

YOUTH AWARENESS PROJECT

BRIDGING THE GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

Best Practices Research & Literature Review Report

Submitted to:

Service Canada – Vernon
3202 - 31st Street
Vernon, BC - V1T 5J1
Tel: 545-2125

July 31, 2007

Submitted by:

Community Futures - North Okanagan
3105 - 33rd Street
Vernon, BC - V1T 9P7
Tel: (250) 545-2215
Fax: (250) 545-9831

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1.0 Background

Sparked by the BC Skills Force Initiative in September of 2005 identifying a clear disconnect between youth of today and small business employers, Community Futures of the Okanagan Valley and Central Kootenays designed the Bridging the Generational Divide - Youth Awareness Initiative, a Local Labour Market Partnership Project. This project primarily focuses on the identification, development, and implementation of “strategies” that encourage employers of youth, participants in the education system, and youth themselves to develop effective workplace practices and realistic expectations in light of the challenges of today’s labour force and multi-generational workplaces. A segment of this project is to gather Best Practices and research that provides information on:

- *Clarification of the four generations including the main differences between the generations in the workplace today*
- *General workplace behaviour of Generation Y youth*
- *Problems and issues for today’s employers*
- *Best Practices for Human Resource Management of Generation Y*

This best practices research and literature review provides the foundation for the development of two workshop series aimed at both employers of youth and youth themselves.

2.0 Methodology

The information for this report was gathered through both primary and secondary research sources. Primary research information was gathered through surveys of employers in the four Community Futures regions. This survey was designed to identify best practices that these local employers are using that have lead to success with today’s youth employees. A total of 20 employers were targeted for interviews – five in each of the four regions. It was found that overall, the responses from the local employers surveyed mirrored the secondary research conclusions. For a copy of this survey, please refer to Appendix A. A list of Employers surveyed is included in Appendix B of this report.

Secondary research methods consisted of a scan and review of literature found throughout the newspapers, internet articles, magazines and books that have been written to deal with this generational disconnect between Generation Y youth and employers. Over 100 articles and websites were reviewed and a list of the main articles, literature and resources that were used to garner information is included in Appendix C of this report.

3.0 Generational Clarification

As expected, there is a wealth of information about dealing with generational differences in the workplace available. On a daily basis, a myriad of organizations, consultants and even “youth bloggers” are publishing articles identifying the four main generations in the labour force today.

Generational studies date back to 1920's when philosopher and sociologist Karl Mannheim, in an attempt to explain political attitudes and behaviours of German youth after WWII, used the theory that groups of people are bound together by historical events. Ever since “Boom, Bust and Echo” by David Foot was published in 1996, the business world has become extremely cognizant of the effect of demographics and the notable differences between generations on their business activities. In the beginning the focus was on marketing and consumerism, now the emphasis has shifted to how the generations are affecting the labour force of these same businesses. Information once used to create marketing campaigns for products and services is now being reworked to help business owners and human resource managers understand the different generations in order to attract, recruit, and retain employees in this new world of work.

The fact that there are now four generations working side by side in the workplace and the specific challenges stemming from the latest age cohort, referred to as Generation Y, are the hottest human resource (HR) topics of the day. This new generation of workers has left many HR managers and business owners at a loss on how to understand and manage them as traditional managerial methods are just not working. While it is true that there have been multi-generational workforces before, previously employees were more sequestered from one another through the traditional and hierarchal organizational structures. In today's world the social and physical separations have disappeared and it has become the norm to have younger employees in senior positions and more mature employees on the front lines.

Research demonstrated that there is very little in the way of consensus in identifying exact date parameters used to describe these four main generations in the workforce today. As a result, it has been determined that the best way to categorize the generations is both through the approximate timeframe in which they were born and also the events, culture and influences that have affected their lives. Using numerous resources from the secondary research, the following generalizations about the generations were developed.

3.1 Veterans

There have been several names for this generation including the Silent Generation, the Matures, the Elders and the Greatest Generation. This age cohort comprises those born between 1922 and 1945 and they lived through or had parents who lived through the Depression years that had a great impact on their attitude towards life. This generation lived through World War II as children or young adults, saw economic prosperity of the 1950/1960, and were entrenched in the Cold War. Veterans grew up in a very regimented and strict education system that left little room for self expression and they also very much believe in the importance of rules, respect for

authority and patriotism. This cohort has a very strong sense of what is right and wrong and dislikes conflict.

3.1.1 Work Style

The Veterans were the “work first” generation and value stability, security and respect. Veterans characteristically seek consistency and uniformity in their work style. They prefer hierarchical organization structures and Veterans were brought up to produce quality work day in and day out without exception. This cohort saw advancement based on authority and above all respected their elders. They are used to having rules of conduct, following directions and being very task-oriented. In many cases, they are the organization historians who believe in a strong chain of command. Veterans take pride in their efforts and are extremely loyal to organizations, the majority of them retiring with the same company they started with after working their way up through the ranks. This generation feels more comfortable with hierarchy and can become very impatient with employees that are not willing to make sacrifices for the organization.

3.2 Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers numerically are the largest cohort compared to any other generation. Typically born between 1946 and 1964 and are considered the post World War II generation. Many countries around the world experienced a similar ‘baby boom’ after the war but not near the growth in North America, the USA in particular. This generation saw numerous world changing events including: the first man to walk on the moon, the revolution of television, the Civil Rights movement, Kent State, the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. This generation also experienced the “summer of love”, the introduction of The Pill, and mechanization of the household and as adults this generation had the highest rate of divorce and abortions. Women of this generation began to enter the workforce in full force creating new home and work obligations. This generation has seen a number of technological advances in many aspect of their lives but in particular the acceptance and adaptation to computers drastically changing their jobs. Younger Baby Boomers are the parents of many Generation Y youth today.

