

THE RESOURCE

VOL. V, ISSUE IV

**Labor &
Industrial**

INSIGHTS

Magazine®

**A NEW PHASE
OF THE EMPLOYEE LIFE CYCLE:
UNRETIREMENT**

INSIDE

How to Motivate Employees:
Look Beyond Money

Stories and Leadership Ability

5 Ways to Attract
Generation Z Candidates

As we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of our Company in 2019, I feel compelled to reflect back on the incredible journey that brings us to this milestone. - Kathy Hartung

Recently a Professional employee asked if I would be willing to mentor her and share insight about running a company successfully, etc.. I was certainly honored that she would ask that of me. I still see myself as a work in progress and never reaching the pinnacle of success. So, as I pondered for a few minutes on what it has actually been like running a business, here is what came clear to me:

3 F's that has made it work for me.

1. Faith - in God. Never having to worry about tomorrow because tomorrow will take care of itself. There have always been many unknowns and no way to control any of it. Faith is what gave me the courage and confidence to push through and trust that the Lord knows the future and that He will see us through and take care of us. This faith also keeps me grounded that we are nothing without Him. Also, that we must save during the good times to survive the bad times, because we will have both along the journey - and the bad times will increase our faith and our courage.

2. Fun - It has to be fun or we will not persevere. Whether the fun is because of what we get to do or who we get to do it with, you need to enjoy it. When it is fun then it's not work and it will energize and motivate us and give us fulfillment, ultimately. It is important to see the positive in every situation and limit those who don't. If you don't, they will suck the life and energy out and hinder positive movement. Making tough decisions is not usually fun; it can be awful and takes a toll on you. It's also part of it!

3. Figure it out! - There is no road map or business plan to follow that will ultimately lead to a successful business. Instead, there is a lot of trial and error and really the most valuable lessons come from failure. There is a lot of pain and regret along the journey. It is important to learn from each mistake and success and to implement those lessons and share them with your team. I spent very little time looking at where we had been and instead looking at where we needed to go and how to get there.

Be sure to check out the next issue to read my answer to the question - *What do I know today that I wish I had known at 29!*

THE RESOURCE

“ Are you operating as your BEST SELF? How can we help you be your BEST SELF? Call me. In 10 minutes after taking the CORE, I can begin to help you understand how... ”



Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Hartung". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Kathy Hartung, CEO

COVER STORY



Emerging Trends

4

A New Phase of the Employee Life Cycle: Unretirement

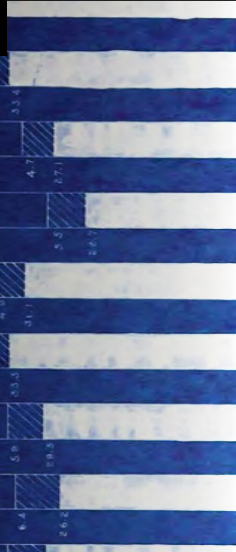
By Sharlyn Lauby

Workforce Management

6

How to Manage Underperforming Employees

By Keith Coppersmith



Employee Engagement

8

How to Motivate Employees: Look Beyond Money

By Valerie M. Grubb



Leadership

10

Stories and Leadership Ability

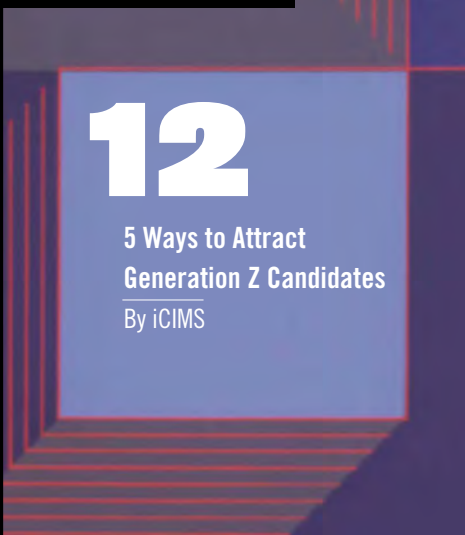
By Lynne Levy

Hiring Strategy

12

5 Ways to Attract Generation Z Candidates

By iCIMS



Workforce Management

14

The Reverse Performance Review

By Jeff Miller



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A NEW PHASE OF THE EMPLOYEE LIFE **UNRETIRED**



CASE CYCLE: RETIREMENT

BY SHARLYN LAUBY

When I worked in the hotel industry, the company's labor attorney made a lunch reservation in my hotel's restaurant every New Year's Day, and at the start of each year he and his wife would talk about their future over a long lunch. I liked the idea of this annual discussion so much that my partners and I borrowed it (with some modifications) when we started ITM Group. As small-business owners, we knew it was important to think about what we wanted our retirement to look like (and when we wanted it to start), so we made certain that topic was on the agenda.

