

Generational Diversity:

An Inescapable Reality

National Symposium on Diversity in the Legal
Profession

Tuesday, November 8, 2011

Philadelphia Bar Association Office of Diversity

Session Description

There are four generations of attorneys in the workplace: Traditionalists (born 1922-1945); Baby Boomers (born 1946 - 1964); Generation X (born 1965-1980); and Generation Y (born 1981-1994). Our distinguished panelists will discuss the traits, characteristics, communication styles, attitudes, opinions and expectations of each generation and its impact in the workplace. They will offer insight into how the various generations view work-life balance, professional development, and gender, racial and ethnic diversity.

Definition of a Generation

A generation is a **group of people** defined by age boundaries who were born during a certain era and share similar experiences and social dynamics when growing up.*

*Debra Dupree, *Generational Diversity...the new frontier*, PowerPoint, July 2009.

Why Are We Discussing Generational Diversity?

The Culprit —————→ **The Consequence**

- Generational differences determine employee values, ethics and expectations.
- A lack of understanding can have detrimental effects on communication and working relationships, recruitment, and advancement.

Four Generations

- **TRADITIONALISTS**

- Ages 66-89
- Born 1922-1945

- **BABY BOOMERS**

- Ages 47-65
- Born 1946-1964

- **GENERATION X**

- Ages 31-46
- Born 1965-1980

- **GENERATION Y**

- Ages 11-30
- Born 1981-2000

Traditionalists

“Maintain the Chain of Command”

- Ages 66-89 (born 1922-1945)
- Key Characteristics
 - Dedicated and Loyal
 - Compliant
 - Fiscally frugal
 - Risk averse
 - Focused on long-term
- Traditionalists
 - Believe that change is only necessary when something is wrong
 - Are comfortable with seniority-based management systems
- Values
 - Honor
 - Law and Order
 - Hard work
 - Sacrifice

Baby Boomers

“Success = Rising to the Top”

- Ages 47-65 (born 1946-1964)
- Key Characteristics:
 - Competitive; Career-focused
 - Motivated by professional recognition and personal growth
 - Collaborative
 - Savvy about workplace politics
 - Value work-life balance
 - Optimistic and Confident
- Baby Boomers have:
 - Experience
 - Witnessed advances by women and lawyers of color
- Values:
 - Teamwork
 - Gratification
 - Equality

Generation X

“What Is Best For Me?”

- **Ages 31-46** (born 1965-1980)
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - Value autonomy; Skeptical of authority
 - Loyal to careers
 - Value balance, versatility and technological savvy
 - Entrepreneurial focus on present and future marketability
- **Generation X Attorneys are:**
 - Ascending toward firm leadership
 - Most likely to leave firms for better opportunities
 - Unwilling to sacrifice personal life for the sake of the organization
- **Values:**
 - Balance
 - Informality
 - Independence
 - Versatility

Generation Y

“What Is Best For Everyone?”

- **Ages 25-30** (born 1981-2000)
- **Key Characteristics:**
 - Skilled multi-taskers
 - Confident and optimistic
 - Team-oriented
 - Eager to please
 - Civic responsibility
- **Generation Y Attorneys:**
 - Expect immediate access to information and services
 - Have diminished expectations of “Big Law” careers
 - Desire instant feedback and constant coaching
- **Values:**
 - Diversity
 - Fairness
 - Innovation
 - Achievement

Generational Differences

Differences in perception about...

- Communication and Technology Styles
- Expectations in the Workplace
- Professional Development
- Work/Life Balance

Generational Differences cont'd

- Learning differences can foster trust which creates a stronger more unified team and more productive business.
- Employees may not realize the biases or prejudices they have against their younger or older coworkers, and may not understand how their behavior affects other generations.
 - Example: An “Over the Hill” party may offend employees over 50.

