

Luring the younger worker

With a different work ethic than baby boomers, business owners are having to try new approaches in their effort to attract, and keep, young talent

By KATIE ARCIERI, Staff Writer

As baby boomers enter their golden years and start to retire in growing numbers, local business owners are anxiously scanning the resumes of a younger generation.

Senior decision-makers are finding motivated candidates with lots of energy - but often a completely different outlook on work.

Experts said younger employees see themselves as free agents, driven by flexibility, technology and team work. By contrast, their baby boomer parents are accustomed to longtime tenures, chains of command and a need for company identity.

To deal with the differences, several Anne Arundel County businesses are hoping to create new work climates that will help younger employees feel at home, said Tina Corner, a certified facilitator with The Alternative Board, an Annapolis franchise of a Colorado-based company that puts together advisory boards for local companies seeking guidance.

She said several businesses are considering changes in everything from traditional work schedules to benefits packages while taking personality tests to see how younger workers respond to rules.

"It is not the No. 1 (issue) but it is a top challenge that they are all having," said Ms. Corner, who facilitates the advisory boards with business owners from different industries. "You get a level of frustration because the values are different."

John Challenger, chief executive officer of Challenger Gray & Christmas, a Chicago outplacement firm, said there can be conflict between generations because there are different expectations.

"X-ers and Y-ers are looking for more work-life balance from the beginning," he said. "They want more autonomy, they want work that's challenging and meaningful and not repetitive."

Steve Herstein, founder of the window-treatment company The Right Track in Crofton, is a prime example of someone who has witnessed a generational clash in work values.

Mr. Herstein, 68, said he worked in an age where you stayed with one company for a long time, instead of jumping from business to business. Now people are proud to have several jobs, he said.

"Instead of having three jobs they've had 10," he said. "As an employer, I look at that and say you may have a tremendous amount of knowledge and talent, but how long am I going to keep you?"

To help accommodate younger workers and their values, Mr. Herstein said he has created a more open dialogue with his employees, takes a more vested interest in their growth and considers their input in the decision-making process.

"Ten years ago I would have said 'this is what I want done,' " he said.

To inspire younger workers to stick around, Mr. Herstein is educating employees on the history of his business, which has gone beyond the plain vanilla blinds to tech savvy motorized window systems that can be controlled in a variety of ways from wall switches to remote controls. He said he also emphasizes that The Right Track is one of the last vestiges of mom-and-pop businesses of its kind.

"The goal I hope is to give the new employees a sense that they are part of something much larger than just having a job," he said, adding he especially wants the management team to feel that they "are part of something."

While younger workers don't seem to have the same pay-your-dues mentality he had growing up, Mr. Herstein said employee Justin Deimling, 19, was a rare find. He said Mr. Deimling, who was hired to work in the firm's shipping and receiving department this month and handles up to 15 orders a day, has the work ethic and "stick-to-itiveness" of workers in his generation.

Mr. Deimling said he also is motivated by team work and appreciates when upper management asks him for advice on how things should be organized in the company's warehouse.

"It's a team effort," he said. "We all should have our say on things that happen."

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