Respecting and Appreciating Generational Differences in the Workplace

The Iowa Governor’s Conference on Public Health
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Food for Thought…

...about different perspectives that employees might bring to the workplace, based upon their generation

CAUTION!

• Hoping to provide information and awareness without stereotyping:
  • Realize that individuals vary, even within the same generation
  • Recognize that personal beliefs and attitudes are based upon multiple factors (e.g., one’s upbringing, family differences, rural/urban differences, cultural and religious differences)
The Four Generations

I. Radio Babies (*Traditionalists*)

II. Baby Boomers

III. Generation X

IV. Generation Y (*Millennials*)

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I. Radio Babies

- Born 1930-1945
- Currently, they are 69 to 84 years old

You know you are a Radio Baby if...

- You listened to Ricky Nelson on radio and remember entertaining yourself without TV.
- You remember when TV was black/white, and you had a ‘party line’ phone.
- You can stretch a buck “nine ways to Sunday”.
- You use a computer but are afraid you’ll break it.
- You ballroom danced, not just watched it on TV.
- You’ve used a no-motor, push lawn mower.
- Your first car had running boards.
II. Baby Boomers

- Born 1946-1964
- Currently, they are 50 to 68 years old

You know you are a Baby Boomer if...

- You thought you might one day join the Mickey Mouse Club.
- You knew who Elvis was before he wore sequins.
- Your favorite toy was a hula hoop.
- You used a typewriter to write your term papers.
- You saw every episode of *Leave it to Beaver*.
- You watched man’s first trip to the moon on TV.
- You definitely know who John, Paul, George, and Ringo are.
- You remember Woodstock.
- Somewhere in your basement you have a Cat Stevens album.
- You used to blare your Peter Frampton cassette on the 8-track player in your Mustang.
- You disco-danced to KC & the Sunshine Band in high school.
- Your hair was to your shoulders in your h.s. graduation photo, and you’re a guy.
III. Generation X

- Born between 1965 and 1981
- Currently, are 33 to 49 years old

You know you are a Gen X’er if...

- You wore shirts that had an alligator or a guy on a horse on the chest, with your collar turned up.
- You remember the Atari and many hours of playing Asteroids and Pac-Man.
- One of your first favorite movies was E.T.
- Family trips meant riding backwards in the station wagon.
- You like totally remember the days of, “gag me with a spoon”.
- You know who Jan, Marsha, Cindy, Peter, Bobby, and Greg are.
- You know who shot J.R.
- All skate and Change directions mean something to you.
- You’ve used a rotary dial phone.
- You remember dancing to the words, “Stop—Hammer Time”.
- You sported a hair perm or a mullet.
- You typed your papers on a Word Processor.
- You couldn’t wait until 1999 to play the song “1999” by Prince.
**IV. Generation Y**

- Born between 1982 and 1994
- Currently, they are 20 to 32 years old

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**You know you are a member of Generation Y if…**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You typed your term papers on a computer, of course.</th>
<th>You had Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles pajamas.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’ve always had an answering machine or voice mail.</td>
<td>You were using a computer by the time you were learning to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You grew up on video games—Nintendo, PlayStation, and even PC games.</td>
<td>You don’t know what music cassette tapes are.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’ve always had cable TV with a remote control.</td>
<td>You’ve always had cable TV with a remote control.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You make your popcorn in the microwave, not on the stovetop or in a popcorn popper. You certainly do not know what “Jiffy Pop” is!</th>
<th>You know who Screech is.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You’ve pierced something besides your ear.</td>
<td>You wore flannel shirts in high school, just like your favorite Grunge Bands did.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Internet has existed as long as you can remember.</td>
<td>The Internet has existed as long as you can remember.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Considerations for each generation in the workplace…

• What might you see?
• What is their perspective?

Radio Baby Considerations
(Ages 69-84)

• Many grew up during the Great Depression (or with parents who went through it), and are frugal:
  *Save for a rainy day; Waste not, want not; Believe in sacrifice!
• Feel they have wisdom to share, but no one asks them for it, or listens to it
• Feel they still have something to offer a workplace and are often underestimated, based upon their age

• Historically, have been very loyal to employers; Do not understand the *jump from one job to the next* mentality; Take pride in a long career with one employer
• Tend to have great attendance, are punctual and respectful of rules
• Have a strong work ethic and gain satisfaction from a job well done
• They don’t expect a lot of praise
• Tend to be good team players who do what’s best for the company
• Tended to grow up trusting and respecting political leaders…and their managers
• Most Radio Baby women were homemakers
How can you help Radio Baby employees to be motivated and successful?

- Ask their opinion; Let them know you value their experience/wisdom
- They might notice ways the company can save money…Ask them?
- Be patient if they are hesitant with new technologies
- Don’t underestimate them, based upon age alone
- Enforce your rules with all employees, to gain their respect
- Understand their discomfort with TMI in the workplace!

Baby Boomer Considerations (Ages 50-68)

- Grew up during the Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War protests; “Hippies”
- Had some shared, national heroes (e.g., Martin Luther King, JFK)
- As adults, worked hard to achieve the American Dream: Were competitive and worked long hours to move up the corporate ladder, achieve the better title, corner office, bonuses, and raises; Took pride in those achievements

- Often, defined themselves by their work; Workaholics
- Feel they paid their dues and don’t understand younger generations wanting what they have, without working long hours and many years first
- Sacrificed family time; Increase in divorces
- First generation of many two-income families, i.e., both Mom & Dad in jobs
- Many find themselves “sandwiched” between aging parents and young adults moving back home due to the economy
- Some saved heavily for retirement and are ready to slow down and enjoy leisure, time with grandkids, volunteering for a meaningful cause, etc.
Others were caught off guard by the drop in value of their retirement accounts, and will have to push back retirement or work part-time in retirement.

