

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Generational Differences in the Workplace for Employees

For the very first time in American history, we now have four generations in the workforce at the same time. While this provides a wide range of talent, knowledge and experience, it can also lead to many conflicts between employees and supervisors from different generations.

Who are the Generations?

Before describing the four living generations who may be encountered in today's workplace, a note of caution is in order. Even though the members of each generation tend to have a unique group "personality", and we will describe the common attitudes and beliefs characteristic of that group, it would be a mistake to assume that all members of a particular generation are alike. The generational descriptions offered here are idealized versions of the average beliefs and attitudes characteristic of each group's members, and not universal truths.

The four living generations that may be found in the workplace today are:

- **The Silent Generation** (also known as Matures, Veterans, or Traditionalists) was born between 1925 and 1946. Overall, they are described as practical, dedicated, respectful of authority, committed to personal sacrifice, and comfortable with hierarchies.
- **The Baby Boomers** were born between 1946 and 1964. They are known as optimistic, driven, ambivalent about authority, attracted to teamwork and decisions by consensus, and in favor of personal gratification.
- **Generation X** was born between 1965 and 1976. They are described as skeptical, respectful of competence but not of authority, determined to balance work with other commitments, entrepreneurial, creative and tech-savvy.
- **Generation Y** (also known as Millennials or Nexters) was born between 1977 and 1997. They are described as appreciating diversity, environmentally conscious, "digital and wired," and coming from unconventional families.

Each generation has been influenced by a unique social, economic, and political environment (both locally and globally) that has shaped their workplace beliefs, values, ethics, and behaviors. Thoroughly understanding each group and what they value on the job is necessary in order to create the most cohesive and productive intergenerational team.

Because of the possibility that four generations are present in your workplace, you, as an employee, now have to be even more skilled at communicating and working as part of an intergenerational team. Being an effective team member includes cultivating communication skills and learning to work together with other generations to achieve goals and objectives established by management. Your understanding of each generation and how they tend to view different aspects of work is a necessary precursor to building the strongest possible relationship with your coworkers and supervisors from different generations.

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