



Work Ethics

How to deal with motivationally challenged younger workers

By Garrison Wynn,
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Do you find it difficult to motivate younger workers? Have you noticed that employees under 25 will quit their job to go on a ski trip? They will choose pleasure and friends over work every time — actions that indicate that there may be a different work ethic in place. What about people in their 30s? They seem to need more time off and value flexible schedules over money.

Whatever happened to dedicated, committed people who did what was right for the company, the customer and the wallet? Well, for starters, they grew up. Now at least in their 40s, many of them are managing the thirty-something and twenty-something workforce and realizing that these younger people cannot be motivated the same way they were. I don't know about you, but I start thinking, "You know back in my day (I am now officially old enough to have had a day), we did what we had to do. We ate dirt and we liked it; we walked to work, up hill, both ways, in the snow — we had no shoes. Heck, we had no feet! We walked on our nubs everywhere we went..."

I admit, I'm taking it a bit far here. I never walked to work, I spent most of my life in Florida (no hills, no snow) and I do have both feet, but I think you know where I'm coming from.

How can we effectively motivate people who feel so differently than we do about their job? Wynn Solutions did some research on how some organizations get amazing results from their younger people. These top-performing organizations:

- Understand that these people grew up in the most affluent time in American history and were raised to expect more out of life. They inherited not only a world of material abundance but also a workplace with perceived unlimited opportunity.

- Know younger workers measure success not just in dollars but also in equality of pay; that is, they expect to be paid as much as anyone who holds the same job.

- Know workers in their 20s will not respect someone just because that person is older or holds a superior position; they will only respect those who show respect for them.

- Create goals that work; younger people respond to small goals with tight deadlines and want a quick track for success with praise along the way.

- Let younger workers know that the skills and training they are getting will help them in the future with other companies, not just with the job they have now. Younger workers believe that companies won't take care of them for life so they don't value long-term employment.

- Know they want stimulating work; they grew up with video games and fast-moving, quickly edited movies. They like to multitask and can become easily bored with processes that move too slowly or have no flexibility.

- Know that younger workers need to be shown that the boss (not just the company) cares about them. They want to know that their supervisor will give direct praise on a consistent basis for a job well done and will encourage and support them when they are not doing well.

- Understand what they think about us: They believe our computers crash because we are old and that we have chosen work and money over fun and family, which makes us uptight and cranky as we multitask unsuccessfully.

For those who are thinking these people are just spoiled and should grow up and face reality ... each generation would naturally be a bit more spoiled than the previous one as long as the economy continues to grow and parents keep scheduling play dates for their children, telling them they can be anything they want to be and driving them to soccer practice. That's reality! It's simply the result of an affluent society.

The good news is that, properly motivated, these young people are brilliant. We talked to many organizations that were implementing some of the strategies outlined above and achieving phenomenal results. The key to long-term organizational growth and change is knowing how to motivate the new talent that can take you into the future. The key does not involve wishing they were more like you. Remember that they are not living in our times; we are living in theirs.

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