

# examining the multigenerational workforce

9 facts managers need to know  
to better recruit, motivate and  
retain today's professionals





# Why a new multigenerational study now?

Social and economic disruption in the past few years, compounded by a global health crisis, have transformed workers' life priorities and notions about what it means to have a job. Remote and hybrid work, meanwhile, have blurred the lines between work and personal life. These factors make generational sentiments in the workplace worth reexamining.

Shifts in people's ideas about how work should intersect with life are not uniform but influenced by a variety of circumstances and demographics, including by generation. Understanding these differences can matter even more at a time when the competition to hire and retain skilled talent remains fierce and top performers continue to quit at a high rate.



Understanding what motivates boomers, Gen Xers, millennials and Gen Zers can help leaders managing multigenerational teams recruit new talent and better support their people so valued employees are more likely to stay put. Knowing more about what makes each generation tick can also help managers better their own performance — and boost their career.

Our research goes beyond stereotypes. In Robert Half surveys, members of these four generations shared how they feel about the workplace and the companies they want to work for.

• baby  
boomers  
(1946-1964)

• millennials  
(1981-1996)

1940 ..... 1950 ..... 1960 ..... 1970 ..... 1980 ..... 1990 ..... 2000 ..... 2010 .....

• gen x  
(1965-1980)

• gen z  
(1997-2005)



Among our findings: Gen Z wants a robust work experience, even though some of the things they care about can seem contradictory. Millennials are spreading their wings and want to contribute even more to their organizations. Gen X professionals are generally comfortable with their careers, but compensation may be an issue. Baby boomers are the least concerned about the impact of AI, yet also are the least prepared for it.

Read on to learn what to emphasize when recruiting candidates, along with ways to engage your employees to keep job satisfaction and retention rates high.



**97% of workers see value in a multigenerational workforce.  
Here's what they like best:**

- 1 Wider range of perspectives
- 2 Learning from colleagues with different levels of experience
- 3 Opportunity to improve communication and collaboration skills
- 4 Mentoring or being mentored by colleagues from other generations
- 5 Expanded and diversified networks



1.

## Salary matters most ... except to *Gen Z*.

By a wide margin, millennials, Gen Xers and baby boomers say a competitive salary with regular merit increases has the biggest influence on their job satisfaction and desire to stay with an employer.

For Gen Z professionals, on the other hand, flexibility in when and where they work and a positive company culture do more to motivate them.

### Top 5 influences on job satisfaction

|   | GEN Z<br>(1997-2005)                            | MILLENNIALS<br>(1981-1996)                      | GEN X<br>(1965-1980)                            | BABY BOOMERS<br>(1946-1964)                     |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Flexibility in when and where I work            | Competitive salary with regular merit increases | Competitive salary with regular merit increases | Competitive salary with regular merit increases |
| 2 | Positive work culture and team dynamic          | Fair workload and job expectations              | Fair workload and job expectations              | Fair workload and job expectations              |
| 3 | Competitive salary with regular merit increases | Flexibility in when and where I work            | Positive work culture and team dynamic          | Positive work culture and team dynamic          |
| 4 | Supportive manager                              | Positive work culture and team dynamic          | Flexibility in when and where I work            | Supportive manager                              |
| 5 | Opportunities for career advancement            | Supportive manager                              | Supportive manager                              | Flexibility in when and where I work            |

# What should managers do?

- Benchmark salaries for your industry and local market to ensure you're offering competitive compensation.
- Provide in-demand benefits and perks, and clearly communicate the value of the total compensation package your organization provides.
- Offer flexible work and highlight these arrangements in interviews.
- Give employees opportunities to collaborate on interdepartmental projects to help them build their skills and gain new perspectives.
- Invest in professional development to create a positive company culture, especially if you encourage staff members to talk to each other about what they're learning.





