

Harmonizing your Team in the Age of the Multigenerational Workforce



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Introduction

Many companies are now employing a workforce that spans four different generations, each with its own unique values, motivations, perspectives, communication styles and work habits. While generational diversity can bring benefits to your organization, the broad range of perspectives between the different generations can also lead to significant employee frustration, intergenerational conflict, and poor morale if not managed properly. To further complicate the workforce landscape, we are working right now under “a new normal” in the wake of the recent pandemic. The age of COVID-19 brought about the need for a remote work environment, with many organizations re-evaluating business protocol moving forward. As a result, we are seeing a seismic shift in business priorities, and companies are pivoting with that to support new demands in the marketplace.

In addition to that, we’ve already entered into a digital revolution, which has skyrocketed by moving towards a more remote workforce and having to keep people interconnected in a way that we never had to do before, redefining the system of work. As we are optimizing those generational team dynamics, it is creating some diversity and inclusion issues that we have to keep in mind as well in developing our post COVID-19 landscape. Nobody has a template to follow for this and it will be unique for everybody.

We have 75 million strong baby boomers that are reaching retirement age, across a wide range of industries, so we are going to start experiencing a labor shortage. Baby boomers are also delaying their retirement and now you have a recipe for a significant generational diversity in a modern American workplace. There will be a lot of new 20 year old people that are coming into work with colleagues that are 50 plus years’ their senior. That is a very large generational gap that you’re trying to work with within your own organization, employing a workforce that spans four different generations. In this article, we will provide actionable tips on how to leverage each generation’s strengths in order to build a harmonious corporate culture that benefits your organization’s bottom line.



Defining a Generation

To define a generation, it is a group of people born in a particular timespan who share similar life experiences, historical events, headlines, your heroes of that decade, music, parenting style as well as an educational system. These collectively shared experiences have influenced and shaped the characteristics and trends of the people born during this timespan that impact today’s workplace in distinctive ways.

The Generational Timeline

- Baby Boomers: Born between 1946 and 1964
 - Generation X: Born between 1965 and 1979
 - Generation Y (Millennials): Born between 1980 and 1995
 - Generation Z: Born between 1996 and 2010
 - Generation Alpha: Born between 2011 to 2025
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Baby Boomers

1946 - 1964

Unique Characteristics Across the Generations

Baby Boomers are the largest span of generations, encompassing nearly 20 years. Following that, we have minimized our generations to about 15 years. Generation Alpha is noted here because they will be entering the workforce in the coming years. Each one of these generations have come into age in a unique era with distinct social trends and formative events. As a result, these groups have developed similar values, motivations, perspectives, communication style, work habit and work ethics. We have to engage with them as though there is always an exception to the rule. These observations are based upon cultural trends in the United States, however, as we are in a digital revolution, this is going to make things more global in impact especially with some of these younger generations.

The “Baby Boomer” Generation

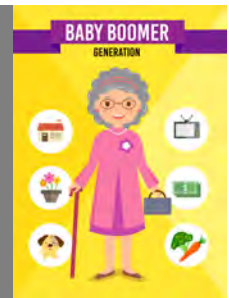
Baby Boomers, raised by those that had seen World War II, grew up with a solid foundation, who started their careers early after completing their education. They had their kids a lot earlier and supported their families immediately. They believed in working hard and sincerely to climb up a ladder of success, which is important to note because it is truly looked at as almost a ladder-based system for this generation of individuals. A lot of their strengths and results stems from being service oriented, team players who are exceptionally loyal to their employers and their companies. This is a generation that would work with their organization through retirement. They have worked there for 20, 30 or even 40 years. As a result, for some organizations, we are starting to see a skills gap as they retire.

The weaknesses of the Baby Boomers are that they tend to avoid conflict and are very responsive to peer pressure. This can be a negative with regards to leadership pressure. They often don't challenge upwards because that is not how this generation was brought up.

They also tend to be less tech savvy, which is a result of the generation and age that they grew up in. Their motivation style is that they are very responsive to managers. They like to have equal input into the work that they are doing and they seek that consensus. They are motivated by rank and salary and they respond quite well to recognition. They look at their work as more of a career than a job, and you will see a stark difference here from some of the other generations. They are goal oriented and competitive and prefer face to face communication.

Baby Boomers

Members of the post-World War II generation, Baby Boomer's formative years were marked by global rebuilding and recovering economies. In the decades following WWII, the mood was optimistic and future-oriented. Baby Boomers tend to be loyal towards their employers and work-centric, with a strong orientation towards customer service.