Would like to be respected for their experience and work ethic; To be mentors to younger workers

Would like to be asked their opinions on workplace issues

How can you help Baby Boomer employees be motivated and successful?

Ask their opinion; Value their experience and work ethic

If appropriate, utilize them as mentors

Be considerate of their responsibilities regarding aging parents or young adult children

Recognize that regarding physical labor, they may feel they’ve paid their dues; Their bodies may not be what they used to be!

Keep a check on potentially damaging workaholic tendencies

A note about personality differences between Radio Babies and The Silver Tsunami, per the forward-looking nursing home
Generation X
Considerations  (Ages 33-49)

• The first generation to have significant
  numbers be raised with two-income
  families or divorced parents

• Many were “latchkey kids” and tend
to be very independent:
  “Get out of my way and let me do my job”

• Less trusting of political figures (have seen many
  scandals); Believe the real heroes are those you really
  know, who walk the talk; Few shared heroes (e.g., 9/11
  rescue personnel)

• Family balance is critical (many grew up in workaholic
  homes); More “demanding” of family time
  vs. endless hours for the company

• Value flex time to attend kids’ activities
  (Boomers and Radio Babes might resent this).
  Emphasis on life outside of work is evident
  (e.g., pix of family, pets, hobbies)
  “Money is good, but control of your time is the primary goal”
  --Marston, 2007

• Resent wasted time at work, meetings that run over, etc.

• Loyal to what’s best for their families, rather than the
  company; Have witnessed layoffs; Are skeptical of job
  security and that social security will be there for them

• More apt to be loyal to their boss than the company, if they
  respect that person; Effectiveness and character mean more
  than a title to Generation X’ers

• Often, are torn between pleasing family
  and their boss/coworkers

• Will thoughtfully move from one company
to another if it’s best for their circumstances;
  Are self-sufficient

• Tend to prefer individual recognition vs. group/team praise;
  May be seen as too self-centered and not as hard-working,
  not there for “the team”

• Fairly comfortable with technology
**How can you help Generation X employees be motivated and successful?**

- Be organized and efficient; Don’t waste their time!
- Adhere to planned schedules
- Respect the tug between work and home, plus additional roles that men may play at home
- Allow them independence when it’s feasible
- Earn their respect and rapport as a supervisor; *Walk the Talk*
- Listen if they tell what’s not working for them

**Generation Y Considerations (ages 20-32)**

- Young, energetic workers; Idealistic, optimistic, and enthusiastic
- Creative, flexible, adaptable…deal well with change
- Amazing with technology; Have been raised with it and have no fear; Have little patience for out-of-date
- Often, great at thinking ‘outside the box’…little fear of doing the wrong thing
- Useful knowledge of trends/where things are going

- Have received harsh criticism from previous generations:
  
  “Two reasons to hire Boomers: They don’t expect to be complimented for breathing, and they’re unlikely to take the week off because someone broke their heart.” *(Cindy Cooke, in Generations, Inc., Johnson, 2010)*

- Have been dubbed, “the most demanding generation in history”
- Often viewed as entitled, i.e., wanting everything now, without having to pay dues; Believe if they *can deliver* now, why pay dues?
- Grew up with Boomer parents who had resources; era of self-esteem, *child-as-center of-universe* parenting
• Many blame wealthy, Helicopter Boomers indulging them, protecting from hard work/failure; Everyone gets a Trophy generation
• Child-centered parenting, shuffling kids to soccer, golf, tennis, cello, and ballet
• More time-outs, fewer spankings; Generation Why vs. Because I told you so
• Parents tended to rescue, even calling college prof’s and employers
• May question authority, want to set own work hours, work from home, get extra vacation days, etc.
• Peter Pan/Boomerang; Marry later & settle into career later

• Prefer fun, casual work environment, and frequent positive feedback, Want close relationship with supervisor; Detest phonies
• Want employer who values contributions right away
• Want meaningful, fulfilling work; Will be creative/engaged
• Accepting of, and open to, differences, and expect the same
• Social networking is huge; Less prone to face-to-face communications
• Environmentally conscious
• Have little tolerance for stories of “the good old days” and “when I was your age…”
• Raised with Columbine & 9/11, have heightened awareness of safety concerns over previous generations
• Want respect for their ideas—not to be treated like a kid!

How can you help Generation Y employees to be motivated and successful?

• Utilize their assets: technology, openness, energy, idealism, new ideas, adaptability, trends
• Give them frequent, positive feedback
• Set clear expectations for work hours, vacation days, dress code, etc., before hire
• Walk the talk.
• Earn respect through being open-minded to differences/new ideas
• Try to place in positions that will engage them
• Lay off the “When I was your age” stories!
Your thoughts???

About respect and appreciation for generational differences in your workplace?

So, who’s around your workplace “table”?

Consider their potential generational perspectives… And remember their common ground!

Closing Thought…

“We need to remember across generations that there is as much to learn as there is to teach.”

--Gloria Steinem
Resources


• Marston, Cam. *Motivating the “What’s In It For Me?” Workforce: Manage Across the Generational Divide and Increase Profits.* Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2007.