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In Praise of The NEXT Generation

Posted by [manoo.ch \(for AHRMIO\)](#) on September 26, 2013 at 11:00

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Sunita Malhotra is the founder of Brussels based [People Insights](#), and spends the majority of her time on organisational development, change management, executive coaching, talent management, and mentoring. A member of the faculty of Warsaw University, she teaches at the University of Louvain (UCL), and the Vlerick Business School, Belgium. Born in New York, Sunita has worked and lived in India, USA, Switzerland and Belgium and has acquired her operational experience in Accenture, Philip Morris, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Electrolux. Here she talks about one of her passions, helping the NEXT generation fit into our organizations.

AHRMIO : You do a lot of work with young people just getting into careers. What do you see as (1) the great things that they can bring to a business and (2) the downsides - perhaps their attitudes or expectations are too high ?

Sunita Malhotra (SM) : I think what young people bring to our organizations is energy, passion and enthusiasm. Also today's generation ask a lot of questions and are very curious. They are so connected, so they have access to so much knowledge and that makes them ever more curious about the world around them. I think that we need to understand that and be able to manage and react to that curiosity. They also seem to want to keep things simple, not get into the complex structures that we (their parents) have created.

On the downside, the one big thing I see is a lack of punctuality, there seems to be little "sense of time." I notice that people arrive for lectures or meetings late, a lot more than previous generations did. On that basis, the other thing I notice is priority setting. Not sure how good they are at that either.

AHRMIO : You mentioned that organizations can learn from young people by asking them what they think, what they value and what they expect. Do you see organizations actively engaged like that or is it something they should learn to do ?

SM : I think that the next generation have a very different set of expectations from those that have gone before. If we are to learn from these people (and let's remember these are not just prospective employees, but clients and customers too)

AHRMIO : You mentioned that organizations can learn from young people by asking them what they think, what they value and what they expect. Do you see organizations actively engaged like that or is it something they should learn to do ?

SM : I think that the next generation have a very different set of expectations from those that have gone before. If we are to learn from these people (and let's remember these are not just prospective employees, but clients and customers too) we'd better spend time understanding them. Quite frankly I don't see many organizations, aside from a few boutique-style consultancies and a very few global organizations, doing much to tap into the experiences and needs of this new generation in the workplace.

AHRMIO : We recently talked with a young person about to embark on her career, she said that she regarded her generation "as the most energised, creative and connected - ever." Do you agree with that ?

SM : Absolutely ! We seem to talk about a lot of the negatives, but we do have a generation coming into our workplaces that has talents we have never seen before. What we need to do is learn how to use these effectively and build new relationships with these people.

AHRMIO : There's a great deal of youth unemployment in the world. Any thoughts on how to make that better ?

SM : This is a tough call ! However, I do feel that employers (not governments) can do so much more by creating short-term job opportunities that will give people much needed experience. I think what we need are "job spaces" for a short time, and companies should create this even if it is just part of their Corporate Social Responsibility Program (CSR). I think we need to understand that careers are now very different from ten or 20 years ago and we must work from that as a start point - not try and recreate the past.

AHRMIO : On a personal note, when you first started working, what was (1) the thing that most surprised you about how business operates and (2) the thing kept you tied to a business career for such a long time ?

SM : I suppose the answer to that was the professionalism of the people. Also that I could learn from different people and different experiences and keep on doing that. Being in organizations has helped me to grow and develop and that's why I am still involved the way I am.

Of course I was also surprised (and continue to be so) about how organizations seem to make the simple very complex and tie things down with too many policies, systems and bureaucracy. Finally, there still seems to be a focus on numbers and a short term-approach, rather than a focus on people. One thing I'd like to change.

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