

In the Workplace, Age is More than a Number

Do you know which worker generation you are part of? Do you get frustrated at times by the many different positions coworkers can take over a work project? Express Employment Professionals in Shreveport, La just had a seminar on the different generations in today's workplace and how to identify them as well as communicate better between generations. It was a huge success and was very helpful to many here locally, both as employers and employees.



The topic of generations in the workplace has generated a lot of discussion in recent years. With Baby Boomers entering the retirement stage and the first throngs of Millennials entering the workplace and bringing with them different demands, ideas and values regarding work and life, it's no wonder the topic of generations is covered so widely.

And in the workplace, it's quickly becoming apparent that it's not just a matter of age that makes generational differences so vast. Each of the generations has a different world view, diverse values, different skill levels, expectations, and even work ethics. They are also all at different stages in their lives. This is important to understand because it offers insights into vastly differing personal needs, which in turn impact the benefits needs of each generation, ranging from educational assistance to childcare to healthcare to retirement.

That's why it's critical when looking for a job these days to be aware of common characteristics of each generation so you can better understand how they view work, what they value and the best ways to communicate and work with employers and co-workers. Check out this overview of each generation: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials.

Generations in the Workplace

GENERATIONS quick facts

TRADITIONALISTS

- ▶ 50 Million Born before 1946
- ▶ 7% of Today's Workforce
- ▶ Characteristics: Loyal, Value Respect, Courteous, Self-Sacrificing, Value Order, Respect Authority

BABY BOOMERS

- ▶ 80 Million Born between 1946-1964
- ▶ 42% of Today's Workforce
- ▶ Characteristics: Optimistic, Workaholics, Social Reformers, Competitive, the "Me" Generation, Collegial

GENERATION X

- ▶ 46 Million Born between 1965-1977
- ▶ 29% of Today's Workforce
- ▶ Characteristics: Independent, Entrepreneurial, Competent, Suspicious of Authority, Skeptical, Value Balance, Tech Savvy

MILLENNIALS

- ▶ 80 Million Born since 1978
- ▶ 22% of Today's Workforce
- ▶ Characteristics: Hopeful, Determined, Ambitious, Close to Family, Entrepreneurial, Inquisitive, Tech Experts, Value Serving Community

Traditionalists

Most traditionalists are past retirement age, but some have chosen to remain in or return to the workforce at least part time. Their lives were influenced by economic hardship and world war, experiences which united them and caused many to rise to positions of great responsibility, such as military service, at a young age. They do not like cursing and like to communicate one on one. It is very wise to try to gain as much knowledge as possible from the traditionalist due to the fact that they likely have extensive experience in their chosen line of work but may not remain active in it much longer, as this generation only makes up 7% of our workforce today.

They are patriotic, value command and control, seek security, trust hierarchy, and are very loyal. Many worked for one company throughout their career and have developed well-honed skills and strengths. They offer a wide range of knowledge and experience. They are courteous, self-sacrificing, and characterized by a strong work ethic.

Baby Boomers

This group currently makes up the largest portion of the workforce, but they are quickly approaching retirement age. At one point, they were leaving the workforce faster than young workers were entering it, causing predictions of a massive worker shortage.

However, experts now note that their serious work ethic and workaholic tendencies may lead a vast number of Baby Boomers to remain in the workforce for an extended period of time. This created tension between Boomers and the younger generations, who at one point expected to quickly be called to fill the shoes of this experienced, hard-working generation. Boomers are competitive, known as the "Me" generation, and place a strong value on self-sufficiency. They are also optimistic, and they hope to redefine the idea of retirement, with over a third of them planning to work at least part time – mainly to support hobbies and interests outside their original career paths. Ask them for their advice and take notes to show you are listening. Try

to not call them "older". Words like "mature" or "prime" are viewed more positively.

Generation X

This generation has been described as rebellious and skeptical of authority, having grown up amidst great social change. As the first latchkey kids, they were instilled with a great sense of independence and confidence. Their parents' work-to-live mentality caused this generation to value work/life balance. Their entrance into the workforce inspired many to interject new ways of thinking into the business world. Now, unafraid of taking risks, many have become entrepreneurs. They are technologically savvy and crave challenging, exciting projects.

Smaller than the generations before and after them, Gen Xers can feel lost in the midst of the great workplace shift taking place as Boomers exit and Millennials enter the workforce. But, many see it as an exciting time to be a part of important organizational change and welcome the opportunity to have a role in transitioning the workplace to a new way of operating. They currently make up 29% of today's workforce. If you are looking for an answer with technical questions ask them or a millennial.

Millennials

Millennials are the youngest generation in the workforce. They are predominately well-educated, hopeful to create change in the workplace, determined to succeed, and highly ambitious. But, their youth and optimism causes many to label them as narcissistic, and many have high expectations for what the workplace should offer them in terms of benefits, projects, and satisfaction. They value work/life balance, flexible work schedules, and challenging work.

Also labeled the "Internet" generation, they are the most tech-savvy generation to date, and they value cutting-edge technology. They are also very close to their family and value teamwork and collaboration. Many of this generation move back home after college to save money or in order to explore the workplace to find their ideal job. They tend to job hop more than any preceding generation, seeking to find meaningful work that will take advantage of their education and fulfill their expectations. They also value community service and volunteerism, truly believing they can affect change. If you are a millennial looking for work, employers are currently trying to keep up with the trend and learn what makes you happy. They are beginning to understand and address the Millennial' need for time off and/or flexible scheduling.

Each generation is so different yet all very important to the workforce. If we can all learn how to identify and work on ways that we can improve our relationships with coworkers from a variety of generations within our organization, we may just be surprised at what we can learn and accomplish working together.

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