

# Gen-Why? The Largest Generation Ever

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Likewise, you probably won't find any Gen-Y'ers who haven't thought their managers were jerks, that the company's technology was from the dark ages (meaning 2008), and that the hierarchical leadership structure was antiquated.

Somewhere between these two world views there is a happy medium where both parties benefit from working together.

Generation Y (also called the Millennial Generation) comprises people born primarily between 1977 and 1997. Those who are currently in the workforce, aged 18-33, make up almost 30% of New Zealand's workforce. The Millennials are the largest generation ever. They represent a huge economic force as today's customers and tomorrow's leaders. While you might prefer never to hire another one again, these young people can bring great value to your organisation ... if you manage them correctly.

I'm not suggesting that you turn your company upside down to accommodate them, just that you understand them and act accordingly. In fact, a lot of the ways to reap the best out of your Gen-Y staff can apply to all staff. These ways of engaging with Gen-Y'ers form part of good leadership and can create the kind of inspired team that drives new thinking, creative solutions, and exceptional results. And who doesn't want that?

Millennials bring several key skills to the workplace:

- Fresh thinking and new approaches
- The ability to successfully multi-task
- The capacity to think, learn and communicate - quickly
- A strong desire to make an impact, to be successful
- Know-how to collaborate effectively - offline and online
- Exceptional technological savvy
- An understanding of how to use social media to benefit the company
- Ease with multi-culturalism and diversity

In exchange for "sharing" these skills, Gen-Y'ers need these things in return.

- A progression of tasks at which they can be successful
- Frequent, straightforward feedback
- Regular coaching and mentoring
- Clear development goals
- The opportunity to have an impact
- Self-direction and collaboration
- Managers who truly take an interest in their success

The other element that is necessary for successful development and retention of your Gen-Y staff is the management of their expectations. Be frank and up-front with them during the interview process. Don't promise that they get a say in things if you're not willing to seek and value their input. Don't talk about the great technology the company uses unless it really is up-to-date. And don't promise them great training and development if what you're offering is the usual classroom experience and death by PowerPoint.

With that said, if you do want to attract and retain the best young staff make sure you solicit and listen to their input; be willing to use technology in new ways; provide experiential, interactive learning; and even give them a chance to train older staff in areas where Gen-Y'ers excel.

All of this might sound like it will take extra time, time you don't feel you have to give. Well, it might. But there's so much that can be gained from engaging and developing your younger staff - new ideas, new ways of working, new energy, superior results. In fact, all staff will profit from the same activities that are designed to benefit Gen-Y'ers. Bottom line - you ignore this generation at your peril. Whether you know it yet or not, you need them as much as they need you.

If you want to learn more about how to have a great Gen-Y employment experience, here are some resources to explore. Not Everyone Gets a Trophy: How to Manage Generation Y, by Bruce Tulgan. Millennial Leaders: Success Stories From Today's Most Brilliant Generation Y Leaders, by Bea Fields. (Both books are available through [www.fishpond.co.nz](http://www.fishpond.co.nz) and

your local library.) Mentoring Millennials, by Jeanne C. Meister and Karie Willyerd (Harvard Business Review, May 2010, <http://hbr.org/2010/05/mentoring-millennials/ar/1>). These are just a few resources. There are considerably more available through a simple Google search.

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