

# Navigating the Generations

## Participant Guide



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIAL SERVICES



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# Learning Objectives

Today you will ...

- Create an appreciation of the four generational work styles
- Understand what events shaped each generation
- Use this understanding to work more effectively and maximize each generation's contribution to the workplace

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# My Generation Defined

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## Four Generations Defined

**Traditionalists (1922–1945)**  
**72–95 years**

**Age**

Characteristics of this group:

- Values company loyalty
- Strong patriotism
- Respects authority
- Civic pride
- Tells “war stories”
- Still hold many of the CEO positions
- **Traditionalist image**

**Baby Boomers (1946–1964)**  
**years**

**Age 53–71**

Characteristics of this group:

- Values hard work and long hours – lives to work!

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- Wants participation and team spirit in the workplace
  - Loves to mentor others
  - Believes in personal development
  - Respects civil rights and diversity
  - Believes in empowerment
  - Is action-oriented
  - **Hippie and Yuppie images**

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## Four Generations Defined

**Gen X (1965–1980)**  
**years**

**Age 37–52**

Characteristics of this group:

- Needs balance in work and family life – works to live!
- Loves technology
- Uses resources wisely
- Independent and self-reliant
- Hates to be “micro-managed”
- Stays flexible
- Needs feedback
- Dark, cynical, fragile image
- “Latch-Key” Kids

**Gen Y or Millennials (1981–2000)**  
**17–36 years**

**Age**

Characteristics of this group:

- Very optimistic about the future

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- Internet savvy
  - Smart, clever and healthy
  - Raised by Soccer Moms and Little League Dads
  - Needs feedback
  - Civic-minded
  - Least number in the workplace
  - **“Trophy” Kids**

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## Four Generations: Working Together

**Traditionalists:**

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**Baby Boomers:**

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# Four Generations: Working Together

**Generation X:**

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**Generation Y:**

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## Generational Diversity: It Can Work Well

The following are several characteristics from companies who are managing differences well today:

Accommodate employee differences – treat associates like customers  
– find out and meet their needs in order to keep them

Create workplace choices – allow the workplace to shape itself;  
casual dress; change as a way of life; relaxed and informal style

Operate from a flexible management style – situational leadership;  
direct and accountable; balance concern for tasks and people; fair,  
competent and trusted

Respect competence and initiative – assume the best of your people;  
best people to do the best job – self-fulfilling prophecy

Nourish retention – make the workplace a magnet for excellence;  
lots of training and development; broader work assignments and  
lateral moves.

**KEYS TO SUCCESS:**

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**Aggressive Communication** – conflict is anticipated and surfaced

**Difference Deployment** – tactical use of diverse employees to strengthen work teams

**Appreciation and Mutual Respect**

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# Generational Case Studies

## Case One: Boomers and Gen Xers

**Q:** Joe is a 34 year old computer guy working on a project with two “50-something” guys, Bob and William, to recommend a new software system for the division/work unit. Joe knows he was assigned to the team because of his technical expertise, but in meetings, he has a hard time getting the other two to listen to him. They act like they know far more about *everything* and he feels like they are ignoring his suggestions. How can Joe get Bob and William to listen?

**A:** Write your answer here:

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## Generational Case Studies

### Case Two: Boomers and Gen Y

**Q:** Tiffany is a Gen Y who has worked for the Agency for 4 years. Everyone else in her work unit is a Boomer with a few Traditionalists. She is a hard worker and gets along well with the group. They don't really socialize outside of work, but are very friendly in the office – they call her “baby girl” and “cutie pie”. Tiffany has recently been promoted to supervisor and now supervises the team. How does she establish herself as the leader without destroying morale?

**A:** Write your answer here:

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## Generational Case Studies

### Case Three: Boomers and Gen Xers

**Q:** Susan is managing a team of bright, enthusiastic Gen Xers. She is a Boomer. How does she provide needed direction and guidance to them without putting out their fire?

**A:** Write your answer here:



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## Generational Characteristics: Summary

See how the different groups see the world in which they live:

CATEGORY	TRADITIONALIS T	BOOMERS	GEN X	GEN Y
<i>Outlook</i>	Practical	Optimistic	Skeptical	Hopeful
<i>Work Ethic</i>	Dedicated	Driven	Balanced	Determined
<i>View of Authority</i>	Respectful	Love/Hate	Unimpressed	Polite
<i>Leadership By</i>	Hierarchy	Consensus	Competence	Pulling Together
<i>Relationships</i>	Personal Sacrifice	Personal Gratification	Reluctant to Commit	Inclusive
<i>Turnoffs</i>	Vulgarity	Political Incorrectness	Cliché, Hype	Promiscuity

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# 6 Tips for Leading Millennials

What you need to know about managing the PlayStation generation.

