MIND THE (GENERATION) GAP:
EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

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I.   HOW DO EXPECTATIONS AND PRIORITIES DIFFER ACROSS GENERATIONS?

    A.   Defining the Generations

        1.   Silent Generation

        2.   Baby Boomers

        3.   Generation X

        4.   Millennials

        5.   Generation Z

        6.   Generation Alpha

    B.   Working Generations

        1.   Baby Boomers (Boomers) (1946 – 1964)

            a.   71.6 million Boomers in the United States[1]

            b.   Around 60% of Boomers remain in the workforce[2]

        2.   Generation X (Gen X) (1965 – 1980)

            a.   65.2 million Gen X in the United States[1]

        3.   Xennial (Microgeneration "Oregon Trail Generation") (1977 – 1985)[3]

        4.   Millennials (1981 – 1996)

            a.   72.1 million Millennials in the United States[1]

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[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/797321/us-population-by-generation/

[2] https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/09/the-pace-of-boomer-retirements-has-accelerated-in-the-past-year/

[3] https://www.businessinsider.com/xennials-born-between-millennials-and-gen-x-2017-11

5.   Generation Z (Gen Z) (1997 – 2012)

       a.   67 million Gen Z in the United States[1]

       b.   Around 72% of Gen Z is currently in the workforce[4]

C.   Generational Context – Understanding Perspectives

    1.   Timeline for the median member: Baby Boomer, Born in 1955

       a.   Childhood

           i.   Age 8: John F. Kennedy Assassinated

           ii.   Age 9: Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed

           iii.   Age 13: Martin Luther King Jr. Assassinated

       b.   Teens/Early Adulthood

           i.   Age 14: Moon landing

           ii.   Age 19: Richard Nixon Resigns

           iii.   Age 20: End of the Vietnam War

       c.   Adulthood

           i.   Age 34: Fall of the Berlin Wall

           ii.   Age 45: Over half of U.S. households own a computer

           iii.   Age 46: September 11th Attacks

           iv.   Age 65: Start of COVID-19 Pandemic

    2.   Timeline for the median member: Generation X, Born in 1972

       a.   Childhood

           i.   Age 2: Richard Nixon Resigns

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[4] https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2/

ii.   Age 3: End of the Vietnam War

    iii.   Age 7: Iranian Hostage Crisis

  b.   Teens/Early Adulthood

    i.   Age 14: Space Shuttle Challenger Disaster

    ii.   Age 17: Fall of the Berlin Wall

    iii.   Age 19: Public launch of the World Wide Web

  c.   Adulthood

    i.   Age 27: Columbine High School shooting

    ii.   Age 28: Over half of U.S. households own a computer

    iii.   Age 29: September 11th Attacks

    iv.   Age 48: Start of COVID-19 Pandemic

3.   Timeline for the median member: Millennial, Born in 1988

  a.   Childhood

    i.   Age 3: Public launch of the World Wide Web

    ii.   Age 11: Columbine High School shooting

    iii.   Age 12: Over half of U.S. households own a computer

    iv.   Age 13: September 11th Attacks

  b.   Teens/Early Adulthood

    i.   Age 17: Hurricane Katrina

    ii.   Age 19: First iPhone released

    iii.   Age 20: Great Recession of 2008

  c.   Adulthood

    i.   Age 23: Osama bin Laden killed

    ii.   Age 27: Supreme Court strikes down same-sex marriage bans

iii.   Age 32: Start of COVID-19 Pandemic

    4.   Timeline for the median member: Generation Z, Born in 2004

        a.   Childhood

            i.   Age 1: Hurricane Katrina

            ii.   Age 4: Great Recession of 2008

            iii.   Age 7: Osama bin Laden killed

            iv.   Age 8: Facebook reaches 1 billion users worldwide

            v.   Age 11: Supreme Court strikes down same-sex marriage bans

        b.   Teens/Early Adulthood

            i.   Age 13: #MeToo Movement

            ii.   Age 16: Start of COVID-19 Pandemic

D.   Experiences Shaping Priorities – Boomers[5]

    1.   Parenting experience – moms stayed home

    2.   Education – birthright

    3.   Money – buy now, pay later

    4.   Technology – acquired skill

    5.   Experiences Shaping Priorities – Gen X

    6.   Parenting experience – latch-key and daycare kids

    7.   Education – the way to advancement

    8.   Money – cautious and conservative

    9.   Technology – assimilated

E.   Experiences Shaping Priorities – Millennials

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[5] https://www.usf.edu/hr-training/documents/lunch-bytes/generationaldifferenceschart.pdf

