

Leading A Young Team In A Start-up

The face and structure of new generation organisations are fast changing. The average age of CEOs is dropping and the same is true of employees of new age companies. In such a scenario, the traditional rules of business need to be revisited and refined so as to deal effectively with employees, most of whom are below 25 years of age.



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With the entrepreneurship boom just round the corner, this

is a good time for people to own companies, even at a young age. The new generation start-up CEOs are not the archetypal 45 year-olds with several years of industry experience. They are young people in their late twenties or early thirties with a couple of years of industry

experience, or in some cases, almost none at all! They normally don't wear suits and ties, prefer watching sci-fi movies and take part in the usual gang gossip and fun activities. These people drive their venture with sheer passion and a like-minded young workforce. However, in order to keep their young team motivated and focused, there are some guidelines that the new generation CEO may consider keeping in mind.

Cultivate an open and dynamic atmosphere

Start-ups should keep a flat hierarchy with minimal levels. The levels should be indicative in nature and shouldn't limit employees to express their creative ideas/thoughts even to the CEO/CXO. Start-ups usually have less than 100 employees and hence knowing everybody personally is not difficult at all. The management team should recognise every employee individually and give due attention to keep them motivated. The young crowd wants to learn new things at a fast pace and is ready to crack a problem by even putting in extra hours. The top management should set a good example to keep these folk going, in order to develop that kind of work culture within the organisation.

They should encourage openness and share both good and bad news. The start-up crowd doesn't view failure as the end of the road, hence business failures should be shared and the way ahead should be illustrated clearly. The success mantra here is openness, freedom with responsibilities, collaborative learning and holistic growth.



Collaborative work environment

CEOs of start-ups should be concerned about end-objectives and the productive quality of work-time rather than the number of hours spent by an employee in the office. Start-ups should encourage employees to use hours saved due to higher efficiency to learn cross-functional activities. New-generation start-up employees want to get involved in several aspects of organisational development, and start-ups should ideally provide them enough opportunities to do that. For example, good developers should also get exposure of sales and marketing. This would enable them to learn and appreciate business aspects, which they would keep in mind while carrying out their future projects. An open culture should be promoted and people at all levels should be allowed to share knowledge in both a formal and informal manner. Organisations should not restrict people from learning new things because of the fear of losing them to other companies. The objective of start-ups should be to create an environment where both the company as well as the employees evolve at the same time.

The 'net value realised' from a start-up employee should be pretty high as compared to traditional, established organisations. The risks and rewards should be shared with each and every high worth individual in a start-up, since these youngsters are ready to take risks in order to get better returns. In terms of salary, these employees might earn less, but they want to learn things faster than their peers at bigger organisations and/or earn stocks/equity in lieu of liquid cash. The young crowd prefers an informal dress code and flexible work hours. They also would like to work from home, as and when required.



Fun@work

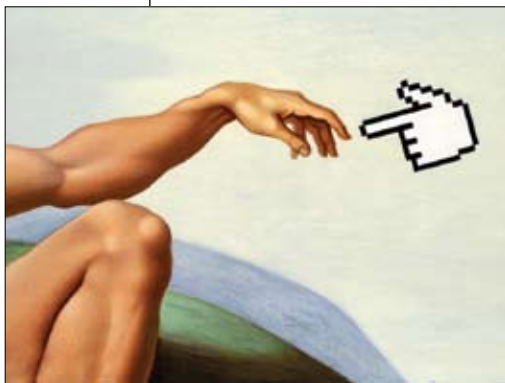
Employees at start-ups view their workplace as a fun place and hence enjoy working for longer without ever giving it a second thought. They discuss movies, books, news, business and lots of other topics with their peers and seniors. The management at a start-up should not consider such healthy banter as diverting people from their work. This kind of interaction, in fact, may act as a booster to refresh their minds and they would work more efficiently. Ideally, everyone should get together for lunch/snacks and discuss something other than routine work. These discussions help employees to relax for sometime and then get back to productive work.



There should always be parties or gatherings to celebrate even small successes. These need not be expensive and lavish, but should act more as a platform for social interaction and tacit knowledge dissemination. These events can also be used as a platform to showcase the creative side of employees with skills in singing, dancing, poetry, etc. These small events should be supplemented with outings to places of interest where the whole team stays together for 2 to 3 days. In this manner, people get to know each other better and start developing informal relationships, which also plays a critical role in creating a strong bond between the team. Small things like the serving of snacks, tea/coffee, etc, help organisations save a lot of productive hours which employees otherwise spend sitting in the cafeteria. Besides, a lot of employees enjoy these small things since most of them are unmarried and such gestures make their life simpler.

Innovation and creative work

Start-ups should provide employees ample opportunities to innovate. Since a lot of employees are quite young, they want to structure



processes and methodologies as per their creative thoughts, knowledge and understanding. They bring in new perspectives and ideas. The fresh mind tries to solve a problem by using innovative and creative ideas. These solutions, after a little iteration, can be very useful for any organisation. All start-ups should give responsibilities to young employees to showcase their capabilities. The spoon-feeding approach is not liked by most of those working with start-ups, as every individual wants

to create something useful and innovative. They are not looking for the usual run-of-the-mill work. For them, their work should have enough substance to satisfy their creative desires.

Growth-path

A start-up CEO should always hire individuals who can be groomed for greater things. They should be assessed for some time and then entrusted with responsibilities. A good start-up employee would love these responsibilities and would grow from an employee to an active participant in the company's success. Start-ups should groom good people in a short span of time and elevate them to higher positions. The employees at start-ups are quite good marketers, good salespersons, good developers, good designers and need a little hand-holding to become the best in the class. Start-ups should not consider age and experience as the main



criteria while elevating people to higher positions. They should ideally look at the employee's passion and performance in their current role in the organisation. With the rise of new age technologies, smart people can learn multiple things within a very short span of time.

Managing a team at a start-up will become quite easy if CEOs take care of these points. If handled properly, the younger generation can help script your start-up success story.