

Tips for Managers

Generation & Gender in the Workforce

Prepared by
Families and Work Institute
For the American Business Collaboration

Research from Families and Work Institute on *Generation & Gender in the Workforce* reveals real differences among the generations at work, including differences in attitudes, in priorities, and in action—differences that could be harbingers of problems. Fortunately, there are many actions that companies, managers, and employees can take to address and resolve these differences—and many are doing so. Here are some suggestions for addressing the generational differences in your organization:

- **Develop training programs that help employees understand and respect differences among the generations.**
 - ◆ Develop workshops that share information about how diverse generations differ and are the same. Include role playing or other experiential learning activities where employees can learn to take the perspectives of others.
 - ◆ Through these workshops, give employees experiences in addressing and solving typical problems that arise in a multi-generational workforce.
 - ◆ Include dealing with differences in generations as a part of regular management training, including managing people who are either significantly older or younger than oneself.
- **Improve the talent development system for employees of all ages.**

Our studies find that while companies may make an effort to develop the talent of new employees and of senior leaders, they pay less attention to those in the middle.

- ◆ Increase opportunities for mentoring and networking for employees of all ages. This can include mentoring and networking where older employees help younger employees, or reverse mentoring, where younger employees teach older employees skills they may not have, such as technology skills.

- ♦ In networking or conferences, profile examples of successful women and men, and those of different generations, who have followed non-traditional career paths or worked flexibly and yet have been successful. Employees need to see that there are many paths to succeed although these examples are often unknown, yet exist in every organization.
- ♦ Help managers see that developing the talent of the employees who report to them is a core organizational competency. Reward and profile managers who do a very good job of developing the talent of the people whom they supervise.
- ♦ When succession planning occurs, ensure that managers think about cross-functional experiences for the employees they supervise, rather than just “holding onto” their best performers. This will occur when managers see that the success of the organization depends on collective success, not just their own individual success.
- ♦ Reward managers who have a diverse slate of individuals for job openings.
- **Make a deliberate effort to build a culture of mutual responsibility for career development that includes employees taking greater responsibility for their own development.**
 - ♦ First determine: 1) What is the stated or unstated process in your company that employees believe they use to get help with their own career development? 2) Do employees know what that process is and do they feel that they have access to it? Make the process you want to use visible by communicating it in written communications with employees, in speeches of managers, etc.
 - ♦ Help employees become more able to ask for assistance and managers more responsible for providing it.
- **Develop career counseling and career monitoring functions in the company.**
 - ♦ Have a dedicated person or group of people to whom employees can go in order to address their own development, such as wanting new opportunities, or feeling “on the fence” about staying, leaving or advancing. In a larger company, this can be a career counseling center or in a smaller company or division, a dedicated person. These people should be problem-solvers who develop solutions that work for employees and for managers, and that prevent turnover and promote career development. It can also have an online component, where there are job postings, and Q&A for frequently asked questions.
 - ♦ Develop a career monitoring function in the company, where leaders mention new leaders in the pipeline to ensure that they receive diverse experiences and that their career development is nurtured.
 - ♦ Ensure that employees know that these function exists.

- **Create “Second Acts” or Flex-Career Programs.**
 - ♦ Pilot or develop a program that helps employees who leave for caregiving or other reasons stay attached to the company. This program should include ongoing training for employees who have left so that they keep using their skills, an ongoing connection to a mentor, ongoing communication channels with the company, and access to the company’s career information.
 - ♦ Pilot or develop a program that helps “regretted loss” employees return to the company. This program can help regretted loss employees begin with project work or by covering for employees on vacation. Include mentoring to help these employees transition back to the company.
 - ♦ Create a network of company alums to keep them attached to the company. Invite them to special events and conferences and keep in touch with them through emails, letters, and other forms of communication.
- **Develop and implement diverse career paths.**
 - ♦ Identify and create a group of positions that can be done on a part-time basis and/or code jobs within the existing system that can be done on a reduced basis.
 - ♦ Develop other flexible models for working such as flex-year programs or accumulated time off programs where employees can work full-time for part of the year at a reduced salary and then take the time they have accumulated off (such as during the summer months or non-peak seasons) at the same salary.
 - ♦ Track the effectiveness of diverse career path positions, solve problems that arise, ensure that there is no jeopardy for working in these ways, and share successes. Report metrics on the success of these new models.
 - ♦ Create different lanes for development where employees can switch on and off the fast track.
- **Improve the performance appraisal and advancement systems.**
 - ♦ Ensure that employees have appraisals that include honest feedback and that are aimed at helping employees of all ages develop and advance.
 - ♦ Make the evaluation process geared to helping employees improve their performance and make the criteria for advancement more transparent.
 - ♦ Train and reward managers on their overall performance in managing people as a core part of performance appraisals.

- **Provide increased access to flexibility without jeopardy.**
 - ♦ Track and report data regarding employees on flexible work arrangements to assess career impacts (compare promotion rates, time in position, et cetera).
 - ♦ Strengthen the infrastructure to support flexible work arrangements, including maintaining a database of information on existing arrangements that has data on the types of arrangements being used, who they are used by, and what the success strategies are.
 - ♦ Fix systems issues that stymie the use of flexibility such as focusing on headcount rather than full-time equivalents in planning for staffing.
 - ♦ Spotlight managers who manage flexibility well.
 - ♦ Create greater consistency between flexibility programs and practice.
 - ♦ Provide advancement and management opportunities for those who work flexibly or reduced hours.
 - ♦ Have a dedicated person to help employees negotiate with their managers for flexibility.
 - ♦ Hold managers accountable for addressing requests for flexibility responsibly. Incorporate discussion about work life issues for people of different ages into career planning process.
- **Address issues of overwork.**
 - ♦ Consider work life impacts of staffing decisions.
 - ♦ Create a team process where employees and their managers develop plans to work more effectively and efficiently and to reduce the amount of low-value work.
 - ♦ Create a culture of realistic deadlines. Spotlight managers who manage deadlines realistically.
 - ♦ Consider setting aside some time during the day where employees don't interrupt each other.
 - ♦ Limit the number of non-essential emails or who are copied on emails to those who need the information.
 - ♦ Set fair and realistic guidelines about when employees are expected to be "on call" during non-work days or non-work hours.
 - ♦ Address the face-time culture by emphasizing the valuing of results over face time in written communications and manager statements.
 - ♦ When people are promoted, don't simply add responsibilities to their workload, but consider reducing some responsibilities or giving them to others so that new ones can be added.