
GEEKS, GEEZERS, AND GOOGLIZATION

By Dr. Ira S. Wolfe

How to Manage the Unprecedented Convergence
of the Wired, the Tired, and Technology
in the Workplace

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Geeks, Geezers, and Googlization

Excerpt

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Who Are The Four Generations?

Excerpt

Who are the Veterans?

Born Before 1946

Veterans have a very strong work ethic. “Just git'er done” could be their motto. Give an impossible task to a Veteran and somehow, someway it will get done. Most have served in the military or been married to someone who did. As a result, Veterans tend to be very respectful of seniority, title and rank. Because their world outlook was shaped by the Great Depression and World War II, Veterans have a very practical outlook (make do, reuse, recycle) and know how to put money away for a rainy day.

Key Veteran values: Self-sacrifice and dedication.

Excerpt

Prepare to say goodbye to the traditional workers, whose core values include dedication, adherence to rules, hard work, patience, delayed reward, conformity, duty before pleasure, and loyalty. Now comprising less than 7% of the employed population, this generation won't be in the workforce much longer.

Born before the end of WWII generation, Veterans thrived within traditional, hierarchical organizations. Members of this generation did not seek to change the system, but rather to work within it. Growing up in large families with many siblings, they often stayed in the same hometown for their lifetime. They also expected to stay with one employer for an entire career. Their childhoods were characterized by spending many hours each day with a stay-at-home parent, and they grew up viewing the world as "safe" and stable. They were raised to believe in traditional institutions like school, the government, and the church. This faith extended to the organizations that hired them.

Veterans were raised to follow rules, establish procedures, and listen to authority. They generally enjoy belonging to organizations, and appreciate the sense of security and affiliation they provide. In fact, when they weren't working in a large corporation, Veterans were prone to join a civic or community organization in their leisure time. Groups such as Kiwanis, Rotary, and the Masons now face the crisis of aging memberships; younger generations have less interest in joining their ranks. Pearl Harbor, a defining experience, forever marked this generation with a military imprint.

Warren Bennis and Robert Thomas, writers and researchers of leadership and generational differences, refer to the coming-of-age years (1945 – 1954) of this generation as the "era of limits." Characterized by the Cold War, these were the years in

which Big Business flourished, and employee benefits were born. The ideas of reciprocal loyalty between employer and employee and the “organization man” characterized this time period. The "one-life, one-career" concept flourished. Rather than two-career families, this generation knew the two-person career, in which the stay-at-home spouse was expected to facilitate her husband's corporate advancement by handling everything on the homefront.

Leaders embraced a command-and-control style that often mimicked military organizations in which many workers had served; a rigid work ethic and a great need for security; and Douglas McGregor's paternalistic “Theory X” management style prevailed, when managers relied heavily on threat and coercion to gain their employee's compliance.

As a result, these Veteran geezers often

- Have had only one to three jobs in their careers.
- Consider their work a vital part of their "social identity."
- Have not generally recognized the value of diversity until late in their careers.
- Consider "paying your dues" essential.
- Learn in traditional ways such as reading and classrooms.
- Are unfamiliar with the pressures of two-career families.

While the stability of the Veterans may be viewed by organizations as a positive trait, younger workers may see this generation as resisting change and being unwilling to adapt. Traditional employees tend to be process-oriented, meaning they are

accustomed to following procedures. They also possess a strong work ethic. They generally don't like taking risks and "rocking the boat."

Veterans may be the last generation who believed implicitly in lifetime employer-employee loyalty. That implied bond was broken with the downsizing trend of the late 1980s, which changed the way younger generations view their relationship to an employer.

Veteran employees have a hard time understanding the job-hopping mentality of younger workers, believing that loyalty to an employer and sacrifice are prime virtues. Some Veterans may harbor the age-old expectation that younger generations should receive the worst assignments and work schedules, learn from the school of hard-knocks, be seen and not heard, and climb the same organizational ladder they climbed (even when the path has been blocked for decades by the Baby Boomers.) After all, this is what they did. The difference is that the younger employees believe that they are not likely to receive the same reciprocal benefits promised to older generations.

The Veteran generation did not necessarily expect deep meaning from their jobs. Unlike the Boomers, who sought to change the world, many Veterans merely like the familiarity of work, the routine, the camaraderie, and the coworkers. They like belonging to an organization and the status it brings.

Dr. Jon Warner and Anne Sandberg, authors of the *Generational Style Assessment (GSA)*, posit that this generation is now in the "winter" of their careers, and therefore their focus is on enlightenment and wisdom. They advise a "supporting" style of management for Veteran employees, which involves listening, offering support, and engaging in collaborative decision making.

Although the Veteran generation won't be in the workforce much longer (by 2011, many in this cohort will be retired), it is important to remember that members of this age group can still learn new skills. They do not want to be discounted or overlooked. Carol Martin and Bruce Tulgan, authors of "Managing Generation Y," advise younger managers to be careful to respect their experience and wisdom. Remember that members of this generation may also possess vital expertise and procedural knowledge necessary to the smooth operation of the business.

