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Nurses in Bifocals vs. Aides with Eyebrow-Rings

How to Bridge the Generation Gap in Your Health Care Organization

For the first time in modern history, four generations are working side by side. Their different values, work ethics and habits can cause major generation gaps — perhaps nowhere more so than in the health care field. But a larger problem is a very real “gap” on the horizon for this field: with Baby Boomers aging and the oldest workers ready to retire, where are the legions of younger workers to fortify the ranks?

We believe that both these problems — the friction among generations and the difficulty of recruiting and retaining younger employees — can be addressed with insight into what makes each generation tick. We have done considerable research on generations in the workplace, and provide training for management and staff on these generational differences. Here are some insights that might help your organization close both “generation gaps.”

SHORT ON UNDERSTANDING, SHORTER ON STAFF

Let’s start by taking a closer look at the generational challenges through the eyes of professionals in health care. First up: the completely different outlooks of the two older generations versus the two youngest.

“People in their 50s and 60s entered medicine for a different reason, with different expectations

than today’s young people,” muses Susie Truesdell, a former physician’s assistant. Carol Bagley, RNC, MAT, and Manager of the Providence Alaska Learning Institute, agrees. “One thing a lot of us [Baby Boomers] could see when we became nurses was an almost religious sense of being on a mission,” she says. “Today, Generation Xers think they can make money. To us, that’s almost sacrilegious. They may feel that other component, but it’s more permissible today to talk about money.”

Cindy Rohde, Director of Medical Staff Services for Providence Alaska Medical Center, adds, “Millennials don’t have the same work ethic. They don’t bother to call in sick — they just don’t show up.”

Meanwhile, the staffs of many organizations are growing grayer. “I see a huge skew in traditional ‘pink collar’ jobs like

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By Devon Scheef and Diane Thielöldt

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LPNs, aides, administrators and nurses towards 50+,” says Kathy Cronin, vice president of Xerox Corporation’s healthcare business. “There’s a shortage of people in their 20s and even in their 30s.”

This skew may be most problematic among frontline caregivers. “On the nursing side, there’s high turnover in the first five years on the job, but after that, you see very little,” Cronin observes. “These long-timers are not motivated by money — they want to help people.” These older nurses are less of a turnover risk, yet they work increasingly physical jobs, so they may be forced to leave to save their health.

“The reality is, you’re going to need the Millennials,” says Springer, “but they’re not interested in managing ...they’re not leaders, they’re team players. They can do good work, but they want to work on their own terms.”

So the big question is: How do you manage, motivate and retain younger workers?

UNDERSTANDING THE GENERATIONS

By learning why each generation is the way it is, what personality traits are found in each and what motivates each, you can create a work environment that appeals to members of all generations, maximize the differences in values and work habits and attract new employees.

Here is an overview of each of the generations working today, including members of the Silent Generation (born 1933–1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation Xers (born 1965–1976), and Millennials (born 1977–1998).

The Silent Generation:

The oldest generation typically found in today’s workplace was born between 1933 and 1945. The earliest members of the Silent Generation grew up in a time of economic turmoil in the aftermath of the Great Depression. They dealt with economic hardships by being disciplined and self-sacrificing. They lived, and helped reinforce, the American Dream — enjoying a lifetime of steadily rising affluence. There are 52 million Silents, and they defy generalization more than any other generation, so watch those stereotypes!

Employees from the Silent Generation are typically disciplined, loyal team players who work within the system. Obviously, they have a huge knowledge

legacy to share and embody a traditional work ethic. There’s a natural affinity between this generation and the young Millennials. It’s a perfect match to have them mentor the youngest generation of employees, and the Silent Generation’s natural civic-mindedness lends itself to this task.

And don’t dismiss their technical skills as out of date: Del Webb, a major developer of retirement homes, points out that the top requested feature in new homes for retirees is his-and-hers offices. Most Silents have a positive view of technology, so provide your older employees with proactive service and support for technology tasks and let them run with it!

Silents may feel unappreciated, but they’re open to returning to the workplace after initial retirement, as long as they have the flexibility to put their newfound freedom first. You might consider asking some of your retirees to return as part-timers and mentors — as well as instituting phased retirement to gradually ease older employees into retirement at a mutually agreeable pace.

Tips on managing this generation: Assure them that you value their work and that it’s respected; ask them to share their knowledge legacy; give them hands-on training; and praise their mastery of new areas.

