

**PRESS RELEASE**

Gen Z: snowflake generation or perfect match for fresh produce?

With a surge in graduates applying to be part of the fresh produce industry, Sapphira Waterson of Management Development Services (MDS), says knowing who Generation Z is and what they want from a job can increase productivity and profitability for businesses.

MDS, which specialises in graduate training in fresh produce businesses, has placed more than 150 trainees from Generation Z, the term used to identify those born in the late 90s, in tough, demanding roles over the last five years. Sapphira, MDS’ Chief Operating Officer, says this generation has a lot to offer the industry:

“With a thirst for variety, responsibility and self-improvement, what could be a more perfect fit for the fast-paced fresh produce industry? Gen Z is sometimes referred to as a snowflake generation for their perceived lack of resilience and oversensitivity but that annoys me. They have been in the workplace for a few years now and we’ve had an insight into how they tick. They have certain demands and priorities, but employers who recognise how they can get the best out of these twenty-somethings will be repaid with hard work and fulfilled, productive employees.”

Gen Z-ers are not solely in it for the money, Sapphira explains; they want a fun place to work where they feel valued. They like to be given responsibility and accountability but also thrive with regular check ins from managers and colleagues, even if it’s just for five minutes. They are self-aware and prepared to learn from failure but need more emotional support than their employers may have had as they entered the workplace.

“Admirably self-aware, this generation sees feedback as vital to their self-improvement, and managers need to leverage this to push their mentees to their best potential. They tend to need more emotional support as they learn resilience, and while this may grate on baby boomers who worked hard and late, and sometimes for free, to get their rung on the ladder, at MDS we have seen the positive results of nurturing young people in a demanding role. And why be tough if we can get the results another way?”

Sapphira says to retain Gen Z-ers in the business, they need to feel valued and to see clear opportunity for growth and career progression. This goes beyond salary - and not just to pensions and benefits that give them security - but to feeling a respected part of the team.  Variety in the job, and open conversations about where career opportunity lies are also vital.

A recent survey by MDS shows that for young people, priorities have shifted, pre- and post-Covid outbreak, from wanting a good salary to wanting stability, and a recognition that the food industry offers this. A doubling in applications to MDS’ graduate training programme has shown how the pandemic has boosted the food industry’s image, not only in terms of job security, but as a diverse and dynamic place to work with challenge and reward.

MDS recruits graduates from across disciplines including engineering, agriculture, food science and technology. Steve Carter of Fleurie Nurseries says that MDS not only identifies capable future talent that works well in this industry but supports both the trainees and the managers to nurture it:

“By their very nature, MDS trainees are aspiring managers and MDS’ Leadership Programme supports them to rapidly develop strong leadership skills, but it’s more than this. The MDS team is also there to give the emotional support and extra mentoring that brings these young people on and supports our managers with training in how to maximise on the touch points for this generation, such as being ‘there’ more; giving them autonomy and how to keep them in the business. Having an MDS trainee has been particularly useful in the last few months when we need self-starters - especially if they are working remotely - who can perform under pressure as we have had to focus on the constantly changing demands of the supply chain.”

In the same way that the fresh produce industry has flexed to adapt to the buying habits of Generation Z, Sapphira says so it needs to when employing them:

“We’ve seen that, as consumers, Gen Z look for a rewarding experience, authenticity, social responsibility and brands with purpose. The same multi-dimensional decision making is applied to their career choice. In fact, they see themselves as consumers in the job market, having paid for three or four years of further education. Their approach is, what can you give me? Although taking Gen Z into your fold may require a little more nurturing and connection, we are not going back so businesses need to adapt, and by working with the positives this generation brings, employers will not see snowflakes melting but strong, able young people with a new perspective.”

**Top tips from MDS COO Sapphira Waterson:**

**Give them responsibility with accountability**

Gen Z thrive on a challenge and feel valued and driven if they are also accountable.

**Keep the communications network open and give regular feedback**

Gen Z are communaholics, used to being constantly in touch. They perform better with regular contact from their managers, even if it’s brief check in, and, self-aware and keen to constantly improve, they thrive on feedback.

**Variety and progression**

Keep them interested with variety and talk openly about opportunity for their progress in the business

**Trust them to do the job**

They prioritise mental and physical wellbeing, and where baby boomers would have worked late to be seen to be diligent, you are more likely to see this generation work fewer hours to maintain their health and happiness, but their work time will count.

/ENDS

**Notes to Editor**

Management Development Services Ltd (MDS) was set up in 1986 by a group of forward-thinking growers concerned about the shortage of skilled managers within the industry.

It quickly established itself as a leading training provider in the fresh food, produce, horticultural and agricultural industry. Since then, it has expanded steadily as companies seek to safeguard the future by attracting and providing training for the right calibre of recruit.

Today, MDS encompasses the whole supply chain of vegetables, salads, fruit, flowers, plants, arable and prepared food products not only based in the UK but also for operations in many countries around the world.

MDS represents a consortium of member companies comprising growers, suppliers and supermarkets. There is consistent interest from potential new members who wish to be involved in what is now seen as a ‘model’ for specialist management training.

The strength of MDS comes from members working in partnership with a common goal, even though some may be competitors in the commercial world. It is run by a Board of Directors appointed from within the membership, with day-to-day management support from the office team in Peterborough. [www.mds-ltd.co.uk/](https://www.mds-ltd.co.uk/)

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