

Best Practices in Precepting: Engaging & Mentoring Gen Z

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Conflict of Interest Disclosure

- I have no conflicts of interest with ineligible companies to disclose



Learning Objectives

- Compare and contrast the defining traits of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z
- Examine factors that shape Gen Z's approach to learning and professional environments & outline strategies to effectively engage and mentor Gen Z learners
- Assess case-based situations and apply strategies to improve learning experiences



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Made a mixtape from the radio	Pharmacy school lectures were not recorded	Has purchased something from the Tik Tok shop	Rode in the back of a station wagon with no seatbelt	Knows what “lowkey” and “cap” mean
Called someone using a rotary phone	Used a VCR	Saved files on a floppy disc	Communicates with emojis instead of words	Used a pay phone
Avoids phone calls & voicemail like the plague	Took an exam on a scantron	Free Space	Regularly listens to Podcasts	Had one house phone – and you had to talk to parents first
Watched Saturday morning cartoons	Knew phone numbers by heart	Remembers MTV playing music videos	Had a MySpace profile	Can still make the dial-up noises
Prefers email to texting	Died of dysentery playing Oregon Trail	Still takes notes on paper	Rented movies at Blockbuster	Used a phone book



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Compare and contrast the defining traits of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z



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Generations

- How to define generations:
 - Groups of people born within a 15-20 year span
 - Members of each group tend to share common characteristics, preferences and values shaped over time
- Factors that shape generations:
 - Historical events and shared experiences
 - Technological advances
 - Societal shifts (economic changes, political movements)



Why this matters: Understanding generational influences helps tailor communication, feedback and teaching strategies

Dimock M. Pew Research Center. 2019



Generational Timeline



Silent Generation
Born: 1928-1948



Baby Boomers
Born: 1946-1964



Gen X
Born: 1965-1980



Millennials
Born: 1981-1996



Gen Z
Born: 1997-2012



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Question 1

What generation are you a member of?

- A. Silent Generation
- B. Baby Boomer
- C. Gen X
- D. Millennial
- E. Gen Z



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Baby Boomers (Born: 1946-1964)



**Vietnam War
(1955-1975)**



**Civil Rights Movement
(1954-1968)**



**Post-WWII Economic Boom
(1945-1969)**



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Baby Boomers

Approximate Age Range: 61-79 years old

- “Workaholics”
- Goal-oriented & achievement focused
- Career-driven
- Competitive & motivated

Work Ethic



- Prefer formal, structured communication
- Comfortable with traditional learning environments

Feedback



- Value clear hierarchy & defined roles
- Respect experience & quality leadership
- Prefer stability & thoughtful change

Leadership



***Preceptor Tip:* Provide structure, respect experience, communicate expectations clearly**

Kennard J. Training Journal. 2017



Gen X (Born: 1965-1980)



**Fall of Berlin Wall
(1955-1975)**



**Rise of Cable TV
(1980s)**



**Latchkey Kids
(~1975-1995)**

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Photo by Jonathan Cooper from Pexels: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/award-statue-in-the-shape-of-an-astronaut-11862827/>

Image AI-generated by Katie Cunningham, 2026 ChatGPT 5.6 Sol



Gen X

Approximate Age Range: 45-60 years old

- Self-sufficient
- Pragmatic
- Resourceful problem-solvers
- Value work-life balance

Work Ethic



- Do not require frequent feedback
- Prefer feedback that is purposeful and actionable

Feedback



- Appreciate autonomy and trust
- Respect competence and expertise
- Value forward-thinking leadership

Leadership



Preceptor Tip: Offer autonomy, trust their expertise, tie feedback to outcomes

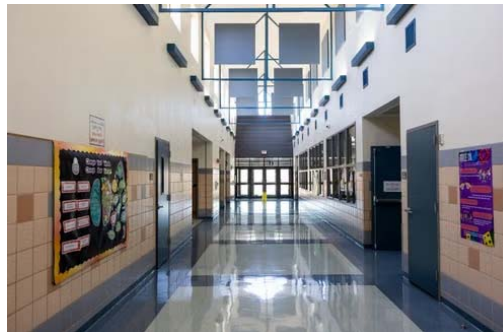
Kennard J. Training Journal. 2017



Millennials (Born: 1981-1996)



September 11, 2001



Columbine 1999



Rise of social media



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Millennials

Approximate Age Range: 29-44 years old

- Team-oriented & collaborative
- Multitaskers
- Entrepreneurial
- Value flexibility, purpose-driven work

