

# THE Multi-Generational WORKPLACE

*Making Generational Diversity WORK!*



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# **The Multi-Generational Workplace**

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*Making Generational Diversity WORK!*

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## The Multi-Generational Workplace—Are You Ready?

The multi-generational workplace...really?

The multi-generational workplace is here and will not be going away! Are you ready?

Since the vast majority of Baby Boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) will not be retiring as planned, we will likely see many multi-generational workplaces with boomers, generation X, and generation Y in the same office or workplace.

There are some discussions that Baby Boomers need to stick around because there are not enough of Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1982) to replace the boomers.

Generation Y (or Millennials—those born between 1983 and 2000) is entering the market in huge numbers. In fact, there are suggestions that [Millennials will make up over half the workforce by 2020](#).

For many Baby Boomers, this is a pretty scary thought. This multi-generational workplace will only get bigger.

### Looking at Gen Y through Baby Boomers' Eyes



One of the real challenges that Baby Boomer managers have is they look at employees of Generation Y like they *are* Baby Boomers. The reality is they do not act like us! In fact, we created them the way they are...they are our children!

Let's compare Baby Boomers and Gen Y.

### Characteristics of Baby Boomers

- Competitive – There were so many of us that we had to compete for everything.
- Work Ethic – We were raised by the Greatest Generation to go to work. It was supposed to be fun!
- Private – In general, we are a pretty private generation. We learned not to discuss how much we make at work!

## Characteristics of Generation Y

- Team Oriented – Everything they did in school was oriented around groups.
- Altruistic – We told them to follow their passions and do what is right. What they *do* is more important than how much they earn.
- Social – They are the polar opposite of Baby Boomers in that Millennials created the Social Media revolution.

As Baby Boomers, we were trained to be employees and to be loyal to our employers. We raised Generation Y to follow their passions and to ask for what they wanted. Therefore, when they ask for the promotion and do not get it, they are likely to move on. We raised them to do this!

Most Baby Boomers had their first job in their early teens. Most of Generation Y do not get their first job until after they graduate from high school. Why? We wanted them to focus on their studies.



Many of Generation Y enter the workplace for the first time after they graduate from college.

Many Baby Boomers expect generation Y employees to understand the workplace, the politics, the processes, and unwritten rules (You know what I am talking about—like giving two weeks notice, never discussing how much you make, being on time at work, to be in the office even when you have nothing that needs to be done there, etc.). We expect them to understand what we did when we entered the workplace.

Many do not!

We look at them through our Baby Boomer glasses and we wonder why they are the way they are.

This should give you something to think about!

What if you had a Generation Y boss in a multi-generational workplace?

## Communication Style in the Multi-Generational Workplace

### Generational Communication Style

What is your preferred communication style?

Would you prefer to:

- Write someone a letter
- Talk to someone in person
- Speak to them on the phone
- Write an e-mail
- Text them on your phone



Each generation has a preferred communication style that was developed a long time ago!

Let me pose the question—when someone moved out from their parent’s home, how did each generation communicate with friends and family they left behind?

#### Greatest Generation (Born 1900-1924)

This was a period when you wrote letters. They were probably written in cursive!

Their preferred communication style was written.

#### Silent Generation (Born 1925-1945)

The rise of the telephone and long distance calling made keeping in touch with home much easier. They talked with their friends and family.

Their preferred communication style was auditory.

#### Baby Boomers (Born 1946-1964)

This is my generation and we used the phone. We used systems like calling home, letting it ring twice and then hanging up. This was a sign to our parents to call us and pay the long distance phone charges.

Our preferred communication style is auditory.

## Generation X (Born 1965-1982)

This is the first generation that had e-mail and other forms of electronic communications. Generation X brought back the art of writing...well, kind of. They wrote, but not like the Greatest Generation. No more pen and paper. Learning cursive penmanship was on the decline.

Their preferred communication style is written.

## Generation Y (Born 1983-2000)

The rise of electronic communications is complete with this generation. Texting or instant messaging has become the preferred method of communications. Like Generation X, their preferred communication is writing, but now it is very different from the Greatest Generation.

Do not think about leaving a note written in cursive for a Gen Y—they may not be able to read it!

Their preferred communication style is written.

What is your preferred communication style? Does it match with your generation's norms?

## Cross Generational Communications

This is where we get into trouble. What if you have an office full of multiple generations, each with their own preferred communication style? What if you are interacting with people of different generations in your job search?

Let's play a game!

