



# YOUR GENERATION OR MINE?

By Audrey Nelson PhD

## Recruiting and Managing the Generation Mix

Only sailors had tattoos in my generation! Flip-flops at work, you gotta be kidding me! Doesn't anyone know what a collared shirt is anymore? I can't imagine not wearing panty hose with a skirt? Can you guess what generation was criticizing what generation? If you guessed a Boomer was criticizing a Generation Y, you are right! Dress code is a perfect example of when values can collide among the different generations. Personally, I look around at Gen X and Y women going to work and I want to yell, "Go home, and put on some clothes!"

Some of these women with their thong underwear sticking up above their waistline of low-slung skirts and pants (thank you Britney Spears) look like they are dressing for access rather than success! But we all know dress is a manifestation of how we not only represent our self to others but also our organization's image is at stake. In our culture, and in the recruitment process, we do judge a book by its cover! So dress code is just one battleground for the clash between the generations. If we have a better understanding of the generations, we can enhance our working environment and minimize conflicts.

Lets review the generations represented in the workplace today: **Silent Generation** (b. 1925-1945), **Baby Boomers** (b. 1946-1964), **Generation X** (b. 1965-1977) and **Generation Y** (b. 1978-1985). Baby boomers represent the single largest group in the workplace. We know the aging U.S. population is working longer and longer. My mantra as a Boomer is "retire is too close to expire!" We also know there is a high demand for new young talent. Add the fact that many companies are upsizing, downsizing and merging. You get the picture! People of all ages are being thrown together more quickly and with more intensity than ever before in American history!

Here are some quick tips on making the generation mix work!

#### SILENT GENERATION:

- Many Silent generations wonder what happened to loyalty and "an honest days work." They cannot understand how and why the other generations hop from one

job to the next!

- Don't expect them to share their inner thoughts.
- They prefer face-to-face or written communication because his/her word is his/her bond. You can trust their word.
- Don't waste their time, or let them feel as though time is being wasted.
- They don't expect some "deep" meaning or fulfillment to come from their job. Work is work.

#### BABY BOOMERS:

- Morris Massey calls this group the "Nuagers." They gave birth to the "Me" decade of the seventies. Consequently, they can be seen as egocentric.
- They don't appreciate rules for the sake of having rules and will challenge the system! Remember, it is this generation that questioned the "system" and began the Anti-War, and Women's, movements.
- Boomers started the "workaholic" trend. The motivation for Boomers to work hard is to move up! The Silent Generation works hard because it is the right thing to do!
- Give them clear goals but with the choice to do things their way.
- Boomers will fight for a cause.

#### GENERATION X:

- This is the latch key generation. The most unsupervised generation of Americans in our history. Consequently, they have a strong "I can take care of myself" attitude and are independent thinkers.
- They are very techno-savvy and some of the most sought after workers. They use email

as the primary mode of communication.

- Job security is an illusion (due to record down sizing in the 90s) and the only security is within.
- They look for more efficient ways of working so they can have time for fun and work-life balance.

#### GENERATION Y:

- This generation grew up in a world of high-speed video games, speed dial and ATMs. Motivate them by frequent feedback-as it happens!
- They believe education is the key to success and they are poised as life long learners. Add their technology ability (makes Xers look elementary) and they are ready to learn anytime, anywhere!
- This group wants more input into how they are learning and the autonomy to do it!
- This group grew up with more diversity than their predecessors (even if they did not get it in their community, they were introduced to diverse cultures through the media).

When you are crossing the great generational divide, remember the generations are like different cultures. They each have their own values, norms, and rules! Different is good! ♦



#### About The Author:

Dr. Nelson is a corporate Communication consultant, trainer and keynote speaker. Her book, *You Don't Say: Navigating Nonverbal Communication Between the Sexes* (Prentice-Hall 2004) is in six languages. [www.audreynelson.com](http://www.audreynelson.com)