Communication and Technology Styles

Traditionalists

- Technologically challenged
- Use of formal language and personal interaction
- Slow to change work habits
- Struggle to learn new technology and work processes

Baby Boomers

- Use support staff to assist with technology
- Technology became a routine part of the practice of law
- Prefer face-to-face communication

Generation X

- Technologically adept
- First generation to grow up with computers
- Learned and adapted new technological tools
- Comfortable using PDAs, cellphones, e-mail, laptops, BlackBerrys and other technology employed in the workplace
- Prefer blunt/direct communication

Generation Y

- Tech-savvy
- Grew up with technology and rely on it to perform their jobs better
- Plugged in 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- Prefer to communicate through e-mail and text messaging, rather than face-to-face contact

Expectations in the Workplace

Traditionalists

- Recognition of & respect for their experience
- Value placed on history & tradition
- Job security & stability

Baby Boomers

- Ability to “shine” & “be a star”
- Make a contribution
- Fit in with company vision & mission
- Team approach
- Input valued on merit, not age or seniority

Generation X

- Dynamic young leaders
- Cutting edge systems & technology
- Forward-thinking company
- Flexibility in scheduling
- Clearly defined rules & policies

Generation Y

- Want to be challenged
- Strong, ethical leaders & mentors
- Treated with respect in spite of their age
- Diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and religious belief)

Professional Development

Traditionalists

- Seek no applause, but appreciate a subtle acknowledgement that they have made a difference.
- “No news is good news”

Baby Boomers

- Are often giving feedback to others, but seldom receiving, especially positive feedback.
- “Feedback once a year and lots of documentation”

Generation X

- Need positive feedback to let them know they are on the right track.
- “Sorry to interrupt, but how am I doing?”

Generation Y

- Are use to praise and may mistake silence for disapproval. They need to know what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong.
- “Feedback whenever I want at the push of a button.”

Know your boundaries:

- Generation Y is most comfortable with informal communication (e-mails, text messages);
 - Companies should provide clear guidance on expectations regarding professionalism, confidentiality and privacy

Know your audience:

- What types of communication methods are effective/appropriate in this kind of relationship?
 - How will this communication be perceived and understood by Traditionalists and Baby Boomers?

Work/Life Balance

Traditionalists

- Strong work ethic and loyal to the organization
- Willing to put in long, grueling hours to get ahead in legal careers
- Committed to one employer their entire career

Baby Boomers

- Relish long work weeks
- Workaholic generation that believes Generations X and Y should pay their dues and conform to culture of overwork
- Criticize younger generations for a lack of work ethic and commitment to the workplace

Generation X

- Display a casual disdain for authority and structured work hours
- Less committed to one employer and more willing to change jobs to get ahead

Generation Y

- Willing to trade high pay for fewer billable hours, flexible schedules and a better work/life balance
- Prioritize family over work
- Request flex time, job sharing, and sabbaticals more than previous generations

Bridging the Generational Gap

- Provide timely coaching, feedback, and direction
- Openly explore ideas and new modes of communication and technology
- Resist the urge to judge colleagues based solely on age
- Raise awareness of generational diversity
- Choose language that recognizes unique perspectives
- Balance between
 - Traditional procedures
 - Support, flexibility & creativity

Acknowledgments

- Virginia Essandoh, Ballard Spahr LLP, *When Generations Collide: Recruitment, Retention and Advancement at Law Firms*, LAW.COM, Mar. 15, 2011, http://www.law.com/jsp/law/article.jsp?id=1202486153023&When_Generations_Collide_Recruitment_Retention_and_Advancement_at_Law_Firms.
- Robin Sangston, Cox Communications, Inc., Sutherland LLP, The Atlanta Legal Diversity Consortium, *Successfully Dealing with Generational Differences*, PowerPoint 2011.
- Mary Carmel Kaczmarek, Esq., *Generational Diversity in the Legal Profession: Addressing the Challenges and Reaping the Rewards*, Skill Means Marketing, LLC, August 2007.
- Debra Dupree, *Generational Diversity...the new frontier*, PowerPoint, July 2009.
- Melissa Dittmann, *Generational Differences at Work*, American Psychological Association, June 2005, Vol. 36.
- Karen B. Kahn and John E. Mitchell, *Open up the Debate, on How Firms Can Create an Environment Where Women Succeed, to Male Managing Partners*, June 2009.
- Rich Paul, *Engaging the Multi-generational Workforce*, HR Management, Issue 6, 2011.