

The Generational Divide: Communication, Organization and Employee Engagement

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Objectives

- Define generation and the span of years associated with Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials
- Review characteristics, outlook, work ethic, learning styles, and communication preferences of the four generations
- Discuss generational stereotypes
- Discuss the benefit of creating intergenerational teams
- Discuss utilization of different generations of employees based on their strengths and capabilities
- Describe strategies for employee engagement in a workforce comprised of 3-4 generations



A GENERATION can be defined as a group of people who share the same formative experiences

- Birth year is used to define a generation (spans approximately 20 years)
- Each generation shares a unique set of values and traits
- Currently the US workforce is comprised of 4 generations: Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials



Generations

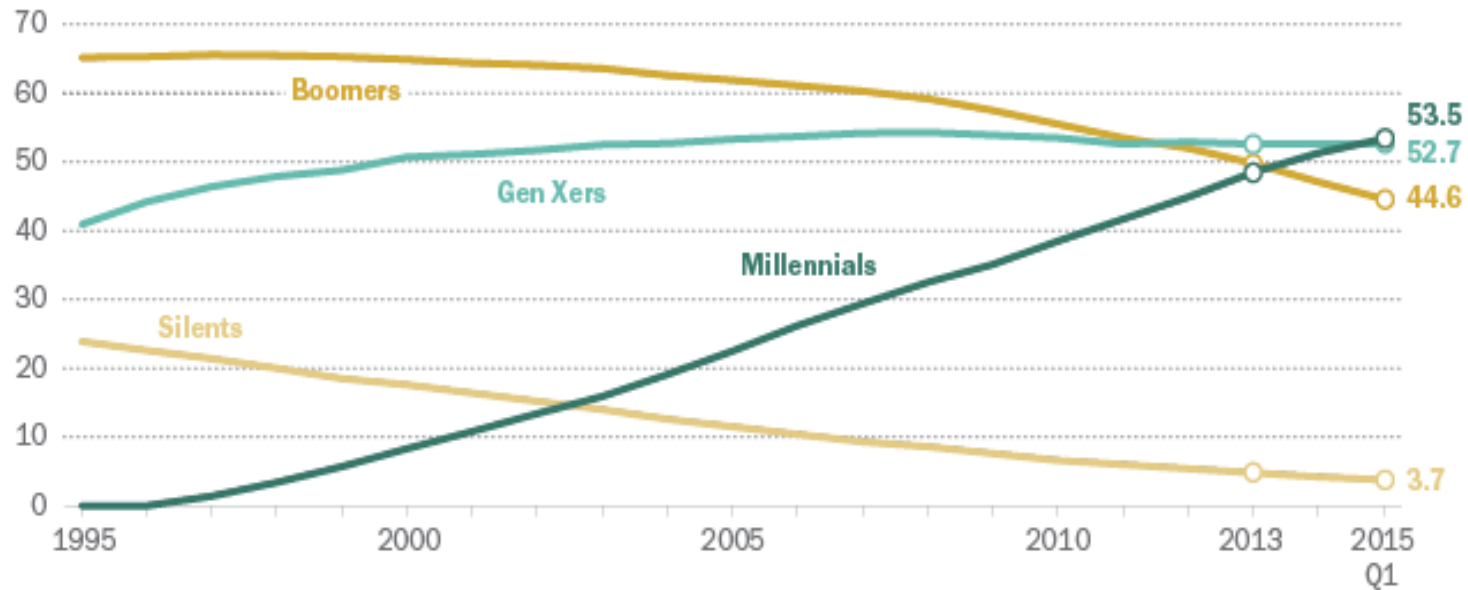
Generation	Birth years
Veterans	1928-1945
Baby Boomers	1946-1964
Generation X	1965-1980
Millennials*	1981-1997

* Data from 2015 indicates that Millennials are the largest generation in the US work force



U.S. Labor Force by Generation, 1995-2015

In millions



Note: Annual averages plotted 1995-2014. For 2015 the first quarter average of 2015 is shown. Due to data limitations, Silent generation is overestimated from 2008-2015.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of monthly 1995-2015 Current Population Surveys, Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)

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Characteristics, Outlook, and Work ethic, Learning styles and Communication preferences

	Veterans	Baby Boomers	Generation X	Millennials
Characteristics	Patriotic/ Loyal	Competitive/ Idealistic	Self-reliant/ Highly Adaptive to Change	Globally concerned/ Realistic
Outlook	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Cautious
Work Ethic	Dedicated	Driven	Free Agent	Self Centered
Learning Styles	Lecture Books	Lecture Books Projectors	Independent Self directed Activities	Participatory Activity- based group work
Communication	Formal Memo	Telephone conversation	Email or Text	Text/Social Media

