



Safe Environments

Healthy Workers

WORKING IN AN INTERGENERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Elderly are delaying retirement, and young people are storming into the workforce. This presents an inevitable forecast of what most workplaces already do and will continue to look like, and that is an age diverse environment. Technically, it is now possible to have five different generations (from Baby Boomers to Generation Z) working together. Majority of the workforce however can be divided into two groups, Millennials (generation born between 1980 and 2000) and Generation X (generation born between 1961 and 1979). Misunderstandings due to the differences between generations can cause conflict and have a negative effect on performance and general satisfaction of work life. Learning about how the other operates and the values they hold can help to understand and relate to each other better, leading to stronger relationships. Diversity in the workplace is a great asset within a team and an organization, but it takes openness to learn about their perspective to reap full benefits.

FIVE THINGS TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT MILLENNIALS ACCORDING TO RESEARCH

1. THEY EXPECT TO BE CARED FOR AT WORK
2. THEY ARE ACHIEVEMENT ORIENTED
3. THEY WANT FLEXIBILITY
4. THEY ARE CONFIDENT
5. THEY CRAVE
FEEDBACK



INTERGENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

GENERATION X

Growing up in late 60s and 70s with traditional parents, Generation X was brought up in a less diverse society than Millennials. Having worked most their lives with Baby Boomers they are slower to express their opinions or make demands at work. Instead, they believe that the right to do that needs to be earned. They view those who comes with demands as entitled. To gain their respect, one must be ambitious, serious, and have a strong work ethic. Gen X are work centered and often sacrifice work life balance for the sake of their job or financial stability, and do not ask for work flexibility as much as Millennials do. They are not as distracted at work as their younger coworkers either. They value the intrinsic rewards that come from their job, and as a result have stronger organizational commitment. It is not a rare occurrence to learn that a Gen X has worked in the same company most of their working life.

GENERATION Y (MILLENNIALS)

Millennials were the first generation to be introduced to computers as children, and they are fast at learning and applying new technology to work and life. They are excited about change but get bored easily – perhaps a result of having the internet in their pockets. Millennials are thought to be raised by ‘helicopter parents’, or parents who acknowledged every effort of their child and rewarded them for participation, telling them they are special. As a result, Millennials are thought to have high self-esteem and confidence. They are achievement oriented, willing to express their thoughts and make moves to advance their careers fast. When it comes to winning their respect, it is interpersonal skills that catch their attention. They want to feel cared for by their employers and coworkers. Millennials have the skills to work in teams. They crave constant feedback, lack of which is perceived as unsatisfactory work. One evident difference from Generation X is their value of work life balance, flexibility and leisure time, something Gen X has always sacrificed. When it comes to pay, they find it important, but prioritize meaningful work over high compensation.

WHEN THE TWO HAVE CONFLICTS

Differences among the generations can create conflict, and not always on good grounds. Often it is misunderstanding the differences that causes problems rather than the differences themselves. Not being able to relate to the values that do not align with ours can create distrust and make us question the other’s competence. For example when striving to work-life balance of a millennial is perceived as laziness and lack of commitment to work by a Gen X, or when tested and true methods are perceived as old and outdated because of little of experience, or when a confident attitude is considered an act of arrogance instead of ambition.

The best way to deal with these conflicts is by being able to listen, and trying to arrive at a compromise. In most situations, both sides could learn from each other. Maybe Gen X needs to learn better work life balance from a Millennial, and maybe a Millennial needs to learn what good work ethic entailed from a Gen X. Be willing to talk openly and with less prejudice can land us to arriving at solutions that are more effective and efficient. Even if compromise isn’t achieved, it’s important to learn to work well together and have a good relationship.

GEN X, THIS IS HOW YOU CAN WORK BEST WITH A MILLENNIAL

- Embrace how millennials work because they are dominating the labour market and will influence industry standards by their presence in the business.
- Use their desire for more feedback as an opportunity to share what you have learned through the years while learning about why they do things the way they do. Do not be afraid of pointing out what you would do differently, but be willing to hear if they are not sold on it and have questions.
- In order to gain their respect, make them feel like you care about them. Interpersonal skills go a long way and help to establish a better relationship that benefits their performance.
- Remember to be motivated and remind them why their work is meaningful. When they see value in what they do, their work ethic will be better and so will be their morale.

MILLENNIAL, THIS IS HOW YOU CAN WORK BEST WITH A GEN X

- Recognize that you may be perceiving their actions wrong because of your bias just as they may be perceiving your actions in light of their prejudices. Explain your position in a way that relates to their values, and accept that they may not agree with it anyways.
- Remember that not all information can be stored in a file. Some data can only be retrieved by being mentored with the knowledge the previous generation has in their head. Generation X will always have the experience that you're yet to have. They need to see how change can be good just as much as you need to learn about what has worked for them in the past.
- Be committed to the organization while you're there, and show that commitment through your work ethic. Speak and act respectably and your older coworkers will note your attitude. Back up your ambition with action and humility, and your confidence will win their hearts instead of push them away.

Regardless of your birth year, you have something to offer to your workplace that the other generation doesn't, and together you complement your team and contribute to the success of your company. In the end, two generations are more similar than we perceive, they just happen to be at different life stages.

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