

# The Gen Z guide to getting ahead at work

The evolving world of work can make it hard for young professionals in their first jobs. Here are expert tips to help you succeed.



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By [Danielle Abril](#)

August 26, 2024 at 7:00 a.m. EDT

The rules of getting ahead at work have become more complex, and that may be especially daunting for people just starting their careers.

Young professionals may need to build relationships with their supervisors and colleagues over Zoom and Slack. They might debate

whether to use artificial intelligence for certain tasks. And they might have to fight the urge to message someone over meeting in person.

The evolving world of work since the pandemic has changed how people operate, with some doing their jobs in hybrid and remote environments, having access to AI and relying on videoconferencing and instant messaging. Gen Z, those born between 1997 and 2012, is expected to make up more than 32 percent of the workforce by 2032, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, with the latest group of grads entering the workforce now. Many of them missed out on in-person opportunities, including internships. As they enter the workforce, there are some things they can do to improve their chances of success.

Here are expert tips for young professionals.

## **Don't be afraid to ask questions**

During your first days, ask where to find sources of information, what communication tools the company uses, how to get face time with colleagues and supervisors, and where to go if you have a problem. There may be an online employee resource that can help.

“You may be uncomfortable, but people won't know you have a question if you don't ask,” said Paaras Parker, chief human resource officer at Paycor, which provides HR and payroll software.

Traci Wilk, chief people officer at educational childcare company The Learning Experience, who has more than 25 years in HR at companies including Starbucks and Coach, said Gen Z often struggles with the fear

of looking like they don't know something that they should. Ask regardless, and request and be open to feedback, she said. It's also okay to ask contextual questions to get the bigger picture of your assignment.

Matt Abrahams, who teaches strategic communication at Stanford Graduate School of Business, said it's fair to ask about what makes people successful at your company.

"You have a reason for asking questions that seem simple. Lean into that," he said.

## **Be thoughtful about AI**

When it comes to AI, first find out whether your employer has policies for it. Some companies may allow its use, with stipulations like not providing it customer information, while others may outright ban it.

But view AI as a tool to assist you with your work, not one to do your work, experts said. Janine Pelosi, CEO of video tech company Neat and former executive at Zoom, said AI could help with brainstorming if you draw completely blank. But, never copy and paste results, even for emails.

"I can tell when someone drafts a communication, and it's written by ChatGPT," Wilk said. "That's not something I want to see."

Use your gut on how much to trust its output, Paaras said. Also consider the ramifications for using it for a specific task, Abrahams said. Just

because you're comfortable using AI doesn't mean others are, so be prepared to do things differently, Abrahams said.

## **Share your thoughts**

As a young person entering the workplace with new ideas and fresh eyes and perspectives, you have unique value, experts said. Don't be shy to share your thoughts. You might know something others don't.

That could look like sharing tools or shortcuts you know within apps, ideas or stories about how you've solved problems in the past, Paaras said.

You might have valuable experience related to a particular topic or insight into how other people your age see things. Or you might be able to spot the inefficiency or error of how things are regularly done.

"You're seeing things for the first time, and you can highlight that," Abrahams said. "Focus on the value you bring."

## **Get to know people**

Set time aside for chatting, by video or in person, with your colleagues and supervisor. Building good relationships can help foster people's trust and willingness to collaborate with you. It also could be a differentiator in your career advancement.

"Your presence needs to be felt by others," Wilk said.

Seek out one-on-one meetings and casual conversations. Be ready with thoughts, questions and goals for the conversation, Wilk said. When in doubt, remember people love to talk about themselves, she added. Ask them about their career or experience on the job.

Get a sense of what someone's working on, what's important to them or check out their LinkedIn profile, Abrahams said. Connect your experience and interests to them. If you hear a colleague is going on a trip, follow up and ask how it went.

"You have to invest in people, whether it's over Zoom or in the office," Paaras said.

But pay attention to context, Abrahams said, as Gen Z has a habit of instantly responding without reflection. Take a beat before responding.

## **Go the extra mile**

Regardless of where you work, make yourself indispensable and unforgettable, Wilk said.

Turn on your camera in virtual meetings to make a better connection, Pelosi said. And don't be a ghost; speak up, especially if you're remote, she added.

"Do the things that help you stand out," she said.

If you don't know what to say in a meeting, ask a question or paraphrase your understanding of what's been said, Abrahams said. Take notes and do some follow-ups.

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Take the extra assignment, do the extra travel, volunteer for the culture team, Pelosi said. People want to know you have confidence and self-motivation. It's especially helpful if you get involved in groups or projects that are cross-functional to get more visibility. Look for the gaps that need to be filled. This will help you gain social capital across the company.

That also means learning how to manage your time so you can do your best work. Leave time for the creative parts of your job.

Consider sending emails after a video call, summarizing the discussion and expressing enthusiasm to connect again, Wilk said. When it comes to bosses, try to connect every day, even if it's a casual conversation welcoming them back from vacation and updating them on what you've been working on. Be proactive. Offer to help with big projects, vs. waiting to be asked.

"It's easy when you work remotely to stay out of sight," Wilk said. "Find ways to stay within sight."

Show up on time, dress appropriately and when virtual, keep a clean background, have good lighting and check your sound quality, Abrahams said. Consider starting your introduction with what you're passionate about before your name so people remember you, he said.

# Tap TikTok

For common issues, there's always an answer just a tap away.

Friends, family and friends of friends have life experience that may help you. If you're uncomfortable asking at work, ask people in your circle, Wilk said. A simple direct message on social media or a group text message or FaceTime might help.

If all else fails, do what you do best. Tap the internet. Google articles or turn to TikTok, where creators can guide you through things like asking for a raise or having a difficult conversation, Wilk said. For generic questions, AI might even offer some good suggestions, Paaras said, advising people use common sense when reviewing its advice.