

CONNECTING WITH THE GEN Z WORKFORCE

A lot has been written about the often misunderstood Gen Z workforce. Born between 1997-2012, they are the first generation that grew up immersed in technology—so-called “digital natives.” Their motivations to keep and stay in jobs, including manufacturing jobs, are often different from older workers.

According to McKinsey & Company, “Gen Z workers are taking jobs less for compensation and more because of factors including their relationships with coworkers (43%), the chance to do meaningful work (41%) and workplace flexibility (38%).” And the number one reason they are leaving manufacturing jobs is the lack of career development and advancement.

So, what can you do?

1. Onboarding is important.

Gen Zs are mobile and have many job opportunities. It is not uncommon for this generation of workers to leave a job during the initial 90 days if they don't have the right support or understanding of their work. Properly explaining what a job entails—from providing a tour of the shop floor to necessary safety precautions such as clothing requirements to keep workers safe—might help curtail some of the job churn. When surveyed, more than 86% of Aluminum Association member companies indicated that they offer internship programs, which serve as building blocks for Gen Z to understand as well as connect deeply with an organization.

2. Meaningful work means more.

Perhaps more than any other generation, the meaning behind the work is important to Gen Z. Connecting the dots for this generation on how jobs in the aluminum industry directly support decarbonization, clean energy production, national security, community building—notwithstanding that aluminum makes many of the products we all take for granted every day—will be noticed.

3. Listen and learn.

This generation also grew up used to expressing and sharing opinions with a wide audience online. Squashing that assertiveness will stifle connection to their job. They are adept at YouTubing information and talking to their peers to group-think solutions, so give them a voice. Beyond their actual job performance, welcome their ideas. They may be in a technical role with thoughts on how to market a new recycling initiative. Or perhaps, they're new in an operations role but believe the workplace culture could be more enjoyable with time off for volunteering or stretch breaks. Whatever the scenario, the most important thing for them is to be heard.

4. Offer continuous learning.

This can be on-the-job training opportunities or partnering with local workforce partners such as community colleges. Skill-building and continued learning is a common question asked by Gen Z during interviews; they are looking for ongoing advancement and development. Gone are the days of staying with one company for 40 years but offering opportunities for growth and advancement can

help. Lean into training and development, mentorship and leadership programs that empower the Gen Z cohort because if they aren't learning and growing, they will leave.

5. Flexibility.

This is a tough one in a manufacturing setting, but there are creative ways to approach a business environment that has gone hybrid and work from anywhere in some sectors. While many Aluminum Association member companies offer hybrid and remote flexibility for administrative or other office roles, Gen Z is putting pressure on employers to explore alternative options, which may include a shorter work week or job sharing even in traditional manufacturing jobs. The National Association of Manufacturers explores this topic more.

To read more about Gen Z in the workplace, please visit the links below:

[*From hire to inspire: Getting—and keeping—Gen Z in Manufacturing*](#)

[*2024 Gen Z and Millennial Survey: Living and working with purpose in a transforming world*](#)

[*Gen Z Careers the Worst to Manage, 45% of Hiring Managers Say*](#)

Gen Z By The Numbers:

