

Managing and communicating across the generations

There are currently four different generations employed in our organisations. Each generation has distinct values and characteristics that often lead to difficulties in managing and communicating with each other. It is important for each generation to be aware and sensitive to these differences in order to minimize misunderstandings. These generations have been labeled the Matures, the Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. The Matures are those born before 1945 and also known as Veterans, Seniors, Traditionalists and even “the Silent Generation”. Boomers are those born between 1945 – 1964, and often referred to as the Baby Boomers. Generation X are those born between 1964 – 1980 and also known as X’ers, and Post Boomers. Generation Y’s, born after 1980, have themselves been labeled as the Millennials, Nexters, and of course the Internet Generation.

Brief Generational Descriptors

For the matures their defining idea is duty, their work style is team player, their view of education is a dream, they manage money by saving. The boomers defining idea is individuality, their work style is self-absorbed, their view of education is a birthright, they manage money by spending Gen X’ers defining idea is diversity, their work style is entrepreneur, their view of education is a way to get ahead, they manage money by investing. Gen Y’s defining idea is back to basics, their work style is team player, their view of education is life long, they manage money by spending their parents dollars.

Values

Matures value dedication, law and order, strong work ethic, risk adverse, respect for authority, loyalty to the organization. Boomers value optimism, team work, personal gratification, promotion and recognition, health and wellness. Gen X values diversity, balance in life, computer literacy, personal development, informality, initiative. Gen Y values optimism, confidence, ambition and achievement education, idealism fun and diversity.

Characteristics at Work

Matures assets: Stable, detail oriented, thorough, loyal and hard working. Mature liabilities: Uncomfortable with change and ambiguity, reluctant to buck the system, avoids conflict, reticent when they disagree. Boomer assets: Service oriented, driven, good at relationships, want to please, good team player. Boomer liabilities: Not naturally “budget minded” uncomfortable with conflict, reluctant to go against peers, puts process ahead of results, overly sensitive to feedback. Generation X assets: Adaptable, techno- literate, independent, not intimidated by authority, creative. Generation X liabilities: impatient, poor people skills, inexperienced, cynical. Generation Y assets: loyalty, optimism, tolerant, multitasking, fast thinking, technological savvy. Generation Y liabilities: Need for supervision and structure, inexperience particularly with handling different people issues, service levels are low.

Generational Attitudes to Feedback

Traditionalists – “No news is good news.” Boomers – “Feedback once a year” Generation X – “Sorry to interrupt but how am I doing”. Generation Y – “Feedback at the push of a button”

Leading and Motivating the Different Generations

Matures: Take time for the personal touch, honour their hard work with symbolic records of achievement, verbally and publicly acknowledge their experience, provide proactive technology support, create ways they can mentor others. Boomers: Give them lots of public recognition, give them a chance to prove their worth, give them perks with status, ask for their inputs, get their consensus. Generation X: Give them lots of projects and control, give them constructive and straightforward feedback, invest in computer technology, resist micro managing them, provide a flexible work environment, reward initiative. Generation Y : Learn about their personal goals let them mesh with the company’s goals, forget traditional gender roles, be sensitive for the potential for conflict with X’ers, develop a hands off style, open avenues for education, skill building and mentoring programmes, personalize their work, talk to them about their interests.

Training and Development Across the Generations

Matures: Take plenty of time, give them the big picture, emphasise long term goals, let them share their experiences. Boomers: Focus on the near future, focus on challenges, focus on their role, provide development experiences. Generation X: Focus on balance, offer them access to many different kinds of information, provide electronic support. Generation Y : Take plenty of time, let them know what they do matters, communicate expectations, focus on customer service and interpersonal skill

Messages that Motivate the Different Generations

Matures: Your experience is respected, it's important for the rest of us to hear what has, and hasn't worked in the past, your perseverance is valued and will be rewarded. Boomers: You are important to our success, we recognise your unique contribution, what is your vision for this project, you are valued. Generation X: Do it your way, we have the latest technology, we are not very corporate here.

Final Thoughts:

Generational understanding does not take the place of concern for the individual. Different generations care about different approaches to the same problem. Different is neither right or wrong, just different. Remember, generational context is not about age, but common experiences.

Article Contributed by Chris Fenney, Co- founder and Director of Training Edge International
Email : chris.fenney@trainingedgeasia.com
Website : www.trainingedgeasia.com