

Generation Next

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reaching the workplace, many of their traits as employees are, at present, speculative. We'll be spending the next couple of decades learning how to recruit, motivate, and retain this newest generation. You will, however, need to keep the following principles in mind:

- **Budget plenty of time for orientation.** Create a clear picture of your work environment — what's good about it, what's not, your expectations and long-term goals. At the same time, learn about each new employee's personal goals and develop strategies for interweaving those goals with job performance.
- **Forget gender roles.** If you still have preconceptions about gender roles, discard them. Nexters will redefine them as men take on more household tasks and women take on more traditional male tasks such as home repair.
- **Focus on teams.** Consider expanding the size of your teams and appointing a strong team leader in areas in which you have many Nexters.
- **Mind the gap.** Be sensitive to the potential for conflict between Xers and Nexters when they work side by side. The gap between these two generations may end up making the one between the Boomers and Xers look tame.
- **Grow your training department.** Nexters will want to continue their education and develop their work skills.
- **Establish mentor programs.** Consider matching your young workers with your most seasoned people with whom they say they resonate. ■

The ACORN Principles

Companies that successfully nurture cross-generational workplaces exhibit five common approaches to making their environments generationally comfortable and focusing their people's energies on the business of their businesses. These five approaches successfully accommodate differences, exhibit flexibility, emphasize respectful relations, and focus on retaining talented and gifted employees. These potent precepts form the acronym ACORN:

Accommodate employee differences.

In order to retain employees, the most generationally friendly companies treat their employees as they would customers — they find out everything they can about them, work to meet their specific needs, and serve them

Two Keys to Successful Intergenerational Work

There are two keys to creating a successful intergenerational workplace. The first is aggressive communication. Companies shouldn't ignore generational differences. Instead, they should take the time to communicate with the different groups, uncover their needs and preferences.

The second key is difference deployment, which means placing workers in positions and jobs that best fit with the generational characteristics.

according to their unique preferences. There are tangible ways of doing this by making the effort to accommodate scheduling needs, work-life balance issues, and nontraditional lifestyles. Each generation's icons, language, and precepts are acknowledged, and language is used that reflects generations other than those in power.

For example, the St. Paul, Minnesota-based West Group (a leading supplier of legal information) is in the midst of changing its Boomer culture to meet the needs of Xers and Nexters. One of its efforts is called Café.com — a Caribou Coffee shop located inside West Group's main headquarters. In the café, employees can man one of the eight Internet workstations or bring their own laptop and hook into one of the dozens of modem connections located throughout the lounge. There are comfortable chairs and sofas and collaborative workspaces, allowing employees greater flexibility in choosing where to do their work. They are not chained to their cubicle workstations.

Create workplace choices.

Generationally friendly companies allow the workplace to shape itself around the work they do, the customers they serve, and the people they employ. Dress policies tend to be casual, bureaucracy is decreased, and the atmosphere is relaxed and informal.

Ben and Jerry's (the Vermont-based ice cream manufacturer) is a fine example of this approach. One of the company's teams — called "The Joy Gang" — is tasked with making work fun by scheduling events that encourage relaxed participation and creativity. There's Elvis Day, in which employees dress up like the King, and (more tellingly) Corporate Dress-Up Day, the one day a year in which employees are encouraged to wear corporate attire, just for the novelty of it.

Indeed, the company attracts iconoclasts from three generations: Xers are drawn by its lack of corporate pretensions; Boomers appreciate the relaxed atmosphere

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