



# Managing Generations in The Workplace

**“Our youth now love luxury. They have bad manners, contempt for authority; they show disrespect for their elders and love chatter in place of exercise; they no longer rise when elders enter the room; they contradict their parents, chatter before company; gobble up their food and tyrannize their teachers.”**

Sound familiar? This quote is attributed to Socrates (469 – 399 B.C.) but to many, “our youth” are

**Baby Boomer Communication Style:**  
Somewhat formal through structured network;  
Mix of electronic and face-to-face.

just as unruly today as they were in early Greece.

Generational differences in the workplace can create difficult situations because it’s tough to see eye to eye with someone who may seem more like a parent, or conversely like a son or daughter, than a peer.

Approaching work from different perspectives comes with people being in the workforce longer, different skill sets needed and the huge impact technology has made.

## Tech Savvy

Nowhere is the difference between Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millenials more apparent than in their approach to the use of technology. Millenial workers were raised on technology. They can handle it in their sleep. The same can be said for Gen X employees who came of age when technology was still burgeoning. But, Baby Boomers can be notoriously lost when it comes to technology because they didn’t grow up with it. When they were young it didn’t exist. There was no internet, no email, no



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Windows or Excel. Millennials, on the other hand, can't imagine a world without technology; and forget desktop computers – now it's laptops, tablets and Smart Phones.

And just as the Baby Boomers were getting used to technology, along came Social Media and Boomers were once again shaking their heads, saying "We just don't get it. Why would you want to use Twitter?"

But don't write the Baby Boomers off regarding technology as they're the money behind technology purchases and advances. And, while statistics show that Gen X'ers have started 80% of the new businesses since 2000, it's likely that their funding comes from Baby Boomer Venture Capitalists. Baby Boomers may not win the "Fastest Texter of the Year" award, but they're professionals who understand the effectiveness and efficiency of the tools of technology.

## Generational Bias

We only know what we grew up with. Therefore, each generation can get stuck in their ways and believe they



know best. Generational differences in the workplace are revealed when older employees treat the younger generations in a dismissive manner. Likewise, it may seem to younger workers that their older co-workers' approaches and ideas date back to the Stone Age. Baby Boomers tend to be more traditional, while Gen X and Millennial workers are much more open to innovation and the influence of current culture.

For example, Millennials and Gen X'ers often prefer open work space and don't place the same value that Boomers do in having a private office. Besides, say the Millennials, you can always use your ear buds and achieve the quiet that you need. Baby Boomers would never be seen wearing ear buds in the office and may still consider the use of Smart Phones and other devices in a meeting as a sign of disrespect.

## Communication

Workplace communications are critical to the success of an organization and each generation has its own style of communication which can be problematic. Millennial employees often speak in casual and informal ways and use slang that make Baby Boomers cringe. Gen X'ers are also more casual in their communication style, while Boomers tend to be more formal.

Technology factors into communications, as well, with the younger generations preferring digital communications like texting and Facebooking to phone or email communication. Boomers are

### JEFF BLEACHER



*"My advice to someone starting in business today would be to work hard, take risks and always learn new things. I would recommend that a new employee learn the soft skills and, if you're starting in the accounting field, don't wait to take your CPA exam. Take it immediately and you will find that it will bring you success."*

### KEN FALK (on the right)



*"Kids going into business today would do well to learn the nuts and bolts of business and learn to stay flexible. For us, every day is a different and unique day. Learn to build processes for the work you do and you'll achieve more success."*





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comfortable with email in business but Social Media does not fit their paradigm for communication. Boomers also place more value on face-to-face conversations, particularly with clients, than their younger counterparts.

## Ways to Deal with Generational Differences

Employers can manage generational differences by creating a culture of learning, an environment of respect and by valuing the differences each generation brings to the workplace.



Focusing on the company's goals and business plans should be paramount for all employees and managers should hold all employees accountable for their role in the growth of the business.

Establishing policies on Social Media usage, device usage in meetings and workspace protocol will give all employees a road map for a company's preferences and keep generational differences to a minimum. These guidelines are especially beneficial to those new to an office environment.

Research tells us that the second most important relationship in a person's life (after family) is with their boss (and co-workers) so it's important that each generation learn to embrace the differences and work together for the common good. Time spent at work should be quality time and, in the end, we all want the same things out of a job: respect, recognition and advancement. No matter what generation, the goal is the same.

### LARRY REICH



*"If I were giving advice to a millennial, I would say that it's important to learn the details of business and to understand the building blocks. Knowing how to do something from the ground up helps you in the long run – there's no substitute for understanding business from the inside out."*

### PATRICK GENDRUE (on the left)



*"Life is too short to worry about whether the glass is half-full or half-empty. So, to someone coming into the business world, look at the situation and decide if that's what you want (half-full or half-empty) and then take action. Life shouldn't be lived in a square box, you should make of it what you want it to be."*

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