

PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource—The Human Resource

Prepared By:

HUMAN RESOURCE ASSOCIATES

Personnel Consultants

HOW MANY GENERATIONS ON YOUR JOB?

There is a theory today that has been growing so much in recent years that it's now taken as basic knowledge. This theory is that we are all part of different tribes that are predetermined to be in conflict. These primary tribes are men-women-minorities-whites-young-old. Our current social conflicts suggest that each of these differences have to be recognized, categorized, legislated, accommodated, enforced, and defended. Heroes and villains are identified and conflicts are drawn up. So ingrained has this become, that we are endlessly extending this concept into more and more tribes within our society and our workplace. We can now add handicapped, sexual preference, marital status, overweight, with children, without children, etc. Our classic ideas of everybody accepting or even tolerating everyone else is almost unworkable.

Believing that someone of a different "tribe" automatically has predetermined attributes is prejudice. Not a hate induced demonic prejudice, but simply a belief that is accepted without foundation. Not someone to hate back but someone to communicate with and for both to share some understanding. There is enough prejudice coming from each "tribe" to make it difficult but we're finding out that if we all want to make this work bad enough we'll make it happen.

In 1987, the Hudson Institute produced the revolutionary work, "Workforce 2000." In 1997, they produced "Workforce 2020." In that latest report, the authors stated that one of the most serious mistakes the public made in the response to their earlier work was that a tidal wave of "experts"

appeared who got rich from diversity training. The authors emphatically state in "Workforce 2020" that the data was misinterpreted. The study showed the necessity to de-emphasize race, sex, age and national origin and instead to concentrate on values and skill development for all.

Are we actually so intolerant, so rigid into our specific tribe that we must be trained or re-educated into every other imaginable difference. How about genetically reproduced vs. medically altered vs. naturally born?

Let's come back down to earth and look at the reality. It's not race, sex, nationality, age, etc. The difference is values! We tend to be intolerant of values we don't understand or agree with. Concentration on values and why we have them should be the key, not those differences that we already know mean very little.

There are people of my race, sex and age that I don't like or trust very much because I find their values so distant and opposite of mine that I cannot bridge that gap. I must either be tolerant of those differences or adjust my attitude in such a way that we can work together.

Now let's identify those value systems into terms that we now know really exist.

In their acclaimed book, "*Generations At Work*," three authors, Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak, have researched those value systems and identified them as generational values. Although

that concept implies that it's a generational (age) difference driving those values, we know that it really is not age, because so many individuals don't share the value system of their age groups. It's not simply age but the value system each person holds that more identifies them in their group. Although they use different titles for these groups, the value systems are almost identical to several other recent books and research reports.

The names for these four generational groups used for this issue of *Personnel Notebook* are:

1. **Depression Generation**
2. **Atomic Bomb Generation**
3. **Generation Xers**
4. **The Nexters.**

Each of these groups (not necessarily age brackets) has a distinct and valid set of values. When we examine the reasons for those values, they aren't so demonic but quite understandable.

Depression Generation (1925 - 1946)

That group of people affected primarily by the impact of the Great Depression. They truly believe that an individual can starve to death in this country if you don't work and that the government can be trusted to solve the problem.

Their value systems are based on:

- Security
- Family
- Trust in authority
- Steady, unchanging environment
- Long, steady work for a reliable pension.

They believe that you should first establish your income, then set your lifestyle to meet it.

Atomic Bomb Generation (Baby Boomers) (1946 - 1964)

This group was primarily influenced by the concept of a single lunatic with a finger on the button, ready to end the world. They don't believe that you will starve to death if you don't work. This is the "me" generation. Their value systems are based on:

- Produce now, reward now
- Trust in friends, groups
- Little trust in authority
- Work is not essential to success
- Recognition / titles / promotion.

They more believe that you should first determine your lifestyle, then find the income to support it.

