***Multigenerational Workforce***

By: Ann Bauer

Dan Schawbel founder of Millennial Branding, in partnership with Randstad conducted the first Worldwide Study of Gen Z and Y workplace expectations. For the first time in history, we have 4 generations in the workforce with Gen Z, Gen Y, Gen X and Baby Boomers all co-existing in the same office.

However, as more Baby Boomers reach retirement age and tech savvy Gen Y’s and Z’s continue to enter college, graduate and enter the workforce, the plain differences in values, communication styles and work habits of each generation are becoming increasingly clear. Leaders must be ready to take on the challenge of integrating newer workers while still respecting the seniority and experience of older workers.

Comparing Generations:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Gen Z | Gen Y | Gen X | Baby Boomers |
| Born | 1994-2010 | 1982-1993 | 1965-1981 | 1945-1964 |
| Core Values and attributes | Tech savvy, globally connected, flexible, tolerant of diverse cultures, Parent influence, views technology as a “way to get things done” entrepreneurial | Realism, confidence. Achievement, diversity, morality, competitiveness, attention seekers; works with their hands | Skepticism, fun, informal, balance, education, pragmatism, adaptable, manager loyalty, independent | Optimism, involvement, anti-war, equal rights, work ethic |
| Education | Not worth it | An expense | A way to get there | A birthright |
| On Training | Will train themselves | Continuous learning | Training creates loyalty | Train them and they will leave |
| Job changing | Potentially more loyal | Changing jobs is a usual routine | Changing jobs is necessary | Changing jobs puts you behind |
| Work/Life balance | Not expected | All about workplace flexibility | Need balance now | Need help with balance |
| Size | 23 million | 80 million | 45 million | 76 million |

So how can leaders make a multigenerational workplace productive, efficient and harmonious? To figure out a solution, we must look at some of the challenges/differences we currently face as well as some of the similarities between the generations.

* Communication styles: Gen Y and Gen Z tend to send text messages, tweets and instant messages to communicate while Baby Boomers and older Gen Xers prefer phone calls and emails. Let’s also not forget that younger workers use abbreviations i.e. idk (I don’t know) or informal language to communicate. The combination of these definitely guarantees a breakdown in communication. A way to combat this is to have leaders bring teams together for face to face team building exercises and ice breakers that focus on breaking down barriers that have to do with digital communication.
* Negative stereotypes: Lazy, entitled, poor work ethic are some words used to describe the Gen Y/Z by older workers. Interestingly, the Gen Y/Z aren’t the only ones. Baby Boomers can be perceived by younger workers as difficult to train, set in their ways and just not interested in learning about technology. Leaders can help combat this stereotyping by looking for opportunities to buddy up older/younger workers and intervening where there is dysfunction caused by misunderstandings or generational judgments.
* Cultural expectations: As the typical workplace evolves to keep up with changing technologies and mobile work, trends shift in cultural expectations. Gen Y’s/Z’s value and expect a healthy work-life balance. They are from a generation where both parents work therefore placing more importance on work-life balance. Older workers tend to sacrifice personal time thinking the more time I put in the office, the more dedicated I am. Leaders can combat this by allowing individuals to work in the style that best meets their needs and by acknowledging the efforts of each team member regardless of their work style. For real progress to occur in a multigenerational workforce, flexibility and open communication are the keys to success. Each generation brings strengths, ideas and skills and by coming together toward a common goal, an organization can have fresh perspectives which could overcome typical workplace problems.

Despite the above aforementioned challenges we face in a multigenerational workforce, there are similarities in what employees are looking for.

* Competent leadership: Each generation expects their leaders to know what they are doing in terms of technical and people skills. When asked in this study, “what do you believe is the most important quality of a leader?” Gen Z’s and Gen Y’s want to work for a company who is honest and transparent. Leadership is an earned privilege and if these organizations are creating a culture of honesty, the younger workers will be more willing to stay longer and that’s good news for an organization. Additionally, employees themselves want to be competent leaders but may not know how to get there. One in four Gen Y’s are currently in a management role but feel unprepared to lead. Mentoring and cross-functional projects are a great way to combat this issue.

* Meaningful work: Gen Z says that the work they do, and who they do it with, are what matters. We all want to be part of a successful high performing team. Work needs to be challenging while able to be completed in a reasonable amount of time. While the work looks different across the generations (older workers look for long term projects while younger workers are more purpose driven, collaborative, with a quick success turnaround) recognizing how work is delegated and accomplished will help leaders deliver on results.

Now that we’ve discovered differences and similarities, it’s important to recognize the new Generation Z. By 2020, Gen Z will make up nearly 10% of our global workforce. (Schawbel, 2015), Entrepreneurs will be on the rise more than any other generation in the past. They will have the competitive edge of being able to access more information faster. Eric Schmidt, Chairman of Google, says “every 2 days we create as much information as we did in 2003” so with technology as their main means of communication, they can reach more people faster, they can ask users instead of bothering managers and they have the ability to problem solve while sustaining and managing

Social media plays a huge role in the future of our workforce. 94% of companies use social networks for recruiting and Facebook is the dominant social network globally.(Schawbel,2015). A case study was done by Sodexo where they used Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Flickr and Widget to recruit new employees globally. 46% of their new hires in 2012 used Sodexo’s social media site. They were able to build a talent pipeline of 300K and their traffic increased 26% every year. By using social media to recruit for jobs, questions were answered faster and interviews were done online thus decreasing the amount of time between applying for a job and having a job offer.

Forums such as “TedxTeen” are avenues for young people, ages 13-25, where they can promote an idea or invention that will possibly change the world. Jack Andraka talks about how he developed a promising early detection test for pancreatic cancer that’s super cheap, effective and non-invasive — all before his 16th birthday. Taylor Wilson believes nuclear fusion is a solution to our future energy needs, and that kids can change the world. And he knows something about both of those: When he was 14, he built a working fusion reactor in his parents' garage. These are just a few examples of the workforce of our future.

While social media and Ted Talk forums drive how Gen Z prefers to communicate, we will also be seeing much more virtual trainings, virtual meetings, teleconferences on Group Meet and more? If we are looking at efficiency and productivity of the new generation, can we really see attending a live staff call as effective? With a generation who still likes to get things done as quickly as possible, will the virtual world be the way of the future?

Our world is moving at a very rapid pace and keeping up is critical to having a successful organization. With some of the examples we see on a daily basis through facility outreach, acknowledging our generational differences is key to cohesion and starting to set up an organization for success in meshing the generations. The things that are important to one generation aren’t necessarily what’s important to the next. Gen Z and Gen Y are generations who are shifting the culture of our workplace. Similar to what we, as CPCS are doing in helping to create a “learning culture” within our workforce, it’s advantageous for us to know how each generation learns and what their expectations are. Perhaps the more that we educate ourselves about our future young workers, than perhaps the more aware we will be of ways to help when we are coaching our managers or acting as career development champions.

References

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