

# Supporting Generation Y at Work: Implications for Business

This report presents insights from studies on Gen Y conducted by Knoll as well as our ongoing learning from customers. We have found that this generation (born between 1979 and 1997) has different attitudes, work styles and expectations of the physical work environment than do other generations. In this paper we discuss: the values and characteristics of this generation, implications for business, and aspects of the workspace that are important to Gen Y.

## The Values of Generation Y

This generation holds clear values about their work experience that emphasize:

- ▶ **Meritocracy.** Only the talented survive and anyone with talent should be able to succeed.
- ▶ **Camaraderie.** Working with others, in teams or just collaboratively; group accomplishment is even sweeter than solo success. A sense of mentoring, or mentors, in the workplace.
- ▶ **Non-traditionalism.** Doing things differently than in the past while making the point, “this is different.”
- ▶ **Integration of work and personal life** in a number of ways: co-workers are “family,” work and social life are blended together, and personal and social activities are blended into the work day (or night).
- ▶ **Fierce independence:** in choice of company to work for, when to leave, how you get your work done, how your work should be done are all individual decisions, (with input from social/professional networks) resulting in little loyalty to employers.

## How Generation Y Sees Themselves

Our research and experience shows that Gen Y workers characterize themselves as:

- ▶ **Unique.** They see themselves as a breed apart, talented, skilled and in demand. They strongly believe in the value of their work and expect “the rest of the world” to appreciate it as well.
- ▶ **Proud.** They are confident in their skills and they enjoy being looked to for advice and guidance and admired for their special talents.

- ▶ **Confident.** They show little fear of the future, believing that their skills will always be in demand and they have a strong support net in place through family and friends.
- ▶ **Realistic.** They are, however, realistic about financial compensation due to ups and downs in the economy.

## Implications for Business

Taken together, these trends suggest a number of implications for business:

- ▶ **Financial compensation.** Young knowledge workers may be realistic about variations in compensation because of economic fluctuations, but the underlying expectation of high compensation remains.
- ▶ **Caring.** The sense of being nurtured and indulged by the organization is central.
- ▶ **Career opportunities.** Gen Y workers have the expectation that their organization will offer learning and growth opportunities: the chance to do creative, challenging work, and the prospect to grow.
- ▶ **Collaboration.** Young workers seek a work culture that is organized around teamwork and collaboration.
- ▶ **Social Responsibility.** The business should espouse a social cause that goes beyond traditional profit and loss.



## What Generation Y Values in their Physical Surroundings

Gen Y knowledge workers are acutely aware of their physical work surroundings, from neighborhood to immediate building to work space. They value the look, feel, design and functionality of their work space. They want a relaxed space that is attractive to be in - one that supports casual collaboration, mentoring and learning. Among desired attributes:

- ▶ **“Quality of life” location.** Neighborhoods nearby that offer lots of amenities and things to do during breaks and after work such as restaurants, bars, shops, and other places where other young, talented people are likely to be.
- ▶ **Easy access to work.** Like the rest of us, young workers hate difficult commutes, especially by car. They would prefer to live very near work, ideally walking or biking to the office

or with easy access to mass transit. Those who drive may desire a ride share program and easy parking for either a car or bike.

- ▶ **Facilities that provide personality.** The physical work space should be visually attractive. Quality furniture is desirable; young workers judge companies by the “look” of their workspace and by the respect shown to employees via the physical elements and the equipment provided.
- ▶ **Amenities.** The availability of food, dry cleaning, workout areas, bike storage and other amenities within the facility are important to this generation.
- ▶ **Safety.** Gen Y workers are sensitive to security issues at work, from theft of equipment to personal harm; they actively value such security devices as video cameras at entrances and key cards.
- ▶ **Workspace Characteristics**
  - ▶ Personal workspace that is ergonomic and comfortable, with good storage.
  - ▶ Access to windows and natural light.
  - ▶ State of the art personal work technology (iPhone, Blackberry, etc) and video conferencing.
  - ▶ Sophisticated, stylish design of workspace and furnishings.

- ▶ The ability to personalize their space by being able to display personal items (photographs, souvenirs, etc) and to adjust work tools (seating, monitor arm, keyboard support, etc).
- ▶ Individual and group work. They value a balance between privacy to conduct individual work and the desire to have spaces that encourage and facilitate learning, mentoring and knowledge sharing with co-workers.

*Knoll researches links between workspace design and human behavior, health and performance, and the quality of the users' experience. We share and apply what we learn to inform product development and help our customers shape their work environments.*

To learn more about this topic or other research resources Knoll can provide, visit [www.knoll.com/research/index.jsp](http://www.knoll.com/research/index.jsp)