Generational Stereotypes

“So much of what is going on in our lives is seen through our own generational lens”

- Misleading; giving the wrong idea or impression
- Pervasive; unwelcome influence that spreads widely throughout a group of people
- Assumptive; without proof
- Divert attention from generational strengths

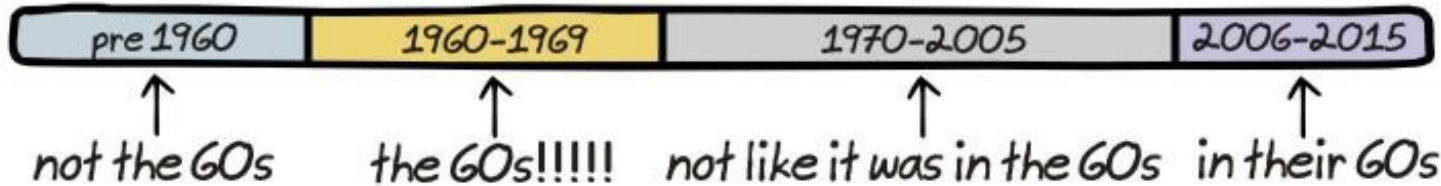


anatomy of generations

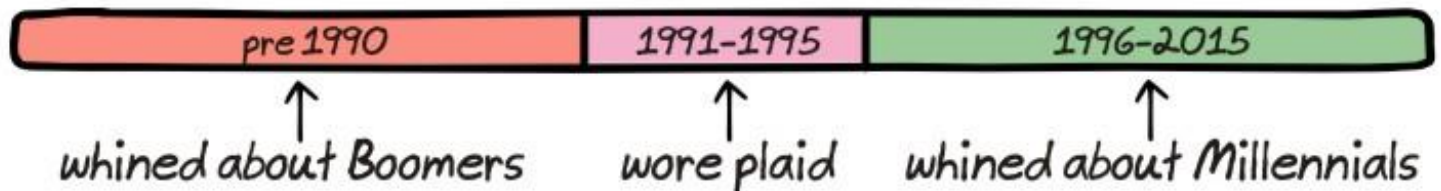
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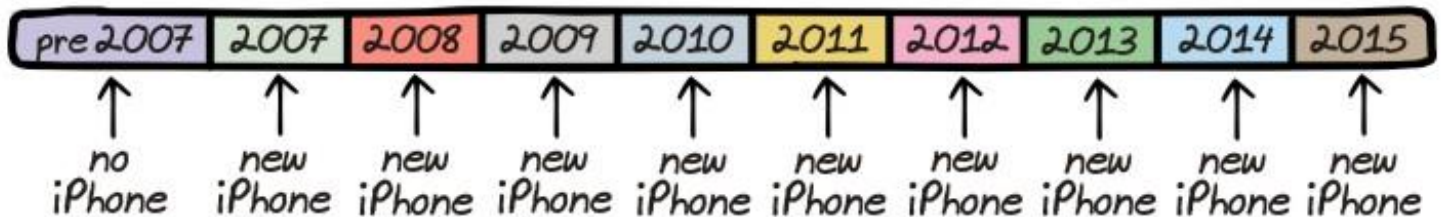
Boomers



Gen Xers



Millennials



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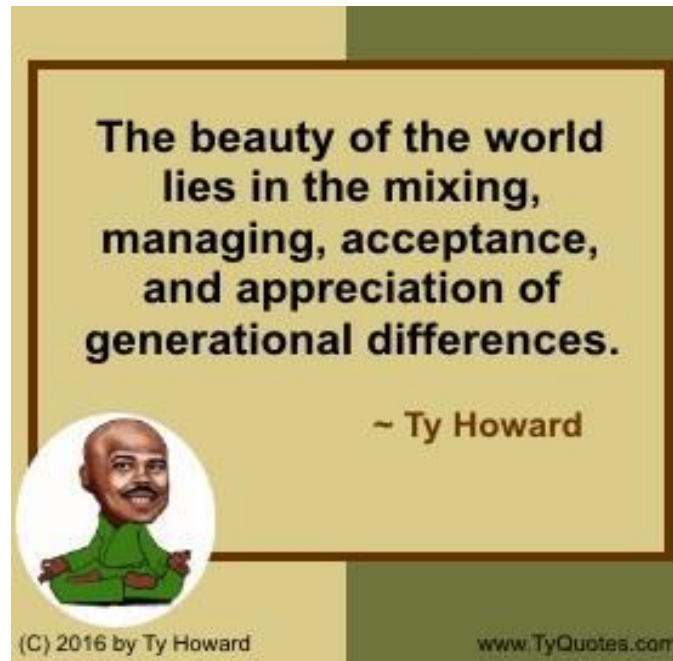


“Generational collisions are among the key management issues being faced by leaders of today's organizations”

How can they be avoided????



