

Engaging a Multigenerational Workforce

From the Silent Generation to Gen Z,
find out what motivates your
employees at every career level



Guide
Q2I8



There's been a notable shift in the labor market in recent years, as unemployment dropped from 10 percent in 2010 to just 4.1 percent in 2017. This—coupled with the fact that job seekers today are more well-informed than ever—leaves employers scrambling to compete to attract (and retain) top talent. That's why it's critical for business leaders to understand both what motivates their employees and how to best communicate with them.

For the first time ever, five different generations are working side-by-side: the Silent Generation (born 1928-1945), baby boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation X (born 1965-1980), millennials (born

1981-1996), and Generation Z (born 1997 or later). The drivers of employee engagement for all groups include: purpose, role clarity, utilization, autonomy, shared values, friendship, trust, authenticity, fairness, feedback, relationship with their manager, paid time off, competency, and professional development. While these engagement drivers are the same across all generations, each group is motivated differently, and the level of importance for each driver varies. By measuring engagement by generation, business leaders can develop initiatives that motivate and engage each of their unique groups.

The drivers of employee engagement for all groups include:

- Purpose
- Shared values
- Fairness
- Paid time off
- Role clarity
- Friendship
- Feedback
- Competency
- Utilization
- Trust
- Relationship with manager
- Professional development
- Autonomy
- Authenticity

Did you know?

Silent Gen.
1928-1945

Gen X
1965 - 1980

Baby Boomers
1946-1964

Millennials
1981 - 1996

Gen. Z
1997 or later



QUICK TIP

Pair older workers with younger workers. Harvard Business Review found that putting older and younger workers together helps both groups perform better. They make good teammates and are less competitive with each other than workers in the same age group might be.³

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The Silent Generation

As children, this generation was expected to be “seen not heard” (hence, the name). Now in their early 70s and older, this generation makes up only one percent of today's workforce. But that doesn't mean companies should ignore their needs when it comes to engagement initiatives. Whether they're already retired and want to stay busy, or are still working out of financial necessity, these individuals deserve to be engaged and productive. After all, they built many of the thriving industries we have today, and have a lot of knowledge and life experience to bring to the table.

Employees in this generation grew up during the Great Depression and World War II. They're civic-minded and loyal, and tend to be good team players. They have a strong work ethic, and place great emphasis on rules. Utilization is an important engagement driver for this generation, as they value being useful and feeling needed.² People in this generation do tend to be less proficient with technology, so make sure they're given ample training (and patience) if they're learning a new tool, as competency is a key engagement driver.



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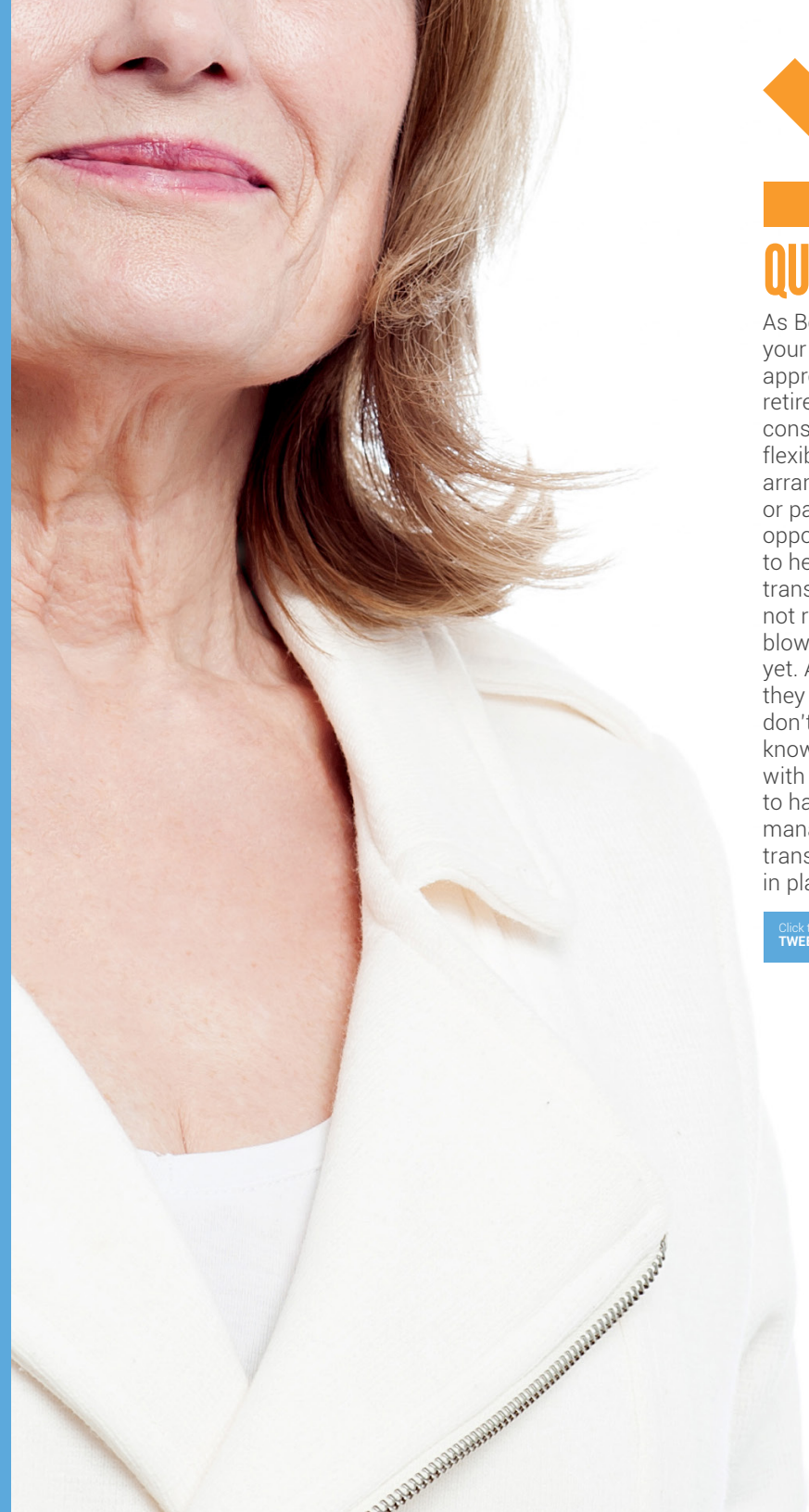
Baby Boomers

