

Bridging The Generation Gap

BY CANDY TYMSON CSP

To be competitive in the labour market, companies are now faced with having to provide more dynamic workplaces and a wider, flexible range of employee benefits, to appeal across a number of different generations. While it was generally believed that Traditionalists, Baby Boomers and their younger predecessors would have different needs, recent findings are questioning that.

According to recent research by the Global Leadership Foundation, 18 – 25 year old respondents (affectionately known as Generation Y), want the same things Baby Boomers wanted.

The study concluded that generally the environment that Gen Y's thrive in is no different from their older peers. It involves immediate and constructive feedback; leaders who are caring and aware; inclusive, engaging non-passive behaviours; being continually informed about the business; having personal goals linked to business goals; new experiences; being coached; and sharing the less interesting tasks.

The only difference is that Gen Y is demanding it, and leaving if they don't get it.

Generational Turn-Ons

As our workforces become more and more diverse, it's useful to be aware of what are the 'turn ons' for different generations. For example, it would seem that Baby Boomers are more enticed to be with a company based on salary, title and status (in that order). In contrast, Generation X are more focused on the expansion of their knowledge, skills and abilities. Their loyalty is to their profession and how diverse they can make their skill-set.

Different again is Generation Y, who generally list quality friendships, feeling they can make a contribution on the job and a feeling of safety as their three top issues when looking to join an organisation.

Job Security vs Career Security

Previous generations saw job security being strongly linked with being with one company for a long time, working your way up, and making yourself secure by your tenure and accomplishments there.

The way business is done today simply does not support this traditional model. Instead, smart Gen Xers are building a 'portable career'. Their desire is to have a resume that contains a variety of experiences that make them more widely hireable. By developing career security, they are creating their own form of job security.

Rewards

As business author Harvey MacKay says: "Little things don't mean a lot, they mean everything".

It is sometimes surprising how little people need to feel appreciated. What is being discovered however is how different these needs can be, based on generational differences.

Most people, regardless of their age, want to work for successful organisations, both profitable and not-for-profit, and receive recognition for a job well done. The only difference is how they get the job done. For example, Baby Boomers are more likely to believe that long hours, office face-time, and receptivity to any offer for upward mobility are musts to career success.



In contrast Generation X believe that results-orientation, working smarter (not harder) and balancing work with personal life is critical to career success.

So, it could be argued that if more Baby Boomers were open to learning how to use technology and current leadership techniques, they may be able to achieve results in less time. If Generations X and Y would be open to learning more foundation skills they may find that older colleagues are more eager to help them succeed.

In their book *When Generations Collide* authors Lynne Lancaster and David Stillman summarise very effectively the differences in the generations when it comes to feeling rewarded:

- Traditionalists** (1930-45) want satisfaction of a job well done.
- Baby Boomers** (1946-64) want money, title, recognition.
- Gen Xers** (1965-79) want freedom—that's their ultimate reward.
- Gen Ys** (1980-94) want work that has meaning to them.

High Commitment Work Arrangements

A recent paper by Jeffrey Pfeffer, a professor of organisational behaviour at Stanford Graduate School of Business, has found five 'high commitment' work arrangements that have proven impact on the bottom line. They are:

- Investment in training to develop skills and knowledge
- Sharing of information so that people can understand the business and have the data to make better judgments about what to do and how to do it
- Decentralised decision-making and self-managed teams that permit trained and motivated employees to actually influence decisions about work
- Rewards dependent on individual but also group and organisational performance
- A regime of mutual commitment and employment security with expectations of a long-term employment relationship.

What are you doing to provide a workplace where good employees will want to stay?

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