Many leaders in the healthcare industry have employees from all four generations under their span of control. This is certainly true at Baylor University Medical Center (BUMC), which is a 900 bed Level 1 Trauma Center in Dallas, TX. There is no single or “cookie cutter” approach to leadership. Known as the Veterans Generation, this group of employees is the most tenured of the four. The members of this group tend to be more traditional in their communication and learning styles. They prefer more formal communication and classroom style learning based on instruction. This group values hard work before fun, and they are motivated by formal recognition of getting a job done. As this group of workers retire and otherwise leave the industry there will be a significant gap in knowledge and experience that the younger generations will need to account for.

The Baby Boomers are a great group of individuals, and many of them got into healthcare because there will always be a need for it and it won’t ever go away. That is true; however, the cost of healthcare has changed and facilities need to adapt very quickly to ensure survival. The Baby Boomers have been the slowest generation to adapt to the changes required. In part, this may be related to the significant advances in technology over the last two decades, and what is commonly found as a constant among the group is that if they are producing a result, why do they need to do anything differently? Many of this generation at BUMC have only worked at this one facility, and they’ve seen it grow from a serviceable hospital to a nationally recognized level 1 trauma center and leading transplant center in the country.

The leaders at BUMC within this generational group are more of a challenge. Many are of the mindset that if they meet their targets then everyone will be happy and leave them alone. In the current environment, it is important to have continuous improvement in all areas; and putting the right leaders in place is a key part to continuous improvement.

The generation X group of employees are hard workers, and willing to change; provided there is evidence based reasoning behind it. Staff level employees understand that their roles are important to the greater organizational picture, and they don’t mind putting in extra time to accomplish the goal. They still crave a work life balance, so extra time is only on occasion and they enjoy the rewards of their efforts. Generation X employees are more technologically savvy than the Baby Boomers; however, most prefer to work alone to ensure the job gets done.
There is a transition occurring from having long term “do my job and go home” employees to employees who want upward mobility, and who want to truly make a difference.

Key characteristics of generation Y employees are that they crave mentoring, frequently ask “why,” and are the most technologically savvy of the generations within the workforce. They likely have never had to get off the couch to turn a television channel, are ego-centric resulting from having dual income parents that provided an easy upbringing for them, and in turn created the entitlement that is widely associated with generation Y. As a leader, it is important to embrace this generation as an energetic, highly educated, and compassionate group.

Meaningful mentoring is a key tactic necessary for successful leadership and effective management of generation Y employees. Historically, managers have expected employees to learn tasks to perform their jobs and deliver the expected results. Generation Y will question this tactic because they don’t trust authority. An effective and authentic mentoring program will gain trust of generation Y employees by giving them the association with authority that they crave, and likely never had from their parents as they worked long hours trying to get ahead. Authentic mentoring is to really try and pass on the knowledge acquired, and also the failures that resulted in that knowledge. The ability to tell a story and talk about the history or background of a situation is one way to engage generation Y employees in a trusting and effective learning environment. Along with being
respected at work, and receiving direct feedback on their performance, generation Y employees want their work to be interesting and to feel that their job/role is important to the overall organization and betterment of society.\(^5\)

**Research**

What motivates generation Y has been reviewed over the last decade, although there has not been much research done in the areas of gender motivation for this generation. One study done showed a slight favorable trend for females to be motivated by improving their career stature and males showed a slight propensity to be motivated by social growth.\(^6\)

While fair pay is important to this group, money is not necessarily a motivator for them. To attract the best and the brightest performers to join a company, it is important to have top performers participate in the interview and selection process. This new generation can be attracted and motivated by opportunities for growth and development at a personal and professional level. Mentoring programs are excellent ways to advertise and invite participation for these opportunities.\(^7\)

In a study performed on the important factors for motivation and happiness, generation Y ranked opportunity for advancement and free time as their top two happiness factors. Many of the survey participants felt that their current levels of free time and advancement opportunities were satisfactory. This study showed that generation Y ranked compensation as the highest motivational factor and the lowest happiness factor, which shows that work/life balance is important for generation Y in terms of motivation and happiness. This also can help explain why generation Y is very deliberate in scheduling learning activities to coincide with their life at the appropriate time for advancement.\(^8\)

A few commonalities among generation Y employees are their knowledge often exceeds their job title, they have grown up in a technological age where immediate feedback is the norm not the exception, and they have no fear of change. Many of them expect to change jobs every two years, and there are some predictions that by age 38, a generation Y employee could have eleven different employers. This presents a new problem for employers who hope to retain their best talent, and continues to put a heavy focus on creating advancement opportunities for generation Y employees.\(^9\)

Knowing what motivates employees is a key part of leadership, and while many researchers can agree that generation Y has similar motivators like respect, fair pay, and interesting and meaningful work; it is not fair to group all of the generation into a cookie cutter category. Leadership still comes down to leading the employee and not the generation that they happen to be a part of. This is ultimately determined by situational leadership, and how you lead and motivate an employee depends on what that specific employee determines to be important for them.\(^10\)

Another study performed via Facebook responses to empathy-based stories showed that generation Y employees working in full time positions were far more intrinsically motivated than externally motivated. The top things having motivational influence over this group were an interesting, variable, and flexible job along with having good relationships.\(^11\) A cultural based study conducted with over 200 participants in four countries confirmed that it is absolutely necessary to take into consideration both generational and cultural differences when determining motivational factors for generation Y workers.\(^12\)

**Conclusion**

Since this is the first time in history that there are four generations in the workforce, it would make sense that a transition of some nature would need to occur. The focus on diversity has increased in many organizations from both a cultural perspective as well as a generational perspective. As we continue to adjust to the best practices identified for leading and motivating generation Y employees, it is also important to realize where they are coming from. Generation X were the original “latch key” kids whose parents were busy working, and the parental relationship and guidance was not necessarily there. That is how generation X became very independent workers. However, it is also how the next generation’s parents have overcompensated to create the defining characteristics of generation Y. These characteristics are primarily viewed upon as negative, and should not necessarily be looked at that way. The sense of entitlement, which has absolutely expanded my own diversification and tolerance, is primarily caused by their parents’ overcompensation of attention and reward system. They want to be social because they are so accustomed to being connected that independence doesn’t seem comfortable. Technology has also made them much more aware of all of the good and the bad in the world, and for that, they truly want to make a difference for the betterment of society. Modifications in leadership styles have to be made from a director model only giving commands to perform tasks to achieve results to a participatory leader model. As a participatory leader, it is important to coach and provide meaningful mentoring to the current employees and future leaders of tomorrow. \(^*\)

**References**


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