## 2.

# Gen Zers want the best of both worlds.

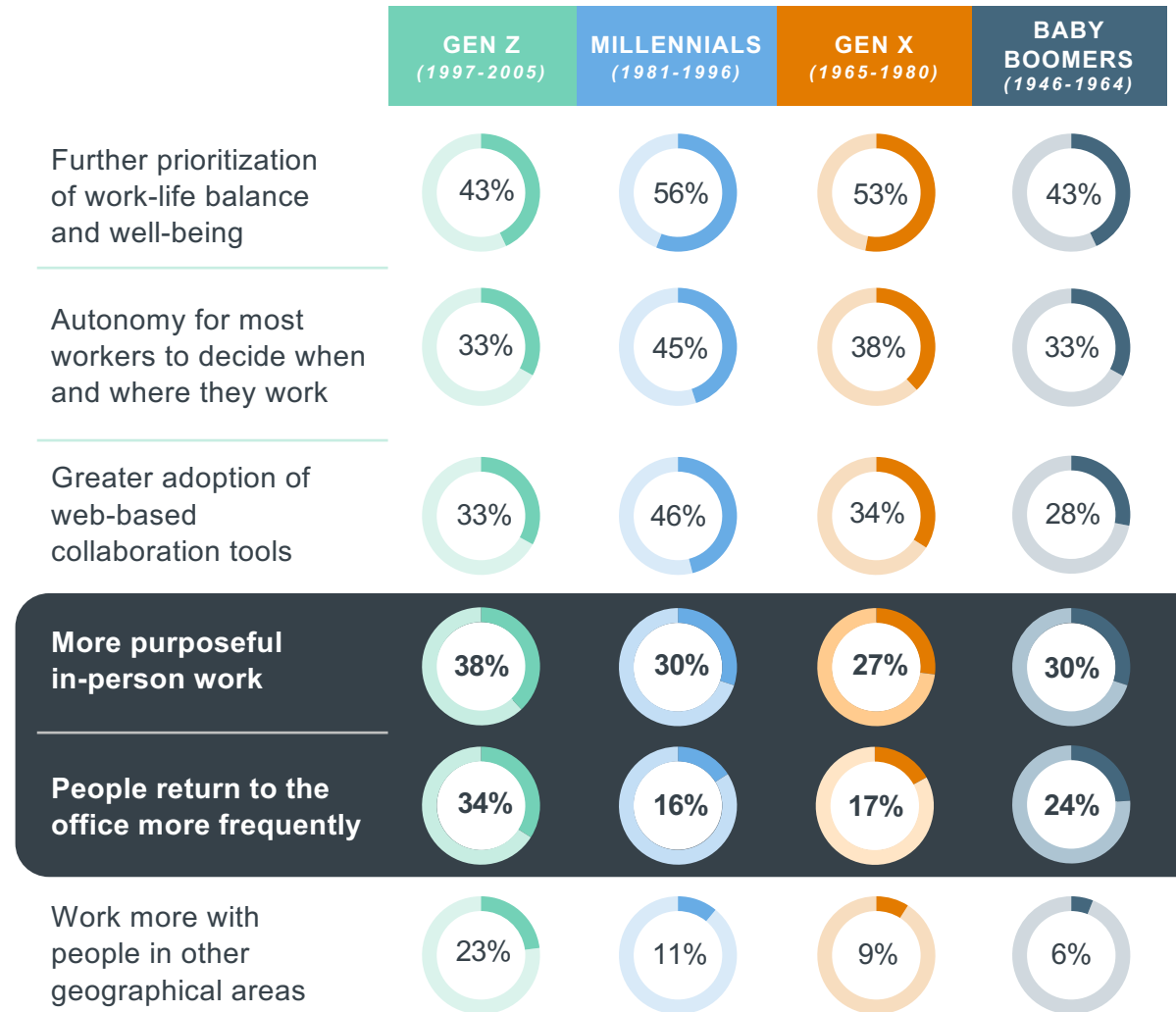
Gen Z professionals want the full scope of what work has to offer, even if some of those aspects seem contradictory.

This generation, for example, wants the freedom to decide when and where they work. Yet, more than any other group, Gen Zers would like to see more purposeful in-person opportunities — such as training seminars — and an increase in people returning to the office. One fear they have about too much remote work is missing out on project opportunities and promotions.

