



café Conversations

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Engaging Multiple Generations Among Your Workforce

“You can divide any working population into three categories: people who are engaged (loyal and productive), those who are not engaged (just putting in time), and those who are actively disengaged (unhappy and spreading their discontent). Our research shows that the U.S. workforce is 26% engaged, 55% not engaged, and 19% actively disengaged.”

— Marcus Buckingham, Gallup Polls



As Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, stated, “Any company trying to compete... must figure out a way to engage the mind of every employee.” But how can a 20-something sales manager engage the members of his team who range in age from 23 to 68?

For the first time in modern history, the American workforce encompasses four separate generations working side by side — and the differences among them are one of the greatest challenges facing managers today. It’s likely for an organization to include members of multiple generations — the Silent Generation (born 1933-1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation Xers (born 1965-1976), and maybe even some Millennials (born 1977-1998).

Many managers are unaware of the issues contributing to the differences among these groups, and most are struggling with how to constructively work with individuals in each generation.

In today’s fast-changing work environment, it has never been more vital to an organization’s success to find ways to maximize the performance of every person. To succeed, you need to engage your employees. This means first understanding what makes each generation tick, and then creating a compelling work climate that addresses the unique needs of each group in a way that creates bridges and common ground.

So how can you best recognize the individuality that each person brings to work and engage employees of all ages to maximize their performance?

By Devon Scheef and Diane Thielholdt

This article has been adapted from Engaging the Generations™ workshop materials, developed and published by The Learning Café.

This article first appeared in Link & Learn, edited by Stephanie Levin. This article can also be found in the North-east Pennsylvania Business Journal and the Bay Area ODN Newsletter.

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Develop Awareness and Deepen Understanding

- * Discover how each generation is unique — what special capabilities does each generation have to contribute?
- * Discuss what is most inspiring about each generation.
- * Imagine what our workplace would look and feel like if each generation fully participated.
- * Identify what it is about our business climate that captures each generation's attention.
- * Learn how to leverage our generational differences for future success.

ACE: The Three Step Engagement Strategy

D) Activate Careers

Members of every generation want work that provides personal satisfaction. A savvy manager serves as a career coach, to create common ground and to encourage employees' taking responsibility for their own careers. To help employees activate their careers:

- * Encourage employees to talk freely and openly about their career aspirations.
- * Schedule career discussions with all team members.
- * Provide feedback.
- * Help build skills in place.

- * Link employees' work to "bottom line" performance.

2) Create Climate

Members of every generation want a positive, empowering work environment. Every manager has the ability to create a climate that is attractive to all team members and reflects each individual's approach and outlook. To create a micro-climate:

- * Increase camaraderie-building events.
- * Be open to new ideas and innovation from employees.
- * Offer flexibility in work schedules.
- * Delegate more tasks and learning opportunities to team members.
- * Encourage work/life balance.
- * Schedule lunch dates to get to know your employees better.

3) Emphasize Communication

Employee satisfaction surveys state that communication is the number one opportunity for improvement. And the truth is, managers don't need to know all the answers – they just need to ask and listen, then respond with what they know and be straight about what's unknown. To emphasize communication practice:

- * Listen 75% of the time and talk only 25%.
- * Ask for frequent feedback.

- * Regularly recognize the significance of each individual's contributions.
- * Beat the rumor mill — be a proactive communicator.
- * Link employees into other teams' meetings to network and learn with others.
- * Be visible and available to all team members.

When leaders ignite engagement, they recognize the individuality each person brings to work. And when employees are engaged, they are exceptional performers.

Getting to Know the Generations

What's the difference between The Silent Generation and The Millennials? Read on to learn what's behind the common generation labels...

The Silent Generation (born 1933-1945)

This 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.

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

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legacy to share and embody a traditional work ethic.

The Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)

The most populous generation in the United States typically grew up amid economic prosperity, suburban affluence and strong nuclear families with stay-at-home moms.

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. 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).

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 companies experience their biggest generational conflict when Boomer managers are confronted with younger employees who don’t “fit the mold” that they themselves created.

