

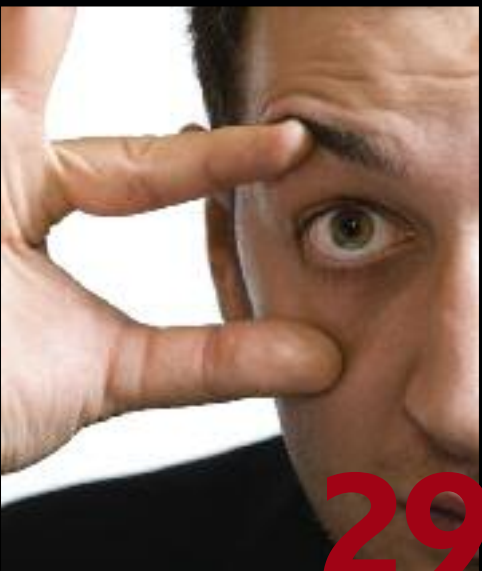
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PRESIDENT'S PAGE



*FMA National President
Patricia Niehaus*

Help FMA Help You!

FMA Action Letters Remind Congress We Are Part of the Solution, Not the Problem

We had some changes in the National Office staff over the summer. Karl Gruss, our exceptional Government Affairs Representative for several years, received an offer he could not refuse and departed to attend law school at the University of Florida. Although I threatened to chain him to his desk to keep him, this is something he has wanted to do for a long time and we wish him well. He is definitely missed but has promised to keep in touch. Shortly thereafter, our Membership

Coordinator, Virginia Hall, left us to accept another position better suited to her interests in event planning. Fortunately for us, Todd, Jessie and Latorea stepped up and kept the office going, and I am pleased to fill you in on our new hires.

FMA hired Katie Maddocks as our new Government Affairs Assistant and she hit the ground running. Katie worked for a U.S. Senator prior to joining us so she already knows her way around Washington. Todd also selected Joann Brown as FMA's new Membership Coordinator. Joann comes to us from another association's membership department and we are looking forward to having her on board.

While federal employees did not take any direct hits to our pay and benefits in the debt ceiling compromise reached by the President and congressional leaders over the summer, we continue to hear from lawmakers that federal employee pay and benefits are *always* on the table. And lawmakers still have targets to meet to decrease funding which may impact us down the road. This is not the end of the attacks on federal workers. *We cannot become complacent because we dodged the bullet this time around.* Unfortunately, we can realistically expect to continue to be the "Target du Jour" for our congressional leaders and, therefore, your grassroots efforts are absolutely critical to our efforts to defend FMA members' pay, benefits and continued employment.

When you receive an email from Katie Maddocks (she DOES have your home e-mail address, right?) asking you to contact your Members of Congress, please take a few minutes to help FMA help you. It only takes a few minutes to personalize and send an Action Letter and e-mail Katie that you have done so. Also, during recesses, Members of Congress frequently have fundraisers and open houses for their constituents. If you would like to attend one of these events, please contact Jessie Klement, our Government Affairs Director. This is an ideal use of PAC funds because our members get face time with their representatives and senators and FMA gets visibility. We all need to let our Members of Congress know regularly that we are their constituents, we vote and we are tired of being their scapegoats and convenient targets.

Yes, I am still asking you to step up to the plate and help YOUR organization. Whether it is time, money or both, we are here for you and we need you to be here for us.

As I reminded you in our summer issue, another way you can help is by contributing to our political action committee (FMA-PAC). The access that FMA-PAC contributions provide has assisted FMA in building stronger relationships with Members of Congress and their staff on issues of importance to FMA. Remember: FMA-PAC cannot use your dues to fund our political activity. If you have not already begun to regularly donate to FMA-PAC, please do so now. You probably will not miss \$5 or \$10 per pay period and it would make a tremendous difference in our efforts with Congress.

Thank you. ■

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All materials submitted to *The Federal Manager* should pertain to public service managers. Copy should be double-spaced, no longer than 10 pages.

High resolution color photographs, charts, or other illustrations should be included if possible. Text should be submitted by email or on compact disc. Include a biography of the author.

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A close-up, profile view of a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket and a white shirt. He is speaking into a silver microphone. In the background, two other men in suits are visible, one looking towards the speaker and the other looking away. The setting appears to be a professional meeting or conference.

