

# Generational Differences and Learning

*Differing values, management styles, and attitudes about workplace dynamics require constant communication among all individuals to promote personal and organizational success. Over 70% of managers find multi-generational teams challenging or very challenging. The benefits to multi-generational workplace include learning from each other's diverse experience and expertise and mentoring. The biggest challenges are negotiating the differences in work ethic and work/life balance approach. Age cohorts can serve as a lens through which to understand behavior, prevent and resolve conflicts, motivate high performance, and create an environment that contributes to personal and organizational resilience.*

## Age Cohort Stereotypes--Caveats

- Based in some truth
- Should not be applied to individuals for "diagnosis," but for dialogue
- Can give insight to interactions, values, beliefs, perceptions
- No one wants to be "put in a box"

## Today's Workforce:

- |                              |     |                                   |
|------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|
| • Matures (up to 1945)       | 5%  | 50% Digi-Immigrants/Digi-Tourists |
| • Baby Boomers (1946-64)     | 45% |                                   |
| -----The Digital Divide----- |     |                                   |
| • GenXers (1965-1980)        | 40% | 50% Digi-Natives                  |
| • Millennials (1980-2000)    | 10% |                                   |

## For Digi-Natives:

- info happens with no effort
- greater personal choice and control
- unlimited options
- visual, interactive learners
- info/entertainment interchangeable
- strong belief in myth of multi-tasking

## By the Numbers:

- Matures – most have retired; many still practicing law
- 80 million Baby-Boomers will leave U.S. workforce in next 20 years
- 50 million GenXers will have to assume leadership positions
- 72 million Millennials will join workforce (or are already in it)

## Matures (1921-1945; age 65 and older):

- Motivate via link to overall good of the organization
- Approach with respect
- Value dedication, consistency, integrity, loyalty
- Recognize the value of their experience and learn from it
- Don't assume not interested in continued learning

## Boomers (1946-1964; age 46-65):

- Motivate via persuasion and personal interaction
- Approach with equality
- Value optimism, personal growth, consensus building
- Likely to be work-centric – putting work first
- More process-oriented in supervision style
- Use them as mentors and coaches to encourage younger workers

**Gen Xers (1965-1980; age 30-46)**

- Motivate via fun, project not position, and flexibility
- Value balance, informality, diversity
- More outcome-oriented in supervision style
- More like their peers globally—cultural convergence—than earlier cohorts
- 75% value balanced lifestyle over career achievement
- Self-reliant, free agent, intra/entrepreneurs

**Millennials/Gen Yers (1981-2000; age 10-30); Identity still forming so tentative descriptors)**

- Motivate via highly interactive learning; mentoring; focus on outcomes not methods
- Value variety, technology, social networking
- Approach with collaboration, teamwork
- Like frequent communication, explanations, and feedback from leaders
- Workplace and education prerequisite: entertainment

**Gen X and Millennials: Challenges for the Workplace and Bar Associations (Smith)**

- Greater job volatility and mobility: 75% of young lawyers change jobs within 5 years
- Building skills to move to next position
- “Happiness is the criterion we use to make decisions”
- Do not belong just for sake of belonging
- Time as new currency: family and work trump bar membership and involvement
- No meetings for sake of meeting
- Impatient with bureaucracy and slow change; want nimble decision-making
- Unimpressed with tenure and position of leader
- Seek opportunities to make a difference, bring about change, get things done
- Want to know how employer and bar can help them build skills, balance lives, give back

**GenXers and Millennials: Good News for Bar Associations (Smith)**

- Joining in higher % than Baby Boomers at same age
- Don't join “fee-based, low touch” organizations
- Join organizations that offer real participation
- GenXers soon to reach “Sweet Spot” of association membership (45 years old)
- Greater job volatility and mobility means local professional organization may be only stable, professional face-to-face community
- “Happiness is the criterion we use to make decisions”
- Research: Happiness leads to success, Success leads to Membership

## Employer and Professional Organization Mentoring Programs (Nelson Mullins)

- Overall Benefits: greater career success and career satisfaction
  - better retention, fewer mistakes, more rapid acculturation
- Traditional mentoring: 1:1; same organization; covers every topic; months to years
- Mentoring networks: multiple mentors; inside or outside organization; contemporaneous or consecutive; greater benefits than traditional 1:1; supplement to traditional mentoring
- Networks needed because changing work environment requiring new skills, different career expectations and work habits of young professionals
- Career Mentoring: focus on substantive legal issues, job skills, professional role model  
Result: greater career success as measured by firm's decision to retain
- Psychological Mentoring: focus on affirmation, honest feedback, trusted confidant  
Result: greater career satisfaction as measured by associate's desire to remain with firm
- eMentoring: convenience, cost savings, greater appeal to those using social networking

### Sources:

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# Characteristics of Millennials: A Law Professor's View

## Core Personality Traits:

- confident
- conventional
- sheltered
- team-oriented
- achieving
- pressured
- ambitious
- demanding
- question everything

## Learning Characteristics:

- ability to piece together information from variety of sources (“bricolage”)
- learn well through discovery: prefer to learn by doing rather than being told; rarely download instructions for anything; experiment until they get it right; grew up exploring the Internet
- gravitate toward group activity, collaboration not only in-person but also virtual
- do not read as much as previous generations; digital technology is second nature: prefer video, audio and interactive media to traditional printed matter; fascinated by new technologies
- oriented to inductive reasoning, formulating hypotheses, figuring out rules
- strong need for immediacy; engaged and constantly connected; crave stimulation and interactivity: need to be encouraged to stop experiencing and spend time reflecting
- strong desire to learn, but expect to be able to choose what kind of education they buy, and what, where, and how they learn; like portability and frustrated by technology that tethers them to a specific location
- crave learning beyond academic slant of current CLE; dissatisfied with the irrelevant
- training is essential because are unprepared for what they will encounter in the workplace: e.g., have been raised to believe self-esteem is more important than achievement

## Work-related Characteristics

- strong need for direction, feedback (praise) regarding goals
- desire highly interactive workplace
- “masters” of “multitasking”
- likely to mix work and play
- dislike mundane work
- loyal to mentor, not employer
- have mass media impression that work should be fun, exciting, high pay
- respond to flexible schedules, praise, and independence
- do not adapt well to rigid rules, criticism, and micromanagement

Source: Cooney, L.L., Giving Millennials a Leg--Up: How to Avoid the "If I Knew Then What I Know Now" Syndrome, 96 *Ky. L.J.* 505 (2007–08).