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1 HOUR
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From Gen Z to Baby Boomers
Working with Multiple Generations

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

Lead different generations more successfully through an understanding of traits and work preferences

No matter where you work as a certified dietary manager, good leadership skills are applicable to every setting. But when multiple generations coexist in the workforce, effective management can be challenging. You can lead these different generations more successfully when you better understand the defining traits and work preferences of each cohort.

GENERATIONAL COHORTS

Generational cohorts are rough groupings of people by their year of birth. Growing up at the same time, each group was shaped by cultural and world events that affected their values and opinions—creating common characteristics.

In today's workforce, you're likely to encounter four different generations of employees:

- **Baby Boomers**: Born in 1946-1964; currently 56 to 74 years old
- **Generation X**: Born in 1965-1980; currently 40 to 55 years old
- **Millennials**: Born in 1981-1994; currently 26 to 39 years old
- **Generation Z**: Born in 1995-2012; currently 8 to 25 years old

Keep in mind the characteristics of each generation are a bit of a generalization. After all, you and your friend born in the same year may have completely different perspectives.

However, research on traits and behaviors shows there are defined shifts in averages between these different generations.

In other words, don't assume being part of a generation governs how an individual will act. Rather, use the generalizations as a starting point for understanding possible differences in work preferences. Embrace that knowledge to develop empathy and become a better communicator.

Let's look at key characteristics of each cohort.

Baby Boomers

- Grew up in an improved post-World War II economy; more affluent than previous generations.
- Shaped by cultural events like civil rights movements, Woodstock, and feminism – many felt invested and involved in causes.
- Optimistic outlook about life and work.
- Biggest consumers of traditional media (like books and newspapers), but becoming increasingly adept at technology.
- Most likely to believe hard work, long hours, and seniority are necessary to achieve movement in an organization. As such, younger generations sometimes criticize Boomers for an outdated career perspective.

Generation X

- Shaped by changing family dynamics—increased divorce rates among their parents.
- Coined as the original "latch-key kids," they were frequently left alone after school as their parent(s) worked. As such, they're generally known to be incredibly self-reliant.
- More skeptical than other generations, thanks in part to the increasing divorce rates and several corporate scandals.
- Involved in development of initial computer technology (i.e. Microsoft).
- Since many of their parents "lived to work," Gen X took a contrary motto of "working to live." In other words, work is an important part of their life —but because it is a means to afford the other parts like family time, hobbies, or vacations.

Millennials

- Often had somewhat doting parents. Grew up in a time where there was increased focus on making all individuals feel special and accepted. As such, older generations may criticize Millennials as being entitled or over-confident.

- Defining events in their lives included widespread Internet availability and the development of platforms like Facebook. They're adept at social media.
- Well educated, tech-savvy, and appreciate diversity.
- Combination of student loan debt and 2008 recession led to financial instability for some Millennials. Many are taking on additional jobs or "side hustles."

Generation Z

- Defining events in their lives included the first black president, instant access to phones/WiFi, and the explosion of social media.
- Appreciate diversity in many forms – racial, ethnic, and sexual orientation.
- Accustomed to instantaneous digital communication. May still struggle with good in-person communication.
- Researchers anticipate they'll be more financially conservative; may be more pragmatic about focusing on secure careers. However, many don't believe in the "American Dream" anymore, so a subset may go towards careers that aren't prosperous but fulfill a passion.

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Tips for Managing Across Generations

BABY BOOMERS

Interact in-person. Boomers are generally more comfortable with face-to-face interactions compared to digital interactions. Consider this when it comes to the interview process, performance evaluations, or addressing a concern.

Recognize hard work to retain. While younger generations are more likely to rotate through many jobs in their lifetime, Boomers value job security. Recognizing their hard work and leveraging their skills can make them feel appreciated and happy with their current role, leading to long-term retention.

Explore group learning—like in-services or team-building activities. Boomers can thrive in a group setting and it allows them to help younger generations.

Think about retirement—a major concern for many Boomers. While you may not control your company's retirement benefits, you can periodically ask HR to review those benefits with employees—or ask to bring in a representative from the plan for sit-down meetings.

Consider corporate wellness. Many in this generation are managing a chronic health condition, like high blood pressure or diabetes. If your company can include corporate wellness programs, it may keep your Boomers healthier longer—leading to better retention.

GENERATION X

Be transparent—as much as makes sense for your company. Gen X is characterized by being skeptical yet adaptable. If you're trying to shield Gen X employees from problems, it might help to loop them in (when appropriate). Not only will this help them trust you as a manager, but it may give you some new ideas for solutions.

Promote work-life balance. Often home by themselves as kids, Gen X employees may not want to miss out on too much time from their own kids' lives. Do you offer staggered shifts? "Mother's hours"? Part-time positions? All of these may help encourage acquisition and retention.

Add (low-cost) value. Gen X embraces the "work to live" motto. Can your company offer any low-cost benefits that support this? For example, consider partnering with a gym that provides a discount for employees, or a farm that offers CSA delivery to your site. Both would cost your company nothing but offer work-life value to the employee.

Avoid micromanaging. This generation typically appreciates more autonomy. If you have a tendency to hover, consider taking a step back and observing how Gen X performs with a little more freedom.

