

# Catch the WAVES: 5 Principles for Motivating Today's Young Workforce

By Ken Whiting

Now that I've shared with you the tricks to hiring the best teen employees (see Nov.-Dec. Rinksider, "Recruiting Teens," pg. 17.), let's talk about how to keep them motivated for the long haul.

Employing teens has always come with challenges, and that's truer today more than ever!

Raised while multi-tasking on life's super technology highway, they can confuse, complicate, and at times, consternate.

The truth is every generation thinks higher of its own performance as teens. How soon we all forget. Still, the reality for many businesses is teens are the employees closest to the customer... the face of their company! To remain competitive and maximize profits, it's essential that employers capture, leverage and contribute to the skills that teens can bring to the workplace. But that requires change on the employers' part.

This is an age group, most born since 1990, whose entire lives have been enveloped in a world of technology, information and communication change, as well as major cultural and societal shifts. Less

attention has been given to personal responsibility, and basic work ethics are not taught in school or at home. They simply have never heard about the importance of being on time and in uniform, giving respect to a supervisor, communicating clearly, making eye contact or job commitment significance.

So what's an employer to do? Plenty! The following are guidelines to an effective strategy for working with teens. We call it catching "WAVES."

## Way of Life

This is about improving the workplace environment. Appreciate the fact that young staff members are the way they are. It's not wrong, it's not right; it just is. Meet them where they are. Allow some failure. Don't focus on what they've done wrong. Build your relationship by encouraging them on what they are doing right. They can become fiercely loyal if they are taken seriously and treated with respect.

First impressions mean everything. Be welcoming, provide social events and emphasize fun. Celebrate their successes,



Ken Whiting

not those just from the workplace, but learn where they excel away from work. Make a connection with their parents, families and friends.

## Attitude

They come with an attitude of inde-

pendence and "what's in it for me." If you learn how to feed this you'll find highly motivated teens. Provide flexible scheduling and provide incentives for performance... and don't make them wait. Instant prize programs are best. Recognize positive behaviors and catch them doing something right. Promote strong performers quickly and give them more responsibility. Patience is not a virtue with teens, so provide variety in job duties. Establish goals and empower them to come up with the answers. You'll be surprised.

Since we are talking about attitude, what about yours? A condescending and inconsistent attitude from leaders at work will send your teen employee out the door and working down the street.

## Verbal, Video and Visual

This age group has watched 20,000 hours of TV by the time they are 18. Over six hours per day are spent in front of a video screen. You need to use this technology to your advantage. Include some examples here, such as create a training

*continued on next page*

## WOULD YOU WANT YOUR CHILDREN TO WEAR THEM?

A good way to do a quick check of your rental fleet is to ask yourself, "Would I want my children to wear them?"

Rental skates are never the most attractive part of a skating rink, but they are one of the most important.

When people visit a rink for the first time they are likely to use rental skates, and if the skates are in poor shape and do not skate well, then that person may choose not to return. School's about to start back, and now is a good time to look at the old rental rack and see if any need to be replaced or repaired.

Are they good enough and safe enough for your children?



## Pacer Platinum

Southeastern Skate Supply now stocks the tan with blue version of Pacer's new Platinum rental skates. These skates feature top-grain leather boots with Cambrelle Plus linings that are bacteria and odor resistant. They also come with brass eyelets that will never rust. They are available in sizes 9J-13.

*You can also special order Platinums in your choice of colors. Special orders require a 300 pair minimum.*

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video for your staff to watch, use computer programs to train new hires, etc.

Names are important, so use their nickname. Applications should be online and your work schedules posted on your Web site. Don't print mounds of paper and expect the information to be read and retained. Make handbooks and memos less complicated and smaller, while focusing on the most important items for your business success. Enhance communication by using e-mail and text messaging. Create a vibrant workplace through the use of photos and videos of your employees at work and away from work.

**Education... not Just Training**

If training is the "how," then education is the "why." This age group requires to know the purpose - the why - behind tasks. Never assume anything, confirm their knowledge and explain the purpose behind every task.

Parents and teachers used to prepare teens for the workplace. That does not occur at the same level as it once did. Build education into your training process and you will find longer-term, and a more committed young work force. This is the new calling for today's teen employers.

**Style Matters**

Style is how employees look, the image of your company and how they are treated at work. Teens care about how they look and how they're treated. Uniforms shouldn't embarrass your staff, and your grooming policy should be relevant. Be prepared to justify both to your employees.

Be knowledgeable of current teen trends in fashion, music and entertainment, and pay attention to the techniques and strategies utilized by retailers to get teens to spend their hard-earned money. Today's retailers are very good at motivating teens!

Teens don't quit companies... they quit people. As a supervisor of teens, how you carry yourself has a huge impact on performance and retention. Every manager or supervisor needs to be on board with the commitment of getting the most from your teens.

A fresh approach in working with your teens does not mean that you need to compromise the values and principals of your business. Instead it should provide the opportunity for you to increase your focus.

Teens can be inspired, motivated and productive - they are the most knowledgeable and adaptive group ever. Don't judge them through the eyes of when you were a teen... look through theirs. You have nothing to lose, and you'll have a positive impact on the lives of your teen employees.

*Ken Whiting is an industry expert on providing solutions for entry-level workforce challenges. For a free copy of the "WAVES 101 Best Ways to Recruit, Retain, Educate and Motivate Today's Teens" visit WAVESforsuccess.com. For speaking and consulting, call 831-423-1890 ex.2 or email ken@wavesforsuccess.com.*

# Two rinks find satisfaction helping families in need

By Dionne Obeso

When young Jimmy Pierce and his parents were killed in a car accident, the members of his hockey team wanted to do something to help his only surviving sister, Megan, 16. They approached the rink at which they held their practices, CN Skate Palace of Aston, Pa. Fortunately, owner Frank Schiazza is always happy to help. "We have never been a stranger to charity events," he said.

Kevin Schad, general manager of Skate Station in Orange Park, Fla., was recently moved to aid a member of his community as well. On the afternoon of October 19th this year, Somer Renee Thompson, age 7, went missing on her way home from school. Two days later, her body was found in a landfill in Georgia.

The entire community of Orange Park had rallied to find her, and everyone was rocked by the way things turned out. "The young girl's home was only about 2 miles from the rink, and she vanished only about a mile from home, so it hit really close to home for us," Schad said. Many members of the community did what they could to support the young girl's family, including Skate Station, which held a fund raiser and benefit on November 3rd.

Charity events, in which rinks help to raise money for a cause, are good press. They are good for community relations, and they are good for the people they benefit, but best of all, they are good for rink owners and employees, who get the joy and the pride of helping those in need.

Schiazza stands by the power of doing good, and so do his employees. "People don't think that kids today (as employees) are all that good, but if we need them to, our staff will help out. They will even come in and volunteer their time during some of the fund raisers," he said.

Amounts of money raised in a charity skate can vary widely depending on the organizers. In the case of CN Skate Palace, Schiazza takes a hands-off approach to raising money for a cause, preferring to donate his rink and employees for the duration of the event. The admission price is set and collected by the people doing the fund raising, and he leaves it up to them to arrange for any additional ways to raise money, including games, raffles, and sales. He also donates any profits after expenses from his snack bar and novelty counter during the event.

When communities are united by a cause, they are often generous with the fund raising events. "We'll donate the proceeds from our snack bar and so on, but the lion's share of money to be made is in the admission price. In fact, people will usually pay extra on admission to help with the cause and to help raise money," Schiazza said.

Schad also relied heavily on the community to help with his rink's event. "We had a lot of people come out to help," he said. "We had local celebrities come out to sup-

port us, including Jacksonville Jaguar Troy Williamson, who showed up with some of the Jacksonville Jaguar cheerleaders. Local radio DJ Dr. Doom performed live for the event, and the Clay county sheriffs showed up as well. We even had some EMTs come

that her school has done fundraisers with us," Schad said. "Halloween was downright spooky for everyone. I mean, her killer is still at large." It was a positive thing to be able to give the community a safe and familiar place to gather in her name.

Schiazza hosted 175 people at CN Skate Palace for the benefit of Megan Pierce, and the coordinators for the event raised approximately \$1000 for her college fund. Schiazza is pleased. "Any time we are approached with a cause, we are glad to help out. It is a part of being part of the community," he said.

If you are approached by a member of your community or want to help out someone in need, there are several ways that you can handle things. If you like being in control of your rink, then it might be best if you host the benefit yourself, setting the price or keeping admission the same, collecting the profits, and turning them over to the beneficiary or to the fund raising entity. You can contact local celebrities and groups to help you. For example, the local high school cheerleaders might be happy to perform on the rink floor for the cause.

It is also easy to turn your rink over to the fundraisers and let them handle the money for the night. You just need to supervise the event and your employees and help out if there are any problems. However you choose to help, it is never a bad idea to reach out to your community and to members of it in need.



out with a fire truck."

Skate Station hosted a total of 160 people for the benefit, and raised a total of around \$1000 for the Thompson family. The entry fee for the evening was donated to the cause, as were any fees raised by other Skate Station attractions, including the rock climbing wall and the miniature golf course. "I would imagine that Somer and her siblings have probably even skated here. I know

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