

MANAGER'S TOOL KIT

THE MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

SO WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

For the first time in corporate history, four generations of employees, each with its distinct experiences, knowledge and values, are working side-by-side in the American workplace. Plus, over the next five years more than ten million new employees will be joining the workforce. Yet for every one entering the workplace two experienced employees will be retiring.¹

How can employers capture the intellectual capital represented by those who are retiring *and* attract and leverage the contributions new employees bring? They must first understand the forces shaping each generation's worldview.

Terms and dates sometimes vary, but the four generations usually are labeled:

Generation Name	Birth Dates	Age Range in 2008	Cohort Size
Traditionalists	1922-1943	86-65	52M
Baby Boomers	1944-1960	64-48	76M
Gen Xers	1961-1980	47-28	51M
Millennials	1981-2000	27-8	69.7M

Each generation has been shaped by the events that occurred during critical developmental years (see Appendix A). These events shape the values and behaviors of individuals which they bring to work with them.

Traditionalists 1922-1943

Traditionalists may represent the smallest segment of today's workforce, but they exercise disproportionate power. Think of Warren Buffett's or George Soros' influence in banking and finance; they were born 18 days apart in August 1930. Senator John McCain, the Republican candidate for president in 2008 was born in 1937. More than one million Americans age 75 or older continue working.²

People over 70 today grew up when there were 7 white Americans for every one American person of color.³ For financially well-off families, gender roles were clear; men were "breadwinners" while women stayed home with the children.

¹ US Bureau of Labor Statistics, cited in Leadership: The Next Generation, DART, October 2007.

² EDS, Generations Working Together Newsletter, February 2005, page 3.

³ Managing Diversity, August 2005, p. 4.

Working mothers bore responsibility for care of the home and children in addition to their jobs.

WWII sowed seeds of social change. Rosie the Riveter joined factory production lines to free up men for military service. African Americans and some others couldn't help but see the contradiction between fighting for freedom from oppression overseas yet being denied equal rights upon returning to the US. Exceptions to Traditional social roles (e.g., Amelia Earhart, the Tuskegee Airmen, and Eleanor Roosevelt) offered alternatives that took root in the next generation.

Key values of this generation include adherence to rules, dedication and sacrifice, hard work and duty before pleasure, loyalty and obedience, patience and persistence, and saving in order to pay cash for material goods.

DO:

- Acknowledge their experience. Demonstrate that you value it by asking them to contribute their ideas and skills.
- Ask them what has/has not worked in the past; if what has worked will no longer work because of new technology or for other reasons, acknowledge what has worked and explain what has changed.
- Refer to the workplace as a family.
- Appeal to loyalty.

DON'T:

- Ignore them or treat them as if their ideas no longer matter.
- Suggest that it is time for them to retire.

Baby Boomers 1944-1960

Baby Boomers comprise both the largest age cohort (76 million) and the biggest single share of today's workforce at 41.5%.⁴ Like Traditionalists, they have experienced tumultuous economic, technological and social changes. Boomers were born into a heady period of post-war economic expansion. Peer group influence and advertising's focus on the youth market competed with traditional adult authority for this "pig in the python" generation.

Television's visual images drew Americans together then apart as "Father Knows Best" yielded to nightly coverage of the Black Civil Rights Movement and the Viet Nam conflict. A stricken nation watched endless replays of the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy in 1963 and of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Robert F. Kennedy and Mahatma Gandhi in 1968. Kennedy's successor, Johnson, signed the 1964 Civil Rights Act into law, providing access to

⁴ EDS newsletter, 2/26/08

employment, housing and public accommodations without regard to race. The Voting Rights Act of 1967 eliminated poll taxes and tests. Title IX, requiring proportional resources for men's and women's sports, also was enacted in 1967.

In the 1980s, YUPPIES (young urban professionals) turned into DINKS (dual-income no kids) then DIKS (dual-income with kids) as most Baby Boomers married and had children. Employees diagnosed with HIV or AIDS or simply identified as gay were routinely fired during this period, usually without recourse. Beginning in 1991, Corporations stepped into the breach with inclusive non-discrimination policies that protect their employees from unequal treatment based on sexual orientation.

These and other corporate changes are part of a larger "war for talent," precipitated by aging and diversification of the American population. More than half of all corporate managers are now women, although their ranks thin to less than 5% at the executive level.⁵ Baby Boomers start turning 62 in 2008, but only 11% plan to take early retirement for personal and economic reasons.

Key values of Baby Boomers include Fairness and Civil Rights, Individualism, Instant gratification, Participation/Inclusion, Personal growth, Health and Wellness, Affiliation and Relationships, and Bringing Heart and Humanity to the workplace.

