

Working In a Multi-Generational Environment

It doesn't take long walking around at the YMCA of the Rockies for one to notice that we are an organization that serves people of all ages. That is why I would like to share some information I recently learned at a presentation on The Multi-Generational Workplace. The four generations covered in the presentation included: Traditionalist, Baby Boomers, Generation X and the Millennials. While the information below specifically relates to the workplace, use your own creativity to determine ways to apply the information to the guest we serve as well.

Traditionalist- This generation was born 1928 – 1945 and included 42 million people. This age group helped develop our work structure in the United States. Their defining moment in history was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. By 2011, only 5%* of the American work force will be made of this generation.

What you should know...

- This group prefers a formal or hierarchical chain of command.
- They are disciplined and have a very strong work ethic – the “can do” mentality.
- They may also be more linear or task oriented.
- They prefer face to face meetings or conversations.
- They enjoy learning through many different educational programs.

People working with Traditionalist need to provide a variety of means of communication to convey important information such as memos, letters, and personal notes. Be sure to personally recognize them for their hard work and commitment (they like plaques or certificates). Also, try to directly connect their personal contribution to the mission of the organization. Consider giving them opportunities to mentor younger generations. If you are in this group you may want to consider sharing your history, be flexible, adapt to new technologies and ask rather than tell.

Baby Boomers - Born 1946 – 1964 and included 76 million people. Their defining moment in history was the Vietnam conflict and its surrounding controversy. By 2011, 38%* of the American work force will be made of Boomers.

What you should know...

- They like to be recognized for their hard work – or “going the extra mile.”
- They are driven & loyal to the organization (They invented the 60-hour work week).
- This group is very good at networking and building consensus to get things done – team players.
- They like to maintain good working relationships.
- They are into life-long learning and making a difference in the world around them.

People working with Boomers need to be friendly and welcoming. (You need to say good morning to them or they may think you are mad at them.) Strive to be inclusive and acknowledge them for their accomplishments. Provide public recognition for a job well done. If you are a Boomer, you need to walk your talk, don't take things so personally and maybe process things a little less.

Generation X - This group was born 1964 – 1982 and includes 54 million people. This was the latchkey generation and they grew up with video games and TV as the baby sitter. Their defining moment in history was the explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. This group will make up 32%* of the work force by 2011.

What you should know...

- This group prefers to be given a problem/ issue & then allowed time to work on it independently.
- They are adaptable and tend to handle change in the workplace without difficulty.
- They don't mind going against the flow or challenging authority.
- They tend to be more committed to a career rather than an organization.
- They want balance between their work life & personal life. They “work to live.”

People working with Gen Xers need to be sincere with them, get to the point, use technology and be flexible. Make sure their work is purposeful & fulfilling because if they fail to believe in the mission, they will disengage and become unproductive. To reward a Gen Xer, consider giving them time off or a gift card to their favorite restaurant – they don't want plaques to hang on their walls. If you are a Gen Xer you may want to consider engaging with your team, ask for what you need, be patient and lighten up.

Millennials - Born 1982 – 2002 and includes 75 million people. Their defining moment in history was the terrorist attacks on 9/11. This group will make up 25%* of the work force in 2011.

What you should know...

- This group likes to be asked for their input on decisions and problem solving.
- They are very good at multi-tasking.
- They are the most diverse & globally-minded of any other generation.
- They want to enhance their skills and knowledge.
- They want an opportunity to make a difference in their community and work and believe that they will change the world.

People working with Millennials should pay attention to them and be friendly to them. They will want to be *your* friend. Ask them for their ideas. They grew up multi-tasking and they like things fast and fun so be prepared to get creative with them. They are very loyal to their family and friends and like to stay in touch (they check in on their cell phone). Millennial's parents also like to be very involved with them, including their work lives. You may need to practice some tolerance as you work with this group because they are very curious and full of lots of questions. If you are a Millennial, you should strive for independence, listen more and talk less, and seek out a mentor (maybe in the Traditionalist generation).

Working within a variety of generations can be challenging. Hopefully, by understanding the different perspectives we will be able to better support & encourage one another.

*Projections according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). Because the BLS data is aggregated into age groups that do not align perfectly with the generation breaks, the numbers in the table are only approximations of each generation's labor force participants and are not an exact depiction.

Brought to you by the YMCA of the Rockies Outreach & Inclusion Team.