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## “What Makes the Generations Tick and What Ticks Them Off <sup>TM</sup>.”

Attracting, Growing and Retaining Top Talent and Loyal Customers  
in a Multi-Generational Marketplace.



*By Anna Liotta, CEO*

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## Why Me, Why Multi-Generational?

Multi-generational issues and opportunities are not theory to me; I have lived them and learned about them on the front lines. I am the youngest girl of 19 children with a Traditionalist father and mother, many Boomer and X-er siblings, and 56 Millennial nieces and nephews. What I mean by these terms is:

Born 1927 - 1945: you are 66 - 84; we call you a **Traditionalist**

Born 1946 - 1964: you are 47 - 65; we call you a **Baby Boomer**

Born 1965 - 1977: you are 34 - 46; we call you a **Gen X**

Born 1978 - 1999: you are 12 - 33; we call you a **Millennial - GenY**

I understand how vital generational understanding is to our future success. I see it impact the quality of my clients and audiences' lives every day. I'm betting you do too; it's why you're reading this...

So, turn the page and find out how you can become more *Generationally Savvy™*.



## If It's Nothing New, Why Do We Care?

Chances are when you entered the workforce, your parent's generation was saying, your generation was:

Rude and a bunch of slackers. They said that you dressed unprofessionally, loved loud and raunchy music, and you didn't respect your elders.

You thought to yourself, "Who are they talking about? It couldn't possibly be ME!

As a matter of fact, they were talking about YOU.

*Time Magazine* published an article in 1968 describing the Baby Boomers as having a bad attitude, a sense of entitlement, a lack of work ethic, being rude as well as disloyal.

This is often a surprise, a source of amusement, and relief to the clients and audience members under 47 who belong to the X-er and Millennial generations. They are relieved to hear that they are not the only ones who have caught grief.

The Boomers, 47 - 65 years young, are generally saying, "Who us? It couldn't possibly be me you're referring to." And the Traditionalists who are over 65 are saying, "Ah, yes I remember. That's exactly how it was."

**What makes this age old conflict of generational collisions and biases so important to us in business today?**

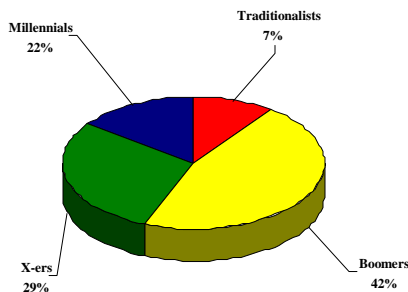
***“For every two executives who retire in the next five years, only one candidate will be eligible to replace them.”***

The business landscape is changing at the speed of light.

- Studies show that over the next 10 years, 22 million jobs will be created, but only 17 million people will be eligible to fill them.
- For every two executives who retire in the next five years, only one candidate will be eligible to replace them.
- Already, 43% of US employees say their managers are noticeably younger than they are.

When you take a deeper look at the numbers, it gets even more alarming.

- Traditionalists currently make up 7% of the workforce.
- Boomers make up 42% of the workforce.
- X-ers, 29% of the workforce, are only roughly half the size of the Boomer generation.
- Millennials make up the final 22%.



Traditionalists that can afford to retire, plan to retire soon.

Boomers are close to eligible to begin retiring and collecting Social Security. Fortunately, many Boomers are not ready to retire. However, they will be leaving their current job to find one with more meaning - a job, career, or vocation they are more passionate about, unless you do something to re-engage them.

Only 44 million X-ers were ever born. X-ers want very different things. They are not planning or frankly willing to have a work-centric life the way their Boomer predecessors do.

*“In the next 10 years, the demand for 35-45 year-old bright, talented leaders will increase by 25% while the supply will decrease by 15%.”*

*“Being Generationally Savvy™ gives you a distinct competitive advantage in today’s and tomorrow’s marketplace.”*

Millennials are still a decade away from upper management. 76 million strong, Millennials will expand to fill more of the workforce, but not for a few years.

*“In the next 10 years, the demand for 35 - 45 year-old bright, talented leaders will increase by 25% while the supply will decrease by 15%.”*

Now I’m not a mathematician, but that 40% gap seems daunting.

The complex challenge facing leaders in today’s market place is how to:

- Attract the top talent and loyal customers from each generation.
- Grow and motivate them to move into the soon to be vacant positions of leadership.
- Retention: once we get them in the door, how do we keep them from leaving?

Business leaders need both tools and understanding to fight harder and smarter to recruit and retain the best and brightest and *Generational Savvy™*.

Leaders must be ready to answer the question: how do we develop savvy messages and benefits that appeal to each generation?

