



ITS ALL ABOUT PEOPLE

## **FAST-TRACKED RECRUITS**

All of us have a vested interest in the future, if for no other reason than we intend to spend the rest of our lives there. So it's worthwhile considering what the major challenges facing HR managers will be when we get there so as not to be caught short. But to look forward we first have to look back and see what lessons are there to be learned.

I remember being an HR practitioner in South Africa in the mid 80's when we were grudgingly welcoming into the workplace a work force who were unashamedly products of their generation and time. Young, gifted and black these radical 20-somethings were intent not on adding value to the bottom line or increasing the productivity of the organization but fully focused on righting civil and social wrongs, pursuing fairness and, wherever they could, striking a blow at the system from within. It was the worst of times. Stay-aways, strikes, go-slows, you name it - industrial sabotage from the inside in every conceivable form was invented and enacted by them during that era. The result for companies and even the country was an era of economic disaster, disinvestment, financial losses, chaos and confusion.

In hindsight our failure as HR Practitioners was not to adequately read the signs of the times. The emerging workforce were the same people who had fought the security police in the streets of Soweto with sticks and stones to protest the introduction of Afrikaans into their education system. They were the angry young men and women of their day and sensing the winds of change blowing through the country they built turbines of anarchy and injustice to harness the power of the storm. So a generation was formed that refused unilateral decision making, fought against exclusion and injustice and outwardly prepared to do battle for what they believed. What we didn't anticipate was that they'd be bringing it all to work and even when confronted by it we were still naive enough to believe that we could keep it at bay or at least in check.

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So if you don't want to be similarly caught short this time it is worthwhile taking time to learn about and study the new generation that is starting to fill our organizations. Known as Generation Y, echo boomers or millennials these are kids born approximately between the late 70's and early 90's

As you are more a product of your time than of your parents and as this is a time when impatience has become a virtue, it's only to be expected that these new job entrants are the most 'want it all and want it now' batch of employees. Having grown up in a fast paced environment (these kids have never known a world without ATM's, iPods, DVD's, CD's, PC's, MTV and CNN) this generation sees life as a drop down screen menu where they can click for immediate access and multiple choices. Generation Y is the first in history to have lived their entire lives with global, digital information technology. It is not easy for them to understand the world without it. Because they are used to accessing information at the click of a mouse or the punch of a button they take immediacy for granted.

And because everybody drives over the limit on the information superhighway these kids are speed junkies. In fact if you don't respond to them just as fast they look at you as if you are from another planet – which we are; Planet over 30 and Planet pre-silicone chip! We marvelled at the wonders of telexes and these kids think faxes are antediluvian! To a generation that has grown up with mobile phones, text messaging, blue tooth, WAP technology and e-mail, multi-tasking is second nature because they can and do deal with multiple forms of communication simultaneously.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the generation is their incredibly high self esteem. Encouraged to succeed from an early age and with an abundance of positive reinforcement from their parents this group of people enter into the organization with their head held high and ask you what's the deal here before **they** decide whether they will even consider working for you. They have high expectations not only of themselves but of you as an employer and generally are very hard to impress. One of the very distinct requirements for Y'ers is that they don't want to be just a number or a person in the system – it is very important that they have their own identity – they want their employer to know them. They want recognition.

There are a number of reasons why these characteristics are there – it's all to do with the environment that they have grown up in and experienced. Why they are there and what might their merits be could be an interesting topic for rhetorical debate but the bottom line is they are the reality that employers are facing. Within the next few years generation Y'ers will be the biggest population group in the workplace. Get used to it!

Admittedly I get a bit frustrated with this new animal breed as they don't appreciate my workplace values nor display the behaviours that I have been conditioned to consider acceptable for work. On the up side, however, I love their drive, energy and resourcefulness. Sure they don't want to pay their dues and 'do time' at the office – don't even mention working late – so be very clear that you are not going to panel beat them into changing their view. The bottom line is they're part of the landscape whether you like it or not and there are more of them coming your way – in the next 10 years they will be managing our businesses, deciding direction and policy. And really generation Y is not that different from us – just faster and better at finding shortcuts.

So it stands to reason that what I am describing is just the tip of the iceberg and in the next few weeks I will explore what this means in terms of how we tackle work place issues like recruitment, training, task structuring etc. And you thought it would be business as usual. There's no such thing anymore!

