

Managing millennials: challenges of hiring graduates

By  Niteske Marshall

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As another year draws to a close, many employers and hiring managers will look to take on graduates or school-leavers with no working experience to fill certain posts. While there are definite benefits to this, employers should brace themselves for what could be a bumpy ride.



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Most managers who hire a graduate would be aware that some patience is required in helping their new recruit adjust to the workplace. But the truth is, the process of successfully transitioning a graduate into the work environment, although rewarding, often involves more than what the average boss bargained for.

In my experience there are several (sometimes surprising) aspects to on-boarding millennials into the working world:

That wasn't a suggestion

Often, when a clear instruction or task is outlined (and unlike the norm where employees are already in the discipline of hearing what needs to be done and getting it done), the first-time worker thinks the task is optional. Direct and absolute instructions seem to be quite mystifying to them, and it takes a few coaching sessions to get such individuals to grasp the fact that the task is not a suggestion or a rough guideline, it's an actual requirement.

Poor performance has consequences

Many new-generation entrants into the business environment haven't had a lot of life lessons in facing the consequences of their actions and of learning the meaning of being accountable. When these millennials forgot their homework book at home, did mom rush to bring it to school so that they wouldn't get into trouble? When a student failed a test paper, could they demand a rewrite or a remark until the fail turned into a pass? I'm not sure, but these patterns do not prepare young people for the demands and pressures of the working world. Continued poor performance or ill-discipline in the workplace is met with real consequences, often to the absolute shock and genuine surprise of the newcomer.

Work is not an interruption in your social (media) calendar

The invasion through technology of every form of media and entertainment into millennials' lives needs to be understood. It means that their celebrity and reality TV role models are sometimes forming their expectations of what life should be like, and it's usually not very realistic. The result is these new entrants into the workplace face a huge adjustment in getting used to an 8 to 5, 40-hour work week where punctuality and productivity are taken seriously.

There is no escalator to success, you have to take the stairs

As much as any employer has to be open to accelerating high-potential individuals' development, there seem to be unrealistic levels of impatience about career advancement among graduates entering the workplace. Do they get bored too quickly? Maybe. I love ambitious and driven people, but everyone needs to learn the basics of a job and believe that if they put in a good effort, recognition will follow.

If you as a manager understand and are prepared for these challenges in employing graduates, the reward for mentoring and allowing these high potential people to develop into contributors in your organisation will be well worth the energy.

ABOUT NITESKE MARSHALL

Niteske Marshall is the managing director of Network Recruitment, a division of the AdvTech Group.

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