Excerpt

What do Veterans remember?

- Pearl Harbor
- World War II
- Kewpie Dolls
- Big Bands
- Mickey Mouse
- Flash Gordon
- Radio – no TV
- Wheaties
- Tarzan
- Jukeboxes
- Blondie
- The Lone Ranger
- The McCarthy Era

Who do Veterans remember?

- Franklin D. Roosevelt
- Audie Murphy
- Joe DiMaggio
- Winston Churchill

Recommended approaches when managing Veterans

- “No news is good news” works for managing performance.
- Responds well to a traditional classroom environment and lectures given by experts.
- Responds best to communication that is logical and non-emotional.
- Likes information that is organized, well-researched and supported by facts, figures, details and practical examples.

Messages that motivate Veterans

- Your experience is respected here.
- It's valuable to the rest of us to hear what has and hasn't worked in the past.
- Your perseverance is valued and will be rewarded.
- Rewards: tangible symbols of loyalty, commitment, and service including plaques and certificates.

Here Come the Boomers!

"If this were a movie, this is when the scary music would start,"

David John, an economist from the Heritage Foundation, said on the day Kathleen Casey-Kirschling turned 62.

You see, Kathleen was born New Year's Day 1946, at one second past midnight, making her the first baby of a new generation – the Baby Boomers. On January 1, 2008, she reached another milestone -- she became the first Baby Boomer to sign up to receive Social Security payments.

Raised on "Howdy Doody" and hula hoops, she danced on "American Bandstand." Her first husband served in Vietnam. And in later years, she prospered like many of her classmates -- the Baby Boomers.

Casey-Kirschling is the leading edge of nearly 80 million other cohorts who are primed to follow her right into "old age." Casey-Kirschling is the raindrop that's about to become a tidal wave.

This tidal wave is disrupting some organizations and rejuvenating others. It is creating both new opportunities and crippling change. Three of the factors driving the energy behind this tidal wave are young workers, older workers and technology or as I've called it: Geeks, Geezers and Googlization.

Who are the Baby Boomers?

Born between 1946 and 1964

Baby Boomers invented the 60-hour workweek. They are competitive to their own detriment at times with a “work-til-you-drop” work ethic. They have a history of turning endings into beginnings. Now entering traditional retirement age, they have no plans for porches, rocking chairs, or seats at bingo tables. Retirement is not the end of a career but the start of a career transition. They are optimistic about their own lives - they believe that if you set goals and work hard, you can achieve whatever you set out to do. Boomers have less respect for rank and hierarchy than their predecessors but still respect the hierarchy of leadership, especially when they can be part of it. They set long-term goals and have the “no pain-no gain” attitude to set them through.

Key Boomer values: Hard work and be a team player.

Once famous for saying, “Don’t trust anyone over 30,” Boomers are now becoming the old guard in the workplace, the authority figures. Forever marked by the experience of the un-won war in Vietnam, Boomers entered the workplace under the traditional workplace set of rules, working under Veteran generation bosses until they paid their institutional dues. Since the workplace has shifted under their feet, they have had to adapt to a new set of workplace rules, mid-career.

Despite their well-earned reputation for rebellion, Martin and Tulgan point out that most Boomers followed traditional work paths and sought employment with established organizations. Like the Veteran generation, they grew up in stable households, believing the world was “safe.” Their bosses had standard operating procedures, and Boomers adapted to the status quo. Command-and-control leadership was the norm and Boomers had to toe the line and work hard. And did they ever work hard! Many became workaholics, leading very unbalanced lives, or foregoing family time (or even families), to succeed in the workforce.

Family-friendly work policies did not exist for them. They responded by reducing their family sizes (contributing to the current shortage of qualified workers) and working endless hours to compete against one another within their swollen demographic group. Generation Jones, or those young Boomers born between 1956 and 1964, seeing the unbalanced work emphasis of their older cohorts, began lobbying for more family-friendly workplaces and better work/life balance. They still believed in job security and figured the system would take care of them through retirement, if they fulfilled their end of the bargain.

But then, just as these Boomers started to earn seniority and move into positions of authority, they were shell- shocked by the 1987 stock market crash and the downsizing of the late 80s to early 90s. Hundreds of thousands of jobs disappeared, virtually overnight, and the promise of lifetime job security became a pipe dream. Many were forced by necessity to become job hoppers or to create their own businesses. Many Boomers had derived their sense of personal identity from their work and sacrificed life balance to achieve success, only to be blindsided by “disloyal” employers.

Coming of age in a work-world that valued seniority, and having paid their required dues, Boomers today find themselves in a changed work-world that now seems to reward speed and youth instead.

