

YOUR MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE:

A Leader's Guide to Leading, Retaining and Optimizing Employee Performance in 2022



THE NEXT GENERATION(S): WHAT'S CHANGING? (1 OF 2)

"There is value in educating ourselves on the realities different generations have faced throughout their careers."

[How to Manage a Multi-Generational Team, Harvard Business Review](#)

First, let's recognize this fact: You probably already have a multigenerational workforce. Unless, of course, everyone in your company is defined strictly by just one of the following generational cohorts:



Silent Generation

Born: 1928-1945
22 million alive today



Baby Boomers

Born: 1946-1964
73 million alive today



Generation X

Born: 1965 - 1976
50 million alive today



Millennials

Born: 1977-1995
83 million alive today



Generation Z

Born: 1996-2015
86 million alive today

(We recognize that generational cutoff dates are debated; they aren't an exact science.)

What is a multigenerational workforce?

It is a corporate environment where multiple population cohorts work together effectively to apply their professional skills. Creating this type of collaboration can be difficult, but it is increasingly critical to achieving high-performing teams.

Learning how to create an environment that capitalizes on the behaviors, habits, and preferences of work colleagues who grew up in a different time from our own experience is hard. We know our values are shaped by the time we grow up in and the experiences we've faced in our lives. Thus, each generational representative that enters the workforce will have different experiences and will have varying needs, wants, and priorities. Our success drivers will be different according to the era we grew up in.

THE NEXT GENERATION(S): WHAT'S CHANGING? (2 OF 2)

Consider that a recent college graduate (Gen Z) may have begun their first job during the global pandemic as a remote employee. Thus, they may value digital communications and a more flexible work environment. However, an employee that lived through the Great Recession of 2008 might place more value on routine, job security, and a nine-to-five, five day a week schedule.

What's even more challenging is the realization that we are stereotyping these generational affectations, so our assumptions might be off base. The trick for employers is not to allow any age or generational assumptions to permeate the workplace.

It's true that assumptions, as well as age gaps, can create miscommunication and lead to stereotypes that break down even the best teams. As the next generation (Gen Z) takes the place of a retiring workforce (baby boomers), they have the opportunity to create what becomes the new normal in your organization. However, the trick is to deliberately shape that normal into a welcoming and inclusive environment for everyone on the team — no matter their age.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE

Today's unique four (or perhaps five) generational workplaces have created some interesting changes that highlight the age differences between our employees.

Your company may experience:

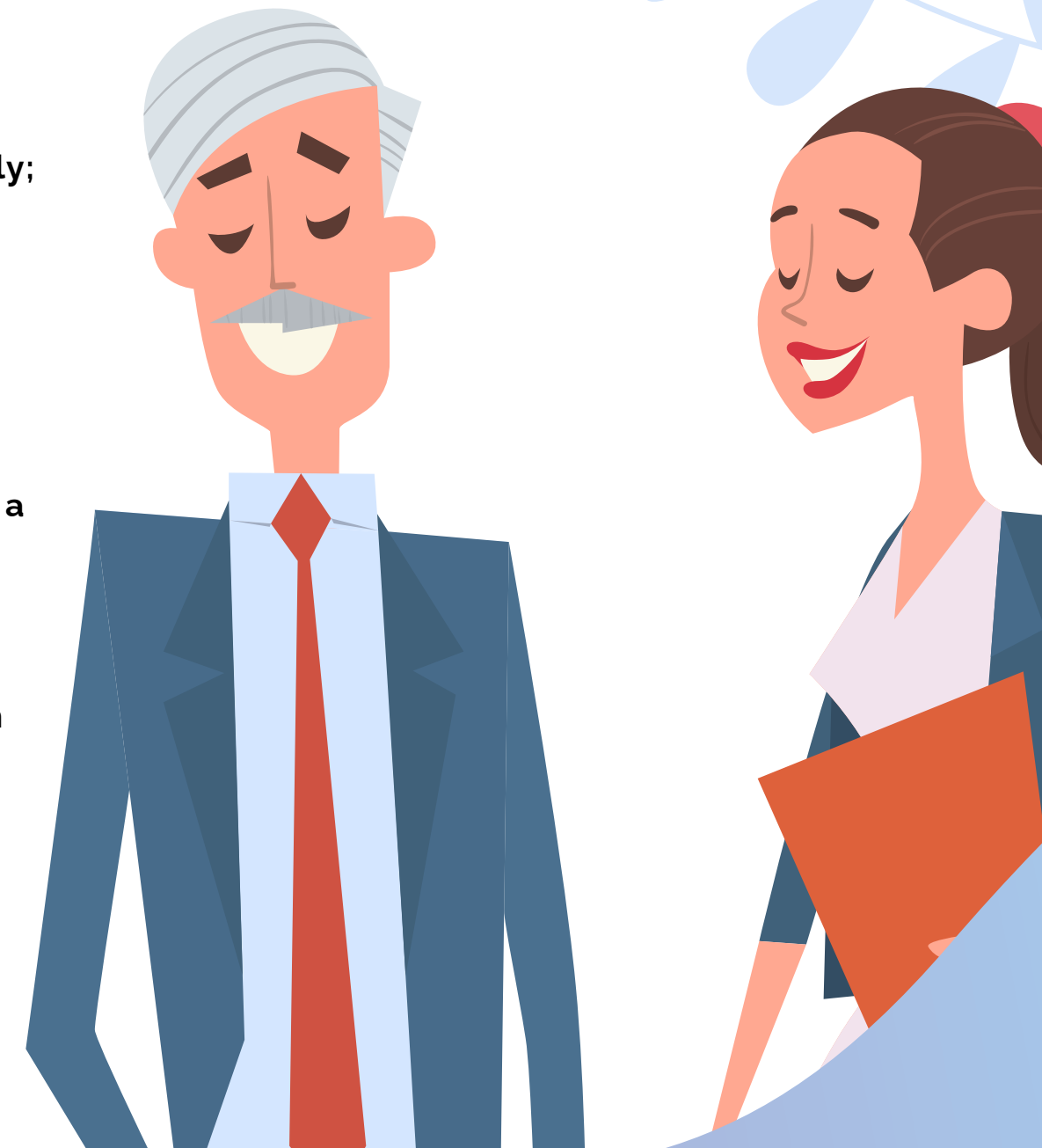
- Generation Z employees who have just entered the workforce while;
- Millennials (Gen Y) are being groomed for management.
- Generation Xers may have assumed some essential leadership roles while simultaneously;
- Boomers are retiring—but many are still in key positions.

Whether your team is experiencing these changes (likely) or not (doubtful), we have data showing some generalizations about the multigenerational workforce you're probably managing. [The data shows:](#)

- By 2025, millennials will become 75% of the workforce.
- Communication styles and career planning differ dramatically among generations— but a commitment to work and vision remains consistent.
- To increase engagement across the generations, employers must communicate more about the organization's mission and less about just the margins.
- Talent and productivity are outpacing seniority and loyalty as the means to “move up” in many organizations.
- As a result, today, [one-third of U.S. employees](#) have a boss who is younger than they are.

Not surprisingly, each generation tends to approach their work environment differently.

On the following pages, we share strategies for getting the most out of each generation in your workplace.



START WITH COMMUNICATION

“It all comes down to listening. HR leaders need to be sensitive to generational differences, but the greatest sensitivity comes with dealing with each and every employee as an individual and as a vital member of the team.”

5 Ways to improve Intergenerational Integrations in the Workplace, Inc.

It shouldn't come as a surprise that communication is the key to inspiring performance in your multigenerational workforce. The best managers already understand that you must manage to the strengths of the individual; you cannot make an employee productive, but you can create an environment that facilitates high production. The key to this environment is talking clearly to one another about how we like to communicate and be managed.

