



Management and Performance Associates – April 2013

Generation Y: Are they that different from us?

Different people may have very different attitudes toward generation Y employees, but we can't afford to ignore the critical fact that by 2025, 75% of the global workforce will be made up of Gen Y employees (also known as millennials). This data highlights the sense of urgency for organizations to understand the characteristics of these young employees and to implement management strategies that translate the potential of different generations working together into positive results.

Accepting the fact that each generation has different expectations is the starting point for this understanding. Differences are much deeper when we refer to Gen Y and we will explore some of them.

Before we do, it's important to remember that although belonging to the same generation, each of these individuals has a unique identity. Therefore, let's not fall into the temptation of stereotyping. To make it easier we will provide tips – within context - to both managers (probably from another generation) and Gen-Y'ers.

1. Relationship with authority

Gen-Y'ers respect the person, not the hierarchy. The most effective way to obtain their respect is to position yourself as someone who can influence their development by sharing experiences, coaching, mentoring, providing the big picture, delegating and most importantly, by offering useful and direct feedback on strengths and areas for improvement. To the Gen-Y'ers we suggest you take the best of both worlds: consider different perspectives, be open to and take advantage of feedback to redirect your development efforts and consolidate what is already recognized as positive differentiation.

2. Instant rewards

It's common for managers to say that Gen Y employees make clear their expectation of

getting a senior position in a short – unrealistic – timeframe. Managers should constructively deal with false expectations, clarifying the required experience and competencies for someone to be considered for the position. Then, managers should build a realistic development plan and discuss other valuable and equally important career options which are in line with the reality of the organization. We would like to remind the young workers that talent and aspiration without effort does not translate into results and success. Several investigations state that about 10,000 practice hours are needed to achieve a degree of proficiency. Well, this might be an eternity for Gen Y'ers but since time will go on anyway, take advantage of each hour to acquire more knowledge, develop a skill or create substance to support the career or activity you have chosen.

3. Commitment

This is perhaps one of the most visible differences between generations. In the past, commitment was something similar to loyalty to the organization and the pride of being associated with a company (emotional commitment) or the alignment between the aspiration to grow and the ability of the company to meet this expectation (rational commitment). Gen-Y'ers are committed only to what has meaning to them, and whether that is compatible to their other interests. Is this wrong? Of course not. Retention of Gen-Y employees may increase if they perceive that the tasks delegated to them have a purpose as well as a meaning and if the assigned activities generate interest and the feeling that they are learning and developing.

4. Quality of life

Here things get slightly complicated. Professionals from previous generations see



Gen-Y'ers as "entitled" and too concerned with their happiness. The younger generation finds the older generations to be workaholics and too stressed. The same way as it does not seem healthy to work 24/7, it doesn't seem realistic to only be concerned with your "happiness." Both groups should look for activities that bring pleasure, that are aligned to their motivational profile, projects that bring the possibility of personal and professional development; and above all, a climate of cooperation and mutual respect. If we succeed in this, time dedicated to work will have a higher quality, less stress and will be more productive for all, regardless of which generation.

The first step to obtain flexibility in the strategies to manage young professionals is to understand their different expectations.

Some strategies that managers may use to face this challenge are: offering autonomy and quality communication: providing feedback, aligning expectations, explaining the context of interactions, being flexible in knowing and respecting different visions of the world, as well as influencing without using positional power.

On the other hand, here are some additional hints for the young professionals who were brought up to show their best to the world:

1. Accumulating 10,000 hours and developing a good reputation makes you master of your career.
2. You do not need to be a genius. At a certain point, intellectual intelligence will not make a difference; the emotional intelligence is what counts. Learn how to deal with emotions: your own and third parties'. This will make a difference for you.

Regardless of your generation and where you are in your career, success continues to be the combination of perseverance, willingness and the ability to see opportunities. "Opportunities" may trigger us to think about our careers. Please check next month's newsletter, as we further explore this topic.

Please check the link on the left column, for an insightful video on the topic of generations.

<http://vimeo.com/44130258>

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

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