The Boomers want to know that management still honors their contributions. They are also, true to form, seeking opportunities for self-improvement and personal growth; employers who can provide these valued experiences will win their loyalty. Although the first Boomers will begin entering retirement soon, members of the Boomer generation will be in the workplace for another 5-20 years—perhaps even a bit longer if the demographic trends provide enough incentives for them to postpone retirement. While they remain in the workforce, they will want the same things we all want: ongoing challenges, the respect they’ve earned, and a sense of relevance.

Because this generation is in the “autumn” of their careers, Dr. Jon Warner and Anne Sandberg recommend an “empowering” style of management. Workers of this age have generally “arrived,” meaning they are often at the peak of their work lives, and they have attained a high level of expertise, confidence, and experience. This

empowering style means allowing the employee to operate independently and managers to simply be available as needed.

Excerpt

What do Baby Boomers remember?

- Cold War
- Sputnik
- Cuban Missile Crisis
- Vietnam War
- Civil rights demonstrations
- Landing on the moon
- Television
- The Ed Sullivan Show
- American Bandstand
- Barbie Dolls
- Fallout Shelters
- Poodle Skirts
- Hula Hoops
- The Peace Sign
- Laugh-In
- World Book Encyclopedia

Who do Baby Boomers remember?

- John Glenn
- John F. Kennedy
- Martin Luther King
- Elvis Presley
- Beatles
- Joe Namath

Recommended approaches for managing Baby Boomers

- Once a year feedback is good enough as long as it is tied to a salary increase or promotion.
- More casual, participative training works best where the Boomers themselves can exert their expertise.
- Offer personal rewards and do it publicly, especially for long hours and going above and beyond what's expected.
- Motivation: Promote and support lifelong learning, provide public recognition and personal perks.

Messages that motivate Baby Boomers

- Your opinion is valued.
- You can work as long as you want to.
- Your contribution will be recognized.
- We need you.
- Rewards: personal appreciation, promotion, recognition.

How Pension Plans Got Started

In the 1880s, Otto von Bismarck crafted Europe's first pension plan. He had to pick an age at which people would be too feeble to work and therefore eligible for state support and entitlement. Bismarck picked 65.

In that year, the life expectancy in Europe and the United States was only 45. Life expectancy at birth today is 79 for women and 73 for men.

But call a 65 year-old "old" today and he will likely out-work you, out-golf you and maybe even out-run you. Ok, old isn't what it used to be. Ask a Generation Xer or Millennial how old is old and yes, they might say age 50 or 60. But ask a 60 year old the same question and they proudly consider themselves middle-aged.

And by the way, if you were to use Bismarck's formula to craft a retirement age today, the retirement age today would be 115.

Who is Generation X?

Born between 1965 and 1979

Gen Xs are the free agents of the workforce – independent, self-reliant, and entrepreneurial. Because they don't find any value in wasting time with non-essential stuff, they shattered the management philosophy of "if ain't broken, don't fix it." Gen Xs grew up alone because both parents were working. In addition, 40% of their parents were divorced and/or lost their jobs during the '80s and '90s. As a result, Gen Xs are very concerned about life balance and fiercely protective of family time. They tend to be skeptical and pragmatic, and value leadership by competence. They have no respect for service, title or rank because their parents had all three and lost their jobs anyway. Their career paths create a mosaic of work, learning, family and even sabbatical. When they receive an email at 11 PM from their Boomer boss, they don't think "Wow, she works hard" but "Wow, she might be over her head and can't handle the workload."

Key Gen X values: Life balance and respect for individuality.

There is no better example of the maxim that each generation reacts to the one preceding it than Generation X. Coming of age in the shadow of the Baby Boomers virtually ensured that this generation would be overlooked and ignored; like Great Britain's Prince Charles, they are the workplace "heirs apparent," waiting endlessly and impatiently to assume leadership.

The smallest generation since the Great Depression, Gen Xs are the products of a Baby Bust.

Upon graduation, they attempted to enter a work-world that was already saturated with the largest workforce generation in American history. They immediately grasped that their chances for upward mobility were blocked for the next thirty years by what has come to be called the "gray ceiling." (I discuss the gray ceiling in more detail on page 83.)

Birth rates show the waves of demographic changes since 1920. The following "waves" contributed in large part to the impending Perfect Labor Storm.

- Birth dearth:** reduction of birthrates in the late 1920s and early 1930s
- Baby boom:** 1946-1964
- Baby bust:** 1965-1975
- Baby boom echo:** late 1980s and 1990s

As Martin and Tulgan report, one Gen X complained,

"It's like we're all stuck in a silo. I've been working here for three years now, and any movement up that silo is blocked by you Boomers. You're going to be around for quite a while, so what am I supposed to do? I'm ready to move now.' The Boomers sat in stunned silence at the audacity of this young woman; the few Xers in the audience surreptitiously nodded their heads in agreement."

After graduating from college with degrees as credible as their predecessors, Gen Xs faced a work-world that didn't need them. Many were shunted into low-skilled, low-paying positions (so-called "McJobs") for which they were eminently overqualified. They quickly ascertained that the traditional career path had little to offer them.

