

## From Vets to the Net: Creating High-Performing and Harmonious Cross-Generational Work Teams

### Inspection and Evaluation Committee Training Conference

June 16, 2009

Dana Brower, Ph.D.  
Partner, The Halcyon Group

## BridgeWorks National Generations Survey

- ◆ To the statement, "A person should build a lifetime career with one company, 29% of Traditionalists agree, compared to just 10% of Xers
- ◆ One-third of respondents said they were often offended by someone from another generation at work
- ◆ 24% of Traditionalists, 30% of Baby Boomers, and more than 60% of Xers say their generation is not viewed positively by other generations

## Making the Case:

"We use the term generational cohort to refer to groups of people who came of age at roughly the same time. Each generational cohort is deeply influenced by the significant events that were happening during its key coming-of-age years. External events such as economic changes, war, political ideologies, technological innovations, and social upheavals act to redefine social values, attitudes, and preferences. And these cohort effects stay with the members of that cohort and influence their behavior throughout the rest of their lives."

– Meredith, Schewe, Hiam and Karlovich  
*Managing by Defining Moments*

## Why Do Generations Matter?

- ◆ **Unique Point in History**
  - ❖ flatter organizations
  - ❖ shifting career patterns
  - ❖ U.S. "longevity revolution"
- ◆ **Leadership & Values**
  - ❖ understand others' values, don't assume
- ◆ **The "Three Rs" & Succession Planning**

## Cautions & Caveats

Generational cohorts share some unique characteristics. Still...

- ◆ Broad brush stroke
- ◆ Generalizations not stereotypes ("critical mass")
- ◆ One addition to your Leadership Tool Kit
- ◆ Life stage *versus* cohort effect

## Four Generations now present in the Workplace:

<b>Traditionalists</b> (1922 - 1943/46)	<b>Baby Boomers</b> (1943/46 - 1960/64)
<b>Generation X</b> (1960/64 - 1978/82)	<b>Millennials</b> (1978/82-2000)

## The Traditionalists: Personality

- ◆ Disciplined
- ◆ Dutiful
- ◆ Conformist
- ◆ Loyal
- ◆ Conservative
- ◆ Patriotic

## The Traditionalists: Who Are They?

- ◆ Born 1922-1946
- ◆ 52 Million People
- ◆ 5-6% of the workforce (6-7% federal gov't)
- ◆ close to 2/3 of the nation's financial assets, as of 2001
- ◆ Veterans, Matures, "the Silents"
- ◆ John, William, George, Joseph, Mary, Dorothy, Ruth, Betty, and Helen

## The Traditionalists: Critical Events

- ◆ Depression
- ◆ New Deal
- ◆ World War II
- ◆ Korean War

## The Traditionalists: Values & The Workplace

- ◆ Mission
- ◆ Structure and consistency
- ◆ Strong work ethic
- ◆ Loyalty
- ◆ Patience
- ◆ Respect



## The Traditionalists: Strengths and Challenges

- ◆ Disciplined
- ◆ Experienced
- ◆ Committed
  
- ◆ Change
- ◆ Technology
- ◆ "Seniority"

## The Boomers: Personality

- ◆ Optimistic
- ◆ Achievement-oriented
- ◆ Self Importance
- ◆ Individuality
- ◆ Consumption
- ◆ Cool

## The Baby Boomers: Who Are They?

- ◆ Born 1946-1964
- ◆ 75 million people
- ◆ 40% of the workforce (54-55% fed gov't)
- ◆ A new 50 year old every 7 seconds
- ◆ James, William, Robert, David, Michael, Linda, Barbara, Patricia, Debra

## The Boomers: Cultural Factors

- ◆ Self Awareness
- ◆ Postwar Prosperity
- ◆ Indulgence & Expectations
- ◆ Television & Marketing
- ◆ Activism
- ◆ Sexual Revolution



## The Boomers & Government Service



## The Boomers: Values & The Workplace

- ◆ Hard work  
-- more recent issues of balance
- ◆ Making a difference
- ◆ Rewards and recognition
- ◆ Individual growth
- ◆ Teams
- ◆ Competition

## The Boomers: Strengths and Challenges

- ◆ Residual Idealism
- ◆ "Can Do" Attitude
- ◆ Seek to Please
  
- ◆ Judgmental
- ◆ Control/Competition
- ◆ Vulnerability

## The Boomers & Retirement

- ◆ 76% say they'll work during their retirement years (post 64)
- ◆ most common choice for ideal work arrangement is "bridging" (42%), followed by PT (16%), self-employment (13%) and FT (6%)
- ◆ 67% say that continued mental challenge & stimulation will keep them working. 37% indicate continued earnings are important