3.2.1 Work Style

The Boomer cohort is the “live to work” generation and they are the vast majority of management and owners today. During their prime work years, economic prosperity provided the Boomers with the outlook that opportunities were abundant for anyone who wanted to work hard to attain them. Baby Boomers highly value work and their employment became part of their identity even to the point of using their job title when they introduce themselves. They are loyal employees who will put the company first and see hard work as working late hours, coming in early, and sacrificing vacations and weekends to get the work done. They have witnessed advancement based on loyalty and hard work rather than on seniority, and they expect their co-workers and employers to have the same sense of loyalty and dedication. Baby Boomers have a high desire for intrinsic rewards from their work and many have adopted their elder’s (Veterans) values of loyalty, dedication, and commitment to their organization. The recession of the 1980s brought a shock to the Boomers as many of them experienced lay-offs from positions they had for years. Convinced that hard work and commitment will lead to success, boomers transitioned into entrepreneurship and hence became owners of today’s

businesses. Overall, Boomers have a strong belief in teamwork and take extreme pride in their work.

3.3 Generation X

Generation X is a term popularized by Canadian novelist Douglas Coupland used to describe people born 1965 to 1978. The name of this generation is often used interchangeably with Baby Busters and they grew up in the shadow of the Cold War, saw the first music video on MTV, and watched the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall as they transitioned into adulthood. Even without the outbreak of war, this generation suffered through the outbreak of the AIDs epidemic, exposure of sexual abuse in homes and daycares, and missing kids on milk cartons. Generation X was the first generation to be recognized as “latchkey kids” and found themselves home alone and taking care of siblings while their parents worked. This generation learned independence early in life which affects the way they behave in the workplace – they exude an “I’ll take care of myself” attitude. The decline in the economy in the 1980’s had Generation X seeing their parents laid off from jobs they had for years when companies downsized. To this generation, the promise of the gold watch at retirement from their career had become a thing of the past and they learned early that they only had themselves to depend on. This is the first generation to be encouraged to find a job they enjoyed rather than just a job for money or advancement. Entering into the workforce in an economic decline in the late 1980s, this generation quickly learned that they would not be able to replicate the lifestyles of their parents.

3.3.1 Work Style

Generation X typically is the “work to live” generation and very much looks for a work and life balance. The economic recession of the 1980 and early 1990s left many young adults in this generation overeducated and underemployed. Generation X was the first generation to not expect to be with the same company for years and years, and they are typically more loyal to *people* rather than to companies. Generation X employees strive for high quality end results, are comfortable with authority but are not impressed with titles. This generation has grown up in a world of ever changing technology and is comfortable and understands the necessity of keeping up to date on the latest technological trends. They do not expect to be with the same company for years but Generation X workers want to be competitive employees because they know at some point, their career will depend on it.

When Generation X entered the job market, economic stressors limited job possibilities and the ability to attain meaningful employment. The term “McJob” stemmed from this generation as Generation X took employment wherever they could get it and in many cases developed a very cynical attitude. As they have matured, many have taken time to develop their careers and are now in higher level positions among companies. However, due to the high unemployment in their early years of work, this generation is tentative about leaving jobs too quickly and will invest much time in research before making career changing decisions. Generation X employees prefer autonomy and flexibility in the workplace. They are efficient multi-taskers, very technically competent, and characteristically Generation X employees believe productivity should be based on the output rather than the number of hours put into a task.

3.4 Generation Y

Generation Y also has many interchangeable names including Nexter's, Echo Boom, WWW Generation and the Millennials. As with the preceding generation, exact date parameters have been in dispute but generally Generation Y includes people born after 1978 and have grown up in the 1990s. Events of this generation include 9/11, extreme violence in schools, and the War on Terror, and Generation Y has seen realistic images of these same events and more through television and media. Speed, change and uncertainty are normal for Generation Y and they have witnessed growth in 24/7 services, phone trees, globalization of consumer goods, e-commerce. This generation is also very skeptical as they have been witness to lying, cheating and exploitation by major newsworthy persons including famous personalities and political figures.

Generation Y has come of working age in a time of abundant employment opportunities and to date this generation has not experienced a recession or poor economic conditions. This generation often has "helicopter" parents who over protect, over indulge and over provide for them leading to what many have identified as the cause of the "problems" with this Generation today. Many sources have described Generation Y as having an overwhelming sense of entitlement derived from parental and educational influences throughout their developmental years.

Generation Y has had the busiest childhood managed by their parents of all the generations thus far and has grown up with very little unstructured free time. This "over-management" of their schedules and organization has left many of Generation Y youth with undeveloped communication skills and a lack of time management skills. Generation Y does not remember a time without computers and the explosion of the internet has been a key milestone in their lifetimes. Living in a world of advanced technology and instant gratification has made them impatient yet adaptable and highly techno-savvy.

Generation Y has been referred to as the most socially conscious generation since the 1960s and has embraced volunteerism in record numbers. These youth are sociable, well-educated, open-minded and achievement oriented. These youth often value life-long learning making it easy for them to grasp new concepts and accept challenges.

Studies have shown that youth of today like their predecessor Generation X anticipate having numerous positions in various jobs and a variety of careers throughout their lifetime.

A interesting example of a Generation Y youth that demonstrates the typical characteristics of this generation is Sean Aiken, a 25 year old from Vancouver, who has been traveling his way across the country working at a different job each week with two objectives. Firstly he, like many in his generation, graduated with a degree and does not know what he wants to do with life. He promised himself that he would not settle for a job that he is not passionate about, therefore he thought he would try and work in a myriad of jobs in a diverse range of industries blogging about his experiences on the website www.oneweekjob.com. Secondly, he is donating all of his wages earned to Make Poverty History – a campaign dedicated to the issue of child poverty in Canada. Employers are inviting him to work in their companies and sponsors are providing funds to support this Generation Y youth and his cause. This youth is a prime example of both the social consciousness and thirst for variety characterized by Generation Y youth.

