

Recruiting Gen Y: Four Killer Tactics

By Andrew Tilin

published on BNET.com 5/16/2008

A recent survey by Robert Half International says that nearly one out of every two business executives is concerned about the upcoming exodus of baby boomers from the workforce. Want to lose a little less sleep? Here's something you can do now: start recruiting the next big wave of workers, the millennial generation. They're hardworking and enthusiastic, but they won't settle for just any job. Here's how McDonald's, Google, Harvard, and others hook today's best young talent.

Pitch-Perfect Campus Visits

Tactic: Get your millennial employees out in front of their peers

Recruiting on college campuses traditionally has meant presentations given by influential senior executives. But today's recruits are less impressed by suits and gray beards. "Millennials in particular are peer influenced," says Lisa Feldman, recruiting director at the University of California at Berkeley's Haas School of Business. "They don't automatically relate to some older person that might have different values."

The point people for your company's next college tour should be more like the millennials themselves — recent alumni fresh into their careers who can describe what life will be like in the trenches. Feldman and her peers suggest that your representatives discuss some unorthodox topics along with the traditional metrics of company success. Tell the job-seekers about your business's positions on philanthropy and corporate responsibility (experts testify that millennials have a soft spot for social justice and conservation issues). Flextime policies and workplace lifestyle — right down to what employees are expected to wear (millennials are notoriously casual dressers) — are also important topics.

Feldman also suggests that you send a company exec along in a supporting role to answer questions after the audience has been won over. "The high-level VP should close the sale," she says.

Flashier Presentations

Tactic: Ditch PowerPoint for Flash

College recruiting experts say they still see a majority of companies attempting to woo job applicants with PowerPoint presentations. But put yourself in the place of the YouTube crowd: That technology is prehistoric.

Consider graduating to a Flash-based presentation, which looks a lot more like a dynamic website than a boring slideshow. Kristen Clemmer, director of recruiting at Manhattan-based management-consulting firm Katzenbach Partners, made the switch from PowerPoint to Flash about three years ago. During that time her hiring efforts have shined, and the company has exploded from a staff of 120 to more than 200. Clemmer says the Flash presentation is not only more stimulating, but unlike the PowerPoint option it's instantly customizable. "I'll walk into a presentation, read the room, and know right then if I should make my show casual or formal," she says. One big crowd pleaser: the two-minute videos Clemmer rolls of Katzenbach employees describing their best and worst days on the job: "Those are the kinds of stories that the candidates care about."

Easy Online Job Applications

Tactic: Get rid of paper-based apps

From Ivy League schools to hourly jobs, millennials like applying via an anonymous, digital interface. Harvard's undergraduate applications, which are available on the Web, were recently up nearly 20 percent over a year ago, and experts attribute some of that soaring growth to online accessibility. Business also senses a trend: In a 2007 study, the number of major retailers accepting online applications for hourly work rose 29 percent in just three years.

McDonald's makes a compelling argument for the move to electronic job applications. In a 2007 pilot program, the fast-food empire installed computer kiosks designed to accept employee applications in 40 of its restaurants. The number of applicants at those restaurants jumped by as much as 100 percent. At one McDonald's in College Station, Texas, the employee turnover rate also was reduced by more than 20 percent.

The secrets to the computers' success? Millennials liked that they could apply on their own time, in their everyday clothes. Plus, the kiosks captured the attention of customers, whom McDonald's believes make the best employees. Finally — and surprisingly — the millennials feel *more secure* applying via computer. Whereas older generations worry about hackers and online identity thieves, millennials feel it's riskier to write a Social Security number on a paper application and that could end up in the wrong hands.

Meanwhile the kiosks eliminate a lot of paperwork and filing for company management. "I wish we had them in all our restaurants," says Josh Winters, a Houston-based McDonald's area supervisor.

Work That Matters

Tactic: Connect employees to issues they care about

There's little consensus regarding what millennials' attitudes are about their 401(k) plans, but they definitely want something in addition to their salaries: that rather intangible benefit, *meaningfulness*. Many experts believe that the millennials' exposure to the 9/11 terrorist attacks has left them with

an unyielding desire to find substance in their lives, whether on the job or elsewhere. “One student recently told me, ‘I’m not looking for an extreme career. Instead, how do I make each day matter?’” says Lisa Giannangeli, director of marketing for MBA admissions at the Stanford Graduate School of Business.

Meaningfulness, of course, has many interpretations, which means your company could adopt a local charity and still not attract a crowd of young workers. Think instead of wooing them with what you can most naturally offer. Deloitte, for instance, has had on-staff career coaches to help its employees transfer within the company since 2002. Nowadays those coaches come in handy, assuring fidgety youngsters that they can work at the same company for 30 years while having myriad jobs, experiences, and opportunities. As for Katzenbach Partners, the firm has long done philanthropic work — “so now we just bring that subject up earlier in the recruiting process,” Clemmer says.

For the kind of employees Google attracts, making a difference means inventing a hot new application. “The goal for me at Google?” confesses Dan Siroker, a 24-year-old associate product manager. “I want the skills that’ll make me successful as an entrepreneur out on my own.” While traditional companies shy away from training employees who might fly the coop, Google puts its strongest young recruits into management positions and gives them two years of hands-on training as a way to attract the best and brightest.