects great young talent with companies that need their skills. I don't pretend to speak for all of Gen Z, but I am of that generation, and I live the experience through my own life and through the people I work with every day.

In my experience connecting talent of my age with employers across industries, I have learned that when it comes to making the connection to Gen Z talent, employers need to know that relationships matter. Companies that make a concerted effort to understand what motivates people of our generation stand to have a tremendous advantage in finding and keeping great talent. And if there is one theme that applies to Gen Z and the companies that employ them, it is this: be amazing.

What Does Gen Z Really Want?

People of our generation, the top talent with the creativity, work ethic, and high level of skill that companies seek, want to be amazing. We want to work hard, save big, do great things, own the great things we do, and, if all works out well, retire early so we can then do more great things. There are many ways to frame the aspirations of our generation, but a simple theme is sometimes best. When looking at a potential employer, I see three things that Gen Z wants: to be a part of something bigger, to always be learning, and to be independent.

A Connection to Something Larger


Our generation is becoming known for its independence and entrepreneurial spirit, but that doesn't mean we want our work to be isolated. In fact, the opposite is true. Almost down to the last person, the Gen Z talent we present to companies as consultants want to work with an organization that is part of a great brand, or with a group that is part of a larger vision, or with a company that knows its influence and responsibility to the larger part of society beyond its employees and clients.

Or, they simply want to participate in something that is a collective experience. A company with great Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives is good. A great employer brand is also good. Picking strong talent out of an event, such as a hackathon where people show off their skills, is good. For employers, the goal is to be creative and commit to bringing talent into an experience that is larger than themselves.

Continuous Learning

We want to grow. In my consulting company, we've found that the people we place are less concerned with starting out with high pay and more concerned about what they will learn from the experience. Within my organization, we encourage vertical learning, and sometimes that learning can be a stretch.

A graphic designer, for example, could learn user interface or user experience design. They are two different disciplines, but understanding each adds value to the total work being done.



As an employer, I want the people I work with to be learning. I know that makes them tick, and it makes our organization better. As an employer, I want the people I work with to become so valuable that I can't fire them even if they disappoint or frustrate me.

Independent Work

Call it the nomad life, the freelance lifestyle, or gig economy. Whatever the name, independent work is growing, and if a company does not respect that choice, it will lose or miss out on employees. That's one part of the independent nature we encounter among people in my generation: being independent while also acting independently in a way that contributes to the group.

Of course, we cannot always expect or allow complete independence because a company is a group, and work needs to get done in a coordinated fashion. But within employees' field of responsibility, they should feel free to approach issues and the work to be done in their own way.

What Can Employers Do?

For an employer, acting on all the wants and needs of Gen Z is impossible simply because we are individuals. You can't be all things to all people. But we can agree that if the top professionals in our generation want to be amazing, they also want to work for an employer that is amazing. For an employer, here are some basic ways to bring out our best.

Make a Great First Impression

Nothing makes a new Gen Z employee head for the exits faster than a terrible onboarding experience. Companies forget that onboarding truly sets up the relationship. It shows how much the company values the employee, and it sets the stage for how the employee views the company.

Communication is everything. Meeting the team is a big deal. Make sure employees know their teams and know what they are doing, not just the job in front of them but also how that

job fits into the larger strategy. Finally, don't forget about interns. They are the people a company needs in the near future, and the employer that fails to set them up for success today will lose them later.

Hear Their Ideas and Be Willing to Act

Amazing things happen when great ideas are allowed to develop and come to life. This fact is the heart of the Gen Z experience. A culture that allows an employee to go to a manager with a better way of doing something will be the one that keeps its employees and grows as an organization.

Fostering a culture of new ideas is not easy, though. Can you dedicate the time of an employee to the pursuit of a new idea, even if it may fail? Google is known for this approach, but not every company has the same focus or priorities on innovation. But innovation can happen anywhere and with people of any age. For example, I know of a doctor who loved his job and went to his medical group with a new idea for a syringe labeling system. The group politely pushed his idea to the back burner every time he brought it up. Finally, he struck out on his own and successfully developed a product that worked. He remained at the group, as being a doctor was his first love, but the company missed out on the intellectual property. If you are an employer, listening to ideas is not enough. You must show your willingness to act on them when they are right.

Respecting the People and the Opportunity

Be flexible. Be understanding and open to change and new ideas. If an employer strives for these qualities as it engages Gen Z employees, it will build lasting and fruitful relationships with talented people. As a Gen Z entrepreneur, I know first-hand how we are looking for big things and how honest we are about what it takes to get there. In the end, the rules are simple. The companies that have faith in us, and respect for what we do, are the ones that will earn our loyalty.

New Talent Perspectives Create Pressure for Change

As their backgrounds and perspectives show, both Millennials and Gen Zs come to the workplace with an important similarity: technology played a highly influential role in their lives as they grew up. Thanks to major innovations (e.g., the Internet, social media, and mobile devices), their perspectives were shaped early on by a connected world where responsive, personal, and relevant interaction is expected, and relationships matter most. Unfortunately, many employers often fail to build vital relationships with Millennial and Gen Z workers due to weak talent practices that never evolved to keep up with changing needs.

The weaknesses of immature practices span the talent lifecycle. For example, how many employers post job descriptions that are inaccurate or fail to align with candidate needs and values? Without listening and adapting to the needs of the talent they seek, companies lose great candidates before they apply. Likewise, many employers rely on application

processes that leave job seekers in the dark, not knowing their status or when the next step occurs. Subpar approaches to training, job flexibility, and career path development are also common.

Each of these weaknesses causes frustration, disappointment, or disengagement in all job seekers and employees and workers – including Millennials and Gen Zs. After all, for a frustrated worker with in-demand skills, a new opportunity may only be a click away. For employers still working with immature talent acquisition and management practices, it's time to grow up.

The good news is that tools and practices to drive mature talent processes are in place to help companies better engage Millennial and Gen Z talent today. Those improved technologies and practices reflect three fundamentals to building better relationships with the talent:



Step 1

Listen to their perspective and reflect their values in the employer value proposition.

Step 2

Engage them on their terms by adapting processes and technologies to give them a positive experience.

Step 3

Empower them to develop skills and advance their careers based on their true strengths and needs.

These three principles — listen, engage, and empower — all require real changes in the way companies approach talent acquisition and management. For employers, pushing their talent practices to grow up is not just an option; rather, it is a necessity for any company to remain competitive in a fast-changing world.