3.4.1 Work Style & Expectations

Generation Y has become the “live *then* work” generation. These youth are multi-tasking all the time and look to effect change and make an impact. They want flexibility in work hours, a variety of job tasks and projects, and value being a part of the decision process. Generation Y does not consider work as an aspect that defines them and are more concerned with how work fits into their lifestyle rather than the reversed mentality of the boomer generation before them. These youth prefer a more relaxed work environment and employment tasks that do not bore them. Generation Y youth are used to getting everything immediately and therefore may come into a workplace with extremely high expectations and will not hesitate to display an explicit impatience if their expectations do not come to fruition in their expected timeframe. It is not uncommon to have Generation Y youth enter into a workforce and expect to be promoted immediately. Studies have shown that Generation Y workers are much more achievement oriented than previous generations and Generation Y believes they should reach their personal and financial goals (such as working in a professional job earning extremely high salaries) by time they are thirty. However, this generation also believes that their personal life comes first and they are not willing to make sacrifices of their life experiences to put in late hours or weekends at work. From a “boomers” perspective this is a contradiction of beliefs and action and therein lies the initial “disconnect” between the managers of today and Generation Y.

Titles and seniority are not factors that impress employees of this generation. Generation Y want challenging, meaningful work that impacts their world. They value team work as collaboration is second nature to them, but demand to work with credible and knowledgeable teammates.

According to the literature reviewed, Generation Y employees have definite expectations from their employers and co-workers. This generation does not want to work with managers or co-workers who are, in their opinion, close-minded, disrespectful and intimidating. Credibility is important to Generation Y and they will respect those who demonstrate effective abilities and knowledge. Generation Y want employers that can teach them, are open to their input, and will get down in the trenches with them when it is needed. This generation does not respect employers and managers that can not train effectively, assign meaningless tasks because they feel the employees are too young, and over emphasize outward appearance. Generation Y feel that they should be judged by what they do, not how old they are or how they look.

Workplaces that engage and motivate Generation Y employees can expect great contributions from these talented, influential and achievement-oriented youth.

4.0 General Generation Y Workplace Behaviour

Magazines such as Business Week, Fortune, Wall Street Journal and Time have published numerous articles on the Generation Y phenomenon and how it is changing the business world, specifically with regard to employment. Of course, every generation has had challenges with their youth. From the “Hippies” of the 1960s and 1970s to the “Punk Rockers” of the 1980s and “Goths” of the 1990s, each generation has had their “different” youth. In fact the research discovered articles dating back as early as 1972 regarding how youth of those days had “no work ethic”. These articles spoke about young adults who have become more selective and have an increased dislike for their jobs – the same issues being discussed today. One significant difference between youth of yesterday and youth of today is that in the past young people valued work so were willing to “clean up, buck up, suck up and shut up”²⁹. Today young people do not value work the same way. They have grown up in a world covered with “help wanted” signs.

Despite these stereotypes of youth employees, two things need to be kept in focus: 1) Not all youth fit the stereotype and 2) Most people out-grow their youth stereotypes. However, given the labour market situation in BC and its abundance of jobs, the tendency for youth to stay in their parents home until well into their twenties (thus requiring less financial demands on them), and the hard wiring youth have received about the world of work, employers need to recognize the factors that have shaped this generation and look for innovative ways to engage these workers and capitalize on their strengths.

Workplace behaviours have changed significantly over the generations. The majority of today's employers are Baby Boomers who have expectations from youth employees based on their own work experience when they were young. These expectations clash with the values of Generation Y, resulting in difficult work environments with high turnover of youth employees.

An interesting observation is that unlike earlier generations, Generation Y involves their parents in many of their major decisions, even after they have left home. The parents' deep bond with their children has resulted in a vested interest in the success of their youth in the workplace. By involving parents, employers can gain great allies who can encourage their children to act in the right direction when it comes to workplace behaviours.

4.1 Typical Human Resource Management Complaints

The BC Skills Report of 2005 demonstrated the frustration that employers are having with Generation Y employees. Overall, employers criticize the lack of work ethic, lack of appropriate workplace behaviours and attitude, and a lack of work skills of youth. A scan of related articles and literature shows that these complaints run rampant throughout all types of businesses and industries but the challenge has been to clearly define and understand what these complaints identify.

Within the Southern Interior, employers surveyed were specifically asked to identify behaviours they thought of when describing work ethic, work behaviours and skills. They reiterated similar themes as the literature and indicated that the desired skills and characteristics for youth employees included:

- Honesty, loyalty, ethical, integrity
- Outgoing and enthusiastic
- Friendly and punctual
- Good attitude
- Professionalism
- Personable
- Team player
- Strong work ethic
- Have a good appearance
- Ability to retain learning/training
- Willingness and quick to learn
- Ability to work independently
- Have attention to detail
- Ability to provide a high level of customer service
- Appreciation for high quality
- Ability to take initiative
- Care about the community

A common theme that emerged through the research regarded the trends of enhanced sense of entitlement, perceived lack of loyalty, and self-absorption in Generation Y employees. However the research emphasized that these traits should not be looked at as negative but rather as “different”. As was discussed, this generation has been influenced by many factors that have changed their definitions of aspects such as loyalty, time, dedication, and success so their views should not be considered negative but rather dissimilar.

4.1.1 Lack of Work Ethic

The research discussed how “work ethic” is undergoing a transformation and how the meaning of the phrase is being reshaped by desires and demands of new workers coming into the workforce. The issue of a perceived “lack of work ethic” is not going to go away; rather acceptance that the definition of work ethic has changed can help to ease the frustration employers feel. While Generation Y employees have stated that they are not prepared to put in 60 hour work weeks and sacrifice their evenings and time off for work, this does not necessarily mean they have no work ethic.

