

The Sand Paper

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A Young Boss and an Older Worker

By Gretchen Stein, Ph.D., CEAP

One of the most challenging supervisor-employee relationships is that of the younger boss supervising an older worker. Generational differences in work style and perception can cause friction and take what could be a strong supportive relationship and diminish it to misunderstandings, miscommunication and dysfunction.

Below I will highlight areas where generational differences tend to appear in this special type of supervisor-employee relationship.



Your Workplace is Not Your Family

Many employees spend more time at work than they do with their families; awake at least. So we naturally grow close to those we work with day in and day out. When your boss is the age of your child or when you are supervising the work of someone the age of your parents, it is easy to begin to think of them that way. Watch your words to make sure you honor your workplace roles and are not mimicking a parent-child relationship.

Work Ethic

Older employees, especially baby boomers, highly value face time in the office or at their work station. They are a generation that values prompt attendance as a key part of their work ethic.

Younger workers and supervisors, especially millennials, raised with high technology and access to work anytime, anyplace, believe that it doesn't matter where the work gets done, just as long as it gets done. Problems in perception arise when a younger supervisor comes in what looks like "late" to the employee when he or she may in reality have been up until 11pm the night before working on the project that was due today. Supervisors rarely feel the need to justify their time, but a brief conversation on work timing could be very helpful.

Technology

Younger workers who have been raised with technology all their lives more easily adapt to changing technology and seem to intuitively know how to move forward with new tech trends. Older workers who started out on manual typewriters and manual everything else in the workplace may have a more difficult time adapting to the next level of technological sophistication. Young supervisors need to offer help, patience and support to their older workforce to aid in the transition without making older employees feel stupid or like a dinosaur. A friendly willingness can go very far in helping workers meet the next phase of technology in the workplace.

Discuss Your Differences

Taking time to discuss our differences can be so enlightening and can reduce conflict in the workplace too. We all come to work with different work ethics, values, expectations and work styles. Many similarities exist in these areas for people raised in the same period of history. Yet, we are all still individual, with different gifts and different ways of looking at the world. If you have not had a workshop on "Generation Differences at Work," I encourage you to do so. It is fun and an enlightening way to build respect within your multigenerational workplace. You will quickly see there is not one right way or wrong way, we simply see things differently and diversity of thinking makes us better able to serve those of many generations.

Source: L. Gravett and R. Throck Morton. 2007, January, "Bridging the Generation Gap; How to Get the Radio Babies, Boomers, Gen X'ers and Gen Y'ers to Work Together and Achieve More."

What's Inside

A Young Boss and Older Worker.....	1
The Exit of Baby Boomers.....	2
Generational Differences at Work.....	3
The Millennials.....	4
Dear Sandy.....	5
About the EAP.....	6



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The Exit of the Baby Boomers

By D.J. Enga, CPFC

Significant changes are coming in the American workforce as baby boomers have begun retiring as of 2011. Nearly 70 million people will make the transition from the workplace to retirement in the next fifteen years, which assures an incredible impact on various public and private businesses across the country. Although this change is inevitable, there are certain things that can be done to lessen any potential negative outcome.

Employers can take preventative steps through succession planning. When baby boomers retire they will end up taking years of know-how and important information along with them. Oftentimes, the most useful and valuable information regarding their duties and responsibilities goes along with them and an opportunity is lost. Most baby boomers are incredibly knowledgeable about the inner culture and processes of the organizations they work for; developing and planning to tap that resource via training or mentor programs will result in that knowledge being passed along from retiree to his/her successor. By offering these programs, working hand-on-hand with less experienced employees, is a great way to ensure that the baby boomers replacement will be well fitted for their ongoing work experience.

Employers also need to realize that millions of retirees equal millions of new jobs. In fact, there will be several million more jobs than applicants, which will greatly influence the hiring process.

Employers will need to consider raising the stakes in order to attract incoming Millennials. Organizations will want to consider offering alternative compensation, annual bonuses and work environments that support the expectations of new workers. Hiring managers and Human Resource Directors need to recognize that with the high volume of positions available that it could be more challenging to fill those positions, so hiring an individual who may be less qualified might become more of a reality. To address this, employers would do well to consider transforming their organizations into training grounds that offer productive and valuable training and instruction in order to equip new hires with the best chance to succeed.

In regard to the Boomer generation, they continue to set an example when it comes to retiring. Many continue to be engaged in the workforce by working part time, telecommuting or starting their own businesses. These transitions into retirement allow for an easier transition for both the employer and the employee. Staying flexible and open-minded to different avenues of opportunity can be healthy for both parties.

