Engaging and Challenging a Multigenerational Workforce

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We are at a unique place in the dynamic evolution of the American workforce. It’s not uncommon for people in their 60s to be working on teams with colleagues who are the age of their grandchildren. In some cases, younger managers are supervising employees twice their age. With such age disparities, managers are seeking ways to motivate each generation to engage them and maximize their productivity.

“As a leader, it is important to take a different approach when managing each of the multi-generational employee groups,” says Grace Lemmon, assistant professor of management, who specializes in employee engagement and work-life balance. “Each generation views its employer in unique ways based on intrinsic expectations they hold of what an employer should be, should provide or should promise.”

Lemmon offers these insights and advice for managing the three primary generations in today’s workforce: baby boomers, Generation Xers and millennials.
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<th><strong>Baby boomers</strong></th>
<th><strong>Generation Xers</strong></th>
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**VALUES**

Baby boomers are looking for companies that clearly value their employees. They seek stability and opportunities for advancement or growth. They believe that employees must pay their dues before advancing up the corporate ladder, just as they did.

**VALUES**

Xers need stability because they are making important life decisions, like whether to have another child or go back to school. They are looking for advancement, but also careers that promote work-life balance. Xers often view work as a mutually beneficial contract between the company and the employee.

**VALUES**

Millennials reached adulthood around the year 2000. They are confident, well-educated, socially conscious, highly collaborative, savvy and always connected—to the Internet and each other. Work is important to them, but generally not the biggest priority in their lives. They would love to have a high-paying job, but are willing to give it up to have life experiences.

**COMMUNICATION STYLE**

Baby boomers are more apt to want face-to-face conversations, largely because they have worked much of their lives within an environment that didn’t allow for instant communication.

**COMMUNICATION STYLE**

Xers prefer a communication style that allows for reflection and reduced pressure for an immediate response, mainly because they prize separation of work and home life.

**COMMUNICATION STYLE**

As the first generation to grow up surrounded by digital media, millennials prefer to use email, texting and instant messaging over face-to-face meetings.

**HOW TO ENGAGE THEM**

Baby boomers offer tremendous experience, so finding a task that challenges them can be tricky. According to Lemmon, they are motivated by tasks that appeal to their inner values. Baby boomers are a pragmatic, goal-oriented cohort, so finding out exactly what they want to accomplish before retirement is key to engaging them.

**HOW TO ENGAGE THEM**

Xers want autonomy and growth. They have developed extensive expertise from work experience and have ample information-gathering know-how. Tasks or goals that Xers can do independently and that deepen their skills will be especially fulfilling.

**HOW TO ENGAGE THEM**

Millennials perform well on tasks that expand their breadth of knowledge. Because they are in the early stages of their careers, they are eager to build their skill sets, and see new experiences as rewarding professionally and personally. Critical to millennials is instant feedback that is fair and justified.

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Born in the post-World War II era (1946-1964), boomers grew up in a time of dramatic social change and economic prosperity. Loyal and hard-working, they seek security in their jobs and may have stayed at one company their entire careers.

Birth dates for Xers range from the mid ’60s to the early ’80s. They lived through the greed of the ’80s and often distrust authority and large institutions. They are results-driven, highly independent and extremely resourceful. They experienced the early age of innovation and know how to get information.

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