On top of the bad demographic odds, they were trying to begin their careers just as major downsizing events during the late 1970s and 1980s thrust experienced Boomers out on the streets. As a result, they had little trust in the implied employer-employee lifetime contract. They responded by becoming a generation of "free agents" and entrepreneurs, striking out on their own.

Their childhoods were much different than those of Veterans and Boomers. According to Martin and Tulgan, Generation X was the most unsupervised generation in American history—the original "latchkey kids." They were expected to look after themselves before and after school while their parents chased fulfillment and climbed the corporate ladder.

Gen X were born during one of the most blatantly anti-child phases in U.S. history. Their Veteran and Older Boomer parents had the highest divorce and abortion rates, highest number of dual-income families, and most permissive parenting habits in our history. In response, Gen X developed the view that the world was unsafe.

As a result, they grew up to be self-reliant, fending for themselves. This necessary fend-for-myself attitude turned out to be remarkably valuable within the changing work-world. Gen X have always been accustomed to taking care of themselves, which ironically turned out to be excellent training for the independent career paths they would pursue within the challenging work environment they faced. It

also became the source of generational conflict with their generational predecessors and successors.

Although Gen Xs were initially viewed by older generations as disloyal slackers who were unwilling to “toe the line” or “pay their dues,” they have emerged as the most innovative generation of our lifetime, ushering in a new wave of American entrepreneurialism. They are independent and comfortable with technology. Their hallmark is flexibility.

Luckily, their coming-of-age coincided with the birth of the Internet, which facilitated their “free agent” career trajectories. They eagerly embraced this liberating new technology, emerging as wonder-kid, “dot.com” entrepreneurs during the 1990s.

It’s true, as the stereotype suggests, that Gen X are prone to switching jobs: nearly 18 million change jobs annually and their average tenure on a job is just three years. Xers are very unlikely to stay with organizations that fail to tap into their creativity and entrepreneurial urges; they like to keep their options open, which make it a challenge for employers to retain them. They want to be marketable when an new opportunity arises or when their employer sells the business, closes its doors, or downsizes and eliminates their jobs. Gen X doesn’t view job hopping as disloyal but sees Boomers who have stayed in the same industry or company for years as complacent.

Unlike Veterans, they lack strong attachments to institutions. Remember: these are the children of many Boomer parents who were laid off, downsized, right-sized and outsourced mid-career after years of loyal service. These Gen X learned early on that their best security came from relying on their own resourcefulness.

Gen Xs demand work/life balance from their employers. Unlike Boomers and Veterans, they are not obsessed with climbing the corporate ladder, since they tend to have a cynical mistrust of institutions anyway. They want to achieve success on their own terms and part of what they consider “being successful” is having a successful lifestyle.

This means having freedom, including time for family, friends, travel and hobbies. They are not content to sacrifice their personal or family lives for their employers, since that neglect is what characterized their own childhoods. Unlike Veterans, who value “face time,” they prefer to be paid for the results they achieve rather than for the hours they put in. Because they work well independently, working virtually, in remote locations, or in telecommuting arrangements is a natural fit.

The free agency mindset that Gen X adopted in response to the difficult economic climate they encountered at the start of their careers didn't disappear as the economy and their career fortunes improved; instead, it went mainstream. Gen Xs' job-hopping horrified Boomers and Veterans. It flew in the face of a cultural norm: loyalty to work and the employer. But many Gen Xs didn't change jobs out of disrespect or a lack of loyalty; they did so to avoid being pigeon-holed in their job or industry.

A “hidden” freelance job market emerged, thanks largely to the Internet, outsourcing, and a global economy. A new generation learned how to make a living at home, wearing pajamas, sipping chai teas, lattes and cappuccinos.

Generation X employees bring continual learning skills which are necessary to keep pace with rapid technological change. They are frequent innovators in the workplace, as well as risk-takers; this places them at odds with the Veteran and older

Boomer generations. Even within established organizations, they bring an entrepreneurial flair for starting new ventures. That led to a whole movement called “intrapreneurism,” where businesses attempted to capture the entrepreneurial spirit within a traditional organization. All of these characteristics, coupled with their relative youth, make them extremely valuable employees to recruit and retain.

Gen X are results-oriented and lean-focused, continually looking for new ways to achieve goals and outcomes rather than follow established and pointless procedures. They are likely to agree with the phrase that it is possible to “work smarter, not harder.” In other words, they want to work on things that add or create value, not just do things to keep busy.

Now that Xers have proven that they can achieve results and “get the job done;” they are ready to move into leadership positions. For too long, Xers have been the overlooked “new kid” on the block. At this point in their careers, these Gen Xs want increased responsibility; otherwise, managers risk losing them to the competition.

