

## **The ABC's of Generation "X"**

By Calvin B. Ball III

In this ever increasingly diverse workplace, many are faced with the "X-Factor." Teenagers and twenty somethings are changing the face of the work environment. Those who have been in the workplace and are from different generations are sometimes at a loss for how to interact, understand and embrace this facet of diversity.

However, this like any other dimension of diversity, is just a matter of recognizing the lenses through which we see the world and not allowing them to stifle any component of either a diverse workplace or diverse marketplace. It always begins with the basics. So I have compiled this list as a starting point. Every great journey begins with a single step. Reading and implementing these strategies are the beginning of a great journey to an easing of the recruitment and retention issues involving Generation "X."

The following is a list of issues that should be considered.

### A - Acceptance

Once the person has been hired, they have already demonstrated that they have the potential to fulfill your companies needs. Accept who the individual is. Don't allow a nontraditional appearance to influence how you view individual performance.

### B - Buy In

If you want this individual to buy into you and your company, you and your company must buy into them. Demonstrate that this individual's lifestyle and needs are respected and celebrated.

### C - Compensation

This individual feels cheapened by small meaningless raises. It serves to reevaluate one's position and worth and can initiate thoughts of getting that better paying job. This is a fatal blow to your company in the talent war.

### D - Dependability

If you promise this individual something DELIVER. If you do not it will be remembered and subsequently affect morale, performance and retention.

### E - Equality

Don't allow others to get away with unacceptable behavior that this individual is chastised for. This person has very little respect for the 'old boy' network and is rarely willing to wait for his/her seat.

## F - Foster Creativity

This is the generation of creativity. If there is a more efficient, easier way this individual is all for it. This person will attempt to think outside of the box with little or no provocation.

## G - Goals

Share company goals and exactly where this individual fits in. This person wants to be an integral part in the realization of your organization's goals, but he/she is not willing to stick around if there is no perceived light at the end of the tunnel.

## H - Help

Help this person in their tasks when necessary but by all means do not micromanage. This is seen as a lack of trust and a hindrance to the individual. However, be available for help both in time and approachability.

## I - Individuality

This is the generation where in many instances all parents worked and/or this individual was a 'latch-key kid' handling many tasks as an independent part of the whole. This is what they are used to. This individual sees 'babying' as condescending and rarely appreciates it as a nice gesture.

## J - Joyful

This person desires a fun, working environment. He is willing to work just as hard and usually harder with and for those with whom he can play. They are his friends and he feels more allegiance to them.

## K - Keep Stress Down

This generation has seen ulcers and nervous breakdowns for minimal return. This individual is not willing to go into stress overload with every 'big' project or visit from a higher up.

## L - Lack of Organization

This individual does not respect authority or an organization based solely on name or title. Proof of organizational capabilities and a structure that earns respect and admiration is absolutely necessary.

## M - Model

If you want this employee to exhibit certain behaviors you must walk the talk. This individual is more willing to challenge any perceived hypocrisy. This person has much less respect for the 'do as I say, not as I do' model.

## N - Nice

This person is much less productive in response to yelling and perceived 'mean' behavior. This is the generation of the underdog and loathes bullies.

## O - Objectives

Objectives that can be set, obtained, and celebrated are wonderful steps to actually keep a 'keeper'. This individual needs to see victorious battles along the way and will work much harder for victorious wars.

## P - Perspicuity

This individual needs clarity and is more willing to challenge nebulous directions. The day of 'work harder' is over for this individual. Specific tasks, specific issues, specific areas of improvement and specific rewards and disciplines help the individual be more productive.

## Q - Qualitative rewards

This individual is less willing to work for a company who rewards with things and events that are of no interest. This individual wants performance rewards that they really want.

## R - Reviews

This individual requires regular feedback and performance reviews. There is little patience here for the "ignore and chastise" management style.

## S - Sincerity

This individual is quite unimpressed with the insincere thank you and often is angered by it. This person would almost rather hear a sincere 'your work stinks' than a phony pat on the back and total rework or scrapping of ideas and projects that she has worked on.

## T - Technology

This person is less afraid of technology. In fact this person sometimes has less respect for organizations with sub-par technology.

## U - Understanding

This individual values a work environment that is understanding of ability and responsibility levels and will offer training and other supplementary devices to foster excellence.

## V - Validation

This person is much more willing to stay and be more productive when opinions and ideas are heard, respected and fairly evaluated.

## W - Work for Them

This person will work for a boss who works for them. If a customer is behaving in a grossly unacceptable manner toward the employee, a boss gains loads of respect by diplomatically standing by the employee. If those with more seniority are acting in an unacceptable manner, the supervisor will usually get a more productive employee by working for him.

## X - Xenophobia

This person is less uncomfortable with the 'strange' or 'foreign'. This individual respects these qualities in a company. Judging the individual for musical or stylistically tastes in a performance-oriented environment often forms more of a rift and communication suffers. Embrace the unique and your organization will be more innovative.

## Y - Youth = ?

"Young fellow, little lady, boy, little girl" are all phrases that are condescending to the new Gen. 'X' employee. This is rarely perceived as positive. Many of these individuals have acquired knowledge, skills and abilities by that age that many in previous generations did not fathom at that age. Be open to the possibilities.

## Z - Zealousness must be fed

If you want passion and commitment from this individual you can get it. It must be fed like a seed. This can be your next Great Oak if you tend to it properly.

Although we may think of these issues only relating to Generation "X", the irony is the fact that these "ABC's" are truths for all generations.

Calvin is a Senior Associate with The Diversity Training Group. Any elucidation, suggestions or queries are greatly welcome and appreciated. Send them through the website and they will be carefully considered for upcoming articles.

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DTG Diversity Training Group phone: 703-478-9191 ◦ fax: 703-709-0591  
692 Pine Street ◦ Herndon, VA 20170

<http://www.diversitydtg.com>

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