

same thing, doesn't necessarily mean he or she is a day smarter or wiser. Our benchmarking tests for press operators show that, on average, knowledge plateaus at ten years of experience.

By comparison, according to the *PIA/GATF Profit Ratios*, a profit leader, on average, spends twice as much on education and training as profit challengers. A study by the Printing Industries Association of Australia reached the same conclusion: "Superior performers universally show evidence that they manage their people with care...as evidenced by training-person days per year."

#### Why does training pay?

- Increased employee loyalty/morale
- Enhanced customer confidence
- Increased capacity to adopt new technology/methods
- Increased productivity and efficiency
- Less waste and re-runs
- Fewer lost-time injuries
- Ability to take on more responsibility sooner
- Cross-training/flexibility

Many of the training topics in the near future will be familiar ones, like required safety training, how to use new software and equipment, and new employee orientation; however, I expect more of a focus in the following areas:

- Database skills for those working with asset management and variable imaging
- Digital workflow knowledge for CSRs and clients
- Troubleshooting skills for press operators (the higher hourly costs of automated presses has made this more important than ever)
- Digital and variable-data printing knowledge for account managers and others
- Mailing requirements and start-up knowledge
- Color management skills in the pressroom
- The application of lean manufacturing concepts
- Process control knowledge and skills in prepress and the pressroom
- Getting more pertinent and timely data from management information systems, particularly in connection with JDF and computer-integrated manufacturing
- Supervisory skills (poor supervision is said to be the number one reason GenX employees leave their job.)

#### Delivering Training

We have been led to believe over the last half decade that there is a major shift in how training is delivered. Computer training was going to take over. However, *Training* magazine's 2005 *Industry Report* (December 2005 issue) shows that 70% of all formal courses in industry are still provided in classrooms. I would speculate that the percentage is higher for our industry. Classroom training removes work distractions, allowing class members to share insights, and makes it easier for instructors to evaluate a trainees' grasp of concepts and skills. Even the most computer-savvy companies find that traditional methods work the best for most topics.

The amount of instructor-led remote training, via such things as Web conferencing (webinars), is growing. About 16% of courses are being delivered across American industry this way, and the choices for this type of training has certainly increased in our industry. The instructor interaction is less than with classroom training, and the topics have to be relatively short in duration. On the other hand, it is a low-cost way of bringing employees together to learn about a focused topic (such as the upcoming PIA/GATF December webinar on how to effectively add soft proofing to your workflow).

It's pretty clear that when online learning is being used, it's not being used anywhere near as much as it occasionally seems. For example, only 8% of all organizations in the above survey said they use online learning to deliver training in computer programs and systems. This was one of the training areas that showed the highest use of online training. And yet, it certainly has its role. Prepress Training Solution has been offering online application-specific training to prepress specialists for over five years.

The growing consensus is that a blended approach—using classroom and computer training—is generally the best approach. Instead of coming to class unprepared, for example, trainees can receive an e-learning primer, or e-learning can extend the learning experience after a class is over. The question for companies is how much of each method to use and for what purpose.

Aside from the methods of delivering training, the larger question is which printers in the next couple of years are going to approach training with the knowledge that it's integral to their future success. It's discouraging to know that only a minority of printers will, but those that do will be repaid many times over.

For more information on the PIA/GATF's wide range of training programs, visit [www.GAIN.net](http://www.GAIN.net).

## Recruiting Gen X and Millennial Employees to Grow Your Business

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For graphic communication companies, recruiting talented personnel will continue to be a key to success in upcoming years. One characteristic common among great businesses—regardless of industry—is a strong culture and a capable workforce. With so much attention given to JDF and the digital smart factory, one might conclude that a strong workforce can be substituted with technology. That couldn't be further from the truth. Businesses that position themselves for growth are focusing on building a dynamic business culture for understanding and recruiting today's employees.

Presently, there are four generations of employment age. They are generally classified as Matures—those born prior to 1946; Baby Boomers—those born between 1946–1964; Generation X—which includes those who were born between 1965–1980; and Millennials—those born between 1981–1991. Each generation possesses recognized characteristics, largely stimulated by cultural influences during their formative years. The workforce of each generation demonstrates differing values and work habits. Those who understand the uniqueness of each generation will have greater success in recruiting and retaining the best workers.

While every individual is unique, influences during the formative years have shaped each generation in particular ways. For example, those who lived through the great depression demonstrate greater frugality than their children. Likewise, today's high school graduate has a unique appreciation for immediacy of communication and information, and is impatient with anything which hinders that speed. The goal of this article is to help graphic communication professionals understand the characteristics of Generation X and Millennial employees, as well as recruit, motivate, and retain those employees for greater productivity in the years ahead.

