

Boomers, X'ers and the Y's Oh My, What's a Manager to Do?

written by vickyp | August 26, 2013



Tips for understanding, managing and motivating your multi-generational workforce

Half of today's Canadian workforce is over 40 or under 40 depending on your perspective. Over the past 5 years there has been an increasing amount of chatter about the generational divide in the Canadian workplace. Although some of the Golden Oldies (Goldies; 1925-1945) remain in the workplace the Baby Boomers (1946 -1964), Generation X (1965 -1981) and Gen Y, (1982-1999) dominates. Different generations with different abilities and expectations mashing up together in the rapidly changing labour market require different approaches in management style to achieve success.

Snapshots of Generational Differences

Different life experiences and life stages impact how we interact with our world. Someone from a different generation is like someone from a different culture. Taking the time to consider the different perspectives each generation brings into the workplace.

Baby Boomers

- **Snapshot Key Words:** social, self-absorbed, idealistic, over achievers, health conscious, optimistic, determined, new experience seekers.
- **Life Stage:** Most are married, often more than once, half do not have children, and only 1/3 are grandparents. Many Baby Boomers are ready to reduce working hours, but do not want quit. Many Baby Boomers seek travel opportunities, and want to have fun and stay healthy.
- **Motivated by:** the opportunity to spend time with people they want to spend time with, be recognized for their achievements and knowledge, continue to contribute and learn and experience new things on their own terms.
- **Management Tip:** Look them in the eye: Boomers value a handshake, face time and collaboration when brainstorming, learning and reporting. This means keeping texts or emails to a minimum when you seek consultation and agreement. However, getting boomers comfortable with video, social and text engagement can help

bridge the divide between them and their more virtually inclined colleagues or clients. Walking them through, step-by-step, technology or new processes and procedures is the best way to get them on board with changes.

Gen X

- **Snapshot Key Words:** Non-affiliated, free agents, many responsibilities, value diversity, realistic, financial security, open to alternatives, non-conformists, spread thin
- **Life Stage:** Of this 'best educated' generation 2/3 are parents, half are divorced and 60% own their own homes. Many are multiple careerists, combining many jobs with self-employment. An individual from the Generation X might support himself with micro-entrepreneurs and freelancing all while balancing responsibilities at home.
- **Motivated by** the need for opportunities that help them achieve financial security and meet their need for flexibility, challenge and diversity. They also seek flexibility and want to spend time with children, spouses, or their own projects.
- **Management Tip:** Back off and focus on work: Gen X has slogged it out unrecognized in the up and down workforce for years where they learned to be self-sufficient, independent risk takers. Tell them what you want from them, give them a series of deadlines and then leave them alone. As a smaller demographic they do not frequently socialize with their older colleagues and may be less inclined to participate in workplace games, fun and social opportunities. For them, work is work. Work is not family. Consider moving them through teams and projects and giving them ongoing challenges to keep them motivated. They prefer a reward of time to a pat on the back.

Gen Y

- **Snapshot Key Words:** Causes, family, friends, generosity, community, connection, pragmatic, involved, clingy, stability, tolerance, sustainability, prosumers
- **Life Stage:** Generally unencumbered by responsibilities, this generation often stays close to home, participates and volunteers in their community, and enjoys keeping up on "cool" trends.
- **Motivated by** the opportunity to contribute at work, at home, locally and globally, and by recognition for their presence and input.
- **Management Tip:** Connect and Praise. Frequent and brief contacts through technology as they like to check in and hear back. Offer them many opportunities to work towards rewards. Do not try to limit their use of to their PED (personal electronic devices) but provide them with guidelines or boundaries for their appropriate workplace use. They seek constant feedback and input, you do not need to respond back in great detail, a few words or pointing them in the direction will enable them to find the information on their own.

Tips for Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y Integration:

Connect **Boomers with Gen Y.** Generation Y folks can 'reverse mentor' Baby Boomers on today's workplace technologies. This partnership encourages relationship building but be wary of the development of an uneven relationship. Boomers need the opportunity to mentor Gen Y in return. If a Boomer mentors a member of Generation Y, he or she introduces workplace knowledge, expectations and processes to them. This may lead to recognition of value on both sides of the divide. Boomers need to understand that Gen Y wants to help make decisions even if they are not ready to fully contribute.

Gen X may be less interested in being mentored by boomers or mentoring younger colleagues. Instead put them on short-term projects with boomers and partner them

with Gen Y to complete a task. Gen Y are often great information gatherers and communicators and Gen X better at analyzing and understanding how to practically apply the information.

Gen X and Y often prefer work from anywhere flexibility that can be difficult for boomers to relate to. Find a balance that includes opportunities for boomers to meet with their younger colleagues face-to-face during regularly scheduled business hours, even if Gen X and Y 'video chat in' some of the time.

Gen X has the ability to be the perfect leaders and managers for **Gen Y and the upcoming Gen A0 (always on)** because of their ability to embrace rapidly changing opportunities and diversity. However, they often do not seek management roles. Preparing Gen X for management now is important for tomorrow. Offer them project leadership and provided management training opportunities so they are ready to guide the next generations through the constant change of the new post-industrial revolution economy.

Sources:

[Adecco: Managing Multigenerational workforce](#)

[Managing a Multigenerational Workforce](#)