*“Being Generationally Savvy™ gives you a distinct competitive advantage in today’s and tomorrow’s marketplace.”*

***“Understanding each generation’s needs and motivators can decrease the generational cultural misunderstandings and clashes that can cause costly employee turnover and the loss of valuable customers.”***

However, it can be a tricky and often a confusing task, as each generation has unique needs and motivators.

Each generation brings their own set of attitudes, values and beliefs to the workplace, and the way they do business. They make choices of who to buy from and who to work for, based on these values and beliefs.

Understanding what shapes and forms each generation is vital. Interestingly, each generation is absolutely clear that their values, attitudes, and beliefs are absolutely the right ones.

***“Understanding each generation’s needs and motivators can decrease the generational cultural misunderstandings and clashes that can cause costly employee turnover and the loss of valuable customers.”***

Each generation’s values, beliefs and attitudes are significantly influenced by what was happening in the world around them during their formative years.

During the ages of 8 - 18 is when each generation is making decisions about how the world works and what’s possible. The events, icons and leaders they see, experience, adore and dislike are shaping their world.

These influences set the paradigm for their decision making. i.e., purchasing choices and job selection for years to come.



## Where are the Generational Boundaries?

So exactly where do we draw the generational lines?

Here are the basic guidelines:

### **The generations -if you were born between**

Born 1927 - 1945: you are 66 - 84; we call you a **Traditionalist**

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Born 1965 - 1977: you are 34 - 46; we call you a **Gen X**

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The years are guidelines. People born near the edge of either generation are called cusp babies and they often understand and resonate with both generations and can be very valuable to an organization.

I'm going to give you a very brief snapshot of the four generations currently in the workforce and the events and influences on their formative years. For more information on this, visit my blog <http://AnnaLiotta.typepad.com>

## Traditionalists



Our Traditionalists formative years were filled with tough times that molded them into hard working, loyal individuals, such as the Great Depression, where the future was dark and having food, or a job was a privilege.

Sandwiched between the two great wars as soldiers and civilians, Traditionalists banded together to fight as one against the great evil. In World War II, they put aside their personal needs for the greater good of America.

Traditionalists' value: hard work, respect for authority and discipline, and above all, work comes before pleasure.



## BOOMERS



80 million strong, the Boomers were a force to be reckoned with. During their formative years, the sky was the limit. They were optimists raised by the ‘Greatest Generation’.

They had opportunities of education, peace and love, freedom of self-expression and Rock and Roll. They had dreams,

*“That little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”*

It was a world of possibility, and a world of fierce competition. 80 million people were vying for your job. You needed to visibly demonstrate your commitment by putting in “face time.” Often, that meant 20 hours a day and no family time.

Ask a Boomer, “What time do you leave work?” They will say, “10 minutes after the boss.” Boomers were all about building a stellar career and staying ahead of their peers.



## X-ers

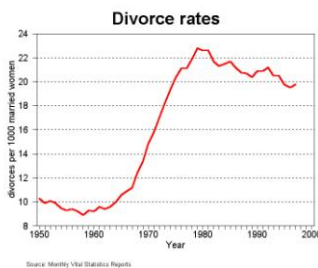


X-ers, only 44 million ever born, entered a very different landscape. During their formative years, they saw their Boomer parent's work-centric life style and felt the impact deeply. They were the first Latch Key kids. With the corporate downsizing of the 70's and 80's, they saw their Boomer parents be let go with out warning.

The X-ers do not believe in the myth of organizations and institutions as safe paternal figures. They lived through divorce rates tripling, which created more single parent households than ever before. They were responsible for making their own after school snacks and managing their own schedules. They became autonomous, self-directed and a little cynical about exactly what leaders were up to.

They loved and yearned for the fantasy of the Brady Bunch, the family who came together to solve their problems in 30-minutes or less; instead they needed to find their own family through their "Friends" who kept their promise of "I'll be there for you."

Technology savvy and comfortable with change, this generation is looking for and demanding work life balance, now. They are unwilling to sacrifice their family life in the name of advancing their career.



## Millennials

The **Millennials** burst onto the scene with energy and optimism and a healthy dose of realism. 76 million strong, these Echo Boomers are techno-infused! These digital natives were born and raised with computers, text messaging, iPods and instant access to information. They are the plugged-in generation.

They watched their heroes like Michael Jordan rise to the peak of their game and their peers go on to make millions, like the Olsen twins. At the same time, personal safety has become their first concern due to events like 9/11, Columbine and Virginia Tech. The fragile nature of life has made a deep impression, but they are very resilient.



Millennials believe they can have anything they can imagine. And thanks to their Boomer parents who have been asking them for their opinions and catering to their tastes since they were in diapers, they aren't afraid to ask for whatever they want.

Millennials will demand to work in creative, diverse work environments where differences are respected and work has meaning.

They will give up higher paying jobs for a good experience and the opportunity to have fun at work.

