



## Understanding Generational Perspectives... a Key to Your Leadership Success

By: F. Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, TRA, ASA

A few years ago, I had the privilege of attending a program delivered by Tim Elmore about the importance of understanding generational perspectives. Dr. Elmore is the founder and CEO of Growing Leaders, a non-profit organization created to develop emerging leaders ([www.growingleaders.com](http://www.growingleaders.com)), best-selling author of more than 25 books, and leadership and generational expert. Before hearing Dr. Elmore's message, I did not fully grasp the importance of valuing generation diversity.

Dr. Elmore inspired me to appreciate the fact that the five generations in today's workplace have differing values, beliefs, and opinions. As a coach and trainer, it was imperative that I answer questions such as:

- What is meant by generational differences?
- What traits, beliefs, and life experiences shape each generation?
- To what degree are people's mindsets formed in their early years?
- How do world events impact generational perspectives?
- What challenges does this present to those who manage and lead others?
- How important is adjusting communication styles to align with the values, beliefs, and opinions of each generation?
- What are the opportunities that generational diversity offers to an enterprise?

## Five Generations in the Workplace

Dr. Bea Bourne, faculty member at Purdue University Global, researches generational response to organizational change, as shown in “[Generational Differences in the Workplace](#)”:

Her research focuses on the five generations that are working together today – each with differing perspectives:

- Traditionalists (born 1925 to 1945)
- Baby Boomers (born 1926 to 1964)
- Generation X (born 1965 to 1980)
- Generation Y/Millennials (born 1981 to 2000)
- Generation Z (born 2001 to 2020)

While some people believe that generational differences are a myth, Dr. Boerne’s research validates that meaningful differences exist in areas such as communication skills, the ability to adapt, and technical abilities.

<b>Traditionalists/Silent (born 1925 to 1945)</b>	<p><b>Characteristics:</b> <i>Dependable, straightforward, tactful, and loyal.</i></p> <p><b>Shaped by:</b> <i>The Great Depression, World War II, radio, and movies.</i></p> <p><b>Motivated by:</b> <i>Respect, recognition, and providing long-term value to their employer.</i></p> <p><b>Communication Style:</b> <i>Personal touch, handwritten notes instead of email.</i></p> <p><b>Worldview:</b> <i>Obedience over individualism: age equals seniority; and advancing through hierarchy.</i></p>
<b>Baby Boomers (born 1946 to 1964)</b>	<p><b>Characteristics:</b> <i>Optimistic, competitive, workaholic, and team-oriented.</i></p> <p><b>Shaped by:</b> <i>Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, and Watergate.</i></p> <p><b>Motivated by:</b> <i>Company loyalty, teamwork, sense of duty.</i></p> <p><b>Communication Style:</b> <i>Whatever is most efficient, including phone calls and face to face.</i></p> <p><b>Worldview:</b> <i>Achievement comes from paying one’s dues; sacrifice for success.</i></p>

