



MANAGING DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

By Marc Belaiche, C.A.

Remember the last time the family gathered around the table for a special occasion? How long did it take before you had Grandpa, the Veteran, saying how easy it is for young people today? Next thing you know Mom, the Baby Boomer, is setting up the “kiddy” table for the, much too old for kiddy table, daughter, the Generation X’er. There’s bound to be some tension forming within the family now! If this has happened to you don’t think you are alone. This situation is likely due to generational differences we are faced with on a daily basis not only in the home but at work as well.

This is the first time in history that we have had *four* different generations working side-by-side in the workplace. In order to understand what a manager in this type of situation must do to keep communication and working relationships flowing smoothly, let’s take a closer look at these four generations and learn the differences in work ethics, styles, values, etc...

| GENERATION: | GENERAL INFO: | AT WORK: |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Veterans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born between 1922-1943 • Prefers face-to-face interaction • Places a strong emphasis on teamwork • Respect for authority • Disciplined | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thrives on hard work • Puts duty and responsibility before fun • Follows the “rules” • Looks at work as an obligation • Leads with a “command and control” style. • Communicates best formally. Ex. A Memo • Feedback/Reward: Satisfied with job well done |
| Baby Boomers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born between 1943-1960 • Born during or after WW2 in an era of extreme optimism, opportunity, and progress • Grew up in a two parent household • Prefers face-to-face communication. • Values teamwork and over individual achievement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workaholics • Gets personal fulfillment from work • Loves to have meetings • Pays great attention to quality • Works efficiently • Leadership style is collegial • Likes to work in a team environment • Communicates best in person • Feedback/Reward: Money / |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--|---|
| | | <p>Title recognition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not balance work and family well. “Works to live” |
| Generation X | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born between 1960 – 1980 • Born after Baby Boomers into a rapidly changing social climate and economic recession, including Asian competition • Both parents work, rising divorce rates and downsizing • Emergence of high-tech and info age | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be very independent • Likes to be in control • Wants fast/immediate feedback • Likes structure and direction • Skeptical in nature • Looks at work as being a difficult challenge • Leadership: Equal, challenge others, asks questions • Has an entrepreneurial attitude • Communicates directly • Feedback/Reward: Freedom • Doesn’t like to follow the rules • Balances family and work |
| Generation Y (Nexters) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Born between 1980-2000 • Born of the Baby Boomers and early Gen X’ers • Part of our current high-tech, neo-optimistic times • Most technologically proficient • Fast learners • Tend to be impatient • Very social, confident, and realistic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent at multi-tasking • Very entrepreneurial • Goal oriented • Looks at work as “a means to an end” • Uncommitted to jobs/careers • Likes to participate rather than lead • Communicates best by email / voicemail • Feedback/Reward: Meaningful work • Balances family and work • Works only the required hours and little more |

Now that you’ve been introduced to the four different generations you can see why conflict at work is more likely to arise than not. These differences can affect everything including but not limited to, recruiting, building teams, dealing with change, motivating, managing and maintaining and increasing productivity.

So how does a manager deal with all these various generational styles, values, etc.?

Let's take a closer look!

VETERANS

The Veterans of the working world are very close to, if not already, exiting the workforce. However, it's important to study the underlying values and characteristics of this generation to better understand the preceding generations.

Managerial Style –

It's important to keep the Veterans experience and values in mind when dealing with them. They are used to rules, and a more direct management style. An effective message a manager may communicate to Veterans is, "Your experience is respected," or "It is valuable to hear what has worked in the past."

This group has a lot to offer an organization. They've acquired a lot of experience, and because of this they are able to solve present problems that may have troubled the company in the past.

BABY BOOMERS

The Baby Boomers make up the largest segment of the four generations. The Baby Boomers have also been in the workforce for many years and have a lot to offer future generations. Baby Boomers are very team oriented and possess excellent communication skills. In most cases they have been with one company for the duration of their professional career, which is helpful when introducing new employees and/or evaluating company practices/procedures.

Managerial Style –

Effective messages to Baby boomers are, "You are valuable, worthy," or "Your contribution is unique and important to our success." This group loves tangible recognition such as, a plaque or certificate. Saying, "You're doing a great job" may not cut it.

Managers keep the Boomers in mind when it comes to communication issues, loyalty, and team building.

GENERATION X'ERS

Gen X'ers are those most recently entering manager land or are already holding managerial roles. This generation breaks the mold, doesn't like to conform, and is generally stubbornly independent. This is one main reason why Baby Boomers and Gen

X'ers have the highest potential for misunderstanding. On the flip side they are technologically savvy, light hearted, direct, and structured.

Managerial Style –

Gen X'ers benefit by messages like "Let's explore some options outside of the box" or "Your technical expertise is a big asset."

To effectively manage this group, remember to: Get to the point, use e-mail, give them space, and lighten up. Gen X'ers can bring a lot to a company, but don't expect them to work a lot of extra hours, etc. After witnessing progressive divorce rates, their family being laid off after years of dedicated work, and the steady progression of organized religion and big corporations, they don't expect employer loyalty and in turn don't see a problem changing jobs etc... You can almost be guaranteed once 5 o'clock hits, they'd rather pursue other interests. Gen X'ers definitely value and practice a healthy work-life balance.

GENERATION Y (NEXTERS)

Generation Y, also known as the "Nexters," are the newest generation to enter the work force. This group favors the assistance of technology when completing most tasks. Unfortunately this can often lead to communication problems within the company, but can be a huge asset as well, especially when it comes to multitasking, and completing duties within a timely manner.

Managerial Style –

Likes to hear messages such as: "You will be collaborating with other bright, creative people." or "You have really rescued this situation with your commitment."

When managing Generation Nexters be sure to challenge them. They thrive on working for causes that matter and welcome more responsibility as a reward for their accomplishments. This generation responds poorly to a dictatorial chain-of-commands. To solve this ask them for their opinion. They prefer a collaborative, team player approach to following direction. Generation Nexters are generally fresh out of school; therefore, it's a good idea to find them someone they can learn/mentor from. Their ability to learn and understand, for the most part, is at its highest. Technology and the internet have made this group used to getting results and feedback instantly. Offer feedback sooner than later.

Veterans, Baby Boomers, Gen X'ers, and Generation Y (Nexters) all bring a unique perspective to the work place. Managers, make yourselves aware of all four generations and what each group can offer. You will find that some groups work better together than others. Use this to your advantage! The more you know the smoother business runs.

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