Gen Zers also say working from home means working longer hours, yet many report higher job satisfaction despite the extra time on the job.

**60% of Gen Z professionals are concerned they won't be visible for project opportunities and promotions when not working in the office.**

## How workers want remote and hybrid work to evolve



# What should managers do?

- Offer both remote and hybrid work arrangements (some days in the office, some days at home).
- Encourage employees to work at home when it's time to focus on a project and travel to the office for activities such as brainstorming, training and celebrating.
- Create a formal mentorship program so early-career professionals can learn from and network with senior employees and managers at your firm.
- Look for reverse mentoring opportunities, where less-tenured employees share their expertise with more-senior colleagues. These interactions can also help build bridges across the generations.





### 3.

## *Millennials* want to spread their wings.

Millennials are no longer the new kids on the block. Some are in their 40s, and many are executives and leaders at their companies. It's not unusual for millennials to have Gen Xers and baby boomers who report to them.

As they grow into more senior roles, millennials are much like Gen Xers and boomers in seeking increased autonomy, preferring only occasional feedback from their boss.

Millennials are also the generation most interested in remote work opportunities. For a solid connection between home and office — and, ultimately, increased support to do their jobs better — millennials seek more company investment in virtual collaboration tools.

• 55%

of millennials want autonomy to make decisions supplemented by feedback from their manager.

• 46%

of millennials want more web-based collaboration tools.

• 45%

of millennials want flexibility in when and where they work.

# What should managers do?

- Don't micromanage. Give teams stretch assignments, and look for opportunities for them to step into new roles.
- Counsel managers on how to work with direct reports from a variety of generations. Offer resources to help them practice inclusive hiring and communication styles while avoiding age bias, both conscious and unconscious.
- Create opportunities for employees to work remotely at least part time, while providing the technology they need to succeed.





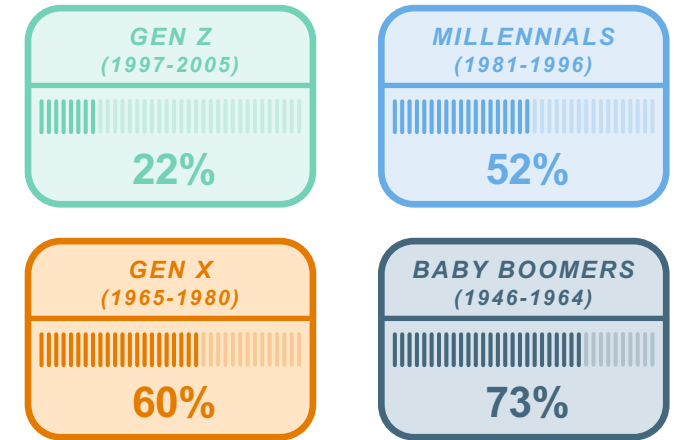
4.

## *Baby boomers* are the least worried about AI — yet also the least prepared for it.

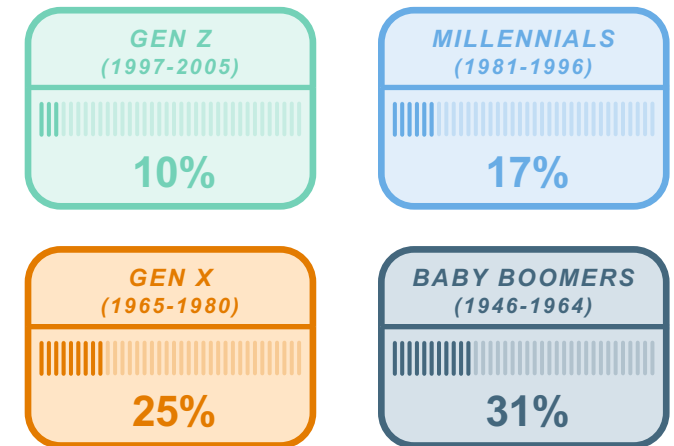
Baby boomers and Gen Zers are on opposite ends of the continuum, and not just by age. Despite the potential impact of automation and AI on their jobs, 73% of baby boomers say they're not at all concerned. And while almost half say they would retrain if their skills became outdated, nearly one-third say they are unsure what they'd do — the highest of any generation.