Listen:

Align the Employer Value Proposition (EVP) to their Priorities

Attracting and retaining talent begins with the ability to listen. Listen to the people who drive your success. Understand their views and priorities. Act on what you learn. Companies struggle with these simple principles for forging relationships with employees, but no talent strategy can succeed without attention to the basics.

An understanding of the basic views of talent is essential to driving an effective EVP, the value proposition that answers the question, “Why would an employee want to work for the company?” To be effective in attracting Millennial and Gen Z talent, the EVP must align with their needs – including needs that may differ from those of older generations.

Today, companies recognize the challenges of EVP and talent attraction of the generations new to the workforce.

For example, nearly three-fourths (71 percent) of Millennial and Gen Z HR decision-makers in an Allegis Group survey say they would struggle to attract and retain workers in their generations if they fail to deliver desired benefits. Examples of cited benefits include tuition reimbursement, diversity and inclusion (D&I) programs, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives.¹⁶

The concerns of HR decision-makers center on two major Millennial and Gen Z expectations and areas where EVP alignment is essential. These include benefits often overlooked in the past, as well as a focus on corporate citizenship in the eyes of generations of workers who are both highly diverse and socially aware.

Align Benefits to New Priorities

Sixty-nine percent of HR decision-makers in the same Allegis Group survey claim their organizations struggle to deliver specific benefits embraced by Millennial and Gen Z workers. These benefits reach beyond healthcare and vacation policy, extending to detailed areas such as career development, flexibility in work style and scheduling, and creative perks.

69%

of HR decision-makers struggle to deliver specific benefits Millennial and Gen Z workers want.

Career Development

When considering an employer, Millennials and Gen Zs are more likely to value the ability to move their

careers forward. In fact, 87 percent of Millennials rate career growth as important to their jobs, compared to 69 percent of non-Millennials who hold this view.¹⁷ For employers, improving the visibility to new opportunities for career growth within the organization can go a long way toward boosting the company’s EVP and its overall reputation in the eyes of Millennials and Gen Zs.

A growing number of employers are boosting their career development focus, offering a host of benefits such as flex scheduling, speedy promotions, mentorships, workplace and wellness perks, innovation autonomy, and executive facetime. These improvements are aimed at helping companies compete for Millennials and Gen Zs, who are focused on independence and career advancement.¹⁸

Likewise, some employers are boosting engagement by increasing the frequency of promotions. Rather than a long, multi-year period between a junior- and principal-level role, the organization may opt for interim steps such as junior, assistant, and associate.

Nearly 3/4 of Millennial and Gen Z HR decision-makers say they'll struggle to attract and retain workers in their generations if they fail to deliver desired benefits.

While frequent advancement helps to promote successful career development, organizations are finding that Millennials and Gen Zs are also concerned with accomplishments rather than titles as a gauge of success. In addition, celebrating and recognizing the success of a project or initiative can boost the career development message of the employer in the eyes of Millennials and Gen Zs. In either case, when a prospective candidate hears about a successful project or promotion from workers within the company (through social media or word of mouth), that company is likely to become more attractive to that candidate.

Flexibility at Work

Data from studies over the last five years support an increased emphasis by Millennials on flexibility among employers. Among the findings: most Millennials (74 percent) believe that flexible work schedules are important considerations for choosing an employer. Gen Z workers also value flexibility to allow work and learning throughout their careers. This is particularly important for the many Gen Zs who join the workforce early and pursue online college programs as opposed to attending a full-time college and potentially acquiring debt.¹⁹

Many employers have taken certain steps to become more flexible in their job requirements and their relationships with employees, but no organization can expect to implement all the strategies available. Instead, an effective approach is to assess the available best practices and then prioritize their implementation to align with the organization's unique business situation.

One approach to flexibility is to rethink the traditional nine-to-five schedule as well as allowing more options

for remote working. By showing that an employee can switch in or out of work at any time, the employer then measures and celebrates accomplishment, instead of attendance, as a gauge of employee performance. For Millennials and Gen Zs, work experience and achieving goals takes precedence over onsite presence, and the EVP that conveys this value will appeal to a wider portion of the worker population.

Another form of flexibility pertains to work style, as many professionals prefer to operate as contractors or freelancers instead of traditional, permanent employees. Depending on their skills and experience, both Millennial and Gen Z workers often have the means to survive and thrive as flexible workers. For example, 43 percent of Millennials and 47 percent of those ages 18-21 did freelance work in 2016.²⁰



While freelance and contract work styles have always been an option, many workers today are embracing them as a matter of choice. As a result, the flexible, non-employee portion of the workforce is larger, more highly skilled, and more central to business success than ever before. Not surprisingly, companies are evolving to better accommodate both traditional employees and flexible workers through a total talent strategy. In the most mature talent function, they are treated as equals with employees. They have the opportunity to grow and advance, and they are recognized for their performance.



Creative Perks

Employers have also developed many creative perks that appeal to Millennials and Gen Zs. A given perk is not necessarily a fit for every organization, but by understanding the types of choices available, talent planners can explore and implement the options that are right for them.

Examples include:

- **Financial management/debt repayment:** Millennials and Gen Zs are growing up with financial constraints based on education and home-ownership costs that are much higher than those experienced by previous generations at the same age. Organizations can provide resources and tools to help workers better manage debt. In many cases, paying off student loans is more important to a worker than saving for retirement with a 401(k).
- **Family-friendly benefits:** Millennials are almost twice as likely as Baby Boomers to have both spouses in the family working full-time.²¹ At the same time, the age by which women have children is rising. In 2015, for the first time, more U.S. women in their 30s had more babies than those in their 20s, with expensive fertility services often a part of the equation.²² Today, employers are offering benefits that reflect these concerns as the newest entrants to the workforce grow older and start families. Onsite childcare, fertility services, and even pet insurance are being offered as perks by a growing number of employers.²³
- **Beyond compensation:** Employers willing to provide organized activities, on-site entertainment, or gyms display a deeper relationship and commitment to their workforce and help them stand out against other companies being considered by prospective employees.²⁴

Corporate Citizenship

Millennials and Gen Zs frequently look beyond salary and benefits when considering an employer, and two areas of commitment rank high among their priorities: diversity and inclusion (D&I) and corporate social responsibility (CSR).

