



Enterprising Rural Families™

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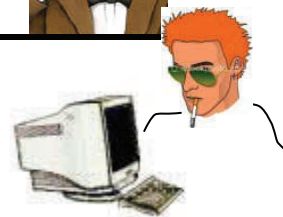
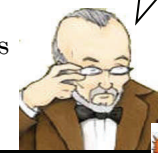
“Managing Generational Differences in the Workplace”

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How does a “fifty-something” manage a “twenty-something?” For that matter, how does a “thirty-something” manage a “sixty-something?” And what on earth do we do with those teenagers sporting the orange hair and body piercings? People in other generations don’t think right. They don’t act right. They don’t have the right values. Why don’t they all act like normal people? It can’t possibly be us. It’s got to be them.¹

There is a new phenomenon in the workplace and it has nothing to do with downsizing, global competition, consumer demand or greed. Instead, for the first time in history, it is the phenomenon of four distinct generations working together and often colliding as their paths cross. Workers with different values, different ideas, different ways of getting things done and different ways of communicating work side-by-side in the workplace. Remember, if you are old enough, when older workers were the bosses and younger workers did what was asked of them, no questions asked. There were definite rules as to how the boss was treated and how younger workers treated older workers. No longer—roles today are all over the place and the rules are constantly being rewritten.²

In the workplace, generational differences can affect everything including recruiting, team building, motivating, supervising, and productivity. Workplace tensions can arise when people of different generations don’t understand each other. Tension at work can be eased by learning about the differences among colleagues, appreciating those differences, and making the effort to interact with members of each generation in a way that suits their work ethic and communication style.³



The Generations in Today’s Workplace: Who They Are

People of today’s workplace generations possess characteristics that developed, to a great extent, from the political, social and economic climate and events of their youth.

Veterans—Born 1922-1943*

Also referred to as traditionalists or matures, adversity best describes what this generation faced as it was growing up. Many of them were born during the Great Depression and lived through World War II as young adults. For this generation, survival was a way of life. Shortages of gasoline, sugar, tires and a host of other items that younger generations take for granted, were items they did without.⁴ Veterans are loyal, hard-working, financially conservative and faithful to institutions. Many are retired and now working part-time.

Baby Boomers—Born 1943-1960

Baby boomers entered a thriving new economy after World War II. The nation had established itself as the preeminent power in the world. Factories were pumping out new, time-saving devices. Houses were being built at a record pace.

* The titles given to the generations and the generational time frames vary by researcher and/or author. Defining moments in each generation influence the values, attitude and expectations of the generation.

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TIP OF THE MONTH:

As nearly everyone knows, a manager has practically nothing to do except: to decide what is to be done; to tell somebody to do it; to listen to reasons why it should not be done, why it should be done by someone else, or why it should be done in a different way; to follow-up to see if the thing has been done; to discover that it has not; to inquire why; to listen to excuses from the person who should have done it; to follow up again to see if the thing has been done, only to discover that it has been done incorrectly; to point out how it should have been done; to conclude that as long as it has been done, it may as well be left where it is; to wonder if it is not time to get rid of a person who cannot do a thing right; to reflect that he or she probably has a family, and that certainly any successor would be just as bad, maybe worse; to consider how much simpler and better the thing would have been done if one had done it oneself in the first place; to reflect sadly that one could have done it right in 20 minutes, and, as things turned out, one had to spend two days to find out why it had taken three weeks for somebody to do it wrong.

