Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers and Millennials: Appreciating Generational Diversity in the Workplace

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Objectives

• Identify characteristics, values, and behaviors of different generations

• Create inclusive working and learning environments to facilitate the educational experiences for all students

• Develop tools to communicate more effectively with those in generations other than your own
A “generation” is defined as a group of people who share the same formative experiences. Most frequently, birth year is used to define a generation, with an approximate 20-year span. Each generation shares a unique set of values and traits. Generational characteristics are not universally shared by all in that group. “Cuspers” may have a blended set of characteristics (born on the “cusp” of a generation).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Age of adults in 2016</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Greatest Generation</td>
<td>Before 1928</td>
<td>88-100+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Silent Generation</td>
<td>1928-1945</td>
<td>70-87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers</td>
<td>1946-1964</td>
<td>51-69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>1965-1980</td>
<td>35-50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Z/Digital Natives</td>
<td>1996-2012</td>
<td>5-19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pew Research Center, 2015
Generations “Defined”

**Baby Boomers**
- Predominantly white
- Conservative
- Source of media fascination
- “Desperate to make millennials hate themselves”

**Generation X**
- America’s neglected “middle child”
- Bookended by two larger generations
- Less conservative, but not liberal either
- Less distinct than the other two, but don’t care

**Millennials**
- Ethnically diverse
- “Entitled”, “everybody gets a trophy”
- Liberal
- Techies
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Seminal Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silent</td>
<td>WWII, The Great Depression, The New Deal, Korean War, Rise of Labor Unions, the discovery of penicillin (products of depression, sacrifice important, “seen but not heard” = loyalty is everything)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomer</td>
<td>Salk Vaccine tested on public, Rosa Parks refuses to move to back of bus, first nuclear power plant, Congress passes Civil Rights Act, birth control pills introduced, National Organization for Women established, Martin Luther King leads march in DC, JFK elected/assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated, first moon landing, Woodstock (optimistic about future; team oriented, health/wellness important, work, involvement = engaged, satisfied with their job)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Intel’s first chip invented, MTV, CDC’s first report on AIDS, first email system, personal computer introduced, Reagan assassination attempt, Watergate scandal, Three Mile Island meltdown, Corporate layoffs, Rodney King beating, Iranian hostage crisis, Desert Storm, fall of Berlin wall, Challenger explosion, Lockerbie flight bombing, Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (survivors of traumatic events; established institutions and leaders in society failed = skeptical, self-sufficient, independent)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennial</td>
<td>Prozac introduced, Google, Ebola, World Wide Web opens to public, O.J. Simpson trial, Oklahoma City Bombings, 9/11, MA issues same-sex marriage licenses, Recession begins, CDs/DVDs, Y2K, Obama elected, rise of social media, school violence, early exposure to adult issues, diversity (cautious; culturally/racially tolerant, accepting of change, “Everybody wins!” = open communicators, want leadership/opportunities to learn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Z/Digital Natives</td>
<td>Children of Generation X, Recession still present, terrorism, Swine Flu, Hurricane Katrina, iPod, Facebook; will be smarter than any generation previously, will not be team players, collaborative and creative, more self-directed, little concern for privacy or personal information, thrive on speed, highly connected to use of communications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as Largest Generation

![Population by Generation](chart.png)

- **Millennials**: 75.4 million
- **Baby Boomers**: 74.9 million
- **Generation X**: 66 million
- **Silents**: 26.8 million

*Pew Research Center, April 2016*

In millions

Note: Annual averages plotted 1995-2014. For 2015 the first quarter average of 2015 is shown. Due to data limitations, Silent generation is overestimated from 2008-2015.


PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Educational Trends

- Gender: By 2021, women are projected to earn 58% of bachelor’s, 62% of master’s, and 51% of doctorate and professional degrees; climbing since 2000
- Information gathering: 57% from television, 38% from websites, 20% from print newspapers, 25% from radio*
  - 50% of millennials get news online; 27% from TV; 14% radio; 5% print newspapers
- Today’s graduates have spent less than 5000 hours of their lives reading, but have spent over 10,000 hours playing video games and over 20,000 hours watching television
- Technology: In 1990 the student-computer ratio in the classroom was 20 to 1; in 2009, the ratio of students to computers was 5.3 to 1
- Grade inflation

*% of each age group who get news on each platform

NCES, 2015; Pew Research Center, 2016.
### Generational Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Silent</th>
<th>Baby Boomer</th>
<th>Generation X</th>
<th>Millennial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outlook</strong></td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Skeptical</td>
<td>Cautious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work ethic</strong></td>
<td>Dedicated; loyal</td>
<td>Loyal; driven; “My way or the highway”</td>
<td>Responsibilities have to align with values</td>
<td>Described as poor work ethic; self-centered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of authority</strong></td>
<td>Respectful</td>
<td>Pay your dues</td>
<td>Competence; do not micromanage</td>
<td>Respect must be earned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communications</strong></td>
<td>Formal memo</td>
<td>In person</td>
<td>Email or voicemail; informality</td>
<td>Text/Social Media (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships</strong></td>
<td>Self-sacrifice</td>
<td>Personal gratification</td>
<td>Reluctance to commit</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work-Life Balance</strong></td>
<td>“Don’t get it”</td>
<td>Responsible for balancing everyone else</td>
<td>Want it now</td>
<td>Flexibility and options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Perception of feedback</strong></td>
<td>“No news is good news”</td>
<td>“Once a year, with lots of documentation”</td>
<td>“Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?”</td>
<td>“Whenever I want or seek it”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A bit about Generation Z...