Organizations who thoughtfully plan for this transition and who prepare and educate their current and incoming employees regarding the upcoming changes, will surely have the most favorable outcome.



“Nearly 70 million people will make the transition from the workplace to retirement in the next fifteen years.”

Generational Differences at Work: Stirring the Pot

by Diane Johnson, MSW, LISW, CEAP

The current range of generations in the workplace is wider than it has ever been before. The beliefs about how work should be done, expectations of work/home balance, what types of communication are useful and what is valued as a reward, are as varied as they have ever been. Broadly speaking, different generations are seen to have a unique “peer personality” with unique characteristics, values and ways of understanding the world. These generations are formed through common age, shared world events, beliefs and behavior. The result is different generations having different norms regarding their overall work style.

As with other differences such as race, gender and class, these are generalizations. The intent of looking at generational differences is not to make assumptions based on age, but to be aware of our own beliefs and judgments and be aware that there may be a very different lens that a colleague is using as they view their work world.

Much of the literature has identified these basic generational differences:

1. **Veterans** (1925-1945) believe in the intrinsic value of work, obedience is valued over individualism and duty comes before pleasure. Hierarchy is fundamental to an organization.
2. **Boomers** (1946-1964) have a sense of self that is strongly linked to career and the need to find meaning from work. There is a work-centric orientation and one “needs to pay their dues” to earn flexibility and autonomy.
3. **Gen-xers** (1965- 1976) believe that their parents “lived to work” and they want to “work to live.” There is a prevailing attitude that work is “just a job” and there is a strong value on work/life balance.
4. **Millenials** (1980-2000) have been raised without absolutes, with a great deal of diversity and the norm is that there is more than one answer. They do not see the need to stay within a rigid job description and prefer to keep career options open. Challenging the status quo isn't viewed as a negative; it's part of looking at options.

These are just a few examples of generational



differences. As different generations supervise one another and relate as colleagues, these possible differences can affect perceptions of one another, especially if we make assumptions about the differences. What seems to be common among all generations at work is the desire to have a balance of autonomy and support from leaders, a desire to feel valued and perceive that one's work contribution matters. A difference though is WHAT is valued and how it is communicated. A Gen Y employee may value total autonomy on a project with the only direction being what the end result should be. They may also be happy to have the assignment given via e-mail. Meanwhile a Boomer may value on-going dialogue about a project and face to face check-ins.

Discussing these differences within workgroups can be enlightening, fun, and educational for everyone. In the groups that EAP has worked with, inevitably the beliefs behind the different behaviors become clear and employees express surprise at how differently a colleague may view the same issue.

Working effectively with employees of different generations requires that we understand what has influenced them, what motivates them, what is valued at work and their assumptions. It also requires us to look at our own influences, beliefs, motivators and assumptions. It is another layer significant in the fabric of diversity.

For more consultation on generational differences, give Sand Creek staff a call.

The Millennials: Ready or Not Here They Come

by Brad McNaught, M. Div., LADC, CEAP

What, exactly, is the Millennial Generation?

The term *Millennials* is usually considered to apply to individuals who reached adulthood around the turn of the 21st century. The precise delineation varies from one source to another, however. Neil Howe and William Strauss, authors of the 1991 book *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, are often credited with coining the term. Generations, like people, have personalities, and Millennials — the American teens and twenty-somethings who are making the passage into adulthood at the start of a new millennium — have begun to forge theirs: confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and open to change.

A Snapshot of Millennials

They are more ethnically and racially diverse than older adults. They're less religious, less likely to have served in the military, and are on track to become the most educated generation in American history.

Stephen Blair Veneable, author of *The Commencement Odyssey*, said in a May 27, 2015 Minnesota Public Radio interview, that Millennials are the most idealistic generation. Veneable stated, "They are the least racist, least sexist, least homophobic, least xenophobic and most inclusive, collaborative generation."

They embrace multiple modes of self-expression. Three-quarters have created a profile on a social networking site. One-in-five have posted a video of themselves online. Nearly four-in-ten have a tattoo. Nearly one-in-four have a piercing in some place other than an earlobe — about six times the share of older adults who've done this. But their look-at-me tendencies are not without limits. Most Millennials have placed privacy boundaries on their social media profiles. And 70% say their tattoos are hidden beneath clothing.

