

**Working with the Generations:  
Generational Issues in the American Workplace  
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*This handout describes the diversity of the current multigenerational workplace. It is designed to serve as an adjunct and support to Dr. Taylor's programs. It is distributed with permission to conference attendees but should not be otherwise reproduced or distributed without permission.*

### **Challenging Workplace**

There are special challenges facing the American workplace today, making the institutional efficiency, effectiveness and productivity offered through improved generational understanding even more critical.

- There is generational tension in the workplace. Older workers tend to be dismissive of the talents and critical of the “work ethic” of younger workers, while younger workers see the experiences, attitudes, expectations and values of older workers as obsolete and out-dated.
- International competitiveness is not abating, and Americans show decreasing preference and loyalty to American products. This may be an ironic, “benefit” of reduced xenophobia, improved multicultural acceptance, and positive diversity efforts.
- The recession, downsizing, layoffs, outsourcing and off-shoring, reductions in benefits, changes in taxation structures, reductions in social and institutional safety nets, and increased federal deficits have decreased many worker's standard of living, sense of security, optimism about the future, and may have predictable impacts on businesses' effectiveness and mood in the workplace.
- Most workers are becoming less “work centric” and more focused on life away from work, or a balance work and “life”. Limited numbers of workers are interested in more responsibility and/or time at work, which is frequently a condition of advancement, which may presage a leadership crisis.
- The retirement of the last the Traditional oldest workers, who are taking their sense of duty and “old school” workplace values, like “loyalty” with them.
- The pending retirement of large numbers of Boomers and limited evidence of their passing meaningful institutional information to younger workers.
- Fewer over all workers and fewer qualified workers will create increased competition for skilled, able, willing and work-ready young people.
- Traditional workplace values and loyalty to employers have decreased. All businesses still need honest, dependable and loyal workers, at a time when these qualities are seen as increasingly quaint.
- The pressing need to bring into the workforce the least work-ready of recent generational cohorts, Generation NeXt.

### **Generational Cohorts**

It should be stressed that making generalizations about any group, including generational cohorts, is a slippery prospect and risky undertaking. Abundant experience shows that stereotypes about any group can be dangerous and are often used to prejudge and abuse individual members of a group. However, describe the central tendencies of the characteristics found in a generational cohort can be useful if people remember that there is great variation within any group and that not everyone will have all of the characteristics. While each person must be understood individually, these described traits can help in understanding generational cohorts.

**Traditionals** are members of the oldest worker cohort today; a small yet valuable cohort. Born before 1944, they are at least 64 years old now. Though few current workers actually remember World War II, and fewer still the Great Depression of the 1930s, Traditionals' socialization was very impacted by these defining events of the American 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Also labeled the Silent generation they were a sandwich generation between the high profile Greatest and Baby Boom

generations. They did not experience, contribute to or get the medals from the character and culture shaping Depression and World War II, nor were they able to fully benefit from the social freedoms available to the Boomers.

In our workplaces, they are the “senior” staff members, whether by title, tenure or both. While most are thinking about transitioning out of the workplace, many are in positions of great authority, which gives their opinions (which come from their underlying values) great importance. Socialized largely in the premodern value model, before the cultural shifts to modernism following World War II, they were taught to value duty, discipline and thrift; do what you are supposed to do, practice self control, follow the rules, and save your money. They were taught to expect to be called upon to make personal sacrifice, for the good of the family, company or country, and to delay personal gratification. Traditionals were taught to believe that life is a serious undertaking and not to be treated frivolously: Life is really not supposed to be fun, certainly not all the time and usually not at work. In culture, and organizations, they learned that conformity is good and that individuality is bad, possibly seditious.

Traditionals were generally socialized into the workplace in traditional hierarchies with strict lines of vertical authority. In an industrial age, innovation was the job of a select few. Everyone else needed to be their assigned cog in the machine. Loyalty to and from the organization was expected, as was the expectation of lifelong employment. Traditionals also came up in a time of stricter gender roles, as well as of more institutionalized discrimination against women and people of color. While some Traditionals have had values shifts and have taken advantage of the social freedoms made available in modern and postmodern times, for many Traditionals these formative values continue to exert a strong, if subliminal, influence.

