



THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO MANAGING & MOTIVATING YOUR GEN Z LEGAL STAFF



WHERE LAW FIRMS COME
TO RECRUIT LEGAL TALENT

A new generation of legal employees has arrived.

Generation Z, the youngest generation to approach the working world, will soon surpass Millennials as the most populous generation on earth. By 2030, this group will make up a huge 30% of the workforce, bringing new demands, expectations, and priorities for employers to consider.

Often raised by innovative millennials, Gen Z is the most diverse and educated age group in the professional world today. They were born into a connected, digital, and empathetic world and spend approximately half of their waking hours interacting with technology. Shaped by an era of social feeds and internet culture, the slew of powerful social justice movements they've witnessed in recent years have given them a unique sensibility and a strong stance regarding ethical business practices and equity.

Though Generation Z has several valuable characteristics to bring to the legal landscape, their approach to the workplace may cause some challenges for business leaders as they aren't motivated or moved by the same things as their millennial parents. This means to engage and successfully manage your new legal workforce, you may need to implement different strategies.

Today, we will define the Gen Z employee, what they need from a legal employer, and how you can manage your youngest team.

Defining the Generation Z Workforce

While generational cut-off points aren't an exact science, anyone born between 1997 and 2012 is generally considered to be part of "[Generation Z](#)". This group is the cohort preceding "Generation Alpha" and succeeding the millennials.

This is where the current legal workspace is on the brink of a massive transformation. Just as the arrival of the millennial worker prompted significant changes in the management of legal talent, the introduction of Generation Z will alter the way we think about "the legal professional" forever.

And once again, law firms will find themselves having to adapt, and quickly as the reputation that Gen Z have developed for being fast-paced, highly educated, and motivated individuals is already placing them in high demand amidst a rampant talent shortage problem. However, the unique set of characteristics, priorities and expectations they have can be difficult to understand for employers and consequently make adaptation a challenge.

Some of these key characteristics defining Gen Z include:

- Focus on Empathy:

The vast majority of the Gen Z generation has grown up exposed to a significantly harsher way of living, having witnessed firsthand the difficulty of keeping one's livelihood afloat in an unstable environment. As such, this is reflected in the values they hold in their personal and professional lives, and they place particular importance on the role of a healthy work-life dynamic in their lifestyle from both an individual and corporate standpoint. It is [well-documented](#) how socially and environmentally committed Gen Z employees today have become, and they want to see this level of empathy in the employer they work with, as well as a clear investment in the protection their physical and emotional health.

However, there is still some disparity between such expectations and reality in the legal sector, where long working hours and high-pressure environments are still very much a part of the daily life of practising lawyers. While there has been a bigger focus on mental health in recent years with efforts to improve workplace culture and provide support for employees increasing, today's generation of lawyers still expect much more of the same from their employers. The cost of failing to provide such would prove too dear as it could mean facing the double whammy of losing talent your firm has worked hard to recruit and struggling to attract talent in market with a serious skills shortage' problem. As burnout and lack of work/life balance have been found to be common reasons for Gen Z to quit their roles, a bigger focus on the health of your Gen Z legal employees is an absolute must.

- Tech Savvy:

According to a survey conducted by [statista](#), mobile device and app usage among the Gen Z generation has only increased over the last few years, with an 82% increase the reported change in phone usage since 2022. Brought up in a world surrounded by technology, Gen Zers spend a huge portion of their lives on social media and the internet, and are 'digital natives' in the truest sense of the word.



Such exposure to a regular novelty of technology and information translates into a desire to constantly have the best tools and tech at hand and so the Gen Z generation expects to work for businesses with a strong investment in the latest tools and services, especially those that can increase efficiency and automate less complex functions to allow for more time to tackle the more in-depth, demanding matters. Firms lagging behind in this regard therefore risk losing out on a lot of the potential that today's generation of legal talent has to offer and losing the interest of their Gen Z team members.

- Cultural Diversity:

Gen Z are the most welcoming, accepting, and diverse generation yet, hailing from countless different groups, cultures and orientations. Many of these employees are more at home in a diverse workplace, believing everyone should have the freedom to "be themselves" and thus, are only receptive to employers who take their Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion practices seriously. Additionally, [around 6 in 10 Gen Zers](#) have either changed their jobs or their industries due to climate concerns, believing it is every bit as important to work for an employer with an active commitment to supporting social causes as their own personal gain, which makes communicating this through your employer brand essential. Ensuring that diversity is shown at all levels in the firm (especially amongst senior employees) and demonstrating how your work culture supports inclusion will effectively convey your authenticity & suitability to potential employees.

- Competitive :

Although they are keen to befriend colleagues at work and build personal relationships with others around the workplace, Gen Z are a naturally ambitious bunch. Highly driven and competitive, they are individuals with a strong set of goals and a clear vision of what they want to accomplish in the industry, something firms can and should be taking advantage of to encourage and motivate team members and facilitate firm and employee success.