Operation Opportunity: How to Leverage Young Feds' Attitudes to Encourage Retention

Operation Opportunity continued from page 3

By Lynn Martin,
Candace Riddle, Tyler
Robinson, and Dave Uejio

Government human resources (HR) is often focused on hiring and firing, with less importance focused on employee retention. The importance of retention should not be underestimated, especially for the management of today's young professionals. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), replacing one employee may cost roughly one and a half times the employee's annual salary.¹ While federal managers are often focused on recruiting new talent, they would benefit from discovering ways of retaining the new employees that they have worked so hard to recruit. This will undoubtedly be a challenge as young professionals are perhaps the most at-risk age group for switching jobs, a practice that seems increasingly commonplace in today's workplace. Data from the Office of Personnel Management's central personnel data file confirms that federal employees under the age of 35 are almost three times more likely to leave federal service compared to those aged 35 and older.²

Pathways: A New Opportunity to Recruit and Retain Young Talent

Young professionals are the target audience for the Pathways Program, an initiative created by an executive order in December 2010 to help recruit and retain qualified individuals into a career in public service. The Pathways Program was developed to fill the void left by the cancellation of the Federal Career Intern Program (FCIP), which was the largest federal program providing employment opportunities to young individuals.

Because of its large size and broad impact across government, the cancellation of FCIP left a large gap for a new program to fill.

The program calls for three individual "pathways" — the Internship Program (for current students), the Recent Graduates Program (a two-year internship for graduating students, eligible for up to two years post-graduation), and the Presidential Management Fellows Program (a two-year internship for individuals with graduate-level degrees). Final regulations for the Internship Program and the Recent Graduates Program have not yet been determined.³ It is certain that the Pathways Program will place a large focus on individuals who are still in school or those who have recently graduated. It can therefore be assumed that the majority of Pathway participants will be individuals born after 1980 in the "Millennial Generation."

The focus on recruiting young talent is of particular interest to Young Government Leaders (YGL).⁴ To provide feedback from young government employees, YGL surveyed its membership to determine the qualities and characteristics that would encourage young professionals to stay with the government after the end of their internship. Specifically, YGL focused on the types of opportunities that would encourage Millennials to commit to a long-term career in public service.

This article highlights YGL's survey findings that pertain to popular approaches to retention. It will examine the survey respondents' answers to questions posed on retention, and possible retention solutions that target the Millennial Generation mentality. Proactive managers and those developing the Pathways Program regulations can utilize this information to encourage retention of government employees upon completion of their internships.

The High Cost of High Turnover

High turnover rates can have tremendous negative effects on a workplace, ranging from the organization level down to the individual employee. A low retention rate can have serious consequences for an agency when key knowledge and leadership is lost. The loss of staff members may result in an agency being understaffed and therefore unable to meet important deadlines. High turnover rates can also negatively affect the morale of agency employees who would otherwise be content and satisfied with their jobs. As their colleagues leave, the remaining employees will be burdened by an increased workload and may lose forward momentum on their assigned workload. Retaining and valuing employees is critical to the success of an agency's mission.

High turnover rates also put a strain on an agency's resources.⁵ Time and money will be spent on performing exit interviews and out-processing of employees, in addition to performing the recruiting, hiring, and in-processing for their replacements. The agency may have to hire more human resources professionals to complete the paperwork necessary to perform the processing tasks related to the recruitment cycle. In addition to human resources professionals, these tasks also burden hiring managers, who will spend valuable time conducting interviews rather than focusing on achieving the agency mission.

Young Government Employees' Thoughts on Retention

Retention of new employees (who are often young) is especially critical to maintaining a successful work environment. New employees are a

¹ www.shrm.org

² <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>. Employees under the age of 35 have a 20 percent attrition rate; employees aged 35 and older have a seven percent attrition rate.

³ <http://www.opm.gov/hiringreform/pathways/>

⁴ YGL is a cross-agency association of over 2,000 young government employees whose mission is to educate, inspire, and transform the next generation of government. To learn more, visit <http://younggovernmentleaders.org>

⁵ "Employee Recruiting Costs Versus Employee Retention," Recruiting and Retention, Bridge Capital Solutions Corp., June 20, 2011.

valuable resource because of their enthusiasm, energy and outside perspective. It is crucial for the government to retain these employees because they have the potential to grow into leadership positions in the agency. Providing younger employees with opportunities to grow and learn is a proven method of retention and succession planning, creating a stable work environment for the agency for years to come.

In May 2011, YGL surveyed its membership on the qualities of an “effective” internship program. This initial survey focused primarily on responding to the development of the Recent Graduate branch of the Pathways Program, but the feedback can be applied to any internship program.

Of the 372 respondents who took the survey:

- 30 was the average age of the respondent; 81% were under the age of 35
- 70% believed their internship was effective or very effective
- 98% had at least a Bachelor’s degree
- 60% had a Master’s degree or higher
- 74% currently work at a federal grade of GS 9-13.

