



# Managing Generational Communication Differences in the Workplace: How to Be Most Effective and Productive

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# Objectives



To thrive in today's competitive marketplace, all the generations need to communicate *successfully* with each other as professionals. Our objectives today are to help you:

- Understand the differences in generational expectations
- Understand the differences in generational values and behaviors but don't stereotype
- Understand the different communication styles
- Use the information gained to be more effective in the workplace



# What is Different Now?



- This is the first time in American history there are four generations working side by side.
- The older boss and younger worker scenario is over!
- Generational differences affect everything at work:
  - Recruiting
  - Teamwork
  - Managing
  - Productivity





# Defining the Generations

*While studies vary slightly, most agree with these parameters:*

- Traditionalists – or Silent Generation (born prior to 1946)
- Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964)
- Generation X – or Nexters (born between 1965-1981)
- Millennials – or Gen Y - or Echo Boomers (born between 1982-Present)





# Why It Matters

Generational differences contribute to workplace obstacles, such as:

- Hiring challenges
- High turnover rates
- Communication confusion
- Poorly defined roles and responsibilities
- Lower morale





# Understanding Communication Styles

- Recognize generational communication differences
- Be prepared to adapt – *these will not go away over time*
- Be insightful and attuned when managing across the generations
- Increase teamwork
- Use communication to lead, inform, engage and inspire





# Understanding the Generations

Understanding the unique differences between the four generations can improve:

- Culture
- Morale
- Recruiting
- Communication
- Motivation
- Productivity





# Understanding the Generations

Each generation has distinctive:

- Historic experiences
- Attitudes
- Behaviors
- Expectations
- Habits
- Motivational “buttons”







# What the Traditionalists Value

## Characteristics of Traditionalists:

This generation of 'conformists' is very civic minded - molded by World War II, the Great Depression, the Korean War and the Atomic Bomb.

As such, they tend to value:

- Hard work, dedication, sacrifice
- Fiscal conservatism
- Respect for authority and formal rules (institutional attitude)
- An education





# How the Traditionalists Behave

## How Traditionalists Behave:

Their conservative attitude and adherence to *professionalism* influences them to embrace –

- A direct leadership style (top down)
- Formal communications
- Respect for experience
- Neat and conservative dress/appearance





# What the Baby Boomers Value

## Characteristics of Baby Boomers:

This generation of workaholics was molded by the focus on civil rights, space travel, the Cold War, sexual revolution, political assassinations

As such, they tend to value:

- Optimism
- Team work
- Work ethic
- Personal gratification, growth and success





# How the Baby Boomers Behave

## How Baby Boomers Behave:

Their positive, more informal approach influences them to embrace -

- A consensus, collegial leadership style
- Team work and interaction
- In-person meetings
- A comfortable, affluent lifestyle





# What the Gen Xers Value

## Characteristics of Gen X:

This generation was molded by the fall of the Berlin Wall, women's liberation, Watergate, the energy crisis

As such, they tend to value:

- Diversity
- Techno literacy (newly emerging)
- Fun and informality
- Self-reliance/independence (latch key!)
- Entrepreneurial





# How the Gen Xers Behave

## How Gen Xers Behave:

Their more confident, pragmatic approach influences them to embrace -

- Leadership that respects everyone (diversity)
- Immediate communication
- Freedom
- A return to fiscal cautiousness and conservatism





# What the Generation Ys Value

## Characteristics of Gen Y (Millennials):

This generation was molded by technology (Google/cell phones/video games), violence (Columbine, Oklahoma bombing), environmental awareness, ethnic diversity

As such, they tend to value:

- Self-expression
- Balanced life style
- Relaxed, flexible work environment combined with meaningful work
- Resiliency
- Instant delivery of everything
- Positive reinforcement
- Socially responsible





# How the Generation Y's Behave

## How Gen Yers Behave:

Their early exposure to serious adult issues combined with exceptional technological advances influences them to embrace –

- Global causes
- Team work
- Multi-tasking
- Active versus passive involvement
- Impatience







# Generational Differences Impact the Workplace

## Generational experiences impact work behavior:

- Traditionalists see work as an obligation; they work hard and put duty before fun; they are very serious and personal life has no place at work.
- Baby Boomers are workaholics with no life balance; they get personal fulfillment from working efficiently; they don't appreciate money they question authority and prefer teams and collaboration (lots of meetings)
- Gen Xers want structure and direction, but find work to be a challenge; they are more entrepreneurial and value freedom to do things their own way; they want instant gratification and they want work-life balance.
- Gen Yers are terrific at multi-tasking, are very goal oriented and see work only as an end to fulfillment (unlike Boomers who enjoy work just for the work's sake!); they treasure work-life balance, meaningful work and working on teams with smart people.





# Generational Differences Impact the Workplace

## Generational experiences impact attitudes and can cause confusion, such as:

- Traditionalists and Boomers tend not to question authority; Gen X and Gen Y challenge this attitude
- Gen X and Gen Y may not listen as well as previous generations; they don't respect authority as much
- Baby Boomers value in-person meetings and personal interaction; Gen X and Gen Y use technology to communicate with large groups (Facebook/Twitter)
- Gen X and Y use email and text as key communication tools
- Baby Boomers are content with occasional feedback and semi-annual job performance reviews; Gen X and Gen Y want immediate and ongoing evaluation – and Gen Y likes to be praised
- Business etiquette no longer is clearly defined – ex., is it a thank you on letterhead, a handwritten note, an email or a text message?





## Generational Differences Impact the Workplace

Generational experiences can cause conflict leading to lower productivity:

- Set the ground rules
- Give others the benefit of the doubt
- Walk in their shoes
- Show mutual respect
- Tailor communication and messaging for the receiver, not the sender





# Managing Four Generations

Understand these fundamental differences

- Baby Boomers were told the future was theirs to own;
- Gen Xers found the future disheartening;
- Gen Y questions whether there even is a future for them.





# Fixing the Generational Conundrum

Options for improving morale and productivity can include:

- Provide intergenerational leadership training
- Offer alternatives like telecommuting
- Understand and accommodate the working and learning styles of the different generations
- Facilitate mentoring *between* the generations
- Provide on going education and career advice
- Create recognition programs
- Judge employees on merit & outcomes
- Give all employees a voice – be less hierarchial





# Fixing the Generational Conundrum

Focus on commonalities across the generations. They all share similar attitudes toward:

- Values (i.e., family, integrity, honesty, trustworthiness)
- Wanting to be respected
- The need for trustworthy leaders
- A fear change
- Being loyal
- Wanting to learn
- Appreciating feedback





# Conclusion

Behavior, communication and leadership styles differ between the generations, with the potential for confusion, disruption, poor moral and inefficiency in the workplace.

Instead, we can strive for:

- a) Increased sensitivity to different styles that can lead to more fruitful outcomes – productivity - in the workplace
- b) A willingness to be flexible, and even adopt some of each other's characteristics, without feeling compromised
- c) Understanding Gen Z!





# Contact Information

Please contact me with any questions!

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