

# Cracking the Code on Gen Z Supervisor Resource



2021

# 1. Inclusion

## Why

CareerWise welcomes apprentices of all backgrounds in an effort to create more equitable opportunities in the workforce. Your apprentice may come from an under-resourced school, have significant family responsibilities, be an English language learner, a recent immigrant or managing other challenges. By making intentional, visible efforts to honor diversity and accommodate differences, you will pave the way to your apprentice's success.

## What

We all have biases and blind spots when it comes to respecting and interacting with individuals different from ourselves. You may be a member of the historically dominant culture who has enjoyed many invisible privileges throughout your life. Working with an apprentice of a different background from your own is a wonderful opportunity to broaden your understanding of the human experience.

Your apprentice will thrive and contribute when they feel safe and appreciated. You can work with colleagues before they start to ensure that your workplace is welcoming to all. Once they arrive, take time to get to know them as a person and understand their unique background. Stay curious about what your apprentice can teach you. Meanwhile, keep working with colleagues to ensure that your workplace is as inclusive as possible.

### Stop and Think:

In what ways is your workplace welcoming to people of diverse backgrounds? Where do you see opportunities to improve?

## How

As a supervisor, you have an important responsibility to set the tone of inclusion and respect in your workplace. Here are some ways you can support your apprentice and colleagues alike in creating a welcoming environment:

- Make a visible commitment to diversity. Look at your organization through the eyes of a person from an underrepresented group. Would they see themselves represented in the demographics of the staff? Pictured on the company's website? Will they feel respected by the culture of the workplace? Will their holidays and traditions be acknowledged? If the answer is, "not yet," take action to address these oversights.



- Prep your team. Lead colleagues in conversations about diversity. Explain how inclusion will not only help your apprentice but also grow your business. Alert colleagues of any known needs or unique qualities that your apprentice will be bringing to the workplace. Collaboratively plan to welcome your apprentice and ensure they feel safe and comfortable on the team and have every opportunity to succeed.
- Be an up-stander. Model respect and inclusion whenever possible. Stay alert to discriminatory comments or acts of racism, sexism or other bias in the workplace. Speak up with direct feedback as appropriate. Recruit colleagues' help.
- Accommodate and support your apprentice as needed. Learn about any unique challenges your student might face. These might include lower academic skills, responsibilities at home, transportation issues, or lack of parental support. Adjust expectations and provide training or resources, as needed.

Joining an organization as an apprentice is intimidating, regardless of your background. Make every effort to extend a hand of welcome. By creating an inclusive culture at your workplace, you are contributing to your apprentice's success.



## 2. Skill Development

### Why

Apprentices will arrive at your workplace with great enthusiasm but limited skills. As a supervisor, you will need to plan task-specific opportunities for learning.

### What

There are many on the job training methods that can be mixed and matched to up-skill your apprentice. As you review the options below, stop and think about which of these might work in your context and with specific skills.

### How

Here are a variety of approaches to apprentice skill development. As you read them over, stop and think about which of these might be best suited to the work you will be asking your apprentice to do:

**Job Shadowing:** Apprentice works alongside a seasoned employee, who performs their work as usual with one important difference — the “think aloud”. This has been described as allowing the apprentice to eavesdrop on the trainer’s thinking. In this method, the trainer verbalizes the things they are doing, the details of how they do it, and why they are doing it this way. This is one of the fastest training methods, as it gives the apprentice the opportunity to not just see the work performed, but understand the reasons behind the process.

**Job Shadowing Rotation:** This type of training expands on job-shadowing by involving the movement of the apprentice from one trainer to another, all illustrating competency on the same skill set. The benefit is shared responsibility between team members and the ability of the apprentice to absorb differences in approaches as well as common themes and patterns.

**Direct Instruction:** This method is also known as training through step-by-step. Under this method, trainer and apprentice sit side-by-side, and the trainer explains and shows exactly how to perform the task, often in repetition.

