

# READY OR NOT, HERE THEY COME!

*By Carol Kinsey Goman, Ph.D.*

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They're tattooed. They're pierced. They're 64 million strong. They're the first wave of Generation Y individuals (born between 1984 and 2002) and they're about to take the workplace by storm. In other words, they're ready for you.

Are you - and your organization - ready for them?

In some circles they're also called "Millennials," and today's Gen-Y'ers come to the workplace with a markedly different perspective than past generations. Having grown up during the dot-com boom and the "war for talent," they recognize the potential to make a significant impact in the business world. At the same time, as eyewitnesses to the corporate, institutional, and even journalistic scandals of recent years, they are also highly skeptical.

They have in common many other shared experiences that will create bonds among them - and distinguish them from your current workforce. Consider, for example, that television was the defining technology for Baby Boomers and drove a culture of homogeneity. For this new generation, the defining technology has been the Internet - which drives diversity.

They've grown up in a digital, networked, mobile world. They've been in school when kids were killing kids at other schools. From Blackberry to Bluetooth, from cell phones that are cameras to eyeglasses that are cell phones - for this techno-savvy generation, these will continue to be "must haves." They're hip, they're aware, and long familiar with AOL, IM, ATMs, PCs, VCRs, and DVDs. Toss in TCBY, for that matter.

They're pragmatic. They've witnessed organizational restructuring and layoffs, often involving their own families, which means they don't believe security is guaranteed. They want to acquire the skills and networks that will make them more marketable now - and in the future. And they're idealistic. As they search for meaning, volunteerism among 16- to 24-year-olds is way up. Family and religious values are central, and "jobs that matter" hold great appeal.

There's more you should know about them. They have a high tolerance for change and innovation and aren't afraid of being fired. They're more afraid of being bored. The high number of college graduates among them don't expect to stay with their first employer for more than two years. They have been told they will have many jobs in a variety of organizations over the course of several different careers.

They represent the most racially and ethnically diverse generation in history. They come, as well, from a different social and cultural environment than past generations. One in four comes from single-parent homes. Three in four have working mothers. And forget about that long-gone era when children were "seen and not heard." Members of this generation had their own cell phones - and credit cards - as pre-teens. Their opinions were regularly sought in family decision-making (especially when it came to buying and setting up the latest technology).

From scholastic tutoring to music and sports, Gen-Y'ers have been overscheduled by parents trying to keep them out of trouble and make up for time lost to the family by working parents. They have, in short, become older younger.

All of this is important information for Gen Y recruiters, who would be wise to follow several tips.

### **Tip #1: Be candid.**

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Gen-Y'ers come to interviews prepared. They've been "sold to" all their lives and their "BS barometer" is finely tuned. They also tend to believe one another, which is why some companies are using satisfied Gen-Y'ers as resources whom candidates can talk to.

### **Tip #2: Recruit to the culture.**

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It's amazing how people want to join an organization whose culture reflects their own values. That's why companies like Disney and the University of Colorado Hospital have applicants watch a video that explains their standards, rules, dress code, and expected behaviors - and, even before filling out an application, are asked, "Can you uphold our values?"

### **Tip #3: Upgrade internship programs.**

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IBM's Extreme Blue internship program makes sure that interns don't end up making coffee and photocopies. Instead, it mixes MBA students with computer developers in research labs around the world.

### **Tip #4: Use your website.**

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A well-structured and easily navigated web site is a must for recruiting.

### **Tip #5: Mind your CRM.**

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Candidate Relationship Management (CRM) is a mindset that understands the importance of the relationship between the recruiter and the potential recruit. The way a candidate is treated by recruiters sets the tone for his or her initial impression of the organization. CRM tactics include responding quickly, making each candidate feel unique, and keeping them informed.

So if you get them, how do you keep them? Here is what research says Gen-Y'ers most want in a job:

### **Want #1: Great bosses and relationships.**

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They want people who will get to know them personally as well as professionally and care about them as individuals. And encourage personal relationships between employees. This generation thrives on them, and people are reluctant to leave companies where they have friends.

### **Want #2: Frequent feedback.**

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The days of annual performance reviews are over. Gen Y employees want constant, informal assessment of how they are doing.

### **Want #3: Recognition.**

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"Catch people doing things right." Instantly recognize and reward outstanding efforts, build reputations within the company, show people that you appreciate their contribution.

#### **Want #4: Collaboration and teamwork.**

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Command and control tactics don't work with the Gen-Y'ers, who are looking to exchange knowledge and be treated as a valuable team member. Bring employees into the planning process of anything that affects them. Address their concerns and co-create goals and strategy.

#### **Want #5: Access to information.**

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Computers have given this generation the experience of always having information "at their fingertips," and they are adept at using different data and technology to blend seemingly unrelated elements when solving problems.

It should come as no surprise that they want much more, as well. Gen-Y'ers put great store in education, and they want to be encouraged and supported to create personal growth and development plans. They want the challenge and excitement of getting on board and getting up to speed quickly. The worst thing you can do is leave them sitting around waiting for something to happen. Give them a task or responsibility they can own and offer a wide range of projects to work on.

They work to live, not live to work. Younger employees want control of their time, whether it involves organizationally structured arrangements such as flex-time or contractual work, or management philosophies and practices that stress results over "face time." They're also looking for meaning in their lives, so help new employees make a "values match" between their personal values and the organization's vision/mission. Let individuals know specifically how their work fits in and contributes to the goals of the enterprise.

Competitive salaries and benefits? Of course they're part of the equation. But as one executive told me, "If they come just for the bucks, they'll leave for the bucks." Retaining Gen-Y'ers will depend more on building their engagement - with challenging work in a nurturing environment - than it will on salary.

# Linkage

Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

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