For Gen Z professionals, worries about AI are much greater. Only 22% say they're not concerned about its impact on their jobs. And more Gen Zers than boomers would be interested in reskilling so they could take on a new role.

**% of workers  
unconcerned  
automation and AI  
will affect their job**



**% of workers  
unsure how  
they'd react to AI  
affecting their job**



# What should managers do?

- Provide training opportunities for employees to keep their skills current and prepare for future roles.
- Emphasize that your company will work closely with staff to prepare for the future. Remind those who seem inclined to look for a new employer if automation were to come that virtually all companies are pursuing digital transformation.
- Gen Z professionals, in particular, see the importance of upskilling and reskilling, so make sure to build appropriate training into their career development plans.
- Outside of formal training, consider hosting brown bag discussions where employees can showcase new applications and teach others about them. Mentoring and reverse mentoring can also help professionals prepare for new automation tools.





## 5.

# Flexible work will set your company apart.

Three years after the traditional work model was turned upside down, workspace and schedule flexibility is now a firm expectation among professionals. The freedom to decide when and where to work is also among the top considerations for job candidates.

Professionals across the generations say working from home offers considerable advantages over a 9-to-5 at the office: It eliminates the cost and weariness associated with a commute, improves morale and overall work-life balance, boosts productivity, and reduces the cost of living for staff who work from areas more affordable than those nearer the employer.

For many workers, returning to the office is a deal breaker. Some professionals would quit their jobs if required to go back full time. Others would turn down a higher paying job that didn't allow some kind of remote work option.



**32%**

of workers would take a pay cut to work remotely full time.

**49%**

of workers say flexibility in when and where they work influences whether they accept a job offer.

**54%**

of workers say their dream job would allow work flexibility.

# What should managers do?

- Offering remote and hybrid work options makes your firm more competitive in the hiring market. Your company becomes more attractive to job seekers and deepens the talent pool if you recruit people regardless of where they live.
- Don't dismiss the advantages of a shared workplace. Create opportunities to return to the office for events that are most valuable to your staff.
- Working in the office can be especially beneficial to new employees. They can connect in person with colleagues and managers and more quickly acclimate to the business.





6.

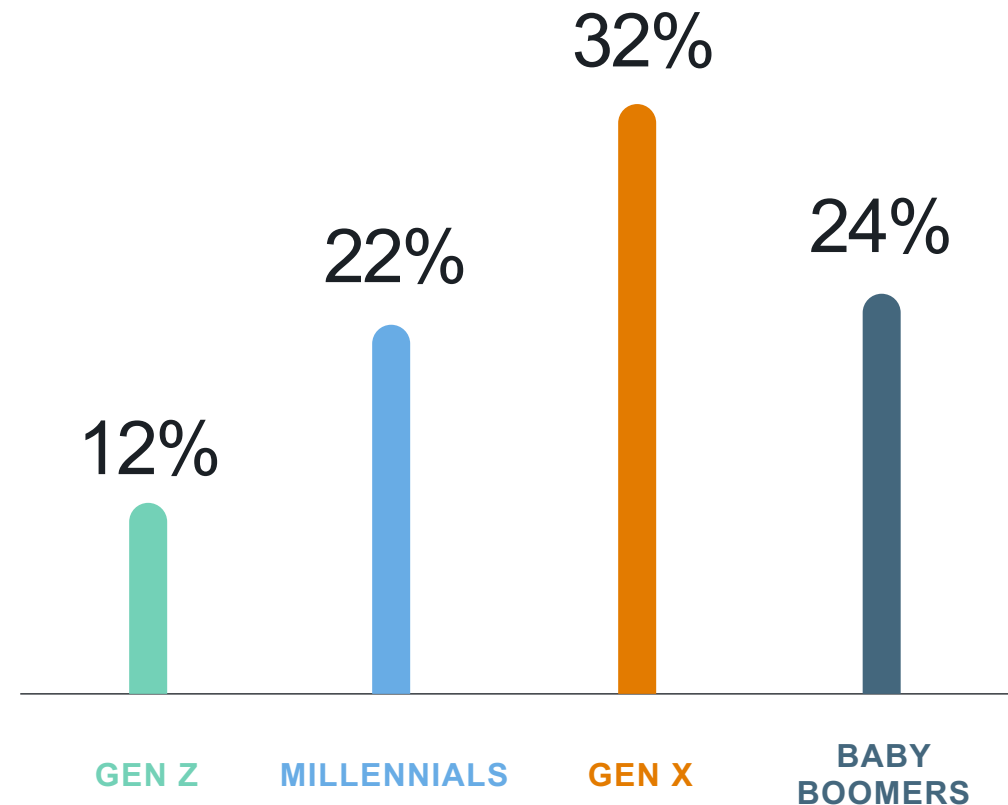
## *Gen X* appears content, but pay may be an issue.