-Anonymous

(Source: *Ag Help Wanted*)



Continued from page one – “*Managing Generational Differences in the Workplace*”

The introduction of the television forever changed the way that those growing up viewed the world.⁵ When the baby boomers entered the work force, they felt compelled to challenge the status quo. They all but invented the 60-hour workweek, figuring that demonstrated hard work and loyalty to employers was one way to get ahead. Their sense of who they are is deeply connected to their career achievements.⁶

Generation X—Born 1960-1980

While baby boomers entered a world filled with optimism and economic prosperity, Generation X had a significantly different experience. The nation faced social turmoil—civil rights, anti-war protests, Watergate, the Challenger tragedy, and a host of other troubling events. Generation Xers are technologically savvy, having ushered in the era of personal computers during their formative years. But witnessing skyrocketing divorce rates, parents being laid off after years of dedicated service, corporate take-overs and more; this generation developed a sense of skepticism and distrust of institutions. They don't expect employer loyalty. In contrast to the baby boomer's overtime work ethic, Xers strive for balance in their lives. They are hardworking and resourceful, but once 5 o'clock hits, they'd rather pursue other interests.

Millennials—Born 1980-2000

Many in this generation are still in school; but some have graduated from college and are in the work force. This generation has been born into a world of cell phones, pagers, voice recognition software and the Internet. They're confident and have high self-esteem. They're collaborators and favor teamwork, having functioned in groups in school, organized sports and extracurricular activities from a very young age. They do not believe one must stay within the confines of a job description. As opposed to Generation X who change jobs, millennials may be likely to change entire career paths.⁷

Bridging the Generation Gap: Steps to Success

How does one cope with the differences in leading different generations?

- Learn all you can about other generations. The more you know about the shared life experiences of other ages, the more you can understand their values, attitudes and expectations. But...
- Be wary of stereotyping. Although certain characteristics may be attributed to one generation or another, that doesn't mean that all people in a particular generation exhibit each of that generation's common characteristics.
- Manage according to values and attitudes. Each generation has a preferred behavior pattern in the work place. Regarding communication for example, Veterans prefer formal memos while Boomers like one-on-one interaction. On the other hand, Xers and Millennials respond more favorably to email, voice mail or text messages.⁸
- Appreciate the strengths. Instead of becoming frustrated over differences, focus on the positive attributes of co-workers.

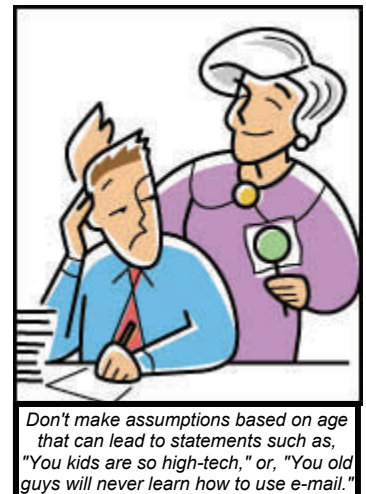
Workplace Strategies to Use with the Generations:

Veterans...

- Honor the chain of command
- Value their experience
- Appreciate their dedication

Boomers...

- Choose face-to-face conversations
- Learn the corporate history
- Give them your full attention



Don't make assumptions based on age that can lead to statements such as, "You kids are so high-tech," or, "You old guys will never learn how to use e-mail."

Generation X...

- Don't micromanage
- Get over the notion of dues paying
- Get to the point

Millennials...

- Challenge them
- Ask their opinion
- Provide frequent, worthwhile feedback⁹

There are more pronounced differences between the generations today than ever before. To work effectively and efficiently, to increase productivity and quality, one needs to understand generational characteristics and learn how to use them in dealing with each individual.



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3. Ibid., 2.
4. The Center for Generational Studies. *Hey Dude: Managing Age Diversity in Today's Workplace*. Aurora, CO: The Center for Generational Studies, 2004.
5. Ibid., 2.
6. Mayo Clinic. "Workplace Generational Gap: Understanding Differences Among Colleagues." *Working Life*, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/working-life/WL00045>.
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9. Mayo Clinic, *Workplace Generational Gap*, 3-4.



Generation gaps in the workplace today are wider than ever and of greater strategic importance. Each generation brings its own set of values, beliefs, life experiences and attitudes to the workplace. These differences are encouraging us to re-examine the way we work with each other.



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