- Desire for Stability:

Generation Z are far more risk-averse than their millennial predecessors. While they're still motivated by benefits and a good salary, they're also looking for clear evidence that they have a strong future with their chosen business and as such, stability is crucial for them.

When advertising roles to the Gen Z population it's important to carefully outline how they make for a predictable, stable and well-rounded career experience, and show both an intent and commitment to working with Gen Z employees on plans for long-term career growth and development shows them you prioritise their goals as well as your firm's and will help to make them feel more at home.

Millennials vs Generation Z: The Difference

Millennials may have raised the Gen Z community, but there are some major differences between the two groups regarding workplace motivation and performance.

The [Millennial generation](#) is an optimistic group, brimming with digital pioneers who witnessed the rise of social media, instant messaging, video conferencing, and countless other tools. Like Gen Z, they value and are committed to keeping a good work-life balance, but they also prefer working in collaborative environments, where they can frequently connect with others. Alternatively, Gen Z employees in the legal space are proactive, innovative individuals keen to implement fundamental changes in the world around them. Having grown up in a more turbulent economic climate, they generally have a more pragmatic and conservative outlook on life than their millennial counterparts.

Gen Z employees might also prefer to have a working area they can call 'their own space' or work remotely rather than interact with people daily, as they are more accustomed to a somewhat more personalised way of life. However, they still want to develop strong relationships with their team members through social media and digital connections.

While the focus of a millennial's career may generally centre around career progression and the next opportunities lying just around the corner, Gen Z place value on, and are more likely to be driven in their careers by the security job stability offers, considering their background. Although they're keen to keep themselves as educated and 'in the know' as possible about the best opportunities on the market, they may be less likely to hop between jobs.

How to Manage Generation Z in the Workplace

As such, managing a Gen Z-dominant legal workforce means committing to a new approach in your leadership. When asked what they value most in a leader, [one study found Gen Z](#) to have empathy and honesty at the top of their list, meaning employers who endeavour to build strong connections with their employees through a culture of respect, transparency and support, are now and will only continue to be the kind that are high in demand.

Therefore, the natural habitat of the Gen Zer is one brimming with a culture that champions and facilitates innovation and opportunity.

While flexible working and a desire for greater digital literacy have come to define (and almost become synonymous to) the wish list of the younger demographic post-pandemic, building an environment that maximises the potential of a Gen Z workforce can take many shapes and forms. Here are some of the most important points your firm's leaders will need to consider when managing one.

1) Prioritise Collaboration & Communication

Having been raised in the age of social media, it's little surprise that Gen Z value social interaction as much online as they do offline. They thrive on constant connection, making it imperative for firms to foster unity and collaboration in their company culture using a blend of traditional and digital methods. Whether through video calls or face-to-face meetings, a Gen Z employee finds joy in engaging with their colleagues, openly and honestly. As this requires a standard of transparency between leadership and staff, your firm's leaders must ensure they're open and consistent with their communication strategies, keeping employees regularly updated on how the business is being built to better serve them, as much as it is to serve a client.

2) Allow for Independence and Autonomy

As Gen Zers are individuals driven by ambition and a desire to chart their own course, they tend to have a preference for a certain degree of autonomy in their work. While they value input and direction from leaders, they also desire the freedom to operate in ways that suit them best. This necessitates that your leaders incorporate a balance of autonomy and support in their management, allowing them to decide their own methods of tackling projects whilst providing tools and opportunities for independent research and a platform to share insights with leadership and other team members regularly.

3) Implement Strategies for Work-Life Balance

Burnout and stress have been significant problems for the millennial group, with around [28% saying](#) they suffer from this issue regularly in the workplace.

Drawing wisdom from their predecessors' challenges, Gen Zers prioritise work-life balance more than most, with a staggering [81% of Gen Z](#) employees emphasise the significance of flexibility in determining their work schedules, and the present workforce now seeking options for fully remote or hybrid work setups (with a growing interest in the concept of a condensed workweek, affording them ample time to rejuvenate outside office hours).

It is well-known to many that leadership plays a pivotal role in fostering a healthy work-life equilibrium and an effort to build efficient schedule management among team members should be both visible and demonstrable to prospective Gen Z candidates.

4) Embrace New Technology

For Gen Z, technology is not just a tool but an integral part of their identity, being the first cohort to enter the workforce with no memory of a time before the internet or social media. Consequently, firms looking to attract and enhance the productivity of a Gen Z workforce must embrace a means of working tailored to their needs. This goes beyond simply incorporating productivity and project management apps, collaboration tools, or video conferencing services into business practices – it means staying abreast of emerging tools that can allow for seamless operation, as well as the establishment of a regular feedback loop from employees to learn what works and what can be a fruitful investment tech-wise.

5) Empathise with Mental Health Needs

Empathy stands as the cornerstone of Gen Z's professional ethos. These employees seek reassurance that their firm's leadership is invested in their well-being and want to know that their leaders are just as committed to keeping them happy as they themselves are. To this end, senior figures within your organisation must proactively manifest this commitment through a strategy that equips team members with the tools to mitigate stress and avoid the common burnout problem.

