GROWERTALKS

Features

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Building Your Business Ethos

Paige Franks



The world at large is comprised of people of all ages, each playing their own role in shaping civilization. From the innocence and curiosity of a toddler who reminds us to navigate the world with wonder to the wisdom and insight from the elderly woman next door who shows us that there's great beauty in the ordinary and that life is precious, every age group has so much to offer.

The workplace is no exception to this, as each generation has something to learn from and teach the other. This ideology shows up in professional values, workplace culture, collective experiences and the overall work environment, each having profound influences on the productivity of the workplace. With that said, companies that successfully integrate the various generations and leverage the unique skillsets in each one not only develop a safer, more inclusive and positive culture, but also drive innovation, motivation and overall performance.

A melting pot of people

So how do you cultivate a thriving company culture while navigating the multi-generational workforce? In order to effectively foster this type of environment, you must first understand the distinct values of each generation. At this rate, we're looking at five generations spanning the global workforce: Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, Generation Z and now Generation Alpha.

- Baby Boomers, or "Boomers," were born between 1946-1964, with their values rooted deeply in security, and their greatest motivating factor being loyalty and the ability to mentor younger colleagues, making up about 12% of the global workforce.
- Gen X, those born 1965-1980, value independence and flexibility. They're known for their adaptability and are often the ones bridging the gap between the retiring Boomers and rising Millennials in the workplace, although they themselves make up a fairly small percentage of the workforce at this point at just 27%.
- Millennials, those born 1981-1996, prioritize purpose and flexibility in their work, searching for a mix of autonomy and collaboration. They're also the first group to bring moral values and empathy to the workplace and are pushing for a more humanistic and empathetic approach, currently sitting at 34% of

the workforce.

- Generation Z, those born from 1997-2010, look for innovation, diversity and social justice, and, contrary to popular belief, actually favor a fast-paced environment (think smaller attention spans due to the age of micro information) and thrive in technology-driven workplaces. They're currently 27% of the workforce and on the rise, especially as the mass wave of retirements in our industry continues.
- Generation Alpha, who are those born between 2010-2025, are starting to infiltrate the workforce (do you have any eye-rolling 15-year-olds helping out in your garden centers yet?). They're anticipated to be the most tech-savvy group yet, as well as the most environmentally conscious, considering their upbringing in a highly digitized and globally connected world, even more so than Gen Z. While they're only very newly entering the workforce, they're expected to make up about 19% in the next 10 years.

What is culture and why it matters

As defined by Forbes, company culture is "an organization's social operating system." It serves as the blueprint for all interactions between employees, customers, external partners and the community. It's represented in your HR policies and operations, work environment, work processes and organizational behavior. It should also reflect your business' values, purpose and mission.

Some key aspects of culture include your company's history, purpose, values and vision for the future. Essentially, it's what sets you apart from the competition and makes you unique and defines who you are, letting both your people and the public know what you stand for and why. And while company culture isn't something that can necessarily be seen, it can certainly be felt, both by everyone who works within the company and by everyone who interacts with it.

This is an extremely important piece of your organization because it tells the world what your values are and is a reflection of its integrity; if a company had a personality, it would be its culture. This shows in how you treat your team and how you interact with customers, as well as in the productivity and engagement of your team. Customer interaction and satisfaction are heavily influenced by this component.

Where does the source and arguably the heaviest influence of culture come from? The top of the org chart—the leaders. Whether the culture is thriving or toxic, leadership is the group that sets the tone, and it's up to them to turn things around and fix a negative culture. Of course, employees must also make the effort to turn around a poor culture, as well, by following the example set by leadership.

But what do the people want?

Based on their distinct set of values, each generation generally tends to seek different things in their ideal working environment. To older generations, it was never even a thought, much less emphasized in the workplace. To the younger generation, it's a huge priority and essential for workplace satisfaction. For Baby Boomers, an ideal work environment sets clear goals, deadlines and offers long-term planning, both for their individual careers and the company at large. For Gen X, they ideally want to work somewhere where their professional experience is valued and they're fairly compensated for all their contributions. Millennials look for community in the workplace, seeking companies with strong cultures and opportunities for personal and professional development. Gen Z deeply values a diverse and inclusive workplace, and mission or purpose-driven companies. And, lastly, Gen Alpha is expected to value inclusivity, technological innovation and environmental consciousness and sustainability.

To initiate action for all employees, leadership must begin psychologically safe and non-judgmental communication with their team that both enforces the organization's priorities, mission and values, as well as holds space to listen to their team's thoughts and feelings and what they feel they need to truly thrive. For employees, as leadership

strives to make positive changes to company culture, keep an open mind and make a sincere effort to embody the precedent set by management (so long as it's truly positive). I'd also encourage the employees to learn about one another's values and perspectives based on their respective generations to further understanding and harmony amongst one another. This helps build trust, displays empathy and improves overall communication across all groups.

I can certainly say that my company and I see a poor culture being the demise of a good team all the time, unfortunately, and we're often working with candidates who share that a toxic work environment is their reason for looking for a new role, with company culture being a huge focus and priority in their next position. This is shared across all generations, not just the younger ones, furthering that company culture is relevant to and affects everyone involved.

I'll end by saying that I implore all leaders and team members to do an assessment of their company culture, morale and workplace synergy and see where there's room for improvement, how they can better get to know one another and bridge the gap between generational differences, and work to build a workplace that everyone is eager to be a part of. You spend more time with your colleagues than your own friends and family—make it somewhere you don't dread being. **GT**

Paige Franks is with Best Human Capital Group.