



# Motivating

## THE YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS

### Meaningful work and continuous learning appeal to Gen Y sales reps

By Josephine Rossi

#### KEY NOTES

- ▶▶ Nearly 43 percent all workers rank lack of advancement opportunities or inability to use their talents as the top reason for leaving a job.
- ▶▶ Workforce studies find that an organization's eco-friendly or socially responsible initiatives can be attractive to potential employees, especially younger ones.
- ▶▶ Managers should encourage high-performing employees to become peer leaders who can inspire and train new hires.

**T**hey're energetic, they're smart, and they are ready to sell. But without satisfying work and professional development opportunities, Generation Y may take its drive and talents to the competition.

For several years, the American business community has been buzzing about a labor shortage caused by the droves of baby boomers due to retire from the workforce. Specifically, human resources experts have called for an overhaul in management practices so that employers can appeal to the wants and needs of a younger generation of workers.

That's easier said than done for some companies, where veteran managers may struggle to relate to their younger colleagues. Gen Y workers (roughly, those born in the 1980s and 1990s) have different work ethics and career expectations than their parents. They crave challenge and aim to work faster and better than their colleagues. They also want their managers to be actively engaged in their professional development. In fact, many will delay marriage longer than their parents did and try many different careers before

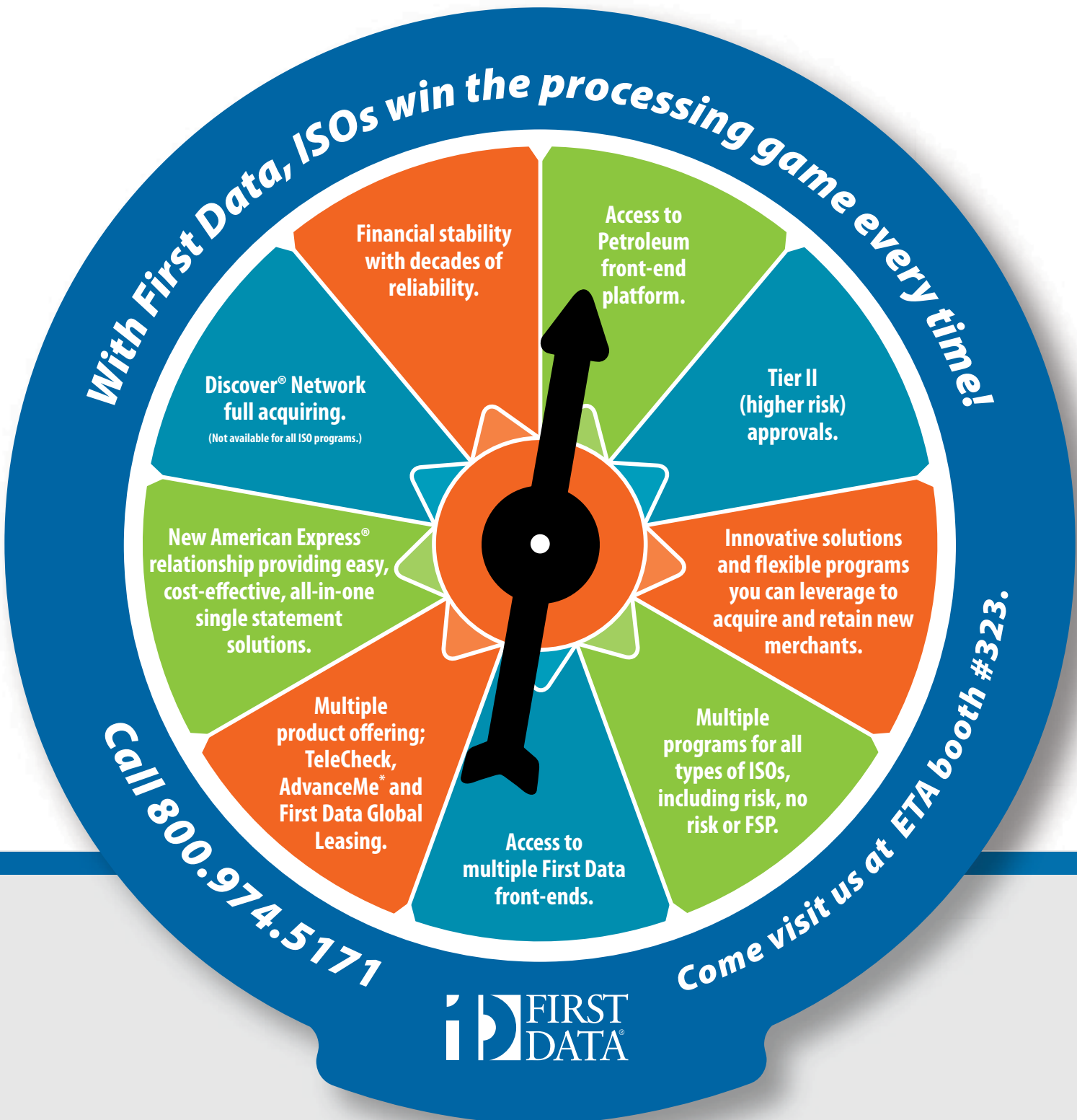
they find one that suits these needs.

