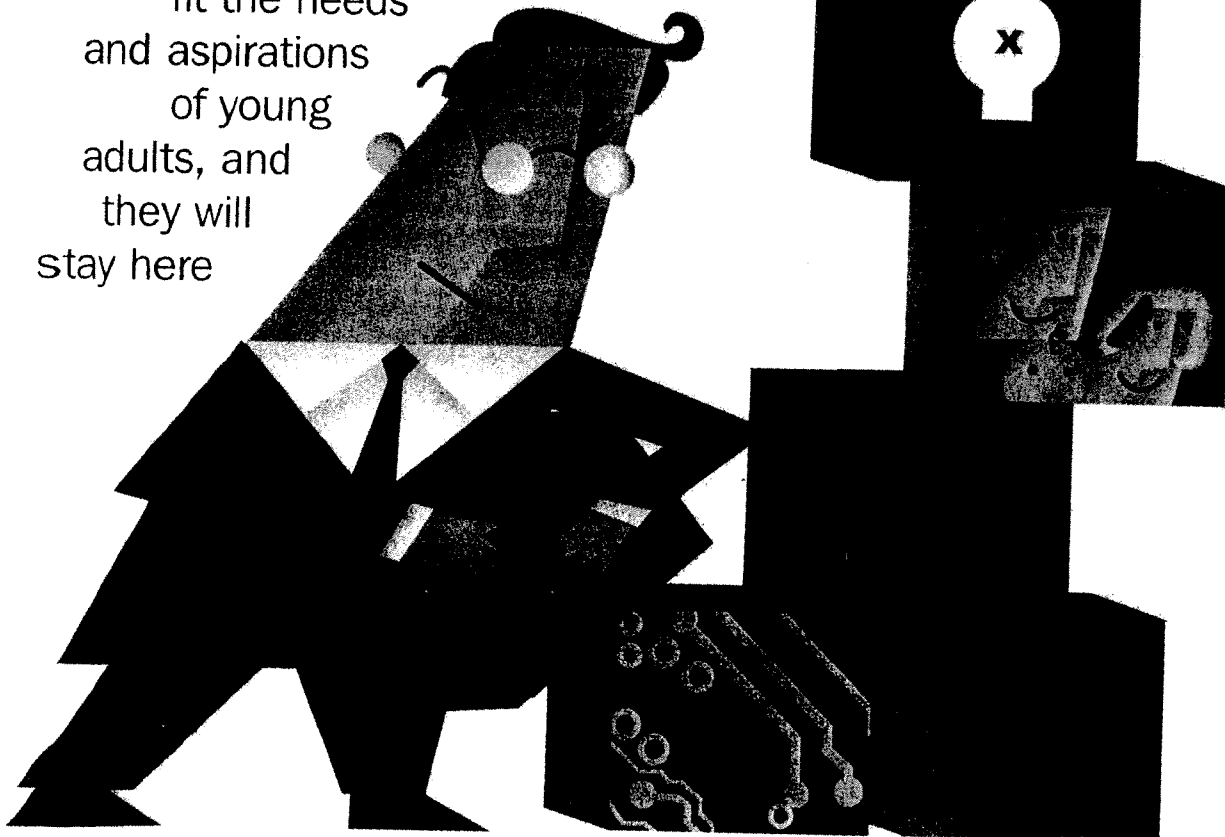


# Pittsburgh Post-Gazette®

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## We get you!

Make work cultures  
fit the needs  
and aspirations  
of young  
adults, and  
they will  
stay here



Anita Dufalla/Post-Gazette

### Dr. Joanne G. Sujansky

Replacing baby boomers who retire presents a continuing problem for companies in the Pittsburgh region. And there is no easy solution in sight. Our universities and colleges attract many young students to Pittsburgh, but after graduation they leave in droves for jobs elsewhere.

The Coro Report of April 2003 showed that between 1980 and 2000, the population of 20- to 34-year-olds in the 10-county Pittsburgh region dropped by more than 200,000 for a 32 percent decline from 1980 levels. Between 1990 and

2000, the region experienced another 6 percent drop.

Of the solutions offered to this dilemma, few, if any, have focused on the need for Pittsburgh companies to restructure traditional corporate culture to make it more acceptable to younger employees.

In the past 25-plus years, I have consulted with corporate leaders throughout the United States and in more than 30 countries around the globe. I have seen them create corporate environments that attract the most talented, younger people while freeing and nurturing the "inner entrepreneur" among all their

employees. I believe more Pittsburgh companies can do the same.

Technology and outsourcing have leveled the playing field in the global marketplace. As a result, corporate culture is now the single, competitive differentiating factor that can neither be copied nor taken away. A corporate culture attractive to younger employees and more mature employees can give our companies a key competitive edge at home and abroad.

