

## Bridging the Gap

### *Managing a Multigenerational Workforce*

Each generation complains about other age groups. The fact that there are differences between generations is nothing new. What IS new today is the magnitude of these differences. It is time to understand and value this diversity so that everyone, manager and employee, Baby Boomer and Millennial, can benefit. Failing to do so can result in failure for everyone. There are predominately three generations co-existing in today's workplace:

- **Baby Boomers**, those born between 1946 and 1964;
- **Generation X**, those born between 1965 and 1976; and
- **Generation Y**, typically referred to as Millennials, born after 1977.

Generational differences create many challenges in the workplace. These challenges can be positive or negative. It's the manager's job to make sure that potential rifts are turned into positives. The following are some of the most common differences between generations, and ways to ensure that each group's talents are recognized, accepted, and maximized.

#### **Different Work Attitudes**

One of the most common complaints that Boomers have about Gen Xers and Millennials is that "they don't have the same work ethic!" Well, they don't, that's true. But this doesn't mean they don't work. While for many Boomers, work is more of an end in and of itself, Gen Xers and Millennials work to be able to fulfill other, more important (to them) priorities.

#### **To motivate both:**

Although different things motivate Gen Xers and Millennials, both age groups need the following:

- Frequent communication, including being told the "why," not just the "what" of projects and priorities;

- To be included, and not just in what affects them most directly;
- Short-term bonuses, which will work better than long-term rewards; and
- To have fun at work, fun with a capital F!

#### **To motivate Gen Xers:**

❖ *Make sure you provide the flexibility needed for them to manage their other priorities, such as dependent children, aging parents, and others.* This flexibility can be as simple as providing schedule changes to accommodate these needs. Managers need to understand that these are needs, not wants.

*Exercise: Do you have flexibility in your work schedule? If not, what could be done to convince management of the need to change his/her thinking?*

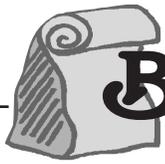
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❖ *Give work/life issues more than lip service.* Attracting and retaining Gen Xers goes beyond tossing a few family-friendly and flexible work benefits into the ring. While many companies say they offer flexible schedules, the reality is that it often extends only to special circumstances and certain types of work. Also, organizations that want to recruit talented workers need to focus on performance rather than time clocks.

❖ *Consider work/life benefits that appeal most to Gen Xers.* These include paid parental leave, sabbaticals, and other options for working parents who need to suspend their careers. The following are some examples:

- Definitions of sabbaticals might include giving people a paid month off or two to explore their own interests, while other employers might offer a longer, unpaid educational leave;
- Allowing non-traditional time off, such as Thursdays instead of weekends; and
- For those interested in community service, integrating volunteer work as a goal on quarterly performance reviews.



# Brown Bagger

**Exercise: Are the work/life benefits currently offered a good fit with your needs? What additional work/life benefits would be of most interest?**

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❖ Offer plenty of opportunities for collaboration and teamwork. This is the generation that “fuels their fire” through teamwork.

**Exercise: Are there sufficient opportunities for teamwork in your organization? If not, what could be to promote better teamwork?**

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❖ Provide recognition in ways that connect with what the employee values most. For some, this might be a handwritten, thank-you note for a job well done. Others might be motivated by a tangible gift, such as flowers or gift certificates. Whatever the compensation, short-term, performance-based rewards work better than long-term promises like corner offices and big promotions that may never happen.

**Exercise: Does your manager or supervisor say “thank you” or “great job!” when a job is well done? What types of short-term compensation would you like your employer to offer?**

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## To motivate Millennials:

❖ Give Millennials flexibility in when and where work is done. Millennials resist what they see as rigid workday starting times. They do not understand why coming to work 15 to 30 minutes late is something Boomers view as irresponsible behavior. Also, if you can provide technology that allows them to work at home one or two days a week, all the better!

❖ Millennials are interested in change and challenge. They will leave a higher paying job for the opportunity to experience something new. They do not see their careers as needing to be

linear, and they are right. Remember, these are the workers who will have at least five different careers, not just jobs, over their working lives. Their tenure in a particular job is often no more than two to three years.

❖ Provide professional development and tuition reimbursement. You’ll enhance your chances of retaining talented Millennials if you offer professional development such as paying for them to attend career-related conferences, and seminars. They think about career advancement a lot, and so should their managers and human resource representatives. Since Millennials may not have families, benefits are often not as important as enabling them to develop new skills and offering opportunities for advancement. Another retention tool is to help talented Millennials pay off student loans or offer tuition reimbursement. Benefits like these are likely to have immediate appeal to younger professionals who have spent most of their lives receiving education and envision a path of lifetime learning.

❖ Like Gen Xers, short-term rewards based on job performance are a good retention tool for this age group. Immediate gratification is effective for young workers who grew up playing video games. As a result, award bonuses are very important to Gen Yers. Of greater importance are strategies that help employers build bridges to longer tenures that Millennials may not envision on their own. Companies should ask themselves, “Can we put in smaller steps up (the ladder), not just a big promotion every five years?”

