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5 Powerful Ways To Harness The Potential Of Millennials

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As many of my readers already know, I regularly cover the topic of the Gen Y worker and all of the opportunities and challenges that they represent in this column. In the past, I've offered some tips from mentoring to organizational restructuring. This piece takes a slightly different tack. It provides 5 solid ideas aimed at building the type of long-term relationships that work for businesses and their younger staff, alike.

One of the biggest criticisms of our current generation of employee is that they are far more transient than generations of the past. They are willing to leave their employer whenever a better opportunity presents itself. This leaves businesses in the precarious situation of having to consider the "flight risk" of their younger staff members before investing in their training and education.

That said, the Gen Y worker often cites the feeling of being boxed-out and excluded as a reason for their early departure. This is a bit of a Catch-22 paradox. On one hand, businesses are unwilling to invest in someone that won't stay and Gen Y workers won't stay if they feel excluded — and, excluded they may be, if they lack the training needed to become part of the greater whole of a business. What to do? Here are 5 ideas that you can put to use today to cultivate the long-term commitment of the next generation of worker:

Establish a Gen Y Committee-The concept promotes leadership/staff idea sharing and mentoring. By designating a committee comprised of younger staff and charging that committee to meet with their senior leader-level committee sponsors on a monthly basis, we will establish a two-way conversation that can be used to garner ideas for improving the business from a Gen Y perspective, while serving to improve morale and inclusion among the younger segment our workforce.

Lock-In Through Tuition Debt Relief Program-Younger staff can be offered a benefit that offers to pay down their college debt in exchange for time on the job. The longer they stay and produce, the more college debt gets paid by the business. This would help a business to lock-in talent, while helping the Gen Y worker establish greater financial security.

Train Through Standard Operating Procedure Documentation Activities-This initiative can be assigned and performed on a part time basis each week (and more frequently during slower periods). It requires Gen Y staff to work with seasoned personnel to document their standard work procedures. This will ensure that institutional knowledge is better retained and help the younger worker to “learn the business”.

As a by-product, operational improvements can also be attained through the back and forth of that will transpire during the documentation effort. Questions from a younger staff member like, “*Why do we do it that way?*” may lead to the break-through thinking needed for change.

Introduce Lunch ‘n Learn-This voluntary program can improve business performance while promoting *esprit de corps* among all staff. Sessions can be hosted by, both, younger or more experienced staff depending on the topic. By offering short, 1 hour training on a business “hot topic,” we can encourage learning and promote the cross-fertilization of ideas.

Create a Buddy Program – This program will pair new employees with peer “buddies,” whom will help to assimilate younger staff into the business. These “buddies” will serve as a mentor for younger staff and help to enhance their sense of “inclusiveness” into the culture. It can easily become an essential component of employee onboarding.

To close, using some combination of these 5 ideas may be what it takes for a business to harness the power of Gen Y. Each idea is aimed at engaging and including younger employees in the operation of the business, while limiting their risk of early departure. I believe that by offering younger staff members the opportunity to gain a stronger sense of inclusiveness we will bring about the “stickiness” that business leaders want to feel when making a decision to heavily invest in the assimilation of the Gen Y worker.

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