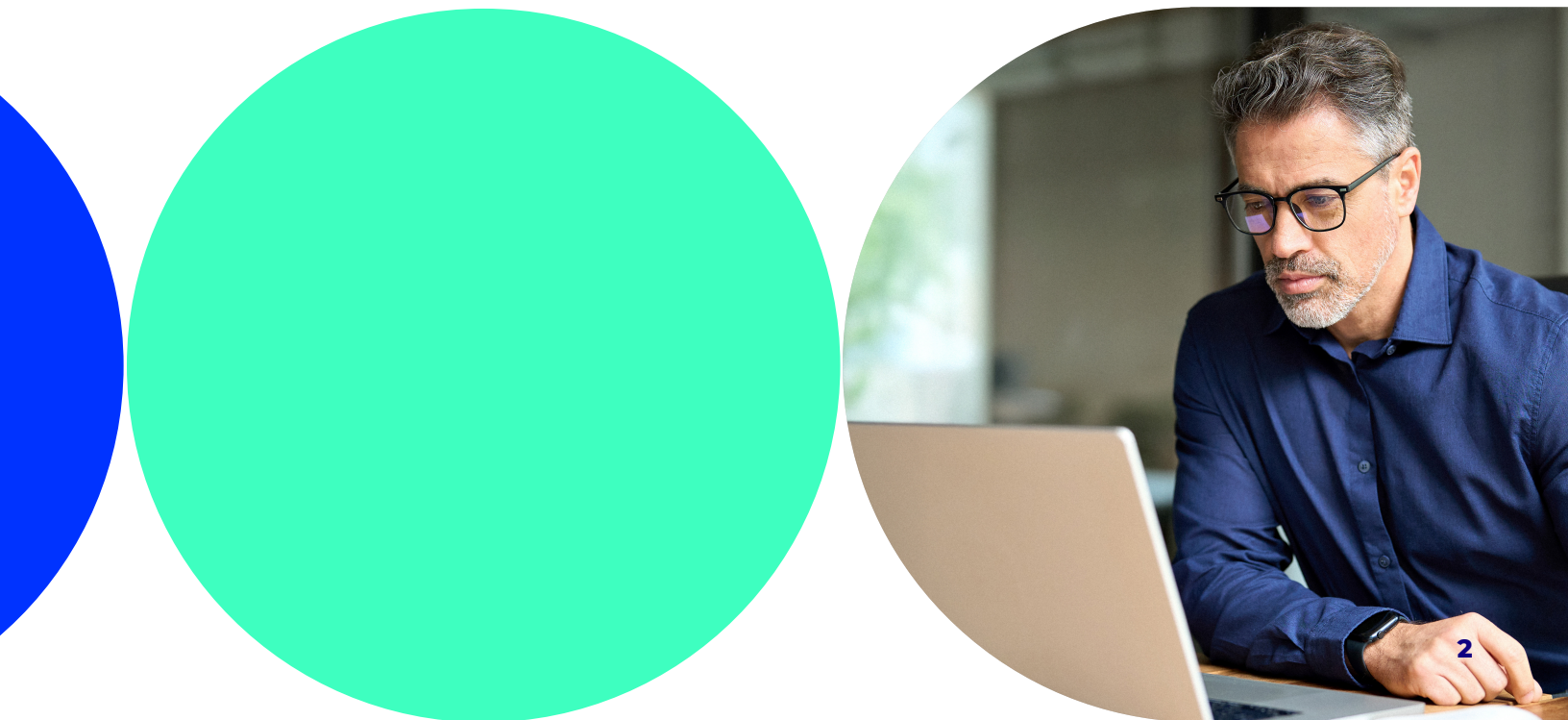


The overlooked workforce advantage: Unlocking health, purpose, and performance among Gen X employees



Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	3
CONFIDENT BUT COMPLACENT: GEN X'S WELLNESS PARADOX	4
DEDICATED BUT DISENGAGED: GEN X'S WORKPLACE PARADOX	7
ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS	13
BEHIND THE FINDINGS: REFERENCES AND METHODOLOGY	16



Introduction

In conversations about the future of work, one generation is often overlooked despite playing a steady and essential role in keeping today's workforce running. While younger generations like millennials and Generation Z receive significant employer attention and accelerated leadership opportunities, Generation X – those born between 1965 and 1980 and representing nearly [a third of the US workforce \(31%\)](#) – is often passed over, which creates a blind spot at the very moment organizations need experienced leaders most. As [baby boomer retirements accelerate](#),¹ organizations face a critical inflection point. They must better recognize and leverage the generation best-positioned to connect institutional knowledge and future innovation.

As Generation X shoulders leadership responsibilities and maintaining organizational continuity at work and caregiving demands at home, signs of strain are becoming more apparent. That was a key finding in The Cigna Group's 2025 Vitality in America research, which found that Gen X workers are dependable, present, and less likely to leave their jobs, yet many report feeling underwhelmed and underrecognized.

