

Tips & Tactics

Managing Employees of All Ages And in All Stages of Employment

Everywhere you look, you find advice about Generation Y and how to engage them in the workplace. However, has everyone forgotten that there are three other generations in the workplace as well?

Diane Thielholdt, co-founder of The Learning Café (www.thelearning-cafe.net), a consulting company that specializes in developing training in the four-generation workplace, shares advice about leading and working with staff of all ages for your organization.

Thielholdt explains that employees, regardless of their ages and generation to which they belong, move through an employee life cycle during their employment. She notes that managers must assume roles to manage the different stages that employees are moving through in order to best engage (or motivate) them. Thielholdt lists the stages in the employee life cycle: Prospect, New Hire, Learner, Performer, and Legacy Leaver.

The toughest part for managers to realize is that not only must they use different roles to lead, but they must also play those roles while keeping in mind the different characteristics and needs of four generations, says Thielholdt.

Five Roles for Managers

Thielholdt describes the five roles of managers:

1. Talent Scout (employee as Prospect). When recruiting and hiring, it's important to keep in mind that your message to employment prospects is different for each generation (Generation Y or Millennials, Generation X, Baby Boomers, and the Silent Generation). As a Talent Scout, you talk about jobs in ways

that appeal to each generation and adjust interviewing approaches when recruiting new talent.

2. Orienteer (employee as New Hire). Onboarding of new hires is another role that often both HR executives and managers must fill. Unfortunately, the focus of onboarding often becomes staff that falls into Generation Y when in actuality, new employees of every age have onboarding needs. As an Orienteer, you help new hires find peer groups, social networks, and understand job expectations.

3. Performance Coach (employee as Learner). In this role you move employees from learners to performers, and a big part of that is providing feedback. Members of each generation have different definitions of, and expectations for, how frequently they want to receive feedback, and what it sounds like. You provide information about what is working and what's not and partner with employees for improvement. You enrich entry-level assignments, and keep the work fresh for experienced people.

4. Engagement Expert (employee as Performer). Employees have moved from learners to performers, and now you want to engage and retain them. It's important to understand that you may not retain Generation Y employees as long as you retained Baby Boomers. The important thing is that you are getting the maximum productivity during their tenure. Pay attention to work climate as well as work output, and you will make the department a great place to work.

5. Legacy Creator (employee as Legacy Leaver). When employees are considering a change, you must make certain that they leave a legacy, the information or knowledge that they

have gained as they transition out of your organization into other roles.

Onboarding with Different Generations

Leaders should understand the characteristics of generational differences that affect their roles. Thielholdt says that there are nuances in orienting new employees of different generations.

Generation X staffers will tell you they can figure it out on their own, but they want to know what the job is, be oriented to the task, and be given a specific time frame in which to accomplish the task or parts of it, she notes. "They want to dive in and accomplish tasks quickly and still have time for their lives."

Generation Y employees want to know that the job measures up to what they were told by recruiters and managers, comments Thielholdt. They have expectations of a manager and mentor taking them through the onboarding process with detailed explanations of expectations.

Baby Boomers need little handholding because they are used to working independently. Historically, they haven't had much orientation, but would benefit from a more formal introduction to the company and their roles and tasks.

The Silent Generation expects leaders to be straight talking and straight shooting, says Thielholdt. They want to be respected for their years of knowledge, but are willing to learn how to use technology and to reinvent themselves in their careers and work if they are provided with tools and training to do so, she explains.

Learning more about every generation with which you work will assist you in leading your teams.

To access a white paper written by Thielholdt and co-founder Devon Scheef titled, "Engaging a Changing Workforce™," request the PDF at no cost by visiting www.sources4hr.com/resources.aspx and clicking on "White Paper: Study of Four Generations."