

'45

VETERANS

'64

BABY BOOMERS

'80

GEN-X

'00

MILLENNIALS

TALKING 'BOUT MY
GENERATION.

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THE PLACE FOR DAILY RECOGNITION

GENERATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE.

Today, over 64% of companies are responding to the presence of four generations in the workforce. Veterans, Baby Boomers, Gen-Xers and Millennials are working side-by-side in cubicles, hospitals and firms across the country. Each generation brings unique skills, preferences and habits to the workplace, challenging traditional management styles. As a result, more than 60% of employers are experiencing tension between employees from the different generations, a Lee Hecht Harrison survey recently found.

The generations disagree on work ethic, use of technology and recognition, adding friction to a workplace already in turmoil. While Millennials comfortably IM a peer in the cubicle next to them, Baby Boomers struggle with decreasing face-to-face communication. At the same time that older workers are coping with “young slackers” filing up the ranks, Millennials are demanding respect and praise for their contributions. Welcome to the new workplace, made up of even more employees with different values, different habits, different ways of communicating and different perceptions of how work should operate.

Employers and managers will need to adjust to the changing workforce in order to remain successful because the generations will be working side-by-side for several years to come. In 2008, Americans suffered significant losses to their retirement accounts. Individuals aged 55-64 lost up to 25% of their savings. Estimates from the Employee Benefit Research Institute predict that in order to recoup their losses, these individuals may need to work up to 13 additional years, depending on the market’s return. For Baby Boomers, the recession couldn’t have come at a worse time. If they retire as planned, they risk draining their retirement savings too quickly. As a result, many will remain in the workplace longer than anticipated.

The generations bring a variety of challenges with them into the workplace. However, they also bring great potential for innovation and collaboration. Organizations can overcome the generational divisions by understanding the existing differences and strengths and reinforcing collaboration.

THE GENERATIONS IN TODAY'S WORKFORCE

VETERANS	BABY BOOMERS	GEN-X	MILLENNIALS
1922-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-2000

**Generations are defined by world events and not a particular period of time. Categorizing the time frame of the generations tends to vary by source.*

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UNDERSTANDING DIFFERENCES.

“Each generation in the workplace has been shaped by markedly different teen experiences that have led them to approach work with diverse assumptions about how the world works and what they want from life,” the Harvard Business Review reports. The various life experiences and world events the generations have witnessed have had an impact on their expectations, assumptions, priorities and approaches for work and life. For example, Veterans and Millennials had very different events shape their youth. The Great Depression and World War II shaped the lives of Veterans while Millennials watched the Columbine shootings and 9/11 attacks take place on TV.

Understanding how to best motivate, recognize and communicate with the different generations is a valuable step in creating collaboration among the four generations. With an understanding of the generations’ individual preferences, managers create a work environment that meets individual needs. The Generational Snapshot Chart below presents a glimpse of the varying preferences among the generations when it comes to motivators, communication styles and recognition preferences.

GENERATIONAL SNAPSHOT CHART

GENERATIONS BY BIRTH YEAR	VETERANS 1922-1945	BABY BOOMERS 1946-1964	GEN-X 1965-1980	MILLENNIALS 1981-2000
Life Stage:	Retirement age but working out of necessity or for enjoyment.	Nearing retirement age, but may not have the resources to retire.	In the midst of starting a family and trying to balance work-life.	Recent graduates beginning careers.
Work Is:	A commitment and responsibility where you abide by the rules.	A defining aspect of my life and achievements.	Enjoyable and balanced with outside life.	Meaningful to me as a person and a place where I have friends.
Technology Is:	Impersonal, doesn't grow relationships.	A distraction and rude in the office.	Efficient and convenient communication.	A part of who I am, my primary means of communication.
My Goal Is:	To build a legacy.	To make my mark.	To maintain independence.	To find meaning in work and life.
Managers Should:	Be aware of my reluctance to accept changes to the status quo.	Respect my knowledge and experience.	Allow me to be independent and flexible with when and where I work.	Provide regular feedback about my work and coach my career.
Communication Should Be:	Formal and delivered in a memo or meeting.	Face to face or over the phone.	Sent directly from the decision maker to wherever I am.	Sent through technology, 24/7.
Motivators Are:	A steady pay check and the simple satisfaction of a job well done.	Feeling valued and needed.	Freedom and autonomy.	Learning new skills, regular feedback.
Recognize Me With:	Praise for my time and dedication.	Name recognition and prestige.	Programs that will help me balance work and life.	Career development opportunities.

*Lee Hecht Harrison, Farleigh Dickinson University

REINFORCING STRENGTHS.

As each generation brings a variety of recognition preferences to the workplace, so too do they fill the workforce with unique skills and strengths. Veterans and Baby Boomers embody years of valuable experience, knowledge and network connections. Gen-Xers and Millennials have a comprehensive understanding of new technologies and bring more graduate degrees to the workplace than their predecessors. With the generations providing so many valuable assets, organizations have unlimited potential for innovation and success.

For organizations to truly benefit from the wealth of skills and strengths the generations bring, they must communicate to employees the skills they value. While it may sound simple, organizations continue to struggle with communication, especially manager-to-employee communication where a majority of coaching takes place. Organizations can reinforce generational strengths through communication and by speaking a language all employees will understand: recognition.

“We all possess the need to be recognized as individuals and to feel a sense of accomplishment,” write the authors of *First Break All the Rules*. Recognition is a means of communicating this value to employees of all generations. All generations desire recognition for their contributions, and current total rewards trends point to the importance of recognition for all ages. A 2008 WorldatWork member survey found recognition programs to have one of the highest levels of participation across all four generations, similar to Paid Time Off programs.

In the workplace, praising employees for exhibiting desired behaviors encourages repeat performances. Recognition used strategically communicates to the generations the contributions and skills you value. Over time, recognition will draw out the strengths of the different generations and create an environment where collaboration among the generations thrives.

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First Break All the Rules

SUMMARY

The generations are undoubtedly bringing change into the workplace, and organizations must adjust accordingly. While there are many work issues on which the generations will differ, the need to receive recognition and its ability to reinforce behaviors will always be applicable.

For recognition to be an effective means of reinforcing behaviors and drawing out strengths of the generations, it must take place immediately after the desired behavior is observed. Rather than waiting for an annual award program, on-the-spot recognition communicates to the individual what behavior was praiseworthy while it is still front of mind. To make this form of recognition a habit for even the busiest managers, we recommend the following techniques:

Pencil recognition into your schedule. Recognition should be a habit, so work it into your daily schedule. Schedule time to write a note of praise to an employee. Create a file where you track recognition recipients and reference it when making future award (or promotion) recommendations. If you can't find someone to recognize once a week, you may want to ask a co-worker to check your pulse.

Keep recognition front of mind. Recognition tools that are shoved to the back of a drawer or housed in an office down the hall are quickly forgotten. However, tools kept in plain sight demand front of mind attention. Equip managers in your organization with the necessary tools and products and make sure they are stored in a visible location.

Recognize the individual. The generations, like any other demographic, have a pattern to their behaviors and skills. However, each generation is made unique by its individual members. When it comes to recognition, consider the individual preferences that you've learned about the person, and use that knowledge to make a meaningful and effective recognition presentation.

The generations are challenging the way organizations manage and recognize their people. At the same time, they're strengthening organizations with their diverse skills and perspectives, creating better managers, systems and products. While many organizations and media outlets have already proclaimed the generational diversity to be an added difficulty in today's workplace, it actually represents an opportunity that will yield great results if we have the flexibility and insight to manage the different generations in the manner they desire.

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ABOUT BAUDVILLE

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