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Class Is in Session:

What Younger Workers Are Teaching Us About the Job Market

By Scott Cullen

This generation treats every role as ongoing learning, preparing them for the next step, wherever it may be.

As the school year starts, it's not only students who are in learning mode. Office technology dealers are also learning from the younger generation of job candidates who are shifting expectations at work. These workers bring new ideas, but they also push employers to rethink how they define career growth, culture, communication, and success in sales roles.

Recruiters at Copier Careers emphasize that employers who understand these shifting priorities and communicate their expectations clearly are better positioned to find long-term fits in a tight labor market.

Lesson 1: Career Paths Are Shorter and More Flexible

For younger workers, career development is expected, but not necessarily within one organization.

"They're not expecting to stay at one company for their entire lives," explained Jessica Crowley, SVP, Copier Careers. "They know they'll be there for a few years and then move on. But that doesn't mean career development isn't important; it's just viewed differently. Employers need to consider what skills and experiences they can provide during that time."

Copier Careers President Paul Schwartz pointed out that although employers like to believe they can provide long-term growth, that isn't always possible. "You can't promise every candidate a clear path forward," he said. "But you can set expectations about what success looks like in the role and what they can gain from it."

Lesson 2: Culture Is Personal and Hard to Define

Culture remains a key factor for younger candidates, but defining it isn't simple.

"If a candidate tells me they want a better culture, I always ask what that means to them because it's different for every person and every situation," said Crowley.

And if a client says they have a great culture or we're looking for a team player that will match our company culture, she'll ask them the same thing. The companies that stand out are those with open communication where employees feel safe expressing ideas without fear of reprisal.

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One of the challenges Copier Careers' recruiters face is that clients aren't always able to clearly describe their company culture. "That's probably why they've struggled to find the right fit because they're trying to figure out what's missing from their team and what they need to create that environment," said Crowley.

Schwartz highlighted that culture is subjective. It boils down to matching people with the right environment. "One person may dislike the culture of their current employer, but that same environment could be a great fit for someone else," he said. "Our role as recruiters is to bridge that gap."

Lesson 3: Younger Sales Reps Want to Sell More Than Just Hardware

For younger candidates, the appeal of a sales career in the office technology industry extends well beyond copiers and printers. What motivates them is the wide range of solutions they can offer to clients.

"The more solutions you can sell, the more attractive the position is," explained Schwartz. "It gives reps more reasons to call on businesses and more opportunities to succeed."

Crowley agreed, pointing out that solutions often serve as a hook to attract younger candidates from outside the industry. "That's the only way you can attract someone younger," she said. "If I'm talking to someone from telecom, for example, I'll explain that yes, the core of the dealership is hardware, but you're also selling managed print, managed IT, document management, and all the software solutions that go with it. Once they hear about everything beyond the hardware, they're more open to a conversation."

For dealerships, this means emphasizing their entire portfolio during the recruiting process. Younger workers see themselves not just as hardware salespeople, but as consultants providing comprehensive solutions that deliver a real difference for clients. The more diverse the offerings, the more attractive the role becomes.

Lesson 4: Communication and Expectations Need Alignment

While younger workers may value transparency and collaboration, Schwartz noted that each generation has had its own expectations about the communication they expect from their employer. A Gallup article, "[The New Challenge of Engaging Younger Workers](#)," Reported that since 2020, younger employees have seen drops in knowing what's expected, having growth discussions, and feeling their opinions matter, all linked to reduced engagement.

"Younger candidates sometimes need guidance on professional communication," observed Crowley. "Seasoned employees know how to communicate because we've been in the workforce longer. For younger workers, part of the challenge is teaching them what employers expect."

Another article on Cake.com, "[The Gen Z Effect and the Workforce Evolution: 2024 Statistics](#)," revealed that nearly half of Gen Z prefer instant messaging over email, and 97% want personality, emojis, GIFs, and a casual tone in work messages.

Ultimately, younger workers expect employers to provide more frequent, constructive feedback, clearly articulate role expectations and growth opportunities, and embrace varied communication styles while guiding toward professionalism and clarity.

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Lesson 5: Work-Life Balance Is Part of the Conversation, Albeit Unrealistic in Sales

Work-life balance often comes up with younger candidates, but dealers need to understand what that really means in the context of sales.

“It’s interesting because we want to say yes, it’s important,” said Crowley. “But if you’re in a sales role, how do you say, ‘I want a better work-life balance’? It’s part of the conversation and decision-making, but not necessarily the number one priority.”

“For us as recruiters, it’s about matching the right individuals,” added Schwartz. “If it’s an up-and-down-the-street sales role and net-new business is the goal, we’re not going to propose someone who makes work-life balance their top concern because the requirements of the role won’t align. This is a sales role and they’re expected to produce, and their personal income is directly tied to that production.”

For dealers, the lesson isn’t to dismiss the idea of work-life balance, but to set realistic expectations from the start. Sales positions are demanding and performance-driven, with compensation tied directly to results. Candidates who value work-life balance above all else may not be suited to those roles.

At the same time, flexibility can be a key part of the retention strategy for top performers. Dealers who recognize the importance of work-life balance and reward results with earned flexibility will have a stronger case for keeping younger reps engaged.

Individual Priorities Are Key

If there’s one common lesson Schwartz and Crowley identify, it’s that younger workers are more individualistic than earlier generations. It goes back to understanding the candidate's priorities.

“And maybe that's the main takeaway from all this,” said Schwartz. “People are more individualistic than before. They’re choosing not to follow a traditional career path, whereas perhaps a generation or two ago, things were different. People are now more aware of their goals and objectives. Our job as recruiters is to understand those priorities and then find the best possible match with a client.”

For dealers, that means listening carefully, being transparent about expectations, and recognizing that success often relies on aligning what motivates the candidate with the role's requirements.

This fall, as classrooms fill up, it’s important to remember that recruiting is also about learning. The younger generation is teaching employers a lot, and those willing to adapt are the ones most likely to build lasting, successful teams. The same goes for young candidates, being willing to learn from their employers and adapt in order to launch a successful career.