

# Thriving in a Multigenerational Workforce

## Five Generations in the Workforce

### Gen Z

**Approximate birth years:** 1996–2015

- Do not remember 9/11 Terrorist Attack

#### **Events and technology that shaped them**

- “After 9/11” lifestyle: travel security protocols.
- The Great Recession (2007-2009).
- The Great Resignation and COVID-19 lockdown protocols.
- First African American U.S. President.
- COVID-19 was a highly impactful event in Gen Z lives, the tail-end of their high school years.
- Technology is “assumed.”
- YouTube and social media platforms “on demand” (free) Internet learning.
- Impacted by social media influencer celebrities.
- Amazon selling and purchasing global commerce platform.
- Smartphones are always available.

#### **Characteristics and motivation at work**

- Global mindset, entrepreneurial, independent, value diversity and innovation.
- Expect personalization and new technologies.
- Motivation: Scheduling and flexibility, pay, likable coworkers and boss, job perks, including regular pay raises.

#### **Expectations of the work environment**

- They want to work in jobs where they learn new skills to help them advance in their careers.
- They expect employers to pay for education or training toward work skill competencies.

### Millennials (Gen Y)

**Approximate birth years:** 1977–1995

- The largest generation in the workforce, nationally and worldwide.

#### **Events and technology that shaped them**

- 9/11 Terrorist Attack, nationally and globally.
- Impacted by the most rapid technological changes in human history: Internet, mobile phones, email, social media platforms and digital media at their fingertips.
- COVID-19 impact on careers: Some had complete disruption of careers and reported high stress because of unexpected and overnight adaptation to remote and hybrid work environments.
- Many reported COVID-19-related stress as a factor regularly affecting them.

- U.S. post-9/11 Veterans: The millennial veteran generation is the largest cohort of U.S. veterans in the civilian workforce. This means that post-9/11 veterans are also some of the most educated and experienced among Millennials in the workforce. Therefore, they possess some work characteristics that differ from those of the Millennial generation. They have excellent teamwork, technology, communication skills, organizational structure, and work accountability competencies.

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- Motivation: Responsibility and a unique work experience that contributes to their growth and development. Open-minded.

#### **Expectations of work environment**

- They expect their managers to be competent and earn employees' respect through competency. They are highly loyal to colleagues and may support colleagues over managers if they perceive an injustice. They expect their job to be enjoyable and contribute to work-life balance.

## **Gen X**

**Approximate birth years:** 1965–1976

#### **Events and technology that shaped them**

Mostly from two parents working households (“latch-key kids”), high divorce rates, Energy Crisis and AIDS epidemic.

First, “personal computers” and other personal technology: Atari, Walkman and Commodore64.

MTV: the first platform devoted solely to video music.

First to experience the dot-com boom and Internet businesses.

#### **Characteristics and motivation at work**

Beginning to step into senior leadership roles. Favor diversity and life-work balance.

Motivation: Personal-professional interests over company interests. Generally, if a change occurs and there’s a conflict between the two, the employee chooses personal values over company values.

#### **Expectations of work environment**

Value competence and skills. Therefore, they expect skills and work competence of themselves and those they work with or for.

## **Boomers**

**Approximate birth years:** 1946–1964

- Do not remember World War II

### **Events and technology that shaped them**

- Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movement, massive social change and 60's Counterculture and the first man on the moon.
- Any technology that is best for the moment to effectively meet the needs at hand.

### **Characteristics and motivation at work**

- Currently, they may fill senior leadership positions in the workforce and challenge authority but follow the rules.
- Competitive and optimistic.
- Motivation: Company loyalty

### **Expectations of the work environment**

- Expect a structured environment with nonfrequent change. Teamwork is valued, and “working hard” is expected. Expect to “pay your dues” for career growth.

## **Traditionalists**

**Approximate birth years:** 1925 - 1945

### **Events and technology that shaped them**

- The Great Depression & World War II.
- Radio and Television

### **Characteristics and motivation at work**

- They may also hold senior leadership positions in organizations, be semi-retired, or do volunteer work. They are reliable, straightforward, respectful to others, have a long-term commitment, and communicate in person.
- Motivation: Recognition

### **Expectations of the work environment**

- Follow the rules, not individualism, seniority based on age, progress in career through advancement through company hierarchy.

