

State of the Workplace

When evaluating the state of the workplace, one cannot deny the influence that pop culture has had on the American workforce. Being “connected” is a requirement for most Americans and with that connection there is access and exposure to multiple online resources. We are inundated with information about pop culture icons. Musicians and actors, with their notoriety and wealth, have become idols to many Americans. And as the exposure to these new heroes has increased, it seems Americans’ appetite for information, photos, and videos of these pop icons have become insatiable. Information about Brittany’s whereabouts or recent activities is top news. Reality TV, a nonentity seven or eight years ago, is now commonplace.

With this shift has come changing values and mores. Acceptable behavior has expanded to new bounds. The younger worker of today has very different values from her parents. Expectations are also different.

Another important factor in the changing workforce is the unprecedented generational spread. For the first time there are four generations in the workforce – all with different expectations from their work and employers. Employers must be aware of not only Traditionalists, Boomers, and Generation X, but now Generation Y, sometimes known as the Millennium Generation. Within organizations, from a loyalty and value perspective, Traditionalists are aligned with the corporate values, Boomers’ slant leans toward Department loyalties, and Generation X has developed close Supervisor/Manager associations. Generation Y has the strongest work attachment to their peers.

From an economic perspective, the reality of jobless recoveries, continued productivity pressures, a looming skilled labor shortage, along with a global economy and the need to conserve and care for earth’s resources, companies in the US find themselves in uncharted waters.

Managers within organizations need to be in touch with all of these situations. Retention of talented and skilled workers has to be a priority. Whether these workers are 22 or 62, they make the difference in your organization. Your competition can build infrastructure, put up buildings and build manufacturing facilities, and match your technology capabilities. The only real differentiator from your competitors is your people. Talent retention is a key factor in the future success of your organization. And retention will only come with understanding what is important to your diverse workforce and providing the flexibility that they will demand. If you do not provide it, they will find an employer who will.

It is incumbent on employers to understand each Generational group, and respond to their values and expectations – understanding that each Generation has different perceived needs. That understanding will lead to an engagement situation that will allow for the employer to receive the discretionary effort that every employee has to give if they feel valued and perceive that their needs are understood.