

Bridging the Generation Gaps in the Retirement Services Workplace

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Understanding the psychology of the various generations can be a powerful tool in ensuring the effective operations in our firms, both from a standpoint of employee interactions and in regard to advancing the quality of the work we do. So, this article asks: What are the generation gaps that exist today and how can we bridge them to bring harmony to the workplace and position our businesses for future success?

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For several years, we have heard about the “Graying of America” as Baby Boomers approach retirement. The retirement services industry is experiencing a similar type of “graying.” Many third party administration firms (TPAs) were created in the ERISA (Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974) era, just before or just after the “Act” changed the retirement services’ world forever. Some of these TPA firm owners (Radio Babies and Baby Boomers) have passed their businesses on to heirs or sold their businesses to other entities, and some have held on and are now dealing with succession issues. Many of the industry experts and managers that financial institutions and TPAs rely on are Radio Babies or Boomers.

Fortunately for the profession, the children of the Baby Boomers are entering the workplace and advancing through the ranks. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are approximately 80 million Millennials and 50 million Gen Xers, and the Millennials are even more numerous than their Baby Boomer parents. Within the next year or two, Gen Xers and Millennials are likely to make up 50–60% of the country’s workforce. Their sheer size and their immersion in technology give them the power to radically transform every aspect of society. As these talented individuals permeate the retirement services sector, businesses are faced with unique opportunities and challenges resulting from the interactions of three or four generations working side by side. One of the major challenges will be the knowledge transfer required in such a knowledge-intensive business. Rapid technological change combined with the need for sophisticated customer service will make collaboration across the generations essential to a successful business model.

Understanding the Generations

Although every individual is unique and some may not fit their generational mold, for the purposes of this article, we will look at “generational generalities.” To better understand a single generation, we look at the similarities. To compare generations, we look at the differences. Generations are similar to cultures, with common values and beliefs and shared experiences. Many of the people from a distinct generation have been “programmed” to view the world and filter information through their own “generational lenses” based on experiences during their formative years.

We often have misconceptions about other generations. For example, the older generations tend

to think Gen Xers and Millennials are very much alike, but in fact, the most significant thing these two groups have in common is technology. They are extremely different in most other aspects, and overall, Millennials are actually more similar to Baby Boomers. Once we gain a better understanding of each generation, it is easier to identify and accept the differences. From there, we can seek out commonalities, capitalize on opportunities and bridge the gaps.

Although there are no exact lines drawn for the start and finish of a generation, the chart below indicates the way most resources categorize the generational timeline. As in astrology, generation members can find themselves “on the cusp,” where traits of two generations might be relevant. Thinking about where we ourselves fall on the timeline will also give us insight into our own thoughts and beliefs.

Radio Babies

Radio Babies grew up in close family environments and looked up to heroes. In their younger years, they never knew the luxuries or technology that the subsequent generations came to know. They were a hard working generation who wanted jobs, security, and decent wages in order to take care of their families. They were loyal to their employers, and in return, they relied on company pensions to take care of them in retirement and repay them for their years of loyalty. They were most significantly impacted by the Great Depression and World War II.

Baby Boomers

As Baby Boomers were growing up, they began to see the deterioration of the traditional family as divorces became more popular. They believed in the “American Dream” and went for it. Historically, the Boomers were the largest workforce group and because there were lots of them, they were conditioned to compete for position and recognition. They were workaholics who believed in throwing time at work to solve problems. They were the first generation exposed to technology in the workplace. They were heavily influenced by political events and women’s rights, and they pushed for change to make the world a better place.

Gen Xers

Gen Xers were the first wave of Baby Boomer children. Many Gen Xers were latch-key children and had less adult supervision than prior generations as

they were growing up, primarily due to dual working parents or single parent environments. They also were conditioned not to trust strangers. As a result, Gen Xers are very independent and not as social as other generations. Because they experienced parents who worked long hours, work/life balance is very important to them. They represent the smallest generational group of available workers. For most of them, their first exposure to technology was in school. They were influenced by the Challenger disaster, AIDS, and the prevalence of technology and the media.

