

“DEALING WITH GEN Y STAFF”

Simply mention the term “Gen Y” in the workplace, and you will inevitably be given an emotive response with regards to what it is like to work with this generation. At the recent NASOG conference held in Melbourne in September 2010, I was asked to present on this very topic and as a result, an enthusiastic discussion has developed between the delegates present at the conference and their staff. I have found as a practice management consultant, this generational issue is a common challenge in the workplace.

Firstly we need to establish what the differences are in the various generations. The following tables outline the characteristics of the various age brackets and their values and workplace expectations:

Baby Boomers Born 1946 - 1960	Generation X Born 1961 - 1975	Generation Y Born 1976 - 1994
No longer want to burn their way up the corporate ladder	Are working their way up the career ladder	Want a fast tracked career
Want the work conditions and entitlements negotiated by the younger generation	Work life balance	More casual in the way they dress and communicate at work
Looking to scale back from work place to spend time with grandchildren	Want to spend more time with family	Believe a career is of their making, not of their employer's
Can lack technological skills	Will forgo a pay rise in return for additional annual leave	Job hopping every 3 - 5 years
Have a more formal attitude	Believe staff have to earn everything they get	Want environmentally friendly work-places

Source: Cara Jenkin “Top Job at Any Age” Herald Sun October 30 2010

	Baby Boomers Born 1946 - 1960	Generation X Born 1961 - 1975	Generation Y Born 1976 - 1994
Employment	Job for life	Work life balance	Learn and earn
Leadership	Command and control	No thanks	Inspire me
Respect for Elders	Of course	Is polite	Whatever
Technology	Adapting to it	Comfortable	Part of their way of life
Money	Work hard -earn it	Not everything	Yes please - now!

Source: Steven Herzberg Managing Director NRG Solutions - AAPM Conference Oct 2009

Gen Y, as you can see in the tables above, are a different type of employee to those that have preceded them. Unless you plan for and address these differences in your work place, they may be a catalyst for conflict and dissent.

Recently I was working with a practice that clearly demonstrated the issues that can arise when specific strategies are not established at your practice for working with a combination of generations. Dr Greenwood* (not his real name) is a very busy practitioner. As a busy doctor, he approached the front desk and asked the receptionist to follow up on appointment book refinements. The Gen Y rostered on this particular day enthusiastically applied changes to the appointment book as requested, in a typically reactive manner.

The issues occurred when the Baby Boomer and Gen X employees came in for their shifts the next day and were horrified that all of these changes had taken place without any prior discussions with the team. The atmosphere at the practice started to become tense as the Gen Y defended herself by only doing as she was asked, and the Gen X and Baby boomer were cross that they were not consulted in this process. This type of scenario is an all too common occurrence and can easily lead to a worsening situation, where the different generational work methods clash.

This situation could have been avoided by implementing some key strategies in the workplace. Firstly it is important to establish clear lines of communication and authorisation processes. This way all employees are clear that changes in the workplace require team approval before they can be implemented. The introduction of these types of processes are especially important for the Gen Y employee as they are generally the least experienced, and need to be expertly guided in the methods of best practice.

Key strategies for working with Gen Y in the workplace are to:

- ④ Designate a work place leader to mentor and coach the Gen Y
- ④ Ensure that clear lines of communications and reportability are established
- ④ Set clear boundaries and rules and ensure that they are regularly monitored but not micromanaged
- ④ Motivate Gen Y with projects, but establish strict timelines and reporting mechanisms
- ④ Establish forums such as staff meetings for all the generations to have an opportunity to mix together and exchange ideas
- ④ Ensure that formal meeting agendas and follow up action plans are set up to avoid the meetings being hijacked by a strong personality
- ④ Pay them well if you would like them to stay

The danger is to generalise with regards to employing Gen Y. Often they are stereotyped, but within all generations you will find that there are 'stars'. The trick is to identify those Gen Y employees with the 'star' qualities and develop and motivate them in the ways that will encourage them to stay with you as a long term employee. One of the biggest costs you will have at your practice is people. If you can encourage your employees to stay, the cost savings in terms of training, practice disruption is invaluable.

As Socrates pointed out about the children from 400 BC: "The children now love luxury; they have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for elders and love chatter in place of exercise. Children are now tyrants, not the servants of their households. They no longer rise when elders enter the room. They contradict their parents, chatter before company, gobble up dainties at the table, cross their legs, and tyrannies their teachers."

History demonstrates that the difference between the generations is always an issue. Gen Y is simply the younger generation of our current time. We need to learn how to work with them effectively to produce the best outcome.

Hanya Oversby
Specialist Consulting
0407 390 074
hanya@specialistconsulting.com.au
www.specialistconsulting.com.au