

Leading a Highly Diverse Workforce

The advent of the 21st Century is bringing with it a level of age diversity among the workforce never before seen in corporate America. As Generation Y, also known as the Nexters, the Millennials, or the Nintendo Generation, actively enters the workforce, employers are faced with Veterans (b. 1922-1943), Baby Boomers (b. 1943-1960), Gen X (b. 1960-1980) and Gen Y (b. 1980-) all working side by side.

These distinctly different generations have diverse values based on their early life experiences that include the defining events of their lifetime, their heroes, and their cultural memorabilia. Ask a member of Gen Y what a Kewpie Doll is and you're likely to get an unconcerned shoulder shrug. Ask a Veteran what the X Games are and their response will likely be a blank stare. These differences in life experiences have resulted in distinctly different values and views that can create conflict throughout your organization.

According to a recent article about Gen Y in the Nov. 7, 2005 issue of *USA Today*, a survey by Lee Hecht Harrison revealed that "More than 60 percent of employers say they are experiencing tension between employees from different generations. The survey found more than 70 percent of older employees are dismissive of younger workers' abilities. And nearly half of employers say that younger employees are dismissive of the abilities of their older co-workers."

When you combine the challenges raised by these generational differences with the predictions made about workforce shortages in the coming years, effective leadership is more important than ever. So what can you do to get the most from this multi-generational workforce?

Start by assessing your current workforce: Do your current employees have what it takes to accomplish your organizational objectives? Do they have the work ethic and judgment capacity to take the organization to the next level? There is a general feeling among Veterans and Baby Boomers that Gen X and Gen Y are slackers, don't have a good work ethic, etc.

Whether this perception is true or not, the fact is, a poor work ethic or a slacker attitude is not limited to the younger generations. There could be Veterans and Boomers working in your organization right now who have already checked out. So, as you start the New Year, take time out to assess your workforce to identify your organizational strengths and weaknesses. There are now highly accurate and validated assessment tools that can help you find out who is committed to your organization and who has the capacity and capability you need to achieve your goals. Then, use this informa-



tion to be sure you've got the right people in the right job and to create developmental action plans targeted at addressing those weaknesses that can hold individual's and the organization back.

Clearly define your organizational goals and objectives: The old adage remains the same...If you don't know where you're going, how are you going to get there? Continuing that train of thought, if you don't know where you're going, how can you focus your workforce to take you there? Once you have clearly defined your organizational goals and objectives, you can effectively define the roles and responsibilities of your key people.

Align individual goals and objectives to your organizational goals and objec-

tives: When your employee's individual and team performance is aligned with your organizational goals and objectives, you can leverage the power of your people to achieve extraordinary results. Establish individual goals that are clearly aligned to your organizational goals and SMART - specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-bound. Vaguely written goals (i.e. "increase sales") make it difficult, if not impossible, to know if the goal has been reached. Sales of what? By how much? By when?

Finally, monitor, evaluate and reward your success: Implement an integrated performance management system to monitor, evaluate and reward achievement of individual and organizational goals and objectives. If you can't effectively monitor and evaluate performance, how can you keep your workforce motivated to achieve your desired results? The Internet has made it possible for small and large organizations to implement efficient and cost effective performance management systems for tracking individual and organizational goals. An effective performance management system should provide you with real time feedback on your employee's performance, should considerably increase communication among managers and employees and can be the key to tying individual compensation to organizational results.

Whether you're working to manage the perception of differences among generations or struggling to keep a diverse workforce motivated, continued diversity among the workforce is a given. Assessing your workforce, clearly defining your organizational goals, aligning individual goals to organizational goals and monitoring, evaluating and rewarding results are the key to leveraging the power of your workforce. ○→○

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