

The Generational Leader

How to effectively manage and lead the generations in your workplace

Viewpoints on Work

Silent Generation (1925-1942)

Background Information: Silents were part of “The Greatest Generation” who made the world safe for democracy. Major leaders of the Civil Rights and women’s movements are from this generation.

Silents in the Workplace

- Wonder where loyalty went
- Do not understand job hoppers
- Feel comfortable with hierarchies
- Solve problems by gathering opinions
- Like tried and true ways of doing things
- Loyal
- Responsible
- Have a strong work ethic

What Matters Most to Silents

- 1) The work itself
 - Silents will learn new skills in order to be more effective in their present job. They will not learn skills just to make themselves more marketable.
- 2) The people they work with
 - Silents like strong leaders with proven track records. Thus, younger leaders have to prove themselves.

Leading the Silent Generation

To successfully lead the Silent Generation, clear guidelines, policies, and principles are best. These are viewed as tried and true ways of being successful. They enjoy background information and processes (i.e. knowing why something is the way it is). Silents will more than likely have put in the most time in an organization. Utilize their experience and knowledge and have them pass on what they know to younger generations.

Baby Boomers (1946-1960)

Background Information: Boomers have the idealism and optimism of the late 60’s/early 70’s. They had a child-centered upbringing and are often referred to as the “me generation”.

Boomers in the Workplace

- Work is viewed as just a necessity to survive and is something that everyone must do
- Want to make themselves more marketable and do so by going back to school
- Feel they need to make themselves more marketable since many organizations are downsizing
- Strong work ethic
- Work best with clear goals and guidelines with flexibility and freedom in accomplishing goals

What Matters Most to Boomers

- Respect
- Recognition for paying their dues as well as their expertise
- Mentoring younger staff
- Flexibility and authority to try new things
- Having their ideas factored in the decision making process
- Self-improvement
- Constructive feedback
- Balance between family and work

Leading Baby Boomers

As a leader, show respect for Baby Boomers and do not overlook the experience they have brought to the organization. Learning opportunities are great for new hires, but it would be beneficial for you to utilize the expertise of Baby Boomers and allow them to mentor younger generations. In fact, boomers do not like bosses who spend large amounts of time and energy catering to younger generations. Save time and money and put the experience and expertise of boomers to good use. This will also give boomers a sense of recognition.

Generation X (1965-1977)

Background Information: This generation grew up with high divorce and poverty rates and thus has learned that security lay within themselves and developed an “I can do it myself” attitude.

Xers in the Workplace

- Techno-savvy
- Flexible
- Adaptable
- Job hoppers
- Hardworking
- Open-minded
- Independent
- Productivity is viewed as working smarter (not harder) and having fun in the process
- Enjoy taking risks

What Matters Most to Xers

- Constant learning
- Balance between life and work
- Results
- Extra responsibility
- Creativity
- Opportunities for growth, challenges, and mobility

Leading Generation X

Give Xers a lot of responsibility in order to fulfill their desire to be dedicated to their careers. It would also be appropriate to give Xers plenty of opportunity for growth. If there is no room for growth, Xers will typically start searching for other jobs. Training and/or professional development are good ways in which Xers are able to grow in their careers. Their flexibility calls for leaders to be flexible in return. Offer flexibility in scheduling and the manner in which work gets done.

Generation Y (1978-1985)

Background Information: Generation Y has always been told they can make a difference. This generation thus has a high self esteem and work in record number for social causes.

Yers in the Workplace

- Most techno-savvy generation
- Demanding
- Like challenging work and creative expression
- Like freedom and flexibility (not micromanagement)
- Work best in teams

What Matters Most to Yers

- Challenging, meaningful work that impacts their world
- Collaboration with others
- Team work
- Reaching lofty goals
- Making large salaries
- Strong relationship with their boss
- Good work environment
- Constructive feedback

Leading Generation Y

In order to utilize their creativity, allow Yers to take initiative when completing projects. It would also be beneficial to allow them to work with other motivated individuals within the workplace (such as a boomer or silent who enjoy sharing their expertise) since they enjoy collaborating with others. Since Yers have high self esteem and a desire to reach lofty goals, they would be best suited for being a part of or leading high goal-oriented teams.

Source: *Managing the Generation Mix From Collision to Collaboration* by: Carolyn A. Martin and Bruce Tulgan, 2002