For example, we know that Gen Z finds emails and texting more efficient over phone calls. However, while baby boomers spend a lot of time on their smartphones, they still believe face-to-face interactions are more beneficial in a work setting.

In a multigenerational workforce, managers must facilitate clearer communication between people. This requires some flexibility and an understanding between leaders and their teams about how to interact. To do this, we should lay a baseline understanding of these populations, their experiences, general preferences, and work styles.

Let's start with the silent generation, whose population will make up the oldest employees in your workplace today.



SILENT GENERATION BEST PRACTICES

Born between 1928 and 1945, the silent generation today makes up only about [3% of today's workforce](#). This population cohort is the last of the workplace traditionalists, having grown up at a time that did not move at digital speeds. Many of these workers are preparing for their final move into retirement, where they can focus more on hobbies or family life.

This generation experienced a great deal of hardship, growing up during the Great Depression and the Second World War. As a result, this is a very resilient and resourceful population with a strong work ethic. Financial security is critical to the silent generation, and they work hard to maintain that stability and centeredness.

In fact, work is a central part of what defines the individuals within this generation. The silent generation finds work fulfilling and meaningful. Most are motivated to provide their families with opportunities that their parents never had.

This population grew up at a time where traditional corporate structures were the norm, and the term “disruptor” wasn't a catchphrase in business. The silent generation has adapted to modern technology in part because they normalized as part of these corporate cultures.

Leverage the silent generations' skills by:

- Placing them in leadership roles where their patience and perseverance can shine.
- Creating collaborative work teams that are motivated to reach goals.

- Allowing the space to accomplish tasks on their own.
- Reaching out to these employees to offer upskilling.
- Building office spaces that seem more traditional, minus the open floor plans and collaborative work environments of modern workspaces.
- Providing them with a level of job security that will make them grateful for the opportunity.

The silent generation is generally more conservative and feels quite comfortable in traditional work environments. This includes hierarchical structures in the corporate environments of large, dispersed enterprise organizations. These employees are quite loyal and are the exact opposite of the latest trends that show employees stick around on average for two years—or less.



BOOMER BEST PRACTICES

Born between 1946 and 1964, the Baby Boomers, or “Boomers,” value loyalty, recognition, and top-down management. Baby boomers typically care about structure, processes, and hard work. They tend to log long hours in the office and prefer face-to-face communication over using technology to keep in touch. The recent recession drained many pensions and retirement plans among this group, keeping many of them in the workforce longer.

Baby boomers' lives were shaped by key political and cultural events like the civil rights movement, Vietnam, the cold war, and the 1960s counterculture. Perhaps ironically, they are also the parents of millennials and watched the birth and growth of the internet. While boomers are retiring every day, they have had a significant impact on the world of work.

Get the most out of boomers by:

- Providing clear rules and expectations.
- Giving them the job security they crave.
- Allowing autonomy in goal development.
- Harnessing their competitive natures.
- Encouraging them to develop methodical workflows and processes.
- Fostering face-to-face meetings and in-person collaboration.
- Offering workers with seniority the chance to mentor younger peers.

Baby boomers can serve as a valuable resource for companies because they bring decades of experience to your teams. If they've been in your organization long-term, they are often the keepers of historical data that hasn't been digitized yet.



GEN X BEST PRACTICES

Generation X totals about 29% of the U.S. workforce. Born between 1965 and 1976, they tend to be entrepreneurial, independent, and thrive on direct, constructive feedback. Think about it: Gen-Xers were the first generation to experience both parents working. They were called the latch key generation because many had keys to their houses because they got home from school before their parents got home from work. This generation values their independence and a flexible work environment.

Gen-Xers were also shaped by rapid technology iterations. This generation saw the first personal desktop computers evolve into the handheld smartphones we have today. This population is also typically more educated than prior generations. Generation X cares about fiscal responsibility and self-reliance, with a good dash of work ethic thrown in. This generation is flexible where technology is concerned and is comfortable both with face-to-face interactions and online.

