

GENERATIONS@WORK

Cracking the Code: Coaching Gen Z to Success

A new mindset can be incredibly rewarding

By Kim M. Catania



Have you coached, trained or led Generation Z team members? Then you already know — coaching Generation Z team members can be challenging. But once you crack the code and change your mindset, it is incredibly rewarding.

Gen Z was born between 1997 and 2012, millennials between 1981 and 1996 and Gen X between 1965 and 1980. So, many leaders and coaches are Gen X or older millennials right now. Which means we need to really flex our styles and change our way of thinking, coaching and doing: The Gen Z team is unlike any generation we know or can relate to.

As a trainer, leader and coach, it is important to understand the unique characteristics and mindset of this generation to effectively motivate and inspire them. You have seen their unique characteristics described before:

- **Scroll, Swipe, Click:** Gen Z is the first generation that has never known a world without Internet or smartphones; therefore, they have all the answers to everything at their fingertips and, they can fact-check on the spot (thank you). They are also known as the **TikTok Generation**. In fact, a new survey from ResumeBuilder.com states that 50% of Gen Z and millennials obtain career advice from TikTok.
- **Think Differently:** Gen Zers have enhanced cognitive abilities and left-brain hemisphere activation due to digital activity and online stimulation. What does this mean? They have a natural affinity to technology, digital platforms and communications tools. Studies say that while millennials can handle three screens at once, Gen Z can handle five and 78% of them can effectively use more than one device at a time.
- **Resounding Impact:** Their ability to have access to all news and information all the time, coupled with the ever-changing world and its events, has shaped them. For example, the prominence of social media, belief in human rights and the aspect of living through the COVID-19 pandemic during critical stages in their growth and development have impacted their mindset. And diversity, equality and inclusion have never resonated with a generation more than with Gen Z.

Making Connections

First, the work world the way we know it has changed dramatically. The workweek as Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. is outdated. For Gen Z, work-life balance is key – it is a 24-hour day and the hours to work can flex and people can work remotely. This enables them to build in life experiences, which is very important.

Second, while Gen Z is a respectful, driven, hard-working group, titles and experience (they learn by watching TikTok and YouTube) may not mean as much to them as they do to our generations. They expect mutual respect and to be treated as equal at work, regardless of title and role.

However, we know it takes time and experience to develop capabilities and to grow behaviors, skills and competence to become experts in any field. Due to our experience and time served, we can cultivate the virtue of patience and perseverance for career success.

This is an important aspect to consider as Gen Z has exceptionally high expectations. We must manage the fact that Gen Z is weaned on immediate gratification — they want promotions now.

Third, think “snack-sized communications” – make it clear and concise and no longer to read than 8 to 12 seconds. Also, keep it relatively informal and consider leveraging technology. Have you used Slack, WhatsApp, Teams Chat or even texted to connect?

Gen Z wants regular feedback – 40% of Gen Z said they want daily interactions with their leader. So, increase how often you communicate with your Gen Z team. They need regular feedback as they are used to getting instant opinions and answers due to social media. Keep in mind, Gen Z may be uncomfortable with face-to-face interactions, so text chats may have a greater impact on them.

And, when developing and delivering training, ensure you emphasize skill-based learning, make it bite-sized and incorporate technology. Ensure that clear objectives with follow-up actions are incorporated into how various topics align with their career development. Since they crave learning, are hungry for growth and driven to succeed, this will maximize results and impact on Gen Z team members.

Coaching Is Key

We know that face-to-face coaching is ideal for any team member as it enhances eye contact and increases the ability to read emotions and hear tone. It is especially important to attempt face-to-face interactions with the Gen Z group, who may be challenged with face-to-face communication, since they spend so much time in front of screens.

Note that it does not have to be in the same location, so Zoom, Teams and WhatsApp will all work in these circumstances. In fact, 91% of Gen Z claim

advanced technology impacts their interest in working for an organization. This could be your “in” to face-to-face with them.

Leverage coaching with your Gen Z team members as an influential tool to drive, motivate and retain talent. Coaching is always an inherently collaborative process, where both the coach and coachee play active roles. So, it is important to not only increase communication, but to instill a coaching culture and cultivate continuous learning and development among your Gen Z team members.

Make coaching sessions with Gen Z team members individualized, effective and goal-oriented. They should last about 15 to 20 minutes and should never be longer than 60 minutes. Ensure coaching conversations align with organizational vision, mission and goals, so Gen Z coachees walk away from the coaching session feeling valued with a sense of purpose, enhanced self-awareness and an action plan to enhance development and growth.

Do Not Employ ‘Do as I Say’

During your communications and coaching sessions, it is critical to employ “probing” and “active listening.” Incorporate open-ended questions, so you do not receive one-word responses. The example I always use is when my teenage son comes home from school and I make the mistake and ask, “How was school today?” Of course, the response I get is “good.” And that is the end of the conversation.

Gen Z does not like to be told what to do, they would much prefer uncovering the solution on their own or partnering with you to do so. Implement an inquisitive approach to enable them to think differently and seek alternative methods to solve challenges.

What does this mean for you? You will need to plan your session and be both skillful and mindful that you do not just “tell.” Provoke them with questions and provide them with the opportunity to evaluate a circumstance and come up with a solution, then you provide tools to resolve situations.

Conclusion

To summarize, we need to adapt, since Gen Z is the future, and the future is now. So, we cannot train, coach or lead the way we were brought up or taught, since Gen Z does not learn the way we learn. Nor will they view their career and work the way we do.

Utilize technology when appropriate in growth and development of their skills. Communicate clearly and concisely. Modify coaching approaches as we know them to best align with their way of learning to best suit their needs.

Once we recognize that our perspective is vastly different and that we need to flex our style to better align with them, we can harness their potential. That will result in tremendous success for us as trainers, coaches and leaders and for our Gen Z teammates.



Kim M. Catania is principal, Catania Communications. Email her at kim@cataniacommunications.com or connect through [linkedin.com/in/kim-m-catania-1312196](https://www.linkedin.com/in/kim-m-catania-1312196).