When employees feel disengaged, even those who remain committed and reliable may experience decreased motivation and productivity, which can ultimately impact overall workplace effectiveness and drive up costs for companies – according to [Gallup reports](#),² lost productivity amounted to \$10 trillion globally in 2025.



“This report highlights where Generation X is today, the pressures they’re navigating, and the immense value they continue to bring to the workplace. Employers have a meaningful opportunity to reengage this generation and fully harness the experience, dependability, and purpose they bring to their work.”

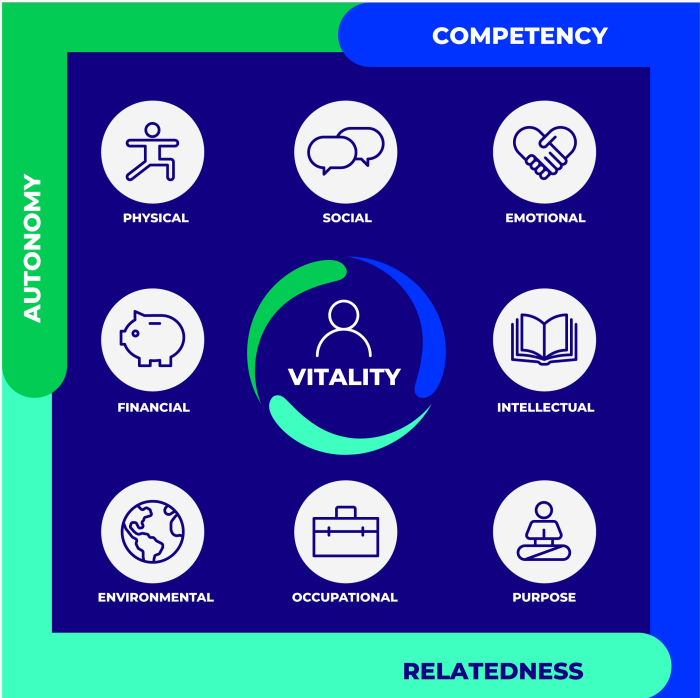
Stacie Lukasiak, vice president, U.S. employer medical solutions
Cigna Healthcare

Confident but complacent: Gen X's wellness paradox

Healthy employees are a critical component of any organization. Our research consistently shows that workforce vitality directly influences productivity, engagement, and job satisfaction.

According to the study, Gen X workers are struggling with personal wellness, reporting the lowest average EVI score of any generation, at 66.8 out of 100.

AVERAGE VITALITY SCORE BY GENERATION



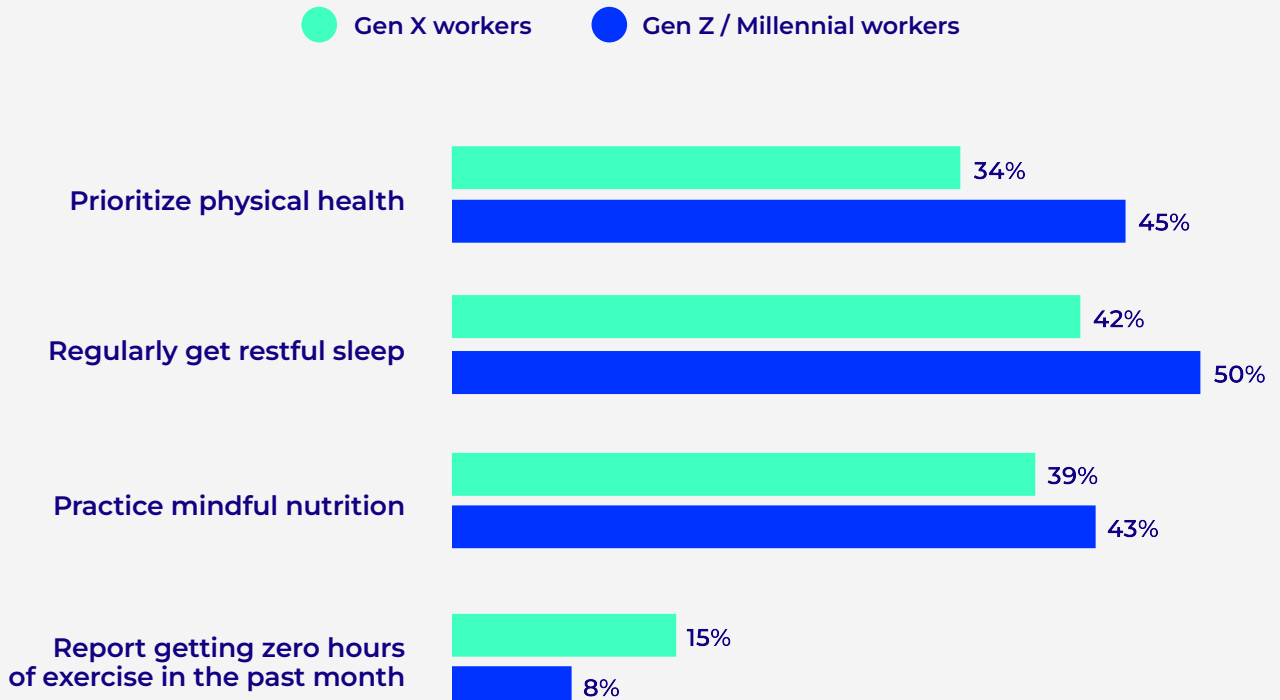
The Evernorth Vitality Index (EVI) measures an individual's perception of their capabilities across eight dimensions of health.