Millennials

Millennials are the product of either later or more mature Baby Boomers or Gen Xers, and their generation has the lowest parent-to-child ratio in US history. This generational time frame gave birth to the term “helicopter parents.” Millennials’ parents were very involved in their activities, controlled their schedules, oversaw their schoolwork and, in essence, “hovered” over every aspect of their lives. Millennials were groomed to learn and achieve, and they were frequently rewarded (i.e., gold stars, participation awards) for their endeavors. Growing up, their mouse and computer represented what pencils were to Boomers, and the Internet became their virtual library. They learned about technology and the underlying logic of how it works in the same “native” way that they learned to speak a language. Their technological abilities far exceed even Gen Xers. Technology is integral to the way they live, think, communicate, and the way they work. They are very social, collaborative, and the ultimate multi-taskers. They see themselves as part of a global community where diversity is an advantage, and their work should make a difference in the world. They are energetic and like to participate in activities inside and outside of work. They were heavily influenced by terrorism, which reinvigorated new respect for family and community, the Internet, and environmental issues.

The Retirement Services Workplace

We naturally expect others to think and feel as we do. When we understand more about the generational differences, we gain insight into how others thoughts and actions might differ from our own.

The chart below shows workplace traits that help us understand why the Baby Boomer comes in early and stays late, why the Gen Xer might be a little cynical, and why the Millennial asks a lot of questions and wants constant feedback.

Category	Radio Babies	Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennials
	1930–1945 (<1940)	1946–1964 (1940–1960)	1965–1980 (1960–1980)	1981–2000
a.k.a.	Silent generation, Veterans	Boomers, Sandwich generation	Generation X, Xers, Busters	Gen Y, Gen Why?, Nexters, Echo Boomers, Bridgers
Shaped their beliefs	Parents' views	Views of family and friends	Television/world events	Television/world events
	Values held in community	Political events	Views of family and friends	Parents' and grandparents' views
	Views of respected leaders	Civil rights	Respected mentors	Values held in community
Mantra	Sacrifice/duty	Change the world	Be careful out there	Protect the environment
Core values	Loyalty	Involvement	Skepticism	Optimism
	Discipline	Optimism	Diversity	Achievement
	Duty	Personal gratification	Pragmatism	Diversity/global awareness
		Work	Informality	Sociability/fun
				Civic duty, volunteering
Views on authority	Respects authority	Questions authority	Distrusts/ignores authority	Respects authority and expects mutual respect from authority
Family	Traditional, moms at home	More working moms, more divorces	Latch-key kids, career working moms, single parents	Split families, some stay-at-home dads, soccer moms, "helicopter" parents
Money	Don't borrow, pay cash, save	Buy now, pay later	Conservative, save now	Earn enough to buy what you want, save later
Education	A dream	The way to get ahead in life	Means to an end	A huge expense
			Personal growth	Life long learning
Telephones	Rotary phones/party lines	Touch tone phones	Cell phones	Smart phones
Exposure to technology	Radio	TV	Nintendo, PC, MTV	Internet, X Box, Wii
	Learned technology at work	Learned technology at work	Learned technology in school	Learned technology while learning to walk and talk
Music	Big band	Rock & Roll	Rap	Pop rock, techno
Work & family life	Keep work out of home	No balance; work to live	Work/life balance	Life/work balance
The People	John F. Kennedy	Bill & Hillary Clinton	Jeff Bezos (Amazon)	Mark Zuckerberg (Facebook)
	Robert F. Kennedy	Bill Gates	Pierre Omidar (eBay)	Ezra Klein (political blogger)
	Martin Luther King Jr.	Stephen Spielberg	Tiger Woods	Kelly Clarkson
	Warren Buffett	Oprah Winfrey	Kurt Cobain	Danica Patrick
Influences/ events	The Great Depression	JFK, RFK & MLK assassinations	Challenger explosion	Columbine, 9/11, terrorism
	Pearl Harbor	Civil rights, women's rights	AIDS	Parents laid off work
	Atomic bomb	VietNam War/Cold War	Parents laid off work	Difficulty finding work
	Launching of Sputnik	Watergate	Recession, dot.com crash	Recession, global economy
			CNN, USAtoday, Internet	Social networking, blogs

As part of the retirement services profession, what do we need to change in our recruiting practices, employee retention and reward systems, management policies, approaches to training, technology, and the operational aspects of our

business? How can we foster a knowledge-sharing environment that has the generations working together effectively and efficiently? What can we do to help the various generations in our offices get along?

