
PARK STREET STRATEGIES

MESSAGE MATTERS

Fall 2021 INGAA Foundation Research
Project:

Interest in Industry Careers Among Younger
Generations,
and Message & Communication Strategies to
Attract Gen Z

Park Street Strategies
October/November 2021

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Section I: The Do's and Don'ts of Messaging: Recruiting Gen Z to the Natural Gas Industry

Do:

- **Do Highlight Growth & Benefits:** Due to their concern about the industry's longevity, Gen Z's perception of the natural gas industry is one that leaves little room for upward career mobility. They need to hear that natural gas/infrastructure companies are indeed positive opportunities to help start and grow their careers, and not simply for long-time or veteran workers. Communicating all the different opportunities, plus the key benefits provided (e.g., salary, work-life balance, healthcare, and retirement benefits) is extremely important to attracting the next generation of workers.
- **Do Position Natural Gas as a Partner to Renewables:** Framing natural gas as a partner to renewables will show Gen Z how the industry is adapting for a clean energy future – which is a priority they very passionately believe in. There is some understanding of the necessity of natural gas for today, but the industry needs to show that there is true and sincere partnership with renewables to attract this younger generation of workers.
- **Do Utilize Relatable Messengers:** In terms of messengers to use to represent the industry, the more relatable the messenger, the more effective the industry's message will be among Gen Z. More specifically, it will be necessary to use younger, entry- or early- level industry professionals who may be better tuned-in to the values, views, wants and needs of younger jobseekers.
- **Do Promote Cleaner Energy Innovations/Advancements:** Promoting the technological advancements the industry is making, such as carbon capture technologies, utilizing renewable natural gas, and hydrogen, will make Gen Z more likely to work in the natural gas industry. Why? Not only does Gen Z find it more exciting to work with technology and innovation, but these advancements serve as powerful proof points that the industry is changing to address the risk/threat of climate change – *which is a major issue about which this generation is otherwise simply unaware of what the industry is doing.*
- **Do Promote a More Aspirational, Big-Picture Focus:** For the industry to attract this younger generation of professionals, it must start telling a different story – one that is more aspirational and that conveys the natural gas industry is part of achieving a larger mission or purpose (i.e., a clean energy future/better environment, etc.). This in turn should help negate the pervasive perception among Gen Z'ers that the industry is, at best, focused on the present or that it is not an obstacle for the future.

Don't:

- **It's Not All About the Enduring Value of Natural Gas:** While most Gen Z'ers agree that natural gas is a better fuel source than both coal and oil, this generation strongly believes that the *best* alternative is renewable energy. Therefore, be careful not to tout natural gas as the "best" fuel or option – *not only might this message come off as counterproductive, but it can be seen as self-serving.* Why? Most do not believe it – so why would they want to work in an industry that seems disconnected from what they see as the future?
- **Avoid Using Technical, Industry-Specific Language:** When highlighting the benefits or more interesting aspects of working in the industry, it is important not to overuse technical industry terminology that young professionals with little to zero exposure to the industry may not be able to understand or appreciate. This otherwise only perpetuates the perception that this industry is inaccessible to those with less institutional or background knowledge and is only a STEM or physical labor/field-focused career. In other words, it may intimidate others who may have other valuable skills away from wanting to work in this sector.
- **Don't Reference Existing Negative Industry Perceptions:** Referencing that there are negative perceptions and connotations of the industry only reinforces the viewpoint that natural gas is an industry that faces a "deadline" and will be phased out. Put differently, Gen Z doesn't want to work in an industry that is defined by negative public perceptions. Instead, focus on the positive work, exciting developments, and real progress being done in the industry (e.g., partnering with renewables, developing clean technologies, etc.).
- **Don't Compare Benefits to Other Industries (i.e., Tech or Healthcare Industries):** Gen Z had negative reactions to the comparison of benefits and flexibility offered by the tech and medical/healthcare industries to the natural gas industry – even though the benefits and work-life balance offered in natural gas/infrastructure industries may be better. Why? This wasn't necessarily believable, and such overt negative comparisons are ineffective.
- **Don't Talk About Career Growth Without Proof:** The prevailing presumption from Gen Z is that the industry is shrinking. When they are told it is in fact growing without any examples to prove it, many are understandably skeptical. This claim needs to be paired with examples that help exemplify and demonstrate the future career growth that exists for Gen Z'ers to believe it.

