

Recruitment & Training

Career Development: What do Younger Generations Expect?

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A 17 year old cook working with a 40 year old sous-chef. A 65 year old housekeeping supervisor working with a 22 year old room attendant. A 35 year old front desk manager working with a 50 year old reservation associate. These are all realities within the hotel and hospitality sector, where multigenerational teams need to work effectively together. All four generations are in the workplace (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Gen Ys), and often you may have younger generations managing older employees.

In such a diverse age environment, it is important for executives to realise that people strategies can no longer take a 'one-size fits all' approach. In fact, people strategies now need to be broader in scope and application so that they can tap into the values, behaviours and expectations of all four generations. One area that organizations need to understand and respond to more effectively is career development. The goal of career development in today's workplace is to keep employees longer, and more engaged while they are with your organization, since they won't likely be with you forever. To achieve the goal of retention, organizations need to develop employees in the career direction of the employee's choice. While this is particularly true of Gen X and Gen Y, it is nonetheless necessary to understand the career development expectations of each generation, and to build mechanisms to either meet those expectations or manage them.

Traditionalists grew up in times that were filled with hardship – wars, depression, hyper-inflation and mass unemployment. Because of these events, they developed values such as honour, sacrifice, respect for authority and dedication. Their goal is to build a legacy which includes their careers. Traditionalists are most accustomed to having organizations tell them what their next career move will be. They would be surprised and maybe even nervous if they are asked to determine their own career goals. However, if the career development discussion is positioned based on their expertise, and how they can continue to build or share that expertise in the final years of their careers, there will be a greater understanding of the need to set career goals.

The Baby Boomer generation is one of the most talked about generations, because its power is felt in all areas of life – politics, economics and business. As activists in the rebellious 60s, they realized they had power in numbers. There are 9.6 million Baby Boomers in Canada, 78 million in the US. These numbers worked for them in protesting social wrongs – marching for equality, multiculturalism and greater diversity tolerance – but worked against them when they entered into the workplace. Traditionalists had the power in organizations. They were happy to replace rebellious Baby Boomer employees with any number of other candidates who would not rile up against authority. As a result, Baby Boomers had to compete and work long hours to climb the corporate ladder. Their goal is to put their stamp on things.

At work, Baby Boomers are looking to add value to projects, decisions and strategies. If they can put their stamp on things, they can prove that they are a corporate star. This generation varies in their career development expectations as this aligns to age position within the cohort. Some are still looking to move up the organizational ladder; many others are looking to continue to work on interesting projects, while using the skills that they like best, and continuing to add value to the organization without the pressure that they must move up. Most Baby Boomers have had similar experiences to Traditionalists in that they are told how their career should develop. As people practices changed in the last decade, more Baby Boomers are being asked what they would like to do next or where they would like to develop and grow. Unfortunately many Baby Boomers still feel that they work in environments where stating their true career desires of tomorrow could hurt their career reputation of today. So many from this cohort won't reveal their true career desires, but rather will tell the organization what they believe leaders want to hear.

Gen Xers are still often viewed as the new kids on the block in an organization – part of the 'young' professional groups. However, many in this cohort already have up to a decade or two of work experience. Witnessing their parents and other relatives be downsized in the 80s and early 90s caused many Gen Xers to view themselves as free agents in the labour marketplace. They maintain their independence in the workplace by constantly focusing on gaining marketable skills and results. Those two factors allow Gen Xers to control their own careers and be ready to find a job if they decide to leave an organization or if the organization decides to lay them off. Their goal is to maintain independence in all areas of their life.

The concept that career development should be a win-win outcome is not a nice-to-have for Gen Xers, rather it is a must-have. They absolutely expect organizations to not only ask them what skills or direction they wish to take their careers, but also to honour and support them to fulfill that request. In the event that the request by a Gen Xer is not reasonable (either because of performance issues, no training budget, no room for promotions), then Gen Xers expect the organization to be very transparent about the situation. It is critical with this sceptical generation to not try to stall their career advancement, or cajole and mislead them into staying with your organization longer. It is much more effective to let your high-performers move on and then bring them back to the organization when the conditions have changed and you have a position for them where it will be a mutually beneficial relationship.

