

Summary Report on
Managing a Multigenerational Law Firm

Presented by
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This is the first time in history that there are currently four generations in the work force: Traditionalists; Baby Boomers; Generation X (“Gen X’ers”) ; and Millennials. This session identified each generation’s work styles, described their various types of communications, provided strategies for building effective multigenerational teams, and explained how to adapt policies and training programs for them.

The first generation is the Traditionalists. They were born between 1922 and 1943 and represent 5% of the workforce. Some world events that have helped shape who they are include the Stock Market Crash, Depression, WWII, and the Holocaust. Traditionalists tend to be private, loyal, financially conservative, hard working, and detail-oriented. They value relationships and enjoy interacting with the younger generation. The Boomers say they are not adaptable to change. The Gen X’ers think they need to learn to use technology. However the Millennials like their principles and believe they are true leaders who take the time to talk to them.

The Baby Boomers were born between 1943 and 1960 and make up 47% of the workforce. They lived through the Cold War, Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, Women’s Lib and are considered the “Me Generation.” Boomers are also hard working and set high standards. They have a strong base of expertise, are willing to experiment, and are enthusiastic. They are seen as bossy, negative, and cliquish. They are not eager to retire and are focused on “how,” and not “what.” The Traditionalists believe they share too much personal information and that they like change for change’s sake. The Gen X’ers think they are workaholics, too political and want them to get out of their way. The Millennials like their music, but feel they work too much and they do not see enough of them.

Gen X’ers were born between 1960 and 1980 and make up 33% of the workforce. The world events that shaped their lives are Pentagon Papers, Agnew/Nixon scandals, Iran Contra, the energy crisis, economic recession and layoffs. They are often products of divorce and latchkey kids who grew up with “new” math, phonics and “evil child” films. Gen X’ers are independent, creative, and technologically savvy. They are engaged with their peers and family, but not awed by authority. They do not like over supervision and can be impatient, cynical, and enigmatic. They are not strong mentors. Traditionalists do not understand them and say that they do not value relationships and are not ready to take over the business. Boomers believe that they do not work hard enough and lack social skills. They believe that the Gen X’ers want to do things their own way. The Millennials think they are terrible supervisors and need to lighten up. They are left feeling like they are imposing if they ask a Gen X’er for help.

Millennials were born between 1980 and 2000. They are diverse, healthy, educated and prosperous. They were actively parented and born during the informational and technological explosion and considered the “Net Generation.” They experienced political stability until Columbine, 9/11, the Gulf War, Iraq and Rwanda. They are technologically savvy and adept at change. Millennials tend to be confident, optimistic, pleasant, ambitious, altruistic, creative, collaborative and seem to value family, friends and lifestyle above work. However, they were over-parented and have a sense of entitlement. Millennials tend to be shy and are poor problem solvers because they have a difficult time putting together the big picture. They require close supervision and lack attention to detail because they are scanners and surfers. Their preferred

method of communication is text messaging. Traditionalists like their enthusiasm and think they are nice kids. The Boomers believe they need too much attention and do not know what it will take to satisfy them. The Gen X'ers think they are high maintenance and spoiled. They believe their work is poor quality and that they waste too much time.

The values and motivations for the four generations are very different. However, a few things that they all want are fair treatment, a sense of achievement, camaraderie, to learn new skills, flexibility in their jobs and to understand the economics of business. The Traditionalists value relationships and are motivated out of duty and respect. The Boomers value authority, kids/grandkids and are motivated by their finances and staying young. Gen X'ers value family and lifestyle. They are ambitious and like autonomy. Millennials are the first generation to rate having fun as their #1 job requirement. They are altruistic, value money and are motivated by recognition. They are used to everyone getting trophies or acknowledged and 40% believe they will earn six figures by age 30.

In order to build effective multigenerational teams it is important to give people choices, accommodate differences, respect competence, encourage creativity, reward initiative/achievement and retain talent.

There are various factors that should be considered regarding training a multigenerational work force. A classroom environment works well for Traditionalists. It also helps to enlist them in training. The Boomers tend to coach, but do not teach. They like various formats and trying new things. Although they want lots of information provided, they want to pace themselves. Gen X'ers are trained best by using CD-ROM, interactive video, computer, internet and role-playing. They are geared toward building knowledge and experience and tend to maximize their time and efficiency. Millennials prefer that the process is explained to them and they want to know what they will gain from it. It's important to begin with the fundamentals and provide accountability and follow-through. When training a Millennial, one must be patient, thorough, explicit, yet brief.

It is without a doubt that the workforce is changing. Each generation brings specific values and ideals to the workplace that will ultimately alter policies and management strategies. Firms that make an effort to understand and accept their differences and act upon these professionals' perspectives will find themselves with a dedicated and ambitious group of workers.

**“Each generation imagines itself
to be more intelligent than
the one that went before it,
and wiser than
the one that comes after it.”**

George Orwell