

Four steps to inspire our Gen Y employees

By Nicholas Barnett, CEO, Insync Surveys

With over a quarter of the workforce comprising Gen Ys, and that number set to increase to nearly 50 percent by 2020, it's increasingly important for business owners to understand how we can engage this cohort and align them with our organisation's goals.

Much of the narrative in relation to Gen Y within the workplace characterises them as fickle, lazy, mistrustful of bureaucracy and disrespectful of seniority. Not only is this characterisation unfair, it also diminishes the potential benefits that can be gained from ensuring this group is engaged.

In Australia, Gen Y are the most educated and culturally diverse of any other generation so far. A product of their times, Gen Y will enter the workforce as more technologically competent than any other generation within the organisation. They are also more agile, able to accept change and are likely to possess a greater ability to think and behave innovatively. This begs the question for business owners - what motivates this group and how can we inspire them to high performance? It all comes down to four steps: living an inspiring vision, building a flexible and inclusive culture, providing recognition and genuinely caring.



Step 1: Live a clear vision and purpose

Gen Y are motivated more so than other generations by job fulfilment. Helping them by drawing a line of sight between the work that they do and the organisation's vision and purpose reinforces that what they are doing is meaningful and in turn makes them feel valued for the contribution they are making.

In a recent study that drew upon the views of over 100,000 employees from around 200 organisations, Insync Surveys identified seven business habits that most differentiate high performance organisations from low performance ones. Our research showed that the single biggest differentiator of high performance organisations is the extent to which the senior leadership team adopted and lived an inspiring vision for their organisation.

Step 2: Build a flexible, inclusive and contemporary culture

The notion that a successful work day can only be completed at the office between the hours of nine to five is no longer relevant to today's

workforce. Offering flexible work arrangements not only shows you trust your employees to maintain their performance outside the office but also has proven links to reduced turnover, improved productivity and overall employee engagement.

Gen Y employees expect that they will be managed in an inclusive style. Ideally, open communication will be an essential part of the organisation's culture and with that a leadership style that is based more on consensus rather than autocracy.

Gen Y are the first generation who have grown up with computers, tablets and smartphones. For most of them, social media will form a natural part of their daily existence. For some retailers, social media is uncharted territory so it's understandable that some are reluctant to use it to communicate. Social media can be a great way to communicate with Gen Y employees but it must be done in an authentic way.

Step 3: Develop and recognise your employees

Ensuring there is a respectful and collaborative relationship between

managers and their employees, investing in Gen Y's career development and recognising good performance should all be integral to our people management practices.

Career development and growth are likely to be among the top priorities for our Gen Y employees. Because they are motivated by accomplishment and independence, delegation of responsibilities is important for creating a sense of personal fulfilment within the work that they do. Providing Gen Y with the opportunity to work on stretch projects, cross functional secondments and supporting them with mentoring are all ways to better engage them.

It's always important to recognise the contributions of employees. For

Gen Y this is a necessity. They have a far greater desire and expectation for acknowledgement and constant feedback than prior generations. Recognition does not need to be monetary - often it's simply words of thanks that will motivate them and reinforce behaviours that drive organisational excellence.

Step 4: Demonstrate genuine care for your employees

Gen Y employees are far more likely to put in extra discretionary effort if their manager builds a respectful and personal relationship with them and if they feel they are genuinely cared for by their organisation. They will assess the underlying motives and intentions of their senior leaders to determine authenticity. Don't try and deceive

them as they'll spot it a mile off.

Gen Y will reciprocate an employer's positive commitment to them. Building personal relationships, taking a genuine interest in employees as well as acknowledging and recognising their performance is likely to result in a much more engaged Gen Y workforce. ■

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