



# Fresh Approach

The workforce of today is very different from that of the past, made up of what we call the 'Gen Y'. To tackle this new wave of employees, new skills are needed.

**A CURRENT CHALLENGE THAT** has caught nearly every organisation off guard is Generation Y. Gen Y for short, sometimes referred to as the 'millennials', are those born between 1980 and 2000. Where the old and traditional methods of initiating and launching 'Generation X and baby boomers' had worked in the past, they are no longer working for Gen Y. Organisations are having to try new methods to attract, and more importantly, retain Gen Y.

Gen Y is very much different in their thinking. They think themselves as unique individuals, who are technologically savvy and view their work and life as a merged entity. They



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tend to shape their jobs to fit their lives rather than fit their lives to the workplace. They are hard-workers as long as their sense of purpose, humour and access to technology is preserved at work. They view life as more than work and believe in corporate social responsibility. They are willing to work hard as long as the employer displays trust and grants flexibility. This is rewarded by a more productive and loyal employee.

It is easy to see why the traditionalists (Generation X and baby boomers) easily classify the Gen Y as 'lazy, no sense of respect for the seniors, want everything on their terms'. The fact of the matter is, there is a little bit of Gen Y in all of us but it has been so tuned out as we have had to 'conform' or have been happy to conform to be accepted.

We can sit back and make excuses and keep complaining at how Gen Y will not conform but where does that get the organisation? With approximately 40% of the workforce in Malaysia being Gen Y, it is impossible to ignore them. Organisations could try to enforce their old templates on this generation but it will not work. Those who try are getting frustrated. The only thing that will work is to try new tricks (or skills) to first change the way of thinking and then to do new things within the organisation to embrace this new wave of employees.

Large multinationals are taking a lot of time to understand this generation and are appropriately changing the training framework to suit Gen Y and help the traditionalists understand them. This is a great example of the 'old' giants adapting to the new world. This

type of change is becoming the norm rather than the exception.

### **Personal branding**

The one thing with Gen Y is that they believe in and promote a strong personal brand. They think of themselves as unique individuals. With a strong purpose and as members of the fast-paced Facebook world, they have evolved into better problem solvers, are able to make decisions quickly and seem to cope better with failure.

Perhaps the rest of us can learn something from this generation. Though I fall into Generation X, I have quite a bit of Gen Y in me that helps me understand the challenges faced by both sides. It is my belief that, for Gen Y in particular, their personal brand is going to be what drives them forward. Personal branding, the process to enhance the personal brand, is a new skill that promotes empowerment and brings out the full potential of the individual.

### **New skills**

Which brings me to another point I want to make. I have always been an optimist but a realistic one. I believe that one has a choice and that it is up to the individual to make or break a situation.

So, it was rather alarming to have the following feedback from a senior editor of a local daily when talking about the level of customer service in Malaysia:

'There is nothing new that you can introduce to improve customer service here – you can't teach old dogs new tricks!' This had me bewildered. Are

we going to leave the level of customer service where it is forever? Surely not, I hoped.


The point is to focus on the new tricks (read: new skills), not the old dog.

When we look at any business or organisation, the outcome of a certain department within the organisation depends on the person responsible for that department. This is logical as organisations spend a lot of time, energy and money in getting the right person for the role. Part of the decision-making process is to look at the competence, aptitude, knowledge, previous experience and ability of the candidate to cope with the challenges of the role.

This ability includes the candidate's capability to manage challenges within the department and though not written in the contract – one of the tools they are expected to come with is a set of skills or capabilities to deal with challenges. So, it is really critical for any leader within an organisation not only to have the relevant experience, but also have new skills or new tricks at their disposal, especially in challenging times.

### **Heart of the matter**

The current economic environment poses a unique set of challenges. Many processes which were core to an organisation can now be automated or outsourced. Interactions which were within the organisation have become interactions with outside vendors. On the client side, requirements are getting even more stringent. As a result, the focus for these leaner organisations is to build 'high-value' relationships with their employees, clients and vendors. In a world where most functions can be outsourced, the greatest asset becomes your 'client-focused' employees. They are your 'brand' and they are 'you'. What you invest in them is who you become in the market place.

I will address the learning of new skills, relevant for the future economic environment, in my next article. 

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