But Gen Xs are hitting the ‘gray ceiling’ harder and more often, as Boomers are not giving up their jobs as quickly as forecast. A dicey economy plus a generational DNA that won’t let them be idle keep Baby Boomers working, in both paid and volunteer positions. The longer that Gen X is blocked by this gray ceiling, the more time the up-and-coming Gen Ys to develop their skills. Trapped between the aging geezers and tech-savvy geeks, the tension caused by the squeeze within the Gen X cohort is nearly palpable.

By offering customized organizational charts, rather than the cookie-cutter hierarchies of the past, businesses can provide enough different, satisfying alternatives to retain this talented generation of employees.

Other ways to motivate and retain Gen Xs include offering non-Veteran work arrangements that facilitate work/life balance. If organizations can offer flexible work arrangements—including schedules, assignments, locations, coworkers—they can hook Gen X into a long-term employment relationship.

Xers seek responsibility, challenge, growth, and mobility. Mobility doesn't always have to be upward, however. Not everyone wants to move into management, especially if the advancement comes with increased time commitments. Organizations that can redefine Veteran and Boomer career paths to accommodate new lifestyle patterns will have the best chance to attract and hold on to key talent among younger cohorts, both Gen X and Gen Y. Offering high producing Xers opportunities to advance their careers in ways that make sense to them is a key retention strategy.

Gen Xs place a high value on opportunities to build lasting relationships with wise and experienced mentors; this is a great way to bring the different generations into positive and productive collaboration while increasing the transfer of organizational knowledge to the heirs apparent.

Dr. Jon Warner and Anne Sandberg advise using a “steering” style of management for this age group, which is in the “summer” of their careers. This age group is frequently struggling with direction and they benefit from being given broad frameworks, within which they can accomplish goals on their own.

What do Generation X remember?

- Challenger Disaster
- Three Mile Island
- AIDS
- MTV
- Commodore computer
- Sesame Street
- The Brady Bunch
- Cosby Show
- Pet Rocks
- Platform Shoes
- The Simpsons
- Dukes of Hazzard
- ET
- Cabbage Patch Dolls
- Super-hero Cartoons on TV (He-man, Incredible Hulk, Spiderman)
- Encarta

Who do Gen Xs remember?

- Ronald Reagan
- Kurt Cobain
- Magic Johnson
- Pee Wee Herman
- Christa McAuliffe
- Muppets

Recommended Approaches for Managing Gen X

- Need lots of ongoing positive feedback.
- Prefers role-playing to practice their skills and get immediate feedback and on-the-fly coaching.
- Meetings can be face-to-face or by phone. Younger Gen Xs may prefer web meetings. But agendas are merely guidelines, susceptible to change depending on the discussion.
- Hierarchical authority doesn't work. Allow interaction and opportunities to participate in discussions and help in forming policy and strategy.

Messages that motivate Gen X

- Do it your way.
- We've got the newest hardware and software.
- There aren't a lot of rules around here.
- Rewards: Free time, upgraded resources, opportunities for development, certifications.

Make Way for Generation Y

Born between 1980 and 2000

Gen Ys are very entrepreneurial. Most worked at legitimate jobs before they left high school. Gen Ys are technology-savvy. They've never known a world without mobile devices and 24/7 connectivity. They see themselves as citizens of the world and feel very connected through the Internet. Gen Ys fly to Europe to visit friends and family as easily as Veterans and Boomers crossed state lines. Family vacations take place on cruise ships instead of cabins by the lake. They have better relationships with their parents than many Gen Xs and Boomers, and have a strong interest in teamwork (although they define "team" differently than Boomers and Xers). And despite an ongoing debate about the human ability to multi-task, they seem to be creating a new frontier for juggling multiple activities simultaneously.

Gen Y values: Making a difference in the world and respecting diversity.

The youngest workers, members of Generation Y, are on the scene and demanding respect. You've heard the stereotypes about this generation. They text constantly. They dress inappropriately. They're overly confident. They are Generation Y.

Described as being "high maintenance," (some might say, "spoiled") they're quite vocal and willing to share their opinions about everything. And they expect management to care. And to respond: Quickly, please.

They have been also called the Millennials, Generation Y (and WHY), iGeneration, Net Generation, the Children of the Rising Dow, and most recently Trophy Kids.

Trophy Kids

On March 2, 1962, Wilt Chamberlain set the NBA single-game scoring record by scoring 100 points. This achievement has been proclaimed as one of the greatest achievements in sports history. Events like Chamberlain's scoring record along with landing a man on the moon shaped and influenced an entire generation to believe that you could achieve anything if you set your mind to it.

But 47 years later, a Texas high school girls basketball team, after winning the game by a score of 100-0, received nothing but backlash and criticism for running up the score. In a case of remorse, officials from the school responded by seeking a forfeit and apologizing for the margin of victory.

Chamberlain was cheered. The girls were jeered.

What changed?

