

Understanding the Gen Y revolution

Communication is the key for managers

If you believe the spin, the 15 to 30-year-olds who make up Generation Y are a selfish, lazy, demanding, impatient, arrogant and far from loyal bunch who want it all – yesterday.

Managers only employ them because chronic staff shortages mean they have no choice and because Gen-Yers boast supreme IT knowledge that eclipses their mostly Baby Boomer bosses.

How on earth do you manage people like that, especially if they are working for you? Re-engagement expert Karen Schmidt set about answering that question at an Australian Institute of Management workshop at Maroochydore last week.

She said rather than tiptoe suspiciously around this wild child generation with tasers and animal-trapping nets at the ready, it was far better for managers to simply get to know them.

"Spend some time getting inside their heads and talk to them. Communication is the key," she said.

"Gen-Y is looking for managers who are real people, who don't hide behind a corporate policy and who look at ways to make the workplace more flexible.

"And that flexibility can be about hours or even duties. If a group of people is doing similar work, put all their duties in a hat and then allocate certain ones to certain people each month.

"That way you are delivering variety, you can still measure performance and you are getting coverage of work.

"We also worry about young people leaving to go to the city. Why not make an arrangement with a similar company in Brisbane for a three or six-month secondment?"

Ms Schmidt said Gen-Yers had higher expectations than previous generations and rather



KNOW YOUR STAFF: Karen Schmidt addresses an Australian Institute of Management seminar on the Generation Y revolution.

WHO'S WHO

BUILDERS:

Motto: Pay your dues

Attitude: Cautious

Motivators: Security

BABY BOOMERS:

Motto: Hard work is its own reward

Attitude: Optimistic

Motivators: Status symbols

GENERATION X:

Motto: Work smarter, not harder

Attitude: Pessimistic

Motivators: Control

GENERATION Y:

Motto: Work with meaning

Attitude: Confident

Motivators: Variety

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than chasing a work-life balance, life always came first.

"If they don't like a job, they won't do it," she said.

"Earlier generations wanted more meaning out of work because it was always the expectation that you got married, got a job and became an upstanding citizen.

"But now people are realising life's too short, why spend eight

hours a day doing something you hate?"

Ms Schmidt warned employers who did not take time to investigate Gen-Y would face consistently high rates of staff turnover and have trouble filling vacant positions.

She also encouraged Gen-Yers to do their own homework as part of the inter-generational investigation.

"The right ones in the right position with a good manager can make fabulous employees," she said. "They are innovative, passionate, enthusiastic and they are not restricted by all those work conventions – they come in as naive experts.

"The pace of society is faster and there is technology to help us. Ys will find smart ways to do stuff we don't like, they will ask, 'Can a computer do it, can we outsource to India?'"

"But you cannot equate wanting everything now with laziness, they just have a different work ethic. They will work hard at things they think are important, interesting and that capture their attention."

Ms Schmidt said similar critical discussions about each and every "younger generation" had been happening "since Socrates".