



Managing the Generation Gap

What's the Meaning of Work?

While research shows that co-workers in [different generations](#) work well together overall, one of the most common causes of tension among the generations has to do with the meaning of work itself.

Whether it's about acceptable work hours, pulling weight, or pulling rank, the views of what work is – and should be – vary widely across the pool of generations. In order to better manage the tension that can arise in your workplace, it's important to understand how each generation feels about the meaning of work.

What work looks like. According to a recent report by the Conference Board, top executives worldwide recently said their top concern is the ability of employees to excel in execution. But, there's a lot of finger-pointing regarding work ethic among the generations. A recent Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) report on generational differences showed that Traditionalists think Gen Xers and Millennials don't know what an honest day's work is. Characterized as workaholics, both Traditionalists and Boomers place great value and self-worth in climbing the traditional corporate ladder. At the same time, the report said employees in these groups, often those with seniority, tend to think their company owes them something and thus have poorer productivity than employees who report to them, a fact that's duly noted and disdained by younger generations. Millennials and Gen Xers often think that knowledge as well as the amount and quality of work a person contributes should outrank tenure and job title. Promoting mentoring among the generations makes everyone accountable for their performance, decreasing conflict about work ethic among different age groups.

How workplaces should be structured. Traditionalists and Boomers, comfortable with structure and command and control style, place value on strict organizational hierarchies, experience, job titles, and knowing how to navigate office politics. Gen Xers and Millennials, who value innovation and collaboration, at times appear to resist authority or bypass the chain of command. Highly-educated but with fewer years in the workforce, they often complain when employees are promoted because of tenure rather than qualifications and knowledge. But, the workplace is quickly moving away from a strictly traditional organizational structure. In fact, SHRM reports that according to HR professionals, 90% of organizations have instances of older workers reporting to younger supervisors. Offering leadership training can help relieve the tension over workplace structure and place an emphasis on mutual respect.

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Upcoming Luncheons/Events

- “Legislative Update” 2/20/08 @ 11:45am. Speaker: Jeanine DeBacker



Managing the Generation Gap (con't)

How work is done. As the more technologically savvy and team-oriented generations Gen Xers and Millennials tend to place a high value on innovation, advanced technology, and collaboration. This often means they favor scrapping the tried-and-true ways that Traditionalists and Baby Boomers see as proven, effective processes. To help mitigate conflict on work processes, teach Gen Xers and Millennials how to effectively research and pitch new ideas in terms they value Traditionalists and Boomers, like the bottom line, productivity, and return on investment. Communicating openly and promoting training for new technologies can help Traditionalists and Boomers accept change.

Where work takes place. Most Traditionalist and Boomer employees prefer in-person meetings, structured office settings, and professional attire. Gen Xers and Millennials are more comfortable with relaxed environments, telecommuting, teleconferencing and other innovations that allow traditional "work" to take place in a setting outside the office. As the meaning of place in work changes, however, an increasing number of Traditionalists and Boomers are finding the value of a multi-place approach to work. Taking a flexible approach to work settings will appeal across the generations. Research shows that recruiting and retention are enhanced by taking this stance, and productivity doesn't usually take a hit; in fact, it often increases.

When work happens. According to SHRM research, 24% of HR professionals report observing frequent conflict about acceptable work hours among the generations, making it the biggest source of inter-generational tension. Many Gen Xers and Millennials feel more productive when not tied to the traditional office hours Traditionalists and Baby Boomers value. To appeal to differing views of work schedules and help promote appreciation and respect among the generations, consider offering a flexible work schedule policy that allows both traditional office hours and flexible options.

By understanding the different generational views of work, you can help prevent inter-generational conflict and handle it when it arises. Check out next month's article to learn how to manage the generation gap concerning pay and benefits.

Article brought to you by [Express Personnel](#)

Contact Shannon Gilbert-Weaver @ 209-522-1574 for more information

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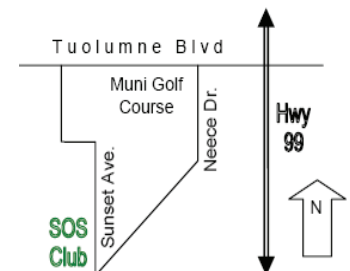
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Laughs and Horror Stories

A sales rep, an administration clerk and their manager are walking to lunch when they find an antique oil lamp.

They rub it and a Genie pops out. The Genie says, "I'll give each of you just one wish". "Me first! Me first!" says the admin clerk. "I want to be in the Bahamas, driving a speedboat, without a care in the world".

Puff! She's gone. "Me next! Me next!" says the sales rep. "I want to be in Hawaii, relaxing on the beach with my personal masseuse, an endless supply of Pina Colodas and the love of my

life". Puff! He's gone. "OK, you're up", the Genie says to the manager. The manager says, "I want those two back in the office after lunch".

Moral of the story:

Always let your boss have the first say.