Gen X workers also report lower optimism than their peers and feel less physically healthy, a primary contributor to their overall vitality. Now in their mid-40s to late 50s, three-quarters of the Gen X workforce report having at least one chronic health condition. More than one-third (37%) have high blood pressure, three in ten (30%) have high cholesterol, and many others live with conditions such as musculoskeletal (MSK) disorders, diabetes or pre-diabetes, digestive issues, and arthritis – conditions that are [costly to manage](#)³ and can meaningfully affect daily life.

Despite these challenges, Gen X workers express strong confidence in their ability to manage their health. They believe, at rates similar to other workers, that they have the skills and tools necessary to lead a healthy life (48% vs. 49%), and they feel more confident than younger generations in managing existing conditions (52% vs. 45% of millennials and 40% of Gen Z).

That confidence, however, does not consistently translate into action. Gen X workers are significantly less likely than younger workers to prioritize their own physical health, often falling behind on maintaining healthy habits and preventive care.


GEN X ARE LESS LIKELY TO PRIORITIZE THEIR HEALTH COMPARED TO YOUNGER WORKERS



Preventive care trends reinforce this pattern:

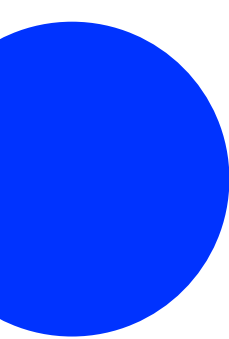
- Just over half (52%) of employed Gen X women have had a mammogram in the past year.
- Only 64% of Gen X workers have had a colon cancer screening in the past 10 years.
- Only 58% of Gen X workers have had a dental cleaning in the past year.

This disconnect reflects the well-documented [intention-behavior gap](#)⁴ – the challenge of turning healthy intentions into sustained action. For Gen X workers, competing job and family demands often leave little time or energy to prioritize personal health.



“I don’t feel like I have enough time, between working to support my family and having other commitments, to help my child and show up for my friends and family. I don’t have enough time to prepare the meals that I think would help me be healthier or be physically active in ways that would help me maintain or achieve health goals.”

Female, 47, Oregon



“My commitment to work, the long hours, the exhaustion of working fourteen hour days and weekends ... I had the best of intentions, but it was much easier to stay on the computer and DoorDash meals and not exercise.”

Male, 46, California

Over time, consistently deprioritizing health increases the risk of new or worsening conditions, higher medical costs, and reduced productivity due to absenteeism, presenteeism, and burnout.

Employers can play a powerful role in encouraging Gen X employees to prioritize their health. For a generation accustomed to putting work and family first, encouragement from the workplace can make self-care feel acceptable, worthwhile, and attainable. By offering wellness incentives, fitness challenges, and other supports such as meal subscription services or digital health tools, employers can reduce barriers to healthy choices and reinforce that employee well-being is a business priority.

Dedicated but disengaged: Gen X's workplace paradox

Once labeled the “[slacker generation](#),”⁵ Gen X workers have long since disproved that reputation. Research shows they are highly dedicated and dependable. They are capable, mentally present on the job, and loyal to employers who treat them well.

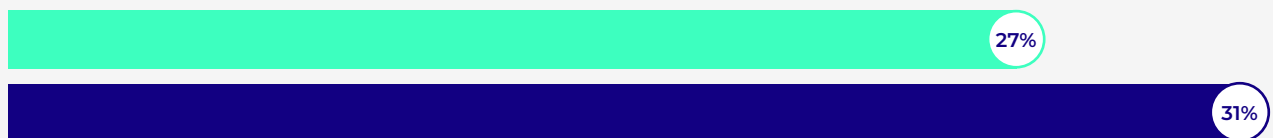
With decades of experience, Gen X employees approach their work with confidence and a strong sense of responsibility. Three-quarters (75%) say they feel confident in their ability to do their jobs well, compared with 66% of younger workers. They are also just as motivated as their younger colleagues, with 68% willing to work harder than necessary to help their workplace succeed.

