The Future of Work and Generation Z: The data you need for more strategic recruiting
Generation Z has arrived

Sixty-one million strong in the U.S. alone, they will comprise 30% of the workforce by 2030. They are more diverse, more educated, and more technologically adept than any previous generation.

And they are poised to join the workforce at a moment of unprecedented change. The future of work will be more global, more collaborative, and more flexible than ever before. It will demand new competencies from a more engaged workforce and create new possibilities for how work gets done.

Ready to take on the world!

SkillSurvey Career Readiness research shows that evaluators rated “Global/intercultural fluency” and “Teamwork” the strongest competencies in today’s students.
A perfect storm..

Entrepreneurial, pragmatic, and increasingly dedicated to work that matters, GenZ will drive this transformation—at your organization and across the workplace. Finding new ways to engage this emerging cohort will be critical to the success of your organization.

As HR prepares for their imminent arrival, recruiters find themselves, once again, on the front lines.

To engage GenZ, recruiters won’t just need to identify their favorite social platforms. They will need to understand who they are and what they are capable of achieving. And they will need a way to measure this generation’s skills and competencies to match them successfully to jobs we are only starting to imagine.
And, of course, recruiters today are also navigating how to attract, engage, and retain an entirely new generation entering the workforce with new experiences and different expectations.

What you think you know about GenZ might include a few facts and a lot of hype. Are they really obsessed with taking selfies? Do they only engage with each other over social media? Are they truly the most anxious, lonely, and scarred generation since...forever?¹

Or are they motivated by moral passion, activism, and a dedication to public service?²

No single survey can ever fully capture the diversity of an entire generation—particularly one just emerging into adulthood. But new research findings should help you begin to understand how Generation Z might just change how you do business.
Roughly speaking, Generation Z was born between 1996 and 2010. The first wave, at 20-23 years old, is beginning to enter the workforce now. Just over half of Generation Z is non-white, making them the most diverse generation in the history of the United States. And at 61 million strong, they are a larger cohort than either Baby Boomers or Millennials.

This so-called selfie-taking generation shares a sobering past. GenZers have always taken their shoes off at airports. Mass shootings have always been epidemic in the U.S. Since 2014, they have experienced the five hottest years ever recorded. And they have watched parents and siblings struggle with a bruising economic recession.
They are technologically nimble

Generation Z has grown up saturated in technology. It’s a primary means of connection—with each other and with brands like your organization. They are comfortable with technology—and they are using it in new ways to navigate their world. They are Airdropping memes and messages at concerts and in the classroom. They are creating private spaces on Facebook and Instagram for friends and family. They are experimenting with self-identity on Snapchat. Their technology is less a tool than it is an extension of themselves.

They are well educated

Educational attainment in the U.S. is rising, and GenZ is right on track to outstrip any previous generation. More likely to live with a college-educated parent, GenZers are less likely to drop out of high school than previous generations. They are also pursuing college in record numbers. Second generation Hispanic students are driving this trend, with 61% of those who are 18 to 20 enrolled in college. GenZ is also self-directed, preferring YouTube over textbooks, but they continue to seek out the opinions of their parents, friends, and influencers.
They aren’t waiting around for jobs

GenZ is also poised to be the most entrepreneurial generation we’ve ever seen. Nearly half of GenZers plan to own their own business.9 With the rise of social media, as well as peer-to-peer networks, they are using new platforms to invent new opportunities—predicting trends, creating podcasts, and launching start-ups.

They’re pragmatic

Shaped by recession, GenZers tend to be realistic about their prospects. More than 80% of them would rather save for a splurge than purchase something on credit.10 Their experience that life can change on a dime has made them more inclined to plan for the future, designing majors that will help them be career-ready, using internships to gain experience, and having a backup plan if things don’t work out.11

Despite being raised with a device in their hand, Digital Technology skills are rated in the middle of the pack (rated 4th out of 8) for college students according to their evaluators and SkillSurvey Career Readiness Project research.

This is because the top digital skills in demand for today include: AI/Machine Learning, Digital Marketing (Mobile, SEO/SEM Marketing) and Data Analytics/Business Intelligence.
GenZ: What do they value?

