Generation Y, also called the Millennials, are poised to be the next leaders. In a rare occurrence, four generations are now in the workplace and Gen Y is quickly becoming a large cohort.

Their presence is making an impact, causing employers to wonder how to best attract, retain, and most importantly, effectively harness the capabilities of their Gen Y employees.

Research proves Gen Y is distinct from other generations in ways that extend beyond their age (Source: Pew Research Centre Feb 2010). Presuming that this cohort will “grow out of it” and assimilate into the Generation X and Baby Boomer work world is unlikely. Instead, their traits will continue throughout their career and impact what leadership looks like in the future.

Many people label Gen Y as "demanding" and "self-serving," but this puts employers in a talent deficit dilemma given that these are the company’s future leaders. By understanding their work style differences, providing them formal and informal opportunities for learning, and setting clear expectations, you can truly benefit from this dynamic group.
### Practical Tips to Best Work with Gen Y

**Why your Gen Y employees behave as they do and suggestions for the workplace**

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<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Reasons Why</th>
<th>Suggestions for Employers</th>
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<td>Gen Ys have no hesitations contacting senior managers.</td>
<td>Gen Ys were raised with less hierarchy and were even encouraged to question their &quot;figures of authority.&quot;</td>
<td>Coach Gen Ys on how to handle internal politics and how to interact with senior management. Meanwhile, let executives know that when they say &quot;drop by with questions&quot; that Gen Ys will follow through.</td>
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<td>Gen Ys believe as long as the work gets done, arriving “late,” and breaks to socialize or surf the internet are acceptable and even helpful on their productivity.</td>
<td>This generation was raised to focus on the end result and not on how it was achieved. They realize that inviting peer input can help them solve problems faster.</td>
<td>Set clear expectations on work start times and what is acceptable or unacceptable on company time. Consider focusing on the end result and encourage productive collaboration.</td>
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<td>Gen Ys are constantly connected to others via the internet, social media, email, instant messaging, and texting.</td>
<td>They grew up with a sense of global community in a world where the internet has always existed.</td>
<td>Encourage Gen Ys to collaborate with others in different divisions and uncover answers and best practices. Have them reverse-mentor Boomers who are less familiar with new technology forms.</td>
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<td>Gen Ys have a strong sense of civic duty and 86% want to give back to the community. (Source: 2009 HBS Publication Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg)</td>
<td>This generation realizes life is short, due to the results of 9/11, the Columbine Massacre etc. They are seeking happiness, opportunities to help society, and more than a pay cheque from life.</td>
<td>Consider volunteer programs that allow workers to use paid-time to volunteer. Many progressive organizations are using their United Way “Days of Caring” volunteer days as a starting point.</td>
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<td>Gen Ys can be sensitive to criticism but are eager for feedback.</td>
<td>Gen Ys had parents who took self-esteem concerns seriously and Gen Ys were applauded for their efforts (e.g. “Participation trophies”). Meanwhile, school systems made them accustomed to frequent feedback and reassurance.</td>
<td>Respectfully provide feedback in private. Ensure they know the context of your comments and the link to the bigger picture. Ask for their feedback and how both of you will work to fix the problem. This plays into Gen Y’s need for an advocate and the desire to feel that everyone is in this together.</td>
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<td>Today’s new employees are not interested in following the same career path that everyone has.</td>
<td>Gen Ys were raised to believe that they could have any career they wanted.</td>
<td>Gen Ys are looking for support to realize their goals. Consider a mentor program, ideally pairing up a Gen Y with a Boomer as 58% look to Boomers as mentors. (Source: 2009 HBS Publication Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg)</td>
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<td>Gen Ys consider loyalty different than Boomers. Rather than be loyal to a company for their career, Gen Ys can be loyal to the job while they are employed there.</td>
<td>Gen Ys were imprinted with the message of multiple careers. They also saw the effects recessions and the myths of “job security.” The only “security” is in their own skills. Society has told them to find a career that makes them happy, so they will move to the next company if they do not find it.</td>
<td>Focus on bolstering engagement during their time with your organization and, to improve retention, truly understand their career goals and how you can assist them. Specifically highlight the skills they are building while working with you.</td>
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<td>Gen Y performs best if they have friends at work.</td>
<td>Gen Ys grew up with a social life that was meticulously crafted by their parents and Gen Ys have an innate sense of group belonging.</td>
<td>Consider providing opportunities for socializing with non-mandatory events on and off site. By increasing the opportunities to create natural friendships, you increase their connection to the job and their peers. This in turn builds company loyalty and collaboration.</td>
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Real Stories – Real Advice

Help! My Gen Y wants to be promoted – now! He has been in his role for a 18 months and he mentions his promotion needs to me ... weekly!
Gen Ys want to be rewarded based on their contributions, not their seniority. So set clear criteria of what promotion steps are and define what demonstrating those capabilities looks like. If there is a time requirement for being in a role, tell the Gen Y directly versus telling them vague generalities or what they want to hear.

