



LEADING GEN Z IN THE WORKPLACE: WHAT DO GEN Z EXPECT FROM THEIR LEADERS?

AN OFFICIAL CLIENT UPDATE OF PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA



“Gen Z is weak.”

“Gen Z is taking something too personal.”

“Gen Z is difficult to stay for a long term in one company.”

“Most Gen Z do not want to do tasks outside their job.”

“Many Gen Z have a bad attitude.”

I often hear that from corporate leaders on social media and even from several candidates whom I've called for discussions about intergenerational leadership.

The 12th edition of Deloitte’s Gen Z and Millennial Survey finds that Gen Z feels stressed and anxious most of the time because of the work pressure they get.

However, is this true?

Let me tell you a story about one of my candidates who experienced challenges when he had to work with Gen Z in my client company.

My candidate's name is Budi. My client company hired him to lead the Sales Department, especially to penetrate and grow the company’s newest product to the market. During my search for this position, he stood out among other candidates because of his solid skills and experience.

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Therefore, I was not surprised if my client favored and chose to hire him compared to other candidates.

His onboarding process went smoothly, and he got himself busy making sales strategies with his team. After three months after his arrival at the company, things did not look as smooth as I had initially hoped. When I discussed his performance with my client, I was informed that he needed help with his leadership skills.

When I investigated this concern with him, I discovered that this was the first time he had to lead a team dominated by Generation Z, and he had trouble managing them effectively.

As someone born in the late '70s and rarely had a direct professional relationship with Gen-Z, Budi mistakenly treated them like he would treat people from his generation or one generation below.

It was the root of his problem. As a result, his ineffective leadership ability made him unable to achieve the sales target given by the company.

I then teamed up with my Senior Consultant to help Budi overcome his leadership challenge. We invited Budi's team members to understand more about their concerns and aspirations in moving forward working with him as their leader. One common theme was that they felt it difficult to get close to him as a leader.

We gained many valuable insights after discussing with Budi's team members, especially what Gen Z expect from their leaders. His team agreed that the following things are needed by them so that they can work comfortably and professionally connect with him as their leader:

Communication Style

In this case, Mr. Budi has a communication pattern that needs to be aligned with Generation Z's expectations. For example, Gen Z wants to leverage technology to its fullest advantage by utilizing communication

and productivity platforms.

Generation Z prefers leaders to coordinate work-related materials through verbal and writing. They want communication to be smooth, so if the leader cannot be in the same place with them to discuss, at least they can get information from him by phone or the WhatsApp Group.

In short, they adapt to today's technology and want communication unrestricted by space and time.

Engagement

Budi's team members felt there was a distance between him and the team because they rarely interacted with each other—except about work.

In other words, Budi saw his team members as merely corporate employees with tasks to complete. The relationship was built only around the vocabulary of work.

Generation Z craves good working relationships and personal interactions with their leaders at work. They want the kind of leaders that can communicate with them about work or non-work related topics.

They don't want to be perceived as only workers but well-rounded human beings with interests and passions. When we spend most of our time at work, we want to ensure that the company we choose can provide us with a comfortable working environment. And one of the signs of a comfortable working environment is when the employees and the leaders can create a meaningful engagement with each other.

In this case, to help strengthen Budi's engagement with his team members, my Senior Consultant and I advised him to allocate time to bond with them.

One of the ways we suggested was by inviting his team members to have lunch with him. Lunch could be a perfect time for

leaders and team members to get to know each other and see them beyond the responsibility of work.

He listened to our advice, and it worked well. By sitting together with them for lunch, Budi slowly started to see and understand the personality of each of his team members. That way, Budi can adjust his communication style and won't have difficulty communicating with them again.

Trust

At the beginning of their work together, Budi tried to solve all work-related issues independently and rarely included their team members in solving the problems.

When there are people who say that Gen-Z is lazy and unmotivated workers, they might not know that Gen-Z can be the most ambitious and exciting generation to work with.

Gen-Z wants to be trusted and involved in every decision correlating with their work. They want their leader to trust them but still under their leader's supervision, so they are always aware during the work, especially when things get tough.

Mr. Budi, who initially did everything by himself, finally agreed to start getting his team members involved in every decision. As a result, he has a lighter workload, and Budi's unyielding trust and support make the team feel appreciated.

Mentoring Sessions

When Mr. Budi entered the company, he needed to clearly explain how his team members should work together to achieve the sales target.

Consequently, a lot of them are clueless. Though they have the required skills to do their jobs, they still need clear direction from their leader.

Gen Z prefers having leaders who can mentor

them before they do their job.. They want clear directions so that it will be easier for them to carry out their duties properly and perform well according to their leader's expectations.

Gen Z needs direction regarding how they should work and workflow clarity—starting from a working timeline, report structure, and clear SOPs. It is what they want so that everything is clear, and if there is an urgency, they are not confused about reaching out to someone directly related to their work. They want every challenge to be solved together so they can find the best solution.

Conclusion

Each leader has a different leadership style. However, leaders need to be willing to adapt to the new generation's way of working—in this case, Generation Z, because one day, they will become a leader and successors in a company.

Sometimes, leaders are not aware of the "blind spot" that exists in them. Leaders need to listen to the aspirations of their team members. When leaders are willing to listen to their team members, creating a positive working relationship in the workplace becomes possible.

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