

Ten Top Tips for Working with Gen Ys

Born between 1978 and 1996, currently aged 11 - 29 years

One How they came to be

Baby Boomers are their parents and their bosses. It was the boomers that taught them to be independent and confident, and reach for the stars. It was the boomers that gave them computers and other tech-toys so that they would be 'savvy', (but they taught themselves.) Now we are reaping the benefits of (or paying for) having them as employees. The uncomfortable mismatch is really a **struggle for power**. The boomers have worked hard to get it and the Gen Ys want it all NOW.

Two Who are they?

A summary of their personalities and attributes includes:-

- lifestyle centered, impatient, street-smart, socially aware, independent, tech-savvy, and possibly over confident, 'cashed up bogans'
- They are not prepared to work a 90 hour week for 20 years to become a partner in an accounting firm. They want progress they can see every day.
- They are likely to use plenty of SMS and email to communicate (and can be less comfortable with face to face).
- They work at their own pace, often with iPods plugged in, and **do** mean to finish the job, sometimes ahead of time and sometimes after the timeframe you would have predicted.
- Many are goal focussed, but the goals are not all work/career goals. They seek 'life experiences.'
- However, they are the most creative, innovative and inspired generation yet.

Three What do they want?

Flexible working arrangements and a balanced work/life are automatically expected. The main 'treatment' they are after is **Respect and Control**. They do not automatically respect title and position, they respect the people who first show respect to them. You can easily show this respect by **acknowledging their efforts**, concepts and potential on a regular basis.

Four ...there's more...

Gen Ys want **Rewards and Recognition**. While money is important they believe that if they are doing the same job and getting the same results as another employee that is older and/or more experienced then they should be paid the same amount. Time off in lieu, gift vouchers, tickets, and bonuses won't go astray either. Find ways to give recognition - from a personal pat on the back, or public acknowledgement in front of the team, to 'Person of the month' or even a story in the local newspaper.

Five The 'know it alls'

GenY s do not know everything, it's just their confident attitude that makes it appear that they believe they do know everything! **They need** (respectful) **guidance**, help and understanding. They value 'thought' leadership and the opportunity to 'have-a-go' at a task.

Six How to communicate

To communicate with GenY's, be authentic and be yourself. Don't try to be their version of 'cool'. Avoid judging a book by the cover. Their looks could just be their current assumed identity that they are 'trying on'. Underneath is often a creative, hardworking individual looking for respect, recognition and encouragement.

Seven How to recruit them

Apart from the normal methods, consider yourself a talent scout - much like putting together a good sports team. Word your ads in their language... 'job variety, room to move up, gain respect and recognition, flexible working conditions' ...etc. Then back this up again at the interview process. Poach High Schools, TAFE colleges and Universities. Create Cadetships and Apprenticeships. E.g. Engineering is currently putting Uni students on the part time payroll while they complete their studies.

Eight How to retain them

- To retain them in your organisation **keep moving them around** to try new and challenging positions (ones that they are likely to enjoy and successfully contribute to). They become easily bored and may leave quickly if kept in the one position. With the training you have put in, it is better to keep them in the organisation (not just the one position) for as long as possible to realise a return on your investment.
- Try **partnering them up** with the different personalities to create a mentor/buddy system. This partner needs to be briefed on these Ten Clues too.
- Don't just say you support their needs and environment, adjust your management style to actually reflect it.
- However, it is not about management doing all the adjusting for Gen Y. They just happen to have the upper hand at the moment due to the current employment situation!

Nine How to let them go

When they leave, and they will, (Research shows that they are likely to have 29 different jobs across 5 different industries) avoid the typical 'exit' process ("Give me back the phone and laptop....goodbye"). Instead thank them for their time and effort and, if appropriate, offer them the opportunity and invitation to come back and seek employment again with you in the future. Some of these people will be brilliant in a few more years, and your open door and approachability may put you in the box seat!

Ten How to enjoy it!

These people are unique. Baby Boomers made sure of that. Know that you have the opportunity to shape and influence their lives in a positive way. Be prepared to change some of the typical expectations, attitudes and beliefs that you may have with a 'young employee'. See what you can do to bring out the very best in them. This means you are still in total control, because you are being proactive and not reactive. Consider yourself to be the coach of a great team with Gen Ys as the new recruits, and enjoy their energy, creative thinking and view of the world.

Gen Ys need your experience, wisdom, friendship and respect. With this they will not only be a bonus to your organisation but a blessing to the planet!

References:

Generation Y: Thriving (and Surviving) with Generation Y at Work, Peter Sheahan, Hardie Grant Publishing, 2005
Working with Gen Y, Management Today, June 2005