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Section II: The Do's and Don'ts of Messaging: Recruiting Gen Z to the Natural Gas Industry

Do:

- **Do Emphasize Workplace Diversity & Inclusion:** There is an expectation from Gen Z for their employers' values to align with their own to varying degrees – and one of the most important values that the industry can highlight is its commitment to diversity and inclusivity. This commitment must be demonstrated as a living practice, and not a simple verbal promise. In short, Gen Z needs to hear from people in the industry who exemplify a diverse/inclusive workforce and must see real proof that the industry workplace represents their vision of America.
- **Do Highlight Different Opportunities:** Due to a perception that careers in the natural gas/infrastructure industry are somewhat narrow in scope and/or limited to physical jobs in the field, efforts must be made to aggressively communicate all career opportunities available. In practice, this will require a far more aggressive public effort or campaign that demonstrates the diversity of jobs available for young professionals. One message that will greatly aid in this goal is an emphasis on cross-departmental learning as it shows Gen Z that the industry offers options for different and exciting career paths.
- **Do Utilize Face-to-Face Recruiting:** To educate Gen Z about the industry, and eventually attract them to it, you must meet them where they are, and specifically, where they're networking for jobs and internships. Given the pervasive questions that so many young people have about this industry, having more face-to-face interactions is crucial to having a lasting impact on a potential recruit. Such interactions will help build credibility and foster a belief that the industry truly welcomes and has a place for young talent.
- **Do Promote the Changes Happening Within the Industry:** Emphasizing positive change in the industry is key to drawing in Gen Z. Cross-industry diversity and inclusion initiatives, targeted programs for young people, new partnerships, and alliances with other industries (i.e., tech) are just some examples of positive change that can help attract young talent. Not only are these examples enticing in themselves, but they are also critical to highlighting the scope of change that will help further positively define the industry over the coming decade.

Don't:

- **Don't Make it Just About the "Last Job":** Gen Z places great importance on the growth of their hard skills in the workplace, and do not necessarily see themselves in one job or career forever. Given that the industry is competing with the tech industry and others for top talent, it is imperative to highlight (1) an array of skills that one can develop, (2) that they will and can be part of a great (diverse) team who share their core values, and (3) that they will develop life/job skills that will provide them with even more exciting internal and external opportunities over the course of their professional careers.
- **Don't Ignore the Threat Posed by Climate Change:** When it comes the issue of climate change specifically, most Gen Z'ers clearly see this as a real threat and they must hear/see that the companies recruiting them believe this, too. To have any chance at attracting more diverse skills and talent, other than those driven simply by financial reasons or their interest in the industry, a more concerted effort must be made that makes clear the industry is not simply ignoring the threat of climate change.
- **Don't Solely Utilize Traditional Industry Workers in Ads:** Ineffective recruitment ads are those that narrowly feature typical field workers in hard hats. Why? While these images are not necessarily negative, they are largely ineffective in attracting those younger professionals who currently believe the industry only employs these 'traditional' professionals doing hard labor. Instead, career-related ads must showcase a variety of professions that are available within the industry to increase the likelihood of attracting Gen Z to these jobs.
- **Don't Focus on the Current Benefits of Natural Gas:** Gen Z'ers do not actively think about the value of natural gas, so focusing on the present-day value of natural gas won't attract talent to these jobs. Again, many believe that renewables and other forms of renewable energy hold more promise. To make a pro-natural gas argument more effective, you must show how the industry is rapidly and dramatically evolving to meet a changing world – a world that it is more determined to impact for the better.

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Section III: Communicating to Gen Z: Key Messages to Emphasize

