

# Understanding Generation Y

Changing stereotypes and behaviour can result in satisfaction in the workplace

## WORKPLACE STAFF

**P**EOPLE born between 1980 and 1995 (Generation Y) often sense a feeling of resentment towards them at work from older colleagues and managers.

So says Lawrence Wordon, managing director of PAG, who believes a greater understanding of their generation along with its characteristics and traits will go a long way in helping younger people in the workplace to overcome the stereotypes levelled at them and improving their relationships with their colleagues and bosses.

Generation Y are the largest and best educated generation ever, says Wordon. "They reflect the sweeping lifestyle changes over the past 20 years, driven in part by exponential advances in technology."

But their exuberant, impatient and opinionated style can be frustrating for older managers and executives who often dismiss Generation Y as inexperienced and disrespectful.

"However, this view often clouds Generation Y's potential and their ability to add value to an organisation," he says.

"It's an open secret that Generation Y workers do not have the best reputation in the workplace," says Wordon.

There are many criticisms levelled at Generations Ys including a lack of work ethic, constant distraction with social networking, and no loyalty to a company.

"However, by knowing what these stereotypes are and changing



Generation Y is technologically savvy, although this is not always appreciated by those in older generations.

your behaviour to negate these perceptions, you can get greater satisfaction from the workplace and contribute meaningfully to your job."

● **Stereotype one: You spend more time on Facebook than you do to the details of the job.**

"Technological advances over the past two decades have created so many additional channels for communication but not all of these are fully understood or socially accepted by older generations who regard new social media as toys rather than tools," says Wordon.

"Every company accepts a reasonable amount of personal communication during working hours as long as this privilege is not

abused.

"But while picking up the phone and organising an after-work drink with a close friend is considered acceptable, logging on to Facebook and messaging a friend for the same reason is not."

While these two communication methods were used for the exact same purpose and took about a similar amount of time, the perception that social networking is a waste of company time will persist while older generations are in charge.

"One day when you are in charge, you can call the shots but until then it is wise to mind your boss," Wordon advises.

However, Generation Ys can use their technological know-how for the benefit of older generations who are now only starting to understand the power of social media as a marketing tool, Wordon believes.

"Many managers and executives are looking to create their own blogs to position themselves as industry spokespersons and leaders and are starting to use Facebook and LinkedIn to reach out to potential clients, customers and employees," he says.

"Generation Ys can use their savvy to show their bosses how to create groups and networks and to establish their own blogs," he says.

● **Stereotype two: You are a per-**

petual job-hopper.

The perception that Generation Ys show very little loyalty and are constantly changing jobs is a fallacy according to Wordon.

"Contrary to popular belief, Generation Ys can be loyal as long as they are continually challenged and do new things. They believe loyalty works both ways and they will only be loyal to a company if the same respect is given in return," he says.

"This stereotype can be overcome if you show commitment to your team and your work. A visible willingness to commit to hard work such as working late to complete a project or taking on responsibilities beyond your immediate job requirements will go a long way to building acceptance and overcoming this stereotype."

● **Stereotype three: You have a smug sense of entitlement**

"The perception is that Generation Ys enter the world of work thinking they will earn a starting salary of R20 000 and will be a manager within six months.

"Unfortunately this perception is largely true," says Wordon, "but, ironically, this sense of entitlement is the product of the very people they are working for now.

"Generation Y grew up with the liberal ideologies of their parents. From a young age, they've been involved in family discussion and decision making and their opinions have been respected.

"They were sheltered from the harsh realities of life and were told that anything was possible if they put their minds to it.

"Generation Ys need to remember that the people they are working for spent many hard years to get where they are now. Intelligence and enthusiasm will help you to climb the corporate ladder but there is ultimately no substitute for hard work and dedication."