

The Four Generations in the Workplace

Veterans

- Members of this generation were influenced by the great depression and World War II among other events and have been described as being conservative and disciplined, as having a sense of obligation, and as observing fiscal restraint.
- They have been described as liking formality and a top down chain of command, as needing respect, and as preferring to make decisions based on what worked in the past
- Generally they worked for only one employer, men made up most of the workforce and women stayed home to run the household
- Members of this generation have also been characterized as loyal workers, highly dedicated, averse to risk and strongly committed toward teamwork and collaboration, willing to sacrifice, have respect for authority, duty before pleasure and accept delayed reward.
- At work, they are presumed to show consistency and uniformity, be past-oriented, display command-and-control leadership reminiscent of military operations, and prefer hierarchical organizational structures.
- They are also likely to be stable, detail oriented, thorough, loyal, and hardworking, although they may be inept with ambiguity and change, reluctant to buck the system, uncomfortable with conflict, and reticent when they disagree

Baby Boomers

- Members of this generation grew up in a time of significant scientific advances, dramatic social change & economic prosperity. They were influenced by Vietnam, Watergate, TV & the Pill. They are the civil rights, empowerment and diversity generation
- They grew up in an era of “prosperity and optimism and bolstered by the sense that they are a special generation capable of changing the world, have equated work with self-worth, contribution and personal fulfillment”.
- Boomers have been characterized as individuals who believe that hard work and sacrifice are the price to pay for success. They started the workaholic trend and believe in paying their dues and step-by-step promotion. They also like teamwork, collaboration and group decision-making, are competitive and believe in loyalty toward their employers.
- Boomers are often confident task completers and may be insulted by constant feedback, although they want their achievement to be recognized. Some have described them as being more process- than result-oriented, although they have also been characterized as being goal-oriented. They are not naturally budget minded, are uncomfortable with conflict and can be self-centered. They value health and wellness as well as personal growth and personal gratification, and seek job security.
- Finally, Boomers have been described as having a sense of entitlement, and as being good at relationships, reluctant to go against peers and judgments of others who do not see things their way. They also thrive on the possibility for change, have been described as the show me generation, value the chain of command, and may be technically challenged.

Generation X

- Members of Generation X are the children of older boomers, who grew up in a period of financial, familial and societal insecurity. They witnessed their parents get laid off and the decline of the American global power. They grew up with a stagnant job market, corporate downsizing, and limited wage mobility, and are the first individuals predicted to earn less than their parents did.
- They have grown up in homes where both parents worked, or in single parent household because of high divorce rates, and as such, became latchkey kids forced to fend for themselves. They were influenced by MTV, AIDS and worldwide competition and are accustomed to receiving instant feedback from playing computer and video games.
- Among the characteristics attributed to Xers, the following appear most often. They aspire more than previous generations to achieve a balance between work and life. They are more independent, autonomous and self-reliant than previous generations having grown up as latchkey kids.
- They are not overly loyal to their employers although they have strong feelings of loyalty towards their family and friends. They value continuous learning and skill development. They have strong technical skills, are results focused, and are “ruled by a sense of accomplishment and not the clock”. They can be impatient, cynical, lacking in people skills and at times brutally honest.
- Xers naturally question authority figures and are not intimidated by them. Money does not necessarily motivate members of this generation, but the absence of money might lead them to lose motivation.
- They like to receive feedback, are adaptable to change and prefer flexible schedules. They can tolerate work as long as it is fun. They are entrepreneurial, pragmatic, and creative. Although they are individualistic, they may also like teamwork, more so than boomers.

Generation Y

- This generation was raised during a period of unprecedented economic growth and expansion of personal wealth. They have grown up in a very diverse world. They have occupied the center of their parent universe, were kept busy as kids and were the first generation of children with schedules
- One of the most frequently reported characteristics of this generation is their comfort with technology. They value team work and collective action, embrace diversity, are optimistic, and adaptable to change. Furthermore, they seek flexibility, are independent, desire a more balanced life, are multi-taskers, and are the most highly educated generation. They are socially conscious and volunteer minded while materialistic.
- They also value training. They have been characterized as demanding, and as the most confident generation. Like Xers, they are also purported to be entrepreneurial, and as being less process focused.
- They are ambitious but not entirely focused, look to the workplace for direction and to help them achieve their goals. They are attached to their gadgets and parents. To them work should be fun, they expect attention and feedback and can shift gears fast and collaborate with team members. They are inexperienced, particularly handling difficult people issues and will need supervision and structure in the workplace.