



# CLI Whitepaper

## The Future Ain't What it Used to Be: Understanding the New Multi-Generation Workforce



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**For perhaps the first time in history, four generations are working side-by-side.**

That means everyone must make an extra effort to understand other generations and the emerging workplace landscape, so we can avert real or perceived discrimination, and everyone can do their best work.

Everyone is already under pressure in this economy, which Peter Cappelli, author of *Employment Relationships: New Models of White-Collar Work*, claims has forever altered the lives of workers in every age bracket.

The simultaneous collapse of the manufacturing age and rise of the information age has created transparency and sped up knowledge sharing almost beyond comprehension. This paper will help you understand the needs of every generation in your workplace, so you can actually benefit from these changes.

## Understanding the Generations

The four generations in the workplace can be identified in general as:

- **Traditionalists**, the “silent generation,” were born between 1925-1945. Many are retired, but the recession has forced some back into the workforce. Others, however, have voluntarily returned to work, and are willing to share their expertise. These workers possess important knowledge and skills. But this generation is often mistakenly dismissed as a vital potential source of knowledge. This generation typically prefers direct interaction, and may have some trouble adapting to new technology. But these workers have decades of invaluable knowledge and processes that could help you and your younger workers.
- An estimated 80 million **baby boomers**, born between 1946-1964, represent the majority of our existing workforce. This generation works long hours, sacrifices family or personal needs for the job, and dreams of change that betters the world – consider the activism of the 1960s and 1970s. Boomers place less importance on technology, prefer face-to-face contact, and believe in and expect company loyalty.
- **Generation X** is a nearly hidden generation, existing as it does in the shadow of baby boomers. Nearly 50 million Gen-X workers were born between 1965-1982. They work best with a combination of direct and

technical feedback and interaction. They prefer a balance between their work and family lives, and are best motivated by new challenges. They want their information in shorter meetings or online.

- The 72 million **Generation Y** workers born 1982-2000 are also called Millennials. This generation was raised with technology, so these workers prefer less-direct communication – more text, e-mail, or cell phone calls. This generation is goal-directed, needs a balance between work and family, requires feedback to optimize performance, and older mentors to develop skills and abilities.

## What this Means for You, As an Employer

As your baby boomers retire or reduce work hours, you must ramp up your Generation X and Y leadership development. The leadership styles of Generation X and Y will differ from past leadership styles. But Generation X and Y leaders are hesitant to supervise subordinate staff who are their parents' age or older, and who might possess more abilities and skills than they do.

Emerging leaders will have to help subordinates and co-workers feel useful, engaged, and connected, without feeling directed, blamed, or belittled. Seth Godin, author of *Linchpin*, believes new workers must be called to action before they can or will perform at their highest levels. He says newer workers must feel connected with leaders to whom they want to be connected. He describes a new workplace, in which employees consider their work "art." These employees want to experience work in a meaningful way, according to Godin.

If Godin is correct, every workplace must create opportunities for each generation to do its best

## Managing Talent for the Future

Cappelli considers talent management the process through which employers anticipate and meet human-capital requirements, in order to reap the greatest possible benefit from them.

"Getting the right people with the right skills into the right jobs is the basic people management challenge in any organization," Cappelli says.

So what are the solutions for optimal work our soft economy, with employers lurching forward and back under the weight of the recession and "recovery?" How can you optimize multiple age groups in this environment?

Try these:

### **Managing Multiple Generations: A Blueprint for Optimal Practice**

1. Eliminate generational and talent-utilization assumptions. The assumption that older workers cost more to hire and retain is false, according to Cappelli. He maintains that older workers often are or become an organization's most valuable employees.
2. Many older workers returning to the workforce, according to Cappelli, want to avoid high-pressure jobs, but end up perceiving ageism in younger supervisors. Cappelli said younger supervisors don't necessarily disrespect the older workers – they often actually fear that effectively managing older workers could be perceived as disrespect, so they avoid them entirely. In his book, *Managing the Older Worker: How to Prepare for the New Organization Order*, Bill Novelli calls this inversion of authority the greatest problem we face today in talent management.

So, we need a new model to help the generations co-exist and create "art" together.

A good model of younger leaders optimizing management skills with help from more experienced workers exists in the Marines, where junior officers team with older subordinates. Cappelli believes young leaders should acknowledge the depth of experience and skills of the older worker, and ask key questions to improve the outcome of any project, such as:

- What problems are we likely to face?
  - How do you recommend we proceed?
  - How would you do it?
  - The older worker becomes the teacher, feels appreciated, and all workers and the company score across-the board wins.
3. Hire for talent, not age. Employers should consider hiring across all age groups for talent, ability, or attitude. British author and London Business School co-founder Charles Handy describes a "donut organization." A donut organization hires as

needed capabilities and expertise, with many workers empowered to sustain the organization. Consider hiring experts as needed to become a donut organization.

4. Nurture knowledge transfer and sustainability. As traditionalists and baby boomers retire, employers must plan ahead to access and transfer knowledge and skills to the incoming workforce. Generation X and Y workers can become effective leaders with baby-boomer mentoring. Mentoring, shared leadership, and understanding generational differences will help you develop the best possible talent pipeline.
5. Develop leadership now, to ensure a sustainable pipeline. There are differences among generations, but the attributes of an effective leader really don't change. Here is the top ten list of desired traits for effective leaders:

### **Top 10 Desired Leadership Traits**

1. Credibility, 69%
2. Trustworthiness, 59%
3. Good listener, 55%
4. Farsightedness, 52%
5. Encouraging, 50
6. Dependability, 48%
7. Focus, 44%
8. Good coach, 40%
9. Dedication, 38%
10. Experience, 38%

But even great leaders can optimize their role with each generation:

### **Leading Baby Boomers**

- Show these workers how important they are to your organization.
- Deliver critical feedback behind closed doors.

### **Leading Generation X**

- Upgrade your hardware and software regularly.
- Demonstrate appreciation for their ability to adapt and work creatively.

### **Leading Generation Y**

- Show these workers that they are critical to your ability to succeed.
- Appreciate optimism and good ideas.
- Direct and structure members of this group during development.

List source: Martson, C (2007) Motivating the "What's in it for me?" Workforce. Managing across the generational divide and increasing profits.

# Bottom Line

We're all adapting to new workforce and workplace trends and realities.

Recruit and develop talent from all age groups, to optimize your workforce talent pipelines.

# References & Further Readings

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Cappelli, Peter, and William D. Novelli. *Managing the Older Worker: How to Prepare for the New Organizational Order*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2010. Print.

Godin, Seth. *Linchpin: Are You Indispensable?* New York: Portfolio, 2010. Print.

Martson, C (2007) *Motivating the "What's in it for me?" Workforce. Managing Across the generational divide and increasing profits.*

*Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace* by Ron Zemke

*Retiring the Generation Gap: How Employees Young and Old Can Find Common Ground* (J-B CCL (Center for Creative Leadership)) by Jennifer J. Deal

*Generations, Inc.: From Boomers to Linksters--Managing the Friction Between Generations at Work* by Meagan Johnson

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