While it is true there are many youth who lack the initiative to find work activities to keep themselves occupied or will not do more than is asked, it is not necessarily due to laziness or a lack of desire. Past generations were wired to the need to “work before we play”. Generation Y sees no need for this linear type of thinking – they think in digital and circular, not necessarily buying into the cause and effect type of thinking their parents rely on. For Generation Y, “hard work and sacrifice doesn’t always return a high yield. Doing a bad deed doesn’t always lead to disciplinary action. Mistakes can be wiped out by pressing control-alt-delete.” (Chester 2005)

Rather, Generation Y typically have a self-centered work ethic. They are dedicated to completing their tasks on time and with quality but they have not been raised to take initiative to look beyond what was asked of them. In general, Generation Y employees want to know what their job is exactly and they will go about finding the best and fastest way to complete the tasks, however when their tasks are complete, they consider themselves as done. Generation Y youth have a tendency to work on a project to project basis and will dedicate the necessary hours to finish the project within the parameters provided. It was also identified that in many cases,

youth may not have a clear understanding of the expectations of them regarding work requirements desired for the task.

Work is something Generation Y does between their days off and they may not be looking past the immediacy of the pay cheque that will help them pay their car payment or buy the next and greatest techno-gadget. The research emphasized that employers need to realize what they can not change, make efforts to understand what motivates their employees, and then find a common ground that both can live with. Employers need to communicate that they understand the current job may not be the youth's lifelong career choice but they also need to clearly explain the work expectations for the youth to earn their pay cheque. The research also identified that when employers make true efforts to engage Generation Y employees, companies will find a marked difference in the youths' enthusiasm towards their tasks which will translate to an increased work ethic.

4.1.2 Lack of Appropriate Workplace Behaviours and Attitudes

To an employer, professionalism encompasses aspects such as appearances, interpersonal skills, attitude, and respect.

To a Generation Y youth, image and individuality is paramount. They do not want to be part of the crowd and self-expression through the way they dress and act is how they stand out. Battles over dress codes have been ongoing for generations and in many cases may not be necessary. For example, Home Depot requires all of their employees to wear the company apron and within reason youth can dress their own way underneath. Guidelines are provided about what is and is not acceptable and youth are happy to be able to dress how they want. Employers need to recognize that piercings and tattoos to this Generation are not a sign of rebellion, but rather a sign of the fashion today.

If a company needs to enforce a dress code for a valid reason such as safety requirements or having the type of clientele that may be offended by certain aspects of youth appearance, these reasons should be clearly outlined to the youth. Employers need to look at why they are enforcing a dress code and be able to explain to the youth why the dress code is in place and how appearance affects the "bottom line". These youth understand money and will respect the cause and effect parameters if they are informed. However, if a company is enforcing a dress code on employees who do not deal with the front line or have safety issues to consider, it is suggested that employers reconsider the reasons behind the dress code as youth interpret these regulations as a case of older people enforcing their own wishes on their generation.

With regard to interpersonal skills, youth do not always have an accurate idea of what skills are considered "good" in the workplace. Many Generation Y youth have not had the chance to mature and this is reflected in their attitude and people skills. These youth were very much coddled during childhood and "over-managed" throughout their upbringing so they simply lack training and knowledge of appropriate interpersonal skills. In many cases, these youth may not know what is meant by "a positive attitude". Employers need to bridge the gap between what the Generation Y employees know and don't know and help employees recognize how interpersonal skills will make a difference in the workplace. For example, customer service skills can be demonstrated and taught through training, videos, field trips, and role plays.

A lack of respect by Generation Y employees is another common complaint of employers. In actuality, Generation Y can have great respect for those they deem worthy. As a rule these youth will not give respect unless it is earned. Following through on statements, giving credibility to Gen Y ideas and demonstrating mutual respect will effectively garner respect from these employees. Generation Y are loyal to people, not to organizations, and therefore building sincere relationships with these employees will help gain their respect.

4.1.3 Lack of Workplace Essential Skills

Service Canada has taken efforts to identify the essential skills needed to carry out a wide variety of everyday tasks in all occupations. These skills include reading text, document use, numeracy, oral communication, working with others, thinking skills, computer use and continuous learning. Complaints from employers about Generation Y employees include lower levels of literacy, poor written skills and problems with numeracy. These complaints are very concerning as this generation is the most educated generation in the past fifty years. There are more high school graduates and more youth transitioning into post secondary training than ever before. This disconnect between the skills employers need from youth and the skill levels of youth has caused many employers to have to learn how to teach the necessary skills. Thus, employers will often look for "attitude" in their new hires and then must take the time to train the required essential skills. Understandably employers are upset that the education system has not provided youth with the skills they need for the workforce. Furthermore, Generation Y employees typically have a very high opinion of themselves and their capabilities and many times this opinion is not shared by employers.

Employers have access to a number of online tools and assessments that will help determine skill levels of their employees. Currently the Essential Skills website (http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home_e.shtml) through Service Canada provides a number of easy to use tools designed for employers including a hiring checklist to identify skill sets of potential hires and compare them against the position being hired for.

Additionally, a myriad of companies have developed online assessments and resources intended for employers to incorporate into their hiring processes to assist them in better identifying and screening potential employees, specifically regarding skills needed for the positions.

There are also opportunities to assist youth to gain skills while they are on-the-job. For example, when an employee wants to take on a huge project, employers can help them break it down into manageable tasks which will allow youth to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and take opportunities to enhance their skills.

Many publications identified that employers are still searching for "hard working" employees but what they should be looking for are employees that work "smarter" not "harder".

5.0 Challenges for Today's Employers

The human resource challenges of today in BC are creating fundamental business issues that may effect the operations and viability of small businesses. Employers need to be cognizant of the effects of HR management, workplace environment, the available labour force and then develop proactive strategies the meet the HR challenges of their workplace. Unfortunately, many small business owners are too busy working "in their business" instead of having the opportunity to work "on their business". A lack of attention to human resources could result in business closures or downsizing.

5.1 Labour Force Realities

Labour market realities and trends, including technological advances, changes in social behaviour, demographic shifts, and economic changes, are driving fundamental changes in the structure of the labour force. With the Baby Boomer exodus predicted between 2005 and 2020, the competition for human resources will only intensify.

