

## How To Engage That 'Portable Generation' - By J. Ragsdale Hendrie

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### Who Will Ultimately Run Your Business!

We have called them everything, from Gen X'ers, to Generation Y to the Me. Where many of us now in Senior positions were the product of Walkmans and Beepers, what has been technically spawned is remarkable, and our future leaders, General Managers and Key Middle Management are connected, as never before. Their ears are adorned with cell phones or head sets, fingers deftly tapping text, Blackberrys humming, iPods poppin' and laptops magically imbedded on knees. They are mobile with their technology and aspirations.

Individually, they have compartmentalized their lives through technology, and their social community is abuzz with activity and their curiosity never sated. They are the 'best and the brightest' with chutzpah thrown in for good measure. Corporate America has little idea how to engage this 'Portable Generation'.

'Portable' represents their psyche, technology is their network, and their employment is not a means to an end, it is just a means for fulfillment, for the moment. Their social fabric is elastic, that is where the loyalty lies. They have entered the workplace, full of vigor and innovative ideas. For many the motivation is to build their Portfolio - become more adept, more skilled and knowledgeable. Naturally, they aspire to be the next Google or Ian Schrager. Failure is not a word in their vocabulary - quite a resilient type. They approach an employer like a contractor (a 1099'er). They seek immediacy, gratification, and empowerment. They feel they are entitled! And, by the way, I am outta here if you do not deliver, actually gone, even if you do. They show a touch of arrogance, too. But, we need them mightily.

Of course, we say wait a minute - you have not paid your dues, or you cannot make that decision, or you need permission. - all vestiges of a Corporate America neither responding to their employees nor the harsh realities of doing business in a Global Marketplace, which requires flexibility and speed. Some Industries, like Hospitality, think that a 100% personnel turnover is the accepted norm, and warm bodies will always fill the void. That well is empty, and we are mired in mediocrity! We are facing a world-wide labor shortage. Some are shocked that many people change jobs every two to three years, we used to raise that red flag when we noticed on a resume a gap of several months or unusual job movement. That is now the norm. In America we are outraged with outsourcing to foreign lands, but, in India, a major benefactor of those decisions, they are now outsourcing our work to other developing countries. The traditional, historical business paradigm is bogus. Time to create the new model.

Corporate America (and others) for shame. Your short-sightedness and knee-jerk reaction to Wall Street has rendered you helpless, hapless and hopeless in some cases. The 'Portable Generation' has watched for twenty plus years as you slowly dismembered families, communities and business concerns. Everyone has been touched by your 'rightsizing', so this knowledgeable Generation knows that there is no such thing as Corporate loyalty or social responsibility - just the rush to the bottom line, a squeeze for profits rather than excellence. But, they also know that they must make a living and that economics does have variables. Thus, they can make an impact, but on different terms, and we must begin to understand that new workplace agreement. Change is the only certainty.

The traditional view of the Corporate entity - its mission, structure and protocols - must undergo a significant review in order to be vibrant and responsive to the marketplace. It may be an old saw, but, as J. W. Marriott, Jr. once said, if you take care of your people, they will take care of your customer. This new cadre of Hospitality lifeblood is a tough character, though.

The first look is at your Organizational structure. If yours shows a distinct hierarchy, your 'Portable Generation' will revolt and bolt. The more linear you are, the more decisions and involvement are driven down. The Automotive Industry, years ago, did this within their Salaried ranks, with Executives looking at the number of layers from the CEO down to the line employee. They actually reduced their structure, removing several Management layers, as well as the General Foreman layer. Sadly, within a Unionized environment, this approach became subject to years of negotiation, addressing work rules. However, this evolution did create a profound change, really emphasizing who knows more about and can address a manufacturing issue - the Manager or the machine operator. Draw the parallel to Guest Relations. The flatter your organization the more emphasis there is on immediate resolution and ownership of that action. Barriers to excellence and innovation are removed.

The next template you need to consider is the Culture of your organization. The Key word is respect, and this is shown in a number of ways. Compensation that is competitive and comprehensive. Open communication that encourages participation. Recognition for contribution. Development opportunities. Mentoring by Senior Management to help navigate the obstacles. If your Culture reflects the aforementioned hierarchal Organizational Chart, you become simply a revolving door with talent departing.

The 'Portable Generation' along with wonderful attributes also presents some traits which are perhaps unsettling. They are impatient, not particularly good with advice, ambitious, which requires some tempering, and confidently quite used to being right. Who said it would be easy? But, if you can harness that energy, encourage that idealism, and direct that intelligence and passion, you, as an organization will move forward. What is growth and change without some challenge? The 'Portable Generation' is out there, they are electric with activity, and they work for you! Care to be revitalized?

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