

Generational differences between baby boomers and millennials and the impacts on ...



Generational Differences Between Baby Boomers and Millennials and The Impacts on HR Kimberly Senkler September 14, 2010 Human Resource Management BA 421 KP Normally we tend to think of diversity in relation to age, race, gender and religion. These days there is more focus being given to diversity in the form of generational differences. While the other factors in diversity (age, race, gender and religion) tend to lead to legal issues, generational diversity is generally more of a performance issue. Generations can be loosely defined as bodies of individuals born and living at about the same time. Each generation is molded by distinctive experiences during their critical developmental periods” (Twenge, 2008). The culture and media created common value systems...different for each generation. There are gaps between generations due to differences in the cultural environments that they grew up in. Experts don't always agree on the specific years to include in each generation (Crampton & Hodge, 2006), but they do agree that each generation has its own principles, behaviors, expectations, conventions and motivators.

Companies are becoming increasingly more interested in how to attract, retain and manage people from different generations in the workplace. Each generation has different expectations, values, communication styles and motivators (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007). What interests an older employee might not be the same for a younger employee. The U. S. workforce contains four different generations of workers: the Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. There is however, a consensus among experts that the two largest generations creating

change in the workplace are the Baby Boomers and Millennials (Gesell, 2010).

Understanding generational gaps in the workplace is critical in today's business environment. Bridging those gaps can help ensure a productive, cohesive, and successful environment. Baby Boomer Snapshot Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1967. They are often referred to as the "show-me" generation, the "breakthrough" generation, the "stress" generation, or the "me" generation. Boomers grew up in a time of social and technological change. "They are characterized by social change and increasing affluence" (Simons, 2010).

They experienced the invention of the TV, the Pill, the Civil Rights Movement, the space race, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Women's Movement, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s march on Washington, the Watergate Scandal, and The Vietnam War. They witnessed the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. , and Robert F. Kennedy. Boomers are sometimes viewed as overachievers or workaholics. They are often seen as idealists and have a strong sense of loyalty. In the Boomer's day it was not unusual to work for the same company until you retired. Baby Boomers respect authority but tend to see themselves as equals.

According to Crampton & Hodge (2007), Baby Boomers are the largest generation group today with 78 million in the work force. Due to their knowledge and experience, most of today's leaders are Baby Boomers. As leaders, Boomers are sometimes thought to be micromanagers. Millennial Snapshot Millennials were born between 1980-2003. Other known names for

Millennials include; Generation Y, Echo-Boomers, Gen Next, Generation Now, and the Why Me generation. Millennials have grown up in a time of instant gratification due to technological advances. “ Millennials were raised during the most child-centric time in our history” (Neil, 2010).

Millennials were raised in an environment where their parents catered to them and rearranged their schedules around them; they made them the center of the family. Significant events that mark the Millennial generation include the 1986 Challenger Explosion, the fall of the Berlin Wall, The Oklahoma City Bombing, The Columbine High School massacre, the Virginia Tech murders, Hurricane Katrina, the Indian Ocean Tsunami, and September 11, 2001. Millennials tend to be technologically advanced and eager to learn. They also value social responsibility and team-work.

They are often seen as impatient and quick to express opinions without having all of the data. Millennials are quick to jump-ship if they do not feel if they are progressing fast enough, often at speeds that might be seen as unreasonable. Dayan (2005) says that about 5. 6 million Millennials are about to enter the employment market. Millennials are said to be the most challenging generation for employers. Attracting Boomers and Millennials “ The number of employees over the age of 55 has increased by 30 percent; however, the number of 25- to 54-year-olds has only increased by 1 percent” (Claire, 2009).

In 2008 the eldest of the 77 million baby-boomers turned 62. Estimates are that by the end of the decade about 40 percent of the work force will be eligible to retire. As people begin to reach the age of retirement there may

be not be enough new employees to fill the gap (Clare, 2009). Companies need to find ways to attract Boomers and Millennials. Companies that want to attract Boomers and Millennials need to be creative in their culture, HR policies and work environments. According to the U. S. Census Bureau the number of people 65 and older will possibly double by the year 2030.

According to Yager (2008) forecasts are showing that the United States could reach a labor shortage by 2030. As the Social Security program continues to experience strains, more and more people are choosing to stay in the work force. Fogg, Kehoe & Kestner (2007) note that after spending millions of hours recruiting, prescreening, interviewing, hiring and training employees, employers find out those people are not actually right for the job or don't stay in one job for long. Baby Boomers are a work force that is experienced and dedicated.

After so many years in the workplace Boomers might be more attracted to companies that offer them reduced schedules. They no longer want 80-hour work weeks but they still want to contribute their knowledge to the workplace (Wagner, 2007). Baby Boomers are looking for a flexible work place to accommodate their new roles as Grandparents and Snow Birds (Wolgemuth, 2009). Baby Boomers also have different benefit requirements. Sometimes Baby Boomers already have benefits from retirement and it may be cost effective to the employer as well as a draw for the Boomer to come on as a contract.

