

# **Generation Y: An Organizational Behavior Analysis**

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**Organizational Behavior**

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## Introduction

The younger generation has been in conflict with the older generation since ancient times. I Kings, Chapter 12, of the Holy Bible mentions the young King of Israel, Rehoboam, rejecting the elder's advice. Instead, Rehoboam took advice from the younger men of his generation. Ultimately, the conflict split up Israel. (Kupperschmidt 2006) Rather than sharing a similar fate of Rehoboam, how can generational differences be used as a competitive advantage to maximize each worker's unique generational behaviors, values, and beliefs?

This paper specifically analyzes the youngest of the workplace generations: Generation Y, also known as Millennials. The main focus will rest on the relationship between Generation Y and Generation Boomer, and a general understanding of each generation's values and characteristics will be evaluated. Concerns, challenges, and benefits will be examined with the process of integrating a new culturally different generation into a work environment that doesn't share the same values and beliefs. Veterans have been omitted from this paper in order to condense and focus the discussion. Next, this paper will evaluate methods and strategies to increase effectiveness between different generations. Finally, this paper will conclude by answering the following question: What can a Generation Y worker do to use his or her work values and behavior as a competitive advantage in the workforce?

When referring to a generation, generalizations are made rather than truths. Along with genetics, a generation worker's behavior and values are based on his or her social, economic, and technological environment. Before proceeding further, one needs to have a general overview of the three main generations that comprise the workforce. Ulrich (2001) researched generational behavior within the specific field of nursing and found that colleagues' workplace behaviors come from their generational values. The following is a breakdown of some of the generational values compared to Generation Y. (L.R., E.C.B. and R.G. 2008).

	<u>Boomer ('46-'64)</u>	<u>Gen X ('65-'81)</u>	<u>Gen Y ('82-'00)</u>
<i>Style</i>	Semiformal	Not so serious; irreverent	<b>Eye-catching; fun</b>
<i>Content</i>	Chunk it down but give me everything	Get to the point — what do I need to know?	<b>If and when I need it, I'll find it online</b>
<i>Context</i>	Relevance to the bottom line and my rewards	Relevance to what matters to me	<b>Relevance to now, today and my role</b>
<i>Attitude</i>	Accepts the "rules" as created by the Veterans	Openly questions authority; often branded as cynic and skeptic	<b>Okay with authority that earns my respect</b>
<i>Tactics</i>	Print; conventional mail; face-to-face dialogue; online tools and resources	Online; some face-to-face meetings (if they're really needed); games; technological interaction	<b>Online; wired; seamlessly connected through technology</b>
<i>Speed</i>	Available; handy	Immediate; when I need it	<b>Five minutes ago</b>
<i>Frequency</i>	As needed	Whenever	<b>Constant</b>

Researchers have reported connections between generational conflict and workplace stress. In other words, when differences of values exist, conflicts can exist.

Can one imagine possible tension between generations when the Boomer generation wants a semi-formal environment while the Y generation prefers a fun environment? In addition, Generation X has been known to value self-reliance while Generation Y values achievement. These differences in values translate into differences in behavior. The following chart provides a simplified example.

GENERATION	GETTING THINGS DONE
Boomer	"Let's work together and come to a consensus."
Gen X	"I'll do it myself."
<b>Gen Y</b>	<b>"I don't care as long as it gets done."</b>

(Kupperschmidt 2006)

Why is it important to understand different generational values and behavior as a manager? Lancaster and Stillman (2002) stress that we must all be aware of colleagues' generational differences and use them as strengths to maximize effective teamwork. This doesn't mean that coworkers need to adopt or change, but they should rather understand and respect so that they can know how to work with each other and derive the most potential. Within 10 years, all of Generation Y will be in the workforce, and this is important for managers, because Generation Y is going to help shape the future of managers' businesses. In addition, Generation Y is nearly as big as Generation Boomer, placing even more importance on learning about Generation Y. (Reynolds 2008) If a manager understands that one size does not fit all, then that manager can get the most out of each worker by leading his or her worker in a way that the worker can produce efficiently. (Ulrich 2001)