D&I: Widen Your Embrace

An Allegis Group survey of HR decision-makers found that among organizations with a D&I program, only 17 percent of organizations consider D&I as a key part of the EVP, and 88 percent do not believe that it is helping them to attract Millennial and Gen Z talent.²⁵

This finding is no surprise as an earlier Allegis Group survey found that a full 79 percent of D&I programs are not supported with a clear, well-understood strategy and 83 percent of companies with D&I programs do not have success metrics.²⁶

A number of tactics contribute to an inclusive company culture. For example, employee resource groups and councils can help bring diverse employees together to share ideas and make their voices heard. Likewise, employers must make a commitment to fairness in pay, between both men and women, as well as among workers across different ethnicities and backgrounds. The reasons are clear:

63 percent of 18-26-year-old workers share their salary with immediate family members, 48 percent would share with their friends, and 30 percent share with co-workers.²⁷

A more challenging aspect of an inclusive employee experience centers on bringing people together within the organization. Are people of different perspectives being brought into projects that can move the company forward? Are their voices being heard? Is their impact being felt, and are they being recognized for the part they play in the organization's success? These questions point to the importance of inclusiveness in the employee experience. Eighty-three percent of Millennials claim to be more engaged as workers when they believe their company creates an inclusive culture — compared to only 60 percent among Millennials who feel their companies do not foster inclusiveness.²⁸

Among companies with D&I programs:

Only
17%

of HR decision-makers consider D&I a key part of the EVP.

88%

say their D&I program is not helping them to attract Millennial and Gen Z talent.



For organizations to improve and align D&I as part of the EVP, commitment begins at the top. Without leadership commitment, any activity related to D&I will likely have little lasting impact on the organization or its perception in the marketplace. Demonstrating D&I's value is central to translating an inclusive workplace into a trait that attracts Millennial and Gen Z talent. More than simply posting a page about diversity on a career site, communicating the culture to the world is a matter of showing by example. Are diverse employees making a presence on social media? Are they relating a positive view of the organization? For talent decision-makers, addressing these questions can make the difference between a D&I effort that remains hidden and one that creates open conversation and promotes continuous improvement.

CSR: Impact Their World

Eighty-two percent of newer workers consider CSR a major factor when deciding where to work, and 66 percent would take a pay cut to work for a more socially responsible company.²⁹ With newer workers placing a high value on CSR in an employer, many companies recognize a need to improve their CSR efforts and better promote their stories.

While companies offer opportunities for volunteerism, fundraising, and other community activities, they often struggle to achieve lasting and widespread employee participation. An Allegis Group survey of HR decision-makers found that among organizations with CSR programs in place, 80 percent of CSR programs do not have a clear, well-understood strategy, and 81

percent of CSR programs do not have success metrics. Only 16 percent of CSR programs are viewed by their companies as a key part of the EVP. And, currently, 87 percent of organizations with CSR programs do not believe that their efforts are helping them attract Millennial and Gen Z talent.³⁰

Impactful CSR aligns with the employer's mission as a business. As examples, consider the engineering firm that supports STEM-related education in the community, the construction company that backs Habitat for Humanity, or the food retailer that supports local charities that feed the hungry.

Likewise, an effective CSR strategy reflects the voice of the employee. When brought into the vision as shared owners of the employer's CSR direction, employees are likely to talk to others about their causes, helping to boost the organization's employer brand and improve candidate attraction, particularly among Millennial and Gen Z talent.

To make CSR a part of everyday life, a consistent process and a forum for advocacy and continuous communication are essential. A daily or weekly update celebrates activities and accomplishments, and individual employees have the opportunity to be acknowledged for their efforts. Volunteer opportunities and events can be communicated repeatedly through social media. The message about CSR, as with all aspects of employer brand, is best conveyed through grassroots support. Employees own the message, but with the right actions and message, employers can shape the CSR story.

Among organizations with CSR programs, HR decision-makers report that:

80% of CSR programs do not have a clear, well-understood strategy.

81% of CSR programs do not have success metrics.

Only **16%** of CSR programs are viewed by their companies as a key part of the EVP.

87% do not believe that their efforts are helping them attract Millennial and Gen Z talent.



When Employees Tell Your Story, People Listen

Craig Fisher

Head of Global Marketing

Allegis Global Solutions, an Allegis Group company

As an employer brand strategy leader and consultant to companies in some of the most competitive markets for talent, I've seen how organizations struggle to bring their stories to life. A well-executed marketing plan can help get the story out, but for Millennial and Gen Z talent, traditional marketing is greeted with skepticism. The real story lies in the hands of the people who live the employer brand every day. Those people are the most available, most powerful, and most cost-effective employer brand resource a company has: they are its employees.

When an employer establishes its employees as champions and advocates of the company, people listen, and we have the numbers to prove it. For example, in a recent effort with major IT employer CA Technologies, we developed an employee advocacy program that achieved a tenfold increase in audience for its digital content and an estimated \$300,000 in savings over traditional advertising costs while achieving measurable improvement in how people interact with content.

Cracking the Code of Effective Employee Advocacy

Most employers recognize that employee reviews on Glassdoor and activity on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter can make all the difference in swaying a potential

candidate toward an organization. Unfortunately, employee advocates can be elusive.

The organization that simply encourages people to talk positively about the company on social media will achieve little impact on its ability to attract talent. Instead, organizations need to establish their story, identify their brand champions, give those champions the technology and training to succeed, and, above all, measure results. With that in mind, the following keys to an effective advocacy strategy can make all the difference in creating a growing and impactful human voice that brings your employee brand to life.

Understand Your Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

Is your organization truly a good place for fast-acting risk-takers and self-starters, or is it more of a family that brings together many perspectives to take a deliberate approach to projects, problems, and opportunities? These are the types of questions an EVP will answer. By assessing and understanding the real qualities that make your organization the employer it is today, a company then has the means to develop the messaging that employees can promote through their social channels.

Find Champions

To get the employee advocacy program off the ground, the organization must take an active role in developing influencers. A conventional survey can help identify the most obvious champions, but an internal social media effort is likely to help pull in more potential advocates. In any case, the employer brand must be sold internally and externally, and it must be accompanied by an intentional effort at targeting champions to promote the message.

Use the Right Technology

In the case of CA Technologies, the platform we used to drive employee advocacy proved instrumental to the success of the program. Through the use of an innovative employee advocacy solution, we were able to give employees one place where they can share messages out to their networks.