### Generation X

The term *Generation X*, or *Gen X*, was popularized after Douglas Coupland published his novel titled *Generation X in 1991*. In his book, Coupland fictionalizes a rather angry, disenfranchised, arrogant society of young people. Coupland's story focused on characters that were largely over-educated, under-employed, and chose to forgo the pursuit of position, money, and social status. The 51 million U.S. members of Generation X are between the ages of twenty-six and forty-one today. Gen Xers grew up as latchkey kids, with nearly 40% from divorced families. This generation thinks differently than their Baby Boomer parents, sometimes giving the appearance of a weaker work ethic.

Gen Xers work to live, not live to work. The work ethic of Baby Boomers, striving for prosperity, isn't inherent in Gen Xers. They are entrepreneurial and technologically savvy—being credited for the dot-com boom in the late 1990s. They view their jobs within the context of a contract. As such, employers must recognize their level of commitment and offer clear, consistent expectations and opportunities for professional growth and intrinsic rewards. When possible, providing Xers with the opportunity to be innovative will reap rewards and motivate these individuals. Gen Xers appreciate variety and seek fulfillment in their work while maintaining a balanced lifestyle. Their interest in outside activities can be interpreted as aloofness in the office.

When understood, the experienced manager learns the interests of Gen X employees and leverages their strengths for corporate benefit. Engaging Gen X employees in challenging and opportunistic ventures will help them see relevance in their job. Educating them about the entire business and letting them see their role will help, too. Gen Xers look to companies to provide benefits beyond monetary reward, including comp time and professional growth opportunities.

Generation X employees can be invaluable in working with Millennials. Seniority as a system of promotion doesn't feel natural to Xers. Instead, they see performance as a better measure of management readiness. They have seen their peers run

multi-million-dollar businesses in the dot-com world and see no reason why they can't have supervisory influence. Providing these challenges earlier in their career is important in order to motivate Gen X employees.

### Millennials

*Millennials* are the youngest generation entering the workforce today. They are also called *Generation Y*, *Generation Why*, *Generation I*, *Net Generation*, *Echo Boomers*, *Nintendo Generation*, as well as other names. The term *Millennial* was first coined by William Strauss and Neil Howe, who have written extensively on generational differences. The term was also used in an early ABC News survey asking the youth about their preference for a name for their generation. Interestingly, they preferred "Millennial" over "Generation Y" 4:1, giving some insight to the differences of the two generations. The 75 million U.S. Millennials are between fifteen and twenty-five years of age today.

Millennials are quite different from earlier counterparts. They are characterized by believing they can positively change their world. They are optimistic about their future and the world's future. They are particularly environmentally conscious, which can be of benefit or detriment to working in a printing company, depending on corporate values. For those companies pushing for sustainable practices, Millennials will enjoy the challenge of making print greener.

Millennials live in the moment. They were raised in a much faster environment than their predecessors. They rely on the immediacy of technology, having grown up in a menu-driven society. Information was more readily available to them, and they have mastered multitasking. Email is too slow for Millennials. They grew up with cell phones, instant messaging, and text messaging. They can engage in multiple activities nearly simultaneously, including carrying on a text-message conversation on their cell phones during meetings. They are very impatient with anything that is slow and deliberate, especially if it is not entertaining. They have less tolerance for background knowledge and operate on a need-to-know basis. Their curiosity takes a back seat to the immediacy of accomplishing a task.

Millennials are more diverse demographically. They are very tolerant of alternative lifestyles and mixed families, but tend to question everything. In the workforce, the strategic manager will help the Millennial see how their work is a critical part of the greater good. They prefer a casual relationship with their manager. Millennials value mentorship over autocracy, and they can be a key ally when relevance is clearly stated.

### Managing Gen Xers and Millennials

The goal of any organization is to have employees exhibit "ownership." Nothing is better than to hear an employee talk with pride about "our company." To achieve this level of commitment, one must understand today's youth and develop a culture that will be attractive to younger employees while maximizing the return for the business. Here are some specific suggestions:

- *Accept and exploit each employee's unique characteristics.* Gen Xers and Millennials have qualities that may seem negative when viewed through the lens of a baby boomer. However, with strategy, these qualities can be exploited to take advantage of them. For example, Gen Xers tend to resist the status quo. They seek to be differ-



ent. Some would view this as not being a team player. However, exploiting this nature can be useful in investigate new markets or processes. Use the Gen Xer to bring fundamental change in those areas that need change.

