

10 Tips for Hiring—and Retaining—Gen Z Employees

By Bruce Horovitz
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It wasn't the Beef 'n Cheddar sandwich or the Loaded Curly Fries or even the Jamocha Shake that persuaded Hannah Bartle to work for Arby's. It was the culture.

"You want to work for a place that not only has your back, but where they actually want you to thrive," said the 23-year-old who interned at Arby's for three months after graduating from Auburn University with a degree in public relations. Bartle was hired last year as a field marketing coordinator for Arby's, a division of Inspire Brands, the holding company that also owns the Buffalo Wild Wings, Sonic Drive-In, Jimmy John's, Rusty Taco, Dunkin' and Baskin-Robbins restaurant chains.

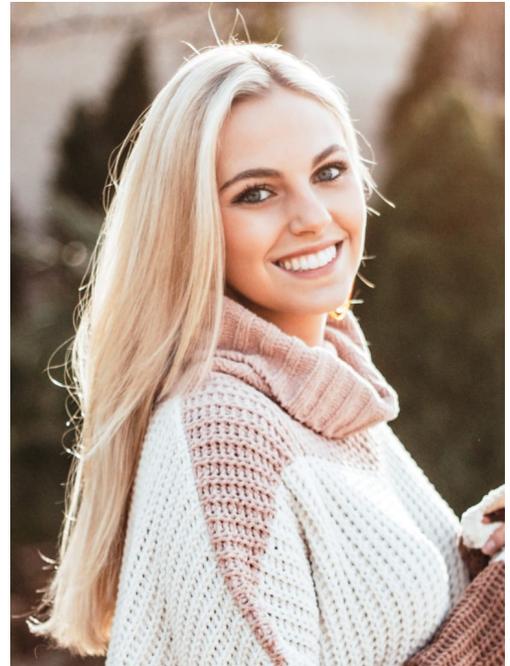
A company's culture isn't just what it says about itself—it's what it does. Bartle said she quickly learned about Arby's corporate culture when her job interviews included a slew of conversations with team members who not only asked in-depth questions, but also gave her time to ask as many as she wanted on whatever topics she thought important.

Many human resource professionals, recruiters and members of Generation Z say they are laser-focused on genuine growth opportunities and an upbeat work environment that fosters innovation. Developing insights into the company's individual brand can be critical for Generation Z employees.

So what exactly are the best ways to attract and retain members of this generation—workers age 23 and younger—at a time when COVID-19 restrictions can play havoc with a company's corporate environment and give potential employees limited insight into what a company is really like?

Here are 10 of the most compelling qualities that can help employers attract—and keep—Generation Z employees:

- 1. Flexibility.** Flexible work options are expected, said Lauren Smith, vice president of talent acquisition research at Gartner Inc. in Stamford, Conn. Since they are often more fluent in digital tools, Generation Z workers prefer to work from home or wherever is comfortable. "They want to work from whatever place fits into their lives," Smith said, which might be their bedroom, the workplace, a table at Starbucks or even a lounge chair at the beach.
- 2. Peer coaching.** Few efforts are more valued by Generation Z employees than peer coaching programs. It's more effective for a peer to encourage another peer, like they have through years of schooling, than for a supervisor to micromanage, Smith said.
- 3. Teamwork.** Feeling like part of a team is a Generation Z must—especially during the pandemic, said Bartle, who is working remotely from her home in suburban Atlanta. She "meets" virtually every week with her team and boss, which "makes me feel much less distant and more a part of something," she said.
- 4. Diversity.** Generation Z is the most diverse generation that has ever worked for any of the Inspire Brands restaurant chains, so it's incumbent upon each of the chains to demonstrate to potential Generation Z employees that each chain reflects that same diversity throughout the workforce, said Matt Thomas, director of talent acquisition for Inspire Brands in Atlanta. "We have to look, act, walk and even smell just like them," he says. "This generation is forcing that upon us in an appropriate way." Bartle agrees. "When you're looking at different companies, nothing comes into play more than the pride you feel in working for a company," she said. "It's super important to feel comfortable in your own workplace."
- 5. Work/life balance.** Working for a company that promotes a healthy work/life balance is critical, Bartle explained. On several occasions since she joined Arby's, her boss has given her time off for doctor's appointments and other emergencies that have arisen. Every week in group meetings, her boss reminds the crew to balance their work lives with their real lives. "A company has to understand that we're all human beings," Bartle said.



Hannah Bartle

6. **Development.** Most members of Generation Z cherish and deserve a clear set of development opportunities so they not only progress in their roles, but can develop new skills as well, Smith said. Employers need to develop an internal talent marketplace so employees can identify opportunities that interest them and test responsibilities outside of their current roles.

7. **Growth.** From day one, Generation Z demands absolute transparency about real opportunities for advancement. "They don't care so much about job titles, but instead what their opportunity is for growth," Thomas said. After all, their lives have been layered with serious insecurities, starting with the 9/11 terrorist attacks to the Great Recession to the current pandemic, he said, so they're searching for the security of career growth.

Bartle said the potential for advancement is the most important quality she looks for from her employer. "Bouncing from company to company is risky and stressful. The possibility of career advancement keeps me happy," she said.

8. **Social awareness.** Few things are more important to most members of Generation Z than a corporate commitment to social responsibility on both equity and environmental issues, Smith said. Particularly critical is not just what your organization and its CEO have said, but what they've done on these issues.

9. **Mentorships.** Mixing and matching different generations on the same team is one of the keys to attracting and retaining Generation Z workers at Inspire Brands, Thomas said. Some teams have members from four generations who meet to discuss their experiences and career goals.

10. **Job rotation.** Young workers especially enjoy the opportunity to rotate through several jobs during their first few years with a company. For example, an accountant at Inspire Brands might spend six months on franchise accounting, another six months on brand advertising accounting and perhaps six more months in corporate accounting, Thomas said. "This gives them the chance to identify what they like most and the path they want to pursue."



Matt Thomas

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