The platform provided ease of use, a positive experience for employees, and measurable results for sharing content and tracking views. Through our #LifeAtCA program and using the employee advocacy platform, employees were talking about all aspects of their work through Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Shortly into the program, employees began lining up to participate.

Measure, Measure, Measure

An employer brand initiative only achieves lasting impact if there is some way to track performance and success. Thanks to the focused strategy and technology platform we applied at CA, we knew what we wanted to measure, and we had the means to measure it.

As a result, we can now say that we achieved a 1,019 percent increase in audience for our messaging, as well as a 33 percent boost in overall audience reach. Plus, the overall content we posted received an average of 70 percent more clicks compared to pre-initiative activity.

The Final Ingredient: Live the Brand

The employer brand advocacy strategy is not limited to current employees and conventional messaging. In fact, any person who interacts with the company can be an advocate if they had a positive experience. If handled well, even the candidate who is rejected for a role can be turned into a champion.

At CA, we set up a system for assessors to identify where candidates stood in relation to the role requirements. Obviously, the yes's would move on in the process, but for the no's, we sent a personal response, thanking them for applying, telling them we'll keep in touch in case another opportunity comes up, and inviting them to join our talent communities. The positive response from talent was overwhelming. We know many of them had become an advocate within their networks, and, in some cases, the company later hired them.

Together, the employee advocacy strategy and related technology underscore the extent to which the rules of branding have changed. Marketing is much more than advertisements, logos, campaigns, and taglines. When friends and colleagues have something good to say about your organization, people will listen and believe. No amount of marketing fireworks can substitute for a voice of trust. That's what employee advocacy brings, and it's a quality that can put an organization in front when competing for scarce talent of any age.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Deliver with Impact

Tanya Axenson

Global Head of Human Resources
Allegis Group

Millennials, Gen Zs, and workers of all ages are seeing a world of social challenges and human needs that cannot be ignored. Increasingly, they are looking at employers as more than a source of income and rather as an agent for change, both in their lives and in the communities around them. So, when looking to step up their presence in the community, companies are compelled by the expectations of workers to do something.

When it comes to volunteering and community service, however, doing something and having a lasting impact are two different things, and that's the challenge many companies face. The real need is to drive a CSR strategy that creates a lasting commitment and deep relationships in the community, and fosters participation across the employee population.

Allegis Group and its network of specialized companies have addressed the CSR challenge by building a program that reflects the experience and voice of our employees, and aligns with our business mission of connecting great talent with great opportunities. Our CSR mission is built on three pillars of value:

- **Education:** We seek to provide the life skills and building blocks for people to reach their full potential.
- **Strengthening the Workforce:** Our efforts focus on career development and increasing access to employment opportunities for underserved adults, veterans, and people with disabilities.
- **Employee Engagement:** We give all employees the opportunity and the support to take part in CSR initiatives through partnerships spanning Allegis Group and its companies, as well as grassroots causes our employees feel passionate about.

Supporting Causes That Highlight our Mission

Every successful cause needs a compelling reason for support. A company should wisely and selectively commit its resources – both monetary donations and employee volunteer time – to a cause that aligns with its mission as an organization. This strategy increases the likelihood that employees will embrace the cause and truly offer their support and energies. In the case of Allegis Group and its companies, our choices reflect our talent-first focus.

We have been a long-time supporter of Junior Achievement (JA), an organization that focuses on educating young people with the fundamental skills to succeed in the workforce. Likewise, Habitat for Humanity has provided us with the opportunity to engage our employees in building homes in the community, offering hope to people who may otherwise have no adequate a place to live. Aerotek, an Allegis Group company, is also a primary sponsor for HabiCorps in Baltimore, Maryland's Chesapeake region. The Habitat for Humanity program teaches individuals the skilled trades needed to construct a home and gain meaningful, long-term employment. Another group we support at the Allegis Group level is APAFHDEM, a group based in Cancun, Mexico that promotes the development of adults with intellectual disabilities to become productive through workshops, employment, and relationship building.

These are just a few examples of the causes we support that directly impact the world in which we live and work. Our employees are proud to be part of a longstanding and consistent CSR program that creates opportunity for the people who need it most, and it's a commitment that helps make us an employer of choice among Millennials, Gen Zs, and talent of all ages.



Engage:

Adapt Processes to Meet Talent on Their Terms

Engagement is the emotional and behavioral connection between the worker and the employer, and it is one of the most pressing challenges companies face in managing Millennials and Gen Zs. Only 29 percent of Millennials are actively engaged in their jobs, and 21 percent report changing jobs within the last year — more than three times the rate of non-Millennials.³¹ Likewise, more than one-third of managers believe Gen Z employees will be more difficult to manage than previous generations, and 42 percent plan on introducing new technologies to improve engagement.³²

A collaborative culture, new technology in the workplace, organizational transparency, and digital recruiting are all qualities that are essential to engaging Millennials and Gen Zs. Not surprisingly, an Allegis Group survey found 49 percent of HR decision-makers are concerned about their ability to attract Millennial and Gen Z talent, and a similar portion (51 percent) say their companies have trouble bringing to life those factors and qualities that drive engagement.³³ Engagement issues translate to significant business

costs. According to one Gallup study, turnover of workers in these generations due to lack of engagement costs the U.S. economy \$30.5 billion every year.³⁴ Clearly, improving engagement with Millennials and Gen Zs is not just a good intention; it is essential to talent and business success.

51%

of HR decision-makers say their companies are not fully realizing the qualities that drive engagement with Millennial and Gen Z talent.

To improve engagement, organizations must focus on two needs of the Millennial and Gen Z worker. First, the means of engagement must be digital, easy, and fast as members of these generations have grown up with the ability to achieve results quickly. Second, engagement must be personalized, humanized, and collaborative because these worker groups have grown up with human interaction through social media.

Digital, Easy, and Fast:

A Direction for Better Talent Engagement

The influence of technology on the Millennial and Gen Z career perspective is far-reaching. Seventy-five percent of American Millennials and Gen Zs prefer to communicate through text as opposed to speaking, and 20 percent favor digital shopping with no human interaction. Likewise, 62 percent of Millennials and Gen Zs would rather accidentally leave their wallets at home than their phones.³⁵

Interacting via a digital environment is the norm, and it is expected as an integral part of the employer-employee relationship. Employers have several opportunities for improving processes for ease of use. Key examples of areas ripe for improvement include sourcing and recruiting, administrative processes such as time and expense reporting, and information access.

