

## Gen Z Frenzy

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Six-hundred fifty thousand. That's the number of skilled trades workers the construction industry needs to hire just to keep up with the current backlog. In the grand scheme of the American workforce, it may not sound like a lot, but when you consider the fact that not even 20% of Gen Zers - the newest generation in the workforce - say they would even entertain the idea of a career in the trades, it suddenly becomes quite daunting. In an industry historically slow to adopt the latest technology, how can contractors entice the tech-savvy "zoomer" generation into careers in construction?

In an exclusive interview, Construction Executive talks to Casey Welch, CEO of end-to-end workforce development company Tallo, who sheds light on what Gen Z wants in a career, how and where to reach the incoming workforce, and what proactive steps construction companies can take today to secure the skilled workforce they'll need to complete tomorrow's projects.

### **WHAT FACTORS HAVE LED GEN Z TO SHOW A DISINTEREST IN PURSUING A CAREER IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY?**

Well, first off, this is not a new problem for employers in the construction industry. Talent shortage in this industry has been around for decades, along with the pressure to find younger talent to fill vacant opportunities left by more experienced workers. In a survey conducted earlier this year, we found that in a ranking of 22 industries, construction placed close to dead last, attracting the interest of only 16.7% of more than 29,000 Gen Z high-school and college respondents.

When we start to talk about why that is, there are really a number of factors, ranging from industry perceptions to



inadequate skills. Many students may feel they don't meet the stereotypical characteristics for a career in construction, much less the criteria for the physically demanding skills required in the construction field.

### **WHAT SKILLS, TRAITS, OR INTERESTS MAKE GEN Z GOOD CANDIDATES FOR CAREERS IN CONSTRUCTION?**

A lot of students today have little to no experience working with their hands. As schools shift their focus to training students on the latest and greatest tech, construction employers should look to how other industries dealing with similar shortages have changed their recruiting strategies to focus more on technology.

Take the trucking industry, for example. Tallo's recent collaboration with the trucking industry focused on implementing gamification into recruiting applications by highlighting immersive technologies, such as virtual reality, that can give prospective candidates a better idea of the

work they would need to perform. Gen Z isn't known as the digital generation for nothing. These are exactly the sorts of opportunities they're seeking, and they, in turn, can offer contractors exactly the sort of skillset needed as they implement technological solutions to increase efficiency and productivity and make the most of a shrinking skilled-trades labor pool.

### **WHAT ARE SOME WAYS EMPLOYERS IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY CAN GARNER MORE GEN Z APPLICANTS?**

In order to overcome industry challenges brought on by the talent shortage, construction employers really need to appeal to potential workers earlier in their lives - we're talking before high-school graduation. In the aforementioned survey, it was also found that 70% of Gen Z decides on their future employer in high school or early college, while 74% indicate they would be more inclined to work for an employer if they connected with them prior to looking for a job.

In order to get Gen Z interested in construction, employers have to get to them early and get to them often. The earlier students can see the benefits of the career, the more inclined they'll be to commit to it.

### **WHEN AND WHERE SHOULD EMPLOYERS PROMOTE THESE POSITIONS?**

Employers need to consider new ways to meet students where they spend the bulk of their time. And while online platforms, such as social media, may be the first place that comes to mind, we found that students remain divided on the idea of employers reaching out to them through their social media accounts, with 54% of respondents saying they would be comfortable with it and about 34% saying it would make them uncomfortable. With this in mind, employers need to look into other online platforms that are geared toward career connection to reach today's students.

### **WHAT SORTS OF BENEFITS ARE GEN ZERS LOOKING FOR THAT COMPANIES SHOULD TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION, BEYOND TRADITIONAL HEALTH CARE, RETIREMENT AND PTO?**

Seventy-nine percent of Gen Z says they value making a difference in the world over making money. In addition, when Gen Z was asked what was most important in keeping them at a job, financial stability was number one, followed by company mission/purpose, and career advancement.

When it comes to remote work, which is a challenge for many skilled-trade industries, Gen Z talent is surprisingly open - in fact, they prefer a hybrid model. When polled, 37% of young talent said that they preferred to work 50% of the time in an office and 50% of the time remotely - the highest share for any of the options offered. What's more, choosing an employer based on geographic location is back on the rise.

Another survey revealed that 42% of Gen Zers find location very important when considering a job, compared to 39% in mid-pandemic 2020, and 51% in 2019. For this next generation taking the workforce by storm, they've made it clear that making a personal connection to their jobs is key. And this desire for fulfillment has significantly increased for the majority of Gen Zers during the turbulence of the past year.


Sixty-nine percent of Gen Z respondents said it has become more important in the past year to find a job that is personally fulfilling, and the majority of Gen Zers say it's important for them to work in a diverse and inclusive environment. Focusing on those efforts may help employers stand out to a Gen Z audience. Survey respondents reported that women in leadership; diversity and inclusion training and discussions; and people of color holding leadership positions are the top three DEI initiatives they're looking for in a future workplace.

### **HOW CAN CONTRACTORS USE TECHNOLOGY WHEN RECRUITING GEN Z?**

The most important thing to remember in any attempt for successful recruiting is to connect early and connect often. How do you do that? Well, first you have to meet students and young professionals where they are: online.

Where early talent really leverages social media and technology is when checking out a prospective career field and determining whether or not it is a good fit. So, it's in the best interest of contractors to use technology in the recruiting process to give early talent a look inside the industry in a way that highlights all its benefits and upsides.

### **WHAT'S THE NUMBER-ONE PROACTIVE STEP CONTRACTORS CAN TAKE TODAY TO FILL THE SKILLED-LABOR GAP WITH INDIVIDUALS FROM THIS NEW GENERATION OF WORKERS?**

I may sound like a broken record here, but the number-one thing that contractors can do is to reach out early. Construction companies should make it a priority to appeal to potential workers and get them skilled well before they graduate from high school. 



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### About the Author

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Maggie Murphy is the managing editor for Construction Executive. Maggie handles Construction Executive's production, scheduling, and digital assets, including the website, digital edition, and social media, in addition to editing the print content and writing feature articles, industry new briefs, and a variety of topical columns. She's a native Marylander and a graduate of Salisbury University, with a background working on the marketing team for a large general contractor.

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### About the Article

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