

[WHAT THE EXPERT SAYS ]



## LEADING GENERATIONS

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**OUR FUTURE** of work & collaboration is changing according to a special report published in the Times on how teamwork has evolved. Looking at the workplace, I believe multi generations are opening up these intergenerational pipelines of wisdom, so we can all learn from each other. In the US, 40% have a boss younger than them and this trends in the UK as well, and is a rapidly growing number. The power is cascading to the young like never before because of our increased reliance on digital intelligence. There's ample evidence that gender and ethnically diverse companies are more effective. But what about age? A number of European studies have shown age-diversity makes a team more effective and successful as for the very first time ever we have five generations in the workplace, unintentionally.

Predominantly, we have the traditionalists – those born before 1945, followed by the largest generation – the baby boomers, and their children, the Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980). This is followed by the second largest population, the Generation Y, also known as millennials, born 1980-1990 and Generation Z, born post-1990. If you look around the workplace, you will most likely identify at least the three main generations which are baby boomers, Gen X, and millennials. In the next five to ten years, we will also see a shift in the workplace with more Gen Y reaching out to high or senior roles, while more Gen Z will be entering the workplace. Hence, one role in leading others is to serve them, and unless you take the time to create an environment for each of the

above generations to co-work as it can be very difficult to retain any of them; especially the millennials and Gen Z.

### SO WHY ARE GENERATIONS DIFFERENT?

Well, each of the aforementioned generations are of different ages and were born in different conditions of time, meaning they have different experiences, which can be attributed to how they see themselves. However, age is not the sole reason for generational behaviours, otherwise teenagers today would not be distinguishable from teenagers from previous generations. It's also about the current economic, political and social conditions which we all live under that further divide the generations. The same conditions act upon people of different ages in different ways – a good example of generation difference could be texting. Whilst everyone can send a text, those more digitally native can text while talking to someone. For those who are digital immigrants, this may be considered rude but to some, this is actually normal since we now live in a digital world. Gen Y have been exposed to these in their formative years, therefore digital language and technology are almost their first language. Experiences that occur during formative childhood and teenage years also create and define differences between the generations. These social markers produce the paradigms through which the world is viewed where three specific elements contribute in creating generational attributes.

Baby boomers were the most spoken about generation after World War Two. They



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are so big as a generation that everything they touched became global news, be it in investment, property, pensions, vacations and medical care. They had such impact on each of these industries that they almost disrupted them. It is widely reported that about 14,000 of them are now retiring daily, hence leading to a leadership gap.

Generation Xers are perhaps the middle or the bridge generation, as I call them. They have at least 20 years of experience in the workplace. They have seen and experienced the hardship of their parents, the baby boomers, seen the rise of automation and are the most ready for leadership. Whilst not naturally tech savvy, they understand technology and, most importantly, can adapt to it. They were reluctantly working the long hours set by the boomers and certainly don't want to be in stressful jobs like their parents working long hours. This is the generation we see in the workplace today in their 40s. As a generation, they are quiet, unlike the millennials. They appreciate good lea-

dership, structured training and personal development led by experts and they strive for a good work-life balance. As such, they are the ideal generation to be head of HR, team leader and leading the organisation, and most importantly bridging the gap between those three main generations. In the past, they witnessed poor management and motivation, lack of support and recognition. They want a change and are ready to adapt.

Millennials form the youngest generation in the workforce to usher in a new employment trend. These young workers value personal downtime and have no desire to be the “company people” like their seniors (Gen X) were. They will simply not put up with it and will resign. They want to use their strengths and be trusted to do their best. After millennials are hired, HR must find out how to earn their loyalty to prevent chronic turnover leading to costly rehiring. This generation highly values personal time, and can quickly text and tweet between work assignments and leisure activi-

ties. They prefer to learn from their peers, coaching and mentoring using fun and multi-sensory experiences. Many millennials I come across during the Leavers to Leaders mentorship programme want a leader who can motivate them to pursue their passion, align with a good culture and push them forward in their career.

As the demographic composition of the workforce changes, their motivations and expectations evolve too. It is imperative that leaders understand what is most valued by these workers. Is it compensation, prestige, or perhaps autonomy at work? Rather than casting judgement on these young geniuses, leaders should turn their judgement into curiosity. The one thing for sure is the world is getting older. The baby boomers are getting more vibrant and into healthy living, and actually working later into life. In most companies, baby boomers and Gen X are seen as mutual mentors for the Millennials and the Gen Z where they intern publicly and mentor privately. The leadership gap is a way to bridge these generational borders and change the physics of wisdom so it flows from old to young and young to old. This will create a mutual mentorship relationship where our wise eyes can see with their fresh eyes to solve modern-day problems.