

# WORKFORCE HORIZONS

## Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today

Louisiana Department of Civil Service

Volume Two, Issue 13: April 2007

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### ATTRACTING GENERATION Y

All organizations face a current staffing crisis due to the aging workforce and impending loss of “Baby Boomers” to retirement. Employers are increasingly competing for a shrinking supply of qualified applicants. A major challenge is how to recruit and retain the youngest generation, Generation Y. Generation Y refers to persons born between 1977 and 1997<sup>1</sup>.

So what are the concerns of Generation Y? What do they want in a job? How do we engage them?

Because they have seen lots of turbulence in the job market during their lives and often have seen a parent lose a job, they are interested in taking responsibility for their

own employability by constantly building on and improving their job skills. So they are attracted by organizations that provide professional development, training, continuing education, and career coaching and mentoring. Some other benefits cited as valuable by Generation Y’ers are extra vacation time, access to health clubs and more social functions tied to work (e.g. happy hours). Generation Y also shows a preference for career mobility *within* an organization as opposed to within the open job market.

The good news for the public sector is that Generation Y is socially conscious and interested in public service and doing meaningful work. 76% of college students who want to work for the federal government cite “the opportunity to make a difference” as their main motivation. The bad news is that nonprofit organizations do a better job of attracting Generation Y than government. What hampers government is its image as a slow-moving, monolithic bureaucracy that does not spend money wisely and the perception that government lags behind the private sector in application of new technology.

So what can government employers do to capture some of the Generation Y labor market? Here are some strategies broken

down by four Generation Y workplace needs.

Need # 1: Work / life balance, sociability  
Strategy: Allow flexible work schedules, develop formal and informal networking for career development, host social events tied to work.

Need # 2: Flexibility  
Strategy: Create learning opportunities, do long range career planning, promote mobility within organization both promotionally and laterally as a learning or cross-training opportunity

Need# 3: Access to Technology  
Strategy: Use online recruiting, e-learning, multi-media

Need # 4: Sense of purpose, meaningful work  
Strategy: Emphasize core values, make social responsibility a priority, outreach to campuses, branding campaigns.

It is this last area that is one of the most important and most challenging for government. How do you engage Generation Y employees? Why should they work for your organization? What makes your organization different?

Government has a poor image that must be overcome. You must convince Generation Y'ers that working for you they can make a difference in some meaningful way. You must have a mission that appeals to them and that you are serious about and effective in accomplishing. You must communicate this to them effectively. Finally, they must believe they will have the opportunity to *actually* do something meaningful. It has to be real, not hype.

Part of the solution lies in promotion and recruiting. Tell them what they can do working for you that they would not be able to do in the private sector. Promote the unique opportunities you offer. The second part of the solution is making it real. Generation Y'ers must be allowed to begin some meaningful work quickly after being hired and experience rapid growth opportunities. Remember Generation Y'ers won't wait around for a long runway to advancement.

“The wisest mind has something yet to learn.” – *George Santayana*

## HOW GENERATIONAL FRIENDLY IS YOUR WORKPLACE?

Does your organization provide an environment that Generation Y would want to work in? Rate your organization according to how well it exhibits these desirable characteristics:

1. Managers, leaders and employees selected for desirable projects are a mix of ages, genders, and ethnicities
2. We have discussions, sometimes with humor, about our differing viewpoints and perspectives
3. Employees are treated like customers
4. Managers in the organization have a reputation for being straightforward
5. Decisions are discussed openly and strategic planning is explained before directives are issued
6. There is an opportunity for feedback and differing opinions and a means of communicating different ideas to management

7. There is an element of fun and enjoyment at work as well as a challenge to learn and grow

### **REVERSED MENTORING – WHAT THE NEWEST EMPLOYEES CAN TEACH SEASONED WORKERS<sup>2</sup>**

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric pioneered reverse mentoring when he ordered several hundred of his top executives to seek out mentoring relationships with their newest employees. However, the mentoring would flow in the opposite direction from traditional mentoring. His goal was to have the younger employees pass knowledge up the corporate ladder teaching the seasoned executives about the Internet and other technology based expertise.

Upper management can learn from newer workers and not only in the area of technology and computers. New employees can help with workplace perception. They see things going on at the ground level without the view being filtered through years of experience and preconceptions. Top managers may think they know all about it, but new employees can offer a fresh perspective and insights that a manager would never see on her own.

#### **Here are some tips for making reverse mentoring successful:**

Hire future leaders – it can be intimidating for a younger worker to mentor a senior; hire persons who are comfortable assuming a leadership role once in a while.

Survey new employees after three months on the job – make survey responses anonymous; get input on customer service, organizational culture, communication, etc.

Set up regular “View from the Trenches” meetings – Have employees who interact most with customers brief their deskbound colleagues and superiors on what is really happening down in the trenches.

Set goals – Write clear goals and expectations of the mentoring program and roles of participants; detail how the expertise of younger employees will help the organization.

Provide Training – Young employees will likely be inexperienced mentoring anyone and may be uncomfortable or intimidated by the thought of mentoring a senior manager. Training to help them assume this role with confidence is essential

<sup>1</sup>Data in this article is taken from the book States of Transition: Tackling Government’s Toughest Policy and Management Challenges. William D. Eggers and Robert N. Campbell, III, ed. (2006)

<sup>2</sup>Adapted from “Reverse Mentoring-Old Dogs, New Tricks,” Charles Wonderlic, HR.COM-The Human Resources Portal

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Issued: Monthly

Purpose: The purpose of the Workforce Horizons is to educate readers about workforce planning issues and best practices, inform them about upcoming Civil Service workshops and training related to workforce planning and to provide practical job aids to assist agencies with workforce planning.

Comments and submissions: We welcome questions about workforce planning and suggestions for improvements to the newsletter as well as submissions of articles about what your agency is doing in workforce planning. Questions, comments, and requests to be added to the distribution list for the newsletter should be sent to the editor.

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