The YGL survey asked respondents what the barriers were to retaining employees after the completion of their internship, and what would help overcome those barriers. The results showed that 81 percent of the respondents had participated in an internship program; therefore, the survey responses provide guidance based on real experiences with federal internships.

Respondents answered the question, “What are the biggest barriers in retaining employees after the two-year internship? (Select up to 3)” with the following responses:

- 73.2% - Quality of work assignments
- 69.9% - Career advancement opportunities
- 50.4% - Private sector opportunities



(l-r) Dr. Nick Nayak, Chief Procurement Officer, Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Greg Rothwell, Chief Procurement Officer, DHS (retired), President, Evermay Consulting, and Candace Riddle, Standards Manager, National Institute of Governmental Purchasing/Young Government Leaders (YGL) Director of Strategic Planning at the YGL GovUp Seminar.

- 39.4% - Manager
- 19.4% - Burnout
- 15.7% - Other

It is evident from the answers received that quality of work assignments, career advancement opportunities, and private sector opportunities are the biggest barriers to retention. In examining these responses, it is clear that respondents placed tremendous value on quality assignments while working for the federal government. The responses also indicate that young workers sought meaningful career advancement opportunities, without which they were more likely to leave public service. These responses contrast with conventional wisdom which generally states that employees “quit their bosses,” or are overworked to the point of burnout.

The need for engaging work is a primary desire for the Millennial Generation. Advice for providing engaging opportunities may be taken from Hcareers, the world’s largest online hospitality career newspaper. In a guide on retaining younger workers, one of the recommendations is to keep younger employees “on their toes.”

When it comes to retaining your Gen-Y and Millennial employees, remember that boredom is the kiss of death for workers in these age groups. Make a concerted effort to challenge your younger staff members, offering them meaty responsibilities, thorny problems, and plenty of opportunities for professional development. An actively engaged employee is much more likely to develop a sense of loyalty to the company – and to act accordingly.⁶

These observations provide universal advice for all managers of younger employees. Responses to the YGL survey show that young employees are eager for more responsibilities and increasingly demanding work. Respondents repeatedly characterized themselves as, “not feeling part of the overall solution.” Respondents reiterated a “lack of appropriate challenge,” and openly sought more challenging work. They also lamented a “lack of appeal to the generation’s need to be included and involved in their work and community.” Respondents further observed a “lack of employee development and training,” and felt, “talented new hires have plenty of

⁶ “Retention Strategies that Resonate with Younger Employees.” Hcareers Resource Center. On Target Jobs, June 20, 2011.

continued on next page

Operation Opportunity continued from page 5

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Make a concerted effort to challenge your younger staff members, offering them meaty responsibilities, thorny problems, and plenty of opportunities for professional development. An actively engaged employee is much more likely to develop a sense of loyalty to the company – and to act accordingly.

”

other options and will leave under these circumstances.”

This desire for more challenging work and the training and development necessary to be successful is not surprising. Most interns recently left an academic environment where they were constantly challenged and accustomed to a dynamic atmosphere of continual learning. Universities and colleges develop students to become leaders of their peers, both within the classroom and in extracurricular activities. The transition from this environment to a more hierarchical workplace can be a struggle for these individuals. The open-ended survey responses show a strong need to provide an environment that leverages the respondents’ educational experience, providing stimulating opportunities where employees can fully participate and where they are presented with challenging opportunities to learn and grow.

Managers may not be convinced that younger employees are ready to work on demanding projects until they have more tenure in their positions. Managers may also be drawing on their own experience to help guide them in the development of their young employees. This can result in well-intentioned but ultimately misaligned practices. According to Garrison Wynn of Wynn Solutions, Baby-boomer managers often spent years performing menial tasks before being selected for more exciting challenges, whereas Gen Y has been raised to believe their future is of their choosing. “When you repeatedly tell a child she can achieve anything she wants and coax her along by rewarding her for hitting one easy-to-achieve goal after another, she grows to expect that pattern in the work world.”⁷

While the Millennial Generation has much to offer the workplace, they also have lessons to learn as new government employees. Millennials are frequently described as lacking interest in completing the mundane tasks that are usually assigned to entry-level employees. Young employees do themselves no favors by perpetuating the stereotype of the entitled

superstar destined for the Senior Executive Service. Young employees may underestimate the sheer complexity of the federal government, to say nothing of the years of experience required to cultivate relationships and learn the subtle skill of navigating the public sector. Learning how to dig in and get things done, whether or not the job is considered fun or has a high profile, is one of the realities of the working world from which the Millennials are still feeling growing pains.

