

# Responding to Schoolpersons of Different Generations

1940

2020

## **Traditionalists/ Veterans**

Born Before 1946

## **Baby Boomers**

(Born between 1946  
and 1964)

## **Generation X**

(Born Between  
1965 and 1977)

## **Millenials**

(Born between 1978  
and 1997)

## **Generation 2020**

(Born after 1997)

### **Why care about the different generations?**

Our global talent shortage is rapidly becoming acute. The global competition for highly qualified workers will be in full swing by 2020. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that U.S.-based employers will need 30 million new college-educated workers in the next decade, while only 23 million young adults are expected to graduate from college in that period.

It is vitally important that leaders understand that the workforce of the immediate future will be vastly different that that of the past.

There are, of course, many variables that impact our life view: ethnicity, socio- economic status, learning profiles, gender, mobility, family life, religious beliefs, etc. As we enter the 21st century we have added generational differences to the list of variables because we now have four generations in the work force and technology has so impacted how we live our lives.

School leaders can use the strengths of each generation if they are proactive in learning about those generational differences and using them to develop appropriate and productive ways to work with and lead each of them. Important tasks for school leaders include the development of deeper understanding of the staff members who work in a school, learning what they value and how they view the world, and then creating a culture where all individuals work in a collegial manner.

When the principal as well as staff members from different generations know more about each group's values, characteristics, and contributions, it is inevitable that a stronger school culture will evolve.

### **What are these Generations?**

Social scientists have identified four generational groups whose actions, attitudes, and achievements are impacted by the discoveries, events, and inventions they have experienced.

These groups are: *The Traditionalists, The Baby Boomers, The Generation Xers and the Millenials.*

### **Who are the people in these generations?** *Traditionalists*



Born before 1946, traditionalists have had lots of experience and were shaped by the great depression and World War II. Today they often have the time and means to support schools in many ways. They may be the grandparents who are raising students in the community.

Leaders should remember to:

- acknowledge and ask about their experiences
- be explicit about the ways they have made a difference
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- let them know that they are the historians of the changes in education.
- use retired teachers as mentors who will share their institutional history and their belief that

hard work is the right thing to do.

### Baby Boomers

Born between 1946 and 1964 these 'boomers' were shaped by the Viet Nam war, the Civil Rights' Movement, putting a man on the moon and access to only 3 TV channels.



They, like the traditionalists, have had lots of experience and are often characterized as being optimistic but with a competitive edge—their careers often had them looking for chances to move up the "career ladder") They are involved team players who enjoy including others. They are also process and change oriented—they expect change. They have worked hard and often have earned success and independence.

Leaders should remember to:

- Provide them with opportunities to be involved in school life beyond the classroom
- watch for over-commitment and burn-out keep eye on desired results because they are process-oriented so may need guidance



They can be "workaholics" and they may expect "perks" given their age they should be provided, when possible, an explanation of the rationale for alternative decisions.

### Generation X or Gen Xers

Members of this group are often children of the boomers. Born between 1964 and 1977 they were shaped by events like Sesame Street, the Challenger Disaster, Operation Desert Storm and technology like the Internet and TIVO.



This group represents the majority of our teachers and parents. They are often characterized as having an Entrepreneurial spirit, being global thinkers who are both independent and self-Reliance. Socially they are informal, creative and enjoy fun. At work they seek feedback and, while being concerned about the quality of their work life, they seek a balance of personal and professional lives.



They prefer action to talk so have them "do" rather than listen and watch.

- Honor their preference for action but monitor the work because often their focus is on getting the task done rather than thinking through alternatives, considering pros and cons, cause and effect, and then identifying the best course of action.
- use their technology skills to enhance the work of the organization.
- earn their respect with personal power rather than with position power.
- *to not micro-manage them.*
- use their creative energy to help the organization "think outside of the box."
- let them know that they are on the right track and give them space to work as independently as possible.

### Millenials

Born after 1978 this group may range in age from newborn up to 30 years.

They have been shaped by events like: 9/11, Columbine, the Dot Com Crash, and technology like Google, mp3s and Ipods.



