



RECRUITING & MANAGING MILLENNIALS

8 Tips on managing Generation Y from a successful HR recruiter

by

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Gen Y; Millennials; Echo Boomers; the Trophy Generation; Net Y Not. Google “managing” any of those terms and you’ll receive hundreds of thousands of hits. The literature positively explodes with deep insight and pop psychology on how to deal with younger employees—professionals in their mid-20s to early 30s.

The advice is plentiful, as are the number of consultants available to help you determine how to navigate this generational challenge. I’d love to join their ranks and hold seminars, sell DVDs, and develop an iPad-friendly micro site on the topic. The upside is promising.

Consider a few of the most notable traits of this generation:

- There are 80 million of them (give or take 10 million) and they’re the only real hope for baby-boomers hoping to retire before death.
- They’re diverse and highly educated.
- They’re the most tech-savvy generation on the planet.
- They love to travel all over the planet and communicate with fellow tech-savvy peers.
- They’re not real big on starting at the bottom and “working their way up the ladder”.
- They have great expectations for themselves and major demands for those around them.
- They loathe authority, believe in the power of the individual, volunteer religiously, and care far more about what their friends say than what their boss thinks.

Therein lies both the rub and the potential for lucrative consulting fees. How do you recruit, hire, manage and survive with younger, rising executives who may not speak your language or respect your values? If the Millennials receive most of their validation from outside of their professional network, what leverage does the leadership of your organization have to shape raw talent into valuable current and future leaders?

The tips below will save you time and money. As an executive recruiter for Lucas Group, I’m charged with finding transcendent talent for some of the finest companies in the world. As such, I have some unique insights into this challenge. I’ve tracked candidates from coast-to-coast and have been involved in many a tense contract negotiation between candidate and potential employer. I’ve placed some simply outstanding professionals who have gone on to drive business success for their companies. I’ve also experienced a few setbacks in the recruiting/hiring process and those few failures weigh more heavily on my mind than the thousands of successes.

To help you minimize the failures and maximize the impact of your executive recruiting and placement efforts, I've developed eight important guidelines on how to successfully recruit and manage the next generation of executive talent. Unlike the soccer fields of this generations' youth, in the business world, very few companies hand out trophies for just showing up.

#1: Everything in moderation

Some managers and companies go way too far in trying to appeal to Gen Y employees and in the process they upset their business practices and organizational culture. They revamp systems, procedures, and work teams in an effort to make their environs more Millennial friendly. Think of a parent attempting to placate an unruly child in a store (“just be quiet and sit still and daddy will get you whatever you want”), and you immediately understand the problem with this approach. Hiring and encouraging bad behavior can ruin a company's ethos.

Others, make the opposite mistake. They pay no attention to it whatsoever and keep doing things the way they've always done them (“things worked pretty well when our old CEO was in charge, so I see no reason to allow these people to change our entire operation”).

Both approaches are wrong. The world evolves; people change; and companies are forever adapting. Compare the IBM of Sam Palmisano to the IBM of John Akers and you'll appreciate the point. Change for change sake (or change to merely keep abreast of the latest trends) is poor leadership. But thoughtful change that leverages technology, global diversity, and market forces is something to embrace.

#2: This is nothing new

The “Greatest Generation” was undoubtedly viewed as a pack of fuzzy-cheeked lightweights by those who had survived the mustard gasses of World War I and lived to forge successful careers. And few LBJ-era executives knew what to do with the peace-loving, bell-bottom-wearing, soap-and-water-challenged ingrates pouring out of U.S. colleges and universities in the 60s and 70s looking for fame and personal realization.

But everyone ultimately adjusted. Executives learned to open up the decision-making process a bit to encourage creative competition and 60s anarchists eventually became both corporate leaders and regulars in the member-member tournaments at their clubs. Every generation evolves and adjusts to the next. The key is not to over-compensate one way or the other while continuing to steer a clear course for success.

#3: For every stereotype, there are exceptions

The stereotypes I've outlined above are just that—stereotypes. They are far from universal. Not every young professional is brooding, self-absorbed, and disdainful of anyone over 40. Think for 90 seconds and you will undoubtedly recall at least two young professionals you know who possess a solid work ethic, go the extra mile to accomplish a task, and are pleasant people to be around. These are the people you want to target through your talent acquisition process.

