

Bridging the Generational Divide



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Growing Great Ideas
Growing Great Leaders

Traditionals

Born before 1946

Who are they?

Traditionals generally consist of two groups—the GI Generation (1900-1924) and the Silent Generation (1924-1946). The most vivid characteristics of Traditionals are gleaned from the GI Generation.

The GI Generation is also known as the Greatest Generation, World War II Generation, and the Veteran Generation. Service to country is important to this group. This generation looked to the military to lead the country and world through the darkest time of their lives. Many were soldiers, often as draftees. The armed forces became the epitome of the melting pot America and soldiers were celebrated in the media.

The GI Generation learned early to be team players and to trust the people they stood next to. Many achieved higher standards of living than their parents and worked hard to weather the great depression. Their standard of success was being happy with a good job, promising future, and a small house for their family. This is a generation of “doers” and “believers,” striving to get ahead with a strong set of morals intact.

The Silent Generation is caught in the middle, between the get-it-done GI Generation and the vocal, world-changing Baby Boomers. The Silent Generation looked respectfully at the GI Generation for leadership and as role models. They worked to refine the more organized and peaceful world that the GI Generation fought hard to establish. They founded many organizations of political dissent that the Baby Boomers would later radicalize.

What do they want?

Traditionals do not want to retire and those who do likely worked for the same organization their entire career. They rarely planned to retire and want to remain active. By now, many Traditionals have retired, but that hasn't stopped them from working. Many have come out of retirement to find work. They want to work, but more so, they want to provide a meaningful contribution through that work. Organizations that can find or create a significant role for Traditionals stand to gain from their wisdom and expertise.

What do they value?

Hard work. Sacrifice for the common good. Duty to country. Order. Thriftiness. Respect for authority. Satisfaction of a job well done. Building a legacy.

What have they seen that has shaped their perception of the world?	What do they care about or value?	What motivates them?

Baby Boomers

Born 1946-1964

Who are they?

Baby Boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, during a time when the country experienced an unusual spike in birth rates. This is largely due to soldiers returning home after World War II starting a family with a renewed sense of optimism for prosperity in a safer world. A war-torn world and fractured economies were in need of goods and services. This drove an economic boom that did not diminish until 1968. Furthermore, the GI Bill enabled a record number of people to earn college degrees and subsequently, higher salaries. A greater household income was able to support larger families with more children.

The Baby Boomers were the first to be raised on television. Many remember the television coming into the house and nights spent watching the same shows, listening to the same news, and laughing at the same jokes. Television idealized the American dream and family settings such as *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver*. Later, this generation saw firsthand America at war. They saw immediate news coverage of the Vietnam War and assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy.

Although starting to shift, Baby Boomers still make up the lion's share of the political, cultural, industrial, and academic leadership class in the United States. Bill Clinton and George W. Bush are the first and second Baby Boomer presidents and their leadership differences are the quintessential case to exhibit the disparity of values and attitudes held by this generation.

Baby Boomers experienced a lifestyle that included more money, possessions, and education than their parents. Among many reasons, this has contributed to Baby Boomers having more difficulty managing time and money than their parents did. Baby Boomers also have parents who are living longer and children seeking a longer and costlier education. This financial pinch on both sides has given the Baby Boomers the characteristic of a "sandwiched generation."

What do they want?

Baby Boomers have always wanted to make a difference to their company and their community. Many are nearing retirement, looking to retire from the same company where they started their career. They have seen significant workplace changes and have likely held many different positions within the same company. Baby Boomers are loyal to companies that value their employee. They have shown this loyalty with time, both time in terms of years of employment and time spent behind the desk.

What do they value?

Personal fulfillment. Career achievement. Can do everything. Willing to sacrifice for success. We are all equal. Face time. Time in the office.

What have they seen that has shaped their perception of the world?	What do they care about or value?	What motivates them?

Gen X

Born 1965-1979

Who are they?

Generation X includes people born between 1965 and 1979. They are a generation plagued with stereotypes. During the early 1990s, media portrayed Gen X-ers as a bunch of flannel-wearing, overeducated, underachieving misfits. They had body piercings and worked McJobs. While some of these assertions are true, they are more a rarity blown out of proportion.

When comparing one generation to its chronological neighbor, Gen X would probably have the most overtones of cynicism to project on their neighbor, the Baby Boomers. Gen X-ers grew up during the end of the Cold War and the Reagan era. Then as they transitioned to adulthood, they saw the Soviet Union collapse and the United States rise to a lone position on the stage of international superpower. Gen X saw the world become flatter. In addition, the Western World became less industrialized in front of their eyes. The world their parents forged was changing.

