



# *Leveraging Generational Differences in the Workplace*

Workforce Solutions Conference

June 23-24, 2015

**Catherine Rasmussen, Extension Professor**

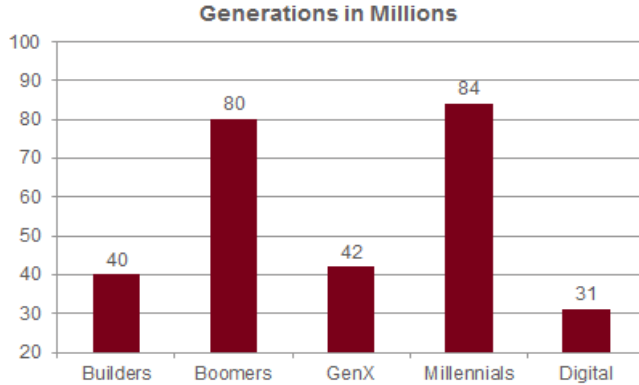
**Leadership and Civic Engagement**

**Center for Community Vitality**

**[rasmu035@umn.edu](mailto:rasmu035@umn.edu)**

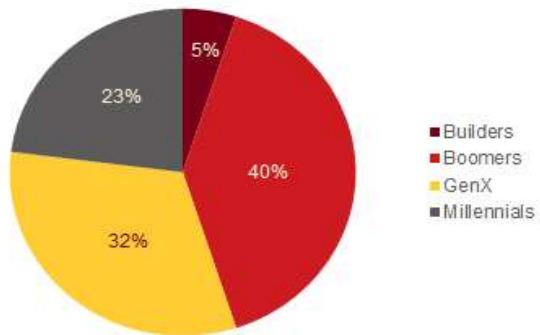
**Office: 507-389-6749 Cell: 507-276-3514**

## Sizes of Generations - 2014



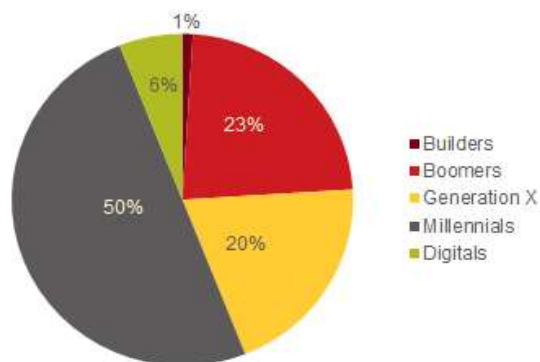
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

## Workers in U.S. (2014)



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

## Workers in U.S. (2020)



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA | EXTENSION

The first of the Boomers turned 65 in 2011 and can expect to live to age 83

Every day for the next 19 years, 10,000 Boomers will turn 65

Roughly 30 million Boomers will be retiring in the next several years

Pew Research Center (2011)

# A Snapshot of the Generations and Their Characteristics

---

A generation is a group that shares birth years, age, location, and significant life events at critical developmental stages.<sup>1</sup> Each generation adopts its characteristics through life factors that impact their viewpoints, attitudes, needs and expectations. Such factors as our culture, technology, society, media and events have a powerful influence on shaping a generation's identity.

## THE BUILDERS / VETERANS (BORN PRIOR TO 1946)

- **Defining Events and Trends:** Patriotism. Families. The Great Depression. World War II. New Deal. Korean War. Golden Age of Radio. Silver screen. Postwar rise of labor unions. Family-school-faith
- **Core Values:** Dedication. Sacrifice. Hard work. Conformity. Law and order. Patience. Respect for authority. Duty before pleasure. Adherence to rules. Honor.
- **Generational Personality:** Builders are conformers. Builders are conservative spenders. They are past-oriented and history-absorbed. They believe in logic, not magic.

## THE BABY BOOMERS (BORN 1946-1964)

- **Defining Events and Trends:** Prosperity. Television. Suburbia. Assassinations. Vietnam. Civil Rights movement. Cold War. Women's movement. Space race. Beatle and Elvis.
- **Core Values:** Confidence. Optimism. Team orientation. Personal gratification. Health and wellness. Personal growth and wellness. Retain youth. Work – defined by job.
- **Generational Personality:** Boomers are driven. Boomers are soul-searchers. They are willing to "go the extra mile." They have a love/hate relationship with financial prosperity.

## THE GEN XERS (BORN 1965-1980)

- **Defining Events and Trends:** Watergate. Latchkey kids. Single parents. MTV. AIDS. Computers. Challenger. Fall of Berlin Wall. Wall Street frenzy. Michael Jackson and Michael Jordan
- **Core Values:** Diversity. Thinking globally. Balance. Technoliteracy. Fun. Informality. Self-reliance. Pragmatism.
- **Generational Personality:** Xers are self-reliant and risk takers. They are skeptical. They seek balance and a sense of family. They think about the job, not the work hours.

