



Attracting Gen-Z to Transit

KEOLIS

Generation Z

Generation Z is reshaping the workforce with values rooted in technology, social responsibility, and purpose. To attract and retain this generation, organizations must embrace innovation, authenticity, and adaptability, creating workplaces that align with their vision for a more connected and impactful future.

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Inside

This whitepaper explores the unique values, aspirations, and workplace expectations of Generation Z, the first digitally native generation. It examines how their focus on technology, social responsibility, and purpose is reshaping organizational strategies, offering insights and actionable steps for attracting, engaging, and retaining this influential talent in a rapidly evolving job market.

1 DECODE THE FIRST DIGITALLY NATIVE GENERATION

Generation Z, or “Gen Z,” was born between 1997 and 2012. As it has grown up amid technological advancements and social change, this generation exhibits unique values and aspirations that employers must address to attract and retain top talent in a competitive job market.



Distinct values, expectations, and aspirations embraced by Gen Z:



Proficient with technology from an early age



Awareness of social responsibility



Concerns regarding climate change



Recognition of social justice issues



Motivated by purpose

Considering these collective experiences, Gen Z has distinct career expectations and values compared to Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers. Organizations must adapt and embrace a new forward-thinking mindset to attract and retain this talent.

As digital natives, Gen Z adapts to technology fluently, shaping individual work styles and worldviews. Technology that facilitates two-way communication and fosters collaboration is more than a tool; it is a vital aspect of work life. By embracing AI-supported technology, Gen Z can assist organizations in adapting and improving internal communication between frontline workers and management. This is especially crucial for transportation organizations, as the industry relies heavily on data and advanced technology. Keolis teams frequently use tools like LaTeX and Python to carry out AI development projects. Additionally, proprietary tools such as Keolis Evolve leverage data to improve transit systems and better serve communities.

Like their colleagues, Gen Z values social consciousness and is deeply concerned about climate change and social justice. They strive to positively impact the world and align their work with their values, seeking purpose and authenticity instead of traditional benefits.

Gen Z views environmental issues, such as climate change and sustainability, as real challenges that they are ready to confront. In fact, this generation often prefers public transportation over driving, and many choose to live in areas that promote walking, biking, and ridesharing. Therefore, one of the most valuable insights Gen Z provides to transportation agencies is their unique perspective on transit.



The term ‘Zillennial’ was coined to describe a microgeneration of people born between the early 1990s and the early 2000s. It’s a portmanteau of the terms “Millennial” and “Generation Z,”

Deborah Carr

Professor of Sociology and Director of the Center for Innovation in Social Science at Boston University

The workforce is becoming increasingly accustomed to working anywhere¹ and relies heavily on mobile devices, leading to a rise in public transit usage over the last decade. A study² by the University of Michigan in 2011 found a steady decline in the number of people under 30 with a driver's license. Furthermore, an annual study³ by KRC Research and Zipcar revealed that 45 percent of 18- to 34-year-olds consciously choose public transportation over driving, compared to 32 percent of older populations.

There are positive signs that Gen Z plans to follow the two previous generations in championing public transit. A Facebook group with nearly 230,000 members, “New Urbanist Memes for Transit-Oriented Teens,” or “NUMTOTS,” is dedicated to sharing humorous memes about transit-oriented teens.

2 CREATING A WORKPLACE THAT EMBRACES NEW VALUES

Fostering transparency, authenticity, and open communication builds trust and demonstrates a genuine commitment to core values. In short, Gen Z seeks more than just a job; they desire meaningful contributions. Creating an employer brand that reflects a company's values invites a fresh perspective on how organizations showcase themselves.

In the last decade, leaders have increasingly focused on organizational commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion and belonging (DEI), which is now essential for attracting talent from this segment. Employees expect inclusive workplaces where everyone can thrive. Therefore, a strong DEI culture also serves as a cornerstone of an employer's brand. Regularly engaging employees in programs that support sustainability and social impact is crucial, as it assures Gen Z that their work contributes to positive change.

Gen Z values are not solely ideological. Daily operational changes can showcase flexibility and a commitment to fostering an environment that provides optimal service and fulfilling careers for employees. For example, in recent years, Keolis has worked in conjunction with unions to adjust its schedules to be less reliant on “split shifts.” In a world of traditional 9-5 commuting patterns, these were the norm. Peering around the corners, Keolis saw a need to develop new ways of doing business that better served passengers, its partners, and its own people. Instead, it has implemented reasonable shifts that help employees balance personal priorities, including caregiving responsibilities, mental and physical health needs, and personal interests.



My commute is twice a week, during which I take an Uber to the train station, which is 15 minutes away, and then I ride the train to the office for another 15 minutes.”

Quentin B.

3 RETHINK RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Along with presenting an attractive employer brand, organizations need to streamline recruitment technology and make the process MUCH MORE engaging with prospective talent.