You come to work and you want to ask a colleague to lunch today. Their office/cubicle is a 5-minute walk from where you are. How do you approach them?

- Walk over and ask them face to face
- Call them on their phone
- Send them an e-mail
- Text them

What would you do if you were:

- 65 years old
- 55 years old
- 45 years old
- 35 years old
- 25 years old

Would you change your communication style if the person you are asking was much older or younger than you?



Hopefully, I have gotten you to think!

Can we adapt? YES! For example, many Baby Boomers and Generation Xers have learned to text to better communicate with our children.

Here is a big problem:

***Teaching Generation Y to adapt their communication style once they get into the workplace***

This does not mean we all have to simply text, e-mail, or talk. We need to use mixed communication styles depending who we want to communicate with.

As a professional trainer for most of my career, I learned that I needed to adapt to the learning style of my clients or students. Similarly, if you want to be understood and get your message across, you need to adapt your communication style to the preferred method of the listener.

As a Baby Boomer, I want my Generation Y employee to be able to clearly articulate in both oral and written forms (not texting).

Similarly, I may well text my Generation Y employee when I need something different from them!

We all need to be adaptable. There is no “right” communication style!

Does this have an effect on how you will interact with recruiters, hiring managers, and others in your job search?

What is your next step?

## Acquire and Learn Information in the Multi-Generational Workplace

### How do you acquire and learn information?

How we acquire and learn information has changed drastically over the last fifty years. It can also create a huge rift in the workplace based on generational expectations of how it should be done.

Let's look at the three most common generations in the workplace currently:

- Baby Boomers
- Generation X
- Generation Y

How would each generation have answered the following question when they were in high school?

What is the capital of Madagascar?

### Baby Boomers

If you are a Baby Boomer, you might remember fondly the first set of World Book Encyclopedias you used. If you were special, you might have even owned a set of Encyclopedia Britannica. They probably sat on a shelf in the den or a bedroom. In my case, they were in my brother's bedroom. Each year, you would receive a yearbook that kept the contents of the set up to date.



The average Baby Boomer would have looked this question up in the encyclopedia. If someone asked you when you were away from home, you had to wait until you got home to make your discovery. However, you knew where to find the information.

Would you remember this piece of trivia? Probably!

A Baby Boomer would acquire and learn information by looking it up in a book.

## Generation X

Generation X was the first generation that had access to online materials. In the early 1990's came the rise of the CD-ROM. Encyclopedias started to go online. There was no Wikipedia yet, but it would not be far behind.

This was a very transformational time...where information was not quite at your finger tips, but it was getting closer.

A Generation X-er would have still looked this question up in some form of encyclopedia, which was often to be found online. They still probably had to go home to answer the question because they needed to look it up on the household desktop computer.

Would someone from Generation X remember this piece of trivia? Probably!

A Generation X-er would acquire and learn information online.

## Generation Y

For Generation Y, there was no need for an encyclopedia. All you needed to do to answer this question is search the Internet.

In 1996, I remember helping my son work on a middle school project comparing Bill Clinton and Bob Dole, who were both running for President. Everything he needed was available on the Internet. Who needed an encyclopedia?

When my son got to college, he was required to purchase a laptop computer. Search became ubiquitous.

A Generation Y-er would just search the Internet for information.

Would someone from Generation Y remember this piece of trivia? Maybe or maybe not!

A Generation Y-er would acquire the information online, but may not learn it.

Why should they?

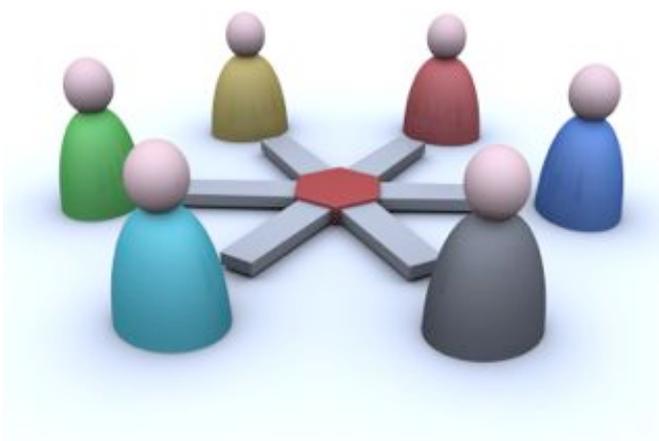
This is what pisses off a lot of Baby Boomers. Why don't young people have to remember it? They can look it up again!



