

## **Wake Me When It's Over: Generation Y in the Classroom**

"You can't train these new dogs with old tricks," says Eric Chester in his book, "Employing Generation Why?" It can be challenging to manage and motivate people who are either older than you are or younger. Each generation has its own culture and influences that make it different from the generations before it and after it. Many of these differences, while seemingly subtle, often result in big differences in the style in which the people of that generation think, learn, work together and view success.

Ignoring these differences makes it difficult, if not impossible, to effectively manage and motivate people of different generations. Instead of shaking our heads and observing that, "These young people just don't want to work anymore," or dismissing an older worker as "stuck in the past," it makes more sense to explore the commonalities, the differences and the stereotypes that affect the way sales team members from different generations work together.

Managing and motivating individuals of different generations is all about gaining respect for their unique attributes: understanding who those individuals are and what is important to them. Managers who learn to value the generational differences in their teams will steer their teams away from the potential clash between the age groups. Instead, they will find ways to capitalize on the rich variety of backgrounds, experience, skills and viewpoints that people of different generations bring to the team and use this diversity to strengthen their sales force, their project teams and their management bench.

Of course, not every person who is born in one generation acts alike, behaves alike, thinks alike, identifies with, affiliates with, or relates to his or her generation. However, research shows that they do share many common themes, character traits, and behaviors.

One of the most significant effects on any generation is the way in which it is taught. Our learning styles as adults reflect the way we are taught in school. The Baby Boomers spent their school years in large classrooms with one teacher. The situation called for a teacher who spent a lot of time lecturing, even to very young students. Quiet and respect were not only valued, but necessary in a classroom of 40 to 60 children and one adult.

Generation Y has had a different experience in the classroom. The computer revolution is just one of the influences on this generation's learning style. Instead of large, static classrooms, Generation Y has been taught in small groups with an emphasis on collaboration, projects and presentations. Interactive lessons, often utilizing multimedia presentations, are part of their everyday experience. A great

deal of emphasis has been placed on developing leadership skills and rewards have been a standard part of the learning experience from kindergarten through high school.

## **Tips for Teaching Gen Y**

With this information what can we guess about Generation Y as learners? How do they learn best? What motivates them?

Generation Y is used to a rapid paced classroom with a variety of activities and presentations in the classroom. They are comfortable with technology, use it with ease and expect it to be a part of the learning experience. And they expect rewards and praise for “winning” or just for participating. But just as important as the techniques that are used is Generation Y’s expectation of understanding why they learn. They want to know why. Why do they need to know what you are teaching? If you don’t tell them, they will be less interested. Tell them why it matters. Show them what it means to them. Engage them and do it fast!

Generation Y is used to a fast pace. Move fast, then double your speed - and take many short breaks. Make your presentations active, with lots of classroom participation. Don’t waste valuable classroom time on didactic presentations. Make it fun and have a playful attitude.

Some of the best ways to illustrate why what you are teaching matters is to create multi-generational training groups to share experiences, show successful role models, customers and patients. Take the time to link what you are teaching to the big picture or to career goals where appropriate. Make sure that they know what exceptional performance looks like.

Just because different generations have different cultural values and different learning styles does not mean that one generation is “more serious” about their work or is less interested in achievement. Remember, every generation has a success story to tell.