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Mixing & Matching the Generations

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Dr. King presents on a wide range of topics including team building, resolving conflicts, effective communication, motivating employees, the dynamics of change,

reducing stress, why people avoid success, and the changing role of leadership. She facilitates strategic planning, mergers and acquisitions, staff and administrative retreats, collaborative efforts, and mission & vision development.

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It is said that

Traditionalists

(born before 1946)

*value loyalty and discipline
and respect hierarchy and authority.*

Baby Boomers

(born 1946-1964),

*are goal-driven, competitive
and work-centric, and
now occupy positions of power
in the work world.*

Generation X

(born 1965-1980)

*is 55 million strong in North America
and is a skeptical, pragmatic
and self-reliant cohort
that values independence,
respects diversity
and desires work-life balance.*

Generation Y

(born 1981-2002)

*numbers 80 million in North America
and is filled with digitally-fluent optimists
who embrace social responsibility,
celebrate individuality and difference,
rework the rules,
and thrive on collaboration
and kinship.*

These generalizations come from research about the majority, but obviously not all people of a certain age fit these descriptions. As is always true, stereotyping can be dangerous and inaccurate, so make sure to check out the truth before applying the categorizations.

*The next few pages are so descriptive that they begged to be used.
However, they arrived without citations.
I apologize to “anonymous” for not citing name(s) and source(s).*

Perceived Generational Differences and Similarities

Attitudes toward work

The perceived decline in work ethic is one of the major contributors of generational conflicts in the workplace. Generation X has been accused of not working hard enough because they seem uncommitted to their jobs and tend to work only the required hours and little more. Conversely, Boomers may be workaholics - and reportedly started the trend - while Traditionals have been characterized as the most hardworking generation. Indeed, the prevailing stereotype is that younger workers do not work as hard as older workers.

That premise is debatable!

The perception of how hard one works may also be associated with how individuals approach tasks. For instance, Boomers have often been characterized as being process-oriented, while younger generations as being results-focused. While younger workers focus on high productivity, they may be happier with the flexibility of completing a task at their own pace and managing their own time, as long as they get the job done right and by the deadline.

Loyalty toward employers

Loyalty toward employers has been found to decrease generationally: the younger the generation, the less loyal they appear to be. The frequency with which individuals change jobs may also be related to the economy, as people are more likely to change jobs if the economy is good and opportunities are numerous.

Employees were also more likely to stay if the organization's values matched their own. For instance, how organizational change is managed, as well as whether there are opportunities created for a better quality of life, good communication, and improvements such as more autonomy, control, and greater contribution to their specific job were cited as values that mattered. Individuals were also apt to remain with an organization if the organization respected older people with experience and if organizations respected younger people, at least for their talents.

Attitudes regarding respect and authority

Xers complain about managers who ignore ideas from employees and have a “do-it because I said so” management style. Mutual respect is an issue for all generations.

Both Xers and Yers are comfortable with authority figures and are not impressed with titles or intimidated by them. They find it natural to interact with their superiors, unlike their older counterparts, and to ask questions. Questioning from a Yer’s perspective does not equate with disrespect. Similarly, Yers believe that it must be earned and do not believe in unquestionable respect. Only a small percentage of the younger generations feel a need to exert authority.

Younger workers, like their older counterparts, want to be respected although the understanding of what that is among older and younger workers differs. Older workers want their opinions to be given more weight because of their experience and for people to do what they are told, while younger workers want to be listened to and have people pay attention to what they have to say. Furthermore, older people may think they deserve respect just because of their age. Therefore, meeting the expectations of respect for various generations may be a genuine challenge in the workplace.

Food For Thought

- This is the first time in American history that we have had *four* different generations working side-by-side in the workplace.
- At work, generational differences can affect everything, including recruiting, building teams, dealing with change, motivating, supervising, and maintaining and increasing productivity. And, it most certainly affects communication.
- Think of how generational differences - relative to how people communicate - might cause misunderstandings, high employee turnover, difficulty in attracting employees, and gaining employee commitment.
- Research indicates that people communicate based on their generational perspectives. Each generation has distinct attitudes, behaviors, expectations, habits, and motivational buttons.
- Whether at a family gathering or at work, it's important to effectively manage intergenerational groups with differing work styles, dissimilar values, and idiosyncratic approaches. It's essential that we stop judging each other and seek to understand.
- Every generation has created its own commotion as it has entered into the adult working world. And, every generation says the same things about other generations: "They don't get it" or "They have it so much easier than we did."
- Generation X wants to derive some fun from every activity in which they are involved.
- Baby boomers tend to stay with one employer for a long time, perhaps even their entire career. They expect that if they are loyal, work hard and do as they are told, they will be rewarded with secure jobs, steady pay increases and financial security.
- Baby boomers will not suffer in silence, but they may not confront their issues directly, nor will they leave.
- Generation Xers, may have seen their parents or other family members cut loose from an organization to which they remained loyal, are loyal to themselves and their personal goals. According to their "unwritten contract," X-ers will develop

skills and apply them effectively, for which they expect their employer to listen to their needs, create a supportive environment, and pay them fairly.