Gen X workers tend to be more physically and mentally present on the job as well. They report fewer unplanned absences and are less likely to be mentally disengaged while working. This consistency benefits employers, as both absenteeism and presenteeism carry significant [cost implications](#).⁶

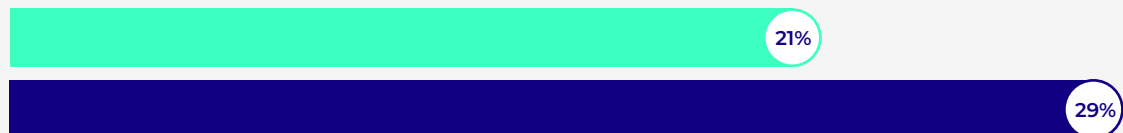
GEN X WORKERS ARE MORE PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY PRESENT ON THE JOB

● Gen X workers ● Gen Z / Millennial workers

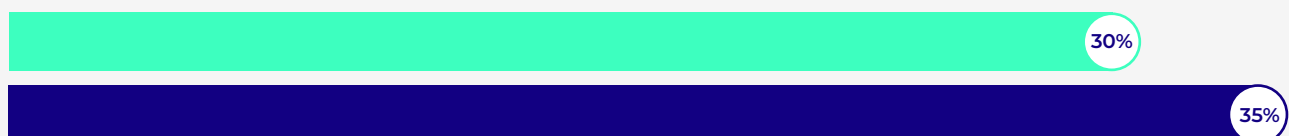
Missed 1+ days of work in past month because of physical/mental health



Missed 1+ days of work in past month to care for family/friend



Have felt mentally somewhere else while at work

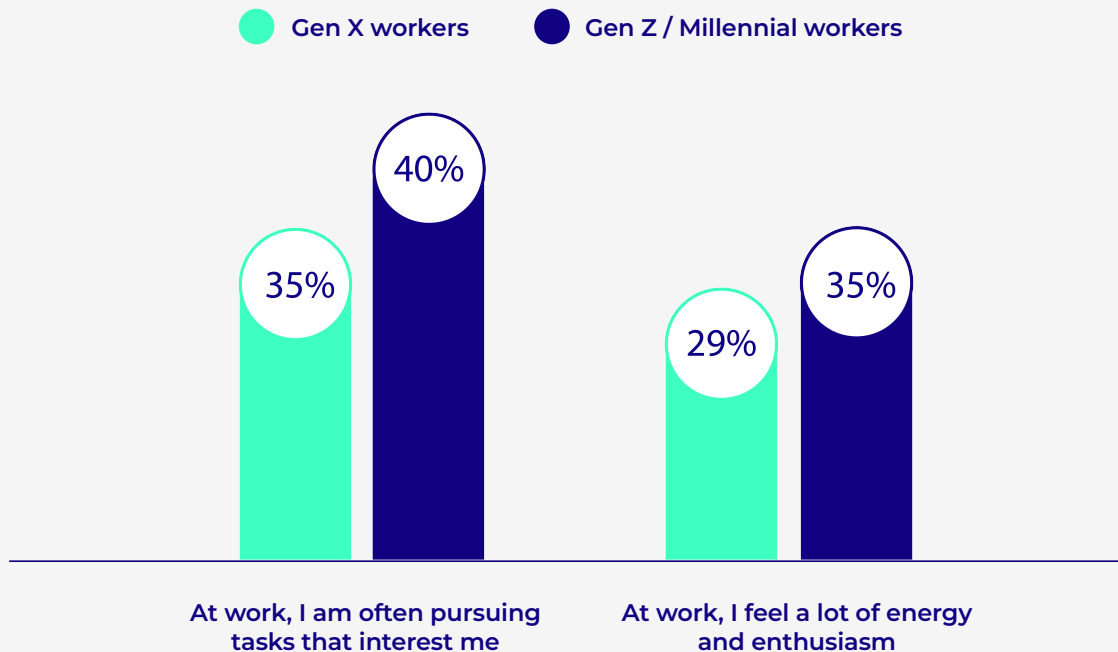


DEDICATED BUT DISENGAGED: GEN X'S WORKPLACE PARADOX

In addition to being capable and reliable, Gen X workers are also loyal. Only 23% say they plan to look for a new job in the near future, compared with 33% of millennials and 47% of Gen Z.

Despite their dedication and capability, many Gen X employees feel underwhelmed at work. Only 29% report feeling high levels of energy or enthusiasm on the job, and just 35% say they are often pursuing interesting tasks. This is less a complaint than a signal – an indication that something meaningful may be missing. This reflects a workplace paradox: even highly capable, reliable employees can become disengaged when their contributions feel invisible or underused.