### **Working with Traditionals**

- **Seniority-** The senior administrative positions held by many Traditionals give the values of this relatively small cohort of workers great influence, and can cause problems. If the boss believes that “work is not supposed to be fun” and “important decisions will be made at the top and work down” conflict can arise with the rest of the workforce who might not accept that work should be toil and who prefer more modern horizontal, participatory management.
  - Traditionals need to work to accept the changing expectations of workers and the changing needs of the workplace
  - Traditionals need to practice more participatory management and horizontal organizational structures.
  
- **Transitioning-** Most Traditionals are planning their exit from the workforce, though their dedication to the job can be expected to remain high until their last day of work. Others are seeking to transition from full to part-time employment, so find themselves supervised by Boomer, or even Xer, workers.
  - Organizations should explore flexible employment options appropriate to these valuable workers. They have important skills and perspectives organizations need to try and keep, even if only on a part-time or consulting basis.
  
- **Dependable-** Negative stereotypes about the attendance, tenure and energy of mature employees have been shown to be flatly untrue. They are among the most stable, reliable and hardworking employees.
  - With the length of time the average worker spends at each job decreasing, a Traditional employee who may work for five to eight or more years is a solid hiring choice, especially given their knowledge and experience.
  
- **Formal/ Conservative-** On the job, Traditionals do tend to be more conservative and sometimes resistant to change. New is not necessarily seen as better, especially not just because it is new. Many prefer more traditional, formal workplace relationships, structures, schedules and procedures.

- Traditionals can work to be open to newer ideas, while younger workers need to respect the traditional, formal preferences of Traditionals.
- **Structured-** Traditionals can be expected to be good rule followers. They do want to and need to know clear procedures. They tend to be frustrated by what they see as a lack of discipline, respect, logic, order and structure.
  - The proprieties and feelings of Traditionals need to be considered, especially if the workplace is more relaxed, flexible and spontaneous.
- **Traditional-** “Traditional” manners and courtesy mean a lot these workers. Stereotypical gender roles notwithstanding, they may think doors should be held open for ladies and men should not wear hats indoors. Rude or obscene language is definitely seen as inappropriate in the workplace.
  - Maintaining a vestige of office decorum might be a minimally reasonable accommodation for Traditional workers.
- **Analog-** Technology can be a challenge for Traditional workers who worked for many years in a pre-digital era. They might prefer face to face contact to e-mail, and value the handwritten note. Many men in this age group never learned to type.
  - Helping Traditionals develop appropriate digital-age office technology skills should be slow paced, and ideally delivered by someone near their age.
- **Experienced/ valuable-** Traditionals are wonderful archives of social and institutional tradition. They do tend to bring a strong sense of mission and historical memory to organizations. Traditional workers have paid their dues and have a wealth of experience with success and failure. Unfortunately, older workers who are leaving the workforce are often viewed as having obsolete experiences by younger workers, so valuable knowledge is not effectively or meaningfully transferred before their retirement. Unfortunately some older workers, feeling left out of the technologically sophisticated workplace, may view “knowledge as power” so may be disinclined to share.
  - Younger workers who see Traditionals’ experiences as obsolete deny themselves valuable sources of learning.
  - Traditionals need and deserve to hear that their effort, knowledge and experience are valued.
- **Stoic-** Traditionals, especially those not near the top of the organizational chart, may not assume that their happiness, comfort, or well-being is of particular importance to anyone and so may suffer in silence. Advancing years may make normal work tasks and schedules more tiring, taxing and even painful.
  - Managers and fellow workers need to be especially empathetic and sympathetic with Traditional workers by anticipating what may be difficult for them, and should even go the extra step of empowering Traditionals to speak up on their own behalf.