- *Educate them about your business.* Younger employees are discontent with fulfilling their job duties and going home. Many have high expectations for “making a difference.” They want to know how they fit into the bigger picture. They seek impact. Educate Gen Xers and Millennials about your business for greater buy-in. Provide specific examples of how the company is working toward the greater good.
- *Offer opportunity and challenge with specific deliverables.* Gen Xers, with their entrepreneurial spirit, and Millennials, with their great desire to make a difference in the world, seek opportunity for growth. If a Millennial seems impatient with the speed of advancement, give him/her responsibility over a small, but significant, project. Ask the individual to develop specific goals, identify deliverables, and set a timeline. This can be as simple as asking a roll tender to explore methods for improving movement of paper. Assigning a mentor can aid in the process, though care should be exercised in finding the right person who understands and can appreciate their differences.
- *Set clear and high expectations.* Younger employees are accustomed to specificity. It begins early in their schooling, where educators have catered to their demands for step-by-step instruction. Therefore, Millennials in particular don’t do well with ambiguity or loose instructions. Providing clear expectations will result in clear outcomes and actually be preferred by the employee.
- *Provide frequent and immediate feedback.* Both Gen Xers and Millennials were raised with instant access to information. They are accustomed to frequent and immediate feedback. One of the best retention tools to use with employees is honest communication and feedback. The lack of clear and relevant feedback can be a huge source of frustration for employees, and is ranked as one of the primary reasons for leaving a job.

### Those Irritation Points

Focusing on the positive qualities of each generation will allow your business to work well with younger employees. However, there will always be friction points, particularly when viewed through the lens of the Baby Boomer. Realizing and developing reasonable policy, which ensures the interests of the business environment without discouraging the individual employee, is important. There are at least four areas to focus policy.

- *Appearance.* Generation Xers are particularly interested in making a statement in their dress. Tattoos have become mainstream among even the mildest Millennials. It is important that you focus your appearance policy on safety, customer perception, and efficiency in the workplace. Beyond that, providing as much freedom as possible will lead to increased satisfaction with younger employees.
- *Work hours.* Gen Xers and Millennials alike have adapted to a later schedule. Unlike your agrarian parents who

awoke at daybreak, Gen Xers and Millennials grew up staying up late, often surfing the Internet, communicating with friends, or playing video games. We hear of many dot-com start-ups operating on nontraditional work hours. Instead of 8:00 to 5:00 business hours, dot-com companies would start work and noon and work well into the late nights. Many Gen Xers and Millennials would prefer flexibility in work hours. This flexibility in print environments may not be functional but it is worth considering if you want to make a Xer- and Millennial-friendly workplace.

- *Outside interests.* Gen Xers and Millennials aren’t married to their job like Boomers, and, particularly, Matures. They have many outside interests. Recognizing those interests and offering flexibility and support to pursue those interests is important to attract a strong, youthful workforce.
- *Electronic communication and personal gadgets.* Set reasonable rules for personal communication devices and other electronic devices like iPods. Millennials, in particular, love their iPods, cell phones, and instant messaging. For Boomers, the cell phone is primarily a business tool. For the Millennial, the cell phone is a social tool. It is as much a part of their daily lives as the automobile. Millennials have mastered multi-tasking—text messaging their friend while completing a complex task. However, these devices can also be very distracting and result in reduced productivity or errors. Establishing clear guidelines on the use of cell phones, text messaging, email, Internet use, iPods, and instant messaging will help avoid conflict and improve productivity.

### Recruiting the Great Ones

Once you have developed an understanding of the differences in work habits of Boomers, Generation Xers, and Millennials, you are prepared to recruit those who will make a positive difference in your business. But, perhaps you have made the mental leap, buying into the fact that diversity can improve your business. Will your business improve by recruiting employees who think like you? Or, can you benefit by recruiting young talent who thinks and acts differently than you, even if it creates some tension points?

To be successful in recruiting and retaining a strong young workforce, determine how much latitude you can provide to entice the great ones. It may require you to assemble a taskforce to determine how much flexibility you can realistically provide without negatively impacting your productivity. Consider the dot-com movement—the workplace rules were thrown out the window as Gen Xers started work at noon, wore tattered jeans and scruffy shirts, sat at their computers writing code until midnight, playing loud music the entire time. The Gen Xers “owned” their workplace and had full buy-in. You may consider altering your culture to and experiment with new ideas.

