Optimizing Your Contact Center with the Gen Z Agent Workforce

When a comes to staffing up a contact center, hiring young agents is inevitable.

Sometimes a junior agent just doesn't work out, and other times they grow into your most reliable, loyal, and best agents.

However, there is one certainty with hiring a large number of young agents. They will drive change in your contact center and can make all the difference in being either two steps ahead of or behind your competition.

Today the focus is on "Gen Z" agents, who are born after 1997, comparing them when appropriate to their "Millennial" (born between 1981-1996) and "Gen X" (born between 1961-1980) counterparts.

How will Gen Z change the contact center and the habits and processes created by previous generations? That's a tough question to answer, and it will be addressed later on. First, let's provide some context by evaluating some key characteristics of Gen Z and how they factor into the workplace both now and in the future.
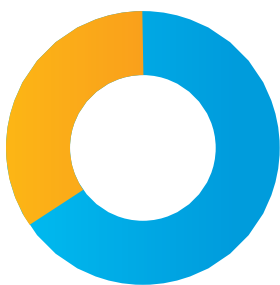
30%

of the labor force by 2030 is expected to be Generation Z.

(U.S. Census Bureau)

Who is Generation Z?

Like their predecessors, Gen Z as a whole brings their own distinct traits to the contact center environment. Here is some information to start off on how Gen Z is unique.

57%

of Gen Z adults in the U.S. were enrolled in college between the ages of 18-21, up from 43% for Gen X and 52% for Millennials. *(Pew)*

42%

of Gen Z adults are gainfully employed, approximately 30% less than other generations.

(Mckinsey)

37%

of Gen Z individuals expressed concern that technology is weakening their ability to develop personal skills.

(Deloitte)

92%

of Gen Z adults are concerned about the generation gap technology is creating both personally and professionally. *(Deloitte)*

The Role of the Gen Z Agent within the Contact Center.

As the stats indicate, Gen Z employees are entering the workplace with a distinct set of characteristics. Here are some of the main ways this generation will impact the contact center, especially in the next few years.

More Hispanic agents will be available to meet bilingual demands.

With the growing Hispanic population in the United States, finding agents that can speak Spanish will continue to increase in importance. Seeing that Gen Z has a higher percentage of Hispanic individuals than any age group, their introduction into and presence within the workforce will help tremendously to improve the pool of agents that are bilingual.

When it comes to working with agents that speak multiple languages, it's important to keep track of agent skills so contact center scheduling and forecasting can improve. Leverage workforce management (WFM) software to create agent profiles and add skills, such as language proficiency. This will enable you to quickly make schedule adjustments with your team based on the unique skills of each agent. Instead of trying to locate unscheduled Spanish-speaking agents when call volume for the language is high, it's easy to review agent skills and pull in currently staffed bilingual agents that may be working calls in English.

1 in 4

Gen Z individuals are Hispanic, up from 17% of Millennials and 12% of Gen X. *(Pew)*

Less work experience means more hand holding, higher risk.

Simply put, a large chunk of Gen Z is entering the contact center with little or no relevant work experience. With this generation working less during high school than other generations, there may be a stronger need for more training and supervision when they start with your company. Gen Z may also bring a level of technological aptitude to the table, but this sometimes comes at the expense of lacking confidence in their interpersonal skills. They may not be averse to taking calls, but they may require additional reassurance and positive feedback when it comes to their work. To prepare Gen Z agents for success within your contact center, ensure your training program is solid and be prepared to provide them with a little bit of extra attention.

For keeping a distanced but accurate eye on this inexperienced generation, especially as remote agents increase in popularity, leveraging WFM software with sophisticated agent adherence can make a huge difference. With this solution, you can see exactly when agents clock in and out, when they are actively taking calls, and so much more. Make the most of this data to proactively reach out to a Gen Z agent should you see any sort of issues with their work performance to find out what's happening. Approach them with a positive attitude to understand what their issues may be and how you can help them succeed within your company.

27%

of Gen Z worked in high school, down from 41% of Millennials and 62% of Gen X. *(Pew)*

Gen Z is more likely to take on contract and freelance work.

The perception that Gen Z lacks traditional work experience isn't necessarily a bad thing. It can also mean this generation of employees is more open to trying out different styles of work. While other generations may prefer the traditional work schedules, contract and freelance work is a style of employment Gen Z has grown up experiencing and is more open to experimenting with. This can be beneficial for both the employee and the contact center, and it can also create a trial period with any new agents to ensure they are a good fit for your business.

50% of Gen Z individuals are opting for freelance work.

30% of Gen X participates in this labor market. *(Upwork)*

Hiring short-term contract and freelance agents can also help to streamline operational costs. With the right WFM software, you can still communicate with these agents directly through this technology without needing to use an additional messaging solution. This can be valuable for larger contact centers to reduce administrative overhead costs.

Higher smartphone ownership means greater technology demands.

All generations have grown up with different types of technology, but the relationship Gen Z has had with their devices is quite unique. They are the only generation to grow up with a smartphone in their hand and the information of the entire world at their fingers. This has resulted in a generation that, unlike their predecessors, has a wider array of technology experiences. As a result, they don't exactly have the highest level of patience for poor user interfaces and extensive manual processes. They have grown up with clean, streamlined, and elegant technology experiences.

