

Bridging the Generation Gap at the Workplace



Jean Lowrie-Chin JP MA
Founder-CEO | CCRP
May 7, 2010

Three Generations

After thirty years in business, I find myself interacting with two and sometimes three generations in the various organizations which we serve.

Below is a 'Generation Timeline' created by Prof Greg Hammill of the Fairleigh Dickenson University

GENERATION TIMELINE			
1922-1945	1946-1964	1965-1980	1981-2000
Veterans, Silent, Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Generation X, Gen X, Xers	Generation Y, Gen Y, Millennial, Echo Boomers

Generations in local businesses

At LASCOCO, the daughter of the founder is now a marketing executive.

At Sandals, the son and daughter of the founder are now senior executives.

At National Baking Company, the son of the founder is now the Chairman and CEO.

At BPM Financial, the niece and nephew of the founder, by mutual agreement, created their own company from the former Barita Portfolio Management

At McIntosh Bedding, the two daughters of the founder are now Executives in the organization.

In the ICD Group, the sons of the Matalons are now CEOs.

PERSONAL AND LIFESTYLE CHARACTERISTICS BY GENERATION

	Veterans (1922-1945)	Baby Boomers (1946-1964)	Generation X (1965-1980)	Generation Y (1981-2000)
Core Values	Respect for authority Conformers Discipline	Optimism Involvement	Skepticism Fun Informality	Realism Confidence Extreme fun Social
Family	Traditional Nuclear	Disintegrating	Latch-key kids	Merged families
Education	A dream	A birthright	A way to get there	An incredible expense
Communication Media	Rotary phones One-on-one Write a memo	Touch-tone phones Call me anytime	Cell phones Call me only at work	Internet Picture phones E-mail
Dealing with Money	Put it away Pay cash	Buy now, pay later	Cautious Conservative Save, save, save	Earn to spend

- Prof Greg Hammill - Fairleigh Dickinson University



In my own business, we have various generations on our team, including relatives.

1. The business experience parallels the life experience, in that the younger generation will invariably pass comments about outdated approaches and methods.
2. The senior generation may sometimes be impatient of the progress being made by their younger team members and frustrate them.
3. We have to learn to differentiate between being 'manager/supervisor' and being 'parent'
4. It is difficult to maintain a professional relationship with relatives but important that this is done if one wants to be viewed as a professional organization and not a "mom and pop" shop.

WORKPLACE CHARACTERISTICS

	Veterans (1922–1945)	Baby Boomers (1946–1964)	Generation X (1965–1980)	Generation Y (1981–2000)
Work Ethic and Values	Hard work Respect authority Sacrifice Duty before fun Adhere to rules	Workaholics Work efficiently Crusading causes Personal fulfillment Desire quality Question authority	Eliminate the task Self-reliance Want structure and direction Skeptical	What's next Multitasking Tenacity Entrepreneurial Tolerant Goal oriented
Work Is ...	An obligation	An exciting adventure	A difficult challenge A contract	A means to an end Fulfillment
Leadership Style	Directive Command-and-control	Consensual Collegial	Everyone is the same Challenge others Ask why	*TBD
Interactive Style	Individual	Team player Loves to have meetings	Entrepreneur	Participative
Communications	Formal Memo	In person	Direct Immediate	E-mail Voice mail
Feedback and Rewards	No news is good news Satisfaction in a job well done	Don't appreciate it Money Title recognition	Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing? Freedom is the best reward	Whenever I want it, at the push of a button Meaningful work
Messages That Motivate	Your experience is respected	You are valued You are needed	Do it your way Forget the rules	You will work with other bright, creative people
Work and Family Life	Ne'er the twain shall meet	No balance Work to live	Balance	Balance

*As this group has not spent much time in the workforce, this characteristic has yet to be determined.

- Prof Greg Hammill - Fairleigh Dickinson University

Communication Differences

An example, based on these traits, would be to think about how words are received differently. When a Boomer says to another Boomer, "We need to get the report done," it is generally interpreted by the Boomer as an order, it must be done and done now. However, when a Boomer says to an Xer, "This needs to be done," the Xer hears an observation, not a command, and may or may not do it immediately.