Sourcing and Recruiting

For employers, improving engagement begins with the very first interaction with the potential candidate. Sixty percent of job seekers have abandoned an application process due to the complexity and length of time involved.³⁶ A study of first-time job seekers found that the biggest frustrations applicants experienced include a lack of response from the employer (81 percent) confusing application systems (72 percent), and vague job descriptions (75 percent).³⁷

Digital innovation and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) applications are helping companies address the challenges of engaging Millennial and Gen Z workers in the sourcing and recruiting process. For example, when today's job seeker submits her application, an AI chatbot can respond to acknowledge receipt, advise next steps, and provide updates on timelines and scheduling. This example is just one instance of a technology, applied thoughtfully, to improve the candidate experience and streamline the recruiting process.

The influence of technology can improve the entire application process and boost the experience of both the job seeker and the recruiter. Consider an example applying AI technology:

- A candidate visits a career site.
- A chatbot appears and starts a conversation.
- After that conversation, the chatbot interacts with an AI-driven resource such as people aggregator HiringSolved. The people aggregator researches the candidate and validates his information on LinkedIn and other data sources.
- The system identifies potential opportunities for that candidate.
- The chatbot covers standard screening questions, which also saves time.

Through the digitized process, the applicant flow is being intelligently narrowed, as talent is directed to the right jobs for the candidate. In this end-state, sourcing and recruiting, which took up to 40 percent of a recruiter's time in the past,³⁸ is now largely automated. Lacking the need to spend time on research and administrative tasks, the recruiter:

- Takes time to have a conversation with the candidate early in the process
- Returns phone calls and emails within a reasonable timeframe (According to a recent study, only four in 10 recruiters return calls to candidates at all.³⁹)
- Provides advice to help the candidate define or adjust goals
- Coaches the candidate through the application process
- Maintains rapport with high-value candidates not hired for a role as a source of future talent
- Works with hiring managers to better define job descriptions and requirements



Optimize Administrative Processes

As employees, Millennials or Gen Zs often encounter what they see as unnecessary obstacles. Many of those obstacles may seem like small inconveniences to older generations; however, in the eyes of the under-35 worker, they reflect a worrisome lack of attention on the part of the employer. To workers who take pride in their employers' ability to stay ahead of trends and innovations, outdated processes take their toll.

Consider expense reporting. One study found that while waiting to be reimbursed for a business expense, Millennial workers are 21 percent more likely than older generations to have difficulty paying a personal bill, and they are 24 percent more likely than Gen X or Baby Boomer workers to avoid submitting a business expense due to cumbersome expense reporting processes.⁴⁰

Printing paper receipts and managing expenses on spreadsheets is still part of the reporting process at some companies today.⁴¹ With the availability of cloud-based digital solutions, companies can automate reporting, make it mobile, and accelerate the process, eliminating a burden that may hinder engagement.

Throughout the candidate and employee experience, there are many such obstacles that employers can address. They can range from long performance review assessments that are not fully relevant to the role to career sites that require the applicant to re-enter her resume on a tiny text field. Each shortfall may be small, but the company that commits to eliminating them gains an advantage in appealing to talent accustomed to processes that work quickly and easily.



Create a Portal for Employees Where Information and Communication Lives

One study of workers of all generations revealed that the inability to track down information is a common problem for 38 percent of 18-24-year-olds, and 33 percent of those workers experience frustration finding out who has information related to a project or task.⁴² Another report found that 62 percent of employees claim that the ability to access company information has a direct impact on their job satisfaction, and nearly half (45 percent) believe their employer is not doing enough to enable communication.⁴³

Solving the information access problem involves enabling the employee to connect to all data sources under one umbrella, providing ease-of-use and transparency for the critical information and processes

that influence the employee experience. That resource may be a company portal feature that provides one point of access to the people, contact information, notices, and libraries of data that commonly house information ranging from employee policies to specific project group analytics and presentations.

While most companies have some kind of portal and information available online, the real challenge is to make that information easy to find, anywhere, anytime. The right solution must be accessible through mobile devices, intuitive, and deliver the right information quickly and simply. The result is a self-service capability that is valued by workers of all generations.

Technology Transforms Digital Recruiting

Fara Rives

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Candidates want more interaction with their potential employers than most organizations can provide. That's because too few human recruiters manage too many candidates to allow for adequate status updates, let alone meaningful conversations. Candidates don't receive regular communications from employers they've applied to. They struggle to land interviews with those potential employers, and they fail to receive regular communications from employers after the interview.

These challenges have become even more urgent as companies compete for Millennial and Gen Z workers who expect more openness and interaction in the application process. The good news is that new technologies, particularly those based on artificial intelligence (AI), can now balance the equation by augmenting overwhelmed human talent resources with automated capabilities for communication and management of the process. The human experience, the processes involved, and the way data is managed all contribute to a digital recruiting function that moves the needle on the candidate-employer relationship.

Digital Automation Boosts the Candidate and Recruiter Experience

Eighteen percent of a recruiting organization's time is spent sourcing candidates, and 26 percent is spent

screening candidates for open positions.⁴⁴ Through digital automation of this activity, much of the recruiter's time is freed to spend on high-value activities, such as advising candidates on their search, helping them evaluate their goals and directions, and preparing for interviews. Below are just a few examples of digital recruiting tools and practices in use today:

- **Digital sourcing channels** lead the way to candidates who live much of their lives in an online, social, and mobile environment. Tools such as AI-driven candidate aggregators automatically search these sources to build intelligence about candidates in a fraction of the time required for human research.
- **Algorithmic match models** apply AI to connect potential candidates to opportunities. Notably, improved technology better enables automated systems to look beyond highly inconsistent job titles and keywords to recognize skills and competencies that truly apply to the open role.
- **Chatbot pre-screening and interview scheduling applications** automate the repetitive tasks of recruitment, helping to quickly reduce the number of candidates while also allowing more time and human attention for the more critical interactions of the interview process.

Spanning the Recruiting Cycle

To have a real impact on the candidate experience, the digital strategy must span the recruiting cycle. The strategy includes pre-application activity such as recruitment marketing and sourcing, largely facilitated with the recruitment marketing platform, through to the candidate application itself. And, the process extends through post-application aspects of the journey, such as screening and assessment, scheduling, hiring manager interviews, and new hire onboarding. Aside from the hiring manager interviews, each of these activities is enabled and enhanced by AI technology.