Through those conversations we realized that we wanted to have something to do instead of have a traditional retirement. That realization led to the launch of our new blog, *Unretirement Project*, which has connected us to many individuals who have similar ideas about their own unretirement. Some enjoy working and want to continue contributing (albeit on a reduced schedule) as they age. Others would like to pursue encore careers or are thinking about going back to school and learning something new. And others have decided to become freelancers or consultants.

Organizations have a huge opportunity here. With unemployment at record lows, companies need to find ways to tap into the talents of individuals who are thinking about retirement and unretirement. In many organizations, retirement has become synonymous with resignation, and when someone tells his or her manager, "I'm planning to retire at the end of the month," the organization has to scramble to try to capture a departing employee's knowledge and find his or her replacement.

One of the reasons why the business world finds itself in this predicament is because unretirement hasn't yet been considered part of the employee life cycle (unlike, say, transfers and promotions), the business world hasn't talked about it often and openly and *made plans for it*. Companies can embrace unretirement as part of the employee life cycle by considering these three strategies:

Recruiting: *Remember, not all jobs are necessarily full-time jobs.* When work needs to be done, the organization needs to remember the "buy, build, and borrow" approach and ask, "Does this work require a full-time position?" It's possible that the organization could hire a part-time employee, an on-call worker, or a freelancer to get the work done.

Benefits: *Consider a benefits package for contingent employees.* In most organizations, only full-time employees receive benefits. As companies build contingent workforces, they might want to consider offering some sort of benefits package for part-time employees. This type of incentive could go a long way toward improving recruitment and retention among this group.

Training: *Give managers the tools they need to engage contingent workers.* The key to working successfully with an unretired workforce is to treat them as though they're not retired. Managers need to engage and train part-time employees and freelancers to the same degree to which they engage and train full-time staff. The company still expects high levels of performance from all of its workers, regardless of their retirement status.

Organizations cannot afford to let their talent simply retire and take years of knowledge and experience with them. By encouraging employees to unretire for a few years, the organization could create a real win-win situation both for themselves and for their employees. As when managing all the other phases in the employee life cycle, however, the implementation of an unretirement strategy takes planning and open, honest conversations about the future.

Sharlyn Lauby is the author of *HR Bartender* (www.hr-bartender.com), a friendly place to discuss workplace issues. When not tending bar, she is president of ITM Group Inc., which specializes in training solutions to help clients retain and engage talent. She can be contacted on Twitter at @HRBartender.

HOW TO MANAGE UNDERPERFORMING EMPLOYEES

BY KEITH COPPERSMITH

Lack of engagement among today's employees is a widespread problem and a serious one as well, because it can lead to workplace underperformance that hurts businesses on multiple levels.

Not only can underperforming employees bring down overall workplace satisfaction and productivity, but they can also negatively affect a company's customer experiences and its industry reputation. Also, those workers aren't likely to stick around long: one study found that "the more disconnected employees feel, the greater their readiness to job hop," and that 56 percent of unengaged workers "are looking for jobs or watching for opportunities."¹ Companies need to stop

ignoring underperformance problems (or sweeping them under the carpet) and instead take immediate steps to resolve them quickly.

ENSURE THAT EMPLOYEES UNDERSTAND THEIR ROLES

The first step in addressing underperformance is to make sure that the underperforming employees understand their specific roles and the importance of their jobs. Be clear about the company's goals and missions. Most importantly, explain to the employees how they, as individuals, fit into management's holistic corporate vision.

PROVIDE REGULAR FEEDBACK

Not talking to underperforming employees in order to avoid upsetting them is not the solution. After all, how can people be expected to change their behaviors when they don't know that they're doing something wrong? To improve employees' workplace engagement, make sure they know where they each stand in relation to management's expectations.

