Bridging Generation Gaps at Work
## By Tom Wagner

1. What all people want
   a. Respect
   b. Performance feedback and appreciation for good work
   c. Information: To be "in the know"
   d. Meaningful work (that can change the world for the better)
   e. Training and opportunities to grow and develop new skills
      i. Skills training in their field of expertise
      ii. Leadership
      iii. Team building

2. Who we are

Born	Age	Generation	Workforce (Millions)	Percent of Total Workforce
1981 -	16 to 34	Millennials	59	24%
1965-1980	35 to 48	Generation X	60	25%
1946-1964	49 to 67	Baby Boomers	82	34%
1925-1945	68+	Veterans	42	17%
	TOTAL		243	100%

US Civilian Workforce - 2012

- Millennials 24%
- Generation X 25%
- Baby Boomers 34%
- Veterans 17%
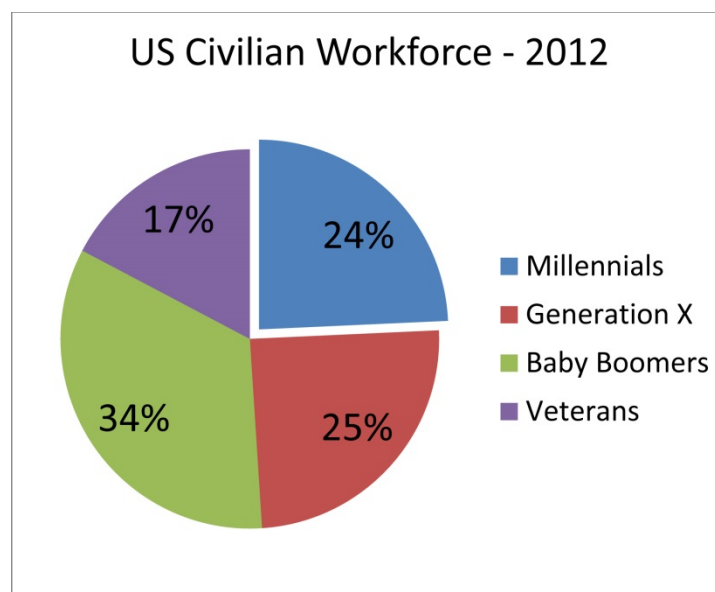
3. Who are the youngest generation?
    a. Millennials – Born 1981 and later
        i. Core values: Realism, confidence, extreme fun, social
        ii. Family: Merged families
        iii. Education: An incredible expense
        iv. Communication media: Internet, picture phones, e-mail
        v. Dealing with money: Earn to spend
    b. Unlike all their forbearers, Millennials grew up in a time of constant change, with no peace between wars, no settled and predictable job market, and less "free" time to just be kids. They were over-scheduled, over-stimulated, over-praised (everyone gets a trophy), and over-protected by their helicopter parents, who were themselves struggling with multiple roles.
    c. Millennials grew up in an age of electronic Instant Gratification, or at least feedback – think electronic video games. Once you successfully complete each level, there is sound and music – Hooray, You Won! This helps explain their desire for continuous job performance feedback, and little patience for delayed rewards. In fact, Millennials have little patience for any setbacks.
    d. Communication technology also shaped their expectations. They are accustomed to instant communication (think texting, Face Time, Skype) anywhere, any time. The downside to this is an erosion of face-to-face social skills, and acceptance of a very narrow communication bandwidth: Essentially text-only, minimum voice, and few if any visual communication cues. Accordingly, Millennials have poor face-to-face social skills compared to previous generations.
    e. Millennials will quit a job in a hot minute if they feel disrespected or unappreciated. As with all employees, their direct supervisor most influences their job satisfaction, but they *also* want to be part of a cause with meaning. In that respect, culture matters greatly.
    f. Money is less of a motivator. Schedule flexibility is.
    g. Millennials want to make friends at work and be part of a vibrant social/networking environment.
    h. Millennials live "blended" lives; the sharp delineation between work and home doesn't exist for them. Technology is the enabler for this. This is a big difference with Generation X workers.
    i. Other characteristics
        i. Job hopping: Currently, the typical American worker stays on a job for 4.4 years. For Millennials, that's less than 2 years. Millennials see frequent job changes as a buffet where they can sample different experiences.
        ii. Dependency on others: Because of their upbringing (think helicopter parents), Millennials have more difficulty thinking indecently.
        iii. Unrealistic expectations: They're ambitious and want rapid advancement, BUT don't see the connection between effort and outcomes. Older generations took the stairs; Millennials want the express elevator.

        iv. Multi-tasking = Mediocrity: Millennials multi-task more than previous generations. Science has irrevocably proven that humans cannot truly multi-task. Instead, we just shift our attention among different activities frequently. This inhibits learning and prevents deep thinking. Hence, stunted intellectual development and mediocre results.

    j. On the other hand, Millennials will account for 1/3 of the work force by 2020, and they're unlikely to change.

4. Generation descriptions

   For the first time in human history we have four generations working side by side. This diversity creates leadership challenges because of divergent core values and communication preferences, to name just two issues. Success managing a mixed-generation group requires discovering a common purpose around which people can unite.

Preferred Leadership Attributes			
Veterans 1922-1945	Baby Boomers 1946-1964	Generation X 1965-1980	Millennials 1981-2000
Credible	Credible	Credible	Listens well
Listens well	Trusted	Trusted	Dependable
Trusted	Farsighted	Farsighted	Dedicated
Farsighted	Listens well	Listens well	Focused

➢ The top four desired attributes of their leaders were identical for the first three generations, but the Millennials have a different set of priorities. Notice trust drops out; not because it's not important but because Millennials don't expect it! That's rather sad, but it reflects the world in which they grew up.

