

The Successful SUPERVISOR

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Tips from  LifeSolutions

My younger workers are driving me crazy! Constant texting and their “sense of entitlement” annoy and frustrate those of us who take work a little more seriously. How do I manage this group? I know generational differences in the workplace are supposed to bring creativity and richness, but sometimes it just feels like a challenge. The younger generation appears to be seriously lacking in work ethic and my efforts to instill that in them seem to go nowhere. The next two *Successful Supervisor* newsletters will focus on managing a multigenerational workplace with emphasis on managing the younger generation, the Millennials. This month’s edition provides a brief profile of each generation. Next month we will look at strategies that will allow you to experience *more* of the creativity and richness and *less* of the challenge in your workplace. *As always, we are interested in your feedback and/or questions. Please e-mail your questions and comments to LifeSolutions at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com or contact an EAP account manager at 1.800.647.3327.*

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To manage employees of any generation, it’s helpful to understand a little about who they are and how they got to be that way. We are all shaped by our times — and that plays out in certain ways at work.

Millennials – You are special!

From age 2–22, Millennials were continually being told “you are special,” so it’s no surprise that they are confident/overly confident, optimistic, and expecting to move ahead quickly and easily in the workplace. This sometimes naïve expectation is what is often described as a “sense of entitlement.”

Millennials have often been raised by “helicopter parents” who have “hovered” over them, structuring every moment of their lives, and functioning as their advocate, coach, and cheerleader. Sometimes this role extends into adulthood. Don’t be surprised if you get a call from a parent about a disciplinary action their Millennial child received! Accustomed to being benevolently managed, Millennials may be at a loss to structure and manage their own time or work without clear directives, guidance, or coaching. Finished with one task and not sure what to do next, this employee may see nothing wrong with texting friends since “I have nothing else to do now.”

Born between 1981 and 2000, this generation has not known a time without computers, cell phones, and the Internet. They are savvy users, connected 24/7, and adept at accessing information through the global network. Life happens fast in the Millennials’ world and their attention span is wide but not necessarily deep. The world is small and interconnected. Multiculturalism is a part of who they are and open-mindedness, inclusiveness, and tolerance are some of the great qualities they bring to the workplace. Generous and socially conscious, Millennials breathe fresh air into the workplace.

Gen Xers – Don’t count on it.

Gen Xers, born between 1961 and 1980, grew up during a time when public leaders were disgraced (Watergate), massive corporate layoffs shattered their parents’ nest egg, the divorce rate skyrocketed, and more women entered the workplace, changing the family structure dramatically. These “latchkey kids” learned to be self-reliant, independent, cynical, and practical. They value flexibility, honesty, self-management, and freedom. They are often intolerant of anything they view as a waste of time and they do not suffer incompetency well. *Life-work balance* (not work-life balance) is the key — family, school, and activities are important to them so they won’t stay with a job that doesn’t allow time for these. They work hard and are committed to their jobs but they feel it’s unreasonable to expect 70 hours of work for 40 hours of pay.

Baby Boomers – Change the world.

Born after WW II (1943 – 1960), this generation experienced a booming post-war economy. With the birth rate also booming, the country put high expectations on this large group to “make the world a better place.” They were the first generation to be

graded on their report cards, “works well with others,” so they are relationship-oriented and consensus builders. Driven and dedicated, the boomer is said to have invented the 60-hour workweek and unlike the Gen Xers, they live to work instead of work to live. (Those late boomers, born during the second half of this period, may say this work ethic does not fit them and may relate more to the Gen Xers characteristics.) Boomers seek fulfillment through their contributions at work and generally need to feel that what they are doing “makes a difference.”

Traditionalists – “I learned the hard way and you can too!”

Born between 1922 and 1942 and shaped by the economic hardships of the Great Depression and World War II, this is a no frills generation. They did without and worked *not* because it was fulfilling but because it was their duty — to put food on the table and support the family. Discipline, sacrifice, respect for authority, and loyalty are a part of the veteran’s work ethic. Although few in number in today’s workplaces, their wisdom and experience can be a valuable asset. And don’t automatically think they’ll be out in left field when it comes to technology — many are willing and eager to learn, if given the right atmosphere and coach.

All of these descriptions are generalizations and to be used only as guidelines to help us understand ourselves and others. We use this information to think about our own behaviors, and how we communicate and challenge ourselves to flex our styles so we can relate better to those of a different generation, especially at work.

Next month we will look at how to strategically use this information to become better managers and supervisors.

LifeSolutions consultants are always available to answer any questions you may have. Contact us at 1.800.647.3327.

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