In the continuous improvement world, we talk of incremental improvement and breakthrough improvement. Incremental improvement focuses on a steady slow path of making small improvements. Breakthrough improvements focus on completely reinventing a process or culture. Both are important. But many print firms are in need of breakthrough improvements. Paradigms need to change. Youth can bring in a new perspec-

tive, but only when the culture promotes new ideas and breakthrough improvements.

Consider a structured development program. A clear path of growth is a powerful recruiting tool. In printing, there are often long paths to promotion. Wherever those paths can be reasonably shortened, therein lies a powerful recruiting tool. If your organization can provide a structured development program, or a clear path of growth, you will have great success attracting new employees. Further, you have the opportunity to educate them about your business and integrate them into your culture. Early career employees, while less experienced, are also more adaptable and bring fewer preconceptions into their business career.

### Conclusion

Regardless of age or generation, we all are looking for the same outcome from our work experience. We are looking for the ROI of employment—relevance, opportunity for growth, and interest. For any position to be personally rewarding, it must be relevant to individual values and congruent with the individual's view of importance. Second, individuals are looking for opportunities to grow, both professionally and personally. A “dead-end” job means that all the learning and growth is finished. Gen Xers and Millennials need additional opportunity to cultivate new skills and add to their knowledge base. They welcome professional development opportunities that will add valuable bullets to their résumés. Finally, employees are looking for interesting work. The more interesting it is, the more enjoyable it is.

As a business professional, you may be able to recruit and hire the great ones. However, in order to offer a strong ROI to prospective employees, you may have to change your business culture. It may entail changing company policy, or at least asking the questions that may lead to change. These changes may occur slowly, and they may not be easy, but building a youth-friendly work environment may attract a new generation to your workforce. You shouldn't throw all the rules out. But you will need to reexamine your policies, constantly asking the question, “Does this policy truly improve productivity and inspire buy-in?” You may find that some of your practices discourage Gen Xers and Millennials from thriving in your business. It helps to follow one of seven habits from leadership guru Stephen Covey: “Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” Bring the generations together by recognizing and valuing their differences. Great companies will solidify future growth by recruiting and retaining Generation X and Millennial employees today.

### References:

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## From the Classroom to the Printing Plant: GAERF Prepares Today's Students for Tomorrow's Workforce

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For over two decades, the Graphic Arts Education and Research Foundation (GAERF®) has been a vehicle for channeling significant funds into worthy projects that advance knowledge and education in the field of graphic communications.

Initially created as a grant-making organization, GAERF has awarded over \$4.5 million in funding to finance projects that cut across all educational levels—from elementary schools to high schools to post-secondary institutions and beyond. Elementary school and high school students have used GAERF funds to produce their own magazines. High school instructors and college professors have expanded their skills so that they can deliver the latest knowledge to their students by attending GAERF-sponsored teacher institutes. Since 1997, GAERF has supported the extremely popular GRAPHIC COMM CENTRAL web portal created and maintained by Virginia Polytechnic and State University. Teachers, students, printing industry personnel, and others looking to connect with the graphic communications education community visit this site on a regular basis.

In 2000, the foundation announced a major expansion by assuming management of PrintED—a national accreditation and certification program for graphic communications courses of study at the secondary and post-secondary levels. To date, 167 programs in thirty-two states have been accredited, and forty-five additional institutions are candidates for accreditation.

Since the launch of certification examinations in 2004, 285 certifications have been issued, providing businesses that hire a certified PrintED graduate assurance that the individual has attained a valuable level of knowledge and skill sets.

In late November, GAERF announced an important new alliance that will benefit industry employers nationwide, as well as schools and teachers working to develop tomorrow's workforce. The foundation formed a strategic partnership with the National Occupational Testing Institute (NOCTI) and the Multistate Academic and Vocational Curriculum Consortium, Inc. (MAVCC) to develop a comprehensive educational package. The package will consist of a complete system that begins with the administration of a NOCTI pre-assessment to establish baseline knowledge and skills of the students. Using the MAVCC guidelines, a teacher can deliver a comprehensive curriculum and focus on areas of need discovered through the pre-assessment. The system concludes with administration of a PrintED Certification Assessment. A program has the option to participate in any or all of the components.

In a nutshell, notes GAERF Chairman Randolph W. Camp, CEO of Walton Media Services in Monroe, Georgia, “This three-way alliance enables graphic arts educators all over the country to take advantage of a defined process that will document student learning from pre-assessment of student knowl-