**Baby Boomers**, born between the end of World War II in 1945, and the baby-crash of 1964 when the birthrate started slowing, are between 45 and 63 years old now and comprise the vast majority of management. Boomers were raised in times that were strikingly different than earlier generations, caused largely by the relative affluence of the USA in the decades following World War II. This new middle class in the new suburbs saw the development of television and many other new consumer goods, along with values supporting the perceived need for consumer goods (at least for mainstream majority families).

The “Cleaver” family profile of dad working, and mom at home with children predominated, with young Boomers experiencing the most care-free childhood of any generational group. They were mostly spared the “children are seen but not heard” and harsh discipline of earlier generations, as well as the fractured families and day care stresses of later

groups. They were treated as special, they were advantaged, and were a lucky group of children. Disneyland was build for Boomer children.

Unlike earlier generational groups who tended to focus on premodern, tradition and values-based decision making and beliefs, Boomers tend to embrace the modern values of individually, creativity and personal fulfillment having been raised in times that more fully embraced the modern values of human development and progress through science and reason. If a Traditional would like a tombstone reading “She did her duty”, a Boomer will want “She made a difference”.

### **Working with Boomers.**

- **Special-** Boomers have been special in the workplace, just as they have been special everywhere. Boomers like recognition and awards.
  - Boomers want to hear that their ideas and efforts are important and will be acted on.
- **Meaningful-** Boomers want their efforts to matter. Silly routines (or procedures they see as unnecessary) are especially frustrating. They may not expect work to be fun, but they expect their work, and themselves, to matter.
  - Before Boomers get involved with or do anything, they need to know why it matters, how it fits into the big picture, and what impacts it will have on whom.
- **Work-oriented-** As a generation, they have tended to be defined by their careers, so their work is very important to them. They are showing, however, a tendency to join the broader cultural movement away from a work centric lifestyle to a more life centric orientation. Many are now in a “sandwich generation” with responsibilities for children, and for aging parents competing for their time.
  - Accept that Boomers are moving to a life-centric work orientation.
  - Don’t expect Boomers to work long (especially unpaid) hours like they might have when they were younger.
- **Mission oriented-** Boomers tend to see the big picture, though the actual tasks of productivity might be a little fuzzier. Boomers developed “death by committee.”
  - If Boomers can’t delegate the actual tasks of work, they might need help in developing progress measures and markers.
- **Relationship oriented-** Boomers tend to like and to do well in teams, are good at collaboration and in seeking consensus, are motivated by their responsibilities to others, and respond well to attention and recognition. They tend to be confused and disoriented by the difficulties they may have developing meaningful relationships with younger, task oriented, workers.
  - Boomers may need help recognizing that many people come to work to do the work and earn money, not to develop meaningful relationships.
- **Mentoring-** Boomers hold a special cultural place as member of the last big cohort before the NeXters. They still comprise the majority of management at many organizations.
  - Boomers need to step up to the plate to mentor younger workers by engaging them in meaningful interpersonal ways to help develop these younger workers, and in ways that younger workers see as valuable.
- **Feedback issues-** Boomers don’t take criticism well and are less likely to offer necessary feedback to their subordinates. They prefer to receive, and so give, mission level supervision, and see this as the only respectful way to manage. This conflicts directly with the need for and preference of members of the younger generational

cohorts for ongoing feedback, and might be the central management conflict and issue in American organizations today.

- Boomers may need special help in giving meaningful task or outcome direction to younger workers, and in monitoring the work of others. Boomers need developmental help separating relationships, missions, desired outcomes and specific tasks and learn to better give and receive constructive feedback.
- **Conflicts.** Boomers may conflict with Traditionals over Traditionals' respect for hierarchy, policy and procedure and Traditionals expectation that people put other's needs first, and Boomers needs for flexibility, attention and freedom. Boomers may conflict with Xers over feedback, loyalty, relationship and process issues.