**Coaching:** This method is most effective for enhancing behaviors and performance rather than introducing a new skill. Coaching is a frequent, on-going activity that takes place in a one-on-one format and relies on a strong level of trust between the coach and apprentice. Together, the coach and apprentice review and reflect on past performance and identify specific areas for improvement. The coach provides guidance and resources to facilitate growth, and continues providing critical feedback in a cycle.



**Debriefing:** Make time immediately after a meeting, project sprint or deadline to talk with the apprentice. Find out what was confusing or challenging for them and offer insights to clarify. Share your own thoughts about what went well and reflections on why things occurred in the way they did. Discuss what lessons can be learned from this experience. This will help build your apprentice's business acumen, and will make them more effective in anticipating and meeting the businesses needs in the future.

**Sandbox Project:** The apprentice is given a task or responsibility that they are not yet qualified to perform, in an isolated environment where their work cannot risk harm to the team or organization. In this training method the apprentice is expected to make mistakes and learn to be resourceful. In performing the tasks they will identify gaps in their knowledge or abilities, then independently seek e-learning resources to learn the new skill and apply it to the project.

For example, an apprentice learning PowerPoint might be assigned the task of recreating an internal deck from scratch. In order to replicate the slides they'll need to master many individual skills along the way. Their work is in a "sandbox" because the PowerPoint they are developing is not actually integrated into the work products of the organization.

**Understudy:** In this method, the trainer assigns their typical workflow, task or responsibility to the apprentice as their understudy. The apprentice performs the work assignment in their place, under close and constant supervision. The supervisor observes closely and provides open and frequent feedback, corrections and reflection until the apprentice can independently perform the task correctly, and assume the full scope of the responsibility.

In each of the methods outlined above, the goal is to make the implicit explicit. You can offer all the invisible things you know, think, expect and understand, and explicitly articulate them to your apprentice. This approach will accelerate their learning and strengthen their ability to contribute to the team.



# 3. Management

## Why

Management is the art of getting the best from your people. After three years as an apprentice, your student will be independent, capable and fully qualified for work. Yet, to start out, your apprentice will need much closer management, clear instruction and consistent feedback in order to grow skills and make contributions to your organization.

## What

Your apprentice comes to you with great potential and high motivation, but low technical and self-management skills. While it may be tempting to offer them independence and flexibility to “have a go” without too much adult guidance, this approach might waste valuable time and energy. Instead, help them start off on the right foot by providing structure and clarity. As a professional, you already have an array of tactics and tools to manage your own time, tasks and the colleagues who report to you. Those will come in handy in your role supervising your apprentice. In addition, below are some proven management strategies you can employ to support your apprentice’s early success. While these efforts require an investment of time in the early days of the apprenticeship, the long term payoffs in apprentice productivity will demonstrate that your management efforts were worthwhile.

## How

Supervisors who see best results take time daily to connect with their apprentice, regularly break projects into smaller tasks for their apprentice and provide targeted skills training in preparation for those tasks.

**Prioritize daily check-ins:** Connect with your apprentice at a consistent time each day for at least ten minutes. Demonstrate interest and care about them and their work by asking questions such as:

*How are you today?*

*What are you working on?*

*Which meetings will you attend?*

*What deadlines are on your calendar?*

*Do you have any questions?*





**Provide task-specific training:** For each task, make the implicit explicit by taking time to instruct, check understanding and clarify expectations. Wait until one task is completed before assigning the next and repeating this cycle:

Instruct: Instruction can be provided in a variety of formats (see Skills Training). Whatever the format, clear instruction includes three parts: Why, What and How.

1. Why: explain the purpose of this task in the big picture
2. What: describe desired outcome; show a finished product
3. How: demonstrate exactly how the task is to be completed

**Check Understanding # 1:** Rather than simply asking your apprentice if they understand the instructions, ask them to explain it back to you. Listen for the why, what and how. If critical pieces are missing, provide further explanation.

**Clarify Expectations:** Once you are confident your apprentice understands the task, clarify expectation for completion: by when does this need to be finished? Where will they find the necessary materials? How long should the work take? What should they do when done?

