

## Embracing generational differences

For the first time in history, the American work force is comprised of four distinct generations — traditionalists, boomers, Xers and millennials. As a result, you cannot recruit, retain and motivate by exclusively using the messages and the media of the past.

In the good old days it truly was a one-message-fits-all workplace. In the new multigenerational work force, success is often determined by your ability to identify the different generations and adapt your message to fit that mindset.

Each generation has different values, experiences and expectations from jobs. To communicate a message that lacks generational flexibility is a recipe for disaster: Where a traditionalist may value one inherent benefit of his career, a millennial may view the same attribute as a negative.

For example, many traditionalists consider building a career with one organization a success while millennials often change companies, positions and careers multiple times. A traditionalist hiring manager would view “job-hopping” as a negative and a millennial hiring manager would see the same background as a positive.



### RESOURCES AT WORK

Sherri Elliott

Beyond the message, the medium also plays a critical role in successful communication. A letter may work for some, but for employees who grew up with virtual social networking, blogs and texting, a letter may be seen as a sign their employer just doesn't get it.

Each generation should be valued and respected for its differences. They don't need to be molded to fit within your culture or your comfort level. Instead, you need to toss the molds altogether.

It's not an easy process, mostly because to be successful you're forced to move beyond what you know and beyond your personal comfort level. Not big on blogs? You'll need to overcome your bias. Not a fan of the “old school of thought”? You'll need to learn to listen.

Instead of sending one message in one way to the entire world, you should send specific messages in specific media to select audiences.

In today's multigenerational work force we need to work both harder and smarter. We need to show flexibility. And we need to tailor our message to fit the audience we're attempting to reach.

**ELLIOTT** is president of Optimance Workforce Strategies LLC, a Plano-based human resources consulting firm, and author of “Ties to Tattoos: Turning Generational Differences into a Competitive Advantage.” She can be reached at [selliott@optimance.com](mailto:selliott@optimance.com).