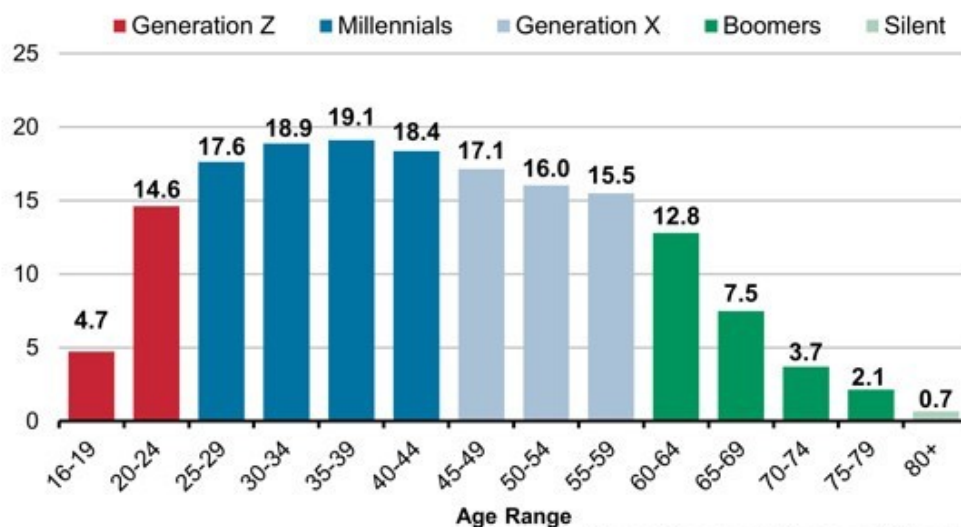
<p><b>Generation X</b> (born 1965 to 1980)</p>	<p><b>Characteristics:</b> <i>Flexible, informal, skeptical, and independent.</i></p> <p><b>Shaped by:</b> <i>The AID's epidemic, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the dot-com boom.</i></p> <p><b>Motivated by:</b> <i>Diversity, work-life-balance, personal interests rather than employer interests.</i></p> <p><b>Communication Style:</b> <i>Whatever is most efficient, including phone calls and face-to-face.</i></p> <p><b>Worldview:</b> <i>Favoring diversity, quick to move on if employer fails to meet their needs; resistant to change at work if it affects their personal lives.</i></p>
<p><b>Generation Y/ Millennials</b> (born 1981 to 2000)</p>	<p><b>Characteristics:</b> <i>Competitive, civic, and open-minded, and achievement-oriented.</i></p> <p><b>Shaped by:</b> <i>Columbine, 9/11, and the Internet.</i></p> <p><b>Motivated by:</b> <i>Responsibility, the quality of their manager, and unique work experiences.</i></p> <p><b>Communications Style:</b> <i>IMs, texts, and email.</i></p> <p><b>Worldview:</b> <i>Seeking challenge, growth, and development: a fun work life and work-life balance; likely to leave an organization if they don't like change.</i></p>
<p><b>Generation Z</b> (born 2000 to 2020)</p>	<p><b>Characteristics:</b> <i>Global, entrepreneurial, progressive, and less-focused.</i></p> <p><b>Shaped by:</b> <i>Life after 9/11, the Great Recession, access to technology from a young age.</i></p> <p><b>Motivated by:</b> <i>Diversity, personalization, individuality, and creativity.</i></p> <p><b>Communication Style:</b> <i>IMs, texts, and social media.</i></p> <p><b>Worldview:</b> <i>Self-identity as digital device addicts; value independence and individuality; prefer to work with Millennial managers, innovative coworkers, and new technologies.</i></p>

Source: [Generational Differences in the Workplace](#)

As values, beliefs, and opinions are formed and solidified at an early age, we may assume that Generation Z will continue to be impacted by the war in Ukraine, the pandemic, domestic terrorism, racism, school shootings, national security, and more. The Department of Labor put together the following chart projecting the size of the U.S. labor force (in millions) by age, for the year 2025. You will see that Generation Z will be represented by more than 19 million individuals in the workplace, with Baby Boomers representing 26 million people.

### The Workforce in 2025

Projected size of U.S. labor force (in millions) by age, for the year 2025



Source: Department of Labor | WSJ.com

## Managerial Challenges

What does this mean to you? As a leader of your firm, it is imperative that you embrace generational perspectives and capitalize upon the beliefs and styles of each. Yet, managing an age-diverse workforce comes with challenges, including work inter-generational conflict, communication, and work styles.

1. **Inter-Generational Conflict:** Each of the five generations has preferred work environments. For example, when a younger employee suggests a different way of solving a work-related matter, the more seasoned professional may take objection and see the recommendation as a disrespectful action. Carter McNamara, MBA, PhD of Authenticity Consulting ([www.authenticityconsulting.com](http://www.authenticityconsulting.com)), a firm specializing in organizational development and strategic planning, lists what each generation values in the workplace:

**Traditionalists:** Workplaces that are conservative, hierarchies, and have a clear chain of command and top- down management.

**Baby Boomers:** Workplaces that have flat hierarchies, democratic cultures, humane values, equal opportunities, and warm and friendly environments.

**Generation X:** Workplaces that are positive, fun, efficient, fast-paced, flexible, informal, and have access to leadership and information.

