

The Game Has Changed

The ABCs of Managing Gen X&Y

BY HEATHER E. SCHWARTZ

The youngest manager at The Sewickley Spa, in Sewickley, Pa., is 23 years old, a woman in the middle of Generation Y. She was promoted to the position by Dorothy Andreas Tuel, a baby boomer and owner of the spa, and joined a management team that includes both baby boomers and members of Generation X.



After working with owner Dorothy Andreas Tuel (right) on their management styles, Megan Venezie says, “I now feel empowered in my management position, versus defending my decisions. With more confidence, we have had zero complaints and zero turnover at my location.”

An initial clash in work styles was almost inevitable when the 23-year-old manager stepped into her new role.

“Anytime you have different generations working together, it’s common for one generation to want to label the other negatively,” says Bea Fields, author of “Millennial Leaders: Success Stories From Today’s Most Brilliant Gen Y Leaders” and a Generation Y consultant. “In order to be effective in business, we need to find similarities among people of different generations.”

The Players

For spa managers who employ many workers of different ages, defining the generations can be helpful. Baby boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964. Generation X comes next, born between 1964 and 1982. The latest group to join the workforce is Generation Y, also known as Millennials. They were born between 1981 and 2000. Yes, there’s some overlap there, and that makes sense.

Generations X and Y are close enough to want many of the same things in the workplace. Like siblings, they often clash. Generation X is the older child, worried that Generation Y is getting more attention and better perks.

As Fields explains, Generation X is recognized as having a strong work ethic. These workers are willing to switch companies to build a career, and they’re skeptical of organizations, having seen their parents fired, laid off and downsized. Raised as latchkey kids, they’re independent. But they’re not nearly as vocal about their needs and wants in the workplace as Generation Y.

In contrast to more mature workers, members of Generation Y are sometimes viewed as lazy, demanding and even slow to learn. Those are the kinds of negative labels managers need to avoid. In reality, Fields says, Generation Y is very similar to Generation X. The difference is Millennials are more concerned with working efficiently than working long, hard hours. But they’re very capable workers; many run Web-based side businesses in addition to holding a full-time job. Millennials don’t take well to being “bossed around,” but they do want mentoring, coaching and plenty of feedback. “If you want Generation Y to do something, they’ll do it more quickly if you do it with them or model what you want done,” Fields explains.

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The truth is Generation Y is empowered more than any other generation to walk away from an unsatisfying job. Some call Generation Y entitled, but Fields says they're the result of a "perfect storm." Millennials grew up in a period marked by corporate scandals, global terrorism and the hard-hitting tragedy of 9/11. They were raised by parents whose concern about their children's self-esteem led them to micromanage their kids' lives. Parents of Millennials have been known to go on job interviews with their grown children and even call

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Human Resources if their child is turned down, according to Fields.

Baby boomers were expected to be grateful for a good job and didn't like to make waves in the workplace. Generation X saw that that didn't work out for their parents and made more demands. Millennials are now taking it all a step further. Their parents taught them not to settle. If that means leaving a job, Millennials would rather work several part-time jobs instead, while crashing on a friend's couch or back at their parents' house.

Case Study: The Sewickley Spa

When Dorothy Andreas Tuel promoted Megan Venezie, her 23-year-old employee to manager, she didn't have any qualms

about the young woman's talent and abilities. Still, the situation created some challenges almost right away. "I saw excellent potential in her, but I didn't quite understand her," said Tuel, noting, "She's the age of my oldest child, but I was treating her like a contemporary."

Tuel and the other managers weren't sure, for example, why the new manager asked so many questions. "She would ask questions and I would say, 'That's the same scenario we talked about four days ago,'" recalled Tuel. "I was terse, expecting her to get it quicker."

Staff members at The Sewickley Spa were having other problems communicating effectively, and Tuel consulted Silver Lining Solutions, an outside human resources company based in Pittsburgh, for help. The company performed the D.I.S.C. test, a personality assessment that measures behavioral styles, to help explain natural differences among the spa's employees.

The main purpose of the test is to raise awareness about how each person on the team communicates, which can help management decide how to delegate tasks, according to Nancy Stampahar, author, organizational development consultant and owner of Silver Lining Solutions. The personality types don't seem to fall along generational lines, though she says there's probably a good chance that Generation Y, raised with many protected rights and opportunities, is more optimistic, emotional and spiritual than more mature workers. "They definitely want work that's meaningful to them," she noted.