Work Ethic



- Expect frequent, real-time feedback
- Respond well to positive reinforcement

Feedback



- Prefer mentor-style leadership
- Value collaboration over hierarchy
- Prioritize prof. growth & development

Leadership



Preceptor Tip: Give frequent feedback, explain the “why,” foster collaboration by connecting work to team goals, purpose & growth

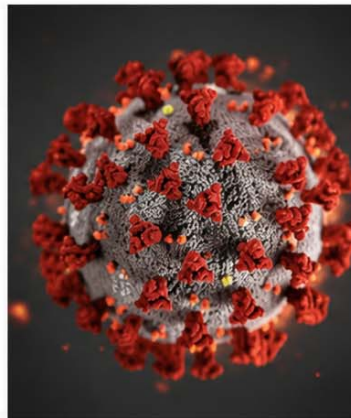
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Gen Z (Born: 1997-2012)



**Economic
Recession
2007-2009**



**COVID-19 Pandemic
2019-2023**



Social Justice



Digital Natives



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Younger U.S Generations Are More Racially & Ethnically Diverse

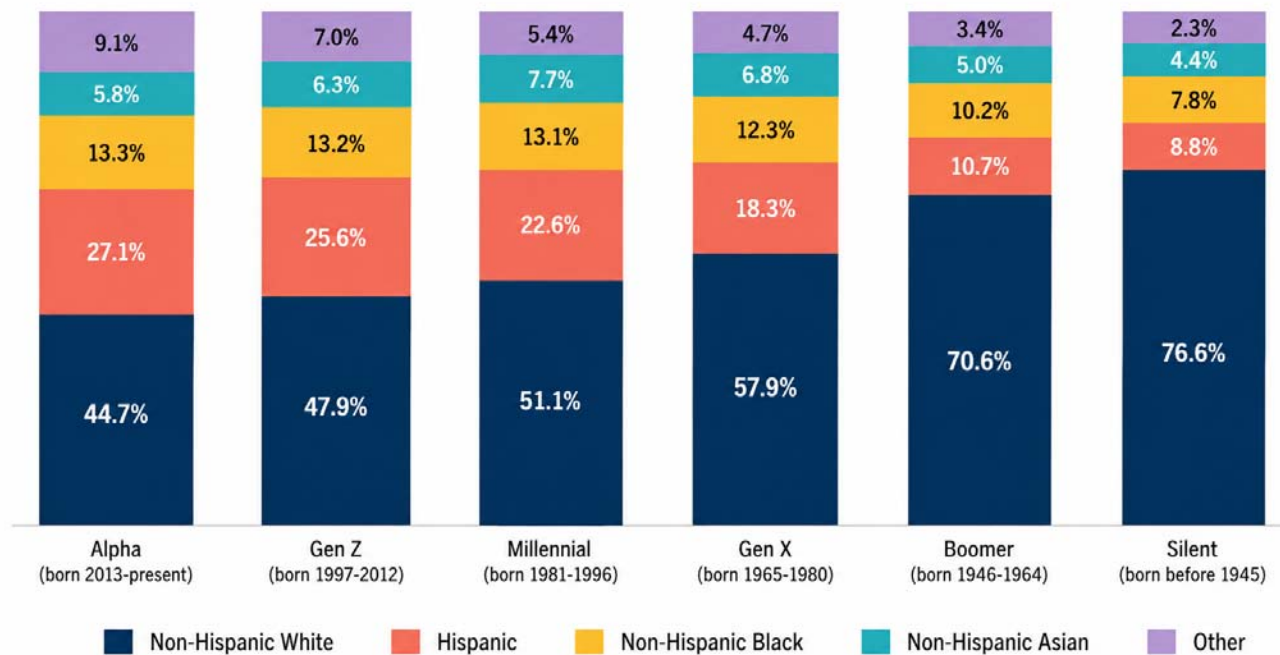


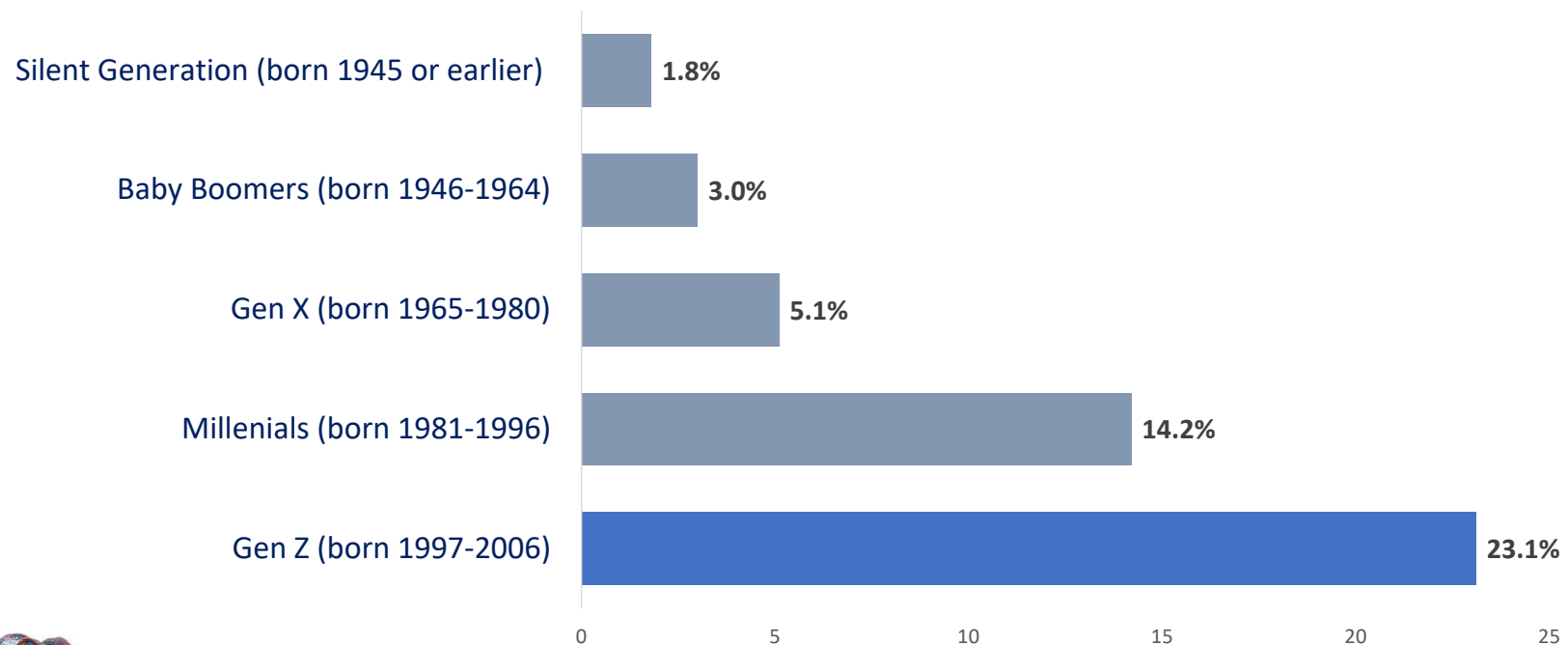
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Adapted from: Pop-Facts Demographic Snapshot. Claritas. 2023. <https://claritas.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Pop-Facts%C2%AE-Demographic-Snapshot-2024.pdf>



Gen Z Adults Are More Likely to Identify as LGBTQ+