**Check Understanding #2:** Again, invite your apprentice to restate the expectations about how the task is to be completed and by when. You might say, “Just to be sure we are clear, can you recap your understanding of this conversation?”

### Stop and Think:

What are some projects you will assign your apprentice?

How will you break those into manageable tasks?

What instructional resources are available?

How will you describe criteria for success?

Are there some common pitfalls you can help your apprentice avoid?

By providing clear structure and instruction early in the apprenticeship, you will build your student’s skills and confidence to function independently in the workplace. If they fall short, offer feedback to your apprentice, but also review the above guidelines and consider whether you might provide more extensive check-ins, break tasks into even smaller pieces or devote more time to instruction in the future. Your investment will pay off in good time.



## 4. Feedback

### Why

The purpose of feedback is to acknowledge strengths, foster improvement and address errors. Corrections and praise are both examples of feedback that help us grow. Providing frequent, clear feedback is an essential part of your role as a supervisor and will accelerate your apprentice's learning.

### What

To set the stage for feedback, you need to create an environment where your apprentice feels safe and open to learning. Many of us have been on the receiving end of judgments, criticisms or sarcastic comments that undermined our confidence. Instead, supervisors can strive to establish productive relationships with apprentices by being clear and kind, even when providing challenging feedback.

Feedback can be positive, affirming an effective approach, or adjusting, helping an apprentice see how they can improve. Effective feedback is:

**Behavior-focused:** addresses a specific behavior that your apprentice can control, instead of airing judgments or assumptions. Rather than, "You don't care about this project," which is an assumption, a supervisor might say, "You are consistently late to planning meetings," which is an observation of a behavior.

**Goal-referenced:** describes how the apprentice's behavior is influencing their progress towards a desired outcome. Rather than, "What a mess!" A supervisor might say, "Keeping your workstation clean will help you to be more efficient," naming efficiency as the goal.

**Specific:** addresses concrete actions or impacts. Rather than a general comment like, "Good job," a supervisor might say, "The effort and care you took to proofread your email made it clear and reader-friendly."

**Timely:** provides prompt input as soon as possible after the apprentice's behavior is observed. Rather than wait for a weekly review meeting, catch your apprentice in the moment to offer quick and clear feedback. Do this so often that they expect it regularly.

**Actionable:** offers concrete next steps. Rather than, "You need to work on your professionalism," a supervisor might say, "We heard your goofing off in the lunchroom all the way down the hall," which alerts the apprentice of the specific, troubling behavior.





## How

Before providing feedback, a supervisor needs to get clear on the apprentice behavior, its impacts and the desired outcome of the conversation. Feedback can be delivered in three parts:

- What (behavior)
- So What (impact on you / the client / the team / the organization)
- Now What (intentions; why you are raising the issue and next steps)

For example, if an apprentice is doing an excellent job with attention to details in their expense reports, their supervisor might acknowledge them using this formula:

- What (behavior): “You are carefully double checking your numbers and consistently turning in accurate reports.”
- So What (impact): “This saves me a lot of time because I do not need to correct your work.”
- Now What (next steps): “Keep up the strong effort, and please show how you are approaching this task. ”

As another example, when an apprentices is falling short, this conversation formula can also be employed:

- What (behavior): “I notice you rarely speak up during team discussions.”
- So What (impact): “Our colleagues don’t get to learn from your perspective.”

Now What (intentions): “I’d like to make sure your voice is heard, so I am wondering what would help you feel more comfortable sharing.”

### Stop and Think:

What sorts of feedback have you given to colleagues lately?  
How might this *What - So What - Now What* approach have sounded in those circumstances?

Strive to balance positive feedback with constructive feedback. We all grow best when we feel seen for our strengths. Whenever delivering feedback, seek to establish common ground by stating the shared goal behind the feedback - whether saving time, learning or being efficient. Knowing you are both working towards a common purpose will ease your apprentice’s anxiety and open their ears to your input.



