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The Gen Z Workplace: 5 Changes Leaders Need to Prepare For

The Five Changes Businesses Will Need to Make as Gen Z Becomes the Majority at Work

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What You Will Learn
- Why Gen Z's workplace expectations differ from previous generations and what that means for teams
- The five specific adjustments leaders are making to manage, motivate, and retain early-career employees
- Practical steps you can take without lowering standards or adding complexity to your management approach
- How to use these shifts as a competitive advantage when attracting talent

Not long ago, leaders were still adjusting to millennials becoming the core of their teams. Now a new generation is stepping in, and for a lot of businesses, it feels like starting from a different place entirely.

Most early-career roles are now being filled by Gen Z. By 2030, this generation is expected to make up close to 70 percent of the workforce. That shift is already changing how teams feel day to day. How people ask for feedback. How quickly they want answers. How directly they question decisions.

None of this is radical. It's a different starting point from previous generations, shaped by different experiences. That's why businesses need to prepare now. The five adjustments below reflect what leaders are already doing to stay ahead of it.

Shift 1: Moving Away from Annual Reviews

Annual reviews worked when roles stayed predictable and expectations moved slowly. That pace doesn't line up with how early-career work runs now. For younger employees, waiting six or twelve months to find out how they're doing creates unnecessary doubt and second-guessing.

This generation is used to fast signals. Outside work, feedback is immediate. Inside work, long gaps get filled with assumptions. Employees start to question themselves, which may be why only 8 percent of hiring professionals say Gen Z arrives fully prepared for the workplace.

The real gap usually isn't skill. It's direction.

When companies deliver feedback more regularly, engagement rates increase by <u>an average of 40%</u>. That doesn't always mean more meetings.

A regular 15-minute check-in often covers what matters when it stays practical:
What does success look like right now?
What are you learning?
What's been harder than expected?

When feedback is framed as help rather than judgement, standards stay high and progress speeds up.

Shift 2: Rethinking Authority and Access

Managing early-career employees can feel difficult when leadership relies on closed-door decisions and top-down instruction. In many teams, problems surface when context isn't shared, questions are dismissed, or decisions arrive without explanation.

Most of this generation aren't trying to run the company. They want access. They want to understand how decisions get made and where their work fits in. When that access isn't there, frustration builds quickly. <u>Deloitte's research</u> shows that a lack of transparency and perceived unfairness are among the main reasons younger employees start looking elsewhere.

Explaining how decisions are made helps more than most leaders expect. So does asking for input when it's genuinely useful and coming back to people once a decision has been taken. For SMEs, the adjustment is often straightforward. Smaller teams already have fewer layers. The change is behavioural. Share priorities early. Explain trade-offs instead of issuing instructions. Make it clear when feedback will influence a decision and when it won't.

Reverse mentoring can help too, pairing younger employees with more senior colleagues to share insight in both directions.

Shift 3: From Job Security to Growth Opportunity

Job security used to be the promise. Stay long enough, do solid work, and stability would follow. That promise carries less weight now, not because early-career employees don't value security, but because skill growth feels more reliable than institutional loyalty. <u>Most only stay in a role for an average of 1.1 years.</u> They aren't job-hopping so much as growth-hunting. If a role doesn't help them develop, they move on.

Many SMEs have an advantage here. Smaller teams offer broader exposure, faster responsibility, and closer access to decision-making. The problem is that this rarely gets framed as development. Without that framing, movement feels random and progress feels invisible.

Growth needs to be discussed early and often. Not as a promotion promise, but as a skills conversation. What will someone be better at in six months? What will they own? What will stretch them next? These questions matter more than titles.

Practical steps don't require big budgets. Cross-functional projects, shadowing, and short focused training sessions all work. Over 94 percent of employees say they'd stay nearly three years longer if they could grow within a company.