First, include employees when setting performance goals. Ask them how they would like to improve, what skills they would like to learn, and what they would like to change. Then follow up with them about those clear performance goals: track their performance regularly and give them feedback frequently. (Most employers do this monthly or quarterly, but some research shows a positive correlation between weekly feedback and higher engagement.²) An employee productivity report must be clear, unbiased, and to the point. Its purpose is to alert employees to their major performance problems and help them address those issues. Most importantly, employees should be able to respond to the report and seek advice about it in person.

ASK FOR FEEDBACK

Employees aren't usually comfortable going to management with their problems (whether professional or personal), so it's important to encourage them to talk to management regularly and to ask them for feedback. Foster an open-door culture, and if they remain reluctant to have in-person conversations, use anonymous pulse surveys to get their input. Encourage workers to describe their main challenges and solicit their ideas for how to address them. Ask them directly for their opinions about management (remember, many top employees decide to leave their workplaces because of poor management).

INCENTIVIZE HARD WORK AND IMPROVEMENT

Rewarding workplace productivity and dedication is a very powerful—and effective—strategy to improve employee engagement and retention.

Show personal appreciation. Knowing that management cares about them as individuals will encourage employees to keep doing their best work. Help them celebrate personal milestones, for example, or give them flexible working time. Even a simple (but sincere) "Thank you" can have a

significant positive impact.

Choose rewards that motivate. One of the most mainstream ways to incentivize employees for exceptional performance is to give them bonuses or raises. But it's important to offer more personalized rewards, too, such as a gift card to a favorite bookstore or coffee shop. Or, if an employee has a sweet tooth, give him or her a box of chocolates with a personalized thank-you note.

Praise them publicly. Instead of over-the-top—and dull—"employee of the month" events (which usually increase unhealthy competition among staff members), schedule a meeting just to emphasize an employee's notable improvement and contribution to the team. Also, publish photos of top-performing employees on the company's Instagram or Facebook pages to spread the word about their success and make them feel appreciated.

USE A BUDDY SYSTEM

The goal of a buddy system is to help new staff members fit in better, make friends, learn from each other, and work more efficiently. During the onboarding process, pair new hires with seasoned employees who have the patience and experience to be good mentors. Not only can veteran employees help new employees understand their roles better, but they can also play important roles in managing underperforming employees later, because those underperformers are likely to trust (and therefore open up with) their coworkers more than their managers. Talking with experienced colleagues whom they appreciate and respect can help underperformers relax and at the same time motivate them to work harder.

PROVIDE ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Ask underperforming employees about what motivates them and how they envision the growth of their careers over time. Most importantly, show them that their goals matter by supporting their career advancement. First, provide them with the proper mentorship and educational training opportunities. Then engage them—and help them become better performers—by giving them more challenging and creative tasks. (For example, put them in charge of major projects, introduce them to key clients, or ask them to represent the company on a panel.)

IDENTIFY EXTERNAL CAUSES OF EMPLOYEE UNDERPERFORMANCE

When hard workers start underperforming, it's important to understand the source of their poor productivity and satisfaction. Ask them directly whether any temporary personal problems (which could include health issues or changes in relationship or family status) might be affecting their behavior. Be empathetic, encourage them to

open up, and offer help (but remember not to blur the line between being a boss and being a friend).

REDUCE DISTRACTIONS

Nonwork activities consume a great deal of employees' time in the workplace and can lead to a drop in performance. For example, one recent study found that employees spend almost five hours per week "using their personal mobile devices for nonwork activities" and three and a half hours per week "attending to personal tasks during work hours."³ To solve this problem, should companies ban the use of personal phones? Of course not. A better solution is to give employees some personal time during the workday (but with clear boundaries).

Sometimes underperformance results when employees lack the tools they need to get their work done. For example, one of the most common workplace distractions is e-mail, with one survey finding that "the 'typical' knowledge worker spends 11.7 [hours] processing e-mail at work [and] 5.3 hours from home for a total of 17 hours or a third of their work week."⁴ To deal with the deluge of e-mail and improve employees' workflow, use project management tools to make sure they receive only the e-mail that is relevant to their active projects.

Finally, engagement and performance can be undermined by other workplace conditions. Are the office spaces too small? Is the amount of natural light inadequate? Ineffective employee collaboration, poor management, lots of time-wasting meetings—any of these could damage employees' morale.

