

TODAY'S GENERATION

EMBRACING ALL AGES O

AUTHOR MIK

Today's Canadian workplace may feature as many as five different generations harmoniously under the same roof for 40 hours a week, 50 weeks a year? How approaching work and life? The answer is that it's possible—though not easy—a workplace? According to Nora Spinks, President and Founder of Work-Life Harmony Enterprise generations in Canadian society, but with a few exceptions only five will be found in most workp

UP TO 1945

ELDERS, SENIORS, AND TRADITIONALISTS

WHO ARE THEY?

These are the veterans of the workplace, most of them nearing and ready for retirement. Sometimes called the Matures, these folks are the most loyal and dedicated of all workers. They are people who grew up during the Great Depression and have survived the Second World War. Their focus is on security and maintaining what they have.

WHAT THEIR WORLD LOOKED LIKE

Phone calls were rare and expensive, shopping was done mostly at locally owned stores, household appliances were few, and radio shows were the main source of news and entertainment.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE AT WORK?

They are rooted in respect for authority and want to be respected in return. They are a wealth of knowledge, but they don't usually share that knowledge unless they are asked to do so. They expect to be recognized for their experience and longevity at work. Employers should maintain the engagement of veterans since they are working more years or returning from retirement, and often hold the history of the workplace in their "heads and hearts." They give a lot at work but prefer not to work overtime or meet short deadlines.

BRINGING OUT THEIR BEST

Smart organizations ask their older workers to show newcomers the ropes and because they hold the corporate memory that they can play a very useful role in strategic planning and problem solving. Traditionalists make the best mentors and like working on intergenerational teams, bringing a great deal to those processes. Companies that consistently reward them can count on their loyalty until their final days at work. Many traditionalists like flexibility in work schedules and often prefer part-time positions. Pre-retirement positions created for traditionalists, with few line responsibilities and less stress can make this group the happiest in the workplace.

1946 - 1957

BOOMERS

WHO ARE THEY?

Nora Spinks has actually divided the more commonly known Baby Boomers into two segments: Boomers, born from 1946-1957 and Trailing Boomers born from 1958-1972. Boomers were born just after the Second World War and their early days saw the rise of advertising and the consumer society. Because they have been one of the largest generational groups in society they expect to have their issues addressed and to have a great influence on any public or political debate.

WHAT THEIR WORLD LOOKED LIKE

Boomers came into adulthood at a time of great growth and expansion, and jobs were plentiful. Households usually consisted of a wage earner and a homemaker. The introduction of television changed the shape of family, and Elvis was considered a rebel.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE AT WORK?

With a life focus on work, Boomers have been accused of living to work rather than working to live, though they are social at work. They place a great deal of value on promotions, raises, awards and achievements. They are quite stoical and do not expect rewards for their everyday work—only when they go beyond the standard or average, which they often do. Boomers quickly perceive unfairness and don't like it when some people aren't doing their share or there is a perception of inequality in workloads or responsibilities. They may also react poorly if they are not included in strategic discussions or if they are not consulted about their replacements.

BRINGING OUT THEIR BEST

This generation has a good work ethic and they want to be rewarded and praised for extra efforts. Organizations that value their contribution and express it tangibly can utilize Boomers for special projects, extra overtime, or weekend work as long as they make sure to compensate and acknowledge these efforts. They will also do well in any company that makes them feel special and encourages and appreciates their input.



Nine Gen

ELDERS (ov
SENIORS (7)

TRADITIONALIST

BOOMERS (5)

TRAILING BOOME

NEXUS (Gen X)

NET GEN (19

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F T H E W O R K I N G F A M I L Y

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s, each with unique attitudes about life, living, and work. How can they work can one manager engage these often competing interests and diverse ways of and your workplace will be the stronger for it. So who are all these strangers in the rises, an international research and consulting firm based in Toronto, there are actually nine places. Ms. Spinks based her categories on social, political, economic and technological factors.



1958 - 1972

TRAILING BOOMERS

WHO ARE THEY?

The Trailing Boomers are the first segment of what many have called Generation X. This generation grew up in the social upheaval and changing social mores of the 60's and 70's. They are different from Boomers because they entered the workforce at a time when it was contracting and this has been cause for some mild resentment amongst the Trailers.

WHAT THEIR WORLD LOOKED LIKE

Trailers' most impressionable years were the free-wheeling '60s and '70s, where they could play outside without supervision (or helmets). They experienced the McDonald's mentality—faster, easier, cheaper. The microwave made life easier.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE AT WORK?

Trailing Boomers are sometimes driven to outperform the previous generation and want to move up quickly in any organization they join. This group of workers is often frustrated by the lack of career progression and many can't seem to wait until the Boomers retire so that they can take their place. They value personal communication and they do not appreciate lack of information, especially from the top. They can also become easily frustrated if there is little staff turnover or if they feel that they are not being personally challenged by their work.

BRINGING OUT THEIR BEST AT WORK

Training Boomers thrive in organizations where their education is recognized and rewarded and where there is regular and moderate change. They want to be told individually how they are doing, and enjoy working in teams that acknowledge their individual strengths. They also want to know that there are clearly defined and available opportunities for advancement.

1972 - 1982

NEXUS

WHO ARE THEY?