---

<sup>1</sup> Tolbize, A. (2008) Generational differences in the workplace. Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota, p.1

## THE MILLENNIALS / GEN Y (BORN 1981 – 1995)

- **Defining Events and Trends:** Technology. School violence. Oklahoma City bombing. TV talk shows. Reality TV. Multiculturalism. Girls' movement. Princess Di and Tiger Woods.
- **Core Values:** Civic Duty. Achievement. Sociability. Individualistic but group oriented. Morality. Diversity. Street Smarts.
- **Generational Personality:** Both optimistic about the future and realistic about the present. They are individualistic but also very social and prefer collective action. They are tenacious and entrepreneurial. They seek work/life balance and interested in social commitments. Millennials may have difficulty focusing on non-stimulating tasks so like to multi-task.

## DIGITALS / GEN Z (BORN MID-1990'S)

- **Defining Events and Trends:** Global financial meltdown, first African American President, Asian wars and new U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Raised by hands-on Gen X parents and spend more time at home with multiple digital platforms. Schools introducing behavioral curriculum to forge into sensitive, helpful, rule-playing students.
- **Core Values:** Social media. Instant results and constant feedback. Human connections. Global mindset - local reality. Infinite diversity. Unique to them.
- **Generational Personality:** On the grid 24/7 – connected to anyone, anywhere in the world - ability to leverage this connectivity. Access more information than any others. Highly engaged parenting, teaching and counseling. Skills gaps in technology and broad skills like interpersonal communication, critical thinking. Forever creating their own personal montage of selfhood options.

---

Note: Generational characteristics *will not fit* every person born during the same time period.

- Generations overlap at the end points, divisions are *not* hard and fast (“tweeners”)
  - Those born early in a time period tend to be the trend-setters for their generation
  - Geography may make a difference. Attitude and values of a previous generation linger longer in rural areas.
  - Personality types and family dynamics influence individual attitudes and behaviors
- 

Lancaster, Lynn C. & David Stillman, *When Generations Collide*, New York; Harper Business, 2002.

Zemke, Ron, Clair Raines & Bob Filipczak, *Generations at Work Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers and Nexters in Your Workplace*, New York: AMACOM, 2000. Life Course Associates, *Generations in History*, [www.fourthturning.com](http://www.fourthturning.com)

Tulgan, B. (2013). Meet Generation Z: the second generation within the giant “millennial” cohort. RainmakerThinking.Inc.

## Differences in Views of Work by Generation<sup>2</sup>

	Builders	Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
<b>Work ethic</b>	Hard working	Workaholic	Only work as hard as needed	Work hard
<b>Attitudes towards authority/rules</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Value conformity, authority &amp; rules, &amp; a top-down management approach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Love/hate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comfortable with authorities, not impressed with titles</li> <li>Natural to interact with their superiors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Believe that respect must be earned</li> </ul>
<b>Expectations regarding respect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deference</li> <li>Special treatment</li> <li>More weight given to their opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Deference</li> <li>Special treatment</li> <li>More weight given to their opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Want to be held in esteem</li> <li>Want to be listened to</li> <li>Do not expect deference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Want to be held in esteem</li> <li>Want to be listened to</li> <li>Do not expect deference</li> </ul>
<b>Preferred way to learn soft skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the job</li> <li>Discussion groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the job</li> <li>Discussion groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the job</li> <li>One on One coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the job</li> <li>Peer interaction and feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Preferred way to learn hard skills</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom instruction-live</li> <li>On the job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Classroom instruction-live</li> <li>On the job</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the job</li> <li>One on One coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On the job</li> <li>Peer interaction and feedback</li> </ul>
<b>Feedback &amp; supervision</b>	Attitudes closer to boomers'	May be insulted by continuous feedback	Immediate and continuous	Immediate and continuous
<b>Attitudes regarding loyalty to their employer</b>	Considered among the most loyal workers	Value company commitment and loyalty	Less loyal to companies than previous generations, but loyal to people	Committed and loyal when dedicated to an idea, cause, or product
<b>Work/life balance</b>	Sacrifice personal life for work	Sacrifice personal life for work	Value work/life balance	Value work/life balance
<b>Preferred leadership attributes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credible (65%)</li> <li>Listens well (59%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credible (74%)</li> <li>Trusted (61%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Credible (71%)</li> <li>Trusted (58%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Listens well (68%)</li> <li>Dependable (66%)</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Tolbize, A. (2008) Generational differences in the workplace. Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota, p.8-9. Retrieved from [http://rtc3.umn.edu/docs/2\\_18\\_Gen\\_diff\\_workplace.pdf](http://rtc3.umn.edu/docs/2_18_Gen_diff_workplace.pdf). Summary drawn from research See report for complete listing

