

Generation X

What's all the fuss about?

We have heard much about recruiting for, working with and managing Generation X over the past couple of years. A great deal of research has been done on this generation, their wants, needs and expectations. It is essential as a recruiter that we understand what makes this generation tick. To be a successful recruiter, we must be mindful of the employment expectations of this generation, and we must be comfortable re-educating our boomer clients so that their generational prejudices don't enter the recruitment equation. We must also change our recruitment methodologies and sourcing strategies to suit, and not expect them to 'conform' to the old baby boomer ways of many of our recruitment business owners and managers. This is a restless generation, valuing diversity, being short term focussed and preferring a less structured approach. That means that many of our interview techniques won't produce the best results and certainly won't instil trust and loyalty in our candidates. Those agencies that go on to become exceptionally successful will become so because of their loyal candidate base.

Educating your clients

Work life in 2004 is about intergenerational teams. You will find boomers managing Xer's as well as Xer's managing boomers. As a recruiter, you will need to become expert at coaching your clients in interview techniques that will suit each generation. For example, boomer interviewers will take a more structured approach to conducting interviews whereas Xer's prefer an unstructured approach. Boomer clients will need to really 'sell' the opportunities on offer to the Xer's as this generation want a workplace where they belong – this is much more important to them than salary or benefits. Your clients must sell the opportunity to the Xer candidates in this way. Contrast this with Xer clients interviewing boomer candidates and they will have to take a more structured approach to the interview – this generation wants loyalty and respect for their knowledge and abilities. Without an understanding of how each generation thinks, matching clients with candidates can become a minefield.

Your interview techniques

An understanding of which generation your candidates belong to will assist you in building their loyalty. We all know candidate loyalty is essential to a successful desk, whether you run a temporary or permanent desk is irrelevant. You must alter your interview structure and techniques depending on whether you are interviewing a boomer or an Xer. One of the biggest complaints about recruitment consultants is that they don't treat their candidates well. I believe that one of the reasons why some consultants have gained this reputation is because they don't understand the expectation of their candidates. How many of you have used the same interview structure on a boomer and an Xer? Consider whether you may have been more successful if you had tailored your interview to suit the particular generation style. Remember that people buy from people like them. Your candidates will be more loyal to you if they trust and respect you.

In summary

Xers

- Take an informal approach
- Consider interviewing in a coffee shop rather than in your office (taking into account confidentiality issues)
- Take a relaxed approach to the questions
- Your body language should be more relaxed
- Be mindful of their need for short-term results – if your job is a sideways move for this candidate, you need to sell them on the benefits that would interest them such as social, team or opportunity to learn new skills
- Ask for exclusivity only when you have built their trust by demonstrating an understanding of their needs – they will not respond to insincerity in any form
- Get ready to sell them on why you are the best consultant to deal with them
- Make the interview experience FUN

Boomers

- Take a structured and business like approach to the interview
- Your body language should be less animated and more controlled

- Be mindful of their need for security, loyalty and achievement
- Ask for exclusivity only when you can provide them with a solution. That is if you are sure you can place them quickly. They will want to know exactly what you are doing on their behalf.
- Get ready to sell them on your credentials as a consultant (especially if you are an Xer)
- Make the interview experience pleasant and informative

And for those that manage teams of recruiters

Xer's abhor micro-management, Boomers respond better. For those of us that have been in the industry for a number of years, micro-management was considered the norm for successful companies. You need to change the way you manage your staff, taking into account what they respond to. Xer's are interested in the social aspect of work and as such incentivise them accordingly. Hold informal meetings, emphasise the team aspect of your organisation, reward team behaviour. Boomers want money and status. They want to be rewarded on individual achievement. Hold formal meetings and stick to a pre-defined agenda.

If you spend some time really getting to know your team and their wants and needs, as well as a general generational understanding, you will create a harmonious and successful team environment. ■



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