Many studies have been published about the labour force crisis facing employers in Canada and in many parts of the world. It is documented fact that the number of available jobs will continue to increase and yet the available labour force will not be enough to fill all of the vacancies. Retirement of baby boomers is affecting many countries and it is critical that employers prepare for this situation through improving their workplace and succession planning for key employees.

With Generation Y being so technologically advanced, youth employees have the opportunity to directly compare employers and workplaces immediately through websites and electronic information. Employers that do not become competitive in the labour market will undoubtedly lose employees to other companies and face the reality that they do not have the staff to continue operations.

5.2 Multi-Generational Management

Many employment workplaces now have multi-generational workforces and will continue to have this mixture for the foreseeable future. A lack of understanding of the various generations' perspectives can cause strife in the workplace and create an "us" versus "them" mentality. A difference in values, world views and work style can set people in opposition to one another and the need for understanding and overcoming differences is critical to create positive and productive working conditions. An outcome of a blended generation workforce can be increased creativity. Varying perspectives always have the potential to bring different thoughts and ideas to problem solving or opportunity identification. The possibility for positive creative synergy among a multi-generational workforce is very high.

While many best practices and strategies are aimed at dealing with Generation Y, most of the theories can be applied across the board with all generations. Efforts should be made to accommodate all employee differences and treat each employee in the most effective manner specific to them.

5.3 Cost of Employee Turnover

Many employers are acutely aware of the costs associated with employee turnover. While turnover is inevitable, making efforts to reduce turnover through effective hiring processes and retention strategies not only saves the organization tangible expenses but also intangible costs that may not be easily quantified.

Tangible costs of turnover that can be measured include:

- Recruitment costs including advertising, time spent screening, interviewing and selecting
- Administrative hiring costs
- Lost productivity during the time just before a voluntary or involuntary termination, during the interim before a replacement is hired, during the time it takes for new workers to get up to speed and the time that co-workers must spend away from their positions to help new employees
- Costs of training including supervisory and co-worker time and the time away from the actual job being trained for
- Potentially increased termination payouts due to involuntary terminations

There are many formulas available online to calculate the cost of employee turnover and studies have shown that turnover costs can be significant and can greatly affect the bottom line of small business. The Society for Human Resource Management in the United States estimates that a conservative estimate of up to \$3,500 to replace one \$8.00/hr employee when all expenses involved are calculated.

Intangible costs of employee turnover include the mental and emotional stress on management and other staff (having to cover for a vacancy taxes energies and can negatively affect the morale of the workforce), lost employee knowledge (possibly to a competitor), customer relationships and potential public relation costs through rumors in the community from disgruntled employees or the perception of having a high number of employees leaving the organization.

6.0 Best Practices for Human Resource Management

Human resource management faces structural modifications if they are to be successful given the changes Generation Y is instigating in the workplace. Numerous publications and articles have been produced regarding the top employers in Canada and around the world. In many cases, these employers are larger companies but often the practices they implement can be adapted to smaller organizations. Throughout this section, a number of the best practices and strategies presented stem from the theory behind the practice of these top employers as well as human resource experts.

In the small sample of youth employers in the Southern Interior, all employers surveyed were asked to rate issues of attraction, hiring, retention and employee development on a scale of one to five with one being most critical factor regarding their youth employees. Only one employer surveyed reported that none of these factors were an issue for them at this time. Other issues that were noted included turnover, motivation and work ethic. This primary information did not differ greatly from the secondary research. Many of the blogs, human resource consultant websites and articles indicated that all four of these issues are critical issues for employers, and a great deal of information was found on how to attract, hire, retain and develop Generation Y employees.

6.1 Attraction/Recruitment

The research has shown unequivocally that traditional attraction and recruitment strategies do not work effectively with Generation Y. It was stressed that even companies who are fully staffed are unwise to not be constantly make efforts attract and recruit employees. With the high level of job hopping among Generation Y employees, organizations need to look at recruitment as a continual process, not a one time activity when there are openings in the company. Entire employment situations can change overnight so employers need to be constantly recruiting, interviewing and looking for ways to increase the number of applicants to their organization.

Some of the highlights of best practices recommendations from the research regarding attraction and recruitment include:

- Start in house – clarify and outline the skills, attributes, qualifications and characteristics of their ideal employees. Put as much effort into understanding employees as companies put into understanding customers.
- Locate where they are – find out where an ideal employee may be e.g. schools, drama clubs, sport teams and get connected with people who can refer candidates.
- Utilize referrals – take stock in referrals from current employees, friends, contacts and family. Keep in touch with past employees who left on good terms as they are a great source of connections.

- Think like they do – analyze and utilize where youth look for jobs, use the internet and on line resources. Submit catchy banner ads to key internet sites that youth frequently visit online that links them to a special recruitment site for the company.
- Connect with Co-op Programs – look to local schools and post secondary education organizations to identify potential work placement opportunities.
- Be creative – use their language, make it Generation Y friendly by utilizing current youth employees to help create advertisements and recruitment information.
- Look at customers – Generation Y repeat customers should be considered as potential employees as they often are experts on the products and services they like to purchase.
- Brand the company – work to promote the company as an “employer of choice”, put information about the work atmosphere, perks and benefits and positive testimonials from youth employees on the business website and in promotional material for attraction. In addition, Generation Y youth are very socially conscious and are attracted to companies that demonstrate similar social values. Raising the profile of the company with regard to community contribution and volunteerism opportunities is an effective attraction strategy.

Overall, the research highlighted that Generation Y youth do not respond as favourably to the traditional recruitment methods as generations before them. Using Help Wanted signs in the window or ads in the newspapers are not the most effective ways to attract youth. Finally, the research very much emphasized that in this labour market employers need to sell themselves to Generation Y instead of the reverse. Generation Y wants to know how the position is going to fit into their life and why they are going to want to work in that company. Companies have done this for years with marketing to customers; they can now use the same messaging to market for employees.

