



The Gen Z Gap: Part 1

What Young People Really Want from Insight Days & Work Experience

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What Young People Really Want from Insight Days & Work Experience

The gap between what young people want, what they know and what they expect from work is widening.

The first piece in our series looks at how Insight Days and Work Experience programmes can give Gen Z what they're really asking for – real experience, genuine advice and a sense of belonging before they even step into the professional world.

So, what do Gen Z actually want to see? Let's break it down.

Work Experience – ‘Does it do what it says on the tin?’

Gen Z want actual work experience; it's in the name! Lately, the term Work Experience has become simplified to mean a few days, virtually or in-person at an office; it's losing its substance. However, the truth still stands: young people don't feel ready for work; only 23% of young people report having any confidence in their professional skills (ISE, 2024).

There's an appetite and demand from Gen Z!

95% of young people see work experience as essential for their future careers because it builds both confidence and readiness (ISE, 2024). For Gen Z, it's not just about learning and growing in the moment. It's also about having something tangible to show on their CV that proves they're ready for the next step.

This is where Insight Days and Work Experience programmes can make a real difference.

When done well, these programmes help students feel prepared to step into the workforce. Young people want to be involved, contribute and gain hands-on experience. Put simply, they want the experience!

Bringing to life career insights

As a business, don't approach career insight opportunities thinking about how you're going to 'work around students'; think about how you're going to 'work with them':

- Integrate students into live projects.
- Give them an idea of what your everyday life looks like and let them contribute in meaningful ways.
- To consolidate this experience, add a session helping students embed their experience with you into their CVs.

This leaves students feeling more skilled and confident, but also equipped to show it.

Discovering their place in the workforce

For today's emerging talent, Insight Days and Work Experience are about more than skills.

They're a chance to figure out who they are, both professionally and personally.

By gaining experience at your company, students learn life skills such as:

- How they collaborate with others
- How they approach challenges
- How they fit into a team

It's not just about the big moments. It's also about the small discoveries: how they feel on their commute, what they like to wear to work, what time they prefer to take lunch, or how they wind down after a busy day.

These everyday choices, once fixed by school timetables, are now theirs to navigate. Your organisation can play a key role in helping students explore their strengths, preferences, habits and rhythms. That's a special role to play, embrace it!

How can your organisation bring this to life

Give students space to figure it out. No one steps into the workplace knowing exactly who they are or how they work best. Instead of setting expectations, create an environment where they can explore, experiment and grow.

Patience and support are essential in helping today's emerging talent develop.

Guidance that goes beyond TikTok

From our impact data at The Ladder Group, we're seeing that Gen Z are constantly searching for career advice.

They've gained hands-on experience, added it to their CV and discovered more about themselves. The next question is simple: what's next?

70% of Gen Z have turned to TikTok for career advice and nearly half say it's influenced their choice of profession (EduBirdie, 2023). This shows how hungry they are for clear, practical guidance but it also highlights a gap.

How can your organisation bring this to life?

- Show young people the opportunities within your organisation.
- Signpost clear career pathways.
- Highlight your progression routes.
- Share insider tips on what employers like you are really looking for.

By spending time here, you can shape the workforce of tomorrow and possibly even inspire students to build their career with you.

Building a two way network

Like previous generations, Gen Z value strong working relationships. But when you're new to the workforce, networking can feel intimidating. Despite that, it's one of the most important skills to develop early and keep honing throughout your career.

By weaving networking opportunities into Insight Days and Work Experience, you give students the chance to start building their professional network. These connections can last for years. A single conversation at a networking lunch could spark the connection that shapes their career.

Most of all, students are thrilled just to be there. With applications growing each year, they know being selected is a privilege. Simply stepping into the workplace, seeing it in action and meeting professionals in their element is invaluable. They want to hear real career stories and see what thriving in their dream role might look like.

How can your organisation bring this to life?

Host a networking session. It could be as simple as a lunch or as structured as an all day event. Give students the chance to meet people from across your organisation, ask questions and hear career journeys.

This builds their confidence, grows their network and gives them authentic exposure to the workplace.

Cultivating a culture of belonging

For Gen Z, belonging is about more than inclusion. It's about believing they have a real future in the workplace, that their dream careers are tangible, not abstract. They want to be able to picture themselves thriving in a role, whatever that looks like.

Beyond the skills gained, the CV updates and the networking opportunities, students want to leave feeling they belong.

"If [Gen Z] can see a young person enjoying a role and progressing in it, they are more likely to be inspired by the role and trust they can flourish with that employer or within that sector" (Mediorite, 2024).

How can your organisation bring this to life

Show students who work at your organisation. By making a conscious effort to ensure the people they interact with during their time with you are diverse, you allow students to see their future selves at your organisation. To supplement this, emphasising and encouraging curiosity will enable participants to feel safe and give them a space to discover what belonging looks like for them.

Conclusion

Gen Z are clear about what they want from Insight Days and Work Experience: real experience, space for discovery, actionable advice, the chance to build networks and a sense of belonging. The question is are you giving it to them?

Partner with The Ladder Group to design programmes that do more than tick a box. Together, we can bridge the gap between potential and opportunity and help the next generation step confidently into the world of work.

References

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