

# “What’s Generation Got To Do With It? Working Across Generations”

*Elevate Conference* at the Kansas Leadership Center, Wichita, KS  
Hosted by Rural Health Education & Services, University of Kansas Medical Center  
Presenters: Tara Morrow & Brad Thomison  
*April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023*

## **Baby Boomers**

*Dedicated workers who value visibility*

The end of World War II and the economic prosperity that followed led to a boom in births; hence the name “Baby Boomers.” *Stereotypes:* Adverse to change, old and out of touch. Give the impression that they don’t care about the younger generations’ ideas. (Born 1946 – 1964)

### **Characteristics of Baby Boomers:**

- **They value visibility into their work.** This can make remote work environments challenging for them. In a recent GetApp survey, 48% of small business employees over the age of 56 said that their job satisfaction was higher when they were working in the office or worksite.
- **They have had to adapt to technology.** Unlike the generations that came after them, boomers were not born into technology. By the time commercial Internet access was being sold to customers in 1995, boomers were well into adulthood, with the youngest of them 31 years old and the oldest, 49.
- **They are retiring later than previous generations.** Improved life expectancy combined with baby boomers’ strong work ethic has led to a majority of them retiring later than previous generations. According to Gartner, 36% of the current workforce in the United States is made up of employees above 65 years of age, and this percentage is expected to increase to 45% by 2028. Japan, Germany and Italy are also facing a “silver tsunami,” with more than 20% of their populations above the age of 65.

### **What you should do for Baby Boomers at your Workplace:**

- **Recognize them for their accomplishments.** Baby boomers place value on the organizations they work for, the positions they hold and the duration with which they stayed with a company. Acknowledging their accomplishments will improve your chances of retaining them.
- **Create a culture welcoming of an aging workforce.** Ageism can be subtle or overt, but either way, it violates the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act*, which protects individuals age 40 or above. Regardless of their age, your employees should be offered development opportunities, access to training, acknowledgment of their performance, and regular feedback and coaching.

### **Communication that works for Boomers:**

- **Make time for face-to-face interactions.** Growing up without digital communication means that boomers are more amenable to interaction in group meetings. If your organization is fully remote, video conferencing a few times a week is a great way to imitate in-person interactions.
- **Most comfortable with using the phone at work.** It’s a close second to face-to face.

### **Value Boomers Bring:**

- **They are competitive and driven.** When boomers reached working age, they faced higher competition for jobs because of the rise in population. This led to a generation of determined workers who take pride in their career. They are part of the innovation from which today’s businesses were framed. Use their knowledge base and build on it.

# Generation X

## *Independent, entrepreneurial, and educated*

Though there are theories about the origins of the moniker “X,” many believe that the “X” refers to an unknown variable or to a desire not to be defined. *Stereotypes:* Bleak, cynical, workaholic and expect that to be the norm for everyone. (Born 1965 – 1980)

### **Characteristics of Gen X:**

- **They are well educated.** The decline of manufacturing jobs at the time Gen Xers were leaving for college led to a generation that used education as a means for professional advancement.
- **They value autonomy.** Often the children of two working parents, the “latch key” generation became independent and learned to solve problems on their own early on in life.
- **They are comfortable with technology.** Gen Xers grew up on MTV, video games, and cable news. Because of that, Gen Xers are very comfortable with technology like computers and smartphones, along with learning new software or programs.
- **They value a flexible work-life balance.** Now sandwiched between taking care of their parents and their children, Gen Xers ranked time off as the number one employment perk.

### **What you should do for Gen Xers at your Workplace:**

- **Offer leadership opportunities.** Gen Xers are ready to step into leadership roles as baby boomers retire, and their direct communication style and hands-off approach to getting things done make them excellent managers.
- **Enable them to continue to learn.** Gen Xers value education. Offering opportunities to continue their education can improve their job satisfaction and likelihood to stay.
- **Offer work flexibility.** A survey found that 53% of employees between the ages of 46 and 55 felt that work-life balance is better while working remotely. Gen X employees are finding that working remotely has helped improve their work-life balance.

### **Communication that works for Gen X:**

- **They choose email when they can.** Generation X was the first generation to embrace digital communications in the workplace (and in their lives). The earliest adopters of email, they became comfortable with writing as their primary method of communication at work.

### **Value Gen Xers Bring:**

- **They are hardworking and resourceful.** Figure out ways to involve them in problem solving situations and support their ideas. Use Gen Xers to bridge the gap of communication between the Boomers and the younger generations.

