

Who is this new generation of employees and what do companies need to do to keep them?

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The “crystal ball” is getting a bit cloudy. The employment market has altered dramatically over the last five years and the sheer number of individuals working in the future will change. We are entering a Generation Transformation as the Baby Boomers pass the baton to the Gen X population. These two groups couldn't be more diverse in their thinking, needs and ethics. Therefore, companies should start to think about who will be leading their organizations in the future and what will ensure their success.

The new GenX population sports creativity, a powerfully independent style, hard-working ethic and solid beliefs. They have a strong sense of company loyalty, but only when they feel valued by their company and have a driving desire to achieve and learn, and yet are not tied to the trappings of the necessity for “success”. Gen Xers are far more focused on financial and emotional security. Too much has happened to this generation to doubt their exposure to a wide variety of events such as: the after-effects of the ended Vietnam War, the global economic rollercoaster and a changing demographics in company dedication. They entered the workforce during the best and worst of times, the stability of the 80's, the volatility of the 90's and the unknown of the new century. They lived through the famous Y2K warnings and were affected by a new world of “terrorism” in so many forms. As first time employees, they experienced companies that didn't truly appreciate their abilities, were focused more on “shareholder value” and were deficient in establishing any career direction for these hungry Gen Xers.

Who are these people and what makes them unique?

- Born between 1966 and 1979 (although some cut off at 1975)

- They average about 42MM in the workforce (that's 40% less than the Baby Boomers)
- Matured under a world of diversity, independence and individuality
- Driven by the fact they CAN achieve and WILL achieve under the right circumstance.
- Highly technologically oriented with a strong need for growth and knowledge.
- Understand the necessity for reciprocal loyalty by individuals and companies.

Although they heard the stories of previous generations and their company loyalty, they don't want a one company experience and tend to value more corporate diversity. They are comfortable with autonomy and have a strong desire to build something, but possess a great deal of impatience. As a result, many have taken the plunge into the world of entrepreneurship, by starting small companies or working as independent consultants. Consulting has become a highly lucrative business for this generation as companies outsource projects to save on employee investment and bottom line costs. This group also saw corporations focus more on their products and services than their employees' needs. This has resulted in damaged relationships between employers/companies and the Gen X population. Either they saw it happen to their aging parents or were part of the fickle loyalty companies portrayed to employees in the mid and late 1990's. During this critical period, employees found they weren't nearly as important as product growth, corporate development and financial improvement. Now add to this the instability of the economy in recent years, the push for stockholder equity and the soaring price of adequate healthcare, corporations have forgotten about their critical asset...their employees, specifically the new GenX workers.

Companies will need to address the differences of a group that is beginning to leave the workforce and the needs of the new generation coming in. Knowing this new workforce will begin to enter middle and senior management in the next three to ten years, what are companies doing to entice them?? With 40% less workers, companies will certainly want to address how to keep talented associates. The necessity to develop solid retention strategies that create increased company loyalty and managing career expansion for the Gen Xers will begin to take center stage. Although the corporate world is still in the midst of an employee overload, the shift will take place soon and may be painful for some.

If what many experts predict is true, we will again be seeing a changing labor market with dwindling talent and therefore, a heightened demand for real work expertise. Retention will make a comeback, but it won't be the same as what was experienced in the late 1990s. The focus will be on what companies can do to have employees who are loyal, motivated and productive. This won't be the guessing game of previous generations in which employees were given what management thought was important. Gen Xers know what they want and need, and will, therefore, be very selective in where they put their allegiance. "Managing to the masses" will no longer work effectively, As in sales, the "spray and pray" approach will fall short. Companies have long focused on what their clients need; "customer-oriented sales" has long been a buzzword for corporations looking for high growth and results. Why not apply the same thinking internally to employees. What do my employees need? And just like customers, your employees are different, driven by unique needs and individual behaviors.

Companies can't afford to manage this generation of employees like a guessing game. They are distinct human beings and, therefore, must be addressed the same way. Although there are commonalities within this group they boast their individual differences with pride. Knowing what motivates and

stimulates each person individually and manage to those unique characteristics will develop a group of highly productive, loyal employees. For companies, their greatest asset is their employees, so what better way to achieve corporate success than to know how to develop and retain top talent. Assessing your organization on what motivates them and then managing to these individual needs will result in loyal, productive colleagues. This is an opportunity for companies to discover the unique strengths and abilities of their people by understanding what drives their GenX employees and managing them precisely as required. Doesn't this sound like an easy answer to keeping your best talent long term?

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