From the local surveys in the Kootenay and Okanagan Regions, slightly more than half identified word of mouth and referrals as an effective recruitment strategy for their businesses. A referral incentive program was offered through one business where they provide rewards to existing employees who referred a candidate that worked out for a position. This is a very common strategy that can have great benefit.

Other strategies identified by local employers included fairly traditional sources of recruitment:

- Utilizing local employment centres and Hire-A-Student
- Advertising directly in schools and post secondary education institutions
- Postings inside the business or on billboards outside of the business
- Career fairs or other events
- Internet job posting sites or the company website
- Newspapers or local publications – including using testimonials and pictures of youth employees to relate to other youth
- Being known as an employer of choice and having a good reputation with the youth
- Treating employees well is the best advertisement for new employees

However, it was also interesting to note that two employers interviewed offer scholarships to entice students to work at their companies; however there is a retention requirement to collect i.e. if youth remains with the company for the summer, they will be able to collect their scholarship.

Another employer surveyed described a recruitment strategy they called “Catching People Doing The Right Thing”. This practice includes management watching for people in the community who exhibit the right attitude towards customer service. If a manager is provided with service that exceeds their expectations, they will provide the youth with a business card and recruit them on the spot. Although this strategy is considered “poaching” it is a reality and employers need to be aware that the good staff may be solicited to other companies, including direct competitors.

6.2 Hiring

It was very clear from the research that hiring strategies must be rethought in the wake of national labour force challenges.

Some of the best practices found through the research include:

- Streamline application processes – make them easy to find and keep them simple. McDonald’s in the USA has started to print applications on their food bags and IKEA puts applications on the back of bathroom door stalls.
- Immediate response – employers should make it a practice to follow up on applications immediately (within 24 hours) even if it is just a touch base to thank them for their interest. Youth will often move on to other employers if they do not get instant response.
- Decreased wait time – shorten the time frame between application, interview and job offers. Generation Y are impatient by nature and will not want to wait too long through the entire process.

Ultimately, it is important to find the line between making the application process simple but yet making it seem like getting a job in the company is an accomplishment. A rigorous, but efficient application and interview process will screen out the less committed potential employees.

6.2.1 Interview Process

With the costs of turnover so significant, businesses need to be more proactive in screening their potential hires. The interview process is the starting point to the hire and is the best opportunity to find out as much information as possible. Generation Y youth are a different breed of employees than those before and as such it is suggested to use varying interview techniques. Best practices found include:

- Incorporating direct supervisors and co-workers in the interview. They can provide valuable insight into the type of person they would work best with. Where possible include existing Generation Y employees as this inclusion can empower and engage them.
- Varying the interview questions – do not rely on the typical interview questions so often used. Rather, incorporate questions that will lead to honest, sincere and unrehearsed responses. Types of questions asked can include:
 1. rating style where a candidate is asked to rate themselves along a continuum

2. behavioural style that lets them describe what they have done in the past in certain situations versus what they would do
3. situational style that provides insight into how they may handle situations in a workplace environment i.e. working with difficult people, following rules they did not agree with

(There are lists of Generation Y interview questions that are very good at revealing personality traits and tendencies)

- Creating a relaxed environment that will help the candidate relax but avoid becoming overly casual and turning the interview into an informal chat.

Specific best practices outlined from the locally surveyed employers included:

- hiring people who employers feel will most enjoy working *with* them (managers). – this company works to have a strong knowledge of what makes their employees like working with management and they have 50% of youth under the age of 30 making up their workforce.
- Getting youth to be upfront about other expectations in the interview e.g. availability, school commitments, other jobs, so the employers not only gain an understanding of potential issues could affect the workplace but also can provide the youth with what the work situation is going to expect from them.

6.3 Retention

As was indicated by the surveyed employers, youth employee retention was rated very highly as a factor they deal with in their organization. Employers must accept that Generation Y employees are not going to be with their organizations until retirement. In fact, the research indicated that at most a “long term” Generation Y employee may only be between one and two years. A common theme throughout the research reviewed indicated that it is imperative for employers to understand who their employees are and what desires they have. Retention strategies need to be tailored to the type of workers, even to the extent of personalization for each employee.

6.3.1 Orientation

Many of the experts in the human resource field emphasized the importance of implementing efficient process for orientation as an effective retention strategy for Generation Y employees. Much of the research reviewed indicated that retention of youth starts with how they are treated on their first day. As other generations before them and contrary to the self-confidence they portray, many youth employees have the same anxiousness and nervousness that everyone has experienced on the first day of a new job.

The secondary research unequivocally stressed the importance of having a concrete orientation for new employees. However, youth of today are looking for an orientation program that is tailored for them, suiting their learning and communication styles as well as being a personalized experience.

Research reviewed emphasized that orientation should be first learning about the company and then becoming a part of it. Site tours, staff introductions and company policies and protocols are important aspects of an orientation for new employees. All new employees need to be told precisely what the job is and made aware of expectations, limitations and enforcement guidelines. Orientation can play to the need for socialization of a Generation Y employee through introductions to staff, welcome lunches and the like. Making an employee's first day a banner event will create a warm, welcoming environment that provides the opportunity to assess what they know and find out who they are.

Strategies identified by top employers for orientation also include creating a welcoming atmosphere. One company provides the new employees with a welcome basket that includes company SWAG and other items that may be of interest to them specifically. In addition, there is a box of Timbits on their desk or at their workstation, not for the employee but rather for the numerous staff who make their way to greet and welcome the new staff member.

It was emphasized that employers need to be sure to explain why and how the new employee fits into the big picture. Generation Y employees want to know what contribution they are making to the organization. It is also important to ensure the materials provided to Generation Y employees throughout orientation fit with their learning and communication styles. Having company manuals that are hip and trendy will contribute towards faster assimilation into the company. One restaurant created a policy manual that fits into the pocket of the uniform so it can be kept handy for new hires.