2005 -- "The New Retirement Survey"  
conducted for Merrill Lynch

## Generation X: Personality

- ◆ Independent
- ◆ Skeptical
- ◆ "Disloyal"
- ◆ Technologically Savvy
- ◆ Institutional Malaise

## Generation X: Who Are They?

- ◆ Born 1964-1979
- ◆ 33-35% of the workforce (29-30% fed gov't)
- ◆ 46 million strong
- ◆ David, Brian, Steven, Mark, Melissa, Jennifer, Kimberly, Lisa
- ◆ 13th Generation, *Baby Busters*, Tuned Out Generation, *Doofus Generation*, Slacker Generation, *Generation without a Soul*

## Generation X: Cultural Factors

- ◆ Economic Recession
- ◆ Rise of the PC Industry
- ◆ Divorce & Two-Income Families
- ◆ Latch-Key Kids
- ◆ AIDS



## Generation X & Government Service



"The best minds are not in government. If any were, business would hire them away."

"Government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem."

"Government is like a baby. An alimentary canal with a big appetite at one end and no sense of responsibility at the other."

## Generation X: Values & the Workplace

- ◆ Autonomy
- ◆ Diversity
- ◆ Informality (fun)
- ◆ Competence
- ◆ Technology
- ◆ Ongoing learning & development
- ◆ Feedback
- ◆ Balance



## Generation X: Strengths and Challenges

- ◆ Independent
- ◆ Results-oriented
- ◆ Creative and adaptable
- ◆ People & political savvy
- ◆ Impatient
- ◆ Cynical

## The Millennials: Personality

- ◆ Optimistic
- ◆ Ordered
- ◆ Respectful
- ◆ Open-minded; nonjudgmental
- ◆ Technologically supreme

## The Millennials: Who Are They?

- ◆ Born 1980 - 2000
- ◆ 70 million people
- ◆ 15-20% of the workforce (9% fed gov't)
- ◆ Echo Boomers, Internet Generation, Netsters, Generation Y
- ◆ Jessica, Nicole, Kaitlyn, Amanda, Sarah, Jacob, Nicholas, Jason, Joshua, Tyler

## The Millennials: Cultural Factors

- ◆ Information Revolution
  - ❖ "Digital natives"
- ◆ Peace
- ◆ Prosperity/Opportunity
- ◆ Globalization
- ◆ Diversity
- ◆ Structure
  - ❖ "Helicopter parents"



## The Millennials: Values & the Workplace

- ◆ Achievement
- ◆ Collaboration
- ◆ Mission
- ◆ New "Platinum" Rule
  - ❖ Treating others like the *others* would like to be treated
- ◆ Respect

## The Millennials: Strengths and Challenges

- ◆ Multi-taskers
- ◆ Global mindset
- ◆ Team players
  
- ◆ Supervision curve
- ◆ Long-term thinking
- ◆ Lofty expectations

## For Millennials, Public Service ≠ Government Service

### "The Class of 9/11" Report

- ◆ only 19% of this year's graduating (college) seniors described government work as "completely" a form of public service
- ◆ down from 28% who did so in the Class of 2003
- ◆ 30% perceive non-profit work as public service
- ◆ 81% say volunteering is public service

Partnership for Public Service / [ourpublicservice.org](http://ourpublicservice.org)

## Millennials & Government Service

When it comes to federal government service, interest is high, but knowledge is low.

### "Back to School" report by PPS:

- ◆ 42% of college juniors and seniors indicate that they're extremely or very interested in federal government jobs.
- ◆ Only 13% say they feel extremely knowledgeable about federal opportunities.

Partnership for Public Service / ourpublicservice.org

## 9/11 & Iraq

- ◆ 9/11 woke up the class of 2005. They became even more interested in news and the world around them. About half said the terrorist attacks made them more patriotic, and *two-thirds said the attacks gave them a more positive view of the U.S. government.*
- ◆ But the respondents indicated the invasion of Iraq dampened the enthusiasm for the government that the terrorist attacks brought out. *Three-quarters said the invasion of Iraq gave them a more negative view of the government.*

Partnership for Public Service, May 2005



## Working with Traditionalists:

- ◆ Demonstrate respect for them, their experience
- ◆ Remember their values: structure, consistency, formality, mission
- ◆ Human interface
- ◆ Engage them as mentors
- ◆ Be patient w/technology & structure training carefully
- ◆ Know and acknowledge history and background of organization, projects, and efforts
- ◆ AVOID – slang, lack of respect for tradition and experience, being too informal