Generation X (born 1965-1976)

Members of this generation 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. 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.

The Millennial Generation (born 1977-1998)

Just beginning to enter the workplace, the Millennial Gen-

eration is 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.

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. ✨

What You Need to Know about Mentoring the New Generations

By Devon Scheef and Diane Thielfoldt

Which of the following means the most to you?

- * Elvis joins the Army.
- * Jimi Hendrix dies
- * MTV debuts.
- * Kurt Cobain dies.

Your answer, of course, depends on your age — or more specifically, on the generation you belong to. While pop music milestones may not seem all that important, the sum total of experiences, ideas and values shared by people of different generations makes for a melting pot of work approaches and priorities.

Once you understand where the newer generations are “coming from,” as a Boomer (born 1946-1964) might say, it’s easy to target your mentoring style to bring out their strengths and make the most progress. Remember to discard biases and pre-conceived notions, and you and your mentees from all generations enjoy your generational differences — and similarities!

Generation X	Millennials
Born 1965-1976 51 million	Born 1977 – 1998 75 million
Accept diversity Pragmatic/practical Self-reliant/individualistic Reject rules Killer life Mistrust institutions PC Use technology Multitask Latch-key kids Friends, not family	Celebrate diversity Optimistic/realistic Self-inventive/individualistic Rewrite the rules Killer lifestyle Irrelevance of institutions Internet Assume technology Multitask fast Nurtured Friends and family
Mentoring Do’s	Mentoring Do’s
Casual, friendly work environment Involvement Flexibility and freedom A place to learn	Structured, supportive work environment Personalized work Interactive relationship Be prepared for demands, high expectations

Source: *The Learning Café* and *American Demographics* Enterprising Museum 2003.

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Generation X: Declaring their Independence

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.

At the same time, 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.

Even more so than Boomers, members of Generation X dislike authority and rigid work requirements. An effective mentoring relationship with them must be as hands-off as possible. Providing feedback on their performance should play a big part, as should encouraging their creativity and initiative to find new ways to get tasks done. As a mentor, you’ll want Gen Xers to work *with* you, not for you.

Start by informing them of your expectations and how you’ll measure their progress — and assure them that you’re committed to helping them learn new skills. (Members of Generation X are eager to learn new skills because they want to stay employable.) Gen Xers work best when they’re given the desired outcome and then turned loose to figure out how to achieve it. This means a mentor should guide them with feedback and suggestions, not step-by-step instructions.

The Millennial Generation: Up and Coming

Just beginning to enter the workplace, The Millennial Generation was born between 1977 and 1998. The 75 million mem-

bers 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.

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. They’re good multitaskers, having juggled sports, school and social interests as children, so expect them to work hard.

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.

All Millennials have one thing in common: They are new to the professional workplace. Therefore, they are definitely in need of mentoring, no matter how smart and confident they are. And they’ll respond well to the personal attention. Because they appreciate structure and stability, mentoring Millennials should be more formal, with set meet-

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ings and a more authoritative attitude on the mentor's part.

Provide lots of challenges but also provide the structure to back it up. This means breaking down goals into steps, as well as offering any necessary resources and information they'll need to meet the challenge. You might consider mentoring Millennials in groups, because they work so well in team situations. That way they can act as each other's resources or peer mentors. ✨

Retaining the Four Generations in the Workplace

Members of every generation want to work in a positive, satisfying work climate. So retaining your talented employees, regardless of generation, should be easy, right? The task is trickier than it seems. Based on research from the program Engaging the Generations™, there are distinct differences in the whys and hows of retaining each of the four generations in the workplace.



The Silent Generation (born 1933-45)

THE SILENT GENERATION built its success on hard work, discipline and postponement of material rewards. They are often called the “facilitative” generation because many members have taken leading national roles as diplomats, civil rights leaders and distinguished civil servants and politicians. “Giving back” and contributing to the collective good is an emblem of this generation.

