Managing Generational Differences in the Workplace

A primer for your future...
Goal

Provide a frank discussion on the challenges and benefits of integrating today’s young professionals (YPs) into the workplace. Topics will include attracting, managing, and challenging YPs in order to make them successful. Material presented in this discussion will be a mixture of personal experience and the general trends seen in published media.

To develop an appreciation for the damage of the “Soccer Trophy Mentality” and provide insight on how to counteract it.
We will cover...

... through sweeping generalizations:

- Why is this important?
- Who are they?
- What do they have to offer?
- How do we attract them?
- Once we have them, how do we keep them?
“Age is foolish and forgetful when it underestimates youth.”
- J.K. Rowling
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## Historic Young Professionals

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**Nobel Prize Winners Before Turning 36**
Why is This Important?

- 20% of American workers will be retirement age by 2020.
- 35 million worker shortfall for next 20 years.
- YPs will be filling those spots.
Within the AWMA

As of January 1, 2010:

- Number of members providing birthdays: 5,167
- Number born since January 1, 1975: 854
- Number using YP Membership Rate: 475
- Number of Student members: 584
- 2% of overall membership are newly joined YPs
Who are the YP’s?

- The AWMA considers professionals 35 years of age and under to be YP’s.
- Predominantly Generation Y, with some Generation X leftovers.
- Today’s entry level hires, and the next round of people looking to be promoted.
Baby Boomers

- Born between 1943 and 1965
- Children of “The Greatest Generation” – survived the Depression, and two world wars
- Largest population explosion in history at that time – 72 million
- Focused on personal commitments
- Loyal
- Optimistic
Generation X

- Often referred to as the “Lost Generation” or “Baby Bust”
- Born between 1965 and 1980 – 46 million
- Very cynical and distrustful of leadership
- First “latchkey kids” – *fiercely independent*
- Feel plagued with social concerns and “death everywhere” which arose in their lifetime – AIDS, environmental destruction, political apathy, starving children, and increased divorce rates
Generation Y

- Also known as Millennials and Echo Boomers.
- Born between 1980 and 2000 – children of boomers, few Xer’s.
- Outnumber Baby Boomers at 76 million.
- Many from two income homes, positive political and economic environments – can have or be anything.
- Most have always had a computer.
- Socially conscious.
- Tend to be group oriented and need communication.
- “Empowered and entitled”.
- May suffer from information overload.
Generation Y Stereotypes

- Lazy
- Unmotivated
- Greedy
- Need instant gratification
- Self-Concerned
- Arrogant
- Expectant
- Entitled
Are the Stereotypes True?

- Sorry, but depending on perspective, many of them appear to be.
- The good news is that they are manageable and can be advantageous.
The stereotypes for Generation Y aren’t all that different from the way the Greatest Generation felt about the Baby Boomers at the time...
They will not hold one job forever.
They need to be valued and feel important.
Rarely embrace “corporate culture”.
They expect to be promoted and receive “appropriate” compensation.
They demand a lot of personal time – yours and theirs.
Why Such a “Change?”

- The fault of the Baby Boomers and ‘Progress’.
- The Gen Y’s parents were softer and more affluent than previous generations.
- Maximum independence and minimal accountability.
- Informational overload with no filtering.
- Society showed them global instability and corporate distrust in formative years.
- Celebration of every minor achievement – the “Soccer Trophy Mentality”.
Do we really want them?

- We don’t have much of a choice.
- They are history’s biggest generation, one day they will rule the world.

Perhaps most frightening, they aren’t leaving.
- They are our organization’s future.
- They are the beginning of our legacy.
- You must teach and manage them successfully.
Now that we don’t have a choice, how do we handle them, and what do we get in return?
On a Positive Note, Gen Y Brings...

- A desire to succeed and be better than their parents.
- Ability to look at things from a completely different angle – or multiple angles at once.
- Not afraid to express themselves.
- Embrace of technology.
- A willingness and desire to work.
A Motivated Gen Y

- If you successfully motivate your YPs, the sky is literally the limit.
- Their creativity and ability to leverage types of technology into usable tools are unparalleled.
- Their confidence will swell, but under the correct mentoring, they will continue to push the envelope in amazing ways.
- Their innovation can be contagious.
Maybe they are OK, now what?

Eventually you will need new people, and they will likely be members of this generation.

- How do you find and attract them?
- What do you do to hire them?
- What does it take to keep them?
Attracting Gen Y

- Develop a value proposition for the demographic you are seeking.
- Make an impression – visual, upbeat, high tech.
- Communicate in a manner that speaks to them directly – different by generation.
Attracting Gen Y

- Appeal to what you are doing for them.
- Develop your webpage to reflect your organization.
- Embrace the YP’s you currently have – they are the most connected generation.
  - Get them involved in your organization
  - Get them involved outside your organization
“Hooking” Gen Y

- Advertise electronically.
- Talk about potential and recognition – must convey (AND MEAN) that every person and task is important.
- Discuss schedule expectations and benefits – these things may be more important than salary.
- Talk about professional opportunities related to volunteer work.
- Be prepared to back it up – all of it.
Retaining Gen Y

- Feedback is key – they need to know they are doing a good job (no trophies please).
- They need to know the work they are doing matters.
- Involve them in things that may be over their head.
Retaining Gen Y

- Challenge them.
- Give them responsibility – but be prepared for them to make mistakes.
- Pay attention to them.
- Reward them.
- Good luck – the odds are against you as they will likely “move on,” so recognize it in the beginning and do your best to keep them.
Maximizing Their Potential

- Be prepared to mentor them.
- Listen to them about ambitions and goals.
- Communicate – don’t talk – continuously.
- Provide immediate feedback.
- Understand their motivation.
- Help them strategize about their development.
From a management standpoint, young professionals are expensive in regard to both time and resources, but we literally have no choice.
What my Gen Y’s thought...

After some prodding of summer interns, here are their thoughts on the workplace and their pending transitions.
Luke

25 year old Environmental Management graduate student at an Ivy League school.

“We’re nervous about having to conform to an antiquated structure, just because it has ‘always been this way.’”

“Office flexibility and openness allow the free flow of ideas and collaboration.”

“We don’t want to sacrifice our energy by burning ourselves out in entry level jobs just so that we can gain the experience to get a better job where our creativity would mean something. We shouldn’t have to wait.”
22 year old Environment Management graduate student

“We have spent so much time behind computers or being forced to consume information, critical analysis is sometimes overlooked or otherwise forgotten.”

“Being so accustomed to rapid communication through email, IM, and cell phones makes us more confident that we can get a manager’s feedback right away.”

“I have put myself into debt getting college degrees, and I am still not sure I can be competitive, there are too many of us.”
Alex

19 year old Environmental Engineering BS Student

“Am I getting paid for this?”

“We are willing to challenge anyone about anything. We want to know why and want to consider other ideas.”

“An informal office environment is preferable. Wearing nicer clothes doesn’t make me smarter.”

“I am not sure how to go about earning respect on a professional level, coupled with starting at the bottom, that’s scary.”
25 year old graduate student.

“I want to make a difference now.”

“Point me in a direction and let me go. I will make mistakes, and I know that, but I need to know that you trust me enough to let me try.”

“The only thing that scares me is someone not giving me the chance I want.”
Who Comes After Generation Y?

- Currently referred to as iGen, or Generation Next
- Gen X’s kids – born between 2000 and present
- Expected to be shaped by the recession, greater social awareness, high technology
- Theorized to be highly functioning, very hard working – no sense of entitlement, focused on local and domestic affairs, and very accepting of diversity
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Any Questions?

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