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# Generational Contrast

The workforce today is made up of four different generations, each with their own nuances, values and peculiarities.  People born between 1946 and 1964 would be considered part of the Baby Boomer Generation.  Those born from 1965 to 1981 are known as Generation X.  1981 to 1995 are the Millennials. Finally, the newest generation is just starting to join the workforce, those born 1996 and after are known as Generation Z.

| Generation | Birth Year Start | Birth Year End | Youngest Today |
|---|---|---|---|
| Baby Boomer | 1946 | 1964 | 54 |
| Gen X | 1965 | 1981 | 37 |
| Millennial | 1982 | 1995 | 23 |
| Gen Z | 1995 | 2012 | 6 |

Why is any of this important?  By understanding your employees' values and needs, you will have a greater success in fostering engagement, retention and productivity.  Although no one fits perfectly into a neat little box of generation norms, the concepts are broadly applicable have proven true and, on average, you can expect similar outcomes based on your staff's generational cohort.

You need to understand the differences in the generations and how that affects your employees. They may need help understanding each other.  The values and motivations of a Baby Boomer CEO will be different than the values and motivations of Millennial engineers or Gen X sales people working within the organization.

Each generation tends to respond to different motivations and to hold different values.  Let's take a look at the averages and figure out what will be needed to boost your organization's engagement levels.

**Baby Boomers**

- Drives and qualities
    - Strong work ethic
    - Well-educated
    - Live to work
    - Support organizational and authority structure
    - Face-to-face communicators
    - Organization tenure, loyal
    - Individual expression

- Challenges
    - Personal challenges (medical, offspring costs, retirement)
    - Rapidly shrinking peer group
    - Less comfortable with technology
    - View salary and career progress as a scorecard for success
    - Strong-willed
    - Ladder-climbing
    - May fear retirement as a surrender of self-identity

## Suggested Approach

- Mentor opportunities: encourage them to pass on the knowledge they have gained and to create social networks in your organization.
- New skills: many Boomers enjoy learning new skills or trying out new jobs, even lateral ones, just for the experience.
- Teamwork: this generation grew up working together, supporting each other and building value in their workplace.
- Acknowledge them: peer recognition goes a long way.  They understand and are comforted by the rewards of work, both verbal and tangible.
- Challenging work: Boomers thrive on challenges. Their lifestyle and work ethic is goal-oriented and they enjoy using their skills and experience to overcome obstacles.

## Generation X

- Drives and qualities
    - Individualistic
    - Independent
    - Resourceful
    - Technology adept
    - Flexible
    - Diverse skill set
    - Progressive

- Challenges
    - Disdain for traditional work hours
    - Distrust of authority structures
    - Prefer to set their own goals and timelines
    - Likes to test limits
    - Strong-willed
    - Skeptical
    - Willing to change organizations for new opportunities
    - Personal goals can rush retirement
    - They work with you, not for you

**Suggested Approach**

- Provide training: have a career development program in place. Gen X are looking for progress
- Work-life integration:  time off from the grind should not have a negative impact
- A more casual approach: dress code and work space should be more welcoming
- Prefer tangible rewards to verbal accolades: public recognition is not the goal.  Gen X respond better to time, freedom and benefits than to personal feedback on their merits
- Trust projects to them: they have a drive to accomplish goals with a different ethic than the Boomers.
- Lighten up: Incorporate fun into the workplace

**Millennials**

- Drives and qualities
  - Ambitious
  - Team players
  - Independent
  - Technology generation
  - Multi-taskers
  - Global outlook
  - Entrepreneurial

- Challenges
  - Often lack focus
  - Require stimulus
  - Unstructured
  - High expectations
    - Respect must be earned
    - Impatient
    - Employment is fluid, they will move quickly to new horizons
    - They work to live; home life trumps work

**Suggested Approach**

- Challenge them: menial tasks are a mind killer for this group
- Provide training: expand their knowledge: teach them new skills; offer mentoring
- Friendly environment with positive people
- Inclusive praise: they like to be acknowledged for hard work but crave that for their peers as well. They consider themselves part of a group
- Distributed structure: Millennials favor networked organizational structure over hierarchy
- Collaboration: encourage work in small groups.

- Active listening: Millennials want to be heard and taken seriously
- Encourage their interests: engage in fun in the work place
- State-of-the-art work tools: progressive technology approach

**Gen Z**

- Drives and qualities
  - Digital natives, it is in all aspects of life and always has been
  - Racially diverse and accepting
  - Self-driven
  - Hyper-multi taskers
  - Innovative
  - Passionate
  - Social

- Challenges
  - Lacking real-world wisdom
  - Require stimulus
  - Require feedback
  - High expectations
  - Interpersonal skills
  - Technology dependent
  - Attention span
  - Want the workplace to bend towards them, they want to see change
  - Even more entrepreneurial than Millennials, can impact organization tenure

**Suggested Approach**

- Social knowledge: focus on mentor training and learning from peers

- Go beyond the tech: Gen Z are digital natives but prefer face-to-face communications

- Continual feedback: ditch the yearly reviews and offer continuous feedback and communication. Why wait for course correction or positive reinforcement?

- High expectations: Growing up with parents hit by the recession, they want to see the rewards of their work. Gen X expects good pay and benefits

- Invest in their growth: develop their skillset, they want to be judged for their individual ability and see that pay off

- Tech-centered work environment: they know and understand that cutting-edge tech tools make life easier and they want to use them.

- Adopt an organization fast track approach" reward the power employees and show that they will not be stuck in your trenches for years

- Seek the most important metrics: value skill and ability more than formal education

In 2018, Millennials already make up the largest demographic in the workforce. Studies indicate that by the year 2020, Millennials will make up 50% of the workforce; by 2025 they will be at 75%. The Baby Boomer Generation and Gen X will continue to shrink as a proportion of the working population. Generation Z is up and coming and will only grow larger over the next 40 years.

A lack of engagement results in lower quality of work, less profit and higher turnover. Disengaged people will look elsewhere for employment, someplace they will feel challenged, engaged and happy.

| Generation | Average tenure with organization |
|---|---|
| Baby Boomer | 7 years |
| Generation X | 5 years |
| Millennials | 2 years |
| Gen Z | 1.5 years |

This chart shows the tenure that we can expect of each generational group, on average. With the largest portion of the workforce at an average tenure of 2 years within an organization, ignoring the writing on the wall will be catastrophic.

Savvy managers won't wait to start engaging employees; the time line shows that every day it becomes more critical. Thriving organizations will learn how to lead and engage their employees to yield a higher retention and a more valuable and powerful workforce.

Bridging the differences in the generations within your organization can be a challenge but should be something you pursue. A connected and engaged staff will be more productive, profitable and stay with your organization longer. Your organization will be stronger for having a more connected and engaged workforce.

No one person is going to be the standard for their generation and no single engagement method is going to apply to all people. Use these suggestions and our other training tools and articles to tailor engagement approaches to your staff.

Most importantly, embrace the idea of change. The workforce is continuously changing, and we must change with it.