Gen X does best in an environment where their creativity and autonomy are allowed to shine. One company [put it this way](#), "If you want a problem to be solved and something done, give it to a Gen-Xer, as they've been self-managing from a young age."

Get the most out of Generation X by:

- Encouraging them to continue embracing new technologies.
- Giving them psychological and physical space to manage their work.
- Offering them greater autonomy for completing the responsibilities of their job.
- Staying out of their way and allowing them to coach and mentor others.
- Breaking down "feedback sessions" into regular events rather than a single annual review.
- Providing schedule flexibility that helps them manage their family lives.
- Structuring departments to allow for pursuit of individual or small-group projects that fit into the business's overall goals.

This population originated the idea of work-life balance but don't get the idea they're taking it easy on either side of that fence. Generation X both works hard and plays hard, making them a valuable part of any team.



MILLENNIAL BEST PRACTICES

Millennials, also known as “Generation Y,” were born between 1977 and 1995. They’re the youngest generation in the U.S. workforce. With a worldview shaped by mobile technology and recent recessions, they value flexibility and productivity highly, and they expect to make many job changes in their careers. However, they also had helicopter parents, so they are used to lots of feedback, recognition, and the belief that they can still change the world.

Don’t discount the importance of the millennial generation experiencing the peak of an economic recession. These young adults have had it tougher than their parents did; [Pew Research points out](#), “it’s harder for (these) young adults to reach many of the basic financial goals their parents may have taken for granted.”

To attract more millennial talent, make sure your application process is mobile-first. To keep new millennial employees engaged, create new opportunities for upskilling to address their strong interest in progressing their careers.

Get the most out of millennials by:

- Shortening the time between their work and manager feedback.
- Creating transparency and genuine manager to employee interactions.
- Providing constant, real-time coaching.
- Offering plenty of opportunities to give back to the community.
- Provide information in shorter increments and leverage video technology.
- Sharing with millennials how much their work matters to the organizational mission.
- Using in-person meetings to encourage contributions and suggestions.
- “Decentralizing” work by focusing on productivity, rather than hours logged in the office.

Unlike baby boomers and Gen-Xers, millennials need constant stimulation, so they can be tough to manage. But they are tech gurus and exceptionally creative in their approach to using these tools to work smarter. Every team needs a few millennials to help find new workarounds to improve productivity.



GENERATION Z: WHO'S NEXT?

“Generation Z,” born around the start of the new millennium, is just beginning to complete schooling and consider entering the workforce. Although few are actually working, forward-thinking companies are starting to include these workers in their strategic planning.

What's particularly interesting for Gen Z is its place alongside the technology boom. Think about the impact of digital technology on all of these generational cohorts for a second. Baby boomers watched TV expand. Gen X saw the beginning of the PC revolution. Millennials experienced the internet moving from an idea to shaping everything we do.

For Gen Z, all of these trends were a part of their lives from birth. True digital natives, they've grown up with social media, our ever-connected cell phone, on-demand entertainment, and the immediacy of a Wi-Fi connection. Every other generation had to adapt to these things. Gen Z grew up in it. The truth is, we're still learning the impact of our digitization on this new generational cohort.

Demographers predict that Generation Z:

- Will be even more flexible in communication styles than its predecessors due to its lifetime of comfort with cell phones, the web, and other devices.
- Are even more concerned about issues of sustainability than previous generations.
- Are more focused on student debt than any other generation.
- Emphasize work ethic, etiquette, resilience, fortitude, and self-responsibility.

To attract and manage Gen Z, employers should work on building a strong omnichannel brand presence across the digital space. Pay particular attention to employee review boards and social media to attract Gen Z. When hired, this population may prioritize salary over benefits—who needs health insurance when you're going to live forever?

Get the most out of Generation Z by:

- Creating a highly collaborative work environment.
- Offering flexible work hours.
- Emphasizing diversity and mission.
- Authentically committing to sustainability and equality goals.
- Providing educational and growth opportunities.
- Creating mentoring and coaching throughout their tenure.