1. Parenting experience – blended/merged families

2. Education – incredible expense

3. Money – earn to spend

4. Technology – integral

F. Focus on Workplace Priorities – Boomers

    1. Work ethic – driven

    2. Preferred work environment – flat or democratic structure

    3. Work is … an exciting adventure

    4. Interaction style – team player

    5. Motivated by … being valued

G. Focus on Workplace Priorities – Gen X

    1. Work ethic – balanced

    2. Preferred work environment – functional, flexible, and positive

    3. Work is … a difficult challenge

    4. Interaction style – entrepreneurial

    5. Motivated by … freedom and flexibility

H. Focus on Workplace Priorities – Millennials

    1. Work ethic – ambitious

    2. Preferred work environment – collaborative, creative, diverse

    3. Work is … a means to an end

    4. Interaction style – participative

    5. Motivated by … working with talented colleagues

I. In the Workplace – Differences in Practice

1. Gen Z and Millennials at work now make up nearly half (46%) of the full-time workforce in the U.S.[6]

2. 2018 Gallup polling addressed a crucial question in the workplace: What does each generation look for most in an employer?

J. What Employees Look for in Their Employer, by Generation

1. Young Millennials and Gen Z (1989 – 2001)

   a. The organization cares about employees' wellbeing

   b. The organization's leadership is ethical

   c. The organization is diverse and inclusive of all people

2. Older Millennials (1980-1988)

   a. The organization cares about employees' wellbeing

   b. The organization's leadership is ethical

   c. The organization's leadership is open and transparent

3. Gen X (1965-1979)

   a. The organization's leadership is ethical

   b. The organization cares about employees' wellbeing

   c. The organization's financial stability

4. Baby Boomers (1946-1964)

   a. The organization's leadership is ethical

   b. The organization cares about employees' wellbeing

   c. The organization's financial stability

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[6] https://www.gallup.com/workplace/336275/things-gen-millennials-expect-workplace.aspx

II.   LEGAL PROTECTIONS PROHIBITIONS ON AGE DISCRIMINATION

   A.   Federal law: 29 USC §621

      1.   The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) is a federal law which forbids age discrimination against people who are age 40 or older.

      2.   The ADEA prohibits discrimination based on age in any aspect of employment, which includes:

         a.   Hiring

         b.   Promotions

         c.   Firing

         d.   Pay

         e.   Job duties and assignments

         f.   General claim is that an employee must prove that age was the 'but-for' cause of an employer's adverse decision. *Gross v. FBL Financial Services, Inc.*, 557 U.S. 167, 176 (2009).

         g.   Uniqueness of age discrimination claim: An employee (plaintiff) alleging age discrimination based on unlawful termination of employment must prove: "(1) the plaintiff is at least forty years old; (2) the plaintiff suffered an adverse employment decision; (3) the plaintiff was qualified for the position in question; and (4) the plaintiff was ultimately replaced by another employee who was sufficiently younger so as to support an inference of a discriminatory motive." *Willis v. UPMC Children's Hosp. of Pittsburgh*, 808 F.3d 638, 644 (3d Cir. 2015).

      3.   ADEA prohibits harassment in the workplace based on an individual's age.

   B.   Application and Charging

      1.   ADEA is applicable to all employers with 20 or more employees.

      2.   Individuals have 180 days from the date of alleged discrimination to file a charge, unless state law permits longer time (300 days in Michigan).

         a.   Charges are filed through submission of a signed statement to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

b.   Additional information on charging and response procedure available at: https://www.eeoc.gov/age-discrimination

C.   Employer Duties Under ADEA

1.   Employer may be liable for harassment by "non-employees over whom it has control … if it knew, or should have known about the harassment and failed to take prompt and appropriate corrective action."[7]

a.   A harassing individual may be a supervisor, colleague, or even a non-employee such as a client, customer, or consultant.

2.   *Meritor Sav. Bank, FSB v. Vinson*, 477 U.S. 57 (1986).

a.   Federal employment discrimination laws protect an employee's "right to work in an environment free from discriminatory intimidation, ridicule, and insult" based on age.

b.   Age-related harassment that results in a hostile work environment is a form of discrimination prohibited by the ADEA.