- **Each generation has a lot to offer and when they work together the diversity of the generations makes for a much more productive workplace.**

To begin to understand how individuals in different generations act and react, one must first start with understanding oneself.

Look at where you fall on the:

“Generation Timeline”



BoorTTraditionals

Traditionals, also known as the Veterans, the Silents, the Silent Generation, the Matures, and the Greatest Generation

Born 1922-1945

Influenced by the great depression and World War II among other events.

Described as follows:

- Conservative
- Disciplined
- Having a sense of obligation
- Observing fiscal restraint
- Formal
- Partial to top down chain of command
- Need respect
- Preferring to make decisions based on what worked in the past
- Private
- Believe in paying their dues
- Their word is their bond
- Have a great deal of respect for authority
- Like social order
- Love their things
- Loyal workers,
- Highly dedicated
- Risk averse
- Strongly committed toward teamwork and collaboration
- High regard for good communication skills
- Save & conserve
- Show consistency and uniformity
- Seek out technological advancements
- Past-oriented
- Display command-and-control leadership reminiscent of military operations
- Prefer hierarchical organizational structures
- Are likely to continue to view horizontal structures in a hierarchical way
- Stable
- Detail oriented
- Thorough
- Loyal
- Socially and fiscally conservative
- Fear being replaced by younger generations
- May still be in the workforce because they enjoy it or for financial reasons.

- Have much to offer because of life experience.
- Hard working
- Somewhat inept with ambiguity and change
- Reluctant to buck the system
- Uncomfortable with conflict
- Reticent when they disagree.

Baby Boomers

Baby Boomers are called this because of the extra seventeen million babies born during that period relative to previous census figures.

Born: 1946 – 1964

Influenced by having the largest impact on American society due to its size and the period during which it came of age.

Boomers witnessed and partook in the political and social turmoil of their time: the Vietnam War, the civil rights riots, the Kennedy and King assassinations, Watergate and the sexual revolution and the freewheeling 60's. Protesting against power characterized the formative years of many of the individuals now in leadership positions in numerous organizations.

Boomers were raised to respect authority figures, but as they witnessed their foibles, learned not to “trust anyone over 30”. They grew up in an era of “prosperity and optimism and bolstered by the sense that they are a special generation capable of changing the world, have equated work with self-worth, contribution and personal fulfillment”.

Described as follows:

- Believe that hard work and sacrifice are the price to pay for success
- Started the workaholic trend
- Like teamwork, collaboration and group decision-making
- Competitive
- Loyal toward their employers
- Confident task completers
- May be insulted by constant feedback
- Want their achievement to be recognized
- More process- than result-oriented
- Goal-oriented
- Accepting of diversity
- Optimistic
- Liberal
- Conflict avoidant.
- Value health and wellness as well as personal growth
- Into personal gratification
- Seek job security

- Have some sense of entitlement
- Good at relationships
- Reluctant to go against peers and judgments of others who do not see things their way
- Thrive on the possibility for change
- Have been described as the “show me” generation
- Will fight for a cause even though they do not like problems
- Value the chain of command
- May be technically challenged
- Grew up in an atmosphere that was optimistic and positive.
- America was No. 1, and everyone knew that by getting a college education and working hard you could achieve a prosperous lifestyle that surpassed that of your parents.
- Leaders were strong and confident.
- New frontiers were everywhere, not just in space.
- America seemed to possess an unlimited potential for growth and expansion.
- Expectations for this generation were so high that in 1967, Time magazine gave its "Man of the Year" award to the baby boom generation, proclaiming it as "the generation that would clean up our cities, end racial inequality, and find the cure for the common cold."
- They were the first generation to earn a report card grade for "works well with others," tend to be team-oriented, and willing to collaborate.
- Many have single-mindedly pursued their goals, often at the cost of their relationships with family.
- Baby boomers often "live to work," and define their identity by their occupation and level of success.

