

Understanding Generational Differences in the Workplace

WHAT TRADITIONALS WANT

Coaches/Mentors

respect their experiences (not their age) and use them accordingly for all generations.

Credible leaders

If you supervise them, give weight to their opinions and listen well.

Delegate

Traditionals expect leaders to delegate. If you supervise them, define tasks clearly.

Training

Offer them training in their fields and in computer skills.

Communication

One-on-one communication; using the telephone or memos.

WHAT BABY BOOMERS WANT

Change Agents

Let them know they can make a difference, they'll get credit, and will be respected for their accomplishments. Keep them informed about coming changes. Understand they are the "keepers of the institutional memory."

Coaches/Mentors

Ask boomers to act as coaches for the Gen Xers and millennials.

Career Planning

Ask what they want to achieve in their remaining work years.

Training

Offer them training in leadership skills as well as flextime and work-life balance; training in new technology.

Communication

One-on-one communication; use the telephone; call anytime; use diplomacy.



By Deborah Walker

Millennials comprise the fastest-growing segment of today's workforce, one that was designed by baby boomers and now often is managed by Gen Xers. Each generation has different goals, motivators and preferences. At work, generational differences can affect everything, including recruiting, building teams, dealing with change, motivating, managing and maintaining and increasing productivity.

Research indicates that people are influenced by their generational backgrounds, as well as their backgrounds based on race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and other cultural differences. Each generation develops an outlook on life, shaped by society's overarching cultural values and by the common and different experiences of each generation's members. The lifestyles and values each embraces often stand in stark contrast to those of the previous generation, as each seeks to distinguish itself from the generation before it.

This is the first time in American history that we have had four different generations working side by side in the workplace. So it is critical to understand the unique contributions each group brings, identify their workplace needs and identify strategies that help leverage their cross-generational differences. Leveraging these differences will help ensure that an organization's culture is one that allows each generation to do its best work and to contribute to the organization's bottom line.

Generations 1, 2 and 3

Traditionals were born between 1900 and 1945, faced major hassles caused by economic chaos and world war. They value history, traditions and family. Traditionals are loyal and stable and believe in paying their dues. They tend to be frustrated by what they see as a lack of discipline, respect, logic and structure, especially if the workplace is relaxed or spontaneous. Traditionals tend to be motivated by money, responsibility and opportunities to lead. "I learned my work ethic from my parents, who had limited educations. They taught us that we each had a responsibility to the family and we each had an important role in sustaining it and ourselves," says Dr. John Vickers, professor emeritus, Alabama A & M University, educational consultant and entrepreneur. "They taught us to be the best at whatever job we did, and provided the road map for how we should live and work."

Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, baby boomers are optimist and, like traditionals, have a strong work ethic. They grew up believing their lives could be even more fulfilling than their parents'. Boomers were driven to compete and gain material rewards. While traditionals believed it important to save, save and save, many

boomers believed it was OK to spend now and worry later. Like millennials, boomers care deeply and want to make a

TRADITIONALS

"Work is an obligation... duty before fun."

BABY BOOMERS

"I live to work. I don't mind working a 60-hour work week. I am a workaholic."

difference. They are willing to "go the extra mile," both at work and on social justice issues. The Cold War, Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War greatly influenced them. While they grew up in an era of

great social unrest, conflict and change, it is the technological changes that are creating current workplace challenges. Despite their entrance into a technological world, boomers still value "people and process" and want to be recognized for their unique and important contributions to the team.

"I get to work in an environment in which I interact often across all the generations, and there are many millennials and Gen-X'ers in my work environment, including one that I currently report to," says Dr. Gwen High, vice president of community relations, Aramark K-12 Education. "It is great to work with smart, confident and creative people, while contributing to the company's bottom line and to social justice concerns. I have the best of both worlds."

Gen Xers were born between 1965 and 1980, grew up more socially, culturally and technologically diverse than previous generations. They also grew up with skepticism about the safety and predictability of the world. Gen Xers were the first latchkey kids and came of age when the United States was losing its status as the most powerful and prosperous nation in the world. In this environment, Gen Xers learned to be adaptable,

GEN XERS

"I work to live. My family and work/life balance are more important to me."

pragmatic, results-driven, creative, media savvy and not intimidated by authority. While their boomer parents lived to work, Gen Xers work to live—work became a means to an

end. An entrepreneurial spirit and freedom to do it their way motivates this generation.

"My generation is keenly aware of where we add value and are working to maximize opportunities in this increasingly technological environment," says Adrian Woolcock, managing principal at ProSidian Consulting. "From my perspective, everyone is a business owner. My world is the whole world."

The New Generation

Millennials were born between 1981 and 2002 and are digital natives. Purpose, development and balance drive them, not a

paycheck. They are smart, realistic, confident and the best-educated generation. Growing up more protected than any other generation influenced them to want to be the next "great generation" who turns around all the "wrongs" they have seen in the world. "Those in my

MILLENNIALS

"I work as a means to an end... When it's 5:00 p.m., I'm out of here!"

generation are hungry to make an impact, and we work hard to figure out what [it is] and how to do that. We also are trying to balance the desire to make an impact

and wanting to be a part of the American Dream," says Maggie Wittman, project manager, Read Charlotte.

Managing the Generations

Recent Gallup Poll research on "How Millennials Want to Work and Live" confirmed that millennials will change the world decisively more than any other generation and that they will continue to disrupt how the world communicates—how we read and write and relate. The research also confirmed that millennials struggle to find good jobs that engage them. They have the highest rate of unemployment and underemployment in the United States and only 29 percent of millennials are engaged at work. The poll also noted that more than ever in the history of corporate culture, employees are asking, "Does this organization value my strengths and my contribution? Does this organization give me the chance to do what I do best every day?"

Traditionals and baby boomers were taught to follow the Golden Rule, "Treat others as you would like to be treated." The new rule is the Platinum Rule, "Learn how others want to be treated, and develop contracts and agreements with them to do just that." The Platinum Rule acknowledges generational differences and the new rule for the new game.

The strength of the workplace and the marketplace depends on what the millennial generation can accomplish. It also depends on how well each generation is able to adapt to these changes. While there are similarities among the generations, it is the social, cultural and technological differences within generations that have to be leveraged to ensure success. **CMR&M**



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WHAT GEN XERS WANT

Freedom

The greatest reward you can give them is the freedom to work independently. Don't micromanage. Gen Xers are not likely to do what you say without asking questions.

Control

Gen Xers want greater control over their time and greater work-life balance.

Training

Offer them the option of leadership training and people skills development.

Communication

Give them direct and immediate feedback. Tie your message to the "results." Use computers and cell phones and emails. Call them only at work.

WHAT MILLENNIALS WANT

Work Environment

They want to work around bright people and given opportunities to learn and grow.

Coaches

They were raised to feel valued. They are the first generation to have had schedules as kids. They expect to be treated respectfully. Provide a rationale for the work you've asked them to do and tell them the value it adds. Their questions signify interest, not disrespect. Be impressed with their decisions. They want IMMEDIATE feedback.

Training

Offer them training in professional protocol, people skills—listening to others, leadership and problem-solving. They are motivated by learning new skills.

Communication

They use social media and text messaging. Use email, text messages or picture phones to reach them.

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PRIDE



Hissho SUSHI

How Philip Maung
created an empire

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