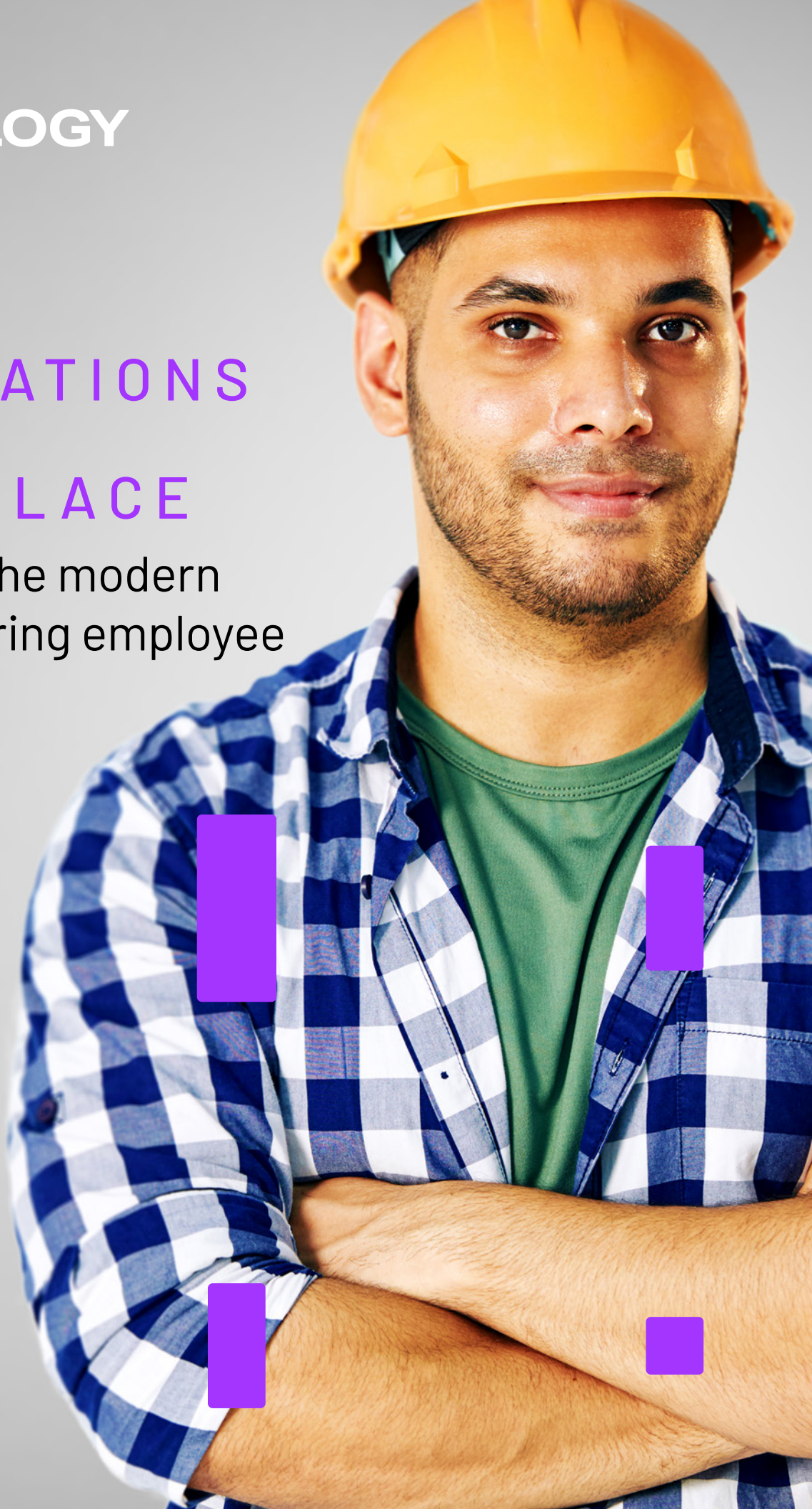




NEW GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

A guide to the modern
manufacturing employee



Overview

As expected, when a new generation replaces its predecessor, workplaces will change. As more millennials become leaders and managers in their organizations, we see Gen Z enter the workforce. With this newest generation we should expect a shift in values, motivators, and expectations. Be prepared to attract, manage, and collaborate with Gen Zers in manufacturing using this guide.

How to attract Gen Z talent and close the skills gap

Partner with local community colleges or trade schools

The skills gap exists when there is no pipeline of candidates who are informed, motivated, and trained in the basic requirements for successful performance in manufacturing roles. One of the most direct and effective ways to combat this is to target your applicant search to students who have already exhibited an interest and basic aptitude for working in manufacturing. Organizations that embrace this mindset will go beyond job fairs and become a true partner with local educational programs.