# Millennials (General Y)

## *Collaborative and Impact-Oriented/Focused*

This group got the name “millennials” because the oldest of them were entering adulthood at the turn of a new millennium (2000). *Stereotypes*: Entitled, lazy. Often seen as the “me” generation, self-obsessed and unwilling to serve their time and pay their dues for career advancement. (1981 – 1996)

### **Characteristics of Millennials:**

- **They are digital natives.** Early versions of wi-fi were available starting in 1990, which means that millennials grew up with the internet and have watched technology like virtual reality and artificial intelligence grow from their early stages. This exposure has led to a generation with an intuitive knowledge of technology.
- **They are amenable to feedback.** Most millennials are currently in either an entry-level, intermediate, or mid-level position. As such, they are focused on their own professional development and place a lot of value on feedback and mentorship from their managers.
- **They look for meaning and impact in their work.** As the earliest generation to grow up with the internet, most millennials feel connected to a global context and want their work to have a meaningful impact on the world around them.

### **What you should do for Millennials at your Workplace:**

- **Provide ample opportunities for collaboration.** Collaborating on projects appeals to millennials’ desire to consider viewpoints different from their own, because when multiple minds work together, there’s bound to be different ideas brought to the table. Even if the nature of their work is independent, you can direct them to someone they can bounce ideas off or who can give feedback on their projects.
- **Set up an anonymous employee suggestion box.** Millennials want their voices to be heard. One way to gather their input is through a digital suggestion box. There are tools designed to serve this purpose, but you can also just create an email address that employees can send their ideas and feedback to.
- **Explain the impact and importance of their contributions.** As we mentioned earlier, millennials are motivated by work that is impactful. Help them understand your organization’s mission and how it makes people’s lives or the world at large a better place. More importantly, consistently measure and share the impact of their performance on the rest of the business.

### **Communication that works for Millennials:**

- **They prefer written communication.** Many millennials grew up texting instead of calling friends and family. They prefer text communications because they can send and receive short messages that get to the point. As a result, they dislike talking on the phone.

### **Value Millennials Bring:**

- **They prefer/expect to collaborate.** According to recent survey, 61% of millennial workers say collaborating across many teams is critical to them staying at a job. They would rather approach their work with consideration for different points of view than just take direction from the top-down. Engage multiple millennial voices in decision-making.
- **They are motivated by meaningful work.** Millennials doing work they are passionate about is a top factor when considering job opportunities in the future. Use millennials preferences on work to use their creativity, leverage their talent, and make an impact on others.

# Generation Z

*Optimistic, yet risk-averse group*

Also known as Gen Z or “zoomers”. The term “zoomer” is a portmanteau of “(Generation) Z” and “boomer.”  
*Stereotypes:* Disloyal, short attention span, addicted to technology, can’t handle face-to-face interactions. (Born 1997 – 2015)

## Characteristics of Gen Zs:

- **They expect to work with modern technology.** Gen Z were born into a digital world, so it makes sense that they expect technology to be interwoven into their jobs. The majority use multiple tools for everything from personal organization, to storing files, and learning and development.
- **They’re breaking away from institutional structures.** Gen Z is inclined to take a non-traditional approach to their education, finances, and work. For example, they are investing their money in cryptocurrency and in college they are using tutorial videos, online classes, and real-world experience to tailor their learning towards their unique, personal goals.
- **They want stability AND flexibility.** Events like the Great Recession and the student loan crisis have caused Gen Zers to focus on generating security through their choices. They also want work environments that offer flexibility in place and time. Pay and benefits and the option to work remotely are two of the most important factors for those 18 to 25 years old when considering a job post-pandemic.

## What you should do for Gen Z at your workplace:

- **Prioritize fostering a diverse and inclusive workforce.** As the most racially and ethnically diverse generation to date, Gen Zers expect diversity to be the norm.
- **Offer a variety of development opportunities.** In “Making Way for Gen Z”, Gartner claims that broadening their skillset and gaining relevant experiences are the two top priorities for Gen Zers at work. As such, it’s essential to offer them development opportunities like on-the-job training, mentoring from experienced coworkers, and eLearning programs.
- **Embrace flexibility.** Embracing a hybrid work environment that allows Gen Zers to work remotely and in-person is a great way to offer them flexibility as well as facetime with their coworkers.

## Communication that works for Gen Z:

- **Prefer written communication.** Unlike millennials, Gen Zers can’t remember a time before smartphones. So, they too may prefer written communications, and they also expect a fast response to their messages. They are less comfortable with phone conversations, as they have never used their phone for voice messaging.

## Value Gen Zers Bring:

- **They value social responsibility and diversity.** Gen Z has grown up with immediate access to the internet, news, and social media. In fact, social media has allowed them to express their thoughts on political and cultural issues before they were old enough to vote. Gen Z wants to work for companies that take inclusion and ethics seriously. This generation wants to work for companies they trust to do the right thing.

## Websites/Resources:

- <https://www.getapp.com/resources/characteristics-of-different-generations-in-the-workplace/>
- <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/workplace-generational-communication-gaps/>
- <https://www.forbes.com/sites/tracybrower/2022/08/28/what-the-generations-want-from-work-new-data-offers-surprises/?sh=19e8a59b3f32>
- <https://hbr.org/2021/08/how-to-manage-a-multi-generational-team>