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The Baby Boomers:

The most populous generation in the United States, the 76 million Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964. They typically grew up amid economic prosperity, suburban affluence and strong nuclear families with stay-at-home moms. Boomers asked tough questions about social issues, civil rights, war, sexual freedom and more. They took stock of their radically changing world and went to work with a vengeance. Some researchers divide the Baby Boomers into two groups: those born between 1946 and 1954 (the “Woodstock” group, known for their idealistic endeavors and social conscience), and those born between 1955 and 1964 (the “Zoomer” group, known for their preoccupation with self).

Boomers tend to be optimistic, competitive, and focus on personal accomplishment. They work hard — maybe too hard. This is the generation that increased our workweek from 40 hours to 70 or 80 hours. As younger generations have entered the workplace, Boomers have waited for them to pick up this traditional approach to work.

This generation has ruled the workplace for years and is comfortable in the culture they’ve created. They view changes as sometimes painful but inevitable. Many organizations experience their biggest generational conflict when Boomer manag-

ers are confronted with younger employees who don’t “fit the mold” that they themselves created.

Tips on managing this generation: Spotlight intangibles such as fulfillment and spirituality; redesign jobs to accommodate the family demands of children and aging parents; and encourage them to “lighten up”. Let them know how their contributions are unique and important.

Generation X:

The 51 million members of Generation X, born between 1965 and 1976, grew up in a very different world than previous generations. Divorce and working moms created “latchkey” kids out of many in this generation. This led to traits of independence, resilience and adaptability. Generation X feels strongly that “I don’t need someone looking over my shoulder.”

At the same time, this generation expects immediate and ongoing feedback, and is equally comfortable giving feedback to others. Other traits include working well in multicultural settings, desire for some fun in the workplace and a pragmatic approach to getting things done.

Generation X saw their parents get laid off or face job insecurity. Many of them also entered the workplace in the early ‘80s, when the economy was in a downturn. Because of these factors, they’ve redefined loyalty. Instead of remaining loyal to their company,

they have a commitment to their work, to the team they work with and the boss they work for. For example, a Baby Boomer complains about his dissatisfaction with management, but figures it’s part of the job. A Gen Xer doesn’t waste time complaining — she sends her resume out and accepts the best offer she can find at another organization. Generation X takes employability seriously. But for this generation, there isn’t a career ladder. There’s a career lattice. They can move laterally, stop and start... their career is more fluid.

Tips on managing this generation: Create a “campus culture” environment that allows flexibility and independence; mentor them instead of managing them; promote a participatory work environment; provide chances to compete; offer constant feedback and if applicable, assign a series of long-term, meaningful projects. Motivate them by eliminating as many rules as possible.

The Millennial Generation:

Just beginning to enter the workplace, The Millennial Generation was born between 1977 and 1998. The 75 million members of this generation are being raised at the most child-centric time in our history. Perhaps it’s because of the showers of attention and high expectations from parents that they display a great deal of self-confidence to the point of appearing cocky.

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As you might expect, this group is technically literate like no one else. Technology has always been part of their lives, whether it's computers and the Internet or cell phones and text pagers.

Millennials are typically team-oriented, banding together to date and socialize rather than pairing off. They work well in groups, preferring this to individual endeavors. And they're used to tackling multiple tasks with equal energy, so they expect to work hard. They're good multitaskers, having juggled sports, school and social interests as children.

Millennials seem to expect structure in the workplace. They acknowledge and respect positions and titles, and want a relationship with their boss. This doesn't always mesh with Generation X's love of independence and hands-off style.

Tips on managing this generation: Provide a fun, friendly environment that still has structure and stability; personalize their work; help them become a specialized generalist, boost teamwork; and address them personally.

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Health care, perhaps more than any other field today, faces the problem of an aging work force. How can your organization recruit younger employees — and keep them for the long term?

Opportunity for Change

— “The challenge is creating a workplace for [younger workers],” says Springer.

“What are we doing to reshape it to attract them?”

Millennials are drawn to different aspects of an employer than you might expect. Offer them a long-term view with career stability. After receiving our training in engaging the generations, Bagley says her organization changed their recruitment messages. “For the youngest workers, we tell them, ‘we want you to stay a long time, but you don't have to do the same job.’” The message also promises rapid learning and technology to appeal to Millennials.

Stability — Gen Xers are concerned with having steady employment. Members of the Silent Generation and Baby Boomers often see this age group as lacking loyalty. Actually, Gen Xers have redefined the concept. Instead of remaining loyal to their company, they have a commitment to their work, to the team they work with and the boss they work for. Provide them with assurance that your organization is stable and financially fit, both during the hiring process and throughout their employment.

