

May 12th, 2011 | 6:00 am

[Five Tips for Developing Gen Y Women](#)

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Recently [Business and Professional Women's Foundation](#) launched a project to build a framework through which to view the choices Gen X and Gen Y women make in the workplace – the Young Careerist Project. And last week, [BPW Foundation](#) released the results of its focus groups on Gen Y women specifically.

Dr. Sheila Barry-Oliver, BPW Foundation Board of Trustees and Research & Education Committee Chair, explained why this research is important. She said, “Women represent 46% of the Generation Y workforce, which by 2025 will represent 42% of the US workforce. Given the size of this segment of the future workforce, it is critical that employers understand the career choices and challenges of Generation Y women, which are different from prior generations. With this insight, employers can adjust their policies as necessary to ensure the pipeline of talented women remains robust and thus maximize the contribution of Gen Y women to the US economy.”

She continued, “We believe that our initial qualitative research provides some insight but we are following up with a detailed online survey to gain greater insight.”

Young Careerist Project research consultant Kara Nichols Barrett explained, “We asked ‘how does Gen Y define work and work/life balance, perceive intergenerational workplace dynamics, and experience gender in the workplace.’”

Nichols Barrett continued, “I would describe Gen Y women as anxious super-women. We’ve been told all along that we can do anything, and yet we recognize that there are limits, and the workplace is still different for men and women.”

As these women begin to take on more responsibilities in the workforce, the information revealed by the Young Careerist focus groups can provide valuable advice for managing, mentoring, and developing them into effective leaders.

1. Provide generation-specific networking opportunities. “Surprisingly, as a Gen Y women myself, listening to their perspectives helped me understand my own perspectives in the workplace,” Nichols Barrett explained.

Providing opportunities for Gen Y women to network with one another can help them talk through the uncertainties they may have about their own careers, and make headway on achieving their own career ambitions.

2. Understand that Gen Y women have a different definition of balance. “Gen Y women pursue *life*, not work/life balance, and they feel that work is an integral part of that life. Once you understand those workplace assumptions, you begin to understand how they evaluate work opportunities,” Nichols Barrett said.

According to Nichols Barrett, Gen Y men *and* women are looking for job opportunities or work styles that enable them to live their lives the way they want, and companies need to recognize this going forward.

3. Build a better dialogue with more senior women. Nichols Barrett reported that in focus groups, Gen Y women expressed significant admiration for the viewpoints of their more experienced colleagues and managers. Yet focus groups with managers revealed that these same more experienced colleagues felt that Gen Y women were ignoring advice, bordering on being disrespectful.

She explained, “We saw a lot of disconnects, but employers can help Gen Y women and older colleagues engage one another. The gaps can be bridged, but the generations have to learn to communicate better.”

4. Anticipate a drive for a new workforce infrastructure. According to the report, managers can expect to be challenged on the way workplaces are structured. Nichols Barrett said, “This is not just particular to Gen Y women, but Gen Y men as well. They are pushing for changes in the workplace and asking, ‘why are we doing things the way they are being done now? Why do we have to work nine to five?’”

She continued, “They are challenging and questioning the way work is done and asking how it could be done.”

As a result, she said, “We are seeing an increase in the number of young women who are moving into entrepreneurship, saying, ‘if the workplace isn’t going to change, then I’ll create my own.’ I think that will continue.”

If today’s top companies want to retain this highly educated and motivated group, they will have to make changes in the way work is structured and managed.

5. Understand that Gen Y women view their careers as a lattice instead of a ladder. “The key to retaining these women is critically engaging women – not assuming they want some elaborate workplace policy or program that may not meet their needs, but sitting down and exploring their needs as part of a roundtable setting,” Nichols Barrett advised.

One of the things the Young Careerist discussions revealed is that Gen Y women are not necessarily viewing their career as a matter of climbing the ladder to the top. “One of the best practices we discovered was Deloitte’s Mass Career Customization program – that there’s not one ladder, but our careers adapt to the realities of life.”

She continued, “There is the growing recognition that this isn’t just a Gen Y issue, but a workforce issue. The business case for reshaping how work is structured exists.”