

## Five Steps to Bridging the Workplace Generation Gap



Four, and possibly five, generations work side-by-side in today's workplaces: Veterans (born 1930-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation Xers (1965-1976), Generation Yers (1977-1990) and Millennials (born since 1991). Although each person is an individual with his/her own personality, shared experiences shaped the generations and influenced their work styles. Recognizing the strengths and values of each one promotes respect for diversity and fosters cohesiveness within the workplace.

**Be aware of preferred work styles:** Veterans tend to prefer detailed directions and guidance. Baby Boomers work best in teams, value meetings and ask for direction when needed. Gen Xers, many of whom grew up as “latchkey” kids, are independent, resilient and adaptable. They work best when they are empowered to work alone to get the needed result. Gen Yers respond well to workplace structure, challenges and coaching. Like Boomers, they work well in team situations.

**Adopt effective communication techniques:** Veterans are used to formality – a memo, personal conversation or a phone call. Baby Boomers also respond best to personal contact but have adapted to voice mail and e-mail. Gen Xers expect the direct, immediate response that e-mail and instant messaging bring, while Gen Yers and Millennials have communicated via technology all their lives. It's no surprise that they find cell phones, texting, and social networking essential and effective.

**Identify the most successful feedback techniques:** Veterans understand “no news is good news” and expect feedback only when a goal is met. Baby Boomers expect corporate accomplishments to be recognized through promotions, a hierarchy of titles and a yearly pay raise. Gen Xers and Gen Yers both seek immediate and continual feedback to assure they are on target with organizational goals. Gen Yers, especially those raised with high expectations and much praise, appreciate immediate rewards.

**Understand expectations of work/life balance:** Veterans and Baby Boomers believe hard work leads to success and expect to adapt personal life to the needs of the organization. Gen Xers enjoy challenging work but want balance in their lives. Gen Yers are committed to their careers but expect to use the flexibility of time and technology.

**Recognize the different reactions to conflict:** Veterans grew up respecting authority and utilizing the corporate chain of command. Baby Boomers look for team consensus. Gen Xers prefer to resolve problems immediately and directly, while Gen Yers proactively utilize the conflict management skills taught during their school years.

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