

A New Generation of Workers Is On the Way

By Pat Cataldo, Managing Director



People get ready, there's a train a comin' and it's called the Nexter's Express. On board will come an entirely different set of workers and learning styles. Ready. Set. Adapt.

As Baby Boomers retire, the cohort of workers called Nexters (also known as Generation Y or Millennials), who were born between 1980 – 1994, are moving into the workforce to take their place. These are the children of “helicopter parents” who hovered over them from an early age to provide a world of constant choices along with the latest technology. This new workforce generation was treated to an upbringing of constant and frequent praise nurturing a feeling of self-esteem and self-confidence.

So it should come as no surprise that as they enter the world of work they are filled with expectations of high salaries, quick promotions, flexible work hours, friendly – supportive work environments, and positive feedback that develops their talents.

Improving workplace readiness for this new breed of workers is an ongoing and constant challenge. This is especially evident when their managers are from other generations who were raised during different economic times and with different parental upbringings. Case in point: As a Boomer growing up, if you were asked what you wanted for dinner, it might have been on your birthday when your mother offered you one or two choices – which she was going to make anyway. Other than that, you ate what was put in front of you or not at all.

Companies will need to find creative ways to adopt and incorporate the strengths of the Nexters into the workplace as quickly as possible to produce outstanding results. These new workers have plenty to offer... they tend to be more positive about themselves and how things will work out for them, better educated, direct in their communications, more collaborative, and civic-minded.

In contrast, however, is a set of personal characteristics offered by Dr. Mark Taylor, a nationally recognized educator and expert on young people who I heard speak, that would tax even the most skilled manager. He described Nexters as those who:

- Will have minimal respect for authority and social rules of conduct
- Respond defensively to constructive criticism
- Expect immediate gratification
- Have a sense of entitlement
- Desire work to be fun
- Will leave a job (without having another one) if their desires are not being met

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To meet the challenges presented by Nexters, employers should consider the following:

- 1) Website audits – Do you have an up-to-date website with attractive messages for Nexters?
- 2) Recruiting – Do you involve their peers in the process to describe the realistic workplace expectations of the company?
- 3) Internships/Summer employment – Do you provide an opportunity to sample what you have to offer in your environment? (Many companies get their best hires by making this early investment).
- 4) On boarding – Do you provide an adequate and dedicated amount of time for them to learn about the job, learn about you (and you about them), learn about goals/expectations, and how they fit into the organization?
- 5) Communication – Do you use instant messaging or texting as a means of regular communication with them?
- 6) Recognition and Socialization – Do you provide avenues for reward and employee networking through organized activities – outings, sports events, or after-hours informal get-togethers?

The overall objective is to get more in touch with them so that they can get more in touch with you. If companies can accommodate Nexters in the same manner expected from those generations before them, the organization as a whole should do well and prosper.

If you'd like to comment on the article or want further information on managing Nexters in the workforce, contact me at pcataldo@unc.edu.

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