

A Book Review: Managing Generation Y

By

LCDR Larry D. Kalsow, CHC, USN

Now that we've figured out what Generation X is all about, along comes Generation Y. The good news, however, is that Gen Y (also known as the Millennialists or the Echo Generation) and Gen X have many similarities. Carolyn A. Martin, PH.D and Bruce Tulgan who is the founder of Rainmaker Thinking, Inc, a business-consulting firm, have co-authored a book for managers, entitled "Managing Generation Y." At only 105 pages in length including a comprehensive bibliography, Martin and Tulgan's book serves as a valuable primer for busy Navy supervisors who don't have the time to wade through more complex dissertations. Here are a few highlights.

Generally regarded as anyone born between the years of 1978 and 1984, the 29 million members of Generation Y are optimistically predicted to be the best generation ever. The authors base that prediction upon four truths. One, Gen Yers are more confident, upbeat and possess a higher self-esteem than previous generations. Two, with 90% desiring college, they are the most education minded in US history. Three, they are already creating a more open, tolerant society partly through their own racial makeup, one third are non-white. Four, they are leading a new wave of volunteerism in our country.

The ideal job for the GenYer will involve meaningful work in a meaningful institution that makes a significant positive impact upon society. They will be employed within a highly motivated team structure, which welcomes input from all levels, shares responsibility, provides the latest innovative tools and offers an attractive salary package. In exchange for such a dream job, here's what the authors suggest the Navy or any employer might be able to expect from typical GenYers. They will be comfortable, self-reliant. They don't require over-supervision nor do they tolerate it well. They will expect the right tools, but to do their job the way they think it should be done, they will expect those tools right now. They want a job that brings meaningful, not mindless, excitement. While extreme games may excite some, many Gen Yers will possibly already have had excitement of a different sort running their own online e-business. Would Gen Yers thrive in the Navy? The authors point to the Sailors of the USS Benfold under the leadership of CDR Abrashoff who have received numerous awards for innovative achievements.

Managing Generation Y offers practical guidance for Navy leaders. Martin and Tulgan offer their version of the seven deadly sins of a Gen Yer manager. The manager who is closed minded about how a job should be done, who is ineffective in delegating tasks, who lacks technical knowledge and organizational skills, who does not train nor offer training, who disrespects young people, who displays an intimidating attitude to gain obedience, or who places undue emphasis on outward appearance (Navy Division Officers or Division Chiefs don't need to worry so much about number seven!) will find themselves struggling in the workplace.

If the Navy unit leadership was willing to listen to what the Gen Yers have to say, they might be surprised at how insightfully productive these new Sailors can be. Gen

Yers offer fourteen requests of their future employers: Provide challenging work that really matters. Balance clearly delegated assignments with freedom and flexibility. Offer increasing responsibility as a reward for accomplishments. Managers should spend time getting to know their staff and their capabilities. Provide ongoing training and learning opportunities. Establish mentoring relationships. Create a comfortable, low stress environment. Allow some flexibility in scheduling. Focus on work, but be personable and have a sense of humor. Balance the role of ‘boss’ and ‘team player.’ Treat Yers as colleagues, not as interns or ‘teenagers.’ Be respectful and call forth respect in return. Consistently provide constructive feedback. Reward Yers when they’ve done a good job. What Navy CO would argue with such a list?

The book concludes with an entire chapter devoted to strategies that supervisors might use to address each of the job expectations of Gen Y Sailor or civilian employee. Again, Martin and Tulgan offer practical ideas some of which could easily be translated to the military work environment. Finally, the authors provide a three-page bibliography of other works related to both Gen X and Gen Y cultural issues. To learn more about Managing Generation Y, check out these two websites: www.rainmakerthinking.com or www.hrdpress.com.