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Understanding, Motivating Multi-Generational Workforces

Many companies are struggling with the challenge of managing a diverse workforce. This is particularly apparent in the widening generation gap, which is threatening productivity and profitability at firms nationwide. It actually isn't anything new for one generation to complain about another age group.

What IS new is that with more generations working alongside each other than ever before, learning how to work together has become crucial to success. Before one can address how to bridge generation gaps, it's important to point out the main demographic groups.

❖ **Baby Boomers**, *those born between 1946 and 1964*. Generally speaking, this generation of workers is concerned most about their aging parents and long-term financial issues, such as planning for retirement.

❖ **Generation X**, *often defined as those born between 1965 and 1982*. This generation of workers tends to be focused on raising their kids and day-to-day financial problems, such as child care expenses. However, Gen-Xers may also be part of the "Sandwich Generation," responsible for raising children while also taking care of aging parents.

❖ **Generation Y**, *more commonly referred to as Millennials, those born between 1983 and 2000*. Leading concerns of this age group include getting their careers on track and paying off college loans.

❖ **Generation Z**, *those born in the 21st century* (after 2000). Like Millennials, they are concerned about their careers and student debt, but also milestones like getting married, becoming a parent or buying a home. They also report more stress than older generations to situations like mass shootings and sexual harassment.

"You do need to understand the generation you're speaking to and what their expectations are," said Tina Thompson, senior vice president of health and performance solutions for Beacon Health Options. "And then on top of that, you need to get an idea for where that *individual* is in the process."

Connecting Different Generations to an EAP

Baby Boomers may have concerns like eldercare, retirement planning, and chronic health concerns like diabetes and high blood pressure.

"Baby Boomers respond favorably to a more personalized experience, which the EAP can offer by phone, through face-to-face or video-based counseling, or via an online chat," said Ken LeBeau, CEAP, Director of EAP with Cigna.

Generation X is best served by seminars or other targeted activiteies on topics like eldercare and saving for their children's college, according to LeBeau.

Kara Hoy, client solutions specialist at Mazzitti & Sullivan EAP Services said that with Gen Z entering the workplace, her organization's strategy includes using social media to attract them, becoming more electronic, and stocking their website with a lot of information about work/life balance and getting out of college debt.

To appeal to younger generations, LeBeau suggests online private chats or texting (as opposed to email), video-based counseling and resources for financial benefits or stress management help.

Different Values, Attitudes, and Expectations

According to Joanne Sujansky, founder of the Key Group, a business consulting firm, here are some suggestions on how managers and supervisors can motivate a multigenerational workforce:

To motivate Baby Boomers:

❖ *Offer position, power, and prestige*. Baby Boomers are often traditionalists, and perks of the position matter. They want titles and authority commensurate with responsibility.

❖ *Allow Boomers to participate in associations and conferences that keep them professionally connected to their peers*. Working together on professional projects motivates Boomers.

❖ *Offer long-term compensation*. Because they're much closer to retirement age than younger workers, Baby Boomers are often more interested in perks such as profit sharing, 401ks, and health care benefits, including long-term care.

To motivate Gen-Xers:

❖ *Give work/life issues more than lip service*. Attracting and retaining Gen-Xers goes beyond tossing a few family-friendly and flexible work benefits their way. While many companies say they offer flexible schedules, the reality is that it often extends only to special circumstances and certain types of work. Organizations that want to recruit talented workers need to focus on performance rather than time clocks.

❖ *Offer plenty of opportunities for collaboration and teamwork*. This is the generation that "fuels their fire" through teamwork. Are there sufficient opportunities for teamwork in your organization? If not, what could be added to promote better teamwork?

❖ *Provide recognition in ways that connect with what these employees value most*. Whatever the compensation, short-term, performance-based rewards work better than long-term promises like corner offices and big promotions. Besides, younger workers tend to be more committed to their *work* than a particular *job*. They have little problem with going elsewhere when a better opportunity comes along. Reward them for work they're doing *today.*

To motivate Millennials and Gen-Zers:

❖ *Give them flexibility in when and where work is done*. Younger workers resist what they see as rigid workday starting times. They do not understand why coming to work 15 minutes late is something Boomers view as irresponsible behavior. If you can provide technology that allows them to work at home one or two days a week, so much the better.

❖ *Offer professional development opportunities* such as career-related conferences, seminars, etc. Millennials think about career advancement a lot, and so should their managers. Since Millennials and Gen-Zers in particular may not yet

have families, traditional benefits are often not as important as enabling them to develop new skills and offering opportunities for advancement. Another retention tool is to help talented employees in these age groups pay off student loans or offer tuition reimbursement.

Recognize that Some Issues Cross Generations

While there are clearly differences in values, attitudes, and expectations among different age groups, it's also important to recognize that certain issues cross generations.

Stress is one multigenerational issue, according to the APA's "Stress in America" report. Among all demographics, 64 percent of adults find work and money to be major stressors, and 63 percent find health-related concerns to be a major stressor (up from 59 percent in 2017).

Along similar lines, the report, "Increasing Employee Assistance Effectiveness and Utilization: New Approaches and Emerging Trends" cited the prevalence of major generational stressors for which an EAP could help in the workplace. For example:

- 1 in 4 employees report that personal finances have been a distraction at work;
- 1 in 6 full-time and part-time employees are caregivers; and
- 168 work hours on average are lost for an employee dealing with legal, financial or psychological issues related to divorce.

