



The Journey Ahead *How to Be a Multi-Generational Leader*

As in all generations, we are shaped by national events, the achievement of educational credentials, family dynamics, community limitations and freedoms, even global crises. All of these factors influence how people from a specific generation describe their worldview, communicate personally & professionally, and interact in team collaborations in the workplace. Today's leaders are facing an unparalleled mix of generations in their work environments, the Silent, the Boomers, GenX and GenY or often called, the Millennials. Their challenge is to foster and support these individuals to work in partnership together, resolve conflict with positive results, permit different working techniques; and, allow for life balance expectations from each age group.

From a survey by Harris/Decima Harris/Decima, using an online panel, 501 baby boomers (aged 47 to 62) and 501 members of GenY (aged 18-30) responded that both groups identified team spirit as a motivating factor to stay in their current company. The survey was conducted from July 27th through August 12th, 2011. "These findings are a real wake up call to companies," said Dr. Linda Duxbury, an expert in workforce generational differences at Carlton University's Sprott School of Business. "Besides the motivation element, there's a huge gap between what both of these generations want; and, what companies are delivering. If companies don't step up, they risk losing valuable workers, both among the young and older."

Not all of the news from companies with the mix of workforces is negative. There are success stories of companies that recognize generational values and have designed some innovative practices. Two of these creative ideas come from UPS and Scripps Health in San Diego. UPS holds Super Loading contests. UPS recognizes that work in a warehouse can be repetitive and boring, in an atmosphere that is far from lavish. Super Loading Contests allow GenYs to have some fun, learn from their mistakes with the Boomer work crew; and, be something more than a unit for production.

Scripps developed a system-wide plan to attract new employees and retain the *pillars* of their employee base. They analyzed the entire workforce in generational percentages, implemented a re-skill program for those desiring a career change, created a mentor program to teach and coach; and, enhanced communications for motivation and positive word use. They rose from number 58 to 82 in the ratings scale of 'A Great Place to Work' index.

To be an effective and successful multi-generational leader, practice as many of these guidelines that resonate in your work environment:

- Review both your organization chart and your succession planning strategies. You are looking to determine if the majority of leadership roles are filled by one generation category such as, Silent Generation or Boomer males. If this is the situation, then younger staff, as well as women, will perceive that only one *kind* of person tends to be promoted. This can induce others to fall into resignation of 'I have no chance here' and leave the company with the next job offer. Communicate the message that all promotions will reviewed for both job competency skills and equivalent leadership abilities.
- Whether you have inherited people or hired new folks, have a 'core values' meeting. Your goal is to facilitate a values discovery for all of the generations present in identifying and sharing their deep



held beliefs. Ask the team members to state their top 5 core values; and, emphasize that no one's set ranks more important than anyone else's. When each individual hears and understands the significance of each other's value group, it increases the respect level of individual value boundaries.

- Employ conflict resolution practices for those situations that may be highly emotional such as, perceived staff favoritism. When department managers only practice conflict avoidance, employees can receive the impression that to be successful you have to be overly passive. When employees lose the 'right to challenge' unique ideas and ingenuity will be lost.
- Design mentoring relationships between the veteran staff and the newer generation workers. Almost always, older workers are pleased to share their expertise and reasoning abilities, while the younger staff benefits from the 'lessons learned' from prior experiences. In reciprocity, the younger workers can speed the use of the latest technologies, programs and apps for their mentors. Many companies have also realized that these kinds of programs allow for cross training and the passing of invisible knowledge that has been a working standard, but not documented.
- Disparity in working techniques and personal style can be misunderstood by an employee's physical absence. Realize that the traditional 8am-5pm work attendance is outdated. Unless you are required by a government agency or a security contract to be physically present in the office, smart phones, Internet tablets, and laptops enable many workers, not just GenY, to be productive at any hour and any place. Establish working options that are aimed at productivity and no sacrifice to home or personal life.
- Evaluate your customers for their predominate generational base. Often, customers like to be supported by staff of the same value structure—someone who understands their perspective. Look at matching individual clients with those from your workforce that are from the same generation or one removed.
- Celebrate publicly every time you can. Even small successes such as, a thank you card or call from a client on someone's performance can be the occasion to call a celebration meeting. As everyone realizes that they are a critical part of the 'total' plan for success, this helps build team cohesion.

When you are leading a multi-generational team, *ask* yourself:

- How often do you elicit feedback from the team on their progress or performance? If you have a large group of Millennials, are they dissatisfied with the amount of feedback they are getting from you?
- How can you design an award system that is not just based on years of service? Can you institute a 'pay for performance' system encouraging productivity without regard for age or seniority?
- Can you review the entry level or line positions and management positions for a balanced concentration of generations? If you find a saturation of one generation in a position, how can you help them spread their expertise with other staff in the company; and, how will you re-balance these positions for the future?

"We need to remember across generations that there is much to learn as there is to teach."
Gloria Steinem

If this resonates with your current situation, we invite you to realize your efforts with us.