

How to manage a younger workforce

The demographics of today's workforce are changing. The workforce is getting younger, as more and more of the Baby Boomer generation is retiring. According to the Census Bureau, 10,000 people turn 65 each day. That means, if you own a company or manage a workforce, you must be able to communicate and work well with young workers.

But managing today's younger workers is often different than prior generations. This is partially because the nature of work has changed, but also because there has been a cultural shift within the generations. That means your approach to managing a younger work force needs to be different. To be successful, you have to understand the needs, desires and communication styles of the younger generation. That way you can understand your workers and more effectively connect with them to get the most productivity out of each worker.

Employ a startup culture mentality

Younger workers have been raised in the exciting era of startups. They watched Uber, Facebook, Google, Amazon and other unicorns go from tiny starts ups to some of the largest companies in the world. Beyond financial success, these companies offer the opportunity to be a part of something new and innovative. These companies have often embraced a think-outside-the-box mentality and employed limited institutional structures. Younger workers understand the dynamics of start-up culture and want to be a part of that.

You can use this to your advantage. You can create a company culture that is innovative and dynamic. It needs to be a place where workers are valued when they are innovative and take risks. Younger workers will be willing to go the extra mile for you when you demonstrate that your company has embraced a startup culture and has limited structure.

Embrace diversity

A modern workforce is not homogenous. It's diverse. It has people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures, and as a manager, you need to embrace diversity. We often have an inclination to hire people who are more like us, but a diverse workforce brings different ideas and perspectives to a job. You can use your company's diversity to not only attract talented people, but also bring new ideas. You will be building a modern workforce if you can embrace and aspire to diversity.

Give frequent feedback both positive and negative

When managing a younger workforce, you need to provide continual feedback. In our increasingly digital world younger workers are accustomed to immediate feedback both positive and negative. Many bad habits have emerged from the environment in which younger workers were raised that are not conducive to a workplace. The cellphone is an example. Workers should not be on their

phones all day, texting friends and surfing the Internet. You need to let them know right away that there are consequences for this and other types of unacceptable behavior. At the same time, you can't be afraid to praise younger workers. They want to know when their work is impactful so provide positive recognition & reinforcement for doing good work. You should go out of your way to praise them and thank them for doing a good job.

But this isn't always across the board. You must realize that it can be challenging to manage people from different backgrounds, which is the case with a diverse workforce. You might have to manage one person differently than another. You might need to more heavily praise one individual but be more assertive with another. You just need to understand that your management style must be flexible when you work with a more diverse workforce. You cannot be the same manager to everyone. It's about riding the change of the new workforce and embracing diversity.

Allow telecommuting

Technology has quickly changed the way Americans work. We are no longer tied to our desk. With a laptop and Internet connection, you can pretty much work anywhere. Long commutes, decreasing vehicle ownership and rising environmental consciousness in younger workers has increased interest in telecommuting. According to a recent survey by Virtual Vocations as much as 25% of the U.S. workforce now works remotely, and this workforce is educated, as 82% have a college degree. California is the top state in the country for telecommuting.

Younger workers want some flexibility on where they work, when they work and how they work. They want to know what is needed for success and allowed the flexibility to get it done in a way that is best for them. Therefore they should be given some latitude. You don't have to necessarily let them telecommute five days a week, but you could let people work from home one or two days a week. They will need to be in the office for meetings, but if they have the ability to be productive working remotely, they should be given that opportunity.

Provide opportunities for advancement and training

Like other employees, younger workers want the ability to gain new skills and advance. They need to be given the opportunity to grow and branch out into different areas. You might send them to a conference, sign them up for online courses, allow them flexibility to attend industry meet-ups, work with a mentor, or volunteer. You need to also give younger workers the chance to take risks and get out of their comfort zone. A worker is more likely to stay with a company if he or she knows that they are being given the opportunity to develop professionally. Unfortunately, it's not uncommon these days for people to advance their career through changing companies, and you need to find ways to prevent that talent churn. You can make a concerted effort to give them those opportunities and keep them longer by making professional development a regular part of your management mantra.

Take advantage of their technology literacy

Younger workers were raised around technology. You can use that to your advantage. Maybe you need to evaluate a new online resource, or integrate a new technology solution within your business. Most likely one of your younger workers is well qualified to undertake the task or provide critical perspective on the project. You need to embrace the fact that most younger workers have a deeper understanding of the systems, constraints and tradeoffs in the technological world. They might have a totally different way of doing something that is more efficient than the way it has been done historically within the company. They are a resource. You need to leverage it.