

Stereotyping employees is counter-productive to success

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Employers worldwide are faced with the question of how to juggle the demands and expectations of the incoming millennial workforce without alienating the baby boomers - thereby losing their valuable knowledge and experience.



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However, this distinction encapsulates one of the biggest problems within the job sector today: a glaring overemphasis on the generations and what divides them, as opposed to what binds them. In fact, there's been a complete over-amplification of the millennials and their wants and needs. What's frequently overlooked is the broader scenario of work and people's ideological views on it, evolving as a direct result of the changing world we live in. Technology and its impact on communication is a definite game changer, regardless of the generation you find yourself in.

Understand your workforce

That's why I'm convinced to overplay and over-respond to the millennial/baby boomer divide is a big mistake. What's required instead is the acceptance that most organisations will in fact have a whole gambit of generations working for them. They need to understand who their workforce is, what is and what isn't going to work for them and be careful not to oversubscribe to just one group.

Running a business at the end of the day is about getting certain fundamentals right - no matter who you're talking to. Every generation wants a view on where the organisation is going, a sense of how they fit into that organisation and want to feel secure in their job. And even though millennials may be less preoccupied with it than baby boomers, and are more inclined to change jobs more often, every generation cares about job security.

Mobility is another big issue. Baby boomers desire progression. It's an important part of validating themselves. Millennials on the other hand might not require the same upward progression, but they want variety. So whether it's vertical or horizontal progression, progression remains the requirement. The classic perks in a work environment are not restricted to one generation either.

Stability and earnings

Most baby boomers will have children, be committed to a bond or a long relationship, which drives certain requirements in terms of stability and earnings capacity. This might not be the case with a millennial - however, that's not a function of the generation the person finds themselves in, but rather a function of the commitments a person has at that moment in time.

In terms of the working environment, baby boomers may also traditionally be more accepting of authority and more compliant in nature. I'd venture to suggest millennials are equally compliant, but that what they do require is the capacity to voice their opinion, as they are already doing this through platforms like social media networks. Having learnt to trade in that space is merely due to the availability of that technology and having done so from a young age. If baby boomers had also had the capability available to them, they would possibly also be more inclined to do it today.

Where and how employees want to work, is also largely a function of their circumstance and not necessarily of their preference or socialisation. While most boomers have been socialised into a routine of going into the office and having set office hours, it's also true that reality has a way of getting in the way. Most boomers will have families at home, and with that comes disruption. That's why you can't compare someone of 23 living in his own apartment and his desire to work from home to someone who wants to be at the office the whole day because family life keeps them far too preoccupied at home.

Freedom within a framework

Essentially this all boils down to the fact that while there does need to be an emphasis on generational gaps and an understanding of the differences between the generations, stereotyping employees and their behaviour will be both counter-productive and counter-intuitive to success. It would be unwise to select any one of the generations and aligning your overall employee value proposition to one of them exclusively. Rather run a business so that it makes sense to everyone involved.

It boils down to freedom within a framework. Offer people insight into where the company is going, excite them about it, connect them to it, and give them growth and recognition opportunities within the context of their contribution within the company's growth path. Understand each employee's unique incentive requirements and then supply options to leverage these and create an optimal working environment.

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