

4 Generations 1 Company

by Eric Papp

Today more than ever, we are faced with a unique opportunity in the workforce. For the first time in American history we have four generations working together in the workforce. The word diversity takes on a whole new meaning because of this concept. Not only do we have a diverse workforce, but now we have people of vastly different ages working together. The four generations in the workforce today are the veterans that some refer to as the traditionalists, the baby boomers, generation x, and the millennials or what some call generation y.

The veterans or traditionalists are a group comprised of those individuals that were born between 1920s and 1943. Some of the characteristics that make up this generation are hard-working, value oriented, patriotic, trusting, loyal, and dedicated. There are about 76 million traditionalists in our society today. Some of the incidents that occurred during their time were the Great Depression, World War II, Korean War, the dust bowl, D-Day, and Pearl Harbor. They grew up with heroes such as the Lone Ranger, Superman, Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Winston Churchill, FDR, and General Patton. This generation is used to a very bureaucratic style of leadership and this is the most resistant to change. When this generation entered the workforce, they were trained to show up and get the job done. Business life and personal life were always separate.

In recruiting traditionalists some tips that might help is to have them work part-time. Let them share their valuable experience. Tell them that your company has tradition and try to align their values of family with your company mission. Remember two powerful words when dealing with this generation, please and thank you. Rewarding this generation can be giving them time. They value time with important people in the company and like to know that people are acting upon their experiences. Another reward that this generation also likes are thank you notes. They grew up writing letters and this type of interaction appeals to them. This generation brings an admirable work ethic to the business community, and the US. Department of Health and Human Service reports these workers are as every bit productive as younger employees.

The next generation are the baby boomers born between 1943 and 1964. This is a very competitive generation, composed of about 80 million people. Some characteristics that describe this generation are optimistic, competitive, workaholics, rebellious and willing to succeed. Some of the events that shaped their lives were television sets in their homes, the assassination of President Kennedy, Martin Luther King Jr. speech, landing on the moon, Vietnam, Woodstock, Cuban missile crisis, and the civil rights movement. Some of their heroes were Mahatma Gandhi, John Glenn, Martin Luther King Jr., and President Kennedy. The baby boomers were one of the first generations to challenge authority. They demonstrated this through many protests and the music that they listened to. This generation is used to working many hours, because they were told. "You have to put in many hours and be seen to get ahead." Due to this belief we saw many baby boomers put career over family and divorce rates exploded.

In recruiting this generation one of the biggest benefits to them is providing them with a lifestyle that they can work from home. Many are so accustomed to showing up and working many hours at a particular job so it is appealing to them to work from home. They like to be recognized in front of their peers, so any form of public recognition is received well. Also keep in mind that if you are selling anything this is a great generation to target. They have the largest credit card debt and like to buy nice items. As oppose to the traditionalists who grew up in hard times and pay cash. This generation will gladly charge it.

The third-generation is Generation X anyone born from 1964 to 1981. This generation is about 46 million people. Some characteristics that describe this generation are skeptical, techno-savvy and self-reliant. Many folks in this time grew up in single-parent homes. Some of the events that shaped their lives were the Exxon Valdez tanker spill, MTV, 1980s crime wave, the Challenger disaster, AIDS, stock market crash, and computers. This generation saw their parents work many hours for a company and get little in return. That is why many have the mindset work to live and not live to work.

In recruiting this generation, show the importance of a balance, and flexible work schedule. Some rewards for this generation might be daycare service, allowing them to work four ten hour days and let them spend three days with their family. This generation has been referred to as the lost generation because it is so small and often forgot about.

The last generation is what we call Generation Y anyone born from 1980 to 1999. This generation is comprised of 70 million. This generation is already being called America's next greatest generation. Some characteristics that describe this generation are optimistic, creative, digital techno-efficient, and entrepreneur, service oriented, structured, goal seeking, and team players. Some events that generation y was exposed to, were Columbine, Oklahoma City, Clinton/Lewinsky scandal, and 9/11. The heroes of this generation are Michael Jordan, Larry Bird, Tiger Woods, Mark McGwire, Michael Dell, Christopher Reeves, and Mother Teresa. This generation brings an entrepreneurial spirit and can-do attitude into a work environment that is oftentimes missing. They are willing and eager to get involved and be challenged at work.

In recruiting this generation you want to show where their ideas can impact the company immediately. Also this generation likes to know the reason behind what they are doing. Emphasize the greater mission and overall consciousness of the company. Another technique used to recruit this generation is showing a fun work environment. They grew up where learning was fun and cool. They expect their job to be cool and fun.

When you have to manage different generational workers, seek to find common values that run through your employees and align them to the company's values. Also realize that every generation responds differently to the messages that you put out. They are looking at the world through their experiences and what has impacted them. Everyone responds differently. Just as a winning coach, you have to know your employees and how they respond. By learning some of the generational history you are on your way to building a winning team.

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Eric Papp travels the country speaking to business leaders and organizations. He helps them understand Generation Y employees and customers.

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