“Mixing, managing, acceptance, & appreciation”



Mixing

- The mixing of multiple generations into a cohesive team can benefit the team as well as the organization that the team represents.
- Each generation brings both strengths and weaknesses to the team
- Strengths can be reinforced and weaknesses can be overcome by the mixing generations



Example of mixing for the benefit of the team

Employee #1 is a baby boomer and Employee #2 is a Millennial

Scenario: the lab is going to be implementing a new computer system in one year.

Employee #1 (who has been stereotyped as being “computer illiterate”) is concerned about learning the new system and shares his concerns with the department manager. After that discussion, the manager realizes that there may be other employees on the team that may also fall into that same category.



Example of mixing for the benefit of the team

After thinking about those individuals on the team who have shown interest in additional assignments, the manager chooses to send employee #2 to super user training (with the hope that he/she will become one of the primary trainers in the department).

A few months later, employee #2 attends the super user class, assists the department manager with creating a comprehensive training and competency assessment and acts as the primary trainer for all lab employees on her shift.



Reverse mentoring

- The example that I provided is an example of **Reverse mentoring**
- **Reverse mentoring** is an innovative way to encourage learning and facilitate cross-generational relationships. It involves the pairing of a younger, junior employee acting as mentor to share expertise with an older, senior colleague.
- Using the strengths of one generation can help overcome the weaknesses of another.



Reverse mentoring (Continued)

- The benefit to employee #1 is that employee #2 will always be a resource not only for training but will also be available to ask a computer question in case the department manager is not available.
- The benefit to the department manager and the organization is:
 - The department has a resource (employee #2) for the staff during and after the initial training
 - Improved employee engagement
 - Improved communication
 - Improved trust
- The benefit to employee #2 is that even as a younger and less experienced employee, their strengths are tapped in to (computer savvy) and they feel valuable to the team



Managing

- The key to managing a successful intergenerational team is to be flexible and understand that different generations have different learning styles, communication preferences, and work ethics
 - Tailor training, communication and work schedules to fit the needs of each generation (one size does not fit all)
 - DON'T ever make assumptions; they lead to poor communication and breakdown of trust
 - Be open to suggestions for improvement; all processes should be created in order to fit the needs of all team members



Managing

- Managing intergenerational teams can be challenging.
 - Maintenance and improvement of employee engagement in an uncertain workplace
 - Team morale
 - Bridging of generational differences to avoid collisions
 - “Clashing” personalities
 - Work ethic



Acceptance & Appreciation

Reinhold Niebuhr, an American theologian, wrote the Serenity prayer:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference”

- The prayer was written in 1932 and has become the primary mantra of Alcoholics Anonymous
- When life feels out of control, it’s easy to try to work harder at controlling everything and everyone around us!



Acceptance & Appreciation

- In the workforce, no matter which generation(s) your team is comprised of, both acceptance and appreciation are essential for daily interactions with other team members as well as for correspondence with customers.
- Appreciation has also been linked to employee engagement
- Appreciation can come in many different forms but as a department manager, it's important to use multiple approaches to showing appreciation for your employees (consistent reinforcement).

For example: an employee who lives alone and does not cook (or bring leftovers to work for lunch), may benefit and appreciate a cafeteria voucher rather than a movie theater gift card.



Staff Appreciation

- The example on the previous slide is associated with appreciation of individual employees
- An integral part of employee engagement is in ensuring that your team feels appreciated.
- It's important to recognize staff members both individually and as a group.
- Individual recognition can be accomplished in multiple different ways. Some examples include:
 - A simple face to face thank you for a job well done
 - A gift card for working an extra shift
 - An email or text message to say thanks for staying late



Staff Appreciation

- Staff appreciation should also be handled in group form; for example:
 - Start a staff meeting off with great news about an employee; this doesn't have to be work-related but can be as simple as “Congratulations on becoming a grandmother” or “Let's celebrate Jane's husband getting a promotion”
 - Provide lunch for your team on a holiday
 - Bring bagels in for breakfast after a successful inspection
- Using these (and other types of) appreciative gestures can benefit the team by improving morale, productivity and engagement.



