

Diversity Tip Sheet

Generations:

Quick Reference Guide

The guide below gives a brief overview of the four generations in the American workforce. Please note that while this information can be helpful in understanding workplace dynamics, it is a broad generalization of the generations as a whole and cannot be used to predict or explain the behavior of individuals within that generation!

Stabilizing Traditionalists 1900-1945

When you think of the typical Traditionalist, representing roughly 10% of the 2005 workforce, think of The Greatest Generation who came of age before or during World War II. They are the good soldiers whose core needs are for group membership and responsibility. They lived through the Great Depression, and many overcame great struggles. They value stability, security, a sense of community, patriotism, and God. They trust hierarchy and authority and may be surprised when others go against these social structures. Based on their military command and control style, they prefer actions with a focus on standards and norms. They use their institutional experience and intuitive wisdom to face the radical changes in the new workplace.

Transformational Baby Boomers 1946-1964

The transformational Baby Boomers who once pronounced “Don’t trust anyone over 30” represented nearly 45% of the 2005 workforce. They were the first workaholics, not because it was the right thing to do, but because it was necessary to advance up the ladder. They paid their dues under the old hierarchical rules and are now redefining themselves in light of global initiatives and business restructuring. Baby Boomers tend to be gifted at political correctness, having changed the social order by saying the right thing, at the right time, to the right person. The ultimate idealists, they had traditionally found their self-worth in their work ethic, but are now desperate for a healthy work/life balance.

Entrepreneurial Generation Xers 1965-1980

The entrepreneurial and most misunderstood Generation Xers, representing about 35% of the 2005 workforce, started their careers during profound economic changes. They count on their technological acuity and their business savvy to stay marketable. Gen Xers are an extremely resourceful and independent generation who don’t believe that any person or institution is going to see them through. They want to get in, get the work done, and move on to the next thing. Gen Xers’ core needs are to have the freedom to act without hindrance, and their energies are focused on skillful performance, variety and stimulation in the workplace. Gen Xers like to dress down and lighten up in the workplace.

Always On Millennials 1981-2000

The always on Millennials, representing roughly 15% of the 2005 workforce, have come of age in an era of instantaneous global communication, media saturation, and material excess. They have grown up in the “decade of the child” with extraordinary research on children’s issues. This digital generation is quickly becoming the intellectual authority in their homes and at work. They are high-speed stimulus junkies with just enough skepticism (like the Xers) to keep them asking healthy questions, just enough political savvy (like the Boomers) to know who’s who, and just enough respect for character development (like the Traditionalists) to incorporate the virtue of individual responsibility into their jobs.