



BRIDGING THE WORKPLACE GENERATION GAP

The modern workplace is more diverse than ever and with diversity comes new opportunities and challenges. One challenge today's workers and managers are encountering is **the Workplace Generation Gap**. Workers of different ages bring inherent preferences related to work expectations, communication styles and priorities. While treating everyone fairly is of first importance, this doesn't mean that everyone responds best to a cookie cutter approach from management and understanding people from their point of view is critical to leading them effectively. Whether you are a new grad seeking your first job, a senior citizen re-entering the workplace, or a manager tasked with getting the most out of your multi-generational team, understanding the unique needs and wants of your coworkers can make you more appreciated, happy and effective in your job.

AGEISM AND IT'S NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS

While considering the implications of blending workers of various ages in the work setting, it is important to define Ageism and avoid its negative connotations. Ageism can be defined as the recognition of stereotypes associated with individuals or groups based on age. In a negative sense, Ageism can be applied in a discriminatory (and illegal) fashion when such stereotyping creates biases causing employers to steer individuals into (or away from) workplace opportunities based on the individual's age. The goal of this article is not to focus on the negative implications of age-based discrimination, but to identify strategies where people of different age groups can work well together.

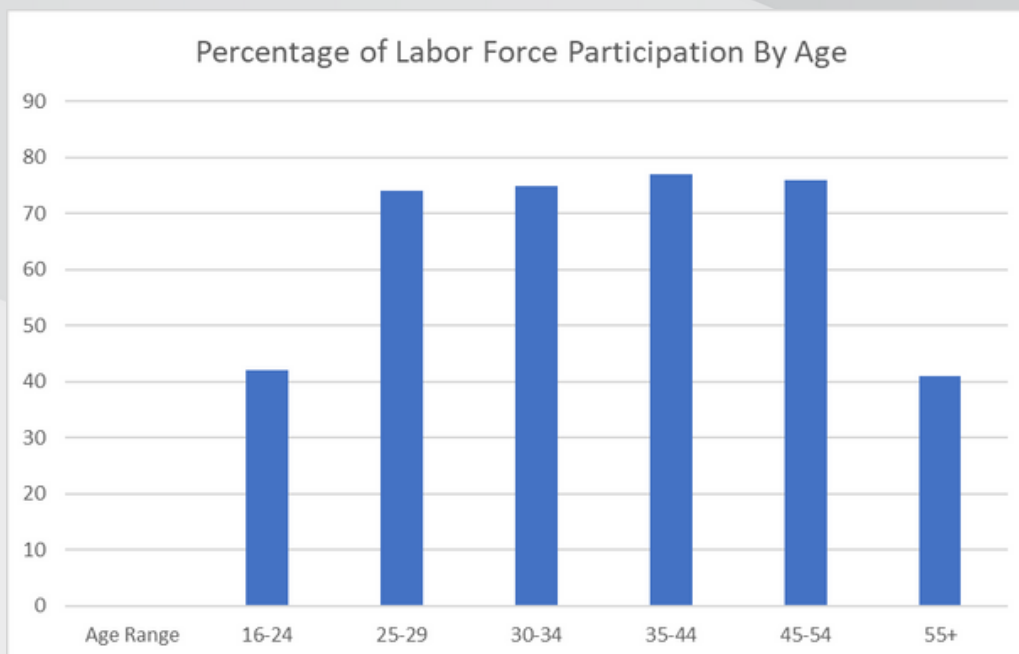
GENERATION WHAT?

Various titles have been applied to different generational groups in the U.S. over the last 100 years. Among the most common are the following:

1. The Silent (or "Greatest") Generation – Born from 1928 to 1945 – This group of Americans lived through the Depression and World War II.
2. Baby Boomers – Born from 1946 to 1964 – This generation was part of a population surge and witnessed the United States ascend as an economic and military superpower following WW2.
3. Gen X – Born from 1965 to 1980 – Gen Xers have enjoyed increased opportunities for financial growth and entrepreneurship.
4. Millennials – Born from 1981 to 1996 – This generation grew up during the Information Age and is highly proficient with technology.
5. Gen Z – Born from 1997 to 2012 – Gen Z Americans have never known a world social media.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY AGE

Statistics slightly vary by source, but U.S. Labor participation by age follows the bell curve model below



AN AGING WORKFORCE

As indicated above, the majority of U.S. workers are aged between 25 and 54. However, a new trend is increasingly apparent – the average U.S. worker is getting older. While statistics vary from industry to industry, the median age of full-time employed U.S. workers today is over 42 years of age. This is more than 5 years older than the median age for American workers in 1990. This trend of older people working longer (or re-entering the workforce) while younger people are waiting longer to start working only seems to be accelerating. The latest data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics which shows the 55 and older group moving from 36.7% employment in 2021 to 41.1% employment in 2022 (an 11.99% increase) while the 16 to 24 age group went down from 50.1% employment in 2021 to 41.5% employment in 2022 (a 17.7% decrease) during the same period and this is not unique to the U.S. as many other developed countries are experienced the same trend.