**Generation X** are the 27 to 44 year old products of the "Baby Bust" of 1965 to 1982. They were socialized in the shadow of the Baby Boom during the Consciousness Revolution of the 1970s and 1980s when cultural values underwent major shifts. Comedian Dennis Miller said many felt like they were late to the Baby Boomer's party; by the time Xers arrived, all that was left were a couple of smoky links and half bottle of Zima. For many Xers it was a tough time to be a kid. Families were struggling to adapt to new social realities and expectations, including women being widely expected to work out of the home, the expectation that everyone personally actualize, and the lack of requirement that adults have children. For the first time adults could be seen socially as complete, fulfilled adults without being parents. Many Xers were low priority kids more likely to be seen as inhibiting parents' growth than contributing to it. The first day care generation, they were expected to get up and leave the house with everyone else from a very early age. Their day care experiences might be described as uneven at best. In natural consequence, Xers tend to be less optimistic than Boomers. The changes in their formative environments have led Xers to be pragmatic, self-reliant, and adaptable, if somewhat skeptical and possibly cynical.

### **Working with Xers.**

- **Change oriented-** Xers have an unprecedented, though possible appropriate, lack of appreciation for the status quo. They recognize that if products and procedures don't change, they can improve (and very few things are perfect already). Occasionally this look like global dissatisfaction and desire for "change for changes sake."
  - Leverage the ability of Xers to initiate, accept and manage change.
  - Let Xers point to directions for organizational change as they demonstrate the advantages of the changes.
- **Task oriented-** Xers tend to be good task managers with good short term problem solving skills. They may be able to "work fast" because they do not take the time develop appropriate cooperation.
  - They may need help taking responsibility for full process completion, and in appreciating how their effort affects the larger organization.
  - Xers may need special help in developing relationships and the consensus necessary to make collaborative tasks happen.
- **Skilled-** Xers bring a special, generally current, set of skills to the workplace, most obviously in technological sophistication. Xers may resent entering the organization at the entry level, especially when they see their specific skill set as superior to their managers and bosses.
  - Leverage the special skills of Xers to compliment the approaches of Traditionals and Boomers.
- **Life oriented-** Stereotyped early in their careers as "slackers" for their perceived lax work ethic, they were, in fact, on the leading edge of the social movement away from a work centric lifestyle. While many Xers are hard workers, they work to live. They do not

live to work. Ask why they work and their answers are unlikely to relate to the intrinsic rewards of job completion or even organizational goals, and more likely to involve lifestyle issues, advancement (as more money or less work time contributes to lifestyle), and even retirement.

- Xers need their managers to appreciate that they have a life, and that the “away from work” life is actually their main motivator.
  - Helping Xers identify their work as a significant and rewarding part of their lives may also increase loyalty and retention.
- **Less promotion oriented-** While many Xers want to “advance”, fewer than half of Xers report wanting a job with more responsibility, which is generally a part of being “promoted”. This could presage a leadership crisis unless ways are found to help Xers develop their careers. Some senior managers report that many Xers who want to advance have unrealistic expectations for the rapidity of advancement.
    - Work with Xers to help them understand both the intrinsic and non-monetary rewards of work, as well as the benefits of climbing the career ladder at a pace appropriate to them.
  - **Reward oriented-** Xers may not expect work to be fun, but if it is not fun it had better have other significant and tangible rewards. They might expect to be compensated in some way for extra work they do, especially the extra hours which many Boomers and most Traditionals may have logged as “part of the job”, especially early in their careers. Xers may feel that they have already paid their dues; they have been going to “work” (day care or school) their whole lives.
    - Pay for extra work can be balanced with more productivity compensation than a reliance on strictly “on the clock” compensation packages.
  - **Loyalty issues-** Workplace loyalty may be non-existent in Xers, so retention can be an issue. Employers who don’t think workers are planning to stay might shrift on employee development and training. It should be kept in mind when investing in workers that, while it improves their competitiveness for other jobs, training and development also make them more valuable to the current organization.
    - Recognize the need for, expectation of and value in developing employees. When employee development is combined with a personal, mentoring relationship, improved retention should be the result.
  - **Flexible-** Xers thrive on flexibility in scheduling, dress, environment and other workplace features Traditionals and Boomers often don’t see as negotiable. “Why can’t I work from home?” is a question that has confounded many managers, who would never have considered asking it themselves. The impact of “old school” work structures on employee dissatisfaction and short work tenures is much stronger than most managers appreciate.
    - Traditional and Boomer managers need to seriously reconsider their rules and standards for time, place, dress and appearance, not to mention how the job gets done. Just because they, the manager, prefers something does not mean it automatically improves productivity, is the preference of workers, or matters to or appeals to clients and customers.
    - Managers should identify outcome/productivity goals and give workers maximum input on how those goals are reached. Assign the outcome and monitor progress.
  - **Informal-** In stark contrast to Traditionals and from many Boomers, and related to their desire for flexibility, Xers tend to be informal and might even see organizational “traditions” as inhibiting their creativity, expression and productivity. Expressively and in