## Similarities in Views of Work by Generation<sup>3</sup>

	Builders	Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
<b>Concerns related to changes in workplace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doing the same work with fewer resources</li> <li>• Technology changes</li> <li>• Change that is disorganized or unnecessary</li> </ul>	Similar	Similar	Similar
<b>Reasons for staying with an organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity to advance within the organization</li> <li>• Learning and development</li> <li>• Respect and recognition</li> </ul>	Similar	Similar	Similar
<b>Attitudes regarding flexibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom to set own hours if the work gets done (76%)</li> <li>• Working full-time for a firm (64%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom to set own hours if the work gets done (74%)</li> <li>• Working full-time for a firm (64%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom to set own hours if the work gets done (73%)</li> <li>• Working full-time for a firm (63%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom to set own hours if the work gets done (63%)</li> <li>• Full-time job with extended time off as needed for personal reasons (53%)</li> </ul>
<b>Most important aspects of workplace culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair (90%)</li> <li>• Ethical (90%)</li> <li>• Straightforward (74%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair (86%)</li> <li>• Ethical (84%)</li> <li>• Straightforward (76%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair (87%)</li> <li>• Ethical (83%)</li> <li>• Straightforward (74%)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fair (66%)</li> <li>• Ethical (66%)</li> <li>• Friendly/social (59%)</li> </ul>
<b>Top reasons for happiness in the workplace</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling valued (88%)</li> <li>• Recognition &amp; appreciation (84%)</li> </ul>	Similar	Similar	Similar

---

*“All generations have similar values; they just express them differently...How people express their values is often different by generation, just as it is often different by culture. For example, wearing jeans to work may be considered to be an expression of disrespect for the work site to a Silent or an Early Boomer who thinks that jeans are too informal for work, but to employees from the Early or Late Xer generations, wearing jeans at work is not necessarily an expression of disrespect – they just want to wear jeans.”*

- Jennifer Deal<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Tolbize, A. (2008) Generational differences in the workplace. Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota, p.8-9. Retrieved from [http://rtc3.umn.edu/docs/2\\_18\\_Gen\\_diff\\_workplace.pdf](http://rtc3.umn.edu/docs/2_18_Gen_diff_workplace.pdf). Summary drawn from research See report for complete listing

<sup>4</sup> Deal, J. (2007). *Retiring the generation gap: How employees young and old can find common ground*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, p. 21-22

# Leveraging the Strengths of Each Generation

## As Employees, Builders:

- Have a history of excellent personal skills
- Hardworking; focus on quality
- Detail oriented, thorough
- Loyal; committed to getting the job done
- Follow the rules

## To get the best from Builders:

- ➔ Honor their experience
- ➔ Involve them as mentors or trainers
- ➔ Allow for flexible schedules
- ➔ A personal thank-you from the boss goes a long way
- ➔ Don't make a fuss over them

---

## As Employees, Boomers:

- Are proven hard workers
- Service oriented; want to please
- Function well in teams
- Compete to win, internally and externally
- May need to work more years than they initially expected

## To get the best from Boomers:

- ➔ Recognize their value to the organization
- ➔ Honor their experience
- ➔ Immediate evidence of technology benefits for user & organization
- ➔ Serve as mentors/coaches
- ➔ Allow for flexible schedules

---

## As Employees, GenXers:

- Have no fear of technology and embrace the newest
- Adaptable; creative
- Function well individually
- Teamwork can be done but isn't their preference
- Will constantly question, "Why are we doing it this way?"

## To get the best from GenXers:

- ➔ Tap their expertise in technology
- ➔ Value their competence and creativity
- ➔ Provide them with their "role" within the organization
- ➔ Give some control over their time when possible

---

## As Employees, Millennials:

- Embrace new technology and will change jobs to keep up with it
- Low tolerance for bureaucracy but civic minded
- Enjoy working w/Boomers and especially Builders
- Teamwork – true teams or groups of individuals?

## To get the best from Millennials:

- ➔ Tap their expertise in technology
- ➔ Create a plan for their future with the organization
- ➔ Role rotation and cross-training
- ➔ Eliminate bureaucracy and hierarchical structures within the workplace
- ➔ Mentor and coach one-on-one

## 5 Best Practices for Leading a Multigenerational Workforce

Successful organizations have been able to tap into and leverage the strengths of their intergenerational workforce by creatively applying five critical principles:



### 1. Operate from a Sophisticated Management Style

Effectively articulate the bigger vision, specific goals and measures to employees. Study the generational composition of the workforce and use the information in many HR strategies (supervision and feedback, training to specific needs, recognition). Include all generations on boards and councils for planning and decision-making. Use multiple communication avenues – and overcommunicate.