DO:

- Publicly acknowledge their contributions and successes.
- Tell them you need them—and why.
- Give them approval as often as possible.
- Create a participatory, fair, casual work environment.
- Get to know them personally.
- Let them be in charge of something and dabble in several things.

DON'T:

- Treat them like a number, or one of the crowd.
- Give directions without their input.
- Expect them to "know" you appreciate them without telling them.

Generation X 1961-1980

In general, Gen Xers possess a high degree of self-reliance, fostered for many by growing up in dual-career or single-parent households. Tattoos, nose rings and multiple piercings frequently distinguish Gen X employees from older co-

⁵ <http://www.catalyst.org/publication/206/women-in-US-management>, March, 2008.

workers. Because of the growing Latino population, Gen Xers between 30 and 40 live in a world where one in three Americans is a person of color.⁶

Gen Xers place high priority on enjoying what they do, with the lines often blurring between work and play. They live in a 24/7 world where ever-smaller and more sophisticated computer technology has made time and place almost irrelevant to getting tasks accomplished.

Gen Xers expect multiple career changes. Approximately 10% have been involved in the start-up of a private enterprise.⁷ Business has to incorporate flexibility in scheduling, work styles and rewards as Gen Xers choose self-development and satisfaction over security or economic definitions of success.

Key Values include independence, casualness toward authority, informality, nontraditional orientation to time and space, global thinking, techno literacy, and work-life balance

DO:

- Give them the end goal and let them do it their own way.
- Provide them with the newest technology.
- Keep rules to a minimum.
- Create a workplace that is as informal as possible.
- Create a workplace with little hierarchy.
- Tell them why—they want reasons for doing things.
- Spend time with them – they appreciate relationships.
- Help them know what is expected. They want specific responsibilities, goals, standards, opportunities and rewards.
- Encourage them to find creative ways to have fun while getting the job done.

DON'T:

- Tell them “that’s the way it’s always been done”.
- Micromanage them
- Create rigid rules without reasons
- Ignore them.

Millennials 1981-2000

Millennials are often compared to Baby Boomers. In addition to the size of this cohort (67.9 million), until recently Millennials have grown up in a healthy economy that caters to their buying power. Millennial women comprise more

⁶ Managing Diversity, August 2005, page 4.

⁷ American Cancer Society, The GAP – Bridging Generational Differences, 2008, page 17.

than half of all college and graduate school students, and almost half of those studying medicine and law.

Millennials are more environmentally and globally attuned than prior generations. Watershed events include the Exxon Valdez oil spill, Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami across Indonesia and global warming. Unpredictable human events are part of Millennials' heritage as well: the Columbine High School, Virginia Tech and "Beltway Sniper" shootings and the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Millennials have never lived in a world without AIDS, however, they think of it as a medically manageable disease. Economic status is more salient than sexual orientation or gender identity to most Millennials. The War on Terrorism continues to draw heavily from the Millennial generation to serve in the military around the world.

Like Gen Xers, Millennials' environment is filled with sophisticated miniature electronics designed for work and play. Instant messaging (IM-ing or texting) is the preferred means of communication for Millennials. Like Gen Xers, Millennials view work as a series of careers.

Millennials are particularly close to their parents. Employers may see a job candidate bring a parent to their interview. Many Millennials choose to live with their parents even after they are employed and/or while they pursue additional education. At the same time as LGBT cohorts are pursuing legal recognition of their relationships, straight Millennials are delaying marriage.

Key Values include individualism, multi-tasking, responsibility, speed, technology, confidence, diversity, morality, achievement, optimism, access to resources, and sociability.

DO:

- Provide one-to-one mentoring
- Look beyond the outer package—tattoos or piercings do not determine performance
- Profile timely, frequent, and focused feedback
- Deliver criticism gently and constructively
- Provide current technology
- Ask for their help with technology when needed
- Respond quickly when they ask questions or need assistance
- Help position them for key jobs or promotions

DON'T:

- Ask them to conform to things not necessary to performance
- Give them busy work

- Tell them they have to “pay their dues” before being considered for key assignments or promotions
- Expect them to adhere to hierarchy unnecessarily

CROSS-CULTURAL CAUTIONS

Generational differences influence the assumptions people make about “how the world works” or ought to. These assumptions show up in three areas: time, activities and relationships. Observation of Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen Xers and Millennials point to these cultural differences as areas to be aware of:

TIME Past ---- Present ---- Future Focus

A critique of Gen Xers and Millennials is that they expect exciting assignments with significant responsibility and rapid advancement from day 1 of their employment. There is no better definition of “future focus” than this. In general, Baby Boomers in managerial and production ranks tend to focus on the present: “What fires do I have to put out today?” Traditionalists respond through their lens of accumulated past experience.