My experiences as a Lab Supervisor

- What happened to my team in 2016.....mass exodus???
- How were new employees hired/chosen?
- How did I (and the remaining team members) keep up the morale during the staffing shortage?
- What did I learn during the past year that can be used to benefit the future of the department?



What happened to my team in 2016.....mass exodus??

- Here's the background information about me and what happened in the department in 2016:
 - I am the Supervisor of a Blood Bank that has 15 employees; I have been the Supervisor of the department since 2002. When I first started in 2002, I was the second youngest in the department. I am now the 4th eldest.
 - From January – August 2016, two full time employees retired (1 Veteran, 1 Baby Boomer), two full timers left (both are Generation Xers); one moved to Florida and the other found a job closer to his home; and one per diem employee (Generation X) left to pursue another career.



What happened to my team in 2016....mass exodus??

- If you do the math, 1/3 of the employees left and the team was left extremely short staffed and in need of help!!!
- It really did feel like a mass exodus!



How were new employees hired/chosen?

- I sent out a plea to the Human Resources (HR) department to begin actively recruiting and send me the applications of individuals who were candidates for the positions.
- After reviewing the applications, I performed phone interviews and then set up “in person” interviews.
 - Phase 1 interviews: candidate met with myself and the Lab Manager
 - Phase 2 interviews were set up for those candidates who were found to have both the technical skills necessary for the position and appeared to be a good “fit” for the team
 - Phase 2 interviews were team interviews:
 - The team that the prospective new employee would work with (i.e. first shift or second shift) with meet with the existing blood bank team members and the Blood Bank Medical Director.



How were new employees hired/chosen?

- By March 2017, the first new full timer was hired for the second shift and he began his training at the beginning of April.
- The other positions were filled slowly for the following reasons:
 - Each time an employee gave his/her notice, the process of rehiring for that position required financial approval for the replacement
 - More phase 1 and phase 2 interviews had to be set up
 - Background checks and initial Occupational Medicine evaluation had to be completed
- The good news is that by December 2016, 4 full time and one per diem position was filled.



How did I (and the remaining team members) keep up the morale during the staffing shortage?

While the department was severely short staffed, morale boosting was an essential part of each day.

- Every day started with some form of staff appreciation; it could be as simple as a thank you to an individual employee for working late on the prior night, to bagels for breakfast, to gift cards for giving up their day off.
- Supervisor presence: “I’m here; what can I help you with?”

Another non-tangible morale boosting process included recruitment of the existing staff’s assistance in building their team:

- Phase 2 interview process
- Even though the interview process may seem mundane at times, rebuilding a team that was going to work well together as well as get along well and provide excellent customer service is important to all generations.



Intergenerational teams

- Every individual (no matter which generation they fall in to) brings their own strengths and weaknesses to a team.
- Some of those strengths and weaknesses appear to come from generational characteristics, experiences from past employment, and social influences.
- By combining multiple different generations into each sub-team (1st shift and 2nd shift), the strengths of one generation have the ability to compensate for the weaknesses of the other.



Intergenerational teams

- The teams that were formed as a part of the 2016 “Blood Bank rebuild” are intergenerational teams:
 - The first shift is comprised of 3 - Baby Boomers, 1 - Generation X, and 1 - Generation Y.
 - The second shift is comprised of 2 - Generation Y employees and 1 - Baby Boomer.
- My experiences in managing intergenerational teams has been extraordinary.
- I had read about the benefits of intergenerational team dynamics but was somewhat skeptical until I had the chance to experience the benefits personally.



What did I learn during the past year that can be used to benefit the future of the department?

Once I got over taking the mass exodus personally, I learned that:

- The staff that I had worked with over the prior 14 years, were a group of extremely dedicated, self motivated, and empathetic individuals.
- The staff that I hired into the new 1st and 2nd shift full time positions (that were originally placed into those positions as an “intergenerational trial”), worked out better than I ever could have imagined that they would.
- Future department hiring will continue to include phase 2 interviewing.
- Don’t ever be afraid to ask for help!







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- “How have careers changed? An investigation of changing career patterns across four generations”, Journal of Managerial Psychology, Vol. 30 Issue: 1, pp. 8-21, 2015
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