Table 2

Category	Radio Babies	Baby Boomers	Gen Xers	Millennial
	1930–1945 (<1940)	1946–1964 (1940–1960)	1965–1980 (1960–1980)	1981–2000
Communication style	Respectful	Politically correct	Informal, abrupt	Eager to please, inclusive
Work ethic	Hard work	Workaholic	Be efficient, get it done	Multi-taskers, what's next?
	Duty before fun	Personal fulfillment	Career development	Goal oriented
	Letters/memos	Call me anytime	Call me only at work	E-mail, text or IM me at work
		Faxes/Express mail	E-mail	Social networks
View of technology	Difficult and complicated to use and learn	Improves personal productivity, source of information, good for data storage, and processing transactions	Critical for personal and work efficiency, interactive way to connect	Core to life and work and way of thinking, always looking for the next cool thing
Workplace needs	Organization	Mission	Efficiency/results	Values
	Long term goals	Status/recognition	Technology	Collaboration
			Independence	State-of-the-art technology
			Values	Ability to learn/grow
Feedback/rewards	No news is good news	Money, title, recognition	How am I doing? Freedom	Needs continuous feedback, meaningful work
Interactive style at work	Individual	Loves meetings	Entrepreneur, independent	Team player/seeks input
	Hierarchical	Team player	Focused on product	Engaging/helpful
Work advantages	Committed	Team players	Independent	Collaborative
	Respectful	Service oriented; good at relationships	Technoliterate	Technologically savvy
	Wealth of experience	Technical experience	Creative	Multi-tasking abilities
	Hard worker	Driven	Adaptable	Heroic spirit
Work challenges	Resistant to change	May put process before results	Impatient/cynical	Need for supervision and structure
	Difficulty accepting direction from younger generations	Judgmental of those with other viewpoints	Poor people skills	Inexperienced, especially with difficult people issues

Perceptions: Respect, Loyalty, and Work Ethic

Approach to authority is one of the areas where the different generations diverge. Radio Babies were taught to respect authority, while Boomers learned to question authority. For the most part, Gen Xers ignore authority. Millennials actually respect authority, but they expect mutual respect in return. Gen Xers do not like to be given “orders,” but Millennials need guidance and structure. Millennials get along well with their elders and actively shop for mentors. A Boomer may feel it is disrespectful if a Millennial speaks with improper grammar, while a Millennial may feel that it is disrespectful when a Boomer points out that the Millennial is inexperienced and young enough to be his or her child. It becomes evident that even our definitions and perceptions of respect are different across generations.

Loyalty to businesses may be a thing of the past for all generations, given the increase in layoffs and downsizing efforts across the U.S. Many Gen Xers and Millennials may never experience the luxury of working for a company for 30 years or more like many Radio Babies and Boomers did. The younger generations saw their parents work hard and long hours, only to get laid off after giving years of loyalty to an employer. Even some of the Gen Xers and Millennials have already been victims of layoffs and downsizing, no matter how hard they worked or how loyal they might have been. Loyalty has to work both ways, and it has to be based on mutual trust and job security. Gen Xers have shown loyalty towards respected supervisors that they trust, which may be the best that we can hope for in today’s environment. The jury’s still out on Millennials, but there’s hope, given that they are an optimistic bunch.

