

GENERATION GAP

MIKE KNAPP

Five keys to managing generation Y

You'd think we were grumpy old men. Recently I had lunch with a number of IT leaders, and several people were bemoaning the challenges they're having with some of their younger staff members. The complaining was ironic, as none of us are old men (yet). One thing was clear however: managing the generation of instant gratification (gen-Yers, millennials) requires a different set of strategies.

Set clear expectations

Setting clear expectations is always important in the workplace, but it is especially so with gen-Y. Culture and socially acceptable behaviour changes very quickly. For many, the line between work and social environments can be blurred. Setting expectations for everything from basics such as dress code, attendance, focus-requirements (put down your iPhone) and

communications styles, to professional items including how work should be completed, timing, follow-ups and what to do when things don't go right, will help reduce misunderstandings and set a strong foundation for success.

Show them the big picture, but make tasks bite size

Understanding the big picture and how their tasks fit into it is important to gen-Y. They want to feel like they're contributing to something bigger. By exposing them to the corporate vision, they'll also start to appreciate and understand the process of thinking beyond their next task. As a result, they will feel more engaged and connected to the company and won't quit quite as soon.

Sometimes the big picture can be overwhelming. To counteract this, break tasks down into small pieces and measure progress regularly. Team members will feel

they're constantly making progress, even if the whole project is large.

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Celebrate accomplishments (no matter how small)

There's a huge disconnect between the world where gamers accomplish something epic every 15 minutes (you finished the quest, here's a bag of gold) and a workplace that conducts

performance reviews annually and pays bonuses after Christmas. Changing from a structured, infrequent review and celebration process to a frequent one will help gen-Y better recognize their successes and increase their engagement.

For a gen-Y team I recently became a part of, we created short (15-minute) daily meetings for our teams, with a simple three part agenda: What did you accomplish yesterday? What are you working on today? What roadblocks are standing in your way?

The results: Individuals knew that their team lead was always there to support them. Accomplishments were publicly celebrated daily. The team was more focused and engaged. The team lead knew exactly what was happening at all times and could adjust where necessary. Projects were more successful as a result of public accountability, and the

teams were happier following recognition of their successes.

Understand their values

Each generation has different values. This creates some of the biggest disconnects in business. Where older generations often value stability, gen-Y values flexibility. It's not live to work, it's work to live (the way it should be).

For individuals, flexibility could be key, or professional development, or cool projects. Understanding what's important to each member of your team will help you engage and retain them.

Keep them connected and communicating

Communication is king. In a connected age with smartphones, instant messaging, Facebook and Twitter, this has never been more true. Millennials have grown up being collaborative, networked and constantly connected. Forward-thinking

companies use these technologies to engage staff, keep them connected and aligned with their businesses.

Internal collaboration and communication tools (think "corporate" Facebook) can be used to communicate everything from the big picture to the smallest details, engage staff, increase visibility and connect individuals and teams.

Developing strategies to manage gen-Y is key to the success of every business. A lot of it is common sense: Show them the big picture, but make tasks manageable. Celebrate often. Understand what drives your teams. Find ways to keep everyone connected and collaborative. Do this well and you'll attract and retain the most talented, fresh-thinking people in the workforce. ■

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Initiative is what a person does when no one else is watching over them.

They see what needs doing and do it, no hand-holding required. If your sales team is continually trying hard, you're in a good place. If you need you to light a fire under them, look out.

Capability: in a word, skill. If motivation is present, skill can be taught and developed over time. A person who has a low skill level coupled with high motivation is clay waiting to be moulded. A person with high skill and low motivation is a manager's frustration.

Results: a well-motivated but less skilled team can move mountains. A well-motivated and highly skilled team can move bigger mountains. A poorly motivated and low-skilled team sits at the base and admires the view.

At first blush, it seems that if you simply motivate your team, activities

and results will follow. But it doesn't always work that way. Here's why.

Your salespeople arrive to your company fully formed. Your role is to be clear on the specific activities they're to perform, how to perform them and how they will be measured. The rest is up to them.

Lead your people; don't try to "save" those who just aren't a fit

If they don't have initiative and motivation when they reach you, you'll be hard pressed to instill these traits in them. Many sales leaders have struggled to no avail to do so. Lead your people; don't try to "save" those who just aren't a fit.

Start early. Ensure new hires share the traits and characteristics of your top performers: initiative, drive, desire to succeed and the like.

Next, get those who don't fit off the bus. To do so, remove all roadblocks to their doing their jobs well. Give them regular feedback on how they're doing. Be clear on the consequence of non-performance, and when that consequence will occur. When that time comes, their performance will make the next steps clear.

Managing non-performance is never fun. Both parties involved know that if the audio and video don't get in sync, the channel will have to be changed.

Being clear with your team on the expectations of their roles and engaging them early in creating solutions to non-performance may help make it more manageable. Who knows, you just may help someone save himself. ■

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