Explicit recognition of how different people relate to time is a useful first step to defusing irritation or misinterpretations of behavior. Most tasks benefit from the complementarity of these divergent approaches.

ACTIVITIES Formal --- Informal Approaches

Each generation seems to see its successor as less concerned with “appropriate” appearance and behavior. Informal Millennials may view Baby Boomers and Traditionalists as more concerned with the formal chain of command than getting the job done. Experienced executives often are appalled by newer employees’ directness, use of slang in office conversation and/or frequent text messaging.

Each approach may be “appropriate” at different times. Preserving flexibility for internal communication while developing clear expectations for communication outside the team serves everyone’s interests.

RELATIONSHIPS Equity --- Status is Earned --- Status Is Given

Traditionalists and Baby Boomers tend to be comfortable with hierarchical markers of status and authority. In their world, a Vice President has more power than a Director or Manager. They may grumble amongst themselves, but assuming “status is given” carries a clear expectation that openly challenging a VP’s decision is an option reserved for her higher-ups.

Among Gen Xers and Millennials, individual or collaborative efforts with peers have been more important than titles or chains of command. The quarterback or coach may call the plays but execution requires everyone's buy-in in their world.

Do's and Don'ts: Creating Collaboration and Smoothing Succession

Recommendations for attracting and retaining new employees as well as promoting cross-generational collaboration carry an important caveat: *The single most useful thing a manager can do is to get to know his/her employees as individuals.* Generalizations help us process tremendous amounts of information quickly. The danger is unconsciously falling back on them to explain or predict a specific individual's preferences or behavior.

DO

PREPARE to experience change as the only constant in the workplace. Competitive pressures require forward-thinking as well as an ability to bring together employees who offer diverse contributions.

ASK your employees about their perspective on work, how they work and communicate most effectively and what they value in terms of supervision, motivation and reward. Open-ended questions and using "and" instead of "but" in your responses yield richer opportunities for dialogue than closed-ended questions that usually elicit "yes," "no," and "let me get back to you" responses.

LISTEN without preconceived judgments, seeking to understand what your employee is conveying verbally and non-verbally.

SHARE your own experiences, preferences, ideas and questions about how you can work effectively together. Keep lines of communication open through a variety of media – individual face-to-face contacts, email, texting, telephone and/or teleconferences, team meetings, formal reports, etc.

DON'T

MAKE ASSUMPTIONS about the impact of shared experiences for every member of a generation. You may not expect a Traditionalist to be a sunny, informal, go-with-the-flow kind of person, for example, but notice how many greeters at Wal-Mart are in their mid-60s and older the next time you're there.

IGNORE NEW COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES that you are unfamiliar with or uncomfortable using. Most corporations offer courses on new media and, if not, they are available online, at computer centers and many other educational centers (e.g., community colleges). Learning current technology is an investment in your career *and* in your ability to work across generations.

HESITATE TO ASK QUESTIONS about how to handle new situations. Are you confused by multiple visible tattoos on a well-qualified candidate for a position you need to fill? If it's obvious as you interview the candidate, say so, and if tattoos are irrelevant to the candidate's ability to do the job, assure him or her that they will not factor into your decision. If you can, turn the situation into a learning opportunity. Stepping back to acknowledge the trend is new to you may open a dialogue about ongoing changes in the workplace and the contributions each generation has to offer.

EXPECT OLD RECRUITING OR RETENTION TECHNIQUES TO WORK

TODAY, especially with Gen Xers and Millennials. Focus on:

- websites that are upbeat, fresh and appealing – and regularly updated
- blogs (web logs) by internal and external bloggers that give behind-the-scenes views of the organization
- social networking sites like MySpace and FaceBook as referral sources; do not emphasize candidate vetting; word spreads quickly!
- podcasting – using iPods to send short audio and video spots to prospective employees or other targeted groups.⁸ Use “do’s” above to promote retention.

Case Example of Generational Differences

How recently have you reviewed your position announcements? Compare the description below for a Creative Solutions Director for a high-tech software company (KillerApp) with one for a Marketing Director in your organization. What differences do you notice?

KillerApp

Company Overview

KillerApp is a fun, fast-moving industry leader focused on break-through products. Employees are encouraged to bring their talents, ideas and personal styles to create next-generation problem solutions. The work environment supports team performance with flexible scheduling and state-of-the-art technology. KillerApp has on-site gym and childcare facilities and provides reduced-cost mass transit passes. Full health and dental coverage, liberal paid vacation and Domestic Partner Benefits are available to all full-time equivalent associates.