The older generations tend to think the younger generations have no work ethic. Work ethic can no longer be measured solely by how many hours you spend in the office; it is being redefined in terms of results produced, with less focus on how, when, or where the work is done. Gen Xers and Millennials have a very strong work ethic when it comes to quality standards, getting the job done, and contributing to the company’s success. Gen Xers and Millennials can demonstrate to Boomers that working long hours isn’t necessarily the best way to inspire creativity and solve problems. Work/life balance is very important to Gen Xers and Millennials, especially after seeing their parents work long hours away from home. Radio Babies and Boomers should keep that balance in mind when they set schedules and expectations. Don’t

assume that if employees are not in the office, they are not thinking about work. Millennials are known to surf the web for hours seeking solutions to issues, and they don’t mind as much as Gen Xers do if they are contacted after work hours about a work issue. Millennials thrive on constant connectedness via cell phones, text messages, and social networking.

Knowledge and Technology

The two greatest generational challenges in the workplace today are technology and knowledge transference.

Technology is pervasive, constantly evolving and changing the way we connect with our coworkers and our customers. For all Millennials and most Gen Xers, even a fairly high-tech workplace is a step backward from what they are accustomed to in their personal lives. For Radio Babies and Boomers, however, that same high-tech workplace may be a considerable leap forward from how they operate outside the office. The technology gap remains one of the most challenging to bridge, and it will continue to widen with technological innovations. The older generations understand that technology is a great tool to access data and process transactions, but they are not as quick to see its applicability in all aspects of the business. Gen Xers depend on technology to make them more productive. Millennials especially rely on modern technology to fill in their experience and knowledge gaps, to problem solve, to interact, and to stay fully engaged in their work. However, increased technology in the workplace can lead to increased security risks. Technology policies must be established and properly communicated. Gen Xers and Millennials are all too familiar with debates over technology (e.g., violent video games, inappropriate Internet sites, illegal music downloading), but since their productivity and motivation hinge on the ability of their employer to meet their technological expectations, understanding the reasons behind any technology restrictions is critical to their acceptance of those policies.

While technology plays a critical role in shaping a business, human capital is by far a retirement services company’s greatest asset. Transferring knowledge from generation to generation within the workplace is just as important as it is at home. Many Radio Babies and Boomers hold the key to years of industry experience, law changes, internal processes, and customer relationships that enhance the company’s ability to operate. However, highly skilled Boomers are accustomed to control and power that stems from their knowledge

and access to privileged information. To successfully transfer that knowledge, they should agree to share the information freely through knowledge databases that can be used to make the knowledge transparent. Knowledge transference can be threatening to Boomers, especially if they are not great masters of technology, because it can create a feeling of minimized importance. However, impending retirements, as well as trends of younger generations changing jobs more often, make a culture of knowledge transference imperative in today's workplace.

One solution to the knowledge transfer challenge is to create a two-way mentoring program that provides opportunities for the older generations to transfer technical knowledge and relationship experience to the younger generations, while the younger generations mentor the older generations on technology. By understanding more about Twitter and Facebook and wikis, the older generations can begin to understand how social networking and "bottom-up" self-evolving information systems can apply to the workplace. Mentoring opens up the channels of communication and sets the stage for other types of collaboration, helping to bridge the generational gaps. Job shadowing is another technique that is frequently used to transfer knowledge across generations. These types of programs can help bridge the technology and knowledge gaps, while at the same time help the generations to develop mutual respect for their individual abilities and contributions.

The Company Perspective

If your company were a person, which generation would best fit its characteristics? If your company has an older center of gravity, a tightly-run senior management group and a conservative approach to technology, this approach may not be sustainable over the next decade. As the retirement services business becomes more commoditized, services that are relevant to the workforce and valued by the customers are more important than ever. The younger workforce might cease to find your business relevant, and most likely, your customers will start feeling the same way. You may need to bring a more youthful perspective to your firm in order to survive and thrive.

Strategic Business Planning

Your company needs to develop or update and document its strategic business plan. A Mission Statement and Values Statement are important to establish the purpose and culture of the firm. The

goals, objectives, and strategies laid out in the plan will provide the roadmap for work to be done. Remember that Millennials and Gen Xers care about company values and want their work to make a difference in the world. A Mission Statement about "helping people to retire with dignity" may have more meaning to these groups than one of "providing effective retirement plan services."