What does this mean for contact centers? It's a strong indicator that having great technology interfaces at their job matters to Gen Z agents. They know both sides of the coin with technology, so ensure the software solutions you select to power your contact center have clean and straightforward user interfaces that makes sense. This is especially true for WFM software with an agent portal and mobile app as agents are closely interacting with this technology daily. Gen Z is the modern-day driver of user experience and choosing easy to use and logical software solutions appeals to them.

Gen Z, on average, received their first mobile phone at age

TEN

(Kasaza)

4 Key Optimization Areas for Working with Gen Z

Now that the preferences and the role of the Gen Z agent has been covered and the table has been set, it's time to answer the question we posed initially. It's as good a time as ever to dive into how Gen Z agents will change the contact center and the impact they will have moving forward.

Need for mobile and direct communication without calling in.

Because Gen Z has grown up with texting and chatting from day one, they aren't exactly the generation that instinctively makes a call to talk to someone. While delayed communication like email is fine for asking about hours next week, it isn't acceptable if a Gen Z agent is running late for the start of their shift. As the way people work evolves, contact centers should attempt to be accommodating and meet Gen Z agents where they want to communicate. Don't make them call a supervisor for everything, instead let them communicate directly with their superiors in the ways they want to. Leveraging a mobile WFM app and an agent portal with a communications framework built in provides agents with timely communication alternatives they are comfortable with.

The Community Everywhere mobile app meets the needs of the Gen Z workforce.

Preference and comfort with remote work and unique schedules.

With a Gen Z agent being more likely to freelance, contact centers need to understand that the model of them being a sole employer may become less frequent. Because of this employment situation, it's important to create schedule flexibility to ensure you keep good agents around.

As an example, more contact centers continue to leverage creative scheduling solutions to work with the unique availability of their agent workforce. Split shifts, or where an agent works two or more fragmented shifts in the same day with breaks in between, are an option for busy Gen Z agents. This solution is easily managed within WFM software and lets agents work the demands of your company around their life.

Workforce industry research shows

33 PERCENT

of Gen Z said they would "never" tolerate an employer giving them no say over their schedule.

(Workforce Institute)

Desire for automated communication with quick actions and results.

Simply put, Gen Z is used to rapid efficiency and automation within their everyday lives. They've grown up with smart technology that has helped to create streamlined processes for managing their money and time so they could focus on other things. This generation is also accustomed to a level of automation in other areas of their life as well.

Gen Z has the highest smart phone ownership rate (97%) of any generation. *(BI/eMarketer)*

All of this is a reason why automated scheduling in the contact center resonates so well with this generation. With so much of their life already streamlined, it only makes sense to efficiently manage the process of working as well. This way, when a WFM analyst triggers a schedule adjustment plan that opens shifts, an agent is automatically notified on their phone that a shift is now available and they can start working. There's no need for a Gen Z agent to manually check in multiple times throughout the day to see if any shifts have opened up.

Values independence and planning out their own time.

Gen Z more so than any other generation is placing a high emphasis on striking the right work-life balance on their terms. They generally aren't interested in working hours that fail to align with their lifestyle and their priorities outside of their job.

Because of this unique tendency, contact centers are leveraging their WFM software to enable solutions such as shift bidding to give agents more control and choices over when they work. A shift bidding system lets a WFM analyst set all the necessary shifts for a period. Afterwards, they can then create a timeframe for agents to bid on blocks of these shifts based on defined attributes such as seniority or a required skill. So, if a Gen Z agent has classes at a local college on Tuesday and Thursday night, they can bid on schedules that don't have shifts during these times.

43%
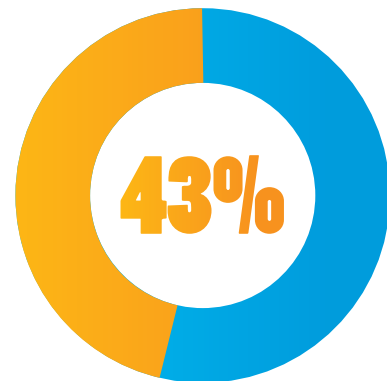
Creating the right work-life balance is important.
43% of Gen Z employees in the U.S. cited flexible hours as what matters most to them when selecting employment.
(Workforce Institute)

Summarizing Gen Z as Contact Center Agents

Hopefully this breakdown of Gen Z agents and how they will fit into your contact center both now and in the future was helpful. They are a generation that is set to become a key part of your workforce in the coming years.

Here are a few key bullets to share with your boss to get the conversation started on optimizing your contact center with Gen Z agents:

- They are tech savvy, smart agents that value personal choice in relation to when they work.

- Gen Z is more comfortable with remote/ freelance work and cross-channel communication than other generations.

- They are adaptable but may also require more handholding as new agents than their predecessors.

As a final statement, it's worth reemphasizing that WFM and contact center leadership needs to adapt to Gen Z and not the other way around. They will only continue to increase their presence in your workforce and operations will continue to shift to meet their demands. Don't hold onto dated processes any longer than you need to. Prepare for the changes this generation will bring instead of fighting them.

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