## I. **Generation Boomer**

In order to produce more efficiently, a better understanding of the relationship between Generation Boomer and Generation Y is needed. Generation Boomer has been defined as hardworking and self-efficient. Most current CEO's are from Generation Boomer and are seeking to hand over the future of their companies to the younger Generation X and Generation Y. When Generation Boomer entered the workforce in the 60's and 70's, he or she intended on climbing the corporate ladder and retiring with perks. This all changed with corporate consolidations and massive layoffs, which was witnessed by Generation Millennial children who learned that loyalty to one company is not always rewarding. (Sujansky 2009)

## II. **Generation Boomer vs Generation Millennial**

Generation Boomer did not grow up with Internet, instant messaging, personal cell phones, and the many other gadgets that make up the Generation Millennial instantaneous-on-demand lifestyle. Generation Millennial is accustomed to multi-tasking, a trait not normally encouraged in the corporate world along with working until a "task" is done rather than working 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. There seems to be a stereotype that Generation Y is lazy and does not want to work. The truth is that due to the fast-paced environment that Generation Y was raised in, he or she values his or her time and despises time wasted. While Generation Boomer might value the work ethic of a long work week, Generation Millennial prefers accomplishing his or her work in a shorter amount of time by being more resourceful. Generation Millennial is more pragmatic unlike his or her parents who value loyalty to one company. Generation Millennial sees himself or herself as a "free-agent" who can use his or her transferable skills to project

value to employers. Kennedy's "What can I do for my company?" has been replaced with "What can my company do for me?" (Sujansky 2009)

### **III. Technology**

Ask a Generation Boomer what he or she thinks of when he or she hears the words "work" and "technology," and you might get a response like, "I only use it when it's necessary" or "It's too confusing and tough to learn." Generation Millennial, on the other hand, grew up with fun technology like video games, computer games, and cell phones compared to his or her parent's tedious early computer prototypes that did not include enjoyment. It should be no surprise that tech-savvy Generation Y wants to feel connected, updated and involved. The technology that Generation Y grew up with gave him or her real-time access to information while his or her boomer parents and teachers encouraged him or her to speak up and contribute his or her ideas. (Reynolds 2008)

Generation Millennial finds enjoyment in collaboration, multi-tasking, and using technology that allows him or her to be expressive while presenting. Fast-paced, engaging, and enjoyable are things Generation Y seeks in employment. (McEwan 2009)

### **IV. Communication**

Companies that use more modern media attract the attention of more Generation Millennials. Trust seems to be harder to gain in this generation than in others, perhaps because of the constant bombardment of advertisement Generation Millennial endured growing up. Generation Millennial came to the realization that just because it is said, doesn't mean it is true. Furthermore, if it looks too good to be true, it probably is. Instead on mainstream media, Generation Y has embraced viral networks like Facebook,

LinkedIn, Youtube, and Twitter. Sharing opinions seems to have trumped old fashion news anchors. The aesthetics also hold much weight of the message. Generation Millennial wants information that includes sight, sound, and, most importantly, interaction. For example, one organization chose to give video cameras to its employees and film what makes their jobs exciting. The clips were posted on YouTube for prospective employees to see. This method taps into the channel that Generation Y communicates on and, therefore, possibly reaches more viewers, if not by quantity, by quality. (Sujansky 2009) Keeping it fun in the process is a smart way to spark interest.

Generation Boomer's challenge is to create incentive for its Generation Millennial employees to stay. Generation Boomer must adapt to Generation Millennial learning traits in order to reduce the challenge of turnover. A Generation Millennial employee desires job responsibilities that interests him or her and seeks areas for job advancement and growth. Some companies are implementing "career laddering" so that an ambitious Generation Y employee can understand what competency and performance attributes are needed for advancement.

What can be done to meet Generation Y's need for shorter, more frequent updates? A company can reduce the amount of people who approve the message before it is sent or give more people authority to communicate in order to streamline the communication process and create real-time messages. It is not enough for communications to be fast, communication must be authentic. Generation Y asks, "Why should I care?" and Generation Y prefers down-to-earth language versus formal rhetoric. A manager should appoint a Generation Y employee to head up a focus group

to generate ideas on improving communications. A Generation Y employee wants to be involved in the process, and this will help ensure his or her interest along with the improvement of the organization.

## V. **Feedback**

While growing up, Generation Millennial became accustomed to receiving constant feedback during sports or school activities backed with a lot of encouragement. Real-time feedback is what motivates most Generation Millennials versus annual reports which feel cold and out of touch. Giving effective positive feedback to a Generation Millennial employee includes being specific, focusing on performance, and giving timely feedback. This will provide a Generation Millennial employee with an understanding of his or her performance, how to improve, and encouragement to do so.

