

Why are Gen Z and Millennials descending the corporate ladder?

For decades, a desire to climb the 'corporate ladder' has driven employees to work hard and fight for promotion. But it seems this tradition is being replaced. Driven by Gen Zs and Millennials, organisations are finding that some junior employees are actively deprioritising their career growth for a more desirable work/life balance and even 'descending the corporate ladder'.

Temps de lecture : minute

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TikTokker @aaronflarin explains in his [viral video](#) why he's trying to descend the corporate ladder: "I just think it's better for mental health". With 1.1M views and over 130K likes, it's clear this resonates with many others who think the same way.

But why is the younger workforce rejecting the idea that working hard is worth the reward? [Deloitte](#) reports that Gen Zs and Millennials are putting well-being ahead of skills development and promotion, with poor well-being a crucial factor - 8 out of 10 employees are at risk of burnout this year. The younger generation has had enough, and managers are scrambling to maintain engagement. However, all's not lost. While Gen Zs and Millennials may be reluctant to trade their well-being for career progression, they're also searching for purpose. And managers could be the ones to give it to them.

Why are Gen Z and Millennial staff difficult to

engage?

At some point, you will have encountered a manager who just can't grasp the *people* side of their role. This is because most managers are promoted for their technical performance, not because they're skilled leaders. In other words, they were great at the job their team is now doing, but they haven't a clue how to assist others to progress. And it's not their fault—how can anyone be expected to perform well as a manager when they haven't been trained?

Without having been taught how to manage effectively, managers tend to default to more of a directive 'command-and-control' approach. Relying on a weak notion of being 'in charge', managers spend their time firefighting problems, and micro-managing the workload of others, telling them what to do. However, whenever a manager steps in to 'fix' a problem, they deprive team members of a valuable learning opportunity. By not stimulating their thinking and allowing them to resolve the issue themselves, junior employees have little room to develop their own creative thinking and problem-solving skills, both crucial for career advancement and cultivating a sense of purpose at work.

This leaves many Gen Z and Millennial staff feeling marginalised as it denies them the workplace autonomy they crave. Left with a lack of hope and feeling devalued, employees can easily become disheartened and disconnected—*Deloitte says* 35% of Gen Zs and 28% of Millennials feel mentally distanced and cynical about their work.

In addition, new research shows that managers and leaders have a greater impact on *employees' mental health* than their spouses, doctors, or therapists. Yet managers still aren't being given the modern skills they urgently need to engage this newest cohort of the workforce. Ill-equipped to nurture a sense of purpose and growth, the long-standing elephant in the room is that poor management corrodes confidence and leads to

stress, overwhelm, and burnout.

To counteract this and give Gen Zs and Millennials the tools and confidence to contribute, progress, and ascend, we need to build an atmosphere of autonomy, purpose, and inclusion.

Adopting an enquiry-led approach to leadership

The 'command-and-control' method isn't working but could be easily replaced by a much more effective technique: the 'enquiry-led approach'. Cultivating a deeper sense of purpose, using an enquiry-led approach integrates more impactful questions into daily conversations with team members. It invites employees to share their own thinking, tapping directly into their experiences, insights and talents.

A well-intentioned question about a problem, asked purposefully to direct focus on what employees can change about the situation, helps to engage employees' problem-solving capabilities. It helps build confidence in decision-making skills and develop prioritisation skills, encouraging them to step up and take more responsibility. Powerful questions leave team members with a sense of ownership over their work and also indicate their manager's belief in their ability to resolve problems and manage day-to-day issues, which ultimately fosters deeper, more trusting connections.

We call this new management discipline Operational Coaching® because it operationalises coaching behaviours and brings coaching *into the flow of work* by making it something that managers do naturally, as a part of their everyday management style. Learning to develop an awareness of those *coachable moments* throughout the day and how to ask well-intentioned, powerful questions begins to change behaviour and invite others to contribute. Managers can quickly utilise purposeful enquiry to

stimulate their teams' development and continuous performance improvement.

For example, if an employee comes to a manager with a problem they're facing, they could ask Clarify questions like *"What's the crux of the issue?"* to bring focus to the situation. Explore questions like *"What would need to change?"* provide the basis for their ideation, while Shift Perspective questions like *"What advice would you give to a colleague in your situation?"* help them consider the problem from a different perspective, which can shed new light and stimulate new ideas. To generate confidence in taking action, Challenge Barriers questions like *"What is it that makes you think you can't do that?"* will assist them in overcoming something that may be preventing them from moving forward.

Achieving career growth by asking better questions

Feeling confident in decision-making doesn't happen overnight, but managers have the power to encourage team members to explore their ability to do so. Building this confidence within a team provides purpose while removing uncertainty, which is what leads to feeling overwhelmed and disengaged at work. When junior employees feel confident, they will desire progression, feel supported to ascend the ladder and take ownership of their career growth.

Learning to adopt an Operational Coaching® style of management not only benefits managers and their teams but also has a snowball effect across whole organisations. Insightful questions positively affect people's thinking and cultivate a culture of appreciation. Soon, leaders, managers and colleagues across the organisation will adopt the technique, asking better questions of themselves and others, leading to a workplace where people are motivated to develop, contribute, and engage.

And who wouldn't want to work in a coaching culture like that?

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