## Information Revolution

I remember working for IBM in 1990. The new computer system I was working on had all of the documentation available on a CD for the first time. At the time, IBM was the largest publisher of printed material in the world. The average computer system had 50-100 manuals. As a programmer or administrator, I needed to know about all of these manuals and at least know which manual had the information I might require. All I had to do was stick the CD in the CD-ROM and “search.” The information revolution had begun.

Generation Y has grown up with search being available. Now it is available anytime and anywhere!



I now wonder how we got along without Google or Apple Maps applications. (Yes, I use the Apple map app on my iPhone!)

How has the ability to acquire and learn information affected your workplace?

Have you adapted?

Can we learn something from Generation Y?

## Group Dynamics in the Multi-Generational Workplace

### Group Dynamics

Group dynamics in the workplace is changing rapidly, mostly because of the entrance of Gen Y-ers onto the scene. Why is that, you might ask?

How well we play in groups has changed dramatically over the last century.

## **Baby Boomers**

I am a Baby Boomer born in the mid 1950s to parents of the greatest generation. Both of my parents were raised through the Depression, and my father served in World War II.

They grew up in a time when self-reliance was critical. They grew up to believe that, to be successful, you had to be a strong individual. They trained their Baby Boomer children to be self-reliant.

We were raised in school to study hard and rely in ourselves. We are the generation who was taught that asking for help is a sign of weakness.

Most of the great corporations of today are run by Baby Boomers, and their mission statements and values are based on strong individualism.

Group dynamics? What group dynamics? It was all about individual contribution.

## **Generation X**

Gen X-ers were the children of the silent generation. People of the silent generation were born during the depression or World War II. Birth rates plummeted during the depression and, therefore, the silent generation is very small. The silent generation has very high rates of divorce.

Gen X-ers were, therefore, the first latch-key kids. Many of Generation X raised themselves and learned that, to survive, they had to take care of themselves.



Gen X-ers also first entered the job market in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the concept of a job for life had started to disappear. They were responsible for their own careers.

Group dynamics? This generation grew up to be self-reliant.

Now let's look at Generation Y!

## **Generation Y**

Gen Y-ers are the children of the Baby Boomer generation.

We did not raise this generation to be strong individualists...we raised them to be good team players!

Look the explosion of youth team sports. We organized summer camps for Generation Y to explore and play with peers.

Public education has been transformed by group learning. We learned that, when you work in groups, productivity increases. Rather interestingly, I am currently reading [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change \(25th Anniversary Edition\)](#), and Stephen Covey expounds on the value of groups working together for a win-win solution.

Gen Y-ers are highly social creatures. How often have you seen a restaurant with 10-20 twenty somethings gathered around the table? This is the generation that created Facebook!

## **Group Dynamics in the Workplace**

Generation Y is unlike either of the previous generations. They function extremely well in teams. They perform in teams much better than either of the previous generations. In fact, they thrive in group environments.

When I started my career, I aspired to have an office for myself. That was a sign of achievement.

Generation Y does not want a big corner office. They want to make a difference along with their peers!

What does your workplace look like? It is individualistic, group oriented, or something in between?

Think about this—by 2020, half of the workforce will come from Generation Y!



Will the group dynamics of your organization attract or repel Gen Y-ers?

## **Gen Y Boss—Baby Boomer, Are You Ready?**

### **Could you work for a Gen Y boss?**

For most Baby Boomers, thinking about working for a Gen Y boss might seem like a nightmare. Could you work for your kid...or someone your kid's age?

You might think that will be a rarity. Well... [Projections show that by 2014 millennials will account for 36% of the American workforce. In 2025, that number balloons to 75% of the \*global\* workplace.](#)

I know, I know...you are saying that, by 2025, you will be happily retired, sipping on piña coladas by the pool. There are a couple things I want you to think about:

- [The economy needs you to keep working.](#) Particularly, the economy needs you to work past 70 years of age. The social programs of this country need you to keep working.
- [More than 80% of boomers will work past 65 years of age.](#) It should be no surprise to you that you will be working for a while past 65. Most Baby Boomers do not have enough money to retire.

What does this mean?

You WILL eventually have a Gen Y boss.

I now work for myself. My last two bosses have been Gen X-ers. Both were nearly incompetent in managing people. They understood the business, but when it came to managing people, it was not pretty.

As a Baby Boomer, I learned to ignore them and get my job done.

Functioning in a workplace dominated by Gen Y-ers and having a Gen Y boss will be a very different experience for you.