## Working with Boomers:

- ◆ Demonstrate respect for them, their experience
- ◆ Work to build rapport
- ◆ Remember their values: optimism, making and difference, growth/learning, fairness
- ◆ Work to build consensus; gather their input
- ◆ Engage them as mentors
- ◆ Open communication
- ◆ Opportunity to work in teams
- ◆ AVOID – brusqueness/rudeness, a "tow the line" mentality, lack of respect for experience

## Working with Xers:

- ◆ Be efficient and direct
- ◆ Provide open information and communication
- ◆ Remember their values: competence, results, challenge, technology
- ◆ Allow autonomy
- ◆ Give FAST Feedback [*Frequent, accurate, specific, timely*]
- ◆ Flexibility and a more informal (and fun!) work place and work culture
- ◆ AVOID: wasting their time, schmoozing and unnecessary complexity

## Working with Millennials:

- ◆ Demonstrate genuine peer consideration, right away
- ◆ Seek and consider their input
- ◆ Remember their values: technology, achievement, immediacy, discovery, positive work environment
- ◆ Help them create appropriate work structure and processes
- ◆ Frequent feedback (and remember to affirm)
- ◆ Team orientation

## Working with Millennials (continued.):

- ◆ Regularly affirm how their individual work impacts mission
- ◆ Flexible and more informal (fun!) workplace
- ◆ AVOID: talking down and/or being dismissive, cynicism, rigidity

## Traditionalists – Additional Communication Tips:

- ◆ Request a time to talk, rather than “stopping by”
- ◆ Be polite and respectful, but...
- ◆ Get to the point quickly
- ◆ Prefer more formal written communication (correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation)
- ◆ May prefer talking -- in person or via phone -- over using technology (text, email, etc.)

## Baby Boomers – Additional Communication Tips:

- ◆ Demonstrate active listening skills. Seek to understand before being understood.
- ◆ Relate to them. Demonstrate genuine personal interest – Boomers value and rely on relationships
- ◆ No surprises. Be honest, and keep communication lines open.
- ◆ Boomers appreciate and expect good written and verbal communication skills.

## Tips for Building High-Performing, Harmonious Cross-Generational Teams:

- ◆ clearly defined, shared goals (ownership)
- ◆ get to know team members – what are their strengths, backgrounds, work and personality styles, etc.?
- ◆ create “Ground Rules” for working together as a team
- ◆ talk about “respect,” communication, and general work preferences
- ◆ leverage unique (generational and individual) strengths and skills
- ◆ utilize appropriate training, shared learning, mentoring, and peer teaching
- ◆ provide meaningful, constructive feedback to one another

## Attributes of a GREAT Cross-Generational Supervisor:

- ◆ Flexible, adaptable, open minded
- ◆ Respectful, affirming, interested, patient
- ◆ Diversity-oriented, unbiased
- ◆ Innovative and creative
- ◆ Desire and willingness to communicate (excellent communication skills)
- ◆ Keeps the focus on the work (goals)
- ◆ *Regularly* acknowledges and shows appreciation for employees’ contributions

## Attributes of a GREAT Cross-Generational Supervisor (continued):

- ◆ Develops relationships with his/her employees
- ◆ Treats employees equitably, not equally
- ◆ Sensitive to different needs
- ◆ Tech capable and a tech advocate
- ◆ Provides career management for all
- ◆ Creates and facilitates development opportunities in line with employees' interests
- ◆ Provides feedback in accordance with employee preferences (style, method, and frequency)
- ◆ Recognizes and leverages generational strengths

## Communicating with the Generations:

- ◆ Communication should travel "up," not simply down the chain of command
- ◆ Recognize preferences and comfort levels with communications and communications technologies
- ◆ Power and potential of the "informal" conversation
- ◆ Younger generations prefer more informal and more open communication

## Communicating with the Generations: FEEDBACK

- ◆ *More frequent feedback than annual P.A.s*
- ◆ Traditionalists: *instructive* feedback, preferably from a supervisor
- ◆ Boomers: *judicious* feedback, i.e. coaching approach, asking questions
- ◆ Xers: more *frequent* and *direct* feedback (FAST)
- ◆ Millennials: likely more frequent feedback, also positive reinforcement

## "Working/Managing Up"

- ◆ Respect & incorporate colleagues' experience
- ◆ Be patient (technology & change)
- ◆ Discuss expectations & find middle ground
  - ◆ Including your own career expectations/aspirations
- ◆ Stress the value of learning -- to your organization & to meeting challenges
- ◆ Be a team player
- ◆ Respectfully call out patronizing when it happens