**Exercise: Does the organization where you work provide professional development? Short-term rewards? If not, what types of opportunities would you like your employer to offer? How could your employer be convinced to offer them?**

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❖ Do not interpret Millennials’ rebellious nature as negative. Let them vent, don’t take it personal, and by all means avoid “writing them up” unless circumstances really warrant it. Remember, this is the generation that will not only challenge, but also change much of what needs to be changed in the workplace.



## To motivate Boomers:

❖ *Offer position, power, and prestige.* Boomers are often traditionalists, and perks of the position matter. They want titles and authority commensurate with responsibility.

❖ *Allow Boomers to participate in associations and conventions that keep them professionally connected to their peers.* Working together on professional projects in affiliates motivates Boomers with colleagues.

❖ *Offer long-term compensations.* Older workers are often more interested in profit sharing, 401Ks, and healthcare benefits, including long-term care.

## Different Sets of Commitments/Loyalties

Boomers have always been seen as being loyal to their companies. They feel a sense of belonging and dedication based on their work history. Gen Xers and Millennials usually don't feel this way. They are more focused on the present and the future. They have little problem with going elsewhere when a better opportunity comes along. But while this may be interpreted as being disloyal to their current company, this isn't necessarily true. Younger workers can be very committed to their *work*, just not to a particular *job*. They will do what is required, but not because of a sense of belonging based on tenure, but because they find meaning in the work. They need to feel that they are making a difference in their work.

So, how can managers motivate workers whose loyalty lies within? The answer is simple, although the solutions aren't always easy to provide. To motivate Gen X and Gen Y, directly connect the job to their interests, and make sure they find meaning and fun (yes, fun!) in their work.

Providing fun in the workplace does not mean goofing off or wasting time! Examples include:

❖ *Provide regular social outings, such as sports events, picnics, etc.* Be sure that the activities are a good fit with the culture and interests of the co-workers. Make sure that these events are optional – not everyone will be interested.

❖ *Celebrate successes.* Throw a late afternoon party at a favorite watering hole when an important

project is completed, or even throw a party for no reason at all from time to time. When an employee has an important occasion, such as a school graduation, new baby, or new house, celebrate with them. Vary the celebrations, so surprises can accentuate the fun. Again, make these events optional, so that those who aren't interested in these types of activities aren't made to feel that they're not part of the group.

❖ *Do something really different.* What about closing the office unexpectedly for an hour or two occasionally?

Try some of these ideas for managing different generations differently, and you may be able to avoid the revolving door syndrome that is costly in terms of advertising, recruiting, hiring, and training. Consider these activities part of "talent management."

***Exercise: What types of social activities are offered where you work? Are they well attended? If not, what types of outings would be of greater interest to employees?***

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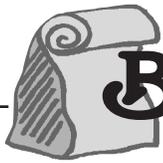
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## Summary

Each generation of workers requires a different set of standards for motivation. In order for a company to be successful, all co-existing generations in the workplace need to understand and value each other, even when their perspectives and goals are different. Management plays a key role in how different generations will interact together.

Rather than focusing on a quick solution, employees and managers alike need to spend some time with co-workers in order to better learn their perspectives and goals. Then, everyone will be in a better position to capitalize on the strengths that each age group brings to the workplace. ■

*Sources: Patti Fralix, author of "How to Thrive in Spite of Mess, Stress and Less"; and Workforce Insights, an online resource center about emerging labor trends produced by Veritude ([www.veritude.com](http://www.veritude.com)), a provider of strategic human resources. Veritude, which is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Fidelity Investments, serves clients throughout the U.S. and Canada. © 2006 Veritude, LLC. Reprinted with permission.*



## If Your Firm isn't Doing so Already, Consider Mentoring

**M**illennials are typically more interested than previous generations in finding a mentor. They have grown up with the notion that one must constantly seek the advice of someone else. This has especially been true since the advent of social media.

But Millennials typically want mentoring to be more of a two-way road than it's been in the past. Today's workplaces have seen the rise of "*reverse mentoring*" in which younger people typically mentor the older worker 20% of the time while the more experienced employee advises the younger person roughly 80% of the time.

Boomers and Millennials need to embrace reverse mentoring. It is part of the postmodern worldview that they have been raised with; they believe that their ideas are important and valuable. If you don't listen, Millennials aren't likely to respect you.

Consider: You have invaluable knowledge that demands to be shared, but in this technological age so do Millennials! They typically understand emerging technologies and social media trends better than older generations, and they can often teach us more than a thing or two.

Karl Moore, a writer and mentor, adds, "As a manager, I have to make a point of giving more thought to providing more feedback than to previous generations of workers. It used to be more of an afterthought, but today I must more



actively spend time thinking about not only a couple of points of feedback, but four or five pieces of feedback."

Further, Millennials are used to searching for and choosing their own mentors. In fact, mandatory corporate mentoring programs are likely to feel forced and unauthentic. Millennials are more likely to find it difficult to connect with an individual that they do not personally deem relevant.

Rather than focus on your differences, why not join forces? Step up to the plate, embrace a mentoring role, and accept whoever comes forward. Identify and utilize each other's strengths. Millennials are the inevitable leaders of tomorrow and older workers have the ability to nourish the growth of these young employees. As the saying goes, it's a real win-win. ■