

# Recruiting the four generations

*Different generations require different tactics from employers looking for talent*

BY GISELLE KOVARY AND ADWOA BUAHENE

Recruitment has evolved into a complex courtship ritual, one in which both recruiters and candidates try to avoid major faux pas while seeking to impress — employers with their career opportunities, exciting projects and benefits and candidates with their competence, charisma and commitment.

Now layer on the fact that the workforce is comprised of four distinct generational identities — traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X and Generation Y — each shaped by differing life-defining events and motivated by different needs and wants. (See chart.)

Recruiters who use a one-size-fits-all approach to attracting new employees ignore the unique requirements of each group. To attract high performing employees from all the generations, organizations must create an integrated recruitment strategy that speaks to all four generations.

**Five steps to building an integrated recruitment strategy**

- **Understand the characteristics of the four generations:** The unique life-defining events that each generation experi-

enced translates into core attitudes and values that influence each generations' viewpoint of employment and working life.

These differences are behaviourally demonstrated through the type of work they seek, the organizational culture that they desire and the compensation and benefits they negotiate.

Naturally, recruiters should be careful not to pigeonhole candidates by making assumptions based on age alone. But it is as critical to success for recruiters to learn the generational identities as it is for their marketing colleagues to learn about different consumer identities and behaviours.

- **Evaluate existing recruitment practices:** Evaluation will identify the gaps in an organization's ability to successfully attract candidates from each generation. For example, a corporate website should highlight organizational innovations and what it is like to work there.

Those in Generations X and Y will evaluate the cultural fit of an organization as much as the role for which they are applying. The website should include specifics on training programs, career paths, mentorship opportunities, rewards, work-life balance and diversity.

Recruiters and line man-



agers should also be evaluated on their ability to sell their organization in a way that will interest and excite potential candidates from the four generations.

- **Create recruitment messages that appeal to each generation:** To ensure an organization can attract and retain the best and brightest from each generation it should tailor its recruitment messages. The messages need to address generational values, motivations and expectations.

When constructing job postings tell a story that includes:

- For traditionalists: The history and legacy of the organization as well as part-time work options.
- For baby boomers: Industry awards and evidence of market leadership.

- For Generation X: Flexible work policies, work-life balance and opportunities for formal and informal learning.

- For Generation Y: The organization's use of cutting-edge technology and its social responsibility at a regional, national and global level.

- **Establish transparency and alignment between promises and reality:** All generations are interested in challenging work, a supportive manager and a great work environment.

But the younger generations are much more likely to try to "peek behind the curtain" during the recruitment process. They want to ascertain whether the organization's promises are likely to come true. Candidates may request to speak to current employees

to evaluate a prospective manager's reputation, and to review policies and procedures related to work-life balance, sabbaticals and performance management.

It is crucial that there be alignment between the messages communicated and opportunities proposed by the recruiter and the line manager. Otherwise candidates may sense a disconnect and will question the organization's ability to deliver on the employment deal. Generations X and Y will hold the manager accountable for the promises made during the courtship ritual.

- **Learn to interpret each generation's responses:** Because each generation views work and their relationship to an organization differently, candidates will not all respond the same way to the recruitment process.

A recruiter at a global consumer products company was shocked when a Generation Y candidate questioned her about what his next assignment would be and when he could expect a career move. The baby boomer recruiter felt that this type of questioning was bold and inappropriate — the candidate had not even proven himself and yet he already wanted to know the next step. But for the Generation Y candidate, opportunities for career growth, and the speed at which they could take place based on performance, was a valid criteria to evaluate the job offer.

It is important that recruiters understand how different generations respond to the process. The younger generations frequently define employment terms in a more pragmatic way. But loyalty is not a dead concept to them. Whereas traditionalists define it as a long-term commitment to an organization, Generations X and Y define it as their ability to achieve results and in being dedicated to their managers and colleagues.

Since most HR practices and processes are founded on traditionalist and baby boomer values, it may be a challenge for recruiters and managers to adjust to the increasing demands and straightforward negotiation style of younger candidates.

By understanding generational motivations and expectations, recruiters can actively and successfully manage the recruitment process. The five steps allow recruiters to approach the courtship ritual in a holistic fashion, resulting in employment relationships that meet both individual and organizational needs.

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## The four generations

Generation	Traditionalists Born 1922 - 1945	Baby Boomers Born 1946 - 1964	Generation X Born 1965 - 1980	Generation Y Born after 1981
Life-Defining Events	Great Depression, WWII, Korean War, rise of labour unions	Civil rights movement, Cold war, Quebec crisis, Trudeau era	Personal computers, AIDS, corporate downsizing, fall of communism	Digital age, reality TV, attacks of 9/11, corporate and government scandals
Attitudes & Values	Loyalty, dedication, sacrifice, honour, compliance, hard-working	Personal growth, youthfulness, equality, ambition, collaboration	Independence, pragmatism, results-driven, flexibility and adaptive	Confident, optimistic, civic minded, innovative, diversity focused, technosavvy
Goal	To build a legacy	To put their stamp on things	To maintain independence in all areas of their lives	To find work and create a life that has meaning
Recruitment expectations	Formal, traditional methods of recruitment Employer-driven negotiations	In-person, relationship building recruitment Balanced negotiations	On-site tours, meetings with current employees Open employee-driven negotiation	Review / evaluation of organization's reputation Valued employee-driven negotiation
Unique selling proposition	The organization's legacy, stability and strong loyalty to its employees	The organization's market leadership and growth strategy	The organization's career growth, learning and development opportunities	The organization's social responsibility, diversity and creativity
Key messages	Your experience will be valued here You will be given the support to learn the organization's IT systems	You can be a star here Your personal growth is important to us	You will work independently You are encouraged to have a life outside of work	You will work with experts from across divisions You will have a variety of experiences