# 5. Professionalism

## Why

Professionalism is workplace-appropriate behavior that helps us each to be effective members of our teams. Expectations differ from company to company, and yet in nearly all professional settings, we are consistently relied on to show responsibility, competence, communication skills and other virtues. These are best learned in the workplace.

## What

You are an experienced professional who understands the culture of your workplace and knows how to effectively participate, communicate and navigate the various roles of your position. While the expectations of work may be so familiar to you that you participate appropriately automatically, this may not come as naturally to your apprentice intern. You can support their success by narrating clearly the norms for professional behavior at your company and in your profession. These might include:

**Responsibility:** be reliable; work during work hours; manage break and lunch schedules

**Competence:** produce high quality work; recognize when help is needed and ask; complete tasks on time

**Communication:** listen and learn; look people in the eye during conversations; use professional language

### Stop and Think:

Which of the above apply in your workplace? What else does professionalism include? Is it acceptable to eat during meetings or check your phone? Do you raise your hand to be called on in meetings or just speak up? Is it okay to wear headphones in the hallway? How quickly is one expected to respond to an email or text? Is there a dress code? What is second nature to you and your colleagues may not be as clear to your apprentice; you will need to help them learn what you know.



## How

You can convey expectations for professionalism through explanation, modeling, feedback and reflection. Each of these approaches can be used interchangeably and frequently to support your apprentice's ongoing growth as a professional.

**Explain:** Provide clear instructions, as in, “Your lunch break is 30 minutes. That means that after 25 minutes, you need to clean up your eating area and wrap up conversations, so you can be back to work by the time your lunch ends. There are no bells.”

**Model:** Demonstrate professional expectations all day every day. When appropriate, narrate your decision-making, as in, “I really wanted to stop for coffee this morning on my way in, but I realized that would make me late for the team meeting, and I did not want to disrespect my colleagues' time by being tardy.”

**Provide Feedback:** Affirm specific, positive behavior by naming what went well and why, as in, “Wow, Rachel, you got that report ready and polished the day before it was due! That is the kind of diligence that shows you take your job seriously. Way to go!”

**Encourage Reflection:** Suggest your apprentice pay close attention to the professional behavior of experienced colleagues: How do they act in meetings? Interact in hallways? Manage their time and responsibilities? Speak with others? Initiate conversations about your apprentice's observations, and clarify how professionalism looks and sounds.

If you are concerned about your apprentice's professionalism, stay focused on their good qualities while providing them time to self-correct. If you see an unproductive pattern emerging, provide feedback that clarifies the expectation, points out a model and encourages your apprentice to adjust. It is not kind to let unprofessional behavior slip by unaddressed; your apprentice is learning how to function in an adult workplace, and you are their valued guide.



# Onboarding Plan

	Timing (hours)	Y/N	Notes:
Supervisor Initial Meeting (one-on-one)			
Team Meetings			
Informational Interviews or Meet & Greets with Colleagues			
Reading, Website, Annual Reports, News Feature			
HR New Employee Orientation			
Computer, Email and Program Logins Setup			
Shadow Team Member(s)			
Read Team Process Documents / Manuals			
Write a Summary of Learning			
Online Skill-building Courses			
Train for a Specific Training Wave 1 Skill or Process			



# Ongoing Work

	Timing (hours)	Y/N	Notes:
Supervisor / Apprentice one-on-one meeting			
Team Meetings			
Work Independently on Tasks Mastered in Earlier Waves of Training			
Train for New work Waves (increasingly complex tasks)			
Job Shadowing or Sandbox Projects			
Write a Summary of Learning			
Online Skill-building Courses			



# Work Wave Training Plan

<b>Task</b> <i>What work will the apprentice accomplish? Aligned to which competency?</i>	<b>Training</b> <i>What skills will be required, and what is your training plan for each of these skills?</i>	<b>Timeline</b> <i>When will they begin? By when will you expect independence with this work?</i>

