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Hughes-Consulting specializes in Human Resources and Business Management Consulting.

Hughes-Consulting is an approved – Incumbent Worker Training Program (IWTP) training provider and an approved consultant to LANO and MEPoL

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Times Are Indeed a Changin'

Richard Blabolil

"Unraveling the mystery of recognizing and retaining Gen X and Y workers."

Be fluid. Be frequent. Be relevant. Let these words guide your next Generation X and Generation Y employee merchandise incentive program. Many baby boomers miss the mark when it comes to motivating their youngest employees. The reason may be the huge generation gap: Gen X and Gen Y comprises workers between 18 and 40 years old.

Consider two huge cultural differences between the groups. For baby boomers, television was the primary external influence on their childhoods with three networks airing fairly homogenous, predictable programming and commercials. As children, Gen X and Y were not only exposed to the Internet, hundreds of TV channels, electronic games and other intense visual stimuli, but, because of numerous and diverse choices, were able to self-select precisely what interested them at any given moment.

And consider this dramatic cultural difference: one in three people in the Gen X and Y group are not Caucasian as compared to the boomer generation, which was approximately 83% Caucasian.

Today, fluidity is key when motivating younger workers. The business landscape changes constantly. Programs need to be able to turn on a dime and be adjusted along the way to keep them fresh and enthusiasm high. Recognition is not simply about longevity or contrived milestones any more because employees shift jobs and careers far more frequently than their parents and grandparents did. Today's employees respond to recognition that is merit-focused and based on accomplishment at any point in one's career. So recognition programs need to reward at unexpected junctures.

Young employees crave interaction: they would rather 'do' than observe, so the communication format is critical. Today's young workforce craves frequent feedback. They don't want to wait six months or a year for a job review to hear how they are doing. And, because they don't just communicate with words and numbers, the more visual and dynamic the communication, the more effective it will be...

It's a myth that young workers have shorter attention spans than their more seasoned brethren. The reality is that they are able to process information quickly and from multiple sources simultaneously. They are 'on alert' all the time. Boomers may view the constant bombardment of information as distracting noise, but Gen X and Y employees are accustomed to it and seek it out...

Frequency and integration are the keys to communicating successfully with younger workers. That means the message is delivered often and via different vehicles, such as e-mail, intranet, online newsletters, voice mail, and in person.

Relevancy... It is best to reward younger employees with their own buying behavior. In days gone by, workers were delighted to receive luxury-item merchandise incentives. Today's younger generation are interested in life-style enhancing rewards... Relevancy also means providing incentives for behavior that is in alignment with [the organization's values]. Being honest, transparent, and demonstrating ethical behavior are hot buttons that speak to today's workers, no matter what age.

Remaining relevant means keeping in touch with your constituents. Treat employees like customers. Get them involved in the design and administration of incentive programs.

With 60 million Gen Y employees coming into the workforce or already in it and 18 million Gen X workers, there has never been a better time for managers to capture the potential of incentive

and recognition programs. It is simply a matter of learning what makes them tick and communicating effectively.

What Makes Gen X and Y Customer Service Employees Tick?

The customer-service division of T-Mobile is comprised primarily of Gen X and Gen Y employees. The company conducted a survey in order to learn more about their motivation levels and work attitudes. The following results were particularly compelling:

- The top three forms of recognition in terms of affecting job satisfaction are gift certificates, one-on-one verbal recognition, and group travel.
- Employees value recognition most from their direct supervisor followed by customers, upper management, and finally from peers.

The power of recognition in job satisfaction is not rooted in monetary value because many non-monetary forms rate highly in job satisfaction.