Mentoring — Millennials get along well with members of the Silent Generation; so

if possible, tell potential new employees they'll be paired with a staff member in their 60s for a mentoring arrangement. Millennials have likely taken part in mentoring programs in school, and are comfortable with these relationships.

Structure — Millennials also want structure and attention from their supervisors, so get the message out that your organization has clear expectations for each job. Gen Xers, on the other hand, crave independence on the job. They want to find their own way of getting things done — without a supervisor's constant attention.

Training — One of the most important offerings you can promise any new recruit is the opportunity for training. “Quality of work life is important” to people in health care, says Cronin. “Money isn't an incentive, but rather a career path that isn't a ladder — because there isn't one. If you can, offer more training, so a young worker can move from being an aide to an LPN, or pay for education so an administrator can get a masters degree and run the department.” Gen Xers in particular will appreciate learning opportunities, because this increases their sense of employability.

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APPEALING TO EMPLOYEES OF ALL AGES

After studying the “generation gap” problem in their organization, Mercy Health Partners is considering some changes to attract more, and younger, employees. These changes include:

- A consumer-driven benefit plan where each person chooses which benefits they want. “This addresses all generations,” says Springer, “and employees see us as flexible.”
- Incorporating a “buddy system” into new employee orientation practices, so younger employees will feel they belong. “Our exit interviews showed that people didn’t feel connected,” explains Springer. This one-on-one system should help new employees make friends and learn the ropes.
- Flexible pay. “The gradation of jobs in a hospital allows some flexibility in how we compensate individuals,” says Springer. “Someone may elect to forego some benefits and put more into their paycheck, depending on their personal needs.”

These are all excellent ideas because they incorporate something for each generation. Rather than focus on the current age groups in the health care field, or catering only to the up-and-coming Millennials, offering flexible benefits and pay, and

teaming up employees of different ages, will appeal to everyone.

Any organization can take this approach and expand it to create a work environment that fulfills members of each generation. Everyone wants to work in an environment that’s trusting and open. To create an ideal climate, you must prove your openness to ideas and innovations from your employees. Don’t just listen to them — act on their ideas or let them know why you can’t.

Supervisors and administrators can create an ideal workplace by delegating tasks to help employees learn new skills, and by shaping the work to the needs of each individual. Even members of the Silent Generation are interested in trying new things at work — so challenge each individual to learn new skills.

Also, celebrate individual and team accomplishments, either with verbal praise or more tangible rewards. You can create handmade certificates, or hand out gift certificates to each “employee of the month” Preferably, use as many different means of recognition as possible to appeal to all generations; Boomers prefer practical rewards like time off or monetary incentives, while Millennials actually enjoy more responsibility on the job.

The advice in this article is just the tip of the iceberg. There is enough information available on the four generations and how they work to fill a good-sized

book. However, the insights and tips provided here are enough to get you started on the path toward fostering understanding in your workplace, and successfully recruiting younger workers. ✨

Generations Defined

There are various opinions on the birth years that define each generation, most differing by only a year or two. Please keep in mind that it’s less important to focus on specific dates than it is to concentrate on what managers can do regarding generational differences.

This article uses the following definitions of generations.

The Silent Generation
(born 1933-1945)

Baby Boomers
(born 1946-1964)

Generation Xers
(born 1965-1976)

Millennials
(born 1977-1998)

Practices & Policies of Gen-Friendly Organizations

401K Plans/Pension/Retirement Plans

Accelerate or shorten the vesting period to accommodate career mobility; make sure benefits are transferable between business units or divisions. This promotes flexible careers, and provides a way for employees to establish their financial independence early in their careers.

Diversity

Diversity is a desirable hallmark for Gen Xers and Millennials who grew up with diversity as a way of life. They know when companies give lip service to diversity. If you're known in your industry or community as a diversity-friendly employer, you're miles ahead of the competition in the race for Gen Xer and Millennial talent.

Flexible Work Hours

The ability to manage work-life balance is the number one need of all generations. Many members of the Silent Generation are now beginning to work part-time, or are transitioning to retirement careers; Baby Boomers are caught in the sandwich of caring for aging parents and raising their children; Gen Xers are starting families and many are determined to make different work-family choices than their parents.

Feedback Friendly

While the paperwork for the file is still a requirement, gen-friendly companies provide frequent and useful feedback that looks different than performance appraisals. They encourage infor-

mal, on-the-spot discussions that strengthen manager-employee communication — and they advocate that managers receive as much feedback from their employees as they give.

Career Lattices not Ladders

Gen-friendly organizations offer encouragement and flexibility for employees that want to ping-pong through the organization, picking up skills along the way. They offer cross-functional mentoring programs to give their employees an opportunity to explore other parts of the organization. They create non-managerial career ladders, and offer promotions and raises that are tied to building expertise not just promotions into management.