## Job Changing

*“How come it seems to mean so little to the new generations to move from job to job?”*

*“The employee/employer equation has changed. From the first contact or touch with the potential employee, employers must be demonstrating we meet your needs and we want you.”*

Our **Traditionalists** were building a **legacy** with their careers to pass on to the future. Loyalty was rewarded and your length of service was a badge of honor. For Traditionalists, changing jobs carried a stigma and was to be avoided at all costs.

To our **Boomers**, loyalty was a necessity to succeed. Boomers stayed with an organization to avoid getting behind their peers. They built stellar careers with lots of plaques and statues to prove it.

Our **X-ers** are busy building portable careers. They are compiling a large skill set so if something cataclysmic happens again, they can pick up and find another job anywhere. On average an X-er will change jobs seven times in his/her career.

And our **Millennials** well...while their Boomer predecessors live to work, Millennials work to live. This generation has no problems with changing careers or products if their expectations are not met. They will not only change jobs, but careers 13 times in their life. Work is just one activity in their busy social schedule. They are building parallel careers. They will try accounting for a while and when it gets boring, they'll move over to sales and then customer service... And so on and so on...

Often in my Leadership and Marketing consulting with organizations, clients ask, “How do we get them to pick us? And how do we keep them from leaving once they are here?” These are good questions.

The employee/employer equation has changed. From the first contact or touch with the potential employee, employers must be demonstrating we meet your needs and we want you.

No longer is it a one way street. The potential employee is interviewing you! Asking important questions you need to be ready to answer:

- Does your organization match my needs and values?
- What are the opportunities to build my skills?
- What will my career path look like in 6, 12, 18 months?
- What kind of innovative project will I work on?

***“Even after the employee says yes and starts the job, they are still deciding if your company is a good match.”***

You need to ask yourself on a day to day basis, are they getting the support and feedback they need to feel relevant and appreciated? Because if employees don’t feel like it’s a good fit, and that they are relevant, they will leave.

***“Even after the employee says yes and starts the job, they are still deciding if your company is a good match.”***

## Feedback

Feedback is another area of mystery for many. Employees often ask, “How do I know how I'm doing?” and managers struggle with how to give members of other generations this essential feedback.

To our **Traditionalists** with their military background, “No news is good news.” My Traditionalist father often used to say, “If I'm not yelling, you're not in trouble.”

This amount of information was not quite enough for our **Boomers**. They needed a way to demonstrate tangibly how they were doing against their 80 million competitors. It was a big win for the Boomers when they convinced the Traditionalists to institutionalize the annual reviews, a structured opportunity to sit down in a formal environment to review how they were doing, backed up with data, documentation and statistics.

For **X-ers**, once a year is definitely not enough. A bit uncertain of themselves (ok, neurotic) and constantly assessing how they are doing in their careers, X-ers need and crave frequent feedback. It doesn't need to be in a sit-down formal manner. In fact, X-ers do well with on-the-fly informal feedback that's authentic. This can drive their Boomer bosses nuts as they prefer having time to prepare and collect their thoughts and X-ers are asking, “How did I do in that presentation, 10 minutes ago?”

*“As challenging as it may seem, developing your leaders skills and the systems to delivering quality and consistent feedback is one of the most important things you can do to stop the revolving door from swinging.”*

***“The biggest reason people leave is because they feel unappreciated. They feel they do not have impact on the success of the organization and their time is wasted.”***

But if you think that’s tough, prepare for the **Millennials** - who grew up on instantaneous, constant positive reinforcement, not necessarily “constructive” feedback - from the video games with bells and whistles, a multi-media “Atta Girl”.

The first generation raised with Pop Psychology, Boomer parents learned to tell their kids, “I’m ok. You’re ok. I’m just so proud of you for just trying.”

Millennials expect this kind of frequent, positive kudos and are frankly shocked and disoriented when they aren’t getting them.

Studies show that when people leave organizations, the number one reason for leaving is not too much work or too little pay.

***“The biggest reason people leave is because they feel unappreciated. They feel they do not have impact on the success of the organization and their time is wasted.”***

In the current and evolving economy, organizations can’t afford to have talented people leave because they feel unappreciated.

“As challenging as it may seem, developing your leaders’ skills and the systems to delivering quality and consistent feedback is one of the most important things you can do to stop the revolving door from swinging.”



## The Bottom Line - Generationally Savvy™

Understanding these guidelines is merely a start, opening the door on the power of being *Generationally Savvy™*.

As you develop your messages to attract, grow, or retain top talent and loyal customers, ask the question, “What do they value? The generation that I’m trying to attract, what are their priorities? Am I demonstrating that I respect them?”

One thing all generations have in common and is a great place to begin is the need for **Respect**.

If you ask these questions and pay attention to the answers, you will have a significant competitive advantage in the marketplace.