At work, members of the Silent Generation are looking for due process and fair play. When they find it they are loyal to the company and work within the system. For most, their word is their bond and they expect others to behave responsibly and to honor commitments, whether or not they’re the bosses.

Contrary to the popular belief that they have reached a career plateau, many Silents are still very interested in their futures and in trying new things at work. They want to know that their employers value their work and that they are making a financial contribution. Let them know how their contributions drive profitability and impact the bottom line.

SILENTS TIPS

- Verbally and publicly acknowledge their experience.
- Provide proactive technology support services if they aren’t techno-savvy.
- Use due process and explain the reasoning behind decisions.

By Devon Scheef and Diane Thielöldt

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The Baby Boom Generation (born 1946-64)

BABY BOOMERS grew up with idealistic longings and changed the social structure of the country. They created a place for themselves in history as rebels who initiated many causes: civil rights, nuclear disarmament, consumer advocacy and women's rights. And when they joined corporations, Baby Boomers took their priorities of change with them and made their organizations their new causes.

Baby Boomers are famous for being process-oriented and relationship-focused at work. As a group, they have been optimistic corporate citizens who dislike conformity and rules. They are hard workers who strive to do their very best and are willing to take risks.

Perhaps more than any other generation, they want to make a contribution to their clients and their companies. The workplace is often a place to find personal fulfillment and purpose. Baby Boomers need personal satisfaction from their jobs. Provide praise and recognition. Allow for flexibility so that they can balance family and work responsibilities.

BOOMERS TIPS

Send the message that long hours at work aren't necessarily a badge of honor.

Redesign their jobs to provide flexibility.

Spotlight personal fulfillment, meaningful work, intangibles.

Generation X (born 1965-76)

GENERATION XERS entered the workforce during volatile economic times and amid turbulent world affairs. They watched their parents cope with massive corporate layoffs and job insecurity. When Generation Xers went to work, there wasn't a corporate welcome mat waiting for them, so they have reacted to the work world as they found it.

Gen Xers are seeking the same control over their corporate lives that they experienced as children and young adults. Many tend to be output-focused and outcome-oriented. They are seeking balance in their lives. They've observed workaholic Baby Boomers are choosing to live and work differently.

Generation Xers want to know that they can remain widely employable while pursuing a career with a single organization. Communicate frequently and truthfully about how the company is performing. Provide feedback on their job performance. Provide learning and development opportunities to increase their sense of employability. Allow for work/life balance and provide situations where they can try new things.

GEN XER TIPS

Resist micromanaging them.

Provide flexible work environments (i.e., telecommuting, flex-time).

Reward their initiative.

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The Millennial Generation (born 1977-98)

MILLENNIALS are being raised in the most child-centric time in U.S. history. Studies show that their Gen Xer parents are rejecting the benign neglect practiced by their own parents. And those Baby Boomers who waited until later in life to have their children are giving parenting their formidable all. So this offspring enters the workplace as the best educated, most technically literate and most doted upon of any generation at work.

The Millennial generation brings together the “can do” ethic of the Silents, the teamwork approach of the Boomers, and an even greater tech savvy than that of the Generation Xers. They may be the first generation in some time that readily accepts older leadership. They’re looking for careers and stability.

To attract and keep them, be clear about your goals and expectations, communicate frequently, provide supervision and structure, establish mentoring programs, honor their optimism and welcome and nurture them. They want to be happy at work and are seeking organizations that are friendly in nature. Millennials are at ease in teams. ✨

MILLENNIALS TIPS

Personalize their work — one size doesn’t fit all.

Make their work interactive, like their technology, and group oriented, like their social preference.

Communicate the civic side of your company.

What Generations Want from Their Careers

Members of every generation want work that provides satisfaction. So a manager's job as a career coach should be easy, right? Not quite. Each generation has a distinct attitude and approach to careers. Savvy managers tailor their career conversations to the needs of the individual — keeping in mind some significant generational influences.