Generation X

Generation X

Born: 1965 –1980 (some say as high as 1982)

Influenced by being the children of older boomers, who grew up in a period of financial, familial and societal insecurity. They witnessed their parents get laid off and the decline of the American global power. They grew up with a stagnant job market, corporate downsizing, and limited wage mobility, and are the first individuals predicted to earn less than their parents did. They have often grown up in homes where both parents worked, or in single parent household because of high divorce rates, and as such, may have been latchkey kids forced to be independent. They were influenced by MTV, AIDS, and worldwide competition and are accustomed to receiving instant feedback from playing computer and video games.

Described as follows:

- Aspire more than previous generations to achieve a balance between work and play
- More independent, autonomous and self-reliant than previous generations
- Not overly loyal to their employers
- But strong feelings of loyalty towards their family and friends
- Value continuous learning and skill development
- Have strong technical skills
- Results focused
- Ruled by a sense of accomplishment and not the clock
- Question authority figures and are not intimidated by them
- Money does not necessarily motivate members of this generation, but the absence of money might lead them to lose motivation
- Like to receive feedback
- Adaptable to change
- Prefer flexible schedules
- Can tolerate work as long as it is fun
- Entrepreneurial
- Creative
- Although individualistic, may also like teamwork
- Not that loyal to employers
- Value relationships with co-workers more than with organization

- Think 2 weeks notice is enough when leaving a job
- View job-hopping as a valid career advancement method
- Learned, by watching their parents, that loyalty to an employer not a guarantee of job security
- Complain about managers who ignore ideas from employees
- Don't like "do it because I said so" mentality
- Comfortable with authority figures and not intimidated or impressed with titles
- Find it natural to interact with superiors
- Ask questions
- Want to be listened to and acknowledged
- America's world position was less clear and the gap between the haves and have-nots had grown.
- The most highly educated generation ever, with approximately 60 percent having some college education, it is also the first generation in America to likely to have a standard of living below that of its parents.
- Many X-ers cannot afford to live on their own; some 46 percent still live with their parents.
- Members of Generation X "work to live," and seek to balance their roles as employees, spouses and parents, while not as willing to work exceptionally long hours or volunteer.
- X-ers were more often latchkey children at a rate three times higher than that of boomers, and consequently became self-reliant and used to being alone.
- They were also the first generation to mature in an "instant gratification" society of microwave, ATM, and remote control users.
- Education is a tool for getting ahead, not an end in itself.

Generation Y

Generation Y, also known as Millennials, Nexters, Generation www, The Digital Generationk Generation E, Exho Boomers, N-Gens, the Net Generation, the Non-nuclear Family Generation, the Nothing-Is-Sacred Generation, the Wannabees, the Feel-good Generation, Cyberkids, the Do-or-die Generation, and Searching-for-an-identity Generation.

Born: 1981 -2002

Influenced by parental excesses, computers, and dramatic technological advances. One of the most frequently reported characteristics of this generation is their comfort with technology. In general, Generation Y shares many of the characteristics of Xers.

Described as follows:

- Value teamwork and collective action
- Embrace diversity
- Optimistic
- Adaptable to change
- Seek flexibility
- Independent
- Desire a more balanced life
- Multi-taskers
- Most highly educated generation
- Value training
- Demanding
- Most confident generation
- Entrepreneurial
- Less process focused
- Comfortable with authority figures
- Not impressed with titles or intimidated by them
- Find it natural to interact with superiors
- Ask questions and don't think it's disrespectful
- Believe respect must be earned and not unquestioned
- Don't feel the need to exert authority
- Want to be respected, but not just because they hold a certain position
- Has seen the world through the prism of the 9/11 tragedy. They have grown up with war and uncertainty and tend to view the world through that lens. They see the world with less optimism than many of the other generations.

Some examples of cross-generational communication issues when words are received differently.

When a *Boomer* says to another *Boomer*, “We need to get the report done,” it is generally interpreted as an order. It must be done and done now. However, when a *Boomer* says to an *Xer*, “This needs to be done,” the *Xer* hears an observation, not a command, and may or may not do it immediately.

At annual appraisal time, a manager from the *Traditionals* generation gives out a nice bonus for a project well done. The *Generation X* employee seems ungrateful and says, “Why didn’t I get this six months ago, when the project was completed?” *Gen X* is more apt to want instant gratification, whereas a person in the *Traditionals* generation is happy to get money anytime.