While Gen Z is still making its way into the workforce, global consultancy Ernst & Young says,

“They seem eager to take the reins and lead the transformational reforms necessary to achieve inclusiveness, equal economic opportunity and social justice.”



CROSS-GENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS: THE BIG ISSUES (1 OF 2)

"Juggling the many generations of today's workforce is one of the top challenges HR pros must tackle in pursuit of workplace harmony."

5 Ways to improve Intergenerational Integrations in the Workplace, Inc.

In many workplaces, generations of workers feel like cultures colliding. Here are the biggest “cross-cultural” challenges among the generations at work:

- **Communication.** The problem is that 81% of today's workers report the primary difference between generations is how they communicate. For example, boomers value formality and face-to-face discussions; Gen-Xers just want to “get it done”; Millennials prefer text-based communication and working remotely. Gen Z wants a lot of feedback, but they don't want it in person; they want an instant message.
- **Cultural expectations.** It's not uncommon for baby boomers to measure their work in hours logged, gen-Xers in projects completed, and millennials in feedback obtained. Gen Y is focused on learning work skills in addition to completing tasks.
- **Work-life balance.** Boomers grew up hearing that advancement required sacrifice, but Gen-Xers and millennials who watched both parents work – and, in some cases, lose everything in the 2008 recession anyway – demand a healthier work-life balance.
- **Negative stereotypes.** The media has done much to drive wedges among generations, painting younger workers as tech-obsessed and older ones as destroying the “American dream” after seizing it for themselves. Click-bait headlines focus on sensationalist stereotypes like Gen Z is disloyal or millennials are entitled. Baby boomers are change reluctant, and Gen X are bleak. Don't even get us started on assumptions about the silent generation, whose traditional values suggest a time long past.

As a result of these harmful stereotypes, older workers may feel their younger team members are lazy. You've also probably heard that the younger generations are job jumpers, and the boomers need some serious reskilling if they want to stay competitive. Millennials are spoiled and received too many participation trophies to ever make it in the real world.



CROSS-GENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS: THE BIG ISSUES (2 OF 2)

Even though we've listed generational characteristics as generalities, avoid stereotyping whenever possible. [One study stated](#), "employees threatened by age-based stereotypes concerning work performance are less able to commit to their current job, less oriented toward long-term professional goals, and are ultimately less adjusted psychologically."

Each generation is different. Each has its own set of likes and dislikes. Managers and executives must learn to revise their leadership style to elicit a better response from their teams by focusing on the individuals within them.

Since many employees leave when the relationship with their manager fails, it's critical for employee retention that we get this right. Don't expect managers to suddenly understand how to do this well, either. Organizations must provide training and coaching to their leadership teams to help them maintain the rigor it takes to manage to a multigenerational standard. Having employee-wide training can tighten bonds and bridge generational gaps.

At the same time, management must lead by example. Diversity training must encompass ageism and hidden biases while fostering acceptance between employees. Also, recognize that not all conflict is generational and may stem from other types of conflict. No matter the issue, the job of leadership is to find and reinforce common ground.

Still, the depth of the differences between these populations can feel like chasms. For example, if millennials and baby boomers are paired on teams, it's important to note that they generally have vastly different attitudes toward the work world. Boomers look for stability and a regular paycheck. Millennials are comfortable in the gig economy and care more about work/life balance. There is a real transition right now between boomers who formerly made up the lion's share of the workforce and have now been edged out millennials. This means boomers will have to become comfortable with coworkers and managers who are the age of their children or even grandchildren.

What companies should not do is take the approach that "they should adapt to us." That cuts out the entire benefit of a multigenerational approach. Multigenerational is just another form of diversity in an organization. True inclusion sees the benefits of the approach of all of these generational attributes.



