

The Four Generation Workplace
By Sherri Elliott-Yearly

I heard an interesting story about a 23-year old who recently announced she quit her job at the local restaurant.

“You left your employer short-handed on a Saturday night?” scolded her Traditionalist grandfather.

“That’s going to look terrible on your resume,” fretted her Baby Boomer mom.

“Don’t you know how hard it is to find a job these days?” worried Gen X brother.

“I asked off three weeks ago! They scheduled me to work anyway. I’m not missing Stacey’s wedding.” She said confidently.

Perfect examples of how four generations handle things differently. **From their point of view, they are all correct but each one looks at the issue through a different GENERATIONAL LENSE.**

Today’s workforce comes with very different expectations and values. How they are rewarded, use technology, communicate and see education and advancement are in quite different ways.

Traditionalist aka The Silent Generation are 65 years and older still make up to 10% of the workforce due the rising cost of healthcare. They are healthier than previous generations; they still want to work, even if it is only part time. Their values, shaped by the Depression and WWII, are of discipline, sacrifice and loyalty and they demand that of others.

Boomers entered the job market with 80 million others. Competitive workaholics, they are finally saving for retirement, could it be too late???. At 45% of the workforce and 46-64 years old, their sheer numbers help them call the shots.

Just ask the Gen Xers, 30-45 years old and always competing with the Boomers. These “children of divorce” insist on balance between work and family life but never seem to find it. Managing time is the big issue as this “juggling” generation struggles to make it to their kid’s soccer game and manage their careers. Their weapons: the technology they understand so well and the networking empires they’ve built.

Here come the Millennials aka the Trophy Babys, 29 years and younger. At 76 million they are nearly many of them as Boomers. Their educations often cost more than the family home and they are looking for a payoff. They grew up surfing the internet, texting and playing on teams. This “networked generation” knows how to find everything and if not, they can find someone who does.

Do they all have anything in common? Yes! They all want to do good work for great companies and feel valued. How does a manager make that happen? Start by looking for ways to leverage their different strengths. Help them see that each of them brings something of value others can use to reach company objectives and goals. Discourage the “we know better” attitude. For example, have Traditionalists mentor Millennials about the big picture and Millennials coach Traditionalists about social networking. Give everybody a chance to strut their best stuff and the company of tomorrow WINS!

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