



TenStep Supplemental Paper

14 February 2004

Generation Influence

Today's workforce, made up of Traditional, Baby Boomer and Generation X employees, is a challenging HR issue in any organization. Employees from different generations have different value systems, react and respond differently to common life events, and have different work demands. However, managers can use these differences as strengths and avoid the generation war.

A major task for managers today is to bring these employees together in ways that provide fair and equitable opportunities for each individual. To accomplish this, managers need to adopt a generational perspective.

Traditional generation. This generation was raised in an era that stressed morality, obligations, social norms, self-denial and hard work. Traditional employees respect authority and accept the 'Great Man' theory of leadership, executive decision-making and the command model of management. They value safe working conditions, job security, and benefits and derive satisfaction from doing their jobs well. Traditional employees often have qualities like frugality and loyalty to organizations and managers.

The Baby Boom generation. Baby boomers belong to the times of economic and educational expansion. Employees of this generation are characterized as workaholic, strong-willed and concerned about work content and material gain. They value promotions, title, reserved parking places and spending rather than saving. They value speed for its competitive advantage, leisure to offset the pressure of fast paced lifestyles, money and material goods. Baby boomers bring many abilities to the workplace - consensus building, mentoring and affecting change.

Generation X. This generation inherited the boomers' social debris: self-absorbed parents, divorce and an educational system that emphasized social skills and self-esteem rather than academic achievement. They are entrepreneurial, resourceful and independent parallel thinkers and risk takers, plus a little cynical and savvy. They do not believe in job security, so they expect to attain career security and enhance their marketability through challenging jobs in which they constantly learn. They balance work and leisure. They demand a technologically up-to-date work environment and competent, credible managers and co-workers.

Summary

To benefit from a multigenerational workforce, HR managers will have to create a generation-neutral work environment in which employees focus on business. Generation-savvy managers accommodate employee differences by learning about and working with employees to address their specific needs.