

# Generation Y is changing the workforce rules

**John Rony**

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**Madison, Wis.** - As CEO of Madison-based [CDW Berbee](#), formerly Berbee Information Networks Corp., Paul Shain is familiar with the challenges associated with managing the next generation of IT workers.

On the day the iPhone first became available, Shain said Berbee received no less than 125 requests from staff members who asserted that they required the devices "immediately" in order to effectively perform their jobs.



**Paul Shain**

While it's unclear how many, if any of the urgent requests were honored, what is clear is that the latest generation of 20-somethings who are entering today's workforce expect to have nothing less than leading-edge technology as part of their daily existence, Shain said last week as part of a presentation to IT executives at the Fusion 2008 conference.

"Gen Y is changing the rules," he said. "All of us need to figure out a way to bring in the next generation."

There is a lot to be learned about what the limits are from a people perspective in delivering IT with the next generation of workers, says Shain, who is also a senior vice president for Berbee's parent, CDW Corp. Some key points about this group of workers include:

- 78 million strong, with 32 million in the workforce today.
- Highly mobile, and demand constant connectivity.
- Desire personalization and choice.
- They work to live, not live to work.

- Very socially conscious. "Green" policies and practices are important to them.

"I would say the number of people being paged at 3 a.m. (to fix a problem) is pretty low," Shain adds. "These people will also change jobs at a moment's notice."

"The younger people flip very quickly - we expect that to happen, said Greg Smith, a senior vice president and CIO for [Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare](#) in Milwaukee. "We may hold on to someone for four years, and we consider ourselves very lucky. We might be unable to put unique work rules or opportunities in place to keep them."

### **Back to basics**

Rockwell Automation in Milwaukee, the emphasis is on retention of workers, said CIO Mike Jackson, a vice president of Global Business Services who was part of a five-person panel that addressed workforce issues at the Fusion conference.

"We can read all the books on Gen X and Gen Y," Jackson said. "But, what we try to do is get to know our people and get to know what drives them, and to structure their job so that it is rewarding to them and rewarding to the company."

In most companies, people tend to get rewarded and promoted to technology jobs/skills for which they are ill-suited, Jackson said. At Rockwell, when it comes to aligning IT workers and managers with the right job responsibilities, it's about getting back to basics through a highly synchronized change management process.

In developing IT managers, Wheaton Franciscan has a rigorous program that weeds out those who are not cut out for management. They assign a manager-in-training to a development plan, and after six months the employee is moved into a job that supports front-line operations.

"We remove them from everything they are comfortable with, and they spend 12 to 18 months in that environment," Smith said. "The washout rate is pretty high, but the people who make that transition are incredibly effective. They really begin to understand what core business they are there to support."

### **Retention is key**



Once you find these employees, what are you doing to keep them? posed Jane Durment, CIO of Milwaukee-based [Marcus Corp.](#) How do you keep them happy, and engaged and motivated to stay?

"I think that if we, as employers, allow employees to meet all of their responsibilities that are important to them... if we can allow an accommodation for flexibility as things come up, the loyalty that it develops is tremendous," she said.

The reason younger people change jobs is that they are being loyal to themselves by learning and growing, observed Melanie Holmes, a vice president for Milwaukee based [Manpower.](#)

"The older generations want flexibility, and the younger ones do, too," Holmes said, naming telecommuting and job-sharing as examples of flexible work arrangements. "Everyone wants meaningful work. And, give your employees the opportunity to give back to the community - we use that as a recruiting tool at Manpower, and it works."

At [Aurora Health Care](#), celebrating success by going out to lunch or dinner and being recognized by key business leaders goes a long way toward making young IT workers feel valued and more likely to stick around, said Phillip Loftus, CIO and vice president of information systems.

### **"They want to collaborate"**

Blogs and wiki websites are fairly common tools that Gen X and Gen Y workers use to communicate and collaborate, said Mark Hennessy, the CIO for IBM.

"If you have skills and capabilities that can help solve a problem, they are on it," Hennessy said. "It doesn't matter where you are in the world."

The communities that develop around these innovation tools are a lot more efficient than senior execs think, Hennessy said. At IBM, where collaboration and innovation are encouraged across the global enterprise, associates have created their own blogging guidelines, there was a lot of self-policing and sharing of ideas.

“We have a set of values, those are the controls we have,” Hennessy said. “What we have to understand is this is happening whether we want it to or not. We can't control it... they way they want to collaborate. That is how you can keep and attract this new talent.”