The second part of Generation X is called the Nexus generation. This grouping is perhaps best known as the latch key kids. They have grown up during a time when both parents worked outside of the home. They are used to spending time alone, which means that they have developed independence and self-sufficiency as major character traits. They are also concerned that their path to success may be blocked by the Boomers ahead of them but because of their independent spirit they don't harbour the same resentments as their Trailing Boomer siblings.

WHAT THEIR WORLD LOOKED LIKE

In the '80s and '90s leaders were being arrested and big job titles no longer guaranteed respect or immunity. Nexus' faces go blank when you ask them to roll down the car window, turn the channel, or quit sounding like a broken record. Some common terms: ATM, VCR, PC, CD, DVD, MTV, CNN, SUV, AIDS.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE AT WORK?

Nexus workers are totally comfortable with technology and have a great adaptability for change. They are networkers and are most comfortable when they feel connected with the people at work and their friends outside. They have an immense capacity for learning information about themselves and the world they live in. They don't mind working when they are at work but they definitely value and will fiercely protect their work-life balance. The Nexus generation often has a distrust of authority and may have a negative reaction towards any form of hierarchical structure. They function poorly in routine or repetitive work and many of them are reluctant to make a long-time commitment to any one organization.

BRINGING OUT THEIR BEST AT WORK

Nexus generation workers perform at their best when they are given challenging assignments and a variety of job functions. Employers that can create a good work-life balance and keep them well informed have a much better chance of retaining these workers for a longer period of time. They are happy to learn and practise new skills and want to have fun at work as well as make a living. Organizations that can provide a continuous learning environment for their Nexus employees will find that they have recruited a happy and healthy cadre to join their existing team.

Generations

over 80 yrs)
 70 to 79 yrs)
 s (62 to 69 yrs)
 0 to 61 yrs)
 rs (35 to 49 yrs)
 (25 to 35 yrs)
 5 to 24 yrs)
 to 15 yrs)
 p to 10 yrs)

NET GEN**WHO ARE THEY?**

Net Generation kids are just starting to make their way into the Canadian workplace. But this group of people, sometimes known as the Millennials or Generation Y, will soon be everywhere at work. Across North America about four million of them will enter the employment market every year and by 2010, they'll make up about 40 per cent of the workplace population. They have grown up with Napster, blogs and GameBoys and one characteristic of this generation is that, unlike some of their older generations, they have never been alone. They have learned to travel in packs for safety and security.

WHAT THEIR WORLD LOOKED LIKE

Nets had before- and after-school programs, group classes and highly structured schedules. Their birth was attended by both parents. They have grown up with Napster, blogs and GameBoys. They were raised when violence, terrorism and drugs were highly visible in the media-heavy environment surrounding them.

WHAT ARE THEY LIKE AT WORK?

The Net Generation are used to more choices in their everyday lives than previous generations and that makes them discriminating when selecting an employer. One characteristic that makes the Net Generation different from their counterparts is that they like spending and making money. They were raised with the concept of life-long learning and expect to continue to educate themselves while they are working. They want to have fun at work and expect that any good employer will have exercise equipment, a staff lounge, and even video games for them to enjoy on their breaks. The Net Generation are natural multi-taskers and they tune out when work becomes boring. If they are engaged they just might stay up all night to finish a project. They have a great disdain for workplace conflict or crisis and just don't "get it" when people get all upset about work related matters.

BRINGING OUT THEIR BEST


Employers who want to make the most of this group will have to find a way to acknowledge their fun-loving spirit. Organizations that allow them to work and problem-solve in teams will find that their comfort level and productivity increases. They are looking for diverse experiences that can allow them to develop and grow, and companies that produce this effect for the Net Generation will find that they bring a high level of efficiency and effectiveness to their work along with a sense of enthusiasm and positive energy that can help make good organizations grow into great ones. Financial rewards, learning opportunities, and travel will almost always motivate the Net Generation.

Working Together

Given that all these strangers now spend long hours together at work every day it means that the modern manager has to play a major role as interpreter and translator between the generations at work. They will settle the minor squabbles about things like what is appropriate to wear in the office and the major ones like older employees who feel that their younger comrades are not showing them enough respect. An open communication system, written guidelines in sensitive areas, and a listening post that can hear all complaints might prove very useful in smoothing the sometimes choppy water in the workplace.

Employers who want to attract, hire, and retain new employees will have to find a balance that respects the generational diversity of this era. They will also have to find ways to build on the strengths of each generation and use their best qualities in the right roles within the organization. Finally, they will have to show flexibility in how they reward and recognize employees at various stages of their working lives. This might mean the possibility of more time off for older workers or recreational facilities for the younger generations. As Ms. Spinks says, "The organizations that are going to be successful are the ones that recognize that diversity in all its forms is an asset."

Every employee in the workplace today has a responsibility to understand and value their coworkers regardless of which generation they are from. Listening and learning a little about an older worker's early days with a company might be very beneficial for someone just starting out. On the other hand, the seasoned employee might find that the younger men and women know a ton about technology and how to maximize its impact.

We may start out as strangers but we can certainly respect the other members of our working family. 

Mike Martin is a freelance writer from Ottawa Ontario.