

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Defining The Generations

Silent Generation

The Silent Generation was born during the Depression, and came of age after WWI. These individuals entered adulthood during the 1950s and believed in choosing a good and safe job, getting married and starting a family at a young age. They tended to adapt to the world around them and encouraged conformity (believing that "children should be seen and not heard" for example). They identified themselves as patriotic and loyal to America. This generation is referred to as "silent" because they never really had a specific cause of their own. In addition, this is the only generation without a member who became President of the United States.

For the Silent Generation, work is seen as an inevitable duty and something that you do to support your family, which is the ultimate goal of life. Members of this generation are described as stable, detail-oriented, thorough, hardworking and incredibly loyal. They are the ultimate team players because they dislike conflict in the workplace and will not speak up when they disagree with something, especially when it comes from someone further up on the company hierarchy. Workers from this generation are most comfortable when workplaces are structured as a hierarchy, so that everyone knows their place and role and doesn't step outside of, or even think outside of, those bounds.

Members of the Silent Generation believe that even if a job has drawbacks or makes people miserable, they should stick it out and remain loyal to the organization. They dislike ambiguity and change. Therefore, job-hopping, "bucking the system" or even simple complaining or disagreeing publicly (even when they believe something is wrong) is not something this generation would ever dream of doing on the job. Instead, people should be quiet, do their work, and be grateful for what they have. Jobs can be easily taken away, resulting in debt and despair (such as during the Depression). Members of this generation think that saving money is crucial in order to provide for their family's needs and prevent the suffering that they experienced during the Depression.

Leisure can be a reward for hard work and meeting goals, but it is not something that is really important to this generation. Recreation occurs only when the job is done and everything else has been completed. The goal of this generation is not to get enjoyment out of life, but instead to fulfill their duty and provide for their family. Balancing work and family needs is not something that this generation even thought about. Hard work and the job are paramount, even if it means not seeing family very often.

Members of this generation view work as a duty that must be endured and gotten through. As a result, this generation would never expect, or even be very comfortable with, having fun in the workplace. A job requires hard work rather than social activities and parties. You are there to meet the needs of the company and as a result, get your paycheck, which can be used to meet the needs of your family. In addition, this generation views retirement is something that will eventually occur when they are forced out of the workplace in old age, but not something that is longed for, or even desirable.

This generation is not overly fond of working women, especially those in a leadership or authority role. A male employee that must report to a female supervisor will likely be very uncomfortable. However, because this generation believes that authority is always to be respected and never challenged, he will likely do his best to keep his discomfort hidden and work to meet the goals of the job regardless of the female supervisor.

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Silent Generation members are not very comfortable with technology. Technology did not play a large role while they were growing up, and most were near the end of their careers before technology entered the workplace. However, some members of this generation are beginning to accept and enjoy technology during their retirement years, particularly as a way to connect with their children and grandchildren and stay up to date with distant family members.

This group is described by the Baby Boomers as "dictatorial and rigid" for their beliefs that authority is to be respected, never questioned and always followed. The biggest complaint from Generation X is that the Silent Generation needs to learn to use e-mail and other technological options to communicate, instead of always calling a meeting to discuss things. Generation Y, on the other hand, typically sees Silent Generation members as trustworthy, good leaders and brave because of all they lived through and survived, as well as their drive to protect and support their families.

Baby Boomers

In contrast to their parents from the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers grew up in a time of prosperity and created/defined the American middle class. Because of the sacrifices of their parents, Boomers see education as a birthright. Work is viewed as an exciting adventure to undertake, not a duty that must be tolerated. Instead, a person works in order to gain their desires and live a life of leisure as much as possible. To the Boomers, leisure is the point of life and should not be relegated to the bottom of the list after work and other duties.

The Baby Boomer generation came of age during the 1960s, and experienced the civil rights movement and political climate changes of that era. Events that occurred during their formative years include the Vietnam War, assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, as well as later events including Watergate and the Cold War. This generation also experienced the disability rights and feminist movements of the 70s. They were also the first to grow up with rock and roll music and a culture of free love and drugs.

Boomers that grew up during the earlier events tend to be very involved in political matters and are interested in and committed to social change. In contrast, Boomers that witnessed the later events during their formative years tend to be more distrustful of government and less optimistic than earlier generational members.

Overall, this generation is driven and good at building and sustaining relationships. They believe in "going the extra mile" and want to please others. Because of this desire to please, they are generally good team players on the job. Like their parents, they dislike conflict and are reluctant to disagree with their peers or supervisors. Rather than focusing on the process used to complete a job, they are, instead, results-oriented. In other words, getting the job done is the most important thing, not how a person does it. Because of their life of prosperity, Boomers are not typically budget-minded or careful with money. Again, they want to focus on achieving goals and not the details of how to get there or afford them.

Members of the Baby Boomer generation are somewhat more comfortable with technology than the Silent Generation, but still not an overwhelming fan of it. Boomers view technology as something to be tolerated in order to achieve a goal. Because Boomers witnessed (or heard about), women entering the workforce during WWII, they are much more comfortable with female colleagues and supervisors than their Silent Generation parents.