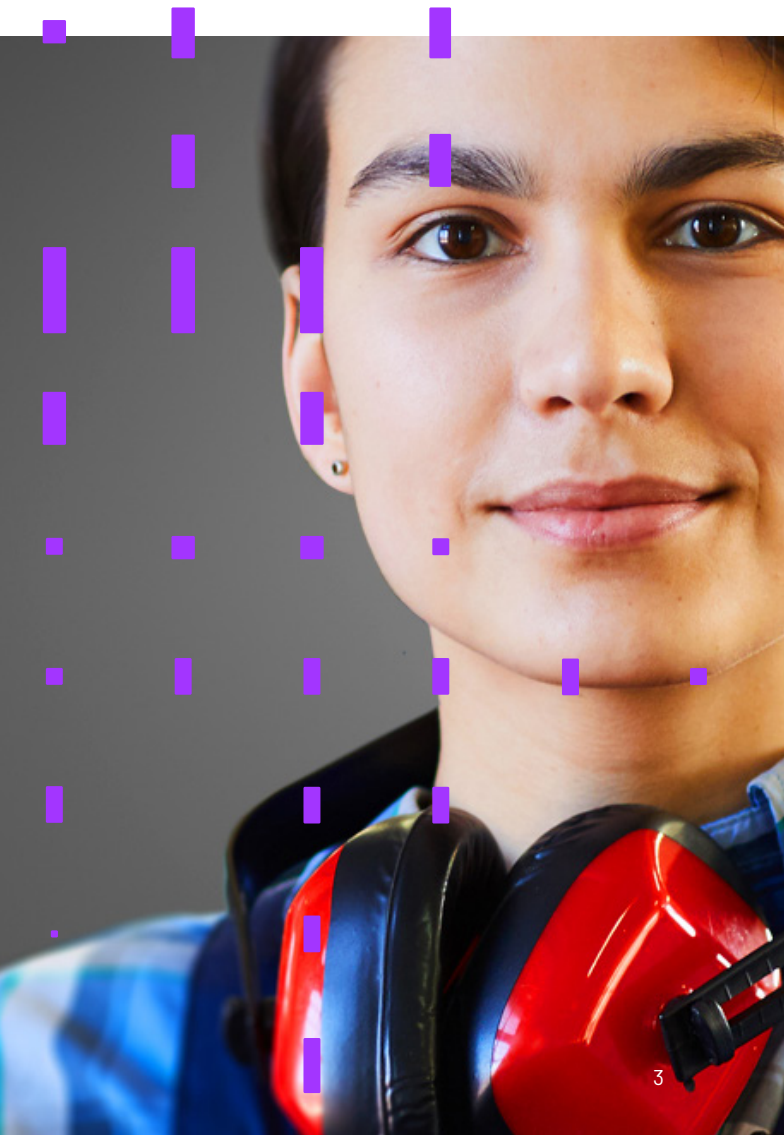
How can you get started attracting young trade-schoolers?

- Have monthly or quarterly tours for students interested in learning about the organization.
- Set up internship programs and/or job shadowing opportunities.
- Have a social media presence. Regularly post information about these internship programs and your company's benefits. You can even run targeted advertising promoting the information you want to share.
- If you use assessments in your selection process, offer testing opportunities at local schools to make it easier for candidates to complete your process.

Assess aptitude, not knowledge

If a partnership with local communities is not feasible, great potential employees can still exist in your candidate pool. However, since applicants with little or no manufacturing experience will likely need more time to learn the role, they will require more upfront information about the job itself.

Successful organizations know that aptitude to learn is almost as important as already having the skills for the job. If your selection system includes knowledge-based questions for a role that is entry-level or a role in which this knowledge can quickly be learned, then you're likely screening out candidates who could be successful. Instead, assess a candidate's ability to learn the job along with their personal preferences for the job type. These two factors will help increase your rate of hiring high potentials even when their current skillset is lacking.



Consider an automated hiring process

You can optimize your hiring process and boost the candidate experience by using Assessment Process Outsourcing (APO). The modern employee expects a smooth, communicative, and interactive hiring process. APO can take your recruiting and hiring process beyond basic candidate coordination to create a more positive experience both for candidates and hiring teams by using cutting-edge, predictive analytics and other solutions, like:

- Simplified logistics using a framework for regular candidate contact, scheduling, and applicant tracking.
- Psychometric testing to evaluate culture fit and aptitude for critical roles like machine operators, team leads, and production managers. This will give both you and your candidates an idea of the type of role in which they will perform best and be happiest.
- Physical production simulations measure applicants' ability to perform physical tasks. They also give candidates an idea of what to expect on-the-job, which is appealing to younger generations who are used to having information at their fingertips.

While open positions remain unfilled in many sectors, the manufacturing industry is the worst affected with 85% of businesses currently feeling the strain from a lack of skilled workers¹

Update your culture to be an employer of choice

Manufacturing jobs are hard work. They typically come with long hours, less-than-ideal shifts, and physically demanding tasks. But, the manufacturing industry has evolved, and it is important to update your workplace environment, rules, and perspectives.

The good news is that the heart of this issue is impression management – and that is entirely within your control. Think about it this way: manufacturing has never been safer or more innovative, and opportunities for advancement are readily available for those who want to turn the job into a career.

