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# Onboarding young professionals

## What’s different?

The face of the workforce is changing. Over the next decade, a growing number of young people will enter the world of full time employment, causing the generational mix in the workplace to shift radically as Baby Boomers retire. As younger generations become a larger part of the working population, a shift in attitude, work ethic, and approach to teamwork is bound to occur. Managers will be challenged to explore their leadership and motivational styles in order to get the best results from multi-generational teams.

## Generation Y – does this sound familiar?

Members of Generation Y, the largest and youngest generation in the workplace have a number of common characteristics:

* Gen Yers have spent their waking hours in a series of supervised situations e.g. after school activities. As a result, Gen Yers have strong preferences for working in teams and in networks.
* Gen Yers are highly efficient individuals who learned to get their work done in the family car between sports and drama. They know shortcuts.
* Members of this generation live, breathe, eat and sleep with technology. Take advantage of their wealth of knowledge by asking for their advice, e.g. putting them into innovative teams.
* Gen Yers are interested in getting ahead but money alone is not the only driver to keep them happy. Promotions, level changes, new opportunities, training programmes and recognition for a job well done may be more important.
* Members of this generation have little patience for politics, spinning and political correctness. They want direct instructions, straight talk and honesty in their communication.
* Gen Yers were brought up to question authority. It’s important to educate them on the formal and informal policies in the organisation that may cause blockages in their success.
* Generation Yers need to know what is expected of them. Grouping them with older generations as formal/informal mentors will provide them with role models for success.

## Best Practices for managing and motivating young professionals

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| **Set clear expectations upfront** | * Young professionals may have a different interpretation of what the task/project requires them to do. If you as the Manager find yourself thinking “Anybody should know that: I shouldn’t have to say it”, you probably have not set clear enough expectations. Take time to outline exactly what you want the end product to look like. |
| **Show them what great looks like** | * If good is not good enough for you, be sure to provide examples of what great looks like. Link this back to your organisational values. If your team needs to be at 125%, make sure you’re upfront about your expectations – Gen Yers might assume that 100% should be good enough. Give them lots of praise when they meet the standards you have set. |
| **Tell them why it matters** | * Members of this generation are invested in giving something back to society and to the world, but they are not completely altruistic when it comes to their careers. Provide them with opportunities to volunteer for assignments that touch others. Show them how their performance on the job affects the wider team and stakeholders. Make sure Gen Yers understand how what they are doing will help them reach their career and personal goals. |
| **Set goals and have regular catch-ups – weekly and monthly** | * Schedule a goal-setting meeting every month – set goals in measurable terms * Schedule short, 10-minute “sunrise/early-bird meetings” to provide clarity on transactional matters: prioritize, identify problems, and communicate progress. * Circulate “team notes” every week with a quick recap of events that might be of interest to the team. |

**Motivating and rewarding your young professionals**

Young professionals come from a generation that need a very high level of feedback on their performance from their Manager or other respected mentor. They require a lot of reaffirmation that they are on the right track.

Many wonder how often people should be praised, but a good rule of thumb is about once a week. If this seems too often, consider why frequent praise is so important. Whenever a person does something, there are consequences. Those consequences will affect whether team members engage in that behaviour again. We know that to get the results or consequences we want, frequent praise can encourage the behaviour that produces it.

## Some best practices

* Feedback, feedback, feedback. Gen Yers are used to praise and constant reaffirmation from parents, teachers and coaches. Help them gain confidence in the workplace by communicating about their performance on a daily or weekly basis. If it is within your means to do so, set up more frequent performance reviews.
* Educate your team about the importance of positive recognition and the significance of a recognition- oriented culture.
* Ensure that for every piece of recognition that is given, there is an emphasis on “why” the recognised act was important. Ensure that the recognition is specific and where possible, that it is written, e.g. in an email.
* Promote your young professional’s areas of competence and expertise to others. This creates opportunities for others to seek the person out and ask for his or her opinions and comments.

## Motivating your young professional

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| Motivation | Explore… |
| **Having autonomy in their work** | What level of autonomy they have and their thoughts about this, any barriers to autonomy, opportunities to grow their autonomy and their working preferences. |
| **Financial or other rewards** | What is their current remuneration and other benefits, how well do they understand our remuneration system, what opportunities are there to progress within their role, what career opportunities exist with a higher salary? Is job title and status important to them? |
| **Opportunities for career development** | Where are they now in their career, what are their career aspirations, how can they progress to this, what development opportunities would help them advance? |
| **Technical challenge** | What challenges them, what are the current gaps, where could they get more challenge? |
| **Being acknowledged for their contribution** | What makes them feel appreciated? Some examples are a simple thanks, informal corridor conversations, a formal acknowledgement in their performance and development meetings |
| **Their relationship with you and colleagues** | What management and leadership style do they like? Are there any issues? How do the team roles work, are there any issues, what could be improved? How are the social interactions with their colleagues going? |
| **Our reputation / environment** | What do they like about your organization? What attracted them to the organisation? Is this still true? Are there any issues? |
| **Work-life balance** | What constitutes work-life balance for them? How could they manage this? What does their role require? What enhancements may work, e.g. time management? |
| **Coaching, training or mentoring.** | What are their specific needs? What training, coaching or mentoring solutions exist? Which would be most relevant? How could this be accessed? |

People feel motivated and inspired when their leader takes an interest in them. This improves their efficiency, productivity and job satisfaction. It’s important to recognise that different things motivate people.

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