



Next Generation Workforce

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- ▶ The health care industry has become a very complex business. Costs are rising and resources such as funding and human capital are diminishing.
- ▶ Human capital resources are about to reach true crisis proportions. The vital workforce we have counted on is expected to begin thinning as large numbers of Boomers retire. Not only does this deplete the workforce from a pure numbers perspective, but it also affects intellectual capital and institutional memory.
- ▶ Generational trends and characteristics have affected the workforce environment and will continue to do so as another generation continues to enter the workforce.
- ▶ Generation Y, also tagged Nexter, offers core values that can bring positive changes to the health care workforce.
- ▶ Technology continues to change at lightning speed. Embracing new technology and using it to refine the way we do business will help deliver success.
- ▶ Meaningful strategic plans are needed to change the model of business delivery and employee care in our future workforce.



Cathy Swenson

WE CAN ALL AGREE THAT our world has become very complex. From a business perspective, no matter the industry, fiscal success is a challenge, costs for health care continue to rise, and costs for natural resources such as fuel are skyrocketing. Our human capital resources are changing as well.

As Baby Boomers retire, the health care workforce is about to undergo a unique change. Boomers are the 78 million people born in the United States between 1946-1964 and make up a large portion of the workforce. A Boomer turns 50 every 7.6 seconds and 76 million of them will retire by 2030 (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2006). The health care industry is even more challenged because we are dealing with human lives. And many of us are concerned about the future as we age. One of the concerns impossible to ignore is who will care for us?

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Workforce projections continue to show imbalances between supply and demand. The growth in the demand for health occupations is twice that of non-health occupations, resulting in the need for more than 4.3 million health professions workers to fill the job openings created by departures and new positions between 2004-2014 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2005).

The Robert Wood Johnson (2006) study indicates that over 6 in 10 health care leaders believed that expected retirements over the next 5 years would cause a talent gap or “brain drain” in their organizations. Only 29.8% of the leaders have done anything to counterbalance these trends. Those who had, said they had instituted the following: focus on leadership succession planning (21.6%), mentoring programs of younger employees by older workers (18.6%), informal knowledge networks (17.5%), Web-based knowledge and transmission tools (15.5%), training programs conducted by older workers (9.3%), and knowledge transmission goals in the performance reviews of older employees (only 7.2%).

Yet the price of employee turnover costs the U.S. economy \$5 trillion per year (Frank, Finnegan, & Taylor, 2004). The bottom line: we have put our heads in the sand in preparing for future health care delivery.

Generational Impact

Multiple generations have contributed to some of the challenges within our workforce. Each generation has innate core values created by the era in which they were born and the experiences within their life span. These core values affect work ethic, perceptions of others’ work ethic, and communication styles.

Most recently our workforce transitioned from a two generation workforce (Matures and Boomers) to three generations (Matures, Boomers and Generation X). The Mature generation’s characteristics developed from experiences in the Great Depression. Responsibility and quality are key expectations of the Matures, as well as structure and respect. The Boomer generation, a larger part of the workforce who experienced an era of growth and prosperity, requires praise and recognition, putting company needs before personal needs, while juggling multiple responsibilities with competence.

These two generations have worked together with minor communication issues. Generation X was the first generation with more expectations for themselves, and more expectations for consistent ongoing communication and productivity for themselves and others (Kogan, 2001). When Generation X entered the workforce, most organizations looked at this group as a problem and were not prepared to deal with the resulting dynamics on workforce teams.

Nexters

The newest generation to enter our workforce, and the largest since the Boomers, is Generation Y, born between 1980 and 2000 — also known as the Millennials, Generation Next, MyPod generation, GenY, Digital Natives, Echoboomers, and the Boomerang Generation (Kogan, 2001).

This generation is globally aware, well educated, wired, and technologically sophisticated. Nexters have positive expectations and a desire for collective action (Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, 2000). Life experience of the Nexters has created a generation that possesses traits such as a lack of trust in corporations, a focus on personal success, and a short-term career perspective. Nexters have a desire to improve everyday life by volunteering and giving back.

This generation has a great ability to multitask and maintain several dialogues, which makes them versatile communicators. While this generation communicates through technology, they remain quite savvy in verbal communication skills (Melik, 2007).

Nexters have been exposed to technology from birth, using technology since their years as a toddler. Nexters access information 24/7; therefore, they expect to work anytime and anyplace. Using the Web for information and social networking is part of the Nexter's core competencies. Web-based social networking and accessing information on such sites as LinkedIn, Facebook, and MySpace are normal practices.

YouTube already has a few videos created by young members of the nursing profession. Each video exhibits out-of-the-box thinking, with the intent to recruit people into the nursing profession. One video done by students at Decker School of Nursing is titled "Bring Nursing Back" (2006). This video has had 140,000 views through November 2007. The other, created by emergency center nurses from the University of Alabama, recruits candidates through a hip approach ("UAB Emergency Room Rap," 2007). This video has been posted not only to YouTube, but has also appeared on Yahoo video.

Parents of this generation have been highly invested and involved with their growth. Some critics call this generation coddled. They may require more mentoring up front, but have shown an ability to make dramatic and constructive changes to the workforce in the short time they have been a part of it. According to Claudia Tattanelli, CEO, Universum Communications, this generation gets a bad rap but has an "incredible will to make changes" ("The bottom line on next gen workers," 2007).

As a whole, younger workers can take great work risks; therefore, they are more mobile and able to pursue better jobs anywhere. The workplace will need to adapt to the attitudes and needs of this generation (Rasmus, 2007).

Each generation comes to the workforce table with different life experiences. Each communicates

and perceives verbal and nonverbal messaging differently. While this does create complex work environments, it also presents a wonderful opportunity to put these diverse approaches to initiate new innovative practices.

Next Generation Work Environment

"Futurizing your organization — that is, creating an organization that thinks in the future tense and acts in the present — is prerequisite for success in a rapidly changing and uncertain world" (Morrison, 2007).

Organizations that thrive will be those that are open to imagination, adapt quickly to change, accept new technological methodologies, and entice employees with learning opportunities. Tomorrow's successful organization will retain employees because they continue to challenge and empower them to use their knowledge and skills to benefit the team and the organization. Résumés will boast the ability to learn, incorporate, and synthesize new knowledge, transforming new value for the organization. Work will consist of creative environments that inspire, challenge, and motivate. A multitude of flexible work schedules, locations, and job arrangements — such as job sharing, and telecommuting — will be available.

Diverse experience and backgrounds of workforce members will be accepted and utilized to create innovative work environments. Opportunities will be created for people to contribute in a variety of roles. Nexters will be accepted and truly integrated into a variety of projects and career opportunities. Matures and Boomers will be targeted for their industry expertise, business understanding, teamwork experience, and will be retained and utilized for their intellectual capital and wisdom.

Work environments will support team-based projects and group dynamics. Employees will be supported in their pursuit of personal and social activities, such as volunteer work.

Training and mentoring programs will be creative, efficient, and effective, such as e-learning via the Web. Employees will be recognized for contributions to new models of work delivery. Reciprocal mentoring, a practice where the teacher and student each learn from the other, will be a frequent practice.

Never before has there been such an opportunity for constructive changes to the health care industry. The impending changes in the makeup of the workforce remove barriers that have hindered progress in the past — doing it the same old way. Our next generation health care workforce is about multi-generational groups with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and experience creating new streamlined models of care and communication through human interaction and technology. \$

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