

Diana Clement: Why businesses need Generation Y

5:00AM Saturday February 02, 2008

By [Diana Clement](#)

Generation Y workers. They can be fickle, high-maintenance and have a sense of entitlement.

But they're also technologically sophisticated and breathe life into a stodgy old company.

America's Fortune magazine classed Generation Y, the workers born from 1980 to 2000, as potentially the most high-performing generation in history.

Given New Zealand's tight labour market and with the Baby Boomers heading for retirement, employers can't do without Generation Y.

The difficulty lies in how to recruit them.

A stuffy, old company may be passed by. But turn it into a "trendy" workplace and you might alienate the Baby Boomers.

"The key to successful [Generation Y] recruiting is to treat each applicant as an individual and find out what's really important to them," says Kim Smith, division director of Robert Half Finance & Accounting in Auckland.

It's also in understanding what makes Generation Y workers tick.

Every generation has its strengths and weaknesses. In the case of Generation Y, they can be:

Strengths:

- * They are technically savvy. This generation grew up with technology and lives with it every day.
- * They are team players, good in collaborative work environments.

Failings:

- * Having been praised all their lives, this generation can't deal with failure.

They went through an education system that taught all children they were winners. They expect acknowledgement even when they don't deserve it.

- * They want to be put on the fast-track whether they deserve it or not.



Diana Clement

* They dislike working long hours.

Iain McCormick, director of the Executive Coaching Centre, believes the trick to employing them is: "For HR to interview the [existing] Generation Y employees and see why they joined the company. The reasons will often be very different from what management thinks.

"Generation Y may have no interest in your prestige or brand, just the training programmes and the money. The job adverts for Generation Y need to appeal to these people directly with what interests them, not the usual type of advert at all."

But, says Smith, don't make the mistake of believing that promoting the social side is the way to go.

"All the research shows that Gen Y really want their employers to provide them with inspiring leadership, flexibility and the opportunity to do meaningful work," says Smith.

"Why would anyone, no matter what their age, not be motivated by inspiring leadership and the ability to do meaningful work?"

She adds that to recruit the right employees for your organisation, you must be clear what your company culture is, be consistent in the employer brand you portray and treat every applicant as an individual.

"If you do that, you will attract the best of Gen Y, Gen X and Baby Boomers, without alienating any age group."

When it comes to advertising, Trish McLean, director of Retailworld Resourcing, says it's best to focus on the skills necessary for the role, rather than specifically going to market to get a particular generation.

"However, once you have candidates, your approach to the process may vary in order to relate to and inspire the generation you're speaking to."

Generation Y-ers use Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and many more social networking websites.

They are attached to their mobile phones and text messaging with an electronic umbilical cord. Some companies, such as Deloitte and KPMG in the United States, have even go so far as raising their profiles on YouTube or by creating Podcasts, in order to create the image of an exciting and challenging work environment.

Here in New Zealand, KPMG offers sabbaticals and exchanges with other offices around the world to entice younger people to work for them.

It is also designed to stop them moving on when they want to do their OE or take on a greater challenge.

McLean says once they're on board, it's important to integrate Generation Y with the Baby Boomers and Generation X-ers and create a culture that works on the attributes that each generation can offer.

"So when the Generation Y is impatient we laugh and feed off their energy.

"We take their feedback seriously when brainstorming, as the 'commercial naivety' can be better viewed as a fresh set of eyes and opinion.

"This, combined with experience, can provide a real edge to the outcome."

Management techniques for getting the best from Generation Y:

* Make sure you give your Generation Y workers the attention they feel they are entitled to.

* Have regular reviews and career planning meetings.

- * Provide challenging assignments.
- * Support the consumer technology they use in their daily lives, such as MSN Messenger, instead of banning it.
- * Set up internal mentoring programmes so they can learn from different generations.
- * Provide good training opportunities, especially in personal development and communication skills.

Not all communication can be done by email or text message.

- * Keep them on the move internally with advancements to ensure they don't want to jump ship.
- * Talk to them electronically.
- * Offer flexible work schedules.
- * Offer relevant perks.

Generation Y workers might be more interested in receiving high-tech gadgets than health insurance.

- * Pay for mobile phones and Blackberries.
- * Offer Telecommuting as an option.

At Google, which relies on Generation Y employees, table football, beach volleyball and free food are available.

Up to 20 per cent of an employee's time can be spent working on their own project.

If your workplace already caters well for this generation, perhaps with PlayStations in the staff room or Sky TV to watch international sporting events, then you need to shout about it.

Generation Y-ers love their social networks and might well want their friends to work with them.

As a result, generous referral bonuses to existing young workers may pay off handsomely.

Having said all of that, bear in mind that there is a difference between changing corporate recruitment policies and spoiling a bunch of arrogant Generation Y-ers.

This story was found at: