

X,Y, Zoom

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You dipped into your cash reserves to build a way-cool open-concept office space, splurged on the latest video-game console for your lunchroom and, once a week, you meet with your entire team to discuss their challenges and celebrate achievements. Yet productivity is sinking like a stock exchange during a credit crisis.

"It could be that in trying to reach your youngest staffers, you end up alienating the people who have been with you for years," says Giselle Kovary, co-author of *Loyalty Unplugged: How to get, keep & grow all four generations* and the managing partner of Toronto-based n-gen, an HR consultancy specializing in the generational divides. Or maybe those young guns you've recently hired get enough Guitar Hero at home.

But don't cancel the company snowboarding outing just yet. "To engage employees and drive greater performance and productivity," says Kovary, "[employers] need to maximize the skill sets of each generation while managing the differences." Indeed, meeting the wants and needs unique in quality or quantity to the three largest generational cohorts in today's workplace — Generation Y, Generation X and the baby boomers (which some people are trying to rebrand as the Zoomers) — can go a long way toward growing a highly profitable and sustainable business. (You have to manage the "traditionalists," too, but not for much longer — the youngest of them will reach 65 in 2010.)

But managing the generations requires more thought and deliberation than Canadian entrepreneurs appear to be giving it. To wit: A recent survey by Edmonton-based David Aplin Recruiting found that less than two-thirds of companies surveyed offer the incentives that are highly prized by young workers. At the other end of the spectrum, just 17% of Canadian firms have recruitment plans aimed at older workers and only 24% have strategies to keep their most senior employees, according to a survey of 1,343 businesses conducted last year by multinational staffing firm Manpower Inc.

Moving your manpower in the right direction starts with a basic understanding of the forces that have shaped the psyche of each generation, then applying a few simple tactics that play to their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. With that process in mind, we present the following guide to the boom, bust and echo generations that hold the key to your continued success.

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