

IGNITING

PERFORMANCE

By Nancy S. Ahlrichs, SPHR

CAN AMERICA'S LONGTIME EMPLOYEES – YOUR EMPLOYEES WITH 15+ YEARS OF EXPERIENCE – MUSTER THE PRODUCTIVITY, INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY OF NEW HIRES? EMPHATICALLY, YES! BUT ONLY IF THEY ARE TREATED LIKE “UP AND COMERS.”

Productive, innovative and creative employees of any age require training, specific expectations (but not longer hours) and new metrics that emphasize results – not just attendance and tenure.

In today's highly competitive marketplace, it is not enough for America's Baby Boomers (ages 43-61) and Veteran generation employees (age 62 years and above) to be loyal, dependable, punctual workhorses. Today, every employee must do more than their job description.

In the corporate world, highly paid, experienced Americans are being pushed out of jobs by Chinese, Indian or Eastern European workers willing to work longer and harder for less pay. In the not-for-profit world, there has been an explosion in the numbers of agencies vying for the same dollars. Competition is competition, and it requires innovation and creativity from every employee in order to succeed.

Complicating matters, large numbers of Baby Boomers and Veterans are planning to retire or cut back their hours, and may be starting to “coast” to retirement. Their “replacements,” Gen X employees, are too few in numbers by about half.

Doing tomorrow's job by today's standards will not be enough for employees of ANY generation if we are to provide the higher quality goods and services that are more valued than those offered by our competitors. Employees at not-for-profit

organizations can and will learn to innovate – and every available employee will be needed from all generations to participate. For the first time, employers will need to turn to their long-term employees as an innovation resource.

How vulnerable is your organization?

After looking over their employee hire dates, many organizations are discovering that some branch offices or departments will have 100 percent retirements of key employees in the course of a one-year time span because of the (otherwise positive) retention of a group of employees.

Staffing plans must go beyond the present year. Even organizations with strategic plans that require developing skills need projections for the next five years follow through with both a current gap analysis AND a projection of retirements and other turnover losses.

What talent management strategies are needed?

Three strategies must be put in place:

- 1** Ensure that the right people are in place, that they understand the challenge and opportunity ahead, and that they have the skills needed to succeed. Map skill needs identified by both managers for their staffs and by the staff members themselves

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against the most recent strategic plan as well as the values of the company. Depending upon the gaps (organization-wide? departmental? individual?), a plan should be developed that includes a variety of approaches from classroom training with validation of learning transfer to book clubs, lunch and learns, pursuit of certifications and accreditations, etc. Finally, develop a recognition and reward process for those employees who meet the new skills goals.

2 Develop strategies to delay the retirement and lengthen the workspan of top talent among your longtime employees. Like recruitment, retention is a one-on-one activity. Set up metrics to determine whether retention goals are being met. After age 40-45, too many people are overlooked for promotions, projects and new positions of all types – especially if the opportunities involve relocations. Promotions and cross-departmental task force participation are the most visible signals that long-term employees are valued. Feeling valued is a major motivator for staying engaged (and staying!) on the job.

3 Rekindle engagement among longtime employees. Get your experienced employees involved! Set the expectation of both managers and employees that laurels are great – but no one gets to rest when the marketplace demands innovation and creativity! If that means getting new skills, get them – management will help! If that means raising your hand to be on a project, raise it! If that means speaking up, speak!

What metrics indicate engagement among long-term employees?

Some of the best metrics include voluntary participation in:

- » 360 degree feedback
- » career planning
- » training classes
- » mentor programs
- » job description review
- » promotions
- » project leadership

How can managers be rewarded for “going above and beyond” in the development of their people?

Managers need to encourage and make time for even their longtime staffers to attend training, participate on projects and suggest them for promotion. On a monthly or quarterly basis, employees should vote for the manager who develops them the most and in the most ways. Additional rewards (pay, non-cash benefits, time off, etc.) should be the much-publicized rewards for managers who develop all generations of employees.

Reverse age bias and ignite performance

Put age bias on the table for discussion. Provide all managers and employees with inclusion training. If your organization does not have inclusion training, contact your local diversity roundtable or go to DiversityInc.com for resources. Create a “Diversity Dashboard” or scorecard to track a range of diversity metrics, including age. Develop metrics around the hiring, training, lateral career moves and promotion rates for longtime employees, as well as career path movement, rehiring, compensation rates, and other relevant indicators of fairness.

Your Boomers and Veterans have ideas and energy. They want new assignments, training and to be mentored. Engage them and your organization will beat its competition!



Nancy S. Ahlrichs, SPHR, is vice president of workforce development and diversity for United Way of Central Indiana. Her newest book, “Igniting Gen B and Gen V: The New Rules of Engagement for Boomers, Veterans and Other Long-Termers on the Job” is available on Amazon.com.

Don't miss Ahlrichs speak on May 8 at the Solutions Summit.