

GENERATIONS



GENERATION Z

GENERATION X

GENERATION X

MILLENNIAL

BABY BOOMER

MILLENNIAL

GENERATION Z

at Work



GENERATION X

MILLENNIAL

By Jamie Gayer

Have you ever just stopped and looked around your work environment to truly see who is around you? Do you see a boomer mentoring a kid so young you don't know what generation she's from? A Gen Xer diligently presenting a project while the millennial supports the technology for it?

Right now there are at least four different generations showing up each day who are creating a strong and versatile workplace. Each of these groups has a different way of working, thinking, and measuring success. However, unless managed appropriately, ageism and stereotypes can derail the positive contributions that each generation can offer to organizational culture. It is critical to operational success that managers understand each generation and how to manage each appropriately.

GENERATIONAL VALUES

A generation is defined as a group of people living within the same period, typically a time frame of roughly 20 years. This number can be slightly more or less depending on the era and the societal trends for each generation having children of their own, which in turn starts a new generation.

According to author/trainer/consultant Morris Massey, differences in what each generation values are based upon how their values were developed or programmed. People within the same age range tend to develop similar characteristics and values, given that they are often influenced by the same political, social, and economic factors. He determined that values are generally programmed by the early teenage years (10-13) and tend to influence decisions for a lifetime.

In the next sections, you will see a snapshot of what values defined each generation as well as the attributes that made them successful, the challenges inherent in each, and the critical takeaways for each as well.

BABY BOOMERS

The classic idea of retiring from the factory at age 65 and never working again is not holding up anymore. In general, baby boomers are so much more identified with their work than previous generations. Work is not something that boomers are yearning to give up (Steve Slon, QuoteHD.com).

The boomers grew up in an era of civil unrest and heightened concern regarding international affairs and the dramatic social changes taking place in the United States. They witnessed all this change and uncertainty while typically being raised in structured and well-disciplined households. This contradiction led the boomers to push toward self-actualization, shifting away from the values of conformity and loyalty typified by the previous generation to focus more on self-expression and self-realization.

Boomers are seen as the generation of achievement, for whom individual aspirations were valued more highly than the organization's; they generally put loyalty to career first, and their employer second. This behavior led to the view that they were mainly concerned with building fortunes and finding ways to achieve status, prestige, and power by working long hours and rarely taking vacations. In reality, boomers find worth in education, in their work ethic, and in producing high-quality work products, although they tend to rebel against convention and are willing to challenge the status quo, a trait that may be supported by their ability to handle crisis.

Critical Takeaways: *Before they do anything, boomers need to know why it matters, how it fits into the big picture, and what impact it will have on whom. They want to hear that their ideas matter, as their work is very important to them. They often value face-to-face interactions and need to know important details in advance so that they have time to research and prepare for meetings.*

GENERATION X

Generation Xers have come of age in a depressed economy, restricted job market, with more crime on the streets, and growing environmental concerns, which

partially accounts for why Xers view the world differently than did their predecessors. Yet they are also the first generation to grow up in a time of relative peace and economic prosperity, with access to technology both at home and school (Vann Wesson, *Generation X: Field Guide and Lexicon*, San Diego, CA: Orion Media, 1997).

Many Gen Xers raised themselves, as the majority of this generation grew up in dual-income households. They tend to prize self-sufficiency and independence. Because they came of age during a time when the United States was losing its status as the world's most powerful and prosperous nation, they became skeptical of authority figures, politicians, and institutions. They value education, knowledge, and personal accountability.

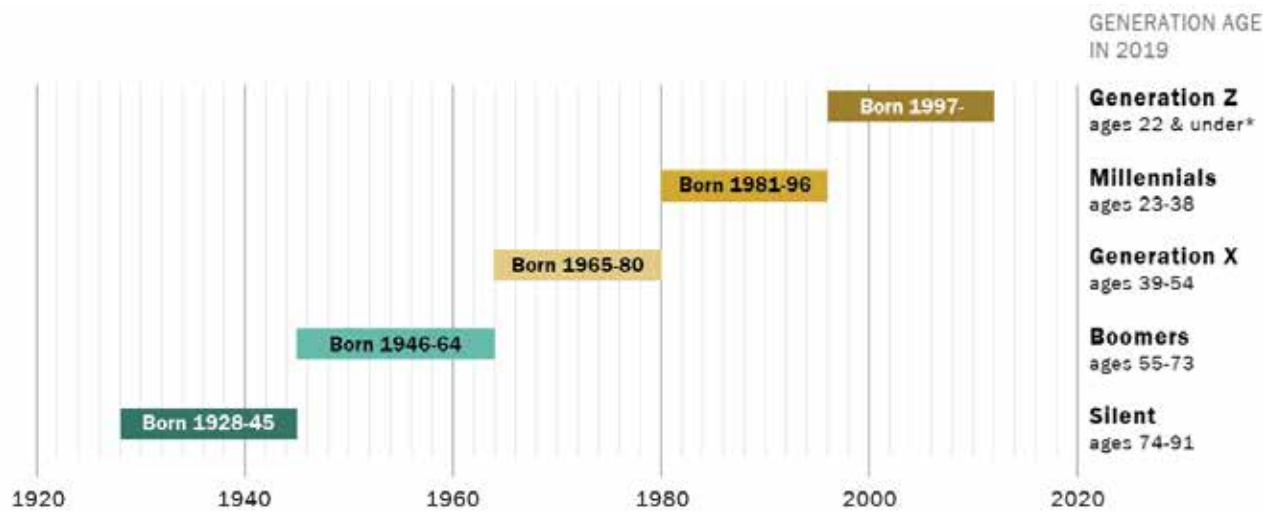
The Gen Xers grew up watching their boomer parents focus on work, only to be laid off just prior to retirement. They learned that blind dedication to an organization is not a guarantee for survival, so they tend to fall into the attitude of "It's just a job," while focusing on working smarter and maintaining a clear balance between work and home. They see superiors more as colleagues who are there to support their careers and remove barriers between them and the decision-makers they want to collaborate with. This generation is motivated to do good work when presented with flexibility, technology, feedback, and evenly disseminated recognition.

Critical Takeaways: *Gen Xers expect to have challenging work opportunities and to be rewarded appropriately for performance. They want autonomy in the workplace and to be respected for their ability to complete their work. They value having fun and getting access to the latest technology.*

TABLE 1: Generational Attributes and Challenges

	ATTRIBUTES	CHALLENGES
Baby Boomers	Ambitious, Driven, Optimistic, Responsible, Socially Aware	Typically take a top-down approach to leadership, similar to the chain of command in military hierarchy.
Generation X	Adaptable, Confident, Independent, Pragmatic, Self-Sufficient	Do not automatically respect authority or individuals in roles of authority; expect individuals to prove they are worthy of respect before giving it.
Millennials/ Generation Y	Collaborative, Inclusive, Open-Minded, Persistent, Tech-Savvy	Require attention and continuous feedback, although supervisors must be careful to balance constructive feedback with compliments. Tend to respond poorly to those who act in an authoritarian manner and expect to be respected for their rank alone.
Generation Z	Collaborative, Digital Native, Entrepreneurial, Optimistic, Pragmatic	Need help building interpersonal relationship and interpersonal communication skills.

FIGURE 1: Five Generations Timeline



* No chronological endpoint has been set for this group. Generation Z ages vary by analysis.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: <https://www.pewresearch.org/topics/generations-and-age>.

GENERATION Y/MILLENNIALS

Instead of complaining about adapting for millennials, it's imperative for leaders and managers to acknowledge the role of millennial behavior as an indication of the needs of the modern workplace to attract, leverage and retain modern talent (Crystal Kadakia, QuoteStats.com).