MILLENNIALS

Ask for their input and advice. Millennials in particular value sharing their thoughts, so asking them for input can make their day and can provide you with an unexpected perspective.

Make them feel special. Think of low-cost, low-time ways that can make your Millennial employees feel special. Examples could include regular praise for a job well done or a hand-written card on their one-year work anniversary.

Recognize financial instability. Many Millennials are dealing with shaky finances due to high student loan debt. Is there a way your company can help with this, leading to better retention? This might include competitive pay or raises after a certain time frame.

Use their skills. Gen Z may be the most digitally connected, but Millennials have been in the workforce longer. They may better understand your specific organizational technology, like POS systems or EMRs. Ask them about ways they might improve business systems, or work with them to facilitate technology training for new employees.

Address stress. This is a major concern among many Millennials. Perhaps your company can offer corporate wellness programming that targets stress relief, or simply send regular reminders about your organization's EAP (employee assistance program).

GENERATION Z

Embrace the digital world. To attract Gen Z employees, create strong online branding with the ability to apply for positions online. Similarly, consider offering online training (for example, in allergy awareness) rather than only in-person sessions.

Get tech advice. Allow Gen Z employees to offer input about process improvements. This is the most tech-savvy generation to date, so they may have creative solutions that other generations might not have considered.

Teach rather than tell. Try approaching Gen Z in a style of mentorship and coaching, rather than top-down management. They appreciate collaborative relationships that help them grow and learn in their position.

Think about retention. Gen Z employees are young and have a full career ahead of them. Are there ways your organization can help support them (and thus retain them longer)? For example, is there a formal training you could offer to help some of your foodservice employees pursue their CDM, CFPP credential?

Help with in-person communication. Have empathy that in-person communication may be a struggle for some who rely predominantly on digital communication. Gently help them with these skills.

MANAGING A MULTI-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Using the same management style across all these generations is comparable to a company trying to market to everyone. You've probably heard this saying from Meredith Hill – "when you speak to *everyone*, you speak to *no one*."

In other words, effective management is being able to understand and empathize with all the different types of people you work with; communicating and leading them in a way that connects with their values and preferences. Some key constructs apply across the board, and then specific considerations may be relevant for each generation.

EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT is being able to understand and empathize with all the different types of people you work with.

Tips Across All Generations

Bring multiple generations together. Whether it's to work on a project, enjoy a coffee break, or participate in a team-building activity – find ways to encourage employees of different generations to connect. Learning from each other helps bridge generational gaps.

Offer mentoring opportunities. Experienced employees can help mentor newer employees. According to the National Restaurant Association Education Foundation, 40 percent of Millennial and Gen Z restaurant employees believe that mentorship helps them build better job skills, and 38 percent say it helps improve their confidence.

Don't discriminate. This goes in any direction— whether it's a Millennial manager joking about "outdated Boomer advice," or a Boomer manager rolling his eyes about the "lack of work ethic in Millennials." Overcome your own biases for more effective leadership.

Consider multiple methods of communication, including print, digital, and in-person. This will help ensure all generations receive their preferred method of communication.

Be willing to jump in when needed. All generations appreciate a manager that is willing to get their hands dirty when short-staffed.

Use the **ACORN** framework, as described by Hahn, to help shape your leadership across all generations:

- **A**ccommodate employee differences.
- **C**reate workplace choices.
- **O**perate from a refined management style.
- **R**espect competence and creativity.
- **N**ourish employee retention.

A FINAL WORD

There's no one-size-fits-all approach to managing a multigenerational workforce, but understanding their characteristics and preferences (despite that these are generalizations) can be a start. While a workforce with varying ages presents challenges, it also brings together a dynamic group of opinions, values, experiences, and skills. When met with a strong leader, this can actually result in more efficient work and stronger patient, student, or client care. **E**

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II This Level II article assumes that the reader has a foundation of basic concepts of the topic. The desired outcome is to enhance knowledge and facilitate application of knowledge to practice.

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1. How do generational cohorts relate to workplace values, behaviors, and preferences?
   A. Everyone in a specific generation will act the same at work
   B. Some generations are better at hard work than others
   C. There are shifts in averages for traits and preferences across different generations

2. Which generation was born in 1965-1980, making them currently 40 to 55 years old?
   A. Baby Boomers
   B. Generation X
   C. Millennials

3. Which generation is more likely to believe that hard work and seniority are important to achieving movement in an organization?
   A. Baby Boomers
   B. Generation X
   C. Millennials

4. Which generation grew up in a time when there was increased focus on making all individuals feel special?
   A. Baby Boomers
   B. Generation X
   C. Millennials

5. What leadership approach would be most applicable to managing a Generation X employee?
   A. Teach them good communication skills
   B. Explore group learning
   C. Avoid micromanaging

6. What organizational approach would be most applicable to acquiring and retaining Gen Z employees?
   A. In-person applications
   B. Formal training to help with career development
   C. "Mother's hours" for employees

7. Which management strategy can help bridge the gap between multiple generations?
   A. Offering only in-person communication
   B. Embracing traditional top-down leadership
   C. Offering mentoring opportunities

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