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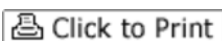
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Companies slow to adjust to work-life balance concerns of Gen Y

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By Sharon Jayson, USA TODAY

Businesses are struggling to keep pace with a new generation of young people entering the workforce, who have starkly different attitudes and desires than employees over the past few decades.

"We're at the tip of the iceberg," says Steve Miranda, of the Society for Human Resource Management, in Alexandria, Va. "The next 10 to 15 years will bring significant changes to expectations of what employers need to provide.

Workers born since the early 1980s (known as millennials, Generation Y or echo boomers) crave a more collaborative work environment and detest drudgery, say workplace analysts. They want a work-life balance, which is often at odds with the values of the corporate world.

It's a mindset that Miranda says most companies haven't yet faced, but retention is becoming a greater challenge than recruiting as companies watch entry-level hires move out rather than up.

Add in projections that suggest a dearth of young workers to replace an aging workforce and there is "a real concern about who is going to fill those management positions that baby boomers are leaving," says Claire Schooley, a San Francisco-based senior industry analyst at Forrester Research.

Some companies have already made overtures to appeal to this new sensibility, including St. Louis-based Enterprise Rent-A-Car, whose 200 recruiters typically hire 7,000 college graduates a year for its U.S. management training program. About a quarter of employees worldwide are 25 or younger.

Also, two of the Big Four accounting firms, PricewaterhouseCoopers and Deloitte & Touche, have in the past year revamped recruiting and retention programs to appeal to the work-life balance, mentoring environment and collegiality that millennials want.

"What changed my view is that within large companies, you have little groups," says Amy Chiu, 25, an accountant with Deloitte in San Jose, Calif. "Working for a large firm doesn't make me feel like a cog in a big machine."

Deloitte's largest division — the audit division — is 25% millennials.

At PricewaterhouseCoopers, about 20% of its 30,000 U.S. employees are in this age group. Last year, it launched a campaign supporting a balance between work and outside interests. The company website stresses job flexibility and says there are "no standard hours" because "work isn't the same day to day."

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With millennials' growing numbers comes greater clout. A 2004 report by the human resources organization suggests that the views of these young workers will be significant for decades.

As a result, consulting firms specializing in the millennial generation are out in force, offering advice to businesses baffled by the attitudes of their youngest employees.

"They're in a hurry and they do everything fast," says Bruce Tulgan, founder of the management training firm RainmakerThinking, in New Haven, Conn. "That's where we're all headed and they're already there."

His company's analysis of data from the U.S. Census, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources finds that about 10 million more young workers will join the ranks of the employed over the next five years.

Because this age group is such a new element in the workforce, there is relatively little data about their work habits. About half of 20- to 24-year-olds had a year or less of tenure with their current employer, according to labor force data released in September.

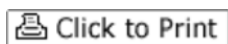
An online survey of 320 graduates by Experience, Inc., which provides career services to university students and alumni, found a similar pattern, with an average tenure of 1.6 years at a first full-time job. More than one-third (36%) stayed less than a year.

"They crave stimulation and fear boredom," says Dan Nagy, associate dean for global business development at Duke University, Durham, N.C. "The ultimate obscenity is to be in a boring job."

David Stillman, co-author of the 2002 book *When Generations Collide*, says so many more options are available to today's young that companies have to approach them differently than previous generations. "Savvy, leading-edge companies are realizing there's no right or wrong. They're just different."

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