The Devil is in the Data

Intelligence lies at the core of the digital recruiting experience, and that intelligence is maximized when all talent data is brought together in one place. Bringing candidate information together in a common data pool requires time and commitment, but the result is a powerful resource for intelligent talent acquisition.

With access to all information, an AI-driven matching function can learn from all available information, connect opportunities that best fit the talent, and, in so doing, start the process off with high-quality candidates.

The result is a reduced screening and management burden for recruiters that sets the stage for a more effective talent acquisition process.

Building an Ecosystem That Works

Bringing together a complex array of data sources, talent technologies, and related systems requires a technology ecosystem that is smart and seamless to the end-user. When smart development of data and AI tools leads to a mature system, the result is a candidate, employee, or flexible worker who remains engaged in their work and with their employer, unencumbered by the roadblock of information gaps and inconvenient phone tag with HR or the help desk. For recruiters and hiring managers, it means valuable time is spent doing the work that matters – building relationships that keep talent in the fold.

Personalized, Humanized, Collaborative: Give Them a Voice

Outside of work, both Millennials and Gen Zs are used to genuine, personal interactions on a large scale enabled by social media, and they are skeptical of infrequent, large-scale mass communications. At work, or with a prospective employer, the same rules apply: genuine interaction matters. Interactions must be personalized, humanized, and collaborative. Job seeker communications, a social media presence, and communities to share ideas are all part of talent engagement for successful organizations as they better connect to the Millennial and Gen Z workforce.

Personalized Job Seeker Communications

A 2017 Talent Board survey found that 46 percent of candidates who withdrew from their job applications cited “time disrespected during interviews” as the leading reason why followed by an overly long process (26 percent). Additional causes for withdrawal included issues with the company culture, poor hiring manager rapport, missed salary expectations, and discrepancies with the job description at the interview.⁴⁵ Many of the issues that drive job seekers away are caused by poor candidate communications, but the issues can be addressed by focusing on personalized interactions with the job seeker. The ingredients to effective personalized communication include:

- **Two-way interaction:** Often, a candidate will have a question for the employer about the role description, the timeline for applying, the teams and projects involved, or a technical issue in the application process that is not answered in an FAQ. Early in the recruitment process, the employer can boost engagement and reduce dropouts by making human interaction possible with someone who can listen and answer relevant questions. Likewise, throughout the interviewing phases, the recruiter and hiring manager must make time to allow the candidate to ask questions and be willing to answer them in detail.
- **Time and technology:** For employers, the challenge to personal communication is one of sheer volume. In most cases today, recruiters

simply do not have the time to interact with every candidate, and hiring managers often feel similarly overwhelmed when it comes to the interview and selection process.

The good news is that technology can remove much of the administrative burden. AI chatbots automate the time-consuming interview scheduling process, freeing up time and resources on the recruiter side. Likewise, for many roles, an automated chatbot can answer candidate questions or provide prescreening early in the process. This approach further reduces the communication burden and helps candidates better decide whether to apply early in the process. As a result, stakeholders enjoy improved communication, higher quality candidates, and more time for employers to focus on meaningful human interaction.

- **Communication to silver medalists:** Personal communications to candidates who do not win a job can go a long way toward boosting engagement. An effective message will thank them for applying, honestly explain the employer’s choice, and invite the candidate to join the organization’s talent community. That same candidate may prove to be a quality, engaged applicant for another position later. Just as importantly, she may be inclined to positively share her experience with other potential future hires in her network.

Leadership on Social Media

An organization's presence on social media matters. One recent study found that 73 percent of employees 18-34 years old found their most recent job through social media.⁴⁶ At the same time, approximately 75 percent of surveyed employees in the United States consider companies to be more trustworthy if they see corporate leadership using social media to convey the company's values and mission.⁴⁷

Given the presence of Millennial and Gen Z workers across the spectrum of social media venues, corporate

leaders have a unique opportunity to engage them and enable interaction that is easy, fast, and positive. Executives may be seen liking or commenting on input from employees or sharing knowledge that they have found. Examples range from a shared photo of a company event on Instagram to a tweet congratulating an employee on an accomplishment or a LinkedIn article expressing a viewpoint consistent with the company's values.



Venues to Connect Employees

Technology is advancing, so companies can rise to the challenge of establishing stronger connections with their employees.⁴⁸ Microsoft's Yammer and Salesforce's Jabber applications have been widely adopted as a means of communication between employees. Slack is also growing in popularity, providing an experience reminiscent of Facebook, enabling employees to communicate, share files, and collaborate in a group setting through mobile devices.

Other examples of employee communication applications include tools for enabling recognition

and feedback, providing the immediate, frequent, and genuine interaction for teams and their leaders. Another solution lets companies build their own branded mobile apps for virtual employees, enabling employers to provide communications, information, and training through a simple interface. These resources are just a few examples of tools now available to help employers connect with Millennial and Gen Z talent quickly and easily, with new solutions arriving at a rapid pace.

Pushing Technology to Drive Human Engagement: Three Qualities That Matter

Stephen J. Hill

Executive Director of Product Development
Allegis Group

Millennial and Gen Z workers grew up with technologies that older generations only came to know later in their lives. That means workers under the age of 35 are understandably more accustomed to tools and systems that make things work, quickly and without fuss. Whether reaching out to a colleague with a message, sharing knowledge in a group, checking pay information, or ordering equipment, speed and results are a given.

In developing a technology strategy, organizations have a dizzying array of options, features, and directions they can take. But beneath all the tools and platforms, three qualities in a technology platform or service should always be considered in the strategy:

- **Self-Service:** More than ever, Millennial and Gen Z workers want control over how and where they work, and how they access information. By putting every resource from benefits and eLearning to new opportunities into one place, the employer can enable a level of self-service that puts workers in control.
- **Automation:** Data is only useful if it is seen and put to work. In a sea of information and data overload that defines the work experience of today, individuals are counting on reminders that cut through the

noise. Humans do not have the bandwidth or consistency to deliver updates to employees about due dates or to flexible workers about assignment end dates. The system that automatically pushes the right information, on time and repeatedly, will become a trusted resource for the worker.