interaction they might be seen as “ill mannered” or “blunt”, while they probably see themselves as unconstrained and honest.

- A balance between unbridled free expression that might be unnecessarily hurtful, and a slavish devotion to social decorum that might actually inhibit meaningful and productive expression can probably be achieved.
  - Xers should be alerted to the probable formality expectations of their contacts and clients and helped to develop skills to respect those expectations.
- **Technology-** The digital divide between the older (Traditional and Boomer) and younger (X and NeXt) cohorts is a chasm that must be bridged by every successful company. Employers must offer appropriate, usually cutting edge, technology to workers to be considered even minimally adequate and to facilitate the productivity of workers. Managers must also understand that their clients and customers may prefer electronic contact. Many managers have sent workers on time consuming face to face calls and meetings, when the time and effort might have been better spent on customer or product research that could be quickly, digitally transmitted to the client, who might prefer the time flexibility of e-contact and true personalization reflected by the research.
    - Technological sophistication is a necessary prerequisite for any employer, as is an appreciation of the technological preferences of important persons inside and outside the organization.
  - **Independent-** Also unlike their Boomer coworkers, Xers don't necessarily want to work closely with others. This may relate to underlying trust issues and Xers expectations that they have to take care of themselves. Managers should, nevertheless, work to develop solid, functional teams and meaningful interpersonal relationships.
    - Managers need to accept trust and show themselves, and the organization, as trustworthy.
    - Managers need to help Xers balance independence and interdependence.
    - Xers need to develop skills in understand when and with what they should work independently and autonomously, and when they need to work collaboratively and cooperatively.
  - **Segmented-** While much is made over the reported ability of Xer and NeXters ability to “multitask”, the ability and, even the word, may be misconstrued. Multitasking is actually the ability to do more than one thing at once. What is more commonly observed is actually sequential-tasking where the focus rapidly shifts from one activity to another. Since each shift requires at least a minimal ramping down from one task and ramping up to the next task, it might not be as effective a use of time as focusing on one task at a time for longer period of time.
    - Xers, like most humans, can be most efficient one task at a time, though they can juggle several projects when they need to. They may need help developing appropriate attending project completion skills.
  - **Feedback oriented-** Unlike Boomers, Xers prefer regular feedback about their work. They are willing to be held accountable on process and outcome, but are less dependent on being told they are good people. Xers don't mind direction but resent intrusive supervision. Xers want to know how they are doing, not especially what anyone thinks of them personally.
    - On-going, routine feedback should be outcome and principle based, not based on personality or the expectation that they please the boss.
  - **Conflicts-** Xers may conflict with Traditionals and Boomers over issues of time, workplace loyalty and dedication, formality, the need or expectation that people have to “pay their dues”, and feedback issues. Xers may see NeXters as coddled, undeveloped

and irrationally confident. Xers may need meaningful process level supervisor training if they are going to manage NeXter workers.