1. **Communicating the Industry's Energy Vision – Innovative:** An obstacle that the natural gas industry faces when trying to attract young talent is the overall lack of awareness about what the industry is doing to adapt and progress along with the inevitable changing energy mix of the future. The industry should highlight and effectively communicate the broad scope of innovations and how such innovations will help achieve a technologically advanced and cleaner energy future. Why? Gen Z'ers hold a preference for wanting to work at an exciting workplace, one that is cutting edge, and that embraces new technology/clean fuels vs. old technology/fossil fuels.
 - **Examples of an Effective Message:**
 - "There's amazing innovation happening to realize the green energy future and sustainable clean future for the energy industry."
 - "There's been different kinds of discussions for what the industry is envisioning. There have been talks of using hydrogen plants instead of crude oil, and using cleaner gas transport."
2. **It's About Being a Part of the Carbon Neutral Energy Future:** Something that cannot be overstated is that Gen Z will not agree to any message promoting natural gas as *the* fuel of the future. When targeting Gen Z'ers for recruitment, it's imperative that industry messaging be reframed to instead focus on the specific measures that the industry is taking to become cleaner and how it is focused on reducing or eliminating carbon emissions.
 - **Example of an Ineffective Message:** "[Natural gas] is the cleanest, best alternative to fossil fuels there is. It is the cleanest burning fossil fuel, and it is the future as we move away from coal and other sources for electric power generation."
 - **Example of a Better Message:** "We're going through another transformation where we're pushing away from heavy production. So, what you're starting to see is a lot more focus on being carbon neutral, which you're seeing for all industries. But it's interesting when you apply that concept to the energy industry, because we can directly impact the amount of carbon [emissions], building carbon capture facilities."
3. **Promoting the Opportunities for Young Workers:** Explicitly highlighting the opportunities for young people entering the industry is extremely valuable. There is a perception among the Gen Z age group that the natural gas industry is mostly for older generations or those with established experience in the industry, so messaging that highlights the opportunities available for the younger generation to enter and quickly grow their careers is effective in increasing Gen Z's likelihood of working for the natural gas and infrastructure industries.
 - **Examples of an Effective Message:**
 - "There are opportunities to move around to different parts of the company, and find your passions and also your skill sets, and match those."
 - "There's a gap in age from people who are senior leadership and then people who are coming in the industry. [But] there's gonna be fast development of these resources, and they're gonna move up [quickly]."

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4. **The Importance of Highlighting Gen Z's Values in Messaging:** There is inherent value in reflecting the values of this more progressive generation – when prompted, respondents said it was very or somewhat important that an employer's values shared that of their own. As such, Gen Z responds positively to direct messages which emphasize their values; in particular, that employers prioritize diversity/inclusivity, giving back, and improving their community.
 - **Example of an Effective Message (from outside industry):** "You can have the opportunity to work on projects that have a lasting effect on the world we live in and define the technology of tomorrow. We are looking for the one-of-a-kind, to not just think outside the box, but reinvent it. At our company, you will work alongside a global community in a workplace that champions inclusion and a culture of giving back. If you're ready to do what you love and have a great time doing it, join us."
5. **It's About Mission, Not a Job:** Another priority for many Gen Z'ers is that their career not simply be a job, but part of a bigger mission to improve the world around them. If they do not feel as though an employer is working toward that larger mission, then they will be far less inclined to work in that industry. In short, they want to work in an industry that reflects and empowers their passions. More importantly, if they do end up in a career within an industry they do not agree with morally or ethically, they will be less motivated to work hard and less passionate about their work.
 - **Example of an Effective Message:** "We don't offer jobs — we offer opportunities for people like you to apply your passion to vital work."
6. **It's About a Positive Workplace Culture:** That the industry offers a great workplace culture and community with people who support one another was one of the most powerful messages tested among Gen Z participants in focus groups. Why did this message elicit such a positive response? According to these respondents, they want to work at a place that promotes a positive environment which values internal collaboration, trust, and aligned values.
 - **Example of An Effective Message:** "It's a great community that we have. Everyone is supporting one another. If you go to a conference by yourself, you'll see someone that you know there just from working in the industry, working on projects, all the contacts that you make. You'll have them for rest of your life. I've met some amazing people that are good, genuine friends of mine, because we share the same values regardless of what we do for work."
7. **Highlight the Specific Benefits:** Job and workplace benefits, including compensation, are very important to Gen Z. One of the strongest messages tested was one that not only emphasized the specific and broad benefits offered within the industry, but that actively boasted about how good these benefits were.
 - **Example of An Effective Message:** "[The industry] takes care of your health insurance. Usually, you start getting life insurance; I'm already building a 401k at 24 years old, and those kinds of benefits make you think about the longevity of your life ... and of what you can become, and how comfortable that you can be 40 or 50 years from now. So, the benefits are astronomical, and they are definitely worth the while and the hard work."
 - **Key Point:** In terms of attracting Gen Z to the industry, consider utilizing a young, relatable professional as a messenger who can communicate their experience receiving these benefits firsthand.