Underperforming employees aren't necessarily "bad" employees. More often than not, unengagement, personal problems, or stress are the culprits behind underperformance. By identifying and addressing those causes, companies can help their underperformers become great performers once again.

Keith Coppersmith is a business journalist based in Adelaide, South Australia. He specializes in startup growth and business marketing.

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HOW TO MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES: LOOK BEYOND MONEY

BY VALERIE M. GRUBB

When people are
financially invested, they
want a return.

When people are
emotionally invested, they
want to contribute.

— SIMON SINEK

No matter what size their departments are and how far removed they are from the CEO's office, all managers are responsible for defining the missions and goals of their departments (preferably keeping them in line with the overall missions and goals of their companies). By rewarding employees who successfully help a department accomplish its goals (often by achieving their own individual goals), leaders reinforce what is valued in—or even required by—a job.

Unfortunately, many leaders in corporate America don't see the importance of recognizing and rewarding their employees. Because people who feel valued at work are more likely to be satisfied and motivated, those leaders miss out on many of the benefits of an engaged workforce:¹

- higher productivity
- higher success rates
- better customer service
- higher safety rates
- greater job satisfaction
- lower turnover and absenteeism
- greater happiness

The more motivated employees are, the more likely they are to put forth their best efforts on behalf of the company. And those best efforts translate into great success for them—and for the organization.

When companies want to motivate their employees, they often turn to the old standby: money. No doubt raises, bonuses, and other financial incentives can have a strong positive influence on employees. But money isn't the only motivator out there. In fact, it's not even the best motivator: in recent years, study after study has revealed that employees usually rank money well below the intrinsic awards associated with work that's well done (and well appreciated).²

STARTING POINT

Before taking any action to motivate their teams, managers must first motivate themselves, because their behaviors and attitudes have a ripple effect throughout their departments. When managers hate their jobs, their team members are more likely to hate their own jobs. When employees see that their managers are stressed out, the chances are good that they will be stressed out as well. After all, negativity is contagious. Fortunately, so is enthusiasm! When managers are excited and motivated about their jobs, it's much easier for those around them to have similarly positive feelings about their own jobs.

INTERNAL MOTIVATION

Motivation that comes from within an individual has a more lasting effect on that person than external rewards (such as money, titles, corner offices, etc.) whose positive effects soon fade. Here are some strategies for helping employees develop intrinsic motivation.

- **Keep employees in the know.** No one enjoys feeling like a cog in a machine. Employees are more engaged in their work and with the company if they have a sense of the “big picture,” not just of their small slice of the organization. So give them insight into how the company operates (and how it is doing financially). With this knowledge, employees are more likely to feel that the organization is *their* company—and not merely a place where they work in accounting or HR or marketing.
- **Assign interesting and engaging work.** Management theorist Frederick Herzberg once said, “If you want someone to do a good job, give them a good job to do.”³ So give employees good jobs by making sure that their responsibilities include something of interest to them. Even in jobs that are inherently boring, having at least one or two stimulating projects can motivate employees to perform well on the mundane tasks, too.
- **Invite involvement and ownership in decisions.** Most companies don't prioritize involving employees in decisions that affect them. Perhaps it's time to reconsider that practice, though. Keeping employees in the loop is not only respectful (and makes them feel like part of the company) but also practical: people who are closest to a situation typically have the best insight on how to improve it. Employees on the ground floor of an issue often know what works (and what doesn't) and can provide valuable insight into how to resolve a problem quickly and effectively. In addition, employees who have a hand in crafting a solution feel ownership of it and

are therefore more invested in working toward its successful implementation.