Shift 4: From Salary-First to Values-Aligned

For this generation, salary answers one question. Everything else answers whether the role feels workable once pressure shows up. That's why values surface so early in hiring conversations. Candidates ask how decisions get made when things go wrong, how mistakes are handled, and what happens when priorities collide.

Deloitte's 2025 research found that 44 percent of Gen Z candidates have turned down a role because the organisation's values didn't match their own. That figure makes more sense when you look at how values show up in everyday behaviour. Who gets backed when a client pushes too far? How feedback is delivered when targets slip. Whether workload gets shared or quietly piled on the same people.

For smaller businesses, this shift doesn't require brand work or polished messaging. It comes down to consistency. Being clear about what matters. Talking through trade-offs honestly. Owning decisions instead of hiding behind policy.

Shift 5: From Work-Life Balance to Work-Life Integration

Work-life balance suggests two separate things to manage. Younger employees don't tend to experience work that way. The expectation isn't fewer hours or less responsibility. It's work that fits around real constraints. Deloitte reports that 85 percent of this generation rate flexibility as highly important, and many expect it to be part of the role from the outset.

What often goes wrong isn't the policy, but how leaders follow through. Remote days and flexible hours shouldn't create a two-tier workforce where flexibility exists on paper but limits progression in practice. People shouldn't be expected to respond to messages when they're logged off.

Mental health sits underneath all of this. Around 40 percent of Gen Z report feeling stressed or anxious most of the time, which leads to burnout and turnover. Effective integration requires structure. Clear outcomes, clear deadlines, and agreed windows for collaboration. Space outside that to manage energy and personal demands, with boundaries set early rather than after resentment builds.

Adapting to the New Generation of Candidates

When adapting for Gen Z comes up, it's often taken to mean lowering expectations.

That concern is understandable, particularly in small teams where performance gaps are felt quickly

What usually causes problems isn't the standard itself. It's how unclear things have become.

Expectations sit with one person instead of being shared. Feedback arrives after frustration builds. Growth is mentioned without specifics. Flexibility exists but only if you already know how to access it. Making those elements clearer tends to fix more issues than changing the standard ever would.

This generation tends to expose gaps earlier. They ask direct questions, notice inconsistencies, and don't wait years to see if things improve. That gets labelled as impatience when it's more often a response to ambiguity.

Leaders who adjust how they set expectations tend to deal with fewer surprises. Less rework. Fewer quiet exits. Stronger follow-through, without relaxing what's required. The advantage comes from noticing when familiar management habits stop working as intended and being willing to change how work is explained, not what's asked of people.

A little about Sarah Bishop and Recruit Recruit Ltd

Whether you're a sole trader hiring your first team member, a VC-backed startup needing to scale fast, or a corporate looking for top-tier C-suite talent, one thing stays true:

Your business grows when your people grow.

I help founders, CEOs and business leaders build brilliant teams through:

- **Recruitment:** finding and placing the right people for the right roles or embedding a talent team into growing businesses
- **Sales & Leadership Training:** developing high-performing teams that sell, lead and deliver
- **Speaking & EmCeeing:** energising events and conferences with insight, humour and practical takeaways
- **Coaching:** supporting leaders to grow confidently, communicate better, and build culture that sticks

Over the years, I've supported businesses at every stage, from bedroom startups to scale-ups and established firms navigating change. What they all have in common? A vision to grow and the ambition to get the right people on board to make it happen.

I bring no-nonsense advice, energy, empathy and results, whether I'm:

- Hiring a game-changing leadership role
- Training a founder-led team to sell with confidence
- Speaking on stage about team-building, fearless follow-up, or people strategy
- Coaching a business owner through their first ever hire

So, let's talk If:

- You're ready to grow and want to hire with confidence
- You need training or coaching to get more from your team (or yourself!)
- You're planning an event and want a speaker or EmCee who brings both energy and value

Drop me a message or connect - let's build something brilliant together.

Now - #1 Bestseller on Amazon -
Scale Up!: The Founders' Guide to Accelerating Growth by Building Dream Teams by Sarah Bishop

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