➢ Millennials witnessed recession, loss of American prestige in the world, ending the lifetime employment social contract, business turmoil, and the beginning of a technology revolution.

5. Generational challenges

   a. Imagine you're a twenty-something trying to discuss current social trends with your great grandmother. Now imagine you're the great grandmother discussing history with your great grandson. *Now* imagine you are unrelated employees working together. Welcome to the new workplace!

   b. The generational values spectrum ranges from the Veterans' respect for authority and discipline to the Millennials' insistence on realism, extreme fun, and social connectivity. Then consider communication preferences. For example, we know Millennials love texting.

c. Fundamentally, everyone wants clout. Since older employees usually make the rules and younger employees must follow them, conflict occurs over who has clout and who wants it.

d. Here's a great example on a non-functional team by Greg Hammill, who worked at HR for AT&T and then went on to academia.

> "*The Veterans on the team are looking for handwritten notes and direct, specific requests for work to be done. The Boomers do not like to work independently, and they expect to have meetings any time, any place — and it is fine if they are called day or night. Xers do not want to hear about the project outside of work, and don't dare call them at home. And the Millennials don't want any meetings at all, they only communicate via voice mail and e-mail.*"

6. Solutions

a. With the caveat that individuals have different interests (different strokes for different folks), research suggests the following age-related motivation approaches are generally helpful in improving job performance.

   i. Generation X and Millennial workers
      1. Opportunities to exercise leadership and advance in the organization
      2. The chance to learn new things and use "my special skills"
      3. Input in the decision-making process
      4. Variety in work assignments
      5. Make the world a better place

   ii. Baby Boomers
      1. Money, recognition, and prestige
      2. Working as part of a team
      3. A chance to benefit society

b. Overcoming big differences in values and communication styles requires concessions to work habits and a common purpose around which all generations can unite. The foundation to achieving this is mutual respect. Respect begins with an acknowledgement that each person's intentions are good, even though values and behavioral styles vary. This requires meaningful dialog among the group members, moderated by a leader's deft hand.

c. Mutual respect usually flows from a common purpose, which may be a shared vision or a common adversary (tried and true, this gambit is used frequently in business and government). Another cornerstone upon which to build respect is identifying what unique contributions each generation brings to the table. This leads to discovering concessions to work habits that can accommodate generational norms without sacrificing results.

d. The secret to all of this is "core." That is, areas of overlap that are agreed to by everyone as essential and common to all. Once the workgroup has identified those areas upon which they agree, other differences become less of a problem.

Accommodation Space

Core Behaviors
(Non-negotiable)
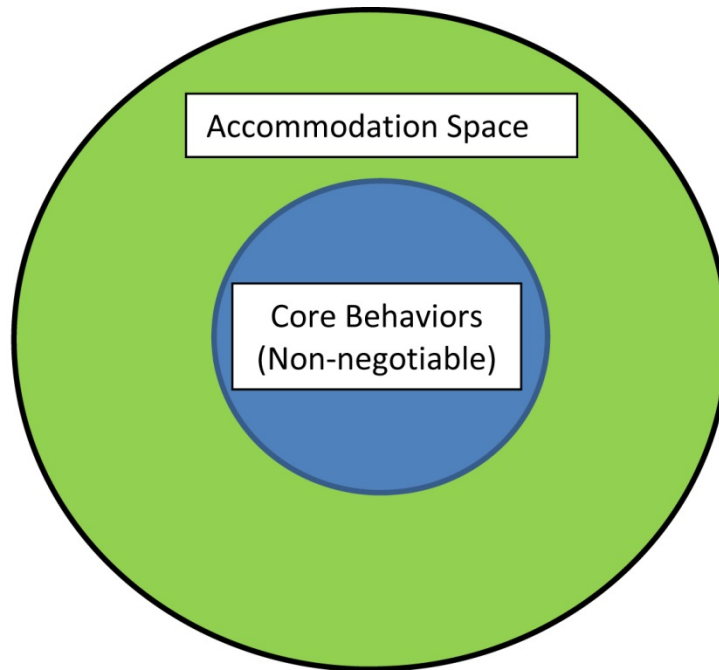
7. What young workers need to understand
    a. Experience has value because enduring principles don't change
        i. Enthusiasm for new approaches should be tempered by "old school" checks and balances
        ii. Elders have learned expensive lessons – no need to pay tuition twice!
    b. The world does not revolve around you

8. Managers need to remember that a good leader
    a. Has adaptive capacity: Hardiness, observant, continuously learning
    b. Engages followers by creating shared meaning: Encourages dissent, empathy, and an obsessive communicator
    c. Has a distinctive voice: Purpose, self-awareness, self-confidence
    d. Integrity: Ambition, competence, and a Moral Compass
        i. Too many leaders are immoral and self-serving (and occasionally in jail)
        ii. Be authentic: Yourself, cards face up, honest, and humble

9. Guiding Principles[1]
    a. Everyone wants respect; they just don't define it the same way.
    b. Trust matters.
    c. People want leaders who are credible and trustworthy.
    d. Organizational politics is a problem--no matter how old (or young) you are.
    e. No one really likes change.
    f. Everyone wants to learn more than just about anything else.
    g. Almost everyone wants a coach.

1 - From Retiring the Generation Gap by Jennifer Deal, Center for Creative Leadership, 2007

Resources
- Jennifer Deal, *Retiring the Generation Gap*, 2007. Empirically-based research of 3,200 employees.
- Greg Hammill, *Mixing & Managing Four Generations of Employees*
- Warren G. Bennis & Robert Thomas, *Geeks & Geezers*, 2002