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## Generational differences can be overcome at work

By Marie Hayashi Reichelt

Most companies have issues of different generations working together. Analysts predict a severe shortage of skilled workers when the baby boomers begin to retire.

There are about 145 million U.S. workers, and they are divided into five generations:

- Depression Generation Traditionalist (born 1927-1935): About 2.9 million
- Pre-Boomers Traditionalist (born 1936-1945): About 7.25 million
- Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964): About 76 million
- Generation X (born 1965-1980): About 51 million
- Generation Y (born 1981-present): About 7.25 million

and are not team-oriented. They are self-reliant, and many were raised as latchkey children. They are the most technologically savvy of current employees.

Generation Y are characterized as hopeful, polite, relaxed and ambitious. They will not hesitate to move from one job to another for better opportunities. They don't expect or have loyalty toward their employer. They seek continuous learning and are at ease with a diverse work force. They are interested in keeping their options open and may seek degrees in more than one discipline. They are interested in work and life balance. They grew up with the Internet and are technically savvy.

Each company has its own culture, and employees need guidance on how to be successful in a company's culture.

The Depression generation traditionalists endured great financial hardships resulting from the stock market crash of 1929. They learned to do without and make do with what was available. They are very mindful of costs and frugal with company resources. They are loyal to their companies and often sought a long career with a single company. They are usually conservative in their values and have a dependable work ethic.

Pre-boomers entered the job market when the U.S. economy was improving. They are fiercely loyal, hardworking and share the work ethic of the traditionalist. They are often reluctant to change jobs and want to be respected in their career choice.

Baby boomers will be eligible to

start retiring soon. With such a large group retiring, great stress will be placed on retirement programs like Social Security and Medicare. Their work ethic is consistent with prior generations, and they will work long hours to accomplish their goals. They seek job security and are not inclined to change jobs voluntarily. They are likely to spend freely on items of luxury, such as expensive vacations and automobiles.

Generation Xers are very wary of employers and society in general. They have witnessed firsthand the employers' breach of the loyalty contract with their parents. They are generally well-educated and hardworking. They place a high value on balance between work and personal life. Gen Xers are generally unimpressed with authority figures

Here are some suggestions on what companies can do to minimize the generational issues:

- Train all employees in diversity, particularly generational sensitivity.
- Establish mentoring programs.
- Create a real team atmosphere and remove barriers.
- Emphasize quality over quick profits.
- Retain skilled workers as long as possible.
- Treat all employees with respect and avoid favoritism.

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