Percentage of U.S. adults identifying as LGBTQ+, by generation, 2024



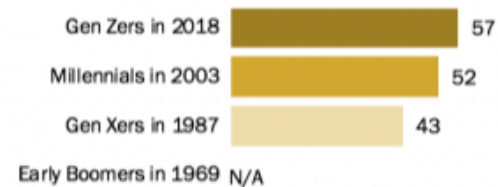
Source: Gallup, 2025



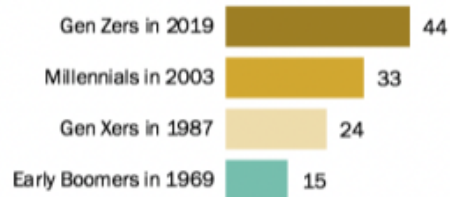
Educational Attainment By Generation

Gen Zers more likely to be enrolled in college and to have a college-educated parent than Millennials, Gen Xers at a comparable age

Among 18- to 21-year-olds no longer in high school, % enrolled in college



% of 7- to 17-year-olds living with a parent who has at least a bachelor's degree



At comparable ages, Gen Z shows higher college enrollment and is more likely to have college-educated parents compared with prior generations

Note: Share living with a parent who has at least a bachelor's degree is limited to 7- to 17-year-olds living with at least one parent. Those without a parent in the household are excluded.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1987, 2003 and 2018 Current Population Survey October supplement and 1969, 1987, 2003 and 2019 Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement (IPUMS).