### **The Great Workplace for Generation X**

- What they want in a great workplace
  - To use their skills.
  - **To develop and learn marketable skills.**
  - To produce obvious results and contribute.
  - To be rewarded for their efforts.
  - To work in an informal environment.
  - Technological sophistication and support.
  - To have limited dependence on others.
  - To have maximum flexibility in time, place, appearance and how tasks are managed and completed.
  - To receive meaningful feedback on their performance.
- What they may also need in a great workplace
  - Help in seeing their role in institutional mission and the benefits to them in reaching institutional goals.
  - Managers who are trustworthy and who represent an organization that keeps its promises.
  - Help in recognizing the advantages of being promotable and promoted.

**Generation NeXt.** Members of the “Baby Boomlet” starting in 1982, NeXters are up to 25 years old now and are members of a huge generational cohort of the children of Boomer parents. Many are delaying their entry into the workforce with a new, socially accepted delayed adolescence. As many as half expect to move back home with their parents after college graduation. While the jury is still out on their long term adaptation as workers, they are well known as students, and have what Levine has called “a pandemic of workplace unreadiness”.

Nexters are the postmodern products of postmodern times. The social changes Xers had to adjust and adapt to have been in place NeXters’ entire lives. Xers witnessed the shift from cultural modernism to postmodernism. NeXters have never known anything except postmodernism’s spin, created reality and meaning, skepticism, cynicism, and hyper-consumerism. Day care, divorce, single parents, all parents working and choice in all aspects of life have always been perfectly normal.

While culturally Xers were seen as unnecessary for their parents development and self-actualization, NeXters are more likely to be seen as the embodied manifestation of their Boomer parents’ personal growth, so tend to be (or once were) the wanted, precious, protected children of Boomer parents. At work they share many traits with Xers including the change, task, reward and life (over work) orientations, as well as the loyalty issues, informality and direct communication. In other ways, revolving around their high self importance, self esteem and specialness, they are very different, as will be described below. Some of their other tendencies like a consumer orientation, reliance on parents and marginal academic preparation might prove problematic when large numbers of NeXters are expected to enter professional and technical workplaces productively.

### **NeXt at Work**

Workers from Generation NeXt are the unhappiest on the job. They report the lowest overall satisfaction and engagement levels. They don’t think they are making enough money. Many distrust large organizations and refuse to compromise workplace arrangements and workplace style. They have record high rates of turnover, at great expense to employers. Half of younger workers actually report that they feel burned out and one in four report that they are not only seeking a new job, but are seeking a new career. They are clearly ready for a different kind of work experience.

## NeXt and Technology

Issues of technology will figure prominently into NeXters transition into the workplace. As digital natives and generation net their relationship with technology, especially the internet and digital media and communications, is different that that of any previous generation. While members of other generational cohorts can use technology efficiently, technology is a part of most NeXters' identity. Like the Xers before them, as the most recently educated NeXters may bring the most current and sophisticated technological application (as opposed to programming or trouble-shooting) skills to the workplace so may have some early status. However, their language, math, social and communications skills may need to be developed. E-mail abbreviations and flexible rules of grammar may not be a good fit with the expectations of "professionalism" by older workers.

## Working with NeXters

- **Consumer orientation-** While NeXters have a powerful consumer orientation, they may not have the necessary related expectation that they also become a producer. NeXters consumer employees present themselves to potential employers as more interested in what work can offer them than in what they will be expected to do, or produce, at work. They may expect to have major input on the terms and conditions of their employment and work tasks; what they will do when and for how long. NeXters may be impatient and expect to "get it now". This can cause major conflict, especially with more work-oriented Traditionals and Boomers, and the pragmatic "paid their dues" Xers.
  - Major issues of workplace orientation and education are indicated if these younger workers are going to become productive workers.
- **Work orientation issues-** Many college students have a poor understanding of the skills required to be successful at work, what employers value in new hires, and of the relationship of skills development to workplace success, and so have major difficulty transitioning to work.
  - NeXters will need lots of help in being oriented to the nature and expectations of the world of work in general and the particular organization that hires them.
- **Peer oriented-** NeXters have a strong identification with their peers, but much less so with older people, or the culture at large. Combined with their sense of specialness, they tend to believe that their experiences and opinions are the most important, those of their peers are relevant, but that those of others may be irrelevant and obsolete. For most, college has contributed to these ideas by praising their opinions and allowing them to associate primarily with peers of their choosing.
  - Orientation to workplace expectations and ongoing continuing education may best be delivered by someone they view as a peer, ideally one who has been successful acculturated to the organization.
- **Expectations-** While NeXters may have youthful optimism about work, they might be surprised that they will not start with high levels of management responsibilities, or salaries commiserate with those of their parents.
  - NeXters may need help developing more reasonable expectations about typical career paths, and specifically how that path might be realized with this particular employer.
- **Skill development/ supervision-** NeXters may need help developing appropriate workplace skills in language and math, as well social and communication skills.
  - Organizations are encouraged to work with them formally and informally to help them develop appropriate workplace skills, manners and sensibilities.
  - NeXters will need high levels of close supervision, especially early in their careers. This may be especially problematic as those in the workplace with responsibility for supervising them as closely as then may require, especially

