Dhopade, Prajakta. (Feb, 2016) "Support generation Z." *Benefits Canada*, p. 22+. General OneFile, go.galegroup.com

The buzz of the millennial generation has barely died down, but companies are already looking at those who will follow them. What comes after Generation Y? Generation Z, a legion of young workers who have never known a world without the Internet, smartphones, Facebook, Snapchat and Twitter, will soon be entering the workforce.

The exact definition of Generation Z is fairly murky. Statistics Canada pegs the Internet generation as those born between 1993 and 2011 whereas some demographers say that it's those born between 1990 and 1999 or just after 1995. Right now, the members of this generation are currently in their teens or have just hit their twenties. For the most part, that means they haven't quite entered the workforce but will start to do so in the coming years.

By 2020 more than 20% of the workforce will be members of Generation Z, according to research done by Bruce Tulgan, founder of U.S. management and training company Rainmaker Thinking Inc.

How will Generation Z differ from the millennials that precede them? "Whereas millennials went to the technology, this is the group that was born with a device in hand," says Neil King, senior vice-president for the employee support solutions group at Morneau Shepell Ltd. Often referred to as the first digital natives, this cohort is used to receiving information quickly and independently.

Members of Generation Z are self-starters empowered by their digital resources. One of the challenges companies may encounter with the integration of these digital natives into the workforce is a disconnect between the new entrants and older generations in leadership positions. According to a 2015 study conducted by Robert Half International Inc. and non-profit organization Enactus that surveyed more than 770 Generation Z college and university students in the United States and Canada, 45% believe working with the baby boomer generation will be somewhat or very difficult.

However, their technological savvy can be a huge resource for companies, King adds. The best way to take advantage of that resource is working to both understand and fit the needs of the upcoming generation.

**Give them a voice**

"You need to make sure that you have their voice at the senior leadership table... so that we understand how to work with Gen Z. It's that whole concept of, 'You don't know what you don't know,'" says King.

Companies will have to bridge the inevitable generational gap between generations X, Y and Z by creating an environment where the youngest entrants to the workforce feel their employers are taking them seriously and value their input on business practices and other issues.

Another way to lessen the gap between the generations is to instil mentorship practices, says Canadian demographer and economist David Foot. And according to the Robert Half study, 21% of those who are part of Generation Z say they value mentorship capabilities in a leader or boss.

"In general, young employees have much better technological skills; older employees have much more experience to be productive in organizations," says Foot. As a result, partnering new, more digitally savvy employees with senior executives could lead to a sharing of information and expertise that helps Generation Z workers feel valued and more prepared while older workers can benefit from learning new technological skills.

**Offer digital services**

From self-serve options for employee benefits to mental-health services, members of Generation Z will want fast, easy and digitally adept ways of doing things in the workplace. Given that, it's particularly important to have the technology on hand as well as provide the training necessary to increase efficiency and capitalize on the knowledge of these young newcomers.

Employers also need to be aware of their specific needs and offer technological solutions. According to an Ipsos Reid survey, 53% of young people in Canada are at risk of mental-health issues such as depression and anxiety. King says companies should provide mental-health support from a digital perspective with options such as video counselling and smartphone applications.

Companies should also be sure to raise awareness of, and provide training on, handling mental-health concerns in the workplace.

**Give them flexibility**

To accommodate their self-starting, entrepreneurial work habits, companies should offer flexible office environments and trust their employees to work independently, according to Kelly Allder, vice-president of human resources programs at Ceridian Canada Ltd. "We don't want to lose our great employees, so we need to make sure we keep them interested and give them the autonomy so we're satisfying that [need]," she says.

That means giving them the opportunity to work from home and the ability to choose their own hours. "It's more about having the respect and the trust in them to give them work and say, 'You go and do it whether it's by yourself or with a group of people. But I'm not going to micromanage you,'" says Allder.

A more flexible approach, of course, requires having the technology that allows employees to plug into meetings and projects and work in groups remotely.

In addition, companies that want to retain Generation Z employees should consider including lifestyle elements in the office, such as gyms and recreation rooms, says King.

**“Support Generation Z”**

Prajakta Dhopade, *Benefits Canada*

Task: As you read the article, record the suggestions the author makes about how to support Gen Z in the workplace on the left. Afterwards, write down possible responses/resistance from Millennials, Gen X and the Baby Boomer in the appropriate columns.

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| **Article Suggestions** | **Millennial Response** | **Gen X Response** | **Baby Boom Response** |
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