Start by looking ahead three to five years. What will be important to your company at that time? Start creating the strategies that will get you there. Many retirement services firms have not planned adequately for succession, and must develop a succession plan and knowledge transference strategy that will bring new talent in the door and up the management chain. Consider technology and operational experience, and forecast the key functions that will need to be done. Look at your current workforce in the same way you would do a defined benefit emerging liability study. Who is nearing retirement and who needs to be replaced? Where will you find their replacements? What programs do you need to put in place to preserve your human capital—cross-training, two-way mentoring, phased retirement for key individuals nearing retirement, support of remote workers, and/or creation of a central knowledge database?

Bridging generation gaps is a "top-down" issue, and the underlying theme is communication. The strategic business plan should be a living, breathing document that is communicated to employees and frequently referenced so that employees from all generations will accept the business culture and understand the important roles they play in achieving company goals.

Management, Professional Development, and Communication

If your workforce is starting to look like an age barbell, with lots of younger and older workers and not many workers in-between, your firm may be experiencing generational issues. Generational issues are not new to the workplace—what is new is that the gap is much wider, primarily due to rapidly changing technology.

Acknowledging that generation gaps exist is the first step in managing the "age barbell." Managers who solicit input and involve employees from the various generations to help develop policies will create a positive, productive working environment. A structured brainstorming session before stressful times such as tax season can help to solve problems and bring the generations closer together. Millennials will often

suggest ways to deal with data more efficiently, while asking for more cross-training and professional development. Boomers will offer to lead training sessions and provide insight into good client communication skills.

Structured brainstorming sessions centered around education will point out to management that different employees have different training needs, and some of those needs are generational. Credentialed employees need continuing education. Boomers need better technology skills. Gen Xers and Millennials are technologically savvy, but they need technical training and training in social skills. The temptation in a difficult economy is cut back on training dollars, but this strategy can be short-sighted when plan sponsors and referral sources are looking more than ever for services that provide value. Communication and relationships are at the heart of everything we do in business. Don't overlook the importance of education—especially in technical communication and relationship skills.

How training is delivered should take into account different generational learning styles. Boomers prefer traditional classroom style learning, with or without interaction. Gen Xers typically like self-directed learning through webinars or podcasts. Millennials like a learning environment that has many components—classroom, group activities, interaction, fun, and technology. Technology is transforming education. The way Millennials access and process information is much different than former generations, and it keeps morphing. Change up your own internal training to appeal to all groups, and make outside opportunities for education available in a range of styles.

Face to face meetings are a critical component of management and communication, but understand that the different generations view meetings in different ways. Boomers are usually willing to meet any time, any place, and for any length of time. They grew up with the top-down style of communication at meetings. Gen Xers prefer meetings that are structured, brief, and to the point. Millennials prefer meetings that are very conversational and interactive. Change up your meeting styles on various occasions to have a broader appeal. Let someone else, perhaps a Millennial, lead part of the meeting to gain confidence and establish credibility. Try 10–15 minute “stand-up meetings” to address one or two brief topics. As much as everyone—especially Millennials—would like to think, electronic communication is not always a substitute for face to face or phone communication.

Other areas that cause generational friction can be addressed by management through effective communication. Appropriate (and inappropriate) office dress, flexible work hours, virtual office work, and expectations for meeting deadlines are examples of policies that should be clearly communicated.

In today's workplace, it is not uncommon to have a 35-year-old managing a 55-year-old or a 65-year-old managing a 25-year-old. Clear, cross-generational lines of communication are key in dealing with these demographics. For example, a Boomer manager might say to a Gen Xer, “This ADP test needs to be done.” Although the Boomer meant the statement to be an order with urgency, the Gen Xer might merely see it as a statement of fact. The Gen Xer may or may not get the test done within the Boomers' desired time-frame. When speaking across generations, it is important to be very clear about your intent—don't make assumptions! Instead, the Boomer should say “I need you to complete the ADP test and have it on my desk by Friday so I can review it.” That statement would be clear to any generation.

