

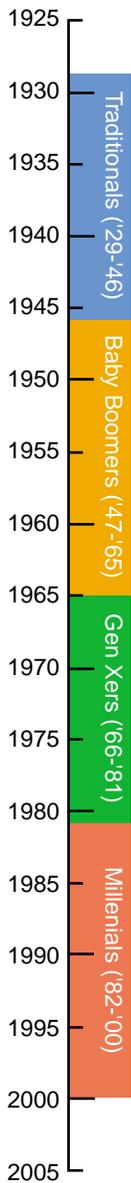
From Traditionals to Millenials

By Carla J. Levy

For the first time in the country's history, we have an unprecedented phenomenon occurring. Four very distinct generations are working side by side in the workplace. If you are a business leader, a human resources director or a manager of people, you either have experienced or will experience the challenges associated with this exciting time in our history.



Carla J. Levy



Who are they?

We start with Traditionals, ages 57 to 74. Traditionals, sometimes called Veterans, are very loyal, disciplined and believe in self-sacrifice. Whether marriages or jobs are fulfilling or not doesn't matter, they stay the course.

Next come the infamous Baby Boomers, ages 38-56. Baby Boomers, also called Yuppies, are very team oriented and have glamorized every phase of life they've gone through.

Then we have Gen Xers, ages 22-37. Gen Xers, also called Latchkey Kids, are very independent. They put fun high on the list of what they want at work.

Last are Millenials, ages 3-21. Millenials, sometimes called Gen Y or the Internet Generation, have a great deal of optimism, morality, sociability and civic duty.

What makes them different?

Each generation has its own unique personality. Personalities are developed through the people, places and events that particular generation experienced. It may be war, depression, recession, economic boom, or the birth, death, marriage or divorce of important figureheads that impacts that generation's behavior, beliefs, values and work ethics.

These differences can cause conflict, especially in the day-to-day life of the workplace. The consequences of conflict can be significant for businesses and organizations. Morale, productivity and profitability can plummet. Turnover can increase significantly.

Where do they clash?

There are four areas where generations typically clash. These clash points are career, management, job change and retirement.

The generations view career very differently. Traditionals often stay with the same company for 30 or 40 years. Their employer helped put kids through birth, braces and college. Traditionals see their career as a way to build a legacy.

Baby Boomers aren't content with just staying the course. They have to be climbing the corporate ladder. Title and salary are of utmost importance to the value they assign to themselves. Boomers go to great lengths to build stellar careers.

Gen Xers know they are expendable. Loyalty from employers is no longer a given. When times get tough, jobs get eliminated. Xers spend their time developing transferable skills to build portable careers.

Millenials are so far past the notion of staying with one company for any length of time that they are building parallel careers. Why have just one career path when you can have more?

The four distinct generations are also very different in their views on management. Traditionals adhere to the chain of command. Boomers believe in the change of command. Gen Xers think of nothing but self-command. And then there are Millenials who don't believe in command at all, but in collaboration.

Job change is the third area in which the generations clash. For Traditionals, changing jobs carries a stigma. You must not be loyal or a good employee if you're going to another company to work. Boomers think that changing jobs has the potential of putting them behind in their climb up the ever-important corporate ladder. They may have to take a step back in title or salary if they move to another company. Gen Xers, on the other hand, see it as necessary. The only way to get ahead in their minds is to change jobs, which may require changing companies. Millenials see changing jobs as part of their daily routine.

It's easy to see where such stark differences in mindset can cause challenges in the workplace.

The last clash point for the generations is retirement. Traditionals see retirement as a reward. They've earned it after 40 years with the same company. Boomers view retirement as a chance to retool. What will they do next with their skills, knowledge and experience? Gen Xers see retirement as a chance to renew. Millenials, with retirement almost beyond their imagination, see it as a time to recycle.

Generational advantages

With such distinct differences between the four generations, could there possibly be any advantages to having them work side by side? The answer is a resounding yes! The generations have much to offer each other. The challenge for you as a leader is to help them manage their differences successfully. The first step is awareness – yours and theirs – of their differences and where they come from. Meaningful and long-term understanding, acceptance and collaboration can be built from there.

An ideal workplace?

So, what type of workplace would suit the characteristics, assets and challenges of the generational groups? Is it possible for all four generations to co-exist in one ideal workplace? For answers to these and many other questions facing businesses today, stay tuned for future editions of BizVoice and Generations@Work.

INFORMATION LINK

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