



# THE GREAT DIVIDE:

Leading, Motivating, and Retaining  
a Multigenerational Workforce

■ AN SRG PUBLICATION



The baby boomer generation is obsolete; it needs to retire already.  
Millennials are too self-centered to be trusted in team scenarios.  
Generation X has no vision.



Every generation can hurl insults at any other in the workplace.

A cohesive, sustainable organization, however, must pull the best talent from every generation - and teach employees to work together. In fact, the best multigenerational workplaces leverage one another's strengths to sustain competitive advantage.

### **In this special report, you'll find:**

- News on multigenerational workforces: what's changing?
- Best practices for encouraging performance and retention in each generation
- Tips for team building and mentoring across generations

# the next generation(s): what's changing?

**Generation Z is just entering the workforce.**

**Millennials are being groomed for management.**

**Generation Xers have assumed essential leadership roles.**

**Boomers are retiring, but many are still in key positions.**

Today's work teams span multiple generations. Here's what has changed:

- One-third of U.S. employees have a boss who is younger than they are.
- Communication styles and career planning differ dramatically among generations - but commitment to work and vision remains consistent.
- Talent and productivity are outpacing seniority and loyalty as the means to "move up" in many organizations.

Not surprisingly, each generation tends to approach these changes differently. Here's how to get the most out of each generation in your workplace.

# boomer best practices

Born between 1946 and 1964, the baby boomers or “boomers” value loyalty, recognition, and top-down management. They tend to log long hours in the office and prefer face-to-face communication over tech. The recent recession drained many pensions and retirement plans among this group, keeping many of them in the workforce longer.

Get the most out of Boomers by:

- Providing clear rules and expectations,
- Encouraging face-to-face meetings and in-person collaboration, and
- Offering workers with seniority the chance to mentor younger peers.



# gen-x best practices

Generation X totals about 29 percent of the U.S. workforce. Born between 1965 and 1980, they tend to be entrepreneurial, independent, and thrive on direct, constructive feedback.

Get the most out of Generation X by:

- Encouraging them to continue embracing new technologies,
- Breaking down “feedback sessions” into regular events, rather than a single annual review, and
- Structuring departments to allow for pursuit of individual or small-group projects that fit into the business’ overall goals.

# millennial best practices

Millennials, also known as “Generation Y”, were born between 1980 and 1995. They’re the youngest generation in the U.S. workforce. With a worldview shaped by mobile technology and recent recessions, they value flexibility and productivity highly, and they expect to make many job changes in their careers.

Get the most out of Millennials by:

- Shortening the time between their work and manager feedback. Millennials need to know how their work matters.
- Using in-person meetings to encourage contributions and suggestions.
- “Decentralizing” work by focusing on productivity, rather than hours logged in the office.

# generation z: who's next?

“Generation Z”, born around the start of the new millennium, are just beginning to complete their schooling and consider entering the workforce. Although few are actually working, forward-thinking companies are starting to include these workers in their strategic planning.

Demographers predict that Generation Z:

- Will be even more flexible in communication styles than their predecessors, due to a lifetime of comfort with cell phones, the Web, and other devices,
- Are even more concerned about issues of sustainability than previous generations, and
- Emphasize work ethic, etiquette, resilience, fortitude, and self-responsibility.



# cross- generational connections: the big issues

In many workplaces, generations of workers feel like cultures colliding. Here are the biggest “cross-cultural” challenges among the generations at work:

- **Communication.** Boomers value formality and face-to-face discussions; Gen-Xers want to “get it done”; Millennials prefer text-based communication and working remotely.
- **Cultural expectations.** It’s not uncommon for Boomers to measure their work in hours logged, Gen-Xers in projects completed, and Millennials in feedback obtained.
- **Work-life balance.** Boomers grew up hearing that advancement required sacrifice, but Gen-Xers and Millennials who watched both parents work-and, in some cases, lose everything in the recession nonetheless-demand a healthier work-life balance.
- **Negative stereotypes.** The media has done much to drive a wedge between the generations, painting younger workers as tech-obsessed and older ones as destroying the “American dream” after seizing it for themselves.



# cross- generational connections: team building and mentoring



Faced with so many cross-generational challenges, how can a company cope?

Try these tools:

- **Encourage team building on every level.** Leverage Gen-Xers' love of entrepreneurial projects by pairing them with idealistic Millennials or strategic Boomers. Foster both individual connections and company-wide team-building projects, from in-person meetings to wikis.
- **Create many points of contact.** Younger workers in particular want more feedback and more meaningful projects. Teach older employees to delegate and to provide this feedback.
- **Skip stereotypes.** Managers of any age who maintain an "open-door" policy and listen carefully in the face of conflict are better equipped to defuse intergenerational tensions and build consensus.
- **Encourage mentoring-in both directions.** Mentors have much to teach mentees about company culture and efficiency; mentees can provide innovative views and point out opportunities to mentors. Encourage relationships based on reciprocity, not just instruction.



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