Operations

Many retirement services firms operate in teams, so there is already some coordination across generations. We can make the interaction more effective by promoting collaboration on projects that makes everyone feel that they are contributing. Collaboration creates trust, an appreciation for others' skills and talents, and a unified effort to fulfill firm goals. Be sure to identify the *what*, *when*, *how*, and *why* when defining projects or tasks. Millennials especially need a clear picture of what success looks like so that their jobs seem meaningful, but this type of clear communication helps everyone. Millennials are also the ultimate multi-taskers and capable of juggling numerous projects at once without feeling overwhelmed.

Because of the intense technical aspects in retirement services work, the older generations sometimes discount the younger generations' abilities to contribute solutions to operational issues unique to our industry. If your firm is considering new software for a given purpose, explain the purpose to a Millennial and let him or her preview it and report back to you. Be creative in how you use Gen Xers and Millennials to problem-solve. With a little education around the technical aspects of an issue, they are frequently able to find technological solutions to complex problems and operational bottlenecks. Let's take a look at two actual case studies from our industry.

Case Study #1

An institution providing bundled retirement services to a large group of plans on one plan document was struggling to provide accurate and timely testing results during tax season. Most of the problems had been traced to the receipt of inaccurate data or data that had been incorrectly imported into the computer system. The administrators were experienced Baby Boomers, and two of them held ASPPA credentials. They were excellent at analyzing the failed tests, but they were frustrated from spending too much time chasing down data errors.

When a Millennial employee was hired to help, he was initially dismissed by the team as too inexperienced to be of much use in solving their backlog problems. He annoyed them by asking endless questions about how they handled the census data, why they ran the tests, and why they needed the data they were collecting. He formulated an idea about how to deal with the data in a new way, but because he had no credibility with the team, he went over their heads to the department manager with his idea. The team became even more annoyed with him when they heard what he had done.

Notwithstanding the negative reaction to his efforts, the Millennial pushed forward with his idea of handling the data in a new way. With his manager's support, he worked with the internal IT department and with the software vendor to implement automated data importing and data scrubbing solutions that acted upon the census data for the entire group of plans at one time. The project was an overwhelming success. He taught the administrators how to use the new automated tools to run their tests overnight using the scrubbed data. Ninety percent of the tests were completed before March 15, and only a handful of them had any remaining data problems.

The Baby Boomer administrators had a newfound appreciation for the Millennial employee's specific skills, and they were excited about collaborating with him on future projects. Although the Millennial learned some things about testing by approaching the problem from the data end instead of from the technical end, he recognized that he still had a lot to learn and was eager to fill in the knowledge gaps. He asked the Boomers to teach him about qualified plan administration. They were flattered and happily complied. They set up a lunch time study group to help him and others learn the basics and work through the ASPPA Retirement

Plan Fundamentals program. A generation gap was bridged.

Case Study #2

A large TPA firm had 2,000 Form 5500 extensions to file. In previous years, this process had taken four to six weeks, even though the TPA was using sophisticated government form software. An administrator's recent college graduate daughter (a Millennial) was looking for a short-term job and asked her mom if there were any opportunities to help out in the TPA office. The mom discussed this with her boss, and it was agreed that the daughter would be hired on a temporary basis to do the Form 5500 extensions. At first explanation of the task at hand, the Millennial realized that the current process was cumbersome and time-consuming. Upon questioning the process, she was assured that this approach was the way that the firm had done it for the last couple of years, and the current process was much more efficient than the prior process. She continued to ask questions and explore the software that generated the forms. She discovered features in the software that could generate the forms in batch mode using an export file from the database in a specific format. In approximately one week from the time she started the project, she learned the software and created a new process that would expedite the project. She was able to complete her task and generate the extensions in a couple of days using the new batch process. Her work was done—and she was able to take the rest of the summer off!

Recruitment, Retention, and Rewards

Recruiting talented people is especially important in retirement services. What should future employees of your firm look like and how will you find them? Different media will reach different generational audiences. For example, Millennials are not likely to work through recruiters, whereas Boomers will. Gen Xers and Millennials turn to the Internet to search for jobs, so companies seeking these employees should use web services and consider adding "Career Opportunities" to their own web sites. Use social networking tools such as LinkedIn—over 45% of employers are using these sites to find and vet employees. Boomers expect a detailed job description, which is helpful for any generation. Gen Xers will be attracted to short-to-the-point descriptions that stress individual contributions, a fast pace, and work/life balance. Corporate values and opportunities for growth are important to

Millennials and may be the reasons they take a job or walk away.

