

Motivating Xers: Dorothy's Pep Talk

Dorothy is a Veteran who uses pep talks to fire up her mostly GenXer staff. She's conducted these talks for 30 years, recalling the inspiring pep talks her favorite manager used to give her and her fellow employees when she was younger. Those talks breathed fire into workers, as her manager ranted, raved, challenged, and motivated his employees into doubling their productivity. Unfortunately, Dorothy's speeches are not clicking with her twentysomething staff; in fact, she fears she's flunking the "snicker test" and actually demotivating her troops. What can she do?

- **Know how they see you.** Pep talks are outmoded; Veterans' values were kindled by fiery speeches that

Keeping the Fires Burning

If you're managing a team of bright, enthusiastic Xers, how do you provide direction without putting out their fire? The answer: a strategy that includes five key elements:

- **Working with your Xers to create a picture of what you want to accomplish together.**
- **Breaking that vision down into tangible, results-producing steps.**
- **Building in milestones and celebrating when you reach them.**
- **Giving individuals and the team lots of positive feedback about their creativity.**
- **Making certain that you are genuinely validating their ideas and accomplishments, while continuing to assist them in laying down achievable tracks that get results.**

Take Mindy McCune, for example. As operations manager for Motorola's Phoenix, Ariz., design center, she has 105 Xers reporting to her. Once she has given people the high-level outcomes of what she wants accomplished for a certain project, she lets them come up with specifics for their game plan to complete the task. Together, they schedule checkpoints, reporting methods, and project reviews, allowing her to steer projects back on track if they derail. If a report does not meet her expectations, she asks what she can do to help, avoiding the typical "this is what you do" response. Her approach of letting people direct their own efforts, combined with positive feedback, gives her employees the confidence and fire they need to succeed.

tapped into "can do" attitudes and resulting behaviors. You must recognize that younger associates, however, react cynically to such inspirational efforts. Even the most well-intentioned pep talks are usually seen as insincere.

- **Find different inspiration.** Younger generations are increasingly task-centered, requiring a different approach to inspiration. Rally your troops around their work, inspiring them around the task and importance of finishing a project, delivering a service, or shipping a product.
- **Be honest.** If the task is an unpleasant one, be honest about it. Back up that honesty with motivation, scheduling some fun activity as a reward after the job is done.
- **Switch it up.** Consider assigning different staff members to lead meetings, and allow the team to decide as a group upon their goals and how to measure them. ■

Generation Next

The most carefully studied generational group has yet to make an impact on the workplace, but the anticipation of their full-on arrival in professional circles leads many to believe that impact will be significant. These "Nexters" were/are born after 1980 to both late Boomers and early Xers.

Whereas their parents' parents placed work before family, Nexters' parents have paid pinpoint attention to almost every facet of child rearing in the all-out pursuit of bringing up well-educated, well-adjusted children.

Savvy in the particulars of digital technology as no generation before them, the Nexters are expected to have an impact on the dynamics of the family as well. Today, as never before, kids actually know more about technology than their parents. Boomers and Xers who (by choice or lack of ability) cannot keep up with technology will find themselves standing on the edge of a generation gap wider than any they could imagine.

Yet, in many ways, Nexters are more like their pre-World War II Veteran forebears than either group would like to admit. Early Nexters seem eager to subscribe to a stricter moral code. Reacting to excesses they perceive in their parenting generation (such as the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal), they will, experts agree, have a much stricter moral center. Manners also seem to have been recently reborn in many of the Nexters' families. Parents have been vigilant in insisting their progeny say "please," "thank you," "sir" and "ma'am."

Since the initial vanguard of Nexters is only now

(continued on page 7)