- Born 1996-2010 (now in high school and early college)
- More practical and financially-driven than Millennials
- Learn by doing
- Want future to reflect specific, personal interests (vs. Millennials who seek to make an impact on others)
- “Smarter than ever before”

Some Background on Millennials...
Millennials = Safest Generation

• Car seats up to age 8
• Bicycle helmets
• Participation trophies
• “Stranger danger”
Technology

• Information access (internet) is not a luxury; it’s a requirement
• No longer *nice to have* → necessary to have
• There have been more changes in technology in the last 5 years than the previous 50
• Robotics
Information Generation

• Access to global information
  ◦ Tragedies happen frequently
  ◦ Violence
  ◦ Live video as events are happening

• Public scandals
  ◦ National leaders
  ◦ Sports heroes

• “Do-it-Yourself”
  ◦ YouTube
  ◦ Craigslist

Image credit: DNAIndia.com
Changing Trends...

Ownership

Community
Loyalty (jobs, political parties)
Status = success

Advocacy

Access

Globalization
Social awareness/Loyalty to a cause
Relationships/Inclusion = success
Open-mindedness
Feedback

- Frequent feedback sought
- Product reviews
- “Rate your Doctor”
- “Likes”
- Digital Badging
## Working with Baby Boomers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
<th>THINGS TO CONSIDER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large generation</td>
<td>Recognize their experience as a valuable asset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td>Use them as mentors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skewed work-life balance</td>
<td>Recognize role overload and conflicting demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought up in competitive environment</td>
<td>Assist with time demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will revolutionize retirement</td>
<td>Not comfortable with working at speed of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Work ethic” and “loyalty” are synonymous</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Working with Generation X

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedicated to people, projects, ideas</td>
<td>They like and want flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and tasks, but not longevity and lifetime employment</td>
<td>Want to be developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parallel thinkers</td>
<td>Enjoy engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent and resourceful</td>
<td>Want affiliation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfortable with diversity</td>
<td>Want others to “lighten up”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct with feedback and requests</td>
<td>Want to be appreciated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepting of change</td>
<td>Want balance</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don’t force them to fit your definitions</td>
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# Working with Millennials

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<tbody>
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<td>Using computers since Pre-K</td>
<td>May change jobs every 2-4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Learners</td>
<td>More free agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In a state of continuous partial attention</td>
<td>Hop-scotch approach will replace linear career pathing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used to instant communication and feedback</td>
<td>Expect to work 8-10 years then seek extended time off, like a sabbatical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accustomed to giving feedback</td>
<td>Technology allows them to work remotely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cautiously optimistic</td>
<td>May not want to work traditional hours but will be dedicated to completing a task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oriented toward collective action/team-oriented (<a href="https://youtu.be/8Amu3UBj-qw">https://youtu.be/8Amu3UBj-qw</a>)</td>
<td>Don’t force them to fit your definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speed</td>
<td>They don’t respect authority just because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>
Working with Millennials: Do’s

- Group work/collaborative projects
- Specific tasks and outside the box – grab info from various sources
- Have a plan for their long term goals
  - Make sure timeframe is short enough for them to envision
- Time sensitive projects – efficient
- Creativity/fun environment
- Feedback – direct, frequent, meaningful
  - Electronic is fine (email, text, digital badge, etc.)
Digital Badging

“A validated indicator of accomplishment, skill, quality or interest...based on systems-thinking.”

Students will be able to customize learning goals within the larger curricular framework, integrate continuing peer and faculty feedback about their progress toward achieving those goals, and tailor the way badges and the metadata within them are displayed to the outside world. Students won’t just earn badges—they’ll build them, in an act of continuous learning.

Working with Millennials: Don’ts

• Try not be defensive when questioned
• Don’t break promises – they will become jaded
• Don’t guarantee anything
  • Nothing is a guarantee in their world
• Self-centered work ethic but dedicated to completing a task

• Not interested in climbing corporate ladder
  • Promises of promotions and titles don’t interest them
• Using technology is not necessarily disrespectful
• Don’t expect them to fill downtime
• Don’t expect loyalty, longevity in a job
  • If not stimulating they will move on
Bottom Line

• Wishing people were more like you is not a good strategy
  • Adapt
• How will interact with, motivate and reward all generations on your staff?

“To better understand who your Millennial employees are and what drives them to succeed, perhaps it's easiest to understand who they are not. You.”

~Cam Marston, leading expert on generational change
Questions?

Image credit: fyi.uwex.edu/youthadultpartnership.com
References


References (Cont.)


References (Cont.)


https://www.thebalance.com/tips-for-retaining-millennial-employees-1918679 .