CROSS-GENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS: TEAM BUILDING AND MENTORING

As companies plan for the future, they must address the damage that ageism can cause and actively cross-generational gaps that can potentially widen to Grand Canyon size. But when faced with so many cross-generational challenges, how can a company cope? Try these tools and tactics:

- **Provide digital training.** We are in the process of digitally transforming as we move to permanent remote or hybrid work models. However, each generation and each person will react to the challenges of the new normal in different ways. The key for companies is to avoid assumptions and make digital training accessible for anyone that needs it. When you're handling a multigenerational workforce, training should never be "one size fits all."
- **Encourage team building on every level.** Leverage Gen-Xers' love of entrepreneurial projects by pairing them with idealistic millennials or strategic boomers. Foster both individual connections and company-wide team-building projects, from in-person meetings to wikis.
- **Create many points of contact.** Younger workers, in particular, want more feedback and more meaningful projects. Teach older employees to delegate and to provide this feedback.
- **Skip stereotypes.** Managers of any age who maintain an "open-door" policy and listen carefully in the face of conflict are better equipped to defuse inter-generational tensions and build consensus. Also, address ageism as part of your diversity and inclusion practices to create a company where assumptions really don't fly. Today, only about 8% of companies add age into their D&I

efforts. This isn't just about hiring "old people," either. Younger employees may be passed up for leadership positions due to the same types of ageist assumptions that hold an older but highly skilled workforce back.

- **Encourage mentoring – in both directions.** Mentors have much to teach mentees about company culture and efficiency; mentees can provide innovative views and point out opportunities to mentors. Encourage relationships based on reciprocity, not just instruction.
- **Listen to your teams.** Respond to what they need. Take care of your workforce by increasing work flexibility and work/life balance. Create a work environment where everyone of every age becomes the best and most productive worker possible.

Your goal in all of these initiatives is to create a supportive work environment for every employee. It is that human connection that brings people together in teams and helps you retain employees for the long haul.

"This is a reminder that generations themselves are inherently diverse and complex groups, not simple caricatures."

Defining Generations: Where Millennials End and Generation Z Begins, Pew Research Center

BUSINESS BENEFITS OF OPTIMIZING THE PERFORMANCE OF AN AGE-DIVERSE WORKFORCE (1 OF 2)

“HR practices that improve the age diversity climate within an organization have the potential to further improve performance and lower employee turnover.”

Leveraging the Value of an Age-Diverse Workforce, SHRM Foundation Executive Briefing

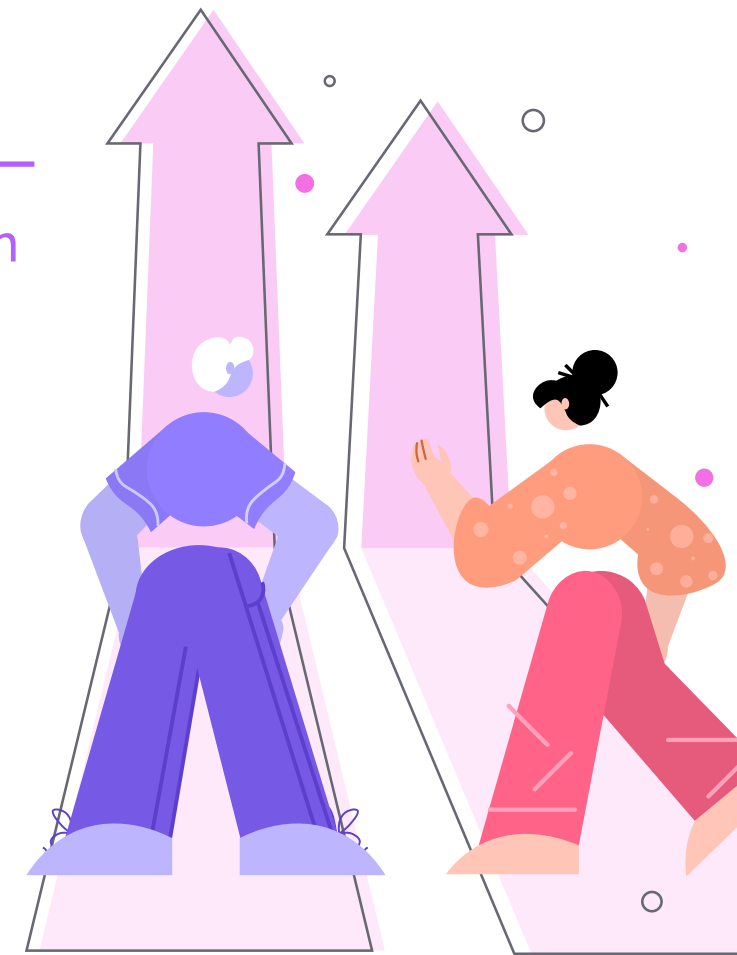
Now we come to the real core of this conversation:

Why are we doing this? What benefits could creating a truly high-functioning multigenerational workforce have on your business?

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) calls it “a major opportunity waiting for employers.” They remind us that the research demonstrates age diversity in the workplace improves organizational performance. Studies also show that worker productivity is high when mixed-age groups collaborate.

Other data shows us that the benefits of an optimized multigenerational workforce include:

- **Increased employee engagement**, which in turn improves the performance of the entire team.
- **Higher employee satisfaction**, which helps with retention. SHRM points out that workers over 55 are generally more loyal and stay longer than their younger counterparts. Gallup research shows that employers with a diverse workforce have a 22% lower turnover rate than those that don't.
- **Stronger brand**. This is especially true if you have a multigenerational customer base, too. This improves your company's brand image and reputation while increasing your understanding of your customers.
- **Expanded talent pool**. You have a wider group of candidates to review and consider. This can help with your time-to-hire numbers and improve your bottom line.



An illustration featuring three business professionals—two men and one woman—working together to push a large, thick orange arrow that points diagonally upwards and to the right. The woman on the left is in a crouched position, pushing against the base of the arrow. The man in the middle is also crouched, reaching up to support the arrow. The man on the right is standing and pushing against the upper part of the arrow. All three individuals have determined expressions. The background is a solid light gray, and the overall style is clean and modern.

- Having a multigenerational workforce gives your organization the perspective it needs to move forward in a volatile marketplace. Varying perspectives allow your teams to solve previously unsolvable problems. This can lead to a true and long-lasting competitive advantage for your organization.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR YOUR MULTIGENERATIONAL WORKFORCE?

"It's critical for modern HR leaders to remember that generational trends and stereotypes may not reflect the whole truth, but can still be helpful to keep the workplace inclusive of all age groups."

Understanding Baby Boomers at Work, Forbes

Your multigenerational workforce will be here for a while. Most predictions indicate this issue will be top of mind for HR teams in the coming years. Interestingly, your workforce is highly motivated to work within this kind of environment.

[A recent study from AARP](#) showed seven in 10 employees on your team enjoy working with a generation outside their own. These employees say older and younger workers collaborating can have a positive impact on your business. The study showed:

- 77% of study participants said older workers bring teachable skills for younger generations.
- 69% say the collaboration between younger and older workers brings real productivity to their work environment.

The study highlighted that mentorship opportunities facilitate better communication between multigenerational work teams. More than 83% of participants said that mentorships provided real value for their careers, whether they were mentor or mentee.



NEED HELP RECRUITING TALENT?

“Age diversity in the workplace brings about different experiences, expectations, styles, and perspectives. All of these differences make up the foundation of innovation when it is addressed and managed the right way.”

11 Benefits of Gender and Age Diversity in the Workplace, Future of Working

Connect with your staffing partner for access to a diverse pool of candidates who:

- Want to be part of a team.
- Value meaningful work.
- Strive to create a better world.

No matter your hiring needs, there is a staffing firm standing by to help diversify your workforce. Companies leverage these firms to decrease their time to hire. Partnering with a staffing agency frees up your team to manage and lead your multigenerational workforce. Together, these HR experts can help your business stay on top.