For the record, Millennials were born between 1980 – 2000. They grew up during the greatest period of wealth creation in modern history. They have also witnessed irrational exuberance ending in the dot-com crash, terrorism, war, climate change, and the worst recession since the Great Depression. They have been coddled by their parents and nurtured with a strong sense of entitlement. Now entering the workforce, this generation's attitude towards life creates a stark contrast to the make-do-with-what-you-have attitude of the WWII generation and the winner-take-all attitude of the Baby Boomers. The workplace has become an interesting psychodrama featuring the workplace attitudes of the Millennials and employers' efforts to manage these uber-connected and collaborative rookies.

As evidenced by the jeers and not cheers to running up a 100-0 score, winning isn't everything anymore. That's not to say Millennials don't have ambition. In fact, their ambitions may even be far larger than any previous generation – they just don't see the path of achievement littered with bodies that they need to step over on the way to their personal goals. For previous generations who grew up and worked in a world when there was only one winner and all others were losers, this "trophy kid" generation is a tough pill to swallow.

How did these kids get this way? For many Millennials, few "accomplishments" didn't rate some type of acknowledgement. In games, it was common for everyone to receive a trophy — win or lose – thus the name "trophy kids." Stick ball transformed into T-ball. The embarrassment of getting selected last (or not at all) by your friends shifted to not being allowed to strike out! The lesson shifted from "second place is the first place for losers" to "everyone who plays is a winner."

This generational tension is a bit ironic. While many managers and most of the media targets the kids, the blame might fall squarely on the very people doing the loudest complaining - doting parents, teachers and coaches. After all, the grumbling Baby Boomer managers are the same indulgent parents who raised the millennial generation after starting families late in life or vowing not to make the same mistake twice with children from second and third marriages.

And it's not just Boomers who are the hovering adults. Generation X latch-key kids, now raising their own families, have ditched the key and are showing up at every school event, soccer game and even parent-teacher conference. Moms go to work and Dads stay home to see their kids off to school and meet them at day's end. No more are kids expected to fend for themselves while both parents plug away at work. And if it's not Mom or Dad doing the doting, it's Grandma or Grandpa. No child left behind for many Millennials means no child should ever participate in any event without his or her own raving fans.

At school, teachers accentuate the positive. Kids no longer fear the bad report card – teachers do. This generation was treated so delicately that many schoolteachers stopped grading papers and tests in harsh-looking red ink to avoid bruising the child's precious self-esteem. Managers in turn must now tread lightly when making even the most benign critique.

Millennials also grew up with “Baby on Board” signs and a culture that lovingly catered to their needs. They arrived at college and work expecting the same. Their parents have been called “helicopter parents” and “snowplow parents” for hovering over every move their child made and trying to pave the way to a better future. Managers

and more experienced workers are now expected to be mentors and coaches, not teachers and drill sergeants.

Authorities on the digital revolution, these youngsters have grown up online, bathed in bits and bytes. As a result, they are characterized as being tech-savvy, multi-cultural and collaborative. Unlike their parents who grew up *watching* 24 hours of television per week, Millennials grew up *interacting* with their media. These “crackberry” kids literally let their fingers do the talking. They send more text messages everyday than there are people on the planet. They grew up tethered to multiple electronic devices while juggling text messages, surfing the Net and listening to iPods – all while doing their homework. They effortlessly mix learning, communicating and playing.

By age 21 years of age, it is estimated that the average Millennial child will have:

- Spent 10,000 hours playing video games
- Sent 200,000 emails and text messages
- Spent 20,000 hours watching TV
- Spent 10,000 hours on their cell phone
- Spent under 5,000 hours reading

Young people are gathering en masse online to collaborate. Millennials, unlike their Gen X predecessors who incessantly played one-dimensional games, create the games they play – virtually and interactively with people they’ve never met. Hanging out with friends down the street has been replaced by online gaming and social networking. It’s like they closed the bedroom door, but instead of one best friend inside they now invite thousands of friends in. Lacking in many Veteran social circles – school, work and family – these online networks provide virtual instant feedback and affection.

Worldwide this generation is huge, nearly 2 billion strong. In the U.S., the Millennials outnumber the Baby Boomers, previously the largest generation. When combined with the Gen Xs, they already make up the majority of the workforce. The Boomers made and moved markets. The Millennials will be the doing the same thing but more quickly and dramatically. Millennials will rewrite the rules for communities, education, meetings, workplaces, and marketplaces.

A controversial study released in 2008 found today's college students are more narcissistic and self-centered than any preceding generation. A ferocious response erupted on blogs condemning the study: "our youngest generation isn't more narcissistic," the offended said. "We are just more misunderstood," reads one blog.

Fittingly for a win-win generation, both conclusions might be correct. In a 2007 Center for Applied Research study of the Millennial Generation, two responses dominated:

- The Millennials are spoiled rotten brats whose parents have given them everything.
- The Millennials are extremely talented and will bring the most advanced technology and teamwork skills to the workforce.

Which response is correct? What if both responses are correct? What if the Millennials are spoiled, narcissistic brats who possess the talent and skills businesses need?

