Generations at Work

The workplace is constantly changing as more generations are working side by side. Some of the Mature/Silent Generation is continuing to work past the traditional retirement age, more Baby Boomers are also delaying retirement, Generation X is becoming a larger portion of the workforce, and Generation Y continues to enter in increasing numbers. The four generations differ in their expectations, assumptions, priorities, and approaches to work and communication, as each generation brings distinct sets of values, attitudes and behaviors to the workplace. Having an understanding of generational characteristics increases our ability to work collaboratively with one another and improves organizational dynamics. This, in turn, reduces workplace conflict, minimizes costly employee turnover, increases productivity, and promotes a positive working environment.

Texas A&M University Staff Generations

The pie chart provides a snapshot of the four generations that are represented at Texas A&M University.

![Pie chart showing the distribution of generations at Texas A&M University]

Generational Characteristics

The following descriptions of generational characteristics apply primarily to individuals who were raised in the United States. While there tends to be identifiable generational attitudes and behaviors, expectations, habits, and motivational influences, each individual is unique. Hence, not every person in a
generation will share all of the characteristics and values with others in the same generation, and some might be born in one generation yet identify more strongly with another.

While not meant to be all encompassing, descriptive information is provided here to give a general understanding of the values and traits that are commonly associated with each generation. Below are some general characteristics of each generation along with major events (“signposts”) that shaped their beliefs and attitudes.

**Matures/Silent Generation**
- Born before 1946, also known as Veterans, Traditionals
- Signposts – Great Depression, World War II, Korean War
- Value loyalty, hard work, punctuality, patriotism
- Respect authority, trust institutions

**Baby Boomers**
- Born between 1946-1964
- Signposts – Civil Rights, Vietnam War, JFK Assassination
- Optimistic, competitive, team oriented, idealistic
- Workaholics, often sacrificing personal life
- Conflicted about authority

**Generation X**
- Born between 1965-1980, also known as Baby Busters, Post Busters, Thirteeners, Twentysomethings
- Signposts – Corporate downsizing, skyrocketing divorce rates
- Created informal work environment, work/life balance concept
- Value flexibility, autonomy, technology, family
- Skeptical towards large corporations
- Question authority

**Generation Y/ Millennials**
- Born between 1981-1999, also known as Generation 2001, Nintendo Generation, Generation Net, Internet Generation
- Signposts – rapid growth of Internet, multiculturalism, 9/11
- Confident, optimistic, sociable, curious, civic minded
- Demand input on decisions
- Thrive on immediate feedback
- Lack loyalty to organization but value interpersonal relationships with colleagues and supervisors
Guidelines for Working with the Different Generations

Research indicates that people’s work preferences and motivational factors are influenced by their generation. Strategies for motivating, retaining, and effectively working with others based on common generational characteristics are listed below.

➢ Working with Matures/Silent Generation
  o Emphasize their loyalty
  o Be open and honest
  o Acknowledge, value, and seek insights from their experience, expertise, and dedication
  o Provide traditional incentives such as plaques
  o Make changes slowly; don’t surprise them
  o Make announcements well in advance
  o Notify them of your experience and credentials
  o Be a degree more formally dressed than your team (if the majority comes from this generation)
  o Speak more formally and professionally
  o Communicate with handwritten memos, letters, and personal notes
  o Use surnames and titles; ask their permission before you address them by their first name
  o Provide clear lines of command

➢ Working with Baby Boomers
  o Be open and honest
  o Emphasize career advancement and opportunities for growth
  o Acknowledge, value, and seek insights from their experience, expertise and dedication
  o Give lots of public recognition and reward their work ethic and long hours
  o Involve in decisions
  o Balance communication between email, voicemail, face-to-face conversations, and meetings
  o Communicate more frequently with phone calls and personal interaction
  o Encourage teamwork and be transparent

➢ Generation X
  o Offer flexibility
  o Respect work/life balance
  o Provide “hands off” supervision
  o Provide variety of tasks and projects
  o Offer frequent and honest feedback; be clear and direct
  o Communicate more with voicemail and email
  o Facilitate flexibility and autonomy in work style and processes
  o Give surprise rewards for unusual achievements
Foster an open, friendly, informal, and fun work environment
Encourage reverse mentoring that pairs the technology savvy younger workers with more traditional seasoned employees

Generation Y/Millennials

- Provide training opportunities
- Encourage community involvement
- Offer to be (or find) a mentor; they enjoy interacting with older generations and learning in a hands-on manner
- Assign them to projects where they can be challenged and grow
- Give them meaningful work
- Be open to new and different ways of working
- Empower and provide instant rewards and feedback
- Ask for their opinion or assistance
- Communicate in a positive manner using instant messaging, blogs, text messages, and emails
- Provide opportunities to work in teams with peers
- Foster a fun and face-paced work environment
- Speak directly and quickly; avoid wordy explanations

Learn More

Visit http://EODinfo.tamu.edu/Generations for information on available training, including a brief online tutorial and an interactive workshop, Bridging the Gap – The Multigenerational Workforce.