

Different Generations in the Workplace

“Managing Your Human Capital – One Size Does Not Fit All !”

Today, more so than ever, employers need to acknowledge the ‘generational’ make-up of their workforce and understand the different characteristics and drivers that each generation exhibit, in order to tailor their approach to HRM accordingly and subsequently attract, manage and retain the right staff for the business.

Baby Boomers (1950 - 1964) – >41 years

Characteristics & Attributes

- By population largest generation in history.
- Optimistic, ambitious, loyal, stable, conservative, technology challenged.
- Job status and symbols important.
- Want more fulfillment at work and are searching for a less-pressured environment as they approach retirement.
- More focused on job security and being offered company-funded training programs (ie. technology skills).
- Focus on efficiency, teamwork, quality and service.
- They strive for personal convenience and gratification.
- Espouse values of 'inclusive' leadership, but often do not have the required skills.
- Focus on process and output, not implications and outcomes.

How to Attract, Manage & Retain

- Average of 2-3 career changes.
- Research shows a 7% chance of resigning.
- Need to see steps toward defined goals.
- State objectives and desired results expected of team.
- Love pep talks.
- Use their name.
- Ask for their input
- Enjoy receiving recognition with wide public profile, eg company newsletter.
- Quality is a key focus.

Generation X's (1965 – 1978) - 27 years – 40 years

Characteristics & Attributes

- Often had both parents working.
- Can be pessimistic and cynical.
- More resourceful, individualistic/self-concerned, self-reliant and irreverent.
- Focus on relationships, outcomes, their rights and skills and are money focused.
- Not interest in long-term careers, corporate loyalty or status symbols.
- Bend traditional gender roles.
- Generally motivated by financial rewards & opportunities for career development.
- Work to live, but tend to be far less concerned about work/life balance than their ‘Generation Y’ colleagues.
- They expect versatility and flexibility.
- Easy to recruit, hard to retain.
- Moving into management ranks.



How to Attract, Manage & Retain

- Average of 9 jobs by Age of 32.
- Tell them what needs to be done, but not how.
- Give multiple tasks, but allow them to set priorities.
- Ask for their reactions and opinions.
- Prefer informal recognition, eg days off.
- Supporters of parental leave.

Generation Y's (1979 – 1994) – < 26 years

Characteristics & Attributes

- Similar values to Veterans - optimistic, confident, sociable, strong morals and sense of civic duty & social responsibility.
- Technology savvy, looking for challenge and variety in their work environment.
- Think differently to any other members of the workforce.
- Money not everything.
- Comfortable with peers of differing ethnicity.
- Women and men will expect greater workplace flexibility in terms of hours.
- Expectations shaped by media though Media, Brand & Communication savvy marketing.
- Separate life and work. Do not define themselves by their job, instead lifestyle counts.
- Tend to be more inclined to work for socially conscious organisations.
- Entering workforce.

How to Attract, Manage & Retain

- Research shows a 30% chance of resigning. Likely to have on average up to 29 different jobs in their career.
- Need to have clear understanding of their role in the big picture.
- Offer flexibility: Both in terms of hours and trust them to work from home. Provide opportunities to do different jobs. Work/life balance almost demanded.
- Communicate informally, through email and hallway conversations and provide regular constructive feedback.
- Leadership style should be more of a coach & mentor, less of a boss. ‘Generation Y’ is loyal to people not organisations.
- Expect access to state-of-the-art training and opportunities for education and skill-building.
- Provide an inclusive environment: Do not wait too long before providing an opportunity for Y to contribute.
- Redefine your expectations: Long-term employment will be four to five years and nine to five is out.
- Give regular recognition & reward: A card, movie tickets, dinner or even a simple 'thank you' make people feel valued.
- Make the workplace more inviting: Colour, rest and recreation rooms, plants, funky meeting rooms.
- Respect their strengths: Generation Y was weaned on technology. Smart managers will be willing to be mentored by Y's on technology.
- Career planning advice: Offer opportunities for growth and development according to individual needs. Show them a path that will allow them to change paths within the same company.
- Watch for boredom.

The key to success in managing the workforce of today is adaptability, empathy & tolerance of the different generational characteristics and reference points.