

The Gen Z Effect: Transforming Manufacturing Towards the Future

Discover how Gen Z is reshaping the manufacturing workforce with their values of flexibility, sustainability, technological advancement and inclusivity.



According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by the end of 2025, the U.S. workforce is projected to consist of approximately 170 million employees. The World Economic Forum reports Gen Z (currently 13 to 28 years old) will make up over 25% of this workforce, marking a significant demographic shift. Currently, about 35% of workers are Millennials (currently 29-44 years old), followed by 31% who are Gen X (currently 45-60 years old). Baby Boomers (currently 61-79 years old) comprise roughly 15%, but their participation is declining as many continue to retire, with the Silent Generation nearly fully retired. While Millennials and Gen X still form substantial portions of the workforce, the rapid entry of Gen Z is reshaping the labor landscape.

Gen Z

Generation Z, born from 1997 to 2012, is characterized by their digital nativity, social consciousness and desire for purpose-driven careers. Understanding their expectations is crucial for precision machining companies aiming to attract and retain this new workforce segment. Unlike older generations that often accepted rigid 9-to-5 work schedules, Gen Z values flexibility, remote work options and work-life continuity. This shift is driven by their familiarity with technology, which has normalized remote collaboration and digital communication. To meet these expectations, shops may benefit from shifting their traditional setups by offering flexible shifts, remote management tools and adaptable workspaces.

Gen Z employees also prioritize meaningful work that aligns with their values. They are highly interested in environmental sustainability, ethical labor practices and corporate social responsibility. They want their jobs to contribute positively to society and the planet. Manufacturers can address these values by emphasizing sustainable practices, reducing environmental impact and ensuring transparency in supply chains and

manufacturing processes, which can make manufacturing roles more appealing.

As digital natives, Gen Z expects workplaces to be technologically advanced. They are comfortable with automation, robotics and Internet of Things (IoT) integration, which can improve efficiency and appeal to their tech-savviness. Providing ongoing training in new technologies and fostering innovation can help create stimulating work environments aligned with their preferences. Furthermore, Gen Z values continuous learning and career development. They seek workplaces that promote skill-building, upskilling, and clear pathways for advancement. Shops may use this as an opportunity to foster loyalty and motivation through training programs, mentorship, and opportunities to develop technical skills. PMPA members can take advantage of PMPA.org's Knowledge Centers, National Technical Conference and Management Update to provide their employees with resources, education and networking opportunities.

Finally, diversity and inclusivity are fundamental for Gen Z. They prefer workplaces that embrace diversity, promote equality and are free from discrimination. Creating policies that celebrate diversity and foster a welcoming environment is essential for attracting this generation.

As the workforce shifts toward a majority of Gen Z employees, manufacturing shops can meet their expectations by offering flexibility, emphasizing sustainability, integrating cutting-edge technology, supporting continuous development and fostering inclusive environments. Aligning workplace practices with these values will help attract and retain today's incoming worker ensuring a manufacturing shop stays resilient and innovative in the industry. **P**

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