



Chief Diversity Officer Collaborative

Gen Z Decoded

New Data on How Your Youngest Employees Want to Experience Work

Introduction

Gen Z, defined as those born between 1997 and 2012, represent an increasingly large proportion of global workplaces. By 2029, [the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) projects that one-third of the US workforce will be members of Gen Z. This generation brings [unprecedented diversity](#) that many diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) leaders hope will help enable more inclusive and equitable workplaces.

But Gen Z also brings uncertainty. Since the oldest Gen Z began entering the workforce, media coverage and anecdotal complaints have created myths and stereotypes about Gen Z employees:

- ▶ *They're lazy and they don't want to work.*
- ▶ *They don't want to advance.*
- ▶ *They have no loyalty and all they care about is money.*
- ▶ *They're always pushing us to make political statements.*
- ▶ *They don't want to come into the office.*
- ▶ *They're so hard to work with. They always want to know why we're asking them to do something.*

This research grew out of efforts within Seramount's Chief Diversity Officer Collaborative, a community of committed leaders dedicated to creating authentic and sustained engagement with DEI both within and across their organizations, most of which are global. The goal was to understand the myths and realities behind Gen Z from an employer's perspective, including what skills and beliefs they bring to the workplace and what they want from their organizations in return. Seramount's research team reviewed more than 200 books and articles culled from academic journals and general news sources to understand current explorations of Gen Z. Then the team executed a series of [Employee Voice SessionsSM](#) (EVSs), Seramount's innovative, anonymous virtual listening sessions. This research finds that Gen Z are ambitious, motivated, and often navigating biased expectations in the workplace.

This executive summary identifies and debunks five *myths* about Gen Z. These stereotypes can bias managers and colleagues alike against Gen Z employees. The research also uncovers five *truths* about Gen Z that will help leaders create a better, more inclusive workplace for all employees. The full report delves deeper into the data and rationale behind these statements with practical recommendations from Seramount advisory on maximizing relationships with Gen Z.



5 Myths About Gen Z

1. They're lazy.

What They Said: They're [less engaged with their work than any other generation](#), and they [invented "quiet-quitting."](#)

What We Found: Gen Z are just as dedicated as their older colleagues. Forty percent of Gen Z EVS participants agree with this statement: *I am inspired to work hard at my company*—the exact same percentage as non-Gen Z participants.

2. They're the most salary-driven generation.

What They Said: Salary is [a top priority](#), and new college graduates [expected increasingly high starting salaries](#).

What We Found: Gen Z is highly motivated by salary—but so is everyone else. Gen Z and non-Gen Z are approximately equally likely to indicate that salary is the most important aspect in a job: 51 percent of Gen Z and 47 percent of non-Gen Z. They're also equally motivated to earn a raise or bonus: 47 percent of Gen Z and 57 percent of non-Gen Z indicate this.

3. They're motivated by different things than older employees.

What They Said: Gen Z's goals and desires for work are [unique](#) and [different](#) than those of other generations.

What We Found: All employees share the same three core desires: compensation, advancement, and flexibility. Asked why they might consider leaving their current companies, Gen Z and non-Gen Z alike selected these three top options.

4. They reject authority.

What They Said: [Managers](#) are [frustrated](#) by Gen Z employees not taking orders without understanding their justification.

What We Found: Gen Z is highly motivated by their relationships with their managers and view them as partners in their success. Wanting to perform well for their direct supervisor is one of the biggest workplace motivators for Gen Z, second only to earning a raise or a bonus and ahead of the desire for advancement.

5. They demand political involvement from organizations.

What They Said: Gen Zers [demand organizations speak out](#) against injustice and inequality.

What We Found: Gen Z are no more likely than non-Gen Z to want their organizations to speak out in the face of societal or political turmoil, be it in the form of taking a public stance or merely issuing a statement internally. About 2 in 10 Gen Zers don't want their companies to be involved in sociopolitical issues at all.

Methodology

Standard Gen Z samples include college and even high school students, as well as job seekers and employees working outside the corporate sector. Many of these surveys are aimed at marketing to Gen Z instead of employing them. In contrast, Seramount's EVS data comes from a sample of current employees from CDOD companies—in other words, employees from organizations like yours.

Seramount's research team held eight one-hour EVSs between September and December 2023, including four sessions specifically designated for Gen Z employees (defined as those under age 27) and four sessions designated for older, non-Gen Z employees.

Twenty-one companies that were members of Seramount's Chief Diversity Officer Collaborative participated, from industries including consumer products, education, financial services, health care, media, pharmaceutical, professional services, and science and technology. Across the eight sessions, 110 members of Gen Z and 276 members of older generations (including Millennials, Gen Xers, and Baby Boomers) participated. These employees represent a mix of gender, race/ethnicity, tenure, job level, and other demographics.



5 Truths About Gen Z

1. They want to build careers.

What They Said: Gen Z are [less interested](#) than their older counterparts in climbing the corporate ladder, and many [don't want to supervise](#).