Gen X-ers know the woes of an economic recession, having weathered the recession of the 1990s and current recession. They saw organizations and companies change their loyalty. No longer would they have the traditional permanent job contracts with guaranteed pensions like their parents. Short-term contracts, international outsourcing, and years of shaky employment have driven this generation to look out for themselves. The employment security their parents experienced is no longer the norm. The desire to start working for and retire from the same company is almost non-existent among Gen X-ers.

Time Magazine summarized the views of Gen X-ers in a 1990 article that is still largely true today:

By and large, the 18-to-29 group scornfully rejects the habits and values of the baby boomers, viewing that group as self-centered, fickle and impractical. While the baby boomers had a placid childhood in the 1950s, which helped inspire them to start their revolution, today's twentysomething generation grew up in a time of drugs, divorce and economic strain.

What do they want?

Gen X-ers can't expect a company to take care of them for life and therefore do not want to sell their soul to one master. They want expertise that they can pick up and carry with them from job to job. They are looking to build skills and experiences that are transferable and useful in many contexts. They want consistency and balance in their lives. Their strong desire for more equitable life balance is evident in many statistics showing that Gen X-ers spend more time with their families than Baby Boomers. Work is not life to a Gen X-er.

What do they value?

Learning to live with uncertainty. Personal security. Save, save, save. Live for today. Freedom. Autonomy. Casual encounters. Informal approaches.

What have they seen that has shaped their perception of the world?	What do they care about or value?	What motivates them?

Gen Y

Born 1980-2000

Who are they?

Generation Y includes people born between 1980 and 2000. They are a generation of many names, including Millennials, Internet Generation, iGeneration, MySpace Generation, and Facebook Generation. Gen Y is the most connected generation of any preceding group. They hardly know a world without cell phones, email, the internet, and almost instantaneous connection to anyone. They have always had information at their fingertips and are quite adept at finding what they need, when they need it. Institutional knowledge is not a priority for this generation, because most likely, if they don't know it, they know where they can look it up.

This group had a great amount of control with modern media choices. Television remotes encouraged channel flipping. These choices reduced the commonality of messages that they received and the centralized control over the information that was shared. They have grown up with technology and for the first time, are often more skilled and efficient with technology in the workplace than their supervisors.

Diversity and inclusion are hot topics for this generation. Gen Y members are generally more tolerant and accepting of other opinions, races, ethnicities, and ways of life. It is not uncommon for those born after 1970 to date someone of a different race or religion. These multicultural interactions are uncomfortable for their parents and elders, who grew up in a society where interracial romance was taboo and even banned.

This generation was the cause of much concern during the 1990s. The Columbine High School shooting, street gang proliferation, hate groups, and teen pregnancy rates fueled a wave of actions by schools and organizations. This generation has probably been exposed to more world events through a more immediate and unfiltered lens. With almost instantaneous access to news and information from blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and Google News, they have seen the world in a more raw form than any other generation growing up.

What do they want?

Gen Y believes that life and work both have a higher meaning. Life is not work and work is not life. Much like Gen X, they want balance. And much like the Baby Boomers, they want to achieve something by their efforts. They know their way around a computer and are not intimidated by technology. In fact, technology is tightly woven and integrated into Gen Y lives. They have experienced travel and education beyond their years. They bring to the workplace an open mind, technological fluency, and experiences living in the global village. For this group, learning and work must be fun and connected. They also want the freedom to make their own choices and shape their own future. If there aren't options, this group isn't interested.

What do they value?

Living in the moment. Asking questions. Responsibility. Autonomy. Self-directed career. Transferable skills. Short-term rewards. Participation in decision making. A voice.

What have they seen that has shaped their perception of the world?	What do they care about or value?	What motivates them?

How can they fit in Farm Bureau?

Traditional Volunteers		Today's Volunteers
Board approves new projects. May take one to two years before completely off the ground.	Proposing a new idea or project	
Members patiently wait their turn, moving up the ranks through the leadership hierarchy.	Leadership Opportunities	
Attend board meetings, committee meetings, conferences and other organization events.	Volunteering	
Command and control model has one clear leader who guides the process and delegates when possible.	Leadership Style	
Executive committees or board members decide the course for initiating change.	Change	