Generation Y is very group/team oriented. Thinking that you can ignore Gen Y and just get the job done will probably not be acceptable. You will need to be a good team player, even if your teammates are young enough to be your kids.

Gen Y-ers have embraced electronic, "just in time" communications...whether this is texting, instant messaging, or using various social media platforms. Fully expect that social media-like platforms will penetrate the largest organizations by 2025. Collaborative communications will become normal. Face to face communications may be a rarity.

Can you work for a boss that will have less work experience than you, but will have skills that you need you to learn from and adapt to?

Most Baby Boomers would feel fine if we did not see our boss for weeks on end. What will happen when you are in contact with your boss on a daily basis, some of it by text and other electronic means?

What if your new Gen Y boss is not ready to lead? [This has become an increasingly common phenomenon.](#)

Will you be ready to help them?



## **Gen X and Y— Like Oil and Water?**

### **Gen X and Y – Do They Get Along?**

As a Baby Boomer, I would assume that an office full of employees from Gen X and Y would work together harmoniously.

WOW, that is a bad assumption!

Gen X and Y are cut from very different cloth.

## **Gen X**

[Gen X](#) (born 1965-1982) were the children of the Silent Generation (born 1925-1945). I was talking with a client yesterday who told me that her parents divorced in her early teens. She said that, when she was in junior high school, it was common to hear from her friends that their parents were divorcing.

Generation X-ers were the first latchkey kids. Their parents divorced in record numbers. To a large extent, they raised themselves. Many went to work in their teens to help support themselves and their family.

The generational echo effect is that Gen X has the lowest divorce rates. This is primarily because they have waited to get married. I currently know quite a few Gen X-ers who are 40 and getting married for the first time.

I spoke at a recruiting conference a few months ago, and I was talking about how Gen X-ers have more typically waited to get married. A female Gen X-er offered up that she told her parents she was gay in order to get them off her back about the subject!

When these kids left home, many had to put themselves through college.

They also entered the workforce starting in the mid 1980s—about the time that companies were discontinuing jobs for life. The concept of loyalty to a company was disappearing.

Gen Xers created the concept of “work life balance.”

## Gen Y

Let’s contrast this to [Gen Y](#) (born 1983-2000). They are the children of Baby Boomers. [Until recently](#), Baby Boomers have had stable marriages. Gen Y grew up in relatively stable homes (compared to Gen X). As a Baby Boomer parent, we raised our child to build a college resumé. We did not want him to work, but rather, focus on his studies. Therefore, often the Gen Y-er’s first work experience was in college—and that may have been an unpaid internship.

Gen Y entered the workforce when at the beginning of the worst recession since the great depression. Many stayed in college because they could not get a job. Therefore, this is rapidly becoming the most educated generation ever. It is also the most in debt generation ever due to student loans.

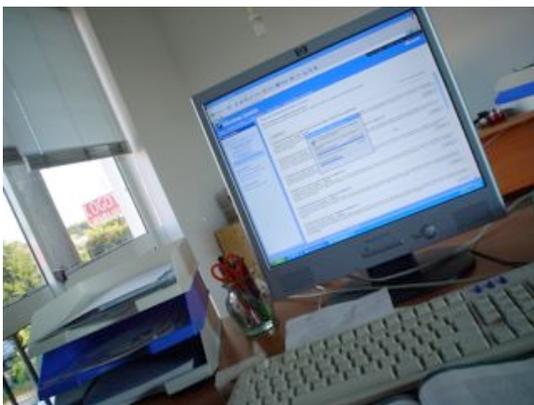
Gen Y grew up in an age of organized sports, where everyone got a blue ribbon or trophy just for participating. Some will tell you they grew up entitled.

Gen Y has entered the workplace with a thud. We Baby Boomer parents encouraged our children to ask for what they want.

Gen Y will ask for the promotion or pay raise.

We wanted our children to study and not have to work.

Gen Y is entering the workforce with less experience as an employee than any other generation.



## Today’s Workplace

As Gen Y enters the workplace, they have either Baby Boomer or Gen X bosses. Over and over, I have seen the mix of a Gen X boss and Gen Y employee become toxic.

These Gen X and Gen Y grew up in very different environments.

The challenge is that both Baby Boomers and Gen X bosses look at Gen Y employees through their own lenses, expecting them to BE like them.

They are not!

When Gen Y employees enter the workforce, they need far more coaching to become good employees. They do not have work experience!