"On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Generation Z So Far"

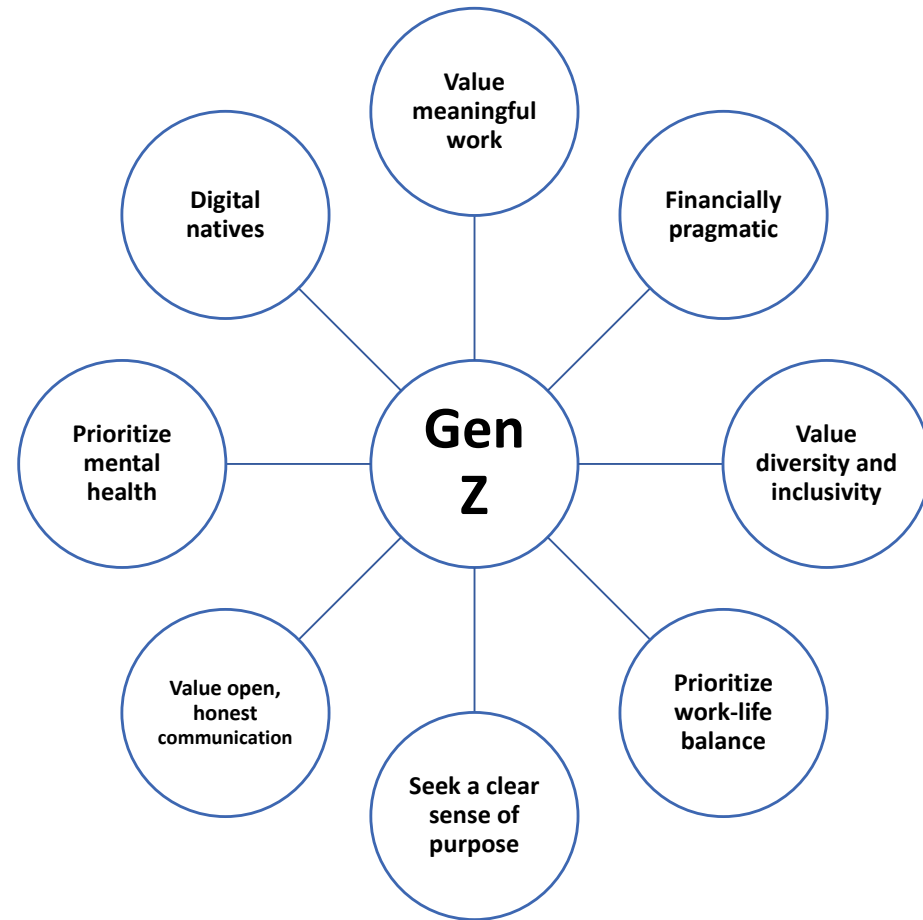
PEW RESEARCH CENTER



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Gen Z: Core Values & Priorities



Seemiller & Grace, 2017; Schroth, 2019

Gen Z

Current Age Range: 13-25 years old

- Digitally fluent
- Purpose-driven & socially aware
- Prioritize mental health & work-life balance
- Value diversity, inclusivity & authenticity

Characteristics



- Expect frequent, timely check-ins
- Prefer clear, direct & actionable feedback
- Appreciate transparency & psychological safety

Feedback



- Prefer supportive, coach-style leadership
- Value approachability and trust
- Expect clear expectations with structured guidance

Leadership



Preceptor Tip: Set clear expectations, provide frequent coaching & create an inclusive, supportive learning environment

Medina et al., 2021
Shorey et al., 2021



Examine factors that shape Gen Z's approach to learning and professional environments & outline strategies to effectively engage and mentor Gen Z



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Factors Affecting Gen Z's Approach to Learning & Professional Environments

- Limited professional work experience
- Heightened focus on mental health & work-life balance
- Technology-integrated learning and communication
- Expectation of frequent feedback & clear structure



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Medina et al., 2021
Shorey et al., 2021

- **Fewer early employment experiences among Gen Z**
 - ~19% of 15-17 year-old Gen Z report holding a job compared with ~30% of millennials at the same age
 - **Contributing factors:**
 - Increased competitiveness for higher education
 - Greater parental emphasis on academics
 - Expanded access to structured extracurricular & enrichment programs
 - **Educational & workplace implications:**
 - Developing comfort with professional norms and workplace interactions
 - Ongoing learning around expectations related to communication, accountability and workload
 - Benefit from explicit guidance to support engagement, confidence and retention

