



## CAREER VISION

### Four Generations

In the late 1990s the U.S. entered an era in which four generations share the workplace. As a result of the unique experiences of these cohorts, generational differences will have a larger role in how we communicate with one another.

A recent and prominent example of generational differences is between Baby Boomers and Generation Xers. In the late 1990s thousands of Generation Xers took fast-paced jobs in the new technology firms. They invested long hours in exchange for potentially lucrative stock options and other perks, such as casual workplace attire. The level of prominence that technology-related companies may expect to have in the workplace of the future is a topic that often elicits different views from Boomers and Xers.

While it's realistic to expect quite a bit of diversity among members of any given generation, it is also true that individuals from particular generations share common experiences that influence values and attitudes. Here are a few examples of broad themes related to each generation, as discussed in a book from Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipeczak, co-authors of "Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace".<sup>1</sup>

#### **Veterans** (*born 1922-1943 [ages 59-80]; 52 million people*)

- ❑ Respectful of order, rules and authority; values lessons from past
- ❑ Believes in the virtues of hard work, patience, and thriftiness
- ❑ Enjoys receiving memorabilia to note their accomplishments and contributions
- ❑ Defining events and trends: Great Depression, World War II and Korean War, Radio Age, rise of labor unions

#### **Baby Boomers** (*born 1944-1960 [ages 42-58]; 73 million people*)

- ❑ Takes pride in working long hours to get ahead; carefully plans and monitors projects to their completion
- ❑ Places great importance on teamwork and interpersonal relationships
- ❑ Enjoys receiving public recognition and other rewards for their accomplishments
- ❑ Defining events and trends: Television, suburbia, Vietnam, Civil Rights movement, Cold War

#### **Generation X** (*born 1961-1980 [ages 22-41]; 70 million people*)

- ❑ Confident in their technology-related skills; wants to have input on how they do things

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- ❑ Considers results to be more important than tenure or hours worked; strives for work-life balance
- ❑ Trusts authority only if accompanied by competence; desires a lot of feedback about their performance
- ❑ Defining events and trends: Computers, MTV, Watergate, energy crisis, fall of Berlin Wall

#### **Nexters** (*born 1981-2000 [ages under 21]; 70 million people*)

- ❑ Self-reliant and independent; seeks opportunities to explore new paths
- ❑ As children, surrounded by affluence and led busy lives
- ❑ Optimistic, sociable, and achievement-oriented
- ❑ Extensive uses of technology in home and at work
- ❑ Defining events and trends: Advanced technologies, Oklahoma City bombing, TV talk shows, school violence, multiculturalism

Their book uses case studies to provide useful insights into how generational viewpoints impact organizational productivity, such as managing and motivating, building teams, recruiting, and training. Considering how the understanding of different perspectives can contribute to improved collaboration in a rapidly changing world, their points ring true.

<sup>1</sup>Zemke, Raines, & Filipczak, (2000). *Generations at Work: Managing the Clash of Veterans, Boomers, Xers, and Nexters in Your Workplace*, Amacom Publications.

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