Companies that renew their cultures share the big picture with employees. Transparency is the rule, and there are no

secrets. This openness empowers people to take risks to advance the corporate vision and hold themselves accountable. They know where their companies are now, where they are headed and the values that will take them there. What better way to support increased return on investment in employees and profitability!

With the loyalty of yesteryear fading, corporate leaders can exemplify a new face of loyalty by addressing the needs of younger employees who want more than a place to go to put in their time and collect a paycheck. These leaders challenge, inspire and create ways for people to use their individual skills and talents. They help employees with resources and support to accomplish their goals. And they provide opportunities for employees to grow, develop and become more marketable.

For example, through its corporate university, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield has established a nationally recognized training program that continually educates its employees. For IT staff, employees are trained in state-of-the-art technology. They complete 37.5 hours of training each year, adding substance to their education and resumes.

Leaders of enlightened companies support high productivity but minimize stress. Downsizing and scarce resources have created stressful and fragmented workplaces. Employees seem to work at almost superhuman speed and intensity. Such business may seem like a good thing, but it is harmful. As stress rises, mistakes increase, opportunities are lost and productivity can actually decline. Employees become physically ill and start missing days. The result: a counterproductive environment, unsuited for the quick response times needed in today's global environment.

Young people are eager to make contributions, own their solutions and hold themselves accountable. But if they are forced into a rigid mold, they will hold corporate leaders accountable for outcomes instead of themselves. Younger employees feel especially connected with companies that view them as complete human beings. A healthy, work-life balance means as much, if not more, to some of them than salary.

At Highmark, all employees have the option of free use of its fitness centers and participation in its clinically based health and

wellness programs. Employees who live in areas not accessible to the fitness centers receive incentives to join health clubs where they live. This effort, combined with other benefits and work-life programs, has helped Highmark to keep employee turnover to a low rate, between 8 percent and 10 percent.

Gen Xers and Gen Yers want to know that corporate leaders value their personal lives as well as what they bring to the company. They also have an overriding need to experience progressive challenges and to sense that they are fulfilling their personal destinies within reasonable time periods.

In this regard, newly hired management trainees at National City Bank move through a progressive, three-year training and development program, experience a number of career assignments and become visible to senior management while moving into managerial positions at the branch level. Gen Xers and Gen Yers thrive on dynamic approaches like this.

Forward thinking companies also produce a winning tradition through ongoing evaluative processes that include feedback through spontaneous coaching as well as formal evaluations. They accept feedback in real time that helps them know what they are doing right and how to make corrections and improve. They want to be part of a winning tradition. And once accustomed to winning, they want to keep on winning. Losing becomes unacceptable.

Corporations that create a cycle of winning hire only the best people for their raw talent, values and character, not just for skill sets. Skills we can teach. We cannot always imbue others with a work ethic, integrity or optimism. And because attracting new talent is arduous and expensive, selection tools and assessments ensure that companies hire the right people for their respective corporate environments.

In this regard, National City Bank concentrates on communicating extensively with prospective trainees through a high-touch recruiting program -- a series of hiring events that take place multiple times each year. Each event includes a "Super Saturday" during which up to 40 job candidates interview with three different National City Bank executives and learn about the bank's culture. The bank enjoys an 85 percent acceptance rate on its

offers to these college graduates, and its retention rate for the program is about 70 percent.

Federated Investors actively recruits from local colleges and in one program, Federated recruits recent college graduates to work as associate research analysts. These positions, which last for two to three years, provide an opportunity for an analyst to learn the investment management business from one of the largest investment management companies in the country. Participants sample the business and use the experience to prepare them for an MBA program. Federated has enjoyed success with this program, which provides opportunities to highly desirable young professionals in Pittsburgh.

Whatever the company and industry, companies that retain younger and more mature employees alike elevate communication to an art form. This goes beyond sending out e-mails or holding employees forums on critical issues, although these tools may well be valuable. It means that corporate leaders ensure that employees understand major change initiatives and can make their voices clearly heard. People on both sides of the leadership desk need to care enough to share their heartfelt viewpoints, not just exchange information.

No matter how brilliant an idea or innovation may be, if employees lack the drive, the commitment and the dedication to nurture it to fruition, it will not be worth the bother. There will always be a competitor who can take the idea and do it cheaper, faster, better. What competition cannot replicate is a company's culture, one that is peopled with passionate, dedicated employees who have an endless source of brilliant ideas.

Perhaps most important in all this, adapting corporate culture to changing circumstances and different generations of employees cannot happen by itself. In fact, corporate culture needs to be structured to assure ongoing vitality and profitability, and the ability to compete.

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