



The Role of Technology in our Changing Workforce

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Technology has always been a constantly evolving part of the world and part of the workplace. So why do we keep hearing more and more about how important it is to Generation Y and why we need to pay attention to it in order to keep our business running smoothly and our employees happy?

To begin with, Generation Y is the first generation that has truly been born and grown up in the global world where connecting and staying in touch with friends and family has been a part of who they are their entire lives. The generations entering today's workforce expect to have the latest technology at their fingertips and adjust easily to new trends and products. Their ipods and cell phones are like appendages to them and taking them away would be akin to cutting off a limb.

So what does this have to do with the workplace? What role will technology play in the workforce of the next decade? How will it impact how we conduct our business? How can we use it to our advantage? These are just a few of the questions that we must ask ourselves in this digital climate.

Changing the World We Live In

"We become what we behold. We shape our tools and then our tools shape us."

-Marshall McLuhan

Technology is changing our expectations. It is the largest factor in today's business climate that determines how we do business and often determines whether a business flourishes or fails. Constantly evolving technology is forcing companies to upgrade all the time in order to keep up with the competition. Technology can assist or hamper our efforts to acquire and retain new employees.

It may sound cliché, but the global village has become a reality. We now have the technology to keep in touch with our customers and clients around the world with the punch of a few keys. It is getting harder and harder to remove ourselves from technology and not be connected 24 hours per day. Our working lives no longer end when we lock up the office or store. Because the technology to stay open 24/7 is easily available to us, our customers expect it.

Take a look at the popularity of online shopping. It offers 24 hour access and convenience in that you can browse from the comfort of your own home. Comparison shopping between brands is easy as is finding the best price.

Technology has also forced businesses to increase their customer satisfaction ratings. It is all too easy for consumers to find out all of the dirt on your company.

Each of the above mentioned ways that technology has changed our business can be said for the up and coming group that makes up our workforce.

Employees shopping around for their next big opportunity will check on line to see what is being said

about your company, your benefits and your corporate climate. Your online presence and how you present your company can make the difference between having the cream of the crop apply for employment and having less experienced and talented people apply.

When you are in meetings or at a conference, have you ever noticed how the moment a break is called, practically everyone in the room will jump up, turn their cell phone back on and check for messages? It is truly a sign of the times that we have become so dependant on our technology that remaining accessible at all times has become the norm.

This is especially true with Gen Yers. This group is so used to being in touch with friends, family and colleagues at all times that companies are going to need to acknowledge this and work with it to keep their employees content.

Youthful employees also expect to be using the latest technology when it comes to their work. They do not want to be stuck with outdated information systems and will have a tendency to become frustrated when they are slowed down because of their equipment.

How Technology has Changed Interaction Between Employees

Communication has been made a great deal easier and more efficient between parties within any business in the last decade and will continue to become increasingly efficient throughout the next.

Email, text messaging, the internet and social networking sites have become the norm rather than the exception when it comes to staying in touch with those we work with. Consider how easy it has become to inform employees of changes in policy via a simple email sent out company wide. Before mass forms of electronic communication existed, a company would have to hold meetings, put up flyers or posters, or find other ways to ensure everyone remained in the loop.

Employees in different jurisdictions can now video conference, email, and otherwise stay in touch and collaborate with the click of buttons. There is no longer any need to physically bring people together to brainstorm, allowing employers the best of both worlds - saving time and money because less travel is required by all groups within the company, and achieving the same, if not better results.

Utilizing the latest technology for your communications often serves to promote creativity within your group. Many people are more comfortable offering up opinions or advice from behind a computer screen rather than in person where they may be shy or unwilling to risk rejection of their ideas.

Technology has also made it possible for managers to easily keep an eye on their employee's performance, habits and productivity if they so desire. This behind the scenes approach is less intrusive and disruptive to an employee and their work flow because it is not obvious while it is happening.

Technology Serves to Eliminate Our Differences

Technology can also serve to reduce or eliminate biases based on any number of factors including gender, age and race and allow employees to prosper in an environment that is unmarred by personal feelings. Using technology to communicate within a business can take away the personal aspect of the communications and allow participants to remain open to ideas no matter who the idea comes from.

Many times, it is possible that employees will get to know each other solely through electronic means and never actually meet in person or speak on the phone. This enables a free and open environment that is free from judgement based on one's ethnicity, gender and other such factors.

Technology Serves Us Well When We Use it Correctly

Technology is not without its pitfalls however. Older generations in the workforce may have a harder time adapting to it than their younger counterparts. Employers need to be aware of this and take measures to ensure that everyone is sufficiently trained and has the support that they need when new systems are introduced so that the playing field remains relatively even.

When communications are done over a device that involves typing rather than speaking, it can be easy for information and feelings to be misinterpreted. Companies would be wise to train their staff on effective communication techniques that are appropriate when using technology in order to avoid misunderstandings.

About the author: Gen Y-er Michelle Dagnino earned her stripes as a community and corporate consultant on youth engagement and workplace development. A lawyer, consultant, and author, Dagnino is an international award winning speaker working with organizations around the world to create meaningful workplace and community experiences. For more information visit: www.michelledagnino.com