

grey is the new gold

by Dave Hunt

If you have good Boomers keep them. If you haven't - get them. The new skills shortage is experience.

Few of today's managers have lead through a recession and too many will fall in to the traps of knee jerk reactions, cost cutting, price hikes and burning staff. The extended favourable conditions of recent years, means many senior leaders are without the hard experience and they would be wise to keep those that have close.

How hard can it be?

Indications are that it will get worse before it gets better. As the effects of this year unwind and flow through we will see reduced demand, increased unemployment and increasingly tough trading conditions. Leaders will be under pressure to make targets in these harsher conditions; which will lead to price hikes, cost cutting and sweating of resources. These need to be handled delicately.

Go ask an expert

Faced with a new issue or opportunity a smart leader finds an expert. The youngest of those with experience in managing in a recession were in their late twenties in 1992 and therefore are in their mid forties now; the ABS defines those born before 1965 as the Boomers. The generation that some are keen to retire have never been more relevant.

Ask Y?

Much has been written about and by Gen Y. Many are waiting for them to get their comeuppance in a downturn, they are unlikely to be the worst hit due to their lower levels of commitment. Gen Y's energy, optimism and exploratory nature will remain important, as will the guidance to ensure it is appropriately directed.

What about the X?

Gen X have the most to lose from this downturn.

They have the greatest exposures and the least flexibility. They are also in the firing lines in their careers, and have not lead through a recession before.

Booming Boomers?

Letting Boomers go could be an expensive talent drain. Whilst there's eight years before the average boomer gets to the average retirement age of 60.2 years, many begin to reduce their work commitments before then; 40% of people between 50 and 59 are not in full time employment (20% part time, 16% retired). Despite recent press over 80% of boomer wealth is held in property and they will have to work less than a year on average to replace their share market losses. Many Boomers may not need to work again if they receive large redundancy payments.

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So if you have good Boomers keep them, if you haven't, get them. Whilst they might no longer be driving the business, they are essential support for younger leaders. Gen X and Y leaders should listen to the Boomers in these challenging times. Over the past few years of growth creativity has been king, but in the tougher times it is the fundamentals and experience which count. Ideas are still important, but the focus now more than ever is making them work. Grey is the new Gold.

Dave Hunt

Dave Hunt is the MD of Straterjee. Straterjee is a team of General Managers who are proven in delivering leading business results. Straterjee's leadership team is comprised of Boomers, except Dave who is a member of Gen X. For more information go to www.straterjee.com