All the students in our schools as well as our youngest parents are members of this generation. Generally more willing to take on the beliefs of their parents than are boomers or Gen-Xers, they are often char-

People	Era	Ethic	Value	Dominant Belief	Behavior
<p><b>Traditionals</b></p> <p>Grew up during the '50's and '60's</p>	<p>social fix-it agenda home bodies <i>housewives and working husbands</i> economic growth oriented</p>	<p>work ethic top-down management self-fulfillment people-oriented protection of the environment</p>	<p><i>focus on self and worker happiness</i> hard work upward mobility commitment to the organization</p>	<p>pluralistic models of how to "beat the system" bottom-up planning loyalty to one's field family demands important</p>	<p>self replaced the organization <i>did not respond to authority with any automatic respect</i></p>
<p><b>Baby Boomers</b></p> <p>Grew up during the '60's and '70's</p>	<p>competitive pragmatism process-oriented</p>	<p>self-fulfillment want mine get my share</p>	<p>winning - not losing self-knowledge competitiveness</p>	<p><i>identifying with an organization through shared beliefs</i> cost-effectiveness outlook: optimistic</p>	<p>cynical of authority not a team player get my share</p>
<p><b>The X Generation</b></p> <p>Grew up during the '70's and '80's</p>	<p>accept diversity social pragmatism reject rules results-oriented</p>	<p>empowerment, <i>committed to work, the team they work with, and the supervisor they work for</i> loyal to family balanced work ethics</p>	<p>personal blended agenda <i>autonomy and independence</i> less stressful lifestyle</p>	<p>believe in technology personal agenda health and fitness outlook: skeptical</p>	<p>strategic positioning. slightly competitive in nature <i>give them the work and leave them alone to do it</i> home-type activities</p>
<p><b>The Millennials</b></p> <p>Grew up during the '90's</p>	<p>celebrate diversity teamwork well-educated achievement-oriented</p>	<p>interactive relationships team-oriented</p>	<p>structured, supportive work environment personalized work prepared for demands high expectations health and fitness valued</p>	<p>assume technology fast multi-taskers family-friends collaborative</p>	<p>optimistic/realistic self -inventive/ nurtured <i>new to the workplace need and appreciate mentoring</i></p>

acterized as wanting time with family and desiring autonomy.

Millennials want feedback and may view silence as disapproval. They are generally educated and have confidence, a positive outlook and optimism.

While they have limited experience they excel at using all forms of technology so remember that they can multi-task. Let them know that they are the future, that you believe in them, and that they will be mentored.

Leaders should remember to:

- use cutting-edge technology whenever possible
- use email to communicate
- make the work environment a fun place
- use humor
- understand that they can multi-task
- let them know that they are the future, that you believe in them, and that they will be mentored
- provide feedback as they may view silence as disapproval—recognize their productivity and results

### **Leadership from these Generations**

School leaders come from all four generations. Some principals are selected in their twenties while others are working well into their seventies.

Gen X or Millennial principals, working with staffs comprised mainly of Baby Boomers, will be much more successful when they not only have an in-depth understanding of how Baby Boomers perceive the world but an understanding of how their own perspectives and strengths impact the relationships.

At the other end of the generational per-

spective, some older principals are hiring teachers who were not born when those principals began their professional careers.

“The most important point to note is that we should lead with the mindset that no one generation is "greater" than another. Our job is not to try to change those from other generations into clones of our own generation. Our goal as leaders is to know all staff members well, to use our knowledge about what they know, what they can do, and what they need in order to be contributing members of the school community in ways that promote high levels of student learning.

Three questions provide focus to this discussion of generational differences.

*What are some of the typical characteristics of each generation and how can a leader build upon the strengths of each group?*



Traditionalists as staff and community members serve as historians of the changes that have occurred in education and in our world in general. It is important to acknowledge their contributions and life experiences. They often work as mentors for young teachers and help them to see that

learning to teach well is a lifelong endeavor. Baby Boomers actively seek opportunities to contribute and move up the career ladder with many seeking administrative or teacher leader positions. Wise principals channel their competitive nature and sense of optimism into school initiatives that benefit everyone in the school community. The life experiences of Gen Xers span events from Watergate to Operation Desert Storm.

They grew up "pre-standards" with open classrooms and experiential learning. As today's teachers, Gen Xers prefer action to talk and seek balance between their personal and professional lives. Principals can call upon their extensive technological skills to enhance the work of the school and use their creative energy to think outside the box. School leaders should not try to micro-manage Gen Xers but instead give them clear guidelines followed by the space and independence to get the job done. Millennials value the expertise of the older generations and bring their cutting-edge technological knowledge and skills to the school environment. They are especially adept at multi-tasking and value and seek immediate feedback on their work performance. When we are explicit in letting Millennials know that we value their expertise and input, we are more likely to retain more of them in the teaching profession.