**Generation Y/Millennials:** Workplaces that are collaborative, achievement-oriented, highly creative, positive, diverse, fun, flexible, and continuously providing feedback.

**Generation Z:** Workplaces that foster security, independence, entrepreneurial thinking, and competition. Generation Zs are digitally focused, willing to multi-task, and want to be heard and valued.

2. **Communication:** In today's hybrid work environment, leaders must adapt to the communications preferences of their employees. Baby Boomers use technology to enhance efficiency and productivity, and enjoy Zoom video, email, and phone calls. The younger generations, on the other hand, embrace digital communication through texting; apps, like WhatsApp and TikTok; and social media platforms, such as Instagram.
3. **Work Styles:** Each of the five generations has a distinct style as relates work. While Baby Boomers are comfortable working long hours and enjoy return-to-office, Generation Y and Generation Z prefer flexible hours and the option to work remotely.

## Managerial Opportunities

Although there are obvious challenges in managing an age-diverse workforce, the traits, values, beliefs, and experiences of each generation offer a rich opportunity to improve your customer experience, enhance problem-solving, and build a stronger talent pipeline.

1. **Improved Customer Experience:** Diverse generational perspectives enhance your ability to gain insights on what makes your customer feel understood, heard, and respected. An age-diverse workplace empowers you to assess the degree to which your product, services, resources, and solutions engage your customers' emotions and drive results.
2. **Enhanced Problem Solving:** The ability to "think outside the box" is best supported in an environment whereby differing views and perspectives are recognized and valued. When an age-diverse workforce tackles a problem, creativity and innovation come to the forefront. People of different ages bring different viewpoints and life experiences to problem-solving.
3. **Stronger Talent Pipeline:** A lack of generational diversity impacts a firm when it comes to attracting talent. In today's ultra-competitive environment, human capital is a key priority. A generationally diverse workforce appeals to those in search of employment. They value the fact that your organization seeks diversity of values, beliefs, opinions, and perspectives.



## 10 Guidelines to Bridge the Generational Perspectives Gap

In “[Understanding Generational Differences: Guidelines and Resources](#),” Dr. McNamara suggests the following 10 guidelines to bridge the generational perspectives gaps:

- Avoid talking about generational stereotypes that might be offensive. Instead, recognize each staff member for his or her individuality.
- Recognize your own biases. Every leader has them, and they affect what he or she sees.
- Arrange for your associates to spend time with colleagues from different generations. Often, this strategy allows for people to overcome differences.
- Make every effort to use preferred communication styles.
- Understand that each associate may have different motivators. Invest time to understand motivational triggers.
- Ask each person what they value about the workplace and how they prefer to work.
- During employee performance reviews, ask each associate what could make the workplace more supportive of them.
- Make it a point to attempt to customize work according to their preferences.
- Ask for solutions from people of different generations about frustrations and conflicts in the workplace.
- Use a leadership style that is participative and consensus-oriented. If need be, communicate the benefits of the style

Diverse communication methods cannot be overstated. Dr. Tim Elmore wholeheartedly agrees with Dr. McNamara. “When communication suffers, the company suffers,” states Dr. Elmore. The use of email, chat, and in-person meetings goes a long way. He also suggests that you reevaluate your benefits – especially for the younger generations as they value flexible work hours, work from home, and cutting-edge technology. Provide continuing education and mentorship opportunities. Seminars and workshops are a great way to engage diverse age groups. Lastly, ensure that each new associate understands and values your corporate culture. Taking time to communicate organizational values and principles are so important.

Understanding generational perspectives...a key to your leadership success!

### About the Author

Scott Addis, CPCU, CRA, ACRA, TRA, ASA is the CEO of Beyond Insurance and is recognized as an industry leader having been named a Philadelphia finalist for *Inc. Magazine*’s “Entrepreneur of the Year” award as well as one of the “25 Most Innovative Agents in America.” Beyond Insurance is a consulting firm that offers leadership training, cultural transformation, and talent and tactical development for enlightened professionals who are looking to take their practice to the next level. Since 2007, the proven and repeatable processes of Beyond Insurance have transformed individuals and organizations as measured by enhanced organic growth, productivity, profitability, and value in the marketplace.