

How to keep your Generation X employees engaged

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Though different sources show slightly different ranges, Generation X includes people born between about 1965 and 1980. Perhaps because they're likely to have seen their parents lose jobs to downsizing, many Gen X-ers have learned not to put all their career eggs in one basket. They often enjoy continuous learning and seize new opportunities. They may get branded for "job hopping" when really they're just following a unique development path.

Of course there's no one-size-fits-all solution for keeping every member of any generation engaged. But there are approaches that tend to resonate well with members of Generation X. Why not give some or all of them a try and see for yourself?

Encourage work/life balance. Members of Generation X often want to make work/life balance a top priority. And that means they may not be big fans of long commutes, relocating for a job, 50 hour work weeks or checking work e-mails on nights and weekends. They like to engage with the world outside of work.

Add flexibility to your team's culture. It's easier to achieve work/life balance with a little flexibility. That could include more choices when it comes to work schedules, working from home and the ability to take time off guilt-free.

Offer development opportunities. Gen X-ers often like to face new challenges and learn new things. Try suggesting training programs, short-term projects or department exchange openings. Help your team recognize experiences that can aid in their career development.

Choose influence over control. Many Gen X-ers aren't likely to be impressed with authority. Sometimes they even rebel against it. Be sure there's a good reason to play the boss card before doing so. It could end up harming your rapport in the long run.

Treat your people like people. Your team members want to feel valued. Members of Generation X can bristle at policies that detract from their work/life balance or seem illogical. They often feel stifled by "no exceptions" decisions. Many members of Gen X value freedom and autonomy. This also means they prefer not to be micromanaged.

Show your team the meaning in their work. When possible, let your team see how they're making a difference. Even if it takes a bit of time away from the work itself, this can be a big morale booster for all generations.

Help them grow their networks. Many Gen X-ers are savvy with technology and comfortable networking in person, on the web or through your company intranet. Introduce them to others who can act as mentors. Learning from people in other business areas could lead to new ideas and improvements for your own team.

It's true: Each member of Generation X has his or her own unique set of needs, preferences and values. To figure out what works for your employees, try some of the suggestions above or use them as a starting point for a team discussion.

Knowing what your team members value most is the first step toward finding new and better ways to keep them engaged, no matter what generation they belong to.