

Leading Generatio

Young teachers have very different ideas than their veteran colleagues about what they want, need, and have to offer.

PREVIEW

To engage young teachers, principals should accommodate their individual needs and create opportunities for collaboration.

Multigenerational faculties benefit from personalized professional development and customized schedules.

You, as a school administrator, are facing the perfect storm: a growing number of baby boomers retiring each year, an absence of experienced teachers to take their place, and high turnover among young teachers. The need to hire and retain a new generation of teachers is one of the biggest challenges facing school administrators. To fill these vacancies, you must develop a plan for mentoring new teachers and retaining the expertise of your veteran teachers. But first, it will help if you understand how young teachers are different than previous generations and what they need and expect from you.

Leading Gen Y

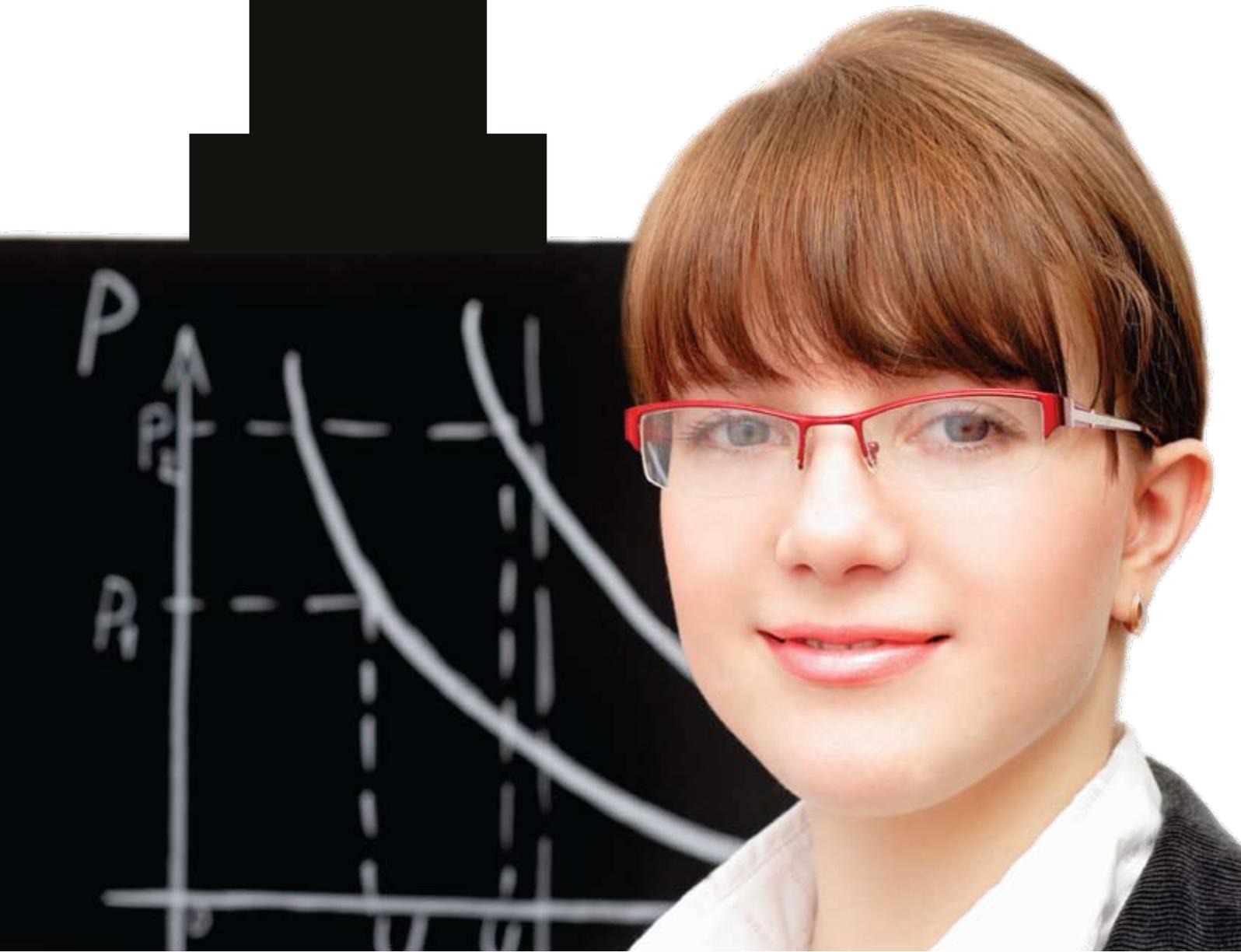
Born in the 1980s and 1990s, Generation Y is tech savvy, values personal connections, and multitasks with ease. If Gen Xers feel comfortable with technology, Gen Yers have it in their DNA. By the time they entered middle school, they had the Internet, e-mail, and their own cell phones. They also want to know all about you and don't mind revealing information about themselves. They are used to being on

the go, balancing soccer practice and piano lessons, and doing their homework while riding in the family minivan. Their parents doted on them and are often referred to as "helicopter parents" for being quick to drop in and rescue their kids at a moment's notice. As a result, Gen Y teachers expect certain benefits from you. Although the entire faculty will appreciate those things, for young teachers, they are necessary.

Offer face time. If you want to retain young teachers, you must keep in mind that they received lots of feedback and attention from their parents. If you have a large staff, then you will need to delegate the leadership role carefully and verify that the mentor/coach is interacting daily with new teachers. It is not sufficient to say, "Let me know if you have any problems or need anything." That may work with teachers who have experience, but it will not be effective with Gen Yers. They need face time with you and will expect it. Don't wait for the performance evaluation conference to give them needed feedback. They want to know if they are doing a good job and how they can improve in real time.

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By David C. Coley





Collaborate. Many principals have been struggling to get baby boomers and Gen Xers to collaborate on curriculum pacing and teaching strategies. Not to worry. Gen Yers will not push back when it comes to working in teams to address the core mission of the school. But do not be confused: Gen Y teachers will recognize the difference between meaningful collaboration and ancillary committee work. They are used to networking in the virtual world but also value personal interactions with colleagues. If they feel connected with and appreciated by their colleagues, they will stay.

Be a coach, not a boss. Young people who are entering the work force today are looking for a supervisor who serves as a mentor and a coach. They aren't interested in finding a boss. If you want them to be committed and loyal, you will need to earn their respect for your expertise and willingness to guide them in developing their craft, not for your position. Gen Yers say that they want to work with managers who are pleasant and easy to get along with, understanding, and open-minded. Do not underestimate the importance of your relationship with Generation Yers.

Recruiting Gen Y

The race to attract qualified teachers becomes more competitive each year. The following tips will help give you an edge in getting more teachers to apply and stay interested during the application process.

Check out your district's and school's Web sites. Most young adults will investigate and apply for positions online, so it is essential to understand how they view your school's and district's online "face." Does it promote the size of the district and how many people are employed? Some Gen Y teachers are looking for smaller work environments that promote personalization and close working relationships. Your Web site might be unintentionally sending the wrong message. Young teachers will also be very interested in your mentoring

program and the professional development that you provide to teachers. They want to know that you will be committed to helping them transition into their chosen profession and support them in their continued growth.

Hook those prospects and keep them online. Many districts are moving the application process partially or entirely online. If the process being used is outdated or too cumbersome, you will lose many prospective teachers before they even apply. After the application is submitted, do you do anything to let them know that they are under consideration? I recommend that someone monitor the list of candidates and send out periodic updates. It is a cost-effective way of staying in touch and keeping them interested. I also suggest that you conduct a survey or focus group with the last cohort of employees that was hired to get feedback on their experience—what worked and what didn't.

Interview effectively. Gen Y is also called "Generation Why." Gen Yers will not be shy about asking pointed questions about why they should teach in your school. Keep in mind that the interview is an opportunity to sell candidates on your school. I recommend that you involve at least one teacher who is similar in age to the candidate and will have good things to say about the teaching and learning conditions in your school. It is important for new teachers to be able to connect with someone their age and assess that person's commitment to the school. This communicates your trust in your staff members and your respect for their role in helping support new hires. With some thought and preparation, your staff members can help sell your school to the next group of applicants.

