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How to Give Gen Y the Learning They Want by Jessica DuBois-Maahs

### **Millennials expect their first employer to provide formal training from the get-go.**

Millennials, also known as Gen Y, don't feel like employers are investing enough time in developing their skills, according to a recent survey.

More than 77 percent of pending 2013 graduates expect their first employer to provide formal training, but only 48 percent of 2011 and 2012 graduates report having received it in their first job, according to the April "Accenture 2013 College Graduate Employment Survey." The survey polled a little more than 1,000 students who will graduate from college between 2011 and this year.

Susan Cantrell, a research fellow at the Accenture Institute for High Performance, said the study underscores a potential discrepancy between the expectations of both new graduates and employers in terms of learning and development.

Many recent graduates believe they won't have the specialized skills required for their desired jobs after graduation, and they are hoping their employers are willing to close that skill gap through training programs during on-boarding.

Employers, however, do not view on-boarding in same light.

"It used to be that organizations would hire general liberal arts majors right out of college and train them," Cantrell said. "Recent graduates could expect to be hired in an entry-level professional job, receive substantial on-the-job and formal training, and then advance through the organization. Most organizations today offer less training compared to what they offered in the past, and [they] are looking for specific skills when they hire young people, rather than expecting to develop them through training."

Some organizations that are hiring millennials use specific strategies to overcome this misconception. Enova International has tailored its training programs to the Gen Y's specific needs and strengths, said Sarah Doll, the firm's senior director of talent management. She said the key is to take an in-the-moment, hands-on approach to training. More than 80 percent of Enova's workforce is Gen Y.

"Classroom training is not typically the best way to go with Gen Y, because they really want that one-on-one interaction," Doll said. "They want to be involved and feel like they are adding value. We give them meaningful projects where they are continuously learning. We feel that Gen Y employees will learn faster and be more productive quicker if they do more on-the-job training."

The company's mentoring program, for example, taps into a millennial's desire for immediate, constructive feedback and peer interaction, Doll said. In addition, the company's new employees

are given a long-term project to tackle on their first day, helping them feel like they hold a stake in the company's success.

Customizing training for young employees may also help retain them. More than half of U.S. employees report a desire to change their careers, and nearly 80 percent of workers in their 20s — the highest concentration among the age groups surveyed — report a desire to change careers, according to a July Harris survey for the University of Phoenix in Arizona.

For Enova International, the benefits of employing a primarily millennial workforce far outweigh the potential of an increased training and development cost, Doll said.

“They bring a certain energy and drive, and they are extremely motivated. They come with fresh ideas, and they really drive our projects,” Doll said. “Companies need to understand what they want and what they need. The easiest way to get that information is to simply ask.”

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