GEN X EMPLOYEES FEEL UNDERWHELMED AT WORK



These feelings of disengagement aren't just about personal fulfillment – they affect the bottom line. When Gen X employees aren't feeling engaged in their work, they're twice as likely to think about leaving and more likely to mentally check out during the day. In fact, Gen X workers who don't get to pursue engaging tasks are three times more likely to be distracted at work and twice as likely to underperform. This presenteeism adds up: [Gallup reports](#)⁷ lost productivity cost the global economy \$10 trillion in 2025. Addressing this gap isn't just good for morale, it's good for business.

FEELING ENGAGED IN WORK HAS A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON GEN X WORKER PRODUCTIVITY

● Pursuing interesting tasks at work ● Not pursuing interesting tasks at work

Have felt mentally somewhere else at work



Missed 1+ days of work in the past month because of physical/mental health



Very likely/likely to find a new job



Unable to perform at optimal level



For Gen X employees, fulfillment at work is closely tied to feeling useful and valued. Qualitative research shows that they feel most engaged when they can positively impact others, whether by helping, teaching, or contributing in ways that matter personally or socially. When work feels transactional, undervalued, or misaligned with their strengths, that sense of purpose erodes. This is especially true when autonomy is reduced, recognition is absent, or relevant decisions are made without their input.

When work feels meaningful:



“The moments that feel most meaningful to me are the ones helping directly solve a problem and improving the workday of others. If I make someone’s job easier or if the result of my daily tasks deliver smooth results – that’s what makes me go home happy and fulfilled.”

Female, 49, New Jersey



“I was trusted to put together the majority of insights and presentation items for potential investors into our company. I was also asked to sit in and participate in those meetings and to be an active voice in those meetings. Afterward, our CEO told me that I was right where I needed to be, that my voice was just as important as his was, and that he trusted my opinions and insights.”

Male, 46, Utah

When work feels disconnected:



“I’ve felt disconnected from purpose when my work felt repetitive or like it didn’t really make a difference. What was missing was a sense of why it mattered and how it helped others.”

Female, 60, California



“When the work becomes about metrics and success on a spreadsheet and less about people and the community, it’s difficult to feel connected.”

