

Managing Multiple Generations of Employees

Overview:

- As the workforce continues to shift and change, St. Olaf leaders and supervisors must be prepared to manage multigenerational teams with varying needs, values, and priorities.
- It is possible to leverage generational differences into opportunities by understanding and optimizing our workforce.
- Each generation has its own priorities and concerns, which are influenced by how they were raised and in order to effectively lead employees, leaders must understand where they're coming from.
- Training and coaching employees will avoid problems with skill gaps.
- By understanding the different generations, generation clashes such as conflicts around how work gets done, challenges with technology, dress codes, etc. can be avoided.

How are the generations defined?

- **Baby Boomers:** born 1946 - 1964
- **Generation X:** born 1965 - 1981
- **Millennials:** born 1982 - 1997
- **Generation Z:** born post 1998

Baby Boomers:

Baby Boomers are loyal, hard-working and want to be valued for their skills and experience.

- When you are working with Boomers, make sure you value their experiences and listen to what they have to say. They have a breadth of knowledge and want to share it with younger generations.
- They did not grow up with technology and want to keep face-to-face interaction as part of the norm. Talk with them directly. When sending emails, they will appreciate keeping a certain level of formality.
- They are work-centric, self-motivated, competitive, and goal-oriented; leveraging this will quickly advance your team. They value peer competition and created the "workaholic" trend, which may clash with the newer value of work-life balance. Address this within your team so that there are not conflicting expectations.
- The Boomers grew up in a politically and economically stable time, where things were more certain. This may translate into their work, where they crave structure and certainty, especially as they approach retirement. They might meet change with resistance, so be patient with them as they accept new realities.
- Boomers believe leadership should be consensual and collegial. They seek cooperative approaches with sympathetic and emotionally intelligent responses, mutual understanding, acceptance, and agreement before actions are taken.

Generation X:

Often forgotten, yet incredibly important to understand, Gen X'ers are fiercely independent and may err on the side of cynicism due to the time in which they grew up.

- Gen X'ers are self-reliant, have a good work ethic, possess high leadership potential, and are focused on work-life balance.
- Ultimately, Generation X is marked by a series of major disruptive events (both domestic and international), and as a result, they may struggle to trust a company enough to give them their loyalty. Sometimes considered an "in-between generation", Gen X is known to be more cynical, due to the time in which they grew up. They are considered the first "latchkey" generation, as they started to experience more dual-income households and rising divorce rates. To manage this cynicism and skepticism, ask for their input and suggestions. They might not be as naturally forth-coming as the Boomers or Millennials.
- Gen X's view on leadership include: competence is key, everyone is equal, asking why, and challenging others.
- Members of Generation X were the first generation to grow up with technology. While they share this with the Millennials and Gen Z, Gen X is similar to the Boomers in that they are more hierarchical than their younger counterparts, and desire a mixture of growth and stability. Manage these desires by helping them grow in place (e.g., internal professional development).
- Gen X'ers prefer less supervision and greater autonomy. They want an environment with emphasis on the individual. They are open to change and new ways of doing things. As a manager, it's okay to just stay out Gen X's way. Don't worry -- if they have a problem or a question, they'll come to you.

Millennials:

Millennials want to be judged for their results -- not their hours in the office.

- Millennials were raised in a child-focused world and may be known as the generation of the participation trophy, but managers can easily use this to their advantage by providing consistent feedback and having a more hands-on management style. In reality, Millennials are not interested in participation trophies in the workplace -- they simply want recognition of their work. A simple 'thank you' or 'good job' will go a long way.
- Millennials are optimistic dreamers and want to work toward meaningful goals. They want to discuss new ideas and develop leadership skills within the workplace. You can get them excited by encouraging collaboration and allowing them to be leaders. Millennials are team-oriented and enjoy forming relationships with their peers, which may differ from other generations, but can be valuable in creating a workplace culture where everyone can thrive. For Millennials to be happy in the workplace, they must have an "organizational fit," which means they are aligned with their organization's values and feel fulfilled by their daily work. Many in this generation are more focused on the meaning behind their work than anything else.
- Millennials are incredibly tech-savvy, so take advantage of it, but be cautious of their tendency to multitask. They are great at balancing multiple tasks, but there is also the risk of lower productivity due to distractions. By encouraging a good work-life balance which Millennials crave, distractions during the workday can be counteracted.
- Similar to Gen X'ers, Millennials are open to change and new ways of doing things, but prefer collaborative group work.
- Millennials are ambitious and flexible, focused on career growth, and look for achievers, coaches and mentors when it comes to leadership.

Generation Z:

Generation Z is the younger version of Generation X, and they are ready to work hard and compete.

- Generation Z wasn't brought up with participation trophies; they were taught to compete. They are future-focused and concerned with taking care of their families. They are scrappy and innovative, looking to work hard to improve the world around them. Like the Millennials, they want their work to have a larger purpose. They need to see how things tie back to the ultimate objective, otherwise they're not really interested. Encourage them to connect with the broader meaning of their work as it will make them more productive.
- Generation Z does not remember September 11, 2001, but they grew up in its aftermath. They have never known life without these stresses, and also grew up during the Great Recession. As a result, Gen Z is stressed. They are coming of age in uncertain times, the reverberations of which may appear within the workplace. Supervisors can combat this by prioritizing work-life balance.
- Gen Z are digital natives and are talented at sifting through and absorbing large amounts of information at once. However, this may lead to chronic multitasking and short attention spans. In the workplace, capitalize on their tech savvy nature, but be aware of the issues that can come with it. Gen Z wants to be socially connected with everyone.
- Similar to Gen X, Gen Z values independent work. They are fed up with group projects where people don't pull their weight. Give them individual projects, but do suggest collaboration with their coworkers. They will appreciate being able to do it on their own time.
- Gen Z'ers tend to have a realistic and multicultural mindset in their work. Give honest and forthcoming feedback regularly; they expect it. They crave structure, guidance, goals, challenges, and clear ways to measure progress. Being up front with Gen Z employees is a good way to feed this desire. While they are technologically savvy, they also value face-to-face communication. Honest and straightforward one-on-one conversations will go a long way. Gen Z is more inclined than millennials to develop skills and grow a career in one place.