- **Mobility:** If a system isn't mobile-friendly, going mobile must be part of the next-step plan for any technology strategy. For any new toolset we develop that connects to the talent community or applicant tracking system, mobile is part of the roadmap.

The Human Factor

Any level of automation or self-service enablement that a technology system brings is only as impactful as its ability to enable better human interaction. Recruiters and managers can spend more time with candidates, flexible workers, and employees on key interactions such as performance feedback, career counseling, and relationship building. We understand what's at stake. If you are the worker, this is your career. You don't need someone to talk to about passwords and account information. You need a career guide and confidant you can trust.

Empower Their Future to Support Yours

One of the most pressing concerns for Millennial and Gen Z workers is the need to develop skills and advance their careers. In fact, 87 percent of workers in these generations look to their employers for professional development opportunities.⁴⁹ Similarly, 84 percent of Gen Z job seekers look for an employer to help them develop job-specific skills, and 83 percent seek employers' help to develop applied or "soft" skills such as leadership, communication, and management.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, only one in three Millennials agrees that their skills and experiences are being fully applied through their employer.⁵¹ These figures suggest that dissatisfaction at work among Millennials and Gen Zs is very real, but so is the desire to succeed.

Employers are feeling the pressure to step up. In an Allegis Group survey, 71 percent of HR decision-makers worry that shortfalls in their organizations would cause Millennial and Gen Z talent to leave. Of those respondents, 22 percent cited a lack of skills development opportunity and 28 percent cited unclear career paths as major shortfalls.⁵²

Two of the largest obstacles standing in the way of success for Millennials and Gen Zs are inadequate learning resources and a lack of advancement opportunities that align with their unique skills and priorities. These challenges are not insurmountable. With the right strategies and tools, organizations can empower each employee to explore opportunities, work toward a future that is compelling to them, and provide lasting value to the company.



Among the 71% of HR decision-makers who worry that shortfalls in their organizations would cause Millennial and Gen Z talent to leave, reasons why included:

22% A lack of skills development opportunity

28% Unclear career paths

Learning: Feed Their Hunger for New Skills and Experiences

Behind salary and benefits, Learning and Development (L&D) is the most important consideration of workers in these generations as they consider an opportunity.⁵³ To keep up with the Millennial and Gen Z's hunger to learn, organizations must embrace the variety of options available today. Examples include traditional, instructor-led learning, as well as more innovative micro-learning and on-the-job learning through stretch assignments.

Instructor-Led Training

Many business skills are well-served through the collaboration and interaction that comes with traditional, instructor-led training. Agile methodologies, project management, or other management techniques lend themselves to the classroom structure.

Notably, that classroom structure can also incorporate a variety of new, non-traditional learning resources to enhance the experience. For example, videoconferencing can be used to deliver classroom training remotely, and the training can incorporate eLearning tools to provide exercises and supporting material. Millennial and Gen Z workers are likely to embrace a program that covers multiple types of engagement, helping to make the experience realistic, and, most of all, directly relevant to their work.

Micro-Learning

As a practical skills development approach that lends itself to a digital L&D environment, micro-learning appeals to a desire for intense information delivery aimed at specific learning objectives. This approach features brief content, generally no longer than four minutes in length.

Effective modules are limited to one learning objective, utilize video, incorporate high-quality production, and provide an opportunity for users to display and validate their learnings through video demonstrations or quick surveys. Repeatable and easily accessed to deliver immediate results, micro-learning modules provide an effective tool for keeping workers in control and independent in their development efforts.

The power of micro-learning comes from its ability to be strictly outcome-driven. In a well-conceived micro-learning module, the learning is clear and specific. That quality is essential for generations that value immediate, practical results and the constant addition of new capabilities.

Stretch Assignments

One effective means of expanding an employee's horizons is to assign her to roles outside her normal comfort zone. For example, a manager at the local or regional level may be asked to participate in or lead a project at the national level. A marketing contributor may have the opportunity to lead a product-branding initiative, or a manager of a business development function may be asked to take part in a product development initiative that has strong product experts but needs a stronger go-to-market strategy.

In each of these cases, the employee with the stretch assignment takes a risk. There is always the chance that she does not succeed in driving the outcome she wants, but success means the employee has more career options, and the organization has created an employee with more strategic value to provide.

There are several keys to effective stretch assignments. First, assignments should not stretch the employee too thin. (After all, the employee is still responsible for her core role.) Stretch assignments should also build on one's strengths, expand one's network, and build a positive reputation for the employee.⁵⁴

Opportunities: Allow Them to Take Their Unique Journey to Career Success

Millennials who feel in control of their careers are nearly three times as likely to be highly satisfied with their employers, compared to workers who are less in control (by a margin of 28 percent compared to 11 percent).⁵⁵ Traditionally, providing a career path has been seen as a way to boost visibility for training and advancement among workers, but career path development can be a controversial topic with Millennials and Gen Zs. Many would object to an organization dictating the direction their career should take, but at the same time would welcome clarity and guidance to help make independent, informed decisions.

The good news is there are several ways that companies can better support employees today by enabling independence and flexibility while providing the guidance and opportunity they need to succeed. Improved visibility into opportunities across the company can shed light on new options that enable employees to expand their capabilities. Likewise, an openness to non-traditional career paths provides more choices for the employee, and finally, improved mentorship options can help employees build the relationships they need to keep their careers advancing within the organization.

Visibility Into Opportunities

An ability to see a variety of options can make the difference in helping the employee take a successful next step on a career journey within the company. Any effort at creating an employee career path requires detailed visibility into job vacancies, project team roles, or other types of needs across the organization.

For employers, creating visibility across the organization can be a challenge. In larger companies, visibility into opportunities is limited. Many openings are not posted internally, or they may not be posted in places that are available to the entire employee population. Bringing internal systems together is no small task, and the effort involves both human training and technology alignment. The result, however, is a valuable platform that can boost retention of critical talent and provide a tremendous resource for fostering growth and development in-house.

Once a view into opportunities is established, a strong consultative relationship between the employee and a manager, HR, or recruiter is important. The manager can help the employee assess options and make an informed decision about which opportunity to pursue based on her vision or career goals.

Non-Traditional Career Paths

Traditionally, employers offered clear but limited and inflexible paths to advancement and success for their employees. For example, an engineer would begin as an intern, advance through several job levels at multi-year intervals, and, if successful, move into management and leadership. If that employee wanted to explore another path, perhaps into a different but related field, he may have to pursue education and opportunity outside his employer. This desire for exploration can cost companies some of their most ambitious and capable Millennial and Gen Z employees.