- **Increase visibility and opportunity.** Don't make assumptions about how much visibility and opportunity employees want. Everyone likes to be recognized and noticed by more than just his or her supervisors after doing a good job. Whether or not they want promotions or more challenging work, all employees flourish when they receive more visible recognition and opportunities that are personally meaningful.
- **Provide autonomy.** Employees value the freedom to do their jobs as they see fit. So if employees are able to get their jobs done (and done well) on their own, *leave them alone!* Giving high-performing employees more autonomy increases the likelihood that those employees will continue to perform as desired. Even with new recruits who haven't yet proven themselves, it's possible to provide autonomy in work assignments by telling those employees what needs to be done without dictating exactly how to do it. By letting go of all the decision making, managers not only ease their own burdens but also empower employees to develop and demonstrate their own skills in leadership, organization, and communication.
- **Be loyal.** Bosses should demonstrate loyalty to their employees, even though it can sometimes be challenging to do so. This can include being transparent (when possible), providing accurate feedback designed to improve an employee's performance, and giving full and proper credit to employees for their work.
- **Show appreciation.** It's amazing how many managers don't thank their employees for completing tasks. Yes, it's their job to do that work, but why not take a moment to say a simple “Thank you”? All employees like to be appreciated, and whether appreciation takes the form of small gestures or big statements, it can go a long way toward motivating—and retaining—them.
- **Cultivate a fun environment.** It's common sense that when people like their workplaces, they're more likely to stay with their companies longer and put more energy into their work. Even in companies that have more “buttoned up” or formal environments, managers can still try to inject some fun at the department level.

- **Show empathy.** In any workplace and with any employee, sometimes “life just happens.” When employers understand that problems arise outside the office and are willing to work with employees in times of a crisis, that can go a long way toward building the goodwill that's key to securing an employee for a longer tenure.
- **Coach and mentor.** Unlike the goddess Athena, who sprang from her father's head as a fully grown adult ready to take on the world, people don't start their careers with all the knowledge and skills they'll ever need. They have to learn those things along the way—often with the help of their managers and senior colleagues. (In fact, most successful leaders have had a great mentor in their past!) By cultivating coaching and mentoring relationships within their own organizations, managers not only help employees develop their skills but also strengthen the relationships among team members—both of which can increase engagement.

IT'S NOT “ALL ABOUT THE BENJAMINS”


Money can buy a lot of things, but it can't buy everything. And in the workplace, it can't buy the attitudes and knowledge that drive employee engagement. To motivate employees to do their best (both for themselves and for the organization), appreciate and reward their efforts and successes, and give them the recognition and support they need to thrive. ■

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Stories and Leadership Ability

BY LYNNE LEVY



Change your
thoughts
and you change
your world.

NORMAN VINCENT PEALE

At most leadership development training programs, attendees receive a toolkit and a set of processes. Yet many of these programs do not take into account the mindset needed to be an effective leader. One of the prominent themes of Workhuman Live 2019 was that a great leader asks questions and enables others to realize their dreams, in part by understanding how stories can affect leadership, innovation, productivity, and organizational growth. Inspired leaders focus on rewriting and unraveling negative stories to transform them into positive stories that reinforce accountability.

Both Brené Brown and Cy Wakeman have done research on some of the critical skills needed to reframe negative stories. Brown's research makes it clear that vulnerability and courage work together: the human mind tends to tell itself stories that associate vulnerability with weakness and shame, but it is only by reaching into that vulnerability that leaders can inspire their teams.¹ Vulnerability creates trust and permission to experiment, learn, and make mistakes. As Brown stated at Workhuman Live 2019, "Without leadership that accepts and exposes vulnerability, innovation will not happen. Do not expect individuals to come up with creative ideas if there are negative repercussions for failure."

The human brain is wired for stories, and in the absence of data it makes them up. For example, someone who feels ignored by her manager at a meeting might start to feel that she is about to receive

some bad news, her career is ending, or she will never get the promotion she deserves. These stories use what little information is available (even if it's incomplete or inaccurate) to inflate fears, create shame, and embolden insecurities.

Leaders who believe these stories start to micromanage and become too controlling (possibly even bullying). The most resilient leaders, however, recognize that these stories are made up and change them by focusing on the facts and emphasizing the positive. They ask themselves, "What do I know? And what is the story I am telling myself?"

Accountability, too, changes the story. With the philosophy that leaders must hold each person accountable, Cy Wakeman explains that individuals and leaders who do nothing but complain, moan, and whine often end up stuck on negative stories that create a victim mentality.¹ When employees believe they cannot change anything, declines in productivity and innovation result.

Venting is how people keep negative stories alive. It feeds the ego and protects them from the realities of their circumstances. One of the most effective tools for changing negative stories is self-reflection, the ultimate drama killer. Some questions that turn negative stories into positive stories that promote accountability include:

- "What can I do to help?" (This moves someone from a state of judging to a state of helping.)
- "What do I know for sure?" (This loosens the grip of the negative story and moves the emphasis to accountability.)
- "What can I do to add value?" (This helps the brain figure out how to make things work rather than focus on negativity.)
- "What would 'great' look like?" (This is the ultimate positive accountability question.)