Older workers are staying in the workforce longer while younger workers are waiting longer before engaging in full-time employment.

Some of the factors keeping older workers in their jobs longer are listed below.

1. People are living longer and new work settings (and the kinds of work being done) are allowing older workers to be productive in their jobs later in life.
2. Some older workers are choosing to work longer embracing the personal challenges and identity associated with work.
3. Other older workers are working longer out of necessity for financial reasons or to support other family members.

Meanwhile, many young people are waiting longer to engage in traditional, full-time jobs.

1. In a competitive labor market demanding experience, they do not possess, some young people are opting to pursue advanced education or training before pursuing their careers.
2. The extension of medical insurance eligibility under family plans to age 26 (previously 18 for non-students) has made it possible for young people to delay entry into the workforce.
3. Non-traditional forms of making money through social media are emerging which give young people alternative ways of supporting themselves while maintaining life balance.

BRIDGING THE GAP

Every individual brings unique talents and preferences. In competitive environments like our current business and labor market, the goal of good companies is to bring out the best in everyone and the good news is that it isn't an either/or question. While stereotypical advantages and challenges can be associated with people of different age groups, there are hiring and leadership practices which foster positive work experiences regardless of your age strata. It is possible to create a work culture appealing to one group without alienating another. In fact, when a company makes the effort of taking care of one segment of their population, it is appreciated by other employees even when they are not directly benefited by these changes. We recommend the following strategies as best practices for attracting and retaining employees of all ages.

Positive Culture – Everyone aspires to work for a company that is both successful and caring. People are your greatest asset, and investing in them makes your company stronger. Your workplace should foster an open and inclusive culture where everyone has a place, goals are clear, and people are trusted to do their jobs.

An Environment Of Respect – The modern workplace brings challenges and stressors of many kinds – meeting deliverables, dealing with unpredictable changes, turning a profit in competitive markets, to name just a few, but within the walls of your business (even if they are virtual walls), there must be a climate of respect between co-workers regardless of hierarchy, age or any other dimension. When this can be established and maintained, there is a sense that, whatever challenges may come from outside of the business, you can handle it TOGETHER.

Manage People How They Want To Be Managed – Regardless of a person's age or tenure, different people expect and respond better to different management styles. Rather than taking a cookie cutter approach to management, each manager should customize their style to each reporting employee in terms of how objectives are communicated and monitored, and the amount of support needed.

Stability – While each employee may have different expectations of what equates stability to them, people like employers with a clear vision of what they do best and plans for the future. Articulating and reinforcing these goals builds confidence in your team and shows them their contributions matter.

Training – Most employees appreciate the opportunity to add new skills or get better at some of the things they do already. Training is an investment that raises the bar for everyone and demonstrates the company’s long-term commitment to internal development. table, and everyone has something new they can learn. Taking this to another level, progressive companies create job sharing situations where diverse groups leverage individual strengths to solve problems together.

Career Planning – Providing options for various career paths and customizing them to align with each employee’s personal goals demonstrates long term commitment to your people and allows them to project themselves into new and more interesting roles as defined training objectives and work achievements are realized.

Work/Life Balance – Employees of all ages are recognizing the need to find harmony between their time devoted to work and their personal time. While some people strongly identify the things they do at work as self-defining as to who they are, others want to compartmentalize work as a means to enable the life they want to live outside of the office. Good companies should strive to help individuals realize the balance they are seeking within a framework that ensures company goals can also be achieved. Remote work and flexible hours are one example of how companies are evolving to give employees more freedom to get their work done in a way that is beneficial to the individual worker and to the company. Defining project specific work which prioritizes objectives over how or when the work is fulfilled is another way of giving your employees to have more control over their work/life balance.

Diversity in other areas – Fostering a culture that is inclusive of people from many different groups will also be helpful in bridging the generational gaps that may exist in your company. Demonstrating that your company encourages and is supportive of good workers regardless of their demographic differences shows your commitment to support everyone.

Moving Forward

Treating people how YOU would like to be treated has always been the standard for interpersonal relationships, but diversity in today’s workplace asks us to move to a higher standard of treating people the way THEY would like to be treated. Nowhere is this more obvious than when we engage with people of different ages as we commonly do in the modern workplace. As you get to know them better, you will find they probably have something they can teach you!

Contact Enspire Partners by visiting our website.
at enspirepartners.com or calling
678-730-6966