At The Sewickley Spa, the D.I.S.C. test helped Tuel see her young manager in a new light. Like many members of Generation Y, the young manager was asking questions simply because she wanted direction from her boss. The D.I.S.C. test revealed her personality also leans toward perfectionism; she was afraid of making a mistake. Once Tuel understood her better, she was able to reassure her and guide her toward success in her new role.

"I said to her, 'We will back up anything you do. We want you to succeed and we are your safety net if you fail. The worst thing that happens is you make a mistake and if you do, we will help you fix it,'" Tuel recalled. "Understanding her personality nuances has really helped. We could have potentially lost her. Once we all relaxed, she blossomed."

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Bridging the Gap

The Society for Human Resource Management Workplace Diversity Initiative reports Millennials make up about 23 percent of the U.S. workforce. They're truly a force to be reckoned with, demanding more than any other generation before. The questions are: What do Millennials need and want in the workplace? And can spa owners give it to them in order to retain these young employees without alienating Generation X and workers of other generations?

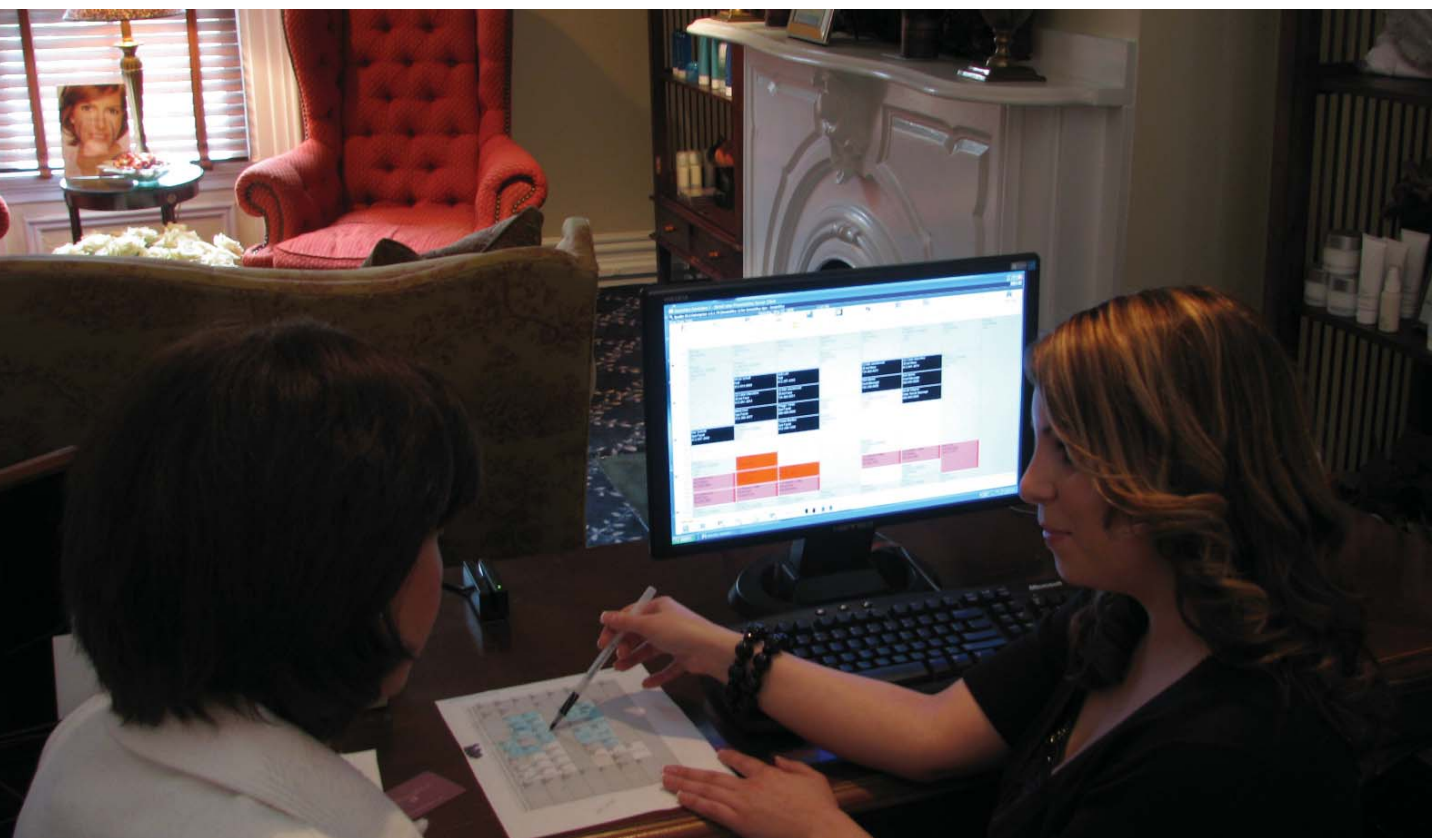
A 2007 survey conducted by CareerBuilder.com questioned workers ages 25 to 29 who work in human resources and as hiring managers across all industries. The survey found what these Generation Y workers want most are better pay, flexible work schedules, promotion within a year, more personal and vacation

