



# The pursuit of happiness:

## For Generation Z, the quest for work-life balance begins and ends in Michigan

Just as employers were starting to get a grasp on what millennials want in the workplace (good design and cold brew on tap), a whole new generation is making its debut, bringing along a different set of preferences and expectations for their careers. Across Michigan, leaders of companies small and large, homegrown and transplanted, are working to understand and anticipate the wants of Generation Z, in order to attract an educated and motivated workforce. Fortunately for them, a location in the Great Lakes State may help put their business ahead of the game.

## Who is Generation Z?

[Pew Research Center](#) considers anyone born since the start of 1997, a member of Generation Z. To call them tech savvy would be an understatement. Members of Gen Z are the first true “digital natives,” raised in a time when the internet was already widely in use. The oldest members of the generation were 10 when the iPhone launched in 2007. They’ve grown up using mobile devices as a form of entertainment, information, creative expression and social connection. As young children, they saw their families struggle during the recession, and it made an impact when it comes to the pragmatic way they look at finances. They’re the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in history (nearly half of them are nonwhite), and, potentially, the most educated: Early signs indicate that they’re enrolling in college at a higher rate than millennials, according to [Pew Research Center](#). All these factors are helping shape Gen Z as it joins the workforce.

In a number of ways, the values of Gen Z overlap with those of the millennials. They both cherish diversity, especially in the workplace. [Pew Research Center](#) found that the majority of Gen Z and millennials say that increasing racial and ethnic diversity in the country is a positive step. Nearly one third of people in Gen Z say they know someone who uses a gender-neutral pronoun. Like their predecessors, Gen Z is mission driven, and according to a survey by [Monster.com](#) and global research firm TNS, 74 percent of Gen Z rank “purpose” ahead of a paycheck. Still, finances and flexible schedules matter. A survey by [Sodexo](#) found that a high salary and work-life balance were considered leading factors when it comes to quality of life for Gen Z. When the job search site [Glassdoor](#) performed a text analysis of pros and cons that Gen Z employees wrote about their jobs, the most common phrases were “work environment,” “flexible hours” and “good pay.” Research by staffing agency [Robert Half](#) found that members of Gen Z also value the option to work remotely and appreciate having access to resources to help them learn new skills and advance their careers.



**74%** of  
Gen Z rank  
“purpose”  
ahead of a  
paycheck



Gen Z is coming into its own at an intriguing time. Unemployment is low, and baby boomers are retiring at a rapid rate, leaving job openings that managers are eager to fill. In many competitive fields, it's a jobseekers' market, which puts an added pressure on employers to create work environments and compensation packages that will attract and retain employees for years to come. All around Michigan, legacy business leaders know, and new business leaders are learning, that the state is loaded with enticements—from cost

of living to quality of life—for members of Gen Z, who already fill the classrooms of Michigan's colleges and universities and are eager to find employment upon graduation. Here, we spotlight two companies that are enjoying the benefits of doing business in Michigan. In both cases, business leaders have found that their location serves as a selling point to the younger generation, fueling the work-life balance they crave.

## Nexient: Tapping Michigan's talent

Soon after [Nexient](#) launched as a 100 percent U.S.-based software service provider in Silicon Valley in 2009, its leaders began searching for the perfect location for its product development center. They knew they wanted an affordable, attractive, central spot where the growing team could live and do business, within convenient reach of their many Fortune 500 clients. After much debate, the team narrowed a list of 350 possible cities down to 12, then to three, then finally to the current location: Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Ann Arbor appealed to the company for number of reasons: Michigan ranks as the fourth most affordable state in the country, with a 6 percent corporate income tax, a 4.25 percent flat income tax and cost of living that's 10 percent lower than the national average. Ann Arbor is within 500 miles of nearly half the U.S. and Canadian population, with easy access to Detroit Metro Airport, a major international gateway. Plus, leafy "Tree Town," as Ann Arbor is called, is renowned for its quality of life, having been named as one of the "Best Places to Live" and "Best College Towns" by national media. And organizations such as the Michigan Economic Development Corporation and Ann Arbor SPARK offered to help with recruiting and other tasks.

"Michigan checked all the right boxes," says Colin Chapman, Nexient's chief delivery officer.

Today, nearly 10 years after the product development center opened, Chapman is confident they made the right decision. The business has grown from a couple dozen employees to more than 500, with a majority in Michigan. It's been able to hire a large portion of its smart, savvy team from area colleges and universities. Michigan, after all, is home to the highest concentration of engineers in the nation. "The new college graduates come in, and they're very strong. They know what they're doing. They're very motivated. They're hungry. And they love to find a place at Nexient where

**“Michigan  
checked all  
the right  
boxes,”**

**Colin Chapman,**  
Nexient's Chief Delivery Officer.

they can start to build their career,” says Chapman.