Today, baby boomers make up about 23 percent of the workforce, which has actually increased since the Great Recession. In fact, the percentage of individuals between the ages of 62 and 64 who are “working or looking for work” has increased over the past decade.⁴ Part of that increase can be attributed to dropping unemployment levels, as well as the fact that many workers in this age group are choosing to delay retirement. Boomers also have a longer job tenure than their younger counterparts, at an average of seven years.⁵

Baby boomers are defined by their purpose. When it comes to engagement levels, we’ve found that Boomers are most comfortable with the way they’re being utilized at work compared to other generations.

This likely relates to tenure, as it correlates with utilization and finding meaning at work. As employees gain more experience, they also gain more clarity on how an organization can effectively leverage their skills and abilities, which explains why baby boomers also scored highest overall in role clarity.

One engagement driver we found to be low among Boomers is friendship—particularly in those with a tenure of 10 years or more. So while they may be confident in their roles and feel capable of doing good work, keep an eye on work relationships for baby boomers. Encourage team-building initiatives and mentoring relationships that can encourage more social interaction.



QUICK TIP

As Boomers in your organization approach retirement, consider offering flexible work arrangements or part-time opportunities, to help them transition if they're not ready for full-blown retirement yet. And when they do retire, don't let their vast knowledge leave with them—be sure to have knowledge management and transfer programs in place.

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QUICK TIP

Beware of burnout. According to Donohue's research, Gen Xers have a tendency to be more tired and stressed at work. Have an open dialogue about workload, and provide employees with sufficient paid time off—and make sure they use it.

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Generation X

Sandwiched between baby boomers and millennials (everyone's favorite generations to talk about), Gen X is sometimes referred to as the "middle child" generation. While millennials now outnumber them in the workforce, there are still close to 66 million Gen Xers working today.⁶ They're a highly educated group, with over 60 percent having attended college. Their average job tenure is about five years,⁷ and they account for 51 percent of leadership roles globally.⁸

Generational expert, Dr. Mary Donohue, referred to her generation as the "Jan Bradys" of the world, and said they're screaming "Marcia! Marcia! Marcia!"—and no one is listening. "Gen X is your bread and butter. They have worked through more recessions than their parents or grandparents ever did. Most often they are executive leaders who are on the cusp of becoming the C-class, but aren't thriving in the workplace," she said.⁹

In our study, Gen X employees scored lowest on the engagement drivers friendship and shared values, and they scored lower than millennials and Gen Y on feedback. These scores were particularly low for those that have been at their organization for more than 10 years. So encouraging your more senior employees to get involved in social and team-building activities is important to their engagement.