With the right strategy in place, companies find they can retain workers as they advance on non-linear career paths. For example, a graphic designer may decide to move into an IT role, or a product development specialist may move into marketing. Such lateral moves are not on the traditional career ladder, but they may ultimately lead to the development of key skills that make the employee a better leader in the future, or they provide an expanded skill set for the organization while retaining its critical talent.

Support for non-linear career paths begins with a focus on employee relationships and company culture. When a manager knows an employee wants to work in a different division, both the manager and the employee should be able to identify new opportunities through a common system of posted roles across the company. The manager must be able and inclined to support the employee, making recommendations and introductions as needed. Eventually, the employee should feel empowered to move to the new position and gain the experience she needs.

This ideal situation is based on several employer strengths. For example, managers must be willing to allow employees to move to new positions, with the trust that other departments may allow employees to migrate to their teams. Organizational commitment and visibility into opportunities are also key, along with the available resources to allow employees to develop new skills.

Mentorship

One of the most valued areas of guidance for workers is mentorship. One study found that 68 percent of Millennials intending to stay longer than five years at their employer have a mentor. Of those not intending to stay, only 32 percent have a mentor. In organizations that have mentorship programs in place, 61 percent of these workers report that they

benefit from the advice and leadership development support of their mentors.⁵⁶

Millennial and Gen Z workers embrace several mentorship types. Traditional mentorship pairs a senior-level employee with a more junior worker to share insight and coaching. In another case, junior team members may be assigned to teach the use of new technologies and communications to more senior-level employees through a “reverse-mentorship.” Each employee learns from interaction with the other. Finally, with digital access to talent across the organization, employees may also benefit from “micro-mentoring,” connecting with an expert or leader to help them learn a skill or practice, explore the workings of a particular role, or help with a project.⁵⁷

Through multiple types of mentorship, the Millennial or Gen Z employee builds capabilities and forges relationships that can lead to career advancement in ways that break free of the limitations of the linear career path. The result is an employee who is engaged and likely to remain longer with the organization.



Breaking Out of the Linear Career Progression Trap: A Data Science Perspective

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The story is all too familiar. A worker finds a niche in a field that holds great promise. She may be skilled in specific programming languages, or possess a comfort with numbers, a talent for writing or speaking, or any number of critical competencies. That person experiences great success as a contributor, using her talent to stand out and gain promotions until a new problem emerges. The more advanced roles begin to require skills that the worker does not have, such as management and leadership. Or, over time, the worker finds that the skills she developed earlier in her career are obsolete.

With limited options for change, she remains in a low- or mid-level management role, unable to use her strengths to her fullest, and experiences little or no advancement. Comfortable with the idea of seeking out new options, the Millennial or Gen Z worker may leave the company to find new growth opportunities.

Innovation Looks Beyond Conventional Career Paths

The good news is that new technologies provide the means to break the linear career progression pattern. Advanced data science techniques and machine learning capabilities address the career progression challenge in three distinct ways: visualizing all career options, analyzing for best opportunities, and humanizing the complex data to drive a practical career discussion.

Visualize the Universe of Opportunity

Through artificial intelligence (AI) applications and large data sets, it is possible to identify a myriad of possible tracks based on the experience of workers who have done it before. The technology must navigate the inconsistencies of language (e.g., titles alone don't always indicate real job duties or levels of experience), and it must "see" all potential paths to the desired goal. For example, a finance professional can make a lateral move to gain skills in business development or marketing. The employee may advance to CFO, but that path may venture through many disciplines to get there.

Analyze Data and Trends for Best Options

Seeing the many career possibilities available to a worker is not enough to make a difference in a person's decisions. After all, humans do not have the time or capability to sift through millions of possible career path options, but machines do. Data analysis reveals the difference between what's possible and what's likely in terms of career movement. With a large enough set of data, the career path system can identify trends where movement from one field to another has led to positive results.

Humanize the Results to Support a Practical Career Conversation

With a career path analysis function, we can identify trends that indicate how someone in one role could eventually achieve another desired role. The result is a very human, consultative conversation that the recruiter or hiring manager can have with the worker to truly push her development while maximizing value to the company.

Moving Forward: Technology is the Beginning

A mature career-path analysis technology and a process to back it up can transform how companies look at talent. Today, employers seek people with similar skills to match stated role requirements, leaving little room for advancement or stretch on the part of the worker.

By applying trending data based on AI technology, companies can now intelligently manage the risk of pushing employees beyond their boundaries. There is still much work to do, however, as even once the technology is in place, the training and culture must also be in place to have the manager or recruiter engage in a consultative conversation with the employee or, in the case of a staffing and recruiting firm, guide the careers of the talent it places with clients.

Advancing skills. Building value. Making smart decisions. These priorities are fundamental to success for Millennials, Gen Zs, and workers of all ages, as well as the employers that engage them. Through our investment in advanced career-path technology, we continue to bring these fundamentals to life.



Embracing a Future-Focused Workforce

In 2015, 57 percent of Fortune 500 companies from 1955 were no longer in existence,⁵⁸ and it is predicted that 50 percent of companies on the S&P stock index in the United States will not be in existence 50 years from now.⁵⁹ No one can capably predict the challenges, opportunities, and needs companies will face in the future, but one view has always proved true: change is a constant, and when it comes to navigating change, talent is the key to success.

No group in the workforce will play a more important role in navigating change over the next two decades than Millennials and Gen Zs. To adapt to new markets, new demands, and new innovations, organizations will depend on talent that is flexible, connected, collaborative, experience-driven, and accomplishment-motivated. While all generations of employees bring these qualities to their employers, today's under-35 workforce will be critical to maximizing them for tomorrow's business environment.

Inevitably, an organization will encounter obstacles when adapting to the needs of Millennial and Gen Z workers. People will resist change. They may question the need for digital strategies and investment in new technologies. Most likely, some will question the sacrifices needed to engage Millennial and Gen Z workers. But history has shown that the successful employer will be the one that views change not as a sacrifice but as progress. Organizations that adapt their processes today to better engage Millennials and Gen Zs are doing more than trying to please an elusive portion of the workforce; they are setting them up to succeed. This result is not only good for the workers companies are trying to attract, but it is also essential for the survival of the business itself.

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