

Workplace Comfort One of the Keys in Retaining Younger Workforce Offshore

By Valerie Jones, Careers Editor
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Offshore conditions can be messy, dangerous and grueling at times ... we all know that. And so do the thousands of workers who make their living working on offshore drilling rigs as well as the high number of job candidates who are awaiting an opportunity to work offshore. These job candidates are a mixture of industry vets – some who have been laid off in recent months and are



anticipating the industry turnaround – and some newcomers attempting to break into the oil and gas industry.

Much has been said in recent years about the Great Crew Change and how it has affected the oil and gas industry. Employers have found themselves in a tough situation: the Baby Boomers of the industry are headed for retirement and the younger cohort of workers (i.e. millennials) will have to fill the gaps. But industry experts complain

of a [skilled labor shortage](#) and once employers do acquire a skilled workforce, the challenge is then retaining the employees ([millennials have been known to hop around](#)).

But how much weight is placed on quality of life while offshore? According to a [white paper released by Target Logistics](#) titled, “The Great Crew Change: Managing Generational Differences in Oil, Gas, Mining and Construction Workforces,” there is a strong link between workers’ productivity and their work environment. Gen Xers (born between 1965 and 1980) and millennials (born between 1981 and 2000) have characteristics that differ from their older counterparts, characterized in the report as Traditionals (born before 1945) and Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1964).

Younger workers, particularly Gen Xers, expect to have a strong work-life balance. Unlike the Traditionals and Baby Boomers, the younger workers “aren’t willing to sacrifice their free time and do whatever it takes to succeed in their jobs,” the report finds. I suppose it would be wise of employers to take heed of this, *if* they expect the younger workers to stick around.

“Because offshore, by definition, is offsite, the issue of work-life balance will be difficult,” report author Dr. Elaine Cullen, who was a researcher for the U.S. Bureau of Mines and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), told Rigzone.

She said that while workplace comfort is important to younger generations, offshore workers typically understand they’re in a Fly-In, Fly-Out (FIFO) situation and don’t expect luxury accommodations.

“Access to computers, WiFi, etc. will help ease feelings of isolation since this is their preferred way of communicating,” she said. “Younger workers also have a higher need for approval and feeling a part of things, so closer communication and mentoring by supervisors is necessary.”

Workers should be assured that their safety is important to their employer and they should be trained properly to do the work, said Dr. Cullen.

“A combination of perceived unsafe conditions, poor meals and uncomfortable accommodations will help convince [young workers] that this work is not for them.”

A threat to workplace safety, the report said, is when workers are tired, lonely, unhappy or unhealthy. Instead, employers should strive for what Target Logistics refers to as the Economics of Comfort model. This means that “keeping your workers safe, comfortable, relaxed and well-fed is what keeps them from missing a shift, getting injured on the job, jumping to a competitor or just packing their bags and heading home.”

And the industry certainly doesn’t want that.

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