As Baby Boomers go into phased retirement, a company that offers telecommuting might have a large draw for them (Skillman, 2008). Baby

Boomers are often looking for different types of benefits choices. While medical benefits top the list, disability coverage and life insurance are also ranked highly for this generation. As Baby Boomers reach a point in their lives where they are starting to take care of their parents, they are viewing long-term care insurance as important as well (Munk, 2009). To recruit Baby Boomers, companies may want to pursue different avenues for publishing job postings.

One idea is to place advertisements in magazines that cater to this demographic as well as in professional society publications. Another tactic is to be sure to note that age and experience are assets; too often Baby Boomers face thoughts that they are too old or over qualified. Companies are also finding that they can reach out to Baby Boomers using social networks as well. Those most often favored by Baby Boomers include Classmates Online, Reunion. com and AARP's online community. Studies show that an estimated 30 million Millennials will be joining the workforce in 2010.

To locate and attract Millennials, companies must understand what motivates this new generation. A company culture that will attract Millennials offers a good work/life balance, rewards hard work, offers quick advancements, has a fun work environment, a social purpose, and doesn't treat new or young employees poorly – they embrace a new generation's opinions. Millennials are use to high-speed resolutions. They want instant gratification. The needs and expectations of Millennials are different than those of Baby Boomers. Technology is important to Millennials.

Companies who offer laptops and PDA's are more apt to attract this generation than companies who do not (Cavanaugh, 2008). Millennials also focus on life balance so flexible scheduling and mobility is attractive to them. Millennials have a strong sense of social responsibility. Employers who place great emphasis on supporting charitable organizations in the community will attract the Millennials (Schuyler & Berkwitz, 2009). Companies who not only support local charitable organizations but support and encourage employees to get personally involved will score even higher with Millennials.

Benefits such as paid time-off for volunteering will be a very attractive benefit. " Among Millennial talent, 60 percent would prefer to work for companies that give them opportunities to contribute their talents to nonprofit organizations" (Berkwitz & Schuyler, 2009). Millennials want flexible benefits packages that include wellness programs. Millennials tend to be a healthier generation and they sometimes think they will live forever. They look for discounted or free health club memberships to be included in their benefits package. Millennials also look favorably towards companies that offer Health Savings Accounts and self-funded enefits as they want control over where their money goes while paying as little as possible in premiums. Large portions of the Millennials coming into today's workforce are college graduates. That being said, Millennials tend to have college loans that they are responsible for paying off. One creative benefit that may attract Millennials is a student-loan reimbursement program (Hanna, 2009). The company can offer to pay a portion of the employees student-loan balance once they have put in a certain amount of time with the company, such as one or two years.

Companies who are looking to attract the youngest generation need to consider using social networking sites to reach their target. The Internet is a key tool for recruiting Millennials. Millennials tend to be pro's at LinkedIn, Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. Using these mediums is one way to get a Millennials attention. Employers need to ensure their " Career Page" on their company website is current. YouTube is another way to reach Millennials. Some companies suggest having current employees or interns post videos that share their own experiences (Polimeni, Burke & Benyaminy, 2009).

Career Fairs at colleges and universities is another way to reach out to possible job candidates and interns. Managing the Differences With so many different generations now working together, conflicts are likely to arise. Generational conflicts undermine working relations and could possibly lead to legal battles such as age discrimination. To effectively manage any group of people, employers need to make sure and recognize the different values and expectations each generation has. Doing so will reduce the tensions that can arise from generational differences.

It is important that employers and managers are aware of the stereotypes that define the generations. For example, Watt (2010) says that some of the stereotypes define Baby Boomers as technology challenged and change resistant. He says Millennials are described as idle, hard to manage and job-hoppers. Falling prey to stereotypes can negatively impact performance. Galt (2007) says that instead of trying to force conformity, employers should leverage generational diversity to the company's advantage.

No matter what generation an employee falls in to, they all seem to desire flexibility. Although Baby Boomers tend to be loyal to the company they work for, Millennials may leave if they don't receive the flexibility they want (Tsai, 2008). Oftentimes Baby Boomers are not always still in the workforce for financial reasons. Studies have found that Baby Boomers continue working for respect and appreciation (Perry, 2005). They want to know that they are contributing to the success of a company and that they are valued.

At this point in their lives they are looking for balance between their family, their personal interests and their work. Baby Boomers in the past have tended to be hard workers and dedicated to the company they work for.

Millennials want a life balance. They are not as work centric as Baby Boomers were. Millennials look for jobs that have a purpose and meaning but still want to advance within a company quickly. Baby Boomers are generally thought to have a good work ethic, they expect to start at an entry level position and work their way up.