Female, 47, North Carolina

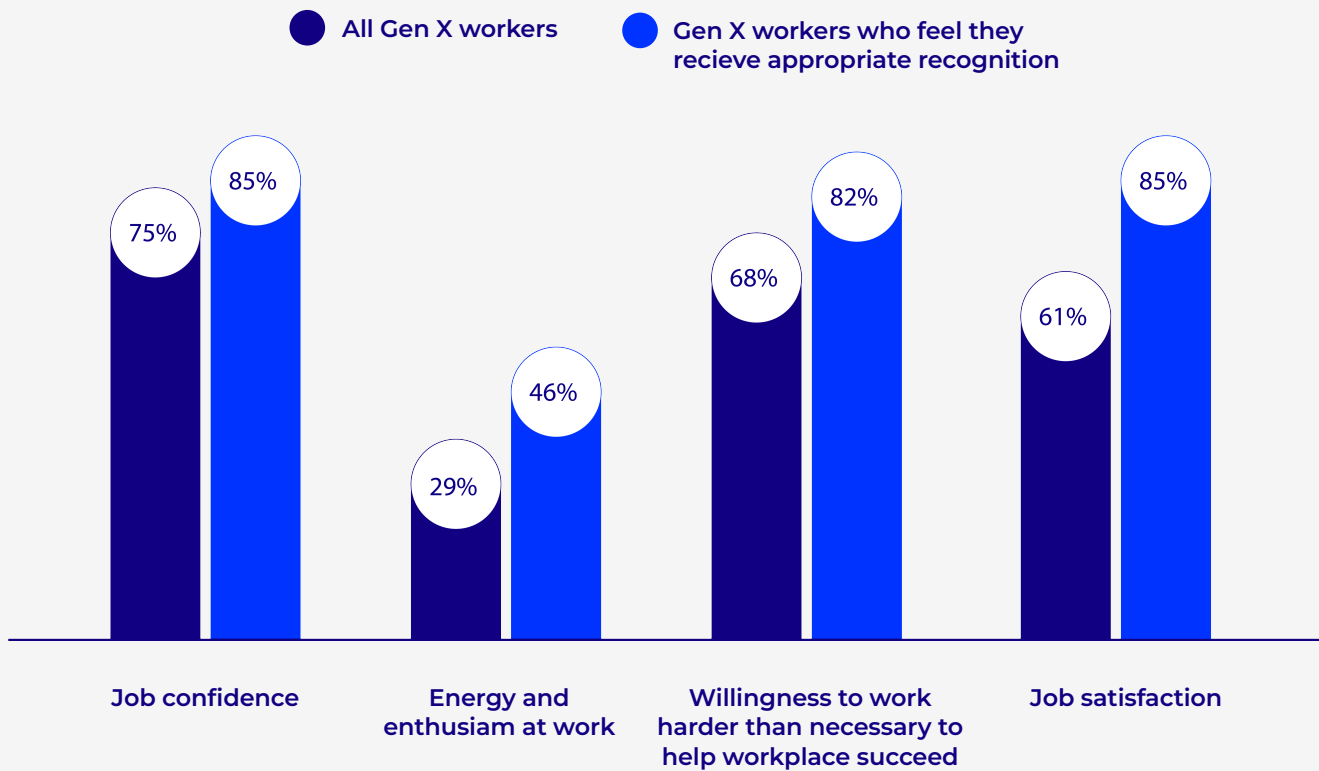


“When executives don’t consider my input on a decision they’re making where my knowledge is directly relevant, it makes me feel disregarded.”

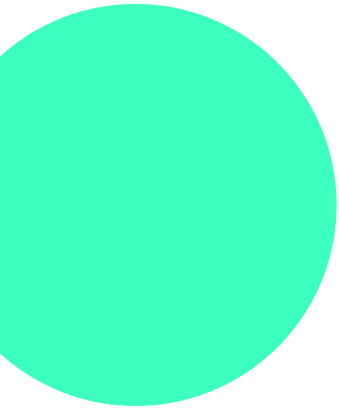
Male, 46, Utah

Recognition plays a critical role. Currently, only 33% of Gen X workers say they receive appropriate recognition or rewards for good performance, compared with 39% of younger workers. Feeling appreciated has a powerful effect: while 68% of all Gen X workers say they're willing to go above and beyond for their workplace, that number rises to 82% among those who feel appropriately recognized.

FEELING APPRECIATED AT WORK DRIVES STRONGER JOB SATISFACTION AND PERFORMANCE

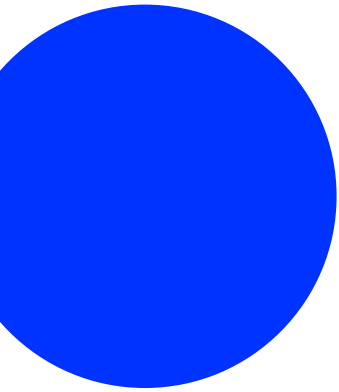


Just as employers can help Gen X employees feel supported in prioritizing their health, they can also play a powerful role in reinforcing meaningful contribution at work. Conversations with Gen X employees reveal they want appreciation that is visible, specific, and consistent. They value timely feedback delivered through ongoing conversations and grounded in their actual contributions – not just a high-level annual review. They also expect recognition to be reinforced with tangible signals like thoughtful gestures, public acknowledgment, or occasional financial incentives that clearly demonstrate their effort is valued.



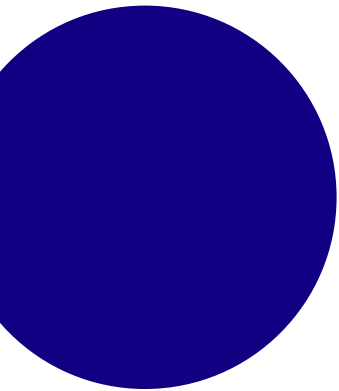
“I would like to be acknowledged more often and told that what I am doing matters to the company as a whole.”

Female, 45, Florida



“Stop buying staff pizza and use that money to provide small bonuses. Also, more face-to-face appreciation and empathy.”

