

Industrial Manufacturing

Managing Generation Y – the challenges and rewards

They have been lauded as the next “Great Generation,” praised as tech savvy, optimistic and eager to please.

And they have been panned as: demanding (“They expect their jobs to accommodate their personal lives.”); fickle (“They change jobs more often than you change your smoke alarm batteries.”) and immature (“They need a lot of supervision.”).

In truth, both depictions probably contain a kernel of truth.



Generation Y, also known as Millennials or the Echo Boomers, were born roughly between the late 1970s and 2000.

At 70 million strong, they are more than three times the size of Generation X, and they’re the next largest generation behind the 72 million baby boomers.

As more of them reach working age, and more baby boomers retire, “Gen Y” will make a huge impact on the work force.

The more successfully you learn to manage this generation of employees, the more successful your company and your own career are likely to be.

It has been noted that Gen Y employees present the following challenges to managers and supervisors.

They:

- Have high expectations of what a company can or should provide them
- Want and need more feedback, coaching and recognition than older employees
- Change jobs often, holding as many as 10 to 14 jobs by age 38, according to U.S. Labor Department estimates
- Tend to be informal in dress, manners, written and verbal language, and attitudes toward authority

But, Gen Y employees also bring the following strengths to their work.

They:

- Are eager to do a good job to prove themselves
- Are adept with current and emerging technologies
- Respect diversity, and work well in a global economy
- Are optimistic and idealistic – at least for now

How to Manage Generation Y

It is important to adjust your management practices to fit the employee. Don't act as if one size fits all. Following are some strategies for managing Generation Y more effectively:

Manage Gen Y every day. Check in. Ask how things are going and what help they need. Coach them. Help them prioritize their work. Give them whatever they need to get it done.

Explain the big picture. They need to know how their job fits into the overall organization. They want work to be meaningful, not to be a cog in the wheel.

Ask for their input. Be solicitous of their ideas and suggestions, especially in their areas of expertise, such as newer technologies and youth culture. If you have a product line aimed at young people, you'd be foolish not to be consulting with your young employees.

Give multiple forms of recognition. Everybody likes to be recognized for a job well done, but Gen Y needs it more because they are still finding their way in the world of work. Be creative in the ways you recognize them. Sure, money is good, but so is time off, praise or an article in the newsletter about their project.

Use the right motivators. Again, money isn't everything. Be generous with paid vacation. Provide the best technology you can afford. Career advancement is important to Gen Y, so provide opportunities to learn new skills, cross train and reimburse tuition.

Consider a mentoring program. Mentoring refers to pairing a seasoned employee with a relative newcomer so that the mentor can help the "mentee" learn the nuances of the job and advance more quickly.

Provide information in the right formats. Gen Y grew up watching television, playing video games, surfing the Internet, instant messaging and texting. They were not inclined to curl up with a good book. They don't like to read dense text. Don't give them a thick manual and expect that it will get read. Instead, provide information verbally and visually as much as possible. Show them how to do something. When it has to be in writing, break it into small chunks, similar to that on Web pages.

Make work fun. Who says work has to be serious? Productivity and fun are not mutually exclusive activities. Have a positive sense of humor. Combine work or training with recreation on occasion. For example, brainstorm about a new product while hiking or sailing.

Remember the relationship! It is often said that employees don't leave jobs, they leave managers. The most important factor in retaining employees is the quality of relationship they have with their managers. This applies to all generations but bears special attention with Gen Y because it is easier to change jobs early in one's career. With this in mind, managers need to be honest, straight-talking, genuinely concerned about their employees and available.

Do all of these things and you will be well ahead of most companies when it comes to attracting and keeping top young talent. Your company's productivity will likely rise, as well.