Generation Xers (1965 - 1980)

Rebels without a cause. Many feel they missed out on the over glamorized excitement of the '60s, civil rights, Viet Nam, ban the bomb, etc. They were strongly influenced by single parent homes, day care, and latch key kids. They believe that attitude is a virtue.

Their value systems are based on the following:

- Work to live, not live to work
- Hate close supervision
- Crave feedback and praise
- Very comfortable with change
- Not family oriented
- Want a balance of private life - work life
- Want experiences
- Want skill training
- Want responsibility.

More of them believe in UFOs than those that believe they will ever see a Social Security check. There are an estimated 52 million Generation Xers.

A few million of these are truly the much maligned "slackers." They will drop out of the mainstream workforce and seek personal goals and experiences. About six million are the entrepreneurs who will use every means to create their own businesses. And then there are the 40 million+ who will be pursued by employers all their lives. This group is full of creative, hard working, confident achievers. They and their employers want to develop not only their worker skills, but their ability to manage themselves. They are not loyal to companies, they are loyal to the technology. They will chase it. They can be super producers for the lucky employers who can identify, recruit and motivate them.

The Nexters (1980 - 2000)

Not much is known of this group as they are just now entering the work force. But we can already identify some obvious characteristics and trends.

This is the most highly intelligent, healthy, educated, confident, affluent and positive group of human beings in history. What a world of promise! They have no limits in their beliefs to accomplish anything. They are unencumbered by doubts, paranoid fears, or prejudices. Race, sex and age, to them, are ancient tribal religions. The very fact that you may discuss these issues is evidence that you are part of that antiquity. They're "cool with all that." Skills, looks, style, intelligence are the tools of their future. One surprise is that they admire greatly, and identify with, the Depression Generation. They, who know no fear, no paranoia, look up to those who faced the Depression and fought WWII. They dress like them, are absorbed in books, movies, and relationships that bring them closer to that group. They also feel that their parents are "in."

Their value systems are:

- Achievements
- Relationships
- Recognition
- Team efforts

- Freedom to act
- Less structure,
- Sky's the limit
- "Go for it"
- Risk and reward
- Non-competition
- Work at what you love!

To try to motivate Generation Xers or Nexters with promises of security, steady pay and retirement is a waste of time. To expect a Depression valued employee to risk their job on a new venture and a move across the country, or to abandon their pension for a 401(k) plan is not always very realistic either.

Each of these groups has different strengths that together make a better company. Motivating employees by their value system is the way to go.

Where is all this leading us? There's a lot of information coming forward on this. Much of it is still too diverse to lock down. But some trends are starting to show. In his cutting edge new book, "Work," author Joshua Halberstam, Ph.D., discusses the future of work. He describes many things that are about to happen in the workforce. The most fascinating is the likely elimination of the job! As these entrepreneurial groups, with little company loyalty and supreme confidence, seek freedom and achievement, they will move more rapidly, become independent contractors, work when and where they want, to such an extent that they will do jobs but not have jobs!

Halberstam says that even rewarding people with money, certificates, plaques and recognition may become a thing of the past as new generation employees select their work on different and changing values including where and how they work during different times of the year and different times of their lives.

New workers will be motivated by the work. As industrial psychologist Fred Herzberg advised years ago, "If you want people motivated to do a

good job, give them a good job to do!" For repetitive or mechanical work, rewards may still be the answer but the new work to do will be more creative, intelligent and innovative. For results like that, you do it, not for the rewards, but for the work itself!

George Bernard Shaw put it this way:

"This is the true joy in life, the being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy."

Okay, so George Bernard Shaw was a little crusty, he described the right attitudes we will likely be seeing as the next set of values develops in our workforce.

Bill Cook
Human Resource Associates

HUMAN RESOURCE ASSOCIATES

6050 Greenway Court
Manassas, Virginia 20112-3049
(703) 590-3841, Fax (703) 590-6437
website: www.consulthra.com
e-mail: hrahtl@consulthra.com