Key points:

- **Keep in mind generational differences when praising employees**
- **Listen to current employees for strategies to retain new workers**
- **Millennials may react differently to problems**

Once you hire younger workers, use strategies to retain them

By Dave Kittross, **cyberFEDS®** Washington Bureau

IN FOCUS: Hiring millennials and Gen Zers is only part of the challenge to creating an effective workforce. Agencies must also demonstrate "generational awareness and competency" if they want to retain them once they are in the door, according to Jeffrey Vargas, president and CEO of **Generationology** LLC.

And "without an entry and mid-level candidate pool to pick from and develop into leaders within an agency, there will be real gaps that will affect mission performance," warned Mika Cross, federal workplace expert and VP of Employer Engagement at FlexJobs.

Like baby boomers and Gen X, most younger workers believe their agency's mission is important, but there are also some differences. Cross recommended that agencies "include employees themselves" when developing policies to keep younger employees. To improve the employee experience, "learn from the experiences and perspectives of the people we already have and want to keep," she said. Agencies should survey or speak to new hires about their overall experience with the hiring and onboarding process within their first two weeks.

Feedback

Vargas recommended that agencies "look at policies and programs filtered through generational awareness" so they can be most effective.

For example, all employees generally appreciate acknowledgement and praise, but there may be some differences in how they should be given based on generation.

Baby boomers, said Vargas, tend to respond to the more traditional type of recognition -- a formal public ceremony with photo opportunities and a plaque or certificate that can be displayed. But younger workers may want to receive recognition in ways they are familiar with, for example, a YouTube ceremony that can be shown on a regular, on-demand basis. Millennials also tend to want acknowledgement more frequently but are not as concerned if others are aware of it, while Gen Xers are very career- and pay-focused.

"The one size fits all" approach just doesn't work, said Vargas.

There are also key generational differences in the way problems with performance should be addressed.

"Government has big challenges really understanding performance management from a generational perspective," said Vargas. While "the law is still the law," the best way for managers to communicate with the employee and take action may differ by generation.

Baby boomers, for example, "want to see lots of documentation" focusing on the issue or actions in question, but millennials will often "challenge the person delivering" the analysis even before they get to documentation of the issue itself. Managers can expect more questions about management credentials, which can then lead to a more contentious process.

To address the issue, managers must anticipate problems and become "more comfortable in the millennials' world." That doesn't mean problems should be ignored, and the legal requirements for addressing performance must still be addressed. But managers should try to address problems with younger workers in the context "of helping people grow" in their jobs before things reach the stage where an official adverse action must be filed.

Managers should also try to communicate with younger workers in a more "millennial-friendly fashion," said Vargas. Instead of pulling them in for a long formal meeting focusing on problems, ask if they have a few minutes and discuss issues with an eye toward helping them reach their potential. Again, problems must be clearly outlined, "but the way it is presented" plays a key role in the effectiveness of staving off formal action. Make the case that the steps being discussed are designed to help employees become more effective and address career opportunities and needs.

Vargas emphasized that even when proposing an official adverse action, there still can be an emphasis on helping employees grow if all formal requirements are clearly outlined.

He praised the Central Intelligence Agency for its "generational knowledge" in recruiting, outreach, and outboarding, noting the use of Skype to communicate with applicants and new employees. The Department of Transportation also uses "generational awareness" to make its awards programs more effective.

Looking ahead, Vargas said agencies should also prepare for a new issue. While it's not yet really a factor in the federal government, in the private sector, almost 40 percent of employees are managed by someone younger than them. This means understanding generational differences from different perspectives may become important in new ways.

Resources on *cyber*FEDS®:

- [Effectively engage both baby boomers and millennials](#) (10/17/18)
- [Understand key ingredients to using FEVS data to improve employee engagement](#) (10/11/18)
- [Are new college grads ready to work?](#) (04/25/18)

November 9, 2018