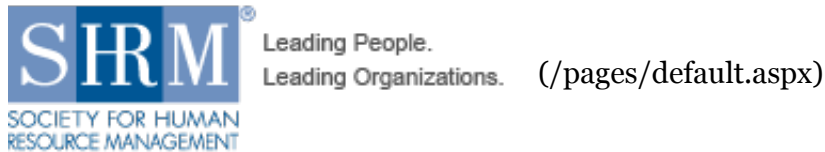


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Career Transitions Across Generations

Understand characteristics to guide workers through change

By Dave Ciliberto 7/14/2014

Do workers approach career transitions differently based on their age? For instance, do employees in their 30s experience transitions more easily than employees in their 50s?

There's little doubt that each generation has certain strengths—and faces specific challenges—when it comes to a career transition. For HR professionals, it's important to note how generational differences affect these transitions, and to coach and guide workers to understand one another so they can work together productively.

Baby Boomers, or 'The Encore Generation'

Many Baby Boomers have had full careers, and, when they leave longtime positions, they typically have more options open to them than younger workers. Some people are ready to change what they do entirely and pursue a passion, a hobby or a community service role as a vocation. Others decide they want a part-time job. Some of the characteristics that Boomers have when it comes to a career transition include:

- Loyalty and a stick-to-it attitude. Many have been at the same workplace for years.
- Functional expertise and a strong skill set in one or two areas.
- Strong interpersonal skills.
- Variations in networking fluency: Those in one organization for a long time tend to have fewer connections outside of the firm they work for; while those who've had vendor and client relationships, or who attended many conferences, tend to have stronger networking skills.
- Relatively weak social media skills when compared with younger workers.
- A tendency to resist career coaching because they're uncomfortable asking for and receiving help.

Since many Baby Boomers are working beyond retirement age, two good ideas when considering a new type of job for them are to match their values, preferences and interests with their tasks, and to craft a few social media accounts for them, then share the ins and outs of using social media for networking.

Generation X, or 'The Sandwich Generation'

Generation Xers are the current and next wave of workplace leaders. They tend to be midcareer, and are often not only sandwiched between the Boomers and Generation Y at work, but also at home between child care and elder care. They typically have two key strengths: They are fluent in most technologies and are flexible about how works gets done. Their

LinkedIn skills are strong, so you may only need to help them tweak their profiles and suggest content that might not occur to them.

Some of the characteristics Generation Xers possess when it comes to career transitions include:

- The fluid integration of their interpersonal and technical skills.
- Expecting work flexibility in their jobs.
- The ability to use technology to be productive and to manage global teams more easily than Boomers.
- Comfort with matrixed organizations.

After experiencing a career transition, one Generation Xer said: “I think since we are in the middle at work and in the general population, we can flex toward the styles of both Gen Y and Boomers. We know networking is critical to getting new opportunities.”

Generation Y, or ‘The Tech Generation’

Generation Y is the first to grow up with technology at their fingertips, which has enabled them to bring to organizations the latest trends in social media and a large online presence. Many times this is a huge advantage in the workplace, so employers are often eager to hire Generation Yers to fulfill strategic technological and online/social media positions.

Just as this is Generation Y’s strength, however, it can also be their weakness as technology is not the solution for every business problem. Some business problems a company faces may require an outside focus that many Generation Yers aren’t accustomed to.

Often, people have a misconception that Generation Y is an “entitled” group; in reality, this is a generation that thrives on recognition, not necessarily “winning” or overcoming challenges.

At times members of Generation Y can:


- Over-focus on what they're looking for in a job, rather than focusing on organizational needs.
- Embrace expectations that are out of sync with the job market or industry realities.
- Assume that the way they communicate with one another is how the whole world communicates.
- Need help with interpersonal skills, as their communication preference tends to be texting and e-mailing, which can come across as abrupt and lacking in finesse, especially to Generation X and Boomers.

Julie Feskoe, a member of Generation Y who works in a bustling New York City firm, said that “being in the workforce a few years now—sometimes we worry that others don't see us as corporate or professional enough compared to other generations. What's important to us and how we interact are different than other generations. So it's hard to adjust to the styles of others. Learning how to assess and understand the audience before reacting to them has helped me.”

When working with members of Generation Y, consider that they frequently need a road map and plan for their careers. Guidance on crafting a five-year plan is helpful, and something they may have never considered.

They also need help understanding the importance of more personal interactions with co-workers, clients and customers. They need to be coached on how to pick up the phone, rapidly establish credibility, build rapport and arrange a face-to-face meeting.

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