

Retaining Younger Employees



By Patrick Healey

[excerpted from
The Employee Attraction™ Workbook]

EmployeeAttraction.com

Copyright © 2008 by Patrick Healey



Retaining younger employees

As with managing them, retaining these generations of employees requires special attitudes and adaptations. Those that could apply to both groups are discussed here. Leaving a job and finding a better one is a big hassle for anyone, so there is potential to retain these younger employees longer than the average statistics show. It takes hiring the right person in the first place, giving them plenty of opportunities for growth and treating them well. Here's a statistic that may wake you up: **Companies with human resource departments typically budget \$1,500 per employee for human resource services.** I tell you this to make you consider your own budget. What budget, you say? Few small business owners seem to budget for team development. They budget for marketing but not to find, develop, inspire and retain their most valuable asset—their employees. Perhaps that should change.

Getting inside their heads—studies show this is what Gen Xers and Gen Yers believe:

- 97 percent define loyalty as making a contribution during the time they work somewhere
- 79 percent expect to have a job that allows creative thinking
- 78 percent define success as enjoying increasing responsibility and personal accomplishments
- 30 percent believe that changing jobs frequently will damage their career

Compare those stats to Boomers and Veterans:



- Majority define loyalty by tenure
- Most expect increased salary and benefits
- 67 percent define success by salary and job title
- 81 percent believe changing jobs frequently will damage their career

Points to remember about retaining both groups:

- Gen Xers and Gen Yers *will* move on—when they do outgrow their position and move on, the goal is that they'll refer friends and family to you.
- It's counterproductive to project your values onto younger team members. Don't assume everyone likes the music heard in the office or any other policies that affect the whole team. Ask for their input.
- Keep providing training and learning opportunities—or you'll watch their interest flag and fade.

- Both groups want to care about the product and mission of their employer. It's hard for them to stay motivated if they don't care about what's going on at your agency.



- Both groups respond well to working with others who are talented, well-motivated high performers. They like being surrounded by excellence and team members who care about doing quality work. Working with such peers reinforces that they made a good choice in working for your agency. Conversely, one bad apple can demoralize the whole team, so don't delay dealing with under performers—they can drag the entire team down with them.

Retaining Gen Xers

These tips apply just to Generation Xers. In order to retain the best Gen X employees, it's important to give thorough feedback. Regular, constructive feedback confirms their success. When these employees see that their work is paying off—and when they receive continuous feedback on how to achieve even more success—they become more confident, more productive and more willing to use their creative talents.

A number of studies reveal that one in five Gen Xers is preparing to leave his or her current job. They cite lack of job satisfaction and fulfillment as two important reasons. That's where you come charging in as an **Employer of First Choice™** and give them a fresh start.

Points to remember about retaining Gen Xers:

- They appreciate having the **latest tools and technology**. In fact, a Gen Xer is a great person to have as your in-house techno-wizard. They'll enjoy displaying their expertise and they have the patience to troubleshoot—Gen Yers are more apt to just want to go buy new computers!
- Encourage them to develop **office friendships** and collaborative relationships. Gen Xers grew up in social conditions very different from previous generations. Many were latchkey children, and 50 percent were raised in single-parent homes. They often spent an excessive amount of time alone. As a result, Gen Xers are relationship builders. In fact, this need for strong relationships touches every aspect of their lives at home, at work, and as consumers.
- Let them **collaborate** with you! Rather than tell your Gen X employees what steps to take to solve a problem, allow them to brainstorm with you to generate ideas. Or when you need to decide on a course of action, get their feedback on which option to pursue. Really listen to what they offer and act on their input. Be open to what they say; often their suggestions will amaze you.

Retaining Gen Yers

These tips apply just to Generation Yers. When properly motivated, these young people can be brilliant. The key is knowing how to motivate the new talent that can take you into the future. It does not involve wishing they were more like you. **Remember that they are not living in our times; we are living in theirs.**

Gen Yers can be astoundingly loyal and committed to an agency where they feel valued and where they can connect with a Big Vision. They have the time, tools and the talent to create a better world and better results for your agency, if you have the sensitivity and patience to understand them. As a generation, they are not interested in conforming to your ways and traditions.

They expect you to adapt to them—after all they know they're worth it!

Points to remember about retaining Gen Yers:

- Perhaps the most surprising attribute many Yers share is a sense of **commitment**. They pledge their hearts and souls to causes that they believe in, which can make them very loyal employees. The key: tapping into those values without sounding hollow or patronizing.
- You can't ignore them for three weeks or go six months without a review. They need far more feedback, coaching and **appreciation**—every step of the way. This extra effort from you will go a long way toward getting the most out of your Generation Y employees.
- Gen Yers like to express their **opinions** and have a chance to influence policy and change. Be sure to include them in decisions that affect them.
- Some businesses have had success with giving them a **pay increase schedule** for the first two years of employment. Assuming performance goals are met, the new employees can plan what they'll be making at any point in the next two years, which is appealing

to them and gives them something to aim toward and even increases productivity. The danger, of course, is having to deal with employees who aren't meeting their goals. That's where coaching comes in, as well as frequent communication, so that an under-performing team member can be brought up to speed.

- Be sure your 20-somethings have people around them to help them **learn** what they need to know. They don't like the inferior feeling of not knowing how to do something. Don't forget to include the *why* behind instructions.
- Anything you can do to enable **self-expression** and autonomy is worth trying. Tell young employees what you want done and then ask them how they would like to vary their approach from how it's been done in the past.
- You may believe that Gen Yers don't want to be told what to do, when they actually do want **direction and support**. However, they also want the freedom to run with the project at their own pace.



Some hallmarks of a Gen X- and GenY-friendly office are:

- The latest technology is in use. Both hardware and software are state of the art.
- A cheerful, colorful, modern office space says: we're not stuck in the 20th century.
- Environmentally-friendly policies reinforce one of their core values.
- They can see other younger employees on your team—it's tough to recruit them if everyone else is over 40. They want peers for friendship.
- Employees act like they're having a good time—no stuffiness allowed!
- The mood is as casual as you can permit while still maintaining a level of professionalism. That especially pertains to the dress code. While insurance agencies aren't apt to draw too many green-haired applicants, allowances may need to be made for employees with unusual tastes. Compromise may be a workable solution.
- The boss is approachable and regardless of his or her age, comes off as able to relate to someone much younger.
- The agency supports their growth. Ask yourself: are you building their future or are you in the way?