Equality and inclusivity
According to a comprehensive study conducted by the Pew Research Center, GenZ is more liberal and open in its outlook than previous generations, especially valuing equality and inclusivity. GenZers are more comfortable with gender fluidity and about a third know at least one nonbinary person. They are also more likely to recognize (and reject) racial inequalities. Diversity, in the words of one GenZer, “is simply the norm.” They expect their reality to be reflected in the workplace.

Stability and opportunity
In addition to growing up haunted by recession, this generation has seen the student debt crisis soar past the $1 trillion mark. They are keenly aware of the downside of debt and know that jobs can sometimes go away, particularly with the gig economy on the rise. It’s no surprise, then, that this generation ranks job security highly. But Gen Z is also open to change and willing to take risks. They expect to work hard, learn on the job, and explore different pathways to success.

Collaboration and exploration
Multitaskers who easily manage information across multiple devices, GenZers are natural synthesizers. Rather than focusing on a single task, they are more interested in (and wired for) contributing across multiple projects that interest them. Collaborating with others—without sacrificing personal agency—isn’t just something they’re good at, it’s a part of how they understand and negotiate the world.
GenZ: How do they connect?

You guessed it.
The generation most saturated in technology uses its social platforms to connect. They tend to prefer visually driven platforms like YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and embrace new ones like TikTok. While visual content attracts eyeballs from across generations, GenZers tend to use platforms with less “noise”—i.e. streamlined content and fewer comments. But recruiters take note: GenZ wants one-on-one conversations, preferring phone calls over email when dealing with a business and face-to-face conversations at work. Encouragingly, GenZ is also more likely to consider different opinions and the importance of dialog.
Recruiting GenZ

GenZ already has a bit of a reputation. They aren’t as likely as Millennials to take the first job offered. They’ve been known to “ghost” recruiters and even employers. (For the uninitiated, that’s disappearing without explanation). To many HR veterans, this sounds like entitlement. But in a world where life moves increasingly quickly, GenZ feels the need to keep pace. They are anxious about the future. They worry that they won’t find a job or career that’s a good fit.

And although they expect to work hard and be promoted quickly, a considerable number of GenZers believe they don’t have the necessary skills—particularly soft skills—for the jobs they want. That anxiety might explain their desire for on-the-job professional development and mentoring, both of which rank high in survey after survey.

While practical considerations like job security, career growth, and professional mentoring are important to GenZers, their goals are broad in scope. In a very real way, this generation is the first who are experiencing a world without borders. They expect their work to have a global and interdisciplinary focus, to be interdisciplinary in nature, and to deliver experiences that will enrich their careers and their lives. And they expect to have an impact. Organizations that are able to articulate a higher purpose will have an edge when it comes to recruiting and retaining talent.
How do you find them?

Actually, they may have already found you. Insatiable sleuths, GenZers use a broad network of contacts and sources to suss out job opportunities, relying on parents and friends as well as online tools to research and evaluate organizations. Because they are seeking authentic and meaningful experiences, GenZers are keenly aware of your organization’s brand. Savvy recruiters are shifting their sourcing and recruiting practices to better articulate the mission and purpose of their organizations. They are incorporating new social platforms in their sourcing strategies. And they are meeting job candidates face-to-face, helping them understand company culture and focus on the right skills for more demanding entry level jobs. In fact, according to a recent Yello study, nearly half of Gen Z job candidates said their experience with a recruiter has had the biggest impact on their decision to accept a job.26 27
How do you evaluate them?

As entry level jobs grow more demanding, recruiters are looking for better ways to understand what skills members of Generation Z bring to the table. Two years ago, a Harvard study found that employers are still likely to filter out applicants who don’t hold a four-year degree but are otherwise qualified. Today, as the skills gap looms, recruiters are less likely to rely on “signaling” criteria such as what school a candidate attended or what major she pursued. And they are more keenly aware that using the wrong criteria to evaluate candidates can lead to mismatches. And mistakes, for a generation eager to make their mark, can lead to high turnover rates and low productivity.

When over a third of employers say that the soft skills gap is getting worse at their organizations, identifying competencies like problem solving, communication skills, and leadership potential is a priority.
Science-based evaluation

In a competitive working environment where collaboration, innovation, and adaptability are no longer “nice to haves,” soft skills increasingly drive business success. But what soft skills really matter? Especially for a generation that anticipates filling multiple roles—sometimes even simultaneously—at your organization?

