



In our Experience

Why should we worry about Generation Y? Graduate Recruitment in the 21st century

'Generation Y' were born in or after 1982. This is the generation of young men and women that are now joining graduate trainee schemes and fast-track programmes. They are the future of our organisations. Why are they being talked and written about so much? According to Rebecca Huntley they are described as the most 'Technologically savvy generation yet, a group that has never known a world with without remote controls, CD's, cable TV and computers'. As a generation of young people, they're seen as more optimistic, idealistic, ambitious, confident, committed and passionate than their predecessors. They've been described as 'consultants' to their parents who don't know how to use new technology. They know how to use the internet more efficiently than older generations used the library. For the first time in history, members of the younger generation know more than their parents.

Why is this important to organisations? The key issue is that most of these technologically able, optimistic young people are being recruited and managed by a different generation. You may well say that this has always been the case. The contrast between this generation and the previous one is starker than ever before. Most of us who are recruiting and managing today's graduates are not from generation Y. Our expectations of work and life are different. When we joined organisations we might have expected to work our way up through a structured hierarchy, learning from people as we went. We valued employment stability and some of us were inspired by a having a 'job for life'. But we can't impose our own values on Generation Y'ers and hope to get the best out of them.

Generation Y graduates are unlikely to be lured by promises of climbing a career ladder until retirement. They want more freedom and flexibility to make their mark and are not concerned by job insecurity. They want to achieve a work life balance that their parents didn't have. This presents problems on both sides. Organisations need to understand these changing needs and offer employment opportunities that inspire them. Generation Y'ers need to understand that they have to fit in with employers and that they may not be able to have everything their own way.

Organisations can do a lot more to attract, retain, enthuse and get the best out of Generation Y'ers. They can also help young employees understand what they need from them. From our experience and research, we offer a few points that will help you get the best from your Generation Y employees.

Open mindedness

In interviews about bad management practices, Generation Y'ers identified closed mindedness as one of the worst tendencies. Generation Y'ers are comfortable with multiple ways of doing things. They know how to get information and explore options. Managers who are closed to their ideas are likely to lock horns with Generation Y'ers very quickly, which will result in dissatisfaction on both sides. There is a need to be more open minded, to encourage ideas, creativity and innovation. Equip your managers with the skills to encourage and explore ideas rather than dismissing them.

Capitalise on their technical expertise

Your graduate trainees may have more IT knowledge than many of their older colleagues. This could cause frustration. Give young employees opportunities to formally share their technical knowledge with others. Give them training and coaching skills so they can be involved in formal and informal IT training.

Train and coach them in time management

Our experience of new graduates is that they need help with managing their time in a way that is acceptable to organisations, so that they are able to achieve their objectives. Help them adjust to work disciplines by offering them coaching or formal training in time management techniques. Equip them with skills that will help them.

Create a mentor network

Effective mentoring is a two way process in which both mentors and mentees benefit. Mentees integrate more quickly into the organisation and culture. Mentors can benefit from learning from their younger mentees. Select mentors that will be helpful and informative to young new employees. Your mentors need to be open and receptive to ideas, as well as straightforward enough to give honest information and feedback. Allow time in the working day for mentor meetings.

Build flexibility

In all the research and anecdotal evidence about Generation Y, the theme of 'flexibility' comes through strongly – the need to be flexible in scheduling, allowing flexibility about how tasks are approached, flexibility about dress and outward appearance, flexibility about working hours, working from home and training opportunities. Whilst there are some things that you aren't able to be flexible about, it's worth considering those things where being more flexible is a possibility. All your employees will thank you for this. It's also worth asking your Generation Y trainees about their expectations of flexibility at work.

Encourage a portfolio career

Research suggests that Generation Y employees don't want a structured career like their parents had and organisations may not be able to offer the structure and stability that they knew. Capitalise on their enthusiasm and ability by offering them assignments and tasks where they build up a range of valued skills. Help them by offering project work that will develop their abilities. Ensure that your HR policies recognize and encourage portfolio careers, not just a sequence of jobs.

If you want to read more about Generation Y, we recommend

Managing Generation Y, Global Citizens born in the late 70's and early 80's, by Carolyn A. Martin Ph.D and Bruce Tulgan. Published by HRD Press in 2001

The world according to Y: inside the new adult generation, by Rebecca Huntley. Published by Allen & Unwin in 2006

If you'd like to talk to us about attracting and selecting the best graduates for your needs, please contact us on enquiries@chromis-consulting.com