Strategies to Address Limited Work Experience

- Set clear expectations early
- Provide structured onboarding & orientation
- Normalize learning curves and early-career development
- Use frequent, actionable feedback
- Discuss power skills
- Emphasize skill-building & gradually increase independence



Preceptor takeaway: Structured onboarding, supportive guidance and gradual autonomy help learners build confidence and competence



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Medina et al., 2021

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Heightened Focus on Mental Health & Work-Life Balance



• Contributing factors:

- Greater awareness of mental health
- Increased academic and professional pressures
- Experience with disruption and uncertainty (pandemic, economic stressors)
- Expectation of boundaries between work, learning and personal time

• Educational & workplace implications:

- Value supportive, psychologically safe learning environments
- Prefer clear expectations and predictable schedules
- Benefit from proactive check-ins
- Increased engagement when well-being is acknowledged alongside performance

DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020; Shorey et al., 2021



Strategies to Support Mental Health & Well-Being

- Foster a positive, inclusive learning environment
- Promote mutual respect and psychological safety
- Demonstrate an interest in learners as individuals (within professional boundaries)
- Normalize check-ins and asking for help
- Be transparent, honest and consistent in communication
- Model kindness, professionalism and balance



Preceptor Takeaway: Supporting well-being isn't about lowering standards - it's about creating an environment where learners can meet them



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DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020
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Technology-Integrated Learning and Communication



- **Digital natives:**

- Grew up with constant access to information
- Comfortable with virtual and hybrid learning
- Regular use of social media and digital communication tools
- Expect efficient, technology-supported workflows

- **Educational & workplace implications:**

- Prefer clear, concise communication
- Benefit from guidance on professional communication norms
- Need support in evaluating quality information



Strategies to Integrate Technology



- **Intentionally incorporate technology into the learning experience:**

- Use short, focused educational videos
- Assign pre-recorded content (education sessions, code response reviews)
- Use brief pre-assessments or knowledge checks (online forms or quizzes)
- Leverage the learner's strengths

- **Leverage secure digital tools for communication and collaboration:**

- Use secure messaging platforms for patient discussions
- Share cloud-based documents for DI questions, task lists

Preceptor takeaway: Curated videos, pre-work, and secure shared tools help reinforce concepts, support communication, and streamline feedback while maintaining professionalism

Shorey et al., 2021; Medina et al., 2021



Expectation of Frequent Feedback & Clear Structure



• Contributing factors:

- Feedback-rich educational environments
 - Detailed rubrics, frequent assessments, specific learning objectives
- Digital culture with real-time responses
- Reduced informal learning during virtual and hybrid training periods

• Educational & workplace implications:

- Prefer clear expectations, goals and success criteria
- Benefit from brief, regular check-ins rather than infrequent formal evaluations
- Increased confidence and engagement with timely and actionable feedback
- Greater efficiency and performance when structure is established early



DiMattio & Hudacek, 2020; Medina et al., 2021

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Strategies to Provide Feedback & Structure

- Set clear expectations on day one
- Use brief, frequent check-ins
- Make success criteria explicit
- Provide structured milestones
- Explain the “why” behind expectations
- Maintain consistency



Preceptor takeaway: Clear expectations and brief, frequent feedback build confidence, efficiency, and professional growth

Medina et al., 2021

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Question 2: Which of the following factors has most influenced Gen Z's approach to learning and professional environments?

- A. Growing up with immediate access to information and technology
- B. Experiencing significant social and economic uncertainty
- C. Increased emphasis on mental health, inclusion, and well-being
- D. Entering education and the workforce with different expectations around feedback and communication
- E. All of the above



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Preceptor Takeaways

- Structured onboarding, supportive guidance and gradual autonomy help learners build confidence and professional competence
- Supporting learner well-being does not mean lowering standards – it creates the conditions needed to meet them
- Curated videos, pre-work, and secure shared tools reinforce learning, support communication, and streamline feedback while maintaining professionalism
- Clear expectations paired with brief, frequent feedback promote confidence, efficiency, and professional growth



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Assess case-based situations and apply strategies to improve learning experiences



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Scenario 1

- APPE student on 1st clinical rotation on general medicine service
- **Situation:**
 - During the 1st week, the student is highly motivated and engaged and seems genuinely excited to be on rotation
 - Despite arriving on time, the student states they are unable to work up 2 patients before rounds
 - When presenting patients, the student:
 - Reads off every single lab value they looked at
 - Has difficulty identifying and prioritizing the patient's problems
 - Struggles to formulate concise, actionable recommendations



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Think – Pair – Share

- What early-career factors might contribute to this student's approach?
- How could you help the student prioritize information and manage time effectively?