A Roadmap for Retaining Millennials

Overcoming the retention problem among younger employees hinges on identifying barriers and solutions that address interns’ desire for a dynamic workplace where they can utilize their talents, develop new skills and make significant contributions. Respondents’ suggestions demonstrate a strong preference for providing interns the autonomy to make their own decisions and supporting them in their desire for further educational opportunities and advancement.

When asked, “What should be included in the Recent Grads program? (Select all that apply),” the following were the items respondents most wanted to see in the program:

- 84.8% - Rotational assignments
- 81.0% - Job shadowing opportunities
- 80.7% - Leadership training
- 77.7% - Formal mentorship
- 76.6% - Meetings with higher officials, including SES

The seven other options received between 40 percent and 64 percent such as a group orientation retreat (54.9 percent) and agency paid continuing education (62.5 percent). The top responses, rotational assignments and job shadowing opportunities, show that interns have a continuous desire to learn and grow. Respondents’ preference for meetings with higher officials, formal mentorship, and leadership training demonstrates that

⁷ PRWeb. “Industries Desperate to Keep Talented Young Workers Train Managers to Boost Retention.” PRWeb News Center, Wynn Solutions, May 13, 2008. Web, June 20, 2011.

they recognize that more experienced workers have significant knowledge to share. Many of these needs can be addressed through high-contact, low-cost activities that will lead to greater job satisfaction and long-term retention.

In response to the question, “After the two-year internship, what would help retain employees? (Select up to three),” respondents indicated the following:

- 92.9% - Allowing the employee the opportunity to be placed in his/her preferred office
- 80.2% - Educational reimbursement for a further commitment
- 35.3% - Allowing graduates the opportunity to serve as ambassadors at local colleges
- 28.5% - Providing a group for Pathways alumni
- 16.4% - Other
- 14.1% - Mailing list of events and activities

It is not surprising that young employees desire the latitude to find permanent employment in an office that best fits their skills and interests. Based on these responses, Student Loan Repayment Programs (SLRP) may be an untapped means to retain quality young employees. The open-ended answers further support these findings by suggesting:

- “A continued commitment by the agency to provide training opportunities.”
- “Advancement opportunities.”
- “Placement in meaningful work.”
- “Having those [colleagues] with whom the interning employees have worked during their internship treat the interns not like glorified ‘go-fers’, but like members of a team.”

These suggestions capture respondents’ concern that their ability to contribute to their home office might not be sufficiently valued by their coworkers. It also highlights the respondents’ interest in enhancing their skills. By appealing to their need for involvement and drive for

advancement, managers and drafters of the Pathways Program may be able to retain more of the employees brought in under the internship program.

The majority of Pathways Program interns will have different requirements and interests in the workplace than their predecessors, which can result in natural generational conflicts that can have a decidedly negative effect on perceptions of internship programs with the federal government. Supervisors should be mindful of the idea that some Millennials “expect constant guidance, attention, feedback and rewards... [and tend to] equate attention with value. They want managers to spend time with them, help set realistic and achievable goals, challenge them, and provide constant feedback.”⁸

Conclusion

The results of the YGL survey demonstrate the importance of ensuring that new employees feel involved and valued. In exchange for increased responsibility and training opportunities, they are more likely to show loyalty to a career in public service. As one survey respondent aptly stated, “If we go after the best and brightest [applicants], the program needs to offer and deliver on commitments for fast-track training, development, responsibilities, and career advancement.”

The Millennial generation will stay – and succeed – in a workplace that addresses their need for inclusion, values their contributions and provides an atmosphere of opportunity. Incorporating these qualities into federal internship programs will allow the government to be a dynamic workplace that caters to the interests of its young recruits. Both the federal government and the individual employees will benefit, translating into a winning succession plan for all. While large-scale change is often difficult, feedback from survey participants shows that improvements can be made at the office level with manager and employee

having an open dialogue about their expectations and how they can work together to achieve their personal and agency goals. ■

To learn more about the Young Government Leaders, please visit:

<http://younggovernmentleaders.org>.

Lynnie Martin is a Contract Specialist for the Federal Acquisition Service (FAS) of the General Services Administration (GSA). She is the National Public Relations Manager for YGL. In this capacity, she shares YGL’s message to educate, inspire, and transform the current and future leaders of government. Having entered federal government service through an internship herself, she has both personal and professional interest in the development and implementation of the new Pathways Program.

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⁸ Ibid.