Start by figuring out to what’s important to your organization and the roles you’re trying to fill. The soft skills a candidate needs to thrive—whether in an entry level job and beyond—vary from role to role.

SkillSurvey’s deep experience in job competency modelling is helping recruiters identify and measure the soft skills their GenZ candidates will need to succeed, data that helps recruiters match the right candidate to the right job, onboard new hires more quickly, and provide the kind of targeted training and mentorship that GenZers crave.

Our science-based surveys, designed by skilled industrial psychologists, uncover precisely what soft skills are most needed to succeed in a specific role. We’ve collected data on competencies for thousands of entry-level job candidates and a growing database of student competencies. Our tech-enabled reference checking process provides a quick and easy way for recruiters to gather the specific data they need to understand just how well a candidate has mastered those skills.
Where can entry-level candidates improve?

Data from references analyzed by SkillSurvey’s Analytics Team finds that communication skills and decision-making skills continue to be key areas of professional growth for entry-level job candidates. The SkillSurvey analytics team studied one thousand job reference reports on candidates for each of the seven most common entry-level positions: engineer; finance; IT; registered nurse; sales/business development; sales/account management and customer service. A vast majority of these references came from past employers and professors.

The team identified these as the most frequently cited areas for improvement:

**Customer service**
- Attention to detail
- Making high-quality decisions
- Communicating clearly

**Sales/Account Management (sales “farmer”)**
- Presenting info and advice in a logical, compelling manner
- Attention to detail
- Persistence when faced with objections

**Sales/Business Development (sales “hunter”)**
- Presenting information
- Negotiating with others to achieve an acceptable outcome
- Attention to detail

**Finance**
- Staying up to date
- Explaining financial concepts and information
- Using financial data to make decisions

**Registered Nurse**
- Displaying confidence in nursing skills
- Instructing others in processes/procedures
- Taking initiative

**Engineer**
- Staying up to date
- Software proficiency
- Independently making decisions

**IT**
- Documenting program and code creation
- Staying up to date
- Handling multiple projects
For GenZers, the SkillSurvey Reference process is fast, easy, and—crucially—social. They simply enter the references they would like a recruiter to contact from among their supervisors, peers, and extended networks using the device they prefer. Candidates and their references can receive requests via text message or email. Within hours, recruiters have honest, objective feedback about a candidate’s past performance—a key predictors of future success.

Here’s a sample feedback report showing overall ratings from references for each of the key behavioral competency clusters. Feedback on Managing Others and Leadership can also be included on surveys if relevant to the job role being filled.

For deeper insights, hiring managers can review feedback on individual behaviors.

Explore more.
See what else is included in a reference feedback report at: www.skillsurvey.com/reference-checking-hiring-manager-tools/
Emerging data on career readiness

SkillSurvey Reference can help uncover gaps and disconnects between recent graduates and potential employers. In fact, SkillSurvey has been working with the NACE Center for Career Development and Talent Acquisition, to help institutions assess students in eight key competencies, as defined by NACE in conjunction with over 100 member institutions. Using the same scientifically validated solution that thousands of HR departments have come to rely on for reference checking, institutions are measuring and verifying student competencies, gaining new insight into how their skills compare to a national sample of other students and real entry-level candidates in similar roles. SkillSurvey Career Readiness was recently recognized with an Education Technology Breakthrough Award for Best Competency Education Solution.

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Final thoughts

Just entering the workforce in significant numbers this year, Generation Z is a growing and evolving cohort. Generational research provides a useful foundation for understanding and assessing their strengths, weaknesses, and potential. But Generation Z is more than simply a collection of attributes. Young people across the globe are ready to drive positive change. They are individuals with unique passions and needs. And they might just change the world.
SkillSurvey applies the science of human behavior and smart technology to create a fuller picture of the people our customers engage. SkillSurvey solutions help employers save time and money, grow revenues, and bring the right employees onboard faster; and help students and higher education institutions gain insight about competence and career readiness. SkillSurvey Reference® is proven to reduce first-year turnover for cause and uncovers behavioral competence; SkillSurvey Source® offers new ways to build a pipeline of talent. Our 11,000 users are connecting with hundreds of thousands of job candidates, references, students, evaluators and peers each month.

www.skillsurvey.com
References: