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**Q: What will be the HR executive's most pressing problem in the year 2008?**

**A:** A lot of attention has been given to the four generations now in the workforce and the behavioral differences between the traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X and millennials—each of which produces unique challenges for HR executives to effectively manage talent.

For example, the exceedingly competitive boomers have the most invested in their careers and possess the most experience and knowledge. These baby boomers drove workplace change by questioning the status quo and defining their personal successes through their individual career achievements.

This “me-centric” approach was reinforced by the entry of Generation Xers in the workforce. They are known for their disdain of traditional entities and generally lack employer loyalty. Following on the heels of these Gen Xers are the millennials, today's bright recent college graduates who rely heavily on technology and further reject the confines defined by job descriptions. Clearly, each generation brings its own challenges to the workplace.

And, beginning in 2008, HR executives will have one of their greatest opportunities to leverage technology to attract talent and to

create a bond with all employees and the much sought-after millennial generation.

While taking a long time to develop, employee self-service has proven effective for day-to-day employee information needs and simple transactions. Clearly, the employee portal of today has blossomed into an interactive tool for both the potential new employee and the hiring manager. Even after an employee has separated from an organization, interactive access to retrieve previous W-2s and request routine prior employment information extends the value for all.

Organizations that took the early lead with self-service successes are preparing for their next wave of self-service applications now packaged in an extensive employee portal.

The self-service evolution has brought us beyond just self-service to true interactive access to information that, in fact, enables employees. So, here is where a major 2008 challenge for HR executives is really centered: making sure their next phase of employee self-service touches all aspects of the employee life cycle.

Starting new employees with an interactive, paperless philosophy from the initial job

inquiry to “day one” on the job and beyond has great benefits and sets the tone for better managed processes throughout the employee's life cycle.

And, one of the biggest payoffs of interactive access is often not considered—employee communication. Every communication with employees, whether directed to a potential or active employee, makes an impression.

These communication impressions represent wonderful opportunities for the HR team to promote the organization's brand early on in the employee life cycle. Beginning with day one, the first few months of the employee experience are crucial to their supporting the culture.

The coming race to find the best employees will most certainly be won by those organizations that take a proactive approach to managing the critical talent-acquisition process.

In 2008, HR executives will be challenged to view the relationship with an employee as a continuum by leveraging best practices, such as self-service, to extend performance and high value before the employee is on the job ... and long after he is gone.