While keeping the common generational issues in mind is good in the macro sense — whether that's remembering that Millennials may have money issues, Baby Boomers may have marital problems or Gen-Zers may be dealing with depression or suicidal thoughts — *steering away from a cookie-cutter approach will help an EAP reach a person as an individual, not just as someone who was born in a certain year.*

Also Vital to not Over-Generalize

While being aware of generations and generational trends in the workforce is valuable for EAPs looking to add variety to their services, it's

important not to over-generalize. Certain stereotypes — like older people being bad with technology or younger people being uncomfortable communicating via telephone — are becoming less true, according to Beacon's Tina Thompson.

There are certain trends that may apply to employees of any generation. For example Cigna found that with many of its employer clients, workers felt overwhelmed by emails, LeBeau said. Using traditional media like posters, brochures and health fair giveaways are becoming more popular.

"Across generations, we have seen advantages to having an EAP representative participate in benefit fairs during open enrollment," he said. "This facilitates face-to-face interactions about program services and establishes a personal connection to the EAP."

Cigna uses mobile apps to appeal to tech-comfortable people, a growing number of its member population. Through the app, members can access both coaching modules on key health and well-being topics and webcasts that people can watch via phone, tablet or computer.

This can also help EAPs appeal to employees on different worksites or teams, as they may have different preferences, LeBeau said.

Mazzitti & Sullivan, too, stressed the need to provide options for everyone from the old-fashioned to the tech savvy. Further, the organization also seeks to keep managers and staff up-to-date. Offering a variety to everyone is also a good way to avoid generational stereotypes.

Hoy said that the EAP tries to keep on the cutting edge of technology to appeal to anyone of any age who might find that appealing while still providing personalized services that treat each individual as a human being.

Consider Offering Generational Workshops

Another area within the workplace that EAPs can address is tension among co-workers of different generations, according to Cigna's LeBeau.

"A younger person may be managing older employees who have different communication and learning styles," he said. "A younger manager may seek to make changes that cause resistance or a negative response by long-term employees."

Cigna addresses this in their EAP by offering a "Bridging the Gap" seminar about generations working together. Mazzitti & Sullivan does something similar, offering training to managers and staff in its EAP to help people in the multi-generational workforce understand each other better.

Summary

An EAP's ability to appeal to everyone is important because while employers want higher employee utilization of EAP services within their organization, getting employee engagement can be a challenge, according to LuAnn Heinen, vice president of workforce well-being, productivity and human capital at the National Business Group on Health.

For example, behavioral and mental health is currently a big priority for employers, but "we still have the challenge of access and engagement in mental health services, starting with EAPs, which is the front line," Heinen said.

The majority of this article was written by Andie Burjek, an associate editor at Workforce magazine, where she primarily writes about benefits, wellness, and employee health along with other human resources topics. The information is based on a story published in Workforce magazine in May 2017.

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Connecting with Younger Workers

It's clear that today's fast-paced world is much different than the one that older workers grew up in. As a result, rather than building generational walls in the workplace, implement the following recommendations to build bridges instead:

❖ **Technology**: One of the biggest technological advancements of the Baby Boomer generation was replacing the 8-track tape player with audio-cassettes! Now consider that today's young adults have _always_ known a world with cell phones, computers, Facebook, iPods, and others. Technology has played a role in shaping every aspect of their lives.

➢ _Workplace tip_: Use this fact to your advantage by allowing Millennials to help with technology-related projects. Get their input when updating company websites or using social networking sites. Allow them to share their wealth of technological knowledge with your staff.

❖ **Information and communication**: Information used to be delivered largely via daily newspapers and nightly TV newscasts. Communication was done face-to-face, in writing or over the phone. Over the last decade, information and communication have flowed in an instant stream and can even be customized. Young adults are hard-wired to process the maximum amount of facts, figures, and news. Today's communication occurs at a far greater and faster rate through cell phones, text messages, social networking sites, etc.

➢ _Workplace tip_: Use this fact to your advantage by texting and/or emailing schedules and company information to younger workers, bringing them up to speed in a manner they're more familiar with.

❖ **Society and culture**: With access to credit cards, we have evolved to a consumer-driven society dominated by brand names. In many cases, role models have moved away from a local positive adult influence to distant celebrities who can easily disappoint. All of these things have shaped what young adults expect in the workplace.

Moreover, preparation for entry-level, hourly, and seasonal jobs rarely occurs. Parents and schools have tended to abdicate this responsibility, and many young adults honestly don't see the cause and effect between a part-time job and the million-dollar lifestyle they aspire to. As a result, many young adults are less prepared for workplace realities than previous generations.

➢ _Workplace tip_: Smart employers will tackle this challenge by setting honest expectations up-front, and mentoring younger workers on a regular basis so they stay on track with their future goals.

❖ **Appearance**: Self-expression has always been a high priority for teens and young adults. Tattoos, body piercings, and different hair colors are usually not acts of rebellion. Carving out one's individuality is a natural response to the bombardment of messages that young people receive on how to look and act.

➢ _Workplace tip_: Don't pass judgment simply based on appearance. As a rule, it's not a reflection of their work performance. Remember that young adults are used to seeing things differently, and are more accepting of other cultures and differences.

❖ **Speed is everything**: Today's young people have been raised in a 24/7, got-to-have-it-now world. From Main Street to the Internet, in their lifetime companies never close for business. As a result, don't expect to witness patience as a virtue in your workplace.

➢ _Workplace tip_: Use this fact to your advantage by encouraging multi-tasking in the office. Young adults are used to managing multiple projects at once, so don't feel the need to look over their shoulder constantly.

Sources: Mechele Flaum, a noted future trends and marketing consultant; and Ken Whiting's WAVES for Success program, which teaches companies what inspires young adults to participate, contribute and excel at work.