Attracting and keeping young talent

Dal Sohal, MA

When I completed my first degree in the mid-90s, the job market was tough and opportunities for new grads were dismal. It was bliss for employers who could pick and choose from the cream of the crop. As new recruits, we took whatever job we could get. This often meant working in jobs that were low pay and low skill with the hope that as soon as a vacancy in a more challenging position came up, it was ours.

Today as I work with young adults launching into their careers I can't help to notice the significant shift that has taken place. The tables have turned. Gone are the days of accepting the first job offer. Instead, new graduates are holding out for the best proposition, which translates into much more than just the dollar figures. This has many organizations realizing that a new strategy is needed to recruit and retain the young professional.

The demographics in the workplace are changing drastically as Baby Boomers draw closer to retirement age. With the talent pool shrinking, there is inevitably greater competition to recruit and keep the “Millennial” worker (those under the age of 27) for as long as possible. So, how do you create a culture that attracts and grows young leaders? The formula is simple – promote your organization using an empowerment philosophy. Here are six key principles to consider:

**Encourage professional development.** Known as the “Me” generation, Millennials want to know how an organization will help them build on their skill set and provide constant learning opportunities. Well-defined career paths that are individualized and performance planning processes that maximize their potential are desired by young professionals who want to excel. Whether it's on-the-job training, certification or conferences, these are ways to keep them engaged, motivated and interested in their job and contributing to the long-term vision of the company.

**Provide mentorship.** Young people are climbing the organizational ladder at a rapid rate without the years of experience that was common practice for Baby Boomers. Mentorship and coaching accelerates their leadership development and readiness for greater responsibilities. Not only is mentoring a way to pass down the years of experience and wisdom from Baby Boomers to Millennials, it is welcomed by Millennials who are eager to learn from older adults.

**Support innovation.** They may be young but they want to know that their knowledge is respected and their ideas are championed. Work environments that recognize and appreciate use of creative skills, new ways of thinking and risk-taking in their corporate culture will attract and motivate the young worker.

**Have flexibility.** Not about to give up their leisure time, Millennials want to work for an organization that is flexible in work hours and arrangement. It could be as simple as starting the work day at 11am and leaving at 7pm. Or it could mean working from home. Having grown up in world where choice is plentiful, Millennials want options in how and where they can do their work.

**Be socially conscious.** More and more these days, greater emphasis is being placed on the public image of an organization and its social responsibilities beyond its own profit margin. Young people want to work with an organization that is thinking globally and contributing to the greater community. Organizations that engage in philanthropy and support the involvement of their employees to worthy causes will attract young recruits.

**Promote fun.** Last but certainly not least, young professionals want to work in an environment where fun and a spirit of collaboration are promoted. They can buckle down and get the work done, but a little lightheartedness and play is also expected. Social activities provide opportunities for employees to get to know each other, helping to boost morale and create an inviting workplace. With the explosion of online social networking, it's not uncommon to see young professionals as members of various groups that foster both business relationships and friendships.

The empowerment philosophy encourages organizations to create work environments where people feel valued, appreciated, respected and supported. A commitment to these six principles will help you to create an environment that will not only attract young talent, but keep them motivated and engaged for a long time.

Dal Sohal is Principal of PAIRS Consulting Group, specializing in leadership development of young professionals.

Copyright © 2008 Dal Sohal. All Rights Reserved.
If you would like to reprint or share this article, please send your request to info@pairsgroup.com

604.875.1049  ●  dal@pairsgroup.com  ●  www.pairsgroup.com