While that scenario may cause your heart to skip a beat, make your skin crawl and send chills up and down your spine, GET OVER IT! Millennials are the future. Yes, their attitudes and values are different - not good or bad, just different.

Whether you agree with them or not, Millennials will be knocking on your doors for jobs for years to come. Blame it on the Boomers who lowered our birthrate to historic lows. Blame it on society who raised a generation of latch-key kids then expected them to play ball with the rest of the kids. Blame it on the helicopter parents who won't let go of their kids long after they reach adulthood. Blame it on a restrictive immigration policy. Blame it on whomever and whatever you want. But let it be known that when managed effectively, Millennials will emerge as some of the brightest, most generous, and collaborative employees you've ever employed.

These Gen Y "geeks", unlike the Veterans who matured in an "Era of Limits," grew up in the "Era of Options" (1991-2000). Seminal influences included MTV, AIDS, terrorism, globalization, the end of the Cold War, weapons of mass destruction, high public distrust of government, and influential special interest groups.

The "company man" disappeared during this era as competitive speed and innovation led to flatter, more nimble organizational structures. Dot-com companies came out of nowhere, driven by the powerful tool that promised to eliminate political, economic, and societal boundaries once and for all: the Internet.

As a result, Gen Y geeks often

- Are committed to making a life, not just a living.
- View team-building, engagement, and partnerships as essential to leadership.
- Recognize that with diversity come new perspectives, ideas, and insights.
- Desire and believe that they can better the world.
- Are experimental and entrepreneurial, less loyal to employers.
- Learn through both Veteran and experiential means.
- Are more secure with insecurity and change.
- Have multiple careers, thanks in part to longer life expectancy.

Why shouldn't they expect more balance in their lives, greater satisfaction in their careers, better relationships with more people?

Millennials are used to the instant gratification of the technological resources that have always been at their disposal. While answering machines changed communication habits for the Veterans, beepers, voice mail and fax machines revolutionized the modes of staying in touch for Boomers. Then came the mobile "bag" phone in the 80s and cell phone in the 90s. Today we have a generation that has grown up with "instant" messaging, staying in constant contact with others anywhere in the world through mobile phones and smartphones—virtual entertainment centers that combine communication, music, and video in the palm of your hand. They are accustomed to sharing their opinions, favorite music and live video with the world and making their voices heard instantly, about even the most mundane topics. Through self-created

blogs, websites, Facebook, and Twitter accounts, they are connected to the entire world, anytime. The world is literally at their fingertips.

They can easily gain instant access to people and information around the world, providing them with a sense of empowerment, and speed that may overwhelm less tech-savvy older generations. They really are the “net” generation, with a global outlook, although the events of September 11, 2001, certainly left an indelible imprint on their collective psyches.

Gen Y, like older generations, experienced the sort of close parenting that eluded Generation X. Thanks to more family-friendly workplace policies, and a natural reaction against unsupervised children, Generation Y enjoyed closer parental involvement, bordering on the over-indulgent, resulting in the “helicopter” and “snowplow” parenting I mentioned earlier. Reports abound of parents going with their children on job interviews, serving as agents to negotiate compensation packages, and constantly texting their kids in class. The combination of technological access with parental backing has created a phenomenal sense of empowerment.

As these youngsters finish school and go looking for work, job recruiters are noticing they are bringing a sense of entitlement with them. They are, after all, what they’ve been told all their lives – the most talented, tech-savvy generation ever. These younger workers demand to be treated like colleagues, not subordinates and expect access to all levels of management, even the CEO, to share their brilliant ideas –not tomorrow, not next week but today, right now. This is the generation that gets and reports news instantaneously by texting and “tweeting.” Patience is not seen as a virtue.

This “Digital Generation” is ready to learn anywhere, anytime, and is even more comfortable with technology than Generation X. While the Gen X grew up in a world with ATMs and personal computers, Gen Ys have always had the Internet. Influenced by education-minded Boomer parents, Gen Yers believe that education is the key to their success, and they’re poised to be lifelong learners. Generation Y is *even more* entrepreneurial and techno-savvy than Gen X.

A distinctive characteristic of Generation Y is that they demand immediate feedback, and they expect to gain a sense of accomplishment hourly. They thrive on challenging work and creative expression. They’re more than willing to tell management how to improve their workplace policies and procedures, which can rub experienced, older employees the wrong way. Savvy managers need to provide them with appropriate outlets to share their insights because they also possess the ability to be great team players. They love challenging work and creative expression and they, too, value freedom and flexibility.

What this all means is that Generation Y is used to getting attention, and they are demanding it in the workplace. They want to have a close, highly-responsive relationship with their superiors, like they had with their parents, and a personal relationship with their boss is very important to them. They don’t respond well to the Veteran command and control management style. Martin and Tulgan point out, “They consistently tell us they have difficulty with older managers who condescendingly correct them or even yell and scream.”