- Boomers, may be disinclined to do so. Luckily, Xers will show little hesitation direct NeXters.
  - Mentoring, especially by younger workers who have made successful transitions to work, will be most effective in helping Generation NeXt transition into the workplace.
- **Socialization-** Socializing NeXters to see themselves as members of the organization and to adopt organizational goals as their own goals must be central focus of their orientation and on-going supervision. The development of a work ethic recognizing that their helping the organization reach its mission and targets is the best way for them to reach their personal goals might need to be made materially clear with performance bonuses and perks for time on the job replacing raises or a part of base salary.
  - Mechanisms need to be established to tie rewards to real productivity and outcomes, not just attendance. It might be effective with NeXters to start them at a lower base salary, then reward them for tenure or performance with a bonus or laptop, a procedure that might also address problems in tenure and “job hopping”.
- **Technology-** This is a technology savvy generational cohort, though their understanding may not penetrate very deeply beyond the surface applications; they may be able to use the applications but may not be able to do more in-depth programming, trouble shooting or problem solving. Technology may have also contributed to their impatience and need for high stimulation.
  - That they will need to have access to the latest technology is a given, though they may need help identifying work-appropriate and inappropriate uses of the technology.
  - Technology can be offer great tools for effective work, but can also be a time waster. Workers need clear guidelines for and appropriate monitoring of time on-line and in e-contact with others.
- **Parent issues-** Surprisingly to many managers, parents may actually seek to intervene on behalf of their Generation NeXt worker children.
  - Establishing guidelines for parental communication with bosses, and in conflict management with other workers, might need to be considered.
- **Esteem issues-** Most in Generation NeXt have, and are being, raised by friendly parents and have been supervised by friendly coaches who might have been focused on and sensitive to helping them develop positive self esteem (even in the face of less than stellar performance)
  - 1010NeXters will need help moving to being rated on performance and outcomes as opposed to attendance or on their intrinsic goodness.
- **Conflict issues-** NeXters might have difficulty with workplace conflict and difficult customers. Again, they might be expected to need more developmental, educational help than earlier generations of workers in human relations, conflict management and social skills.

### **The Great Workplace for Generation NeXt**

While what NeXter’s want and what they need in a great workplace might be different, the following might be considered.

- What they want in a great workplace
  - To have fun in a happening place.
  - To be around nice, affirming people.
  - High salaries and quick promotions.
  - To learn marketable skills.

- Moderate hours.
- To have flexibility in time and appearance.
- To make meaningful decisions that produce results.
- What they need in a great workplace
  - To have meaningful orientation to workplace expectations
  - To be involved in meaningful tasks and to see their personal impact on the big picture.
  - To have increasing levels of responsibility as they demonstrate readiness.
  - To have ongoing skills development for workplace skills and social/ professional behavior.
  - Help increasing attention span, critical thinking and time on task.
  - Meaningful feedback based on clear performance expectations, not based on personality.
  - Rewards tied to tenure and productivity, not just “time on the clock”.

### **Implications summary/ suggestions**

#### **Recruitment**

- Improve assessments of meaningful skills through portfolios, sample projects during interview process.
  - Applicants may need to produce a writing sample, such a letter asking a client for a good time to for a meeting, to assess language skills, business etiquette and style.
- Assess work orientation and understanding of workplace expectations, in the short and long term, during interview process and through references.
- Questions?
  - “What skills do you bring to the organization? What evidence do you have of these skills?”
  - “On a scale from 1 to 10, how hard a worker are you?”
  - “In an eight hour day, how much time would you expect to spend on task?”
  - “On a scale from 1 to 10, how would you rate yourself on finishing tasks?”

#### **Orientation/ socialization**

- Use younger employees to communicate workplace expectations.
- Work to socialize NeXters to a meaningful work ethic. Help workers understand and adapt to work through education before they are hired, during orientation after they start work, and through on-going supervision.
- Help younger workers understand the non-monetary rewards and satisfactions work can offer to increase the intrinsic satisfactions of working, and worker dedication.
- Preach the mission. Help workers see their role and significance in helping the organization reach its’ goals and how the organization reaching its’ goals helps the workers reach their goals.
- Work to see that the valuable knowledge of older workers is effectively transferred before their retirement.
- Develop better links to higher and vocational education to address the pandemic of workplace unreadiness of today’s young people by better linking educational processes and goals to career entry and success.

#### **Supervision and management**

- Assign meaningful work appropriate to the worker’s skill level.
- Supervisors should help workers develop autonomy, problem solving and critical thinking by assigning specific outcome expectations, and letting workers develop processes and methods for reaching those goals.

- Assign desired outcomes, then monitor progress.
- Remain available for questions and supportive of efforts.
- Offer workers increasing flexibility in the workplace and with work tasks, especially in schedules and appearance, when possible and appropriate.
- Give meaningful task and performance based feedback and supervision. Feedback must be based on principle and outcome, not the person.
- Develop meaningful personal mentoring relationships. Recognizing and getting to know each person as a unique individual and developing meaningful interpersonal relationships will always be the best strategy for workplace success.

### **Teambuilding**

- Help younger workers understand when to work independently and autonomously, and when they need to work collaboratively and cooperatively.
- Work to develop meaningful teams and interpersonal relationships in the workplace so younger workers can see how the workplace can appropriately meet other, significant, non-monetary needs like achievement, recognition, satisfaction, engagement and meaning.

### **Technology**

- Maintain technological sophistication for productivity and worker interest.
- All workers will need ongoing help in incorporating technology appropriately into their work.

### **Skills development**

- Help all workers develop appropriate skills and offer meaningful development opportunities.
- Use technology for ongoing training on asynchronous schedules, and in NeXters preferred style.

### **Compensation**

- Tie compensation, benefits and perks to outcomes. Develop reward systems based on outcomes and production, not just clocking in and clocking out.
- Successful task completion and job tenure can be rewarded with added time off, schedule flexibility or increased responsibility.
- Clarify minimal expectations for continued employment and document progress, or lack thereof, toward meeting these expectations during a lengthy probationary period.

### **Promotions**

- Low and decreasing interest in promotions and in accepting more responsibility at work by younger workers presages a leadership crisis, especially among workers of sufficient dedication.
- Work to increase the pool of workers interested in accepting more responsible positions. Help younger workers see the advantages of increasing workplace responsibility and of being promotable and promoted.
- Identify to all workers clear guidelines for acceptable, maintenance levels of workplace performance that will lead to their continued employment, as well as exceptional levels of performance that may lead to their promotion. Task completion may be maintenance level. Critical thinking, anticipation of obstacles, consensus seeking, and creative problem solving may lead to advancement.

## Resources

More information about Generation NeXt is available from Dr. Taylor. His referenced articles are available from the [Resources/ Links](#) section of his web site [www.taylorprograms.com](http://www.taylorprograms.com)

The following resources and references support this handout in both generational and workplace issues. This handout is designed to serve as an adjunct and support to Dr. Taylor's programs. It is not intended as a "stand alone" document and should not be reproduced or distributed without permission.

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