

Our clients often ask us “what is new in the field of leadership development?”

Working with many of our clients on a variety of leadership development programmes, we have been struck by two clear themes:

- **Younger managers have very different priorities on what is important to them in their careers and what they expect from the companies they work for.**
- **Older and more established managers are finding it difficult to motivate and provide effective leadership of this next generation.**

Generation Y (also known as the millennial generation) is in their 20’s and is just entering the workforce. With numbers estimated to be as many as 75 million worldwide, they are the next generation of leaders. These individuals, born after 1982 are different to the generation x, born 1965 – 1980 and certainly very different to those who were the baby boomers of the 1960’s.

These definitions were originally created by the authors William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book “Generations” in 1991 where they explored the idea that people of a particular age group tend to share a set of similar characteristics and behaviours due to the particular segment of history and time in which they have grown up.

The challenge is that the baby boomer generation is now providing leadership to a generation that thinks differently, acts differently and behaves differently.





So what are the characteristics of this Generation Y?

There is a lot of research on the characteristics of generation Y and much anecdotal evidence. However, the key characteristics can be summed as follows:

Well educated knowledge workers

They have parents who have generally had higher level education and a far higher percentage of them will have completed a university degree before starting work. They recognise the value of learning and knowledge and see this as their passport to progression

Mobility and flexibility

Their parents will have moved jobs more frequently or been made redundant more frequently so they are more acceptant of constant change. They have less loyalty to an organisation and will stay as long as they are gaining what they want. They are quite likely to move every few years and will be far more likely to work for themselves at some point. A move of job every two to three years is described as the norm, particularly if they are not gaining the recognition and progressions that they desire.

Achievement orientated

Brought up by parents who have nurtured them, boosted their self esteem and given them positive recognition and support from babyhood (child rearing manuals changed significantly from the Dr Spock "leave them to cry" era) these individuals love positive feedback, crave attention and want to achieve, to be successful and popular.

Technical experts

They grew up with technology as an integral part of their world and are intuitively competent in using it to their advantage. They live their lives through social media, twitter, blackberries and facebook. They prefer to get information when they want it so prefer the option of webinars, on line learning and use email and text often as a preference to face to face communication.

Command and Control is dead – but what replaces it? Coach and Connect needs to be the new mantra. The new leadership paradigm is a contact sport where you are there to coach them to be the best player they can be.

Dr Paul Redmond is Head of Careers and Employability at Liverpool University and one of the country's leading experts on generational theory and the graduate labour market. Google him to read many of his articles.

His view is as follows:

'They are less likely to turn up to things; they are constantly connected and communicate differently. They value open and honest communication.' He goes on to describe a group that is civic-minded, has little interest in a person's race, gender or sexual orientation, is earnestly interested in values and corporate responsibility, as well as flexible working and work-life balance.

The other characteristics listed by the Consultancy Deloitte are "educated, bored by routine, success-driven, lifestyle-centred, anti-commitment, service-minded, environmental, entrepreneurial,

Work to live

This generation recognises that life is there to be enjoyed. They work to live, not live to work. They are less prepared to give up time with friends and family in order to keep their manager happy. The growth of home working, flexible contracts and sabbaticals are all key to keeping this generation motivated. They have strong social conscience and have grown up with the fair-trade ethos.

So, what does this mean for the managers of these individuals?

Despite the evidence of these changes all round them, managers are failing to adapt their leadership style to meet the needs of this new generation.

Coaching

Generation Y wants to develop their skills and is not afraid to ask for help. Providing coaching is the key to helping them grow.

- Challenge their thinking
- Give them time with you
- Don't give them the answers
- Provide a sounding board for their decision making
- Stretch the boundaries of what you give them to do
- Ask them for help
- Be prepared for them to do things differently
- Be prepared for them to do things better than you do them.

Connections

Generation Y value connectivity with their colleagues, suppliers and clients. They want to be in the midst of relationships and communication. Relying on top down communication will not work for them. They need to be in the centre of communications and part of an on line community.