Wakeman firmly believes that suffering is optional and that individuals can control their suffering by changing their stories. Leaders need to help their teams change the stories to create accountability. For example, they can ask venting employees to edit their stories (perhaps by writing things down, which can help individuals tune into their thoughts). Two great questions to think through during this process are "What would be most helpful in this situation?" and "Would I rather be right or be happy?"

The impact of stories on leadership, innovation, productivity, and organizational growth cannot be overstated. Over the course of millennia, stories have come to play a pivotal role in shaping human communication, connection, conflict, and myriad other types of interaction. Because stories have the ability to bring many benefits (or great harm) to the workplace, leadership needs to become adept at helping people shift from negative stories to positive ones and thereby increase their accountability.

Lynne Levy is the product evangelist at Workhuman (formerly Globoforce). Workhuman (www.workhuman.com) is a leading provider of social recognition solutions, trusted by some of the most admired companies in the world to inspire and energize employees and create best places to work. Through award-winning SaaS technology and proven methodologies, Workhuman empowers HR and business leaders to take a modern, more strategic approach to recognition programs.

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Scan to watch Brené Brown's compelling TEDx talk on "The Power of Vulnerability."



5

WAYS TO ATTRACT GENERATION Z CANDIDATES



BY ICIMS



As the first members of Generation Z begin to graduate from college and enter the U.S. workforce, they are drastically changing how recruitment is done. This generation is usually defined as the approximately 700 million people who were born between 1996 and 2010 or so, and its members cannot remember a time when they had to use an encyclopedia to look something up or couldn't text their friends.¹ These true digital natives are accustomed to immediate gratification and expect a quick, smart, and efficient experience in all aspects of their lives, whether they are shopping online or applying for jobs.

Thanks to today's tight talent market, Generation Z can be choosy about which jobs to take. Therefore, companies looking to engage and hire this cohort need to evolve to meet its needs and interests. By making five key changes to the candidate experience, employers can deliver on this generation's expectations.

OPTIMIZE CAREER SITES AND JOB POSTINGS FOR GOOGLE

Most Generation Zers will go to company career sites to get the information they need to quickly find, complete, and submit job applications. Before they reach those sites, though, job seekers often get sidetracked to third-party job sites full of repetitive forms and profiles. (In fact, one recent survey found that “65 percent of college seniors agree that the majority of the search results from job boards that they've used are irrelevant or not a good fit for them.”¹) By optimizing its career site for Google and adding as much detail as possible to its job descriptions, a company can ensure that its open positions appear right in the Google search results list and display information that Generation Zers actually care about (such as commute time, salary, and responsibilities). When companies present lots of relevant information up front, candidates can find open roles quicker via Google—and, as a result, have a better candidate experience.

ENGAGE GENERATION Z WITH COMPELLING AND MEANINGFUL CONTENT

Generation Z spends a tremendous amount of time each day interacting with online content, with some studies reporting that “nearly half are connected for 10 or more hours per day.”² To build consumer engagement with this generation and ensure that their brands stand out, companies must have a strong digital content strategy. To lead Generation Z candidates to their career sites, organizations need to publish short, visual, shareable, and clickable digital content that works well with this generation's modes of interacting with information (and works well with Google's ranking algorithms). They also need to create and share on their career sites and social media accounts content that speaks directly to this generation's interests, such as purpose, diversity and inclusion, culture, training, social responsibility, and industry-specific conversations (for example, women in technology).

MAKE THE JOB APPLICATION A CONSUMER EXPERIENCE

In a world in which people stream Netflix to their phones while waiting for their Starbucks orders and in which companies provide one-click purchases and same-day shipping, Generation Z candidates expect the same convenience when applying for jobs. A company's career site should enable a candidate to submit a resume to the cloud via a mobile phone and receive an immediate follow-up e-mail about his or her application. In short, the application process should be as streamlined—and as fast—as online shopping, in which a purchase is immediately followed by an order confirmation and then a shipment notification.

USE CHATBOTS TO ANSWER QUESTIONS

The members of Generation Z like to feel connected and expect responses quickly. Companies usually have some way to answer candidates' questions, but what happens when candidates have questions after hours? Or when they are uncomfortable posing their questions directly to a recruiter or other company representative? One solution is to use artificial intelligence–powered chatbots to handle frequently asked questions. Using this technology to provide relevant information quickly can help keep candidates engaged through the entire recruitment process and feel more connected to the organization.

