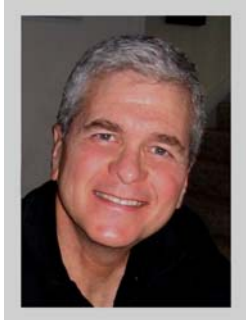


Managers, Employees Can Work through Generation Gaps



By Leigh Branham

(Adapted from guest column that appeared originally in THE KANSAS CITY STAR.)

Managers born before 1965 (Boomers and Traditionalists) have had to learn to deal with workers born after them (Gen-Xers and Millennials). When Boomer managers were first starting their careers, there were only two generations in the workforce. Now there are four, with another one on the way.

Because there are 20 million fewer Generation X-ers than baby boomers, retaining 30- to 45-year-old workers has become a crucial priority for most companies, especially since boomers have begun to retire.

Differences between Boomers and X-ers have been thoroughly documented for decades, but frustrations continue. Boomer managers still complain that X-ers (and Millennials) are slackers who won't pay their dues and insist on doing things their own way. Many X-ers see Boomers as inflexible, technologically backward, overly political, and as one-dimensional workaholics who need to lighten up.

The different generations have all earned the right to see things as they do because of different life experiences. Boomers grew up amid social calm and prosperity and were willing to patiently climb the career ladder, because they knew there were other boomers who could take their jobs. X-ers grew up amid uncertainty. They watched Nixon resign, the Challenger explode, and their parents lose their jobs after years of paying their dues.

When Boomer managers say "you may get promoted in three years if you are patient and work hard," a top-performing X-er or Millennial may think, "the heck with that.. .I'll just take the job with that other company that's willing to challenge me now and let me grow at my own rate."

That is why companies such as Enterprise Rent-A-Car, which give young workers the challenge and responsibility they desire, are retaining more than their share of Millennials and X-ers.

One 26-year-old computer software whiz flatly turned down an attractive offer after learning that he would have to slowly earn vacation days over a two-year period. Like many Millennial, he wanted time for leisure pursuits—in his case, rock-climbing trips. "Having a life outside of work" is a recurring theme

