

**Minding the Gap:**

Appreciating Generational Differences

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**THE FOCUS**

One of the biggest diversity issues facing corporations today is the lack of mutual understanding, appreciation, and collaboration between the four different generations that make up the workforce. Consequently, the unique talents and perspectives of each cohort group are rarely utilized. Giving leaders and employees the skills they need to comfortably relate to others who grew up in a different time in history can help an organization combine the energy and ingenuity of younger generations with the wisdom and experience of older generations. An age-inclusive culture can improve every area of corporate life: recruitment, retention, strategic thinking, problem solving, product development, marketing, and customer service.

# Introduction

The ‘Minding the Gap’ workshop challenges individual leaders and employees to take personal responsibility to bridge the generation gap at work. This program teaches participants how to better understand and appreciate people from other age groups, and how to adjust their own style of relating and communicating to connect more successfully with members of all four generations.

# Different History & Social Conditioning

If we are going to value individuals from different generations, we must learn something about the different historical events and cultural forces that shaped each generation and the resulting norms, values, priorities, and perspectives that are unique to each cohort group.

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| Traditionalists  (born before 1946) Major defining event: World War IITechnological era: radioDefining group norm: loyalty | Baby Boomers  (born 1946-1964) Major defining event: economic prosperityTechnological era: televisionDefining group norm: ambition |
| Generation X  (born 1965-1979) Major defining event: economic recessionTechnological era: personal computerDefining group norm: self-reliance | Millennials  (born 1980-1994)  Major defining event: globalizationTechnological era: internetDefining group norm: tolerance |

# Different Strengths

Due to the unique cultural surroundings and group norms

each of us grew up with, we all tend to have certain generational characteristics hard-wired into us depending. These can be strengths when balanced by the prevailing traits of other generations.

* **Traditionalists –** dependable, sacrificial, dutiful, structured, frugal
* **Boomers –** driven, passionate, optimistic, collaborative, relational
* **Xers –** resourceful, adaptable, candid, entrepreneurial, confident
* **Millennials –** innovative, dedicated, global inclusive, techno-savvy

# Different Stereotypes

When generational traits are not balanced by other

generations, and when they are taken to the extreme, they can

have a negative effect—just like personality types. Consequently,

each generation gets stereotyped. It is important for us

(whichever generation we are a part of) to be aware of how

our tendencies can create negative perceptions.

* **Traditionalists –** old-fashioned, rigid, authoritarian, conservative, slow moving
* **Boomers –**overachievers, workaholics, materialistic, sensitive, self-absorbed
* **Xers –** cynical, loners, non-conformists, disrespectful, blunt
* **Millennials –** entitled, overly confident, bad work ethic, migratory, impatient

# Different Needs

It is critical for organizations to understand and accommodate the different needs of each generation if they expect to have success recruiting and retaining talent from all cohort groups. Here are some specific concerns that must be addressed:

* **Traditionalists –** respect, consistency, commitment, straightforward feedback
* **Boomers –** perks, affirmation, challenge, tactful feedback
* **Xers –** freedom, flexibility, change, frequent feedback
* **Millennials –** empowerment, development, technology, instantaneous feedback

# Generations & Corporate Practices

Participants work in groups to discuss tailoring the follow corporate practices to appeal to each generation:

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| * Recruiting efforts * Career planning * Giving & receiving feedback | * Recognition & rewards * Retention strategies * Marketing * Customer service |