If Gen Y employees do not get the experience they want in the workplace, they will leave and go somewhere else. Why?

Because we raised them to ask for what they want!

Do Gen X and Y get along?

Not really. They do not mix well, just like oil and water!

What is your experience? I want to hear your Gen X and Y story!

## **Baby Boomers, Gen X, and Gen Y—Feedback**

### **Baby Boomers, Gen X and Y**

#### **“Paying their dues”**

Several people have commented to me that new Gen Y employees expect to come into the workplace and rapidly move up, but that they think they should have to pay their dues before being able to do so.

Hmm...pay their dues.

My first reaction was “Why?”

The world is changing at a phenomenal pace. If someone can do the job better than another, why should they have to wait in line? What difference does their age or years on the job make?

With the workplace rapidly moving to a more nimble place, why does anyone need to “pay their dues?”



## Why do we have to label people?

Many have reacted to my using the labels Baby Boomer, Gen X, and Gen Y!

These are not homogeneous groups. They are very heterogeneous with a lot of variation, especially when people are born at the edges of each generation. These labels were created by sociologists and others to understand the characteristics of groups of individuals who had common experiences. For example, Baby Boomers were uniquely shaped by having lived through the Vietnam War and Watergate eras.

In addition, the years that define Gen X and Y can be quite different!

I think the labels are good when used *properly* to help discuss our differences.

The challenge is that each generation looks at the others through their own lense. Each generation is different, and it is wonderful when we can discuss them in a multi-generational setting.

## Gen Y Managers

Many readers have responded that Gen Y managers can be capable of managing multiple generations. My personal observation is they are more socially aware of the differences in their employees. On the other side of the equation is the question of who will be training them in leadership and management skills? In the good old days, large companies had management training programs, and many of today's managers went through those programs.

The good old days as we know them are gone. The workplace will shift to a Gen Y-dominated environment over the next ten years...and this concerns me. Who is going to train them?

## Gen X and Y

Gen X and Y are very different. The real issue going forward will be this— are there enough Gen X-ers to replace retiring Baby Boomers?

One of the big reasons for the predictions that [Gen Y will make up 50% of the workplace by 2020](#) (by the way, the SHRM article I link to defines Gen Y starting in 1975 through 1994) is because there are so few Gen X-ers in general. Generation X is a very small generation, at approximately 50 million. Compared to the Baby Boomer generation's 79 million and Generation Y at over 80 million, Generation X is tiny. There are lot reasons for this:

- Silent Generation was also tiny due to low birth rates during the Depression and WW II
- Birth Control became available in the mid-1960's and birth rates flattened out
- Vietnam War drove millions of Baby Boomers to college to avoid the draft and, therefore, delayed household creation and having children
- High divorce rates among the Silent Generation

The issue we have not discussed here is the effect immigration has had on Gen X. There are significantly more people in this country who fit into Gen X age range who were not born here. They do not classically fit into the Gen X experience. What do you think this means?

What do you think is going to happen?

## Workplace of the Future—Defined by Gen Y



### Workplace of the Future

In the next 10-15 years, the workplace of the future will be defined by Gen Y. The current workplace was defined by Baby Boomers and their parents, and not much has changed in the last 40-50 years. Yes, there have been technological changes, but the basic concepts that define a workplace have not changed much...until recently.

Today, [Gen Y makes up 36% of the American workforce. There are projections that in a little over ten years they could make up 75% of the worldwide workforce.](#)

Whether you like it or not, Gen Y will re-write the rules of the workplace. In my honest opinion, this will be for the good!

Some people say that 2014 will be the [Year of Workplace Reinvention](#). Pam Ross wrote in her article on the Huffington Post:

“The Results-Only Work Environment ([ROWE](#)) challenges traditional management strategies. Jody Thompson, and Cali Ressler, co-creators of the ROWE, describe it as “a management strategy where employees are evaluated on

performance, not presence.” In a ROWE, workers can work wherever, whenever, and however they choose to, as long as they achieve their results.”

Does that sound like an environment in which a Gen Y-er would thrive?

## **Millennials (Gen Y) Are Rewriting the Rules of Management**

In an article posted on Chief Learning Officer, [Millennials Are Rewriting the Rules of Management](#), the author Ladan Nikravan states:

“Because millennials feel a [bond](#) with globalization and diversity, they tend to believe a diverse group, with an assortment of ideas, comes up with a better solution than a lone leader. This is changing traditional management practices.”