## **Generational Influences in the Workplace**

### **Influences of life span development**

- Each generation is in a different stage of lifespan development.
- Adults experience continuous development in the psychological and social domains.
- Adults at any age bring their strengths and challenges to the work environment through:
  - Interpersonal interactions
  - Helping each other develop work performance skills

### **What you can do:**

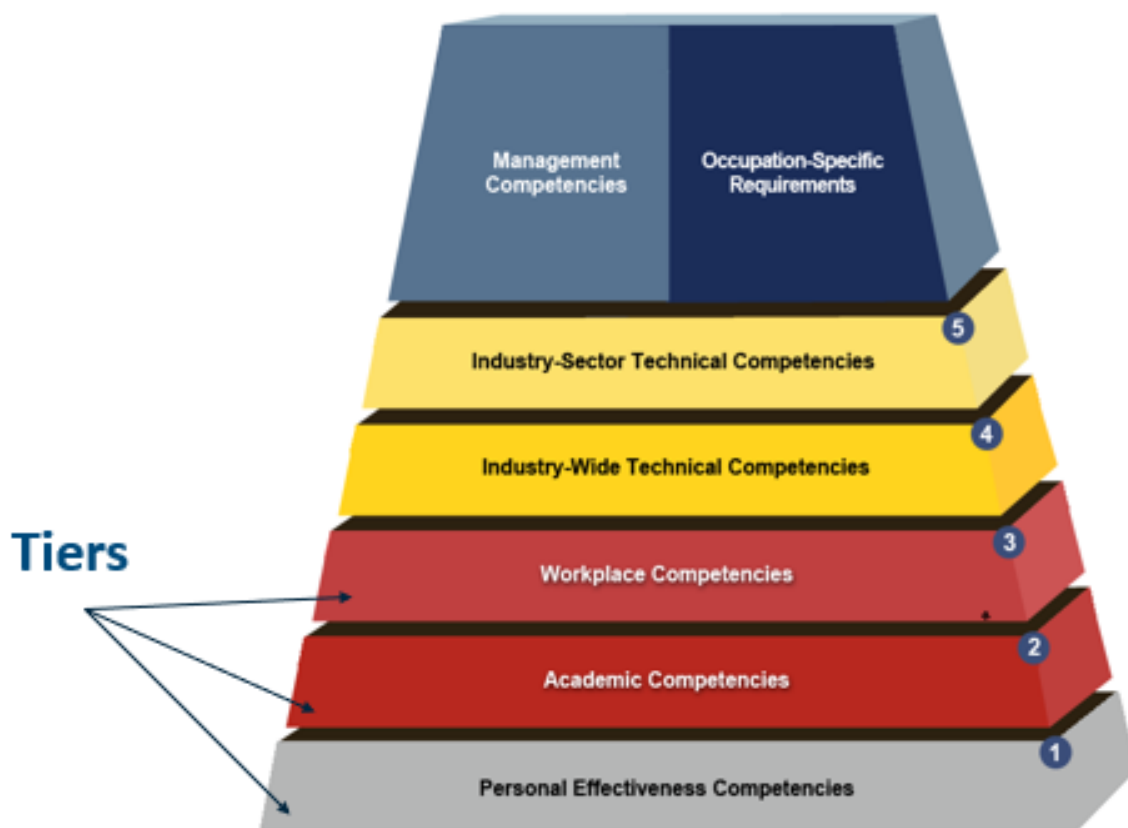
- Think about your coworker's life stage. Is it different from yours?
- Consider how the differences could impact what is “important” to them and possibly their approach at work.

### **Influences of career stage development**

- Each person is in a different career development stage—not based on age.

- Some experienced individuals may have transferred to a new industry or role
- According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers (N.A.C.E.) Veterans bring to the civilian workplace “Career-Readiness Competencies,” such as:
  - Career Development
  - Communication
  - Critical Thinking
  - Equity & Inclusion
  - Leadership
  - Professionalism
  - Teamwork
  - Technology
- There are workers displaced from their original careers for reasons beyond their control, such as economic or medical situations.

### Competency Model Tiers



Reference: CareerOneStop is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration:  
<https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/GetStarted/overview-of-cmc.aspx>

**What you can do:**

- Ask your coworkers about themselves.
- Be interested in their backgrounds and life experiences.
- Allow them to provide feedback and listen nonjudgmentally.
  - This will develop bonding and trust.

**Tips to Help You Successfully Embrace the Multigenerational Workforce**

- Know your generational strengths
- Understand your workstyle preferences, based on your life's experiences and societal influences while growing up
- Recognize that the older or younger team members also have strengths
- Make a choice not to assume things based on the team member's age

**What you can do:**

- Ask open-ended questions rather than questions that require more than a "yes, " "no," or one word.
- This gives the other person a chance to express thoughts and feelings in their answer.
- Example: "Could you tell me about your favorite \_\_\_\_\_ and the things about it that make it your favorite?"
- Share your preferred communication style and learn your team members' communication preferences
- Learn from older and younger team members.

**• What you can do:**

- If it's a technology-based activity, and you're unfamiliar with it, learn something new.
- If it's a traditional application, learn something "new" to you.

You've shared your team member's experience and developed the relationship.

**\*References for "Characteristics of Generations"**

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