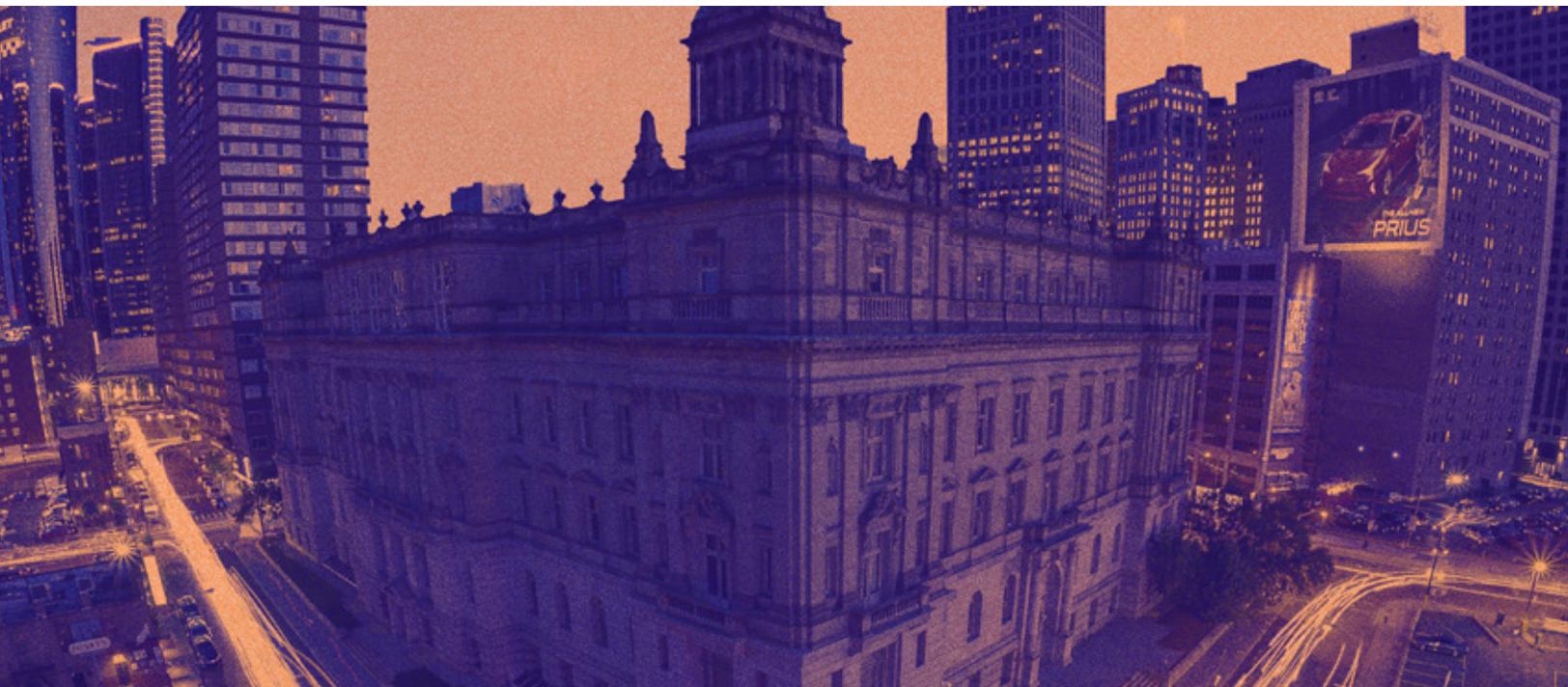
Judy Baxter is one of those hires. The 26-year-old software developer was offered her position soon after graduating Detroit’s Wayne State University in 2017. She accepted, thrilled that the job would allow her to stay not just in her home state, but also to afford a starter home with her fiancé, who is also studying to be a developer. Like many in her generation, Baxter values having a flexible schedule—she has the option to work from home, but she also enjoys working in the office with colleagues. And in her down time, she loves exploring all that the Great Lakes State has to offer, from viewing the Northern Lights from the Upper Peninsula to tubing down the Muskegon River. “You can only go so far before you hit some body of water,” she says.

Chris Kulwik, 23, started working with Nexient as a software developer after graduating from the University of Michigan. He says that the office culture is exactly what he hoped for in a job: It’s a relaxed atmosphere with open, social workspaces, comfortable beanbag chairs and good coffee, and he gets to help produce top-of-the-line software using the latest technologies. “It feels a lot like a Google or Amazon, while still being bite-sized and in a

quaint city,” says Kulwik.

For him, Michigan is synonymous with the outdoors, and in his free time, he loves to explore. “With so much water nearby, there are countless opportunities for kayaking, canoeing, boating, fishing. There is also an extensive network of state parks, metro parks, hiking trails. And if you’re looking for real adventure, you can drive eight hours north and explore Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore or countless adorable little cities full of warm faces in the Upper Peninsula,” he says.

For 20-somethings like Baxter and Kulwik, Michigan has a kind of magnetism that they don’t want to leave. That’s beneficial to Nexient, when it comes to employee attraction and retention, and it’s also a boon to the state’s economy, as more businesses discover the benefits of working in Michigan. “We want to be in an ecosystem we can work from, network with and even hire from,” says Chapman. “It’s better for all of us if the ecosystem grows and the pie gets bigger.”



