

Changing the graduate mindset – a game of strategy

Graduates burst out of university with a strong desire to succeed – and to succeed quickly. Climbing the corporate ladder is high on their list of priorities yet first they have to get down to the business of learning the ropes – the basics of communication, customer service, identifying real opportunities that will make the business succeed – some of the many skills that, no matter how hard we try, just can't be effectively taught in a lecture theatre.

So how do we temper this drive to advance while still maintaining the enthusiasm and engaging the focus of our recruits – and in doing so, ensure they are still around when the time is right to move up the rungs of the corporate ladder?

Bill Lang, CEO of Bill Lang International, a global provider of career development services, believes that today's graduates are in a rush to achieve, and with that achievement comes the expectation of higher management positions. He comments "this generation has been raised in the age of the remote control, the computer game – they successfully got into university and expect to continue their success trajectory after graduation."

He adds that today's students' expectations for their career are no greater than those of the past – only different – and to some degree, it's due to the environment in which they have grown up.

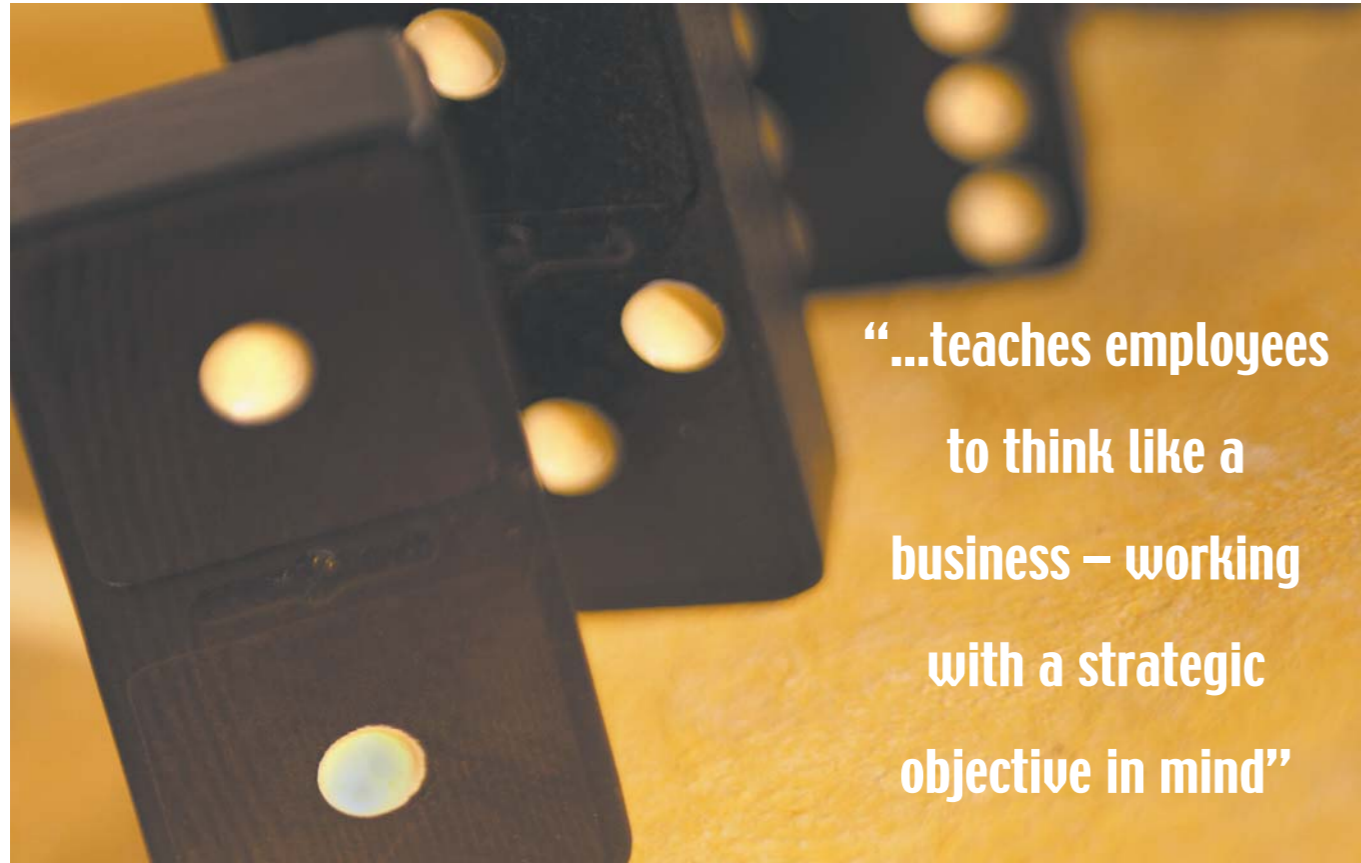
Lang states "Now Uni students seek a job that is more meaningful to them, a job that challenges them and a job that allows workplace skills to be developed and strengthened so they can be quickly promoted or be able to win a more senior job with another company."

Peter Sheahan, Australia's leading expert in Generation Y, agrees that today's graduates have high expectations of their own that are further inflated when it comes to graduate recruitment. Sheahan has identified two areas in the graduate recruitment process that set young professionals up for disappointment early in their career. The first is the glossy approach many recruiters take to selling careers. In their attempt to attract graduates with the most potential, recruiters ingratiate themselves amongst our young talents. According to Sheahan, the Uni Careers Fair is a prime example where recruiters offer freebies and, as he puts it, "offer them the most lavish work life balance programs (sometimes unrealistic), doing a job that changes the world, with a promise of a glittering financial future."

Yet, Sheahan claims, once they hit the workplace, there are expectations of performance placed on these 'hot shots' that they were never fully prepared for. Expectations of working on glamorous cases are soon shattered by endless days of mindless photocopying – hackwork to assist those who have been treading the boards for years before them.

The second area that Sheahan identifies as being potentially problematic for new recruits is their lack of real understanding of the economic realities of the workplace. Having been promised a glittering financial career, the economic reality kicks in, leading to disengagement

**“You will not
learn to drive by reading
the road rules book...
and at the end
of the day,
the responsibility
should lie where the
rubber meets the road –
on the job.”**



amongst some Generation Y employees. Sheahan commented, “One of the major problems is that uni graduates, even those from business disciplines, do not think commercially. They do not truly understand the concept of ROI. At least not the same way as a partner of a major law firm understands it. Some Gen Y’s think their salary is an ‘appearance fee’ - as opposed to an investment from the company, in them, that at say \$60,000pa needs to return upwards of \$240,000 in increased revenue or cost savings or value in that year.”

Both Lang and Sheahan agree that something needs to be done when it comes to grounding these new recruits – to tempering their expectations of achievement and embedding in them a practical understanding of how a business really works.

Sheahan believes the education process should begin at university and is already talking to two major Australian universities about designing a lecture series for final year graduates that will work across faculties to teach students how to think more commercially. Having said this, he freely admits that no student will ever be able to truly understand commercialism until they are immersed into the culture. Sheahan likens it to learning to drive a car “You will not learn to drive by reading the road rules book... and at the end of the day, the responsibility should lie where the rubber meets the road - on the job.”

And that’s where both Sheahan and Lang are offering solutions to employers of new recruits. Sheahan delivers a talent development program that, while not necessarily graduate specific, is designed to develop commercial acumen that will turn potential into profit. Sheahan’s program teaches employees to think like a business –

working with a strategic objective in mind and engaging in only the activities that will positively impact on their performance. A quick review of his program clearly demonstrates that his trainees come out thinking: ownership; strategy, brand, return on investment; relationships and innovation. Skills no doubt that led to him being named the NSW MBN Young Entrepreneur of the Year in 2003.

Sheahan measures the results of his training by auditing the change of thinking and understanding of candidates before and after the session, as well as by surveying managers after a set period to determine any improvement in performance.

‘The 8 Skills for Career Success’ program developed by Bill Lang also results in more productive and effective employees by bridging the gap



between technical and personal skill development. Lang’s program features Australia’s leading professional and career role models like Janine Allis from Boost Juice and Tim Carroll from Village Roadshow. Through these case studies and an active learning approach, candidates develop the key skills to maximise their contribution to their employer and their longer-term career success.

Talking about his programme, Lang states, “It fills the significant skill gap that most graduates have – while they are book smart they typically have limited workplace, business and team playing skills”.

Lang claims his training program has an immediate impact on a firm’s bottom line by increasing graduate productivity and engaging the graduate within the organisation.

He comments “More engaged graduates stay with the organisation longer and are more productive whilst there. If graduates are engaged, they generate positive word of mouth that assists in recruiting other like-minded graduates.”

Lang guarantees the success of his program for his corporate clients and claims that sending graduates along can lead to substantial increases in productivity and therefore profitability.

Sheahan firmly believes there is no shortage of skilled labour within corporate Australia – it’s just that we need to unlock the potential of our

labour force. He comments, “There is a shortage of engaged talent. Managers particularly need to understand that the nature of Australian workers has changed. With the onset of Generation Y, and their self-esteem on steroids, comes an increased demand on management to engage them in a meaningful and profitable way. There needs to be as much work done on the Manager side of the equation as there needs to be done on the graduate side, because the truth still remains - the only source of competitive advantage in today’s market place is your people. And as clichéd and trite as that sounds, it is a hard reality.”

And, while we focus on how to settle new graduates into the real world of business, Joanne Tyler, president of NAGCAS, and a University Advisor has a slightly different perspective on our corporate future. Tyler holds a strong belief that the face of graduate recruitment is changing.

Tyler comments “I’m not so sure that graduate recruiters have come to terms with the fact that the mainstream route to university may not be through year 12 in the near future.”

“There may not be enough Gen Y to go around. Think about how to recruit career changers, and those from cultures where the Gen Y stereotype just does not fit.”

There’s a whole new world in recruitment out there – and it could be just around the corner.



Mission: Find the best graduates
Partner: LINK HR Consulting
Expectations: Proven results
Satisfaction: 100%

Graduate recruitment may seem like an overwhelming task. But a partnership with LINK HR Consulting can take the sting out of the process. We offer the full service from advertising and screening to psychometric testing and shortlisting.

Whether you choose to utilise all or just a few of our services, we will work with you to ensure that your organisation not only achieves its recruitment goals, but favourably positions your brand in the eyes of graduates.

Get the most out of your graduate recruitment program. Visit our website to pick up a free guide or register for a free consultation, or contact us on 03 9608 6264.

LINK HR CONSULTING™
 optimising people™

www.linkhrconsulting.com.au/gradrecruit