KEEP DATA SECURE

As digital natives, the members of Generation Z have a good understanding of the benefits—and pitfalls—of online interactions. They place a high value on data privacy, and “87 percent of [them] consider . . . keeping their information private . . . more important than popularity measures such as getting ‘likes’ on posts.”³ Therefore, companies that want to attract this generation should prioritize data security in all solutions for talent acquisition, texting, social media communication, recruitment, and HR solutions

The members of Generation Z grew up digitally savvy and expect entirely intuitive, smart, and timely experiences when searching for jobs. The stakes are higher than ever, because a failure to meet this need has effects beyond just driving away direct candidates: according to one recent report, 59 percent of college seniors say they are likely “to leave a negative review of a company online if [they] had a bad job application experience.”⁴ The solution is to create a more digital focused recruiting strategy that engages this generation with content it cares about, provides a robust mobile candidate experience, and protects applicants' data.

iCIMS Inc. is a leading provider of innovative Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) talent-acquisition solutions that help businesses win the war for top talent. To learn more about how iCIMS can help your organization, visit www.icims.com.

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THE REVERSE PERFORMANCE REVIEW

BY JEFF MILLER

When asked about the best jobs they've ever had, most people will say that their best jobs were the ones for which they had the best managers. "Most people" isn't merely anecdotal, though: that claim is backed up by plenty of data. For example, Gallup research finds that "managers account for at least 70% of the variance in employee engagement scores across business units," and half of the workers surveyed "have left their job to get away from their manager at some point in their career."¹

Managers have this influence because they are responsible for creating the environments in which their employees operate. A great manager motivates and inspires everyone on the team to do exceptional work. On the other hand, a manager who struggles to create an optimal environment can actually inhibit a team. For managers to improve, they need feedback—not only from senior leadership, but from employees as well.

In a way, this feedback process is a reverse performance review. It starts when managers ask employees the right questions. For example, a question such as "Is there anything I can do to be a better manager?" won't elicit the feedback someone needs to improve because it's too vague and open-ended.

Based on motivation theory, the following six questions will yield far more useful data. They are designed to address the features of a team culture that, when optimized effectively, will create the best environment in which employees can achieve—and managers can thrive.

"Do I ask you to do things that seem to lack value or purpose?" The employees in the movie *Office Space* are irritated by their manager's repeated demands for TPS reports because they don't understand *why* they have to do those reports. Managers should strive to decrease the amount of work that their teams perceive as useless. One way to accomplish this is to understand which asks feel that way to them.

"Do you feel that you own the work you're doing—or that you're just doing what you're told?" To create an environment in which employees will succeed, managers must make sure that those employees have ownership of the work they're doing. When a manager delegates a task, the employee must understand how the task has meaning and adds value.

"Are the goals we're setting together meaningful and manageable?" A manager's expectations should be high—but also reasonable. Use the old fable "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" as a guideline: when expectations are too low, employees won't feel challenged; when expectations are too high, employees will feel discouraged. Managers should aim for expectations that are "just right" and leave employees feeling stretched but not overwhelmed.

"Do you get a balance of positive and negative feedback?" Just as often as they point out which behaviors are preventing employees from achieving results, managers should also point out which behaviors are helping employees reach their goals. This question is designed to measure recognition, which is just as important as criticism.

"Do you understand how to get your job done in a meaningful, efficient way? If not, how can I help you learn this?" People perform better when they understand their roles, how their teams fit into the larger organization, and what tools and resources they can use to do their jobs.

"Do you feel you can go to your colleagues to brainstorm, solve problems, and collaborate to get work done?" Every employee should feel that the team has his or her back. Every employee should be able to communicate and collaborate with his or her colleagues. A strong sense of team connection is a high indicator of motivation and success.

Managers should ask employees to include in their responses a scale (1 to 10 or even 1 to 100) to indicate importance as well as specific examples. Simple "yes" or "no" answers not only omit a lot of valuable information but also fail to promote a growth mindset—and there's always room for improvement. Delving into the details gives managers opportunities to learn how to make employees' experiences even better and, by extension, improve the team's overall performance.

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