

Engaging Your X and Y Employees

Upsize magazine, February 2009

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For the first time in history, small businesses are seizing the economic power and growth opportunities from big business. More surprising, this switch actually has very little to do with the intricacies of business operations or economies, and much to do with generations.



For Generations X (1965-1981) and Y (1982-1995), working nine to five isn't the only way for them to make a living. They would rather start their own businesses than climb a corporate ladder. Salary is not their primary motivator. And they certainly aren't going to work twenty years at the same company to receive a gold watch at the retirement party.

But corporate America remains heavily managed and employed by Baby Boomers, enforcing the work traditions and philosophies of the past: do the work without question, overtime is appreciated, one hour for lunch and two weeks vacation, raises at the annual review, and promotions when someone retires or gets fired.

Not surprising, most Baby Boomers remain in corporate America while Xers and Ys are leaving corporate America to start their own business or work for a small business.

Corporate America is struggling to fill its employment pipeline with qualified workers, simply because Boomer-centric managements haven't been able to create a workforce that appeals to younger generations.

In the long run, this will mean fewer corporate giants and the arrival and survival of more small businesses. Small businesses will have the advantage when it comes to recruiting and retaining workers, clients, and consumers under the age of 40, and will continue to gain economic momentum in the U.S.

But it's important that small businesses don't make the same mistakes and turn young employees away.

A combined demographic of 120 million people, Generations X and Y count some of today's top performers among their ranks. Independent, socially conscious, tech savvy, and open to change, these generations are the most educated, media-savvy, globally-minded, diverse, goal-driven, and high achieving generations in history.

They are also distinctly different from their predecessors, introducing an entirely different set of values, needs, wants, and expectations about family, work, and life. As a result, they have high expectations of their employers, which can make recruiting, training, and retaining them especially difficult.

Your company can increase its odds significantly by understanding what Xers and Ys want at work:

Work-Life Balance

While Baby Boomers define employee dedication in terms of punctuality and hours spent on the job, younger generations view dedication in terms of the quality and quantity of the work completed.

Both Generation X and Y are renowned for being high achievers and dedicated employees, but they want the freedom to work when they want, where they want.

These generations are not opposed to working in the evenings or on week-ends, especially if it means being able to see their children's soccer games in the afternoons. In fact, most X and Y employees view work-life balance considerations as critical to their decision on whether to join or remain with an employer.

Work-life balance benefits include flexible time off, flexible start-stop times, working at home, working less overtime, part-time work, two people sharing a single job, and compressed workweeks.

Flexible Benefits

The preceding generations are interested in retirement options, salaries and bonuses, stock options, investments, and medical coverage. In contrast, flexible schedules and vacation time are critical to Xers and Ys, as is a family medical plan.

This demographic is already, or soon will be, caring for aging relatives and children under the age of eighteen. They want child care and elder care coverage to help them foot the bills and maintain balance in their lives.

In addition, younger generations expect parental benefits, such as the option of working part-time or from home, help finding child care, and on-site lactation rooms.

The needs and interests of Generations X and Y are so different from their predecessors that some companies are offering a choice of benefits, such as cafeteria-style benefits packages to allow for flexibility and individuality.

Learning Opportunities

Young workers value the opportunity to learn a variety of skills to become as marketable as possible. They are eager to take on more responsibility and like to be challenged. They also work in fear of being laid off or downsized, which is why they are cautious about committing to one employer.

The irony is this: The more marketable you make Xers and Ys, the more likely they are to stay. According to the Gallup School of Management, 80 percent of employees say that job training is key to keeping them as employees.

Offer extensive training programs to hone workers' skills and help advance their careers.

Career Pathing

Xers and Ys are the first generations to be more motivated by rewards than by

salary. Those companies that are the most successful at recruiting and retaining these generations give entry-level employees new opportunities early and often.

Immediately upon hiring young talent, introduce the concept of career pathing. Career pathing is the process of planning and achieving one's career goals.

Employers listen to employees' goals, support employees' ambitions through a variety of training and networking opportunities, and meet with them monthly to discuss their achievements and challenges, provide feedback, and chart their progress.

Community Giving

Xers and Ys pursue employment that is worthwhile and meaningful.

These generations are attracted to companies that are supportive of community causes, giving employees ample opportunities to raise money for nonprofits or do service projects.

Remember: Younger generations want to be catered to and respected. They are bright and talented and heavily sought after by every company out there, yet they are looking to small businesses to meet their needs.

The odds are in your company's favor if you take the time to craft a competitive and compelling offer and woo them with age-appropriate benefits, endless opportunities, and meaningful work.

Don't let great talent pass you by. There's never a better time to prepare for your company's future than right now.

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