

Understanding the Millennial Generation and Its Impact on Your Business

Part 2 of a 2 part series

By: Jesse Edelman, COO & Julie Redfield, Partner

Companies doing business today are having to re-align their thinking in order to adjust to the ways of the Generation Y workforce. A key question for many businesses is: How are you going to get your products to market when the newest entrants to the workforce are a generation that has been taught to question authority and one that prides itself on individualism? Doesn't exactly sound like the stalwart characteristics that typify salespeople, does it? But we believe that these "Generation Y" characteristics can be a huge asset rather than a detriment, so long as you know how to channel their talents correctly.

Last month we outlined some of the most common characteristics unique to Generation Y. This month we'll discuss the implications of those characteristics on your sales training programs.

Unleashing the Potential of Your Generation Y Sales Force

The key to maintaining a competitive advantage is to figure out how to tap into these "live for the moment," energetic, and ambitious young people and turn them into your best sales assets.

"Generation Y is much less likely to respond to the traditional command-and-control type of management still popular in much of today's workforce," says Jordan Kaplan, an associate managerial science professor at Long Island University-Brooklyn in New York. "They've grown up questioning their parents, and now they're questioning their employers. They don't know how to shut up, which is great, but that's aggravating to the 50-year-old manager who says, 'do it and do it now.'" (*USA Today, November 6, 2005*)

This is not to say that all Gen Y employees have the same set of strengths, experiences and capabilities. Companies will still need to include individualized training needs assessments and personalized development plans, but there are some commonalities that can be leveraged to train and develop this group.

Characteristics

CONNECTIVITY:
Gen Y is tech savvy and adaptable to technological advances



- Rollout Mechanisms should incorporate technology that is comfortable and familiar
- Discussion forums, instant messaging, blogging and emailing are expected in training design
- Utilize communication tools that allow for collaboration

CAREER MATTERS:
Gen Y values professional development & growth



- Encourage team learning, led by a direct manager, through role play and interactive exercises
- Be careful to design the training so that each group member has an equal role to play
- Assigning a senior manager as a mentor and a project guide will also appeal to Gen Y
- Individualized coaching sessions from Managers including "on the fly" feedback and expectation setting

HOW THEY WORK:
Gen Y loves "multi-tasking" and used to a variety of stimuli



- Individual training must incorporate a mixed mode of delivery – i.e., instructional, experiential
- Store supplemental exercises, assignments or information on a web site
- Structure training modules so that skills and concepts build on each other
- Keep lessons and messages short. Repeat key messages.
- Create modules & sub-modules to ensure that the information is delivered in bites.
- For best results, allow for review and for modules to be taken out of sequence.

Implications

What we've seen with clients who come to us with challenges surrounding Generation Y is a need to adapt traditional techniques to this unique group, and find an approach that will engage this fast-paced group of multi-taskers. At ArchPoint, our approach focuses on training design methods and sales skills development.

Competency-Based Approach

We use a competency-based approach to train selling skills. A traditional "hard sell" approach based on specific steps to follow and even specific phrases to use will not work with this new generation. Their need for individuality and authenticity means that you have to teach them core selling skills that they can then "make their own." As one 23 year old waiter at a casual dining restaurant told us, *"I love working here because they let me be myself with the customers. It's up to me to use the techniques they taught me...but I get to do it my way."*

Teach Transferable Skills

The Millennial Generation is a very ambitious one that values professional development and is concerned about building resumes. Our approach is to tap into the Millennial Generation's desire to build transferable skills that they can take with them to their next role, whether it is with their current employer or another company. While this may seem counterintuitive, we know that this builds engagement with the employees by showing genuine interest in helping them build their own cadre of life skills. We also see immediate effects of lower attrition resulting from the trust that is built.

Summary

While Generation Y brings new challenges they also bring new skill sets to the table. The goal is to develop your training and working environments around the ways that they best think and learn. Flexibility on your end will be rewarded by motivation and engagement on theirs. Not only will you be better able to harness their creative strengths, but you will engage their sense of loyalty to your company. This is a win-win solution for any company willing to change their approach and adapt to a new generation of workers.