

### Extension and the Multigenerational Workplace

Today for the first time in history there are four generations working side by side, each with its own values, goals and communication styles. Each generation brings with it their own set of expectations and hopes as they work and serve the people of Utah. In each generation there is an opportunity to learn new perspectives and get fresh new ideas on how to solve the perplexing problems of our time. To be an effective Extension workforce we must understand one another and the diversity each generation brings to the table. The common denominator among all generations is the need to collaborate. Gaining an understanding of the multigenerational workplace will help us to be more effective in developing meaningful programs, managing people and resources and responding to the needs of Utah communities.

Extension demographics in 2011 help us to understand the workforce we are a part of. The Matures are part of the Traditional generation born between 1922-1946. Today there is 4 % [6 persons] still in the Extension workforce, although many are part-timers. This generation is also known as the veterans, seniors, traditionalists and silent generation. This generation is motivated by the message that their experience is respected; that it is important for the rest of us to hear what has, and hasn't, worked in the past; and that perseverance is valued and will be rewarded. The Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964 make up 59% [77 persons] of the Extension workforce. They are also known as the Boomers. The message that motivates this generation is that they are important to our success; their unique contribution will be recognized and rewarded and that their vision of the projects worked on is critical. The Generation X'ers born between 1964 and 1980 make up 27% [33 persons] of the Extension workforce. They are also known as the X'ers, Baby Busters, and Post-Boomers. Messages which motivate this generation include "doing it your way"; remembering they have the newest technology; there aren't a lot of rules in the organization; and that the organization is not corporate oriented. The Millenials born between 1980 and 2000 make up 10% [13 persons] of the Extension workforce today. They are also known as Generation Y, Nexters, Nintendo Generation, and Internet Generation. This generation is motivated by messages that include; equal opportunities in the organization is critical; mentors are available and are generally in their sixties; that they are making a positive difference in the organization; that they handled the situation/job well and that embracing diversity and tolerance is important.

As an added resource to this discussion consider viewing the PowerPoint Presentation – *Tools for Understanding the Extension Multigenerational Workplace*, in preparation for the discussion or as a training aid with the discussion.



to not "rock the boat".

**Ask: As we attempt to understand the Traditional –Matures generation, what are some additional characteristics and issues that are critical to this workplace generation?**

Listen for suggestions that may include the following:

1. Train these persons one on one. Give them the big picture
2. Ask for their opinion. They may have a much better solution but until you ask they will keep it to themselves so as

*Adapted from*

3. Tell them their experiences are highly valued.
4. They love to hear the words “please” and “thank you”. They appreciate formability and order.
5. They want the organization to hear about and benefit from their years of experience and the rich history it brings to the table.
6. Believe that they have “been there” and “done that.”
7. Their general views of life are grounded in the “Great depression”, The New Deal, WWII and Korean War and the Golden Age of Radio.
8. They don’t want to be stereotyped as technophobes.




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**Ask: As we attempt to understand the Baby Boomer generation, what are some additional characteristics and issues that are critical to this workplace generation?**

Listen for suggestions that may include the following:

1. Challenge them to create change (think of the 60’s and 70’s; Baby Boomers forced great legal and social changes – civil rights laws were enacted.)
2. They enjoy public recognition and hope for such recognition and reward.

3. They want to contribute to the greater good. They want to show their vision for the projects worked on.
4. They like to show that they can make a difference.
5. They are service driven and dedicated.
6. They pride themselves in “going the extra mile.”
7. They are good team players.
8. Often they are uncomfortable with conflict. They like to put process ahead of results.
9. They are generally sensitive to feedback and are often judgmental of those who see things differently.




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**Ask: As we attempt to understand the Gen X generation, what are some additional characteristics and issues that are critical to this workplace generation?**

Listen for suggestions that may include the following:

1. Change represents opportunity to them.
2. They are a strong believer in merit not traditions or years of service.
3. They are independent workers and learners (if their ideas to do a job better and faster won’t work, be prepared to

explain why.)

4. They think globally, are adaptable/flexible.
5. Techno-literacy is critical to understanding their view of the world. Keep training materials brief – bullets/checklists.
6. Generally informal, independent and love having fun.
7. They value diversity, balance in life and personal development.
8. Not intimidated by authority.
9. May be given to cynicism, poor people skills, inexperience and impatience.

*Adapted from*



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**Ask: As we attempt to understand the Millennial generation, what are some additional characteristics and issues that are critical to this workplace generation?**

Listen for suggestions that may include the following:

1. Be clear about what rules are important and why. Equal opportunity is important to them. They are loyal.
2. They like to identify which rules they can bend. Optimism is tempered with realism.
3. They believe it is important to have some fun in the workplace.
4. Like frequent rewards (think video games, where points add up quickly)
5. Most tolerant and embracing of diversity. They generally are tolerant and optimistic.
6. Clearly communicate expectations.
7. Like working in large teams with strong leaders.
8. They are technologically savvy.
9. Customer service levels are generally low; need for supervision and structure.



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It is important that as Extension professionals we involve, recognize and acknowledge each generation remembering that each generation brings to the table many positive assets. As we learn to work effectively together not only with colleagues but with the clientele we serve, we must develop effective ways to communicate with one another. We can do this by applying the ABC approach. That is A – accommodate difference in views; B- Be flexible and C- Create an atmosphere of trust.

The Extension organization will be enriched as we learn to accommodate the differences brought through intergenerational diversity. Effective Extension leaders understand and appreciate the differences brought by the four generations in the workplace and recognize and reward, in ways appropriate to the generationally diverse needs and desires of each group. It is important to step “out of the box” learning to focus on the end result rather than the process and keep open to the many possibilities shared by each of the four generations. As managers of people we must learn to avoid micro-management, learn to effectively involve staff/volunteers in planning and decision making, provide clear and specific goals, with the resources needed and then get out of the way as collaborations occur!

## **The ABC Approach**

- **A**ccommodate Differences
- **B**e Flexible
- **C**reate an Atmosphere of Trust

*Adapted from*

*The Generational Decoder and Zap the Gap*, Megan Johnson, Phoenix, Arizona 2002 and *Communicating Across the Generations*, Stencil and Annette Bjorklund, University of Wisconsin- Cooperative Extension, Department of Youth Development 2008.