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8. **Make Clear Your (Positive) Position on Climate Change:** One of the biggest negative perceptions Gen Z has of natural gas and the broader natural gas industry is that it is producing and distributing a highly polluting fuel source that is directly contributing to climate change. Moreover, many in the younger generation have heard next to nothing in terms of what or how the industry is addressing climate change. To dispel these negative perceptions, the industry must communicate that it is indeed working to address and fight climate change by focusing more on cleaner energy and partnering with renewables.
- **Example of An Effective Message:** “Our industry believes in climate change, and our industry is succeeding in taking active measures to share with the public their goals to become more green and environmentally sound. This publicity in itself should help with the younger generation’s perception of the industries, and that can raise their awareness on the steps we’re truly taking to produce cleaner energy.”
 - **Key Point:** The negative perceptions about natural gas companies and climate change are very strong and will not be easily changed unless active efforts are made to demonstrate how the industry is being more progressive.
9. **Highlight Energy Jobs as Providing a Vital “Public Service”:** Gen Z has positive reactions upon hearing the relationship between energy jobs and providing a larger public service for the greater good. Why? This helps minimize the view that the industry is indifferent to public or societal concerns, and helps reinforce the notion that the industry performs – and will perform – a vital societal function well into the future.
- **Example of an Effective Message:** “It’s all about providing that consistent, safe, reliable energy in the form of a public service. We’re all public servants because we work to serve the rest of the economy, and the rest of the environment, too. We want to be those public servants and do it in the safest manner that we can for the society and for the environment.”
 - **Key Point:** Emphasizing the industry as providing a vital public service – both for the economy and the environment! – represents another key opportunity for the industry to promote the array of values which Gen Z’ers agree with and want to be part of when joining any future workplace.
10. **Promote Active Efforts in Social Responsibility:** The value of social responsibility and giving back to the community through financial and workplace support should not be underestimated when appealing to this progressive generation. Emphasizing social commitments will help highlight that your workplace offers an array of opportunities for employees to become more actively involved in their community and/or the world. Put differently, this generation wants to give back, and such beliefs should be empowered and encouraged when recruiting workers across this age group.
- **Example of an Effective Message:** “We have multiple volunteer programs, everything from reading partners to the United Way. There’s a lot more involvement than people think, and I feel like social responsibility, it’s perhaps not thought of with those older traditional companies.”

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Section IV: Communicating to Gen Z: Critical Recommendations

1. **Tell Your Future-Focused Story:** Tell a new (future-focused) industry story to change the narrative that it isn't worth long-term employment. Showing Gen Z that industry jobs will exist well into the future means highlighting innovation/technology and a lot more clean energy.
2. **Explain Opportunities for Growth:** Promote growth opportunities and job stability. Given the perception that there is little room for growth in a 'dying' industry, Gen Z needs to hear more about career advancement opportunities and be assured these jobs are secure into the future.
3. **Use Effective Proof Points:** While job stability, compensation, and growth opportunities are crucial to Gen Z, simply hearing "*the industry is growing*" is not enough. Such statements must be reinforced/supported by specific facts and examples to illustrate *how* it is growing.
4. **Show/Prove How the Industry is Changing:** Gen Z needs to hear and know more about how the industry is *changing*. An industry currently perceived as focused on the present must make explicitly clear how it is changing to appeal to Gen Z's priorities and desires.
5. **Make Commitment to Climate Change:** Fighting climate change is a big issue for Gen Z. With one of the biggest negatives being that the industry contributes to a lot of environmental pollution, Gen Z *must hear a clear commitment to take responsibility and address these impacts*.
6. **Messaging Must Speak to Gen Z Values:** A values-conscious generation requires a new approach. While employers may traditionally avoid such messaging, Gen Z must hear messaging from the industry which echoes their priorities on clean energy and addressing climate change.
7. **Never Reinforce Negative Perceptions:** Gen Z is already well aware of the industry's negatives – there is no need to reference them unnecessarily in an attempt to be relatable. A more effective approach is simply pivoting to the future-focused industry vision message.
8. **Promote Great Compensation and Benefits:** Gen Z clearly has high expectations for compensation and benefits. Sharing how the industry can provide very well-paying jobs for young career-seekers (and good work-life balance) makes Gen Z more open to industry jobs.
9. **Use Diverse & Relatable Messengers:** Always be sure to use and highlight (young) diverse messengers. Inclusion and diversity are important values to many Gen Z'ers. The most effective messengers for the industry will reflect the diversity in this demographic (and will be similarly aged).
10. **Get the Information Out – Create an Aggressive Outreach Campaign:** A strong, visible, and targeted campaign is necessary to reach Gen Z. A lack of a visible (and resonating) campaign all but ensures the industry will be forgotten by younger career seekers. There is a severe lack of knowledge and awareness about these jobs.

