

"Engaging Multiple Generations among Your Workforce" by Devon Scheef and Diane Thielholdt

"You can divide any working population into three categories: People who are engaged (loyal and productive), Those who are not engaged (just putting in time), and Those who are actively disengaged (unhappy and spreading their discontent). Our research shows that the U.S. workforce is 26% engaged, 55% not engaged, and 19% actively disengaged."

- Marcus Buckingham, Gallup Polls

As Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, stated, "Any company trying to compete... must figure out a way to engage the mind of every employee." But how can a 20-something sales manager engage the members of his team who range in age from 23 to 68?

For the first time in modern history, the American workforce encompasses four separate generations working side by side -- and the differences among them are one of the greatest challenges facing managers today. It's likely for an organization to include members of [multiple generations](#) - the Silent Generation (born 1933-1945), Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964), Generation Xers (born 1965-1976), and maybe even some Millennials (born 1977-1998).

Many managers are unaware of the issues contributing to the differences among these groups, and most are struggling with how to constructively work with individuals in each generation.

In today's fast-changing work environment, it has never been more vital to an organization's success to find ways to maximize the performance of every person. To succeed, you need to *engage* your employees. This means first understanding what makes each generation tick ([click here](#) to learn about the different generations), and then creating a compelling work climate that addresses the unique needs of each group in a way that creates bridges and common ground.

So how can you best recognize the individuality that each person brings to work and engage employees of all ages to maximize their performance?

Develop Awareness and Deepen Understanding

- Discover how each generation is unique -- what special capabilities does each generation have to contribute?
- Discuss what is most inspiring about each generation.
- Imagine what our workplace would look and feel like if each generation fully participated.
- Identify what it is about our business climate that captures each generation's attention.
- Learn how to leverage our generational differences for future success.

ACE the Three Step Engagement Strategy

1. **Activate** careers:

Members of every generation want work that provides personal satisfaction. A savvy manager serves as a career coach, to create common ground and to encourage employees' taking responsibility for their own careers. To help employees activate their careers:

- Encourage employees to talk freely and openly about their career aspirations.
- Schedule career discussions with all team members.
- Provide feedback.
- Help build skills in place.
- Link employees' work to "bottom line" performance.

2. **Create climate**

Members of every generation want a positive, empowering work environment. Every manager has the ability to create a climate that is attractive to all team members and reflects each individual's approach and outlook. To create a micro-climate:

- Increase camaraderie-building events.
- Be open to new ideas and innovation from employees.
- Offer flexibility in work schedules.
- Delegate more tasks and learning opportunities to team members.
- Encourage work/life balance.
- Schedule lunch dates to get to know your employees better.

3. **Emphasize communication**

Employee satisfaction surveys state that communication is the number one opportunity for improvement. And the truth is, managers don't need to know all the answers - they just need to ask and listen, then respond with what they know and be straight about what's unknown. To emphasize communication practice:

- Listen 75% of the time and talk only 25%.
- Ask for frequent feedback.
- Regularly recognize the significance of each individual's contributions.
- Beat the rumor mill - be a proactive communicator.
- Link employees into other teams' meetings to network and learn with others.
- Be visible and available to all team members.

When leaders ignite engagement, they recognize the individuality each person brings to work. And when employees are engaged, they are exceptional performers.

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Getting to Know the Generations

What's the difference between The Silent Generation and The Millennials? Read on to learn what's behind the common generation labels...

The Silent Generation (born 1933-1945)

This generation grew up in a time of economic turmoil in the aftermath of the Great Depression. They dealt with economic hardships by being disciplined and self-sacrificing. They lived-and helped reinforce-the American Dream, enjoying a lifetime of steadily rising affluence.

Employees from the Silent Generation are typically disciplined, loyal team players who work within the system. Obviously, they have a huge knowledge legacy to share and embody a traditional work ethic.

The Baby Boomers (born 1946-1964)

The most populous generation in the United States typically grew up amid economic prosperity, suburban affluence and strong nuclear families with stay-at-home moms.

Boomers tend to be optimistic, competitive, and focus on personal accomplishment. They work hard-maybe too hard. This is the generation that increased our workweek from 40 hours to 70 or 80 hours. As younger generations have entered the workplace, Boomers have waited for them to pick up this traditional approach to work. Some researchers divide the Baby Boomers into two groups - those born between 1946 and 1954 (the "Woodstock" group, known for their idealistic endeavors and social conscience), and those born between 1955 and 1964 (the "Zoomer" group, known for their preoccupation with self).

This generation has ruled the workplace for years and is comfortable in the culture they've created. They view changes as sometimes painful but inevitable. Many companies experience their biggest generational conflict when Boomer managers are confronted with younger employees who don't "fit the mold" that they themselves created.

Generation X (born 1965-1976)

Members of this generation grew up in a very different world than previous generations. Divorce and working moms created "latchkey" kids out of many in this generation. This led to traits of independence, resilience and adaptability. Generation X feels strongly that "I don't need someone looking over my shoulder."

At the same time, this generation expects immediate and ongoing feedback, and is equally comfortable giving feedback to others. Other traits include working well in multicultural settings, desire for some fun in the workplace, and a pragmatic approach to getting things done.

Generation X saw their parents get laid off or face job insecurity. Many of them also entered the workplace in the early '80s, when the economy was in a downturn. Because of these factors, they've redefined loyalty. Instead of remaining loyal to their company, they have a commitment to their work, to the team they work with and the boss they work for. Generation X takes employability seriously. But for this generation, there isn't a career ladder. There's a career lattice. They can move laterally, stop and start... their career is more fluid.

The Millennial Generation (born 1977-1998)

Just beginning to enter the workplace, the Millennial Generation is being raised at the most child-centric time in our history. Perhaps it's because of the showers of attention and high expectations from parents that they display a great deal of self-confidence to the point of appearing cocky.

Millennials are typically team-oriented, banding together to date and socialize rather than pairing off. They work well in groups, preferring this to individual endeavors. And they're used to tackling multiple tasks with equal energy, so they expect to work hard. They're good multitaskers, having juggled sports, school and social interests as children.

Millennials seem to expect structure in the workplace. They acknowledge and respect positions and titles, and want a relationship with their boss. This doesn't always mesh with Generation X's love of independence and hands-off style.

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