#4: Embrace intelligence and diversity; they are your future

My father is of Indian descent and my mother is Chinese. I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky and graduated with honors from the University of Illinois-Champaign. I'm fluent in Cantonese and my children are learning Spanish and Mandarin. I may not be the prototypical U.S. worker...but I'm becoming more so with each passing year.



The ethnic mix that makes the United States a unique, international power should work to your advantage. If you don't understand or appreciate this diversity and quest for educational achievement, it's time to start. Force yourself to diversify. Your competition isn't just across the street; it's around the world. Read "The World is Flat" by Thomas Friedman while sipping Darjeeling tea. Watch "Outsourced" as you nibble on some kebab koutbane and couscous. Attend an international relations-related lecture at your local college or university.

A diversified workforce is not simply a nicety. It's a competitive imperative in today's global economy. Make sure that you're able to understand why and how to achieve it.

#5: Slackers aren't born; they're made

In the age-old debate between nature and nurture, nurture wins when it comes to this undesirability. That's good news for you because you can:

- Look for "slacker warning signs" (see tip #6 below)
- Flush slacker traits out of your workforce through intelligent management
- Focus your recruiting efforts on finding people who are hungry, resourceful, highly intelligent, adaptable, and possess strong interpersonal communications skills.

Maintaining a strong culture of success, while keeping an open mind to the skills and perspectives brought by new talent, is a formula employed by the world's most successful companies.

#6: Weed out the slacker psychology

A quality recruiter will do this for you, but it's good to know how to listen for traits/behavior that may hinder business success. These five interview questions can be highly revelatory:

- Did you have a job in high school or college?
- What is your most memorable accomplishment?
- What led to your most memorable mistake?
- To what do you attribute your success to date?
- From whom have you learned the most in your professional career?

In listening to the answers to these questions, pay close attention to the candidates' takes on work ethic, their ability to constructively work in a team environment, their perspectives of other people, and a clear sense of personal and professional responsibility. Too many ego-centric references and/or a focus on natural talent as their main differentiator should raise warning signs.

#7: Stay abreast of technology or risk being buried by it

In my middle-aged life, I've seen the introduction of push-button phones, personal computers, the Internet, cell phones, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, and a host of other communications technologies. At any point, I could have scoffed at the new technology and simply said, "I love my Selectric and I see no need to replace it with the latest passing fad."

But I didn't. I kept abreast. And while I may not Tweet much, I do understand what it is and how it works. You should too, if you want to remain professionally conversant. While we've not yet devised a more effective means of communication than the one-on-one conversation, it's not always possible or pragmatic.



Interview candidates over Skype. Do your social media research when searching for executive talent. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter have replaced the town square or the men's grill as the place to go to get the real story on people you're considering. While content is king, the choices of communications media are ever-expanding. An intelligent mix of old and new is appropriate for you. Further, you will undoubtedly find that utilizing a mix of communication technology saves both time and money.

#8: Great people—regardless of age—make great companies

One of the biggest mistakes any company can make is to enable bad behavior and compromise core values in the pursuit of perceived talent. The risks are rarely worth the rewards. It's fine to hire the occasional prima donna, as long as he or she can really, really sing. But for the vast majority of executive hires, these are the traits to look for in recruiting executive talent.

- > Proven work ethic
 - Are they willing to go the extra mile?
 - Is being merely competent acceptable?
 - Is there a willingness to put in long hours if success requires it?
- > Strong value system
 - Do they have respect for authority and a sense of professional integrity?
 - Are they self-confident without being unbearably arrogant?
 - Do they have the capacity to treat clients as they would like to be treated themselves?
- > Proven or potential leadership
 - Do they have college or early work history that would indicate leadership capabilities?
 - Are they dedicated to self-improvement?
 - Do they have credible ideas for the future while maintaining an open mind to new ideas and approaches?

Horror stories about Gen Y abound in both lore and reality and we can all complain and wring our hands about the behavior of this group. But there are timeless characteristics of transcendent talent that can help shape a successful future for your company. Maintaining your focus on these attributes can keep you ahead of the competition and ensure that you have the talent necessary to succeed in today's highly competitive business environment. Generations come and generations go, but the core characteristics of success remain.

I welcome your thoughts and/or experiences around recruiting, hiring, and managing Generation Y. Please send your comments to me at alulla@lucasgroup.com.