A *Gen X* manager tells a *Boomer* s/he has been working too hard and should take time off to take the family on vacation. Instead of saying thanks, the *Boomer* replies, “I work to get ahead, to get a promotion, not for a vacation.”

A top-notch, cross-functional team with individuals from several different generations has been set up to recommend a solution to a difficult organizational problem. After a couple of weeks, the manager responsible for the team cannot understand why there is constant bickering and nothing is getting done. If the manager were aware of just one characteristic of each individual relating to communication needs, he or she might understand the stalemate. The *Traditionals* on the team are looking for handwritten notes and direct, specific requests for work to be done. The *Boomers* do not like to work independently, and they expect to have meetings any time, any place — and it is fine if they are called day or night. *Xers* do not want to hear about the project outside of work, and don’t dare call them at home. And the *Yers* don’t want any meetings at all but prefer to communicate via voice mail and e-mail. Is it any wonder that the team is having trouble getting motivated toward the goal?

At the beginning of any team formation, an effective leader should facilitate the group and figure out how team members wish to communicate.

There are more pronounced differences between the generations today than ever before.

What can one expect with the dramatic changes in our world in the last 60 years?

Being aware of these differences can help individuals tailor their message for maximum effect, regardless of the task, or the relationship — family, friends, workplace peers.

Good business is based on understanding others. The majority of us think the correct way, and the only way, is our way.

In business, as well as in personal life, that is just not true.

To work effectively and efficiently, to increase productivity and quality, one needs to understand generational characteristics and learn how to use them effectively in dealing with each individual.

The SHRM Generational Differences study found....

that communication through multiple channels to be the most commonly used means of addressing generational differences and needs. It was also one of the most successful, with 65 percent reporting it to be "very successful." Face-to-face-meetings, email, intranet tools, and printed materials all have value. Different communication vehicles are preferred by different audiences for different kinds of messages.

One size does not fit all.

What Organizations Can Do To Encourage A Multi- Generational Friendly Organization

1. Cross-generational communication is productive when managers and team leaders take steps to bring the generations on to common ground. If blended into functional work teams, for example, older and younger workers can share knowledge and collaborate on devising strategies, developing new processes, and handling service issues. This kind of close collaboration cultivates understanding, trust and respect.
2. Employees can be empowered to embrace new communication tools and explore shared interests that will forge a strong communication foundation that will support them well into the future.
3. As over 90% of Fortune 500 companies have discovered, common bonds are also created through workplace affinity groups. Also known as networking or resource groups, affinity groups to bring employees together around common denominators like background and philosophies. They can also form around shared interests in books, sports, travel, and music. Regardless of their focus, affinity groups hold great potential for fostering the kind of bonds that compel meaningful communication and connection between employees of all ages.
4. Try to understand generational differences in employee needs and preferences through research and employee surveys.

5. Consider innovative workplace practices to allow flexibility in where and when work is done without career or benefit penalties.
6. When possible, find ways to offer more choices in benefits such as health care coverage and retirement accounts to address the diverse preferences of employees.
7. Communicate in multiple ways to respond to generational differences, including varied comfort levels with technology and different needs for face-to-face or print communication.
8. Develop training programs that help employees understand and respect differences among the generations.
9. Share information about how diverse generations differ and are the same.
10. Include dealing with differences in generations as a part of regular staff meetings.
11. Improve the talent development system for employees of all ages.
12. Increase opportunities for mentoring and networking for employees of all ages. This can include situations where older employees help younger employees, or reverse mentoring, where younger employees teach older employees skills they may not have.
13. Capitalize on, rather than resist, various social orientations and team- preferences.
14. Capitalize on individual technology-orientation. Let people do what they do best and help others understand.
15. Make use of those that can multitask and those that require singular focus.
16. Appreciate the diversity around and “use” one another in the best sense of the word. Together you are one perfect person.
17. When possible, let people choose what they most like to do and what best fits their styles.
18. Listen to one another. Really listen!

Key Points

Trying to change someone else's perspective, approach, or style at work may be a losing battle; instead, find ways to capitalize on their strengths and assets.

Masterful communicators connect with people from different generations by adapting to their preferences and/or negotiating common ground.

It's always a good idea to ask your self, " How does this other person want to be treated and can I possibly comply?"

Engaged employees make all the difference, but employee engagement isn't one-size-fits all. It's important to understand what appeals to people from each of the generations.

An excellent work environment is one that supports all the generations, responds to diversity, builds on strengths, offers options, develops people's understanding of differences, and trains people to communicate effectively across generations. ***It is stronger as a result of putting in the effort.***