### 2. Create Workplace Choices

Allow the workplace to shape itself around the work being done, clients being served, and people who do the work. This translates to decreased bureaucracy, short chain of command, a relaxed and informal environment and allowing employees to have fun.

### 3. Respect Competence and Initiative

Assume the best of people. Provide autonomy to do the work and reward performance accordingly. Keep young workers motivated and productive by letting them tell you where their efforts are best employed. Listen to their ideas – the next big thing for your organization may come from Twitter or the energy of a young twenty-something on your staff.

### 4. Accommodate Employee Differences

This means treating employees as you do your customers or clients. Identify and try to serve your employee's preferences such as work-life balance, flextime, job sharing, telecommuting, and scheduling options to accommodate a diverse workforce.

### 5. Nourish Retention

Focus on retention by encouraging life-long learning, offering lots of training, one-to-one coaching, mentoring and leadership opportunities. Encourage regular parallel movement between jobs with broadened assignments to gain experience and break down silos. Offer a wide variety and choices of benefits (life, health and auto insurance, 401(k) match, alumni group, tuition reimbursement, etc.)

Sources: Goudreau, J. (2/14/2013). How to communicate in the new multigenerational office. [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com).

Tolbize, A. (2008) Generational differences in the workplace. Research and Training Center on Community Living, University of Minnesota, p.8-9. Retrieved from [http://rtc3.umn.edu/docs/2\\_18\\_Gen\\_diff\\_workplace.pdf](http://rtc3.umn.edu/docs/2_18_Gen_diff_workplace.pdf).



## Next Steps

The way people work, learn and want to live is changing and is generation-related. If organizations want to attract and retain quality workers, they have to proactively address the multiple generational issue. Critical questions need to be discussed to rethink policies and practices regarding work-life balance, management and training.



## Critical Questions

1. What is the generational composition of our organization's workforce? What will the composition of the workforce be in five years?
2. What major changes are needed in our HR policies and practices to address and meet the needs and demands of different generations?
3. How does our organization create a work environment that fosters and leverages generational and cultural differences and knowledge?
4. How can we recognize the individuality that each person brings to work and engage employees of all ages to maximize their performance?
5. What are the differences between generations that play out in the workplace and make it challenging to manage or be managed?
6. How does our organization effectively transfer and share knowledge from experienced workers to the younger workers?
7. Given advances in technology and experiences that different generations have had with training, are there learning preferences across generations?
8. Do managers and supervisors need to adjust their motivational and leadership styles to fit each generation?
9. How does our organization accelerate getting younger workers on board given their lack of experience, skills, and training?
10. How does our organization motivate and engage mature workers to continually upgrade their skills and participate in continuous learning activities?

## Bibliography

Beloit College Mindset List – [www.beloit.edu](http://www.beloit.edu)

Brinkerhoff, P. (2007). *Generations: The Challenge of a Lifetime for Your Nonprofit*, St Paul: Fieldstone Alliance and the Fieldstone Alliance website – [www.fieldstonealliance.org](http://www.fieldstonealliance.org)

Deal, J. (2007). *Retiring the generation gap: How employees young and old can find common ground*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

- Excellent research as well as specific ideas and examples

Howe, N. & Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials Rising* New York: Random House.

ICMA Next Generation Initiative - <http://icma.org/nextgen>

- A report specific to local government, includes a chapter with 39 best practices for developing talent for future managers and leader

Kaye, B. & Jordan-Evans, S. (2002). *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay*, San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Lancaster, L. C. & Stillman, D. (2002). *When Generations Collide*, New York: Harper Business.

Pew Research Center, <http://www.pewresearch.org/topics/millennials/pages/2/>

Pollak, L. (2014) *Becoming the Boss: New rules for the next generation of leaders*. Harper Collin.

Raines, C. (2003). *Connecting Generations: The Sourcebook for a New Workplace*\_Crisp Publications.

RainmakerThinking, Inc. - [www.rainmakertinking.com](http://www.rainmakertinking.com)

Generations at Work– [www.generationsatwork.com](http://www.generationsatwork.com)

Strauss, W. & Howe, N. (1991) *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc.

Tolbize, A. (2008). *Generational differences in the workplace*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Research and Training Center on Community Living

Zemke, R., Raines C. & Filipczak B. (2000) *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*, New York: AMACOM.