

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Connecting the Multi-generational Green Industry

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They say change is the only constant, and oh, how things are constantly changing! With each generation bringing their own technological, economic, political and social experiences, change is inevitable, whether in values and priorities, approach to work, life goals or their relationship with their emotions.

These variables are shaped by the environment in which each generation was raised, reflecting their challenges, interests, and the cultural and societal norms of the time. It's no secret that preceding generations tend to clash with the younger, as one can expect and as seen throughout history, especially in the workforce. Differences stemming from varied communication and leadership styles, expectations at work, motivations, fundamental goals, sense of fulfillment and varying degrees of emotional intelligence are all considerable influences that can lead to a disconnect between generations. These gaps can ultimately cause conflict, resulting in a lack of workplace collaboration, productivity, retention, respect and harmony. Understanding this can provide valuable insight into how each generation can leverage their differences and build a more synergistic workplace.

The multi-generational workforce

Today's workforce is comprised of four primary generations: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials and Generation Z. The Baby Boomers, or "Boomers," (those born 1946-1964) grew up in post-WWII America, where the mindset was "work as hard as you possibly can and then even harder the next time."

According to a study examining generations' workplace values by Johns Hopkins University, a few of the workplace values associated with this generation are workaholics, self-assertive, goal-oriented and competitive, and they tend to suggest that this generation prioritizes workplace efficiency and work being the center of their lives, with little regard for work-life balance.

Generation X follows the Boomers (those born 1965-1980) and almost fully rejected the former Boomer mentality, displaying hyper-independence, flexibility and owning the "work hard, play hard" mentality. They value healthy work-life balance, informality, creativity and technological innovation.

Next up are the Millennials (those born 1981-1996), who now make up approximately 35% of the workforce. This generation was especially unique in that they experienced life both before and after the major digital takeover and rapid technological advancements. They're highly progressive, being the first to bring empathy and moral values into the workplace, valuing communication, diversity and inclusion, flexibility, collaboration, and professional growth and development.

And, last but not least, Generation Z (those born 1997-2010), the newest generation to infiltrate the workforce. This generation never knew life without technology and digitization at their fingertips, contributing to their many qualities that separate them from former generations. This generation has been deemed "the first global generation" in having access to almost everything at just the click of a button, valuing purpose, inclusivity, company culture, autonomy, flexibility and work-life balance.

Emotional intelligence in the workplace

One of the most prolific differences to note is how each generation manages their emotions, which heavily influences how they navigate the workplace and the world at large. The variance in emotional intelligence levels and how it's approached across generations is quite significant, with Baby Boomers and Generation Z being worlds apart, displaying stark contrasts in emotional regulation and what they prioritize.

For context, emotional intelligence (EQ) is widely defined as the ability to recognize, understand and manage emotions in oneself and others. To provide further definition, EQ is broken down into five primary domains:

- **Self-awareness:** This is the understanding of your own emotions and feelings, and the ability to properly identify them, as well as knowing how they influence others.
- **Self-regulation:** This is the ability to control and adjust your emotions properly, thus preventing the consequences of an emotional outburst by timely regulation.
- **Social skills:** This refers to your interactions with others, building good relationships based on understanding both your emotions and the emotions of others.
- **Empathy:** Empathy is the ability to detect the feelings of other people and then act according to their emotional state.
- **Motivation:** This involves using your emotions to fulfill your needs and goals, becoming highly motivated by internal factors and having the strength to keep going when the going gets tough.

It's about being smart with your feelings, and the essential nature of EQ has become increasingly researched and ultimately valued in recent years, especially in the workplace, as research has shown it to be linked to positive life outcomes like job success, relationship satisfaction and stress tolerance.

Can you start to visualize where a high level of skill in these areas could be beneficial in your job? A few notable benefits of high EQ in the workplace are that it's positively correlated to employee job satisfaction, performance metrics and productivity.

Another point that makes EQ an attractive skill is that it's able to be further developed. It was once thought that it was an innate quality, which in some ways it is (for example, some research suggests that there's a positive correlation between IQ and EQ), but it's ultimately a collective result of one's genetics, environment and life experiences. Of

course, this isn't to say that a high IQ (a number used to express a person's overall cognitive ability, such as logical reasoning, memory, word comprehension, math skills, and abstract and spatial thinking) and technical skills lose or have no value in the workplace, but that type of knowledge doesn't lend itself to knowing how to effectively navigate, communicate and collaborate with people, which is a game-changer in business. And with soft skills becoming more and more of a priority in the workplace, those who have a high EQ are highly sought after, especially for leadership positions. That said, each generation has navigated their emotions completely differently.

What the people feel, what the people want

While emotional intelligence isn't new in the sense of its existence, it's only been researched, recognized and valued in recent years and, ultimately, mainstreamed. Inevitably, Baby Boomers are going to hold a much different seity than the generations who held this concept in higher regard. Baby Boomers are known to be more resilient and pragmatic. Their upbringing led them to prioritize accomplishments over emotions, valuing loyalty, practicality and structure. While these attributes are incredibly useful in overcoming obstacles and problem solving, they can hinder collaboration and create a disconnect with the younger tech-driven and emotionally fluid generations. According to Leadership Development Consultant Cindy Benning, to best engage with this generation, leaders and colleagues should be sure to emphasize respect, trust and seize the opportunity for mentorship.

Generation X is best described as self-reliant and adaptable. Their value in work-life balance, autonomy and mental health lends to their questioning of traditional structures, holding independence and pragmatism in high regard. They may, however, show lower levels of empathy and social responsibility because of this, which calls for leaders to engage this generation by respecting their need for autonomy, offering work-life balance, and providing continuous and meaningful growth opportunities.

Millennials are a product of the age of the internet and social media, deeming them adaptable and emotionally expressive. They value inclusivity, work with purpose and collaboration, with areas such as empathy and social responsibility being highly prevalent. They do, however, tend to have difficulties with self-management and stress management, which can have a negative impact on their overall ability to regulate their emotions. For this generation, leaders are encouraged to create a workspace where open communication and collaboration are prioritized and foster purposeful work and long-term growth and career paths.

Generation Z is the newest in the workforce, many of which are just starting to enter it. They're best described as inclusive and digitally attuned, focusing highly on social justice and inclusivity, equity and community, making interpersonal skills like empathy and social responsibility highly essential. However, this generation is more inclined to experience issues with impulse control, stress management and anxiety as a result of information overload and digital dependency. For the best support for this generation, leaders should benefit from Gen Z's tech-savvy strengths and foster an authentic and inclusive workplace culture, emphasizing and prioritizing mental health and purpose.

By understanding these generational differences in EQ, leaders can create more efficient, inclusive and collaborative workplaces by tailoring the culture and environment to support each generation's respective needs.

The takeaway

With four prominent generations in the workforce, there are bound to be multiple perspectives that contribute to both positive and negative outcomes. Workplace values are the distinguishing factor in understanding how, when and

why employees work, from the Baby Boomers who lived to work to the Gen Zs who work to live. For leaders, employers and colleagues, being mindful of each group's values will help ensure a workplace that engages, retains, motivates and empowers your people. And to reiterate the importance of incorporating EQ into all of this, many people are inclined to feel a sort of defensiveness of their values and can be emotionally charged, which can lead to the need to mitigate disagreements and navigate tense situations by bridging the emotional intelligence gap.

By working together to create harmonious, emotionally intelligent, and mindful work environments and company cultures, your operation is sure to experience an increase in overall happiness, productivity and collaboration, allowing you, your people and your business to truly thrive. **GT**

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