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Discussion

- What early-career factors might contribute to this student's approach?
 - Limited prior exposure to real-time clinical decision making
 - Fear of making an incorrect recommendation
 - Prior educational experiences that emphasized completeness over prioritization
 - Unfamiliarity with time constraints and workflow expectations on rounds
 - Desire for reassurance
- How could you help the student prioritize information and manage time effectively?
 - Have the student observe you working up a patient & discuss your thought process
 - Set clear expectations for pre-rounding prep time per patient
 - Provide a checklist of "must review" data
 - Have the student initially focus on one or two key recommendations per patient



Scenario 2

- PGY1 resident in the MICU
- **Situation:**
 - Resident is well-prepared, has strong baseline knowledge and is motivated. However, as the rotation progresses, they become increasingly frustrated by variation in expectations among different ICU preceptors
 - For example:
 - One preceptor expects the resident to run every recommendation by her before discussing with the team
 - Another prefers the resident to take initiative and intervene when appropriate while on rounds
- The resident expresses uncertainty about how assertive to be and worries about being perceived as either too passive or too aggressive depending on the preceptor



Think – Pair – Share

- How can residents be supported in adapting to different preceptor styles?
- How might inconsistent expectations affect resident confidence and performance?



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Discussion

- How can residents be supported in adapting to different preceptor styles?
 - Set expectations as a team → if there is variation ensure it is communicated
 - Encourage learners to ask clarifying questions when expectations vary between preceptors
 - Model flexibility by demonstrating how recommendations may be framed differently for different providers
 - Use shared handoff tools or documents so preceptors can communicate expectations and learner progress across the team
- How might inconsistent expectations affect resident confidence and performance?
 - Creates uncertainty about what meeting expectations looks like
 - Increases cognitive load as learner adjusts to different preceptor styles
 - May undermine confidence despite strong clinical skills
 - Can lead to hesitation and decreased initiative



Scenario 3

- APPE student on a clinical rotation
- **Situation:**
 - The student starts the rotation motivated and engaged. He is always professional but over a couple weeks his performance becomes inconsistent. He remains professional, but seems fatigued, quieter during discussions and slower to complete tasks
 - **Unbeknownst to the preceptor the student is:**
 - Caring for a sick family member at home
 - Commuting an hour each way to the site
 - Working every weekend for financial reasons
 - **Expectations remain high but the preceptor:**
 - Does not ask about the student's adaptation to the rotation
 - Does not check-in regarding workload, well-being or external stressors
 - Focuses feedback solely on task completion and efficiency
- The student hesitates to disclose personal challenges, worrying that doing so may be perceived as unprofessional or an excuse



Think – Pair – Share

- What opportunities exist for preceptors to create space for disclosure without overstepping boundaries?
- What role does psychological safety play in this scenario?
- How can preceptors support learners while maintaining professional expectations?



Discussion

- What opportunities exist for preceptors to create space for disclosure without overstepping boundaries?
 - Brief, routine check-ins
 - Asking open-ended, non-invasive questions (How are things going? How does the workload feel?)
 - Setting the expectation that support and communication are welcomed
- What role does psychological safety play in this scenario?
 - Enables learners to speak up before stress becomes overwhelming
 - Otherwise, learners may struggle silently and disengage
 - A lack of check-ins can unintentionally signal that personal well-being is less important
 - Small gestures of empathy can significantly increase trust and openness



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Discussion

- How can preceptors support learners while maintaining professional expectations?
 - Maintain clear expectations while offering flexibility when appropriate
 - Help prioritize tasks and projects
 - Adjust timelines or scope when feasible without lowering standards
 - Encourage use of support resources
 - Reinforce that seeking support is part of our professional responsibility, not weakness
- Support and accountability are NOT mutually exclusive



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Conclusion – Teaching & Learning with Gen Z

- **Key Gen Z Characteristics Influencing Learning:**

- Enter professional training with limited work experience
- Value clear expectations, structure and frequent feedback
- Are digital natives who integrate technology into learning
- Place strong emphasis on mental health, well-being and work-life balance
- Seek purpose, transparency and psychological safety in learning environments



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Conclusion – Preceptor Pearls

- Structure and clear expectations can accelerate learning & growth – not dependance
- Technology can enhance efficiency and engagement when used intentionally
- Brief, frequent feedback supports confidence and professional development
- Teaching power skills requires modeling
- Supportive environments help learners meet high standards, not avoid them



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