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AGE OF RECRUITMENT

Karen Evans, MD of NGA.NET discussing recruiting across ages.



Generation X, Y, Z, and Alpha. These fairly common terms may sound like something from the X-Files, but they are possibly one of the most important things a HR manager or recruitment agency should know when recruiting people of different ages. Generational gaps are much broader than you may immediately think. Not only are people of different ages at different stages at life, but they have lived through vastly different environments through their education and career. Most people reading this will remember a time before the internet, whilst many new graduates have never been without it. Many employees would have been involved in women's liberation and the feminist movement, or faced the draft, whereas others couldn't possibly imagine a world without the freedoms younger people take for granted.

The three main generational groups that we see in the workforce today are the Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Generation Y. Baby Boomers represent the massive post war spike in birth rates from the 40s to mid-60s. The boomers are commonly associated with high levels of social change, prosperity and globalisation. Many enjoyed free higher education and relatively cheap housing and living expenses, and are commonly referred to as "having had it all". Boomers will often be able to count the number of jobs they've had on one hand.

Generation X comes next, being born from the mid-60s to late 70s. This generation is more concerned about their health, the environment, and their families. Many members of Gen X have young families, have caught the tail end of the economic boom and seen the crash in the mid-2000s. Generation X is sometimes called lazy, but in reality, many members simply want to keep their head down and get the job done. Many members of Generation X will see a job as a long term commitment, but aren't adverse to changing roles if need be.



Generation Y

Generation Y is the youngest generation currently in the workforce, being born from the early 80s to mid-90s. This generation represents the highest level of racial, cultural, and gender diversity in the workforce, and have the highest rate of formal education in history. Being born in the middle of the digital revolution, they are used to instant gratification, and are often fixated on personal achievement. Generation Y has no qualms about job-hopping to bigger and better things, and could potentially have dozens of jobs over the course of their lives.

Evidentially, there is a huge different between generations. A well-rounded workplace will include employees from all age groups, and as such, a "one size fits all" approach to recruitment may not apply. When hiring, it's vital to ask yourself what you want in an employee. Do you want someone experienced and who will stick to your organisation well past usual retirement age, or do you want somebody energetic and ambitious who will launch your company to the stars before moving on? Here are three tips to keep in mind when recruiting.

Consider the best place to promote the vacancy

When was the last time you saw a 20 year-old read the Financial Review, or turn to a head-hunter? Similarly, some applicants may not even have a LinkedIn profile. When placing your ad, consider where your dream target employee would be browsing. Sometimes taking a specialist approach can be beneficial. Another thing to consider is the employee's avenue for application. Baby Boomers may be comfortable sending a hefty and well-written Curriculum Vitae, whereas Generation X may prefer starting with a phone call. On the other end of the spectrum, Generation Y may be more inclined to apply directly through LinkedIn, and use InMail as their preferred method of communication.

Use appropriate language for your ad

Recruiters regularly change their tone in job advertisements depending on the age group they're trying to reach. However, it's important to remember that the different generations look for different things in a job, so changes to ads shouldn't be purely superficial. Generation X could be looking for keywords such as "work/life balance", whereas Generation Y would focus more on "above-industry pay". Baby Boomers like to feel that their skills are valued, so using terms such as "expert" and "mentoring other staff" would be a considerable plus.

Analyse at your recruitment process

Different generations need different things from a recruitment process. Baby Boomers may be used to multiple face-to-face interviews, whereas Generation X may prefer to keep in touch over the phone. Similarly, it's important to remember that many members of Generation Y like to receive ongoing feedback, so a feedback email after interviews, even if the candidate has been unsuccessful, would do a lot for your brand reputation in the market. Remember to think about the recruitment process, and how your ideal employee would feel while going through it.

As time goes by it's easy to forget that we work in a multi-generational world, where the cultural differences are as strong as ever. Consider these when you make your next hire and you'll be surprised at what a difference it makes.