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## On becoming an employer of choice



**Carmel Valley resident Sandy Asch is an employment expert who tries to aid businesses in attracting, and retaining, younger workers.**

**By Maria Connor**

Faced with a new generation of so-called Gen-X workers with vastly different values and priorities, today's employers are having to change strategies to attract, and keep, the best of the best.

Sandy Asch, a Carmel Valley resident who is founder and principal of the Alliance for Organizational Excellence, has developed a four-session series called the Employer of Choice Forum. A management and leadership consultant, she developed the series to bring together local human resource leaders from companies committed to becoming "employers of choice."

Each seminar is designed to educate businesses how to attract, retain and motivate Gen-X employees. This is a hot issue in the corporate world, according to Asch. Unlike the Baby Boomer generation, many of whom are now leaving the work force, this generation is demanding more from employers than just a steady paycheck.

They want fun, learning opportunities, mobility and flexibility.

"It's a different mind-set," Asch said. "The workforce is really changing. Today's workers aren't willing to bleed anymore."

Employment experts project a shortage of 10 million skilled workers by 2012. As 70 million Baby Boomers fade into retirement, the number of available workers ages 35-to-45 will decrease by 15 percent, they say.

“This means it will be harder for companies to find employees,” Asch said.

Business owners have seen this trend long enough to know they have to start doing something to stay competitive. Many already have incorporated flextime, job sharing and telecommuting to meet employee demand for improved work/life balance.

“The last generation saw workers that were more focused on processes, projects and numbers,” said Shirley Day of Newland Communities, a forum participant. “Now, it’s key that workers are seen as accountable talent who must be developed, coached and effectively managed.”

The high cost of employee turnover is another pitfall threatening today’s companies. Turnover costs businesses 100 to 150 percent of an employee’s annual salary in expenses.

Factors such as those are driving companies to change their corporate culture, management experts say.

Modern Postcard of Carlsbad, considered a cutting-edge employer by many, hosted an Asch session on May 25. The session opened a dialogue on creating and sustaining a culture of excellence.

Three more workshops over the next year are scheduled to address how to develop managers adept at engaging employees, bring out the best in employees, and build a branding strategy to attract and retain A-level talent.

“The end result is for each of the companies to get some kind of recognition for their best practices and becoming an ‘employer of choice,’” Asch said. “The goal is to lay the foundation for San Diego being recognized as a place where companies are very forward thinking.”

Each forum is a half-day event. Following a presentation by Asch, and the host company, breakout groups allow attendees to brainstorm and share ideas.

Participants at the last session include United Way, SANDAG, Cox Communications, Pat & Oscar’s, Harrah’s Rincon, Volunteers of America, the San Diego Zoo, REMEC Defense & Space, and Anthony’s Seafood Group.

“There’s nothing else like this in San Diego,” Asch said. “People are excited about it. There’s an extraordinary amount of energy and enthusiasm.”

Said Day, a participant, “This session is key to taking my company to the next level. We have a strong culture in place, but we need to do a better job applying it.”

Modern Postcard shared some strategies at the “Got Culture?” forum at the May session.

Recognizing younger workers value social interaction and desire a sense of community, Modern Postcard officials said the company encourages fun through activities such as having a summer beach party, hosting ping-pong tournaments and barbecue lunches, renting a movie theater, and allowing parents to bring their kids to work.

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