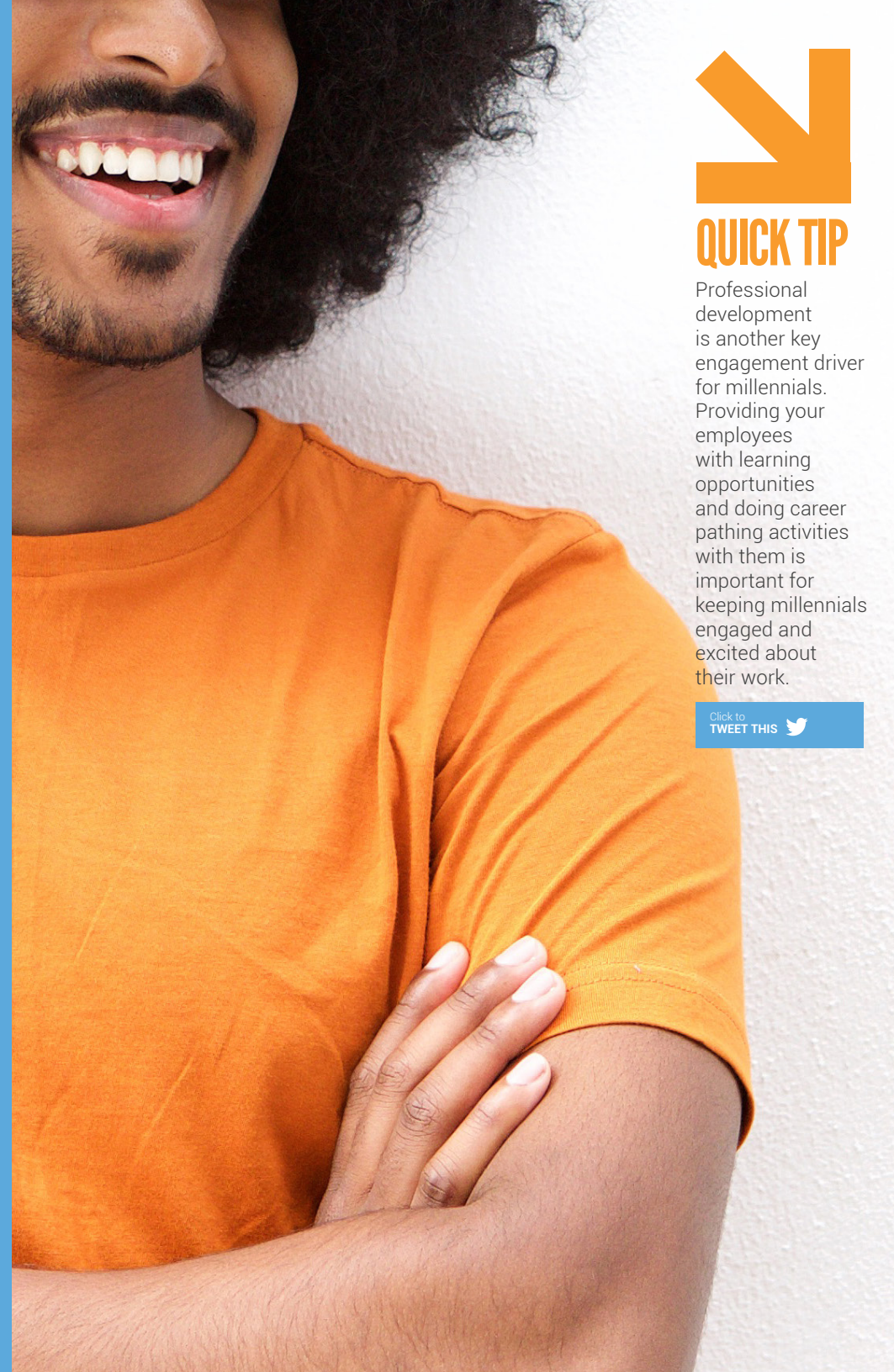
Learning and development opportunities are also important to employees at all career levels. Gen Xers still value traditional learning methods—like workshops and seminars—but they're also very tech-savvy, and modern, technology-based tools are important to them. Providing a multimedia employee experience will ensure your Gen Xers feel more competent and engaged.

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Millennial

As the largest generation in today's labor force, millennials have become a hot topic, particularly when it comes to what they expect at work. One particular trait that is often discussed is the tendency for millennials to change jobs more frequently than other generations. But while this is technically true, it's also a bit misleading. Job tenure has more to do with age than generation. In fact, tenure numbers for today's millennials are almost identical to those of Gen Xers in the early 2000s.¹⁰ Also, while millennials do have a tendency to leave a job after two or three years, research shows they actually want to stay longer. Forty percent envision themselves staying at their current organization for at least nine years.¹¹ So it seems that sometime during the first year or two of a job, younger employees are becoming disengaged. (Or, they were never engaged to begin with.)