- **Strengths:** Service orientated, team players, experience and knowledge, dedication, competitive, good communication skills, emotional maturity, make good mentors for younger employees
- **Weaknesses:** Tend to avoid conflict, responsive to peer pressure, can put process ahead of results, can be workaholics, sometimes not mindful of budget, can be resistant to change, often not tech savvy
- **Motivation:** Responsive to managers who can show them how they can get involved and make a difference, prefer managers who seek consensus and treat them as equals, tend to enjoy high levels of responsibility and challenge, motivated by rank and salary, respond to recognition
- **Work Style:** View work more as a career than a job, goal oriented and competitive, prefer face to face communication

Generation X – “Gen X”

1965 - 1979

Generation X – “Gen X”

The Generation X’ers encompass about 50 million Americans. They have often witnessed the burnout or laying off their hard working parents. They place higher emphasis on family time and work-life balances. After seeing the layoffs and inflation of the generation before, they’ve developed a more cautious attitude towards the future. In this generation, women joined the work force during more of their formative years, creating more importance being placed on a healthy work-life balance. This generation grew up with both parents working outside of the home creating the need for them to take care of themselves and think for themselves. They have also experienced more divorce in their families or of close relatives and friends. Gen X’ers are the entrepreneurial generation and are super ambitious. They started that spirit, are hardworking and like responsibility and challenge.

The perceived weakness of this generation is the tendency to be skeptical, cautious, and to distrust authority. They don’t like rigidity in their work processes and requirements, valuing workplace balance and flexible schedules. Gen X’ers are one of the first generations to start the ‘work from home’ trend. They have a preference for managers who are genuine and hands off in style, but value personal and professional development over their job security. They are results oriented, they want to get things done, but they want to define how they get there. They prefer to work alone, unlike the Baby Boomers who prefer to work together.

Generation X

Encompassing the 50 million Americans born between 1965 and 1979, Generation X’ers often witnessed the burnout or laying off of their hard-working parents. As such, this generation developed more of an emphasis on family time and work/life balance than did their parents. Listening to their parents and teachers talk about inflation and recession, most Generation X’ers developed a cautious attitude towards the future.



- **Strengths:** Ambitious, hardworking, like responsibility and challenge, thrive on change, independent, creative, entrepreneurial spirit
- **Weaknesses:** Skeptical, distrustful of authority, dislike rigidity in work processes/requirements, can value speed of getting things done over quality
- **Motivation:** Value work/life balance and flexible schedules, prefer managers who are genuine and “hands off” in their management style, values personal and professional development over job security
- **Work Style:** Results oriented but want flexibility in how the work gets done, often prefer to work alone rather than in teams, don’t necessarily value or seek face time

Generation Y – “The Millennials”

1980 - 1995

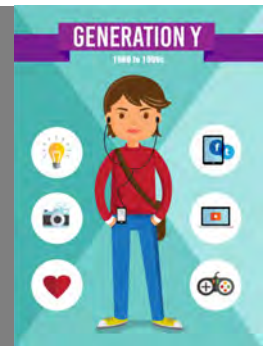
Generation Y – “The Millennials”

Generation Y, commonly referred to as the Millennials, are a very overstudied generation. Encompassing over 70 million people, they will be dominating the workforce in the coming years. This generation has grown up in a world of endless opportunity and freedom, providing them the ability to do anything and be anything. As a result, they are filled with zeal, achieving many things in life and are exceptionally good at it. They have had 24/7 access to the internet and are very tech savvy. Millennials like to be heard and speak how they feel and can share a review of your company, good or bad, with the click of a mouse. They are optimistic, highly creative, independent workers and are the most effective multitaskers in the workforce right now.

In general, Millennials require more supervision and structure, need to be praised for their efforts, and are not necessarily interested in teamwork. One of the most reviewed characteristics of the Millennial is the tendency to be more impatient in their career growth. They value frequent feedback and praise about their job performance and want to help others. This group of employees has a strong social awareness, and that’s important to them when it comes to their employers and how they give back to a community or the environment. They are goal and achievement oriented, crave meaningful work and enjoy multitasking, but value a work-life balance. Millennials are certainly family centric and risk takers, but are more loyal to their profession than they are their employers. This is a stark difference to the Baby Boomer generation who are very loyal to their employers, which is why there can often be a disconnect between the Millennial and the Baby Boomer.



Millennials



With over 70 million Millennials now in the United States, this generation is poised to dominate the workplace for the next couple of decades. Having grown up with 24/7 access to the internet, Millennials grew up seeing the world as connected, and this experience has shaped how they relate to others and communicate. As Millennials oftentimes prefer e-mails and text messaging over face-to-face interaction, training the Millennial generation may be best accomplished through computer and web-based delivery systems.

- **Strengths:** Independent workers, optimistic, creative, effective multi-taskers, technologically savvy
- **Weaknesses:** Typically need supervision and structure, need to be praised for their efforts, not necessarily interested in teamwork, impatient with regards to career growth, can be lacking in work ethic
- **Motivation:** Value frequent feedback and praise about job performance, often value helping others more than their paycheck, respond when managers connect their actions to their personal and career goals
- **Work Style:** Crave meaningful work, enjoy multitasking, goal and achievement oriented, value work/life balance and expect to be able to work when and where they want

Generation Z – “The Zoomers”

1996 - 2010

Generation Z – “The Zoomers”

Generation Z will be a formidable generation as well, projected to bring 60 million into the workforce. They are the children of the Gen X'ers, for the most part, and are going to be the most tech savvy, global and diverse generation ever. They are growing up in the digitally connected world. Most of this generation has never even known life without smart phones and social media. As such, we expect them to be more tech intuitive than the Millennials, which plays a role in how they can help innovate your company as well. In terms of strengths, they are ambitious, hard-working, natural entrepreneurs who are expert multitaskers. They are project oriented and want to make an impact on what they are doing.

Like their parents' generation, they too are more cautious, tending to be cynical and often lacking company loyalty. Work life balance is very important to them and they are focused on their salary and a robust benefits package more so than the job. Financial security in this generation is starting to show even more so than it did with the Millennial generation, who were much bigger risk takers. They like face to face connection with management but they also prefer the use of technology, often multitasking with the use of multiple electronic devices.



Generation Z

Comprising around 60 million Americans born between 1996 and 2010, Generation Z promises to provide yet another disruptive influence on the American workforce.

Generation Z is the most technologically savvy, global and diverse generation ever. Growing up in a digitally connected world, most of this generation has never known life without smart phones and social media. As such, this generation is even more tech-intuitive than Millennials and can play an important role in helping your company innovate and automate work processes.

- **Strengths:** Ambitious, hardworking, natural entrepreneurs, expert multi-taskers, driven to make an impact on both the company and the world, project oriented
- **Weaknesses:** Usually prefer extensive feedback from superiors, can be cynical, often lack company loyalty, over-reliance on technology to solve problems
- **Motivation:** Motivated by salary, prefer genuine face-to-face connection with management over email, having an impact on the world may be more important to Generation Z than their jobs
- **Work Style:** Work/life balance is important to them, enjoy multi-tasking with a variety of different electronic devices



Generation Alpha – “The iGeneration”

2011 - 2025

Generation Alpha – “The iGeneration”

This is the generation that we are still defining. What is really interesting to note with this generation is that they are growing up in the days of COVID and are learning to do school and education remotely. They’re living in a world where it’s important to be connected to your family, friends and teachers through electronic devices. They are part of an unintentional global experiment that nobody expected, but we have placed these technological devices in front of them not only as entertainment but schools now use them as educational tools. Generation Alpha are children of the Millennials and are expected to be upwards of 2 billion by 2025 across an entire global economy. They are the first to be born in the 21st century and while it still has yet to be defined, they are going to bring a new dynamic to the workplace of the future.



- **Strengths:** Generation Alpha is expected to reach two billion by 2025
- **Weaknesses:** First to be born in the 21st Century
- **Motivation:** Most members are children of Millennials
- **Work Style:** New dynamic to be expected in the workplace of the future

Generation Alpha

This newest generation are part of an unintentional global experiment where screens are placed in front of them from the youngest age as pacifiers, entertainers and educational aids. This great screen age in which we are all living has bigger impacts on the generation exposed to such screen saturation during their formative years. From shorter attention spans to the gamification of education, from increased digital literacy to impaired social formation, these times impact us all but transform those in their formative years. Generation Alpha began being born in 2010, the year the iPad was launched, Instagram was created, and App was the word of the year- and so from their earliest years, they have been screenagers.

Keys to Integrating Generational Differences in the Workplace

- **Work Style:** Offer flexible work options that allow employees to contribute in the way that best suites them and acknowledge the efforts of each team member.
- **Flexible Benefits:** Eliminate one-size-fits-all reward and recognition programs and instead develop flexible programs that motivate your employees with incentives that matter to them.
- **Manager Incentives:** Develop programs that reward managers for retaining the people who report to them. Retrain your managers to hire the best people for the position to maximize retention.
- **Internal Hiring:** Make sure the hiring team contains diverse generational perspectives so all employees have a fair chance to be hired for the position. Few things promote intergenerational conflict like a biased internal promotion process.
- **Special Programs & Events:** Creative way to build intergenerational teams, rapport and respect. It can also be helpful to create intergenerational teams that encourage generations to share knowledge and work with each other towards a common goal.

Conclusion

It is important to establish a shared vision and common goals, aligning the remote business model with the company mission. How you share that is going to be different by each generation. Set clear expectations. Each generation needs to know what is being asked of them. Some like to know the specific process about how to get there, while others like to know what the results are that they need to provide and it's up to them as to how to get there, but be sure to check in to assess where they are on achieving those results by the expected deadline. However, trust your employees by staying focused on goals, not activity.

Start to incorporate different and unique ways that can bring these generations together in a cohesive manner. The purpose of that is to create exceptional employee retention and loyalty while maintaining a high level of employee engagement to build our workforce of the future.

Companies that adapt by implementing the right combination of programs, policies and practices in order to build an engaged and productive multi-generational workforce will have a significant competitive advantage in the marketplace. Leveraging the unique strengths of each generation to foster supportive, collaborative and engaged work teams will provide many important benefits for your organization. Companies that do the work to develop harmonized work environments that value, reward and develop employees from all generations will win the war for talent and position their organization for success.



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