



Featured Article



Embracing Generational Diversity

Learn from the strengths of team members from all generations

Intergenerational distrust is as old as time itself. However, there should not be an “us against them” generational mindset — we are all in this together. The generation gap is in large part the result of miscommunication and misunderstanding, fueled by common insecurities and a desire for influence and power. Getting past stereotypes is the first step in creating excellent teams.

With differing values and seemingly conflicting views, baby boomers, Generation X, millennials and Generation Z work, communicate, learn from and teach each other differently while working side by side in the dental practice.

One of the most powerful tools that can create a climate of trust and cooperation lies in understanding what drives each generation. Each brings its own strengths and weaknesses, differing work philosophies and priorities to the practice. It’s important to appreciate distinctive characteristics and ways of communicating.

Although generational differences are not absolutes, research has shown that those born within the same generation form collective memories based on shared social and cultural experiences. These collective memories can result in shared norms of attitude and behavior.

Why does understanding the distinction between generations matter? At least half (52%) of workers say they’re less likely to get along with someone from another generation than their own. Problems generational differences can lead to include disengagement in the workplace, poor communication, decreased productivity, leadership miscues and more.

Baby boomers, sometimes called the “Me generation,” were born between 1946 and 1964. The Vietnam War, Woodstock, civil rights, economic prosperity, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. and rock ‘n’ roll shaped this generation. Boomers tend to be driven, optimistic, team-oriented and career-centric workaholics who expect everyone to go the extra mile. Boomers can be recognized on the dental team because they may be reluctant to go against their peers, want to please everyone, seek respect and rely on their experience level. They make great mentors for younger generations but may need assistance in utilizing new technologies.



Generation X was born between 1965 and 1980. The "X" refers to this generation's desire to not be defined. Watergate, layoffs, changes in family structure, the space shuttle Challenger explosion and MTV shaped this generation. With more than 60% of the generation attending college, they are better educated than baby boomers, as well as more ethnically diverse. They are independent, resourceful and self-sufficient, valuing freedom and responsibility in the workplace. They dislike being micromanaged and embrace a hands-off management philosophy. On the dental team this generation appears to be off doing their own thing, working independently. Members of this generation may appear not to be paying attention in team meetings. Gen X team members tend to embrace changes that are efficient and save time.

Millennials, also called Generation Y, were born between 1981 and 1996. They have also been called "Gen Why" because they question the status quo, or the "boomerang generation," because many returned home after going to college. The Great Recession, the Columbine High School shooting, 9/11, Y2K, the internet and technology in general shaped this generation. Nurtured by parents who didn't want to make the mistakes of previous generations, millennials tend to be confident, ambitious and achievement-oriented. They are creative, optimistic, collaborative and entrepreneurial. They have been taught that questioning authority is permissible. Millennials in dentistry have been noted for helping the practice commit to charitable causes or as those who will help the community.

Generation Z is usually defined as being born between the late 1990s and early 2000s. They are also known as the iGen, centennials, globals and post-millennials. Terrorism, mobile technology, social media and cyberbullying are current events that shaped this generation. They are the first generation born into a digital world. They are tech-dependent, financially focused, entrepreneurial, competitive and adaptive to change. They are independent and want to be heard. Members of Generation Z are just beginning to join dental practice teams. Their technological aptitude aids their assimilation.

It's important to realize that not every generation is motivated by the same things. Labels and judgment don't do any of us any good. So the next time you find yourself thinking poorly of a peer from a different generation, remind yourself that this team member has something to offer, just like you do, perhaps with a different approach.

Let's stop generation shaming, name-calling and scapegoating. Instead, let's think about what different generations can teach and learn from each other, and how those conversations can result in entirely new ways of solving problems together.

Make it a goal to create "Generation Us" teams.



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