Here's what we've learned about the career needs of each generation, taken from the workshop Engaging the Generations™:

The Silent Generation (born 1933-45)

Members of the Silent Generation initially went to work in companies that valued respect for authority and adherence to rules. They achieved job and career success through their discipline, hard work and teamwork. In their work today they look for appreciation for their expertise and experience. Many are now retiring, taking their knowledge legacies and corporate know-how with them. A common misconception is that they've stopped growing and learning. In fact, most are eager to continue to learn and build their abilities.

In 2000, Congress eliminated the Social Security earnings test for workers 65 or older allowing them greater freedom to pursue employment after retirement. Instead of coasting on their ex-

isting skill sets, many Silents are eager to continue working and building on their abilities. Silents see themselves as vigorous, contributing members of the workforce and they appreciate help with career planning.

Tips

Value their experience by creating ways that they can mentor others

Provide part-time jobs and job sharing for those who want to continue to work

Consider phased-retirement options, which gradually ease employees out of the company at a mutually agreeable pace

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The Baby Boom Generation (born 1946-64)

Baby Boomers have had a huge influence on the corporate environments that we work in today. Boomers applied their competitive nature and industrious work ethic to building their careers. Their willingness and ability to sustain hard work through mid-career is the topic of much research. Today, as they face increasing responsibilities for the care of aging parents and growing children, they are re-examining their careers and looking for ways to bring new balance to their lives.

As Boomers take stock of their careers, many are seeking ways to revitalize themselves. Others are looking ahead to retirement or exploring their next set of career options (consulting, managing franchises, doing temp work, freelancing). Boomers are rewriting the retirement rules,

too — shuffleboards are out, spas are in. Many are looking forward to more time freedom, but a recent AARP poll found that 80% plan to work at least part-time in their retirement years.

Tips

Help them explore their next set of workplace options, and demonstrate how your company can continue to use their talents

Walk the talk on work/life balance by redesigning their jobs to accommodate multiple life demands

Encourage them to enrich their present jobs and grow in place if they need to slow their career pace

Generation X (born 1965-76)

Generation Xers went to work in a chaotic, no guarantees work world. For many, their independent childhoods led them to seek autonomy and independence in the workplace. Today they are seeking opportunities to make a visible difference and use their creative abilities.

Generation Xers absorbed the workplace lessons of the Baby Boomers. In the view of many Gen Xers, Baby Boomers devoted their lives to their work and corporations, putting personal fulfillment ahead of mar-

riages, families and balanced living. And Generation Xers have carefully watched the changing work environment. Their goal is to mitigate the possibility of layoffs in unstable corporations by putting their own skill sets first. They realize the need to be employable because no organization can guarantee employment. Generation Xer's career goals are often different than their older bosses. They value diverse experiences and are comfortable with job "hopping." They are also committed to work/life balance and see it as a priority.

Tips

Talk to them about their reputation, not just job tasks; they want your candid perspective and feedback

Acknowledge their ability to work independently and encourage them to leverage their entrepreneurial abilities

Help them get the most out of every job position by discussing what the job can do for them and what they can learn from it

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The Millennial Generation (born 1977-98)

As the oldest Millennials come into the workplace, they are seeking stable jobs and corporations. Their group-orientation and civic-mindedness are likely to continue in the corporate environment. They are being dubbed “the confident generation” at work.

When Millennials and their employers talk about career development, they are often speaking different languages. Millennials think in terms of their personal fulfillment, asking, “Is the job interesting and satisfying? Is the work meaningful and important?” Employers want to know, “How long will you stay and do the job?” Offer training opportunities to build basic business skills (beyond training for their current job), and help them find their best job fit early in their careers. Managers who help Mil-

lennials find a career path, or set of career paths, will be acknowledged as valued mentors. Researchers predict that Millennials will be loyal, committed employees as long as their organizations provide them with variety and opportunity. ✨

Tips

Demonstrate the stability and long-term value of your company. Also show how your organization is flexible and filled with learning opportunities for them

Provide work schedules that help them build careers and families at the same time

Make groups and teams part of their job