

Seven Trends You Need to Know

by Robert W. Wendover

Jack has operated a thriving contracting firm in the Midwest for the past 30 years, with more than 200 people on his payroll. But as he has considered retirement, he's also realized that many of his seasoned staff will be doing the same thing in the next few years. So just as much as he thinks about whom will succeed him, Jack's realized that he will need to replace a number of managers and supervisors as well. That means hiring and developing a new generation of leaders who approach work and life differently than those his age. Does this sound familiar? It is a dilemma facing most of those in the industry.

So how will this emerging generation of contributors impact the way you prepare for management succession? As I have worked with and surveyed those in the emerging generations, it has become abundantly clear that they will apply their own values and attitudes to the roles they will assume. Here are seven trends to keep in mind as you search for and develop those who will manage your business going forward:

First, patience may be their biggest challenge.

This emerging generation of leaders has come of age in a world that preaches instant outcomes, total convenience, and access to everything 24/7/365. They read about the business marvels who go from start-up to millions of dollars in a matter of months and think, "Why not me?" The power of today's social networking allows them to compare positions, responsibilities and opportunities with their friends in real time. So it is understandable that they are programmed to expect immediate results.

Over time, of course, they have discovered that succeeding within any business or industry requires time, perseverance, persistence and more than a little luck. This disparity between expectations and reality will bedevil them until they find peace with the natural tension between the desire to succeed and the diligence to develop the skills necessary to manage others and the business itself. Part of your job will be to nurture and develop these insights while counseling the patience necessary to learn and embrace these nuances.



Second, they bring better formal training to the workplace than any generation in US history.

The number of those attending college has skyrocketed over the past 30 years. Our fast-changing world has encouraged them to become self-reliant and well prepared for unexpected life changes or unforeseen opportunities. We have seen hundreds of thousands complete a master's degree in business administration, providing them with far better formalized training than most veteran leaders. This, coupled with their never-ending desire to collect skills, licenses, certifications, experiences and titles, tends to position them for the future responsibilities they seek.

But while they can appear directed and enthusiastic, this bravado can sometimes mask a deficit of experience or expertise. On one hand, they bring their training to the table. On the other, many lack the skills and wisdom that comes from years in the trenches. It will be your job to ferret out these differences and then develop them from there.

Third, they look at every job as a contract rather than a calling.

The career-oriented emphasis of the Baby Boom generation has never been shared by younger generations. These individuals are ready to throw their all into challenging, growth-oriented positions. But they are not looking to climb the traditional succession ladder embraced by their parents. They refuse to become too socially engaged in a particular workplace for fear of losing their objectivity when a better opportunity comes along. When these individuals feel they've outgrown the position or conclude that their upward mobility is slowing, they may leave for another position. This is nothing personal. It's business. But the impact of this practice can have a monumental effect on your succession planning.

Ironically, young managers may leave your firm for a competitor after having completed all the training and development you have invested in them. At the same time, you may recruit managers from your competitors who have participated in the same kind of program. As a result, you may be training your competitors' future leaders while they train yours.



Fourth, they are invested in technology as a solution. While seasoned leaders have grown used to the electronic gadgetry of everyday life, younger generations use technology to its fullest. Most are more comfortable communicating via e-mail, text and cloud-based applications than picking up the phone. As these individuals assume leadership roles, they are changing the way many tasks are handled, from strategic planning to communicating a vision. Why, sit around a table when you can attend the meeting from your place on Sanibel Island? Why spend three hours analyzing the numbers when computer modeling will do it for you? Why write a proposal when artificial intelligence will do it for you? As you select and develop these leaders, you will need to find the balance between their desire for a digital answer to everything and reality.

Fifth, they view work as one slice of a more abundant life. Most contractors have thrown their all into building and maintaining the business, through good times and bad. Emerging professionals consciously seek a balance between business and the desire for fun, family, and other pursuits. When the time comes, they will work hard to accomplish the tasks at hand. But they may do so from a remote location and only until the project has been completed or the crisis averted. Working long hours simply because the boss has worked long hours is simply not part of the equation. This means young managers may turn down advancement opportunities that interfere with family obligations, involve too much travel, or place them in stressful positions for which they do not perceive a long-term advantage. These are not emotional decisions, but rather objective calculations involving consultation with family and friends.

So what will you do when the best person for the job turns down what you think is a golden opportunity

Sixth, they will relax many of the traditional practices that have been mainstays of the organization. These include everything from dress codes, to work hours, to communication, to company gatherings. Having come of age in an increasingly detached and informal world, they fail to see the need for many of the protocols established in the past. Why meet face-to-face when business can be discussed over Skype® or Zoom®? Why talk to someone when a text will do? Why hold company social gatherings that take everyone away from family and other pursuits? Your emerging leaders will focus on outcomes rather than traditions, even if it means unsettling seasoned employees who are troubled by some of these changes.

As much as you may rail against some of these developments personally, wise leaders will let these emerging managers find their way. Balancing between coaching them and letting them learn from their mistakes is part of management development. While construction knowledge is essential to those on the front line, the development of leadership skills is essential to running the business successfully. There is no other way to learn this than to experience it.



Seventh, they bring a different worldview to the job. Those coming of age since the turn of the century have been immersed in a world of constant change, drastic economic upheavals, terrorism, political polarization and battles over immigration, the environment, gender rights and other public policy debates. Understandably, they are bringing these experiences into the workplace. Studies indicate they are more relativistic in their beliefs about right and wrong, the role of business in society and the individual rights of others. All of this will inform the way they manage and lead in the coming decades.

Yes, they understand that contracting is a business. But business also has a responsibility to the community. Yes, they are all for economic growth, but not at the expense of the environment. No, they are not fans of unnecessary regulation. But many believe that the government should play a substantial role in how businesses operate. Whether you agree or disagree with the above is irrelevant. They are your firm's future leaders and managers. How you and they reconcile the differences in these worldviews will have an impact on their approach going forward. How can you, going forward, walk the balance of selecting and developing emerging professionals, yet successfully maintain the principles upon which the organization was built?

The next decade will witness a sea change in the way organizations are led as Baby Boomers transition out of management roles and this cohort of leaders assumes those responsibilities. How well will you embrace these professionals and encourage their success?



About the Author

Robert W. Wendover has been researching and writing about workforce trends for more than 30 years. He is the award-winning author of ten books including *Smart Hiring*, *Two Minute Motivation* and *Figure It Out! Making Smart Decisions in a Dumbed-Down World*. He is a regular contributor to print and electronic media. He has served as a special advisor to the *American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC)* and on the management faculty of the *University of Phoenix* for more than ten years.

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