Offering certain perks like access to counselling, more vacation days when employees feel overwhelmed at work, and competitive salaries to address financial concerns will be a good way to attract and retain Gen Z employees.

How to Motivate Your Gen Z Employees

One of the more prominent characteristics of Gen Z employees is they're already highly self-motivated. Self-starters, this group is driven to establish themselves in their chosen firm and achieve financial stability.

However, Gen Zers are also highly driven by their values. They're more than willing to jump from job to job if it means finding a workplace suited to their goals. Already, studies show that [almost 66% of Gen Z workers](#) plan to leave their current employer within the next two years.

To motivate and retain your legal Gen Z staff, you'll need to follow these steps:



Step 1: Provide Regular Feedback

While Gen Z employees like the freedom to explore their own strategies and work styles, this doesn't mean they don't want regular feedback. They are highly motivated by positive acknowledgement and recognition. Like their millennial counterparts, Gen Z employees need to know when they're doing a job well and want real-time performance updates.

Rather than waiting for an annual performance review to explore the strengths and weaknesses of your Gen Z legal employees, focus on developing a more regular feedback routine. Simple messages to your associates letting them know they're doing a good job can help them stay focused and engaged in their role.

Clear expectations are also extremely important when working with Gen Z employees. These competitive professionals want to deliver their best work, but they can only do so when they clearly understand what's expected.

Step 2: Promote Interpersonal Relationships

Gen Z employees might spend most of their time using online communication methods, but they still want to feel connected to the rest of their team. Promoting interpersonal relationships is a great way to boost the engagement of your staff and make them feel more committed to the workplace. Law firms can invest in everything from bonding days with gamification elements to leverage Gen Z's competitive nature to regular video conferencing between remote workers.

It's also important to ensure they have a chance to develop a relationship with their firm leaders. These employees want to be able to connect regularly with managers and supervisors, as well as colleagues.



Step 3: Provide Growth Opportunities

Because Gen Z employees are interested in future-proof jobs, firm leaders need to ensure their team members can see a future with the business. In a climate where the skills required to succeed in any workplace are constantly evolving, Gen Z professionals need to be able to expand their knowledge and talents continually.

It is well-known that professional growth and learning opportunities are a number one career priority for them when looking for a new job. This may be why many technology companies with strong reputations for innovation and development have captured the attention of so many new candidates. With this in mind, it's important to have a clear development strategy. Firm leaders can experiment with everything from online learning opportunities for their team members to mentorship and shadowing for staff looking for promotions. Showing a clear path for progression in your firm will be crucial to maintaining employee engagement.

Step 4: Promote Diversity and Inclusion

Gen Z employees feel most comfortable in a diverse workplace, capable of accepting, supporting and collaborating with all kinds of team members, and to keep teams motivated, firm leaders will need to ensure their Gen Z employees have plenty of opportunities to work with people who have different skills and lives to their own. A strong DEI strategy will make it easier for employers to build a diverse selection of staff members.

Inclusivity is particularly important for Gen Z teams. This means firm leaders must implement campaigns ensuring their staff members feel valued, no matter their background. Ensuring every staff member feels listened to and respected is critical for ongoing motivation. You can help your Gen Z employees thrive by inviting them to more strategy meetings, listening to their ideas, and gathering regular feedback.

Step 5: Offer the Right Benefits

Keeping your Gen Z legal employees motivated ensures you're offering the right perks and benefits for working with you. Though Gen Z staff members still want to be paid the right salary for their skills, they're also highly motivated by security and benefits.

Around [70% of Gen Z professionals](#) think health insurance is a must-have benefit for a business, while others are looking for access to paid education and mentorship. Firms must offer traditional and modern benefits to keep Gen Z on track.

Compensation perks, wellness benefits, student loan assistance, and attractive maternity and paternity policies are all a good way to appeal to this security-focused generation. However, it's worth talking to your team members and tailoring benefits packages to different needs where possible.

Understand and Optimise Your Gen Z Workforce

The rise of Gen Z in the legal landscape marks a transformational time for business leaders and managers. How you motivate and support your youngest employees will differ from how you've served their millennial and Boomer counterparts.

Fortunately, with a strong understanding of the characteristics of the Gen Z community, you'll be better prepared to attract and retain the right legal talent.

Of course, one of the easiest ways to ensure you're collecting the right talent for your team from the Gen Z employee landscape is to work with a [specialist legal recruiter](#). A recruitment agency will help you to tailor your job descriptions and offers to speak to the youngest generation.

Attracting the right team members from day one will make it much easier to build a phenomenal team of hard-working, diverse, and highly educated Gen Z staff.

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Trinity House
88-96 Market Street West
Preston
PR1 2EU

T: 01772 259 121
E: enquiries@clayton-legal.co.uk
W: clayton-legal.co.uk