Karl Hendrickson

We interviewed Karl Hendrickson about the phenomenal success of his four children who now each run their own businesses.

"I knew that with guidance they would realise their capabilities," he says. "It is important to release energy, intellect, potential."

The iconic business leader harks back to the 70s when they saw many of their extended family members migrating: "But we made a collective decision to stay in Jamaica. Times were tough ... the family, including the children, focused on work and home. It made them stronger and inculcated positive work habits. They also developed a deep compassion for the less fortunate." Hendrickson caring, diligence and discipline.

Karl Hendrickson Cont'd

Karl Hendrickson passed on his approaches which we could do well to follow.

- Treat all children equally with no gender bias.
- Identify the strengths in your children and help them to release their energies.

“I recognized that of the four, some were creators and others improvers.”

Technology

One of the biggest difficulties in bridging the generation gap is the mental block that some senior have towards technology. Yet a recent survey shows that the over fifty-age group is the fastest growing group of Internet users.

Organizations should pay special attention to coaching their senior members so that they can become more comfortable with technology.

A great deal of the difficulties in efficiency and ethics that our companies are facing is as a result of companies jettisoning technology-shy workers, thereby losing some of their most experienced and loyal team members.

How We Communicate

- A top-notch, cross-functional team with individuals from several different generations has been set up to recommend a solution to a nasty manufacturing problem. After a couple of weeks, the manager responsible for the team cannot understand why there is constant bickering and nothing is getting done. If the manager were aware of just one characteristic of each individual relating to communication needs, he or she might understand the stalemate.
 - o The Veterans on the team are looking for handwritten notes and direct, specific requests for work to be done.
 - o 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.
 - o Xers do not want to hear about the project outside of work, and don't dare call them at home.
 - o And the Yers don't want any meetings at all, they only communicate via voice mail and e-mail.

How We Communicate Cont'd

Is it any wonder that the team is having trouble getting motivated toward the goal? At the beginning of any team formation, an effective leader should consider spending time learning how team members wish to communicate.

- Prof Greg Hammill - Fairleigh Dickinson University

Younger Team Members

We have to guard against being patronizing and even dismissive of our younger team members. We cannot on the one hand request professional performance if we do not give them the respect they deserve.

Here are some suggestions to ensure that they are given “equal time”:

1. Plan social rituals at which everybody is relaxed and can enjoy each other without the pressure of the daily grind.
2. Ensure that assessment sessions are two-way exercises so that they are allowed to give their suggestions and feelings about the organization.
3. Have a clear policy guideline on salary packages so that no one feels as if they are discriminated against.

Senior Team Members

In the case of senior team members, we should realize that in this fast-paced business climate, some of our more senior employees may find themselves with younger bosses. There needs to be policy guidelines to ensure that a respectful relationship is maintained.

The Human Resource heads of companies with various generations working in close proximity should agree with their team on guidelines for

- Communication
- Mode of dress
- Social ethics

Pre/Post Independence

In the Jamaican context, we have pre- and post-Independence generations as well as workers moulded by the unique characteristics of the various decades since then.

I have worked closely with my friend Merrick Needham on Protocol Guidelines but sometimes we agree to disagree as even the rules of protocol must bend to accommodate the times without causing serious breaches.

Social responsibility

Those seniors among us who have been privileged to be young in a “kinder, gentler” time, should be especially sensitive to the challenges of young entrants into the workplace. Some may have the intelligence but not the social ethics – this is a call to mentor, not to sneer. I have seen some rough diamonds become brilliant stars – when you uplift others, you enrich your country and your own life experience.

Bridge the Gap to Build Jamaica

A prominent Jamaican was heard to remark “There is no spare talent in this country.”

As CEO and Founder of the recently launched Caribbean Community of Retired Persons (CCRP), we will be promoting the re-entry of retired persons into the job market, especially in the areas of training and management.

We believe that many of our national problems are a result of the gap between the senior and younger generations. Values and traditions are not being passed on and so our young people feel lost and rootless. We have to bridge the gap with patience, understanding and compassion.

All Hands On Deck

We need all hands on deck:
the wise and experienced, as well as the young and
energetic.

“Let’s get together and feel alright!”

Thank you!