By Martha Maznevski May 27, 2015

We've all heard the stereotypes about Millennials: They are used to being praised. They are not ready for real-world setbacks. They want instant gratification. They lack loyalty. And the list goes on.

While there may be truth to some of these labels, the same things could be said about previous generations. Millennials are digital versions of how 20-somethings have been characterized since the Industrial Revolution.

Yet they do have distinguishing characteristics that leaders should understand in order to harness their power. Here are six insights into Millennials that can help you do that.

**1. They learn through experience.** They're not referred to as the PlayStation generation for nothing. They grew up playing a lot of video games that came with little or no instructions. So they learned to make it to the next level by "dying" over and over again. They can be like that in their professional careers, too. They throw themselves into new experiences without a lot of planning, and they learn by failing repeatedly until they succeed.

They expect a leader to play the same role as the walls and cliffs in their video games. Leaders should be aware of this and help point out the potential pitfalls of certain courses of action, both before and after tasks are completed.

**2. Their lives are nonlinear.** The world has always been complex and volatile for this generation. They witnessed Sept. 11 and the war on terror, came of age in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, and never experienced a world in which climate change wasn't a major concern.

This generation has not experienced the world as a safe and coherent place. They know they will have nonlinear career trajectories that reflect shifting circumstances. A lot of them will go back and forth between traditional employment and entrepreneurship.

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For most of their lives, they have been getting their information online and through mobile devices, focusing on one subject one minute and something completely different the next. Previous generations learned in a more linear way, such as by reading books from start to finish.

The good news for leaders is that Millennials are coming to the workforce prepared for complexity. They don't know anything else. Older managers may have a hard time adapting to the new normal.

**3. They are loyal—but to principles more than people.** Millennials appreciate personal development. They love new opportunities. But they will not follow your lead just because you are the boss.

Instead of trying too hard to get Millennials to be loyal to your leadership or organization, focus on developing and communicating the principles and purpose behind your organization's work. Millennials need to know that they are working to make the world a better place. They believe that there is no success without sustainability for individuals, organizations, society and the environment. If you can convince them in an authentic way that what you are doing is principled, they will get behind you.

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## 6 Tips for Leading Millennials

What you need to know about managing the PlayStation generation.

**4. Their assumptions about privacy, boundaries and roles are fluid.** This can be good and bad. On the one hand, we have all heard horror stories of young adults suffering the consequences for what they post on social media, like that friend of a friend who got fired for calling their boss a jerk on Facebook. On the other hand, not submitting to antiquated hierarchical structures allows Millennials to think creatively and find business opportunities where others might not imagine there were any.

While leaders should watch out for unintended consequences, they should also encourage younger employees to think beyond the established way of doing things.

**5. They don't put up with bad bosses.** For Millennials, power is distributed and control requires permission. They don't listen to authority figures they don't agree with.

This might seem like a challenge, but, in the long run, the sooner people stop accepting poor leadership, the sooner leaders will have to improve—and everyone will benefit.

The lesson here is: Don't be a lazy leader. Make sure your Millennial employees understand why your organization and team are doing what they are doing. Don't tell people they should do things just because you said so.

Also, don't neglect leadership development. Keep investing in your leadership capabilities so you can motivate your Millennial employees.

**6. They are not good at boring but necessary work.** To develop expertise and wisdom in any industry, people must invest in non-glamorous grunt work. These experiences also help build character and patience. Millennials aren't so fond of this type of work.

Today's senior managers should put in the extra effort to show these employees why the hard work is important. Make sure entry-level talent know that having a deep understanding of the different aspects of an industry will help them in more-senior roles later.

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By and large, organizations have been good at getting Millennials in the door, but they have had a harder time retaining them and helping them transition to higher levels of responsibility. If senior managers follow these six pieces of advice, they can tap into Millennials' strengths and sense of loyalty—and help them to become the next generation of leaders.

*Martha Maznevski is a professor of organizational behavior and international management at IMD Business School.*

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## Resources

### **Managing a Multigenerational Workforce**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sfootedt1IE>

### **Managing Gen X**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDAKc1tOFXc&feature=topics>

### **Managing Gen Y**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ini37FJB1FY&feature=relmfu>