Position Description

As KillerApp's Creative Solutions Director you will lead a team of diverse talents in analyzing future directions for resource allocation. Responsibilities include communicating directly with clients and industry leaders to identify future software application needs, coordinating design, IT and support efforts and

⁸ Leadership: The Next Generation, *ibid.* pages 13-15.

working with the executive team on strategic priorities. This position is based in Silicon Valley, CA. Starting salary is competitive with short- and long-term opportunities for growth. Relocation benefits reflect a local cost of living schedule.

HOW WE CAN HELP:

Executive Diversity Services offers classes in managing generational differences that are from 1-3 days in length. We also offer Formal Mentoring Programs and classes in Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Developing Cultural Competence.

Susan: Think the following is a nice paragraph for marketing formal mentoring programs which we will think about how to use. Don't think it belongs in the toolbox, however. On the other hand—perhaps we should include a marketing blurb like this for each of our offerings as an appendix to the entire toolbox. Want to consider this so am leaving it here for now. D

Formal Mentoring Programs: Incoming employees, Millennials and Gen Xers, want to succeed. If you hire wisely they have the necessary skills. What they don't know – that can make or break their careers – are the unwritten rules, the corporate culture that influences how work gets done. Mentoring is not a one-way relationship either. Newly minted graduates or new hires from your competitors bring a fresh perspective to products and processes as well as immensely valuable information about research, marketing and cultural trends.

Informal mentoring relationships are great – if they happen. Formalized screening of mentor and protégé candidates, regular meeting dates, mutual information about benefits and goals and outcome assessment increases the value both to individuals and the corporation. How better to capture the best contributions of an experienced employee and a new hire in a way that is beneficial to all?

IMPORTANT EVENTS FOR AGE COHORTS

Traditionalists	Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
1927 – Lindbergh completes first transatlantic flight	1954 – McCarthy HCUAA hearings begin	1970 – Women’s Liberation protests and demonstrations	✎ Child focus
1929 – Stock market crashes	1955 – Salk Vaccine tested on the public	1972 – Arab terrorists at Munich Olympics	✎ Violence: Oklahoma City bombing, schoolyard shootings
1930 – U.S. Depression deepens	1955 – Rosa Parks refuses to move to the back of the bus in Montgomery, Alabama	1973 – Watergate scandal	✎ Technolog
1931 – <i>Star Spangled Banner</i> becomes national anthem	1957 – First nuclear power plant	1973 – Energy crisis begins	✎ Busy, overplanned lives
1932 – Lindbergh baby kidnapped	1957 – Congress passes the Civil Rights Act	1976 – Tandy and Apple market PCs	✎ Stress
1932 – FDR elected	1960 – Birth control pills introduced	1978 – Mass suicide in Jonestown	✎ Clinton/Lewinsky
1933 – The Dust Bowl	1960 – Kennedy elected	1979 – Three Mile Island nuclear reactor nears meltdown	✎ Columbine High School massacre
1933 – The New Deal	1961 – Kennedy establishes Peace Corps	1979 – U.S. corporations begin massive layoffs	✎ Computers
1934 – Social Security system established	1962 – Cuban Missile Crisis	1979 – Iran hold sixty-six American hostage	✎ TV Talk Shows
1937 – Hindenburg tragedy	1962 – John Glen circles the earth	1980 – John Lennon shot and killed	✎ Multiculturalism
1937 – Hitler invades Austria	1963 – Martin Luther King leads march on Washington, D.C.	1980 – Ronald Reagan inaugurated	
1940 – United States prepares for war	1963 – President John Kennedy assassinated	1986 – Challenger disaster	
1941 – Pearl Harbor; United States enter World War II	1965 – United States sends ground combat troops to Vietnam	1987 – Stock market plummets	
1944 – D-Day in Normandy	1966 – National Organization for Women founded	1988 – Terrorist bomb blows up Pan Am flight 103, over Lockerbie	
1945 – FDR dies	1966 – Cultural Revolution in China	1989 – Exxon Valdez oil tanker spill	
1945 – Victory in Europe and Japan	1967 – American Indian Movement founded	1989 – Fall of Berlin Wall	
1950 – Korean War	1968 – Martin Luther King and Robert F. Kennedy assassinated	1991 – Operation Desert Storm	
✎ Golden Days of Radio	1969 – First lunar landing	1992 – Rodney King beating videotaped, Los Angeles riots	
✎ Silver Screen	1970 – Woodstock	✎ MTV	
✎ Labor Unions	1970 – Kent State University shootings	✎ AIDS	
	✎ TV	✎ Single Parent Homes	
	✎ Suburbia	✎ Tianamen Square	

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