

# Manage Multigenerational Communication

Each generational member has strengths, weaknesses, productive behaviors, and stress behaviors that may be similar to or differ from his or her generational cohorts. The key is first identifying and then integrating them in the workplace. **BY SHARON BIRKMAN FINK**



**Sharon Birkman Fink** is president and CEO of Birkman International, Inc., which provides an assessment tool that measures internal needs, behaviors, occupational preferences, and organizational strengths. She can be reached at 713.623.2760 or [sfink@birkman.com](mailto:sfink@birkman.com). For more information on the Birkman Method, visit [www.birkman.com](http://www.birkman.com) or call 800.215.2760.

**E**conomic turmoil is forcing Baby Boomers to postpone their retirements. As 401Ks shrink to 101Ks or smaller, some Boomers are wondering whether they will ever be able to retire at all. But the 80-million strong Baby Boomer generation cannot forever remain an immovable object—not with the equally large number of Millennial generation workers in their early 20s ready and eager to assume job responsibility.

This can, but does not have to, create intergenerational conflict in the workplace. Personality research shows that intergenerational workforce differences are not fundamental. Older and younger workers may have different social norms and levels of comfort with technology, but every generation has introverts, extroverts, and other personality types, usually in the same proportion. Personality testing can identify these types and their workplace capabilities, and effectively integrate them.

## **GENERATIONAL VS. PERSONAL**

Certainly there are generational differences in the three primary demographic segments of the workforce. Baby Boomers, ages 47 to 62, tend to be competitive, moralistic, optimistic, and self-focused on career advancement. Generation Xers, ages 26 to 46, define success by creating the life they want, and view themselves as free agents not indefinitely tied to any organization. Millennials, workers ages 25 and under, love freedom and responsibility, expect consistent and positive feedback, bond closely with their peers through technology, and want to learn as much and as quickly as possible on the job.

Beyond these broad trends, each generational member has strengths, weaknesses, productive behaviors, and stress behaviors that may be similar to or differ from his or her generational cohorts. Miscommunication can occur between any employees with clashing personality styles or traits. Effective personality testing identifies and

brings those characteristics into focus and addresses the problem by identifying where employees are strongest and weakest, pinpointing the hidden assumptions, motivations, or interpersonal styles that may create conflict. Thus, identifying how employees can best work with others will benefit any company.

## **DEFINING THE INDIVIDUAL**

The best personality tests analyze and define whether individuals perform better working alone or on a team, in a structured or unstructured environment, and by focusing on details or the big picture. Such assessments identify how employees of any generation can better communicate, work together, and achieve work objectives. This is particularly important if tension and miscommunication occur as Boomers stay longer, Millennials want to move up, and personality traits or styles clash. Testing can break down communication barriers because it offers insight into how peers think and act, and allows focused training to encourage desired behaviors.

All successful organizations adapt and grow by identifying and nurturing employees with the most potential. That puts the focus on Millennials, who have tremendous potential to transform the organizations where they work by serving as a new generation of strong leaders who are flexible, able to cope with change, and ready to find new ways of solving problems. The best ways to realize this potential, while integrating Millennials into the overall workforce, involve effective training programs based on accurate personality assessment. By channeling these traits to the best fit with job responsibilities, any organization will be able to integrate today's and tomorrow's best performers, and create a new level of excellence. **t**

Visit [www.trainingmag.com/empowering](http://www.trainingmag.com/empowering) to read "Empowering Employees to Own Their Careers."