

Zap the gap!

Understanding generational differences in employees

The employees you supervise may not view work in quite the same way that you do. How do you cope with the variety of generations in the workplace today, and their strengths and weaknesses, and still accomplish what you need to get the job done?

“Why are you quitting?” asked Jane. “Is it for more money?”
“No,” the soon-to-be-long-gone employee answered. “I get to do cooler stuff at the other company.”

Jane had been a manager for 15 years. She had dealt with difficult employees in the past, but nothing had prepared her for the employees she had today. What made it so difficult was that it wasn't just one employee but many she could not figure out.

She remembered when she graduated from college. Her father told her to get a good job with a company like IBM and stay employed forever. Now keeping good young employees seemed impossible. To make things even more challenging, Jane just had a new employee added to her team—someone who is twice her age.



By Meagan Johnson

How was she supposed to work successfully with someone who was re-entering the workforce after retirement?

In the past it seemed easier: People worked

for a paycheck. Now, after a number of years of record low unemployment, people have grown accustomed to having a variety of choices in the workplace and are looking for something more than just a paycheck. How could she work smoothly with all of them?

Today, the people we encounter on the job come in at least four generational flavors:

- **Traditional**—raised in the Great Depression, listening to “Fred Allen”
- **Baby Boomer**—raised during Vietnam, watching “Ozzie & Harriet”
- **Gen X**—raised in single-parent homes, imitating “Beavis & Butthead”
- **New Millennium**—raised on the Internet, living in “South Park”

Each generation brings to the workplace a different set of signposts. Signposts are the key set of experiences that shape our values and attitudes. Some signposts are personal, such as a lesson learned from a parent. Some signposts are generational, or unique to the cohort of a particular time period. Each generation has a set of signposts that influences their thoughts and actions. How could Jane adapt her approach to each generation of employees with these signposts in mind?



Generational signposts

“Traditional Generation” signposts

Great Depression
WWII

Baby Boomer signposts

Largest generation
First generation to have a recognized childhood
Vietnam
Question authority

Gen X signposts

Television (as an entertainment source)
Both parents worked
“Latchkey” kids
The recession of the late '80s through the early '90s

New Millennium signposts

Born with the Internet
Older parents
Experiences “beyond their years”



Traditionals

More than any generation in the past, the Traditional Generation has come out of retirement and is returning to work. The people of this generation like to feel that they are part of a team. If an employer can show the traditional employee that he or she is making a difference, no matter how small a difference, they will retain a loyal and productive employee. Wal Mart is an example of a company that taps into this wealthy resource of employees.

Boomers

The Baby Boomer generation is reaching an age when retirement may not be tomorrow but is closer than it was 10 or 15 years ago. Many Baby Boomers are looking for a way to make a difference. And "difference" to a Boomer does not mean only a difference in their company's bottom line, but also a difference in their community. Companies that look for ways their employees can make an impact while at work will be successful with Baby Boomer employees. For example, every

year Xerox selects a handful of employees to take a year off and work with the charities of their choice.

Gen Xers

After watching the fallout of the recession of the late '80s and early '90s, Generation X is not looking for the lifetime employment opportunity that their Baby Boomer parents were told to look for. Companies that look at what they give Gen Xers besides a paycheck will be successful with this age group of employees. Many Gen Xers are looking for an experience that will help them in their next job endeavor. As a manager, ask yourself: "What does my company offer an employee that our competitor does not?"

New Millennium

After postponing children for many years, many Baby Boomers began to have children. This birthing boom, which started in the mid-1970s, produced what we call the New Millennium Generation. It is the second largest generation, exceeded in number only by the Baby

Boomer generation. This generation has had the benefit of having experiences like travel and education that are "beyond their years." They are computer savvy and often do not have to work. Companies that look for ways to create structured learning that is fun will maintain this generation's interest.

When a company takes into account the different signposts each generation brings into the workforce, four generations can work successfully as one. ✪

*Meagan Johnson will be presenting two seminars at the TAA Education Conference & Lone Star Expo in Austin: **Unchain Your Brain** on Friday, April 25 from 10-11:15 a.m. and **Zap the Gap: Generational Issues** on Friday, April 25 from 3:15-5:45 p.m.*

Johnson is a professional speaker who combines humor with content to challenge her audiences to think differently and act decisively. Her work with clients like Harley-Davidson Motor Company, Bubba Gump Shrimp Company Restaurants and Chase Manhattan Credit Card Services gives her the outsider's perspective on how business relationships can be dramatically improved.

TWO GENERATIONS Duke It Out!

TRY SOMETHING
DIFFERENT FOR
YOUR NEXT MEETING!

"ZAP THE GAP!"

**Find balance, productivity and
your sanity while working with
multiple generations.**

Professional speakers Larry and Meagan Johnson, the father-daughter speaking team that actually still speaks to each other, present the generations from the unique perspectives of a Baby Boomer dad and his Gen-X daughter.

Audience members love the combination of two speakers, each with their own twist on how to manage, market and maintain a strong mutli-generational team.

"Meagan & Larry were TERRIFIC! The audience hung on their every word. I really think the combination of two speakers kept the audience on their toes. It does not hurt that the combination of Meagan and Larry is cry-your-eyes-out funny AND informative."

—Jim Ford, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce