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Why Can't We All Just Get Along?
How to manage the newest generations in the workplace

Recognize these situations?

Jennifer
a 22-year-old recent college graduate, has big plans for her career. She announces, "I'm going to be a director by the time I'm 30," instantly alienating her older co-workers.

Morgan
a 29-year-old supervisor, bristles at his manager's micromanagement. "If he doesn't get out of my way and let me do my job, I'm out of here," he mutters.

What's going on in organizations today? Why it is so hard to manage the newest generations? It's likely your organization has all four documented categories: the Veterans (over 60), Baby Boomers (ages 42-60), Generation Xers (ages 25-45), and Generation Y/ Millennials (ages 3-29). Each one has a different set of values, expectations, ambitions, views and mindsets.

You already know the problems you face: kids who don't show up if the surf is up, young workers who quit if miffed, and your decisions constantly being questioned. One Boomer partner at a Melbourne accounting firm told me, "I feel like I'm doing all the work and they just want to show up and get paid."

The first step to managing the newest generations is to understand them.
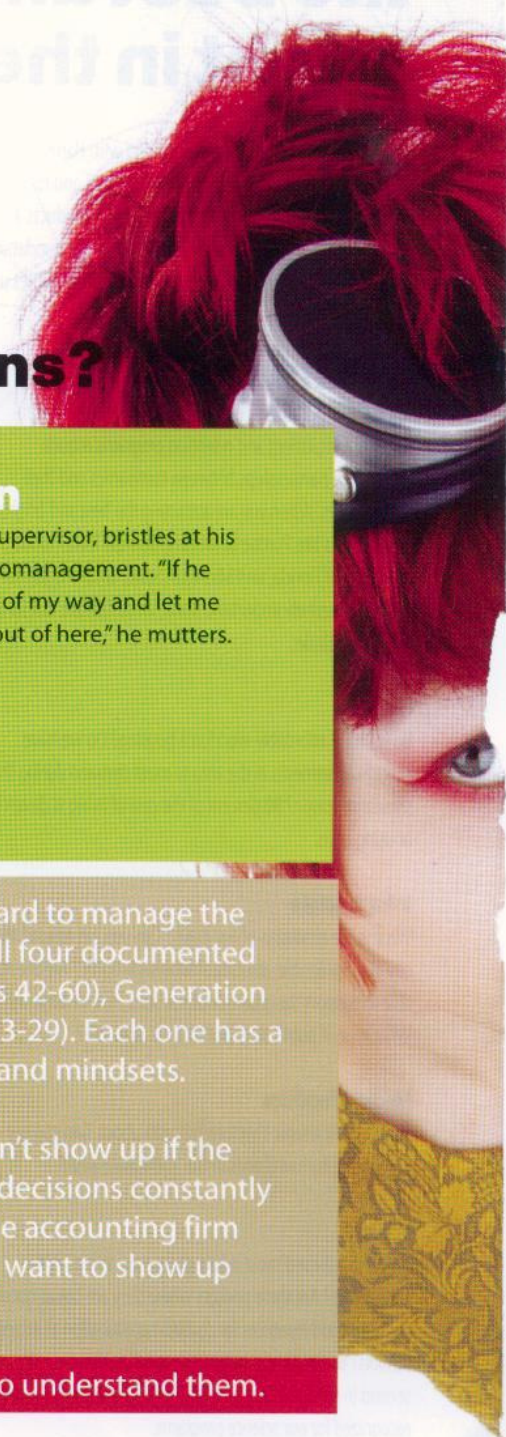
generation X

Ages 25-45
(Born 1961-1981)
Population: 46 million

BACKGROUND
- x-Divorce and working moms created these "latchkey" kids
- x-Blended family include stepbrothers and stepsisters from previous marriages
- x-They watched their parents being laid off

EMPLOYEE TRAITS
- x-Independence, resilience, and adaptability learned from being latchkey kids
- x-Focus on work/life balance, opportunities for growth and good work relationships
- x-Define loyalty as a commitment to their work, their teams, and to their bosses, not the company
- x-Demand respect for their results and compensation to go with it
- x-Expect immediate and ongoing feedback
- x-Work well in multi-cultural settings
- x-Desire for fun in the workplace
- x-Career lattice moving laterally, stop and start ... their career is fluid
- x-Not afraid of change if they know what is in it for them
- x-They will quit if unhappy

TIPS ON MANAGING
- x-Use motivating messages like, "Do it your way," or "We are not very formal in the workplace."
- x-Create a "campus culture" environment that allows flexibility and independence, including flextime and/or telecommuting; mentor them instead of managing them
- x-Promote a participatory work environment
- x-Offer constant feedback
- x-Assign a series of long-term, meaningful projects
- x-Eliminate as many rules as possible

generation Y

Ages X-25
(Born 1977-2003)
Population: 70 million

BACKGROUND
- x-The most child-centric and over-scheduled childhoods in our history
- x-Brought up in prosperous times
- x-Computer users since childhood, they easily adapt to change, are used to constant stimuli and expect instant information and answers

EMPLOYEE TRAITS:
- x-Confident; consider themselves ready to overcome challenges and leap tall buildings
- x-Expect a workplace that is challenging, collaborative, creative, fun, and financially rewarding. They have read about Best Places to Work and expect to be in one
- x-Goal- and achievement-oriented. Expect to work hard
- x-Constantly ask "Why" to understand your decision making process
- x-Optimistic yet practical
- x-Civic-minded. They were taught to think in terms of the greater good. They expect companies to contribute to their communities—and to operate in ways that create a sustainable environment
- x-Inclusive; used to being organized in teams and to making certain no one is left behind. They expect to earn a living in a workplace that is fair to all, where diversity is the norm
- x-Team-oriented, banding together to date and socialize rather than pairing off
- x-Good at multi-tasking, as they've juggled sports, school, and social interests as children
- x-Expect structure in the workplace
- x-Acknowledge and respect positions and titles, and they want a relationship with their boss
- x-They too will quit if unhappy

TIPS ON MANAGING:
- x-Use motivating messages such as: "You'll be working with other bright, creative people," or "You and your coworkers can help turn this company around"
- x-Provide a fun, friendly environment that still has structure and stability; boost teamwork; offer flextime and/or telecommuting; and address them personally
- x-Align them with organizational strategy to understand how they fit into the bigger picture

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