



Industry Update



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The Generation Gap in the Workplace: Tips for Effectively Managing and Communicating with Different Generations at Work



The combined result of longer life expectancies and concerns over lack of sufficient retirement funds is that working individuals are choosing to remain in the workforce until increasingly later points in their careers. This means that, in the average current workplace, employees from a broader range of generations are working more closely together than ever before. Consequently, many work environments are conducive to employee

miscommunications and conflicts caused by the different emotional drivers that are associated with different generations. According to recent studies, tailoring your management and communication styles to effectively reach the different generations to which your employees and coworkers belong can help avoid these types of conflicts and create significant productivity benefits for your company.

A study conducted by the Gallup Organization examined the factors that drive individuals' decisions more closely. Researchers found that when people make decisions about 30 percent of their decision-making is driven by reason and about 70 percent is driven by emotion. Basically, people will pay more for products and services and work harder for companies that give them the best emotional experiences. This phenomenon, which is the basis of most interpersonal interactions in the world today, is often termed the emotional economy.

Understanding how the emotional economy works, and, more specifically, what drives people's emotional decision-making, is the key to understanding and effectively managing employees of different generations in the workplace because the emotional economy plays out most distinctly in the different generations. Basically, different things trigger emotions that drive decision-making for different generations. This includes the decision to stay with and work hard in a job. These different triggers are the result of the societal events that occurred during each generation's formative, or childhood and adolescent, years.

The Traditionalists

Currently, there are up to four different generations in the average workplace. Gallup researchers refer to them as the Traditionalists, Boomers, Xers, and Millennials. The eldest generation of employees in the workplace, the Traditionalists, is made up of individuals born between 1900 and 1945. This group was shaped by the Great Depression, the New Deal, and World War II. These individuals are generally very disciplined and frugal. The Traditionalists created the structure of post-war society, which is the foundation for the

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current world in which we operate. This group is aging, and, as a result, declining as a percentage of the working population.

Tips for Working with Traditionalists

You can access the emotional decision-making drivers of employees that belong to the Traditionalist generation to create a productive work environment in a handful of ways. First, remember to honor the chain of command when working with Traditionalists, because they have great regard for authority and expect it in return. Second, reward Traditionalists' dedication because they are more likely than members of any other generation to stay with your company for their entire careers. Finally, value Traditionalists' years of experience, because, as a result of their dedication, they have likely been with your company for years, through both the "ups" and the "downs", and can offer a significant amount of insight as to what has worked and what has not in the past.

The Boomers

The second generation of employees in the workplace, the Boomers, consists of individuals born between 1946 and 1964. This generation was shaped by the advent of television in everyone's home, programs like Laugh-In, and the Watergate scandal. Individuals from this generation are idealistic, hard-working, and change oriented. They entered the workforce wanting to challenge and improve upon the framework of the world built by the Traditionalists and continue to want to improve upon the status quo. This group will put in long hours to achieve their career goals. After work, many of them are caring for both their aging parents and their children.

Tips for Working with Boomers

There are a couple of different techniques that can be used to access Boomers' emotional drivers to ensure they are as engaged in their jobs as possible. First,

choose face-to-face conversations with Boomers whenever possible, because they did not grow up with PCs and cell phones, and often consider electronic forms of communication to be impersonal. Second, avoid multi-tasking while communicating with Boomers. While you may be able to get away with sending an email or printing a document while speaking with employees or colleagues from younger generations, Boomers appreciate having their audiences' full attention while discussing work-related issues, and may end up at odds with managers or co-workers who do not give it to them. Finally, consider the structural changes that have occurred in your organization during a Boomer's career. Remember that Boomers put in long hours over the years to be involved in making progressive changes in their companies, and they may clash with new employees who want to make changes without regard to the company's past.

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Award Feature Quiz: Which Generation Are You?

This quiz will predict your generation based on your answers to a handful of pop-culture questions. If you already have a good idea of which generation you belong to, give the quiz to a co-worker to learn which generation they are from and use some of the tips for effectively communicating with them from this month's feature article *The Generation Gap in the Workplace: Tips for Effectively Communicating with Different Generations at Work*.

