

What Will it Take to Attract and Motivate the Best of Generation Y?

"I just don't understand how to motivate our younger employees!" "They have huge expectations, but they are not willing to make the sacrifices we had to make to get ahead!" "Is there a better way to manage this population?"

I hear questions and comments like these consistently when speaking to leaders across all industries, especially those who are recruiting many young graduates. Not surprisingly, there is no simple answer – but there are some basic do's and don'ts that can begin to make an impact. Before reviewing some of these, it may be worthwhile understanding why this is such a critical issue.

A Bit of Context

Generation Y, otherwise known as Millennials, (born between 1979 and 1994) is roughly twice the size of Generation X, which came before it. According to PWC, in 2020 this generation will make up 50% of the global workforce. As the economy recovers, it will therefore become even more essential to learn to attract and motivate this powerful contingent. Adding to this challenge is the delay in retirement of the Baby Boomer generation. Creating room for growth and advancement for the newest generation in the workforce will become even more challenging. So what are some of the things you can emphasize in your talent management strategy today to be well placed for tomorrow?

I looked at survey data from almost a dozen studies from across the globe trying to understand this generation, combined with my own and my clients' experience, and tried to summarize what I learned in eight recommendations:

- 1) Develop a coaching culture within your organization. This means managers who excel at building trust, giving powerful feedback, and truly listening to the ideas and concerns of the people in their teams. This generation wants meaningful, challenging work and they want to be empowered to get on with it. They seem to be asking for someone to be supporting them, building on their ideas, offering regular (as opposed to annual!) feedback – but not telling them exactly what to do and how to do it each time. An ILM/Ashridge Business School study showed that graduates are looking for a

coach and a friend more than a traditional manager. They will respect you for the way you coach them, not because you are in a position of authority.

- 2) Use these coaching skills to deepen their understanding of the impact they may have on others. This generation seems to like working in teams and having a close relationship with their boss, but it can sometimes be difficult to see this in their behavior.

A recent Time Magazine article referenced several studies highlighting the increased incidence of narcissism in this generation (A National Institute of Health study showed 58% more college students scored higher on a narcissism scale in 2009 than in 1982.) Don't assume that these new employees understand the impact they are having on others. Try coaching them to make their impact clear, and look for more successful options.

- 3) Set crystal clear expectations in the recruiting process and manage career discussions transparently. This generation has consistently been told that they are special, and have been rewarded just for participating – not necessarily winning. According to the Time article, 40% believe that they should be promoted every two years, regardless of performance. Setting realistic expectations from the beginning can reduce disappointment down the road.
- 4) Create flexible career ladders, or even lattices. This generation is highly ambitious and wants to see their career progressing quickly. They do not, however, seem to be prepared to make the same sacrifices in work/life balance that many of the previous generation are still making. Being creative about how you define career progression and looking for win/win solutions to allow them to progress in certain areas, to feel that they are continuing to learn and develop, but also lowering our expectations around 24/7 availability, will be key in retaining your younger top talent.
- 5) Build flexibility into their working lives. Consistent with their desire for trust and empowerment., they would like to get their work done when and where it is most convenient for them with flexible work options. They would also like the opportunity to take some time off to volunteer, travel – work on something they are passionate about. Building a culture that allows more of

this, where it is seen as a development opportunity for top talent, will help with retention as well as keeping them motivated on the job.

- 6) Manage your Employer Branding carefully. The image of the company they choose to work for remains extremely important for this generation, but they seem to put more emphasis on socially responsible corporations than many of us did in the past. This criterion was repeatedly mentioned in research across geographies and businesses as being critical when choosing an employer.
- 7) Pay at market rates. Along with a strong demand for flexibility and challenging work, many of the surveys have shown that they are as ambitious around salary as any other generation. It is critical to ensure that managers have the ability to reward their top performers.
- 8) Develop state of the art on-boarding tools. No matter how successful you are at the first seven points, this generation is even more likely than past generations to change jobs. In addition, more and more people are working nomadically on a project basis versus becoming employees. Your ability to on-board talent quickly and effectively to maximize the time you do have with them, therefore, becomes increasingly strategic in your human resources strategy.

So What's New?

Rereading this list, an obvious question may be - how truly different is this generation? Wouldn't all of us like to work in a company that is able to deliver on each of these points? Different or not, leaders are clearly frustrated by the challenges of managing this generation – they are feeling a difference – and implementing the suggestions above can go a long way towards reducing some of this frustration. The good news is that while we are doing it, we are quite likely to build commitment and loyalty within our entire workforce, not just the most junior.

Julie Jessup is an executive coach who has spent her career developing leaders. She has 25 years' experience working with

senior executives, and driving change in organizations.

For additional information, she can be contacted at :

Julie@juliejessup.com

+32 491 94 90 11 www.juliejessup.com

Further Reading

Hewlett, SA; Sherbin, L; Sumberg, K. (2009). How Gen Y & Boomers Will Reshape Your Agenda. *Harvard Business Review*. July-August.

Institute of Leadership & Management and Ashridge Business School. (). *Great expectations: managing Generation Y*. Available:
[http://www.ashridge.org.uk/Website/Content.nsf/FileLibrary/5B2533B47A6D6F3B802578D30050CDA8/\\$file/G458_ILM_GEN_REP_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ashridge.org.uk/Website/Content.nsf/FileLibrary/5B2533B47A6D6F3B802578D30050CDA8/$file/G458_ILM_GEN_REP_FINAL.pdf). Last accessed 18 February, 2014.

MERCER and ACCA. (2010). *Generation Y: Realising the Potential*. Available:
<http://www.accaglobal.com/content/dam/acca/global/PDF-technical/finance-transformation/generation-y.pdf>. Last accessed 18 February, 2014.

PWC. (2011). *Millennials at Work Reshaping the Workplace*. Available:
http://www.pwc.com/en_M1/m1/services/consulting/documents/millennials-at-work.pdf. Last accessed 21/02/2014.

Stein, J. (May 20, 2013). Millennials: The Me Me Me Generation. *Time Magazine*.

Vlerick Business School. (15 February 2010). *Generation Y - Graduated, Now What?*. Available:
<http://www.vlerick.com/en/research-and-faculty/knowledge-items/knowledge/generation-y-graduated-now-what>. Last accessed 18 February, 2014.