They want managers to spend time getting to know them and their capabilities, and to develop a personal mentoring relationship with them. In keeping with the

atomization of the Internet, they want their jobs to be even more personalized, and even more customized than the Gen Xs that preceded them.

These Millennials see the older generation as resisting change and being stuck in procedures. They are always seeking shortcuts and striving to get more done faster. They may seem to older employees to be stuck on “fast forward”. (So some things never really change from one generation to the next!)

Managers are advised to consistently provide constructive feedback to this cohort—the more immediate, the better. Gen Y expects to stay in constant contact with others, including management. Executive secretaries and middle management must now function as portals of access, not gatekeepers. This may mean adaptation for older managers accustomed to being “out of touch” after hours or on weekends and preserving their time for board room meetings and golf outings. Today’s VIP list must include the up-and-coming workforce.

As is always the case with new employees or younger generations, the older generation may find themselves having to explain the rationale behind certain policies or being challenged to justify every procedure and explain why things are the way they are. It will be most productive if managers see this as an opportunity to question the status quo and a chance to consider innovation, rather than as an impertinent imposition.

Millennials not only value but demand opportunities for ongoing training and development. Like Generation X, these Millennials see “job security” as meaning constantly updating their skills to remain marketable. They are always looking for better opportunities, elsewhere. Finally, whereas older employees understandably want

rewards to be tied to seniority, younger employees want to be rewarded for their performance and results.

Dr. Jon Warner and Anne Sandberg propose that members of Generation Y are in the “spring” of their careers, and, as such, are filled with enthusiasm and interested in discovery and exploration. The authors recommend using what they call a highly interactive “building” managerial style, in which communication is clear and focused, as well as energetic and engaging. Additionally there should be a lot of give and take in communicating.

Cam Marston, a multigenerational communications and marketing consultant, points out that many younger workers have had an extended adolescence—as much as a decade longer than their predecessors. They marry later and stay in school longer, and as a result, feel less pressure to select a career in their twenties. Whereas earlier generations were told to “get a job” and become “self-sufficient,” today’s young workers are being encouraged to find a job that makes them happy or that offers “self-fulfillment.” Marston’s interesting view is that Boomers sought self-sufficiency first, and hoped to stumble upon self-fulfillment, while the Millennial’s view is reversed: seek self-fulfillment first, and hope to become self-sufficient eventually. To complicate matters, more and more Millennial employees are finding self-fulfillment outside of work – like family, friends, and community.

Some other interesting differences include perspectives on time. Boomers were apt to define a hard worker by counting the number of hours devoted to work. A 60-hour work week meant you were on track for a highly valued promotion. Gen Ys measure work ethic by whether they complete required jobs on time, and they are likely to

perceive office gatherings as interfering with their personal time, rather than as a reward.

Promotions mean little to Gen Ys. Boomers define themselves by their work and work to pay the bills. Gen Xs also work to pay the bills, but they assume the job they have will not last forever. Thus, they work to learn new skills that will help them obtain their next job. They are loyal to people, not jobs.

Generation Y is not working to pay the bills, but to afford a lifestyle. Work to them is a means to an end, not an end in itself. With all this in mind, organizations will need to possess adaptable and flexible leaders to be able to motivate and manage such disparate workers.

Excerpt

What will Millennials remember?

- September 11
- Columbine
- iPods
- Gameboys
- Wii
- MySpace
- Facebook
- Google
- Iraq war
- Wikipedia

Who will Millennials remember?

- Princess Diana
- Bill Clinton
- Backstreet Boys and N*Sync
- Britney Spears
- Tiger Woods

Recommended approaches for managing Gen Ys

- Feedback must be instantaneous and frequent.
- Training needs to be participative. This is the “wiki” generation. They learn by participation, interaction, and collaboration.
- Technology drives their interactions. Why schedule a meeting days or weeks from now when you can access any information you need right now?
- Top-down management is taboo. When it’s a choice between “my way or the highway,” they’ll take the highway.

Message that motivate Gen Ys

- You’ll be working with other bright creative people.
- You and your co-workers can help turn this company around.
- You can be a hero here.
- Rewards: awards, certificates, tangible evidence of credibility

About the author

Ira S Wolfe is a “Gen Y trapped in a Baby Boomer body.” He is a widely respected expert, speaker and consultant on workforce trends and recruiting, selecting and retaining top performers. In addition to serving as president and founder of Success Performance Solutions, he is a popular speaker at conferences, organizations, and CEO groups. He writes a monthly column for Business2Business magazine, contributes to several blogs (www.workforcetrends.com and www.GeeksGeezersGooglization.com), and has authored several books including *Perfect Labor Storm 2.0* and *Understanding Business Values and Motivators*.

He invites readers to contribute and/or comment on his blogs, become a Facebook fan at *Geeks, Geezers and Googlization*, and to email him at iwolfe@geeksgeezersgooglization.com.

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