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**I hope you may find it interesting.**

**Jean**

Baby Boomer Versus Generation X

Managing the New Workforce

Gregory P. Smith

Many good employees are quitting traditional organizations because the older workforce does not know how to manage them properly.

I recently worked with the U.S. Army who is experiencing a severe retention problem. Highly skilled Generation X junior officers and enlisted soldiers are leaving in droves. The lure of higher paying civilian jobs is only part of the problem. According to a survey I conducted many of these young Gen. X officers are not merely leaving for *financial* reasons, but for *management* reasons. They don't believe their older and more senior-ranking officers understand their needs nor manage them properly. This issue is not unique with the military but reflected in most traditional organizations in America today.

In general, Generation X employees are those between the ages of 19-34.

Unlike their parents and grandparents, Generation X employees do not plan on staying with one job or company throughout their career--nor will they sacrifice their family for their job. They grew up seeing their parents laid off. Many of them have grown up as latch key children and in divorced family situations. Therefore time for their family is very important to them.

Many times Gen. X workers are characterized negatively by the older generation. Clearly, their work ethics are different, but along with their age they bring unique strengths and abilities. First they have a voracious appetite for technology and learning. This is good unless your organization is not willing or able to share information or has up-to-date technology. There are major hurdles between work environments that will either attract or repel Gen. X:

**Traditional Workplace**

* Security from the institution
* Promotions based on longevity
* Loyalty to the organization
* Wait to be told what to do
* Respect based on position/title

**New Generation Workplace**

* Security from within
* Promotions based on performance
* Loyalty to the team
* Challenge authority
* You must earn respect

Generation X employees tend to be less motivated by promises of overtime pay and more motivated by personal satisfaction with their jobs. They want to grow in their jobs and learn new skills. They will change jobs often as they seek jobs that offer them both better benefits and more opportunity for professional growth as well as personal fulfillment.

Generation X employees want, and expect, their employers to hear what they have to say. They want to understand the "big picture" for the company and how this influences their employment and growth. They are creative thinkers, independent, results oriented and bring with them a healthy dose of skepticism.

Here are a few general areas to keep in mind to improve retention and productivity.

* Be approachable

Direct access to decision makers is very important to the younger workforce. Take time to speak with an employee's spouse or family when you meet them and let them know you appreciate the employee. Remember, Generation X employees look for more than just fair pay: they need and want personal acknowledgment and job satisfaction.

* Take time to be personal

Thank an employee for doing a good job (in person, in writing, or both). Listen to what employees have to say, both in a one-on-one situation and in a group meeting. Let the employee know what happened to the idea or suggestion he or she submitted.

* Encourage employee growth

Provide feedback on their performance. Be specific; mention a particular situation or activity. Make sure the employee understands company expectations. Involve the employee in the decision-making process whenever possible. Give an employee room to do the job without unnecessary micro-management. Pay for employees to attend workshops and seminars; offer on-site classes where employees can learn new skills or improve upon old ones. Most jobs contain a certain amount of routine, day-to-day work; offer employees a chance to work on something in which they have a special interest, something that will challenge them.

* Performance based promotions and rewards

Traditional organizations lose valuable younger employees because of their longevity based recognition and promotion systems. Recognize an employee who has done an outstanding job by giving an unexpected reward, such as a day off or a free dinner for the employee and his family at a nice restaurant. Manage people individually and promote outstanding individuals even if it means ahead of older or more senior employees. The employee who deserves a promotion and does not get it will start looking elsewhere for a better opportunity to move upward.

* Help employees see the "Big Picture."

Employees need to experience a sense of ownership. Encourage this by providing them with information about new products, advertising campaigns, strategies for competing, etc. Let each employee see how he or she fits into the plan. Help employees see how meeting their goals contribute to meeting the organization's goals.

* Build morale.

Have an open work environment; encourage initiative and welcome new ideas. This generation enjoys having fun at work. Don't be afraid to try something new every now and then. For example hotel tradition calls for employees at the Hyatt Regency in Lexington, Kentucky to wrap a 12-pound frozen turkey with electrical tape. Then they roll it 50 feet down the loading dock toward the human resource office and try to turn over as many wine bottle "bowling pins" as possible. Winners get a pumpkin pie.