


# Generations at Work - Embracing the New Workforce!

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PIECES OF THE GENERATIONAL PUZZLE

- First time, ever, that we've had 4 distinct generations in the workforce
- Creates challenges
- Offers opportunities
- Important to remember: PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE!




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Companies report that the combination of people representing four generations in today's workplace is simultaneously one of their biggest frustrations and greatest sources of creativity and energy!

When discussing generations, it's important to remember that no one likes to be stereotyped. There are distinct behaviors that can be reliably attributed to each group. However, there are always exceptions. And, everyone likes to be treated like an individual – unique in their contribution and approach.

TRADITIONALISTS

- AKA WWII, Silent Generation
- 1922-1945
- 60's to 80's
- Defining Events:
  - Great Depression
  - WWII
  - Stock Market Collapse
  - A-Bomb



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TRADITIONALISTS

- General Characteristics
  - Reliable
  - Frugal
  - Patriotic
  - Respectful
  - Adhere to rules
  - Hardworking
  - Strong set of moral obligations



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Many people discount the impact of Traditionalists on today's work world. While there are very few still actively working, it is important to note that they bring distinct strengths. They are excellent in customer service roles that involve high people interaction. They are also eager to learn new skills. As a group, Traditionalists have the highest rates of enrollment in computer classes. Most importantly, this group is a wealth of information that should be tapped before it is too late!

TRADITIONALISTS

- Workplace behaviors
  - Loyal to employer
  - Effective and warm interpersonal skills
  - Work ethic= timeliness, putting in the hours, working hard
  - Very willing to learn
  - Accept "command and control" management style

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**BABY BOOMERS**

- 1945-1964
- 40s to 60s
- Defining Events:
  - JFK, MLK
  - Woodstock
  - Civil Rights
  - Vietnam
  - Feminist Movement
  - TV
  - Cold War



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**BABY BOOMERS**

- General Characteristics
  - Optimistic and Driven
  - Used to being the focus of attention; want their opinion to count
  - Value individuality “Me Generation”
  - Resisting traditional aging
  - Believe in growth and expansion
  - Try to “have it all”

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Our work world today is, essentially, a product of the Baby Boomers. Concepts like “work ethic,” “loyalty,” and “teamwork” have all been perpetuated by the Boomers. Conflict is created for many Boomers as they watch the concepts on which they built their workplace success get redefined by younger generations hitting the work world.

Traditionally, Boomers have been credited with a “work is everything” mentality. However, this is starting to shift. As Boomers near retirement, many of them are facing a struggle between being unable or unwilling to fully retire, but also not wanting to continue with the traditional long and demanding work situation which they have championed in the past. Boomers, too, are beginning to seek life/work balance.


**BABY BOOMERS**

- Workplace Behaviors
  - Work comes first
  - Loyal to the company
  - Work ethic= working long hours, hard, and being observed while doing it
  - Believe in, champion, and evaluate others on their “work ethic”
  - Focus on teamwork and relationship building
  - Work hard to advance; “put in your time”
  - Boomer attitudes are changing

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**GENERATION X**

- AKA Post Boomers; MTV Generation
- Born between 1965 and 1980
- Late 20s to early 40s
- Defining Events
  - Challenger explosion
  - STDs, AIDS
  - Energy Crisis
  - Computers
  - Latch-key kids



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**GENERATION X**

- General Characteristics
  - Balanced
  - Independent and self-reliant
  - Adaptable
  - Cautiously optimistic
  - Non-traditional orientation to space and time
  - Skeptical and hesitant
  - Comfortable with technology

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## GENERATION X

- Workplace Behaviors
  - Work to live NOT live to work
  - Reject Boomer and Traditional definition of “work ethic”
  - Work ethic= getting the job done fast and right
  - Casual approach to authority
  - Value talent and ability over longevity
  - Loyal to a person not a job or company

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Generation X was the first generation to challenge the approach of Boomers in the workplace. Much of their attitude was shaped by watching their Boomer parents dedicate loyalty to a company only to have it returned in the form of layoffs and reorganizations. Xers decided to give their loyalty instead to people, namely themselves and their families. Another big difference between Xers and Boomers is their feeling on teamwork. Xers are much more comfortable working independently and frequently get frustrated with Boomers’ requests for meetings and group projects.

## MILLENNIALS

- AKA Gen Y; Generation Next
- Born after 1980
- 28 and younger
- Defining Events
  - School violence
  - Technology – Internet, Texting, Cell phones, IM
  - 9/11 and Iraq War
  - Busy, Over-planned lives
  - Helicopter parents



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## MILLENNIALS

- General Characteristics
  - Optimistic
  - Value freedom and autonomy
  - Global outlook; want to make the world better
  - Immediate gratification
  - Success from hard work
  - Inclusive; seek multi-culturalism
  - Relate well to Traditionalists



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Millennials are only now entering the workforce, but they are joining it in droves! As Boomers retire, Millennials will soon become the largest generation in the workforce. Much of what we know about Millennials at work is only beginning to surface. But, one thing is certain – they are bringing their own, unique, approach to work and understanding it and responding to it is crucial to create a successful workplace.

Perhaps the most important piece of working with Millennials is giving them a voice and showing them respect. Boomers want coworkers to “earn” their respect, and this approach doesn’t work for Millennials. They want to be valued first!

## MILLENNIALS

- Workplace Behaviors
  - Value meaningful and fun work
  - Loyal to people they work and play with
  - Want to learn and grow, but want rewards NOW!
  - Achievement oriented
  - Technology is a necessary part of the work environment
  - Work ethic= ???

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	Traditionalist	Boomers	Xers	Millennials
<b>Rewards</b>	Plaques, pins, certificates	Promotion, recognition, money	Money, time away from work	Time off, flexibility, INSTANT
<b>Acknowledge</b>	Loyalty, experience	Skills, hard work, time served	Speed, accuracy	Knowledge, creativity, ideas
<b>Say Thanks...</b>	Handwritten notes	Public recognition	With actions, individually	Quick email or IM
<b>Communicate</b>	Face to face; formal; proper	Collaborate ; More formal; groups	Computer-oriented; direct; honest	Positive; friendly; electronic
<b>Work Environment</b>	Clear policies, structure, hierarchy	Team-oriented, recognition, advance	Flexible, casual, fun, individual	Flexible, collaborate, positive

Of course, there are individuals in each generation who may not fit these generalizations. It is especially important when talking about motivation, appreciation, and communication to work with each person in the manner that is most suitable to them. This table provides suggestions, but only your employees and coworkers can tell you exactly what they need!

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- o “When Generations Collide” by Lancaster and Stillman
- o “Millennials Incorporated” by Orrell
- o “Generations at Work” by Zemke, Raines, and Filipczak
- o Rebecca Ryan, Next Generation Consulting: [www.nextgenerationconsulting.com](http://www.nextgenerationconsulting.com)

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**EVERYBODY WANTS. . .**

- o To be appreciated for the qualities that they bring to a group
- o To feel respected by their coworkers
- o Flexibility!
- o To be seen as a person: unique, valued, important, and special!

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