## Quicken Loans: Success that's made in Michigan

When Quicken Loans moved its headquarters to downtown Detroit from the suburbs in 2010, its founder, Dan Gilbert, said it was part of an effort to transform the city into a “high-tech hub of business and ingenuity.” Today, Quicken Loans and its family of companies employ 17,000 in the downtown core, which is, indeed, becoming the hub Gilbert envisioned. His businesses alone have invested more than \$5.6 billion in 100-plus properties in or near downtown.

Mike Malloy, who is “chief people officer” for Quicken Loans and is involved in managing the company’s human resources, is continually seeking new talent to add to the team. “We have 1,300 open jobs at this moment,” he says. “We are hiring nonstop, hundreds and hundreds of folks every single month.”

The business, which is the country’s largest mortgage lender, works to fill those roles in a number of ways, including partnering with nonprofits to support job training and mentoring programs in the community and by working with Michigan universities to recruit students and graduates. “Michigan is home to incredible universities producing world-class talent in all the most cutting-edge things you need,” says Malloy. “We find incredible talent in technology, data science, artificial intelligence, machine learning and business.” Quicken Loans also runs a robust internship program that introduces interns to a variety of areas of the business.

Logan Dailey was one of those interns. She applied for the program her final year at Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan, and after a few months on the job, she was hired on and

now works as a senior project analyst. Dailey, 22, says that Quicken Loans appeals to a number of her Gen Z sensibilities. “Overall, what I think Gen Z is looking for is an employer who can offer us some financial security and a comprehensive compensation package, the whole deal,” she says. Workplace culture comes next on her priority list. The friendly office is a place she truly enjoys spending time. Plus, she appreciates that her employer works to improve the community through a volunteer program that encourages employees to give back while on the clock.

Through the program, Dailey has accompanied area children to summer camp and a museum, participated in neighborhood clean-ups, helped with renovation projects and more. “I think

**“We are hiring  
nonstop,  
hundreds and  
hundreds of  
folks every  
single  
month.”**

**Mike Malloy,**  
Chief People Officer, Quicken Loans



it's almost in everyone's blood here to want to help Detroit," says Dailey. She adds that her job allows for freedom in her schedule to explore Detroit, trying out new restaurants on her lunch hour, connecting with friends for a drink after work and constantly meeting young professionals like herself. "Because so many big businesses are moving their headquarters downtown or opening up offices or branches in downtown Detroit, there's so many things going on down here that the opportunities are endless," she says.

Quicken prides itself in offering initiatives that appeal to all generations, and Malloy says he sees a lot of overlap in what Gen Z, millennials and older generations want. Many, like Dailey, are drawn to the mission-driven aspect of the business—which the team often refers to as a "for-more-than-profit company." The company culture also encourages learning and skill building through incentives such as

tuition reimbursement and a program called Thrive, where employees can explore roles in different departments (a mortgage loan officer, for example, could switch to a job in marketing or learn to write code). And for many employees, the location seals the deal. Some, like Dailey, have grown up in smaller towns around Michigan and are eager to live in a cosmopolitan city. Others come from outside the state, and are surprised to learn of the vibrancy and affordability of Detroit and discover the gorgeous scenery all around the state. "They are always blown away by the energy in downtown Detroit, and then they also begin to see the incredible variety of Michigan, with all its beauty," says Malloy. "It is really a huge selling point for us."

## Finding pure balance

Jobs, benefits, career development, an affordable cost of living—these are all important factors for the next generation of engineers, computer programmers, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, sales people and others who choose to live in Michigan. But just as a person is more than what they do, a state is more than its business opportunities. When people who live in Michigan are asked what they love about their state, they frequently mention one or two of the 11,000 lakes, or walking along the country's longest freshwater coastline. They talk about recent visits to small, character-filled towns, like Holland, Michigan, known for its annual tulip festival, and larger cities, like Grand Rapids, beloved for its art and beer scene. They share memories of the forested Upper Peninsula, where one can take a shipwreck tour of Lake Superior; of

riding bicycles and horse-drawn carriages on Mackinac Island, where no cars are allowed; and of Detroit, hopping on the QLine streetcar to reach Little Caesars Arena to cheer on the Pistons or the Red Wings.

In many ways, Michigan remains a cherished secret to residents and holiday-goers throughout the Midwest. It's a land of lakes and rivers, dunes and dogsledding, where you can travel to diverse cities and towns, taste wines, beers and ciders paired with food fresh from nearby farms. But the word is spreading, and as more businesses get in on the action in Michigan, they discover a climate that favors commerce and embraces community. In this day, that's a secret that's hard to keep.

To learn more about business opportunities in Michigan, visit

[MichiganBusiness.org](https://MichiganBusiness.org)

and to discover more about living, working and playing in the Great Lakes State, visit

[Michigan.org](https://Michigan.org).