

Generations Widen Workforce
Presentation outlines new focus for business success
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It's the first time in U.S. history that three generations are working together, and different values, skills and communication styles for each must be managed properly to ensure business success.

Succeeding at this was the focus of Thursday's presentation, "The Generational Divide: Navigating a Multi-Generational Workforce," at a meeting of the Lafayette Regional Business Advisory Committee. About 60 managers and human resources directors from local companies were in attendance.

Christina Harper, co-founder and managing partner of The Training Source, a staff training consultant company in Lafayette, spoke at length on the psychological makeup of Generations Y and X and the Baby Boomers. Significant differences among them can confuse managers and slow work productivity, Harper said.

When considering the values of staff members, a manager must know what their generation values. Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964) typically value personal freedom stemming from the Civil Rights-era influence and teamwork in the office. Their values can also lead to a self-centered view of how office decisions affect them, and too uncomfortable with conflict to raise concerns to management.

Generation X (1965-1980) are children of the workaholic Baby Boomers who were turned off in many ways from company loyalty and their parents' uneven work-life balance, Harper said. Gen-Xers seek out a greater balance between work and life, and prefer the "free agency" mindset that allows career-hopping to be seen as a positive.

Generation Y (1981-1995) is the tech-savvy group, considered very adaptable, confident, optimistic and inclusive of a diverse staff. Because of ever-evolving and improving technology options, they're also considered the most impatient group, and seek instant gratification in work tasks, employer feedback and career progression.

A repeated key among those who attended for learning these traits is to know how to please, and retain, staff better. During the past two years, Lafayette Parish has repeatedly had one of the lowest unemployment rates in the state. As of October it was 2.1 percent, the lowest rate recorded for the parish since the Department of Labor began using its current methodology in 1990.

"I'm having a problem with (retention), we all are," said Carla Lester, safety manager for Control Concepts & Technology, an oil and gas service company. "The newbies want it

all. ... I'm our 'people person,' so I am dealing with all these conflict issues."

After learning a staffer's values, managers will know how to retain and build staff enthusiasm. Baby Boomers appreciate formal recognition through job titles, and yearly feedback, while Gen-Xers want more life-work balance, minimal bureaucracy and more regular feedback on their performance.

The same profiles and concepts can be used in other arenas, like knowing how to pitch or sell a product to customers of varied generations, said some audience members.