

How to Manage X'ers

Some of the X'ers' characteristics exasperate the baby boomers, but with the right management and motivating techniques, this energetic, creative, and often enthusiastic generation is ready to contribute and has much to offer. They are well suited to today's diverse, global, and high-tech environment. The following methods are particularly productive for managing and working with people under age 30 and can be applied to relating to them in general.

1. Accept Them. Accept them and learn to work with them, rather than fight them. Showing that you don't like them only creates conflicts and turnover. Don't refer to this generation in negative terms or use such expressions as "you people" or "your generation." Eliminate expressions such as "when I was your age . . ."

2. Use Love and Caring. X'ers need to be shown that you truly care about them as people. They often did not get this from their own parents. They need to know that they matter. To them, talk is cheap. A key to motivating them is to show you care or appreciate them. But be careful: they hate anything that smacks of phoniness and can spot it a mile away.

3. Support Them Outside of Work. Show you support their difficult personal situations. Keep in mind that people pay attention to what hurts them the most emotionally. This is a difficult time for young people. Many times, they don't have anyone who will listen, and they will appreciate and reward those who do.

4. Don't Baby Them. Generation X'ers crave care and concern. They want you to guide them, but they also want to be seen as indepen-

dent and self-starters. They don't want anyone to see them being babied, as this conflicts with their independence and embarrasses them. At the same time, they love the strokes. Once you've proven yourself as a caring manager or coworker, you have won them over.

5. Hands Off, but Be There. Give them some freedom and independence. This may seem a bit of a paradox, as this group likes interaction with managers. Don't micro-manage them. Empower them to make decisions, but let them know how far they can go before consulting you. Set goals with them, and let them create the plan to attain those goals. X'ers get a tremendous amount of satisfaction from creating, analyzing, and solving. They crave stimulation, so you must vary the challenges to keep them from getting bored.

6. Ask, Ask, Ask. Another key to managing Generation X'ers is "management by asking questions." Rule #1 is Don't ask unless you have time to listen to the answers. Rule #2 is Don't ask X'ers unless you are willing to implement the changes based on their answers.

Asking lots of questions and implementing solutions based on those answers does three things with this generation. First, it shows that you value and respect their opinions. Second, it gets them involved and participating in decisions, which they love. Third, it builds loyalty and commitment. X'ers feel that the ideal boss is someone who listens to their ideas.

7. Discuss Your Methods. Explain to them how you like to manage, communicate with them, and evaluate them. By discussing matters ahead of time, you gain a lot of insight. Ask what they liked or disliked

about the way they were treated by previous managers, coworkers, and teachers. Tell them how your methods compare. This gives you a clue about which of their buttons to push and which to avoid.

8. Train and Orient. Meet with X'ers often—even daily. You need to know if they are having problems, where they need help, and if they are happy with their jobs. Training is a key motivator. They look upon it as a way to learn a new skill or behavior that makes them more marketable. X'ers have a strong desire to learn leading-edge technology that will increase their worth. Find out what areas they need development in and what their career plans are. Target training to those areas. Develop mentoring programs, too. This increases their loyalty and keeps them on board longer.

9. Set Specific Standards. It is critical to write out the specific standards of behavior, responsibilities, and policies you expect. This generation is not irresponsible, as some boomers think. Rather, they are simply new to the workplace and haven't been taught enough about responsibility. They will get things done but must know the task at hand. There is a testing period for some to see what they can get away with. Don't overreact.

10. Make Work Fun. Make the workplace as much fun as possible. Sales contests and games work well. X'ers enjoy social events. Family picnics, holiday parties, softball or bowling teams, and birthday parties all create team spirit and increase morale. Friendly competition between individuals or teams for a predetermined goal builds excitement.

—Bob Losyk