*How do strong school leaders use their knowledge of generational differences to create a school culture where the preferences and contributions of each generation are recognized and used to promote a learning-centered environment?*

Paula Rutherford in *The 21st Century Mentor's Handbook* identifies four key variables of school life (and has recently added a fifth in journal articles) that are heavily impacted by generational differences.

Those variables are:

- Communication channels
- Professional development
- Feedback
- Supervision and evaluation
- Appreciation and recognition

Those staff and community members who are 40 years old and younger are called "digital natives" while those over 40 years old are "digital immigrants." That is, those over 40 are at various points in the frequency and sophistication of their use of technology to learn, teach, and organize their lives. For the digital natives, the first

choice of communication channels is always the newest technological one; the Gen Xers and Millennials are wired and there is no turning back. Cell phones, instant messaging, iPods, Podcasts, blogs, e-newsletters, and so on are the preferred communication channel for their personal lives and we need to work with them to make it at least a part of their professional development and for giving and receiving instant feedback.

These digital natives need to be patient and understanding with their colleagues who are less technologically proficient or inclined and the older crowd needs to be accepting of the new wave.

In teaming and mentoring situations, those involved need to be proactive in learning about the work preferences and seek to understand the perspectives of those who are coming from a different place and time.

Much like the work we have done around multiple intelligences theory and learning styles with our students we need to build the same level of understanding and appreciation for each other. It is only when we do the work to better understand and appreciate one another as adults that we will be able to do our best work in helping students succeed at high levels.

*Why is it important for a principal to share information about generational differences with parents in the school community?*

Anyone who works in a school is fully aware of the fact that parents in the community talk about the school their children attend with friends and neighbors. Many share their positive feelings about the school and the teaching staff while others complain and bemoan the fact that their child has "one of the older staff members" or "one of those right-out-of college novice teachers" this year.

Just as teachers need to develop a better understanding of the strengths of different generations, parents likewise will benefit

from an increased awareness of the potential contributions of different age groups. An older teacher may bring wisdom and stability to a classroom while a newer teacher may bring new methods and a strong energy and enthusiasm to the learning environment.

Each can be seen in a positive light. Sharing information about generational differences through school newsletters or at PTA meetings may help parents to look at their child's teacher with greater optimism. Further, a principal can highlight different faculty members in school newsletters acknowledging their experiences and the contributions they make to the school.

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### **Get Ready for the Future**

Whereas organizations have historically dealt with diversity in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation and physical disabilities, they will now also need to manage extreme age diversity as members of four, soon to be five, generations work together side by side. While a record number of Millennials are entering the workplace, many older workers are returning to it.

Because of the economic meltdown that began in 2008, many older workers simply cannot afford to retire. These workers may either stay in their current jobs longer or enter second careers, fulfilling long-held dreams when possible. Increasingly, the federal government is one sector that appears to be hiring older, more experienced workers.

### **Five Key Findings from 'The Generations @**

### **Work' Survey**

Each generation brings a different lens to the workplace. They have differing expectations for how they want to work, learn and communicate. The different lenses of each generation will impact the employer-employee relationship.

Five findings from the survey reveal how these preferences and expectations will play out in the future workplace:

**1. Traditionalists and Baby Boomers are as likely as Millennials to be Web contributors.** Members of all generations are engaging with and contributing to social media sites. However, Traditionalists and Baby Boomers are more likely to be active contributors to existing content, while Millennials focus on creating and publishing new content.

**2. Baby Boomers and Generation Xers look for a work life/home life balance, while Millennials see work as "part of life."** Baby Boomers and Generation Xers place a high value on being able to blend their work and home lives, while Millennials consider work to be part of life. For Millennials, finding a balance between work life and home life seems "irrelevant," in the words of one survey respondent, because "work is part of life, not separate from it."

**3. Millennials and Generation X place a high importance on working for a company that develops both their career and life skills.** Millennials and Generation Xers acknowledge that establishing oneself in a career is vastly different from going to school. What's important to members of these two generations is being able to take advantage of company-funded training and development programs.