Out of 19 employers surveyed, 18 identified they have an orientation process, however when questioned about the topics included in their orientation, only six of them separated orientation from training. Topics surveyed employers offered as part of the orientation included a welcome letter, tour of the facility, review of company policies and procedures, information on where to go to get questions answered.

6.3.2 Retention Strategies

Throughout the research many consultants, authors and experts identified a myriad of strategies that could be implemented in a workforce to retain Generation Y workers. It was identified that employers who truly get to know their employees and understand their hot buttons, values and outlook will be able to ignite the spark inside them and encourage their contributions to the workplace. Many of the best practices identified for retention of Generation Y employees had to do with corporate culture. Creating a corporate culture that will attract them will also go a long way to retain them.

Research shows that Generation Y is looking for the following from a workplace:

- **Challenge** – Generation Y youth are constantly looking for opportunities to grow, learn and develop.
- **Collaborative** – youth of today are group oriented and want to be included. They want to work with friends and not just co-workers.
- **Flexible** - this generation is the busiest generation ever and they are not going to give up their personal activities because of a job. Offering flexibility around scheduling to

accommodate school team commitments and other extra curricular activities will go a long way to retaining a Generation Y employee.

- **Respect** - Employers that start by giving respect will undoubtedly gain respect faster than those that make their employees earn it. Generation Y hate to be discounted just because they are youth. They want to be listened to and respected and feel that a lack of experience is not a good enough reason to discount their ideas.
- **Positive and Fun** - Creating a fun workplace can decrease boredom and disengagement. Employers can vary the tasks so each employee has a chance to do something different, vary the environment by changing the music or vary the procedure by providing clear guidelines about the parameters and empowering youth employees to find a different way to accomplish the same outcome.

Employers should work to create a corporate atmosphere were employees enjoy coming to work and they may even be more accepting of the most mundane and menial tasks.

Best practices identified to create the type of corporate culture Generation Y desires include:

- Be flexible not only in mindset but also in aspects such as work schedules and dress code. It is recommended that employers consider all aspects of their workplace that could include flexibility.
- Empower them - employers that provide clear parameters, expectations, and deadlines but also give the employees the freedom to do it their way will retain committed and creative employees.
- Provide timely feedback – provide feedback on a regular and timely basis. The yearly review process for employees does not work with Generation Y. These youth have grown up with constant feedback throughout their childhood and school and want to know exactly how they are doing. Consider quarterly reviews but also let them know where they stand on project or task basis.
- Show them how what they do is contributing to the big picture. Generation Y wants to know the “why” and they will be more likely to do even menial repetitive tasks if they understand how their contribution fits.
- Leverage their knowledge – let them train other employees in new technology or latest trends that may affect business. Let them train other generations in the way they think so that everyone has a deeper understanding of customers. Ask for their opinions and suggestions on systems, processes, feedback on their supervisors – involve them!
- Involve the parents of younger school aged employees by communicating with them as well as the employee about expectations and the company policies. Send holiday greetings to the family, invite them to be involved.
- Re-evaluate the way time off is provided - for example, consider changing sick days and holidays into Personal Time Off (PTO) where employees have a certain number of days to cover holidays, sick time, personal time, stress days throughout the year to use at their own discretion.
- Allow them to customize their personal workspace within reasonable guidelines and create a physical comfort zone.
- Use a coaching style of management as it has been deemed one of the most effective management styles for Generation Y employees.

6.3.3 Rewards and Incentives

Throughout their lives, Generation Y has been recognized in every aspect of their lives from team sports and education to accolades from their parents for the smallest achievements at home. Employers need to realize the importance of recognition of achievement to Generation Y workers to motivate and inspire them to achieve results. Behaviours that are rewarded are repeated. Making the switch from punishing the undependable to recognizing the dependable can go a long way towards repeat positive behaviour. Recognition contributes to loyalty, creativity and encourages desired behaviours. The most important considerations of recognition include personalizing and tailoring the acknowledgement to the employee and keeping the acknowledgment inline with what performance or behaviour is being recognized. Generation Y like to have their accomplishments noted by others so making recognition public in nature can be very effective with youth employees. Most importantly, recognition needs to be timely and specific. Implementing a recognition program in the workplace does not need to be expensive. Recognition can include everything from an informal thank you for a specific task well done to implementing a suggestion in the workplace and ensuring everyone knows who made the suggestion.

Financial rewards in the form of cash bonuses, gift cards and the like are also effective recognition strategies. One example was giving a gift card to a music store to an employee who had a tough shift due to someone else phoning in sick. When asked whether this person wanted an extra \$50 on their cheque or an instant \$20 gift card to a favorite store, the gift card was chosen and valued much more than money.

The pitfall of rewards can be how it creates expectations and de-motivates staff if they are not receiving what they have come to expect. Employers need to find the balance between rewarding all behaviours and recognizing significant behaviours that go above and beyond expectations.

6.3.4 Compensation and Benefits

As many Generation Y employees are admittedly working for the pay cheque, one way to get them engaged in their job is to give them a vested interest in the profitability or increased efficiency of the company. Tying compensation bonuses to meeting targets and sales goals will help motivate employees to see how they are part of the overall picture and increase their efforts to help meet these goals. If the company makes money, so do the employees. Employers who rethink the compensation factor and change the thought of linking compensation to productivity or skill advancement instead of positions will be able to retain Generation Y employees who see how enhanced performance will benefit them monetarily and encourage them to achieve these increases.

In many cases, money is not the most important consideration for Generation Y as many of them are still living at home or are still somewhat supported by their parents. However financial compensation is still quite high on their list. Employers need to have a solid compensation strategy that may not include the highest wages but includes perks and benefits

that appeal to Generation Y youth. Perks can include discounts on products, tuition reimbursement, and to encourage retention offering retroactive increases at the three month mark that date back to their first day.

As each employee is different and may not value the same benefits as the next and it is important to recognize what perks and benefits would be attractive to each employee. Some organizations are providing a “cafeteria style” of benefits that offer a range of benefits letting employees choose those that mean the most to them.

6.4 Employee Development

An effective retention strategy is providing the opportunity for employee development. Generation Y value lifelong learning and organizations that provide ongoing training and learning opportunities will have an advantage in retaining youth employees. These youth want to see the connection between the skills they learn today and the skills they will use tomorrow.

Generation Y have grown up with interactive media that combined education with fun and they expect learning to be a part of their lives. Many best practices were identified regarding the employee development and how employers should invest in learning opportunities for their staff. Best practices and recommended strategies found throughout the research included:

- Customize training plans and then allowing employees to put their new skills to use in a timely manner is greatly appreciated by Generation Y.
- Personalize and develop customized learning plans that fit with the learning style of the employee. Training must engage and be done in a manner that Generation Y appreciate. Employers should work to find out what the employee wants to learn and help them incorporate it into the workplace.
- Communicate exactly what is expected of them for their current position but recognize that many also want to know what is necessary to advance to the next level and most likely in an immediate fashion. Employers who can demonstrate career advancement opportunities within the company will have an advantage in retention of Generation Y employees.
- Utilize training methods that are engaging, fun and fast paced. Youth today are so technologically adept that simulations, e-training and hands on scenarios are more effective training tools. Training should also be in short bursts and repeat key messages.
- Build skills versus “dumbing” down the job. Generation Y employees do not want to be talked down to because of their youth.
- Let them apply the skills they are learning as they learn them. Train these employees in a just-in-time fashion.
- Reward skill development and take the time to acknowledge when they have mastered something well or quickly.
- Offer challenging assignments. Generation Y need to be challenged, however some may have overestimated their abilities. For example, if they want to take on a huge project on their own, provide them with smaller goals to reach and as each is met, provide them with increased responsibility.

6.4.1 Mentorship

Much of the research indicated that the “buddy system” or a “mentor” is an effective tool to encourage and develop Generation Y employees. An effective strategy is to provide new hires with a “mentor”, a longer term employee who knows the ropes and can provide support to the new hire. Mentors can answer those questions youth do not want to ask their bosses, can explain in worker terms what is going on with management, and be the friend at work.

Some organizations set up their new employees with a mentor to help them learn the ropes of the organization while others pair up youth employees with others to help them learn new skills in order to advance in the workplace. Mentorship was said to work best when different generations are paired together as it provides Generation Y with leadership and guidance from a more seasoned employee but also works to bridge generational divides in the workplace. It was mentioned by one of the employers surveyed that it is best not to pair up friends together in the workplace as this may lead to an unbalanced relationship. Mentorship should not be overbearing for Generation Y but rather should empower them to try new skills with enough guidance so as to not get off track.

Employers can also consider “reverse mentoring” by providing youth with the opportunity to mentor older employees in areas of new technology and trends that are required in particular industries and business.

7.0 Conclusion

Overall the results from the locally administered surveys supported the abundance of literature available regarding dealing with Generation Y employees. It is extremely clear that traditional management styles need to be adjusted accordingly to deal with this new labour force and all generational differences are not necessarily in the way they think but in the way they are managed. Employers that can determine the hot buttons of their Generation Y employees will have an increased chance of success in this highly competitive labour market.

Appendix A

Employer's Survey

Youth Awareness Project Bridging the Generational Divide Employers Survey

City/Region: _____

Employer: _____

Contact Name: _____

The theme of youth being a challenge as employees has resonated throughout many studies and articles as employers emphasize their frustration with and inability to understand the motivation and skill level of youth applying for jobs in their workplaces. Given this situation, Community Futures has designed a project that focuses on the development and implementation of "strategies" that will allow employers of youth to develop workplace practices and realistic employee expectations. As part of this process, we are interviewing employers who are known to hire youth so that local knowledge and best practices are collected.

Thank you in advance for participating in this survey. Please note that information about the individual employers will not be publicized in a manner that will allow for specific identification of individual organizations.

1. What percentage of your workforce are youth under the age of 30? _____
2. Please rate these issues you deal with regarding youth employees in order of significance starting at 1 being most critical? If these issues do not apply, answer N/A.

Attracting _____
Hiring _____
Retaining _____
Employee Development _____

Are there other specific issues you deal with that are not listed above?

Other _____ Rating of
significance _____

3. What specific advertising strategies/techniques do you use to attract/recruit youth employees?
4. Tell us what kind of duties/jobs do you generally hire youth for? (e.g. customer service, front end reception, entry level or more advanced positions etc)
5. Do you have a formal orientation process for new employees? Yes or No
If yes, please give examples of the types of orientation topics included.
6. What training methods do you use for new employees?
7. What is your turnover rate – specifically with youth employees?

8. What would you say would be the most important characteristics of employees to work in your organization/business?
9. What would you consider to be best practices to attract, hire, train and retain youth employees?

Other Comments:

A main aspect to this project is the development of a workshop series for employers including aspects such as an understanding of today's youth as well as strategies and tactics that could be implemented to help create an effective workplace for both youth employees and business owners/managers. To assist in this workshop delivery we are asking employers the following two questions:

1. What would most attract you to this particular workshop series (eg topics, length of workshop, cost, knowledge gained)?
2. What would be the best day and time for you to attend workshops?

Appendix B

List of Employers Surveyed

List of Employers

Boyd Auto Body & Glass
Canadian Tire (two locations)
Dairy Queen
Excell Service
Kal Tire
Kootenay Country Co-operative Store
Lillie & Coho
LocoLanding Adventure Park
London Drugs
Mitchell's Supply
Simply Delicious
SL Resorts
Starbucks
Sutherland Global Services
TD Canada Trust
Universal Specialties
Valu-Plus Foods Ltd

Note: Two survey respondent requested total anonymity

Appendix C

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