What We Found: Compared to their older counterparts, a larger percentage of Gen Z EVS participants believe they will advance to leadership positions at their company (33 percent vs. 19 percent). Additionally, significantly more Gen Zers than non-Gen Zers want to supervise people (44 percent vs. 27 percent). But Gen Z participants also expressed concerns about maintaining work/life boundaries as they advanced their careers, with comments such as "I want to have a good work/life balance and the requirements for advancing go directly against that, therefore making me not want to advance."

2. They prefer hybrid work.

What They Said: Return-to-office initiatives were "[driving Gen Z to quit](#)." The percentage of new college graduates who indicate they would turn down a job that doesn't offer flexible or hybrid work schedules has [increased](#) in the past year.

What We Found: Gen Z do prioritize flexibility, but they're still tied to the office. Hybrid work plans are more popular with Gen Z than they are with their older counterparts: 74 percent of Gen Z prefer some type of hybrid work arrangement, compared with only 52 percent of non-Gen Z. Only 11 percent of Gen Z would prefer to be fully remote, compared with 34 percent of non-Gen Z. Work/life boundaries are a high priority for both Gen Zers and non-Gen Zers, regardless of their feelings about working on-site or at home.

3. They're navigating expectations and biases.

What They Said: [Articles](#) and [studies](#) parrot the myths of Gen Z's laziness and anti-authority tendencies and alleged that they are [unwilling to conform](#) to workplace expectations. More even-handed articles have given voice to manager frustration with the amount of [on-the-job training](#) their young, inexperienced employees require, particularly around [soft skills](#).

What We Found: Like all new employees, Gen Zers are still adjusting to the workplace. But a mere 28 percent of Gen Z do *not* feel the need to compromise their authenticity to match the leadership style of their workplaces. Fifty-nine percent indicate that they compromise how they communicate. Both Gen Zers and non-Gen Zers experience struggles with cross-generational communication.

4. They put the "I" in DEI.

What They Said: Perhaps because of their [inherent diversity](#), Gen Z care about their company's commitment to DEI: [83 percent](#) of Gen Z job seekers indicate that a company's commitment to DEI is important.

What We Found: Gen Z's understanding of DEI is changing. Their values revolve around inclusion of underrepresented groups, including neurodivergent employees and those with disabilities. They value current corporate DEI efforts comparably with their older colleagues, but fewer Gen Z than non-Gen Z agree that they have a personal responsibility to advance DEI (29 percent vs. 53 percent). Significantly fewer Gen Zers than non-Gen Zers agree with these statements: "My company's leadership is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion" (31 percent vs. 46 percent) and "My company is making progress towards advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion" (28 percent vs. 55 percent).



5. They have the potential for loyalty.

What They Said: “[Job-hopping](#)” is increasingly acceptable to Gen Z. They [don’t want to stay](#) at any job—or company—long-term.

What We Found: Equal percentages of Gen Z and non-Gen plan to stay at their companies for less than one year, but a larger percentage of Gen Z plan to stay for one to less than three years, and the inverse is true for the five or more years option. Only 28 percent of Gen Z see themselves staying at their companies for five or more years, compared with 57 percent of non-Gen Z. But Gen Zers foresee themselves leaving because of a lack of advancement opportunity or work/life boundaries—*not* because they aren’t interested in building a career at their current company. As one wrote, “I would love to sit at the same company for decades, but I refuse to sacrifice my relationships and life for it.”

Conclusion

This research has debunked five pernicious myths about Gen Z in corporate America. Using proprietary EVS technology to capture a sample of Gen Z and non-Gen Z employees at companies like yours has revealed that they are far from the lazy, difficult-to-manage cohort the media has depicted them as. In fact, Gen Zers are every bit as ambitious and eager to work hard for company success as their older colleagues. They’re trying to adjust to workplace expectations, not upending them. And they have the potential for loyalty, assuming their needs for advancement opportunities and work/life boundaries are met.

The most surprising takeaway from this research may be that despite some key differences, Gen Z desires the same things from the workplace that their older peers want. Competitive salaries, flexibility, and advancement opportunities are key to retaining employees of all ages. This is good news for organizations concerned about balancing the competing desires of multiple generations. The full report, available only to Chief Diversity Officers Collaborative members, details the numbers behind all these truths, giving fact-based evidence for practical recommendations on how to recruit, engage, and retain Gen Z employees and maximize cross-generational communications.

Next Steps

- ▶ To view the full report and participate in the community of committed DEI professionals who helped shape this research, join Seramount’s [CDO Collaborative](#).
- ▶ CDO Collaborative members are invited to schedule a Partner Intensive at your organization to help you better understand and work with your Gen Z employees. Our experts can discuss the full research and solutions and advise you on your generational employee needs.



Demographics

	Gen Z	Non-Gen Z
Gender		
Woman	69%	71%
Man	30%	26%
Gender non-conforming	1%	2%
Prefer not to answer	0%	2%
Race/Ethnicity		
White	54%	55%
Asian	26%	8%
Black/African-American	8%	17%
Hispanic/Latine	4%	11%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0%	1%
2 or more races	8%	4%
Other	0%	1%
Prefer not to answer	1%	4%

** Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.