One reported result of millennial optimism is entering into adulthood with unrealistic expectations. Many early Millennials went through post-secondary education only to find themselves employed in unrelated fields or underemployed and job hopping more frequently than previous generations. Their expectations may have resulted from the very encouraging, involved and almost ever-present group of parents that became known as helicopter parents.

Millennials in the Workplace

The millennial generation, born between 1980 and 2000 now entering employment in vast numbers, will shape the world of work for years to come. Attracting the best of these millennial workers is critical to the future of your business. Their career aspirations, attitudes about work, and knowledge of new technologies will define the culture of the 21st century workplace.

In 2011 Price, Waterhouse, Coopers commissioned Opinium Research to survey 4,364 graduates across 75 countries. All were aged 31 years or under and had graduated between 2008 and 2011. Here are some of the key findings of that survey:

- **Loyalty-lite:** The economic downturn has had a significant impact on the loyalty millennials feel towards their employers. In 2008, 75% expected to have between two and five employers in their lifetime but in this survey the proportion has fallen to 54%. Over a quarter now expect to have six employers or more, compared with just 10% in 2008.
- **Development and work/life balance are more important than financial reward:** This generation is committed to personal learning and development and remains their first choice benefit from employers. In second place they want flexible working hours. Cash bonuses come in at a surprising third place.
- **Work/life balance and diversity promises are not being kept:** Millennials are looking for a good work/life balance and strong diversity policies, but feel that their employers have failed to deliver on their expectations. 28% said that the work/life balance was worse than they had expected before joining, and over half said that while companies talk about diversity, they did not feel that opportunities were equal for all.
- **Moving up the ladder faster:** Career progression is the top priority for millennials who expect to rise rapidly through the organization. 52% said this was the main attraction in an employer, coming ahead of competitive salaries in second place (44%).

Millennials matter because they are not only different from those that have gone before, they are also more numerous than any since the soon-to-retire Baby Boomer generation to millennials already form 25% of the workforce in the US. By 2020, millennials will form 50% of the global workforce.

Millennial statistics (Source: Pew Research):

- 50% of Millennials consider themselves politically unaffiliated.
- 29% consider themselves religiously unaffiliated.
- 55% have posted a selfie or more to social media sites versus 20% of Generation X.
- They send a median of 50 texts a day.
- There are about 76 million Millennials in the United States (based on research using the years 1978-2000).
- Millennials are the last generation born in the 20th century.

Dear Sandy,

I'm a Baby Boomer who supervises a staff of about 30 or so younger employees. Most are in their mid-twenties and I'm having a hard time thinking of ways to create a working environment that keeps them engaged and motivated, we've been having some issues lately, any ideas?

-Desperately Seeking Motivation



Send your inquiries for Sandy
to info@sandcreekeap.com.

We may not be able to
publish all inquiries, but all
will be responded to via
email. Thank you.

Dear Desperately Seeking Motivation,

Motivating younger employees is all about creating collaborative and flexible environments. There are many ways to support younger staff by simple attention to the work space. Creating collaborative areas for creative engagement, as well as focused work time, are becoming more and more of a necessity for younger employees. Here are some ideas to consider:

- **Shared White Board:** Creating a Community Board for employees to post personal goals, interesting quotes, or offering office-kudos to their work peers.
- **“Game” rooms:** Companies have found success creating an actual game room, or area where employees can play video games, ping-pong, darts, etc. are all geared towards the social element that is inherent in this demographic.
- **Telecommuting:** Offer to work remotely one day per week allows younger employees to be more productive in their own spaces at home, or even at a library, etc.
- **Go Ergonomic:** Offer standing desks in the work space, many employees find that it fits well into their ability to focus and change up a monotonous day of constant sitting. Some companies hire a masseuse once a month and some even offer yoga classes too.
- **Get Competitive:** Create office-challenges that are incentive to get people engaged in fun activities that involve group thinking and partnership.
- **Get Different:** Celebrate an obscure holiday by allowing staff to create their own event.
- **Field Trip:** Hold an off-site retreat where staff could brainstorm ideas on how to drive the company forward.

These are just several ideas that might get you thinking. Ultimately it's about identifying what works in your particular work culture and not being afraid to think outside the box. Happy planning!

Sand Creek Group, Ltd
610 North Main Street
Suite 200
Stillwater, MN 55082

Phone
888.243.5744

Fax
651.430.9753

Email
info@sandcreekeap.com

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SAND CREEK GROUP, LTD
610 NORTH MAIN STREET
SUITE 200
STILLWATER, MN 55082

Mailing Address:



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