



## Top 10 Ways to Attract and Retain Early Career Talent

By Josh Feldman

These days, the word “millennial” is often used synonymously with early career professionals. Spoiler alert: Your 22-year-old staffer is not a millennial. In fact, they are part of the first wave of Generation Z to graduate college. There are 65 million people in this generation in the United States currently ages 3–22. It’s safe to assume that this generation will have a major impact on our workforce in the coming years. If your organization is likely to hire early career professionals in the next few years, you’ll need to create a great place for Generation Z to work.

Luckily this can be cost-effective, and in the end, worth every penny to generate the productive workplaces they need and want.

But how?

We’ve figured out an essential formula, which can be boiled down to 10 best practices:

1. Culture is key: Cultivate a culture where professionals are cared for and invested in. Early career talent thrives in cultures that are user focused, flat enough to let great ideas rise, and where a sense of shared mission exists.
2. Prioritize diversity and inclusion: Gen Z is the most diverse generation of Americans to date. Promoting and maintaining an inclusive and diverse culture is vital to innovation, collaboration and healthy organizational growth. Professionals want to know they are valued by their peers and organizational leaders. Create inclusive policy so that systems reinforce your goals.
3. People management is crucial: Talent does better work when supervised by effective “people managers.” Early career professionals especially need supervisors who can harness their creativity, manifest their ideas, provide space to prototype, and tolerate risk in projects. Get the basics right. Have weekly one-on-one meeting for at least 30 minutes; create clear measurable annual goals and conduct both six-month and yearly reviews.

4. Design jobs that meet the needs of an organization and the interests of young adults: What are the organizational needs? What fits into current areas of interest for young adults? And, most importantly, is the work meaningful? Make sure to consult young adults directly; they know what they are looking for, and it's crucial to include them in the conversation.
5. Culturally specific toolkits are indispensable: Draw from the rich history, leadership, culture and religion to provide staff with deep values-driven sources that they can implement directly in their work. Put emerging leaders in the driver's seats of their cultures. This not only grounds your work in tradition; it means the participants will have a sense of belonging. They will understand that they are part of something bigger.
6. Retreats work: Immersive, in-person trainings have a powerful impact in forming a community of practice for early career professionals.
7. Experiential education is powerful: With studies showing that lecture-style teaching has a low information absorption rate, training and teaching must be experienced. Include explorations, assignments and opportunities to try out best practices in the field. Webinars are only effective when you build on them by starting with in-person training and use curriculum designed to help participants apply what they've learned, and to reflect together as they experiment in their work.
8. Mentorship matters: Monthly one-on-one sessions with early career professionals leads to more effective, productive professionals that are happier in their work. See each professional as an expert in their own lives and support them in finding their own answers based on their needs. This helps learners develop strong "habits of mind."
9. Empowerment is essential: Participants thrive when professional mandates help create authentic leadership opportunities. Value and cultivate a peer-to-peer network. Beyond providing training, make sure to invest in ways that participants can learn from each other, learn to support each other, and grow from a room of strangers to lifelong connections.
10. Create organizational buy-in from the top: Leadership has to believe in early career talent, and they have to show it! Alexa Zappia, a first year Springboard fellow, shared, "I greatly appreciate the feeling that my voice is being heard and that my ideas matter. I believe this buy-in is what results in the success of our work." Early career pros don't expect to have the ultimate decision rights, but rather want to be of service

towards getting better results. Great leaders do this not only because the optics are right, but because they know it results in better strategy and higher impact.

This list applies to everyone, not just early career professionals. But if you want to attract and retain top talent, one of the best bets for gaining competitive advantage will remain on prioritizing early career talent. Become known as the best place for early career talent to work and the future will be bright for your organization.

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