A Day in the Life of Gen Z

POSTING AND COMMENTING ON TIKTOK, INSTAGRAM, AND YOUTUBE

ENJOYING GAMIFIED, INTERACTIVE EXPERIENCES THAT OFFER INSTANT FEEDBACK



RIDING MY BIKE TO WORK FOR EXERCISE AND BECAUSE I CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

CONNECTING AUTHENTICALLY IN BOTH SOCIAL AND PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

I VALUE COMPANIES THAT RESPECT MY INDIVIDUALITY AND TIME

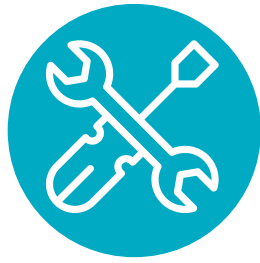
Studies show that Gen Z is more aware of cost-of-living concerns and the challenges of achieving financial stability. A recent survey⁴ by Newsweek reported that Gen Z considers a household income of \$120,000 per year to be “middle class.” Therefore, agencies need to rethink starting salaries and, perhaps more importantly, engage prospective talent with a wider range of benefits and opportunities for growth.

For example, third-party certification programs allow non-permit holders to earn their CDL and Passenger Endorsement through fully sponsored training programs WHILE talent is already on salary.

Besides accreditation, recruiters should be empowered to present a variety of future opportunities and assist entry-level talent in visualizing different career paths:



DRIVERS



**MECHANICAL OR
CIVIL ENGINEERS**



**OPERATIONS
MANAGEMENT**



FINANCE



LEGAL



**CUSTOMER
SERVICE**



**DATA
ANALYSTS**

Also, real examples of internal mobility should be highlighted. Celebrate employees who relocated within the business and explored roles in other areas (i.e., bus or rail.)

4 PRIORITIZE LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

This generation values continuous learning and skill development, understanding its importance in a rapidly changing world. Employers are expected to support talent's growth through mentorship, training, and professional development—starting on day one. Encouraging collaboration and exposure to new technologies is also essential to this generation, which thrives in environments that promote career pathing and ownership of one's career growth.



My dream mentor cares about my growth and success. They are proactive in conversations that drive innovation and meaningful impact,”

Maggie W.

Keolis Proposal Team Intern

5 OFFER IDEAL WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Although Gen Z is digitally native, transportation agencies have the unique and historic opportunity to introduce a new audience to real-world jobs they may not have encountered before. Although the bulk of this generation politically favors collective bargaining, many might not fully understand the advantages of union roles for themselves and their peers. For example, the railroad retirement board offers one of the best pensions in the country.

Following the Great Resignation of 2021 and 2022, now is an ideal time for recruiters to engage with talent early in their careers. In 2022, the Center for American Progress reported⁵ that Gen Z is the most pro-union generation alive today. Furthermore, the American National Election Studies survey ranked Gen Z with a mean approval rating of 64.3, compared to 60.5 for Millennials and 57.8 for Generation X⁶.

As younger workers begin to pursue the advantages of collective bargaining for wages, benefits, stability, and a voice in the workplace, they can establish strong foundations for future worker empowerment.

Given the strong values of this cohort, recruitment efforts should present a compelling case for attracting young talent that emphasizes:

- Unions provide a variety of economic benefits, inclusive of members without four-year college degrees
- Direct wage increases over time help individual workers establish financial security by enabling them to save more, pay down debt, etc.
- Collective bargaining raises pay standards for all workers, effectively reducing racial, ethnic, and gender pay gaps
- Younger workers (ages 18-34) were almost 40% more likely to have access to employer health insurance
- Unionized workers are 89.8% more likely to have a retirement plan compared to their nonunion peers.

6 CONCLUSION

In addition to the snapshot outlined here, Keolis can help its partners develop their own strategies to grow ridership and revenue.

Contact Keolis North America at Media@KeolisNA.com to discuss specific needs and solutions.

Footnotes

- ¹ Mark C. Perna, January 2, 2025, "What Your Gen Z Workers Really Want in 2025," Forbes. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2025/01/02/what-your-gen-z-workers-really-want-in-2025/>.
- ² University of Michigan, January 2011, "Fewer young but more elderly have driver's licenses," Retrieved from <https://news.umich.edu/fewer-young-but-more-elderly-have-drivers-license/>.
- ³ KRC Research and Zipcar, Annual Study, "Zipcar Annual Millennial Survey Suggests Being a 'Millennial' Is Related to Where You Live, Not When You Were Born," Retrieved from <https://www.zipcar.com/press/news/zipcar-annual-millennial-survey-suggests-being-a-%E2%80%98millennial%E2%80%99-is-related-to-where-you-live-not-when-you-were-born>.
- ⁴ Aleks Phillips, December 2023, "What Gen Z Thinks Is Middle Class and Why It Differs From Other Generations," Newsweek. Retrieved from <https://www.newsweek.com/gen-z-middle-class-salary-difference-money-views-1854720>.
- ⁵ Justin Dorazio, August 2023, "What You Need to Know About Gen Z's Support for Unions," Center for American Progress. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/what-you-need-to-know-about-gen-zs-support-for-unions/>.
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