1. You grew up listening to:

- A.) Glen Miller on the radio
- B.) The Beatles on your record player
- C.) Madonna on your cassette player
- D.) Britney Spears on MTV

2. You most fondly remember Dick Clark as:

- A.) That local radio disc jockey who had a show that your children watched on your first television set
- B.) The host of *American Bandstand*
- C.) The host of *New Year's Rockin' Eve*
- D.) The guy that Ryan Seacrest replaced as the host of *New Year's Rockin' Eve*

3. Your childhood sports idol was:

- A.) Baseball star Babe Ruth
- B.) Football star Joe Namath
- C.) Basketball star Michael Jordan
- D.) Golf star Tiger Woods

4. As a child, you played with:

- A.) Marbles and/or Lincoln Logs
- B.) Cap guns and/or Hula Hoops
- C.) G.I. Joe Action Figures and/or Strawberry Shortcake Dolls
- D.) Nintendo and Sega

Generation Quiz Results

If you answered **mostly A's** you are most likely a disciplined and frugal individual from the Traditionalist generation.

If you answered **mostly B's** you are most likely an idealistic, hard-working Boomer.

If you answered **mostly C's** you are most likely a self-sufficient, technology savvy Gen Xer.

If you answered **mostly D's** you are most likely a hi-tech, team player from the Millennial Generations

If your **answers were split evenly among two letters** you are most likely a "Cusper" or an individual who was born on the extremes of the birth year range for a given generation and easily relate to individuals from both generations on the edge of which you were born.

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The Xers

The third generation in the workplace is the Xers. Xers are individuals born between 1965 and 1980. Most of these individuals are children of Boomers, and, as a result, were shaped by Latch Key Programs while their parents put in overtime at work. Many Xers were left to fend for themselves at a very young age. They are well-educated and small group oriented. Xers often define themselves by the next group with which they will choose to associate.

Tips for Working with Xers

Xers are often the hardest employees to foster a positive emotional workplace experience for because they know what they want and are used to getting it for themselves. However, there are a few things you can do to ensure that you get the most out of your Xer employees. First, Xers are extremely comfortable with technology, so use email when appropriate to communicate with them. Second, don't micromanage Xers. They are used to being self-sufficient and will be happiest when given general goals and allowed to figure out the best method for achieving them. Finally, be sure to reward Xers for putting in extra hours with time off because, unlike the Boomers, Xers do not believe that a 60-hour work week is required to get ahead and place a high value on a good work-life balance.

The Millennials

Finally, the youngest generation in the workplace, the Millennials, are individuals born between 1981 and 2000. This generation was shaped by chat rooms, soccer moms, Columbine, 9/11, and onset of gangs. As a result they are very realistic, technically savvy, team-oriented, and focused on continuous learning. These individuals have been scheduled since a young age with sports and other after school activities. They are well educated, fast learners, and multi-taskers. Millennials are often impatient and intolerant of thinking time. They do not have high regard for the chain-of-command. They have seen what has happened to individuals in older generations who did not plan for retirement. As a result, they are financially savvy and have long-term financial goals.

Tips for Working with Millennials

To ensure that Millennial employees are happy employees, be sure to challenge them. Millennials will become disengaged working on menial tasks. Reward the accomplishments of Millennial employees with added responsibility. Also, include Millennials in projects that are assigned to teams because they have thrived at being part of a team since a very young age. Finally, communicate with Millennials through technology. This group of individuals is very high tech. If you want to really engage them in their jobs, send your message to them through technology. For example, train Millennials with interactive cd-roms, attract Millennial employees by ensuring your company has a good online presence, and ask Millennial employees to help organize and participate in web-based conference meetings when you need to communicate with individuals outside of your organization.

Obviously, not every individual in each generation possesses all of the traits listed above to a "t". Some individuals, especially those who were born at the beginning or end of a generation, may have traits associated with each of the generations on the edge of which they were born. These individuals are valuable in the workplace because they can easily relate to more than one generation. If you have employees with multi-generational traits in your company, utilize them as communicators and mediators for the generations they fall between.

All in all, there is a reason why we can all relate to cliches like a parent telling an unappreciative child, "Back in my day, we had to walk to school, uphill both ways." That reason is that we have all experienced difficulty positively communicating with individuals from generations with different emotional drivers from our own. It is the same reason why employees from different generations will respond differently to different communication styles. Tailoring your workplace management and communication to the generation of the employees you are trying to reach will have a positive effect on how engaged and productive your employees are in the workplace.

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In the Break Room: Award Staffing's Sudoku

Enjoy a Sudoku, an addictive numbers brain teaser, on your next break courtesy of Award Staffing.

The instructions are simple. Just fill in all of the empty squares so the numbers 1 to 9 appear once in each row, column, and 3 x 3 box.

If you get stumped call or email your Award Staffing Contact for a copy of the solutions to the puzzle.

Good luck!

7	4		5					
	2		3	7	8			6
					9		5	7
4			7					
9								3
					3			2
1	5		9					
2			1	4	7		9	
					2		1	4