"I doubt we will find too many Gen Ys who will be able to say that they worked for one company for 25-30 years like their parents or grandparents did," says Carolyn Martin, an educator, author, and master trainer who specializes in generational issues in the workplace. "The world has changed for them, and they know there is no such thing as job security—a myth boomers embraced and then were disillusioned by."

#### Satisfaction and Meaning

This so-called "Entitlement Generation" sometimes has unrealistic expectations about the workplace, according to Martin. But they also have solid, reasonable expectations that not only can be met, but can also help motivate and retain salespeople of all ages.

For example, the need for satisfying work and career growth transcends generation. Nearly 40 percent of Gen Y workers and 43 percent all workers rank lack of advancement opportunities or inability to use their talents as the top reason for leaving a job, according to new research from performance consulting firm Blessing-



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White. Similarly, employees also desire flexibility. They want to be able to choose their schedules, assignments, work locations, and even teammates.

Finances, however, factor in a bit more for younger reps, who are lower on the workforce food chain and who may be saddled with student loan debt and the expenses of their first new car or apartment. But doesn't mean that managers need to inflate salaries across the board, Martin says.

"Compensation should be commensurate with contributions," she explains. Don't give them a blue ribbon just for showing up. Hold them to high standards of performance and behavior and reward them for achievement."

Many business experts and trainers suggest appealing to rookie sales agents' sense of immediacy from their first day on the job.

"They want to be able to do meaningful work now," says Martin. "They don't want to sit 'fish-eyed' for hours in classrooms going over 401(k)'s and health plans. Get them up and running right away doing something—anything—that's meaningful."

For most sales managers, that means they should convey the company's mission and goals to young new hires as soon as they start. From there, managers should define the sales teams' missions, clarify their work, and describe the unique contributions needed by each sales agent individually.

But "meaningful" can also be used to describe work that effects social or environmental good.

"When I leave at the end of the day, I want to feel good about myself and the job I do," says Malissa Bader, 26, a sales representative for Money Movers of America (MMOA). "I've done the 'eh, it's just a job' thing, and I've done the 'I can't believe I got that guy to sign the paperwork' thing. I wanted something more."

Recently MMOA announced a partnership with the National Breast Cancer Foundation that struck a nerve among the company's staff, who range in age from 26 to 35. When a consumer makes a credit card purchase from a participating merchant, a portion of MMOA's profits from the processing fees are donated to the NBCE.

"I couldn't have asked for a better cause-based marketing campaign," says Anthony Holder, chairman and CEO of MMOA. "Nearly everyone here has somehow been

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affected by the disease." As a result, his sales agents are working hard, even on weekends, to recruit merchants to become part of "Process Pink."

"With our Process Pink program, I have the opportunity to be a part of something that really can make a difference in people's lives," says Christine Cozzi, 29, who has been selling for MMOA for only a year. "Everyone needs to have a job and every company needs to make a profit—it is an unbelievable feeling to be a part of something bigger than the bottom line."

Workforce studies, such as the "Green Workplace Survey" by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), find that an organization's eco-friendly or socially responsible initiatives can be attractive to potential employees, especially younger ones.

"These employees check the background of organizations and talk with employees to find out for themselves if the messaging delivers on its promise," says Gerlinde Herrmann, president of the Herrmann Group and a member of SHRM's Corporate Social Responsibility Expertise Panel.

Companies that implement environmental responsibility programs report considerable pay off, too. Human resources professionals cite improved employee morale and a stronger public image for the company as top benefits, plus increased consumer confidence and a positive financial bottom line.

### Skills Development

On an individual level, managers can help rookie agents develop the knowledge and skills they need to succeed.

"They're the 'education is cool' generation," Martin points out. "They expect work to be a career store where they can keep on amassing marketable skills and knowledge that will serve them in the future." Specifically, she says that younger sales agents need to work on communication, problem-solving, and conflict-resolution skills. And managers should not assume that just because someone is younger and has a lot of gadgets, they know how to explain complex technology to potential merchant clients.

"Think about an educated person in any field who can't teach," she says. "Technical expertise requires the counterbalance of communication expertise."

Many Gen Y workers say that building solid relationships with their managers and co-workers is a major challenge when starting a new job. So, managers should pair young people with older, wiser professionals whose mentoring and coaching can help shorten their learning curve.

"You need the best teachers for these enthusiastic, talented sales students," says Martin. "Don't put them on teams with people who don't like, stereotype, or can't communicate with younger people."

Managers should also spend more time with highly talented agents, who are usually doing two or three times more work than the low performers. Managers should encourage them to become peer leaders who can inspire and train new hires, and they let these high performers know what leadership opportunities are open to them.

"As soon as you spot a top performer, invite him or her into your next leadership training program," explains Martin. "There will be a dearth of Gen X managers in two years. Beat the rush by capturing, captivating, and training talented Gen Ys for management positions."

By taking the time now to create a sound plan for hiring, training, and retaining young sales agents, ISOs position themselves to thrive in the future, says Martin.

"They are the highest maintenance workforce in history, but if you have managers who know how to engage their energy, they have the potential to be the highest producing generation in history." **TT**

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