If you offer and your recruit accepts the job, your work is not over—it has really just begun. You want that person to feel like a part of your organization as quickly as possible. A welcome gift is a great way to make them feel a member of their new “home.” It is also nice to assign a fellow employee to show the new hires around and teach them what they need to know to get started. Boomers will want to get involved right away and understand how they can make a difference. Gen Xers like to work more autonomously. They like flexibility not only in work hours but also in how they do their work. (Sometimes such flexibility in retirement plan processes is a problem from a compliance perspective, so give them this message up front.) They also want to learn new skills that they can put on their resume, since they don’t believe in job security. Millennials are impatient; they need to buy into the culture right away and understand how their job fits into the bigger picture. Millennials want a relaxed work environment where they can collaborate with fellow coworkers directly and through technology. Work/life balance is important to Millennials and Gen Xers. A more relaxed work environment—casual dress, occasionally working from home, free soft drinks and snacks, games—will be much more appealing to Gen Xers and Millennials and may bring more balance to them while they are in the office.

Try to get new employees involved in a team project. Give constructive and frequent feedback. Think of new reward programs that appeal to each generation. While the older generations like status and appreciation for commitment, Gen Xers and Millennials may prefer free time or educational opportunities. Millennials also expect to get awards or other tangible tokens of recognition. For example, consider developing an award or recognition for someone who saves the firm money or comes up with an innovative idea. Although all groups like money, it is not always the most important thing to an individual. Time off or recognition might be equally as motivating. Peer to peer recognition is also effective—especially for Millennials. For example, providing gift cards or movie coupons to everyone to distribute to a colleague who was especially helpful is a powerful teambuilding technique.

Consider creating multi-generational teams to participate in charitable events. Buy office games to promote social interaction in the workplace (e.g., Foosball or Wii in the lunchroom). Host a

generational awareness week where employees can bring in photos and mementos from their childhood years. During that week, allow them to post generational messages around the office, play generational music during lunch, and create generational trivia questions.

Our Customers and Our Industry

News flash! It’s not just our employees who are generational. We are selling plans and services to firms that are multigenerational also. If we understand our own firm’s generational differences better, we will also come to understand our customers better, which can translate to increased profitability. Ask your own employees what is important to them in terms of the operation of your own retirement plan.

Gen Xers and Millennials are changing jobs much more frequently than the generations before them. Many of them are cashing out their assets from their 401(k) plans each time they change jobs. As an industry, we need to emphasize the importance of retirement savings at younger ages. Institutions are ramping up to retain these assets, and they are establishing rollover programs to keep retirement funds invested with them once employees leave their employer. Easy access to rollover options and single-step simple execution are a must. Products and services that allow Millennials and Gen Xers to understand savings concepts, make decisions quickly, and even have fun (think YouTube videos) will be in demand. Millennials will also expect the technology to give them feedback on how they are doing, like telling them if they are moving in the right direction with their retirement savings (the gold star approach). Gen Xers and Millennials are the wealth accumulators and the wealth inheritors of tomorrow. The Boomers, on the other hand, are moving toward a decumulation stage. Providing services for Boomers’ phased retirement options and distribution strategies is another burgeoning market opportunity.

A Bright Future

President Obama was the first President to use email and a Blackberry®. The 50+ age group has been extremely successful with online dating services. Gen Xers and Millennials are heavy users of blogs, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter—and they are the pacesetters when it comes to carrying these trends into the business world.

There is a growing trend towards knowledge management and client-centric models in the workplace.

Businesses are scrambling to transfer and document technical and client relationship information before it walks out door. Companies are turning to portal based technology solutions. Although for the next few years Boomers and Gen Xers will likely manage

these changes, many of the changes themselves will be driven by what we've already learned and continue to learn from the Millennials. Their future is our future. The future is bright, and so are the talented young individuals entering our workforce. ■