**4. Millennials are likely to select an employer based on the ability to access the latest tools and technologies at work.** Fifty-eight percent of Millennials and 52 percent of Generation Xers agree that

		Meeting the Learning Needs of a Mixed Crowd				
		When Things Go sideways				
	Pet Peeves	Gaffes That Cause Grudges	Class setting	Style of Presenter	Substance	Worries and A versions
<b>Veterans</b> (Born before 1945)	Profanity Bad grammar Disorganization Lack of respect for traditions Disregard for expertise	"We really don't have a plan. Let's just wing it." "Tell me again when you said you were retiring." "Can't you do that any faster?" "Whazzup, dude?"	Traditional classroom environment Stress-free; unhurried Opportunity to practice skills privately Adequate breaks	Unemotional and logical Credible experiences Older, more mature presenters who speak the same language Coaches in a tactful way	Large-print materials Reader's Digest facts and summaries Actual examples Minimal techno bells and whistles	Being called on and not knowing the answer Stories that are too personal Overly technical information Coddling younger participants Rudeness
<b>Baby Boomers</b> (Born between 1946 and 1964)	Unfriendliness Slackers Challenges to their authority Political incorrectness	"This teamwork thing stinks." "I'm too busy to come to your meeting." "Do you even know how to turn on your computer?" "Whatever!"	Organized for group interaction Chance to network Open-ended discussions Participation in setting the agenda	Recognizes them for what they already know Comes across as a friendly equal (never call them ma'am or sir) Uses personal examples	Easy to scan Well organized Icebreakers, team-building exercises Case studies	Looking foolish in front of peers (nix the role play) Content that doesn't apply to their current assignment All the work piling up back at school or the office
<b>Generation X</b> (Born Between 1965 and 1977)	Schmoozing Stern lectures Clichés, acronyms, jargon Too many rules and policies Inefficiency	"If you cared about the team, you'd stay late like the rest of us." "We have to do this because the district office said so." "You need to earn your stripes before getting that assignment." "Didn't you read it in the policy manual?"	Structured so they can work at their own pace Distance learning and independent study On-the-job training	Gets right to the point Informal and fun-loving Earns their respect Doesn't hover over them Gives lots of feedback	Bulleted to highlight key points Headlines and lists Role-play (unfazed about looking clumsy)	Reteaching them what they already know Beating a topic to death Using overheads Boredom
<b>Millennials</b> (Born after 1978)	Cynicism and negativity Unfair treatment Sarcasm Condescending remarks Low expectations	"You probably don't have anything to add since you're new." "Are you sure you aren't supposed to be in high school instead of teaching it?" "You ought to be happy just to have a job." "When I was your age..."	Versatile Combines teamwork with technology Ability to get up and move around the room when tasks are finished	Positive and upbeat Makes purpose, process, and payoffs clear Listens; validates ideas Recognizes them as lifelong learners	Retooling what they know to adapt to workplace changes Music, art, and games Ideas for dealing with difficult parents	Moving too slowly Lecturing Out-of-date technology Implying that they can't do something Criticism

**And so...**One of the simplest definitions of corporate culture is “*the way we do things around here.*” People who share common beliefs and assumptions in an organization, whether stated or not, are described as fitting into the culture.

**Personalize the employee experience.** Develop a systematic and automatic capability to deliver a unique, tailored experience by offering a wide range of choices so that employees can self-select benefits and services to match their unique needs. Work with the IT function to allow employees to select their own desktop equipment and tools within a range of parameters.

**Create an inclusive culture.** Build a welcoming corporate environment and employer brand that are sensitive to culture, ethnicity, race, age and other differences and that provide equitable access to opportunities, products and services for employees, suppliers and customers. Arrange to be reverse-mentored by someone as different from you as possible. Sponsor organizations and events that promote diversity and inclusion.

**Emphasize learning agility.** Develop an ability at the organization level to acquire new knowledge and skills across functions to adapt to a changing environment. Insist on learning reviews after every major customer win or loss to determine causal factors and to build a common understanding for the next customer proposal.

**Build citizen leadership.** Develop a pervasive approach that reinforces the principles of openness and democracy through access to information and social collaboration in order to deliver sustainability and integrity

## Five Generations at Work

The 2007 population data from the U.S. Department of Census shows:

- **Traditionalists** include the 46 million people born before 1946.
- **Baby Boomers** include the 78 million people born between 1946 and 1964.
- **Generation X** includes the 50 million people born between 1965 and 1976.
- **Millennials** include the 88 million people born between 1977 and 1997.
- **Generation 2020** includes the 41 million people born after 1997.

within the society in which the organization operates.

**Drive systems thinking.** Design and connect systematically across functions and bodies of knowledge, understanding their interdependencies, to gain a competitive advantage at the organizational level.

**Champion openness and transparency.** Develop a bias toward full disclosure of the thought process leading to decisions that matter to the organization. Create a forum that outlines a major decision the company is considering; allow employees to react and offer their ideas.

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