On the surface, Gen X professionals appear relatively comfortable in their careers. They are the most likely to say they don't plan to make any changes in their career path over the next 10 years and are among those who place importance on good relationships with their colleagues.

Below the surface, however, there is salary dissatisfaction. Gen X professionals are more likely than other generations to feel underpaid, with nearly 1 in 3 saying they aren't fairly compensated for their work. That's significantly higher than their boomer, millennial and Gen Z counterparts.

**Nearly 1 in 3 Gen X workers feels underpaid — roughly 33% higher than their boomer and millennial counterparts and nearly triple Gen Z professionals.**

Workers who feel underpaid



# What should managers do?

- Never underestimate the power of compensation. Rewards such as raises and bonuses show people their work is valued and help them feel appreciated.
- In one-on-one sessions, ask team members if they feel fairly paid.
- Hold regular career discussions with your team. These sometimes get overlooked when business requirements are coming fast and furious.





7.

## Many younger professionals would quit to pursue contract work.

More and more professionals recognize the benefits of contract roles, including the opportunity to take on a variety of assignments and work at different companies.

Many may see this as a way to build skills faster and gain different experiences.

Gen Z professionals, a group intent on upskilling, are the most likely to transition to contract work — even if it means quitting their permanent job.

**Gen Z workers would quit their current job to pursue:**

- **Part-time contract or consulting work plus a new permanent job**

54%

- **A full-time career as a contract professional or consultant**

50%

- **Multiple part-time contract or consulting roles**

47%

# What should managers do?

- The challenge of finding and hiring skilled permanent staff makes interim professionals even more valuable.
- Consider bringing in contract professionals who can alleviate the burden on your permanent employees and provide specialized skills.
- Take a hint from the popularity of contract work and the benefits of project variety and exposure to different opportunities that it brings. Offer your permanent staff stretch assignments and the opportunity to work with other business units and leaders.





# 8.

## Some deal breakers are shared, but key differences persist.

A generational divide extends to what would keep an employee at their current job and what would make a job seeker lose interest in a role.

Work flexibility and better pay, benefits and perks are among the top reasons employees might leave for another job opportunity. However, baby boomers are less interested than other generations in making a move for the sake of better benefits and perks. Work flexibility is of greater interest to Gen Zers and millennials.

Though not in the same order, all generations rank a lack of salary transparency, unclear or unreasonable job responsibilities, and poor communication with a hiring manager among the top reasons to withdraw from consideration for an open role.