- Offer social activities and support charities – this will help to build morale and comradery among employees and allow them to feel like they are a part of the big picture within your organization.
- Create offerings for a good work-life balance. We'll provide suggestions for how to do this in the manufacturing industry in the next section.
- Provide training and development opportunities. It has been shown that Gen Zers value development opportunities in the workplace. Once you've found the right employees to bring onboard, you'll want to keep developing their skillset regardless of their background. Plus, as a bonus, your company will have a higher caliber of employees who can mentor the next wave of new hires.

Rebrand

Now that you've done all this work to position yourself to best recruit new talent to your plant, get it out there! Manufacturing has evolved – when recruiting young candidates, leverage innovative technology and automated systems. Young talent will be more attracted to the job if they know that it will be intellectually stimulating and innovative.

1. <https://www.search.co.uk/blog/2021/03/latest-research-reveals-how-the-skills-shortage-is-affecting-uk-business>

Master the art of managing Gen Zers

Give regular feedback

Proactive Gen Zers will likely ask you for feedback before you even have the chance to give it to them. Make ongoing feedback a regular practice for all your employees. Here's how:

- Set up weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly meetings to not only discuss current projects, but to also give feedback.
- Give real-time feedback. In addition to providing employees with feedback during your 1:1 meetings, give real-time feedback as work is completed so it can be tied back to examples.
- Focus on the content of your feedback – feedback is more effective when it is task-focused and simple. Furthermore, being specific to the task can increase learning because employees can envision how to make effective changes.
- Give feedback relative to a neutral standard, rather than in comparison to peers.

Be flexible

Even your non-Gen Z employees are valuing flexibility more than ever, many thanks to the technology that enables us to blur the line between work and life. This is easier to accomplish in an office setting, but there are ways to offer flexibility and offer better work-life balance in a manufacturing setting:

- Consider having more flexible shift offerings through split shifts or days on/days off. This allows employees to manage family and health-related priorities in addition to work.
- Get the input of employees on when they would most benefit from break time.
- Foster an environment that encourages shift swapping. This allows employees to feel like they have more control over their lives and schedules.

Manufacturing has evolved – when recruiting young candidates, leverage innovative technology and automated systems

Create a culture that prioritizes training and development

Focus on development

Create a culture that prioritizes training and development. These efforts do not have to be time-consuming and expensive. Here are some simple, yet effective ways to incorporate employee development into your management plan:

- Schedule a monthly meeting with your direct reports that solely focuses on development. Together, come up with a training need, and devise a plan for how you will help your employee get that training. Make sure that you follow up, and hold your employee accountable for his/her own development as well.
- Create in-house programs and certifications. Offer voluntary trainings and programs to anyone who wants to learn specialized skills. Investing in new employee development is beneficial for everyone involved: employees gain a sense of pride in themselves and commitment to the organization.

Don't put too much stock into generational differences

At the end of the day, try to see beyond generational boundaries. Although a lot has been written (by us, too!) about differences between generations, it's important not to focus too much on these distinctions. We're all at least partly products of our time, but some characteristics that have been attributed to Gen Zers are probably simply a factor of them being young.

Take it a step further by promoting cross-generational teams. Many Gen Zers prefer to work collaboratively on projects. Allow opportunities for employees to brainstorm solutions for commonly encountered problems, or set up committees to spearhead new initiatives. This will allow older generations to see value in what younger generations have to offer, and vice-versa.

Set career paths and make them visible

Seeing a clear career path within your company is motivating to employees. Regularly communicate or publish on your intranet a ladder of potential careers available as well as job trajectory for each role in your plant.

Demonstrate task significance

Gen Z's aren't just looking for a job to pay the bills. They don't want to feel like a number. They want to know that what they're doing matters and is having a larger impact. Demonstrate to employees how their work matters to the big picture. Show how they are contributing to the organization meeting its goals and missions, and as an organization, show how you are contributing to society.



What's next?

Looking to Generation Alpha

The next generation will start moving into the workforce in the next 5 years. What do we know so far about this group, born between 2010 and 2025, and what can we expect from them?

Extreme comfort with technology and AI

A generation that started in the year the first iPad was launched, Generation Alpha is extremely comfortable with technology and Artificial Intelligence, relying on both for connectivity and interaction. In terms of what this means for the workplace, we can expect that they will be comfortable using all kinds of technology and AI. In-person work relationships may be less important to a Generation Alphaer, with online engagement being the ultimate comfort zone.

Constantly refocusing

Their lives have been shaped by screens since birth, and this was only amplified by the impact of the global Covid pandemic. A social and educational life that largely takes place online, enabling them to digest huge amounts of short content nuggets throughout their day. The generation might have a shorter attention span than previous generations as a result, but it also allows for a natural agility that can be immensely valuable in their working life. Given this capacity for agility and affinity with technology, experiential on-the-job learning opportunities that are facilitated by technology may be a powerful way of developing Gen Zers.

Conclusion

Recognizing and preparing for the workplace change caused by technology advancements and generational shifts will position HR professionals in the manufacturing industry for success. Understanding how the modern employee is motivated and communicates, as well as being open to new technology, is key. The channels and frequency of communication may change, but as long as those communication channels remain open, generations spanning from baby boomers to Gen Z can continue to work together effectively.

