

## Gen Y, Gen X, Gen Who?

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“Why do I have to work until 5:30 on the dot, if I’m done at 5:25?” “They don’t have any work ethic.” “It took me 10 years to achieve my position; they want it in two years.” “I can’t stay late; I have baseball tickets to a Met game.” These are just a few comments during a recent experience with a multi-generational group of graduate students. That is the backdrop to this article-which inspired me to write about work relationships in a multigenerational workforce.

Our workforce consists of at least four generations which presents unique challenges and opportunities to work effectively to achieve desired outcomes/results. The reality is that there is an opportunity to leverage the differences to achieve better results while reducing unnecessary conflict and frustration. I believe it requires two things: the willingness to increase self awareness and embrace the differences of each generation. Those two things are the key to more successful relationships and will improve the work environment.

Self awareness is the process of knowing ourselves from the inside out. I often refer to self awareness as our intra-personal compass. Where does self awareness come from? In large part it comes from your experiences, relationships, environment, belief system and values. This creates our view of life, or our “life’s filters”. In other words, it’s 100% who you are so the greater the understanding you have of yourself, the more successful you will be at understanding others. Your intra-personal compass represents how you feel and think in situations and helps you make effective decisions about yourself and others particularly during challenging or difficult situations. In other words, this helps you stay in tune with your emotions and how you tend to respond to specific situations and people. The best way to understand others is to understand your self first.

Developing your self awareness requires a desire to understand your strengths and limitations, and recognize how you react and feel in situations. With an increased sense of self awareness you begin understanding how your behaviors and actions affect others. Utilizing your heightened sense of awareness enables you to make more thoughtful decisions and interact more effectively with others. In addition, being a more self aware person enables you to be more mindful of other’s thoughts, ideas, and feelings and stretches you to detach from your “life’s filters” (perceptions/feelings/bias’) while listening to others so that you can remain objective and non-judgmental. As you begin to become more self aware you begin to appreciate the differences in others and can create and build more effective relationships, which will produce better results and desired outcomes.

Each generation has unique characteristics that shape the way they work, learn and interact with people. Let’s begin by defining the generations and then explore some of the unique characteristics. The four generations include:

1. The Matures (Born before 1945)
2. Baby Boomers (Born between 1946 and 1964) most influential group of people today.
3. Gen X (Born between 1964 and 1980) “Prove it to me”
4. Millennials (Born between 1980 and 2000) “Instant gratification”, and the next most influential group of people.

Understanding some of the unique characteristics may provide the opportunity to better understand your co-worker and increase your personal effectiveness. The Matures value

moderation, dedication and sacrifice; they believe you work for what you earn and experience is the best teacher; they are extremely loyal; relate to them through experiences and value their experience; and be aware that they resist change and fear technology. Baby Boomers are workaholics, competitive, vertical climbers and believe teams are sacrosanct; they are optimistic want to feel in control, are results oriented; place a high value on personal development. Gen X'ers are skeptical and question authority/institutions; less loyal and value independence; they like broad career choices and need to make their own decisions; they welcome diversity; like to seize the day; and work-life balance is important. Millennials are collaborative and innovative; work must have value and purpose; they thrive on change; they are jumpers vs. climbers when it comes to their career; have a tendency to be impatient; want approval from their peers; they work to live versus live to work-they place a high value on leisure time; they don't have any fear of expressing their needs, wants or opinions-they expect a response and they don't hesitate speaking to the boss or the boss's boss; communicate honestly, openly and be clear about expectations.

As you explore increasing your self awareness and the unique characteristics of each generation it becomes less about one generation being more right than the other, and more about how you can appreciate and embrace the differences to achieve more effective relationships and better outcomes.

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