- Involve them in network and client events – make them feel involved

This is a generation that can multi task when watching TV, facebooking and writing reports. Their brains are hard wired to pay attention to different things simultaneously.

- Challenge them to find out about potential clients/providers/external contacts
- Connect them to other colleagues internally – help them to find a mentor
- This generation are more natural collaborators, they share knowledge and live in a wikipedia age. Use these skills for business advantage to break down organisational silos, getting them involved in cross functional project groups and use their team working skills to innovate and develop new solutions
- Ask their opinions and take note of what they say, they want to have influence
- Exploit their knowledge of social media and on line communication

Continual development

Generation Y want a challenge and want to be stretched. They get bored quickly and are constantly searching for new opportunities and experiences. They have low boredom threshold, mastering one skill and then moving to master the next. This is a generation that can multi task when watching TV, facebooking and writing reports. Their brains are hard wired to pay attention to different things simultaneously.

- Provide new and stretching assignments
- This generation know more about social media and network marketing than their managers, use them to coach upwards.
- Provide learning opportunities with their peers, this generation are comfortable learning from each other and sharing knowledge. Peer networks and buddy coaching is cost effective and works
- Provide opportunities for international and global projects, outside their comfort zone



We ran a series of interviews with a selection of generation Y individuals across a number of different sectors and asked for their top three requirements from their managers. The answers were very clear – more coaching, more contact and more development.

- Provide leading edge development programmes to equip them with skills for the future
- Delegate your work to them and give them a chance to be in the limelight and shine

Constant feedback

Generation Y have been brought up to feel good about themselves. They thrive on positive recognition and feedback and lots of support. Many have had the questionable benefit of "helicopter" parents who are constantly there, circling above them to check that everything is alright and ready to swoop in if they are needed.

- Do not rely on a yearly performance review; they want daily virtual contact with you
- Give feedback frequently and clearly
- Provide positive recognition and celebrate their successes
- People who feel good about themselves perform better. Your role is to inspire them to do their best work and help them feel good about themselves

Many managers on our programmes come with a view that the younger generation need to learn from the experience of their older and wiser colleagues

This is true as long as they also realise that they need to learn from their younger colleagues who come into business with a very different attitude and belief system, as well as a whole set of different skills. In the world of fast global communication, constant technological advancement and constant economic shifts, this stands the traditional power base on its head. Respect for the leader is no longer based on tenure and seniority, it is based on knowledge and skill – a true

If you would like to find out more about generation Y, choose from 138 million internet links, go on facebook or join a blog...

knowledge and skill meritocracy rather than the hierarchical model of the last decade.

There is also responsibility on the shoulders of the Learning and Development teams that support the organisational development of these individuals. Relying solely on face-to-face training workshops will not meet the needs of this population. They want information at their fingertips, twenty four hours a day. On line learning libraries, blogs, webinars, podcasts all form part of a blended approach to their development, backed up by coaching for high potential individuals, not just senior managers, challenging work based projects rather than academic case studies, opportunities to move roles frequently rather than wait for the next promotion. When was the last time you asked your future leaders what they needed – and actually then provided it?

Mark Sanborn, the American author and leadership expert said "Your success in life isn't based on your ability to simply change. It is based on your ability to change faster than your competition, customers and business."

Senior managers and leaders need to wake up to the fact that unless they change their approach now, they will not gain the best from these highly motivated and highly demanding entrants into the business world. These individuals are the future leaders and our responsibility is to develop them to become the best they can be. We are merely holding the baton until they are ready to take it from us, and it may be earlier than we would like.

Based on our own practical experience, Represent Ltd have developed a Coach and Connect Programme, aimed at established managers of teams who recognize the need to adapt their style and approach. Using a mix of on line learning, work based and face to face development this programme prepares senior managers for the challenges of managing and developing a new generation of future leaders.

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