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## THE INTERGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE: HOW DOES IT WORK?

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Dealing with diversity and understanding each other's differences is critical to communication and success of every company. Letting people be who they are and dealing with it is not new. There is no doubt that words, actions and sometimes behavior can be misconstrued in the workplace and even across generations. In order to master intergenerational communication, it is necessary to understand some broad generalizations about the generations and then move beyond those to connect as individuals.

The Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), the Millennial Generation (1981-2000) are generations currently sharing workplaces [1]. The challenge for companies and individuals is to take advantage of the varied strengths of different generations while diminishing points of friction. And in an ideal world, this would happen when members of each generation learn from each other. But the first step to bridging these generations is helping people understand each other.

Younger generations are geared to working in a fast-paced environment and getting information. Short, abrupt communication may occur and leave out important details that others may need to know in order to provide adequate responses. Older generations may overestimate, causing confusion or extra work in sifting out pertinent information. Striking a balance with each generation can be difficult. Business and human resources professionals need to be able to recognize how these differences are impacting the work environment and relationships. Moreover, acknowledging that someone is part of a particular generation is not meant to put them into a box, it is just a way to glean clues on how to better understand and connect with them. As is known, older workers can teach younger colleagues a thing or two. But education is a two-way street, and older workers can also learn from newer hires. People who grow up at different points in history have a unique experience and outlook toward life. It's always been that way and will mostly likely continue. It's easy to say, "We were all young once" – but the truth is we were not all young under the same circumstances. The study of the differences between generations makes it possible to form a holistic characteristic of each of them and eliminates prejudices. When corporations believe that older workers invest less in their knowledge, are less excited by their work and exploring their world, and are on a path to physical decline and exhaustion, they make the wrong decisions about whom to select, promote and develop, and whom to retire [2].

By working together, workers of different generations bring tremendous benefits to their companies. Once manager understands any one generation's formative years, he can make sense of that generation's workplace values and beliefs, and the gaps between the generations then tend to shrink. Understanding what makes each generation unique is only one piece of the puzzle when it comes to managing employees.

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