Boomers tend to be extremely hard workers that spend many hours on the job. However, it's not the sense of duty or loyalty that drives them, but a desire to gain monetary items and enjoy leisure whenever possible. This group is often viewed as self-absorbed, especially by members of the Silent Generation. Boomers are seen as clueless, self-righteous political workaholics by their Generation X children. Generation Y believes that the Boomers are cool, especially about music and knowing how to enjoy themselves.

Generation X

This generation came of age during a difficult and somewhat turbulent era. They experienced the beginning of the AIDS crisis, the Challenger explosion, the Stock Market Crash of 1987, and corporate downsizing. These events led them to view education as the way to get ahead, and work as a tough challenge that must be met. Rather than viewing leisure as the point of life (like their Baby Boomer parents), Generation X views leisure as a relief from the struggles of the world around them.

Since they saw and experienced the beginnings of corporate downsizing, this generation does not feel a sense of loyalty to the company they work for and will repeatedly switch jobs if they are able to secure something better. Often, Generation X members who are dissatisfied with their current job will simply create a job or company that suits them. Not surprisingly, this generation is very entrepreneurial and created the "dot com" era of the 1980s and 90s. They prefer variety rather than doing the same thing all day.

The career decisions made by Gen Xers are not based entirely on money, but also on growth, learning, and what will help them get ahead in their careers. Advancing their skill-set is their top priority, as better skills translate into securing the best jobs. They have a tremendous thirst for knowledge and as a result, like to work in a team environment that provides mentors and training programs. In addition to a learning environment, they also want jobs and workplaces that are cool, fun and fulfilling. Work should be as much fun as possible and not a "downer" each day.

Generation X members are enthusiastic about technology and using it to get ahead in the work world, as well as to communicate with those around them. They grew up in a world of the earliest computers and pride themselves on being aware of the latest technology. As a result of the technological and world changes they've experienced, they are seen as being very adaptable, independent, and creative.

Members of Generation X want others around them to be straightforward and candid, instead of using meaningless gestures or words. They want leadership by interaction, not leadership by example. They are not intimidated by authority and don't believe in the hierarchies of the past generations. They strive to "think outside the box" and believe that anyone who has a good idea should share it with others in the company, regardless of their position on the corporate ladder. Gen Xers are apt to challenge established ways of doing things and reason that there's always a better way.

Because of these beliefs, those from the previous generations often see Gen X as being impatient, cynical, inexperienced in the ways of business, and as having poor people skills. The Silent Generation sees them as not being respectful of experience or following the established procedures. Baby Boomers view members of Gen X as slackers who are rude and lacking social skills. Generation Y thinks Gen X should just cheer up and stop being so cynical and depressing all the time.

Generation Y

The Generation Y cohort is as large as the Baby Boomer generation. Because of the large families of the Baby Boomers and the increased immigration to in the United States, this group consists of more than 80 million members. In the 1990s, 25% of the new immigrants were under 19 years of age.

When asked where they were when Kennedy died, members of this generation will recall JFK Jr.'s plane crash, not the assassination of JFK in Dallas. Prior to September 11th, 2001, this generation couldn't really recall any bad times. Their only exposure to war was through peacekeeping missions, and the only kind of shortage they knew about was the labor shortage. The labor shortage has given this generation a sense of entitlement. Because of a low supply of qualified candidates, Generation Y members fresh from college were often able to ask for and receive exorbitant job terms in some fields because companies had no other options. Furthering their sense of entitlement is the fact that many in this generation grew up as the center of their parents' universe and were driven around in cars that proudly proclaimed "baby on board" or "my child is an honor student."

Members of Generation Y are used to making and spending money as part of the "show me the money" generation. They reject the notion of "one size fits all." To attract this generation, Army recruiters have even changed their slogan from "be all you can be" to "an army of one."

People in this group are aware of and comfortable with people from all over the world. Interestingly however, this group is much less politically involved and concerned than Baby Boomers. In addition to being more comfortable with technology than any other generation, they also tend to be skilled multi-taskers. On the down side, they have short attention spans and a need for constant stimulation and entertainment. Generation Y is likely to become one of the least healthy generations due to poor lifestyle habits such as lack of physical exercise in part shaped by their relentless consumption of media and technology.

Generation Y members have confidence in the future, and they are more accustomed to viewing members of older generations as authority figures who should be respected (especially when compared to Generation X). Many in this generation were raised or cared for by grandparents and, as a result, feel closeness to and respect for members of the Silent Generation. Generation Y members want work environments that are flexible and provide time for strong family connections. They often discuss job-related decisions with their families, so companies need to provide information and workplaces that appeal to members of more than one generation.

25% of Generation Y members grew up in single parent homes and 75% had a working mother, so having women in the workplace is the norm for this generation. They also expect to see women in authority positions within companies. Information, especially from potential employers, will not necessarily be taken at face value by this generation, due to their distrust of marketing. Still, they want to be associated with companies that are "cool, hip, fun and popular." As a result, they look for companies with strong brand identities when searching for places to work.

With the introduction of virtual universities and on-line learning programs, members of Generation Y have more educational choices available to them than prior generations. As a result, non-traditional and unfamiliar universities and programs are beginning to show up on their resumes. This trend can be confusing to company leaders from past generations.

Generation Y is seen by the Silent Generation as having good manners and being smart, but also needing to "toughen up" a bit. Baby Boomers see them as "cute," but needing more discipline. Generation X sees them as similar to their self-absorbed Baby Boomer parents and as "spoiled brats."