

Member's Quarterly

Spring 2019 Edition

Feature

Understanding the Intergenerational Workforce

Harmonious relationships at work

Picture a large family reunion with the old grandparents, older parents, younger parents, newly married couples, university and college graduates and teenagers — now picture them in your workplace. Scary, isn't it? There are five generations in the workforce right now and they don't always understand each other and they don't appreciate each other. To create harmony amongst our intergenerational workers, we need to overcome the animosity between the generations by understanding them and educating them so that they can appreciate each other.

In addition to the familiar character styles identified through Personality Dimensions, Myers-Briggs, DISC and other such tests, we have values that have been created through the times when we grew up. These values affect our work ethic, our beliefs, our fears, our hopes and change how we are motivated.

I believe that the key to successfully managing a team of intergenerational workers is to maintain that each individual is a valued contributor. You can do this in four steps: identify and use their strengths, show appreciation, motivate and encourage them using their values.

The Traditionalists who were born between 1922 and 1945 are now 74 and older. Surprisingly they are still out there and usually directors or senior executives of companies. They were influenced by the Second World War and want dedication, loyalty and respect for authority. They don't like change, so explain carefully why their procedures need to be changed.

The Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964 are now 55–73 and in 2015 made up 31% of the workforce (Bureau of Labour Statistics). Influenced by the Moon Landing, Woodstock and the Vietnam War, they are idealistic and challenge authority. They want job security and live to work. They are known for their loyalty and spend too much time at the office. They want recognition for their hard work and expect promotions, titles and bonuses.

Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1980 and are now 39–54 years old. Having witnessed the collapse of communism, space shuttle explosions and environmental disasters, these latchkey kids are self-sufficient, family oriented, media and tech savvy and they work to live. Work-life balance is important to them. They see the Baby Boomers as a warning and don't want to sacrifice their family for their jobs.



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Feature continued

The Millennials are the Y generation, born between 1981 and 1994, they are 25 to 38. Along with the newest group, Generation Z (under 24 years old), they made up 35% of the workforce in 2015 (Bureau of Labour Statistics). The defining events in their life have been school shootings, terrorism, corporate scandals and huge strides in technology. They are connected to the world, have a moral mindset and want meaningful work. They have been given ample reason to question authority, not bow to it. Cam Marston, an expert on the impact of generational change and the workplace, noted that the younger generation has often told their Baby Boomer managers "We define success differently and will pursue other rewards for our work" (*Motivating the What's in it for me? Generation*).

They place a high value on individuality, creativity, personal freedom and professional flexibility.

In the very near future, the Millennials and Generation Z will make up 50% of the workforce. Graham Scott stated in 2015, "Companies of all sizes and across all sectors need to know how they are going to recruit, train, retain and advance these employees as Baby Boomer retirement accelerates."

How should employers handle these new workers?

To survive, we need to acknowledge that the world has drastically changed. We need to embrace the desires of these new employees: to use their talents through customized job descriptions; to work remotely and avoid long commutes; to have flexible hours to be there for their children's plays, or accommodate their interests in sports and continued desire to take additional courses. Because they are hopeful and optimistic, try not to burst their bubble. They want meaningful work so show them how they will be helping and contributing to the company goals, and how these company goals are in line with their personal goals. As graduates of schools that involved them in required community service, let them head up some company charity endeavours. They value diversity and change. Reward their initiatives and give them the opportunity to play the lead in change. They are technologically and globally aware and can be used to access and share information quickly. Use their skills to troubleshoot problems.

Given the opportunity, they will shine. When they are challenged and succeed, they will be satisfied and stay.

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