### Deal breakers for job candidates

|   | GEN Z<br>(1997-2005)  | MILLENNIALS<br>(1981-1996)  | GEN X<br>(1965-1980)  | BABY BOOMERS<br>(1946-1964)   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Unclear or unreasonable job responsibilities, reporting structure and career path | Lack of salary transparency   | Lack of salary transparency   | Unclear or unreasonable job responsibilities, reporting structure and career path |
| 2 | Poor communication with the hiring manager  | Unclear or unreasonable job responsibilities, reporting structure and career path | Unclear or unreasonable job responsibilities, reporting structure and career path | Lack of salary transparency   |
| 3 | Lack of salary transparency   | Poor communication with the hiring manager  | Poor communication with the hiring manager  | Poor communication with the hiring manager  |
| 4 | Mismatched job title and required experience or education                         | Mismatched job title and required experience or education                         | Misalignment with company culture and values                                      | Misalignment with company culture and values                                      |
| 5 | Misalignment with company culture and values                                      | Misalignment with company culture and values                                      | Mismatched job title and required experience or education                         | Mismatched job title and required experience or education                         |

# What should managers do?

- Consult sources like the [Salary Guide From Robert Half](#) to help ensure your pay, perks and benefits are competitive.
- Allow employees, as much as possible, to decide when and where they work. Ideally, this would include the freedom to focus on tasks in flexible bursts throughout the day or evening rather than the traditional 9-to-5 workday.
- Be upfront about the salary that job candidates can expect and make job responsibilities crystal clear. When working with a talent solutions firm, communicate your needs clearly and stay in close touch with the recruiter.





9.

## Coworker and managerial support are key motivators across the board.

For roughly 4 in 10 professionals across the generations, being on good terms with their team members is a main factor for increased motivation.

Flexible work and, particularly for Gen Z professionals, support from their manager are also prime motivators. Younger workers are more likely to seek a clear career path at their company.

**Motivation is rising for some workers because of:**

|   | GEN Z<br>(1997-2005)   | MILLENNIALS<br>(1981-1996)                        | GEN X<br>(1965-1980)                              | BABY BOOMERS<br>(1946-1964)                       |
|---|--|---|---|---|
| 1 | Good relationships with colleagues                                   | Good relationships with colleagues                | Good relationships with colleagues                | Good relationships with colleagues                |
| 2 | (tie)<br>Manager's guidance and support<br>and<br>Raise or promotion | Increased flexibility in when and where they work | Increased flexibility in when and where they work | Increased flexibility in when and where they work |
| 3 |  | Raise or promotion                                | Recognition for accomplishments                   | Manager's guidance and support                    |
| 4 | Increased flexibility in when and where they work                    | Manager's guidance and support                    | Manager's guidance and support                    | Alignment with company culture and values         |
| 5 | Clear career path at their company                                   | Clear career path at their company                | Raise or promotion                                | Recognition for accomplishments                   |

# What should managers do?

- Create opportunities for employees to connect. Set up in-person or virtual social events outside of work-related meetings, and encourage remote employees to come into the office occasionally to get to know colleagues on a deeper level.
- Boost your recognition efforts. Show people their work is valued and how it contributes to the success of your company and customers.
- Help establish career plans for your team. Accommodate the full scope of their needs, including health and wellness.





# The business of being people-centric

The more you learn about what motivates your teams, the better their resiliency when seas get rough. Putting people first is a must.

While generational influences are only part of what makes an employee tick, getting to know your people better will help you accommodate the full scope of their needs. It takes time, but managing on an individual basis is the best way to show your team members that you and, by extension, the business care about their future and welfare. That's ultimately what keeps them on board and eager to tell others that yours is a great place to work.

# Research Methodology

The data in this report is from surveys developed by Robert Half and conducted by an independent research firm in April and January 2023 and November 2022. Each survey contains responses from at least 1,000 workers 18 years or older.

## About Robert Half

Robert Half (NYSE: RHI) is the world's first and largest specialized talent solutions firm that connects companies with highly skilled job seekers. Offering contract and permanent placement solutions in the fields of finance and accounting, technology, administrative and customer support, legal, and marketing and creative, Robert Half has more than 300 locations worldwide, including nearly 100 locations in 18 countries outside the United States. Robert Half is the parent company of Protiviti®, a global consulting firm that provides internal audit, risk, business and technology consulting solutions. Robert Half, including Protiviti, has been named a Fortune® Most Admired Company™ and a Forbes Best Employer for Diversity. Robert Half and Protiviti have also each been named to the Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For® list. Explore our comprehensive solutions, research and insights at [roberthalf.com](https://roberthalf.com).



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