Brad Karsh, author of [Manager 3.0: A Millennial’s Guide to Rewriting the Rules of Management](#), said in the article:

“...we focus on millennials and how this generation will lead. We have talked to thousands of millennials across the country, and there are a few things that we heard time and time again that just aren’t working when it comes to management. A few ideas and icons that don’t work at work for millennials include:

- Corporate ladder
- Bureaucracy
- Overly formal communication
- Inflexibility
- Lack of diversity
- Boring work



Millennials aren’t afraid to say these elements of business aren’t working, and they’re standing up for the new rules of management and fostering a positive work culture. As millennials take on management roles, they are pushing for new ideas and values.”

## **Outsourcing and Crowdsourcing**

Back in the 1990s, outsourcing became the fear of just about every worker. Today, outsourcing or globalization is a fact. When you include the new concept of [crowd-sourcing, where you can find groups of people from around the world who can and will do micro-tasks for you](#), the concept of a traditional workplace pretty much disappears.

This is the brave new world that Gen Y will be bringing to workplace.

Are you ready?

## **Diversity in the Workplace—A Different Perspective**

### **Diversity in the Workplace**

There is more diversity in the workplace now than ever before. I am going to approach diversity from a different perspective.

We are diverse in a variety of ways:

#### **How We Communicate**

Think about it. If you are 65 years of age, you grew up doing the following:

- Learned to write cursive.
- Created an outline before you would write a paper
- Typed that paper on a typewriter
- Used a phone to call home, and it was probably a pay phone
- When you called long distance on the phone, you were aware of the time

If you are 21 years of age:

- You may not be able to read cursive, much less write it
- Outline? What is an outline? You start writing and rearrange as you go
- Everything you write is entered electronically
- What is a pay phone?
- What is long distance calling?

These are the two extremes, but these changes have occurred in the last 10-15 years. For example, when I traveled in 2001 on business I had:

- A laptop computer with an analog modem to download my e-mail
- A cell phone with roaming charges
- A long distance calling card

The way we communicate in the workplace has become extremely diverse.

#### **How We Learn**

Again, think about it. If you are 65 years of age you grew up:

- In a school where you listened to a teacher instruct
- You did higher level math on a slide rule
- You did most projects on your own
- The library was the place to do all of your research
- You memorized a lot of the information to be able to do well on a test

In contrast, if you are 21 years of age you grew up:

- Learning in groups
- Taking online courses
- Using a calculator from the time you entered school
- Doing research on the Internet
- Memorization?? Why memorize information when it is readily available on your smartphone or tablet?

Again, these are extremes, but much of the diversity in the way we learn and acquire information has occurred within the last 15 years!

## Group and Family Dynamics

Think about this. If you are 65 years of age you grew up:

- To be a strong individual
- If you are a man, to be the primary income provider
- If you are a woman, you were expected to marry and raise a family
- You were never to share personal information like how much you were making
- To go to work for a company that would take care of you

In contrast, if you are 21 years of age you who grew up:

- To be a good team player
- If you are man, you hope to find a partner who can contribute equally
- If you are a woman, you can reach for the heavens when it comes to a career
- Everything is available on the Internet. You want to know what I make? Sure...
- To work for yourself doing something that will have a positive impact



Though these are extremes, they demonstrate that there is tremendous diversity in how we function in groups.

## **Cultural Diversity**

If you are 65 years of age, when you entered the workplace in the mid 1960s, it was probably pretty segregated.

I was talking to a client the other day who works for a major technology company in Silicon Valley. He said that his department was made up of employees where everyone was foreign born. Everything from Russia, Hungary, Cuba, China, India... Most had been in this country for many years, and most were now citizens. If you were 21 years of age and entered the workplace today, what would be your expectations?

How would this kind of diversity affect how you approached your career?

Even though we have labeled each generation, it was to discuss the differences that exist today in the workplace. The key to making such a diverse workplace functional is to discuss our many differences.



## **Conclusion**

As stated earlier in this white paper, these generational groups are very heterogeneous. Everyone is different. Hopefully, you can now see the some of the commonalities of each generation, as well as better understand why they behave the way they do.

**This still means you need to ask how each person prefers to communicate and acquire new information.**

Each of us are unique individuals and want to be treated in certain ways. Take off your generational lenses and ask your employees, boss, and team how they want to function together.

**Please let me know what you learned, or if you have any additional thoughts regarding The Multi-Generational Workplace. Find me on Twitter @CareerPivot or e-mail me at [Marc@CareerPivot.com](mailto:Marc@CareerPivot.com)**