Managers need to realize the untapped potential that exists in their young employees. If a company is going to survive, it must adapt to the changing culture and improving technology. The youngest generation is most equipped to contribute, because it is the one that possesses the greatest understanding of it. (Sujansky 2009)

## VI. **Real Life Examples**



Much of the research on Generation Y is validated through the 2007 Business Week article, “Careers: The Goods on Generation Y.” A graduate from Penn State, Ryan Healy, wants to be an entrepreneur so he is collaborating with a friend and building a blog to network with other Generation Y individuals about their aspirations. Generation Y parents support their children saying that they should pursue their dreams. Ryan’s biggest dilemma has been deciding on which career path he is most interested in, but his parents tell him not to worry, just move back into their house and choose different career paths until he finds one that fits him. Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, author of “Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties” [Oxford University Press, 2004] and research professor at Clark University in Worcester, Mass. says, “They expect work to be a form of self-fulfillment -- they don't want to take a job that pays well but is boring or annoying. Money is important to ‘twentysomethings,’ but it's not as important to them if the work's not enjoyable and exciting. This notion comes from their baby boomer parents, who invented the idea that work should be fun.” (McCormack 2007) Bruce Tulgan, founder of New Haven [Conn.]-based generational research firm RainmakerThinking and author of “Managing Generation Y” [HRD Press, 2001] says, “This group is always connected, always accessible, and creative.” Generation Y might be high-maintenance, but Generation Y is also high-performing if led properly. (McCormack 2007)

## **VII. How Can We All Get Along?**

Some people think that new employees need to conform to the way of doing things. If this were done, innovation would cease. Differences don’t need to be

eliminated, they need to be understood. Augsburger (1973) created the term “carefronting,” caring enough to confront. He believed carefronting is a way to build effective relationships by communicating with respect. Conflict, he says, is normal. It is how we work through conflict that is important. Rather than withdrawing or making disrespectful comments, both parties should state how they feel and what they value. By understanding one another and remaining honest, we open the door for peaceful and productive communication.

## **VIII. Takeaways**

Generation Y has been labeled as the entitled generation, the next great generation, and the connected generation. Time will decide if these titles stick and what the outputs of a Generation Y’s unique makeup will be. Until then, here are some key takeaways for a Generation Millennial employee to turn his or her behavior into a competitive advantage.

- Use your technology skills to your advantage by utilizing resources and connections to place yourself in a position that can meet your needs and fulfill your desires. Generation Boomer and Generation X lack these skills; therefore, the competitive advantage exists in meeting their needs by doing what they are not as skilled in. (McEwan 2009)

- Your pragmatic behavior tendencies are a benefit in achieving greater efficiency than Boomers and Xers that prefers a slower work pace. (L.R., E.C.B. and R.G. 2008)
- Generation Millennials need to present themselves as "free agents" because there's no such thing as job security, especially in the current economy.
- Transferable skills are key to increase your value to employers. Be versatile in your skills and education.
- If given the option, choose work that you can learn from versus work that doesn't provide growth.
- Build relationships and seek advance from expertise within your job.  
(McCormack 2007)
- Find out what is required by your superiors in order to advance.
- Carefront with other generations in order to work together effectively.

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## YOUTH MOVER

### Brandon Lee White

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Youth Speaker, ballroom dancer, and entrepreneur, **Brandon Lee White** has spoken to thousands of youth through student conferences, school assemblies, leadership events, graduations, camps, and more. His purpose is to move youth on the inside so that they move towards success on the outside.

Brandon is also a professional ballroom dance instructor. In 2009, Brandon founded "Step In Step Out!", a youth ballroom dance program centered around personal growth and physical fitness. In 2010, Brandon was featured in the national documentary "Dancer with Tiny Legs." Airing on TLC, Discovery Health, and Fit TV, it highlights the amazing life of his wheelchair ballroom dance student, JoAnne Fluke.

In addition, Brandon works nationally and internationally as an actor/model with commercials, film, runway, and print. In 2006, Brandon founded Happy Rhino Clothing, a youth activist clothing line that focuses on raising awareness for philanthropic causes.

Brandon attended Rockhurst University where he earned his Master's in Business as well as a double major in Business and Psychology. Brandon encourages youth to seek higher education in what they love to do.