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Friendly Expatriate Policies

Many Millennials and Gen Xers have grown up with an international view. They are the best-traveled U.S. generations to date, and are comfortable with international business. If you're a global organization, make sure that your expatriate policies meet the needs of your younger workers.

Expand the Definition of Family

Make your corporate benefits available to significant others. Many employees consider friends and non-traditional relationships as significant to their life foundation as traditional relationships.

™“Career” Development: One Size Doesn't Fit All

Consider offering career development workshops that speak to the unique needs of each generation and what they want from work. Build employee loyalty by acknowledging that employees in different life stages and generations have very different needs. For the Silents, offer a “Retreading” session — how to plan for a retirement career, how to work part-time for your organization if desired. For the Baby Boomers, offer a “Retooling” session — how to acquire skills to fulfill personal career goals or acquire skills for a second career with your organization. For the Gen Xers, offer a “Reflection” session — how to take stock of your career to date and make the plans that take you to your goal

within the organization. For the Millennials, offer a “Roadmap” session to get their careers off to a good start.

Vacation and Sick Day Policies

Boomers tend to stockpile their vacation and sick days — let them sell their days back to the organization. On the other hand, Xers tend to use both vacation and sick days. Let them bank their days for some type of reward or buy additional time — or even “buy” a week without pay.

Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle

Are your business practices environmentally friendly? Protecting the environment is a concern of Millennials and potential common cause for Millennials and Boomers. Encourage Millennials to lead environmental causes at work. Do you recycle?

Community Involvement

Millennials bring a strong civic pride/orientation to the workplace. Is their contribution to the community encouraged and recognized? Can they take a day off for a community project, e.g. Habitat for Humanity? Is your organization involved in the local community? Does your organization give back? Are your employees aware of your contribution and how to get involved?

Sabbaticals

Time off to learn and grow is not just for academia. Gen Xers who want to growth their career and


employability, Millennials with their love for learning, Boomers who are exploring broader utility within the organization, and Silents who are retooling to continue their contribution to your organization might well be encouraged with the option of a sabbatical after an appropriate amount of time/tenure on the job.

Colleagues and Community at Work

How collegial is your office/work environment? Is there time and encouragement for employees to build relationships and friendships at work? Designate common space where people can mix, mingle and build their networks. This will be especially important for the Millennials entering the workplace.

Generation Integration

How a Technology Company Bridged the Generation Gap between Two Organizations



The generation gap that families face around the dinner table has entered the workplace. For the first time in modern history, many organizations have people from four generations working side by side. Today's American workplace is likely to include members of the Silent Generation (born 1933–1945); Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964); Generation Xers (born 1965–1976); and Millennials (born 1977–1998). Bridging the differences between these diverse groups, and melding them into effective work teams may seem overwhelming to most managers, especially considering the different ways the generations approach work. There

are no easy solutions. But raising managers' consciousness about these issues, and helping them understand how each generation looks at work and at their coworkers, can have a significant impact on their effectiveness on the job.

That is the approach that our client took when faced with a major intergenerational challenge in 2002. At that time, the company's North American operations integrated two divisions which had been serving the same customers, to form the new Services Division. According to the client, the division, responsible for installation and post sale equipment repair and support, was a "stable, tenured, and very entrenched group. They were mostly male and mostly Baby Boomers and Silents." "On the other hand, the division (which provided services on customers' premises including copying, print production and mail distribution) was a much younger,

more diverse group with many Gen Xers who were less tenured and had a youthful, entrepreneurial attitude, and their structure reflected that," explained the client.

The more tenured middle managers moved into the more senior positions in the new organization. This suddenly left them in charge of a group of much younger managers and employees. It was a shock all around. In the past, managers and workers were used to dealing with people pretty much like themselves. Now they found themselves dealing with people who were very different.

According to the client, "the merger created a dichotomy of a mature management team working with younger people. Typically, these generations have conflicting attitudes, work styles and values and often have difficulty understanding each other.

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It's important to understand the differences."

Successful integration of these two groups was absolutely critical to achieving the cost reduction and productivity improvement goals that prompted the merger in the first place. Integration would have been complex under any circumstances. But what made integration even more complex, was the stark generational differences and the sheer size of the undertaking. The new division was trying to shape a cohesive, efficient organization out of a very diverse combined group of 15,000 people scattered throughout the United States under 400 managers.