3.   When an employer knows (or should reasonably know) that an employee is experiencing age-based harassment, the employer has a responsibility to act promptly to prevent further harassment.

a.   *Kilgore v. Thompson & Brock Management, Inc.*, 93 F.3d 752 (11th Cir. 1996) ("[T]he remedial action must be reasonably likely to prevent the misconduct from recurring.")

4.   If the employer fails to take action or doesn't take appropriate preventative action, the employee may have cause for a complaint under the ADEA.

a.   Where a pattern of general harassment is established, courts may find that even a single age-related instance may cast the entire course of conduct as prohibited age-related discrimination.

b.   *Chavez v. New Mexico*, 397 F.3d 826 (10th Cir. 2005) ("[C]onduct that appears [age]-neutral in isolation may in fact be [age]-based, but may appear so only when viewed in the context of other [age]-based behavior.")

D.   Michigan Law: Elliott-Larsen Protections (MCL 37.2101 et seq.)

1.   The Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act (ELCRA) prohibits discrimination on the basis of age.

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[7] https://www.eeoc.gov/harassment

   a. Prohibition on "discriminatory practices, policies, and customs in the exercise of … rights based upon religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status …"

  2. ELCRA applies to businesses with one or more employees. MCL 37.2201

  3. No minimum or maximum age listed.

   a. This means that employers are also prohibited from discriminating against individuals on the basis of their youth.

  4. ELCRA creates a direct cause of action.

   a. Employees aren't required to pursue administrative remedies prior to pursuing civil claims for discrimination.

   b. If individuals to pursue administrative remedies, they have 180 days from the date of alleged discrimination to file a charge with the Michigan Department of Civil Rights or 300 days to file with the EEOC.

  5. Employees may bring claims under the ELCRA within three years of the occurrence of an incident.

III. <u>GENERATIONAL REACTIONS TO POST-PANDEMIC CHANGES IN THE WORKPLACE</u>

  A. COVID-19 Reactions by Generation

   1. Younger generations have responded to COVID-19 changes in the economy with more anxiety because younger generations have "more of the future ahead of them" to worry about. (Tim Elmore, CEO of Growing Leaders)

   2. Baby Boomers express concerns about retirement plans.

   3. Gen X was never optimistic, and that's unchanged.

   4. Millennials have financial worries about their next stages, including buying a house.

   5. Gen Z feels like their adult lives have been postponed or they're being punished by COVID-19. [8]

  B. Focus on Well-Being

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[8] https://www.ajc.com/life/opinion-the-future-of-work-is-changing-which-generation-is-ready/DDVZU2H2MBHNRIFSLTRCUAQMXU/

1.   Overall, Gen Z is the most worried about their future across a variety of categories.[9]

2.   Top concerns post-pandemic vary across generations.

        a.   Mental health is Gen Z's first priority.

        b.   Financial health is the most concerning topic for both Gen X and Millennials.

        c.   Baby Boomers are most concerned about physical health.

C.   Emerging Data: Unexpected Alignment

1.   Preliminary research indicates that post-pandemic, we may see an unexpected alignment between generations:

2.   Millennials and Gen X are more interested in a hybrid home-office work environment post-pandemic to balance family obligations."

3.   Meanwhile, "Boomers and Gen Z want to be spending more time in the office to benefit from in-person connections and collaboration."[10]

        a.   This shift may mean that as more Baby Boomers exit the workforce, Gen Z may be the primary employees who prefer to be in-office.

D.   Shifting Employee Needs

1.   Think about your workforce and their priorities.

        a.   Who are your employees?

        b.   What are their priorities in the workforce?

2.   Don't be afraid to ask employees what they prioritize.

        a.   Regional differences may mean that your workforce doesn't follow broad trends.

        b.   The best way to understand how COVID-19 has impacted your employees is to ask for feedback.

3.   Identifying employee needs will help align your priorities with what employees really want.

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[9] https://www.metlife.com/content/dam/metlifecom/us/noindex/pdf/ebts-2021/MetLife_EBTS_2021.pdf

[10] https://www.rbcwealthmanagement.com/en-eu/insights/how-different-generations-will-adapt-to-post-pandemic-life