Millennials were generally raised by parents who focused intently on them and scheduled every part of their developing years. The impact of this is felt in the workplace, as this generation needs to be engaged in a variety of different tasks while continuously receiving positive feedback for their contributions. This has ultimately led many millennials to be uncomfortable with ambiguity in work assignments; however, they excel when given clear expectations and guidance on what is required to advance. Millennials grew up respecting the role of management in the workplace, yet they expect the same level of respect in turn.

This is a paradoxical generation that expects management to get to know them as individuals, listen attentively to them, and ask what they need, while still expecting independence in their work. It is critical that millennials know their managers care about them and are willing to provide them with training and development opportunities that can increase their skills.

Critical Takeaways: *Millennials were raised to feel valued and very positive about themselves. They will balk at doing tasks simply because "this is the way it has always been done." It is important that millennials be given the opportunity to ask*

questions and to be heard so that they understand the rationale for the task and the value behind it. They esteem a personalized and interactive work environment where management openly shares information.

GENERATION Z

Gen Z will move faster and with even fewer ties to the way things were in the past because they simply do not remember a time before blazing-fast Internet speed, an African-American president, and being able to have anything you could possibly want delivered to your door with a single click (or not even having to click—just ask Alexa) ("The State of Gen Z 2017" White Paper, the Center for Generational Kinetics, 2017, p. 25).

Gen Z are digital natives, having grown up with a handheld device as a part of educational and childhood entertainment experiences. They need to know that their work has an impact on their organization and that sustainability is of value to the organization. Generation Z is so diverse that it only notices diversity in its absence.

The work environment for Gen Zers needs to serve as a refuge that supports their development yet allows them to have a personalized functional workspace. There is a need for immediate access to information and training materials that can be viewed at the individual's convenience. They tend to work best in small teams with open collaboration and guidance from a strong team leader. Gen Z values a flexible workspace that



Having staff who were born between the 1940s and the 2000s working together creates the potential for creativity and innovation, but also for conflict and misunderstanding. Leaders can avoid costly mistakes and ensure inclusivity by learning about generational differences and adapting their communication styles appropriately. They should avoid using stereotypes and find ways to be respectful to each generation's preferences in order to shape a work environment that allows for success. By actively understanding the individual needs of each team member, leadership can create strong and versatile teams that are highly engaged. 📌

enables them to work in a multitude of environments, including office, home, airports, stores, and more.

Critical Takeaways: Gen Z is looking for management to take the time to become involved with them and build a personal relationship. They thrive on being provided with a variety of different growth opportunities and incentives. They value flexible work scheduling and will work hard when given this chance.

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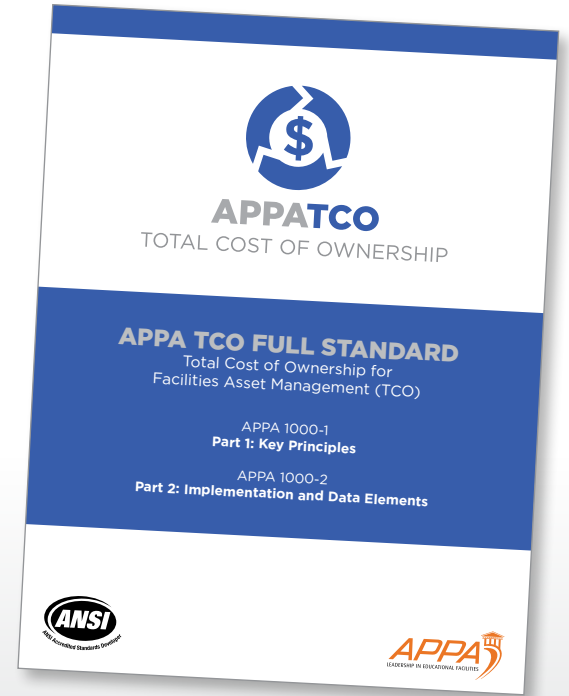
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