Millennials on the other hand are sometimes said to want to start at the top. They are generally willing to work hard but they want to get the results in as little time as possible. This can cause strife because Baby Boomers put in the time and hours with the company to earn their way up the ladder. Baby Boomers want to be left alone and do not desire constant feedback or praise as the Millennials do. Millennials want honest, open and constant communication with their managers (Ferri-Reed, 2010). Millennials may benefit from mentors or coaches.

One way to help manage differences and have the generations learn to coexist would be to have Baby Boomers and Millennials teach each other in their day to day work. When Baby Boomers act as mentors to Millennials it helps the company to retain knowledge, and have that knowledge passed on within the company (Messmer, 2008). Baby Boomers need to feel that they are making an important contribution to the success of the company and this may help accomplish that. Baby Boomers grew up and worked in environments that were more professional in the ways of dress and communication.

Millennials can be coached by Baby Boomers on how to write letters and emails using correct grammar and not the slang that has become commonplace in their world. Baby Boomers can also impress upon Millennials, who rely on email, instant messaging and texting, why face time is important in a business environment. Baby Boomers can also benefit from mentoring. Millennials can help Baby Boomers with technology (Galt, 2007). They can help them learn to navigate social networks used by many companies as well as instant messaging.

However, some Millennials have a problem separating their work-life from their outside life. They have been raised to multi-task and often do not understand why it's not acceptable to use company time, even while getting their job done, as play time on the internet (McClellan, 2009). One area where issues can arise is when you have a Baby Boomer reporting to a younger person (Restaurant Hospitality, 2005). It is imperative that employers quickly resolve any conflicts that arise from this. More

importantly, proper training and communication will help avoid these issues.
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Mutual respect is a key factor. If younger managers or employers take the time to find out what motivates and drives a Baby Boomer it can ease the way. On the flip side, Millennials were not raised in an era where respect was automatic, it has to be earned. Baby Boomers who have Millennials reporting to them will need to set an example and show the Millennials that they deserve respect. Giving Millennials opportunities to prove themselves, such as presenting their work in meetings, will often earn the Baby Boomer respect because it shows they value the Millennials contributions.

Millennials are also not afraid to question their superiors. This is often something that Baby Boomers do not expect as they were raised in a time where you did not necessarily question authority. Millennials are looking for constant feedback and praise like they had growing up as the center or focus of their family. They had “helicopter parents” raising and praising them and they look for the same thing from their employers. When you have a Millennial with this expectation reporting to a Baby Boomer issues can arise.

While Baby Boomers are said to be micro-managers, praise and constant feedback is not the norm. Baby Boomers worked independently and have expectations that the people who report to them should as well. They see the need for constant praise as a type of hand-holding and look down on it. However, constant monitoring of a Millennials behavior versus constructive feedback can result in their leaving the company rather quickly. That being said, Millennials do seem to appreciate stability and regulations. They are sometimes procrastinators so they appreciate deadlines and timelines to help them stay on task.

Millennials want to be treated as equal contributors and collaborators. They thrive on team work and sometimes don't actually perform as well when working independently (HRMagazine, 2009). Baby Boomers however were often put in a sink or swim environment. They had to learn on their own what needed to be done. Working independently was not just an option, it was often the norm. Succession planning plays an important role with so many generations in the workplace. While Baby Boomers are often the current leaders, they are headed towards retirement.

It is critical to have a plan in place. Companies need to find ways to address how to pass along the knowledge and aptitude that will be leaving with the Baby Boomers. Emphasizing their importance and setting attainable goals will help retain Millennials. Conclusion Economic and social needs are going to result in more generations remaining in the workforce than ever before. This will present companies with opportunities to learn from each generation. Engaging employees is one of the easiest ways to help companies understand those generational differences.

Understanding the differences between generations will go a long way in understanding employee's motivators as well as help minimize and avoid conflicts. Understanding the generation differences will aid in Human Resource departments developing recruitment strategies, benefit plans, training programs and succession planning. When you take into consideration the number of Baby Boomers still in the workforce and coming back to the workforce combined with the number of Millennials entering the workforce, the pool of available talent is enormous.

Finding ways to understand and work with each generation will help make a company more productive and possibly more successful. Employers should constantly find new ways to attract, preserve and sustain the multigenerational workforce. Communication, succession planning and mentoring will foster those relationships. Different generations, such as Baby Boomers and Millennials, work well together because they bring different types of knowledge, experience and skills to the workplace. If the strengths of each generation are allowed to thrive, so will the relationships and company environment.

At the center of it all, generational differences present the same challenges companies have previously faced with other types of diversities. References Cavanaugh, B. B. (2008). The New Invincibles. *Best's Review*, 109 (6), 87-87. Clare, C. (2009). Generational Differences: Turning Challenges into Opportunities. *Journal of Property Management*, 74 (5), 41-43. Crampton, S. M. & Hodge, J. W. (2006). The Supervisor and Generational Differences. Allied Academies International Conference. *Academy of Organizational Culture, Communications & Conflict. Proceedings*, 11 (2), 19-22. Crampton, S. M. & Hodge, J.

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