Female, 52, Ohio

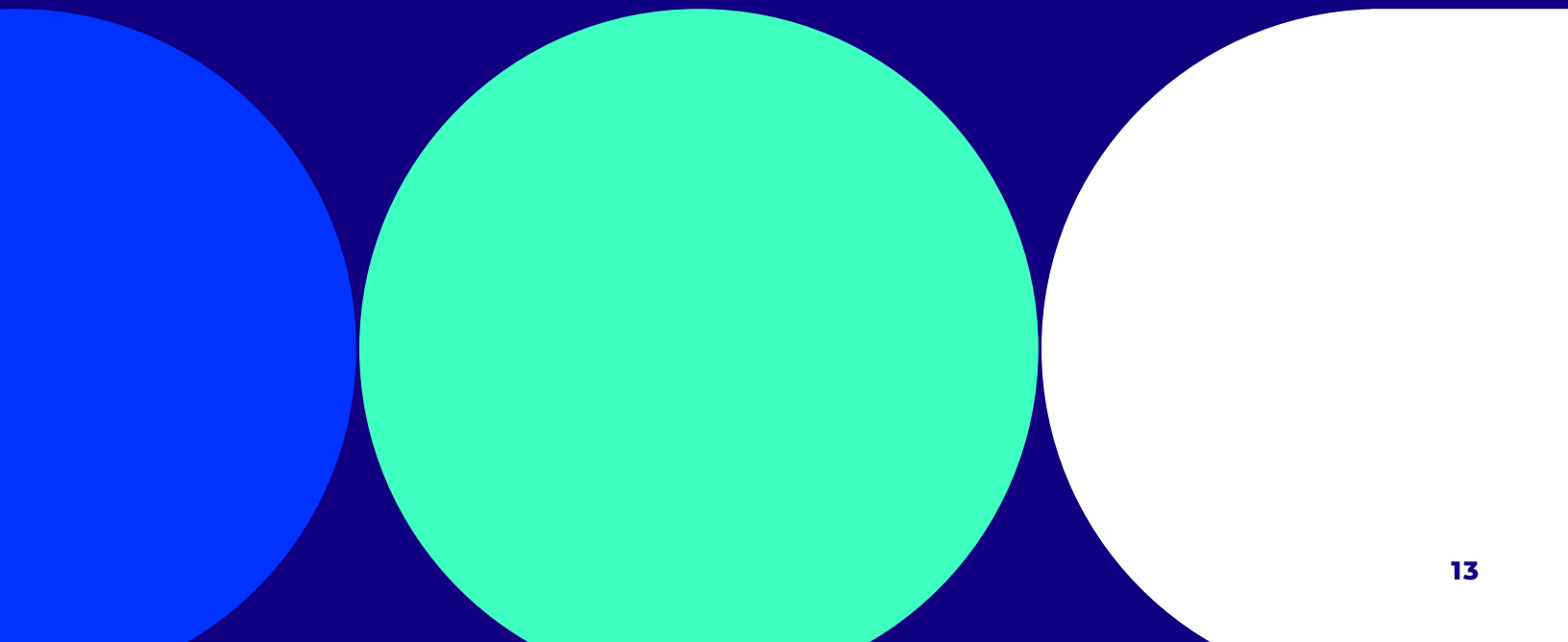


“Honestly, I think if anything, it would be that appreciation would be shown more regularly – it tends to only happen once a year in a glowing annual review.”

Male, 46, Utah

Left unaddressed, feeling overlooked can quietly erode engagement – even among the most reliable employees. But when employers build a culture of timely, concrete recognition, Gen X workers are more likely to reengage and bring their full strengths to the workplace.

ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS



The data reveals a consistent pattern: Gen X employees are capable and committed, yet often constrained by friction, competing demands, and unmet needs. Employers can help close these gaps and translate potential into sustained vitality and engagement by taking these steps.

1

Help Gen X employees reprioritize their health by creating permission, reducing friction, and reinforcing follow-through.

- Encourage leaders to openly model and support preventive care and healthy routines (e.g., blocking time for appointments, taking walking breaks), to reinforce that prioritizing health is associated with being a high performer.
- Remove obstacles with practical supports Gen X workers will use. Offer simple, autonomy-friendly resources – like fitness trackers, digital health tools, and meal subscription services – to make healthier choices easier on busy days.
- Use participation-based challenges and incentives. Run low-barrier fitness challenges and incentivize healthy behaviors (not “perfect” outcomes), to encourage employees to build momentum even when time is tight.
- Normalize and promote preventive care follow-through via simple reminder campaigns that encourage scheduling medical screenings and dental cleanings, and by offering employees flex-time for those appointments.
- Promote behavioral health tools/resources that can help with challenges Gen X workers face (e.g., stress management and sleep difficulties).

2

Help Gen X realize the meaning behind their work by connecting daily effort to impact.

- Make the “why it matters” explicit. Connect projects to the people they help (customers, colleagues, communities) so work doesn’t feel like “metrics on a spreadsheet.”
- Lean into opportunities where Gen X can help, teach, mentor, solve problems, and share expertise – because these are the moments they describe as most meaningful.
- Have conversations to understand professional goals and how those can align with workplace needs. Ensure access to appropriate professional development opportunities.
- Share outcomes and feedback to help employees understand and celebrate the impact of their efforts. This can help boost their sense of value and engagement.

3

Recognize and reward hard work and dedication by providing more regular and specific acknowledgement of success.