Section V: Key Words/Phrases to Use & to Minimize/Avoid

	
Natural gas will continue to be a partner to renewables	Natural gas is the cleanest alternative fuel
The natural gas industry is innovating for the future	We will always need natural gas; natural gas is the future
The industry is adapting with the needs of the world	You're not always going to have sun, you're not always going to have wind, geothermal or nuclear...
Building a smarter energy future, together	Whether you are working in the field, whether you are a driver for a logistics company, whether you are inside sales pushing out quotes every day...
Creating a healthier energy future for all	Great benefits as opposed to people who work in the medical industry. The pay's great, but their quality of life is clearly not too great.
Joining the energy innovation sector allows you to be an agent of change...	Companies are updating things like compressor stations...
Instead of fighting the change, the industry is very rapidly adjusting to the change [through] renewable natural gas projects, for example...	We're using different technologies like bitcoin mining...
The industry is going through a transformation in carbon reduction...	Even though there may be negative connotations toward the industry...
You will be challenged and learn something new every day	Because of the lack of investment in infrastructure...
Your benefits [and starting wage] are going to be great...and you're going to have a relatively straight path forward of progression in your career.	One of the things that makes this the best country in the world...

Section VI: Strong Positive Messages to Use/Gen Z Reactions

Five Strong Positive Messages	Gen Z Hears/Thinks...
Whether you're seeking a summer internship or your first job out of college, when you join our company, you can expect socially impactful projects and plenty of leadership exposure.	Even at an entry-level position, I'd have the opportunity to work on something that will make a positive impact.
The personal growth you get out of our careers will help you become a strong and confident leader...you will like being part of a group that is doing the right things to support our environment and to help [your community]	I'm comforted knowing that not only these values align with my own, but that the opportunity for growth is there.
You're going have your weekends off, and you're going be able to do things like take a lot of trips...You're going have the flexibility to do those kinds of things. [Work/life balance is an important value for us]	I appreciate hearing that the industry/company would respect my need for a healthy work/life balance.
Instead of fighting the change, the industry is very rapidly adjusting to the change. There are more renewable natural gas projects...	I like hearing that the industry is adapting to change, and <i>how</i> it's doing so, such as through specific clean energy projects.
Joining the energy innovation sector allows you to be an agent of change.	The industry's focus on innovation and change is positive and exiting than what I would have assumed it to be like.

Section VII: Weak Messages to Avoid/Gen Z Reactions

Weak Messages to Avoid	Gen Z Hears/Thinks...
Our operations technicians work together to embrace common goals, support pipeline operations, safely maintain facility equipment, and analyze data to solve technical and operational problems.	These jobs seem to require a specific skillset which I may not have. This is about pipelines and an old industry.
Last year, we supported over 80 organizations, donated more than \$300,000, and our employees volunteered over 1,300 hours.	While this is positive, it is not enough to convince me to work in the industry. These are just numbers out of context.
We will always need natural gas – it's the cleanest alternative fuel.	While I agree natural gas is cleaner than oil and coal, I don't necessarily agree it's <i>the cleanest possible fuel</i> .
[The natural gas industry is] one of the things that makes this the best country in the world.	Is this country the best in the world? Seems like a different/unrelated discussion.
Because of the lack of investment in the infrastructure...	This is the opposite of the future-focused industry I'd want to work in.

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Section VIII: Examples of Young Industry Employee Testimonial Messages (Positive to Focus On vs. Negative Messages to Avoid)

Focus on This Type of Message	Avoid This Type of Message
If you want to work for a large multinational corporation, your benefits are going to be great. Your starting wage is going to be great, and you're going to have a relatively straight path forward of progression in your career.	Those are great benefits as opposed to, people who work shift work in the medical industry – the pay's great, but their quality of life is not too clearly great in my opinion. The same thing with the tech industry, a lot of long hours.
In my time with the company, I've had the opportunity to work on some very technical and important projects, from data visualization and compliance work in our major offices, to network deployment at a recently acquired facility.	My work has centered on the preciseness of our measurement systems, creating a handbook – among other projects – to help our project teams consistently size new and replacement meters across the company's system. It's exciting to know that my work will be utilized well into the future.
We're going through another transformation... pushing away from heavy production... a lot more focus on being carbon neutral, which you're seeing for everything. It's interesting when you apply that concept to the energy industry, because we can directly impact the amount of carbon emissions... [we're doing things like] building carbon capture facilities...	We're also considering resourcefulness in revisiting plugged-up or dried drill sites. We're starting to revisit those sites that we thought and that were at the time dry; sometimes we go back to them, and they're ready to be pumped again...