

Attracting the 'woke' workforce, Generation Z

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A 'woke' business attracts a 'woke workforce'-So how 'woke' are you?

In contemporary pop culture, being 'woke' is defined as "having an active awareness of systemic injustices and prejudices", particularly in relation to the treatment of minorities. Today Gen Z are thought to be the 'woke' generation, they go against the grain, defy conventional norms, voice their opinions, and demand systemic change.

Gen Z is on way to being the largest growing demographic, and their role in the economy is going to be crucial for the generations to come.

So, what are you doing to attract the socially 'woke' generation?

Are you employing the leaders of the future?

Who are Gen Z?

Generation Z, commonly referred to as Gen Z, are individuals born between 1997 and 2012, aged 11 to 26 years. They are often described as the 'digital natives' reshaping our world.

They are younger than Millennials, who were born between 1981 and 1996, aged 27 to 42 years. Due to the significant technological advancements of their time like, internet without a cable, flat screen TVs, and iPhones, coupled with the rise of social media, Gen Z have grown up with information at their fingertips, in the form of a device.

Gen Z watch the harsh reality of the world play out on screens. Not only are Gen Z exposed to the harsh reality of the past, but the reality of the present. Today you only need to open Instagram or Tiktok to see a timeline of live-streamed genocidal bombings, burnt down forests and flooded islands. What may have been ignorant bliss for generations of the past are flooding the news feeds of Gen Z in real time.

Constant exposure to everyday issues fuels a longing to change the world. This is the case for Gen Z, this serves as the catalyst for the aspiration to forge a world different from that of those who came before.

The 'Woke' Workforce

Deloitte's Gen Z and Millennial Survey connected with 14,483 Gen Zs across 44 countries, highlighting the challenges and concerns these generations have for their futures when it comes to working in a world crippled with rising inflation, inequalities, and natural disasters.

It seems that Gen Z are simply a generation responding to the social and environmental problems of their time. Although we live in a society where 'money makes the world go round', Gen Z are looking for that **purpose and value beyond just money**.

According to the survey, three priorities emerged among Gen Z:

1. How much positive impact an organisation has on society,
2. How organisations address the ever-evolving issue of climate change,
3. Gen Z are only willing to work with organisations that align with these values.

The stats show that:

- 44% of Gen Z's have turned down work due to ethical concerns, and 39% have turned down job offers due to them not aligning with their values.
- 7 in 10 said they are actively trying to minimise their impact on the environment.
- They rank business leaders as the third most influential group, following politicians, and social justice and sustainability advocates, in addressing these issues.

What does this look like in Aotearoa New Zealand

Looking in our own backyard, the same story is being told, and the same conversation arises among the younger generations like Gen Z and even Gen Alpha (those born after Gen Z, between 2010-2024). The same 'woke' conversations are being had around pioneering for systemic change and addressing inequities and inequalities. In addition, here in Aotearoa New Zealand, Gen Z are also gunning for the recognition and embracement of all that encompasses Te Ao Māori. To put it simply the adherence of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

As the Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa, Māori should be a majority, yet we are not, Te Reo Māori should be steadfast, yet it is not.

Gen Z in Aotearoa are pushing for the same values and actional change as those around the world. Now that the new-age Kura Kaupapa kids are making moves, we are seeing that push now more than ever. These young Māori are endeavouring for an inclusive New Zealand economy, where Māori are **no longer on the backburner** and are **no longer in the pits of deprivation** that colonisation put them in.

In Aotearoa, Gen Z are looking for organisations whose values strive for the betterment of **ALL** in the economy. A social conscious that **transcends the sole pursuit of profit for profit's sake** and generates positive social impacts. This includes the revitalisation of Te Reo Māori, the return of Māori land, and the preservation of Māori taonga (treasures) in our taiao (environment).

The solution is clear, to attract the workforce of Gen Z's, organisations need to be socially responsible. Cruciality lies in making clear and tangible impacts on society; rewriting inequalities, lifting the marginalised, and making clear strides in saving the planet.

"I'm here for a future that sees people, culture, and land prosper. A commitment to systemic change without a clear roadmap is a future without progress." - Mauriora Kaihau

So, what can your organisation do to ensure your social responsibility is on the Gen Z radar?

Attracting the workforce

For large organisations, there is unique potential to contribute more significantly to the betterment of society. To ensure your organisation's social responsibility is on the Gen Z radar, here are a few things worth considering:

1. **Communicate Values:** Clearly articulate and communicate your organisation's values, especially those related to social and environmental responsibility.
2. **Demonstrate Impact:** Demonstrate examples of the positive impact your organisation is making in society; this could be through community and/or sustainability efforts.
3. **Champion Diversity:** Create diversity across your organisation, this could be through leadership, workforce, and/or supply chain.
4. **Transparency:** Be transparent about your business practices, including ethical sourcing, fair labour practices, and environmental sustainability.
5. **Engage in Social Issues:** Actively participate in and support social justice and sustainability causes. Demonstrate your commitment to making a positive difference.
6. **Provide Opportunities for Involvement:** Create opportunities for Gen Z employees to actively participate in social responsibility initiatives, allowing them to contribute to meaningful change.

By aligning with these principles and promoting diversity and inclusion organisation-wide the commitment to social responsibility will be showcased. Although while showcasing is important, **tangible action is crucial**. It's essential to practice what you preach as Gen Z will easily discern and identify any attempts at woke-washing or greenwashing.

To cultivate an inclusive, equitable, and socially responsible organisational culture, organisations should; address the gender and ethnic pay gap, address racial and sexual harassment in the workplace, lower their carbon footprint, and create diversity champions across leadership. Within Aotearoa New Zealand the same practices should be applied, but with a solid focus on acknowledging and embracing the use of Te Reo Māori and embedding and upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a guiding principle.

It's time for organisations to help level the playing field, not just for the socially woke Gen Z but for the minorities, the under-represented, the poor.

Conclusion

An organisation is more than just the sum of its parts; it encompasses the people, the culture, the attitudes, and the passion it is grounded in.

To attract Gen Z, employers need to adapt to the speed of the modern world, or risk falling behind in the ever-evolving landscape of change. This generation is characterised by a strong social and environmental consciousness, a certain type of 'wokeness' and to appeal to them, one must be ready to adapt. The demand for social and environmental responsibility from Gen Z is reshaping the business landscape, and companies that don't adjust are likely to miss out on the value of this demographic.

Observing the world today, it's evident that things are moving at an unprecedented pace. Technology, the rise of AI, and the challenges in our societies, including war, live-streamed genocides, and increasing natural disasters- these all demand a response. Rebalancing social justice is imperative for any hope of a sustainable future. So, get on top of your social responsibility, implement progressive actions, and play your part in building a country where people are truly living rather than merely existing.

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