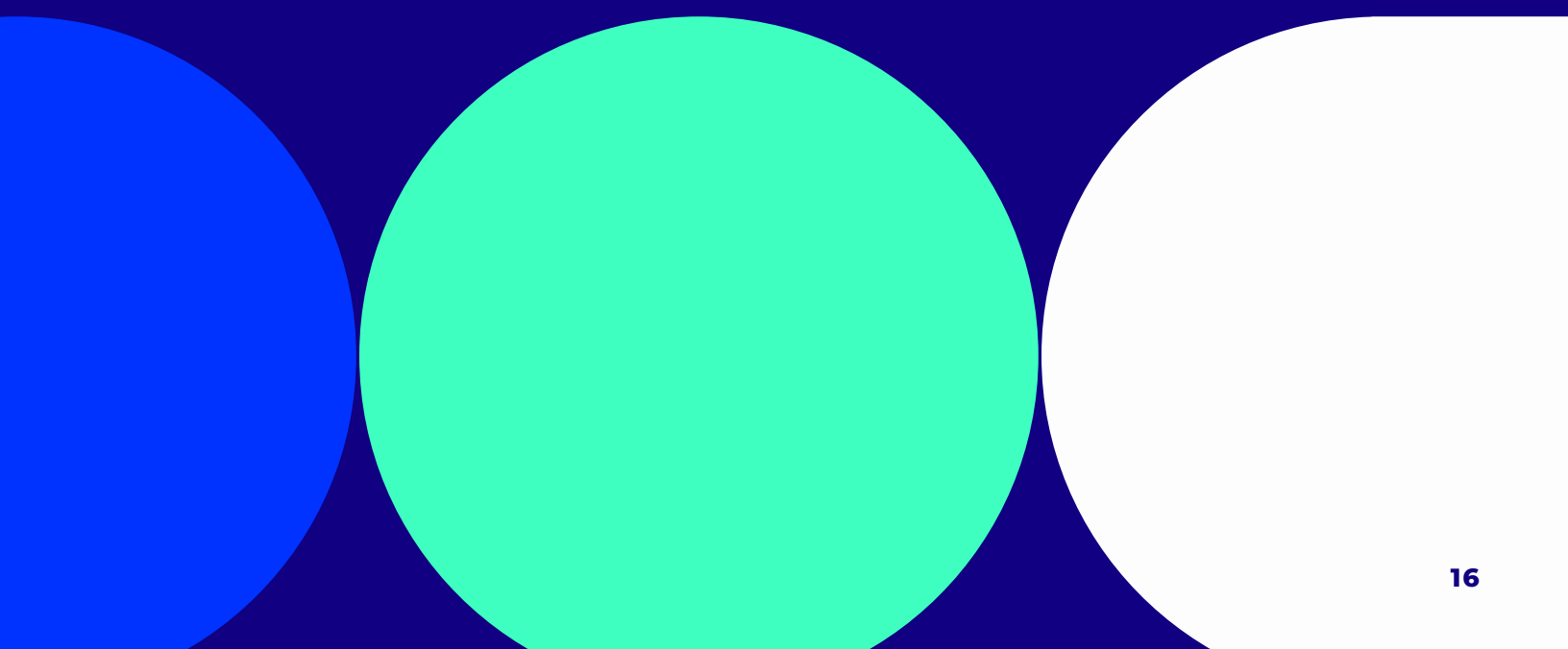
- Shift recognition from annual to ongoing. Build a cadence of timeline feedback and appreciation in regular conversations, rather than reserving it for formal reviews.
- Make recognition specific and tied to concrete contributions. Gen X workers want appreciation that reflects what they did and why it mattered – especially when it helped others or improved outcomes.
- Look for and recognize the “quiet achievements.” In addition to larger contributions and tangible outcomes, be sure to spot and reward the dependable, behind-the-scenes wins that keep organizations running smoothly.
- Use a mix of visible and tangible reinforcement. Pair public acknowledgment (when appropriate) with small, meaningful rewards or occasional financial incentives.

“Gen X is a highly capable, dependable generation with tremendous value still to deliver, but many are stretched thin and under-recognized. Employers can strengthen Gen X vitality by making it easier to prioritize health, clearly linking work to meaningful impact, and building a culture of consistent, visible appreciation. Supporting this generation isn’t just the right thing to do, it is a workforce advantage.”

Stacie Lukasiak, vice president, U.S. employer medical solutions, Cigna Healthcare

BEHIND THE FINDINGS:

References and methodology



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Methodology

The Cigna Group conducted an online survey with 5,000 U.S. adults from June 3 to 22, 2025 in collaboration with YouGov. This bilingual (English and Spanish) survey assessed health, vitality, social needs, productivity, and social media attitudes and behaviors across generations.

Participants were United States residents 18 years of age and older, fluent in English or Spanish. To ensure that the sample was representative of the United States population, quotas were established based on Census Data using a cross-section of age and gender, with employment quotas based on Bureau of Labor Statistics data. Data was then weighted to match the U.S. population on gender, age, ethnicity/race, region, education, and income.

Survey respondent demographics

The sample was split about equal with 48% male and 50% female with 1% preferring to self-describe their gender. Respondents were split representatively between the South (38%), West (24%), Midwest (21%), and Northeast (17%). 60% of respondents were white; 17% report Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; 12% were Black; 4% Asian; and 6% other races. The majority, 57%, of respondents work for pay and 90% had health insurance or health care coverage.