Help! My Gen Y only wants to do the fun work, not the mundane tasks that are part of the job. She also wants to choose who she works with!
Gen Ys are used to choosing tasks that interests them as on-line groups are self-defining. (Source: Gary Hamel Management Innovation Exchange 2010) Because less interesting work is part of the job, make a “deal” with them and reiterate that with the completion of the mundane work, they are able do more of the “fun” work.

Help! I have another wasteful committee meeting run by a Gen Y. She even has 15 minutes slotted for some book review! How do I get her to lose the” timewasters” and let me get back to my job?
Gen Ys look to others for idea-sharing and problem-solving. Consider respectfully declining the added agenda item but allowing the other Gen Ys in the group to continue discussing. If you manage Gen Ys, encourage their teamwork, and involvement on problem-solving task forces, while also coaching them on the best use of everyone’s time.

Help! My Gen Y can’t write properly! It’s embarrassing!
If grammar is important, stress the reasons why; often, the Gen Ys does not think it required for the job. You may also need an alternative solution such as peer review before submission.

Help! My Gen Y thinks he deserves a company Blackberry. Doesn’t he understand that these perks are for people with seniority!
Gen Ys do not see why they should be denied productivity tools that others have since the company benefits too. Coach your Gen Y on the company policy, the politics, and the semantics of different requests. Meanwhile, if there are productivity enhancements, consider if your Gen Y can benefit. Or consider connecting the Gen Ys own Blackberry to work and partially subsidizing it for a great return on their loyalty.

Help! My Gen Y employee is “ friending” me on Facebook and wants to hang out?
Remember that you are his boss and in the end he will look to you for his promotions and clarity on his work. While it is important to know him as a person not just as an employee, I would be careful to still maintain a line where you can keep your authority. So go for lunch, chat, but be wary of the weekend social gatherings.

Fact or Fiction

With the media and water cooler talk about Generation Y, what is myth and what is reality?

Fiction: They expect a “trophy” for everything.
Fact: They want to be recognized for their real achievements. They do not want false praise and would actually find this de-motivating.

Fiction: They look to their peers for making decisions.
Fact: Actually, Gen Ys frequently look to their parents for advice with 42% of Gen Y women and 30% of Gen Y men talking to their parents daily. (Source: 2009 HBS Publication Hewlett, Sherbin, Sumberg)

Fiction: They want to challenge authority.
Fact: Gen Y is actually respectful of authority with nearly 70% of Gen Ys agree that “authority figures should set and enforce rules” versus 40% of Gen Xers who agreed. (2007 Emory University Goizuzeta Business School)

Fiction: They think they know it all and do not want to be told what to do.
Fact: Gen Ys are looking for clear expectations and guidelines. They believe the outcome is more important than the exact steps, but they crave clarity on the boundaries that they can operate within.
Implications on Learning and Development

Provide tools to unleash creativity
Allow for participants to multitask during training by providing “toys” such as balls or play-doh; this unleashes creativity and actually helps the learner listen. Gen Ys consider “multi-tasking” normal; having the TV on, using Facebook Chat, music on, and talking on the phone are considered “doing nothing.”

Provide alternatives to memorizing
Instead, consider Job aids for learning. Also make use of on-line searchable information and wikis as a resource. Growing up in a world of search engines, Gen Ys are accustomed to finding information with just a click.

Provide opportunities for learning in teams
Provide opportunities for training and emphasize the applicable skills the Gen Ys will gain. While Boomers like to be in charge of their learning and Gen Xers prefer to learn independently, Gen Ys prefers learning with team interaction. They want to know in advance what their managers expect and what the evaluation criteria is. They want to know “Is this required?” and “how will this affect my life in a positive way?”

Provide engaging activities
Gen Ys like learning to be entertaining and fun, and they become quickly bored in a learning environment that is not highly active and interactive. They grew up with the Learning Channel, video games, and Chuck E. Cheese, and learning games. Replace lectures with interactive activities and harness online and technical activities as appropriate.

Aren’t employees supposed to meet the company’s needs, not vice versa?
Because the company needs results, it needs employees to perform at their maximum potential. Also the company needs employees that work well with each other. Skilled employees who do not get along with their co-workers cost the organizations $150,000 per year because of the counter-productive effects on others (Source: Bob Sutton, Stanford 2009). This means that the organization can maximize results by adjusting to the new workforce rather than enforcing a Traditional or Baby Boomer model.