

The CEO Advantage: Bridge Generation Gaps to Maximize Success

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge

A 60-year-old CEO was struggling with the attitudes of his much younger employees. “We need to fix these new generations. They are lazy, don’t have a strong work ethic, feel entitled and spend their time on Twitter, Google and ‘Spacebook.’ They’re focused on ‘life balance.’ Isn’t that something you save for retirement?”

It didn’t help that his management team was also composed of baby boomers who agreed with their boss. From their perspective, younger employees didn’t seem to have any loyalty to the company, quitting only expecting to be hired back if things ‘didn’t work out.’ The executive group could only hope that this tough economy would change the bad attitudes of the younger set.

The question was, would it? Did it need to?

CEO mistake

This CEO’s perspective could have cost his company dearly. There is a global war for talent going on in the marketplace, especially for leadership talent. Two-thirds of this organization’s workforce was under the age of 44, including a full third under the age of 31. Expecting them to adopt boomer attitudes was not only unrealistic, it was dangerous. With this mindset, our CEO was in for a tough time attracting, retaining and developing top prospects for the long term.

CEO solution

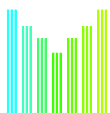
To win the war for talent, it’s critical to embrace the needs of your generation X and Y employees. There are three key generation clashes: life balance, career planning and technology. By tackling each one of them, this CEO was on his way to retaining the people he needed.

First, he developed an explicit life balance strategy for the organization, starting with the executive team and then cascading it throughout the company. He mandated that all employees, including executives, use up their vacation time. He set expectations among staff members that they were to adhere to more realistic working hours, minimizing overtime in favour of non-work pursuits. And he introduced flexible work arrangements such as part-time job sharing and telecommuting.

Second, he implemented an integrated succession and career planning strategy that included coaching, mentoring, job shadowing and the flexibility to move in and out of the company. Not only did this strategy resonate with the younger employees, it improved morale and increased abilities across the company.

Third, he championed the creation of a social media strategy to enable the responsible use of the new technologies, both personally and professionally, in the workplace. Accepting that Facebook, Twitter and other online outlets are here to stay, he found a way to allow them and even use them to the advantage of the organization.

This CEO saw his way through to accept and embrace the generational differences, rather than dismiss or try to change them. He realized that he was destroying the very relationships the company



needed to nurture for the future. He learned that he had to view the organization's talent holistically instead of segmenting, judging and blaming specific groups. And, to show he was serious, he created his own Facebook page. •

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