

## **Young Professionals:**

### **Can't live with them- can't have a future without them.**

By Regan Brown, CFRE, Nonprofit Consultant

Let's face it, when you think back to your entry-level position that helped you start down the road of what has become an amazing career, you might not have the fondest memories. My first employer was tough, but looking back on the experience and what it brought to my career; I'm appreciative.

Young professionals in the development world today have two strikes against them. First of all, many are from the dreaded Gen X or Gen Y generations. This group has an uncanny characteristic I refer to as the need for "Instant Gratification." Instead of starting an entry level job and devoting several years to professional experience, they tend to be flighty and abandon post as soon as it looks like something better is coming along. Secondly, they are working in a field with high rollover and as the economy struggles to get back on its feet, the pressure is worse, making it easier than ever for young professionals to skip from one workplace to another.

As the field continues to grow and the generational gap of experienced professionals deepens, as much as 49% of senior executives will be gone in 6 – 10 years. Who is going to fill these positions? If we have a lack of prepared individuals ready to assume these duties, the profession is going to suffer and the reputation of the not-for-profit community will falter. In addition, our donor base is not growing. We are going to the same small pool of generous patrons over and over again. Our young professionals are challenged with increasing the number of donors for our organizations and ensuring them that we are merely the liaison between their good intentions and a wonderful mission.

### **Are you an executive or administrator?**

To preserve the fiscal accomplishments of your organization and the reputation of the field, we need to ensure that our young entry level colleagues are focused on their present responsibilities AND engaging in the big picture operations of the organization, so that their interest and skills grow as the demands of the development field increase.

## Three Simple Tips

1. First, they need to know that sitting at that desk and completing your boring data entry tasks will earn them the pleasure doing more creative things, if they so desire. A rare few actually enjoy data entry, while most would rather get the necessary data entered so that they may work on the special event project you've given them or other tasks that appeal to them.
2. While they are entering said data, explain everything to them so they understand why their job is essential to the success of your development program.
3. Don't forget to reward them! Everyone needs successes to celebrate now and again, whether it is a small pay raise or an increase in responsibilities. Many times, just a word of encouragement is enough, if it's sincere, to make them feel appreciated.

## The Emerging Need

Emerging is the need for self assessment among young employees. Our profession is beginning to see many different concentrations. If someone enjoys details and creative writing, grant writing and annual reports or donor acknowledgements might fit their skill set, or maybe they would excel at creating and maintaining your online instant communications. If they are a more magnanimous person, they might have potential as a major gifts officer, or an operations manager.

Can you add a subtle responsibility in a new direction as encouragement? Options exist in several different genres of non-profit including education, religion, health, social services, environmental, arts, etc. You can show them these options. Though most organizations have similar issues they battle on a day-to-day basis, they all have very different donors and very different missions.

By teaching young professionals how to self-assess skills and enjoyments, we have a better opportunity of retaining them in the profession. This is how we will guarantee a legion of prospective service leaders.

I salute individuals who have been in the field for 15, 20 even 30 years, and every good manager knows the benefits of having a contingency plan. We are already seeing organizations hire inexperienced professionals for senior positions within development departments.

We need to start retaining the best and brightest young professionals so that we may continue to see the good work of our organizations thrive in the future.

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