

# Four Generations

*Develop and engage them at work.*



by Beverly Kaye

MEMBERS OF EVERY generation want to work in a positive, satisfying work climate. So developing your talented employees, regardless of generation, should be easy, right? The task is trickier than it seems. There are distinct differences in the why's and how's of developing each of the four generations, since each has a distinct attitude and approach to careers. So, tailor your career conversations to meet the needs of the individual—keeping in mind *generational influences*.

**1. The Silent Generation** (born 1933 to 1945) built its success on hard work, discipline and postponement of material rewards. They are often called the *facilitative generation* because many members have taken leading national roles as diplomats, civil rights leaders, and distinguished civil servants and politicians. *Giving back* and contributing to the collective good is an emblem of this generation. At work, they look for due process and fair play—and when they find it, they are loyal to the company and work within the system. Many Silents are still interested in their futures and in trying new things at work. They want to know that their employers value their work. Let them know how their contributions drive profitability and impact the bottom line. Verbally and publicly acknowledge their experience. Provide proactive technology support services if they aren't techno-savvy. Use due process and explain the reasoning behind decisions. Value their experience by creating ways that they can mentor others. Provide part-time jobs and job sharing for those who want to work. Consider phased-retirement options, which gradually ease employees out at a mutually agreeable pace.

**2. Baby Boom Generation** (born 1946 to 1964) grew up with idealistic longings and changed the social structure of the country. They created a place for themselves in history as rebels who initiated many causes: civil rights, nuclear disarmament, consumer advocacy and women's rights. And when

they joined corporations, Boomers took their priorities of change with them and made their organizations their new causes. They are process-oriented and relationship-focused at work. They dislike conformity and rules. They are hard workers who strive to do their best, take risks, and make a contribution to their clients and companies. Boomers seek personal satisfaction from their jobs. Provide praise and recognition. Allow flexibility for family and work responsibilities.

Today, as Boomers face increasing responsibilities for the care of aging parents and growing children, they are re-examining their careers and looking for ways to bring new balance to their lives. Many also seek ways to revitalize themselves. Others are looking ahead to retirement or exploring their next set of career options. Most plan to work at least part-time in retirement. Help them explore their next options, and demonstrate how your company can continue to use their talents. Redesign their jobs to accommodate life demands. Encourage them to enrich their present jobs and grow in place if they need to slow their career pace.

**3. Generation X** (born 1965-1976) entered the workforce during volatile economic times and amid turbulent world affairs. They watched their parents cope with massive layoffs and job insecurity. When Gen Xers went to work, there wasn't a corporate welcome mat waiting for them, so they have reacted to the work world as they found it. Gen Xers are seeking the same control over their corporate lives that they experienced as children and young adults. Many tend to be output-focused and outcome-oriented. They seek balance in their lives. They've observed workaholic Boomers and are choosing to live and work differently. Gen Xers want to know that they can remain widely employable while pursuing a career with a single organization. Communicate frequently and truthfully about how the company is

performing. Provide feedback on their job performance. Provide learning and development opportunities. Allow for work/life balance and provide situations where they can try new things. Resist micromanaging them. Provide flexible work environments (telecommuting, flex-time). Reward initiative.

**Generation Xers** seek opportunities to make a visible difference, use their creative abilities, and avoid being laid off by *putting their own skill sets first*. They realize the need to be *employable* since *no organization can guarantee employment*. Acknowledge their ability to work independently and leverage their entrepreneurial abilities. Help them get the most out of every job position by discussing what the job can do for them and what they can learn from it.

**4. The Millennial Generation** (born 1977 to 1998) enters the workplace as the best educated, most technically literate and most doted upon of any generation. They bring together the *can do* ethic of the Silents, the *teamwork* approach of the Boomers, and an even greater *tech savvy* than the Gen Xers. They readily accept older leadership. They're looking for careers and stability.

To attract and keep them, be clear about your goals and expectations, communicate frequently, provide supervision and structure, establish mentoring programs, honor their optimism, and welcome and nurture them. They seek friendly, stable organizations and work well in teams. Millennials think in terms of personal fulfillment, asking: Is the job interesting and satisfying? Is the work meaningful and important? Employers want to know: How long will you stay and do the job? Offer training opportunities to build basic business skills (beyond training for their current job), and help them find their best job fit early in their careers. Managers who help Millennials find a career path will be seen as valued mentors. Millennials will be loyal, committed employees as long as they find variety and opportunity. Show how your organization is flexible and filled with learning opportunities. Provide schedules that help them build careers and families at the same time. Make groups and teams part of their job. LE



Beverly Kaye is co-author of bestseller *Love 'Em or Lose 'Em* (Berrett-Koehler, 2008) and author of *Up is NOT the Only Way* (Nicholas-Breakey). Visit [www.careersystemsintl.com](http://www.careersystemsintl.com).

**ACTION:** Learn to lead four generations.