time, and access to state-of-the-art technology. In fact, any Generation Y employee would enjoy these workplace improvements – and so would workers of other generations as well.

Sharilyn Abbajay, COO with the Neill Corporation, based in New Orleans, says her company offers structured training programs and ongoing education every month, as well as outside education employees can earn through a point system. The company also offers flexible work schedules. Policies and benefits are the same for workers of every generation, but these types of offerings cater especially to Millennials.

"We're very clear about our expectations," she adds. "Millennials are used to an environment that's very structured."

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Tuel, a baby boomer, and Venezia, a Gen Yer, had to learn to speak each other's lingo to find a way to better communicate at work.

In addition, the company uses technology to keep Generation Y employees excited about their work, such as a new software system for billing color-process clients as well as a software system that can be used to track points earned toward outside education opportunities.

According to Abbajay, who is also owner of Abbajay & Associates, in Lanham, Md., today's teens and 20-somethings

commonly use a BlackBerry or iPhone to track their personal schedule. They're comfortable with technology and expect spas to use the latest technology available.

"When they can monitor their performance (and compare with others) on a software system, they're engaged," she explains. "They like the competition."

As spas develop these kinds of offerings, they illustrate how Generation Y's outspoken nature may be reshaping the structure of the workplace. Fifteen percent of those surveyed by Careerbuilder.com said their employer had implemented new policies and programs to accommodate them, including more flexible work schedules; more recognition programs; more access to state-of-the-art technology; increased salaries and bonuses; more continuing education programs; paying for cell phones, BlackBerry devices and other

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SWEET BEAUTY

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tools; more telecommuting options; and more vacation time. Spa owners might consider similar policies and programs to accommodate their own employees of every generation.

Managing different generations effectively isn't about catering to the most vocal group, of course. So how does Generation X really fit in when it comes to these offerings? As Fields points out, these

workers sometimes resent the introduction of new policies meant to engage and retain Generation Y. According to Abbajay, these workers aren't interested in a structured work environment; they're too independent. And they aren't as eager to embrace new technologies as their Millennial coworkers.

Abbajay says she does manage Generation X differently from Millennials. "I expect more of Generation Xers," she explains, noting they're older, they have more experience and they're more independent. Realizing that has led her to find an ideal position for them alongside their younger co-workers.

"Generation Xers are my mentors to the Millennials," she said, noting the younger workers like learning from someone in the same position, such as a massage therapist or hair stylist. "They seem to understand each other. They're both very similar."

It might be easier to work when every member of the team is from the same generation. When employees think alike, quick decisions can be reached. But those might not be the best decisions, according to Stampahar. She says the best team is a balanced team, managed well.

"It's about listening to each of the generations and adapting to their needs," she said, explaining everyone on the team should be educated about different generations' communication styles and work ethics. "It comes down to respect and appreciation."

Perhaps the most effective way to manage a mix of employees from different generations would be to recognize that Generation Y's demands are really the desires of every generation. Fields notes Millennials have recognized that the way we work today isn't really working for us when it comes to environmental issues, work-life balance and our health. As baby boomers retire and Generation X steps into more leadership roles, she expects to see a movement

toward more diversity and flexibility in the workplace.

"Generations X and Y are here to change the way we work," said Fields.

And that could be good for everyone. ■

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