Leaders should create an open, transparent environment where Gen Xer can feel comfortable stating their career and development goals without any sense of retribution. Depending on available organizational resources, if formal learning dollars are limited, Gen Xers are very open to independent learning through stretch assignments, action-learning projects, or cross-functional team projects. They are also open to being coached and mentored as long as they can choose their coach or mentor and are able to drive the goals within the relationship.

Gen Ys are growing up in an era where their interests, opinions and ideas are solicited, listened to and acted upon continuously. Parents and the school system have focused on building the confidence and the self-esteem of Gen Ys by providing praise and encouragement.

They have been coached, both at home and in the school system, that they can be and do anything they want, and that they should always pursue opportunities that interest them. Most Gen Ys believe that they will have 3-5 divergent careers, not jobs. For example, first they will be a chef, then a hiking guide, then an owner of a B&B, then the next creator of a social media site). This cohort's goal is to find work and create a life that has meaning.

Within this reality, Gen Ys expect organizations to continuously assist them to find that meaning in their current and future career goals. Learning and development provided by the organization is a must-have, and is not perceived as a reward. Moreover, they expect that while they will be trained on skills required to do their job successfully, they will also have the opportunity to learn skills that align to their other interests. Active career collaboration with this generation is critical, as leaders need to understand and not judge the career path of their Gen Y employees. The more leaders are supportive of and provide assistance to achieving Gen Ys career goals, the longer they will keep those employees. Support and assistance can take a variety of forms from tuition subsidies, to scheduling accommodation night school classes, to peer-to-peer learning, to job shadowing.

There are many vehicles to retain the right employees, (salary, reward and recognition, work environment) and career development is one of the ways that an organization can recognize, respond to and manage the expectations of employees in order to create a positive employment relationship. Gone are the days that organizations rely on the fact that employees simply move into the roles and positions as designated by the organization. In particular with younger employees, they have accepted that they are responsible for their own careers and now expect organizations to support them in their development while not dictating the path they will take to achieve success. To achieve greater retention through career development, organizational practices need to be broader in order to be able to address the expectations of a multigenerational workforce, and leaders must be able to create an open and transparent environment where career development becomes a win-win for both parties.

	Traditionalists 1922-1945	Baby Boomers 1946-1964	Gen Xers 1965-1980	Gen Ys 1981-2000
Attitudes, Values And Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Loyalty ✦ Respect for Authority ✦ Dedication ✦ Sacrifice ✦ Conformity ✦ Honour ✦ Privacy ✦ Stability ✦ Economic conservatism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Optimism ✦ Involvement ✦ Team-Orientated ✦ Personal growth and gratification ✦ Youthfulness ✦ Equality ✦ Career-focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Independence ✦ Self-reliance ✦ Pragmatism ✦ Skepticism ✦ Informality ✦ Balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Confidence ✦ Diversity ✦ Civic duty ✦ Optimism ✦ Immediate access to information and services
Key Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Compliant ✦ Stable ✦ Detail-orientated ✦ Hardworking ✦ Dedicated ✦ Fiscally frugal ✦ Trustworthy ✦ Risk adverse ✦ Long-term focused 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Driven to succeed ✦ Team player ✦ Relationship-focused ✦ Eager to add value ✦ Politically savvy in the workplace ✦ Competitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Techno-literate ✦ Flexible and adaptable ✦ Creative ✦ Entrepreneurial ✦ Multi-tasker ✦ Results-driven ✦ Individualistic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✦ Techno-savvy ✦ Collective Action ✦ Expressive and tolerant of differences ✦ Eager to accept challenges ✦ Innovative and creative



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