

QUARTERLY

Balancing Life, Work & Wellness

LifeSolutions™

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➤ Bridging Generation Gaps

Turn to Page 2 to better understand the four generations at work and suggestions to bridge the gap between generations.

➤ The Older Worker

Hiring and retaining workers over age 50 benefits them, their companies, and society as a whole.

Welcome!

This quarter's theme is generational differences in the workplace. We welcome your feedback at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

DidUknow?

- ◆ **7,918** – The number of people estimated to turn age 60 each day in 2006. That amounts to 330 every hour.
- ◆ **33% and 5%** – The proportions of adults age 25 and older with at least a high school diploma and at least a bachelor's degree, respectively, in 1947. By 2004, the respective proportions had risen to 85% and 28%.
- ◆ **78.2 million** – The estimated number of baby boomers, as of July 1, 2005.
- ◆ **2.1** – The number of workers for each Social Security beneficiary in 2031, when all baby boomers will be over age 65. Currently, there are 3.3 workers for each Social Security beneficiary.

Source:
http://www.census.gov/Press-Release/www/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/006105.html

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The Older Worker

Throughout history, the U.S. population has always had more young people. For the first time ever, we are facing a period when there will not be enough younger workers entering the workforce to replace the number of workers retiring.

There is, however, a light at the end of the tunnel — the expanding number of older workers in the workforce. Older workers, defined as over age 50, are an increasingly common trend. Their skills, knowledge, and experience are invaluable to our economy. Moreover, studies have shown that continued work at older ages improves health, mental capacity, and overall quality of life.

In 2005, AARP commissioned a study to assess the business case for investing company resources to retain and attract workers age 50 and over. The key findings of the study were:

- ◆ Average age-based total compensation cost differences for older workers are negligible and hover around 1% per year.
- ◆ Older workers have experience and other desirable traits that translate into a tremendous plus for their businesses.



"These findings are especially important because the workforce is aging, labor shortages are projected in a number of sectors, and many employees intend to continue to work beyond the retirement age," said former AARP CEO Bill Novelli in releasing the study. "Keeping people in the workforce longer benefits the employee, the employer, and society as a whole."

In her review of the AARP study, Melanie Holmes, Vice President of World of Work Solutions for Manpower, wrote "There is no denying the facts: The U.S. population is getting older, and even in the tough economy many employers are unable to find the skilled talent they need. As the workforce shrinks, employers must turn to mature workers to remain competitive."

Sources:

- *AARP Study Debunks Myths, Shows 50+ Workers as a Solid Investment.* (2005, December 21). Retrieved November, 25, 2009, from AARP.org website: <http://www.liu.edu/CWIS/CWP/library/workshop/citapa.htm>
- *Aging Issues.* National Older Worker Career Center (NOWCC). Retrieved from the World Wide Web on January 28, 2010, from <http://www.nowcc.org/aging/>
- Holmes, Melanie. *Why Grey Matters: Attracting and Retaining the Mature Workforce.* *T+D Training + Development*, Vol. 63, No. 11, November 2009.

Bridging Generation Gaps

It's common to find four generations sharing the same workplace nowadays. Generational identity — much like gender and ethnicity — distinguishes each person. Navigating unfamiliar cultural territory can become a daily task. But generations don't have to divide people. Understanding, appreciating, and respecting each other has always been the key to teamwork.

Here are generalities that identify each generation — please note generalizations are helpful as guidelines in understanding another person but are NOT necessarily applicable to every person in a generational group:

◆ **The Silent or Traditional Generation (born 1930 to 1945)**: This group is too young to have been World War II heroes and too old to participate in the rebelliousness of the 1960s. These kids of the Great Depression learned that "children are to be seen and not heard." They grew up hearing slogans such as, "Loose lips sink ships." They value thrift, hard work, and respect for authority. They built a work ethic on commitment, responsibility, and conformity as tickets to success. A command-and-control approach comes naturally for members of the silent generation.



◆ **The Baby Boom Generation (born 1946 to 1965)**: This group grew up with the Cleavers, the can-do optimism of John F. Kennedy, and the hopes of the post-World War II American Dream. Social and political upheaval from Vietnam, Watergate, and Woodstock spurred them to rebel against authority and carve lifestyles based on personal values and spiritual growth. Rocked by years of reorganizing, reengineering, and relentless change, they long to stabilize their careers. They welcome team-based work and are consensus builders.

◆ **Generation X (born 1966 to 1979)**: These "GenXers" are street-savvy survivors who grew up quickly amid rising divorce rates, latchkey lifestyles, AIDS, violence, and low expectations. They are adaptive and creative in the workplace. GenXers are willing to work as hard as any other generation, but they want a life beyond work. Ambitious and independent, they strive to balance the competing demands of work, family, and personal life.

◆ **Generation Y, also known as The Echo Boom Generation or Millennials (born 1980 to 2000)**: This most recent generation to enter the workforce is referenced in a number of different ways and is still being studied. They benefited from the backlash against hands-off parenting and the cultural elevation of stay-at-home-moms. Coming of age during a shift toward virtue and values, they set their sights on meaningful goals. In seeking personal and professional fulfillment, they have adopted a can-do attitude that characterizes their work ethic. They are accustomed to lots of feedback and coaching and sometimes shock the older generations with their casual attire and attitude toward hierarchical structure.

With such diverse perspectives, it's little wonder that most workplace polls show that the majority of workers have experienced generational clashes of attitudes, ethics, values, and behaviors. One problem is that reporting hierarchies no longer correlate to age or experience. Though people of different ages have always worked together, the ranking system that once separated them — with older folks at the top — is largely a thing of the past. Twenty-year-olds are working alongside people old enough to be their grandparents and, in some cases, managing them.

You might want to ask yourself what you're going to do to work effectively in a multigenerational workplace. To start, acknowledge that the workplace has changed and that it will continue to change. Look to build relationships with people of different generations. It will enhance your knowledge of others, provide personal experience that prevents stereotyping, and foster respect. Your career will benefit if you take time to master a few communication tools and strategies.

Suggestions to Bridge the Gap:

- ◆ It's not what you say, but how you say it. Generational clashes often stem from miscommunications in tone or style. The Silents, for example, are aware that they might be technologically challenged; empathy is a better strategy than derision. Don't be surprised if the younger generations are turned off by reading huge documents; offer verbal or online training.
- ◆ Understand the different generational motives. GenXers like to work autonomously and prefer a manager who gives them a deadline and turns them loose to meet it. Boomers are motivated by leaders who get them involved and show them how they can make a difference.
- ◆ Benefit from diverse opinions. Poor teams allow generational differences to divide them; effective teams leverage generational knowledge to better understand and serve their customers and clients. A four-generation team will produce stronger results than any single focus could.
- ◆ Keep an open mind about attitudes. Just because others don't share your work ethic, it doesn't mean they're lazy. If GenXers are reluctant to volunteer for overtime, perhaps it's because they're mindful of how workaholicism affected their own upbringing. In fact, all generations are coming to value work/life balance as contributing to one's own health and wellness.
- ◆ Adapt your style to the realities of today's workplace. Technology, global competition, and demographics have reshaped the workplace, so don't think that your attitudes and perceptions should remain the same.

When navigating the generational landscape, look for what unites you with your peers. Everyone is living through profound changes in the business world. By recognizing and respecting differing ideals about the workplace, you'll get the job done better and faster. Plus, you might have fun.

Source: King, D.. *Bridging generation gaps*. (L. Zereski, Ed.). Raleigh, NC: Workplace Benefits. (Updated by editor March 7, 2008.)