Two of the strongest engagement drivers for millennials are purpose and shared values. Being more transparent with employees and connecting what they do on a daily basis with the overall mission of the organization can be a big motivator. Getting involved in (and having employees actively participate in) corporate philanthropy can have a big impact on engagement, particularly for millennial workers. One study found that 88 percent of millennials think it's important for their employer to share goals, progress, and achievements related to corporate social responsibility, and 75 percent would actually take a pay cut to work for a socially and environmentally responsible company.



QUICK TIP

Professional development is another key engagement driver for millennials. Providing your employees with learning opportunities and doing career pathing activities with them is important for keeping millennials engaged and excited about their work.

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QUICK TIP

Generation Z has grown up with the internet (many can't even remember what life was like before the iPhone). Use their technical insight to your advantage, and find ways to incorporate new tools and technology into their roles. They'll feel better utilized, and you'll have access to a more contemporary perspective.

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Generation Z

While many are just entering the workforce, Generation Z is already showing some unique traits. Gen Z employees—who came of age during the Great Recession—are motivated primarily by money and job security. Early indications are that they're highly competitive and hardworking—75 percent are willing to start at the bottom and work their way up.¹² Also, fewer Gen Zs are seeking higher education (64 percent, compared to 71 percent of millennials).

When it comes to engagement, we found that Gen Z employees are least comfortable with how they're utilized at work, and they struggle the most with role clarity. This is likely related to tenure, as most are just joining the workforce or are only a few years into their career. Setting clear expectations right off the bat will help younger workers better understand their roles.

It's also an opportunity for organizations to discover the best ways to utilize their younger employees' unique skills.

Like baby boomers, Gen Z scored lower on friendship in our study. With many coming straight from high school or college—where they likely had thriving social groups—they might struggle to fit in or build new relationships at work. Consider incorporating opportunities for social interaction into the onboarding process, and pairing new hires with existing employees for mentorship. And since Gen Zs are digital natives, implementing a social platform where younger employees can connect and create special interest groups is a great way to boost engagement.



Truth you can act on.

While each generation has common traits and motivators to consider, the best engagement strategy comes from collecting and reflecting on data from your own unique employees. Don't play the guessing game—find out what matters most to your teams, with real, actionable insights.

[Learn more](#)

External Resources

¹ Pew Research Center. (March 2018). Defining Generations: Where Millennials end and post-Millennials begin. Retrieved April from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/03/01/defining-generations-where-millennials-end-and-post-millennials-begin>.

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³ Cappelli, Peter. (November 2014). Engaging Your Older Workers. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2014/11/engaging-your-older-workers>.

⁴ Brandon, Emily. (February 2016). 5 Baby Boomer Retirement Trends. US News. Retrieved from <https://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/planning-to-retire/articles/2016-02-12/5-baby-boomer-retirement-trends>.

⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (September 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/tenure.pdf>.

⁶ Kane, Sally. (March 2018). The Common Characteristics of Generation X Professionals. The Balance. Retrieved from <https://www.thebalance.com/common-characteristics-of-generation-x-professionals-2164682>.

⁷ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (September 2016). Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/tenure.t01.htm>.

⁸ Neal, Stephanie; and Wellins, Richard. (April 2018). Generation X — not millennials — is changing the nature of work. CNBC.com. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/11/generation-x--not-millennials--is-changing-the-nature-of-work.html>.

⁹ Donohue, Mary. (May 2017). Forget Millennials And Boomers. Gen X Will Save the Workplace. Huffington Post. Retrieved from https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/mary-donohue/generation-x-workplace_b_16271164.html.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center. (April 2017). Millennials' job tenure is no shorter than that of prior generation. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/19/millennials-arent-job-hopping-any-faster-than-generation-x-did/ft_17-04-17_millennialjobtenure.

¹¹ Deal, Jennifer; and Levenson, Alec. What Millennials Want from Work. McGraw-Hill Education, 2016.

¹² Elejalde-Ruiz, Alexia. (March 2017). Why employers are reaching out to the next generation of workers: Gen Z. Chicago Tribune. Retrieved from <http://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-generation-z-workforce-0402-biz-20170331-story.html>.

¹⁷ Bailey, C. and Madden, A. (June 2016) What Makes Work Meaningful—Or Meaningless. Retrieved December 5, 2017, from sloanreview.mit.edu/article/what-makes-work-meaningful-or-meaningless/.