

Boomers & Millennials Strive for Mutual Understanding

“There’s a renewed quest for workplace harmony as Baby Boomers delay retirement and work side by side with people young enough to be their children – or grandchildren. Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, grew up in a very different world than Millennials, also called Generation Y, who were born between 1980 and 2000. Both groups experienced different events and were raised in very different ways. So it’s no surprise that they bring very different attitudes to the workplace.

In a recent Time Moneyland article, writer Dan Schwabel looked into a recent study by MTV entitled “No Collar Workers.” The study looked at Gen-Y’s perspectives about work and how their views differ from their parents’ generation. The differences are significant.

▪ **Millennials require immediate attention:**

Gen-Y has grown up with the Internet and learns via the “Google effect.” Anything they need or want to know, they simply look up right away. Gen-Y is therefore used to instant results. Eighty percent of those surveyed want instant feedback and 75% yearn for knowledgeable mentors. Gen-Y workers seek constant and consistent feedback whereas Boomers are happy with a more structured feedback schedule; e.g., every six months or annually.

▪ **Millennials will work ruthlessly at a job they see as valuable and interesting.** While Baby Boomers identify with their place of work (I work for the ABC Company), Gen-Y workers identify with what they actually do (I’m a draftsman). This belies a difference in values and loyalty – Boomers do what they’re told to do in order to maintain a paycheck while Gen-Yers

would rather do what they find interesting and absorbing. This may explain the job-hopping nature of Millennials versus the longer job tenure of Boomers.



- **Millennials see the work environment as flat.** Gen-Y workers see no real reason for strict hierarchy in the workplace. They take the approach that everyone should be heard. They also demand transparency and want to have a voice in the organization’s vision and strategic plans. Baby Boomers tend to be much more comfortable with the traditional hierarchy.
- **Millennials view supervisors as mentors and guides.** Baby Boomers were nurtured in a culture where the supervisor is boss, judge and jury. However, this is quite foreign to Gen-Y workers who were educated in a “child centered” system where individuals were validated rather than regulated. They will nonetheless respect a supervisor who is perceived as knowledgeable and helpful – but will probably be more puzzled than fearful of a supervisor who “cracks the whip.”

The good news is that Boomers and Gen-Yers seem to be working together with a minimum of friction. By suspending judgment and striving for mutual understanding, this trend should continue.