Highlight what makes your school unique. I have seen a change in the number and types of questions prospective teachers ask. Teachers coming out of college may be young, but they are not shy about asking why they should select your school over other offers

they have in hand or are considering. You need to be prepared to answer this question just as you expect the applicant to nail your key questions. Convincing the applicant of your commitment to the school will convey the type of leadership that he or she can expect from you as a staff member. Be ready to explain your school improvement plans and how staff members will work together to reach those objectives. Tell the story of what makes your school unique and how you think the applicant can help write the next chapter. Gen Yers want to make a difference in the world, and your school might be the right place for them to start.

Leading a Multigenerational Faculty

To lead and motivate a multigenerational faculty, you must customize your leadership. The following recommendations will help you retain teachers and reduce the costs associated with turnover.

Customize staff development. All schools plan new staff development opportunities each year. To create a sense of traction for change in an area of focus, the training is usually one size fits all. Frequently, it has been prescribed by central office for all schools, kindergarten through high school. It is not a bad idea to strive for alignment behind one or two goals, but rarely does the process for improvement apply equally and in the same manner for all teachers.

You can customize the process by gaining input from staff members. The goals may be developed by outside agencies or chosen in response to student test scores, but your staff members should be involved in creating the strategies to meet those goals. By soliciting ideas from those who have a vested interest in the school's success, you may discover untapped expertise and willingness to lead professional development from the ranks of staff members who are already in the building. Customizing training will enable you to

maximize the in-house talent of your faculty and ensure that teachers get what they need, regardless of their age or level of experience.

Modify schedules. You should also be open to customizing work schedules to address teachers' need to balance work and life. As they reach retirement, many baby boomers want abbreviated schedules and part-time work. They also are looking forward to retirement, but may not be ready for complete withdrawal from interaction with students and the school routine. Creating part-time schedules allows students and staff members to benefit from veteran teachers' years of experience and makes veteran teachers more available to mentor younger teachers. Part-time work is win-win for teachers and students.

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Job sharing is also an attractive alternative for teachers, especially those with small children. The schedules vary, but position sharing accommodates personal needs and keeps strong teachers connected to students and the profession. Principals should also be flexible when it comes to arrival and departure times if they want to hold on to teachers struggling to maintain the balance that is so important to Generations X and Y.

Tailor assignments and location. To retain teachers, especially the novice and alternative route teachers, you must assign schedules and classrooms strategically. Two recent studies

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captured the frustration of teachers just entering their careers. Johnson (2004) reported that

teachers were given unusually challenging assignments, which made their first years especially difficult. Although schools rarely protected new teachers from such assignment, there was no evidence that the principal and teachers deliberately tried to make things difficult. Rather, these assignments seemed to be the inadvertent consequence of a delayed firing process or seniority-based transfer provisions in the teachers' contract. When new teachers enter the scene, frequently in late summer or early fall, they usually get whatever is left. Although a few principals made a deliberate effort to ensure that new teachers' assignments were manageable and fair, that was unusual. (p. 104)

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality and Public Agenda (2007) found that alternative route teachers are particularly vulnerable to difficult teaching assignments. One new alternative route teacher put it this way:

I think that in a lot of other professions, first-year people are mentored and eased into it. You start them with easy assignments. I think in education, the older teachers have paid their dues, and therefore they teach fewer classes, get the honors classes. If you're a first year teacher, you are just muscle

almost. I know that's what we are here for. (p. 17)

I recommend that you give a lot of thought and care to the teaching and room assignments for young teachers. Otherwise, you will have to hire a replacement each year and lose valuable time with students that cannot be recovered.

Enable collaboration. Another way of customizing the workplace is to allow staff members some choice over whom they work with and how often they meet. Some staff members enjoy collaborating on just about everything, and others prefer to work more independently. Seek input from staff members before making team or department assignments. Putting teachers in the right position and on the right team will maximize their strengths and reduce the potential for friction between them and their coworkers.

Conclusion

To be an effective school leader for Gen Y teachers, you must be aware of the talents and demands that they bring to their first job, what to avoid, and how to make the most of their talents. Knowing the characteristics of each generation in the teaching force, their unique needs, and how to lead a multigenerational faculty will help you recruit and retain effective teachers. **PL**

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