"Our company has always taken diversity very seriously and the company was sensitive to inter-generational differences well before the merger. Understanding the generations adds one more dimension to our diversity approach. If you are going to engage each person to optimum effectiveness, you need to take into consideration diversity of thought and value systems, and you also need to understand how the time in which they were born affects them."

With changing business conditions and assignments, the client's leadership training had for some time focused on achieving some specific goals:

- * develop leaders at all levels
- * help managers deal with constant change

- * increase business acumen
- * help managers approach their job as owners of their business
- * teach managers to think more strategically.

As part of this overall leadership training, held at the company's Learning University, a workshop called Managing the Generations(tm) was included to sensitize all first line managers to the generational differences they would inevitably face. At the time of the merger, this workshop was part of a four-and-a-half day leadership development program for first and middle managers. There were 18 participants in each workshop and only 12 sessions planned for the year. However, the demographics of the merger demanded a more widespread and intensive approach to training about generations. Recognizing the importance of successful integration, the company immediately broadened the base of the training so that all managers in the newly merged organization would receive it.

The goal was to help these managers understand: they couldn't manage the way they had in the past; this was a brand new organization with different needs, values and issues; and they needed to open their eyes to generational diversity and prepare them to meet the challenge of leading people of different ages.

"We needed to have the man-

agers help us integrate the two groups," says the client. "Fortunately, the managers understood that there was more to the job than managing as they had in the past. You can't slam a new organization into an old model. The management techniques you learned 20 years ago may not work any more with a new generation," he said.

To date, the integrated group's vice presidents, middle managers, and first line managers have all participated in the Managing the Generations workshops. The workshops do not provide pat solutions. But they do increase people's awareness of what makes each generation tick, and show them how to work on that awareness in their daily management practices.

Before they participated in the training, many managers wondered if this was all really necessary. That quickly changed after the training. Some 99 percent of respondents to surveys after the workshop said that they have incorporated the insights and feedback from the experience into their daily business activities, and 95 percent indicated that it had an impact on their ability to lead successfully. The response was so enthusiastic, that the company is considering using the workshop for other divisions.

"The generation differences on my team range dramatically," wrote one manager. "I have an employee in their 70s and the

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work ethic is stellar. I actually have to ask them to slow down. On the other hand, another associate is in their early 20s, and they believe they know it all. Being able to pull them together is a difficult task and before my training it left me feeling all stressed out. Now I can approach both associates and get the desired outcome because I have the understanding of what makes them tick.”

Another manager put her new knowledge into practice even before she got back to the office. “Before leaving to travel back home,” she wrote, “I had considered purchasing trinkets for my employees. After the class, and realizing the generation most of my employees are in, I realized that they probably would not appreciate this gesture from me so I decided not to buy anything. When I told them about my revelation, they laughed and thanked me for not buying them another mug!”

“This workshop has allowed me to understand different generations and behaviors better and to understand how to lead them effectively,” wrote another manager.

Understanding the generations seems to have been particularly useful for managers dealing with much younger workers. “I currently manage several different generations in the same account,” wrote one, “and the insight, especially to the current 18-23 year old generation, has

been very helpful. I have done a better job at hiring qualified candidates with some of the things I’ve learned.”

“I am more receptive to Gen X and individuals who do not conform to my norm,” wrote another. “I am more self confident because I know my style is mine and is natural for me.”

The workshop, which is ongoing, begins with an explanation of the demographics of the two organizations, so that managers can clearly see the differences, and then shows them how these differences could impact their interactions with the people who work for them. Interactive presentations highlight differences between all four generation and the influences that shaped these differences, such as the Cold War, the anti war protests of the 60s, economic downturns, or the explosion of new technology. Participants are divided into four groups. Each group becomes an instant expert in one generation and presents their learnings to the rest of the class. Through these presentations, and opportunities to speak about what they have noticed personally, managers are able to articulate for the first time how different the workplace looks now, and to discuss how to deal with that beyond generalizations and stereotypes.

Managers also receive tools to take back to their work teams, including a foldout called “Generations Over Time,” which

serves as a quick reference guide to understanding the trends and events that shaped each generation, from the Depression to World War II, to Vietnam, to Watergate to Columbine. They also take away a deck of 60 “Engagement Tickets” or “E-Tickets” each printed with an idea to jump-start their thinking on how to support careers, create a motivating work climate, and provide the kind of communication that each generation needs.

Besides the obvious benefits to managers and teams, the new look at what makes the generations tick has had another unexpected benefit. It has helped managers and employees understand their customers better. The awareness of generational differences and the appreciation of the events that shaped the values of different generations is helping to enhance client relationships as effectively as it has helped team relationships. ✨